

Vibrant culture nurtured from nation's rich history

Palesa Masetse
AMBASSADOR OF LESOTHO



In line with my mandate to enhance the bilateral relationship between Lesotho and Japan, I'd like to share our culture with The Japan Times readers on our National Day this year.

Basotho (people living in Lesotho) culture is an amalgamation of the past meets modern, and rural mountainous versus urban lowlands. Lesotho is the country with the highest lowest elevation in the world, with the country's lowest point being 1,400 meters above sea level, and the highest at 3,482 meters. Its rural areas are decorated with scenic basaltic peaks and rock formations. These feature wild fauna, crystal-clear highland streams, snow and the Sehlabathebe National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. They are

further conspicuous because of historic dinosaur footprints dating back 200 million years and rock paintings left by the San bushmen (Lesotho's original inhabitants). The mountains also nurture households whose livelihoods depend on livestock. These households contribute largely to the country's economy by selling wool and mohair, one of the country's major exports.

Some of these mountains are also home to cave dwellers who have used the mountains as shelters from time immemorial. The dwellers are also custodians of the bushmen culture and are the descendants of the San bushmen. Basotho are also known for pony-trekking, whereby ponies are used for their transportation and for being blanket-wearers, wearing blankets to combat the harsh cold weather conditions. Their physical strength is attributed to dietary practices that include foods such as maize and millet, and they are generally peaceful and friendly.

Lesotho's tourist attractions and activities include the annual 116 km Moshoeshoe Walk from Butha-Buthe to

Thaba-Bosiu, where Her Majesty Queen 'Masenate Mohato Seeiso is a regular participant. The walk is symbolic of the trek taken by Lesotho's first king, Moshoeshoe I, from Menkhoaneng, where the Basotho nation was founded, to the fortress of Thaba-Bosiu. Other attractions and activities include skiing; canoeing; the annual Roof of Africa motor race; the highest bar in Africa; rock paintings; fossilized dinosaur footprints; Basotho Cultural Village; the Katse Dam, which is one of Africa's largest double curvature arch dams; 'Maletsunyane Falls and its annual barbecue festival; and many others.

Concerns, however, have been raised that urbanization and poverty have compromised the clean morals that Basotho were known for. To combat these concerns, the Right Honorable Prime Minister Moeketsi Majoro led a campaign in September that began in the capital city of Maseru. It is our hope that the tourism industry will contribute to rebuilding our post-coronavirus economy.

I'd also like to acknowledge the cordial relationship we have with the city of Hamamatsu, which is intended to pro-

mote business, education and culture. The relationship has resulted in the establishment of the Lesotho-Japan Association, whose main objectives are to promote mutual understanding and friendly relations between Lesotho and Japan. This is to be achieved through events, seminars, economic cooperation through information sharing and research, support for small and mid-sized enterprises and the development of a skilled workforce. Let me further appreciate the solid diplomatic ties shared with Japan's government, which presented food aid recently to Lesotho, amounting to 1,300 tons of maize, 200 tons of fortified foods, and 200 tons of tinned fish, among other interventions.

To conclude, I'd like to congratulate the new Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and his government and wish the people of Japan good health. *Khotso, pula, nala!* Peace, rain, prosperity!

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