**Shinto Festival**

**Shinto festivals - Matsuri**

Kanda Myojin shrine, Tokyo [**©**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/copyright.shtml)

The word *matsuri* can refer to any occasion for offering thanks and praise to a deity at a shrine. It comes from a word meaning 'to entertain' or 'to serve'. Matsuri is also used to refer to Shinto festivals.

Shinto festivals generally combine solemn rituals with joyful celebration, and these celebrations can include drunken and loutish behaviour. Some writers have found a religious meaning in the vulgar behaviour as a sort of sacred transgression.

To Western eyes the combination of extreme solemnity and vulgar revelry can seem irreverent, but the mix of very different moods is an important feature that may encapsulate the intimate relationship that Shinto has with the world as it really exists.

Festivals centre on particular kami, who are treated as the guests of honour at the event. The celebrations are very physical events, and may include processions, dramatic performances, sumo wrestling, and feasting. They are bright, colourful, and loud, aromatic with the smells of food, and involve much activity - these performance elements perhaps parallel in their own way the importance of aesthetic and sensual pleasingness in shrine worship.

The processions often feature a *mikoshi*, a 'divine palanquin', used to carry a kami (or an image of a kami). The mikoshi is often described as a portable altar or portable shrine.

The procession of the mikoshi is effectively a visit by the kami of the shrine to the local community that is devoted to them, and is thought to confer a blessing on that community.

Because Shinto originates in the agricultural prehistory of Japan, most of its festivals are tied to the farming seasons.