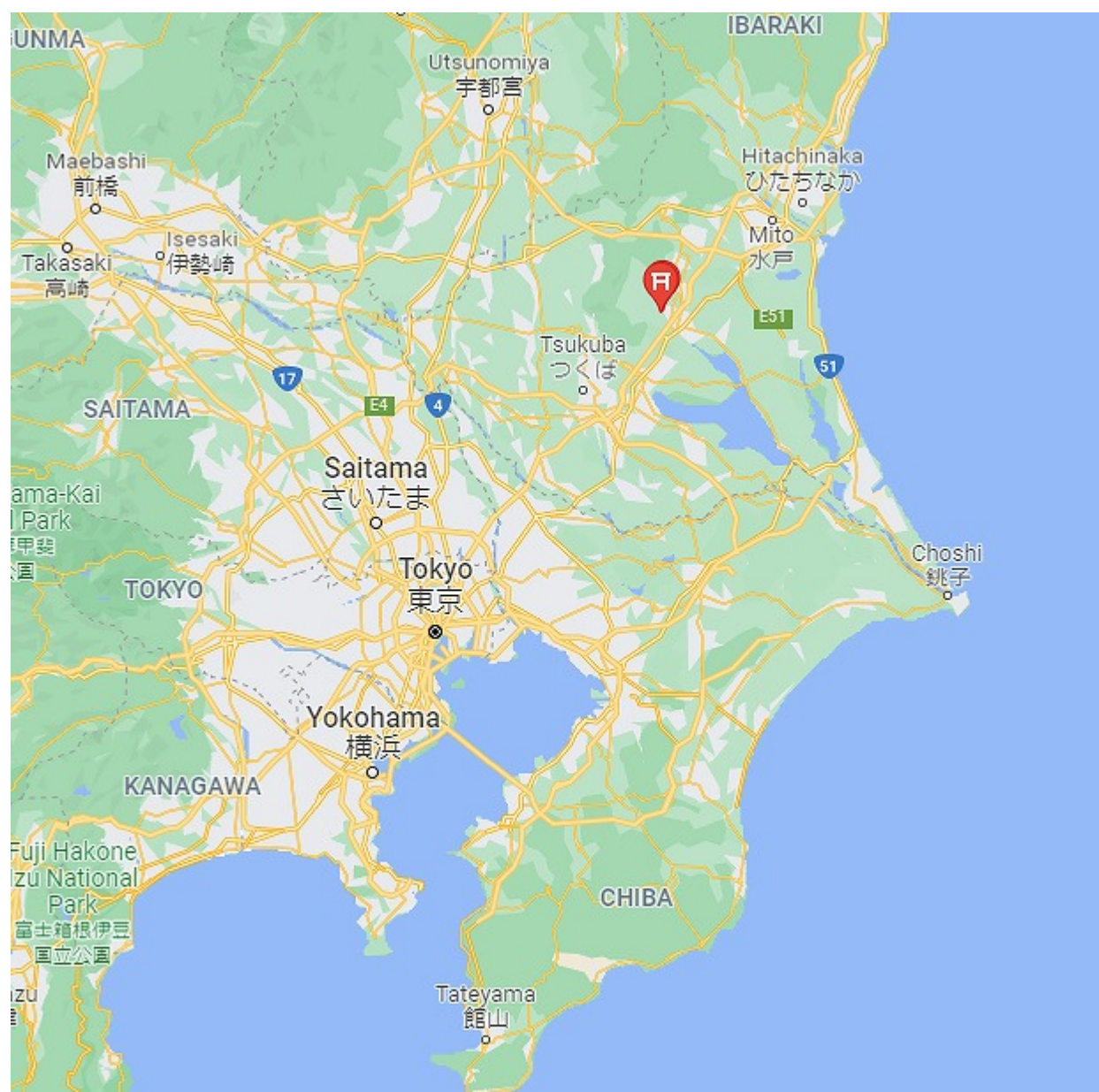
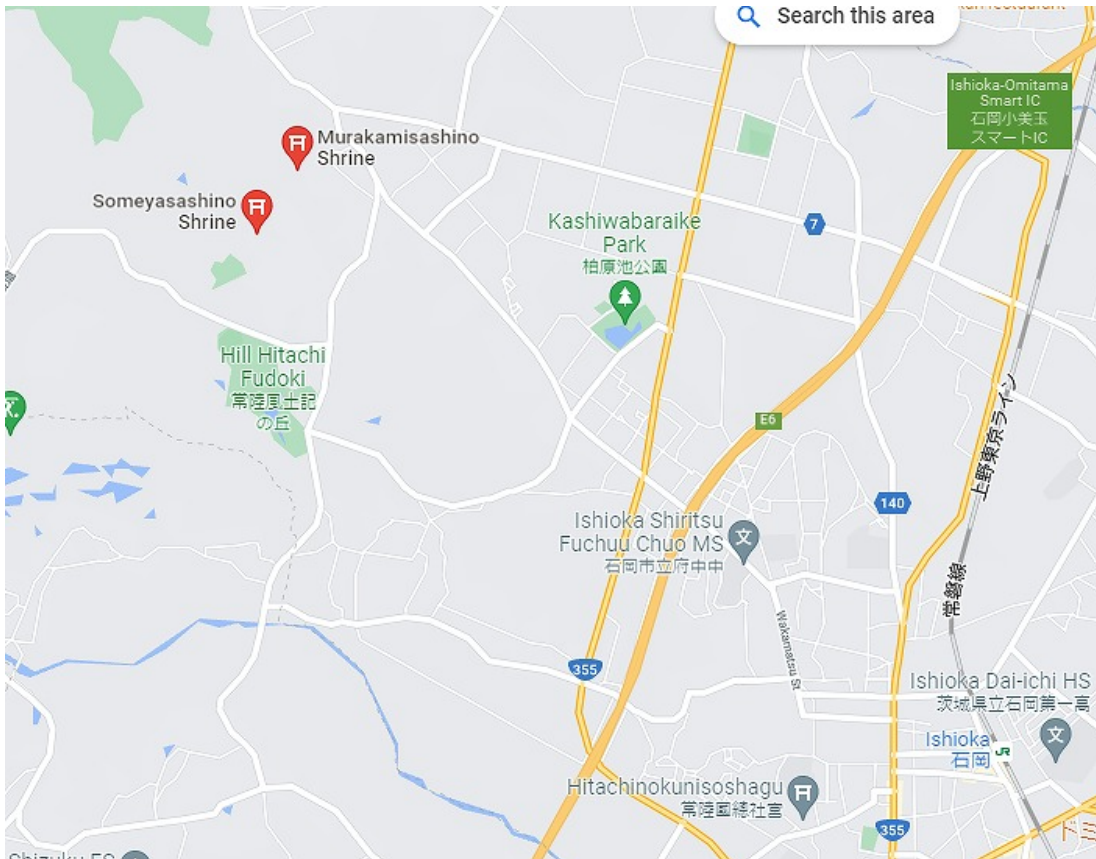


# Someya juniza kagura in Ishioka





**Date:** 19th April

**Location:** Someya 1856, Ishioka city, Ibaraki prefecture

**Access:** Take the Joban Line from Ueno and get off at Ishioka Station. About 1 hour by express train (2,500 yen) about 1.5 hours by ordinary train (1,500 yen). Take the Kantetsu Green Bus for Kakioka Shako via Hayashi, and get off at Murakami bus stop (15 minutes on foot). Or, take the Ishioka Gurururin sightseeing bus (1,000 yen) and get off at Hitachi Fudoki no Oka. It's a 5-minute walk. If you want to rent a bicycle, there is a bicycle rental service in front of the station for 300 yen with an additional 700 yen deposit (to be returned when the bicycle is returned).

*\*This article is based on interviews conducted in 2015*



One lucky day. A family of goldfish decided to go out. The child asked his parents.

“Where are we going?”

“We’re going to see a sacred performance to pray for rain.”

This picture, in which such a conversation can be heard, is by Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳, a painter active from the late 18th to 19th century.







It's not easy for goldfish to go out. They have to dodge a variety of natural enemies along the way.



Oh my Gosh. We could be lost.



Isn't this the right way to go?

In fact, there are two shrines here, and since they have the same name, it is even easier to make a mistake. And the festivals take place on the same day. And they both worship the deity of dragon. Locals consider one to be a male dragon and one to be a female dragon. To get to the shrine where the kagura is performed, the hill of Hitachi-Fudoki is a landmark. As you head that way, you will see a road to the cemetery on the way. Pass through there and climb the hill. The shrine you are aiming for is at the end of the road.







Hey, we're on the right road.







But we have to go up these stairs.



Whew! We can finally see the shrine.





Oops, we're finally here, just in time for the 11am start.







**The First act ~Sarutahiko**







"Hey, goldfishes. How did you get here? I'm Sarutahiko, the first program performer. As you know, I'm the deity who guides things."

I thought I had to see it at least once.

We got lost, but...

You don't have to say anything extra.

Ha-ha-ha (laughter)

Well, have fun with it.







It's always nice to have someone who can explain things to you (but in Japanese).

Not that many Japanese come here, and no one would dream of a foreigner, either. If they came to visit, they would be welcomed with open arms.

## **The second act ~ Ya-daijin**





"Hey there, goldfish. I see you've come to see me."

Oh, it's Mr. Ogre. You don't look too tough.

"My appearance is to enhance the Ya-daijin. As soon as I'm eliminated, I'm out. Here comes the Ya-daijin!"







“Haha, I’m Ya-daijin. I will use this bow and arrow to drive away the bad ones.”

Ya is an arrow. Daijin can mean many things, like minister or respectable person. I think the name here means a fine god.

But his face looks pompous, as if he were a minister.

“What? Did someone say something? I’ll put it all together and exterminate them together.”



Hey, hey, hey!





**The 3rd act~ Long sword user**







“I am the Sadaijin( Minister of the Left)”.

Black face. A raven-tengu (Crow-billed goblin).

They call it the dance of the long sword too.



Let's get rid of the bad things that are doing us harm. Eia-Eia-Ah!

**The 4th act ~Dance of sword**









I am Udaijin (Minister of the right).



To explain a little, in Japan, there is an event for girls on March 3, when they display hina dolls. They are modelled after the old Emperor's family. The emperor and queen are at the top. Below them are the Minister of the Right and the Minister



of the Left.

The two in the forth row from the top are them. But all these decorations cost a lot of money.

## Sowing seeds





What did this deity start?

Sowing. In other words, from here, kagura shows the sowing of spring. Once the earth, and all the evil things around it, have been driven away, they now move on to the spring sowing, and then to the fall harvest. This form of kagura is very common. It is the very essence of the old life of the Japanese people.





**The foxes cultivate the rice field**





"For God's sake, Enyakola  
Good rice grows, Enyakola  
One more thing, Enyakola"











"I'm a little tired. Why don't you take a break?"

"Already? What should I do?"

"I have stiff shoulders. Please rub my shoulders."

"She's a noisy wife. Here, that's better. Please do the same for me this time."

"You don't even work."

"You son of a bitch. You turned me upside down."







It's a bit of a couple's comedy.

You have to include these elements or the audience will get bored. In the old days, this is exactly the kind of life the people watching lived.

## **planting seeds**





"I hope everyone is doing well. I wish you a great harvest this year.





## Shrine maiden's dance



Let's pray to God.

This dance is performed by an elementary school girl.

## Mochi (rice cake) throwing





" Everyone's gathered here. Are you so happy that we came out?"

"They all just want rice cakes, don't they?"

"Anyway, it's harvest time. Hopefully we'll harvest a lot this fall."

audience "Here, over here, over here."









The a person whose role it is to give explanation said that



many people leave after this one, right?

If that's the case, why not make it the last one like other kagura?

It proves that they are keeping the old form. It is possible that the kagura has been handed down even older than the oldest kagura of Washinomiya Shrine in the Kanto region. The people added the rice-cake throwing later, and that's why the order is like this.

## Sacred sake





Programs that have retained their most ancient form. It is monotonous by itself. This dance is meant to give thanks for the harvest and to offer sake to the gods.

**Ebisu ~Fishing sea bream**







"I'm Ebisu. Well, where shall I go fishing today?"

"Oh, Sir Ebisu is fishing again."

"When I think it's someone, it's Hiotoko and Okame."

"We'll help you too."







"Oh, this is a big one. Hey, you, Hyottoko, help me out."



"We caught a big one. Let's go home."

"Hey. But Ebisu-sama is a different person when it comes to fishing. Ebisu-sama is not like a god only when fishing."





## The 12th program ~Open the Amano-iwato door



I am the mythical and familiar “Tajikarao”. I am about to open Ama-no-Iwato (the Great Rock Door) and welcome you, Amaterasu-sama.





The kagura ended with the safe appearance of Amaterasu. Now,



let us go home.

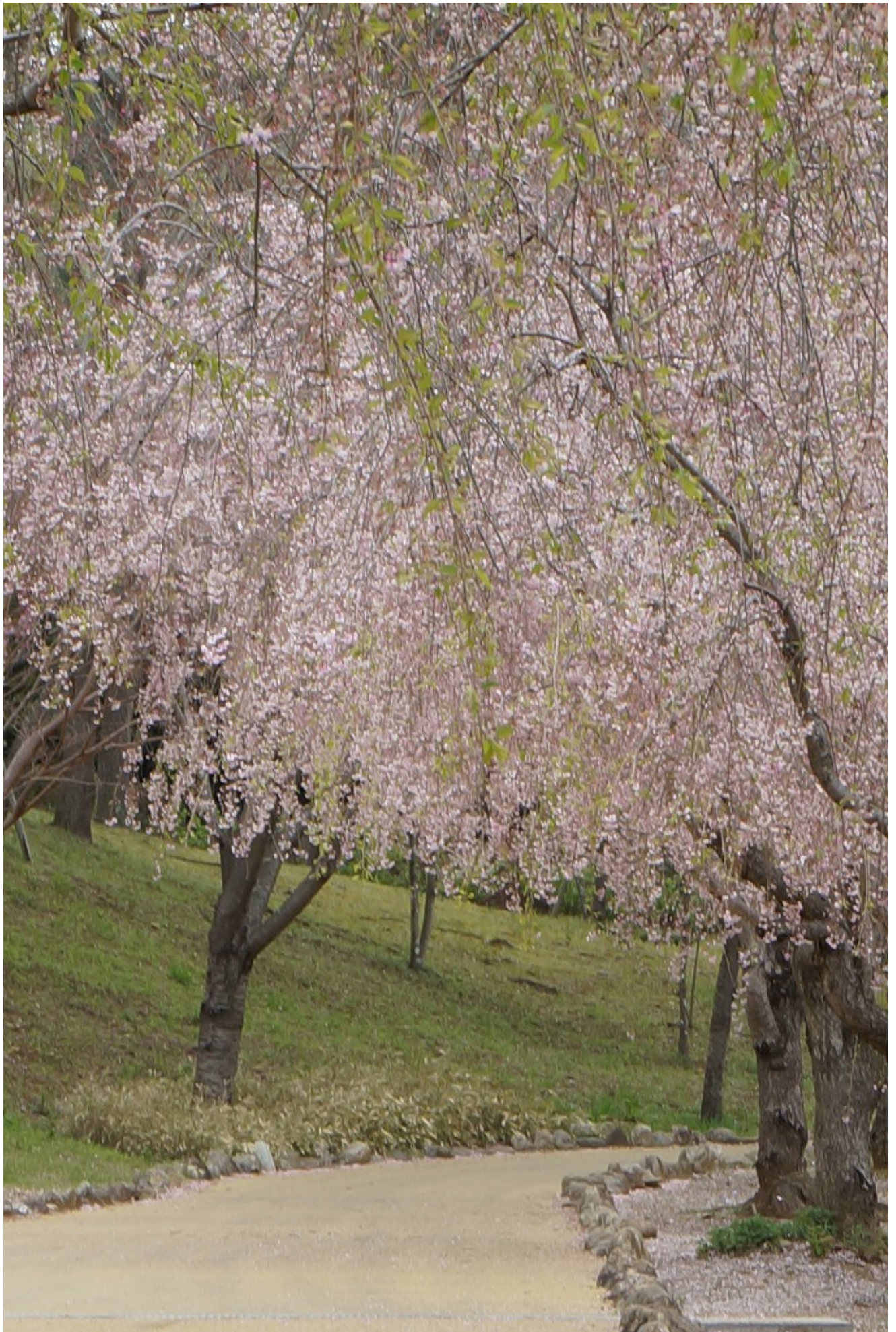
## Ending













Let's stop by "Hitachi-Fudoki-no-Oka." Hey, it looks like spring.

What is this big lion's head?

At the Ishioka festival, a large lion's head leads huge lion dance parade . That is famous. Let's come see it sometime.

By the way, will it rain?



"Wow, it's coming down fast. That's the Dragon God."

What do you mean you're a goldfish and you're in a big hurry for rain? And if you look closely, you can see that the rain is pond skater.



In this country, such things are also sold as figures.

cf.

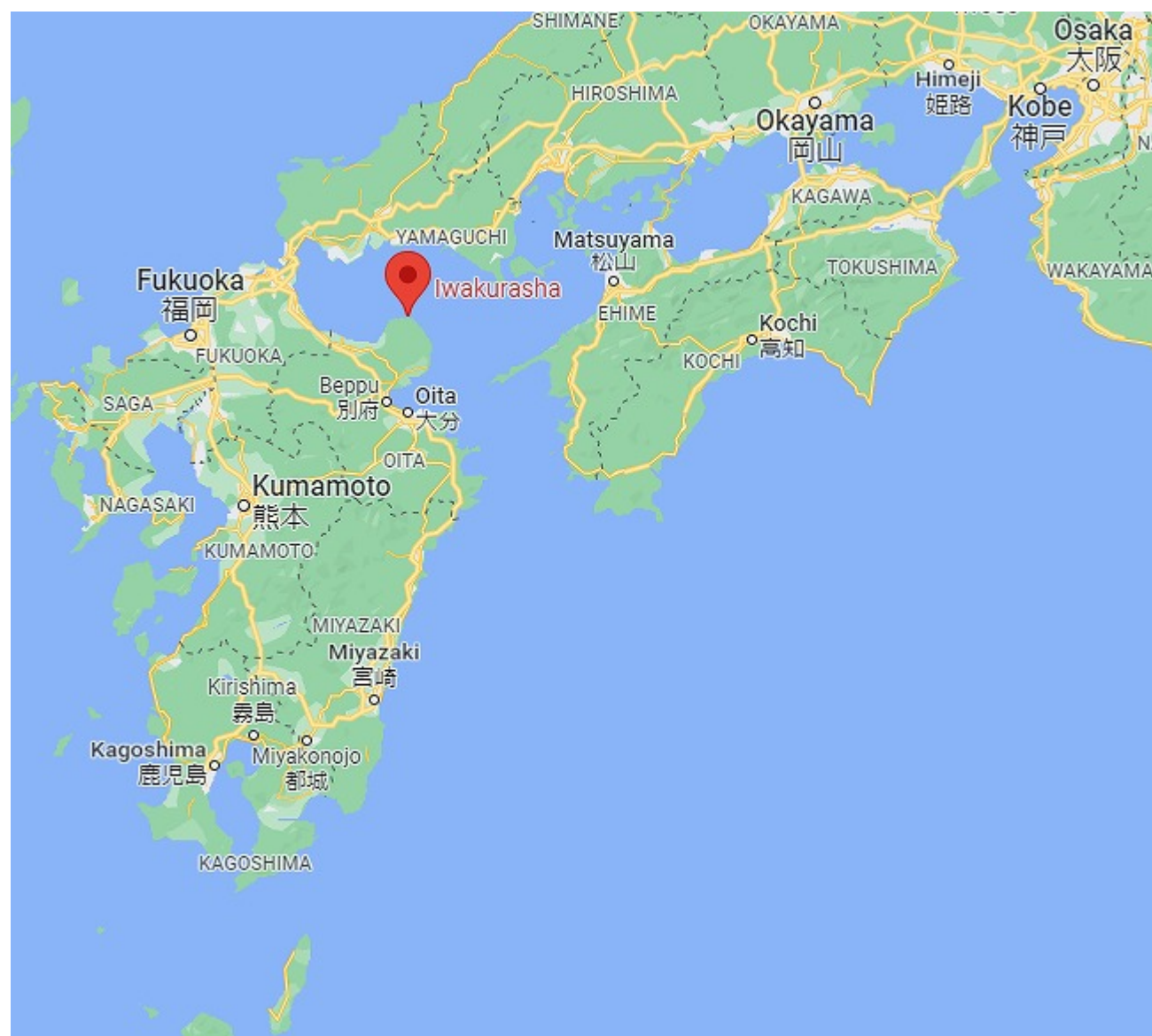
\*<https://www.adachi-hanga.com/ukiyo-e-en/category/33>

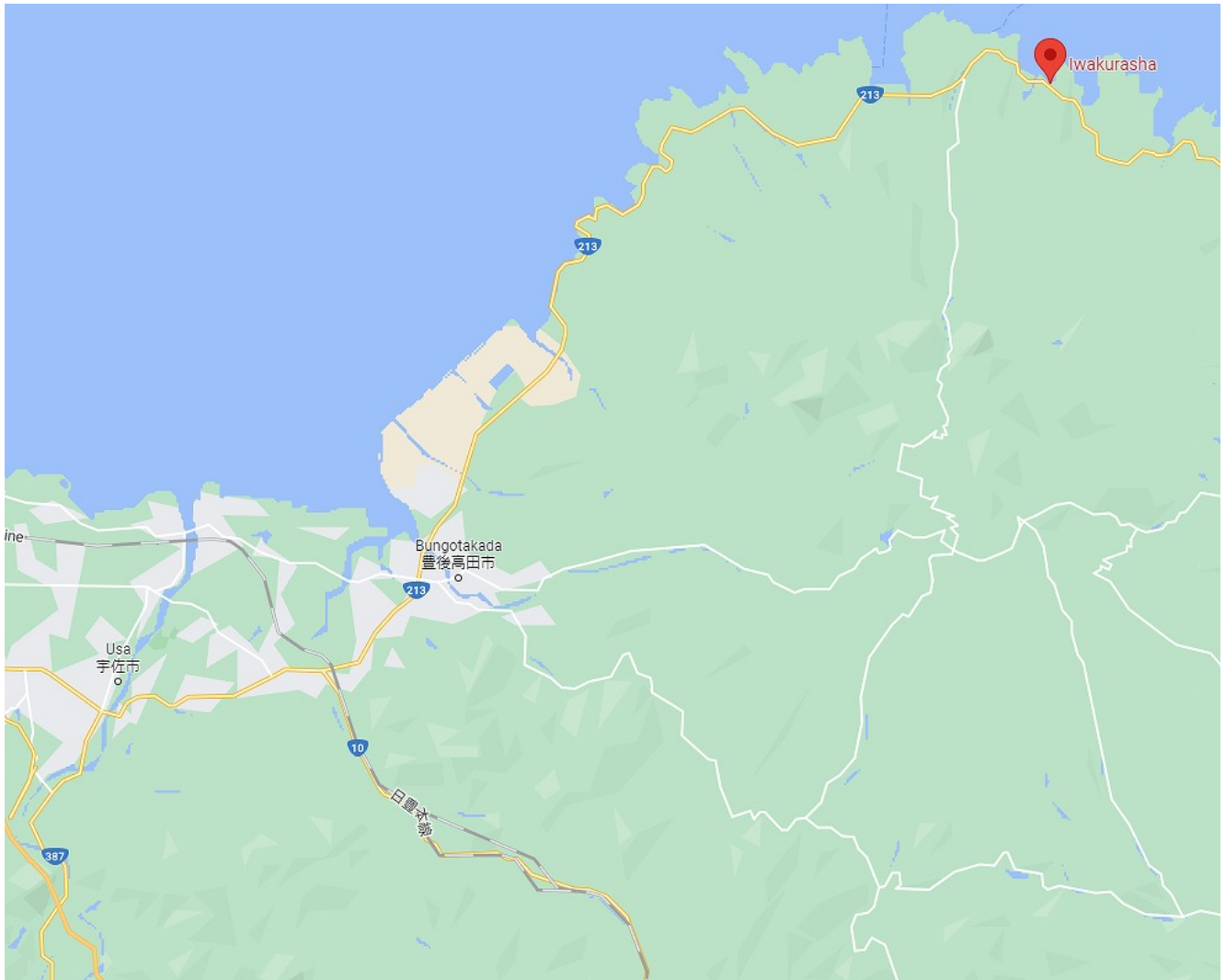
\*[https://bunkashisan.ne.jp/bunkashisan/08\\_ibaraki/7041.html](https://bunkashisan.ne.jp/bunkashisan/08_ibaraki/7041.html)

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# One of the most strange festival ~Kebesu festival







**Date:** October 14th every year

**Location:** Kusiku Iwakura Hachiman shrine คุしくいわくら

くしきくしき, Kunimi town, Kunisaki city, Oita prefecture

**Access:** Take a bus from Usa to Kunimi Post Office in about one hour. From there, walk 30 minutes. A cab will take about 30 minutes.





<https://www.pref.oita.jp/site/archive/200474.html>

There are some festivals where it is not at all clear now what the purpose of such events is. Among them, the one this site

will introduce here is a festival full of mysteries. There are even questions about the relationship between Greek mythology and Judaism.

As is often the case with such festivals, the traffic is very poor. There is a bus service from the nearby Usa station (1200 yen as of 2022), but it arrives at around 2:00 in the afternoon. You have to walk another 30 minutes. If you take a cab, you can specify the time, but the price will go up to about 10,000 yen.

## **Schedule and outline ~up to the day before**

Simply put, the festival is about a mysterious masked god named Kebesu 𐄂𐄂𐄂, who is rushing towards the fire, but is stopped by a character named Tooba 𐄂𐄂. And finally, Touba joins in and sprinkles the area with fire. It takes about 30 minutes.

Getting to this point was a challenge. The first step is to decide which of the ten districts will be in charge this year on October 7, and then to decide on the roles of each of them, except the role of Kebesu.

On the 8th, we make a place under the eaves of the house of the person on duty to welcome the gods. Then all the people, led by the god's caretaker called Okayo, move the god there. The Okayo purifies himself with sea water every day from this day on, and then makes offerings to the gods. They had to collect ferns for the festival.

The people in charge also go through a one-week purification period. Specifically, they do not eat meat. They do not mix fire with other areas. For this reason, they can only eat food that they have prepared themselves.

13 days. All of them go to the beach to bathe in sea water and



make rice cakes. Finally, the role of Kebesu is decided by lottery.

## On the day



<http://www.suigun.sakura.ne.jp/tokusyu/kunisakinotabi26.html>



<https://kunisaki-tambo.com/kebesu/>

At around 2:00, all staff members carry the gods and offerings to the shrine, the site of the festival.

7:00 p.m. The ritual begins. The person in the role of Kebesu wears a mask, and the priest draws the character for "victory" on his back with his finger. Around 7:30. Kevesu and all the others dressed in white appear at the venue. Already in the center of the room, a pile of ferns is ablaze with flames.

## Highlight



<http://oitaian.com/heritage/%E3%82%B1%E3%83%99%E3%82%B9%E7%A5%AD/> photo by Ishimatsu Takeo

At the venue, drums, flutes, and bells played a four-beat rhythm. The Kebesu and Toubas march in a line. Eventually, Kebesu sees an opening and rushes toward the fire. Tooba rushes to stop him. Both of them have long sticks, which they use to hit and stop each other. This is repeated three times. On the third time, Kevesu reached the fire and stirred it with a stick. But even there, Touba pushes him back again.

These series are repeated three times over, resulting in a total of nine times. Finally, on the ninth time, Kevesu stirs the fire and rolls a burning fern around a stick. However,



even the Tooba, who is supposed to stop him, gather around the fire together. They hold up the lit sticks and face the audience. It is as if the people who tried to stop the zombies have turned into zombies.

And the festival ends in confusion and chaos. This is the sequence of events.

## **What is the Kebesu ?**



[http://www.shikoku-np.co.jp/national/life\\_topic/photo.aspx?id=20141014000588&no=1](http://www.shikoku-np.co.jp/national/life_topic/photo.aspx?id=20141014000588&no=1)



<http://oitaisan.com/heritage/%E3%82%B1%E3%83%99%E3%82%B9%E7%A5%AD/#:~:text=%E5%8F%A4%E3%81%8F%E3%81%AF%E7%A3%90%E5%80%89%E3%81%A8,%E9%96%A2%E4%BF%82%E3%81%99%E3%82%8B%E3%81%AE%E3%81%AF%E7%A2%BA%E3%81%8B%E3%80%82>

What is Kevesu? No one has any idea what it is. There are many theories about when it started, some say it started a thousand years ago, others say it started around 500 years ago. The records have been destroyed in fire a long time ago, so there are no clues at all.

There are several theories. The first is that it is an abbreviation of the Chinese character for “fire kicker. This word appears in the incantations chanted by the Shinto priests.

The second one is that Ebisu has become bastardized. Ebisu is a familiar god in Japan who brings good fortune. He is always depicted as having caught a sea bream. As you can see, he is a god who originally came from the sea. The theory is that it was originally people who made their living on the sea, and that it represents the conflict between them and land groups.

The third is that this peninsula produces iron sand, and the people who work with it in blacksmithing took fire very



seriously. Furthermore, there is this theory. In Greek mythology, a man named Prometheus stole the fire in God's kingdom and gave it to the people. I can only say that I don't know what's going on here anymore.



<https://4travel.jp/travelogue/11065407>



<https://norbulingka.info/guide>

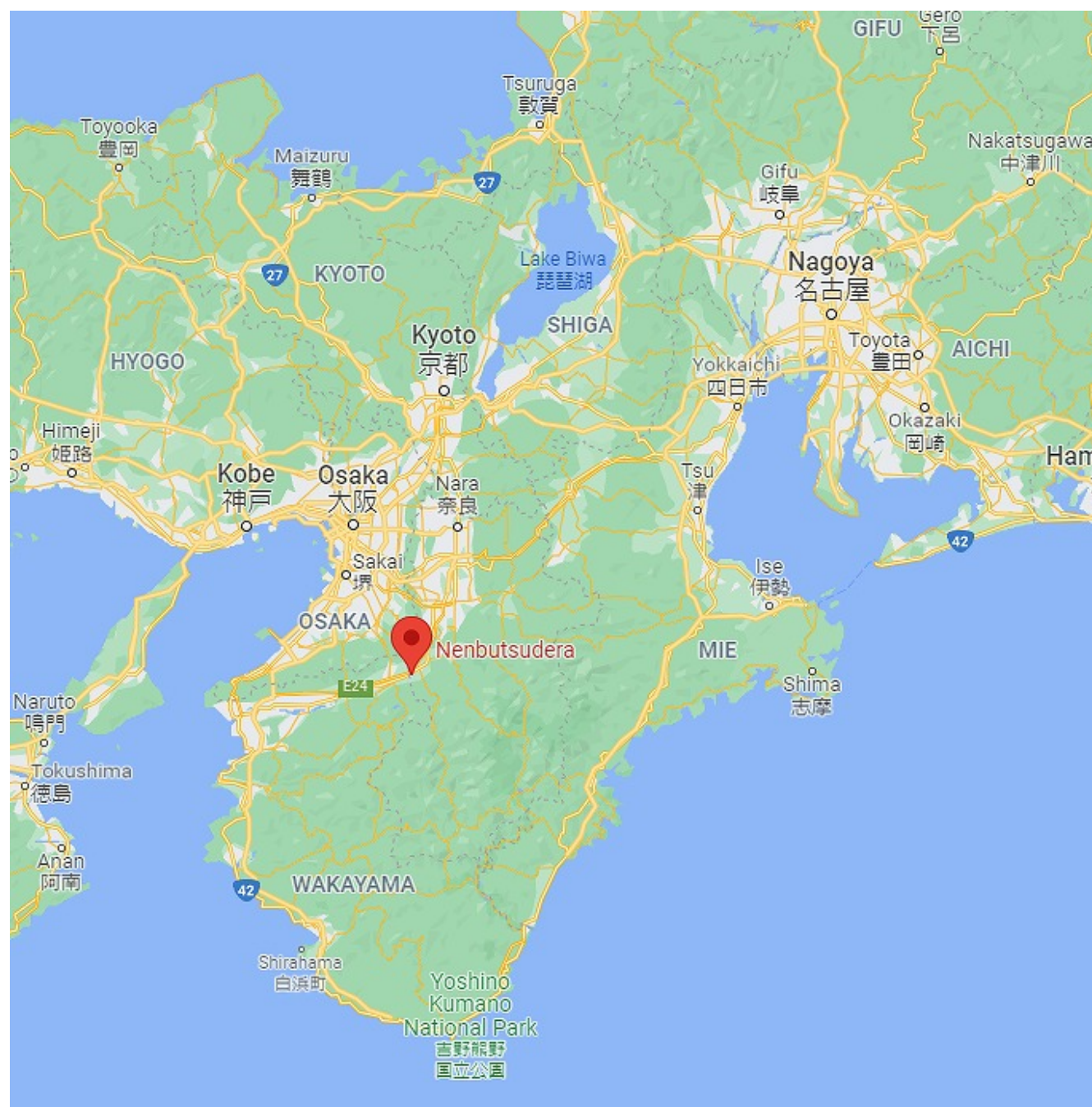
In any case, it is certainly a festival full of mysteries. One person has this to say about the festival. It is a festival that no amount of words can convey.

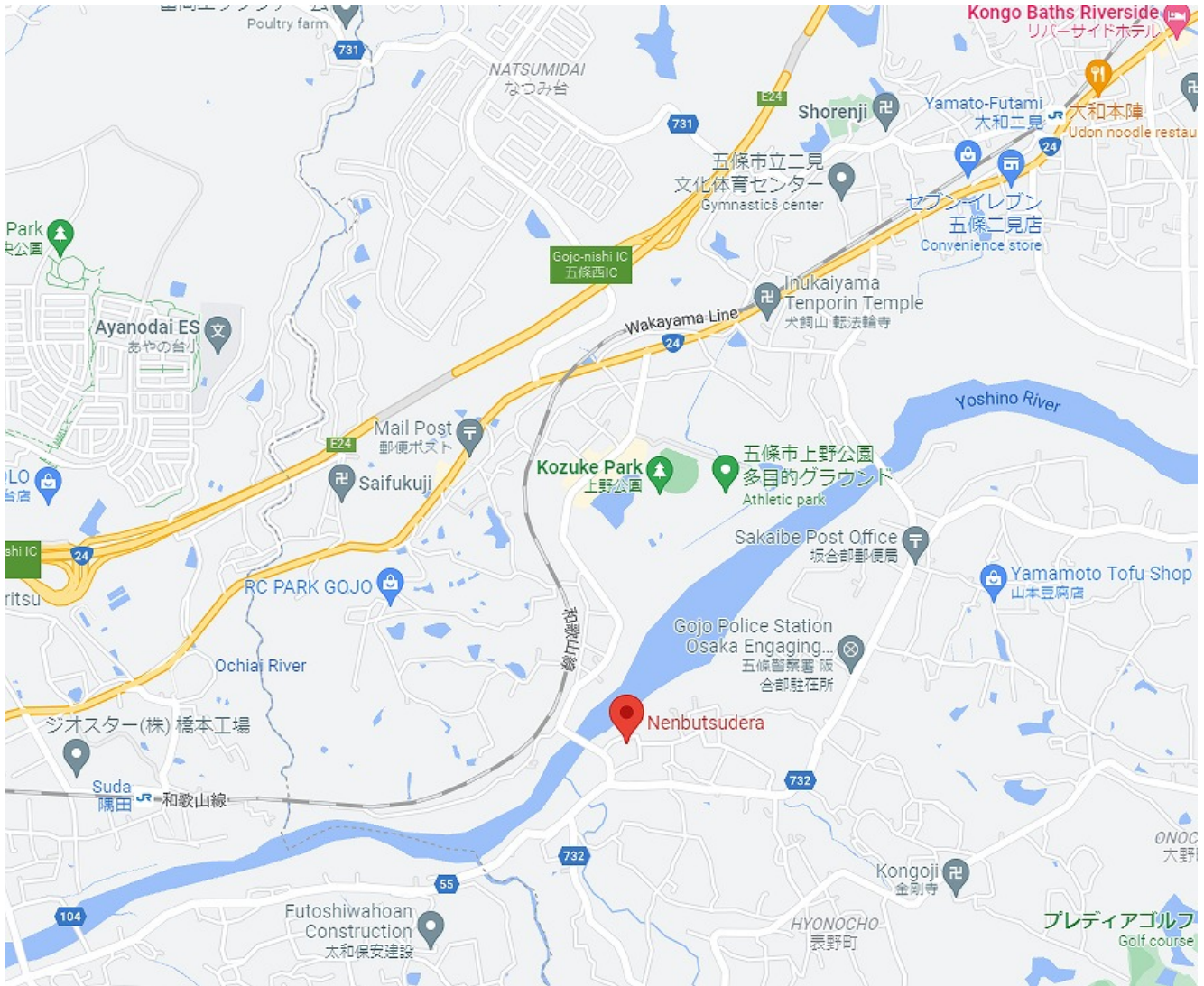
You just have to experience it for yourself. However, please be sure to wear clothes that are safe from the fire.

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## Ogre runs with fire ~at Dada-do







**Date:** January 14th every year

**Location:** Otsu town 177, Gojo city, Nara prefecture

**Access:** 10 minutes by car from JR Yamato Futami Station, or 30 minutes on foot.

**What is the purpose of doing this?**





<https://ameblo.jp/ura-tom0/entry-11750814403.html>

Ogres with huge torches wielding fire. Such events are held at a place called Nenbutsuji Temple 念仏寺. It is a very inconvenient place. The official website even lists the last train schedule. Every year, they hold an event where ogres run with torches in the temple.

Part of an event called Shusho-e 正月会. Shusho-e is a Buddhist event held at New Year's to pray for a good harvest and to ward off bad luck. Here at Nenbutsuji Temple, we regard it as an event to rid ourselves of past sins and pray for happiness in the new year. The final day is Kechigan けちがん. Kechigan means "consummation of a vow period".



father and mother ogre



父王



子鬼面



鬼面（伝阿弥陀面）



kid and Amida

The masks used in the current event were made of cypress in 1961. However, the older masks were made in 1468, so we can assume that this event started at least around that time.

## Schedule of Events

4:00 pm. the event daytime

4:30 pm. throwing rice cakes

7:00 pm. Monks begin reading sutras

9:00 pm. main event starts



<http://yoshino-ohmine-koya.jp/information/2014/01/1684/>

Why don't we go to Dada-do? There are no foxes or raccoons there. If there are, we can go back. But then ogres appeared!

This time, the stage was the Dada-do だだど in Nenbutsu-ji Temple ねんぶつじ where such a children's song is handed down. It is roughly

divided into daytime and nighttime sessions. In the daytime, ogres appear and run around with torches as in the nighttime, but they do not set fire to the torches. It's like a kind of rehearsal. But it has the advantage that there are not as many people as at night. Also, since it is bright, you can see the gestures and masks clearly. In the past, people used to make the masks from a single tree made of Japanese cypress, which weighed about 4.5 kg, but now they use masks made of a single tree made of thatch.



[https://www.city.gojo.lg.jp/soshiki/bunka/1\\_1/1/3117.html](https://www.city.gojo.lg.jp/soshiki/bunka/1_1/1/3117.html)





However, the main attraction is still at night. Fire seems to have something that makes people's hearts flutter. Whether or not you've prepared well for the daytime session, the main event is the evening session.

The evening session begins at 9 p.m.

As the sound of sticks tapping on the wall rang out, the monks entered first, blowing hollow shells. Behind them are the ogres. The monks began to shout, and the sound of sticks and more bells rang out. It's time to begin. The sound of the bells was and still is used to warn people of fire. The sound of the bells quickens people's heartbeats and heightens their sense of danger. People also call tapping on the wall with a stick "Amitabha's shoulder tapping," a unique name. In Buddhism, Amitabha is the Buddha who saves all people.

In the meantime, the first person to handle the fire in the hall (called katte) appeared with a large torch. He draws the Chinese character for water 水 in the hollow to prevent the fire from raging. Right behind him was a waterman named Kawase

with a bucket of water to put out the fire and clear away the sparks. When it was over, the demons finally made their appearance.



<https://www.pref.nara.jp/45519.htm>



[https://yamatoji.nara-kankou.or.jp/01shaji/02tera/04south\\_area/nembutsuji-gojyo/event/qtx8lu3j2a/](https://yamatoji.nara-kankou.or.jp/01shaji/02tera/04south_area/nembutsuji-gojyo/event/qtx8lu3j2a/)





A father ogre, a mother ogre, and a child ogre: there are three ogres in total:. It is said that the ogres here are not bad, but good, bringing good fortune to the people. That's why they have quite charming faces.

The assistants pass the burning torches to the ogres. The ogre puts it on his crotch and supports it with one hand. The torch is 70 centimeters in diameter and weighs about 60 kilograms. There are two pillars in the center of the hall, so when the ogres appear, they move one by one to the next. When the child ogre appears, the three ogres are all together, creating a breathtaking sight. In this way, the demon circled the hall three times before finally leaving the hall.

Anyone can play the role of an ogre, but once they do, they often continue to do so. They bathe in water for a week and avoid fire. It takes a lot of strength and energy to be an ogre, so when they become weak, they are passed on to the next person. The event ends with people trying to steal the paper strings from the ogres, as the paper strings that the ogres wear on their bodies is said to ward off evil.

Ends around 9:30 p.m.

The nearest town, Gojo, is a traditional building preservation district where the streets of olden times remain intact. If you have time, you should definitely take a stroll.



[http://yamatoji.nara-kankou.or.jp/03history/02old\\_house/04south\\_area/shimmachidori-gojoshi/](http://yamatoji.nara-kankou.or.jp/03history/02old_house/04south_area/shimmachidori-gojoshi/)