

A City Sustained by Rivers and Awa Odori

Tokushima began as a castle town built on a sandbar in the lower reaches of the Yoshino, Shikoku's second longest river. The city is surrounded by rivers, and many place names in the area feature the word *shima* (island). Fukushima, Terashima, and Sumiyoshijima are other examples. Merchants prospered by using the rivers as waterways to transport goods.

When Tokushima officially became a city in 1889, it was the tenth largest city in Japan. The region was ideal for indigo cultivation, and as the indigo dyeing industry thrived, it supported the city's economic development.

The people of Tokushima have been performing Bon Odori (folk dancing during the summer Bon Festival) since the early Edo period (1603–1868). From the outset, local authorities imposed strict regulations so that residents could only dance in certain neighborhoods. Since they were assembling on the streets, they needed to obtain permission from the police department—a situation that continues even today.

The Tokushima Chamber of Commerce and Industry started to sponsor the Bon dancing in 1928, and it quickly grew into a tourist attraction. Around this time, people began to call the dance “Awa Odori” instead of “Bon Odori,” because the traditional summer dances were now being performed for various events and celebrations year-round. Awa is the old provincial name for Tokushima. The name “Awa Odori” became official in 1946, as the dance enjoyed a revival and spread throughout the country.