

Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JANUARY 2019

Thank you for picking up this quarters' "Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City".

In this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima city has to offer.

With a population of around 290,000 people, Fukushima is surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is famous as a fruit-producing area: producing many varieties through the seasons, including cherries, peaches, Asian pears, grapes, and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little of what Fukushima City has to offer.



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① Tsurushi-bina - Uniting people in spirit and embellishing the town

② Though it is the middle of winter, Iino Town in Fukushima City is bustling with preparations for an event to bring an early spring. This spring will mark the 12th "Iino Tsurushi-bina (hanging Hina dolls) Festival," which began in Iino, where there was once a flourishing silk weaving industry. Each year, the number of visitors increases, and last year approximately 30,000 people from in and outside the prefecture came to this town, which has a resident population of just 5,500 people. During the festival residents play a very active role. From the tsurushi-bina dolls brilliantly embellishing the town, to running resting places and organising traffic, the entirety of Iino provides hospitality for visitors. The featured article in this issue introduces Iino Town's heartwarming tradition of welcoming an early spring.

③ A handmade festival that began in a town where raw silk production and silk weaving flourished

It is said the Iino Tsurushi-bina Festival was born when the Iino Town Chamber of Commerce and Industry Business Women's Club made tsurushi-bina as part of their Zero Waste campaign. The festival began when the women took the unused kimono and old fabric they had sitting at home, and after receiving instruction from a handicraft expert, crafted tsurushi-bina and used them to decorate the main shopping street.

As Mr. Hiroshi Saito, Chairman of the Festival's Executive Committee explains, "From ancient times in Iino, raw silk production and silk weaving have flourished. We have continued the festival in the hopes that it will lead to the recycling of kimono, the passing on of our culture, and the revitalization of the town." After the Great East Japan Earthquake, "Uniting our spirits and spreading cheer with tsurushi-bina" became their new slogan. They visited the temporary housing in the town, where people from Iitate Village were living, to give on-site lectures and make dolls alongside the residents. The dolls were then displayed, creating not only new decorations but also new hope for the future.

④ Three-generational families wishing for the healthy growth and happiness of their children.

The Iino Tsurushi-bina Festival has now become a hallmark of early spring. Mr. Saito claims its attraction stems from, "The involvement of a large number of organizations." Six different organizations make the tsurushi-bina, and when the festival finishes they are already preparing for next year's event. "Each year, the guests become more discerning so the dolls become more and more elaborate." During the festival, the many volunteer organizations, including the Women's Association, Red Cross Volunteer Group, JA Women's Group, and the Folktale Association, all work hard at the four rest areas made available to guests free of charge throughout the town. They serve tea and provide folktale story-telling. The Traffic Safety Association and Traffic Safety Mother's Association cooperate to direct traffic in the free parking areas. "The work is hard at times, but it leads to the revitalization of the entire town." At the last festival, local junior high school students wearing pink happi coats also acted as guides. The figure of the young guides really pleased visitors. "One other attraction is the fact that this is a festival to wish for the healthy growth and happiness of children." In recent years, families of three generations made of young couples with small children and their parents, are often seen at the festival. Leisurely strolling the nostalgic town streets while taking in the adorable Hina doll decorations brings a serene pleasure to visitors of all ages. Among the Hina doll decorations, kyoho-bina dolls from the Edo period and a magnificent eight-tier display are also being exhibited. We hope you will come and see them too.



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① A Tsurushi-bina Tour

The tsurushi-bina are lovingly made, with great care infused into each and every stitch. Why not take a tour of the unique Tsurushi-bina on display, both within the city and on the outskirts.

② Kyu-Sakumatei Free entrance

③ We have 70 members in the Azuma Tsurushi-bina Appreciation Society and are divided into four classes. We craft Tsurushi-bina learning from Tsurushi-bina expert, Mikiko Suda's original creations. We make one doll a month, enjoying the happy and fun atmosphere of our activities. This exhibition highlighting the atmosphere of the old traditional home, Kyu-Sakumatei, will be our eighth. It is held with the cooperation of the Old Home Exchange Society. We hope you will come and see our heartwarming tsurushi-bina decorations.

④ Kyu-Horikiritei Free entrance

⑤ As members of the Iizaka Women's Club, we decide on an theme based on that year's zodiac animal for the Tsurushi-bina we will create and display. We also display a variety of hina decorations and Tsurushi-bina made by local elementary school students. Members of the Iizaka community all help in holding hands-on craft experiences, choral recitals, and tea parties during the festival. We have a hospitality area as well, so after you take a look at the tsurushi-bina please stop by and relax with a cup of tea.



① The “Sabara Wasabi Production Association” was launched by local volunteers in 2014 in order to ensure the continued cultivation of sawa (or water) wasabi in the Sabara district of Fukushima City, where it has been grown since the Meiji era. Those who gathered were all amateur wasabi growers. Despite their average age exceeding 70, however, they were all enthusiastic about moving forward with this new endeavor from a desire to “preserve our local treasure grown with pure water” and “re-energize the community.” We asked Mr. Eiichi Sato, the Association’s chairman, about the appeal of wasabi and its future prospects.

② The appeal of the wasabi cultivated in the pure water flowing from the foothills of Mt. Azuma is in its nose-piercing pungency and rich aroma.

③ Sabara’s sawa wasabi is a gift from the abundance of nature and one that we hope to pass down to future generations.

④ Six people passing down the Sabara region sawa wasabi from the Meiji era

The history of sawa wasabi cultivation in Fukushima City’s Sabara district dates back to the Meiji era. Originally it was a native plant growing in a swamp in the foothills of Mt. Azuma. The flow of mineral-rich subsoil water, created over time by snow melt-off and rainwater penetrating underground, and the cedar forest that provides just the right amount of shadow, make the perfect environment for sawa wasabi, which can only be grown under certain conditions. Eiichi Sato also states, “It is a great location for the sensitive sawa wasabi as the water volume is constant throughout the year and the water temperature stays between 11 - 13°C.”

In the Taisho era, people began selling what they had once grown for personal use, and in the late 1980’s the late agriculture aficionado, Futami Sato began cultivating a wasabi field. Due to Sato’s use of advanced technology while establishing his cultivation method, his wasabi earned a reputation for its high quality which resulted in most of his harvest being shipped to Tokyo’s Tsukiji Market. As Mr. Sato explains, “It was decided that the methods should be passed down when Futami became elderly and the combination of a variety of circumstances made it difficult for him to continue.” The swamp with the wasabi field is located in a place known locally since ancient times as “wakimizu” (spring water). As the source of the Kajiyagawa River that flows through the Sabara district is rich in nature and is also inhabited by salamanders. “I want to preserve this precious wasabi field and the wealth of its nature. So if I was going to do that, it might as well be done by locals, so six local volunteers created an association.”

Revitalizing the community with wasabi grown in the foothills of Mt. Azuma

When they finally went to the wasabi field in the summer of 2014, restoration proved difficult as it hadn’t been cultivated for three years. The volunteers helped to cut back grass that had grown almost as tall as they were, used a power tiller to remove moss from the gravel and a high pressure washer to further wash away dirt, and raised the ridges to prepare for planting the seedlings. They faced a variety of difficulties, including the seeds they themselves had collected and sown as well as the pre-grown seedlings both failing to sprout, but no one complained. In 2015, they began harvesting whilst also pioneering their own sales channels. With the desire to bring their sawa wasabi to the local people of Sabara, they sold the wasabi directly at the JA direct sales shop in the city and wholesale to the co-op. The wasabi could be eaten at restaurants such as Sasaki Farm Cafe and at hotels within the prefecture that were certified as organic. Since then, the wasabi has earned a reputation for also being creamy in addition to its outstanding aroma and pungency.

Additionally, wasabi grown in a swamp (sawa) becomes sawa wasabi and wasabi grown in a field (hata) becomes hata wasabi. When the six volunteers meet, their conversations extend to what should be done about the future of agriculture in the community. They are currently working on plans to produce, process, and sell hata wasabi, whose stalks can be harvested in the spring and whose edible leaves and stems appear in spring and autumn, in the Sabara district. We are looking forward to the day when the wasabi nurtured by the rich natural environment, that enhances the flavor of dishes, becomes a specialty product of the Sabara district.



① Shinobu-Sanzan-Akatsuki-Mairi

② Winter event information

Japan’s largest straw sandal weighing approximately two tons and boasting a length of 12 meters, is carried through the city before it is offered at Haguro Shrine on Mt. Shinobu. In addition, local elementary students along the route also carry the 2.5 meter long children’s straw sandal and participate in the Akatsuki-Mairi. Why not come and see and hear the yells of those carrying the giant straw sandal giving life to this Fukushima tradition?

③ Coming soon!! The Olympic and Paralympic Games

On Sunday, November 4th, Olympic Day Festa in Fukushima City was held. Seven Olympians, including Kohei Yamashita (track and field) and Kana Oyama (volleyball), gathered at Fukushima City’s gymnasium and martial arts gym, NVC Fukushima Arena, to join approximately 120 elementary school students from the city in a game of link tag and to sing songs.

Mr. Yamashita said, “I am very happy to be able to return to my hometown in this capacity. I want the kids to watch me as I work hard towards the Tokyo Olympic Games.” There are only 18 months left until the opening ceremonies! We will continue to bring to you the growing excitement in Fukushima City in future editions of Yume Tsushin.

④ On the cover

A wish infused in each and every stitch

Wild boars, the zodiac animal for 2019 are being made. Even though the wild boar design is the same, every one is special as they are made from fabric scraps, and the wishes infused by each artisan are different. No two are alike.

