

## **Takayama Festival Floats**

The individuality of the Takayama Festival floats was born from competition. Each neighborhood in Takayama built its own float, or *yatai*, and traditionally there was fierce rivalry between the neighborhoods in designing and decorating the most spectacular floats.

The designs of the *yatai* are thought to have been based on floats made in Edo (now Tokyo), but their decorations were influenced by trends in Kyoto—especially the metal ornaments, which were made by Kyoto artisans. As a mixture of Edo and Kyoto aesthetic styles, the floats' designs exemplify the heritage of Takayama as a merchant town.

Each float is stored in its respective neighborhood in a tall warehouse called a *yatai-gura*. Tremendous care is taken to ensure the floats are not damaged by weather or mishandling. If there is any chance the floats could be caught in even a drizzle, they are kept in the *yatai-gura* for the festival proceedings. Until the 2010s, each float could only be moved or ridden by members of its corresponding neighborhood.

Originally, the spring festival had 16 floats and the autumn festival had 15, but several floats were lost to fire and other circumstances. Today, the festivals have 12 and 11 floats, respectively. In 1960, all 23 floats were designated Important Tangible Folk-Cultural Properties, and in 2016, the festival was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as part of the "Yama, Hoko, Yatai, Float Festivals in Japan." Four floats from the autumn festival are on display at the Sakurayama Hachimangū Shrine.