

# 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

I interviewed twenty international students. They told me they were happy to have come to Oita and would like to stay and work here, where the nature, the food, and the people are all wonderful. These international students are highly skilled professionals in the making who have the potential to contribute to regional revitalization as outstanding supporters of the regional community. We are trying to make sure international students can visit many places, meet many people, and grow to love “Oita” even more and make it their second home. In order to make this a reality, we ask for the support of everyone from the region and related businesses.

## Mejiron Overseas Special Correspondent Report

Oita Prefecture has some of the most beautiful scenery in Japan. One of the best ways to get back to nature is via bicycle. Oita Association of JETs (AJET) has organized a charity bike ride for the last 20 years that explores a different area each year. The 20th Oita AJET Charity Bike Ride 2017 「Let it fly! / 飛べ」 was held on the May 27th and 28th. We started from Oita Castle Park, cycled through the lovely ocean views of Beppu and Hiji, then into the mountains of Kunisaki to the campsite at Baien no Sato. It was a grueling mountain course, but it was all worth it in the end to raise money for the Japanese's Red Cross Kumamoto Earthquake Relief Fund.



This year, we had one of our biggest groups ever with over 60 people participate either as cyclist or volunteers. It was truly an international bike ride with eight countries represented and bikers coming in from Shikoku and Shimane Prefecture to take part in this event. It is a great way to meet new people while raising money for charity. We hope that you'll be able to participate next year too!

【From Mejiron Overseas Special Correspondent Casey Kasper】



# *The Road to Hell is Paved with Hot Springs*

Beppu is home to some of the strongest geothermal activity in the world and has well renowned hot springs, or onsen. But there are some onsen in Beppu that you can't dip your body into. Enter "Jigoku Meguri," the Hell Tour, seven different jigoku (hells) with very intense and very hot geothermal activity. These hells are easily accessible via Kamenoi bus, and, for just 2,000 yen, you can enter all seven. I decided to challenge myself to do just that.



**Oniishibozu Jigoku**

- Foot bath ✓
- Steamed buns ✓



**Umi Jigoku**

- Foot bath ✓
- Restaurant ✓
- Steamed buns ✓
- Gift shop ✓



**Kamado Jigoku**

- Foot bath ✓
- Drinkable onsen ✓
- Jigoku ice cream ✓

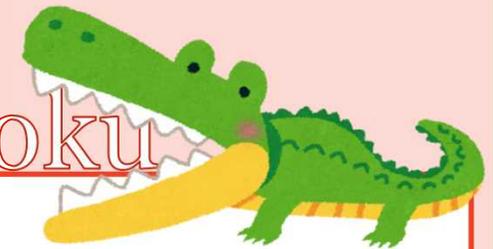


**Shiraike Jigoku**

- Aquarium ✓



## Oniyama Jigoku



The first thing I noticed when I visited Oniyamajigoku was that the mouths of all the crocodilians were open. Upon meeting Yasutsuna Utsunomiyage, operator and descendant of the founder of Oniyamajigoku (literally "Demon Mountain Hell"), I couldn't help but make that the first question I asked him.

As it turns out, crocodilians sleep with their mouths open because they're ectotherms, and they use their mouths to regulate their body temperature to keep themselves from getting too hot or too cold. This is the crocodilians' own natural form of temperature control. Another form of natural temperature control for the crocodilians at Oniyamajigoku comes from a different source: onsen water.

Because Japan has four seasons, it isn't typically feasible to keep crocodilians as they will get too cold come wintertime. However, the water from the onsen allows the crocodilians here to be kept alive even during the cold winter months. During the winter, the crocodilians submerge themselves into the onsen water to stay warm. During the summer, they laze around in the shade. (Looks like we've got something in common.)

Using onsen water as part of the environment for the crocodilians is only one of Oniyamajigoku's special features. Oniyamajigoku actually has a record breaking crocodile on site. This crocodile in question is not alive, but a model of him lives on in the onsite museum. His name was Ichiro, and he lived from 1923 to 1996. At nearly 7 meters, Ichiro was the longest and oldest crocodile to be brought up largely in captivity. Ichiro's third generation descendants are still alive in the park today. The average crocodile lifespan is 70 years, but Ichiro lived to be age 73.



Ichiro began the first of his 73 years in his birthplace of Malaysia, and the connection that Oniyamajigoku shares with Malaysia endures to this day. The onsite museum where Ichiro is displayed today is called the "Malaysia House." The onsite museum where Ichiro is displayed today is called the "Malaysia House." The Malaysia House was constructed from special iron wood that had never before been used outside of Malaysia and was specially imported from the Malaysian embassy. Malaysia House was built in a style reminiscent of traditional Malaysian architecture, and after its completion, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad made a courtesy visit to the premises.

(Ichiro was a crocodile, but Oniyamajigoku houses both crocodiles and alligators onsite. To tell a crocodile and an alligator apart, take a good look at their mouths. Alligators have more circular mouths whereas crocodile mouths are more triangular.)

Unlike other holding places for crocodilians, no killing takes place at Oniyamajigoku, be it for food, fashion, or otherwise. The alligators are not raw materials for products; Oniyamajigoku functions as a zoo. This zoo known as Oniyamajigoku was founded in the Taisho period and will celebrate its 100th year in 2022.



Take your time in the streets surrounding Jigoku Meguri. Snack on some onsen-steamed food.

Wiggle your toes in a foot bath.



**Chi no Ike Jigoku**

- Foot bath ✓
- Gift shop ✓



**Tatsumaki Jigoku**

- Gelato ✓
- Gift shop ✓



## Editor's Note

The weather in Oita has taken a turn for the severe lately, but there is plenty to look forward to. The future is full of festivals!

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