

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.