

## **Gongen Jinja Shrine**

Gongen Jinja Shrine enshrines the deity of Yumugi hot spring, which is located on the east side of Kuchinoerabujima. The age of the shrine is unknown, but it is said to have been built sometime during the Edo period (1603–1867). There are various legends surrounding the origin of the hot spring. According to one tale, a hunter got lost while hunting for deer, and then heard the call of a bird. Looking down in the valley, he saw a white chicken in a pond. He immediately shot an arrow with his bow, striking the chicken. The chicken, however, disappeared, and white smoke began to billow from the pond. The hunter climbed down the mountain and touched the pond, which turned into a hot spring. As its therapeutic benefits became known, local residents began to frequent the spring.

Gongen Jinja enshrines the white chicken of the legend, which is believed to be an incarnation of a Shinto deity. A drawing of male and female white chickens painted by Suzuki Taro, a resident of Yumugi in around the 1950s and 1960s, is dedicated to the shrine. Gongen Jinja also worships Sukunabikona no Kami, the god of medicine, in connection with the hot spring's medicinal effects. Women in the village of Yumugi currently maintain the hot spring facility. The water, which is characterized by floating mineral deposits, is taken directly from the source and not filtered or heated with a boiler. There are separate baths for men and women. The facility is open 24 hours a day year-round, and anyone is welcome to bathe there.