

Belgium king's day

Relationship built on firm common ground

Johan Maricou
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM TO JAPAN

As I deliver this King's Day message to you, the Belgian Embassy is about to leave its temporary premises and return to its home of almost half a century, at the heart of the quiet Chiyo-da district. A brand-new compound building has been erected over the last two years at this same location, within walking distance of the Imperial Palace grounds. It is my sincere wish that the new embassy will, just like the previous one, prove an attractive place for homely get-togethers for several generations of Japanese and Belgian friends of all walks of life.

Our old embassy enjoyed a rich tradition of pleasant functions, concerts and receptions. Be assured that I, together with my successors in Tokyo, will be eager to continue this tradition, thereby contributing to shape the very friendly relations between our countries and peoples.

To mark the end of this two-year hiatus, a grand opening in the presence of, among others, Belgium's minister of foreign affairs, will be held April 8, 2010. In addition, a Japanese

winner and a Japanese finalist of the famous Belgian musical contest named after the late Queen Elisabeth will perform at the Kioi Hall on the same evening to further mark the occasion.

Three years ago, I presented my credentials to His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito, and together we evoked the warm friendship between our Imperial and royal families, which over many years has been of crucial importance for the development of the excellent ties between our two countries. Relations between Japan and Belgium are void of any problems, which means that being Belgium's ambassador in Tokyo is a much rewarding task.

In spite of the economic downturn, our bilateral trade and investment are back on track. Belgium has long been a favorite destination for investment by Japanese companies and this for a number of reasons, such as Belgium's highly educated and efficient workforce, the excellent quality of life, the existence of world-class harbors with easy links to a highly developed European hinterland and, of course, because of the presence of major European institutions in Brussels, Belgium's capital.

Belgian products are very well appreciated in Japan, be they of a high-end technologi-



Royal lineage: King Albert II and his son, Crown Prince Philippe



State rooms: The Royal Palace in Brussels is used today as His Majesty King Albert II's office.

cal nature as illustrated by our frequent seminars and events around nanotechnology and low-carbon solutions, or more

traditional as in the case of our famed Belgian chocolate, waffles and beer.

In the field of international relations, both our countries' belief in a well-functioning and smoothly run system of multilateral organizations is an important shared value between Belgium and Japan. In today's often uncertain environment, Belgium highly values Japan's growing readiness to take up a more influential role in the multilateral arena, as is clearly demonstrated by the leadership displayed by Japan within the G-8 as well as its active involvement in the G-20 context. It further trusts that, as a recently elected member of the Security Council, Japan will further contribute to strengthening multilateralism in all areas.

The coming year will also be an important one for Belgium as during the second semester of 2010 our country will hold the rotating presidency of the European Council. In this capacity, my government will chair many important international meetings and sum-

mits, including the eighth summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which will take place in Brussels in a little less than a year from now.

Another common ground in our bilateral relations is our deep concern for Africa. Both countries have shown a firm commitment to this continent for many years as was evidenced, in the case of Japan, by the continuous success of the TICAD process. Belgium and Japan should go on studying means and ways of taking joint action on that continent, and in particular in Central Africa, which unfortunately remains a priority on the international agenda.

Japanese travelers who visit World Heritage sites all over the world should not miss the opportunity to visit Belgium. In the southern part of Belgium, Wallonia, a visit to castles such as Chateau de Modave or Bouillon is a must. In Flanders, Brugge is certainly one of the most popular tourist destinations for its medieval character, and Antwerp is very popular for art, diamonds and for its "Dog of Flanders" story. (For more information please see www.belgium-travel.jp or www.visitflanders.jp)

If I cannot meet you in a Brussels restaurant to taste some of our best seafood, then I would definitely hope to meet you one day at one of our Belgian events here in Tokyo.



"Tapis de Fleurs": La Grand' Place in Brussels is covered by a flower tapestry every two years. The next festival is scheduled for Aug. 13-15, 2010.



Land of castles: There are more castles per square meter in Belgium than anywhere in the world. This is the castle of Mirwart in Wallonia.

So many reasons to pay a visit to Belgium

Brussels

La Grand' Place is a happening place. In the center of the city, the historic square is famous for its market, the Hotel de Ville, cafés, festivals, museums and shops. In August, it is transformed into a flowering wonderland during the three days of the "Tapis de Fleurs" (flower tapestry).

The Belgian Beer weekends in September are a must for beer lovers.

Museums and art

From comics to music and from Gothic to the surreal Margritte, Brussels offers more than 80 museums covering every imaginable topic. Jazz has been a strong feature of Brussels' night life since the 1920s

and year-round live jazz sessions can be found at a cluster of venues. The saxophone was invented in Dinant in 1846.

Brussels is also the "Capital of Art Nouveau," with more than 500 buildings fully or partially art nouveau. Weekend antiquing is the sport of kings at the antique markets in the Grand Sablon and Place du Jeu de Balle in Brussels, and all around Belgium.

Belgium for food lovers

Belgium enjoys an unparalleled reputation for its specialty beers. Connoisseurs favor Belgian beers for their variety, real flavor and character. There are more than 800 types, so the choices are endless. With more than 2,000

chocolate shops throughout the country, Belgium is irresistible. Beyond chocolates and beer, street food is a delectable bargain: try Belgian fries, mussels, shrimp cro-



National pleasure: Brewing Belgian beer is an art form.

quettes or Brussels and Liege waffles.

Beyond Brussels

Beyond Brussels there is a world of landscapes. There are more castles per square meter in Belgium than anywhere in the world, stone-built villages, gourmet restaurants and carnivals.

Collectively, these and many more superlatives can be found in Wallonia, the southern French-speaking region of Belgium. For a quick getaway, visit scenic Namur, the Citadel in Dinant, the castle of Bouillon, relaxing Spa, the biggest city in French-speaking Belgium, Liege, or the smallest in the world, Durbuy.

More information about the French-speaking Belgium, Brussels and Wallonia is available at Belgium Tourist Office Wallonia — Brussels or on the Web site:

www.belgium-travel.jp
(Japanese brochures are also available.)

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The Japan - Belgium Society
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Belgium king's day/world

Bound by 80 years of royal exchanges

Takao Kusakari
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-BELGIUM SOCIETY

On the occasion of the Kingdom of Belgium's King's Day, I extend my heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the Japan-Belgium Society. It is indeed a matter for rejoicing that His Majesty King Albert II, Her Majesty Queen Paola and the royal family of Belgium are in good health.

I am very pleased to note that Japan and Belgium have long enjoyed very close relations not only in the realm of economic,

politics and diplomacy but also in cultural and social spheres. It goes without saying that this excellent relationship is based on more than 80 years of good and stable exchanges between Japan's Imperial family and the royal family of Belgium.

In September this year, the Japan-Belgium Society hosted, as the annual cultural exchange event, a coach tour to the city of Hanyu in Saitama, the twin city of Durbuy, and the city of Ashikaga, Tochigi, where Their Majesties King Albert II and Queen Paola, accompanied by Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, paid a state visit to in October 1996, together with Crown Prince Philippe.

Fifty-nine participants, including Belgian Ambassador Johan Maricou and his wife, all enjoyed "inekari" rice harvesting and watched bonsai being created in Hanyu. At Ashikaga School, the oldest university in Japan, we followed the path of the royal family and Imperial family in 1996.

I sincerely pray for the greater prosperity of the Kingdom of Belgium, which is playing an increasingly important role in the European Union. Particularly, 2010 is a remarkable year, when Belgium assumes the EU presidency. I also pray for the everlasting bonds of friendship between Japan and Belgium.



People watching: There's always time to unwind at a terrace café in one of Belgium's many historical cities. BELGIAN EMBASSY

Flanders: Belgian center of art, culture

Five Flemish cities (Brugge, Antwerp, Ghent, Mechelen and Leuven) and Brussels are the most well-known touristic cities in Flanders. Train connections make the cities easy to access, allowing visitors to tour them all, each of which has its own charm. Flanders is especially proud of its World Heritage sites and culture, its gastronomy, shopping and lifestyle.

Flemish cities have many medieval streets and areas, and the size of the cities makes them ideal for visiting on foot. The marketplace ("markt"), surrounded on four sides by the city hall and guild houses, is the center of the city. Since the Middle Ages, it has taken a central role in the life of the citizens as a place of business and a gathering point. While relaxing at a café in the marketplace, you can experience the life of the people and understand the history of the city.

Churches and cathedrals are also fascinating places where you can encounter many splendid paintings and religious art, like visiting a museum. The "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb" by the Brothers Van Eyck in St. Bavo Cathedral (Sint-Baafs) in Ghent and the altar piece of Rubens in Antwerp's Cathedral of Our Lady are masterpieces that you definitely should see.

Any time of the year you visit Flanders, you can enjoy authentic Flemish cuisine pre-

pared with ingredients of that season, such as white asparagus in spring, herring in summer or mussels and stews cooked with beer in winter. Flanders is also known for its big selection of beers, which are locally brewed. Visiting different cities and enjoying the local beer is another pleasure of traveling through Flanders.

2010 is a year to mark in your calendar as two festivals listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage will be held.

The "ommegang" of Dendermonde is centered around the procession through the town of a giant, magical, wooden horse, the "Ros Beiaard." The festival dates back to the 14th century and is based on a heroic song from the 12th century, "The Four Sons of Duke Aymon." It is a

golden opportunity to see this festival as it only takes place every 10 years.

The "Procession of the Holy Blood" in Brugge takes place every year on Ascension Day, when the relic of the Holy Blood is paraded through the city.

There are also two major flower festivals that should not be missed. On the La Grand' Place ("Grote Markt") in Brussels, a "flower tapestry (Tapis de Fleurs)" will be created, covering the square with thousands of begonias. This festival takes place only once every two years. And in Ghent, a city known for its production of flowers, there'll be the "Floralia," which takes place once every five years.

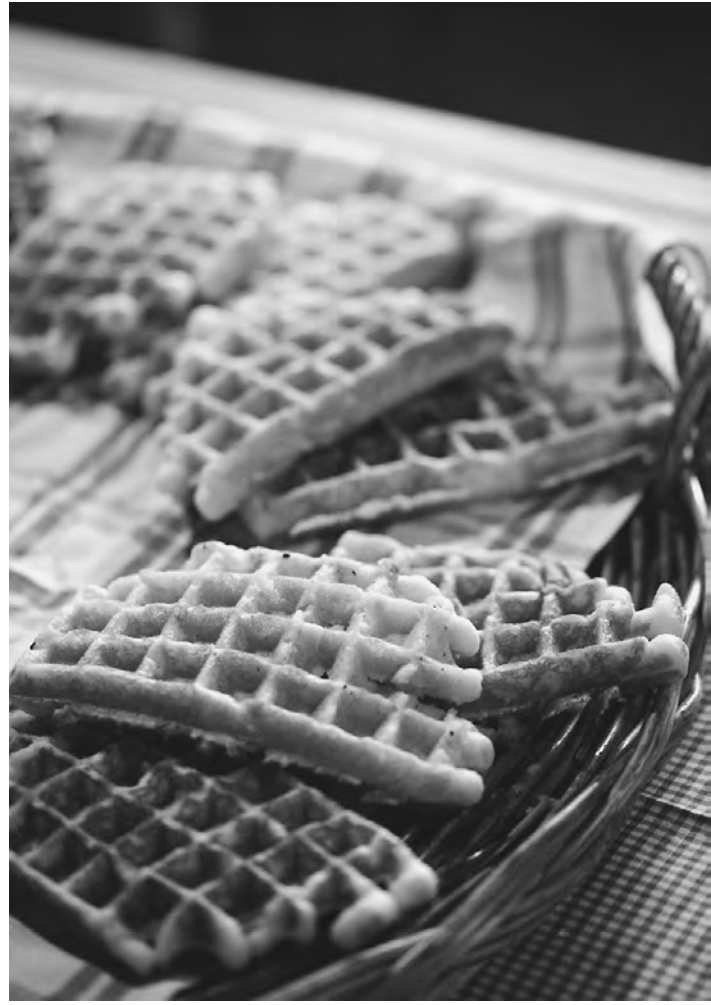
For more information about Flanders, please visit www.visitflanders.jp



Religious rite: The colorful Procession of the Holy Blood is held on Ascension Day in spring. The bishop of Brugge carries the relic through the streets of the city, accompanied by costumed residents acting out biblical scenes. TOERISME VLAANDEREN A. KOUPIRIANOFF



Historic legacy: The beautiful houses along the Graslei by Ghent's old harbor reflect the wealth and power of the medieval guilds. TOURIST OFFICE FOR FLANDERS BELGIUM/MIEKO YAGI



Just desserts: Handmade waffles sweet enough for the sweetest teeth BTO WALLONIA-BRUSSELS/HIROKAZU TAKAYAMA

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Congratulations

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