

Festivals

Several festivals and ceremonies are held throughout the year at Munakata Taisha. One of the busiest times is the New Year, when tens of thousands visit the shrines starting at midnight on December 31 to pray for good luck in the coming year. The Three Female Deities of Munakata have historically protected sea routes and, by extension, all travel routes, so many people come to pray for protection from car accidents as well.

Munakata Taisha Spring Festival

The annual Spring Festival at Munakata Taisha from March 31 to April 2, includes prayers for road safety, prosperity and good harvests, with ritual dances featuring shrine maidens in elaborate, twelve-layered ceremonial kimono.

Tanabata Festival

At Nakatsu-miya on the island of Oshima, August 7 (July 7 in other parts of Japan) heralds the Tanabata Festival, and Nakatsu-miya is said to be where Tanabata was first celebrated in Japan. Originally from China, Tanabata is the love story of Orihime (also known as Shokujo), a weaver and daughter of the sky king, and the cow herder Hikoboshi (also known as Kengyu), represented by the stars Vega and Altair. After they married, they neglected their work, and Orihime's father forbade them to meet, keeping them separated by the Milky Way. He eventually relented and allowed them to meet once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month. The island is decorated for the week leading up to the festival, when Nakatsu-miya is lit up with intricately carved bamboo lanterns.

Munakata Taisha Grand Autumn Festival

The largest and most important event of the year is the Munakata Taisha Grand Autumn Festival, held during the first three days of October. This festival honors the Three Female Deities of Munakata. Festivities begin with the Miare Festival on October 1, when the two island-dwelling deities are transported to Hetsu-miya to visit their sister deity, Ichikishimahime no Kami. It is a spectacular event in which around 150 fishing boats festooned with colorful flags escort portable shrines bearing the deities back to the mainland. Shinto priests hold a welcome ceremony and female shrine attendants perform an elaborate dance in beautiful robes. On October 2, there is a performance of horseback archery in the shrine precincts. In the early evening on October 3, the festival ends with the Takamiya Kannabi Festival, and ritual dances at Takamiya Saijo, the ancient ritual site where the deities are said to have descended from the heavens.

Chrysanthemum Festival

The Chrysanthemum Festival is held at Munakata Taisha from November 1 to November 22, during which approximately 3,000 pots of chrysanthemums are displayed on the grounds of the shrine. Growers display their best flowers in creative, colorful patterns. The festival coincides with Shichi-Go-San (“seven-five-three”), a November 15 festival to celebrate children. Girls aged three or seven and five-year-old boys are dressed in kimono and visit the shrine with their families to pray for a long and healthy life.