

My Kaminoyama – First day memories.

Time flies and soon it will be a year since I came to Kaminoyama. It has been quite a change for me in terms of lifestyle. Before coming to Kaminoyama I lived for almost 4 years in London, United Kingdom, so I changed busy big city life (jap. *tokaikurashi*) to a peaceful rural life (jap. *inakakurashi*). I was both excited and a little bit scared of the change. I lived in Japan before but I've never been to Yamagata, actually, I haven't even been to Tohoku before.

I arrived in August, in the middle of summer, so it was extremely hot and humid. But that wasn't anything new – I've survived three Japanese summers before and I wasn't too impressed with famous *mushiatsui* (hot and humid) weather. There were, however, a few things that I remember very well from these first days. Arriving in Kaminoyama and gazing through the Shinkansen window, my first impression was how pretty and old school Japanese Kaminoyama looks like – mountains, rice fields, orchards, traditional houses and little narrow streets. And so green everywhere around! A Perfect Japanese town – I thought.

But wait a minute...What is this tall building doing here? By "this building" I mean the 134-metre-tall so -called SkyTower 41, the tallest residential skyscraper not only in Kaminoyama but also in Yamagata prefecture. How odd! - I was thinking - It just doesn't really fit the rural landscape. For a long time, Sky Tower 41 was just something I considered as an object that is destroying my pictures but now I am kind of used to its view and just find it peculiar. Whether you like it or not, it has become one of Kaminoyama's trademarks.

There are many extremely beautiful views to be distracted by in Kaminoyama, other than some tall random building. From the first moment I arrived I was completely taken by picturesque mountain scenery around the town. There are many hills and smaller mountains surrounding Kaminoyama, but the landscape is dominated by the Zao Mountain Range. Rising as high as 1800-metres, Zao is a famous place for skiing in the winter, *momiji*, or falling leaves in the autumn and hiking in the spring and summer. It was definitely something I looked forward to.

Except Sky Tower and Mt. Zao, there is one other spot that immediately draws your attention - Kaminoyama Castle. Situated just by the center of the city on a hill, it is very picturesque and reminds of the town's long and rich history. The views from the hill are outstanding and what is even better - you can enjoy them while giving a treat to your feet in close by *ashiyu* - foot bath. Hot Springs, or *onsen* in Japanese, are a big thing here anyway and being a big fan

of it myself I was looking forward to diving into all of them while I'm here.

These first hot summer days in Kaminoyama were a little bit easier to bare thanks to my frequent visits at one ramneya place near my workplace. I know, most of you don't think of ramen as their favorite summer food, but you would if you've tried famous Yamagata *hiyashiramen*, or cold ramen. I have to admit – I was a little bit reluctant at first with the idea of ice cubes in ramen noodles, but I became a huge fan of this "*Tsuttai ramen*" as the local called it.

Actually, talking about the local dialect, Yamagata-ben, it was one of the things that struck me the most from day one. How difficult it was for me to get used to it! I might've studied Japanese for quite a long time but let me tell you – they don't teach you anything like Yamagata-ben at the university. At first what I often heard was more or less: "*Something something something ndabe*", or "*Something something sama*". Since then, I still haven't mastered the local language but I made some progress, so at least nowadays I don't have to ask for the sentence to be repeated time and time again.

These were my impressions of Kaminoyama when I first arrived. I knew my life would change a lot, but hey – changes are good and necessary. I was definitely looking forward to discovering the place that for the next two years would be my home. I'll let you know how the discovery is going some other times!

Until then!

Hanna