

St. Patrick's Day Special

Marching in tribute to strong and resilient ties

DAMIEN COLE
AMBASSADOR OF IRELAND



I would like to extend warm greetings to all of the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of St. Patrick's Day. Ireland's national day falls on March 17 each year, and is celebrated

by 70 million people of Irish heritage and by our friends and partners all over the world, including here in Japan. At the outset, let me convey my deep gratitude to the government of Japan and members of the Diet, as well as our wide range of political, economic, cultural, research, academic and media partners for all of your work in fostering closer Ireland-Japan ties. We deeply appreciate your commitment and support.

I am delighted to see that St. Patrick's Day events around the country are back with a bang this year. For many of these events, this is the first time in three years they are being held in person. I was particularly delighted to see the return of the Tokyo parade on Omotesando-dori on March 12 and the I Love Ireland Festival in Yoyogi Park on March 11 and 12. The parade on Omotesando-dori is the oldest and largest St. Patrick's Day parade in Asia. In 2019, the Tokyo parade and the I Love Ireland Festival together attracted over 180,000 people, making it the largest Irish event in Asia, and Japan one of the best places in the world to celebrate St. Patrick's Day!

Many lively community groups from Yokohama to Matsue, Shimane Prefecture, and from Sapporo to Kumamoto, joined forces around Japan to take part in celebrating our national day. Events in these locations saw marching bands and



Minister of State at the Department of Transport Jack Chambers EMBASSY OF IRELAND

parades, and the illumination in green of several popular landmarks, including Ferris wheels and castles. The richness and diversity of these events is a testament to the strength and resilience of our relationships in Japan. It is also a result of the hard work and dedication shown by the Irish community and friends of Ireland who worked tirelessly to make this happen, and to whom I also express my sincere thanks and appreciation.

These were the sentiments of Minister of State at the Department of Transport Jack Chambers TD who represented the government of Ireland at the St. Patrick's Day events in Japan this year, during an intensive program in Japan that included official engagements with political counterparts and leading the parade in Tokyo.

This year, St Patrick's Day will mark "100 Years of Ireland in the World," a century of Ireland's engagement as an active member of the international community in the promotion of democracy, peace and security – values which we share with Japan.

As part of this, we are marking the centenary of Ireland's joining the League of

Nations. Ireland has been an active member of the international community. We recently concluded our fourth term on the U.N. Security Council. And like Japan, we have continued to denounce Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Ireland continues to stand by the people of Ukraine, offering support to those fleeing the conflict and working at the U.N. and EU to condemn Russia's actions and impose sanctions in response to its aggression.

This year, we also celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement was a very significant shared achievement by the two governments, the parties in Northern Ireland and the people on the island of Ireland, which was also made possible by the enduring support of our international partners. We will celebrate the end of political violence on the island, the creation of inclusive political institutions and a new framework for relationships across these islands through a series of events at home and abroad.

2023 also marks the 50th anniversary of our accession to the precursor of the European Union. Ireland remains a committed member of the EU. Recent polls have shown that 88% of Irish people view our membership as a positive thing. This is hardly a surprise, since EU membership has transformed Ireland's economy into an innovative, science-and-technology-based digital global hub focused on services in the high-tech, life sciences, finance and agri-business sectors. As an English-language country with a highly educated and young workforce, Ireland's access to the EU single market of about 450 million people and the Eurozone, continues to attract businesses from all over the world, including Japan, who recognize Ireland's unique strengths.

St. Patrick's Day offers a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with our dias-

pora and to celebrate the uniqueness of Irish culture, so evident this year in the record number of Oscar nominations for Irish films. Later this year, the embassy will launch an Irish Film Festival, which I hope you will support and enjoy.

So on this St. Patrick's Day, I would like to invite you to join us in wearing something green, supporting your local parade, and joining in the fun and spirit of the day. *La fheile Padraig sona daoibh go leir* (Happy St. Patrick's Day).

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



One of the filming locations for "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," Skellig Michael is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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Ireland's State Minister for Transport Jack Chambers and Ambassador Damien Cole help lead the Tokyo St. Patrick's Day Parade down Omotesando-dori on Sunday after a three-year hiatus.

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Happy St. Patrick's Day from Team Ireland in Japan!



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