

The Three Spiritual Sites of Oku-Hida

The Oku-Hida region holds three revered spiritual destinations that are collectively called the Sanmairi, or “three shrine visits.” Going to all three of these “power spots” is said to ensure lasting relationships, successful conception, and good health.

Romance

The tiny Mozumo Shrine sits beside Taruma Falls in the village of Shinhirayu Onsen. Prayers at the shrine are thought to strengthen romantic and marital bonds (*en musubi*). The site acquired this power through a curious link with Izumo Grand Shrine in Shimane Prefecture, which is widely associated with *en musubi*. According to Shinto belief, in the tenth month of the lunar calendar deities from across Japan travel to Izumo, where they gather at the great shrine to discuss matchmaking for the coming year. Local legend has it that, along the way, the deities pass through the river valley where Mozumo Shrine is located. Here they rest, drink the pure water of the falls, and relax in the mountain village’s hot springs.

Because of the valley’s long-standing association with the procession to Izumo, the area took on the linguistically linked name “Mozumo.” The connection also brought the deities of Mozumo Shrine a similar power to bestow good fortune in marriage, making it a popular destination for couples. In winter, visitors can also travel beneath the Mozumo River through an illuminated tunnel.

Fertility

Nakao Hakusan Shrine is a tranquil spot in the woodlands near Shinhotaka Onsen. Within the shrine precincts are two large, moss-covered rocks shaped unmistakably like male and female genitalia. Legend tells of a loving but childless couple who, while praying at the shrine, heard a voice telling the man to sit on the female rock and the woman to sit on the male rock. They did so, and soon after miraculously conceived a child. Visitors are welcome to sit on the rocks to make their own prayers.

Healing

It is said that between the late fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries, a local army attempted to invade Hida by traversing a nearby mountain pass. By the time they reached the top, the warriors were exhausted and sickened by sulfurous volcanic fumes coming from mountain. They collapsed, unable to go any further. Suddenly, a white monkey appeared. They followed it, and the monkey led them to nearby healing waters. The warriors miraculously recovered, and Hirayu Hot Spring was discovered. Today, Hirayu Shrine is reputed to heal all manner of physical ailments. Visitors are welcome to take one of the free wooden placards (*ema*) and write upon it a prayer for healing. Inscribed placards should then be tied on the nearby lines.

Mozumo Shrine and Taruma Falls are a minute’s walk from the Shinhirayu Onsen or Zentsujimae bus stops. Hirayu Shrine is a 4-minute walk from Hirayu Bus Terminal. Nearby parking is available for all three locations.