

Festival of Longevity



The **Nechi Yamadera En'nen Festival**, known locally as “**Oteteko-mai**” is held on September 1st at Hiyoshi Shrine in the Yamadera District, deep in the heart of Itoigawa’s beautiful Nechi Valley.

The word *en'nen* comes from a word meaning “longevity.” The dances performed in the festival are said to soothe the heart and promote long life. En'nen dances were traditionally performed at Buddhist temples as entertainment following important worship services and gatherings.

The Nechi Yamadera En'nen Festival is unusual, because the dances are performed not at the local temple, but at nearby Hiyoshi Shrine. This is a rare surviving relic of a time when the lines between Buddhism and Shinto were blurred and many temples and shrines were closely intertwined.

The festival starts with a procession from Konzōin Temple to Hiyoshi Shrine. As the children are carried in, they are greeted with *omikoshi* at Kannon-dō. They are then carried to Hiyoshi Shrine where they perform their ancient dances passed down for 500 years.

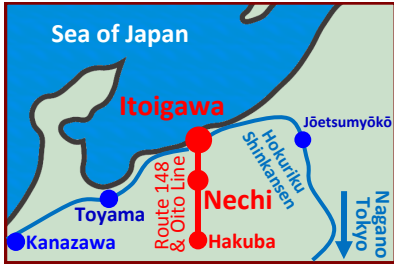
Hiyoshi Shrine & Yamadera



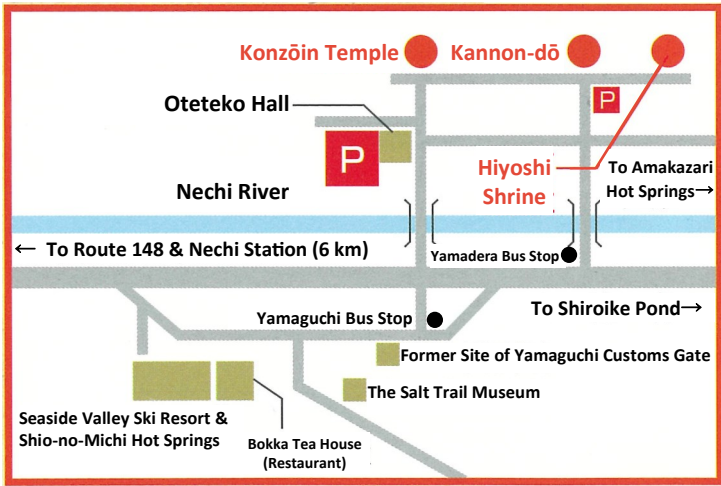
Nestled against the foothills of Mt. Komagatake, the **Yamadera District** was for many centuries an important stop along the Salt Trail, an ancient road used to carry salt from Itoigawa to what is now Nagano Prefecture. However, the Salt Trail is no longer the busy highway it once was, having been replaced by National Route 148.

Yamadera’s name means “Mountain Temple.” In ancient times, as many as 12 Buddhist temples and monasteries made their home here among the sacred mountains. Today, only **Konzōin Temple** remains.

The Yamadera En'nen Festival is held primarily at **Hiyoshi Shrine**, a small Shinto shrine at the southeast corner of the village. The shrine is dedicated to the mountain god **Ōyamakui-no-Kami**, giving the shrine its local name **Sanō-sha**, “Shrine of the Mountain King.” It has long been the primary place of worship for the local people.



Getting to Yamadera



Festival Schedule


※Festival may be canceled or rescheduled for inclement weather or unforeseen circumstances.

September 1

- 10:00 Shinji - Shinto Worship Service at Hiyoshi Shrine
 - 13:00 Chigo Gyōrei - Children are paraded from Konzōin
 - 13:30 Mikoshi no Oshiai - Omikoshi Shrines
 - 14:00 Bugaku Hōnō - Oteteko-mai Dances (National Cultural Treasure)
- ※All times are approximate

More Info About Itoigawa


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En'nen Dances of Nechi Yamadera



The Yamadera En'nen Festival consists of 10 traditional dances, each with its own meaning. It is the only surviving en'nen festival in Niigata Prefecture and is registered as a Nationally Important Intangible Cultural Property.



1. *Kurui-no-mai* (Dance of Disorder)

Held before the procession, once on the stage and twice on the road, these dances act as harbingers who prepare the stage and shrine-grounds for the festival.



2. *Oteteko-mai* ('Oteteko Dance')

Named for the music's rhythm, this performance combines 6 dances which are reminiscent of early kabuki dance. The children wear celebratory 'noshi' decorations on their backs.



3. *Kagami-no-mai* (Mirror Dance)

The youngest dancers, ages 4 - 5, perform this dance. They hold traditional mirrors and as their dance ends they are showered with flowers, toys and other gifts.



4. *Hana-no-mai* (Flower Dance)

In red robes and crowns of flowers, two children dance with copper bowls. As they dance they toss colorful flower petals from these bowls around the stage.



5. *Yumi-no-mai* (Bow Dance)

This relatively fast dance features two children dressed in hunting costumes. In one hand they hold a bow while the other hand holds a ceremonial bell.



6. *Hoko-no-mai* (Spear Dance)

One of the most elegant dances of the En'nen, 4 children adorned with flowers dance while waving large ceremonial spears.



7. *Tanemaki* (Seed Sowing)

This dance features two characters, Tottsua and Kakasa. They dance around the stage in an amusing parody of farming.



8. *Shime-no-mai* (Rope Dance)

A single adult dances vigorously while holding a ceremonial cord of rope. The dancer is said to represent Susano'o, the God of Storms.



9. *Manzai-no-mai* (Comedian's Dance)

Two characters, Tayū and Saizō, perform this dance. As Tayū tries to recite songs, Saizō comically interrupts him and cracks jokes.



10. *Shishimai* (Lion's Dance)

The lion's dance was one of the first dances to enter Japan from the mainland, but Yamadera's is unique in that the character Saizō makes an appearance. He arrives to tease the lion as it lies down to rest, but the lion snaps back and he scampers up a pillar in fear.