

Last week, I started to tell you about my spring vacation in Kyushu. I had such a great experience camping and traveling around Shikoku last year that I wanted to do the same thing again this year. It was my first trip to Kyushu and while we didn't get to visit every prefecture or any of the outlying islands, it was a good trip to get an overall feeling for Kyushu and to enjoy many of its famous sites. One of the biggest surprises to me when we arrived in Kyushu was how suddenly we arrived. As we were driving along the expressway and started to cross a small bridge, I wondered when we would arrive in Kyushu. Suddenly, at the other side of the bridge we only glimpsed the edge of the sign that said "Welcome to Kyushu!" I thought the bridge from Honshu to Kyushu would be much bigger than it actually was!

After visiting Kagoshima, we spent the rest of the trip working our way back north through the island. It rained often during our visit, but it cleared up long enough for us to have a nice day of hiking around Mt. Aso and for us to enjoy a few nights of warmer, dryer camping in our tent. We were not expecting the weather to be as cold as it was! We took a nice two hour hike around some of the craters that surrounded the main peak at Mt. Aso. I was surprised at the gases that were coming out of the top of the volcano. I knew it was an active volcano but I expected it to be less threatening than that! Not the outdoorsy-type, I had to be convinced by the others that it would be a good idea to hike around the volcano. And while the hike was more rugged than I expected (sometimes we were wading through bushes!), we had saw amazing scenic views that we wouldn't have otherwise, and it definitely felt good to get out and move around.

Another thing that we really enjoyed in Aso and Kumamoto was the food. In fact, the food that we ate everywhere in Kyushu was some of the best I have ever eaten in Japan! One of the things I was looking forward to trying in Kumamoto was horse sashimi. I had tried horse sashimi on one other occasion in Mie and I liked it, so I was looking forward to eating it there. I was not disappointed! I never imagined that raw horse could taste so good! I got to eat it on a few occasions when we were in the Kumamoto area, in addition to other regional foods like "dagojiru," a kind of local soup with veggies and clumps of dough that taste like udon, and a special kind of rice with local pickled vegetables mixed in. It was hard to leave!

After leaving Aso, we still had 5 days left in our trip. We got to visit a lot of places in a pretty short period of time—it's no wonder we were so tired when we got back! I'll finish writing about the end of my trip next time.