

Namahage Performance, Part 2: Introduction (2)

Before entering a home in Shinzan, the Namahage stamp their feet seven times. They then barge in, calling out, “Are there any lazybones or crybabies here?” and go through the house in search of such people. The head of the household sets out food for the Namahage and asks them to sit down; they stamp their feet five times before obliging. Next, they quiz their host on topics such as that year’s harvest and family matters. Finally, the Namahage stamp their feet three more times and walk through the house once more. The 7-5-3 combination of numbers is considered auspicious in Japan.

When the Namahage walk around indoors, straw from their costumes often falls onto the floor. This straw is considered sacred, and is left there overnight. Wrapping particularly long straws around one’s head is said to give protection from the common cold or make one smarter. It is fine to pick up the straws left behind after the performance, but please do not pull straws from the Namahage: this is said to scare away the deities and make the straws lose their power.

The performance you are about to see is a reenactment of a Namahage visit to a home in Shinzan decades ago. Taking photos during the performance is allowed, as is moving around to get a better angle, but do not enter the room the performers are in. Now, please sit back and enjoy the show.