

# MAEBASHI FOCUS

## Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) Newsletter

Howdy y'all!

Even though it's only early June, it already feels like the middle of summer. This year, I'll be experiencing Japan's "hidden fifth season," the rainy season (tsuyu), for the first time. If it's as hot and humid as everyone says, I'm sure it will remind me of home. Back where I'm from, the humidity gets so high that simply stepping outside can feel like walking through water.

That being said, with the heat already setting in, I decided to do something adventurous this month and try whitewater rafting in Minakami!

For starters, I had never been whitewater rafting before. The closest thing I had done was riding a canoe on a small lake when I was ten, so this was a completely new experience for me. The reason I decided to go was that the whitewater rafting and canyoning events are supposedly some of the most famous activities organized by the JET community here in Gunma. In fact, they were among the first events I heard about while researching Gunma after learning I had been placed here.

The entire event, organized by GAJET (Gunma JET) alongside the tour company Canyons, lasted three days. Participants either arrived Friday night or Saturday morning and stayed until Sunday. As for me, I arrived around noon on Saturday and went straight into rafting. I usually need at least a little time to mentally prepare myself for activities like this, but I was given no time to think before I was already riding on a bus to the river alongside my rafting group.

Once we reached the riverbank, we were given a quick rundown on how not to die while rafting, and then we were off. My group consisted of six people from a variety of backgrounds. Despite our differences, for that brief period of time, we became a unified team trying not to flip our rubber boat over in the raging river. Since it was the rainy season, the water was especially rough.

As we set off, our guide shouted directions from the back of the raft, telling us when and where to paddle. At first, we were somewhat disorganized, but we quickly found our rhythm and began making our way downstream smoothly.



Rough Section



My group and I

As we ventured deeper into the rapids, we did our best not to fall out while the raft was tossed around mercilessly by the river. Despite our efforts, one particularly rough section knocked the person sitting at the front clean out of the boat. Thankfully, according to our safety training, the member closest to him grabbed the straps of his life jacket and pulled him back aboard while the rest of us struggled to keep the raft steady in the current.

Nearing the end of the course, we began taking in the scenery around us. The mist clinging to the mountains reminded me of my trip to Nikko on a cloudy day. The greenery seemed to be slowly reclaiming the abandoned hotels and resorts lining the riverbanks. Coincidentally, the person who had fallen into the river actually lived in that part of Minakami, and he pointed out different landmarks along the way — we even floated past his apartment!



Outside Scenery

Finally, after laughing our way through the final stretch, we climbed back onto the bus completely soaked and reflecting on the experience as we returned to the cabin where we would spend the night.

As afternoon turned into evening, we had a barbecue party. There was all sorts of food: kebabs, sausages, steaks, and vegetables, all kindly prepared by fellow participants. We stayed up late into the night playing games, talking about our experiences on the JET Program, making new friends, and simply enjoying the atmosphere together.

The next morning, I woke up early and made my way back to Maebashi with a few friends. The experience was unforgettable — not just because of the whitewater rafting itself, but because of the people I got to share it with.