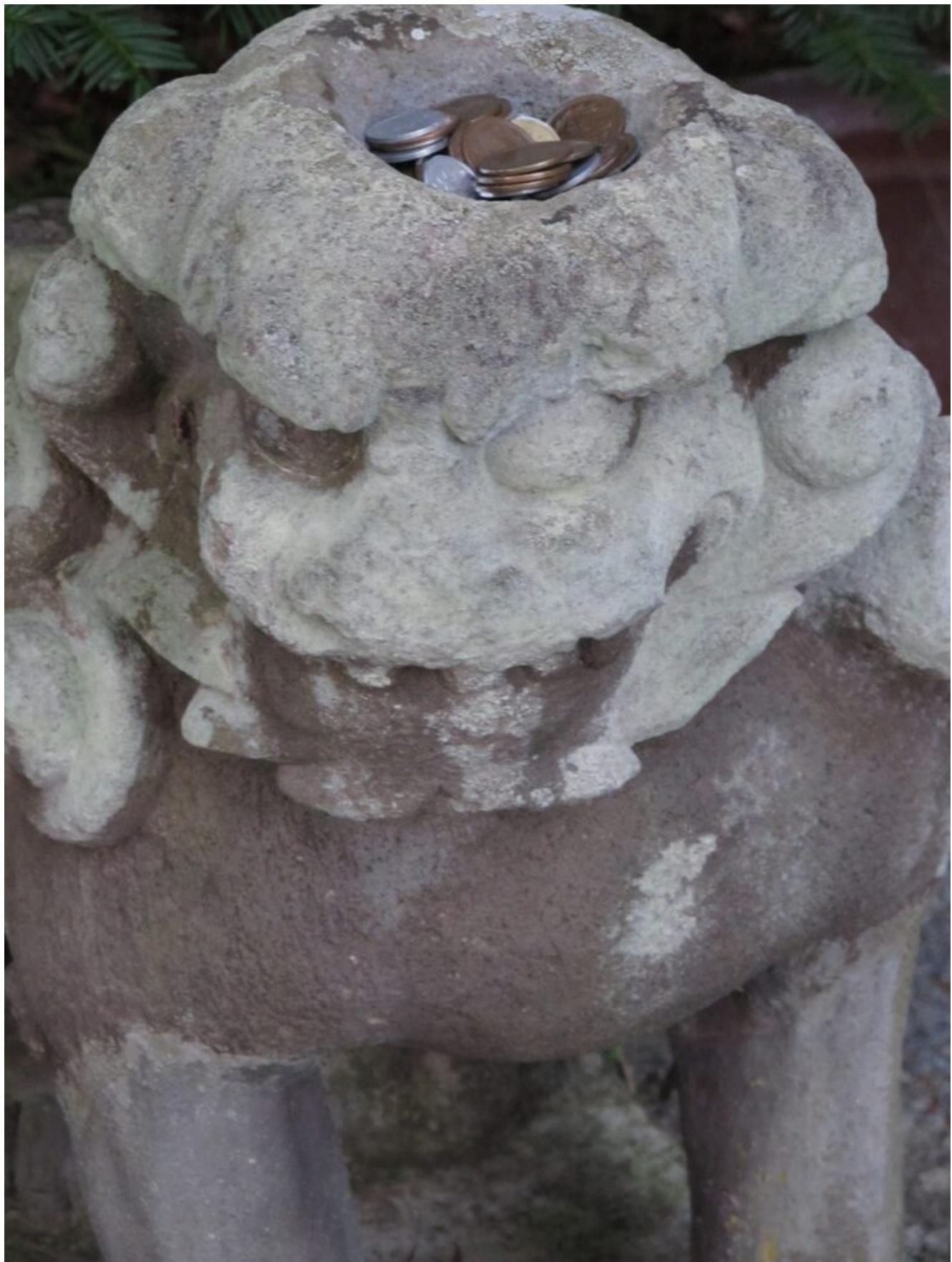


Report: Tono festival ~Day 2

Did you sleep well last night?

It was fun meeting you all. I also got to hear a lot of old stories.

I'll have some time today to show you around town a bit.



ら誘いかけ……夜があけるとわが身は泥
はとうに消え





I didn't notice it yesterday, but Komainu (the guardian dogs) here have kappa-like plates on their heads.

It is commonly known as “Kappa Komainu. After all, kappa are the biggest stars in Tono. Tono is also famous for having many other mysterious legends in the region. This stone monument commemorates a legend about a fox.





Perhaps it was because I had seen too much of the deer dance, even the clouds looked like deer horns.

Well, we'd better get back. Today's main event is the dedication of the performing arts at the Tono Hachimangu Shrine on the other side of the station.

But that starts at noon, doesn't it?

The performing arts groups are going to the shrine, to present their art and do "Kadozuke" again.

Road to Hachimangu Shrine



This is how they slowly made their way to the shrine,

performing tricks from about 10:00 am.



In large facilities such as hospitals, groups come in one after another. It's a sort of "Kadozuke".



Still, I found it a strange sight to see deers, a kind of demonic transformation, walking around the city in broad daylight. Yokai and demons usually appear at night, don't they?

That's the charm of a festival, isn't it? On the day of the festival, even if there are demons and kappa next to you, they won't notice, just like us. While I was saying this, I realized that we were already at the shrine.

At the shrine





The first thing that takes place here is “yabusame” (horseback archery). The three most popular folk tales in Tono are Kappa, Zashiki-warashi (the strange child who brings good fortune to the house he dwells in) and Oshirasama. Do you know the story of Oshira-sama?

I haven’t heard that one.

In Tono, horses and people used to live together. Horses were like family. One day, a girl fell in love with a horse. But her father didn’t approve of it. Finally, he cut off the horse’s head and killed it. The grieving daughter ascended to heaven with the horse in front of her father. When her father saw what had happened, he regretted his actions and enshrined her as “Oshira-sama” for a long time.

Yabusame



Yabusame is a game in which horseback riders run and shoot at

targets with arrows. In the old days, it was a requirement for samurai. It is held all over Japan, but Tono is special because it is a horse producing area.

I hear a familiar sound coming from upstairs.

In front of the main hall of the shrine





I thought I could hear sounds coming from upstairs, but there is also a performance going on in front of the main shrine during the yabusame.

Look. Here comes the “Wakumizu deer dance,” the only self-drumming style deer dance in Tono.

Unlike other drumming style groups, the performer has a short-hemmed costume. In addition, the feathers on their back are also bird feathers.

It is an art form that has been handed down from the nearby Esashi district and has a history of 150 years.

Parade at the riding ground





After the yabuseme, the parade finally started.

There were so many people watching.

Not only the spectators, but also the people from the groups that are not in the parade are waiting together.

Free session

There was some kind of drumming coming from up there again.

Yes. During the parade, there are also various performances going on up there. This sound is the deer dance, right? Let's go see it.







It's all very exciting. It's full of free movement that we don't usually see.

That's the power of the "Tane fukube" as a leader.

The deer performers seemed to be very spontaneous. The deer's antlers were almost hitting Tane fukube, but he was able to avoid them at just the right angle. It's amazing.





Now he is drawing another performer into the dance. This one didn't seem to be a very good dancer.

He is always in charge of the taiko drumming.

The deer are taking advantage of this and are overwhelming him. Oh, the deer have finally eaten him. The dance itself is just a simple movement, but it's amazing how good or bad it can be. I guess there are masters of everything.





A deer dancer I know told me about it. He is the son of a former master of the dance, but he said that lately it has become a little less interesting. He said that the master was a person who could improvise and perform various free movements. I guess that's exactly what he was like.

It is incredible. Everyone in the audience called for an encore.

I'm glad I was able to show you something good today. Now it's time to go back down and watch the parade.

Others



Kagura is also performed at the same time at Kagura-den.

Today, we have a rich variety of Tono traditional performing arts at Tono shrine. We can pick and choose whatever we want.



Konsei-sama

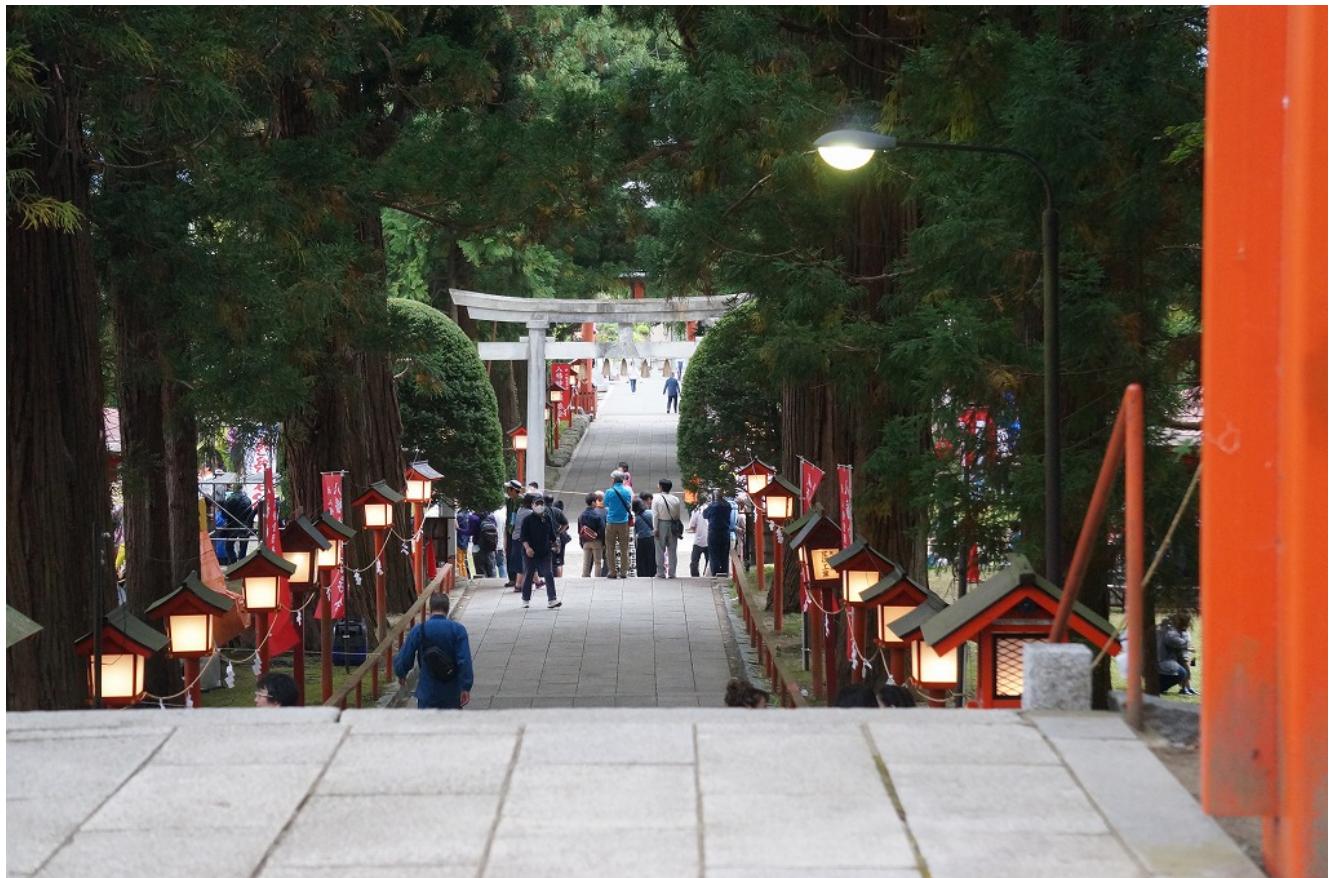
So it's the women who ride the mikoshi here. How unusual.



All the girls are cute too.

Stop it, stop it. That's why people misunderstand kappa as rather lewd.

And Good-bye time





police box

It's time to say good bye.

It's been fun. I hope you'll come to Fukuzaki someday.

In Tono, the trees are already beginning to change color. Once the festival is over, winter will be just around the corner. But the festival season will come again. Please come and visit this typical region in Japan. You might even be able to meet a kappa!

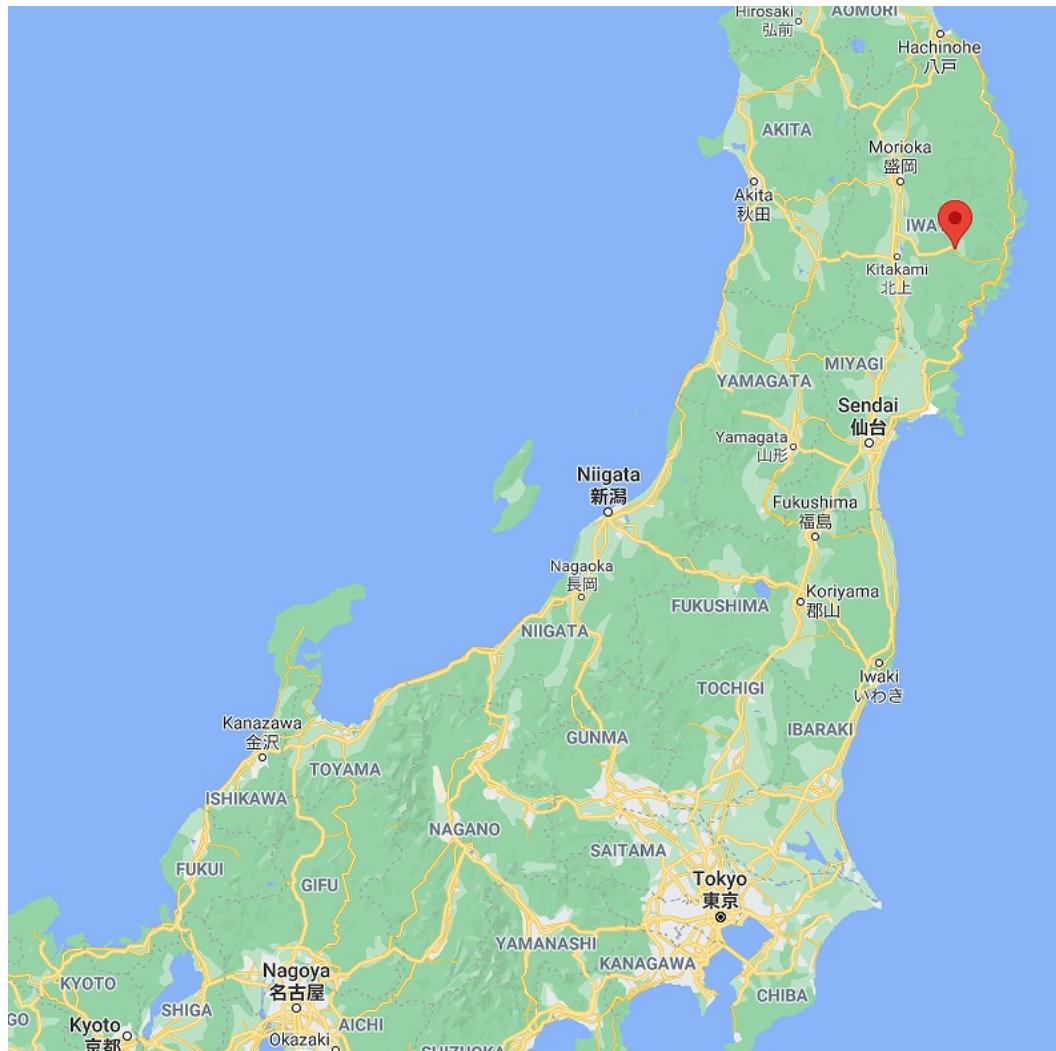
Report: Tono festival ~Day 1,

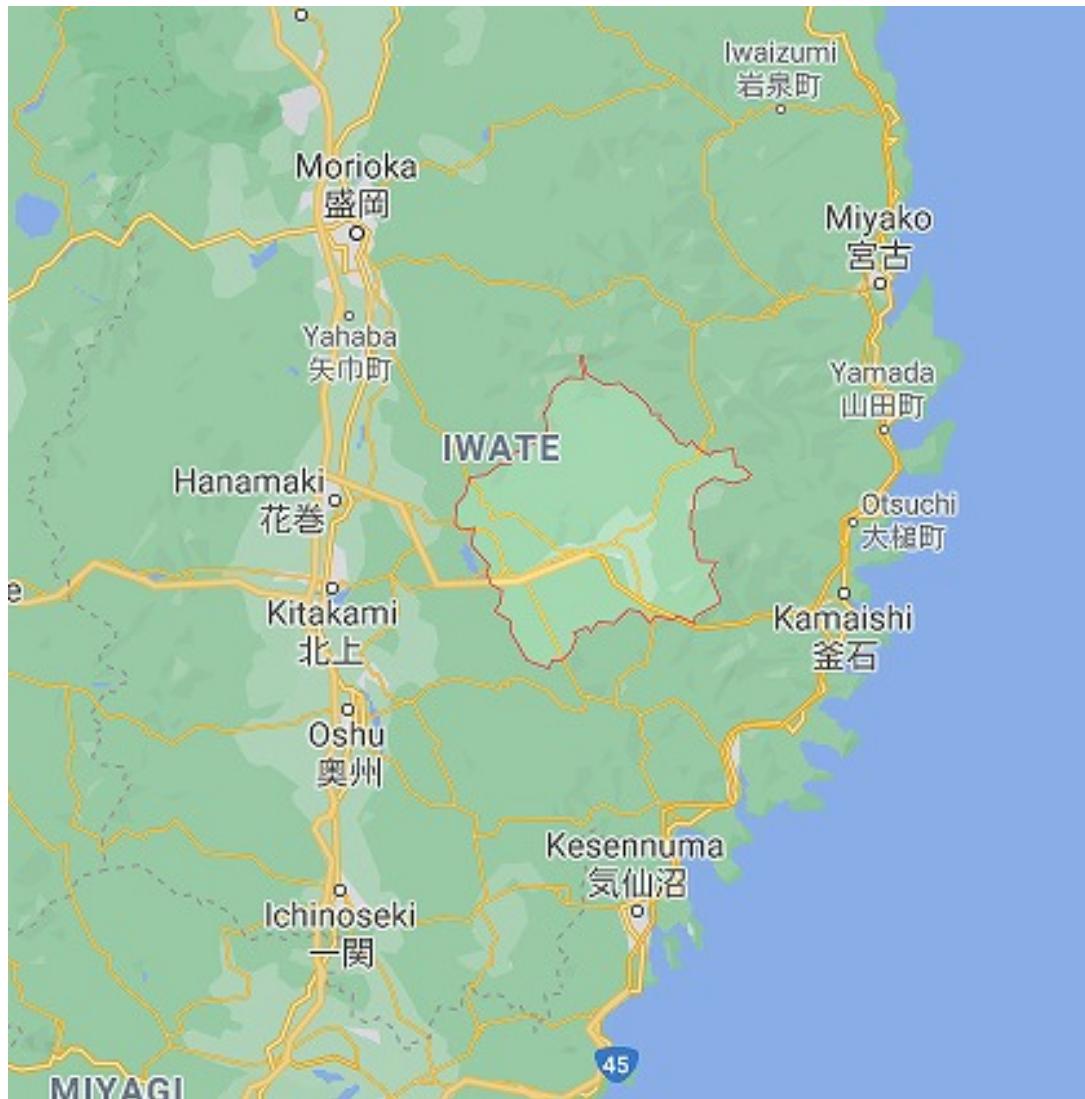
at the city

Date: the 3rd Saturday and Sunday, September, every year

Location: Tono city and Tono Hachiman shrine, Iwate prefecture

Access: 1 hour from Kitakami, 2 hour from Morioka by local train. 3 hours from Tokyo by Shinkansen and change at Shin-Hanamaki, 1hour by local train.





Tono has many strange stories

Tono is a small mountain village about an hour's train ride away from the center of Iwate Prefecture. Its main industry was agriculture for a long time, but in recent years, tourism and hospitality services have been increasing in proportion. Tono has the largest cultivation area of hops, the raw material for beer, in Japan.

Tale of Tono

When Japanese people hear the name Tono, the first thing that comes to mind is “Tono Monogatari トノモノガタリ (the tale of Tono)”.

About 100 years ago, there was a scholar named Yanagita Kunio

柳田國男. He was amazed at the number of legends and folk tales in the region, and compiled them into a book. In the preface to the book, he wrote enthusiastically, "Let the stories of this mountain village make the people of the plains shudder". In fact, the book became a bestseller, and it still holds a place in people's hearts. Yanagita thus became the founder of Japanese folklore. The "Tale of Tono" contains many strange stories, such as the story of a girl who was married to a horse, and the story of a man who spent time with a giant in the mountains. The most famous of these characters is the *kappa*. Even today, there are still many places in Tono where legends about *kappa* remain. This is the reason why Tono is called the home of folk tales.

Kappa

**Kappa* is one of the most famous Japanese "yokai". The approximate image of a *kappa* is that it lives in a river, has a shell on its back, hair on its head, and a dish in the center of its head. When the water in the dish runs out, it dies. They have waders on their hands and feet and are good swimmers. They are about the size of a child. They lean out of the river and drag people and horses into the river. Sometimes they come out at dusk and say, "Let's play Sumo". Their favorite foods are human liver and cucumbers. Since they are all over the country, they are called by different names in different places. "Gataro" is one of them.

川あゆ
かつて
み童



Written by Toriyama Sekien (1718~88)



Written by Akutagawa (famous novelist)



Let's go with Kappa

Tono is also a treasure house of folk performing arts. All of them come together once a year to perform at the Tono Festival. The festival takes place over two days. On this day,

the normally quiet mountain village welcomes a large number of people and becomes spectacular. If a *kappa* from this area were to guide us through the festival, it might look something like this.

Day 1

Welcome guests

scene: in front of Tono station





Today is the long awaited day of the annual festival. Now, it looks like Kappa living in Tono (named Wooden) is going to welcome guests soon.

8:00 in the morning. It's almost time for the guests to arrive. Oh, here he is.

Hey, I've finally arrived at the Kappa Sanctuary. I've been looking forward to it.

Welcome from far away Fukusaki-town, Hyogo prefecture.

*Yes, he is Gajiro, a kappa from Fukusaki town in Hyogo Prefecture. There is a little explanation as to why he appeared this time. Fukusaki town is actually the hometown of Yanagita Kunio, who wrote "The Tale of Tono". In his memoirs of his hometown, he wrote about the existence of a kappa named "Gatarō" in the town. In Fukusaki Town, Gajirō, who is set up as Gatarō's younger brother, plays an active role.

I have heard you're busy every day.

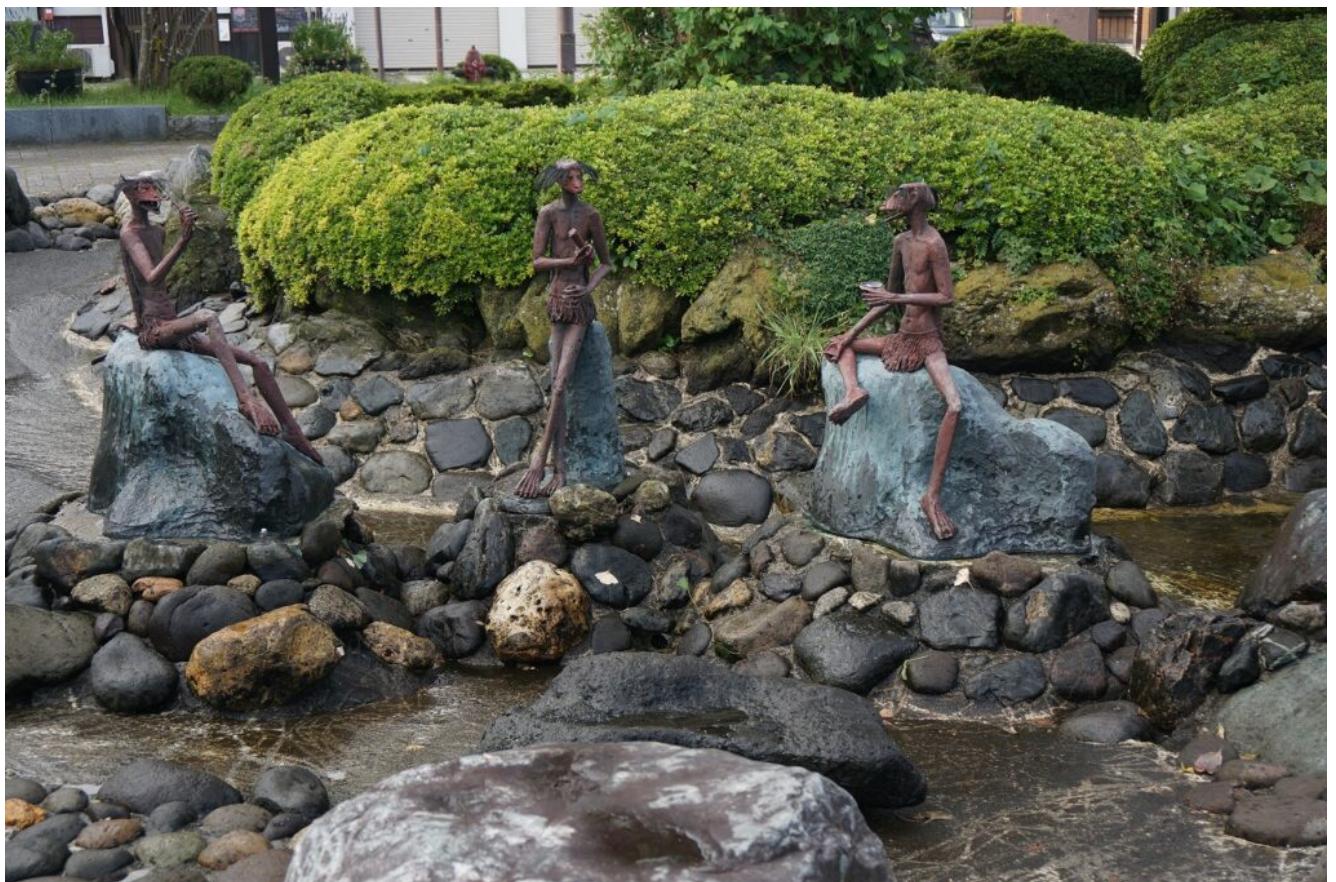
That's right. I work at the pond showing up every fifteen minutes during the day from nine in the morning until five in the evening every day.

*Explanation again. Fukuzaki town has installed objects of kappa and other yokai (Japanese strange monsters) throughout the town to promote the town. In particular, the main pond and the station in front of the station are attracting a lot of attention because of the kappa jumping out of the pond.

cf. <http://www.fukusakikankou.jp/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hix5SerE19g>

It sounds tough. A lot of kappa friends are waiting for you, too. Take your time and enjoy yourself.



Kappa in front of the Tono station



Kappa at the “Kappa pond”

Door-to-door entertainment

scene: Tono town

There's still time to walk around town a bit. Today I'll show you the south side of the station.

This is the area where the museums are. Most of the travelers stay here first.





Where is Kappa-pond, where are kappa said to be?

It's on the north side of the station. It's a bit far, so you should rent a bicycle or drive.

I'm starting to hear some amusing sounds.

It's already nine in the morning. It might have started by now. Let's go back.

The content can also be enjoyed on video→<https://youtu.be/l0Eu0TPm7tw>



There are people all over the place. What are you doing?

This is a custom called “Kadozuke かどづけ,” in which people go from house to house to bless and receive congratulations. This used to be a very common custom in the past, but now we can see very few places where this custom still exists.





Not only the deer dance, but also the Kagura groups do the gating. The group holding the lion's head is the kagura group. In Tono, the lion's head is not worn on the head, but is usually held in the hand.

Parade~Deer Dance



The content can also be enjoyed on

video→<https://youtu.be/NGlb81BCuc>

The first tengu with long noses came strolling in.

This is not a Tengu, but a Sarutahiko, a god of guidance. The Sarutahiko of each kagura group lead the procession together.

But that's a lot of people. And there are a lot of foreigners, too.

Currently, Tono City has friendship cities with Salerno, Campania, Italy, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, USA. And Tono has about 60 performing arts groups.

But there are so many banners, aren't there?

There are about 60 performing arts groups active in Tono.



Deer dance



Kagura



Nambu dance



Sansa dance

All things aside, the main thing is the deer dance. In addition, the Kagura dance with a shishi head, the Nambu dance with gorgeous costumes, and the Sansa dance are active. You can see many other interesting things.

But I heard that the deer dance is the most famous.

Structure of the Deer Dance

Yes. There are two types of deer dances in Iwate Prefecture, one is the self-drumming style and the other is the drape-curtain style (the dancer are holding a drape-curtain while performing). And Tono is the representative of the drape-curtain style.



Tane-fukube and Nakataiko



Katanakake

Let's look at the basic structure. At the head of the group is the leader, called "Tanefukube," who oversees the entire group. The "Fukube" group follows him. Behind them is Nakataiko group. They are holding a tassel in their hands. Next is "the Katanakake". They have a sword on their waist, and sometimes play with a deer (shishi).



Nakadate



And finally, Shishi appears. First comes the “Nakadate”, a few people in the group who have excellent skills. Then comes the flutes and drums.



Finally, a large group of Shishi arrive. All roles are based

on 12 people. So if you were to perform as traditionally done, you would need 60~70 people, but there are hardly that many nowadays.

In addition, I want you to pay attention to the top of Shishi's head. There are various designs between the horns, which are fun to look at.

That's so Tono as can be expected. There are also kappa.

Other performances besides the deer dance





The content can also be enjoyed on video→<https://youtu.be/xdmo0oWz3TM>

Oh, tiger is coming over here.

It's a tiger dance. It's performed mostly in coastal areas, but there are also some in Tono. It looks like a lion dance.

I'm wondering why the tiger dance has been handed down to people who aren't in Japan.





Sansa Odori and Nanbu Odori, right? The Sansa dance is based

on drums and flutes and has a light-hearted feel, while the Nanbu dance is characterized by its elegance. The Nanbu Odori in particular is said to have been created by inviting a performing artist from Kyoto.

All women look pretty, and men look rugged and dynamic.

For example, in the same way that children in Tokyo learn English or swimming , girls in Tono yearn to dance the Sansa or Nanbu Odori dance, and boys try the deer dance.

There are so many different generations here, it's a good social learning experience.

Tono daikagura







What a strange group of people we have here.

It's Tono Daikagura. There used to be masters of the dance, and it is still handed down to this day.

It's such a strange music. It seemed to add to the suspicious atmosphere.



Corps de Deer Dance

You're not tired yet? The biggest highlight of the day is the big deer dance that will start around three in the afternoon. All the groups of deer dancers from the previous day perform their dances at the same time. You can't miss this.

I can now hear the sound of loud drums and flutes.





Wow, here it comes. They seem to spring up from behind me.

The town is completely occupied by deer right now, isn't it?
People are now just a supporting cast.





My head is already dizzy. I don't know if I'm awake in real life or just dreaming.

This is the festival. During this time, no matter how much we make noise, no one will pay attention to us.

Kagura theater



The content can also be enjoyed on

video→<https://youtu.be/Fx0clpoxjp0>

In the evening, there'll be a kagura performance in front of the city hall by the street. There are more than 20 groups in the city alone.

That's Tono, known as a treasure of folk performing arts in Iwate prefecture.

End of the 1st day



It's still crowded, isn't it?

There's a lot of fooling around until past nine at night.

This makes it hard to stay in the town of Tono.

I guess people have to book at least a month in advance to stay here.

What if they can't stay here?

In that case, I think it would be safer to stay in the surrounding areas. Kitakami, Hanamaki, Kamaishi, etc. All of these places are about an hour away by train. I recommend Kitakami. Kitakami is the economic center of the region and many businessmen come here, so there is no shortage of accommodations.

What about us?





Of course, there will be a welcome party at Kappa Pond this evening. Oh, and don't touch the cucumbers. It's a trap to catch kappa.

Let's get going.

to be continued....

Report: Michinoku performing Folk Arts

Festival~Kagura

Michinoku Folk Performing Arts Festival. Kagura is the centerpiece of the festival, along with the Ogre Sword Dance and the Deer Dance. Here in the Tohoku region, there are many unique kagura performances. One of the pleasures of this festival is to be able to see some of them all at once.

“Hayachine kagura”

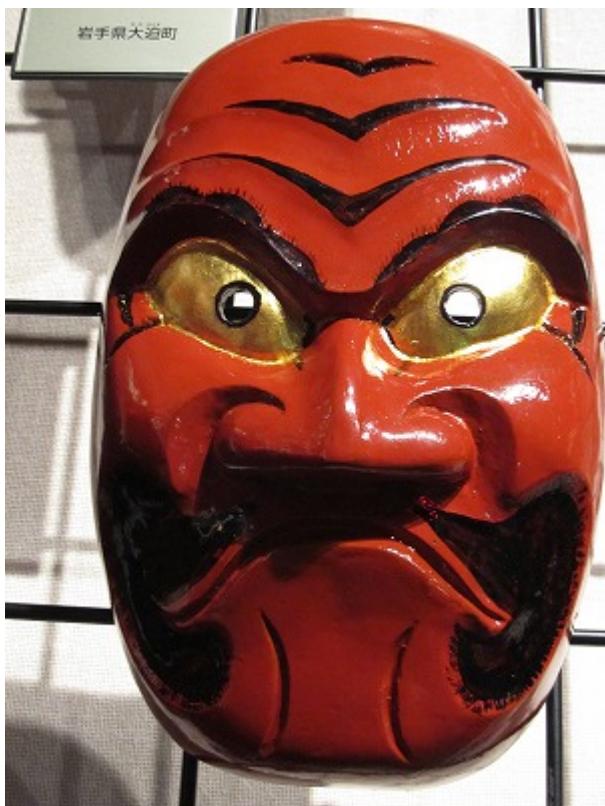




□The first thing that comes to mind when talking about Iwate's Kagura is the "Hayachine Kagura", which is dedicated to the Hayachine Shrine located between the cities of Hanamaki and Tono, next to Kitakami City. This Kagura, which is said that

"Yamabushi" (mountain priests) have been spread by "Yamabushi" (mountain priests) in the past, is now registered as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. The surrounding area is dotted with a number of kagura performances that follow in its footsteps (Its number is more than 100). It is so popular that many people come at one time mostly using tourist buses to the annual festival at the original Hayachimine Shrine. Its greatest feature is the good tempo of the dance. The dancer dances at a good tempo by the sound of drums and "tebiragane" (Palm-sized cymbals), which is beaten without a break, bending slightly forward and slumping at the waist. And sometimes the sound of feet stamping on the floor works as a perfect accent. The costumes are also distinctive, the most noticeable being called "torikabuto" like the "Eboshi" (an old hat, long and narrow and high) with a bird on top of it. And underneath, feather-like things hang from both sides, flapping up and down in response to the dance. It is also common to leave the jacket hanging below the waist.







□

“Daijo kagura”

Since there are many forms of Kagura in Iwate Prefecture, it is up to luck what kind of Kagura can be seen at any given time, but there are also many forms of Kagura that are a fusion of Buddhism and Shinto. Due to Japan's polytheistic beliefs, the country is tolerant of foreign cultures in terms of religion. Where there was originally Shinto, Buddhism was introduced. At that time, the Japanese handled it like this. The theory was that the Japanese gods were the manifestation of the Buddhist gods in different forms. These are called “Daijo Kagura” or “Hoin Kagura” and are characterized by their strong influence on Buddhism compared to other types of Kagura.



□However, the degree of this varies greatly from one kagura to another and from one performance to another. First of all, I would like you to see a performance called "Maou". This is performed by Kamiyado Kagura, not a demon, but a Buddha who has the power to exterminate demons in Buddhism.

□





□The next play, “Kanemaki” is based on the story of a woman who desperately wants to visit a Kanemaki temple where women are not allowed to worship. However, according to tradition, if she breaks the rule something terrible will happen. Will it happen?

A visiting, slightly unreliable-looking monk is suddenly attacked by a monster. This was a woman’s altered form. The monk managed to dispatch the monster with his magical powers.

□





□The next show is called “Teito”. First, an attractive young woman appears. Then a strange man with a comedic mask appears. He has been chasing after the woman. From there, a funny exchange with the drummer begins. The man dances, but at first his rhythm is too fast and he dances riotously. The man asks him to slow down, but this time the rhythm is more leisurely. The man eventually collapses and falls asleep. By this point, it has almost nothing to do with Buddhism. Some of these performances are for entertainment.

“Makisawa kagura” (one of “Nambu kagura”)







□Finally, I would like to introduce “Makisawa Kagura” of Nambu Kagura. Nambu Kagura is structured like an opera, with drummers singing a song and advancing the story. When the characters appear on stage, they themselves sing and talk as if they were singing. Then the song continues, and so on.

□And if you look closely, you will see an old man next to him striking hand cymbals, and next to him is another young child striking hand cymbals single-mindedly. Worried about the heat, he was just beating the gong incessantly, with a towel on his head. I asked him about it, and he said he was three years old. There are probably three generations of parents and children standing in a row. When he grows up, he will follow in the footsteps of his grandfather and father.

This is not a rare sight in Tohoku. There is no doubt that the economic development of the large city of Kanto is advancing, and its convenience is unrivaled. But here in the Tohoku region, I feel that something that has been forgotten in the big city is definitely alive and well preserved. I am very jealous of the Tohoku region.

Report: Michinoku traditional folk performing Arts festival ~The Deer Dance

□





All about Shishi Odori

The Shishi Odori (the deer dance) is a performance unique to the Tohoku region. There are many theories about its origin but it is not well known. Some scholars (mainly around Kyoto) say that it was modified by the propagation of some of the performing arts from the capital , while others from the northeast claim that it developed on its own. The word “shishi” is often compared to “shishi-mai” (lion dance), but in this region the “lion dance” is called “Gongen-mai” and exists separately. The word “shishi” generally refers to an imaginary animal of Chinese origin, but it also meant animals themselves in general (although it is rarely used today). In Kanto, the “wild boar” is called “shishi”, while in the Tohoku region, the word “shishi” came to mean “deer”, because the deer was the most accessible prey in the Tohoku region (this is also confirmed by relics). Legend has said that this dance was started to make offerings to the prey. It can be said that this kind of thinking was not common in the capital because the division of labor was well developed in the city. The

people who ate did not think about the people who caught and dressed it. It was different in Tohoku. Animals were closer to them. It can be said that this is why people had a strong sense to make offerings.



□The most unique aspect of the Deer Dance is its visuals. When transforming as an animal, Europeans often try to be the animal itself, wearing furs and such. In Africa or Papua New Guinea, they try to cover their bodies with leaves and other natural materials to appear as something other than this world. The Japanese tend to try to leave behind a human figure. They may use part of the animals, but only a little. More often than not, they don't use them. Shishi odori (Deer dance) is one of the few exceptions to this rule.

□We can find Deer Dance in Iwate, Miyagi and Yamagata prefectures. In Iwate Prefecture, the Deer Dance can be divided into two groups. : those danced by a large group of people and those performed by the deer themselves, who beat the drums. This is said to have originated in the 18th century (Edo period) when the area was divided into two feudal domains of feudal lords. The Nambu clan ruled in the north and the Date clan in the south (and Miyagi prefecture). In the former Nambu domain, one group involved dancers in large numbers, while in the former Date domain, the Shishi (deers) themselves often beat the drums. This group is also seen in Miyagi prefecture.

The position of the deer dance in this festival

□The Deer dance is one of the most popular performance of this festival along with the Ogre Sword Dance. It can be seen at several venues, but the best place to see it is in the "Shiika no Mori Park" on Saturday afternoon. "The Shiika no mori park" means "the poem park". The Northeast region has produced many poets. There are also a number of poems written about the region. There is a facility in the park that specializes in poetry. (It should be. To tell the truth, I was too busy watching the performing arts to have time to look at the park.) There is no doubt that it is a beautiful park, covered with lawn and lush with trees.

□The event starts at 1:00 p.m. Each group will perform every 20 minutes. In previous years, all of them have performed the Deer Dance. In fact, one of them includes a high school group. It is unique in this area that there is a Deer Dance club in the school, just like baseball and soccer. You just don't see it anywhere else, especially in Tokyo. Let's start with the Deer Dance, in which the deer beats the drum himself. (This style is called "self-drumming style.)□

The self-drumming style deer dance ~*The song of the earth echoing from the depths of the earth*





□This self-drumming style is characterized by the long antlers on its head. They are made from real deer antlers. If it is broken, they will be provided by the hunter. Originally, the antlers had to be split into four pieces, but nowadays it is difficult to get the right ones. And the raised eyes. He carries a long pole (called "Sasala) on his back. There is a piece of paper wrapped around it. It is said that this is the gohei, in which dwells the deity. A drum is tied around his belly, and behind it, just like in the ogre sword dance, hangs an "ookuchi". Basically, it consists of a group of eight people. It is said that the dance is handed down to the next generation in a group of eight people. The weight of the entire costume is about 15kg. In summer, the temperature is said to be around 40 degrees Celsius. However, one can only admire their light and harmonious movements that do not make you feel that at all. There are also several schools of the art, but they are mostly the same in appearance.



□Like the ogre sword dance, each performance lasts about 10 minutes, and there are several different types, but I won't go into details here. However, one of the features of the dance is that at the beginning of the performance, there is always a program called "Niwa-home" which means "praise the place you visit." When they visit a shrine or a mansion, that performance is performed first, and then the rest of the performances follow. The Sasara is bent at the back and slammed onto the ground with force. It is believed that this is meant to drive away evil spirits of the land. Here, the host introduces the name and the program before it begins, but people who have never seen it before do not understand it well. A deep bass of the drumming seems to echo from the

depths of the earth. And the occasional singing voice enters, adding to the effects—a visual that overwhelms the viewer. It was as if the cries of the souls of the Tohoku region could be heard.

Drape-style deer dance ~inland areas



□For a change, this time there will be a deer dance performed by a large group of people. This dance is called “drape-style” because the whole body is covered with a kind of drape. The appearance of the dance is also very different from the “self-drumming style”. First of all, they do not use real antlers. It involves an extremely inspirational design. The design also differs from region to region. The most representative one is the one in Tono City, which is located east of Kitakami City.

The design is quite different except for the fact that it has raised eyes and a stick-like object on its back. Its most distinctive features are that it has a large amount of wood shavings called “kannagara” on its back, and the dance that causes the drape to rise and fall violently. Moreover, each group has its own role after the leader. There are more than 60 people in total (officially). However, it is difficult for all the groups to get that many people together, so the number can be increased or decreased as needed. Unlike the “self-drumming style ,” there are separate drums and flutes, and the shishis focus on dancing. Men play the role of the deer, and many women play the role of “Nakataiko” or “Katanakake”. However, in the olden days, all the roles were performed only by men and none were taught to women because women might eventually leave to other areas. This was because they were afraid that other communities would copy their methods.



Katanakake and Shishi



Nakataiko and Shishi

Drape-style deer dance ~coastal area

□The dance is done in such a plaza with the whole thing going around in a circle. Basically, drums and flutes are often set aside. And the shishis raise the drape violently and shake their heads from side to side while squatting down. Those who are good at it have a keen sense of how to handle the drape. In the role called “Katanakake”, the actor dances holding his sword in the air while facing the shishi. It looks as if they are confronting the shishi.







□Drape-style Deer dance outside of Tono also makes an appearance. Unlike the taiko style, the drape style has many variations. For example, the shishi in Kamaishi City, on the coast, use really flamboyant colors. Their bodies are bright blue and their heads are more ornamental. There are also deer that are clearly recognizable by different colors, like the lion dance in Kanto. There is also a performance called “Tsunagakari,” in which the performers go over a single tight rope through trial and error, which is also in the Kanto style. If you ask the origin, you’ll find out that it was learned from fishermen who finally arrived after drifting from Chiba (Kanto) in the olden days.

Others



There are also other much performed deer dances. On the other hand, there are also more designed and impressive and slender deer dances like the "Hakoishi" deer dance (Miyako city). A slender figure and a bright contrast of red and black costumes. It's really unique.

□Thus, the drape style can be enjoyed in a variety of designs. On the other hand, the self-drumming style is not as interesting, but its dignity cannot be imitated. You can feel its awesomeness on the main street on Saturday night. If the finale of the festival is the ogre Sword Dance group dance, what should be called the “Deer Dance Group Dance” will take place shortly before that.

Corps de deer dance ~Night part



Although it is not like the demon sword dance where everyone dances the same program at the same time, it is very powerful to see as many as 10 deer dancing groups performing at the same time. Especially it is overwhelming to watch the drummers. Of course, the Maku-kei is nothing less impressive

than those performances. The sound of the drums shaking the earth and the singing voice echoing in the depths of the stomach. The power to make the earth tremble. In reality, though, the earth doesn't shake because it's on concrete. It is possible to move around to see several groups, but the 20 minutes go by very quickly. I recommend you to take your time and focus on just one or two, if possible.





A Miraculous Experience of the Deer Dance

Finally, I would like to share two interesting experiences I had. When I was about to leave the hotel to watch the night session, I found a self-drumming style deer dancing man standing in the backyard. Apparently, he had just finished getting dressed there and was about to go to the venue. I was so surprised that I was allowed to take a picture of him up close. When he asked "where did you come from?", I replied, "From Tokyo area". He was delighted and said, "Good to see you from afar. I am grateful to you for visiting me from such a distance. Then I said, "Well, let's have a dance," and he beat the drum in front of me and danced lightly. It is impossible to describe the power of this performance in words. I remember that the surprised hotel staff came out of the hotel to see what was going on. And then the deer dancer walked away leisurely. I remember it as vividly as if it was yesterday.

And here is one more episode. I was watching the Deer Dance in the daytime, not wanting to miss a second of it. I had

taken a camera and videotaped it. Halfway through, my batteries ran out. But the dance wasn't over yet at all. I hurriedly took out my cellphone and filmed the remaining part. When I was relieved that I could record till the end, I remembered something. Probably from the impact of dropping it, I remembered that the smartphone's camera function had been disabled for a while now. But I was able to take a picture safely. And ye after this one moment my camera hadn't recovered until I changed it to a new one.

□You have to actually visit the place to see it. Miracles don't happen just by looking at images and photos. I highly recommend you to visit the place and experience it for yourself.

Report: Michinoku traditional folk performing art festival~Oni-kenbai

□



Tohoku Region is a Treasure Trove of Festivals

When we say “Tohoku” (the Northeast) region of Japan, there is a kind of plaintive image. Japan has developed mainly around the western part of the country. Since ancient times, the capital was located near Nara and Kyoto, and the Kyushu region continued to have a large influence as a point of contact with the continent. The Kanto region, where the current capital city of Tokyo is located, did not appear on the historical stage until the 10th century, and it was not until the 18th century that Tokyo became the center of the country. Tohoku, on the other hand, had long been considered a land to be conquered. When Tohoku region had come on the historical stage several times, each had ended with a pathetic story. But on the other hand, it was also a land that produced a lot of rice and, above all, gold, which the central government wanted to acquire at all costs. The Tohoku region was seen as just a gold mine. At the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, it was the Tohoku region that was far more affected than the Kanto region.

At the same time, the supply of agricultural products is abundant and plentiful, making it a fertile region, which many

people think of when they think of rice and sake. It is also a place where a lot of folklore has been handed down from generation to generation.



□Summer in the Northeast is short. Long winters come earlier than in other parts of Japan. For this reason, summer in the Northeast is the season when people are passionate about their momentary emotion. Especially in the first week of August, several of Japan's most iconic festivals are held. These include the Nebuta Festival in Aomori, the Kanto Festival in Akita, the Tanabata Festival in Sendai, and the Hanagasa Festival in Yamagata

What is the Michinoku traditional folk performing arts festival ?

□At the same time, the Michinoku Performing Arts Festival is being held in Kitakami City, Iwate Prefecture. Iwate Prefecture is the largest prefecture in Japan and is said to have the largest number of traditional performing arts in Japan. The Ohshu 両国 Kaido (a highway road), the most important road from ancient times, runs through the center of the city, leading north to Morioka, the capital of the prefecture, east to the Pacific Ocean, south to Hiraizumi, famous for its Golden Temple, and west to Akita.

□During the three days from Friday evening to Sunday, various traditional performances, said to be more than 100, will be held throughout the city. In this article, I would like to focus on the performing arts using masks.



Iwate prefecture

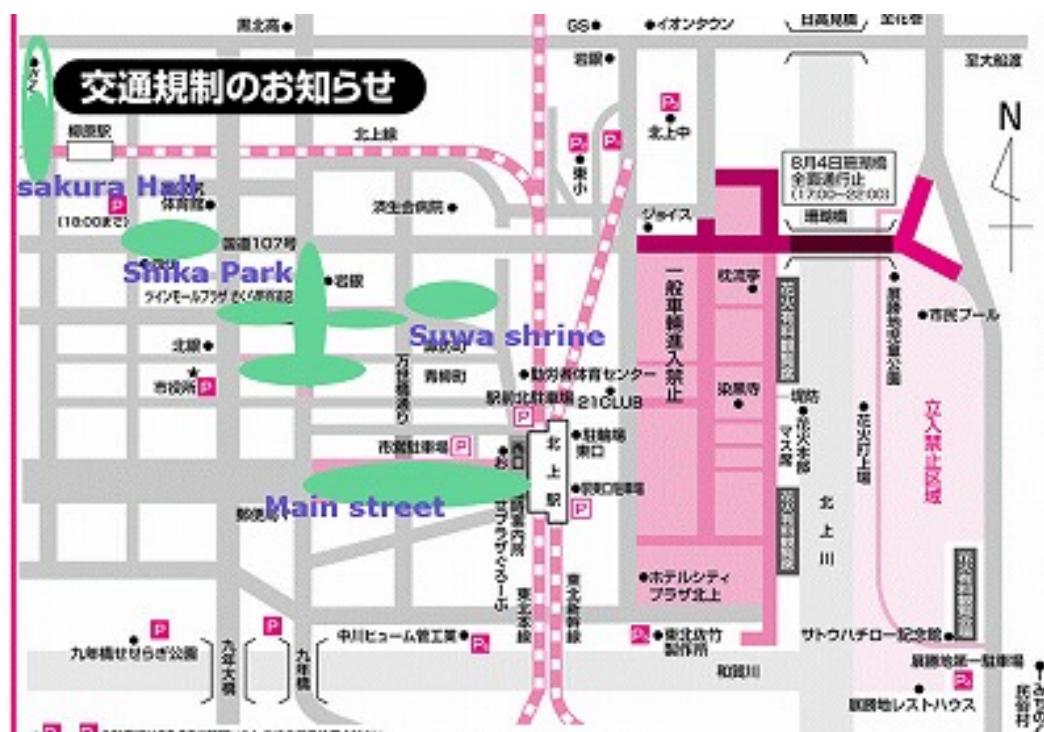


Kitakami city

Outline of the festival



front of Kitakami station



venues

□ The area is divided into several locations and varies by time

of day. On Friday, the first day of the festival, there is a parade on the main street in front of the station and a dance troupe called “Onikenbai,” which is the most popular form of entertainment in the city. On the next day, in the morning, there are performances at the site of Iwasaki Castle and Nyoirin-ji Temple. In the afternoon, various places such as squares, parks and shrines are used for the performances. At night, The festival reaches its first highlight. More than 50 performing arts will be performed in a little over two hours on the main street in front of the train station. On Sunday, most of the performances end in the morning. In the afternoon, the Oni-kenbai (ogre sword dance) is performed in the hall. And on the last night, a fireworks display finishes the whole schedule.

□As for transportation, there is a city bus service (500 yen per day), which is the most convenient. However, the Iwasaki Castle, Oni no Yakata and Nyoirinji-temple are not included in the route, so you have to take another city bus (about 30 minutes from the station). There are several rental bicycles in Kitakami City, so it may be easier to use them. By the way, it took us about 30-40 minutes by bicycle. As for the other venues, they are well within walking distance.

□Despite this it is certainly limited to the performing arts of the Tohoku region, especially around Kitakami City, it is perhaps the festival that provides the most direct insight into Japanese folk arts. There are two main performing arts, “ogre sword dance (Oni-kenbai おにけんばい) and “dear dance (Shishiodori しそうどり). But I’ll focus on the former this time, and at last, I’d introduce the rest.

Oni-kenbai (Ogre sword dance) おにけんばい

□It is impossible to see this festival without mentioning “Oni-kenbai” おにけんばい (the ogre sword dance). Sophisticated movements and elaborate figures. The dance is a seamless, well-trained dance. The most impressive feature of the dance

is the masks. Although the mask is called an ogre mask, it is said to be an incarnation of a Buddha. The evidence of this is that it has no horns, which a ogre should have. Oni Kenbai is one of the sword dances. It is just one of the forms of sword dance that incorporates elements of various predecessors and refines the dance and design. This may be due to the fact that this dance had been performed in front of the lords of the time. In other words, at that moment, it was transformed from a mere folk art to an official art form.



¶The Waga 朝氏 clan reigned as the lords of this area until about the 17th century. After that, the Nambu 南部 clan replaced them, but the dance is still loved by the lords, and it has

remained so to this day. Although Iwate Prefecture is a large area, each region has its own performing arts that are representative of the region. Morioka City has the “Sansa”, Tohno City has the “Deer Dance with a large group”, and Hanamaki City has the “Hayachine Kagura” and “Deer Dance with its own drum”. And most of all, Kitakami City is famous for its “**鬼の舞** ogre sword dance”. That’s why the people of Kitakami City are so passionate about this dance, that they have become connoisseurs. Children learn it the same way they learn to play soccer or baseball (which are the two most popular sports in Japan). Motifs related to the ogre sword dance can be found throughout the city. Currently, there are 12 organizations active in the city. Therefore, this dance is very much a part of this festival.

Oni-kenbai ~feature~

□

□As I mentioned earlier, the feature of this dance is the use of masks. There are four types of masks. They are white, red, blue, and black, and each one has its own meaning. And a pair of eight masks is the basis of the form. White is a special color, and only one person who is skilled in the art is allowed to wear it.

□On the head, they wear hairs called “zai”. This is made of horse hair. It is considered good to have this “zai” standing during the dance. They also wear a sword at the waist. Now a fake sword is used, but it is said that in the past a real sword was used.

□In addition, the “Ohguchi **帯**” draped from the waist in the back, and a small jacket draped over it. This is remnant of the past where it was taken off and draped over the waist. The “Ohguchi” is decorated with pictures of heroes who once ruled the land and fought fiercely against the central government. On the chest is drawn the crest of a Chinese bellflower, the crest of the Waga family, who once ruled this area. When the lord of the castle in this land invited the Waga family to his

castle, he showed them a performance of the ogre sword dance. It is said that the lord of the Waga was so pleased with the dance that he allowed the dance group to use this crest. In addition to this, there are people who are in charge of the accompaniment. They support the dance with drums, bells and flutes under a leader called “Dotori 道ตร”.



Oguchi 道ตร

□□Watch “Oni-kenbai”1 ~The Iwaski castle ground and the museum of Ogre

□You can enjoy the ogre sword dance in several venues. The main venues are the main street throughout the city, the site of Iwasaki Castle grounds, Oni no Yakata (the museum of ogre), and Sakura Hall. On the first night, if you want to learn the charm of the ogre sword dance, you should wait for it on the main street. You will see a big group dance of the junior group (junior high school students and under) ogre sword dance. They are only a select few who are allowed to dance here. You may underestimate them as juniors, but they will surely show you breathless and impressive dancing. Every year, after the opening parade, the dance starts at 8:00 pm and lasts for about 30 minutes.

□Next morning, you should go to the Iwaski castle ground. This place is near “Oni no Yakata (the museum of ogre). The museum opens at 9:00 a.m., so you'll have an hour or so to visit before the sword dance starts at 11:00 a.m. The museum has a display of goods related to demons (ogre) not only from the ogre sword dance, but also from all over the country and even abroad.(500 yen for adults, as of October 2020)

□



map [Oni-no-Yakata \(Demon museum\)](#)



Oni-no-Yakata (Demon museum)





□The site of Iwasaki Castle is located on top of a small hill a short distance up from the museum. For about an hour, several groups will perform a ogre sword dance here. This is said to be a memorial service. The first thing to do is to pray in front of a stone monument in honor of the Waga clan.





There are about 15 to 18 different kinds of ogre sword dances being handed down, depending on the group. One of the most noteworthy performances is the one in which dancers dance alone. This is a special dance that only those wearing a white mask are allowed to dance. Since the basic performance of "Oni-kenbai" is a group dance, there are not many opportunities to see this dance in detail. There are many groups in the venue, but only a few of them dance, partly because of time constraints. It is not difficult to imagine the honor and pressure of dancing alone in the midst of all that attention. It will all be over by 12:00. If you want to get back to the city after this, you'll have to hurry. Most of the events will start at 1:00 in the afternoon. If you want to enjoy the Oni-kenbai more, there will be another one hour performance in front of the "Oni-no-Yakata (ogre's museum)". However, there are some opportunities to see the Oni-kenbai in other parts of the city.



□ Watch the Oni-kenbai 2 ~on the street

When the dance takes place on a street corner, there is another way to enjoy it compared to a genuine performance. The proximity between the performers and the audience adds a kind of street performance element. Some of the performances are acrobatic and others are very exciting, such as the use of many swords. One of the most noteworthy is the program called "Kakkata". I have already mentioned that there are four basic types of masks used in "Oni-kenbai". Each of them represents the north, east, west and south, but this "Kakkata" represents

the center. The expression on the mask is also much different. The expression on the mask is rather droll. Unlike other performers who use fans or swords, this Kakkata uses a long stick. He put it between his legs and swings it up and down. This suspicious performance the audience laugh. He also invitees one from the audience out onto the stage and makes them laugh even more with his joking motions, as he lies down to watch. His role is like that of a circus clown. But that doesn't mean he should be underestimated. This is a special role that can only be played by someone who knows it all. If you see him on a street corner, I would like you to enjoy his performance.





Watch the Oni-kenbai 3~Saturday night

Saturday night is when the performances are at their best; every 20 minutes starting at 6:00 p.m., The main Street will be filled with local entertainment. Among them, you can see the “Oni-kenbai”. The sideshow-like performances are especially performed. Many of them are fun to watch, such as the one in which the dancer dances so as not to drop the flat

tray in his hands, and the one in which the number of swords in his hand is increased one after the other. And at the end of the day, the time is usually 8:00 a.m. The biggest highlight of the festival comes at 8:00 a.m., when about 20 groups of eight people perform a dance in unison. A bonfire is lit at regular intervals, and the performers begin to dance in unison as the musical accompaniment set up on the stage in the center of the street begins to sound.



□

□Local audiences will stay in front of their favorite (often local town) groups before them. There's hardly any moment breathing during the "Oni-kenbai". It just resembles an intense aerobic dance. It is done with masks on and swords in

hand. It's not hard to imagine the intensity of the dance. In the darkness of the night, the figures that emerge from the bonfire, filling the main street, is sure to leave a strong impression.

When it's over, they become temporary heroes. Children begin to dance with pamphlets in their hands as if they were swords. People are so excited and they want to shake hands and take pictures with them. Of course, anyone who asks them to do so will do so. The town of Kitakami is filled with the "Onikenbai" fever. On the way home, the melody of the dance echoes in our heads forever.







□□Watch the Oni-kenbai 4 ~Sakura Hall

□More performing arts exhibits will continue until the final day, Sunday morning. If you walk around the city, you can

expect to see “Oni-kenbai” at every corner. In the afternoon, the Oni-kenbai will be performed at Sakura Hall. This is where all the groups will perform and all the acts will be performed. If you are interested in “Onikenbai”, you can’t miss it. There is a fee of 1,000 yen for advance purchase and 1,500 yen at the door, but it is worth it. Advance tickets are available at all time until the show starts, so you can buy them if you arrive at the hall a little earlier.

□



There are thirteen to eighteen different types of “Onikenbai”, depending on the group. The basic group is made up of eight performers and is called the “Niwa”. There are also other forms that alter the basic form.

The number of people in the dance is not limited, so the number of dancers can be as small as one or two. I've already mentioned the one in which the dancer dances without dropping holding trays, and the one in which the dancer rotates his body while increasing the number of swords which he holds. There are also other movements that look like gymnastics.

□Lastly, I would like to introduce the "Kitsune-kenbai (Fox Sword Dance)". It is a part of the "Oni Kenbai" and uses a fox's mask and moves in a slightly different way. Once upon a time, there was a man who could not come to the dance due to illness. This is based on a mysterious legend that a god disguised himself as a fox and joined the dance. The performance lasts about three hours, and then all the performances are finished.

□Next time I would like to introduce the dances other than the Oni-kenbai.





To be continued in the next article.

□