

## Hagoromo Shiraito Falls

Water is a symbol of purity, nature, and life itself, and the mountains of Yamanashi Prefecture are rich sources of water. Hagoromo Shiraito Falls is one of the most attractive natural landmarks in the area and its source is in the Minobu mountain area.

The waterfall was given its name from the way the water falls off the rock wall like vertical strands of white silk thread (*shiraito*).

Near the entrance to the hiking trail leading up to Mt. Shichimen is Hagoromo Shiraito Falls, and in front of it, a statue of Lady Oman, who was a consort of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), founder of the Tokugawa shogunate.

From ancient times, women had been barred from climbing mountains that were considered sacred to the Shinto and Buddhist religions. In fact, women were not even allowed to climb Mt. Fuji until 1912. However, thanks to Lady Oman, Mt. Shichimen has been open to women for hundreds of years. After Tokugawa Ieyasu's death in 1616, Lady Oman was determined to climb Mt. Shichimen and pray for his safe passage into the afterlife.

It is said that Lady Oman meditated beneath Hagoromo Shiraito Falls for three days to prove her purity. Some versions of the legend say she sat under the waterfall for seven days. Then she completed her pilgrimage and prayed for Ieyasu's spirit at the top of Mt. Shichimen. After her pilgrimage, the ban on women climbing Mt. Shichimen was lifted.

Since Lady Oman meditated under a waterfall to prove her purity, it is fitting that her statue is located next to Hagoromo Shiraito Falls. Near the statue is a set of stairs leading to the base of the waterfall. Water is diverted into a small wading pool before it continues down the river. For a nominal fee, visitors are permitted to enter the wading pool, swim, or even meditate under the waterfall as Lady Oman did hundreds of years ago. Waterfall meditation, known as *takigyō* in Japanese, is still practiced today.

Since the water is cold, even in summer, standing under the waterfall is a severe test of mental and physical fortitude; the practice is thought to help in the attainment of enlightenment.