

Chiba Prefecture Designated Intangible Folk-Cultural Property

Designated on March 30, 2004

Successor: Seven-Year Festival Preservation Society

## Shimosa Miyama Seven-Year Festival

One of the Shimosa region's leading festivals, this event is a collective festival that brings together nine shrines from the cities of Funabashi, Chiba, Narashino and Yachiyo. It is held in the Year of the Ox and the Year of the Sheep every six years in two parts: a small festival in September and a large one in November. As this cycle is seven years based on East Asian age reckoning, the event is called the Seven-Year Festival.

There are multiple theories behind the origin of the festival; however, the leading one is that it originates from a tradition of praying for and giving thanks to easy childbirth that is associated with Yasutane Makuwari from the House of Chiba in the Muromachi period (1336-1573).

The small festival is also referred to the "yudate" festival based on the Shinto ritual of the same name that was used to forecast the day of the large festival. It is held solely at Ninomiya-jinja Shrine. There, the likes of portable shrines and floats are marched through the town of Miyama throughout the day.

On the first day of the large festival, a "purification ceremony" is held in which participants venture to the former Saginuma Coast to purify their bodies in preparation for the next day. On the second day, a large festival to give thanks for easy childbirth is held in which portable shrines from all participating shrines come together at Kamisoroiba (7 Miyama, Funabashi City). From there, they progress along a road called Nanamagari as they head for then enter Ninomiya-jinja Shrine. Held on the third day of the event is the "isode festival," a ritual conducted on the former Makuhari Coast in Chiba City by four shrines to pray for easy childbirth. After this ritual, a "farewell ceremony" conducted with portable shrines from Ninomiya-jinja Shrine and Koyasu-jinja Shrine is held. On the way back from the ceremony, a ritual is conducted in which just the portable shrine from Ninomiya-jinja Shrine makes a stop at "Hinokuchidai" in Saginuma, Narashino City. This ritual is said to signal the conclusion of the Seven-Year Festival.

Following this ritual, after the portable shrine from Ninomiya-jinja Shrine is marched through Fujisaki, Narashino City and Takinoi, Funabashi City (as part of its sacred transfer back to its place of enshrinement), it is returned to Ninomiya-jinja Shrine.