

Festival Float Overview

Twelve decorated *dashi* and *yatai* floats take part in the Kumagaya Uchiwa Festival, each representing a different neighborhood. Seven of the floats are *dashi*, tall floats that can reach a height of 9 meters and are decorated with models of ancient deities and historical figures. The other five floats are called *yatai*. All are ornately carved and decorated to resemble shrines, with a platform at the front for musicians playing drums, cymbals, and flutes. The *dashi* and *yatai* are pulled through the streets of Kumagaya on each of the three days of the festival and are lined up in the festival square in front of Kumagaya Station in the evenings.

Until the late nineteenth century, the Kumagaya Uchiwa Festival consisted of Shinto ceremonies and a portable shrine procession. During the Meiji era (1868–1912), Kumagaya was a center of commerce in the region, with a thriving silk industry. In the late nineteenth century, the Daini Honcho-ku neighborhood purchased a lavish festival float from Tokyo to use in the annual festival. Other neighborhoods began to build their own *dashi* and *yatai* for the event, and a friendly rivalry developed over the years, adding to the excitement of the occasion.