



Nick Zoa

Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni
Yamaguchi, Japan
1980-81, Term III
2007-08, Terms IV & V
2008-09, Terms I, II & V
2009-10, Terms I, II & V

Iwakuni was my first teaching assignment with UMUC. Although I later taught at more than 20 locations throughout the European and Asian Divisions, I taught more terms at Iwakuni than anywhere else. Iwakuni is where I met Setsuko Iwami, an adjunct Japanese language instructor. She is the mother of our two children.

The first time I came to Iwakuni, I arrived on a MAC flight from Clark AFB. I was 26 years old. Teaching seismology and astronomy at Iwakuni was my first real job out of grad school. Although I didn't know what to expect, I was thrilled to be in Japan for the first time. Term III went by fast. When Bill Berglof sent me to NAF Misawa, I promised myself that I would return to beautiful Iwakuni again someday.

25 years later, after having married, raised two children, founded and sold a company, and divorced, I reapplied for a position with UMUC. I received my new assignment by email from none other than Bill Berglof, who was still in Yokota with the Asian Division. To my delight, Bill assigned me to Iwakuni. It was like coming home again.

Although the base was completely rebuilt in 25 years, the feeling of Yamaguchi was unchanged. The dark hills behind the base cast the same cool afternoon shadows on Iwakuni. The romantic Kintai Bridge was still standing. The cherry trees blossomed along the river and families gathered underneath for picnics just as they always did. There were still 3000 tiny green islands in the Setonaikai (Inland Sea).

When I met Chris Ames, my Area Director in 2008, the first thing he did was show me an advertisement of a sailboat for sale at Iwakuni. I went to the marina to see the boat. The major who owned the boat was due to leave for Afghanistan within a week and was caught in an awkward legal situation: He was required by his commander, SOFA and Japanese maritime law to sell his boat immediately to someone who had a US skipper's license ... which I happened to have. It took about 10 minutes to close the sale.

Here's *Daisy*, anchored at one of the 3000 islands in the Setonaikai. This is Japan's largest national park. Most of these islands are uninhabited. *Daisy* was free to anchor in any of their quiet inlets for lunch or for overnight stays.



Through all my terms at Iwakuni, I rotated my courses between geology, astronomy, seismology, statistics, computer science and physics. Geology was the course that I taught most. While mainland Honshu has beautiful limestone caverns and fascinating metamorphic fold belts, there are some unusual outcrops in the Setonaikai which are only accessible by boat. *Daisy* turned out to be very useful for geology field trips.

During the term, I took my geology students out to the Setonaikai to collect rock samples from the islands. Pillow basalts can only be found under water, so snorkeling was often required. *Daisy* could accommodate seven. So, for a class of 30 students, this required me to take field trips with students almost every Saturday.

GEOL-100 students prepare for finding pillow basalts and collecting rock samples under water



Daisy was also useful for astronomy field trips because it allowed us to get away from the city glare of Hiroshima. Sailing on the Setonaikai was not difficult, day or night. For most of the year, there were reliable southerly breezes off the Pacific. The shipping lanes and maritime hazards were well marked. With the protection of many small islands, there were no large ocean swells. From Iwakuni's marina, it wasn't far to the other side of one of the larger islands where we could get dark night skies.

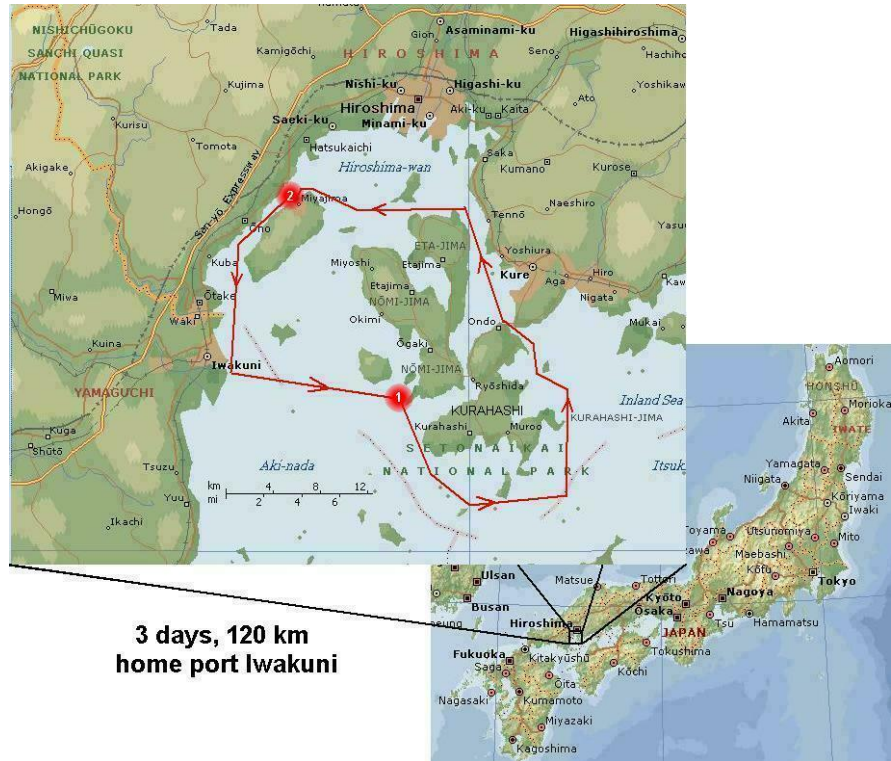
ASTR-100 students ready for an evening observing a meteor shower



Geology and astronomy classes were popular at Iwakuni, perhaps because of these field trips aboard *Daisy*. UMUC's field representative (Yiraliz Beltran) noted that my geology and astronomy classes were always the first classes to fill up every term.

During breaks between terms, I often sailed around the Setonaikai on private trips. On longer trips, the harbor master required that I file float plans.

Here's a typical float plan for a three day trip out around some of the islands near Iwakuni. Numbers 1 and 2 indicate overnight anchorages.



In 2010, I taught my final term at Iwakuni. I sold *Daisy* to one of my best students, who has retired in Iwakuni. He still owns *Daisy* and says that I'm welcome to come back and take her for a sail anytime that I like. I hope to take him up on his offer one of these days.