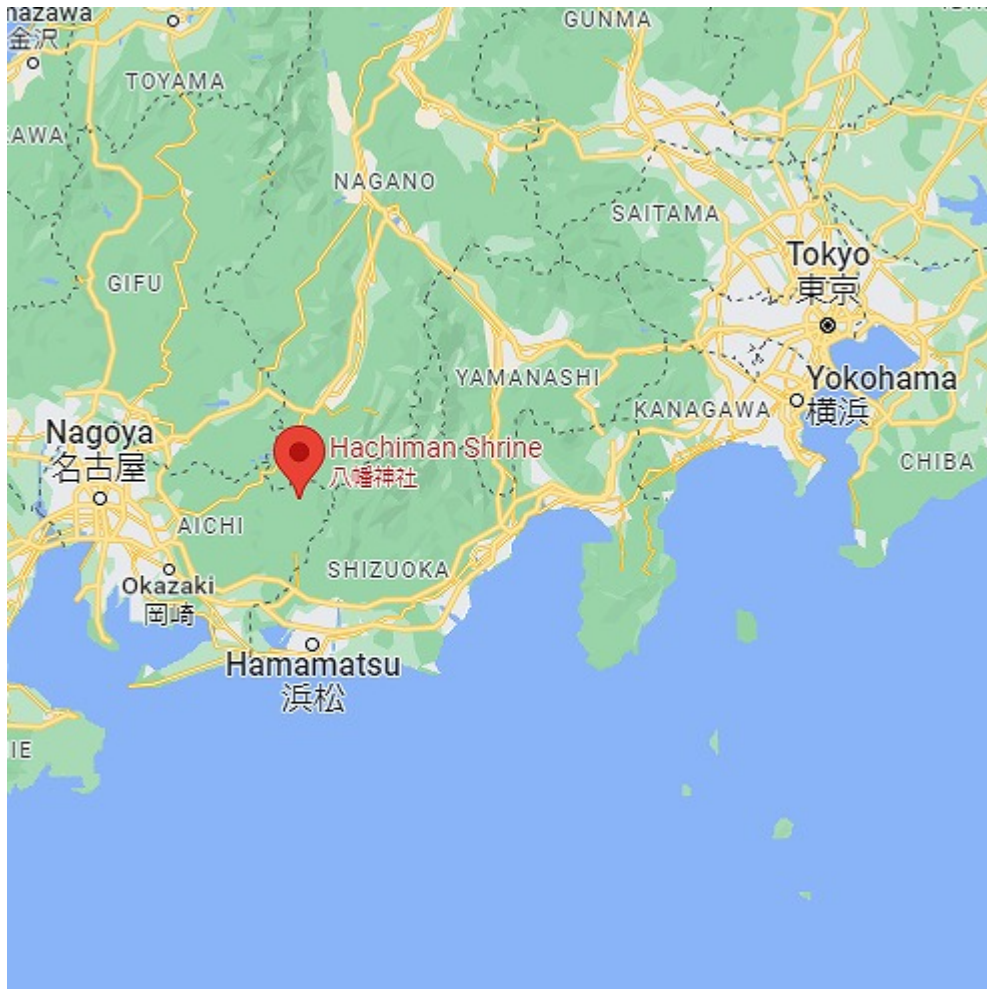
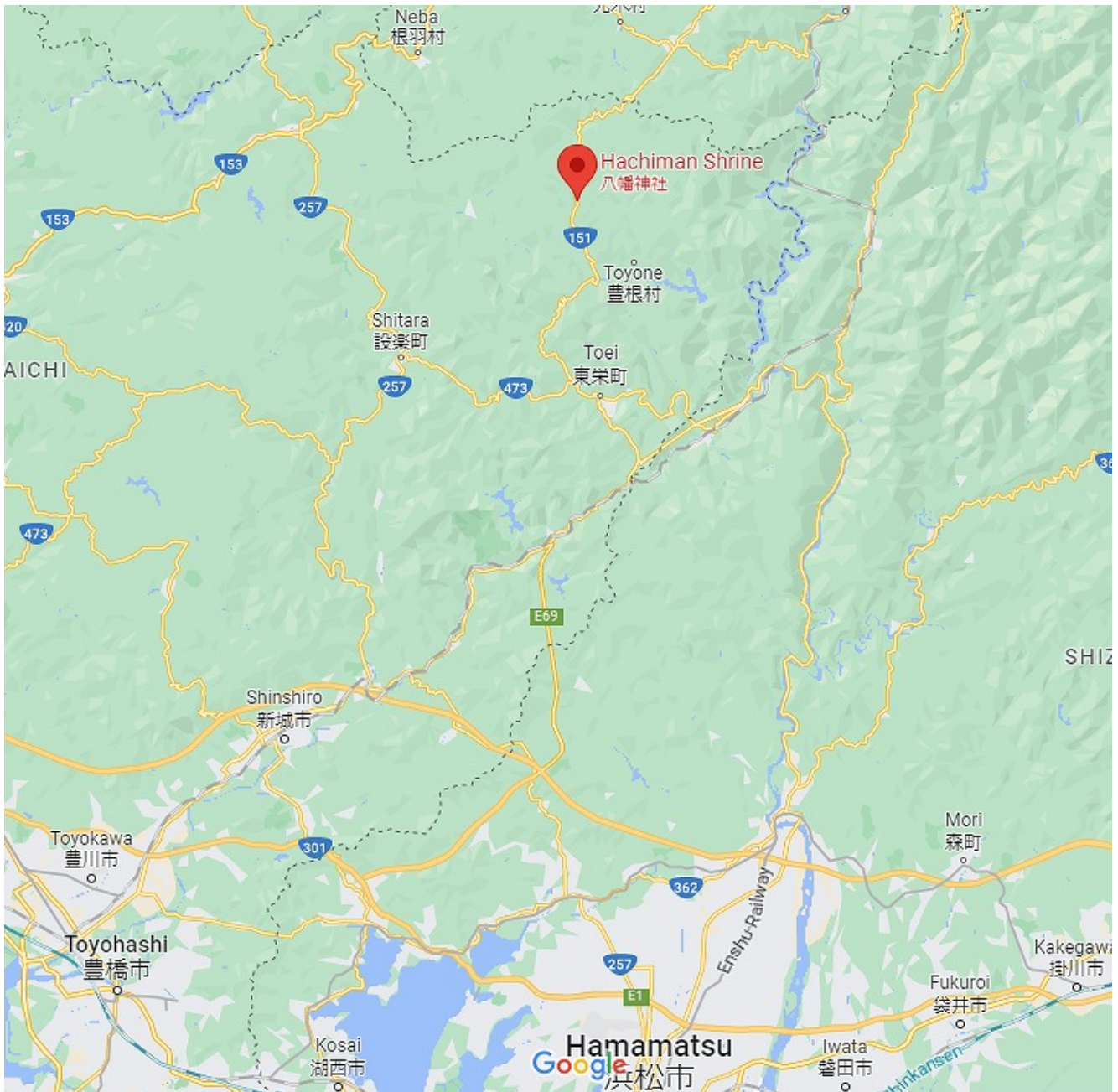


# Oni dance in a mountain village~ Hana-matsuri





This time it is set in Aichi Prefecture. Aichi Prefecture is a region centered around Nagoya and is geographically located in the middle of Osaka and Tokyo. Nagoya is also the home of Toyota, a famous car manufacturer. Most of Japan is covered by mountains, so if you leave the coastal plain, it becomes a mountainous area. Aichi Prefecture is no exception. The northern part of Aichi Prefecture, bordering Shizuoka Prefecture to the east and Nagano Prefecture to the north, is particularly mountainous. Because there are such places, old performing arts often remain as they are. One of them is “Hana-matsuri ” 花まつり”. In the past, this festival (which has a

history of about 700 years) used to take a month to hold. But, this was too expensive, so people shortened it to three days, and now they do it in a single day. However, there are many areas where the festival continues from noon to noon the next day. Currently, residents of 15 locations in this district continue to participate.

*Because of its location, transportation access is very poor. All festivals are held on top of the mountain and far from the station. This area belongs to Shinshiro City. The population of Shinshiro City is approximately 50,000. Forty thousand of them live at the foot of the mountain.*

Festivals cost money. The enthusiasm of the locals is strong, but it is not enough to keep the festival afloat. For this reason, a tour bus has recently started to operate from the station at the foot of the mountain only during the period when several festivals are concentrated. Toyotetsu Sightseeing has also begun to offer tours. Even with a car, it is dangerous to go to a mountainous sight-seeing area at night. We recommend that those who wish to visit join a such a tour.

“Hanamatsuri” is a festival centered on Oni (ogres). So maybe there used to be a tour like this.

*This article is based on the 2018 tour.*





**Toyohashi station**

Hello everyone, are you all here? Thank you for joining us on



this “Hana Matsuri” tour. This time, you will visit a festival in the Sakauba 〇〇〇 area. This tour is perfect for those Oni who are tired of being pelted with beans and exterminated on a daily basis.



front of Toyohashi station



Although the place we are about to visit is administratively part of Shinshiro 市 City, more than 40,000 of Shinshiro City's population of approximately 50,000 live at the foot of the mountain.

It takes about 4 hours with a stop at a roadside station along the way.





Well, we've arrived. It's already 8:00 PM. You will see the



festival here until next morning. It's a long night, so if you are tired, you can take a rest in the resting room here. It is a roadside station during the daytime, but we rent it only during the nighttime, so please make yourselves at home. Now, let me take you to the festival site.



*Tehohe Tehohe, Tewotole Tole*

Oh, I've heard this sound before. It's a shout unique to the Hana-Matsuri.



Let's go inside.

First, in the center is a large cauldron, the symbol of the festival, where the water boils all night long. This place is called "maido. It means a stage for dancing.

In front of the "maido" is a drummer. This drum sets the rhythm for the whole thing. Also, there are various decorations hanging from the ceiling. These are the gods' Spirit-dwelling object. On the wall are the names and amounts of those who donated. Please be assured. The donation is included in the price of this tour.









There are several types of dances, which gradually increase in age and proficiency from children, boys and girls, to young men and women. You can see the complexity of the dances gradually increase.

Adults accompany each child. I wonder if this is how they learn all the time.



Isn't everyone cold? There is a brazier in the front seats of the stage, though. It gets below 0 degrees Celsius at midnight, so please be careful not to catch a cold. Or, please warm up in the break room mentioned earlier.

Hi, I bought a warm Chinese bun outside.

Sounds good. I'll go buy it later.

Light food are sold at cheap prices outside.









We see a man holding a sakaki tree. Since ancient times, sakaki has been famous as a tree in which God dwells. It is said that if you are struck with it, you will be free from disease. By all means, everyone.

I always get hit with beans on Setsubun. Besides, we Oni are also members of the gods.

It's already around 11:00 p.m. It's almost time for the first Oni to make his appearance.

**Yamami-Oni** □□□



Here it comes at last: the first of the three Oni, the Yamami-oni 山見鬼. This is the companion Oni to the Yamami-oni.







*Tehohe, Tehohe,. Tewotole tole*

Listening to this melody for a long time puts me into a kind of trance.





This is Yamami-oni.

He looks magnificent, doesn't he?

He's the star of the show.



Yamami-oni is an Oni that breaks mountains. They drive away evil spirits with their powerful spells and encourage the rebirth of life by breaking up mountains. He does not actually break anything, but rather swings the hoe he is holding over the hot water pot in a large gesture to dispel the evil spirits.

I have also heard. It seems to have that kind of meaning in winter festivals that wish for rebirth.

Experts say it's because that's when the sun's power is at its weakest.

In the past, this Yamami Oni was the most important Oni.





As expected, I started to feel a little sleepy. I'll sleep a

little until the next Oni comes out.

I'll get some coffee from the vending machine too.

## Sakaki-Oni 〇〇

It was around 3:30 in the morning when the Sakaki Oni, the main character of the Hana Matsuri, made his appearance.







First, the dance of the accompanying Oni enlivens the occasion.

Now, it's time for the real deal, Sakaki Oni to make his appearance. Oh, there are a few people missing.

It's past 3 a.m., so some of members are sleeping in the break room.



Sakaki Oni is a “Araburu kami” (raging god) who lives in this



land. So people ask and answer questions to this Sakaki-Oni.  
“Why did someone like you come here?”

What’s a raging god?

Dictionaries describe him as a “violent god” or a deity not subject to the rule of the emperor. If myth is a projection of reality, it is a projection of history from the ruling side. However, there have always been people who resisted such things, and this can be said to be a symbol of that.

I often say that we demons are also people who do not obey the imperial court. Hey, Sakaki Oni, keep up the good work!





There's a word "Many kiss the hand they wish to cut off".

Two-faced?

Yes. For people, the rules of their own land are more important than the rules of people in power. No matter what the powers that be say, if you offend the gods of the land, you can't make a living. So it is only natural that they treat the local deity with the utmost care.

And they say we Oni are also the people who resisted and were discriminated against. We should be more proud of being Oni.

More on that later. From now ,the gods are coming to bless the people.

**Negi, Okina, Miko (or Oturuhyala) □**



□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□



What are they doing? They've got something in their hands.

The stick has a miso paste on it, and if you put it on your face, it will bring you good health for a year. How do you like it?

Oh, no!



**Breakfast, and Yubayashi** □□□□





It is indeed getting cold. You have some time before the yubayashi, and there is time for breakfast, so get some rest.

Breakfast starts at 6:00 a.m. Bread is main and soup, salad, etc.

And the time is around eight o'clock. It's getting light around here. This is when the "yubayashi," the biggest spectacle of the festival, begins.

Finally, the yubayashi begins. The scheduled departure time was 8:00 a.m., but we will move it back one hour.

It's already past 8 o'clock. I've totally fallen asleep. But the dancers are amazing, even though they've been doing it all night. They are full of energy.

The festival started the other evening and has already lasted over 15 hours. Even after arriving on the tour, it has been more than 10 hours. Since the population is small, the same

person appears in several dances, which puts a considerable burden on them. Even so, there is not the slightest sign that their energy is waning.



We slept and ate breakfast on the way, so we are fine, but why do these people have so much energy and stamina when they dance here almost all night long?

Is this the power of the festival? Still, I feel that the festival is becoming more and more exciting.

Now, it's time!

The dance moves toward the center as if to send chi toward the already extinguished hot water pot.

*o-hore, sanya, to-hore, sanya*

Like a wave that comes and goes, excitement rises to a peak and then settles down again. This is repeated over and over again, and finally the time comes.





The dancers dip a bundle of straw in their hands with plenty of hot water from the cauldron and sprinkle it vigorously.

Wow, everywhere is soaking wet.

The fire has been out for a while, so the heat must have diminished considerably, right?

That's not the point.



**Asa-Oni 〇〇~ ending**





After the Yamami-oni and Sakaki-oni, the last Oni appears.



That is the “Asa-oni”. The literal translation is “morning oni. The Asa-oni knocks off the symbol of the gods that is suspended from the “maido”. Next, a lion appears to purify the scene. After that, People return the deities they invited back to where they came from, and all festivities come to an end. But it’s time for us to leave.

After this, we will stop at a hot spring on the way back to Toyohashi Station. You must be tired overnight. Please take a long soak in the hot spring and recover your energy!

I’m lucky as “Oni” to watch this festival.



Fifteen Hana Matsuri have survived throughout the region, and although the people in each community suffer from a shortage of labor, they held between November and March of the following year. In order to support the festival, buses run late at night from the nearest station to each area on the days when the festival is concentrated, and travel agencies



offer tours such as the one introduced in this article. It is one of the festivals where you can feel the original landscape of the Japanese people.

I would like to conclude with a comment posted on Instagram by a young woman who lives in the area.

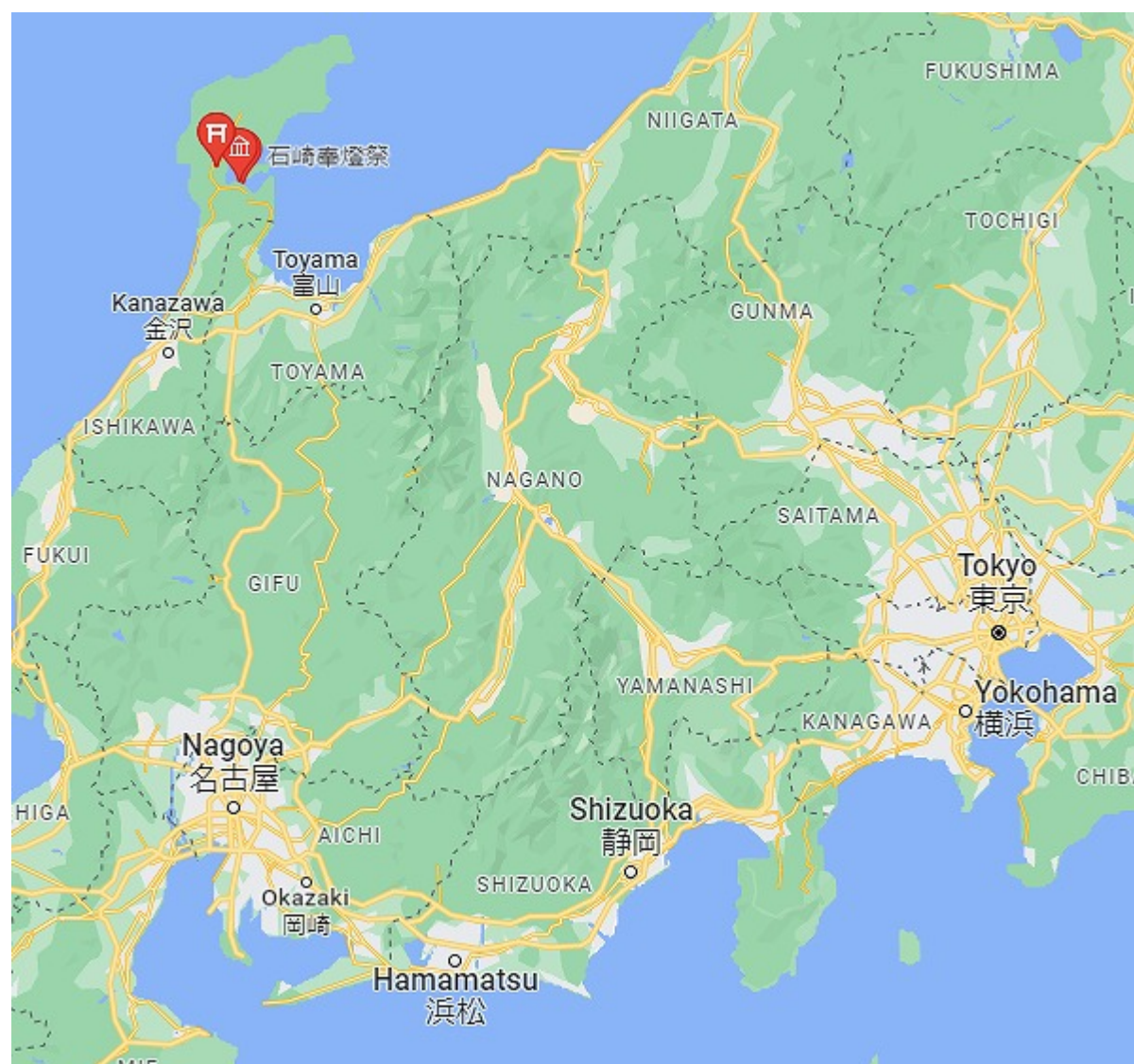
She commented, "Life in general is inconvenient here, too, but I think it's okay to continue living here because of the Hanamatsuri."

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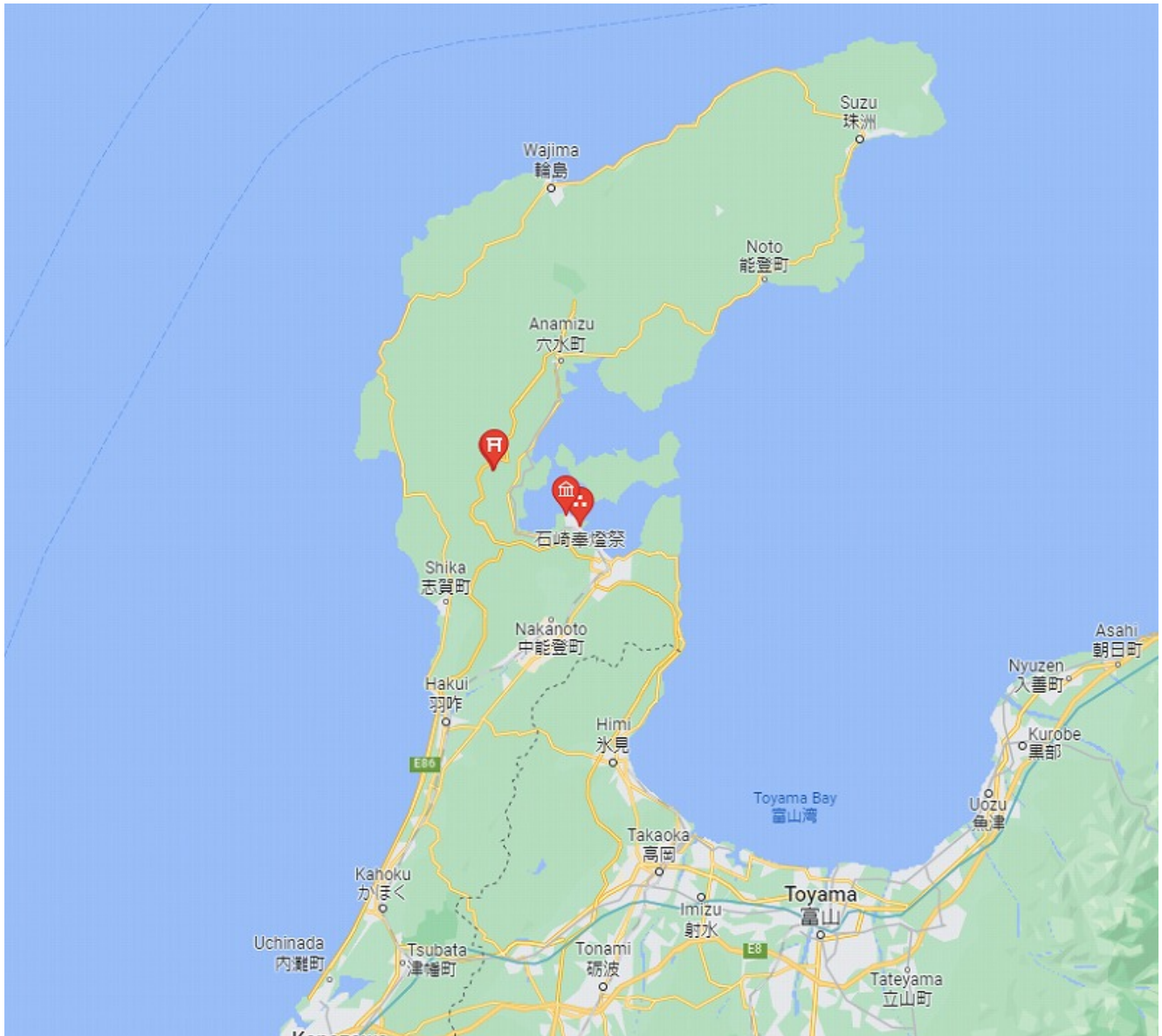
## Okuma-kabuto festival 〇〇〇〇〇〇~ Sarutahiko about to pass



<https://www.walkerplus.com/article/162071/image941310.html#mainimage>







**Date:** September 20 every year

**Location:** Kumakabuto shrine 熊鹿神社, Miyamae, Nakajima town, Nanao city, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan

**Access:** The nearest station is Noto-nakajima 能登中島 Station. It takes about 4.5 hours from Tokyo to there by Shinkansen and limited express. From Kanazawa, it takes about 1.5 hours by limited express and local train. A shuttle bus runs from Noto-nakajima Station on the day of the festival. There are also city buses.

## Festival flow

There is a heroic festival in the Noto Peninsula in which many Sarutahiko appear. On this day alone, the cheers of the people and the excitement of the festival overtake the usually quiet town. On this day only, the people who go to this place take a day off from school and work to attend the festival. And they stubbornly observe the 20th. This festival is filled with the spirit of the people.

The festival is held by 19 shrines associated with Kumakabuto Shrine and their residents.

The festival consists of three main parts. First, people from each town come to the shrine with portable shrines and flags (the flags are the key to the festival). Next, when all the townspeople gather, move to Otabisho which is about 500 meters away from the shrine. Finally, the participants perform a performance using flags at the otabisho. During these processions, the leader of the procession is Sarutahiko, an incarnation of the masked god. As readers of other articles on this site may know, Sarutahiko has always been the leader of Japanese festivals. Especially there's a lot of them at this festival. There are at least two or three Sarutahiko in a town, and there are 19 towns in all. One of the highlights of the festival is that these Sarutahiko parade through the streets and shrines, performing their unique dances to the rhythm of gongs and drums. Let's take a closer look.

## The entry of the portable shrine into the shrine's premises





falags

<https://www.hot-ishikawa.jp/event/6870>



Sarutahiko's dance



do.

Festival morning comes early. Around 7:00 a.m., people carrying portable shrines and flags from each town leave the town for the shrine. There are 19 towns in total, some of which face the sea. So people from these towns bring their portable shrines to nearby towns on boats. By about 8:00 all the town get together. For a distance of about 200 meters, the festival group, centering on the mikoshi, will line up in front of the shrine. Let me explain about the flag here. This flag is the most distinctive and symbolic feature of this festival. It is a long red flag, about 20 meters long, and is called “wakuhata 旗”. Unfortunately, due to a lack of volunteers to carry the flag, the length of the flag has been shortened to about 15 meters in many places these days.

Upon arrival, the first thing Sarutahiko does is tap on the steps of the main shrine. This is a greeting that he has arrived. Following this, people raise the flags in the precincts of the shrine with a loud shout. The ceremony lasts for about two and a half hours. This ceremony at once sends the audience into a whirlpool of excitement. When all towns arrive it will be approximately 10:30 am. From there, the arrival greeting ceremony begins. Led by Sarutahiko’s dance, portable shrines and tool bearers march in two lines to greet the gods. When all are assembled, the priest proceeds to the center and gives a festive greeting to the deity. Here all rituals in the precincts of the shrine come to an end. This is the first part.

## Heading to the Otabisho 大御所





do.

After a short rest, after noon, the trip will now begin to Kamohara 町, called Otabisho 町, about 700 meters away. The word " Otabisho" means the place where the gods travel to.

The Sarutahiko dance is unique and not easy to learn, so it is important to pass it on to the younger generation.

Also characteristic of this festival is the rhythm of gongs and drums. The monotonous sound of the high gong is not often heard in other areas. Some people feel the influence of the Korean Peninsula can be felt. The first in line usually arrives at Kamohara around 2:00 p.m. By 3:00 p.m., only half of the line has arrived. The other half waits for the first half to finish. The order of departure is also decided by lot drawing before the festival each year. Where first is a major topic of discussion every year.



# Shimada kuzushi (Otabisho)



do.





do.

Guided by Sarutahiko, mikoshi and flags from each town depart one after another for Kamohara, the otabisho. The last group finally leaves the shrine around 2:00 PM when the first group arrives at Kamohara. The sight of red flags over 15 meters high lining the Kamohara and golden mikoshi (portable shrines) in the sun is spectacular. And here is the highlight of the festival: the flag parade.

Among them, the skill that people are most looking forward to is Shimada-kuzushi. It means to put it into disorder. It is a technique to knock down a long flag so as not to touch the ground. The origin of the name is as follows:. Once toppled, the flag touched the hair of a woman who came to see the festival and ruined her hairstyle. The name of the hairstyle is Shimada. It is said that the name 'Shimada-kuzushi' came from the fact. The festival continues until around 5:00 p.m., and the fervor continues unabated. Unfortunately, we can no longer use long flags like before. Because of the labor shortage in recent years. However, the spectacle and enthusiasm of the event is the same as in the past.

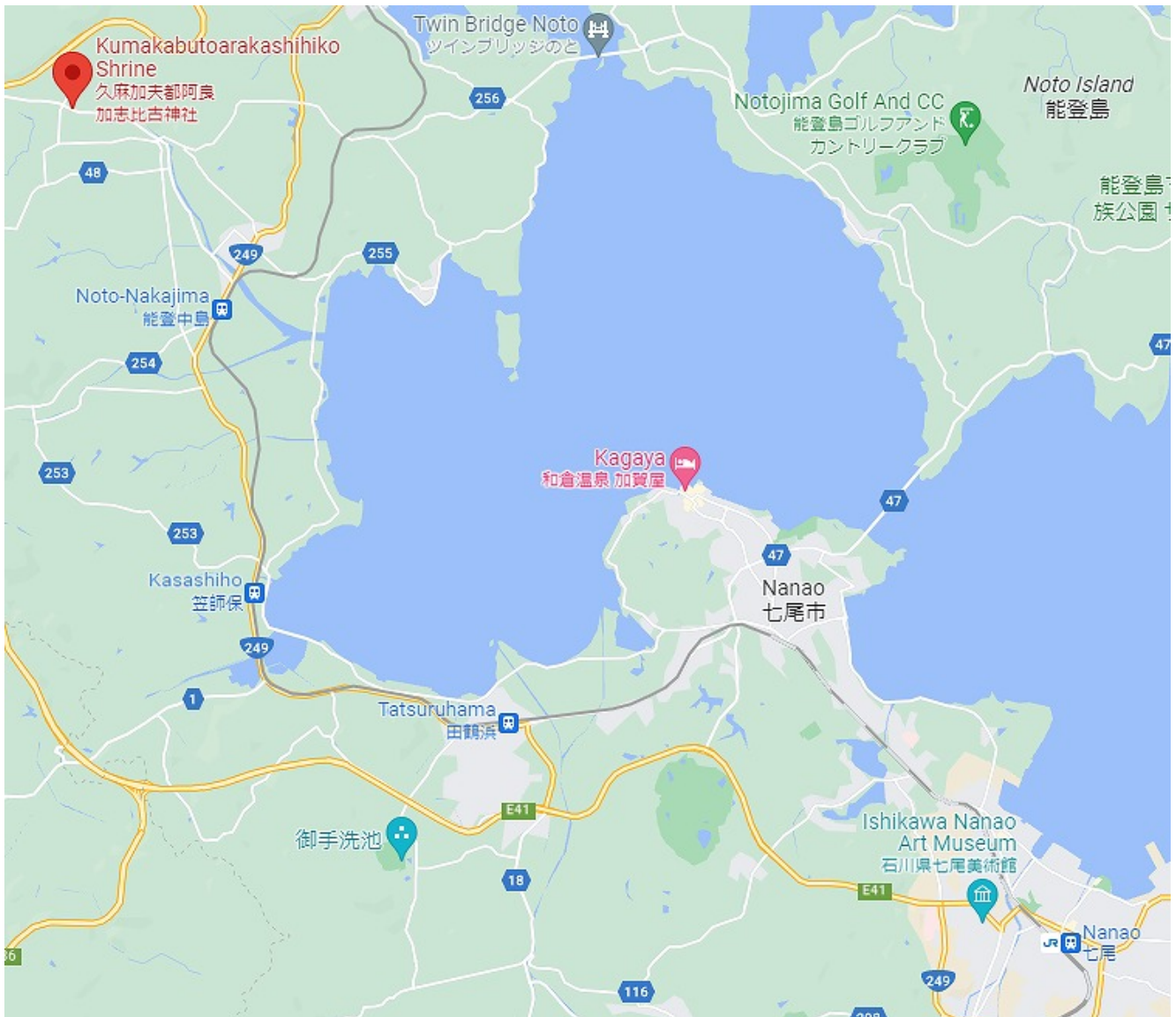
## Ending

It takes only 2 hours to get there from Kanazawa (Kanazawa is 2.5 hours from Tokyo). In addition, Wakura 温泉 Onsen (hot spring) is just 15 minutes away. Wakura Onsen is also home to the most famous inn in Japan, Kagaya 旅館, which has been voted the best inn in Japan for many years in a row (though it is moderately priced).



<https://www.wakura.or.jp/>





In 2025, the Noto Peninsula was damaged by a major earthquake and also by heavy rain in the summer. It is still in the middle of reconstruction, but the people have been reviving the town with the indomitable spirit of never giving up, and the festival has continued. Why don't you see the beauty of the Noto Peninsula, the strength of the people, and the valor of the festival with your own eyes?

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# Hida Furukawa 飛騨古川

Hida Furukawa is called a back room, as it were, to Hida Takayama 高山市. As its name suggests, it is located about 15 kilometers from Takayama, a famous tourist destination, and a 15-minute train ride away. Originally developed as a castle town of a feudal lord named Kanamori, it later became a territory directly under the Tokugawa shogunate.



the Hida Furukawa station









One of the places you should stop by when you come to Furukawa is the Matsuri Kaikan 祭囃場 (Festival Hall).





Furukawa has a big festival on April 19 and 20. The main event

is the main festival, in which various parts of the town pull magnificent, ornate yatai floats with karakuri (mechanical) dolls on them, but the event called "Ōkoshi-taiko" (drumming to wake the town up) held the day before the main festival is particularly famous. In this, a huge drum is on a large raft-like platform, and two people take turns beating it. Then each town group carries a smaller drum and tries to get closer to the main drum. People consider an honor to get as close as possible to the main drum, and the groups thrashes each other violently. Thus the heavy bass of the taiko drums cruises through the town of Furukawa until midnight, signaling the start of the festival.







At the Matsuri Kaikan, visitors can not only see the actual floats and karakuri dolls, but also watch the festival on a powerful screen in the theater.



You can see the most highlight, Shirakabe Dozo 白壁道場 (white



wall storehouse) Street, from the side of the temple in front of the festival hall.





There are 1,000 carp swimming in the Setogawa River and you can feed them, but you have to feed them from a feed box fixed to them. It is because the amount of feed given per day is fixed. In winter, dozens of people move carp to different locations to avoid the freezing cold, a unique challenge in mountainous areas.

















There is a word “Hida no Takumi” (artisans of Hida) to describe Hida craftsmen. This is proof that people all over the country trusted Hida craftsmen. A part of it we can now see in each of the houses. It is called “Kumogata hijiki 雲形ヒジキ (a cloud-shaped ancon)”. We usually see this in temples and shrines, but here you can see it in private houses. This is a remnant of the excellent woodworking skills of the Hida carpenters, who were active in many parts of the country.





Kumogata hijiki 雲間木

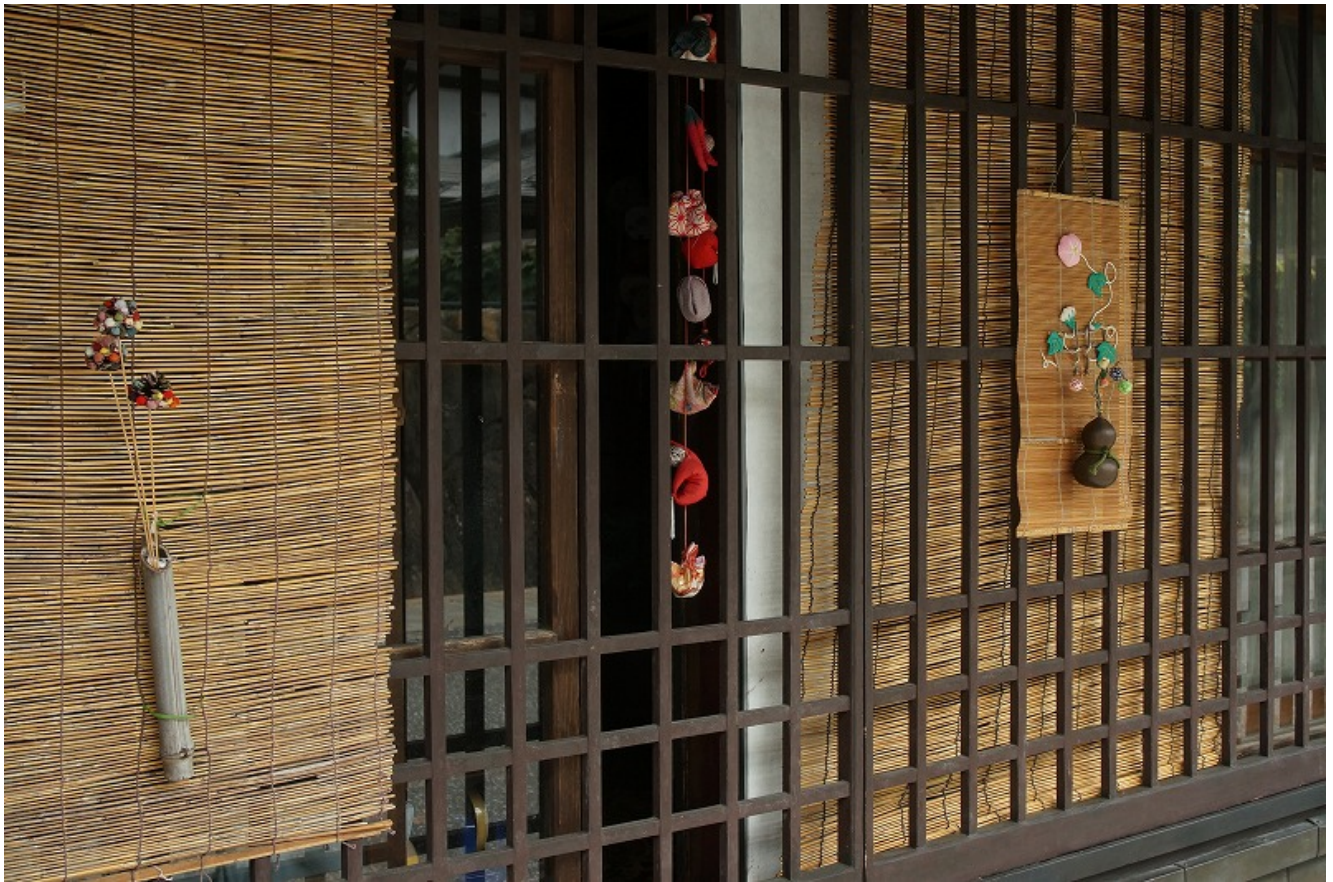


Each carpenter changes the pattern on it. Therefore, you can

tell which carpenter did the work by looking at the pattern.  
We can see the pride of the craftsmen in this work. It is also  
famous for its wood carvings.











Japanese style hotel (ex. Notoya)

















There are simple ramen noodles with a nostalgic flavor, handmade soba noodles, and cafes in old private homes. There is also a famous sake brewery that won the Grand Prix. In recent years, the area has become well known as the setting for the animated film “Kimi no na wa” (“your name” directed by Shinkai Makoto 新海誠 ). However, since it is not as famous as Takayama, there are fewer tourists and you can enjoy a relaxing stroll.









To a town with a sense of nostalgia



CX.

<https://hida.travel/>

<https://visitgifu.com/>

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## **Hida Takayama ~Proud home of artisans**

There is a term “Hida no Takumi” (artisans of Hida). Hida 郡 is a mountainous area. There is little flat land suitable for agriculture, and people had no choice but to make a living from wood. From there, the people of Hida developed their woodworking skills. Eventually, the technique became known throughout the country, and Hida wood was used for various types of construction, and carpenters and other technicians went to various places in response to the demand.



The Hida region is part of present-day Gifu Prefecture. In the



past, they were divided more finely than the current administrative division. Therefore, the southern part of Gifu Prefecture was called Mino and the northern part was called Hida. Mino has many plains, and commerce developed in close cooperation with the neighboring Owari region (western Aichi Prefecture). Even now, it takes nearly two hours from Takayama to Gifu by express train. Therefore, Hida developed itself. Takayama is the center of Hida, so the station is much bigger than the surrounding area.



The area around station is no different from the rest of the town. It takes about 10 minutes to reach the street, which is an important traditional building preservation district.





Eventually you will see the river and cross an impressive bridge, which marks the beginning of the old town.

















This town seems to be famous even abroad and is always full of tourists. Sometimes groups of visitors occupy the road and take pictures. The streets are narrow because of the old townscape, so it is unavoidable that the streets fill up quickly.





However, after 5:30 in the evening, people suddenly disappear.



Probably because the group guests have gone home. Most of the restaurants also close at 6:00 p.m. This means that if you are planning to eat or buy souvenirs, you need to get there early. (If you go to the street in front of the station, the big souvenir stores are open.)









By the time the lights are turned on, the town is once again quiet and regains its original appearance.

















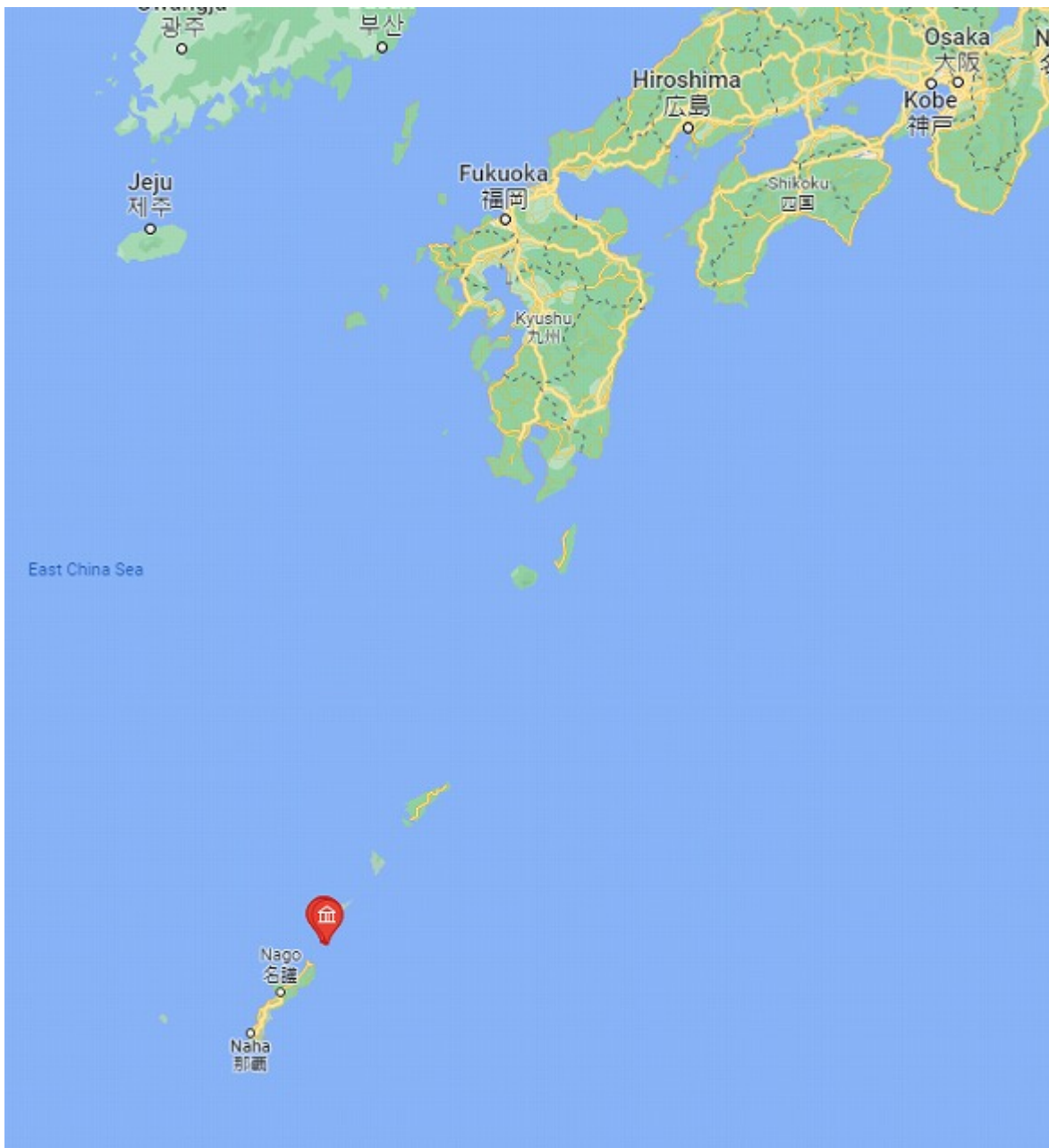




<https://www.hida.jp/english/>

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# A unique cultural experience at the resort ~Yoron jugoya festival







**Date:** The 15th day of March, August, and October in the lunar calendar (about one month later in the new calendar)

**Location:** Gusuku, Yoron-town, Oshima-gun, Kagoshima prefecture  
 鹿児島県大島郡大島町

**Access:** About 10 minutes by car from Yoron Airport. It takes less than two hours to fly from Kagoshima Airport to Yoron. From Okinawa, it takes about 40 minutes by plane. There are also ferries.

## To beaches with blue sea and white sand

Maldives, Hawaii, Seychelles, Fiji. The blue sea, the white clouds, and if possible, the white sand beach would be great. The scenery with the beautiful sea has always been a dream of mankind, and many people would like to go there someday. There is such a place in Japan. That's Okinawa. There are many Japanese who can't go to New Caledonia or Phuket, but would like to go to Okinawa. Yoron Island, introduced today, is in Kagoshima Prefecture, but its location is almost Okinawan. A number of outlying islands lie to the south of Kagoshima Prefecture, the southernmost part of the Japanese archipelago.

Half of them are in Kagoshima and the other half in Okinawa. And Okinawa was once an independent kingdom. Its name is Ryukyu. It flourished through trade between China and Japan. However, it was invaded by the Shimazu clan in Kagoshima in the 17 century and became a vassal state, leaving only its name.

So, a hybrid culture has grown up in Yoron, which borders such Okinawa and is also Kagoshima. The two cultures – Okinawan, with its strong Chinese influence, and Japanese – merged on the island to create something that is not simply a cross between the two, but something unique and strange to the island.

## **Yoron jugoya festival**

Because of this history, this Jugoya 十五夜 (Fifteenth Night Festival) will be divided into two major groups to put on the performing arts.

The first group performs Japanese mainland-style theater and the second group performs Ryukyu-style dance.

## **Ryukyu style dance**

Ryukyu-style dancers perform various dances wearing shuppa and hoods. One is a rain dance, and it has been said that it always rains at that time.

With their faces completely covered by cloth, they look as if their ancestors have risen from the land of the dead as spirits.





## **No.2 group**

<https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/contents/learn/edc27/genre/ryukyu/culture/arts01.html>

## **Yamato (main land) style**

One is Yamato style. Yamato means the Japanese mainland. In other words, it means mainland style. Indeed, it is in the form of a play based on Kyogen. The relationship between daimyo and servants is truly a Kyogen.

However, even a single mask is quite different from the original kyogen. Whereas the original kyogen used masks carved out of wood, here they use ones made of bamboo and paper.

The original masks are like works of art, painstakingly made by craftsmen. In contrast, the masks here are simple and sometimes look like a joke. This gives them an originality that can only be seen here.



### **No.1 group**

<https://www.yorontou.info/topics/e000349.html>

However, all the performers speak old dialects, so it may be a little difficult to understand without prior knowledge. Therefore, this website introduces some representative performances.

## ***Sanbasu***





<https://matsurito.jp/matsuri/yoron/index.html>



<https://www.kagoshima-kankou.com/event/12270>

To use in ceremonies, the daimyo made Taro buy something called Suehirogali (a fan). But Taro doesn't know what it is. On the way, he meets an umbrella seller, who says, "This is



the Suehirogali4,” and makes him buy a torn umbrella. The daimyo gets angry at Taro, who returned home without knowing that he had been deceived. However, Taro delighted the daimyo with the songs and dances he learned from the umbrella vendor, and the daimyo forgave him.

## ***Okumagawa***

Okumagawa Genzaemon, whose father was killed, plots to kill 1,000 people. Yamabushi(a mountain priest) appears there and accompanies him, chanting a Buddhist memorial service. Eventually, as Genzaemon tells the story of how his father was killed, he discovers that the Yamabushi himself is actually the avenger. However, Genzaemon was admonished by the Yamabushi that slaying a man would not help him in any way, and he became a disciple of Yamabushi.



<https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/contents/learn/edc27/genre/ryukyu/culture/arts01.html>





<https://bewave.jp/yoron/spot/southerncross.html>

So here is the Genzaemon. He does not look like a great avenger, but he is a representative mask of Yoron here. It is no longer even a mask. It is in the wrong position and the face is too big. It has been used as the cover of a photo book and as a souvenir.

As you can see this, the masks here are generally laid back. There is a worldview unique to this place. In fact, The second show, which only wears a headdress, is more mysterious.



<https://xn--jhg467avu8a.com/souvenir-yoron-gum/>



<https://www.yanaihiroyuki.net/works?lightbox=dataItem-jkx3aj6u>





<https://amamishimbun.co.jp/2020/10/02/27542/>



<https://www.kagoshima-kankou.com/event/12270>



Originally, only the second group of dances were on the island. However, one day, someone brought the Kyogen (satirical plays) back from the Yamato mainland. Therefore, laughter is the main part of 1st groupe. So the masks are also laid back.

The festival is held three times a year, but the one in August (actually September) is the most spectacular. The lion dance is performed only at this time. Lions are different from those on the mainland and are more Okinawan. They put palmlike plants called shuro on their bodies and gnaw on the heads of islanders.

Everyone dances at the end of the festival. This night is called Jugoya 15 Nights and is said to be the most beautiful moon of the year. Listening to the sound of the waves, dancing, and admiring the moon, the festival continues, forgetting that it is late at night.



[https://amami-time.com/cat\\_topic/cat\\_koto/5038/](https://amami-time.com/cat_topic/cat_koto/5038/)





[https://activityjapan.com/blog/ajblog\\_tourist\\_attractions\\_kago\\_shima\\_yoronto/](https://activityjapan.com/blog/ajblog_tourist_attractions_kago_shima_yoronto/)



Yoron Island, near Okinawa, is one of the most beautiful

places in Japan for its sea. Transportation is by bus with about 5 buses a day. Others are cabs, car rentals, and bicycle rentals. Recently, it seems that kickboard rentals have started. There are many other ways to enjoy the island, such as marine sports. There are many facilities where you can experience diving, snorkeling, sup and windsurfing. A festival where you can admire the ocean and interact with the islanders is highly recommended.

cf. <https://www.yorontou.info/en/>