

## **Ueno Tenjin Festival: The Danjiri Parade**

The parade is made up of three main segments: a portable shrine (*mikoshi*) procession, an *oni* procession, and a procession of *danjiri* and *shirushi* floats. Leading the parade is the *mikoshi* procession, in which priests and members of the community carry *mikoshi* and other Shinto objects. At the head of the *oni* procession is the Ōgohei, a large bamboo staff with paper streamers. It is over 6 meters tall and weighs more than 110 kilograms and must be carried by five men. The central beam is supported by four others and each man holds one of five colored beams. The beams' colors represent the five traditional Chinese elements: fire, water, wood, metal, and earth.

Following the Ōgohei, the *oni* procession is divided into two parts: the En no Gyōja and the Chinzei Hachirō Tametomo processions. Participants from four neighborhoods dress as *oni* in traditional costumes and grotesque masks and march through Iga, gesturing wildly as they greet spectators. Locals believe that a child will grow up healthy if it cries when seeing an *oni*, so parents tend to push their children toward the frightening performers. Drummers follow each section, providing background music.

Last in the parade are the *danjiri* and *shirushi* floats, each pulled through the town by more than 30 people. Each *danjiri* is paired with a *shirushi* float, which together symbolize the neighborhood that maintains them. In the past, only people who lived in the neighborhoods that were responsible for the festival were allowed to participate, but as younger generations move away from Iga and the resident population grows older, this practice has begun to change. In addition to the people pulling floats, musicians ride in the *danjiri* playing festival songs. Participants from each neighborhood also wear matching overcoats (*happi*) that differ from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Over 1,000 people participate in the procession every year, dressing as *oni*, attending to floats, or making music. The parade winds through Iga's streets for almost 2 kilometers. This unusual festival has attracted more than 150,000 international and Japanese visitors in recent years.