

Udo Shrine: Rabbit Statues

The grounds of Udo Shrine are dotted with statues of rabbits, which are believed to be messengers of the enshrined deities. The origins of this legend are not entirely clear, but a connection between rabbits and Ugayafukiaezu, the shrine's primary deity, is often cited. The "u" at the beginning of Ugayafukiaezu is also the Japanese word for rabbit. Local legends also mention many rabbits living in the woods around the shrine, though none are to be found today. A monthly festival is held at the shrine on the first day of the rabbit in the Japanese zodiac calendar, when vendors set up stalls for food and drink and children's games, and *kendo* swordsmanship and archery tournaments take place.