**Tokoname Maneki Neko (Lucky Cats)**

Tokoname is a leading producer of *maneki neko* (lucky cat) ceramic figurines, which are symbols of good luck. *Maneki neko* are usually calico cats with white, black, and orange markings. They raise one front paw in the air and clutch a gold coin in the other. The raised paw mimics the Japanese gesture used to beckon someone: a raised hand with the palm facing down, and fingers moving up and down. Some *maneki neko* raise a left paw, which is said to beckon people, making them particularly popular with businesses eager to draw in customers. Other cats hold up a right paw to bring good fortune and wealth.

The origin of the *maneki neko* is unclear, but farmers and shopkeepers have traditionally valued cats because they catch rats and other pests. While the first lucky cat figurines are thought to have appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, Tokoname’s production began in the late 1930s. Traditional pottery industries were in decline then, so local artisans began making the figurines as a new line of business.

By 1950, the city was Japan’s main producer of lucky cats, its signature style of *maneki neko* having large eyes and ears on a plump body. The traditional calico cat remains the most popular, although today, *maneki neko* come in various colors and designs. They have even inspired some of Tokoname’s best-known tourist attractions, including the following.

**Tokoname Maneki Neko-dori (Lucky Cat Street)**

Tokoname Maneki Neko-dori is a street lined with 39 colorful, modern interpretations of *maneki neko.* Artists with connections to Tokoname made the cats, imbuing each one with the power to offer a specific blessing. These include a happy marriage, good health, and the successful completion of a task.

The street connects Tokoname Station with Tokonyan, Tokoname’s most famous lucky cat, and Tokoname Tojiki Kaikan (Ceramics Hall), which is the entry point for the Pottery Footpath.

**Tokonyan, the Guardian Cat of Tokoname**

Tokonyan is the giant *maneki neko* (lucky cat) figure that peeks over an embankment near a bridge halfway along Tokoname Maneki Neko-dori (Lucky Cat Street). Visitors traveling by train may spot this guardian of the city on arrival at the station.

The name “Tokonyan” is a combination of “Tokoname” and the meowing sound of a cat (*nyan*) in Japanese. Since its creation in 2008, Tokonyan has become a beloved symbol of the city and a popular subject for taking photographs.

Tokonyan stands 3.8 meters high and 6.3 meters wide, making it one of Japan’s largest *maneki neko*, although it has only a head and a raised left paw. It welcomes everyone while keeping watch over the city. A careful search along the wall near Tokonyan will reveal 11 small, realistic cat figurines that keep the huge *maneki neko* company.