



What's up, OITA!

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



JICA Volunteers Paraguay and Vietnam



Umeki-san (4th from left) and Suzuki-san (3rd from right) pose for photo with Director General of Planning Promotion Dept. and others.

On Friday January 12, 2024, two new JICA Volunteers paid a courtesy call to the Director-General of the Oita Prefecture Planning Promotion Department. The two new volunteers are Kana Umeki and Honoka Suzuki. Umeki-san will be working as a physical therapist in a governmental organization in Paraguay, helping evaluate and improve their level of care and physical therapy programs. Suzuki-san will be dispatched to Vietnam to help with community development, and cooperate with local government officials to improve tourism policies. Both Volunteers will be in their respective positions for two years, until February 2026.



What's Up in Oita? 国際交流員だより

◆ S'more S'mores?

American CIR Austin Vaughn

I want some American snacks. I can't get the thought out of my head. I love my life in Japan, to the point that I'd like to stay here forever, but you just can't beat American junk food. So when my friend invited me to a "S'mores Party" the other day, I just couldn't say no. If you don't know what a S'more is, it's an American camping tradition, made from chocolate and a roasted marshmallow sandwiched between two graham crackers. The name is said to come from saying you'll want "S'more!" (some more) after you eat one. Normally you roast the marshmallows over a fire, but this time my friends and I used my stove and had a gooey time. I still have some graham crackers left, so anyone else want S'more?





Hina Dolls in an Elegant Edo-era Castle Town

Hiina Meguri

Every year from February to March, traditional Hina dolls are placed all over Kitsuki Castle Town. Of the Hina Matsuri (Dolls' Festival) in Oita Prefecture, Kitsuki is the only one to call Hina dolls by their traditional name, "Hiina." It's said that calling them by this quaint and ancient name started in tribute to Kitsuki Castle Town itself. There are many Hina dolls that can only be encountered in Kitsuki, whether they be the precious Hina dolls in the feudal home of the Sano family of domain physicians, or the dolls that have been shown in samurai and merchant homes since the Kyoho Era (1716-1736). In front of the buildings housing Hina dolls are bonbori (paper lanterns) and hana-mochi (rice cake flowers) marking the spot for visitors and bringing the enchanting spirit of Hina Matsuri to Kitsuki Castle Town.



Hiina Meguri Experiences

Kimono Walk AT Kitsuki Hiina Meguri



Those who choose to tour Kitsuki in a kimono can receive numerous benefits, such as entering sightseeing spots for free and receiving discounts at "Kimono Discount" restaurants. In addition, they can receive a small gift and commemorative photo at the Kimono Gratitude Festival on Saturday, February 17.

Special Hiina Cuisine



During Hiina Meguri, six restaurants (Dainochaya, Ichibankan, Zakoba, Owatari, Wakaeya, and Matsuyamadou) will have special "Hiina" items available on their menus.

Enjoy the elaborate dishes they've devised, with ingredients related to Hina dolls.



Where's Mejiron?

Beppu Journey

Austin Vaughn



Egg of the Sea

The chicken of the sea is tuna. But what is the "egg"? While it isn't food, I have found it: Umitamago (lit. Sea Egg) Oita Marine Palace Aquarium, is an aquarium on the border of Oita City and Beppu. Horrible jokes aside, the reason for the name is that the sea is a bed of evolution and unknowns, and that the aquarium is a new style of aquarium (egg) that comes from that constantly changing environment.

Personally, I have an "interesting" relationship with aquariums. It's not that I dislike them, per se, but I didn't really enjoy them. What's so fun about looking through glass at some fish...is what I thought. And honestly, my thoughts hadn't changed much over the years. I found looking at fish much more calming and interesting, which is why I chose to go to Umitamago, but in the end, it's still just looking at fish.

But the Marine Palace changed my mind. It was fun, and I think most of that is from it delivering on its promise of being a new style of aquarium. It's *not* just looking at fish. There are shows constantly going on, with completely different animals, different styles, and different things to learn. One of these is the "Dolphin Performance," with three dolphins, Lala, Kanata, and Haruka, showing why dolphins are thought to be the smartest species on Earth (depending on your thoughts about humanity). There's even a splash zone that gets wetter with each successive dolphin flip. While I have absolutely no idea why people sat there during this cold winter weather, it does seem like it'd be nice on a hot summer day.

There's also the "Umitama Performance" with tricky walruses and a fish-catching pelican, but I wasn't able to see it this time, unfortunately. However, I was able to see a performance that I'd never seen anywhere else—one that made me change my mind about "fish behind glass."

The "Fish Production" was something I never expected to see. Fish not just glub-glubbing in their tanks, but putting on an interesting show, with electrifying eels, fish that could read, fish with built-in water guns, and much more. To me, fish have always been "pretty" but not "interesting," so I was very much happy to be proven wrong. Evolution hasn't just led to pretty and strange faces, but also fascinating abilities and other features that you would never see here on land. I can't wait to see what else hatches from this egg.



Umitamago
Aquarium
Official
Website





Welcome to Hell. It's Cuter Than You'd Think.

Hell is not a word to be used lightly in English. Telling someone to "go to hell" is a horrible insult. I've never even said it to another person. And yet, if you say it in Oita, you're just recommending one of Beppu's most unique sightseeing spots. Welcome to the Beppu Hells.

There are seven Hells in total, Umi (Sea), Oni-Ishibozu (Demon Stone Monk), Kamado (Cauldron), Oniyama (Demon Mountain), Shiraike (White Pond), Chinoike (Blood Pond), and finally, Tatsumaki (Tornado). Every single one has different colors or properties to their onsen (hot springs) that makes every hell unique in some way. But what they share is that if you went into any of them, it would be a living hell.

But they've already been detailed to hell and back in recent issues of "What's Up, Oita!" (English Vol. 79 and Japanese Vol. 125). So instead, I would like to introduce you to the denizens of hell. The demons themselves. The providers of your eternal torment—the cuddly-wuddly oni you see above. Not what you would usually expect from hellspawn, that's for sure.

On February 10-11 and February 24-25, the Beppu Jigoku Association held an event that allowed for visitors, including myself, to meet-and-greet with the colorful devils. They posed with visitors, while journeying through the different hells themselves. The turnout was large, and I was able to hear at least a few chants of "Oni get out! Luck come in!" This is a chant said during the holiday of Setsubun on February 3, kids throw beans at someone dressed up as an oni (usually a parent) while saying the phrase in order to bring good luck for the new year.

In addition to the oni, however, there were a few other residents that bear mention. There are, of course, the crocodiles and alligators of Oniyama Jigoku, living fossils that are older than the concept of hell itself. You can't get close to them (for obvious reasons), but they sometimes decide to get a bit nippy and swim around a bit. Absolutely terrifying, which balances out the cuteness of the demons. Who would've thought that real creatures would be more terrifying than the devil?

Finally, there were two unexpected varieties of residents in Kamado Jigoku. For Girls' Day, Hina Dolls decorated a stage, with little paper umbrellas everywhere. And nearby were rocks painted like cats, in adorable sleeping poses. If hell really is this cute, I wouldn't mind going there.



Beppu
Hells Tour
Official
Website

