

# W h a t ' s U p , O I T A !

*Bringing the latest from Oita, Japan to all those connected to Oita thriving all across the globe.*

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**Greetings!** from Shunro Hori <hori-syunro@pref.oita.lg.jp>, the Head of the International Policy Division in the Oita Prefecture Planning Promotion Department

This May the 19th MUSIC FESTIVAL Argerich's Meeting Point® In Beppu will be held. Seiji Ozawa will be conducting, and a special Martha Argerich piano concert will also take place. Prior to the festival, a promotional video titled "OITA PEACE SYMPHONY" was released worldwide online and received one million views in just one month. The best things about Oita come through in the video, so please be sure to watch it. <https://youtu.be/feSRuQ3Jdbo>

## **Kawazu Cherry Blossoms in Tsukumi**

On Sunday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, we went to Tsukumi in search of cherry blossoms. Cherry blossom season doesn't typically happen until around late March and early April, but kawazu blossoms bloom early. There are a variety of cherry blossoms viewing sites scattered throughout the area, and the Youra Peninsula cherry blossom shuttle bus (operating on February 18/19/25/26) gave us the opportunity to see as many as possible. We took in the beautiful sight of cherry blossoms dotting the roads from the bus windows. If you've got the time, Tsukumi and its kawazu cherry blossoms make for the perfect background for a picnic.

*Find out more about our Tsukumi trip on **page 3**.*



## *Oita Prefecture Mejiro Overseas Supporter*

From February 2nd to the 17th, Mr. Kuniyuki Sashihara visited the city of Austin, Texas. This official visit was arranged by the Austin-Oita Sister City Committee (AOSCC). Mr. Sashihara has thirty five years of experience in pottery and working with clay. He states his current work is “centered on simple functional pieces for everyday use, however, I find joy in finding ways to express myself within the confines of my genre. I am inspired by the great masters who have come before me in terms of technique as well as balance and overall style of my work. I also take inspiration from beautiful natural settings, sculpture, and paintings.”

On February 6th, there was a welcome ceremony at the Austin City Hall with Ms. Sheila Fling performing tea ceremony and local elementary students presenting their environment-themed pictures. Mr. Sashihara also led workshops for adults and children. These workshops were really popular and sold out very quickly. On February 9th, The AOSCC ate dinner together with Mr. Sashihara at a Japanese restaurant called Kome, then had a reception at the Austin Asian Resource Center. Austin’s Culture and Museum Division Head Laura Esparza gave a presentation about sister city activities. “Austin has 14 sister cities. Some of the cities are business or technology based, but our connection to Oita is mainly cultural. Oita is known for hot springs, and in Austin we are famous for Barton Springs



*Casey Kaspar (L) Kuniyuki Sashihara (R)*

(which stays at 68-70 F year-round). I would love to have a “Hot Springs, Cold Springs” advertisement! Austin and Oita became sister cities in 1990, and since then we’ve had a lot of cultural exchanges. However, this is the first time that we’ve had a professional from Oita visit us in Austin, so I’m very happy. Since this has been a big success, I want to invite more people from Oita to visit us here in Austin.” There were about 60 people in attendance at this reception, so I believe there definitely is interest in these kind of cultural activities.

At this reception, I had a chance to talk with Mr. Sashihara and other people from Oita prefecture. After his presentation, I had a chance to speak with Mr. Sashihara. He said the things he likes about Austin are the “warm people and delicious food. Right after arriving at the airport, they went to Black’s Barbeque for lunch. Then, today, they went to Torchy’s Tacos. When President Obama visited Austin, he also went to Torchy’s. Now I know why, it was delicious!” He also mentioned that one point of difficulty was even though there were Japanese-English translator volunteers present at most functions, it is hard to translate words specific to pottery. However, he was able to convey his feelings via the clay he was working with!

# *A Day with the Dolphins*

After looking at the cherry blossoms, we decided to spend the rest of our day at Irukajima, or Dolphin Island. We started our visit at the onsite restaurant, where we ate Tsukumi's most famous dish: Hyugadon, or cool slices of tuna atop a bed of warm rice. With sesame seed, soy sauce, and green onions. After we finished with lunch, we headed off to interview Mr. Iwata, a leader at Irukajima. Our conversation taught us a variety of interesting things.

For example, although there aren't any pamphlets or materials available in languages outside of Japanese, the park is a huge hit with foreigners as well as locals. At least 25% of park visitors come from outside of Oita, and many visitors come from Taiwan, China, or even as far as Europe. The park opened six years ago and, depending on the season, with the summer months being most popular, sees between 2,000 and 10,500 visitors per month. The park currently has 14 dolphins. The oldest is 11 years old, and one dolphin is pregnant and due in April.

We headed off to see a dolphin performance after our interview. The dolphins were fantastic performers. They jumped, used their bottlenoses to hula hoop, and rode around with their trainers. The attractions at Irukajima extend from just watching to getting in on the action. We fed, petted, and shook hands with Sora-chan, our new dolphin friend. Later, as we fed the many fish that live in the waters near the dolphins, we watched as children in wet suits got a chance to ride dolphins. (Anyone, not just children, can ride with the dolphins.) Although dolphins are obviously the most popular attraction, the park has other animals, including seals, otters and penguins. The park also has a walking trail that offers an excellent view of the sea.

We wrapped up the day in the best way possible: ice cream. One cone of Irukajima's specialty flavor (a chocolate dolphin atop vanilla ice cream) to celebrate our time with the dolphins and one cone of sakura flavored ice cream to celebrate our time looking at the cherry blossoms.

*Irukajima is open from 10 AM to 4 PM and closed from mid-January to mid-February.  
Admission is ¥870/adult, ¥540/children, and ¥430 for children under 4.*



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## Editors' Note

This will be our last issue of the 2016 fiscal year. We're excited to greet 2017 again in a different way with even more exciting news and goings on in and around Oita Prefecture.