

Tanuki Figures of Shigaraki

Over the centuries, Shigaraki ware has become prized for its high quality.

Shigaraki is known as one of Japan's Six Ancient Kilns—areas with pottery-making traditions dating back over 800 years.

In 2004, the town was merged with four other municipalities to form the city of Koka. Along with ninja motifs, visitors to Koka will see many ornamental figures of *tanuki* (Japanese raccoon dogs). In the early 1950s, a Shigaraki potter named Fujiwara Tetsuzo made the first of these *tanuki* figures, which were part of the welcome for Emperor Showa (1901–1989) during his official visit to the town. The figures have since become one of Japan's signature products. The best-known version is a *tanuki* figure called *hassou-engi*, who wears a hat and holds a sake flask, but in Koka you will also see *tanuki* as ninja in disguise.

Shigaraki's *tanuki*, with their cheerful expressions, have become popular as symbols of good luck. As the word *tanuki* also suggests the meaning of “to surpass others,” many business owners place a *tanuki* at the

entrance to their store or restaurant to encourage prosperity.

Shigaraki ware also includes jars, tea ceremony utensils and, more recently, tableware, flowerpots, ceramic tiles, and decorative ornaments.