

## Ayako's Story

When I moved to Gladstone, I saw a big sign that had 'sister town Saiki' written on it. I had no idea about this place, even though I was born and grew up in Japan.

So, this time when I returned to Japan, I made a special trip to get to know the sister town of Saiki. It's a very isolated town - it takes two hours by shuttle bus to get from the nearest airport to Saiki. There are 3 bus trips per day so when I arrived at the airport, I had to wait 4 hours to catch the last bus! (Luckily, the airport has a free foot spa and also shops and restaurants so I would never get bored!)

Even though it is a bit inconvenient to get to Saiki, there is so much to offer once you're there. The rich, deep forest meets the ocean - both are categorised as national parks! The local people are very nice and the food is amazing!

Once in Saiki, I caught the ferry (it cost \$2 AU) to go to 大入島 (pronounced oh-new island). The journey only takes 7 minutes from the mainland and once at sea, I could see a bit of the industrial port area, giving me a flash back to the view of Gladstone when you hop on a boat! The island is only 5.56 square kilometres and 16.2km around the island so I hired a push bike at the jetty to have a look around.

There used to be a population of 3000 on the island but now there are only 600 people living there, mostly those in retirement. I could see empty schools on the way and sad, rotting houses. I also spotted many temples so even the Gods live on this little island. I discovered that a few times per year there are big ceremonies at the temples and I would definitely like to come and see it next time.

Once I had taken back the bike, I hiked to 'OLLE' (a Korean word that means trekking route). I passed along a small road between local, old houses and a loquat fruit farm to a small, freshwater creek and finally to the mountain top. At the end of the track, there is a Kangaroo Park. The sign reads that the park was built to represent the friendship with Gladstone and there were many trees there from Australia, like the bottlebrush tree which was full of red flowers when I visited in May.

I went into a restaurant there too, and the owner was so nice. He told me that he was at the ceremonial opening of the park in 2004 and that he helped to plant the Australian native trees there with the mayor.

We have the Japanese Tea House at Tondoon Botanical Gardens in Gladstone and Saiki has the Kangaroo Park as a reminder of our sister city relationship.

It was a great excuse to explore a new place, and with so much to offer I will definitely come back next holiday!