

Discover the Japan inside you (an Ibaraki Prefecture travelogue)

REASONS TO CHOSE THIS TOPIC

Ibaraki Prefecture is considered the least popular prefecture for travel in Japan. I wanted to share my personal experience to not just talk about the beauty of Ibaraki prefecture, but to make other students consider traveling to unusual destinations in general, as this may become a very special experience.

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We come to Japan, we go to study almost every day, we walk around the same city in our free time. But at some point, we inevitably realize we only see a small part of the country.

Such a regret awakened in me with the first cold winds of Autumn. Looking through the photos on the Internet, my choice fell on an unusual option - Ibaraki Prefecture.

If you look at Japanese surveys of the popularity of travel destinations, Ibaraki Prefecture ranks 47th out of... 47 prefectures.

The noisy Tokyo station brings you to the small city of Hitachinaka, and then it takes just a little to arrive at Hitachi Seaside Park. The main attraction in Autumn is red Kochia bushes. The summer cypress, gentle shade of green falling into the red, its leaves seem sharp, as if you touch it you will get pricked. A whole mountain wearing a dress of red leaves. But October is second to April in Ibaraki Prefecture when blue flowers of nemophila bloom, and the fields, endless fields, become a scene from another world you probably saw in dreams.



As night fell, I was already sitting in a half-empty train, rushing into the darkness. I couldn't get to Fukuroda Falls directly; the railroad that had broken down has not yet been repaired. Stations in the provinces are very different from those in big cities, there are no ticket gateways, and in the late hours, even people cease to be seen. Only

lonely house lights and forests in the distance make up for the company. But even there some kind people who were driving in the same direction as my hostel gave me a ride. As I got into the car, I did not feel the slightest bit afraid, I just trusted - this is perhaps one of the great wonders of Japan.



The hostel was more like a cottage - standing on a hill, an epitome of an idyll. Inside were old lights, souvenirs from various parts of Japan, and inscriptions from various countries. Now, of course, there are fewer. But I am sure they will come back for sure, some day we all are waiting for.



After treating me to some breakfast (I had no idea that fresh natto could be so delicious), the inn owner took me to Fukuroda Falls. A small trail lined with local stores leads to an amazing place, a huge and majestic cascade of waterfalls. In summer its waters shine crystal bright, in fall they are framed by a veil of scarlet leaves, and in winter covered by a cap of ice, creating a whimsical, snow-white still shot.



The path to the station was paved with numerous advertisements for orchards offering "apple hunts". I did not have a chance to go to such an orchard, but I could buy one apple - sweet and crispy - from a nice grandmother on the side of the road.

Nevertheless, an obstacle was waiting for me at the end of the road.

"Hello, when is the train to Mito?"

"In two hours."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"Go to the onsen. There's nothing else around here."

And so I went.

It was in the little onsen that I happened to strike up a conversation with Kawase-san. Kawase-san had once moved from Ibaraki to Tokyo, and I asked her a little bit about what she thought about Ibaraki Prefecture.

From what she said, Ibaraki's geography is stretched and narrow, and the thinking of those who live closer to Tokyo and those who live closer to Fukushima is noticeably different. Ibaraki may seem like a remote province, but it is where Tsukuba Science City, Hitachi, Ltd., and Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute are located, so you can meet many foreigners there - a slice of globalization carved deep into the depths of Japan. Despite this, Ibaraki is famous as a rather conservative place. It was with Mito that the last Shogun was closely associated. Maybe that historical pride still lingers, finding a place not only in the old Edo-era wooden buildings in the city of Mito but also in the hearts of the people.

Ibaraki has a lot to offer. Landscapes, delicious food, hot springs. So why do so few people come there? My footsteps led me there, and this prefecture found a place in my heart, became a piece of "Japan inside me."

I am not just trying to tell you to go to Ibaraki. Go beyond Tokyo and Kyoto, and you will find a Japan for yourself, one that is unique and precious. Japan inside you will become Japan around you. Discover it for yourself, so that it opens up to you. It has lots of treasures to share.