

Putting Geotourism for everyone into practice: Examples from the Oki Islands Global Geopark

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The Oki Islands Global Geopark emerged in 2009 from a grassroots regional development initiative that commenced in 2004. The goals of the original organization were to discover the many resources of the region, including the land, nature and culture, and develop guides to convey this heritage to visitors and local people. These goals have passed directly onto the geopark and have evolved into a three-tiered concept that focusses on identifying the links between the “geohistory of the land”, “unique ecosystem” and “lifestyles and traditions” of the Oki Islands. In Japan, earth science is not popularized and the term “geopark” is perceived as scientific and difficult. As a strategy to combat this perception, the geopark makes efforts to introduce geological themes through more accessible topics such as lifestyle, culture and nature. In doing so, travel agencies and other businesses that previously had a view that “geopark” is a difficult concept to sell, have gradually come to change their views and develop products. As a result, the geopark has seen an increase in tourist numbers. This approach has also seen favorable reactions from foreign tourists. The geopark is now introduced in foreign travel books such as Michelin Guide, Guides Bleus and Lonely Planet, as well as in other media. This presentation will introduce methods aimed at making the geopark accessible to all.