**Shiogama Jinja Shrine Rituals and *Mikoshi***

The two *mikoshi* (portable shrines) on display here are used in festivals held by Shiogama Jinja Shrine and Shiwahiko Jinja Shrine.

The black-lacquered *mikoshi* belongs to Shiogama Jinja and is over 280 years old. It weighs around one ton, but despite its immense weight, during festivals just 16 men carry the portable shrine down the steep, 202-step stone stairway that leads into the city. Shiwahiko Jinja’s *mikoshi* is more recent, built about 50 years ago, and is a brilliant vermillion color.

The *mikoshi* are brought out for three of the shrines’ biggest festivals. During the Hote Matsuri in March and the Hana Matsuri in April, the Shiogama *mikoshi* is paraded around the city. In July, the *mikoshi* of both shrines are brought out for the Minato Matsuri (Port Festival), where they are loaded onto elaborate dragon- and phoenix-shaped boats and then floated around Matsushima Bay. The rest of the year, the *mikoshi* are on display here at the Shiogama Shrine Museum.

Visitors to the museum can get a deeper understanding of the history of these festivals by viewing the collection of scrolls and prints from the Edo (1603–1867) and Meiji (1868–1912) periods. Some of these images portray ritual processions and festivals of the time.