



Japan Local Government Centre

Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), London



Local Japan: Case Studies in Place Promotion

Using regional products and PR to revitalize local areas

Yamanashi prefecture profile

Capital: Kōfu

Area: 4,465.38km²

Pop: 861,431

Density: 192.91/km²

Yamanashi Prefecture has been growing the Koshu variety of grape for over 1,000 years. It is unsurprising then that the region has been producing wine for 120 years and is home to 80 vineyards. Though wine is not the first thing that comes to mind when people think of Japan, the Yamanashi Prefectural Government and the Koshu of Japan Association are hoping to bring their regional wines to the global market through joint ventures abroad.

The promotion of Koshu, its historical name, as a wine growing region has both national and local government support and is one of several collaborations between government and local industry that have sprung up throughout Japan in recent years, with the aim of supporting Japan's regional produce abroad.

The Koshu of Japan Association is made up of 15 producers of wine, the Kofu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Yamanashi Wine-Makers Association and the Koshu City Chamber of Commerce. Their three aims are publicity, new product development and overseas promotion. The organisation hopes to improve the quality of these distinctive Japanese grapes and awareness of the variety of grape.

In 2010 fourteen wineries were accompanied by the Yamanashi Prefectural Government on a trip to London to introduce their produce to industry professionals as an accompaniment to Japanese cuisine, such as sushi, rather than the more traditional partner of sake. This was followed in 2011 by a two day wine tasting exhibition at the Imagination Galleries near Tottenham Court Road. Journalists and members of the wine business community were able to try different varieties of wine drawn from the Koshu grape.



It is hoped that the United Kingdom will be a good base for entry into the competitive European market, where they will have to compete with established wines from France as well as further afield.



The drive to push the wine outside of Japan was set in motion by Shigekazu Misawa of the Grace Winery, who said: 'It is my dream to see Koshu wine recognised for the qualities I know it can have'. And it is this love for and pride in their produce that has won Yamanashi wine fans. Wine critic Jancis Robinson OBE MW of the *Financial Times* and consultant for Koshu of Japan, has been involved with efforts to introduce the wine to Europe and she is not alone in her high praise of Koshu's produce.

In a period of global recession, Yamanashi Prefecture's local to global market push is one example of regional producers being supported by their local authorities to compete on the world stage. How the Koshu wine industry grows over the next few years will be of interest to other prefectures in Japan keen to promote their wares abroad.



Nara prefecture profile

Capital: Nara

Area: 3,691.09km²

Pop: 1,425,839

Density: 386/km²

Success and controversy have always walked the same line, and nothing demonstrates that point as well as the Association of Commemorative Events at the Nara Prefectural Office paying ¥5m (approx. £39,000) for Sento-kun - the official mascot to mark the 1,300th anniversary of Nara becoming Japan's capital in 710 AD.

Designed by Satoshi Yabuuchi, famous sculptor and professor at Tokyo University of the Arts, Sento-kun is an image of a young Buddha crowned with a pair of deer antlers. Deers are regarded as holy animals in Nara,

appointed by a god to guard the new capital when it was established in the area.

Often overlooked by the tourists that flock to its neighbor Kyoto, Nara is home to several world heritage sites, including the Tōdai-ji Temple which is not only the largest wooden building in the world but also houses the largest bronze Buddha within it. Nara replaced the old capital Fujiwara 1,300 years ago. 'Sento' literally means 'the transfer of the capital'.

To mark the occasion Sento-kun was drafted in by the local government to promote the anniversary. His own website was launched and he put in appearances at municipal events. However, not only was his design criticised as being disrespectful to Buddha and expensive, it also suffered a fatal flaw: it was not 'kawaii'. Local residents even held their own competition to find a replacement which received over 600 entries.



Despite his flaws, however, Sento-kun has provided Nara Prefectural Government with the last laugh. According to the official estimates from the anniversary homepage press office, Sento-kun raised the equivalent of ¥22.5bn (approx. £169m) in free publicity in 2010. He appeared in newspapers and magazines 3,500 times and his total television coverage amounted to 32 hours and 40 minutes.

Over 200 items adorned with Sento-kun's image also went on sale, produced by companies both inside Nara and outside the prefecture, bringing in income from licensing of over ¥4.8bn.

All of this was reflected in the increase of tourists who visited the restored palace of Heijokyo – the ancient capital of Japan. A total of 3.63m tourists visited the site between April and November 2010 which was up 45% on the original estimate. It has also been reported that 13.8m tourists also visited other sites in Nara up to October 2010, which exceeded the annual forecast of 10m.

Sento-kun has presided over a sizeable increase in Nara's tourism and is credited with raising Nara's profile to the forefront of Japanese tourism. Despite the initial backlash, his popularity is such that Nara Prefectural Government are considering keeping him as a long-term mascot after 2010.



Kumamoto prefecture profile

Capital: Kumamoto

Area: 7,404.14km²

Pop: 1,842,140

Density: 249/km²

Winter 2010 brought a new radio show to the airwaves of Nippon Broadcasting (Tokyo) in the form of 'Kumamoto Prefecture presents Suzanne's Love! Kumamoto' (*Kumamoto-ken presents Suzanne no daisuki! Kumamoto*). Running from October 2010 to January 2011 the weekly broadcast of twenty minutes showcased Kumamoto's people, produce and places to the citizens of Tokyo. Presented by talent Suzanne a.k.a Kumamoto PR Officer Suzanne, the show was the latest in a PR campaign that is now in its third year.

Inaugurated at a ceremony at the Kumamoto 'embassy' in Tokyo November 2008, Kumamoto-born idol Suzanne has been the centre of a campaign to promote the prefecture of Kumamoto nationwide. Given the title 'P.R. Officer Suzanne', the project originally began with four missions laid out on the official 'Love! Kumamoto' (*Daisuki! Kumamoto*) website:

1. Eat Kumamoto's local produce and report on the secret to its deliciousness.
2. Promote Kumamoto's agricultural produce and sea food at the Kumamoto Fair in Tokyo.
3. Talk about Kumamoto's appeal at the 'Welcome to Kumamoto' event held in Tokyo's Midtown.
4. Report on PR work at the Kumamoto Prefectural Office.



Over the three years since the start of the campaign however, Suzanne's activities have gone beyond these initial goals, including the production of and filming a music video for a Kumamoto song ('*Daisuki! Kumamoto Fire*') and working hard to attract tourists upon the completion of the Kyushu bullet train last year.

Encouraging the participation of Kumamoto Prefecture's residents, the campaign's official website asks users to sign up, which upon doing so allows them to access exclusive content such as downloadable 'P.R. Officer' business cards, special codes to adorn their blogs with, and a free download of '*Daisuki! Kumamoto Fire*' and, more importantly for building community spirit, its karaoke version and lyrics to sing along with. There is also a scheme promoting blog entries by members on a Kumamoto theme announced by the website, encouraging users to spread the word on their own personal blogs. January 2011's column featured blogs recommending popular dating spots in Kumamoto.

While Suzanne's personal involvement in the website is unknown, it is updated weekly with articles promoting various sightseeing destinations, local delicacies and seasonal activities. It also archives summaries of 'Kumamoto Prefecture presents Suzanne's Love! Kumamoto'. Users who have signed up can also see backstage photos of Suzanne taking photos for the campaign.

Catching her first big break in 2007 at age 20 on the Japanese show *Quiz! Hexagon II*, Suzanne is a regular guest on a variety of television shows and often appears in TV commercials. Despite Japanese 'talents' and idols being ten a penny, Kumamoto Prefecture's 2008 external promotion budget, including Suzanne's appointment as P.R. Officer, was not cheap at ¥49m (just under £382,000). Although with a return of ¥1.2bn (approx. £9.3m) according to one Japanese news source, it would probably be seen as a good investment.

Suzanne's work as P.R. Officer will continue into 2011.

Credits

Text: Phillippa Harvey
 Editor: Andrew Stevens
 With thanks to Keith Kelly &
 Kumamoto Prefecture PR Dept.

Maps reproduced from Wikipedia Wikimedia Commons.

Koshu of Japan Logo copyright© KOSHU OF JAPAN

Sento-kun logo and homepage copyright©2009 Association for
 Commemorative Events of the 1300th Anniversary of Nara Heijo-kyo Capital

Suzanne photo ©2010 Kumamoto Prefecture *Daisuki Kumamoto*

Japan Local Government Centre
 15 Whitehall
 London
 SW1A 2DD



Japan Local Government Centre

Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), London

www.jlgc.org.uk