

<page 1>

Countryside with strong Japanese cultural influence can be the starting point of mutual understanding



The annual number of foreign tourists to Japan finally surpassed 10 million at the end of December 2013.

This is not necessarily astonishing when compared to countries like France, which receives the most number of annual foreign tourists in the world. France receives 8 times more foreign tourists than Japan a year. In terms of the number of inbound foreign tourists, Japan ranks 39th in the world and 10th in Asia. Japan is a less developed country when it comes to international tourism.

On the other hand, there are more than 2 million foreigners living in Japan, including students and workers (2012 Statistical Survey on Legal Migrants).

Although the Japanese government is trying hard to bring more new foreigners into Japan, I believe it is much more important to introduce the true value of Japanese culture to the foreign people who are already living in Japan.

Foreigners living in Japan are relatively familiar with the famous tourist attractions all over Japan, but they seldom visit the countryside that still has charms of an old Japanese culture rich with traditional way of living and festivals. If one really wants to promote international, mutual understanding, it is essential to show foreigners the great virtue of the countryside where the roots of Japanese culture exist.

Having been engaged in community development projects for many years, I know that visits by foreigners revitalize regional communities. It is about time that each region recognizes this and takes advantage of such opportunity.

I am very pleased that I now have a good relationship with IAC which is working hard to promote cultural exchange with foreign countries.

IAC is collaborating with embassies in Tokyo for its project called "Understanding cultures through food" where people can experience the culinary culture of various countries. IAC also takes young diplomats to the Japanese countryside and try to connect them with the local people, so that they develop a deeper understanding about each other.

In 2013, when the diplomats went to Hinode-machi located in Tama, Tokyo, they visited "Hinode Sanso", an old house with a thatched roof that belongs to former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, who is well-known for the so-called "Ron-Yasu talks (talks between President Reagan and Prime Minister Nakasone)". They also took part in the "Sakura Festival" that was being held at the time.

This year, we are organizing a participatory tour to "Shirahama Ama Festival" at Shirahama in Minamiboso city, Chiba Prefecture for the diplomats and their families (I have local ties with this particular area).

Let me introduce to you the "Shirahama Ama Festival" of Minamiboso city.

"Ama" (female divers) have been around since ancient times. We don't exactly know when or where the tradition started, but there are only two countries in the world where Ama fishing is practiced, Japan and Korea.

"Ama-chan", the popular NHK morning drama series aired in 2013, is a story based in a fishing village in Sanriku kaigan, Iwate Prefecture, Tohoku region. Women of Shirahama, Minamiboso city, Chiba Prefecture have also been practicing Ama fishing from old times and they are still carrying out free diving to this day. "Shirahama Ama Festival" is held here every summer.

"Ama no Yaei" (Ama's night time swimming), in which local Ama wearing white garments and bearing bamboo torches swim in the sea at night, is a spectacular event, and is the biggest summer festival in the area.

Last year, organizers started recruiting women who wish to participate in the "Ama no Yaei" from all over Japan.

At night, the excitement starts with the parade of mikoshi (portable shrines) and the dance of Ryu-jin (dragon god) in the sea, which are the highlights of the festival. This is followed by the nocturnal swimming of ama with bamboo torches in their hands, and as a finale, hundreds of fireworks light up the sky above the sea. The program of light takes the spectators into a world of fantasy.

The festival will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, so it is expected to be even more exciting!

I am sure that by coordinating events that provide foreign diplomats the opportunity to experience Japanese culture in the countryside, IAC can enhance mutual understanding between Japan and countries from all over the world.

As a community development producer, I would be very proud if IAC's activities can also revitalize local communities in Japan. I hope IAC will keep up its pivotal role as the "key station" for cultural exchange through its future activities.

Nagaki Nihei, Community Development Producer
(translated by Keiko Hori, IAC)
(photo by Harunobu Otani, Kintetsu International)

The Design Festa Gallery is an international art gallery and a mecca of artistic and cultural diversity found in the heart of Tokyo's Harajuku. With two buildings and 21 show rooms, over 30% of the 80,000 guests the gallery welcomes annually visit from overseas. There are no conditions, restrictions, regulations or censorship at the Design Festa gallery, which offers equal opportunity to all painters, photographers, sculptors, cinematographers, performers, fashion designers, illustrators, workshop instructors and graphic artists of all ages, nationalities and genres.



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Understanding the Culture of Peru through Food



During four days, from Friday 6th until Monday 9th, December 2013, The Embassy of Peru in Japan held two really meaningful cultural events in the IAC-International Artists Center Tokyo, Design Festa Gallery.

Two main Peruvian artists shared this gallery to show different aspects of Peru. On first place we had Japanese-Peruvian painter Oswaldo Higuchi with 5 master pieces about the immigration of Japanese people to Peru during the last part of the 19th century. On the other hand, Peruvian plastic artist Gisela – Freundt exhibited her personal homage to the city of Machu Picchu with 10 abstract paintings. Alongside these paintings the Embassy of Peru set up an exhibition/sale of handicrafts made by Peruvian artisans, including gloves and scarves made of alpaca as well as little typical souvenirs made by Peruvian artists by hand.

In addition, of this outstanding exhibition, a second main event was held on December 7th: “Peruvian tourist spots, ethnic grains and cuisine”, as the name of a special seminar/workshop made in the Design Festa Gallery’s restaurant. H.E. Mr. Elard Escala, Ambassador of Embassy of the Republic of Peru attended. Omar Ortega Ortega, second Secretary was in charge of giving a

delightful presentation on where to go, what to do and what to eat in Peru, followed by Giulianna Soto, Peruvian Ambassador’s Residence cook, who gave a master class on the now trending Peruvian food.

The year 2013 was declared "The International Year of the Quinoa" by FAO and Peru is a major quinoa producer country. Therefore, in addition to tourism and Peruvian Culture, both parts of the presentation where focus on giving as much information as possible about this Andean golden grain, since in Japan is still not that common in every Japanese family.

Because its recently discovered nutritional facts, Quinoa may play an important role in eradicating malnutrition and hunger, which brought huge attention from all over the world in recent years.

The menu for the workshop included a “Seafood Quinoa Risotto”, jelly and juice made of Peruvian purple corn, and it was very well received by participants in the cooking class.

(Embassy of Peru)

Hello, dear embassy #16 "Burkina Faso"



Burkina Faso is a multi-ethnic, landlocked country in West Africa, home to over 60 ethnic groups and 60 different languages

The name of the country translates to “Home of Noble People.”

Its main industries are agriculture and livestock rearing. Baseball has flourished underneath guidance by Japan

When asked what they know about Burkina Faso, the majority of people in Japan respond with " ... what?" Burkina Faso is a landlocked country in West Africa with a total area of 274,000 km² (70% that of Japan), and a population of 15.76 million (in 2008). Before gaining independence from France in 1960, the country was known as Haute Volta (Upper Volta, in English, in reference to its location along Volta River). In 1984, the name was changed to Burkina Faso under President Sankara, who established a semi-presidential republic. The name « Burkina Faso » translates to “Home of Noble People”.

The Embassy of Burkina Faso is located in the quiet residential area of Sendaizaka, Minato-city, surrounded by the foreign embassies of South Korea, Madagascar, France, Germany and others.

Mr. François Oubida, the Ambassador of Burkina Faso, greeted us at the start of the interview. He is a career diplomat with work experience in Cuba and New York.

Ambassador: "While this is my first post in Japan I have already served as the director of the ministry of foreign affairs between Japan and Burkina Faso, so I am fairly knowledgeable about the country. I was also invited here for a visitation in 1998 by the JICA."

-----What is Burkina Faso like?

Ambassador: “Burkina Faso is a multi-ethnic, landlocked country that is home to over 60 ethnic groups and 60 different languages. Our official language is French. Our economy is centered on agriculture. Our economy is based on a flourishing agricultural industry and the cultivation and production of cotton, peanuts, sugar cane and sesame, and the raising of goats, sheep, chicken and other livestock. One of our immediate goals is to modernize our agricultural processing techniques, as we currently import more than we export to Japan due to the state of our manufacturing industry. A semi-presidential democratic republic, we have a history of many coup d'états, but the country is now very stable beneath President Blaise Compaoré. Through the government's democratic reformation efforts the maximum presidential term was recently revised from seven to five years."

-----Is baseball popular in Burkina Faso?

Ambassador: "The sport is only played in the capitol, Ouagadougou, for now. We have 5 active teams. About ten years ago, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers introduced baseball to our country for the first time. Since then, it has really taken root. We have even sent a young athlete named Sanfo Lassina to a team in Kochi prefecture in Japan to improve his skills."

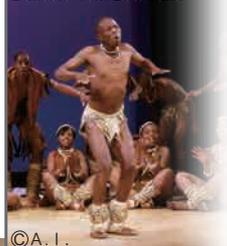
It would be exciting if, some day, extraordinary baseball players from Burkina Faso could find success through playing Japanese high school baseball, Japanese professional baseball and even in the Major Leagues. It could only mean good things for the prominence of the country.

(Yasunori Yamashita, IAC)

(translated by Feinerman Sarah, Design Festa Office)

(photo by A.M. Fujikura)

Dancers from Botswana



Join the IAC!

International Artists Center (IAC) is a non-profit organization. It was established in 1960 and has been doing its activities in the aim to contribute to the international understanding and the world peace through cultural exchanges programs.



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