

Nationally-designated Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Property

Edo Masari 'Superior to Edo' Spirit

Sawara Grand Festival



Summer Festival

10 festival floats

Fri., Sat. & Sun., on the second or third weekend of July when Friday first falls on a two-digit day.

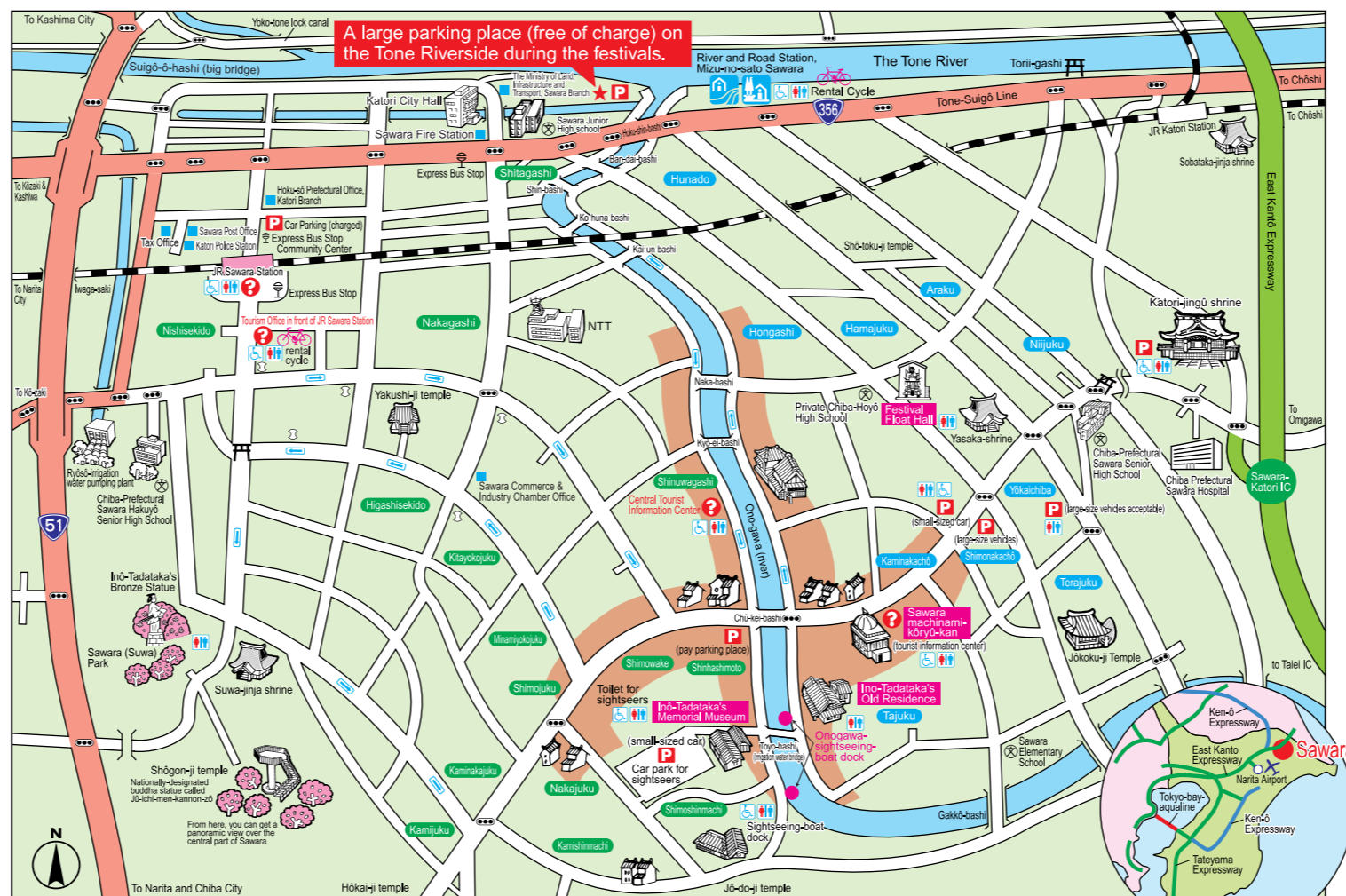


Autumn Festival

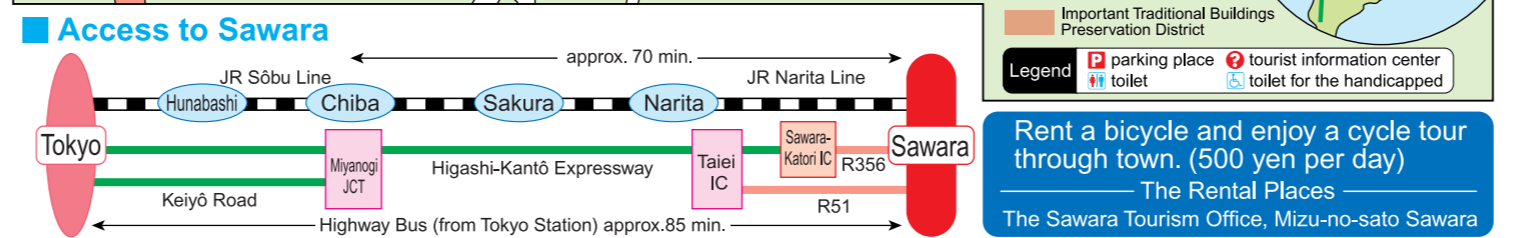
15 festival floats

Fri., Sat. & Sun., on the second weekend of October

In case of emergency or bad weather, the schedule is subject to change. Before setting out, please make sure the festival is under way.



A large parking place (free of charge) on the Tone Riverside during the festivals.



The Beauty of Tradition, Japan No. 1 Floats on display Suigô Sawara Dashi Kaikan



Two floats on display seen up close. The one drawn in July and the other in October are changed once a year. Each figure shows off its real power and strongly appeals to visitors.



Open Hours
9:00 ~ 16:30, (closed on Monday or the day after Monday is a national holiday)
9:00 ~ 20:30, open during the period of summer & autumn festivals
Open every day during the period of Ayame Festival in June

Transportation Access to Sawara
By JR Narita Line: 15-minute walk after getting off at JR Sawara Station
By Car (From Tokyo): turn off the Higashi-Kanto Speedway at Sawara-Katori IC, and drive on about 5 min.

admission fee
individual adult 400 yen elementary and junior high students 200 yen
group of adults (15 people and over) 350 yen elementary and junior high students 150 yen

Buy a discount special ticket equally valid at Float Museum & Inô Tadataka Memorial Museum
adult 800 yen elementary & junior high students 350yen

The annual passport available at the following facilities.
Buy the annual passport valid for admission to the three facilities (Suigo Sawara aquatic botanical garden, Suigo Sawara festival float hall and Inô Tadataka Memorial museum) all through year as often as you can and get certain gifts from shops under the sponsorship.
adult 2,000 yen elementary & junior high students 1,000 yen

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Nintoku tennô (Minamiyokojuku)

Made in Taishô 14th year (1925) by Yasumoto-Kamehachi III.

Looking down from the highest tower, how pleasant I feel to see the smoke rising from the kitchen of every home! This waka-song was written by Emperor Nintoku, the 16th tennô. He is said to have reduced taxes from the suffering folks.



A colored woodblock print of a hero Chô-jun (good swimmer likened to river fish) breaking down the watergate
From 'Suiko-den' (a Chinese picaresque),'



An elaborately carved dragon on a pillar of the float of Nishi-Sekido block
Kaei Years (1848-1854)
Carved by Ishikawa-Tôkichi-Tomomitsu IV



Jinmu tennô (Hunado)

Made in Meiji 20th year (1887) by Hara-shûgetsu III.

According to the accounts of mythology, Kojiki and Nihon-shoki, Jinmu-tennô ascended the throne as the first Emperor of Japan after he suppressed all protesting gods. Another figure of Jinmu-tennô sits on the float of Nakagashi-block.

The wood carvings attached to the four sides of the float

The wood-carvings made of hard keyaki (Japanese zelkova) wood are attached around the floats. This style of carving is called 'Kantô-bori.' Most of the carvings around the floats were produced by notable master-sculptors of Edo. The scenes are from popular myths of Japan, war tales, legends and Chinese historical stories besides dragons, flowers, birds, lions, and other objects. Especially, the features of each character are lively and vividly expressed.



Shimoshinmachi
Bunkyû 2nd year (1862)
Carved by Ishikawa-Sannosuke
Group of heroes of color print originally drawn by Utagawa-Kuniyoshi are carved in wood by Ishikawa-Sannosuke. The best scenes from stories of 'Suiko-den' are brilliantly expressed around the float.

Yôkaichiba
Produced in Meiji 21st year (1888) by Komatsu-Jûtarô-Mitsushige and Mitsuharu
The whole scenes around the float are from the stories 'Taikô-ki (the life story of Toyotomi-Hideyoshi)'. The wood-carvings show Toyotomi-Hideyoshi and his followers, Takenaka-Hanbei, Katô-Kiyomasa and others. This photo is Katô-Kiyomasa.

The splendor of figure-makers' skill, the largest scale in Japan

Float ornaments and big figures

The strongest point of Sawara's festival floats is to have a big figure settled on top of each float, nearly 5m tall. From Edo to Shôwa era, most of these figures were manufactured by exquisite artisans of Edo and Tokyo during the period from Edo to Shôwa. Among these master artists since Edo times are Nezumiya-Hukuda-Mankichi, Hara-Shûgetsu, Yasumoto-Kamehachi, and Ôshiba-Moritoyo. Nowadays, in Japan exists no artist who can make such a big head of a doll. So, every doll is well worthy of being preserved as an important cultural property.





Jinmu tennō (nakagashi)
 ① Meiji 31st year (1898) ② Meiji 31st year (1898)
 ③ (hiko-koto-ten-no-gotoshi, boundless expanse like heaven)
 ④ Just like the stage of the Noh play, the whole form of the float is decorated with continuous culture of art toys, Japanese calligraphy with beautiful small tags, produced in Kyoto.



Shōnankō (Kusunoki masatsura, Masashige jr.) (Shimowake)
 ① Meiji 28th year (1895) ② Showa 10th year (1935)
 ③ (Shimo-wake, name of town block)
 ④ Masatsura scribbling his last walk-song on the wall of Nippon-ji temple with the point of an arrow, about to start for the battle of Shimonoseki (footpath).



Onono tōhū (shinhashimoto)
 ① Meiji 27th year (1894) ② Meiji 4th year (1871)
 ③ (Shimo-wake, name of town block)
 ④ The characters on the frame written by Ono-no-Tōhū himself.



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Dainankō (Kusunoki Masashige) (Higashisekido)
 ① Showa 10th year (1935) ② Showa 10th year (1935)
 ③ (jun-sei, genuine purity) ④ The carvings on the four sides, and pillars uncovered. The calligraphy was written by General Sadao-Araki.



Minamoto no Yoriyoshi (Shimoyokujiku)
 ① Meiji 8th year (1875) ② Meiji 32th year (1899)
 ③ (sei-i, sincerity) ④ The historical event that Minamoto-no-Yoriyoshi managed to smash the rocks with a bow and come upon a water vein at the battle of Yamanaka.



Chinzei Hachirō Tametomo (Kaminakajuku)
 ① Kaei 5th year (1852) ② Meiji 15th year (1892)
 ③ (carving of Mt. Fuji) ④ The carvings surrounding the float skillfully hide the pillars on four corners, and there the view of the grand hunting at the foot of Mt. Fuji is panoramically laid out.



Takehaya Susanōno mikoto (shitagashi)
 ① Meiji 31st year (1898) ② The latter half of Edo era
 ③ (kō-an, immensity) ④ The life-sized figure is manufactured in the form of Hoppo-nirami (staring at or watching all sides) and so this figure may glare rigidly at you from whichever angle you see it.



Urashima Tarō (Shimoshinmachi)
 ① Later Edo era (1800s) ② Meiji 12nd year (1879)
 ③ (hō-en, densely-rising columns of smoke, symbol of people's wellbeing) ④ The gold sacred straw festoons and the carvings are gravely and well reproduced from the wood-block prints, the best scenes of the Sukto-den (in Chinese picturesque).



Yamato Takeruno mikoto (Kitayokojuku)
 ① Meiji 8th year (1875) ② Meiji 8th year (1875)
 ③ (ai-koku, love of the country) ④ The carvings are full of solidity and vitality for woodcraft.



Suwa daijin (Kaminimachi)
 ① Showa 11th year (1936) ② Showa 11th year (1936)
 ③ (the sake-pong (looking down from the highest tower, how pleasant I feel to see the smoke rising from the kitchen of every home) (Emperor Nintoku), ④ The whole carvings took ten years to complete. The scenes are chosen from the best stories of 'San-goku-shi (the Record of the Minamoto no Yoritomo, assumed Gen-zeim-Nyūto) (crosses after the Three Kingdoms of China).



Ninigino mikoto (Nishisekido)
 ① Showa 10th year (1935) ② Showa 15th year (1940)
 ③ (shin-kaku-iki, god's glory) ④ The frame edge decorated with Ishikawa-Tomomitsu's work. The characters on the frame written by Arima-Ryōkyō, chief priest of Meiji-ji-ji.



Momotarō (Nakajuku)
 ① Later Edo Era (1800s) ② Taiishō 11st year (1922)
 ③ (hō-en, densely-rising columns of smoke, symbol of people's wellbeing) ④ Since Showa 30s years this float has never been open to the public.



Minamoto Yoshitsune (Kamijuku)
 ① Showa 53rd year (1978) ② Showa 55th year (1980)
 ③ (hō-en, densely-rising columns of smoke, symbol of people's wellbeing) ④ Yoshitsune standing majestically on the mountain pass, the Hyōdori-goe, at the last battle fought in 1184 between Taira and Minamoto clans.



Nintoku tennō (Minamiyokojuku)
 ① Meiji 8th year (1875) ② Taiishō 14th year (1925)
 ③ (the sake-pong (looking down from the highest tower, how pleasant I feel to see the smoke rising from the kitchen of every home) (Emperor Nintoku), ④ The whole carvings took ten years to complete. The scenes are chosen from the best stories of 'San-goku-shi (the Record of the Minamoto no Yoritomo, assumed Gen-zeim-Nyūto) (crosses after the Three Kingdoms of China).



Ushi tenjin (shinuwagashi)
 ① Meiji 45th year (1912) ② Later Edo era (1800s)
 ③ (sawa-gashi, town-block name) ④ The figure of Sugawara-Michizane, spirit of thunder, riding a black ox (He was born in the year of the ox). And the splendid ornamental wood-carvings laid out at the right and left ends of the front side of the float (warabi-ke) vividly depict the exploits of Minamoto no Yoritomo, assumed Gen-zeim-Nyūto (crosses after the priesthood, hero of the War of Hogen-and-Heiji) period (1156-1160).



Sugawara Michizane (Shimonakachō)
 ① Bunsei 5th year (1822) ② Taiishō 10th year (1921)
 ③ (shō-toku, respect for virtue) ④ Oldest existing float in Sawara ascertained from the ancient documents found in Heisei 24th year (2012). The strings of beads at the front side and the curtains around produced in Ansei 3rd year (1856).



Jinmu tennō (Hunado)
 ① Heisei 9th year (1997) ② Meiji 20th year (1887)
 ③ (jō-kan, overwhelming joy)
 ④ Superb carvings, carp in particular



Carp (Yōkaichiba)
 ① Meiji 29th year (1896) ② Bunkyō years (1861-1863)
 ③ The wood-carved dragon
 ④ The fish of barley-straw by townfolk



Ameno Uzumeno mikoto (Hongashi)
 ① Meiji 15th year (1892) ② Later Edo era, refurbished after Second World War ③ (shō-raku, radiant smile)
 ④ The roof-top gracefully constructed as the theater stage for the dancing deity.



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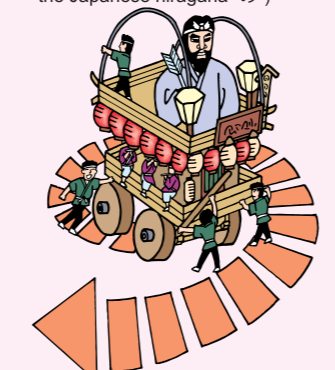
Hutsunushino mikoto (Araku)
 ① Showa 3rd year (1928) ② Taiishō 9th year (1920)
 ③ (toku, power of virtue) ④ The chief deity of Katori-jingu. Skilled wood-carvings around the float, especially the ones over the pillars of four corners.



Ota Dōkan (Kaminakachō)
 ① Meiji 34th year (1911) ② Taiishō 10th year (1920)
 ③ (toku-, power of virtue) ④ The curtain lavishly woven with spun gold in Bunkei period (1804-1817), highly appreciated as cultural property

(Fancy rapid moving of floats)

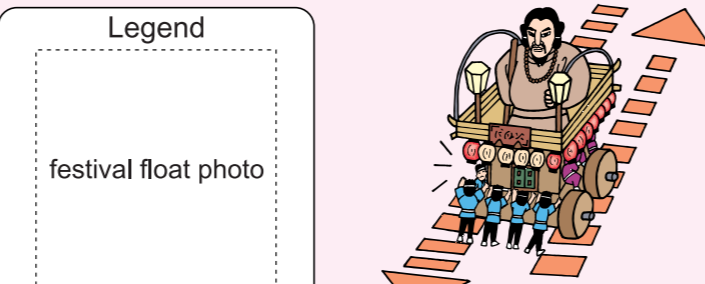
No-no-ji-mawashi
 (Clockwise turning of the float tracing the Japanese hiragana 'の')



Koban-mawashi
 (Clockwise turning of the float tracing the edges of oval gold coin called 'koban' which circulated in Edo era)



There are two ways to do spinning or turning; one is to start turning after a temporary pause for preparation and the other is to start turning without any pause heading into the performing site, which is called 'Mawashi-kōmi'. Moving is slow, but never stop the turnings. It has been thought utter shame or disgrace to stop the turning even for a moment before the signal by wooden clappers.



Pushing the float ovally tracing the shape of 'koban' is very hard to perform, and keeping the regular speed of turnings and handling at each corner need high degree of skill.

Legend
 festival float photo
 Figure's name (town block)
 ① Production year of the float
 ② Production year of the figure
 ③ The characters written on the frame
 ④ Must-see points of the float & figure



Kintoki Yamanba (Terajuku)
 ① Kaei 3rd year (1850) ② Meiji 12th year (1879)
 ③ (he-i-ai, festival float) ④ Young Kinokoi, later great samurai, and his mother. The young boy riding a bear, wielding a broad axe, shows the power and strength of youth.



Takemikazuchino mikoto (Hamajuku)
 ① Heisei 9th year (1997) ② Showa 12th year (1937)
 ③ (nyū-ka, gentleness) ④ The completion of carvings took four years during the early years of Kaei period (1848-1854)



Hawk (Niijuku)
 ① Heisei 11th year (1999) ② Hōreki years (1751-1764)
 ③ (iri-ai, benevolence)
 ④ The bird of rice-straw and bamboo by townfolk



Izanagino mikoto (Tajuku)
 ① Kaei 4th year (1851) ② Meiji 43rd year (1910)
 ③ (jū-ai, peaceful tranquility) ④ The whole body of float Japan-acquired. The ceiling within decorated with lacquered drawings.



Nationally-designated Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Property
Edo Masari 'Superior to Edo' Spirit
Sawara Grand Festival
 Sawara Grand Festivals are the general name given to the two festivals, the Yasaka-jinja (shrine) 'Gion' Festival held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday on the second or third weekend of July when Friday first falls on a two-digit day and the Suwa-jinja Autumn Festival held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday on the second weekend of October.
 Every massive festival float constructed of hard Japanese zelkova wood with a big figure on its roof-top and splendid carvings around it moves on through the historic buildings preservation area, accompanied by the bouncy tunes of Sawara Bayashi (festival music). More often than not, the people drawing and pushing the floats perform to the festival music graceful dancing called Te-ko-mai (originally, a festival dance of geisha in fireman clothes). Sawara Grand Festivals were nationally-designated as Important Intangible Folk-cultural Property in February 2004.
 The origin of the Sawara Festival is unknown because there are no documents left, but it might be that the festival of the present style originated at mid-Edo era. Around that time, Sawara Village began to enjoy its prosperity as the new fast and safe transport route by ship to Edo up and down the Tone River, was developed. That financial power of Sawara made it possible to create luxurious culture of the festival, Sawara people being strongly conscious of Sannō-Festival and Kanda-Festival (Edo's typical grand festivals). People aimed to create their own style of festival superior to Edo.
 The tradition of over 300 years has still been handed down by the people of Sawara.

Nationally-designated Important Intangible Folk-Cultural Property
Sawara Bayashi (festival music),
Japan's top three festival music.

At the middle level of each festival float, the band of the festival musicians plays Sawara-Bayashi festival music. The tunes of Sawara Bayashi are very unique in the genre of the Japanese festival music. They have their own specific melodies, sentimental and atmospheric, because most of the music pieces were composed by Kabuki and Bunraku composers in Edo.
 In Sawara, the festival music is called 'Ge-za (theater music)' and the band of musicians is called Ge-za-ren (music band). The instruments are bamboo flutes, thick drums, small drums, big drum, and handy metal disk. About 15 players usually play sitting inside and on the rails of the float, which performance is worthy of being called 'Orchestra'.
 More than 40 tunes are classified into 3 groups, 'Dan-mono' (dramatic tunes, composed in harmony with slow movement of the float), 'Ha-mono' (popular tunes, like folk songs, popular songs in each period and melodies with the fast tempo) and 'Yaku-mono' (supplementary and ritualistic melodies, played when the float begins to move). Every music is played in accordance to the atmosphere and conditions of the streets through which the float is moving.
 No other Japanese festival tunes have such specific sound of tunes and plenty of music numbers as Sawara Bayashi.

Main selection of Sawara Bayashi
 Dan-mono: azuma, sugomori, sarashi, kanda, yaoya, danshichi, sogu, tate, kuzushi
 Yaku-mono: san-giri, baka-bayashi, hana-sanbasō
 Ha-mono: oyakama, nekoja, yaguruma, sugomori-kuzushi, tsushima, yoshino, ken-bayashi, yamato, Sawara-ondo, Sawara-kouta, matsukazari, anba, ōsugi-anba, rappa-bushi, sendō-kouta, kushimoto-bushi, and others.

The background image shows a sheet of festival tune taken down in the musical notation in 1948 for the purpose of transmitting the Sawara Bayashi to the next generations, because the festival music had been passed on orally alone.