

Gero Onsen Festival

Held annually from August 1, the Gero Onsen Festival is the largest festival in Gero and features a variety of events and traditional activities over its four-day period. The first day kicks off with the Ryujin Fire Festival, inspired by Wankasebuchi, a local legend about a dragon deity who lived near the Hida River. This dragon would lend bowls and other tableware to the poor villagers for weddings and other celebrations, and the people would usually show their gratitude by washing the dishes before returning them. On one occasion, however, a villager stole a bowl meant to be used at a festival, incurring the dragon's wrath. The festival reenacts the legend with five huge dragon puppets, plenty of fire, and a bowl-shaped portable shrine (*mikoshi*). On the second day, local residents carry the *mikoshi* through the hot spring district. There is also a performance of the Gero Odori, a dance that is best experienced while wearing a traditional robe (*yukata*), in which anyone can participate. The festival's third day is dedicated to expressing gratitude to the hot springs, the source of the town's prosperity, and features a parade of local people dressed in traditional costumes proceeding from Gero Station to Onsenji Temple, as well as a grand fireworks display in which about 13,000 fireworks are synchronized with music. The highlight of the final day's program is a live music performance.