

# Iceland national day

## Working together in the clean, pristine Arctic

Stefan Larus Stefansson  
AMBASSADOR OF ICELAND

We Icelanders would like to congratulate Japan in recently obtaining observer status in the Arctic Council. Iceland has for many years supported Japan's application to the Arctic Council because of the close ties between our countries and because we believe that Japan can make a significant contribution to our understanding of the changes taking place in the Arctic.



In order to tackle climate change, cooperation between Iceland and Japan should continue in the field of geothermal utilization looking especially into space heating for houses here in Japan. In a lecture recently in Hitotsubashi University about using geothermal hot water for heating houses I presented that in Iceland 92 percent of all houses are heated with geothermal hot water and only 1 percent with oil!

Global warming, melting ice caps and the opening of new shipping lanes, especially the Northern Sea Route, or NSR, will afford many opportunities as well as dangers and challenges. Japan is in a unique position if one looks at the world map from the North Pole perspective; one sees that when the NSR finally opens all year round the distance between Yokohama and Iceland shortens to exactly 7,850 km, compared to the 20,000 km from Yokohama to Rotterdam.

Such a shortcut would make Iceland an ideal transshipment port for Japanese shipping companies that would not have to sail the distance to Rotterdam or the East Coast of the U.S. but could drop their containers off in Iceland and head directly back to Yokohama.

This may become reality sooner than we think because the Japanese are master ship-builders and it would not be

problematic to design icebreakers and specially strengthened freighters to service the NSR all year round.

Sailing from the port of Yokohama to a transshipment port in Iceland could be accomplished in less than half the time than through the Suez Canal.

Looking back at the five years of service as ambassador of Iceland to Japan I am extremely proud that the embassy has been able to assist Icelandic companies in their exports to this great country. My pride stems especially from the fact that we Icelanders have for centuries been fishing in the cold and clean North Atlantic Ocean. Being both island people, the Japanese and Icelanders are used to eating fish, which sustain good health and longevity. Fish distributors from Iceland like the world-famous brand Icelandic have been selling the highest quality seafood to Japan for decades, such as "shishamo" (capelin), "karasugarei" (Greenland halibut), "akauo" (red fish), and "saba" (mackerel).

We know that it is getting more and more difficult to obtain clean and healthy food for young and old alike, but when Japanese people come across fish from Icelandic they are getting fish of the highest quality.

Japan has now been for decades Iceland's biggest market for one of nature's most special products and that is eiderdown used for duvets and pillows. Nishikawa Sangyo has been selling this special product for many years in Japan.

What makes the Icelandic eiderdown so special is that the processing of the eider is totally harmless for the bird because the eider sheds its breast feathers to line its nest while waiting for the chicks to hatch. But the eider is literally a sitting duck for predators like the arctic fox and the mink.

So what makes the processing special and unique is the relationship with this wild animal. The eider and the farmer make a silent contract that is the farmer



**Eider duck: Eiderdown, lining the nest, is one of the highest quality kinds of down and is known for its extreme insulation qualities and incredible softness.** EMBASSY OF ICELAND

is peacefully allowed to harvest the extra soft eiderdown and replace it with soft dry hay.

The eider is protected 24 hours a day from predators by the farmer and his family until the chicks have hatched and the eider swims with them out to sea to return a year later to the same hatching ground where the same process resumes.

Shorter sailing distances could lead to revolutionary changes in trading between Iceland and Japan, and possibly the rest of the world.

The Arctic is a brave new world for animals and humans alike, and Japan and Iceland must seize this moment and become leaders of new ways in commerce and shipping.



**Nature's bounty: North Atlantic salmon carve their way through wild rivers flowing past volcanic mountains, deep valleys and open farmland in Iceland.** EMBASSY OF ICELAND

### *Icelandic eiderdown comforter*

*Extra warmth from Mother Nature*



<http://www.nishikawasangyo.co.jp>

TOKYO NISHIKAWA



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