

Vocational School and University

Great

“Our station, Michi-no-Eki”

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What place do we consider at the word “Michi-no-Eki” (a rest station)? Is this a rest area while driving? Is it an information center where you get information about local events? Is it a shop where they sell vegetables or special products of a region? Every answer is correct. According to the Minister of Land, Michi-no-Eki is a rest station where it has three functions for road users, it is “a function of a rest” for local people, “a function of dispatching information” for road users as well as local people, and “a function of cooperation with a local community” for conducting community development with vitality which is joined with locals through Michi-no-Eki. In Okinawa, there are many Michi-no-Eki in various places as well as the seven rest stations where they are registered formally with the Road bureau of the Minister of Land. It could be said that Michi-no-Eki is not only “a rest station” but also “a tourist spot” because every rest station has a different tourist spot to attract tourists to visit.

However, Michi-no-Eki in Okinawa is still not enough as a rest station. Although most of the rest stations satisfy “a function of a rest” for local people, “a function of providing information” and “cooperating with the local community”, is the key to improving a tourist spot is lacking. The key is to be able to provide “a function of regional cultural experience”. Michi-no-Eki could be a place of not only shopping and being an Information Centre, but also offering to experience regional culture. It allows people to learn a community more deeply, and might be made especially memorable by the function as well. In fact, there are a wide range of Michi-no-Eki where it becomes people’s destination and a tourist spot itself like a theme park. Those rest stations promote people to experience the regional culture through some activities of the regional nature such as harvesting of products of the region, and creating traditional craftwork. I think that Michi-no-Eki in Okinawa is not only a rest station, but can also improve as a tourist spot through “a function of regional cultural experience”.

If Okinawa adopts “a function of regional cultural experience” for Michi-no-Eki, what kind of activities can it offer to visitors? There are a variety of attractive resources in Okinawa such as the beautiful nature that includes the ocean and Yanbaru Forest, and traditional culture and crafts that include Karate, Okinawan Eisa dance, Bingata (colorful dyed fabrics indigenous to Okinawa) and potteries. It could be great if Okinawa adopts these activities in the rest station. Although you can experience these activities if you go to theme parks or beaches, the point is that “to be able to experience Michi-no-Eki” and the ease that you can have unique experiences only found in Okinawa could attract tourists. Michi-no-Eki may allow visitors to learn Okinawan Eisa and dance with locals at the station where you drop by for a rest, also allow them to go scuba diving where you would stop for getting information about it, or allow them to cook Okinawan dishes when you buy local vegetables there.

Furthermore, it will be good for local residents as well as visitors if Michi-no-Eki becomes a lively tourist spot. However, local residents have to recognize more of their regional culture in order to let visitors experience the culture. Not only revitalizing the local community by getting many visitors, but also lead local residents to recognize more of their cultural values as well as their pride.

If Michi-no-Eki is able to provide “a function of regional cultural experience” as well as “a function of a rest”, “a function of providing information”, and “a function of cooperating with the local community”, then the Okinawa tourism industry can improve. Tourists will be able to learn the region more deeply and local residents can rediscover regional attractiveness as well. Finally, Michi-no-Eki can be considered a place not only for specified people such as, tourists and local residents, but also for everyone.