

riences and paints a very convincing picture of the "individualism" and "rationalism" of the American players. A poignant example is the case of Randy Bass, a top hitter and home-run king for the Hanshin Tigers, who took leave to accompany his son to the U.S. for treatment for a brain tumor but was released when he postponed his return to Japan. The consensus in the world of Japanese baseball was that a Japanese player would not desert his team just because his son was sick.

In the eyes of many Japanese, the American players are overpaid, are selfish, are pampered, are not team players, and are over the hill. This friction shows no signs of abating in the 1990 season. Indeed, it is unlikely the situation will change so long as the Japanese baseball world thinks of American players as mere short-term help. Nor will it abate until the American players themselves make more of an effort to adjust to the Japanese style of baseball.

Banning foreign players because of

these problems is not the answer. Rather, I feel that the present limit of two foreign players per team should be raised to three. What is wrong with some friction? Is it too much to hope that this friction will fuse the best of the American style and the best of the Japanese style to create a new brand of baseball that is even more interesting?

Yosuke Uehara
Senior Managing Director
Image Plan Co., Ltd.

Outing

Niigata: Hub of Japan Sea Rim Economic Sphere

The Sea of Japan coast area was once called *uranihon*, the back of Japan, with the beginning of political and economic centralization in Tokyo in modern times. As the name suggests, it has spent years in obscurity. But today the area and its de-

facto capital of Niigata are claiming their rightful place as one of the nation's doorways to the world.

Since ancient times, the Sea of Japan has been both buffer, protecting the bow-shaped Japanese archipelago from the powerful countries of continental Asia, and sea-lane, carrying the culture and material wealth of the continent to Japan's shores. The coming of the Meiji Restoration (1868) and Japan's opening to the West plunged the region into relative obscurity, isolated from the metropolitan area as it was by difficult terrain and underdeveloped transportation networks. Its traditional ties to Asia were all but ignored as the economy turned to Europe and North America.

This exciting rebirth of the Sea of Japan area in part reflects government measures to spur regional development. But even more than that, it has been a spontaneous result of the shifting map of world politics. The end of the Cold War and the improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations has been felt in new, *perestroika*-driven economic policies in the Soviet Far East. Today's visionaries speak of a "Sea of Japan Rim Economic Sphere" tapping the great latent synergy of ties among Japan, the Soviet Union, the Koreans and China. It is Niigata City, the biggest port city on the Sea of Japan coast, that stands to benefit most from the rebirth.

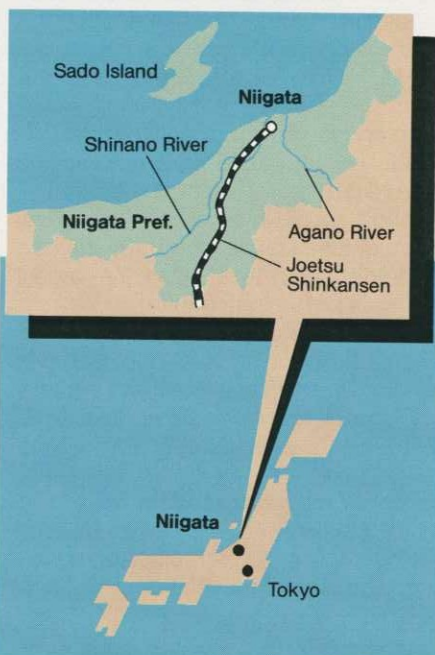
Niigata, capital of Niigata Prefecture, and with a population of 480,000, can be reached from downtown Tokyo in only two hours via the Joetsu Shinkansen su-

perexpress train. The city sprawls over a giant delta formed by the egress of the Shinano and Agano Rivers. Originally growing up along both sides of the mouth of the Shinano, the longest river in Japan, the city of Niigata has now spread east and west along the coast.

Walk 15 minutes from the bustling city center, and you come to the shore of the Sea of Japan. The clear and calm dark blue waters of the sea glistening under the summer sky are in dynamic contrast to the raging leaden gray sea of winter. Visitors accustomed to the dirty and pale blue waters of Tokyo Bay and its environs on the Pacific coast marvel at the Sea of Japan in summer. The silhouette of Sado Island lying off the coast some 30 kilometers west of the city is breathtakingly beautiful, backlit by the setting summer sun. The long, gently curving coastline of Niigata is spotted with numerous attractive bathing beaches, crowded in the summer with young people and families.

Spectacular display

The biggest event of Niigata's summer is the Niigata Annual Festival, lasting from August 7 through August 9. Long lines of dancers course through the streets of the city on the first two spectacular nights. The Bandai Bridge spanning the Shinano River is packed with more than 30,000 dancers and spectators, surging back and forth like giant waves. The spectacular fireworks display on the night of the 9th is a grande finale in the old tradition, with





A Soviet cargo ship unloading lumber in Niigata. On its return home, it will carry Japanese used cars which Soviet seamen take back for their personal use.



A morning vegetable market only five-minute's walk from Niigata city hall. The vendors are usually sold out by 8 a.m.

3,000 fantastic fireworks lighting up the sky over the river in an uninterrupted two-hour display.

Niigata City is famous for the tremendous variety of foods served in each season of the year. The Sea of Japan is a treasure trove of fish and shellfish, while the Echigo Plain extending into the city's hinterland is a famous rice-growing center. In olden days, Niigata farmers were confined to their houses during the long winters by heavy snowfalls. But spring brought ample reward for their patience. The melting snows yielded the abundant sparkling water essential to rice cultivation. True, the spring thaw often caused flooding in low-lying areas along the coast. But even the floods brought layers of rich soil. Where there is delicious rice and clean water, there is also delicious sake. Niigata boasts a long tradition of sake making that has created many famous local brands. Sake lovers visiting Niigata are as happy as ants in a sugar bowl.

The port of Niigata is the busiest on the Japan Sea Coast. Niigata was one of five ports opened for trade with foreign countries in 1868 when Japan ended its long era of isolationism and opened its doors to the West. In 1967 it became the first Japan Sea port to be designated as a "port of special importance" by the Japanese government.

The West Port district, adjacent to downtown Niigata, is a terminal for domestic trade routes plied by container ships and ferries. It is the starting point for the jetfoils and car ferries servicing Sado Island, and also serves as a terminal for foreign routes, including the once-weekly route to Pusan, South Korea opened in 1988, and the twice-monthly Japan-Nakhodka route linking Japan and the Soviet Union since 1976.

The East Port district, opened in 1969 as the gateway to a waterfront industrial complex some 16 kilometers northeast of the city, has berths for LNG tankers, lumber carriers and container ships. The Southeast Asia container route has been used by two ships a month since 1988. In 1980 the monthly Nakhodka container route was launched, followed by the Nakhodka refrigerated container route in 1988. The Nakhodka container route in particular is the final link in the Siberian Land Bridge, Japan's shortest route to Europe and the Near and Middle East via the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Niigata Port is already the biggest physical distribution center on the Japan Sea coast, and it is coming in for even more attention as hopes rise for expanded economic exchange with the countries on the far side of the Japan Sea.

Famous friendship

All major Japanese cities facing the sea have had a strong interest in exchange and friendship with other countries, and Niigata is no exception. The city is especially famous for its close ties with the Soviet Union. Of the 815 ocean-going merchant ships entering the port in 1989, a full 198 (24.3%) flew the Soviet flag, while 52.6% of the export cargo that year was bound for the Soviet Union. The Niigata-Khabarovsk air route, launched in 1973, has one flight a week in winter and two to three flights a week in summer. Meanwhile, the city established ties of friendship with Khabarovsk in April 1965, and has also established relations with Galveston, Texas (January 1965) and Harbin in China (December 1979).

The Niigata International Friendship Center is a sterling example of the city's international spirit. Founded to give for-

eign visitors a place to relax and get together with Niigata citizens, it is equipped with conference rooms and an exhibition hall. The New York Times, Pravda, the Harbin Daily News and the Japan Times are available in the lobby. The signs showing the direction to such centers are written in English in most Japanese cities, but in Niigata they are written in both English and Russian.

Niigata has had its share of pain. On June 16, 1964, the city was devastated by a violent earthquake with a magnitude of 7.5 on the Richter scale. The city was quick to get back on its feet, and today Niigata has been reborn as a clean, modern metropolis looking every inch the part of an important prefectural capital. Yet the earthquake did exact its price. There is no trace left today of the old "city of waterways" lined on both sides by elegant weeping willows. Instead, the main street looks like the central thoroughfare of any large Japanese city.

But Niigata is not merely picturesque. The prefecture is the nation's largest energy production center, with wells accounting for 79% of the crude oil and 60.3% of the natural gas produced in Japan in 1989. It is a distinction Niigata has claimed for itself since ancient days. In Japan's oldest history, the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicle of Japan), it is written: "In the year 668, burnable stones and flammable water were presented to the emperor by the Province of Koshi." Koshi was the ancient name of the Niigata region, and the "burnable stones" and "flammable water" were undoubtedly coal and petroleum.

A 20-minute Japan Railway ride south from Niigata Station takes you to Niitsu, a city built by oil. In its heyday in the first years of the century—from 1903 through 1910—the Niitsu Oilfield had the largest output of any in the country.

Arriving in modern Niitsu, there is little evidence of this unusual past. Catch a bus from the station, and enjoy a leisurely half-hour drive along narrow roads up a valley into the mountains. The tiny village that is your final destination is equally deceptive, until you get off the bus. There is no mistaking that pervasive smell of petroleum, and the high-pitched, monotonous squeak of machinery.

A local resident first discovered oil leaking from the ground at the Niitsu Oil-field in 1608. In 1789, the wealthy Nakano family got the rights to the find. But it was not until 1874 that Kan'ichi Nakano, later to become the "Oil King of Japan," began drilling in earnest. Importing U.S. technology for machining-pumping crude oil at the beginning of the 1900s, he boosted output three times over, and ushered Niitsu into its golden age.

Machine-pumping is a dying art today. A single unit of motive power, called pumping power, drives some 10 drilling shafts, connected to the drive unit by wires. Compared with traditional methods

it was energy- and time-efficient. Today the old machine-pump unit in Niitsu is the last in the world of its kind still in operation. It has been chugging away without a pause amid the trees on its mountain slope, supplying power to oil wells one of which was originally drilled back in 1910.

Niitsu's golden age did not last long. Oil output quickly fell off and never recovered, until today the ancient machinery only creaks out 40 drums of oil a day. Yet Kan'ichi Nakano's vast estate remains, and is open to the public as a Japanese-style garden. The garden now includes a "World of Oil Museum" with an exhibition with sound effects and pictures, called

"Clima Theater," showing documentaries of the industry in its heyday and people carried away with excitement at the unexpected oil boom.

The people of today's Niigata are staking their future on less ephemeral riches. As Japan and the world draw closer together in the years ahead, Niigata City and the Japan Sea coast, rich in natural beauty, look to a new era of international prosperity and growth.

Ritsuko Misu
Editorial Manager

Journal of Japanese Trade & Industry

Table Talk

Ristorante Al Porto

When one traces French cuisine back to its historical origins, one comes to Italian cuisine. If French cuisine is delicious, then it seems reasonable that Italian food should be, too. What differentiates the two is that French cuisine is the product of a rarefied culinary perfectionism. Both the people who make and the people who eat French cuisine are argumentative about the food they eat. And then there are the ardent food critics egging them on. All these many participants have contributed their taste, creativity and critical palates to bringing French cuisine to the level it has achieved today.

Unlike the fastidious French, the sensual Italians simply enjoy delicious food. They don't reason or theorize. They simply appreciate it, saying "*Buono* (delicious), *buono!*" They don't discuss why the food is delicious. They just say they will go eat again at the same restaurant.

Al Porto, one of the finest Italian restaurants in Tokyo, serves Nuova Cucina Italiana—simple, light and delicious Italian food in the fashion of French nouvelle cuisine.

It was a fluke that Mamoru Kataoka, the owner-chef of Al Porto, went to Italy when he was only 20 years old. An acquaintance who was taking up the post of consul general in Milan invited him out of the blue. Putting aside his high school dreams of becoming an industrial designer, Kataoka went to serve as a cook at the consul general's residence, consoling himself that both cooking and design are creative arts. By the time his five-year stint at the residence was nearing its end, he had created such a reputation that it was said there was not a restaurant in Italy that could serve better food. Returning to Japan, he opened Al Porto in 1983, and today it is one of the most talked-about restaurants in Tokyo.

Al Porto offers a host of fine à la carte dishes, but I would recommend one of the three full course dinners at ¥7,000, ¥8,000 or ¥11,000. Al Porto makes a specialty of fresh seafood served with novelty sauces and purees made of seasonal vegetables, herbs and spices. Good olive oil and fragrant basil, anchovies and parsley appear often, and are fragrant reminders that the inspiration in this restaurant is Italian.

When I visited Al Porto the other day, I had octopus, squid, abalone, sea urchin, lobster, shrimp and flavorful fillets of fish. There is always a pasta. The day I visited, I was served a spaghetti in a rich porcini

mushroom sauce, followed by a tender fillet of beef in red wine sauce. Dessert was my choice of sorbet or ice cream and pastry.

Even if you are on a diet you need not worry at Al Porto. The menu is Nuova Cucina Italiana, but the effect is pure Japanese. The food is a feast for the eyes, and a joy for the palate.

(Yoshimichi Hori, editor-in-chief)

Address: 24-9, Nishiazabu 3-chome,
Minato-ku
Tel: (03) 403-2916

Open 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.–11 p.m.; 5:30 p.m.–11 p.m. on Sundays and national holidays; closed on Mondays.

