

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

March 2022

March has passed, and we are now seeing more days with noticeably spring-like weather. Ontario's health authorities lifted most of its mask mandates and other regulations on March 21 for all except a few specific types of facilities. Two years of COVID-related regulations have now arrived at a major turning point. It cannot be said that the threats surrounding the novel coronavirus have been made fully clear through science. However, I remain thankful that I am resuming my normal daily routine albeit while still taking the necessary precautions. Visitors to Japan are also no longer required to quarantine if they are fully vaccinated and have negative PCR test results.

At our Consulate-General, we will continue to take reservations for in-person visits for the time being. We will provide updates on our reception procedures through our consular e-mail and website. It is our aim to continue providing timely and accurate information to both the people of Ontario as well as Japanese nationals residing here.

Even as COVID-related health regulations are eased, however, this year continues to be characterized by the socio-economic uncertainties resulting from the conflict in Ukraine, supply chain disruptions, and concerns over inflation starting with the prices of gas and food. Here also, our office will provide pertinent information and support as much as possible.

This month, I would like to report on Sakura cherry blossoms which should start to bloom shortly around Ontario. I would like to touch upon various topics related to sakura including our own initiatives.

In autumn of last year, our Consulate-General held a social media campaign called the "Sakura Haiku Challenge", inviting submission of Sakura-themed haiku from our followers. We received over 250 haiku not only from Ontario but around the world. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who sent us a poem. We started posting the submissions on March 22 on our social media platforms, starting with the haiku from the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. We will continue through to the end of April when the Sakura should be in full bloom. We hope you enjoy the lovely haiku.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the completion of the Sakura Project, which from 2000 to 2012 planted 3082 Sakura trees around Ontario under the guidance of the Sakura Committee (made up of representatives from our office and the Japanese and Japanese Canadian community). We would like to plan some projects to mark this anniversary. (Details on the Sakura Project are available here: <https://www.toronto.ca.emb-japan.go.jp/english/sakura/main.html>)

Some Japanese and Canadian businesses in Ontario are also planning various Sakura-themed events and promotions of their own. Here are some examples:

Sakura Themed Events Currently Being Planned By Businesses	
Fujifilm Canada	Planning an online Sakura photo contest from April to May
Izumi Sake Brewery	Planning to hold a drop-in Sakura event on April 30, at its store and patio in the Distillery District
The Japanese Paper Place	Presenting an online, juried exhibition " <i>Sakura, Sakura</i> " of artwork inspired by Sakura, created on washi (Japanese paper)
MUJI Canada	Planning a Sakura Festival at the MUJI Atrium Store (downtown Toronto) on April 24th
Subaru Canada	Planning Sakura-motifs in its advertising nationally, as well as an interactive Sakura quiz event
UNIQLO Canada	Considering Sakura prints on its merchandise sold in its Toronto store



I feel the Sakura in Ontario, many of which were planted by Japanese Canadians and previous generations of Japanese, are a valuable asset symbolizing the friendship between Japan and Canada. Sakura is an invaluable icon of Japanese culture and also serve to mark the end of a long winter every year. In this way, they symbolize regeneration and new encounters. I hope that Sakura season every year will be a time when everyone renews their activities, as well as an opportunity to reaffirm the friendship between Japan and Canada and between Japan and Ontario.

