

The Machida Tourist Times

Vol.6

Saturday, DECEMBER 25th, 2010

FREE Paper

December

■ Seven Lucky Gods

They are gods that are believed to bring good luck and prosperity. There is a walking tour in Machida coming up to visit the gods, or *Shichi Fukujin* in order to have a good year in 2011.

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Experience the traditional post New Year's Day, by burning the New Year items after the holiday is over.

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It is a god of the New Year that is believed to bring prosperity in your family. There are certain ways to welcome it and send it back.

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■ Machida Tourist Gallery

It is the visitor center of Machida in the Poppo Building near the Machida Station. English service is available when an English-speaking staff member is available.

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Pay a visit to the Seven Lucky Gods for good luck this New Year Season!!!

It's believed that visiting the Seven Lucky Gods will bring good luck. The Machida City Tourism and Convention Bureau will offer a *Shichi Fukujin* walking tour.



(Photos above and left) *Shichi Fukujin*, commonly known as the "Seven Lucky Gods" in English, are becoming the new face of tourism in the Haramachida district, due to the growing popularity of visiting them. The *Shichi Fukujin* Map is available at the Machida Tourist Gallery.

Whether you are superstitious or not, there is a fun tradition in Japan. It is related to the issue of gaining good luck: visiting *Shichi Fukujin*, or the Seven Lucky Gods during the New Year season. The Seven Lucky Gods are mythological deities that have their roots in India, China, and Japan. They are widely acknowledged throughout the nation, and numerous towns in Japan have *Shichi Fukujin*. Of course, Machida is no exception.

The origin of the Seven Lucky Gods is said to have been a protection against the Seven Misfortunes to attain the Seven Happiness's instead. (These misfortunes vary from one theory to the other. Also note that the word "seven" means "many" in this context.) Scholars say worship started during the *Muromachi* Period (roughly from the 14th to 17th centuries). Touring of *Shichi Fukujin* started to gain popularity during the *Edo* Period, under the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate (approximately 200 years ago). Another interesting fact is that the Seven Lucky God's personalities and responsibilities altered throughout history, depending on the era or the region.

Machida's Seven Lucky Gods are; *Hoteison*: the god of happy families, *Ebisu* (also spelled *Yebisu*). A famous beer brand is also spelled in this way), a god for success in business: *Fukurokuju*, God of Three Great Treasures, which are prosperity, property, and longevity: *Jurojin*, who is also a god of youth and longevity: *Benzaiten*, who is a god of arts and treasure who's roots are in India: *Bishamonten*, who is a war god, and also a god of happiness and thriving in life: and *Daikokuten* who is the god for an abundant harvest.

There are stories behind the items they have, and why they became gods in certain elements. Also note that although the majority of Japanese people recognize the names of the gods described above, it does not necessarily mean they know the reasons behind their existence.

For the people who want to pay a visit to the Seven Lucky Gods, and learn their secrets at the beginning of the New Year, a guided tour of *Shichi Fukujin* in Machida will take place in January, 2011.

There are four chances to participate in the tour: January 12th (Wed), February 1st (Tue), January 15th (Sat), and January 22nd (Sat). The first two courses include *zazen*, or *Zen* meditation at a temple, as well as walking tours that take about 1 and a half hours (1200 yen), whereas the latter two courses are only the walking tours, without the *Zen* meditation (1000 yen). Each plan includes guide fee, insurance, and learning materials.

Reservations can be made via FAX (put the name of the tour, name(s) of a participant(s), age of a participant(s), address, phone number, or in person at the Machida Tourist Gallery when an English speaking staff member is available. THE TOUR WILL BE OFFERED IN JAPANESE ONLY.

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Experience *Dondo Yaki*, a New Year Bonfire Event.

Japanese people see off a *Toshigami*, or New Year God, by burning items from New Year's Day.



(Above) *Dondo Yaki* at the Sugawara Shrine. The picture image is from the official website of the Sugawara Shrine.

For *Shogatsu*, or the New Year's season, Japanese people put up the season's decorations in advance. It is for welcoming a *Toshigami*, or a New Year God that will bring prosperity in the New Year. For example, *Kadomatsu*, or a "gate of pine tree" in front of a house's entrance gate will be a temporary home for the *Toshigami*. You might also see an ornament hung up on the door. It is called *shimekazari*, which is made with ropes. It is to mark a purified place, welcoming a *toshigami*.

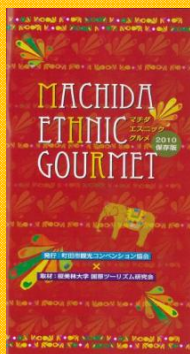
After the *shogatsu* time is over, people gather to burn the items they used to welcome *toshigami*, in order to send the god back to heaven. (It is said to be bad luck if you keep old items that are related to the belief of Shintoism, such as old lucky charms, used New Year's items, and so on) This event is called *Dondo Yaki*. However, the date and the name of the event differ from one region to another. Some may call it *Sagichō*, *Dondon Yaki*, etc.

One major problem with *Dondo Yaki* nowadays is that there is a concern for creating environmental pollutants named 'dioxin compounds'. At some locations of *Dondo Yaki*, people divide flammables and inflammables before they throw the ornaments into the fire to prevent the problem.

Of course, you can experience *Dondo Yaki* in Machida City. For example, you will be able to attend traditional events at Machida *Tenmangū* shrine and at Sugawara Shrine. At Machida *Tenmangū* shrine, they start the fire on January 14th from 14:00. At the latter, they start the fire on the same day, but from 16:00. Bring your New Year items and burn them at *Dondo Yaki*, wishing for a great new year!

Advertisement

MACHIDA ETHNIC GOURMET



Price: **FREE**

Available at:
Machida Tourist Gallery

Language:
English/Japanese
*Japanese version: ¥105

Are you into ethnic food? Do you live in or near Machida? If your answers to these questions are "yes", then this is what you want to get! Visit the Machida Tourist Gallery in the *Poppo Machida Building* and ask for the "Machida Ethnic Gourmet".

An English version of the "Machida Ethnic Gourmet" is available now!



English Section Appears at the Machida Tourist Gallery

There are free maps of the central area of Machida, back issues of the Machida Tourist Times, and more!

Machida City's official tourist information center, Machida Tourist Gallery has a specific section for English materials. Please come visit the Machida Tourist Gallery, and get all the information you are looking for.

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