

Religion in Oita

There's a popular saying that goes, "There are three things you shouldn't talk about in polite company: sex, politics, and religion." But today, we're going to talk about that last one: religion. Or, more specifically, religion in Oita.

I only know two things about religion in Oita:

1. Usa Jingu was the first shrine-temple in all of Japan, and
2. Sorin Otomo, former feudal lord (daimyo) of what is now Oita, was Christian.

Let's start with Usa Jingu. But first, allow me to set the scene.

You are a Japanese person living in Japan in the year 779 CE.

You have never had miso soup before. Miso is a food for rich people and isn't used as a seasoning yet. (Miso soup won't exist for at least another four hundred years.) Samurai exist, but they aren't warrior protectors of feudal lords. (They won't be until the 10th century.) The best poetry of the time has been compiled into the *Manyoshu*, but there are no haikus. (You'll be dead long before they're invented in the 1600s.) Worst of all, you have to chat with your friends in person. LINE is still over a thousand years away.

You also practice Shintoism and Buddhism simultaneously.

According to *Nihon-shoki*, Buddhism came to Japan by way of what is now South Korea in the year 552 CE.

On the other hand, Shintoism, Japan's homegrown religion, has been around for longer than recorded Japanese history. But it isn't until 779 that Japan's first shrine-temple is built.

Shrine-temples are exactly what they sound like: a shrine and a temple both sharing the same complex.

Calling Usa Jingu a shrine-temple in and of itself is a bit misleading though. Usa Jingu was not a shrine-temple when it was built in the early eighth century. It was not until Miroku-ji Temple came to be situated next to it that the resulting mixture became known as "Usa Hachimangu." Usa Hachimangu Miroku-ji, not Usa Jingu, was Japan's first shrine-temple.

Although the grounds of Usa Jingu are quite large and include a main hall designated as a national treasure, you may not think the grounds are that different from any other shrine. It has brilliantly red gates, sells *omamori*, and occasionally hosts festivals. But, unlike most shrines, Usa Jingu has 40,000 children. (Try and top that!)



Usa Jingu is the head shrine for Hachiman (shrines that enshrine hachiman, the Japanese god of war), the most popular type of shrine in Japan. The more than 40,000 Hachiman shrines in the country, including Kyoto's Iwashimizu Hachimangu, are all Usa Jingu's "children."

But Usa Hachiman wouldn't be the last interesting religious fixture in Oita.

Allow me to set the scene (again).

The year is 1551.

You can enjoy a bowl of ramen if you'd like (it's not called "ramen," and it's not particularly popular yet, but it's been around since the fifteenth century). You can participate in tea ceremony (it's a little different from the modern day version but bears a strong resemblance to it). You can even watch a Noh play (although kabuki won't exist until 1603).

Of course, it's still not the Japan of today. After all, LINE is still over four hundred years away.

But in the year 1551, an interesting thing happens: Sorin Otomo meets Francis Xavier.



Francis Xavier



Sorin Otomo

Francis Xavier (St. Francis Xavier after 1622) was a Jesuit missionary from Navarre (now part of Spain) who came to Bungo Province (now Oita Prefecture) to spread Christianity. In 1551, 21 year old Sorin Otomo summoned him for a meeting.

Some 27 years later, in the year 1578, Sorin Otomo was baptized into the Christian faith. He sent two vassals (Harunobu Arima and Sumitada Omura) along with a handwritten letter from himself to the Portuguese king and took on the name of "Don Francisco."

But the impact of Otomo becoming Christian didn't stop at sending letters or vassals. He embraced many aspects of xenophilia. Otomo protected the spread of Christianity throughout his domain and embraced "Nanban" trade (trade between Oita and European countries like Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands).

Now, let's return to the year 2018.

The time of the samurai has long since drawn to a close, kabuki plays are significantly less popular than movie screenings, and LINE finally exists.

Unfortunately, in the year 2018, much of Sorin Otomo's legacy has long since perished. "Long since" means since 1587, after he lost a battle against the Satsuma Clan (who ruled over what is now southern Kyushu, including Kagoshima, Kumamoto, and Miyazaki).

However, you can visit his reconstructed grave in Tsukumi and see a statue of his likeness near Oita Station.

But let's leave 2018. Let's go to 2019, to 2099 and beyond.

What does the future of religion in Oita look like?

I believe that the future looks diverse.

There are many religious establishments of many denominations scattered throughout the prefecture. Oita even has a mosque now, located in Beppu. Although there is only one mosque in the prefecture at the moment, the number of facilities that have begun to offer halal food has gradually increased. I think, in the years to come, other religious considerations will increase as well.

Even now, we are watching history unfold.

Visiting Usa Jingu

The gates of Usa Jingu are open from 6 AM to 9 PM from October to March. From April to September, they are open from 5:30 AM to 9 PM.

Several nearby parking lots are available for a 400 yen rate. For those using public transportation, take the train to Usa Station. Get on the bus bound for "Yokkaichi" (四日市) and get off at the "Usa Hachiman" (宇佐八幡) bus stop.

There is no entry fee for Usa Jingu, but the onsite Treasure Hall (open from 9 AM to 4 PM) is 300 yen for adults, 200 yen for high school/junior high school students, and 100 yen for elementary school students.

Multilingual audio guides (Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean) can be rented for 500 yen from the nearby Usa City Tourism Association.

EXHIBITIONS & SCREENINGS

Date	Description	Place	Cost	Contact #
Nov. 17 th – Jan. 21 st	The multi-talented artist of 20th century Isamu Noguchi —from sculpture to body and garden—	Oita Prefectural Art Museum (OPAM)	¥1,000	☎ 097-533-4500
Dec. 8 th – Feb. 6 th	“Collection no Daigomi” (Pleasure of our collection)	Oita Prefectural Art Museum (OPAM)	¥300	☎ 097-533-4500
Jan. 5 th – Feb. 12 th	Art Takeshi Exhibit	Oita City Art Museum	¥1,000	☎ 097-554-5800
Jan. 10 th – Apr. 8 th	Collection Exhibition	Oita City Art Museum	¥300	☎ 097-554-5800
Jan. 31 st – Apr. 23 rd	Gems from the Oita University Library	Oita Prefectural Museum of History	¥310	☎ 097-837-2100
Feb. 9 th – Apr. 10 th	“Wa no Kokoro” (Spirit of Japanese culture)	Oita Prefectural Art Museum (OPAM)	¥300	☎ 097-533-4500
Feb. 23 rd – Mar. 25 th	The 53rd Oita City Art Exhibit	Oita City Art Museum	FREE	☎ 097-554-5800
Feb. 29 th – Jan. 28 th	“Waka to Egokoro no Majiwari” (Harmony between heart of poem and painting)	Oita Prefectural Art Museum (OPAM)	¥500	☎ 097-533-4500
Mar. 21 st – Mar. 25 th	The 37th Oita Junior Design Exhibition	Oita Prefectural Art Museum (OPAM)	FREE	☎ 097-521-1005

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



STAGE & MUSIC EVENTS

Date	Time	Artist/Event	Venue	Cost	Contact #
Jan. 24 th	19:00	Oita Opera New Year Concert	iichiko Oto-no-Izumi Hall	¥1,000	☎ 097-533-4004
Feb. 3 rd	14:00	iichiko Presents Wales String Quartet, Beethoven Compositions String Quartet Concert	iichiko Oto-no-Izumi Hall	¥3,000	☎ 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.

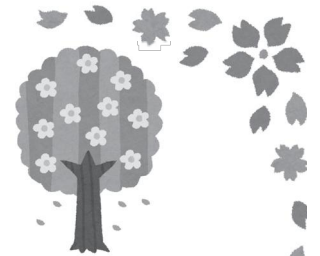
VENUES

iichiko Oto-no-Izumi= Oasis Tower 1F Oita City

Cherry Blossom Viewing
~ Prime Viewing Spots ~

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.

This list is continued on the final page of the Tombo.



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
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	6,000	☎ 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 Kukodouro Aki IC	3,000	☎ 0978-72-5168
Nakatsu City	Nakatsu-kita Park 中津北(二の丸)公園	Late March ~ Early April	15 minutes on foot from JR Nakatsu station	150	☎ 0979-22-1111
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	☎ 097-537-5638

Festivals and Events

Date	Event Description	Location	Contact #
~Mar. 31 st	'Bura-hito-tsumami' – Enjoy eating and drinking Taketa's food and drink! You can buy 3 tickets for 300 yen (1 ticket = 100 yen). This will be a big chance to find something special among Taketa's local snacks and drinks.	Taketa City Various Locations	☎ 0974-63-0585
~Jan. 3 rd	Free hot springs entrance – 7 municipal hot springs (Takegawara Onsen, excluding the sand bath, Tanoyu Onsen, Furosen, Kaimonji Onsen, Nageshi Onsen, Hamada Onsen, and Hamawaki Onsen) will have free entry!	Beppu City Various Locations	☎ 0977-21-1129
Jan. 1 st	First sunrise of the new year – The Beppu Ropeway to Mt. Tsurumi will open at 4:00 AM and give visitors the chance to make their first sunrise of the year a memorable one. Come along and enjoy the beautiful view.	Beppu City Mt. Tsurumi	☎ 0977-22-2278
Jan. 1 st	Usa Shrine New Year visit – Every year around half a million people visit Usa Shrine on this day to pray for good fortune and for things such as the health of their family, business prosperity, road safety, and success in their studies.	Usa City Usa Shrine	☎ 0978-37-0001
Jan. 2 nd	New Year Shonai Kagura – This will be the first Shonai Kagura performance of the new year.	Yufu City Shonai-Machi	☎ 097-582-1111
Jan. 7 th	Houran-Enya Boat Festival – Vibrantly decorated boats float down the Katsura River accompanied by traditional flute and drum music, dancing, and more! This is a very colorful, lively event.	Bungotakada City Ebisu Bridge ~ Katsura Bridge	☎ 0978-22-3100
Jan. 13 th Feb. 17 th Mar. 17 th	Yufuin Onsen Kagura – Live kagura dance performance by local groups. (8:30 PM – 9:30 PM, ¥500 fee)	Yufu City Yufuin Community Center	☎ 0977-85-7667
Jan. 20 th Feb. 17 th Mar. 17 th	Kimono Appreciation Day – A monthly event where visitors can try on rental kimonos, have their photos taken, and receive discounts at nearby facilities if they are wearing kimono.	Kitsuki City Jouka-machi	☎ 0978-63-0100
Jan. 27 th ~ Feb. 4 th	Oita Fugu Festa – Selected famous fugu (blowfish) restaurants throughout Oita City will be offering discounts on fugu cuisine so that everyone can taste the deliciousness of fugu.	Oita City Participating restaurants	☎ 097-537-5764
Feb. 4 th	The 67th Beppu Oita Mainichi Marathon – Well known as a stepping stone for marathon newcomers. Held alongside the Beppu coast, come along to cheer on the runners (if you're not already competing!).	Oita City Umitamago Aquarium ~ Oita Athletic Stadium	☎ 093-511-1119
Feb. 11 th ~ Mar. 4 th	Yoshino Japanese Plum Blossom Festival – During this festival there will be events such as kagura and taiko performances every Sunday amongst the 450 plum blossom trees.	Oita City Yoshino bai-en	☎ 097-595-1676
Feb. 18 th ~ Mar. 18 th	Hita Ōyama Japanese Plum Blossom Festival – The Ōkubo and Furuya plum blossom parks will hold events such as outdoor tea ceremonies (Mar. 4 th), poem-reading meetings, and blossom viewing walks.	Hita City Ōyama-machi	☎ 0973-52-3101
Mar. 1 st	Tsujibasha opening – This day marks the beginning of spring in Yufuin, when the horse drawn carriages resume operation. A ceremony will be held.	Yufu City JR Yufuin Station	☎ 0977-84-2446

Hina Doll Exhibitions

The Hina doll festival is a yearly tradition beginning in mid-February and continuing until mid-March. Families display Hina dolls to celebrate Girls' Day on March 3rd. Displays feature a number of tiers, and each doll represents a different figure, from the Emperor and Empress to court ladies and samurai.

Date	Event Description	Location	Contact #
Feb. 9 th ~ Mar. 11 th	Usuki Hina-meguri - Hina dolls will be displayed at various locations throughout the city.	Usuki City Various Locations	☎ 0972-64-7130
Feb. 10 th ~Mar. 11 th	Kitsuki Hina-meguri - Hina dolls will be displayed at various locations throughout the city. Additionally, the Hina dolls that were owned by a feudal lord will be displayed.	Kitsuki City Various Locations	☎ 0978-63-0100
Feb. 15 th ~ Mar. 31 st	Hita Hina Doll festival - Families in Mameda-machi and Kuma-machi will display their Hina dolls to the public.	Hita City Mameda, Kuma	☎ 0973-22-2036
Feb. 25 th ~ Mar. 12 th	Castle town Nakatsu Hina Doll festival - Various events will be held to coincide with the local Hina doll displays.	Nakatsu City Various locations	☎ 0979-64-6565

What's Going On?

From the Plaza

Free Legal Consultations for International Residents

The Oita International Plaza is holding free legal consultations for foreign residents on *the third Wednesday of every month*.

- When: **January 17th, February 21st (closed on March 21st)**
- Time: **13:00-16:00**
- Consultant: **Sei Ito** (Administrative Solicitor)
- Venue: **Oita International Plaza (iichiko Culture Center, B1F)**

Free Tagalog Consultations

The Oita International Plaza is holding free consultations in Tagalog.

- When: **January 6th, 16th; February 3rd, 20th; March 3rd, 20th**
- Time: **13:00-16:00**
- Consultant: **Rhodora Yoshitake** (President of the Oita Philippines Friendship Association)
- Venue: **Oita International Plaza (iichiko Culture Center, B1F)**

Free Chinese Consultations

The Oita International Plaza is holding free consultations in Mandarin.

- When: **Every Thursday 10:00-13:00 (except Jan. 4th)**
- Time: **10:00-13:00**
- Consultant: **Cui Wenyu**
- Venue: **Oita International Plaza (iichiko Culture Center, B1F)**

(*Dates and times are subject to change. Please contact the Oita International Plaza before coming.) TEL: 097-533-4021

Free Consultations Regarding Immigration, Residency, and Citizenship

The Oita International Plaza is holding free consultations regarding immigration, residency, and citizenship on the first Sunday of each month.

- When: **January 7th, February 4th, March 4th**
- Time: **13:00-16:00**
- Languages available: **Japanese and English**
- Interpretation into **languages other than Japanese and English** may be available with a reservation (there are no guarantees). The reservation must be made 2 days prior to the consultation day.
- Venue: **Oita International Plaza (iichiko Culture Center, B1F)**

International Event Notifications

The Oita International Plaza will be announcing some international events that take place within Oita Prefecture on our social media pages in order to support organizations proactively fostering international relations.

Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/oitaplaza>

Twitter - <http://twitter.com/oitaplaza>

If you are interested in relaying information about an event, please send e-mail at the Plaza.

Mail: kobayashi-ikuyo@emo.or.jp

Free Talk!

Beginning January 2018, come chat with native speakers from America, China, England, and South Korea at the Oita International Plaza. They all speak excellent Japanese, so you can engage in cultural exchange and expect to learn new words through fun conversation. Dates and further details to be announced.

Please e-mail kobayashi-ikuyo@emo.or.jp for more information.

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

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

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)



Cherry Blossom Viewing ~ Prime Viewing Spots ~



City	Location	Blossom period	Address/directions	Number of trees	Contact #
Taketa City	Oka Castle Ruins 岡城跡	Early April	20 minutes on foot from JR Bungo Taketa station	1,500	☎ 0974-63-0585
Usa City	Usa Shrine 宇佐神宮	Early April	10 minutes by bus from JR Usa station	1,200	☎ 0978-37-0001
Usuki City	Usuki Castle 臼杵城跡	Late March ~ Early April	10 minutes on foot from JR Usuki station	1,000	☎ 0972-64-7130
Tsukumi City	Youra Peninsula 四浦半島	Mid-February - Early March	25 minutes by car from Tsukumi IC	3,700	☎ 0972-82-9521

おおいた国際交流プラザ
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

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THANK YOU !!

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

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HOURS: Monday-Friday 9:30am-6:00pm

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

Closed national holidays & Dec 29th - Jan 3rd

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

