

### **Kangetsu-sai (Moon-Viewing Festival)**

The Kangetsu-sai, or “moon-viewing festival,” takes place under a full moon in autumn, usually in mid- to late September. Its central attraction, aside from the glowing moon itself, is poetry: the festival celebrates traditional Japanese poetic forms, specifically *tanka* and haiku.

*Tanka* are poems with fixed numbers of lines and syllables, following a pattern of 5-7-5-7-7, (haiku dispenses with the last two lines). At the Kangetsu-sai, priests read selected poems aloud from the top of Sorihashi, the famed arched bridge. Amateur poets can submit work for consideration. The readings are followed by performances of traditional dancing.

Sumiyoshi Taisha’s association with poetry goes back more than a thousand years. References to the shrine and its coastal setting are found in poems from the eighth and ninth centuries, including those in the *Man’yōshū*, Japan’s oldest surviving poetry collection. The shrine’s gods were seen as protectors and muses. According to one legend, when the famous poet Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241) spent a night at the shrine, the gods appeared to him in a dream in the form of an old man. Their words to him, “the moon is bright,” inspired the title of his diary, *Chronicle of the Bright Moon*.