The 2019 Government Funded Foreign Students Arrived in Kagoshima

Every year, Kagoshima Prefecture welcomes descendants of people who emigrated overseas from Kagoshima as foreign students at universities in the prefecture. During the 11 month study programme the students learn Japanese language and their field of specialisation, and also gain a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and Kagoshima Prefecture. After returning to their respective countries it is hoped they will become cross-cultural agents who will strengthen ties between Kagoshima and their home countries.

This programme began in 1970 and is currently in its 49th year. As of last year, 88 students from Brazil, 20 from Argentina, and 28 from Peru for a total of 136 students studied in Kagoshima under this programme.

This year two students from Brazil and one from Peru were welcomed to Kagoshima Prefecture as government funded foreign students. In early April, the three students departed from Brazil and Peru and arrived in Kagoshima after long flights of approximately 30 hours. Almost right after arrival they attended the Kagoshima University entrance ceremony, thus beginning their lives in Kagoshima. They will stay until February next year.

Although this is their first time in Kagoshima, they explained their aspirations to study hard and challenge themselves to various things in their ancestral home Kagoshima.

Over the 11 months in Kagoshima, the government funded foreign students will not only be studying but will also visit their ancestors’ hometowns and meet with their relatives. Through these activities, we hope they will have a meaningful time in Kagoshima and learn and experience much.
Dear readers, have you heard of Okinoerabujima Island? I learned about Kagoshima’s many islands only after coming here 3.5 years ago. The first island I knew was Yakushima Island, which served as the setting for a world-famous animated movie. After going on business trips to Tanegashima Island with a space centre, Amami Oshima Island that is aiming to be registered as a World Natural Heritage Site, and Iwojima Island that is literally an island of sulphur, conquering Kagoshima’s islands became my dream before I knew it. I later visited the nearby yet off-the-beaten-track spots of Takeshima Island and Koshikishima Island.

I became interested in Okinoerabujima Island after a regular at my English conversation class, prefectural government official Mr Kuroki was transferred there. Knowing someone on the island was one of the reasons. Another is that the spelunking experience I had in Sagada, the Philippines was so thrilling I wanted to do some caving in Japan as well. In addition, I also wanted to experience my first diving here since Kagoshima is surrounded by beautiful clear seas. I was already determined to visit Okinoerabujima Island to do both activities one day before I leave Kagoshima, but being able to go on a business trip was a pleasant surprise that felt like a reward for doing two people’s work.

My impression of winter on the islands is either cloudy or rainy, but luckily for me the sun was out on all 3 days I was there. Okinoerabujima Island is so far away from mainland Kagoshima it takes 1.5 hours by flight, and on fine days it is easier to see Okinawa in the south. Greedy to experience as much as I could, I took the early morning flight and once the plane landed I went straight to Okidomari Fishing Port on the west coast to learn the basics of diving. Despite being a mere beginner, I was at first disappointed as I thought that diving in a port would be boring. However, one must not belittle the ports of Okinoerabu. The shallow clear seas allowed me a moment of bliss in the sunlit blue world observing shoals of fish and clown fish peeking out from between swaying tentacles of sea anemone. My instructor told me that divers can swim with humpback whales that migrate here in winter, tempting me to obtain a diving license even though I was so nervous during the first half of my first dive.

I did caving the next morning. I have seen Okinoerabujima Island’s limestone cave Ginsuido on TV before, but the cave for beginners was a different one called Rimstone Cave. The company lent me everything from the wetsuit and the jumpsuit, to the helmet, headlight, gloves, kneepads and even shoes. I was grateful for Japan’s impeccable hospitality as I had to wear my own clothes and slippers in the Philippines. The guide and I hiked through a forest and clambered down the entrance to a spacious cavern. It is funny how limestone features are named after objects they closely resemble such as ‘straw’, ‘bacon’ and ‘curtain’. Unlike the brown cave system in Sagada, the cave here retains sparkly white parts. I learned that the mud on limestone surfaces – stained when the cave was flooded or from human contact – can never be removed. With the sound of flowing water as background music, I made my way forward carefully taking care not to dirty the pristine surfaces: splashing through the cool, clear water, crawling through narrow spaces, and sliding down a flowstone as if on a waterslide. I have visited countless limestone caves before, but it was my first time seeing cave pearls, a blind cave shrimp, and fossil corals above sea level that is the source of limestone rock. The workings of planet Earth simply bowled me over. The guide was chatty and humorous when we were in dark and claustrophobic areas, but played
moody music to accompany the scenic view of rimstones at our final destination. It was all perfect.

Mr Kuroki brought me around on the afternoon of the first and second days, and local islanders prefectural government official Mr Yamada and Mr Kuroki’s friend Mrs Kawano brought me around on the third day. For coastal sightseeing spots, sandy beaches like Yakomo Beach are unmissable, but one can also appreciate awesome landforms like the cliffs at Cape Tamina and the blowhole of Fucha which was formed from sea erosion. According to Mr Yamada there is a 99% probability of seeing sea turtles at Fucha, and indeed I saw two turtles in less than five minutes!

Other sights are located in unusual places: historic watering place Jikkyonuho is located in a built-up area; Japan’s largest banyan tree is in the grounds of an elementary school; the road to Oyama Observatory for a panoramic view of the island unnervingly goes through the grounds of the Japan Self-Defense Forces.

As expected of a coral island, after seeing and experiencing the many things Okinoerabujima Island has to offer I have come to realise that corals are not just a tourism resource but in fact are a vital part of the islanders’ lives. Coral and coral limestone are used to build stone walls for fields and houses; water for domestic use used to be collected from ‘kurago (lit. dark river)’ – underground rivers flowing through limestone caves; the spring waters of Jikkyonuho, formerly a place for washing clothes and a watering hole for cattle and currently a playground for children, flow precisely because it is a limestone area.

On top of that, the main industry on Okinoerabujima Island – agriculture – is literally founded on red soils deriving from eroded coral limestone. On the island one can see fields of sugar cane and potatoes stretching for miles. The caving guide and prefectural officials told me that they pitch in with harvesting, and I sensed that this is a community with strong bonds in which people help each other out. It was the potato harvesting season when I went, and as I was taking pictures of the
fields the farmer gave me some freshly harvested potatoes! Mrs Kawano is apparently friends with the farmer, and not just that, she seemed to know everybody we passed, while Mr Yamada would often wave at fellow drivers on the road. In fact Mrs Kawano is a friend of Mr Yamada’s elder brother, and I couldn’t help but suspect that everyone on the island knows one another.

Mr Kuroki is not from Okinoerabujima Island, but he brought me places and introduced to me people he met at work such as a Local Vitalization Cooperator. I was hit with a sense of nostalgia as he did the same thing back in mainland Kagoshima when he was at the main office. We visited a facility that manually boils down sugar cane juice to produce brown sugar, toured a factory that grows Jew’s ear mushroom on sugar cane fibres, and interviewed a lady who is a tour guide at the same time she is the owner of a guesthouse-cum-café. From these meetings, I had the impression that many young people from other parts of Japan were charmed by this island to migrate here, and coupled with the news that they are making preparations to welcome foreign tourists, I was certain of Okinoerabujima Island’s bright future.

I am grateful to the people who brought me around and the merry people of Okinoerabu Office who I had dinner with. Thanks to the kind people and beautiful scenery I had such a delightful escape from reality. Dear readers, if you have the chance I highly recommend visiting Okinoerabujima Island!

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Seasonal Tourism Information
Wake Park Wisteria Festival
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Due to shared ties relating to Wake no Kiyomaro, a Japanese official during the Nara and Heian Periods, Wake Town in Okayama Prefecture donated 100 wisteria saplings to Kirishima City. The Wisteria Festival in Wake Park was held after the trees began bearing magnificent flowers. Local products will be on sale and visitors can enjoy the sight of wisteria blossoms over tea and Japanese confectionery. Entry to the park is charged at 300 yen after 30% of the flowers are in bloom.

Entry:
Individual: 300 yen (free for children below 12)
Groups over 10 people: 250 yen per person
Unlimited seasonal pass: 500 yen
Period: 20 April – 6 May
Venue: Wake Park

For enquiries:
Wake Park Wisteria Festival Executive Committee
Tel: 0995-54-6410
Introduction of Kagoshima Specialty Products
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Tel: 090-7445-4056
A Note from the Editors (Kagoshima Prefecture International Affairs Division)
What did you think of this month’s “Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings”? The editors will continue to strive to make this prefectural foreign language newsletter a source of information and a bridge to connect all of you to Kagoshima. We’d like to ask our readers to provide their opinions, suggestions, article contributions and Kagoshima-related news.

Inquiries
International Affairs Division, PR and Tourism Strategy Department
Kagoshima Prefectural Government
10-1 Kamoike-shinmachi, Kagoshima City, Japan 890-8577

BY EMAIL
English : cir1@pref.kagoshima.lg.jp   Japanese : minami@pref.kagoshima.lg.jp
Chinese : cir2@pref.kagoshima.lg.jp   Korean : cir3@pref.kagoshima.lg.jp

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