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year of the Heisei period.

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The "long month" has only 30 days, but
from here the nights start to get longer.

Shinjo-son Forest Therapy Base

By Noriko Ehara

In 2006, the national Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries officially recognized "forest bathing" as a therapeutic way to reduce stress and improve health, by creating a certification for "Forest Therapy Bases." In April this year, Shinjo-son, a northern village near the border with Tottori Prefecture, received the go-ahead to become Okayama prefecture's first Forest Therapy Base.

Mr. Takahiro Sogabe, chairman of Shinjo-son Forest Therapy Council says, "It is not just about climbing a mountain. A walk on the 2 km Therapy Road on Mt. Kenashiyama takes between one and one-and-a-half hours. Anyone, from children to old people can enjoy a relaxing walk here." Sogabe moved to Shinjo-son from Osaka 6 years ago, after falling in love with the people and nature in Shinjo-son. "I feel that I have recovered a natural rhythm after I came to Shinjo. I want people living in the city to know how wonderful Shinjo-son is, and to experience the therapeutic effects of a walk in the forest here."



Forest bathing on the Therapy Road.



Kenashiyama Yama-no-Ie (mountain rest house).



Michi-no-Eki, Meruhen-no-Sato Shinjo (roadside station) to rest, eat and shop.

The Shinjo-son "Forest Therapy Base" is still under development for official opening next May, but the hiking trails are open anytime. This autumn looks set to be a perfect time to take a relaxing walk in the forest, listening to the sounds of a running brook and the chirping of wild birds.

When you make your way out to the Shinjo-son Forest Therapy Base, be sure to visit the following two places as well. Mt. Kenashiyama, (literally "mountain without hair") is a symbol of Shinjo-son, and *Kenashiyama Yama-no-Ie* is a thatched-roofed house on the mountain for hikers to rest up and enjoy some refreshments. It's open between 10:00 and 15:30. On Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, Mr. Sogabe serves light refreshments for free. You can also pay to have an overnight stay there from April to November, but you must make a reservation in advance.

For more information on Shinjo-son Forest Therapy Base and/or *Kenashiyama Yama-no-Ie*, phone Shinjo-son Village Office on 0867-56-2628 (Japanese only).

Shinjo-son's local specialties can be purchased at Michi-no-Eki, Meruhen-no-Sato Shinjo, which is on route 181. (This Michi-no-Eki is open every day between 9:00am and 6:00pm from April to November, and until 5pm from December to March, when it is closed on Wednesdays.) In particular, *Sarunashi* sweet wine and *Sarunashi* jams are a local hit. *Saru* means monkey, and *nashi* means pear in Japanese. *Sarunashi* are a type of pear that grow in the forests and are apparently a favorite food of monkeys. What do they taste like? Go to Shinjo-son to find out!

Photos and text courtesy of Living Okayama.