

ACCORDING to a poll conducted by the Cabinet Office in 2014, among respondents who answered that they lived in urban areas, 52.3% of those in their twenties, 57.6% of those in their thirties and 51.2% of those in their forties said they might consider migrating to a local region. The number of those actively exploring the possibility of migrating appears to be on the rise. According to the Furusato Kaiki Shien Center, a Tokyo-based NPO that supports migration to local regions, the number of inquiries it receives has increased from about 6,000 in 2010 to about 21,000 in 2015.

Itoshima (pop. 100,000) in Fukuoka Prefecture is one of the more popular migration destinations in Japan, receiving about 3,500 migrants on an annual basis. Itoshima is located on the beautiful Genkai Sea coast. In addition to boasting outstanding natural beauty, Itoshima appeals to migrants for its proximity to Fukuoka, the largest city on the main island of Kyushu.

The Itoshima City Government has played its part in encouraging migration to the city by providing grants to people who buy and live in houses there. In addition, it operates an informative website useful for those looking to sell, buy or rent unoccupied

houses in the city.

“We expect new arrivals to cooperate with the local residents who have lived in our city for many years to revitalize the region,” says an official from Itoshima City Government’s Regional Promotion Office. “Already, for example, a number of events have been organized by migrants with great success.”

One of these is the Itoshima Craft Festival. Twenty years ago some thirty craftspeople migrated to Itoshima, establishing a community of artists that now numbers around 120. At the ninth Festival last September, artisans working in wood, ceramics, leather and other crafts exhibited their works and attracted many visitors.

Sharing Itoshima

In one part of Itoshima, there is a small community of just eighteen households from which vantage point residents enjoy a spectacular view of rice paddies and the sea. Chiharu Hatakeyama and Koichi Shida, who have managed Itoshima Share House since May 2013, are migrants to the community. Both Hatakeyama, who was born in Saitama Prefecture, and Shida, who was born in Tokyo, mostly lived in urban areas until they were in their late twenties. But in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake

A hilltop view of Itoshima
Photo: Courtesy of Itoshima Share House

Considering a Move to Itoshima

What is it about Itoshima in Fukuoka Prefecture?

TOSHIO MATSUBARA



Chiharu Hatakeyama (right) and Koichi Shida
Photo: Yoshifusa Hashizume

A gathering at Itoshima Share House
Photo: Courtesy of Itoshima Share House

of March 2011, both abandoned their urban lifestyles and moved to Itoshima.

“Many conditions that make moving attractive exist in Itoshima, such as a rich natural environment, good access to urban areas and a friendly local atmosphere for welcoming migrants,” says Shida.

Currently eight men and women in their twenties to fifties, including a cook, a translator and a writer, as well as Hatakeyama and Shida live in the share house, which is characterized by its self-sufficient lifestyle. Hatakeyama and Shida rent a neighboring rice field and subsist from the rice they cultivate. In addition, both have a hunting license and occasionally hunt wild boar using traps. They produce some electricity from self-made solar panels. They use spring water as a water source.

“For dinner we make it a rule to cook together, preparing one item each and then we eat together,” says Hatakeyama. “I have acquired my power for survival by living in Itoshima.”

The share house plays host to events such as concerts and rice growing workshops, many of which draw visitors from Fukuoka and beyond.



The people who live in the share house help with the farming, and through such activities as working to keep the neighborhood tidy have become integrated with the community. On one occasion, Hatakeyama and Shida invited all of the people in the local community to the share house as the venue for their wedding ceremony.

“It is very important to build good relationships with the local people when you live in a small community,” says Hatakeyama. “It is our ideal to make Itoshima Share House into a collective house where a wide variety of people can support each other and live together in the future. We want to raise our future children in the circle of Itoshima’s community. We want to move toward the future of Itoshima with our children.” 



Itoshima Share House
Photo: Yoshifusa Hashizume