

## **Koka City's Mascots**

Many towns and cities in Japan have mascot figures that serve as ambassadors for local tourism. Koka City has two—Ninjaemon and Ponpoko. Ninjaemon is shaped like a plump rice grain, as the character was inspired by locally grown black rice. He is dressed in black ninja clothing and holds a *shuriken* (throwing star). Ponpoko is a young *tanuki* (Japanese raccoon dog) and promotes the town of Shigaraki, which became part of Koka in 2004.

Shigaraki has long been known as a pottery-making town, and Ponpoko reflects the pottery heritage—the ceramic *tanuki* figures produced there are popular symbols of good luck and prosperity. The Chinese character for *raku* (the feeling of ease or happiness) is written on the mascot's belly in the hope that everyone will enjoy their visit.

Images of Ninjaemon and Ponpoko can be found throughout Koka. The friendly costumed characters also make appearances at local events.