

Sorihashi Bridge

The official name of this steeply curved bridge is Sorihashi, or “arched bridge,” but the structure is often called Taikobashi, or “drum bridge,” after the shape created by its reflection in the water below. According to popular tradition, crossing the bridge is an act of spiritual purification.

The shape of the bridge may have been inspired by rainbows, which connect the earth to the heavens. In Shinto mythology, the deities Izanagi and Izanami created the Japanese archipelago by stirring the sea with a rod while standing on a floating rainbow bridge. Izanagi is the “father” of Sumiyoshi Taisha’s patron deities: they came into being when he purified himself in the sea after a voyage to the underworld.

Although there are records of a bridge here since the thirteenth century, the bridge in its current form was built around 1600 with funds donated by Yododono (1567–1615). Yododono was a consort of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), the powerful warlord who re-unified Japan after a period of civil war and ruled from 1582 to 1598. Yododono was seeking the gods’ favor for her son Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615), who was at war with Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), founder of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868).

The first arched bridge is believed to have been constructed by shipwrights, and shipbuilders have played a leading role in maintaining the structure ever since. It has been rebuilt and repaired numerous times. Before the steps were added in 1955, the only footholds were the gaps between the wooden slats, open to the water.

The modern bridge has a steel frame and cypress-wood boards. It is approximately 21 meters long, 5 meters tall, and 6 meters wide, with a slope of more than 40 degrees at its steepest point. The metalwork on the bridge’s railings has been preserved since the Edo period (1603–1867).

Nobel Prize–winning author Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) made the bridge famous in his short story that bears its name. “Sorihashi” is narrated by a man recalling a childhood incident in which his mother revealed a painful secret to him at the top of the bridge. The narrator tells the reader that descending the slope on the far side with his illusions shattered was more frightening than the initial climb.