

# Fireworks Displays Add Brilliant Color to the Summer Night Sky

Fireworks festivals are a very popular feature of summertime in Japan. The Omagari Fireworks Festival, held in the city of Daisen in Akita Prefecture, is one of Japan's most prestigious.

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



Left: A No. 10 Shin-iri Warimono from 2016

Center: The winning entry in the No. 10 Ball Freestyle category in 2013

Right: A unique and noteworthy title: *Hisui o Chiribameta Pendanto* ("Jade-Studded Pendant")

Photo: Daisen City, Akita Prefecture

This year's Omagari Fireworks Festival will be held on Saturday, August 26 in the Omagari district of the city of Daisen in Akita Prefecture. Twenty-eight fireworks companies from all over Japan will participate in the event, with an estimated 18,000 fireworks to be launched.

The history of fireworks in Daisen dates back to the 1800s. Back then, people used to dedicate fireworks at shrine ceremonies to pray for a good harvest, a prosperous business, or family safety. It is said that the first historical appearance of Omagari fireworks was around this time, when they appeared in an illustration in *Tsuki no Dewaji*, a travelogue by the travel writer Sugae Masumi, who visited the area in 1826.

The event eventually evolved into a skills competition among pyrotechnicians (fireworks manufacturers) from all over the country. They gather to show off their technical refinements. The festival has grown into one of Japan's most prestigious fireworks competitions. It is here that the Prime Minister's Award, the highest honor in the fireworks industry, is given. Festival executive committee member Motegi Toshihiro shared some of the competition's highlights with us.

"The four competitive categories are: Daytime Fireworks, a competition of contrasts in smoke and color; Chrysanthemum Fireworks, where contestants launch No. 10 balls called Shin-iri Warimono<sup>1</sup> (about 30 cm in diameter) in a contest of designs using chrysanthemum-shaped fireworks; Freestyle Fireworks, in which each technician uses their ingenuity and skill with No. 10 balls; and Creative Fireworks, where they compete for the best themes and expressive displays

within a 2.5 minute time limit. Judging methods differ for each division, and fireworks are judged from multiple perspectives, including color, rhythm, 3D effect, and composition. I'm sure you'll thoroughly enjoy the expert skill and attention to detail that goes into each one of these fireworks."

Both the competition and the Taikai Teikyo Hanabi at the end of the event are very worth seeing.

"The Taikai Teikyo Hanabi (Fireworks Provided by the Event Hosts), jointly produced by four local companies in Omagari, is a massive starmine that lasts about six minutes. These fireworks stretch about 900 meters wide, which is even beyond the field of vision from the venue. Another highlight of the festival is the exchange of yells, in which spectators wave lights to express their appreciation of the pyrotechnicians at the end of the event," says Motegi.

Motegi especially wants visitors from overseas to experience the uniquely Japanese artistry that combines delicacy with precision.

"I think that Japanese delicacy and aesthetics are unique and differ from those of fireworks in other countries. Also, since this is a competition, each firework ball is launched with excellent precision, and shows its beautiful ball shape when shot up into the sky. Bouncing back from Covid-19 cancellations, this year the festival will be held normally for the first time in four years. I hope you get to experience the amazing fireworks that can only be seen at the Omagari Fireworks Festival. 🎆



A scene from the Taikai Teikyo Hanabi, which is also known for its innovative presentation.

Left page  
Above: The grand finale of the festival.

Below: The highlight is a flurry of fireworks called "Taikai Teikyo Hanabi" ("Fireworks Provided by the Event Hosts").

1. Shin-iri Warimono is a chrysanthemum-shaped firework that forms a concentric perfect circle. The core is the petal that is placed inside the outer petal, which is called *oyaboshi* parent star. By placing the core, the fireworks open double. This year's competition is open to Warimono fireworks with 30 or more cores that form a circle with four or more layers.