

MoonLight

Saidai-ji Eyo Hadaka

Saidai-ji Eyo Hadaka Matsuri, also known as the Naked Man Festival, is a unique and captivating event deeply rooted in Japanese culture and history. Held annually on the third Saturday of February at Saidai-ji Temple in Okayama City, this centuries-old tradition attracts thousands of participants and spectators from all over Japan and beyond.



Originating in the Muromachi period (1336-1573), the festival is believed to have begun around the 16th century. Its exact origins are shrouded in legend, but it is thought to have emerged as a way to cleanse bad luck and misfortune from the previous year, as well as to pray for good fortune and prosperity in the year ahead.

One of the defining features of the festival is its distinctive attire, or rather lack thereof. Participants, predominantly male, don only a loincloth called "fundoshi" to symbolize purity and to emulate the practices of ascetic mountain monks. The ritualistic stripping down to minimal clothing represents a form of purification and a display of courage and resilience in the face of the harsh winter cold.



The main event of the festival kicks off around 10:00 PM when the lights in Saidai-ji Temple are extinguished, plunging the area into darkness. At this point, the atmosphere becomes electric with anticipation as participants eagerly await the signal to begin. With a thunderous shout of "Wasshoi! Wasshoi!" the festival officially commences, and thousands of nearly naked men surge forward into the temple grounds.

The objective of the festival is to obtain one of the sacred "Shingi" sticks, which are thrown into the crowd by priests from a designated platform. These sticks are believed to bring good luck and prosperity to those who possess them. However, with only two available, competition is fierce, and the struggle to seize a stick from the chaotic mass of bodies is intense.

The scene inside the temple is a spectacle of frenzied energy, with participants jostling and grappling with each other in a desperate bid to secure one of the coveted Shingi sticks. The struggle is not for the faint of heart, as the sheer force and determination of the crowd can be overwhelming. Despite the chaos, there is a sense of camaraderie among the participants, who share in the exhilaration and adrenaline of the moment.



As the tumult subsides and the Shingi sticks are distributed, the festival draws to a close, leaving behind a trail of exhausted but exhilarated participants. For many, the experience is not just a test of physical endurance, but a spiritual journey and a reaffirmation of tradition and community.

The Naked Man Festival continues to be celebrated to this day, serving as a poignant reminder of Japan's rich cultural heritage and the enduring spirit of its people. With its blend of ancient ritual and modern spectacle, it remains one of the most iconic and unforgettable events in the Japanese

calendar, drawing visitors from far and wide to experience its unique blend of tradition, adrenaline, and camaraderie.