

C O L U M N

**The Hakata Machiya Folk Museum:
A glimpse into the life and culture of Hakata**

The people of Hakata are known for their open and unique personalities, and over the years have preserved and treasured the Hakata Gion Yamakasa and other festivals and traditions. At the Hakata Machiya Folk Museum you will find pre-War Hakata merchant homes and other buildings, relocated here to give you a look into the daily lives and traditional culture of "Old Hakata."



Why does the *oiyama* race begin at 4:59?

This climax of the Hakata Gion Yamakasa is the *oiyama* race on July 15th. But why does the first float start out at 4:59 in the morning? The time has been adjusted to take into account the one minute needed to sing the *Hakata iwaiuta* before starting at 5:00.

❖ **Information**

Hakata Gion Yamakasa Promotion Association

● Hakata Gion Yamakasa Promotion Association
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Tourist information

● Hakata Station Information Center 092-431-3003
● Tourist Information Plaza Tenjin 092-751-6904
● Fukuoka Convention and Visitors Bureau
..... 092-733-5050 <http://www.welcome-fukuoka.or.jp/>
● Fukuoka City Information Plaza 092-733-5333
<http://www.city.fukuoka.jp/johoplaza/index.htm>

Transportation information

Subway Subway Telephone Center 092-734-7800
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Trains and route buses Nishitetsu Train and Bus Customer Center
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Showa Bus: Showa Bus Information Center
092-322-2561 <http://www.showa-bus.jp/>

JR JR Sanyo Shinkansen: West Japan Railway
0570-00-2486
<http://www.westjr.co.jp/english/global.html>

Local trains and Kyushu Shinkansen:
Kyushu Railway 092-471-8111
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Profile of cover artist
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- Career
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1980
Received the Hakata-Chonin Culture Award.
1981
Received the 26th Shogakukan Manga Award.
April 1, 2003
Appointed director of the Hakata Machiya Folk Museum.
June, 2004
Appointed director of the Hakata-Chonin Culture Association.
- Works include
"Hakata-ko Junjo"
"Manga Nihon no Koten: Genji Monogatari"
"Hashiranka"

Packed with great tourist information about Fukuoka City!

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Published by **Fukuoka City Tourism Promotion Section**
Fukuoka Convention & Visitors Bureau
With the corporation of Kyushu District Transport Bureau

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Learn all about

The Hakata Gion Yamakasa Festival



Massive Floats Race through the Streets at Dawn: The Traditional Hakata Gion Yamakasa Still Excites the People of Fukuoka

The Hakata Gion Yamakasa, carrying on a tradition of over 760 years, is a rite of the Kushida Shrine. Today, it is well-known throughout Japan.

Huge decorated floats, each weighing about a ton, are carried by teams of 30 men or less and pushed from behind through the city into the frenzied *kakiyama* race. The climax of the Yamakasa, the *oiyama* race, fills the entire city with excitement.

The Yamakasa traces its roots back to 1241, when a Buddhist monk named Shoichi Kokushi, the founder of Jotenji Temple here in Hakata (the "old town" of Fukuoka), is said to have been carried through the town on a shelf for offerings, sprinkling holy water as he went to cure an epidemic.

Each of the seven boroughs of the Hakata district of Fukuoka City, called *nagare*, makes its own float and races it. These *nagare* originally formed the local government for each borough, and today are responsible for operating the Yamakasa. They were created in 1587 by Hideyoshi Toyotomi as part of a zoning plan. Over the centuries, the economic muscle of the Hakata merchants and strong local government supported the development of the Yamakasa into the grand festival it is today.

The Yamakasa floats are thought to have moved through the streets at a leisurely pace back then. The time competition of the *oiyama* race did not appear until 1687: instilling new excitement into the festivities.

Apparently there was some trouble concerning a young woman from the Doi *nagare* who married into the Ebisu *nagare*, and that summer the floats from the two *nagare* engaged in a fierce competition as they passed each other again and again. This is said to be the origin of the *oiyama*, which can be translated as "floats passing each other."

The men in the *kakiyama* originally were close to naked, wearing only the *shimekomi* or *fundoshi* loincloth, but with the introduction of Western culture in the Meiji era the government forbade the practice for various reasons, possibly thinking it looked uncivilized to expose one's buttocks. Yamakasa organizers decided that it would be sufficient to don *happi* coats to hide their buttocks, resulting in the garb used today.

It was at about this time that the *kazariyama* (decorated float) and *kakiyama* were separated from each other. Previously the floats raced in the *kakiyama* were quite tall, but as electric power cables began to appear it became impossible for tall floats to move through the streets. The tall floats were relegated to merely decorative functions as *kazariyama*, and much lower floats were built for the races.

The Yamakasa has continued to carry on long-established traditions while evolving to meet the changing era, and it remains a vital festival even today.

History of Yamakasa



Major events in the Hakata Gion Yamakasa

July 1 to July 15



July 1

Kazariyama decorated floats put on display

Venue See map

In addition to the decorated float on display at Kushida Shrine throughout the year, huge decorated floats are also exhibited at several sites throughout the city.

Toban-cho oshioi-tori

Venue See map

The men of the *cho* (district) responsible for supervising each *nagare*, purify themselves in this ceremony. After praying for safety during the Yamakasa, they carry home *oshoi*, or purified sand.

July 9

Oshioi-tori

Venue See map

Time Beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Along with the men who will actually carry the float, about a thousand people ranging from infants to the elderly run to Hakozaikihama beach in groups by their *nagare*, performing this ceremony of purification and carrying home purified sand.



July 10

Nagaregaki

Each *nagare* carries its float through its own area in a warming-up exercise.

July 11

Asayama (early morning)

Also called the *sbugiyama*, this race is performed from 5:00 to 6:00 in the morning. Honored elderly residents and children who will carry the huge floats in the future are allowed to climb onto the float, as *daiagari*, although this is forbidden during the official race.

Ta-nagaregaki (evening)

The float is carried to the *nagare* borough boundary, and neighboring teams pay their respects to each other.

July 12

Oiyama narashi

Venue See map Time Beginning at 3:59 p.m.

Performed as practice for the major *oiyama* race on the 15th, this is a race over a shorter course of only four kilometers.

July 13

Shudan yamamise

Venue See map Time Beginning at 3:30 p.m.

The floats are carried over a 1.2-kilometer course, from the Gofukumachi intersection to City Hall in Tenjin, Chuo Ward. It is traditional for the mayor and other well-known figures to serve as *daiagari*.

July 14

Nagaregaki

Identical to the *nagaregaki* held on the 10th, the float is again paraded throughout the *nagare* borough. This is used for the final adjustments before the all-important *oiyama* race the following day.

July 15

Oiyama

Venue See map Time Beginning at 4:59 a.m.

The first float leaves at 4:59 in the morning to the beat of a huge drum. After the *Hakata iwaiuta* is sung under the *seidobata* flag at Kushida Shrine, the float bursts from the shrine grounds onto the street. The other six floats follow at 5-minute intervals, vying with each other for the best time over the full course, which is about five kilometers long.



昇山

KAKIYAMA

1 Bobana

The ends of the six carrying poles are called *bobana*, the direct translation being "pole noses." The *hanadori*, who actually steers the Yamakasa float, pushes and pulls the *hananawa* rope attached to these poles to control the direction of travel.

2 Hidarimaki

After the entire Yamakasa course has been completed and the float disassembled, the decorative ropes (*nawakazari*) are prized as protective charms. When the floats are on display these ropes are brown and white, but they are replaced by blue and white "racing ropes" for the actual *kakiyama* competition.

3 Hananawa

These bundles of roughly-woven rope are attached to the *bobana*, and pulled or pushed as needed to steer the float.

4 Hiucbi

The log structure used to reinforce the four float legs.

Kakiyama

These floats weigh about one ton apiece, and are carried by about 30 men through the city streets at dawn. As the main players in the festival, the *kakiyama* are built on a platform of six carrying poles, and assembled with tightly-bound hemp rope but not a single nail.

5 Henoji

The horizontal logs arched to reinforce the four float legs. They are high in the center, protecting the men from being crushed even if they fall and the float passes over them.

6 Shaguma

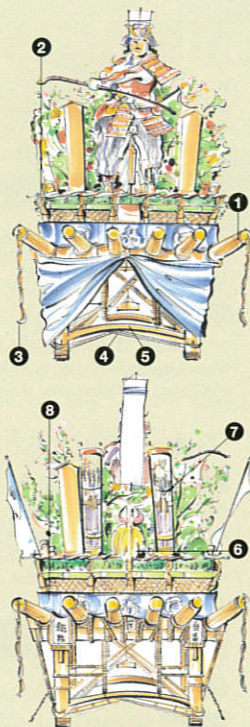
The word *shaguma* actually means "red bear," and derives from the use of red-dyed polar bear pelts used by Zen monks. In the Yamakasa normally white decorations are used on the rear of the float. These decorations are extremely expensive today.

7 Daikyu

The *Daikyu* mounted on both sides of the *shaguma*, is a protective talisman against evil.

8 Daimaku

This *maku*, or hanging cloth, is decorated with the sacred crests of the Giongu and Kushida Shrine. It is red when the float is at rest, but replaced with a blue one for the race.



男衆

OTOKOSHU

9 Mizu happi

The uniform, a *happi* coat worn by the men carrying the Yamakasa. Each *nagare* or *cho* (district) has its own design.

10 Omamorisama

This protective charm is received from Kushida Shrine when money is offered there in prayer. It is usually sewn into the sashes of the men to protect them.

11 Hachimaki and tenogoi

The *hachimaki*, or headband, is actually the same hand towel as draped around the neck, called *tenogoi*. There are seven types of *tenogoi*, the most common of which is the red, and has been used for over a century. Only the young leaders of each team are allowed to wear these red *tenogoi*, indicating that they have been selected by their *cho*. Various other roles are indicated by combinations of other colors (white, blue, brown and green, for example) and patterns.

12 Haramaki

This long cloth is wrapped around the abdomen for protection.

Otokosbu

The men participating in the Yakamasa are collectively referred to as the *otokosbu*. Dressed in their *sbimekomi* and *mizu happi* coats, they cut a dashing figure on the streets of Hakata.

13 Kakinawa

About 120 cm in length, the *kakinawa*, or "carrying rope" is essential in moving the float. These ropes are hooked around the poles by the men carrying the float, providing a better grip and helping prevent their shoulders from slipping. When not in use they are tucked into the back of the *sbimekomi* loincloth.

14 Sbimekomi

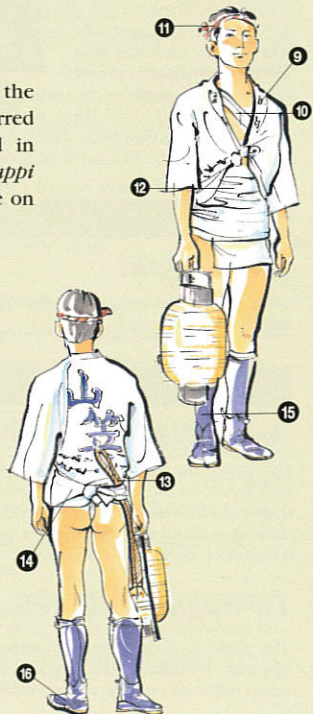
Essentially identical to the loincloth used by sumo wrestlers, it is about three meters in length. It is usually only found in white and dark blue.

15 Kyaban

The *kyaban* protect the shins of the men, but they also help keep insects away, and make the runners look smarter by dressing up their legs.

16 Jikatabi

The *tabi* is the traditional Japanese toe-sock. These *jikatabi* have rubber soles, with one large pocket for the big toe, and another for the other toes. They are normally used for construction work, but also commonly found in festivals.



用語集

GLOSSARY

Dictionary of the Yamakasa

The Yakamasa is full of special words for events and objects, and this dictionary of the Yamakasa will help you further enjoy the festival.



Ikiomizu

Ikiomizu is water splashed over across the path the floats will race down. Not only does it help cool off the men carrying the floats and boost their morale, it also helps the floats move by wetting the road surface. The water also tightens the hemp ropes holding the Yamakasa float together.



Osshoi

The special chant of the Yamakasa is "*Osshoi, osshoi!*" When splashing *ikiomizu* water on the floats and men, this usually becomes shorter and faster, being pronounced "*Oissa, oissa!*"

Kushidairi

The *oiyama* is a race against time, fought out over a 5-kilometer course that begins here at Kushida Shrine. The *kushida-iri* is the part of this beginning from the *yamadome* starting point, racing around the *seidobata* flag, and into the sacred shrine ground. It is only about 112 meters in length, but the men pour their heart and soul into the 30-second battle. The first float starts out at 4:59 in the morning on July 15.

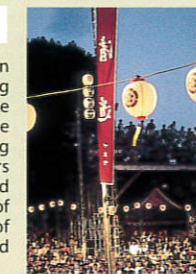


Sashiyama

Floats with odd numbers are called *sashiyama*, and have the names of the *Kushidagyu*, *Giongu* and *Dajjingu* with Kushida Shrine displayed in sacred frames, called *shingaku*, on top. The dolls on the floats are bold and colorful, usually of samurai.

Seidobata

When the Yamakasa floats return to Kushida Shrine, this long flag marks the place where they make their turn into the *seido*, the approach to the Shrine. The flag is scarlet, with white characters reading "*seido*." They are erected in three places: on the grounds of Kushida Shrine, and in front of the gates of Tochoji Temple and Jotenji Temple.



Daiagari

The *daiagari* sit on top of the floats, urging the men carrying the float onto even greater effort. There are three on the front and three on the rear of each Yamakasa float. Demanding considerable experience and good balance, being selected as a *daiagari* is considered a great honor.

Doyama

The floats with even numbers are called *doyama*, and sport models of castles on top, called *odo* or *yakata*. Their decorations are very beautiful.

Naorai

After the *kakiyama* race is over, this ritual with Japanese rice wine is held to celebrate the day's results and the injury-free conclusion of the event. Cheery gatherings are held at the local Yamakasa organizing offices throughout the area, helping all the participants realize a tighter sense of camaraderie.

Hakataiwaiuta

An *iwaiuta* is a celebratory song. Also called *iwaimedeta*, it is often sung on joyous occasions in Hakata. At the Yamakasa, it is sung when the very first float in the *oiyama* comes round the *seido* turn.

Hakataiteippon

This is a type of handclapping, or *tejime*, performed to a certain rhythm when something is decided or completed. It indicates the agreement of everyone there. Hakata has its own special rhythm, which is used in all sorts of gatherings, but it is often used in the Yamakasa to signify agreement between the parties.

Bo-arai

Literally, "washing the poles." This is the first step in making the float, and is usually performed on an auspicious day in mid June. The six support poles, which have been stored at Kushida Shrine for a year, are washed and purified in the waters of Hakata Bay.

Yamagoya

During the Yamakasa, the *yamagoya* is used to store the floats used for racing or display. Normally this storehouse is constructed in the *cho* (district) responsible for the task that year. The Yamakasa floats are positioned facing either Kushida Shrine or east.



Yamakasa Map

The Hakata Gion Yamakasa is a succession of events over a 15-day period, held centered on Kushida Shrine. The sites and courses of each event, such as the course of the key *oiyama* race, constitute a treasure house of Hakata history.



Legend

- Oiyama and Oiyama narashi courses
- Shudan yamamise route
- Kazariyama decorated floats

Oiyama (begins at 4:59, July 15)

Key sightseeing points on the course

- Doi-dori Avenue** (Reisen Park – former Hakata Elementary School)
The starting point. All the *nagare* gather here in grand splendor. The many floats gather here between 2:00 and 2:30 on the afternoon of the 12th for the *oiyama narashi* practice race, and between 1:30 and 2:00 on the morning of the 15th for the *oiyama* race.
- Spectator stands** (Kushida Shrine approach)
It is extremely difficult to obtain seating tickets, but if you are lucky enough you can enjoy the thrill of the *Kushida-iri* close at hand.
- Kokutai-doro Avenue** (Mangyoji Temple)
After the *Kushida-iri*, most floats switch off their riders (*daiagari*) at Mangyoji Temple.
- Taihaku-dori Avenue** (Tochoji Temple approach)
The *daiagari* for each *nagare* pay their respects to the monks of Tochoji Temple, who come to the entranceway to greet them.



- Old Higashi-machi Suji Road**
The floats race around the *seido* (approach) of Jotenji Temple, where there is a monument marking the birthplace of the Hakata Gion Yamakasa, and down the narrow road. Spectators standing here should take care to stay out of the way of the men carrying the float, and be prepared to be drenched with *ikiotimizu*.
- Taihaku-dori Avenue** (Hakata Elementary School – Okunodo bus stop)
The wide street provides an excellent place to watch without getting drenched.
- Kokutai-doro Avenue** (Jotenji Temple – Mangyoji Temple)
If you move along this street in time with the race, you will be able to see the floats three times: on the old Higashi-machi Suji Road, on Taihaku-dori Avenue and on the old Nishi-machi Suji Road.
- Okunodo bus stop – Old Nishi-machi Suji Road** (nicknamed "Gondo-dori Avenue")
The floats leave spacious Taihaku-dori Avenue for these narrow streets, and must be controlled carefully. An excellent place to judge the skill of the carriers.
- Oiyama Goal** (Susaki-machi)
After the float turns the last corner and the finish line comes into view, the men carrying it squeeze out their last spurts of energy. After the race, they are exhausted but filled with a sense of fulfillment and excitement that exhilarates spectators as well.

The arrangement of the nagare

The *nagare* is a borough, and is the basic organization for the management of the Yamakasa. Each *nagare* is composed of a number of geographical districts, called *cho*, and each *nagare* builds and races its own Yamakasa float. There are currently seven *nagare*, each with its own methods and traditions.

- Chiyo nagare**: Another *nagare* formed after World War II, the Chiyo *nagare* has a large number of members. It strongly believes in introducing the Yamakasa to youth, hosting a child Yamakasa and other activities.
- Ebisu nagare**: One of the original seven, the Ebisu *nagare* has been suffering from a decline in membership during recent years, but still boasts a large number of old hands.
- Doi nagare**: Another of the original seven *nagare*, consisting of ten *cho* located along Doi-dori Avenue, right in front of Kushida Shrine. They wear their own smart designs for *happi* coats, with one for *toban-cho* activities and a different one for racing.
- Daikoku nagare**: Consisting of 12 *cho* along the right bank of the Hakata River, it carries on traditions from the old *nagare* and still practices them firmly.
- Higashi nagare**: Formed through the merger of a number of *nagare* in 1966, around the core of the old Higashi-machi *nagare*. Covers the area on the east side of Taihaku-dori Avenue, north from JR Hakata Station.
- Nakasu nagare**: Created after World War II, this *nagare* includes a large number of members who moved to Fukuoka instead of being born here.
- Nishi nagare**: Established through the merger of a number of *nagare* in 1966. While long-standing traditions are still carefully observed, such as respect for elders and Yamakasa officials, it is also creating new activities such as study groups for younger members.

Map of Hakata's cho and nagare

- Nakasu nagare
- Daikoku nagare
- Doi nagare
- Nishi nagare
- Higashi nagare
- Ebisu nagare
- Chiyo nagare

