

## **Vocational school and University**

### **Highest Award**

#### **From “YOKOSO JAPAN” to “MENSORE OKINAWA”**

3<sup>rd</sup> Year, University of the Ryukyus by Kazumi Yamazato

In March this year, Prime Minister Abe said in a greeting: “Tourism is an extremely important area for supporting the economic growth of our country and the regional revitalization.” After watching the news, I felt that as a growth strategy, the government is going to work together and have a much stronger attitude towards making the country more a tourism orientated nation. Sightseeing will play a greater role for the state increasingly.

Japan has to strengthen acceptance mechanism at the same time when it sends the "Japan Brand" that the Prime Minister Abe announced and appeals its charm.

Japan aims at accepting a number up to 30 million incoming tourists in the future.

As currently there are about 8 million tourists visiting Japan, I think that goal cannot be simply achieved.

Of course, as a tourist resort for attaining the strategy, Okinawa may have the potential, and the country shows that it cooperates together. In the case of attracting foreigners to Okinawa, the province aims at increasing the number of tourists from currently 380 thousand to 500 thousand by 2014, and expanding to 2 million people by the 2021. I would like to talk about attracting tourists from now on, and how Okinawa is going to tackle the acceptance mechanism similarly.

Even though the improvements of infrastructures have been the point at issue of Okinawa, it takes time and economic cost for the improvements. Hence, it is not to criticize all the time about the weaknesses of Okinawa, but to focus on the feasible

measures such as to strengthen the good points that are highly rated in the areas of hospitality.

Who is the target of tourists? How is the trend going to change? Whether there are targets with status as potential new markets as far as one can see? I think that it is necessary to understand them, and we have to consider at this time the ingenuity of hospitality and the provision of services that meet the needs.

In the past people who speak English were demanded, but now it is the turn for Chinese speakers. Moreover, I think if we lack the understanding of religions and customs of tourists, there will be less repeat visitors and worse word-of-mouth publicity. Therefore, it is indispensable for us to understand the languages, customs and religions of visitors when we want them to have a pleasant visit. Instead of asking for human resources in tourism industry at a fast pace in response to the demands of the times, it is more crucial to plan the measures while considering the possibilities in the long-run.

I think the approaches that I described are undertaken already in tourist facilities such as airports and hotels, but what I would like to focus on is the fact that visitors do not go to these places only. Because places like department stores, restaurants, cafes and convenience stores, or even places nearby can be places to give impression to tourists, there is a need to think more about tourism in discrete units. I had the opportunity to participate in the Kariyushi Okinawa Tourism Human Resource Development Fund Overseas Universities Training Program last summer. Through the training in Hawaii, I learned a lot of things. For example, saying "Aloha!" as a greeting in any facility or public institution, or the ability to respond to each custom, and entertaining guests so as to make them feel not bored, are some ways that Hawaiian do to let visitors feel friendly and relieved. In addition, we feel "Aloha!" as an exotic greeting that we do not use in our daily life. It however emphasizes their pride towards Hawaiian's unique culture and it shows its own culture like a brand, which they treasure. I feel the idea that they do not treat Hawaii as "Hawaii of the US", but "Hawaii" as the brand as attractive. A saying by a citizen goes "to treat everyone equally with a smile" is the spirit of Hawaiian, shows the high awareness of them.

Through the experience in Hawaii, during my part-time job, I greeted the tourists with “Enjoy Okinawa” when I gave the merchandise to them. Being able to make aware that “Service should not be mechanical, but to watch the feelings of the guests and treat them like our own ones”, I think it would be ideal if we let them know our culture and warmth.

More importantly, it is to let the tourist experience our daily life that intercultural communication should be. If we try our best to communicate with them and create a connection, the journey should become an impressive one to them. For the purpose of communication, we should not forget to let them feel our warmth by experiencing it in the first place.

In order to make journeys more impressive and touching, just building more theme parks with the latest attractions is not enough. For the purpose of letting visitors experience the merits of Okinawa, it is the connection among people that makes a more impressive journey. For that reason, I think that we have to be aware of the needs to allow more people to experience the friendly hospitality spirit in all kinds of circumstances in daily life that we face foreign visitors.

As taught in university lectures that sightseeing is "showing the light of a country proudly", do we, especially the younger generation know what “the light of the country” really is? In order to let the tourists understand Okinawa correctly, we have the responsibility of the future and have to know more about Okinawa first. I think in order to solve this problem, "human resources development" has been becoming increasingly important, but bringing tourism to education is not that easy. However, do you know there is a teaching material called Okinawa Mensore (Welcome to Okinawa)? Teaching materials was written for elementary school students seven years ago, and it is a simple textbook for them to learn the history, culture and nature of Okinawa in the perspective of tourism. Currently, distributed about 17 thousand copies to each elementary school, these books are being used as part of the lessons. I think rather than letting the children know the charm of Okinawa, having a warm heart to serve guests, and entertain them, it is more important to put the emphasis on the attitude that "making efforts to know about island on which they live". In addition, it is a chance for me to think about the future of tourism and to express my opinions

in the memorable 10th contest of "Tourism in Okinawa" this time, and it is a place to make me think about Okinawa again. There is also an opportunity for tutors and elementary school teachers to learn more about tourism in Okinawa and there will be a mutual benefit. Some Hawaiian elementary schools conducted class in Hawaiian language, while English was prohibited during lessons. Regaining the Hawaiian culture lost from the field of education, they are working with the aim of growth in human resources that can leave the culture to the future.

From a young age, we teach the children about the interest, awareness and knowledge about tourism of Okinawa. When they grow up, they teach their children the significance of welcoming visitors. Through this approach, not only for tourism, but the young generation can also show the tourist "the light of the country". Do you not think that in order to promote the awareness of citizen's especially young people, knowing the culture of our own first, from the education side, is important?

As a concrete example, we can work with elementary and junior high schools to organize activities like the "World Heritage Tour stamp relay of Okinawa" for the summer vacation, letting them compete the number of photos and the number of stamps the students collect during the period, and give prizes to them. By that way, we can allow the family to take part, and letting the citizens to visit the world heritages that even they seldom go in Okinawa. It is important for them to know and experience the history and culture on their own. As mentioned before, teaching materials and contests are some of the effective means.

In the near future, it is the citizens, no matter they work in the tourism industry or not, who are becoming the resources of sightseeing, having awareness to promote safe and reassuring destination, and getting prepared to receive the visitor, that is what I mean to the realization of "From "YOKOSO JAPAN" to "MENSORE OKINAWA"

Finally by the way, it was through the participation in the program at Hawaii that deepened my interest and awareness towards the island on which I have lived. As a result, I decided to study abroad for Tourism Studies at the university I received training for one year from August. I think now that there is a need to provide opportunities to raise ambition from low-grade level, and I thought so when I was still young. I would like to learn in a foreign country and absorb more information so that

I can make practical suggestions for tourism in Okinawa in the future and contribute to this valuable experience to society.