

Unlocking the Ryugu Legend

Ibusuki and Sata are steeped in folklore and local legend, and no place more so than Ryugu Shrine on Cape Nagasakibana, said to be the birthplace of Urashima Taro, a Japanese folklore character similar to Rip Van Winkle.

According to one version of the legend, the young fisherman Urashima Taro rescues a turtle, only to find that the turtle is a messenger sent by the sea princess Otohime. The turtle carries Taro on his back to Ryugu Palace, a sea dragon's castle under the waves, where Otohime invites him to stay to thank him for his kindness. Taro immediately falls in love with the princess and accepts her invitation but asks to be allowed to leave after three days, as he does not want to leave his elderly mother alone for long. As he prepares to leave after three days of feasting and celebrating, Princess Otohime gives him a *tamatebako* as a parting gift, a Pandora's box of sorts, to protect him from harm. He is instructed never to open it. When he returns to land, Taro discovers that in his absence many decades have passed, and everyone he once knew has passed away. Distraught, he opens the box and releases all the years he missed, turning him into a 100-year-old man.

Around Ibusuki you will find images and statues connected to this legend, from scenes of Urashima Taro rescuing the turtle and falling in love with the princess, to images of the sea dragon.