



# MIA news

Miyakonojo International Association

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## Life in Colombia (Part 2) — Kodama Tōru, Miyakonojo Fire Department



Training exercises after giving the keynote speech at a firefighters headquarters near Bogota.

Kodama Tōru is back, and this time he's here to tell us a little bit more about what it's like working in Colombia as a volunteer dispatch firefighter!

Continuing on, I'd like to introduce to you what I do for work. As a firefighter, I

was dispatched to the Colombian Fire Fighter's Board. Firstly, I set about getting a general idea of the firefighting situation. This initial investigation took the better part of half a year to complete. The organizational structure of firefighting in Colombia is effectively the same as Japan, being operated at the local government level. There are 745 headquarters across the country, with approximately 15,000 firefighters. However, the structure therein has facets that differ entirely from Japan. We have approximately 160,000 firefighters in Japan, but of Colombia's 15,000 firefighters, around 80% are volunteers. In other words, all of these volunteer firefighters hold alternate jobs as well. The vast majority of a regional station's operations are left in the hands of these volunteers. Additionally, around 20% of all firefighters in Colombia are female. Whilst Japan in recent years has seen an increase in the number of female firefighters, I got the impression that our numbers are still small in comparison. Another thing I found is that a large number of fire stations do not have their own ambulances to make use of. In these regions, all ambulances are operated by medical institutions. Amidst these circumstances, the most significant issue I came across was the difference between cities & regional areas and their firefighting techniques.

Through all of this, the largest project I undertook was in a city located an hour away from the capital of Bogota, in a currently developing, industrially enterprising region known as Mosquera, hosting a keynote for the industrial workers and firefighters of the area. I was presenting on the state of Japan's firefighting organizations, our legal system, and how these things play into our response during times of disaster. I still remember being incredibly nervous standing up in front of such a large number of people.

In addition, I had the further opportunity to head out to several fire stations and share thoughts & ideas with the local firefighters, as well as occasionally plan and

run training sessions. And, I made a good number of firefighting friends. There, the most common question was often 'What can we do in order to be more like Japan, and take disciplined and swift action?' Even for myself as a Japanese person, this was a difficult question to get my head around. Not just as a firefighter, but in general, Japan has a culture and customs of politeness and discipline that are taught as a natural part of being Japanese from a young age. This politeness and discipline, before we know it, is naturally acquired from around us. The actions and discipline of a firefighter in Japan are naturally a step above this. Even now, I still recall that, when asked to consider what Colombia would need in order to acquire these traits, as a place with such different customs and culture, I couldn't give a good explanation, even as my time in Colombia was coming to a close. Conversely, there was an occasion that I keenly felt that happiness of Japan being recognized around the world as having a culture and customs that honors politeness and discipline.

Another enjoyable part of the regional fire stations was their morning, afternoon and evening meals. In general, their cuisine is focused around meat, with beef (Carne), pork (Cerdo), and chicken (Pollo) dishes, all of which appeal to Japanese tastes. In particular, Gallina (a dish involving whole-roasted chicken?) is the best,



Working out with the local firefighters!

and is eaten with your bare hands. As well as Gallina, there is also Colombia's most representative food, Empanada. From Japan's perspective, they are very much like Gyoza.

The size and shape differs from region to region, giving

you the opportunity to enjoy your area's particular flavour.

Looking back over these last 2 years of being overseas, and considering what might be the most necessary or important thing, it would be making good human connections before getting to work, making a lot of friends both at and away from work, getting to know more people; in essence, the necessity and importance of having good communication skills. The words you use are of course important, but overseas, there will be much that you don't understand. Words are but one form of communication. Being able to take your feelings, thoughts & emotions and convey them using your entire body, how you can draw in the people around you, getting people to have an interest in you; I believe

that it is how you consider the options available to you that is most important. Thankfully, I was graced with a great many wonderful friends and colleagues, was helped, protected, and successfully completed my work over there.

To finish off, I would like to give my thanks to JICA and the many related staff for their cooperation and understanding in regards to my dispatch overseas. Even more so, I want to thank all of the many colleagues and friends who helped me out during my time in Columbia. Colombia has managed to become my second home. There were many concerns, expectations

and other mixed feelings whilst working in Colombia, but it has become the most worthwhile and valuable experience of my life thus far. I hope that I can make use of this experience back home in Miyakonojo, providing support for foreign residents in one way or another. Further, starting with Colombia as a base, I hope to be able to spread the appeal of Miyakonojo overseas.

Thus ends my report on my JICA volunteer activities this time around.

Chao, Chao.



## General Information

### ◇ Japanese Course for Beginners

The City of Miyakonojo is now running a beginners Japanese Course for those looking to increase their skills in Japanese. This course will begin with the study of Japanese Hiragana and Katakana. This course will be run free of charge. Please note, however, that the textbook required for this course costs 1,100 Yen. In order to participate, please register with the Internationalisation Promotion Office. You can register by Fax or E-mail. An application form is available online on the City Hall Home Page. **City Hall Home Page Article Number: 1456000.**



**Commencement Date:** September 11th (Fri)  
**Last Session:** November 10th (Tue)  
**When:** Every Tuesday & Friday  
 7PM - 8:30PM  
**Where:** Miyakonojo Community Center  
**E-mail:** [intl@city.miyakonojo.miyazaki.jp](mailto:intl@city.miyakonojo.miyazaki.jp)  
**Fax:** 0986-23-3223  
 \* Please note that September 22nd (Tue), October 23rd (Fri) & November 3rd (Tue) are holidays. Sessions will not be held on these days.

### ◇ Let's Go Miyakonojo! Hometown Support Vouchers

Hometown Support Vouchers have been developed in response to the impact of the Novel Coronavirus outbreak, in order to support everyone's daily lives. They will be sent out to all citizens of Miyakonojo City. Each person will receive 1 book of vouchers worth 5,000 Yen (5 vouchers \* 1,000 Yen). In addition, there will be an additional 1 book of vouchers worth 5,000 Yen for each child. These vouchers can be used at registered stores throughout the city (these stores will have a poster on display as a symbol of being registered, as seen above). These vouchers can be used until February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021. If you have any inquiries, please contact the Internationalisation Promotion Office, located on the second floor of City Hall.



**Phone:** 0986-23-2295  
**Availability:** Mon-Fri, 8:30AM - 12:00PM & 1:00PM - 4:30PM

 <b>Movies info</b> 	
C-Plaza Cine-port (Tel: 0986-24-2571) 17-9 Nakamachi, Miyakonojo, Miyazaki Map-Code (GPS): 117 488 540*55	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Doraemon: Nobita's New Dinosaur (Japanese)</li> <li>●Grand Blue (Japanese)</li> <li>●Rambo: Last Blood (Japanese Sub)</li> <li>●Sonic: The Movie (Japanese Dub)</li> <li>●Dolittle (Japanese Dub)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Onward (Japanese Dub)</li> <li>*The 1st of every month is ¥1,100 for everyone.</li> <li>*Every Wednesday is 'Ladies' Day', all ladies ¥1,100.</li> <li>*The cinema is closed every Tuesday.</li> <li>*For session times visit: <a href="http://movie.walkerplus.com/th286/schedule.html">http://movie.walkerplus.com/th286/schedule.html</a> (Japanese)</li> </ul>