

Mt. Tenpai

Mt. Tenpai, in the city of Chikushino, is the site of several legends and events linked to the historical Sugawara Michizane and his deified spirit, Tenjin.

Mt. Tenpai (elev. 258 m) is deeply connected with Dazaifu Tenmangū Shrine and plays an important role in the shrine's legends and ceremonies. Dazaifu Tenmangū enshrines Sugawara Michizane (845–903), a renowned scholar, poet, and administrator who was deified as Tenjin, the Shinto deity of learning, culture, and the arts. In 901, Michizane was exiled from the imperial court in Kyoto due to false accusations from jealous rivals. He was sent to Dazaifu, where he lived a difficult life and died two years later. According to legend, during his exile Michizane climbed to the peak of Mt. Tenpai in a driving storm to plead his innocence before heaven.

Shitō Falls is a small waterfall at the base of Mt. Tenpai, and Michizane is said to have washed and purified himself there before climbing the mountain. When bathing, he laid his robes across the rock just left of the falls.

Mt. Tenpai is central Dazaifu Tenmangū's most important annual festival, the Jinkō Event (*jinkōshiki*). Before the ritual procession, participants collect purifying sand (*oshioi*) at Shitō Falls and return with it to the shrine. During the festival, residents of the Daimon district (at the foot of Mt. Tenpai) light bonfires called *mukaebi* ("fires to welcome returning spirits") on the summit. Their light is intended as a greeting to Tenjin during his procession from Dazaifu Tenmangū to Enokisha Shrine, which stands where Michizane's residence once was.

The mountain has several other historical sites, including Gojisaku Tenmangū Shrine, believed to have been founded by Michizane himself, and Buzōji Temple, which dates to the Nara period (710–794) and is one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Kyushu. Stone monuments engraved with Michizane's poetry (*waka*) line the trail up to the peak.