

Northern Regions Center

Activity Name	Hokkaido International Students Fureai Cultural Exchange in Shimokawa			
Dates	Friday, August 28, 2009 to Sunday, August 30, 2009			
Location	Shimokawa town, Kamigawa County, Hokkaido			
Participants	International Students	Residents, Corporation	Other	Total
	23	130	0	153

<Activity Details>

Twenty-three international students from 6 different countries (China, Korea, Brazil, Myanmar, Nepal, Indonesia) who study at universities in Hokkaido visited the town of Shimokawa from August 28 to August 30, and spent some time with local residents.



At Sakuragaoka Park, on a clear day

The international students participated in the Udon Festival (udon is a Japanese wheat flour noodle) held in Shimokawa. They also experienced the traditional red-loincloth portable shrine event on the 29th, the centipede mega-race and the udon speed-eating contest on the 30th. Men brought a lot of excitement to the festival wearing their red loincloths, and women enjoyed a bazaar, various attractions, and eating at open-air stalls along with other 7,000 festivalgoers, in their yukata (summer kimono) courtesy of the Shimokawa International Exchange Association.

The women's centipede mega-race team in particular managed to set the 3rd fastest time on record, although it was unofficial, thanks to the intensive practice of the day before.

Other events included a welcome party with home cooking by the townspeople on the 28th. The students and the townspeople performed songs and dance, and thoroughly enjoyed the party. On the 29th, the students went sightseeing to the various establishments in town, including a trip to see the town-famous emu, soaked in a hot spring, and experienced making their own chopsticks. Because they were first-time chopstick makers, it was a struggle for them to use a plan to make two sticks evenly, but the chopstick-making experience gave them a good opportunity to ponder the environment (Shimokawa operates as an ecological model city).

While in Shimokawa, the international students stayed at the homes of the townspeople. This provided opportunities for the students and the host families to gain deeper cross-cultural and international understanding while cooking together or talking late into the night.

<Comments from The Participants>

○ Emanuel Erwin Suwendi (Indonesia)

"One thing that stands out in my mind about the homestay program in Shimokawa is the fact that I was able to have such unique experiences in just 3 short days. I've travelled a lot in the past and shared my experiences with people from other countries, but unusual events like *udon festival*, which I participated in wearing a red-loincloth, top them all. The *Udoon Festival*, the kind of which would be unheard of in my home country, left a deep impression, and I'll remember this forever. I would like to express my gratitude that I was able to act as a member of a team despite differences in everyone's skin color, language, and culture. I also would like to thank the people who allowed us to stay in their homes."

○ Miki Anna Lucia Sasaki (Brazil)

“During the udon festival, women were able to wear yukata (summer kimono) thanks to the host families, and the boys were able to have the extremely unique experience of carrying a portable shrine wearing red-loincloths. We were able to have tasty udon noodles, and participate in many events. We had fun because the townspeople spoke kindly to us and encouraged us to participate in a dance. We practiced very hard together for the centipede race on the day before the race, and we did well. It was very sad to say good-bye to the mother of the host family, and I’m disappointed that I will not be able to see the new friends I made.”

○ Yu Liu (China)

“A few days have already passed since I returned from Shimokawa, but I think about Shimokawa every day. What fantastic memories! I would like to go again sometime.

Shimokawa is a small town, but it has beautiful scenery, and kind people. The activities that we participated in were very diverse. It was great. Everything I saw was interesting, including the symbol of Shimokawa, ‘the Great Wall’, chopstick making, Gomi Onsen, and the speed-eating contest at the Udon Festival. I would love to tell my friends back home about it all. Although we only stayed for 2 nights, I’ll cherish these memories forever.”



All pumped up before the centipede race!



Walking all together “One, two. One two.”



Men in loincloths carrying a portable shrine



Wearing Japanese *yukata* (summer kimono)



Shimokawa *udon* speed-eating contest



“It was hard to make two sticks evenly.”
– Making chopsticks