

About Matsuo Bashō

The famed poet Matsuo Munefusa (later Bashō; 1644–1694) was born in Iga in 1644, the second son of a farming samurai family. His passion for poetry led him to Edo (now Tokyo), where he hoped to make a living as a poet. Bashō's skill was recognized by the local elite, and soon he was instructing disciples of his own under the sobriquet "Tōsei." In 1682 he adopted the pen name "Bashō"—meaning "banana plant"—after a banana tree he was given by his students.

While living in central Edo, Bashō was able to support himself by teaching haiku, but he eventually decided to move across the Edo River to Fukagawa. There, Bashō led a threadbare lifestyle as he attempted to discover his own poetic voice. After his small hut burned down in 1682, two years later he was spurred to depart on a trip back to his hometown in Iga—a theme which would come to feature prominently in his compositions. This journey became the first of Bashō's many roving tours of the country.

In 1691, while wrestling with physical illness and mental unrest, Bashō returned to Edo. He continued to write and travel, and he visited Iga and Kyoto before dying from his illness in Osaka in 1694. Today, Matsuo Bashō is remembered as the father of haiku poetry, as well as an influential force in the world of literary realism.