

FUKUSHIMA REPORT

福島県



Visit Date **7-10 October 2022**

Visit Purpose

To familiarize myself with Fukushima Prefecture key products so that I am better able to explain to agents about the hotels and attractions of Fukushima Prefecture

Initial Comments

The itinerary was well organized and planned and I saw many products in a very short amount of time .

Product Comment

Day 1 - 07 October 2022

I was collected from my hotel at 0930 by Mr Saito from NTA Fukushima office. From the hotel we proceeded to the Fukushima Prefecture Council building to meet with Mr Naganuma, Mr Kanno and Mr Suzuki.

We had a discussion about my scheduled itinerary and the inbound market to Fukushima Ken. Mr Suzuki told me that before the Covid 19 pandemic about 200,000 international guests visit Fukushima and their 5 year target is to rebuild this to 2019 levels again. We took photos together



Fukushima Prefectural Office Building



Meeting with Fukushima Prefectural officers

After the visit to the Prefecture Government office we went to the first place on the itinerary called Tsuchiyu Onsen and we were met by a representative of the Tourism Association called Ms Kato. This was a very charming town with beautiful views and interesting shops. It has a bus connection to Fukushima Station that stops in the middle of the town. The first activity was to watch the traditional art of kokeshi making which is famous in the town. Here I learnt in the workshop how kokeshi dolls are made. Inbound groups are also able to see how dolls are made with a pre booking. After this we went to see a Binary power plant. This was fascinating as I had never seen one before and it was amazing to think that the Binary power station came as a result of the disruption to power during the 2011 earthquake. Kato san our guide from the Tsuchiyu Onsen

Tourism Association was very good and had a good knowledge of the Binary and surrounding tourism attractions. She told us that she is able to do the Binary tour in English too !

We also looked at how the warm water from the binary is used to grow prawns and there is even a place in the town where you can try to fish for prawns.

We also did a sudden visit to one of the shops (Café Moriyama) and I want to mention the owner of the shop who welcomed us with tea and pulin (custard milk pudding). She understands very well tourism and hospitality. After a quick walk around town Saito san and I enjoyed a very delicious lunch and I bought a few souvenirs.



Kokeshi Doll Making



Binary System



Walk around town



Fukushima Ken Pulin Custard Dessert



Delicious Lunch
(Specialty hot steamed wappa rice)

Comment

The Tsuchiyu area has many areas of beauty.

The Binary is very suitable for technical visits as it is unique but not so interesting for regular sightseeing tours.

The Kokeshi class is very suitable for families and groups.

Good time to visit is October to see the autumn leaves

After lunch we went to visit **Yumori Onsen Hotel**. My first impression was that this looked like a 4 star hotel so I was surprised to read on the itinerary that it was a hostel. We were shown around by the hotel Manager who showed us the rooms and onsen facilities. The rooms cater for all size groups with some rooms having balconies and the hostel even has a capsule hotel type of room

I received this datafile from Yumori Onsen

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11wxnlxcRevvebPokCA7Wt8aewKxpr9vY?usp=sharing> and also this message

オーストラリアンアトラクションズ

営業担当

サイモン ウィリアムソン 様

お世話になっております。

先日はお忙しい中 YUMORI にお越しくださしまして誠に有難うございます。

これからインバウンドの受け入れが本格的に始まりますので是非、引き続きお力添えをいただければと思います、宜しくお願いいたします。

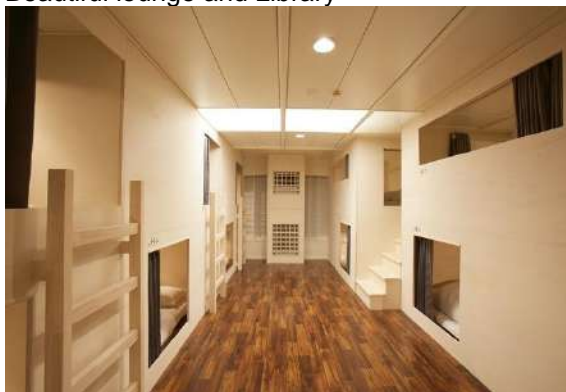
YUMORI 渡邊



Beautiful lounge and Library



Rooms with balcony



Capsule Style Room



Room with beds and tatami for small groups

Comment

Yumori Onsen is very keen to welcome international guests and I believe that they are able to handle overseas groups very well.

Yumori is very suitable for Budget or FIT travellers that wish to stay at a good quality hostel at a reasonable price

We next visited **Nakano Fudosan** which was a very special place. It was raining when we visited but I loved the quiet serenity of this beautiful place. I learned about some of the history of this site and I learned that the caves were dug out by hand.



Beautiful Nakano Fudosan



Entrance to Caves

Comment

This is a must see attraction for groups. Allow one hour

Suitable for groups especially as features Japanese culture. Good for seniors too but they could not enter the caves unless fit.

After Nakano Fudosan we visited **Iizaka Hotel Juraku**. This is an older type hotel but we were warmly welcomed by Mr Kitsunae (橘内さん). We looked first at the rooms and restaurant facilities and then the bathing areas. He also showed us many meeting places where upto 300 pax could have a private function.



Rooms cater for different pax numbers



Twin Room



Lounge Area



Dinner and Breakfast Buffet

Comment

Feeling that the hotel was a little old but is good for groups of all sizes with a mix of Western Style and Japanese Style rooms. The first Saturday in October they have the **Kenka Matsuri** so interesting for groups to see

Good for groups and business seminars due to number of meeting rooms. Best time to visit April or October for Sakura or leaf changing season 紅葉

The last stop for Day 1 was our overnight accommodation called **Yoshikawa-ya**. First impression was of a beautiful lobby with free drinks (tea/coffee/soft drinks) to serve yourself anytime of the day

The second impression was how friendly the staff were. Mr Shimizu (清水さん) and Ms Hata (羽田さん) were there to welcome us and the following day Shimizu san said farewell and was happy to take photos !! We had a delicious dinner with very good service. I received an email from Mr Shimizu with all images and a message

オーストラリアンアトラクションズ

営業担当 サイモン ウィリアムソン 様

先日は遠方よりお出で下さいまして誠にありがとうございました。
並びに、御礼のメールまで頂戴しまして、重ねて御礼申し上げます。
今後共、引き続きよろしくお願い申し上げます。

.....

かむろみの郷/穴原温泉/吉川屋

.....



Japanese Style Room



Help yourself drinks bar



Beautiful dinner



Friendly Staff (Mr Shimizu)

Comment

Very good hotel that left a lasting impression on me mainly due to the friendly genuine staff. Most of the rooms are Japanese style which is perfect for overseas groups of any age (except students) who would prefer a Japanese room experience. The buffet is also suitable for groups and families. Again visit anytime but leaf changing season very good.

Day 2 - 08 October 2022

After a buffet breakfast at Yoshikawa-ya we went to **Jododaira Rest House**. This is a wonderful drive through the mountains to see one of the main attractions which is a volcano crater. The walk to see the crater from the Rest House is about 1.1km. There is also an information center where you can get free maps and walking trail maps and camping is also an option.



Beautiful Drive to Jododaira



Mount Azuma Kofuji

Comment

Very good attraction for regular and student groups but not recommended for seniors to do the Volcano due to steep climb. Drive up is wonderful with many amazing views. Good to visit in April to Autumn and is a very unique attraction that would be hard to see elsewhere in Japan. Very good too for trekking and adventure groups and those who wish to do camping.

After Jododaira Guest house we proceeded to a very unique region called **Urabandai**. This is called the Lake District (UK) of Japan.

It is a region famous for its lake and amazing ponds (Goshikinuma)

Our first stop was at Urabandai Lake Resort Geihinkan Nekoma Rikyu.

This is a very deluxe resort with high end restaurants (great wine list) and very good onsen facilities.



Japanese Style Room sleeps 8



Twin rooms are big about 36m2



Special Meal Packages available



Many meeting rooms for upto 360 pax

Comment

Very good hotel for more upmarket groups but not recommended for students. I would also use this hotel for MICE groups as it has good restaurants and a good wine list

The region has many local activity places where you can go fishing or do a cruise .
There is also a magnificent ponds area where the colour of the water is wonderful .

We visited the tourist information center and there are plenty of maps in English for guest to take free of charge



Cruises of the lake



Goshiki Ponds



Free English brochures

Comment

Many activities in the area and I would recommend April to October visit. Goshiki Ponds are very unique and would appeal to all groups in particular seniors and students. A very good information center that has English brochures and a QR code guiding system make this very useful for FITs to enjoy and is easily accessible by most hotels in Urabandai area even by foot.

Guests staying at Urabandai Lake Resort Geihinkan Nekoma Rikyu and Urabandai Lake Resort Goshiki no Mori can easily access Lake Hibara and do the option of a cruise.

After lunch we went to visit another Ryokan called **Daiwa Royal Hotel** that specializes in student groups. Most of the rooms are Western Style. It is one of few hotels in Japan that has a Rainbow program for students. We were shown around by Mr Saito (斎藤さん). The hotel has many meetings rooms but is very busy around August each year. Most of the rooms are Western Style that can have upto 5 pax per room. The hotel is part of the Daiwa group and they have a good English Website and a booking call center in Tokyo that can answer bookings from around the world.

Comment

With many activities in the area Daiwa Royal Hotel is great for families and students. They have a special Rainbow program that is very unique in Japan and one of the few hotels in Japan to have this program that would cater for kids with special needs and the hotel is only a few minutes walk from Goshiki Ponds.



Western Room sleeps 4 /5



Japanese style Room sleep 4 /5



Lobby check in area



Resort Aerial image

We also saw another very interesting hotel called **Urabandai Grandeco Tokyu Hotel** that is part of the Tokyu Hotel chain and again can cater to international enquiries. Mr Oyama (小山さん) showed us around the rooms and facilities. The hotel is very close to their own ski resort and has long slopes from beginner to advanced skiers. They can also arrange other activities such as trekking and star gazing.

They already cater to guests from Australia who come for the skiing.



Western Twin Rooms



Japanese Twin Rooms



Ski Slopes minutes away



Meeting rooms

Comment

Great for ski groups and FITs due to having ski rental and ski storage areas. Best time to visit is winter for skiing but also spring and autumn give many natural attractions close by. English spoken by reservations also good

Our final stop for Day 2 was our overnight stay at **Urabandai Lake Resort Goshiki no Mori**. We checked in and enjoyed a buffet dinner and buffet breakfast. The hotel was very busy as 8-10 October was long weekend in Japan so the buffet was very busy. I stayed in a Western style deluxe twin room which was very big. It had an entrance corridor and lounge to enjoy the views



Deluxe twin room 58m2



Great dinner buffet



Buffet Breakfast

Comment

Great hotel to stay at and buffet options make it suitable for groups of all ages and families. I would not visit during Japanese long weekends as it can get very crowded but other times all suitable.

Good to use in conjunction with sister hotel Urabandai Lake Resort Geihinkan Nekoma Rikyu for large groups.

Day 3 - 09 October 2022

Day three we took the very picturesque but very windy road called the **Skyline** along the mountain range as we wound our way to Aizuwakamatsu City to visit **Tsurugajo Castle** site of one of the last battles of the Bosshin Wars. Our guide was Mr Watanabe from the Castle Management Division of in Aizuwakamatsu Tourism Bureau.

We could not visit inside the castle as it is closed until April 2023 for maintenance so we toured around the grounds. Mr Watanabe had excellent knowledge of the history of the Castle which was very interesting. Visitors can also rent a kimono and wear it as they walk around the Castle. I also enjoyed macha green tea in the grounds of the tea house next to the Castle



Tsurugajo Castle

Green Tea

Kimono Rental

Comment

Must see attraction for overseas guests. Allow 1.5 hours

Castle is suitable to all segments but children should be over at least 10 years old to enjoy the history of this castle. Good for seniors and student groups as well as special interest such as photography.

Following the visit to Tsurugajo Castle we went into Aizuwakamatsu to try the traditional art of lacquer painting (**Maki-e**). Nakamura sensei (中村先生) was the teacher for this activity which I enjoyed immensely. I was able to paint my own lacquerware from what Nakamura sensei taught me. Later I went into the shop and bought a beautiful gift for my wife.



Traditional Lacquerware Lacquerware painting

Comment

Must do activity for seniors and student groups in particular. Very unique activity that lasts only a hour or so but can be enjoyed by all as they learn a traditional Japanese artform

Following the maki-e activity we drove to a popular tourist town called **Shimogo**

Here guests can wonder up and down a traditional Edo period small town and enjoy buying souvenirs and of course eating the famous negi soba. This was a great experience and I wish I could have spent more time here to explore the shops. Maps are available in English and the negi soba was delicious



Shimogo Town



English brochure



Irori at restaurant



Famous negi soba

Comment

Must do visit. Allow 2 hours with lunch. Very suitable for groups of all types to come here and enjoy the traditional Japanese atmosphere. Groups of 30 pax and under are best due to limited sizes of restaurants but negi soba would be very unique to many Australian travelers and highly recommended. Recommend spring and autumn season

Our next stop was **Aizuwakamatsu Okawaso**. This is a beautiful onsen resort with many modern Western and Japanese rooms.

Western Rooms <https://www.okawaso.co.jp/room#anchor02>

Japanese Rooms <https://www.okawaso.co.jp/room#anchor01>

The hotel sales manager Mr Muroi (室井さん) showed us around the hotel. He mentioned that he has some issues in that it is very hard to find staff so he cannot fill the hotel to

maximum capacity (650 guests) and he also finds it hard to reply to requests in English from overseas.

The rooms however are beautiful and he showed me some of his group menus which looked amazing.

Comment

Very suitable for higher end and senior groups or even some higher end MICE groups. Hotel is not running at maximum capacity currently so better to wait until 2023 before considering this hotel

Our final visit was to a hotel that had been voted No 1 in all Japan. The hotel is called **Bobata Onsen Yahata-ya** and we were greeted by Mr Sagara (相楽さん). He said his main issue is that the hotel is not used to handling overseas guests and communication is a problem as he has no one who speaks English apart from the owner who lived in the US. The hotel is unsure at the moment whether they want overseas guests and they are at a crossroads to decide their next marketing direction. Many of their guests are seniors and Sagara san realizes that this market will decline in the future. Of all the hotels the service at Bobata Onsen Yahata-ya had the best service with many staff on hand to wish us welcome to the hotel and to say goodbye.



Japanese style room



Western Twin Style room



Deluxe outside onsen



Luxury onsen

Comment

Bobata Onsen Yahata-ya are highly recommended for high end senior age FIT or small family group travellers (this is their current market) who have some Japanese speaking knowledge and the hotel doesn't have any English speakers. However the hotel would prefer MICE or larger groups as they would come with a tour guide.

Very very high end service with many staff on hand to help you. Many agents would recommend this hotel as it was voted the number one Ryokan in Japan.

Following this last visit we returned to Fukushima City and I said farewell to Saito san.

I managed to catch up later that evening with Watanabe san and Onodera san whom I met the previous month in Sydney

Final Comments

The inspection was very busy but well worth the time and effort. I saw many things thanks to Saito san and was able to understand much better the tourism products in Fukushima Prefecture.

There were many hotels to see (sometimes it became difficult to remember their differences). I enjoyed the traditional crafts and sightseeing very much as this is what overseas guests want to see in Japan.

Everyone was very kind and helpful and we had coffee with many of the hotel sales managers prior to our inspections and when we left they gave us gifts for visiting which I thought was very respectful. The service level in Japan is also very very high and overseas guests will appreciate this very much. End

