

Shizukuishi and Koiwai Farm

Shizukuishi—Destination for All Seasons

The town of Shizukuishi, located high in the mountains along the western border of Iwate Prefecture, is a mecca for snow sports, as it is close to Mt. Iwate and several other mountains. Warm-weather activities include trail hiking and other outdoor pursuits among the many picturesque nature spots. In addition, there are hot springs (*onsen*) and traditional crafts, as well as delicious locally grown fruit and vegetables.

Koiwai Farm

Koiwai Farm, located at the base of Mt. Iwate, is one of the largest privately owned farms in Japan, covering some 3,000 hectares, and dates from 1891. Visitors to this working dairy farm enjoy family-friendly activities and learn about the history of the dairy industry in Shizukuishi, while visiting original farm buildings that are government-designated cultural assets. Dairy products from Koiwai Farm, which are sold nationwide, are featured in the various dishes served at the farm restaurant.

Sustainable Practices Pioneer

Koiwai Farm was built on principles of sustainability and environmentally friendly practices almost a century before these became mainstream trends in business. Three industrialists joined forces to found the enterprise with the initial aim of boosting food production in the area. The name of the farm is a combination of characters from their last names: “Ko” comes from an alternate reading from the name of Ono Gishin, then-vice-president of Japan Rail Company, “iwa” is from Iwasaki Yanosuke, then-president of Mitsubishi Corp, and the final “i” is taken from Inoue Masaru, then-chief executive of the National Railway Agency. Led by Inoue, the trio embarked on improving the soil and planting expanses of woodland and pasture, laying the foundation for the green oasis of today. Iwasaki Yanosuke’s nephew, Iwasaki Hisaya, took over leadership of the enterprise in 1899. Under his management, Koiwai Farm developed into a working dairy farm and became a leader in agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry.

Family-Friendly Activities

The main area of Koiwai Farm that is open to tourists, called Makiba-en, offers activities for all ages. Hands-on experiences with animals include feeding ponies and rabbits and viewing the farm’s flock of sheep. Visitors can also try archery, horse rides, and carriage rides, or take a trip in a wagon pulled by a farm tractor. At the arts and crafts center, they can also create their own one-of-a-kind souvenirs.

Dairy Farming Then and Now

Japan has a relatively short history of commercial dairy farming compared to other nations. The buildings on this property were all constructed between 1898 and 1936, and most are still in use today. A number of them, including the two oldest silos in Japan and six cowsheds, have been designated National Important Cultural Properties.

The Kamimaru Cowshed area offers the opportunity to learn about the running of the dairy farm today and see the dairy cows and calves close up. At the museum, visitors can delve into Koiwai Farm’s history, learning about the founding of the farm and

viewing exhibits of agricultural machinery, photos, and other artifacts dating from more than a century ago.

Farm-Fresh Food

The food produced at Koiwai Farm is a special attraction. The restaurant menu showcases all kinds of agricultural products. Along with cows and sheep, Koiwai Farm raises free-range chickens, and their eggs are used for one of the restaurant's signature dishes, fluffy omelet wrapped around a savory rice filling (*omu raisu*). Other distinctive menu items are ramen noodles in a creamy milk-based soup and dishes featuring local beef and lamb. For dessert, there is soft-serve ice cream or cheesecake. The full range of Koiwai products, including milk, cheese, butter, eggs, and jam is available at the farm shop.

In Harmony with Nature

Koiwai Farm is a year-round attraction, and there are things to see and do in every season. Spring is a popular time to visit, as the cherry trees blooming against the backdrop of Mt. Iwate make for a wonderful photo op. One tree—the so-called Solitary Cherry Tree, which has been standing in a pasture for more than a century—has become a tourist attraction in its own right. Originally planted to serve as shade for some of the first cows on the farm, the tree is now 20 meters high.

While most visitors come for the farm experience, Koiwai maintains an extensive forest as part of its complex, with the aim of preserving habitat for animals and humans alike. Programs are offered for schools and other groups to experience nature activities in the forest, while learning about the importance of protecting and preserving the environment for future generations.