

## The Oita Castle Challenge

In my experience, many people who leave their country of origin and choose to live in Japan have a particular interest in at least one specific aspect of Japanese culture. It might be temples or kimono, or maybe even Japanese cuisine. For my friend, Ellen, it's castles. Ellen is from the UK, a place that boasts a fair number of impressive castles itself, but she is never happier than when she is tucked away in a café reading up on Japanese castles. When she came to visit me in Oita, it was Nakatsu Castle in Nakatsu City that was at the top of her must-see list – taking priority even over Oita's famous *onsen*!

The other week, Ellen admitted to me that she had set herself a challenge: she had decided to attempt to visit every single one of Japan's *Nihon Hyaku Mei-jo* - "Japan's 100 Best Castles" as ranked by the Japanese Castle Foundation. Being a fan of castles myself, I thought that this was a great idea, but I didn't quite share Ellen's ambition – "One hundred castles throughout Japan!? That sounds too much like hard work..." I thought. But then I had an idea: I may never tick off every castle on the *Hyaku Mei-jo*, but I could have a reasonable go at trying to visit at least a few of the many castles in Oita Prefecture.

I started to research. Oita was home to far more castles than I had anticipated – at least fifty, although probably more (I wasn't sure whether to count sites of former castles or just places that boasted castle remains or restored buildings). Visiting them all wouldn't be as hard as trying to visit a hundred castles scattered throughout the length and breadth of Japan, but it would be no picnic either. Luckily for me, I'd already visited two of Oita's castles, so I could tick two off of my list already!

### Nakatsu Castle



If you have ever been to Nakatsu City and seen the cute little chap with the oddly-shaped red helmet, then you will have "met" Kurokan-kun, the mascot of Nakatsu Castle. Actually, to give him his proper title, Kurokan-kun was a *daimyo* (feudal lord) named Kuroda Yoshitaka, and he was the first lord of Nakatsu Castle. Despite his reputation as a fierce warrior (there was even recently an TV dramatisation of his life), the mascot he inspired, Kurokan-kun, welcomes all visitors to Nakatsu Castle with an adorable smile and a friendly wave.

When I went to Nakatsu Castle, it wasn't just Kurokan-kun who I was able to meet! As me and Ellen posed for photos with Kurokan-kun in front of the

castle, who should emerge and introduce himself to us but the mayor of Nakatsu himself! He offered to take a photo with us –



Ellen dresses up as Kurokan-kun

and Kurokan-kun – as well as letting us pose with some traditional Japanese samurai weaponry. We may have been two giggly tourists, but we tried our best to act the part of retainers to the Nakatsu Castle *daimyo* and strike at least somewhat fearsome poses. It was, without a doubt, the best welcome to any castle that I have ever received.

Sadly, the original Nakatsu Castle building burnt down in 1877, but the current structure (completed in the sixties) is beautiful. It towers over the Nakatsu skyline and when we visited the castle in autumn we were able to catch our first glimpse of it through the autumn leaves.

The inside of the castle is a museum stuffed full of information and artefacts, including helmets so that guests can dress up as Kurokan-kun. Incidentally, the castle also boasts an extremely gruesome painting of a warrior collecting the heads of his enemies – to really get you in that warrior mindset...! For anyone with an interest in Japanese history, this castle is a must-see, particularly the large paintings depicting famous battles hanging on its interior walls.

## Kitsuki Castle

I've been lucky enough to wear kimono on a number of occasions and in some very lovely locations, but quite possibly none of those experiences can compare to wearing a kimono while wandering around Kitsuki Castle in Kitsuki City. On the third Saturday each month, Kitsuki City has a kimono day: wear a kimono and you will be treated to discounts in certain cafes and free entry to other tourist attractions, including the beautiful Kitsuki Castle. Taking photos in kimono is always fun, and castles always make a perfect photographic backdrop, so naturally posing in front of a castle in your kimono is pretty fantastic.

Kitsuki Castle is famous for being one of Japan's smallest castles. But just because it isn't a giant like the castles in Himeji or Osaka doesn't mean that it is not more than worth a visit. When I went with two of my friends, the view of the sparkling sea under the clear blue sky as viewed from the observation deck was breathtaking. We had the castle pretty much to ourselves and were able to look at the small exhibits of beautiful and historic items, including a number of Buddhist statues. Compared to some of the larger castles I've been to that have been packed with tourists, touring Kitsuki Castle was a gentle and laid back experience. Not to mention that wandering around the traditional Japanese building in my traditional Japanese kimono made me feel like I was really getting to experience Japanese culture.

\*\*\*\*\*

As I continue to explore Oita, I am looking forward to continuing my challenge and visiting as many castles as I can! Luckily, I'll have a lot to choose from. I hope that people reading this will also be inspired to check out some castles in Oita Prefecture!



Roberta and Yuki pose in front of Kitsuki Castle.



A view from the top of Kitsuki Castle.

## EXHIBITIONS &amp; SCREENINGS

Date	Description	Place	Admission	Contact #
March 6 <sup>th</sup> – March 29 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Contest Entries for Seven Genres of Art Shown in one Hall (yōga and woodblock prints, Japanese paintings, writings, photography, sculpture, craft work and design)</b>	Oita City Art Museum	Free	☎ 097-554-5800

\*\*\*Most Museums and Centers are closed on Monday, or Tuesday if Monday is a public holiday. Student admissions vary, highest cost shown.\*\*\*



## STAGE &amp; MUSIC EVENTS

Date	Time	Artist/Event	Venue	Cost	Contact #
March 12 <sup>th</sup>	19:00	One Coin Relay Concert Special – YAMATO String Quartet	iichiko Otonoizumi	¥2000	☎ 097-533-4004
March 14 <sup>th</sup>	13:00	OPAM Opening Celebration's Oita Opera Festival – Verdi's Othello	iichiko Grand Theatre	Prices vary (booking in advance recommended)	☎ 097-533-4004
March 18 <sup>th</sup>	13:30 18:00	Japanese Bunraku Puppet Theatre	iichiko Otonoizumi	Prices vary (booking in advance recommended)	☎ 097-533-4004
March 29 <sup>th</sup>	14:00	iichiko Grand Theatre Junior Orchestra Sixth Concert	iichiko Grand Theatre	¥1000	☎ 097-533-4004
April 2 <sup>nd</sup>	11:30	Nice Breeze Jazz Group	Cantaloop II	¥500 +drink	☎ 097-548-5363
April 7 <sup>th</sup>	18:30	William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night	iichiko Grand Theatre	Prices vary (booking in advance recommended)	☎ 097-533-4004

\*\*Ticket prices range from student to most expensive general admission. Prices shown otherwise indicate price for purchase on the day of the event, they may be cheaper if purchased in advance. "w/ drink" prices include a drink, "+drink" prices require the additional purchase of a drink. Times shown indicate start times, doors usually open 30 minutes beforehand.

## VENUES

*iichiko Grand Theatre= Oasis Tower 1F Oita City    iichiko Otonoizumi=Oasis Tower 4F Oita City    Cantaloop II=3-2-30 Miyako-Machi Nakayama Dai 5 Building 6F Oita City*

## Great East Japan Earthquake - Charity Concert

### "A Large Prayer Concert in Oita – Round 4"

A series of concert performances to raise money for charity will be held to mark the fourth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Money raised will be donated to the non-profit organisation "Sumi-chan no Ie," located in Miyagi Prefecture. Entry to the concert is free but all attendees are encouraged to make a donation. There will be a number of performances in a variety of genres, including classical music and opera, and there will also be a charity tea ceremony.

**Date/Time:**

March 7<sup>th</sup> (Saturday) – 15:00 ~ 17:00

March 8<sup>th</sup> (Sunday) – 15:00 ~ 17:00

March 11<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday) – 19:00 ~ 21:00

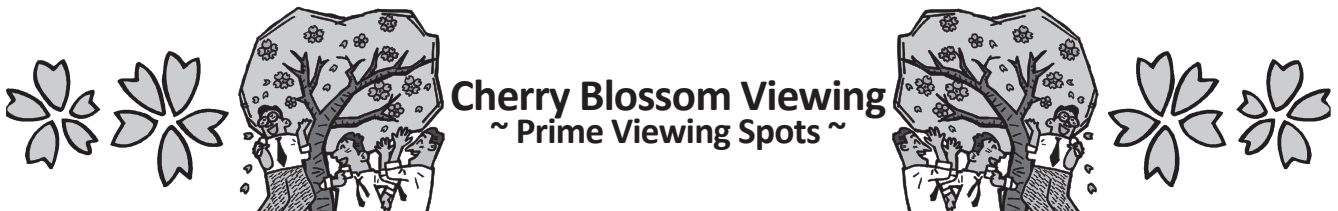
**Place:** The Japanese Evangelical Lutheran Church, Oita (Nihon Fukuin Ruuteru Oita Kyōkai), Oita-shi Ohte-machi, 2-3-25

**Telephone:** 097-535-1595



## Festivals and Events

Date	Event Description	Location	Contact #
Mar. 1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Tsujibasha opening</b> - this day marks the beginning of spring in Yufuin, when the horse drawn carriages recommence operations. A ceremony will be held	Yufu City JR Yufuin station	☎ 0977-85-4464
Mar. 7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Haniwa (clay images) making workshop</b> - A hands on event for children and parents to enjoy. Participation fee is 230yen, reservations necessary.	Oita City History Museum	☎ 097-549-0880
Mar. 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Kimono Appreciation Day</b> - held on the third Saturday of each month, with special offers and discounts for on kimono rental and professional photography.	Kitsuki City Jouka-machi	☎ 0978-63-0100
Mar. 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Magatama' bead-making workshop</b> - A hands on event for children and parents to enjoy. Participation fee is 200yen, reservations necessary.	Oita City History Museum	☎ 097-549-0880
Apr. 5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Taketa Okajyou Sakura Festival</b> - events will be held around the castle from 11:00AM	Taketa City Okajyou	☎ 0974-63-2638
Apr. 1 <sup>st</sup> ~ 5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>The 101<sup>st</sup> Beppu Hot Springs Festival</b> - this festival will include a number of events and attractions, including free entrance to approximately 100 designated hot spring locations.	Beppu City City-wide	☎ 0977-24-2828
Apr. 1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Mount Ogi Fire Festival</b> - Ogi-yama will be set aflame as part of the Beppu Hot Spring Festival. Scenes of the mountain on fire and the hot spring steam rising provide great photo opportunities!	Beppu City Ogi-yama	☎ 0977-24-2828
Apr. 4 <sup>th</sup> ~ 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Tulip Festa 2015</b> - the tulips in this rural town are in full bloom in April. Fun events for visitors will be held each Saturday and Sunday for the duration of the festa.	Bungo Ono City Ogata-machi, near the Harajiri falls	☎ 0974-42-2111
Apr. 12 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Tsurumi Mountain Hiking Competition</b> - three different hiking courses from a timed race, to more relaxed walking courses. Reservations necessary, number of participants is limited (application deadline for walking courses March 6 <sup>th</sup> )	Beppu City Spa Beach to Mt. Tsurumi peak	☎ 0977-24-2828
Apr. 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Kimono Appreciation Day</b> - held on the third Saturday of each month, with special offers and discounts for on kimono rental and professional photography.	Kitsuki City Jouka-machi	☎ 0978-63-0100



In Oita Prefecture, cherry blossoms (*sakura*) begin blooming from late March, and the blossoms generally last until early to mid April. Below is a short list of some well known cherry blossom viewing spots in Oita Prefecture. These spots are ideal for enjoying your own little *hanami* (cherry blossom viewing) party with friends, food and drinks.

City	Location	Blossom period	Address/directions	Number of trees	Contact #
Beppu City	Beppu Park 別府公園	Late March ~ Early April	15 minutes by car from Oita IC 5 minutes by bus from JR Beppu station	100	☎ 0977-21-1111
Usuki City	Usuki Castle 臼杵城跡	Late March ~ Early April	10 minutes on foot from JR Usuki station	1000	☎ 0972-64-7130
Beppu City	Mt. Ogi Sakura Garden 扇山さくらの園	Early April	5 minutes by car from Beppu IC 20 minutes by bus from JR Beppu station	6000	☎ 0977-21-1111
Kunisaki City	Aki Dam Park 安岐ダム公園	Early ~ Mid April	30 minutes by car from JR Kitsuki station 20 minutes by car from Oita Kukoudouro Aki IC	3000	☎ 0978-72-5168
Usa City	Usa Shrine 宇佐神宮	Early April	10 minutes by bus from JR Usa station	1200	☎ 0978-37-0001
Taketa City	Oka Castle Ruins 岡城跡	Early April	20 minutes on foot from JR Bungo Taketa station	1500	☎ 0974-63-0585
Oita City	Heiwa-shimin Park 平和市民公園	Late March ~ Mid April	15 minutes by bus from JR Oita station (to 'Hanazuru' bus stop) 20 minutes by car from Oita IC	650	☎ 097-558-8135

## What's Going On?

### From the Plaza

**A free foreign book giveaway** will take place at the Plaza during March. Please see page 6 of this TOMBO issue for more details.

#### Free Legal Consultations

The Oita International Plaza is holding free legal consultations on **March 18<sup>th</sup>** from **13:00-16:00**.

The Oita Emigration/Immigration Affairs Council also organizes free consultations where emigration/immigration specialists are available to offer advice on a variety of topics from Immigration Bureau paperwork and procedures, to daily life matters. English interpretation available, other languages may be available with reservation two days in advance.

Date/Time: **March 1<sup>st</sup> & April 5<sup>th</sup> - 13:00-16:00**

Venue: the Oita International Plaza

For more information contact the Oita International Plaza.

TEL: 097-533-4021

#### Free Tagalog Consultations

Date: Saturday **March 7<sup>th</sup>** & Tuesday **March 17<sup>th</sup>**

Saturday **April 4<sup>th</sup>** & Tuesday **April 21<sup>st</sup>**

Time: **13:00-16:00**

Venue: Oita International Plaza

(iichiko Culture Center, B1F)

Consultant: Rhodora Yoshitake

#### Free Chinese Consultations

Date/Time: **Every Thursday 10:00-13:00**. Place: Oita International Plaza. Consultant: Cui Wenyu (\*Dates and times are subject to change. Please contact the Oita International Plaza before coming.) TEL: 097-533-4021

Venue: Oita International Plaza (iichiko Culture Center, B1F)

### Japanese Lessons

#### Himawari Japanese Volunteers

Support for people learning Japanese in order to help them enjoy their lives in Oita, now at three different locations.

Wasada Public Hall Wed. 10:00-11:30

Meiji Akeno Public Hall Wed. 14:00-15:30

Tsurusaki Public Hall Sat. 10:00-11:30

For more information contact Ms. Fukata TEL: 097-527-2614

E-MAIL: [nihongo\\_himawari\\_oita@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:nihongo_himawari_oita@yahoo.co.jp)

#### Nihongo Rakuraku-talk

Beppu City Hall offers free Japanese lessons every Monday from 14:00-15:30. For more information contact Mr. Kii in the Beppu International Affairs Division

TEL: 0977-21-6133 E-MAIL: [int-ma@city.beppu.oita.jp](mailto:int-ma@city.beppu.oita.jp)

#### Sakura Japanese Class

Come study Japanese with friendly volunteers and teachers in a pleasant atmosphere. Sakura Japanese Class is held every Monday from 10:15-12:00 at the Oita University International House in Nishiki-Machi, Oita City. Classes are free of charge. For more information call Ms. Ohashi CELL: 090-7866-2486

#### AIUEO Japanese Lessons

Volunteers offer free Japanese lessons on Tuesday and Friday from 10:20-11:50 at I-NESS near Oasis Tower as well as Thursday nights at Compal Hall from 18:30-20:30. Lessons are also offered in Beppu at the Beppu Foreign Tourist Information Office on Tuesday mornings from 10:00-12:00. For more information contact:

Ms. Miyase CELL: 090-8353-2485 (day lessons)

Ms. Kato TEL: 097-532-5940 (night lessons)

### Community Classes and Events

#### Happy Talk

Come practice speaking Japanese with other learners and native speakers. Reservations not required, just show up on the day.

**Information on March and April's Happy Talk dates was not available when this issue of the TOMBO was produced. Please contact the Plaza or the Happy Talk organisers for information.**

Please bring your own drink if you like. Participation is FREE. For more details visit the Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/HappyTalkOita>

## Free Foreign Books Giveaway



Calling all bookworms - the Oita International Plaza will be holding a FREE foreign books giveaway. Don't miss out on a chance to nab some free literature on the following dates:

- 7<sup>th</sup> March (Saturday), 10:00~19:00
- 10<sup>th</sup> March (Tuesday), 10:00~19:00
- 11<sup>th</sup> March (Wednesday), 10:00~19:00
- 12<sup>th</sup> March (Thursday), 10:00~19:00
- 13<sup>th</sup> March (Friday), 10:00~19:00

The giveaway will take place in the Oita International Plaza (iichiko Culture Center (B1F), 2-33 Takasago-Machi, Oita.)

**Please remember to bring your own bag.** Books will be limited to a **maximum of 5 books per person.**

国際交流センター

公益財団法人 大分県芸術文化スポーツ振興財団

大分市高砂町2-33 OASISひろば21(B1F)

**☎ 097-533-4021 FAX:097-533-4052**

# Oita International Plaza

**Oita Prefecture Arts, Culture & Sports  
Promotion Foundation**

OASIS Hiroba21 (B1F) 2-33 Takasago-Machi, Oita-Shi 870-0029

THANK YOU !!

A special thanks to all those who co-operated with us for this issue. Your help was very much appreciated.

THE TOMBO is produced by:

Oita International Plaza  
Oita Prefecture Arts, Culture & Sports  
Promotion Foundation

2-33 Takasago-Machi

Oita-Shi Oita-Ken 〒 870-0029

**☎ 097(533)4021**

Fax 097(533)4052

E-MAIL: in@emo.or.jp

<http://www.oitaplaza.jp/english/>

HOURS: Monday-Friday 9:30am-7:00pm

(closed weekends and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays of each month. We are open on the Saturdays before these Mondays)

Closed national holidays & Dec 29<sup>th</sup> - Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>

The International Plaza is located on the basement floor of OASIS Hiroba 21 (iichiko Culture Center).

