

# Textile Thanksgiving — The Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival



Photo: PKYTA

The Tanabata legend came from the Milky Way Galaxy that hangs in the summer sky.

In Japan, the Tanabata festival, which originated as a star festival, is held around the country during summer. The Textile Thanksgiving — Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival held in the city of Ichinomiya in Aichi Prefecture is especially popular. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

Since ancient times, a star festival called Tanabata Matsuri has been celebrated in Japan, based on a legend from ancient China that tells of the stars *Kengyusei* (Altair in the constellation Alpha Aquila) and *Shokujosei* (Vega in the constellation Alpha Lyra), which are on opposite sides of the Milky Way and only meet once a year, on the evening of the 7th day of the 7th month of the Japanese Lunisolar Calendar. In Japan, Altair is called Hikoboshi and Vega is called Orihime.

According to the legend, Hikoboshi, a heavenly cowherd, and Orihime, a heavenly weaver, fell in love and then neglected their respective jobs. Since the Orihime stopped weaving, the loom filled up with dust, and the heavens no longer received new fabrics.

This angered the heavenly emperor Tentei, who separated the two lovers and only allowed them to cross the Milky Way and meet once a year, on the night of July 7. Based on this legend, in Japan on July 7 (Tanabata day), the day when the two stars meet, the cus-



The magnificent Tanabata decorations at Masumida Shrine are a highlight of the festival.



One of Japan's most famous Tanabata festivals

Photo: Ichinomiya Tanabata Matsuri Promotion Council

tom of people praying to the stars by hanging strips of paper on bamboo trees or bamboo grasses to pray for their children's academic and artistic improvement is said to have caught on, and developed into the Tanabata festival.

Even today, a variety of Tanabata festivals are held in summer throughout Japan. One of the most famous ones, which is very closely associated with Orihime, is the Textile Thanksgiving – Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival held in the city of Ichinomiya in Aichi Prefecture.

We asked a person at the Ichinomiya Tanabata Matsuri Promotion Council Secretariat about the history of the festival.

“The Textile Thanksgiving – Ichinomiya Tanabata Festival began about 70 years ago, in 1956, in honor of Orihime, who was in charge of weaving in heaven. It is said that the textile industry in the region grew thanks to the blessing of the goddess of textiles, the mother goddess of the deity enshrined at Masumida Shrine in Ichinomiya. At first, the festival was held mainly at shrines, but today it also includes dance contests, Bon Odori dancing, and other events for both children and adults. However, the traditional Onzohoken Daigyoretsu parade, a custom since the beginning of the festival, continues to be held today.”

Onzohoken Daigyoretsu (Grand Procession of Woolen Offerings) is a 120-meter procession of 120 people dressed in an array of traditional costumes, including Shinto priests and warriors, to thank the

god of textiles and to dedicate woolen items to the shrine. At this event, you can see many different kinds of traditional Japanese garment. Highlights including parades such as the Wasshoi Ichinomiya, where people dance along the route in freely choreographed

and costumed with an original theme song accompaniment, as well as the Tanabata decorations that lavishly and colorfully decorate the venues. The event drew about 715,000 visitors last year (2022).

According to the secretariat, “This year 2023, the festival held from July 27 to July 30, and one event that was so popular is the unique cosplay parade, in which people marched through the shopping district dressed as manga and anime characters. The general public was welcome to participate in the cosplay. One very popular activity for onlookers was to enjoy taking photos and interacting with their favorite cosplayers.” In addition to the

Cosplay Parade, people were also free to join in the Bon Odori dancing. If you have a chance, we recommend you enjoy not only seeing the gorgeous Tanabata decorations, but also experience a Japanese Tanabata Festival firsthand. 📷



Above: Onzohoken Daigyoretsu, a traditional procession that has been held since the beginning of the festival.

Below: The Cosplay Parade — a festival highlight

1. Before it adopted the solar calendar, Japan used a lunisolar calendar, which was based on the phases of the moon along with the movement of the sun, which indicates the seasons. However, Japan's lunisolar calendar was created using merely one of many calendar calculation methods that have been used throughout history. The so-called Tenpo calendar that was in use just before the change to the solar calendar is generally referred to as the Japanese Lunar Calendar.
2. According to shrine legend, Masumida Shrine was established in the 33rd year of Emperor Jinmu (circa 630 B.C.). Its deity is AmenoHoakari-no-mikoto and its mother goddess is Yorozuhatatoyo Akitsushihime-no-mikoto.