

Miiraku Area

The Miiraku area, located on the northwestern side of Fukue Island, was formed by volcanic flows that erupted from Mt. Kyonodake 340,000 to 260,000 years ago. At the tip of the peninsula is Kashiwazaki Cape, which was once the last port of call for envoy ships that made the dangerous crossing to China in the eighth and ninth centuries. On a small hill, a stone statue and monument honor Kukai (774–835), a priest who traveled to China to study esoteric Buddhism and returned to found the highly influential Shingon school of Buddhism. Kukai remains one of the most revered religious figures in Japanese history.

Several sandy beaches are nestled in inlets on the peninsula's east and west sides, making Miiraku a popular area for swimming and watersports. Sheltered coves on the northeastern side are havens for small farming and fishing villages, where churches built during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries still stand.

Highlights

Takahama Beach

The craggy coastal inlets of Miiraku collect sand and soil carried down from the mountains by rivers. The sand and soil combine with particles of shell and coral brought in on the ocean waves, forming beaches. The sprawling, white-sand beach of Takahama is one of the island's most striking, with a 400-meter-long stretch of sand enclosed by two rocky promontories. The water is calm and clear, making it ideal for swimming, and the shallow depth creates striking gradations of blue and green. This idyllic cove has earned a spot on the Ministry of the Environment's list of Japan's 100 Best Beaches.

Fish-Basket Kannon

The promontory just north of Takahama Beach has an unusual stone statue: the Buddhist deity Kannon, Bodhisatva of Compassion, holding a fish basket. Traditionally, this image of Kannon—a version known as “Gyoran (fish-basket) Kannon”—was thought to keep sailors safe and bring fishermen bountiful catches. From the statue's vantage point, visitors can look out at the East China Sea, as well as observe the Goto Islands' diverse geological formations in the surrounding cliffs.

Traditional Fishing and Farming

Initially, settlers avoided Miiraku because the area is exposed to direct northwesterly monsoon winds. To make the region more habitable, they eventually planted groves of salt-resistant camellia trees to act as windbreaks and protect the circular fields known as *maruhata*. These groves and fields are still

in use today. The area is also a good place to see the traditional tidal fishing weirs called *sukean*, which use stacked walls of lava rock to trap fish at low tide.