

## A Calendar of Words Seasonal Words for August

When August arrives, mass movements of people seeking to refresh themselves physically and mentally begin in Japan. They attempt to do this in a range of ways: they might go swimming in the ocean, visit a summer resort, or use a long holiday to visit their hometown or travel overseas.

August is the height of summer, with continuing days of fierce heat over 35°C, but from *risshu* (the first day of fall in the lunar calendar, around August 7) onwards, it begins to become gradually cooler, and we begin to see the first signs of autumn.

A lot of summer festivals are held about this time, related to the fact that it is the period in which many regions celebrate *o-bon*. Many very familiar customs form parts of these festivals, such as lighting *okuri-bi* (bonfires that send ancestral spirits safely back to the spirit world), performing *shouryou nagashi* (setting lanterns or offerings for the spirits of the deceased to float in rivers or on the ocean), dancing *Bon odori* (the Bon festival dance), and setting off fireworks.

In past times, when there wasn't much in the way of entertainment, these events gave people a chance to catch up again with others who were also visiting their hometowns, and also provided a chance for men and women to meet each other. Wearing a *yukata* (a light summer *kimono*) on the day of the festival probably added to the enjoyment.

## ことばの歳時記 ~8月の季語~

8月になると、日本人は心身のリフレッシュのために大移動を始めます。海水浴をしたり、避暑地を訪ねたり、また長期休暇を活用して帰省したり、海外旅行に出かけたりと、過ごし方もさまざまです。

最高気温も35度を超える猛暑日が続くなど、夏全開の8月ですが、立秋（7日頃）を迎えた頃から、少しずつ涼しくなっていき、秋の気配が漂い始めます。

このころ至るところで夏祭りが盛んに開催されますが、これは多くの地域でお盆を迎えることに関係します。先祖の霊が無事にあの世へ帰れるようにと送り火を焚いたり、精霊流しをしたり、盆踊りをしたり、花火を上げたり、日本ではこれらすべてが夏祭りとして親しまれているのです。

ごらくすくじだいぎょうじきせいひとびと  
娯楽の少なかった時代、こうした行事は、帰省した人々の再会の場や、男女の出会いの場でもあったそうです。このような夏祭りの日に、浴衣に袖を通せば、楽しさもひとしおかもしれませんね。