



What's Up, OITA!

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

Between the 11th - 12th of November, the governor of Oita Prefecture went to the United States to carry out top-level promotion of global human resources development, including the promotion of personnel exchange such as tourists, and expanding the sales market for prefectural products.



~Mission to Promote Exchange With The West Coast of The US ~

<Main Content>

- Visit to Stanford University
- Visit to Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California
- Visit to JETRO San Francisco Office
- Visit to The Mayor of San Francisco
- “Experience Oita” Official Reception



Visit to Stanford University's Program on International and Cross-cultural Education (SPICE)



Visit to Stanford University Drug Discovery Medical Equipment Development Research Institute



Visit to Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California



Visit to JETRO San Francisco Office



Visit to The Mayor of San Francisco



「Experience Oita」

Sparkling Japanese Art: 1300 Years of Treasures

Oita Prefectural CIRs

Rosa Boutelle
Aliceana Lin

Intrigued by the Oita Prefectural Art Museum's (OPAM) impactful commercial, we went to see their "Sparkling Japanese Art: 1300 Years of Treasures" exhibition, hoping it would be a great opportunity understand Japan better!

The Coexistence of Kami and Buddha

I was surprised to see Buddhist Hokekyo (Lotus Sutra) paintings decorating the inside of a Shinto mikoshi. Shinto and Buddhist items are usually separated, so for them to be in the same area was unusual. The Buddhist belief in Buddhas and the Shinto belief in kami, nature and ancestors, created a deeply fascinating perspective.



【Paintings of Hokekyo on Shoji】



Inlaid Western Figure Design Stirrup



【Close-up View】

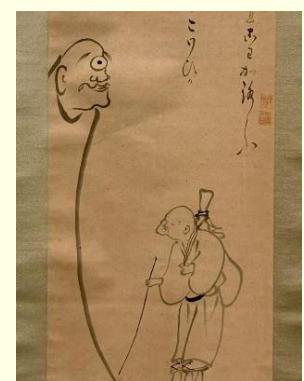
Can you see the bow of the treasure ship?

A stirrup is the part where you place your feet when riding a horse.

The design was influenced by Nanban styles, so the front featured depictions of Nanban ships and people, which were associated with signs of luck such as bringing in wealth and fortune. It seems that Japan at the time was trying to incorporate Western styles or experiment with new artistic expressions.

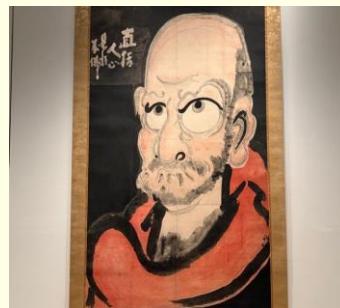
Teachings That Overcome Time

While looking around, this drawing caught my attention. It depicts a tale in which a one-eyed monster boasts of its scariness to a blind monk, only for the monk to reply, "I cannot see at all, so I am the scarier one". This story teaches us to use our heart, not just our eyes, and to try to understand the essence of people rather than judging them based on superficial features. This message remains deeply relevant today, and I felt reassured knowing that this important tale will continue to be preserved and passed on to future generations.



Daruma's True Form!?

Up until now, I only knew “Daruma” as the Daruma dolls which help you accomplish your goals, so you can imagine my shock finding out that he was actually a strict and serious monk! Looking into the intense eyes of this humane but caricatured portrayal of Daruma, I realised once again the power and strong resolve that goes into filling in the eyes of Daruma dolls.



【To think he was a monk!】



【What an intense stare!】

The Blade of Determination

The monk on the lower left tried to become Daruma's disciple while he was meditating, so the monk was completely ignored. To prove his determination, the monk cut off his own arm and was finally accepted.

I thought the monk was only pretending to cut off his arm as a performance, so I was shocked that he actually did it. Maybe he should've waited until Daruma finished meditating before asking to become his disciple, but perhaps Bodhidharma was extremely strict, so the monk felt that showing such resolve was the only way. His expression almost seems to say, “I'll show you my determination!”

Monk



Daruma

Reflections of The Wonderful Everyday



【Going out, bento in hand】



【“Camping” in Taketa’s nature】



【Horses kept in houses to be admired?!】

I was also touched by the reflections of mundane everyday life. My heart felt warm realising that no matter the time period or country, humans never fail to be charmed by animals, nature, and their own day-to-day lives.

It made me wonder if the day-to-day that we're living now will also some day be reflected in an art galleries works.

As a foreigner living in Japan, I felt happy to see so many works and artefacts remain as living proof of the long-standing and ongoing exchange between Japan and foreign countries. The intensity of both the history and artworks came across to me in bucketloads. It made me wish that our own lives, just like this exhibition, can be filled with passionate and charming art too!

【Rosa Boutelle】

When I finished the exhibition, I thought, “Wow, Japan really has a lot of traditional art!” From wooden Buddha statues to swords, paintings, and pottery, there seemed to be an endless history. I learned a lot from the paintings, and even though I’m not well-versed in art, I really enjoyed the experience.

【Aliceana Lin】

News from

Hiji Town

Hiji Town
Homepage



Hiji Town and Taiwan's Hsinchu City signed a friendship and exchange agreement!

On July 4, 2025, Hiji Town and Taiwan's Hsinchu City signed a Friendship and Exchange Agreement. A seven-member delegation, led by the Town Mayor, visited Hsinchu City, where both sides confirmed their commitment to promoting exchanges in four areas: tourism, culture, industry, and education.

Going forward, the two cities plan to further strengthen their exchange through mutual visits.



News from Kokonoe Town

Kokonoe Town
Homepage



Connecting the World Through Smiles and Challenges Mongolia International Exchange Project Aug 2-7, 2025



Experiencing the
vast nature of Mongolia



Interacting with local kids

Participants took part in the project with clear individual goals and returned with valuable learning experiences and renewed inspiration. Below are some of their reflections.

- “I aspire to become a Japanese cuisine chef and hope to bring joy to people across national borders through food.”
- “I learned that the average life expectancy in Mongolia is around 60-70 years, which is shorter than in Japan, and that preventive medicine is not yet widely established, which reminded of the strengths of Japan’s public healthcare system and preventive medicine.”
- “By experiencing cultural differences and reflecting on geographical and historical backgrounds, I came to appreciate the importance of preserving culture and fostering a culturally rich nation.”

Homestay with Ritsumeikan APU International Students Sep 18-20, 2025

The project was conducted for families with children attending the town’s elementary and junior high schools.

Overcoming language barriers, participants learned the importance of effective communication, active listening, compassion, and mutual understanding.



Presentation by
International Students
(Messages from the host family)



Participating in a local
festival with host family

“I felt the children developing a strong desire to communicate, doing their best by using the words they knew. They were deeply impressed by how wide the world is.”

“Even without speaking English, the children learned they can enjoy time together and that there is no need to feel intimidated by foreigners, coming to understand the importance of considering others.”

News from

Kusu Town

Kusu Town
Homepage



The Launch of “Kusu Tenku no Kagayaki”, a Rice Brand Using Man-made Satellites

This year marked the proper start of our rice farming using man-made satellites, culminating in our first harvest. This initiative began in FY2022 with the aim of increasing farm income.

The variety we grow is called “Hitome Bore” (Love at First Sight), which for the past 4 years has consecutively received the highest ranking of “Special A” (Toku A) in the taste ranking by the Japan Grain Inspection Association. We use images from man-made satellites etc. to establish a system which analyses the condition of wet-land “Hitome Bore” rice. We use this to manage and ascertain the harvest period for the wet-land rice.

From the first-grade rice harvested, we carefully select rice which has a low protein content and separate it using a fine 2 mm sieve, with only this rice becoming “Kusu Tenku no Kagayaki”.

This large-grained rice offers a rich aroma and a deliciously sweet flavour. We hope you will take this opportunity to try it.

The rice is available through the Kusu Kokonoe Farmers' Network at ¥3,980 (tax incl.) for 2 kg.



Kusu Kokonoe Farmers'
Market Network Homepage



News from

Yufu City

Yufuin/Shonai/Hasama
Official Travel Guide



Let's stay in Yufu City using the hometown tax! Why not travel to Yufu?

Including “Yufuin Onsen”, the 5 onsen within the city are designated as a National Recreational Hot Spring Area, under the name of “Yufuin Onsenkyo”. You can spend your time relaxing in a hotel while feeling the Yufu wind from season to season.



It will make your heart dance Charm Discovery Stamp Rally in Yufu Round 2 Underway! - Until 15.02.2026

A stamp rally is currently underway targeting 5 onsen establishments in Yufu City. Based on the number of stamps acquired, 50 people will be entered into a lottery to receive luxury prizes. Use this opportunity to travel around Yufu City and collect stamps.

What is “Yunohana”?

British CIR
Rosa Boutelle

(Photo Source: Yunosato)



When I had just moved to Oita, I saw Yunohana Cosmetics in a souvenir shop and found myself wandering “what’s this?” In search of the answer, I visited Myoban Onsen. There I found out that this year (2025) the “Yunohana Goya” (huts) are celebrating 300 years since their establishment, and that the natural products produced in these huts are still being collected by hand.

The natural bath additives which we now call “Yunohana” used to be called “Myoban”, and were cultivated here on land directly controlled by the Tokugawa Shogunate. The traditional methods used to produce Yunohana are still used to this day, and are designated as a nationally Important Intangible Folk Culture Asset.

(Photo Source: Yunosato)



Yunohana observation hut



So this is “Yunohana”!



Yunohana Cosmetics



What is Yunohana?

Yunohana is a crystalline structure which is a by-product of the chemical reaction between steam flowing approximately 30cm beneath ground-level and blue clay. Within the Yunohana Goya (“huts”) this crystal grows, just 1 millimeter each day. Myoban Onsen is unique in its use of onsen steam in its gas form to make Yunohana.

When added to your bath it is not only relaxing but is also popular in helping to relieve stiff shoulders and sore backs. Yunohana’s cosmetics are also much-loved for leaving the skin with a “fresh-out-of-the-onsen” glow.



Straw Roof

The Yunohana Goya (huts) are an amazing sight, lined up amidst the beautiful nature in Myoban.

Of the what used to be 300 huts, just 15 remain now, and they are protected as a nationally Important Cultural Landscape.

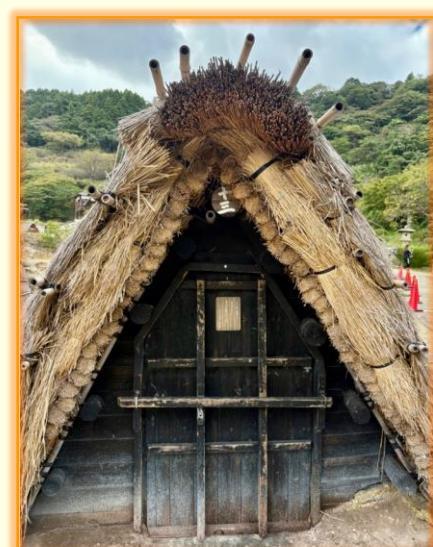
The roofs of these huts are hand-built by the Yunohana workmen from local straw, bamboo, and sticks, and are re-thatched every 3 years due to the effects of the steam kept within them. The largest of the huts is around 4 meters tall, and the inside can reach temperatures of up to 50 degrees C.



Rosa

After visiting the Myoban Yunohana Goya I was truly touched by the value of handmade natural cosmetics, and the effort put in to protecting this important tradition.

I would definitely recommend visiting them, and experiencing that charm for yourself♪



Hand-built Yunohana Goya

Let's enjoy Oita's Autumn in Yabakei!



Chinese CIR
Hanyu Jin



Since it's my first time visiting Yabakei, I joined the "Yabahaku" tour. It was early autumn, so the weather was just right, not too hot or too cold. Taking in the fresh air made me feel completely refreshed.

This year, lingering summer heat continued into October, so I assumed the autumn foliage had yet to appear. However, when I visited, I was delighted to find hints of red beginning to emerge.

This time I will introduce the scenery of Yabakei during this transition.



By the way, the thing that caught my eye when I exited Nakatsu Station was..... the 10,000-yen bill! Nakatsu City, where Yabakei is located, is also the birthplace of Yukichi Fukuzawa!

The tour followed the Furakan Route: Ao-no-Domon, Kyoshuho, the chain bridge at Tenjinbashi, and Kunisaki-to.

What is Ao-no-Domon (Blue Tunnel)?

During the Edo period, the construction of the Arase Weir dammed the waters of the Yamakuni River, raising the river level in the Hida and Ao areas. As a result, travelers were forced to cross a highly dangerous road built into the steep cliffs of Kyoshuho, relying on iron chains as lifelines.



While on a journey of pilgrimage to various regions, the monk Zengai stopped in Yabakei and his heart ached at the sight of people and horses losing their lives while crossing the dangerous road. In 1735, he began carving into the cliff by his own efforts. He raised funds through religious mendicancy, and together with stonemasons, continued to work using only chisels and hammers. After more than 30 years, in the first year of the Meiwa Era (1764), spanning 342m with an inner section of 144m, the Domon (tunnel) was completed. Since the area used to be known as "Ao," the tunnel was named "Ao-no-Domon."

Monk Zengai continued the almost unimaginable task of carving into the rock cliff by hand for 30 years. Compared to him, I grow tired after just 7 hours of work in an office. I wonder, can we truly be seeing the same Yabakei scenery before our eyes?

Passing through Ao-no-Domon, we head into the mountains along the Kyoshuho exploration trail.

Kyoshuho is one of Yabakei's most renowned scenic spots. From the Hida side, a series of massive agglomerate rock peaks and striking rock formations, including Ichinomine, Ninomine, and Sannomine, as well as Ebisu Iwa, Kimen Iwa, Daikoku Iwa, Myoken Iwa, Tono Iwa, Tsurigane Iwa, Jinno Iwa, and Hachioji Iwa, stretch for nearly 1km. I climbed several of them by following the chain routes.



There were many caves that looked like something straight out of a Chinese historical drama. I took a short break inside one of them while imagining scenes from a movie. After offering a quiet prayer to the Jizo statues enshrined there, I set off again.

Though my legs were trembling, I somehow managed to reach the summit. It was only a small taste, but the experience allowed me to understand the harshness of the past and made me appreciate the present-day tunnel even more.



Mountain
Summit!





Olives in a mountain stronghold

Kunisaki City *Kunisaki Qlive Garden*

The Q in “Qlive” stands for the “Q” (“Kyu”) in Kyushu Kunisaki and the “Q” in “Quality”

Olive Garden



Korean CIR
Suyoung Ahn



WHY Kunisaki ?

Kunisaki City is a peninsula facing the Seto Inland Sea, so it has relatively little rainfall throughout the year, a mild climate, and long hours of sunshine. These weather conditions make it an ideal environment for cultivating olives.



Olive tree



Harvest



Sorting



Pressing



The olive harvest season lasts for about two months, from late September to November.

In the morning, ① the olives are harvested, followed by ② the sorting process. In the afternoon, these olives are ③ pressed, and through this series of steps, ④ high-quality olive oil is produced.



Best Spot

Garden Tour (reservation required)

Fee: From ¥500

Schedule: Weekdays, Weekends, Public Holidays, 9am to 4pm

Time: Approximately 1 hr

Capacity: Between 1 and 45 people

Address: 2797-3, Angokujii, Kunisaki-machi, Kunisaki City

For Inquiries: 0978-73-2255

Leaf icon: In mid-May you can see the olive trees pale-yellow blossoms, and during the harvest season you can even experience harvesting the olives yourself.

Leaf icon: In the future, the farm is expected to be developed into a full-scale tourist orchard.

It was such an enjoyable experience that I completely lost track of time.

Listening to the story behind olive cultivation made me appreciate the food I eat even more.

I was spell-bound when walking among the olive trees. It is also a highly recommended photo spot!





National Treasures and Sweet Traditions



★ ★ National Treasure Usuki Stone Buddha

Japan is home to countless historical Buddha statues. Since my mother is Buddhist, I wanted to visit the Usuki Stone Buddhas at least once. There are 61 stone Buddha statues carved directly into the cliffs, and all of them are National Treasures. During my visit, a volunteer guide kindly explained to me the history and features of each area.



Hoki 2nd Cluster

Here, I learned the difference between Nyorai, Bosatsu, Myou, and Tenbu. The stone Buddhas face the East, so followers can bow towards the West. The Buddhas are also facing the temple in the distance which I think was intentional.



Hoki 1st Cluster

Featuring colorful Jizo statues, Jizo Bosatsu (center) is surrounded by the Ten Kings, who are said to help people suffering in hell. There's also a hole where sutras were once placed.



San-no-san Sekibutsu

There were 3 Buddhas with childlike faces here. The head is big and the body is small. It looked innocent and cute compared to the other statues here.



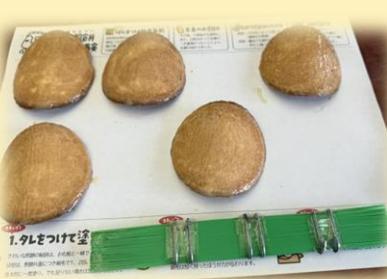
I became a part of the Buddhas!

Furuzono Sekibutsu

Due to many years of harsh environmental conditions, the Buddha's head had fallen off, but in 1993 it was restored to its original position. It is a rare Nyorai wearing a crown, and the expression in its eyes felt as though it could see through everything.



Thanks to the guide, I had lots of fun visiting. I highly recommend requesting a guide when you visit. It was very peaceful and fascinating that the statues have been here for over 900 years and are still in pretty good condition.



Senbei before painting

Usuki Senbei

Hand-Painting Experience

I tried the famous Usuki Senbei hand painting experience—using a plastic brush to hand paint a ginger sugar syrup onto the wheat flour senbei. I was surprised to hear that a worker paints about 1000 pieces a day. I only painted 5 pieces, but my hands hurt when it was over. It was harder than expected.



It came with a special box!

From Our Reporters



Into an Unknown World!

British CIR Rosa Boutelle



I recently started Kendo. I had no prior experience, so when I first entered the dojo, full of nerves, the first thing that shocked me was the uniform. It was incredible seeing people transform into samurai-esque figures as they put on their armour and masks. The echoing sound of raised voices and feet slamming into the floor with a “bang” was also beyond my imagination.

I was a little scared to step into this unknown world, but as I watched a 5-year-old boy practicing among the adults, shouting “Men!” with all his might, I found myself admiring him and wanting to build that kind of confidence in myself too. Everyone teaches me so kindly, so I look forward to going every single time!

With the words of my Kendo teacher, “You must think of yourself as the best in the world”, carved into my heart, I have decided to do my best even outside of the dojo, to keep challenging myself without fearing failure!



Prepped and ready to go!



Intensity-filled Aura



“Meeeeeeeeeen!”



When you are unsure, ask!

Chinese CIR Hanyu Jin



I welcomed my first autumn in Japan. In my hometown, autumn is always brief—just when it finally feels nice enough to go out after the heat, the next day suddenly turns cold. In Oita, short sleeves were still common until mid-October this year, but autumn was pleasant. Although October lacked the colors of autumn foliage, a certain phrase added warmth to the season.

This is about the time I went to Nakatsu. When I got lost after exiting the station, an elderly woman called out to me, “Where are you headed?” She showed me to the bus stop and told me, “When you are unsure, the quickest thing to do is to ask someone.” It’s my 7th year as a working adult. I feel like I’ve often been told, “When you don’t understand something, first try to handle it yourself before relying on others.” Which one is right depends on the situation, but her words left my heart feeling warm.



Persimmons bathed in autumn colors



Climbed it!



Let's go! (from bus window)

From Our Reporters



Being Grateful For The Ordinary

Korean CIR Suyoung Ahn



Recently I had the opportunity to rethink the things that I had taken for granted as being ordinary.

When my father came to Japan, we visited Kokonoe-machi and Bungoono City together. During this precious time, I felt gratitude bubbling up inside of me as I felt the true value of the natural landscape and my father's presence.

Living abroad is an adventure without a doubt. However, thanks to the presence of my family and those I love, I am able to live each day with gratitude in my heart. Ordinary things such as the warm sunlight, the cool breeze, and the meals I eat each day have become things I am grateful for. Moreover, my current job, part of my ordinary every day, has become a source of greater joy when I approach it with gratitude. Living each day with gratitude...



Oita's beautiful nature



Memories with my dad



Ordinary → Gratitude



Long Awaited Movie

American CIR Aliceana Lin



I usually don't go to the movie theater because it's expensive in New York, and I prefer watching movies at home. But this time, I decided to see a film I'd been looking forward to for a long time: *The Legend of Hei II*, the sequel to the 2019 movie, *The Legend of Hei*. It's a Chinese animated fantasy adventure about a young black cat spirit named Xiao Hei who meets a powerful human named Wu Xian, and together they help Xiao Hei learn how to live in a world shared by humans and spirits. I recommend it if you like Studio Ghibli films or Chinese fantasy. You can watch it in the original Chinese audio or in Japanese!

This was my second time seeing a movie in Japan, and I was surprised that people stayed until after the credits. In America, most people leave as soon as the credits start. The seats were comfortable, but I was surprised they didn't recline—most theaters in New York have reclining seats unless they're very old. It was also cool to see a section for movie goods. In American theaters, there usually isn't merchandise; people mostly just go to watch the movie. I also really liked that they had exclusive collaboration food and drinks for some of the movies. I couldn't try any this time because they were all sold out, but next time I'll definitely get some.

While the theater wasn't packed, more people came than I expected. I didn't realize foreign films could be so popular in Japan. I'm really glad Oita has theaters that show foreign films, and I can't wait to become a regular.



Ticket in hand, vibes activated

Notice from



What's Up, OITA!



CIR Dispatch Available!

The International Policy Division is providing opportunities to learn about different countries' culture and daily life through dispatching **Coordinators for International Relations (CIR)** as lecturers! Do you want to learn more about culture and lifestyles from around the world?

Possible CIRs for Dispatch: British, American, Chinese, Korean

Overview

- Target Audience: Oita Prefecture Schools • Regional Organizations • Community Centers etc.
- Time: Weekdays 9:00 ~ 17:00 (flexible upon request)
- Contents: CIRs will introduce culture, tourism, food, pastimes and more of their home countries!
- Cost: Dispatch is free of charge! (Excluding transport/material costs)

Application Process

- ① First consult via phone!
- ② Confirm the date and contents, then submit the application form at least one month in advance.
- ③ Coordinate with the CIR by email, etc.
- ④ On the day of, the CIR will visit! Enjoy learning together.

Things to note

Depending on the date/time and content of the dispatch, there may be cases where we cannot accept the request. Please feel free to inquire for more details!



Request a CIR
Here



Want to be featured in What's Up?

Kenji-kai events? News about former international students? If you've got something you want to tell the world about Oita, let up know!

(Any format is accepted)

Recruiting!

【Submissions/Inquiries】

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