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Giant maguro donated to shrine of fishing-god Ebisu

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Giant maguro donated to shrine of fishing-god Ebisu

Scott Wilson Jan 12, 2015



The start of a new year means it's time for *hatsumode*, the **year's first visit to a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple**. You pray for good luck in the new year, throw some spare yen into the *saisenbako* (big offering box), get some *omamori* (good luck charms), and hope that the *omikuji* (fortune) you get is *dai-kichi* (great luck) and not *dai-kyō* (you're screwed).

While most people are satisfied donating a few yen coins in the donation box when they visit their shrine, the **Nishinomiya shrine in Hyogo Prefecture** does things a little differently. They want to make sure the gods hear them loud and clear, so they **lug a massive frozen maguro onto the donation box and leave it there for three days**.

This wasn't an act of maguro vigilantes or anything though. It's a **yearly tradition** dating back to 1970, sponsored by the Kobe City Eastern Marine Products Wholesale Cooperative. Every year they donate a giant frozen maguro to the Nishinomiya Shrine, the main shrine to **Ebisu – Shinto god of prosperous business and fishermen**.

▼ He's pretty much the best god that fishermen looking for good business could ever hope for.

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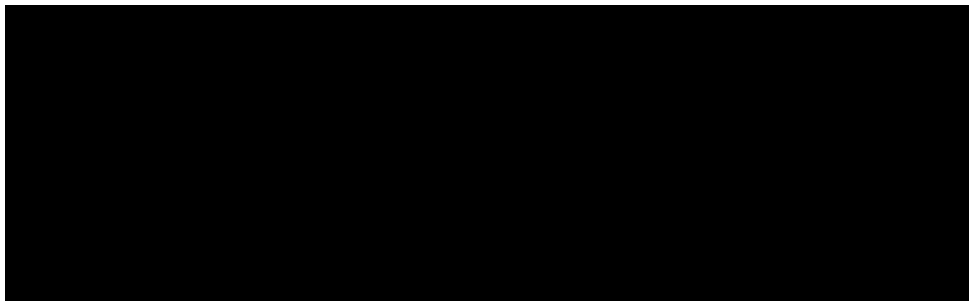


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Since maguro are **big, expensive, and impressive**, they're the perfect offering to the god of fishermen. The maguro is brought to the shrine each year on January 8, then stays there from the 9th to 11th during a three-day festival known as "The 10th Day Ebisu." It's the **biggest yearly festival** in the Osaka/Kobe area, bringing in over one million people.

Instead of donating yen coins normally into the donation box during that time, visitors instead **stick them onto the frozen maguro**, hoping that it will stay on. If the coin sticks, that means that money will "stick" to them during the new year as well. If it falls, well, then better luck next maguro.

You can watch a video of some people trying their luck here:



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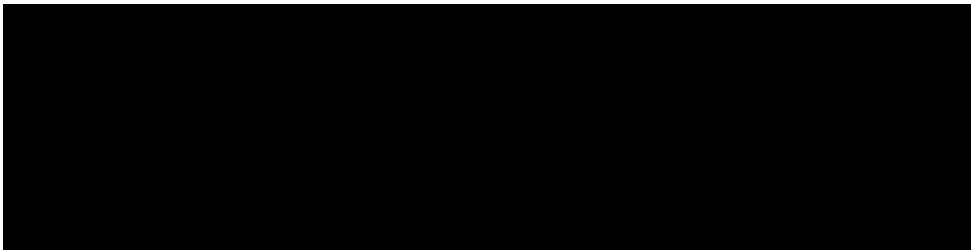
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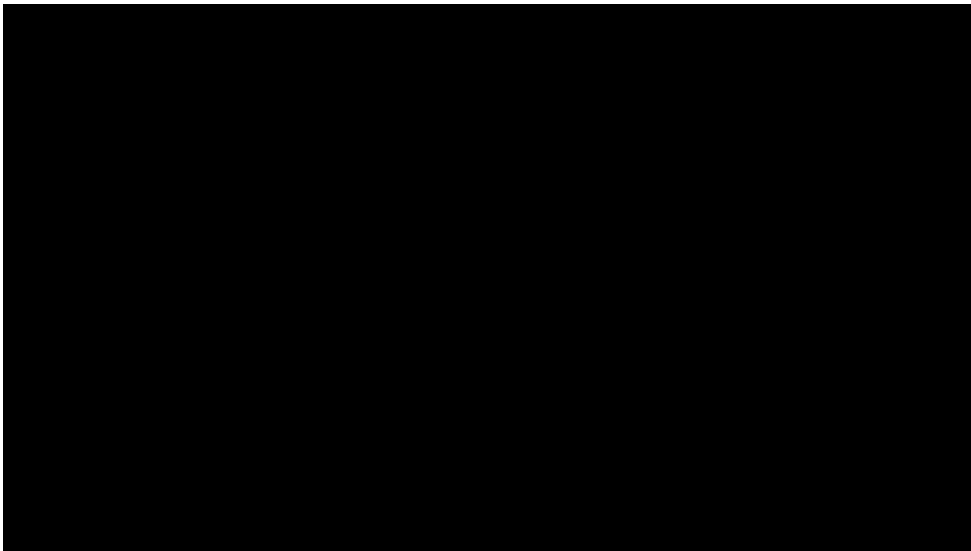
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The maguro itself is quite a specimen, weighing in at 250 kilos (551 pounds) and 2.5 meters (8.2 feet) long. Just by itself it could supply enough delicious sashimi for 1,300 people. And don't worry, **none of it goes to waste**. After the festival is over on the 11th, the maguro is removed, cut up, and served as a tasty treat to members of the shrine, the cooperative, and anyone else involved in the whole maguro business.

But just in case you got a bad fortune or your yen didn't stick to the maguro and you feel like you really need to get some luck for the new year, the Nishinomiya Shrine also holds a "lucky man" event in the early morning on January 10. Participants line up at the front entrance, then sprint 230 meters (755 feet) as fast as they can through the shrine grounds and into the inner sanctuary, being rewarded with some rice, sake, wooden statues of Ebisu, and, if they're lucky, a hug or two from the priests.

▼ It's kind of like Japanese Black Friday, minus the terrible.



If you can't visit the shrine yourself, feel free to buy some frozen tuna, stick some coins to it, and pray for good luck in the new year as it defrosts in your kitchen sink. Or, if you'd prefer, you can just take a look at some tweets from the shrine's visitors who got to see the "lucky maguro" in person.

▼ Get all your shopping done at the Nishinomiya Shrine!

▼ Shh, maguro is sleeping.

▼ Try your luck at picking a good *mikuji* (fortune)!

▼ ...and if you get a bad one, well, maybe Ebisu will show up and make everything all right.

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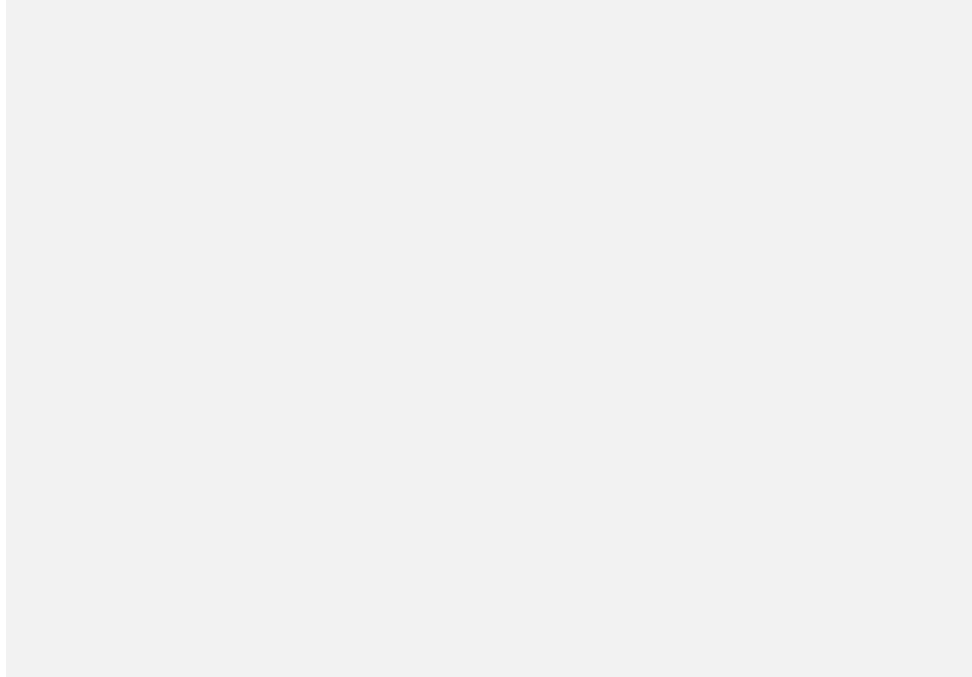
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