

World War II Sites in Ibusuki

As a major port in southern Japan, Ibusuki was the location of multiple military training facilities during World War II (1939–1945). Today, Ibusuki is connected to the wartime era by remnants of wartime infrastructure and memorials to the lives lost.

Former Ibusuki Naval Air Base and Monument of Grief

Following a devastating loss at the Battle of Midway in 1942, Japan began to use seaplanes to supplement its dwindling reserves of carrier-based aircraft. Most combat seaplanes were transferred to Ibusuki in 1943, with the construction of the Ibusuki Naval Air Base. In 1945, the units began kamikaze training. At the Battle of Okinawa, in March of that same year, 82 young men were sent on suicide missions in dilapidated training planes. None returned. The Naval Air Base itself was destroyed by an air raid in early May, less than two months later.

The former site of the base is now the Monument of Grief, a memorial to the lives of the pilots and other personnel killed in the kamikaze missions and air raid. Rows of stone lanterns lead through a grove of pine trees to a small hill that conceals the remnants of an air raid shelter. Atop the hill is a statue of Kannon, the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion, and a monument listing the names of the dead. A nearby northbound road leads to Tara Beach, where joggers run laps along the water that once served as a runway for the base's seaplanes.

North of the beach, opposite Chiringashima's famous sandbar, is a concrete boat ramp that was used by the Imperial Navy's 106th Shinyō Attack Squadron. Shinyō were small plywood motorboats packed with hundreds of kilograms of explosives. Like kamikaze planes, they were used in suicide attacks on enemy ships.

Hanazebōhi Memorial Park

Japan invaded the Philippines on December 8, 1941. Japanese forces

occupied parts of the country until 1944, battling a coalition of Filipino and American soldiers and, later, against guerrilla resistance. More than 1,000,000 people are estimated to have died during those bloody years of conflict. This includes soldiers from Kagoshima, many of them conscripted youths, whose remains were never recovered.

In 1966, bereaved families and survivors founded Hanazebōhi Memorial Park. It is located on a promontory in Ibusuki that points toward the Philippines, some 1,900 kilometers away. A team of experts was dispatched to former battlefields in the Philippines to search for the bodies of Japanese soldiers. The remains of 4,147 individuals were repatriated and interred at Hanazebōhi, which has become the symbolic gravesite for the Japanese personnel who died in the conflict. Every March 27, a memorial service is held at the park.

The park's solemn atmosphere invites quiet contemplation about the cost of war and the value of peace. Its grassy grounds are dotted with 190 stone

memorial lanterns, many of which are engraved with the names and hometowns of fallen soldiers. An evocative statue by sculptor Nakamura Shinya (b. 1926) depicts a woman and child gazing across the water, yearning for the return of a loved one who will never come home. A large bell hanging in a nearby pagoda was donated in the hope that its deep peal would echo across the ocean and bring comfort to all those who died in the conflict.