Iwatate Shrine

Located in a quiet residential area in Kishiku, this ancient Shinto shrine is surrounded by a protected primeval forest and hosts one of the largest performances of *kagura* (shrine dancing) on Fukue.

The shrine was reportedly founded in 804 on nearby Miyanoko Island by the renowned Buddhist monk Kukai (774–835) to honor three sea goddesses. At the end of the fourteenth century, the ruling Goto family had the shrine moved to its current site, near their new seat of power in Kishiku.

In mid-September, the shrine holds an annual festival that includes *kagura* performances—sacred dances performed for the deities and accompanied by drums, flutes, and gongs. Shrine maidens (*miko*) and masked dancers perform on a small tatami stage surrounded by the audience. Many of the dances depict stories from folklore or mythology, and the performance culminates in the popular lion dance, an acrobatic portrayal of a confrontation between a guardian lion-dog (*shishi*) and a long-nosed goblin (*tengu*).

The main approach to the shrine is lined with lantern-topped stone walls and sheltered by the boughs of the primeval forest. Now a designated cultural property of Nagasaki Prefecture, the forest is thought to have survived because of a long-standing prohibition against saws and hatchets on shrine grounds, which was put in place out of respect for the spirits of the trees.