

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL ITO TAKAKO

June 2020

The situation relating to infections by COVID-19 in Ontario is finally showing signs of continuous improvement, and almost all of the province, including Toronto, have moved into the second stage of economic reopening. Activities which were prohibited under the state of emergency for over three months are being resumed slowly, and the arrival of summer's bright sunny weather also seems to have lifted our spirits. There must be many people who are now looking forward to the chance to have their hair done at a barber or beauty salon or to have a meal on a restaurant patio. Many local Japanese businesses also seem to have resumed their activities.

However, while the number of infections has decreased, this does not mean the virus has now vanished around us or that a cure or a vaccine has been developed. New cases in Toronto from June 7 to 13 numbered approximately 20 per 100,000 people. The same number in Peel Region was 15. In either case, this is 30 to 40 times larger than the condition for Japan lifting its state of emergency, which is 0.5 per 100,000. Furthermore, with increases in the traffic of people resulting from the reopening of the economy, there is a fear of the rate of infections rising again. Starting on July 2, masks will be mandatory on the TTC as well as the public transits system of other municipalities such as Mississauga and Brampton. However, regardless of whether you are riding on public transit, please wear a mask when physical distancing of two meters is impossible.

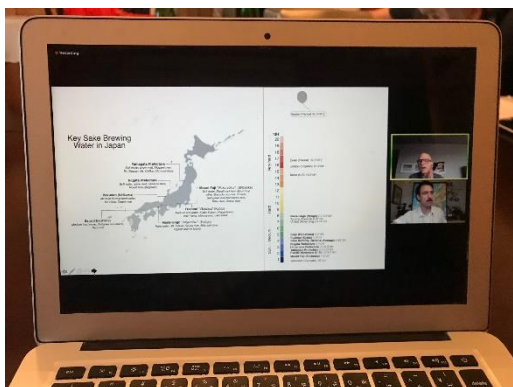


Please also continue to take safety measures such as avoiding the three C's – closed areas (poorly ventilated spaces), crowds and close contact with others – and washing your hands frequently.

It was under such circumstances that the Spirit of Kampai, a sake promotional event hosted by the Sake Institute of Ontario (SIO), was held online on June 18.

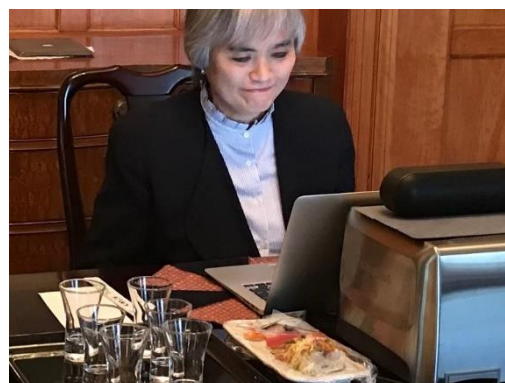
Kampai Toronto was originally scheduled to take place as usual with participants from Japanese breweries, featuring sake tastings, seminars, dinner with

Japanese cuisine and sake and more, but was moved online due to COVID-19. The event, however, was truly rich in content, featuring: a webinar on the “Terroir of Sake” by Mr. Michael Tremblay, Toronto’s own Sake Samurai; tastings of six brands of sake by Mr. Tremblay and the owner of a local sake bar that is a favourite among aficionados; and messages from one



Toronto and five Japanese breweries of sake. I was especially moved by the passion toward sake expressed by the representatives of Japanese breweries, their high expectations for the Toronto market and the ease and enthusiasm with which they communicated in English.

Because the event was held online, we did not have the luxury of time to converse with each of them individually to deepen our knowledge of sake, nor did we have the opportunity to taste each of the many brands produced by each brewery. On the other hand, I was able to enjoy sake at home in a relaxed setting with my family. I would like to



express my deep appreciation to the organizers of this online event who devoted tremendous effort toward maintaining the momentum of spreading the culture of sake among Canadians.

Collision, the largest international technology conference in North America which took place in Toronto in May last year, was also held online this year. The online participants totaled over 32,000, and notable persons from such fields as government, business, art and culture as well as the media appeared in slots 10 to 20 minutes long. There was no need to go back and forth in a large convention hall, because moving from one event to the next was as easy as changing channels with a flick of a finger. It was also not necessary to push oneself into a



corner of a crowded room in order to hear a popular speaker. It was possible to arrange meetings online with other business participants of interest, and there was no need to line up for meals or the washrooms. One could take their meals wherever they wished and have whatever they wanted to eat. Despite the 13-hour time difference with Japan,

there apparently were more participants from Japan this year than last, partly due to the savings in travel time and expenses as well as accommodation costs.

From working from home to virtual business meetings and get-togethers for drinks, doing things online is a part of the new lifestyle which quickly developed from our efforts to contain COVID-19. I myself have gained some first-time experiences such as participating in the City of Markham's town meetings online and contributing an article on Glenn Gould and Japan to a website. Information gathering online also seems to be occurring at an unprecedented level. While the online environment offers many advantages, there are also such drawbacks as the difficulty of forming individual connections or informally chatting with others on different subject matters. There is as well the impossibility of sharing the distinct atmosphere and energy of an actual place. Data security is also a constant concern. Confinement at home for a long period of time may cause some problems, such as mental health issues or domestic violence. Japanese residents suffering such difficulties are advised to contact Japanese Social Services (<https://jss.ca/en/>).



To read the article "Proactive Social Distancing by Artists Glenn Gould and Natsume Soseki," [click here.](#)

The Consulate-General of Japan in Toronto is currently collecting wishes from people online in preparation for the *Tanabata* Festival (Star Festival) on July 7. A wish you submit will be inscribed on a strip of paper and hung from a stalk of

bamboo. A photo of this will be posted regularly on Facebook and Twitter, so I hope you will take part in this tradition. My own wish is that, “Canadians will be able to visit Japan and experience its many riches first-hand as soon as possible.”



Send your wish to event@to.mofa.go.jp.

To participate in our Virtual Tanabata Festival, visit our [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

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