

# The Machida Tourist Times

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## CULTURAL NOTE

### Meaning of the Rings of Thatch Plants at Shrines

Have you seen a big ring made of thatch plants at a shrine?

The name of the object is *chinowa*, or “ring of thatch plants”. It is believed to have the power to purify sins or eliminate impurity in shintoism.

Shrines hold a ritual called “O-harae” twice a year, once in summer, and once at the end of the year.

For example, according to the service at Machida Tenmangu, the ritual begins inside the main building on New Year’s Eve.

General visitors can join the purification ceremony in front of the foremost shrine. This requires the *chinowa*.

First, to purify yourself, bow. Then walk through the ring and go around the left side of the ring in a counter-clockwise motion.

Then, go through the ring again, but circle the right side. Finally, go through once more and circle around the left side one more time. Then, proceed through the ring.

Finally, you may move on to pay a visit at the front shrine.

Other shrines like Sugawara shrine and Mochio shrine have this ring as well.



A big ring made of thatch plants.

### So why does it have to be thatch?

There are several versions of the legend (i.e. alternations of the setting and names of the characters and locations), so MTT will introduce one version here.

Long ago, a deity named Guzu Ten-no was traveling. On the way to his destination, he decided to ask brothers in the area to let him stay for a night.

The older brother, “Kotan Shorai” turned him down although he was a rich man.

On the other hand, the younger brother, “Somin Shorai” welcomed the traveler despite his poverty.

Guzu Ten-no showed gratitude to the younger brother, and said, “If you use a thatch ring as a protection, your clan will be protected from any plague forever”.

As a result, the older brother’s family died away, but the younger brother’s family cherished for eternity.

## Less Holiday Illumination to Save Energy

The size of annual winter illuminations is reduced considerably this year due to concerns for electric shortages in Japan.



The picture above was taken at the “Pocket Park” in Tamagawa Gakuen.

In Japan, Christmas is usually considered to be a big holiday event to get presents.

Especially among young people, it is recognized to be a day to spend time with the ones you love.

Although most Japanese people are not Christians, the day is still meaningful. (And Christmas Eve is more important than Christmas day!)

Also it is important that it is a significant event economically.

In the U.S. for example, they begin

Christmas sales in November with Black Friday, which is one day after Thanksgiving.

Of course, some stores in Japan start decorating on November 1<sup>st</sup>, and Machida is no exception.

As soon as Halloween is gone, the atmosphere in town shifts to a happy winter event.

In Machida City, many illuminations decorate trees and buildings in town every year.

However, this year, the scale of illuminations is reduced considerably due to the concerns for electric shortages.

In order to both enjoy illuminations and save electricity, some commercial districts are using LED lights, lighting up for a shorter period, or using other methods.

How do the holiday illuminations look to you this year?

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## TEMPLES YOU CAN VISIT TO RING THE BELL AT THE END OF THE YEAR!

It is believed to eliminate worldly desires in Buddhism

### Jounji Temple:

You can line up for a ticket from 23:00, and ringing the bell starts from 23:45.

### Shorakuji Temple:

You can line up for your turn to ring the bell around midnight.

