



HELLO OKAYA

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Spring Issue April 15, 2008

This newsletter is distributed four times a year by the Okaya International Exchange Association, with the aim of providing local foreign residents with information necessary for daily life, as well as insight into aspects of Japanese culture. Please feel free to contact us with your feedback or any questions you may have.

What you can do to protect this beautiful earth

On February 17th this year, the OIEA held its 3rd Annual Round Table Discussion. The theme for this year's discussion was 'What you can do to protect this beautiful earth.' Sixteen participants from ten different countries living in the Suwa area came together to discuss about global warming. Out of the participants countries there were those countries whose land area was decreasing due to the effects of global warming, and those that are bordering on sinking if warming continues at this rate.

Why not think about what you can do to prevent global warming?



The earth is warmed by the sun's energy with some of the heat being released into outer space. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere absorb this heat and warm the air, keeping the temperature so that living things can live comfortably. If the consistency of greenhouse gases is too high the heat given off becomes difficult for the atmosphere to absorb, which causes the earth's temperature to become higher than necessary. This is called 'global warming.'

On average, the earth's temperature rose 0.6°C during the 20th Century, and between 1990 and 2100 it is expected that it will rise between 1.5°C and 5.8°C. This may not seem like much of an increase, however, even with the temperature during the ice age being only 3 to 6 degrees lower than now, there is no way to measure just how much of an impact this has had on the earth. Also, the sea level rose between 12 & 22 centimeters during the 20th Century, and it is expected that it will rise another 18 to 59 centimeters by 2100. However, even if the sea level was to rise 40 centimeters by 2080, this will have a significant impact on coastal zones and lowland.

In addition, it is said that various other problems will occur, for example, there will be an increase in the number of endangered species, a widening of the outbreak areas for tropical diseases such as malaria, and an rise in the frequency and strength of unusual weather patterns. There will also be a significant decrease in grain crops due to an increase in diseased insects, which will in turn lead to a severe food shortage worldwide.

In order to prevent global warming it is necessary to limit the discharge and incidence of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. In order to do this it is important to rethink our own actions and the way lead our lives.

For example:

- Do not cool down too much using the air conditioner or warm up too much using the heater.
- Turn off lights when you are not in a room, and do not leave the television running when you are not watching it. Also, make sure to remove the plug from the wall when you are not using an appliance for a significant amount of time in order to save electricity.
- Turn off the keep 'warm mode' on electric pots and jars
- Do not fill your refrigerator with too many things
- Do not leave water running
- Have all family members take a bath one after another before the water gets cold, and try to reuse leftover bath water for when doing the laundry
- Take along your own shopping bag to the grocery store, instead of accepting plastic bags
- Try as much a possible not to travel by car, but instead to walk, ride your bicycle or use public transportation
- Turn off your car engine when parked

Just by doing these simple things that you can put into action right away, you can help decrease the release of carbon dioxide, and at the same time save money on electricity, water and gas.

Why not rethink the way you live today?



Japanese Spring Traditions ~One Point Japanese Culture~

Tea Picking

茶摘み ちゃつみ

Green tea is the main drink of the Japanese people.

While the climate differs from region to region, picking the young sprouts and leaves of the tea bush occurs over some three weeks from mid April till the end of May, especially the two or three weeks following the 88th night. (around May 2) when the tea picking season is at its height.



After the picked tea leaves are steamed they are massaged the same evening, and left to dry. In the past, tea used to be picked by young girls with their sleeves tucked up with a red sash and a rolled up towel tied up around one's head while singing the tea picking song (*chatsumi no uta*), but along with the advancement of mechanization, the artistic affect of the old has been lost.

Rice Planting

田植え(Taue)

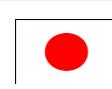
Taue is the activity occurring from May to June of transplanting rice seedlings from nursery to rice paddy. Planting rice seeds is at its peak before and after the 88th night (around May 2) that corresponds to the 88th day counting from the first day of spring, and the transplanting to rice paddies follows the beginning of the rainy season. Nowadays, rice is generally planted by machine, however, until



such a machine was invented, it was a backbreaking task with people standing bent over in the rice paddies planting the seedlings by hand. Because rice is the principal food of the Japanese, the success or failure of the harvest impacts life for a year. Accordingly, *taue* is an important event, which formerly was a cooperative activity and even a Shinto ritual for village people.

Golden Week

ゴールデンウィーク(GW)



Golden Week is a collection of holidays that occur between April 29th and May 5th each year in Japan, and is sometimes abbreviated as 'GW.' Currently, April 29 (*Showa no Hi*), May 3 (*Constitution Day Kenpo Kinenbi*), April 4 (*Greenery Day Midori no Hi*), April 5 (*Children's Day Kodomo no Hi*) are national holidays, with many businesses also being closed May 1 (*May Day*). If you take the weekdays off in between the week becomes a long vacation. Before May 4 was made a national holiday in 1985 (*Showa 64*), under revisions to the national holidays act, the national holidays were spread out sporadically over the week, so the vacation period was known as a *tobiishirenkyu* (a week studded with holidays).

If the national holidays act is not revised in the future, the long weekend that falls either side of next year's Autumnal Equinox (September 23), will become known as 'Silver Week,' or the Golden Week of fall.

'What Do You Think About the Town You Live?'



◆ Global Citizens Project ◆



This year as one of the OIEA's newly established projects, we decided to interview foreign residents living in and around Okaya City about their thoughts on life here, and incorporated these interviews and facial portraits in to panels as part of the 'Global Citizen's Project *Tabunka Kyosei Project*.' The panels were on display for eight days from February 27th through until March 5th at Suwako Heights as well as the If Plaza Culture Center featuring in the Global Citizens Message Exhibition. Through the message exhibition, we were able to create more of awareness in the community; not only of the various cultures and backgrounds of foreign citizens, but also that they are a valuable resource in the community. It also provided an avenue to find out more about some of their everyday problems and concerns, and gain some insight into what we need to do to help create a multicultural society.

An organizing committee made up of members of the OIEA Board of Directors, Board of Councilors and volunteers were the body behind the planning of this project, with an additional 20 other volunteers carrying out the interviews over a period of about one month. Thanks to their help we were able to interview 41 residents from 17 different countries including Brazil, China, Philippines, USA, Korea etc, on things such as 'what they liked in the area,' 'what they thought about Japan,' as well as 'their future hopes for the town they live in.' The foreign residents interviewed ranged from elementary school students to those in their fifties, some had lived here just a few months, and some as long as twenty years.

In addition to interviewing foreign residents, we also interviewed 20 Japanese citizens who had various degrees of interaction with foreigners as to 'their current involvement with foreign residents,' 'hopes for future interactions,' as well as the 'places and things they most recommend.' Through the interviews, we were able to gain a variety of valuable opinions, which we hope to be able to use to make Okaya an even better place to live in the future.



'Global Citizens Message Exhibition' Panels

~Voices from Foreign Residents~

Next you will find the interviews of eight foreign residents. An overview of all the interviews can be found on page four.

Jeffrey Gee USA ★ 10 Years in Japan	Imelda Mochizuki Philippines★19 years in Japan	Rama Syofiaan Indonesia ★7 Years in Japan	Zhang Yi China ★ 6 Years in Japan
			
<p>'Things I Like about Okaya'</p> <p>Nature is plentiful and I really love the lake. I enjoy drinking coffee in my backyard each morning.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan'</p> <p>I am glad that I can live a really healthy lifestyle. I wish that people were not so prejudice and more open-minded towards foreigners and different cultures.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live'</p> <p>It would be good if there was a bullet train linking Okaya to Tokyo. I would like it if there was a restriction on trucks entering residential areas and for the deregulation of internet access.</p> 	<p>'Things I Like about Okaya'</p> <p>Yamabiko Park, and the area around the civic gymnasium. The city is richly endowed with nature, and I can enjoy it together with my children.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan'</p> <p>Japan is a safe and comfortable place to live. While I think it is the best country in the world, there have been many heinous crimes occurring in recent years, which have lead to an increase in public anxiety.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live'</p> <p>I think is it necessary to enhance school patrols and provide school buses. I also think it is important to provide opportunities for mutual exchange, and to try and understand one another.</p>	<p>'Things I Like about Okaya'</p> <p>I love the nature, especially the mountains such as Kamikochi and Norikura. I like the Taiko Festival, playing badminton, and going bowling.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan'</p> <p>At first I found it difficult to communicate with Japanese woman, but I laws lucky to meet and marry a wonderful woman.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live'</p> <p>Last year I was considering moving in to public housing, however, when I went to take a look, the place was in really bad condition so I decided not to move in after all. I wish that the city would reform or upgrade the housing. I also think that while there are many small parks, there is little room for play equipment.</p>	<p>'Things I Like about Okaya'</p> <p>I like it that Japan has four distinct seasons. I love Lake Suwa, and I think that the surrounding mountains are really beautiful. When the weather is fine, I often go for a drive up to Kirigamine or Kurumayama. As I like to play badminton and table tennis, I go to a club once a week.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan'</p> <p>I am glad that there are Japanese classes here in Okaya. The Japanese people are all very kind and polite, and always abide by the rules.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live'</p> <p>I want to continue to live here in the future. I would like it if there was less bullying, and more opportunity to interact with people from other countries.</p>

Yara Tanaka Brazil ★ 7 Years in Japan	Seo Jung Ja Korea ★ 20 years in Japan	Norbert Goldbergs Latvia ★ 10 Years in Japan	Matthew Taylor U.K. ★ 5 months in Okaya
			
<p>'Things I Like' Dancing in the Samba Festival. Feeding the swans at Lake Suwa, which is a good place for walking and exercising.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan' I like Japan as there are many jobs here. If I work I can buy whatever I want.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live' I would like for there to be interpreters available at the hospital.</p>	<p>'Things I Like' I like everything about Okaya. There is plenty of nature, everyone is kind, and I am satisfied with my life here. I am thankful that my kids can experience many things through the various events run by the city and other facilities.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan' I felt isolated when I first came to Japan (a long time ago now!), and I thought that Japanese and Korean people are both human. I am glad to be living here.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live' I want to let those people who are in having trouble or are feeling lonely about the Okaya International Exchange Association.</p>	<p>'Things I Like' Okaya is a very comfortable place to live.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan' When I first came to Japan I was mistaken in my impression of Japan as a nation overflowing with high tech equipment and well institutionalized.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live' The area we have had the most trouble with here in Japan has been our children's education. As there was no one to take care of the needs of foreign children we had a lot of problems. Kids need to learn to read and write in order to live in Japan. I hope for some kind of Japanese language instruction to be provided in the future.</p>	<p>'Things I Like' I really like Lake Suwa and the views of Yatsugatake.</p> <p>'My thoughts on Japan' Okaya is a good place to live as everyone is very friendly and helpful. I like Japan, and Japanese food. However I can't eat <i>natto</i> or <i>anko</i>. While it is cold in winter I like to go skiing. I am studying Japanese at the moment, however, I find <i>Kanji</i> rather difficult.</p> <p>'My hopes for the 'town' I live' I would like it if there were more international exchange events and more opportunity for Japanese and foreign residents to meet.</p>

~Voices from Japanese Residents~

When we asked Japanese residents what kind of involvement they had with local foreign residents, many people commented that they came into contact with foreign residents at their place of work. Some people said they had foreign coworkers; some said foreigners often came into their store or workplace. As far as communicating with foreigners in the work place, most people said that they became used to it after a while and there were no real problems. Some people mentioned that they meet with foreigners outside of the work place, having dinner together, going out together, and some said that they volunteered to teach Japanese, hosted foreigners, or spoke to them at language classes. Some people said that felt nervous talking to or had virtually no contact with foreign residents. Here we introduce four Japanese residents that were interviewed.

Yuki Takabayashi	Jiro Iwasaki	Kozue Iimori	Natsuki Yoneyama
 <p>Involvement with Foreign Residents I have only really spoken with foreigners who come into my workplace. I also approach foreigners at the hot springs or sports gym.</p> <p>Hopes for Future Interactions It is summer! The place is Sekicho Park in Suwa., where there is a flea market and people are cooking food from their home country outdoors, there is live music and in the evening we set off fireworks.</p> <p>Recommended Things and Spots The parks around Lake Suwa. During the day the lake is pretty with the reflecting sunlight, and at night the town lights twinkle like jewels. In winter the ducks and swans are really cute.</p>	 <p>Involvement with Foreign Residents I have had many opportunities to interact with my American English teacher, and to play jazz together with British people.</p> <p>Hopes for Future Interactions I want to enjoy playing tennis or music together, and to learn about their lifestyle habits, way of thinking, and differences in culture.</p> <p>Recommended Things and Spots I want to let people know that they are able to use Five-Pennies-Live House for music events. I also recommend the autumn leaves at Onodachi Park. I think that many people would like more opportunities to get to now foreign residents.</p>	 <p>Involvement with Foreign Residents As school principal, I have the chance to meet with children and parents of various nationalities and am consulted on many different issues. We try to speak slowly for the parents and write school notices in hiragana. I try to encourage kids that are lonely to stick at it together.</p> <p>Hopes for Future Interactions I wish the Japanese people felt more relaxed about talking to foreigners. I want to encourage the Brazilian students to speak freely in Portuguese, and for the Japanese students to try and learn some Portuguese too I want to endeavor to make sure all students enjoy their school life.</p>	 <p>Involvement with Foreign Residents At my workplace, I am in charge or training 14 Asian trainees and apprentices. They seem to pick up the language rather quickly, so there are no problems with communication. I also volunteer teaching Japanese.</p> <p>Hopes for Future Interactions I hope for deeper mutual understanding in the work place, and to be of more assistance. I want for foreign residents to enjoy their life in Japan.</p> <p>Recommended Things and Spots I would like for everyone to enjoy the four seasons. I recommend traveling in Japan.</p>



Results of Foreign Resident Interviews



「What things or places do you like in the ‘town’ where you live?」

★Favorite Things★

No. 1. 「Experiencing the Beautiful Nature」

Everyone commented that they could relax in nature, and enjoyed the various things nature has to offer in each of the four seasons, viewing plum and cherry blossoms in spring, Lake Suwa and fireworks in summer, autumnal leaves in the fall, and hot springs and skiing in the winter.

No. 2 「Festivals and Events」

Many people said they were impressed when they heard the sound of Taiko drums for the first time, others that they enjoyed being able to perform their national dance at a local festival, experiencing various things at city-run activities, and having the chance to interact with local citizens at events.

No. 3 「Kind and Gentle」

Many people commented on the kindness of people in their neighborhood, for example, that they like it how kids greet them all at once and that they can live secure lives. Some liked the fact that people cooperate to clean up the neighborhood or shovel snow.

★Favorite Places★

No. 1 Lake Suwa

People enjoy a variety of activities at Lake Suwa, such as walking or jogging, picnics under the cherry blossoms, relaxing in the foot spa, and watching the birds, while others feel calmed watching the sunset, play sports or go fishing, each person having their own memorable time down by the lake.

No. 2 Parks

At Yamabiko Park, many people enjoy cycling or playing Frisbee, and the panoramic views of Okaya city from the observatory. Many said that they thought the night view of the city was breathtaking, and that adults and kids alike can enjoy quality time at the park.

No. 3 Mountains, Highlands and Hot Springs

People said they enjoyed skiing & snowboarding, mountain climbing, driving, the nice views and other activities during each of the four seasons.

Some people also thought the following:

- Social rules are rather strict and there is too much pressure.
- That they were being discriminated against as some Japanese people won't greet them because they are a foreigner.
- They had little involvement with Japanese people, and that it was hard to form deep friendships.
- There are a lot murders involving one member of a family killing another, and there is a lot of other news that is the cause of social unrest.
- Japanese people do not say their opinions clearly and you never really know what they really mean.
- Embarrassed to go to the hot springs.

‘What are your hopes for the ‘town’ where you live?’

The foreign residents living here in Okaya have many hopes, for the future of the city however, it seems that the most common one was regarding the provision of public services. One issued that was raised was that there are many people without driver's licenses amongst the foreign residents living here. For these people, major obstacles included such things as: bus and trains being the only form of public transportation, the fact that only one train runs every hour, the earliness of the last train, and the inconvenience of catching the bus.

Many others hoped for signs to be in other languages, Japanese study materials in the library, more information on public activities, interpreters at hospitals, and other services in concerning their everyday lives.

Out of those people who have lived here for a long time, some said they wanted voting rights, others hoped for an increase in public safety, and for more opportunities for Japanese and foreign residents to get to know each other.