

Shirayamahime Jinja Shrine

Shirayamahime Jinja Shrine is dedicated to Izanami no Mikoto and Kukurihime no Mikoto, female deities associated with maritime safety, protection of the country, and regional prosperity. The original founding date is unknown, but the shrine has been at its current location on a hill overlooking the village and the Sea of Japan for at least several centuries. The annual spring festival, held on May 3 and 4, involves a large procession through the streets of Teradomari with a portable shrine (*omikoshi*) and sacred dances (*kagura*) held in the main shrine.

Shirayamahime Shrine houses a valuable collection of 52 *funa-ema*, votive tablets donated to the shrine to pray for the safety of boats at sea. The collection, which represents ships active from 1774–1889, is a designated Important Tangible Folk Cultural Property.

Main Shrine

The current main shrine building was constructed in 1771, replacing a

previous structure lost to fire in 1758. The exterior of the wooden hall is decorated with carvings of dragons, chrysanthemums on water, plum flowers, and a tiger. The coffered ceiling features colorful paintings of seasonal flowers surrounding a black-and-white ink painting of a dragon in the clouds. If the doors to the shrine hall are closed, visitors are welcome to open them and enter to view the ceiling.

The large nameplate over the inner sanctuary partition reads “Hakusangu,” which is another way to write the shrine name. It was carved based on calligraphy brushed by Matsudaira Sadanobu (1759–1829), a daimyo lord and former chief senior councilor to the Tokugawa shogun. The characters are written in a playful script that hides the abstract shape of birds within the strokes. Other items on display include old photos of the shrine’s spring festival, paper lanterns, and a large painting of Teradomari port.

Nimen Jinja Shrine: The God with Two Faces

One of Shirayamahime’s subsidiary shrines, Nimen Shrine, is dedicated to

a deity that is unique to Teradomari. According to legend, this shrine was built in 1391 by local fishermen after a fellow fisherman named Heisaburo dreamed of an unknown deity claiming to be trapped beneath the waves. Following the deity's instructions, Heisaburo went out the next day to search underwater and discovered a peculiar two-sided figure. The wooden figure is carved within a frame measuring 39 cm x 82 cm. It depicts on both sides a Western-looking person who seems to be holding a rope and hauling in a net full of fish. It is believed one side depicts the mysterious deity in male form and the other in female form, which led to the name Nimen ("Two Faces") Shrine. Some scholars have suggested the figure may have originally been a decorative feature on a Western ship.

Ever since Heisaburo enshrined the deity at Nimen Shrine, it has been revered for granting prayers related to maritime safety and prosperous hauls of fish. However, the sacred figure was traditionally concealed from the public for fear it could be mistaken for a Christian relic during the centuries when Christianity was outlawed. Rather than holding a public festival, it became customary for the head priest and the village's chief fisherman to instead hold a secret ceremony in the shrine twice a year, in

March and September. As part of the ritual, they would symbolically turn the figure to its reverse form, then visit residents of the village privately to share the deity's blessings with them.

Shrine Grounds

In addition to Nimen Shrine, Shirayamahime Shrine also contains subsidiary shrines to Amaterasu (the deity of the sun), Inari (a deity of business and agriculture), the Sumiyoshi sea deities, Susano'o no Mikoto (the deity of storms), and Hachitengu (supernatural beings that guard against fire and disaster). The grounds brighten in October and November, when the *tsuwabuki* (Japanese silverleaf) bloom, dotting the mossy landscape with vibrant splashes of yellow. A wooden building to the left of the main sanctuary houses the lavish gold-covered portable shrine used in Shirayamahime Shrine's spring festival along with a wooden representation of a sacred white horse. Old ship anchors and a granite mooring stone from the Edo period (1603–1867) are displayed in front of the Funa-ema Storage Hall. Visitors interested in viewing the *funa-ema* inside may

contact the shrine by phone in advance to make a reservation.