

Last week, I finished by writing about my experience at Mt. Aso. After all of that time sleeping in tents and hiking outside, we were really looking forward to a more relaxing part of our trip. Before leaving Kumamoto, we made a one day stop in the small town of Kurokawa, a famous onsen village.

I've been to a lot of onsens since I've come to Japan, but none rivaled the quality of what we enjoyed in Kurokawa. It was suggested to me by a friend that we visit this small onsen town and I am glad that we went! For a very reasonable price, you can buy a pass that grants access to any three onsens in the town. I think there are more than twenty to choose from! We spent a lot of time looking at the photos in the pamphlets and deciding which ones to choose. After making our choices we went to one the first night, and then two the next morning before moving onto the next location on our trip. The first onsen that we visited had a huge outdoor bath, and it was surrounded with large stones as it was right next to the river. We went at the right time of night, and had the entire bath to ourselves, so it was a great place to start! The next morning we tried two more baths, both great, although not as wonderful as the one the night before. One bath had an outdoor view of the river and a small waterfall. It was very scenic. After those onsens, and one last bowl of *dagojira*, we headed off to Oita.

We finished crossing over the mountains and suddenly we were passing through Yufuin on our way to Beppu. We had such a nice experience in Kurokawa that we were not so impressed with Yufuin, and instead of visiting an onsen, we just had lunch before heading out to Beppu. In Beppu we spent our last night (another wet and cold one!) in a tent before going to the city for good coffee and then doing the Beppu onsen tour. We visited the hells, and touristy as they were, it was a fun change from the rest of our trip, which had hardly any tourist destinations like that. We enjoyed Beppu, but it was starting to rain, so instead of spending another night in the tent, we called it quits and headed to Fukuoka.

It was a surprise how fast we got to Fukuoka, and before we knew it, we were eating Hakata ramen in a *yatai*. That was all I wanted to do in Fukuoka, so after the first hour or so, I was satisfied! After a day trip to Arita, we were back in Fukuoka for just a few days after our trip. We ate a lot of ramen, and on the last night, some delicious *motsu nabe*, a Fukuoka specialty. You might remember that I am not a big fan of *horumon*, and presumably *motsu* either, but I am willing to go out on a limb for a local specialty! We were worried about two of the girls that we went with though, and since they didn't speak any Japanese, we told them that *motsu nabe* is "meat and veggie stew." They liked meat and veggies so they were excited to come along. At first, we

worried that they would be disappointed to find that it was not meat, but *motsu*. But actually, they didn't notice that anything was strange. One of our friends said, "The meat is a little fattier than I like it," but other than that, they loved the soup. We were planning to tell them about *motsu* after the dinner, but we didn't have the heart to tell them. They tried *motsu* for the first time and discovered that they like it, so why would they need to know exactly what it is?

In a lot of ways, our trip to Kyushu was very low-key. We spent a lot of time outside, relaxing in onsens or enjoying the local cuisine. The whole week went by faster than we expected but we were still really lucky to have another great chance to get to know another place in Japan.