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# ANNUAL EVENTS IN JAPAN



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"YOKOSO" means "welcome"

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 you may choose for your

trip to Japan, you have an opportunity of enjoying a goodly number of these celebrations. And, joining the joyful throng, you 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 the 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 Tamaseseri or Ball-Catching Festival, Hakozakigu 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 Big Sight. 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 women in colorful kimono, carried in palanquins, through the main streets.
2nd Coming of Age Day Monday (national holiday)	In Japan, children are considered adults on their 20th birthday. From that day on they are invested with all the rights of citizenship. Municipal governments host special coming-of-age ceremonies for 20-year-olds and the participants dress up in their finest clothes for this ceremony. It is the custom for 20-year-old women to wear a long-sleeved kimono on this ceremony day.
one day Grass Fire on Wakakusayama prior to Hill, Nara Coming of Age Day	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.
Sunday Toshi-ya or a Traditional (mid-Jan) Japanese archery contest, Sanjusangendo Temple, Kyoto	On this day, 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.
<b>FEBRUARY</b>	
2nd Mon.- Snow Festival in Sapporo, 3rd Sun. Hokkaido	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.
3rd 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.

Date, Event & Site	Remarks
11th National Foundation Day (national holiday)	On this day, the origin of Japan is reflected upon and wishes for continued development are made. According to an ancient Japanese legend, this is the day when Emperor Jimmu, the first Emperor of Japan, established his capital in the Yamato district. This day is celebrated in commemoration of the foundation of the country.
15th–16th Kamakura in Yokote City, 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 Bonten Festival at Miyoshi Shrine, Akita City	Dozens of Bonten, 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.
17th–20th Emburi Festival in Hachinohe, Aomori Pref.	Emburi is a harvest festival rich in local color. More than 30 groups of villagers, each comprising of 20 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. 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 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 offering flowers and incense at the tombs and altars.
<b>APRIL</b>	
8th Hana Matsuri or 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 shoulders of the image as an expression of devotion.
2nd Sun.–3rd Sun. Kamakura Matsuri of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura, Kanagawa Pref.	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.
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)	This day was the birthday of the late Emperor Showa. Upon his death in January 1989, it was renamed Greenery Day.
<b>MAY</b>	
3rd Constitution Memorial Day (national holiday)	Commemorated on this day is the establishment of the modern Japanese Constitution, which came into effect in 1947. This new Constitution prohibits armament and war.
3rd–4th Hakata Dontaku in Fukuoka, Fukuoka Pref.	Citizens in fancy disguises parade through the streets, masquerading as legendary gods on horseback to the accompaniment of Shamisen, flutes and drums.
3rd–5th Kite Battles in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Pref.	Huge kites are flown by groups of citizens, who try to cut the strings of their opponents' kites by skillful maneuvering.

Date, Event & Site	Remarks
5th Children's Day (national holiday)	Ceremonies and parties are observed throughout the country in which the children are wished happiness and prosperity. People hoist carp-shaped streamers on tall bamboo poles outdoors, take a hot bath with iris leaves floating in it, and eat rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves called Chimaki and rice cakes stuffed with sweet bean paste wrapped in oak leaves called Kashiwa-mochi. Some homes display a Kabuto(ancient warrior helmet) in the hope that the boys will have a strong and healthy warrior spirit.
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. before 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.
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.
3rd Fri., Sat., and Sun. 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.
2nd Sat. 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 Gion Yamagasa in 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 Altar, 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 throughout Japan	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.
16th-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

Date, Event & Site	Remarks
<p>3rd Mon. Marine Day (national holiday)</p> <p>22nd–24th Summer Festival of Warei Shrine, (Ushioni Matsuri) Uwajima City, Ehime Pref.</p> <p>23rd–25th Soma Nomaori or Wild Horse Chasing on Hibarigahara, Haramachi, Fukushima Pref.</p> <p>24th &amp; 25th Tenjin Matsuri of Temmangu Shrine, Osaka</p> <p>(usually in July) Kangensai or Music Festival of Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima, Hiroshima Pref.</p> <p>Last Sat. Fireworks Display on the Sumida River, Asakusa, Tokyo</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>The holiday was founded to celebrate the ocean's bounty and to pray for the prosperity of Japan as a seafaring nation.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>A fleet of sacred boats bearing shrine palanquins sail down the river escorted by other boats which carry images of historical interest.</p> <p>The date of the festival varies every year, since it takes place on the 17th of June according to the lunar 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.</p> <p>This is the grandest one of its kind in Tokyo.</p>
<p><b>AUGUST</b></p> <p>1st–7th Nebuta Matsuri in Aomori and Neputa Matsuri in Hirosaki, Aomori Pref.</p> <p>Mid July– Early Sept. Gujo Odori in Gujo-gun, Gifu Pref.</p> <p>3rd–6th Kanto Matsuri, Akita City</p> <p>6th Peace Ceremony, Hiroshima</p> <p>5th–7th Hanagasa Matsuri or Floral Sedge-hat Festival in Yamagata City</p> <p>6th–8th Tanabata or Star Festival in Sendai, Miyagi Pref.</p> <p>12th–15th Awa Odori in Tokushima, Tokushima Pref.</p> <p>15th &amp; 16th Yamaga Toro Festival, in Yamaga City, Kumamoto Pref.</p> <p>16th Daimonji Bonfire on Mt. Nyoigadake, Kyoto</p> <p>26th &amp; 27th Lantern Festival of Suwa Shrine, Isshiki, near Nagoya</p>	<p>The Nebuta and Neputa (papier-mâché dummies representing men, animals and birds) are placed on carriages and pulled through the streets with powerful chants and jumping dances. The Nebuta is held in Aomori City from 2nd to 7th, and Neputa in Hirosaki, from 1st to 7th.</p> <p>Gujo Odori is one of the most popular folk dances. Thousands of townspeople wearing “yukata” dance to the accompaniment of merry music.</p> <p>This festival is a form of Tanabata, which is observed to comfort souls of the dead revisiting the earth in this period and 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. “Kanto” is said to be a road sign for the souls.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The entire city bursts with singing and dancing. Day and night, groups of musicians in fancy attire parade on the streets.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>A spectacular bonfire in the shape of the Chinese character “大” meaning large, is lit near the summit. This is the most splendid attraction of the Bon Festival in Kyoto.</p> <p>In the evening, great paper lanterns, painted with colorful designs, are lit in the shrine compound.</p>
<p><b>SEPTEMBER</b></p> <p>1st–3rd Owara Kaze-no Bon Festival, in Toyama, Toyama Pref.</p>	<p>In the evenings, Owara-bushi folk dance to the accompaniment of Shamisen, flutes and drums is presented by yukata-clad villagers in the area.</p>

Date, Event & Site	Remarks
3rd Mon. Respect-for-the-Aged Day (national holiday)	People wish the elderly of the nation a long life and thank them for their contribution to society for so many years.
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 Autumnal 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 offering flowers and incense at the tombs and altars.
<b>OCTOBER</b>	
3rd Miya Matsuri Sat & Sun Gamagori, Aich Pref	The highlight of this festival is called “Kaichutogyo” that four huge old floats are pulled in the ocean by many young men.
7th–9th Kunchi 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.
8th–10th 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 13th Ainu dances are performed on the lakeshore and on the 15th 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.
2nd Health Sports Day Monday (national holiday)	This is celebrated to promote the mental and physical health of the people through the enjoyment of sports. This day was established in commemoration of the Tokyo Olympic Games, which began on October 10th, 1964.
11th–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)	This day was established to stress the importance of science as well as thank those who have contributed to the advancement of Japanese culture. On this day the government bestows medals to people who have made significant contributions to cultural progress in Japan.
3rd Daimyo Gyoretsu in 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.

Date, Event & Site		Remarks
23rd	Labor Thanksgiving Day (national holiday)	This day was established to provide a day for recognition of the importance of labor and to stress the importance of work in everyone's mind.
November	Tori-no-ichi or Rooster Fair, 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, Saitama Pref.	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.
14th	Gishi-sai at Sengakuji Temple, Tokyo	Gishi-sai or memory of the famous vendetta carried out by the 47 Ronin (masterless samurai) of Ako (present Hyogo Pref. back in 1720) is celebrated at Sengakuji Temple. Gishi Gyoretsu, procession by children starts from Shinagawa Prince Hotel around 2 p.m., arriving at Sengakuji Temple around 3 p.m. on Dec. 10th. Japanese drum beatings are scheduled 3 or 4 times from 12 noon on the 10th in the precinct of Sengakuji Temple. Other major events on Dec. 14th are: Buddhist ceremony in the precinct of the temple from around 11 a.m.; a parade originating from the park near Kabukiza Theater to Sengakuji Temple from 11 a.m. to around 2 p.m. with a stop at Zojoji Temple at around 12 noon; samurai costume parade departing from near the Nishi-Ginza Department Store toward Shimbashi along Sotobori street from 4:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., eventually arriving at Sengakuji Temple around 5:30 p.m.
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.
15th-18th	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	The Emperor's Birthday (national holiday)	The Emperor of Japan does not rule but is a symbol of the nation. On this day prayers are offered of his longevity, and the Imperial Family, appearing on the balcony of the Imperial Palace, exchanges greetings with the crowd of visitors below.
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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