



Visitors to Hida make *kumihimo* braid, a traditional handiwork, which plays an important role in the movie.

Seeking Out Hida

Inspired by the hit 2016 animated movie *Your Name.*, tourists have been flocking to Hida in Gifu Prefecture.

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IN Japan, animation and cartoon enthusiasts like to call the locations where animation and cartoons were set “sacred places” and to go on a “pilgrimage” to them. In recent years, there have been more cases in which towns that were little known as tourist destinations suddenly began to attract many visitors from both at home and abroad as sacred places, which boost local revitalization, including an increase in migration, and also created economic effects.

Hida in Gifu Prefecture is one of those sacred sites that have attracted much attention since last year. Images of places such as the train station and library in Hida appeared in the animated movie *Your Name.*, produced by director Makoto Shinkai. In this story, a high school girl living in a rural town and a high school boy living in Tokyo experience a body switch with each other. Since it was released in August 2016, the movie has become a big hit that has attracted more than 15 million audience members domestically as of December 2016.

“The center of tourism in Hida is Furukawa, which retains the old atmosphere of its castle town hey-

day. The town was not as well-known in these parts as Takayama, Shirakawa-go or Gero Hot Spring,” says Takahiro Sunada of Hida Municipal Government’s Tourism Division. “Before the release of the movie *Your Name.*, the old townscape of Furukawa attracted about 250,000 tourists annually, but since the release of the movie, we have had an increase in the number of visitors, apparently on a pilgrimage, of up to about 10,000 a month.”

Every day a wide variety of movie enthusiasts, ranging from high school students to people in their forties, visit the sacred sites that are considered to be the models for the locations appearing in the movie, such as Hidafurukawa Station on the JR Takayama Line, Ketawakamiya Shrine and Hida City Library. There has also been a sharp increase in the sales of *Gohei mochi*, split-roasted crushed rice cakes, which is a traditional local specialty in the Hida region and eaten by some characters in the movie.

The Hida City Government makes an effort to entertain movie enthusiasts who go on the pilgrimage to the sacred sites. The Tourism Division created maps to respond to inquiries from fans about the locations appearing in the movie, distributes those maps at the tourist guide station and also provides a lot of information on its website.

Hida City Library decided to allow the movie enthusiasts who visit to take photos to the extent



- 1 Visitors to Hida City Library take a seat and feel like a character in the movie.
- 2 Movie enthusiasts make the pilgrimage to Ketawakamiya Shrine.
- 3 Two visitors to Hida enjoy a *Gohei mochi* rice cake snack, a local specialty
- 4 White-washed storehouses and old tradesmen's houses remain along the narrow waterway running through Furukawa

that it will not disturb other users in the library. The library also put up a notice asking movie enthusiasts to share “Now I am at Hida City Library” when they post comments on SNS from the library building and tweet about the notice on Twitter. Movie enthusiasts praised such flexible responses from the library, which was also covered by the media and resulted in attracting more enthusiasts to the city.

Movie enthusiasts who visited Hida commented, “I feel as if I were in the movie scenes”; “It’s a lot of fun. I’m excited to remember the scenes of the movie”; and, “I was impressed that the dialect spoken by the local people was the same as the dialect spoken by the characters in the movie.”

There are also more people who noticed how attractive Hida is even aside from the sacred sites. Furukawa is a quiet castle town on the Seto-gawa river where colorful carp swim and where white-washed storehouses and old tradesmen’s houses have been preserved. The town used to be visited by elderly people in tour groups before the release of the movie, but many young people who visited Furukawa for the first time said, “I came to this town to enjoy seeing the sacred sites, but I like the attractions of this town even more” and “The old atmo-

sphere of this town makes me feel relaxed. I want to live here.”

In the meantime, because there is no movie theater in Hida, many citizens had no chance to watch *Your Name*. Hida City Government’s Tourism Division therefore held a special movie showing event at a hall in Furukawa for local residents in November and December 2016. Sharing the world of the movie has enabled many local people to understand the pilgrimages to the sacred sites, which has boosted exchanges between local residents and movie enthusiasts from other regions.

“The Hida City Government has continued to promote a campaign for discovering the great appeal of the region within the lives of local people,” says Sunada. “Through local efforts some areas have continued to preserve landscapes that can be said to be archetypal images of Japan. We would like to take these pilgrimages as opportunities to disseminate the appeal of our local region to more people.”

All photos: Yuichi Itabashi