

## **Udo, a National Place of Scenic Beauty**

The forested Cape Udo has been popular with travelers for more than a millennium. The cape's coastline is dotted with strangely shaped rocks and boulders, formed by geological events millions of years ago. These rocks, together with several coastal caves, were what first attracted people here in ancient times. Many of these early visitors were religious ascetics, who came to practice spiritual disciplines by spending extended periods of time in isolated places. The development of organized religion, especially the popularization of Buddhism in Japan, then led to the establishment of shrines and temples at such sacred sites. The sanctuary founded at Udo, which is now a Shinto place of worship called Udo Shrine, has attracted devotees from all walks of life during its 1,200-year history. Associated with the ancient myths of the divine origins of the imperial family, the shrine remains a popular site of prayer today.

The rocks and boulders that astounded pilgrims in antiquity are now being studied by geologists, who estimate the cliffs at Udo—which consist of a mixture of hard sandstone and softer mudstone—to be at least 8 million years old. Of particular interest are the striated fields of rock that jut out of the sea on the southern side of the cape. Known locally as the “ogre's washboard,” the fields assumed their peculiar shape due to the difference in hardness between the layers of sandstone, which remains, and the mudstone, which has eroded. In 2017, the Japanese government recognized the distinctive history and geology of Udo by designating the cape a National Place of Scenic Beauty.