

LIVING GUIDE MORIOKA

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Tsukimi (Moon Viewing)

Although not so well known as "o-hanami" or cherry blossom viewing in spring, "tsukimi (o-tsukimi)" or moon viewing is also one of the traditional Japanese customs. People admire the beautiful full moon in mid September. Have you heard of it? The special full moon of September, called "chushu no meigetsu (mid-autumn beautiful moon)" or "jugoya (the 15th night)", will be seen on September 19 this year. The date of tsukimi differs every year as it is based on the lunar calendar. With the moon looking particularly bright and beautiful because of the dry air at this time of the year, mid-September has been said to be the best time for moon viewing. Tsukimi has often been referred to in traditional Japanese poems, which often contain descriptions of the seasons.



【History of Tsukimi】

The custom of tsukimi dates back to ancient China. It came to Japan during the Heian period (794~1185), when court aristocrats had banquets and read tanka poems under the mid-autumn full moon. Later the custom became popular among samurai and merchant classes as well as among farmers, who developed the custom into an event to celebrate the year's harvest. This is how we celebrate tsukimi today. We also have a custom to celebrate tsukimi on September 13 of the lunar calendar, which is called "jusan-ya (the 13th night)". It's October 15 this year.

【What We Do for Tsukimi】

It depends on the local custom of each region, but generally it's customary to display susuki or Japanese pampas grass, which is believed to have the charm against evils, tsukimi dango (dumplings), crops such as potatoes and sake at a place of your house from which you can see the moon. You will find several kinds of tsukimi dango at supermarkets around this time of the year. Just try any dango you like. With the summer heat gone, it's nice and comfortable to enjoy moon viewing and songs of insects. Turn off the lights, and you can

have a better view of the autumn moon and be eco-friendly as well.

【A Rabbit in the Moon?】

It has been said in Japan that a rabbit lives on the moon and is pounding steamed rice to make mochi, as the pattern appearing on the surface of the moon look like a rabbit. There is a nursery song of a rabbit that is jumping to see the moon, and a story of a rabbit that jumps into a fireplace to help starved old couple and then gets raised to the moon. Songs and stories like these probably make children believe that there is a rabbit living on the moon.

【"Tsukimi" Something】

You may often find menus named "tsukimi" something in Japanese restaurants. For example, tsukimi soba (soba, buckwheat noodle, with a raw egg on top), tsukimi udon (udon, wheat noodle, with a raw egg on top), tsukimi burger (a hamburger with a sunny side up inside), and so on. There may be more. Tsukimi something usually have an egg on top of or in the food, probably because the yolk looks like the moon.

UPCOMING EVENTS

◆ Morioka Shohisha (Consumers) Matsuri

----- 10:00~16:00, Sep.9 ~ Sep.11 at Plaza Odette

Information that is helpful in our daily lives is provided through presentations by consumers' groups, displays and sales of useful goods, flea market, second-hand store and other events. You can also join the stamp rally to get some nice prizes. "Shohisha Matsuri" may not sound appealing, but it's fun. You will not regret.

◆ Morioka Aki Matsuri (Autumn Festival)

-----Sep.14~16, Morioka Hachiman Shrine, etc.

The origin of this traditional festival dates back to 1709, when people dedicated floats to Hachiman Shrine to celebrate the completion of the capital town of Nambu (Nambu is the old name of Iwate.) The area around Hachiman Shrine becomes very lively during the festival, with floats marching and music played by Japanese drums and flutes. The festival features several events:

* "Hachiman Kudari" -- Beautifully decorated traditional floats march through the town, starting at 1:00 p.m. on Sep.14.

* Parade of floats: All the floats for the festival march along the Odori street from 6.00p.m., Sep.15.

* "Yabusame: This traditional event is held in the precincts of Hachiman Shrine on Sep.16. Archers riding on horses compete with each other by how many of the three arrows they shoot can hit the target.

◆ Morioka Tezukuri Mura (Handicraft Square) Kobo (craft centers) Matsuri

----- Sep. 23~27, at Morioka Tezukuri Mura

Craftsmen will show you the techniques of the traditional local crafts such as Nambu ironware, Nambu sembei (cracker), wooden toys and rice straw crafts. (Nambu was the name of the clan of this area during the Edo period.)

◆ The 17th Imonoko Matsuri

----- Oct. 2, at Morioka Ice Arena

Iwate produces good imonoko (taro or aroid). In autumn people enjoy cooking and eating imonoko jiru --- soup of imonoko, other vegetables, meat and tofu. For this event imonoko jiru is prepared in a large pot – two meters in diameter – and served to visitors (200yen a bowl). Ohgayu Yamabushi Kagura (kagura is the traditional Shinto dance with music) is also performed.

◆ Mystery Film Festival in Michinoku

----- Oct. 14~16 at Eigakan Dori street and other places.

During the annual festival over 30 films – mystery films and others – are screened in Morioka, which has more movie theaters than any other city in the Tohoku region. Film fans from across Japan visit Morioka for the festival, to which mystery writers, film directors, actors and actresses are invited. The theme for the festival of 2005 is "detective".

◆ The 25th morioka Sangyo (Industry) Matsuri

----- Oct.20 ~25, at Kawatoku

Local foods and folk crafts will be displayed and sold. Confectioners will demonstrate how they make local confections. Enjoy the event and find something new about Morioka.

****Disaster Message Board of Cell Phones****

You may have found it difficult to get connected by cell phone when a natural disaster like an earthquake occurred. In such a case you can use the disaster message board service to send a message to or from the devastated area. The service is provided by cell phone carriers like au, Vodaphone and NTT DoCoMo. Find the service at the top menu of the Internet of your cell phone and see how to use it before a disaster occurs..