

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, October 2025

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

## Volunteers

This What's Going On? website is produced by a volunteer staff in cooperation with the Matsuyama International Center. Vincent Merkhajeb was the instructor of MIC's English volunteer guide class for many years, and most of the WGO staff members have taken his class. The Matsuyama Outloud section was created by him and he has greatly contributed to WGO for many years as a main editor.

As of September, he retired from WGO. We are sorry to see him go.

Vincent, thanks so much for all your help over the years!

(Nobuko Yamamoto, WGO Coordinator, on behalf of the WGO staff)

With the cruise ships calling regularly at Matsuyama seaport, the need for English-speaking guides is on the rise, and that has me a bit concerned.

I volunteered last June to greet passengers at the seaport and give them advice about where to go and what to see during their short time in Matsuyama. But a city hall employee there confided in me, muttering, "We're afraid there's going to be fewer and fewer people to volunteer."

If so, appropriate measures should be taken to prevent a shortage of volunteers, even in the middle of the fiscal year.

City hall asked for thirty volunteers to help with inbound tourists in August, but only three applied.

No matter how enthusiastic these volunteers are, I understand how they might feel bewildered by the onslaught of ship-bound tourists. Plus, it's not easy to operate outdoors under the hot sun for a full day. And it's a peculiar situation when you have to deal with a flood of questions from hundreds of tourists in a language other than your own.

English-speaking volunteers come to assume a difficult responsibility.

It was the Inbound Tourism Division of City Hall that decided to invite foreign tourists, but I don't think the local government is fully prepared to deal with this influx of ship-bound travelers.

They have hired an agency to coordinate the volunteers who are charged with answering inbound ship passengers' questions and concerns, but the agency itself doesn't have any English-speaking employees.

Volunteering is essentially a spontaneous act of goodwill, but it can be exploited in situations where good service is expected and provided at a low honorarium.

Excessive reliance on the goodwill of volunteers, so-called "Yarigaisakushu" occurs when low wages are offset and excused by the belief that volunteers are contributing to society or helping others, or when overworking them is justified because they are doing what they love.

It is also a mechanism through which the organization slyly exploits the passion for English communication and the sense of mission of the volunteers.

I'll continue contributing as a volunteer and am planning to help with another guide workshop to train those working at the frontline at Matsuyama Port.

City hall officials say they require a lot of English-speaking volunteer guides. If they need more in the near future, they must acknowledge the real importance of our task as volunteers.

(Miwa N.)