

Inuyama Festival

The Inuyama Festival began in 1635 as a way for people to pray to the deity enshrined at Haritsuna Shrine for peace and protection. The festival has offered the same traditional atmosphere for centuries and is held during the first weekend of April when cherry blossoms add their beauty to the scene.

The main attraction is the procession of 13 elaborately decorated floats each measuring more than eight meters tall. It takes the muscles and skill of a team of people to navigate each float through the narrow streets of the castle town. During the day the floats are topped by puppets (*karakuri ningyo*) that perform to the music of flutes and drums. At sundown, the floats are redecorated with hundreds of candle-lit paper lanterns and again roll through the streets. The climax involves turning the floats in a maneuver called *donden* orchestrated by a team that lifts and pivots the more-than-5-ton vehicles.

The festivities have evolved over the years, and initially included a ceremonially decorated horse and a procession of tea pickers. Today, residents of all ages work throughout the year preparing for the event, directing their efforts to honoring the gods, nurturing community spirit, impart tradition, and welcoming visitors. The Inuyama Festival is one of 33 Japanese festivals on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.