

Rough seas will help you become tougher: Adventurer

This is the seventh installment of the “Message II” series, in which marine adventurer Satoru Yahata describes his epic journey by kayak in stages from Australia to Japan and what he learned through encounters with fishermen.

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I’ve spent about 20 years of my life with the sea, traveling around Japan and other Asian nations by sea kayak and working in Okinawa Prefecture as a guide to help people have real wildlife experiences.

When I was a novice kayaker in my mid-20s, my kayak sank in rough seas between Iriomotejima and Haterumajima islands in Okinawa Prefecture. It was the most dangerous moment of my life. I had to swim for about six hours to reach land. The accident was caused by my own immaturity. I did not closely check the weather forecast and the kayak’s condition. In rough seas, it is pointless competing with other people in a kayak. Everyone is weak. Under such severe circumstances, people are forced to think seriously about how to survive. This type of experience makes them stronger.

When I was a 21-year-old university student, an

encounter with a fisherman on Tokyo’s Hachijojima island opened my eyes to how wonderful people who live with the sea are. One day the fisherman showed me his incredible technique below the surface of the water. In two minutes, he

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dived in, speared a fish, and even removed its offal to keep it fresh. It was so masterful, I got goose bumps. My immediate thought was to do what he did.

After constant training as a skin diver, I was able to catch fish by myself. The result of my training exceeded my expect-

ations. I felt my body’s potential had bloomed. Under the sea, I caught various fish that I had never seen at stores in the Tokyo area. They were so delicious. We are used to eating only food sold within the distribution system. But through this experience, I learned things I had not studied at school. I felt like I couldn’t waste time looking for a regular job. After graduating from university, I visited fishing villages abroad as a backpacker for several years. I sometimes earned money, selling fish I caught with a spear. Following a suggestion by a friend, I started learning to



Eishi Miyasaka/The Yomiuri Shimbun

paddle a kayak.

I got into sea kayaking because I could move much faster by kayak than with fins. It’s also possible to carry a lot of fish in a kayak. After my fifth kayaking experience, I decided to take the bit between my

teeth and travel about 11,000 kilometers from Australia to Hachijojima by sea kayak, and without an outboard motor. Was I stupid?

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Thoughts from
Satoru Yahata