

# Toyama's Hikiyama Festivals

Registered on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage



**Takaoka Mikurumayama Festival**



**Uozu Tatemon Festival**



**Johana Shinmei Shrine Hikiyama Festival**



# Takaoka Mikurumayama Festival

Takaoka city

The origins of the Mikurumayama Festival are said to lie in an imperial carriage presented to Maeda Toshiie, first lord of the Kaga Domain, by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. This carriage, which had been used to welcome then-Emperor Go-Yozei on his visit to Hideyoshi's Jurakudai Palace in 1588, was subsequently converted into a ceremonial float and presented to the people of Takaoka by Maeda Toshinaga, second lord of Kaga, on the occasion of the construction of Takaoka Castle. Takaoka was a bustling center of commerce during the Edo period, and the civic pride and financial means of its townspeople enabled the Mikurumayama floats to be decorated with ornamental work featuring exquisite metalwork, lacquer work, dyeing and other artisanal craftsmanship, making this one of the most splendid festivals of its kind in Japan today.



The colorful “hanagasa” atop the central pillars of the Mikurumayama floats, seen here in full force, attract the attention of divine spirits who descend into them.





※  
The body of a float is covered in a tapestry-woven textile depicting elephants and Chinese boys.



※  
The magnificent float wheels are exquisitely decorated in lacquer and metalwork.



**Shrine** Takaoka Sekino Shrine (annual spring festival)  
**Place** Yama-cho, Takaoka city, Toyama prefecture  
**Date** May 1

#### ◆Related facility



#### Takaoka Mikurumayama Museum

(permanent display of authentic Mikurumayama float)

Address: 47-1 Moriyama-machi, Takaoka city, Toyama prefecture

TEL: 0766-30-2794

Closed: Tuesdays and New Year's holidays

Open: 9 a.m.– 5 p.m. (admission until 4:30 p.m.)

※ photo provided by Takaoka City Board of Education

## Japanese Festival 祭 Q & A

### Q1 What are traditional Japanese festivals like?

Japanese festivals are ceremonial rituals that honor Shinto gods called “kami.” Festivals can be divided into two main categories: spring and autumn festivals that pray to and thank the gods for abundant harvests, and summer festivals held to ward off evil spirits, disease and other adversities.



A Japanese Shinto shrine

Shinto is an indigenous Japanese religion with no widely recognized founder, sacred texts or fixed doctrines. It is a polytheistic religion characterized by its animistic beliefs, and Japanese shrines are associated with Shintoism.

In Japan, gods reside in elements of nature such as trees





# Uozu Tatemon Festival

## Uozu city

An annual festival held by the Suwa Shrine to pray for safety at sea and a bountiful harvest of fish, the Uozu Tatemon Festival features seven large Tatemon floats which are pulled along the streets of Uozu. The word “tatemon” is said to symbolize the act of making an offering to the gods, and each Tatemon float consists of a sled-shaped base that supports a 15-meter pillar from which approximately 90 lanterns hang in rows, forming a triangular shape which resembles the unfurled sail of a ship. Groups of young people wearing traditional festival happi coats push and pull the almost 5-ton Tatemon floats from the Uozu shore to the Suwa Shrine, a feat made even more remarkable by the fact that the Tatemon floats lack wheels. This procession culminates in the spinning of each float in front of the shrine, a truly spectacular climax to the festival.



Tatemon floats are triangular in shape and have no wheels. The octagonal paper lamp atop the central pillar serves as a temporary residence for the divine spirit who accompanies the float.

## Japanese Festival



### Q2 What is the difference between

Mikoshi are portable shrines used in various types of festivals. In the case of the Johana Hikiyama floats, the T as hikiyama. People can ride on a hik

A festival procession centers around a lion dance and ritual objects known as shishimai. These objects serve as ceremonial attendants of the

### Q3 What is the shishimai lion

The shishimai lion dance is a traditional Japanese festival. It features a lion's head and cloth body. A “shishi” refers to the lion. The lion dance leads a mikoshi procession along a path for the divine god who follows. It has been performed in Japan 1300 years ago during the Asu





## Festival Information

### ◆Related Facility



(approximately full-sized model of Tatemon float displayed in lobby)

Address: 2898-3 Kita-onie, Uozu city, Toyama prefecture

TEL: 0765-23-9802

Closed: Tuesdays and New Year's holidays  
Open: 8:30 a.m.– 9:30 p.m.

## Q & A

to carry the spirit of a shrine deity during festivals. Hikiyama refers to a float decorated with a variety of images including spears and human figures. In addition to the Takaoaka Mikurumayama floats and Uozu Tatemon floats are also classified as Hikiyama, but are not allowed to ride in a mikoshi.

d a mikoshi, which is carried on the shoulders of participants. A shishimai as “hoko” often lead the procession, while hikiyama and other floats may mikoshi, which they follow behind.

ditional folk dance performed by participants in costumes consisting of a lion's head and a lion, whose fierce strength enables it to fend off evil spirits and disease. The dance is performed in order to drive away any evil or misfortune, thereby purifying the area. It is believed that the lion dance originated in India and was introduced to Japan during the Nara period.



Mikoshi



The lion dance preceding the mikoshi



# Johana Shinmei Shrine Hikiyama Festival

Nanto city

Known as the “little Kyoto” of the Etchu region (present-day Toyama prefecture), the Johana district of Nanto city flourished as a center of silk production during the Edo period. On the occasion of the rebuilding of Johana Shinmei Shrine in 1717, a mikoshi (portable shrine) was constructed, and a spring festival was begun to celebrate the “togyo” ritual of transporting the shrine deity to its temporary residence in the mikoshi shrine. In later years, the mikoshi procession was joined by a shishimai lion dance, as well as hikiyama and iori-yatai floats.

Today, the festival procession which winds through the streets of Johana features three mikoshi which are preceded by the shishimai lion dance and ritual objects known as kenboko and kasaboko. Following the mikoshi are elegantly ornamented hikiyama floats, which bear deity statues representing each of the Johana area neighborhoods, and iori-yatai floats carrying musicians who play “iori-uta” folk songs from the Edo period. The hikiyama and iori-yatai floats are considered a highlight of this festival, and the beautifully evocative sound of iori-uta performed on the shamisen and Japanese flute helps to bring the atmosphere of old Edo into the modern day.



Deity statues are borne on the gorgeously decorated hikiyama floats.





During the festival, divine spirits are believed to descend into the kasaboko which precede the mikoshi.



lori-yatai floats, modeled after traditional restaurants and teahouses of the Edo period, carry musicians playing Johana iori-uta folk songs.



**Shrine** Johana Shinmei Shrine (annual spring festival)  
**Place** Johana, Nanto city, Toyama prefecture  
**Date** May 4-5

#### ◆Related Facility



#### Johana Hikiyama Museum

(permanent display of authentic Hikiyama float)

Address: 579-3 Johana, Nanto city, Toyama prefecture

TEL: 0763-62-2165

Closed: New Year's holidays

Open: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. (admission until 4:30 p.m.)

## Japanese Festival Q & A

### Q4 What are some characteristics of Toyama festivals?

Toyama has a wide variety of festivals which vary in character and purpose according to the time of year in which they take place. Three distinguishing features of Toyama's festivals are as follows:

- 1) Many festivals in Toyama include a shishimai lion dance. Toyama prefecture has one of the highest numbers of lion dances in Japan, with 850 lion dances that have been passed down through the generations and continue to be performed.
- 2) Toyama also has many festivals with hikiyama floats. The three festivals introduced here are leading examples of Toyama's hikiyama festivals and are all registered on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- 3) Fire is also a predominant element of many Toyama festivals. Fire is used to welcome divine spirits, or is used as an instrument of purification that drives away misfortune and impurity. The Namerikawa Nebuta Nagashi is a festival that ritualistically banishes sleepiness and uncleanness by sending rafts with flaming torches out to sea.



The Namerikawa Nebuta Nagashi is a Nationally-Designated Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property



