

## FEATURES

# Summer Fun in Japan: Seaside Festivals and Events



Photo: SHINTANI Koichi



Photo: PIXTA

Above: A scene from the Kangensai Festival: a gorgeously decorated *goza-bune* (center) sails through the Seto Inland Sea accompanied by three smaller boats.

Below: Both *seireisen* boats and red-and-white lanterns sway on the waves, gradually catching light and burning.

Japan is one of the world's leading maritime nations, surrounded by the sea on all sides. Its summers are hot and humid, and many festivals and other events unique to its coastal areas are held to bring in the cool. The origins of these festivals and events can be traced back to the elegant pastimes of the aristocracy, to *mikoshi* (portable shrines) that are carried to pray for the end to an outbreak of disease or a good catch, or to events that send the souls of ancestors back to the sea in the summer during the Obon<sup>1</sup> period. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* introduces the seaside festivals and events held across Japan, including the Itsukushima Shrine Kangen-sai, a festival with a history and tradition of more than 800 years, and the Miyazu Toro Nagashi Fireworks Festival,

a lantern floating ceremony that has been held for about 400 years. We also highlight more recently conceived events, including the unique Amami Sea Kayak Marathon Race in Kakeroma, which is held on an island in southern Japan, and another event to pick up and reduce marine litter<sup>2</sup> wearing cosplay costumes.

1. A Japanese custom that combines Japan's ancient ancestral beliefs with the Buddhist event "Urabon-e." A series of events in which the souls of deceased ancestors periodically return to this world and then are sent back toward their world. The timing of Obon festivals vary according to region, generally falling in mid-July or mid-August.

2. Marine litter refers to the collective term for washed-up litter on coastlines, drifting litter on the sea surface and underwater, and litter accumulated on the seabed.

