

Doburoku Festival

The Doburoku Festival is one of the most important events on Shirakawa-go's annual calendar. Rather than a single occasion, it is a series of harvest festivals held in succession at local Shinto shrines between October 14 and 19 to celebrate the end of the farming season and to thank the gods for an abundant crop. The program varies little from shrine to shrine, consisting of religious ceremonies, including a procession in which a mikoshi (portable shrine) is paraded from house to house in the neighborhood, performances of lion dancing (shishimai) and other traditional arts, and the drinking of copious amounts of doburoku, or unfiltered sake. Each shrine brews its own doburoku, as has been customary since at least the early Edo period (1603–1867). They have special brewing licenses, which were granted in 1896 after the government had banned home brewing and imposed strict regulations on liquor production. The shrines were exempt from these rules, provided that they brew sake only for religious purposes and refrain from selling their product for a profit. The Doburoku Festival at Shirakawa Hachimangu Shrine attracts the largest number of participants, many of whom come specifically to sample the shrine's doburoku. In exchange for a donation of 400 yen, visitors receive a sake cup that can be refilled as many times as one likes.