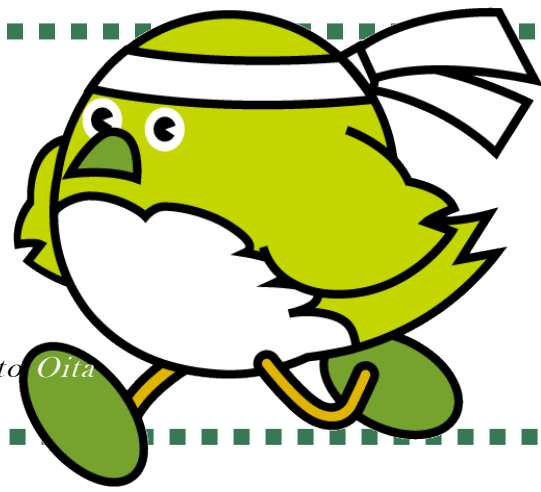


What's up,

OITA! 2019 February No. 33

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



From April this year, new qualification guidelines for residency statuses will apply to industry-ready overseas individuals with predetermined professional skillset. These new measures are enforced in response to the significant shortage in labour in small to medium-sized businesses – we feel that it's become increasingly important to embrace overseas workers with flexibility and to create a multicultural environment within our local regions. Presently, there are around 12,000 overseas individuals residing in the Oita prefecture, a third of whom are exchange students. The Oita prefecture has thus far upheld a positive track record for overseas student-local resident interactions, as such, we think that we should make use of our accumulated experience in preparation for the growing number of overseas residents in our regions.

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MUSIC FESTIVAL Argerich's Meeting Point in Beppu Performed in Rome, Italy



The world-renowned *MUSIC FESTIVAL Argerich's Meeting Point in Beppu* convened in Rome, Italy in December last year.

Receiving the full support from the local Embassy of Japan, the Japan Cultural Institute in Rome, and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, the 20th convention of the festival was a grand success. *(continued on next page)*



(continued from previous page) Interactions between Rome and Oita can be traced back to year 1551 when the feudal lord Otomo Sorin placed the co-founder of the Society of Jesus, Francis Xavier, under his political protection. Following this, the Japanese people came across Western musical performances for the first time ever in Funai (now Oita City), succeeded by Lord Sorin sending forth the Tensho Embassy comprised of four young ambassadors to the then Pope of Rome. In the present day, Oita continues to communicate academically with the Vatican Apostolic Library through the international joint research programme 'Marega Project', a project with a focus on Christianity studies.

Sir Antonio Pappano from the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, music director for the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and a frequent guest of the music festival, shared his thoughts on the 460 years of history and interactions between Oita and Rome while on stage. Sir Pappano's words were received with awed utterances and a warm round of applause from audience members.

In the post-performance reception themed 'An Evening in Oita', around 200 performers and affiliates of the Oita Prefecture turned up and networked late into the evening, forging an ambience befitting for an event as grand and wholesome as the Argerich's Meeting Point in Beppu.

Furthermore, the mini-performances and networking events held at the Japan Cultural Institute in Rome and the Japanese ambassador's residence also received a high degree of media attention. The Oita Prefecture is holding great expectations for its future interactions with Rome.

- Culture and Sports Promotion Office



Image descriptions: Left: Post-performance reception 'An Evening in Oita' . /Right: Special exhibition featuring Oita on display in the Japan Cultural Institute in Rome

Making most of the recent fine weather, I went to the Kijima Kogen Park in Beppu on January 19. Sitting at the foot of two mountains and overlooking spectacular scenery, the Kijima Kogen Park is the largest outdoor ice rink in Kyushu.

The first thing I noticed upon arrival was the highly differing levels of skills among the skaters. While there were beginners who circled around slowly without letting go of the border of rink, there were also those who were spinning mid-air like pros. The only flaw to this fine, sunny day was that the ice melted too quickly. Anyone who fell over was soaked sopping wet in one go – myself included!

Although my muscles cramped the next day, the park is only 40 minutes away from Oita City and offers a unique skating experience right in the middle of mother nature, so I would definitely recommend it!

- Sarah Backley, CIR from the UK



Just a while ago, I made a seasoned steamed rice dish with shiitake mushrooms, carrots, and pork soft bones braised in chilli bean sauce. The shiitake mushroom is a local favourite in the Guangdong Province of south China, and for someone like me who was born there, it's a cooking ingredient that brings nostalgia.

I frequently ate shiitake dishes even after I moved to Australia. The shiitake is distinguished in its fleshy firmness, pleasant fragrance and strong savouriness, and is markedly different in texture and taste to mushrooms commonly used in western cuisine. Since Australians have a fairly different food culture, the shiitake wasn't very popular in the past – finding anything other than dried products was a challenging task. However, people have begun experimenting with the shiitake in recent years, incorporating it in dishes like grilled mushrooms with butter, risotto and many more. I'm expecting to see the shiitake mushroom, an Oita specialty, to make more regular appearances on Australian dinner tables, and the thought alone fills me with endless excitement.

- Xin Lan Xie, CIR from Australia

Monthly staff corner

WINE & HISTORY: VENTURING THE LESSER-EXPLORED SIDES OF OITA PREFECTURE

What's up, OITA! 2019 February, No. 33



*Image description: Distillery production warehouses
in Sanwa Shurui Company, Usa.*

Shortly after entering the city of Usa, the Sanwa Shurui Company emerged into view as the bus crawled up a gentle slope. As someone who appreciates a good drink, I was excited to visit the brewery giant of the Oita prefecture.

When it comes to traditional Japanese alcoholic beverages, explained one of Sanwa Shurui's representatives in their presentation, sunny Kyushu as a whole is better known for its shochu. Local attempts at making sake in the past often ended sourly due to heat and high humidity, but thanks to improvements in technology and modern brewery techniques, Oita too now produces its local sake, an impressive feat considering that the sake-fermenting yeast survives much better in cooler conditions.

What was even more surprising was discovering that Sanwa Shurui has a winery of its own based in Ajimu. When speaking of Oita, the image of mountain ranges and abundant rainfall immediately comes to mind, and the image of wine just doesn't quite register since grapes tend to favour drier climates and flatter terrains. The sight of small vineyards that delicately line the edge of a tall hill lush with vegetation was peculiar at first – having come from Australia, I was more accustomed to expansive fields of grapevines stretching beyond the horizon on arid, flat land. However, the winery has an impressive garden at its heart not to mention that autumn foliage just happened to be on full display. Sampling fruity new wine while gazing at the colours of autumn was certainly a refreshing and enjoyable experience.

After pampering my palate with various beverage samples, I was ready to explore the Oita Prefectural Museum of History that was situated just close by. One of the best places to be introduced to the history and culture of the Oita prefecture, the museum overlooks a spacious park lined with ancient tombs built sometime between the 3rd to 6th century.



Image descriptions: 1. Sanwa Shurui wine distillery interior./ 2. Spacious park littered with ancient tombs outside of the Oita Prefectural Museum of History./ 3. Kote-e depicting a maneki-neko.

The establishment is carefully laid out into various sections, and places much emphasis on the spread of Buddhism and the worship of the Shinto deity Hachiman during a time when Oita was still known as the Bungo Province. Among all the displays, the one that immediately caught my attention was the life-size replica of the Fukiji Temple. While I haven't been to the Fukiji Temple itself, I was told that the in comparison to the shiny paintwork of the museum replica, the colours of the original has long faded with time. This had made only me more curious about the Fukiji Temple, since I was by then just a bit more knowledgeable about Oita's culture. Another display that I found extremely enjoyable was the collection of *kote-e*, or Japanese plaster relief, an art-form that is commonly used to decorate walls and window casings. The Kunisaki Peninsula is littered with *kote-e*, and it is said that adventurous *kote-e* enthusiasts would drive through the winding paths of the mountainous region to spot these pieces of artworks, a hobby that I find quite delightful.

The breweries and the museum are only some of the many things on offer in the region. Like an old, mysterious treasure box, the Kunisaki Peninsula is full of hidden gems waiting to be discovered. With the aftertaste of good wine on my palette and new knowledge on Oita history still fresh in my memory, I boarded the bus and headed back to Oita city.

Words from the editor:

While we have reached the coldest time of the year, there have been sightings of the early-blooming *Kawazu-zakura* cherry blossoms in some corners of the prefecture. I am already anticipating the arrival of Spring, when more common varieties like the *Somei Yoshino* will put on a show as well.

- Xin Lan Xie, CIR from Australia