

Yamagata Prefecture Association for International Relations Multilingual Magazine

Face to Face

Yamagata Prefecture CIRs' Yamagata Adventures Report



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Introducing Yamagata's history and culture to all foreigners living in and outside of Yamagata, through our own adventures!

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Taking on Yamagata ①: Soba-making in Tendo

1

Hello, everyone! I'm the Chinese CIR, Xiaofan Bai. I came to Yamagata from Heilongjiang in April, so it's already been eight months.



Kneading the buckwheat flour

This time, I went to Shogimura Tendo Tower with the Belgian CIR, Merel, to try out a soba-making experience. I'm from China, so I've eaten soba before, but I had never made it myself. Since we were both beginners, we started out with beating hearts, wondering if we'd succeed in making tasty soba.

The first step is to knead the buckwheat flour and make the dough. When our teacher showed us how to do it, it looked so easy, but it didn't turn out so easy when I tried to do it myself. I didn't know how hard to press, and I ended up getting flour all over the palms of my hands. It looked like I was a kid playing in the mud.

On to the next step, rolling out the dough! This was also really difficult! Even after Merel and I used all our strength to roll out the dough, it was still too thick. The teacher ended up helping us out, and finally the dough became just the right thickness.



Rolling out the soba dough

Next, it was finally time to cut the dough and make the noodles. Our teacher kindly told us, "You can cut them to whatever thickness you want." The soba noodles I cut looked like a mix between soba and udon noodles. Merel also made a "creative soba" with randomly sized noodles. Seeing the noodles we made lined up side by side, I thought, "these will definitely have a very unique flavor."

Lastly, we boiled our noodles and got to taste them! To be honest, I was a little bit unsure based on their appearance, but when I took the first bite, it was surprisingly good! The thickness and texture of our handmade soba were varied, but this gave it a nice, original flavor.

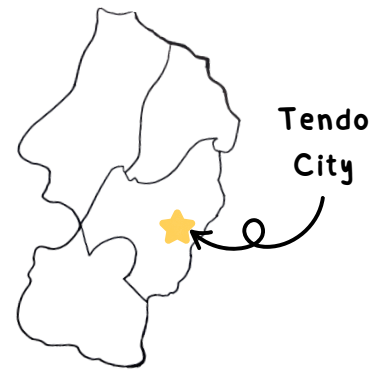


The soba is done!

I'm glad that the two of us were able to have this adventure. I can't wait to find out what we will try out next time.



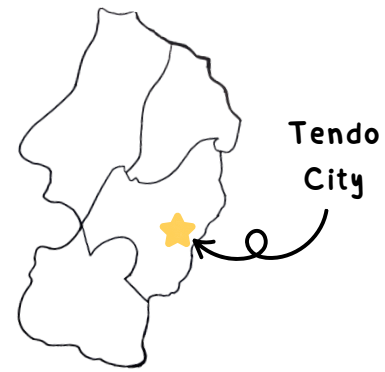
What do you think?



2

Taking on Yamagata ②: Shogi-piece Carving

Hello everyone! This is the American CIR, Ian Scherer. I came to Yamagata from Colorado at the end of July.



You all know about shogi, right? Shogi is a board game that has been played in Japan since long ago. Its pieces, or *koma*, are shaped like hexagons with Japanese *kanji* characters written on them. Shogi pieces are a specialty product of Tendo City, where more than 90% of the shogi pieces produced in Japan are made. This time, I went together with Gyeongha to Shogimura Tendo Tower where we carved our own shogi pieces. The first step is to choose a favorite *kanji* to carve onto the pieces. I went with 楽, meaning “fun,” because I was hoping to have fun carving my piece.

Next, we wrote the characters we would be carving on the pieces. Real shogi pieces are pretty small, but for the experience we were making larger-sized pieces to be used as decorations. They were about the size of an onigiri and were easy to hold in my hand. When I picked one up, I felt the weight of the wood and could sense it was high quality.



Chisels

After writing the character on the piece, we carved it into the surface with a special chisel. Apparently, you have to relax to make a good shogi piece, but it was really hard to relax and concentrate at the same time.



Carving the Pieces

The teacher taught us in a really fun way, making jokes the whole time. Along the way, he gave me some advice: “Nobody can do it perfectly at first, so you don’t have to worry about making mistakes.” Just as he said, when I tried carving without worrying about whether it was going well or not, I was able to do it better than I thought. I think that the teacher’s advice will continue to be useful in my life from now on.

A few days ago, the completed shogi piece was delivered to me. The final result was amazing and looked much better than I expected. I’m going to use it to decorate my apartment. I will treasure it as the first of my memories from Yamagata. Now that I’ve made a shogi piece, next I have to actually learn how to play!

Also, a “Tendo Cherry Blossom Festival Human Shogi” event is held in Tendo every April. I definitely want to go next year!



Our Carved Pieces



Together with our teacher!



Doesn't it look cool?

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Introducing Yamagata ①: Yamadera



Admiring the view from
Yamadera ♡

Nice to meet you! I'm Merel, the CIR from Belgium. I came to Japan in August as an English-speaking CIR, and from that point on I started my life in Yamagata!

The other day, I visited Yamadera for the first time! It had been two months since I came to Yamagata, but since I arrived smack-dab in the middle of Summer I didn't have the confidence to climb it before... So going together with the other Yamagata Prefecture CIRs right at the start of Fall was perfect!

Yamadera is a temple belonging to the Tendai sect on Mt Hoju in Yamagata City, and according to legend it was built nearly 1200 years ago. Its actual name is 'Risshakuji', but it's known inside and outside Japan as 'Yamadera' ('mountain temple'). Surely, when you hear this name you can picture what kind of place it is!

Jealously watching the cats lazing about at the foot of the mountain, I gathered my courage. I wondered if I'd be able to climb all 1015 stone steps, but still I took on the challenge! When we first started climbing, I wanted to give it my all and quickly get to the top, but because of my hurrying I was already out of breath by the halfway point. Thanks to that, I learned the importance of taking a break...

If you don't take a break, you can't fully appreciate Yamadera's beauty either. Gazing at the numerous shrines and statues you pass by during your climb, as well as the beautiful green of the surrounding forest, you feel Yamadera's charm just like the pilgrims of the past did before you.



Why don't you try
sending a letter from
this post box on
Yamadera's peak?



What kind of fortune
will we draw?

When we made it to the Okunoin inner sanctuary at the top, we of course had to draw our fortune! This time, I drew a 'kichi' (good fortune), but it said that the person I'm waiting for will be late. I wonder why for two years already, whenever I draw my fortune I get the same message? If the person I'm waiting for is reading this FTF: Please be punctual!

Relaxing at a roadstation footbath ♡

Because we hurried so much on the way up, my legs were shaking like jelly on the way down. We took a footbath at a nearby roadstation and ended our Yamadera expedition with a sigh of relief!



Introductions from Gyeongha

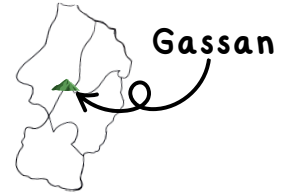
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I'm Gyeongha.



Hello everyone! I'm Gyeongha, the Korean CIR. I've been living in Yamagata for three years. Today, I'm going to introduce you to some of the adventures I've had as I've been enjoying Yamagata to the fullest.

Introducing Yamagata ②: Mt. Gassan



I'm taking in the mountains!

There's a famous mountain in Yamagata called Mt. Gassan. Snow starts falling there in November, and from then on you're not allowed to climb it. Since you can only go from June to October, I finally decided to go this year before it closed for the winter. Normally, the only exercise I do is walking, so I was tired by the time I even made it to the entrance of the mountain. I was covered in sweat. But then, a while after starting to climb, I was able to see the gold scenery stretching out ahead of me, and I was glad I came. The pleasant wind and the cold sky gave me a sense of relief.

Eating ramen in the mountains is the best!

I have a favorite Japanese proverb. It goes, "*hana yori dango*," or "dumplings over flowers"! When I climbed the mountain, I enjoyed the fresh air, along with chocolate and apples, two onigiri, cherry tomatoes, grapes, and finally, I even ate some cup noodles. I want to climb Mt. Gassan again next year!



I brought my own hot water!

Taking on Yamagata ③: Dried Persimmon Making



All done peeling!

Persimmons are very common in Yamagata, so when fall comes, I often see houses with persimmons hanging out to dry. I also tried making some myself to use as decoration. Did you know that to make dried persimmons, you use sour rather than sweet persimmons? Eating a sour persimmon feels almost like all the fluid is being drained from your body. Would you like to experience the bitter flavor? You should try it out at least once lol!

Getting back on topic, to make dried persimmons, first you peel them all the way around, then you tie them together with string and dip them in hot water. Then, all you need to do is wait for them to dry for about two months and they'll turn into sweet dried persimmons. I'm looking forward to my dried persimmons being finished soon! I'm so excited

That's all for the introductions of my adventures from my days off!
2024 was another really fun year!



Cutting the persimmon stems to tie them together with string.

5 Introduction of CIR Activities

We go to all kinds of places to do our exchange activities!!

Cultural Introduction Classes	Elementary, Middle, and High Schools • Universities
Exchange Meetups	Tourism Organizations • Prefectural Library • Prefectural Police Academy
Foreign-Language Experiences	Municipal Associations for International Relations

★★★★ **Examples of Activities** ★★★★★

1 Gozare Hiroba (Kahoku)

A "fun English conversation program" which aims to advance international understanding and to improve basic English skills by learning about the history and culture of other countries.

- Introduction to Belgian food and nature
- Introduction to Belgian schools
- English role-playing



<What our clients say>

- We are able to interact with people from many different countries through the dispatch requests.
- It was great getting to know what Belgium is really like.

2 Chidokan Junior High School (Tsuruoka)

The "Chidokan Global JAM," which deepens cross-cultural and international understanding through interaction with people from various countries as a part of a global education.

- Introductions to the home countries and cultures of the CIRs (Coordinators for International Relations)
- Introductions to the differences in customs between Japan and other countries
- Conversation lessons in each CIR's native language

<What our clients say>

- I think that learning not just foreign languages, but also culture and customs will lead to a true international education.
- It was thanks to all the CIRs that the Global JAM was a success.



Apply for our classes here

In order to promote internationalization, Yamagata Prefecture sends our CIRs to activities relating to international exchange or understanding, held by schools and organizations within the prefecture.



Apply
Here