

## History of Yashima

Over the last 1,300 years, Yashima (“roof island”) has been a site of strategic, religious, and more recently tourist interest. As the name suggests, it was originally an island, separated from Shikoku by a narrow channel. Its location made it a strategic site: fortifications on Yashima were first mentioned in the *Nihon shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan), completed in 720. The fort was one of many outposts built in Kyushu and on both sides of the Seto Inland Sea as a network to protect the then-capital of Asuka (near the present-day city of Nara) from invasion. Centuries later, in 1185, Yashima was the site of a key turning point in Japanese history, when the Battle of Yashima was fought between the rival Taira and Minamoto samurai clans at Dan no Ura cove on the eastern side of the island. This battle was won by the Minamoto, who went on to crush the Taira and later established the Kamakura shogunate, the first samurai-led government. Warrior rule over Japan continued for almost 700 years until the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867.

The first religious structure on Yashima is said to date back to the eighth century. The Sengendo Temple, which stood near the middle of the North Ridge, was soon abandoned in favor of Yashimaji Temple, which is now the 84th temple on the Shikoku 88-Temple Pilgrimage. According to legend, Yashimaji was founded by the famous Buddhist priest Kukai (774–835), who is considered the originator of the Shikoku Pilgrimage. The temple became very popular after the mid-1600s, when a guidebook was published in Osaka about the 88-temple test of faith, spreading the word among the general public. The resulting increase in visitors created demand for inns and eating places, and Yashima became a destination in itself. Its history of epic battles and pious pilgrims captured the popular imagination, and played a role when Yashima was included among the first national parks to be designated in Japan in 1934.