

Kintoki Matsuri and Mt. Kintoki

The legend of Kintaro is one of the staples of Japanese folklore. Raised by a witch on a mountain in Hakone, Kintaro is a boy with superhuman strength who fought monsters and demons from an early age. In his free time, he could throw rocks the size of a small house and fell trees with his bare hands. Understandably impressed by these feats, the samurai Minamoto no Yoritomo (948–1021) recruited the youngster, renamed him Sakata no Kintoki, and paved the way for Kintaro to rise through the ranks of the aristocracy in Kyoto, the capital at the time.

Mt. Kintoki in Hakone styles itself the birthplace of Kintaro, and Kintoki Shrine at the foot of the 1,212-meter peak honors Sakata no Kintoki as a deity and protector of children and good health. The shrine's annual festival, which takes place on Children's Day (May 5), features a footrace for those aged 12 or under, a lion dance performance dedicated to the good health of children, and a kids' sumo wrestling tournament open to anyone attending elementary school and willing to don a traditional *mawashi* loincloth. Visitors of any age can follow a hiking course to the peak, which offers some of the best views of Mt. Fuji in Hakone. On the way up, you will pass several huge boulders that may or may not have been tossed there by Kintaro.