

Sumiyoshi Matsuri Festival

The Sumiyoshi Matsuri is one of Osaka's largest summer festivals. It is held every year from July 30 to August 1. It is also called the Oharae, meaning "purification," because its ceremonies ward off disease and other misfortunes. Before the festival begins, the portable shrines, or *mikoshi*, which are used to carry the deities, are cleansed. The water for this task is drawn from Osaka Bay in the early hours of the morning.

On July 30 at 8:00 p.m., the Yoimiyasai ceremony is held to transfer the deities to the *mikoshi*. The Nagoshi no Harae Shinji, or "summer purification ceremony," is performed the following day. The ceremony consists of a procession that includes shrine maidens, children, and dancers dressed in colorful Muromachi period (1336–1573) costumes. They pass through huge standing rings made of plaited grass, which is considered spiritually cleansing.

The Mikoshi Togyo ceremony is held on August 1. The *mikoshi* are carried over the steeply curved Sorihashi Bridge, across the Yamato River to Shukuin Shrine in Sakai City, then back to Sumiyoshi Taisha. Carrying the main *mikoshi* is quite a feat as it weighs roughly two tons and is 11 meters in length.