

Intensive lecture on Yoronjima: An Island's System

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Kagoshima University has lectures on practical training on remote islands in Kagoshima Prefecture. One of these is “An Island's System,” a common educational subject and intensive lecture. Faculty members of the International Center for Island Studies oversee the training on Yoronjima conducted over six days (though two nights are spent on board a ship). This is a so-called general liberal arts course, so most of the students are first- and second-year students, but third- and fourth-year students also participate.

There is always a guidance session held prior to departing for Yoronjima. I have noticed interesting trends when asking students at this time about why they decided to enroll in this course. Students from remote islands in Kagoshima Prefecture, such as the Amami Islands (or those who had experience living in remote islands), answered that it was because they were interested in “islands.” Students from outside of Kagoshima Prefecture answered that they wanted to go to the “islands” because they have come to Kagoshima.

What about the students from the mainland of Kagoshima Prefecture? The passive answers stood out: because a friend is going, or because a senior recommended the lecture. Additionally, they would say that they have had experience going to Yakushima or Tanegashima, but not to other remote islands in Kagoshima Prefecture. Coming from outside Kagoshima Prefecture, I can't help but think that there should be more educational programs on the mainland of Kagoshima Prefecture for elementary and junior high school students to learn at the Amami, Tokara, and/or Koshikishima Islands.

A ferry is used instead of a plane when going to Yoronjima for the “An Island's System” lecture because we want the students to feel the “distance” from Kagoshima city to the southernmost island of Kagoshima Prefecture. The experience of being on a boat for around 20 hours is an unknown one even for students who have been on a ferry before, let alone for students who have never ridden one. Even then, the students surprisingly have a good time on the ferry (though this is when the seas are calm).

After arriving at Amami Oshima in the early morning the day after boarding, we then head to Yoronjima after seeing Kakeromajima / Ukeshima / Yoroshima, Tokunoshima, and Okinoerabujima, in that order. This also gives the students a sense of the positional relationship, size, and topography of each island in the Amami Islands—another advantage of the ferry.

The Kagoshima University Yoron Revitalization Center (formerly Yoron Municipal Clinic) located on a hill in Chabana has been used as the training center and accommodation in Yoronjima (guesthouses have been used since it was closed in 2017). Incidentally, the new government building in Yoron town is currently at that location (opened in January 2020). The damage inflicted on the old government building in the 2013 typhoon is still fresh in people's memory. It is thought that the hill is a good location after considering natural disasters such as a tsunami.

During the intensive lectures, the students first attend classroom lectures by experienced practitioners of Yoronjima on the current circumstances, issues, and future of the administration, education, culture, tourism, agriculture, fisheries, and other facets of Yoron town. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who were involved in these lectures.

It would be a wasted opportunity to just attend classroom lectures after coming to Yoronjima. Therefore, we spend the entire day traveling around the island. The destinations vary every year, but examples include the Yoron Town Hall, fire station, compost center, fisheries cooperative, Nihon Maruko Co. Ltd. Yoron factory, Furusato water purification plant, Arimura sake brewery, Yoron Minzoku Mura (Yoron folk village), Southern Cross Center, and Kotohira Shrine / Tokonushi Shrine.

The entire island can be seen when going to the highest point in Yoronjima, and the students are not only moved by the beauty of the surrounding sea but also are surprised that they can see Okinoerabujima as well as Iheyajima, Izenajima, and even Okinawajima in Okinawa Prefecture. The fact that the national border was located here (Yoronjima and Okinawa Prefecture) until 1972 does not seem to register with the today's students.

A perennial favorite among the students is Yurigahama (Oganeku Coast). If lucky, you can even go ashore onto Yurigahama as it floats onto the sea and look for star sand. Students become totally enamored of Yoronjima after the lecture.

The subject of the intensive lecture report is "What should we do to revitalize Yoronjima?" Despite the occasional dull essays scattered about among them, some of the students suggest very nice ideas from a youth perspective. I have made efforts to send these reports to the instructors of Yoronjima each year in the hope that they would be of some help to the island.

Due to the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic in 2020, this lecture could not be held in 2020 and 2021. I hope that students will be able to fully enjoy Yoronjima in 2022.



View of Okinawajima from Yoron Castle



Walking around the ruins of Yoron Castle and looking up at the natural defensive walls