

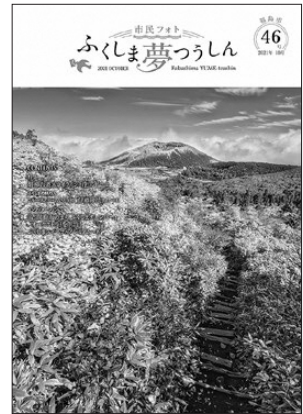
Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — OCTOBER 2021

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.



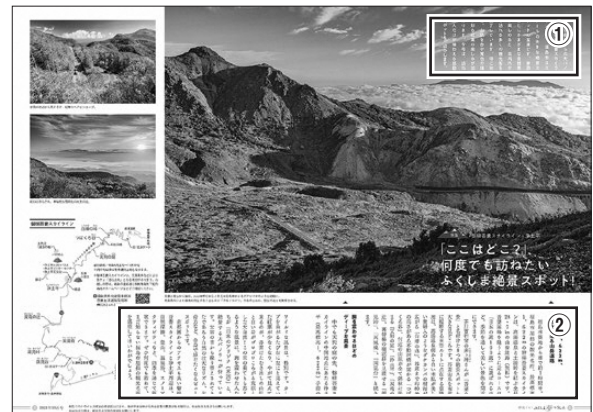
P. 2, 3

① Fukushima City is a treasure trove of scenic spots on a grand scale, including the panoramic view from Mt. Issaikyo and the Bandai-Azuma Skyline. Many tourists from both within and outside the prefecture are lured to Fukushima to enjoy a wide range of scenic beauty offered in each of the seasons. In particular, autumn brings a red and yellow brocade that adorns the surfaces of the mountain. In this issue, we will introduce you to some of the most impressive spots that can only be experienced by those who visit.

② Maximum elevation 1,622 meters, A mountain road above the clouds

A 1.5-hour drive from the center of Fukushima City. The Bandai-Azuma Skyline, at an elevation of 1,622 meters at its highest point, is one of Fukushima City's most famous tourist attractions. It is a 28.7 km-long (toll-free) mountain road connecting Takayu Onsen and Tsuchiyu Pass. This road that weaves through the Azuma mountain range was selected as one of "Japan's top 100 roads." Here, you can get an up-close view of the beautiful scenery year-round.

The eight scenic spots making up "Azuma Hakkei" (Eight Views of Azuma) as named by the Akutagawa-prize winning author, Yasushi Inoue, are also major attractions. These picturesque spots dot the lofty skyward route traversing the Azuma mountains from north to south. Starting from the Takayu Onsen side, there is the Shirakaba-no-mine, a sprawling forest of Erman's birch trees with white bark that they wear like the gowns of noblewomen. Next is the Tsubakuro Valley with the Fudosawa Bridge standing over it about 80 meters from the bottom of the valley. From Tengu-no-niwa, Jododaira, and Soryu-no-tsuji, the nearby mountains appear to be draped from top to bottom in autumn brocades. And Umimi Pass, Tenpukyo, and Kunimidai offer expansive views of the marshes and lakes of Urabandai.



Landscape so profound your heart will pound

Among these spots, past Tengu-no-niwa, the untamed scenery that spreads Jododaira (1,622 meters maximum elevation), the midway point of the Banda-Azuma Skyline, is in a class of its own. The autumnal leaves that were visible both to the left and right become fewer and fewer with each turn in the winding road until, eventually, the mountains you can see have become a reddish-brown and white rocks are strewn about the desolate wilderness. In this landscape, which might make you think you have reached the edge of the world, you will discover a tremendous panoramic view that has been praised as the Arizona (U.S.A.) of Japan by those who have seen it and had their hearts pound at its sight. This is a viewing spot that will make you want to feel with your entire body the magnificent rhythms and life force of nature that have been repeating from time immemorial.

The Bandai-Azuma Skyline and Jododaira area, which are easily accessible from the Tokyo metropolitan area, can be enjoyed throughout the four seasons with activities such as exploring nature, mountain climbing, bathing in onsens, and snow activities. Come back again and again and make new discoveries each time at one of the best sights in Fukushima City.

P. 4, 5

① Enjoy autumn in Fukushima, even more

Walking, climbing, running, there are various ways to enjoy the autumnal leaves of the Bandai-Azuma Skyline. The best time to see the scenery at Jododaira, which boasts the highest elevation, is generally from the end of September through early October. Once the peak leaf viewing season ends at Jododaira, which has the highest elevation on the Bandai-Azuma Skyline, the viewing season moves downward starting at Tengu-no-niwa and the Tsubakuro Valley. We recommend going to view the autumnal leaves in the morning while the morning sun is shining upon them.

② Tengu-no-niwa

The third of the eight sights of the Azuma Hakkei from Takayu. It is named from a legend which said the legendary mythical creatures called Tengu flitted about the area as if it was their own yard, or "niwa" in Japanese. The gradation of the autumn-colored broad-leaved trees and green of the coniferous trees on the slopes of Mt. Azuma-Kofuji is said to be the most spectacular sight of the year on the Bandai-Azuma Skyline. The nearby mountains become a sea of red and yellow.

③ Tsubakuro Valley

This valley was named for the fact that martins used to fly through it. The 170-meter long, 84-meter high arched Fudosawa Bridge, which spans through the autumn foliage is the perfect spot for an impressive photo. There is a parking lot, observation point, and restrooms where the old road once passed. The view is spectacular from various angles of the bridge and Fukushima City off in the distance.

④ Majo-no-hitomi (Witch's Eye) (Goshikinuma Pond)

This is a caldera lake approximately 300 meters in diameter, and its cobalt blue water changes color from one moment to the next depending on how the sun is hitting it. "Goshikinuma Pond" meaning "five-colored pond," is also known for its popular name, "Majo-no-hitomi" or "witch's eye." Different from the 30 or so large and small ponds and lakes in Urabandai known generally as Goshikinuma (Goshikinuma group of lakes), this lake is located on the hillside of Mt. Issaikyo at an elevation of 1,949 meters. Climbing from Jododaira, the view of Goshikinuma Pond from the top of the mountain is spectacular.

⑤ Kamanuma

It is said that this lake received its name for the fact that it is shaped like a sickle, or "kama" in Japanese. Located at the heart of the Azuma mountains and an elevation of 1,770 meters, you can enjoy the many alpine plants along the 5.1 km Kamanuma Nature Trail, which takes you around the lake from Jododaira.

⑥ Bliss and Exhilaration

Recommended Autumn Courses

We spoke with Shigekazu Takeda, Chairman of the Azumayama-no-kai, about the recommended courses in the Banda-Azuma Skyline area and their attractions.



⑦ **The mystic lake, Majo-no-hitomi, is truly a feast for your eyes**

We cannot talk about recommended courses on the Bandai-Azuma Skyline without talking about the Mt. Issaikyo Course. The highlight is the view from the summit of Mt. Issaikyo of the mystic lake, Majo-no-hitomi, which translates to "witch's eye" or what is often called Goshikinuma Pond. Thanks to the Skyline, you can drive all the way up to Jododaira, which is the trailhead at an elevation of 1,600 meters, making it an easy starting point to start your climb. The feeling of accomplishment and the amazing view that you get when you reach the top of the trail breathless from climbing the sand and gravel trail, is truly a feast for the eyes. The primeval forest on Mt. Higashiazumayama and Mt. Iegatayama of Marie's firs and other coniferous trees are also well worth seeing. As you enter the forest of Marie's firs, you will see large Erman's birch trees scattered here and there, which is fascinating in itself.

Don't stray from the mountain climbing or wooden paths

The Okenuma Course is another great course. Even beginners can climb this course without any trouble. Okenuma Lake is the deepest of the Azuma mountain crater lakes with a maximum depth of 13 meters. The autumn foliage and new greenery reflected in the water's mirror surface are particularly beautiful. After enjoying Okenuma, you might want to visit the Azuma-goya mountain hut to the east of the lake. There is a rest space where you can drink some of the tea that you brought along.

When climbing a mountain, it means that humans are entering nature, so please be careful not to stray from the mountain climbing or wooden paths when walking. The wooden paths are not maintained to make it easy for people to walk, but rather, they are maintained to prevent hundreds of people walking back and forth on areas where there is no wooden path and ruining and stripping the land, thus affecting the surrounding vegetation. Please do not stray from the wooden paths in order to protect the beautiful landscape.

Finally, let's talk about spreading the fun of mountain climbing. Use the free apps available on your smartphone for mountain climbing and use their various maps, GPS, and photo sharing functions to make walking even more fun.

P. 6, 7

① **Fruits Farm Itoh President
Mr. Takanori Itoh**

② Born into a farming family, Takanori Itoh is a fourth-generation farmer who has allowed his curiosity to lead him into doing things most people wouldn't. At 22, he was the first person in the area to try his hand at growing grapes. At 25, he went to Europe on an agricultural study trip with Fukushima Prefecture. However, the days of smooth sailing ended when the nuclear accident occurred. In an effort to dispel the harmful rumors, at age 65 he started a 6th sector business drying and processing high-end grapes. The perfect balance of sweet and tart in the large, dried grapes led to his success in commercializing his product, and along with their luxurious packaging, they are now known both domestically and overseas. In this issue, we give you a closer look at Mr. Itoh and his bold efforts from production to 6th sector commercialization, to sales.

③ **Attempting to sell dried grapes using a high-end variety to dispel rumors**

Mr. Takanori Itoh's farm is located in one of the fruit growing areas that spread in the northeastern part of Fukushima. When he started growing grapes 51 years ago, it was one hardship after another. Recalling the days back then, Mr. Itoh said, "I couldn't forget the deliciousness of the large, sweet premium variety 'kyoho' grapes when I first tried them, so I continued to grow them while paying meticulous attention to the soil." It took five years for his Kyoho to become a saleable product and 10 years for it to really get off the ground. Once his efforts began to pay off, he added the Takao and Pione varieties, and during the off-season for farming, he and his wife would travel overseas to get recuperated and make new discoveries. Everything was on track.

However, the situation took a turn when the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Accident happened. Harmful rumors spread and sales of fruits and vegetables took a plunge. When receiving advice from the Fukushima Prefecture Small Business Association, he came across the keyword "dried grapes" and allowed his natural curiosity to lead him into a bold new challenge. Conducting research while consulting with the Fukushima Technology Centre, Agricultural Technology Centre Prefectural Agricultural College, and growers in Iwate Prefecture, he succeeded in commercializing his product in 2013. In 2015, when he launched a dried-fruit product featuring additive-free, large, Kyoho grapes with a sweetness level of at least 18 degrees and two bunches dried on one branch, words about their juiciness and depth of their sweet permeating flavor began to spread. However, "we still had difficulty turning them into a business," said Mr. Itoh.

Changing the status quo and starting anew with quality and design

Around that time, Mr. Itoh attended a lecture where he learned that design is what highlights a product's appeal, communicates it, and sends it directly to the necessary people. He immediately consulted with the lecturer. With the help of a grant, he worked together with a design company to develop a comprehensive branding strategy, including packaging, logo, and an exhibit booth, that would convey the hopes of the creators behind the product. In 2016, the design was complete, and it expressed a sense of luxury and premium qualities of Kyoho and the newly introduced Shine Muscat variety with a refined, black-toned color scheme. Mr. Itoh began attending business meetings wearing a bowtie and black vest.

"In addition to the packaging that gives a sense of specialness, when I go to Tokyo dressed as a sommelier, the people I meet started to remember me. People from airlines, railways, and department stores now approach me." Mr. Itoh has been interviewed on TV and in newspapers for his efforts to start anew, and he was even given the chance to test selling his products in Singapore. Since then, he has expanded his product lineup to include 100% pure fruit juice and fruit vinegar, and in 2019, Mr. Itoh introduced the option of doing a farm stay for people who want to experience farm work. When asked what his next goal is, he replied, "I want to expand overseas and pass down the know-how I have cultivated in my orchard to my 26-year-old granddaughter who says she wants to follow in her grandfather's footsteps. I'm 73, so I'm at the age where I'm thinking it would be fantastic if my granddaughter takes over!" Mr. Itoh will have to work a little longer until his granddaughter, who will inherit her grandfather's spirit, is ready to stand on her own two feet. We are cheering for you, Mr. Itoh!

④ **His insatiable curiosity led him to succeeded in making premium grape varieties a 6th sector business and in branding the products**



P. 8

① **Fukushima Chamber Orchestra established in the town of Yuji Koseki!**

Please help support this project through our crowdfunding effort

The first professional orchestra, "Koseki Yuji no Machi Fukushima Chamber Orchestra" (Fukushima Chamber Orchestra in the Town of Yuji Koseki) will be established in one of Japan's best concert halls beloved by countless musicians, the Fukushin Yume no Ongakudo (Fukushima City Concert Hall).

A crowdfunding effort is being conducted to support the Fukushima concert hall-based orchestra. We look forward to your cooperation and warm support in this effort.

② **Fukushima Sweets Premium**

Fukushima Sweets Premium program certifies delectable sweets made with agricultural produce grown in Fukushima City under the Fukushima City brand. All products that receive this certification are available for sale to the general public, so please don't miss an opportunity to taste these premium sweet for yourself. Please see the Fukushima City homepage for details on the certified products and where they can be purchased.

