
Slovenia National Day

Mature, modern and optimistic nation

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AMBASSADOR OF SLOVENIA

Twenty-five years ago, the historic dream of an independent Slovenia state shared by many of our forebears came true. A feeling of pride, confidence and great unity prevailed. Slovenia declared independence on June 25, 1991. In his speech on the occasion, then President Milan Kucan ended with words that have remained famous, "Today, dreams are allowed; tomorrow is a new day."



After the declaration of independence, it was vital to first lay firm foundations and secure international recognition for the newly founded country. Slovenia joined the United Nations and other relevant international organizations, and some 10 years later it became a full member of the EU and NATO, giving it access to the European common market and the opportunity to enhance its global reputation. In 2007, Slovenia adopted the euro and became

an attractive destination for foreign direct investment that made a significant contribution to the efficiency and growth of the Slovenian economy. Today, Slovenia is an export-led economy, with a particular focus on high-tech, research and development and digitalization.

Slovenia's geostrategic position gives it great potential for further development. Located in the heart of Europe, Slovenia provides an excellent entry point to the markets of Central and Southeast Europe. The country is positioned on Europe's two main corridors, the Baltic-Adriatic and the Mediterranean, and, with its Port of Koper, offers the shortest sea route from East Asia to Central Europe. It has quality infrastructure, a modern highway network and well-developed general information and communications technology. Slovenia also has three international airports handling passengers and cargo and is rapidly modernizing its railway system.

Slovenia's partnership with Japan is firm and has been growing stronger in various areas of mutual interest. In science, Slovenian researchers collaborated on challenging ex-

periments at CERN, which culminated in their participation in the discovery of the Higgs boson through the collision of elementary particles and in the breaking of symmetry between matter and antimatter on the Belle detector at the KEK particle physics laboratory in Tsukuba. These collaborations resulted in Nobel Prizes for their theoretical predictions.

As Slovenia and Japan approach the 25th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, Slovenia is determined to enhance cooperation with Japan and sees great potential for this in both the bilateral and multilateral contexts. We are looking forward to an exchange of visits at the highest levels, and we are equally enthusiastic about encouraging people-to-people contacts.

Building trust and understanding between two nations is the basis for solid political, security and economic cooperation. We are very pleased that the Japanese are regular visitors to Slovenia, and we would be happy to welcome more of them. To this end, direct charter flights will be organized this summer between Slovenia and Japan.

Slovenia has much to offer in terms of nature, tourist attractions, architectural heritage, culture and history, always treating guests with special culinary delights and delicious wine. Slovenia is situated at the meeting point of the Alps and the Mediterranean and at the Pannonian Plain and the Karst, and is also one of the richest countries in the world in terms of forests.

The capital of this small green jewel, home to only two million people, is Ljubljana, which holds the title of European Green Capital 2016.

The world is currently following an extremely rare phenomenon that is happening in Slovenia, as two "baby dragons," or olms (*Proteus anguinus*), have hatched for the first time in Postojna Cave, one of the most amazing Karst caves in the world.

For these and many other reasons, I would like to invite our Japanese friends and readers of *The Japan Times* to visit Slovenia, the only country in the world that has "love" in its name, to feel it and discover the hidden and unexplored places of breathtaking beauty to be found there.