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# sustainable japan

Andreas Baum works toward environment, network for innovation

## Swiss envoy ‘creating value together’ with Japan

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**Title: Ambassador of Switzerland**  
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**Hometown: La Tour-de-Peilz, Switzerland**  
**Years in Japan: 1 year and 9 months**

### Leaders & Readers

**LOUISE GEORGE KITTAKA**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

With a career that spans three decades and which has taken him to Canada, the United States, Nigeria, Israel and India, Andreas Baum is delighted to now find himself in Japan. He took up his role as the Swiss ambassador to Japan in October 2020.

“Usually we move on every four years, and you get a list of available postings for which you can apply. If you’re lucky, you get one of the postings on your list, and Japan was on mine, so I was fortunate,” he said. “I have been in diplomacy for 30 years, and now they call me a ‘seasoned diplomat.’ But I am still enthusiastic and, I hope, young at heart!” he added with a smile.

In his youth, Baum originally studied medicine but says that his heart wasn’t in it and that the role of medical doctor was not a good fit for him. After completing his training, he moved to the United States in 1988 to pursue a graduate degree in international relations and realized he had found his calling. “It was a very exciting time, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and we thought that anything was possible. I have great memories,” he reminisced.

**Successful presidential visit**

Baum and his team recently hosted Ignazio Cassis, the president of the Swiss Confederation, along with a delegation of leaders from Switzerland’s political, economic, business and scientific communities.

“Switzerland and Japan share common values and are looking for solutions to the same challenges, such as climate change, digital disruption and aging society. After a lack of opportunity for contacts during the pandemic, the first thing is to re-establish people-to-people relations,” said Baum.

The issues of international security, bilateral trade and science were high on the agenda during the presidential visit. “Needless to say, the war in Ukraine was an important topic of discussion,” he continued. “Both Japan and Switzerland have condemned Russia’s aggression and taken sanctions. The presidential visit offered an important opportunity to exchange views on the way forward.”

Both nations are candidates for the United Nations Security Council and are applying for a seat on the council, with a view to serving a two-year term in 2023 and 2024. With more than 150 years of bilateral trade, Japan ranks as Switzerland’s second-largest trading partner in Asia, while Switzerland is the sixth-biggest investor in Japan. A free trade agreement has been in existence since 2009.

Cassis and his delegation traveled to Osaka, where he broke ground for the new Swiss Consulate location there. “This goes beyond your classic model of a consulate. It will be part of a network we call Swissnex, and will focus on research, innovation and education. We have identified Kansai as a focus region of great promise, in terms of all

the academia, industry and many startups there,” Baum explained. Osaka will be the sixth location to join the Swissnex network, after Boston, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Shanghai and Bangalore.

**Green tech for better future**

Baum and his team are looking forward to preparations for Expo 2025 in Osaka, with Switzerland planning a pavilion focusing on life sciences, artificial intelligence and environmental protection.

As countries lacking in natural resources but rich in innovative ideas, Baum pointed out, Switzerland and Japan share an interest in initiatives that will safeguard the environment. They have both committed to a goal of zero emissions by 2050. Swiss companies in the fields of transportation, energy or decarbonization, for example, are actively developing innovative solutions that embrace green technology, and it is hoped that some will come to fruition in time for presentation at the Osaka expo, such as zero-emission hydrofoil boats.

As a major global financial center, Switzerland is actively engaged with the topic of transition finance. This refers to framework conditions that, among other things, help drive high-carbon companies toward net-zero emissions, and support them as they start to implement long-term changes to go greener.

“In some cases the transition technology is not here yet, so how do financial institutions help companies make these transformations? Moreover, how do you choose which industries to invest in?” Baum pondered.



HIROMICHI MATONO

**Creating connections**

Baum has been making the most of opportunities to develop his relationship with Japan on both a personal and professional level. “My answer is probably a common one, but I enjoy the traditional aspects of Japan, such as the aesthetics, the philoso-

phy, the sense of nuance, the harmony and the work ethic. Then in my professional life, I have come to connect with the modern side of Japan,” he noted.

“I like that we can learn from each other, building bridges and connections around commonalities and differences. That is

### World traveler is multilingual

Andreas Baum was born in Zurich in 1963 but calls the municipality of La Tour-de-Peilz in the Lake Geneva region home. He completed a medical degree at the University of Lausanne but then changed direction, studying for an MA in the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. Following his graduation, he joined the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. He held the role of diplomatic collaborator in Bern and was then promoted to Secretary to the State Secretary. He subsequently went on to represent his country in diplomatic roles in Canada, the United States, Nigeria and Israel. His most recent posting was as ambassador and head of mission at the Embassy of Switzerland to India and Bhutan in New Delhi for four years, before taking on his current role in 2020. In his free time he enjoys running, listening to music, reading and traveling. He is fluent in German, English and French, and understands Italian and Spanish.

really the core of diplomatic work — creating value together,” Baum said.

Reading is one of his favorite pastimes, and he mentioned a book that recently made an impression on him, “Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals” by Oliver Burkeman. “Four thousand weeks is an average lifespan — it isn’t that long! It talks about the brevity of life and the limitations of the human condition. Life is not a dress rehearsal,” Baum pointed out.

Baum has never lost the passion for international relations that he discovered more than 30 years ago. “I still love the job, and in these difficult times I think diplomacy has become even more important. You get to go to places and meet people that you wouldn’t in other jobs, and sometimes you get to witness historical events. Every day brings surprises and the opportunity to — modestly — change things for the better and try to help those in need.”

## Just Peoples is a leader in locally controlled change

**ESG/SDGs**  
**TIMOTHY SCHULTZ**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Christey West is a co-founder of Just Peoples, a unique charity organization that allows donors to directly invest in small but impactful projects in developing nations. What she offers is unique.

Unlike more recognizable organizations, Just Peoples does not act as a middleman, organizer or leader of local communities; instead, West and her co-founder, Johanna Peek, allow the leaders of local projects to speak for themselves.

Donors to Just Peoples invest in a single project, and meet the local project leaders via group Zoom calls. Small donations of under ¥200,000 (\$1,600) can do amazing things, such as expand the only school in a slum or offer healthcare to hundreds of Maasai kids with disabilities. After funding a project, donors stay involved and watch as it achieves its goals.

West calls this personal, intimate and incredibly fulfilling process “locally led change,” which after seven years has funded over 125 projects in 14 countries. And while she now calls it “the best job ever, with her best friend ever,” her path to starting Just Peoples wasn’t an easy one.

**‘Voluntourists’ beware**

West started her journey into international development as a student volunteer working in Hanoi. There she had signed up to work in an orphanage managed by a local woman and a monk. What she discovered after arriving was heartbreaking. Not only were she and the other “voluntourists” (her term) sleeping in dilapidated, infested rooms, but the organizers were in fact keeping most of the service fees for themselves.

“They were intentionally keeping the kids



**Christey West, PL Douglas Mwangi and Johanna Peek in the Mathares slum, Kenya** JUST PEOPLES

poor,” she said. “They’d keep the kids in rags so that they’d attract more donations. It was all going into this scam that was harming kids, while that monk was buying thousand-dollar handbags.”

She didn’t give up on international development, and went on earn her degree while focusing on human trafficking in Vietnam, the Philippines and eventually Singapore. And while she did manage to help many, a sense of despair and helplessness seemed to be universal among her fellow aid workers and activists. Together with Peek, her best friend and fellow graduate, West came to a sobering conclusion: “It’s not up to us. We don’t know the nuances of these places. We might care ... but that’s not enough. In all of these places where we had worked, there were local fraudsters like that monk, and there were giant Western organizations telling the local people to work on massive projects. But also there were always these genuine local people who understood the problem and knew how to help.”

Now graduated, the two best friends hit upon an idea. “We set up Just Peoples to connect the local leaders who have the solutions with the people around the world who really care but don’t know where to start.”

**A new model of connection**

After experimenting with different fundraising models, the two women have now settled on a simple structure: a small, personally vetted group of project leaders (PLs) in the

developing world, and a growing network of donors supporting them. “We see ourselves as facilitators, not as marketers,” she said.

The biggest draw for her donors is access to the local project leaders. “All of our PLs are incredible people,” she said. “Some of them grew up as orphans. Others come from wealthier families. But whatever their background, they are so inspiring.” The Zoom events, which are called “Connections and Conversations,” happen about once a month. “Speaking to someone from Kenya, it’s a special conversation. The donors are inspired, they know the impact they’re going to have, and they stay involved and connected to see the project completed. It’s an amazing thing.”

Now in their seventh year of operation, West and Peek have been running Just Peoples from different locations the entire time. For the first five years it was a labor of love. “At first we had no overhead fees. We set up our founding 50, people who paid a small fee monthly for our overheads. Then we grew, we got more project leaders, and it simply became too much to organize part time. So now we use 12.5% of donations to cover our own operating costs.”

**Dinner and a movie**

Now living in Tokyo after her spouse took a job here, West is experimenting with a new funding event: charity dinners where a set meal and drinks includes a ¥10,000 donation. After dinner, attendees watch a few project videos, then choose which one to fund. “The first dinner was able to fund a ¥260,000 project,” West said. “We showcased a project helping to solve period poverty in Tanzania, one to support single mothers in Vietnam and one to support a cooperative business for Indigenous Mexican women.”

She smiled at what happened at the end of that night. After the winning project was chosen, the two others were also funded individually. It turns out that while there may be bad in the world, there is also much good. Along with her best friend and amazing people from all over the world, Christey West is helping that good find its way to the neediest people in the world.

**JUST PEOPLES**

*If you would like to get involved, please visit <https://www.justpeoples.org/>*



**The co-founders meet with PL Charlot Magayi, aiming to support her clean cooking stove factory in Kenya.** JUST PEOPLES



**West and Peek meet kids in Korail, a slum area in Bangladesh.** JUST PEOPLES

## On islands in city of Kure, community-building flowers

**Satoyama ~ Authentic Japan**  
**MAIKO MURAOKA**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

At a time when depopulation is a common woe in rural areas around the nation, one district stretching across two small islands in the Seto Inland Sea is attracting many young talents eager to start new businesses and activities: Yutakamachi Kubi, part of the Hiroshima Prefecture city of Kure. As the “yutaka” (rich) in its name suggests, the scenic area abounds in nature and sunlight.

The 23rd Satoyama Cafe, held on April 28 by the Sustainable Japan Network, run by The Japan Times, invited three key players who have contributed to and encouraged this trend.

Yasuharu Salashina is a representative director of Mamena, a nonprofit in Kubi that supports individuals and organizations starting new businesses or projects in pursuit of the public good. Koichiro Miyake is the founder and CEO of Nao-rai Inc., a local startup that not only produces organic lemons and sake but also collaborates with other sake breweries in the region, with a goal of revitalizing the whole sake industry in Japan. Kure Mayor Yoshiake Shinhara also joined the talk session.

Tokyo-born Salashina worked in various industries, including fashion and information technology, until he turned 60 but then, through his experience of having to take care of his mother, began to think about “making a world where no nursing for the aged is necessary.” Salashina

and Miyake had known each other since they were both in Tokyo, and Salashina, thinking about where and how he could best realize what he calls his last mission in life, visited Miyake, who had started making his first original liqueur, in Kubi.

The trip turned out to be an unexpected milestone for Salashina. “I saw aged people working energetically in a good natural environment and thought this was where I wanted to devote myself to the mission.”

For the elderly to live their lives fully, Salashina thinks, the community has to be lively and filled with people from all generations. This is why Mamena not only runs an eatery and community space where aged people, especially those who live alone, can gather and have nutritious meals, but also supports young entrepreneurs and aspiring students from outside with ideas focusing on enhancing the social good. Among them are university students running renovation projects on old houses, monitoring water wells and learning agriculture, a group of young people managing a rental yacht, a startup providing home nursing service, a group of designers and a patisserie.

Also important is that there be companies and individuals willing to support Mamena. In addition to financial help, Mamena has received some of the build-ings it uses as its office and facilities, plus a yacht, from people wanting to give back to society. “We need to think what we can do and what to ask from the community and local companies before depending on the government,” Salashina said.

Kure Mayor Shinhara said, “Obviously Mamena doesn’t need financial aid from us, so we would like to support it in other ways.” Shinhara noted that there are people and regions that do not have the resources to do what Mamena is doing, which is where local governments can come in and help. But many people, he hopes, would look at Mamena as an advanced role model and start to change



**Mamena co-representative directors, from left: Yasuharu Salashina, Koichiro Miyake, Hide Kajioaka** RIKUO FUKUZAKI

their communities through their own efforts.

Miyake, who was born into a family that runs sake breweries in Kure, said that naturally he loves sake culture, and has been concerned about the future of Japan’s sake industry as the number of breweries decreases.

“For the last 40 years or so, many businesses that involve time-consuming processes or lack economic efficiency have been forced to discontinue. I feel something is wrong in this trend,” said Miyake.

He invests a great deal of time and care on his products, such as Jochu, a spirit made of sake, which tastes better the longer it is stored in the wooden barrels. He also spends time networking with other sake breweries to invite them to the Jochu project. In addition, he grows the lemons used for making Mikado Lemon, a sparkling liqueur that is Naorai’s first product, and Kohaku Jochu, a new product made from Jochu and lemon juice. Naorai raised more than ¥8.4 million (\$65,000) through crowdfunding for the Kohaku Jochu project, and thanked the city of Kure for granting a subsidy equal to the commission fee paid to the crowdfunding platform.

Naorai also accepts interns from a local university. “I feel happy when I can show young people options to live and work in rural areas when the only model of success they knew was to go to a city and get a good job,” Miyake said.

*The sustainable Japan section highlights actions toward the environment and a sustainable society. For more information please visit <https://sustainable.japantimes.com>*



**The amber sake Kohaku Jo-Chu made by Naorai is similar to whiskey and made from organic lemons and sake from Kubi.** NOSIGNER

