

Living Guide



Morioka International Relations Association

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Festivals in Tohoku

What comes to your mind when you think of summer attractions in Morioka? Probably many people will think of the Morioka Sansa Odori which is the most important festival in Morioka. The Sansa Odori has been danced and passed down since the time of the Morioka domain in the Edo period (1603~1868). The festival is one of the major events liven up Morioka's summer, and every year over 1 million people visit the city during the festival.

There are six major festivals, including the Sansa, held in the Tohoku area. Tohoku Kizuna Festival is an opportunity to bring local festivals together and will be held in Morioka this year. Also, festivals will be held in many hometowns in Tohoku during August.

■ What is the Tohoku Kizuna Festival?

From 2011 to 2016, the Tohoku Rokkon Festival was held sequentially in the capital cities of six prefectures in Tohoku that suffered from the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 as a way to console the souls of victims and to wish for early recovery of the affected areas. The Tohoku Kizuna festival started in 2017 as a subsequent event to appeal both domestically and abroad for efforts towards recovery from the disaster. You can now enjoy all these festivals together, which formerly could only be seen in each area.

■ Overview of the Tohoku Kizuna Festival 2018 in Morioka

Date & Time : June 2nd, 2018 (Sat.) 10:00~19:00, June 3rd, (Sun.) 10:00~17:00

Venue: Parade : Chuo-dori (starting from Morioka City Office)

Event Venues : Morioka Castle Site Park, Morioka History and Culture Museum etc.

Organizer: Tohoku Kizuna Festival Steering Committee

Contact: Tohoku Kizuna Festival Call Center 019-601-2444 (weekdays 10:00~17:00)

■ Six Major Festivals in Tohoku

Morioka Sansa Odori Festival

In the time of the Morioka domain, a demon called Rasetsu which was causing trouble in present-day Morioka was defeated by the deity of Mitsuishi Shrine. People were glad to hear the evil defeat danced together calling out, "Sansa, sansa". This is said to be the origin of Sansa Odori. The festival is held every year from August 1st to 4th. Dances, drummers and flute players show us their co-ordinated performances. In June 2014, 3,437 Sansa drummers performed the drums together, and this was registered by the Guinness World Record as the 'World's largest concurrent performance of Japanese drums'.



Aomori Nebuta Festival

Aomori Nebuta Festival is held every year from August 2nd to 7th. The creators spend 3 months constructing 'Nebuta' floats, which are a kind of gigantic lantern made on a wire frame covered with Japanese paper. The floats and the dancers called Haneto parade together throughout the town. The maximum size of a Nebuta is 9m in width, 7m in length and 5m in height. It is said the Nebuta Festival originated from the practice of Toro-nagashi (floating paper lanterns down the river) at Tanabata, the Star Festival. After hundreds of years, it has become one of the popular festivals representing Japan and dynamic Nebuta is shown both domestically and overseas.



Sendai Tanabata Festival

Sendai Tanabata Festival has been familiarly called 'Tanabata-san' in Sendai. The festival is said to date from about 400 years ago. During the festival period, from August 6th to 8th, thousands of Tanabata ornaments, from the tiniest to enormous ones over 3 to 4 m, are hung as decorations everywhere in the city, making it wonderfully colorful. There are seven kinds of Tanabata ornaments; each one has a meaning and a wish for things such as improvement of learning or perfect health.



Akita Kanto Festival

The Kanto (pole lantern) Festival in Akita has a long history as an event to wish for protection from evil or for a good harvest. The festival has been designated as Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties of Japan. A Kanto is a long bamboo pole from which lanterns shaped as straw rice bag, and looking like ears of rice, are hung. 46 lanterns are hung on the tallest 12m poles, which weigh 50kg. In the festival being held from August 3rd to 6th every year, Kanto poles swaying just like abundantly growing rice ears are skillfully balanced. This dynamic performance is the greatest attraction.



Yamagata Hanagasa Festival

Yamagata Hanagasa (traditional straw hat) Festival originated from the 'Hanagasa Ondo Parade', which was one of the events of the 'Zao Summer Festival' held in 1963. The parade held independently since 1965, was the starting point of this festival. Held from August 5th to 7th, festival dancers holding Hanagasa decorated with flowers perform dances in perfect formation to the song 'Hanagasa Ondo' the lyrics of which describe sightseeing spots and local specialties in Yamagata. This Hanagasa dance is often performed at various events held in Yamagata prefecture.



Fukushima Waraji Festival

Fukushima Waraji (straw sandals) Festival started in 1970, and originated from 'Akatsuki Mairi', when the largest waraji in Japan is dedicated to Shinobu sanzan, three major mountains in Shinobu, Fukushima every February. In the festival held in early August every year, a huge waraji, the pair of the one dedicated in February, is dedicated with the wish for strong legs for the citizens and prosperity in business. The huge waraji is 12m long and 1.4m in wide.



It is said that these festivals, which have different histories and origins depending on the region, are an aspect of our culture that is indispensable for the enjoyment of summer in Japan. It might be interesting to learn more about the local histories and customs together with festivals. This summer, please go to the festivals in each area.

Image Providers: Morioka Sansa Odori Festival Organizing Committee, Aomori Tourism and Convention Association, Sendai Tanabata Festival Support Association, Akita City Kanto Festival Committee, Yamagata Hanagasa Association, Fukushima Waraji Festival Steering Committee, Fukushima Prefecture Tourism & Local Products Association