

Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — APRIL 2021

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 a famous fruit production 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 Spring Sightseeing in Fukushima

② Flowers spread across the city of Fukushima throughout the seasons. There are several spots scattered throughout the city famous for their beautiful blooms. Hanamiyama is located in the city's center and is famous throughout Japan. To the north is Hanamomo-no-Sato, located at Iizaka onsen. Hanayashiki Park is located to the south in Inomachi. Each area has its own location known for its flowers. In addition, the flowers that bloom in each location change with the seasons. In spring, cherry and peach blossoms bloom. In early summer you can see kumagaiso, azaleas, irises, and hydrangeas, and in summer the alpine plants bloom. The flowers let us know what time of the year it is by which flowers are blooming.

After the season with gently scented flowers comes the gift of fruit. The first to make its debut each year in the fruit kingdom of Fukushima are cherries that shine like bright red rubies.

Peak cherry harvest is a short two weeks. However, the tourist orchards in Fukushima City produce varieties that mature from early in the season to late in the season allowing you to enjoy cherry picking from early June through early July. Both flowers and cherries are a once a year pleasure. We hope you will enjoy spring in Fukushima to the fullest.



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① Fukushima Flower Promenade

A small journey that will move your heart with its beauty

The flowers of Fukushima bloom throughout the seasons. Why not take a journey through the Fukushima Flower Promenade and see the seasonal landscapes adorned by flowers in the well-known flower spots around the city?

Here we'll introduce you to some of the more famous spots around Fukushima City boasting gorgeous blossoms.

② Iizaka Onsen Hanamomo-no-Sato

Roughly 300 peach blossom trees of 40 different varieties gathered from around the world bloom across the grounds.

③ Hanayashiki Park

The park and its surroundings boast approximately 7,000 trees of mostly peach blossoms, but also forsythia, camellia, and other flowers. The view from higher ground is breathtaking. Every year a large number of photography enthusiasts visit in an attempt to capture shots of this "Togenkyo," or paradise on earth.

④ Uwadaiyama Weeping Cherry Trees

Weeping cherry trees bloom along the road in the Mizuhara area of Matsukawa Town. Both sides of the narrow street are lined with blooming cherry blossoms for you to enjoy as you stroll the several hundred meter stretch of the road.

⑤ Kumagaiso-no-Sato

This is one of the few places in Japan where you can find a native colony of the kumagaiso, which is designated as an endangered species. There are approximately 30,000 plants and 5,000 flowers here tended to by the local preservation association.

⑥ Jorakuen

This Japanese-style garden is reminiscent of the Muromachi period. Its mid-April cherry blossoms are stunning. In May, the rhododendrons and irises bloom followed by the Japanese irises. Early autumn is the best season for viewing bush clovers in bloom.



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① Fukushima Cherries

② The first batter of Fukushima's fruits

Spring in the western portion of Fukushima City where fruit orchards spread in the area known as the "Fruit Line," fruit trees show off their blossoms one after another. The blooms on Japanese ume, plum, apricot, peach, pear, cherry, and apple trees flower one after another as if passing a baton, coloring their surroundings in gentle colors.

When the flowers bloom, next comes the fruit! In this issue we will introduce the cherry, which is the fruit that announces the start of the season in Fukushima City. We spoke to Mr. Yoshiaki Konno, the Sub-Committee Chairman of the Fukushima City Tourist Agricultural Association Harvesting Sub-Committee, who communicates a variety of information about fruit picking.



③ A moment of sweet and sour bliss

A wealth of varieties from the early ripening Beni-sayaka variety to late-ripening varieties

Cherries, with their subtle tartness and sweetness that spreads the moment you bite into it, are the first batter of the fruit harvesting season in Fukushima. The season is almost about to start again this year, and the excitement has already begun.

Until now, cherries were synonymous with the Sato-nishiki variety, but in recent years as breeding has made progress, and there are now a wealth of varieties from those that mature early in the season to those that mature later. What varieties are there to enjoy at the tourism orchards in Fukushima City? "The earliest variety to mature is the Beni-sakura, which ripens in the beginning of June. Following that, Seiko-nishiki ripens with the Takasago variety soon after that. In mid-June Sato-nishiki are ready for eating," explained Mr. Konno. Later towards the end of June, the recently acclaimed Benishuho and Napoleon varieties ripen. The Fukushima cherry season continues until early-July when the latest-maturing varieties are harvested.

Enjoy fruit picking that lets you taste the fruit at its best

Mr. Konno says the attraction of fruit picking is being able to eat the fruit when it is most delicious. This is also true for cherries, and the early-ripening Beni-sayaka taste even better when they are left on the tree to mature until they are almost black in color. "Recently, some orchards put tables and chairs out in the orchard like a café. Take your time selecting the ripest cherries and enjoy the fully mature fruit." He told us about one more attraction of fruit picking, which is encountering rare varieties. Within the tourism orchards that spread along the Fruit Line, there are some varieties being grown that you don't often find in markets. For example, the large, early-ripening, adorably heart-shaped Beni-yutaka, the juicy and perfectly sweet with just a hint of tartness the Yamagata-bijin, and the old Jabore variety are all varieties not often seen, but you can look forward to finding them at fruit-picking orchards.

This year, the Fukushima City Tourist Agricultural Association once again plans to have an opening ceremony of the fruit picking season in early June. We hope that as you visit the various tourist orchards in the city, you will enjoy these two aspects of cherry picking.

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① Yoshihide Muroya is an air race pilot and Ruu is a dancer and choreographer. These two people are based in Fukushima, but are active around the world, and though their fields of expertise are different, they have a lot in common as they both push themselves to the limit to present the best performances possible. In this month's "Person of Interest" we spoke to these two people who performed at "The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster 10 Years Later: Reconstruction and Beyond" hosted by Fukushima City on March 7.

② An air race pilot is always prepared and challenging limits

③ Yoshihide Muroya made Fukushima City his activity base in 1999. He was blessed with many friends. He was involved with the establishment of the NPO, Fukushima Flight Association, and in 2009, participated in his first air race. He continued to hone his skills and in 2017 became the first Asian to win the overall annual championship. Meanwhile, he was also participating in aviation events both in Japan and overseas. We asked Mr. Muroya, who continues to perform air shows and encourage those looking up at the sky, about the joy of being a pilot and what he is doing to nurture the next generation.

④ Air Racer/Pilot

Yoshihide Muroya

Born in Nara Prefecture in 1973, he was a fan of the anime, "Mobile Suit Gundam," which inspired him to join the Aviation Club at Chuo University where he learned to ride a glider. He went to the U.S. at the age of 20 and got his pilot's license. In 1995, he became fascinated by the aerobatics international championship held in Hyogo Prefecture, "The Breitling World Cup of Aerobatics" and decided to aim to become the world's best pilot. He started participating in air shows in 1998 and in air races in 2009. In 2017, he won 4 of the 8 rounds of the Red Bull Air Race World Championship and was crowned World Champion. He is also the recipient of numerous other awards and honors, including the Fukushima Prefecture Honor Award and the Fukushima City Hometown Honor Award. He communicates the attraction of Fukushima as Fukushima Sports Ambassador and Fukushima City Momorin Ambassador.

⑤ I love flying. The pure emotions I feel are my source of energy

Mr. Muroya's first encounter with Fukushima City's Sky Park was very romantic. On a flight to Hokkaido 24 years ago, he flew over Fukushima Sky Park. "The straight runway stretching in the middle of the green natural landscape made me fall in love at first sight. I thought this was the only place I wanted to live" says Mr. Muroya as he reflects back on the time. Since then, he has made Fukushima City his base as he continues to fly like a bird through the sky.

In 2009, he competed in his first air race battling over every tenth of a second. In the years leading up to 2017, when he became the first Asian to be crowned World Champion, he met with various difficulties, such as the Great East Japan Earthquake and aircraft malfunctions. When asked how he was able to stay motivated, he replied, "Because I genuinely love to fly through the sky."

In fact, in his first air race he felt winning was a long way off. In addition, air racing was suspended for a time, and he found himself in a pinch. He decided to incorporate mental training as a way to make himself stronger. He took a long, hard look inside himself and asked questions like "For what purpose am I flying," and as a result, he came up with the answer, "Because I genuinely love it. It's fun."

Harnessing the crowd's energy and turning it into a win in Chiba!

Mr. Muroya really made the most of his mental training at the 2017 Red Bull Air Race World Championship. He was disqualified for the first round. He won the second and third rounds but began falling apart in the fourth and made his way back in the seventh. Winning the championship became difficult at that point, but the moment he felt how lucky he was just to be able to race at a venue packed with fans, his nerves and concerns all melted away, and he found himself in the zone. "The season was unpredictable until the end, but I was prepared, and I had envisioned myself winning, and so I feel like I was meant to win."

Even after realizing his dream of winning the overall championship for the year, Muroya continued training hard to reach new heights winning the season opener, the second round, and the final round held in Chiba in 2019. "Very few competitors have the chance to race in their home countries, and it is said to be difficult to win at home, but I believe that my win came from the energy I received from everyone in the crowd."

People can feel positive and cheerful just by looking up

Now that air races ended the year before last, Mr. Muroya is working on conditioning himself for when they resume, while also working hard on future development activities. Last year amid the situation where many people felt like hanging their heads low, he flew flights drawing smiley faces in the sky. He also holds an aviation workshop called "Sora Labo" ("Sky Lab" in English) and a Youth Pilot Program for children thinking about futures in aviation, as well as working on a project to develop parts for air race crafts with students from Fukushima Prefectural Technical Academy. The list of activities he is involved in is endless. "The human mind and body are connected, and raising your eyes up naturally makes you feel refreshed," says Muroya. He said he will continue to work on projects that make people look skyward and support making children's dreams come true. We're looking forward to it.



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① In 2016, she made her first endeavor at winning the dance world championship held in Los Angeles attended by competitors from more than 30 countries with a team of select dancers. Ruu won the competition two years running. She is the owner and operator of Dance Studio ViVid with a location in Fukushima City and another one in Minamisoma City where students range in age from three to around 20. Some of her students from as far as Iwate, Miyagi, and Yamagata prefectures. Ruu says she wants to use dance to make the people of Fukushima happy. We asked her about how she first started dancing and some episodes that triggered her growth, and about her future as a dancer.

② Fukushima is my home. I want to make everyone happy with dance.

③ Dancer, choreographer, director

Ruu

Born and raised in Fukushima City, she started dancing at the age of two. In her first year of high school, she won a national title. In 2016, acting as leader and choreographer of the group, Fabulous Sisters, she became the first Japanese person to win the dance world championship, World of Dance, held in Los Angeles. The following year, she achieved her second consecutive win. Currently, she is engaged in a broad range of activities including directing AKB48, choreographing for Korean idol groups, and teaching and holding performances for students in Fukushima, where she grew up, as well as other places both within and outside the prefecture.

④ The shock I received at my first national competition changed both my body and mind!

Ruu laughs as she says that since she started dancing from the age of two, she had never even imagined a life without dance. What is noteworthy is her passion. From the first through third grades of elementary school, she attended lessons at two different dance studios, so it is easy to imagine just how enthusiastic she was about dance. A contest she entered in her first year of junior high school inspired her to take dance seriously. "It was my first national competition. The preliminary and final rounds were both held in Tokyo. It gave me a real shock." She explains that after that, she started thinking seriously about what she needed to do in order to win a national competition. She changed both her makeup and costumes. "I quit the studio I was attending in Fukushima City, and made the big decision to attend lessons in Tokyo every weekend. The results were everything. I wasn't dreaming about my future; I was serious about making it real."

In the spotlight for developing child dancers

Ruu says her family supported her. When her parents built a house with an attached dance studio, she took that opportunity to open Dance Studio ViVid (hereinafter referred to as ViVid) at age 16. The tide really turned when she was in her first year of high school and competed in the largest contest in Japan, winning her first national competition. "Things took shape, and I was able to get the results I wanted, and that really cemented the path I wanted to take." Then in 2016, the Fabulous Sisters became the first Japanese dancers to win the world championship dance competition, "World of Dance." The next year, with a highly synchronized dance with crisp, clean moves, the team received the highest score in history and won the competition for the second year in a row. Since then, Ruu has continued the charge in making a name for herself both in Japan and abroad, while garnering attention for training child dancers.

At ViVid, everyone can overcome even the hardest practice together

However, her journey has not always been easy. Ruu says competing in front of others helps you grow. Looking back, she pushed herself to the limit in lessons and continued to challenge herself daily by competing in contests that were battles of survival. What was her motivation? "I hated losing more than anyone, and I was sure that dancing at ViVid would help me overcome any hardships and allow me to grow. I went to the dance world championship to win it." Ruu says that the environment in Tohoku is not exactly ideal for dancing. "My students understand that in order to succeed, hardship and fun come as a set. My 3-year-old students and my 20-year-old students all dance as if their lives depended on it."

ViVid is home base for Ruu. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, she trains with her students online to prepare for what comes next. "I want all of my students to grow up full of confidence. Confidence is very important for seizing opportunities. If these kids can have fun and be happy dancing, it will make their families and everyone around them happy." She says she wants to focus more on directing in the future. She wants to work on large-scale projects like concerts and musicals to make more of a name for herself and produce top artists out of Fukushima in the near future. Her ambitions are so upright and refreshing, we can't help but want to give Ruu our full support in her endeavors.



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① Fukushima City, home to Yuji Koseki

The TV series "Yell," which broadcasted last year, was enjoyed by large numbers of people and enlivened the town of Fukushima. Here we will introduce you to some of the filming locations from "Yell."

② Mizubayashi Nature Forest

Mizubayashi Nature Forest, featured in the opening sequence, has maintained walking paths allowing you to stroll along to the sound of the babbling brook while you surround yourself in negative ions in the forest.

It's a great spot that allows you to pretend you are the main character of the drama and take a commemorative photo.

③ Former Hirose-za Theater at Fukushima City Minka-en

The former Hirose-za Theater found at Fukushima City Minka-en is a theater built in the Meiji period and designated as a national important cultural property. In "Yell," the scene where the main character directs the harmonica club's concert was filmed here. Other scenes from his childhood in Fukushima were also filmed in the sprawling park.

④ Support Fukushima Town Development! Energize Fukushima with a Hometown Donation (hometown tax payment)

The valuable donations we receive in Fukushima City are being used for initiatives to take Fukushima City to the next stage. We are waiting for your support.

We have a variety of return gifts waiting for you, including seasonal fruit grown in Fukushima City!

