

PG-086

# ANNUAL EVENTS IN JAPAN


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Japan is a land of many festivals. In cities, large and small, as well as in rural districts, colorful rites and merrymaking—some of religious significance and others to honor historical personages or occasions—are held throughout the four seasons.

No matter what month of the year a visitor may choose for

his trip to Japan, he has an opportunity of enjoying a goodly number of these celebrations. And, joining the joyful throng, he will actually feel the pages of Japanese history being turned back and will experience the pleasant thrill of peeking into the nation's ancient culture and traditions.

DATE, EVENT & SITE		REMARKS
<b>JANUARY</b>		
1st	New Year's Day (national holiday)	New Year's Day, the "festival of festivals" in Japan is celebrated with solemnity and yet in a joyful mood. The streets are gay with New Year decorations of pine and plum branches, bamboo stalks and ropes with paper festoons. People pay homage to shrines and visit friends and relatives to exchange greetings.
3rd	"Tamaseleri" or Ball-Catching Festival, Hakozaikigu Shrine, Fukuoka City, Kyushu	The main attraction of this festival is a struggle between two groups of youths to catch a sacred wooden ball, which is believed to bring good luck to the winning team for the year.
6th	"Dezome-shiki" or New Year Parade of Firemen, Tokyo	The parade takes place in Tokyo Bigsight. Agile firemen in traditional attire perform acrobatic stunts on top of tall bamboo ladders.
7th	"Usokae" or Bullfinch Exchange Festival of Dazaifu Temmangu Shrine, Dazaifu Fukuoka Pref.	Hundreds of people try to get hold of "good luck" bullfinches made of gilt wood which are given away by priests. They are passed from hand to hand in the dim light of a small bonfire.
9th-11th	"Toka Ebisu" Festival of Imamiya Ebisu Shrine, Osaka	Thousands of people pray for a successful New Year's business. "Ebisu" is the patron deity of business and good fortune. The festival features a procession of colorfully kimonoed women, carried in palanquins, through the main streets.
10th	Coming of Age Day	National Holiday
15th	Grass Fire on Wakakusayama Hill, Nara	In the evening twilight, a trumpet signals the setting ablaze of Wakakusayama Hill in Nara Park. Fireworks streak to the sky from a nearby slope. The spectacle reminds one of the historic burning of the turf on this hill, which more than ten centuries ago marked the amicable end to a long dispute over the boundary of two major temples in Nara.
15th	"Toshi-ya" or a Traditional Japanese archery contest, Sanjusangendo Temple, Kyoto	On this day, which falls on "Coming of Age Day" (a national holiday), the archery contest is conducted in the rear of the 118-meter-long hall of the temple, participants in traditional attire from different parts of Japan draw bows and shoot arrows at a target.
17th	"Bonden" Festival at Miyoshi Shrine, Akita City	Dozens of "Bonden," symbol of the Creative God, are carried by young men, who vie to be the first to reach the shrine. A similar festival is observed at Yokote in Akita Pref. on February 17.
<b>FEBRUARY</b>		
5th-11th	Snow Festival at Sapporo, Hokkaido (6th-12th in case 11th falls on Sat. or Sun.)	Elaborate figures sculptured in snow are lined up along the main thoroughfare of Sapporo. Similar festivals are held in various districts of the island including Asahikawa, Mombetsu, Abashiri and Obihiro. These areas also have their own local color.

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3rd or 4th “Setsubun” or Bean-Throwing Festival in all Japan	According to the lunar calendar, “Setsubun” marks the last day of winter. People crowd temple grounds to participate in the traditional ceremony of throwing beans to drive away imaginary devils, shouting “Fortune in, Devils out!”
3rd Lantern Festival of Kasuga Shrine, Nara	More than 3,000 lanterns, either standing in the precincts or hung from the eaves of the buildings, are lit, presenting an enchanting sight.
11th National Foundation Day	National Holiday
3rd weekend “Kamakura” at Yokote, Akita Pref.	“Kamakura” is a popular pastime for children in snowy areas. They make snow houses called “Kamakura” in which they enshrine the God of Water and hold parties.
3rd Sat. “Eyo” Festival of Saidaiji Temple, Saidaiji, Okayama Pref.	A multitude of partially clad young male devotees elbow and shoulder one another for a pair of sacred wands thrown to them in the darkness in and around the temple.
17th–20th “Emburi” Festival at Hachinohe, Aomori Pref.	“Emburi” is a harvest festival rich in local color. More than 50 groups of villagers, each comprising of 30 people, get together at Shiragi Shrine on Mt. Choja in the morning and go down into the streets in gala processions.
<b>MARCH</b>	
1st–14th “Omizutori” or Water-Drawing Festival of Todaiji, Nara	In the evening, a solemn rite is performed in the flickering light of pine torches. Young ascetics brandish huge burning torches, drawing circles of fire and shaking off the burning pieces in the darkness of the night, for which pious people make a rush as the fire flakes are believed to have a magic power against evil. The function is held on the largest scale on the night of the 12th.
3rd “Hinamatsuri” or Doll Festival in all Japan	In this special festival for girls, a set of “Hina” dolls and miniature household articles are arranged on a tier of shelves, covered with bright red cloth. These “Hina” dolls consist of the Emperor and Empress in ancient costumes, their ministers and other dignitaries, court ladies and musicians.
Sat. & Sun. (Mid March) “Sagicho” Festival of Himura Shrine, Omihachiman, Shiga Pref.	Gaily decorated floats are carried along the streets. On the last day of the festival, these floats are burned in the shrine precincts, surrounded by dancing devotees.
Mid-late Mar. Fire Festival of Mt. Aso, Kumamoto Pref.	This festival features “Hifuri Shinji” or Fire Torch Swinging, “Noyaki” or Grassfire and “Takigi Noh” or Torch Light Noh Performance.
20th or 21st Vernal Equinox Day (National Holiday)	The week centering around this day is known as “Higan,” when all Buddhist temples throughout the country hold special services and people pray for souls of the departed.
<b>APRIL</b>	
8th Buddha’s Birthday	Commonly called “Hana Matsuri” or Floral Festival, it is celebrated in all Buddhist temples in commemoration of Buddha’s birthday. At the temples, a small image of Buddha is displayed before the public and sweet tea called “Amacha” is poured over the image as an expression of devotion.
2nd Sun.– Tsurugaoka	The festival is featured by various events reminiscent of such great characters in history as, Yoritomo Minamoto, Yoshitsune Minamoto, Gozen—by elegantly-performed sacred dances, a mikoshi parade and “yabusame” or horseback archery, etc.
3rd Sun. Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura, Kanagawa Pref.	
14th & 15th “Takayama Matsuri” of Hie Shrine, Takayama, Gifu Pref.	This festival, said to date back to the 15th century, is noted for a gala procession of gorgeous floats.
16th evening & 17th “Yayoi Matsuri” of Futara-san Shrine, Nikko, Tochigi Pref.	The festival is featured by a parade of gaily decorated floats.
29th Greenery Day	National Holiday
<b>MAY</b>	
3rd Constitution Memorial Day	National Holiday
3rd–4th “Hakata Dontaku” at Fukuoka, Fukuoka Pref.	Citizens in fancy disguises parade through the streets, masquerading as legendary gods on horseback to the accompaniment of “samisen,” flutes and drums.

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3rd–5th	Kite Battles at Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Pref.	Huge kites are flown by groups of citizens, who try to cut the strings of their opponents' kites by skillful maneuvering.
5th	Children's Day	National Holiday
11th & 12th	"Takigi Noh" Performance at Kofukuji Temple, Nara	Noh Plays are presented after dark to late evening, on a stage set up in the precincts of the temple, under the light of blazing torches.
11th–Oct.15th	Cormorant Fishing on the Nagara River, Gifu Pref.	Cormorant fishing is an ancient method of catching "ayu," a trout-like fish, with trained birds. This takes place at night under the light of blazing torches fastened to the prows of fishing boats.
Sat. & Sun. proximate to the 15th.	"Kanda Matsuri" of Kanda Myojin Shrine, Tokyo (held every other year)	Dozens of mikoshi portable shrines are paraded in the neighboring area of the shrine. A gala tea ceremony is also offered. (The 15th is the day of its regular festival).
15th	"Aoi Matsuri" or Hollyhock Festival of Shimogamo and Kamigamo Shrines, Kyoto	The festival features a magnificent pageant colorfully reproducing the Imperial procession that paid homage to the shrines in ancient days.
17th & 18th	Grand Festival of Toshogu Shrine, Nikko, Tochigi Pref.	This centuries-old festival is featured by a gala parade (on the 18th) of over 1,000 armor-clad people, who escort three shrine palanquins through the town's streets.
Fri., Sat. & Sun. proximate to the 18th	"Sanja Matsuri" of Asakusa Shrine, Asakusa, Tokyo	Nearly 100 mikoshi portable shrines, carried by happi-coated men and women, assemble at the shrine; afterward they parade to the respective parishioners' areas. A gala pageant, with 1,000 participants in traditional attire, consisting of "sanja-bayashi" festival music, "geisha," "kiyari," etc. add color to the festival.
3rd Sun.	"Mifune Matsuri" or Boat Festival, Arashiyama, Kyoto	This charming festival is held on the Oi River near Arashiyama in the suburbs of Kyoto. It revives the atmosphere of the Heian Period (794–1192) when the Emperor and his courtiers often went on pleasure trips on the river.
<b>JUNE</b>		
1st & 2nd	"Takigi Noh" Performance at Heian Shrine, Kyoto	The famous "Takigi Noh," participated in by the various Noh schools, is presented after dark under the light of blazing torches on an open-air stage set up in the shrine's compound.
14th	Rice-Planting Festival at Sumiyoshi Shrine, Osaka	Twelve selected beauties ceremoniously transplant rice-seedlings in the shrine's paddyfield to the accompaniment of music and rice-planting folk songs.
15th	"Chagu-Chagu Umakko" Horse Festival, Morioka, Iwate Pref.	At this festival, a number of colorfully decorated horses are led by their proud owners to Sozen Shrine where the owners pray for the longevity of their horses.
around 10th–16th	"Sanno" Festival of Hie Shrine, Tokyo	Originating in the Edo Period (1603–1867), the festival is featured by a procession of mikoshi portable shrines through the hub area of Tokyo. (This event is held every other year).
<b>JULY</b>		
1st–15th	"Hakata Yamagasa" at Fukuoka, Fukuoka Pref.	This festival is highlighted on the 15th by a fleet of giant "Yamagasa" floats topped by elaborate decorations representing castles, halls and dolls. They are either pulled along or shouldered by youngsters in gay attire through the streets.
7th	"Tanabata" or Star Festival in all Japan	As an offering to the stars, Vega and Altair, who meet across the Milky Way, children set up bamboo branches to which colorful strips of paper bearing their wishes are tied.
13th–15th	"Bon" Festival	The festival is celebrated from the 13th to the 15th either in July or August, depending on the area in Japan. Religious rites are held throughout the country in memory of the dead who, according to Buddhist belief, revisit the earth during this period. Lanterns are lit and Bon Odori folk dances are offered to comfort the souls.
14th	"Nachi Himatsuri" (Fire Festival of Nachi Shrine), Nachi-Katsuura, Wakayama Pref.	This festival is featured by the lighting of 12 giant torches carried by white-robed priests.

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17th	“Gion Matsuri” of Yasaka Shrine, Kyoto	The festival is actually celebrated from the 1st through the 31st of July and is one of the most noted festivals in Kyoto. It dates back to the 9th century, when the head priest of the Yasaka Shrine led a large number of men and women in forming a procession to escort the decorated palanquins as a means to seek the protection of the gods against the pestilence that was then ravaging the city. On the 17th, gorgeously bedecked “yama” and “hoko” floats parade through the main streets.
20th	Marine Day	National Holiday
23rd & 24th	Summer Festival of Warei Shrine, Uwajima City, Ehime Pref.	The festival is highlighted by many mikoshi crossing the river accompanied by hundreds of people with torchlights in their hands. “Togyu” or bull fighting and a fireworks display are other major events.
23rd–25th	“Soma Nomaoui” or Wild Horse Chasing on Hibarigahara, Haramachi, Fukushima Pref.	A thousand riders in ancient armor vie for three shrine flags set-up on the plain and men in white costumes try to catch the wild horses chased into an enclosure by the horsemen.
24th & 25th	“Tenjin Matsuri” of Temmangu Shrine, Osaka	A fleet of sacred boats bearing shrine palanquins sail down the river escorted by other boats which carry images of historical interest.
(usually in July)	“Kangensai” or Music Festival of Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima, Hiroshima Pref.	The date of the festival varies every year, since it takes place on the 17th of June according to the old calendar. Brightly decorated sacred boats are towed from the large red-painted “torii” gate standing in the sea to the opposite shore across the channel. On the boats classical “gagaku” (court music and a dance) are performed.
Last Sat.	Fireworks Display on the Sumida River, Asakusa, Tokyo	This is the grandest one of its kind in Tokyo.
<b>AUGUST</b>		
1st–7th	“Nebuta Matsuri” in Aomori and “Neputa Matsuri” in Hirosaki, Aomori Pref.	The “Nebuta” and “Neputa” (papier-mâché dummies representing men, animals and birds) are placed on carriages and pulled through the streets. The “Nebuta” is held in Aomori City from 2nd to 7th, and “Neputa” in Hirosaki, from 1st to 7th.
Mid July– Early Sept.	“Gujo Odori” at Gujo-gun, Gifu Pref.	“Gujo Odori” is one of the most popular folk dances. Thousands of townpeople wearing “yukata” dance to the accompaniment of merry music.
4th–7th	“Kanto Matsuri,” Akita Pref.	This festival is a form of “Tanabata,” which is observed to invoke divine help for a prosperous autumnal harvest. Young men in gay attire try their skill at balancing “kanto,” long bamboo poles hung with many lighted lanterns, on their hands, foreheads and shoulders.
6th	Peace Ceremony, Hiroshima	The ceremony held at the Peace Memorial Park in the city is in memory of the A-bomb victims. In the evening, thousands of lighted lanterns are set adrift on the Ota River by the citizens, with prayers for world peace.
5th–7th	“Hanagasa Matsuri” or Floral Sedge-hat Festival at Yamagata City	More than 10,000 townspeople, each wearing a low round sedge-hat adorned with artificial flowers, dance their way through the city’s main streets.
6th–8th	“Tanabata” or Star Festival at Sendai, Miyagi Pref.	The festival, the largest of its kind in Japan, is observed one month later than in most parts of the country. The streets are decorated with colored paper streamers and strips.
12th–15th	“Awa Odori” at Tokushima, Tokushima Pref.	The entire city bursts with singing and dancing. Day and night, groups of musicians in fancy attire parade on the streets.
15th & 16th	“Yamaga Toro” Festival, at Yamaga City, Kumamoto Pref.	A parade of “Toro Odori” dances are performed by women wearing “yukata.” Each has a lantern that is lit on her head and they parade on the main streets.
16th	“Daimonji” Bonfire on Mt. Nyoigadake, Kyoto	A spectacular bonfire in the shape of the Chinese character “DAI,” meaning large, is lit near the summit. This is the most splendid attraction of the Bon Festival in Kyoto.
26th & 27th	Lantern Festival of Suwa Shrine, Isshiki, near Nagoya	In the evening, great paper lanterns, painted with colorful designs, are lit in the shrine compound.

DATE, EVENT & SITE	REMARKS
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	
1st–3rd “Owara Kaze-no Bon” Festival, at Yatsuo, near Toyama	In the evenings, “Owara-bushi” folk dance to the accompaniment of “samisen,” flutes and drums is presented by yukata-clad villagers in the area.
15th Respect-for-the-Aged Day	National Holiday
16th “Yabusame” at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura, Kanagawa Pref.	“Yabusame” is a fascinating sport of horseback archery, a reminder of feudal days when “samurai” warriors competed grimly in horsemanship and archery.
(usually in) “Oyama-Mairi” or A Visit to Sept. Iwaki, Aomori Pref.	Mt. Iwaki, known as “Tsugaru Fuji” from its resemblance to Mt. Fuji, is considered a sacred place by the local people, who march to the shrine on the mountain with prayers and joyful music. *The date of the festival varies every year, since it takes place on the 1st of Aug. according to the old calendar.
23rd or 24th Autumnal Equinox Day	National Holiday
<b>OCTOBER</b>	
7th–9th “Okunchi” Festival of Suwa Shrine, Nagasaki	This festival is highlighted by a parade of floats of Chinese origin including “kasa-boko” carts, lavishly decked with umbrella-shaped decorations along the city’s main streets. Colorful dances of Chinese origin are also performed.
13th–15th “Marimo Matsuri” on Lake Akan, Hokkaido	“Marimo” ( <i>Aegagropila sauteri</i> ) is a singular spherical green weed, found in Lake Akan in Hokkaido and Lake Yamanaka in Yamanashi Prefecture. The festival is given by the native Ainu inhabitants. On the 9th Ainu dances are performed on the lakeshore and on the 10th the weeds are thrown into the water with ceremony.
9th & 10th “Takayama Matsuri” of Hachiman Shrine, Takayama	This festival, said to date back to the 15th century, is noted for the gala procession of gorgeous floats.
9th Health-Sports Day	National Holiday
12th & 13th “Oeshiki” Festival of Hommonji Temple, Tokyo	This festival is celebrated in commemoration of the Buddhist leader, Nichiren (1222–1282). People march toward the temple carrying large lanterns decorated with paper flowers.
14th & 15th “Nada Kenka Matsuri” or Roughhouse Festival of Matsubara Shrine, Himeji, Hyogo Pref.	Gorgeous shrine palanquins jostle each other and the bearers vie to show their skill in managing the palanquins.
17th Autumn Festival of Toshogu Shrine, Nikko, Tochigi Pref.	A palanquin is carried from the main shrine to the sacred place called “Otabisho” escorted by armor-clad parishioners.
22nd “Jidai Matsuri” or Festival of Eras, Heian Shrine, Kyoto	This festival is held to commemorate the founding of the old capital city of Kyoto in 794. It is featured by a procession of over 2,000 people in groups, attired in picturesque costumes, representing important epochs in the city’s history.
22nd Fire Festival of Yuki Shrine, Kurama, Kyoto	Long rows of torches placed along the street leading to the shrine are set on fire and gaily-dressed children march to the shrine holding burning torches.
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	
3rd Culture Day	National Holiday
3rd “Daimyo Gyoretsu” at Hakone, Kanagawa Pref.	The long parade passes along the old Tokaido Highway lined on both sides with tall cryptomeria trees.
2nd–4th “Okunchi” Festival of Karatsu Shrine, Karatsu, Saga Pref.	This festival is highlighted by a parade of huge colorful floats pulled along the streets by young men in gay uniforms with music accompaniment.
15th “Shichi-go-san” or Children’s Shrine Visiting Day in all Japan	“Shichi-go-san” literally means “seven-five-three”, and children of these three years, all dressed in their best, are taken to the shrines by their parents to express their thanks to the tutelary deities for their good health and to pray for future blessings.
23rd Labor Thanksgiving Day	National Holiday

DATE, EVENT & SITE	REMARKS
Dates subject "Tori-no-ichi" or Rooster Fair, to change Tokyo	The festivals are held on "rooster" days in November according to the oriental zodiacal calendar. "Kumade" or bamboo rakes adorned with ornaments symbolizing good fortune are sold. The Otori Shrine at Asakusa is best known.
<b>DECEMBER</b>	
2nd & 3rd "Chichibu Yo-matsuri" or all-night festival, Chichibu City, SaitamaPref.	The festival, counted as one of the three grandest float festivals in Japan, is highlighted by a parade of six huge, lavishly adorned and lantern-lit floats. On the evening of the 3rd, all the floats assemble at the Chichibu Shrine (around 7:00 p.m.) and proceed along the city's main streets. A display of fireworks at Hitsujiyama Park, 8:30 p.m.–10:00 p.m., will add color to the festivity. In the daytime, a performance of a local Kabuki Play on a temporary stage set up in front of Musashino Bank, 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m., will also be worthwhile seeing.
14th "Gishi-sai" at Sengakuji Temple, Tokyo	"Gishi-sai" or memorial celebration of the famous vendetta carried out by the 47 Ronin (masterless samurai) of Ako (present Hyogo Pref. back in 1702) will take place in Nihombashi over Ryogoku Bridge. The costume parade by businessmen reenacting the famous vendetta will start from Nihombashi Memmo Co., at 6:00 p.m., near Higashi-Nihombashi Sta. on the Toei Asakusa Line, crossing Ryogoku Bridge, and will arrive at the Matsuzakacho Park around 6:30 p.m. After a reception at Matsuzakacho Park, the warriors will proceed to Higashi-Nihombashi Sta. to catch the Toei Asakusa Subway Line to Sengakuji Sta. They are due at the Sengakuji Temple, the burial place of the 47 Ronin, at around 7:30 p.m., and a memorial service will be held in the worship hall for the repose of the separated souls.
17th–19th "Hagoita Ichi" or battledore Fair, Asakusa, Tokyo	It is held in the compound of Asakusa Kannon Temple, Asakusa Sta. on the Ginza Subway Line, from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. every day. Stalls will be open all night.
17th "On-Matsuri" of Kasuga Shrine, Nara	The festival is featured by a gala procession of people masquerading as courtiers, retainers and wrestlers of those long-ago days.
23rd Emperor's Birthday	National Holiday
31st "Namahage" on Oga Peninsula, Akita Pref.	In the evening, groups of "Namahage," men disguised as devils, make door-to-door visits, growling, "Any good-for-nothing fellow hereabout?"
31st "Okera Mairi" at Yasaka Shrine, Kyoto	At midnight a sacred fire is kindled in the shrine precincts, and each worshiper tries to take some of the sparks to his home, with which to cook the first meal of the new year.



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To take advantage of our service, you must appear in person at any of the Welcome Inn reservation counters located at the Tourist Information Centers (TICs) operated by JNTO (in Tokyo and Kyoto) or ITCJ (at Narita Airport and Kansai Airport).

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c/o International Tourism Center of Japan

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