

Omatsuri

**Audley's
Japan
specialists
introduce a
different
facet to
visiting the
country**



Asakusa Matsuri

Omatsuri, or festival time, is one of the most important moments in the Japanese calendar, a chance for each town or village to re-establish its local traditions and sense of community identity whilst celebrating the turning of the seasons. For the visitor, these festivals provide an exciting and often spectacular glimpse into an aspect of the national character far removed from the usual Japanese stereotypes.

Yuki Matsuri, Sapporo

The Snow Festival (Yuki Matsuri) is held every February in Sapporo, the capital city of Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido. The week-long festival sees huge ice sculptures created along the Odori-koen park, ranging from near life-size



Kyoto Jidai participant

imitations of feudal castles to kitsch replicas of cartoon favourites. The event is lit up at night and provides a spectacular sight from the TV tower at the end of the park's main thoroughfare.

Laura Morris
01869 276 224

Nebuta Matsuri, Aomori

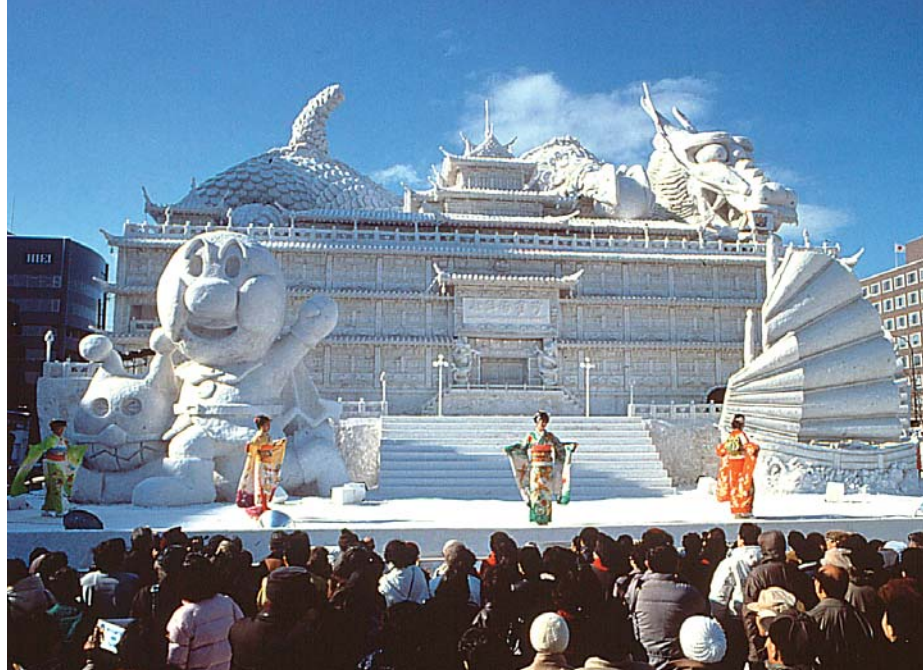
The Nebuta Festival is held in August in Aomori on Honshu island, and attracts more than three million visitors each year. Legend has it that in the ninth century AD a General Tamuramaro subjugated his enemies' armies by frightening them with huge lanterns, replicas of which are now carried through the streets on festival evenings. The parades are a sociable, community event with

dancing, musical accompaniment and traditional costume. This is definitely a festival to be caught up in and carried away by.

Laura Morris
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Jidai Matsuri, Kyoto

Kyoto's Jidai Matsuri (Festival of the Ages) dates back to 1895, and takes place annually on October 22nd to commemorate Kyoto becoming the capital of Japan in 794 AD. The focal point is the Jidai Gyoretsu procession, which features a parade of splendid traditional costumes. At the front, participants wear the local dress of 1868 (when the capital was transferred to Tokyo) with the costumes behind going progressively back in time until the Heian period



Sapporo Snow Festival



Nebuta Festival, Admori

of 794 AD, when Kyoto was known as Heian-kyo. With maiko (apprentice geisha) displaying the beautiful kimonos of the imperial court, the whole procession slowly makes its way from the Kyoto Imperial Gardens to Heian Shrine.

Zoe Woods
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Asakusa Sanja Matsuri, Tokyo

One of Tokyo's more energetic festivals, Sanja Matsuri is a popular three-day event which takes place in the old temple district of Asakusa during May. After gathering at Asakusa Shrine, revellers dressed in local costume take to the streets carrying over 100 colourful and elaborate mikoshi (portable shrines)

on their shoulders, all to the accompaniment of music, chanting and much merriment. The highlight comes when participants deliberately rush toward each other carrying the mikoshi, with the aim of intensifying the power of the gods mounted within them.

Lou Mullineux
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Awa Odori, Tokushima

'You are a fool to dance and a fool to watch so you may as well dance!' - local song

Awa Odori has remained largely secret from the outside world, but this festival of dance attracts over a million Japanese visitors a year. It is held all over the prefecture of Tokushima on Shikoku island in

August, when few visitors brave Japan's summer heat and humidity. The distinctive drum beats and flute tunes whip the costumed dancers into a frenzy as they parade through the streets. Should you not be able to make it to Tokushima for the odori, a museum dedicated to the festival is open all year round with dancing performed in the evenings.

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New brochure

To order a copy of our new North & Central Asia brochure which is out in October, please contact our specialists on 01869 276 217.

FACT FILE

A two-week trip incorporating one of these festivals, including return flights, costs from £2,195 per person. For further details contact Zoe, Lou or Laura on 01869 276 217.

