

Multilingual Electronic Newsletter

多言語メールマガジン

かごしま南の風便り



Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings

VOL. 175

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Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) Column

●A deep green jewel shining over the Pacific: Amami Oshima●

By Joseph Snowden (CIR from the UK)

If you take off from Kagoshima Airport and fly southwards for around an hour, it finally comes into view. A deep green jewel protruding out of the endless ocean, Amami Oshima.

Not only the home of sweet-tasting *kokuto* (brown sugar) *shochu* and Oshima *tsumugi*, said to be one of the world's three great fabrics, Amami Oshima has unique ecosystems and biodiversity, and was registered as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site in 2021 along with Tokunoshima, the northern part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island. In December 2022 I had the chance to visit Amami Oshima, and was able to experience the island's charms for myself. In this column, I introduce my impressions of the sites I visited.



Amami Oshima comes into view!

(1) Amami Park

Located just five minutes away from Amami Airport, Amami Park is a real ‘must-see’. It serves as a base for tourism, and by visiting the range of exhibition zones, including the ‘Path of the Sea’, ‘Path of the Island’, and ‘Path of the Forest’, you can learn all about Amami. The exhibitions combine photos, models, and interactive videos to introduce visitors to the culture and nature of the Amami region. What’s more, by scanning the QR codes in front of each display, it’s possible to see explanations in a number of different languages.



The Event Plaza



Statue of Tanaka Isson



The observation deck at Amami Park



Immediately adjacent to the General Exhibition Hall is the Event Plaza, where fashion shows, children’s Christmas parties, and a range of other events are held.

You can’t miss the Tanaka Isson Memorial Museum of Art, also located within the park. After moving to the island in his fifties, Tanaka Isson used his unique artistic style to portray many of the birds said to represent Amami Oshima, such as the ruddy kingfisher. The museum holds over 400 of his works, and the displays are changed seasonally.

Personally, the view from the Amami Park observation deck left a particularly lasting impression – the perfect place to start my Amami adventure.

(2) Hara Habu-ya

Amami Oshima is renowned for *habu*, a type of venomous snake, and it is said that there are over 100,000 on the island. With this in mind, I made my way to my next destination.

Established in 1948, Hara Habu-ya is a *habu* specialist store. In addition to offering a range of unique *habu*-based products, it hosts *habu* shows three times a day, and through collaborations with various brands, the store is full of luxury goods.

The *habu* show itself was a truly fascinating experience. The host, Mr Takehiro Hara, introduced the audience to a number of different live snakes, and even gave a demonstration of *habu-tori*, or *habu* catching, all while skillfully weaving humour into his routine. While the show is performed in Japanese, an English show guide is available.

What particularly surprised me was something that Hara-san said.

“Habu are the guardian spirits of the forest.”

In fact, it wasn't only Hara-san who held this view – many of the island residents I spoke to felt the same way. While acknowledging that they are, of course, dangerous animals, the people of Amami Oshima see *habu* as an important protector of the island ecosystem, and have a deep respect for them.



Did I really hold a snake...?
Or is it just an illusion...?



Hara-san, presenter of the *habu* snake show



The *habu*, guardian of the forest

(3) Amami Nature Observation Forest

Leaving the coast behind me, I make my way towards the forests of Tatsugo Town and enter a completely different world. Instead of the sound of lapping waves, the air is now heavy with the rustling of trees, pierced occasionally by the call of the Amami jay. I feel as though I've stepped into a primeval forest, thousands of years back in time. This is the Amami Nature Observation Forest.

Heading inside the Forest Pavilion, visitors are greeted by an exhibition room showcasing the unique ecosystem of Amami Oshima. From the bellflower cherry blossom in January and February to the range of insects that thrive in summer, you can enjoy learning about island nature across all four seasons.



The Forest Pavilion



Woodpecker



A 'strangler' fig tree



Newt

After a tour of the exhibition room I made my way to the actual forest, where I was able to see Amami Oshima's flora and fauna in their natural environment. As soon as I entered the forest, my guide turned and said to me, *"the forest is a place you should enjoy with all five senses."*

Indeed, thanks to my guide, I could hear the calls of wild birds, see the mysterious form of the sea fig tree (also known as the “strangler tree”), and even taste the fallen fruit of the chinquapin. Finally, I made my way to the observation deck, where a stunning view was waiting for me. The path to the observation deck is barrier-free, so it’s a place that everyone can enjoy.



The view from the observation deck

(4) Amami Oshima’s Izakayas

As night fell, my first day in Amami was almost over, but I stopped by at an izakaya before returning to my hotel.



Bottles of kokuto shochu

I ate many island foods, including *chomeiso* (*Peucedanum japonicum*) tempura and *abura-somen* (stir-fried somen noodles), and just like the food on Kagoshima’s mainland, they were delicious. I was also able to try several different brands of Amami’s iconic drink, *kokuto shochu* (a spirit made with brown sugar). I had *kokuto shochu* both with still water and with soda water, and every time I was surprised at how smooth and easy it was to drink.

Then, my personal highlight of my first day – I was able to listen to an authentic performance of traditional island songs, or *shima uta*. At first, I enjoyed listening to the island melodies and just immersed myself in the atmosphere they created, but the izakaya quickly got more and more lively, and by the end, everyone (myself included!) was dancing and singing “*Dokkoi! Dokkoi!*” along with the performers. I don’t think I will ever forget that moment.



A wonderful night of food and drink!

(That’s all for this time!

Find part two of this column in issue 176.)

The Governor's Activities

●Visit by Governor Kim Kwan-young of North Jeolla Province (South Korea)●

On 16th December, Governor Kim Kwan-young of South Korea's North Jeolla Province, with which Kagoshima Prefecture has enjoyed over 30 years of exchange, paid a courtesy visit to the Prefectural Office.

In addition, a ceremony was held on the following day (17th December) at Chin Jukan Kiln (Hioki City) to commemorate the Chin Jukan Honorary Consulate North Jeolla Province Exhibition, which showcases traditional crafts from North Jeolla Province. Governor Shiota attended the ceremony as a guest of honor.

Governor Shiota mentioned that the Chin Jukan Kiln has kept the Satsuma-yaki kilns of Kagoshima firing for around 420 years, as well as dedicating itself to promoting exchange with North Jeolla Province, an area with which the Chin family has strong ties.

Following the ribbon-cutting event at the commemorative ceremony, the governor looked at drawers made with *hanji* (traditional Korean paper) as well as lacquered tableware, among other traditional crafts.



Left: Governor Kim Kwan-young / Right: Governor Shiota



The commemorative ceremony (Chin Jukan Kiln, Hioki City)

●Visit by participants in the Satsuma Students Dispatch Project●

On 26th December, four students from Kagoshima high schools visited Governor Shiota to report on their participation in an online British education experience program over a 13-day period in August.

Comments from the students included that participating in the program ‘was a chance to get closer to my dreams,’ and ‘being able to listen to lectures in English about the world’s most advanced technology boosted my motivation.’

In addition, Governor Shiota heard from the students about participating in lectures taking place in a different time zone, online discussions, and the difficulty of the English used throughout the program.

The governor hopes that, in the future, all of the high school students that participated will make use of their experience for the benefit of Kagoshima and Japan.



Photos from the courtesy visit

The A-Z of Kagoshima’s International Relations

●Promoting Kagoshima at “2022 Pingtung Christmas” in Pingtung County, Taiwan●



Between December 23rd – 25th, we ran a Kagoshima Booth at the “2022 Pingtung Christmas” event held in Pingtung Park, Pingtung County, Taiwan, handing out tourist brochures and novelty items to visitors.

We received an invitation to set up a booth at the event from Pingtung County, so prefectural employees travelled to Taiwan and promoted Kagoshima, aiming to raise awareness of Kagoshima in Taiwan and boost post-COVID tourism.

The event is held every year during the Christmas period, and the theme for 2022 was “Ice World, Snow Country.”

Pingtung County Magistrate Pan Meng-an also participated in the stage events, and with over 5,000 visitors per day, the event was a huge success.



Left: The Kagoshima Booth / Right: Illuminations at the venue

Seasonal Tourism Information

●Radish houses (Minamikyushu)●



Today's photos show 'radish houses', a winter tradition in Minamikyushu!

Radish houses appear in Minamikyushu every year from December until around January. Against a backdrop of vast farmland, the countless hanging radishes are truly a sight to behold!

Photos by @joe_gram315 (from Instagram)

Thanks for the wonderful photos!





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

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How did you find this month's edition of Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings?

We editors will continue to strive to make this prefectural multilingual newsletter a bridge of information connecting you with Kagoshima.



The Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings's Bulletin Board is looking for the following Kagoshima-related content!

☆ The Kagoshima Photo Gallery

We invite you to send in photos that capture the spirit of Kagoshima, as well as photos of Kagoshima that you have seen abroad. Please send your photos along with a brief description (e.g., a mountain of ash collection bags).

☆ Kagoshima Lifestyle Wisdom

We invite you to share with us information related to living in Kagoshima (e.g., delicious ways to enjoy fried fish cakes, or how to deal with volcanic ash).

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

▲▽▲▽ Inquiries and submissions ▲▽▲▽

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