

Danjiri Matsuri

The Danjiri Matsuri, (float festival) is said to have its origin in the “Inari Matsuri” held in the 16th year of the Genroku era(1703). Created by the Lord of Kishiwada Castle to pray for an abundant harvest, the festival, from its very beginning, enjoyed tremendous local support.

The Danjiri Matsuri quickly grew in significance for the people of Kishiwada. Gates normally barring townspeople from entering the castle grounds were thrown open on festival days. Feudal Lords of Kishiwada looked on as each Danjiri was drawn in, and each Danjiri pulling team staged various, high-spirited performances. In those days, “Kenka Matsuri” (The Fighting Festival) of Kishiwada, became the festival’s unofficial name as the excitement turned to competition, and Danjiri teams raced and sometimes collided, and crashed.

With 300 years of tradition and all of Kishiwada behind it, the Kishiwada Danjiri Matsuri is proudly held in September each year. 34 Danjiri teams bring their sacred float on a “recklessly” swift tour of this castle town in a race of strength, endurance, and celebration.

Danjiri Terms

Hiki-dashi (Opening pull)

The opening of the Danjiri Matsuri with high spirits and speed. Danjiris in tow, all 34 Danjiri teams begin a mad dash around the streets of Kishiwada at the sound of the siren at 6:00 am.

Yari-mawashi (Corner turning)

Working both front and rear levers in unison, Danjiri teams literally “skid” their heavy Danjiris around each street corner. Done quickly to the beat of drums and shouts of the pulling team, corner turning is one of the most dramatic elements of the festival.

Daiku-gata (Carpenters)

The privilege and risk of dancing upon the upper roof of each Danjiri belong to Kishiwada’s local carpenters. The most visible member of the Danjiri team, each daiku-gata creates his own style of performance. “Hikoki-nori”, (the Airplane dance) performed with arms spread wide and standing on one foot, is particularly famous.

Horimono (Wood carvings)

Each of the massive Danjiris is adorned with a number of intricate wood carvings. The carvings depict celebrated battles and records of war in ancient Japan.

Miya-iri (Going to worship at the shrine)

In the morning on the second day, 34 Danjiris divide into three groups and go to worship at the three major Shinto shrines in Kishiwada.

Hi-iri Ei-kou (Parade of lantern-lit Danjiris)

In the evenings, brilliant sails of red lanterns are affixed to each of the Danjiris, and they begin a slow procession along the main parade route. As the pace becomes leisurely, the bright lanterns and costumes, the rhythmic drums and chants, blend with the sounds and smells of the night vendors to produce a wonderfully different experience- an evening matsuri.

Pulling schedule

1st day

6:00 - 7:30	Hiki-dashi (Opening pull)
9:30 - 11:30	Parade
13:00 - 17:00	Parade
19:00 - 22:00	Parade of lantern-lit Danjiris

2nd day

9:00 - 12:30	Miya-iri (Going to worship at the shrine)
13:00 - 17:00	Parade
19:00 - 22:00	Parade of lantern-lit Danjiris

The citizens of Kishiwada are proud to hail the Danjiri Matsuri of Kishiwada as the greatest of its kind in Japan. Townspeople, from the youngest to the oldest, take part in the festival with duties assigned to them according to age, and with each Danjiri team organized and managed by a particular “Cho”, (an area within the community covering a certain number of blocks). Few examples of traditional cultural festivals of this size and of this degree of organized participation exist in Japan today.

Each Danjiri is hand-made, entirely of zelkova wood. It weighs about 4 tons, is 3.8 meters high, 4 meters long and 2.5 meters wide. The draw-rope is from 100 to 200 meters in length and is pulled by as many as 500 to 1000 people.

- ① Oo-yane (upper roof)
- ② Ko-yane (lower roof)
- ③ Mae-teko (front lever)
- ④ Ushiro-teko (rear lever)
- ⑤ Daiku-gata (carpenters)

