

# ANOTHER SENDAI

A free journey beyond the everyday city

¥0 FREE ENGLISH

## Third Issue!

Each issue is a journey to another Sendai, places that are all too easy to pass by without noticing. This publication is a collaboration between the Sendai Tourist Information Desk and expert local writers.

### [Edition Theme] Urban Temples & Shrines

We usually imagine a Buddhist temple or a Shinto shrine far from the buzz of a city, surrounded by serene nature. However, in Sendai you can find a treasured sanctuary nestled behind a shopping arcade or on the rooftop of a major department store. This month we feature two places that embody the spirit of downtown Sendai – tradition and economic growth linked hand in hand.

# Fujisaki Ebisu-jinja Shrine

## Finding fortune on a rooftop

This year Fujisaki, the well-known department store which originated in Sendai, celebrates its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. There are many things Fujisaki is beloved for, but today we are going to talk about something which is much lesser known.

But let's start from the beginning. In 1819, a new shop selling fabrics opened its doors in Sendai. The name of the shop was Ebisuya. And, as you may have guessed, the shop owners venerated Ebisu – the god of fortune and trade. They chose Ebisu as their *ujigami* (guardian god), and apparently Ebisu helped the shop succeed in becoming the Fujisaki we know today.

It is not so rare for a company to have a Shintō shrine on their premises. But usually these shrines are concealed from the public. In contrast, Fujisaki Ebisu-jinja Shrine has been open to the public since 1932. When Fujisaki moved to a new building made of reinforced concrete, the shrine was relocated to the rooftop. The building has been rebuilt since then, but the shrine stays on the roof where everyone can visit it freely.



Fujisaki Ebisu-jinja Shrine



Mitakisan Fudōin Temple



## A rooftop shrine for everyone

On a bright sunny day, I made my own small pilgrimage to Fujisaki Ebisu-jinja. The rooftop was more crowded than usual as a group had come to pay a visit. A Fujisaki shop assistant was preparing *goshuin* – seal stamps which commemorate a visit to a shrine. When I asked if she is always at the shrine, she pointed to a nearby phone, "When no one is here, you can call and someone will come assist you."

The shrine is visited by all sorts of people. First, there are Fujisaki employees. As Fujisaki store manager, Mr. Seta explained to me, employees

usually pay a visit to the shrine in the beginning of every month, as well as before some important events. Local shop owners consider Fujisaki Ebisu-jinja their guardian shrine, too. Some people come to pay homage to Ebisu as one of the Sendai *Shichifukujin* (Seven Gods of Fortune), enshrined at certain temples and shrines around the city. Some visit in hopes of getting a little more fortune. Others just want to know more about the history of Sendai. No matter your motivation, you are always welcome at this little shrine on the roof!



### Fujisaki Ebisu-jinja Shrine

Fujisaki Main Building 8F (roof),  
Ichibancho 3-2-17, Aoba, Sendai, Miyagi  
Hours: 10:00-19:30  
(Goshuin stamps until 17:00)  
Closed days: irregular  
Tel: 022-261-5111  
URL: <http://www.sendai-shichifukujin.com/>  
\*Please see the map on the reverse side



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# Mitakisan Fudōin Temple

## The spirit of the arcade

When walking through Sendai's shopping arcades, sometimes you can smell the fragrance of incense sticks. And then, between buildings on a busy shopping street, appears an elaborate *shimenawa* (rice straw rope used in Shintō). Behind it stands... wait, is that a Shintō shrine or a Buddhist temple?

"It is a temple," states Katō Ryūshun, who oversees this place, "but people often can't say for sure. This place does look a little like a Shintō shrine."

Indeed, Mitakisan Fudōin Temple is an unusual temple. It was built in 1865 when a local woman, Katō Take, found a statue

of Fudō Myōō in a river. She prayed to this powerful Buddhist deity to cure her eye disease. Take, who was said to possess spiritual powers herself, brought the statue home and soon found that the statue was miraculous. Word spread quickly, and many people came to pray to the Fudō Myōō for success in their daily lives.

"The temple was popular among local merchants, but when my father took over in 1989, it was in a state of decline," says Katō Ryūshun. "We had to rebuild it completely. To make the temple more popular, we started searching for something that would attract people. And we found Sendai Shirō."



## Sendai Shirō – the smiling god

Sendai Shirō was a rather mysterious figure. He lived in Sendai at the end of the 19th century. Shirō was likely intellectually disabled, because he almost never spoke. He enjoyed walking around the town, playing with small children and occasionally visiting local shops. Shop owners liked him because of his bright personality and often gave him treats. Soon people noticed that after Shirō frequented a shop it began to flourish. Shirō became a local God of Fortune, but not a single sanctuary was dedicated to him until Ryūshun's father decided to enshrine Sendai Shirō's statue in Fudōin. After Fudōin was introduced on TV as the "Sendai Shirō temple," people started coming to pray not only to Fudō Myōō, but to Sendai Shirō, too.

"On the 28th of each month we hold a *goma-taki* (prayer ceremony). I guess this is the only time of the month when Fudōin starts to look like a regular temple," Ryūshun smiles.

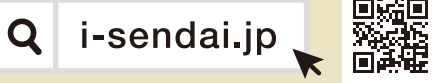
Inside the temple, surrounded by the warm scent of incense sticks, all the noise and fuss of the arcades seems to disappear. Step into this cloistered space for the help of the powerful Fudō Myōō and the warm smile of Sendai Shirō.

### Mitakisan Fudōin Temple

Chuo 2-5-7, Aoba, Sendai, Miyagi  
Hours: 10:00-18:00 / Closed days: none  
Tel: 022-221-3056 / URL: <http://www.mitakisan.com>



### Continue your journey at nearby temples and shrines



### Dainichinyoraido Temple

Ichibancho 1-11-3, Aoba, Sendai, Miyagi



Guardian deity for those born in the year of the sheep or monkey. At night the lanterns light up the neighborhood.

### Nonaka-jinja Shrine

Ichibancho 2-7-18, Aoba, Sendai, Miyagi



This shrine is dedicated to relationships and business prosperity. It holds a procession for the popular setsubun festival (February 3).