

Okayama Metropolis?

Okayama City will become the 18th National Government Designated City in April 2009. The move was approved at a Cabinet meeting on October 10. This has been a long-term goal of Okayama city mayor, Shigeo Takaya, and in order to achieve it, the city merged with neighboring Mitsu-cho and Nadasaki-cho in March 2005 and Takebe-cho and Seto-cho in January 2007.

According to the Local Government Law, a city needs to have a population of 500,000 to become a Government Designated City. Okayama City, the capital of Okayama Prefecture had a population of 692,530 at the end of March 2008 (9,272 of the people in the city are non-Japanese.) Okayama's is now the smallest population

among the 18 Government Designated Cities, with less than one fifth of Yokohama City in Kanagawa Prefecture which has the largest at approximately 3.6 million.

In anticipation of the change to Government Designated City, last spring Okayama City collected ideas for the names of 4 new wards (ku) that would be created. In spite of some interesting suggestions from the public, such as Momotaro-ku, Sakura-ku (means cherry), Asahigawa-ku (means Asahi River), Ujo-ku (the nickname of Okayama Castle), the city has settled on four very orthodox names: Kita-ku (north), Naka-ku (central), Higashi-ku (east) and Minami-ku (south.)

What is a difference between a City and Government Designated City?

The system of Government Designated City was established to execute public administration more rationally and efficiently. Government Designated Cities are able to take over some clerical duties from their prefectures and to make certain decisions without the prefectural governor's permission. For example, Okayama City can now produce its own lottery tickets. In return, Okayama City will receive more funding from Okayama Prefecture and the national government.

Okayama City from April 2009



What will change for citizens of Okayama City?

The most obvious change is that from April next year, Okayama will have four Ward Offices instead of City Office and smaller branches. There will be four "Ward Mayors" under the City Mayor.

The Ward Office for Kita-ku will be in the current Okayama City Office, Naka-ku will have a Ward Office in Hama, Higashi-ku will have its office in the current Saidaaji Branch Office, and Minami-ku will use Nadasaki Branch Office until an official ward office is established. Essentially it means that public administration (including Alien Resident cards) will happen at ward offices, saving a trip to City Hall.

Also, addresses will change. If you live in Okayama City, the name of your ward (Kita-ku, Naka-ku, Higashi-ku or Minami-ku) will be added to your address. For example, the address of Okayama City Office will now be 1-1-1 Daiku, Kita-ku, Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture. (The Japanese order is opposite: 岡山県岡山市北区大供1-1-1)

Okayama City is expecting to receive more financial assistance from the national government, but is also hoping that becoming a Government Designated City will make Okayama City better known throughout the nation, encouraging major investment from private sector companies opening new branches here.

The other 17 Government Designated Cities (from north to south)

Sapporo City (Hokkaido), Sendai City (Miyagi Pref.), Saitama City (Saitama Pref.), Chiba City (Chiba Pref.), Yokohama City (Kanagawa Pref.), Kawasaki City (Kanagawa Pref.), Niigata City (Niigata Pref.), Shizuoka City (Shizuoka Pref.), Hamamatsu City (Shizuoka Pref.), Nagoya City (Aichi Pref.), Kyoto City (Kyoto Pref.), Osaka City (Osaka Pref.), Sakai City (Osaka Pref.), Kobe City (Hyogo Pref.), Hiroshima City (Hiroshima Pref.), Kitakyushu City (Fukuoka Pref.), Fukuoka City (Fukuoka Pref.)