

# A Traditional Performing Art of Kagawa Prefecture

Visitor Guide



Agency for Cultural Affairs

Grant for Promotion of Culture and Arts for Year 2020  
(Project for Promotion of Comprehensive Utilization of Cultural Heritage)



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# The lion, a sacred animal of India, was introduced to Japan through China and the Korean Peninsula, undergoing some changes along the way.

The lion has been worshipped as a sacred animal in India from ancient times, and it can be seen sculpted on entrances and columns in Hindu and Buddhist temples, as well as on pedestals of Buddha statues.

Idolized as a symbol of power and wisdom, the lion inspired the Lion Dance of China, a masked dance that drives away evil spirits and brings in happiness. It then travelled through the Korean Peninsula and reached Japan, where it turned into the unique Japanese traditional art of *shishimai*.

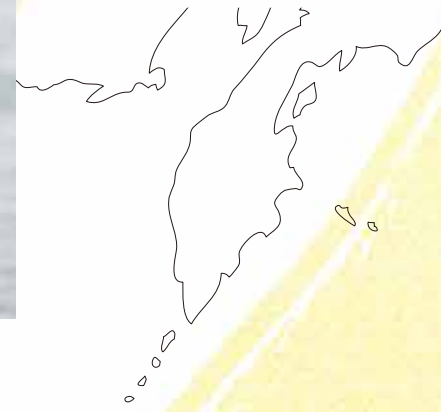
## Chinese Lion Dance

Today, people of Chinese descent in Southeast Asia practice the Lion Dance tradition during the Chinese New Year celebrations as a way to fend off the evil and bring in prosperity.



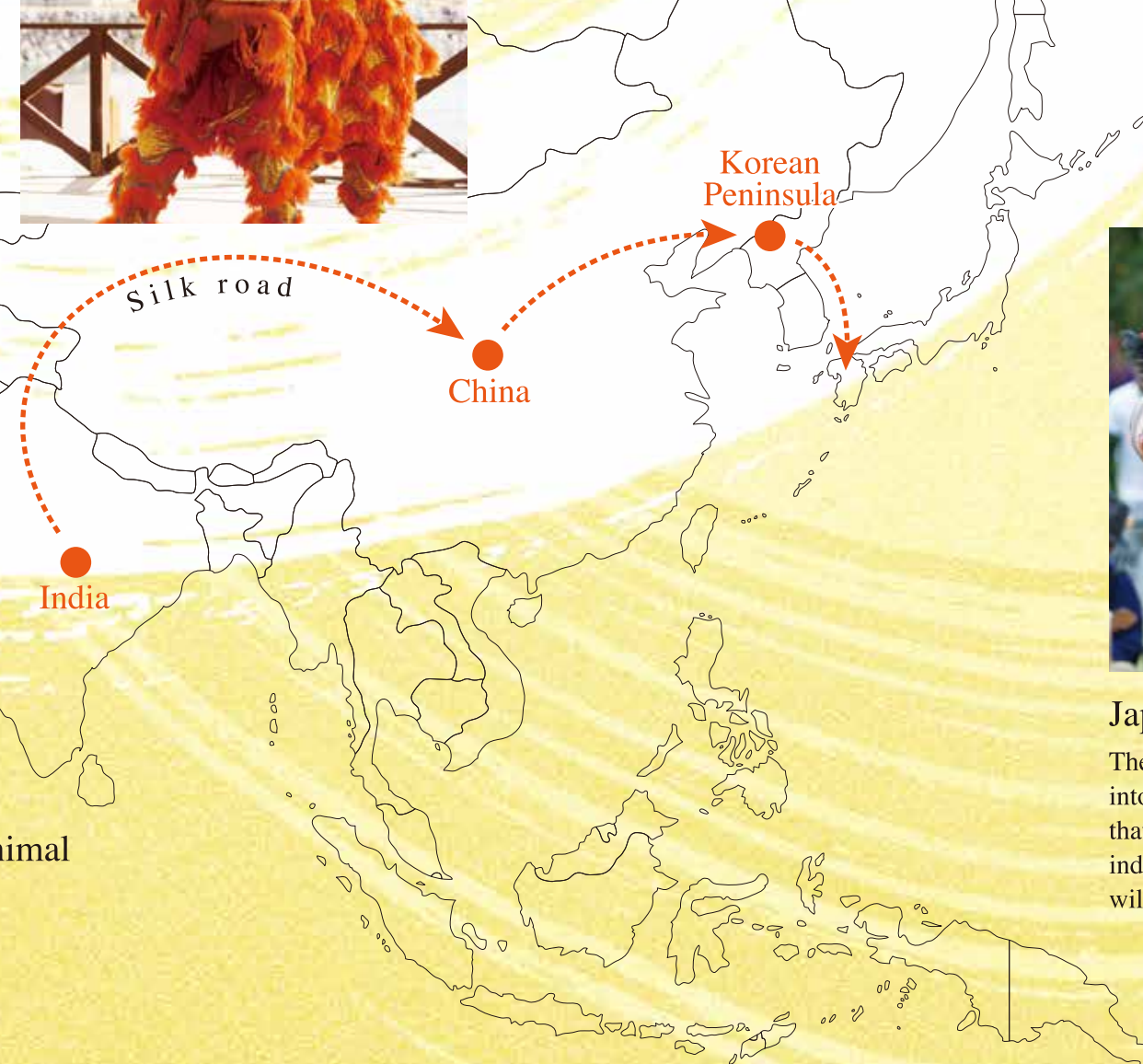
## Korean Lion Dance

The Chinese lion dance was introduced to the Korean Peninsula as well.



## Statue of the Lion, India's Sacred Animal

The statue called "Lion Capital of Ashoka" is used in the national flag of India, as well as coins, stamps, and passports.



## Japanese Lion Dance (Shishimai)

The Japanese lion dance can be divided into two large types: the masked dance that came from China, and the Japanese indigenous dance that imitates deer and wild boars.



# Kagawa is one of the top Japanese prefectures in number of *shishigumi*\*

Kagawa is one of the top Japanese prefectures in number of *shishimai* performances, boasting 800 *shishigumi* despite being the smallest prefecture in area.

In Kagawa, multiple *shishigumi* belonging to different local associations would perform in one shrine, so they strive to be different, each competing to showcase their creativity in the lion's head, its body covering, or choreography. One particular reason for the popularity of the *shishimai* in Kagawa is the passion of the *shishigumi* members in their engagement in *shishimai*.

\**Shishigumi* is the *shishimai* troupe





*Shishimai* is performed at a *jinja* (a Shinto shrine) to thank the gods for the year's harvest. Traditional *kane* and *taiko* instruments accompany the performance.

In Kagawa, *shishimai* is performed from late September to early November as part of the autumn festivals held at the shrines.

The lion dances to the accompaniment of the traditional *kane* and *taiko* instruments from ancient Japan. Sometimes, children will dress up and join the performance.

In some regions, the custom still remains in which the *shishigumi* will venture outside the shrine, performing for homes, stores, and companies.

### *Jinja*

*Jinja* is a facility that enshrines the gods of Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion. At the entrance of the *jinja* is a gate called *torii*, which represents the boundary between the sacred world of the gods and the world inhabited by humans.



*Shishimai*



*Kane* performance



*Taiko* performance



Child performer



# Two performers coordinate to skillfully control one lion.

Many of the *shishimai* in Kagawa have two performers controlling one lion, but in some cases the lion is controlled by a single performer.

When two performers are used, one is in charge of the head and front legs, and the second is in charge of the hind legs.

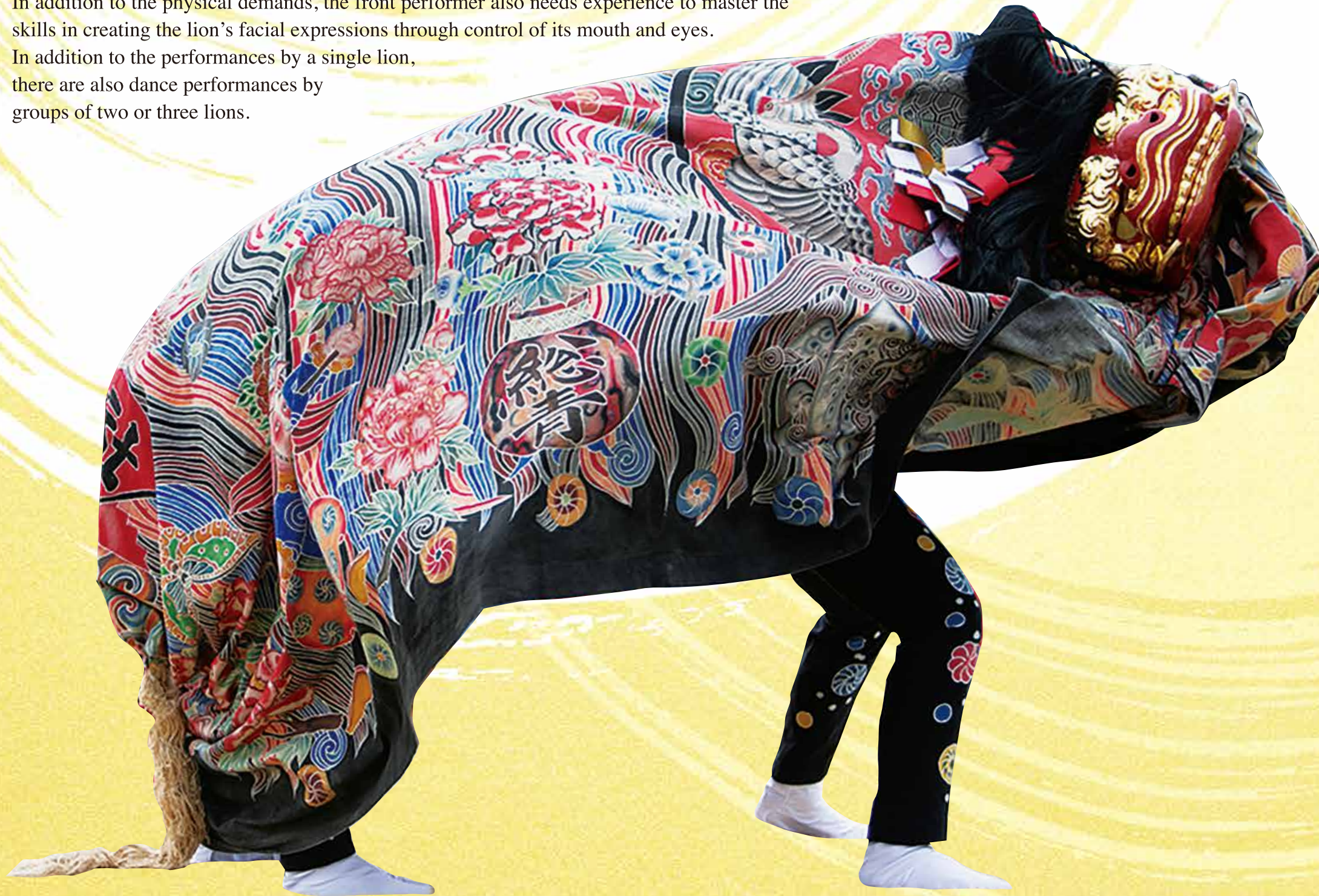
Performing for long stretches of time in a crouched position inside the cover is a strenuous task.

The performer needs to keep up training to ensure strength and endurance of the lower body.

In addition to the physical demands, the front performer also needs experience to master the skills in creating the lion's facial expressions through control of its mouth and eyes.

In addition to the performances by a single lion,

there are also dance performances by groups of two or three lions.



Since ancient times, Japan has had a *shishimai* in which one performer controls one lion. This form originates from the traditional *shishiodori*, which portrays deer or wild boars. In Kagawa, the lion of the single-performer *shishimai* has the same face as that of the two-performer version.



## *Shishigashira* is made using paper mache, with the techniques from Kagawa's traditional lacquerware craft

The head of the lion is called the *shishigashira*. With big eyes and a nose and mouth, its rugged face bares its teeth, and is adorned with vivid colors such as red and gold.

Most *shishigashira* in Kagawa are made by pasting together *washi* (Japanese paper) and applying a lacquer finish in a technique called *hariko*. In some cases, animal hair is implanted in the face during the *hariko* process. This type of *shishigashira* is called *kejishi*.

The *shishigashira* made from paper and lacquer are light, strong, and easy to handle. Wood-carved *shishigashira* are rare in Kagawa but are common in other prefectures.



*Hariko* (Painted Lion)

Layers of *washi* (Japanese paper) are pasted over a frame for the lion's head. A lacquer finish is applied in the end.



*Hariko* (*Kejishi*)

Long hair is implanted in the face of the *shishigashira* made by *hariko*. It is sometimes called *nekojishi*, or "cat lion", due to its resemblance to a cat.



*Kibori*

A *shishigashira* made by carving wood. The disadvantage is that it is heavier than the *hariko*.



## Lavish artwork and patterns adorn the lion's trunk.

In Kagawa, the fabric covering worn by the *shishimai* performers is called *yutan*. The *yutan* can be categorized by the type of artwork: *mushae-yutan* depicts samurai in action, *mon-yutan* is adorned with the crest of a clan or a *jinja*, and *kemoyō-yutan* has patterns designed based on animal fur. There is also the *ke-yutan*, which has animal hair sewn on to the fabric. Please look out for the lavish *yutan*, which characterize the *shishimai* of Kagawa.



*Ke-yutan*

In *ke-yutan*, the hair of an animal such as a horse is sewn onto the cloth.



*Mon-yutan*

The *mon-yutan* depicts the crest of a clan or a *jinja*, or emblems of things in nature such as flowers and birds.



*Kemoyō-yutan*

In *ke-yutan*, the hair of an animal such as a horse is sewn onto the cloth.

*Mushae-yutan*

A style unique to Kagawa Prefecture, the *mushae-yutan* depicts samurai in action. The vigorous movement of the *shishimai* brings the samurai in the artwork to life.



●Artwork of the famous “Fan Target” story in the Battle of Yashima of the Genpei War

In 1185, two samurai forces clashed in the Battle of Yashima (a peninsula in Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture), with one side positioned on the sea and the other on land. When dusk came and they entered a ceasefire, the side on sea raised a fan up high, and dared their enemies to hit it with their bow and arrow. Nasu no Yoichi, an expert archer on the land force, rode up to the water's edge on his horse, and while mounted, hit the fan with his arrow. This story, set in Kagawa, is known as the “Fan Target” by many people in Japan.



# The *kane*, *taiko*, and child performers liven up the act

The lion is the star of the *shishimai*, but the *kane* and *taiko* that accompany the movements of the lion are also indispensable to the performance.

In some *shishigumi*, child performers make appearances dressed up in their costumes, adding some extra jubilation to the performance.

## *Kane*

The *kane* is a traditional Japanese instrument made of metal shaped like a shallow basin. The performer strikes it with a wooden mallet to produce the sound. It is sometimes played using an instrument resembling a cymbal.

Different regions and *shishigumi* have their own ways of hanging and striking the *kane*.



## *Taiko*

The *taiko* used in Kagawa are mostly made using wooden drum bodies hollowed out in the shape of a barrel and fitting leather drum skins using tacks. We use *Taiko* with short bodies and large *taiko* in which strings are passed through holes at the edge of the leather and fastened tightly.

The size and shape of the *taiko* vary, as well as the pedestals on which they are mounted.



## Child performers

The child performers wear woven hats with decorations and bright costumes. They sometimes perform on the taiko and sometimes dance with the lion.

