

St. Patrick's Day

Relationship reaches new level

John Neary
AMBASSADOR OF IRELAND

It is my great pleasure to send warm greetings on Saint Patrick's Day to all Japan Times readers!

I am delighted to welcome Frances Fitzgerald, the Irish minister for children and youth affairs who has come to Japan to join the celebration of our national day.

During her weeklong visit, Minister Fitzgerald will focus



Irish Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Frances Fitzgerald

on advancing economic, educational and cultural links with Japan. She will be traveling to

Hokkaido, Osaka and Kyoto as well as Tokyo to meet with political, civic and business leaders, as well as Irish people and friends of Ireland.

In the last year, great strides have been made in advancing the relationship between Ireland and Japan.

In June, the country saw its first visit by a Japanese Prime Minister when Shinzo Abe visited Ireland. And when Taoiseach Enda Kenny paid a return visit in December, it was the first by an Irish Prime Minister since 2009.

These visits have raised the relationship between Ireland and Japan to a new level. At their meeting in December, the two leaders agreed on a partnership for prosperity and growth, which sets out a framework for developing cooperation between the two countries in a range of sectors.

Ireland's economy is now firmly on the road to recovery.

On Dec. 15, Ireland exited the EU/IMF assistance program, becoming the first Eurozone country to exit a program of this type. We have made a full return to normal market funding. Our debt is now rated as investment grade by all three major ratings agencies and bond yields are close to historic lows.

Our economic recovery has been driven by exports which are now significantly higher than the pre-crisis peak in 2007.

Why? We have one of the most open and progressive economies in the world. Forbes magazine ranks us as the best country in the world for business.

Other independent studies rank Ireland first in the world for inward investment by quality and value and the best country in Western Europe in which to invest.

Ireland's competitiveness relative to our trading partners has significantly improved. Labor costs, commercial property prices and other business costs have come down.

Our agriculture and food sector is performing particularly



There are various events celebrating St. Patrick's Day held around Japan. EMBASSY OF IRELAND

strongly, with exports increasing by 40 percent since 2009 to reach a value of almost €10 billion in 2013.

It was a special boost to our trade with Japan in this sector, when Prime Minister Abe announced the lifting of the import ban on Irish beef last December.

Our economic links with Japan are growing as our economy recovers. Japan is our 11th largest trading partner and there are 50 companies investing in Ireland employing over 2,500 people. They include industry flagships such as Takeda, Astellas and Fujitsu.

Noteworthy recent investments include a large scale acquisition by SMBC in the airline leasing sector, which was followed by a further expansion of their operation in Ireland in January.

In recent years Ireland has been building a reputation for excellent research and supporting significant academic-industrial collaborations.

Ireland is now in the top 20 countries in global rankings for the quality of its scientific research, up from 36th in 2003.

The journal Nature lists Ireland as one of five 'up and coming' destinations for high-level research. We rank second in the world for the quality of our research in immunology and

probiotics, sixth in the world for nanoscience and eighth in the world for materials science.

In recent years, Japanese companies have been establishing research ties with Ireland and these are beginning to yield exciting results.

Last December, Science Foundation Ireland, the agency responsible for supporting research in Ireland, announced a 2-year funding program worth €1.2 million targeted at promoting research and development links with Japan.

Last year, approximately 8 million tourists visited Ireland, up 6 percent from 2012.

2014 is set to be another exciting year for visitors to Ireland as they get to experience Ireland's first long-distance touring route, the Wild Atlantic Way, stretching all the way from the Inishowen Peninsula in County Donegal to Kinsale in County Cork. The new route will rival the world's best driving tours, along 2,500 km of the wildest, most captivating scenery, with lots to do and see along the way.

So come and join us in the St. Patrick's Day celebrations around Japan. We look forward to seeing you and sharing with you the special friendship that exists between our two countries. For information, visit www.irishembassy.jp

Celebrating the joys of Irish generosity and hospitality

Michael D. Higgins
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

I am delighted to send best wishes for St. Patrick's Day to the people of Ireland and to our global family and friends around the world.

The 17th of March is a day when we remember St. Patrick and the very challenging circumstances under which he arrived on our shores. Despite the fact that he was a Roman-Briton who came to Ireland as a slave, Patrick forgave his captors and accepted the Irish he encountered as his own community. We recall the transformative power of his great spirit of forgiveness and generosity. It was this generous spirit that commended Patrick to be embraced as our beloved patron saint. His name has since become synonymous with an inclusive and authentic version of Irishness with its stress on the duty and the joys of hospitality.

For those of us who will spend St. Patrick's Day in Ireland, I hope its celebration, in the company of family and friends, will connect with those deep authentic aspects of Irish life which we share and of which we are rightly proud — our music, our culture, our sports, our natural environment and our rich community life.

In recent years, there has been a welcome increase in the number and nature of St. Patrick's Day celebrations facilitating greater participation by the diverse communities who make up the tapestry of our lives together. The many parades that now take place across the country express our citizens' pride in their home place; they are valuable expressions of community solidarity and are deserving of our participation and support.

St. Patrick's Day also marks the advent of spring, a season of renewal that is keenly welcomed after the severe weather of recent weeks and the destruction it has caused. Patrick's values of pastoral concern and human solidarity were much in evidence as members of the emergency services, local authority workers and good neighbors reached out to assist those who were afflicted by the storms and the flooding. It was an uplifting example of that spirit of friendship and generosity embodied by Patrick in his own lifetime that continues to define our sense of community today.

As we reflect on the remarkable life of St. Patrick, we are also conscious of how the theme of migration has remained an important part of our national narrative. It continues to play a significant role in defining us as a society and as a people. Today we celebrate our wider and diverse Irish family, to whom we remain connected by a strong cultural heritage and history. We are grateful for all they do to keep



that heritage alive in their adopted homelands across the globe, as well as for their interest in, and tangible support for, Ireland's welfare and development. Today is a special day for all those Irish communities great and small across the world that come together in a spirit of pride and joy to celebrate their identity and their links of affinity and affection with their homeland of origin.

On St. Patrick's Day, our recent emigrants from Ireland will, in particular, be foremost in our thoughts. Where ever they may be, we hope that our sons and daughters are happy and prospering in their adopted communities and that they will have some opportunity, with friends and neighbors, to share the joyous celebration of our patron saint. I am especially conscious of Irish peacekeepers and humanitarian workers whose sense of service to vulnerable people in distant places prevents them from being home on this special day. Just as we remember our own emigrants, we should also be mindful of those migrants who have made Ireland their new home and, on this day in particular, make a special effort to include them in our national celebration.

To all those who share this island, to Irish people by birth or descent wherever they may be in the world and to those who simply consider themselves to be friends of Ireland, I wish each and every one of you a happy, peaceful and authentically Irish St. Patrick's Day.

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