

Message from Consul-General Takako Ito

February, 2018

One month has already passed since the start of 2018. I was given the opportunity during January to attend various New Year's celebrations and traditions organized by local Japan-related organizations, including the customary first Tea Ceremony of the year. I was extremely impressed by the hard work and innovation shown by the organizers and participants, which made it possible



to enjoy Japanese New Year's traditions including specially prepared Japanese food, despite being as far away from Japan as Toronto. In particular, at the Oshogatsu Kai – New Year's Festival at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, in addition to the year's first Shinto



shrine visit and the *omikuji* fortune telling at the entrance, I was able to enjoy traditions that one does not commonly see any longer even in Japan, including the pounding of *mochi* rice cakes, *shishimai* lion dance, and an exhibit of the first calligraphy of the year, as well

as *otoso*, New Year's saké. I understand there were about 2,000 people in attendance, including the visitors with tickets and volunteers supporting the event. With many children enjoying this festive event, it was truly an uplifting gathering.



Local events in Toronto celebrating the 90th anniversary of Japan-Canada relations were launched with the Jan. 7 screening of the film *Vancouver Asahi*. In order to carry out at least one commemorative project each month, the staff at the

Consulate-General of Japan are continually preparing events as well as planning new ones. Anniversary events are not limited just to those relating to culture but also includes lectures and symposia. I myself plan to visit various regions in Ontario to meet with government and business leaders, students and others to give myself as much opportunities as possible to talk to people about Japan. Please do not hesitate to contact the Consulate-General of Japan if you would like me to visit your location or organization.

Meanwhile, it was announced on Jan. 23 that 11 countries, including Canada, agreed on the wording of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and will now be making preparations for its targeted date of signing on March 8. This is a historical occasion which creates a high-level free trade area in the Asia Pacific region which includes Japan and Canada, expanding market access for both countries. I

earnestly hope that the CPTPP will come into effect as soon as possible, resulting in greater economic exchange between Japan and Ontario under this new framework.

In the severe cold of winter in Toronto, it is not unusual for us to ask for appointments with various people only to be told they are away on holidays in Central or South America or in the US. People whose children are no longer in school seem especially inclined to “evacuate” from the cold weather during these months, even



outside of the normal holiday season. It is my intention to work hard to promote Japan as a winter destination for such “snowbirds” so that in the future they would say they “went to Japan to enjoy the hot springs” or “were healed by the beautiful waters of Okinawa” or “fully enjoyed the skiing and the food in Japan”.

The Miss International Beauty Pageant was held in Japan November last year, and the contestants from various countries who came to Japan have been appointed as Special Ambassadors of the Visit Japan Campaign. This includes Ms. Marta Magdalena Stepien from Windsor, Ontario, Miss International Canada 2017. The total number of foreign visitors to Japan surpassed 28 million last year, of which an estimated 306,000 were Canadian. Japan in recent years has become better prepared to welcome foreign visitors. A new scheme to utilize private homes for tourist accommodation is now introduced, while reserving accommodation through internet is becoming popular. Maps and translation apps on smartphones are allowing foreign tourists to get greater enjoyment from their visits in Japan. With the help of Miss International Canada, I wish to increase the above numbers even further, as well as offer more choices of destinations within Japan. So, please join me recommending winter and regional tours in Japan to your friends!

