

## A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Photo by Masayoshi Masuda



### Toka Ebisu Festival in Kyoto

In Japan, there are about 3,500 Ebisu shrines and this Kyoto Ebisu Shrine is one of the oldest Ebisu shrines. The origin of this shrine dates back to 1202. For the safety of one's families and business success in the New Year, Toka Ebisu festivals are held, especially in western Japan, on January 10<sup>th</sup>. Toka Ebisu Festival in this shrine is one of the three biggest Ebisu festivals, along with Nishinomiya Shrine in Hyogo Prefecture and Imamiya Ebisu Shrine in Osaka.

This festival in Kyoto is held from January 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>. It is located near the popular tourist destination of Gion. During the festival, each side of the approach is lined with various shops including street vendors selling goods such as Japanese pickles, octopus dumplings, and Japanese traditional sweets and games. It is traditional customary for some shops to offer New Year opening sales. This shrine and its surroundings are very crowded with a lot of people.

The highlight is January 10<sup>th</sup>. In 2013, on January 8<sup>th</sup>, the first day, the festival hours are from 9:00–23:00 and on January 12<sup>th</sup>, the last day, it is open from 9:00–22:00. However, after it opens at 9:00 on January 9<sup>th</sup>, it does not close until 24:00 on January 11<sup>th</sup>. You may happen to see *geiko* and *maiko*, the famous traditional women who are entertainers in Kyoto, visiting the shrine.

#### Why Do Visitors Pat on the Main Shrine Wall?

When you reach at last the main shrine, you will see a lot of Japanese visitors patting on the wooden wall after praying. You may be wondering why they are patting on the wall.

Ebisu, one of Seven Deities of Good Fortune, is enshrined there. It is believed that he may be sleep and he is hard of hearing due to old age even when he stays awake. Therefore, to get his attention, there is a Japanese sign board, "please pat on the wall when you make a wish."

#### Why is Bamboo Grass Displayed?

You can listen to an original Japanese song repeatedly in this shrine.

商売繁盛、笹持ってこい！ *Prosperous business, bring bamboo grass here!*

Green bamboo grass in winter is still green, so it means a symbol of life force.

As shown in the photo, visitors buy bamboo grass, and then they choose to buy lucky charms such as an oval gold coin, a sea bream, and a straw rice bag to decorate their bamboo branches.

By *Etsuko.N*