

Kaeru Shrine

Kaeru Shrine is a Shinto sanctuary dedicated to frogs. *Kaeru* means frog, and since “gero” is the sound of a frog croaking in Japanese, the people of Gero made the obvious choice to adopt the frog as the town’s unofficial mascot. Frogs of all sorts can be found throughout Gero: as designs on manhole covers, for sale in souvenir shops, and of course hopping across the road in rainy weather.

Built in 2010, Kaeru Shrine pays respect to the town’s mascot. The shrine is filled with various frog figures, including one posing near the purification basin, little green frogs dotted along the inside of the shrine, and a stone frog deity where visitors offer prayers. Even the votive tablets (*ema*) on which visitors write wishes are illustrated with frogs.

Gero is dotted with shrines, but Kaeru Shrine is the only one dedicated to the town’s mascot. The shrine is a particularly auspicious place to make an important wish, because in Japan frogs are a symbol of good luck. There are many reasons for this belief, one being that the word *kaeru* also means “to return,” and as such implies that one will *return* safely.