

Tokyo Pulse | August 2026 vol.1

Tokyo Sugoi! - Episode 16 by Steve Gillick

Shibamata: A Tokyo Hidden Gem



The Zuiryu Pine in Kyoeizan Daikyo-ji Temple (Shibamata Taishakuten)

The Japanese expression "shiru hito zo shiru" means "known only by those who know" and refers to a hidden gem—a special place that lies beyond the usual tourist trail. Discovering such a place often leaves visitors with a sense of happiness, awe, and a lasting glow of satisfaction.

Tokyo's Shibamata neighbourhood fits this description perfectly. It's an unforgettable half-day excursion for travellers who want to experience the atmosphere of old Tokyo.

Shibamata began as a rural settlement where the name may originally have meant "an island or piece of land located where a river branches." Travel time from central

Tokyo stations such as Higashi-Ginza or Shinjuku to Shibamata Station on the Keisei Kanamachi Line is about 50 minutes.



Temple Street, Shibamata



Making kumi-ame on Temple Street

Upon exiting the station, visitors are greeted by a statue of Tora-san, the main character in the film series *Otoko wa Tsurai yo* (It's Tough Being a Man), which

portrays Shibamata as Tora-san's hometown and the location of his family's dango shop. And Dango shops are only a few steps away on Temple Street, which is lined with an enticing array of traditional food shops and local specialties. *Dango* – are sweet rice dumplings made from rice mochi, served on a skewer. *Yokan* is another traditional confection made from sweetened red bean paste. In the open window of one shop, a *wagashiya* (confectionery craftsman) was making *kumi-ame*, carefully slicing four-foot logs of candy into smaller pieces for sale. Next door to a Soba shop, a woman was selling *tsukudani*, seafood, seaweed, and vegetables, simmered in a sweet-and-savory blend of sugar, soy sauce, and mirin, and used for toppings over steamed rice.

Temple Street ends at the Nitenmon (two guardian deities) Gate, where visitors enter a sacred space.



Nitenmon Gate, Kyozeizan Daikyo-ji Temple (Shibamata Taishakuten)

The Kyozeizan Daikyoji Temple, founded in 1629, is commonly known as Shibamata Taishakuten, the name of Indra, a Brahman deity who later came to be revered as a protector of Buddhism in Tibet, China, and Japan. Taishakuten is believed to defend people against evil and misfortune.

The Zuiryu Pine, an impressive sprawling tree, grows alongside the Temple. According to tradition, the temple's founder, Nichiei Shonin, came upon a pine that resembled a dragon ascending to heaven and interpreted it as an auspicious sign that this was the ideal location to build the temple.

The temple buildings incorporate elements of Buddhist art and symbolism. Beautifully carved wooden dragons, *shishi* (lion-dogs), and *baku* (creatures that devour nightmares) peer from the roof beams, guarding against the intrusion of evil. And to fully appreciate the inner force that these figures project, visitors can stand face-to-face with dragons and shishi in Taishakudo Hall.



A scene from the Lotus Sutra Zelkova Wood carvings

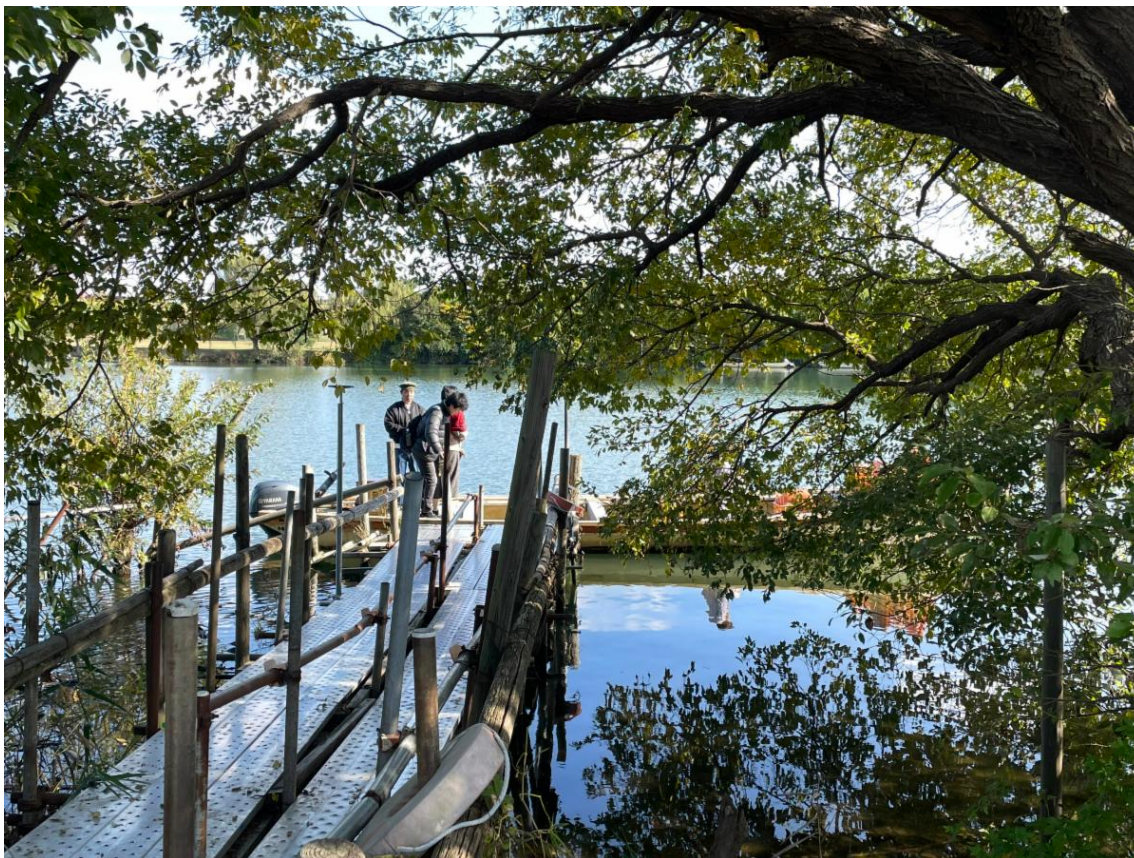
Here, the spiritual experience is enhanced by ten intricately carved zelkova-wood panels depicting stories from the Lotus Sutra, one of Buddhism's most important texts. The extraordinary artistic detail unveils the facial expressions of the figures, the folds of their clothing, clouds, plants, animals, sacred beings, and raindrops.

The feeling of contemplative serenity is carried forward to Suikeien Garden, a pond-centered strolling garden where visitors can amble along the perimeter pathway or sit on the Guest Hall veranda and reflect on a landscape designed to evoke mountains, rivers, and the sea.

Next to the temple shop that sells *omamori* (good-luck charms) and *ofuda* (protective talismans), visitors can interact with destiny through the *Shishimai Omikuji* machine. For 200 yen, a mechanical *shishi* will select a fortune for you. (A translation app may be helpful in deciphering the text.)



The Shishi Omikuji machine, ready to present a fortune



Yagiri no Watashi

About a 15 minute walk from the temple complex is a large green area with paths leading down to the Edogawa River. *Yagiri no Watashi* is the 400-year old tradition where people cross the river by boat from Shibamata to Matsudo city in Chiba, about a 10-minute trip. The river crossing and the Taishakuten temple, are listed in the 100 Landscapes of Japan, and also the Heisei 100 Soundscapes of Japan.

Shibamata, one of Tokyo's hidden gems, provides a window into life in old Tokyo. For those who make the journey, the experience can be beautiful, profound, serene, and memorable.

*All the photos in this article were taken by Steve Gillick, *Talking Travel*



Steve Gillick loves to travel and loves to talk to people who love to talk about travel. He's been at it since 1967 when he visited nine European destinations on a school trip. Steve has had over 400 articles published in consumer and travel trade publications. To date he has explored 85 countries and over 770 destinations. He recently returned from his 23rd trip to Japan. Steve is the author of *A Symphony of Camels: Travel Adventures & Conversations Around the World*, available on Amazon.com

Steve Gillick,
President,
Talking Travel

steve@talkingtravel.ca



Tokyo Tourism
Connection

Follow Us!



Newsletter Archives: View this and previous newsletter editions [here](#).



Tokyo Tourism Rep. Canada office (Japan Communications) | 2 St.Clair Avenue West 18th Floor | Toronto,
ON M4V 1L5 CA

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!