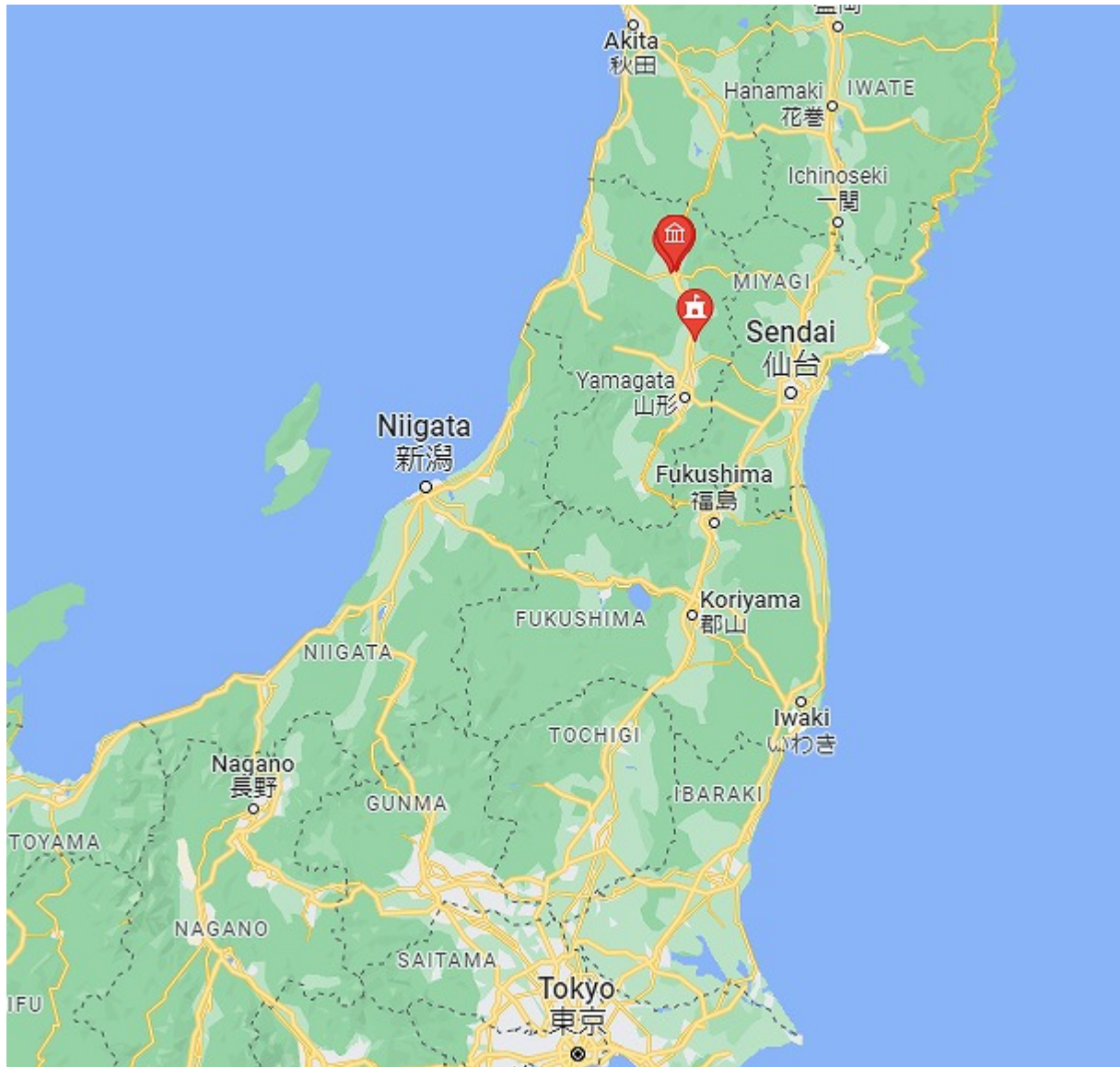


# Nitayama and Hagino serow dance in Shinjo festival





**Date:** 26 August, every year

**Location:** 6-86 Horibatamachi, Shinjō, Yamagata 6-86 Tozawa 〇〇 Shrine Gokoku 〇〇 Shrine and Minami Honcho Crossroads

**Access:** About 1 hr 15 mins on the Yamagata 〇〇 Line from Yamagata.

3 hrs from Tokyo by Shinkansen approx. 2+ hrs from Sendai 〇〇 (conventional line)

By air from Yamagata Airport and Shonai 〇〇 Airport.

Highway night bus, etc.

## Two distinctive Deer dance

The deer dance presented here is from Shinjō, Yamagata Prefecture, in the western part of the Tohoku region. On the west side of Tohoku region, there are variety of Deer dances, which is different from the east side. Why have various dances been handed down in Yamagata Prefecture? The reason is the



history of this land.

## End of Mogami clan

Yamagata Prefecture region was once ruled by the powerful Mogami clan. The Mogami family is the hero of the Tohoku region, along with the Date family in the east. Unfortunately, however, after the death of the hero Yoshiaki, a succession problem arose and the Mogami family decrease their rank in the Tokugawa shogun system. After this, the Tokugawa family divided its vast territory into smaller feudal lords, so the performing arts were handed down in a more varied form than in the west (Iwate and Miyagi prefectures).

## Features and visual



Nitayama □□□





Hagino 〇〇





Nitayama and Hagino are neighbors in the same city of Shinjo. Since the area is adjacent, they are almost same, except for the costumes and the masks. Its appearance looks more like a deer, another creature rather than a lion. It is handed down in the region that it was modelled on a serow. While Nitayama's costumes are more colorful, Hagino's look more

folk-like. In particular, the black cloth that protects the feet reminds us of those worn by travelers in the past. Even today, sometimes agricultural workers wear them. The performer covers his entire body with a thin curtain and beats a small drum on his belly. The drum has a long arm-like object. The group consists of seven members, one in the middle is the leader, and the other six members are divided into three on each side.









Two singers stand with umbrella-covered at the rear. They have an instrument called sasara.





The other two members have sasara, an instrument made of bamboo that is rubbed together to produce a sound, and are in charge of singing. The lyrics of the song are the same in both groups. They also have a banner on their backs with the name of each place. Others have the words 'five days of wind' and 'ten days of rain' dyed on them. This comes from the legend that when each of these occurs, a good harvest will result.

## Flow of performance







The flow is almost the same for both. The *first* part of the performance is the entrance. They praise the garden. This is an expression of respect to the house that invited them. Next follows a scene of fighting over a doe. It is difficult for the audience to tell which is the doe. However, the intense fight scene is a highlight. Then comes the fierce fighting between the doe, *followed* by a dance of gratitude for the congratulatory gifts received. The performers *then* leave the hall. However, the existence of what appears to be a doe is not clear, and it is difficult for the audience to understand whether it is a struggle over a deers in a clear-cut way. One person from each of the left and right rows comes out to fight, and then everyone joins in and things get exciting. The leader comes out at the end to settle the dispute, so it seems as if the henchmen start a fight and the bosses arbitrate it, perhaps because their appearance reminds them of an old \*yakuza family.

\*yakuza ; Old gambler. They were mainly gamble. Although they were part of the underworld, they were also the unofficial



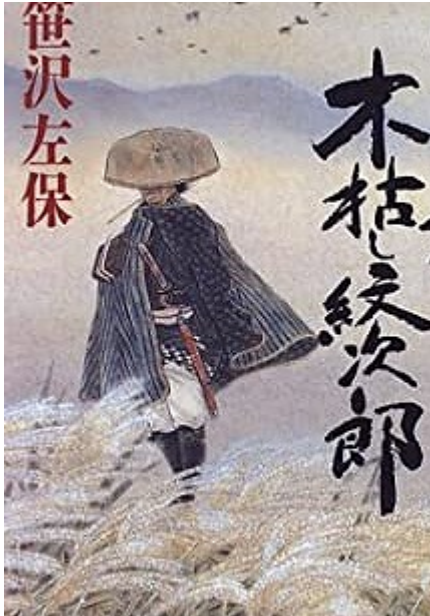
face of the town and did not always have a bad image; some of them corrected corrupt officials on behalf of the common people.





**A leader of Nitayama**





*an image of old gambler and traveller*

Hey, you guys. Can't you keep it down? You look disgusting in front of everybody. Today is the Shinjo Festival. You disgrace the Hagino family, don't you?... I can't help thinking he's going to say something like that.

## Tradition

### Nitayama's history



Their appearance is unusual, not unlike lion dances or deer

dances anywhere else. It is said that this is actually an image of a serow. It is said that they imitate the way serow herd and play in the mountains near here. There is a more detailed legend about Nitayama. In the past, this area was seen by the central government as an object to be conquered. Then a great general came from the center. They defeated the armies of the region and ruled. At that time, they governed the people so well that the people, who were at first afraid of them, soon became accustomed to their rule. One day, when the general was returning to the capital, he asked the residents to organize a dance to commemorate the occasion. The inhabitants were annoyed, but one of them devised and performed a dance in which the skeletons of serow and deer were placed on their heads and covered with straw and grass. The general was so impressed by this that he had him rewarded with a prize.

## **Hagino's history**

Hagino has this episode. It is said that when Yoshiaki Mogami, referenced earlier, gathered all the deer dances in the territory together, he praised the one here as the best. This is evidence that by that time (the second half of the 16th century), the dance had already taken its present form. Later, another feudal lord came, but he also liked it best. After the Meiji Restoration (late 19th century), the clan leader moved to Tokyo. And when they visited his grave, they again watched the dances, but only one other than Hagino took part. The clan leader wished that the dance would be preserved for a long time because it was his family's dance. And Hagino is the only one that has remained to the present day.





**Hagino again**





Two deer dances performed at two neighbouring shrines in the



morning, but only Hagino has the opportunity to see them again during the day. This time, the dance is performed in front of a larger audience in the town's central quadrangle. The content of the dance does not change, but the festival audience takes up positions on all four sides, so the audience feel more enthusiasm and the dance is more spectacular here.

## Shinjo festival





To begin with, these two deer dances are at the Shinjo Festival. The Shinjo Festival has been held in the area for about 260 years and has been inscribed as a UNESCO Heritage Site because of the magnificent stalls. The festival lasts for three days, the eve of the festival, the main festival and the post the festival.





<https://tabi.jtb.or.jp/res/060023->



<http://experienceshinjo.com/sightseeing/>

The main attraction is the decoration of the floats, which are made by people from each township in their spare time from work. The floats are beautifully decorated with scenes from history, Kabuki and stories, and parade through the town. On the second day, a total of 200 citizens re-enact the procession of the feudal lords of the past.

On the third day, after the Deer Dance, all floats gather for a disbanding ceremony at around 3pm.

The Shinjo Festival allows visitors to enjoy three things at once: floats, historical picture scrolls and traditional performing arts. It is worth a visit.