

A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Photo by Masayoshi Masuda



Mitarashi Festival

As Kyoto is a mountain basin, it is hot and humid in the city in summer. Ancient people created summer traditions to enjoy being cool on a hot summer day. Mitarashi Festival is a typical summer tradition started from the Heian Period (794–1191) in Shimogamo Shrine. In order to pray and make offerings of candles, each visitor walks barefoot with a candle stick in this Mitarashi Pond of the shrine. It is said that this purification rite absolves people of their sins, drives away sickness, and helps to ensure safe childbirth. This Mitarashi Pond is usually dried up. However, the pond is watered only during this festival. This festival is held on the day of *Doyoo-no-Ushi* (in 2007, it took place between 5:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m. from July 27th–30th).

Mitarashi Dango

Mitarashi Dango is a stick of five rice dumplings with sweet sauce in the shape of human beings. This is one of Japan's traditional sweets, and was originally created here.

Legend has it that when Emperor Godaigo (1288–1339) scooped up a handful of water from the Mitarashi Pond, a bubble came up and after a short interval four more bubbles came up.

Mitarashi Dango was created to resemble these five bubbles. Shinto priests also make offerings of *Mitarashi Dango* for this festival.

Shimogamo Shrine

The date of its establishment is unclear. According to the Chronicles of Japan, Shimogamo Shrine was repaired in 2 B.C. It is said that this shrine was established before then.

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