

Hamamatsu Festival

浜まつり

May 3rd - 5th in Hamamatsu

[http:// hamamatsu-daisuki.net/matsuri/](http://hamamatsu-daisuki.net/matsuri/)

○ Hamamatsu Festival

The Hamamatsu Festival, held annually from May 3rd - 5th in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, is one of Japan's leading festivals and attracts approximately 2 million people each year. For the three days of the festival the city is filled with excitement as a host of different events take place. During the day epic kite battles are held at the Nakatajima Sand Dunes, while as night falls the action moves downtown, where spectacular floats are paraded through the streets. Spectators can also enjoy displays of regional folk crafts, marching brass bands and a Miss Hamamatsu Festival contest, among other attractions.

This kite-flying festival is said to have originated over 440 years ago when the then Lord of Hikuma Castle, who ruled Hamamatsu and the surrounding area, raised a kite in celebration of the birth of his first son. However, there is little documentary evidence to support this legend.

References to kite flying in the region appear in historical documents dating from 1789-1800. Indeed, the climate of the region, with its strong, blustery wind known as *Enshū karakkaze*, is well-suited to kite flying and the practice of raising a kite to celebrate the birth of one's child is a tradition deeply rooted in the region.

○ Kite Battles

An explosion of fireworks over the Nakatajima Sand Dunes is the signal for over 170 kites, each bearing the unique crest of a local neighbourhood, to be raised into the May skies. The first kites to be raised, known as *hatsudako*, are those celebrating the birth of a firstborn child. The firstborns, dressed in traditional festival dress, also have a leading role to play watching their kites fly from the safety of their fathers' arms. Then, urged on by the sound of the bugles, hundreds of people pile in for the kite battles.



In the epic kite battles, opposing neighbourhoods entangle their 5mm-thick hemp kite-lines in an attempt to cut through the other kite-lines using friction. The friction burns the kite-lines, producing white smoke and a smell of burning. Ripples of excitement spread from the surrounding spectators, gradually building to a roar as all are caught up in the frenzy of the battles.

○ Float Parades

Over 80 neighbourhoods compete to have the most spectacular *gotenyatai* (palace-like float) in the float parades which illuminate the downtown area. It is said that long ago people used to make bottomless floats and parade alongside them to welcome back the young men returning from the kite battles, and it is thought that the float parades have their origins in this tradition. Since then it has become common for children playing flutes and drums to ride on the floats which have become increasingly elaborate, with many featuring spectacular carvings.



As night falls the floats move off to the accompaniment of *samisens* plucked by experienced festival veterans, flutes blown by children dressed in festival finery and drums beaten by children aboard the floats. The festival approaches its climax as the drums and flutes play out into the night.

○ Festival Plaza

During the festival a whole host of events are held at a range of venues in downtown Hamamatsu.

One of the most popular events is the parade of marching brass bands, a particularly appropriate event for Hamamatsu, which is known as the City of Music. The brass band parade along Kajimachi-dōri, Hamamatsu's main street, is well-established as one of the centrepieces of the festival.



A number of other events, enjoyed by residents and visitors alike, are held at ACT City and Zaza City.

A Beginner's Guide to Hamamatsu Festival

Kite Sizes

The kites used in the kite battles range in size from 2 jō to 10 jō. The optimum kite size is considered to be between 4 jō and 6 jō.

1 jō is equivalent to 1.25m², or 12 sheets of traditional Japanese *mino* paper. 4 jō is equal to 2.4m² (48 sheets), 6 jō to 2.9m² (72 sheets) and 10 jō to 3.64m² (120 sheets).



Tools

■ Drums



Neighbourhood teams use drums to give many different signals e.g. to set the rhythm to which the men pull the kite-lines, but they are used primarily as a means of cheering on those flying the kites.

■ Bugles



The kite fliers change their rhythm according to the sounds of the bugles, which also serve to spur them on.

■ Itowaku



The *itowaku* is a large reel used to wind in the thick kite-lines needed to fly the large kites.

■ Tegi



This is a pulley-like tool used to wind in the main kite-line. It is needed because the kite-lines become hot due to friction during the battles.

Ohayashi

The *ohayashi* (music performed by bands of children aboard the floats) is another unique feature of the festival. Unlike the music at most regional festivals, the *ohayashi* performed at the Hamamatsu Festival is the same as that performed in kabuki (traditional Japanese theatre). Bands from different neighbourhoods often perform music traditionally used to accompany kabuki or Japanese dance performances.



Neri

The *neri* is a parade in which the leading person carries the neighbourhood flag, followed by sometimes dozens of lantern bearers. The spirited parades advance to the rousing call of the bugles, the beat of the drums and the constant cry of "Oicho, oicho" until they reach fever pitch, with the various *neri* jostling and pushing as they wind themselves around each other to form a swirling frenzy of festive excitement.



Hamamatsu Festival Pavilion

Experience the passion and excitement of the Hamamatsu Festival at this pavilion, where you can learn all you need to know about the Hamamatsu Festival.

- ◆ Opening Hours : 9:00 ~ 16:30
- ◆ Closed : End-of-year holidays
- ◆ Admission fee : Adult 400 yen
- ◆ Address : 1313 Nakatajima-cho, Minami-ku, Hamamatsu-city
- ◆ Tel. & Fax : 053-441-6211



Hamamatsu Tourist Information Center

This information counter provides information on tourism in Hamamatsu and Western Shizuoka prefecture. There are English-speaking staff on hand at the Information Center, which also arranges tours led by volunteer guides.

- ◆ Opening Hours : 9:00 ~ 19:00
- ◆ Address : 265-16 Sunayama-cho, Naka-ku, Hamamatsu-city
(Inside JR Hamamatsu Station)
- ◆ Tel. : 053-452-1634 ◆ Fax : 053-413-5920
- ◆ URL : <http://hamamatsu-daisuki.net>



♪ HAMAMATSU CITY ♪

Hamamatsu is located roughly halfway between Tokyo and Osaka. The city enjoys an abundance of picturesque landscapes with the rolling Akaishi Mountains in the north, Enshu Coast and Nakatajima Sand Dunes in the south,



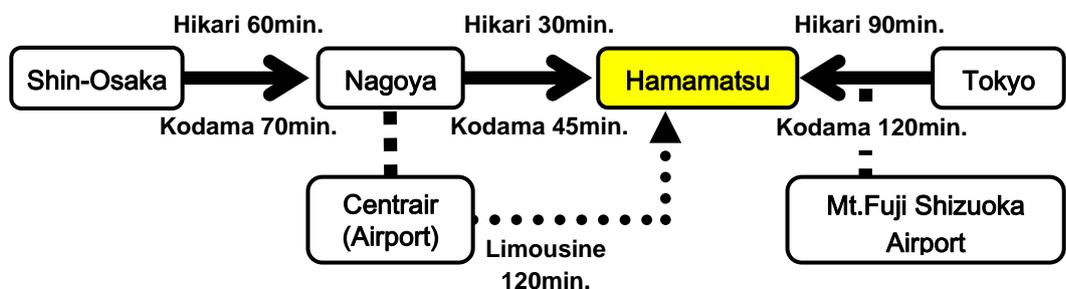
Tenryu River in the east, and Lake Hamana spreading out to the west. The climate is relatively mild with the average winter temperature at around 6°C. Although snowfall is seldom seen, dry, seasonal north-west winds make it feel colder than the actual temperature.



The city has a population of 822,000, including many foreign residents. The main industries are musical instrument and motorcycle manufacturing, as well as flower and vegetable farming.

Access

●JR Tokaido Shinkansen & Airport Limousine Bus



●Expressway

