

A visit to the Hiratsuka Tanabata Star Festival

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14 July 2011

## FESTIVAL

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – According to Japanese legend, many centuries ago, God had a daughter by the name of Orihime who was a hardworking weaver. So he presented a friend to her by the name of Kengyuh, a young man who also worked hard taking care of cattle.

At first sight, the two fell in love and forgot their duties completely. No more clothes were weaved for God and the cattle became sick.

In anger, God separated them by the Ama no kawa, which means “River in the Heavens” or better known as the Milky Way.

Because of Orihime’s weeping, God pitied the two star crossed lovers and allowed them to meet once a year on July 7. But if it rains just before this day, the river over runs and the two lovers cannot meet.

So on July 6, the people of Japan pray that there is no rain before the two lovers allowed to meet.

It is on this legend that the Hiratsuka Tanabata Star Festival was founded, and has been going strong for the last 50 years.

Hiratsuka hosts the biggest Tanabata Festival held in the Kanto plains region. The festival is usually held on the 7th of July, but to accommodate a bigger crowd, the festival is extended to the weekend surrounding the seventh.

This year the festival was celebrated on July 9 and Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation provided tickets to the festival.

"[I'm looking forward to] just getting to see the Japanese people, experience a little bit of their food, the culture, what the festival means to them," said Christopher Dinelli, a 19-year-old visiting family at NAF Atsugi.

The crowd was shoulder to shoulder of people moving in every direction.

Some of the Japanese people were traditionally dressed in kimonos and some with their masks placed on the side of their heads.

The decorations included streamers, lanterns and different displays.

The choice of food seemed endless. Stalls serving everything from soba noodles and grilled fish on a stick to different handmade candies.

Shopping and activities were abundant down the many avenues of the festival. Items like kimonos, large bottles of sake, and even little miniature pet turtles were for sale.

“My favorite part of the festival was just being able to walk around and see everything,” said Tom Smith, a Department of Defense employee and avid tourist.

For a longer stay, riding the trains to and from the festival is recommended.

For those who prefer another venue of entertainment, MWR offers a range of tours to suit anyone.

“I thought there was a wide variety of tour selections,” said Dinelli. “I think it gives people a good chance to come here and explore Japan and its culture.”

For more information on tours and how to sign up for them, stop by MWR or call 264-3770.