

Planes, Trains, and Local Delicacies

I don't mind riding the *shinkansen*. In fact, I quite enjoy it. Even if I'm working, I can enjoy the passing scenery through the windows, or watch all sorts of people getting on and off at the stations. There's a kind of romance to the journey. Flying, on the other hand, is a hassle. It's a hassle to get to the airport in the first place, and then of course I have to queue. The plane seats are usually cramped, too. But for this trip, I have no choice but to fly. Otherwise, the journey would take days.

Choosing clothes is another problem. It's already chilly here, so I want a jacket, but I know I won't need it when I arrive. I've got to choose something light enough that I can fold it up tightly. According to my local colleague, this is the best season of the year; there are no more typhoons and the weather is refreshing. No typhoons is good news. The typhoons there are really no joke.

I left on the earliest flight of the day, and arrived in the middle of the morning. The sun was already strong. Of course, I had forgotten my sunglasses. Last time I was here, I rented a car and drove around, but this time I decided to use the monorail to get from the airport to the city center. It was a good choice – there was no traffic, and the view was great. Very convenient and comfortable. All around me are tourists with large suitcases. Everyone looks happy and content. This has always been one of the poorest prefectures, and still is, but it's comforting to see that people obviously love the place.

After stopping at my hotel, I head to the conference in my colleague's car. On the roofs of the houses we pass are two lion-like figures in pairs. They are a kind of charm against evils, and are peculiar to this part of the country. In my hometown, people often put salt outside of their houses for the same purpose, but here, salt would quickly be blown away by the wind. The lions are not only kind of adorable, but they also have a sense of stability.

After finishing work for the day, there's really nothing like a good meal with good friends. Many of the dishes here are made with pork, but there is also a wide variety of seafood – all of the dishes are made with bonito or kelp broth, and are light and easy to eat. There is also tofu made from peanuts and stir-fried vegetables like giant bitter cucumbers. My friends and I eat slowly, enjoying a small glass of the local distilled alcohol. It's flavorsome and quite delicious.

Actually, during the war, many breweries were lost to bombing or to flamethrowers. Three months. During that time, many enemy soldiers made land, and fierce battles broke out in the civilian space. The everyday people, their flesh and blood, were exposed to the fire of war. Many human lives were lost, but so were a large number of cultural treasures. Lost forever. However, a small amount of yeast was evacuated and stored outside the prefecture. After the war, some breweries were able to find that yeast, revive it, and begin producing their delicious drink again.

There's a deep feeling here that you can only experience in person.

I had some time before my flight home, so we drove to a small island. It's impossible to swim here in July under the blazing summer sun, but at this time of year, children are swimming pleasantly in the afternoon sea. The emerald-green waves are very calming. I take a look in the fish shop, and see a number of fish on display, even tuna. On the seashore, fish meat is being hung out to dry. When I asked what they were, it turned out they were drying squid and shark.

People here are very soft and gentle in their speech. On the way to the airport, the taxi driver asked me if I had enjoyed the food. He seemed very happy when I told him that the tempura I had eaten on the small island was absolutely delicious. He laughed and said he also loved the island's *mozuku* tempura. I think I'll try making it at home.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. What prefecture does the narrator visit?

Answer: Okinawa.

Hints/Clues: Many clues – it is a prefecture, so obviously within Japan, but she cannot get

there by *shinkansen*. Without flying, it could take days to get there (boat). Also seasonal clues – chilly at home already, but still warm at her destination. Poorest prefecture. Food with lots of pork, but also bonito and kelp. Unique alcohol. Wartime experiences – three months. Squid, shark, and *mozuku* tempura. Emerald-green seas.

2. Around what month does she visit?

Answer: Around October.

Hints/Clues: Already chilly at home (most of Japan has fully entered Autumn), but still warm there. However, the typhoon season has finished, and children are enjoying swimming in the now temperate sea.

3. In what prefecture does the narrator usually live?

Answer: Kyoto.

Hints/Clues: “In my hometown, people often put salt outside of their houses for the same purpose, but here, salt would quickly be blown away by the wind.” While not unique to Kyoto, this practice remains extremely common there.

4. What is the name of the alcohol the narrator enjoyed?

Answer: *Awamori*.

Hints/Clues: Given assumed knowledge of the prefecture, *Awamori* is extremely well known. Also, the story of the yeast stock evacuation during the war further establishes the drink.

5. What is the name of the small island she visited?

Answer: Oujima (奥武島).

Hints/Clues: A small island that is not far from the major island of Okinawa, and is accessible by car. Also, the island is particularly famous for *mozuku* tempura, which a quick Google search of ‘*mozuku* tempura’ will reveal.

6. What kind of work does the narrator do?

Answer: Some kind of professional (academic).

Hints/Clues: She travels for work, and works while she travels (e.g., on the *shinkansen*). Also, she mentions attending a conference (学会) with her colleagues.