

## **Tori no Ichi**

The roots of the annual Tori no Ichi go back to the Edo period (1603–1867). Part festival, part fair, for two or three days in November the Tori no Ichi transforms Oku Asakusa into a raucous hub where peddlers and visitors hope for good fortune in the coming year.

This tradition is said to have originated at Chokokuji Temple and Otori Shrine in Asakusa, spreading from there to the rest of the country. Tori no Ichi is held in November on days of the rooster (*tori*) as determined by the Chinese zodiac and the lunar calendar. In a typical year there are usually two such days, which are considered auspicious. Occasionally there are three days of the rooster in November, and though it is celebrated, the third is considered an ill omen portending fire. In its original form, the Tori no Ichi was a harvest festival during which roosters were released in front of Sensoji Temple. It gradually evolved over the years to become a way to express hopes for good fortune and prosperity in the coming year. During Tori no Ichi visitors can get a true taste of the hospitality of Asakusakko—locals born and raised in Asakusa who have an enduring pride in their traditions.

A hallmark of the event is the *kumade*, an ornate bamboo rake believed to help patrons “rake in” prosperity in the coming year or ward off bad luck. These rakes were originally quite humble, decorated only with a sheaf of rice, but as the festival evolved the ornamentation became increasingly elaborate. Modern versions are decorated with gold and silver, and may depict traditional Japanese images like fans or *mikoshi* portable shrines, Japanese deities, or even cute animals. The rakes range widely in size; some are small enough to fit in the palm of a hand while others are so large they have to be carried over one’s shoulder. In years when there is a third day to the festival, special talismans to ward off fire are also available.

The *kumade* are a feast for the eyes, but the real fun starts when purchasing one. In a departure from normal custom in Japan, shoppers and shopkeepers are expected to bargain before settling on a price that is agreeable to both parties. Merchants are also expected to keep the change. Upon completion of a purchase, shoppers are sent off with rhythmic clapping, and sometimes a cup of sake, to show appreciation. Visitors are encouraged to come back in subsequent years to return their *kumade* to the temple or shrine where they purchased it and offer thanks before procuring a new one for the coming year to continue the cycle of prosperity.