

# Belgium king's day

# Solidarity defines new era of relations

Luc Liebaut  
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM

In my capacity as new ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium in Tokyo I would like to extend my best greetings to the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of King's Day. This celebration dates back to 1866 when my country's second king, King Leopold II, wished to add luster to his and his late father's name and thus decided that the day of St. Leopold — included in the calendar of saints on Nov. 15 — would be observed as King's Day. In 1951, it was decided that Nov. 15 would remain King's Day irrespective of the sovereign's name. King's Day is hence also referred to as the Day of the Dynasty.



whom had lost their homes, their personal belongings and often also relatives and friends.

The shock and dismay was being felt well outside Tohoku. To the Japanese people, the triple disaster was nothing less than a national catastrophe. However, with remarkable resilience and determination, Japan started to tackle the challenges it was facing: mourning the victims, taking care of the survivors who had been left homeless and destitute, assessing the destruction, setting out to repair damaged basic infrastructure, restoring the disrupted production lines and starting to plan for the reconstruction of the devastated areas. The Japanese people's resilience, unity and determination in the face of disaster added a particular dimension of respect and admiration to the instant reaction of grief and solidarity from the international community. Indeed, the triple disaster that had hit Japan was felt as a triple disaster that had struck the world community.

In Belgium, too, reactions of solidarity were numerous, instantaneous and spontaneous. Institutions, business circles, artists and groups of citizens sent messages of sympathy and support and launched concrete initiatives of solidarity. As for myself, the first event that I organized together with all my collaborators, with the representatives of the Belgian business community in Japan and with the members of the Japan-Belgium Society, was a charity event in support of the relief efforts by



Three generations: Prince Philippe and his oldest daughter, Princess Elisabeth, sit with his father, King Albert II of Belgium. FPS CHANCERY PRIME MINISTER-DGCE/CHRISTIAN DELOEDT

the Japanese Red Cross Society and by Save the Children Japan.

I have ever since paid a number of visits to the disaster-struck regions and have met both of official representatives and individual citizens. Their stories and experiences, as well as their determination to successfully perform the gigantic task of reconstructing and reviving their region have left a lasting impression on me that will stay with me for the duration of my mission and beyond. At the same time they have convinced me that Ja-

pan and its people will emerge out of the Tohoku catastrophe as an even more united and stronger nation, as has been the case in similar adverse situations in Japan's history.

On May 25, I presented my credentials to His Majesty Emperor Akihito and together we evoked the warm friendship between the Imperial and Royal families, which over many years has been of crucial importance for the development of the strong relations of confidence and friendship between our

countries. Relations between Japan and Belgium are void of any problems. As the ambassador of Belgium in Tokyo, one can therefore concentrate on adding new building blocks to an already large and solid building.

The new embassy and residence complex in Chiyoda Ward, inaugurated in April 2010, is now fully operational and is serving its purpose: to be a transparent and functional meeting place between Belgian and Japanese political, economic, academic and cultural representatives. Semi-

nars, conferences, exhibitions, fashion shows and promotional events are following each other at a quick pace contributing — together with the inevitable glass of beer or chocolate dessert that follows every event — to Belgium's reputation as an attractive, dynamic, innovative country with strong cultural and culinary traditions.

Bilateral trade has largely recovered from the 2009 post-Lehman Brothers shock and investments are back on track. Belgium remains a favorite destination for investment by Japanese companies intent on conquering the European markets. The reasons for choosing Belgium are numerous and range from the availability of a highly-educated, disciplined, multilingual and efficient workforce, the existence of world-class harbors (with easy and fast links to a strongly developed European hinterland) and excellent universities and scientific research institutes, to the presence of major European institutions in Brussels, Belgium's capital. Over the past 40 years, some 200 Japanese companies have selected Belgium for securing part of their activities in Europe by establishing production units, European headquarters, business offices, facilities for logistics and distribution or research and development centers.

On the occasion of some 30 courtesy calls to the Japanese headquarters of some of these



King's office: An aerial view of the Royal Palace in Brussels WIM ROBBERECHTS, ©FPS FA

companies in recent months, I gathered that they all remain strongly committed to their presence in Belgium as an ideal European hub. Moreover, I was highly pleased to learn that — notwithstanding the troubled times that the world economy is facing — some companies even intend to expand their business in Belgium precisely because of my country's central location and attractive investment environment.

In the field of international relations, both our countries share our firm belief in fundamental values of democracy, pluralism, rule of law and respect for ethnic and religious minorities, which we jointly promote through our foreign policy. Both Japan and Belgium — including through its membership of the European Union — have resolutely opted for an enhanced multilateralism through active participation in regional and multilateral forums. Moreover, my country highly appreciates Japan's growing readi-

ness to take up a more influential role in the global economic arena, as is clearly demonstrated by the leadership displayed by Japan within the Group of Eight as well as its active involvement in the Group of Twenty.

The year to come should be rich in developments culminating in the visit to Japan of a high-level economic mission conducted by His Royal Highness Prince Philippe. In the meantime, I look forward to welcoming numerous old and future friends of my country to some of the events that will mark the further development of our relations, be they the new editions of the highly successful Belgian Beer Weekends that were organized in Osaka (June) and in Roppongi Hills in Tokyo (September), cultural events related to two of Belgium's most famous cartoon characters, Tintin and the Smurfs, economic and commercial promotion campaigns or scientific seminars, to name only a few of them.

## A wealth of delicious gourmet flavors await in Brussels, Wallonia



Coffee and music: There are many cafes with outdoor seating in the historical cities of Belgium. PHILIP VANOUTRIVE, ©FPS FA

Damien Dome  
HEAD OF JAPAN BRANCH, BELGIAN  
TOURIST OFFICE WALLONIA-BRUSSELS

From street foods like frites (french fries) or waffles with the toppings of your choice to traditional dishes like croquettes or mussels, gastronomy in Belgium is an art, an "art de vivre."

**2012, the gourmet year**  
Brussels is bursting with cafes to enjoy a world-renowned Belgian beer and the Grand Sablon square is surrounded by shops from Belgium's artisan chocolatiers.

Wallonia, French-speaking Belgium, is a delight of local restaurants, affordable and charming inns, castles and small

breweries throughout the rolling countryside.

Brusselicious 2012 will put the spotlight on all the different aspects of gourmet living in Brussels. The event will showcase produce and producers, talents and creativity, places and people.

The highlights will not only be the traditional recipes, the food stalls, the crunch of chocolate, forgotten and rediscovered veg-



Traditional drink: Belgian beer HIROKAZU TAKAYAMA

etables, the countless types of beers and other culinary specialties, but also the great chefs who take on the challenge of re-creating traditional favorites with their own special slant, capable of conjuring up unsuspected savors.

In the markets and the star-studded restaurants, on the street corners and in the parks, in exceptional venues and in the bistros: food, wonderful food, is everywhere.

**Belgium, land of beer**  
Cheers! A toast to Belgium, the land of beer!

In Belgium, beer is more than just a frothy beverage, it's a culture. With more than 800 different varieties, many Belgian beers have personalized beer glasses in which only that beer may be served. The shape of each glass enhances the flavor of the beer

for which it is designed. This tradition may seem like behavior reserved for wine snobbery, but Belgians take their beer seriously and with good reason. It is easy to see the depth to which beer has become one with Belgium's culture. What other country has a driving tour through the countryside called the Beer Route? After a day of castle-hopping, visitors can stop by one of the local cafes to enjoy some chocolate with their beer as their worries melt away.

Whether visiting a brewery, sitting in a café or attending a festival, visitors will remember the first time they discovered their favorite beer.

**Chocolate, for lovers**  
Chocolate has been a lure for lovers, the indulgence of kings and today, everyone's favorite

sweet. The country's reputation for chocolate began with the creation of the praline in 1912 by Jean Neuhaus. Belgian chocolates stand out from the rest because of the use of only natural products. Even in today's technology-driven world, Belgian pralines continue to be made by hand.

Can't decide which artisan Belgian chocolate is your favorite? Try them all!

After exploring Brussels, venture to Liege, just one hour by train from Brussels, and see the new train station designed by Santiago Calatrava. Then head to the town of Spa, where you can finish a relaxing day of spa treatments with a praline or two. For a romantic getaway, stroll along the cobblestone streets of Namur. Preview what is in store for the town of Mons in 2015 when it becomes the European Capital of Culture.

After witnessing the passion that goes into the creation of these sweet treats, it's no wonder chocolate has become an international symbol of love.



Sweet reputation: Belgian chocolates are highly regarded worldwide. HIROKAZU TAKAYAMA

You can travel the four corners of the Earth, but you have not truly lived until you have your first bite of Belgian chocolate.

For events information about the year of gastronomy and Belgium, please visit [www.brusselicious.be](http://www.brusselicious.be) or [www.belgium-travel.jp](http://www.belgium-travel.jp).

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# Belgium king's day

## Strong bonds of friendship

Takao Kusakari  
PRESIDENT, THE JAPAN-BELGIUM  
SOCIETY (JBS)

On the occasion of the Kingdom of Belgium's King's Day, I extend my heartfelt congratulations on behalf of The Japan-Belgium Society.



It is indeed a matter for rejoicing that His Majesty King Albert II, Her Majesty Queen Paola and the Royal Family of Belgium are

in good health.

I am pleased to note that Japan and Belgium have long enjoyed very close relations, not only in the economic, political and diplomatic spheres, but also in the cultural and social ones. It goes without saying that this excellent relationship is based on more than 80 years of good and stable exchange between Japan's Imperial Family and the Royal Family of Belgium.

This year, Ambassador Luc Liebaut took up his new post. Ambassador Liebaut arrived on March 16, only five days after the

Great East Japan Earthquake. At a time when many people were leaving Japan out of fear, Ambassador Liebaut was coming to be of assistance, and I was very much impressed and encouraged by his arrival as originally planned and his work during those early chaotic days.

I sincerely pray for the greater prosperity of the Kingdom of Belgium, which is playing an increasingly important role in the European Union. I also pray for the everlasting bonds of friendship between Japan and Belgium.



Floral event: The biennial Brussels Flower Carpet will cover the Grand Place from Aug. 15 to 19, 2012. TOURIST OFFICE FOR FLANDERS-BRUSSELS

## Cultural events abound in Flanders in 2012

### Art, fashion in Antwerp

The Museum Aan de Stroom (MAS), in the Eilandje district of Antwerp, opened in May 2011. Its opening exhibition, "Masterpieces in the MAS: Five centuries of images in Antwerp" (through Dec. 30, 2012) examines the development of Western visual culture with masterpieces of old masters and contemporary artists. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Antwerp was considered a world center for the development of imagery. Even today the visual arts created here have

contributed to Antwerp's global reputation as a leading international arts center. For more information, visit [www.mas.be](http://www.mas.be)

"Walter Van Beirendonck: Dream the World Awake" (until Feb. 19, 2012) at the Fashion Museum (MoMu) is the first large-scale retrospective of the fashion designer. Over three decades, Van Beirendonck has built up an impressive international career. He is the maverick of the Antwerp fashion scene and became primarily known for his colorful designs, spectacular fashion

shows in Paris in the 1990s under the W.&L.T. label, and the diverse images of the body that he presents on the catwalks. His work combines the most diverse sources of inspiration, ranging from technology, art and pop culture to ethnography. For more information, visit [www.momu.be](http://www.momu.be)

### Get on Track in Ghent

Track is a large-scale, citywide exhibition that will be held in Ghent from May 12 to Sept. 16, 2012. It builds on an existing tradition and joins previous

art projects such as Chambres d'Amis (1986) and Over the Edges (2000). But Track is not a repetition of these earlier events; it profits from the added value accumulated by its predecessors, probes the boundaries of the public and the private and takes account of the increased significance of the domain in recent years.

In the city center and immediate surroundings, Track will mark out six areas, each with its own distinct character: the area around the Citadel Park, home to the cultural bastions of the contemporary art museum S.M.A.K., the Museum of Fine Arts and the Higher Institute for Fine Arts; the area around the Ghent University Library's Book Tower and the Vooruit arts center, with its high concentration of educational institutions and student amenities; the historical heart of the city where trade has flourished for centuries; the Macharius/Heirnis neighborhood, where the River Leie joins the Scheldt and which was the cradle of the city; the surroundings of Fratersplein, which combines a large number of care institutions; and the area between the Gasmeter site and the Rabot high-rise blocks, an old industri-



Fun time: The Cat Parade in Ypres commemorates a town tradition from the Middle Ages. TOURIST OFFICE FOR FLANDERS-BRUSSELS



The Museum Aan de Stroom ©BART HUYMANS, MICHEL WUYTS



Citywide exhibition: Gent-Sint-Pieters Station will be one of the anchor points of the Track art project in Ghent next year. ©TRACK

al district that is being converted into a new residential area. The two stations — Gent-Sint-Pieters and Gent-Dampoort — act as anchor-points for the whole project.

Thirty international artists are being invited to work at indoor and outdoor locations in the various neighborhoods. They will make use of the local context and the abundant diversity of the urban realm: history, architecture, culture, population, infrastructure and so on. At the same time they will raise vital questions about our globalized world. For more information, visit [www.track.be](http://www.track.be)

information, visit [www.holy-blood.com](http://www.holy-blood.com)

The Cat Parade in Ypres, an event brimming with the history of the town, will be held on May 13, 2012. It takes place every three years. The Cat Parade is a whirling spectacle with floats, giant papier-mache cats, music groups, theater performances and quite obviously a very large number of people dressed as cats. Many peripheral activities make this edition an appointment not to be missed. For more information, visit [www.toerisme-ieper.be](http://www.toerisme-ieper.be)

The famous Brussels Flower Carpet covers 1,800 sq. meters in the center of the Grand Place. It takes place every two years and will be held from Aug. 15 to 19, 2012. An opening night event is held on Aug. 14 at 10 p.m. For more information, visit [www.flowercarpet.be](http://www.flowercarpet.be) or [www.visitbrussels.be](http://www.visitbrussels.be).

### Traditional events in 2012

The annual Procession of the Holy Blood will be held on May 17, 2012, in the city center of Brugge. For centuries, this popular municipal procession has been depicting arresting and moving scenes from the Bible. The procession's roots go back to 1291. It was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009. For more

information, visit [www.visitflanders.jp](http://www.visitflanders.jp)

## Congratulations

to the people of Belgium  
on their King's Day



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