

Kyushu with Hiroko, November 11 - 22, 2018

Trip Overview

Kyushu, the southernmost large island of Japan, is chockfull of incredible interests of so many kinds. I have visited Kyushu in past years on business. During such trips I didn't experience what visitors do in Kyushu, so I had no idea of the huge variety of amazing sights and experiences Kyushu can offer to us. Last year I decided to make Kyushu is the next destination for my annual tour to Japan. Thus was born the initial idea for Kyushu with Hiroko 2018. I have deeply studied the history, natural environment, onsen hot springs, geology, food, art and people of Kyushu. Then, I carefully picked the places, each of which highlights the unique characteristics of Kyushu. This past December, I made this circuit on my own to absolutely confirm my expectations for the tour. This tour plan is the result of my study and exploration: **Kyushu with Hiroko 2018**. Join me on this fascinating, educational, fun and delicious tour to Kyushu this November!

Some of you may have heard these Japanese culinary words: kabocha (squash), kara-age (a deep-frying method without batter), tempura (deep-frying method with batter), chawan'mushi (savory egg custard), kasutera (pound cake) just to name a few. These words describe foods and cooking techniques brought from abroad to Kyushu, reflecting the rich history of foreign influence that extend back nearly 1500 years. This unique history of foreign influence is a major part of the fascination of Kyushu. It is very different from that experienced in the usual more familiar tourist precincts of Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto.

Kyushu sits close to China and Southeast Asia. It was, therefore, the window for the introduction to Japan of Asian culture and religion in the earliest years of the first millennium. Kyushu is also the closest sea access to Europe, and it became the window to European civilization, including Christianity, beginning in the early 16th century. The strong influences of these early international contacts remain present everywhere in the island and its culture to this day.

Kyushu is well known as hot spring heaven in Japan due to its unique geography at the intersection of two tectonic plates. Active volcanoes, Mt. Aso and Mt. Sakurajima, tell the history of the changing natural and geographic environment of Kyushu. Both the beneficial and the causes of disaster, these volcanoes determine much of Kyushu's human and natural history. A particular consequence of their presence is natural glory.

Kyushu's Christian history is a story of introduction, prosperity, suppression, persecution and rebirth. We will see this miracle first-hand and explore this complex story at many locations and from many perspectives. What happened in Kyushu is unique in world history.

At this particular time when we live with growing international tensions visiting Nagasaki Atomic Peace Park and Museum will remind us of the horror of atomic weapons and the need for maintaining world peace to preclude their use.

You may know that for 250 years beginning in the 17th century Japan was closed to the outside world with only the Dutch occupying a tiny man-made island, Dejima ("separated island"), just off of Nagasaki. That island compound has been faithfully recreated. It is not Disneyland, but is a living, fascinating and accessible historical site replete with Japanese and Dutch history.

A foundation of Japanese cuisine is dashi stock which is made by infusing kombu (kelp) and katsuobushi (skipjack tuna) flakes. Katsuobushi comes from the town of Makurazaki in Kyushu. A visit to a factory that produces this indispensable material will reveal the fascinating traditional, artisanal production of katsuobushi. Without seeing this, you cannot say that you know Japanese cuisine.

An equally fascinating and delicious product of Kyushu is shochu, the distilled liquor made variously from rice, barley, sweet potato, potato, brown sugar and more. During the tour we will taste different varieties of shochu as we move from one area to another; the tour will make you a shochu expert.

I look forward to experience all of the sights and experience described above along with delightful walks and hikes with you this November in Kyushu!

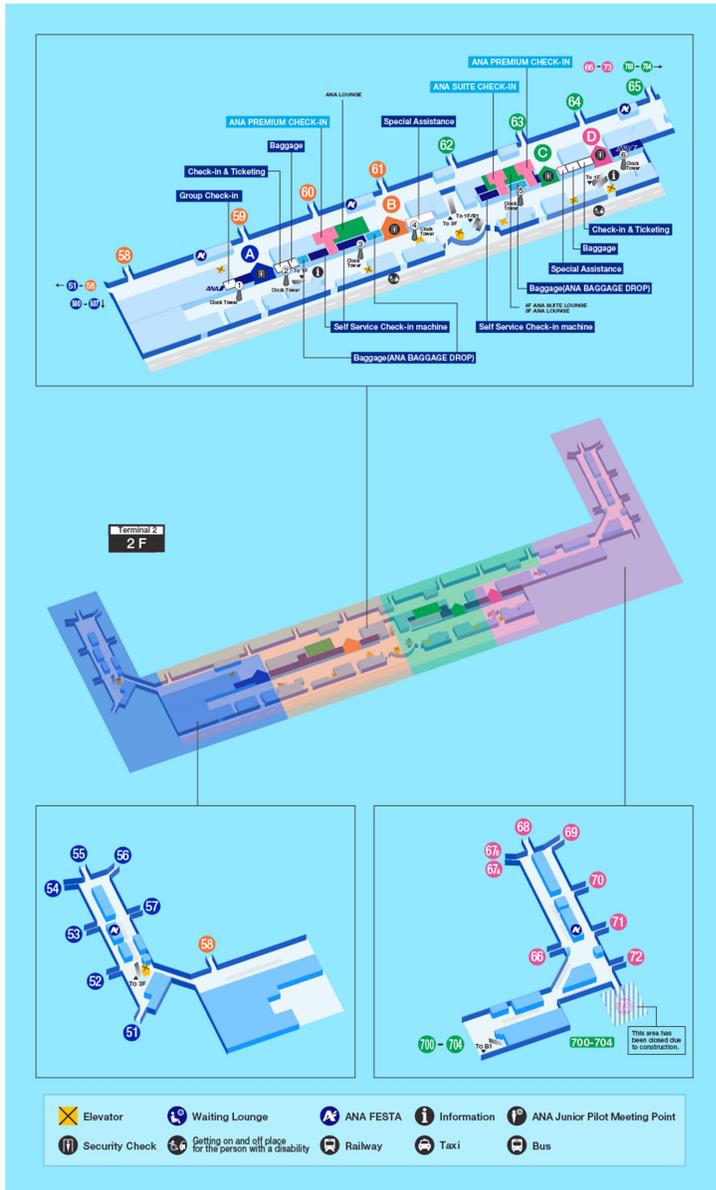
January 24, 2018

Hiroko

Hiroko Shimbo

ITINERARY

November 11, Sunday



Group meets at Haneda Airport (Tokyo); ANA domestic departure Passenger Terminal 2; 2nd floor.

Please meet Hiroko at B Area (see the map on the left). (A specific time to meet will be given to the group.)

We take **8:10AM* flight to Oita Airport**. The airline ticket - Hanada to Oita - will be given to you by Hiroko at the designated meeting location on the 11th.

*Note: Please book a room at the Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyo for the night of November 10th. Hiroko will stay there and the group may meet for an orientation over a drink that evening.

Flight time from Haneda Airport (Tokyo) to Oita Airport (Kyushu) is 1 hour 45 minutes.

November 11 continues.....



Located in the northeast area of Kyushu, Oita prefecture faces the Sea of Suo on the east and a lava plateau to the north. The vast volcanic area that occupies the greater portion of this prefectural territory boasts an abundance of hot springs that are draw to Japanese and tourists from all over the world as well. We will stay two nights in the famous hot springs town of Beppu.

To the north of Beppu is the Kunisaki Peninsula, whose cape reaches out into the Sea of Suo and Sea of Iyo. Kunisaki Peninsula is known for ancient Buddhist culture called Rokugo Manzan. This unique religion contains elements of Buddhism, Shinto and mountain worship. This year is the 1300th anniversary of the Rokugo Manzan culture on the peninsula and the temples and shrines are gearing up to celebrate the religion's long history there.

Our first visit is to Monjusenji in Kunisaki Peninsula a temple built in 648. The principal worship is Monju Bodhisattva, which is widely known as the Mother of Wisdom. At the bottom of 300+ stairs leading up to the temple Nio (guardians of a Buddhist temple) statues welcome us. At the top (we take it slowly!) in the prayer hall we will participate in-a-once-in-a-life time Buddhist ritual service conducted by a venerable priest dressed in beautiful white priest's attire. The priest, tending a large ritual fire he prepares, prays for our health and family happiness; and importantly we hope for good weather and safe journey throughout of our tour. We stop at the Tennenji Temple to admire Magaibutsu, Buddha sculptures carved into the rock cliff. We will enjoy a unique, nourishing lunch at a local restaurant.



We depart Kunisaki Peninsula and check-in to our hotel where we stay 2 nights. This hotel was built at the beginning of 1920s as a resort home for wealthy businessman, Kintaro Kunitake, who made his fortune in the kimono business. It consists of Japanese villa and Western villa, which was added later to the building. Enjoy a hot spring bath found in each individual room. Our coach takes us to the dinner restaurant. There we will enjoy a wonderful course meal based on wild fugu, blow fish, from the Usuki region. The meal is, of course, prepared by a specially licensed fugu chef.



November 12, Tuesday



Today we spend our time in the hot spring town of Beppu, which boasts the largest volume of hot spring water output in Japan, approximately 36 million gallons per day. This is the second highest output in the entire world. Everywhere in Beppu we see hundreds of vents of geothermal steam coming from simple holes in the ground and even out of the town sewer drains.

Hot springs are a major part of the lives of the locals who use inexpensive public bathing facilities. There are hot water supply companies that deliver hot spring water to individual houses through a system of pipes under the town. The price for this service per month is around 10,000 Yen (\$95). This heats your house as well as providing excellent domestic use and delightful bath water. If this is too much money to pay, locals can purchase an apartment which is equipped with individual hot spring bath in each unit. In this case the payment varies from apartment to apartment and is about 600 Yen to 2600 Yen per month.

Hot spring water in Beppu is also used for cooking food items, heating houses and hot houses and for the production of geothermal power.

This morning we attend a Chinese cooking class taught by a Taiwanese native. We learn not only how to prepare some delicious dishes, but also learn the theory of composing nutritionally balanced meals.

After the cooking class and lunch, our coach takes us to a ropeway station and then to the top of the 1300 meter high Mt. Tsurumi for a great view of the city, Beppu Bay and autumn leaves.

On our way back from the ropeway our coach drop us at the center of Kanawa hot spring town. We stroll through the town and experience the true nature of a classic Japanese hot spring town – souvenir stores, restaurants, baths and tourist sites. Just enjoy the experience.

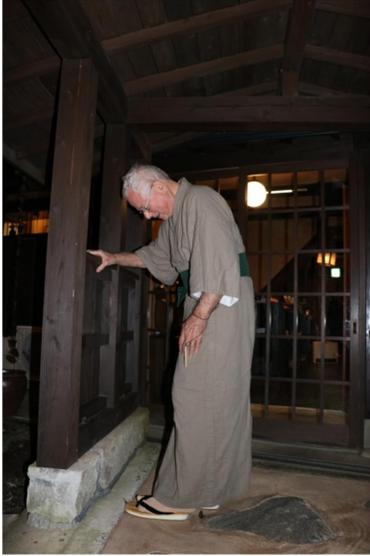
We return to the hotel and relax in our individual hot spring baths. Our dinner is at the local informal Izakaya restaurant where a chef prepares local specialties using the very freshest local fish and ingredients.

November 13, Tuesday



Today we head to Kurokawa Onsen, which has 30 inns scattered deeply in natural beauty alongside the Tanohata River. The atmosphere is traditional, therapeutic and relaxing. The first onsen in Kurokawa area dates back 290 years ago. Kurokawa Onsen is definitely one of the most beautiful hot spring towns in Japan. All hot spring inns are equipped with rotenburo (outdoor hot spring) and the inns belong to Kurokawa Onsen Association. Kurokawa Onsen Association created a smart and unique program to promote all of the inns in the area to the visitors.

One program is Onsen-Hopping and the other is Kappo-Hopping. We will experience both. An Onsen-Hopping-wooden plaque acts as a ticket and allows us to walk around the onsen town, choose three onsen inns and soak in their outdoor onsen. The Kappo-Hopping plaque allows us to visit three different inns and enjoy each of their offerings of a cup of local sake or shochu served with the inn's own specialty snack. These experiences at Kurokawa Onsen are truly unique and very special! The dinner served at our inn, Waraku, is a local specialty meal. The inn is entirely booked just for us. We will spend a golden time here.



November 14, Wednesday



Today we visit the Aso caldera. Aso volcano is a cluster of central volcanoes situated within a huge caldera that is 25km (15miles) north-to-south and 18km (11miles) east-to-west. Its history extends back nearly 300,000 years consisting of complex volcanic activities and mountain growth. The area is part of the Aso National Park known for its beauty and grandeur. Within the caldera itself there are six towns and villages and the overall population reaches to 50,000. Two railway lines and several highways pass through the caldera. The main attraction is undoubtedly Naka-dake (1,506meter/4900feet), the currently remaining active crater. Due to the recent eruptions the area immediately around Naka-dake has been closed to the visitors. Mount Aso's eruption alert level was, however, lowered to the lowest value, level 1 in February 2017, but still there remains in effect a no-entry zone of one kilometer (0.6 miles) from the crater. As a result, it is not possible now to approach and see the crater itself. It is expected that viewing the crater will become possible again from spring 2018. We shall wait and see if that happens allowing us to look down into the volcano itself. On a visit 30 years ago, my husband was able to do this; let's hope we have the chance.

We visit the Aso Museum and watch a video to learn how the Aso caldera was created. This is followed easy hike up to Naka-dake or Kijima-dake providing awesome views across the entire Aso caldera, including a view Komezuka, a perfectly shaped volcanic cone. Our lunch is dengaku, in which local vegetables and fish are cooked over a very hot binchotan charcoal fire in a traditional Japanese irori (open hearth) setting. If you have ever seen a classic Japanese samurai movie you will surely recognize this style of hearth. After lunch our coach takes us south to historical town of Hitoyoshi where we stay one night. Our hotel is just by the river, offering a beautiful view of changing nature. We have meal at the inn and relax at the bath which has stunning view of the river.



November 15, Thursday



This morning at the historic town of Hitoyoshi we take a man-poled boat ride down the Kuma River, which boasts of having the 2nd most rapid current in Japan. This is the same ride in the same kind of craft the local Daimyo, Aira, took in feudal days to go down-river in order to begin his yearly trip to Edo (present Tokyo) to pay his respects and tribute to the Shogun. After the ride we walk to a unagi (grilled eel) restaurant which has been operating for over 100 years at the same location.

Our coach takes us to Onami-Ike, a beautiful crater lake which stands at 1,411 meter (4,500 feet) above sea level. It is a volcanic crater lake with the highest elevation of such a lake in Japan. Onami-Ike Crater Lake was the product of a volcano eruption about 40,000 years ago. The water is cobalt blue. We enjoy walking on a trail through the woods to the top of the Onami-Ike to admire the beautiful lake.

Our coach drives us to our next two nights stay at a venerable Japanese Inn. Relax your body and mind in the superb rotenburo (outdoor hot spring) found in each individual room. We will enjoy local specialty meal at the Inn.



November 16, Friday



We are in now in the prefecture where the most indispensable Japanese food product is produced. It is katsuobushi (stone-hard, dried, smoked skipjack tuna). The infusion of katsuobushi and kombu (kelp) makes dashi stock, the veritable foundation of Japanese cuisine. We visit the Matoba katsuobushi plant and learn and see the fascinating traditional, artisanal production of katsuobushi. Lunch is a bowl of funabito-meshi, a fishermen's lunch.

The coach takes us next to a small, but award winning shochu brewery, Yoshinaga Shuzo, established in 1905. The current president and toji (shochu brewer), Shoichi Yoshinaga, is the 5th generation of his family to operate this brewery and distillery. Yoshinaga Shuzo produces imo-shochu made from sweet potato. Shoichi shows us how his delicious beverage is created in this traditional small space. Even the bottling and labeling are done manually at this artisanal shochu producer. And, of course, you can purchase a bottle or bottles to take home.

You are then ready for a natural steam-heated famous sand bath on the beach at Ibusuki. Dating back over 300 years, it has been medically proven that this sand bath has many positive effects on the human body. According to research done by professor Nobuyuki Tanaka of Kagoshima University Medical School, the sand bath actively stimulates and increases blood circulation in the body....let's find out. After all these exciting activities our dinner destination is a local restaurant in Kagoshima city on our way back to the hotel. We can again take a hot spring bath – remember, this is Kyushu - and experience a sound and restful sleep.



November 17, Saturday



Today we make an exciting transition from the mainland of Kyushu to Amakusa island. Amakusa, which is located at southwestern part of Kumamoto Prefecture, is an island group consisting of two major islands and 100 other islands varying in size. They are part of the Unzen-Amakusa National Park along with the Shimabara Peninsula in Nagasaki Prefecture. Amakusa is remote. This isolation allowed missionaries in the 16th century to convert a considerable percentage of inhabitants and even the local lord to Christianity before the religion was forbidden in the early Edo period during the 17th century. Today there are museums and churches spread across the islands which reflect this religious heritage.

To reach Amakusa our coach takes us in the morning to a main train station in Kagoshima City. Directly across the bay from Kagoshima you may glimpse the towering, continuously erupting (smoke, ash and occasional large boulders) Mount Sakurajima. From Kagoshima we take a bullet-train on the new Kyushu Shinkansen line to the city of Kumamoto. There we transfer to a small local train to the port and from there it is about a 55 minute lovely water journey by boat through the inlet and Shimabara Bay to Amakusa Island.

On arrival our coach takes us to our unique, beautiful and comfortable hotel. After dropping off our luggage we visit Sakitsu church, the iconic of Amakusa church, the Amakusa Museum and Amakusa Collegio (former monastery) Museum. What happened in this isolated part of Japan during 16th century is an amazing story that you will learn – the rise, spread, banning and continued 250 year secret practice of Christianity on this island. Back at the hotel we enjoy rotenburo (outdoor hot spring) found in each hotel room. The dinner is a local vegetable-focused meal based on local ingredients.



November 18, Sunday



Today our coach takes us to Tsuji Island, northwest of Amakusa Shimokusa (lower Amakusa Island). The size of the island is merely 0.6km square area. We visit Salt Farm and observe the sea salt making. Amakusa is unique that it is surrounded three different seas; Ariake Sea on the north, East China Sea on the West and Yatsushiro Sea on the East. Tsuji-jima is surrounded by Ariake Sea. The Ariake Sea, a semi-closed body of water, has the largest difference of tide level in Japan with large tidal flat and very clean water. Near the Hayase straight between Tsuji Island and Shimabara the current rapidly moves, producing abundant plankton blooms. And the water around Tsuji Island is a home of about 200 Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins.

After lunch we head to Takahama Porcelain Company and each of us makes our glazing design on a bare previously baked mug. The mug will be fired and become a souvenir of your Kyushu adventure. Amakusa jiki, the raw material for Takahama porcelain, was discovered in this area in the 17th century. It is known for its pure whiteness and solid nature. The quality of the clay has been highly praised as the best porcelain clay in the world. It has been used for years to make the highest quality Japanese porcelain goods such as Arita-yaki (Arita ware) and Seto-yaki (Seto ware). On my research trip last year I drew my favorite owl on the mug. The baked, finished one was sent to the hotel in Tokyo where I stayed for a few days after the trip to Kyushu. Now the owl mug is my every day morning tea cup in New York City - one of the best souvenirs ever I own. Please think of a design for your own mug.

We enjoy some strolling around the area before the coach takes us to our hotel.

Enjoy the rotenburo (outdoor bath) in your room. Today's dinner includes a dish made from the locally raised breed of very special chicken called Amao jidori. It's the "Bresse Chicken" of Japan.

November 19, Monday



Today we say goodbye to Amakusa and head to Nagasaki. Our 45 minutes smooth, scenic boat ride from the port of Tomioka in Amakusa to the port of Mogi in Nagasaki Prefecture returns us back to the main island of Kyushu. After leaving our luggage at the hotel where we stay for two nights, we head to Kofukuji Temple. Kofukuji Temple was the first Obaku Zen temple in Japan and dates to around 1620 when the merchants from China's Ming Dynasty began to arrive in Nagasaki. A Chinese priest founded the temple to pray for safety in the perilous sea journey from China to Japan. During this period the Tokugawa government tightened its prohibitions on Christianity. Clever Chinese residents, who were suspected of being devoted to Christianity, built other temples such as Sofukuji, Fukusaiji and Shofukuji to prove to the government that they are not Christians. Kofukuji was presided over by such Zen masters such as the second abbot Mokusu Nyojo, who built the 'spectacles bridge' shown above. It was the earliest stone arch bridge in Japan. The third abbot Itsunen introduced a new style of Chinese painting to Japan. We enjoy traditional matcha tea at the temple, chat with the abbot who has spent time in the US and head to our next destination on foot to the Dejima Museum. We return to our hotel for refreshment and for dinner we go back to Kofukuji Temple temple for an elaborate, original Obaku Zen meal that was introduced by the priest Itsunen. This style of cooking became the basis of Shippoku-ryori, the famous unique Sino-Japanese-Dutch cuisine of Nagasaki. We will experience this at our meal in the temple.

Dejima ("separated island"), the tiny man-made island just off the shore and connected by a foot bridge to Nagasaki, was constructed in 1636 and was used to house Dutch traders for 250 years during the Edo period (1600 - 1868) when Japan was closed to the outside world. It was a window on the outside world that allowed the Shogun government to import Western medicine, military goods and other products without "contaminating" Japanese culture, religion and feudal society with "foreign ideas" such a liberal democracy. That this scheme worked for 250 years shows the iron grip of the Japanese government had on its people and society during that period which is also noteworthy for internal peace and extensive Japanese cultural development. The island itself disappeared with more reclamation of the land from Nagasaki Bay, but now island compound has been faithfully recreated as the Dejima Museum on its original, now a land-locked site. Excavation reveals the original stone walls of the island. It is

not Disneyland, but is a living, fascinating and accessible historical site replete with Japanese and Dutch history.



November 20, Tuesday

Today our guide, a native of Nagasaki, takes us around the city and shows us the must-see places in the city. These include Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, Oura Cathedral, Urakami Cathedral, Peace Park at “ground zero”, Glover Garden and the Monument to the 26 Christian Martyrs of Japan (Nishizaka Park).

Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum: The museum covers the history of this event in the accessible form of a story. It begins with the disastrous scene of the attack and includes the events leading up to the dropping of the atomic bomb, the reconstruction of Nagasaki up to the present day, the history of nuclear weapons development, and the hope for a peaceful world free of nuclear weapons.

Peace Park: Once, during the war the area housed a prison. The Nagasaki Peace Park at the site of the bomb hypo-center commemorates the atomic bombing of the city at 11:03AM, August 9, 1945. It is next to the Atomic Bomb Museum and near the Peace Memorial Hall.

Oura Cathedral: Oura Cathedral, designated as Japanese National Treasure, is the oldest wooden church of gothic architecture in Japan; built in 1864 by a French missionary. The church was dedicated to the 26 Christian martyrs who had been executed on Nishizaka Hill.

Urakami Cathedral: Urakami Cathedral was located just 500 meters north of the A bomb hypocenter. It was once renowned for being the largest Roman Catholic Church in the East, but was completely demolished by the nuclear blast. A wooden figure of the Virgin Mary miraculously survived the heat of the nuclear blast.

Glover Garden: Thomas Blake Glover, a Scottish merchant who introduced the steam locomotive to Japan and founded Kirin Brewery, among his many accomplishments, was the first to move to Nagasaki after the opening of Japan to foreigners in 1859. Glover house was built in 1863 high on a hillside above Nagasaki Harbor. It is believed to be the oldest western-style building in Japan. It is surrounded by many other Western-influenced homes built from 1870 to 1912.

The 26 Christian Martyrs of Japan: On Nishizaka hill at least 400 Christians are known to have been martyred for their Christian faith. The 26 saints of Japan were crucified here in the year 1597. They included missionaries from Spain, Portugal and Mexico, as well as Japanese Christians.

We return to the hotel for refreshing ourselves; then, return to the town center for a superb sushi dinner. The restaurant is closed for us. We enjoy sushi made of best local fish.



November 21, Wednesday



Today we leave for our final destination, Fukuoka, on the northwestern coast of Kyushu by train. It is 2 hours journey by Super Express train, Kamome. We purchase our train lunch boxes at Nagasaki Station and enjoy lunch on the train as Japanese travelers do while gazing out at the changing scenery beyond the window.

Fukuoka is Kyushu's largest and Japan's 5th most populated city. Because of its closeness to the Asian mainland, Fukuoka has been an important harbor city for many centuries.

Fukuoka is a gourmet paradise...providing you are not a strict vegetarian. Motsu nabe (intestine and tripe hot pot), tori-suki (chicken hot pot) and very fresh seafood from the Genkai Sea are abundant. Fukuoka-style tonkotsu (pork bone based broth) ramen is also unique and famous and now popular in US ramen restaurants. There are yatai (outdoor food stalls) offering delicious, home-style comfort foods that are unusual elsewhere in Japan, fun and delicious.

We check-in the hotel; then venture out to the city for yatai (street stalls) hopping and our final tour dinner, a tori-suki (chicken hot pot).

November 22, Thursday

Today after breakfast we say good bye to each other and our tour is complete. Those who remain a day or two in Fukuoka City will find the attraction of a major Japanese city – museums, shopping, restaurants and cultural attractions. Those who continue to post-tour locations or those who depart for home, have a safe and pleasant trip. Whatever your destinations the mug you created in Amakusa will meet you at the arranged place. Please cherish your Kyushu memories for the rest of your life!