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# Slovenia national day

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## Celebrating 20 years of relations with Japan

June 25 is the National Day of the Republic of Slovenia, when the country celebrates its independence. This year is especially important since it marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Slovenia.

On this occasion, the Embassy of Slovenia wants to express warm wishes and congratulations to the people of Slovenia and the people of Japan.

The two countries have steadily developed a bilateral friendship based on shared values and have also been working together in the international arena.

The economic interest on both sides is growing. Recent visits to Japan of companies such as Port of Koper and the Slovenian automobile cluster, cooperation in the fields of renewable energy and smart grids are some of the examples. A bilateral agreement on avoiding double taxation would even further boost economic cooperation.

Besides economic relations and tourism, cultural and academic cooperation, and other people-to-people contacts have developed distinctively in these last 20 years.

Maribor, the second largest city in Slovenia, has been nominated, together with Guimaraes, Portugal, as this year's European Capital of Culture. This vibrant town located in the northeast of Slovenia will be hosting a great number of international cultural and artistic events throughout the year. With the support of the Japan Foundation and the EU-Japan Fest, a Japanese non-governmental organization that has been supporting the exchange of both traditional and innovative culture between European Capitals of Culture and Japan since 1992, a number of Japanese cultural events will be held in Maribor and other Slovenian cities throughout the year.

The beautiful city of Ptuj, a short drive from Maribor, is also part of the European Capital of

Culture festivities. It is one of the oldest towns in Slovenia and known for its Kurentovanje, a traditional festival that has been held every February for the past 40 years. Because of the similarity of the festival's symbolic character Kurent to the Japanese "Namahage" ogres, this year Namahage took part in this well-known international heritage carnival. Kurents will return the favor by paying a visit to the city of Oga, Akita Prefecture, to participate in the Namahage Festival in February 2013.

Also, Slovenj Gradec in northern Slovenia and Myoko, Niigata Prefecture, have been celebrating 11 years as sister cities. Through regular visits and exchanges, many friendships have been developed among these people.

The knowledge and experience of mercury connected to other cities, Idrija, Slovenia, a center of the old mercury mine, and Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture, which gives its name to a mercury poisoning disease. Both

cities have through their experiences developed into environmentally friendly cities, and wish to further nurture their friendly relations and work together internationally to raise the awareness of the dangers of mercury poisoning. Idrija, for centuries a home of the second biggest mercury mine in Europe, now closed, is, together with Almaden, Spain, in the process to being nominated as World Heritage sites.

Our two countries also mark a growing number of tourists traveling both directions. This year a number of direct charter flights from Japan to Slovenia are being planned and they provide an immediate opportunity to go to experience firsthand the wonders of Slovenia's landscapes, wine and cuisine, and to take in the international arts and culture in the beautiful settings of historic cities.

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*Information provided by the  
Slovenian Embassy in Tokyo.*

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