A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Photo by *Masayoshi Masuda*

Mitarashi Festival in Shimogamo Shrine

This summer, a lot of Japanese people will be carefully thinking about energy savings after the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred this March. Why don't you also take this opportunity to review ancient Japanese traditions?

Ancient people created summer traditions to enjoy being cool on a hot summer day. In Kyoto, one of the typical summer traditions, called Mitarashi Festival, is held in Shimogamo Shrine. It started in the Heian Period (794−1191). In order to pray and make offerings, each visitor walks barefoot with a candle stick in the shrine's Mitarashi Pond. It is said that this purification ceremony absolves people of their sins, drives away sickness, and helps to ensure safe childbirth. This Mitarashi Pond is usually dried up. However, the pond is filled with water only during the festival.

This festival is held on the day of *Doyoo-no-Ushi* (in 2011, it takes place between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. from July 21st−24th).

Mitarashi Dango

Mitarashi Dango is a stick of five rice dumplings with sweet sauce in the shape of human beings.
This is one of Japan's traditional sweets, and was originally created here.
Legend has it that when Emperor Godaigo (1288−1339) scooped up a handful of water from the Mitarashi Pond, a bubble came up and after a short interval four more bubbles came up.
Mitarashi Dango was created to resemble these five bubbles. Shinto priests also make offerings of *Mitarashi Dango* for this festival.

The Beautiful Surroundings

Kamigamo Shrine and Shimogamo Shrine are located near the Kamo River. They are the upper and lower halves of the same shrine. Shimogamo Shrine has a long history, at least two thousand years. You may reach the Mitarashi Pond via the Tadasu-no-mori, a small forest in the shrine. *Tadasu* means justice.

Kyoto is a mountain basin, so it is particularly hot and humid in summer. This shrine is highly recommended because it makes you refresh.

By *Etsuko.M*

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