

Iceland national day

Japan can follow Iceland's lead in geothermal use

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AMBASSADOR OF ICELAND



It is a great honor for me to address readers of The Japan Times on Iceland's National Day and tell them of the work of the Icelandic Embassy in Japan over the past two years. Our endeavors likely will have enormous benefits in terms of increasing

geothermal utilization here in Japan.

Conference in Tokyo

A high point in Japanese-Icelandic relations will be marked on Nov. 16, when a conference on geothermal utilization will be held at the United Nations University headquarters in Tokyo. The aim of this conference is to present to the Japanese people the multipurpose approach that Iceland is taking vis-a-vis the utilization of geothermal resources.

Another central topic at the conference will be cooperation between Japanese and Icelandic companies in the development of geothermal energy in other countries.

Iceland has had a long-standing relationship with the UNU because its Geothermal Training Facility has been based in Iceland for the past 30 years and has graduated hundreds of geothermal specialists — mainly from developing countries, but also from Japan.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

and External Trade of Iceland Ossur Skarphedinsson will attend the conference. Co-organizers of the conference include the Japanese-Icelandic Chamber of Commerce, Japan Energy Association, United Nations University and many others, both from the government and the private sector.

Japanese policies

The Japanese government has been particularly forward-looking in shaping its environmental goals and policies. The ambitious aims of reducing current carbon dioxide levels and increasing the utilization of geothermal energy resources threefold by 2020 is of particular interest. The Icelandic government recognizes that increased geothermal use here in Japan can bring to the Japanese people enormous benefits because geothermal energy is clean, renewable, stable and safe.

So far, geothermal resources in Japan have mainly been used to generate electricity, but they have also been used in the form of a natural hot-water supply for the thriving "onsen" hot-spring business that Japan is famous for around the world.

In Iceland, different approaches have been used over the past 70 years or so in terms

of geothermal and hydroelectric utilization, which has led to Iceland being rated No. 1 in the Environmental Policy Index (EPI). The index is published annually by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and the Center for International Science Information Network at Columbia University. In the EPI, Japan is ranked 20th. During November's conference, the Japanese public can learn about the Icelandic approach to geothermal utilization. We have for many decades been cooperating closely with such top-class Japanese companies as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Fuji Electric and Toshiba, to name but a few. We consider these firms to be the best in the world in their respective fields in the utilization of renewable energy resources.

Multipurpose use

Geothermal resources in Iceland are mainly used for space heating, i.e., home heating, accounting for 50 percent of the total use of such resources.

Thirty-four percent is used for electricity generation, for the home and in power-intensive industries. This figure is followed by fish farming, 4 percent; swimming pool and onsen business use, 4 percent; snow-

melting, 4 percent; greenhouse use, 2 percent; and various industrial uses, 2 percent.

The industrial use of the geothermal resources in Iceland is under constant development. For example, one Icelandic company developed a recycling process for plastic materials using geothermal water. This company recycles all discarded plastic fishing equipment in Iceland in an environmentally clean way. It should be borne in mind that Iceland is the 12th-largest fish exporter in the world, and nearly all its fish are caught at sea, so the quantity of netting involved is huge. This technique is also applicable to other nonbiodegradable plastic materials, with a utilization ratio of about 90 percent to 95 percent, leaving 5 percent to 10 percent of nontoxic waste to be strained from the plastic.

Financial benefits

By using geothermal hot water instead of fossil fuels to heat houses, Iceland (population: 320,000) saves at least ¥30 billion a year! Areas in Japan, like Aomori city (population: 300,000), could in the same way save billions of yen by following the Icelandic model. And that is only for home heating. So far, this article has mentioned us-



Natural benefit: The Blue Lagoon spa, a 40-minute drive from Iceland's capital Reykjavik, holds geothermal seawater so people can enjoy bathing. ICELANDIC EMBASSY

ing geothermal hot water only for home heating, but thanks to technological advances, this resource can also be used to cool houses in the warmer areas of Japan. Secondly, this could also give a boost to the onsen business. As a point of reference, the Blue Lagoon onsen in Iceland is one of the largest in Europe and is located beside a geothermal power station.



Natural energy: The Hellisheidi Geothermal Plant at Mount Hengill, an active volcanic ridge in Iceland, aims to meet the increasing demand for electricity and hot water. NATIONAL ENERGY AUTHORITY OF ICELAND

'Now is the time to visit Iceland'

Inspired by Iceland, the biggest campaign ever made to promote Iceland abroad, has been launched. The campaign enables everyone to make a difference by telling their stories about Iceland.

The recent volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajokull has given Iceland media attention like never before. The downside of course is that people may be nervous about coming to Iceland at the moment. Some think that the whole country is covered with ash and that Iceland is in a state of emergency. The truth is that only a very small part of Iceland has been influenced by the eruption.

This is of course a big challenge for Iceland because tourism is an important part of the Icelandic economy. For that reason the Icelandic state has teamed up with the tourism industry to get the true message across about Iceland.

By enabling friends of Iceland to take part in the project, the attention Iceland has received will be used to get the message "Now is the time to visit Iceland" across. Our magnificent and powerful nature has never been more alive.

For more information, visit www.inspredbyiceland.com



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