

***Baramon* Kites**

Baramon kites (*baramondako*) are vividly painted, handmade kites decorated with the glaring face of a demon (*oni*). The demon's jaws are clamped onto the helmet of a warrior who has challenged the demon head-on, demonstrating his strength of character and fearlessness. In Goto Islands tradition, a father or grandfather presents a *baramon* kite to his son or grandson on the child's first May 5, a holiday once known as "Boy's Day." The gift represents a wish for the child to be safe, successful, and courageous.

Large paper kites are common in many regions, but only those in the Goto Islands feature the distinctive demon-and-helmet design. The origin of the kites and their motif is uncertain, but folktales from centuries ago describe warriors who are saved from the bite of a demon by their sturdy helmets. The warrior seen on the kites is said to be Watanabe no Tsuna (953–1025), a hero celebrated in art and folklore for defeating demons.

Baramon kites are made of painted *washi* paper glued to a frame of 14 crisscrossing bamboo strips. All *baramon* kites have the demon and helmet motif, but the kite's colors and other decorative details are chosen by its artist. Another unusual feature is a strip of rattan stretched like a bowstring above the head of the demon. This strip vibrates when the kite is flown and emits a distinctive buzz, called the *unari*, or "growl." The fearsome sound is supposed to frighten away any lurking bad fortune.

Various theories exist to explain the name *baramon*, but the most widely accepted one attributes it to the word *barakamon*. In the Goto Islands dialect, a *barakamon* is someone who is cheerfully rowdy. Thus the name alludes to both the noisiness of the kite and the wish it carries for a healthy, rambunctious childhood.