

## **Shizukuishi's Food Culture**

Many of Shizukuishi's residents are farmers, and local people are proud of the high-quality food produced in the area. Hotels and restaurants endeavor to source locally grown ingredients whenever possible. Below are some recommendations for visitors who would like to experience Shizukuishi's food culture.

### **Soba (Buckwheat Noodles)**

In premodern times, rice was the staple crop in most parts of Japan, but it was difficult to grow in northern regions such as Iwate Prefecture, where summers were cooler. As a result, people looked for alternative grains that were more resistant to the cold. One of these was buckwheat, the main ingredient of the noodles known as soba. Clean, fresh water is required for the production of good-tasting soba, and Shizukuishi has this in abundance.

Soba is a highly versatile dish, and can be enjoyed in a variety of styles and in all seasons. It is typically served in one of two ways: chilled on a tray along with a dipping sauce (*zaru soba*) or in a bowl of hot, clear broth with various toppings (*kake soba*). A visit to one of Shizukuishi's many soba shops makes it evident why these simple but hearty noodles are popular with locals and visitors alike.

Shizukuishi's buckwheat flour is also used to produce local Japanese sweets, including an unusual version of a traditional confection called *yokan*, which is typically made with red bean paste. This version uses buckwheat flour instead.

### **Dairy Products**

Shizukuishi is famous as a center of Japan's dairy industry. The high quality of its dairy products is reflected in two family-run businesses that use the fresh local milk to make their specialties. Both are well worth visiting on a trip to Shizukuishi.

### **Gelato**

The handmade gelato at **Matsubokkuri Homemade Ice Cream Barn** is so well known that people regularly drive here from other prefectures to purchase it. After working in the dairy farming industry for more than 30 years, the owners decided to try their hand at gelato-making, and have since gone on to make Matsubokkuri a popular local landmark.

Among the flavors on offer are the uniquely Japanese wasabi (Japanese horseradish) and *goma* (sesame). Those who find it hard to choose just one flavor can opt for the two-in-one combination cone.

After purchasing gelato, customers can relax on the spacious deck or go up to the second floor for a birds-eye view of the surrounding countryside. *Matsubokkuri* means "pine cone" in Japanese, and the name is well suited to a shop built on the edge of a small forest. The owners have added a boardwalk through the trees, inviting visitors to take a short nature walk after enjoying their sweets.

## **Cheese**

Various types of artisanal cheese and yogurt can be purchased at the **Shizukuishi Cheese Factory**, where the husband-and-wife team uses fresh milk sourced directly from a neighboring farm to make their products. After honing his skills working for Koiwai Farm, Shizukuishi's major dairy company, the owner began producing and selling handmade cheese at this business in 2014.

The shop started off specializing in fresh cheese, but product lines have gradually expanded to include semi-hard types, as well as soft-serve ice cream in the warmer months. For a distinctly Japanese twist, consider the cheese flavored with miso, a paste made with fermented soybeans, barley, or rice malt.

There is a small herd of goats on the grounds near the shop. The animals do not provide milk for cheese; rather, their job is to keep the grass under control.