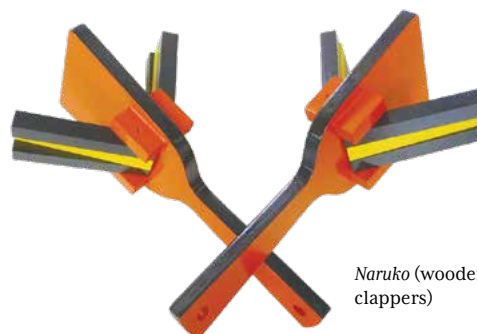


# Yosakoi

## — A Captivating, High-Energy Dance



Naruko (wooden clappers)

The four-day Yosakoi Festival, which is held each year in Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture, kicks off on Festival Eve, August 9. We interviewed Kenichi Takeishi of the Yosakoi Festival Promotion Association about the festival, which draws about one million visitors each time it is held. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

The Yosakoi Festival is a spectacular and large-scale summer festival in Kochi Prefecture, with a total of more than 18,000 dancers from roughly 160 teams who dance wildly while beating small wooden clappers called *naruko*. It begins on August 9 with a Festival Eve celebration and a fireworks show, followed by the main events on August 10-11, then the national competition and closing celebration on August 12. Every one of these events is

action-packed, like a huge carnival.

The Yosakoi Festival got its start in 1954 as a proposal from the Kochi Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The first festival featured dances based on a traditional Japanese dance to the tune of “Yosakoi Naruko Odori” (which is based on the folk song “Yosakoi Bushi,” and still the designated song of the festival), but the dances and the music have evolved and diversified over the years. The music has developed



After a four-year interval, the Yosakoi Festival is coming back in 2023, and the locals are getting excited about it.



from the traditional sound, with more rock and other styles emerging today, and hairstyles and costumes also became flashier. Choreography has also become more creative, with each team borrowing elements from samba, rock, etc., to create its own style.

We asked about the origin of the words “Yosakoi” and “Yosakoi Bushi.”

“The word ‘Yosakoi’ itself is said to have come from ‘yoi-sho-koi,’ a Japanese shout of encouragement. There are also various theories, including one that the song “Yosakoi Bushi” is a variation of “Kiyari Bushi,” a melody that was sung at the time the Tosa Clan built Kochi Castle in the early 17th century.”

The song “Yosakoi Bushi” is marked by the sound of the *naruko*, a musical instrument. The *naruko* is a tool used to drive away wild birds during the harvest season to protect grains from being eaten by them. The creator of the Yosakoi Naruko Odori dance incorporated the sound of the *naruko* into it, and the dance eventually developed into the rhythmical dances of today.

During the festival, visitors can watch the dances at 17 venues around Kochi City. If you want to get a better look at the dances, we recommend going to see them

at the Otesuji Headquarters Performance Hall (there is a fee). Here you can enjoy these powerful dances up close. Since most of the venues are free of charge, it’s also a good idea to stroll around the city and enjoy various dances on stage or in the streets while taking in the atmosphere.

“This summer marks the 70th Yosakoi Festival. Spectators will find it exciting to compare each team’s elaborate *jikatasha*,<sup>1</sup> and the passion and power the dancers put into their Yosakoi dances, including the original songs, glittering costumes, and choreography enhanced with *naruko*, says Takeishi. He adds, “Kochi Prefecture has a Yosakoi Ambassador certification system for representatives of teams dancing Yosakoi outside Japan, and 65 ambassadors from 23 teams in 19 countries are scheduled to participate in this year’s festival.” The organizers hope as many people as possible will have the chance to experience the charm of this hugely popular festival, which also includes international highlights from many different countries. 🗨️

1. A vehicle that leads the way for the dancers and plays music with onboard sound equipment to guide the team. Each team decorates their vehicle elaborately in their own unique way.



Photo: Yosakoi Festival Promotion Association

Above left: Teams also come from outside Japan to participate, like this team from Poland in 2019.

Above Right: Here is one of the *jikatasha*, vehicles with original decorations that add a touch of color to the festival.

Below: At the Yosakoi Festival, you will enjoy each team’s creative ideas for costumes and dancing.