



What's up, OITA!

Bringing the latest from Oita, Japan to people around the globe!

F.Y.
2022

International Policy Division

To everyone connected to Oita all around the globe, please allow us to introduce ourselves.



Director

**Takanobu
Ogi**

COVID-era border restrictions are now a thing of the past, and international exchange can finally begin again in earnest. We'll do our utmost to learn from how countries overseas have grown so we too can build a better Oita.



Associate
Director
(Head Manager)

**Hiroaki
Ikawa**

Main Responsibilities

- Passport inspection (coordinator)
- HR development in Passport Section



Assistant
Director
(Head Manager)

**Daisuke
Anami**

Main Responsibilities

- Overseas strategy promotion (coordinator)
- HR development in Division



Division
Manager

**Kazuhisa
Namba**

Main Responsibilities

- Overseas strategy promotion
- Supporting foreign workers (support for foreigners living in Oita Prefecture)



Chief
Staff

**Kosuke
Kiyota**

Main Responsibilities

- Employment and start-up business support for international students
- MoU with Wales



Senior
Staff

**Mai
Abe**

Main Responsibilities

- JET Program
- Overseeing CIR activities
- Asia Business Collegium



Senior
Staff

**Miwa
Watanabe**

Main Responsibilities

- Passport inspection and shipment
- Commission of passport work
- Budgeting for the Passport Section



General
Staff

**Kaho
Suto**

Main Responsibilities

- Nihongo Partners
- Promoting exchange with Indonesia
- Budgeting, financing, and audits



General
Staff

**Shiho
Shono**

Main Responsibilities

- International student scholarships
- Hong Kong Fair
- What's Up, Oita!

CIRs

Coordinators
for
International
Relations



Noh Jiyoun



Austin Vaughn



Swara Fife



Yang Jianghua

We've added new members and are doing our best to let Oita know more about the world and the world know more about Oita. We'd love to deepen our ties with everyone. Feel free to contact us!



Governor Hirose Ends His Term Beginning of the Sato Administration

On April 27th, Governor Katsusada Hirose reached the end of his term, closing the curtain on his 20-year administration.

Under the motto of making an "administration for the people," Governor Hirose was dedicated to working for the residents of Oita Prefecture. On his final day at the Prefectural Office, he left with a smile, seen off by many prefectural workers. The next day, on the 28th, Governor Kiichiro Sato arrived at the Prefectural Office for the first time, marking a new beginning for Oita Prefecture. Taking a policy of "creating a comforting, bright future," he will be aiming to even further advance the administration of the prefecture, as well as improve services for residents and promote regional revitalization, with support from the country and local municipalities. His term will last four years, starting from the 28th.




News from Around Oita

Headlines for April, May, and June



- Oita City's Red Brick Avenue Shopping Arcade to be Removed Due to Aging after 45 Years in Operation
- International Cruise Ships Visit Beppu for First Time in 3 Years, Tourism Officials Expect Economic Impact
- Takasaki 70th Anniversary Goes Bananas. Tons of Events, Time Capsule Opening Ceremony
- Hosenji Onsen in Kokonoe Offers Unlimited Weekday Admission for 5,000 Yen per Month at Four Facilities.
- Oita City Introduces "Grandchild Leave" for the First Time in Oita Prefecture. Aims to support Childbirth for Their Children or Their Children's Spouses
- Oita Airport to Resume Flights to Seoul on June 22. First Regular International Flights in 4 years
- "Kunisaki City News Bulletin" wins First Place in 3 Categories in Prefectural PR Contest. Secret to Success: Lots of Pictures and Using Magazines as Reference
- Remains of a Large Structure in the Vicinity of National Historic Site in Nakatsu City, Possibly the Largest County Government Office in Kyushu
- Beppu International Tourist Port Receives Major Increase in Cruise Ship Arrivals. 36 ships Scheduled for This Fiscal Year
- Michael Lynn Completes Mural. Beppu Mixed Bathing Onsen Art Project Vol. 2



Lovely Monkeys from Mt. Takasaki



Kinosato Yamanoyu at Hosenji Onsen



Kusu Pays a Visit to TRA and Changhua



The Bungo Mori Roundhouse in Kusu was opened alongside the completion of the Kyudai Main Line in 1934. It was a large railway roundhouse with room for 21 steam locomotives. Over the years, trains switched to using diesel, and the roundhouse was retired in 1971. Conversely, the Changhua Roundhouse in Taiwan was built in 1922 and is still currently in service, housing 55 train cars. From this "roundhouse connection," Kusu signed a friendship agreement with the Taiwan Railways Administration (TRA) in 2019 and with Changhua City in 2022 to expand their relations.

During the visit, Changhua was celebrating the 300th anniversary of the founding of their city. The visiting party also participated in the festivities, marching in the parade. In front of 30,000 onlookers, they held high a banner reading "Kusu, Japan Visiting Party."



With the relaxing of Taiwan's COVID-19 border restrictions, a visiting party from Kusu, including its mayor, visited Taiwan from February 10, 2023 to February 12, 2023. They paid a visit to the TRA and Changhua City to deepen the bond they had formed.

Changhua's mayor, Lin Shih-shen also stated his intentions of visiting Kusu in the autumn. At Changhua Roundhouse, they viewed the actual operation of the turntable as well as the park surrounding the roundhouse. Using the experience they gained from the visit, Kusu expressed its desire to expand relations through homestay programs for junior high students and online exchange involving the roundhouses. It would be great if everyone reading this could also experience a century of history by visiting Kusu's Bungo-mori Roundhouse and Taiwan's Changhua Roundhouse!





Yufugawa Gorge Packraft Tour



A tour deep into the Yufugawa Gorge using lightweight boats called “packrafts.” The course requires a lot of stamina in order to carry the boat over land and cross massive rocks. But ahead lie many beautiful sights, such as wonderful cliff faces carved by nature.



Light meals from hometown moms
Free ticket for Hasama Onsen-kyo!

“Nolc” Green Slow Mobility

Let’s take a slow “Nolc” through Yufuin!

Nolc is an environmentally-friendly electric vehicle that runs at speeds less than 20 km/h, a method for tourism mobility that picks up people at Yufuin Station and takes them on a tour between Flora House and Unagihime Shrine.

Enjoy the sites of Yufuin!

Contact Yufu City Tourist Information Center for details



Tsukahara Plateau Rental Cycles



Majestic mountains, open fields, quaint buildings, and wonderful shops exist all over the Tsukahara Plateau. The best way to see them? A rental cycle! Not only are there normal one-seaters, but you can also rent a true bicycle built for two: a tandem bike.

Supplies limited, reservations recommended.

Start of Climbing Season for Mt. Yufu

On May 14 (Sun) an *anzen-kigan* (safety prayer) festival will be held at the main trailhead for Mt. Yufu. Mt. Yufu stands at 1,583 meters tall and sits on the border between Yufu City and Beppu City. Also known as “Bungo Fuji,” it has long been worshiped as sacred. Beppu Bay, the Kuju mountains, and Yufuin Basin can all be seen from the summit. All climbers, please take care to avoid any accidents when ascending the mountain and have fun!





photo:Takashi Kuroo

A brick hall, reflective of the architecture at the time it was built. Transit has opened on its first floor.



Top: TRANSIT HQ's unique brick style exterior. The building was designed by Testuro Yoshida, a pioneering architect of modernism in Japan. The only buildings left in Kyushu that Yoshida designed are the Beppu City Public Hall and this building.

Middle/Bottom: Consultation rooms. Moving info, solutions for business problems, local issues, and more. We also provide information for art and cultural events.

The Beppu Creative Information Exchange Headquarters, TRANSIT, has opened!

Creating a Positive Growth Cycle for Reinvigorating the Region

Beppu, in addition to being the nation's number one hot spring hot spot, has also become a hot spot for cultural and creative activity in recent years. The population of creators and artists has been increasing, as their search for a charming base of operations led to Beppu. Of course with its onsen, as well as its billowing steam clouds, quaint historic buildings, and industry using regional resources, it's no wonder they choose to move here. And with every person with prolific creative talent that moves to Beppu, the town's charm shines all the brighter.

TRANSIT not only gathers and releases information on the cultural arts of Beppu City, but also supports creative talent in moving here, introducing their activities, and matching creators with companies to try and find creative solutions to regional and business problems. Through this matching process TRANSIT hopes to connect creativity to the local area and help Beppu become an even more charming and better place to live. Not only that, but by having locals drop by TRANSIT headquarters, TRANSIT can serve as a base for locals to feel the spread of art as part of their daily lives and help with regional revitalization.

[Solving Regional Problems with Art](#)

"I want you to draw a deserted onsen." Using the skills and ideas of artists and creators, TRANSIT can help local companies change their perspective and get solutions for their problems.

[Supporting Creators and Artists](#)

Helping match artists and creators with studios and homes and sharing information that can help with moving to Beppu is yet another way TRANSIT helps the creative community. We're currently searching for properties that can be used in this way. If you have any information on currently available properties, please let us know.

[Cultural Tourism Information](#)

TRANSIT provides face-to-face consulting about art and cultural events happening around Beppu as well as sightseeing information about the surrounding area. We also distribute this information via our website and social media.

TRANSIT

1-3 Suehirocho
Red Brick Hall, 1F
☎ 070-4208-9361
11:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.
(Closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays)



Kimonos in Kitsuki



This month, I visited the historical castle town of Kitsuki, which is situated north of Oita City, about 45 minutes by train. Despite the dodgy weather forecast, the sun was shining - I thought to myself that my choice of clothing - a coat and scarf - was perhaps a little off considering the heat. It is, however, that time of the year where the temperature teeters on the cusp of needing a coat or jacket, and it being too hot for one. No matter, we were to wear kimono today, so the heat pack I had stuck to my lower back would certainly regulate my temperature well. The train chugged along and we hopped off, and then onto a bus right outside Kitsuki Station. Illogically, Kitsuki Station is about a 15 minute bus journey from the main tourist attraction in Kitsuki: the castle town with its famous slope. This is a point to bear in mind when travelling to Kitsuki. We made a beeline to the kimono rental shop where I had made a prior reservation. The shop was bustling, and we were greeted by the staff there, who went on to explain the process.

Choosing our kimonos was tough! I wanted to go for a pattern and colours reminiscent of spring, however for the ladies, there was too much choice, and it took us a while to select the perfect garment. So many kimonos had a lovely pattern, but in a dull or uninspiring colour, or were the perfect colour, but with a boring or unseasonal pattern. As well as this, some looked like they could be perfect, but when I held it up to myself in the mirror, it just did not seem quite right. I eventually settled on a light blue kimono with some spring-like flower patterns; it was lovely! My decision-making skills were being tried and tested, as I had to select an obi next. After flicking through the many options, I settled on a hot pink obi that had a pastel pink inside. I was dressed in almost no time - the shop lady's practised hands moving at double pace as she layered me up. Finally, I chose my hair accessory - an orange flower that I clipped behind my ear. I matched this with a pale orange bag and off we went!

Taking dolly steps in our *geta*, we shuffled around the castle town and towards the famous slope where everyone likes to take pictures. We shuffled up the slope to the right and checked out a couple of little museum-cum-exhibition rooms. Strolling through a lovely cobbled stone pathway strewn with deep pink flowers that had fallen from the canopy of trees above, we snapped some pictures and headed towards the viewpoint. The view from here was spectacular and provided another excellent photo spot. From there, we had a little snack as we gazed over the vast expanse of sea and over towards Kitsuki Castle and the old samurai town. After checking out a few other old rooms - I recommend going in kimono, as you can enter these for free if you do - we headed towards our *wagashi*-making experience booked for one o'clock.

Swara Fife

Coordinator for
International
Relations





When booking this experience, I had expected it to take place in a traditional Japanese room, perhaps with tatami and a low table, the walls decorated with motifs of flowers, and a small *ikebana* arrangement tucked into the corner. However reality was a little different. We stepped into a small *mocha* store I had actually been to before. After confirming our booking, we were led by the shopkeeper out back behind the till to what I assumed would be this lovely room I had imagined in my head. What we stepped into, however, was an industrial kitchen that did not at all match the aesthetics of the day. The *wagashi* teacher handed us some white aprons we stretched over our kimono, and we were led to a table lined with *mocha* and *anko*. I shook the shock off and focussed on the experience ahead - it was bound to be fun after all! Our teacher provided us with the raw materials of pre-made coloured *mochi* and *anko*, and went about showing us how to create a lovely spring flower from these two ingredients. We first had to wet our hands a little before flattening a ball of *mocha* and rounding it out into a bowl shape. Next, we placed the ball of *anko* within this bowl shaped *mochi* and covered the ball by stretching the mocha over and sealing it with a pinch.

After getting stuck in, it was a relaxing process that left me fully focussed. We created three different *wagashi* of different flowers. The first was a simple cherry blossom pattern pressed into the top using a flat wooden palette. The second was a little trickier, and involved wrapping the *wagashi* in cling-film and squeezing it to create a textured effect. We then pressed the palette down the middle to finish the peach shape. Finally, we created a *nanohana wagashi*. The *mochi* was pushed through a sieve to create worm-like strands that we then attached to our *mochi* covered *anko* using chopsticks. We finished this off with a yellow sprig of *mochi* on the top. Last but not least, we tried our hands at making *sakura mocha*, which is apparently a spring specialty in Japan. It is infused with cherry blossom flavour and wrapped in a picked cherry blossom leaf. The overall pink theme was so pretty and definitely matched my kimono! Although the experience was somewhat different from what we expected it to be, it was immensely enjoyable, and I brought my *wagashi* along to a cherry blossom viewing party I went to the following weekend - it was lovely to enjoy the sweet flavours of spring with everyone!



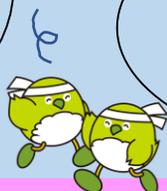
Wagashi-making

experience

9:00-15:30

~60 minutes

¥ 2,000

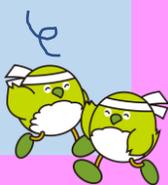


Kimono Rental

10:00-14:00

(return by 16:00)

¥ 3,000



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Swara Fife

Coordinator for
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Cherry Blossom Viewing Party

This spring, I attended a cherry blossom viewing party at a Japanese friend's house. Unfortunately, it was raining, so we had to hold the party inside. In fact, the rain had continued throughout the previous week, so the cherry blossom forecast had been pushed back despite our careful planning. In spite of this, we were still able to see the beautiful cherry blossom trees through the windows from inside. We prepared the food together - it was my first time making sushi the traditional way and I really enjoyed it. I helped season the rice, using a fan to make it 'glisten' as my friend put it, and rolled a breakfast-style roll using *tamagoyaki* and ham - it was delicious! We ate the sushi together and made our own hand rolls with the array of ingredients we had prepared beforehand, and chatted and laughed the afternoon away. Finally, we enjoyed some cherry blossom tea and finished the party off with some dessert, which included apple cake, fruit jelly, and the *wagashi* I had made during my time in Kitsuki. It was a lovely afternoon with some lovely friends.

RC-XD, Ready for Deployment!

Has anyone ever heard of CoD before? If you're thinking of the fish, you're wrong. CoD (pronounced like the fish) stands for "Call of Duty," a famous series of first person shooter (FPS) games. If you're a young, American guy, you were almost definitely into it in junior high. And I was no exception. In 8th grade, I got the limited edition of "Call of Duty: Black Ops" for Christmas. As for why I asked for the limited edition, that's because there was a real RC-XD inside. The RC-XD was a RC car bomb that appeared in Black Ops. It had a camera attached to it like a drone, so you could control it even when you couldn't see the car. It was one of my favorite toys when I was a kid. Sometimes, I would chase our cat or have our cat chase the car. But rest assured, there are no explosives inside the real RC-XD.

Austin Vaughn

Coordinator for
International
Relations





A Sweet Taste of Spring



With the changing of the seasons, I always feel like making a change in my everyday life as well. So, instead of the main 'tourist' attractions of Oita Prefecture, I veered off the beaten track to Bungo Mori, deep in the countryside of Oita. In the countryside areas of the prefecture, the trains are sporadic at best, however I managed to hop on an express at the fresh time of 8:20am and headed on my merry way. The train passed through some beautiful mountainscapes via Yufuin and Yunohira stations; I had originally planned to make a stop at the latter, however the main hot spring drag is a taxi drive away with no public transport. No matter - onwards I travelled towards Bungo Mori Station. All-in-all, it took around an hour and a half. I had three stops on my schedule today - Bungo Mori Roundhouse, its museum, and strawberry picking at a nearby farm.

Bungo Mori Roundhouse is right next to the quaint station. Being situated right in the middle of the JR Kyudai Line, it was originally established as a supply house for coal and water for the steam locomotives that ran through. It also provided a means by which the trains could change direction to a different line with a turntable that still remains to this day. After the era of the steam locomotives ended, there was no longer a use for Bungo Mori's Roundhouse, and it fell into disrepair. Volunteers have recently helped to restore it, however, and a museum now sits next to it, offering an insight to the history of the roundhouse. I wound my way around Bungo Mori Station and past the level crossing over towards the roundhouse. It was a gorgeous day: the sun shone down from a blue sky spotted with small, puffy clouds, and the mountains stood tall and proud on the horizon.

Swara Fife

Coordinator for
International
Relations



The reason I had chosen to visit Bungo Mori's Roundhouse was not because I am a train fanatic, it is actually because of it has recently served as inspiration for an anime blockbuster in Japan. One of the first scenes of Makoto Shinkai's *Suzume no Tojimari*, or simply *Suzume* in the English language release, features the main character, Suzume, wandering up to an abandoned area near her hometown; this abandoned area is inspired by the roundhouse at Bungo Mori. In fact, scenes of Suzume's hometown are all inspired by different areas of Kyushu, with a focus on Miyazaki and Oita Prefectures. In this scene, Suzume enters an area thick with the weight of memories gone by, and is shown surrounded by a circular structure reminiscent of the roundhouse that had fallen into disrepair over many years. The scenery of the real roundhouse matches the atmosphere in the movie perfectly: the peaceful and lush country backdrop paired with the echoes of the past evoked by the roundhouse, with its jagged, smashed windows and abandoned relics rotting inside the structure. It is a place you can almost feel the history buzzing in the atmosphere itself. An old steam locomotive remains in the centre of the half-moon shaped roundhouse, standing imposingly, silently conveying the story of its past. This is where the door that Suzume opened in the movie stands. I like to think of the locomotive as a door too, not to another dimension, but to the past. In the same way, Suzume ends up comforting her younger self in this alternate dimension she strayed into as a child, thereby herself travelling to the past through this door.



The museum was quaint and the staff there were so friendly. It was small with only two rooms, but was well-kept, displaying the hundred-year history of the roundhouse in panels with pictures of its original structure. Alongside this room, there was a rest room with further information about the various trains that pass through Bungo Mori Station with illustrations by a local artist. Small train models made by local children were propped near the window to complement these as well as little models of all the signs of the stations of Oita Prefecture. It was a lovely collection. The souvenirs were also very sweet, and included a wide range of logo-printed bags and pins, etc., and printed train illustrations.



I left the serene bubble of the roundhouse, passed the level crossing once again, and wound my way back around past the station towards the strawberry picking farm. This was a half hour walk away and took me through a lovely partially covered arcade with sleepy shops, half of them only just opening their shutters for the day. I then crossed a bridge that offered a stunning view of the river and mountains, which rose tall and curved elegantly into the foreground. Past this point, I was on country roads. These were sleepy and peaceful, offering me renewed energy from the monotony of everyday life. I finally reached Higuma Strawberry Farm and got started picking. The staff were very friendly, as is often the case in the countryside, and explained everything to me: it was a 40 minute all-you-can-eat strawberry picking experience. This was a little odd to me as I am accustomed to the UK,

where you cannot eat while you pick - instead, you have to take what you pick home and you just pay for what you have picked. There is no set fee. However, as strawberries and fruit in general are expensive in Japan, I made the most of the experience, eating close to my weight in strawberries! I must confess I felt a little ill afterwards, but they were tasty and the vitamin C intake made it worth it. In the UK, strawberries are a summer fruit, and although you can purchase them in the winter, they are usually less sweet and more expensive. Perhaps that is why I still preferred UK-grown strawberries - they are sweeter, at least in the summer, generally bigger, and juicier too. All-in-all, it was a lovely experience, which I topped off with a strawberry ice-cream at the farm's own Café Fraise before heading back for the day.

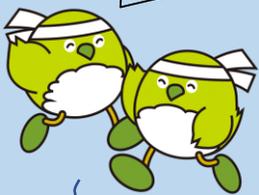


Strawberry picking @Higuma Strawberry Farm

Price: ¥1000-¥1600 for 40
minutes all-you-can pick/eat

Period: End of January to
beginning of June

Opening times: 10:00-16:00



Bungo Mori Roundhouse Museum

Entry fee: ¥100

Opening times:
10:00-16:00



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Swara Fife

Coordinator for
International
Relations



Spring has Sprung!

The cherry blossom season has already ended, however the impressions its beauty left on me still remain engrained in my mind: the fluttering of the pastel pink petals in the breeze, soft but striking against the blue of the sky. As it was my last cherry blossom viewing in Japan for the foreseeable future, I felt as if I took it all in deeply and enjoyed it all the more. For this reason, I am once again writing about the blossoms. I had dropped by my pace after work to freshen up and change into a suitable outfit to match the blossoms. During those moments walking around and about the long stretch of cherry blossom trees in Heiwa Shimin Park, a soft pink and a warm breeze were all I felt. This year, the cherry blossoms were late blooming, so the blossoms were not yet in full bloom. Despite this, the cherry blossoms weighed heavily on the branches of their trees, voluptuous and bold. Taking a deep breath, I felt myself connect with the nature surrounding me, instantly refreshing my body and soul. We silently watched the flapping of the colourful fish-shaped kites that had been hung over the river for Children's Day as the sun slowly began to inch below the horizon.

“Purikura” Aren't Really All that “Pu-retty” ...

Until recently, I had no idea what “purikura” was an abbreviation of. I just thought that it meant “Pretty *Something*” like how “PuriCure” stands for “Pretty Cure.” So when I heard it stood for “print club,” I was pretty surprised. After all, “print club” isn't real English to begin with. “Purikura” in English are known as “photo booths” and honestly are an entirely different experience all together. Purikura have a kind of cute image and are mostly done by high school girls, but America's photo booths let you take cool pictures and cute pictures. Also, the fact they don't make your eyes look like an anime character is a plus. If a guy does purikura, it ends up more “scary” than “cute.” I managed to save myself in the picture to the right, but my poor friends...

Austin Vaughn

Coordinator for
International
Relations



Himeshima Chestnut Tigers



Before the onset of the rainy season, I headed to Himeshima to witness the much-awaited migration of the Chestnut Tiger butterflies that come to and from the island twice a year: once in the spring, and a second time in the autumn. Although the journey was lengthy, taking a good few hours from Oita City to actually arrive on the island itself (let alone the area where the butterflies are most numerous), it was well worth it. The ferry ride over was relaxing and offered picturesque views towards the island and of mountainscapes on the horizon. Arriving on the island, I was struck with how quaint it was, and how community-centred the way of life there must be considering how cut off it is from the mainland.

After disembarking, we followed the crowd to a bus stop, where a mini bus was waiting to take us all to see the butterflies: tourism apparently spikes when the butterflies are migrating and when Himeshima holds its *Bon Odori* in August. Apart from that, the island is apparently relatively quiet, which is, I'm sure, how the residents like it. The mini bus rolled us up to a bus stop about a five minute drive away. Inhaling the slightly salty sea air, I made my way over to the grassy knoll where the Chestnut Tigers were waiting; I could see them flitting in the distance, skimming the grass, which flicked and rolled in the sea breeze.

The Chestnut Tigers were gorgeous. They were coloured a sky-blue with a soft chestnut brown accent around the edges of their wings. Though I attempted to take pictures, they were too fast, and my pictures have indeed failed to capture their fleeting, but nonetheless dazzling beauty. I took many more pictures than I have displayed here, however these are the best. Though the Chestnut Tigers' delicate and vibrant wings popped with colour against the long blades of grass, they looked their best against the gentle rolling sea. Almost half an hour passed before I even knew it, and it was time to move on to the next part of the tour. The ephemeral beauty of the butterflies surpassed my expectations and refreshed my soul - I highly recommend a pilgrimage to Himeshima - even if it is just to see these deep blue Chestnut Tigers.

Swara Fife

Coordinator for
International
Relations





Austin Vaughn



The Seven Wonders of Himeshima

When I was a kid, I played a game called “Kingdom Hearts II.” I remember spending hours just playing the tutorial section. In that tutorial, there was a part where you had to find the “seven wonders” of the town you were in. I always thought those mysterious wonders were so cool, and I wished that something like them had existed in my town. So color me surprised when I found out that those kinds of “wonders” were an actual thing in Japan. And not only that, but the only village in Oita prides itself on having seven of them.

Himeshima itself has interested me almost as long as I’ve been here in Oita. A small remote island, far from civilization, but is building up its IT industry and has a fast internet connection? Where do I sign up? Putting my lack of social skills aside, I’ve been wanting to at least visit Himeshima for quite a while. But getting there without a car is quite the trip, requiring almost every form of public transportation there is. Except planes, luckily. You need to take a train to Usa, then a bus (that only runs a few times a day) to a very remote port, and finally take a ferry to the island. Not for the faint of heart, but it’s all about the journey, not the destination...

Is what I would say, except the destination is also amazing. Once you’ve actually arrived at the island, you’ll be surprised at how **not** remote it feels. It’s not the most hustle-and-bustle place, but a lot of buildings are new, and it genuinely feels like a normal small town. It even has a stop light. (Just the one though.)

Our first stop after arriving on Himeshima was to go see the Chestnut Tiger butterflies, but to learn more about that, you can take a look at the lovely page preceding this one. It does much more justice to the butterflies than I ever could. As for what happened after we saw the pretty butterflies, we took a tour of the island as guided by a pair of locals. Our guides were very kind, and took great effort to explain the legends behind the island and wonders, as well as other little facts about Himeshima. If you couldn’t tell already, Himeshima is a bit of a strange island. For such a small place, there is quite a lot to tell. There were stories about Korea, a stone, a princess, giant snakes, teeth blackening, upside-down trees, a weird proposal, and wheel shrimp. (Okay, there’s no story for the last one. It’s circular shrimp.)

[Himeshima Homepage](#)



[Himeshima Eco Tourism Rental Car: ¥2,000 and up](#)
[Tour Guide \(by phone only\): ¥1,000-¥2,500/person](#)





Princess Island (Himeshima)

Who is the princess of princess island? According to the *Nihon Shoki*, the second-oldest book of Japanese history, there was once a prince in Korea who brought an ox to a village in the countryside. All of a sudden, the ox went missing, and he heard from an old man that the lord of the village had killed and ate the ox, but was willing to offer something in return. The old man told the prince to not ask for riches, but for the god the village worshipped. The prince visited the lord and did as he was told. In return for his ox, he received a white stone. When the prince returned to his home, he laid the stone in his bedroom. When he did, it turned into a beautiful princess. The prince was thrilled and immediately tried to wed the princess. But when he left her for just a moment, she vanished. Not wanting to marry the prince, she had head west, to Japan.

There, she eventually returned to stone and became the patron deity of two shrines, one in Namba (Osaka), and one on Himeshima. Not just the name of Himeshima, but also many of its seven wonders are connected to this legend. One of the wonders, *Sakasa-yanagi* (upside-down willow) was said to form when the princess planted a branch of a willow in the dirt upside-down, making it rise instead of weep. The princess is also said to have placed her brush and cup of metal she used to blacken her teeth (a very common practice in Japan at the time) at another wonder, *Kanetsuke-ishi* (teeth blackening rock), where indentations can be found in a stone for both. However, our tour guide told us of another possible explanation for those indentations. It was the princess's original name, as it could be read as the Korean character, 0| (read like the letter 'e'). It's said the princess then tried to wash her mouth after painting her teeth, but could not find water. She then clapped and formed the cool spring, *Hyoushi-mizu* (clap water). While not a wonder, you can also find the princess herself at the shrine where she's worshipped. As a white stone, of course. The remaining four wonders have their own legends behind them.

Ukisu (floating shoal) is a *torii* on a sandbar, but never gets wet from the tide. Under *Ukita* (floating paddy) lives a giant snake, which gets angry and shakes the ground if you jump. Unfortunately, we didn't see the oysters of *Amida-gaki* as it was off the coast, but our last wonder was truly amazing. *Sennin-dou* (thousand people hall), a tiny building where a thousand people took refuge from debt collectors. If only I could do the same with my student loans.



from our Reporters 国際交流員だより



Swara Fife

Coordinator for
International
Relations



Joyfully Lost in Purple Haze

Every year during Golden Week, the wisteria reach their full bloom across Japan. You're your timing is fortuitous, you will be able to immerse yourself in a sea of cascading deep purple strands, however, this is tricky to time well due to the ephemeral nature of flowers. In fact, when I visited Usa City to see the wisteria last year, the flowers had all but fallen; I was too late.

However, this year was different. This year my mother in Oita invited me to try on her family *kimono* and see the wisteria with her. Perhaps it is because a mother always knows best, but the flower viewing was timed perfectly. I donned her beautiful sky-blue silken *kimono* complete with a vibrant orange *obi*, and plunged into the cascading purple rain of Sasamuta Shrine. The blossoms were spectacular and oh so delicate; a feast for my eyes and senses as I got joyfully lost in purple haze.

What Do You Want to Be?

Recently, there have been some things happening in my life that have really made me think about my future. What kind of job I want, where I want to live, what kind of people I want to interact with, how I should deal with those people... Basically, "what" do I want to be? Putting aside philosophy, I'm thinking of starting by deciding what kind of work I want to do. I've always thought that there were two real paths for me to take. IT or translation. And with the IT experience I got in America and the experience I've had as a CIR in Oita, I think I've finally decided which path I want to take. I'm going to go back to the IT industry. But I still want to live in Japan. I haven't decided when I'm going back, but for now, I'm going to be studying for the "IT Passport" national exam so that I can review IT while improving my Japanese.

Austin Vaughn

Coordinator for
International
Relations

