

Kumano Magaibutsu

Ahead of you is a steep 20-minute hike that leads to the Buddhist stone carvings known as Kumano Magaibutsu. But before you begin, here's a local folk tale about how the trail was made. You might want to bear it in mind as you climb, as it goes like this:

Once upon a time, a red ogre who lived nearby woke up feeling starved for the taste of human flesh. He went to Gongen, a local deity, and begged him for permission to satisfy his hunger. Gongen, thinking an impossible task might dissuade the ogre from pursuing this any further, told him, "If you can build 100 stone steps up the mountainside before daybreak, I'll grant your wish."

The ogre was delighted, and immediately leapt to work hauling stones of all sizes, and piling them up haphazardly to make the steps. He worked without rest, images of a tasty human feast fueling his movements.

Just before dawn, Gongen began to worry that the ogre might finish his task, and he went to the mountain to check. When he arrived, he saw the ogre, tired but energized, hauling the last stone up the mountain. If put in place, it would complete the one-hundredth step.

Gongen was shocked, and quickly thought of an idea to stop the ogre from succeeding: Mimicking a cock at sunrise, he cried out, "Cock-a-doodle doo!"

The frustrated ogre threw away the last stone and fled, fearful of being killed by Gongen for his failure to complete the task before the deadline. And the local humans, unaware of how close they'd come to being an ogre's meal, went on with their lives. They also used the ogre's fine set of steps whenever they climbed the mountain.