

### **【Mitsumata Festival】**

The Mitsumata Festival is held on July 12 and begins at Ime Jinja Shrine. The festival is held to entreat the shrine's principal deity, Uke Mochi no Kami, the goddess of food, for an abundant rice harvest. The festival was started by the four village headmen who prospered from managing the inns that hosted daimyo and other high-status travelers during the Edo period (1603–1868). The portable shrine that is central to the festival was made in Kyoto in 1807.

On the eve of the festival, the head priest of the shrine performs sacred dances called *kagura* to entertain the deities at Ime Jinja. On the morning of the festival, a ritual is performed to transfer the enshrined deities to the portable shrine in the form of sacred objects. The objects are kept out of sight and handled with utmost respect—the handlers are not even allowed to breathe on them. The portable shrine is then paraded through town by bearers dressed in ancient aristocratic costume. During the Edo period, the procession stopped at each of the headmen's households. Today, it stops outside Ikedaya, the Mitsumata Michi-no-Eki roadside station, the town meeting hall, and a local lodge.

At each stop, the portable shrine is positioned outside. While the priests, bearers, and other attendants take a rest inside, the townspeople perform additional dances for the pleasure of the deities. The dances have no prescribed form, but in recent years they have taken on a modern flavor. After completing the circuit, the portable shrine is returned to Ime Jinja and the deities are transferred back to the shrine.