

## 6. Ritual Activities

April 27: Kinensai ("prayers for a bountiful harvest") -- Spring Festival  
July 22 and 23: Reisai -- Annual Festival with portable shrine procession  
November 23: Shinkoku Kanshasai ("thanks for the new harvest") -- Autumn Festival

In addition to these large festivals, there is also a religious observance on the first day of every month and twenty-one regular observances throughout the year, beginning with the New Year's Day Festival on January 1. Moreover, marriages, ritual first shrine visits of newborns and a variety of ritual invocations and announcements (such as Coming of Age ceremonies) are among the many events which enliven the precincts of Suimu Shrine. On January 15, the prayer for domestic safety draws not only local parishioners but also worshippers from faraway places such as Tokyo and Nagoya, and is grandly executed in conformance with centuries of tradition. The prayer for traffic safety dates as far back as the Edo Period (1603-1867), when the Yamamura magistrate overseeing Kiso Fukushima's barrier station on the old Nakasendo highway often came to the shrine to pray for the safety of those passing through the town. As the blessings are remarkably effective, a considerable number of people come from neighboring villages to worship at Suimu Shrine.

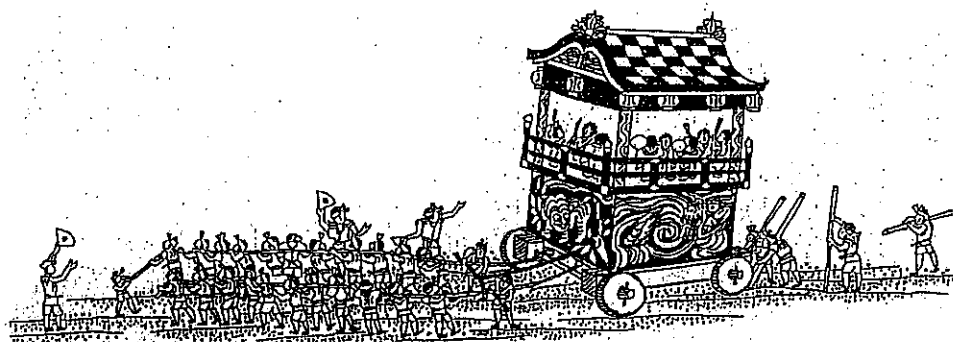
## 7. Treasures

The shrine's possessions include: two carved wooden kaerumata ("frog's legs") ornamental roof struts dating from the Kamakura (1192-1333) and Muromachi (1392-1573) Periods; three swords, one designated a Prefectural Treasure; several inscribed wooden tablets and documents from after the Kamakura Period; a pair of komainu (sacred guardian dogs carved in stone) and three antique mirrors, also dating from the Kamakura Period; a scroll authored by Emperor Gofukukusa (reigned 1246-1259); and a variety of festival paraphernalia, wooden votive plaques and personal effects, primarily from the Edo Period.

## 8. Special Shrine Events: mikoshi makuri ("portable shrine-rolling")

The Annual Festival's portable shrine procession on July 23 includes a unique event called mikoshi makuri. Under the direction of two "shojin" (religiously purified individuals) referred to as Sosuke and Kosuke, a group of men shoulder a freshly-built wooden portable shrine weighing around 375 kilograms (appx. 830 pounds) and depart from Suimu Shrine. The procession then wends its way through the city to the sounds of ceremonial music and religious chants in which the bearers join with spirited cries of "Sosuke! Kosuke!" In the late evening they reach a place outside the city from which Mount Ontake -- forming the border between former Shinano and Hida provinces -- is visible. Then with a great shout they throw the shrine to the ground and begin rolling it side-over-side and toppling it end-over-end in a dramatic succession which continues throughout the night. The spectacle of a giant shrine cleaving the night sky and crashing to earth is a sight impossible to imagine unless one has witnessed it. Early in the morning of the following day, the portable shrine's shattered remains are returned to Suimu Shrine.

According to the tale which has been passed down over generations, in ancient times an area near Minashi Shrine of Ichinomiya (near Takayama City in present-day Gifu Prefecture) was convulsed in warfare, a conflict which threatened to draw the shrine into its vortex. Sosuke and Kosuke, two men from Kiso who were working in the area at the time, couldn't bear to let such a terrible thing occur: resolving to move the shrine's deity back to their hometown and out of danger, they swiftly assembled a portable shrine and made off towards Kiso. After traversing many mountains and valleys, they had just reached the border of Hida and Shinano provinces when they were overtaken by pursuers. In the ensuing scuffle, the portable shrine slipped from the men's shoulders and tumbled down from the summit of the mountain ridge into Kiso territory. Having been thereby delivered from danger, the two arrived safely in Kiso Fukushima with the shrine borne reverently aloft and succeeded in enshrining the deity at the present location of Suimu Shrine in Iya. Accordingly, it is said, the parishioners honor the memory of the two men's heroic labors by recreating the event, tumbling the massive shrine about with hearty cries of "Sosuke! Kosuke!"



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