

Yamanouchi Municipal Yamanouchi Junior High School, Grade 7

Discovering the Charms and Challenges of Our Hometown, Yamanouchi

As a member of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network, Yamanouchi Junior High School promotes Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) – a global initiative that encourages students to think about sustainability and take action for their communities. The school-wide theme is: “Let’s consider what we can do for the revitalization of our town and put it into practice.”

First-year students focused on learning more about the town they live in, Yamanouchi, through local studies, including a training trip and field research. They explored both the beauty and the issues of the area, and then presented their ideas for a better future.

Learning About Yamanouchi Through Firsthand Experiences

To prepare proposals for a town development discussion, students took part in two major learning activities:

- **Training Trip to Shiga Highland:**
They visited the nearby highland area of Shiga Highland, which is designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. There, they studied its unique natural environment and thought about how to protect and make use of it in sustainable ways.
- **“Local Pride” Field Survey:**
Students also visited the Shibu and Yudanaka hot spring areas over two days. They interviewed local innkeepers and joined guided walks to learn about the area’s history and traditions, gaining firsthand knowledge of Yamanouchi’s tourism assets.

Group F: The Charms and Challenges of Shibu Onsen

Group F focused their presentation on Shibu Onsen, a traditional hot spring area in the town.

They imagined a future Yamanouchi:

- Lively with tourists
- Thriving with shops and hot springs
- A place where people and nature live in harmony

They pointed out current challenges:

- Most tourists only come for the snow monkeys, not for the hot springs or inns.
- Winter tourism is popular, but there is little promotion of attractions in other seasons.
- Scenic areas like Shibu Onsen are still relatively unknown.
- Environmental problems are affecting the natural surroundings of Shiga Highland.

Their proposed solutions included the following:

- Sharing information through social media and printed pamphlets
- Highlighting year-round attractions
- Encouraging eco-conscious behavior, such as conserving water and electricity, and discouraging littering among tourists

Group J: Tourism Resources and Local Challenges

Group J focused on the labor shortage and over-dependence on a few tourist spots. From interviews with inn owners, they learned about the lack of new workers and successors in the hospitality industry. They also saw how too much reliance on popular attractions like Jigokudani Monkey Park could pose risks for the local economy.

Their vision for a future Yamanouchi is one where more tourists and residents bring life back to the community. With more people visiting and living in the town, they believe that businesses will grow and issues like labor shortages may be solved.

To make this vision a reality, they suggested the following:

- Promoting the town through social media and TV commercials
- Learning more about Yamanouchi themselves so they can spread its appeal
- Visiting local inns and sharing their own experiences online

Reflections and What's Next

Through their learning activities, students developed a deeper understanding of Yamanouchi's strengths and challenges. Their presentations reflected a strong desire to continue learning about their community and take meaningful steps to improve it.