

Enjoy Clear Sound by Technology of Directional

After receiving complaints from residents in the Dogo area that the volume of the Botchan Karakuri Clock was too loud, the city lowered the volume of the clock in February. Then, however, tourists complained that it was "hard to hear." In response to this issue, on June 13 the city installed a directional speaker that delivers clear sound in a specific direction.

The Karakuri Clock was installed by Matsuyama City in 1994 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the construction of the Dogo Onsen Main Building. The figures of characters from Natsume Soseki's novel "Botchan" appear and move to the music from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm every hour on weekdays, and every 30 minutes on weekends, holidays, and the New Year holidays. The directional speaker was installed and adjusted near the clock, focusing sound in the front area where tourists gather. According to the city's Tourism and International Exchange Division, they have been keeping the volume of the clock below 70 decibels since February, in reference to the prefectural pollution prevention ordinance standard (70 decibels or less at the property boundary). A simple measurement of the volume in the front area after the speaker was installed showed it to be about 61 decibels. The division said, "We can now hear the sound more effectively. As one of the tourist attractions, we hope everyone will enjoy it."

(June 14, Ehime Shimbun)

Dogo Onsen Honkan Reopening Timed with Shiki-Haku Museum

After the preservation and repair work, including earthquake proofing, the Dogo Onsen Main Building (Dogo Onsen Honkan) will reopen on July 11, six months ahead of schedule. The building, an important cultural property designated by the government, has been under construction since January 2019, while kept partially open. After the entire building reopens, the entrance will return to the west side of the building. Two private lounges on the third floor, which are newly built, can be reserved: The Hishō Room, 10-person capacity, is almost fully booked for the three-day holiday from July 13 to 15, and the Shirasagi Room, 18-person capacity, is also booked for other times. Reservations can be made up to 90 days in advance, and if there is a vacancy, you can use it on the day without a reservation. The office said, "If you make reservations, there's no waiting time and it's easy to make a schedule. Please make use of it." To reserve the lounges, visit the Dogo Onsen official website at <https://dogo.jp/en/> or call the Dogo Onsen Consortium at 089-932-1126.

Aligning with the reopening of Dogo Onsen Honkan, the Shiki Memorial Museum (Shiki-Haku) in Dogo Park, which has been undergoing major renovations since September 2023, will also reopen its permanent exhibition to the public on July 3. This is the first renovation of the exhibition in seven years, and the focus on the life and achievements of haiku poet, Masaoka Shiki will be enhanced. A new photo corner using touch panels and augmented reality functions will be added, aiming to attract people of all ages. After Dogo Onsen

Honkan reopens, Shiki-Haku will introduce a service: If you show a numbered ticket issued by Dogo Onsen Honkan or the annex Asuka-no-Yu when waiting for the bath, you will receive a discount on the admission fee to the permanent exhibition at Shiki-Haku. Discount tickets are 320 yen (usually 400 yen) for adults, 160 yen (usually 200 yen) for 65 years and older. Admission is free for high school students and younger. Closed on Tuesdays.

(June 8, 16, Ehime Shimbun)

More People Moving to Ehime

Ehime prefecture announced that the number of people moving to the prefecture from other areas in Japan in 2023 was 7,254 which was 92 more than last year (+1.3%). However, it was less than the target set at 7,300.

According to the prefectural Regional Policy Planning division, 3,385 people moved to Chuyo (Central Ehime) an increase of 238 compared to last year (+7.6%), 2,914 to Toyo (Eastern Ehime) a decrease of 100 (-3.3%) and 955 to Nanyo (=Southern Ehime) a decrease of 46 (-4.6%).

By city, 2,994 moved to Matsuyama, the most in the prefecture. Imabari follows at 1,180 and then Saijo at 787.

About 40% are from the Tokyo and Osaka/Kyoto areas. By age group, 3,905 are in their 20's and 30's, more than 50% of the total.

The number of consultations about moving to the prefecture was 7,595 in 2023, the most so far, and a 106 increase compared to last year (+1.4%).

Governor Nakamura believed that the increase of the number of consultations indicated that there is a need, and said that although Nanyo, where the population is drastically decreasing, could not achieve its target of 1,300, efforts to support the decision-making process to move there will be provided.

The prefecture will install an AI Chatbot in their portal site about living in Ehime to provide useful information 24/7, and plans to improve trial tours for life in the prefecture targeting young families with children. Its target is 7,600 people moving to Ehime this year.

(June 6, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

Lowest Fertility Rate Recorded in Ehime

The fertility rate in 2023 in Ehime was 1.31, less than 1.33 in 2004 which had been the lowest. The number of marriages has also declined, and was 4,157 in 2023, decreasing by 35.2% compared to 10 years ago. Also, a decline of 35% can be seen in the fertility rate in the same period.

The fact that many young people are moving away from Ehime accelerates the decline in the birthrate. 2,312 out of 4,125, the number of people moving out of Ehime exceeding the number of moving in, are early 20's. It is more than a half of the total number, and 1,206 out of 2,312 are female.

The low birthrate countermeasures and gender equality office in the prefecture analyzed that the number of marriages which had declined during the pandemic has not recovered yet, affecting the fertility rate as well. They also pointed out

that the increase in the cost of living and insufficient work opportunities in the prefecture lower the motivation for marriage and having children, and promised to increase the opportunities for the younger generation to meet people and encourage the companies in the prefecture to reform the work style.

The number of babies born in 2023 in the prefecture was 6,950 (boys: 3,568 and girls: 3,382), the least since World War II. The prefecture aims to increase the number of births to 8,500 and make the number of people moving in exceed the number of moving out in 2026.

(June 5, Ehime Shimbun Online)

Traditional Cormorant Fishing Starts on the Hijikawa River in Ozu City

On June 1, the Ukai Opening ceremony was held on the Hijikawa River in Ozu City, Ehime Prefecture, to mark the start of the traditional cormorant fishing season. After a Shinto ritual on the riverbank, about 120 tourists and others boarded 14 yakatabune pleasure boats in the evening and enjoyed watching the cormorants, guided by fishermen, diving underwater to catch ayu (sweetfish) and other fish.

According to the Ozu City Tourism Association, the Hijikawa cormorant fishing is one of the three major cormorant fishing sites in Japan, along with the Nagara River (Gifu Prefecture) and the Mikuma River (Oita Prefecture).

A unique feature of the Hijikawa's cormorant fishing is the "Awase Ukai", where the fishermen's boats and the pleasure boats run side by side. In addition, visitors can enjoy a 2.7kilometer river cruise that takes about two hours.

Cormorant fishing was practiced in the Ozu domain during the Edo period (1603–1867), but declined for a time. However, it was revived as a tourist attraction in 1957 and attracted around 28,000 visitors a year at its peak.

However, the torrential rains in western Japan in 2018 caused the river to flood and severely damaged the river basin, forcing cormorant fishing to be temporarily suspended. Furthermore, the number of visitors in 2021 fell to 643 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Last year, the number recovered to 3,477, and the aim is to attract more than 4,000 visitors this year.

This year's opening ceremony took place in front of the reinforced levee constructed as part of the special emergency project to prevent serious river disasters. Cormorant fisherman Toshikazu Inoue (58) expressed confidence in the recovery, saying, "More people are saying they've been looking forward to the opening of the cormorant fishing season."

The cormorant fishing season is scheduled to run until September 20th. Tickets for the pleasure boats are 4,000 yen for junior high school students and older and 3,000 yen for children aged 4 to elementary school students. For inquiries, contact the Ozu Tourist Information Centre (0893-57-6655).

(June 4, Asahi Shimbun digital)

*For more detailed information about how to go to the festival, please go to the Festivals section.

Saibi Heisei High School 4th in World Math Competition

A team from Saibi Heisei Secondary Education School's Natural Science Club (Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture) placed fourth at the "Mathmatics A-lympiad" World Championship for high school students, held in the Netherlands in March. Although the team didn't achieve their goal of winning, they expressed a sense of accomplishment, stating, "We were able to show what we had built by using our respective strengths."

The contest challenges participants to come up with solutions to real-world problems using mathematical thinking. This year marks the 36th time the contest has been held, and a total of 10 teams from five countries, including the Netherlands and Germany, participated. Over two days, teams of three or four worked on a game simulating the summoning of ambulances.

(June 1, Ehime Shimbun online)