

Hi! from SAGA

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Cultural Night

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New Year in Saga

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Mochi Making

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Saga University Malaysian Alumni Community (SUMAC)

We, from Malaysia were living together and had a very close relationship as we were a family



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Kadomatsu

New year is a magical time where family gathers and shares their times together. When I was a child every Christmas and New year, everything seems to be magical. We sing Christmas carols at school, everywhere were decorated in the theme of Christmas and New year. A lot of new toys were on sale. We would gather at our grandma's house to celebrate and exchange presents. But as I am getting older, new year seems less magical. Maybe because of responsibility and having gone through many New year already. That's why New year decoration and event is important. Not because it is a tradition, but because it pulls us out from our same daily routine, even for a sort time we got a glimpse of the decoration.

This thought came to my mind when I was called to set up Japanese New Year decorations "Kadomatsu" for the university's entrance. Jevri from the Newsletter team also joins me in the event. In case you don't know what Kadomatsu is (which I don't know until this new year.) I would like to explain. Kadomatsu literally means "pine gate". It consists of two sets of decoration made with tree bamboos tied together with straw mats. Each bamboo represents humans, heaven and earths. The pairs will be placed either side of a door or gate to welcome the deity of the harvest called Toshigami.



Kadomatsu Arrangement, Saga University

Our university's Kadomatsu was placed at the front gate near the Saga University Art Museum. The bamboo was delivered straight from the Nanayama Mountain located in Karatsu city, Saga. It was decorated from 18th December to the 9th of January.

Cultural Night

Another activity held before the winter vacation is the cultural nights held by the Global leaders. Students from each country will hold up their own booths and cooked food or sweets (Sometimes are souvenirs from their own country and hand them over to students who join the events. This year we have many delicious dishes such as, Lumpur cake (potato cake) and Risoles fries (deep fried spring rolls) from Indonesia, mac and cheese from America, Blueberry pie from Finland, Bualo (Mochi cake in coconut milk) from Thailand, Tok Pok Ki from Korea and Takoyaki from Japan. The Malaysian students also give out traditional head bands. What goes well with delicious food is a great show. We got fascinating show like Indonesian martial arts "Silat" and Bali dance, Benin traditional dance from our star Josie, Vietnamese traditional dance and Yosakoi from our university's Yosakoi circle.



Cultural Night 2019

New Year in Saga

Counting down for the New Year with your besties at a party or a huge shopping mall might be a popular way to celebrate the new year even for people in Japan. However, since we are already here, why not go for a more traditional stuff? For example, a first shrine visit of the year or Hatsumode. You can either countdown for the New Years to arrive at the shrine on the last day of the year or have a good night sleep and visit the shrine at the next morning. If you are the former, we suggest you to visit the Saga shrine. At the gate of the shrine, you will be greeted by the cute statue of the animal zodiac represent that year, for this year, is a mouse.

You could also see a long line of people lining up waiting to worship the main shrine all the way to the parking lot. I always wondered how people can wait in the line this long just to worship, when they can wait a little bit, come back in the morning and do the same. However after waiting in the line and observed my surrounding, I found that it is not just about worshipping. People wait in the line with their friends and family, catching up and talk about what they did last year. It is like a little gathering. Soon time passed by and it was their turn without realizing. Apart from worshipping the main shrine people also having fun with drawing their fortune or "Omikujii". There are many kinds of fortune lot you could draw.



Omikujii in Saga Shrine

There are common ones like the good luck fortune, the love fortune, the money fortune. After all the activities at the main shrine, if you found the statue at the entrance of the shrine cute, I doubt you would not miss the ice sculpture of the mouse zodiac at the "Matsubara" shrine. The ice sculpture was displayed for three whole days before it melted down.

At midnight, the highlight finally came. The famous Armstrong canon, the first canon in Japan which is being kept at the shrine, was fired after the countdown of the Saga citizens. The word "Akemashite Omedetou" or "Happy New Year" can be heard all over the shrine.



New Year Market in Saga Shrine

It might be late to say this, but Happy New Year to all our readers. This year might have a tough start with the Covid-19 virus. Please take care and we wish you all to stay healthy throughout the year.

Mochi Making

What would be a better treat in this season than Mochi? Mochi is a sticky rice, aka. Mochikome rice, which is pound in a sticky texture rice cake. Everyone gathered around a kotatsu, a Japanese low table with a heater underneath, eating mochi together while watching TV was a familiar seen we often see in Japanese films and series.



International Students are Enjoying Mochi Making

If any foreign student wanted that experience, LIFE, a student circle with the purpose of cultural exchange between foreign students and Japanese students, got that covered for you. Every new year LIFE would hold a Mochitsuki, a mochi pounding events, at the international house. This year was hold on the 17th of January. All the students take turn in pounding the Mohikome rice with a cheering sound from other students awaits for their turn. After pounding the rice, the students shaped the rice dough into small round rice cakes then everyone enjoyed it together with various topping, for example, red bean paste, sweet soy sauce, seaweed and soybean flour. The Japanese New Year's tradition of rice-cake making was a new experience for many of the international students. One of the students said that working together to make the rice cakes was a lot of fun, and the mochi were soft and delicious.

A Message from SUMAC

Saga University Malaysian Alumni Community (SUMAC) was launched last year. I'm glad that our long-cherished dream has finally come true.

It was time I was about to graduate when I felt lonely and sad when thinking about leaving Saga. We, from Malaysia were living together and had a very close relationship as we were a family. I want to keep this relationship forever and start to think if we can build an organization that could connects everyone. I talked to other students, surprisingly they also have the same dream, and we encouraged each other to make it comes true.

Time passed without us being able to take the first step. When Saga University was planned to host Homecoming Day (HCD) in Kuala Lumpur, some friends reminded me about our dream.



Saga University Homecoming Day in Kuala Lumpur

I by all mean tried to contact former students as many as I can to spread the HCD event and persuaded them to attend. During contacting them, we had succeeded to form a temporary management team to run the community. Waiting no more, my friends proceeded with registration immediately. As a result, SUMAC was officially registered on November 5th, 2019.

Of course, I remember there were various difficulties and barriers. For example, when we were forming the management team, we found problem that students who were spending different time in Saga are not knows each other. Fortunately, I knew both sides, and I was able to become a pipe between them. This brought another hint to us. If someone can be the in between, the business can work smoothly. This is SUMAC primary purpose - that is to serve as a bridge between Saga University and Malaysia.

With the establishment of SUMAC, we will share ideas and work hand in hands to make the activities can go to the next level. Since we will be more accessible than before, we will create more opportunities to meet and recall our memories in Saga. We will keep relationship as our time in Saga University, and we hope we can take care and help each other as one family. Another vision is we want to show our presence and make Saga University's name more familiar to Malaysian. We will be very glad if by doing this could increase people who are interested in Saga. And of course, we will connect current and former Malaysia students through our activities.

It may be difficult if you want to do it alone, but by working together as a team, you sure can form a good relationship with Saga University and Saga Prefecture and your own country!

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