

Ueno Tenjin Matsuri: Explanation of the *Danjiri* and *Shirushi* Floats

Shirushi are small floats that represent either the individual neighborhood kami (deity) or some symbol of local pride. Each *shirushi* precedes its accompanying *danjiri* from the same neighborhood during the parade.

Danjiri are wooden carts, the predecessors of modern parade floats. *Danjiri* festivals have been popular in Japan for hundreds of years to honor local legends and Buddhist and Shinto deities. Communities often dedicate the first night of each festival to decorating the *danjiri* with curtains, lanterns, and special ornaments.

The dozens of attendants who pull these large wooden floats during the festival practice throughout the year to ensure the safety of the riders and spectators. The heavy carts have followed the same routes for many centuries, weaving marks into Iga's streets.

During the procession, residents ride their carts dressed in festive clothing, kneeling or sitting on the float's top floor and playing musical instruments. Traditionally, only residents of the neighborhood can ride in their *danjiri*, and between festivals each float is stored within its own neighborhood.