

# Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JANUARY 2023

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 280,000 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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①Manabu Taira says that after the Great East Japan Earthquake, he once again realized that he had been given an opportunity to work in the rich natural environment of Fukushima. He opened an indoor park called CHANNEL SQUARE (commonly known as CHANSUKU) as a place for children whose outdoor activities had been restricted after the nuclear accident. Then, in 2019, he started CHANNEL JOURNEY, a hands-on tourism program in which visitors can also learn about the ecosystem and the aquatic environment in an enjoyable atmosphere. In this article, we would like to introduce Mr. Taira, who has created a cycle that links nature, people, and communities through a variety of contents, and made playing in Fukushima more fun.

②Manabu Taira,  
Representative Director of General Incorporated Association F-WORLD

③I want to create a virtuous cycle that connects people with nature and revitalizes the community.

④CHANSUKU, an Indoor Park Serving Approximately 55,000 Visitors

While the indoor park CHANNEL SQUARE was open in Fukushima City between 2015 and 2018, it was used by a total of about 55,000 people, including children and teenagers who wanted to exercise as much as possible. According to Taira, “Some of the children who came to play at the indoor park during that period went on to become top skateboarders and slackliners.”

At present, F-WORLD is undertaking four major projects at CHANNEL SQUARE, namely the Yume Mirai Support Project, which is supporting children who want to become athletes; the dispatch of staff to the Skypia Adataru Active Park, an indoor complex in Nihonmatsu City (since 2019) that has a business tie-up with CHANNEL SQUARE; the Mobile Bus Station, a concept bus designed for off-grid operations by customizing a microbus so that it can be used for nature experience activities, facility PR, and tours; and CHANNEL JOURNEY, an outdoor sightseeing experience-type program centered on Menuma Pond.



### Walking on Water Using a SUP Board Surrounded by Menuma’s Natural Beauty

Taira is the representative director of F-WORLD, the general incorporated association that manages CHANNEL SQUARE. Falling in love at first sight with the natural beauty of the area about 40 minutes by car from the city center, last autumn he relocated his base from Minami-Yanome in Fukushima City to an old Japanese-style house called Menuma no Shiki Kobo in the small hot-spring town of Tsuchiyu Onsen. “The Tsuchiyu Onsen Tourist Association approached our association in 2020, and we partnered with them as a business influencer for the Tsuchiyu Action 20-25 Program. That’s how CHANNEL JOURNEY came into being.”

Taira, who has been enjoying a variety of sports in natural surroundings ever since he was a child, describes the appeal of Menuma as follows. “The pond was created following an eruption of Mount Azuma, and in terms of area is about twice the size of the Tokyo Dome. On some days, the clear surface of the water looks emerald green. Children who visit the pond are excited to see lots of insects and fish. The pond is a perfect place for SUP boarding because the water does not move. You can enjoy walking on the water while gazing at a mirror image of the sky, the summer mountains, or the autumn leaves reflected on the surface of the pond.”

### A Special Style of Winter Snow Play Winterwith Adventures in a Virgin Forest

Since the road leading to Menuma is closed in winter, the association rents a section of the shore of the pond every year from May to mid-November, and organizes an experience plan that combines SUP boarding, kayaking, barbequing, and relaxing in a sauna to showcase the splendor of the area surrounding the pond. “In late autumn, we remove all the structures and return the area to its natural state, and then the following spring we begin the same cycle of reassembling them again.” Taira feels that Menuma has enormous potential as a place where people can feel the energy of nature with their whole body and spend their time with awareness of the SDGs, including the fact that the area’s deep forests absorb carbon dioxide and contribute to the prevention of global warming. “Nature is something we humans cannot create. I hope to establish a virtuous cycle that connects people with nature and fills the region with vitality, while at the same time providing people with opportunities to experience the fun and profundity of nature through tours,” says Taira.

CHANNEL JOURNEY’s winter tour will move its location to Washikura Onsen in Tsuchiyu Toge Onsenkyo and begin the new year in a special style next January. Set off on a snowmobile or snowboard (snow surfing) adventure through the snow-covered virgin forest! At the end of your snow mountain experience, a secluded hot spring bath awaits you!

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①A Just right Trip, Staying in Fukushima

②Fukushima 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 will introduce a wide variety of “you can play” ideas ranging from fruit picking to encounters with the unknown. You should be able to find the kind of fun that best matches your mood. Enjoy Fukushima freely by following your curiosity.

③Lots of Fun from Early Summer to Early Winter! Fruit Picking

The section nicknamed the Fruit Line is well known for its sprawling fruit fields and the numerous tourist orchards and direct sales stands that line both sides of the road. Beginning in mid-June, when cherry picking and direct sales begin, the season of fruits continues for about six months and also includes peaches, pears, grapes, and apples. Please come and enjoy Fukushima’s delicious fresh fruits.



④Rent a Bicycle for Your Orchard Excursion!

Easy and convenient e-bike rentals are available at Michi no Eki Fukushima, which is located along the Fruit Line! When you visit Michi-no-Eki Fukushima, we recommend cycling around the orchards in the surrounding area.

⑤Enjoy the Outdoors Casually! Campsite

You can stay at a campsite that makes the most of Fukushima City's abundant nature. Refresh your mind and body in a space where you can feel a sense of the extraordinary.

⑥Get a Taste of Traditional Crafts! Tsuchiyu Kokeshi Doll Painting Experience

At Shiki no Sato (Village of the Four Seasons) in the southwest of Fukushima City, visitors can experience painting Tsuchiyu Kokeshi dolls at the handicraft museum inside the park.

Tsuchiyu Kokeshi dolls originated at Tsuchiyu Onsen and are considered one of the three most famous Kokeshi dolls in Japan along with those from Togatta and Naruko. Using a hand-turned potter's wheel, you can create your own original Kokeshi dolls by drawing in the features such as snake eyes, whale eyes, round nose (long nose), and the rokuro (potter's wheel) lines that are characteristic of Tsuchiyu Kokeshi dolls.

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①Enjoy the Mysterious Romance of Iino Town, Home of Japan's First UFO Research Institute!

②Iino Town in southern Fukushima City is a place where you can enjoy a mysterious romance associated with numerous UFO sightings that have been reported over many years. Thirty years ago, Iino began its efforts to revitalize the local community as "The Home of UFOs" (UFO no Sato). In 2021, the town launched the UFO no Sato Iino Sacred Place Project and established the International UFO Lab as Japan's first UFO research institute. With the help of project leader Ryuichi Aso, we would like to introduce the attractions of this project.

③Senganmori, a Mysterious Mountain Visited by UFO Enthusiasts from All Over Japan

Iino Town, in the southeastern part of Fukushima City, has been the location of many UFO sightings since before the town amalgamated with Fukushima City. The symbol of the area, Mount Senganmori, rises 462 meters above sea level and has a beautiful conical shape that is reminiscent of an ancient Egyptian pyramid. Also, the megalithic stones scattered around the town are regularly arranged, making it a mysterious and romantic spot that attracts UFO enthusiasts from all over the country. I was not the kind of boy who would look up at the sky with interest, but I witnessed a UFO. Iino Town is that kind of place.



The Birth of a Research Institute in Iino Town, the Only Facility in Japan Specializing in UFOs

The UFO no Sato Iino Sacred Place Project was launched the year before last, inspired by the desire to revisit the efforts of our parents' generation. About 30 years ago, the youth club of the local chamber of commerce and industry launched a project to revitalize Iino Town as The Home of UFOs (or UFO no Sato in Japanese). It was around that time that the Iino UFO Museum opened. As we continued to engage in a variety of activities, such as installing stone statues of aliens around Mount Senganmori and in the shopping district, and building a bus stop bearing the name UFO no Sato, people began to recognize Iino Town as the Home of UFOs.

As the years went by, we finally arrived at 2022, the year before the Iino UFO Museum was due to celebrate its 30th anniversary. We decided that this would be a good time to do something by ourselves to make the Home of UFOs more exciting. Iino is the only town in Japan with a facility dedicated to UFOs, and we decided to inject some serious fun into the place.

The new project was launched on June 24, 2021 in honor of UFO Day, and the International UFO Lab was opened inside the Iino UFO Museum. Mr. Takeharu Mikami, editor-in-chief of monthly occult magazine Mu, accepted the post of first director of the UFO Lab.

Currently, at the UFO Lab, we are working hard to revitalize the local area by collecting, analyzing, and publishing information on UFO sightings, conducting research surveys and holding challenges for encounters with UFOs, investigating and researching the secrets of the mysterious Mount Senganmori, and producing and selling UFO-related products such as UFO Gyoza Dumplings and UFO Elephant Garlic.

Holding Japan's First Ever UFO Festival in November, 2022

These days we are seeing an increase in the number of visitors compared to the year before the center opened, and we expect the number of visitors to double in FY2022. We collect reports of UFO sightings, and we have received as many as 420 such reports in a single year, including from both inside Japan and around the world. Among them, one elderly person mailed us a hand-drawn illustration of a UFO that they said they had seen a long time ago. We have also heard from many locals who say, "I have watched UFOs too." The information we receive is analyzed and made available to the UFO Lab's membership (currently 400) on its website.

To encourage really people to have serious fun, we are also planning and holding a variety of events. In June of last year, the Institute held a one-year activity report meeting, a Senganmori Mystery Tour with Director Mikami, and a food market featuring delicacies produced in Iino Town. Then In November, we held Japan's very first UFO Festival to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Iino UFO Museum. The festival included an alien costume parade; a talk event with Director Mikami and the filmmaker Hideo Nakata, a Japanese horror film master who shot a movie set in Senganmori; and, for a limited time, a searchlight was turned on at the top of Senganmori to attract UFOs.

As for our future prospects, together with the residents of Iino, we are expanding our dream of making the Iino UFO Museum one of the three major centers in the world alongside the International UFO Museum and Research Center at Roswell, New Mexico in the United States and the UFO archive at the Center for the National Centre for Space Studies (CNES) in France. We would like to share the mystery and romance of Iino Town with as many people as possible by adding the Home of UFOs to the attractions of Fukushima City, which is renowned throughout Japan for its hot springs, delicious fruit, and spectacular Hanamiyama.

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①Fukushima's Hanging Hina-Dolls

Each and every stitch is made with the utmost care and attention. Please come along and see these adorable doll decorations.

②Fukushima City Half Marathon 2023

Fukushima City's brand-new Festival of Sports is about to get underway! Under the slogan "On Your Marks—Run to the Future, Fukushima", we have designed a course that allows the participants to fully enjoy the charms of Fukushima City, including its history, culture, and rich natural environment. In addition to runners, we're currently looking for volunteers and cheerleaders to support the runners! Please join us!

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