

St. Patrick's Day

Bilateral friendship never been stronger

Anne Barrington
AMBASSADOR OF IRELAND

Happy St Patrick's Day to the readers of the Japan Times! I am delighted to see that Ireland's popular national holiday is also celebrated with great enthusiasm in Japan. With a record number of Parades and other Ireland-themed events taking place around the country this March,



it seems that the friendship between Ireland and Japan has never been stronger!

Marking these links, Ireland's Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr Brendan Howlin is in Japan, connecting with business and cultural networks, to bring the positive news coming from Ireland.

In 2014, Ireland recorded the fastest growth in Europe. A 5% increase in GDP, indicated an acceleration in Ireland's economic recovery. The task is now to secure this recovery and build accompanying social

benefits, through measures for jobs growth and reforms across a number of public sector areas.

Although unemployment has fallen dramatically from 15% at the peak of the crisis to the current 10%, there is still work to be done.

Last week's ambitious new Irish Financial Services Strategy is just one of the proposals targeting jobs over the next 5 years and building on Ireland's unique global strengths in this area.

Ireland is Europe's 4th largest exporter of financial services, including to Japan. The sector directly employs 35,000 people, a 71% jump on 2004 figures. The new strategy identifies opportunities for a further 10,000 new jobs in this dynamic sector, including in areas such as fund management and aviation finance and insurance, where Ireland is a world leader.

Japanese companies such as SMBC Orix and Mitsubishi UFJ Lease and Finance, are among



**Irish Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform
Brendan Howlin**

those who recognized Ireland's competency in aviation finance with significant acquisitions in the sector.

Trade figures over the last year remain strong, especially in the food, drinks and agrifood sectors. In recent years, Japanese companies have established research links with Ireland and these are beginning to yield exciting results.



The annual St. Patrick's Day parade takes place in Tokyo's Omotesando district. Many other Ireland-themed events are scheduled around Japan in March. YOSHIKI MIURA

A reduction in Ireland's trade surplus with Japan was due in part to a significant jump in imports of cars and machinery, another sign of Ireland's recovery.

Irish design is a new focus in our trade relations with Japan, as part of a nominated Year of Irish Design. The initiative aims to develop the design sector and increase jobs, as well as in-

ternational awareness of Irish design skills and achievements. In addition to classic international brands such as Waterford Crystal, or traditional Irish crafts and knitwear, Irish fashion brands such as Avoca, Mollo and Sons and Orla Kiely are establishing an increasing presence in Japan. Other design-led sectors such as gaming and animation are both of business and cultural interest here in Japan.

Two years ago, following a visit by Prime Minister Abe to Ireland, our Taoiseach (Prime Minister) paid a return visit to Japan and signed a Partnership Agreement for Innovation and Growth, which is a blueprint for mutual targets across political, business and cultural areas. It is my intention to work towards these objectives and bring some to fruition with the help and support of our Japanese friends, network enterprises and corporations.

Ireland has been building a reputation for excellent research and supporting significant academic-industrial collaborations. ISCA (International Strategic Cooperation Award) is a new Irish Government scheme being implemented in Japan to fund collaborations in the main areas of



A scene from this year's Oscar-nominated animated film "Song of the Sea" by Cartoon Saloon. Irish design is a new focus in the nation's trade relations with Japan and design-led sectors such as gaming and animation are both of business and cultural interest here in Japan. EMBASSY OF IRELAND

ICT, Green Tech and life sciences. The first event organized under ISCA, focused on Big Data and ICT. A follow up event on green energy, takes place later this month in Hokkaido.

Increasing cooperation focusing on sharing skills and expertise with Japanese partners, as well as strengthening trade and investment, gives us much to celebrate!

These ties are supported by a widespread Japanese interest in our culture by people of all ages and backgrounds. Our music and literature inspire many to visit Ireland. We particularly look forward to marking the 150th anniversary of Nobel Laureate, William Butler Yeats, whose dramatic works were strongly inspired by Japanese Noh. Samuel Beckett short works will be performed in Tokyo, by Mouth on Fire next month and flagship Irish dance show, Riverdance, will tour Japan in April and May with their 20th Anniversary show.

Later in the year, we look forward to more music and dance events and I particularly look forward to another Celtic Holiday, Halloween, which has been adopted in Japan as well.

Ireland's tourism sector is a key component of our economy

which is enjoying steady growth, with over 8 million visitors last year. A newly designated, long-distance touring route, the Wild Atlantic Way, provides stunning and unequalled scenery along 2,500 km of Ireland's west coast, with gourmet and cultural delights to stop off for along the way. We hope for more Japanese tourists in coming years, along with students, who enjoy the experience of living and studying in Ireland.

Another important cultural link with Japan will be highlighted in June when a memorial Garden is opened honouring the writer Lafcadio Hearn, in Tramore, County Waterford. We will be welcoming members of the Sanin Japan-Ireland Association, to mark the occasion. Hearn, whose father was Irish, was raised in Ireland and spent many of his summer in this seaside town.

So on this St. Patrick's Day, with another year of record growth predicted, we are delighted to share this news as well as the special friendship which exists between our two countries. I hope you will enjoy celebrating the Day in Japan. For information, visit www.dfa.ie/irish-embassy/japan/.

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Happy Saint Patrick's Day

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