

Fukuno Yotaka Festival

The Fukuno Yotaka Festival is an evening celebration that's part of the spring festival held by Fukuno Shinmei-sha Shrine. This shrine was built in 1652 during the early Edo period. When it was founded, the spirit of the guardian deity Amaterasu Omikami of Ise Shrine, the most sacred Shinto shrine in Japan, was divided and enshrined here as well. As the deity was said to have arrived in the evening, lanterns were used to light the way and pay respect. This festival originated in this ritual greeting of the deity. It is held every year on May 1 and 2 in the Fukuno area of Nanto city. The festival is also known as the Yotaka Lantern Parade as giant paper lanterns (*andon*) are paraded through the streets of Fukuno on the first night of the festival.

The parade runs from evening through to midnight and is accompanied by the beating sounds of *taiko* drums, flutes, and festival-goers shouting "yoiyasa, yoiyasa!" and singing the Yotakabushi folk song. Around 20 floats of varying sizes are carried through Fukuno, including seven large lanterns, which reach as high as 6.3 meters. These giant paper lanterns belong to seven specific districts of Fukuno. On the first day of the festival, the floats compete in artistry. Late at night on the second day of the festival, the lanterns are carried into the main street of the town, and the floats "battle" (*hikiai*) in what has become the climax of the festival. Following the celebrations on May 3, *hikiyama* floats from four different districts make their way around the city center before heading toward Shinmei Shrine.