

### **Wakamiya Hachiman Shrine Autumn Festival**

The Wakamiya Hachiman Shrine Autumn Festival has been celebrated for over 900 years and was originally intended to express gratitude for a good harvest. Today it is one of three Hadaka Matsuri in Japan—festivals in which male participants wear a loincloth called a *shimekomi*, and nothing else other than socks, despite the cold autumn weather.

The three-day festival revolves around a portable shrine called a *mikoshi*. On the first day, men carry the *mikoshi* from Wakamiya Hachiman Shrine, which lies on the east bank of the Katsura River, and parade it through several neighborhoods. It is then carried across the frigid river in which stands a five-ton, 16-meter torch called a *taimatsu* (also known as *Otaimatsu*). The torch is set ablaze by a burning arrow shot from the nearby Odama Bridge and burns brightly, lighting up the *mikoshi* as it is carried through the river. The cheering crowd and the pounding *taiko* drums encourage the men as they carry the *mikoshi* to Geku Shrine, located downstream of the west bank of the Katsura River. After resting for two nights, the men return the *mikoshi* to Wakamiya Hachiman Shrine using the same route through the river. Again, the *Otaimatsu* is set alight, illuminating the *mikoshi* while the men bravely walk through the freezing water.