

33 float festivals from Japan now on UNESCO's heritage listing

- 1) UNESCO has collectively grouped 33 traditional festivals from across Japan for registration on its Intangible Cultural Heritage list.
- 2) The listing means that the festivals, which are held in 18 prefectures and involve parades using floats, feature as a single entry.
- 3) The decision on the “Yama, Hoko, Yatai, float festivals in Japan” was made by the UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee, which consists of 24 countries, during a meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Yama and hoko refer to decorations installed on or pulled with yatai (floats).
- 4) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization announced its decision on Nov. 30, which, because of the time difference, reached Japan on Dec. 1.
- 5) Festivals among the 33 getting listing include Kakunodate-matsuri no Yama-gyoji in Semboku, Akita Prefecture; Chichibu-matsuri no Yatai-gyoji to Kagura in Chichibu, Saitama Prefecture; Takayama-matsuri no Yatai-gyoji in Takayama, Gifu Prefecture; Nagahama Hikiyama-matsuri no Hikiyama-gyoji in Nagahama, Shiga Prefecture; and Hakata Gion Yamakasa-gyoji in Fukuoka.
- 6) In late October, UNESCO’s screening committee, consisting of experts and nongovernmental organizations, recommended the 33 float festivals for collective inclusion in the Intangible Cultural Heritage list.
- 7) All of the festivals feature elaborate float decorations created by local residents in hopes their communities will be spared natural disasters and other calamities and able to live out their lives in peace.
- 8) Residents of the municipalities that preserve the festival traditions were overjoyed by UNESCO's decision.
- 9) In Chichibu, Mayor Kuniyasu Kuki and other local people celebrated the news around 2:20 a.m. by popping a decorative “kusudama” paper ball, a practice often conducted on congratulatory occasions.
- 10) The Chichibu-matsuri festival held annually at Chichibujinja shrine dates back more than 300 years to the Edo Period. Two decorative halberds and four floats are pulled around the city amid festival music.
- 11) This year, the Chichibu-matsuri will start on Dec. 2 and reach its climax the following day. It is expected that 300,000 or so people will be there for the finale.
- 12) “We want to show the world the charms of Chichibu that we inherited from our ancestors without interruption,” said Mayor Kuki.
- 13) “We have obtained a world-class brand,” said Minoru Sonoda, chief priest of Chichibujinja shrine.
- 14) So far, UNESCO has registered more than 300 intangible cultural heritages around the world, of which about 20 are Japanese. They include Kabuki theater, Nogaku theater, washi (Japanese traditional hand-made paper) and washoku (traditional Japanese cuisine).【Dec 1,2016/The Asahi Shimbun】

- 1) collectively 集合的に
group 一団にする、分類する
registration 登録
Intangible Cultural Heritage 無形文化遺産
- 2) floats 山車(だし)
feature 呼び物にする、特徴づける
- 3) Intergovernmental Committee 政府間委員会
consist of ~から成る
refer to ~に言及する
- 4) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization = UNESCO (国際連合教育科学文化機関)
- 6) screening 選考
inclusion 包含すること
- 7) elaborate 手の込んだ、精巧な
spare のがれさせる
natural disaster 天災
calamity 大災害
- 8) municipality 地方自治体
preserve 保存する
overjoy 大喜びさせる
- 9) congratulatory 祝賀の
occasion 場合、行事、式典
- 10) halberd 斧槍(15.16世紀に用いられた斧・槍兼用の武器)
- 12) inherit 継承する
ancestor 先祖、祖先
without interruption 間断なく
- 13) obtain 獲得する
chief priest of shrine 宮司

☆Ice breaker for active discussion

1. Have you ever participated in any of the festivals in the article? Please share your experience.
2. What is the significance of adding those festivals to UNESCO list?
3. Which other occasions can we see "kusudama" popping?
4. Among the washoku, what's your top 3 favorite? Which one can you prepare yourself?
5. Make sentences using the following words: collectively, refer to, consists of, screening, preserve, occasion and shrine.



↑Magnificent floats feature in the Chichibu-matsuri festival held in Chichibu, Saitama Prefecture. This photo was taken Dec. 3, 2015. Asahi Shimbun file photo)