

St. Patrick's Day

Bright future in sight for Japan, Emerald Isle

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AMBASSADOR OF IRELAND

Greetings to readers of The Japan Times on St Patrick's Day.

Ireland's National Day is one of the most iconic and widely celebrated worldwide; I am delighted that there are scores of events organized around Japan during March by friends of Ireland to mark the holiday.

I would like to thank the organizers in each location and encourage those readers based in Tokyo to join us for this weekend's biggest Ireland celebration in Asia, the I Love Ireland Festival in Yoyogi Park that begins today, as well as tomorrow's St. Patrick's Day parade that kicks off at 1 p.m. on Omotesando Avenue.

Our people-to-people links are an important part of Ireland's relationship with Japan. The many individuals attracted to our culture, food or sport, combined with the growing numbers taking part in our popular working holiday plan, are a cornerstone in our thriving relationship with Japan and contribute greatly to raising awareness of Ireland's great offerings in tourism and education.

Our bilateral relationship with Japan was

marked officially last year with a busy and successful celebration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations. Among the year's highlights were reciprocal, high-level visits and a series of friendly games between the Irish and Japanese national rugby teams in June. We look forward to meeting Japan on the pitch again at the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and hope to see the same crowds of enthusiastic fans for all the games.

As we begin a new chapter in our bilateral relationship with Japan, we welcome this week's visit by Minister of Housing, Planning and Local Government Eoghan Murphy.

In various meetings with Japanese political and business partners, Murphy will provide updates on Ireland's robust economic growth and discuss shared concerns in the face of global market uncertainties, including Brexit.

In the negotiations on Brexit, Ireland's priorities are to remain at the heart of the European Union and maintain the closest possible relationship with the U.K. We are also strongly committed to protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process that stemmed from it. This year marks the 20th anniversary of that landmark deal.

Ireland understands hard-won peace and



Eoghan Murphy, Ireland's minister of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

we have promoted the values of the U.N. since we first became members in 1955. We were delighted last year to be recognized, together with key partners, for our leadership during the negotiations of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Next week's visit by Murphy to Hiroshima will underscore our shared values in this sphere.

Last year, Ireland's strong trading partnership with Japan was given a major boost with agreement on the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. This is the frame-



work within which Ireland and Japan will forge ever closer economic relations.

Ireland is a major food exporter, especially of highly prized beef, which is grass-fed, traceable and produced under Bord Bia's (Irish food board) pioneering, independently verified sustainability program Origin Green. We expect that as our cheese, fish and beef appear more often on Japanese supermarket shelves, people here will recognize our food quality and appreciate our stringent production and export standards.

With so many interesting possibilities opening up, I can say that, notwithstanding some global challenges, the future is bright for Ireland-Japan relations and combined with our shared values and many connections, we have plenty to celebrate on this Saint Patrick's Day!

The remains of an early Christian monastery on the island of Skellig Michael, 12 kilometers off the coast of southwest Ireland, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996.

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