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Bon season
By Masahiro Ando

There is a big movement of people in Japan in August, especially during the “Bon” season. Bon is the name of a certain time period around August 15th when it is believed that the souls of family ancestors visit you. In a narrow sense, Bon is several days in the middle of August, while in a broader sense it is the whole month of August.

In accordance with Buddhist temples, the climax of Bon this year was August 13th, around which time people tried to take a vacation. Japan is a small country (as big as California) with a large population (127 million, while that of the US is 313 million), so the movement of people during this season is just like a stampede. Most people went to their hometowns on August 10th and returned on the 14th this year.

Long-distance trains from big cities are not just crowded but packed with people, all of whom have several big suitcases with them. Trains during this time usually operate 60 to 70 percent above seating capacity. The passengers are supposed to keep standing for at least a few hours or several hours. I am not sure if people here are able to imagine how unpleasant it can be. Perhaps an example would be Times Square on New Year’s Eve, only instead of the cold there would be temperatures in the 100s with 90% humidity!

Airports are also packed full of many people. We are not surprised to hear an anchorman say, “All the flights from Tokyo today and tomorrow are fully booked.” You see many people hanging around, waiting for cancellations for hours.

The worst scene can be seen on expressways. It is quite common that a traffic jam is as long as 20 or 30 miles. Once caught in one, your car stops completely and you stay there for a while, which makes you feel as if you were in a parking lot. Although they have a traffic forecast telling that there is going to be a traffic jam for a particular amount of time in a particular city, quite a few people try to go through there anyway.

Every year, everyone says that we should take vacations at different times in different ways, but since our ancestors’ schedule is fixed, we probably cannot help it. I think this stampede is now almost a part of Japanese culture.

Otsukimi, Full Moon Viewing

Saturday, September 29, 2012 at JCC
7pm—8:30pm
Try calligraphy, haiku, and Japanese treats called dango.
Tea Ceremony demonstration too.
Entry fee $3 per adult/$1 for child (under 12)