

Legends of Naruto

The name “Naruto”

Naruto derives its name from the tidal current that rushes through the narrow strait between Cape Magosaki on Shikoku and Awaji Island’s Cape Tozaki. “Naru-” signifies the roar from the waters, while “-to” is a Chinese-derived character that means “gate,” referring here to the Magosaki-Tozaki strait. An illustration from the Edo period (1603–1867) shows children marveling at the ferocious waters and swirling pools while an adult cowers in fear.

Mermaids of the Naruto Strait

Mermaids supposedly visited the Naruto Strait on occasion, according to a book published locally in 1734, as well as other Edo-period records. As with other mermaid sightings across the world and throughout history, it is likely that spellbound witnesses mistook the upper body of a dugong (colloquially known as the sea cow, now an endangered species that is no longer seen in this region) for a human-like torso and face rising out of the water. Another possibility is that these “mermaids” were actually finless porpoises (*sunameri* in Japanese), aquatic mammals that can grow up to 2.3 meters long and weigh over 70 kilograms.