

Slovenia National Day Special

Friendship is key to growing cooperation

ANA POLAK PETRIC

AMBASSADOR OF SLOVENIA



Slovenia lies in the heart of Europe and is, compared to Japan, a “young” country. This year it is celebrating its 29th Day of Statehood on June 25, a holiday that officially commemorates the country’s declaration of independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, but even more importantly honors the day on which a thousand-year-old dream of Slovenes to live in an independent state finally came true.

The area of Slovenia is 20,271 square kilometers, close to the size of the island of Shikoku, and its population is about 2 million. Some are shy to say that Slovenia is a small country, believing this would determine its political or economic value and power. On the contrary, Slovenia’s size is its biggest asset, as one can find on this small piece of the world’s land such diversity and beauty. On the same day, for example, one can climb a high mountain peak in the Alps in the north of the country in the morning and have a cooling swim off the Slovene Adriatic coast in the afternoon.

Slovenia offers the chance to try excellent cuisine and wine, visit the thermal water spas (like Japan’s *onsen*) and karst underground caves, as well as to learn the stories of old charming cities and cultural heritage. Slovenia is well-known for its beautiful nature, as more than 60 percent of the country is covered in forest. Sustainability is the way to go, and living and working with nature has been a hallmark of Slovenian culture for generations and we strive to keep it that way. Every visitor is impressed by the variety of outdoor activities, such as skiing, biking and hiking. And all of this, makes Slovenia, although small in size, such a great nation.

The ties between Slovenia and Japan are traditionally strong and friendly, be it among citizens or in the political sphere. Although almost 10,000 kilometers apart, there are many similarities in the lifestyle of our citizens. “No shoes indoors,” is also heard in Slovenian homes, and we share a common love for buckwheat (*soba*) and honey.

In the past years our mutual respect and long-lasting friendship have been reflected in successful cooperation among the two states in the economic area. Japanese investments are becoming increasingly important for Slovenia, joint projects are ongoing in many areas, especially in energy, robot-



Piran is a picturesque town on the Adriatic Sea. JOST GANTAR

ics and artificial intelligence. New ideas are developing every day, with the aim to implement the goals of “Society 5.0” in both countries.

As we all strive to manage our lives in the difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic, friendship, solidarity and generosity among states and nations are the only values that matter. In years to come, I firmly believe that cooperation between Slovenia and Japan will be only strengthened and enhanced. The Olympic Games in Tokyo and the Slovenian presidency of the European Union in 2021 offer great opportunities to prove that very soon.

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