

A ROUSING SUMMER IN TOHOKU



BOTH PHOTOS: YOSHIFUSA HASHIZUME

Members of the Date Bushoutai group at Sendai Castle. The armor of Date Masamune (center) weighs over 20 kg.

The Sendai Tanabata Festival, which is considered one of the three major festivals of the Tohoku region, dates back to around 400 years ago, and many tourists and residents come to view the festivities. The beauty of the magnificent decorations called *fukinagashi* that line the wide shopping streets are a sight to behold, captivating all who view them. After the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, the organizers considered canceling the event this year.

However, at the end of April it was formally decided to hold the festival on the theme of "Recovery and Repose," and the event went ahead as planned for three days from August 6 to 8.

What lent even more charge and splendor to the festival this year was the East Japan Bushoutai Summit held at Sendai Castle on August 7 and 8. Almost twenty *bushoutai* groups dressed up as warlords connected with the area have now been formed in



Fukinagashi hang from the roof of a Sendai shopping arcade. Sendai Tanabata Festival is famous for its 4-m long fukinagashi, which have a kusudama (decorative ball) at the top and long thin strips of Japanese paper or cranes hanging down from them.

Japan to promote tourism in the region. Gathering at the summit this time were a total of five teams based in Eastern Japan, including Miyagi, Yamagata, Saitama and Niigata Prefectures.

The Date Bushoutai, based locally in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, was formed last year to promote tourism in Sendai. The team comprises eleven members, including Date Masamune, the warlord who ruled over present-day Sendai, Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima Prefectures 400 years ago, and Hasekura Tsunenaga, a vassal of Date Masamune who sailed to Europe by crossing the Atlantic Ocean, being the first Japanese to do so. Its martial arts display performance with members dressed in the clothing and armor of the Warring States period, is very popular.

Since May after the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Date Bushoutai has given performances in major cities nationwide, in gratitude for the reconstruction assistance given to the Tohoku region and to promote the Tohoku region as it bravely works to get back

on its feet.

“When the disaster struck, we received encouragement and support from around the world. We are truly grateful. The Date Bushoutai send the vitality of Tohoku as a signal to the world!” When the young man dressed up as Date Masamune raised the war cry, the 1,000-strong audience packed into Sendai Castle burst into applause, then fixed their eyes on the display of martial arts by the Date Bushoutai and four other bushoutai.

Besides the Sendai Tanabata Festival, other traditional festivals were held as usual this summer in various parts of the Tohoku region. Also, many tourist spots, including Hiraizumi, which was listed as a World Heritage site in June, were bustling, and all types of industry have recovered to their pre-earthquake levels. This month’s feature article presents the face of Tohoku as it begins the steady march toward recovery, six months after the Great East Japan Earthquake. 

