

## A Historical Walk Around Kyoto



### The Rice Planting Festival in Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine

Rice has been very important for Japanese people for centuries, and farmers have always worked hard together to cultivate rice. It could be said that our Japanese group consciousness is based on this ancient rice cultivation culture.

In Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine, you can get a brief glimpse of this ancient Japanese culture. The Shinto rituals for prosperity and good harvests include seeding, planting, and harvest festivals that are held respectively on April 12<sup>th</sup>, June 10<sup>th</sup>, and October 25<sup>th</sup>, the most important stages in rice growth.

On June 10<sup>th</sup>, the Rice Planting Festival starts at 13:00 at the main shrine. All participants then move to the sacred rice paddy (approx. 330 m<sup>2</sup>) near the main shrine to enjoy a special ceremony at 14:00. As shown in the picture, seeds are planted by hand until the four women have completed a sacred dance. This festival is held even if it rains.

Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine was established in 711. This is one of the most popular sightseeing spots, not only for Japanese tourists but also foreign tourists. In 2011, the repair work was completed for the 1300-year anniversary of this shrine. Many of the shrine buildings and vivid-colored carvings have now been fully restored.

### The Origin of the Fox Statues and Shrine Gates

When you visit this shrine, you will see pairs of fox statues everywhere, and may pass through a lot of shrine gates, wondering about their purpose.

One legend suggests that an agricultural cycle is similar to that of a fox's behaviors and habits, and the routes of the shrine gates are considered to be foxes' routes. Foxes have the habit of entering villages from the mountains in spring, and returning in autumn. In addition, the shape and color of a fox's tail resemble rice ears. Ancient Japanese people seemed to believe that foxes had mystical powers. So, this shrine's foxes are believed to be messengers of the Gods.

Each fox statue holds a ball-like object representing the spirit of the Gods, a scroll for messages from the Gods, a key for rice storehouses, or a rice ear in its mouth.

In the Edo Period (1603–1867), local people established the practice of erecting gates along the path of the foxes on the mountain behind the shrine to protect and fulfill their wishes. Presently, there are more than five thousand bright red gates.

By *Etsuko.M*