

Minoyama Daimyojin Shrine and Yashima Inari Shrine

A tunnel of red torii gates leads to a small shrine beside the main hall (*hondo*) at Yashimaji Temple. This type of tunnel usually marks the entrance to an Inari shrine, with fox statues on either side of the path. However, the entrance to this shrine is flanked by two large statues of *tanuki* (raccoon dogs). The sanctuary is dedicated to Minoyama Daimyojin, a legendary local spirit who took the form of a *tanuki* but was believed to be able to shape-shift at will. The deity is said to bring good luck in family life and marriage, and to the nighttime entertainment business.

Although Japanese mythology often describes shape-shifting *tanuki* as mischievous, the story goes that Minoyama Daimyojin helped the priest Kukai (774–835) when he became lost in the mist on Yashima. The deity appeared to Kukai disguised as an old man in a cloak and guided him safely to the top of the mountain. This is just one of several stories involving the legendary *tanuki*, who also made an appearance in the Studio Ghibli animated film *Pom Poko* (1994). The plot centers on a group of shape-shifting *tanuki* in Tokyo who band together to stop a new suburban development.

Behind the Minoyama Daimyojin shrine is Yashima Inari Shrine. To reach its tunnel of torii gates, one must first pass a small collection of *tanuki* statues donated by visitors to Yashimaji Temple. The Yashima Inari Shrine is inside a secluded bamboo grove that accentuates the peaceful atmosphere of the location.