

### **Takada Kanko Bon Dance Festival**

The Takada Kanko Bon Dance Festival, or the Takada Kanko Bon Odori Taikai as it's known locally, is held annually on August 18. It revolves around the Kusaji Odori, a local dance which originated in the Edo period (1603–1868) as a pastime for farmers living under the rule of Yoshimune (1684–1751), the eighth Tokugawa shogun, who encouraged a simple and frugal lifestyle through the Kyoho Reforms. A performance consists of four dances that vary in style and musical tempo. In the more feminine first half of the performance, performers wear a *yukata* (casual summer kimono), while holding a fan and dancing elegantly, while in the more masculine second half, the performers wear shorts and a *happi* (lightweight, straight-sleeved coat) for a livelier routine.

Kusaji Odori performances run on the evening of August 18, with over 30 groups competing to win prizes, and the festival concludes with a performance by the members of the Kusaji Odori Preservation Society. Residents of all ages turn out for the lively outdoor festival wearing *yukata* and *happi* coats. The energetic atmosphere rubs off on the audience members, some of whom jump in and participate.