

# Men-buryu ~Kyushu's representative Oni dance

What is the Furyu dance?



**Men-buryu** 〇〇〇

<https://saga-kashima-kankou.com/feature/10928>



## Oni-kenbai 〇〇〇

Mem-buryu is popular in Saga Prefecture in Kyushu, especially in Kashima city. In this article, we will focus on the Nanaura 〇〇 area of Kashima city, where it is most active.

Men-buryu wear Oni mask. Speaking of group dance with a mask of Oni, Oni-kenbai in Iwate Prefecture is famous, but Mem-buryu is an entertainment comparable to Oni-kenbai in the north.

The Mem-buryu is a kind of Furyu dance with Oni mask. Furyu dances is difficult to define. Because there are all over the country and each has its own characteristics. In very simple terms, it is a dance in which the dancers wear conspicuous costumes and beat drums and other instruments.

## Furyu dance

\*In case you are interested, here is how the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs defined it when it applied to UNESCO.

“Embodying the spirit of ‘fūryū’ (ふりゅう) (gorgeous and eye-catching), the folk arts are performed to the accompaniment of songs, flutes, drums, gongs and other instruments. Folk performing arts that embody the spirit of ‘fu-ryu’, or elegance and attractiveness, and are performed to the accompaniment of songs, flutes, drums, gongs and other instruments. People perform these folk arts performing to pray

for disaster prevention, memorial services for the dead, good harvests, rain harvests, etc. The dance is a symbol of people's wishes for a peaceful life, including prayers for disaster prevention, memorial services for the dead, bountiful crops and rain-making. Participated in by more than one generation of local people on occasions such as festivals and annual events.

Local people of all ages participate on festivals and annual events."

## Men-buryu 男舞 group composition



<https://www.asobo-saga.jp/search/detail.html?id=14>





[https://www.pmiyazaki.com/kyusyu/saga\\_kashima\\_densyougeinou/h27\\_tinjyu.htm](https://www.pmiyazaki.com/kyusyu/saga_kashima_densyougeinou/h27_tinjyu.htm)

Memburyu consists of three groups of dancers. The main character is a kake-uchi, with Oni mask, hair (or hemp) called a shaguma, and a small Taiko (Japanese drum) hanging from it. There is no set number of performers. The average number is between 20 and 30, sometimes less than 10. All are men. Next is the 'kane-uchi', a group of people who beat the gong (kane). They are all women and strike a single gong in pairs at the same time. They wear hanagasa hats on their heads and the most colourful costumes. And the role of the beating the Oo-taiko (big drum). In addition, there are two pairs of people called 'torige 〆〆'. They have a stick with hemp hair on the end and pass it between the two of them as they go. This is an imitation of the processions of feudal lords in old days.

## Story



<https://www.city.saga-kashima.lg.jp/main/4040.html>



‘Mem-buryu’ has one story to tell. First, the Oni challenge the god to a battle. To do so, they march valiantly towards the shrine where the god resides. Then, after the battle with the god, they are converted and dance a joyous dance. The Oni perform a dance to please the god and finally go down to the village to bring good fortune to the houses. As this story, ‘Mem-buryu’ consists of three main parts. The first is on the way to go into the presence of God. The next is the dance before the god, including the fight with the god. The last is a dance expressing joy.

And on the basis of these three parts, experts now classify ‘mem-buryu’ into three types. Those that retain the oldest form. Those that have become a completed performing art. And those that focus on the last part, part three.

## Representative regions

The oldest type is from the Otonari 音成 area. In this district, the costumes are generally plain, with navy blue and yellow accents only on the strings of the drums. In contrast, the Hougaura ほうぐら, which belongs to the second type, wears a more flamboyant costume with a wave and anchor design. The more they change from old to new, the more entertaining they become. The masks and costume designs are slightly different in each district.





## Otonari district

<https://saga-kashima-kankou.com/feature/10928>



**Hougaura distinct** same next to

## When can we watch it? And what are the attractions?

You can see Mem-buryu in many places outside Kashima 県, so the dates vary according to each region, but most of them are held in September in Kashima city , which is most lively region.

The first and best place to start is the Kashima Performing Arts Festival at the Yutoku Inari 湯徳稲荷 Shrine on the second Sunday of September. On this day, you can see not only Mem-buryu but also other traditional performing arts.  
→<https://saga-kashima-kankou.com/en/event/4256>

In the morning of the same day, Mem-buryu is held at 3 shrines nearby. The group of many Oni moving along the paths through the golden fields of harvested rice is a unique sight in the area and attracts many photographers and tourists. But it's a shame that you can't see all of them because they are at similar times.

The Sake Festival at Hizen-hamajuku in late March is also a good opportunity. This area has retained its old townscape and has been designated by the national government as a conservation area. There are three sake breweries here, which open their warehouses at the same time and hold sake tasting events. Performing arts such as men-buryu are also performed at the same time.  
→<https://saga-kashima-kankou.com/en/event/14439>

We must not forget that this season also marks the beginning of Japan's most brilliant cherry blossom season.

## Welcome to Saga

Saga prefecture is not that big. There are many sightseeing spots scattered in a small area. Hizen-hamajuku is a



nationally designated townscape that makes you feel old Japan. It is also a pottery kingdom, and there are many famous places such as Arita, Karatsu and Imari. The Yoshinogari ruins are ancient ruins that shocked Japanese people when they were opened to the public.

It is also very accessible, less than an hour by train from Fukuoka, the center of Kyushu.

→<https://asobosaga.j-server.com/LUCASBSGP/ns/tl.cgi/https://www.asobo-saga.jp/firstvisit/?SLANG=ja&TLANG=en&XMODE=0&XCHARSET=utf-8&XJSID=0>







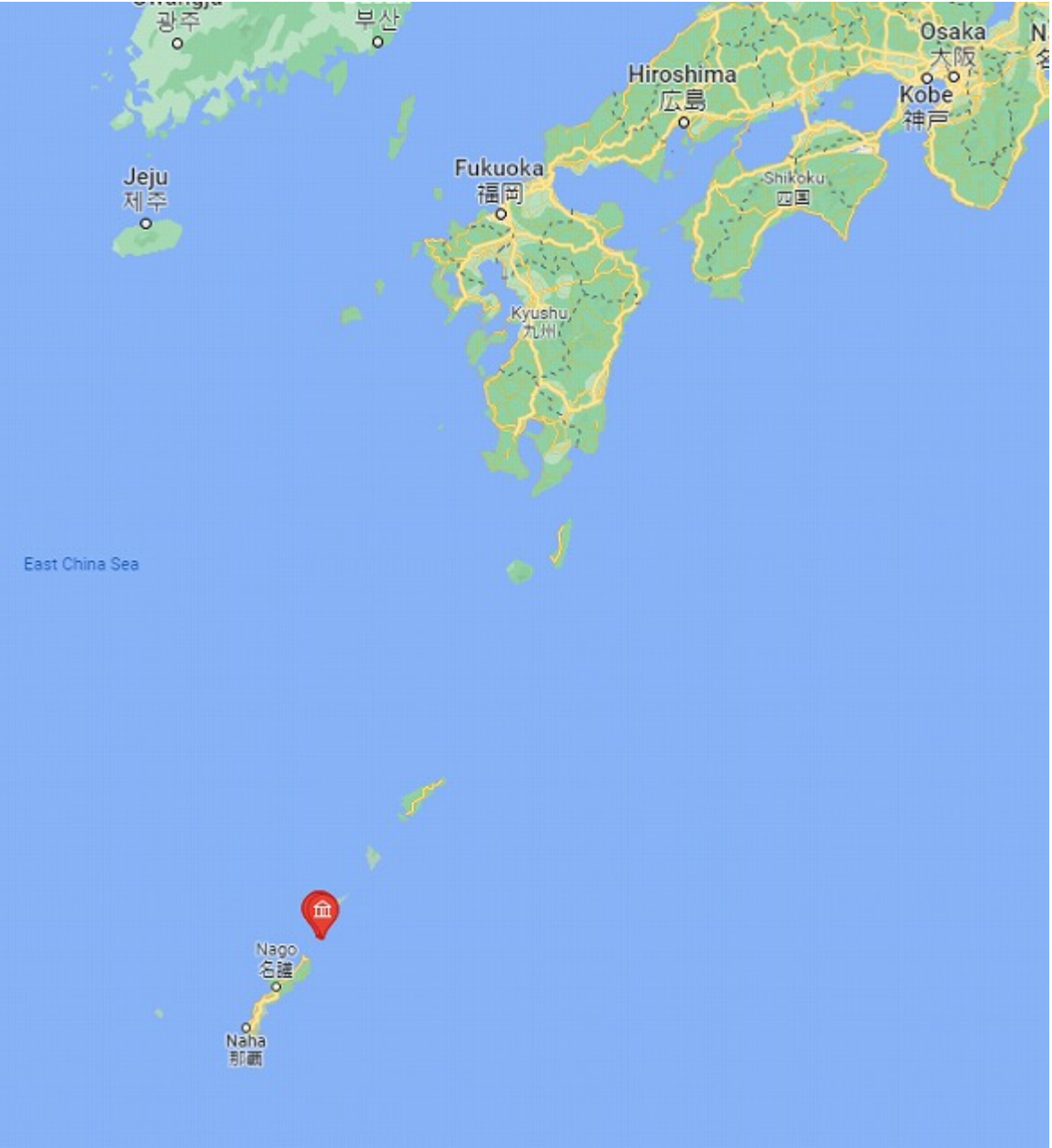


□<https://saga-kashima-kankou.com/spot/1114>

□<https://www.hizenyumekaidou.info/attraction/#watch>

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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

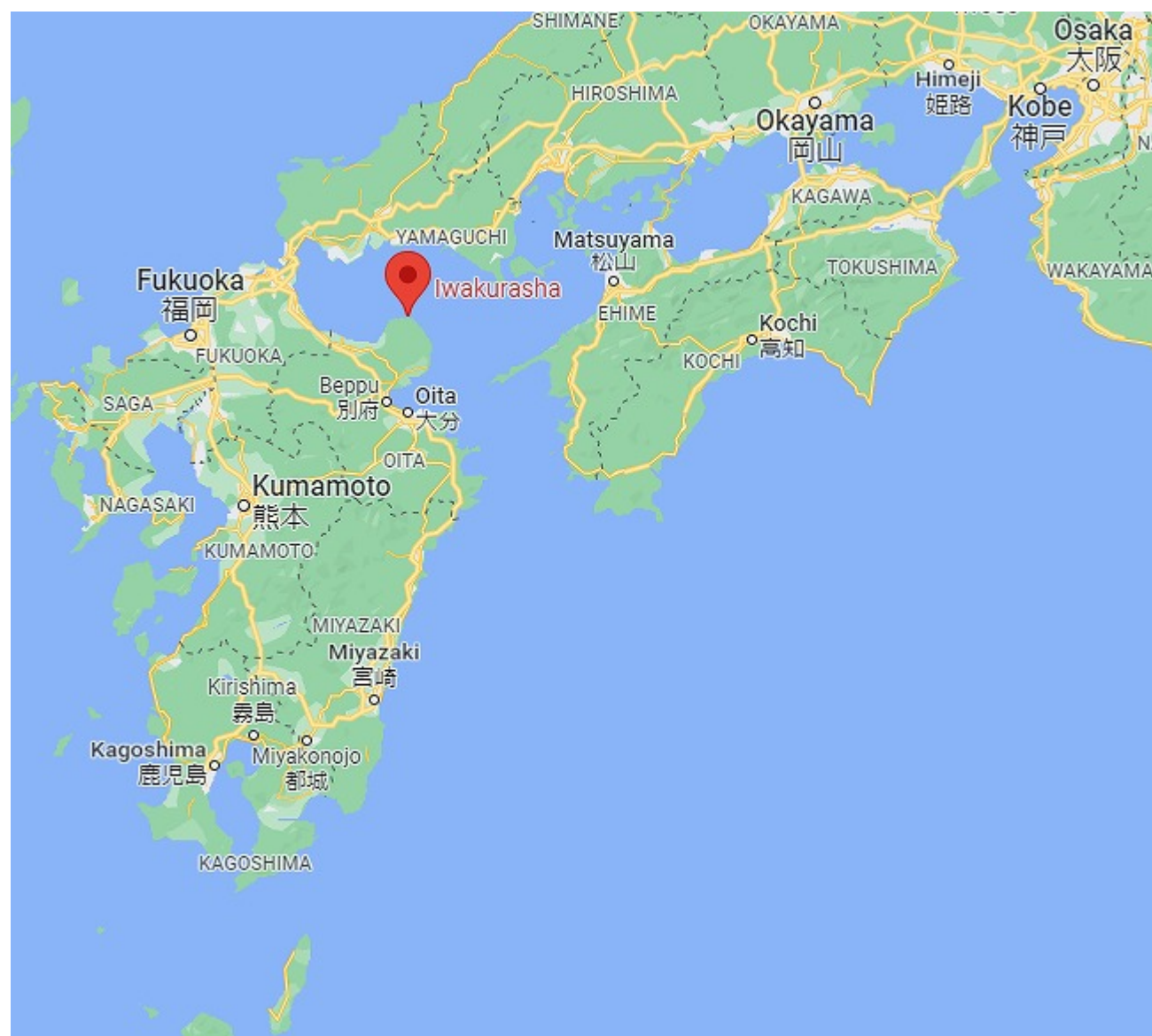
places in Japan for its sea. Transportation is by bus with about 5 buses a day. Others are cabs, car rentals, and bicycle rentals. Recently, it seems that kickboard rentals have started. There are many other ways to enjoy the island, such as marine sports. There are many facilities where you can experience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

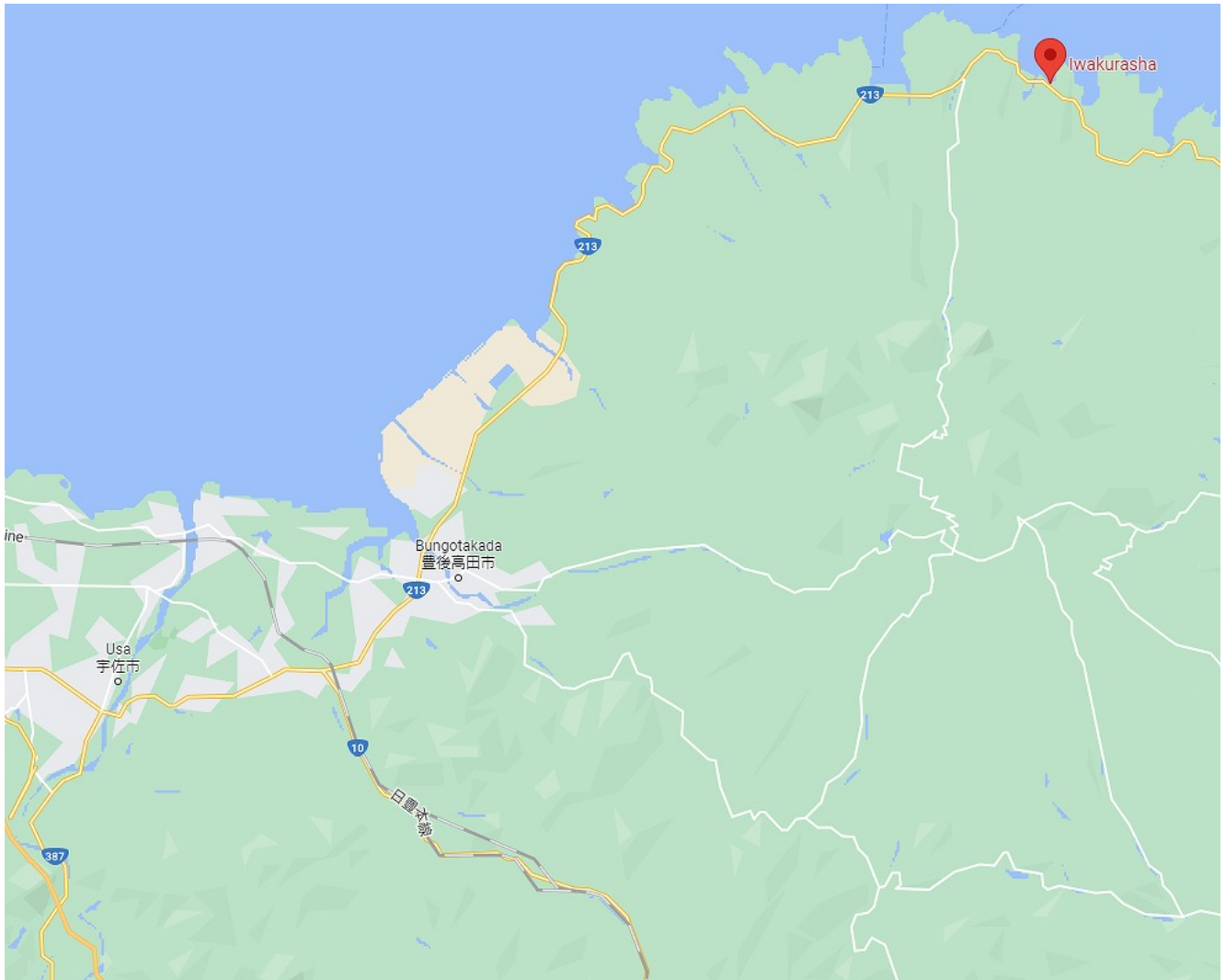
cf. <https://www.yorontou.info/en/>

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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

くしくい Kushiki, 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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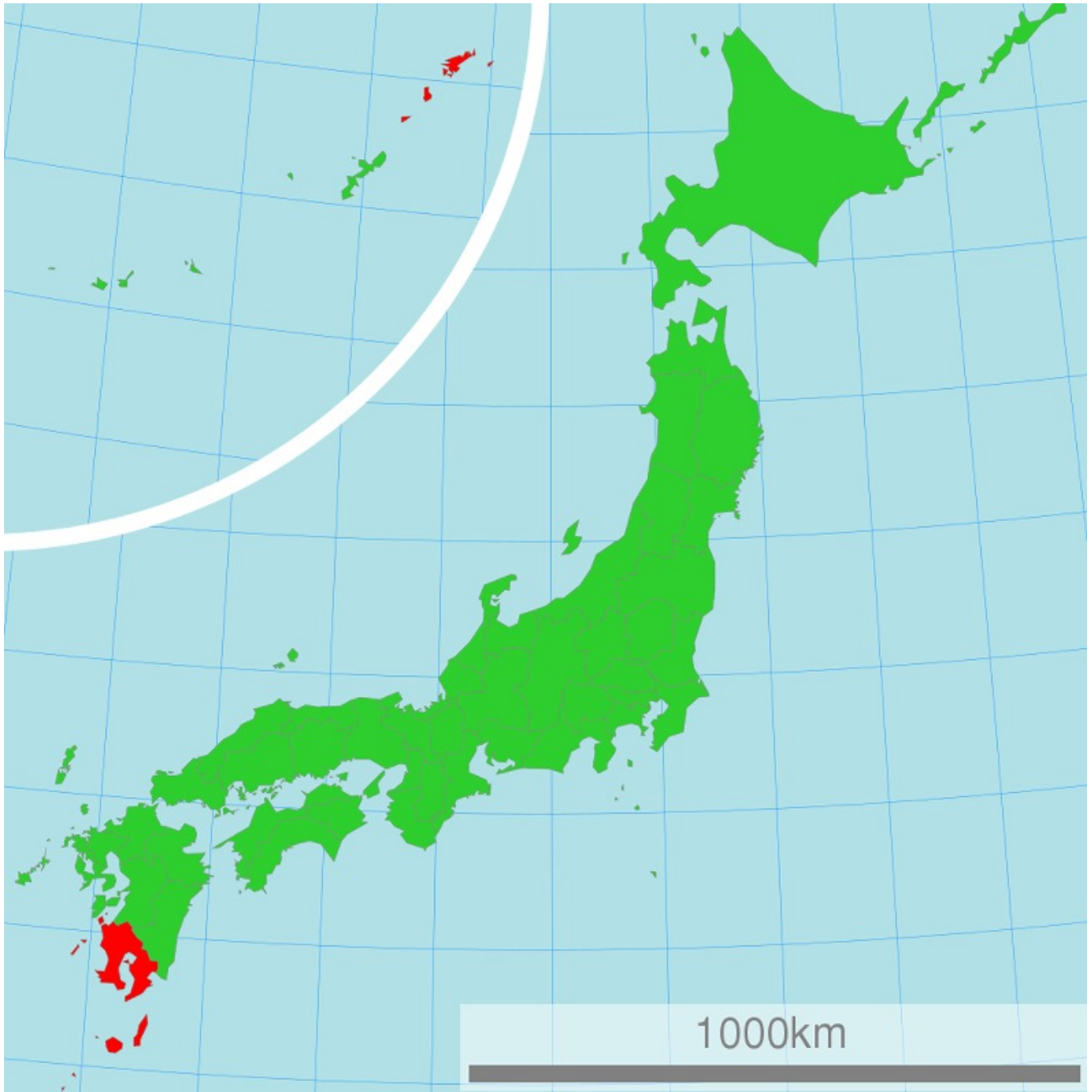
## Otaue(rice planting) festival at Kirishima Grand shrine

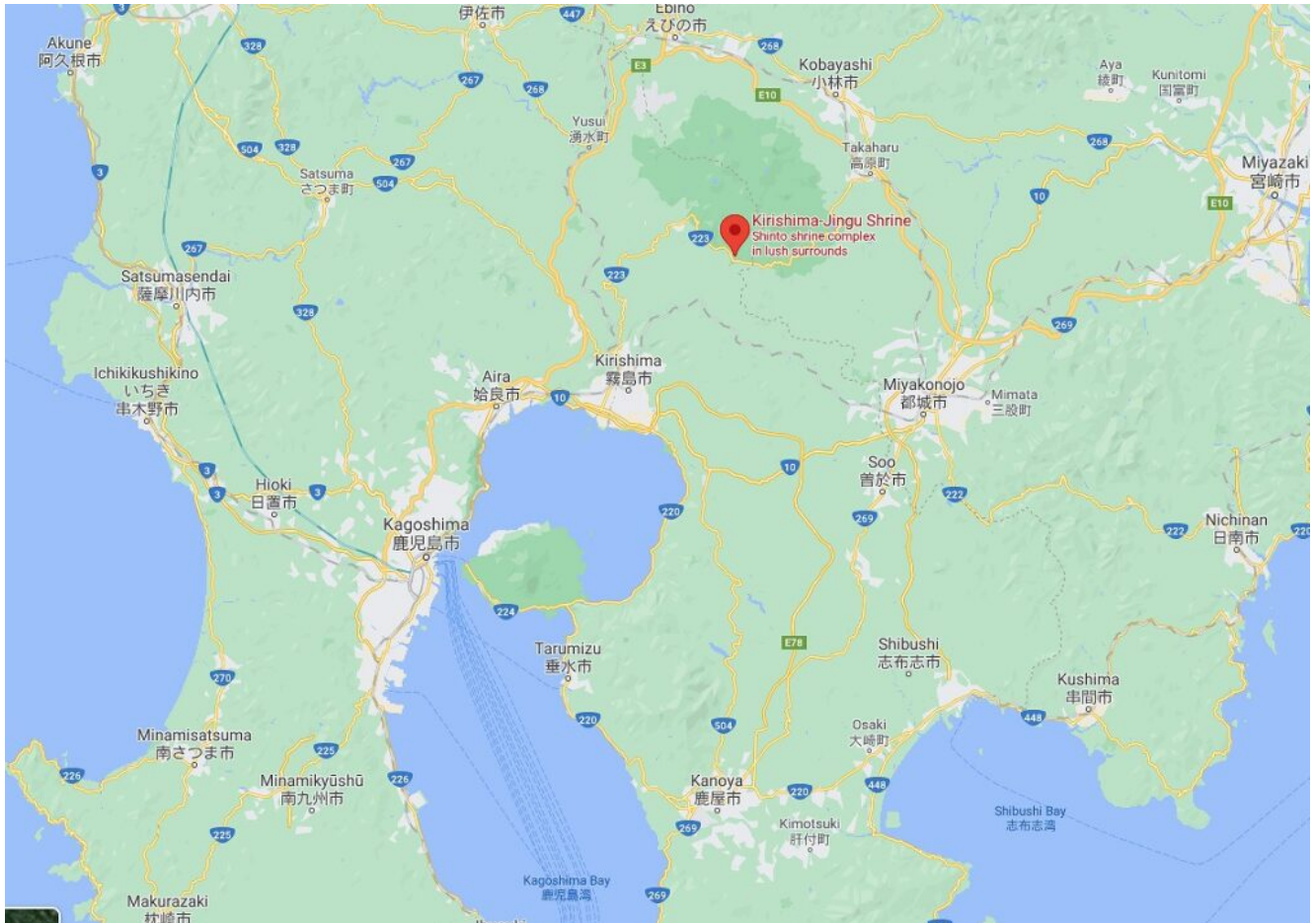
**Date:** February 4 of the old lunar calendar (In the new calendar, it is a month late, in mid-March)

**Location:** Kirishima taguchi 2605-5, Kirishima city, Kagoshima prefecture



**Access:** 10 minutes by bus from Kirishimajingu Station on the Nippo Line. (About 1 hour from Kagoshima)





**Kirishima                      Grand                      shrinr                      □□□□**

<https://www.kagoshima-yokanavi.jp/spot/20063>

Kirishima Shrine is one of the most famous shrines in Kagoshima. However, it is located in a rather inconvenient



place. It is about six kilometers away from the nearest station. There is only one bus every hour. However, it is also one of the places where Japanese mythology is handed down, with a history of over 1500 years. More than 100 rituals are held here every year. One of them is the “Rice Planting Festival”.

There are many rare statues in Kagoshima that are not found in other prefectures. They are called “Tanokansaa”. It means the deity of rice fields. In Japan, if you look at the side of the road, you may see a statue of “Jizo-san”. In Kagoshima, we have “Tanokansaa” like that.





<http://5.travel-way.net/~niemon/kagosima/tanokami/tanokami.html>

It is said that there is a festival in which “Tanokansaa” appears at Kirishima Shrine, the home of Tanokansaa.

It starts at 10:00 on the day. After the Shinto ritual, the first thing to do is to bring in the shii tree with the cow in the lead and scatter the branches around the area. This is supposed to be fertilizer. After that, several rituals are performed, and then the old man and woman appear.





Shinto ritual

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9xkE0BTzVc>







**the aged husband**





## **the aged wife**

These two perform a skit.

“Do you know where the cow is?” “I don’t know where the cow is,” “That cow is always annoying me.” “It’s because you don’t take care of it,” and so on. Then the cow finally appears. But the cow doesn’t listen to them. It does everything on its own and annoys the couple.





[http://www.kirishimajingu.or.jp/contents/gosaigi\\_file/0313otauesai.html](http://www.kirishimajingu.or.jp/contents/gosaigi_file/0313otauesai.html)

After this, the “rice field gods,” who should be called the main characters, finally appeared.



<https://www.tabirai.net/sightseeing/column/0008810.aspx>

It looks as if a roadside “tanokansa” has just stood up and



walked away. He is holding a large rice ladle in his hand. After this, they say a few words and end with a dance. The performance is scheduled to end around noon. Japanese have always lived on the basis of agriculture. Rice has always been the staple food, and in the past, rice itself was the standard of national power, and salaries were paid in rice. This festival is a precious opportunity to experience the original scenery of Japan.

The area is also dotted with hot springs and an art forest. Above all, the shrine itself stands in the midst of a mythical setting. It takes an hour and a half from Fukuoka to Kagoshima by Shinkansen.



<https://icotto.jp/presses/14679>



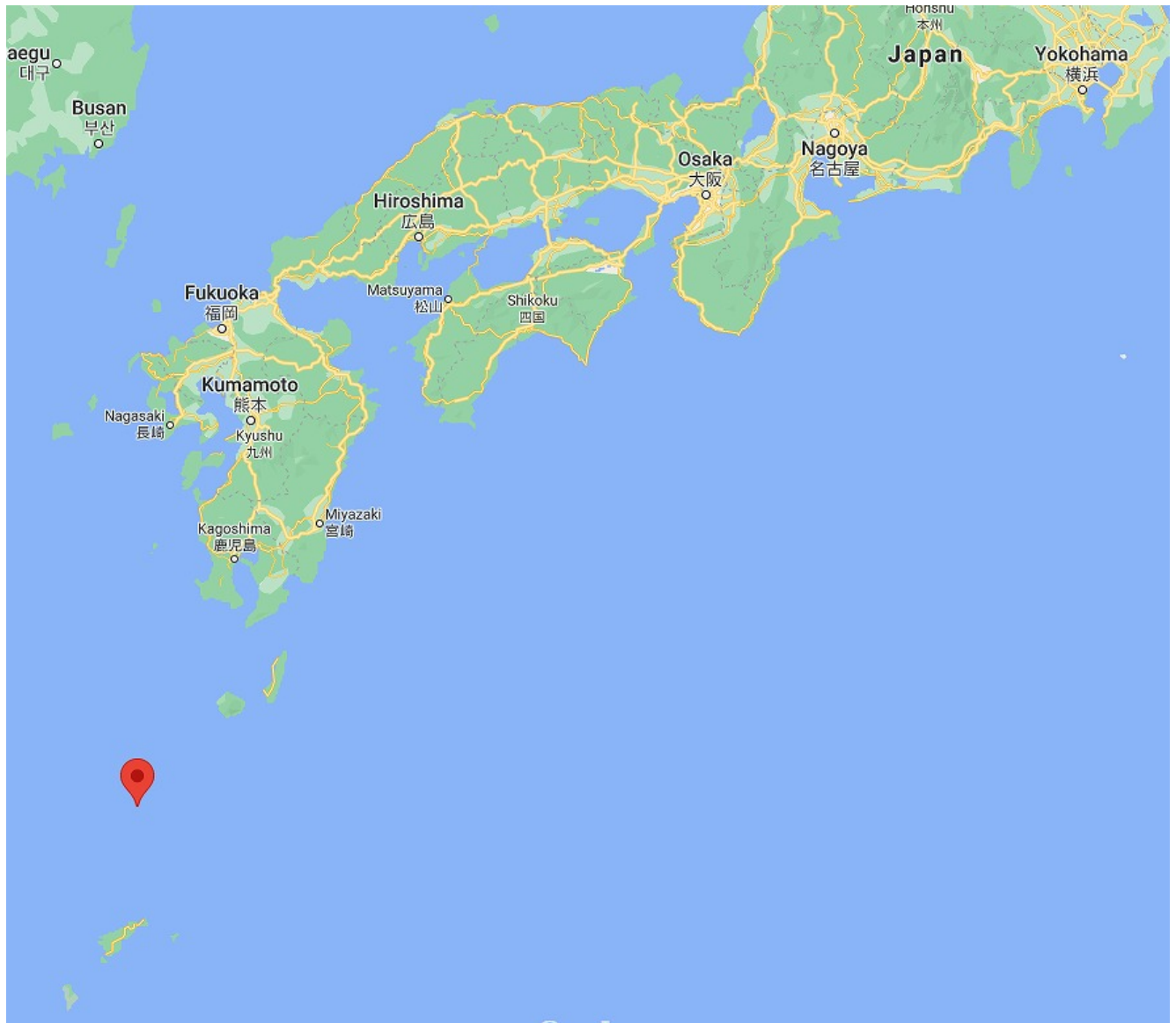
<https://www.ana.co.jp/ja/jp/japan-travel-planner/kagoshima/0000008.html>

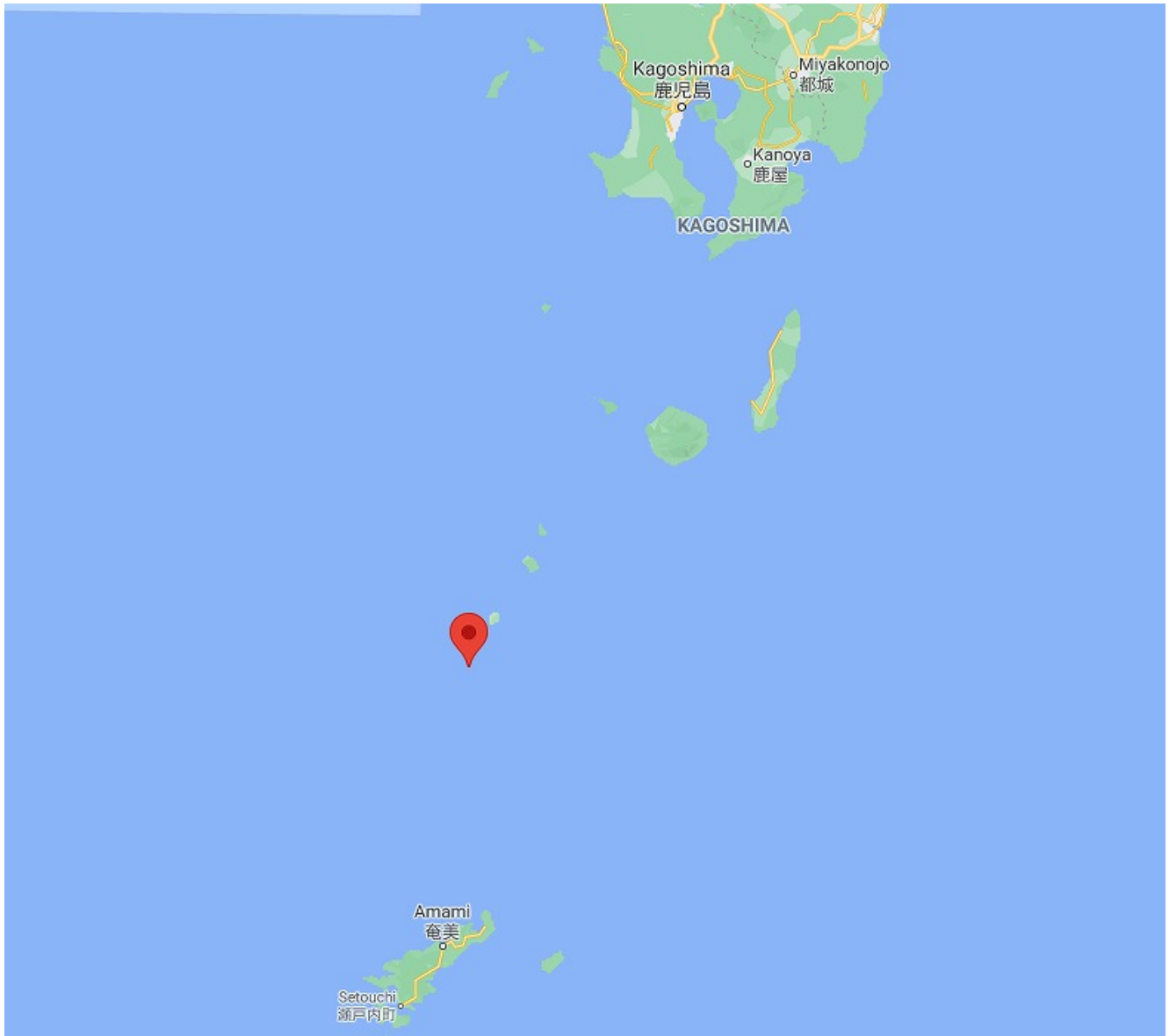
Enjoy the spiritual world of Japan and heal yourself in a hot spring. One way to enjoy Japan.

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# **Boze ~The strangest visiting deity**







**Date:** July 14 of the lunar calendar (around mid-August)

**Location:** One of the Tokara Islands, Toshima Village, Kagoshima County, Kagoshima Prefecture

**Access:** By air, from Kagoshima airport there is a limousine bus (1250 yen) to Kagoshima Honko Minami port. By train, from JR Kagoshima Chuo Station take the Sakurajima shuttle bus (160 yen) and get off at the High Speed Boat Terminal, or take a 15-minute cab ride from Kagoshima Chuo Station. Then take a Ferry from Kagoshima Port which runs twice a week.

## Prologue

Boze is a strange visiting deity. Or maybe it's not even a



deity. It could just be a monster. He does not resemble any masked deity in all of Japan. Just by looking at his appearance alone, it is difficult to instantly determine which country he is from. Access is also poor. The only way to get there is by ferry, which only runs twice a week. Moreover, the season is typhoon-prone. There was a high possibility that even the ferry would be cancelled. Moreover, the ferry only takes 15 to 20 minutes to arrive. Still, there is no end to the number of people who are eager to see Boze every year.

## **Akusekijima (Akuseki island)**

Akusekijima 隠岐島 (Akuseki island) is a small island with an area of 7.49㎢, a circumference of 8.8km, and an elevation of 584m. The population is about 80. As I briefly explained in the "Access", you need to be prepared to go here. The only ferry that goes to Tokara Islands (Toshima Village), where Akuseki Island is located, is the village-run ferry "Ferry Toshima", which usually departs from Kagoshima Port only twice a week. From Kagoshima Port, you can take the ferry that leaves on Monday or Friday. Each will arrive at the island the following day.

If you want to go to Kagoshima Port from the island, you can take the ferry on Wednesday or Sunday. However, it is highly recommended that you book your accommodation for the last day in Kagoshima if you live outside of Kagoshima, because the ferry arrives at Kagoshima Port late at night.



The island is also reluctant to engage in tourism. On the day of the Boze, all the people on the island come together to prepare for the Boze, and they shut down all the guest houses. This is the reason why the island has refused to allow tourists to come to the island. However, this changed in 2009 when the solar eclipse occurred. At that time, a very large number of visitors came and brought a lot of benefits to the island. Since then, the island has been actively accepting visitors during the Bose period. Nowadays, tours are also organized.

## **“Boze” festival**

Usually people call it the Boze Festival, but it's actually a Bon dance. It is also a valuable dance that has been passed down from generation to generation and is unique to this island. The festival is held for three days starting on July 14 of the lunar calendar. On the evening of the last day of the festival, the masked god Boze suddenly appears.





<https://hanatsubaki.shiseido.com/jp/trip/622/>



<https://hanatsubaki.shiseido.com/jp/trip/622/>

Boze wears a strange mask made of a bamboo basket with gods and other objects pasted on it. He wears leaves of a palm tree wrapped around his body. In his hands, he holds a stick called a “bozemala.” This stick has red clay on its tip.



At the end of the dance, they suddenly appear out of the forest. They chase the people around. Children and women are especially prone to attack, as it is believed that if they are poked with the sticks, they will become healthy and have children. Then, after throwing everyone around into confusion, he vanishes into nowhere. In the past, everything was burned down right away, but nowadays, they are left for while to take a photo with tourists later. The dance continues throughout the night.



<https://hanatsubaki.shiseido.com/jp/trip/622/>





<https://hanatsubaki.shiseido.com/jp/trip/622/>

**What is “Boze” ?**





<https://www.kagoshima-kankou.com/event/20278/>

What is this “boze” that destroys Bon dance, causing chaos and leaving like a whirlwind? According to one theory, they are responsible for returning the souls of the dead to stay forever in the other world after life. Others say it is a way to purge the surroundings of the souls of the dead. No one knows the real reason now. The only thing I know for sure is that his appearance is nothing like any other masked deity in Japan. I think it’s worth a visit to check out the human imagination.

## Escaping from the real world

There is also a rare hot spring here called Underwater Hot Springs. There is also a hot spring with a view of the sea. There is also a jungle-like walkway. Even if you wanted to go home, you couldn’t until the ferry arrived. You just get lost



in a different world where strange monsters rule. It's not a bad idea to have such a summer once in a lifetime.





<http://www.tokara.jp/tourism/profile/akusekijima/>