
Finland national day

Finland-Japan unique friendship to turn 95

Manu Virtamo
AMBASSADOR OF FINLAND

The Republic of Finland today celebrates its 96th Independence Day, and the coming year will mark the 95th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Finland and Japan. During those decades Finland's position has changed from being at the periphery of Europe to that of the closest neighbor of Japan in Europe. The distance to the world's economic powerhouse, East Asia, has shrunk to a fraction of what it used to be.

In the last 20 years or so, the change has been more rapid than ever before. Exchanges in economic and cultural fields have become more frequent, and far-reaching. A strong sign of this deepening relationship is the expanding logistic connections between our countries.



With almost 30 direct weekly flights between Finland and Japan by our national carrier Finnair and by Japan Airlines, Finland has become a hub for business and travel, as well as a portal between Europe and Asia.

The relations between Finland and Japan have been traditionally good and friendly, and they have remained so. This is visible not only in the relations between the two governments and in well-functioning trade relations, but also in the growing interest of Japanese people to visit Finland, and to learn more about our culture and lifestyle. The number of Japanese tourists visiting Finland is growing fast and is expected to continue to grow in the future.

It is safe to say that the Finnish country brand is probably better known in Japan than anywhere else in the world. The Japanese are not only interested in things traditionally associated with Finland, such as the beautiful aurora borealis, Santa Claus or the Moomins. They are eager to know more about Finnish

lifestyle, our renowned education system and our leading position in gender equality. They are also interested in Finland's booming game and ICT industries. Many Japanese study the Finnish language and culture, and there are 19 active Finland-Japan friendship societies all over the country. Finland also has five Honorary Consulates in Japan from Hokkaido to Kyushu, and we very much appreciate their contribution in promoting Finland in their jurisdiction. We are deeply grateful for the effort of all the Japanese who have helped us to make Finland more known in Japan.

The interest is profoundly mutual. Many Finns are also interested in Japan and Japanese culture — from young popular culture fans to academic researchers and government officials. Because of this shared interest, high-level visits from both countries have become more frequent. Several Japanese companies have chosen Finland as a base for their operations in northern European markets. An

example of a new type of cooperation is the recent acquisition of a majority share of the Finnish game company Supercell by the Japanese companies Softbank and GungHo. We hope that these mutually beneficial exchanges continue in the future.

In four years, Finland will celebrate 100 years of independence. Before that, there are Finnish cultural icons, whose anniversaries are worth remembering and celebrating as well. In 2014, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Tove Jansson, the creator of the beloved Moomin characters and books. The following year will be the 150th anniversary of the Finnish national composer Jean Sibelius, whose music is hugely important for us Finns but also touches classical music lovers around the world.

To conclude, I wish that the bilateral relations between Finland and Japan continue to blossom, and contacts between Finnish and Japanese businesses, academic and cultural life, and people would flourish.