



# WHAT'S UP, OITA!

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

## RWC2019 Legacy: MOU Signing



On Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March, Oita Prefecture signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote friendship and mutual cooperation with the Welsh Government. With this, Oita Prefecture has taken the first step towards further strengthening its friendship with Wales going forward.

↑ First Minister of the Welsh Government, Mark Drakeford (left), and Katsusada Hirose, Governor of Oita Prefecture (right)

With the hosting of the Rugby World Cup in 2019 as the catalyst, Oita Prefecture and Wales have continued exchange in many areas, such as sports and the arts. On the basis of this continued exchange, the Welsh government floated the idea of a memorandum of understanding, and talks commenced thereafter. After numerous discussions, the final version of the Memorandum of Understanding was agreed upon and signed.

The First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, attended the signing ceremony online, whilst Consul General to the United Kingdom in Osaka, Carolyn Davidson, Welsh Government Japan Office personnel Robin Walker, Senior Representative of the Welsh Government, and Yoko Kobori, Senior Wales Affairs Officer, attended in person in Oita Prefecture. The five major spheres for exchange of 1) Arts and Culture, 2) Sports, 3) Education and Academia, 4) Tourism, and 5) Gastronomy, were determined, and a document detailing both sides' commitments to further develop their bi-lateral relationship, was signed.

## Receiving our Guests with the Welsh National Symbol, the Leek, and the Welsh National Flower, the Daffodil

By strange coincidence, 1<sup>st</sup> March, the day of the signing ceremony, was also Wales' National Day, Saint David's Day (A day where Wales' Patron Saint, Saint David, is celebrated). Oita therefore prepared the Welsh national symbols (the leek and the daffodil) for the occasion, although white spring onions produced within the prefecture were used instead of Welsh leeks.



↑ The signing ceremony venue decorated with leeks and daffodils

The atmosphere on the day was both friendly and amicable, and the signing ceremony was wrapped up in the decadently decorated reception room. The Welsh national symbols became a topic of conversation amongst the three guests present on the Welsh side, whilst First Minister Mark Drakeford wore a daffodil brooch. It was easy to see how beloved both the daffodil and the leek are in Wales!

## Next: A Visit to Oita..?

The signing ceremony took a hybrid form due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, combining online and in-person interaction. First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, expressed his hopes of visiting Oita in the near future. With the relaxing of border restrictions, the day the First Minister will be able to come to Oita is hopefully close at hand.



← First Minister, Mark Drakeford, and Governor Hirose, exchanging gifts online





大分県佐伯市サイクリングマップ

# SAIKI CITY, OITA CYCLING MAP

We have created a map collecting together several cycling courses in Saiki City. There are eight different courses in total that each give their own beautiful views of the city, including seaside courses, mountainside courses, and a course that goes all around Saiki.

You can choose the course that best fits you, from relatively flat beginner courses, to intermediate courses, and even rugged advanced courses with sudden and severe changes in incline. We've also listed different

rest stops and sight-seeing spots for each course so that you can enjoy them to their fullest.

There are also rental cycles available at six separate facilities for those who do not own a bike. Feel free to use their sports bikes, e-bikes, tandem bikes, or one of their many other cycle types! Enjoy cycling in Saiki!

Saiki City  
Tourism Division



Sora no Koen (Sky Park)



Honjo Giant Waterwheel

# Harmony Land: The Whole Ensemble

Pink, ribbons, and a whole lotta pep. As we entered Harmony Land through the archway of flowers and garlands topped off with the rounded faces of Sanrio's most beloved 'Kitty-san' and 'My Melody', I felt that pep injected into my step. My love of all things cute was fed from the very moment we entered the park, and the anime-girl sparkle in my eyes only glittered brighter as the day wore on. Pink as far as the eye could see, with waves of more shades than I knew existed, cushioned by a sea of baby pink blossoms:

the very reason I had chosen March to visit. With a pink haze of pink blossoms lining our path, I was more than ready for all that Harmony Land, a lone theme park buried deep in the mountainous countryside of Oita Prefecture, had to offer.



Our first stop was the Harmony Train, which carries passengers conveniently to the far side of the park in polka-dot pink carriages. As I waited in line excitedly with my Korean co-worker Noh – whose presence is becoming a staple in the recipe for news reporting of the grooviest variety – we chatted animatedly about all topics under

the sun, but also under the pink, pink rainbow created by the dream-like atmosphere of Harmony Land. As we rick-rolled down the path less trodden (in fact, probably never trodden by foot, at least), a cloud of baby pink floated into our line of sight on either side of the tracks. Delicate petals danced in the breeze and spiralled into our trajectory, creating a pink haze I could only imagine existed in heaven. It was both dizzying and breath-taking. We had hoped to board the train and complete the circuit of the park in one go in time to meet Cinnamon Roll back at the front of the park at 11, however we were ushered off the train at Carnival Square Station. We soon realised the reason for this being that it would simply be rude not to accept the invitation extended to us by Kitty-san herself to her birthday party...



The path less trodden, although beautiful, led not to heaven, but to the far end of the park, where just one attraction awaited us: a boat ride through Kitty-san's party tunnel. In spite of our masks, the sweet aroma of freshly baked cookies wafted its way into our nostrils as our little boat meandered its way through a pastel paradise.

*Swara Sife*  
Coordinator for  
International Relations



# Harmony Land: The Whole Ensemble



Little Stars swung on swings made of clouds and dreams, whilst Cinnamon Roll and his friends prepared delicious treats for Kitty-san's guests in a kitchen where everything was just a little too big for them. My eyes sparkled all the more.

After swinging back around to the front of the park from Carnival Square Station, we spent the rest of the day leisurely, taking a ride here, and an attraction there, followed by lunch. Rinse and repeat, minus the lunch. The next highlight was a show held in celebration of Harmony Land's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (a shade late due to COVID-19 restrictions, but set to continue throughout April – check the Harmony Calendar on the official homepage for more information). The roster included an introduction from Sanrio icon 'Kuromi-chan' and Kitty-san's childhood friend and boyfriend (according to his wiki page, anyway...), Daniel. Song and dance abounded as four floats bearing the marvellously round figures

of Cinnamon Roll, My Melody, and Little Stars Kiki and Lala, circled their way around the stage. It was truly an event that contained an immense amount of pep alongside delivering a sensation overload. Dare I say it even outshined Kitty-san's own birthday party..!

Towards the end of our time at Harmony Land, we made our way towards the Ferris wheel area behind Kitty-san's humble castle residence. There, we had another chance to dive into

dive into the wonder-filled world of sakura through a monorail ride with Keroppi the frog. We controlled our pace of advancement through the sakura-lined path, with the smiling countenances of character face-shaped carriages beaming down at us from the Ferris wheel. The sun's rays struggled through a blanket of cloud, warming our backs as the sakura swayed gently in the breeze. It had truly been a magical day.



**Harmony Land:**

Admission: ¥3000 / 4 years+

¥1,500 / evening ticket (entry after 4pm)

★senior, student, disabled, and pregnancy discounts available – see homepage for details ★

Opening hours: 10:00-17:00 (late night opening hours differ)

★Irregular closures – see timetable for further details★



# Adventure Tourism



## Grassroots Adventure Bus Tour

I went on a bus tour for the first time the other day. Normally when I go sightseeing, I choose places by myself or go to different places with my friends, so a guided tour was a fairly new experience for me. And I'm glad that I went, because now I have plenty of tales to tell about some pretty great places.



Austin Vaughn

## Shisei Agri

Our first stop on the bus tour was a *negi* (welsh onion, closely related to leeks) farm named Shisei Agri. Here we were shown a presentation on how the company focuses on making the best *negi* it can and then guided around the premises. First we saw how *negi* were shucked into the white, stalky form that people know and love. Then, we were shown to the field proper. I had never smelled *negi* before, and while I knew the Japanese word for onion was *tamanegi*, I never actually understood why that was. But when I went next to that field, I finally got it. With a smell like that, of course they're related to onions. I still haven't had a chance to eat any *negi* myself, but our division had actually used some of Shisei Agri's *negi* in the ceremony for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Wales and Oita, and according to my coworker who brought them home after the ceremony, Shisei Agri's *negi* are delicious.



## Mureduru Shochu Brewery

I'm going to be perfectly honest; I can't stand alcohol. But going to the Mureduru Brewery was still a fun experience. It was easy to tell how much care and effort the staff put into their products, and they even went out of their way to make sure that people who didn't drink alcohol enjoyed themselves. We helped the staff cook rice in a traditional Japanese *kamado* and ate lunch in a beautiful traditionally-styled room with a Japanese garden and koi pond right outside. They also thoughtfully provided souvenirs for every member of the bus tour, including non-alcoholic beverages for people like me who don't drink alcohol. (Also, while I didn't drink myself, I do have to say that their sake was a pretty big hit with everyone else.)





## Fukoji

Fukoji was probably my favorite part of the tour. It's a small temple on a peninsula with a shrine located within an alcove on the cliffside. There are also statues of Buddha carved directly into the cliff, some of the largest carvings in Japan. We went here for a "meditation experience." I had never meditated before, so I wasn't quite sure what to expect. We were led up into the cliffside shrine and the monk gave us a general overview of meditation and the "traditional" way to do it, but he also told us that the most important thing is that you are comfortable while meditating. With that in mind, we started the experience, and I couldn't think of a better place for a first experience with meditation than Fukoiji. The view from the shrine was absolutely stunning and it was so peaceful that you could just let the world go. Until a cat started meowing at the main temple. But I honestly enjoyed that too, because I like cats quite a bit, and being able to see one in that moment was absolutely fantastic.

## Taketa

Our last stop was Taketa. Here we were given a guided tour by "samurai" who held off the occasional *kusemono* (suspicious person) that attacked us. A historian also told us about the homes of the real samurai and also about the Hidden Christians that held services in a cave right next to the old police station, although we unfortunately weren't able to go into the cave itself due to a lack of time. We then went to a hill overlooking the entire city and got a wonderful view of all its buildings. It really was a sight to behold.

I'm sure I'll remember the places I went for a very long time. They were so striking that I don't think I'd be able to forget them if I wanted to. And I'd love to revisit most of them again. In fact, I've already been back to Taketa to visit Oka Castle. But that's a story for another time.