

The legend of Momotaro, a legend handed down in Okayama, is the origin of the Momotaro folk tale that everyone knows. However, this legend tells a very different story than the folk tale does.

The Stories Compared

Momotaro, hero of folk tale

Once upon a time, there lived an old man and an old woman. One day, when the old woman went to the river to wash clothes, a huge peach came floating down the river.

Upon taking the peach home and splitting it open, the old couple saw a boy come out! They named him Momotaro and raised him with care. After he had grown, Momotaro left home to banish evil ogres.

On the way, a dog, monkey, and pheasant agreed to join Momotaro in exchange for the old woman's millet dumplings that he carried. They traveled to the island of Onigashima, routed the ogres, and went home with treasure. A happy ending!

Legend of Momotaro

Once upon a time in Okayama, back when it was called Kibi, there was an ogre called Ura who lived at Kinojo Castle and terrorized the villagers. Because of this, the king of Yamato told Kibitsuhihiko-no-mikoto to vanquish Ura.

Kibitsuhiiko-no-mikoto set up camp at Kibi no Nakayama, and after shoring up his defenses by building a shield of megaliths, he attacked Ura with arrows, his specialty. Ura countered by shooting arrows from the castle. It was a fierce battle, and sometimes, arrows from the two sides would collide in mid-air. The battle ended when the wounded Ura transformed into a carp and fled. However, Kibitsuhiiko-no-mikoto transformed into a cormorant and caught Ura, completely vanquishing him.

Following Ura's defeat, his head was buried beneath a kettle in the Okamaden (kettle hall) at Kibitsu Shrine. One day, Ura appeared to Kibitsuuhiko-no-mikoto in a dream and announced, "If my wife uses this kettle to cook rice, I will become your servant and tell people's fortunes by making the kettle ring." Thus, even today, a kettle-ringing ritual for telling fortunes, called the Narukama Shinji, takes place at Kibitsu Shrine.

Was the ogre really evil?

There are several interpretations of Ura, the purported ogre. One for example, is that in this battle, Ura was not unilaterally evil in the battle between Yamato and Kibi, and was a person who taught Kibi how to make steel. Furthermore, even after his defeat in battle against Kibitsuhiiko-no-mikoto, Ura continues to guide people by telling their fortunes. Perhaps Ura was not actually an ogre, but a great person who lived in Kibi.

Experience Okayama hospitality
with *Ura* mythology

There are a number of ways to view Ura, Ura is just as beloved by the local residents as Momotaro is, as we know from a festival named after Ura that is held in Okayama. The viewpoint of Ura, the purported ogre, is also taken seriously, and both the events depicted by the tale and the hidden reality behind the tale are warmly accepted in this city. We invite you to experience the hospitality of Okayama for yourself, and discover the true tale of Momotaro as seen through the eyes of Ura — which is not just a name, but a word that refers to the hidden side of something in Japanese.

Column

A column of
local reports
on Japan Heritage.

Okayama, the place where the legend of Momotaro has been preserved, Ms. Konda, a writer, has been visiting locations related to the legend. She shows us the world of ancient Kibi, overflowing with history and romance! For more information about her columns, please visit the website.



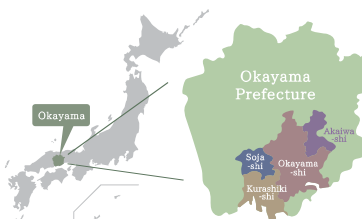
Access this QR code
to see her columns.

Akiko Konda

Ms. Konda is a writer. Seeing the Kanonji Horima clay figurines in Kashihara-shi, Nara Prefecture prompted her to begin visiting archaeological sites and museums at various locations and start ongoing research on clay figurines. Ms. Konda has done extensive work on introducing cultural properties at various locations in easy-to-understand language. She has also been sharing the attractive features of cultural properties in a continuous manner through making television and radio appearances and participating in talk events and so on.

Her books include: *Hajime no Dōgu Introduction to Clay Figures* (2014 / Sekai Bunko Publishing), *Nippon Zenshū Dōgu Taisho Handbook on Clay Figures Across Japan* (2016 / Sekai Bunko Publishing), *Tokuwa Jūmei Zukan (Ten Pictorial Book on the Jomon Period)* (2016 / Yamato Publishing), *Dōgu no Ruru (The Road World of Clay Figures)* (2017 / Yamaoka Shuppan), *Shirazensai Jōmon Raku (The Known Facts about Life during the Jomon Period)* (2017 / Seibundō Shinkasō), *Yokote no Jōmon no Bi no Uchi (Welcome to the World of Clay Figures: The Nation of Beauty of the Jomon Period)* (2017 / Yamaoka Shuppan), the coauthored *Onosato Naotoki Jōmon no Himitsu (Jōmon Mystery Solving: Secrets of the Jomon Period)* (2018 / Shogakukan), and the coauthored *Ono Dōgu-shan (Pier-Making Clay Figure Excavations)* (2018 / Asahi Press).

Getting to Okayama

 Airplane

Various places (Sapporo, Tokyo, Okinawa)

1 (Bus: approx. 30 min)

JR Okayama Station W

 Shinkansen (Bullet train) To Okayama Station

○ From Tokyo 3 hrs 17 min

○ From Nagoya 1hr.30min.

○ From Shin-Osaka 45 min.

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 Expressway To Okayama IC

○ From Osaka (Chugoku Suita IC) 2 hrs. 5 min.

○ From Kobe (Kobe J.C.T) 1 hr. 40 min.

○ From Takamatsu (Takamatsu-Chuo IC) ... 1 hr. 5 min.

[Japan Heritage] Okayama, the Birthplace of the legend of Momotaro
~A tale of ogre conquest handed down through ancient Kibi heritage~



Japan Heritage "Okayama, the Birthplace
of the legend of Momotaro" Promotion Council
Japan Heritage Promotion Project, 2018

<https://momotaro-ura.jp>

Japan Heritage "legend of Momotaro" search



Japan Heritage Okayama, the Birthplace of the legend of Momotaro ~A tale of ogre conquest handed down through ancient Kibi heritage~* is made up of 4 cities: Okayama-shi, Kurashiki-shi, Soja-shi, and Akaiwa-shi

Experience Okayama hospitality with *Ura* mythology

Was the ogre really evil? Even now, many mysteries surround the legend of Momotaro. What is the true form of the ogre "Ura" spoken of in the legend?



