

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 organizations and give them prior notice via their websites. However, you can visit Oura Cathedral without prior notification.

- **"Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region" Information Centre is in charge of visits to the following churches**
Shitsu Church, Ono Church, Kuroshima Church, Tabira Church, Egami Church, Former Gorin Church, and Kashiragashima Church.
Dejima-Wharf 2nd floor, 1-1-205, Dejimamachi, Nagasaki City, 850-0862
Tel +81-95-823-7650, Opening hours: 9:30 to 17:30
<https://kyoukaigun.jp/en/>
- **Ojika Island Tourism is in charge of visits to the following church**
Former Nokubi Church.
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
<https://ojikajima.jp/>
- **"KASSE JAPAN Co., Ltd. Kyushu Sanko Call Centre" is in charge of visits to the following church**
Sakitsu Church.
9th floor, Taiyo Seimei Kumamoto Building, 4-3 Hanabata cho, Chuo ku, Kumamoto City, Kumamoto Prefecture, 860-0806
Tel +81-96-300-5535, Opening hours: 10:00 to 17:00
<https://www.kyusanko.co.jp/ryoko/pickup/sakitsu-church/>

Published by Cultural Advancement and World Heritage Division,
Nagasaki Prefectural Government
Tel : +8195-894-3171, FAX + 81-95-829-2336
Email : s38080@pref.nagasaki.lg.jp
Photographers : Higurashi Yuichi, Ikeda Tsutomu
Issued in February 2024

<https://kirisitan.jp/en>



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Hidden Christian Sites
in the Nagasaki Region
inscribed on the World
Heritage List in 2018



World Cultural 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
distinctive religious
tradition

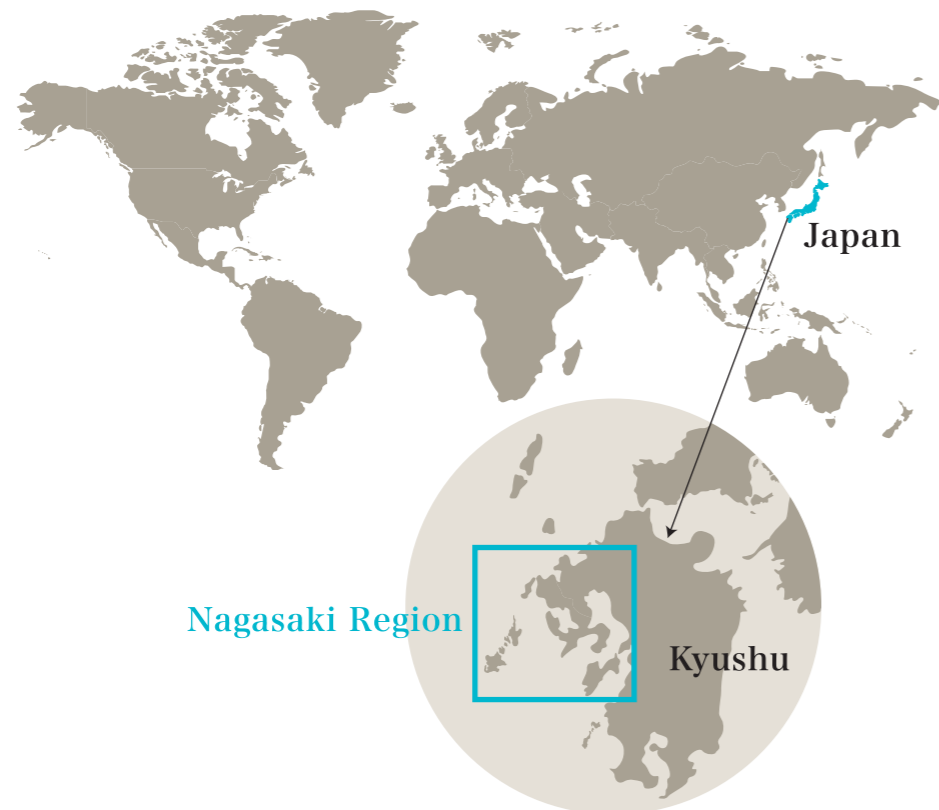
English

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 a tradition of practising their religious faith in hiding in the midst of the conventional society and its religions, such as Buddhism and Shinto. After the ban on Christianity was lifted in the latter half of the 19th century, the Hidden Christian communities joined the Catholic Church as their ancestors did in the 16th century and built churches in their villages, which visually marked the end of their tradition 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



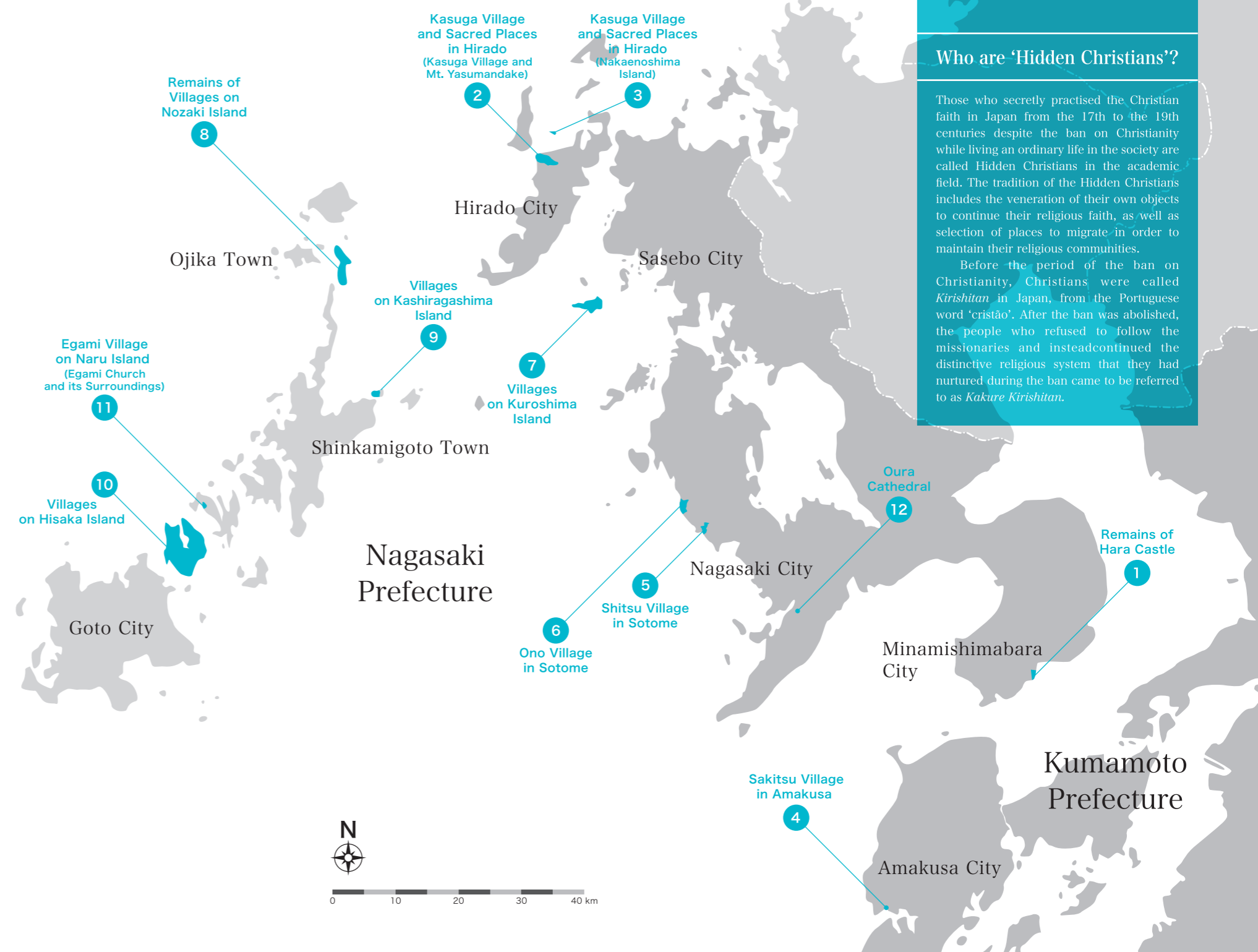
Japan's distinctive religious tradition nurtured in the absence of missionaries

'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, such as Buddhism and Shinto, in the absence of missionaries due to the ban on Christianity. These sites consist of 12 vital components that express the history of the tradition from the beginning of the absence of missionaries and hiding of Christians, through the remaining Christians' endeavours to continue their faith and communities, to the end of the hiding triggered by contact with missionaries. 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 introduced at that time.

Who are 'Hidden Christians'?

Those who secretly practised the Christian faith in Japan from the 17th to the 19th centuries despite the ban on Christianity while living an ordinary life in the society are called Hidden Christians in the academic field. The tradition of the Hidden Christians includes the veneration of their own objects to continue their religious faith, as well as selection of places to migrate in order to maintain their religious communities.

Before the period of the ban on Christianity, Christians were called *Kirishitan* in Japan, from the Portuguese word 'cristão'. After the ban was abolished, the people who refused to follow the missionaries and instead continued the distinctive religious system that they had nurtured during the ban came to be referred to as *Kakure Kirishitan*.



12 components

<p>Remains of Hara Castle</p> <p>The site of the main battlefield during the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion, after which the remaining Christians had to go into hiding and find ways out to continue their religious faith by themselves.</p>	<p>Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado</p> <p>(Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake)</p> <p>Hidden Christians concealed their faith in this village by venerating the mountain that had been worshiped since before the introduction of Christianity to Japan and the island on which their ancestors had been martyred.</p>	<p>Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado</p> <p>(Nakaenoshima Island)</p> <p>Hidden Christians concealed their faith in this village by venerating the mountain that had been worshiped since before the introduction of Christianity to Japan and the island on which their ancestors had been martyred.</p>	<p>Sakitsu Village in Amakusa</p> <p>In Sakitsu, 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>Shitsu Village in Sotome</p> <p>At this village, Hidden Christians were able to practise their faith by secretly revering sacred icons.</p>	<p>Ono Village in Sotome</p> <p>In Ono Village, Hidden Christians practised their religious faith by venerating their own deities secretly enshrined in Shinto shrines.</p>	<p>Villages on Kuroshima Island</p> <p>Hidden Christians maintained their religious communities after they settled in former clan pasturelands on Kuroshima Island in need of redevelopment.</p>	<p>Remains of Villages on Nozaki Island</p> <p>Hidden Christians maintained their religious communities after they migrated to Nozaki Island, which was regarded as sacred by Shinto believers.</p>	<p>Villages on Kashiragashima Island</p> <p>Hidden Christians maintained their religious communities after they migrated to Kashiragashima Island, which once had been used for sick people.</p>	<p>Villages on Hisaka Island</p> <p>Hidden Christians maintained their religious communities in these villages after migrating to undeveloped land on the island in accordance with a migration policy established by the Goto clan.</p>	<p>Egami Village on Naru Island and its Surroundings</p> <p>Egami Village is a prominent example of a village that took shape when Hidden Christians settled in a valley near the sea, some distance from Buddhist villages, to maintain their community.</p>	<p>Oura Cathedral</p> <p>The site of the 'Discovery of Hidden Christians', an encounter with returned Catholic missionaries that triggered the end of Hidden Christians' hiding.</p>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

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 | Beginning of the absence of missionaries and hiding of Christians

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, by which all the churches were destroyed and all the missionaries were ordered to leave 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 (known as *Sakoku*) 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. These believers are referred to as Hidden Christians. 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.



Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake (included in components 2)



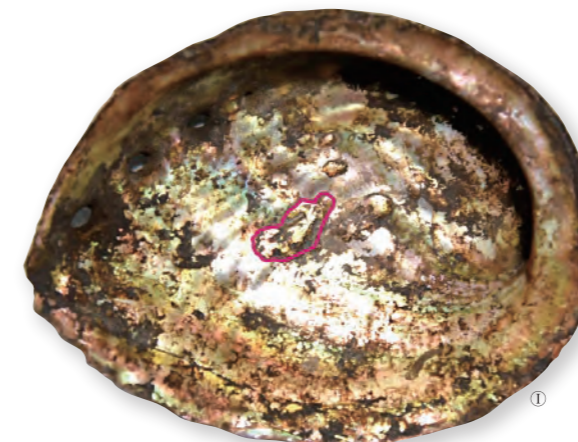
Nakaenoshima Island (included in components 3)

II | Hidden Christians' endeavours to continue their religious 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 tried to find ways out to practise their secret faith. Their own objects provided a focus for their worship: for example, a mountain and an island in Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado, everyday items that were used in their life and work in Sakitsu Village in Amakusa, sacred images in Shitsu Village in Sotome, and Shinto shrines in Ono Village in Sotome.



Ono Shrine (included in component 6)



An abalone shell used as a Hidden Christian devotional tool in Component 4, and now preserved by villager *The part encircled by a red line was regarded as a representation of the Virgin Mary.



'Plaquette of the Immaculate Conception' (Preserved in component 5 and now housed in the Father de Rotz Memorial.)



Okinokojima Shrine
(included in component ⑨)



Shirahama Village
(included in component ⑨)

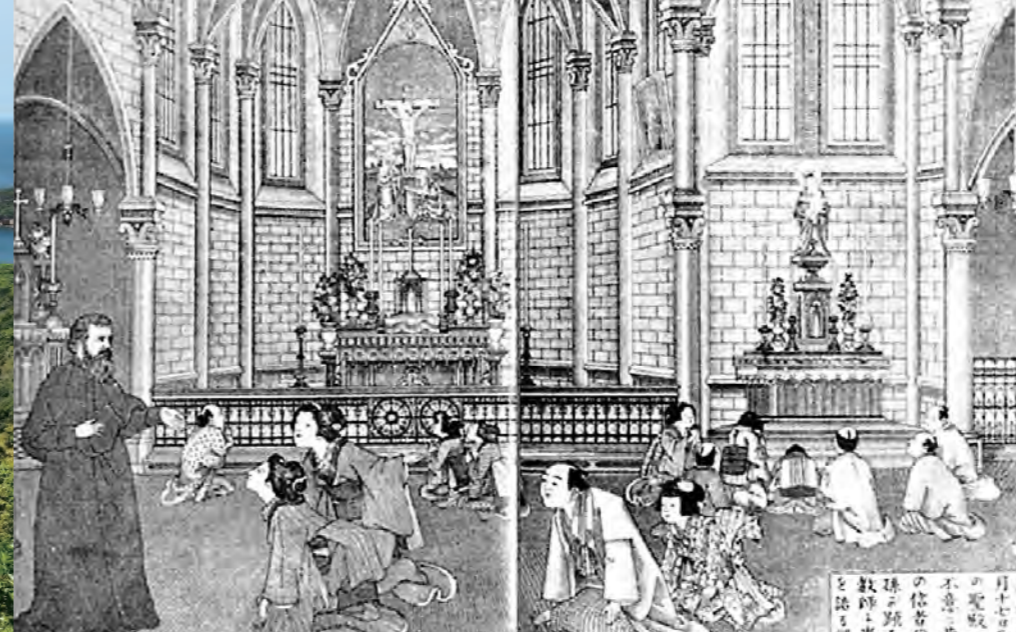


Illustration of the 'Discovery of Hidden Christians'
(A. Villion, *Yamato Hijiri Chishionokakioki*.)

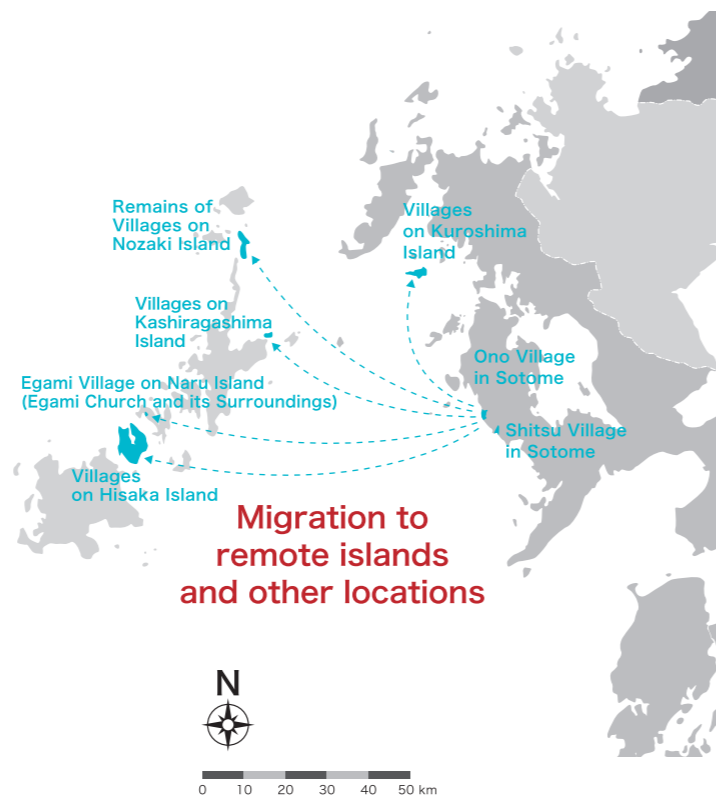


Oura Cathedral (component ⑩)
at the time of its construction
* Photo reprinted by courtesy of Nagasaki Bunkensha

III | Hidden Christians' endeavours to maintain their religious communities

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 maintain their religious communities and live alongside pre-existing communities and their religions. These destinations included abandoned pasturelands of the feudal lord in the Villages on Kuroshima Island that needed redevelopment, a location that was regarded as sacred by Shinto practitioners in the Remains of Villages on Nozaki Island, and a location in the Villages on Kashiragashima Island that had been used for sick people and therefore had no settled communities, and untouched land in the Villages on Hisaka Island.

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.



Migration to remote islands and other locations

Obiraki Village
(included in component ⑩)



Warabe Village
(included in component ⑦)



IV | The transitional phase triggered by contact with missionaries, leading to the end of Hidden Christians' hiding

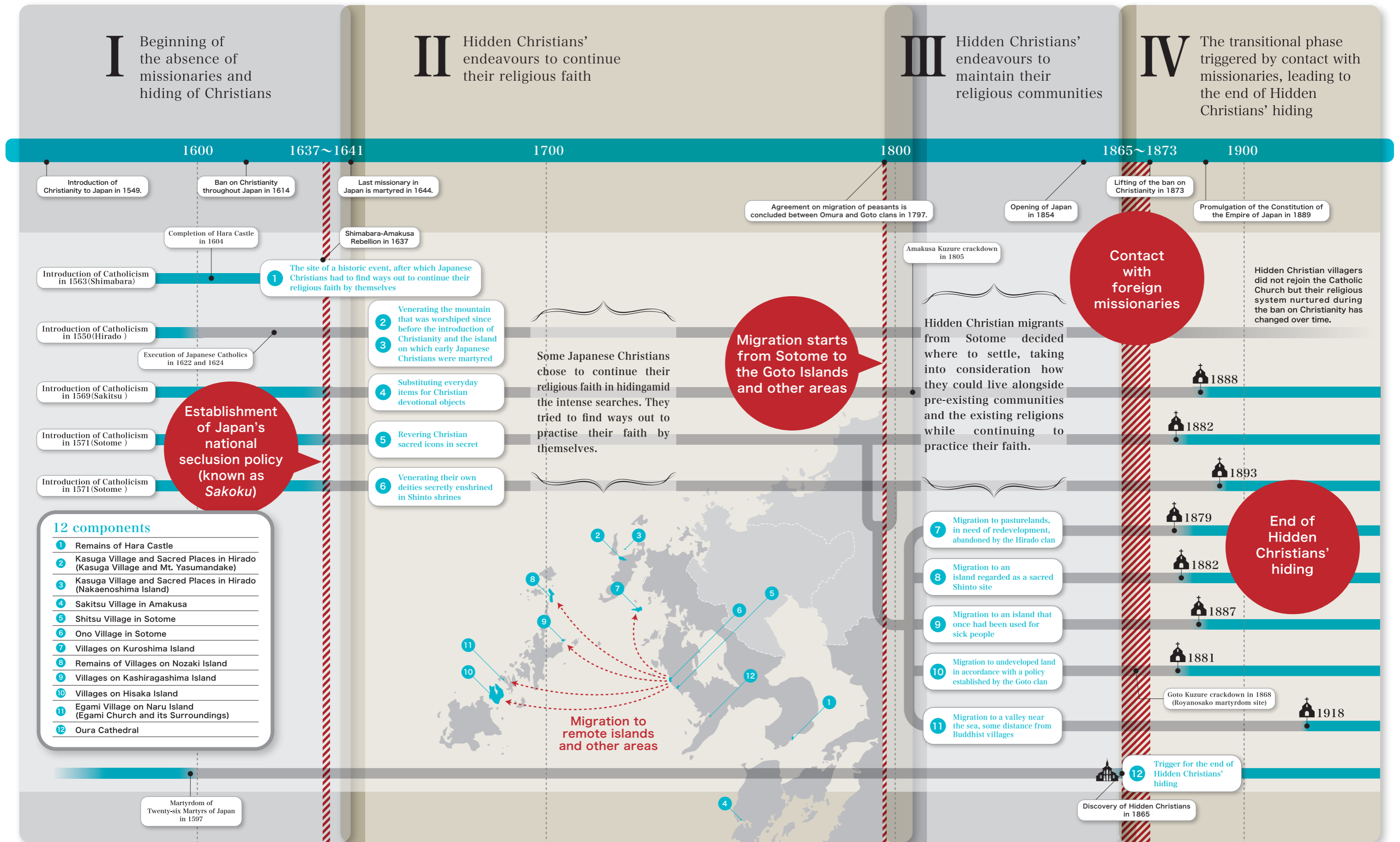
Following the opening of Japan to overseas trade in 1854, Catholic missionaries returned to Nagasaki and constructed Oura Cathedral for Westerners within the Nagasaki Foreign Settlement. In 1865, a group of Hidden Christians from Urakami came to the cathedral and revealed to the missionary that they had been practising Christianity in secret. This event came to be known as the Discovery of Hidden Christians, following which many 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, 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 hiding of Hidden Christians.

Egami Church
(included in component ⑩)



Interrelationships of the 12 components



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



Statues of the traditional Japanese divine beings used as Hidden Christian devotional items; *Daikokuten* (left) and *Ebisu* (right). These statues are now kept by a villager.

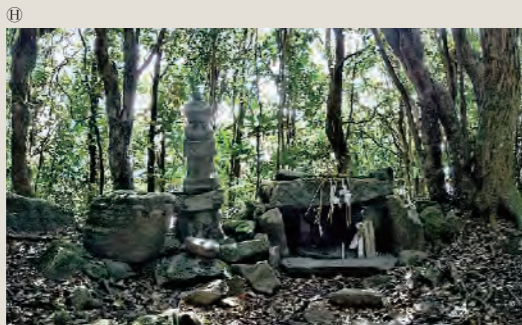


The current Sakitsu Church standing at the site of the former village headmen's house, in which the *Efumi* ceremony was held by the authorities to find Hidden Christians during the ban on Christianity.

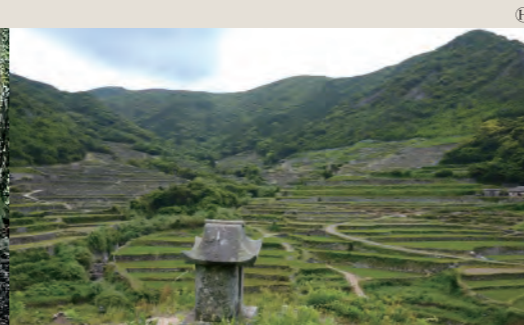
2

Kasuga Village and Sacred Places in Hirado

(Kasuga Village and Mt. Yasumandake)



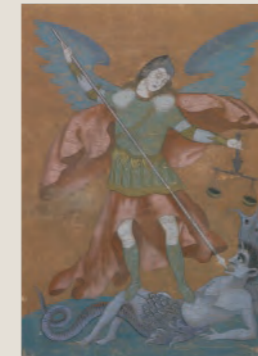
Stone objects on the summit of Mt. Yasumandake, which had special significance for Hidden Christians.



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



Kozenji, a Buddhist temple with which all the people on the island had to affiliate themselves.



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.