

## July: Tanabata (The Star Festival)



*Tanabata* originated from an old Chinese star festival, which was introduced to Japan in the eighth century. It is based on the folk legend of the Cowherd (Altair) and the Weaving Maid (Vega), two celestial lovers whose paths cross only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month on the lunar calendar.

The festival was named after a Japanese mythological goddess who was very good at weaving.

Most Japanese people celebrate *Tanabata* on July 7th although in some areas it is still observed on August 7th in keeping with the old traditions.

On this evening, children write wishes or poems on multicolored strips of paper and attach them to branches of a cut bamboo along with *origami* cranes and other decorations. The decorated bamboo is then fastened to the doorway of the house. It is a time when people gather at home or community parks to enjoy a warm midsummer evening. Children play lighting sparklers and other small fireworks.

In rural areas, they also enjoy catching fireflies, but today, there are very few fireflies in or around cities.