

## **Hitoyoshi Kuma (Introduction)**

In the heart of southern Kyushu, the area centered around the city of Hitoyoshi Kuma abounds with historic sites and cultural treasures, and ancient styles of art and architecture survive in its shrines and temples. Buddhist statuary dates from as early as the eighth century. The river and its tributaries are dotted with recreation and leisure spots, where tour operators offer whitewater rafting, wooden rowboat rides, and SUP paddle board experiences. Distilleries in the area carry on rich traditions of rice shochu distillation to produce Kuma Shochu, a single-distillation brand protected by a Geographical Indication (GI). Hitoyoshi Kuma flourished under the rule of the Sagara family between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, and their legacy can still be felt today in cultural treasures and traditions such as Aoi Aso Jinja Shrine and the biannual Sagara 33 Kannon Pilgrimage.