

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, May 2023

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

## Omotenashi May

Perhaps you've read or heard the Japanese term "omotenashi".

Takigawa Christel's catchphrase "O-mo-te-na-shi" received plenty of attention when she used it in a speech presented to the IOC for the purpose of inviting the Olympics to Tokyo. Omotenashi, loosely translated, means hospitality.

Japan is aiming to revive inbound tourism to pre-pandemic levels. Foreign tourists will have more opportunities to travel to Japan now.

As an English volunteer guide, I believe omotenashi is essential when we welcome visitors. I realized this particularly when I recently accompanied a large family with members ranging from a 12-year-old boy to a woman in her 80's. They had come from Birmingham, England, Hawaii, and San Francisco, and on April 8, we all went sightseeing in Ozu, Uchiko, and Matsuyama together.

On that day, I was able to try out several guide techniques which I had learned at English Volunteer Guide Workshop.

In order to reflect a spirit of omotenashi, my tour needed to include both curiosity and flexibility.

Although we could casually talk about Japanese Major Leaguer Otani Shohei and even the recent steep rise in electricity bills, I discovered that, all in all, many things and ideas familiar to Japanese people are not familiar to Westerners.

The visitors asked me questions about Japanese items commonly found in Japanese houses: the tokonoma alcove in tatami rooms, roof tiles on traditional Japanese roofs, and bamboo handicrafts.

Using props was an effective way to show what Japanese life was like a hundred years ago. I lit a Japanese candle, wax and candle production historically Uchiko Town's chief industry, to demonstrate its good features. For example, Uchiko candles have a brighter flame and produce less smoke.

At Garyu-sanso villa in Ozu, a British boy pointed out the Shinto altar, and asked me what it was used for. Then he stepped forward to show what he had probably learned at a shrine; to bow twice, clap twice, and bow once again.

They were also eager to listen to the legends, folk wisdom and stories I told. In this way they seemed to better understand Japanese history and culture. They were all ears when I told a ghost story at Matsuyama Castle's mysterious Doorless Gate. Following one of the theories of how the samurai would defend the castle in the event of an attack, we all pretended to be enemy soldiers and rushed through the gate together. In this way, they time-traveled back to the Edo era for a moment and felt as if they were actually there.

These kinds of guiding strategies stimulate their curiosity, and they'll remember the places we visited along with their experiences and the anecdotes they were told.

It goes without saying that guides should be flexible in dealing with guests' interests and needs.

Walking around each site together, I was thinking of what and what not to guide, according to both my clients' interests and our time schedule.

In advance, I had prepared some topics and carried my notes with me.

However, when their set itinerary and tight schedule wouldn't allow us to go inside Uchiko-za

Kabuki Theater and Matsuyama castle tower, we had to skip those destinations. Instead, I had to improvise, and on the bus taking us back to Matsuyama, I told them a little about both kabuki theater and castle life. To keep their attention, I talked about how Kabuki had become popular, how it had evolved from acrobatics and risqué dancing. And then I challenged them to an Edo-Era-Fun-Fact-Quiz.

True or false. During the Edo Era, 100% of the samurai class could read and write.

To employ these two significant guide strategies, respecting visitors' curiosity and, as a guide, remaining flexible, omotenashi spirit should be the basis of any tour.

Japan's service industry is among the most dedicated in the world. Our transportation systems are prompt and convenient. Both make travelling to any part of the country easy for tourists.

In addition, if we can guide in English always keeping in mind omotenashi spirit, travelers will want to explore Ehime further and probably experience many unforgettable moments.

(Miwa N.)

Except for us, the elevator going up to the fourth floor was full of teenagers. One Saturday afternoon last month, the three of us, an elderly couple from San Francisco and I, their guide for the day, were there to go shopping at Animate, a well-known anime shop.

Far from California, Kazuko and Richard were visiting Matsuyama after a memorial service for Kazuko's relative in Tokyo.

On our way to the post office downtown, Richard, a retired attorney, asked me if I could also take them to a store that sold anime related goods. Showing me the list his granddaughter had texted him of five kawaii characters, he said he wanted to buy some souvenirs for her.

Ashamed to say, I knew none of the latest manga. He didn't either. But I did remember there was a store on Gintengai shopping arcade. Thanks to a friendly clerk at the post office, we were soon pointed in the right direction with a detailed map.

Stepping into Animate, I felt dizzy in its aisles crammed with cute characters, figurines, stickers, charms, cosplay costumes, and more. This was unknown territory to me. We were lost and had no idea where to look for the characters his granddaughter requested.

Richard showed the list to a young clerk who was really helpful.

That afternoon, I learned kawaii culture is now here to stay. Cute Japanese comic books and animated cartoons are not just big in Japan. Their popularity has spread across the world.

Before saying goodbye, we took a nice break at the foot-bath café in Dogo.

A week later, Richard sent me some photos of his family on the road in Ishikawa, and texted me this message.

"We especially enjoyed the day we spent getting to know our new dear friend Kay in Matsuyama."

This nice couple made my day, and I had the chance to visit a popular store while accompanying them as a volunteer guide.

Welcome to Matsuyama!

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)