

Aso: A holy place where Shinto and Buddhism coexist

The Aso Nakadake Crater attracts tourists from all over the world. Aso's frequent eruptions earned it reverence as a god of nature. Since ancient times, Aso Shrine has worshiped the crater as the embodiment of Takeiwatatsu-no-Mikoto, the god who created Aso. Buddhism also has religious links to Aso, as the crater was worshiped as the eleven-faced Kannon Bosatsu (an incarnation of Takeiwatatsu-no-Mikoto). According to one theory, the area around the crater became a sacred site starting in 8th century and flourished as a major center of mountain Buddhism, with 37 monasteries and 51 hermitages built as bases for monks and mountain priests. The coexistence of Shinto and Buddhism continues to this day, as do prayers for the volcano to remain calm.



Aso Shrine

Aso Shrine is the head shrine for about 500 other shrines throughout Japan.



Aso Shrine is revered as the most important shrine in Higo Province (modern-day Kumamoto). It combines Shinto religion with the ancient belief in the volcano itself as a deity. The shrine worships a family of 12 deities, including Takeiwatatsu-no-Mikoto, grandson of Emperor Jimmu and the founder of the Aso region. The shrine dates back approximately 2,300 years, with its history passed down through 93 generations of the Aso family.



Restoring one of Japan's Greatest Tower Gates

Aso Shrine was severely damaged by the Kumamoto Earthquakes of 2016. Its worship hall and other buildings were rebuilt in 2021. The remaining major restoration work, the Tower Gate was completed in December, 2023.

Mt. Aso Hondo Saigandenji Okunoin

The reconstructed main hall of Saigandenji Temple stands atop Mt. Aso, adjacent to Aso Sanjo Shrine. Buddha and the gods of Japan protect Mt. Aso's summit.



The spectacular scenery of Aso's Summit: Nakadake Crater, Kusasenri & Sunasenri

Nakadake Crater and Kusasenri are Aso's most recognizable symbols, and nearby Sunasenri has a landscape that looks like something from Mars. These three major sightseeing spots boast spectacular scenery and are close to one another, making it easy to visit all three in one go. They also offer unique perspectives on Aso's 600-meter-wide active volcanic crater.

The breathtaking, endlessly smoking Aso Volcano. Climbing the mountain to the crater is called *miike-mairi* and is a type of religious worship.

Hifuri Shinji & Onda Matsuri: Local Tradition Thrives in Aso

Aso's Agricultural Rituals: A National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Asset

Hifuri-shinji (fire-waving ritual) is held in mid-March to pray for a bountiful harvest in Aso. The farm god marries his bride as part of the mystical Goze Mukae ceremony where, in order to welcome the gods, bundles of thatch are lit on fire and swung around on ropes.

The Onda Matsuri is a festival where the 12 deities enshrined at Aso Shrine are transported on four portable shrines to visit the green rice fields around the shrine to observe how the crops are growing.

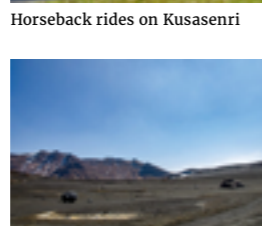
The Tanomi Matsuri is an event held at harvest time in which the first harvest rice is offered to the gods out of thanks for the year's bounty. The locals of Aso pass down these Shinto agricultural rituals and events from generation to generation.



- ▲Onda Matsuri. The gods are accompanied by a procession of about 200 people, including *unari*, holy women dressed entirely in white.
- ◀The Hifuri Shinji ritual is spectacular, with overlapping rings of whirling fire.
- ▼ Shinto rituals such as *gan no sumo* wrestling and *yabusame* (horseback archery) are held to appease the gods.



The Aso Park Toll Road offers easy access to the crater by car.



Sunasenri is a desolate, sandy expanse covered with volcanic ash.

Visiting the Aso Nakadake Crater and Sunasenrigahama Toll Road

Aso Park toll road hours:
 3/20-10/31: 8:30-18:00 (gate closes at 17:30)
 11/1-11/30: 8:30-17:30 (gate closes at 17:00)
 12/1-3/19 9:00-17:00 (gate closes at 16:30)
 Open year-round. Entry restrictions may apply due to volcanic activity.
 Motorcycle: 400 yen, Standard vehicle: 1,000 yen, Minibus: 2,800 yen, Mid-size bus: 3,300 yen

Aso Sanjo Plaza Parking Lot

Address: 808 Kurokawa, Aso City Parking: Yes
Kusasenrigahama
 (Aso Volcano Museum, Aso Visitor Center)
 Address: Kusasenrigahama, Aso City
 Parking: Yes (Motorcycle: ¥200 yen, Passenger vehicle: ¥500, Bus: ¥2,000)
 (These rates allow one use of both parking lots on the same day.)

For information on conditions for visiting the crater, check here ▶

