

## For those wishing to visit churches in the Nagasaki region

### Code of etiquette

A church is a place of prayer. When visiting, you are kindly requested to observe the code of etiquette and respect the church's spiritual atmosphere.



### Give prior notice before visiting the churches

When you wish to visit the churches listed below, please contact the relevant organisations and give them prior notice via their websites. Please note that, owing to a large number of visitors or due to religious events inside the churches, there are times when it may not be possible for you to visit. However, you can visit Oura Cathedral without prior notification.

#### Nagasaki Church Information Centre is in charge of visits to the following churches

Shitsu Church, Ono Church, Kuroshima Church, Tabira Church, Egami Church, Former Gorin Church, Kashiragashima Church, and Sakitsu Church.

#### Ojika Island Tourism is in charge of visits to the following church

Former Nokubi Church.

#### Nagasaki Church Information Centre

Dejima-Wharf 2nd floor, 1-1-205, Dejimamachi, Nagasaki City, 850-0862  
Tel +81-95-823-7650, Opening hours: 9:30 to 17:30  
<http://kyoukaigun.jp/en/>

#### Ojika Island Tourism

2791-13 Fuefukigo, Ojika Town, Kitamatsuura District, 857-4701 (within the Ojika Port Terminal)  
Tel +81-959-56-2646, Opening hours: 9:00 to 18:00  
<http://ojikajima.jp/>

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<http://kirishitan.jp>

Our goal is to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the summer of 2018, following an on-site investigation carried out by an international professional association (ICOMOS) in the summer of 2017.

Candidate  
for  
World  
Heritage

# Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region

Nagasaki Prefecture  
Kumamoto Prefecture  
Nagasaki City  
Sasebo City  
Hirado City  
Goto City  
Minamishimabara City  
Ojika Town  
Shinkamigoto Town  
Amakusa City

Japan's  
unique way of practising  
the Christian faith

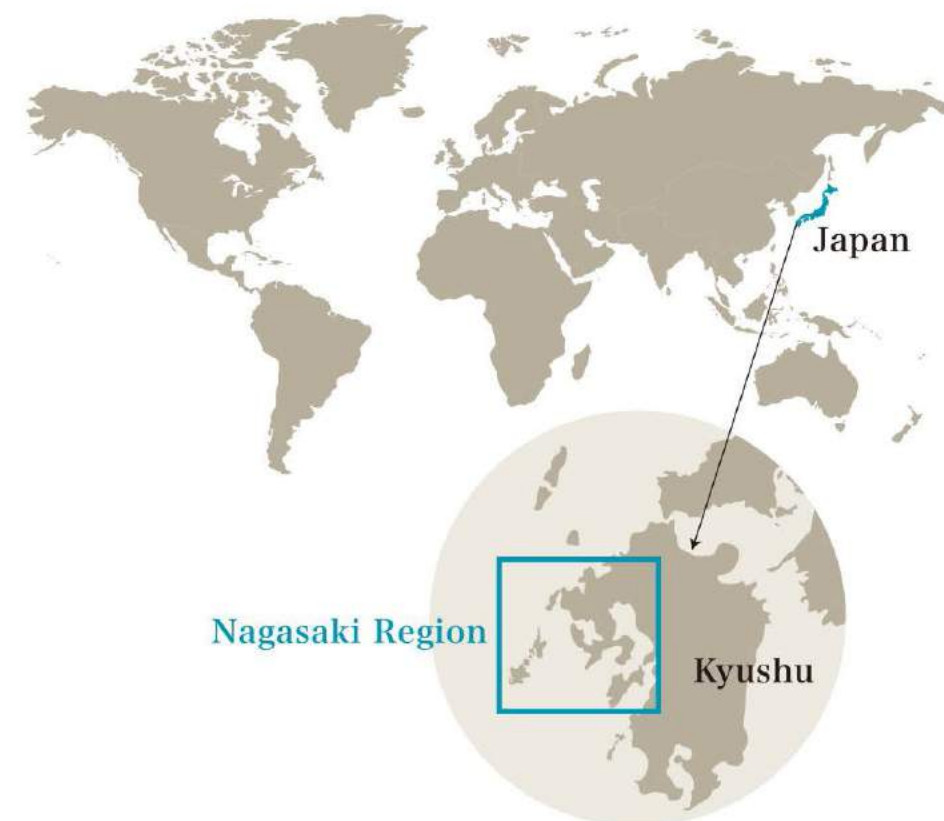
English

## Introduction to the Nagasaki Region

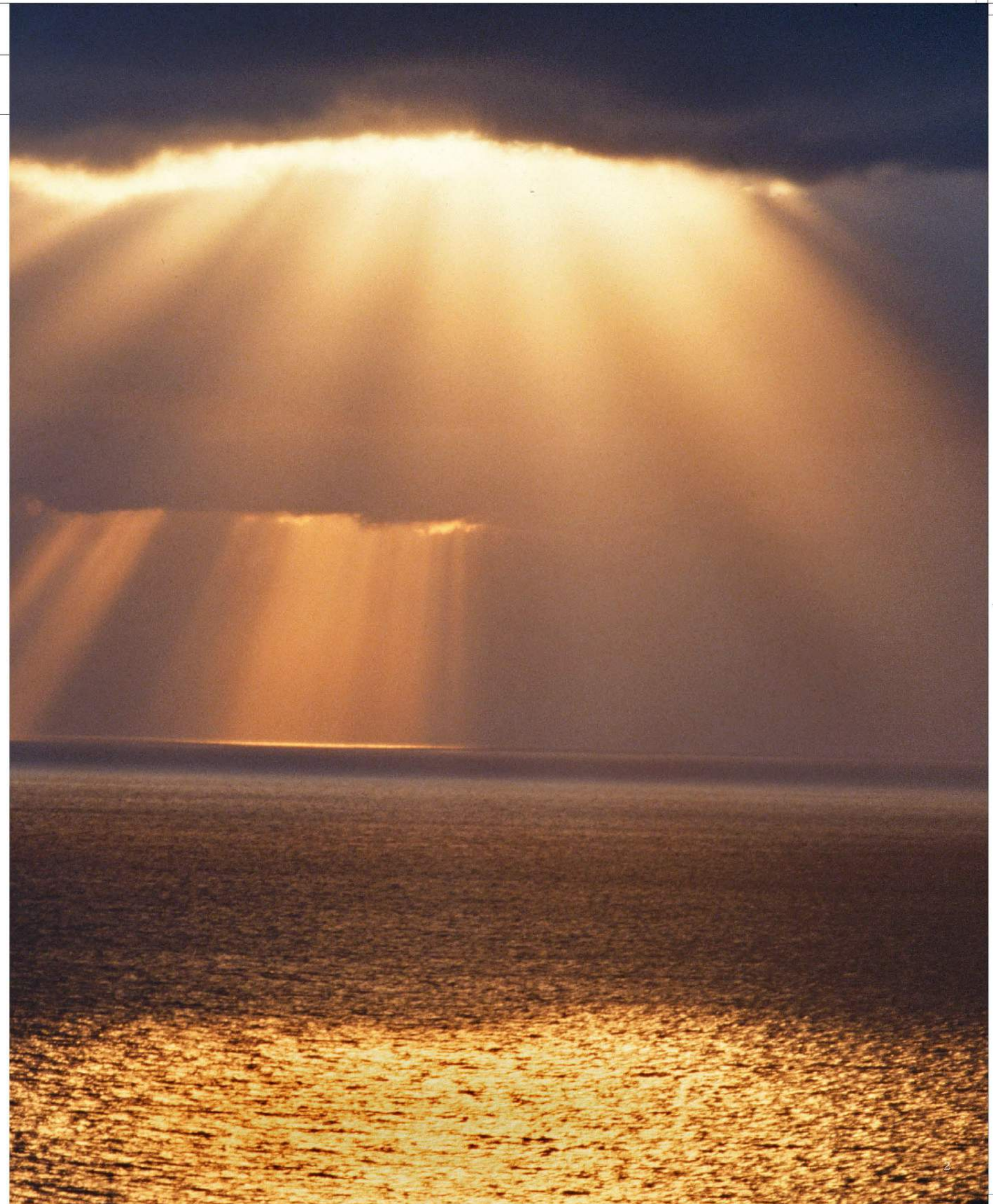
Japan lies at the far eastern edge of the area in which Catholicism was introduced during the Age of Exploration. The Nagasaki region, located in the western part of Kyushu in the south-western part of the archipelago, has served as Japan's gateway for exchanges with the Asian Continent from antiquity and, in the latter half of the 16th century, Catholic missionaries were very active throughout the region. As a result, newly baptised Japanese in the region could receive pastoral guidance from these missionaries over a longer period than anywhere else in Japan, and Catholic communities became firmly established there.

Based on these communities, even after Japan banned Christianity in the 17th century and not a single missionary was allowed to remain in Japan, some Catholics in the Nagasaki region nurtured their own unique religious system and continued to practice their faith in secret while coexisting with the conventional society and its religions. After the ban on Christianity was lifted in the latter half of the 19th century, the Hidden Christian communities rejoined the Catholic Church and built churches in their villages, which visually marked the end of their clandestine religious system nurtured during the ban. Against this historical background, the Nagasaki region still has an exceptionally large number of Catholics and churches, compared with other regions in Japan.

The property, 'Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region', is a unique testimony to the history of people and their communities who secretly transmitted their faith in Christianity during a time when the religion was prohibited for more than two centuries.



Photo/ Crepuscular rays in Sotome ①

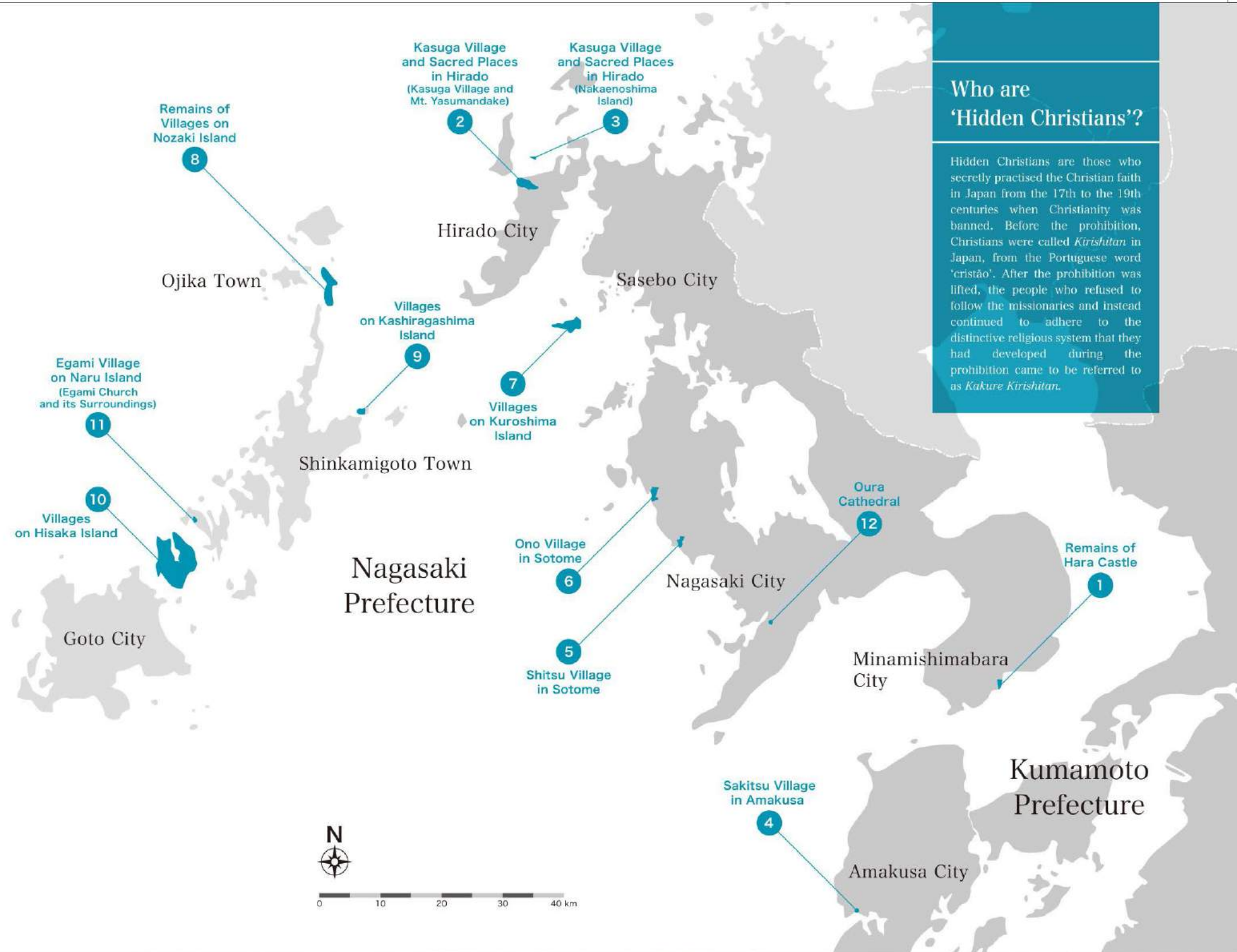


# Japan's unique practice of the Christian faith continued even during the ban on Christianity

'Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region' bear unique testimony to the tradition of people and their communities who secretly transmitted their faith in Christianity while surviving in the midst of the conventional society and its religions during the time of prohibition. These sites consist of 12 vital components that express the history of the tradition from its origin and formation, through its continuation and spread, to its transformation and end in the transitional phase following the lifting of the ban. The 12 components are located in very remote areas including peninsulas and small islands in the Nagasaki region where practitioners received pastoral guidance from Catholic missionaries during the Age of Exploration to a greater extent than in any other region of Japan. Japan itself lies at the far eastern edge of the area in Asia where Christianity was first introduced.

**Who are 'Hidden Christians'?**

Hidden Christians are those who secretly practised the Christian faith in Japan from the 17th to the 19th centuries when Christianity was banned. Before the prohibition, Christians were called *Kirishitan* in Japan, from the Portuguese word 'cristão'. After the prohibition was lifted, the people who refused to follow the missionaries and instead continued to adhere to the distinctive religious system that they had developed during the prohibition came to be referred to as *Kakure Kirishitan*.



## 12 components



<p><b>Remains of Hara Castle</b></p> <p>The site of a historic event that led to the establishment of Japan's national seclusion policy and Hidden Christians assuming responsibility for transmitting their own beliefs without the support of Western priests.</p> <p>1</p>	<p><b>Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado</b></p> <p>(Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake) (Nakaenoshima Island)</p> <p>Hidden Christians concealed their faith in this village by venerating the mountain and island as their sacred places and the sites on which their ancestors had been martyred.</p> <p>2</p>	<p><b>Sakitsu Village in Amakusa</b></p> <p>In this village, Hidden Christians were able to continue practising their faith over time by substituting everyday items used in daily life and work for Christian devotional objects.</p> <p>4</p>	<p><b>Shitsu Village in Sotome</b></p> <p>At this village, Hidden Christians were able to practice their faith by secretly revering sacred icons and keeping the Catholic liturgical calendar and catechism.</p> <p>5</p>	<p><b>Ono Village in Sotome</b></p> <p>At this place, Hidden Christians enshrined their own deities in Shinto shrines and disguised their faith by outwardly behaving as Shinto practitioners.</p> <p>6</p>	<p><b>Villages on Kuroshima Island</b></p> <p>Hidden Christians maintained their faith in these villages by praying to the <i>Maria Kannon</i> statue in a Buddhist temple after their migration to former clan pasturelands in need of redevelopment.</p> <p>7</p>	<p><b>Remains of Villages on Nozaki Island</b></p> <p>Here the villages were built on steeply sloping terrain. Hidden Christians continued to practice their faith after migrating to the island regarded as sacred by Shinto believers.</p> <p>8</p>	<p><b>Villages on Kashiragashima Island</b></p> <p>It was in these villages that Hidden Christians passed on their faith after their migration to the island under the guidance of a Buddhist man. Formerly, that once had been used for sick people; therefore, there were no pre-existing communities.</p> <p>9</p>	<p><b>Villages on Hisaka Island</b></p> <p>Hidden Christians maintained their faith in these villages after migrating to undeveloped land on the island in accordance with a migration policy established by feudal lords. There was mutual cooperation between the Hidden Christians and the pre-existing Buddhist communities.</p> <p>10</p>	<p><b>Egami Village on Naru Island (Egami Church and its Surroundings)</b></p> <p>This village was established by Hidden Christians who migrated to a valley near the seacoast. Isolated from the pre-existing villages, and they later built a church after the ban on Christianity was lifted. The conventional church design was adapted to take the characteristic topography of the village into account.</p> <p>11</p>	<p><b>Oura Cathedral</b></p> <p>The site of an encounter with returned Catholic missionaries after an absence of over two centuries that triggered the transitional phase in the religious identity of Hidden Christian communities</p> <p>12</p>
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Honmaru (the main enclosure) of the Remains of Hara Castle during the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion (Component ①, depicted in 'Shimabara Jinzu Byobu', housed in the Akizuki Folklore Museum.)

# The value as World Heritage

## Outstanding Universal Value

### I | Origin of the tradition of transmitting the Christian faith

Catholicism was first introduced to Japan by a Jesuit priest, Francis Xavier, in 1549. It spread nationwide due to the evangelising activities of the Jesuits who came to Japan after Xavier, and also due to the protection afforded by baptised feudal lords (*Kirishitan Daimyo*) who sought to profit from overseas trade. However, the ban on Christianity, which had begun with an edict issued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi expelling the missionaries, was tightened under the Tokugawa Shogunate, which ordered the destruction of all the churches in Japan. In 1637, during the nationwide ban on Christianity, remaining Catholics took up arms against the tyranny of their local lord and were besieged in Hara Castle. The Shogunate was shocked at this Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion and adopted its national seclusion policy to prohibit the arrival of Portuguese ships that could be used to smuggle missionaries into Japan. After the last missionary within Japan had been martyred in 1644, the remaining Japanese Catholics could only maintain their faith and communities on their own in secret. Many such communities disintegrated in rapid succession in the latter half of the 17th century due to a series of large-scale crackdowns on remaining Catholics, forcing them to either renounce their religious faith or be martyred.

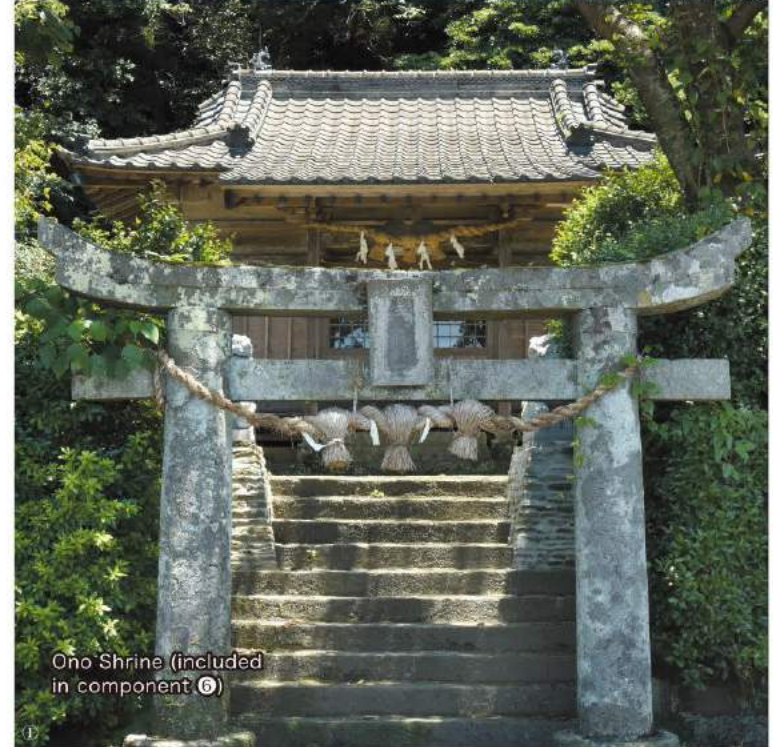


Japanese mirror (used as a Hidden Christian devotional tool in component ④)

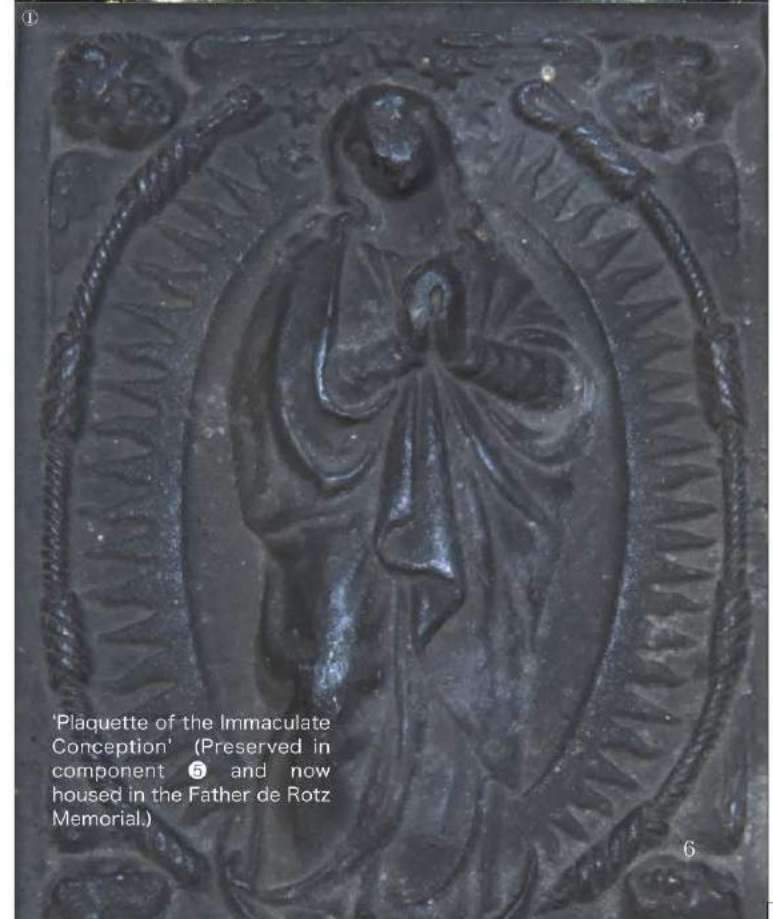
### II | Formation of the tradition of transmitting the Christian faith

Hidden Christian communities disappeared in Japan except for the Nagasaki region, where Catholic missionary activities had taken place more extensively than in any other parts of Japan in the initial phase of the introduction of Catholicism. This region provided the foundations for the maintenance of the secret faith even into the 18th century and afterwards. Here, Hidden Christians nurtured a distinctive religious system and continued to practice their secret faith in various ways. Those in Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado venerated a mountain, an island and other natural sites as sacred places or as sites of martyrdom. Those in Sakitsu Village in Amakusa substituted everyday items that were used in their life and work for Christian devotional objects. Those in Shitsu Village in Sotome continued their religious practices by themselves based on the Catholic liturgical calendar and the Christian catechism, and they secretly venerated sacred images. Those in Ono Village in Sotome combined their faith with common Shinto practices. In this way, the Hidden Christians in these villages nurtured their religious system based on secrecy.

Kasuga Village, Mt. Yasumandake and Nakaenoshima Island (included in components ② and ③)



Ono Shrine (included in component ⑤)



'Plaque of the Immaculate Conception' (Preserved in component ⑥ and now housed in the Father de Rotz Memorial.)



Okinokojima Shrine  
(included in component ⑨)



Shirahama Village  
(included in component ⑩)

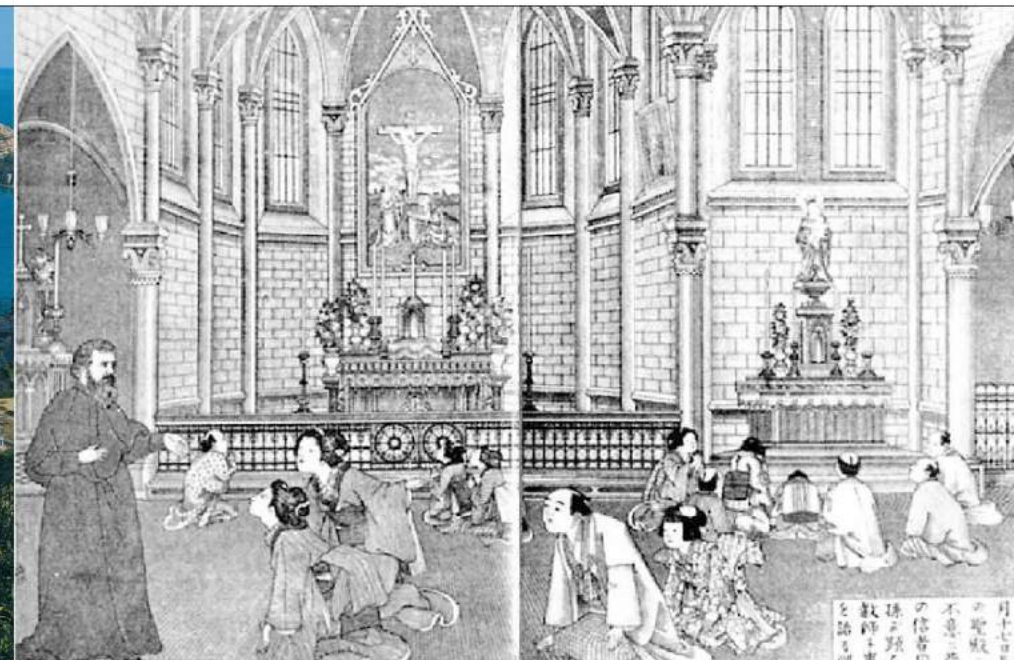


Illustration of the 'Discovery of Hidden Christians'  
(A. Villion, *Yamato Hijiri Chishionokakioki*)



Oura Cathedral (component ⑪)  
at the time of its construction  
\* Photo reprinted by courtesy of Nagasaki Bunkensha

### III | Hidden Christians' endeavours to continue and spread their religious faith

To cope with increases in the population in Sotome, some of the villagers began to migrate to the Goto Islands and other remote areas at the end of the 18th century. Many of the migrants were Hidden Christians, and they decided where to settle, considering how they could live alongside pre-existing communities and their religions. These destinations included abandoned pasturelands on Kuroshima Island that needed redevelopment, untouched land on Hisaka Island, an island that was regarded as sacred by Shinto practitioners (Nozaki Island), and parts of Kashiragashima Island that had been used for sick people and therefore had no settled communities.

Specific sites and devotional tools provided a focus for the Hidden Christian faith, and the migration of Hidden Christians contributed to the continuation of their religious beliefs for over two centuries.



Obiraki Village  
(included in component ⑫)



Warabe Village  
(included in component ⑬)



### IV | The transitional phase in the religious identity of Hidden Christians, leading to the transformation and the end of their tradition

Following the opening of Japan to foreign trade in 1854, Catholic missionaries returned to Nagasaki and constructed Oura Cathedral for Westerners within the Nagasaki Foreign Settlement. In 1865, a group of Hidden Christians from Urakami came to the cathedral and revealed to the missionary that they had been practising Christianity in secret. This event came to be known as the Discovery of Hidden Christians, following which some Hidden Christian communities professed their faith despite the fact that the ban on Christianity was still in effect. The authorities once again strengthened the suppression of Christians, leading to the last wave of persecutions. In 1873, however, due to Western countries lodging strong protests to the Meiji Government, the ban on Christianity was eventually lifted in Japan. Consequently, Hidden

Christians split into three groups: (1) those who reaccepted Catholicism under the guidance of the missionaries and rejoined the Catholic Church, (2) those who continued with their own practices nurtured during the lengthy period when the ban on Christianity was in place, and (3) those who decided to convert to Buddhism or Shinto.

Simple churches were built in the villages where the inhabitants reconverted to Catholicism. Among these churches, Egami Church on Naru Island is a representative example clearly demonstrating how traditional techniques were adopted to deal with the environment in the places Hidden Christians migrated to and visually marking the end of the cultural tradition nurtured during the ban on Christianity.

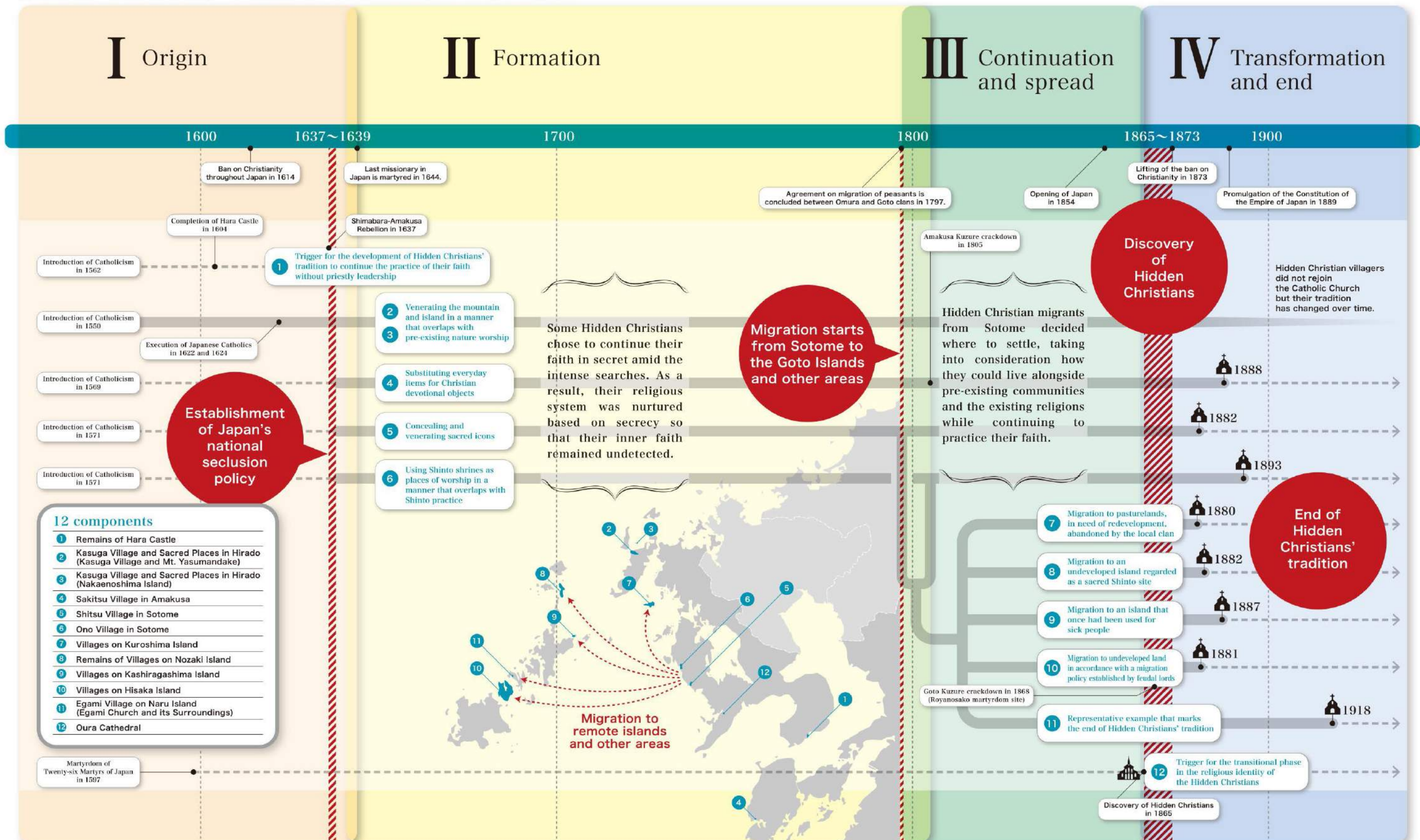
Egami Church  
(included in component ⑭)



# Interrelationships of the 12 components

Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region

## Hidden Christians' tradition to maintain their faith



# Introduction to 12 components

1

## Remains of Hara Castle



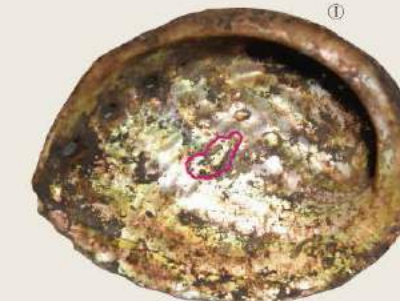
Honmaru (or the main enclosure) of Hara Castle at the time of the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion ('*Harajo Koizu*', housed in the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo.)



Honmaru of the Remains of Hara Castle at present

4

## Sakitsu Village in Amakusa



An abalone shell used by Hidden Christians and now preserved by a villager. The part encircled by a red line was regarded as a representation of the Virgin Mary.

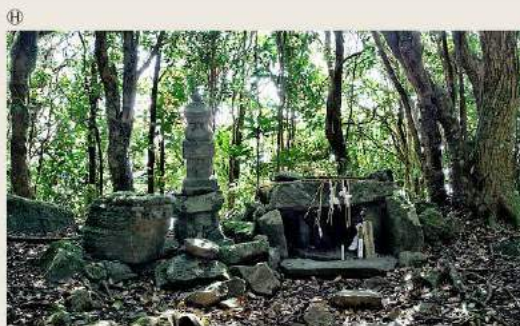


The current Sakitsu Church standing at the site of the former village headmen's house, in which the *Efumi* ceremony was held by the authorities to find Hidden Christians during the ban on Christianity.

2

## Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado

(Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake)



Stone objects on the summit of Mt. Yasumandake, which were a traditional focus for nature worship and also venerated by Hidden Christians.



Kasuga Village of Hidden Christians who venerated Mt. Yasumandake.

5

## Shitsu Village in Sotome



'Saint Michael', an icon secretly kept and venerated by Hidden Christians. (Copy, housed in the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture.)

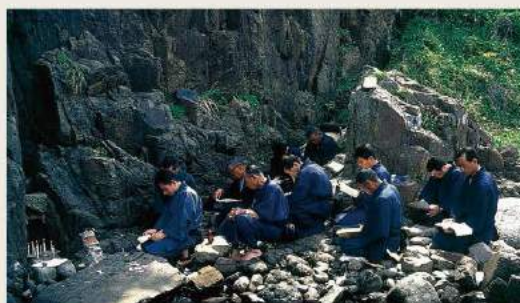


Shitsu Church built on a hill overlooking Shitsu Village

3

## Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado

(Nakaenoshima Island)



*Omizutori* ceremony held on Nakaenoshima Island to collect holy water for the Hidden Christian baptismal ceremony.



Nakaenoshima Island where Japanese Catholics were executed in the early phase of the ban on Christianity and later venerated as a site of martyrdom by Hidden Christians.

6

## Ono Village in Sotome



Kado Shrine, a Shinto shrine in which an early Japanese Catholic is enshrined.



Ono Church built in the centre of Ono Village

# Introduction to 12 components

7

## Villages on Kuroshima Island



Shikirimaki graveyard  
\*The Hidden Christian gravestones in this graveyard, resembling Buddhist memorials, face eastward, while Buddhist graves face westward.

The current Kuroshima Church standing on the site of the first church.

10

## Villages on Hisaka Island



Maria Kannon statue from Eiri Village (Housed in Dozaki Church Christian Archive Centre.)



Former Gorin Church, the first church on Hisaka Island that was later moved to its current location.

8

## Remains of Villages on Nozaki Island



Remains of Funamori Village established by Hidden Christians who migrated to the southern tip of Nozaki Island.

Former Nokubi Church standing on the site of the house of the former Hidden Christian leaders called *Chokata*.

11

## Egami Village on Naru Island (Egami Church and its Surroundings)



The floor level of Egami Church is set high above the ground to deal with the high humidity.

Egami Church is built in a location close to a spring and protected from strong sea winds.

9

## Villages on Kashiragashima Island



Graves of the Maeda family who led the migration to Kashiragashima Island.  
\*As the graves are located on private property, they are not open to the public.

The current Kashiragashima Church standing on the site of the temporary church.

12

## Oura Cathedral



The interior of Oura Cathedral, where the 'Discovery of Hidden Christians' took place.

Oura Cathedral, which underwent extension work after the ban on Christianity was lifted.