

Oita Made Company, Ltd.

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Oita Made was established in 2017 led by Oita Bank to promote goods produced by its clients and other Oita prefecture companies, thereby promoting prefectural business activities. (The “Made” is the English word.) Oita Bank is one of the first ones in Japan to set up a shop promoting the region’s products.

Located on the east coast of Kyushu, Oita is perhaps best known to tourists for its hot springs, especially Beppu, which is just north of Oita City, the prefectural capital. Oita is one of the many prefectures with a declining population, down about 10 percent from a 1955 recorded peak to about 1.15 million in 2018. As such, the prefecture and local businesses have sought to create a brand image and otherwise promote the area both to attract in-migration and support the economy.

In addition to its business as a wholesaler of Oita products, Oita Made has a retail outlet and a web presence. Catering to tourists, the brick and mortar and the web shop exhibit and sell a wide range of products, food, sake, shochu, and crafts from Oita Prefecture. The company publishes an attractive 140-page booklet with articles about their producers and their products, with pictures on every page. The retail store was initially located in Beppu. Then, in March 2018, the flagship store was opened in prefectural capital Oita City. Then, at the end of April 2019 the Beppu store was closed. Located in Oita City, the Oita Made Shop Red Brick Main Store is, as the name indicates, in a red brick building that first opened in 1913 as headquarters of the Nijusan Bank (i.e. the 23rd National Bank, the predecessor of the Oita Bank).

Subsequently, until 1966, it was Oita Bank's main office. The renovated building also includes a small museum and event space.

The company is developing the export of Oita *wagyu* (marbled beef) to Taiwan, as well as fish and shiitake mushrooms. It also promotes the sale of soy sauce, miso products, and other Oita agricultural goods.

A featured product is "JAPAN BLUE Fountain Pen," introduced in March 2019. According to Oita Made, after a three-year research and development period a local manufacturer (Nagao Seisakusho Co, Ltd., which specializes in precision sheet metal processing in Saiki City, Oita Prefecture) created a "metal material colored with natural indigo that has been said to be impossible." The pens' bodies are made by Nagao Seisakusho, and the final product assembled by Sailor Fountain Pen Co, Ltd., one of Japan's leading stationery manufacturers, in Hiroshima. It sells in Japan for 54,000 yen (about \$510 at 106 yen/dollar). Two production runs have sold out, but reservations are being taken. Internationally, the pen is available for \$490 through Wancher Inc., an Oita Prefecture pen maker involved in the Japan Blue's design process.

Although mainly founded by Oita Bank, because of government restrictions, the bank owns only 5 percent of Oita Made Company. Three Oita prefecture companies each own 27 percent, and another local company owns 14 percent. Oita Made is profitable.

Oita Made's president was born in Oita and first worked for Oita Bank for 31 years before being seconded from there and taking on his current position. Of the five full-time Oita Made's employees, three are on secondment from Oita Bank. The bank determines whether they stay or return to the bank.

The nature of Oita Made's business provides opportunities for part-time work, but also requires store staff to work weekends and holidays. The normal shift is 10:30 to 19:30, with an hour break. Three shifts a weeks is standard, but the company is flexible on hours and schedule.

The base wage in March 2019 was 800 yen/hour. This had increased to 850 yen/hour when Oita Made advertised for employees in August 2019. When I visited in May, there were eight part-time employees.

Acknowledgements

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References

The Oita Made and Wancher web sites are in Japanese, but browsers will translate much of the content.

<https://oitamade.jp/>

<https://www.wancherpen.com/products/professional-gear-japan-blue#>