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## **Regional Culture in Japan: Aya Town**

### **Introduction**

The main objective of this report is to reflect fieldwork in Aya Town and propose several ideas to enhance the town's promotion. Located approximately 20 km west of Miyazaki City, Aya Town has a population of 6,557 as of June 2024. The people in the town have cherished and passed down its industry and its perception about nature, especially with the designation as a Biosphere Reserve. The Biosphere Reserves (BR) are model regions with rich ecosystems that promote sustainable economic activities using the region's natural resources, established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Through the fieldwork in Aya Town, we found that the town has more than its reputation, with its beautiful nature, sophisticated crafts, and the characteristics of people there, and thus Aya Town should be promoted more properly so that people outside of the town could realize the existence of the town and such great points.

Aya Town has had issues of declining population and change of the quality of the townspeople. Our suggestion should be based on how Aya Town could make people outside notice the greatness of the town. There are mainly two suggestions which are about: how to promote Aya Town through SNS and the websites; how to revitalize its economy by carrying out farmers markets.

### **How to promote Aya Town through SNS and the Websites**

The increasing number of migrants led them to account for around 40% of its population. Regarding migrants, the Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications found that the age group most likely to emigrate in Japan is those in their 20s, and the probability of emigrating decreases as people get older. This suggests that, if the town would like to stop declining population, they should focus on youth who might emigrate to the town. Moreover, according to the story from Mr. Kawano, Aya Town emphasizes one big idea: If the town keeps refining the industry, whoever realizes it will come to see them in Aya Town. However, what Aya Town needs to do is not only to refine their industry and protect nature, but also to promote themselves. Based on these facts, we suggest that Aya Town should address this issue by utilizing the influence of SNS and organizing websites, which would help people, especially the younger generation, notice and even spread information about the town.

Currently, the SNS that Aya town provides are Facebook and Youtube. Although Facebook is frequently updated and provides information about the town on a daily basis, young people tend not to use it because they often use Instagram or X (formerly known as Twitter) instead. Moreover, YouTube takes a lot of time to be widely recognized and a rapid result is not

expected. We conducted a survey targeting 18–25-year-olds. The survey suggested that the SNS used at the highest level was Instagram, followed by YouTube and TikTok, which indicates that young people are likely to use SNS that can provide information with images or movies and make it easy to imagine and perceive what the information is telling them. Based on this result, it could be effective to utilize YouTube to promote the town as the usage rate of YouTube among young people is high. On the other hand, Facebook, which Aya Town is now using for providing information, is used by less and less people, especially the younger generation. It is thus possible that young people do not even notice the frequently updated information of Facebook. As a result, Instagram could be the most effective way to promote the town if the town is willing to target young people in particular.

The survey also found that many young people use Reels, which is one of the tools of Instagram that shows short videos, to get the information particularly about tourism. Instagram Reels is a feature that allows you to post and watch short videos of up to 90 seconds. In general, people avoid taking their time to get information and like to choose the way to access information quickly with sufficient and brief information. In order to adapt to such a change of the people's preference, the giver of information should use short videos that let people obtain a lot of knowledge about a certain thing in a short time. The Reels also has the following positive points: it allows the town to increase the number of videos because it requires only 90 seconds at the longest level, which enables the town to get opportunities to make people see the videos; short videos can effectively introduce companies and products to people. Therefore, we suggest Aya Town begin to spread the information by using Instagram in order to make people outside of Aya Town realize the greatness of the town.

Regarding the website, based on the experience when we tried to get information from the website that Aya town is now providing and the comparison between the website of Aya town and those of other cities in Miyazaki, we concluded that the website of Aya Town has mainly three issues: a lack of tourist information; the recommendations difficult to understand; and the complicated process of getting to the desired information. We propose the town should address these issues by referring to the Aya Town Hometown Tax Payment website and the websites of the tourism associations of other municipalities, and by creating a dedicated website content management role in Aya Town. This report will explain how to refer to the Aya hometown tax payment website and the websites of other municipalities' tourism associations in detail. First, we will compare the Aya Town Furusato Tax Payment website with the Aya Town Furusato Tax Payment website, which is the most focused website. The most important points of the Aya Town website are its easy-to-read design, simple color scheme and detailed information on the quality, characteristics and production process of each gift. Next, we compared the website with that of Hyuga City, which focuses on tourism. The website is good in that it introduces the attractions of Hyuga City from various perspectives, including tourist spots, events, gourmet food and accommodation facilities. Another good point is that information on seasonal events and festivals is updated in a timely manner. In the gourmet section, local cuisine

and eating places are introduced, and a good point is that it is easy to see what kind of food is served at the restaurant. Referring to other websites in this way would improve the three issues.

## **How to Revitalize its Economy**

This report will now move on to how to promote the town's economy. Our suggestion is to revitalize Aya town's economy by carrying out farmers markets. In fieldwork of Aya Town (July 5, 2024), we confirmed that people who are not residents of Aya Town come to work in Aya Town. People generally shop in the place where they live, so people who come from other cities to work in Aya town won't shop in Aya town. We considered it will be difficult to secure financial resources because of this current situation for Aya town. The Aya Town Farmers Market is an idea for making effective use of Aya Town's resources and increasing profits for the town.

Firstly, farmers market stands for the market where farmers from around the town come together to sell their produce directly to consumers. For example, The Otago Farmers Market sells local vegetables, meat and fruit around Dunedin Station every Saturday morning. Otago Farmers Market is held at Dunedin in New Zealand. Farmers set up a tent and can sell agricultural produce and tell buyers directly about the appeal of a product. We suggest Nelson Farmers' Market that is held in the central area of Nelson city every Wednesday as a second example. There are not only agricultural products, but craft and miscellaneous goods in Nelson Farmers' Market. Therefore, the farmers market is an effective tool for telling the refined industry of Aya Town.

The characteristic of the Aya town Farmers Market that we think is to hold in the central area such as Miyazaki city. Farmers markets are usually held in the local area and residents enjoy it, but we expect the effect of the economy by holding in the area with more population than Aya Town. People would like to shop in trusted places, so they will feel the appeal of Aya Town when buyers communicate with sellers. Aya town farmers market will lead to the opportunity for Aya town to earn regular customers. We got some opinions from Mr. Kawano in Final Presentation: the issue of low participation rate and the burden on farmers, and the new idea of a system in which sellers establish sustainable contracts with trusted farmers.

## **Conclusion**

Through the research and the fieldwork in Aya Town, we found that, even though Aya Town has a lot of fascinating things, the town is not successfully spreading the information about them because of the way they use SNS and its website. In this report, we suggested how Aya Town could make people outside notice the greatness of the town from two perspectives: how to promote Aya Town using SNS and websites, and economic revitalization by holding a farmers' market. MIU students will be able to cooperate as volunteers at the Aya Town Farmers Market. Also, MIU students can exchange opinions with Aya town about making SNS better.