

Optional tour in Iwate Prefecture



[Iwate Prefecture] A journey to discover the background of traditional performing arts that live on in Sanriku

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The coastline stretching from Hachinohe City in Aomori Prefecture to Iwate Prefecture and Ishinomaki City in Miyagi Prefecture is called the Sanriku Coast. This area suffered extensive damage from the tsunami in the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred in March 2011, but people here have lived alongside the sea and mountains since ancient times and have nurtured a unique culture.

The Sanriku International Arts Festival was held in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the region is said to be a treasure trove of performing arts unparalleled anywhere in the world, with numerous local performing arts such as "Kashi Odori" (Deer Dance), "Kenmai" (Sword Dance), "Tora Mai" (Sansa), "Nanyadoyara" and "Kagura".

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Traditional performing arts of the Sanriku region

For example, in the village of Fudai in northern Iwate Prefecture, there is a dance called "Utori Kagura" in which the spirit of "Utori Shrine," which prays for safety at sea and a good catch, is housed in a lion's head and paraded around the coastal villages. This custom, called "Mawari Kagura," is now only found in the Sanriku region and has been designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan.



The first dance in Kagura is "Seisoharai", which purifies the place. It is a dance performed by Izanagi-no-Mikoto.



"Ebisu Dance" depicts the movements of Ebisu as he catches sea bream and salmon.



The red building to the left of the torii gate is the Kagura Hall, where dances are performed at the annual festival in May. The parade takes place from January to March.



You can see the ropes made from fishing nets, which shows that this shrine has a deep connection to the sea.

Utori Shrine Basic Information

Japanese Name	Utori Shrine
Postal code	028-8362
Address	Iwate Prefecture Shimohei District Fudai Village 25th District Ushitori 13
Phone	0194-35-2339
Access	10 minutes by taxi from Sanriku Railway Rias Line "Fudai" Station * Viewing the Udori Kagura outside of the annual festival can only be requested by guests staying at the "Kokuminshukusha Kurosakiso" (advance reservation required)

Ootsuchi Town in southern Iwate Prefecture is home to many local performing arts, including Shikako Odori, O-Kagura, Kagura, Shichifukujin, Toramai, etc. The date and program of the festival vary from year to year, but the "Sanriku Ootsuchi Town Local Performing Arts Bonfire Dance" is held at Kozuchi Shrine in the town, and you can watch the performances even outside of the festival period.



Kozuchi Shrine escaped damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake. It is said that the shrine was protected even though the tsunami reached right under the shrine grounds and flames reached the mountain behind it.



A tiger dance accompanied by flute and drum music depicts tigers playing, raging, and sharpening their claws and fangs on bamboo.

During the Edo period, the wealthy local merchant Maekawa Zenbei (commonly known as Kirikiri Zenbei) transported seafood from Sanriku to Edo. It is said that the sailors on the transport ship were so impressed by a scene from the puppet theater "Kokusenya Kassen," which was popular in Edo at the time, that they brought it back and recreated it by imitating what they saw.

The town suffered heavy damage in the Great East Japan Earthquake, with over 1,200 people killed or missing, but the dance continues to be handed down as an offering to the gods, as a sign of gratitude for the support received, and as a way of encouraging those affected by the natural disasters that occur frequently all over the country even today.



Legend has it that stroking a tiger's head will bring you good fortune.

Kozuchi Shrine Basic Information

Japanese Name	Kozuchi Shrine
Postal code	028-1115
Address	2-16 Kamimachi, Otsuchi-cho, Kamihei-gun, Iwate Prefecture
Open hours	Free to visit (Shrine office 9:00-17:00)
Phone	0193-42-3284
Access	It is an 8-minute walk from Otsuchi Station on the Sanriku Railway Rias Line, and during the Sanriku Otsuchi Town Folk Performing Arts Bonfire Dance event, a shuttle is available for guests staying at accommodations in the town. *The dates of the Sanriku Otsuchi Town Folk Performing Arts Bonfire Dance event vary from year to year, and the performances vary from day to day. For more information, please check the Otsuchi Town Tourism Association website.

The natural environment that nurtured local performing arts

The reason why so many local performing arts remain along the Sanriku coast is thought to be due to the natural environment. The area has a history of suffering from cold damage caused by the cold, humid wind "Yamase" in the summer, making it difficult for rice and cotton to grow. As it was close to the sea, it is easy to imagine that performing arts that pray for good harvests and large catches were developed there.



The Ebisu dance of Udori Kagura is entertaining with interaction between the performers and the audience.

Additionally, north of Miyako City in Iwate Prefecture there are cliffs (marine terraces) formed by the uplift of strata formed under the sea, while south of Miyako City there is a distinctive topography called the Rias Coast with its complex series of coves. As the villages are separated by mountains and access to each other is difficult, it is likely that a wide variety of local performing arts have survived without being influenced by other regions.



From Fudai Village to Miyako City, the road continues through the forest on the huge cliffs, known as the "Alps of the Sea." The view from the representative Kitayamazaki Observatory



On the way from the northern part of Miyako City to Jodogahama, a famous spot in Miyako City. The ocean is just below the cliffs, so one of the characteristics of marine terraces is that you can see the ocean while walking through the forest at a high altitude.

The Michinoku Sea Breeze Trail is a walking trail that stretches over 1,000 km from Kabushima in Hachinohe, Aomori Prefecture to Matsukawaura Environmental Park in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. It was opened in its entirety in 2019 as a contribution to the recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake, through the collaboration of the Ministry of the Environment, 29 municipalities in four prefectures, private organizations, and local residents.

By walking on foot, you can experience the characteristics of the terrain that you can't see just by driving on the road, such as forest roads and sandy beaches. These may be the paths that people who created local performing arts long ago walked on. You are sure to discover new things and encounter new things that you can only discover by walking at a fast pace.



Along the way, there are rest stops overlooking the ocean.

How do I get there?

The Michinoku Coastal Trail can be completed in about 50 days if you walk 20km per day, but you can also walk only the sections you like depending on your physical strength and experience.

Fudai Station is the base of Fudai Village, which is introduced in this article. Fudai Station is 37 minutes away from Kuji Station on the Sanriku Railway Rias Line. Kuji Station is 2 hours and 3 minutes away from Morioka Station on the Kuji Kohaku Express Bus. Morioka Station can be reached in as little as 2 hours and 10 minutes from Tokyo Station on the Tohoku Shinkansen.

Otsuchi Station, the base of Otsuchi Town, is 1 hour and 15 minutes away from Miyako Station on the Sanriku Railway Rias Line. It takes 1 hour and 40 minutes on the Iwate Kenhoku Bus from Morioka Station to Miyako Station.

Summary

What did you think of the "Journey to Explore the Background of Traditional Performing Arts Living in Sanriku"? I think that by walking the Michinoku Coastal Trail, you were able to better imagine the feelings of our ancestors that were put into the dance. You can go to see the performances by car or train, but to get a deeper experience, why not try walking the Michinoku Coastal Trail?

When hiking the Michinoku Coastal Trail, we recommend using the "Hiking Map Book" available for purchase at the online shop and visitor center. A portion of the proceeds from the sale will be used to help maintain the trail, and we hope that the trail will be used to promote the Tohoku coastline, and we hope that it will be developed together with hikers.

**We can arrange this optional tour
For more information contact us**