

LIVING GUIDE MORIOKA

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Aki Matsuri in Morioka

Morioka Aki Matsuri (Autumn Festival in Morioka) of Morioka Hachimangu Shrine adds pleasure and charm to the autumn of Morioka. Have you seen the attractive tradition yet? During the annual festival from September 13th to 16th the streets of Morioka are brightened by traditional events such as the parade of "*dashi*" or beautifully decorated floats and "*mikoshi*" or portable shrine, and "*yabusame*" in which bowmen shoot arrows while riding a horse. Enjoy the nearly 300-year-old traditional matsuri.

● Morioka Hachimangu Shrine

The festival is held for Morioka Hachimangu Shrine, which is the largest Shinto shrine in Iwate and is affectionately called "*O-hachiman-san*" by local residents. Hachimangu Shrines are found across Japan and dedicated to a tutelary deity for samurai warriors.

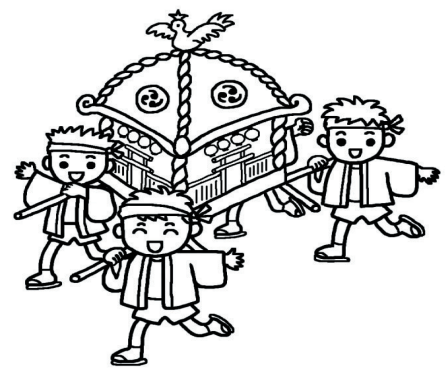
The family of *Nambu*, who had been the feudal lord of the Morioka area, worshipped Hachiman shrine as their tutelary deity. They had a Hachimangu Shrine in the premises of the castle. With the worship spreading to ordinary townspeople, another building of Hachimangu Shrine was established in the 17th century at the present site. The celebration of its completion has remained until today in the form of various events for the present autumn festival.

● Mikoshi Togyo

Mikoshi is a vehicle in which a Shinto deity is carried from one place to another during festivals. Originally the deity left Hatomori Hachiman Shrine that used to be located in the premises of the castle (present Morioka Castle Site Park) on September 14, the first day of *Morioka Aki Matsuri*. The deity stayed there for two days before returning to Hatomori Hachiman on September 16th. That was how the original *Mikoshi Togyo* began in 1681 to enshrine the deity in the new shrine, which was completed in the preceding year.

In 1709, when the towns around the Kozukata Castle were completed, *dashi* or floats accompanied the *mikoshi* for celebration.

Since the deity was moved permanently to the present Morioka Hachimangu Shrine in late 19th century, the meaning and form of the events have changed. People in Morioka, however, have handed down the tradition until today.



● *Dashi* Parade

The fascinating parade of *dashi*, or floats, is said to have started in 1709 when people celebrated the completion of the towns around the Kozukata Castle by dedicating the symbols of autonomic organizations of each district to Hachimangu Shrine. Each float has its theme, such as a well-known historic hero or a famous scene from a *kabuki* play. Beautifully decorated floats parade through the streets of Morioka, accompanied by drums and flutes. It's fun to see different floats.



When the floats pass by, someone from the people accompanying the floats, holding a fan in the right hand, intones "*ondo*", which is a chant for admiring the deity or explaining the decoration of the float. Pay attention to and enjoy the *ondo* or *ondo-age*.

The highlight of the parade starts at 6:00 pm, September 15. All the floats for the festival join the grand parade along the Odori Street. After the starting ceremony in Morioka Castle Site Park, the gorgeous parade sets off, passing right in front of the crowd along the street.

● *Yabusame*



Bowmen riding a horse shoot three arrows at the targets, competing against each other in their success rates. This is a traditional event to wish bumper crop, peace of the country and safety of the families of Hachiman deity worshippers. Each bowman and his horse work together to shoot an arrow, which is dynamic and vigorous.

Yabusame begins at 1:00 pm, September 16, in the precinct of Hachimangu Shrine.

● For more information

Visit the websites below:

<http://www.odette.or.jp/citykankou/frame/frame.html> (Morioka Tourism and Convention Association)

<http://www.morioka8man.jp/htdoc/home.html> (Morioka Hachimangu Shrine)

More festivals in Iwate

In autumn more festivals are celebrated in Iwate. Each festival has its local color and feature. Enjoy different Japanese festivals that have been handed down for generations.

- Shigariwake Shrine Festival
Fri. September 5 – Sun. September 7
at Sakuramachi, Shiwacho
Floats and Mikoshi parade through the town.
- Hanamaki Festival
Fri. September 12 – Sun. September 14
at Kamimachi and other areas in Hanamaki
Enjoy the parade of *Shishi Odori*, deer dance, and *kagura*, traditional Shinto dance and music
- Hachimangu Festival in Tohno
Sat. September 13 – Mon. September 15
at Tohno City
- Happens on the same days as the Morioka Hachimangu Shrine Festival
- Daimyo's Procession of Kanazawa Hachiman
Early September in Ichinoseki City
The event features the grand parade of Daimyo's procession.
- Kuji Aki Matsuri
Thu. September 18 – Sun. September 21
in Kuji City
This is the largest festival in northern Iwate.