

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

September 2023

September has brought about cooler morning and evening hours. “Back to School” signs everywhere signalled the start of a busy time of year. Up north, leaves have already started to change colour.

1. Visit to Woodbine Racetrack

In my May message, I wrote about Mr. FUKUMOTO Daisuke, a celebrated jockey who is very active among horse-racing circles in Ontario. This month, I had the opportunity to visit Woodbine Racetrack, the hub of Canadian horse racing, with members of the Japan Racing Association (JRA)

Woodbine holds races there regularly, and there stables housing over 2,000 racehorses are located there. Here, I was reunited with Mr. Fukumoto and also met with his fellow jockey, Mr. KIMURA Kazushi, for the first time. Mr. Kimura’s chance of winning this season is 20%, and he will also be the only Japanese jockey competing in this year’s Kentucky Derby.

I myself enjoyed horseback riding a very long time ago when I lived in the UK. I am originally from Kobe, where horseback riding can be enjoyed on nearby Mount Rokkō. Horses are very endearing, and it is said their presence grew vital to us due to them having working alongside us for so long.

However, this was my first time seeing racehorses up close. They emerge from their stables at the racetrack with their jockeys and trainers then walk around the paddock and eventually reach the starting gates. Their pace up to this point is quite languid. Then from the start to the finish line, it takes two to three minutes to determine the race’s outcome, depending on its distance. Various drama play out during this brief time due to the personality of the horses, the ways jockeys handle their reins, as well as the communication between humans and horses and the strategies they employ. Mr. Kimura ran all 12 races that day, while Mr. Fukumoto participated in three. The winning horses were terribly excited and breathing hard after their races. Seeing them from such a close distance, their power and courage were very apparent.

Canadian horseracing in keeping with the times is moving online and becoming more international. For example, you can now lay bets online until just before the race. In cooperation with racetracks in other countries, it is also possible to gamble on races elsewhere.

I think further collaborations with such organizations as the JRA will bring about more innovations. Exchanges between Japanese and Canadian jockeys and other stakeholders are certain to increase in the future.



With Mr. Fukumoto and Mr. Kimura, as well as members of the JRA.



Woodbine Racetrack

2. The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF)

TIFF once again took place this year, although there were some concerns about the impact of the strike taking place in Hollywood. On the ground in Toronto, however, the city was full of enthusiasm and such worries were hardly noticeable.

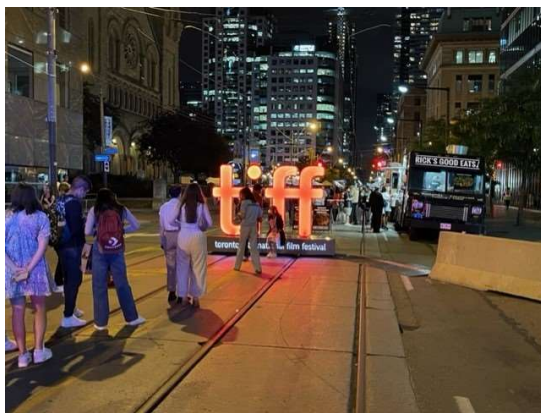
A lot of attention was paid to *The Boy and the Heron*, the film by MIYAZAKI Hayao. This was the first time a Japanese film – or a work of animation – was selected to open the Festival.

HAMAGUCHI Ryusuke's *Evil Does Not Exist*, which won the Silver Lion at the Venice International Film Festival, was also screened at TIFF. *Perfect Days*, the Japanese-German co-production starring YAKUSHO Koji was also a topic of much discussion among critics. YAKUSHO Koji visited Toronto at the screening of his film.

I had the opportunity to attend the screening of *The Great Absence*. Its director, CHIKAURA Kei, along with its stars, FUJI Tatsuya, MORIYAMA Mirai, and HARA Hideko were visiting Toronto from Japan. After the screening, there were many questions posed during the Q&A session related to the issue of aging societies which is now confronting every nation the world over. This kind of interaction among the

audience, the producers and directors, as well as the performers, is always interesting to see.

Acclaimed director KORE-EDA Hirokazu, now a regular guest at TIFF, screened his latest film *Monster*. He apparently began developing its concept five years before the pandemic. The soundtrack was by the renowned SAKAMOTO Ryuichi, who passed away earlier this year. The story begins with school bullying, but then it begins to reveal various aspects of humanity as only Mr. Kore-eda can. He was surrounded by his fans after the screening.



The TIFF sign



Mr. Chikaura and the actors

3. Visit to Collingwood

Collingwood is a famous resort town located along Georgian Bay on Lake Huron, approximately a two-hour drive north from Toronto. Blue Mountain, a popular ski hill, is nearby. Collingwood is the exclusive sister city of Osaka's Katano, a formal relationship that was established back in 1981. This year, a delegation of over 20 people, including Katano Mayor YAMAMOTO Kei, members of the Katano International Friendship Association, as well as a few local citizens, visited Collingwood for the signing ceremony on Sept. 15, renewing this friendship after it had slowed down somewhat during the pandemic. I had the honour of being present for the occasion.

The 40-year history of this sister-city relationship began when a participant of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme was posted to Katano.

When I was there this month, I had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Ron Emo, the former Mayor of Collingwood who spearheaded this sister-city agreement. Back in the 1980s, scars from the Second World War were still vivid. There were more than a few people who opposed having a friendship agreement with a municipality in Japan. In the end, however, they were eventually persuaded by Mr. Emo to accept this act of goodwill. Around this time, many Japanese municipalities established sister-city relations with cities and countries which had taken part in the war. The intent was to build up exchanges of citizens at the grassroots level to ensure the tragedies of war are not repeated. Incidentally, Ms. Mary Margaret McMahon, the Member of Provincial Parliament, is former Mayor Emo's daughter. She was able to join us on this occasion and appeared delighted to be reunited with some local residents whom she had known for years.

Collingwood currently has a population of approximately 25,000, but if you include the surrounding areas, this figure increases to nearly 100,000. Moreover, this number continues to rise.

The region is also a resort area blessed with beautiful natural landscapes and enjoys about 2 million visitors every year. As already mentioned, nearby Blue Mountain is a very famous ski resort.

Collingwood once flourished as a shipbuilding town. Today, the city attracts start-ups, engineers, and artists. There are also many Canadians who keep cottages in the area as vacation properties throughout the year. Thus, the local population always increases on the weekends.

Japan and Canada are members of the G7 and share a strategy for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. This year marks the 95th anniversary of Japan-Canada diplomatic relations, and I have come to realize that it is the profound and strong ties at the grassroots level that supports our fruitful friendship. While the significance and content of such ties might change in years to come, I sincerely hope the friendship between our countries will continue to grow strong in the future.



**With Her Worship Yvonne Hamlin,
Mayor of Collingwood**



Visting City Hall



Giving remarks at the signing ceremony



At the friendship Garden

4. Announcement of the 2023 Michelin Guide

The 2023 edition of Michelin Guide Toronto was announced on Sept. 27. A total of 15 restaurants in the city received stars this year, an increase from 13 last year. Japanese restaurants counted six among them, with Sushi Masaki Saito receiving two stars for the second time, a clear display of his high standards. New selections this year include Kappo Sato. Its owner chef, Chef SATO Takeshi, was formerly the chef at the official residence of the Consul-General of Japan. Aburi Hana, Yukashi, Shoushin, and Kaiseki Yuzen Hashimoto all were awarded a star again this year.

There were also restaurants which were awarded the Green Star for sustainable development. Those in this new category include Frilu, the owner chef of which – Chef John-Vincent Troiano – studied Japanese cuisine. Many Japanese chefs and staff work there so this award is an apt reflection of Toronto's diversity.

The venue of the media announcement was full of much excitement, with chefs, restaurateurs professionals, as well as representatives of the City of Toronto present. I was the only Consul-General working in Toronto to be invited, but I was pleased to attend with Vice-Consul SUZUKI Tokiya (who is responsible in our office of promoting Japanese agriculture, forestry and fishery products, and Japanese cuisine).

The restaurant industry, put in an extremely precarious position during the pandemic, is finally starting to recover. The increase in restaurants receiving attention in general is proof that Toronto's appeal has grown in recent years. The Japanese food boom is sure to continue against such a backdrop. As well, that Japanese restaurants featuring omakase sushi dining continues to attract attention reflects the unwavering faith among Torontonians in the safety and reliability of Japanese seafood.



Announcement of the Michelin star recipients