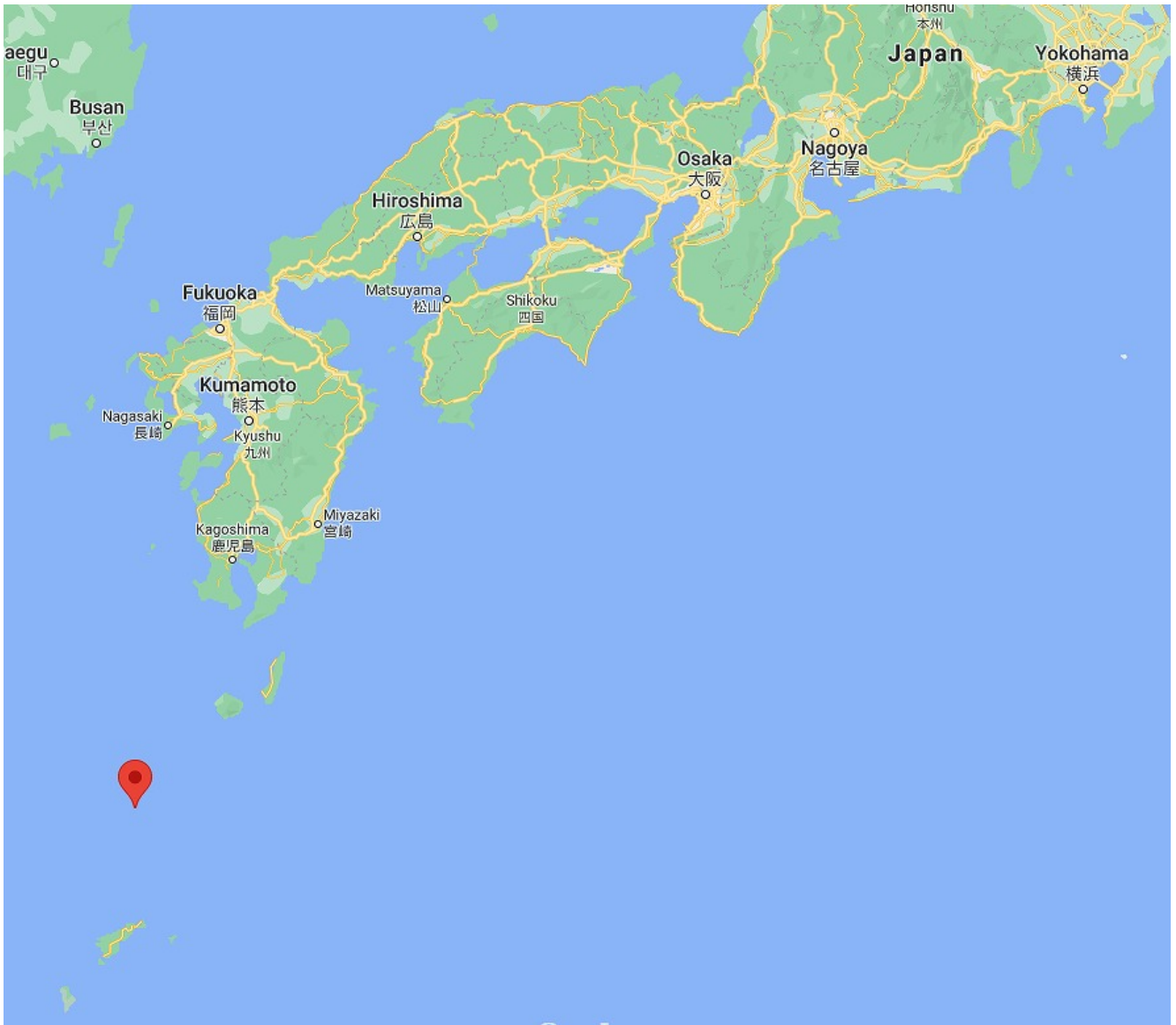
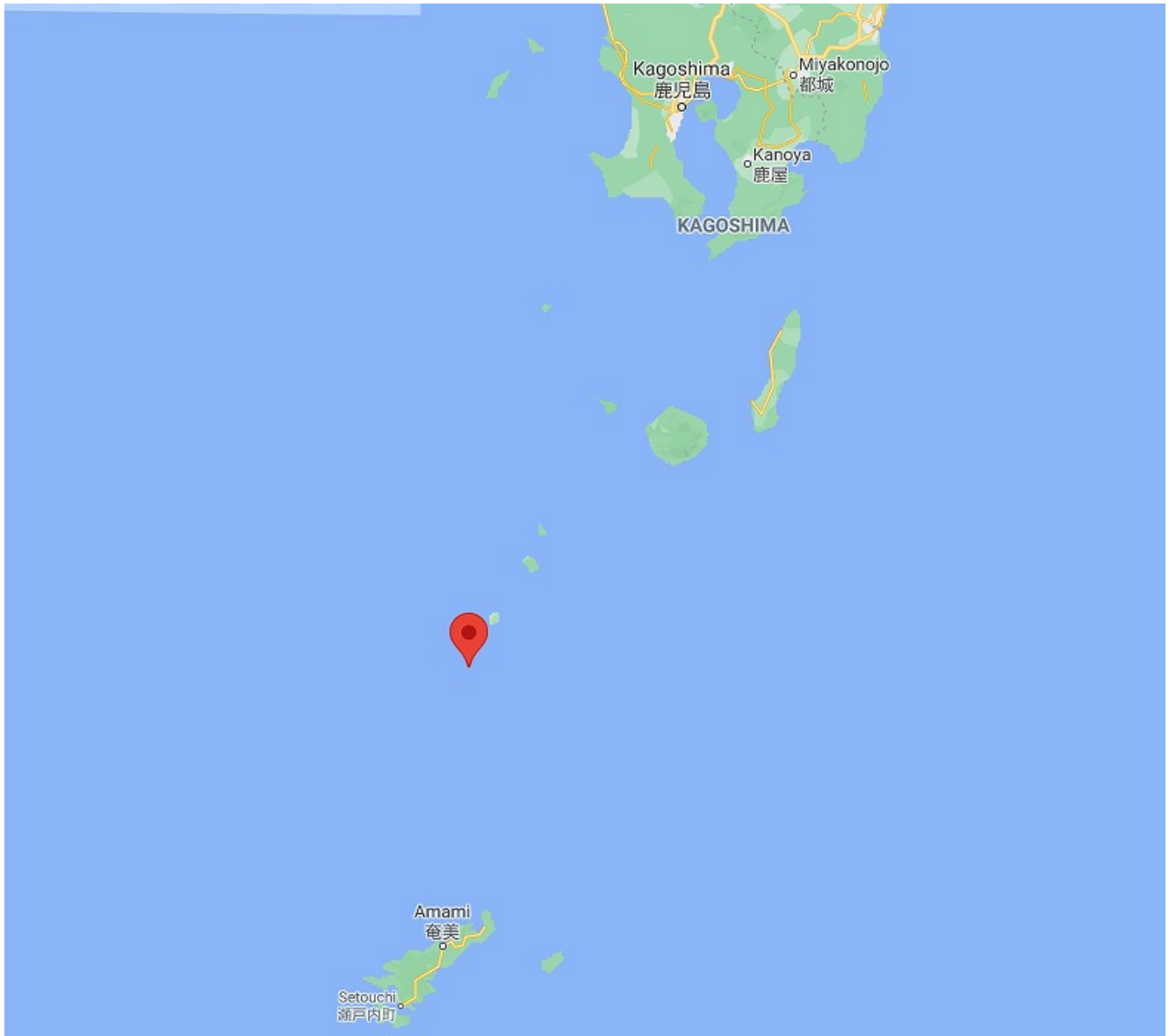


# Boze ~The strangest visiting deity





**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 阿久根島 (Akuseki island) is a small island with an area of 7.49 $\square$ , 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 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://hanatsumaki.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.



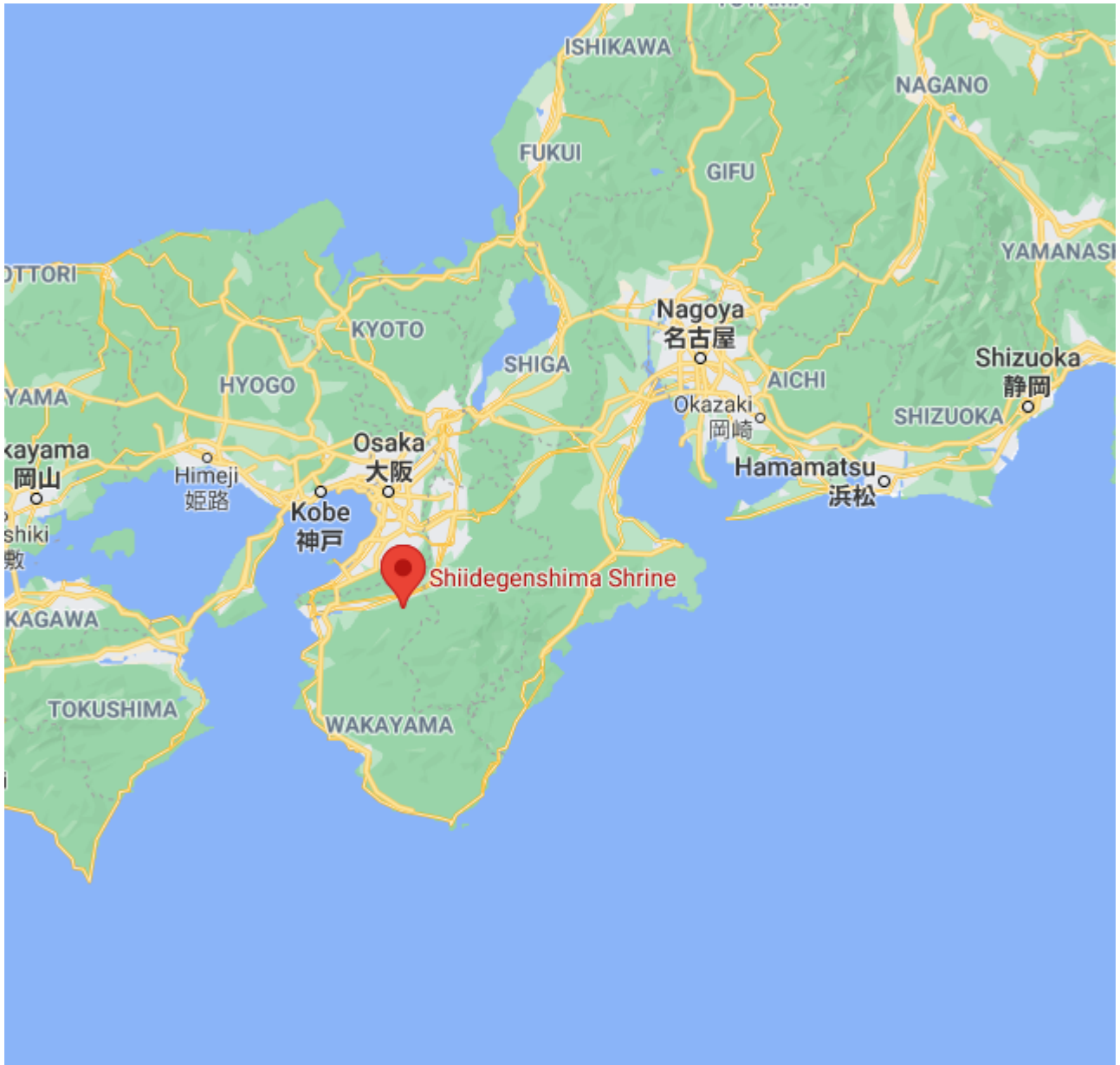


<http://www.tokara.jp/tourism/profile/akusekijima/>

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## **Shiide Ogre dance**









**Date:** 16th August, every year

**Location:** Shiide 3, Kudoyama town, Ito district, Wakayama prefecture

**Access:** 5 minutes walk from Koyacho station (Nankai line).

## A place called Kudoyama

There are two places where the entire mountain is lined with temples, making it a major religious city. Mount Koya 高野山 and Mount Hiei 比叡山. Both were built in the 10th century. Both are legacies that cannot be fully visited in one day (although they are still in operation).

At the foot of Mount Koya, there is a place called Kudoyama 九度山.

At the end of the 16th century, The Tokugawa clan, who were in power at the time, imprisoned the father and son of a warlord

who fought against them here. This is such a place. It is deep in the mountains, and the surrounding area is still dotted with uninhabited stations. There is still a ogre dance here that is said to have a history of 600 years.

## People performing the Ogre dance





A total of 11 people perform the ogre dance. In addition to the ogre, there are ten other people: one drummer, two flutes, seven singers, and one person who holds the drum. They are called the "ten men". They are chosen from those who are 16 years old or older in the community. In the past, it was an honor just to be chosen. The chosen ones purify themselves in a nearby river and bring back three stones each. Then they go through a ritual and join the performance.

It is customary to keep the name of the ogre actor secret until the performance is over.

## **Performance**





This is held as a festival of Itsukushima Shrine. At the appointed time, the group departs from the nearby Jizoji Temple, beating drums as they go. The ogre slowly moves forward, drawing a circle with a long stick in one hand. For every three beats of the drum, the ogre takes only one step

forward. The path is about 30 meters long, so it takes about 30 minutes to complete the journey.

When they arrive at the precinct, the ogre is released from the restriction of the drums and is free to move around. Parents and children gather in the precinct, hoping to be touched by the ogre. It is said that if the ogre touches the child, the child will grow up in good health, and if the ogre touches the painful part, the pain will go away by the power of the ogre.



Eventually, the ten men leave the grounds, leaving only the ogre behind. The remaining ogre grieves, and even rampages through the precincts in anger. He then prays to the shrine for a good harvest and for rain. Why does the ogre suddenly start praying? Originally, several people, including an old man, appeared on stage to warn the ogre and ask for their prayers. However, due to lack of staff and the trend of the times, that part was cut off about 120 years ago.

Finally, the ogre goes on a rampage again and the festival ends.



# Mount Koya

Nearby is one of Japan's major religious centers, Koyasan 高野山, which was founded in the 10th century and has 19 important buildings. A ropeway takes you up to the town. There is a school and a bus service. Numerous temples line the streets, and at the far end is the largest sacred site, the Oku-no-in 奥の院. Even now, the monks who gather here make daily offerings to Kukai 空海, the founder of the temple, as if he were still alive. As you walk through the dense trees, you will feel as if your daily worries will disappear.



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# Gojinjo Daiko



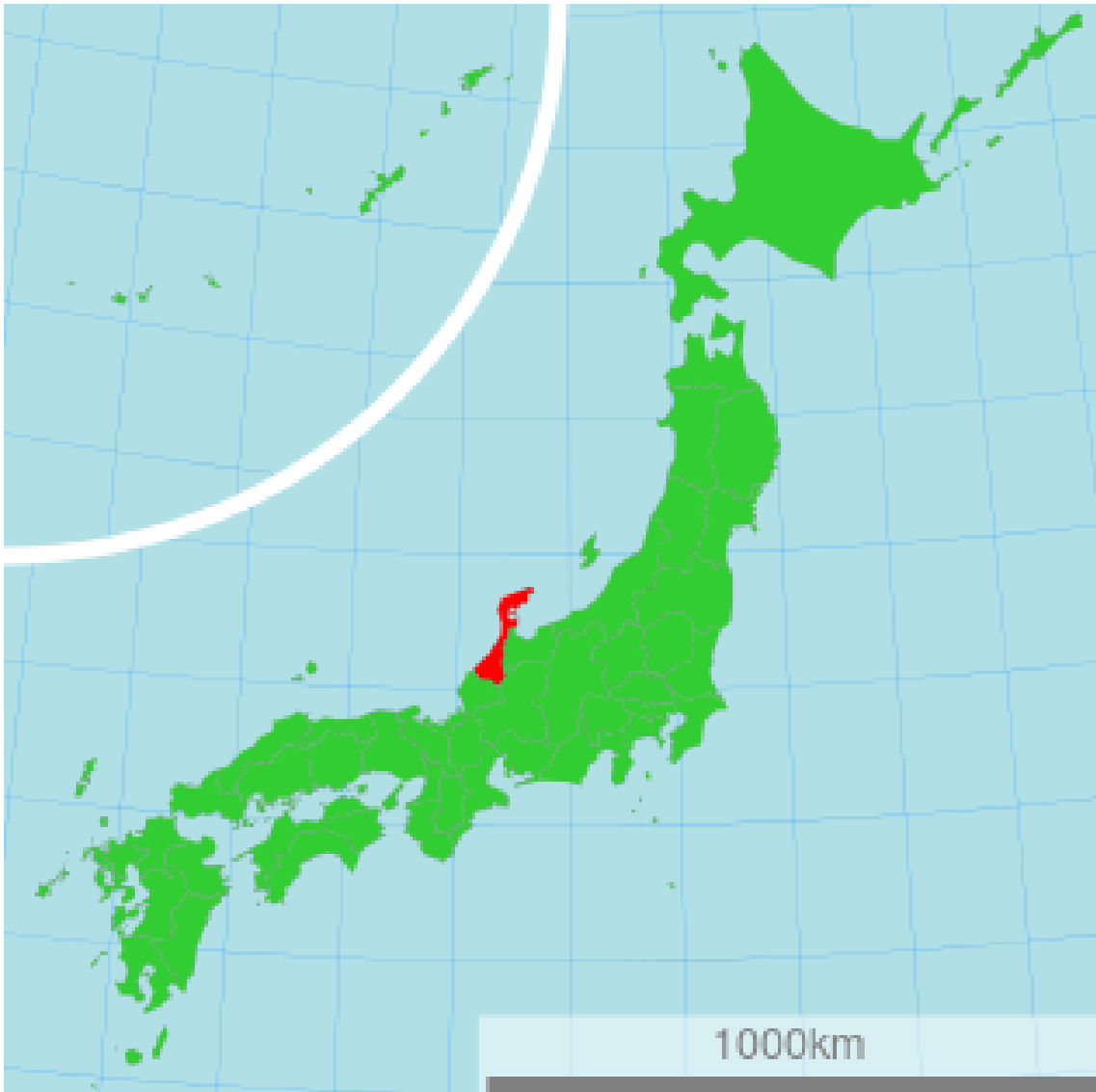
**Date:** 31st, July and 1st, August (Nafune festival)

**Location:** Nafune town, Wajima city, Ishikawa prefecture

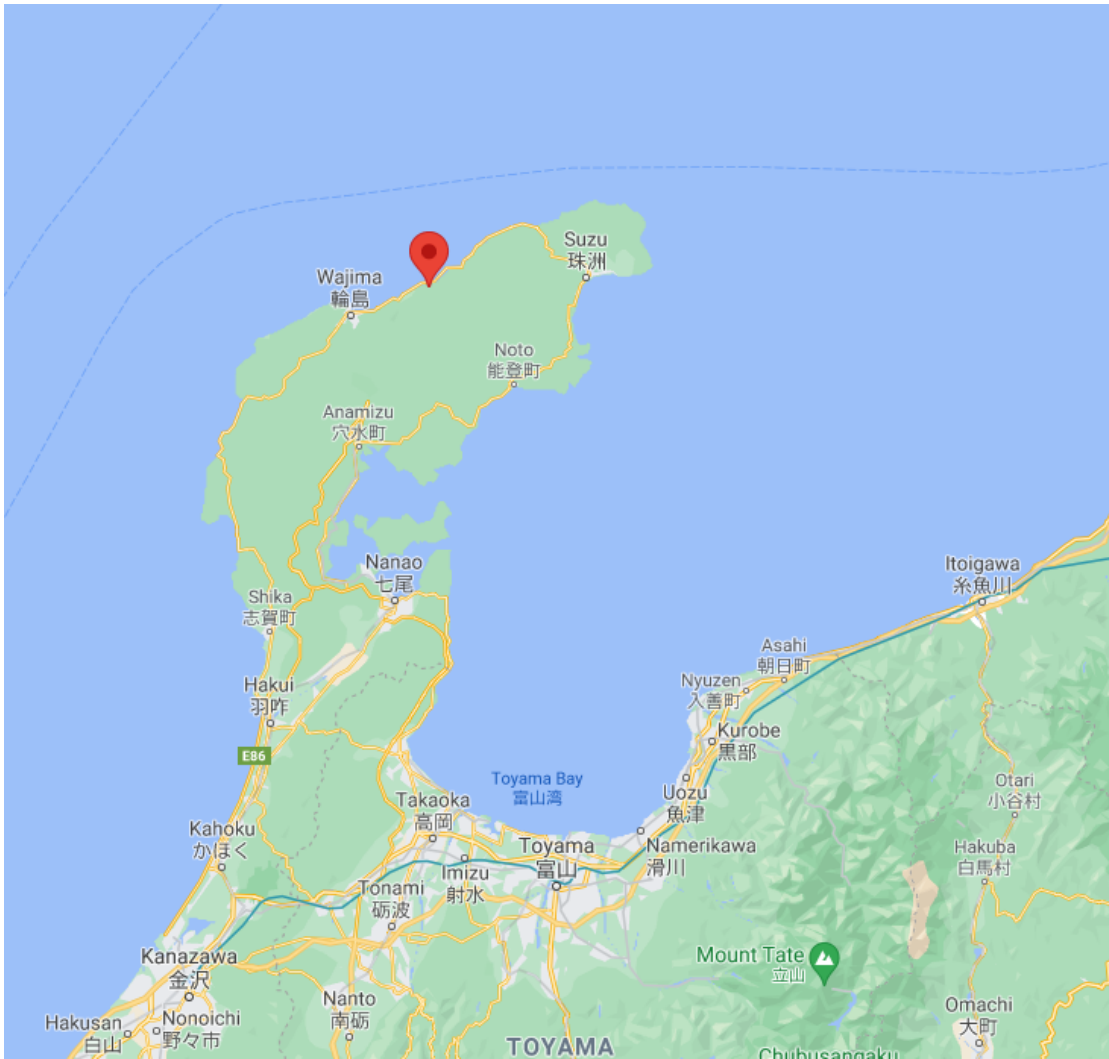
**Access:** About 1 hour by airplane from Haneda (Tokyo) to Noto Satoyama airport

or It takes 1 hour by JR Nanao line from Kanazawa to Wakura Onsen, and 40 minutes by Noto line to Anamizu





**Ishikawa prefecture**



**Noto peninsula**



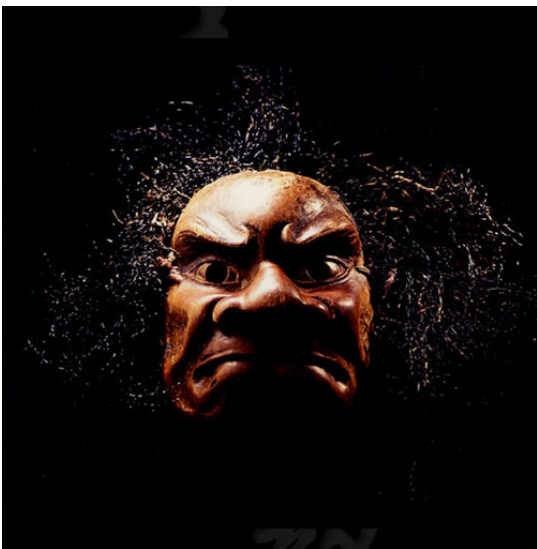
**Yasha (female monster)**



**Jiji (aged man)**



**Jiji**



**Jiji**



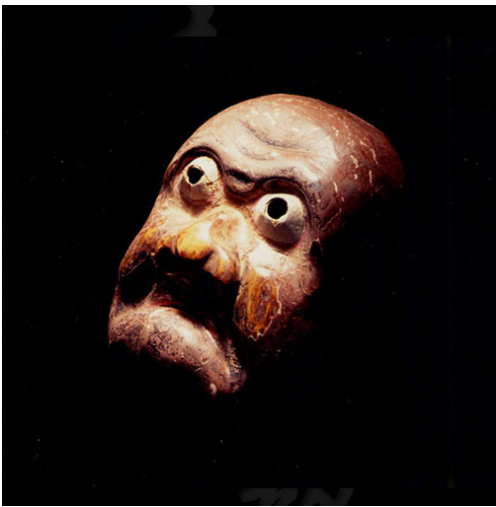
**Otoko yurei (male ghost)**



**Onna yurei (female ghost)**



**Otoko yurei**



**Daruma (priest)**

All images from [http://www.gojinjodaiko.jp/en\\_top.html](http://www.gojinjodaiko.jp/en_top.html)

Gojinjo Daiko (drums) 五箇所太鼓 is the most famous traditional folk performance group in Noto region. Eight drummers appear one after the other to beat a single drum. All of them wear bizarre masks and their hair is made of seaweed or horse hair. They play a rhythm based on beginning, middle portion, and denouement. They repeat it over and over again. Sometimes they make strange noises, sometimes they strike menacing poses.

As for why they started using such strange masks, here is the origin. Once upon a time, there was a powerful warlord named

Uesugi Kenshin 上杉謙信 who ruled the wide area including Niigata and Ishikawa prefectures. When his army finally invaded this area, the farmers, who had no defense, came up with a plan. They wore masks made of wood and hair made of seaweed, and played drums to intimidate them. The fearful army turned back. Since then, the performance has been passed down from generation to generation by the men who protect the area. Currently, they have formed a preservation society comprising about 20 members. All of them are from the town of Nafune. Only those born and raised in the area are allowed to carry on the Gojinjo-daiko tradition. Regardless of the restrictions, the rhythms of the taiko are complex and difficult to master unless one has grown up listening to them from childhood.

Since they are a popular group, they are invited to various events. However, one of the most prestigious and nerve-racking events for them is a performance at the local Nafune Grand Festival.

This is a small village with only about 200 residents. More than 10,000 people gather for the festival. Even those who have left the village come back only for the festival.





**Kiriko lines in festival**  
image from the site above



**a image of Kiriko**

At the Nafune Grand Festival, many people come to see the Gojinjo-daiko. On the first day of the festival, from around 9:00 p.m., a large number of people carrying kirikos pass through the shrine and head for the sea. Then the drums are performed. After that, people continue to enjoy late into the night. The next day, the festival starts in the afternoon.



<https://www.ent-mabui.jp/program/3332>

Even if you can't see it on this day, there are still many opportunities to see the Gojinjo-daiko. The easiest way is to go to the Wajima Kiriko Museum, where the Kirikos are displayed, and performances are held every day at a certain time. There are also other opportunities to see the performance at some hotels.

Summer in Noto is the summer of the Kiriko Festival. And Kanazawa, a popular tourist destination, is nearby. And of course, there are hot springs.



<https://wajimanavi.jp/event/gojinjitsu>





<https://www.hot-ishikawa.jp/spot/6009>

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## Komatsu hounen Shishiodori

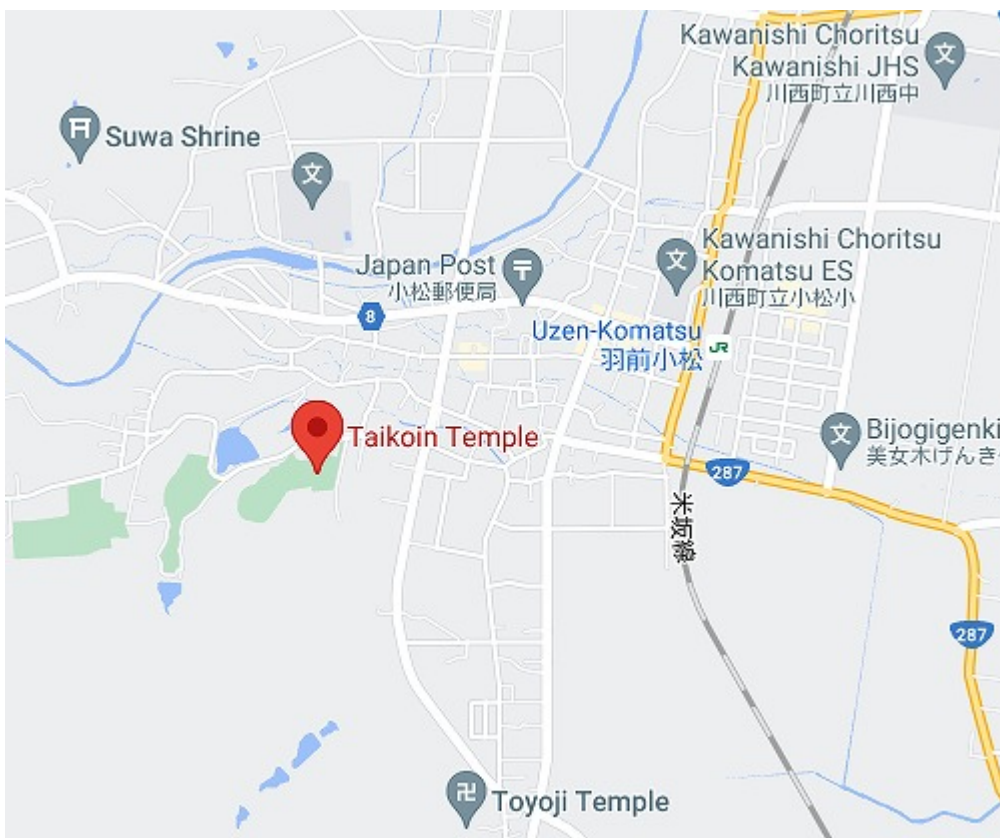
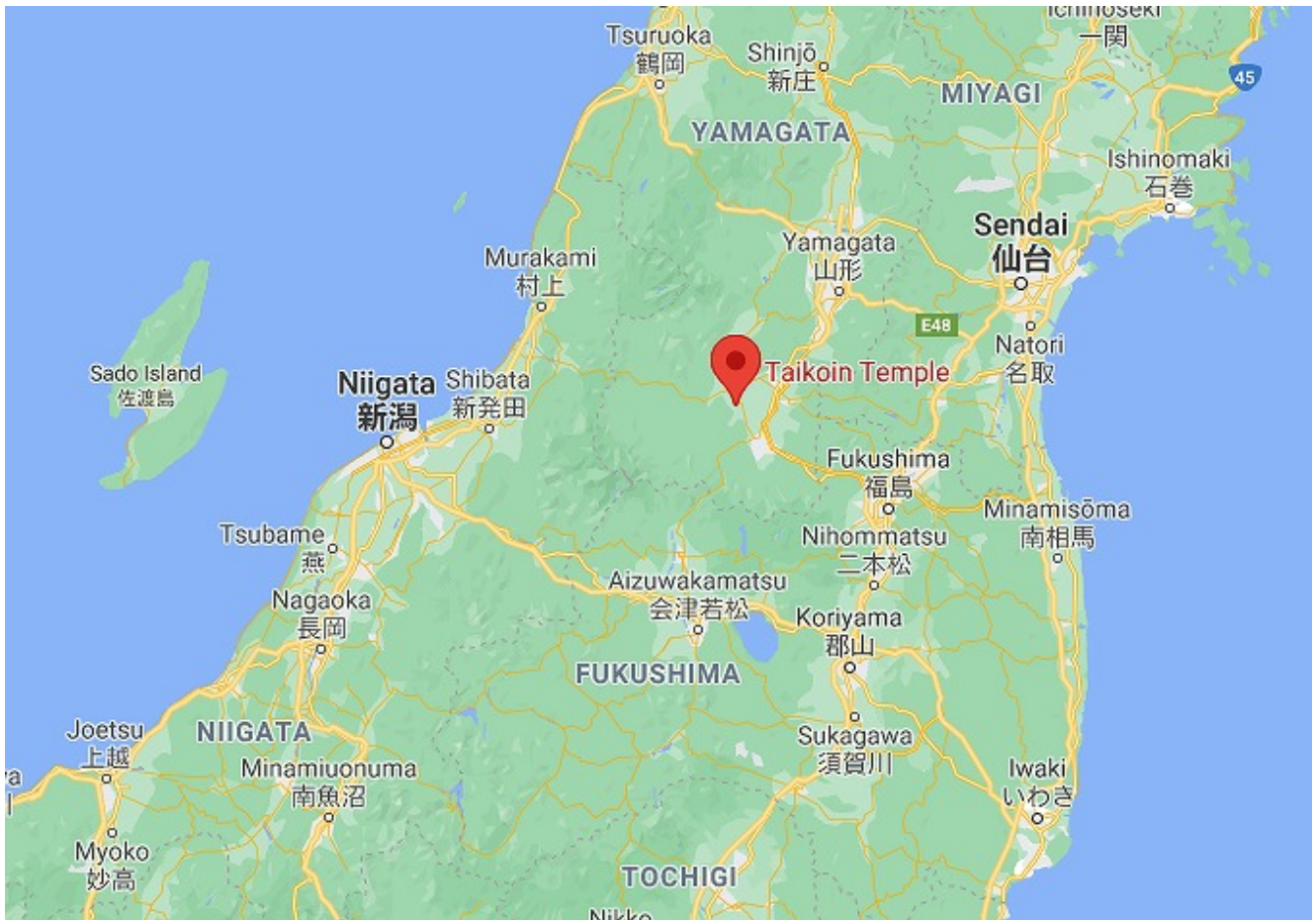


<http://www.e-okitama.net/?p=log&l=291894&m=kawanishi>

**Date:** 16th and 27th, August

**Location:** Oaza Kamikomatsu, Kawanishi city, Higashi-Okitama district, Yamagata prefecture (Daikoin-temple and Suwa shrine)

**Access:** 15 minutes walk from Uzen Komatsu station



Yamagata Prefecture has a wide variety of lion and deer (both



shishi) dances. Among them, in the southern region where this lion dance is performed, the three lion dances commonly seen in the Kanto region are popular. The faces of the shishi are Kanto-style, and the way "Hana-gasa (the flower hats)" accompanies is also very similar.. There is a reason why the lion dance of this small region is so popular among people. It is the performance jumping through the fire ring.



[http://okibun.jp/kawanishi\\_shishiodori/](http://okibun.jp/kawanishi_shishiodori/)



<http://www.shishiodori.net/muwfydlcj-14/>

# History and composition



It is said that the lion dance was started by the local people about 1,100 years ago to comfort a high priest who had escaped to this area after being defeated in his interpretation of a Buddhist doctrine at the capital. In the Edo period (1603-1868), the lords who ruled the area encouraged simplicity and frugality. Therefore, dancing was forbidden except in years of good harvest. So that is why “Hounen 年豊 (harvest Year)” was added to the name.

Ten people make up a group. All of them wear hanagasa (flower hat) and carry drums on their stomachs. They are called “nakadachi,” “saotome,” and “hanagasa”. Each of them has a different color costume. And one person called “Matoi-mochi (a person holding the “Matoi (a sign of a group) who does not take part in the dance) joins them. In the photo, the one in the pale purple costume is the “hanagasa,” and the one in front of them is the “nakadachi.

The dance is divided into three parts: the “introduction,” the “development,” and the “finale/climax,” and it takes about 50 minutes to go through the whole dance. Therefore, usually only



the “development” is performed. Most of the content is about farming. There is also a scene where a wild boar gets lost among the flowers. There is a scene in which a mother lioness loses sight of her child. In other words, the ring of fire is used to express the feeling of not being afraid of fire for the sake of the child.



source *Okitama* <http://okibun.jp/log/?l=329334>



[http://kawa1chu.blogspot.com/2014/08/blog-post\\_18.html](http://kawa1chu.blogspot.com/2014/08/blog-post_18.html)

# Jump through flaming hoop

On the day of the festival, performers will act at about five locations in the town. Not all of them involves the performance of jumping through the flaming hoop. Currently, junior high school students are learning the lion dance in order to preserve their town's traditional folk performing art. They will also perform, but for safety reasons, the junior high school students don't use the fire ring.



<http://okibun.jp/log/?l=329334> (from the same in the left



source)

It is always held on the 16th in Daiko-in, in front of the community center at night, and on the 27th at Suwa Shrine.



*from source Okitama*



[https://www.tohokukanko.jp/sozaishu/detail\\_1002944.html](https://www.tohokukanko.jp/sozaishu/detail_1002944.html)

It's not just about going through the hoops. The fire is on, so it's important to work in coordination with the person



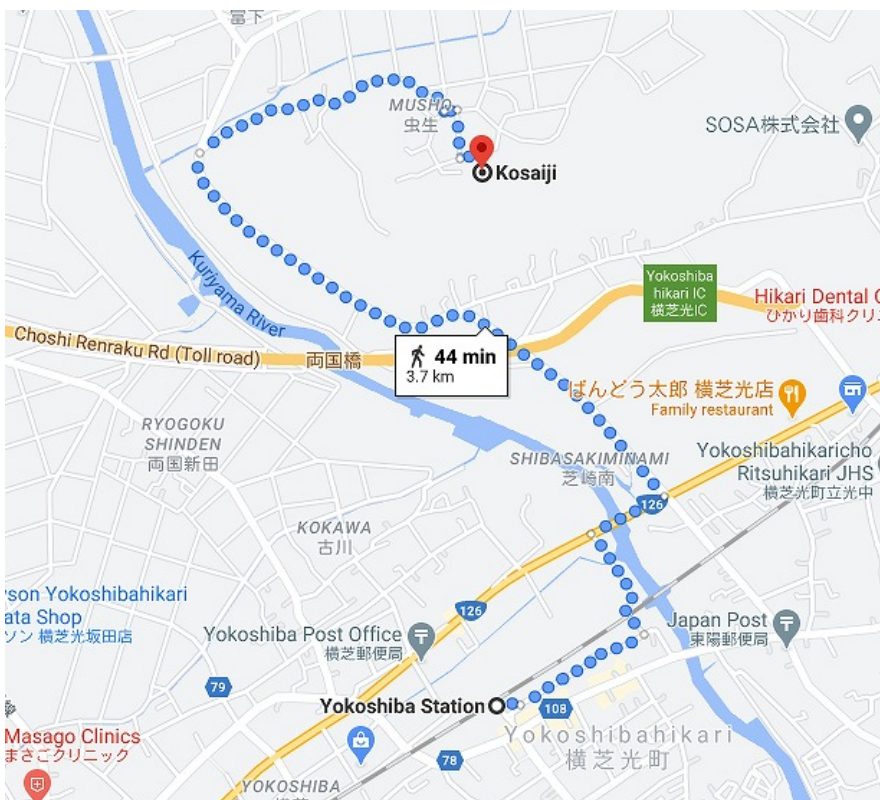
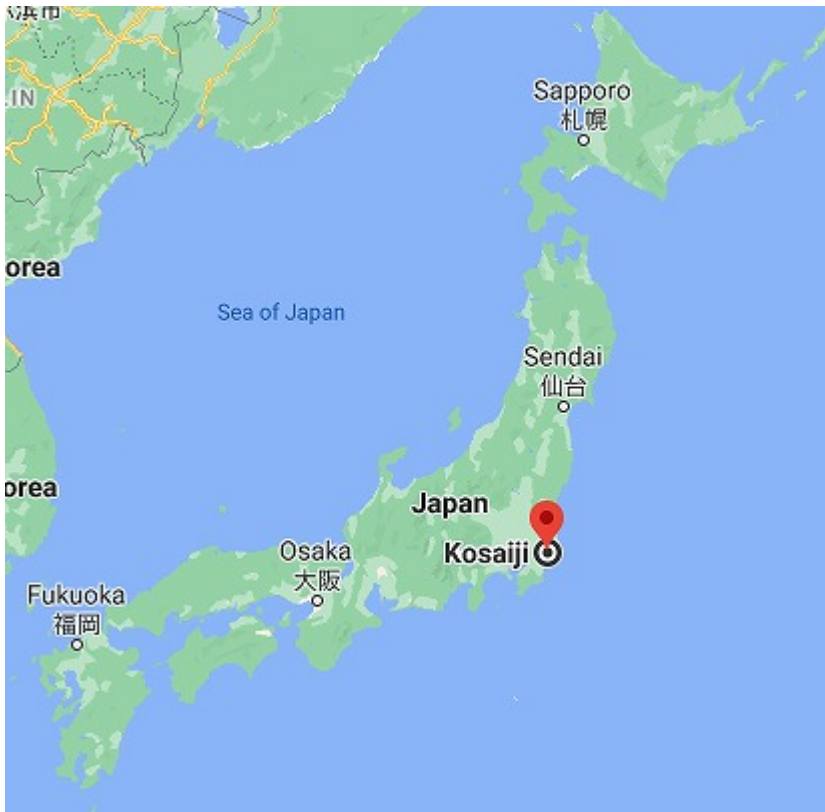
holding the wheel. If the fire is about to shift even a little, the person holding the wheel must be able to instantly shift it to make up the subtle difference. It's also nerve-wracking not to hurt the performer's limbs because the place performer jumps to is either concrete or hard ground.



<https://www.town.kawanishi.yamagata.jp/kyoiku/bunka/komatsuhou-nen-shishiodori.html>

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**Report: Kiraigo~Buddhist  
drama that has lasted for  
about 800 years**



**Date:** 16 August every year

**Location:** Hikari town Musho, Sosa district, Chiba prefecture

**Access:** It takes 4.5 kilometers from Yokoshiba station (JR Sobu line) Yokoshiba is about 1.5 to 2 hours from Tokyo by

train.

## prologue

□It is often said that Japan is a country without religion. Therefore, I have heard that when people from overseas asked, “What religion do you believe in? “, Japanese people are often at a loss for an answer, and are often surprised. Since this site is about festivals, Shinto events often appear. This is because the word “Matsuri (festival)” originally means to worship the deities. However, funerals and other events are conducted under Buddhism. To be precise, some people say that Confucian forms are also involved. In the New Year, we visit shrines, in the summer we have a Buddhist event called “Obon (the event that ancestors return at this time of year)”, and in the winter we celebrate Christmas. There is also a joking way of saying that. But on the other hand, there is this story. A road side was troubled with garbage being thrown away. As a countermeasure, the people concerned set up a small “torii” (a gate at the entrance of a shrine, used as a landmark to indicate that from here it is the domain of the gods). As a result, no more garbage was thrown away.

□In the first place, God and Buddha have been one and the same in Japan since ancient times. Setsubun is an event held at both shrines and temples. This happened because of the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the 6th century. The leaders of the time were thinking, “As a civilized nation, we want to spread Buddhism.” However, they could not force people to abandon their original faith. So they came up with the idea that God and Buddha are the same. They said that God is the temporary form of Buddha in this country. This idea lasted until the 19th century.





**New Year's visit to a shrine**

<https://www.nishinippon.co.jp/item/n/651879/>



**Christmas tree**

<https://haa.athuman.com/media/japanese/world/1570/>

## Hell

□However, Buddhism is the one that Japanese people have believed in the most. Because it answered the biggest question of all, "What happens when we die?" Buddhism say "there is paradise and hell". So the various schools of Buddhism have competed to propagate the idea of how to avoid hell and go to paradise. In the Christian world as well, there is a wide variety of images of demons while there is little variation in the designs of angels, and while most pictures of paradise are

just a line of Buddhas, there are many variations of hell pictures. So many pictures of hell have been drawn and passed down through the generations.



**Buddha**

[https://www.kyohaku.go.jp/jp/theme/floor2\\_2/f2\\_2\\_koremade/butsuga\\_20150317.html](https://www.kyohaku.go.jp/jp/theme/floor2_2/f2_2_koremade/butsuga_20150317.html)



**Buddha come**

<https://knyan.com/work/1105>





**ogres in hell**

<http://www.gyokiji.org/jigokue.html> (Same for the figure on the right)



**boiling in an iron pot**

□ Blood Pond and Needle Mountain are probably the most common images of hell that every Japanese person has heard once.

## **Kiraigo □□□~The Miraculous Legacy**





□And the various schools of Buddhism performed plays as well as paintings and storytelling as part of their missionary work. Most of them have fallen into disuse, but miraculously the one here at Kosaiji □□□Temple has solely survived. It is said that its origin dates back to the Kamakura period. It is miraculous that this is the only place in Japan that still retains this type of event, but what is even more surprising is that there are currently only 25 houses in this area.

## Main story

□

The start time is approximately 3:00 in the afternoon. (However, since there are greetings at the beginning and so on, the actual start time is around four o'clock.) It is almost four kilometers from the station, and there are few buses. The surrounding area is only rice fields as far as the eye can see. However, on this particular day, the roads around the entrance become congested because most people come by car. So uniformed police are even serviced to control the traffic.



Musho district □□□□





## venue

□The stage is a steep cliff covered with grass. In the past, there was a building called “Jizo-do” there, which was used as the stage, but the earthquake destroyed it. Nowadays, people build the stage in a corner of the slope and use it by covering the surrounding area with grass. There are about 60 chairs lined up in front of the stage. Behind them are standing room only. And in the last row, many tripods with cameras are lined up. After the greetings, the first event is for the demoness to wish the child good health. In this event, the demoness holds the child in her arms and shouts, “Go-o!”

□\*It is one of the most famous events in this event, but there used to be trouble over it. Parents would take pictures of the demoness holding their children nearby. So far, this is a very natural process. But then, an amateur photographer behind them said, “You’re in my way. Get out of the way. This became a big problem. Some people, especially retired elderly people with



high-end cameras do this. There is also a local train running near here, which is very photogenic, but I see a number of warning signs posted there as well. They say, "Please do not obstruct the train service," "Please do not photograph schoolchildren in an indecent manner," etc. I once saw an old man who boasted that he would change his personality if he got a camera. This is one of the evils of the camera scene in Japan. This has nothing to do with our readers, but I dare to complain about it here.

## **1st stage ~The opening act**



**"Enma" judge of afterlife**



□ Suddenly there is a noisy sound and the curtain slips open. The play was about to begin. The noisy sound is a rare instrument called a “nyobatsu,” which looks like a large cymbal.

□ Then the curtain slips open. The first character to appear is “Enma”. This is like a judge who decides where the deceased will go, and is the king of hell. Parents often tell their children, “If you tell a lie, Enma will pull out your tongue. He walks lifting his legs high and glares at the surroundings.



**“Gusho-jin” recorder**



□The next one is “Gushoujin”. He is like a scribe who rides on a person’s shoulders and records all their good and bad deeds before they die. Therefore, he has a writing brush in his hand.





demoness "Datsue"





red ogre





**blue ogre**

And then there's demoness called "Datsue-baba", who appeared



earlier to pray for her child's health. It is said that there is a river called the "River of Sands" on the border between this world and the other world. In front of that river is this old woman. She is said to be a being who strips the dead of their clothes.

□However, since the Heian period (9th~11th Century), the custom of sending coins to the dead has spread, as people believe that if they give this woman six coins, they will be able to have a safe boat ride. In the 16th century, there was a famous warlord who used this six-*mon* coin as his banner to show his determination to "hide his death at all times on the battlefield. This is an aside episode, though. Let me return to the main story.

□And finally, the red and blue ogres. They are the ones who are actually responsible for blaming and punishing the dead in hell. This is the all-star lineup of hell.

□





□Demoness and the ogres sue to Enma about how bad the deceased was in life. All the while, the king sits motionless. Eventually, the Great King asks the Gushoujin by his side, “Is this appeal correct? Gushojin replies, “This is a very bad person”. This is end of the first act.

**2nd stage ~Sai-no-kawara (Children’s Limbo)**









□

□When the curtain opens again, it is time for the “Sai no Kawara” scene. The “riverbank of Sai” is said to be the place where the dead children go. The children just pile up pebbles. If the stones reach a certain height, they will go to paradise. However, just before the pile is completed, an ogre comes and destroys it. Then they have to start all over again. The reason children are forced to do such unreasonable things is because it is considered the greatest misfortune to die before their parents. Then the children pile up the stones while saying “One for the father, two for the mother...”.







□ "Don't hate us, hate your parents" the ogres say. Suddenly, the Jizo Bodhisattva appears. The Jizo scatters away the ogres that are in his way and leaves with the children.

### **3rd stage ~The boiling hot iron cauldron**

□







□The next act is the “boiling hot iron cauldron” scene. The demons are tormenting the dead by placing them in the boiling water.

“Is it boiled yet?” “No, not yet.”

□The point of this play is to show the inhumanity of the demons.







□“That’s enough,” the ogres say as they pull the deceased out of the cauldron and further beat him.

## **Mercy of Kannon Bodhisattva**









□Then, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Kannon) appears. He appeals, “Free the deceased. But the ogres say, “This is a person who has been judged as a villain by the court of Enma. It is only natural to torment him. He has never visited a shrine or temple in his life, nor has he given a single penny to charity,” he, though an ogre, says in a strangely Buddhist manner.







□

“What you say is true,” Kannon has to admit. But “I will take his sins upon myself,” he says, leaving the stupa behind and taking the deceased away.

The demons are frustrated, “So has he become a Buddha?” This is the end of the whole story.







□

□The performance lasted about one hour. People were leaving in waves.

The chairman of the preservation society told us the following story. It is indeed very difficult for this small village to maintain it. Above all, the biggest problem is the lack of successors. However, recently, in addition to subsidies from the national and prefectural governments, there are young people who are willing to help. Two of them are making their debut today, he said.

This is a valuable art form that has been around since the 12th century. In other words, we can see the same performance today as people did in that era. It is a miraculous event, and I would like to end this article with the hope that it will continue to be preserved in the future.

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# Report: Michinoku Folk performing Festival~Kagura Arts

□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.

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# 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 doe 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.

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

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## 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 道 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**





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 獅子舞)" and "dear dance (Shishiodori 獅子舞)". But I'll focus on the former this time, and at last, I'd introduce the rest.

## **Oni-kenbai (Ogre sword dance) 獅子舞**

□It is impossible to see this festival without mentioning "Oni-kenbai" 獅子舞 (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 □□ clan reigned as the lords of this area until about the 17th century. After that, the Nambu □□ 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 “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~**

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□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 □□” 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 ㊦㊦”.



Oguchi ㊦㊦



## ☐☐ Watch “Oni-kenbai”1 ~The Iwasaki 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 Iwasaki 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 “Oni-kenbai”, 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.

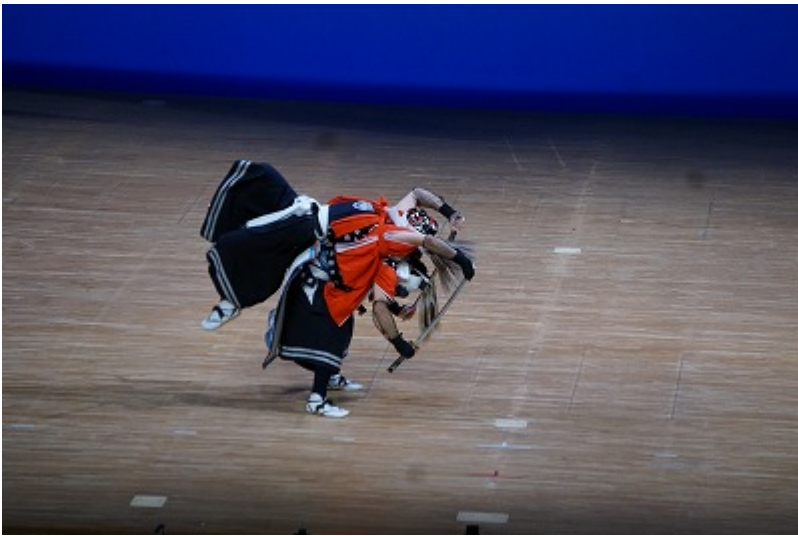


The number of people in the dance is not limited, so the number of dancers can be as small as one or two. I've already mentioned the one in which the dancer dances without dropping holding trays, and the one in which the dancer rotates his body while increasing the number of swords which he holds. There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

□