

## **Namahage Museum: The Origin of the Namahage**

The Namahage are an integral part of local culture in Oga, but exactly how and when the folk tradition emerged has been lost to history. The oldest documented reference to the Namahage as we know them today dates back to 1811, when the traveler and writer Sugae Masumi (1754–1829) described, in both words and through a drawing published in a travel journal, his experience seeing the fearsome deities. Sugae's account contains many details still associated with the Namahage, including their masks and their frightening effect on children.

As for the actual origin of the Namahage, four explanatory legends are commonly cited. From mythical beings to gruff-looking ascetic monks to shipwrecked foreigners, these theories are described in more detail in separate sections.