

# Eat Nature

Eating is an essential part of sustaining your life. In past ages when no imported food or chemical fertilizers were available, what did people eat? The answer to this question is a clue to knowing about the relationship between the natural environment and people. When you look at local people's eating habits, you will find their wisdom and ingenious measures to enjoy eating and living their lives.

Our ESD Practices



## Greenery Carpet Project

### Greenery Carpet

At the Mantomi Kominkan, we have a large flower garden, where seasonal flowers were once planted. We used to water the garden, pick withered flowers, replant flowers a few times a year, spread fertilizer, and remove insects causing damage to the plants. It cost a lot to water the plants and to perform other tasks. It was at that time when the project of "Greenery Carpet" was proposed. Led mainly by local residents in all its phases from planning to operation, the project strove to cultivate sweet potatoes and onions, which need almost no water, and to harvest and cook plants and hold a harvest festival.

Now that we hold a harvest festival twice a year, we have realized the following advantages.

- We can save a considerable part of the cost used for watering the plants and performing other tasks.
- Many residents of all generations participate in planting seedlings, harvesting plants, and cooking dishes, thereby forming closer ties among themselves.
- People can appreciate seeing the "Greenery Carpet," which consists of sweet potatoes and onions growing vigorously in the garden.

We will continue to work on this big project!



Mantomi Kominkan p42 map<sup>33</sup>

## Nurture and Eat Lives with Respect for Them

### Vegetable Garden Club - Nurture and Eat Vegetables and Fruits Together with Local Experts

There are few places in urban areas for children to play outside. Such children have few opportunities to experience nature directly.

For such children, the Koki Kominkan holds a workshop where they can plant vegetables and fruit, harvest them after a while, and learn how to cook, process, and preserve them. After thinning out unnecessary seedlings, watering plants, and performing many other works, children can finally harvest the plants! This is the moment when the children become the most excited. When learning how to preserve vegetables, they are surprised to find that the white, fresh Japanese radishes that they cultivated themselves are changed into wrinkled, dried strips, and that plump, round soybeans are changed into appetizing, yellow soybean flour.

Today, almost any items are available at convenience stores and supermarkets. In this age, we strive to hand down to the next generation Japanese food culture, especially the significance of growing food and the importance of eating such food with respect for it.



Koki Kominkan p42 map<sup>9</sup>





# What is Sweetfish Zousui?

## Let's Cook and Eat Sweetfish Zousui, a Local Legendary Dish!



Nowadays, there are few opportunities to cook local dishes. Meanwhile, in search of rich nature, more and more people are moving into our area from both inside and outside of Okayama Prefecture. In our area, there are the following community publications: a booklet titled *Takebe Tales*, which is a collection of local old, folk stories; and the *Tanepirika Shimbun*, a newspaper aimed at promoting interaction among local residents. One of the articles of the publications said that people used to eat sweetfish *zousui* (rice in thick broth) in the appropriate season. Some of those who read the article wanted to eat the dish, which led us at the Takebe Kominkan to hold a cooking event. Considering that some child participants did not know about sweetfish itself, we invited a local resident as an instructor for the event.



Participants first learned about the natural environment of the Asahi River and the ecology of sweetfish, and then about how to cook the dish. Hearing from the instructor that natural sweetfish smelled like a watermelon, participants tried smelling the fish and were very surprised to find that this was indeed true. At the event, held in a cheerful atmosphere, participants were willing to learn about the local tradition and enjoyed interacting among themselves.

Takebe-cho Kominkan p42 map 23

# Very Big! Magura Gobo

## Food and Health Seminar: Dishes for Specific Events under the Concept of Local Consumption of Local Produce



In Japan, there are dishes for specific events according to the season. In Okayama, using local food, people cook *bara-zushi* (vinegared rice topped with or mixed with chopped raw fish, cooked vegetables, and other ingredients) for an autumn festival, and *osechi* (a dish prepared to be eaten during the first three days of the New Year, which contains various specified ingredients). In our area, a typical local produce is Magura *gobo* (great burdock), which is as big as a Japanese yam.

Worrying about the inheritance of food culture due to the increase in the number of nuclear families, Magura Gonbo Village, a group consisting of 20 producers, has been established in order to ensure that the production of the traditional local vegetable is continued. In tandem with this effort, the Ashimori Kominkan held an *osechi* cooking class where participants used many local vegetables.

After receiving an explanation about the local vegetable from an instructor, participants were surprised and laughed to see the huge size of the Magura *gobo* placed in front of them. They were also very interested in other local dishes, such as *kikko shiitake* and black beans.



Ashimori Kominkan p42 map 2

# To Hand Down the Torch of Tradition to the Next Generation

In the Senoo area, people used to eat *funa* (crucian carp), which lives in a river. Due to the deterioration of the river environment in the mid-1950s and beyond, however, there are now fewer opportunities to eat the fish.

The Funameshi Festival has been launched to enable residents to be aware once again that they used to eat *funameshi* (crucian-carp dish) in the Senoo area, and to learn lessons from their forefathers.

The number of participants in the festival has increased each time, which I feel will lead many more people coming to know about *funameshi*. Since the number of those who can cook the dish is decreasing due to the aging population, the Senoo Kominkan is inviting volunteer staff for each event from junior high school students and other local residents, in order to hand down the food culture to the next generation. Although some families no longer eat *funameshi* or crucian carp, I have a strong determination to hand down the torch of the tradition to the next generation.

I feel very happy and encouraged when I see festival participants increasing their interest in local food culture, as well as when those eating *funameshi* tell me before going home with a smile that the dish was delicious and filled them with nostalgia. I would like to continue to do my best to make the Funameshi Festival even more exciting, and also to develop successors.

Mr. Yasuhiko Namba, involved in activities at the Senoo Kominkan

My ESD experience





# What do Grapes from Joto Taste Like?

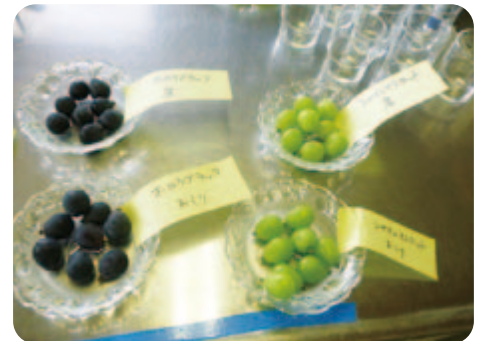
## Explore Excellent Aspects of Grapes from Joto!!

A wide variety of grapes are available in season at gift counters of department stores. Joto is the birthplace of Neo-muscat. Since almost all Neo-muscat produced here is shipped outside of Okayama Prefecture and consumed as an expensive gift, there are few opportunities for local residents to appreciate the taste of the grape. Along with rice, the grape is the main produce of Joto.

Why is the grape produced in Joto not distributed locally? What tasks do producers perform every day and how do they feel when growing the grape? Recently, an event to answer these questions was held. Despite the busy season, a grape producer answered these questions in front of the Neo-muscat and other six varieties of grapes that the producer had grown. After experiencing the luxury of comparing the tastes of the different varieties of grapes, event participants cooked and ate desserts using them.



Joto Kominkan p42 map16



# Eat Seasonal Vegetables Whole

## Jonan Association of Eating Local Products in Whole



In Jonan, a reclaimed land and urbanization control area, agricultural land and private vegetable gardens are expanding, enabling residents to obtain seasonal vegetables easily. In harvest time, there are even cases where the production amount is so large that some vegetables need to be disposed of.

At the Jonan Kominkan, we have decided to solve this problem. *Mottainai* ("What a waste!")

The spirit of *mottainai* encourages residents to take action. Since each farmer has grown vegetables with much care, time and money, it is necessary to devise some measures to use all the vegetables produced.

One of the local dishes in Jonan is *funameshi*, although there are fewer and fewer opportunities today to eat the dish, and fewer and fewer young people know about it. In light of this, we held an event to restore the tradition of cooking *funameshi*. At the event, participants all brought some seasonal vegetables, learned how to cook *funameshi*, and at the same time learned from each other how to cook their special vegetable dishes.

Jonan Kominkan p42 map17





# Itadakimasu – Phrase to Show Your Respect to Lives

## Rice and Life – Cooking with Rice



People in Japan have long been deeply connected with rice in their daily lives. The entire process of growing rice – from bedding out young rice plants to harvesting – requires a great deal of time and effort, as well as considerable care for weather conditions, water temperature, and the amount of sunshine. It is said that one reason why Japanese people are so industrious lies in the fact that they grow rice. It is also said that *itadakimasu*, a Japanese phrase spoken before you eat something, expresses a deep appreciation for those who have grown rice, as well as a sincere respect for the lives of what you are going to eat.

Fujita is not only one of the largest rice-producing areas in Okayama Prefecture, but it is also a newly developed residential area. Presently, fewer and fewer people eat rice across Japan, partly due to the increase in the number of nuclear families and changes in people's lifestyles. This trend might make seasonal events and food culture obsolete.

At the Fujita Kominkan, we hold a seminar where children and parents cook a wide variety of rice dishes. At the seminar, participants fully appreciate the delicious taste of rice and the pleasure of cooking. The seminar serves as a good opportunity to consider why our ancestors have continued growing rice in Fujita.

Fujita Kominkan p42 map 

## Enjoy a Relaxing Life in Tomiyama in a Comfortable Environment

My ESD experience



Established in January 2010, the Tomiyama Eco Club consists of 21 members.

We strive to protect *sato-yama* (a semi-natural area that coexists with a nearby populated area) in cooperation with Shujitsu High School by cutting unnecessary bamboos on Mt. Misao to allow enough sunshine to come in, so that trees, grass, and flowers can grow once again. Using these plants, we have created a hygrophyte garden. In addition, we aim to improve the natural environment by changing uncultivated farmland into a public farm to encourage many more residents to try growing organic vegetables, cleaning the areas around bus stops along the prefectural road running through Tomiyama, and planting sunflowers and cosmos.

We also organize environmental seminars to provide residents with useful environmental information, and hold the Tomiyama Eco Festival on May 30 every year, designated by Okayama City as the Day of Zero Waste, and thereby offering opportunities for people in Tomiyama to consider the environment.

Through these efforts, we hope that Tomiyama will become an even more comfortable place to live and that many more people will enjoy sustainable and relaxing lives.



**Members of the Tomiyama Eco Club**, which is involved in activities at the Tomiyama Kominkan





# Weave History and Hand It Down to the Next Generation

A tale lies behind even common scenes in the everyday life. Likewise, stories of various people lie behind even small shrines, houses, irrigation canals, and other items that you would pass by without paying special attention to. If you unravel such stories, you will rediscover the significance of the streets where such items are located. Such rediscovery will connect you to people in the past, transcending time.



## Preserve Oga Lotuses that Have Survived for 2,000 Years

### Kibi Oga Lotus Preservation Association

In 1951, 2,000-year-old lotus seeds were discovered, and the botanist Dr. Ichiro Oga successfully made one of the seeds sprout. This news spread throughout the world, and was even covered by *Life*. In recognition of his great achievement, offspring of that seed were subsequently nurtured across the world. Such lotuses were named "Oga Lotus" after his family name. Also in our area, the doctor's birthplace, Oga Lotuses were planted at a former castle site. To protect the species in such a way as to allow it to remain as pure-blooded as it was when it was discovered in 1951, the Kibi Oga Lotus Preservation Association has been established. In the association, we replant and take care of Oga Lotuses, while providing local residents with the results of our activities.

Additionally, we interact with associations outside Okayama Prefecture that grow Oga Lotuses, thereby exchanging information and increasing the profile of the plant.



Kibi Kominkan p42 map 6





# Hand Down to the Next Generation the Story of Taro-Kaneyasu Senoo, Called *Mizu-tono* (Water Lord)

## Project of Creating a Well Map / Project of Handing Down to the Next Generation the Story of Taro-Kaneyasu Senoo



The Senoo area is the result of reclamation of a part of the Inland Sea of Japan to develop farmland. In the past, even if residents tried to dig a well in the area, they ended up seeing salt water coming up from the ground. In this environment, it used to be a critical problem to secure water for daily lives, especially drinking water.

Right after Taro-Kaneyasu Senoo, whose family name is the origin of the name of this area, became the lord of the area, he launched a project to draw water from a faraway river called the Takahashi River and to develop an irrigation system. Covering 4,400 *chobu* (1 *chobu* = 2.45 acres), the irrigation system is still the largest in Okayama Prefecture. This project has made the Senoo area what it is today.

In the past, suffering from a shortage of irrigation water and drinking water, people in the regions south of Senoo used to buy water from Senoo's common wells.

To hand down the story regarding the great lord's foresight to future generations, the Senoo Kominkan is promoting activities to preserve the wells created in the area before the Second World War. We have also promoted efforts to restore Suhama Castle, create the *Senoo-Taro-Kaneyasu-Ondo*, a song and dance based on stories related to water, and prepare a well map.

At local events, the song is often played. Along with the castle, it contributes to community revitalization. We would like to hold a conference regarding water and many other events, thereby further expanding interaction among people.



Senoo Kominkan p42 map19

# Journey of Discoveries at Nadasaki

## Tales of Streets in Nadasaki



Prior to its merger with Okayama City, there used to be a pamphlet giving information on Nadasaki Town. After the merger, however, many of the long-used area names were changed, and it became necessary to update some addresses to new ones.

Moreover, partly because of the focus placed on the town's cultural assets, the pamphlet was not very suitable for those who wanted to try just strolling in a casual atmosphere. In this regard, to make a totally new pamphlet that would contribute to a new form of community development, the Nadasaki Kominkan asked the four neighborhood associations in Nadasaki to select appropriate members to form a pamphlet editing committee.

The result is an easy-to-use pamphlet titled *Tales of the Streets of Nadasaki*, which fully conveys the area's attractive features, such as its historical streets, nature, and gourmet food.

The new pamphlet is used as a helpful tool for various efforts to introduce Nadasaki to people outside the area, such as volunteer activities by street guides and promotion of the use of rental cycles among those visiting the area.



Nadasaki Kominkan p42 map27

# Revival of Ujo Pongee

## Ujo Pongee



Ujo pongee was first generated approximately 200 years ago in the Edo Period in the Okayama feudal domain. The textile drew much popularity due to its high quality, contributing considerably to the feudal domain's revenue.

Currently, Ms. Masako Sumoto is the only person who can hand down the weaving skills of the fabric to the next generation. She has accomplished a great achievement – reviving the weaving of the fabric, the skills of which seemed to be on their way out, by conducting steady research. It is our great pleasure that, since 1995, Ms. Sumoto has been raising the next generation at seminars held by the Kozai Kominkan.

In 2008, those who had completed and had been receiving such seminars demonstrated their strong determination and vigor to hand down the texture weaving skills to the next generation. Pooling their money, they established the Ujo Pongee Museum. This outstanding achievement is the result of their belief that they should create on their own what cannot be available. Today, they are further polishing their skills at the museum. In 2010, textile weaving was also revived in Nadasaki, the birthplace of Ujo pongee. In addition, in response to a request from Ms. Sumoto and the Nadasaki Kominkan, a weaving loom was donated, encouraging many more people to create Ujo pongee works.

Seminar participants would like to introduce the texture of the high-quality textile across Okayama Prefecture, Japan, and ultimately the world.

Kozai Kominkan p42 map10

Nadasaki Kominkan p42 map27

## Hoping that Successors will Grow and the Skills will be Handed Down to the Next Generation

As a fourth generation successor of Ujo pongee, I train successors at my home studio and at two Kominkan centers in Okayama City.

To protect the tradition of Ujo pongee, which will simply fade away if I try to promote my activities without the cooperation of others, I have begun to provide seminars on the textile at the Kominkan. It takes a long time for the seminar participants to develop the ability to produce the textile; the textile production consists of many processes that one weaver needs to perform alone. Although these processes require a lot of hard work, dyeing is especially physically tough.

While I continued my activities at the Kozai Kominkan, many more people began to learn about Ujo pongee, leading even people in Nadasaki, the birthplace of the textile, to become aware of it. At the Nadasaki Kominkan, donation money was provided through the courtesy of local people. This has enabled the production of a weft spinning machine which Kosaburo Miyake, my grandfather, wanted to use. Since my grandfather was born in Souzu (Nadasaki), I'm sure that he would have been pleased to hear the sound of the machine echoing in Nadasaki, the birthplace of the textile.

I hope that many more people will come to love Ujo pongee, and that successors will develop so that the related skills can be handed down to the next generation.

**Ms. Masako Sumoto**, a seminar instructor at the Kozai and Nadasaki Kominkan centers



My ESD  
experience







# Revival of *Kojo Kouta*

## Kojo Kouta

The name of our area Kojo comes from the phrase *ko-ri-jo-gai* (doing good for others and eliminating harm). It is thought that since the area was reclaimed land without sufficient water, our ancestors focused on mutual support in order to survive as farmers, who particularly needed much water.

In the early Showa Era, *Kojo Kouta*, a ballad proclaiming love for the area, was created mainly by residents. The first to fourth parts of the song describe the four seasons and the daily life of the area, while the fifth part concerns the ties of the people in the area. In recent years, however, there have been few opportunities for the song to be played as dance music at festivals and other events.

At the Kojo Kominkan, we proposed a project to revive the song. As part of the project, easy dance steps and movements were created to accompany the song, dancers were trained, and the song was sung by a local singer. Moreover, in cooperation with a non-profitable organization (NPO), a rock version of the song was produced for the younger generations.

To let people from a wider range of generations know about the song, we distribute sets of a dance DVD and a song CD to local elementary and junior high schools, as well as other organizations.



Photo provided by the *Sanyo Shimbun*

Kojo Kominkan p42 map 11

# Local Legacy – Scenery, Food, and Culture

## Sonan Local Heritage Project

Sonan has a culture that is typical of reclaimed land. Hoping that local residents will rediscover the magnificence of the local nature, the richness of the area’s history, environment and culture, and the excellence of their hometown, the Sonan Kominkan is promoting the Local Heritage Project, along with many workshops that include the following:

- Opening a photo contest of local scenery → selecting appropriate photos → deciding the best eight views in Sonan
- Helping local people rediscover their local culture
- Reviving local dishes that have seldom been cooked in recent years

Now that residents have less and less interest in their own communities, we strive to encourage residents to learn more about their communities, take necessary action, and consider anew the richness of their communities.

Sonan Kominkan p42 map 20

