

Kumamoto City, Japan (Population 730,000)

Kumamoto City is located in the center of Kyushu Island in southern Japan. With a population of 730,000 and a greater metro area population of about one million, it is the capital city of Kumamoto Prefecture. With historic Kumamoto Castle as its symbol, the city has inherited a great deal of traditional culture and historical legacies as well as a rich natural environment, including our pure groundwater that supplies 100% of our citizens' drinking water. The castle and shopping arcade streets are located in the city center, and the Light Rail System, with its low-floor and retro-themed trams, is an important form of transportation for our citizens. Kumamoto City is a very comfortable and convenient place to live due to the increase of government offices, institutes of higher learning and medical facilities as well as a low cost of living and low crime rate.

Having become an ordinance-designated city on April 1st 2012, Kumamoto City has gained increased authority and financial resources and will be able to further establish our reputation as a city that makes the best of its characteristics. We aim to create a citizen-oriented "Waku-Waku City Kumamoto". Waku-Waku can mean both "exciting" and also "to spring out of" or "to well up" in Japanese. We use this expression to celebrate our pure ground water and also to convey our wish to become a more exciting city, which is our ideal "Liveable Community".

1. Enhancement of the Natural and Built Landscapes

Kumamoto City is committed to making appropriate landscaping changes, improving the scenery whilst preserving its historic and natural qualities. We have set plans in motion for six specific areas: the iconic Kumamoto Castle area, the nationally-renowned Suizenji Park, Lake Ezu and Shirakawa River areas, and the areas around the main station and local tram lines.

There are many merchant's homes and historical buildings remaining from the Edo Period in the castle town (Jokamachi) area. We wish to preserve and utilize these buildings to promote the elegance of Jokamachi.

2. Arts, Culture and Heritage

In Kumamoto City, we strive to preserve our history and cultural inheritance. Our endeavours have included an 8.9 billion JPY ten year reconstruction project at our iconic Kumamoto Castle, which has in turn lead to increased visitor numbers and the introduction of a mutually beneficial 'Castle Owner' system created to foster further citizen involvement.

The city also introduced a contemporary art museum in 2002 to exhibit, promote, and encourage artists on a local, national, and international level. To commemorate the museum's opening, youth groups organized and led the 'Street Art Plex' project to attract business to the shopping district. Public support for this performing arts project has increased over time and it has taken hold and been an effective form of urban culture in our city.

3. Environmental Best Practices

Kumamoto City has encouraged its citizens' involvement in a number of water and environmental projects. Groundwater preservation initiatives have included, amongst others, a subsidised Groundwater Cultivation/Spring Water Recharge Project involving over 400 local farms.

Our 'Green Carpet Tram Project' sees grass being planted alongside the tram lines - a project backed by a support system, whereby citizens and local businesses cooperate with our administration to help manage and maintain the new grass.

Efforts towards the promotion of waste reduction and recycling have also been very successful, and the city is promoting further waste generation control based on a new Basic Plan formulated in March 2011. Projects are now underway involving environmentally-sustainable sewage system operations.

We continue to encourage biodiversity at the 50 hectare Lake Ezu, which produces approximately 40 tons of spring water per day from subsoil resources. The lake and its ecosystem are kept in excellent condition, nurturing a diversity of wildlife and providing a favorite get-away spot for local residents.

The city is also working hard to promote our Light Rail Transit System. Thanks to its eco-friendly qualities and its user-friendliness, there has been a rediscovery of and a new appreciation for the City Streetcar

Service. By introducing the nation's first easy-access, low-floor cars and increasing transit efficiency, Kumamoto City has seen a turnaround in the number of passengers riding the streetcars. Currently, 20 % of streetcar stops have been reconfigured so as to be barrier-free, and efforts in this area are continuing. In October 2011, Kumamoto City was commended with the "10th Japan Railroad Award" for these efforts.

4. Community Participation and Empowerment

Kumamoto City has promoted the establishment of self-governing associations, based on school districts, comprising both residents associations and other organizations. City staff members can attend meetings held by self-governing associations at community planning centers, enabling them to provide administrative information to the community while receiving input as to how the community is functioning.

The city is also working to improve financial support to better promote collaborative activities between residents and the administration. With revenue derived from donations from individuals and businesses, the newly established Kumamoto City Citizens Public Interest Support Fund (Kumamoto Waku-Waku Fund) subsidizes a variety of activities by different groups, whilst encouraging further community involvement.

After the tragic Tohoku Earthquake and subsequent tsunami of 2011, Kumamoto City began a revision of its area disaster prevention and response plans, coordinating "self-assistance", "mutual assistance", and "public assistance". Modifications have been completed regarding the gathering and dissemination of information during natural disasters and the formation of community disaster education and awareness groups are on-going.

5. Healthy Lifestyle

The health and well-being of its residents is of the utmost importance to Kumamoto City, and health improvement is a policy priority of the administration. Each of the five ward administrative offices has a health promotion section with assigned doctors, public health nurses, dieticians, and other health care providers.

We are particularly proud of our Counter-Measures for Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) Project, an illness which can often develop from lifestyle-related diseases (LSRD) such as diabetes, and have introduced measures based around education and information, early diagnosis, onset prevention, and prevention of advanced severity. Residents, businesses, and experts in the fields of health, medicine and welfare, are all involved in dealing with CKD issues as comprehensively as possible. Following a very successful pilot program in the Kawachi School District – an area known for its high risk of adult LSRD - Kumamoto City has begun implementing healthy community development promotions in all of the city's 92 school districts.

Kumamoto is widely regarded as a city with an excellent support system for its residents. In keeping with this reputation, the Kumamoto Medical City 2012 Grand Design has been initiated with the aim of creating a health-oriented community supported by its own people. Within the next 10 years, we aim to become the leading medical center in Kyushu with the most advanced medical research and applications - a city which is able to offer the highest-quality treatment through sharing and collaboration, and a community in which the elderly and disabled can lead active lives.

6. Strategic Planning

A top priority for Kumamoto City is long-term development based on the 6th Comprehensive Program 2009 – 2018, which was created after eliciting a wide range of opinions from city residents. The program aims to build a community in which residents can form and actively take part in rich and rewarding networks; to create a community full of pride and vitality; a community of security and generosity for generations to come. To ensure thorough accountability to our citizens, annual in-depth surveys are conducted among 10,000 residents to better determine levels of awareness and satisfaction regarding city programs and activities.

In 2011, in preparation for becoming a city designated by government ordinance, revisions were made in the Comprehensive Program and 1st year Action Plan to make the most of the new conditions. Three new redesign plans involving the municipal office system, the transportation system, and the city center are now underway. The redesign plans have two ultimate goals: firstly, the development of a city in which every resident feels safe and secure and that the city is a good place to work and raise families; secondly, the development of the city as a destination – whether for tourism, business, education, or making a home.