

Welcome to Fuda Tenjin Shrine!



Welcome to Chofu!

Today, we're going to explore a beautiful and historically significant spot right here in our city: Fuda Tenjin Shrine.

What is a Shrine (Jinja)?

First, let's talk a little about what a "shrine" or "Jinja" (神社) is in Japan. Shinto shrines are places of worship for the Shinto religion, which is the indigenous religion of Japan. Unlike temples, which are Buddhist, shrines are dedicated to the worship of *kami* (神), which can be deities, spirits of nature, or even the spirits of venerated people. Shrines are easily recognizable by their *torii* gates, which you'll see at the entrance, marking the transition from the mundane world to the sacred. People come to shrines to pray for good fortune, health, academic success, safe travels, and various other blessings, and also to show respect to the kami.

What is Tenjin?

Now, let's focus on "Tenjin" (天神). When you see "Tenjin" in a shrine's name, it almost always refers to **Sugawara no Michizane** (菅原道真). Michizane was a brilliant scholar, poet, and politician during the Heian Period (794-1185). However, he fell victim to political intrigue and was exiled. After his death, a series of disasters occurred, which many believed were caused by his vengeful spirit. To appease him, he was deified as Tenjin-sama, the deity of scholarship, learning, and calligraphy. That's why many students come to Tenjin shrines to pray for success in their studies and exams!

The History of Fuda Tenjin Shrine

Fuda Tenjin Shrine has a long and fascinating history. It is believed to have been **founded in 1371** during the Muromachi Period. Originally, it was known as Sugawara Jinja, and it was established to enshrine the spirit of Sugawara no Michizane. The shrine has been cherished by the local community for centuries as a place to pray for academic success and protection from misfortune.

Key Highlights of Fuda Tenjin Shrine:

As we walk around, here are some points of interest to look out for:

- **Torii Gate:** As we entered, you would have passed through the large torii gate. This marks the sacred boundary. **(map①)**



- **Main Hall (Honden):** This is the central building where the deity is enshrined. While you can't enter, you can offer prayers from the front. **(map②)**



- **Ume no Ki (梅の木 - Plum Trees):** You'll notice some plum trees within the shrine grounds. Plum blossoms are closely associated with Sugawara no Michizane. He loved plum trees and wrote many poems about them. It's said that even after his exile, a plum tree he cherished flew from Kyoto to his new home! Because of this, plum blossoms are considered sacred to Tenjin shrines. If you visit in late winter or early spring, you'll be treated to a beautiful display of pink and white blossoms.

• **Nade Ushi (なで牛 - Stroking Cow Statue):** One of the most distinctive features you'll find at Tenjin shrines is the "Nade Ushi," or stroking cow statue. Legend has it that Sugawara no Michizane was born in the year of the Ox, and also that an ox pulled his funeral carriage. Because of this connection, oxes are considered sacred messengers of Tenjin. Visitors traditionally **stroke the part of the cow statue that corresponds to the part of their own body they wish to heal or improve**. For example, if you want to improve your academic performance, you might stroke the cow's head! (map③)



• **Emā (絵馬 - Votive Plaques):** Look for the wooden plaques where people write their wishes and prayers, often related to academic success, and hang them up for the kami to receive. (map④)



• **Omikuji (おみくじ - Fortunes):** You might see people tying small slips of paper to trees or special racks. These are *omikuji*, fortunes that predict your luck. If you get a bad fortune, you tie it up to leave the bad luck behind. (map⑤)



- **Komainu (狛犬 - Guardian**

Dogs): Flanking the entrance to the main hall, you'll see a pair of guardian lion-dogs called *komainu*. They protect the shrine from evil spirits.

(map⑥)



- **Keidai Massha (境内末社):** Smaller Shrines within a Larger Shrine's Grounds. These are other auxiliary shrines that enshrine deities connected to the main shrine, local guardian deities (Jishu-shin), or other revered kami. For instance, at Fuda Tenjin Shrine, in addition to the main hall dedicated to Sugawara no Michizane, you might find 7 smaller shrines (Keidai Massha) within the grounds, each enshrining a different deity. Visiting these auxiliary shrines is believed to offer additional and diverse blessings. **(map⑦)**

How to Show Respect

When visiting a shrine, it's customary to observe a few simple etiquette points:

1. **Bow at the Torii:** Before passing through the torii gate, it's polite to give a slight bow.



2. **Cleanse at the Chozuya:** Near the entrance, you'll find a water basin called a *Chozuya* (or *Temizuya*). Here, you purify your hands and mouth before approaching the main hall. First, scoop water with the ladle, rinse your left hand, then your right. Pour some water into your cupped hand to rinse your mouth, then rinse your left hand again. Finally, tip the ladle to let the remaining water run down the handle, cleaning it for the next person. (map⑧)



1: Rinse your left hand



2: Rinse your right hand



3: Pour some water into your cupped left hand to rinse your mouth



4: Rinse your left hand again



Offer Prayers at the Main Hall:

1: Approach the offering box and throw in a coin (often a 5 yen coin, as "go-en" (五円) sounds like "good 縁-en," meaning good luck or good connections).

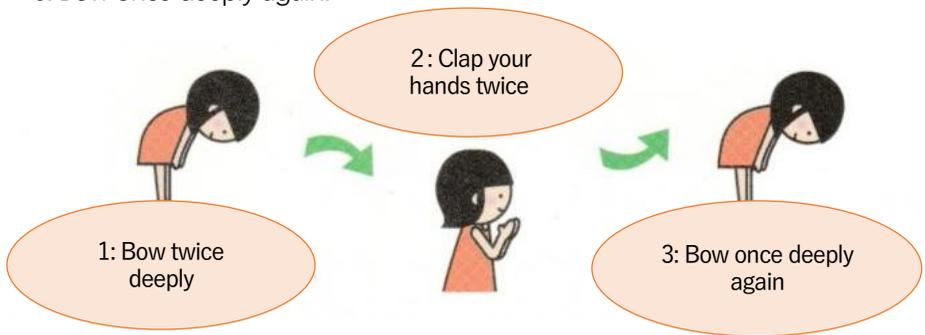
2: Ring the bell if there is one, to get the kami's attention.

3: Bow twice deeply.

4: Clap your hands twice.

5: Make your wish or offer your prayer.

6: Bow once deeply again.



Wrapping Up

Fuda Tenjin Shrine is not just a place of worship; it's a living piece of Japanese history and culture. It offers a peaceful retreat from the bustling city and a chance to connect with ancient traditions. I hope you've enjoyed learning about this special place.

