

## **Cape Nagasakibana in Legend and Life**

Cape Nagasakibana is a hook of land that reaches out into the Pacific Ocean at the southernmost end of the Satsuma Peninsula. The site is said to be the birthplace of Urashima Tarō, a character from Japanese folklore who travels to an undersea palace on the back of a sea turtle.

The cape's association with the turtle-riding hero Urashima Tarō is supported by the loggerhead sea turtles that gather to breed on the beaches at the western foot of the cape. Between May and August, the turtles come ashore to lay their eggs in the sand. The cape is also the location of Ryūgū Jinja Shrine, which resembles the undersea Ryūgū Palace from the legend.

The princess of Ryūgū Palace is Toyotama-hime, a sea goddess who is enshrined at Ryūgū Jinja Shrine. Urashima Tarō marries Toyotama-hime in some versions of the legend, and the shrine has become a popular place to pray for success in love. Visitors to the shrine write their wishes on

seashells, and shells inscribed with hopeful prayers are piled around the main hall and a nearby statue of Urashima Tarō.

Cape Nagasaki is popular with nature lovers, who come to explore the tide pools that have formed in the lava flows at the southern reaches of the cape. The pools support several species of tropical fish and coral that were carried up from the southern hemisphere on the Kuroshio Current. The area is also home to plentiful sago palms, a living fossil largely unchanged since the Mesozoic Era (251.9 million to 66 million years ago).