

Fukushima Dreams - a triannually publication of Fukushima City — July 2015

Thanks for picking up this "Fukushima Dreams - a triannually publication of Fukushima City." Through this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima city has to offer.

Fukushima is a city of around 280,000 people, surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is famous as a fruit-producing area, producing many varieties throughout the seasons, including cherries, peaches, nashi pears, grapes, and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little what Fukushima City has to offer.



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① Enjoy a Retro Local Train

Fukushima Kotsu's Iizaka line is a railway that runs a short 9.2 km from JR Fukushima Station to Iizaka Onsen Station. This is an important transport link not only for city workers and students, but also for tourists visiting Iizaka Onsen. This page introduces to you the charms of the local Iizaka line, along which there are even small crossings that directly lead to some residents' homes.



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① Fukushima Talent — Interview No. 8

A Style Created by His Grandfather

A young bonsai artist, inheritor to Kūkan Yūbi - the "aesthetics of space"

Daiki Abe is third generation at Bonsai-ya Abe, which for over 80 years has been situated in the foothills of Mt. Azuma. At times, he delves deep into the mountains to look at the branches, trunks, and roots of ancient trees, and uses this inspiration in his work. Here, we will talk to him about the appeal of bonsai, which brings shape to this Kūkan Yūbi.



② Third Generation at Bonsai-ya Abe

Daiki Abe

Daiki Abe PROFILE

His late grandfather Kurakichi was a pre-eminent practitioner of bonsai, having even worked on the imperial palace. Together with his father Ken'ichi, Daiki pursues this style of Kūkan Yūbi established by his grandfather. While busy with the day-to-day business of selling seedlings to use in bonsai and taking care of the plants, he also gives lectures, exhibitions, and classes on making kokedama (moss balls) both within Japan and overseas, and these allow him to show off the appeal of bonsai. This autumn, these activities will take him to Switzerland and France.

Facebook : Bonsai-ya Abe <https://www.facebook.com/kukanyubi>

③ Bonsai, Still Moving People

Daiki had no indecision about becoming the third generation at Bonsai-ya Abe. Returning after five years of training, he first set his mind to increasing awareness of bonsai. "While nurturing seedlings and taking care of plants, I started off by participating in young artisans markets, and flea markets." This led to requests for talks and for teaching activities such as making kokedama.

Then, just as his bonsai work was really taking off, Japan was hit by the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011. "I really wondered if I should go on. At that time, people who had evacuated to Fukushima city said "bonsai calms me" before they returned home. These words are what made me decide to continue. "The first bonsai exhibition held after the earthquake in the summer of 2011 saw many attendees.

④ Promoting bonsai's appeal overseas, using Mt. Azuma as a model

The style of the Abe family's bonsai was established by his grandfather Kurakichi, and this gave form to Kūkan Yūbi. Its appeal has been shown off around the world in a book by Kurakichi, and this has been translated into several languages. His parents have been giving presentations in Belgium for the last 10 years. Daiki explains. "Emotion is the driving force behind bonsai. If you're moved by natural, formative arts, then you'll want to let other people know as well. I think that bonsai works precisely because words alone cannot convey that feeling. Using Mt. Azuma as a model, I'd like to keep creating pieces that refresh anyone seeing them." We hope you can experience this charm, through bonsai exhibitions as well as through friendly kokedama workshops.

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① The Culture of Fukushima

Fukushima, the Home of Handicrafts, From the Past into the Future

Based at the Fukushima Minka-en, the "Fukushima City Minka-en Handweaving Association" is actively engaged in activities to hand down Fukushima's traditions of silkworm cultivation and weaving, which propelled Japan's modernization.

② Outstanding Skills Built Upon a Long History

Misako Suzuki, the leader of the Fukushima City Minka-en Handweaving Association explained. "When visitors watch us work the loom, the sight, together with the surrounding view, makes them—especially seniors—recall memories from their youth of their mothers doing similar things." "By taking part in these activities, we can get to know Fukushima's advanced weaving techniques and long history. We are always being surprised, and making new discoveries."

Long ago, the climate of the Shindatsu area in the north of the prefecture lent itself to sericulture. In 1899, the first Bank of Japan branch in the Tōhoku region was established in Fukushima. The reason for this was twofold — Fukushima was a major trading center for silk, at that time Japan's main export overseas; and Fukushima was the financial center of the Tōhoku region. Accordingly, along with the energetic expansion of sericulture, there were also advances in weaving technologies.



The Revival of Traditional Handweaving

A Yumidana loom — one of the machines preserved and exhibited at the Minka-en. In order to resurrect this once-forgotten technology, they started by restoring a string heddle, one of the tools used in weaving.

As more information was collected, we found people who made comments such as "my mother used to weave using a Yumidana." By enlisting their help, we were able to restore the string heddles. "This Fukushima method of weaving that we have inherited is a real eye-opener, and I have come to really appreciate the levels of skill back then."

Yatsuhashi-ori is a type of silk woven using a Yumidana, and has a complex pattern using eight string heddles. The book of secrets inherited over four generations of the Yabuki family was deciphered by the Mrs. Sato, an advisor to the Handweaving Association, and over time, Yatsuhashi-ori has been brought back from obscurity.

Fabric from Fukushima

In an ever-increasingly modernized society, why do we pay so much attention to handweaving? By conveying on to the next generations the outstanding techniques and creations left to us by generations past, we want our children to be able to speak with pride of Fukushima's tradition of weaving. Why not take the time to visit Fukushima City's Minka-en, and see for yourself the handweaving culture that supported the development of Fukushima?

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① Looking for Participants in the Sweet Contest!

The city is holding confectionary contest using peaches, a fruit that represents "Treasure full of fruits, Fukushima." As well as showing off the appeal of "Treasure full of fruits, Fukushima." to the rest of Japan, the confectionary that wins top marks will be sold at confectioners, restaurants, hotels, and ryokans within Fukushima, further enhancing the appeal of Fukushima city.

If you are interested in participating, please view the application guidelines on the web site, and send in the application form by post.

<http://www.city.fukushima.fukushima.jp/soshiki/22/noushin15052001.html>



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