

SANRIKU FUKKO CALENDAR 2012

On March the 11th, a sudden, unexpected natural disaster hit our land. It has been officially named the Great East Japan Earthquake. It caused catastrophic damage to numerous cities and villages in the area. This force of nature consumed countless lives and properties, and left behind massive amounts of rubble and devastation.

The people in Japan, and in other countries too, had to face up to a harsh reality. We could only imagine just how much the victims suffered not only from trying to survive themselves day by day but also from the endless search for their families and relatives who were missing. The grief and sorrow of those who lost their loved ones, is far beyond our imagination.

There were many people who wanted to give whatever help they could, but in the face of the devastating aftermath of that earthquake and tsunami they were at a loss as to what they could do and how. It was still very cold in the early days of spring, with sleet falling daily. We could not help just standing there, looking up at the gloomy sky. But warmer spring weather came in April, then the summer, and as the days and the months go by, the people are now making a new start in their efforts to reconstruct their homelands with the inherited power of their community.

Those who live in these regions are religious people. They worship the gods in the natural world, and carry on the tradition of their folk entertainments as a faith. The folk entertainment is held to wish the state of perfect health, the prosperity and good harvests and large hauls of fish, to drive off evil spirits, and also to protect from diseases and natural disasters. It takes root deeply in their daily lives.

The folk entertainment is now playing a more important role than ever when those who live in Sanriku are struggling for the restoration of their lives. It could strengthen the emotional bond between the community people. We hope that in the coming year they will make a big step for the future, and to those who have this calendar in their hands we wish you a very happy new year.

It would be much appreciated if these photos would remind you of the victims whenever you see them.

The front page Urahama Nenbutsu Kenbai in Ofunato



This is an intangible folk cultural asset of Iwate Prefecture kept in the Okirai District of Ofunato and performed as a service for departed souls in the Bon period of August.

January



Kuromori Kagura in Miyako

Kagura are Shinto music and dance numbers. This particular Kagura has a long tradition from the Edo Period and is one of the major Kaguras of Iwate Prefecture. In 2006, it was designated as a significant intangible folk cultural asset of the country. Some of the dancers suffered from the earthquake, but the company restarted their activities three months later. In October, they performed in Moscow.

February



Namomi in Noda

Namomi is a traditional event held in Lunar New Year around the northern coastal area of Iwate, in which the men disguised as Oni, a traditional demon, go from house to house wishing for the safety of the families. In the train of Sanriku Railway, the namomis appear looking for naughty children.

March



Kamaishi Toramai in Kamaishi

In the coastal area, many kinds of the Toramai, which literally means "The tiger dance", have been handed down through the generations, in the hope of a safe journey on the ocean, as there is a saying which goes "The tiger goes and comes back thousands of miles".

April



Kogayo Shishiodori in Ofunato

Hikoroichi of Ofunato was not affected by the tsunami, but some people lost their jobs and had to leave because their workplaces were damaged. Shishi or shika, Japanese deer, have been worshipped as a messenger of God.

May



Unotori Kagura in Fudai

From January to March, the company travels around coastal regions to perform in the hope of good harvests and large hauls of fish. In 1995, this was designated as an intangible folk cultural asset of the country.

June



Sugunokubo Shishiodori and Kenbai in Tanohata

Since this was designated as an intangible folk cultural asset of Iwate Prefecture, the pupils of Tanohata Elementary School have started learning the dance. Shishiodori and Kenbai, which are danced with a sword commemorating their ancestors, are performed in turn.

July



Yagibushi in Yamada

They dance turning umbrellas, singing "suchoi, suchoi, shobai hanjo, surume mo tairyo samma mo tairyo", which means prosperous business and a good catch of fish.

August



Kenka Tanabata and Ugoku Tanabata in Rikuzentakata

This is an intangible folk cultural asset of Iwate Prefecture. The tanabata festival is the star festival originating from a Chinese legend, in which people present their wishes to the stars. In Kenka Tanabata, the floats carrying the colored papers are bumped into each other, while in Ugoku Tanabata the illuminated floats parade through the city streets. Many floats were lost, but last August the festival was held using the few surviving floats.

September



Nakano Nanazumai in Iwaizumi

In this dance, which is dynamic yet lithe, seven instruments are used and the dancers pray for the productiveness of grain. The local performing art club of Iwaizumi High School carries on the tradition of the dance.

October



Komaodori in Hirono

Nanbu Domain was well known as an area which produced finest horses. Today it encompasses the middle-northern part of Iwate Prefecture and eastern part of Aomori Prefecture. The dance has been handed down as an entertainment for the local people and also in the hope of the growth and safety of the horses. The pupils of the elementary schools in Hirono are learning it very hard as successors.

November



Usuzawa Shishiodori in Otsuchi

They put on "kanagara", a bunch of wooden ribbons made by scraping wood, and horns on their heads, and dance, praying for a large catch of fish and a good harvest.

December



Natsui Daibonten Kagura in Kuji

This kagura, also an intangible folk cultural asset of Iwate Prefecture, is found in the coastal areas, danced by people disguised as mountain priests. The importance is put on some ceremonial elements. On December 12 of the old calendar, the major night event is held, hosted by people working in the forestry business.

SAVE IWATE

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