

Moshioyaki Salt-Making Ritual

The ancient *moshioyaki* salt-making ritual takes place once a year at Okama Jinja Shrine, located in the Monzenmachi area at the foot of Shiogama Jinja Shrine. The ritual was designated an Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Miyagi Prefecture in 1979, and is the only ritual of its kind still practiced in Japan.

The ritual is held over three days, from July 4 to 6. It honors Shiotsuchi Oji no Kami, the deity that taught people the secret of making salt from seawater.

On the first day of the ritual, Shinto priests collect seawater and seaweed from the bay in Hanabushi Jinja Shrine, in the nearby Shichigahama area.

On the second day, priests take a boat out into Matsushima Bay to collect water at high tide. They then replace the water in four iron cauldrons (*kama*) housed within the shrine. According to records from 1636, the color of the water may predict big changes or dangers in the days ahead.

During the final day, priests prepare a large flat cauldron, then pour in the seawater through a thick layer of seaweed. After lighting a fire beneath the cauldron, they stir constantly until the water evaporates. The salt left behind is then presented to the deities of Okama Jinja and Shiogama Jinja.

Visitors can watch a video of the ritual and learn more about Shiogama's history of salt-making on the second floor of the Shiogama Shrine Museum.