

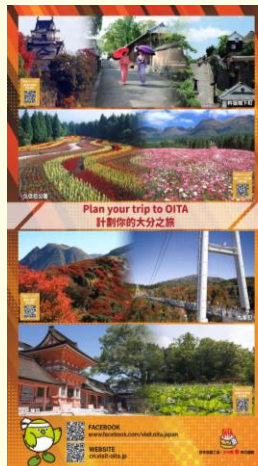


What's up, OITA!

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



Oita Fair in Hong Kong



The 'Oita Fair' in Hong Kong was held between 15th November and 16th December 2022. Through partnership with administrator of the Beppu Association, Oita Prefecture Overseas Goodwill Ambassador Lui Wai Kwong, a time-limited menu was offered that made use of the produce of Oita Prefecture, such as Oita wagyu, kabosu, Japanese amberjack, and locally produced sake.

Additionally, Hong Kong-based tourism companies attended the fair and promoted tourism to Oita Prefecture. Along with the introduction of tourism spots within the prefecture, a tasting session for the time-limited menu utilising the produce of Oita Prefecture also took place.



Japanese amberjack sushi



Beppu Menkan



Scenes from the fair



Coordinators for International Relations Austin Vaughn and Swara Fife

Guest speakers on demand in Usuki



The Coordinators for International Relations for Oita Prefecture, Austin Vaughn and Swara Fife, gave lectures at an Usuki Primary School.



During the school visit, the students gave self-introductions to our lecturers, after which they played English language-based games together. Our guest lecturers then gave interactive presentations on their home countries of the USA and UK.

The students were able to experience interacting with and learning about different cultures, an opportunity that rarely appears in every-day life. The students were excited and eager to learn about cultures around the world!



News from Around Oita

Headlines for November and December

- Revival of “Mt. Takasaki Monkey Doctorate Exam.” Taking applications for January 14, Next Year
- “Jigoku Onsen Museum” opens December 1. History and Culture of the Onsen Village, Kanawa
- Curtains Close on “Culture City of East Asia 2022.” Passion and Bonds to Carry on to the Future
- Oita International Wheelchair Marathon, Hug Wins 10th Title. Preez Sets New Record in T51 Class
- Inauguration of Network for International Exchange Groups. Becoming a More Multicultural Region for the Prefecture’s 14,000 Foreign Residents
- Nakatsue-mura Gives Unchanging Cheers of Friendship. Residents Gather to Watch Cameroon in the World Cup
- Yana Ono, Director of a Ukraine Refugee Support Non-Profit Hired by Beppu City BoE
- Walking Path Completed at Bungo Futamigaura in Saiki. Opening on December 20; Ceremony Also Planned
- Over 30 Years of Charcoal Making at Kiyokawa Junior High in Bungo Ono. A Traditional Event to Learn Local Industry



Mt. Takasaki



Oita International Wheelchair Marathon



Taio Kinzan (Gold Mine)



World Dream One Kanji Character Contest



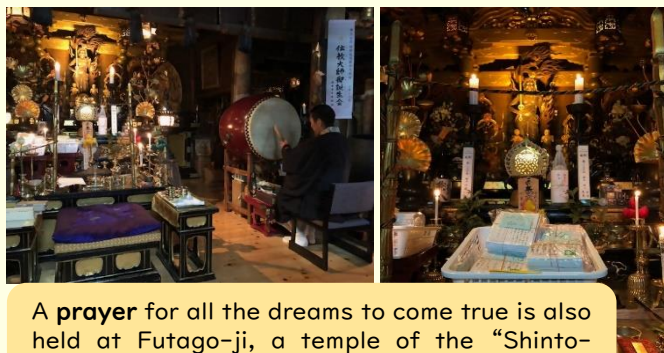
Kunisaki City Project for International Cultural and Educational Exchange by the Public and Private Sectors

This year marked the 15th “World Dream One Kanji Character Contest.” The contest is just one part of Kunisaki’s “Project for International Cultural and Educational Exchange by the Public and Private Sectors.” It isn’t just a contest of whose brushstrokes look the best, but rather looks at how well they represent their “dreams” as a whole, while allowing an opportunity for participants to look back on themselves as individuals.

■ Aim ■

- ① To educate children and help them to be productive members of society
- ② To have people really look at themselves and express their goals based on their own thoughts
- ③ To have people learn more about Oita Prefecture and the Kunisaki Peninsula

Thank you for your submissions, year after year! (Here’s just a few.)



A prayer for all the dreams to come true is also held at Futago-ji, a temple of the “Shinto-Buddhist Village,” Rokugo Manzan.

Groups/Schools (Japan)	63 groups	2551 cards	2021 Total Submissions
Groups/Schools (Taiwan)	47 groups	1950 cards	
Individuals		154 cards	4655 cards



Kunisaki’s Mascot,
Sakichi-kun

Participant Comments (From Elementary Schoolers)

Winners of the contest are put on display at all elementary, junior high, and other schools for compulsory education in Kunisaki.



I was so happy my card was chosen! I’ll be sending one next year too! (Girl, 4th Grade)

You don’t usually write on postcards with a brush, so it was really nerve-wracking! (Boy, 6th Grade)

Putting my dreams all into a single kanji was hard, but really fun! (Girl, 5th Grade)

Applications are called for every year around December or January. You’re the hero of your life! Express your dream in one kanji and send it to us!

*Specific application period differs by year. Please inquire at the following address for details:

▶ <https://www.kunisakiairune.com/english/>

QR code to the right →



Autumn: Yufuin Edition

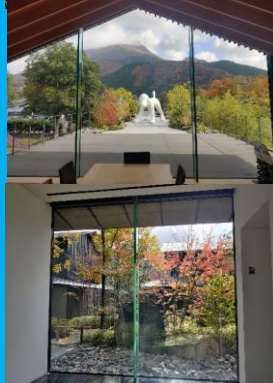
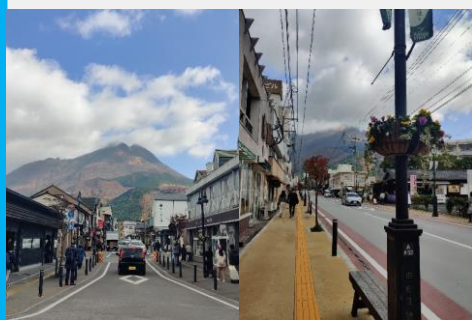


This autumn season, I made my way over to Yufuin by train to enjoy the vibrant seasonal colours and to trial all Yufuin has to offer. We chugged through Oita Prefecture's still mostly green landscape, picking up the hints of light yellows and oranges grazing the tips of leaves as we began our ascent into the mountains. The further we climbed, the more we were consumed by a fiery landscape of not only yellows, but reds and oranges too: it seemed that the time I had spent making predictions regarding the most beautiful time to see the autumn leaves in Yufuin had paid off. Stepping off the train into the crisp autumn air, we headed straight for the tourism information centre to the right of the station once one exits to book our horse carriage ride for the afternoon. Despite it being only 10 o'clock, most of the times were already sold out, but we managed to snag a 3 o'clock spot for two.

First up, we decided to head to the Comico Art Museum: a must-go for fans of modern art. Luckily, we managed to book a time slot for 10 minutes later - I would recommend booking your spot as soon as you arrive in Yufuin to avoid disappointment. Breezing through the tranquillity offered in featured exhibitions from the likes of Yayoi Kusama and Hiroshi Sugimoto, we entered a state of undisturbed concentration, perusing the works from various angles and distances to appreciate the essence of each piece. My favourite exhibition was from Takashi Murakami, whose pop-art-esque works appealed to my sensibilities, offering various arrangements of smiling flowers in funky colours.

Swara Fife

Coordinator for
International
Relations

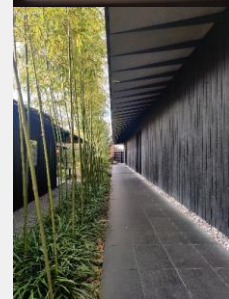


Looking closer, some of these flowers were actually sad, surprised, or indifferent. I particularly enjoyed the pop-art skull collage, which injected mortality with a sense of inevitability, but in a fun way! After checking out the big dog statue by Yoshitomo Nara, which was situated outside on a little veranda on the second floor, we exited the museum in pursuit of our next stop.

Next, we headed to Lake Kinrin, a gorgeous expanse of water that mirrored the sweeps and curves of the mountains on its glittering surface. Koi fish swirled lazily below the surface in the late morning sun, bobbing their heads up and causing ripples on the surface. The edge of the lake was lined with trees of burning red and fiery orange, and the air was abuzz with the chattering and snapping of tourists. Snapping a few pictures of our own, we continued down the path along the river and across a bridge, marvelling at the beauty of the dying landscape around us - the seamless flow of reality to the landscape reflected in the lake was breathtaking, and so perfect it was almost

like an oil painting. Leaves swirled softly around us as we looped back to the main street. Here, we partook in a little snack from Milch - a dessert shop originating in Yufuin that specialises in cheesecake and pudding. One creamy and delicious morsel later, we continued on towards Yufuin Floral Village, where some furry friends were awaiting us.

Yufuin Floral Village is no doubt how Japanese people imagine a European village to be, as portrayed in many a Ghibli movie: it is a short winding street that loops back to a quaint square where you can feed goats and ducks by a fountain. Small 'brick' shops with 'thatched' roofs line each side of the streets, each with different character-themed wares on sale, many of which are from Ghibli.





Once you have chosen your wares, you purchase them at the big souvenir shop at the end of the road, which also, conveniently, houses the Bengal cats of Cheshire Cat Forest! Here, we spent a chilled out time with some slobbered out characters, most of whom were in the middle of a midday nap. The kitty cats were gorgeous, and all had names reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland. Though some came up to sniff at my hands and poke my leg warily, none took the opportunity to curl up on my lap, unfortunately. I did, however, get my fill of pets, and left the place satisfied, with a Cheshire cat-like grin on my lips.



Next up was the Owl Forest. Located in the centre of Yufuin Floral Village, it houses a number of lovely owls, most of whom you can pet gently on

their forehead, although some are beginners and not to be touched yet. Having always loved owls, this was a fun experience for me, although a little sad to see them chained by their talons to perches. We departed the Floral Village having gotten our fill of fur friends, and headed to Yunotsubo Road, where the best *tabearuki*, or 'walking and eating', can be found. We snacked up and down the street, trying some award-winning minced croquettes and munching on some *karaage*. The sweets are to die for on this street - I recommend 'nihoncha5toku', a matcha-based beverage takeout, and 'Sugibee', who do a delicious honeycomb ice-cream. Be sure to also try the dorayaki while you're there - there are many different types, including ones filled with pudding, mont blanc, and other seasonal treats.



Our final stop for the day was our pre-booked horse carriage ride. The course lasted a little over an hour, and looped around Yufuin, passing and stopping at a couple of sweet old shrines, and came back the same way. The deep chestnut brown horse, originally from Europe according to the driver, trotted along at a moderate pace, his hooves making a clip-clop sound on the pavement below. The view out onto the plains of Yufuin, with mountains sweeping up gracefully from the lush landscape was stunning. The mountain peaks were still tinged with the warmth of autumn, and contrasted spectacularly with the bright blue sky. First, we stopped at *bussanji jinja*, whose entrance was a lovely structure with a sweeping thatched roof. It was a small, but peaceful, shrine, away from the bustling centre of Yufuin. A lazy tabby cat meandered around inside, warming himself in the afternoon sun, blinking lazily in greeting. The next stop was *unagihime jinja*, which was a touch bigger, but still peaceful. Moss-coated stone ornaments lined the path up to this shrine, and ancient tree trunks adorned with Shinto decorations stood proudly to the side, venerated as an integral part of the shrine itself. After leaving, the horse broke out into a little canter, and with that, we made our way back to the station, ending our day with a final deep breath of the fresh, mountain air of Yufuin.



Totoro Falls



Next Stop is "Totoro"

Who doesn't love Totoro? Such a loveable...wait what *is* Totoro? As it turns out, "Totoro" is a bus stop in Saiki. Of course there's the famous big, goofy fluffball from *My Neighbor Totoro*, but the bus stop is actually older, dating back at least 50 years. It's hard to say if the name of the bus stop influenced the name of the character at all, but it's pretty clear that the film influenced the bus stop. Apparently, no one knows where they came from, but starting with the Catbus in September 1997, life-size cutouts of the characters of the film started popping up, and by 2000, the bus stop was a tourist destination.

If you head there today, you can see Satsuki, Mei, and a (smaller than life-size) Totoro waiting at the bus stop. They're waiting for a bus that will never come, since the line that serviced this bus stop stopped in 2013. But if you head just a little northwest, you'll find a small footbridge leading to Totoro's Forest, where the Catbus has parked. You can climb aboard, but seeing as the front sign of the Catbus says "Totoro's Forest," it's already reached its final destination, and you won't be going anywhere. (Well, there's that and the obvious reason.)

Between the two locations is a restaurant/cafe called Ryo, which has pasta, pizza, coffee...and of course, boar and deer. Naturally. Not only that, but the deer and boar that are used as ingredients are hunted and caught by the owner himself. Of course the food was good, but the owner was also a very friendly person and kindly talked to my friends and me on a wide variety of topics. So, if you visit Totoro Bus Stop, you might want to drop by and get something to eat. I tried the boar, just because of how exotic it sounded, so next time I'll be getting the deer.

Lastly, a few miles down the road is a location with a bunch of home-made statues of Ghibli characters, such as No-Face, the Laputan Robot, *kodama*, Yakul, and many others. *Technically*, this area is just barely located in Miyazaki, not Oita, so it might be a bit out of scope for this magazine, but if you're a Ghibli lover, I'd say it's best not to sweat the details and go and see the handiwork of an obviously skilled craftsman. As for *why* those statues are there and how long they've been there... Figuring that out would be a job for whoever my Miyazaki counterpart is.



Totoro Falls



Sinking Falls

If someone said, “waterfall in Bungo-Ono,” the first thing to come to mind for most people would probably be Harajiri Falls. But Bungo-Ono isn’t a geopark just for show. There are plenty of other natural wonders to see, one of those being Chinda Falls (沈墮の滝). 沈 *chin* means “to sink” and 墮 *da* means “to fall” but has a negative nuance, like a fallen angel. The falls have more than a bit of history behind them, more than the usual geology-related facts like “these falls wore down the rocks they went over leading to its unique...” et cetera, et cetera. They actually disappeared at one point.

In 1909, a dam was placed on the falls in order to feed a power plant, and when it was raised in 1923, they became basically a face of black rock. However, in 1996, reinforcement work was done that allowed the falls to regain their previous splendor. There is still a power plant on the falls, but the one built back in the Meiji Era is now just ruins, without a generator in sight. Still, you can walk right into the ruins and see the giant depressions in the ground where they used to lie. It truly feels like the kind of place that would appear in a video game, a fantasy anime, or a mystery novel. Speaking of, Chinda Falls will actually be the site of a new murder mystery novel from the writer of *Boku wo Aishita Subete no Kimi e* and *Kimi wo Aishita Hitori no Boku e*.

I can definitely vouch for the potential the ruins have as a crime scene. If you hug the outside wall of the ruins and walk across the thin path there, you’ll find a small hidden crevice between the building and the mountainside. In that crevice are some abandoned items, like a soccer ball and something rusted and metal that I couldn’t really make out the shape of. Also, something that I stepped on which was covered in grass and leaves, very squishy, big...felt like it was in a plastic garbage bag... Let’s not think about that too hard.

In related news, there were two other structures we visited in Bungo-Ono that are definitely worth mentioning: Todorō Bridge and Deai Bridge. Todorō Bridge has the largest arch span of any stone bridge in Japan, and Deai Bridge is number two. They’re thin enough that two cars couldn’t pass each other, so I’m not sure how often they’re used, but in a country as earthquake-prone as Japan, it’s nice to see such old stone architecture that has been able to stand the test of time.



from our Reporters 国際交流員だより



Swara Fife

Coordinator for
International
Relations



A lit night in Taketa

This autumn, I went to Taketa, not only for the autumn leaves I had heard were breathtaking, but also for Taketa's 'Chikuraku Festival', which was held this year without restrictions for the first time in three years.

During the day, before the festival began, we headed to Oka Castle Ruins to see the autumn foliage. The rain had just let up, and the view from our elevated location had become clearer, though was still shrouded in a cloak of mist: it was like a scene from a Ghibli movie. Patches of reds, yellows, and oranges peeked out at us from through the breaks in the mist's shroud; it was there, upon the ruins of Oka Castle, that we had our first autumn leaves viewing of the year. Grabbing handfuls of leaves and throwing them into the air and crunching on mounds of fallen *momiji*, we enjoyed the vibrant views all afternoon.

After filling up on Taketa's famous chicken at Marufuku, we made our way to the festival in the centre of Taketa. Bamboo candles lit up the town, with eight different locations set up. Shrines were studded with candlelight; their pathways seemed to be lit up by an ocean of fallen stars. Candlelight lined the streets of Taketa, their flames dancing in the gentle late-autumn breeze; it was a mesmerising sight. Warming ourselves with food from the various stalls lining the streets, we enjoyed the calm ambience of Taketa as the night wore to a close.

America Doesn't Have *Densha* (Mostly)

I went home for the holidays from the middle of December to the middle of January. To get back home to Utah, I needed to figure out how to get there from (and back to) Los Angeles. For the way there, my grandmother came to pick me up. It takes 8 hours by car (thanks, Grandma), but the real journey was the way back to LA. It seemed fun and I had never tried it before, so I went back by train (Amtrak). And going by Amtrak made me feel truly grateful for Japan's electric trains (*densha*). The trip took 29 hours. Not only that, a freight train took up the only rails and the train ended up three hours off schedule. I knew things like this were common on American railroads, but the road home to Japan was really a long one... But the scenery was really beautiful, and the service was nice, so I think I'd like to ride again someday.

Austin Vaughn

Coordinator for
International
Relations

