

## **Feeling Like a Stranger, Yet at Ease**

What will it be like? I've asked myself this question many times these recent weeks. Sometimes with a touch of anxiety. Now I'm here, feeling like a complete stranger, yet quite at ease. The familiarity of the sea comforts me. The scenery is beautiful and people are very friendly. A slight nervousness remains.

After a long but pleasant journey we arrived in the evening at our hotel in Kii-Katsuura, a quiet coastal town right next to Taiji. Skipping a night's sleep and then not being able to sleep more than three hours before my first working day was not so fun. I still feel jetlagged. Slowly but surely I'm getting back to my normal self though and Blue Cove days (days with no drive hunt) certainly help to keep up the good spirits!

During my first couple of days as a Cove Monitor for CSI no dolphins were harmed. I am very pleased about that of course. I have had time to get familiar with Taiji and the tasks at hand and feel more prepared now for observing and reporting a drive hunt. A hunt may happen anytime. Just on the day of our arrival 22 Risso's dolphins had been killed. I know a hunt will not be easy to witness and my heart will feel heavy but at least I know my way around.

It's very interesting to get a first hand impression of the Taiji situation and atmosphere after having heard and read so much about it. The many years of tension between the Japanese fishing community and the dolphin activists is quite visible. A large part of the harbor is restricted area and clearly marked with yellow lines. There is no chance to get near the slaughterhouse or the dolphin pens without risking legal prosecution. There are off-limit signs and surveillance cameras in areas where one could get a good look at the killing cove. The killing cove itself will be covered in blue tarp in case of a hunt so the bloody scenery will not be recorded and spread across the world. Police are keeping a close eye on us and recording our every step.

Nevertheless, I feel sort of welcome here. Besides a few resentful stares by a couple of fishermen down at the harbor I have been met with nothing but authentic friendliness.

I've only been here for two days but it feels like two weeks. It's intense. I hope we are prepared for what is yet to come. Dolphin hunters have no days off...