

W h a t ' s U p , O I T A !

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

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

My name is Tokuno, and from April onwards I will be the head of the International Policy Division. The cherry blossoms have bloomed later this year, and we will greet hanami season properly starting now. However, a new system has begun in the International Policy Division. As always, we will deliver fresh information about Oita each month while continuing to treasure our network with all of you who we have been able to rely on. Thank you for your continued support.

Kusaji Dancing in Hawaii

The Kusaji dance, a form of folk entertainment, was born in the Kusaji region of Bungo Takada over 280 years ago and was selected as the prefecture's Intangible Folk Cultural Property. This dance was performed at the 23rd Honolulu Festival. This festival is held every year with the aim of furthering relations between Hawaii and Japan. The Kusaji dance was last performed at the festival nine years ago, in 2008.



International Sports Training Camps

In Oita Prefecture, we are doing our best to attract teams competing in international sports events, including the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, to our training camps.

As part of that, a combined training camp of four countries from the Beijing Women's Fencing Grand Prix was held from March 13th to the 21st in Oita City. Sabre teams from Japan, Italy, the United States, and Ukraine participated, including medalists from the Rio Olympics. Mixing players and swords from different countries created not only a high quality camp but also an opportunity for international exchange to occur through sports.

Through these sorts of endeavors, we will disseminate information about Oita's campgrounds and promote sports within the prefecture, but we also plan to use sports as an opportunity to broaden relations.



[Art, Culture and Sports Promotion Division]

A Day of Olle

On a rainy morning in March, we ventured out to Asaji Station in search of an adventure called “Kyushu Olle.” Olle is a walking trail concept invented on the Korean island of Jeju that Kyushu has embraced and reproduced. We spoke to Hitomi Seki of the Asaji Tourism Information Center to find out more about the trail before we embarked upon it.

The “Kyushu Olle” trails were established in 2012 and give an opportunity for travelers to experience rural nature. The Bungo-Ono trail is most popular in fall for maple leaves, although cherry blossoms in the spring draw in visitors as well. Last year, 1,285 people hiked the trail and 600 of those hikers were foreign – although numbers were a little lower than usual due to the Kumamoto Earthquake’s impact on tourism in the Kumamoto-Oita region. Normally around 2,500 people hike the trail each year. Korean tourists particularly like to hike the trail, given that Olle Courses are well known in South Korea, but recently these Olle trails are becoming increasingly popular with Japanese hikers as well. There are currently 19 Kyushu Olle trails (with three trails in Oita Prefecture), and each one has a different “personality.” The Bungo-Ono trail that we chose is excellent for flowers and also bypasses the famous Fuko-ji temple and Oka Castle Ruins, and the trail itself has increased the amount of visitors to Asaji, the trail’s starting point.

It was a Korean woman working in Fukuoka’s Kyushu Tourism Promotion Organization who decided to bring Olle trails to Kyushu. She thought that the Olle trails, which were so successful in Korea, could also enjoy success in Kyushu. Bungo-Ono was selected as a location for one of the trails because it was possible to ensure accessibility by train (it starts at Asaji Station and ends at Bungo Taketa Station – although participants are welcome to hike the trail in the reverse direction or to start at any point along the route).



These fashionable scarecrows greeted us early in our walk.



Take note! Those red and blue strings mean that you’re headed the right way.

As we prepared to leave, we noticed the decorations around the room. There were photographs of smiling people, both Japanese and foreign, who were about to start the walk. There were also a variety of locally produced handicrafts lining the shelves of the room and several items with horse imagery. (Horses are the symbol of Oita.) Ms. Seki gave us a parting gift of pamphlets about the walk, including one in English, and took our photo. Maybe it will wind up on the wall someday, too.

The ideal weather for the trail would have been mild temperatures and sunshine. After all, trails like these are aimed at those who want to dawdle in nature. Although the walk was still pleasant, the rain made us walk with more purpose and we did not spend as much time lingering in Yujaku Park, Fukoji Temple, or at Oka Castle.

Despite the rain, the trail itself was very convenient. There were several toilets along the course of the trail, and we found a covered area to eat our packed lunches. The majority of the trail was also simple and very walkable, although there were a few steep hills, such as the hill leading up to Oka Castle. According to Ms. Seki, the trail is accessible for both children and older people, with participant ages ranging from around three years old to eighty.

On this cool, rainy day, our favorite stop was our last: Hanamizuki Hot Spring. We relaxed from our walk in the hot water and polished off a small meal afterward while sitting on tatami mats.

The hot spring was very close to Bungo-Taketa Station, so from there we headed back from our adventure in nature to the hustle and bustle of city life.

Although the trail is free, the Oka Castle Ruins have a 300 yen entry fee (150 yen for children) and Hanamizuki Hot Spring has a 500 yen entry fee (200 yen for children, free for children under age 6) and is closed on Thursdays.



The view from **Oka Castle**



Looking across the **Sokawa Columnar Joint**

Editor's Note

Greetings in the new fiscal year! The English edition of What's Up, Oita! now has only one editor, but I look forward to more exciting adventures in Oita.



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