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Diplomats from embassies in Japan were captivated by Tokyo's countryside

There are 150 foreign embassies in Japan (as of August 2012, according to the data by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Although we have such a large number of offices representing the respective foreign governments, for ordinary Japanese people, the foreign embassies are not readily accessible. The IAC plans various events so that the people in Japan can become more familiar with the embassies. We hope that these events will help the Japanese people understand more about foreign countries. Let us introduce two events we organized this spring. One was an event to connect the diplomats to a local government in Japan, and the other was to connect embassies to a Japanese company.

It only takes an hour to visit Hinode-machi from the city center, but the town is filled with the charms of the Japanese countryside. Last June, we took people from the Embassy of Botswana to this rural town and the event was very successful.

We wanted more diplomats in Tokyo to experience the attractive rural town called Hinode-machi, so we organized a one-day trip on April 6th for young diplomats from several embassies in Tokyo.

The sakura festival was being held at the town recreation field as the cherry blossoms entered full bloom a week later than those in Tokyo city. The diplomats were greeted by the mayor, Mr. Seiji Hashimoto. They participated in a traditional dance, played the Japanese drums and ate broiled squid and grilled skewered chicken. We were there for less than an hour, but the diplomats seemed to enjoy spending time with the local people.

After that, we went to Hinode Sanso (Hinode cottage),

where President Reagan and Prime Minister Nakasone had a talk many years ago. The diplomats were impressed by the old Japanese traditional house with a thatched roof that had welcomed some of the world's most important leaders. The scenery surrounding the house, full of trees and flowers, reminded us of the serene landscape of the old Japanese villages. The diplomats told us that they enjoyed the stillness of this place, located well away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Lastly, we visited a small Japanese warehouse that has been turned into a museum.

From olden times Hinode-machi had flourished through its forestry industry, and since the end of the Edo period, many *kura* (warehouses) have been built. This museum is one of those *kura* that was preserved. The museum has many historic items. The diplomats were especially attracted to the real swords and armors and to the rich culture inherited by this small town.

Yasuhiro Nakasone, the former Prime Minister, sent out a message to the young diplomats for this occasion, saying, "Diplomacy is about understanding each other and cooperating with one another while making adjustments to each country's interests. I would be very pleased if your visit to the Hinode-sanso today enables you to better understand our country and enhances our friendship." This visit to Hinode-machi gave an opportunity for the IAC to reaffirm its determination to keep helping people accept differences and understand and cooperate with one another.

(Terumi Kanaya, IAC)
(translated by Keiko Hori, IAC)
(photo by Nagaki Nihei)

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Connect embassies to Sakura Group



The corporate philosophy of Sakura group, which operates Sakura House, Sakura Hotel, and many others, is "To provide places and opportunities to allow people to further understand and appreciate one another's differences." They are an important supporter of the IAC, which has the same philosophy. Even though the IAC and Sakura Group operate under different forms of institution (NPO and business corporation), we believe that we can become a great force through mutual cooperation.

Of all the businesses of Sakura Group, we believe that the Design Festa Gallery (DFG), in particular, has a great potential to bring the foreign community together. The DFG can take advantage of its location, Harajuku, the center of Tokyo pop art. We invited diplomats of various embassies to come and see the DFG.

Ms. Kozue Yamamoto of the DFG sent the following message regarding the recent cooperation of the DFG and the IAC.

Think globally, act locally.

To provide a place open to all people with something to express: to encourage the exchange of differing perspectives. That is the philosophy of Design Festa, a subdivision of Sakura Group, which aims to create "a place where people from around the world can meet and work toward mutual understanding".

In cooperation with the IAC in order to promote mutual understanding through cultural exchange I was permitted to visit a variety of foreign embassies in Japan and even provide a tour of the Design Festa Gallery to diplomats from overseas and other representatives. I was able to interact with people from places like Africa and Central Asia and Central and South America—individuals from countries that I usually have no way to come into contact with. Having such people directly before you makes the distant places from which they come feel overwhelmingly real. Through merely shaking hands, speaking and laughing together I very soon felt extremely close to each and every one of them, and became profoundly interested in learning more about their countries and culture.

I've actually been reviewing world maps lately, and the ancient histories of Africa and America. I profoundly hope that more and more people will discover an interest in reaching out to the people of other countries, in ways similar to the wonderful experience I have had. And it is impossible for me to express how grateful I am to the Sakura Group for their assistance in the arranging of these meetings; unspeakably generous opportunities that I hope may be offered time and time again in the future.

(Kozue Yamamoto, DFG)
(photo by DFG)

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Understanding the Culture of Afghanistan through Food

Differences in languages may make it difficult for people from different nations to communicate, but the taste of good food can be appreciated regardless of nationality.

Many people have misconceptions about Afghanistan and are afraid of possible interactions. IAC gave us a chance to connect with the local public through culture. We created a cooking event and a cultural presentation that showed

people to experience the true Afghanistan: a nation of rich history, beauty, delicious tastes, and a love of peace. We connected well with a number of people and we hope that in their kitchens they now remember this true face of Afghanistan. It was a great event.

(Jason Pratt, Public Affairs Officer, Embassy of Afghanistan)

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Hello, dear embassy #14 Mauritania



Octopuses bring two countries together. Rich reserves of oil and natural gas Also rich in gold and rare earth Plans for solar and wind power generation Its future as a large energy supplier Politically stable

Located between the two Shinagawa stations (JR and Keikyu) and JR Osaki station is a quiet upscale residential area called Gotenyama. There are a few similar looking two-storied houses in Gotenyama that stand next to one another. One of the houses is the Mauritanian embassy, which could be easily overlooked if it were not for the national flag in front of the house.

Mr. Yahya Ngam, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania greeted us.

As an elite diplomat, he served as Ambassador of Mauritania to the countries in Africa, Europe, America, and others. He has been the ambassador to Japan since July, 2010.

Mauritania, located in the North-West Africa facing the Atlantic Ocean, certainly is a distant country, but there is one export commodity that makes this country seem very close to Japan. It's the octopus from the Atlantic Ocean. Japan imports around 15,000 to 18,000 tons of octopus from Mauritania each year. A big portion of the octopus sushi we eat at sushi restaurants comes from Mauritania. Many Japanese people who eat octopuses don't know that. Mauritanian people don't usually eat octopuses. The ambassador told us that he had tried octopus for the first time when he came to Japan and he liked it.

The main industries are agriculture and fish, but in recent years oil and natural gas reserves have been found and are under development. Mauritania also produces iron ore, phosphate, and gold.

The ambassador is confident that in the near future they

will produce rare earth metals, which are sought after by Japan. Mauritania has the potential to become a resource-rich country.

"Japanese companies take great interest in Mauritania's resources," says the ambassador. Mauritania's resources are not limited to energy related reserves and mineral resources. In a region called "Sahel", which is the arid area in the southern Sahara, there are plans for large-scale solar and wind power generation projects utilizing the strong sunlight and wind.

If these projects materialize, Mauritania will become a supplier of high-tech renewable energy as well as a fossil fuel supplier. "For that purpose, we are hoping to get help from Japan in terms of technology and funding."

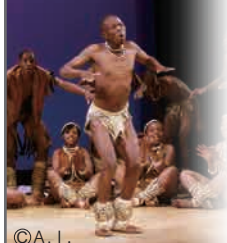
They also want the Japanese companies to help build factories that process fisheries from the Atlantic Ocean.

Some parts of Africa are still facing conflicts and political instability. Ambassador Ngam explains, "Mauritania is politically stable and very safe. We are a democratic country with several active political parties. The government places priority on policies that enhance the education and health of its people."

Mauritania, which has a close connection with Japan through Japanese economic aid, is a country with big potential.

(Yasunori Yamashita, IAC)
(translated by Keiko Hori, IAC)
(photo by Tetsuya Fujikura, IAC)

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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