

## The 4<sup>th</sup> Multilingual Nature Camp

August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018



The 4<sup>th</sup> Multilingual Nature Camp was held in Madarao, Iiyama city, Nagano prefecture from July 31<sup>st</sup> (Tuesday), to August 3<sup>rd</sup> (Friday).

Held every summer in Iiyama city, participants of various cultures, languages, and ages enjoy activities together in nature, transcending cultural differences to form friendships at this three-night, four-day international exchange experience. This year, there were 297 participants ranging from 1 to 70 years old.

High school and university-age members led a multilingual orientation at the opening ceremony. Participants from all over Japan, as well as eleven other countries: China, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, and France, enjoyed various activities, such as a “true or false” game. The mayor of Iiyama city shared as to why Iiyama is called the “hometown of Japan.”



The nine activities of Nature Camp include courses suitably challenging for adults and older children, such as climbing Mt. Madarao, waterfall and river trekking, and trekking at Mt. Kenashi. There are also those appropriate for small children, including water play, walking at Lake Nozomi, nature crafts, rafting, a forest nature walk, and zip lining. Participants chose their desired activities and enjoyed immersing in nature.



At the activity plaza, children could be seen making key holders and forest animals out of wood scraps for nature craft activities. Participants also built forts out of branches collected from the nearby beech trees. Later, an open-air concert was held, featuring the guitar, accordion, triangle, and instruments made from branches. Both adults and children enjoyed this unique nature experience.



The main multilingual event was held on the afternoon of the third day. At the plaza, a mix of Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, French, Spanish and more could be heard. In the refreshing outdoors, participants of various backgrounds deepened their ties while singing and dancing to songs from around the world.



Ultimately, a bamboo slide decorated with scavenged hydrangeas, built by camp participants under the guidance of nature activist, Mr. Yoshihi Futana, was revealed. Constructed without the use of nails or wires, instead only using bamboo and natural fiber rope, the slide proved popular with both children and adults.



The evening was kicked off by over 300 people participating in a tug-of-war designed to start a fire. Even though the weather was misty, their hard work prevailed, and a spectacular bonfire was lit. Finally, participants gathered round to sing “Furusato,” a famous song that originated in Iiyama city.



The closing ceremony was shared online live with Hippo members and friends in South Korea, Indonesia, and Mexico. The group chatted with American members and a coordinator participating in a homestay in Mexico. A representative from the Iiyama Tourism Bureau welcomed camp attendees to come again in the wintertime, and the owners of the hosting pensions were presented with thank-cards from the participants.



During sharing time, attendees stated that during the four days they were able to become like a real family. One participant, a Chinese father who attended with his 10-year old son said, “Before, my son couldn’t speak Japanese at all, but he started to during this camp. I realized that it’s important to let him progress naturally, instead of forcing him.” The ceremony was wrapped up with a slideshow sharing all the fun memories and friendships made during the four days immersed in nature.



Hippo Family Club also coordinates a winter camp in Iiyama city, Nagano. Last year, over 750 participants attended. The 6<sup>th</sup> Multilingual Snow Camp is scheduled for the end of March 2019.