
Multilingual Electronic Newsletter – Kagoshima

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● Toward World Natural Heritage Status (Amami & Okinawa) ●

On May 10, UNESCO advisory body International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recommended “Amami Oshima, Tokunoshima, Northern Okinawa Island and Iriomote Island” as a World Natural Heritage Site. The Japanese government had previously recommended them as well.

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee will review online from 16 – 31 July, and officially decide on the registration.

Amami / Okinawa is characterised by biodiversity, where many rare wild animals and plants that have evolved uniquely are left behind from the continent. Endemic species such as Amami rabbits and Okinawa rail also inhabit the subtropical laurel forest.

○Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) Column ○

●Putting the *shima* (island) in Kagoshima ●

Toh Jia Han (Singapore)

When the seasons next change, my 2 years as a Coordinator of International Relations will come to a close, and I will return to Singapore. Although my work is related to tourism and exchange, but I had not actually visited any of Kagoshima's islands before this trip. The responses I got to this fact ranged from a reproachful "That's a no go!" to sheepish admissions of "Me... me too." Well, I finally made my first island trip in March this year, to the UNESCO candidate Amami Oshima Island.

Hara Habu-Ya. My first stop plunged me straight into nature; a facility dedicated to the habu pit vipers that are endemic to the Ryukyu Islands. Besides a shop selling all kinds of snake-related souvenirs from leather goods to snake oil, there were also live enclosures and a fascinating snake show. The old performer had clearly perfected his repertoire over decades, and it was an educational and thrilling experience from start to finish.



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Oshima Tsumugi Village. Besides learning about the labour-intensive process of mud-dyeing *tsumugi* (silk pongee) that is Amami's specialty, I also learned about *maruki* (the number of warps), which are closely linked to the intricacy and price of the piece. The guide also told me about the expansion of colour range since the introduction of artificial colours in the Showa period, and the difference in regional

designs, such as the iconic Tatsugo area pattern. I was impressed by the solidarity and local support that the Amami residents showed: many wear kimono made of *tsumugi* for their coming-of-age ceremonies, and I spotted many *tsumugi* card holders when I exchanged business cards on my trip.



Hiratomi Shrine. When researching for my trip, I put this shrine on my list without hesitation. The shrine is dedicated to SUNAO Kawachi, who brought the process of making brown sugar from China, and Amami is famous for its brown sugar. Therefore, I was surprised to see that the shrine was a deserted little hut, a relic abandoned despite the historical importance it embodied. However, this mystery was solved later on in my trip, thanks to Mr Tomita from the Tomita Brewery.

Tomita Brewery. Tomita Brewery is the smallest-scale brewery that I have visited so far. Mr Tomita himself graciously showed me around. Besides being treated to a thorough revision of the brewing process, he also told me about the disposal of the acidic shochu lees, and the challenges of running a small operation.



Mr Tomita also shed light on the Mystery of the Neglected Brown Sugar History. In order to bolster the post-war Amami economy, brown sugar shochu was recognised by the national government as shochu and not spirits in 1945, lowering the tax rate significantly. Exclusive brewing rights were also granted to the Amami Islands. At that time, Okinawa had not yet been returned to Japan, and was excluded from this, despite their pre-war history of making brown sugar shochu. As a result, the government provided generous subsidies for Okinawa to grow sugarcane, and produce brown sugar. The Amami Islands would then buy Okinawan brown sugar in order to make brown sugar shochu. Even today, importing Okinawan brown sugar is cheaper than local production.



Amami Kyoraumi Koubow. The factory workers very kindly showed me their brown sugar manufacturing process, where they reduce sugarcane extract into brown sugar. They also told me that the reduction process is the same for salt, which they also make. Sugarcane juice is popular in Singapore, and brown sugar is also used in Chinese cooking and in bubble tea, so I think the manufacturing process would be a familiar yet new experience for Singapore tourists.

Amami Ocean Exhibition Hall. The Kuroshio current sweeps in many foreign marine species into the Amami ecosystem, so it seems like even the fishes are engaged in international exchange. As the northern boundary for coral growth, Amami's biodiversity is special compared to the rest of Japan, and this uniqueness is carefully curated here at the Amami Ocean Exhibition Hall.

The exhibition hall will undergo renewal from next year, and has plans to install a larger tank to house larger specimens of seaweed and a greater variety of fish. I also learned that such marine facilities do not develop in isolation, but instead collaborate with schools and fishermen to source for new species and conduct research. There were also clay works featuring animal spirits performing Amami traditions.



Marine Viewer. Besides being a special ecosystem, coral reefs also help prevent coastal erosion, and Singapore has been working hard to conserve our own. However, they have been decreasing in the face of the land-starved nation's land reclamation. From the boat, I could see the rias coastline very clearly, which gave rise to the Amami *shuraku* (communities).



Historically, the Amami islanders dwelled in small cluster communities, located on the seaside and isolated by a ring of mountains from other communities. These *shuraku* had strong communal identities, and even now rivalry persists between them.

Mangrove Canoeing Experience. Singapore also has a mangrove park (Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve), which was gazetted in 2002. I'm embarrassed to say that I haven't been there in the last 10-odd years... Still, I learned a lot from the guide, from the way that mangrove trees deal with salt, to the existence of crabs that climb trees. As we floated in the water, we looked out at the greenery of Amami, and the guide remarked that the alternating dark and light greens of old and new foliage was Amami's most beautiful face, as the islands did not have autumn foliage.

This Amami trip has helped me to understand the island culture of Kagoshima a little better. Although the southern-ness of the island might make it unique to the rest of Japan, it felt more familiar to Singapore in many ways, such as the cuisine, and the presence of mangroves. In my remaining time in Kagoshima, I hope to give my all and leave no regrets.



The Amami Branch Office staff who very kindly accompanied me on my trip.

○ The A-Z of Kagoshima's International Relations ○

● 27 April Visit by Representative to Japan, Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan ●

Representative to Japan Frank Hsieh (謝長廷 Xie Changting), from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan, paid a courtesy visit to the prefectural office.

Governor Shiota expressed his gratitude for the medical supplies from Taiwan to Kagoshima Prefecture in May last year, and conveyed his willingness to resume exchanges after the coronavirus pandemic, when freedom of movement is restored.

Governor Shiota also expressed that he hoped to continue strengthening economic ties such as trade and tourism, and further develop the relationship with Taiwan.



○ Kagoshima Seasonal Tourism Information ○

● Kagoshima City Aquarium Event Information ●

Special Exhibit “Who’s that Creature?”

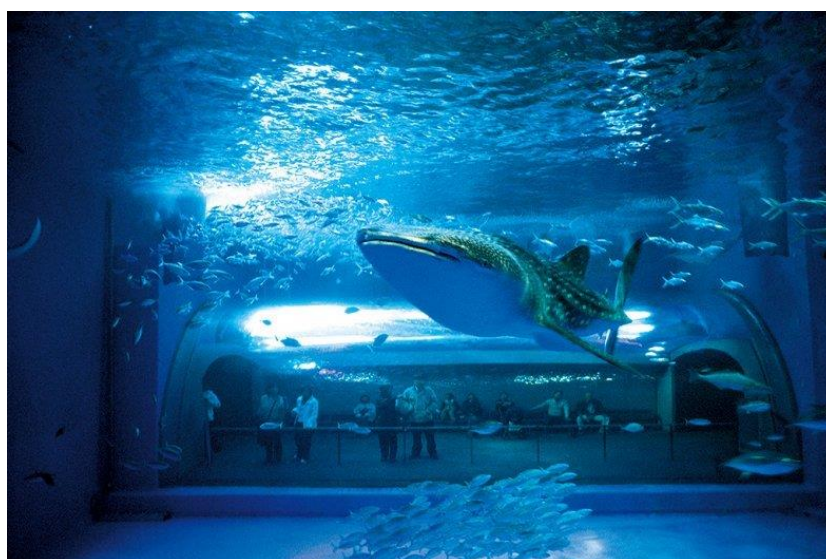
Until 27 June (Sun)

The largest aquarium in Kyushu.

At the 1,500-tonne Kuroshio tank, enjoy the leisurely yet powerful swimming of tuna, appearance of tuna, bonito (skipjack tuna), and large rays.

In addition, there are many unique and interesting exhibits, such as the Mangrove Forest of Life tank and the world's largest freshwater fish, *Arapaima gigas*, from South America.

In the seas of Kagoshima, we share the world of the Kinko Bay and Kagoshima waters, such as the world's first exhibition of *Satsuma haorimushi* (*Lamellibrachia satsuma*) and a seaweed exhibition.



Why not visit the aquarium during this rainy season? Of course, don't forget your safety measures like wearing your mask, washing your hands, and gargling.

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Kagoshima Prefectural Government Website

www.pref.kagoshima.jp/

Editor's Note (International Affairs Division, Kagoshima Prefectural Government)

Nice to meet you. I am the new editor from this issue forth.

I'm always on a sharp lookout for good information to share with all of you. I ask for your kind regard.

A photograph from when I hiked in Kirishima recently (Mt. Karakuni is in the back)



Which mountain next? As I mused thus, we entered an early rainy season. Pity...

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What did you think of this month's Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings?

The editors will continue to strive to make this prefectural multilingual newsletter a source of information and a bridge to connect all of you to Kagoshima.

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Kagoshima's Southern Wind Tidings is looking for the following content:

Kagoshima photo gallery

Please send us photos that remind you of Kagoshima, or pictures of Kagoshima you might have seen overseas. Please attach a brief caption (e.g. A mountain of volcanic-ash bags).

Knowledge about life in Kagoshima

Please share with us information about life in Kagoshima (e.g. a delicious way of eating fried fish cakes, or how to deal with volcanic ash).

We also welcome any other information that you would like to share with our readership.

▲▽▲▽ Inquiries▲▽▲▽

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