

Monitor Tour Report - Aso - Takachiho - Usuki - Kunisaki Wellness Tour Family Trip

Day 1 – February 16th 2023

8:00 - Meet up at Hakata Station and going to Aso by a car

My trip began early in the morning. I met Minami-San, our guide for the whole tour, at the bus stop behind Hakata Station. As the whole group of participants was assembled, we headed off in the direction of Aso by a provided car. Our tour group was international and consisted of people from Japan, Hong Kong, China and Germany.

10:00 - Thousand Year Grassland Horseback Riding Experience in "Yume Daichi Green Valley" in the northern outer rim of the Aso caldera

Our first destination was the Thousand Year Grassland Horseback Riding Experience in "Yume Daichi Green Valley". When we arrived, we were greeted very friendly by the owners of the establishment.

First, we received instructions on how to ride a horse by one of the owners, who would also be our guide for the horse-riding experience. This was important, because we had the great opportunity to control our horse by ourselves. After that, our horses were prepared and we started our ride.

Our guide was leading the way, followed by the whole tour group on their own horses.

While we were riding above the mountain ridge of the Aso caldera, we had a great view on Mount Aso on one side and Mount Kuju on the other side. The scenery and the nature were breathtaking.

We safely returned back to the stable and demounted our horses. After the farewell from the staff, we continued our journey.



12:00 - Lunch at farmer's restaurant "Asono Yamaboshi" with Akagyu beef and dengaku (grilled beef dumplings)



For lunch, we visited a really nice farmer's restaurant in the Aso region. We were served a farmer's style yaki niku with lots of great tasting meat, vegetables and fish, all grilled above open fire.

15:00 - Shitake harvesting and roasting experience in Takachiho

After arriving at our next destination, we were greeted by representatives of the Takachiho tourism agency and local shitake farmers in the middle in a beautiful landscape. After a brief explanation about Shitake mushrooms and how they are cultivated, we had the opportunity to harvest 6 mushrooms by ourselves. The highlight was, that than the freshly harvested mushrooms were roasted above open fire and could be eaten with soy sauce, salt or mayonnaise.



18:00 - Dinner of local cuisine (kappo chicken) and Overnight stay at Farmers' Inn Kuramori

Our final destination for the day was the Farmers' Inn Kuramori in Miyazaki, where we were supposed to have our dinner and stay overnight.



We had been warmly welcomed by the farmers family, which live in a nice old farm building, the middle of the woods and mountains of Miyazaki.

Our dinner was prepared in an old barn, next to the house, where the farmers people live in. They served us plenty of delicious local food, containing kappo chicken, cooked inside bamboo canes, boar nabe and grilled fish over open fire.

Before we went to sleep, we had a nice after dinner party inside the living room of the farmers family.

The sleeping place was a very wide and nicely decorated room, where all male tour participants stayed together over night. Modern facilities like toilet's, a shower and even a bathtub, that was heated above a bonfire, were available.



Day 2 – February 17th 2023

8:00 - After breakfast, drive to Usuki by a car

After we had breakfast inside of the families living room, we headed off to our next destination, the town of Usuki in Oita.

10:00 - Brewing culture experiance (miso, soy sauce, sake) in Usuki, UNESCO Creative City of Food Culture



In Usuki, we were welcomed by a nice local and good English-speaking staff. First, we started our stay in Usuki by a walk through its beautiful old town, with lots of old houses and Buddhist temples. During the walk, we received plenty of interesting information from our guide of the complex Christian and Buddhist of the region.

After that visited an old sake brewery and got a quick tour through the facility, while we one of the brewery's staff explained us the process of sake brewing and the history of the place. At the end of the visit, we had the option, to taste several kinds of the sake, which were produced at the factory, we were visiting.



12:00 - Lunch at Zen cuisine Seigetsu-an

For lunch, we went into an old café, at the other side of the street of the sake brewery. We were served a lot of different unique dishes of local Japanese cuisine.

13:00 - Nozu Town: A Historical Walk through sights of christianity and Carved Buddhas

After lunch we headed of to the Usuki Carved Stone Buddhas, a national treasure of Japan. On our way there, we made a brief stop in a little hamlet, were our local guide was living for seven years. At was nice, to receive information and facts above such a small and remote place, you would normally never visit.



As we finally arrived at the Stone Buddhas, we first got a information handout by our guide. During our walk through the various carved stone buddhas at the place, we were taught even more interesting historical facts about Buddhism and Christianity.

15:00 - Drive by a provided car to Ryoan Fukinoto on the Kunisaki Peninsula

After we left the Stone Buddhas and Usuki, we began our drive to Kunisaki Peninsula in Oita.

18:00 – Dinner and Overnight stay at Ryoan (Japanese Inn) Fukinoto Kunisaki

In the evening, we arrived at the Ryoan (Japanese Inn) Fukinoto Kunisaki, located the old Buddhism temple Fuki-Ji, surround by beautiful and quite After Check-In and a quick visit of our room, we went to the restaurant in traditional yukata clothes, to have dinner.



The food we got served, consisted of local traditional Japanese dishes, including kamo (duck) nabe and vegetable tempura.

The sleeping rooms had a nice wood design and good equipment. For cleaning your body, there was an Onsen including showers. After visiting the hot spring, we went to bed, sleeping in a futon on tatami floor.

Day 3 – February 18th 2023

7:30 - Zazen experience at the nearby Fuki-Ji Temple

Early in the morning, we gathered in the hotel lobby to meet our new local guide, a nice, well English-speaking man.

With him, we went to the nearby Fuki-Ji Temple (the oldest wooden structure in Kyushu), to have a 30 minutes Zazen meditation experience. We were greeted by a monk, that was also working as a chef in the Ryoan Fukinoto Kunisaki and prepared our dinner the night before.



After we witnessed the morning ceremony of the monk, we got instructions how to do the Zazen meditation and clearing our mind. Then, after stretching our bodies a little, we started our 30 minutes session, when the monk hit a gong. We the same sound of the gong, our Zazen session ended end we did some stretching again.

9:00 - Breakfast at the accommodation and check out

Back at the accommodation, we had breakfast of some local Japanese dishes. After we checked out, we started our drive to the Kyu-Sento-ji Temple Ruins, located on the Kunisaki Peninsula.

11:00 - Shugendo Guided walking tour (about 2km) from the former Sento-ji Temple Ruins to Itsutsuji Fudo Shugendo

From the ruins of the temple, we were led by our local guide on a walk through beautiful deep forests up a mountain. During the walk, we learned a lot more about the history of the region and also found a lot of ancient remains, like old stone lanterns and Buddhas.

When we arrived at Itsutsuji Fudo Shugendo, we had a great panoramic view of forests, mountains and the ocean. Aside of the mountain, there is also a little shrine, build inside the rock of the mountain.



13:00 – Lunch at Japanese café "San gaiya"



After our hiking experience, we went for lunch to a small, traditional Japanese café. Again, we were served a large variety of traditional Japanese food, including seaweed and a delicious soup, which included a lot of different vegetables.

14:00 – Visiting Kikutake Charcoal Kiln and seeing charcoal making process

The next point in our program, was to visit a local Charcoal maker and leaning about the making process.

We were warmly welcomed by the owner of the factory, which told us, that he founded his company, after he realized, that there are not enough charcoal manufactures for tea ceremonies. He led us through the whole process of the charcoal making, simultaneously translated into English, by our local guide.



Before we finished, we had the opportunity to create our own charcoal omiyage and also got served fresh tea, heated above open fire.

16:30 - Drive to Fukuoka by a car

Finished with our program, we said farewell to our local guide and headed of with our car back to Hakata Station in Fukuoka.

Overall, this tour was a great experience and I am glad, that I had the opportunity to take part in it and learn more about Japan/Kyushu and its culture and history.