



[Hidden Wonders of Japan] Niyodo Blue: Kochi's Beautiful River

The location is Niyodogawa Town, in Kochi Prefecture's Yasui Valley. Where we are now, the water, after having come downstream, is crystal clear while reflecting the blue sky overhead.

Underwater camera in hand, I dive below the surface. The piercing coolness of the water makes me forget the warm temperatures of summer, as the underwater scenery sprawls straight ahead. With everything bathed in a blue light, this quiet world seems to extend endlessly.

Niyodo river flows headwaters near Mt. Ishizuchi – the highest peak in Shikoku – and passes through seven municipalities in the Kochi area before gushing out in the Pacific Ocean.

According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, the river boasts particularly high water quality, and in recent years the river and its tributary streams have gained popularity, earning the nickname “Niyodo Blue.”

“I shoot here about 350 days a year, but every time I am moved by the scenery.” These are the words of Nobuyuki Takahashi, 73, a cameraman who works largely in the Kochi area. He's thought to be the person who accorded the nickname to the Niyodo River.

The location was featured in a television program about eight years ago, and the name which was before only known among connoisseurs then spread across the whole country.

So why is the water so clear here? Takahashi gives several explanations, such as the fact that there is a lot of rain. And, with many ups and downs in the landscape, mud and impurities tend to wash away easily.

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In a poetic way however, Takahashi added, “If the person who faces the river has a kind gaze, the water becomes cleaner. This is because the river is said to be ‘the mirror that reflects the heart of the people.’”

The affluent Doigawa river also flows into the same Niyodogawa Town. When we visited the area, the gleeful voices of children playing could be heard as we enjoyed the soothing scenery reminiscent of summer.

There is a committee in charge of “The Restoration of the Greenery and Clean Streams of the Niyodo River” in the town.

Mikio Sonoyama, 66, part of the executive office, told us, “The river is really clean now as well, but I am told it was even clearer before. I would like to bring it back to its original state.”

The committee was formed when the community protested construction of a dam across the Doigawa River. In an attempt to help children familiarize themselves with nature, the group holds volunteer cleanup activities and ayu fishing events along the river. Sonoyama explained:

Those who are most sensitive to the change of the environment are those who observe the river closely, meaning for example the fishermen. If we don’t increase the number of people who are interested, we will not be able to keep the water clean.

Niyodo River is often praised for its beautiful clear water, with a blue that is so deep it almost seems that it must be bleeding from the sky above. Its purity is in fact protected by the warmth of the people living in the Yasui Valley.

Source: [Hidden Wonders of Japan] Niyodo Blue: Kochi’s Beautiful River
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【美しきにつぼん】澄み切った青 人の心も映す 仁淀ブルー（高知県）

高知県仁淀川町の安居渓谷。沢を遡行してたどりついた淵の水面は青空を映して輝いていた。

水中カメラを手に、清流に足を踏み入れる。夏の暑さを忘れる冷たさは、水面下の光景を前に吹き飛んだ。青く澄み切った静かな世界がどこまでも広がっていた。

釣り人でにぎわう土居川をはじめとする248もの支流が、自然豊かな仁淀川水系をかたちづくる
＝高知県仁淀川町（安元雄太撮影）

仁淀川は、四国最高峰、石鎚山（愛媛県）近くを源流とし、高知県内の7市町村を潤し太平洋に注ぐ。国交省の調査でトップクラスの水質を誇り、近年、支流も含めて「仁淀ブルー」の愛称で人気を集めている。

「年間350日くらい撮影していますが、毎回感動しています」。高橋宣之さん（73）は、地元高知を中心に活動するカメラマン。仁淀ブルーの「名付け親」という。撮影に関わった番組が8年前に放送され、知る人ぞ知る存在だった川の名が全国に広まった。

神聖な雰囲気漂わせる「にご淵」＝高知県いの町（安元雄太撮影）

なぜここまで透明なんだろう。高橋さんは、降雨量が多いことや、地形に高低差があり濁りが流されやすいことなどを挙げ、「流域の人が温かいまなざしを向けていれば、きれいになります。『川は人の心を映す鏡』ですから」と話した。

アカイセ（遊泳場）＝高知県仁淀川町（安元雄太撮影）

同町内を流れる支流の土居川に、子供たちが歓声をあげて飛び込んでいる。夏らしい景色に心がなごむ。

「仁淀川の“緑と清流”を再生する会」事務局の園山幹雄さん（66）は、「今でもきれいだけれど、もっときれいだったという話も聞きます。そのころに戻したいですね」と話す。

アカイセ（遊泳場）＝高知県仁淀川町（安元雄太撮影）

同会は、土居川に計画されていたダム建設反対運動の過程で結成。清掃活動やアユ釣り体験など、子供たちに川に親しんでもらうよう地域と協力してイベントを開催している。

「環境の変化に敏感なのは、いつも川を見ている釣り人。川に関心を持つ人を増やさなければ、きれいさは保てません」

清冽（せいれつ）さをたたえた仁淀川。空の紺碧（こんぺき）を盗みとったような輝く青さは、流域に暮らす人々の温かさで守られていた。

出典：【美しきにつぼん】澄み切った青 人の心も映す 仁淀ブルー（高知県）

<https://www.sankei.com/photo/story/news/200902/sty2009020001-n1.html>