



# What's up, OITA!

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

## 《 Interview with Tadayuki Yakushiji Oita Kenjinkai International 》



**Tadayuki Yakushiji**

Nakatsu Native, Resides in Tokyo  
Director of Wellnest Clinic

Oita Kenjinkai International began in 2011 as a way to connect those with Oitan roots throughout the world via Facebook and other social media.

We spoke with its spokesperson, Tadayuki Yakushiji about the organization.

### Q1. What made you create the Kenjinkai?

In 2010, I was in the midst of a two year study abroad program in New York. But while there was an association for those from Kyushu to gather together, there was nothing for Oitans. So I took it upon myself to contact the Oita Kenjinkai in Kyoto/Osaka, the Oita Prefectural Office, Sanwa Shurui, and other organizations to create a home away from home for Oitans.

After that, people from all over kept joining the Facebook group. So what started as the "New York Oita Kenjinkai" became "Oita Kenjinkai International." Oitans from all over the world have joined, and we currently (as of January 28, 2024) have 1369 members.

### Q2. What kinds of activities has Kenjinkai International held?

Things died down a bit during the pandemic, but we mainly have welcome parties for those returning to Oita, or welcome and guide those who have gone abroad after leaving Japan.

### Q3. What's in store for the future?

1. Making the group active again
2. Visiting Oita Kenjinkai around the globe
3. Supporting Oita's pro sports teams in their overseas excursions. (Exchange between Oitans abroad and Oitans visiting from Japan)

Oita Kenjinkai International  
<https://www.oitakenjinkai.org/>



Oita Kenjinkai Facebook  
<https://www.facebook.com/Oita.Kenjinkai.International/>



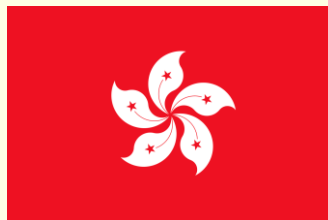
## Oita Kenjinkai International

おおいたをキーワードに世界中に広がるネットワーク



Now Posting!  
Please take a look!

# Winsom Au, Principal Representative of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (Tokyo), Pays Visit to Governor



On February 26, Winsome Au, Principal Representative of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (Tokyo) visited Oita Prefecture and paid a courtesy call to the Governor. Oita Prefecture welcomes many visitors from Hong Kong each year and exports a large volume of regional products to the region. Miss Au and the Governor touched on this while they conversed on working to continue exchange between the regions and how to develop it further.

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office is an organization managed by the Government of the Hong Kong SAR of the People's Republic of China located in Tokyo. They promote economic activity and trade, and serve as a liaison for Japanese people interested in Hong Kong. They provide information, support visits, and promote investment in the region, among other duties.

## ○ Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office

Website: <https://www.hketotyo.gov.hk/japan/en/>  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/hketo.tokyo/>  
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## What's Up in Oita? 国際交流員だより

### ◆ I Arrange Flowers Now. Flowers are Cool.

American CIR Austin Vaughn

The other day at Horuto Hall, I tried flower arrangement (Ikebana) for the first time.

I went with my girlfriend, who loves Ikebana and has been showing me the amazing things she's created, so I was really looking forward to it. I had heard that Ikebana had a lot of rules and traditions that you absolutely had to follow, so I was a little nervous, but this time's event was one made for everyone to enjoy, so we had a lot of freedom. We picked the flowers we liked, arranged them how we liked, and were able to have a relaxing time while the instructor gave us gentle advice. I don't really have the talent for flowers, but if I get the chance, one day I think I want to try the real thing.





## Usa City Tourism Advisor Chang Chun-Sheng

Hello everyone, I'm Chang, a Tourism Advisor for Usa City. I'm from Taiwan, and I've been living in Usa for about four years.

The weather's slowly getting warmer, and you can feel spring just around the corner. Of all the seasons, my favorite by far is spring. Not just because of the enchanting cherry blossoms, but also because I can enjoy one of my favorite fruits, strawberries. Today, I would like to tell everyone the best spot for flower viewing, and a secret place perfect for gathering strawberries.

### The Best Sakura Spot! Sakurazutsumi Park



You need to visit this spot. On both sides of the path lie sakura trees, and when they bloom, what awaits you is a beautiful "sakura tunnel," perfect for your Instagram. Not only that, you can lay back at one of its many grassy areas, go for a bike ride on the cycling road, or pay a visit to a pet-friendly café. Relax to your heart's content.

Location: Biyuu/Nakaharu, Usa City

### Cheap and Tasty!? Act Strawberry Farm Stand



Usa's "Act Strawberry Farm" is famous for strawberry picking, but did you know there's actually two unmanned stands where you can buy strawberries? Not only can you get tons of great, fresh strawberries at a reasonable price, they also sometimes sell tomatoes and vegetables. If you're thinking "I love strawberries, but going picking is a bit..." then be sure to give these stands a try.

Strawberry picking season runs from the end of January to the beginning of May every year. The stands' hours can vary depending on the harvest.

Those interested can check out Act Strawberry Farm's official Instagram!

Stand Hours: Monday-Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM

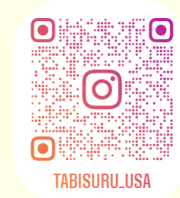
○Stand Locations○

①Tomato Farm Stand 1: Minamiusa 1917, Usa City

②Tomato Farm Stand 2: Ueda 2111-1, Usa City (in the parking lot of Gengendo Holdings)

In addition to what I've mentioned here, there are tons of beautiful sightseeing spots and stores selling great local products in Usa.

We'll be posting a lot more on our official Instagram, "Tabisuru Usa," so please give us a follow!







Austin Vaughn

## Introduction

**Hello Declan, thanks for joining me today. Could I ask you for a brief self-introduction?**

My name is Declan Michael Cassidy. I'm from New York, and I've been in Oita for about a year and a half now. I'm an elementary school ALT at Kasugamachi, Tsurusaki, and Higashiwasada Shougakkou.

**When you first learned you were going to an elementary school, what did you think?**

I think I can speak for most people on the JET Program when I say, most of us had dreams of high school. Elementary schoolers are great. They're wonderful, beautiful people that I love dearly. Playing with them at lunch is one of the few things that keeps me going every day. But... Kids can be monsters, lovable monsters. They rarely get on my nerves and I have very little problem with most of them. But sometimes, they'll just run up and punch you in the crotch, or you have to be careful not to ram them into a wall with how they hang off of you.

**My little brother and cousin are the same way. Loved playing with them, but they'd always go crazy.**

Kids are lovable. Playing with them is very fun. But teaching them is a mixed bag.

## Teaching

**Do you usually teach the lower classes in elementary or the higher ones?**

I think we're mandated to get double the time with fifth and sixth graders than third and fourth, and then I only occasionally get first and second graders.

**How do you feel about that?**

I prefer it. I think fifth and sixth grade are more interesting just because it's more complex. I feel like I have to do more. Especially with sixth graders, they're finally at an age where I feel like you can talk to them and actually teach them things. Or at least, they can get close to understanding actual English.

**You've got a point there. After all, they've memorized almost all the joyo kanji at that point, right? They're probably more cultured than most American sixth graders to be honest. Speaking of, how do you think they compare?**

Good question. I think the language barrier is a

bit of a problem in determining that, but I do feel like they might be more mature in some ways, while less mature in others. But the problem there is that most of my interaction with American sixth graders, was as a sixth grader myself.

**So you can't see from the eyes of an adult what an American sixth grader is like?**

Right, I thought we were all just normal. We were all the same, but now I see sixth graders specifically as children. At the very least, they seem very well behaved, but is that just stereotyping Japanese people as being "well-behaved" compared to Americans? I'm not really sure.

**From things I've heard, kids really do mellow out quite a bit here by junior high, whereas I knew some crazy kids back then in America. Hard to say for sure.**

There are the occasional kids who call the teacher *baba* (old lady) or something, but they are mostly mellow by sixth grade and more receptive to learning.

**How do you teach the lower grades?**

It's mostly just going over words, very basic phrases. No real grammar, since that starts with fifth grade. So it's hard to teach them what a phrase really "means." It's more like, "It's a cat!" "It's a fruit!" "It's an apple!" They don't usually remember the articles. The main teacher works with me though, and sometimes we can get something done. We do play board games and have a lot of pair work, which is good. Getting the kids to speak English during pair work is a different problem entirely. But we do what we can. With fifth and sixth grade, they're a bit more mature and advanced, so we can teach a little bit more grammar, but it's never explicit.



### Mind expanding on that?

So, we'll teach them phrases, but the textbook will never explicitly explain anything. It's on me to specify that "We need past tense here," or "This, we need to use plural." You can't say "Eagle eat frog," but you can say, "Eagles eat frogs." The textbook hints at this with various different examples, but it's up to the ALT if they want the kid to properly say a correct English sentence.

### Do you think teaching the fifth and sixth graders accurate English is more important, or just that they have the ability to convey themselves?

I think at this age, being able to say something is the most important part. But I also don't think anything is wrong with correcting them. We should encourage them to say what they can and when they can. It's good to convey thoughts. But if we surround them with as much proper English as possible, there's a better chance they'll naturally acquire the correct way to phrase things. I don't think any native English speaker can explain how to use "a" or "the." You're just surrounded by enough of it that eventually you pick it up. I think we should create a similar environment for Japanese students. Sure, they can say "Eagle eat frog," but it's on us to correct them. Even if they don't know why it's more correct, they know that it is correct. And maybe that will leave a lasting impression.

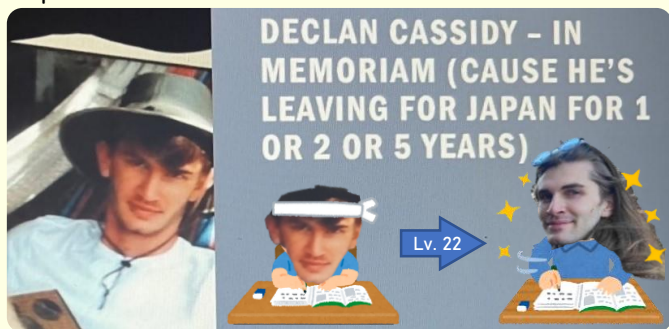
### Yeah, it's best to get that knowledge in before their brains harden and they just can't understand the difference anymore without loads of study.

Right, these kids have a great opportunity to learn English at a young age and get really good at it, but the kids just don't have the motivation yet for it. So they're going to kick themselves later in life when they're like, "I should have learned English when I was six." Well, to be honest I would prefer if all that "brain hardening" stuff was nonsense so that I still have hope for my Japanese.

## Language

### Personally, I think your Japanese is pretty dang good though, you have N2 and know some very complicated words and kanji. What do you do for language study?

Language study... I don't know, I try to read books in Japanese when I can. It keeps my mind active, and I think reading is fun. What's the point in using the language if you're not going to appreciate it at a finer level? If you're going to read Japanese, why not read good Japanese?



### What do you define as good Japanese?

That's a good question. Part of me is just being pedantic, but I'd say, I like stories like this one I'm reading, *Daihitsuya* by Hitonari Tsuji. I've been thinking about this myself. I'm not sure if this is unique to Japanese, good stories are something you can find anywhere. But I appreciate how this specific collection of stories is very in media res, it's in the middle of things. Sometimes there's a conclusion, but half the time with these stories, the person has a problem, they go to the daihitsuya, the ghostwriter, tell him about the problem, he'll write a letter, and sometimes, it just ends with that. You don't know what happens afterwards, you're just left with this open-endedness.

I think there's something very—haunting, beautiful about that. You don't know what happened, you're only given this very brief snapshot into the lives of these two people. You only get the limited perspective from one guy who only hears one side of it, and sometimes you don't even get build-up. You just get the letter and you're like, what on earth is going on?

### You like putting that together?

I like putting it together. I like how it takes you on very different journeys. I think stuff about human relations is fun. It's also fun just being at a point that I can read about this stuff in Japanese, make it out and appreciate it. It sounds very different from Japanese I hear on a daily basis, and I like to think it's a somewhat pretty language. Maybe I'm a fool, but my gut's telling me there's more to this Japanese than what I hear in a daily conversation.

### I'd say beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Some people might find conversational Japanese beautiful, while others might think that written Japanese is absolutely wonderful. But I see where you're coming from, because I like reading books too.

Reading books is fun. I'm sort of wrestling with myself, why I feel like I appreciate this more than other things.

### I think I have a similar feeling. I almost never read in English anymore, it's almost always something from a Japanese creator in Japanese. Do you still read books in English?

Not as much as I used to. I kind of want to go back to it a bit. I feel like I'm missing something. Honestly, I feel like your English ability goes down the longer you stay in Japan. You only talk to people who are only in Japan, you're not getting any new material to work with. God knows, we're not going to understand any slang when we go home. I do wonder if my vocabulary gets worse here.

### I get the same thing, every once in a while I'm speaking English, a Japanese word comes out and I'm like, "Crap, what was the English for that?"

In some ways that's a bad problem to have, but in some ways it's an enviable problem, to have reached that point. Maybe one day, I'll get there...

# 勉強中です





**Well, from the beginning, your kanji was already better than mine.**

Maybe. I feel like you know different kanji than I do. But I mean, speaking-wise, it's still a long, long, long way to go. Making good use of what I know. That's something I struggle with a bit. I think it's very easy to get trapped in the foreigner bubble in Japan, where all you do is spend time with foreigners.

**Is that something you have a problem with?**

I guess being split across three schools, it's hard to really form relationships with the teachers at school, and feel comfortable talking with them. And if they want to talk to me, they usually think it's better to do so in English, so I really have very few areas to truly better my Japanese. And trying to break that is difficult. I keep telling myself I'm going to do it somehow. I'm still trying. I don't think I'm there yet.

**But you're trying, and you do have a few Japanese friends already that speak Japanese with you.**

Yeah, I do. And they do try to speak more Japanese with me than English. Maybe it's compassion, or maybe they're just tired, but either way it's a win. But I just feel recently, my heart has not really been in it for some reason. The energy to study as much as I have has disappeared.

**It's fine to take a break sometimes, I think. You have your whole life to learn Japanese.**

Yes, but I'm 23, that basically means I'm 50.

**You're 50?**

According to millennials, I'm already past middle age. I have three or four more good years left. God forbid I turn 26 soon. I hate to think about that.

**...Hey! (I'm 26)**

Or worse, 30.

**I should tell Alex. (He's 30)**

**\*See "What's Up, Oita!" Jan 2024**  
What's he going to do?

**He'll go super and beat your butt.**

He wouldn't be able to go blond.

**I'm getting this in the article.**

Then get it on the record that Alex is a good guy too.

**You're right, Alex is a good guy.**

**But getting back on subject, spoken Japanese is just something you learn with life experience. Like, for the most part, you're reading books, right?**  
Right.

**It was the same for me. I couldn't speak Japanese until I was in an office where I could do nothing but speak Japanese and listen to Japanese.**

I want to speak more, it's just hard to find.

I do have a few friends to speak to in Japanese, but it's usually not when I'm in the "mindset" to want to speak Japanese. I'm exhausted, and whenever I have the time to speak Japanese, it's always precisely when I don't want to. It's a vicious cycle.

**I feel you there. Japanese can get tiring sometimes, but it is what it is.**

It is what it is.

*Life*

**How are you enjoying it in Japan in general though?**

I'm enjoying for the most part. Oita is a very easy place to live. There's lots to do, everything is nearby. Lots of good places to eat, usually bars and stuff to meet somewhat interesting people. JETs are nearby, so if you want to speak English, well, like I said before that's almost a problem how easy it is.

**So you're more of a city boy then?**

Living in a city is very nice. I'm from New York; I couldn't do the *inaka* (countryside). But there are certain things that I just can't...

**You just can't get here?**

You can't get here. I mean, it's always funny when you see like people and they say, "Once you study abroad, you realize how much you love your food at home." Usually, that's people who have come to America to study and miss the food from their home country, but now I'm in the opposite situation and I'm just like, "Oh, you think your Japanese cuisine is so good? Show me some —ing good pizza. Show me something with some decent spice."

**I would kill for some decent pizza right now.**

I mean, maybe what I'm missing isn't exactly "good" food, but by god—it's my food. It's American culture, right there.



### How about the people side of things?

There is a bit of a struggle. I don't know if my language ability is at a point yet where I can have deep conversations with people, so it feels difficult to make Japanese friends. Or find the interesting people I would like to be friends with. I don't know if—is that a problem with my language ability? Am I just looking in the wrong place? So living here is not bad, but again, there does seem to be some sort of isolation. Even sometimes among JETs, I'm like, "I appreciate our company, but I don't think I've reached the point where I will die for you. I will go to the end of the world for you."

### I get what you mean, it's like, something more than friends—it's...

Compatriots?

### Comrades?

Comrades...

### Nakama.

That's it. It's hard to find nakama. That's just an adult problem, but here...

### You've got the language barrier, and the culture barrier.

And the work barrier too. Sometimes it's hard to feel like you belong. And if you can't make friends at your workplace...then I'm at a loss.

### Do you try to get involved with the community or culture in other ways then?

I do enjoy going to shrines and temples and getting my *goshuincho* (stamp book) filled out.



### Are there any you particularly like?

I got some nice ones for the New Year. Honestly, I forget which ones are which sometimes, but it's fun to have this collection of things, that even if I forget where exactly they're from, I have the physical proof that I went there.

### Have you participated in any of the three big cultural activities, like *shodo* (calligraphy), *ikebana* (flower arrangement), or *sado* (tea ceremony)?

I haven't gotten involved in any of them really. Like, I practice kanji. It might be fun to get involved with those, but I just don't really know how.

Hearing that actually helps me a bit, because as a CIR I'm trying to figure out ways to get ALTs more involved in Oita events and things like that.

I think the head of Oita ESS (a group of English learners and English natives that gathers every month in Oita City) would also like to figure that out. It does cultural events sometimes, but I would like a way to meet more young people. But to bond with people over cultural events would be something that's very fun. It is something I think is missing a bit in my time in Japan. I would like to dabble a bit more.

### When you say that, do you mean smaller events or bigger ones?

I mean, while I say I want to participate in cultural events, the main appeal for me is less the event itself and more that you get to meet and know other people. Fundamentally, there is an inherent value to culture, but at least to me, sometimes it is less about the culture itself and more that it facilitates the exchange, the interaction of people together. That's what interests me. That's what excites me. That's why I'm happy to be here.

## Future

### So, what do you think you're going to do after JET?

That's the big one, isn't it? And that, I still don't have a solid answer for. My default right now is that I want to get at least one year in a big city in Japan. I think I've never properly lived in an urban environment, so I'd like to at least try it once while I'm young. Maybe I'll find the people I want to spend time with there.

### After that?

After that, anything goes, depends on the people I meet, what relationships I build. I think I've made a bit more peace with going home just because there are things I miss. Culture, food, people that I don't know if I'll be able to replicate here. But there are things that I'll miss here if I leave, which is why I don't think I'm ready to go just yet. Also, if I leave, I don't know if I'll ever come back. And my Japanese is not at a point yet where I'd be satisfied to go back home.

### Things aren't finished yet.

Things aren't finished yet. There's unfinished business. Will I ever get finished? God only knows, but we will see. I am nervous. I am excited. This year I intend to do some job hunting. But yeah, I don't think I want to go home just yet. Something here is still calling me.



JET  
Programme  
Website

