

Seki Juku Gion Summer Festival

Every year, in the second half of July, Seki Juku holds the two-day Seki Juku Gion Summer Festival. The festival has two main elements: the parading of the portable shrine (*mikoshi*) belonging to Seki Shrine and the parading of four two-story *yama* floats from separate districts of the town.

The festival starts with several dozen townspeople escorting the *mikoshi* from Seki Shrine on a tour of town landmarks, including the Higashi no Oiwake crossroads and Seki Jizoin Temple. Finally, it arrives at a field at the west end of the town, the *otabisho*, where it is placed for the night.

Meanwhile, the four floats have been cleaned and decorated with their embroidered curtains and colorful paper lanterns. They are now hauled out of the *dashigura*, the special high-roofed warehouses in which they are kept, and paraded around the town. Music is provided by children who sit on the lower of the float's two floors playing drums and flutes, while older men stand on the float's upper floor to direct its progress. The task of music-making is assigned to children as a way of ensuring that enthusiasm for the festival is transmitted from one generation to the next.

The first point of call for the floats is Seki Shrine. The "stage rotation" (*butai-mawashi*, in which the upper parts of the floats are spun around) is performed for the first time here, and then the floats are paraded through the town back to Nakamachi, in the town center. Here the paper lanterns are lit, and the second *butai-mawashi* is performed, this time in the dark. The floats are then returned to their warehouses for the night.

On the second day of the festival, the portable shrine is brought back from the *otabisho* to Seki Shrine. The floats are again paraded through the town, this time with no "stage rotation," before being returned to their warehouses. Thereafter, the focus of the local float associations is on pure merrymaking.