

Experience the folklore of the Namahage

なまはげ館

# Namahage Museum

Oga's Namahage is known throughout the country as a folk event.

Why this custom was born and rooted in Oga. Many questions still remain.

The Namahage Museum is a space where you can experience all of the mysteries and the history of such history.

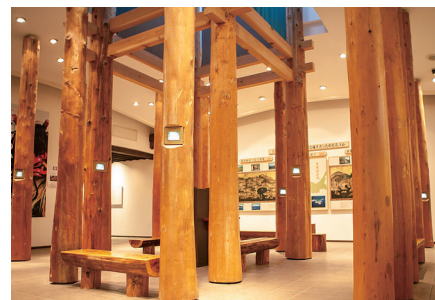


## Namahage Seizoroi The Namahage Exhibit

There are a wide variety of Namahage masks that are actually used in over 150 places in Oga city. It is a masterpiece.

## Shinpi Hall (Oga Room)

Acquaint yourself with the nature and culture of Oga the birthplace of the Namahage legend. A traditional boat carved out of a whole tree, as well as local tools and other items are displayed in this unique room complete with a mini forest containing screens and imbedded graphic panels. A computerized information retrieval system is also provided.



## Namahage Denso Hall The Namahage Legend Theater

During your visit to the Namahage Museum please make sure to view the short documentary film about the Namahage. The film explains the Namahage legend and it offers a peek inside the local houses during a visit from the Namahage, providing further insight into the people who love and preserve the Namahage tradition.

\*An evening with the Namahage\* (15 minutes in length) will be shown every 30 minutes from 8:30 a.m. Views from the Oga Peninsula's many scenic spots are also displayed throughout the day in this room.

## Special exhibition corner

Various exhibitions such as masks used in folk events similar to Namahage in Akita Prefecture and overseas are exhibited.



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Management / Oga Chiiki Shinko Kosha Co. Ltd.



## Namahage Costume Booth

Here's your chance to change into a Namahage! Please ask our staff members for assistance and they will help you try on the costumes. Feel free to take photos.



## Demonstration of Namahage masks by Senshu Ishikawa

Currently, only one Namahage masks sculptor, Senshu Ishikawa, is performing hand-carving work on a Namahage masks. 3-4 days a week (irregular). We also sell orders for Namahage masks. Please see special page for details.

## Namahage Information Corner

Information about Oga's Namahage is displayed on books and touch panel terminals.

## Shop for souvenirs and original goods

The shop has a lot of Namahage goods that can only be purchased here, as well as local specialties and souvenirs.

# Information

## Namahage Museum

**Opening times** 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (open 365 days a year)

**Price (tax Incl.)** 660yen (Elementary, Junior High and High School Students 330yen)

Groups (15 or more) 590yen (Elementary, Junior High and High School Students 260yen)

## Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum

**Opening times** Apr. - Nov. 9:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 2:00 p.m., 2:30 p.m., 3:00 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 16:00 p.m., 16:30 p.m.

Dec. - Mar. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 2:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m.

\* Jan. 1 and 2, in addition to the above, 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m.

\* If you book more than 15 people more than 2 days before, you can do anything other than Sat., Sun. and holidays. Please feel free to contact us.

**Combined Price** 1100yen (Elementary, Junior High and High School Students 660yen)

Groups (15 or more) 1000yen (Elementary, Junior High and High School Students 530yen)

Groups (30 or more) 900yen (Elementary, Junior High and High School Students 450yen)

\* Credit cards and electronic money can be used at the admission fee and at the shops.

\* Estimated time required: Namahage Museum, Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum, Shinzan Shrine, about 30 minutes each.



Oga folk events that still have many mysteries

# Oga no Namahage

## The Namahage Festival

Though this New Year's Eve ritual is observed throughout Oga, all that is known of its origins is that it is an old and important folk-cultural event. Namahage, played by young men in demonic masks and traditional straw garments, make the rounds of houses in their villages. They burst into these houses searching for new community members such as young wives and children.

In an inimitable throaty scream, the Namahage encourage and order these newcomers to work and study hard, and obey their parents or in-laws. Other household members "protect" their relatives, assuring the Namahage that they are good people. The Namahage are then offered with a little sake and some food. There are several theories about the precise meaning of this rite, but one common theory is that it welcomes powerful deities who in turn bring good luck in the new year.



In 2018, Oga no Namahage was designated as a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. (that was already designated as national important intangible folk cultural property in 1978)



## The Legend of 999 Stone Stairs and the Namahage

Legend has it that the Han emperor brought five demonic ogres with him to Japan a little more than two millennia ago. These oni, as they are most commonly called in Japanese, stole crops and young women from Oga's villages.

The villagers decided to trick these ogres, promising to give up all their young women if the demons could build a stone staircase of one thousand stairs in a single night. If, on the other hand, the oni failed to reach the local temple to which the stairs were to be built, they would have to leave Oga never to return again.

The ogres accepted, and had reached 999 stairs when a quick-witted villager imitated a cock crowing for the arrival of dawn.

The surprised and dismayed oni fled, never to be seen again.

## Namahage Sedo Festival

This famous winter rite is the union of the folk Namahage tradition and a Shinto festival.

The festival begins with Chinkama, Yu-no-Mai, a sacred kagura dance particular to the area. This is followed by the dynamic Namahage dance and drums. Finally, fifteen Namahage march down from the mountain bearing torches, bringing the night to its climax. Don't miss the sticky rice cakes passed out by the demons themselves: they are said to ward off disaster.

Date / Feb. 2nd Fri, Sat, Sun

Venue / Shinzan Shrine (near Namahage Museum)



## History and culture highlights around Namahage Museum

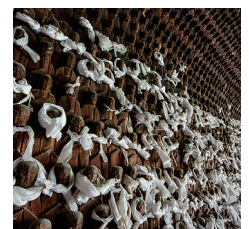
### Shinzan Shrine

Shinzan is the name of the mountain on which this shrine is located. One of the most revered on the peninsula, Shinzan Shrine is deeply associated with the Namahage rites. Every February, the Namahage Sedo Festival is held on these grounds surrounded by majestic cryptomerias.



### 10,000 Buddhas of Shinzan

This hall, once part of a temple called Koboji, holds more than 10,000 wooden Buddhist statues despite being only 5.4 meters on each side. This exceedingly rare site is of particular folk-religious interest.



Enjoy the Namahage ritual year-round.

# Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum

## A Summary of the Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum's Namahage Performance

The show is captivating, the banter between the Namahage and the household head is humorous, and they are both accentuated by the atmosphere of this converted traditional home.

## Demonstration of traditional Namahage in Shinzan area



On New Year's Eve, Sakidachi (a man who helps the Namahage as they visit villager's homes) calls on each house to make sure that the family isn't mourning the passing of a relative or coping with a serious illness of a family member. He also asks if the family has experienced the birth of a child in the passing year. If any of the above things have happened in the past year, the sakidachi and the Namahage move on to another house. If nothing has occurred to prevent the visit, he asks if the Namahage may enter. With the permission of the head of the household, several Namahage enter the house.

The Namahage stomp around the house and eventually settle down near the fireplace, where they are served meals and sake (rice wine). The Namahage begin to talk with the head of the household and ask about the harvest and the health of the older members of the family. The Namahage then inquire about whether or not the older members are being adequately cared for by the younger members, and ask if everyone in the family worked hard (or studied hard) in the passing year. The Namahage warn the head of the household that they would be angry if someone in this family was lazy, disobedient, or not working hard.

The head of the household tells the Namahage that everyone in the family worked very hard over the last year, and that no one was lazy. The head of the household reports about the passing year's harvest and asks the Namahage's favor for a good harvest in the coming year. The Namahage then promise to wish for another good harvest, as well as good health for the family.

Then, one of the Namahage points out that in fact some members of the family are indeed lazy because they did not even make the effort to come to the living room to greet their Namahage guests. The head of the household tries to convince the Namahage that none of his family members are lazy. To confirm this, one of the Namahage takes a book out of his pocket and begins to examine it. Since the Namahage see all that happens in the village from the top of the mountain and because they record all of this information in their secret book, Namahage you see, know everything about the villagers.

According to the book, the children did not study hard, nor did they adequately help their parents. The book also says that additionally his wife did not do anything to discipline the children either. The Namahage raise their voices, and decide that they will take the lazy children and their mother to the mountain. The head of the household apologizes, and tries to calm the Namahage by giving them more food and sake because he does not want his children and wife to be taken to the mountain. Despite his efforts, the Namahage stand up and start to look for the children and the mother.

The head of the household increases their efforts to pacify the Namahage. He gives mochi rice cakes to them, and promises to do his utmost to improve the attitudes of both his children and their mother. He begs the Namahage not to take his wife and children to the mountain this year.

Finally, the Namahage tell the head of the household that they believe he is sincere about working to improve the attitudes of his family. Then, they instruct him on how he can call the Namahage back at anytime (by clapping his hands three times while facing the mountain) just in case the children and his wife do not listen to him. The Namahage then leave the house, but warn that they will be back the following year.

In Oga, Namahage are believed to chase away bad luck and evil spirits with their loud voices and noisy actions. Their visits also cause the villagers to reflect on the passing year. As it always has been in Oga, after the Namahage have left, it is time to welcome the new year.

## Travel time from nearby major tourist destinations

Kitakami JCT > (Akita EXPWY: 2hours) > Showa Ogahanto IC > (R101: 40min) > Namahage Museum

Akita Airport > Akita Airport IC > (Akita EXPWY: 25min) > Showa Ogahanto IC > (R101: 40min) > Namahage Museum

Akita Port Ferry Terminal > (R101: 50min) > Namahage Museum

Tokyo Sta. > (Akita Shinkansen Komachi: 4hours) > Akita Sta. > (JR Oga line: 55min) > Hadachi or Oga Sta. > (Namahage Shuttle: 15min) > Namahage Museum

Akita Furusato Village (Yokote) > Yokote IC > (Akita EXPWY: 1hour) > Showa Ogahanto IC > (R101:40min) > Namahage Museum

Lake Tazawa >(R46: 30min) > Kakunodate > (R46: 30min) > Kyowa IC > (Akita EXPWY: 30min) > Showa Ogahanto IC > (R101: 40min) > Namahage Museum

Lake Towada > (R103&R7: 2.5hours) > Noshiro Minami IC > (Akita EXPWY: 25min) > Showa Ogahanto IC > (R101: 40min) > Namahage Museum