

Spring Grand Festival



Bugaku (Court Dances)

The **Nou Hakusan Shrine Spring Grand Festival** (Nou Festival) is held every April 24th at Nou Hakusan Shrine in Itoigawa City's Nou Region. It began in the 15th century and centers around 11 *bugaku*, a type of ceremonial Japanese court dance.

The festival starts with the *Shishimai* or Lion's Dance. Two men dressed as a mythological lion dance about in front of the festival procession as it makes its ways into and around the shrine grounds.

Starting around noon, the festival explodes with energy as the Running of the Shrines begins. Three *mikoshi* portable shrines are carried on the backs of teams of young men who run them in circles around the shrine grounds to ceremonial music.

As the atmosphere calms following the Running of the Shrines, the first *bugaku* dancers take the stage. 11 different *bugaku* court dances are performed by adults and children, some as young as 4! These dances culminate in the dramatic Ryō'o Dance performed in the light of the setting sun.

Nou Hakusan Shrine

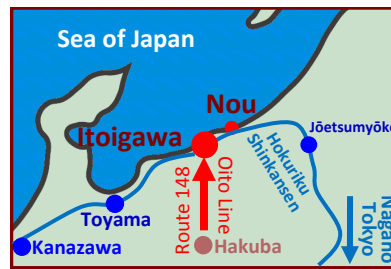


Nou Hakusan Shrine Worship Hall (*Haiden*)

Nestled at the base of Mt. Oyama (87 m), **Nou Hakusan Shrine** is said to have been founded during the reign of Emperor Sujin, which would make the shrine over 2000 years old. Located behind the worship hall, the current *honden* or main sanctuary was built in 1515 following a fire. The building is registered as a Nationally Important Cultural Property. The Shrine Forest seen behind the shrine is a Nationally Designated Natural Monument.

It enshrines local goddess *Princess Nunakawa*, her husband *Onamuchi-no-Mikoto* (also known as *Okuninushi-no-Mikoto*) and the primordial god *Izanagi-no-Mikoto* who according to legend created the Japanese Islands and fathered many of Shinto's gods and goddesses.

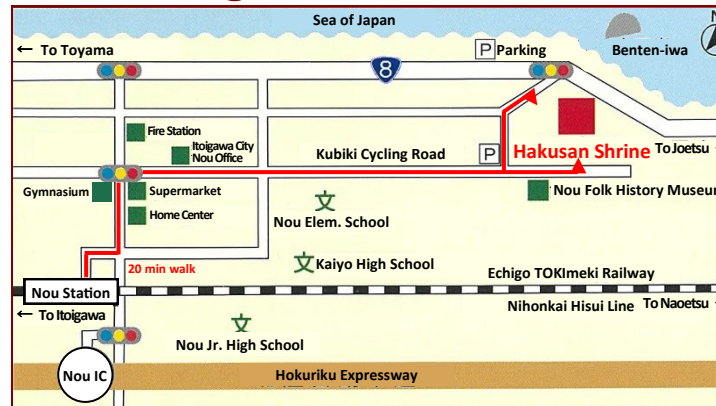
Despite being a Shinto Shrine, Nou Hakusan Shrine also houses many Buddhist icons and treasures, remnants of a time when the lines between these two religious traditions were blurred.



Getting to Nou



Getting to Hakusan Shrine



Festival Schedule

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

April 24

- 9:00 a.m.
Shishimai - Lion Dance & Procession
- 12:00 p.m.
Mikoshi no Ohashiri - Running of the *Mikoshi* Shrines
- 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Nou Hakusan Shrine Bugaku Court Dances
(National Cultural Treasure) ※All times are approx.

More Info About Itoigawa

■ Itoigawa City Geopark Promotion Office
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Nou Festival

**Nou Hakusan Shrine
Spring Grand Festival**



Bugaku Court Dances of Nou Hakusan Shrine



Shishimai (Lion Dance) - 2 Adults

These two dancers dress as a *shishi*, a mythological lion-like creature. They dance in front of the procession to purify the ground. The *shishimai* is not considered one of the *bugaku* dances.



1. Enbu (Waving Spears) - 2 Children

In the first dance of the *bugaku* performance, 2 children dance with spears to purify the stage and dispel evil spirits.



2. Sōrai (Worship Dance) - 4 Children

This quiet, elegant dance is performed in white silk crepe garments and flower-adorned crowns.



3. Dōrari - 1 Child

Only 5 min long, this is a very short dance and the only child's dance which uses a mask. The movements are simple and comical. Watch for the part where the dancer pretends to fall.



4. Chikyuu - 4 Children

Thought to have arrived in Japan from China in the 8th century, the true origins of this dance remain a mystery. Four children dance gracefully in beautiful crowns adorned with flowers.



5. Noh Batō - 1 Adult

A wild-looking man returns from the mountains celebrating victory over the beast that had killed his father. The baton in his hand represents the weapon used to slay the beast.



6. Taiheiraku (Song of Great Peace) - 4 Children

In red and gold robes like those once worn by warriors into battle, they dance holding swords and spears. This dance celebrates the suppression of chaos and a return to righteous order.



7. Nasori (Dragon Dance) - 2 Adults

Also called the Dance of the Two Dragons, this dance represents two frolicking dragons. The dancers wear frightening masks and hold ceremonial batons.



8. Kyūhōraku (Archery Dance) - 4 Children

Four children in nobleman's crowns dance with bows and arrows. They each shoot arrows around the stage, shooting another just before leaving.



9. Chigo Batō - 1 Child

Wearing a celestial crown of flowers and purple robes and holding a ceremonial fan, a single child dances quietly and elegantly.



10. Ringa (Flower Song) - 4 Children

In purple silk crepe robes and flower crowns, these children dance with flowers in this final dance of solemn elegance before the finale.



11. Ryō-ō (Prince of Lanling) - 1 Adult

One proposed origin for this dance is the legend of a Chinese King who rose from the grave to aid his son in battle. The sunset was an omen of the prince's defeat, so the king made it rise. As the sun sets over the Sea of Japan, this dance beckons the sun to rise again.