MIE BRAND ~Succession of Tradition~

*Mie* - the prefecture, being located roughly in the center of Japan, at the east end of Kii Peninsula. This KIPPO tour visits *Toba/Shima area* of the prefecture.

Tour participants will meet a new governor SUZUKI, and covers “Cultured Pearl”, a representative “Mie Brand” product that Mie boasts to the world and “Ama”, professional woman skin divers who catch sea products, which is one of the Japanese cultures full of wisdom of people living with the sea. The tour will feature people who conserve nature and tradition and efforts/challenges to pass on their traditional skills to the next generation.

■Interview with Governor, Eikei SUZUKI

An Energetic Governor, the Youngest in Japan, Introduces the Charms of Mie

■“Pearl”, Gem of the Sea

- “MIKIMOTO Pearl Island” - The Stage of the World’s First Success in Pearl Culture
- Pearl Culture Site “Shinjyuno-sato”
  - Collaboration of Blessings Bestowed by Nature and Craftsman’s Skills

■“Ama Fishing”, a Long Lasting Skin Diving Fishing

- “Osatsu” - The Town where Many Ama Divers Live
- Efforts to Hand Down “Ama Culture and Tradition”

Please note and understand:
As it is NO-fishing season, the tour cannot see/shoot Ama fishing. This tour will feature “Ama Culture” by visiting Ama-related facilities and having interviews with local people etc. Please refer to the detail on the following pages.

【Tour date】 October 14 (Friday) -15 (Saturday), 2011

【Qualification】 Bearer of Press ID Card issued by Ministry of Foreign Affairs

【Itinerary】
Day 1: 12:00/ Meet at Kintetsu Toba Sta. in Mie → PM/ Pearl (Mikimoto) → Night/ Stay & Reception (Shima City)
Day 2: AM/ Pearl (Culture Site) & Ama Culture → PM/ Ama Culture → End of tour at Kintetsu Toba Sta.

【Organized by】 KU / Kansai International Public Relations Promotion Office (KIPPO) (tel) 06-4803-5551
*KU will dissolve at the end of Sep. and The Foundation for Kansai Region Promotion will take over the activities.

【Cooperated by】 Mie Prefecture

*The Number of Participants: 15 reporters (1 reporter from each company, 2 from a TV company and 2 TV max).
*The details of payment and transportation fees etc will reach each applicant later.
*KIPPO may set an upper limit on the number of participants from each country/region and may decide participants in view of their past records based on KIPPO tours if the reporters joined in the past.
--- ● Governor of Mie Prefecture, Eikei Suzuki ● ---

Eikei Suzuki came into office of Mie Governor in April, 2011. As the youngest governor in Japan, 37 years old, he is devoting his energy into information dissemination from Mie to other parts of Japan and the world aiming at making Mie better known. For this press tour, Governor Suzuki goes off to Toba city to welcome the participants. He will introduce attractiveness and initiatives of Mie as well as high spots of the tour.

--- ● Mie Brand Cultured Pearl, Gem of the Sea ● ---

Pearls have traditionally been valued as a jewel all over the world due to their beautiful luster. Kokichi Mikimoto, the founder of K.MIKIMOTO & Co., Ltd., a merchant born in Mie Prefecture, succeeded in culturing semi-circular pearls using Akoya Oysters (an endemic species to Japan) and perfected its method during his experiments in 1893 for the first time in the world. Since then Toba/Shima area of Mie has been famous within and outside Japan as a pearl cultivation site.

In Japan, pearl culture using Akoya Oysters is operated in such places as Uwajima City of Ehime Pref. and Omura Bay of Nagasaki outside Mie. Black-pearl-farming using black-lip is seen in Ishigakijima Island of Okinawa and other places, too.

Pearl culture needs varied fishing grounds, greatest cares, and quality control systems in each process of growing. Ago Bay, above all, in Mie which has about 22% domestic share of cultured pearls using Akoya oysters (rank 3rd nationwide), is an ideal place for pearl culture because the bay features many arms of sea resulting in quiet water and moderate current. The cultivation skills and product qualities, known as Mie Brand Pearls, are highly evaluated at home and abroad.

This KIPPO Press Tour will cover Mie Brand Pearls, the beautiful jewel born in Mie. On the first day of the tour, the tour will visit “MIKIMOTO Pearl Island” to learn about the history/charms of pearls. Also it will have a chance to see a demonstration of Ama fishing, which was once essential to pearl culture. On the following day, the tour will visit “Shinjuno-sato” pearl craft center managed by Yamamoto Fisheries Company, a local pearl cultivation/production company, located in Shima-cho, Shima City.

MIKIMOTO Pearl Island

Kokichi Mikimoto, whose dream was to adorn the women of the world with beautiful pearls he produced, succeeded in culturing semicircular pearls in 1893. Then he started pearl culture in full swing. In 1899, he opened a specialized pearl jewelry store, “Mikimoto Pearl Store” in Ginza, Tokyo, which is the first in Japan of its kind and the mother of today’s MIKIMOTO. After succeeding in farming true circle pearls in 1905, too, he expanded his business overseas. This is how the name MIKIMOTO has become widely known globally. For about 120 years since then, MIKIMOTO has played an important role in establishing modern jewelry culture in Japan and has still been leading the industry.

MIKIMOTO Pearl Island =top photo= is the place where pearl was successfully cultured by Kokichi for the first time in the world. Since 1951 when the island was opened to the public, it has welcomed many state guests and tourists including Queen Elizabeth II of the UK. It has “The Pearl Museum” introducing history/charms of cultured pearls and “Kokichi Mikimoto Memorial Hall” where visitors learn about the life of Kokichi Mikimoto. Also visitors can see Ama divers garbed in traditional white Ama robes =second photo=. In 2009, the facility got 2 stars of Michelin Guide Book.

Shinjuno-sato -Pearl Craft Center

In Koshika region of Shima-cho, Shima City, there used to be approximately 100 pearl cultivation companies at their peak, but currently only 18 survive. Mr. and Mrs. Yamamoto, the 3rd generation of Yamamoto Fisheries Company, a local company having been engaged in pearl cultivation for 55 years, had a sense of crisis that if things stayed as they were, pearl cultivation business there would come to an end. And 2 years ago, they opened “Shinjuno-sato” pearl craft center in order to widely promote the attractiveness of pearls and hand down its traditions.

The tour will meet the couple and will have a chance to see “nucleus inserting operation”, the most important work in pearl-culturing. Also participants will hear about continuing on-site efforts to produce high quality pearls and succeed the traditions/skills, which underpin the glamorous jewelry of pearls.

New Topic on Pearl: Researchers from Mikimoto and the University of Tokyo Reveal the Secrets of the Beauty of Akoya Pearls

Although pearl oysters live in the seas in China, Vietnam and other countries, the variety appreciated as the most beautiful pearl in the world are Akoya pearls, which are produced by Akoya pearl oysters, an endemic species in Japan. The luster unique to Akoya pearls is derived from their fine crystal structure. A research team from the University of Tokyo and Mikimoto Group working in cooperation has succeeded in decoding almost all genetic information regarding formation of the nacreous layer of Akoya pearls, announcing it in the American scientific journal PLOS ONE (online edition). This achievement gives a clue to revealing how Akoya pearl oysters can form such beautiful pearls. This research is also expected to lead to stable production of quality pearls and other applications in pearl culture in the future.
*Please note and understand 2 points below before your application:

(1) **Shooting of Ama Fishing**

As it is NO-fishing season, the tour cannot see/shoot Ama fishing. This tour will feature “Ama Culture” by visiting Ama-related facilities and having interviews with local people etc. (On the first day of the tour, at “Mikimoto Pearl Island”, participants will see/shoot fishing demonstration of Ama garbed in traditional white robes.)

(2) **Lunch for the 2nd day of the tour**

The tour will have a lunch of fresh sea-foods at “Amagoya”. It is impossible to arrange other menu for lunch there.

Ama is a woman professional diver, who catches marine products like abalone, turban shell, sea cucumber, and others without diving equipments. It is said that Ama fishing has a long history of more than 2,000 years and it is one of the oldest works for women. But lately the number of Ama divers has decreased significantly. Around 1960, when an age of high economic growth started, there were about 18,000 Ama divers in Japan but the number has been falling with few successors due to the decrease of fishing resources, low price, and rough labor conditions etc, and today it is reported that there are some 2,100 Ama nationwide.

In Toba/Shima area of Mie prefecture that this tour visits, about 970 Ama divers (the largest number in Japan) live and they conserve the tradition and skills of Ama fishing. In fishing villages of the area, since old times, while men go out for offshore fishery on a boat, women (Ama) catch seashells and seaweeds around the coastline by diving. Ama divers catch sea products intact with their bare hands or minimum tools. Also they limit fishing period and bottom time preventing over fishing and conserving marine resources. Ama works in sea all through a year, supporting households and raising children. They are a symbol of a “vigorou" woman” and a “vigorou" mother” of Japan. Ama fishing is not only an important vocation but also it is not too much to say that it is one of the “living cultures” full of wisdom of the Japanese living with the sea.

This KIPPO Tour will visit Osatsu, known as a town of Ama. It will visit “Osatsu Ama Culture Museum” and “Shinmei Shrine”, a local Shinto shrine many Ama have true faith. Also it will meet active Ama and visit “Toba Sea-Folk Museum”, which has played a key role in efforts to apply to have Ama culture listed as Intangible World Cultural Heritage. The tour will focus on people who preserve abundant nature and Ama culture/tradition and their strenuous efforts in Toba/Shima.

**Osatsu Ama Culture Museum**

Osatsu Ama Culture Museum =photo=, located in Osatsu where the largest number of Ama divers live in Mie, conveys the culture and history of Ama. Dioramas and other displays reproduce fishing and lives of Ama. Mr. Hidemitsu NOMURA, chairperson of Osatsu Ama Culture Council, will meet tour participants to give a briefing on Ama at the museum.

**Shinmei Shrine (Ishigami-san)**

Shinmei Shrine, located in a forest, is a local god of Osatsu town and Ishigami-san =photo= is a goddess enshrined in a small shrine built at the approach to Shinmei Shrine. Ama divers and other residents have true faith in the goddess because of the mystical power of the goddess to realize just one dream of a woman. This tour will visit the shrine with Mr. Yukiteru NAKAMURA, representative of Osatsu Town Neighborhood Association as a guide to know about Ishigami-san and a recent boom of “power spots”.

**Amagoya**

“Amagoya” literally means a hut where Ama divers take a rest and amuse themselves with their fellow divers after diving. In Toba/Shima area, tourists can enjoy the fine flavor of char-grilled local fresh seafood while listening to the stories told by Ama. This tour will have lunch at Amagoya and will have an interview with active Ama divers =photo=.

**Efforts to Preserve Ama Culture**

Throughout the world, only Japan and Korea (Jeju Island) do fishing by skin diving by women or Ama. Intellectuals of the two countries have started in concert their activities to promote the values of Ama culture to the rest of the world aiming at registration as Intangible World Cultural Heritage. As part of such efforts, “Ama Summit” is held in Toba once a year. It is planned in this October, too. Tour participants will visit Toba Sea-Folk Museum, which plays a key role in the efforts, to be briefed by a curator on the initiatives and cooperation with Korea. (Toba Sea-Folk Museum introduces the history, present and future of sea-foke and the sea. The museum building adorned with various things taken from surrounding nature features a ceiling like a ship’s bottom. It has received many architectural awards =photo=.)