

sustainable japan

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Dominican Republic's Reyes builds economic and cultural bridges

Ambassador believes in baseball diplomacy

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Years in Japan: Since April 2025

Leaders & Readers

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Career diplomat Edward Anibal Perez Reyes was once told by a mentor that Tokyo was the best posting a senior diplomat could receive, and the Dominican Republic's new ambassador to Japan now fully agrees. "Japan is a richly rewarding place, and I have set my target to visit all 47 prefectures before I leave," he said, "and so far I have visited 13 of them."

Since arriving in April last year, Reyes has focused on investment opportunities between Japan and the Dominican Republic while also ensuring that they fulfill his country's steadfast commitments to nature and sustainability. "We are a country of beautiful people, with a very good spirit of community, and of course we are very well known for our service economy, especially led by our tourism sector, a sector we are ensuring remains sustainable and eco-friendly."

Ecotourism leader

The Dominican Republic has the world's most protected nature reserves in terms of population and area, comprising over 26% of its landmass and 30% of its marine environ-

ment — and these are set to increase in the future. These areas include the UNESCO-designated Madre de las Aguas and Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo biosphere reserves, both protecting important land and marine ecosystems, and 29 national parks. "The biosphere being protected by UNESCO was a step we have wanted to take for a long time," Reyes said. "We take great pride in our beautiful country, so it was a priority of the Dominican people that this land cannot be touched, and be preserved for future generations." Reyes concedes that it can be challenging to balance mass tourism with environmental protection, but believes the Dominican Republic is now finding harmony in what is becoming a symbiotic relationship: "Our first step in tourism was all-inclusive tourism, and that affected the ecosystem, so we have now created more structure and made it more regulated — we are now concentrating on recycling and water preservation, on ecotourism. We have a lot of beautiful mountains and coastlines, and we are now in the process of making tourism a 100% sustainable venture."

Free trade zones

While ecotourism remains an important foundation of the economy, drawing over 12 million nature-seekers annually to a nation of just over 10 million people, the Dominican Republic also has ample opportunity for partnering with economies such as Japan in more diversified areas such as making medical devices and semiconductors and the development of critical minerals.

"We have the investment experience and a well-developed free-trade-zone ecosystem that provides incentives to Japanese compa-

nies to come to the Dominican Republic and to use our experience in advanced manufacturing in medical devices. We have, for example, eight of the 16 largest medical device companies already operating there, and we now export all over the world," Reyes said. "We are very well located geographically, we have open markets, and we are trying to get Japanese companies to be more involved in all these opportunities."

Along with being a leading exporter of gold, cacao and cigars, the Dominican Republic is also expecting to announce deposits of critical minerals, which it hopes to partner with the United States in developing and exporting, making it a leading player in the region for rare-earth exports, offering further opportunities for investment and partnership in development.

Reyes believes the Dominican Republic has compelling advantages for Japan to invest in it: "The Dominican Republic is also a very politically stable country — we've been a consolidated democracy for more than 60 years, general elections every four years — we have received the most direct overseas investment in our region, and we have a very healthy growing economy in a growing region. Our relations with Japan are very good on all levels. We try to solve a lot of problems together, not only for the Dominican Republic, but for the region as well. We are in a good spot, because we are a leader in the region, so we have a lot of areas of cooperation."

Baseball diplomacy

Reyes sees other opportunities to build bridges between the two countries in areas that are particular to both nations:



HARUO MOTOHASHI

"I know Japan loves baseball, and I think baseball unites both societies. We are working to bring together the commissioners of baseball from Japan and the Dominican Republic, and we want to put together different events to highlight the Dominican players here in Japan and at the same time do something similar in the Dominican Republic to promote our relationship with Japan."

With nearly every Japanese baseball team boasting Dominican players, Reyes hopes to hold cultural events at games across Japan to promote Dominican culture and friendship

and highlight their shared values through baseball. "We'll be having 'Dominican Days' in the baseball stadiums," he said. "Starting this April in Hiroshima, we'll be having music from the Dominican Republic, Dominican food, videos on the big screen... and I'll be throwing the first ball."

The embassy is also facilitating Dominican sculptor Juan Trinidad's "Trascendencia" exhibition at the Matsumoto City Museum of Art in Nagano from Feb. 11 to April 13 and later in the year will host famed Dominican muralists in Osaka, who will create murals to celebrate the success of the Expo 2025.

Postings to WTO, Germany, OAS

Ambassador Edward Anibal Perez Reyes was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and studied law expecting to be a lawyer. After finishing an internship in an attorney's office and then completing a master's in law, he was called upon by chance to volunteer at an African, Caribbean and Pacific conference being held in Santo Domingo. Watching the international participants in action, he became fascinated with diplomacy and decided to join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Before being posted as the ambassador to Japan, he had served as the Dominican Republic's ambassador to Germany, in its mission to the WTO, as a representative to the Organization of American States and as the representative to the International Seabed Authority. Besides his master's degree in law, economics and public policy, he holds a diploma in advanced studies in government and public administration.

Time to know Japan

Reyes likes to travel by train when he has time to help immerse himself in Japanese culture: "I was recently at a small festival in Kitahiroshima (in Hiroshima Prefecture) learning how to plant rice, and I was in Hokkaido recently getting to know that part of Japan, but usually I'm too busy. But as I said, I've set a plan to visit every prefecture before I leave — I love to travel around."

For the immediate future, Reyes is focused on building bridges and believes time is in short supply in a world facing rapid change: "Our countries are now affected by different measures, such as increasing unilateralism for example, and we have to meet that challenge — but every time we sit at a table and realize diplomacy is the way, I am very proud of these little moments. You know diplomacy is good for everybody, and that feeds your soul."



Times Gallery



U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer meets Prime Minister Sanee Takaichi in Tokyo on Jan. 31, strengthening the U.K.-Japan partnership. BRITISH EMBASSY



Ambassador of Honduras Harold Burgos presents his letters of credence to King Maha Vajiralongkorn of Thailand, marking deeper diplomatic outreach across Southeast Asia. EMBASSY OF HONDURAS



Panamanian Ambassador and Consul General Walter Cohen attends Shokuyu Tanker's 60th-anniversary reception, participating in the traditional *kagami biraki* ceremony of opening sake barrels. EMBASSY OF PANAMA



The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan celebrates its 2026 *shinnenkai* at the Imperial Hotel with leaders from the U.S. Embassy and the Japanese government. YUUKI IDE



Alma Muca, wife of the Albanian ambassador, welcomes Japanese guests at a seminar in Tokyo showcasing Albania's tourism, cultural heritage and economic potential. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA



Serbian Ambassador Aleksandra Kovac with Kanagawa Gov. Yuji Kuroiwa at an event promoting Serbia's participation in the World Horticultural Exhibition Yokohama 2027. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



The Brazilian Embassy hosts an afternoon tasting of Brazilian sparkling wines and traditional Minas cheese, which a specialized Japanese audience sampled on Feb. 9. EMBASSY OF BRAZIL



Jarman International consultants meet Sagiryu kyogen master Taro Yonemoto in Yamaguchi to explore how the precious traditional performing art can be preserved for future generations. JARMAN INT.

Professor propels new networks to revive rural Yamagata ways

Satoyama ~ Authentic Japan

MAIKO MURAOKA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Go Matsumoto is an anthropologist and professor specializing in Peruvian archaeology at Yamagata University in Yamagata, the city selected in 2025 as the first Destination Region — places The Japan Times wishes to tell the world about. Born and raised in Tokyo, he relocated to the Yamagata area in 2016 to take up a position as a postdoctoral research fellow after having spent 15 years in the United States.

He initially lived near the university for three years. When the coronavirus pandemic led to an increase in his time at home and halted his fieldwork in Peru, he felt a growing desire to lead a life more rooted in the local land. This impulse also derived from his experiences in the United States. "I once lived in a rural town so sparse that our nearest neighbor was a mile away, and cutting wood for the fireplace was part of my daily routine," he said.

Equipped with the practical knowledge required to live amid nature, he moved to the Iwanami district in a more rural part of Yamagata Prefecture. He acknowledges that rural areas have their own communities with distinct characteristics and attitudes toward outsiders. He considers himself fortunate to have neighbors with open minds — people who would strike up a conversation while he worked outdoors, which became the basis for collaborative efforts that are currently ongoing within the neighborhood.



Working with university students to cultivate rice in abandoned rice paddies. GO MATSUMOTO

One such effort involves making firewood. Matsumoto works with other fireplace users to harvest timber from neglected and overgrown *satoyama* areas — forests that historically served as buffers between human settlements and the wild, kept healthy through moderate human interventions like firewood collection. Today, these areas are facing degradation due to the decline of forestry and an aging and shrinking population across Japan.

"I think various changes in the forests will be visible if you walk through them — for example, mountain paths blocked by impassable thickets. I hope more people will get to know the current state of the forests," Matsumoto said. This is why he began restoring a local historic path in the neighborhood.

This path, a stretch of less than a kilometer that once was vital to local daily life, had partially fallen into ruin from neglect. As he began the work of clearing it, others started contributing — sometimes finishing a section of work in his absence or stepping in to help when they had a spare moment.

Matsumoto pointed out that local initiatives often become "someone else's problem" when leadership becomes too formalized. While he admits that "a catalyst is necessary to spark action" and "a coordinator is needed to keep the flame from dying out," he believes that the ideal state is one where residents maintain their surroundings without strict membership rules for each initiative, simply because they want their home to be a better place. "Even in an aging society, the local seniors who have spent their lives working outdoors remain energetic and motivated to take care of their homeland," he said.

To ensure this connection to the land is shared with the younger generation, Matsumoto has been growing rice with university students. He initially began growing it two years ago, leasing a nearby abandoned paddy. After a successful first year, growing enough for his own household, he expanded the area and invited students to join him — a call that was met with surprising enthusiasm.

Now Matsumoto is planning a rice-farming project with elementary school



A nearby historic trail that has begun to be restored. GO MATSUMOTO

students. He emphasized that rice farming is not merely a series of festive moments like planting and harvesting. He believes it is crucial for children to understand the importance of the steady work of daily observation, maintenance and water management. "I want to provide an education rooted in daily life, where students might stop by the fields to check water levels on their way to school," Matsumoto said.

Much like the forests, abandoned rice paddies are increasing, and Matsumoto feels a sense of urgency because it is an immense task to restore a paddy once water management has ceased. "Adding a new field each year is nothing compared to the speed of the decline," he said. Even so, he intends to keep trying new ideas.

One of the things he wants to try is brewing sake from his rice. "I think it is important to think how we can add value to what we produce to ensure economic viability and sustain the meaning of production," he said. Through these challenges, he continues to live deeply involved in his community, hoping his lifestyle serves as a reminder to those in urban areas of what it truly means to live in a local community.

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Destination Region 2025
Yamagata city