

Kaze no Ie Produce Market

Kaze no Ie is a bustling tourist site that draws more than 400,000 visitors each year. With those numbers, one might expect it to be an amusement park or museum, but it is actually a roadside rest area, or *michi no eki*. Part of a popular network of 1,180 such stops across Japan, Kaze no Ie offers free parking, public restrooms, tourist information, and one-stop shopping for locally made products.

The biggest draw at Kaze no Ie is its sprawling fruit and vegetable market where local and tourist shoppers alike come to buy Hiruzen's seasonal bounty. One notable regional specialty is Hiruzen daikon. Daikon radishes are a common staple essential to Japanese cuisine, but the Hiruzen variety is especially sought-after. Its appearance is as prized as its taste—an important quality in a country where farmers devote countless hours of specialized labor to produce perfectly formed fruit and vegetables free from blemishes. The softness of Hiruzen's black volcanic soil allows the root to grow straight and unmarred, while its mineral composition and moisture result in radishes that are juicy and highly nutritious.

Sales at Kaze no Ie support the community through a simple system of product tracing. Any resident is welcome to take home a green display tray, fill it with produce to sell, and return it to the shop. Each seller has a registered barcode that is used to label the items they supply. A quick scan at the checkout register ensures that a portion of the sale goes to its producer. Professional farmers are not the only suppliers for this market; other local residents, including elderly residents supplementing their pensions, sell produce here, too. Some offer delicacies they have foraged in the mountains, such as rare mushrooms, wild butterbur, and tart goumi berries known in the local dialect as *guibi*.

In addition to its produce market, the Kaze no Ie complex has a retail store where specialty goods and handicrafts from the area are sold, as well as a restaurant and café where visitors can try Okayama dishes like the popular noodle stir-fry called Hiruzen yakisoba.