

Do-gyoretsu Festival

The Do-gyoretsu (Procession of Drums) Festival is held annually in Matsue on the third Sunday of October. (In the Izumo region, the traditional hide-covered wooden drum known as a *taiko* in most parts of Japan is called a *do*.) The festival features a competition among the 30 neighborhoods of Matsue, each of which fields a large roofed float carrying a pair of large horizontal drums. Children pull the floats as adults beat the drums. In addition to the drummers and the pullers, each team includes chanters and musicians playing *changara* cymbals and *yokobue* flutes. Hundreds of people from each neighborhood, all in colorful traditional costumes, participate in the competition.

Drumming and Drinking

The roots of the festival go back to the seventeenth century, when portable shrines were paraded during the autumn full moon festival to the accompaniment of drums, flutes, and cymbals. Movable two-story shrines, with children beating drums on the first floor, were an eighteenth-century addition. The drums at that time were small, about 50 centimeters in diameter. By the start of the Meiji era (1868–1912), the portable shrines had become floats, and the drums had grown to 1 meter or larger in diameter. The festival was periodically banned because of excessive public drunkenness, but eventually became well organized and well managed, ensuring its survival.

The Passing of Traditions over Generations

Celebrations for the enthronement of Emperor Taisho in 1915 provided a great stimulus to the Do-gyoretsu Festival, especially in the design of the wheeled floats, which became larger and more elaborate. The drums of most neighborhoods at the time were 120 to 150 centimeters in diameter, while two groups had drums almost 2 meters across. Each neighborhood has its own distinctive float design and style of drumming, and in the weeks leading up to the main event, the sound of drumming rehearsals can be heard all over the city in the evening. The Do-gyoretsu Festival is an opportunity for each generation to pass on the various neighborhood traditions and festival roles. The floats, lanterns, musical instruments, and other festival items are kept in special storage sheds the rest of the year.

At the Do-gyoretsu Tradition Hall in the neighborhood of Teramachi, the floats and drums, as well as a video of the traditions and history of this lively festival, are visible year-round.