

NARAMACHI

FOLKTALES WALKING MAP



ならまち民話地図

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USING THE NUMBERS FROM THE MAP, ENJOY READING EACH SPOT'S FOLKTALE.

1 The Dragon of Renchoji Temple

On the ceiling of the inner sanctum of Renchoji Temple, there is a large painting of a dragon—said to be painted by Mototoshi Kano.

A long time ago, this dragon got out of the temple every night and ravaged the neighboring fields. So, the priest of Renchoji Temple painted over the eyes and three scales of the dragon in Chinese ink. Then, the dragon could not escape the ceiling anymore.

You can see a circle drawn around the painting of the dragon. It is said that when a certain man possessing psychic powers confronted the dragon, he drew the additional circle to tie down its demonic power.



2 Origin of "Higashimuki (East facing) Street"

The area ranging from Kintetsu Nara Station to the head office of Nanto Bank is called "Higashimuki". There are two residents' associations in this area. The one closer to Kintetsu Nara Station is called Nakamachi and the other, closer to Nanto Bank, is called Minamimachi. These two associations were combined into one and became the main commercial avenue of Nara called Higashimuki Commercial Avenue.



The reason why this area is called "Higashimuki (East facing)" is that, they say, in the middle of the Meiji Period, the houses were built looking only toward the east. As the houses were built on the west side of the street, all of them faced east. At the time, along the east side of the street, stood the earthen wall of Kofukuji Temple.

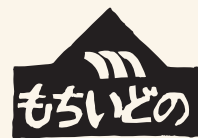
4 Origin of "Mochiidono (Mr. Rice Cake) Street"

It was about two hundred years after En no Gyoja founded the temple on Mt. Omine. A big snake lived in Akodaki waterfall on Mt. Omine, and did bad things to the visiting ascetics. Accordingly, fewer and fewer people climbed up the mountain. Ultimately, this sacred ground became deserted.

It was then that Rigen Daishi, a high priest famous for rejuvenating the Mt. Omimesan Temple, was ordered by Imperial command to exterminate the big snake. He asked for help from Kanbe Hakoya, a senior of the temple, who lived in Nara at the time. Kanbe was a man of great strength and bravery and could blow a conch shell (triton).

They enticed away the big snake. Rigen Daishi held the snake spellbound with the power of Buddhism, and Kanbe cut it into two parts with a sword. Following this, the sacred ground of Mt. Omimesan regained its popularity.

Kanbe Hakoya always brought mochi (rice cake), Rigen Daishi's favorite food, as a gift for when he visited the priest from Nara. So, Rigen Daishi used to call Kanbe "Mochii Dono (Mr. Rice Cake)". The place where Mochii Dono lived came to be called "Mochiidono".



7 Ishiko Zume of Jusan Gane (Thirteen Bells)

The deer of Nara have been treated with great care since early times because they are regarded as messengers of the gods. It is said that when the god of Kasuga Shrine moved to Nara, he rode on a deer. When anyone killed such a precious deer, he or she was sentenced to be buried alive in a hole with the dead deer. The punishment was called "Ishiko Zume".



Bodaiin Omido Temple is popularly called Jusan Gane. A long time ago, there was a temple school beside the temple. One day, when a boy called Sansaku was practicing calligraphy chanting "i, ro, ha, i, ro, ha (A, B, C, A, B, C)" at the school, a deer came to the school and began to eat an important document, which was laid in the corridor. Sansaku was shocked to see it and, shouting "Hey!", he impulsively threw a nearby paperweight at the deer. Then, the deer fell dead. As someone who had killed a deer, Sansaku was sentenced to be punished by Ishiko Zume. A hole was dug in the east of the garden in front of the temple, and he was buried alive with the deer.

Sansaku's mother planted a maple tree in his memory at the place where he was buried. It is said that this incident originated the combination of "deer with maple trees". The time when Sansaku was buried was between the sixth and seventh hour in the evening. Hence, by adding six and seven, the place came to be called "Jusan Gane (Thirteen Bells)".

8 Kishimojin and Pomegranate

Kishimojin is a goddess. She loved to eat human flesh, so she often stole children and ate them.

Once, Buddha thought what she was doing was wrong, and hid one of her scores of children. She made a frantic search for the child. Buddha said to her, "You are in such grief even though only one child is lost among plenty. Humans have only a few children. Can you imagine the terrible sorrow of the parents whose children are stolen? Do not steal and eat human children, but behave well!" Kishimojin said, "You are right," admitting her wrong behavior. Since then, she steals no more children.

Buddha said to her, "If you want to eat human flesh, eat a pomegranate instead, as it looks just like human flesh," and he handed a pomegranate to her. So, when the pomegranate season comes, you can see a lot of offerings of pomegranates at Kishimojin Temple.



3 Origin of Uneme Jinja Shrine

There is a willow tree called Kinukake Yanagi on the east bank of Sarusawa Pond, and Uneme Jinja Shrine is on the west bank. The shrine faces west standing beside the pond, and its torii (shrine gate) stands on the pond side—which is the back side of the shrine. It's said that this is the only shrine in Japan which has a torii behind it.

Long, long ago, there was an *uneme* (court lady) who served for an emperor in Nara. She was so beautiful. One day, she attracted the emperor's attention and was called to his place. But, it only happened once and never again. In despair, she threw herself into Sarusawa Pond and died. Before she drowned herself, she took off her robe and hung it on a willow tree. So, the willow tree came to be called "Kinukake Yanagi (Hanging Robe Willow)".

After that, Uneme Jinja Shrine was built in honor of the *uneme*. When the shrine was built, it originally looked toward the pond. However, maybe since the *uneme*—whose soul was enshrined in it—felt sad to see the pond in which she killed herself, and the shrine turned itself around in one night.



5 Chujo Hime (Princess Chujo)

Tanjoji Temple is the place where Chujo Hime was born.

Her father and mother wanted a child and made a wish to Kannon (Goddess of Mercy) of Hasedera Temple. Then, in their dreams, Kannon appeared and said to them, "Your wish will be granted, but it means that one of you must be lost. Is it alright?" "Sure, we are happy to accept the condition" they said, and as soon as they replied, they woke up. After a while, Chujo Hime was born to them. They brought her up with tender and loving care as the dearest one.



When she was three years old, as predicted by Kannon, Chujo's mother died. Her father felt sorry for her and found her a new mother. Her new mother pretended to love her and said to her, "Sweet little thing, have this cake!" in front of her father. But when he was not present, she was hard on her and said, "Go away! You need no kimono even though it is cold." After the stepmother's own son was born, she became harder and harder on her stepdaughter. On snowy days in winter, she used to bind Chujo Hime to a pine tree and whip her. The pine tree is still seen in Tokuyuji Temple.

Eventually, Chujo Hime became a nun at Taimadera Temple.

9 Roben Sugi (Cedar of Roben)

Long ago, a religious couple lived in Shiga no Sato Village in Ohmi Province. Every day and night they said a prayer to Kannon (Goddess of Mercy), "Please, bring us a child". At last, a beautiful baby boy was born to them. The mother reared him with great care and never left him even for a moment.

On her child's second birthday, she went to the field to pick mulberry leaves with him. While she was working hard, a big eagle suddenly swooped down on them, picked up the child and flew away. The eagle flew and flew to the south, with the child in its talons.

When the eagle came to Todaiji Temple in Nara, it perched on a cedar tree under the stage of Nigatsudo Temple. There came Gien Sojo, who was a priest of Todaiji Temple. Gien Sojo heard a child's cry, and wondering, "Where is a child crying?" he began looking around. Then, he found the little boy in the cedar tree. Gien Sojo was surprised and rescued the child.

The child was reared by Gien Sojo and became a respected priest called Roben Sojo when he was grown up. Roben Sojo regarded the cedar tree of Nigatsudo Temple as his parents, and every day went to the tree and prayed. So, the cedar tree came to be called Roben Sugi (Cedar of Roben).

Roben Sojo's mother traveled around far and wide for thirty years, in the hope of being reunited with her son. One day, on a boat on Yodogawa River she heard a traveler talking, "They say that the famous Roben Sojo was kidnapped by an eagle when he was a baby and was rescued at Todaiji Temple." She went to Nara straight away and, at last, she met her son under the cedar tree of Todaiji Temple.

