

## English Translation/Origin of the Festival

The customs of the “Shineri Benten Tataki Jizo Festival” are said to date back to the mid-Edo period.

This festival, often referred to as one of the “most unusual festivals in Japan,” was traditionally held on the night of June 30 each year (now it takes place on the last Saturday of June). The main venue is located in the central area of Suwamachi in Uonuma City, Niigata Prefecture (formerly Koide Town), between Bentendo Hall and Kannonji Temple in Inaricho, across Jinya Street, where a Jizo statue is enshrined.

The series of festival events begins at dusk, when red lanterns are lit. The sacred object is paraded through the streets, and Benten dances are performed in various locations. Soon, the area fills with lively excitement as cheers rise from young men and women. In this festival, men pinch (shineru) women’s arms and, in return, women playfully strike the men. It is a once-a-year occasion where such informal and uninhibited behavior is allowed.

Although the exact origin of this unusual festival is unknown, similar customs and festivals can be found throughout Japan. A senryu (humorous poem) from the Edo period reads, “On the night of the Snake Day festival, people pinch Benten.” On the first Snake Day of the year, which was a festival day for Benten, people would receive lucky charms said to bring prosperity, and the event was very lively. It is said that on this night, there was a custom of playfully pinching young women.

Additionally, on January 15, people would make “kayu-zue” (sticks carved from partially burned wood used to cook rice porridge) and eat red bean porridge. Senryu from the Horeki era include lines such as “On the fifteenth day, slender waists are struck with willow branches” and “Struck with a kayu-zue, the bride’s belly swells.” These customs were believed to bring blessings such as fertility and safe childbirth. Similar traditions were practiced nationwide and are even mentioned in classical works such as *The Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book*.

The “Shineri Benten Tataki Jizo Festival,” associated with prayers for fertility and safe childbirth, is a humorous and unique festival said to bring good fortune. Highlights such as the procession of the sacred object and various performances attract many visitors, and the festival grows more vibrant each year.

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### [About Bentendo Hall]

Bentendo Hall in Uonuma City was built in 1710 (Hoei 7), approximately 300 years ago. The principal image, Benzaiten, is depicted in a splendid form accompanied by sixteen attendants, wearing a crown adorned with a torii gate and a human figure. The vividly colored carvings are especially striking.

Bentendo has long been widely revered in the surrounding region as a deity of abundant harvests, matchmaking, child-rearing, longevity, and prosperity in business.

The large seated Jizo statue at Kannonji Temple is known as a fire-prevention Jizo. It was originally placed at the entrance of the town (near Koide Bridge) to protect against fires, and was later relocated to Kannonji Temple in the early Meiji period.

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**Note:** This translation was generated using AI and may not be perfectly accurate.