

## My Nōtō Experience

Nōtō peninsula, located around midway along the western coast of Japan, is a rural area extending about 100 kilometers into the Sea of Japan. I had first heard about it when I was searching for information about Kanazawa and Ishikawa region, after I found out I was accepted for an exchange program at Kanazawa University. It didn't capture my attention though and didn't think about visiting it until I heard that my friends were going for a study tour to Nōtō. I had some free time, so I decided to join it, expecting to spend two days in good company and maybe seeing some nice scenery on the occasion. The trip however, turned out to be so much more than I expected.

The first stop we made was in Anamizu, a small town in the northwest of the peninsula. We visited *Kāsan no Gakkō Shokudō*, Mom's School Cafeteria. This initiative was started by a group of local housewives, who wanted to find a use for the building of a primary school, which closed 5 years earlier due to declining number of students. The 6 ladies, whom we had the pleasure to meet, decided to open a cafeteria, where they are cooking using local ingredients and recreating *ofukuro no aji*, the taste of mom's home cooking. Their aim is to highlight the local vegetables and seafood and introduce it to tourist from Japan and abroad but also and perhaps more important to revive the local community and to create a space for people to meet and deepen their relationship. In *Kāsan no Gakkō Shokudō* we had the opportunity to taste delicious food and feel the amazing, homely atmosphere of a real small Japanese community.

Second half of the day was all about oysters. We transferred to Wajima. After passing through narrow mountain roads, we finally reached the sea shore glimmering in the cold, early spring sunlight. We stopped at a small bay, where oysters are cultivated. We hopped on a boat and an oyster farmer explained and showed us how oysters are grown. Later that day, we visited the farmer's house where we had the opportunity to eat oysters the way Japanese people like to eat them- barbecued. We each put some oysters on the grill, waited for them to steam and pop open and then ate them straight from the shell accompanied by some oyster rice and oyster miso soup. It was not only incredibly fresh and delicious, but also great deal of fun.

Wajima is also known for its traditional unique lacquer ware called *wajima nuri*. The second day of our trip we visited the house of an American artist, Suzanne, who specializes in *wajima nuri*. She came to Japan almost 30 years ago, thinking she will only be staying here for a couple of months, but has now grown roots in Wajima. She lives and works in a small house on a mountain slope by a river. The house is surrounded by trees and entwined in creeping plants, which makes it look as if it was not built, but grown there as a part of the mountain itself. She showed us her works and explained how the lacquer ware is made.

When I was planning my spring holidays in Japan I kept searching for interesting places to visit, usually far away from Kanazawa, where I currently reside. What I haven't realized one the most beautiful places in Japan was right under my nose the whole time. My first experience visiting Nōtō was wonderful, but it definitely wasn't my last visit to the peninsula. I have had the opportunity to experience the unspoiled, old and secluded Japan previously not known to me. I have had only a small taste of what Nōtō has to offer, but there's still plenty more to see, the Wakura onsen area, Wajima's Senmaida – 1000 rice fields, the big Wajima festival in August, the Sojiji Temple, the Kongo coast and so on. And I just can't wait.