

Isaba Yojō

*Experiencing the atmosphere
and traditions of Miyako's port town
at the historic Azumaya building*

五十集余情





Isaba Yojō

Traditional Culture × Azumaya

Having endured countless hardships, the traditional culture and time-honored buildings of this land—together with the long-forgotten spirit of Isaba*—are once more awakening in the streets of Miyako.

**isaba*: traditional maritime trade

Miyako 宮古

Revival through History and Culture

The stage is set at Azumaya, a merchant house in Honchō, Miyako City, dating back to the feudal era. The Honchō district has a history as the starting point of reconstruction after the 1611 Keichō Sanriku earthquake and tsunami—400 years before the Great East Japan Earthquake. Despite being located on the disaster-stricken Sanriku coast, many valuable old buildings still remain. Seeking out the town's history and inherited culture, while learning anew, is a step toward passing Miyako's history and culture into the future.

In the early Shōwa period, the poet and sculptor Takamura Kōtarō wrote: “Indeed, Miyako is an old and venerable town. One immediately feels it upon stepping outside. It is a calm, dignified, classical town.”

This is one of the very impressions we hope both residents and visitors will share. In a place deeply scarred by the Great East Japan Earthquake, history and culture breathe life into a “nostalgic yet new gathering place”—the scenery of Isaba Yojō.



Kuromori Kagura—
Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan (Photo: Yūki Ida)

Azuma-ya 史

A Contemporary “Isaba” that Nurtures Culture and Exchange

Along the Sanriku coast, maritime trade with outside regions was long called Isaba, and those who engaged in it were known as Isabaya. Azumaya has a history both as an Isabaya transporting marine products and as a sake brewery. It supported the prosperity of Miyako—once called “the busiest district in the Nanbu domain”—and served as a gateway for external culture brought by trade.

Today, Azumaya has become a new kind of Isaba, fostering regional culture and exchange with the wider world. It houses Cinema de Aeru, a unique community theater drawing attention as a hub of creativity, and continues to cultivate vibrancy in the port town of Miyako.



Traditional performing arts 芸

A Treasure Trove of Traditional Performing Arts

Sanriku is still home to countless performing arts:

- *Yamabushi Kagura* – mountain ascetics carry sacred icons, performing exorcisms and fire-prevention prayers.
- *Nenbutsu Kenbai* – a graveyard dance for Bon memorial rites.
- *Shishi Odori* – dances wearing deer-like headpieces.
- *Sansa Odori* – a Bon dance originating in Morioka.
- *Tora Mai* – tiger dances praying for big catches and safe voyages.
- *Shichifukujin Mai* – dances of the Seven Lucky Gods, inviting good fortune.

These embody the prayers of Sanriku's people, who have long faced harsh nature and demanding labor.



Left to right: Tsugaruishi Sansa Odori, Ushibushi Nenbutsu Kenbai, Hanawa Shishi Odori © Sanriku International Arts Promotion Committee

Banquet 宴

Traditional Food: Experience and Inheritance

In the parlors of Isabaya and the homes that hosted kagura troupes, people served foods and drinks rooted in the local climate. This program, held in the building once used for sake brewing, offers food experiences in collaboration with locals, connecting to the inheritance of traditional cuisine.

Examples include:

- Hyuzu dumplings (sweet dumpling with miso and walnuts)
- Shitogi (pounded rice cakes)
- Happai Tōfu (Traditional Tofu Soup)
- Millet-based dishes (barley, foxtail millet, barnyard millet, buckwheat)
- Tofu Dengaku (Grilled Tofu with Miso)
- Sweetfish (ayu) from the Hei River
- Salted mackerel soup with grated radish
- Stewed salmon belly
- Toshiru Seaweed in Vinegar Dressing
- Abalone and Toshiru sashimi mix
- Soup with Kichiji rockfish
- Braised clams (Zōga & Shūri shellfish)
- Hijiki seaweed with walnuts

Program 演

Experiencing, Learning, and Engaging with Traditional Culture

Isaba Yojō goes beyond tourism and cultural experiences, aiming to pass on traditional culture and performing arts to future generations.

Programs include:

- Live performances of traditional arts with explanations of gestures and origins.
- Storytelling and films of folktales and legends that once enriched local life.
- Learning, interaction, and opportunities to nurture new community connections.

Program Components

- Performances, music, lectures, screenings
- Explanations and experiential learning by performers and scholars
- Experiences of traditional food and sake

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | 1. Local sake “mokkiri” (corner-cup) tasting (held occasionally in the main house) |
| 2 | 2. Experiences of Miyako's traditional foods also offered |





Experience 感

Tradition and the Future

Isaba Yojō is a cultural exchange concept that allows people to experience the traditions and culture nurtured by the harsh yet bountiful Sanriku sea in a new format.

The Honchō district of Miyako still preserves its historical townscape, shaped after the 1611 tsunami. Founded in 1824, Azumaya has withstood earthquakes, tsunamis, fires, uprisings, and wars. Today, the nearly 200-year-old former Azumaya Sake Brewery is the only nationally registered tangible cultural property in central Miyako. Its preservation and use form part of the Higashi de Aeru project.

Our Offerings

- Cultural programs for visitors from outside the region
- Refined hospitality and local Sanriku cuisine
- Markets recreating the atmosphere and liveliness of the historic port town
- New styles of staying in a town both old and new



東屋

HIGASHI DE AERU




Yado 宿

A New Form of "Yado"

Traditional performing arts such as kagura have long been supported by the custom of yado (lodging). Devout villagers welcomed performers into their homes, turning parlors into stages, entrusting them with prayers for the community's well-being. Performers were able to travel and perform widely thanks to these hosts.

For example, Kuromori Kagura still has hosts known as kagura-yado across the region, where performances and rituals form a vital foundation of the tradition.

However, with depopulation and disasters, such yado are decreasing. Isaba Yojō invites the performing arts not as mere spectacles but with the heartfelt spirit of yado: wishing happiness for those gathered. In this way, it may become a new form of host sustaining local performing arts.



Isaba Yojō 五十集余情

2-2 Honchō, Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture
Former Azumaya Sake Brewery – Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property

Planning & Production: Cinema de Aeru Project
Design: Iwata Design Office
Collaboration (Arts & Tourism): Iwate Art Support Center (NPO)

Contact

—About Isaba Yojō

Cinema de Aeru Project
TEL: 090-8582-4940
Email: cinema.de.aeru@gmail.com
Facebook: [@cinema.de.aeru](https://www.facebook.com/cinema.de.aeru)

—About Performing Arts & Tourism

Iwate Art Support Center (NPO)
TEL: 019-656-8145 / FAX: 019-656-8146
Email: info@iwate-arts.jp



CINEMA DE AERU

