

Iwaki City English Bulletin

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Iwaki Vision

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Cherish the
autumnal beauty
of Iwaki City



Shiramizu Amida-do at its Peak



The warm shade of the wooden exterior is complimented beautifully by the red and orange tones of the surrounding maple leaves.

A true beauty at any time of the year, Shiramizu Amida-do and its surrounding garden are particularly stunning during the autumn season. Located within the Buddhist temple of Ganjo-ji, the Shiramizu Amida-do chapel is renowned as Fukushima's only designated national treasure – and what a treasure it is! Constructed in 1160 AD by a member of the Fujiwara clan, the chapel is a shining example of Heian architecture.

Located below a maple tree in the west of the garden, the *Kosodate-Migawari-Jizo* statue is decorated with red cloth and offerings of *Omamori*, which are fabric charms said to provide good luck and protection. This statue is said to answer the wishes of the weak and small and represents those who are raising children. To its left is another larger statue, also adorned in red cloth, made from stone. The real stars of the show lie inside the chapel, however, and consist of five wooden statues painted with gold laquer. Due to their incredible age of an estimated 900 years, taking photographs is forbidden. So, we encourage visitors to appreciate the chapel interior quietly with their own eyes. Trust us, it's worth the visit!



The Kosodate-Migawari-Jizo statue sits cosily beneath red maple leaves.



Leaves are reflected by the vast and glimmering pond, inhabited by Koi fish and turtles.

Here, rich red maple leaves or *momiji* are seen contrasting beautifully amongst the lush surrounding greenery, reflected by the water. Not only can you see Koi fish - but you may also be able to see some turtles perched on a rock, soaking in the rays of the fading autumn sun. We recommend visitors to take their time and walk slowly around the garden to get the best views of the leaves, pond and of course, Shiramizu Amida-do itself. We also suggest visiting at night when the temple grounds are lit up in early November.

The outer garden is free to visit, while entering costs 500 yen for adults, 300 yen for elementary schoolers or free for pre-school age and below. Please note that taking photographs inside the chapel is forbidden. Visitors are encouraged to be quiet and respectful on these sacred grounds.

The Great Iwaki Product Exhibition

On October 15th & 16th, the *Great Iwaki Product Exhibition* was held at Aquamarine Park. The annual exhibition, which had not taken place since 2019 due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, returned with triumphant success! Organised by the Iwaki Tourism and Town Development Bureau, its aim is to present the very best of Iwaki's local food, crafts and culture with outdoor market stalls. Upon entering the park, the fresh sea air was filled with the delicious scent of sizzling yakiniku, Hawaiian-style beef skewers and soy sauce karaage, to name just a few of the most popular savoury foods.



Juicy Shine Muscat grapes sit neatly atop whipped cream, sandwiched between a sliced bagel.

This editor admittedly has a weakness for Japanese sweets, however, so the first stop on her list was *Sakurako-chan's Bagel Sandwiches*. Set up by a local senior high school club, the brand is most famous for its bagel, cream and Shine Muscat grape dessert. Among the many ways to enjoy Japan's exceptionally high-quality seasonal fruits, this certainly takes the cake! (Or *bagel*...?). Luckily, for anyone who was not able to attend, the *Sakurako-chan* brand is also available at certain *Maruto* supermarkets. Blueberry, peach and even savoury meat & vegetable bagels are also available. Keep an eye out for the pink cherry blossom logo!

We then headed over to a stall set up by one of our Sister Cities, Yurihonjo, in Akita Prefecture. Their famous *Yuki no Bousha Bamkuchen*, made using sake lees (a byproduct of sake production), sold out on the first day!

However, Akita is also famous for its long history of crafting *temari* (手毬), balls made by meticulously weaving silk or cotton with colourful and intricate designs. They were initially used as toys but would later be made to pray for the good health of children or given as gifts at festivals, weddings and other special events. Another way to appreciate the beauty of temari is in the form of hand-made sweets, two varieties of which were gifted to us on our visit! Inside the beautifully decorated wafer shell of the first variety was adzuki bean paste, while the second variety contained a mix of white bean paste and fig, a must-try for anyone visiting Akita Prefecture. Also sold at the stand were the city's finest preserves and even gluten-free udon! As a foreigner, meeting specific dietary needs can be difficult in Japan (*udon*'t say...), but for gluten-sensitive readers, our friends in Yurihonjo have you covered.



Beautifully crafted temari sweets from Yurihonjo in Akita Prefecture.



The Hālau Lauānani hula dance team & their newest recruit!

In addition to the huge selection of products, Sunday morning began with a Taiko performance, followed up with a performance by students of Iwaki's Hālau Lauānani dance school. By then, the clouds dispersed and the warm sun shone brilliantly, as expected of Tohoku's 'Sunshine City'. The students put on an excellent performance, especially their newest member (seen at the centre-front) who is just three years old! We look forward to seeing her master the art of hula-dancing alongside her peers.



Halloween-themed flower jars, just on time for the spooky season.

For those more creatively inclined, Iwaki's *Flower Studio Miyoko* hosted a small class in which participants could design their own flower-themed handicrafts. A stunning variety of pre-made crafts were also available to purchase, including Halloween-themed glass bottles and jars featuring deep purple and orange flora. Here, participants could stop by between snacks and flex their creative skills while enjoying the fresh open air. If you missed out, the *Iwaki Flower Centre* hosts similar flower-themed crafting classes at its building in Ishimori. These adorable, one-of-a-kind handmade decorations make the perfect gift!

If Japan is famous for one food in autumn, it's sweet potatoes or *satsumaimo*. Often enjoyed freshly roasted at festivals, another way to enjoy and keep them for a long time is in dried form. Local brand *Fazenda* sources the Red Haruka variety of sweet potatoes in Ibaraki Prefecture and dries and processes them while preserving their naturally sweet taste. They also treated attendees to three varieties of Aizu honey, which were *Yamazakura* (cherry blossom flavour), *Akassia* (mild flavour) and *Tochi no Ki* (horse chestnut flavour). These sweet seasonal snacks make the perfect gift for friends, family and of course, yourself!



Fazenda's dried sweet potatoes, a variety of honeys and more were on offer.



The Iwaki Vision editor's long-awaited chance to see both Hula Ojisan and Furappe together! Name a more iconic duo.

Of course, we couldn't leave the exhibition without greeting a pair of local celebrities! Hula Ojisan (right) and Furappe (left) were only delighted to welcome the hundreds of attendees and pose for pictures. It's not often that we get to see Iwaki City's official mascots together in the same place, making their appearance at the exhibition extra special!

These are just some of the highlights from this year's exhibition. For anyone who missed out, we highly recommend attending next year! Until then, keep an eye out for these brands in your local supermarkets and specialty stores.

Moon Viewing & Museum Visit

Among the most famous autumn festivities in Japan, *Otsukimi* or Moon Viewing falls on the night of the Harvest Moon each year. It originated in China and became a formal celebration in Japan during the Heian Period (794-1185 AD). Its purpose is to show gratitude for a bountiful harvest, and traditionally involves offerings of *otsukimi-dango* (round rice dumplings), seasonal fruits and vegetables, Japanese silver grass and bush clover. The celebration is often associated with rabbits as, in Japan, it is said that the moon's rocky surface looks like rabbits pounding mochi. How cute!



A traditional offering celebrating Otsukimi-Dorobo at the museum including candy, seasonal vegetables, dango, Japanese silver grass & bush clover.

Stemming from this tradition is *Otsukimi-Dorobo* or Moon Viewing Thief, a custom in which children are allowed to steal the offerings of rice dumplings and seasonal fruits and vegetables (nowadays offered alongside candy and snacks). In fact, it is considered good luck for the next harvest if the dango are stolen! One place celebrating Otsukimi-Dorobo this year was the Iwaki City Museum of Folklore & Traditional Housing. The museum had this display (left) in front of one of their outdoor house

replicas. Our guide around the museum explained in detail the origin and meaning behind the offerings. For example, there are exactly 15 dango (right) to represent the 15th night of the 8th month of the traditional Japanese calendar. In the middle is a sample of this year's bountiful harvest, including a pumpkin, pear, Japanese taro, sweet potatoes and edamame. The candy and snacks (left) are 'stolen' by children - somewhat similar to Trick-or-Treating on Halloween!

During our visit, we also took the time to explore the rest of the museum. It contains life-size replicas of traditional Japanese folk houses, and everyday tools from which you can learn a lot about life during the Edo and Meiji periods. Each house has a notably large entrance, used as both a *genkan* (entrance hallway) and a workspace on days when the weather does not allow for outdoor work. The rooms furthest from the entrance are reserved for special guests, while those of lower 'rank' would reside closer to the entrance. Aside from the *genkan*, each room is elevated high off the ground. Bathrooms were kept outdoors for hygiene reasons – we can only imagine how tough this would have been during winter!



The editor of Iwaki Vision trying on a bamboo basket. It's lighter than it looks!

Of course, there is so much more to learn than what we can cover in this feature. We highly recommend visiting the museum for yourself to fully appreciate all it has to offer.

Pumpkin Treats at Miwa Fureai Market

Exploring the autumnal beauty of Iwaki certainly works up an appetite, so why not indulge in the some of the freshest seasonal foods Iwaki has to offer? Located in the rural town of Miwa, the *Fureai Market* is approximately a 30-minute drive from Iwaki Station. Run by friendly locals, the market is full to the brim of fresh and locally sourced seasonal produce, all for very reasonable prices. You can also buy boxed lunches, kitchenware and other goods. We even spotted some natural wooden cat toys called *Matatabi*, for those looking to entertain their feline friends.



The Fureai Market exterior, built from local cedarwood. Space is available to park your car out front.



Miwa's famous Kabocha Manju. If you go early in the morning, they'll still be warm!

If you would like to make your own autumn-themed treats, simply browse the rows of fresh produce sourced straight from Miwa's local farms. Some notable highlights are, of course, the pumpkins, of which many varieties are available. You can also purchase raw adzuki beans, a staple ingredient in many Japanese sweets, including Iwaki's very own *Jangara*.

The market is open six days a week except for Tuesdays. The opening hours from October until March are 09:00 – 17:00, while the hours from April until September are 09:00 – 17:30.

For us, the main attraction was one of Iwaki's most unique autumn treats known as *Kabo-cha Manju!* *Kabocha*, which is the Japanese word for pumpkin, is combined with the kanji for brown or *cha* for this brand name. Made from a different variety of pumpkins each day, these tasty treats are extra fluffy in texture. They are sold exclusively at the Fureai Market on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays and we recommend getting there early as they sell out fast! They can be enjoyed on their own or paired with a cup of slightly bitter tea to contrast the sweet brown sugar. As they contain no animal products, they're also vegan-friendly! Rumour has it that the *Kabo-cha* brand will expand their range to include pumpkin cake and pumpkin meat pies, so keep an eye out!



Three colours of freshly harvested pumpkins are available in a variety of sizes.

Irish Ambassador Paul Kavanagh's Visit to Iwaki

On July 28th, Irish Ambassador to Japan Paul Kavanagh visited Iwaki with the *Maruto X Support Our Kids* charity organisation. The organisation assists students who were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 in doing homestays in a variety of countries. The students joining the ambassador on his visit had the opportunity to stay in Ireland and were accompanied on this day by representatives of the charity. Iwaki was among His Excellency's last visits before finishing his term as ambassador and returning to Ireland.



The ambassador (left) with the editor of Iwaki Vision and members of Maruto x Support Our Kids.

The editor of Iwaki Vision had the privilege of joining the group beginning at the Iwaki Football Club Park. The group were greeted by staff and players of Iwaki's football team as they observed the club's facilities. A football fan himself, the ambassador reminisced about his previous experience playing in Beijing and was keen to learn more about the team's strategy. He was kindly gifted with a jersey by the club and held it proudly while posing for photos.

The group were then invited to *Maruto's* main outlet where they were given a brief tour and sampled some fresh local produce, including smoothies and seafood. As a sponsor of *Support Our Kids*, the supermarket chain was delighted to host the group and allow filming for a news segment aired on television.



Fresh smoothies sampled at Maruto, which featured on Television.



Mayor Uchida meets Ambassador Kavanagh outside Spa Resort Hawaiians.

Ambassador Kavanagh's final stop in Iwaki was at Spa Resort Hawaiians, where he was greeted by Mayor Uchida. The three enjoyed dinner with the rest of the group while the ambassador gave a speech sharing his impressions of Iwaki and expressing his gratitude for the city's warm welcome. Strong connections were made between the ambassador and charity organisation, and each hoped their paths would cross again soon. The ambassador also expressed his wishes for Ireland to continue strengthening its relationship with Japan.

A Word from the Editor

This concludes my second issue of Iwaki Vision. Autumn might just be the best season in Iwaki as there is so much to do and so many seasonal foods to try!

We hope you enjoyed this issue and look forward to the next one.

Aideen Singleton

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