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# TEACHING TUESDAY

## NACHI-NO-OGI

JULY 25, 2017

One of the three largest fire festivals of Japan, the Nachi-no-Ogi festival is staged every year in the Kumano Mountains of Wakayama Prefecture. Featuring huge pine torches weighing about 110 pounds, this festival is believed to have a history of more than 1500 years.

The festival itself is directly connected to the Kumano Nachi Taisha Shrine, which was originally connected to the nearby Nachi Falls, a UNESCO world heritage site that's said to house 12 kami. The sacred waterfall is recognized as one of the best waterfalls in Japan, and is a way of symbolically purifying the waterfall kami for the year.

The main attraction are the twelve 6 meter high portable shrines and twelve torches representing the 12 kami from the waterfall. The shrines are meant to be purified with the fires from oversized torches laboriously carried by men dressed in white. People holding the burning torches cry out loudly as they run up and down the steps of the shrine, while people carrying the portable shrines on their shoulders dash down the steps. Afterwards, both the torches and shrines are carried to the waterfall itself for the final ritual.