

Horan-enya

Horan-enya is a festival that originated in the mid-Edo period (1603–1868) and is held every new year. During the Edo period, rice collected as land tax (*nengumai*) was sent by cargo ship from the area now known as Bungotakada to the castle town of Shimabara (present-day city of Shimabara in Nagasaki prefecture), and to the feudal lord's storehouse in Osaka. The festival began as an opportunity to pray for the safety of the local boatmen delivering the *nengumai* and also for a plentiful catch of fish.

Horan-enya is held on a boat called a Horai-bune which departs from the east bank of the Katsura River near its mouth and heads downstream to Kotohira-gu Shrine (Konpira-gu Shrine) before turning upstream towards Wakamiya Hachiman Shrine. The boat is decorated with fisherman's flags (*tairyobata*) and "flags of all nations" (*bankokuki*). Participants on the boat include oarsmen (*kogite*), young men wearing a type of loincloth called *shimekomi*, a traditional musical ensemble (*hayashikata*), and two boys who are dancers (*odoriko*) dressed as the gods Yebisu and Daikoku, as well as other attendees such as local councilmen.

As the boat travels upstream, observers on the riverbank throw offerings such as sake or money into the water and the oarsmen jump into the cold river and swim to receive them, drawing rapturous applause. Meanwhile, those still on the ship throw auspicious red and white rice cakes (*mochi*) to spectators as a blessing for the new year. Once the Horai-bune arrives at its destination in front of Odama Civic Park, the *mochi* giveaway is performed again. The lively atmosphere is bolstered by boisterous cheers and people shouting *horai-enya yoiyasa-no-sasa* throughout the festival.