

TheYamanashiGrapevine

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Editor's note

By the time you will read this, Winter would have swept the colorful Autumn of Yamanashi. Before the arrival of the coldest cold, the new Grapevine team went off to explore two of the most wonderful cities in Yamanashi. The first, Minami Alps City, was born in April 2003 from the merger of two cities and four towns and is home to the highest chain of mountains in Japan. The second, Tsuru City, boasts a rich history as well as state-of-the-art train technology. Last, but not least, Robin Wilson shares with us a unique ALT experience in her Yamanashi Spectrum.

You might wonder who painted the grapes above. Actually, this picture is a photograph taken in Minami Alps City, and worked on again by computer. Indeed, the city is famous for its delicious fruits. . . But, I will not speak more on this manner, as it might spoil the pleasure of your reading.

Sebastien Noel

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Minami Alps City

No fooling was involved when four towns and two cities merged on April first, 2003, and Minami Alps City was born.

Minami Alps City--originally Hattai Village, Shinane Town, Ashiyasu Village, Wakakusa Town, Kushigata Town, and Kosai Town--is home of the second highest mountain in Japan, Mount Kitadake, as well as the Minami, or Southern, Alps.

Although Mt. Kitadake is the second-highest mountain in Japan, foreigners usually opt for the extra hike Mt. Fuji offers. At 3,192 meters, Kitadake is 600 meters shorter than the infamous Fuji-san, enough of a difference to steal the limelight--and foreign climbers--from Kitadake's adventurous climb.



Anyone willing to take on Kitadake (on any mountains making up the Southern Alps) might want to take time mid-week, as weekends tend to be extremely crowded. Also, transportation into Minami Alps City is limited, so those without rental cars will want to look into the nearest train station and figure out something from there. People climb through mid-October, to avoid snow fall and freezing temperatures

Mountain lovers who want to take a break from climbing have many options throughout the city.

Onsen, natural hot springs, are affluent throughout the region--each with its own spectacular view which changes with the seasons. If the hot, natural spring water alone is not calming, the breathtaking views of each onsen are entirely capable of removing any stresses acquired during a busy week at the office.

Visitors may find it difficult to avoid these relaxation havens which, like Yamanami Onsen, offer much more than a place to bathe. Guests at Yamanami, for example, can take advantage of several spas, whirlpools, and a relaxation room as well.

Yamanami is one feature of Fureai Park, an ideal location for athletic tourists. Also within the park is a tennis court, a children's slide, a gate ball court, and beautiful landscape. Juen is another area visitors can relax at--either in its onsen, at the tennis courts, the open yard, or while enjoying food at the barbecue area.



Aside from the second-highest mountain peak in Japan, a spectacular view of Fuji, and a plethora of relaxing hot springs, Minami Alps City has several other inviting attributes--both natural and man-made.

Dee Coulter, a native of the state of Iowa, in the United States, spent a year in the Kushigata region of Minami Alps City in 2002. Coulter, who was in Japan as part of an exchange program, recommends spending time at Kushigata Mountain, which offers a "cabin area, lakes, hiking trails, and a lookout to see the valley." During Coulter's stay, signs around town were in Japanese only; however, according to employees of Minami Alps City, bilingual signs with English will be available in the near future. Aside from signs, Coulter and her family received help from locals. "Wherever we went," she explains, "There was someone who could speak enough English to get us by. On there were friendly people who 'showed' us what we needed. It was truly a total Japanese experience--not a tourist experience."



Rain may hinder certain outdoor activities, but indoor attractions like the Furusato Museum of Local Culture, the Minami Alps Ashiyasu Mountain Museum, or the Hattai Astronomical Observatory--all located within Yukari no Sato--offer visitors to Minami Alps City information on the region, keeping everyone informed, entertained and--more importantly--dry.

Minami Alps Ashiyasu Mountain Museum, a recent addition to the region, is a real crowd puller. Guests to the museum may peruse the rather impressive library within the museum, which displays 6,000 books--all from the personal collection of museum's head curator.

Those wanting to sit inside while enjoying the outside, can gaze out the large windows of the museum, or simply sit and watch a live view from one of Minami Alps City's mountains.

Anyone wanting to get a glimpse of Japan's infamous Fall colors while in Minami Alps City should stop by man-made Lake Inaga, surrounded by beautiful, large-leaved, maple trees.

Like the rest of Yamanashi Prefecture, Minami Alps City grows delicious grapes and



peaches. However, the fruit does not stop there! Cherries, kiwis, persimmons, plums, and more delicious fruits may be purchased at Minami Alps City's own Happy Park, a fruit market which sells and delivers a variety of produce to its customers.

With all Minami Alps City has to offer, only a fool would pass up a chance to visit.

by Dilek Dogruyusever

都留市

Located in East Yamanashi, approximately 50 kilometres from Kofu, is the small city of Tsuru. Sandwiched between the more well-known towns of Otsuki to the North-East, and Fujiyoshida to the West, Tsuru is surrounded by mountains and, typical of Yamanashi, is abundant in natural beauty. Two of the surrounding mountains, Mitsutoge Yama and Nijurokuya San, are renowned for the beauty of their flowers and are rated among the top hundred such mountains in Japan. The chosen flower of the city is the plum blossom, and plum wine and plum juice are among its specialities. Both of these can be sampled, along with other local delicacies, at the annual local produce festival, which was held in September this year. Until the early twentieth century Tsuru was famous for its production of Koshu textiles and although this industry has greatly declined, the annual produce festival offers a great opportunity to step back in time and examine some of these beautiful products.



The etymology of the city's name has two roots. In Japanese, tsuru can be written 蔓, which means vines, and in this case was reminiscent of the vines that grew at the foot of Mount Fuji. However, another character with the same reading is 鶴, or crane. This bird is noted in ancient Japanese literature for its long life, and cranes can still be found in the habitat surrounding Tsuru city. Whichever origin is correct, the name tsuru was chosen, written 都留, when city-status was awarded to the area in 1954. Although Tsuru city is now on the eve of its fiftieth anniversary, the history of the region stretches back much further.

During the late Edo period, the Tsuru area was a castle town under the Feudal Lord Akimoto of the Yamura clan. At this time, an annual festival was held on the first of September to pray for a bountiful harvest. Each of the four districts of the town would parade their mikoshi (portable shrine) and carry their festival wagons, decorated with beautiful embroideries, through the streets. Seated on the wagons, young people would play music to call for a good harvest. Another feature was the lively Daimyou-gyouretsuo (Feudal Lord Porcession) This festival, called Hassaku, still takes place in the same manner on the first of September every year, and the festival wagons used all date back to the late Edo era.



In 1682, Matsuo Basho, one of Japan's most renowned Haiku poets, came to stay in Tsuru with a disciple of his after a fire forced him to leave Tokyo. One night during his stay, he was struck by the beauty of the moon's reflection in a lake, as it rose above the mountains, and was inspired to write a poem. In commemoration of this, Tsuru city has held an annual Haiku contest since 1992, which each year receives as many as 3,000 applications. The poet's name has also been immortalised in the naming of an onsen in Tsuru - Basho-TsukiMachinoFu.

A detailed account of Basho's time in Tsuru, as well as information and a display of the embroideries and a wagon used during Hassaku, can be seen at the Tsuru city museum, which was established in 1999 to preserve and explain the origins of the city.

The night of a full moon,
The spectacular beauty
Of Takara mountain lake
Matsuo Basho

However, Tsuru is far from being a city which sits on its heritage. In fact, for a city of its size it has a surprising number of activities and institutions aimed at enriching the lives of its citizens, and offering them international experiences and friendships.

Tsuru University opened in 1960, and was one of few universities offering four-year courses at that time. Today, out of a total city population of approximately 35,000 people, roughly one in twelve is a student of Tsuru University. As well as offering a broad range of courses, the university also has exchange links with Hunan Normal University, in China, and the University of California, in the United States.

While Tsuru University offers students a chance to experience life abroad, Tsuru city offers each one of its citizens a similar, life-enriching experience. In 1979, a cultural mission from the Hendersonville area of Tennessee in the US visited Tsuru as part of a trip to various Japanese towns, and performed at the municipal hall. The performers then spent one night with Japanese families in the area, and felt so welcomed they returned two years later. The sister-city relationship finally became official in 1983, when a delegation from Tsuru paid a return visit to Hendersonville.

Over the years, communication and exchange activities have been fostered by friendship committees on both sides. To date, three delegations of children's envoys have traveled from Tsuru to stay with families in Hendersonville; in 1991, the Principals of Beech High School and Henderson Highville School, in Hendersonville, and Katsura High School, in Tsuru, signed an agreement that began a high school exchange program to benefit students. In 2003, both cities celebrated twenty years of international friendship and cooperation.

By Ben Morris



Tsuru city website:

www.city.tsuru.yamanashi.jp (Japanese only)

Grapevine News Spotlight



A new record for the bullet train?

At the end of October 2003, officials of the Tokai Japanese Railway Company declared they would accelerate the testing of the Linear Maglev train and raise its speed to around 570-580 km/h. The linear maglev train, whose test site is currently based in Yamanashi, already broke the World Train Speed Record in 1999, when it reached 552 km/h. Officials at Tokai Japanese Railway also declared the record should be broken by the beginning of December 2003.

The newer model, which was first tested in 1990, can go from Tokyo to Osaka in one hour, more than twice as fast as the previous model. Up to now, the project has faced some criticism because the magnet technology, which enables the train to reach its high speed, might be harmful for health. Studies are now held to measure its possible effects on human beings.

For further information on the linear maglev train, please check the Tokai Japanese Railway homepage at <http://linear.jr-central.co.jp>.

Japan's Forest Jewel

While voices of discontent were rising through Japan in June 2003 because of Mount Fuji and the Japanese Southern Alps denial of acceptance to the UNESCO World Heritage, the certification of Yamanashi as the first "Well managed forest" in Japan went unnoticed. Yamanashi was certified by SmartWood, the oldest global forest certification program in the world. A SmartWood team visited various sites in Yamanashi and conducted interview. Assessment was based on the environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of Yamanashi's forests. Covering 78-percent of the prefecture, Yamanashi's forest is the largest ever certified in Japan, and is even described as "Japan's Forest Jewel." As is pointed out on SmartWood's homepage, few people realize Japan is one of the most forested countries in the world, with 67-percent of its land area covered by forests.

Hello Kitty comes from Yamanashi!

Do you know Hello Kitty? This character is a very cute (depending on how you feel) little cat with a ribbon or a flower on its ear. Yes, I'm sure you know of the infamous Kitty-chan. And, I'm also sure you didn't know that it came from Yamanashi.

Well, actually the company of the no-mouth cat was settled by Mr. Shintaro Tsuji under the name of Yamanashi Silk Center Co. Ltd. Then, when the name of the company changed to Sanrio and moved to Tokyo, Mr. Shintaro Tsuji remained the company's leader. Oh, I forgot to tell you that we have here in Yamanashi a samurai version of Hello Kitty that you won't find anywhere else. What? Did you say that you're jealous?

Great Earthquake in Hokkaido

On September 26th, 2003, an earthquake measuring 8.0 rocked the island of Hokkaido in the North of Japan. No deaths were reported, but hundreds of people were injured and thousands of people had to evacuate their homes. Two hours after the earthquake, an aftershock of similar intensity hit the island. Tsunami warnings were sent as far as Hawaii. Hokkaido's earthquake was the strongest one to hit in 2003.

World record of centenarians

A new record was broken in September, 2003. A survey revealed that the number of centenarians in Japan reached 20,561, topping -for the first time- the seemingly impossible limit of 20,000. The results of the survey also revealed there are more centenarians in Western Japan, especially in Okinawa, a small island located south of Japan that concentrates 42-percent of Japanese centenarians. Experts say people live longer in places such as Okinawa, because they still have a traditional lifestyle: a diet based on plants, and lots of physical labor. Okinawa has long been famous for the number of its centenarians, and books written about longevity preach the lifestyle of Okinawans. But even on this tiny island, experts say, the changing tastes of younger generations, along with modernization, will probably have a negative impact on life expectancy. Okinawajin (people living in Okinawa) will have to resist the temptation of modern life if they want to keep their reputation safe.



A worrying assumption

According to the Ministry of Statistics, Japan now has about 5,100 cases of AIDS infections. This figure is far below those of most industrialized countries, and is partly why Japanese have long considered Japan as AIDS free." Despite this figure, the truth is Japan is one of few industrialized countries where the number of AIDS infections keeps rising. The perception of living in an AIDS free country probably helps the epidemic's spread. Many teenagers and young adults consider there is no risk in Japan, and generally see condoms as a contraceptive not as a way to prevent sexually-transmitted diseases, or STDs. Another reason for the spread of AIDS is, undoubtedly, the lack of sexual education in schools due to die-hard taboos the government does not seem ready to break. The situation is even more worrying now with a thirty-percent rise in STDs (mainly Chlamydia and Gonorrhea) among teenagers and young adults, indicating a lack of protection, said an expert during a symposium on HIV/AIDS at the United Nations University in Tokyo. At a time when AIDS is exploding in all of Asia, some voices have begun to express concerns about a possible AIDS outbreak in Japan. This hypothesis might soon become a reality if Japan keeps avoiding the issue of sexual education.

Yamanashi Spectrum

By Robin Wilson

As I reflect back on coming to Japan in July of 2001, I distinctly remember the overwhelming sense of anxiety and excitement as the bus whisked me quickly away from the hustle and bustle of Shinjuku to the rather quiet city of Kofu. I had graduated from university three months prior, and was uncertain about how my Biology degree would help teaching English in Japan. At first, Japan seemed the furthest place on earth from where I had lived in Texas. Nothing seemed familiar- save the drenching humidity and heat. I knew coming to Japan would be a journey, but I could not know just how much I would change.



Two of my students and me



Asahi Kindergarten Sports Day

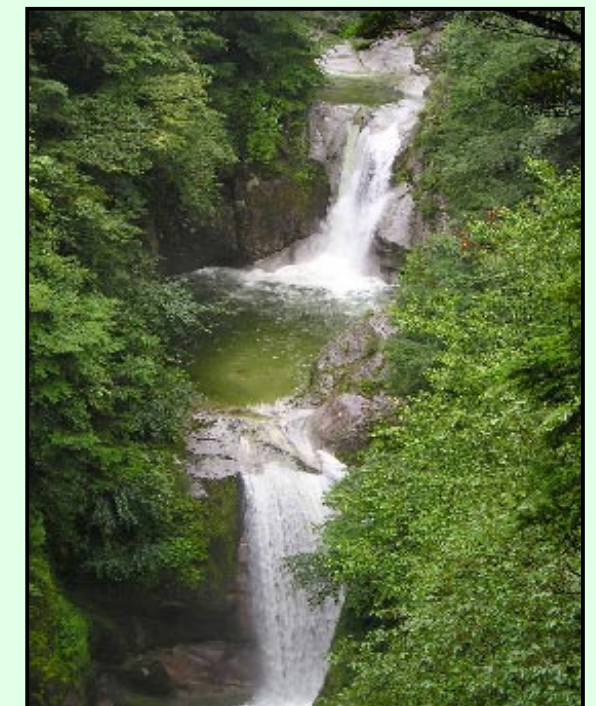
during a tea ceremony. As I turn the scope, I look at my apartment in Ichinomiya, at all the grapes that surrounded it in every direction. I gaze upon the fabric of the purple floral print kimono I spent a weekend learning how to put on. I see the pink cherry blossoms blooming in the spring, and I watch the hanami parties going late into the night. I feel the defeat of losing a boat race in Kawaguchiko: sitting, shoulders burning, as I see a yellow dragon shaped boat glide past. I smile as I look down on the lemon yellow hats the youchien students wear every day, moving through the train station like a group of ducklings. I sense the fatigue of climbing Mt. Fuji all night, and the awe with which the blinding sun rose



Autumn colors in Nikko

When I first came to Yamanashi, I was like most of the new Assistant Language Teachers on the JET Programme in terms of Japanese language ability: unable to communicate anything beyond "Good morning," "Good afternoon," and "Good night." With both hard work on my part, and help from my Japanese teachers and friends, however, I can now understand at least some of what goes on around me. One of the first words I learned was 万華鏡 (mangekyou), or kaleidoscope. My experiences in Japan are like a blend of colors in a kaleidoscope: separate, yet virtually indistinguishable from each other when viewed as a whole.

the next day. My feet tap to the steady beat of taiko drums that carry the rhythm of life, as my eyes focus on the black and white symbol on Kodo's taiko drums at the 2003 Earth Celebration on Sado Island. As I lower my scope, I focus on Yamanashi's mountains and peaches, the relaxing feeling after an onsen. I see the faces of my Japanese teachers, my co-workers, the students who worked hard in my OCA classes. I smile at the strangers who have talked with me and helped me along the way. I think of all of the people I have met here, both foreign and Japanese. With all of these memories and faces lingering in my mind, I try to gather my thoughts. What have I learned here? How have I changed? I have learned to be both independent, and dependant. I now understand what it is like to be an outsider and to be illiterate.



Waterfalls at Ojiragawa

As I look through the lens of my kaleidoscope, I see the deep red autumn leaves for which Shosenkyo is famous. I now understand why Japan is known for its four seasons, the colors and smells that are distinct to each. I see myself riding my bicycle to school on a cold winter morning, my fingers frozen around the handlebars, waving to a sea of students in navy jackets. I see the splash of freezing water from a waterfall while hiking at Ojiragawa ravine. I marvel at the foam in my first cup of green tea made



Dragon boat race in Kawaguchiko



Kodo performance

I understand how one person can change my day by simply acknowledging me. I have learned to accept that it really does "take all kinds" to create a vibrant kaleidoscope view of life.

In May, 2003, a Japanese friend of mine took a trip to Tokyo. She brought back a mangekyou as omiyage. I know I will take it back home with me, to remind me of the wide array of experiences and feelings that created my Yamanashi Spectrum.

Voices from Yamanashi

Jang Woo Sung - Chung Cheon Buk Prefecture - SOUTH KOREA

1) What do you do in Yamanashi?

I came here through an agreement between Yamanashi prefecture and Chung Cheon Buk in Korea. I currently work at the International Affairs Division in the Prefectural Office and deal with translation and interpretation.

2) What do you think about Yamanashi ?

Yamanashi is the home of Mount Fuji and is a very beautiful place. The environment is well preserved. People in Yamanashi are very kind.

3) Is there something you dislike about Yamanashi?

Not really, but I noticed differences between Japanese and Korean people. For example, Japanese people tend to be more individualistic, either at work or in their private lives.

4) What will you do when you go back to Korea?

I will work in the Chung Cheon Buk Government Office. Personally, I would like to work in the Human Resources Division, but I might be placed in the International Division.



Naomi Shimizu - Maracaibo - VENEZUELA

1) What do you do in Yamanashi?

I work at Ogino Supermarket where I do many different jobs. Working there has been a positive experience, because I am able to communicate with a variety of people in Japanese.

2) What do you think about Yamanashi ?

The most beautiful impression was climbing Mt. Fuji. I could see stars closer, sunrise in the morning and clouds. It was an amazing experience the overview from the top of Mt. Fuji.

3) Is there something you dislike about Yamanashi?

In the beginning at work, my first impression about the Japanese people was not so good. They treated me badly because they were afraid of talking to me thinking I would not understand. That was a bad impression I had that time.

4) What will you do when you go back to Venezuela ?

After returning to Venezuela I am thinking seriously to come back to Japan again to study more and brush up my Japanese for about 2 years. After skill up my Japanese I want to work for Japanese Embassy in Venezuela in the future.



Angie Kazue Shima Yino - Lima - PERU

1) What do you do in Yamanashi?

I am a trainee at Escort Yamanashi Travel Agency. I studied about tourism and hotel management in Peru and wanted to use this opportunity to see how both are developing in Japan.

2) What do you think about Yamanashi ?

Yamanashi's natural environment, unlike Brazil's, changes every season, which is quite pleasing. Equally pleasing is seeing Mt. Fuji, a symbol of Yamanashi, change according to the seasons as well. I also think people here are kinder than people in Tokyo.

3) Is there something you dislike about Yamanashi?

Taxi drivers seem to have bad manners here. They rarely apologize.

4) What will you do when you go back to Peru?

My plan is to graduate from college and then work with my father at his travel agency.



Li Caihong - Shichuan Province - CHINA

1) What do you do in Yamanashi?

Yamanashi has an exchange agreement with the Shichuan region in China. I came to Yamanashi to deal with Chinese/Japanese translation. I am also in charge of interpretation when guests from China come to Yamanashi.

2) What do you think about Yamanashi?

Yamanashi is a very beautiful and peaceful place. There are a lot of delicious fruits, like apples and peaches. People in Yamanashi are very kind and well-mannered.

3) Is there something you dislike about Yamanashi?

I sometimes have to guess what the Japanese mean because they don't express their opinion clearly.

4) What will you do when you go back to China?

I will work in the government office in Shichuan and use the experience I acquired in Japan to promote exchange between Yamanashi and Shichuan.



Renato Aristides Orozco Pereira - Minas Gerais - BRAZIL

1) What do you do in Yamanashi?

I came to Yamanashi through an agreement between Yamanashi and the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil. I collect information about Yamanashi and Japan. I also study Japanese a lot because I didn't know the language when I arrived.

2) What do you think about Yamanashi?

Yamanashi is a nice place to live, very beautiful and very safe. People are open-minded; I meet new friends all the time.

3) Is there something you dislike about Yamanashi?

I would like more places to go out at night.

4) What will you do when you go back to Brazil?

I will work in the government office in Minas Gerais where I will probably deal with relations between Yamanashi and Minas Gerais.



Carola Emi Horiuchi - Pousadas / Misiones - ARGENTINA

1) What do you do in Yamanashi?

I am a trainee in Dental Technician since July 2003.

I came to Yamanashi to learn different techniques in area of Dental mechanic about kind of material used, machines, etc...

2) What do you think about Yamanashi?

I think Yamanashi is a calm place. I feel quite comfortable living here. I like mountains and lakes in this Prefecture, too.

3) Is there something you dislike about Yamanashi?

I don't like much when everything is so well planned and organized like "Japanese schedule". There is no flexibility and for me it's too structured.

4) What will you do when you go back to Argentina?

First of all, I am going to look for a job after go back. My dream is to open my own dental clinic.



meet the authors

The Grapevine



Sebastien Noel comes from Orleans in France. After graduating with a degree in English and Japanese business, he came directly to Yamanashi to work as a Coordinator for International Relations. Noel spends his week-ends exploring the skateboard parks of Kofu and brushing up on Guns N' Roses lyrics for karaoke.

Dilek Dogruyusever, a native of Yamanashi's Sister State, Iowa, has lived in Kofu since August, 2003. After studying Japanese for more than eight years, her dream to live in Japan has become a reality. Her interests are music, travel, meeting new people, and trying new things—though her co-workers might add visiting amusement parks, she declines to comment. Dogruyusever plans on spending two years in Yamanashi.



Ben Morris arrived in Yamanashi from England a mere five months ago. Working as a CIR at the International Centre he has quickly become accustomed to Kofu life and can now locate every onsen in town. The jury is still out as to whether this the reason his Japanese is not quite perfect yet, not to mention his pruny fingers. However, Morris, who may stay three years in Yamanashi, has lots of time left to converse and de-prune.

Deysi Lika Kamiji is a second-year CIR, Coordinator for International Relations, at the Yamanashi Prefecture International Center. Deysi was born and raised in Londrina, a city of Parana State in Brazil. She is really enjoying her life in Japan, as has recontracted for the second time-- allowing her to work for the three-year maximum allowed by the JET Programme.



Robin Wilson came to Yamanashi in July 2001 from Texas. She is currently working in the High School Education Division of the Yamanashi Prefectural Government. She spent her first two years in Yamanashi working at Yamanashi Engei High School. Her hobbies include running marathon and reading about politics and science, but not at the same time.

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