

A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Photo by Masayoshi Masuda



Kurama Fire Festival

Kurama Fire Festival is held on October 22 which is the same day as Jidai Festival. This festival starts at 6:00 p.m. and finishes at around midnight. Public vehicles are prohibited around the northern district from around 3:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. the next day.

Yuki Shrine was established in 940 in Kurama area, located in northern Kyoto, to bring sustainable peace because Kyoto, the capital, had experienced major earthquake and other severe living conditions. When a lot of things such as ritual articles and torches were moved from the Kyoto Imperial Palace to the Kurama area for the foundation of the shrine, a lot of people carried them in a procession. It is said that the procession was about 1 km long, and big ceremonies were held. Ancient people who were living in Kurama area were very impressed, so they maintain the ceremonies by holding this festival every year.

The Highlight of Kurama Fire Festival

In the beginning of the festival, local adults and children who wear traditional costumes carry various sized torches. The largest torch is about 4 meters long and weight more than 100 kg. The local people walk through the streets in a procession while chanting in loud voices, "Sairei-ya Sairyo." Visitors are also needed to participate in the parade because the streets are narrow. Local people and visitors are mixed together and have to walk without pausing. At 8:00 p.m., local people with torches gather in front of the Kurama-dera Temple gate and another appointed place, making for fantastic viewing. This ceremony joins the groups of locals with torches. Later, there are more ceremonies at 10:00 p.m. and at midnight for this festival.

Red Long-Nosed Goblin

It takes about 30 minutes by train from the central area (Demachiyana Station) to Kurama Station. Although Kurama area is also well-known for Kurama Onsen Hot Spring, it is usually quiet. However, trains and this area are so crowded during the festival.

When you reach the Kurama Station, you will see not only a lot of nature but also a big red long-nosed goblin monument which may make you wonder. It is a fanciful creature living in the mountains called Tengu (天狗). Tengu has a magic power to protect mountains, kidnap people, or steal. There is a Tengu-related phrase that means "a person who is overly self-confident" in Japanese.

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