

University of Tasmania Taiko Society visit to
Yaizu, Japan
Hobart's Sister City

(A personal account by Maria Grist)

31 January 2005. Six members of the University of Tasmania Taiko Society are visiting Yaizu as part of a tour of cities in Japan, prior to taking part in a Taiko course in Achi Village run by Art Lee, a teacher who is fully qualified to teach Wadaiko within Japan.



We arrived a few minutes late due to some transport problems, and were taken by Mr Masui to the Town Hall, where we thankfully dumped our gear. We were introduced to our host families and went home with them. My host parents were the Yamamotos - Mr Yamamoto is an architect. He and his wife spoke only a word or two of English, but one of his two daughters was there and speaks very good English, her name is Mayumi. The Yamamoto's other daughter has one girl and two boys - the two boys returned home fresh from a Karate lesson and gave me a little demonstration - they were soooo cute!! They looked fantastic. There was also a little miniature daschund who was very good-natured.

Next morning was the official reception. First we exchanged gifts with the Mayor. We gave him a Huon Pine frame made in the shape of a map of Tasmania, with our Taiko logo inside the frame. We had other smaller gifts for the Sister Cities people. They gave us all gifts in return. We were also introduced to the Deputy Mayor and the head of the Financial Department. We were then ushered into a room filled with Japanese council officials. We went through the formal introductions - it can be very intimidating to try to introduce yourself in Japanese when you know as little as I do! Simon had volunteered to act as interpreter during the Yaizu section of the trip.



We were all bundled into Mr Masui's people-moving van. Mr Masui is very tall, and he has an offsider, who is really short. The two of them together look slightly comical. I think they were a bit nervous and didn't quite know how to take this bundle of crazy Australians.



First of all we were taken to the fishing ports and were formally introduced to the President of the Fisheries Association, Tokuichi Nishikawa, who gives us more gifts. Next Mr Masui brings us to the fish freezer. Here we dump all of our cameras, put on our scarves and zip up our jackets to go into the freezer. The first one has an airlock of -30 degrees, where you wait for a minute or so, then you go into the main space, which is -60 degrees. I put my scarf over my nose. We were all looking like dragons, breathing out steam. People laughed and jumped around, the inside of people's noses froze, my jeans trousers started to feel like boards. Mr Masui only had a suit on!!! He was smiling however, putting on a brave face no doubt. The freezer manager told us that they can move the racks inside the freezer

by remote control, and also operate the fork lift, so they can access the fish they need without needing to go in.

Next we went up a couple of floors in another building to look down onto the fishing port itself. There were no fishing boats unloading at the time, but there was a boat being cleaned and

prepared by largely migrant workers. We were told about the fishing process – shown the large hooks, told about the process of spraying the water in order to fool the fish into coming to the surface, shown diagrams of which fish are caught and where in the world they are caught. Yaizu is a very deep port.

Next we went into a lecture room where Simon interpreted as we were given a lecture on deep sea water. This water is drawn from down where the sun never reaches, and is apparently very good, with numerous health benefits. After the salt is extracted it can be used for drinking, for agriculture, and in a variety of products.

Mr Masui and his off-sider took us to a top restaurant where they paid for our lunch.

In the afternoon we were taken to the planetarium. It was absolutely fabulous! Stunning! I loved it. They showed us all of the stars and constellations, then a movie on the probe which is being sent to Saturn. Unfortunately some of us nearly dozed off, because the seats were so comfortable and (of course) leaned right back like a bed.

Next we walked around the science museum, looking at the exhibits, many of which were interactive. Simon and Lara both had a go at making fire with a fire stick – Lara managed to get a small flame going. We all made little polystyrene birds which fly around the room on a small stick. Then we went to the top of the building, in the freezing wind, and took photos of Mt Fuji and the city, as well as the wave-breaking concrete barriers. We didn't stay long as it was so cold.



Next stop was the earthquake facility. We went into a little room which simulated the Tokyo and the Kobe earthquakes. It was fun but you can't help imagining how scary it would be if it were real. It was very jerky and unexpected. We had to be careful standing up – it was hard to keep your balance. We also looked at the displays which showed what you needed to have in your first-aid kit, and tried out a knot which you

need to know in case of emergency evacuation from an earthquake-affected area. We tied the rope between Simon and Ana and Lara sat on the rope in the middle. Mr Masui's off-sider was boggle-eyed at the antics of the crazy Australians. Next we went to the fire station, which was next door, and had our photos taken with the firemen.

That evening we had our exchange with the local Yaizu taiko group. We played some pieces and they played some pieces, then they taught us a rhythm which we all played together. It was a lot of fun, and we ate some food together with the taiko group and our host families. The next day, there was a photo and an article in the local paper.



I must tell you about my host family. They were very kind and provided everything I needed. Mr Yamomoto has a bathroom which



is completely lined with charcoal, which he is very proud of. The food which I was served there was excellent. There was the best food, all made with fresh ingredients and fine wine and sake, all perfectly cooked and presented. Mr Yamomoto used to be a chef and cooked the most absolutely brilliant Okonomiyaki, small and delicate and a mixture of subtle tastes.

Next morning we went to the meeting spot where Mr Masui took us

to a lookout, where you can photograph Mt Fuji really well. Then we were taken to a traditional Japanese tea room where we were treated to a formal Japanese tea ceremony. Like everything else, this was paid for by the Yaizu people. We all had a great time. Then we walked around the tea room gardens. There was ice on the ponds.



Next we walked up past a shrine and continued on a walk up a hill – a bushwalk of sorts, except that at the top of the hill is a Buddhist temple. I noticed camellia trees growing wild in the bush, along with ferns and a variety of other plants. It was extremely steep, and there are small reminders of the gods all the way up the hill.

Lunch was in an all-you-can-eat restaurant. Really good food, and lots of it, all paid for by Mr Masui.

The fish market was next. Every kind of fish – fresh, salted, pickled, dried, shaved, octopus, squid, shrimp, you name it – it was there.

Next was the local shrine with the statue of the founder of Yaizu outside. Nearby there is a kids adventure playground and some of us had fun for a while here. Near the shrine is a small museum with old artefacts like TVs, chests, medicine cabinets, fishing implements, shells etc.



That evening the Mayor came to tea at the Yamomoto's. My interpreter had to go and left her husband in charge of interpretation. He was very nervous because he is her student of English and it would reflect badly on her if he didn't do well. But although he stumbled a bit he did just fine and there was only one word I had to look up. He was very happy and relieved at the end of the evening, that it had gone OK.

The Mayor presented me with a bottle of sake for the group, and a packet of sweetened dried fish. We ate an excellent meal and had a really good red wine with it. I took a photo of the family. They were so gorgeous and hospitable.



Next morning we all went to the Town Hall and said a formal goodbye, with lots of officials there to wave us goodbye. They watched in bemusement as we forced lots of baggage into our car. Mr Masui and his offsider were quite sorry to see us go. At first I think we left them a bit gobsmacked, but later on they really warmed to the Aussie style and their goodbyes were really warm and genuine. They both said that they had a really great time with us over the past few days.