

## Tokoname Maneki Neko (Lucky Cats)

Tokoname is a leading producer of ceramic cat figurines called *maneki neko* (lucky cats), which are symbols of good fortune. The term *maneki neko* is derived from the Japanese words for “to invite” (*maneku*) and “cat” (*neko*) and is sometimes translated as “beckoning cat.”

*Maneki neko* are usually calico cats with white, black, and orange markings. One front paw is raised, while the other front paw holds a gold coin. Some *maneki neko* raise their left paw, which is said to beckon people, making them particularly popular with businesses eager to draw in customers. Other cats hold up their right paw to bring good fortune and wealth.

The origins of *maneki neko* are unclear, but farmers and shopkeepers have traditionally valued and welcomed cats because they catch rats and other pests. The first lucky cat figurines are thought to have appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, although Tokoname’s production of *maneki neko* dates to the late 1930s.

By 1950, the city was the top producer of lucky cats in Japan, and the style of Tokoname’s appealing signature *maneki neko* was established: large eyes and ears with a plump body. Although the traditional calico cat remains the most popular, *maneki neko* now come in a variety of colors and designs.