

# Opening the Door to Future

## Hokkaido Toyako Summit

By *Harumi TAKAHASHI*

THE people of Hokkaido feel greatly honored by the scheduled holding of the Group of Eight (G-8) summit at Toyako (Lake Toya) from July 7 to 9 this year, bringing together the leaders of major countries that greatly influence global political and economic scenes to discuss the future course of the world. With only two months to go before the summit, we are feeling afresh our heavy responsibility for this event.

### Overview of Hokkaido

Hokkaido, located on the northern tip of the Japanese archipelago, is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk. It covers an area of approximately 83,000 square km – equal to Austria – accounting for about 22% of Japan's land area.

From olden times, Hokkaido has been home to the *Ainu* people who, thankful for the blessings of Mother Nature, live a unique life symbiotic with nature. It is favored by an abundance of nature as instanced by six national parks, including Shiretoko National Park designated as a World Natural Heritage site, and Shikotsu Toya National Park, the site of the forthcoming summit meeting, and as many as 12 marshy districts registered under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the so-called Ramsar Convention), including Kushiro Wetlands.

At present, the Hokkaido Government, together with the people of Hokkaido, is pushing ahead with various measures for the preservation of the environment in an effort to leave our plentiful natural environment intact to the next generation. At the same time, by taking advantage of Hokkaido's snowy and cold climate, we are striving to harness natural energy from snow and ice as well as through wind power generation, while making active use of bioenergy obtained from biomass resources.

Moreover, agriculture, based on highly productive specialized farming, has made notable progress in Hokkaido. Farmers, making the most of Hokkaido's cool climate, are turning out safe and high-quality products by minimizing the use of chemical fertilizers and agricultural chemicals. As a result, Hokkaido is dubbed "Japan's food supply base."

In addition to the abundant natural environment as well as safe, delicious foods, Hokkaido is blessed with tourist attractions as typified by hot-spring resorts scattered throughout the island, which help to refresh travelers. Furthermore, Hokkaido is pushing ahead with "Flower Tourism" to enable visitors to enjoy magnificent flower-filled landscapes in various parts of the island, such as hills and fields carpeted with lavender and sunflowers, and mountain ranges covered with moss phlox flowers.

The number of foreign tourists coming to Hokkaido has increased year after year, reaching about 600,000 in fiscal 2006 that ended March 31, 2007.

Photo: The Windsor Hotel TOYA



Summit site and Lake Toya

### Hokkaido's Ties to the World

The progress of globalization has brought various regions into direct contact with the world. Hokkaido has also formed diverse ties with the world. Numerous foreign experts contributed a great deal to the settlement of Hokkaido that got under way in 1868. Among them was William Smith Clark from the US state of Massachusetts, who served as the first vice principal of the Sapporo Agricultural School (present-day Hokkaido University). This has prompted Hokkaido to enter into a sister-province affiliation with Massachusetts. It has also formed similar relationships with the Canadian province of Alberta, the Chinese province of Heilongjiang and the Russian province of Sakhalin.

Hokkaido has strengthened its ties with the world not only in such friendly interchanges, but also in various economic activities. For

Photo: Hokkaido Tourist Association

tourism in Hokkaido, visitors from East Asian countries such as China and other parts of the world are of profound importance, while agriculture, one of Hokkaido's basic industries, is under the direct impact of international frameworks through the World Trade Organization (WTO) and various arrangements, including economic partnership agreements.

Furthermore, Hokkaido's fisheries industry supplying fish, shellfish, crabs and other marine products, which also constitute important tourist attractions, is notably affected by Japan's relations with its neighbor Russia. Hokkaido has a long-pending issue of northern territory now under Russian control. Therefore, it is our earnest wish to see the earliest possible settlement of this problem, followed by the conclusion of a peace treaty between Japan and Russia.

The upcoming G-8 summit, it may be said, will provide a good opportunity to confirm afresh that Hokkaido is thus directly linked with the world. In particular, it is our fervent hope that children, who will bear the next generation, will firmly keep the memory of the summit meeting in their minds and foster a mental readiness to live as members of the international community while reconfirming in this context "love for their native land."



Former building of the Hokkaido Government, designated as important cultural property, and multicolored flowers

### ■ Our Activities for Toyako Summit

Following the decision to hold the summit meeting at Toyako in April last year, we established the Hokkaido Toyako Summit Preparation Council in June in a bid to promote concerted efforts in the public and private sectors to support the hosting of the summit. The council is pushing ahead with preparations to ensure that the summit will be held without a hitch.

In particular, security measures have gained importance for summit meetings in recent years. The Japanese government is set to go all out to tighten the security guard around the summit site. But we also intend to do whatever we can in cooperation with the Hokkaido police force. Moreover, every possible step is being taken to ensure smooth access from New Chitose Airport, a gateway to Hokkaido, to Toyako Town, the main summit site, and Rusutsu Village, which will host a media center, as well as ensuring adequate information and telecommunication infrastructure.

The council is also hopeful that people gathering from various countries of the world will take this occasion to fully enjoy the charms of Hokkaido. All people of Hokkaido will heartily welcome all of you, wishing that you will enjoy abundant nature and its blessings to your heart's content, and become fans of Hokkaido.

While flying into Hokkaido or moving from the press center to the summit site, please look out the window from your aircraft or cars. You will be pleasantly surprised to see carpets of

multicolored flowers welcoming you. At hotels where you will stay, including hotels by Toyako and Rusutsu Resort Hotel, please taste your fill of delicious and safe foods of Hokkaido – farm produce, fish and shellfish, sweets and so forth. All these things represent Hokkaido people's heartfelt hospitality.

### ■ What We Are Expecting of Summit

The protection of the global environment will become a major subject on the agenda of the Toyako Summit. We human beings have so far been assured of an affluent life with the blessings of nature. Nevertheless, the adverse impact of this life on the global environment has turned out to be far more serious than we imagined. The Earth is now confronted with grave environmental problems.

On the occasion of the summit meeting, we would like to embark on the task of building a new Hokkaido that will ensure harmony between the environment and the economy as well as a dynamic life and contribute to both Japan and the world, while learning from the *Ainu* people's spiritual tradition of respecting harmony with Mother Nature. We want to rebuild our Hokkaido as a model for a new age.

The outcome of discussions at the G-8 summit is bound to influence our future to no small extent. We sincerely hope that the world leaders assembling for the summit will dwell on the global environment and other important problems in a restful atmosphere, immersed in the abundant nature of Hokkaido, and open the door to a reassuring future.

In the summer of 2008, Hokkaido will become the door to the future. **JS**

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