

International Workcamp in Imabari

Yui Tasaka

I stayed in a small village in southern Thailand with international members who consisted of two Japanese, two Koreans, a person from France, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland and lots of Thais. I experienced many 'firsts' for those 2 weeks: washing clothes by hand, flushing the toilet with a tub of water, speaking English only, using Thai greetings, and riding a motorbike with three people. This was my first experience of "International Workcamp".

Hello, I am Yui. I have organized "International Workcamp" in Imabari for three years. You must be wondering what "International Workcamp" is? To cut a

long story short, it is a volunteer activity in which people stay at one place for a period of time with other volunteer members from all over the world. It is held in more than 3,000 locations, in 95 countries around the world including Japan. There are many kinds of activities run by many different organizations:

maintaining a forest, protecting plants or animals, helping organic farming, repairing traditional castles or temples, building schools or toilets, running a festival, etc. "International Workcamp" in Imabari helps organize international camps and other international events for children.

It all started from my exciting experience I wrote about at the beginning. While continuing work related to children, I wanted to make some opportunities for them to have an inspiring experience as I had had as an adult. I didn't have these experiences when I was young. When I thought about the situation which could offer something extraordinary, communicating with people who grew up in different countries and different environments, sharing closer relationships with people other than school ALTs, I came up with a concrete idea, an international kids camp. Thanks to meeting with nice friends who sympathized with my idea, cooperation from local residents and my family, I was finally able to start a workcamp.

We've had three workcamps over the last three years.

We've welcomed 19 volunteers from 10 countries including Japan. It is surprising that some foreign members come here only for this workcamp by traveling dozens of hours by airplane and trains. Even more surprisingly, the number of children who participated in our kids' camps and events has totaled more than 300!! I am really thankful to everyone who has shown interest in our camps and joined.

The content of the workcamp is always by trial and error. We have tried various activities: interaction with recreation and games, cultural exchange through cooking and eating, going to the beach, mountain climbing, making bamboo crafts, creating a video with music, and beach cleaning.

Although each child's personality and interests are different and how much they can communicate with foreign members varies, we get reviews "It was fun." "I want to come back again." I am more than happy if the experience helps children to become interested in new things and widen their view.

Furthermore, even the adults like the volunteer staff motivate each other

by spending time together preparing, cleaning up and sightseeing in their free time. It makes me happy to see everyone having fun and to hear someone say "I've found what I want to do" on the last day.

It is not easy to hold an international workcamp, organizing all camp projects and events and arranging activities so that all the children can enjoy them safely. However, I want to do it again because there are children who want to join, volunteers who are willing to help us, and smiles I can see. For now, we have workcamps only in summer but I want to try in different seasons. Yet, all the organizing staff have their own work and life, nothing should be forced. I hope it gets to the point where people are excited and think 'Yay! It's almost time for the workcamp!'

Translated by Yui Tasaka (田坂由衣)
& Ayumi Ueno (上野鮎美)

