

● My view point in *Ippukudokoro Yokokawa* (Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture)



There are many roadside stations (Michi no Eki) in Japan, where various products including local specialties are sold. This time, we will focus on Ippukudokoro Yokokawa, which was registered as the fifth roadside station in Shizuoka Prefecture in 1997. It is located about an hour's drive from Hamamatsu Station and the scenery gradually changes from urban to countryside.

◆ **Ippukudokoro Yokokawa, a mountain village with lush greenery**

We were happily enjoying the view from the car window and before we knew it, we have arrived to a place surrounded by nature. We were greeted by fresh air and delicious smell as we got out of the car.

Ippukudokoro Yokokawa has developed from being an unmanned shop into a modern



facility equipped with EV stands through the efforts of local people and the support of the government in the span of 36 years. Many customers visit even on weekdays not just in their cars, but also by motorbike or bicycle. The roadside station is definitely not only a place to take a break, but also a place to enjoy shopping and a roadtrip destination.

◆Enjoyable shiitake mushrooms harvest



The main industries in this region are tea and shiitake mushrooms. In cultivating these mushrooms, Jolcham oak (*Quercus serrata*) is used. First, the Jolcham oak logs are cut and left to dry for about a month. After which, the logs are further cut into 1 meter long pieces

where holes are made, and the fungus is inserted. The logs are then laid down in a forest to avoid sunlight for about a year and a half. When it is ready for harvest, the mushrooms are gathered on days when it is not raining. Mushrooms are held from the stem and plucked out. It was our first time harvesting shiitake mushrooms and we had a lot of fun.

◆Making our first shiitake croquette



Making croquettes seems difficult so we have never made them before. However, with the guidance of everyone at Ippukudokoro Yokokawa, we were able to make our first ever croquettes.

The first step to making delicious croquettes is to steam potatoes for about 20 minutes. The lovely mothers shared with us their knowhow on croquette-making while waiting. For example, rather than boiling potatoes, steaming them requires less water which also makes them tastier. We peeled the steamed potatoes, mashed them, then added sauteed onions, and seasoned with salt and pepper to taste. We added all these while the potatoes were warm, so delicious aroma spread throughout the room.

Next, each portion is weighed and shiitake mushrooms are wrapped inside the potato

mixture, making sure the mushrooms don't stick out. These are then shaped into a croquette which is coated in flour, eggs, and breadcrumbs before frying making the outside crunchy while the inside is soft. You can taste the balance between the flavors of the onions and shiitake mushrooms. Once you take your first bite, you'll find yourself wanting more. Ippukudokoro Yokokawa also has *okara* (soy pulp) croquettes aside from shiitake mushroom croquettes..

Both are made with ingredients produced in Hamamatsu making them a local specialty.

◆**Even soft-served ice cream is shiitake-flavored?!**

We couldn't imagine what it would taste like the first time we heard about it, but it was surprisingly delicious when we tried it. Shiitake soft serve ice cream is made by mixing shiitake powder with vanilla soft serve ice cream mixture. We could really feel the sweetness of the vanilla soft-serve ice cream and the “umami” of the shiitake mushrooms the moment it touched our lips. Ippukudokoro Yokokawa is the third roadside station in Japan to start selling shiitake-flavored soft serve ice cream so don't miss your chance to give it a try.

