

Tokyoites’ Approach to Luck Is a Very Deliberate Business

Killing two birds with one stone? There is a traditional market held in Tokyo where you can get great souvenirs to take home and you can invest in your future at the same time.



Tori-no-Ichi is celebrated at shrines and temples that have some kind of association with birds. The chanting and clapping of hands can be heard throughout the *Tori-no-Ichi*, such as the one in Meguro Ward, as locals purchase their chosen *kumade*.

Literally translated as the “Rooster Market,” *Tori-no-Ichi* is a festive event said to have originated with the custom of offering a chicken to the gods to pray for good luck. It has been continually celebrated since the Edo period (1603-1868), according to the Edo-Tokyo Museum.

Tori-no-Ichi is not held on a single day, but those which, according to the traditional Chinese calendar, coincide with the day of the Rooster and can occur two or three times each month. The festival is always held in November and in 2018 the day of the rooster will fall on November 1, 13 and 25.

The *Tori-no-Ichi* is celebrated at shrines and temples that have some kind of association with birds, all over Japan. The largest event is at Ohtori Shrine in Tokyo, which boasts some 150 stalls in an open air market that buzzes with 700,000 to 800,000 people at any one time. In the past, the popularity

of the Ohtori Shrine was helped by its proximity to Yoshiwara, the officially sanctioned red-light district under the Shogunate government. The courtesans were prohibited from leaving the area apart from on certain holidays, including the *Tori-no-Ichi*. As the equivalent of modern day celebrities of TV and film, they must have caused quite a stir when they walked through the *Tori-no-Ichi* in nearby Asakusa some 250 years ago!

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Following its roots as an open-air market serving to connect rural areas around Edo as a market for agricultural tools and products, *Tori-no-Ichi* shifted emphasis with the rise of the merchant

classes, and articles that originally served practical purposes became good luck charms.

Perhaps the most famous is *kumade*, originally a rake for gathering up fallen leaves, which local folklore helped transform into a talisman bringing happiness into the household and good fortune upon the possessor. In the Edo period, they were purchased by tea houses, restaurants and shipyards, as good luck charms.

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There is also a ritual involved in purchasing *kumade*. The price listed on the rake is only a guideline, but not an invitation to haggle, and it is thought to be good form to offer to pay more, and not less, for the privilege of owning the ceremonial rake!

And once a *kumade* has been selected and a price agreed, the buyer and seller strike the deal with a traditional hand clap, while chanting *kanai anzen, shobai hanjo*—literally, safety at home, and success in business. The sometimes raucous event is designed to make the buyer’s dream of good luck or prosperity a shared event.

Kumade are displayed high above entrances and gateways so as to make an easy pathway along which good fortune can enter, or are placed in household altars to greet the New Year.

Good fortune is taken very seriously, individuals buy *kumade* for their homes and even world-renowned companies and organizations visit the *Tori-no-Ichi*, often companies en masse, to buy *kumade* to ensure the coming year’s prosperity. Even at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, a magnificent *kumade* can be found in the entrance hall.