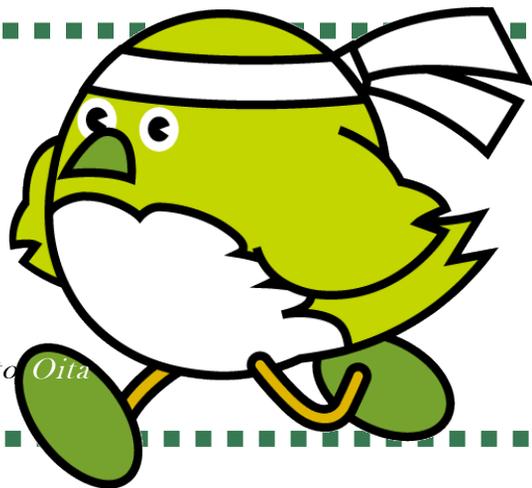


What's up,

OITA! 2019 July No. 38

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



The 21st *MUSIC FESTIVAL Argerich's Meeting Point in Beppu* Ended in a Big Success

The *Beppu Argerich Music Festival*, a major event held by world-renowned pianist and conductor Martha Argerich every year in Oita, had convened for the twentieth time last year. The festival welcomes world-class musicians annually, capturing the attention of both Japanese and overseas audiences as a treasured event of Oita. After revisiting the significance of the interactions between Oita and Rome from the times of Otomo Sorin at the gala performance that ensued in Rome last December, the event finished in grand success.

Moving onto this year, the 21st convention of the festival stepped up to a brand new stage altogether. The Tokyo performance in May had the pleasure of receiving Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita, not to mention that the audience were able to savour the co-performance between General Director Argerich and the globally-famed conductor Seiji Osawa, a moment that would no doubt go down in history.

It should be mentioned that the music festival is an event that General Director Argerich has put much heart into – as well as the nurturing of young musicians, much thought has also been placed into the cultivation of creative minds in children through music. Several events will be held in tie with the Rugby World Cup 2019, one of them including the *Can Cakmur Piano Recital*, which features the eponymous champion of the *2018 Hamamatsu International Piano Competition*. A great lineup is in place even though we are currently experiencing low season for music. For more musically related news in the future, please stay closely tuned!



After waiting for several weeks, I was finally able to participate in the long anticipated ceramics class on June 15. 'Beginners Very Much Welcomed' was what was written in the advert of *Toki*, a ceramics store situated in Yufuin, so I decided to use the opportunity to take a step outside of my comfort zone.

Under the staff's instructions, I had a hand at making something to my own tastes. Since I was told that the bigger the work is, the harder it is to handle, I decided to create a modestly sized bowl. Despite receiving the comment 'your work has quite the rustic touch' on several occasions, and the fact that my piece was clearly rougher around the edges than my friends', I think I had managed to produce a ceramic work that is fairly unique. It appears that ceramic works shrink down by around 20% in size once they hit the kiln, so I may only be able to use my small bowl as a condiment dish at the end of the day. Still, I am nevertheless excited for my work to arrive.

- Sarah Backley, CIR from the UK



After a long wait, we finally welcomed the 100-day countdown to the Rugby World Cup 2019 on June 8. The weather was fine with crystal blue skies, so my colleague and I participated in the *One Rugby, One Oita Parade* that is part of the 100-day countdown events. The sun was fierce, and we burnt in the bat of an eye despite having put on sunscreen. Nevertheless, the parade, in which up to 2,000 participants walked in unison, was such an impressive sight to behold that one may even forget about the heat momentarily.

Immediately after the parade, the *Oita City Chuo-dori Pedestrians' Paradise* took place on the main street of Chuo-dori. I enjoyed my time by strolling the street where rugby-related events and live music performances were in procession, tasting arrowroot ice blocks for the first time, and indulging myself in the atmosphere of the city that was engulfed in the sound of laughter and smell of food. It should go without saying that I had a very eventful day.

- Xin Lan Xie, CIR from Australia

Monthly staff corner



Iris Viewing Festival at Lake Kagurame, Beppu

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Japan is well known for its display of seasonal flowers. While I have had the fortune of visiting many famed flower-viewing spots, the iris garden at Lake Kagurame in Beppu is definitely one of the most impressive, so I think it's only fair that I spend the length of this issue talking about the wonderful place.

Lake Kagurame sits on the outskirts of Beppu city, and is around 30 minutes away on car. Those who don't drive can instead opt for the temporary bus that operates on the day of festival, though the service is infrequent so confirming the timetable prior to visiting is advised. The lake, while modest in area, is a small marshy haven for biodiversity as well as an excellent location for avid bird and insect-watchers throughout the year. Every year, on one Saturday that falls in June, a small-scale flower-viewing festival is held at the location, as this is the time of the year when Japanese irises are in full-bloom.

The Lake Kagurame Iris Festival fell on the 15th this year, and I decided to participate with my co-worker and a friend who happened to visit Oita. While we were riding the bus, rain began pouring down at an alarming rate and showed no signs of stopping even when we had alighted, much to our chagrin. Nonetheless, we were not going to let bad weather and muddy paths get in our way of having a good time. Skipping over any visible puddle while gripping onto our umbrellas, we made our way slowly towards Lake Kagurame.

In spite of the gloomy and miserable weather, the irises seemed to be having a good bath in the rain and looked fully alive in all their glory. The appearance of the irises came in some variety of bluish-purple, white, or yellow. What I had particularly enjoyed were the magenta ones that had stripes like that of a tiger. To give a sense of scale of the place, around 15,000 irises of 80 varieties bloomed in the modestly sized Lake Kagurame on the day, dyeing the area in pastel hues in the rain. A temporary booth and stage were set up, under which a free cup of matcha and a small Kagurame dango were distributed to the first 500 people to arrive. We sipped our tea quietly, while live music performers greeted us with amicable smiles.

Iris Garden in Lake Kagurame

Schedule & Access for 2019 (next year's schedule may defer slightly)

Festival date: From 11AM, June 15, 2019

Iris Garden opening dates: June 1~30, 2019

Address: 51061 Oaza Beppu

Access: 30 min by car from Beppu Station; alternatively, use the temporary bus operated by Kamenoi Bus Co.,Ltd. (550 yen one-way for adults, 280 yen for children younger than primary-school age)

Parking: 310 yen (530 yen for large vehicles over 8 tonnes)

Website: <http://www.gokuraku-jigoku-beppu.com/entries/kaguwameko-hanasyobu>

Something that pleased me exceptionally was the sight of onlookers who clapped politely at speeches and music despite the miserable weather, huddling around the booth with genuine enthusiasm in the interminable rain. I often find that the Japanese people have a gift for showing appreciation even when situations are dire, and the day of the Iris festival was a time when that infectious spirit really shone.

