

Rituals and Festivals at Dazaifu Tenmangu

Festivals are deep-rooted in Japanese culture, and many have connections to the country's temples and shrines. Dazaifu Tenmangu hosts over 100 festivals and rituals every year, and large numbers of people participate in these events.

Jinkoshiki—The Grand Procession of Sugawara Michizane—is the largest ritual associated with the shrine and is depicted in this scroll from 1853. The spirit of Sugawara Michizane—also known as Tenjin—is carried in a *mikoshi*, or large portable shrine, to spend the night at Enoki Shrine, the location of Michizane's former home in Dazaifu. The following morning, the deity is carried back to Dazaifu Tenmangu. During the event, hundreds of people dress in Heian-period (794–1185) costume to accompany the portable shrine as it moves through the grounds of the shrine.

Usokae (Bullfinch Exchange Festival) on January 7 is another notable event. A jostling crowd exchanges small wooden carvings of bullfinches in the dark until a signal is given to stop. The person who ends up with a bullfinch with specific inscriptions on the bottom can exchange it for a pure gold bullfinch, said to bring good luck for the coming year.

The New Year holiday is the busiest time at Dazaifu Tenmangu as over two million people visit to offer prayers and acquire protective amulets for the year ahead.