

## **Matsuo Shrine**

This fifteenth-century structure is the main sanctuary of Matsuo Shrine, an ancient Shinto shrine with deep connections to the nearby village of Inubushi. It was registered an Important Cultural Property of Japan in 1978 and underwent an extensive rethatching from 2017 to 2019.

Historical sources suggest the shrine was founded in 807 to honor the deity Nunakawa-hime, who is associated with ramie (a plant central to the local weaving tradition). The current sanctuary dates to 1497 and is one of the oldest thatched-roof wooden structures in Niigata Prefecture.

Note the steep roof and the large number of support columns. These features have helped the building withstand heavy snowfalls without collapsing. The structure's longevity is also thanks to care from Inubushi residents, who have repaired and maintained the shrine over the last 500 years by hauling the necessary tools and materials up the mountain path.

This shrine is the main location for Nanatsu Mairi, a coming-of-age event held on May 8 each year. Boys in the Matsudai area who turned seven in the previous year make the journey to the shrine. They are helped in the difficult climb by the entire community. After prayers and a ceremony are held, everyone descends the mountain and the boys' extended families hold celebrations in their honor.

Two important artifacts belonging to the shrine are a short sword and a signaling fan (*gunbai*). The fan is said to have been offered to the enshrined deity by Uesugi Kenshin (1530–1578), a powerful daimyo who governed this area in the sixteenth century. The sword and fan are not housed in the shrine itself, but replicas are on display at the Matsudai History Museum.