

Nagareyama:

City in Forest Close to Tokyo

Urban Resort for Metropolitan Area

By Yoshiharu IZAKI



A giant flower carpet at Nagareyama Green Festival, decorated with 6,400 flower seedlings by citizens and participants

Nagareyama City: Tokyo's Oasis

As Japan is densely populated, especially in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area with a population of more than 30 million, one must travel at least an hour by train from central Tokyo to find suburbs where nature with rich greenery and a high-quality urban environment exist in harmony. However, Nagareyama City in Chiba Prefecture is an exception. One can reach there from downtown Tokyo in 20 minutes by the most up-to-date high-speed train "Tsukuba Express" or in some 25 minutes by car via Joban Expressway. Chiba Prefectural Ichinoya-no-mori Park near Nagareyama Ohtaka-no-mori Station is a habitat for northern goshawks (*Accipiter gentiles*) and owls, while Nagareyama Central Park Station is a gateway to a large wooded sports park. This is why Nagareyama is called "a city in forest closest to central Tokyo."

The city is also attracting attention as an oasis for residents of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area because of its "Open Gardens Program," one of the largest of its kind in the region; the Tone Canal, which has been recognized as a selected civil engineering heritage site by the Japan Society of Civil Engineers; and Risokai Commemorative Nature Park, where nature remains as it was hundreds of years ago. In a nutshell, Nagareyama is an "urban resort" for Tokyo residents as well as a high-quality residential community with a population of 170,000.

PHOTO 1

Photo: Nagareyama City



Open Gardens Program, One of Largest in Greater Tokyo

The idea of opening private gardens to the public originated in Britain, where gardening is a popular hobby. An organization for "open gardens" was established more than 70 years ago. The group began the publication of a guidebook called the "Yellow Book," which today lists more than 3,500 private gardens open to the public. For Britons, visiting private gardens is a popular weekend pastime.

In 2003, a gardening contest was held in Nagareyama. Its participants then formed a Nagareyama gardening club, "Karento" (flower lovers). The club launched the "Open Gardens Program" in May 2005. In tandem with the city government's program under the theme of "a city in forest: a city with flowers and trees," open gardens are held annually with the participation of approximately 50 homes in this compact urbanized area of 25 square kilometers. (Photo 1)

"Nagareyama Open Gardens Book," a yellow-cover guidebook likened to the "Yellow Book" in Britain, comes out every year. A total 2,000 copies are printed and sold through bookstore chain Kinokuniya's Ohtaka-no-mori branch, but they sell out in a few months. Every year, nearly 10,000 people from Tokyo and elsewhere visit the city to enjoy open gardens. Unlike in Britain where visitors need to pay for admission and gardens usually belong to large residences, admission is free in Nagareyama, where varieties of carefully grown flowers bloom in small gardens at private homes and those in the premises of collective housing as well as spacious private gardens.

Tone Canal: "Eco-park" Closest to Tokyo

The construction of the Tone Canal began in 1889 to shorten the route of water transport connecting the Tone and Edo rivers when waterborne traffic was bustling. The inland canal stretching about 9 kilometers was completed in 1890. The canal was designed by Dutch engineer Anthonie Thomas Lubertus Rouwenhorst Mulder and, unlike many other canals in Japan, it is curved to create beautiful scenery. The canal shortened the shipping route by some 40 kilometers, thereby increasing the speed of shipment from rice-producing areas along the Tone River to Tokyo, a major consumption center. The canal saw busy traffic through the first half of the 20th century until 1941 when its embankments were destroyed by a typhoon, thus ending a half century of its history in waterway shipping.

What characterizes the Tone Canal is that it has no concrete rein-

PHOTO 2



forcements for its embankments. Both embankments and shores along the waterway as well as lower banks sandwiched between them are covered with grass. This structure allows water to seep into the soil of the shores, creating wetland on both sides of the canal and providing habitats for hydrophyte colonies such as mosses, ferns and sedges. They create “green carpets” reminiscent of damp plains found in mountainous regions. The upper portions of the embankments are dry, and their lower segments on the waterway side are lined with beautiful cherry trees. Areas along the canal include wooded slopes, bogs, ponds, spring water, temple and shrine forests, parks, and paddy fields, all combining into expanses of beautiful nature. Along the canal, the presence of 600 species belonging to 100 plant families has been confirmed. Authorities have also affirmed the existence of nine species of animals and plants listed as endangered in the Red Data Book of the Environment Ministry, and of 26 animal/plant species on Chiba Prefecture’s similar list. The richness of its ecosystem is said to be unrivalled among Tokyo’s suburban areas. In response to this diversity of plants, there are a wide variety of insects and birds in the region. It thus maintains a rich ecosystem and this is why the Tone Canal has won fame as an “eco-park.” (Photo 2)

Only some 35 minutes by train from central Tokyo, the canal offers a great number of visitors from neighboring areas and Tokyo a good place for a stroll and an opportunity to experience rich nature that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years. On side roads along the canal, there are art galleries, a concert venue in a bamboo grove, a Japanese-style restaurant which has been in business for 150 years, a French restaurant with a retro-chic atmosphere, an Indonesian restaurant popular among young couples, and so on. It is a pleasure for the eyes, ears and taste buds to visit the region.

Stunningly Beautiful Seasons in Risokai Park

Risokai Commemorative Nature Park is a 5-hectare natural park on the north side of the Tone Canal where lakes and natural forests are conserved. It was created by an alumni association of the Tokyo University of Science to commemorate the centenary of the founding of their alma mater, which was set up by graduates of the University of Tokyo’s School of Science. It is a precious natural park keeping nature in a Tokyo suburb as it was several hundred years ago. It is possible to reach this park within 35 minutes from central Tokyo.

In April, the park’s forests of young green leaves are full of vitality amid the chirping of numerous birds. If you lie on your back looking up

PHOTO 3

Photos: Nagareyama City



at the skies, you can enjoy the conversation of birds that come close to you in large numbers. You would feel as if you were Dr. Dolittle. In Tokyo, the temperature can go up to close to 40 C in summer, but in the Risokai park, which includes natural groves of white birch trees, the mercury rises no higher than 30 C or so. It is a healing and healthful space filled with negative ions. In autumn, crimson foliage is magnificent, attracting not only visitors who enjoy quiet autumnal forests but also photographers, both amateurs with professional-use cameras and pros. Nagareyama residents are very proud that they have such a natural environment only 35 minutes by train from central Tokyo. (Photo 3)

Come to Nagareyama City

Nagareyama is developing as a high-quality residential community, which is rather rare in Japan, while an endless number of people visit the city all year round to enjoy its rich nature. When you visit Tokyo, or anywhere in Japan, make sure to spend a leisurely day in Nagareyama. It will change your image of Tokyo.

Generous Subsidies for Siting Business

Nagareyama offers one of the nation’s most generous subsidies for enterprises starting operations in the city. In recent years, venture businesses in information technology (IT) and in biotechnology have moved their headquarters or laboratories to Nagareyama one after another. Their moves are prompted by three factors: 1) proximity to Tokyo, easily accessible by train and car, 2) a comfortable environment for employees to live and work in, and 3) the availability of an attractive subsidy program for enterprises seeking business locations here.

For enterprises establishing business facilities in the city for the first time, Nagareyama offers subsidies equivalent to the property and city planning taxes for a period of five years. For those which relocate their head offices to the city, the subsidy program is extended to seven years, the longest period for such subsidies offered in Japan.

Those contemplating doing business in Japan or East Asia are cordially invited to consider Nagareyama, close to Tokyo, rather than Tokyo proper, as a candidate site. **JS**

URL: <http://www.city.nagareyama.chiba.jp/>

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