

Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JULY 2024

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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①Rediscover the Charm of the Region from an Outsider's Perspective! Special Feature

We interviewed members of the Community-Reactivating Cooperator Squad, who connect people with various resources

②The Community-Reactivating Cooperator Squad is an initiative that encourages people to move to rural areas with declining or aging populations and engage in a variety of community cooperation activities for a period of about one to three years. In Fukushima City, these volunteers are active in the Iizaka, Iino, Azuma, Tsuchiyu Onsen, Onami, and Matsukawa districts. For this summer issue of Fukushima Yume Tsushin, we asked three members of the squad to talk about their impressions of Fukushima City after moving here, what things they are currently working on, and their goals for the future.

③Hayato Osawa

④Marina Nagumo

⑤Tetsu Konno

⑥Why I Applied

Osawa: My wife and I were talking about how we wanted to live in a place surrounded by abundant nature, and then we found out about the recruitment for the Regional Development Cooperation Corps through the relocation scouting service SMOUT. I decided to apply because I had a strong desire to contribute to the local community by making use of my experience over many years of working in the food and beverage industry.

Nagumo: I majored in architecture at university and I wanted to be involved in some way in local community development. I was interested in renovating old houses and at the same time I was motivated by the passion of the local people.

Konno: After retirement, I had lots of options, including reemployment, but I wanted to take this opportunity to work at something I had never experienced before, and I also wanted to make a contribution to my hometown if possible.

What I Felt After Moving Here and How My Life Changed

Osawa: Living in the Onami district, I get the feeling that the people around here are quite shy. They are passionate people who care about their friends, but they are also reserved. On the other hand, when I am in trouble, they are quick to come to the rescue. There are people around here who can do anything, which makes me think "Wow! The countryside is amazing!" Also, one of the reasons I decided to move to Fukushima after visiting the area several times, is that the scenery is superb. The sunrises are particularly beautiful. I like to go outside around 6:00 a.m. to look at the scenery while sipping coffee.

Nagumo: I started living in the Matsukawa district in April. The rural landscape with tractors and light trucks coming and going overlaps with the scenery of her hometown and this gives me a warm feeling. When I helped out at the Kumagaiso no Sato Festival, I enjoyed the delicious meals that all the staff ate together, and for the first time in ages I felt the same sort of joy that I used to experience in school at lunch time. I have also started to enjoy food by visiting farmers' markets and roadside stations.

Konno: I'd been living outside Fukushima Prefecture for about 40 years, so I feel a sense of nostalgia at coming back to live here. It is also nice to be able to work face to face with the people of Iino Town. Unlike the work I used to do as a company employee, where I was just performing my duties, I feel that the true nature of my current work is that it gives me a real sense of accomplishment.

Memorable Events During My Activities

Osawa: Three months after I first arrived, I had to open Kominka Café imoca, which was a tough job. But when I was in trouble, local people came rushing to my aid like Superman. I was very impressed because I had never had neighbors like this before. The café is visited by people from within Fukushima City, as well as from Koriyama and Sendai cities, and also by tourists traveling on Route 115. Sometimes women from the community dress up and then visit the café, which makes me very happy. A local resident once told me, "A friend told me that you opened a café in the Onami district. Thank you for helping our community."

Nagumo: There are a lot of well-known flower-viewing spots in the Matsukawa district, such as the weeping cherry trees on Mt. Uwada and kumagaiso (Japanese lady slipper orchids) at Kumagaiso no Sato. I've heard stories about how Matsukawa has become a place that is loved by many people and that everyone works together to protect it, and I think it's really cool to see the people of the district unite for the sake of everyone who comes to see the flowers.

Konno: The Iino district is a unique place where UFOs have been used as a means of promoting the community for the past 30 years, and being able to help out in the district has been a highlight of my life. People who live in big cities tend to retire after they reach the age of 60, but in the countryside people of that age are still young. Living in Iino, I feel energized again. There aren't many people coming into or going out of the countryside, and also there are more going out than coming in. If you spend time in Iino while remembering to maintain an "outsider's perspective," you will realize that the ordinary everyday lives of the people of the district are actually pretty amazing. I feel that by putting this into words, it will somehow help to foster a sense of pride in the local community.

My Future Goals

Osawa: For the near future, I want to do something by utilizing a space on the north side of the café. I have two plans. Firstly, I would like to establish "Onami Day" by creating a place where everyone can gather and local residents can communicate with each other. And secondly, I want to hold workshops and yoga classes to increase the number of people who are not local residents but are involved in the café and the community. Ultimately, I would like to increase the number of people living in Onami, but there are not many houses available to accommodate the people who are moving into the district, so I want to do something about that as well. One other thing is the young people in the community. They are all very nice people, but at the same time they are rather reserved. I would like to hear their voices more.

Nagumo: I have only been here for a short time, so I have not yet started on the renovation of the old house. But I am considering several plans, such as "Can it be turned into a place for selling rice, vegetables, and side dishes grown or produced by local people?" and "Can one corner be used as a space for supporting young people or those who want to start up a business?" I have yet to hear what the local residents want to be done with the old house, so I would like to listen carefully to their ideas and I hope to make the house a good place for the community.

Konno: I think it's time to sort out what I have seen from the outsider's perspective that I have maintained while living in the district for a year and a half. As Nagumo-san mentioned, I think it's important for people in the community to decide what they want to do with their hometowns. This year, Iino Town held the Iino Tsurushi-bina Festival in conjunction with the cherry blossom viewing season at Hanayashiki Park. This event was designed to reduce the burden of attracting visitors and to encourage people to wander from the park to the town center. Even events that have been passed down for generations can no longer be held in the same way as they used to be. This was truly a wise decision. If we can hold events smartly, the next generation will be able to continue them. For the remaining 18 months of my time, I would like to help local residents rediscover the attractions of their town and communicate them to the wider world on their own using social media and other means.

If you would like to know more about the activities of the Community-Reactivating Cooperator Squad, please check out their websites or SNS accounts. Also, if you are visiting Fukushima City, be sure to visit the three volunteers' "favorite spots."

⑦The Volunteers' Favorite Spots in Fukushima

⑧Hayato Osawa's Favorite Spot

The Satoyama Landscape of the Onami District Seen from Café imoca, an Old Japanese-style Farmhouse

The view of the countryside is at its best when you go outside in the morning. Plum, kobushi magnolia, and mountain cherry trees blossom in the spring on the slopes of the low hills. The summer is green, with the rice paddies and the rural landscape dyed various shades of green. In the fall, you can enjoy the vivid colors of the autumn leaves, and in winter, the scene is covered in snow.



⑨Marina Nagumo's Favorite Spot

A Pleasant Straight Road: Prefectural Road No. 52, the Tsuchiyu Onsen Line

On the way from the Matsukawa Smart IC on the Tohoku Expressway heading toward Tsuchiyu Onsen, you will enjoy driving between Numabukuro and Mizuhara in Matsukawa Town along a straight road lined with rice paddies on both sides. The open sky and the green rice paddies stretch on and on as far as the eye can see.

⑩Tetsu Konno's Favorite Spot

The Magnificent Panoramic View from Senganmori

Senganmori, the symbol of Iino Town, is a mountain with an outstanding view that extends towards the distant Azuma and Adataru Mountains, which are visible on a clear day. In addition, there are numerous viewing points including the terrace of the UFO products shop, the Senganmori trailhead, and the UFO contact deck at the summit of the mountain. Why not pay Senganmori a visit?

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①Atsushi Ito, a cyclist who has traveled the world, fell in love with the sport of cycling when he was making round trips by bicycle between Tokyo and his parents' home in Iino, Fukushima City during his university days. "There are views that can only be seen on a cycling trip," he told us. While still a student, he successfully crossed the United States by bicycle, and in all he has traveled to approximately countries so far. In 2021, he established a base in Fukushima City, where he currently manages two accommodation facilities, La Unión and El Amarillo. We asked Mr. Ito about the charm of the Fukushima Basin and the thoughts he puts into the accommodation services he provides.

②Atsushi Ito

③Designed by a Cyclist Who Has Traveled the World— Accommodation and Travel that Celebrates Life in the Fukushima Basin and People-to-People Relationships

④Renovating an Old Building to Use as a Café and Guest House

La Unión, which opened three years ago in Omachi, Fukushima City, is a guest house with dormitories (shared rooms), private rooms, and a café lounge, and serves a menu of foods and drinks personally selected by Ito, who is a world traveler.

When asked why he decided to return to Fukushima City after 18 years away and set up an accommodation facility, Ito said, "Probably there were a lot of elements of luck and fate involved." He decided from the start to open the restaurant during the COVID-19 pandemic, explaining, "I figured that if the business was on track at its lowest point, things could only get better from there. Of course, difficulties were bound to occur. But as it turned out, I was able to open the guest house in the heart of the city." So, why did he choose the accommodation business? "I was motivated by what I learned during my bicycle trips. One of the requirements for being a good town is to have good lodging facilities. Good towns where travelers can stay for an extended period must have good accommodations. I started this project because I wanted to make Fukushima a good town.

Turning the Experience of Living in the Fukushima Basin into Inbound Tourism Content

As he develops his business, Ito bears two particular considerations in mind. The first consideration is to use La Unión as a base from which people can treat the city as if it was a large theme park and enjoy dining, hot spring bathing, shopping, and various other activities. "The worldview I have in mind is to support visitors in experiencing life within the Fukushima Basin. At La Unión, I want to give travelers the opportunity to enter the circle of hospitality that emanates from the lifestyle that has been nurtured in the basin, while at the same time charging a fair price for the hospitality. I believe this is my role as both a local and an outsider who has been away from Fukushima for a long time." The new facility, El Amarillo, which opened in May of this year, has two guestrooms equipped with kitchens where travelers who want to experience life in Fukushima for a longer period of time can cook food they buy at supermarkets and other stores in the city. "I believe that if people alter their perspective, they will see that there are still many diverse worlds out there, and I think there are many interesting things travelers can do," he added.

The second consideration is to promote a lifestyle that emphasizes valuing what you have. La Unión is a self-renovated guest house occupying a building that has overlooked the town for about 50 years. "We kept as much of the building as we could, including the floors that have been restored to their original state and the old-fashioned electrical switchboard. This also comes from a perspective I gained from my travels, that of using and repairing existing bicycle parts with care," Ito explained.

In the Current Era of Information Overflow, It's Good to Travel and Enjoy Coincidences

The guest house is frequented by travelers from overseas, and sometimes people that Ito has met during his travels come to visit. "They just show up on the spur of the moment without making a reservation. And yet when that happens, beds always seem to become available somehow. For me, this sort of thing restores my faith in the power of the coincidences that come with travel, and also reminds me of my own readiness to continue on a journey when things get tough, even if there is no way to return home and I have no good options," said Ito. "People are always a little tense when they travel. So, when people I've met on my travels show up here unexpectedly, I realize once again that I want to provide a place for people to stay in a foreign country where they can rest and relax as if it was their second home."

Ito says that his current hope is that the business he started at his own initiative will lead to something good for the community in which he lives. If you get a chance to visit Fukushima City, why not try to experience life in the basin by bicycle?

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①Fukushima Summer Festivals

②The 46th Fukushima Fireworks Festival

Saturday, July 27, 19:30–20:30

Shinobugaoka Stadium, Shinobugaoka Ryokuchi Park

This fireworks festival is a colorful summer tradition in Fukushima City. This year again, there will be a spectacular joint performance of powerful fireworks from Fukushima and Tezutsu handheld fireworks from Toyohashi in Aichi Prefecture, as well as musical fireworks sponsored by the JRA Fukushima Racecourse. Please enjoy this display of approximately 8,000 fireworks that light up the night sky.

Paid Spectator Seating

Round table seats	Table for 4 people	¥14,000/table
Table seats	Long table (shared seats)	¥3,500/person
S seats	Folding chairs	¥3,500/person
A seats	Stairs	¥2,500/person
B seats	Stand seats (adults)	¥1,000/person
	(junior high school students and younger)	¥500/person

③The 55th Fukushima Waraji Festival

Friday, August 2, 18:00–21:00 Shinobu-dori, Ekimae-dori Purification

Saturday, August 3, 18:00–21:00 Shinobu-dori, Ekimae-dori

Sunday, August 4, 09:30– Haguro Shrine

④Fifty people carry a giant waraji (straw sandal), measuring 12 meters long and 1.4 meters wide, through the streets of Fukushima. The Waraji Odori dance, which is performed to the live music and singing of the Waraji Ondo, is also a must-see. The venue, enveloped in shouts of "Wasshoi!" and the enthusiasm of the audience make summer in Fukushima a hot and exciting time!

⑤Paid Spectator Seating

SS seats	Table for 4 people	¥18,000/table
S seats	Table for 4 people	¥14,000/table
A seats	Folding chairs	¥3,000/person
B seats	Folding chairs	¥2,000/person
C seats	Folding chairs	¥1,000/person

