

Kamonokoshi and the Legend of Urashima Taro

Kamonokoshi, a tranquil, lagoon-like cove protected from the sea by a forested island, is said to be the birthplace of the Urashima Taro legend. One of Japan's most beloved folk tales, it tells of a fisherman who stops a group of children teasing a turtle on a beach, thereby winning the creature's gratitude. The turtle takes Taro to an underwater palace where the man meets a princess and is given a hero's welcome. After several days at the palace, Taro asks to be taken home, but the princess only lets her guest go after giving him a mysterious box and telling him never to open it. Returning to his village, Taro finds that everything has changed; it is as if he has been gone for decades. He ignores the princess's warning, opens the box, and immediately turns into a white-haired old man.

According to local tradition, it was the beach at Kamonokoshi where Taro saved the turtle. Urashima Shrine, on the other side of the cove, enshrines Taro himself, while a rather worn-down statue of the kind-hearted fisherman stands near the shrine's torii gate. Visitors can walk to the shrine at low tide, when a sliver of white beach emerges from the emerald green waves. Take care to return before the tide rises again and the path disappears. After making it back to solid ground, consider staying until dusk, when the rock formations on the opposite side of the cove create a dramatic scene against the backdrop of the setting sun.