

# The Hanging-Doll Decorations of Izu Inatori

## ---Parents' never-changing love for their children---



On the occasion of the Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival), which is also known as the Momo no Sekku (Peach Festival), households with girls display cute little hanging dolls on both sides of the standard tiered platform of *hina* dolls. Each of these warm, colorful decorations is about the size of an infant's hand. These days the custom can be seen throughout Japan, but its birthplace is Inatori (Higashi-Izu Town, Kamogun, Shizuoka Prefecture), located in the southeast of the Izu Peninsula. I visited this scenic port town to see this representative handicraft of Izu Peninsula.

### Giving shape to prayers

Hanging-doll decorations are a custom dating from the late Edo period (1603–1868) that is unique to Izu Inatori. Mothers and grandmothers would make dolls by hand, one by one, as prayers for the sound health and luck in encountering good marriage partners of girls greeting their first Doll Festival (on March 3). Previously the custom was to display these hanging dolls on both sides of the tiered platform of hina dolls, but these days, because of the lack of space in apartments and other dwellings, an increasing







number of families just celebrate the festival with the hanging dolls. And many families now decorate the indoor entrances and living

rooms with hanging dolls not only at the time of the Doll Festival but throughout the year, as kind of Japanese-style mobiles, so hanging dolls have become a colorful part of everyday life.

Families make hanging dolls with a wide variety of wishes---for their girls to be pretty, to be happy, to wear nice clothes, to eat tasty food, and so on. Some families display original handiwork incorporating the animal of the year in which their girls were born according to the Chinese zodiac. Because the hanging dolls reflect the varied wishes of their creators, there are no strict rules on how they should be made and displayed. Except for one thing: Since even numbers can be divided, for good luck's sake, the number of strings hanging from circle of bamboo sticks must be an odd number, such as three, five, or seven, and there must be an odd number of works attached to each string too.

There are about 50 types of hanging doll that are commonly displayed in households. Among them, the peach, monkey, and triangle are musts and can be seen everywhere in Inatori.



**Peach:** Drives away illness and evil spirits and augurs longevity. Since the peach tree is easy to plant, blossoms quickly, and produces much fruit, it is also a symbol of fertility.



**Monkey:** Wards off bad luck and trouble. (The Japanese word for monkey is *saru*, which also means "go away.") It is important for the monkey's arms and legs to be tucked in rather than outstretched. As a substitute for human beings, this motionless posture indicates divine punishment.



**Triangle:** The triangle represents the spiritual power to drive away evil spirits. As with belief in the gods of Mount Fuji, the shape of Mount Fuji here indicates prayers for recovery from incurable diseases, immortality, and wealth. It is also used as a scent bag.



**Golden eye snapper:** This fish, which is caught off Inatori, is highly evaluated by gourmets nationwide and, as a token of good luck, is an essential dish at celebratory events.



The “crawling child doll” and the “dancing child doll,” which both feature children, are also popular for their cuteness.



**Crawling child:** This doll represents the parents’ desire for their child to crawl, stand, walk, and grow up healthily.



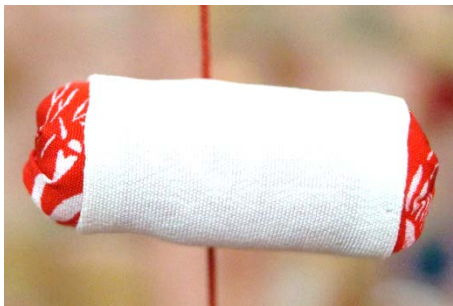
**Dancing child:** Inatori’s summer festival to pray for a bumper harvest always features dancing children, who are said to become healthy after their performance.

## The Identity of Inatori People

“Precisely because they are made by rural womenfolk, some hanging dolls stand out distinctively,” says Sachie Mori, representative of the Kinu-no-Kai workshop to experience the making of hanging dolls and the driving force behind production and exhibition activities. “Discovering them is great fun!”



**Hiding cape:** Since you can conceal yourself if you wear this cape, it is said to protect you from mishaps.



**Pillow:** A child that sleeps well grows up well too.



**Purse:** So that the child never needs to worry about money.

Hanging dolls are folkcrafts. They are made not by artisans with special skills but by ordinary women in their homes. The materials required are cloth, thread, string, and cotton, and everything is sewn together by hand. In the past it was considered only natural for families, even if they were not so wealthy, to make hanging dolls using whatever was available at home, such as old kimonos and pieces of cloth. People use various materials and each doll reflects the thoughts of the maker, so no two works are the same.



Parts like the drumhead and sandal soles are carefully sewn one stitch at a time so that, when the job is finished, they look just as if they have been attached with an adhesive.

Hanging dolls represent the identity of the people of Inatori. If they are asked “What is the pride of your town?” they can confidently reply, “Have you ever seen hanging dolls? Well, Inatori is the birthplace of hanging dolls.” “They have spread even more than we expected,” says Ms. Mori, “so we cannot cut corners. That is why we have received trust from our customers. And that is the biggest encouragement for us to continue our work. It is the job of Kinu-no-Kai to make modest things as best we can and with loving care.”



**Tortoise:** A symbol of long life



**Hen:** Early to rise and hardworking!



**Rice bag mouse:** The mouse, which is said to be a messenger of Daikokuten (Mahakala in ancient India), one of the seven gods of good fortune in Japan, is lucky with money and has spiritual power. The straw rice bag is a symbol of a plentiful harvest.

## Revival after Fading Away

The tradition that had continued since the Edo period faced a crisis of survival as a result of World War II. During the war hanging dolls were suppressed as something useless, and after the war people were just too busy picking themselves up after years of exhaustion. Except for a very few people, the custom of making and displaying hanging dolls faded away and was almost completely forgotten.

Originally hina dolls, after serving their purpose, were floated away in rivers as a memorial or burned in special bonfires along with old talismans and other such objects. It must have been hard to throw something that the family had overstretched itself to buy into a fire, but that was the fate of hina dolls. They were not something that you kept for a long time. In the past hanging dolls used to be rubbed. It was believed that by rubbing them, you transferred your pains or worries to the doll. Then, when the doll was floated in a river or burned, the pain or worry would disappear too.



**Mother-child daruma:** A daruma doll returns to an upright position however many times it is knocked over, so it is regarded as a charm to bring happiness. A special spiritual power to ward off evil spirits resides in the red part.



**Bean:** The bean represents a prayer for the child to be diligent and healthy.



**Seven-treasures ball:** The seven treasures refer to the seven gems of Buddhism, and the charm is an expression of the dreams of ordinary folk.



About a decade after the end of the war families with girls started to buy hina dolls and display them. And then mothers and grandmothers began to find time in their daily lives to sew hanging dolls and display them on both sides of the tiered platform. Gradually the custom was revived. In 1993 Ms. Mori attended an event where hanging dolls were being made, organized by the local women's association, and she was absolutely charmed by the custom. Amid a boom in hanging-doll making among the women of Inatori, Ms. Mori and her friends engaged in lively activities to improve production technique, challenge a variety of new designs while adhering to the basics, and open a workshop to display and sell the craft.

The Kinu-no-Kai can take credit for the fact that it has revived the tradition and, in about a quarter of a century, seen it spread across the whole country. "We don't have an obsession or anything like that," says Ms. Mori, modestly. "We just enjoy diligently making good things. People would soon get tired of seeing sloppy work, so we say to ourselves, 'Since we are going to show these works to everyone as samples, let's put our heart and soul into making them.' That's all we do."



Countless highly creative works decorate the space for experiencing hanging-doll production. Ms. Mori of the Kinu-no-Kai holds a crawling child doll and a seven-treasures ball. "Traditional crafts tend to be very stereotyped," she says, "but hanging dolls are evolving all the time."

## Kinu-no-Kai Hanging-Doll Workshop

MAP

09:30–18:00; closed on Tuesdays

<http://www.kinunokai.com/> (Japanese site only)



## Only the Real McCoy in the Birthplace of Izu Inatori

Izu Inatori has continued as a fishing community since olden times. Blessed by the nature of the sea and mountains, it is a picturesque town. Decorations of hanging dolls made by the locals can be seen everywhere, especially in shopping arcades, guesthouses, and the railway station. They add color to the unique atmosphere of the community, which every spring rallies to organize related events.



## Hina Doll Decoration Festival

(from January 20 to March 31 in 2019)



The huge decoration of hanging dolls displayed in the Culture Park Hina Doll Museum was made by hand by the proprietresses of hot-spring accommodation facilities in the area. It hangs from the seven-meter-high ceiling.





### Main Venue: Culture Park Hina Doll Museum

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The museum has about 20,000 hanging dolls on display, one of the largest collections in Japan. Visitors will be amazed by the countless number of hina dolls as well. (Can be visited throughout the year, except in July and August. Check opening times.)



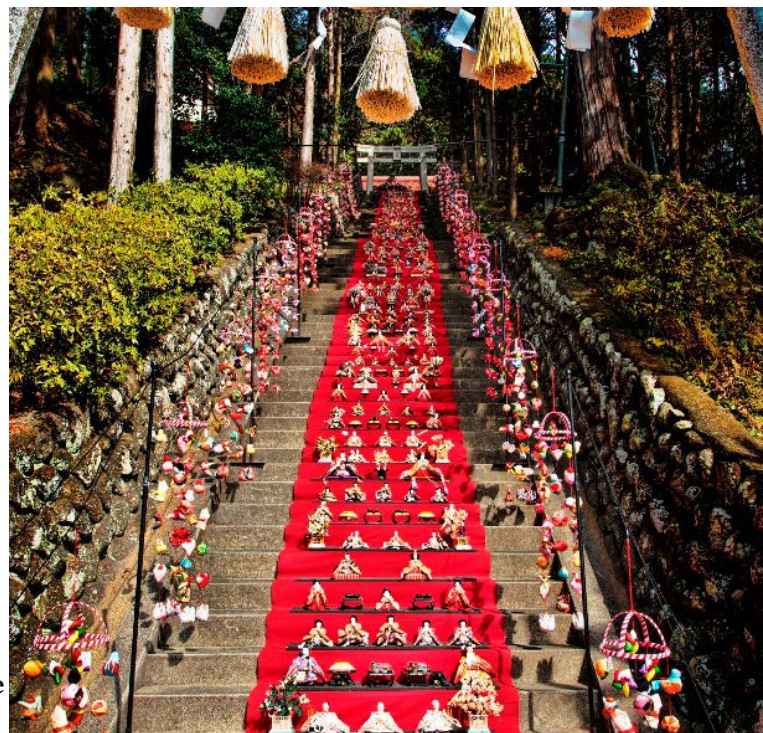
In April there will also be a display relating to the Tango no Sekku (Boys' Festival) on May 5.

### Susanoo Shrine

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The largest decoration of hina dolls and hanging dolls in Japan adorns the 118-step approach to Susanoo Shrine. This grand spectacle, which can also be seen from the fishing port beyond the harbor, is the biggest event attracting sightseers to the area. (15 minutes on foot from Izu Inatori Station)

The side-path view at Susanoo Shrine is also highly recommended.



### Harvest Experience Farm Futatsubori

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The main building of this mikan farm is a purely Japanese-style structure, and the sight of a hina doll platform and hanging dolls decorating the living room is sure to arouse a feeling of nostalgia. Coupled with the views of the garden, which has a wonderful pine tree said to be 400 years old, and the gleaming Pacific Ocean, the scene is one of quintessentially Japanese ambience. (20 minutes on foot from Izu Inatori Station)



From the hina doll platform in the main building of Futatsubori, the Pacific Ocean can be seen through the branches of the pine tree in the garden.



The three ladies chosen as the fourth Miss Hanging Dolls: You never know, you may be lucky enough to meet them at one of the events!

There are lots of other events in Inatori as well. Check the website of the Inatori Onsen Ryokan Association for details.

Editorial cooperation and photos:

### **Inatori Onsen Ryokan Association**

Inatori Onsen Korasshie (Inatori Onsen Ryokan Association website)

<http://www.inatorionsen.or.jp/> (Japanese site only)

Website introducing Inatori

### **Higashi-Izu hot spring information site “e-izu”**

<http://www.e-izu.org/language/english.html>