

Grand Summer Festival of Mitarai

The Grand Summer Festival of Mitarai is hosted collaboratively by three Shinto shrines located in the town: Sumiyoshi Jinja Shrine, Tenman Jinja Shrine, and Ebisu Jinja Shrine. It is held annually on the fourth Saturday of July. The festival's recorded history extends back to 1740, when documents first mention a procession with a *mikoshi* (portable shrine). As Mitarai prospered as a harbor town, the festival became progressively more colorful and lavish. At one point during the Edo period (1603–1867), female entertainers danced around the stage while playing shamisen, and in 1761 a wooden platform bearing a *taiko* drum player, which symbolizes a watchtower (*yagura*), came to precede the *mikoshi* in the procession.

Each year, about 500 people participate in the Grand Summer Festival of Mitarai. During the festival, homes throughout the town are decorated with banners and lanterns bearing their family emblems. The festival consists of two parts: a daytime procession and an evening procession. The daytime procession starts at noon from the Wakaebisu-ya Teahouse, opening with the singing of the watchtower folk song (*yagura ondo*) to the beat of *taiko* drums. Then, the *yagura* is carried through the narrow streets of Mitarai until the procession ends at Sumiyoshi Jinja. During the evening procession, the bearers repeatedly tip the platform supporting the *yagura* by almost 90 degrees while the *taiko* player riding it continues to drum. These sudden maneuvers can be dangerous if not performed precisely, and even spectators have to be quick on their feet to avoid injury.