

## **Disaster Prevention along with People from Abroad**

There are more than 4,000 people from overseas living in Matsuyama, the Ehime prefectural capital. As severe disasters, such as earthquakes, have occurred in various places, Matsuyama City held a program at the Soga Community Hall, in which the local residents and foreigners learned about disaster prevention together so that they could help each other in times of emergency, regardless of language or culture.

A total of about 20 people participated, including Nepalese people working in the city, residents of the Soga area, university students, and members of the Matsuyama International Center. The city officials introduced free apps that are useful in times of disaster. The participants talked to each other using voice translation apps and deepened their understanding of the role of evacuation centers and swift ways to evacuate in an emergency. They were taught how to use "Voicetra", an app which translates words spoken to smartphones or tablets into multiple languages, as well as "Google Lens", displaying information related to objects photographed with a smartphone, or translating and reading out the texts seen on smartphones. Neighborhood community halls are some of the city's designated evacuation shelters. On that day, the hall was actually set up as a shelter in a disaster, where the participants learned how to use the equipment and the evacuation facilities.

At the reception, the local residents experienced taking care of Nepalese evacuees as staff. The items written in Japanese on the reception form were translated into Nepali using the app. The Japanese locals realized that it is easier to communicate when speaking in short and concise language (Yasashii Nihongo) than in polite language.

The Nepalese tried samples of disaster prevention food that could be prepared using only water. They translated labels using Google Lens to confirm that the food did not contain any ingredients that could not be eaten for religious reasons. They also tried cardboard beds for comfort.

(April 16, Ehime Shimbun)

## **Sending 'Giving Chairs' to Taiwan**

In March the Ehime Prefecture Forestry Youth Council donated chairs made of Ehime cypress to kindergartens in Taiwan. This was a part of the effort to spread awareness of the quality of local timber.

These chairs were named after a picture book titled "The Giving Chair", which

is a long-selling picture book published in 1981. It is a heartwarming story about the spirit of giving to each other between animals when they come across a chair with the word "please" written on it.

Since 2004, the council has donated original chairs to more than 340 facilities including kindergartens in the prefecture. This time, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of their activities, they planned to donate chairs to kindergartens in Taiwan, which is connected to Matsuyama by a direct air route. Two Taiwanese kindergartens were selected through a trading company in Hyogo that has contact with some members of the council.

Nine members visited Taiwan and presented each kindergarten with one chair. The kindergarten children were happy when they saw the chair because the picture book is also popular in Taiwan. Yoshiko Kayama, the author of the picture book sent the council a message celebrating its activity's 20th anniversary. The council plans to continue its activities to promote high-quality Ehime wood.

(April 12, Ehime Shimbun)

### **Shikoku's First TGC To Be Held in Matsuyama**

Japan's largest fashion event, "Tokyo Girls Collection" (TGC), is coming to Ehime. The organizers held a press conference in Matsuyama on April 2nd, announcing that "TGC Matsuyama 2024 by Tokyo Girls Collection" will be held on July 13th at the Prefectural Budokan (Ichitsubonishi, Matsuyama). The event is being held for the first time in Shikoku and is attracting attention from both within and outside the prefecture.

TGC is an event that showcases the latest fashion for young women. It began in 2005 and has been held mainly in the Tokyo metropolitan area, but it has also been held in regional areas such as Kitakyushu City in the northern part of Fukuoka Prefecture and Wakayama City in Wakayama Prefecture since 2015. Popular models and guests will appear on stage, allowing the audience to enjoy seeing their favorite clothes.

Matsuyama will be the 8th city outside the Tokyo area to hold the event. The prefecture and Matsuyama want to attract high-profile events to coincide with the reopening of the Dogo Onsen Main Building (Important Cultural Property) on July 11th, while TGC organizers aim to promote regional revitalization through events. The theme for the event is "The Next Chapter", with the idea of conveying the charm of Dogo Onsen and Matsuyama to the next generation through TGC.

On the day of the event, celebrities such as Miyu Ikeda, known as Michopa, and Hina Kagei, a creator and actress with more than 10 million followers on TikTok, will appear as guest models. About 5000 attendees are expected. In addition, the entertainment agency LDH Japan, which represents popular groups such as Exile, is cooperating with the event. They are also planning to have young people aspiring to be dancers to perform with professional dancers.

At the press conference, Mitsuru Aoki, chief operating officer of W Tokyo, the company behind TGC, said, "We want to help boost Matsuyama with the power of entertainment." Mayor Katsuhito Noshi added, "We want to inspire young people by combining Dogo Onsen, said to be Japan's oldest hot spring, with TGC, which is at the cutting edge of fashion."

Tickets are available from April 13th. Inquiries: 089-947-3535  
(April 3, Yomiuri Shimbun Online)

### **Agreement Between Airbnb and Ehime**

Ehime prefecture concluded a comprehensive cooperation agreement with Airbnb Japan K.K. to attract more travelers from America, Australia and Europe. This was the first agreement on tourism promotion that Airbnb concluded with the prefecture.

Airbnb operates a booking site for hotels and vacation rentals, called *minshuku* in Japanese. The number of accommodations listed on their website is more than 7.7 million in 220 countries.

Ehime prefecture and Airbnb will hold a seminar for enterprises operating hotels, Japanese inns (*ryokan*) and individuals managing *minshuku* in the prefecture to be listed on the Airbnb website.

It is expected to attract long-term and return travelers, since Airbnb users show a strong interest in knowing and understanding the culture of a region, and so they stay longer in one place.

At the signing ceremony held at the prefectural office, Governor Nakamura said that it was a big challenge to attract tourists from America, Australia and European countries since, while there are direct flights from some Asian countries there are none from those countries. He expects that Airbnb will play a role in spreading information about tourism in Ehime to potential travelers in those countries.

According to the Japan Tourism Agency, in Ehime, slightly less than 180,000 foreigners stayed at accommodations with a staff of more than 10 people last

year. Half of them were Taiwanese and Korean.

The prefecture will focus especially on the Australian market since many people enjoy cycling and the time difference is very small. The target is an increase to 6,000 in 2026, although it was 3,500 in 2023.

On the other hand, Airbnb aims, through the agreement, to expand the locations of its listings to all over Japan. They are mainly in Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto at the present.

(April 3, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

### **New Shopping Area at Matsuyama JR Station**

The Shikoku Railway Company announced 14 stores will open in the fall at a new commercial area located under the overpass at Matsuyama Station when the station will be elevated.

There will be seven food shops selling the specialties of Ehime such as *Jakoten*, Japanese confectionery, salt, and some citrus products, four restaurants such as *izakaya* and a ramen shop, a souvenir shop, a convenience store, and a study room.

According to the Shikoku Railway Company, commercial area will be about 1,270 square meters and all the stores will be accessible even from outside the ticket gates. In addition to 14 stores announced, two more shops have agreed to open.

The Shikoku Railway Company hopes to create a place full of the attractions of Ehime and serve as the entrance to Matsuyama city.

(April 3, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

### **15 IT Engineers from Nepal Hired by Companies in Ehime**

Fifteen IT professionals from Nepal received Japanese language education and will start working at companies in Ehime Prefecture from April. Hiring people from overseas is part of the prefecture's project to attract work-ready talent because of the difficulty of acquiring IT professionals in Japan due to the declining birthrate and people moving to the Tokyo metropolitan area.

"We Nepali engineers promise to do our best for the development of Ehime," said Prabindra Tapa (23) on behalf of the Nepali IT professionals who paid a courtesy visit to the prefectural office on March 28th.

Tapa, who likes J-Pop, such as Yoasobi, and Japanese anime, developed a desire to work in Japan, so he participated in the "Project to Promote the

Acceptance of Highly-Skilled IT Personnel from Asia”, which the prefecture has been working on since 2022.

The prefecture focused on Nepal, a pro-Japan country with a high level of IT education, and then commissioned a private company to provide online guidance and interviews with companies in the prefecture for young Nepali people to work at local IT companies.

Japanese language education for 600 hours over eight months was provided to prospective employees in the local area, enabling them to acquire a good conversational level of Japanese. This year, 15 people in their 20s will join nine IT companies in Matsuyama and Niihama cities.

Tapa said in an interview, “I’m still not good at speaking Japanese, so I want to get better at it. I also want to develop my IT skills in Japan.”

Hiroshi Ninomiya (53), president of Saver (Matsuyama), a system development company that will accept two people including Tapa, said, “The appeal of overseas personnel is that they are motivated and have a strong desire to improve. We expect them to play an active role in expanding our business overseas.”

(March 31, Asahi Shimbun Digital)