



By Jessica Scott

Japan is a big fan of listing things in groups of three, such as the Three Famous Gardens of Japan or the Three Scenic Views. So without further ado, I present the **Three Great Summer Festivals of Tohoku!** The best thing? All three festivals are held during the same week, so it's easy to hop to each one.



Firstly, where is Tohoku? Tohoku is the region in the north-east of Japan's mainland and is made up of six prefectures: **Aomori** (which sits at the very tip), **Akita**, **Iwate**, **Yamagata**, **Miyagi** and **Fukushima** (which is at the very bottom). It is a region well known for its beautiful countryside, lakes, mountains, hot springs and snowfall.

## 2 Nebuta Festival, Aomori Prefecture



The Nebuta Festival in Aomori City is another great fire festival and runs annually from 2 to 7 August. At night, larger-than-life lantern floats depicting mythical beings from stories are paraded through the city. On the final night, the floats are set sail on boats, bobbing down the bay with big fireworks—definitely well worth seeing!

In the several months leading up to the festival, teams of locals from businesses and organisations handcraft the floats from washi paper and wire. Some floats can get up to 5m tall by 9m wide. If you're in the area before the event, you can even visit the builder's huts and take a peek at their hard work.

## 1 Kanto Festival, Akita Prefecture



The Kanto Festival in Akita City is a four-day event held in the peak of Japan's hot and humid summer at night. From 3 to 6 August, hundreds of performers gather on the main street, blocking off an entire 1km stretch of road.



To the sound of pounding taiko drums, set on the back of moving trucks, and festive flutes, Kanto performers display impressive skill in balancing tall, lantern-adorned bamboo poles in the air. That's no small feat, considering the poles can weigh up to 50kg!

As an Assistant Language Teacher based in Akita, I was lucky enough to experience Kanto three times and even performed taiko in it once. With the crowd's loud chanting of "*dokkoi-sho, dokkoi-sho!*" and the beating drums vibrating through your chest, it's easy to get swept away in festival fever.

## 3 Sendai Tanabata, Miyagi Prefecture



Sendai City's Tanabata Festival—or "star festival"—is one of the largest and most famous in Japan. Every year between 6 and 7 August, thousands of giant 3 to 5m long streamers representing shooting stars decorate shopping arcades—all lovingly crafted by the community.

Unfortunately I didn't get to see this festival in person, but it's certainly on my bucket list—and hopefully it's now on yours!



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