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AGRI-LESSONS

Close-ups of well ripe cherries with sweet flavor and marvelously juicy flesh at Kunagi's cherry orchard

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE
INNOVATIONS OF
AGRI-TOURISM
AT YAMANASHI
THE FRUIT KINGDOM
OF JAPAN

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The image shows a magazine spread. The top half features a close-up photograph of a cluster of bright red cherries hanging from a branch with green leaves. A green banner in the top left corner of the photo area contains the text 'AGRI-LESSONS'. Below the photo, there is a short paragraph of text. The bottom half of the spread is a white background with a red border, containing the main title of the article in large, red, serif font. At the bottom of this section, there is a line of smaller text crediting the author. The very bottom of the page has a small footer with the page number and publication details.



Cherry trees in Japan, like the apple trees get a silver foil like layer laid on the ground around each tree. This layer is apparently made of a material like flexible sheets of polythene.



Farmer Kunagi ready to receive visitors to his cherry orchard.



Mr. Joselito C. Bernado - the Director of the Agriculture Department of the Asian Productivity organization (APO) in Japan and Masashi Hashimoto San a former staff member of the APO pause for a picture at Kunagi's cherry orchard.



Kunagi's cherry orchard in a green house

JAPAN blessed with a nation of dedication and sacrifice towards their homeland's socio-economic development, is a country of vivid diversity. With innovations in many fields such as industrialization, art and agriculture today, the nation is setting examples to the entire world sharing its numerous developmental aspects and segments enabling the nations across the world to effectively learn through the innovations in Japan. Sharing and experiencing the innovations in Japan therefore, are of vital importance in developing many emerging sectors in Sri Lanka too. As a country that has an immense potential to cater towards being a successful destination of hospitality in the industry of tourism, Sri Lanka has many things to learn from the Japanese experience. One such effective component the magazine is helping the country throughout is, helping the entrepreneurs of the tourism industry of Sri Lanka to learn from the innovations in the sector of agri-tourism in Japan. This time, we are taking our readers to Yamanashi the fruit kingdom of Japan and the home of Mount Fuji, for an exceptional cherry picking experience.

Yamanashi is located in the centre of Japan and is a region richly endowed with nature and surrounded by beautiful mountains. One of those mountains is Mount Fuji, heartily called by the Japanese as Fujisan, the highest mountain in Japan, with a height of 3,776 meters.

The beauty of the four seasons in Yamanashi is spectacular. In spring, Kofu basin is filled with blooming peach blossoms which carpet the area,

making it to appear like a fairyland. With the breezy freshness of the Fuji five lakes namely, Lake Yamanakako, Lake Saiko, Lake Shojiko, Lake Motosuko, Lake Kawaguchiko and the Kiyosato highland in the summer, the mountains dyed in fall colours in the autumn, and the sight of a snow-covered Mount Fuji in winter, travelers passing through Yamanashi are guaranteed an array of breathtaking views.

Yamanashi is considered to be Japan's 'Kingdom of fruits', and boasts high-class grapes and peaches cultivated with superior techniques. From summer to autumn, you can enjoy picking grapes and peaches at farms open to the public. Furthermore, strawberry picking in the spring and cherry picking in early summer are also popular. The production of high quality wine is well established in the prefecture. This unique wine is characteristically known for being a superior complement to Japanese cuisine.

Furthermore, Yamanashi is a good spa and health resort destination that has many high quality hot-springs. The attraction of Yamanashi is not only nature. You can experience the pure and beautiful spirit that is unique to Japan, such as ancient and medieval sites, temples, shrines and old houses.

Yamanashi is close to Tokyo, and is only 1.5 hours away by train. On a recent bright Saturday Morning, Mr. Joselito C. Bernado - the Director of the Agriculture Department of the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) in Japan and Masashi Hashimoto San a former staff member of the APO accompanied us for an authentic cherry picking experience in Yamanashi. As we started in the mid day, it was almost 02.00pm the local time when we reached by road the cherry farm of Kunagi Isao at the beautiful and serene countryside of Kofu area in Yamanashi. Kunagi an energetic, elderly farmer who has a son and two daughters has been farming here for the last 25 years. Now, he has two cherry gardens and he allows visitors to visit them for almost 40 minutes for an entry fee of 2000 yen per head. It is a fixed fee here for any local resident or a foreign visitor. A visitor can eat cherries as much as he picks during the visit in the cherry orchards inside green houses. Green houses protect cherries from rain during picking period. Each visitor is given a basket to drop the seeds of the cherry fruit after consuming the flesh of this juicy fruit. In his gardens he has grown several varieties of

cherry. Around 60% of the cultivation here is from the Satho Nishki variety which is known as the best popular variety. He has also grown 20% of the Takasa variety and 5% from the Yamagatha Beijing variety. There are few cherry trees from other varieties too. Each variety has its own delicate, sweet flavor and marvelously juicy flesh distinctively but closely different from each variety. Some are slightly sour preferably liked by the Sri Lankans. The true joy of cherry picking is being able to taste as many of these fruit as you please here during your visit at the cherry yard. At the entrance counter there are boxes of picked cherry for the visitor to buy to take home for a price cheaper than at the supermarket.

Being our translator, Hashimoto san explained Kunagi's words in English to us. "This area has started growing cherry about 100 years ago. Actually, this Kofu area is very famous for cherry in Japan," Kunagi says. He has grown 10 acres of cherry in Kofu.

Cherries being an early-summer luxury in Yamanshi, are so exceptional that they're known as the 'Jewel of Fruits.'

The fun part of cherry picking at Kunagi's cherry orchard is to climb the ladder placed at the orchard and looking for the brightest red cherries at the top of the trees. The cherries relished from this spot atop the ladder apparently taste better than any other served on the ground..!

Cherry trees in Japan, like the apple trees there, are protected with a silver foil like layer laid on the ground around each tree. This layer is apparently made of a material like flexible sheets of polythene. During the Multicountry Observational Study Mission on best practices in promoting Innovation and Productivity in agriculture for Mass Media Practitioners in Japan last September, an international programme for journalists in the Asia Pacific Region, sponsored and organized by



As the visitors walk around the cherry orchard, farmer Kunagi engages picking ripe cherries to make them ready to sell



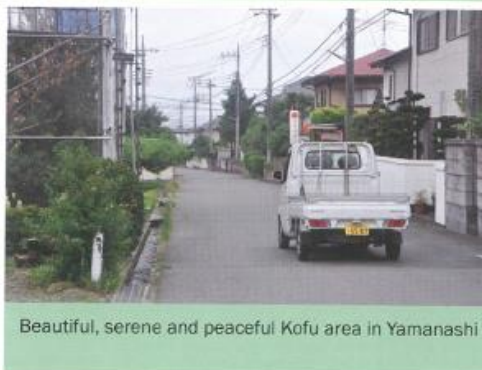
Farmer Kunagi busy packing the picked cherries for sale. Weighed, nicely packed and priced cherries are kept in boxes for sale at the entrance table.



Carefully grown cherry trees with the silver foil sheets beneath. A ladder placed to pick cherries on the top of the trees are seen at a distance



In the cultivation of grapes in Japan, farmers carefully place a special kind of pieces of paper on the top of each bunch of grapes in the vineyard to avoid excess sunlight on the fruit



Beautiful, serene and peaceful Kofu area in Yamanshi



Anura Gunawardhane and Ajantha Gunawardhane visitors from Sri Lanka at Kunagi's cherry orchard during their recent visit to Japan.

the Asian Productivity organization (APO), Mr. Joselito C. Bernardo - Director Agriculture Department of the APO clarified the reason behind this innovative idea. "The silver colour foil material on the ground reflects the rays of the sun back on the fruit so that the bottom part of the fruit can easily catches it. So that part of the fruit gets its colour alike as it gets it on the top from direct sun light. This also makes the ripening process expedited. In the cultivation of grapes, farmers use the technique of the other way around. They carefully place a special kind of piece of paper on the top of each bunch of grapes in the vineyard to avoid excess sunlight on the fruit," he explained.

Agri tourism in Japan is not just visiting agri-tourism sites. It also offers a vast innovative knowledge and experience on innovations of agriculture in Japan that

could also be practiced in the visitor's homeland.

If carefully studied, Sri Lanka can learn a number of lessons from these experiences to add towards the island's immensely valued fruit cultivation especially for the crops like 'Rambutan' and mangoes. Furthermore, if the authorities here in Sri Lanka can take a careful exploration and insight into the Japanese model of innovations in agriculture through effective deployment of agriculture practitioners and journalists in various related programmes in Japan, conducted by institutions especially like the APO, such procedures would be of immense assistance to help rightly re-shape and align many sectors of agriculture industry such as agri-tourism and agri-home-stay programmes in Sri Lanka to run them sustainably on the right track.