

## **Shiogama Jinja Shrine Rituals and *Mikoshi***

Shiogama Jinja Shrine and Shiwahiko Jinja Shrine perform a variety of rituals and celebrate many festivals throughout the year. The *mikoshi* (portable shrines) of the two shrines are brought out for three of the biggest festivals.

During the Hote Matsuri in March and the Hana Matsuri in April, the *mikoshi* of Shiogama Jinja is paraded around the city. For the Minato Matsuri (Port Festival) in July, the *mikoshi* of both shrines are loaded onto elaborate dragon- and phoenix-shaped boats and then floated around Matsushima Bay. The rest of the year, the portable shrines are on display at the Shiogama Shrine Museum.

The black-lacquered *mikoshi* belongs to Shiogama Jinja and is over 280 years old. It weighs around one ton, but during festivals just 16 men carry the portable shrine down the steep, 202-step stone stairway that leads into the city. Shiwahiko Jinja's *mikoshi* is more recent, built about 50 years ago, and is a brilliant vermillion color.

Besides the two *mikoshi*, the Shiogama Shrine Museum also has a collection of scrolls and prints from the Edo (1603–1867) and Meiji (1868–1912) periods, some of which portray ritual processions and festivals of the time.