

## **Koromo Festival**

Eight elaborately decorated floats are paraded through the streets of central Toyota during the annual Koromo Festival, a two-day celebration that centers on Koromo Shrine and has been a highlight on the local calendar for centuries. The festival takes place on the third weekend of October and is held to pray for a plentiful harvest in the coming year.

The floats are approximately 6 meters high and weigh up to 5 tons. They have wooden wheels, a box-like central section with a small stage in front, and another covered stage on top. Decorative features include traditional lanterns, lacquered beams with gold fittings, gilded wood carvings of auspicious creatures and plants, and embroidered tapestries depicting scenes from Japanese and Chinese history and mythology. It takes dozens of well-coordinated crew members to maneuver a single float; during the festival the floats are pushed and pulled to the sound of rhythmical chanting.

The recorded history of the Koromo Festival goes back to the first half of the 1600s. The first floats are thought to have been added in the mid-1700s, perhaps in response to regional trends, as many other festivals in the area now covered by Aichi and Gifu prefectures also use floats. Since 1778, each of the city's eight traditional neighborhoods have had their own float, and these are a significant source of local pride. Traditionally, the float procession would travel from Koromo Shrine to Koromo Castle (now the site of the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art) to entertain the local daimyo lord.

On the festival's first day, known as Shingaku ("pre-celebration"), the floats are maneuvered through their respective neighborhoods. In the evening, the crews leave their floats behind, purify themselves in the nearby Yahagi River, and gather at Koromo Shrine with lanterns in hand to circle the shrine grounds seven times in prayer. Seven is an auspicious number and is also a synonym for plenty. On the second day, known as Hongaku ("main celebration"), the floats are rolled onto the shrine grounds to be shown off to the deities, and rituals and performances of sacred dance and music take place. The climax comes late in the afternoon, when the floats are pushed back out into the city at high speed while crew members riding on them release colorful confetti over the audience. The festival ends with a fireworks display in the evening.