

Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JULY 2022

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 Special Feature: Michi-no-Eki Fukushima

② On April 27, 2022, Michi-no-Eki Fukushima celebrated its grand opening, and every day since then, the station has been bustling with visitors and shoppers! Please be sure to read the contents of this magazine before you visit. The main building is designed based on the image of a piano, reflecting Fukushima's status as the birthplace of popular music composer Yuji Koseki, and makes abundant use of local timber in its construction. Among the products sold at the direct sales counter, the fresh fruit grown in Fukushima City, which has a reputation as “a Jewel Box of Fruit,” is particularly recommended. In the summertime, visitors can enjoy a wide selection of peaches, ranging from early to late varieties, followed by pears, grapes, and apples as summer moves into autumn. There are also sweets, processed foods, and side dishes, as well as a wide assortment of Joban seafood and a local sake that has won nine consecutive gold medals at the Annual Japan Sake Awards. Adults and children alike can pass the time pleasantly dining in a restaurant that offers magnificent views of the Azuma Mountains through large panoramic windows, exploring the indoor children's playground with its refreshing wood-scented atmosphere, or exercising their pet dogs in the free dog run. Located next to the Fukushima-Ozaso IC on the Tohoku Chuo Expressway, Michi-no-Eki Fukushima is expected to serve as a base for attracting and interacting with visitors, sending out information, and promoting industry, as well as for regional development through co-creation with various entities. Please look ahead to further developments in future.



③ Presenting Fukushima’s “Seasons” through Delicious Sweets

④ At Fruit Factory Yuki Usagi, a take-out store inside Michi-no-Eki Fukushima, the aim is to create and cook delicious sweets. In an effort to encourage the local community, the staff make active use of fruit in season sourced direct from the Fruit Line in the orchard area adjacent to the station. Please pay particular attention to the sweets featuring the famous “snow rabbit” of Mt. Azuma, which were developed with a focus on their unique appearance and “Fukushima-like” quality that will entice you to pick them up. During the summertime, Yuki Usagi will sell its flagship fruit parfait desserts, which are made using Fukushima’s renowned peaches. And from now on, the store will continue to develop exciting menus that change with the seasons in order to attract and delight customers visiting Michi-no-Eki Fukushima at any time of year!

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① For many years, Nobuei Higuchi, who lives in the Ozaso district in northwestern Fukushima City, helped his parents cultivate rice paddies, strawberries, chives, and cucumbers while also working at a company job. Since his retirement, he has taken over the family business and these days he devotes the bulk of his energies to growing rice, vegetables and fruit—mainly peaches and pears. In addition, this year he took on the role of chairman of the Michi-no-Eki Fukushima Producers’ Council, when the station opened just a two-minute drive from his home. We interviewed Mr. Higuchi, who told us, “We are excited to be able to deliver outstandingly fresh fruits and vegetables to our customers,” and asked him about the fruit trees he cultivates and his thoughts on Michi-no-Eki Fukushima.

② Chairman of the Michi-no-Eki Fukushima Producers’ Council, Fruit Grower Nobuei Higuchi

③ Focused on farming since retiring from full-time work.
Lives just two minutes’ drive from Michi-no-Eki Fukushima.
Takes pride in delivering fresh fruits and vegetables.

④ Ozaso’s excellent soil and plentiful water produces many kinds of delicious fruits.

Fukushima City is a “Jewel Box of Fruit” where people can enjoy a rich variety of fruits of guaranteed high quality. Ozaso, where Mr. Higuchi was born and raised, is one of the city’s main fruit-growing areas. When we asked him about the characteristics of the area, he replied as follows.
“This is a place where we can enjoy a wide variety of locally-grown fruits including cherries, peaches, pears, grapes, and apples, in an interrupted progression from early summer to early winter. I don’t think there is any other area in the city that produces such a diverse range of fruits.”
According to Mr. Higuchi, one of the main reasons for this is the abundance of mineral-rich water in the Ozaso district, including the Jurokunuma Swamp, which has been used as an agricultural reservoir since before the Meiji era, as well as Takishimizu, which was previously used as sources for the simple water supply system, the Ozaso Dam, and the Kitahattandagawa River. In the Meiji era, almost all of the households in Ozaso were farmers. The district seems to be an area where updated agriculture, passed down from one generation to the next, continues to thrive.

Summertime means peaches! Don’t miss the early ripening Hatsuhome variety, which begins shipping in July.

As a fruit grower, Mr. Higuchi produces three varieties of peaches, namely (in order of earliest harvest season) Hatsuhome, Akatsuki, and Madoka, as well as about eight varieties of pears, including Kosui, Hosui, Oshu, Kaori, and the increasingly popular Akizuki. In addition, this year he has taken on the role of



chairman of the Michi-no-Eki Fukushima Producers' Council, an organization of farmers and growers who supply agricultural produce to the roadside station. The council has about 200 registered members, including people engaged in producing all manner of fruits, vegetables, horticulture, and other produce. "The sales floor is large, and we are all strongly motivated to do our best because we get to see the fruits and vegetables that we put so much time and effort into growing being sold at close quarters." In July peaches will begin to be shipped to the roadside station, in addition to fresh outdoor-grown vegetables such as eggplants, cucumbers, and new potatoes. Everyone is enthusiastic about this year's crops, including those planted last year, which were devastated by frost damage. In particular, Mr. Higuchi is looking forward to shipping Hatsuhome, one of Fukushima Prefecture's original peach varieties that he began growing four or five years ago. "I planted them because I wanted to ship the tastiest of the early varieties that signal the arrival of the peach season," he explained. "The harvest season is from late June to early July. Last year, when I ate these peaches, they were so fresh and tasty and had a high sugar content, so I was confident that they would be excellent. We don't have many of them since this is our first shipment, but if you can find them on the sales floor, be sure give them a try."

**Meet up with fresh local vegetables and fruits at a roadside station with a breathtaking view!
Spread the word!**

About a four-minute drive from Michi-no-Eki Fukushima, in the area around Ozaso, nestled in a picturesque landscape dominated by fruit and rice cultivation, is Shiogama Shrine, where Mr. Higuchi serves as the sodaicho—the head of shrine elders committee. The view from the top of Haneyama, the low hill where the shrine—long venerated as the home of the guardian deity of the entire Shindatsu Plain—is located, is truly magnificent. You can see Mt. Shinobu off in the distance, while the foreground offers a panorama of rice paddies, where you may just catch the early seedlings swaying in the breeze. "I hope that the station will serve as a base for bringing together various local resources, increasing interactions, and generally attracting more people to the area," says Mr. Higuchi. Come and visit us as soon as possible to enjoy the very freshest fruit and some spectacular scenery.

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① A Just right Trip, Staying in Fukushima

② Fukushima City is just 90 minutes from Tokyo. A medium-sized city, Fukushima offers visitors rich natural surroundings, a wide variety of recreational activities, gourmet food, hot springs, traditional culture, and a plethora of other attractions that are difficult or impossible to find in Japan's larger metropolitan areas. Whether you want to have fun, eat out, or simply unwind, you are sure to find something in Fukushima that is just right for you. In this issue, we would like to introduce some "things you can eat" that are perfect for beating the summer heat. Our list includes soul food unique to the local area, farm cafés where you can savor delicious fruit fresh from the orchard, and stylish cafés where the emphasis is on relaxation... Visit Fukushima, where you can explore and discover the distinctive cuisine of a region blessed with abundant nature.

**③ Hot Soul Food to Help You Beat the Summer Heat!
Fukushima's Disk Dumplings**

Fukushima's distinctive disk dumplings, or enban gyoza in Japanese, have a history going back to just after the Second World War, when they first began to be served in restaurants throughout the city by people who had recently returned to Japan from Manchuria. In the postwar decades, salaried workers used to flock to gyoza restaurants on their way home from work, and many of these places still open from the evening. The dish itself is characterized by its disk shape with the individual dumplings placed close together to form a disk matching the shape of the pan, fried, and finally turned over onto a plate for serving. The dumplings are also healthy, containing plenty of vegetables, and they were certified as "100-year food" by the Agency for Cultural Affairs as part of its 2021 Food Culture Momentum Fostering Project.

**④ Farms and a Farmer-owned Cafés!
"Cool Sweets" Featuring the Taste of Seasonal Fresh Produce!**

Fruit tree cultivation thrives in Fukushima City, taking full advantage of the distinctive climatic and environmental conditions of the Fukushima Basin. Both the Fruit Line (Prefectural Road No. 5) and the Peach Line (National Road No. 13) are dotted with tourist farms and direct sales stands. Sweets made from seasonal fresh produce are also available!
* For further details, please check the latest information on the respective farms' websites and SNS accounts.



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① The Largest Straw Sandal in Japan!

The 53rd Fukushima Waraji Matsuri (Straw Sandal Festival) 2022

② The Waraji Matsuri, which has become a summer tradition in Fukushima City, was first held in 1970. The festival has its roots in the 400-year-old Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki Mairi (Mt. Shinobu Dawn Procession), in which a 12-meter-long straw sandals dedicated at Haguro Shine on Mt. Shinobu, and its Waraji Ondo theme song was originally composed by the nationally famous local composer Yuji Koseki. This year, the Waraji Odori and the Great Waraji Parade will take place for the first time in three years. The dancers will perform a new version of the Waraji Odori, which has been redesigned with dynamic music to bring even more excitement to the summer in Fukushima.

③ The 44th Fukushima Fireworks Festival

Under the theme of "An Orchestra of Hope for the Future," the Fukushima Fireworks Festival will be held for the first time in three years to pray that the COVID-19 pandemic will end and that the citizens of Fukushima will have the vitality to overcome the ravages of the disease with hope. On the evening of the festival, handheld fireworks from Toyohashi City in Aichi Prefecture and fireworks from Fukushima, which have deepened their exchanges since the broadcast of the NHK morning TV drama series "Yell" in 2020, will color the summer sky.

