

## Recommended Kokeshi venue

### Within Tsuchiyu Onsen resort



### Japan's largest Kokeshi dolls

The year 2012 saw the debut of Japan's largest Kokeshi dolls here in Tsuchiyu Onsen: a complete set of "Hina" dolls (dolls in the style of the ancient imperial court), each as tall as 1.3 meters. The sight of these huge dolls, which include the five court musicians, is truly impressive!

Tsuchiyu set another record in 2013: a couple of giant Kokeshi wearing a hat, each taller than two meters, made their debut.

### Around Tsuchiyu Onsen resort

#### Nishida Memorial Hall – a collection of "Truly Nostalgic" Kokeshi

This memorial hall is dedicated to the late Minekichi Nishida's impressive collection of Kokeshi dolls (some 10,000 dolls in total).



#### Info

Anna Garden, 3-183, Aza Yokozuka, Arai,  
Fukushima City  
TEL 024-593-0639

#### A curator's view

Ms. Satoko Aihara, Nishida Memorial Hall



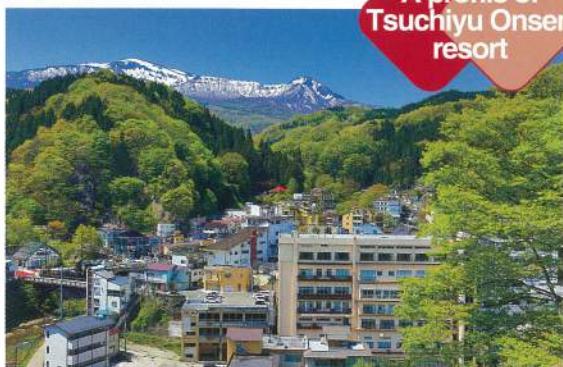
For me, a native of Fukushima, Kokeshi that originated here have become a part of my everyday life. In fact, almost every room in my home has had one or two Kokeshi on a shelf.

After I began working as a curator for Nishida Memorial Hall dedicated to traditional Kokeshi, I came to learn that Kokeshi were originally toys for children and that the features of Kokeshi vary from one producing area to another. Finding this out made me realize that Kokeshi have a greater artistic depth than previously thought.

Kokeshi appear to be modestly smiling at us, but at the same time their expressions reveal strength of mind or determination as if representing the stout-hearted mindset of the people of Tohoku who, for so long, have lived under the harsh climate of the region. We can see subtle yet a true variety of expressions in Kokeshi, which curiously enough makes us never tired of looking at them. Although I formerly thought that they had queer or odd faces, I now find an attractive depth in Kokeshi.

Nowadays, Kokeshi are becoming increasingly popular among city folk particularly young women. It is my sincere hope that you visit Kokeshi folk-art centers and come to appreciate the charms of Kokeshi with your very own eyes – those dolls that came into being influenced by the climate peculiar to Tohoku.

### A profile of Tsuchiyu Onsen resort



Tsuchiyu Onsen is a hot-spring resort town located to the west of Fukushima City. Surrounded by a verdant natural environment, the resort utilizes hot-spring waters that gush out in the upstream valley of the Arakawa River. It boasts many types of abundant thermal waters which together offer medicinal efficacies noted particularly for rheumatism, neuralgia and female disorders. The town is also famous as the birthplace of "Tsuchiyu Kokeshi."

#### Access

**By car:** approx. 20 min. after exiting Fukushima-nishi IC on the Tohoku Expressway.

**By rail:** Get off the train (JR Tohoku-honsen or Tohoku Shinkansen bullet train line) at Fukushima Sta., then approx. 45 min. by bus.

### Publisher / For Inquiries

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# TSUCHIYU KOKESHI



## What are "Kokeshi" dolls?

"Kokeshi" are traditional Japanese wooden dolls. A Kokeshi doll is made by fastening a piece of wood to a lathe, which is used to turn and shave the wood into the desired shape.

Tsuchiyu Onsen hot spring, located to the west of Fukushima City, is renowned as one of Japan's foremost Kokeshi producing centers; as such, Tsuchiyu-style Kokeshi dolls are considered to be one of "Japan's Top Three Greatest Kokeshi." In former days, Kokeshi dolls were mainly purchased as souvenirs by visitors to *onsen* hot-spring resorts used in prayer for the blessing of healthy children or as toys for their children when playing house. Today, as Kokeshi-making techniques attain refinement in artistry, the dolls have become a more artistic form of traditional folk craft and are appreciated not only by visitors to *onsen* resorts but also by a large number of Kokeshi lovers and collectors throughout Japan.

Hi!  
Nice to meet you.



Tsuchiyu Onsen's mascot character  
**Kibokko-chan**

This charming mascot  
represents a somewhat  
shy girl.

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Fukushima City Tourism & Convention Association



## The origin of Kokeshi

In the late Edo Period (late 18th century to early 19th century), “kijiya” or woodworkers, who made household utensils such as bowls and trays, began to make these dolls in a hot-spring area of the Tohoku (northeastern) region. These dolls gradually found their way to various other parts of Tohoku as souvenir items for hot-spring resort visitors.

Traditional Kokeshi are largely classified into eleven types including the Tsuchiyu type, each folk-art center exhibiting its own distinct characteristics. In times of old, Kokeshi were called by different names based on the centers’ respective dialects. In Tsuchiyu, for example, they were called “Deko” or “Deku.” It was only in 1940 that these dolls came to be known by the combined name “Kokeshi.”

It is said that Tsuchiyu Kokeshi had their beginnings some 170 years ago when Kamegoro Sakuma created one inspired by a wooden toy he had seen in the Kamigata (Kyoto/Osaka) region on his pilgrimage to the Ise Grand Shrine. And it was his son, Yashichi, who added ingenious improvements to Kamegoro’s original doll and completed the style of a Kokeshi with a revolving head that is common today. The Kokeshi that Yashichi created was then known as “Yashichi Deko,” which is regarded as the prototype of today’s Tsuchiyu Kokeshi.

Today, artisans who make Kokeshi are called “Kokeshi *kojin* (artisans).”

## 11 types of traditional Kokeshi created in the Tohoku region



## How to appreciate Kokeshi

There is no particular rule to appreciate Kokeshi. As everyday decorative items, simply display them anywhere you like in your home or office.

Each Kokeshi doll has its own expressions and other features according to the “*kojin*” (artisan) and individual doll. If you display tens of Kokeshi together, it is not only impressive but also allows you to enjoy their great variety of expressions. One may be able to better appreciate the subtle beauty of Kokeshi by coordinating them with interior decor – displaying one or two dolls on a shelf in your foyer or in combination with a piece of pottery or flower arrangement.



## Features of Tsuchiyu Kokeshi



# Kokeshi-making process



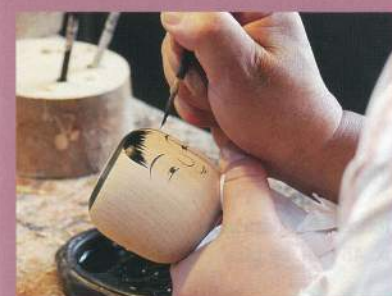
1 Fell a tree suitable for Kokeshi making, remove the bark, then age it for about one year in order to season it.



2 Cut the wood into the length for the intended size of the Kokeshi. Rotate the lathe to shave the wood into the desired shape.



3 Use sand paper or “*tokusa*” (horsetail grass)\*1 to polish the doll’s surface to a smooth texture. Using the rotation of the lathe, paint a lathe-drawn design\*2.



4 Paint a face on the head. (Draw a circle-dot design on the head, then draw a hair ornament (between the forehead hair and temple hair), followed by the eyes, nose and mouth.)



5 Fit the head into the torso, using the frictional heat generated by the turning of lathe. (You can see smoke rising as the head and torso rub against each other.)



\*1: “*Tokusa*,” aka horsetail grass, is dried then used as a polishing material like sand paper.

\*2: Lathe-drawn design: Tsuchiyu-type Kokeshi are characterized by horizontal-stripe designs which are drawn using the turning of the lathe. According to design requirements, patterns may be drawn by turning the lathe in reverse (“*rokuro-gaeshi*”) or by stopping the lathe in order to draw a detailed design.