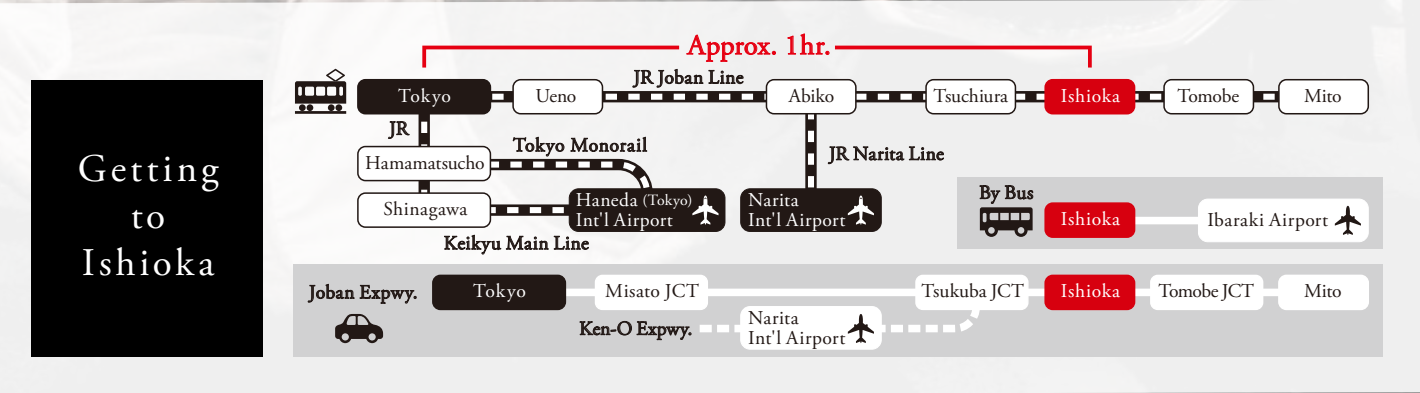


Ishioka is a center of rich Japanese culture, and it's just an hour away from Tokyo!



This little-known destination, rarely visited by overseas tourists, is just a short distance away!



Published by the Ishioka City Economic Department's Tourism Division (1-1-1 Ishioka, Ishioka, Ibaraki Prefecture)

Ishioka City, Ibaraki Prefecture

Just  
**One Hour**  
from  
Tokyo

Hitachi-no-kuni Sosha-gu  
Shrine Grand Annual Festival

# Ishioka Festival

An undiscovered part of Japan is  
just around the corner.





## Ishioka: A Town with 1,300 Years of History



About 1,300 years ago during the Nara Period, Ishioka was the capital of Hitachi Province (today's Ibaraki Prefecture) and served as the center of government and culture for the region. One of the official duties of the provincial governor was going to pray for peace and tranquility in the region at Hitachi-no-kuni Sosa-gu Shrine, a place where deities from throughout Japan were enshrined. From around the 16th century onward, people of the region began adding new traditions to this shrine visit ritual, and these traditions have accumulated and been passed down through the generations, resulting in today's Ishioka Festival.



Experience  
the Ishioka  
Festival



The Ishioka Festival is considered one of the Kanto region's three greatest festivals. Although numerous people attend each year, very few visitors from outside of Japan know about this event. Karlee, who was born in Canada and trained as a model in Tokyo's old-town district, commented, "The festival is just an hour away from Tokyo and provides an easy way to experience Japanese culture, so I hope that more tourists go and see it for themselves." We're proud to introduce the Ishioka Festival, which has moved Karlee in such a profound way.





## Overview of the Ishioka Festival

# A Two-thousand-person Procession Imbued with Local Tradition

This grand annual festival of the old Hitachi Province capital has developed and grown over the years, steadily acquiring new traditions since the 16th century or so. During the Edo Period's Enkyo Era (1744–1748), ritual sumo wrestling matches were added the festivities, and in the Meiji Period (1868–1912) wealthy merchants from the area began displaying festival floats throughout the town as part of the event. These efforts laid the foundations for today's Ishioka Festival. Every year, the Reisai annual festival rites are held on September 15, and then for three more days until Respect for the Aged Day (the third Sunday of September) the Jinkosai, Hoshukusai and Kankosai events are held. The 15 neighborhoods that make up Hitachi-no-kuni Sosha-gu Shrine's local member base take turns (rotating annually among the neighborhoods) building and operating a *kariden* (temporary shrine) facility in their area to welcome the deities. The ceremonial procession of roughly 2,000 individuals carrying *mikoshi* (portable shrines) alongside performers in dancing *shishi* lion costumes, accompanied by traditional *hayashi* music, is an impressive sight to behold.

## Reisai (Annual Festivities)

At 10 a.m. on September 15, a *kenpeishi* (messenger) from the Association of Shinto Shrines carries out the most important rites of the entire festival.

## Jinkosai

The most important *mikoshi* (portable shrine) is carried to the *kariden* (temporary shrine facilities) erected for the festival in the neighborhood responsible that year. This is accompanied by *dashi* (traditional festival floats) and *horojishi* (a type of lion dance costume with a structure being carried behind it by people underneath a cloth.), all of which are carried by a procession of roughly 2,000 people.

## Hoshukusai

Ritual sumo wrestling, sacred music and dance, and other events take place at Hitachi-no-kuni Sosha-gu Shrine, while the *dashi* and *horojishi* come together on Miyuki-dori Street.

## Kankosai

On this day, the *mikoshi* leave the *kariden* and return to the main shrine. The traditional *hayashi* music continues into the night, expressing despair at this parting of ways.



Members carrying the *horojishi* lion that will serve as a *tsuyubara* (procession leader) depart from Hitachi-no-kuni Sosha-gu Shrine



Hoshukusai ritual sumo matches have been held as part of the festival since the Edo Period (1603–1867).



## Observing Proper Shinto Shrine Etiquette

### Washing Hands

● Collect water in the ladle and wash (pour water over) your left hand first



● Pour water into your cupped left hand and use it to rinse out your mouth (do not swallow)



● Switch the ladle to your left hand and wash your right hand



● Wash your left hand again, orient the ladle vertically with the cup on top so water runs down the handle to cleanse it, then return the ladle to its original position



### Praying at the Shrine

● Stand up straight, then bow deeply from the waist two times



● Bring both hands together and clap two times



● Bow deeply from the waist one more time



## VISIT



### Hitachi-no-kuni Sosha-gu Shrine

2-8-1 Sosha, Ishioka, Ibaraki Prefecture  
20 min. walk from JR Ishioka Stn.  
[www.sosyagu.jp](http://www.sosyagu.jp)

MAP

number 1





Attractions of the Ishioka Festival

## The Awe-inspiring *Horojishi* Lion Dance —A Rare Sight Even in Japan

The lion dance (*shishi-mai*) is performed in regions throughout Japan, but Ishioka's lion dance uses *horojishi* lion costumes, each of which has a portable Shinto structure attached to its large head. This is an ultra-rare variant, seldom encountered elsewhere in Japan. The head alone on the larger *horojishi* measures 60 centimeters (2 feet) across and weigh 30 kilograms (66 pounds), and the most capable member from each participating neighborhood is assigned to don and carry it. Traditional *hayashi* music performers riding the structure on top play large and small taiko drums, the flute, and the *sho* handbell, while the *horojishi* dances and moves with the procession. The facial features, dancing style, and coloring of the canopy draped on the structure are different for each *horojishi*, making for a wide range of individualistic looks and styles. The soul-stirring *horojishi* lion dance is a must-see event that has become a symbol of Ishioka itself. Come over and see it in person!



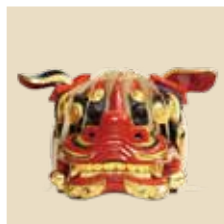
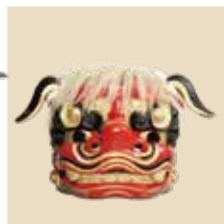
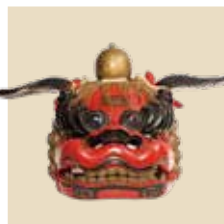
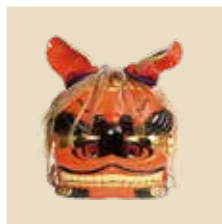
A total of 12 *dashi* festival floats and 32 *horojishi* lions wind their way through central Ishioka's streets



The three *Shishi* lions from Tomita-cho, who serve as *tsuyuharai* (procession leaders), are seen here performing the offertory Sasara. The Sasara is officially designated as an Ibaraki Prefecture Intangible Folk Cultural Property and an Ishioka City Important Tangible Folk Cultural Property.



The various neighborhoods' *horojishi* each have a unique face!



Make sure to go see the giant *shishi* lion head on Hitachi Fudoki-no-oka Hill—it's 14 meters (46 feet) tall!

Hitachi Fudoki-no-oka Hill

1646 Someya, Ishioka, Ibaraki Prefecture  
Open 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (Mar.–Oct.) /  
9 a.m.–4 p.m. (Nov.–Feb.), closed on Mon.

Go off the beaten track!



VISIT



During the festival, events can be seen on Ishioka's main streets

MAP number 2





Attractions of the Ishioka Festival

## Passing Down Traditions that Bring Ishioka Locals Together: *Dashi* Festival Floats and Ishioka Hayashi Music

In addition to the Ishioka Festival's *horojishi*, visitors can enjoy *dashi* traditional festival floats as well. Ishioka's *dashi*, known as Edo-style *dashi*, have no roofs and are two to three stories tall. Furthermore, each displays a large human figure standing two meters (6.6 feet) tall, with individual neighborhoods displaying different figures—these include Emperor Jinmu (Japan's first emperor), the 11th-century warrior Hachimantaro (Minamoto-no-Yoshiie), and other heroic and historic figures. Moreover, the front-facing stage section of each *dashi* hosts musicians who perform traditional *hayashi* music using large taiko drums, *fue* (traditional Japanese flute) and other such instruments, which is accompanied by dancing. This program includes the slow-paced *okame* section (music of the plain-faced woman), the highly rhythmical *hyottoko* section (music of the male jester-like figure), and the up-tempo *kitsune* section (fox's music). Each participating neighborhood shows off their strongest section and adds unique touches to the overall performance. Ishioka's *horojishi* lions, *dashi* floats and traditional Sasara *hayashi* music are together known as the Ishioka Hayashi, which has been designated by Ibaraki Prefecture as an Intangible Folk Cultural Property.



VISIT

During the festival,  
events can be seen  
on Ishioka's main streets

MAP number 3

## Interview

We talked with Yuko Kikuchi, who plays the *fue* during the Ishioka's traditional *hayashi* musical performances, about what attracts her to this festival.

## Experiencing the Joy of Life through Traditional Festival Culture



Karlee Rae Opal : Ishioka locals all tell me they have good memories of the Ishioka Festival. Do you feel the same way, Ms. Kikuchi?

Yuko Kikuchi : Yes. Even if I can't make it home for the Obon or New Year holidays [important holiday seasons in Japan when families gather together], I always make sure to come back to Ishioka for the festival. Everybody gets so excited about it! I was born and raised here in Ishioka and have watched the festival since I was a little kid, so the event gets me worked up every year— my body begins to move naturally with the rhythms when I hear the traditional *hayashi* musical instruments play. For me, it's the most anticipated event of the year.

Karlee : When did you start playing the *fue* in these traditional performances?

Kikuchi : I started when I was ten years old. I took lessons from a teacher in the neighborhood, and my first time playing while riding a *dashi* festival float was at the age of 14. That was truly a happy moment for me; everybody kid dreamed of standing atop one of those floats.

Karlee : Is this type of flute a difficult instrument to play?

Kikuchi : Traditional Japanese instruments like this are different than the recorders everyone learns to play in school. They don't follow the same do-re-mi scale, so they are tough at first. Also, there is no sheet music, so you have to memorize the music by listening to the teacher play and watching their fingers. Personally, it took me quite some time to memorize the three pieces—the *okame*, *hyottoko* and *kitsune*—and commit them to muscle memory.

Karlee : I see. So participants pass along traditions one at a time—having teachers and experienced musicians individually teach young flute players, for example.

Kikuchi : The Ishioka Festival has been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years now. It's truly the local culture of Ishioka citizens. Recently, I have come to view the festival traditions as a long, continuous process, and I personally stand the end of this long line of cherished tradition and memories.

Karlee : So now it's your turn to pass on the traditions!

Kikuchi : That's right. I have a child who is still young, but I hope to pass on these traditions. I also want my child to personally experience that unique feeling of excitement that comes from viewing the festival in person, while also understanding just how important one's connections and relationships with others can be as participants practice together in preparation for the festivities.

Karlee : That's so true. The only way to carry out a festival like this is for people to come together and work as a team. Kikuchi : It really brings people together at the deepest possible level. At their core, I think that's what traditional festivals are all about.





## Explore Fascinating Shops During the Festival to Experience Japan to the Fullest

### Dagashi Traditional Sweets and Snacks



This traditional sweets dealer is housed in a dyer's shop from the late Edo Period (19th century). It even hosts exhibitions of traditional crafts and special product sales events. Try their shaved ice along with some old-fashioned *dagashi* snacks and sweets.



#### Machikura Ai

3-5-6 Kokufu, Ishioka City  
Open 11 a.m.–9 p.m. during the festival period

MAP

number 4

### Charming Old-style Japanese Cafe



Enjoy lunch in a old-style with an atmosphere of early and mid-20th century Japan. Their menu is richly varied, offering flavors only found in this type of good old-fashioned cafe.



#### Shien

3-5-3 Kokufu, Ishioka City  
Open 10 a.m.–9 p.m. during the festival period

MAP

number 5

### Relax with Matcha Green Tea in an Old Warehouse Building



This Japanese-style cafe and gallery is located in a renovated rice warehouse from the early 20th century. Sit back and enjoy a cup of matcha green tea with accompanying sweets while surrounded by art.



#### Kohmaru Shiryokan

1-4-14 Fuchu, Ishioka City  
Open 11 a.m.–9 p.m. during the festival period

MAP

number 6

### Varied Selection of Ishioka Sake



The shop's owner, formerly a sushi chef, offers outstanding seafood and dishes made using seasonal local ingredients. Customers can enjoy sake from all four of Ishioka's breweries.

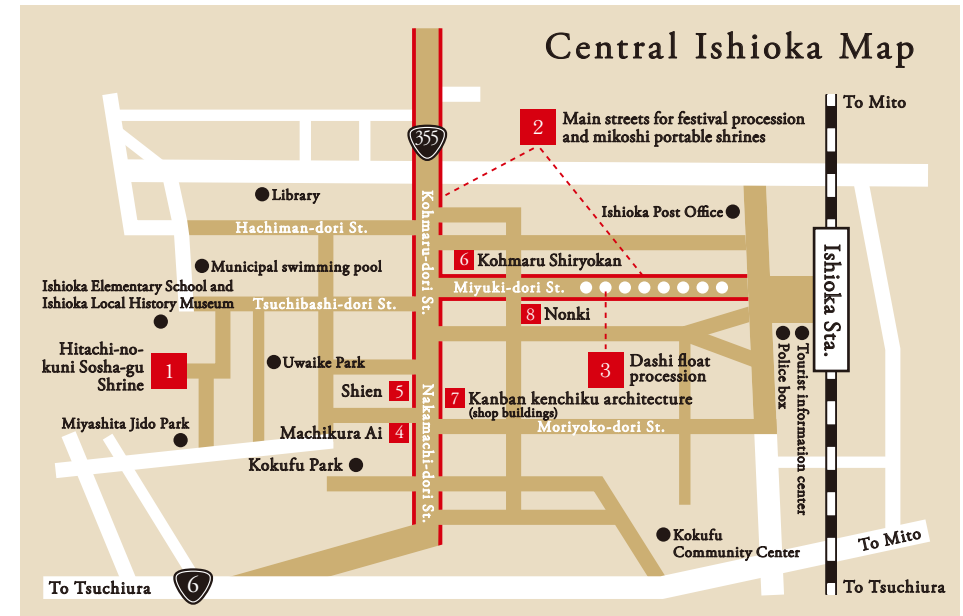


#### Nonki

2-2-14 Kokufu, Ishioka City  
Open from noon to 9 p.m. during the festival period

MAP

number 8



### Don't forget to check out the retro-style *kanban kenchiku* architecture!



Nakamachi-dori Street is lined with numerous retro-style buildings featuring *kanban kenchiku* ("billboard architecture"), an architectural style from the early 20th century that became popular primarily in and around Tokyo and the Kanto region following the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. This unique Japanese architectural style, utilized by the common people, was developed based on Western styles and designs.



MAP

number 7

### Don't stay for just a day—stay overnight in Ishioka and take your time seeing the sights!



Numerous historic sights



Relaxing hot springs



Views of Mount Tsukuba while gliding through the sky



Scan Here for Sightseeing Recommendations

### Contact Point for Festival/Tourism Inquiries

#### Ishioka City Tourist Information Center

TEL

0299-24-5001