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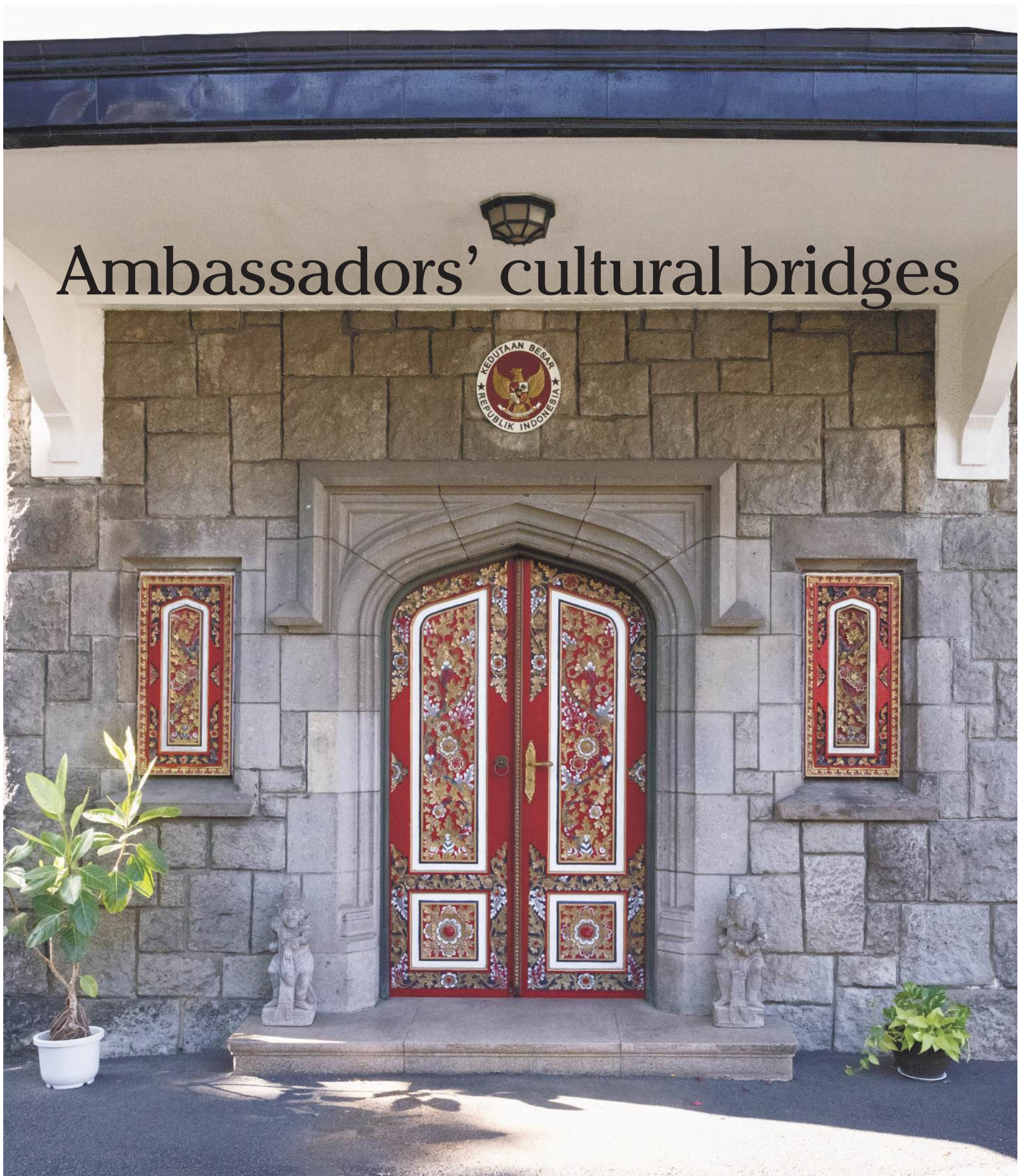
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SUSTAINABLE JAPAN MAGAZINE

Saturday, January 25, 2025

Ambassadors' cultural bridges



FROM THE EDITOR

By YOSHIKUNI SHIRAI / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The initial special feature of 2025 is the third in which we meet members of the diplomatic corps and ask them about their favorite Japanese-made items. This time, we paid visits to the ambassadors of Brazil, Indonesia and Georgia and spoke with them about relations with Japan. Many nations are celebrating auspicious anniversaries of diplomatic relations with Japan this year: Nor-

way (120th anniversary), Saudi Arabia (70th), South Korea (60th), Malta (60th), Papua New Guinea (50th) and Cape Verde (50th). Brazil tops this year's group by celebrating its 130th anniversary of relations with Japan.

By the end of 2025, the 21st century will be one-quarter finished. As always, we are seeing wars and terrorist attacks persist in all corners of the globe

— Europe, Asia, Africa and other regions. Many factors contribute to these problems, but if one thing is certain it is that diplomatic efforts will always be essential for resolving them. With this in mind, let's take a moment to hear from the ambassadors whose tireless diplomacy in the cultural and political arenas helps deepen bilateral ties between nations.

2025年最初の特集は、今回で3回目となる「駐日大使に聞くお気に入りのMade in Japanアイテム」特集です。今年、日本との外交関係樹立のアニバーサリー・イヤーを迎えるのは、ノルウェー（120周年）、サウジアラビア（70周年）、韓国（60周年）、マルタ（60周年）、パプアニューギニア（50周年）、カーボベルデ（50周年）などがありますが、なかでも外交関係樹立130周年を迎えたのがブラジルです。今回はブラジル大使をはじめ、インドネ

シア、ジョージアの大使を大使館・公邸に訪ね、日本との友好関係についてお話を伺いました。

今年いっぱい21世紀も第一四半期を終えることとなりますが、世界各地で戦争やテロが常に起きています。その要因は様々ですが、その解決のために必要なのは外交的努力であることに、みなさん異論はないでしょう。

文化交流を含め、外交努力をしている大使たちのお話に、しばし耳を傾けてみたいと思います。



The ambassador's official residence is surrounded by an elegant bamboo grove. The building was designed by Ruy Ohtake, a Brazilian architect of Japanese descent.

Feature **AMBASSADOR**

BRAZIL

Japan and Brazil build on a 130-year relationship

By RIKO SAITO



Cortes in the lounge of his official residence. The partition made of cylinders is a portion of a pavilion designed by architect Shigeru Ban for the Brazilian Embassy during the 2014 World Cup.

✦ OTTAVIO HENRIQUE DIAS GARCIA CORTES

Cortes was born in Rio de Janeiro on Dec. 13, 1959. He graduated in electrical engineering from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and joined Brazil's foreign service in 1986. He has served in Washington, Asuncion, La Paz, Tokyo, Baghdad, Amman and Addis Ababa. He was previously ambassador to Bolivia (2018-2022) and Ethiopia (2015-2018), and nonresident ambassador to Djibouti and South Sudan. He was also the representative of Brazil to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). In Brasilia, he has worked in many different units of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President's Office for Strategic Affairs and the Federal Senate. He has been the ambassador of Brazil in Tokyo since July 2022.

PHOTOS: YOSHIKI TSUTSUI

● Summary

外交関係樹立130周年。2国間の新たな関係づくり。

2025年は日本・ブラジル外交関係樹立130周年を迎える節目の年。笠戸丸という船で日本人781人がブラジルに最初の移民として渡ったのは1908年。現在ブラジルには250万人以上の日系人が住み、日本国外として世界最大の日系人コミュニティがあるゆえ、日本との絆も深い。「2024年5月の岸田元首相のブラジル訪問、11月の石破

総理大臣のG20リオデジャネイロ・サミット参加など、日本の首脳訪問がありました。2025年度にはブラジルのルーラ大統領の訪日計画が計画されています。外交的にはこの大統領訪日が一番大きなイベントとなります」とガルスシア・コルテス駐日大使は語る。

その実現に向け多忙なスケジュールをこなす大使の公

邸は、代々木公園に近い閑静な住宅街にある。設計は日系ブラジル人の建築家ルイ・オオタケ。曲線を取り入れたインテリアや竹林に囲まれた大きなテラスが印象的だ。コルテス大使の日本赴任は、2008年から2012年の次席公使に続き今回で2回目。群馬県高崎のダルマが大変気に入り、コレクションのひとつになっているという。



日本語全文はこちら

It was in 1908 that a small ship named the *Kasato Maru* transported the 781 people who became Japan's first immigrants to Brazil. Today, Brazil has strong ties with Japan — and the largest community of ethnic Japanese outside of Japan, consisting of more than 2.5 million people.

2025 marks the 130th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Brazil. At their summit in 2024, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida designated 2025 as the “Japan-Brazil Friendship Exchange Year.” They confirmed that the two countries would promote cooperation in culture, tourism and sports and would support Japanese-language education in Brazil and Portuguese-language education in Japan, a foundation for deeper exchanges in the future.

Octavio Henrique Dias Garcia Cortes, who as Brazil's ambassador to Japan is committed to making those promises a reality, lives at the official residence in a quiet, upscale residential area near Yoyogi Park. The house was designed by the Japanese-Brazilian architect Ruy Ohtake (1938-2001), combining the prominent Brazilian modernist style with a Japanese touch. The first floor of the curving building has a reception room and other public spaces, with tastefully arranged furniture and a prominent terrace surrounded by a beautiful bamboo grove.

“With Japanese leaders having visited Brazil recently — including former Prime Minister Kishida in May 2024 and Prime Minister Ishiba in November for the G20 Rio de Janeiro summit — President Lula is now planning to visit Japan this year. As we celebrate the 130th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, this visit will be the biggest event of the year,” explained the ambassador. Japan and Brazil signed a “strategic global partnership” agreement in 2014. The two countries are working closely as important friends who are actively deepening cooperation in a range of areas, including international cooperation, global governance reform, trade and investment, defense, infrastructure, energy, and science and technology.

“Among these many areas of cooperation, we recognize that political dialogue and trade, as well as the fight against climate change, are of great importance to both countries,” Cortes said. “Brazil is a leader in clean, sustainable energy. The oil shocks of the 1970s triggered the development of biofuels based on ethanol, as a renewable substitute to fossil fuels. Brazil is the world's largest producer of sugar, and it is now also the world's largest producer of bioethanol, which is made from sugarcane and corn. Most of the cars produced in Brazil are flex-fuel vehicles, which can run on either 100% gasoline or 100% ethanol, or a mixture of the two in any ratio. As a sustainable energy source for decarbonization, we would like to expand exports of Brazilian ethanol to Japan and work together to develop sustainable aviation fuel, helping Japan achieve its decarbonization goals.”

The COP30 climate conference will be



Top: Cortes' collection of *daruma* dolls. He was given the doll on the left, which has “Brazil” written on it, but purchased the doll on the right, which says “Cortes family.” Bottom: The ambassador liked this Akari light fixture by sculptor Isamu Noguchi so much that he bought one. The chair on the right, by architect Oscar Niemeyer, is the property of the official residence.

hosted in Belem, in Brazil's northern state of Para, this November. This will be the first time the conference will be held in the Amazon region. Cortes said he hopes to work with Japan to develop a strong agenda for the conference and to promote Brazil as a leader in sustainable energy and decarbonization under the guidance of Lula, who is passionate about environmental issues.

The ambassador's current posting is his second to Japan; his first was as deputy chief of mission from 2008 to 2012. Shortly after his arrival, a Japanese Diet member with close ties to Brazil presented him with a *daruma* doll from Gunma Prefecture, which he liked so much that it has become a part of his collection.

“I was so impressed by the tradition of leaving one eye unpainted and drawing it in once a wish has been granted. In Brazil, in the state of Bahia, there is a custom that arose from the Church of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim whereby a ribbon is wrapped

around the wrist, and when the ribbon breaks the wish comes true. Gunma Prefecture is home to many Brazilians, and I sometimes receive *daruma* doll presents from them. I also buy *daruma* dolls myself and gift them to my relatives and friends in Brazil as souvenirs.”

Cortes' father was also a diplomat and once came to Japan for a meeting. The ambassador still treasures a kimono his father gave him at the time — along with three others that he uses as loungewear. He also loves Japanese ceramics, even the inexpensive pieces, and he often buys things he finds while traveling.

“Japanese culture is so diverse and so deep that I cannot hope to know everything about it, but the more I learn, the more I want to know. Thanks to the many ethnic Japanese in Brazil, Japanese culture has taken root everywhere in the country. Japanese food is not even seen as particularly special, but is found on the tables of ordinary households on a daily basis. Thanks to deep human exchange over many years, Japanese culture has become a part of Brazilian society. In Japan I sometimes go to a supermarket and hear Brazilian bossa nova music playing in the background. It surprises me, but there is no doubt that these grassroots human connections, which transcend politics, have made the bond between Japan and Brazil as strong as it is,” he said.

Architect Ban signed one of the cylinders for the World Cup pavilion at the official residence.



The carefully designed dining room, where luncheons and dinners are held.



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Head Office:
 Ichibancho-Daini-TG Bldg., 2-2 Ichibancho,
 Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
 The Japan Times Cube Inc.
 Tel: 03-3512-0330
 Email: jtc-csinfo@japantimes.co.jp
 Web: <https://sustainable.japantimes.com/>

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: MINAKO SUEMATSU
 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: YOSHIKUNI SHIRAI
 DIRECTOR: AYUMI KIMURA
 MANAGING EDITORS: MARIANGELES DEJEAN,
 AYAKO NAKANO
 TRANSLATORS: EDAN CORKILL (B2, 8),
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 WEB DESIGNER: ERIKO OZAKI
 WEB DEVELOPER: TAKA AKI OGURA

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COVER PHOTO

The official residence of the Indonesian ambassador is located in a quiet residential area. Visitors are greeted by a beautiful red door with a traditional Indonesian design.
 PHOTO: YOSHI AKI TSUTSUI



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The Indonesian ambassador's residence, located in a quiet, upscale residential area, is a Western-style building with a serene atmosphere. The well-kept lawn and old trees have a graceful charm.



The entrance of the ambassador's residence. The doors and windows, with their traditional Indonesian carving, are strikingly beautiful.

✦ **HERI AKHMADI**

Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary
 Born on Jan. 1, 1953, in Ponorogo, East Java, Akhmadi graduated with a bachelor's degree in engineering (majoring in mining) from the Bandung Institute of Technology (Institut Teknologi Bandung, or ITB) in 1982, and then enrolled in the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program in the School of International Service at American University from 1989 to 1990. Following the fellowship program, he became a visiting fellow of the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell University from 1991 to 1992 and a visiting fellow at Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies in 2004.
 Akhmadi is a seasoned politician from the ruling party, the Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan). He was elected three times as member of parliament from 1999 to 2014, and had been assigned to Commission IV, overseeing infrastructure (1999-2004), and Commission X, overseeing education, culture and tourism (2004-2014). From 2001 to 2004, Akhmadi was elected vice chairperson in parliament (MPR) as a representative of PDI-P. From 2002 to 2004, he was then assigned to the Indonesia-Japan Economic Cooperation Task Force, appointed directly by the Indonesian president. Prior to his arrival in Japan as the Indonesian ambassador to Japan, concurrently accredited to the Federated States of Micronesia, since 2017 he served as the head of policy research and analysis in the Executive Council of PDI-P.

Feature **AMBASSADOR**

INDONESIA

Indonesian envoy Akhmadi buoyed by ukiyo-e

By RIKO SAITO



Heri Akhmadi, ambassador of Indonesia to Japan, in his embassy office. The room is adorned with a statue of Garuda and, on the wall, a Bali-inspired painting created by Japanese artist Hisao Ishizawa. The painting was presented in 2006 to commemorate the appointment of the then-incoming Indonesian ambassador.

PHOTOS: YOSHIAKI TSUTSUI

● **Summary**

浮世絵に心を落ち着かせ、両国間の友好に務める。

2023年12月にリニューアルオープンしたインドネシア大使館。随所にインドネシアの意匠があしらわれ、足を踏み入れた瞬間にインドネシアを感じる大使館に生まれ変わった。その最上階に執務室を構えるのが、ヘリ・アフマディ駐日インドネシア共和国特命全権大使。2020年11月に就任し、任期満4年を迎えた。1958年1月に平和条

約に署名し、国交が樹立したインドネシアと日本は以来、戦略的パートナーとして経済・政治・安全保障はもちろん、社会や文化の側面でも友好関係を確立している。2008年7月には、幅広い分野での協力を強化するために、「インドネシア・日本経済連携協定」が発効された。共同軍事演習が3回目を迎えるなど、防衛面での協力でも

確固たる結びつきを築いている。多忙な日々を過ごす大使の趣味は浮世絵のコレクション。北斎や広重をはじめ200作品以上を集めている。浮世絵を見ていると不思議と考えがまとまると大使は語る。自宅で浮世絵に囲まれてくつろいだり、浮世絵美術館を訪れたりする時間が大使にとっての至福の時だ。



日本語全文はこちらから

After a 2½-year reconstruction period starting in 2021, the Embassy of Indonesia in Tokyo was reopened in December 2023. The gate and building facade are adorned with an embossed batik pattern. In the lobby, visitors are greeted by a large wood carving of Garuda, the Hindu deity said to be the “vehicle” of the god Vishnu. A wall of the spacious lobby is decorated with a “tree of life” (*kalpataru*), and the window screens are batik. In the front garden is a metal sculpture resembling Prambanan Temple. With distinctive features like these, the embassy has been reborn as a place where one feels the spirit of Indonesia the instant one steps inside.

On the building’s top floor is the office of Heri Akhmadi, the ambassador of Indonesia to Japan. Having assumed this post in November 2020, he is now concluding the fourth and final year of his tenure.

Akhmadi said: “Indonesia and Japan signed a peace treaty and established diplomatic relations in January 1958. Since then, we have developed friendly relations as strategic partners not only in the areas of economy, politics and security, but also in terms of society and culture. The Indonesia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement went into effect in July 2008 in order to strengthen cooperation in a wide range of fields. The agreement on the transfer of defense equipment and technology, which allows for the export of defense equipment, was signed and went into effect in March of 2021. The following year, Japan participated in defense exercises in Indonesia. Joint military exercises by Japan are taking place in Indonesia for the third time this year. I think this is a very significant development. It’s my view that this accord is one of the most important agreements to have been signed during my tenure in Japan. In addition, Indonesia and Japan are among the 11 countries participating in the Asia Zero Emission Community, a platform for cooperation towards carbon neutrality/net-zero emissions. These and a range of other agreements between Indonesia and Japan have been established, and the friendship between the two countries is more solid than ever.”

The Indonesia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement has established cooperation in a wide range of fields, including the liberalization and streamlining of trade and investment, the movement of persons and the maintenance of energy



Left: One of the works in Akhmadi’s ukiyo-e collection. Right: When he accompanied the emperor and empress on a goodwill visit to Indonesia in June 2023, he was presented with this vase, along with a photo signed by the emperor and empress, as an expression of gratitude.



and mineral resources, private property and business environments. The purpose of the agreement is to further strengthen the relationship between the two countries. While exchanges in fields like politics, economics and defense are of course important areas covered by the agreement, said Akhmadi, the most important area is connections among the hearts and minds of people.

“After the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, the president [of Indonesia] at that time came to Japan and donated a library to the city of Kesennuma, which had suffered devastating damage,” he said. “Since then, Indonesia has been engaged in supporting Kesennuma in various ways each year. The year 2021 marked the start of the Indonesia Japan Friendship Festival, which introduces Indonesian culture to the public. The festival is held in a different city every year. In 2024, it took place in Yoyogi Park in Tokyo, and over 100,000 people attended. In fiscal year 2024, the number of Indonesians working in Japan surpassed 170,000. That’s twice as many as two years ago. There has been a rapid increase in the number of Indonesians working in factories and on farms in regional areas. For that reason, I’ve been placing a great deal of importance on connections with Japa-

nese people living in regional locations.”

Starting in 2000, Akhmadi frequently stayed in Kyoto. In 2004, he resided there as a visiting research fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University. Through this experience, he became a great admirer of Japan and Japanese culture. He said he particularly loves ukiyo-e.

“I have several works by Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige,” he stated. “I also have quite a large number of works by other artists — I think I have over 200 works in all. When there are things I need to think about, I often spend time in a room with ukiyo-e pictures on the walls. For some reason, my thoughts take shape when I’m looking at ukiyo-e. I love looking for ukiyo-e books in the used bookstore district in Kanda, and when I find the time I make the rounds of antiquarian bookstores. Japan has countless art museums and museums in general, so museum-hopping is something else I enjoy very much. I particularly like the Tokyo National Museum and the other museums in Ueno, the Sumida Hokusai Museum, and the Mori Art Museum. Not only does the Sumida Hokusai Museum have a wonderful collection, but the building, which was designed by SANAA, is stunning.”

The ambassador also likes Japanese architecture. An admirer of Kengo Kuma, he said he actually had occasion to meet and converse with the architect. Japanese buildings are wonderful, he said. The architectural consultant for the newly built Indonesian Embassy is Kisho Kurokawa Architect & Associates. The late Kurokawa is also well known as the architect who designed Kuala Lumpur International Airport, which opened in 1998. With 2045 as the target year, Indonesia is planning to move its capital from Jakarta to the city of Nusantara in eastern Kalimantan. There may be possibilities for the participation of architects from Japan in the project, which has been called the largest capital city relocation of this century.

Akhmadi has visited areas throughout Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, and has been involved in a variety of friendship programs. Wherever he goes, he visits local museums to learn more about the area’s history and culture. Particularly memorable, he said, were the National Ainu Museum and the museum in Okinawa.

“To promote friendship between the two countries, I believe it’s very important for people to interact in a heartfelt way, transcending the framework of economics. That’s also the reason we carry out numerous events and festivals where people can learn about Indonesian culture. Most recently, at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum we presented ‘Harmony in Diversity,’ a lecture and exhibition introducing Indonesian culture. Activities such as a presentation on the history and production process of batik, which my wife has put a great deal of effort into, were popular as well. I think cultural cooperation is very important in promoting connections between the people of Japan and Indonesia.”

Displayed in the ambassador’s office is a vase bearing a chrysanthemum crest. When the emperor and empress traveled to Indonesia in June of 2023 on their first goodwill visit after accession to the throne, this vase and a photo signed by the emperor and empress were presented as an expression of gratitude to Akhmadi, who accompanied them during their visit.

“I was truly honored to accompany the emperor and empress on their visit to Indonesia,” said the ambassador. “The vase and photo that I received are my lifetime treasures. The photo signed by the emperor and empress is something truly precious. It’s a great privilege to be able to display them here.”

With glass walls on three sides, the living room of the ambassador’s residence is a comfortable, light-filled space. Batik fabric, the popularization of which is a focus of the ambassador’s wife, accents the décor.





Ambassador Lezhava in his office. On the shelves are family photos and favorite objects, such as traditional craft products, presented by areas throughout Japan.

PHOTOS: TAKAO OTA

Feature **AMBASSADOR**

GEORGIA

Cultural exchange from Georgia, birthplace of wine

By MINAMI NAKAWADA

The middle bottle of wine was made from Khikhvi grapes, a variety unique to Georgia. The wine was presented to Fukushima Prefecture as part of the ambassador's "wine diplomacy" initiative.



● Summary

ワイン発祥の国の大使が展開する文化交流。

いま一般の日本人に一番顔と名前が知られている駐日大使は、ティムラズ・レジャバ駐日ジョージア大使といって間違いないだろう。1992年、4歳の時に来日。日本の公立学校でも教育を受け、早稲田大学を卒業。2018年にジョージア外務省に入省という経歴をもつ。日本語で発信する「X」のフォロワー数は現在35万人を数える。

ジョージアはアジアと欧州の境目に位置し、昔から周囲の大国に翻弄されながらも独自の言語と宗教を守ってきたという歴史を持つ。そんな国の大使が力を入れている文化交流の活動が3つあるという。それが「SNS発信」と「ワイン外交」、「茶道を通じた日本とジョージアの文化比較の発信」。ジョージアと言えば、近年ワイン通の

間では美味しいワインの産地として知られるが、ワイン外交とはどのようなものだろうか？ 「ワイン発祥の地であり、8,000年のワインの歴史を持つジョージアには、525ものブドウ品種があります。日本に47ある都道府県を、私がジョージアのだぶどうの苗木とワインをもって、巡るという文化交流です。」

◆ TEIMURAZ LEZHAVA

Born in 1988, Lezhava moved to Japan with his family in 1992 for his father's work. From that time until university graduation, he was educated in Georgia, Japan, the United States and Canada. In September 2011, he graduated from Waseda University's School of International Liberal Arts. He worked in foreign sales and marketing at Kikkoman Corp. from 2012 to 2015, and for three years starting in September 2015 was engaged in Japan-Georgia economic activities. In December 2017, he founded LLC Delivery. In October 2018, he joined Georgia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and from August 2019 to November 2021 he served as charge d'affaires at the Embassy of Georgia to Japan. He has been ambassador of Georgia to Japan since Nov. 15, 2021. He has over 350,000 followers on the social media platform X.

The ambassador to Japan whose name and face are most familiar to Japanese people today is undoubtedly Georgia's Teimuraz Lezhava. He first came to Japan at the age of 4 in 1992, when his biologist father was employed at the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (Riken). He attended Japanese public schools and graduated from Waseda University. His distinctive career history includes employment at the Japanese company Kikkoman Corp., starting in 2012, and joining Georgia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2018. Naturally, he is fluent in Japanese. He posts in Japanese on X, where he currently has over 350,000 followers. He smiled as he recounted a childhood memory: "When I was going to Japanese elementary school, I went to a friend's house after school. We played games, and his grandmother served us watermelon. I must be the only

ambassador to Japan who has had that kind of experience. I think that's probably my strength."

Situated at the intersection of Asia and Europe, Georgia has throughout its history preserved its unique language, Georgian, and religion, Georgian Orthodox, even as it was buffeted about by powerful countries in the region. In April 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia declared independence. Today it is bordered by Russia to the north, Turkey to the south, Azerbaijan to the east and the Black Sea to the west.

The Embassy of Georgia is located in a house in the Minamiaoyama area of Tokyo's Minato Ward. The day of our visit, the ambassador's first words after we exchanged greetings were, "With war and division so prevalent in the news today, cooperation between countries with shared values such as freedom, democ-





A raku ware teacup made by the ambassador in Kyoto. Georgia's flag is inside the base ring.



The Georgian flag is painted on a Joboji-nuri lacquerware bowl from Iwate Prefecture.



The floor above the ambassador's office is a dining space with a terrace, where embassy staff members can take a relaxing break.

racy and respect for human rights is very important." He emphasized the great importance of culture and cultural exchange. With regard to relations between Georgia and Japan, he is currently focusing on three cultural exchange initiatives. One of these is the social media activity mentioned above. The others are "wine diplomacy" and "dissemination of Japan-Georgia cultural comparison through the tea ceremony." In recent years Georgia has become well known among connoisseurs for its wine production — but what is wine diplomacy?

Lezhava said, "The first initiative I'd like to talk about is wine diplomacy. In this cultural exchange project, I visit Japan's 47 prefectures and present them with Georgian wine made from specifically Georgian grape varieties. Georgia, the birthplace of wine, has a wine history of 8,000 years and has 525 grape varieties. I present wines selected to go with the climate and history of each region of Japan. In December 2024, for instance, I went to Fukushima Prefecture and gave the prefecture a gift of Khikhvi grape seedlings. During the Soviet era, this variety almost ceased to exist at one point, but in recent years it's made a resurgence and gained popularity. In presenting this

gift, I related Khikhvi's story to the revival of Fukushima. I've visited 28 prefectures so far."

Last October, he visited Ishikawa Prefecture, which suffered severe damage in the 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake, and presented grape seedlings and wine to the governor. He had also been to Ishikawa the previous February, just a month after the earthquake. At that time he visited the Noto Wine Co. in the town of Anamizu. In one sense this was a visit of support to a winery that makes wine from the Georgian grape variety Sapiravi. But the ambassador had another special reason.

"Actually, on January 1st, 2024, my family was heading to Ishikawa Prefecture for vacation. The earthquake happened when we were on the shinkansen train, and shinkansen operation was stopped. We ended up spending the night on the train — then we had to turn around and go back to Tokyo, and couldn't go to Ishikawa Prefecture. So I decided to visit affected places as soon as possible to pray for their recovery."

He then spoke about his other cultural initiative. "Japan has the tea ceremony, and Georgia has a similar 'wine ceremony.' This is a traditional Georgian feast

culture called 'supra.' In the Japanese tea ceremony, the host shows *omotenashi* (hospitality) by delighting guests' eyes with a hanging scroll, teacups and so on. In a Georgian banquet, there's a toastmaster/host called a *tamada*, who shows hospitality to guests by reciting poetry and singing. I think the fact that a ceremony created around a beverage was developed into a special culture is something very rare among the countries of the world. It isn't just about drinking a beverage, it's about the participants sharing deep values which go beyond that. It's interesting to me that Japan and Georgia have this cultural point in common."

In 2021 the ambassador started practicing and further exploring the tea ceremony himself. Additionally, throughout 2024 he contributed 12 articles in Japanese to the Urasenke tea ceremony school's magazine, Tanko. His subjects included comparison of Japan's tea ceremony culture and Georgia's supra culture.

Lezhava said that, being quite young compared to other countries' ambassadors, he makes a special effort to actively visit many places in order to increase awareness of Georgia's appeal. At the

same time, his presence and social media posts have had a major effect in terms of Japan-Georgia friendship. At the end of 2024, a new president of Georgia was sworn in, and ongoing negotiations with the EU about the country's EU accession were suspended. In such circumstances, the importance of the ambassador's cultural exchange activities in Japan is likely to increase even more.

A Georgian flag made with the knotting craft *mizuhiki*, which is used in Japan to decorate special gift envelopes.



PICK-UP
ARTICLE

Major cultural events in Japan in 2025

Expo 2025
(Osaka's Yumeshima area)
April 13 through Oct. 13
<https://www.expo2025.or.jp/>

Study: The Osaka Kansai International Art Festival 2025
(Osaka and other cities)
April 13 through Oct. 13
<https://osaka-kansai.art/>

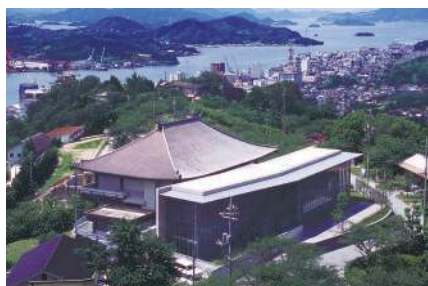
Setouchi Art Triennale 2025
(Kagawa Prefecture and others)
Spring: April 18 through May 25
Summer: Aug. 1 through 31
Autumn: Oct. 3 through Nov. 9
<https://setouchi-artfest.jp/>

Aichi Triennale 2025
(Aichi Prefecture)
Sept. 13 through Nov. 30
<https://aichitriennale.jp/index.html>

Okayama Art Summit 2025
(Okayama city)
Sept. 26 through Nov. 24
<https://www.okayamaartsummit.jp/>

Hiroshima Architecture Exhibition 2025
(Fukuyama, Onomichi and other locations)
Oct. 4 through Nov. 30
<https://hiroshima-architecture-exhibition.jp/>

Tokyo Odaiba Triennale 2025
(Odaiba, Tokyo)
Oct. 18 through Dec. 25
<https://www.tot2025.art/>



The Onomichi City Museum of Art, designed by Tadao Ando, stands on a hill in Onomichi. It will host the "Nine Visions" exhibition.

© ONOMICHI CITY MUSEUM OF ART

Fukuyama and Onomichi to hold not-to-miss events

By TOSHICHIKA IZUMI

2025 is shaping up to be a golden year for cultural and artistic events in Japan. For starters, Expo 2025 will be held in Osaka — the first time Japan will host an international expo since Aichi two decades ago and only the third time ever that Japan has hosted one. Three triennial events will also take place: the Setouchi Triennale, the Okayama Art Exchange and the Aichi Triennale 2025. Then there is Study: The Osaka Kansai International Art Festival, which is being expanded especially for the expo year, and the Tokyo Odaiba Triennale 2025, a brand-new art festival. However, one of the highlights is likely to be an event focused on architecture, not art: the Hiroshima Architecture Exhibition 2025.

The exhibition is held once every three years in Hiroshima Prefecture to promote the art of architecture. This year's inaugural event will unfold over two months at more than 10 venues, including the Onomichi City Museum of Art, Onomichi U2 and LOG (also in Onomichi), as well as the Fukuyama Museum of Art (Civic Gallery) and the Shinshoji Zen Museum and Gardens (in Fukuyama). Of particular note is the exhibition "Nine Visions: Japanese Architects from Japan to the World" at the Onomichi City Museum of Art.

This exhibition spotlights seven Japanese individuals and one duo who have won the Pritzker Architecture Prize, the "Nobel Prize of architecture." Japan and the United States are now tied for the

most Pritzker laureates in the world. Kenzo Tange was the first Japanese winner, in 1987, and the prize has subsequently been won by Fumihiko Maki (1993), Tadao Ando (1995), Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa (2010), who frequently work together as the architecture firm SANAA, Toyo Ito (2013), Shigeru Ban (2014), Arata Isozaki (2019) and Riken Yamamoto (2024). Why are Japanese architects so highly regarded? How did they reach this level? The exhibition seeks to answer these questions and more.

The Hiroshima Architecture Exhibition also boasts other events sure to appeal to architecture lovers. For example, a project is currently underway in Fukuyama to reconstruct architectural legend Tange's residence, which was built in the Seijo area of Tokyo's Setagaya Ward in 1953 but later was demolished. The project is scheduled for completion around 2027. It will be the subject of a new exhibition that will also introduce other buildings in Fukuyama and Onomichi that are Designated National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties.

Visitors to the exhibition may choose to travel straight to Hiroshima or combine their trip with Expo 2025 in Osaka. Equally, they could stay in the Seto Inland Sea area and stop in at the Setouchi Triennale and the Okayama Art Exchange. Whatever your preference, 2025 is definitely the year to plan a trip around these major art and architecture events.



Above left: LOG, one of the venues of the Hiroshima Architecture Exhibition, is an accommodation facility located on a hillside in Onomichi. © SETOUCHI CRUISE

Bottom left: Festival venue Onomichi U2 is a multipurpose facility that includes a hotel for cyclists. © SETOUCHI CRUISE

Right: The Mumyoin main hall at the Shinshoji Zen Museum and Gardens, where an exhibition on the reconstruction of Kenzo Tange's private residence will be held.

© SHINSHOJI ZEN MUSEUM AND GARDENS



**ひろしま国際建築祭 2025
Hiroshima Architecture
Exhibition 2025**

The theme of the Hiroshima Architecture Exhibition 2025

**Architecture:
A new stance for tomorrow**

Natural disasters on a global scale, wars, humanitarian crises and environmental degradation: One-quarter of the way through the 21st century, we find ourselves faced with a range of problems and a lingering sense of anxiety.

Here in Japan, the birthrate is declining, the population is aging, the economy is stagnant and unregulated urban development is transforming our cities and choking them of vitality. How can we make sense of so many problems? How should we solve them?

We believe that architecture is not just about making buildings and towns. What it represents is a body of wisdom for creating and nurturing culture, enriching lives and building a future.

In this festival, we will think about “a new stance for tomorrow” through the prism of architecture.



COURTESY KAMBARA TSUNEISHI FOUNDATION



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© TOYO ITO & ASSOCIATES, ARCHITECTS



PHOTO: KENZO TANGE, COURTESY OF MICHIKO UCHIDA



© TECTONIC

Top: The Taoyuan Museum of Fine Arts, designed by 2024 Pritzker Prize winner Riken Yamamoto. Middle left: The National Taichung Theater in Taiwan, designed by 2013 Pritzker Prize winner Toyo Ito. Right: 4 World Trade Center, which was designed on the site of the former World Trade Center in New York City by 1993 Pritzker Prize winner Fumihiko Maki. Bottom left: Kenzo Tange's private residence, which was completed in Tokyo in 1953 but has since been demolished. A project is now underway to reconstruct this legendary house in Fukuyama, Hiroshima Prefecture.

Outline of the Hiroshima Architecture Exhibition 2025

<https://hiroshima-architecture-exhibition.jp/>

The Seto Inland Sea region is home to a large number of architectural masterpieces that have been built in response to the region's unique climate, landscape and traditions. The sea, which Hiroshima Prefecture faces, has served as a major artery of culture and transportation throughout Japan's history — from the time when the nation first sent envoys to the Sui and Tang courts of China to the time of the Joseon missions from Korea and the *kitamaebune* merchant ships of the Edo Period. Across this sea, Japan has invited people and cultures from abroad while also transmitting its culture to the world. In addition to ancient architecture, contemporary architects such as Kenzo Tange, Tadao Ando, Toyo Ito, Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa (SANAA) and Shigeru Ban have created challenging and experimental masterpieces here, attracted by the unique magnetism of the region, forged by both nature and civilization. As a result, the region is now a trove of architectural treasures, dating from ancient times to the present.

Dates:
Saturday, Oct. 4 through Sunday, Nov. 30

Venues:
Onomichi and Fukuyama in Hiroshima Prefecture

Admission:
Three-day passports tentatively will cost ¥3,000

Organizer:
Kambara & Tsuneishi Foundation

Participating architects:
Tadao Ando, Kazuyo Sejima, Ryue Nishizawa, Toyo Ito, Shigeru Ban, Riken Yamamoto and others

Onomichi venues
The Onomichi City Museum of Art, LOG, Onomichi U2 and others
Fukuyama venues
The Fukuyama Museum of Art, the Shinshoji Zen Museum and Gardens and others
Satellite venues
Around the Seto Inland Sea



ILLUSTRATION: RYOKO YAMASAKI/INFORAB.

● **Summary**

2025年秋開催の
〈ひろしま国際建築祭〉。

2025年は、文化イベントのゴールデンイヤーと呼ばれている。「大阪・関西万博」開催をはじめ、3年毎に開催される「瀬戸内国際芸術祭」「岡山芸術交流」「国際芸術祭あいち」が重なるからだ。なかでも注目ののが〈ひろしま国際建築祭〉だろう。この建築祭は、3年に一度、広島県を中心に開催

する建築文化を発信する建築展で、初回である今回は、尾道市の「尾道市立美術館」や「ONOMICHI U2」、「LOG」、福山市の「ふくやま美術館」や「神勝寺 禪と庭のミュージアム」など、10を超える会場で、建築に関する展示・展覧会が2か月間行われる。特筆すべきは『ナイン・ヴィジョンズ展：日本から世界

へ跳躍する9人の建築家』だろう。

これは丹下健三、安藤忠雄、坂茂など建築界のノーベル賞と言われる「プリツカー建築賞」受賞の日本人建築家8組9名にスポットを当てた展覧会で、なぜ日本の建築家は世界で評価され、どのように世界レベルに達したのか、その魅力と真相に迫る内容だ。



日本語全文はこちら

the japan times

Destination Restaurants

AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION 2021-2024



A list of the best restaurants in Japan, selected by Japanese experts with international diners in mind.

In 2021, The Japan Times created the Destination Restaurants list around the idea of Japanese experts uncovering top local restaurants for people around the world — hidden gems that not only offer unique culinary experiences but also contribute to community revitalization, sustainable food and the promotion of natural resources. We aim to differentiate ourselves from other selections by bringing countryside talent proper recognition.

This book, marking the fourth anniversary of the Destination Restaurants project, is a compilation of the finest restaurants we have selected so far.

Suggested price: ¥4,200 (without tax)
Circulation: limited to 2,000 copies

Number of pages: 160 (color)
Sales agency: The Japan Times Publishing
ISBN 978-4-7890-1889-0

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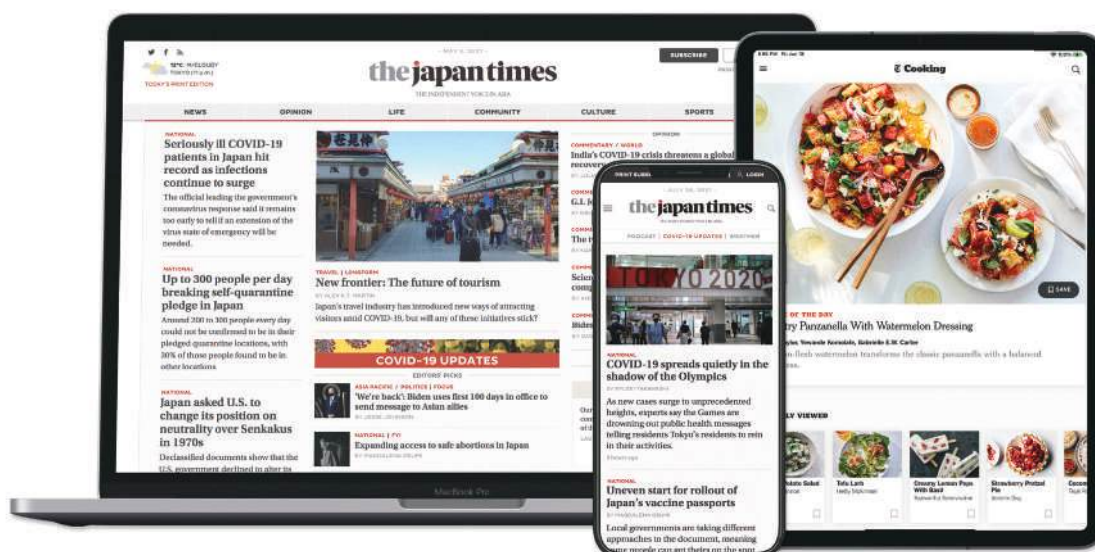
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Destination Restaurants 2024

AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

Niigata's Shintaku makes brilliant comeback after fire

By TAEKO TERA0

Murakami, located in northern Niigata Prefecture on the Sea of Japan coast, is a small coastal Niigata city of just under 55,000 whose historic atmosphere includes the ruins of Murakami Castle, the city's symbol, and the Wakabayashi Family Home, a samurai residence designated an Important Cultural Property. Its old black fences harken back to its days as a castle town, but such views grew marred as concrete block walls increased after World War II. Since 2002, however, residents of all ages have joined forces in a volunteer beautification project funded by donations.

Situated in a corner of the city is the gastronomic Japanese restaurant Shintaku. Its predecessor, the traditional restaurant Kinrinkaku, opened in 1867, and its name was subsequently changed. Today the restaurant is run by fifth-generation owner-chef Shinsuke Yamagai and his younger brother Ryota, who create the dishes, and their wives, who are in charge of service. The restaurant's creative and original cuisine has attracted attention, and diners are now visiting from all over the country and even from overseas. But there was serious hardship along the way.

"In 2005, the restaurant burned down," said Shinsuke, who at the time was working as a chef in the family establishment after training in Kyoto. "Not just the restaurant — everything, including tableware passed down through generations, became unusable."

Before the fire, Shintaku was a traditional restaurant with a 140-mat second-floor grand hall accommodating up to 100 people. It hosted

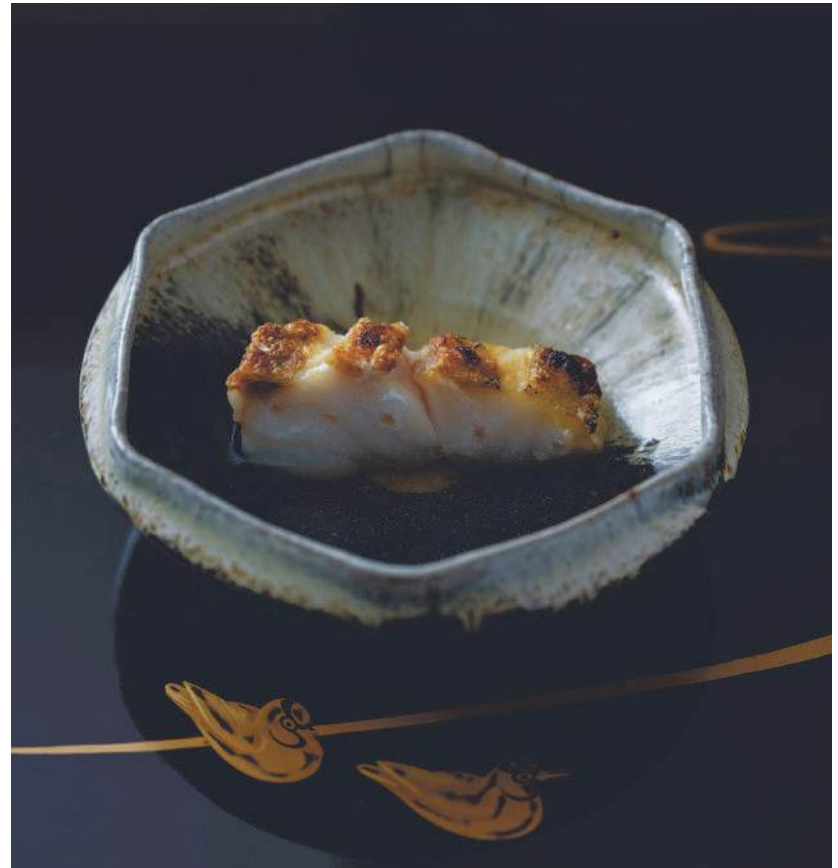
splendid banquets that even featured geisha.

Shinsuke explained, "My parents said they wanted to re-create the same type of traditional restaurant. But with the opportunity of the renewal in 2006, we decided to transform it into a fine-dining restaurant concentrating on cuisine, with a counter as the main focus, rather than the sort of social gathering place it was before."

At that point Shinsuke teamed up with Ryota, who had also trained in Kyoto and was working in a different job. The brothers undertook the restaurant's reconstruction and gradually shifted the focus of the cuisine.

"In the past, Shintaku served a course menu with all types of salmon dishes, featuring the salmon that Murakami is known for," said Shinsuke. "We also sourced ingredients from other prefectures, with the aim of using excellent products. But we realized that everything we needed was actually produced in Murakami."

Indeed, Murakami abounds in delicious ingredients. In addition to salmon caught in the Miomote River, there is *masu* salmon in the spring, *iwagaki* oysters and sweetfish in the summer and blackthroat sea perch and snow crab in the winter. Murakami beef is available year-round. Murakami is Japan's northernmost tea-growing region, and the area also produces sake and wine, and even miso and soy sauce. In addition, Ryota obtained a hunting license and set up a meat-processing facility on the property. In autumn and winter, the restaurant serves wild boar and other types of fresh game meat. Thus it came



Broiled *mahata* (sevenband grouper), with its crunchy-crisp skin, is served with stock made from the grilled bones of the fish along with kombu seaweed and spring water. Bringing out the mahata's excellent qualities to the fullest by extracting the essence of the ingredients is a concept reminiscent of French cuisine, but Ryota Yamagai said, "It came about because we wanted to make the most of this type of fish."

PHOTOS: TAKAO OHTA

about that Murakami products now comprise 90% of Shintaku's ingredients.

The dishes are created through an exchange of ideas between Shinsuke and Ryota. Even with traditional Japanese methods as a foun-

ation, their cooking, which makes the most of its ingredients, results in original dishes found nowhere else. It is this kind of cuisine that serves as a "tourism ambassador" conveying the attractions of Murakami to the world.



Niigata Prefecture (Japanese)

Shintaku

3-38 Komachi, Murakami-shi, Niigata Prefecture
Tel: 0254-53-2107
<https://murakami-sintaku.com/>



SHINSUKE AND RYOTA YAMAGAI

Shinsuke Yamagai, born in 1978, is the second son at the restaurant Shintaku in Murakami, Niigata Prefecture. After training in Kyoto, he returned home at the age of 25 and entered the family business. He is in charge mainly of sashimi and appetizer courses. Ryota Yamagai, born in 1979, is the third son at Shintaku. After helping with the family business since high school, he trained for three years in Kyoto. For a time he left the world of cuisine, but when Shintaku burned down in 2005, he returned home and rebuilt it with Shinsuke. In addition to sea fishing, he trap-hunts game animals such as wild boars and badgers. He is responsible for simmered and grilled dishes.

● Summary

全焼から兄弟で再起した新潟県の日本料理店。

新潟県村上市は人口55,000人弱。村上城跡や重要文化財指定の武家屋敷からは歴史が感じられる。そんな街で約150年を刻んできた割烹『新多久』を営むのは5代目店主となる山貝真介、亮太の兄弟。以前は2階の大広間で宴会が行われるような料亭だったが2005年に店が全焼してしまう。

「2006年のリニューアルをきっかけに料理中心の割烹へとスタイルを変えていったんです」(真介)。そこに同じく京都で修業を積んだ弟、亮太も合流。兄弟で店の再建に取り組んでいった。

かつては他府県産の素材も使っていたが、現在は魚介や野菜、肉のみならず日本酒やワイン、調味料

に至るまで、ほぼ村上産。秋には亮太が罾で獲るジビエも提供する。料理は真介と亮太、2人でアイデアを出し合って作る。日本料理の伝統的技法をベースにしながらも「その食材が生きるように」作ると、どこにもない独創的な一品が出現する。そんな料理こそが村上市の魅力伝える、観光大使になっている。



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