

Thanks for picking up this "Fukushima Dreams - a quarterly 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, Asian 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 One of the Top Three Birthplaces of Kokeshi
Tsuchiyu Kokeshi

② With their origins near the end of the Edo period, kokeshi dolls took form in the Tohoku region and have long been cherished there. They are now seeing a resurgence in popularity. Their simple pop aesthetic uses limited colors and shapes, and has an increasing appeal to young women and visitors from overseas. Tsuchiyu Onsen is known as one of the top three birthplaces of kokeshi. We asked Yukinori Jinnohara, the chairman of the Tsuchiyu Traditional Kokeshi Workers' Union, about the history of kokeshi, their allure, and new initiatives.

③ "Kokeshi," literally meaning "wooden dolls"

It is thought that kokeshi originally started as wooden dolls made by wood turners, who were proficient with a lathe in making daily items such as bowls and dishes. They became popular with visitors to the hot springs as presents for children, gradually becoming widespread throughout the region. At a later point, from the 1920s onwards, there was a new movement in the creation of Tsuchiyu Kokeshi. Mr. Jinnohara explained, "Increasing attention paid to the finish of the product meant that it evolved from being a children's toy, to being more of an ornament for adults to enjoy. This was known as the Tsuchiyu Kokeshi "kokeshi renaissance," and was key to the first kokeshi boom."

At that time, given that this was a miniature doll ("keshi") made out of wood ("ko"), in 1940, the name was standardized as "kokeshi" that could be understood by all. "Before this, everywhere had their own names for the dolls—in Tsuchiyu, they were known by names such as "degu" and "deko." The word "kokeshi" is actually quite new."

④ Hand-made individually, with a comforting warmth

The 1960s and 70s saw the second kokeshi boom, and we are now in what is called the third kokeshi boom. Mr. Jinnohara feels that "their appeal probably lies in their charming expression."

Kokeshi from Tsuchiyu are characterized by a roundel on the head, "kase" (bow) hair decorations, and lines painted using a lathe. They are simple yet serene, with a timeless charm. Professional kokeshi makers create each doll in the same way, however the small differences in expressions between each doll affect people in different ways—this is part of their appeal.

⑤ Initiatives to sustain Tsuchiyu Kokeshi into the future

With half a century of creating kokeshi behind him, Mr. Jinnohara comments, "Tradition can mean to retain practices. But it can also mean to incorporate new ideas and to change, while still valuing the past." "People have a desire to create better things, which is why I'd like young people to keep on challenging themselves—in this way, they will continue to create quality products into the future."

The Tsuchiyu Traditional Kokeshi Workers' Union is trying various measures to ensure that kokeshi will remain with us in the future. One of these is having "kokeshi painting workshops" visit elementary schools in Fukushima City. Mr. Jinnohara is also the chairman of the "Mirokukai" organized by kokeshi artisans from throughout the Tohoku region. In January this year, they decided to start full cooperation in activities to have kokeshi from five cities including Fukushima City registered as a "Japan Heritage" product. "A strong point of Tsuchiyu is that the locals all place great importance upon kokeshi. I think this affection comes from the kokeshis as a whole, and attracts people." In April every year, the major "Tsuchiyu Kokeshi Festival" is held. This year's festival will feature a talk session, aimed at increasing interest in having kokeshi registered as a special "Japan Heritage" product. We urge you to visit.



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① Special feature
Our inbound advisor —
using easy-to-understand English to show the world the appeal of Fukushima!

② We are now in spring, the season where a variety of flowers paint Fukushima City with a riot of color. We spoke with Andrew Coombs who works at the Fukushima City Tourist Information Center as an inbound advisor, providing guidance for visitors from overseas. We asked him about what he pays attention to, when trying to communicate the appeal of Fukushima.

③ A second home

Andrew Coombs ("Andy") works at the Fukushima City Tourist Information Center at the west exit of Fukushima Station. There, he provides visitors from overseas with information about sightseeing spots and transport within Fukushima City, in addition to translating tourist pamphlets, creating video material, and using social media to publicize the area. He considers Fukushima his second home, and his love of the prefecture shines through in his fluent Japanese.

Studying translation with the aim of helping Fukushima

Andy first encountered the Japanese language during his university days. "I was hoping to become an elementary school teacher. This had as a requirement studying a foreign language, and so I registered for Japanese. This led to me spending time as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher), and eventually ending up working here."

Andy married in March 2011, but he did not return to Australia even during the earthquake disaster. In 2014 at the end of his contract, he returned to Australia for a while to study translation at post-graduate level. This was spurred on by his desire to double down on his study of Japanese, and to somehow help Fukushima.



Many interesting and historic places are also part of Fukushima's appeal

We asked Andy about the attraction of Fukushima. He said "there are four distinct seasons, each with a different feel. Onsen (hot springs) and orchards are close to the city center, with many places of note and historic sites." Also, "the image that lots of foreigners have of Japanese is of Samurai. But so much history remains, even from before that time. I'd like to let visitors from overseas know more about Fukushima's history and culture, including the Miyahata Ruins from the Jomon period, as well as the Fukushima City Minka-en, haiku, and kokeshi."

Andy works at the tourist information center, which is also visited by many tourists from countries which do not have English as their mother tongue, such as Thailand, China, Germany, and France. He commented "this isn't a problem. I explain the attractions of Fukushima in easy English. Having taught English to children is really paying off." He is working hard so that when overseas visitors are looking up things about Fukushima online, they will be able to easily find a wealth of information on the beautiful scenery, delicious food, festivals, and Onsen of Fukushima. Please ensure that when you visit Fukushima, you drop in to see Andy.

④ Hanamiyama Walking Trail

Here, visitors can see a riot of color, with as many as 70 types of trees blooming—these include plums, Yoshino cherry, forsythia, quince, and flowering peach. Volunteer tourist guides called "Fukushima Flower Guides" are in attendance during this period, and they are happy to show off the highlights. On a clear day, it is possible to see Mt. Azuma Kofuji from the top of Hanamiyama. The abundance of cherry and rapeseed blossoms are a must-see.

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① Andy's recommended Fukushima spring walks

To the west, Mt. Azuma Kofuji, a swath of purple. To the east, Hanamiyama, a riot of color. According to Andy, the secret to enjoying spring in Fukushima is to "take in the views from high places, such as Mt. Shinobuyama, Hanamiyama, Bentenyama, Tatenoyama, and the Bandai Azuma Skyline." He will introduce you to his recommended viewing spots, so why not take a trip in Fukushima's gentle spring air? In the scenery dyed with the gentle hues of spring—this is where you will find the history and lifestyle of Fukushima, and the warmth in the hearts of its residents.



② Fukushima City Minka-en

Spread over expansive grounds, this introduces private houses, merchant establishments, and restaurants dating from the middle of the Edo Period through to the Meiji Period. Most of these have been relocated from the northern part of Fukushima Prefecture. This also features the "Kyu Hirose-za (Former Hirose theater)" theater, designated a National Important Cultural Property. With around 4,100 cherry trees, the adjacent Azuma Sports Park is another famous spot at which to take in the cherry blossoms. During cherry blossom season, these are also illuminated for your enjoyment.

③ Mount Shinobu Park

Mt. Shinobu is a symbol of Fukushima City, and its cherry trees were planted there by volunteers during the Meiji Period. More than a hundred years later, spring in Fukushima is dominated by this colorful spectacle. Here you will find a row of stalls selling products such as crepes and fried chicken. This is also illuminated during cherry blossom season.

④ Hanamomo-no-Sato in Iizaka Onsen

Here you can enjoy the breathtaking beauty of blossoms on around 300 flowering peach trees of 40 types from around the world. The top of Tatenoyama is a prime viewing spot, and from there you can take in the beauty of Iizaka Onsen in the spring. There are many other places nearby to enjoy the views of tree blossoms, such as Otowa Park.

⑤ Tanemaki-sakura (weeping cherry tree), Jitokuji Temple

"Tanemaki-sakura" is so called, because local farmers used to start planting seeds when this tree bloomed. Planted around 300 years ago, the tree is designated as a natural monument in Fukushima City. The tree in bloom with the temple as a backdrop is an impressive view, and as the temple is situated on a hill, this is a good spot from which to view Fukushima City. During cherry blossom season, this is illuminated (until 9 p.m.).

⑥ Daizoji Temple

The Daizoji Temple is home to the Senju Kannon statue, the largest of all the national important cultural properties of Fukushima Prefecture. Come spring, visitors can enjoy the beautiful blossoms of the 300-year old weeping cherry tree (photo) at the entrance, and the legendary "Chigo-zakura" cherry blossom within the temple grounds.

⑦ "Fukushima Guide" website <http://fukushima-guide.jp/>

An English-language web page to provide recommendations about Fukushima City. This also has a video in which Andy introduces Fukushima's Minka-en!

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① Post your best photos!

Account: wakuwaku_fukushima Name: Fukushima City Tourism and Convention Promotion Office

We'd like everyone to learn about the appeal of Fukushima City, and so we've created an Instagram hashtag.

"Wakuwaku" means exciting in Japanese, so use "#wakufuku" (exciting Fukushima) as the hashtag.

Let's get everyone excited about Fukushima City!

To post photos—

1. Follow the Fukushima City Tourism and Convention Promotion Office account.
2. Post a photo taken within Fukushima City using the hashtag "#wakufuku".
3. We'll introduce the most exciting photos on the Fukushima City website!

② Cover: The charming expressions of Tsuchiyu Kokeshi dolls

Explanation:

The expressions on the faces of kokeshi vary between the artisans who made them. This is most apparent when they are viewed side-by-side. They are said to resemble the faces of the artisan and their family, another factor in their appeal.

(Photo: Tsuchiyu Denshokan Museum)

