

We don't have anything like Golden Week in America. Most schools have a spring vacation, but there are no national holidays grouped together at one time like in Japan. The closest thing we have to Golden Week is a 3-day weekend at the end of May. So I am always pleasantly surprised at this break from the normal workweek just a month after school has started. As I just traveled to Shikoku during my school's spring vacation, I decided not to do any big traveling and to stay close to home this year.

The first weekend in Golden week was dedicated to "spring cleaning." At home, after the long winter and when the weather is finally starting to warm up, many people do a big cleaning of their homes. I think it's kind of like the big cleaning that many Japanese people do at the end of December. To me, the spring is a fresh start, so I cleaned my apartment, re-organized my closet and packed away my winter clothes. I had a lot of bugs in my apartment last summer, so this year I was more motivated than usual to get rid of old things that I don't need. More space in my apartment means it will be easier to see big bugs if they come back this year!

After cleaning my apartment, I felt like I could relax and enjoy the rest of the holiday. During the second weekend I did lots of things that I don't often have the time to do like going to the driving range, going to the movies and just reading at home. It was great! Then for two days, I went camping in Wakayama. In my journal about Shikoku, I wrote that it was my first time camping and sleeping in a tent. I had a great time in Shikoku so I decided it would be ok to go again during Golden Week to a place nearby. We packed the tent and sleeping bags into the car and headed south through Mie and ended up near Hongu Shrine in Wakayama. The drive there was beautiful. We wove through the mountains and along the river and I realized that I don't have to go as far away as Shikoku to see lots of beautiful scenery. But it was much warmer during this camping trip and I started to feel like summer is almost here (I really dislike warm weather). This time, camping was a little bit less fun than our first trip. There were tons of families at the campsite we used. I felt more like an animal in a small pen than like a person camping in the wilderness. And when we woke up in the morning, the tent was SO hot. The humidity made my hair start to curl! It was fun to go camping again in Wakayama, but I by the end of the trip I was happy to come home to my clean apartment, where I could stay inside and read a book!

On the way home from Wakayama, we saw the sign for Maruyama Senmaida—the famous terraced rice paddies in Kumano. I had heard of these famous rice paddies before, but I had no idea where they were. It was lucky that we saw the sign! After a short drive down a side road, we came to the mountainside that was covered in rice paddies. It was so beautiful! They had just been filled with water and it looked like a kind of advertisement for life in rural Japan. It was gorgeous. I got to see something really amazing without traveling very far or for very long. It was a good reminder that while there are many interesting places to visit around Japan, there are still a lot of beautiful places left for me to see right here in Mie.