

## **“Please at least wear a mask”. The thoughts from the Taketomi Island POP creator towards tourists.**

“Please at least wear a mask” --.

A POP image with a message from residents for tourists visiting the remote island "Taketomi Island" in Okinawa Prefecture is attracting attention on SNS. On April 6, 2020, the J-CAST News editorial department interviewed the creator of the POP image, Taketomijima Future Creation Executive Committee, Kenji Ichise.

**“There are too many tourists that come to visit without a mask on ...”**

Taketomi Island is an island about 6 kilometers south of Ishigaki Island. It is known for the white sand beach "Kondo Beach" and the luxury resort hotel "Hoshinoya-Taketomi Island".

Due to the spread of the new coronavirus, it was reported that the number of tourists decreased in various parts of Japan in late March thanks to the requests of refraining from going out in places like Tokyo and other cities. However, the "Yaeyama region" where Taketomi Island and Ishigaki Island are located was different. For the Ishigaki Island, which is the gateway to Taketomi Island, on March 31, the Mayor Yoshitaka Nakayama of Ishigaki City said that on SNS, posts such as "the southern island is safe "and" Corona evacuation because the school was closed" has been spreading and many young people and families are visiting.

Mr. Ichise, who usually works at the port facility on Taketomi Island, recalls, "A lot of tourists were visiting." However, he noticed that most of the tourists visiting the island were not wearing masks.

Mr. Ichise made a POP image with the message "Please wear a mask at least" to call attention, and started putting the image up in the airport of the island from April 3rd. On April 5th, he posted a POP image on Facebook in the "Taketomi Island Future Creation Executive Committee" page which he belongs to and where he usually used to keep the dialects of the island on the calendar.

"There are so many people who come to sightseeing without masks, so I'm sorry, but I'm sending a message like this." (From a post on the Taketomi Island Future Creation Executive Committee Facebook)

## **"I don't want you to feel that the “cause of death is your trip”."**

On April 4, the person in charge of Twitter of the ferry company "Yaeyama Kanko Ferry" that connects Ishigaki Island and Taketomi Island posted the photo of the POP image on Twitter. The tweet with the message "A request from Taketomi Island" received more than 10,000 retweets by 16:00 on April 7.

The POP image has two reasons to encourage tourists to wear masks.

The first is "Taketomi Island has a large number of Oji-Oba- (grandfathers and grandmothers)." According to Mr. Ichise, out of the 282 members of Taketomi Island's self-governing body "Taketomi Community Center", 103 of them are 70 years old and up who work. Another reason is that "Taketomi Island has only one small clinic." The clinic only has one doctor, one nurse, and one office worker and Mr. Ichise said "Of course, it's not somewhere you can be easily be hospitalized."

Because of the average age of the population and the medical care of the island, which is not well-developed

"If one doctor gets infected, the medical care on the island will collapse. For people who love Taketomi and spend time and money, I don't want to make them feel like when the Oji-Oba dies that the “cause of death is your trip”. "

as Mr. Ichise said.

On April 6, Ishigaki City urged people from visiting the island during the state of emergency. According to the local newspaper Ryukyu Shimpo that was published on the same day, this "self-restraint" is said to be "the consensus of the three Yaeyama cities and towns" including Taketomi-Cho and Yonaguni-Cho, and Mr. Ichise also stated, "it is best if people refrain on their own".

"I want the customers to come comfortably. When they come again, I want to laugh without wearing a mask and say, “Welcome” and “Welcome back”. For that reason, we are now refraining and putting up with this situation. I think it's best to wait for Corona to settle down."

(J-CAST News Editorial Department Shonosuke Sato)