

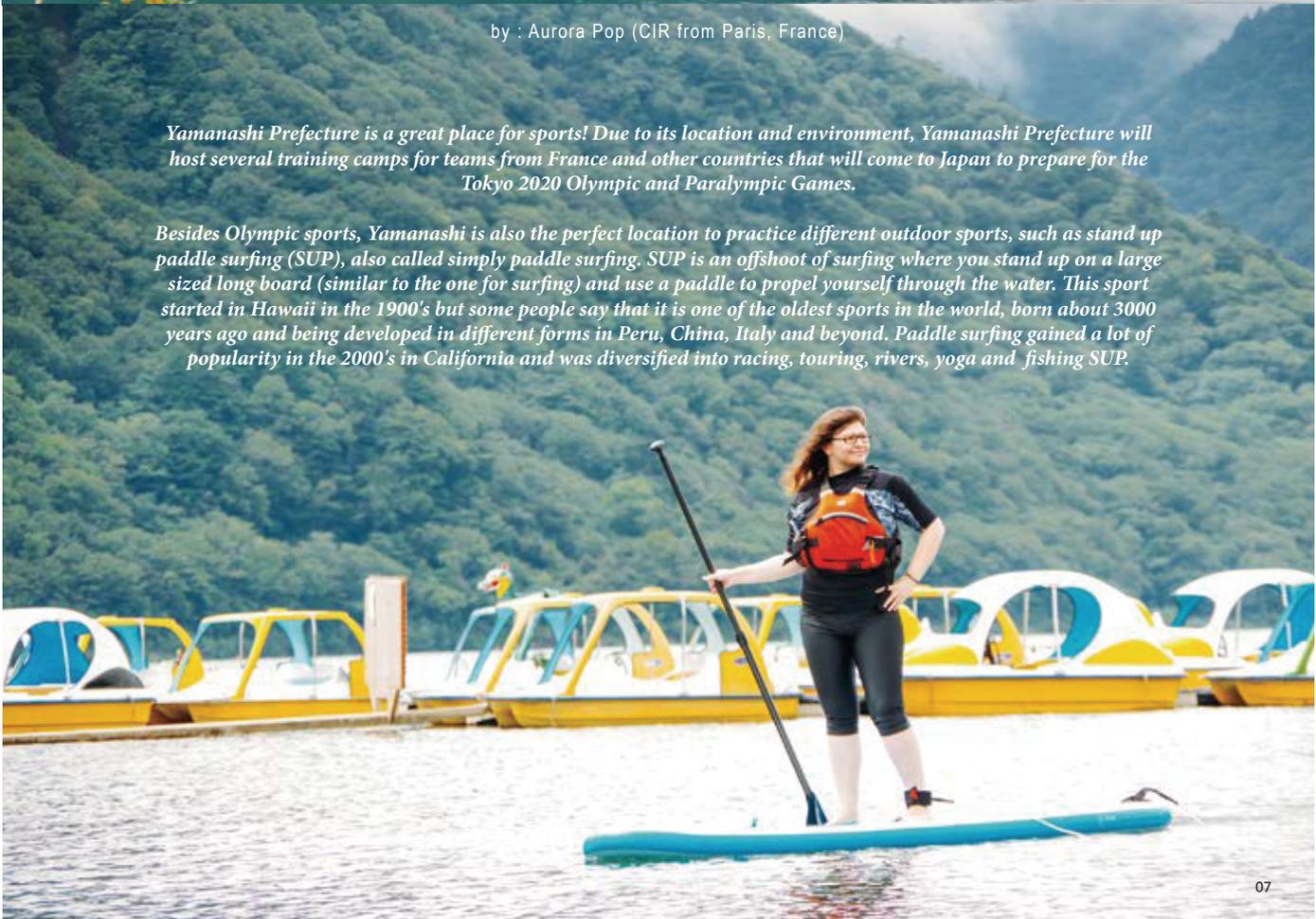


Paddle Surf

by : Aurora Pop (CIR from Paris, France)

Yamanashi Prefecture is a great place for sports! Due to its location and environment, Yamanashi Prefecture will host several training camps for teams from France and other countries that will come to Japan to prepare for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Besides Olympic sports, Yamanashi is also the perfect location to practice different outdoor sports, such as stand up paddle surfing (SUP), also called simply paddle surfing. SUP is an offshoot of surfing where you stand up on a large sized long board (similar to the one for surfing) and use a paddle to propel yourself through the water. This sport started in Hawaii in the 1900's but some people say that it is one of the oldest sports in the world, born about 3000 years ago and being developed in different forms in Peru, China, Italy and beyond. Paddle surfing gained a lot of popularity in the 2000's in California and was diversified into racing, touring, rivers, yoga and fishing SUP.





Lake Motosuko

SUP also became popular in Japan, especially in Okinawa where you can practice it while looking at turtles and admiring great landscapes. But there are other beautiful spots in Japan, more or less known in other countries, where people can do SUP. One amazing location for practicing SUP is Lake Motosuko, one of the five lakes of Mount Fuji, located in Yamanashi Prefecture.

Motosuko, a world cultural heritage site asset since 2013, is the deepest of the five lakes, being 121.6m deep and located at an altitude of 900m. It was created from an eruption of Mount Fuji, has no inflow or outflow from a river and its area is 4.7 square kilometers. It's the only lake of the five that doesn't freeze in winter because its temperature never goes below 4 degrees Celsius. I was struck by its clearness but also by the beauty of the scenery, which took my breath away. It was and still is a great inspiration for various artists and photographers, like Okada Koyo, who took the famous photo "Kohan-no-Haru" (Spring on the Lake Side), portrayed on the 5,000 yen bill starting in 1984 and then on the 1,000 yen bill starting in 2004.

My own experience of SUP on Lake Motosuko

We arrived at Lake Motosuko at around 8:30 in the morning by car. It was the end of summer and a little cloudy but that didn't stop me and my colleagues from trying SUP for the first time on Motosuko. We were very excited and wanted to get in the water with the boards and the paddle as fast as we could. I recommend doing this in summer and not in other seasons because it can be very cold. During the hot summer of Japan it's the perfect temperature and place to be if you want to refresh from the hot city of Tokyo and at the same time practice a sport that is not so difficult and that doesn't require a lot of equipment, since almost everything can be rented.

Before we went in the water, we met Mr. Nakahara, who was our guide. First he explained to us the place and the surroundings using a 3D map, and demonstrated how to use the boards and the paddle. "You have to use a paddle as big as your height plus your right hand raised," he told us on the shore.

When we went in the water I thought of two things: first, of course, the balance on the board and being able to paddle

while standing up, which wasn't so difficult because the lake was extremely calm. Every time I managed to stand up on the board I felt really happy. The second thing that passed through my head (and heart) was that finally I made it to Japan! It may sound funny but paddling in Lake Motosuko, this place in Yamanashi a bit hidden with an extraordinary view of Mount Fuji, was for me a symbol of achievement in my life. It felt very mystic, like it has a sort of a magical power. There are a lot of power spots around Mount Fuji and I feel that one of them is definitely Lake Motosuko. That day it was cloudy so the weather intensified the mystical appearance and feeling of being in the middle of nowhere, but I'm sure it could be totally different on a sunny day.

We paddled up and down the lake for two hours. It's really great fun only paddling around. It was very calm, and only two other people were there. The hills on one side and another, and the mountains visible at the horizon were so beautiful. I felt like I was in a secret valley of a fairytale surrounded by dark green hills and that nobody was around besides my colleagues and our guide. There are also a few interesting bushes on one side of the lake in the water and the ground all around is volcanic with basalt rock. After we finished we had a great cup of tea on the shore and it felt like the greatest tea of my life!

Mr. Nakahara told us that not a lot of Japanese tourists come to Motosuko for SUP, but rather only for sightseeing, and even for sightseeing this place is still not so popular, which in my opinion is a pity. Of course there are some foreigners that are interested but not as many as he wishes there were. It is not so obvious to come to Japan and to do SUP, and not a lot of visitors know that they can try it on Lake Motosuko.

I highly recommend SUP on Lake Motosuko because it gives you a great view of the scenery, because it's always healthy and fun to practice a sport, and because it will become a great memory in the future. It's really something extraordinary because of the location and the scenery, the sport itself, and the feeling that you will experience.

How can you get to Lake Motosuko?

Kawaguchiko station (Fujikyuko Line) is the nearest train station. From there, take the bus to Motosu-iriguchi (about 45 minutes). By car, take the Chuo Expressway and the Kawaguchiko IC. It is possible to park near the lakeside.

