

Jinkosai highlights

Imperial Envoy's Visit

The Imperial Envoy, a messenger of His Majesty the Emperor, visits Katori Shrine every six years, in the Year of the Rat and the Year of the Horse. During the festival, in addition to the Imperial Envoy's recitation of a prayer and offering of sacred branches, "Goheimono" (offerings) are presented to the deities. These Goheimono consist of five-colored silk, hemp, and cotton items placed in a willow box.

The Dance of Eternity

This Kagura dance is performed at the grand festival of Katori Shrine. As the song says, "Until the very end of time, our country will be the most superior country among all nations," it prays for the long-lasting prosperity of the nation. Kagura dances and other ritual dances are performed at related ceremonies during the Shikinen Taisai (Grand Festival) and Shikinen Jinkosai (Procession Festival).

The Deity's Boat (Gekishusen)

The Deity's Boat, which carries the portable shrine and sails the Tone River, is adorned with a decoration of the mythical bird "Geki," known for its strength against wind and waves and its ability to soar through the sky. It is also called the Gekishusen (Gekishusen). It is a counterpart to the Ryutosen (Dragon Head Boat) used in the Kashima Shrine's Deity's Boat Festival.

Tone River Water Crossing

The Deity's Boat sails along the clear waters of the Tone River, also known as Bando Taro. A water festival is held on the river, and many spectators gather on the riverbanks to catch a glimpse of the Deity's Boat's passage. It is said that after completing the great task of transferring the land and pacifying the eastern provinces, Katori Okami traveled by boat to the land of Katori and settled there.

Welcoming Festival

Celebrations of Katori Okami's procession are held at various locations. These include Kashima Shrine at Ushigahana on the Tone River, and Komikado Shrine at the point where the Deity's Boat disembarks. In addition, welcoming ceremonies are held at the Suwa Shrine (Shinjuku's guardian shrine), the Yasaka Shrine (Honjuku's guardian shrine), and the Yasaka Shrine (Shinohara's guardian shrine) within the town of Sawara.

The townscape of Sawara

The procession proceeds through the townscape of Sawara, affectionately known as the "Little Edo of Northern Chiba." It is the first area in the Kanto region to be designated as a National Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings, and many famous sights and shops line the area around the Ono River that flows through the center, offering enjoyment in conjunction with the festival.

Key Jinkosai procession units

1) Dew sweepers, Sarutahiko, and Guardian Boys

At the head of the procession accompanying the Jinkosai festival are two dew sweepers in hitatare (formal court attire), Sarutahiko, who guided the gods during their descent to earth, and guardian boys in suikan (traditional court attire) who lead the procession on horseback. Each role is performed by parishioners from the Tsunomiya district, where the Hamatorii gate stands before the portable shrine is loaded onto the sacred boat.

2) Sacred Boat Wood

This is a ceremonial offering made from pine wood cut from Mount Mifunegi. It is considered material for the gods' boat, and in ancient times, after the Jinkosai festival, the wood was floated down the Tone River as an offering to the gods in a ceremony called "Mifunegi Nagashi" (floating the sacred boat wood). Three sacred boat woods are carried during the Shikinen Jinkosai festival.

3) Large Brocade Flag

The brocade flag, topped with a chrysanthemum crest, is approximately 3 meters in size, and various other flags adorn the procession. The procession is adorned with banners depicting the Four Divine Beasts (Azure Dragon, Vermilion Bird, Black Tortoise, and White Tiger), sun and moon flags, and five-colored silk decorations in blue, yellow, red, white, and black.

4) Armored Warriors

Warriors in colorful armor and carrying swords guard the procession. The Shikinen Jinkosai (periodic procession) is said to be a replica of the military display in which Katori-no-Okami pacified the eastern provinces and subdued the unruly gods, conveying the glorious appearance of military power to the present day.

5) Tugboat Troop

This kagura (sacred dance and music) troupe, comprised of people from the Ogishima district, performs a unique style of kagura that incorporates Western music into traditional kagura from the late Edo period to the early Meiji era. They are also called the Tugboat Troop because they lead the portable shrine and ceremonial boat, announcing the arrival of Katori-no-Okami.

6) Hirehoko (Sacred Spear)

Along with banners and other decorations, weapons and other ceremonial objects are carried in the procession. The Hirehoko is a spear adorned with a Hire (a type of decorative scarf) featuring divine crests and traditional patterns that appear in mythology. It joins the procession alongside bows, swords, and shields to protect the portable shrine.

7) The Portable Shrine

This is the portable shrine used by Katori-no-Okami during the procession. It is black lacquered both inside and out, adorned with metal fittings depicting phoenixes, swallows, and lions. The current portable shrine, like the newly constructed main hall, was repaired around 1940 (Showa 15), the 2600th year of the imperial calendar. Its specifications follow those of the existing, older portable shrine and documents from the Kamakura period.

8) The Sacred Horses

The sacred horses, adorned with golden gohei (ritual paper streamers) on their saddles, are beautifully decorated befitting the grand festival and marches gracefully. The sacred horses are also depicted in the Jinkosai picture scroll, representing their role as an offering to the gods and as a vehicle for them. The horse, in the Chinese zodiac, represents the south and is a pure animal symbolizing the sun.

9) Katori Shinto-ryu Swordsmen's Corps

Led by the Iizasa family, the head family of the Tenshinsho-den Katori Shinto-ryu, the entire school of swordsmanship proceeds in a procession. This school was established during the Muromachi period, and it is said that the founder, Iizasa Chōisai Ienao, received martial arts instruction from Katori-no-Okami after a thousand days of training in the sacred grounds of Katori Shrine.

10) Lion Dance and Kagura

Kagura, which enlivens the Jinkosai festival, also joins the procession. Many local Kagura traditions still exist in Katori City, and the Kagura of Ōsaki, Shin-ichiba, Shimo-ono, Kaeda, Tada, and Tsunomiya in the Katori district will be performed.