



Fukui's Buckwheat Fields

Minami Echizen-cho, Eiheiji-cho

The best places for growing the buckwheat used in soba noodles are those that experience considerable variation in temperature from afternoon to evening, and enjoy ample morning mist. Fukui's climate and topography are well suited to this, as shown in the fields of buckwheat blooms that signal the beginning of fall in the prefecture.



Buckwheat fields (Eiheiji-cho)



All-Japan Amateur Soba Making Festival

From September to October, the white blossoms of buckwheat fields color parts of the prefecture. After the Obon holidays, soba seeds are sown, bursting into brilliant white flowers before turning black and yielding the buckwheat that will become soba noodles, harvested in November.

Fukui's soba is deeply tied to religion, and was eaten as an afternoon meal during Hō'on, the most important festival in the Jōdō sect of Buddhism, whose monks and initiates observe a vegetarian diet. Sitting at the same latitude as other buckwheat producing regions, Fukui's soba carries an excellent reputation for rich flavors,

undoubtedly another factor in its local popularity. In order to promote this key element of Fukui cuisine, the All-Japan Amateur Soba-Making Competition has been held since 1996. This annual tournament bustles with soba-lovers and those hoping to test their soba-making mettle.



Minami Echizen-cho's Imajō Soba Festival^①



Amateurs trying their hand at soba-making in Imajō

Fukui's famous Echizen *oroshi soba* is said to have originated in what is now Echizen City. Nearly 400 years ago, Honda Tomimasa, administrator of part of what is now Echizen City, brought with him a master soba-maker from Kyoto. His distinct style of grated radish and soy sauce broth quickly caught on, and so Echizen *oroshi soba* was born.



Fukui's famous Echizen *oroshi soba*

Throughout the prefecture, anyone from children to adults can learn to make soba noodles at any of a number of instructional facilities.

The influence of this dish on Fukui cuisine is deep, and it is an indelible part of the prefecture's culture and history.



Sharp-tasting *daikon* radish, without which *oroshi soba* cannot be made

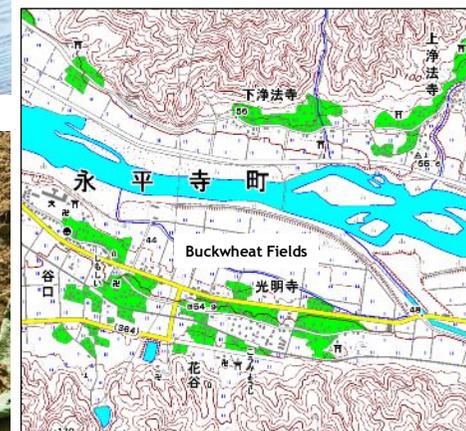


Photo ① courtesy of Minami Echizen-cho