

Marlaina Mcelheny works at the International Affairs Division of the Hokkaido Government as CIR and visited Soya region to write an article for the "Red Brick Bulletin" from August 31 (Monday) to September 2 (Wednesday). Let's find out what she discovered in this trip!

A Visit to Wakkanai, Rebun, and Rishiri

A trip to the northern tip of Hokkaido helped me escape the heat of early September. You might not think that a few degrees can make a difference, but the polar bear genes I have disagree. Climbing out of the small plane, coolness washed over me and I reveled in the brief respite from the muggy summer weather clogging the city of Sapporo.

Thus began the three day, whirlwind trip of Wakkanai, Rebun, and Rishiri.

Wakkanai Area

Welcome to the north of the north! Wakkanai City is the capital of Soya sub-prefecture, and home to Cape Soya, the northernmost point in Japan. You can see Russia from here!



The JR Wakkanai Station. Here the tracks end at the northernmost part of Hokkaido. Head outside to see one of the Pokemon manhole covers that have been popping up across the 'Do.



Visit Cape Soya and stand at the northernmost point of Hokkaido. In the nearby building, there is a display of taxidermied critters. I am not a fan of taxidermy, but these guys caught my eye!

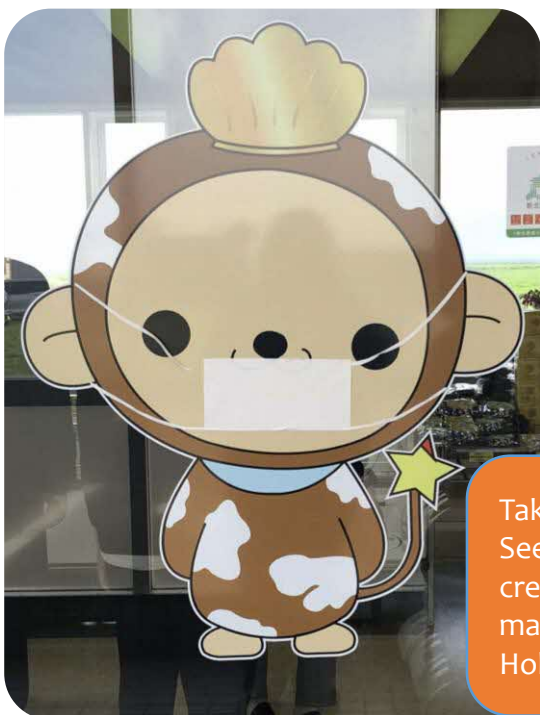


White Shell Road :

Behold the magnificence as the rolling hills and ocean spreads out below you.



Want to try your hand at curling? The Wakkanai Midori Sports Park has you covered! They have four brand new curling lanes. They also have spaces for kendo, archery, Japanese archery, judo, and other sports.



Take a trip out to Sarufutsu. See the cows, eat some ice cream. Even the mascot is masking up. Stay healthy, Hokkaido!



Rebun Island



Rebus is home to 3,000 people, and its main industries are fishing and tourism. There are some great hiking spots, and while most of the island is accessible via car, not all of it is...and people live in that area! I was very surprised, but also curious.

A Chorus of Angles, the 2012 film adaptation of the novel Kita no Kanaria-tachi by Kanae Minato, was filmed here. You can see the school house set used in the movie. →



←A shrine out on an island that I thought was cool. When I asked the people we were with, they didn't really know who or what the shrine was dedicated to.

↓Rebus's Mascot, Atsumon!



↑Cape Sukoton. Located at the north of the island of Rebus, this cape and the island that you can see further out were a beautiful outreach into the north.

Rishiri Island

To the south-east-ish of Rebun sits Rishiri Island, the name-giving mountain looming on the horizon. It is the bigger of the two islands, and is home to just over 5,100 people. Sea urchin and konbu seaweed are some of the islands most famous products, though Rishiri's nature and plant life make it a draw for tourists. It also has a cycling road (specifically for bikes) that I would love to take my bike on.



On Rishiri, you can participate in various “experiences”, like harvesting and cracking open some sea urchin, or learning about konbu seaweed.

At Rishiri High School, we participated in an international exchange class with the students, talking about Sister-States, life in America and on an island, and really anything we could. It was a pleasure to speak with such bright students.



Beautiful nature and delicious seafood await!

There is still so much left to explore on these islands! I would love to spend some time hiking both islands because there are some sights to see! There is also an annual marathon that encompasses both islands, for the runners that are reading.

Travelers can take a ferry from Wakkanai for a reasonable price and only a few hours ride. Rishiri Island also has an airport with those tiny puddle-jumper planes that will fly you back into other smaller airports, like Okadama Airport in Sapporo which I had no idea was there!

It was a whirlwind trip full of delicious food (I don't have many pictures, but trust me), stunningly beautiful scenery, and even a few ferry trips, which I adore. At the end I was exhausted, but I can't wait for the next adventure!



HOKKAIDO JET SPOTLIGHT



There are about 200 participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme who call Hokkaido home. We come from all over the world and we all have a very unique experience with the island. Read on to learn more! This month, we'll meet two JETs who have quite remote placements on the islands of Rebun and Rishiri!



Meet Joe!



Tell me a little bit about yourself:

I was born in the Philippines and moved to Guam. I had known about JET since I was in HS where I had the chance to go on an exchange program to Japan. One of chaperones was JET. Then, when I was in college, the form caught my attention and I applied.

What were your thoughts about receiving such a remote placement?

I didn't really have a problem with it because I am from Guam, which is a tiny island as well. I had wanted to be placed somewhere different, and Guam doesn't really have different seasons, and definitely no winter. My first winter was an experience. But everyone here is very friendly, and I have felt very welcomed into the community. I didn't get the chance to go skiing this past winter because of COVID-19, but maybe next year!

How has the experience been for you so far? Have you been able to do any traveling?

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, I haven't been able to travel at all. Before JET, I spent time in Tokyo, Shodoshima, and Kyoto, but there are other places that I would like to visit. People here are really nice, and I am enjoying my job. I've taught at camps before, but the kids here are especially enthusiastic, which makes my job enjoyable. Guam has a lot of tourists that come from Japan and other Asian countries, and was occupied by Japan so a lot of the culture was already implemented there, so I didn't have as much of a transition or culture shock.

What difficulties have you faced in your time here? Have there been things that were exacerbated because you live on such a small island?

Kanji. I know what it means in English but can't read it in Japan and that is biggest issue. Living wise: I can never get used to the small space; and by that I don't mean the small island, more the small living space. Abroad everything is bigger than it should be, and here my genkan opens right into my apartment. There seems to be a lack of privacy in the smallness. And because I'm on an island, it's harder to get things immediately, but it's not something that I really worry about; I can still get it, it will just take time. There's no fast food on the island, which is healthy for me because it means I have to cook for myself, but I miss it. Everyone here farms and there is a lot of fresh food. People share with me all sorts of vegetables, like spinach, broccoli, green beans, and zucchini.

Meet Lee!

Tell me a little bit about yourself: Originally I'm from an isolated and sheltered place in northern Michigan (USA), close to the Lake Superior, where we have lots of trees and lots of deer. In elementary and junior high school, there wasn't really any exposure to other foreign cultures, but starting in JHS and continuing through high school, I became interested in history and other cultures, which led me to a focus on Asian cultures and history, and eventually to Japan.

What were your thoughts about receiving such a remote placement? This is my third time in Japan. The first was a study abroad in Shiga Prefecture in 2010, and then I studied some more in Beppu down on Shikoku. When it came to the JET Programme application where it asks us about placements, I figured between my studies and the traveling I had already done, I had gone to most of the main islands, and so I chose my three placements: Kyoto, Hokkaido, and Okinawa. When I actually got my placement on Rishiri Island, I didn't know much about Hokkaido or the island, and so I Googled it. I was surprised at how rural it seemed, but considering the rural nature of my hometown, I figured I'd give it a go. It's about the same as northern Michigan, in terms of being far from any cities; internet's faster here though.

How has the experience been for you so far? The experience and adjusting has not been extremely difficult. I knew the language thanks to my studies abroad, and because I was coming from a rural place and going to a rural place, things were easier. Very similar experience—hard winters, cold temperatures, ruralness—here and where I'm from. As for adjusting to the lifestyle, I had a hard time back in 2010 on my study abroad, but because I had that prior experience, I didn't have as hard a time adjusting this time around.

What difficulties have you faced in your time here? Like I said before, I haven't really had difficulties adjusting this time. The first time I came to Japan, I had no Japanese at all. It led to some interesting experiences, like the time I thought I was buying a chocolate donut that turned out to be red bean paste. But it gave me experience about how to adjust to a new life and a new place. It kept me from hiding and sheltering myself from the world, because I knew nothing about it. I was forced to broaden my horizons, my taste buds, and my communications skills. Being so limited in terms of language and experience can be a good experience because it throws you into the deep end, and you have to swim.