“SOME FOOLS DANCE, AND SOME FOOLS WATCH.
YOU’RE A FOOL EITHER WAY,
SO WHY NOT DANCE?”

In general, Awa-Odori is considered to be both the name of this dance of the fools and the name of a fabulous dance festival that takes place in Tokushima City, Japan each year. More than a thousand dancers, accompanied by taiko drums, flutes and other instruments, come together every summer to dance and chant this silly song. It’s not only the dancers; more than a million spectators can be seen seemingly filling every nook and cranny of the city during this four-day festival every August as they join in the dance, high spirits, and joy.

The audience applause, the boom of powerful taiko drums, the gongs, the high-pitched flutes, and the exuberant calls of the dancers seem to ignite the very air with excitement. The simplicity of the two-beat rhythm and the stunning and captivating unison of the Awa-Odori dancers uplifts and enriches the soul. It’s no wonder that spectators throughout the world are getting caught up in the spread of happiness that is accompanying the spread of this lovely dance.
HOW TO DANCE

Men’s Dance

1. While keeping your weight on your left foot, put your right foot forward toe-first. At the same time, put your right hand forward.

2. Shift your weight to your right foot and raise your left foot. Repeat these simple motions in a two-step rhythm.

3. Now, while keeping your weight on your right foot, put your left foot forward toe-first. At the same time, put your left hand forward.

4. Then shift your weight to your left foot, and raise your right foot. Repeat these simple motions in a two-step rhythm.

Women’s Dance

1. While keeping your weight on your left foot, kick your right foot back and then put it forward toe-first. At the same time, put your right hand forward but make sure to keep it above shoulder-height.

2. Shift your weight to your right foot up towards the inside.

3. Kick your left foot back and then put it forward toe-first; at the same time place the left hand forward. Keep arms tight to the body and knees closed.

4. Shift your weight to your left foot and raise your right foot up towards the inside. Repeat these simple motions in a two-step rhythm.

INSTRUMENTS

Uchiwa
(Japanese hand fan)
Most are made from bamboo and feature a round shape. These fans were originally carried to help fan the wind, but now they make the men’s dance refined and chic.

Amigasa
(braided straw hat)
Originally used to shade from the sun, this hat knitted from grass is pulled over the eyes to subtly conceal the face.

Rikyugeta
(Rikyu wooden clogs)
This footwear for the women’s dance is geta that features two thin teeth that are low to the ground. To prevent slipping, some dancers use rubber on the toots and teeth.

Yumihari Chochin
(paper lantern with a bow-shaped handle)
A small cylindrical lantern with a bow handle used in the men’s dance. To create fantasy scenes, lit lanterns are used during stage performances.

Kane (small gong)
A metal instrument shaped like a dish that is rung with a wooden bat hammer-shaped and an anode, the high pitch suits the tempo.

Shamisen
Strumming three stretched strings with a pick - this instrument is indispensable for “Zomeki” to create mood among the instruments.

Fue (Japanese flute)
A flute made from a slender cut of bamboo. It plays the lead melody and its pitch is controlled by its length.

Shime-daiko
Japanese tight drum
This medium-sized drum features two leather layers that are tightened by strings. It’s light tone lifts dancer’s spirits.

Okawa
(large hand drum)
Its sound is controlled by how the strings are gripped as it is beaten with a Harison (folded fan). Its higher tone makes it a key accent within the ensemble.

Narimono
(Instruments)
The instruments that accompany Awa-odori are the small gong, Japanese flute, shamisen and various drums. Through these, each team has their own unique rhythm.

Odoriko
(dancers)
Men with their powerful, dynamic dance, women with their elegant dance come together. Additionally, there are happy-coat female dancers and children dancers too.

Awa-ODORI TERMS

Introducing the unique terms of Awa-odori. Once you know these, it will be fun to watch.

Zomeki
“Zomeki” is the general term for Awa-odori’s sound and rhythm. Originally, it means to “revel happily, go around in jest”.

Enbujo
( street amphitheater)
There are various paid or admission free places to see Awa-odori. Among these, the largest can accommodate about 5,000 spectators.

Odoriko
(dancers)
Players shoulder this large smooth drum and beat it on both sides with large drumsticks. Its deep sound resonates with the body as it provides bass to the ensemble.