

## **Obara Jinja Shrine**

Obara Jinja Shrine venerates the Shinto kami of creation: the primordial deity Izanami no Mikoto and two of her children, the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami and the moon god Tsukuyomi no Mikoto. The shrine was originally established in 852, though the current buildings were constructed in 1796. The shrine has an impressive collection of 35 *ema* (votive tablets). These can be seen in the main shrine and the open-air *emaden* hall. The shrine also has a collection of materials on childbirth and child-rearing from the Edo period (1603–1867) and the Meiji era (1868–1912).

## **Ubuya**

*Ubuya* are small thatched huts that were once used as the place for childbirth. The entrance faces the shrine so mothers could receive strength from the kami (deities) during labor. Inside there is a dirt floor, which was covered by 12 bundles of rice straw during use, and in the back a *chikarazuna*—a rope held by the mother during delivery—hangs from the ceiling. In front of the rope there is a small mound of sand demarcated by white paper streamers. This sand is known as *koyasu no suna* (“sand of easy childbirth”) and Obara Jinja includes it in good-luck charms. Records show that *ubuya* existed in some areas as early as the Nara period (710–794). They fell out of fashion in the postwar period, and were effectively banned from use by changes to the law in 1965.