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Dancing the Summer Nights Away

3'51"

Gujo Hachiman is a well-preserved old castle town in the mountains of Gifu; a town of rivers, springs and waterways. It is most famous for its 400-year old dance festival, the Gujo Odori. For 32 nights each summer, the town's old streets are packed with people dancing and singing the traditional songs, and for several of these nights, the dancing goes on till dawn. A feature of this festival is that the dancing is open to anyone – visitors are encouraged to join in, and the dances themselves are quite easy to imitate.

***Mottainai* - Even Tiny Scraps Can Be Reused**

3'45"

Mottainai is a traditional Japanese custom of never wasting anything that can be reused, and Kaga Yubinuki are a good example. The old region of Kaga (part of today's Ishikawa) was famous for kimonos and textile dying. In the Kaga Yuzen style of kimono, many colors of thread are used for each piece, creating large amounts of cast off short lengths of silk thread. The old seamstresses recycled the threads to make thimbles (yubinuki), and over the centuries these silk thimbles evolved into delicately patterned little pieces of folk art.

Cruising Down the Shimanto River

4'22"

The Shimanto River, on Shikoku, is one of Japan's clearest and most beautiful rivers. And for centuries, Japanese tourists have been coming here to enjoy the scenery from yakatabune river boats. These wooden boats have a large cabin in which passengers sit on tatami mats to enjoy a meal of freshly caught river fish and prawns while watching the deeply forested banks pass by. Among the sights you see as you eat are fishermen casting their nets in the traditional way to catch the next meal.

Umbrellas To Slip in a Pocket

3'10"

An umbrella is essential in Japan, a land of frequent, unpredictable showers, so it's only natural that Japanese umbrella makers have long been pioneers in designing folding umbrellas that you can carry at all times, just in case. New technology is now allowing folding umbrellas to be made flatter, smaller and lighter – indeed, there are now umbrellas weighing just 192 g, that fold as small as a mobile phone. But designers are not yet satisfied – they hope to reduce this convenient item to the size of a fountain pen.

Dancing the Summer Nights Away

3'51"

01 (Aerial view)

Gifu Prefecture lies at the heart of Honshu, Japan's main island. And at the center of Gifu, ringed by 3,000-meter mountains, stands the old town of Gujo Hachiman.

02 (Map fades out)

The town grew up in the shade of its feudal castle and still looks much as it did 350 years ago, its old streets lined with white walls and wooden lattices.

03 (View down over river)

Running water flows everywhere in Gujo Hachiman, keeping it cool and comfortable in the summer heat.

04 (Spring & statue)

The town's many old springs, wells and waterways are still an essential part of daily life here.

05 (River and lights)

As night approaches, people begin to light lanterns and gather in the center of town.

06 (Dancing crowd)

They are celebrating the Gujo Odori – a dance festival that takes place on 32 nights each summer. In the old days, people in such remote mountain towns had few entertainments, and this festival became a strong tradition that has endured for over 400 years. The high point is from August the 13th to the 16th, when the dancing continues throughout the night.

07 (Pan L over dancing crowd)

Unlike many Japanese festivals, where watching spectators outnumber the dancers, the Gujo Odori encourages everyone to join in. It doesn't matter who you are or what you're wearing, you're welcome to dance along. The movements are simple and uncomplicated, so it's easy to learn simply by imitating the people around you.

08 (Interview - M)

"We vary the rhythm of the dances, making some slow and some lively, to help people to keep on dancing right through the night."

09 (Musicians)

There are ten types of dance performed at the festival, each with its own distinctive song and tempo.

10 (Woman in white with outspread arms)

One dance has elegant, graceful movements; another mimics a frisky kitten at play; in some the dancers vigorously clap along with the music. This pacing and variation is designed to keep the dancers entertained for many hours at a stretch.

11 (Clock)

The energy of the dancing crowds reaches its peak in the small hours.

12 (Sandaed feet)

Now it's time for the Haru Koma dance. The rhythmical stamping of wooden-sandaed feet recalls the horses that once carried samurai through these streets. The dancers come together in spirit as they form chanting lines, arms moving in unison to mimic a rider holding a horse's reins.

13 (Zoom back looking down on crowded street)

Visit Gujo Hachiman for its festival and you too will forget about sleep, caught up in the dancing that has enlivened summer nights in this mountain town for so many centuries.

***Mottainai* - Even Tiny Scraps Can Be Reused**

3'45"

01 (Pan R over display case)

Brightly colored rings, less than a centimeter deep, decorated with complex patterns in silk thread.

02 (Hand picks up thimble)

Actually, these are traditional thimbles, used to protect the fingers when doing needlework.

03 (Zoom in on finger)

This type of thimble, beautifully made from the finest silk, is called a Kaga Yubinuki.

04 (Map)

Kaga is the old name for the region that forms the south of today's Ishikawa Prefecture.

05 (Kanazawa on map)

At its heart is the city of Kanazawa, famed for 400 years for its castle and prosperous industries.

06 (Scroll & vase)

Kanazawa has always been known for kimono making, and especially for the delicately patterned, dyed silk fabric known as Kaga Yuzen.

07 (Sewing machine)

When sewing a kimono from Kaga Yuzen fabric, the silk threads are selected to exactly match the many colors of the pattern.

08 (Scissors)

Because the threads are cut off and replaced by a new color each time the pattern changes, a great volume of waste silk thread is created.

09 (Ball of thread)

It is these piles of cut thread that are used to create the multi-colored Kaga Yubinuki thimbles – another example of *mottainai*, the traditional Japanese reluctance to waste anything unnecessarily.

10 (Interview - F)

"Anyone who does sewing needs to use a thimble. People would make them out of scraps of silk and the cut ends of thread, and over the years this developed into the beautiful thimbles you see today."

11 (Woman making thimble)

The *mottainai* principle of avoiding waste runs deep: this designer is even using rolled up old postcards as base and stiffener for the thimble she's making.

12 (View over L shoulder)

See how she uses needle after needle, each with a different colored thread, to build up the pattern.

13 (Thimble on display)

Countless designs become possible, simply by varying the colors, numbers, intervals and angles of the threads.

14 (Stack of thimbles)

The imaginations of the old kimono seamstresses, and their ingenuity at sewing delicate patterns, transformed the humble thimble from a simple tool into a small work of art.

15 (Pan down over many thimbles)

Kaga Yubinuki are still used as thimbles, but today more and more people also appreciate them as beautiful accessories, and even as art objects.

Cruising Down the Shimanto River

4'22"

01 (Map)

In the southern part of Shikoku, one of Japan's four main islands, a famous waterway winds its way to the Pacific Ocean. This is the Shimanto River.

02 (Underwater)

These pure waters support an astonishing variety of wildlife. About 200 aquatic species flourish in this river.

03 (Bridge)

The Shimanto River makes a popular and fascinating day's excursion for the region's many visitors.

04 (Boat in distance)

The highlight of any day here is a cruise on a *yakatabune* river boat.

05 (Yakatabune subtitle)

Yakatabune boats have a big roofed cabin where passengers sit on *tatami* mats around tables,

viewing the passing scenery through large windows.

06 (Ukiyoe painting)

This kind of pleasure cruise has a long history in Japan – *ukiyoe* paintings from 200 years ago show people enjoying themselves aboard *yakatabune*.

07 (Boat in distance)

This is the best and most relaxing way to take in the magnificent scenery of the Shimanto River.

08 (Boatman talking)

The guide is a river fisherman.

09 (Interview – starts as we see the backs of 2 women's heads – speaker's face not shown)

"Look over there. Those fishermen are just setting out to catch prawns."

10 (Two men in yellow boat)

Cruising down the river, you pass many people fishing in the traditional way.

11 (Eating)

The *yakatabune* is designed as a kind of floating restaurant, and now it's time for lunch.

12 (Casting a net)

The meal features fresh fish caught in the Shimanto River.

13 (Man in white shirt)

You'll eat *ayu*, a kind of river trout, and freshwater prawns, all served in a box lunch.

14 (Eating)

Somehow, eating on a boat improves both the taste of the fish and your appreciation of the passing scenery.

15 (Boat approaches bridge)

The river is also known for its *chinkabashi* bridges.

16 (View along bridge)

There are 47 of these bridges, sturdily designed with no parapets to allow the region's frequent floodwaters to wash over them safely.

17 (Boat passes under bridge)

The *yakatabune* passes under the low bridges with little headroom to spare.

18 (Boat in midstream)

Each river cruise lasts about an hour.

19 (Interview - F)

"I really enjoyed the boat ride. It was so quiet and peaceful."

20 (Interview - F)

"It was great, and lunch was delicious."

21 (Interview - M)

"The water was beautifully clear. A lovely calm ride."

22 (Yellow flowers)

Summer isn't the only time to visit the Shimanto River – each season shows its magnificent scenery in a new light.

23 (Boat)

The *yakatabune* – a unique way to enjoy one of Japan's most beautiful rivers.

Umbrellas To Slip in a Pocket

3'10"

01 (Woman leaving building)

If sunny skies suddenly give way to showers, you can escape a soaking if you have a folding umbrella in your bag.

02 (Umbrellas)

Japan's folding umbrella designers keep coming up with new ideas to make this convenient accessory even smaller and lighter.

03 (Hand holding umbrella)

This umbrella barely covers your palm when folded. It's not much bigger than a mobile phone, and fits easily in a back pocket.

04 (Scales)

Weighing in at just 192 grams, it's even lighter than a banana.

05 (Shop)

You'll see tiny folding umbrellas like these everywhere in Japan, and you'll probably wonder how it's possible to make them so small.

06 (Conventional umbrella)

Conventional umbrellas have a long latch that locks the canopy in the open position.

07 (Latch)

This mechanism means that the umbrella can't be made shorter than the length of the latch.

08 (Fingers and new latch)

The new designs use a spring to allow the latch to be shorter.

09 (Two umbrellas)

This means folding umbrellas can now be made much smaller than before.

10 (Umbrella mechanism)

Conventional umbrellas have a round cap at the top of the tube. Replacing this by a flat cap makes the folded umbrella only half as thick.

11 (Opening the stretchers)

The stretchers slide into position round the cap as they are extended to open the circular canopy.

12 (Various colors of umbrella)

Ideas and designs like these made possible today's ultra-thin, palm-sized folding umbrellas.

13 (Opening red umbrella)

The frames are strong enough to withstand 20 meter per second winds, and even when blown inside out, safely return to their original shape.

14 (Interview - M)

"My ideal folding umbrella is one so light you can just forget you are carrying it. I want it to become so unnoticeable it's like another part of your body. Our ultimate goal is to make a folding umbrella that's as small as a fountain pen."

15 (Umbrellas)

These folding umbrellas are not only tiny and convenient– they come in a range of colors and patterns guaranteed to brighten up the gloomiest of rainy days.

Dancing the Summer Nights Away

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