



FEATURES



Roadside Station “Meruhen no Oka Memanbetsu” Exploring Majestic Landscapes Unique to Hokkaido

Situated in Ozora Town, Hokkaido, this *Michi-no-Eki*, or roadside station, is conveniently located next to a famous scenic spot that's a popular choice for photography. This *Michi-no-Eki* offers a variety of local agricultural and livestock products at affordable prices, and visitors can even participate in food production experiences. We had the opportunity to talk to the representative of the roadside station to discover more about what makes it so appealing.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



About a 10-minute drive north from Memanbetsu Airport, the eastern gateway to Hokkaido's skies, lies one of the area's representative tourist attractions—Meruhen-no-Oka (Hill of Fairy).

This picturesque spot is known for its seven larch trees lining vast fields, creating a scene reminiscent of a storybook illustration, attracting countless photography enthusiasts. The landscape of the area gained nationwide fame after being featured in the 1990 film "Dreams," directed by Akira Kurosawa.


Situated not far from this tourist attraction is the Meruhen no oka Memanbetsu. We had the opportunity to speak with Nanbu Takeshi, who is responsible for managing and operating this *Michi-no-Eki*.

"Okhotsk is known for its thriving livestock and agriculture, offering a wide range of delicious products. Every morning, local farmers bring freshly harvested vegetables to the market. Also, processed foods such as soy sauce made from freshwater clams harvested from Lake Abashiri and freshwater clam miso soup, which only requires the addition of hot water, are particularly popular," he explains. "Cheeses and soft-serve ice cream made from locally produced milk are also a hit. I also recommend locally sourced meats such as Sakura pork, a local brand of pork. The town is rich in culinary ingredients."

Not just limited to shopping, this *Michi-no-Eki* also offers a variety of food workshops for visitors to enjoy. "The workshops include making items using wheat flour such as bread and udon noodles, as well as experiences like crafting bacon and sausages," says Mr. Nanbu.

If you travel north on Route 39 from the roadside station, you'll reach the Abashiri Prison Museum. As a result, the store in this station is able to consistently sell prison labor products¹. Actually, original items like clothing and aprons printed with the Abashiri Prison

logo have gained firm popularity.

We also asked Mr. Nanbu about other recommended nearby tourist spots. "In August, the sunflower fields at Memanbetsu Airport are at their best. During spring, *Higashimokoto Shibazakura Park* in Higashimokoto is decorated in a stunning *pink*, with broad fields of blooming *shibazakura* flowers as far as the eye can see. There are numerous stunning vistas in Memanbetsu, so I highly recommend considering this *Michi-no-Eki* as your starting point for exploration," Nanbu suggested. 

1. Products manufactured by inmates within the prison system with the intention of being sold to the general public. These items encompass a variety of goods, including detergents, food, leather products, and furniture.



Photo: Meruhen no oka Memanbetsu



Above: A distinctive feature of the *Michi-no-Eki* is its castle-like appearance. Below: At the roadside market, local farmers personally supply their vegetables, highlighting the appeal of freshness and budget-friendly prices.

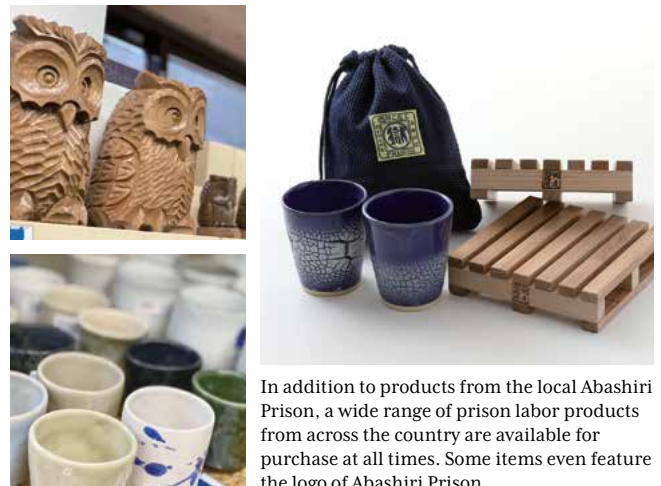


Photo: Meruhen no oka Memanbetsu

In addition to products from the local Abashiri Prison, a wide range of prison labor products from across the country are available for purchase at all times. Some items even feature the logo of Abashiri Prison.

Left page

Above left: The cylindrical formations scattered across the fields consist of rolled straw leftover from wheat harvesting. This spectacle is exclusive to the harvest season.

Above right: The spectacular sights of Meruhen-no-Oka (Hill of Fairy) change from season to season and even during a single day. The silhouette of the seven larch trees stands out against the backdrop of the setting sun.

Middle: Seven larch trees, the sky, and fields form the enchanting landscape of Meruhen-no-Oka (Hill of Fairy)

Below left: Higashimokoto Shibazakura Park, located about a 25-minute drive from the roadside station.

Below right: Many people visit to capture airplanes flying over the sunflower fields in photographs.