

Kaga-tobi Dezomeshiki Festival

Every January, a thousand local firefighters gather at Kanazawa Castle for the Kaga-tobi Dezomeshiki Festival.

Teams of firefighters display their skills in the main spectacle called the *dezomeshiki*: acrobatic stunts performed while perched atop tall ladders. Despite the cold Ishikawa winter, the firefighters wear scant, traditional outfits—some are even doused with firehoses while wearing nothing but a loincloth.

The *dezomeshiki* tradition, found nationwide, originated in the Edo period (1603–1867) when firefighting brigades were guided by a single firefighter who rode atop a high ladder, shouting instructions to their fellow firefighters below. Keep an eye out for the gold leaf-covered *matoi*. These are Edo-period flags that were raised on the roof of a building on fire to notify people that the fire was being extinguished. Each team carries *matoi* of its own design.