



What's up, OITA!

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

JICA Volunteers Off to Ghana and Laos!



Tomotaka Sato
Dispatch Country:
Ghana



Yoshikazu Miyawaki
Dispatch Country:
Laos

JICA Volunteers?

JICA Volunteers is a program that, based on the needs of a developing country, dispatches a volunteer that has the skills, knowledge, and experience to meet those needs and wants to help people in developing countries.

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers:

Recruits may have a broad variety of skills and experience levels.

Senior Volunteers:

Recruits must have a certain level of experience or skills.

<https://www.jica.go.jp/volunteer/>

This year's dispatch includes two members from Oita, Tomotaka Sato and Yoshikazu Miyawaki. Before their dispatch, the JICA Volunteers paid a courtesy call to the Deputy Director General of the Oita Prefecture Planning and Promotion Department.

Mr. Sato will be dispatched as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer to the Republic of Ghana. There, he will use his experience in vehicle AC design from his current career to teach classes on refrigeration and air conditioning technologies at technical schools in the country, among other roles. Mr. Miyawaki will be dispatched as a Senior Volunteer to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. He will use his expertise and experience in Social Education as a curator at the National Museum of Luang Prabang (Royal Palace Museum).

What's Up in Oita? 国際交流員だより

◆ Sarcophagus BBQ... Doesn't Sound Tasty.

American CIR Austin Vaughn

Way back in 1932, two sarcophagi were discovered on the premises of Kouzaki's Hachiman Shrine. As time passed, the four skeletons that were found in those coffins became the subject of worship and, eventually, even a festival started to be held in their honor. My girlfriend and I were invited by a friend to this "Sarcophagus Festival." You don't really get a chance to go to local festivals like that these days, so we decided to go. When we got there, our friend had me, my girlfriend, and one other person he invited dress up in ancient clothing and get up with him on stage while he sung karaoke. That was a bit embarrassing, but it was fun, so eh, whatever. After that, we had a BBQ at a beach house we rented out. Japanese BBQs really are completely different from American BBQs. In America, usually you've got the dad or the grandpa cooking a bunch of steaks for everyone by themselves, but in Japan, you work with everyone to cook little pieces of meat and veggies. Felt a bit weird, but being able to go to a festival, watch the sea, and have a BBQ with the person I love will be an experience I'll never forget.





Umitama Experience Park Tsukumi Dolphin Island



Tsukumi Dolphin Island not only offers dolphin performances, but also experiences such as feeding and swimming with the dolphins. We're also the only place in Japan where you can attempt the "Dolphin Foot-Push!"

○Hours: 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM (Hours may be extended or reduced depending on the season)

○Entrance Fee: Adult ¥1,300 Child ¥800 Toddler ¥650 *Some experiences require separate fee

○Location: 2218-10 Youra, Tsukumi City



Hotojima

Hotojima, an island so beautiful it was chosen as one of Japan's 100 Fishing Village Heritage Sites. It takes 25 minutes to arrive by boat from Tsukumi City, and after that you can enjoy a leisurely stroll through the maze-like streets of the island.



Hyuga-don

Once upon a time, the fishermen of the once deep-fishing capital Hotojima devised a dish known as the "Tsukumi Hyuga Bowl." Fresh tuna and sweet sesame sauce are the absolute perfect companions for some hot, hot rice. Every summer, enjoy our *hyuga-don* promotional campaign!



Youra Peninsula Bungo Channel Kawazu Cherry Blossom Festival

Near Tsukumi Dolphin Island are nearly 5,000 Kawazu Cherry Trees. Every year from February to March, people from all over Japan come to see their blossoms bloom. Celebrate the festival with some local mikan oranges!



Austin Vaughn



John Henry, Meet Zenkai Osho

When I think of tunnels, I don't usually think of them being hand-carved, for obvious reasons. The mere thought of someone looking at a mountain with a chisel in their hand and going, "Imma make a big hole through that!" just boggles my mind. To me, the only person who could carve a tunnel by hand is the American folk hero, John Henry, and as far as I know, he isn't real. And even in his story, he died carving the dang thing.

But back in 1735, a monk going by the name Zenkai Osho was journeying through Bungo (Oita) and came across a problem the local residents at Yabakei Gorge (near Nakatsu) were having. Due to the creation of a dam, the water level of a nearby river had risen and in order to get past, locals had to use a treacherous bridge across the tall precipices of the Kyoushu Peaks.

Zenkai learned that both men and horses had lost their lives traveling on this dangerous path and resolved to create a tunnel for the people. He collected alms to fund this tunnel and began digging with a few masons he hired. In 1750 the first leg of the tunnel was completed. It's then said by some that Zenkai began to charge four *mon* per person and eight *mon* per horse or cart for travelers who used the road, allegedly making it the first toll road in all of Japan. Zenkai and his masons finished the entire 342m of the path (144m of tunnel) nearly 30 years later in 1764.

This tunnel's name is *Ao no Doman*, "Blue Tunnel" and it was my colleagues and my first stop on a tour through Yabakei. Every year, baby blue eyes flowers (nemophila) are planted all around the area, but unfortunately it wasn't the season for them, since they bloom in April or May.

Instead, we went for the autumn leaves...or at least, we tried to. Due to the strange weather this year, we ended up going a bit too early to see any big changes in color, but there were a few hints of yellow and orange here and there.

The tunnel itself is no longer the completely hand-carved one that it once was, as it went through major renovations in the 1900s, but you can still see remains of the original tunnel in a few different places, such as the "windows" of the tunnel that still have the marks from the chisels of the monk and his stonecutters. But when you see those marks, it really makes you think. Specifically, why use chisels over 30 years instead of blasting the stone away with gunpowder like other tunnels?





Cycling Roads are Real?

After we went through this tunnel came the main event, the reason we went to Yabakei: Maple Cycling Road. Well, that was the reason for three of us. One of my cohorts wasn't quite confident enough to ride a bike on their own and so they hitched a ride on a tandem bicycle instead. I've never seen a bicycle built for two in real life before, so that was a sight in and of itself. But I digress. The main thing we were going to see on this road were the changing colors of the maple trees, but for me, there was one other reason why I wanted to go. I had never been on a cycling road before.

Of course I had been on "bike paths" before, as in, a scenic road separated from others that motor vehicles are prohibited from traveling on, but those aren't normally called "cycling roads" in English. The only place I have ever heard the term "cycling road" before is in the Pokémon games. If you've been reading What's Up for a while, then you should already know that I'm a huge fan of Pokémon. To the point that Beppu's "African Safari" made me think of Pokémon's "Safari Zones." Because of that, I've been wanting to go on a cycling road for quite a while. Well, that and I'm a fan of cycling in general.

We went on the trail a bit backwards. Most maps have you start in the gorge to the south and then come out in the north, but instead we went the opposite direction, starting north and going south, deeper into the gorge. Luckily, there are places to rent bikes at both ends of the gorge, so that wasn't really a problem. What was a problem was that we had a little trouble finding the building to rent bikes in the first place. A hint for future travelers, if a giant sign says 「サイクリングセンター」 (CYCLING CENTER) in huge letters, **it is indeed the center with the bicycles.**

The cycling road itself wasn't too eventful, but it was exactly what I had hoped for. A well-maintained trail with beautiful scenery, stops to enjoy that scenery, plaques with history lessons about the surrounding area, and at the end, a restaurant with a peaceful Japanese garden and tasty food. I had the *sumi-soba* (charcoal soba), which used charcoal to turn the soba a dark gray. It didn't have any effect on the taste though. It was just great soba. Then finally, after our long journey, we caught a bus at the stop near the local junior high school. Only in Japan will you find a fairly large junior high with regular bus service in the middle of a gorge...

