

## **Gero Onsen Shrine**

Thermal waters spout from the mouth of a dragon sculpture at Gero Onsen Shrine, symbolizing the abundant hot springs that feed Gero's many baths. An annual festival held at the shrine on October 8 honors the town's hot springs and their history. As part of the festivities, celebrants take to the streets in colorful outfits, including white egret costumes and formal samurai attire.

Centuries ago, when the hot springs purportedly stopped flowing, Gero's fortunes were revived by a white egret (*shirasagi*) that was observed flying to the Hida River every day. Curious townspeople went to investigate and discovered a new hot spring source where the bird was bathing. The white egret is a common motif in Gero, and is celebrated in the traditions of the shrine.

The shrine is located steps away from Shirasagi Bridge and the Hida River. It was established in 1989 to express gratitude for the abundant hot springs that have earned Gero its reputation, and to pray for the town's continued prosperity. The shrine is affiliated with Yudonosan Jinja, an ancient shrine with a sacred hot spring source in Yamagata Prefecture.