

Diversity and Hospitality of Chiba

By Arata Hidetomo

Chiba's strength: an agricultural kingdom

In 1995, farmers and other agriculture-related people of Chiba Prefecture heard the good news that Chiba's gross agricultural production surpassed that

of Ibaragi Prefecture to gain the nation's number two position. Following Hokkaido, Chiba had already been number two in terms of both total income and per-household income from agricultural production. Statistics have confirmed Chiba as

Japan's leading agricultural prefecture both in name and reality.

Chiba Prefecture is situated at an average of 43 meters above sea level. The land is generally flat without high mountains and most of the land is used for agriculture. Four hundred years



ago, Edo (today's Tokyo) became the capital of Japan and developed into a large consumer market. To serve this market, Chiba expanded its capabilities as a supplier of agricultural products. By virtue of its proximity to the capital, Chiba was able to quickly grasp the diversity of consumer needs and meet them, and thus developed and accumulated agricultural technologies.

Japan's unmatched leader in vegetable production

By capitalizing on its location and technological base, Chiba remains Japan's leader in production of mainstay vegetables such as *daikon* (Japanese radish), carrots, cabbages, tomatoes and green onions, while meeting the new needs of consumers with products such as Chinese vegetables and herbs. As a result, Chiba is not only number one in terms of supply of agricultural produce to metropolitan Tokyo, but also in gross production of vegetables in Japan.

Taking advantage of its warm climate, Chiba is also active in the cultivation of fruits and flowers. In particular, pears represent about 80% of all fruits grown in Chiba, making it number two in the nation's production of pears. Production of Japanese medlars in Chiba is also ranked number two nationwide. Chiba is also famous for flowers in early spring. In addition to raising them outside, a growing number of farmers have recently been utilizing greenhouse (vinyl and glass) cultivation year round.

Further, when talking about agriculture in Chiba, the livestock industry cannot be ignored. While Japanese in general were traditionally an agricultural people, they tended to regard cows and horses simply as working animals. Nevertheless, it is said that dairy farming in Japan began in 1728 at a ranch on Mt. Mineoka in southern Chiba, with the grazing of white cows from India and production of something like butter. Today, dairy cattle, pigs and chickens are raised in various parts of Chiba Prefecture, with a wide variety

of dairy and livestock products being produced.

Leisure base for the metropolitan area

As described above, agriculture is a major activity in Chiba Prefecture, demonstrating the richness of its natural environment. The southern part of the Boso Peninsula is just two hours away from metropolitan Tokyo, but when you're there, you will feel very much in touch with nature. In prefectural parks such as the *Yoro Ravine*, visitors can easily immerse themselves in nature, forgetting all about the urban bustle.

Kamogawa and Katsuura, along the Pacific coast area of the peninsula, are major centers for the cultivation of flowers, taking advantage of the area's warm climate. Even in the winter, visitors can enjoy rape blossoms and pansies, as well as a wide variety of fresh marine products caught locally.

Kujukuri Hama Beach is not far, if you have time. This is known as Japan's longest beach, stretching 66 kilometers. Washed by the Kuroshio Current, it is a dynamic beach and visitors can enjoy not only various marine sports but also boat fishing. *Kamogawa Sea World* in the southern part of the peninsula offers killer whale and dolphin shows. Other tourist spots include *Nambo Paradise*, a botanical garden which has a sister relationship with the National Botanical Garden of Singapore, and the newly opened *Shakespeare Country Park*, where visitors can enjoy viewing replicas of the house where Shakespeare was born and New Place, where he spent his later years.

Chiba Prefecture is also well known for its large number of golf courses. In order to protect the natural environment, however, Chiba Prefectural Government is encouraging the system whereby greens are maintained without the use of chemicals.

Urban resort

Tokyo Disneyland, which opened in 1983 as the first Disneyland outside the United States, is located in Chiba Prefecture. It is crowded with Japanese

and foreign visitors every day, and attracts over 10 million visitors a year. While many theme parks have been opened in Japan recently, none even comes close to Tokyo Disneyland in terms of popularity.

Last year, Tokyo Disneyland opened a new theme land called "Toon Town." Tokyo Disneyland introduces new facilities and shows every year so that repeat visitors can enjoy something new each time. This may be the secret of its continued popularity.

There are many hotels situated near Tokyo Disneyland. Some time back, people began calling this area the "Bay Area," a very popular dating spot among young people. Located in Makuhari New City, which was described earlier, are the *Chiba Marine Stadium* and a man-made beach, which attract many visitors. All these facilities make Chiba Prefecture an ideal urban resort area.

Also in this area are *SSAWS* (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter Snow), the world's largest indoor ski slope using artificial snow, and *Lala Port*, a large-scale suburban shopping center with 360 shops, including a Sogo Department Store. These facilities also demonstrate Chiba's youthful vitality.

There are also a number of historical sites near Narita Airport, where visitors can learn about Japanese history. These include *Naritasan Shinsho-ji Temple*, the *National Museum of Japanese History*, the largest of its kind in Asia, and *Boso-no-Mura Museum*, where visitors can put on samurai armor. In Chiba City, there is the *Kasori Shell Mound*, where visitors can get a taste of the lifestyle of the ancient Japanese. A little farther away from the airport are Kikkoman and Yamasa soy sauce factories.

While Chiba Prefecture is sometimes overshadowed by the large metropolis of Tokyo, the prefecture is aggressively incorporating diversity from Japan and abroad and steadily growing as an "international" prefecture open to the global community and a new age. People can enjoy both urban and resort lifestyles in Chiba Prefecture thanks to its hospitality toward Japanese and foreign people and companies. ■