

Iwaki Vision



Cycling the Seven Shores

Making the Most of
Summer in Iwaki,
Despite COVID-19

Disaster into Opportunity

Iwaki's Cycling Road of Recovery

The Nanahama Kaido, which can alliteratively be translated as the “Seven Shores Seaway,” is an ambitious new piece of cycling infrastructure spanning 53km of Iwaki's sprawling coastline. Partially opened in 2018 and made fully traversable as of March 28th, 2021, the route has been dubbed Iwaki's “Cycling Road of Recovery”. The route employs a seawall built after the triple disaster of March 2011, and includes preexisting national and prefectural roads, which connect the Hisanohama anti-disaster green space in the north to the Nakoso Barrier Park in the south.

The Nanahama Kaido connects Iwaki's seven major beaches of Hisanohama, Yotsukura, Usuiso, Toyoma, Nagasaki, Onahama, and Nakoso, with various sightseeing spots dotting the journey between them. The length of the seaway features beautiful scenery, cutting between Iwaki's white shores and dense areas of green pine. These forested areas serve as “anti-disaster green spaces” that offer additional protection in the event that waves make it over the seawall. Also along the route are Cycle Stations which offer rentals and maintenance, as well as 54 local business designated “Cyclistops”, which offer rest areas and amenities for cyclists.

When the seawall was originally proposed, the project was not without some dissenting voices among the community. Citizens feared, understandably, that a concrete wall would appear ominous and obstruct scenery. The Nanahama Kaido is a response to those voices, and an effort to compromise by providing a new means of appreciating this scenery, while serving as a draw for tourism.

The wall is representative of a conflict faced by Fukushima, in particular, Hamadori (the prefecture's coastal region) in relation to building a new identity. The region is aiming for recognition beyond the March 2011 triple disaster, without denying the profound impact it has had on the area and its citizens. Overseas, Fukushima's reputation remains obscured - dwarfed in the face of the nuclear incident, and prone to an exploitive breed of disaster tourism. The Nanahama Kaido invites visitors to rethink their assumptions of Fukushima, and serves as both a celebration of Hamadori's natural beauty and a symbol of its resilience.



Mayor Toshio Shimizu poses with cyclists for the opening of the Misaki Park-Shinmaiko Heights leg of the Nanahama Kaido.



Running atop the embankment, the seaway is sandwiched between lush green areas and the Pacific Ocean.



The full Nanahama Route Map.

A Full Course Load

Although tourism has suffered a drastic decline in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nanahama Kaido has served as a crucial outlet for locals by providing a socially-distanced, outdoor source of activity for those who have otherwise been stuck inside. Of course, as the largest city in the prefecture, there are some neighbourhoods in Iwaki from which it is hard to access the coast. Thankfully, there is an app for that.

In addition to the main coastal route, the Iwaki Tourism and Town-Planning Bureau has assembled several courses which traverse the more central areas of Iwaki, including Yumoto hot spring district, Natsugawa Valley, and downtown Onahama. All of these course guides and sightseeing information are available via the NAVITIME cycling app, which has been translated into English and Chinese.



Automated guidance makes it a breeze to explore more rural areas, with no fear of getting lost.



Members of the Japan Paracycling Federation testing the route.

The app also features routes designed in cooperation with the Japan Paracycling Federation. These routes are designed to be suitable for a more laid-back pace, making them accessible for a wide range of cyclists, including beginners and those with physical disabilities.

While the app contains some paid features, access to all the basic route info related to cycling in Iwaki is available for free. Cycling with any of these routes will direct you to points of interest along your way - including all the Cyclistops, sightseeing spots, and well-reviewed restaurants located within your selected course. Between mountains, seashores, or city scapes, there are many different courses to be enjoyed, while savouring the sights and flavours along the way. One of which, Iwaki Vision had the pleasure of testing last fall...



The Navitime Cycling app is available in multiple languages, via the QR codes to the left:



Nanahama Kaido: Course 2 Shinmaiko Heights North

You may be wondering why the first installment in this series of cycle route reviews is Course 2 and not Course 1. The answer to that is simple: coffee. Blue Mug Coffee Roasters in Kusano marks the halfway point in this particular route and was deemed essential by Iwaki Vision's editorial staff, given the early morning set-off.

Course 2 begins at Shinmaiko Heights Cycle Station, where you can rent a bike (complete with lock and helmet) for the day* for a modest 500 yen. The cycle station features several bikes to choose from, including four cross bikes, four road bikes, two children's bikes, one electric bike, and a tandem for those who are feeling the team spirit.



Yotsukura features a manhole cover featuring Chancey (Fukushima's Prefectural Pokemon) and Bellossom, enjoying the Hula culture Iwaki has embraced.

undersells the scope of the facility. The second floor features several restaurants that offer local seafood of various styles, while the first floor features souvenirs and fresh (not to mention, inexpensive) local produce. It's worth bringing a large backpack, if you reckon you have the stamina to carry it the rest of the way.

From there, the course runs atop the seawall overlooking the Pacific until slightly before the mouth of the Natsui River, where one must briefly join the main road below (cyclists should be advised to follow the blue guiding lines and not to overshoot the exit - although the seawall does continue, it will not take you to the bridge). Shortly after crossing the river you'll be able to take the seawall once again, until you eventually reach Yotsukura Port Roadside Station.

For those unfamiliar with "roadside stations" (*Michi no Eki* in Japanese), the other nearest English equivalent is "highway rest stop" - although when it comes to Yotsukura, this translation drastically



Route signs guide the way for much of the main course of the Nanahama.



Chilled Soba noodles at Yotsukura Roadside Station - the perfect dish to cool down with during a long summer ride.



Fresh produce lines the shelves of Yotsukura Roadside Station.



The interior is as tasteful as the coffee and baked goods they serve at Blue Mug Coffee Roasters.

The course then follows the main highway for a stretch. Although not as scenic, this does grant to opportunity to grab some drinks and snacks at convenience stores along the way. From there, the course weaves through scenic rice paddies until you're deposited near the main road again. Crossing the intersection will take you to Blue Mug coffee, where you can take a minute to enjoy the atmosphere while recharging yourself and your electronics.

When you're eventually ready to take off again, the course will take you through more rural scenery, until it eventually reaches Okunitama Shrine. Okunitama is the oldest shrine in all of Iwaki,



No shortage of espresso-based drinks for cyclists who need a pick-me-up mid way through the course.

which served as a head of the seven shrines in what was formerly known as the Iwaki region. One can enjoy some shaded respite here and listen to the sounds of nature before setting off for the return to Shinmaiko Heights. Cyclists can take advantage of Heights' facilities upon their return which include a drop-in hot spring, and a large variety of sports areas.

For those who are curious about what other courses are available, you can download the app or check out the city's course information (<http://www.city.iwaki.lg.jp/www/contents/1602117500960/index.html>). The Iwaki Tourism and Town Planning Bureau has also created promotional videos for the routes, which local Iwakians have taken a shot at translating themselves, as part of a subtitle challenge held by the Iwaki International Association! (<https://iia-fukushima.or.jp/2021/09/21/eigotilyarennzi/>).

(*Bicycle rentals hours are between *9:00am-4:30pm)



Coming off the coast will find you surrounded by bamboo forest and rice fields.



Okunitama Shrine offers a lush retreat before the final third of your journey on Course 2.

Introducing: The Nanahama Ikemen

The Sultry Studs of Iwaki's Seven Shores

Chances are that you've heard of Japan's notoriously wide variety of quirky and obscure mascot characters ... but have you ever heard of a municipality that's had its various shorelines anthropomorphized into seven dashing young men? The Iwaki *Nanahama Ikemen* (Seven Shores Attractive Guys) Project is another uniquely quirky aspect of the city's local industry.

The unofficial project has created a stud for each shore, with an appearance and personality to match the character of the region they represent. Their creators, Masako Kobori and Megumi Nemoto, stated that they designed these characters in order to get young people more engaged with their local seafood and marine product industries.

And they were effective! At the time of writing, the Ikemen have over 2,000 Twitter followers, and more across other platforms. On their website and social media pages, these sentient shorelines introduce the various seafood products that Iwaki is famed for, simple recipes of how to prepare them, and other musings about the marine products industry, and the challenges it faces. The Ikemen also help to promote shoreline cleanup activities, and marine awareness in general.

The Ikemen can be spotted sporadically around the city - with character goods on sale at sites such as Yotsukura Port Roadside Station, the Nakoso Barrier Museum of Literature and Iwaki La La Mew, among other sites. Nakoso Ouji (pictured above on the top left), also has a life-sized cutout at a downtown Italian restaurant, where the character is known to work.

To learn more about the guys, check out their English-language promotional video, translated by local Iwakians. You can also check out their homepage and social media (Japanese) via the links below:

<http://nanahama-p.com/>
https://twitter.com/iwakinanahama_p
<https://instagram.com/iwakinanahamajikemen>
<https://www.facebook.com/いわき七浜イケメンプロジェクト-912553485606832>



Character designs which could rival some of Japan's most popular anime studios are now representing Iwaki's marine industries.



© Iwaki Nanahama Ikemen Project (@nanahama_P)

The beach-boys, listed in geographical order according to their respective shores.



Then-mayor of Iwaki, Mitsuhide Iwaki and Tony Moony sign the sister city declaration between Iwaki and Townsville.

Celebrating City Sisterhood Ten-years with Kauai, Thirty-years with Townsville

In addition to being 55th anniversary of Iwaki's amalgamation, 2021 marks a significant year for international relations in Iwaki - celebrating its 30th anniversary with the sister city of Townsville, Australia, and its 10th anniversary of inter-city relations with the Hawaiian county of Kauai. Townsville is Iwaki's second earliest sister city relationship, with the agreement being signed on August 21st, 1991. The relationship was originally forged due to their connection as port cities - with various exports being shipped through Townsville to Onahama. The sister cities have since hosted exchange student programs, as well as runners for the annual Iwaki Sunshine Marathon.

By contrast, Kauai is Iwaki's most recent sister city, having shared "friendship city" ties since 2011 which later evolved into a sister city partnership in 2016. This northernmost island in the Hawaiian archipelago, known as the "Garden Isle," has a longstanding history with Iwaki which precedes the official intercity ties. For example, it has sent delegations to Iwaki for various hula events and hosted runners from Iwaki in its annual marathon, with Iwaki inviting champions of the Kauai Marathon to participate in the Iwaki Sunshine Marathon in turn. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed formal celebrations of these anniversaries, the strong bonds formed throughout the decades of exchange in tourism, sports, and culture remain.

Hula Fulla Dance

Iwaki Meets the Big Screen, with Big Names in Tow

Hula Fulla Dance, a new animated feature film taking place in Iwaki, is set to debut on December 3rd, 2021. It follows the story of Hiwa Natsunagi, an aspiring hula dancer chasing the footsteps of her older sister. The film is to be produced by Aniplex and directed by Seiji Mizushima (of Fullmetal Alchemist fame) and will boast staff responsible for major titles such as Cowboy Bebop, Violet Evergarden, and Mobile Suit Gundam franchise, just to name a few. It also lends the voice talents of Haruka Fukuhara, Karen Miyama, and Dean Fujioka, among others. Iwaki residents may also recognize a voice cameo by a certain local figure as well.

The film is one in a series produced to pay tribute to the areas affected by the March 2011 triple disaster. It is not the first time Iwaki has been captured in anime, joining series such as *Hula-ing Babies* and *Hakubo*, both released last year. The name presents an interesting challenge to translators; the original title is wordplay - the Japanese phoneticization of "hula" being "fura", whereas "furafura" is an onomatopoeic for "wavering" - a much more apt title to express the uncertainties associated with adolescence and pursuing the arts for a living, but that is just this translator's two cents.

What tone will the movie actually take? Look forward to this winter to find out! In the meantime, you can catch the trailer on Iwaki Vision's facebook page*! ([*facebook.com/iwakivision/](https://www.facebook.com/iwakivision/))



Natsunagi Hiwa, the protagonist of the film, also serves as Iwaki's official character, and can be seen occasionally on posters and publications around the city.

A word from the editor:

It's been an honour to compile Iwaki Vision, as part of my duties as Coordinator of International Relations over these past fourteen months.

Having interviewed for the position before the COVID-19 pandemic had begun, to say that my term was filled with surprises would be an understatement. Although the term was short, and fraught with obstacles related to "the new normal", I truly consider myself fortunate to have had this opportunity to serve the city that has been so kind to me since I first arrived as an ALT four years ago.

Despite the shortness of my tenure, I have no shortage of great memories, whether sharing aspects of the city that I love with those abroad through Iwaki Vision, or sharing my own culture and perspectives as a Canadian in seminars held by the city. This is of course, in addition to the many more wonderful memories I've had in Iwaki during the three preceding years as ALT.

Truthfully, it feels as though I am just getting started. There are many more things that I would've liked to do, both to promote multiculturalism within Iwaki, and to make Iwaki's resilience and all of its quirky charms better known overseas. But with the COVID-19 pandemic at its worst point to date, and with loved ones who I haven't seen in years back home, it was with plenty of bitter-sweet feelings I've come to realize it was my time to return home.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my coworkers in the City Exchange Section, without whom Iwaki Vision would not be possible, and to all of those who helped me throughout my life in Iwaki. I wouldn't have been able to make it these four years without supportive peers, and such a kind and welcoming community.

I hope that I can be back some time soon.
Until then, I wish for the health, happiness.

Truly, thank you for everything,

Liam Duffy

Iwaki Vision is produced by the Tourism Exchange Division of Iwaki City Hall.
21 Umemoto Taira Iwaki City Fukushima Prefecture Japan 970-8686 TEL: +81 246 22-1279
Fax: +81 246 22-7581
<http://www.city.iwaki.lg.jp> Email: kankokoryu@city.iwaki.lg.jp