

Sweden National Day Special

Nation leads the way in ongoing fight against climate change

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Today, we are celebrating Sweden's National Day. This year, due to the coronavirus, celebrations will be different. During the last couple of months, many Swedes have become used to

celebrations online, instead of meeting physically. We were planning to have a big get-together with our Swedish and Japanese friends at the Embassy of Sweden, but that has now become virtual.

Why is June 6 our national day? In 1523, Gustav Vasa was elected king of Sweden on this day. On June 6, 1809, a new constitution was adopted. It became Flag Day in 1916, and in 2005, June 6 became a national holiday.

A key feature of our national day is the many special ceremonies welcoming new Swedish citizens held around the country. Did you know that 24 percent of the Swedish population has an international background? Sweden is the birthplace of many successful companies with a global reach, many of which are present in Japan, such

as Ikea, AstraZeneca, H&M, Tetra Pak, ABB, Scania, Volvo, Electrolux, Ericsson, Spotify, Skype and King's Candy Crush Saga to name a few. Sweden is also the location of innovative, entrepreneurial businesses. Not everyone knows that after Silicon Valley, Stockholm has the second-most "unicorns," or startups valued over \$1 billion, per capita in the world.

Sweden is at the forefront in protecting the environment and fighting climate change. For example, 54 percent of energy use in Sweden is renewable. And Sweden even imports waste for energy production. Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg continues to engage young people all over the world, including those in Japan.

There is a great deal of Japanese interest in gender equality in Sweden, as 50 percent of the Swedish government's ministers are women, while 46 parliamentarians are female. Thirty-nine percent of board members in large Swedish companies are women. Sweden changed its constitution in 1980 to allow for women to inherit the throne and Crown Princess Victoria will become queen some day. However, like Japan, Sweden has not yet had a female prime minister. On average, every Swedish father takes more than 100 days of state guaranteed parental leave days before their child turns 8.

Sweden and Japan have solid, long-lasting ties. Sweden was one of the first countries to establish official relations with Japan after the Meiji Restoration. The relations between the Japanese imperial family and the Swedish royal family are close — the king and crown princess are both frequent visitors to Japan.

The Nobel Prize is also something that has contributed to our strong relations. Since the first Nobel Prizes were awarded in 1901, there have been 28 Japanese laureates. I hope that there will be many more to come.

Let me end by giving you 10 facts about Sweden. Music is one of Sweden's biggest exports, along with computer games; Sweden's freedom of expression law is the world's oldest (1776); one of the most Swedish things you can do is eat tacos on a Friday evening; one of the world's most bestselling novel series is the Swedish crime fiction "Millennium;" more than 80 percent of all payments in Sweden are cashless — 20 percent of Swedes never withdraw cash from ATMs or banks; Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was murdered in Stockholm in 1986 — the murder remains unresolved; two-thirds of Sweden's land area is covered by forests, almost the same ratio as Japan; a village in Hokkaido, Sweden Hills, Tobetsu, looks exactly like a small town in Sweden;

the longest marathon in history took place at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, as Japanese runner Shiso Kanaguri got lost during the race but finished it 54 years later; Swedes love Japan, and apart from indulging in sushi, Swedish skiers dream about Japanese powder snow — and the planes between Sweden and Japan will soon start flying again.

I wish everyone a peaceful, safe and happy June 6, and a great year ahead for the Swedish-Japanese partnership.

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



View over the Royal National Citypark also known as The Ecopark. It is the first national citypark in the world and it includes 27 sq. km of nature and cultural values. SWEDEN IMAGE BANK

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