



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
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TEACHING TUESDAY

MANEKI NEKO

Maneki neko, also called lucky cats or beckoning cats, are often found in Japanese businesses and homes. A raised left paw attracts customers, while a raised right invites good fortune and money. Both paws raised can bring both, and also offers protection. The higher the paw is raised the more luck it brings.

There are two major legends about the origin of the maneki neko. The first involves an Edo era feudal lord who was passing by a run-down temple on his way home when he noticed a cat sitting in front of the temple. It raised its paw and beckoned lord inside. Shortly afterwards a huge thunderstorm arrived. The lord was so happy he hadn't gotten caught in the storm that he adopted the temple and made it rich. The temple became known as Gotokuji Temple which still exists today in Tokyo. When the cat died, Shobyodo temple (beckoning cat temple) was built inside Gotokuji.

The second legend is about an old woman who sent her cat to live in Imado Shrine in Asakusa after she could no longer take care of it due to poverty. That night the cat appeared in her dream and said, "You will be happy if you make a doll in the image of me." So she made ceramic figurines of her cat and sold them. The figurines became popular and made the woman wealthy. Today, a pair of female and male maneki neko sit together in Imado Shrine.

The maneki neko colors, positioning, and outfit also judge how lucky it is. Calico is the traditional coloring and is the luckiest. White represents happiness, purity, and positive things to come, while gold brings wealth and prosperity, black wards off evil spirits, pink brings success in love, and blue family well-being. If the cat is holding an oval coin called a ryo, it brings fortune. A mallet attracts wealth if shaken. A fish brings abundance and good fortune and a marble brings money and wisdom.