

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, October 2024

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

October Costumes

Perhaps because Tokyo banned merrymaking at Tokyo's Shibuya intersection after an incident in South Korea in which 158 people died, not many people in Japan seem to have a good image of Halloween.

Today's Halloween events have little to do with exorcism or the ancient Celts.

But even though the activity is far from the holiday's original meaning, dressing up, for example, as an anime character on Halloween, has become representative of a Japanese subculture, one that attracts anime fans from all over the world.

The best part of Halloween is the moment when we show off our costumes.

So when I hear bad news about Halloween, I resent people's stupidity and carelessness in causing such accidents.

Ancient Halloween developed as an event to expel evil spirits, and it's ironic that such a holiday could be the cause of so much trouble and even the loss of human lives.

Today's Halloween should be a fun event. It's even better if the holiday leads to regional revitalization and internationalization.

In general, people in Matsuyama usually dress rather plainly, so it may sound outrageous to them to go out in disguise for even one day.

Some of my acquaintances are a little opposed to the idea of going out in costumes at night. For one thing, it's not easy for them to prepare a costume. For another, they don't really know how to enjoy this Western tradition or think they are too old to dress up and go out drinking.

Once upon a time in the 1990s, Matsuyama International Center supported Halloween parties. They provided an annual budget to prepare a banner, decorations and prizes for a costume contest.

As a member of the International Salon, I helped plan the party. Middle-aged people, housewives, foreigners, as well as youngsters participated in the all-you-can-eat masquerade party at night. All the participants disguised themselves in elaborate make-up and creative costumes. We pointed and laughed at each other as each of us arrived at the party.

I hope MIC can afford to encourage such an international event again because it's a cross-cultural opportunity and a good way for Matsuyama citizens to share a fun time with people from abroad.

In recent years, I have teamed up with friends to dress up for Halloween.

I recently visited San Francisco's hippy Mecca Haight Ashbury, where there were a lot of shops selling psychedelic fashion, a real eye opener for me.

And I came across people on the street dressed in classic hippy-wear who looked as though they still cherished the Haight's past.

Back in 1967, hippy slogans like "love and peace," and "Make love, not war," raised an alarm in society. Innocent, freewheeling youngsters believed they could exert their power for a better society. That enthusiasm, along with fashion, long hair and music, was instigation for young people to unite.

Inspired by the birth of this culture, I decided to be a hippie last year. I got a tie-dyed halter-neck outfit, something I'd never worn before. I also hand-made beaded necklaces and a headband.

That night, the disguises people wore created a bizarre atmosphere that you wouldn't necessarily imagine on Nibancho in Matsuyama. I met many costumed people celebrating Halloween.

"Tada!"

Janis Joplin, Flower Power Hippie, caught the eyes of passersby and people in the bars.

We all laughed at each other, pointing at our costumes.

(Miwa N.)

When autumn arrives in Shikoku, I see more *ohenro* pilgrims with *sugegasa* sedge hats walking along the roads in my neighborhood. Many of them are clad in white outfits, wearing *wagesa* sashes across their chests and carrying sticks and prayer beads on their left wrists.

One year ago, this mid-October, a gentleman from Athens named Theo visited Shikoku and tackled the walking pilgrimage of 1,400 kilometers (870-miles), finishing the entire route in a mere 50 days. He had learned all he could about the pilgrimage before his arrival, and from start to finish, with help from a Hungarian coordinator stationed in Tanzania, I assisted with logistics while Theo was in Japan.

The Shikoku pilgrimage is a circuit of 88 sacred temples established by a Buddhist priest now known as Kobo Daishi who lived in the early 9th century. Kobo Daishi founded an esoteric Buddhist sect after completing rigorous religious training on a pilgrimage route that was, in those days, considered almost impossible to finish.

Speaking for myself, until I moved to Matsuyama, I was completely clueless about the Shikoku pilgrimage.

I'm embarrassed to admit that I've walked to only 3 out of the 88 temples dotting the island's four prefectures. However, I've heard a lot about the friendly welcoming *ossettai* spirit displayed by people living along the ancient pilgrimage trail.

Along the way, there are free lodgings for pilgrims. Local volunteers set up rest stops offering refreshments of tea, sweets, fresh oranges and more.

Frankly, I've never personally experienced their hospitality. But when I had to book accommodations for my Greek client's journey

calling a number of tiny family-run inns, I found that without exception, all of the owners were kind and cooperative, with heartfelt hospitality that is truly rare these days.

When I recall Theo's posting, I realize that Shikoku is where I belong.

"Shikoku, a place of PEACE for me, reminds us that all places around the world should be like this."

(Kay)