

## Senkosai Festival

The Senkosai Festival is one of the three largest festivals in Otsu and is held every year on August 17. The festival begins at Takebe Taisha Shrine, which is dedicated to the legendary warrior prince Yamato Takeru, but the main site for the festivities is the Seta River.

First, the brilliantly decorated *mikoshi* (portable shrines) at Takebe Taisha are carried onto ceremonial boats. The boats sail down the Seta River, passing under Seta no Karahashi Bridge on their way around the Nango area. The festival is a reenactment of part of the Yamato Takeru legend, recalling the time the prince had to cross the ocean on the way to defeat a powerful foe.

As the Seta River is believed to be home to a dragon god, the front of each boat is adorned with gold-colored dragon heads. Takebe Taisha has two large *mikoshi*, and the older one was made in the Edo period (1603–1867). One of the portable shrines used in the festival is so heavy that 100 people are required to carry it to the boat, while children can carry smaller, lighter *mikoshi*.

Since the portable shrines are said to contain the spirit of Yamato Takeru, they must be treated with care. During the Senkosai Festival, the Seta no Karahashi Bridge is closed to traffic. This is to ensure that when the *mikoshi* pass under the bridge, no one is above them, which would be an insult to Yamato Takeru. In the evening, after a Shinto ritual at Nango is completed, the boats return to Setahama, the riverbank on the north side of the eastern end of Seta no Karahashi, and a fireworks display lights up the area with pyrotechnics synchronized to the movement of the large *mikoshi*.