

Folk Songs and Dance (Sado Minyo)

Sado Minyo is a traditional form of song and dance that has been performed on the island since the Edo period (1603–1868) and remains popular today. The music can often be heard in shops and on loudspeakers throughout Sado. It is traditionally performed during the Buddhist Obon period in August, when people honor the spirits of their ancestors by temporarily welcoming them back into the realm of the living. Sado Minyo troupes consist of dancers, singers, and a musical ensemble playing *taiko* drums and the shamisen. Twenty-three groups, including one high school club, perform Sado Minyo on the island, preserving the tradition and passing it on to the next generation.

During the Edo period, a magistrate was sent to Sado from Edo (present-day Tokyo) to oversee the gold and silver mines, which were owned by the central Tokugawa government. Women performing Sado Minyo for the magistrate wore blue kimono and a straw hat covering their face and peripheral vision, ostensibly because commoners were prohibited from looking at the magistrate and other high-ranking officials. This costume is still in use today, as is the program known as Sado Okesa. Now one of the most common Sado Minyo pieces, the Sado Okesa used to be a special program and was originally performed by geisha. Unlike other Sado Minyo songs, a flute is added to the musical ensemble for the Sado Okesa.