

Madagascar national day

Natural beauty and mineral wealth on 'Treasure Island'

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CHARGE D'AFFAIRES OF MADAGASCAR

Independence is the biggest asset and the greatest treasure. Today, June 26, we Malagasy people are proud to celebrate the 53rd anniversary of regaining our full independence. On this auspicious occasion, on behalf of the Madagascar Embassy, I would like to extend my warmest and sincere greetings and best wishes to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, members of Imperial family and the government and the friendly people of Japan, to all the Malagasy community residing in Japan.



Since the establishment of our first diplomatic relations in 1962, Madagascar and Japan have maintained cordial relations. Despite the political crisis since 2009, Japan remains a fundamental partner for Madagascar. Thanks for Japan's friendly cooperation renewed on Oct. 12, 2012, to accompany Madagascar toward a constitutional normalcy. Taking this opportunity, the Embassy of Madagascar in Japan is proud to share some significant values of Madagascar, about its own culture, tourism and natural resources.

Malagasy people are known by their legendary sense of hospitality and kindness, as most who have been there can confirm. To understand a gist of this cultural richness, one has to observe the Zafimaniry com-

munity's worldwide renowned knowledge on the art of wood sculpting. The Zafimaniry community lives in the mountainous south-central part of Madagascar. In fact, the Zafimaniry's expertise in woodworking has been recognized by UNESCO in 2003 and was registered on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008. A special exhibition about the Zafimaniry was held in Osaka from March 14 to June 6, 2013. My special thanks go to the National Museum of Ethnology of Osaka for organizing this event and we are looking forward to any collaboration of this kind in the future.

In terms of tourism, Madagascar is best known for the endemic fauna and flora, up to 80 percent of all species, and the three UNESCO World Heritage sites, which are the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga (2001), the Rainforest of the Antsinanana (2007)

and the Tsingy Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve (1990). Tourist visits in Madagascar increased by 13 percent in 2012 compared to 2011. And it is worth noting that Madagascar has been ranked in 2013 as among the 15 most desirable destinations in the world.

Particularly about Japanese tourists in Madagascar, their number increased by 11 percent in 2012 compared to 2011, and they are mostly attracted by the southwest of Madagascar including Morondava, known as the city of the baobabs, which are oversized trees that can live up to 1,000 years and commonly called "upside-down trees." Morondava is also one destination to reach the fascinating and spectacular Tsingy of Bemaraha, one of the three UNESCO World Heritage sites in Madagascar.

Japanese tourists are also fascinated by Fort Dauphin and its beautiful bay, discovered by

the Portuguese in 1500. Fort Dauphin is no doubt one of the most beautiful and representative of Madagascar's ecosystems with its dry, wet and coastal forests and even desert landscapes. There are opportunities to observe whales from June to September, as well as giant sea turtles, manta rays and dolphins. In the last few years, Fort Dauphin City is transforming very fast, benefiting from the infrastructure development impact of an international ilmenite mining project.

Speaking of its mineral resources, since 2006, Madagascar occupied the first place in world production of sapphire. For instance, the world's biggest sapphire named "sapphire of the millennium" of 65,000 carats was discovered in Madagascar in 1995. Madagascar holds an important place in the world in the production of graphite, chromites, ilmenite, iron, nickel



Flora and fauna: Six out of eight species of baobab and all species of lemurs are found only in Madagascar.

TSUNEO YAMAMOTO



and coal. The Ambatovy Project, worth \$6.5 billion of investment, with which Japanese companies participate at 27.5 percent through Sumitomo Corp., is one of Japan's most important projects in Africa. Through the Ambatovy Project, Madagascar will annually produce 60,000 tons of nickel, 5,600 tons of cobalt and approximately 190,000 tons of fertilizer.

Under the framework of an official side event of TICAD V from

May 16 to 18, 15 African countries were invited to a ministerial meeting on natural resource development, attended by 2,000 people including African ministerial delegations, Japanese mining companies, the World Bank and international NPOs. Our minister of mines has the opportunity to present our attractive mining investment policy and to hold bilateral meetings for the strengthening of bilateral cooperation with Japanese gov-

ernment and promising private investors.

Our national airline company Air Madagascar is represented in Japan, and there is already cooperation with Japanese travel agencies that offer attractive tours to Madagascar, so we expect that Japanese tourists will continue to discover Madagascar's unique natural beauty and culture, but also Madagascar as a "treasure island" is ready to welcome any Japanese business.



Rock of ages: Discovered in 1995 in Madagascar, the 65,000-carat Millennium Sapphire is the world's largest carved sapphire, featuring images of human achievement ranging from the ancient pyramids of Giza to modern-day accomplishments, such as Neil Armstrong landing on the moon, designed by Italian artist Alessio Boschi. EMBASSY OF MADAGASCAR

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