

Toro Nagashi

Toro Nagashi, a ceremony in which paper lanterns are set afloat on rivers, is held at locations across Japan, usually to coincide with the mid-August Obon period, when the spirits of deceased ancestors are believed to return to their hometowns. While the lantern-floating custom itself dates back to ancient times, Hiroshima's Toro Nagashi was begun in 1947 as a consolation to the souls of the millions of Japanese citizens who perished during World War II.

Given Hiroshima's history as the first place in the world to experience an atomic bombing, in which a significant percentage of its citizens were killed, the city's Toro Nagashi ceremony is especially significant, and it is one of Japan's largest. The ceremony is held on August 6, about a week ahead of Obon, to coincide with the anniversary of the bombing. Locals and visitors alike are invited to write prayers for peace on around 8,000 often colorful lanterns, which are then set afloat to drift slowly down the Motoyasu River, passing in front of the A-bomb Dome.

Deeply poignant, visually enchanting, and imbued with the hope that Hiroshima's experience never be repeated anywhere in the world, the Toro Nagashi ceremony is best viewed from one of the bridges spanning the Motoyasu River. Visitors wishing to float lanterns of their own can purchase them from 6:30 a.m. until 8 p.m. at reception tents on either side of the river. The ceremony runs from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.