

# Explore the Christian Heritage of Hirado

## Recommended Driving Routes

The arrival and flourishing of Christianity

Explore the landscapes and traditional culture of the Hidden Christian villages

### Ikitsuki Island 2.5-hour tour

#### 5 Ikitsuki Island Museum "Shima no Yakata"

A broad selection of artifacts and videos linked to Ikitsuki's Hidden Christian community. This museum is a great place to learn about the traditional culture passed down through generations on Ikitsuki Island and in western Hirado.



#### 6 Grave of Gaspar Nishi Genka

A large cross commemorates Gaspar Nishi Genka (1556-1609), a martyr who was executed on this spot. Behind the cross is Saint Gaspar's Grave, a tiny graveyard with a grave marked by heaped-up stones.



#### 7 Nakaenoshima Island

The Kakure Kirishitan regard Nakaenoshima as a sacred place, and collect water that seeps from the rocks to use as holy water. The island is a World Heritage Site; however, it is not open to the public.



#### 8 Yamada Church

French priest Father Jean François Matrat and 17 members of his congregation built this church in 1912, making it the town's second-oldest after Hōki Church. Note the butterfly-wing collages in the interior.



#### 9 Yakiyama

The name, meaning "burning mountain," derives either from a church being burned down here or from murdered Christians being crammed into a hole and burned. There is now a hall here where Kakure Kirishitan hold ceremonies.



#### 10 Danjiku-sama (Giant Reeds)

A Hidden Christian family was hiding in the giant reeds on the shore here when a child accidentally gave them away, resulting in their execution. A memorial ceremony is conducted for them on January 16 every year.



### Hirado West Coast 2-hour tour

#### 5 Ikitsuki Island Museum "Shima no Yakata"

A broad selection of artifacts and videos linked to Ikitsuki's Hidden Christian community. This museum is a great place to learn about the traditional culture passed down through generations on Ikitsuki Island and in western Hirado.



#### 11 Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake

After being converted by missionaries in the sixteenth century, the people here maintained their Christian faith in parallel with ascetic Buddhism even while Christianity was banned throughout Japan. They secretly revered nandogami, or closet gods, in their houses.



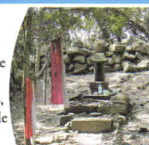
#### 12 Hirado Christian Museum

Most exhibits here are related to the Hidden Christians of Neshiko Village. Learn about the nandogami ("closet gods") they worshipped, and how they passed their faith down over generations.



#### 13 Ushiwaki Wood

Graves from the Kirishitan period have been excavated here. According to the oral tradition of the village of Neshiko, Ushiwaki is a sacred place where people were martyred.

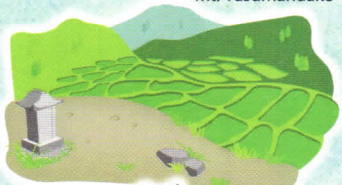


Christianity came to Hirado in 1550. Since then, it has passed through three distinct phases. The first was its arrival and flourishing; the second was its being banned and chased underground; and the final stage was the lifting of the ban and Christianity's revival. Meanwhile, on Ikitsuki Island the Kakure Kirishitan cultural tradition is still alive.

### What are Hidden Christians and Kakure Kirishitan?

The people who secretly maintained their faith throughout the ban on Christianity are called Hidden Christians. The people who persisted with the forms of faith that developed over those years even after the lifting of the ban are called Kakure Kirishitan.

Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake



Kasuga Village Information Center "Katarina"

Takushima Island

Nakaenoshima Island

Obae Lighthouse

Shiodawara cliff

Ichibu Church

Sunset Way

13.0km  
20 minutes by car

Enjoy the panorama from the viewpoint.

5 minutes by car

10 minutes by car

30 minutes by car and foot

World Cultural Heritage  
11 Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake  
Kasuga Village Information Center "Katarina"  
Kasuga Town, 166-1

World Cultural Heritage  
7 Nakaenoshima Island

Yamano Church

Ikitsuki Bridge

6.5km  
12 minutes by car

5.5km  
10 minutes by car

10.0km  
15 minutes by car

4.5km  
5 minutes by car

9.5km  
15 minutes by car

12.5km  
20 minutes by car

1 minute walk

30 minutes walk

15 minutes by car

10 minutes by car

15 minutes by car

20 minutes by car

### 80-minute tour

Hirado's highest peak  
Enjoy some gentle hiking.

#### P Yasumandake Parking

From the parking lot to the summit takes around 30 minutes each way. The path is well maintained and highly walkable. There are toilet facilities in the parking lot.



#### Walk the shrine approach

This 250-meter-long historic stone path is portrayed in pictures from the Edo period. It's a bit uneven, so please watch your step.



#### View from the summit

Go around the side of the shrine on top of Mt. Yasumandake to get a splendid view. Ikitsuki Island and Kasuga Village are right in front of you, with the Gotō Islands in the distance. (Please stay well away from the cliff edge here.)



The arrival and flourishing of Christianity

### 2-hour tour

Learn about the Age of Exploration when Christianity came to Japan.

#### 1 Hirado Dutch Trading Post

Originally built in 1639, this warehouse was the largest building in the Trading Post. The shogunate ordered its demolition because the design of the façade featured a year from the Christian calendar. (The present building is a 2011 reconstruction.)



#### 2 Francis Xavier Monument

The monument is situated in Sakigata Park, high on the hill behind the Dutch Trading Post. The park offers a fine view of the town and Hirado Strait.



#### 3 Matsura Historical Museum

The former private residence of the Matsura family, the lords of Hirado, this historic place once hosted many important visitors from overseas. Many unique historical artifacts are on display.



#### 4 St. Francis Xavier Memorial Church

Named after St. Francis Xavier, this church is a Hirado harbor landmark. The view looking up to the church with the temple in the foreground is considered a classic.



5 minutes walk

5 minutes walk

10 minutes walk

15 minutes by car

11.5km  
15 minutes by car

2.5km  
15 minutes by car

9.0km  
15 minutes by car

5.0km  
10 minutes by car

4.5km  
5 minutes by car

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10 minutes by car

The ban is lifted and Christianity revives

### 2-hour tour

Visit the beautiful churches that symbolize the revival of Christianity.

#### 14 Himosashi Church

This reinforced concrete church from 1929 was built on the site where most preaching was done from the Meiji era onward. Because of this, it is one of the most significant churches in the entire prefecture.



#### 15 Grave of Father Matrat

Father Jean François Matrat was the pastor of Himosashi Church and Hōki Church, as well as multiple other churches. He died in 1921 and was buried in the graveyard for foreigners on Tasaki Hill.



#### 16 Hōki Church

Father Matrat supervised the construction of this 1898 church, which is the oldest in Hirado. Somewhat unusually, the façade is of brick while the rest of the church is made of wood.



#### 17 Tabira Church

This brick church, consecrated in 1918, has a beautiful exterior and interior and has both historical and architectural value. It has been designated a Nationally Important Cultural Property.

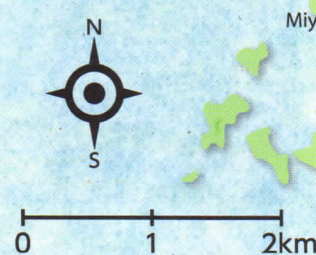


\* There are many other churches in addition to those shown here.

### For Visitors to Tabira Church

Tabira Church is a place of prayer. Visitors are asked to behave in a suitably quiet and respectful manner. It is best to contact the church before visiting, because the building is closed to visitors when ceremonies are taking place. The church also cannot accommodate a large number of visitors at any one time.

For inquiries, contact: Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region Information Center  
TEL: 095-823-7650  
<http://kyoukaigun.jp/en/>  
Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region Information Center



Time needed  
Times given for the tours include time for sightseeing.



## 1 Christianity arrives in Hirado, Japan's western capital

The first Portuguese ship to come to Japan arrived in Hirado, already a flourishing international port, in 1550. It was near the end of Japan's Age of Warring States, when the feudal lords were battling each other to expand their territory. That same year, the missionary Francis Xavier came to Hirado to preach. (A church known as Tenmonji Temple was later built here.)



**Sengoku Period**  
(1467–1600)

### Otenpenshia

Derived from the Portuguese *penitencia*, this was originally a whip used for the mortification of the flesh. Japanese Christians venerated it as an object of worship.



### Omizubin

An *omizubin* is a ceramic jar used for storing holy water collected at Nakenoshima Island and other sacred sites. A wooden stick known as an *izunpo* was used to sprinkle the holy water.

Christianity is banned and transmitted in secret

## 4 The Christians go into hiding



The churches and crosses in Hirado's villages were destroyed. The local Christians began to be referred to as Hidden Christians because, while outwardly going along with the religions of Buddhism and Shinto, they stayed secretly true to their own faith. They worshipped *nandogami* ("closer gods") in their homes, chanted Christian prayers known as *oratio*, and passed down the faith from generation to generation.

# The History of Christianity on Hirado

The arrival and flourishing of Christianity

## 2 Christianity spreads and churches are built

At the time, Matsura Takanobu (1529–1599) was the hereditary lord of the Hirado domain. He permitted two of his vassals, Koreda Yasutsune and his brother Ichibu Kageyu, to convert to Christianity, because he thought it might be advantageous for trade.

In 1558 and 1565, the inhabitants of Ikitsuki Island and the west coast of Hirado Island (both territories controlled by the Koreda brothers) converted to Christianity, making this the first region in Japan where the religion flourished. As Christianity spread, both the religion and its followers were referred to by the same Japanese word: *kirishitan*.



I LIKE CHRISTIANITY WELL ENOUGH...



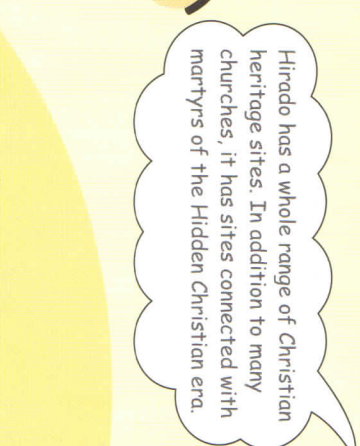
BUT I LIKE FOREIGN TRADE EVEN BETTER!



Christianity is banned and transmitted in secret

## 3 Repression of the Christians begins

Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), who was seeking to unify Japan in order to end conflict, issued an edict expelling the Christian fathers from Japan in 1587. Despite this, serious repression of Hirado's Christians did not begin until 1599, when Matsura Takanobu, who had been tolerant toward the foreign religion, died, and his converted vassals, Koreda Yasutsune and his brother Ichibu, had to flee.



Hirado has a whole range of Christian heritage sites. In addition to many churches, it has sites connected with martyrs of the Hidden Christian era.

The ban is lifted and Christianity revives PART II

## 6 Returning to the faith

With the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853, Japan's state of national seclusion came to an end. In 1865, a group of Hidden Christians visited Oura Cathedral, a church built in the foreign settlement at Nagasaki, and made the world aware that Japan's Christian community had survived the long centuries of repression.

In 1873, the Meiji government revoked the ban on Christianity. Catholic priests began to preach in many regions, and Hidden Christians came out of hiding and began building churches in their villages.

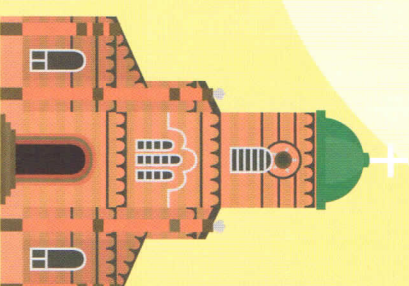
### Modoshi

*Modoshi* refers to funeral rites that were intended to send the soul of the deceased to paradise.



### Meiji era

(1868–1912)



The ban is lifted and Christianity revives PART I

## 5 Continuing with the ceremonies that were secretly passed down

Some people chose to continue with the forms of worship they had been practicing in secret even after the ban on Christianity was lifted. Known as Kakure Kirishitan, they venerated their ancestors who had been stalwart in their faith and treated the places where they had died as sacred.

Unlike today's Japanese Catholics, the Kakure Kirishitan have no churches of their own. Instead they continue to practice their faith alongside Buddhism and Shinto, just as they did when Christianity was forbidden in Japan. Focusing only on the kirishitan aspect of their faith, you can see that it preserves the basic forms of Christianity from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

