About Suwa Taisha Shrine
Suwa Taisha consists of 4 shrines; South of Lake Suwa are Mae-miya and Hon-miya and North of Lake Suwa are Aki-miya and Haru-miya. Around Japan there are over 10,000 branch shrines. It is one of the oldest shrines in Japan. In ancient times people would worship the gods of hunting and farming, during the period of the samurai they would worship the gods for success in war. Now, people worship the gods for industry, road safety, marriage, safe birth, health, etc.

About Onbashira Festival
Onbashira Festival is a Shinto ritual that has been carried on for over 1200 years. In the festival, the Houden is rebuilt, and the four fir pillars surrounding the main building of the four shrines are replaced. The fir pillars are taken from the mountains and pulled to the shrine, this is known as Yamadashi and Satobiki. This series of rituals are the Onbashira festival. The Kiotoshi at Shimosuwa during Yamadashi is especially well known because of the hikiko with all their might pull the giant pillars down the steep slope.

How to Enjoy Onbashira Festival

Please absolutely refrain from entering the pathway where the pillar will pass through.

Information
Shimosuwa Tourism Association
[Phone] +81-(0)266-26-2102
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Why are the pillars replaced?
In Shinto, there is the belief of Tokowaka, where constant renewal purifies the spirit. Based on this belief the pillars are replaced periodically.

Why are there four pillars?
Even now it is still a mystery of why there are four pillars, but some believe that they are there to provide protection or that they act as a bridge for the gods or that they are the border between the gods and the shrines.

Recommended Items

- Happi

A wooden stick with thinly sliced pieces of wood or paper at the end. It is said that where the gods come and a essential item in the festival. Let's enjoy the festival while swinging onbe and singing kiyari.

- Onbe

Traditional festival clothing that when worn bring out the festive spirit. It can be purchased at the clothing stores in the town.

- Oikakezuna

The rope tied to the end of the pillar is very important because it acts like the rudder of a boat by steering the direction of the pillar.

- Oikakeshu

They control the oikakezuna.

- Yokitorishu

They use an axe called an YOKI to cut the ropes suspended to keep the pillar in place. They also carve the pillar into a cone shape in the Kanmuri Otoshi.

- Tekoshu

They control the direction of the pillar with the teko stick.

- Motozuna

The rope tied at the front to pull the pillar. Facing the pillar, on the right is Mezuna, on the left is Ozuna.

- Motozunashu

They are the main people who pull the pillar.

Onbashira Data

- Length: About 17m
- Weight: About 8t
- Circumference: 3m
- Age: 150~170 years old
- Type: Fir

What's Kiyari?
Kiyari is a song that is an important part of the festival, it is so important that it is said “Without kiyari, the pillar won’t move”.

When the hikiko hear this song, they become as one and pull the pillar. To be able to reach the thousands of people at once, even the men will sing in a high pitched voice. The people who sing kiyari and carry ONBE.

Yokitori

They control the direction of the pillar with the teko stick.

Hikiko

They pull the pillar and are the local residents of the Suwa area. As long as they are a resident of Suwa, regardless of age and gender, they are allowed to participate. For every pillar, 3000~4000 hikiko participate.

Each role above wears a different color costume during the festival.

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The pillars are placed on the grounds of the shrines. These large pillars, taken from the mountains, will represent the gods for the next seven years and provide protection for the people.

Small Kiotoshi (a short distance kiotoshi)
On the first day of Satobiki, on a small slope on the grounds of Haru-miya, Kiotoshi takes place. Even though it is a short slope, it is quite steep, so it is one of the most difficult areas and a highlight of Satobiki.

The local people dress in Edo Period (1603 ~ 1867) clothing in a parade.

The Sharp Corner at Sakigakecho
Because of this sharp corner the motozunashu, tekoshu, oikakeshu must use their skill to navigate this turn smoothly.

Who can mount the pillar?
Local residents who have contributed greatly to the festival, the shrine and its rituals are selected to mount the pillar. Within those selected, a person who has been recognised to have contributed the most to the festival who be nominated to mount the front of pillar on the day of the festival. This is known as Hananori. A person can only be selected once for Hananori, so it is a once in a lifetime honor.

During the Festival
Onbashira Festival has a history of over 1200 years and is a very important ritual for the local people of Suwa. Please refrain from entering restricted areas to take pictures. It is considered very dangerous and prohibited. Please listen to the instructions of the festival attendants, follow the rules and act responsibly.

Please take note that tickets are required for observing Kiotoshi at The Kiotoshi Slope. Visitors without tickets will not be permitted to enter the observation seating. Observing from the area around The Kiotoshi Slope is also not permitted.

The area around the pillar felling site and viewing area are expected to be extremely crowded on the day. Even if you have a ticket, it is possible that you will not be able to reach your seat. Please ensure that you leave yourself plenty of time.

It is necessary to present your viewing ticket and ID (towel) in order to enter the viewing area and to get on the shuttle bus. Please keep these things visible for staff to see.

Let’s Enjoy Onbashira Festival in the Public Viewing Areas!