

Les Clefs d'Or Japan

Key News



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Kyushu Tourism Organization Inspection Report

By Asako Onoyama

The Kyushu Tourism Organization's "Kyushu Golden Route-based Sales Promotion Project" aims to attract wealthy overseas visitors (especially in the European, American, and Australian markets) to Kyushu and promote short trips and wide-area excursions starting from Fukuoka. In response to our request to obtain feedback and opinions from concierges who provide travel guidance to overseas guests in Tokyo and Osaka, Ms. Aiko Imaizumi from Grand Hyatt Tokyo and Ms. Asako Onoyama from Conrad Osaka, accompanied by a representative of a land operator Media International visited the three cities for an inspection tour.

September 9th (Monday)

Ms. Imaizumi went from Narita Airport via Kumamoto Airport, and Onoyama went from Kansai Airport via Fukuoka Airport to transfer to the bullet train to meet the organizer at Kumamoto Station.

Lunch at Shunsai Ryoury Teitaku Hachigotei

While enjoying a beef bowl and other dishes made with seasonal Kyushu ingredients, the current state of tourism in Kyushu and the purpose of the visit were explained by a representative from the Kyushu Tourism Organization.



Fruit Marche UFO

Since Kumamoto Prefecture is known for a variety of fruits, we enjoyed desserts made with seasonal fruits at this riverside restaurant to cool down where people can also enjoy fruit picking and fishing.



Reigend

It is a natural cave not far from the city, and it is said to be the place where Musashi Miyamoto visited in the last years of his life and wrote his "Book of Five Rings" about swordsmanship, strategy, and philosophy. The sculptures of the "Five Hundred Arhats" have been well preserved, and on this day, it was almost entirely reserved for us. Visitors can appreciate them in peace and quiet in these days when you see many foreign tourists everywhere you go.

Samurai Experience

At Musashikan Dojo in Kumamoto City, we were taught one of the movements of laido under the guidance of Mr. Tetsunori Matsunaga, the 18th headmaster of Miyamoto Musashi Niten Ichiryu (Tsuruta school) and the inheritor of Muso Jikiden Eishinryu laido, as well as other distinguished samuráis in this present era. Mr. Matsunaga's mission is to convey to foreign guests the spirit of the Japanese "way" of swordsmanship, which is not to slay a man but to slay a bad heart. At the same time, we were impressed by their friendly attitude and their desire to make the event more enjoyable for the participants.



September 10th (Tuesday)

Mt. Aso Grassland Ride "Aso B Tai"

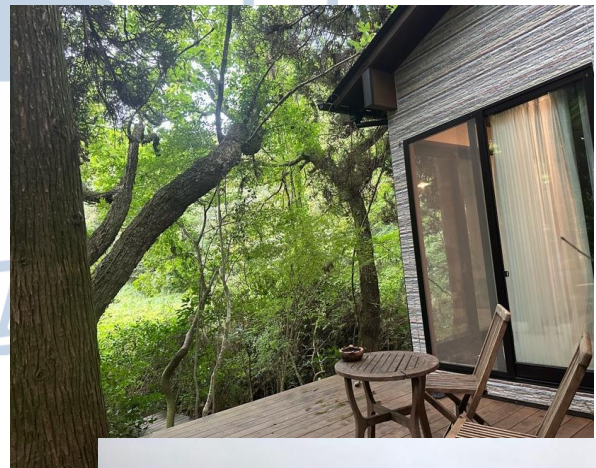
At first, I was astonished to hear that the four-hour course was a mountain bike ride with electric assist, but when I finished, I realized that this was the only experience that allowed us to experience the various faces of Mt. Aso. We went up to the top of the mountain to see the powerful crater while watching the cows and horses being raised, visited a naturally formed cave, and enjoyed a grassland ride through the lush grasslands, followed by onigiri rice balls made with takana, a local specialty vegetable, on a pleasant plateau. On the way, we experienced two turns of

changeable weather in the mountains: sunny, cloudy, showery rain, and strong winds, and finally finish with an exhilarating ride along the bike path.

Accommodation "Hanarenoyado Sen no Mori"

Located in the Aso Kuju National Park, you can feel the rich serenity of the forest at this inn. It offers a bath using spring water, and meals featuring Kyushu-style ingredients such as horse-meat sashimi and goshu-dofu (bean curd soup). You have the whole house as your room and it has terraces surrounded by trees, allowing you to relax and feel nature.

I am sure our active guests from Europe, the U.S., and Australia will enjoy this tour. Mr. Yoshifumi Usui, a former firefighting mountain rescue captain, works wonderfully with the team and provides excellent support and fun.



Takachiho Gorge

Although some of the footpaths were closed to traffic due to the effect of the recent typhoon, many tourists could be seen despite it being a rainy weekday in this most popular tourist spot in Miyazaki



Prefecture. Some people were enjoying boating in the beautiful terrain surrounded by unique hexagonal columnar rocks called columnar joints, which are formed during the cooling process of lava.

Ama-no-Iwato Shrine

The priest who takes us to the shrine of Ama-no-Iwato, the sacred body of the Goddess of Mercy, explains many myths and their connection to the present day in an entertaining manner. If possible, it is better to arrange an English speaking guide so that guests who do not understand Japanese can also enjoy the tour.

Amayasu no Kawara

This is one of the places where "Amaterasu" in Japanese mythology is said to have hidden. It was very interesting to see and hear monuments and legends related to this myth throughout the town, as if the people living here still live with the myth.

Accommodation "Takachiho Shinsen"

The inn is part of The Ryokan Collection, and its spacious grounds are dotted with accommodation buildings separated into a main building and a detached building, as well as a Japanese garden. At in-room check-in, you will be served Japanese sweets and green tea with careful guidance, and for dinner and breakfast, you will be served in a different room each time to enjoy a different scenery and taste seasonal dishes unique to the area.





Yakagura

At Takachiho Shrine, not far from the inn, we watched a traditional kagura performance. The stage was crowded with many tourists from lodgings in the area. The stage is performed by several groups that have taken over the kagura, and each day's program is different. I thought it was wonderful that there are people who carry on these traditional performing arts, and that there are local people and spectators who support them.



September 11th (Wednesday)

Beppu Kannawa Jigoku Onsen Museum

The facility, which opened in December 2022, is relatively new, but it offers an opportunity to enjoy and learn about the features of Beppu's hot springs, and it also has a stylish café that locals use on a daily basis. The theater and tour are both fun and informative. After the theater, the screen automatically rises up to show the gushing hot spring water, which is a very surprising and memorable experience.



Hell Tour

Under the cheerful guidance of Ms. Kiriko Toyoshima, a devoted Beppu enthusiast, we toured two of Beppu's Hells, "Kamado-Jigoku Hell" and "Umi-Jigoku Hell," which are the two most popular Hells in Beppu. Kamado Hell features Showa-era decorations and a footbath where visitors can enjoy some specialties such as Ishigaki manju and hot spring century egg while bathing in the footbath. Umi Jigoku has a cobalt blue hot spring and a bright red Akaike Jigoku. Visitors to Beppu Onsen can enjoy the beauty of Umi Jigoku from various angles, such as through the torii gate, over the steam, and from the observation deck.

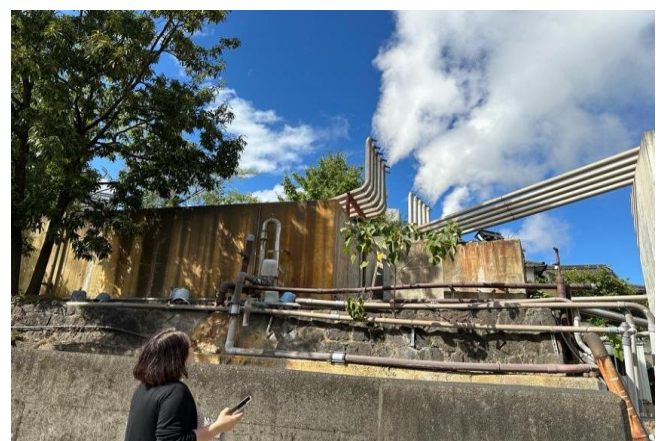
Lunch Hell Steaming

At “Geothermal Tourism Labo Enma,” we enjoyed a hell-steamed meal using local ingredients and experienced the actual process of putting the ingredients in and out of the kiln. This restaurant has a pizza menu that is not available at other hell-steamed meal restaurants, and it was very tasty with a sticky texture!

With a little time to spare afterward, Ms. Toshima showed us around some local attractions that only a local would know. The tour took us through exciting back alleys that are unique to hot spring resorts, such as a hot spring facility attached to a house that is frequented by locals and a device that cools the hot spring water by running it down a bamboo branch.

Kyushu has long been known as a popular travel destination for Asian countries, but I still felt that the number of tourists from Europe, the U.S., and Australia is much smaller than in Tokyo and Osaka. As the number of repeat visitors increases, information on such hidden spots will become more important as a concierge. To this end, we promised to provide as much feedback as possible from the concierge's point of view, including points for improvement that we noticed this time, things that the host side should know, and things to prepare for and head back to each city.

Reported by Asako Onoyama



The Ryokan Collection Dinner Gathering

By Mayako Sumiyoshi

On September 10, 2024, eight members were honored to be invited by The Ryokan Collection to participate in a joint study session and networking dinner. The event took place at the newly renovated "Ristorante ASO Daikanyama" and provided a valuable opportunity to interact with members from 15 facilities from The Ryokan Collection.

During the session, we exchanged insights about the latest initiatives at each facility, providing us with a wealth of useful information to better guide our guests. There were also some new members joining The Ryokan Collection, and by chance, we had the pleasure of meeting the owner from a facility that one of our members were visiting on the same evening for the inspection, which led to some exciting and lively conversations.

We look forward to this opportunity every year. It's a time to reconnect, and we truly value the relationships we've built here, which allow us to guide our customers with confidence. Going forward, we will continue to strengthen our ties with The Ryokan Collection's facilities to offer exceptional experiences to visitors to Japan.



Getting to know our members!

The Westin Hotel Osaka Chief Concierge Kazuyoshi Nishikawa

Experience as Concierge: 21 years

Member of Les Clefs d'Or: 14 years

Highlight of the Hotel

The Westin Osaka is in the center of Osaka, Umeda district and surrounded by greenery. Next door is the famous Umeda Sky Building, a highlight of Osaka sightseeing. The recently renovated guest rooms combine motifs inspired by Osaka's heritage as the "city of water" with the essence of the Westin brand. Inspired by the Azuchi-Momoyama period, the interior features a rich collection of related artworks and historical documents, and guided art tours are one of its popular attractions.

How to spend my Day Off

I mostly spend my time listening to classical music. When I listen to Italian opera, I feel like maybe I was Italian in a past life, and when I listen to German classical music, I almost believe I might have some German blood in me.

But Mozart is special; his music makes me feel something beyond human—something divine or otherworldly. Discovering the beauty in music makes me happy to be myself. It's an important time on my days off to reconnect with who I am.



My Favorite Place

The Fujita Museum has a collection of East Asian antiques, including nine National Treasures and one of the world's only three Yohen Tenmoku tea bowls. Despite the high-quality artworks on display, it is not crowded, and it only closes for the New Year holiday. The museum is also worth visiting just for its beautiful Japanese garden. Additionally, don't miss the Japanese tea served in contemporary artist-made cups and the traditional dango (sweet rice dumplings) in a modern setting.

My Favorite Restaurant

If you want delicious Takoyaki, go to the suburbs! I often buy freshly made Takoyaki from a shop near my home, so most of my recommended spots are in suburban areas. "TAKOYAN," just a 3-minute walk from Hankyu Awaji Station, is my favorite.

So, if you're visiting Osaka, make a detour and drop by!

Monthly Meeting

September

- September Meeting was held at Hotel New Otani banquet room Sirius

- Report on the Kyushu Inspection was shared.

*Please refer to the report article for details.

- The members decided on the assignment of each member's responsibilities at the January 2025 seminar and discussed how they would tackle the group work scheduled for the second day of the seminar.

- We were given details about the schedule for the planting trees at Noto Peninsula as a part of our CSR event planned in November.

- In the second part of our meeting, our affiliates updated us with their news, and members exchanged opinion on useful tips for our daily operation.

October

- October Meeting was held at the newly renovated Hilton Hotel Tokyo banquet room Kiku on October 16.

- Report was shared by the participants who participated in the Tobu Nikko Spacia X test-ride experience.

- As part of its CSR activities, we were shared on the final information on the tree planting in the Noto Peninsula scheduled for November. Also, there was a report on the mileage we collected from the "Charity Mile".

- The members again discussed in the workshop for the seminar co-sponsored by Les Clefs d'Or Japan and the Japan Concierge Association to unify the direction for the success of this seminar.

- Mr. Yusuke Nomura, the 4th generation owner of Daigo vegetarian restaurant, spoke about his passion for cooking, vegan and vegetarian (Shojin Ryori) cuisine, and the differences in food culture.

