

Udo Shrine: Nursing Rocks (*Ochichi-iwa*)

Part of the uneven wall of the cave appears to be shaped like a pair of protruding breasts. These “nursing rocks” are always moist due to the water that drips slowly from their tips, and have been worshiped since ancient times. In local lore, they have been connected to the legend of Ugayafukiaezu, the primary deity of Udo Shrine. In the myth, Ugayafukiaezu is abandoned at birth by his mother, the daughter of the god of the sea, who returns to her home beneath the waves. The “nursing rocks” were believed to have been her parting gift to her son, who was raised on the “milk” they produce and went on to become the father of Jimmu, the legendary first emperor of Japan. Believers touch the rocks and wish for safe childbirth, child-rearing, and maternal health.