

## **Udo Shrine: Shinkyo Bridge**

Crossing the Shinkyo Bridge leads visitors into the most sacred part of Udo Shrine: the main sanctuary, which is set inside a cave at the foot of a steep staircase carved into the rock. In the past, devotees would remove their shoes at the bridge and proceed barefoot toward the main sanctuary. This was believed to prevent the hallowed ground from being contaminated with the impurities of the outside world. The custom is no longer followed, but on the other side of the bridge, visitors are expected to act in a manner befitting a sacred site.

Near the bridge, on the left side of the path when looking toward the main sanctuary, stand a number of stone lanterns. These were donated by the Ito family, daimyo lords of the Obi domain (the southern coastal region of present-day Miyazaki Prefecture), who during the Edo period (1603–1867) revered Udo Shrine and financed its upkeep. The lanterns each have differently shaped fire boxes (in which a light would be placed), which express the phases of the moon, and are decorated with the Ito family crest—a sphere surrounded by eight smaller circles, symbolizing the cosmos in Hindu-Buddhist thought.