

## Overview of Aomori Nebuta Festival

The Nebuta Festival is the highlight of summer in the city of Aomori and also marks the symbolic end of the short warm season in this northern region. The focal points of the festival are floats called Nebuta. These giant creations that often depict a historical event or a scene from a Kabuki performance, are illuminated from within. For the local people, companies, and organizations involved with the festival, it is the culmination of months of preparation, and a wave of excitement can be felt throughout the city as the event approaches. Along with the Sendai Tanabata and the Akita Kanto, the Nebuta Festival is one of the three major Tohoku festivals held in August and swells the city with more than 2.5 million visitors every August 2 to 7.

The Nebuta floats are pushed by participants along a three-kilometer parade course before audiences of local residents and visitors from around the country. *Haneto* (festival dancers) show off their moves and chant “Rassera! Rassera!” cheering on the pullers of the floats and rousing the excitement of the audience. The music of the *hayashi* festival musicians, who play drums, wooden flutes, and hand cymbals in the parade, reverberates along the route, while spectators enjoy festival fare from the food stalls.

The Nebuta Festival most likely originated from a mix of the Tanabata Festival, a celebration of the stars, and a Japanese custom called Nemuri Nagashi. These traditions involved releasing lanterns onto rivers or the ocean, and the original Nebuta floats developed from these lanterns. Today’s style of colossal, figure-shaped floats was established after World War II, and in 1980 the festival was designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan.

The festival’s evening parades run for five days from August 2 to 6, starting at 7:10 p.m.; all 22 large Nebuta floats make an appearance on the last of those days. On August 7, the final day of the festival, events kick off with a daytime parade at 1:00 p.m. and finish with an evening Bay Parade featuring the best Nebuta floats for that year, plus a fireworks show. Preceding this six-day program, the Nebuta Eve is held on August 1 around Rasse Land, an area where finishing work on the floats is done in hangar-like tents. In addition to these tents, there are also food stalls, *hayashi* festival music, and the finished floats on display.