

# Iwaki Vision

Spring 2023



Iwaki Sunshine Marathon,

Hinamatsuri & more!



# Sunshine Market & Marathon Welcome Party



Claps Cheerleaders performing a pep rally. (Top left: strawberry, marshmallow and chocolate bagel from Sakurako-chan's Bagel Sandwiches. Bottom left: strawberry cream horn croissant from Iwaki Chocolat.

Iwaki's Sunshine Market kicked off on the morning of February 25<sup>th</sup> at Iwaki Station's Pedestrian Deck. This was in celebration of the Iwaki Sunshine Marathon which would take place on February 26<sup>th</sup>, after being postponed for five years due to unsuitable weather and the COVID-19 pandemic. To drum up hype for the marathon's triumphant return, the Sunshine Market offered some of Iwaki's finest cuisines from nine different stalls. Each used only the tastiest ingredients from Iwaki's sea and mountains, such as sea salt chocolate, baked goods, wine and locally grown fresh vegetables. Attendees were able to enjoy local cuisine while watching live performances of Jangara, a pep rally by Claps Cheerleaders and many more.



Furappe (left), Kibi-tan (center) and Hula Ojisan (right).

After speeches were given by Mayor Uchida, the marathon organisers and sponsors, the marathon's seven special guests representing Iwaki's sister cities were introduced on stage. Each was delighted to be in attendance and felt optimistic about the challenge ahead.

At 16:00 that same day, a welcome party took place in the Iwaki Washington Hotel. In attendance were marathon runners, organisers, company sponsors and of course, the Iwaki Vision staff! We even got a glimpse of Iwaki's Hula Ojisan and Furappe-chan, as well as Fukushima Prefecture's Kibi-tan, each of whom added to the excitement and posed for photos with their fans.



Richmond Sense (left, representing Townsville), Bridget Webber (center, representing Townsville) and Pedro Paulino Pais Abreu (right, representing Kauai County).



# Iwaki Sunshine Marathon



On February 26<sup>th</sup>, the long-awaited Iwaki Sunshine Marathon finally returned. Approximately 7,000 participants ran various distances between Iwaki's Track and Field Stadium and the finish line at Aquamarine Park, with the full course spanning 42.195km! We spoke with the runners from Iwaki's sister cities on the big day.

"During training, I had an old injury flare up, so I'm going to take it easy and just enjoy myself", said Richmond. He was invited to Iwaki after winning his first ever marathon in 2022 in his home city of Townsville. This was also Townsville's 50<sup>th</sup> Marathon Anniversary, which motivated him to take part. "I grew up doing cross-country so I have experience with long-distance running. I was never much of a sprinter". Richmond was delighted to have completed his second-ever marathon, and his first to take place abroad.

For Pedro, this was his eighth marathon, and his first in Japan. He was invited to Iwaki after winning the Kauai Marathon while on vacation. "I took an interest in personal fitness some years ago and began with simple exercises around the house. Gradually, I worked my way up to 10km, then half-marathons, then full marathons". Pedro reached the Sunshine Marathon's finish line at shortly after Richmond. "I didn't want to overdo it. I took breaks when I needed to". Richmond, Pedro and Bridget agreed that the fierce winds posed a big challenge. Nonetheless, they persevered and made it to the finish line.



*Richmond (left), Pedro (center) and Bridget (right) at the start line.*

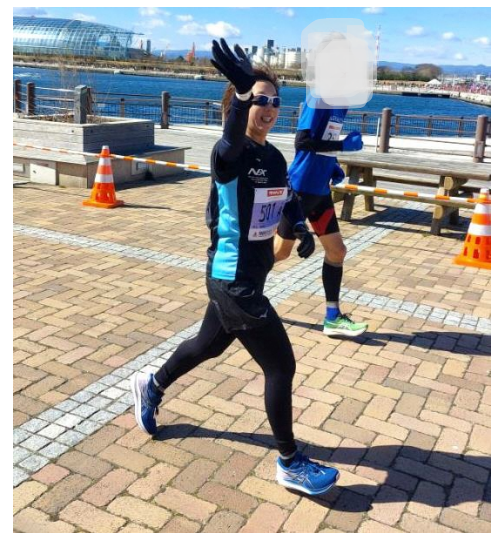


*Jun Murakami approaching the midway section of the course.*

Next, we caught up with runners Jun Murakami and Yuriko Murakami. Both are from Akita Prefecture's Yurihonjo City, which first established sister city relations with Iwaki in 1986. Jun ran his first marathon while on holiday in Honolulu after graduation, and his motivation for joining the Iwaki Sunshine Marathon was to beat his previous best record, although he admitted to not practicing as much as he had hoped. Like the others, Jun agreed that the wind added an extra challenge, and that the second half of the course was quite difficult. When asked about participating in future marathons, Jun said "I have no concrete plans just yet. But I would like to try again after practicing a little more". His finish time was 3 hours, 29 minutes and 53 seconds.



Although it was tough, Yuriko said she was delighted to have completed the marathon. “From the start to the midway point of the course especially, I really appreciated hearing the cheers of encouragement from onlookers. They shouted things like ‘You can do it!’, ‘Thank you for running for us!’ and ‘We were waiting for you!’. That was really heart-warming”. When asked if she had any advice for those participating in the Iwaki Sunshine Marathon next year, she urged runners not to get carried away in the first half. “The course begins with a downward slope, so you must be careful not to over-exert yourself by running too quickly. As for the last 10km, the course goes through an industrial park with less of a crowd for support. I was in a battle with myself”. Yuriko’s finish time was 4 hours, 6 minutes and 57 seconds. She hopes to participate in the Lake Kinshu, Lake Tazawa and many other marathons.



*Yuriko Murakami waving to her supporters.*



*Rinko Takahashi from Nobeoka City.*

Finally, we spoke with participants Rinko Takahashi and Rukito Hirano, both of whom are middle school students from Nobeoka City in Miyazaki Prefecture. Unlike Richmond who is more comfortable with long-distance running, Rinko wanted to become fast on her feet, leading her to take an interest in marathons. She saw her invitation to Iwaki’s Sunshine Marathon as a rare opportunity and looked forward to challenging herself further than before, and completed 5km of the course in 22 minutes and 6 seconds. “Thanks to the support of so many people in Iwaki, I was able to enjoy my time running in the Sunshine Marathon. It was an amazing experience. Thank you so much!” Rinko is looking forward to running in Miyazaki Prefecture’s Aoshima Taiheiyou Marathon and completing the full Sunshine Marathon someday.



*Rukito Hirano from Nobeoka City.*

Rukito first became interested in running in elementary school, where he ran a distance of 1km. The Iwaki Sunshine Marathon gave him the chance to run 5km, a distance of which only high school students and above are allowed to try in Nobeoka City. His finish time was 17 minutes and 17 seconds. “The wind was pretty intense but I was able to enjoy myself. For those wishing to participate in the Iwaki Sunshine Marathon next year, remember that you can enjoy running even at a quick pace with encouragement from the crowd”. Rukito has no plans for future marathons just yet but is determined to keep running.



*The finish line at Aquamarine Park.*

# Hinamatsuri Decoration Viewing & Crafting

*Hinamatsuri*, also known as Girls' Festival or Dolls' Festival, takes place each year on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. This date is also known as *Momo no Sekku*, the literal translation of which means Peach Festival. It is a celebration during which parents pray for the good health, prosperity and happiness of their daughters. Families with girls display *Hina-Ningyo* or beautiful traditional Japanese dolls in their homes. Of course, the festivities are also enjoyed by anyone with an appreciation for Japanese history, culture and beautifully hand-crafted decorations.

Our first stop for Hinamatsuri festivities was the Iwaki City Museum of Folklore and Traditional Housing. This museum is a must-go for history buffs, and during the Dolls' Festival season they also display their own Hina Doll exhibition. The museum had a vast number of beautiful traditional dolls on display, each adorned with luxurious clothing. Here we can see a portion of a 7-step display platform, with this number of steps believed to protect girls from evil and misfortune and instead help them to grow up healthy. The main exhibition took place near the entrance, although the museum also took advantage of its outdoor traditional house replicas and placed several displays throughout. We highly recommend exploring the exhibition in full!



*The emperor and empress Hina Dolls sit on the first (top) step.*



*A white rabbit decoration.*

With a focus on hanging crepe doll decorations, Nakanosaku's "Seikoukan" Old Folk House held their first doll display in two years due to COVID-19 infection prevention measures, and what a comeback it made! We went on the final day, when sunshine and a gentle early spring breeze filtered throughout the building. It is estimated that over 5,000 hand-made hanging decorations were on display, including designs inspired by cherry blossoms, sea creatures, kimonos and many others! Each was carefully hand-made by *Mamaya*, a group which runs regularly held craft workshops. According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2023 is the year of the rabbit, so special attention was given to rabbit decorations too! A market was held just outside of the building where attendees could enjoy coffee, beer, dried persimmons and much more.

However, we weren't finished with Hinamatsuri festivities yet. Aquamarine Fukushima was also celebrating with Mamaya, who hosted a class in the entrance hall where participants could make their own rabbit decoration using crepe fabric. We couldn't resist the opportunity, so under our teachers' guidance, we picked up our needles and thread and began the delicate process of hand-stitching the body. Once we stuffed the body with cotton, our rabbits really began to take shape. The final touches consisted of adding rosy cheeks with eyeshadow and placing unique decorative fabric on the sides. How did we do? Not bad, if I may say so myself!



*The final product!*



# Shrine Visit and Cherry Blossom Stroll



*Colourful pinwheels spin in the breeze at Yumoto's Onsen Shrine.*

As the weather slowly warmed up, we made our way to the onsen town of Yumoto. We highly recommend visiting in spring while the weather is just right for resting at the many outdoor footbaths and basking in the sunlight. We then stopped by the town's famous Onsen Shrine, now decorated with yellow, pink and blue pinwheels spinning gently in the breeze.

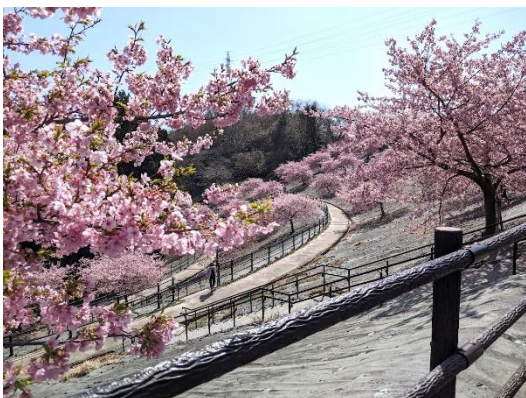


*A cherry blossom Omamori sold at the shrine.*

As luck would have it, the shrine was selling beautifully hand-crafted *Omamori*. Typically sold at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, these fabric charms are said provide luck and protection. Each of the Onsen Shrine's cherry-blossom Omamori were unique, with slight variations in the fabric pattern and colour of the three blossoms at the bottom. A black variation was also available, along with spring themed red ink stamps called goshuin. We chose this gorgeous butterfly and cherry blossom design, which serves as an official "certificate" of a visit to a shrine or temple.



*A spring themed goshuin.*



*Kawazuzakura at 21st Century Forest Park.*

Finally, we made our way to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Forest Park, less than a 10-minute drive from Yumoto. The *Kawazuzakura* or early blooming cherry blossoms were at their peak, and we were able to get a magnificent view from each of the three levels of curved paths. The park is an excellent choice for those wanting to get a head start on cherry blossom viewing or *hanami*. A sheltered seating area is located right next to this area's entrance, so you can rest or even have a mini picnic while enjoying the scenery.



# St. Patrick's Day Illuminations



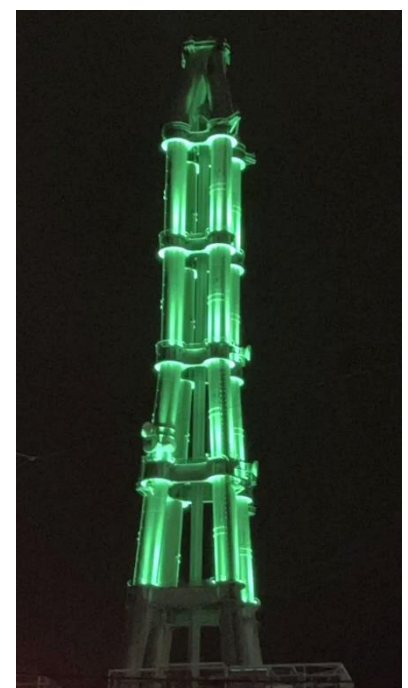
*St. Patrick's Day 2023 in Dublin City, Ireland.*

This spring, Iwaki hosted its first green illumination in celebration of Ireland and St. Patrick's Day. This special day takes place each year on March 17<sup>th</sup> and celebrates the life of Saint Patrick, who brought Christianity to Ireland. Using the *shamrock* or three-leaved clover, he explained how God consists of three parts known as the Holy Trinity. Since then the shamrock, and later on the colour green, have become prominent symbols of Irish culture. The holiday is celebrated by people of all countries, religions and backgrounds, and the main parade takes place in Dublin every year.

On the day, the main streets of Dublin are closed off to traffic to make way for various floats and live music, dance and other performances representing Irish culture. Crowds gather on either side, with many donning green clothing, costumes and accessories. Pints of Guinness are not an unusual sight!

Joining in on the fun for the first time ever was none other than Iwaki City itself! Green illuminations were kindly initiated by Mr. Hideki Mimura, who previously worked at the Irish Embassy in Tokyo. He took his expertise on all things Ireland-Japan related to Maruto and Nakoso, who agreed to take part in. The "greening" took place at the Maruto Headquarters, Maruto SC Joto and the Nakoso Yume Light Tower (Jobankyodokaryoku Nakoso Power Station) each evening from March 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>.

As Iwaki's first Irish CIR, I hope that this is just the beginning of many Irish cultural exchange events in the city, and that I can continue to be a bridge between Irish and Japanese culture!



*Above: The entrance to Maruto Headquarters. Top right: Maruto SC Joto. Bottom Right: Nakoso Yume Light Tower.*



# A Word from the Editor

Iwaki has so much to offer during spring, especially with the Iwaki Sunshine Marathon's triumphant return! We look forward to seeing more seasonal events return throughout the year.

Aideen Singleton

Iwaki Vision is produced by the Iwaki City Gender Equality and Intercultural Center.

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