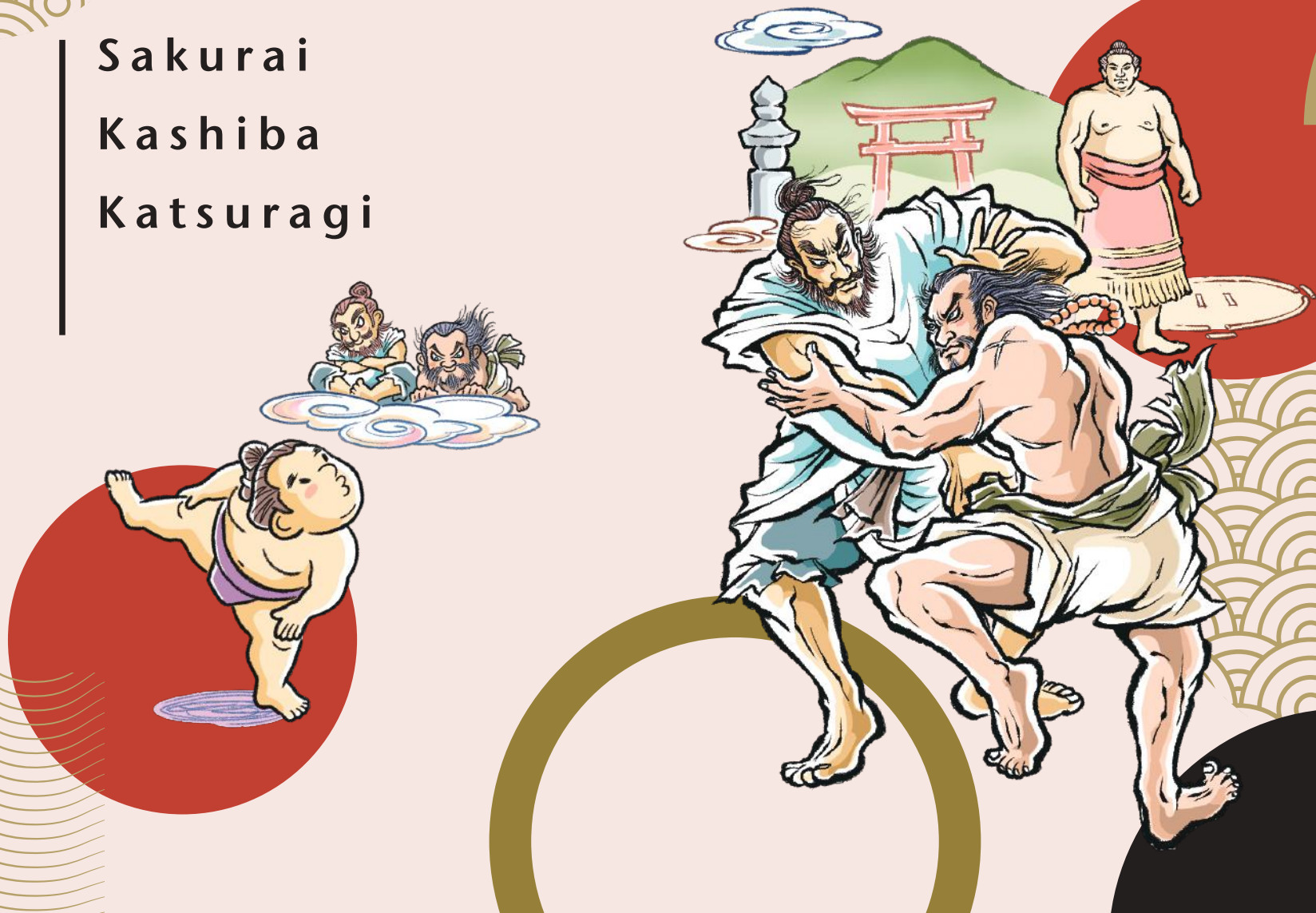


The Birthplace of Sumo: Nara

Sakurai
Kashiba
Katsuragi



THE BIRTHPLACE OF SUMO: NARA

The cities of Sakurai, Kashiba, and Katsuragi in Nara Prefecture preserve the tradition that they are the birthplace of sumo wrestling.

The *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan) says that “In the village of Taima lived a brave, strong man named Taima no Kehaya. He boasted that he was the strongest man under Heaven. One day, the Emperor ordered his vassals to find someone who could contest Kehaya’s strength, and Nomi no Sukune of Izumo was summoned to engage in a contest of strength with him. Kehaya’s back was quickly broken and he died. And so it was that Kehaya’s lands were seized and given to Sukune.”

Two millennia ago, two men of great strength, Nomi no Sukune and Taima no Kehaya, met in a contest of strength staged before the 11th Emperor, Suinin.

Nomi no Sukune won, Taima no Kehaya lost.

This contest of strength is said to be the origin of competitive sumo wrestling, and of sumo held in the Emperor’s presence. This booklet takes you to Sakurai, Kashiba, and Katsuragi to introduce the legends and history of Yamato Mahoroba, the birthplace of sumo.

Let it guide you as you walk and feel the roots of modern sumo.



Gyoji-kun

A *gyoji* is a sumo referee. Gyoji-kun is a native of Nara who explains the history of sumo. If you visit sumo-related locations in Sakurai, Kashiba, and Katsuragi, Gyoji-kun will approach you and offer information about sumo. His dream is to referee a match between Nomi no Sukune and Taima no Kehaya.

A shrine associated with Nomi no Sukune

Junihashira-jinja Shrine

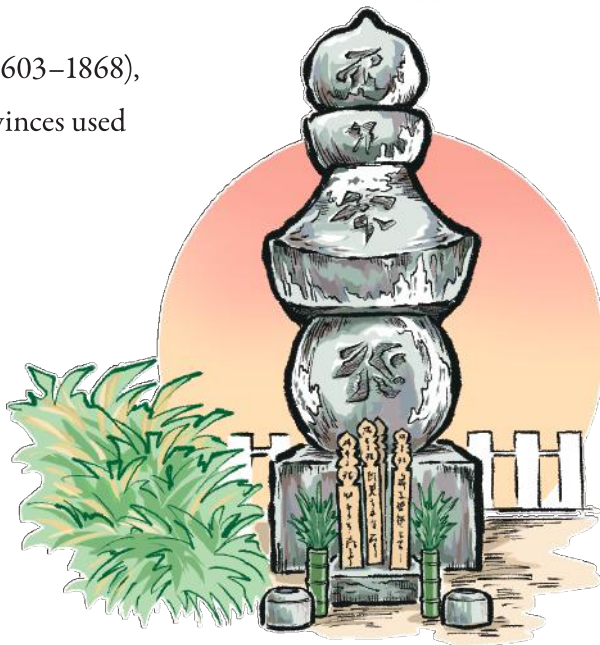
Sakurai
City

Named after the 12 deities who are enshrined there.
Visitors are met by guardian dogs
supported by sumo wrestlers.

The shrine is located in Izumo, Sakurai,
which is said to be the birthplace
of Nomi no Sukune.

His resting place marked by the Gorinto Pagoda.

During the Edo period (1603–1868),
wrestlers touring the provinces used
to make a pilgrimage
here for good luck
from Nomi no Sukune.



Look closely and you'll see four sumo wrestlers supporting each guardian dog. The wrestlers press their palms together in prayer that they may become as strong as Nomi no Sukune. Nomi no Sukune is said to have been born in Izumo, Sakurai, but he is also said to have come from Izumo Province (now Shimane Prefecture).

The birthplace of sumo

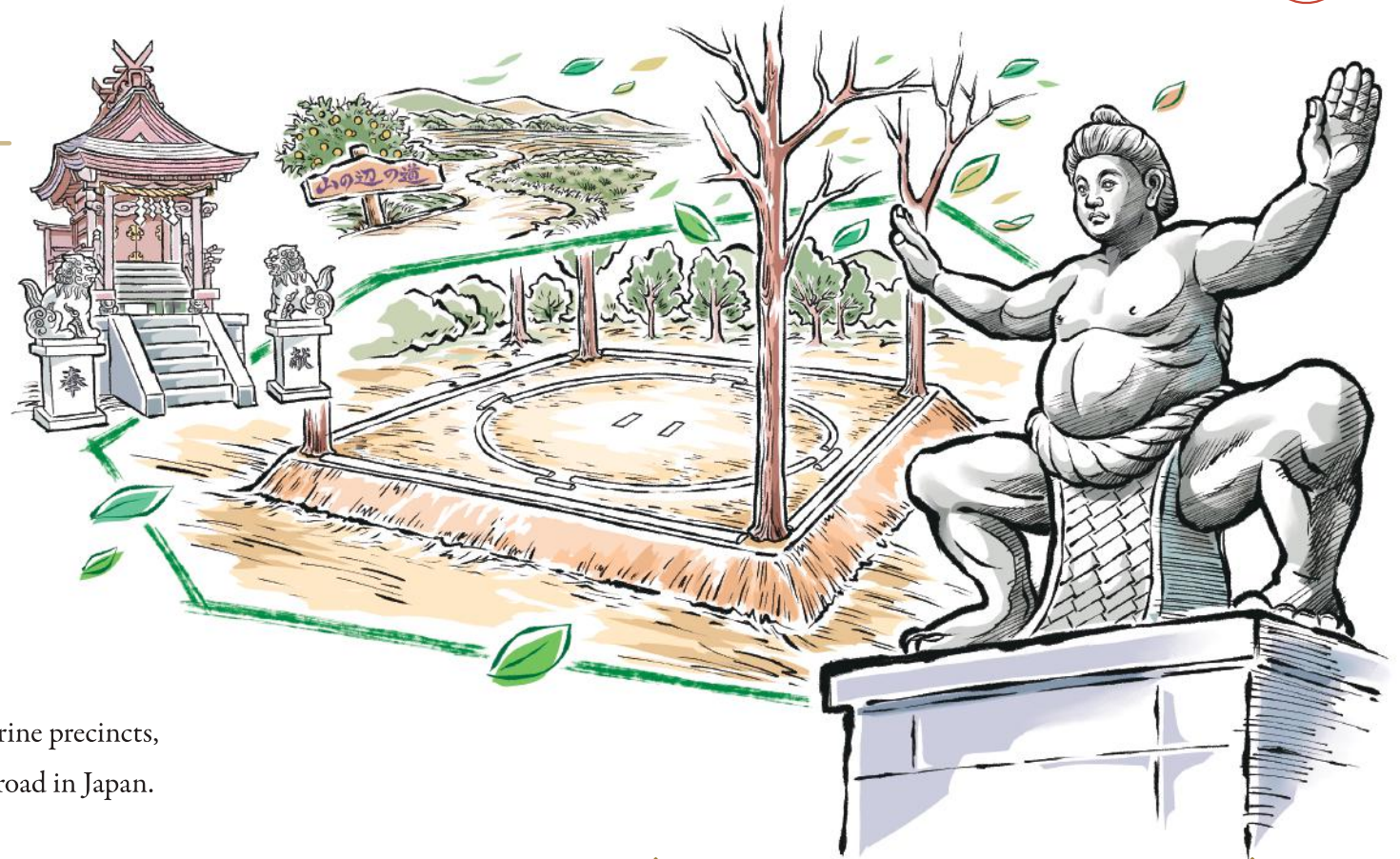
Sumo-jinja Shrine

Sakurai
City

This small shrine is located in a place called Katayakeshi. It is here that Nomi no Sukune and Taima no Kehaya engaged in a contest of strength before Emperor Suinin.

Their contest is said to be the origin of competitive sumo wrestling, and the first sumo match to be held in the Emperor's presence.

Today, there is a sumo ring in the center of the shrine precincts, close to the Yamanobe no Michi road, the oldest road in Japan.



“Kataya” in the name Katayakeshi means “place of the wrestling ring.” In the precincts you’ll see a statue of a sumo grand champion. There’s also a monument commemorating Tokushoryu, the first native of Nara Prefecture to win a Grand Sumo tournament, in January 2020. From up on the rise where the monument stands, there’s a good view of Sakurai.

Another scene of a contest of strength

Site of the Koshioresha Legend (Koshioresha Park)

Kashiba
City

This is another place
where legend has it that
Nomi no Sukune and Taima no Kehaya
met in a contest of strength.

The legend says the battle became
a kicking contest,
and Taima no Kehaya's back was broken.
This is where the place name
Koshioresha (broke back)
comes from.

There is a statue
of a sumo wrestler
looking toward
beautiful Mt. Nijo.



It seems that the rules of ancient sumo permitted everything, including punching and kicking. There were no referees to monitor the matches or make decisions. That's pretty different from today's sumo, isn't it? We do wonder where Nomi no Sukune and Taima no Kehaya had their contest of strength—was it at Sumo-jinja Shrine, or Koshioresha Park?

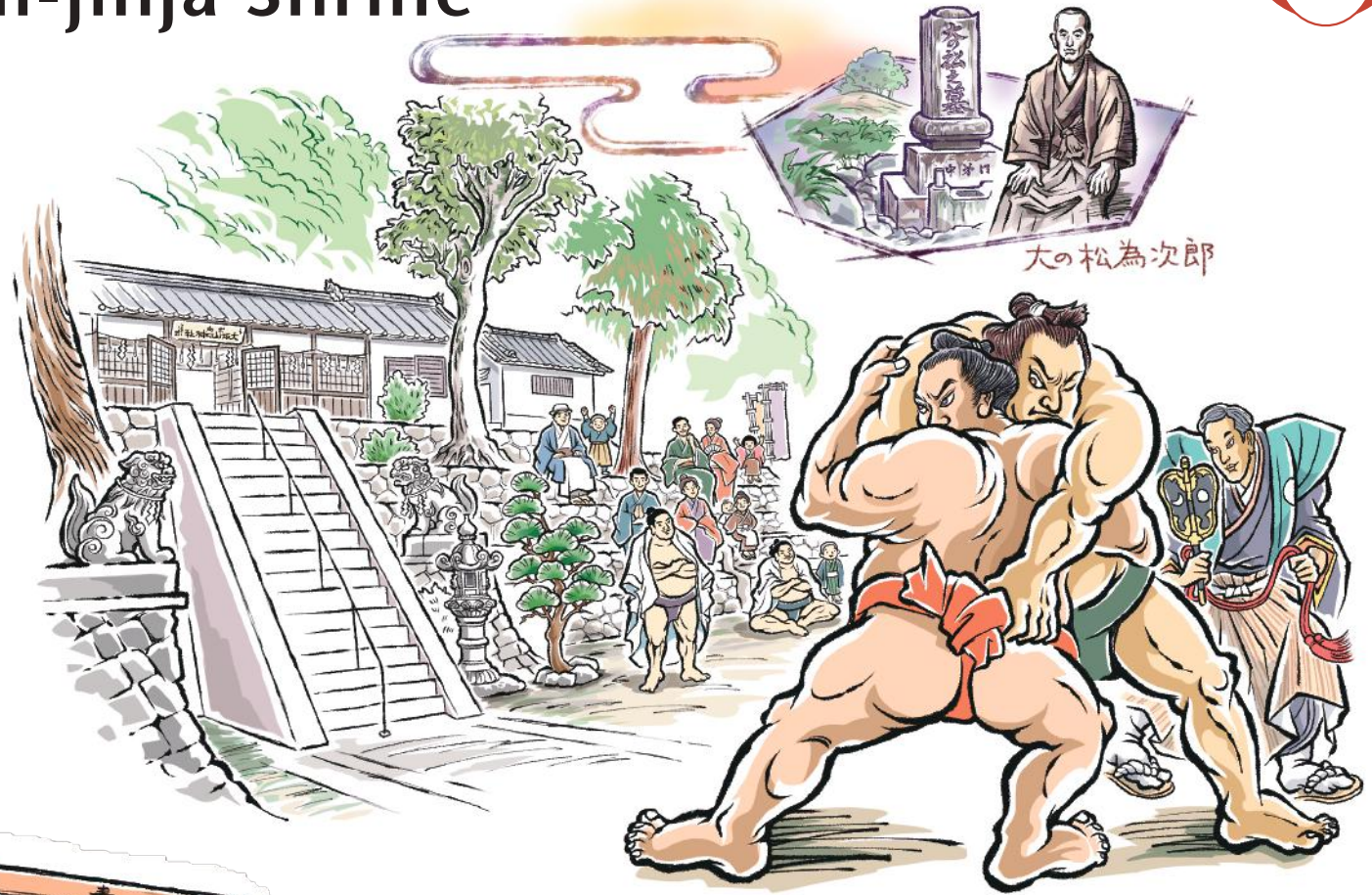
Shrine sumo and legendary wrestlers

Osaka Yamaguchi-jinja Shrine

The ruins of a sumo ring and stone seats remain on the shrine grounds.

During autumn festivals and other events, sumo matches were held at local shrines as an offering to the gods. This type of sumo remained popular into the Taisho Era (1912–1926).

Tamejiro Onomatsu, a sumo wrestler native to the region, fought his farewell match at this shrine before becoming an amateur sumo coach.



The impressive depictions of sumo wrestlers are offerings to the gods.

Tamejiro Onomatsu was not a large wrestler, but they say he was strong enough to lift a 130-kilogram stone.

One can almost hear the sound of wrestlers' bodies colliding and the applause and cheers of the villagers watching from the seats.

Yamato Mahoroba hall of sumo

Kehayaza Sumo Museum

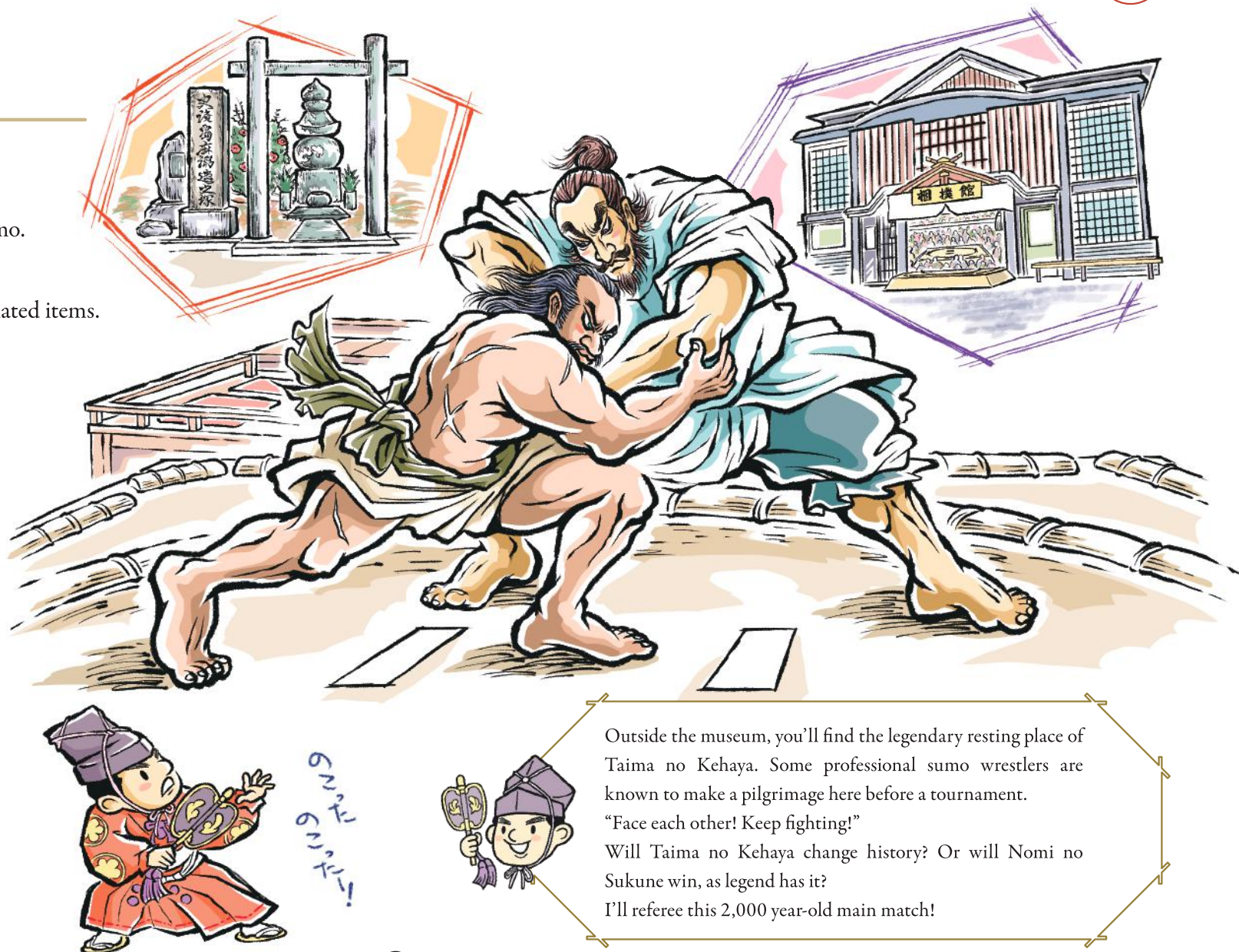
Katsuragi
City

This unusual sumo museum
is dedicated to honoring
Taima no Kehaya and to propagating sumo.

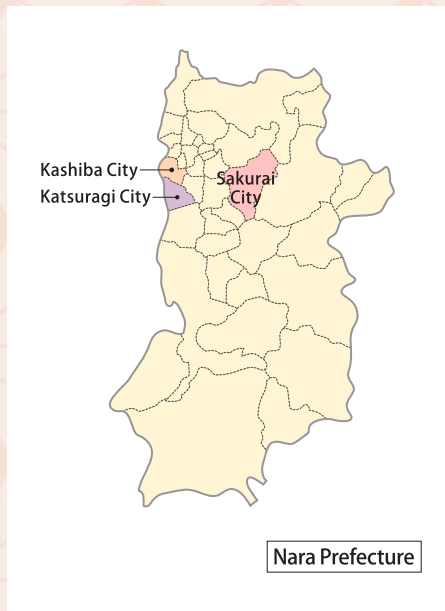
The museum is home to 12,000 sumo-related items.
Along with permanent exhibits
of precious items like
elaborately decorated wrestler belts,
the museum also holds
periodic special exhibitions.

It also has a tournament-size sumo ring
that everyone is free to step into.

Donning wrestler garb
for commemorative photos
and experiencing the salt purification
are also popular.



Outside the museum, you'll find the legendary resting place of Taima no Kehaya. Some professional sumo wrestlers are known to make a pilgrimage here before a tournament. "Face each other! Keep fighting!" Will Taima no Kehaya change history? Or will Nomi no Sukune win, as legend has it? I'll referee this 2,000 year-old main match!



1 Junihashira-jinja Shrine/ Nomi no Sukune Gorinto Pagoda

650 Izumo, Sakurai-shi, Nara Prefecture

Free entry to shrine precincts

☎ 0744-42-9111 (Sakurai City Tourism and Urban Development Division)

Access: 20-min. walk from Hasedera Station on the Kintetsu Osaka Line

2 Sumo-jinja Shrine (Located inside Anashiniimasu Hyozu-jinja Shrine)

Anashi, Sakurai-shi, Nara Prefecture

Free entry to shrine precincts

☎ 0744-42-9111 (Sakurai City Tourism and Urban Development Division)

Access: Take the Nara Kotsu Bus from JR/Kintetsu Sakurai Station to "Sumo-jinja-guchi" and disembark. 20 min. by foot.

3 Site of the Koshioreda Legend (Koshioreda Park)

6-chome, Isokabe, Kashiba-shi, Nara Prefecture

Free entry

☎ 0745-44-3312 (Kashiba City Commerce, Industry, and Tourism Division)

Access: 15-min. walk from Nijojinjaguchi Station on the Kintetsu Minami Osaka Line

4 Osaka Yamaguchi-jinja Shrine

1499-1 Anamushi, Kashiba-shi, Nara Prefecture

Free entry to shrine precincts

☎ 0745-44-3312 (Kashiba City Commerce, Industry, and Tourism Division)

Access: 4-min. walk from Nijo Station on the Kintetsu Osaka Line

5 Tombstone of Tamejiro Onomatsu

2480 Anamushi, Kashiba-shi, Nara Prefecture

Free entry

☎ 0745-44-3312 (Kashiba City Commerce, Industry, and Tourism Division)

Access: 10-min. walk from Nijoan Station on the Kintetsu Minami Osaka Line

6 Kehayaza Sumo Museum/ Taima no Kehaya Stone Grave

83-1 Taima, Katsuragi-shi, Nara Prefecture

Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Closed: Tuesdays and Wednesdays (open on national holidays)

Admission: Adults 300 yen, children 150 yen

☎ 0745-48-4611

Access: 5-min. walk from Taimadera Station on the Kintetsu Minami Osaka Line



The Birthplace of Sumo: Nara

Published March 2025

Publication: Yamato Mahoroba Sumo Liaison Council

Illustration: Hideaki Murai (Futuro Graphics)

Design: Itsuko Kawakami (Futuro Graphics)

Text: Takahiro Chiwaki (Ryoko Yomiuri Publications, Inc.)

*Unauthorized copying and reproduction prohibited.