

## **Sagicho Festival**

The Sagicho Festival is a colorful and dramatic celebration with more than four centuries of history. The festival is held annually in Omihachiman to mark the advent of spring and features parades of 8-meter-high floats, which are decorated with figures of the year's Chinese zodiac animal sign. Lively groups wearing colorful coats carry these floats about the town and engage in trials of strength called *kenka*, in which pairs of floats are pushed against each other until one topples over. At the climax of the festival, the floats are burned as offerings to the deities, and participants dance around the flames. The Sagicho Festival is an expression of both community pride and Omihachiman's mercantile heritage: each float is made and carried by residents of a specific neighborhood, and the flamboyant appearance and grand scale of the floats were historically made possible by the wealth of the town's merchant families. The festival, which has been named a National Intangible Folk Cultural Property, takes place over two days on the weekend closest to March 15.