Special feature! Ride Kitakyushu in style with the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail and the Chikuho Electric Railroad!

Exclusive interview: Takeshi Aikou from the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail!

PR in China! Leaders from the Kitakyushu area visit Dalian!

Incheon celebrates 30 years of sister city relations with Korean dancing in Kitakyushu!

The Queen Mary 2 docks in Kitakyushu!

And more!
Ride Kitakyushu in Style with the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail and the Chikuho Electric Railroad!

If you say Japanese public transit, the shinkansen is probably the most famous. It is known all over the world as a symbol of Japanese postwar development, and it is often said that you need to ride the shinkansen if you go to Japan. JR lines are also very popular, especially since the introduction of the JAPAN RAIL PASS. However, the public transportation in Japan is not just shinkansen, JR lines, and subways. In this issue of BRIDGES, I, your editor and Kitakyushu Coordinator for International Relations, Patrick Spellman, want to introduce the charms and histories of the various kinds of special public transportation we have here in Kitakyushu, including the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail, the “legs of the citizens,” and the romantic and nostalgic Chikuho Electric Railroad, along with my own experiences riding them.

Carrying your Dreams to the Future, a High-flying Monorail
(Kokura to Kikugaoka: Length: 8.8km / One-way trip: 19 minutes)
The first urban monorail system in Japan, the Kitakyushu Monorail was born in January 1985 to link the downtown of Kitakyushu with residential areas. Until the monorail was built, the area was chronically prone to congestion, making it a pain just to go out downtown. Thanks to the start of monorail operation, people became able to ride safely, timely, and comfortably, and now it has become an indispensable set of “legs” for those commuting to work or school.

A train that flies through the sky above the city?
The defining feature of a monorail is that it runs through the sky. You can gaze out of the windows of the monorail, which at its highest is 19 meters above the ground, and enjoy a different view of the city below. That trip, 19 minutes each way, never gets old, and just using the monorail is like taking a mini vacation, bringing joy to many a tourist. There are also plenty of places to see along the tracks. There is what is called the ‘city kitchen’ of Tanga Market, its interior harkening back to the good old days; the Media Dome, the birthplace of “Keirin,” home to many events and concerts; the Kokura Racetrack, the largest horse racetrack in all of Kyushu, where you can see horses up close; Kokura Castle, a symbol of Kitakyushu; Aru Aru City, the premier pilgrimage site for pop culture fans; and more.

Ride the Galaxy Express 999
To have a monorail that runs directly through the front of a building to enter the station is rare in Japan, and the Kitakyushu Monorail Kokura Station stop has been described as a “futuristic space station.” To fit that image, there are also monorails running featuring a design from an anime by famous manga artist Leiji Matsumoto, who has a deep connection to Kitakyushu himself, called Galaxy Express 999. The Galaxy Express 999 that departs from Kokura Station grabs the attention of everyone, including anime fans, forming one of the important tourism resources for “Kitakyushu, the City of Pop Culture” and carrying the dreams of all of its riders as it rides through the sky.

The monorail is loved by the people of the city, and you have got to try riding it if you come to Kitakyushu. More than anything, riding a monorail is just fun! Looking out at a city, even if you know it well, from a new angle just makes you remember the first time you came. You feel just like a bird, flying the skies over Kitakyushu.
Enjoying the slow life on the Chikuho Electric Railroad
(Kurosakieki-mae to Chikuho-Nogata: Length: 16km / One-way trip: 35 minutes)
The Chikuho Electric Railroad is called by the people of the region the “Chikutetsu” (Chiku Rail) or “Chikuden” (Chiku Electric), nicknames filled with love. The train departs from Kurosaki, one of the other downtown areas in Kitakyushu, running close to residential areas and cutting through mountains. You can gaze at the sights from the windows, like the Onga River and Mt. Fukuchi, allowing them to heal you as you enjoy a relaxing time on the train.

Nostalgic charm, and modern comfort
Formerly running through downtown Kitakyushu as streetcars, the trains currently occupy a rare position here in Japan as streetcar-style trains run on train tracks. There are old cars that have run for over 50 years and next generation low-floor cars that call to mind Europe running on the tracks. During the morning and evening rush hours, an attendant inside the train, small bag around his waist, offers guidance and money changing, allowing you to come face-to-face with a scene that feels nostalgic.

Lots of attractions along the way!
Along the line, you can find long shopping arcades in Kurosaki and Nogata, the Nagasaki Kaido Koyanoseshuku, which retains the look of an Edo Period inn town today; the Nogata Municipal Coal Memorial Museum, which tells the story of the Chikuho coal fields, some of the largest in Japan at the time; as well as lots of delicious bakeries and cafes. The area is also rich in events in festivals, with the Kurosaki Gion Matsuri, which began over 400 years ago and is the so-called Kenka Yamagasa (“fighting festival”); the Chikuzen Sakura Festival, in which over 1000 sakura trees are lit up by traditional lanterns for enjoyment both by day and night; the Nogata Fireworks Natsu Matsuri, featuring approximately 6000 fireworks and a 1km-long string of ‘Niagra Falls’ fireworks; and more.

Why not take a day and stroll along the railway line as relaxedly as the train does?
I really like streetcars, so I was super surprised to find out that there used to be streetcars here in Kitakyushu. I was so surprised, I wanted to build a time machine to go back and see them! A time machine is unnecessary - on the Chikuden, with both state-of-the-art new trains and older trains with a long history, you can take your time and relax. From the bottom of my heart I recommend just sitting on the comfortable seats in the train and taking in the bounty of nature and historical sites of the Chikuho region through the window. The pace is just a bit different, and as you get away from downtown Kitakyushu, you can experience a Japan not written about in guidebooks.

Of course if you come to Japan, I recommend riding the shinkansen or JR trains, but if you come all the way here to Kitakyushu, why not challenge yourself and try riding some public transportation unique to Kitakyushu?

... And more!

Kitakyushu Bank Retro-line “Shiokaze-go” (Sightseeing train)
Riding this sightseeing train, you can see the nostalgic streets of the Mojiko Retro and majestic views of the Kanmon Strait.

Mt. Sarakura Cable Car
You can reach the top of Mt. Sarakura, a 622m high mountain with one of the most famous night views in Japan, using a cable car and slope car.
Have you always been interested in transportation?
The Kitakyushu Urban Monorail opened in 1985, and I was 12 then. I was in 6th grade. I heard that something amazing had been built above the roads in Kokura. So, right after it opened, I went with my parents and relatives on a special trip, just to ride for riding’s sake. That was my first experience with the monorail. I can still remember how shocked I was, because there were mostly streetcars in Kitakyushu, but this was completely different, with the cars running in the sky. When it came time to job hunt, I saw the monorail was hiring and remembered how I felt back then. Plus, this was my hometown, so I could help contribute to Kitakyushu’s development and work as a driver. Since joining I worked as a station attendant, as train crew, as a dispatcher, and more. I was always doing jobs where I could directly interact with people.

What are the best aspects of the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail?
Well, it’s different from other forms of public transport in that it runs in the air. It’s not just about moving from one place to another, but also about looking at the view while you do, enjoying it while you do. There’s definitely a lot of people who use it to commute to work or school, but we’re proud to have a service that people can have fun viewing the scenery on while they ride.

What is important in making a system people want to ride?
The Kitakyushu Urban Monorail has been active for 34 years now, and our operations have been based on the motto, “safe, timely, and comfortable.” We have not had a large accident, and safety is really important to any rail transport system. We try to be strongly aware of the considerations and equipment necessary to allow our customers to ride with peace of mind. In addition, starting about three years ago, we introduced an IC card system, allowing for use of IC cards from all over Japan, and they were installed in order to make riding an even easier experience for the customer. Lately, we’ve had the number of foreign tourists to the Kitakyushu and Kokura areas increasing rapidly, and so we’ve been active in sending out information, as well as researching the use of robots that support multiple languages to give information about tourist attractions along the line so that customers can use the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail more easily.

Does the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail provide any support and services for foreign tourists?
Actually, in 2017 we added numbers to the stations. So Kokura Station is #1, Kikugaoka Station is #13, etc. Just identifying the stations by their names is a bit hard to understand for those that don’t speak Japanese. We’ve also added information regarding fares in four languages in the station: Chinese (simplified and traditional), Korean, and English. Our website, including timetables, fares, and how to ride, is now also available in the same languages. We’ve also reduced the fare from Kokura Station to Tanga Station to ¥100 to help tourists enjoy the many sightseeing spots in the Kokura Station area, including Kokura Castle and Tanga Market, allowing them to enjoy a different view of the city while they ride.

What do you envision for the future of the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail?
We’re working to create new goals for ourselves at the Kitakyushu Urban Monorail. Through every employee’s mentality and changes to protocol, we’re working to create a common, shared image of the monorail and a better experience for our riders. Of course we aim to continue not having any accidents, but we’re also working towards creating a new value for the monorail: a combination of the fun of riding and economic revitalization for the areas of the city around the tracks. There are many people who ride the monorail simply because they are commuting to work or to school, but we want to get people to think, “I’m glad to be in a city with a monorail!” or “I want to go to a city with a monorail!”
Hello everyone. I’m Sri Ram from Singapore, and it’s my 5th year living in Kitakyushu City. I’m currently the Coordinator for International Knowledge Promotion at the Kitakyushu International Association. My work mainly involves conducting events and activities that promote multicultural understanding and international cooperation. Another aspect of my work involves providing support services for foreign residents living in Kitakyushu City, ranging from administrative assistance to activities that help foreigners to familiarise and adapt themselves to living in the city.

So why did I end up in this city, or Japan for that matter of fact?

As a Secondary School student, I was particularly interested in Asian History, and I started digging deeper into Japanese history after my Secondary School history lessons on the Pacific War. I wanted to better understand the Japanese psyche, so I made up my mind to one day live and work in Japan. I started by working as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) at a public school in Kitakyushu City. Prior to my employment, I had visited many of the famous destinations in Japan, but I had no knowledge of the city to even consider it worthy of a visit. I had accepted the job offer, as it was after all located in Japan. I started to meet people in the city and visit important places to gain a better understanding of the city. I believe my work as an ALT helped me to connect myself with the ground, as I was directly involved in working with the students and teachers at the Junior High School.

Kitakyushu has a very rich history and culture. I particularly like its energetic festivals, such as the Kurosaki Gion Yamakasa, of which I have been part of for the past two years. The other participants have been very warm towards me and are always willing to share about their experiences. In my short time living in the city, I have come to appreciate the little joys and surprises the city has to offer, and I now proudly consider Kitakyushu City to be my second home.

If you ever visit Japan, do stop by my city, I am sure you will have your very own special memory to take home with you.

Sri Ram

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The Queen Mary 2 docks in Kitakyushu!

The Queen Mary 2 will be docking in the Port of Kitakyushu on Friday, March 1st as part of her 95-day 2019 World Cruise. In 2016, the QM2, one of Cunard’s flagships, underwent large-scale renovations costing approximately 132 million dollars (approximately 14.9 billion yen), and she carries on the Cunard legacy with her state-of-the-art facilities, elegant, refined British design, and excellent service, all of which are rated very highly.

This dedication to quality is reflected in the famous American Travel + Leisure magazine, in which Cunard has been honored by the “World’s Best Award” for three years running, firmly occupying a place without equal in the cruise industry.

The Port of Kitakyushu will be celebrating its 130th anniversary in 2019 and plans to greet the Queen Mary 2 with famous Japanese omotenashi spirit.

What’s Cunard?

Cunard began trans-Atlantic crossing cruises in 1840. It is famous for its deep relationship with the British royal family, which have bestowed upon Cunard the exclusive right to use the names of the Queens of the United Kingdom in the naming of their ships.
Kitakyushu Airport, located in Kitakyushu City, Fukuoka Prefecture, the so-called “Gateway to Kyushu,” is the only 24-hour airport built on an artificial island in Kyushu. Due to its location in the middle of Tokyo and Shanghai, as well as in the middle of Kyushu and Honshu, Kitakyushu Airport is close not only to the Fukuoka area, but also all of Kyushu in addition to Yamaguchi, Shimonoseki, and Hiroshima, rendering it as the perfect base for traveling in Japan. The airport is also located close to the highway and to the shinkansen, allowing you peace of mind while enjoying your travels.

Currently, there are six international routes (Seoul-Incheon, Busan, Muan, and Yangyang in South Korea, Taipei in Taiwan, and Dalian in China) and three domestic routes (Tokyo-Haneda, Okinawa-Naha, and Nagoya-Komaki). You can visit Kitakyushu Airport from America or Europe by flying to Incheon in South Korea or Tokyo in Japan and then transferring to a flight to Kitakyushu.

During the Edo Period (1603 - 1868), the area of downtown Kitakyushu called Kokura was a castle town, and even today the castle, with its full keep, acts as a famous example of the castles that symbolize Japan. In addition, the local area is full of excellent ports from which delicious seafood is gathered, including in the Hibikinada Sea and in the Kanmon Straits. You can enjoy seasonal specialties well-known across Japan, including fugu (blowfish) and sushi. The city is overflowing with charm, and in addition to offering spots for food, shopping, and tourism, there is also easy access to Beppu City’s onsen, second in the world by hot water produced, by bus or rapid train.

Access from Kitakyushu Airport to a number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites is also easy, including the Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region, Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining, Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region, the Genbaku Dome, the Itsukushima Shrine, the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine and its Cultural Landscape, and more.

Why not try using the Kitakyushu Airport not just when coming to Kitakyushu, but also when coming to Japan or Asia in general?
Leaders from the Kitakyushu area visit Dalian!

From May 25th to 28th, 2018, leaders from 10 cities in the area around Kitakyushu visited Dalian to promote tourism to the Kitakyushu area, corresponding with the 29th Dalian Acacia Flower Festival and the 2018 China-Japan Dalian High-Level Tourism Forum. At the New World Hotel in Dalian, 30 leaders from Kitakyushu, Nogata, Nakama, Ashiya, Mizumaki, Kotake, Kurate, Kanda, Kounge, and Chikujo held the “Kitakyushu Area PR Seminar,” each introducing the charms of their cities and towns. They also worked hard to promote the Kitakyushu Airport for tourism to Japan from China. There were about 70 guests in attendance from Dalian travel companies, the media, the Dalian City Government, and more.

10 leaders, including Kitakyushu Mayor Kenji Kitahashi, visited the Mayor of Dalian, Tan Chengxu, and the head of the China-Japan Friendship Association, Yu Jianjun, exchanging opinions on how to further mutual economic development and promotion of private exchange with each. The City of Kitakyushu became a Friendship City of Dalian in 1979, and the two cities will be celebrating their 40 years of economic, trade, environmental, cultural, and youth exchange in 2019. Events to celebrate are currently in the planning stages on both sides.

The City of Kitakyushu and Incheon Metropolitan City celebrate 30 years of being sister cities!

Incheon Metropolitan City Dance Theatre gives a performance at the Wasshoi Summer Matsuri Citizens’ Performance Stage

2018 marked 30 years since the City of Kitakyushu and Incheon Metropolitan City signed an agreement in 1988 to become sister cities. To celebrate this, the 23-person Incheon Metropolitan City Dance Theatre were invited to Kitakyushu to participate in the Wasshoi Summer Matsuri, the largest festival held in Kitakyushu, on August 4th to 5th, 2018, where they performed traditional Korean dances on the Citizens’ Performance Stage. Many citizens gathered to see the performance, undeterred by the hot sun beating down overhead. Thanks to this performance of traditional Korean performing arts here in Kitakyushu, the citizens, who may not be able to travel regularly, were able to get a taste of the atmosphere of our sister city, the Incheon Metropolitan City, here in Kitakyushu.
The City of Kitakyushu – the SDGs Future City!

Our city, the City of Kitakyushu, is working towards becoming a city overflowing with “true wealth,” a trusted “Green Growth City” that contributes to the world through initiatives that realize SDGs.

Our city’s initiatives are highly-regarded both inside and outside of Japan, and Kitakyushu was designated as a pilot city for OECD’s “A Territorial Approach to SDGs” project in April of this year, the first in Asia. In addition, in June of this year, Kitakyushu was selected as a “SDGs Future City” by the Japanese government because of its commitment to implementation of a wealth of programs to help satisfy SDGs on the local level.

With these designations as the wind in our sails, we plan to continue working towards being a leading city in the field of SDGs.

What are SDGs?

SDGs refer to the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all members of the United Nations in 2015. With “No one will be left behind” as its motto, they give 17 goals for all countries, both developing and developed, to achieve by 2030.

The City of Kitakyushu Stats

Area: 491.95 km² (As of June 1st, 2018)
Population: 945,676 (As of November 1st, 2018)
Number of foreign residents: 13,291 (As of October 31st, 2018)
Average temperature: 17.7˚C (2016)
Annual rainfall: 2064.5mm (2016)
Number of tourists from overseas: 682,000 (2017)
Financial scale (Total budget): 1.21 trillion yen (FY2018)
Gross city product (Nominal): 3.54 trillion yen (FY2014)

Sister and Friendship City Information

City of Tacoma, U.S.A. (since 1959)
City of Norfolk , U.S.A. (since 1959)
City of Dalian, China  (since 1979)
Incheon Metropolitan City, South Korea (since 1988)
City of Haiphong, Vietnam  (since 2014)
Phnom Penh Municipality, Cambodia  (since 2016)

International Student Information

Total Universities: 15 (Not including vocational schools)
Total University Students: ~24,000
Total International Students: ~2,700

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No.1806040B
Published 2019/2/6

Previous editions of KITAKYUSHU BRIDGES can be viewed as PDFs at the following website: http://www.city.kitakyushu.lg.jp/english/e20100007.html