

Aoshima Shrine: Motomiya

Motomiya (“original shrine”) stands in the middle of Aoshima, on a site that has been a place of worship and ritual since ancient times. Earthenware, bones, seashells, and other items that were likely used in religious ceremonies during the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE) have been discovered in the ground here. The first sacred buildings on the island are thought to have been constructed here more than 1,000 years ago. In the Edo period (1603–1867) devotees prayed here for protection against disease, often leaving locks of hair behind to signify their faith. This tradition lives on in sacred strings that visitors can tie to trees and ropes by the shrine to make a wish. The 1907 visit of crown prince Yoshihito (Emperor Taisho; 1879–1926) brought the shrine increased attention, and many members of the imperial family have come to pray at Motomiya in subsequent years. Once open only to Shinto priests and royalty, the shrine was made accessible to the public in the late 1960s.