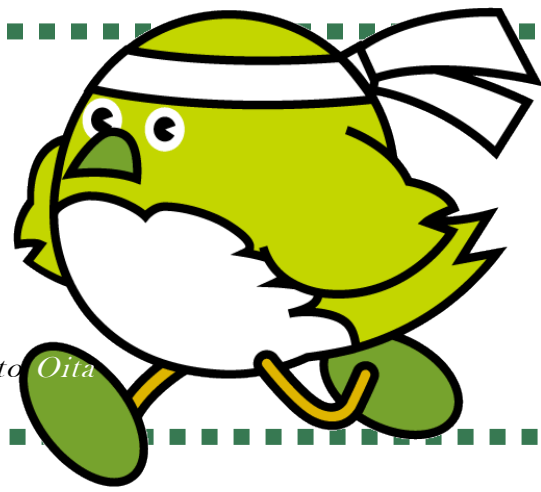


What's up,

OITA! 2019 March No. 34

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



25,472 passports were issued in Oita prefecture in 2018, the first time that numbers have exceeded 25,000 in the past six years. In comparison to 2017, we have seen a 14.8% jump in issuing numbers, placing Oita prefecture 2nd place in the nation when it comes to growth rates. Travellers bound for overseas destinations continue to increase every year, so it's only natural that there will be a great number of applicants for new passports from this point onward. In 2019, the pages reserved for immigration stamps in the Japanese passport have received a facelift, with twenty-four images from the iconic *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* by the renowned ukiyo-e artist Hokusai now included as part of the new design – it looks like that a new layer of fun had just been added to travelling.

Mitsuru Tokuno <tokuno-mitsuru@pref.oita.lg.jp>,
Head of the International Policy Division in the Oita Prefecture Planning Promotion Department

Debriefing Meeting & Governor's Courtesy Greetings for Returnees of the *Tobitate! (Leap for Tomorrow)* *Study Abroad Initiative*

On February 18, six elected members who studied overseas in countries including the USA as part of the *Tobitate! (Leap for Tomorrow) Study Abroad Initiative* came together for a debriefing meeting upon returning home. The *Tobitate! (Leap for Tomorrow) Study Abroad Initiative* is a programme that places a focus on 'producing proactive and talented individuals who are globally literate through study-abroad programmes'. Including the 6 members this year, Oita has provided study-abroad opportunities for a total of 26 participants since the prefecture joined the initiative from 2015. *(continued on next page)*



(Continued from previous page) The destination countries for this year's returnees include USA, Italy, the Philippines and Myanmar. During their periods of exchange, the participants took part in research and internship work in line with their respective chosen themes of interest, the results and experiences of which were presented in the meeting. The presentations were received with supportive comments from sponsoring businesses – 'We were able to see plenty of accomplishments during this short study-abroad programme, and we're confident that the participants will be successful in the future as well,' 'We too would like to place our younger employees in exchange programmes and see them returning home experienced and matured as a result.'

Following the presentations, the party then received a courtesy greeting from the Governor of Oita. The participants were able to report their findings directly to the Governor and received many questions in return. 'You have come a long way in comparison to your pre-placements selves, for which I am extremely pleased,' expressed the Governor to the participants. 'Remember to be grateful towards the businesses that have supported you – I look forward to seeing you all becoming the future bearers of globalisation for the Oita prefecture.'

Among this year's students, there were many who were highly motivated in using the Spring break as an opportunity to take part in short-term study-abroad programmes. In an effort to back student members like these, we greatly look forward to your continued support in the future as well.



While I was studying in Japan, I once drew an *omikuji* fortune-telling paper strip while I was travelling. I was really excited since that was my first *omikuji* but the draw turned out to be a *kyo*, in other words, "cursed". On top of this, the fortune warned me not to travel although I was already travelling, and tore apart when I tried to tie it up, so the whole experience turned out to be quite a downer.

Although I haven't drawn an *omikuji* ever since, I decided that I should give it another go because I was at the Usa Grand Shrine and it was the start of the new year. What I got out of that was "*ato-kichi*", a fortune that I had never seen before. I tied the strip up anyway, went home and did some research, only to find that Usa Grand Shrine's fortunes are ranked as such – "*dai-kichi*", "*kichi*", "*chu-kichi*", "*sho-kichi*", "*sue-kichi*", and "*ato-kichi*". So to put it simply, "*ato-kichi*", or "what's left of a blessing", actually means "cursed"! While I think that's a lovely way to mince words, I can't believe that I got a "cursed" strip again. The last time that happened, everyone tried to cheer me up by saying things like "this is actually good since it's so rare" and "things can only get better from now on", but drawing "cursed" two times in a roll is honestly just too much, so I think I probably won't draw an *omikuji* ever again.

-Jina Kim, CIR from Korea



Just a while ago, my colleagues and I went for a mountain-climbing tour in Kyoshu-ho Cliff in Nakatsu. The Kyoshu-ho Cliff is a symbolic landmark of the Yabakei Gorge that has a wonderful resemblance to an ink painting, and is conjoined with impressive peaks such as the Ichi-no-mine, Ni-no-mine, San-no-mine, Ebisu-iwa and Daikoku-iwa lined alongside the downstream section of the Yamakunigawa River. Once you reach the top, a lovely view stretches before your eyes. As an act of reverence, a Buddhist monk by the name of Zenkai once completed the feat of carving out a tunnel named *Ao no Domon*, which can be found by the foot of the mountain, with a hammer and chisel alone. The tunnel is a local hotpot, not to mention that it is well-known for its debut in Kan Kikuchi's novel *Beyond the Pale of Vengeance*. No matter how you look at it, the Kyoshu-ho Cliff is definitely a place worth visiting.

- Yingmei Fang, CIR from China

Monthly staff corner

Exploring Nakatsu

What's up, OITA! 2019 March, No. 34

While I have passed through Nakatsu numerous times on my way to and from Kokura Station for train connections, I had yet to properly explore the place until last month. A cold but sunny day in late February marks the first time I set foot in Nakatsu, and the sun beamed brightly at my colleagues and me as we walked across the *shotengai* for our kimono rental.

I spent a little time deciding before the array of colourful kimono and obi sashes which spread before me on the tatami mat. While my colleagues went for something more vibrant, I selected a somewhat subdued design – an ivory canvas peppered with a few small flowers with a pink and gold obi to match. Like most people who don't wear kimono on a frequent basis, I was a breathless as the obi tightened around me. Taking one small at a time with the geta sandals click-clacking beneath my feet, I followed my colleagues to the Teramachi district.

Teramachi is a Japanese compound noun that is formed by *tera* and *machi*, meaning “temple” and “town” respectively. As the semantic layer of the word suggests, Teramachi refers to a part of town that contains high numbers of Buddhist temples. The old yet pristine stone floor tiles and plaster walls of the Nakatsu Teramachi district looked especially lovely against the blue sky. Since we were in kimono and looking for photo opportunities, we headed towards Goganji, a temple that is easily recognisable for its red walls. Legend has it that the local daimyo, Yoshitaka Kuroda, slaughtered some samurai of his rival Utsunomiya Shigefusa before the temple, staining the walls with blood. Although many attempts at repainting the walls were made, the blood stains continued to seep through, so it was eventually decided that the walls would be painted dark red.

Our next stop was the Yukichi Fukuzawa Memorial Museum. If you approach any Japanese person, chances are that they would certainly know about Fukuzawa. Arguably the most prominent leading figure for political reform that swept through the early Meiji Era,





Fukuzawa is also well-known as the founder of Keio University and the face on the 10,000-yen note. The museum itself, which told of the life of Fukuzawa in great detail, stood next to the man's old home. Since it was almost the Hinamatsuri festival, the gardens and the rooms were adorned with hina-dolls dressed in royal garb. Having never seen hina-dolls aside from books and the internet, I couldn't take my eyes off of the neatly displayed ornamental dolls that depicted the extravagance of a royal wedding in the Heian period.



Having finally fully appreciated the dolls, we then made our way to the last stop, Nakatsu Castle, which can be reached on foot in around 10 minutes from the Nakatsu Station. Built by the same Kuroda Yoshitaka who was responsible for the legend of Goganji Temple, the history of the castle can be traced from 1587 and currently serves as a museum of the Okudaira family, who were hereditary vassals of the Tokugawa family. Various heirlooms, weapons and armour were displayed, and what caught my attention the most was a screen depicting the Battle of Nagashino and documents that contained Tokugawa Ieyasu's own handwriting. The fifth and top floor of the castle acts as an observatory spot that overlooks Nakatsu, and by the time we reached it, the weather had suddenly turned gloomy and we shivered in the cold. Nevertheless, the details that one can capture from a vantage point are quite amazing. Staring at the plump white goose that fluffed itself in the moat, I fancied myself as a samurai who overwatched their home for some time before finally making our way back to the station where the train took us home.



Words from the editor:

Hay-fever has reached epidemic levels in the office, but on the other hand, sakura will blossom soon, so all's well with the world, I suppose.

-Xin Lan Xie, CIR from Australia

