

Introduction to Art Performances on Sado Island

Experience

Noh

on Sado



春日社 猿楽
四月、春日明神の祭礼
例年五日をもて猿楽あり。
このやしろはむかし春日岬に有りしを、
今の下戸村に移せしと云。
神明、善知鳥の両祠に並へり。
故に三社と呼。

Japanese beauty breathes on Sado Island

2020~

Welcome to the Island of Performing Arts

Noh

The island is enveloped in the elegant atmosphere of the Noh plays.



Sado Island currently has over 30 Noh stages and about 20 Noh plays are being performed per year. The history of Noh began with Okubo Nagayasu, who arrived on Sado Island as the first magistrate overlooking affairs concerning the newly discovered gold mine. A stage performer himself, Okubo Nagayasu brought other Noh actors with him from Nara, donated Noh masks and dedicated Noh to Aikawa's Kasuga Shrine. Noh, originally meant to be enjoyed by the warrior class exclusively, has spread to the locals through festivals and the performing art of Noh was handed down. It is well known that Zeami, the actor and playwright who perfected Noh, was exiled to Sado Island and spent his later years here.

The Sagi school of Kyogen is handed down only in three places in Japan.

On Sado Island, the Sagi school of Kyogen is making efforts to hand down and popularize Sagi school Kyogen. Sagi school Kyogen existed until the end of the Edo period (1603-1868) and disappeared almost completely during the Taisho period (1912-1926). Nowadays Sagi school Kyogen only remains in Yamaguchi City, Chiyoda, and on Sado Island.

Where to Watch

Daizen Shrine Takigi Noh
562-1 Mano-Takeda, Sado City
Ushio Shrine Annual Festival Takigi Noh
2532, Niibo-Katagami, Sado City
Suwa Shrine
724, Harakuro, Sado City
In June, Noh plays are performed in various places on the island on weekends.

Shrine Ritual Performing Arts

It's not just Onidaiko! You can encounter various performing arts at festivals.

Harigoma Harigoma is a kind of performing art done in a door-to-door style during new year. Usually between January and March, the performers would go from house to house in their community, holding a hobbyhorse, dancing and singing.

Onidaiko Onidaiko is a traditional performing art performed together with a Taiko drum. It is an essential part of festivals on the island and is also called "Ondeko" in the local dialect. There are five different styles of Onidaiko.



Where to Watch

At village festivals on the island
Ondeko in Niibo Toki-no-Yubae Market
Parking lot of Sado City Office's Niibo Branch
TEL: 0259-22-2166
(Niibo Chamber of Commerce)

Kojishimai It is also called Shishiodori. Putting lion or deer head pieces on, three persons dance in unison while drumming the small Taiko hanging on their bellies. It has been handed down mainly in Sado Island's Maehama and Kaifu coast area.

Where to Watch

Ogi Minato Matsuri
Ogi port and other places
TEL: 0259-86-2216
(Ogi Minato Shinkokai)



Tsuburosashi Tsuburosashi is a kind of "Kagura" (Shinto ritual ceremonial dance). It is said to have been handed down from Kyoto and is performed at festivals at Sugawara Shrine and Kusakari Shrine in Hamochi area. The male deity holds a phallic object ("Tsuburosashi") that the female deity rubs with bamboo sticks while performing a sexual dance accompanied by flutes and drums.

Where to Watch

Kusakari Shrine
2081-1, Hamochi-Hongo,
Sado City
TEL: 0269-88-3111
(Hamochi Branch, Sado City)



Ningyo Shibai (Puppet Theater)

The three kinds of puppet plays remaining are nationally designated important cultural properties.

Designated as important cultural properties, Bunya Ningyo, Noroma Ningyo, and Sekkyo Ningyo still remain on Sado Island. Sekkyo Ningyo is performed in accordance with the narration of a Sekkyo Bushi along with Noroma Ningyo puppets. The narration is in Sado Island's dialect and generally appears as an interlude. Bunya Ningyo originated from "Kojoruri" (another sort of puppet theatre) that was popular in and around Kyoto about 300 years ago. It was handed down as a song accompanied by Shamisen (guitar-like three stringed instrument). It is said that Bunya Ningyo, consisting of a puppeteer and a narrator, was established in 1872.



Where to Watch

Sado Puppet Theater Performance
(Hamochi Rural Environment Improvement Center)
617, Hamochi-Hongo, Sado City
TEL: 0259-66-2719
Noura Performing Art Festival
Noura Area, Sado City

Sado Okesa

A folksong called Hanya Bushi came to Sado Island from Kyushu.

There are various opinions on the origins of Sado Okesa, but the most convincing story of how it came to Sado Island's Ogi area is that of Hanya Bushi. It is a song that sailors from Kyushu sang during feasts. It spread across the country through sailors on cargo ships called "Kitamaebune" that carried goods from Hokkaido to Osaka passing by Sado Island on their trade route. Coming to Sado Island via Ogi, it was then passed to Aikawa, the town where the gold mine was, and then to the rest of the island.



Where to Watch

Aikawa Kozan Matsuri
(Aikawa Mine Festival)
Aikawa District, Sado City

Immerse yourself in the world of Noh



It is said that presently there exist about 240 Noh plays.

We will introduce you a digest of the plays often performed on Sado Island following the five categories of Noh plays. You should enjoy the continuation directly while watching a performance.

The Five Categories of Noh Plays

Noh plays can roughly be divided into five categories depending on which of the following characters the protagonist appears as: “Kami” (deity), “Otoko” (man), “Onna” (woman), “Kyo” (a mad person), and “Oni” (demon). Let's pick up some representative plays for each category.

(*Nowadays, the quintuple day program is seldomly organized.)



First Category

The first category is called “Waki-Noh”. The protagonist is a “Kami”. These are plays concerned with festivals to pacify the protagonist deity (Shite) and to ask for universal piece. On Sado Island, the plays “Tsurukame” or “Chikubushima” are performed.

Representative Chants: Tsurukame

Centering on the dance of Tsurukame wishing for the Emperor to have a long life.

Third Category

“Kazura-Noh” are popular on Sado Island and characterized by the graceful situation development centering on dancing and singing. The Shite (protagonist) is a woman (“Onna”).

A popular play on Sado Island:

Izutsu

Izutsu is a masterpiece of Mugen-Noh that even Zeami praised to be of highest quality. “Tsutsu Izutsu” from “The Tales of Ise” is the pivot of the play. The highlight scene is where the “Woman of Izutsu” (daughter of Arisune) remembers the old days, watching the reflection of herself in the water of a well wearing a Kimono of Ariwara Narihira whom she had been waiting for. The fake well with Japanese pampas grass expresses the desolation of autumn.



Second Category

“Shura-Noh”, describe the agony of soldiers (“Otoko”) who have fallen into the world of permanent strife after death. The protagonist is a military commander of the Minamoto or Taira clans.

Popular plays on Sado Island:

Kiyotsune

The ghost of Kiyotsune (Shite) who committed suicide appears in his wife's dreams. This play is considered a “Genzai Noh”, depicting normal events of everyday life. It is the story of a warrior, but the love of wife and husband is also integrated.



Yashima



Yoshitsune, one of the most popular men in Japanese history, is the main character in this story and appears as a general who fell into the circle of permanent strife after death. While describing how the bloody war was raging, the beautiful scenery of a spring night is incorporated.

Tomoe

Tomoe Gozen is the main character in this play. It is the only play in Shura-Noh which has a woman as its protagonist. The ghost of Tomoe Gozen, beloved concubine and vassal of Yoshinaka, talks about the resentment that she could not die with Yoshinaka and shows the struggle of being a female warrior in a dance.



Fourth Category

“Kyoran-Noh” (madness plays) tell the stories of lovers and families who, not able to let go, wander about looking for the deceased ones they loved. They are also called “Zatsu-Noh” (miscellaneous plays) because plays that don't fall under any other category are listed here, as well.

A popular play on Sado Island:

Makiginu (Silk to a Deity)

A man went to Kumano Gongo to dedicate a bolt of silk to a deity. However, on his way to the shrine, he took a detour and visited Otonashi Tenjin, so he got tied up for being tardy. But Tenjin (god of heaven) entered a female medium and came to his rescue. The medium dances kagura in a state of possession. It is unique that a Shite dances in a state of possession already from the beginning and not starting from the middle of the play. The quick tempo of the climax scene where the Shite dances in madness is particularly impressive.



Fifth Category

Noh plays from the fifth group are the last to be performed at a Noh event with the protagonists being Oni (demons), Tengu (mountain spirits), or Yosei (sprites). They are called “Kiri-Noh” (final plays).

A popular play on Sado Island:

Funa Benkei



It is a popular play in which Yoshitsune, Benkei, and Shizuka Gozen, historical characters everybody knows, appear. The story has Benkei as its central figure. Having even two Shite, with a beautiful courtesan as the Mae-Shite and a vengeful spirit as the Nochi-Shite, it is a very unusual piece. While a graceful dance is shown in the first act, a rough dance in which a Japanese halberd is shaken is performed in the latter act. Both acts are completely different in rhythm, as well.



Han'nya

A Han'nya mask expresses a vengeful female ghost.



Doji

A Doji mask expresses a boy with elfin mystique.

Two Notable Noh Stories

You can enter the world of Noh more smoothly if you know the story of a play in advance. So, let us introduce the stories of two plays that are often performed on Sado Island.



Shojo

Shojo, the legendary animal, brings good people happiness.

It is a folklore that had been told in China. Shojo is said to have a red face and to be fond of liquor. In Noh, Shojo is often performed on happy occasions.



Shite: Shojo



Waki: Kofu

Hagoromo

The theme is the "Legend of the Feather Mantle" with its highlight being the dance of Tennyō, a celestial nymph.

In the Legend of the Feather Mantle, Tennyō reluctantly became the wife of a man. In the Noh play, however, Tennyō got the feather mantle back by performing a dance and returned to heaven. The highlights are the sea of spring, the pine grove in Miho, and the dancing scene of Tennyō wearing the beautiful mantle. It can be seen as an introduction to Noh plays.



Shite: Tennyō



Waki: Hakuryō



Once upon a time, there was a man called Kofu in China. He was a very obedient son to his parents. One night he had a dream that he was to become rich if he sold liquor at the market.



A fisherman named Hakuryō found a beautiful mantle on the branch of a pine tree on his way home.



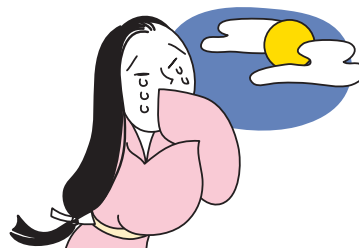
When he did just that, he really started to get rich gradually. There was a man who came to Kofu's shop to drink liquor every market day. But no matter how much that man drank, he never got drunk. Kofu wondered who he was and asked. The man answered that he was Shojo, living under the sea.



He wanted to take it home when a woman who called herself Tennyō appeared and pleaded with him to give it back to her. But Hakuryō had no intention of returning it to her because he thought it was a rare treasure.



At a beautiful moonlit night Kofu waited for Shojo at the sea shore.



Tennyō wailed in sorrow that she would not be able to go back to heaven without the mantle. Hakuryō felt a little sorry for her and proposed that he would return it if she danced for him.



After a while, Shojo appeared, drank liquor and danced joyous.



Tennyō agreed. She told him how the moon world was and praised the beauty of the pine grove in Miho.



Then, Shojo gave Kofu a Sake jug that would never run dry no matter how much Sake he poured, and left.



But she went up to heaven while dancing.



Shojo
Shojo is a mask of a drunk, dancing sprite.



Zo'onna
Zo'onna is a graceful female mask also expressing divinity.

Let's stand on a Noh stage

What is Shimai?

Shimai is a dance that expresses the key elements of a specific Noh play accompanied by a chorus. The Shimai dancers usually dance in a crested kimono and hakama without masks and costumes. Also, the play of flute and drums is omitted.

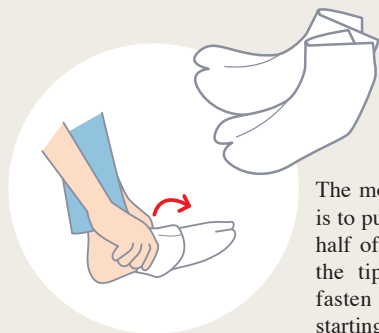
You may actually stand on a Noh stage and dance yourself. Have a bodily sensation of the appeal of Noh that you cannot grasp by observation only.

This is how it goes:

Experience Shimai – learning by doing

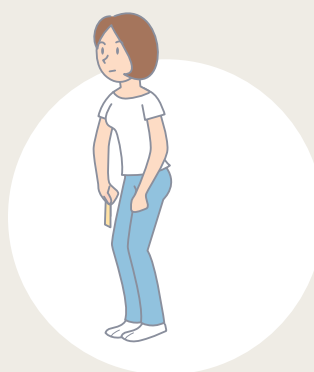


1st Step – Put on Tabi (Japanese split-toe socks)



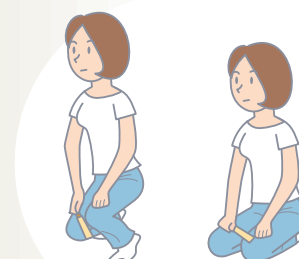
The most basic part of the experience is to put on white Tabi. Turn the upper half of the socks inside out and slide the tips of your toes inside. Then fasten the clasps on the heel part starting from the bottom.

2nd Step – Master “Kamae” (the basic posture)



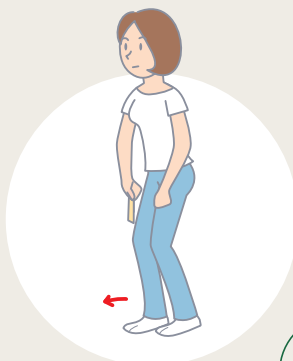
In Noh, the upright posture of “Kamae” is the starting point for every movement.

To keep a stable stance, stand upright, lean forward slightly, and stick out your buttocks a little. Keep your feet straight together and your knees bent slightly.



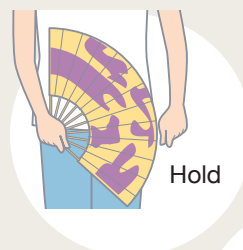
3rd Step – Walk on the stage with “Suri-Ashi” (sliding feet).

After having mastered how to stand and kneel down, you will learn how to walk with “Suri-Ashi”. Lower your hips and slide your feet forward in short steps with bended knees, starting with the left foot and briefly stop at the even numbered steps with both feet together. When going backwards, you also start with the left foot with the rhythm being based on three odds – left, right, left.

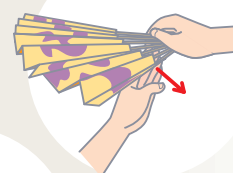


When seating yourself on the floor, in the motion of kneeling down, keep your back vertical and pull your right foot back. Finish the move by resting your hands on the center of your thighs. When resuming Kamae from this position, hold the fan in your right hand, use your right knee to slowly push yourself up until you reach the starting posture again.

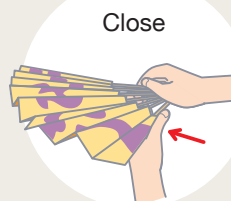
4th Step – How to hold, open, and use a fan



Hold



Open



Close

The fan is an important prop for Noh performers. Various things are being expressed with it. To hold a fan correctly, put the fan's pivot in the middle of your palm and hold it between your thumb and fore finger.

To open it, attach your left hand under the paper part of the fan and open it by pushing it towards your body. To close it, fold it down in reverse.

5th Step – The expression of the state of mind



In Noh, subtle states of mind are expressed by specific movements called “Shosa”; by extension and reduction of the posture, changes in rhythm, or handling of the fan. To express happiness, for example, the Noh actor turns his face up a little, changing the angle of the mask he's wearing. To express sadness, the actor turns his face down. Crying is expressed by putting one hand with straight fingers close to the eyes. To express deeper sadness, the actor brings both hands close to the eyes.



Ja

This mask stands for the face of a woman who changed into a snake due to excessive hatred.



Kasshiki

Kasshiki is the face of a young man who is half monk and half layman.

Noh Stages on Sado Island



At one point there were over 200 Noh stages on Sado Island. Many of them have been preserved and are still in use. Let's visit the mysterious and serene world of Noh.



Kusakari Shrine Noh Stage



Noh performances on the 15th of June and in early September

This shrine has a Noh stage with an impressive thatched roof and is designated as tangible cultural folk asset by Niigata prefecture.



Hamochi-Hongo

Haguro Shrine Noh Stage



Noh performance on the fourth Saturday in August

Haguro Shrine has a small Noh stage and is registered as tangible cultural folk asset by the prefecture.



Anyoji

Other Noh performances

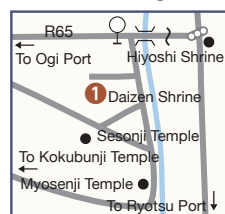
Around the beginning of June	Kankō Teirei Noh at Kanai Noh-Gakudo Hall (7)
	In the middle of June
3rd of July	Onnatachi no Kokoromi, "Bunya no Yube to Yanoh" (Bunya Puppet Theater and Evening Noh for Women) at Kanai Noh-Gakudo Hall (7)
	Shoboji Temple Rosoku-Noh (Candle Light Noh) (11)
	Kumano Shrine Takigi-Noh (9)
	Noh play dedicated to Hino Koki at Myosenji Temple (12)
Last Sunday of July	Homma Family's Noh Stage regular performance (8)
At the beginning of August	Tenryo Seminar at Kanai Noh-Gakudo Hall (7)
14th of August	Ocean Takigi Noh at Oda Port (13)
15th of August	Furusato Week at Kanai Noh-Gakudo Hall (7)
Third Saturday in August	Niku Shrine Takigi Noh (10)
	Zeami Kuyo-Sai at Kanai Noh-Gakudo Hall (7)

Daizen Shrine Noh Stage



This shrine has one of the most beautiful Noh stages on Sado Island with a thatched roof. It is designated by the prefecture as a tangible cultural folk asset.

Noh performances on the 18th of April, the first Sunday in June, and in the middle of August



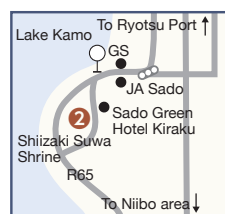
Takeda

Shiizaki-Suwa Shrine Noh Stage



This Noh stage is located on a hill with an excellent view of the Osado Mountain range and Lake Kamo. It is registered as a tangible cultural folk asset.

Noh performances on the first Saturday in May, June, July, September and October, and usually in the middle of August.



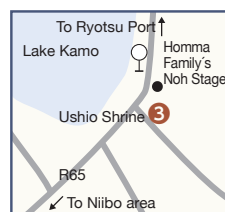
Harakuro

Ushio Shrine Noh Stage



A Noh stage surrounded by a forest. It is designated as a tangible cultural folk asset by Niigata prefecture.

Noh performance on the 12th of June



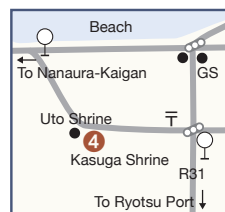
Niibo-Katagami

Kasuga Shrine Noh Stage



Kasuga Shrine was reconstructed in 2005. It is said to be the birth place of Noh on Sado Island.

Noh performances in June, August, and October.



Aikawa-Orito



Obeshimi

An Obeshimi mask is used to depict Tengu.



Sankojo

This mask represents the face of an old man who is damned to do penance even after death.

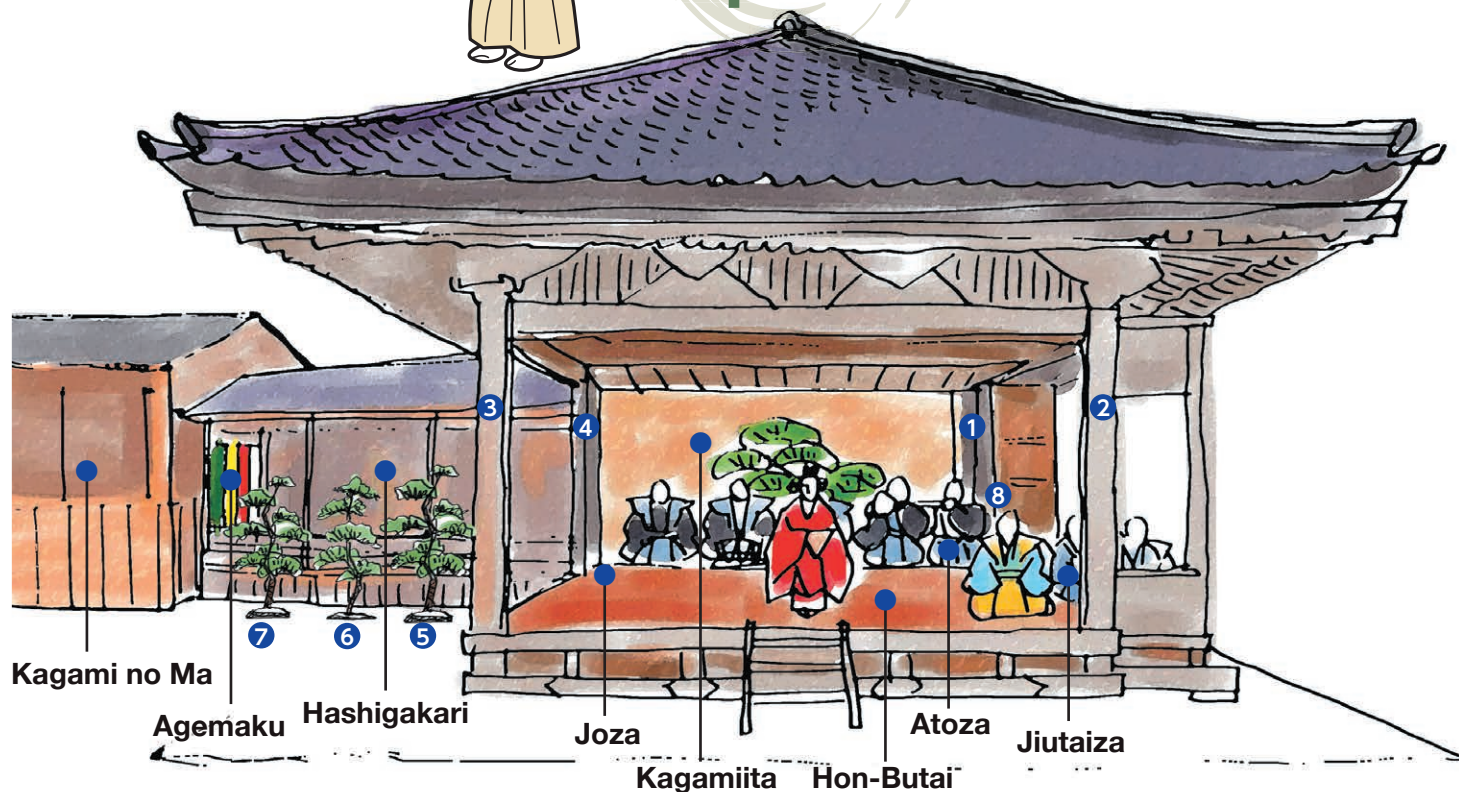
How to appreciate Noh

– Thorough examination of the Noh Stage

Each spot of a Noh stage has a specific meaning. In this section we will discuss the general structure of a Noh stage.



The so-called prototype of a Noh stage that remains in Kasuga-Taisha Shrine in Nara was a piled-up mound of earth. It is believed that the natural background when it was still performed outside is reproduced in present Noh stages. On Sado Island you can see the special kinds of ideas in accordance with the arrangements of a Noh stage against the backdrop of various natural environments, such as the sea, mountains or paddy fields. They may not be sophisticated, but the simple Noh stages taking advantage of the common people's wisdom is a charming point only to be found here.



① Fuebashira

Fuebashira is the one of the four pillars on the main stage in the rear right corner as seen front-up. The flute players sit in that spot.

② Wakibashira

Wakibashira is the one of the four pillars on the main stage in the front right corner. The Waki-actor usually waits there for his part.

③ Metsukebashira

Metsukebashira is the pillar in the front left corner of the stage. The Shite confirms his position with this pillar as aid since the Shite's view becomes very narrow wearing the mask.

④ Shitebashira

This is the pillar in the rear left corner. It is the border between the stage and the Hashigakari, the narrow bridge to the left of the stage. When the Shite appears, he stands there at first.

⑤ Ichi-no-Matsu (The first pine tree.)

⑥ Ni-no-Matsu (Second pine tree.)

⑦ San-no-Matsu (Third pine tree.)

The pine trees are counted starting from the one closest to the main stage, from right to left, and are getting smaller the farther they are away from the stage to create perspective. They are also used by the Shite to confirm his position on stage. It is also believed that they represent the pine wood from when the stages were still open-air.

⑧ Kiridoguchi

Kiridoguchi is a small door on the side of the Kagamiita (the painting of a pine tree in the back of the stage). It is the doorway for the Jiutai chorus and Koken (stage assistants).

Hon-Butai

The main stage. It is about six meters long on each side with four pillars at its corners. However, on Sado Island, many Noh stages are a bit smaller. Every part of the storyline of a tale is reproduced on stage by the actors using minimalized movements with specific meanings to them ("Shosa"). It is said that one step of Suri-Ashi (sliding feet) expresses thousand miles.

Jiutaiza

This is where the members of the chorus (Jiutai) sit. The chorus usually consists of eight members sitting in two rows facing the audience. The ones in the back take the lead.

Atoza

The space in front of the Kagamiita where the musicians and stage assistants sit is called Atoza.

Kagamiita

Kagamiita is the background of the stage with a pine tree painted on it. It makes the voices of the actors and the music resonate from it. The design of the pine tree differs depending on the stage.

Joza

This is the spot where performances start and end; where the Shite and Waki appear and enter the stage. It is here, where the self-introduction takes place and the key points of the plot are explained.

Hashigakari

Hashigakari is the bridgeway between the backstage (Kagami no Ma) and the main stage. It also represents a link between the present world, which is the main stage, and the world of the dead, the Kagami no Ma.

Agemaku

The curtain dividing the Hashigakari and the Kagami no Ma is called Agemaku. It is pushed open to one side when the musicians appear, and pulled up inward with two bamboo poles when the Shite and Waki get on stage.

Kagami no Ma

This is the so-called backstage – a room with a big mirror next to the curtain. The actors put on their costumes and masks in this room. When they are ready, the musicians start to play "Oshirabe" (turning up); the signal that the play begins.



Semimaru

The mask of a noble boy who was abandoned because of his blindness.



Yorimasa

The expression on this mask shows the resentment of Yorimasa for not being able to defeat the Taira clan.

Protect the treasure of the island and hand it down to the next generation

There are no other places than Sado Island where Noh is integrated into everyday life. Noh plays are supported by Noh enthusiasts who diligently study Noh here. It is said that there are about two hundred Noh fans presently engaging in Noh on the island (about 150 registered members in Sado Island's Noh Theater Association). Nowadays, Noh is introduced to the integrated study periods at the island's elementary and junior high schools. The circles of "the guardians of Noh" are spreading steadily as the classical Japanese popular entertainment alive on Sado Island. If you are interested in learning more about Noh, feel free to call Sado Tourism Association (TEL: 0259-27-5000).



Homma Family's Noh Stage

Activities to revive Noh

Finding a new value in Noh on Sado Island – "Sado no Noh wo Shirukai-Association"

The association was established in 2005 for the purpose of vitalizing Noh on Sado Island from a new point of view. They promote, for example, Bunya Puppet Theater and Evening Noh for women, or "Rosoku Noh" (Candle Light Noh) at Shoboji Temple – a temple noted in connection with Zeami. For more information please contact Sado Tourism Association (TEL: 0259-27-5000).



Shoboji Temple

To get a new understanding of the existing Noh stages and the value of Takigi Noh plays (torch-lit Noh performances at night).

The booklet "Noh Island Sado Tour Guide" published by Sado's Institute for Cultural Property gives information about Takigi Noh plays and share the value of the Noh stages on Sado Island. An annual schedule of all planned performances and a map of all Noh stages are included. For more information, please contact Sado Island's Institute for Cultural Property NPO (TEL: 0259-57-0118) or Sado Tourism Association (TEL: 0259-27-5000).



Messages from Noh enthusiasts on Sado Island

I am very happy that my grandson is interested in Noh.



He is an active Noh performer of the Hosho school although he's already very old. His grandson started learning Noh when he was five. They performed together in "Funabenkei".



The earphone guide will make Noh easier to appreciate.



Please enjoy Takigi Noh while staying at Shiizaki Onsen wearing Yukata and Geta.



They are not only staff members of Sado Tourism Association but also shrine maidens at "Ryotsu Tenryo Takigi Noh" at Shiizaki Suwa Shrine. They have been shrine maidens for about ten years. The role of shrine maiden who receives fire from the gods is very important in divine service Noh.



After knowing the summary of the play, it became much easier to really enter the world of Noh.

We are moved by the world that is created by Noh. It even translates through the viewfinder of a camera.

■ Noh Shooting Tricks

It is advised to bring a tripod stand with you as there are many Takigi Noh (i.e. at night) performances on Sado Island. Be sure to avoid using flash. The flash light disturbs the actors who only have a narrow view through their masks and it destroys the atmosphere. The use of color correcting filters is highly recommended as the color of pictures is influenced by the light source.



Heita

Heita represents the bravest man of war and a military leader in the middle ages.

Sado Island and Noh

The first magistrate sent by the Shogunate to manage affairs related to the newly discovered Gold Mine was the one who brought two Noh actors from Nara to Sado Island in 1604, thereby setting the foundation. Four hundred years have passed since then, but Noh remains firmly established in the everyday lives of the people of Sado Island.

Sado Island became a demesne of the Bakufu (military government) after the discovery of the gold vein. It is said that Okubo Nagayasu, the first magistrate, was a Noh actor himself. When he brought two Noh actors with him, he dedicated Noh to the island's shrines.

Forty years after Okubo Nagayasu's arrival, the Homma family opened the Hosho school of Noh. This led to the spreading of Noh to the common people and the sense that dancing Noh was an "accomplishment of men" began to take root.

The Noh stages still existing on Sado Island, the Takigi Noh performances, and the Noh playwright Zeami who got exiled to Sado Island even 170 years before Okubo Nagayasu came here – the history of Noh is still fascinating people nowadays.



The History of Noh on Sado Island

- 1434** The Noh playwright Zeami (aka Kanze Motokiyo) got exiled to Sado Island.
- 1436** Zeami wrote "Kintoshō" (The Island of Gold).
- 1604** Okubo Nagayasu, the magistrate sent by the Bakufu to oversee affairs regarding the gold mine, brought two Noh playwrights with him from Nara to Sado Island.
- 1636** Divine service Noh started in Kasuga Shrine.
- 1645** Sado Island's first Noh stage was built in Kasuga Shrine.
- 1651** Homma Hidenobu was appointed to be chairman of a Noh group by the magistrate office and thus the first generation of the Homma Family's ongoing Noh tradition.
- 1805** Divine service Noh started to be held at several shrines around the island.
- 1846** The Noh stage of Daizen Shrine was reconstructed.
- 1883** Kaneko Ryutaro from Nishi-Mikawa became the first chairman of the Kaga Hosho school of Noh on Sado Island and constructed a Noh stage the following year.
- 1885** Homma Family's Noh Stage was reconstructed.
- 1909** The Sado Island Noh Theater Club was founded.
- 1919** The Sado Island Noh Theater Association (Nishi-Mikawa school) was founded.
- 1924** The poet Omachi Keigetsu wrote the Haiku: "Uguisu ya – jikko no mura no – nohbutai". It means that there is a Noh stage even in a village with only ten households.
- 1969** Master Nomura Ransaku became a living national treasure.
- 1975** Master Homma Fusataka became a living national treasure of Noh.
- 1997** Eight Noh stages on Sado Island were designated as tangible folk assets by Niigata prefecture.



Okina

Okina is said to be a god-like mask which stands for longevity.

The Difference Between Noh and Kyogen

Noh and Kyogen appeared around the same time and have often been performed as a set. Let's compare the differences.

Noh	Kyogen
Actors	
There are four parts: Shite, Waki, Kyogen, and Hayashi. The five existing schools of Shite are Kanze, Hoshō, Komparu, Kōgō, and Kita. They are different in plays, melody, and lyrics of Utaï (songs), movements, direction or costumes.	There is a Shite, lead actor and director, and an Ado, actor playing opposite the lead. Two schools of Kyogen still remain at present – one is Okura, and the other one is Izumi. The Okura school has its base in Tokyo and Kansai, while Izumi is based in Tokyo and Nagoya. The plays are generally performed by the school unit.



Masks and Costumes

Noh-costumes are called “Shozoku” and represent the beauty of Noh. They used to be simple in the early stages, but they became more magnificent towards the end of the Muromachi period and stylized during the Edo period. The Shite and part of the “Tsure” (supporting roles) wear a mask; the Waki does not wear one. This is said to be due to the Waki representing a real person while the Shite represents non-human beings, such as deities, ghosts, or spirits. The Shite sometimes appears on stage without a mask and acts as if he is wearing one. There are over 200 kinds of masks and they are roughly divided into six groups.

As Kyogen describes the real world, the actors usually don't wear masks and the costumes are simple. Kataginu (shoulder pad-like sleeveless gown) and Kyogen-Bakama (Hakama) are the typical costumes. Kataginu are famous for their daring designs such as Onigawara (face of a demon) or snails. The split-toe socks (Tabi) are yellow.



Kinds of Plays

In total, there are about 240 Noh plays. They are divided into five categories. A Noh day program used to be organized so that plays of all five categories were performed. However, that has changed nowadays.

Kyogen performers appear during the interludes at Noh performances as part of Noh. They also play the role of filling the time until the Nochi-Shite (Shite in the latter half of a Noh play) makes his appearance. There are about 260 songs now, including Waki-Kyogen, Daimyo-Kyogen, Shomyo-Kyogen or Oni, and Yamabushi-Kyogen.

Basic Knowledge of Noh

What kind of roles are there? There are four major categories of Noh performers: Shite, Waki, Kyogen, and Hayashi. With actors of every category playing their part a Noh play is being performed.

The Shite Part
The Shite (lead actor), Tsure (supporting actor of the Shite), Jiutai (a kind of chorus), Koken (sitting in the back of the stage watching the progress of the play and sometimes playing the part of the Shite).

The Waki Part
The Waki plays the part opposite the Shite and appears first on stage to explain the story to the audience. He also confronts the Shite during the play.

The Hayashi Part
Hayashi are the musicians who play the instruments usually used in Noh theater. Fue-Kata (playing the transverse flute), Kotsuzumi-Kata (playing the shoulder drum), Otsuzumi (playing the hip drum), and Taiko-Kata (playing the stick-drum).

The Kyogen Part
The Kyogen actors perform in between acts during interludes but also perform plays separately.

What is Noh?

Before actually going to watch a performance on Sado Island, let's get to know more about Noh first. What is Noh? Once you mastered the basic knowledge, you'll feel more familiar with Noh.



Noh is a form of Japanese theatrical arts consisting of Utaï (singing) and Hayashi (instrumentalists). Most of the main characters are non-human beings; Noh is a mysterious performance that describes the true nature and emotions of human beings in the afterlife. Until the Edo period it had been called “Noh of Sarugaku” or “O-Noh” in short. It came to be called “Nohgaku” in the Meiji period, including Kyogen. Various emotions are condensed in one minimalized movement, and behind the seemingly emotionless mask, many kinds of expressions are hidden. Noh is the theatrical art form that Japanese are most familiar with and have handed down for centuries. Be open-minded about Noh and feel the beauty of it.



The History of Noh

From “Sangaku” to “Noh of Sarugaku”

In the old days of the Nara period, “Gagaku” (or “Bugaku”) and “Sangaku” were imported from China. Though “Gagaku” had been handed down in the Imperial Court, “Sangaku” had spread among the common people as public entertainment mainly performing conjuring tricks and acrobatics. Gradually it turned into re-enactments of tales and short plays, which are the roots of the present Noh and Kyogen.



Zeami perfected “the aesthetics of Noh”

In the Muromachi period, the father and son duo Kan'ami and Zeami appeared. It is said that they put the Noh structure, that had become very complicated, in order. The accomplishments of Kan'ami and Zeami caught the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's attention, and under his patronage they achieved greatness. Later, Zeami wrote “Fushi Kaden” and completed the theory of Noh, centering on the sense of beauty of “Yugen” (mysterious, elegant simplicity). After Yoshimitsu died, Zeami got exiled to Sado Island because of the next Shogun Yoshinori's suppression, but Zeami's aesthetics and discussions about art has been highly evaluated.



The Completion of Noh Style and the “Iemoto System”

Even after Zeami's death, Noh was handed down. It was in the Momoyama period that the final form of Noh stages, masks and costumes were completed. Amateur groups appeared and Noh began to spread as a national drama. In the Edo period, however, Noh schools began to receive a salary as the official performing arts of the Bakufu. In addition to the traditional four schools, Kanze, Hoshō, Komparu, and Kōgō, Kita was also approved by the Bakufu and began to receive a salary. Starting from then, Noh became the classical performing art, and was handed down by the so-called “Iemoto System”. “Iemoto” means the founder or grand master of a certain school of art. In the middle of the Edo period the form of Noh as we know it now was completed.



What Kind of Masks Are There in Noh? Noh masks fall into six principal categories.

Okina-Style
The oldest mask among all Noh masks. It is used in the play “Okina” which is regarded as sacred in Noh theater.

Old Man-Style (Jo-Kei)
It is used for a god or deity that appears in form of an old man temporarily.

Male Style (Otoko-Kei)
This mask is mainly used for the leading character in dynastic tales.

Female Style (Onna-Kei)
The mask is expressionless. The hair shows its age.

Fierce Deity (Kijin-Kei)
This mask expresses the wrath that wards off evil spirits, uncleanness or wicked hearts. It is an incarnation of a Tengu (mountain spirit) or god but it has no fangs.

Ghost, Spirit
This mask is worn by a military leader who died a regrettable death, or by the deceased who are unable to find rest because of the lives he has taken, or a woman mad with jealousy. It is a mysterious mask with golden eyes.

Chujo
Chujo is said to stand for the face of Ariwara Narihira. It expressed the melancholy of a lead character.

Ko-omote
Ko-omote is a typical female mask. Kempt hair represents a pure young lady.

About the leaflet series “Introduction to Sado Island's Performing Arts”

Various performing arts have been handed down on Sado Island due to their historical and geographical backgrounds. Our idea to this leaflet series is that we want as many people as possible to see the real performing arts – the treasures of Sado Island – feel them and hand them down to the next generation. In this series we will introduce to you the traditional performing arts of Noh, Taiko, Puppet Theater, and Sado Okesa.

Noh and Shimai Experience (minimum 4 persons)

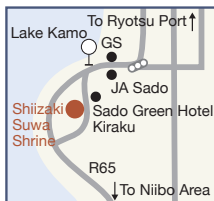
Venue: Shiizaki-Suwa Shrine (Ryotsu area)

Date and time: every day, starting 10:00 am
(for about one hour)

Admission: ¥2,000 for adults, ¥1,000 for children

Meeting Place: at the shrine

Application: until seven days prior to the scheduled day
(by phone)



Please contact: Sado Tourism Association, TEL 0259-27-5000



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