

LIVING GUIDE MORIOKA

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Let's Enjoy the Festivals in Morioka!

In Japan various traditional festivals are held throughout the year on a nationwide scale. Like many other cities, Morioka boasts a lot of festivals that everybody is looking forward to. Let's take a look at some of the main festivals in our region from now.

You are invited to participate in the enjoyable festivals here in Morioka.

☆☆☆ Chagu-Chagu Umakko Horse Festival (June) ☆☆☆

About 100 local horses, decked out in colorful attire, parade from Sozen Shrine in Takizawa Village to Hachiman Shrine in Morioka City. The 15km horse parade festival is held annually on the second Saturday in June.

Long ago horses were very important farm animals. Especially in Nambu region (part of present Iwate and Aomori prefectures), farmers loved horses just like their family members and kept them under the same roof of their houses. It is said that their caring attitude to horses would naturally have led them to the faith in a guardian god for horses. "Komagata Shrine" and "Sozen Shrine" have been the center places of the worshippers. Back then people used to visit the shrine with their horses on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month (Tango no Sekku, or Boy's Day). Then gradually the farmers came to dress their horses in colorful outfits when taking them to the shrine. In this way people also thanked their horses for their daily work. This is said to be an original form of Chagu-Chagu Umakko Festival.



With jingling brass bells, nearly 100 horses in gorgeous costumes take part in the parade each year. This festival has become one of the seasonal charms of early summer in the region of Morioka. Since the parade of this year was over, please be sure to watch the Chagu-Chagu Umakko parade next year- on the second Saturday in June!

☆☆☆ Morioka Sansa Dance Festival (August) ☆☆☆

From August 1st through 4th, Midsummer-Festival Morioka Sansa Parade is held in downtown Morioka. Local people in Yukatas (cotton summer kimonos) parade while dancing or playing the Taiko-drums and the flutes.

In 2007 a large Sansa Taiko-drum performance was given, which was registered in the Guinness World Record as "The largest Japanese Drum Ensemble." Sansa Festival is the largest one in Morioka and it attracts a lot of tourists from inside and outside Iwate prefecture. When People in Morioka hear the flute and Taiko-drum music being practiced all over the city in July, they get excited and know that summer has arrived.



Sansa dance is said to originate from "The legend of Mitsuishi (three sacred rocks)" of Mitsuishi Shrine in Nasukawa-cho, Morioka. The legend says that a long time ago, a troublesome Oni (ogre or demon) afflicted the local people badly and they prayed to their god "Mitsuishi-sama" for wiping it out. When their prayer was answered, the delighted people started to dance around the sacred rocks to give thanks while singing "Sansa, Sansa." There are some other legends behind the origin of Sansa dance.

The chant of Sansa dance is "Sakkora Choiwa Yasse." The kanji for "Sakkora 幸呼来" has a meaning of



"to bring happiness." And besides Yukatas (cotton summer kimonos) the Sansa dancers wear the belts, the bamboo hats decorated with artificial flowers, the Taiko-drums and so on, which evoke the legend of wiping out the demon. Originally the dance had religious significance as a memorial service for the departed soul. But now its religious meaning has faded and it has turned into an entertaining festival that everybody can enjoy.

After the parades the grand finale of the Sansa Dance Festival called "Wa-odori (circular dance)" is held. There are oval or circular lines where people line up and dance. You are invited to join in this Wa-odori dancing.

Let's dance together and experience Japanese festivity deeper.

Around the same time of this festival, there will be a "Yukata City Morioka" campaign to promote wearing Yukata (cotton summer kimono). If you wear Yukata and visit downtown Morioka during the campaign period, you will get the benefit such as receiving a free drink, a free sweets or a discount ticket at various shops and cinema houses. Let's enjoy this benefit while experiencing the way of Japanese living.

☆☆☆ Funekko Nagashi - Sending back the spirits of the ancestors (August) ☆☆☆

Obon is an annual Buddhist event to honor one's ancestors. It is believed that the spirits of the ancestors return to this world on the first day of Obon and leave again on the final day. On August 16th (the last day of Obon), Funekko Nagashi is held in Morioka as a type of farewell bonfire which is said to guide the spirits back to the other world. At the river bed of the Kitakami river near Meiji-bashi Bridge, the ceremonies including the prayers for good health of the local people take place. Soon after that the tiny boats decorated with the paper lanterns and the offerings are dragged down into the river to be set afire. The sight of the burning ritual boats will surely be the highlight of the event. For a finale the splendid bursts of fireworks can be seen in the evening. Toward the end of the event some might become a bit sentimental in the cool breeze because the fireworks show is also a summer end festival in northern city Morioka.



☆☆☆ Morioka Hachimangu Shinto Shrine Autumn Festival (September) ☆☆☆



Morioka Autumn Festival, also known as the Hachiman Shrine Festival

is held from September 14th through 16th. Eight gorgeous floats with motifs that depict famous scenes from Kabuki plays or historical incidents are pulled through the streets in the city.

This festival is said to have started in 1709, when all the young men from each section of the town celebrated the completion of the construction of the castle town Morioka, Nambu. They dedicated their elaborated Cho-Jirushis (symbol of each section

of the town, similar to floats) to the shrine and paraded along the main streets of the town for three days.

There will be the Hachiman-kudari parade on September 14th, the Dashi-Daiemaki parade on September 15th and the festival floats parade on September 16th. A leaflet about the festival floats which is published by "The Steering Committee of the Float", is available at Morioka Tourism and Convention Association. The leaflet will give you some details of the information on the festival float and the group to which each float belongs.

If you would like to get more information, please visit

URL <http://hellomorioka.jp/mtca/>

E-mail cnv@odette.or.jp

The various festivals here will be excellent opportunities for you to experience some of the fine cultural heritages in Japan.

Let's join in on the Japanese festivals and have fun!