

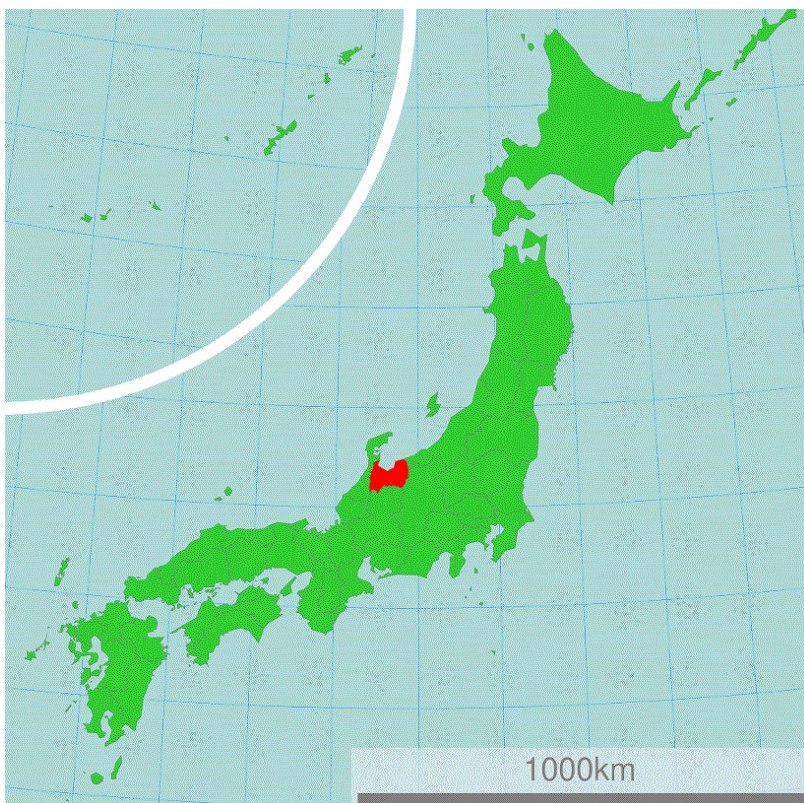
Report: 3 reasons for going to Toyama Part 1 Rokudoji~ Winner of Kingdom of the Lion dance

Date: 14th May, every year

Location: Rokudoji district, Imizu city, Toyama prefecture

Access: Rokudoji station (Manyo line). You take "Ai-no-kaze-Toyama line from Toyama and change at Takaoka to Manyo line. To Toyama from Tokyo, you take Shinkansen (JR line) or night express bus.

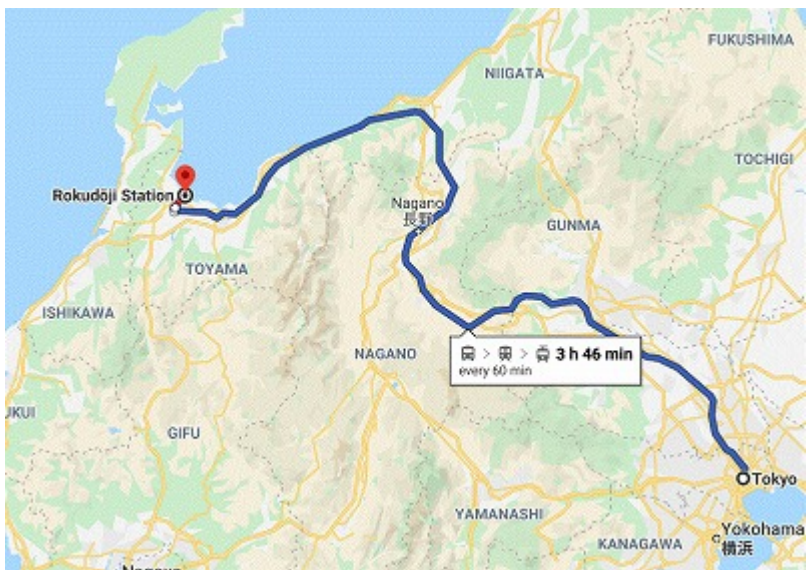
*This article is written based on writer's experience in 2018.



Toyama prefecture 〇〇〇



Imizu city 〇〇〇



From Tokyo to Toyama



Rokudoji district

□Hello, everybody.

□ Do you have a time when you want to go to Japan, but just going to major cities like Tokyo, Osaka or Kyoto, isn't enough? Those of you who doubt there must be something more than just Ninja, temple, Fujiyama, Kawaii and high technology in Japan—you are lucky to reach this site. There are many good regions where most people don't know. For example, what do you think of Toyama prefecture? You may say "Toyama? Where is it? I have never heard such a name". That's what's fun about it. You want to see more than Tokyo, don't you? You want to know deeper attractive Japan, don't you?

□3 reasons why you should go to Toyama.

One. Toyama has great nature. "Kurobe-kyokoku (gorge) is deep V shaped gorge with a height difference between the river and mountain ranging from 1,500 to 2,000 meters. This area has

many hot springs, Unatsuki or Tsurigane which are famous for their natural open-air baths at the river bank of the Kurobe river. And “Yuki-no-otani” is a snow wall walk. It’s ten meters long. The wall reaches a height of 20 meters in some spots!

cf.→<https://www.alpen-route.com/en/yuki-no-otani-snow-wall-walk-2016apr-16th-jun-22nd%E3%80%80%EF%BD%9E%E9%9B%AA%E3%81%AE%E5%A4%A7%E8%B0%B7%E3%82%A6%E3%82%A9%E3%83%BC%E3%82%AF2016%EF%BD%9E> Yuki-no-otani



https://www.kurotetu.co.jp/about_kurobe/



<https://www.travel.co.jp/guide/article/2007/>



<https://travel.rakuten.co.jp/mytrip/ranking/spot-toyama/>

Two. There are many traditional cultures. The old castle “Toyama castle”, the big buddha in Takaoka. “Kanaya” is a town as if time had stopped. “Gokayama”, the historic village is designated as a World Cultural Heritage Sites.



Toyama castle



Takaoka great buddha



Kanaya town



Gokayama village

*cf. Toyama castle, Takaoka buddha and Gokayama village from <https://travel.rakuten.co.jp/mytrip/ranking/spot-toyama/>
Kanaya town from <https://toyama-bunkaisan.jp/search/1747/>

□Every spot is accessible within one or two hours by train from Toyama station. It's very convenient.

Three. There are many great "Shishimai (Lion dance). Yes, I am definite about that. Actually, it is said Toyama has more than 1,000 groups of Shishimai. Each region has its own style. They have been performed for more than 300 years. Among these, I recommend the lion dance in "Rokudoji" and "Shinminato" areas. While flames are rising up, the endless battle of "Shishi" and "Tengu" unfolds. You can watch performances transcending simple traditional performing arts.

□First, you are at the Takaoka station of "Manyo-line". Takaoka is within half an hour from Toyama. "Manyo-line" is a vehicle between a train and bus. In short, it is a streetcar. You have to get a number ticket when you get on. This streetcar starts slowly and drowsily as if you were on a roller coaster. When I got on, there were many students because it was a weekday. Although most traditional performing arts are held on Saturday or Sunday near the original day, in this area, they stubbornly observe the day prescribed. The streetcar drives along the environs of the old town to Shinminato.





*from

https://www.tripadvisor.jp/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g311426-d2401483-i228144336-Manyosen-Takaoka_Toyama_Prefecture_Hokuriku_Chubu.html

□After about thirty minutes, you reach a station. You may see a building with a nice rustic in front of the station. That's Rokudoji. But you will murmur "Well, Where is the Lion dance group? I don't know."

□When I visited the area, I arrived at about nine am. The only information I had was to be at the shrine at six. I walked along the river. Then, I heard some sounds of flutes and drums. I walked following the sound, and had a look in the alley. I found it. There was a group of the Lion dance right here.



Tengu





□Shishi and Tengu were dancing. There were five people inside both Shishi and Tengu, children (called Kiriko)dressed up with flower hats, followed by a little vehicle with several people playing traditional flutes and Japanese drum (Taiko) riding. And in addition there were more than ten people who are the leader and supporters. All people other than Tengu and Kiriko wear the same clothes.





Kiriko



□Shishi consists of five people. The front man handles the head of Shishi, and others are covered by a long cloth tinged

with a unique pattern. This style is called “centipede Lion”.

□They walk along the street, sometimes stop to play a short dance (within five to ten minutes). Shishi try to catch Kiriko, and Tengu face Shishi to try to protect them. This is the basic form. The leader decides on the spot what they do. The leader tells the name of the program, and they instantly dance it. Sometimes, a man who happen to pass by join them. I suspect he, of course, may be a member but he couldn't participate this day for some reason. And sometimes the musicians play as Kiriko.



□People who live along the street go out from their house. Children watch them with their shining eyes. This festival is held every year, but they can't help coming out to the street

when they hear the sound of the Lion dance. The group walk as they dance to meet everyone's expectation all over the town the whole day. That day was a weekday, as expected the number of viewer was not many especially in the morning. Just because the viewers weren't many, they never cut corners. Come to think of it, despite being weekday, people walk around playing Shishi dance don't go to work, and children are absent from school, too. But people in this town must consider it is only natural. And they are waiting for Shishi to come. In Japan, towns like this still remain.





□The leader cries the name of the program, every member gets prepared immediately like an army. The leader cries “Tololo!”, “Baigaeshi!”. We, as third party, don’t know any meaning of these words, but as we watch them again and again, we could imagine what they play. Thus their chant “Iyasaa, iyasaka!” echoes all over the town. This “Iyasaa” chant is short for “Iyoiyo sakaeru”, means “thrive more and more”. This chant is rare.



□People inside Shishi continue to swing its long curtain. The curtain doesn't swing easily by a little shake. People have to make the curtain swing by power of the whole bodies. It's a good amount of hard work. So people change their role repeatedly. People who come out from the curtain are covered in sweat and their faces are burning, especially the man who handles the head. Even in May, it's hot.



□They sometimes imitate pounding rice cake (Japanese traditional ceremony at New Year) with Hyottoko joying in. They don't pound rice cake actually, Kiriko (children dressed up) throw confetti at last to celebrate. They go around giving fortune to the town.



□They walk around the town while doing short performances, and sometimes do long versions of the program at facilities, like at a hospital or a kindergarten.

□When the group arrived this hospital facility at about 2 pm, many people had already waited impatiently for them. I only followed after the group of Shishi, but local people might know the time, it arrives for every year. Not only the people in this facility, but many neighbors have gathered. □Whether the people are concerned or not, or whether they have nothing to do...(no)...they all seem to gather despite of themselves every year event.

□We can see the perfect form of this Shishi dance at last here, although, the basic format doesn't change. Shishi goes mad, Kiriko dance colorfully and Tengu faces the Shishi. Then, what is different? Let's go on to the chase, and we can see the last part. Until then, Shishi runs over, Tengu and Kiriko appears, and coaxes it. But that was all just a part of the battle. If there are people who say "So? What ultimately happens?", they would finally find out here.



□Before we see the last, we must give you more information. It is the torch. Most Shishimai group use this torch recently. The group that started using, Rokudoji. This performance has been the typical style, Rokudoji being the is origin. So, when Tengu holds the torches, the audience lives up. It takes about more thirty minutes.

□Rokudoji received the first prize at the competition of the Lion dance in Toyama for six years in a row for this performance. Moreover the Shishi dance is characterized by Tengu wearing the long hat called "Eboshi". Tengu has long hair called "Shaguma" in Imizu city, while Tengu has long hat in Himi city. Rokudoji has both feature.



□Tengu dangles fire in front of Shishi. Shishi is dazzled soon, and calms down.



□Every group in Imizu type has the performance “Killing the lion”, but Rokudoji doesn’t have that performance. This is another feature. Rokudoji received the first prize at the competition of the Lion dance in Toyama where it is said to be the kingdom of the Lion dance, for six years in a row for this performance.



□When the main event finishes, it will be late afternoon. Rokudoji is located between the river and the sea. It's great to do cool off in the afternoon, or you want to eat something. Unfortunately, this area doesn't have any convenience stores, cafes or restaurants. If you want to go to a shop, you can get on the Manyo-line and go to the center of the city. In my case, I walked a very long way to find shops because I thought there are some convenience stores nearby. After all, I ended up walking for two stations away from Rokudoji. Lesson 1. "Don't think there are some shops within five minutes walking distance like Tokyo."

□In the evening, finally the most popular performance will be held called "Iwai-bana". This means that the Shishi group goes to and celebrate a house that is new or a family that had a happy event like a wedding or a new baby.



□This evening, two ceremonies were held. One was a personal new house and another was the community center. It started about seven pm. When this time approached many cars were lined up along the river. First, in front of a just personal house. People already filed up the area in front of the house. I couldn't see anything having been late. So, I gave up watch at this place, and moved on to the next place, the community center. In front of the center is a wide square, but many people already surrounded it. Just so you know, this information isn't uploaded on SNS. I knew that it is held at the community center just because I heard they (members of the group) say so. If you want to know where it held, you should ask them. They will surely answer because they love their Shishi performance.



□As fire lights the torch gets exciting. Fire is great. especially at night. I guess fire would awaken the memory of ancient times. The accompanied music sounds sometimes high, sometimes low, sometimes fast, and sometimes slow along with the dance movement. The whole audience is drawn into the fantasy world.



□ In this place, you can see everything that you have seen till this time. You find that all you saw in daylight mean like fitting peaces into place together like a puzzle. Shishi is not killed, calmed down and becomes obedient. All the world have become happy.





□There is a specific scene in “Iwai-bana”,too. It is called

“ko-jo”. Literaly translated, this means “to state”. What they say is to celebrate the house or people, etc. Every “Kojo” is fixed sounding rhetoric. This is one way to enjoy it.



□Every event will end between 8:30 to 9 pm. It would be suggested to stay in this town or go to stay in Takaoka city. The last train starts at 11 pm but only two trains ran an hour between 10 and 11 pm. Don't forget to get a number ticket.