

## **Gokoku Shrine**

The spirits of those who lost their lives in service to the country from the mid-nineteenth century through the end of World War II are venerated at Gokoku Shrine. The shrine was built in 1904 on the orders of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912), and today it honors the memory of more than 56,000 people from Miyagi Prefecture.

### *Honoring the deceased*

Japan enjoyed two centuries of peace and prosperity under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867) following centuries of civil war. However, fears of foreign encroachment contributed to anti-shogunate sentiment in the late nineteenth century. In the social and political upheaval that followed, pro-shogunate and anti-shogunate forces clashed, and lives were lost on both sides. The end result was the Meiji Restoration (1868)—the dissolution of the shogunate and the restoration of rule under the emperor. Japan modernized rapidly in the wake of this political revolution, and later engaged in international conflicts overseas, culminating with World War II.

### *The shrine grounds*

The heart of the shrine is its inner sanctuary and worship hall. The inner sanctuary is off-limits to the public, but visitors may offer a prayer in front of the worship hall. The hall has a wide, curved copper roof with a green patina that contrasts with its red wooden frame. Carvings and decorative metalwork adorn the gables, and a *shimenawa* (special rope used to designate sacred spaces) hangs above the entrance. In spring, cherry blossoms fill the grounds with their pale pink blooms.

### *History on display*

In addition to the main shrine buildings, there is an exhibition hall with displays that introduce Japanese history from the Meiji Restoration through World War II in chronological order. Exhibits include old black-and-white photographs of historic events and young soldiers, as well as memorabilia, including a 1:100-scale model of the battleship Yamato, the world's largest battleship. A small fee is charged for admission to the exhibition hall, which has English signage.