



HELLO OKAYA

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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.

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Summer Festivals

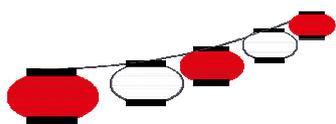


The end of the rainy season ushers in the "Fox Festival" at Okaya City on July 23 (Saturday). It is a unique festival that features a marriage of foxes where the bride and groom parade through the city, culminating in a wedding ceremony.

Then, on August 13th and 14th, a very famous drum festival in Japan called Okaya Taiko Matsuri is held. Only in Okaya can you hear the resounding drumbeats from the outdoor stage set at the parking lot of If Plaza resonating through the whole city. "Furedaiko" signals the beginning of the festival by going around the city once. As evening falls, the "Taiko-Mikoshi," "Minakoi-wassaka" and "Nagashi-odori" parade around the city, making their way towards the stage as darkness envelops the city. The outdoor stage, especially built for the event, will feature Kiyari chants alternating with drum beats, and finally concluding with 300 drummers performing in perfect synchrony.

Obon (August 15th) comes after the Drum Festival. This is when the grand spectacle that is the Lake Suwa Festival Fireworks Display closes the summer season. This large-scale fireworks display is very famous in the whole Japan and boasts 40,000 fireworks that attract more than 450,000 spectators from all over the country. The sound of the fireworks resonating in the whole Suwa region is truly the embodiment of summer and an overwhelming experience that is beyond words. The Fireworks display is then beautifully and quietly concluded by the "Niagara," a waterfall-like fireworks that seemingly blends Suwa Lake with the fireworks.

The following day, August 16th, the Okaya Fireworks Festival and the Toronagashi floating lanterns at the Kamaguchi Watergate will be held. It is said that the floating lanterns are set adrift on the lake to send off spirits of dead ancestors. Approximately 1100 lanterns are donated by families, private companies and businesses within the city.



Japanese Traditions ~One point Japanese culture~



Mid-year (summer) greeting cards

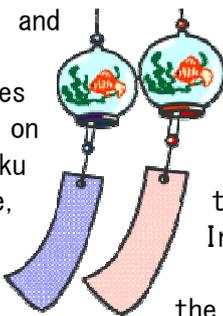


暑中お見舞い申し上げます

Shochu-mimai is a postcard sent to greet someone from around July 15th until the setting in of fall around August 8th. If it is sent after that, it is called a postcard asking after one's health in the lingering summer. The Japanese summer with its high heat and humidity can cause physical exhaustion and illness, so this is a custom that emerged from checking up on a close friend's well-being during summer. Nowadays, it has become a courtesy to send these cards even to business acquaintances, but they are not as common as New Year's cards.

Wind-chimes

Furin are small bells made of glass, metal or ceramic which are hung from the eaves of houses chiefly in summer. A rectangular strip of paper which is called tanzaku is hung from a clapper, and ancient Japanese poems or verses are written on it. When the tanzaku catches the breeze, the bell chimes. In the hot, humid Japanese summer, the sound of the furin vibrating in the breeze is, for the Japanese, a special sound that conveys a refreshing feeling unique during summer.



Bon Odori

The Bon-odori or Bon dance (a style of dancing) wraps up the Obon Season. During Obon, it is believed that spirits of one's ancestors return to visit their kins and that the Buddhist chants accompanied by dancing (originally a Nenbutsu folk dance) console these spirits. It is also said that one of Obon's major function is to comfort the spirits of the ancestors by dancing the Bon-odori on August 15th, so that the spirits can be sent off the following day, August 16th. Even though bon-odori is performed in a festive mood, perhaps because summer in Japan has a melancholic connotation, bon-dancing also feels a little nostalgic.



Our "City Assembly"



During the elections last April 24, the residents of Okaya City voted the City Assembly members. The role of the city assembly members is to voice out the opinions and requests of the citizens to the city government. They also discuss everyday problems and come up with solutions on how to improve the City of Okaya. Although foreign residents do not have the right to vote yet, let us know about the structure of our city assembly and the roles of the assembly members.



What is a City Assembly?



The role of a City Assembly

The City Assembly Members constitutes the City Assembly and decides on the policy, ordinances and budget of the city. The city mayor has to receive the decision from the assembly before actual local development projects can be pursued. The city assembly members who are the people's representative, as well as the mayor, support the city and they also run the local government as mandated by the city residents.

Speaker, Vice Speaker, Assembly members

There are 18 assembly members in Okaya City, each with a four-year term of office. The current assembly members will remain in position from May 1st, 2011 until April 30th, 2015, keeping the management of the local government in check, and coming up with different proposals for the benefit of the city residents. The assembly elects a Speaker and Vice Speaker from its members. The Speaker represents the assembly and assumes a very important role which includes keeping the assembly proceedings in order.

When the Speaker falls ill or is away for an official function, the Vice Speaker temporarily takes over his/her role.

Political Parties

Political parties refer to groups of members who share similar political opinions and ideas and intend to reflect their opinions in city administration as much as possible.

Plenary Session

Plenary session is where the assembly members deliberate proposals and make final decisions. This is also the meeting when the city mayors explains the background and purpose of the proposed bill and the assembly members raise questions and voice out their opinion.

Committees

The affairs administered by the city are varied and complicated. Therefore, committees – which consist of assembly members appointed at plenary sessions – are established to discuss specific matters such as bills. In Okaya City, there are three established committees in place.

Petitions and Appeals

Every citizen may directly submit written requests and opinions concerning city administration to the Assembly. Petitions must be filed with an introduction by an assembly member while appeals are directly submitted to the Assembly. Submitted petitions and appeals will be reviewed by the committees.



Let's pay our taxes!



What happens when you fail to pay your taxes on time?

Tax delinquency is when a tax payer fails to settle his taxes up until the prescribed due date. If taxes are remain unpaid even after the deadline, overdue fees will be charged on top of the required tax amount and delinquent payers will be subject to coercive or forced tax payment collection.

Please consult when you have difficulty in paying taxes!

Consult the city hall immediately if you are not able to pay taxes due to the following:

- Inability to work resulting from sickness or injury
- Inability to sustain livelihood due to loss of employment
- Suffered damage due to disasters or theft.

Tax delinquency is a violation of the law

When a car or motorcycle owner fails to pay city taxes or national health insurance taxes within the prescribed period and fails to respond to demand letters, a wheel chock lock will be attached to his vehicle preventing him from using it. The purpose of this is for the vehicle owner to voluntarily pay taxes. Failure to pay taxes even after this will result to the vehicle being seized and be subject to public auction.

Perseid meteor shower

The Perseid meteor shower is said to be a standard fixture during summer because this astronomical event happens in latter part of the month of July. However, the number of visible meteors increase in the middle part of August. You can see the most number of meteor showers around August 13 (the day and time may change depending on the year).

With some margin of error, the most number of meteor showers can be seen for 2 to 3 nights. Together with the Quadrans Muralis Meteor Shower of January and the Gemini Meteor Shower of December, these three



is known to be the "Three Big Meteor Showers." On a dark and clear sky at night, one can see as much as 30 to 60 shooting stars in an hour. This year, the peak is scheduled to be from the midnight of August 12th until the dawn of August 13th. The Perseid meteor shower is also recommended to people who are new to star-gazing. This meteor shower can be easily seen even without the aid of a telescope or binoculars, so why don't you look up to the sky at night and wait for the meteor showers while enjoying the end of this year's summer.





Parent-child Playtime



There are specific days at each nursery school where parents and their pre-kindergarten children can visit and join the activities at the nursery school. Why don't you let your child experience a day at nursery school first before enrolling him?

Name of Day-Care Center for Children	Telephone Number	Scheduled Playtime									
		June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	
Oguchi Nursery	22-2489	9th	14th	11th	8th	8th	10th	8th	12nd	10th	
Imai Nursery	22-2935	9th	13th	11th	1th	1st	17th	9th	12nd	22nd	
Ayame Nursery	22-2680	1st	6th	3rd		1st - 5th	18th	6th	11th		
Kawagishi Nursery	22-3829	7th	6th	5th		7th	4th	6th	11th		
Natsuake Nursery	22-3861	14th	20th	23th	24th	18th	15th	13th	10th	21st	
Narita Nursery	22-2464	2nd	14th	11th	8th	13th	15th	1st	19th	23rd	
Minato Nursery	22-3566	9th	7th	5th		1st - 6th	4th	9th	5th	3rd	
Osachi Nursery	27-4194	14th	14th	9th		1st	4th	1st	10th		
Wakakusa Nursery	22-4038	16th	13th	18th	24th	18th	16th	15th	17th	21st	
Nishibori Nursery	22-7670	8th	14th	5th	24th	28th	18th	6th	11th	22nd	
Higashibori Nursery	27-9366	16th	21st	18th		1st - 20th	17th	15th	19th		
Shinmei Nursery	22-4555	3rd	6th	5th		1st - 6th	2nd	5th	11th		
Yokokawa Nursery	28-1180	9th	14th	11th	8th	1st	10th	15th	19th		
Tsurumine Nursery	22-2911	7th	6th	2nd	2nd	1st	4th	6th			
Sei Yosefu Nursery Okaya	24-1477	16th	21st	11th	23rd	13th	17th	23rd		23rd	
Himawari Nursery	27-2816	Every Monday									