

Yamagata Prefecture Association for International Relations Multilingual Magazine

Yamagata Prefecture CIRs' Yamagata Adventures Report

Face to Face



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

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Face to Face



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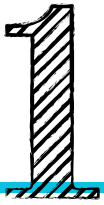
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BYE-BYE YAMAGATA: TSION'S (AMERICA) CIR MEMORIES



Kasedori Festival (Kaminoyama)



Cherry Picking in Higashine



Hanagasa Festival in
Yamagata City



Potato Stew Party
at Mamigasaki River

I'm TSION, a CIR from America! This will be my last article.

When my placement notification came in 2021, I had never heard of “Yamagata,” and I didn’t even know where it was in Japan. I’ve lived in Tokyo and Gifu, but Yamagata is the place in Japan that I can call home.

Because Yamagata isn’t a big city, I’ve had many experiences that would be impossible in a bigger town. I’ve been able to try going cherry picking with colleagues, planting the rice paddies with local college students, and making charcoal out of bamboo with other Yamagata City residents.

My first memory was the *Imoni-kai*, or Potato Stew Party! I got to eat potato stew soon after arriving in Yamagata, and then I was able to get the recipe from my colleague. It was so good that I started making it at home too. I also have treasured memories I made participating in my beloved Hanagasa Festival twice. If I hadn’t been placed in Yamagata, I never would have been able to learn even a little bit about Yamagata culture.

I also got to interact with so many people. I did English activities with elementary and high school students, and I listened to English speeches on complicated topics like unconscious bias and gender identity from college students. I was very impressed by the high level of English-speaking skill of Yamagata’s college students.

Finally, I also got the chance to teach Yamagata residents about American culture! There is a Japanese saying that goes, “To teach is to learn twice”; I feel like I’ve also come to have a deeper understanding of American culture. I look back fondly on getting to have fun comparing Japanese and American culture about things like Halloween and Christmas in AIRY events.

I was very lucky to get the opportunity to live in Yamagata. I will always remember Yamagata, along with all of your kindness to me.

To everyone in Yamagata, thank you for your two years and eight months of kindness.

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TAKING ON YAMAGATA, PART 1: YONEZAWA UESUGI FESTIVAL



I became a samurai ♡

Nice to meet you. I'm Bai Xiaofan, a CIR who came to Japan from Jixi City, Heilongjiang in China.



How did you guys spend your Golden Week this year?

As for me, I participated in the “Yonezawa Uesugi Festival” that was held in Yonezawa city on May 5. The Yonezawa Uesugi festival is a festival held every year to celebrate the coming of spring by Ueshigi Shrine, which honors the ancestor of the Yonezawa Uesugi family, Uesugi Kenshin, and by Matsugasa Shrine, which honors benevolent rulers like Lord Uesugi Yozan, Lord Uesugi Kagekatsu, and Lord Naoe Kanetsugu, along with the people of Yonezawa. Every April 29 – May 3, you can see lines of samurai and portable shrines parading through the streets of Yonezawa.

The main event is the battle of Kawanakajima, held on May 3!

I participated in the reenactment of the battle of Kawanakajima as a “samurai.” I woke up early to get on the train, but on the way there, we were delayed because of a collision involving a wild goat for about an hour. Thankfully, I still managed to make it to the rehearsal on time. We met at the gym and the staff dressed us in our armor. By wearing real authentic samurai armor, I got to learn about its structure and feel its actual weight. It really felt like I had actually become a samurai.



An enemy army approaches!

After a short rest, it was time for the samurai armies to sprint onto the battlefield. I had prepared for the fight, but it was finally the real thing. I played a soldier in the Takeda Army. The battle was reenacted twice. It was apparently most important to not be seen smiling. There were many points in the battle for us to shout, so I made sure to give a proper yell from my stomach. I think I definitely looked really cool! I made some great memories.

I hope to participate in all kinds of activities as I carry out my role as CIR in the upcoming year.

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TAKING ON YAMAGATA, PART 2: PICKING WATER-SHIELD

Hi everyone. Gyeongha here.

What do you think of when it comes to Yamagata in June? For most people, “cherries!” may be the answer. However, today I’m going to introduce a rarer experience to you all.

That’s right, I went out to gather water-shield! In Yamagata, you can try out gathering water-shield in June and July at Oyachinuma in Tazawa, Murayama City. Slimy egg rice, grated yam, and okra are three Japanese foods that I don’t like at all, so when I first

came across water-shield, it was a huge shock to me. I couldn’t believe you were supposed to eat something with that snot-like texture!

On the internet, they said water-shield was a delicacy... I really don’t get why.

To harvest water-shield, you sit on your knees in a little box-shaped boat and pick it from the bottom of the swamp. At first, I was worried I would fall into the water, but it was a surprisingly well-balanced boat. Also, when I tried pushing the oar to the bottom of the water, it was only up to my knees, so I knew I would be okay even if I fell in.

Water-shield is very slimy, so when I tried to pick it, it would always slip out of my hands. I thought it would have been nice if there had been fish in the swamp, but I couldn’t even see any frogs, let alone fish. The water was clearer than I expected, and I was surprised that it didn’t even smell bad. It was terrible to have to row with my own strength to get back at the end. My arms really hurt. Let’s just keep it a secret that I came back crying.



When the harvest was over and I got out of the boat, my legs had lost all their strength from spending so long on my knees, and I felt like I was going to fall over. I looked just like a newborn deer the way I was walking! But everyone was walking like that, and we had a big laugh about it. I took the water-shield I had gathered home and tried boiling and eating it. When I did, it tasted good, just like any other vegetable.

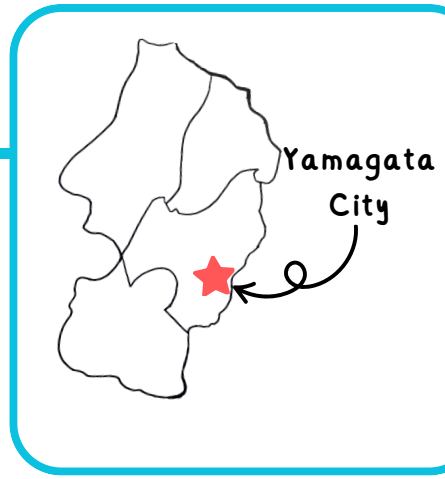
Where we searched for water-shield

Lastly! Don’t forget to wear your sunscreen, everyone. I got a burn on my hands, and it didn’t stop hurting for three days. Now I have a tan on just my hands.



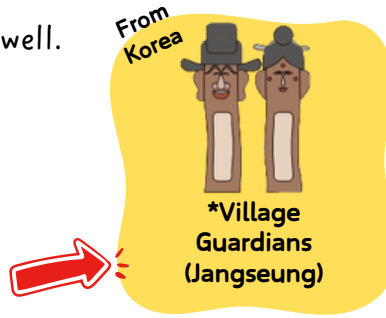
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TAKING ON YAMAGATA, PART 3: POTTERY ADVENTURE



Still Gyeongha! I'll introduce the next topic as well.

Recently three of us CIRs went together to Shichie Mongama in Hirashimizu, Yamagata City to try our hands at pottery making. Have any of you ever made pottery? I remember going to do it on spring field trips in elementary school. Back then I made these weird things* that always came back cracked, so I don't really like making pottery. However, Yamagata has many regions famous for their ceramics, so I decided to challenge myself to it one more time.



I wasn't sure what I should make, but I decided to go with a dish that I could use for meat and vegetables together. I pounded the clay, stretched it, and finally added a picture. I was so nervous that I would mess up when trying to draw the picture. For my picture, I went with "the Night Sky Seen by a Cat," so I made my rice bowl plain. I didn't manage to make the shape exactly how I imagined it, and when it was done I was a little worried whether it would crack when it was fired.



Making a rice bowl

Tsion and Bai, who went with me, made a heart-shaped bowl and a small, star-shaped bowl, respectively. It was interesting that all three of us chose to make different things in different designs. I felt like you could tell a little bit about each of our personalities from it.

Lastly, we chose a color, and I was surprised by the amazing example pieces. The Godzilla pencil holder was particularly cool. The next time I come I definitely want to try making a Godzilla for myself. It takes two months for the finished piece to be delivered, but I'm looking forward to seeing its finished shape.



I'm happy that us three CIRs got to have this adventure together, but I'm also sad that it will be Tsion's last adventure in Yamagata. There were also a lot of troubles in planning and editing "Face to Face." There are still parts of it that could be improved, but I would like to thank Tsion for working hard on it with me from volume 91 to volume 94. I hope that your finished bowl makes it to your new address safely.



All three CIRs working diligently

**Take care,
Tsion!!**



ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM AIRY

[Upcoming CIR Events, September to December 2024]

Event	Date	Time	Organizer(s)	Details
Tobiiri World Café	• September 14 (M)	14:00-16:00	Ian Merel	Introduction of new employees: • Ian (America) • Merel (Belgium)
	• December 14 (Sa)	14:00-16:00	CIRs	Christmas Party
Beginning / Intermediate Korean Course (6 classes)	1. 10/3 2. 10/17 3. 10/31 4. 11/14 5. 11/28 6. 12/12 (All Thursday)	19:00-21:00	Gyeongha	Learn about simple, everyday conversation.
Introductory Korean Course (6 classes)	1. 9/28 2. 10/12 3. 10/26 4. 11/16 5. 11/30 6. 12/7 (All Saturday)	10:00-12:00	Gyeongha	Learn the meaning and usage of basic vocabulary.
Chinese Conversation Class	• November 16 (Sa) • December 21 (Sa)	10:00-12:00	Bai Xiaofan	Learn about simple, everyday conversation.
Culture Class	• Korea - September 28 (Sa) • China - October 26 (Sa) • Belgium - November 30 (Sa)	14:00-16:00	CIRs	Introductions to culture and daily life in the home countries of CIRs.
AIRY Picture Book Class	• October 5 (Sa) • November 30 (Sa)	14:00-16:00	CIRs	A class aimed at adults. Learn about language and culture through picture books.

➔ As soon as a new event is ready, we will announce it on the AIRY website.

➔ To contact us, please send us an email: cir@airyamagata.org