

「Email Newsletter from Mayor of Okayama(52) August 4th Issue」

【Okayama's summer tradition, "Uraja"】

Hello, I'm Omori, Mayor of Okayama.

On both last days of Saturday, August 1st and Sunday, 2nd, the town of Okayama was wrapped in hot air of "Uraja".

The "Uraja" is a citizen participation typed festival centering on a dance. It's held in the city center on the first Saturday and Sunday of August every year and it marked 22nd anniversary this year.

Origin of the name is the combination of the words "Ura(orge)" which is said to be a model of demon of an old tale "Momotaro" and "~Ja (~Da)" which is Okayama's dialect and put the end of sentences.

The summer festivals I used to be once in Okayama, I recall they were overall slightly quiet. However this "Uraja" was just full of energetic. Because all the dancers' smiles and costumes in addition to make-ups imaging Ura worn by not only dancers but also audiences shined the town.

As for me, it was the first visit to this festival because I had been away from Okayama for over 30 years (the time of last year, I was visiting San Jose City, California which is an international friendship exchange city). I watched the performances at Shimoishii Park, Omote-cho shopping streets, and Aeon Mall on Saturday and mainly on Shiyakusho-suji Ave. on Sunday. Although both days recorded a heat wave and could hardly stand in this intense heat that would cause a heat stroke, all the dancers made nothing of it and had danced for two days from the Saturday through the Sunday dance by all. I was very very overwhelmed and impressed by their energy to dance the whole time.

"Uraja" which more than 6,000 people of 139 dance groups participated this year and is widely known for Okayama's summer tradition. It is good to watch and good to dance. Those who live outside of the city, why don't you join us and feel this enthusiastic next year?

Incidentally the delegation from Bucheon , Korea was also visiting Okayama, and they were surprised that we had such an energetic festival which many citizens participated and all the trash were cleaned up after the festival.