

Tenka Festival

The annual Tenka Festival (Tenkasai) is held in Matsudaira-go on the second Sunday of February to honor Matsudaira Chikauji (d. 1394?), the founder of the Matsudaira family. According to family lore, Chikauji, who lived in turbulent times, wrote a prayer in which he hoped for peace throughout the land. That wish came true eight generations later when Chikauji's descendant Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) unified the country and established the Tokugawa shogunate. The Tenka Festival commemorates the Matsudaira family's role in bringing peace to the realm with various purification and luck-bringing rituals.

The festival begins on the previous evening when the priests of Matsudaira Toshogu Shrine bless a wooden ball washed with water from the sacred Ubuyu Well behind the shrine. This water is believed to have been used to give generations of Matsudaira newborns their first bath, including Ieyasu. On the day of the Tenka Festival, large numbers of men wearing only loincloths form three teams and parade through Matsudaira-go, eventually gathering in a specially prepared arena next to the shrine. This is where the *tamaseri*, the highlight of the festival, takes place. The ball that was washed with well water is brought in, and the participants engage in an at times physical contest trying to get their hands on the lucky ball. Most participants are aged 25, 42, or 61 because these ages are traditionally believed to be unlucky (*yakudoshi*). Those who are 42 years old are in charge of handling the ball in between ceremonies because 42 is considered the unluckiest age of all.

The Tenka Festival program also includes performances of traditional dance and music. There are opportunities to make your own mochi rice cake, and vendors set up stalls for food and drink and children's games.