

Our Tour to Nihonmatsu

On November 22nd we - a small Group of exchange students from Australia, Russia, China, the Philippines and Germany - were invited to a tour to Nihonmatsu (二本松市). Nihonmatsu is a city in Fukushima prefecture and is just a little bit to the south of Fukushima city.



First we were brought to Nihonmatsu castle, of which today only the still impressive castle walls remain, and used to be called Kasumi-ga-jō (霞ヶ城). There we saw a Flower exposition in the Kasumi-ga-jō park. It's a real pity that we came there just a little too late to observe the sweet maries in their full bloom, however the flower arrangements were still incredibly pretty. As beautiful as the flowers and the autumn landscape was when we arrived, just a few weeks earlier the view must have been breathtaking. Which caused me to want to go back there a little earlier next year. Especially impressive were the chrysanthemum puppets(菊人形), live sized puppets with clothes made from chrysanthemum flowers. These puppets impersonated real historical figures from the history of nihonmatsu castle who once lived there. Aside from the flower exposition there were also various food stands and souvenir shops - I for example bought some tasty cookies as omiyage. And for the musical entertainment a live band played for the visitors of the exposition.

After leaving the flower show behind us we went on to Dake onsen. The first thing we did there was going to a garden restaurant near the onsen where we ate an absolutely delicious meal. I had ordered the chicken menu from a list of menus already some time before the tour. The menu included a fresh salad, a pumpkin soup - a first for me, since pumpkin is not really common in Germany, however, if I went there again, I would definitely order it a second time. The main course was a delicious, tender chicken breast mit cooked rice. Desert was a sweet little vanilla pudding.

After that we went for a walk through the picturesque streets near the Dake onsen. On the streets there were a lot of interesting shops, where you could buy souvenirs and

sweets. We also visited a hotel that offered rooms with private onsen. Into one of those rooms we could take a look. The room for up to seven persons had a naturally designed little onsen bath, that actually looked like you could find something like that somewhere outside in the mountains. Although it's already quite cold around this time of year, we were still lucky in



concerns of the weather since there was no rain and almost no wind. Against the cold during the walk helped a hot outside foot bath, which is fed by the nearby Dake onsen and is free to use for everyone. The men of the group took the opportunity to warm up their feet in the ashiyu (足湯). Even though it was quite hot on our cold feet for the first few moments, it was a very relaxing experience and we stayed there until our feet were red like boiled lobsters.

In the end we went to take an actual bath in the Dake onsen. Before getting into the hot bath you have to thoroughly wash yourself with soap to keep the water in the bath itself clean, of course. The hot water was incredibly relaxing for the muscles and the soul. When the heat of the hot water penetrates your whole body, it is really very easy to forget all your stress, even if it is just for a short while. When I'll be back in Germany and once again have to get out when it's cold and wet outside, I'll remember my visit to the onsen, yearning to get back there once more.

I can highly recommend a relaxing bath a nice hot spring. If you ever get to come to Nihonmatsu, and want to do something nice for yourself, you should really consider visiting the Dake onsen. If I get the opportunity, I'll certainly go there once more.