

Domestic and International Exchange Events: Summer 2017

This year's summer was full of events for Iwaki. Whilst there were of course the annual exchange events with Iwaki's sister cities, there were also some significant events involving Kauai (Hawaii, USA), Iwaki's newest sister city, and Samoa, the country that Iwaki will support by hosting training camps for the Rugby World Cup 2019 and Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Here is a summary of some of the main exchanges involving Iwaki City over the summer of 2017.

Iwaki City formed a parent-child city relationship with Iwaki Town (now amalgamated into Yurihonjo City) in 1986 based on the historical connection of having the Iwaki Clan relocated to this region in Akita by order of the newly formed shogunate in the early-Edo period. One of the exchanges that takes place involves Iwaki City sending performance groups to the Kyuhan Festival (also known as the Kamedakumano Shrine Festival) in July every year. This year, 15 members of the Iwaki Yumoto Onsen Youth Volunteer Association shared Iwaki's jangara dance with the local community by joining a parade down the main streets of town.

Yurihonjo Kyuhan Festival (8-9 Jul)



Kauai Yankees Goodwill Baseball Match (13-16 Jul)



Iwaki and the Hawaiian County of Kauai are already showing signs of enthusiasm for a variety of exchanges a year after officially forming sister city relations in September 2016. As part of the exchanges through sports, 12 players of the Kauai Yankees team visited Iwaki, accompanied by their coaches and family, to play a goodwill match with the Iwaki Little League team. For many of the visitors, it was their very first time in Japan or their first overseas trip, and so were fortunate to have an incredible once in a lifetime experience in another country with a different culture. Apart from the goodwill match, the players also stayed with a Japanese host family, getting a brief taste of Japanese culture and sharing some of their culture with their hosts.

Alongside the baseball exchange, Kauai Mayor Bernard P. Carvalho Jr. also attended an "umibiraki" or beach opening ceremony at Usuiso Beach. This ceremony was significant as it was the first time that the beach had reopened in seven years due to the devastation caused by the tsunami of 2011.



Townsville High School Exchange (16-20 Aug)

Iwaki and Townsville have been sister cities for over 25 years. Over those two and a half decades, one of the main exchanges between these cities involves exchange with high school students: two students from one country visiting the other one year and alternating the next. Since Iwaki accepted two students from Townsville last year, it was Iwaki's turn to send two high school students to visit the North Queensland city. Two students from Iwaki Shuei and Iwaki Ryokuin high schools were selected out of over 42 students to represent Iwaki this year, with the students briefly enjoying a typical Australian high school life and home stay for their first trip abroad. The visitors from Iwaki were also able to enjoy some of Townsville's sights, including a trip to Magnetic Island, and meet with officials from Townsville City Council.

Samoa High School Visit (16-20 Aug)

As part of Iwaki's exchanges with Samoa in the lead up to the Rugby World Cup 2019 and Tokyo 2020 Olympics, a group of five students from Taira Commercial High School visited Samoa alongside a delegation of Iwaki City Hall representatives. The students visited St. Mary's College and Leififi College and learned more about Samoan culture through activities including an 'ava welcoming ceremony and umu - Samoa's traditional stone oven style of cooking that involves insulating the food with hot rocks and banana leaves. In exchange, the Iwaki students shared some of Japan's culture with the locals through flower arranging and tea ceremony demonstrations.

Meanwhile, the Iwaki City Hall representatives visited the Samoa Rugby Union Headquarters as well as areas of the coast that were devastated by the tsunami that hit the nation in 2009.

This was the first trip to the small Pacific Island nation for the entire delegation, but a significant step towards deepening ties between Iwaki and Samoa over the next few years.

