

From Ambassador

July 3, 2015

Former Japanese Ambassador. Mitsuko Shino



Góðan daginn,

The Embassy of Japan in Iceland is a focal point of Japan's diplomacy, promoting the friendly relations between Japan and Iceland. As Ambassador of Japan, I, Mitsuko Shino, will experience many scenes of Japan encountering Iceland, and Iceland encountering Japan.

In this corner, I would like to share my personal experiences and impressions during my stay. It might be interesting for the Icelandic people to know, what a Japanese finds special and attractive in Iceland. I hope, that both Icelandic and Japanese people discover new attractive aspects of both countries through this corner.

Kærar þakkir

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1. Greeting



I don't need any words. Or my voice is gone after the joyful scream last night.

Congratulations to you all.

Shortly before the game, I learned a very important lesson. "How small or how big the population is, on the field, there are just only 11 to 11." The Icelandic Soccer team played the game without being overwhelmed by the reputation of England.

Áfram Ísland!

2. New start on the existing Friendship



On the 8th of September, we received so many valuable Friends of Japan in our Embassy. This is a new start for me as a newly appointed Ambassador to Iceland, but I could happily convince myself with the existence of the sound and solid platform between our two countries.

I cannot name all the prominent guests, such as the honorable members of Althingi, my diplomatic colleagues, dear friends of Iceland–Japan Society, and members with strong ties in the business sector.

As a diplomat serving in this country, I was especially honored by receiving Foreign Minister Sveinsson and respected Madame former President Vigdis Finnbogadottir.

At the reception, I was able to introduce my Embassy and newly arrived diplomats and staff, who will develop our relationship further more. The guests were treated, of course, with Sushi and Sake. Japan will be more visible to you.

3. 'Tohoku no MIRAI (the Future of north east Japan)' and Iceland



On the 25th of September, I had a chance to attend to the ICEFISH, the Icelandic Fisheries Exhibition. I was surprised to see so many prominent guests such as the President Mr. Grimsson and Mr. Johannsson, Minister of Fisheries. Numbers of companies and organizations, mainly from Europe, participated at the ICEFISH. Among those, we could proudly find a booth representing Japan. There were representatives from Kesen-numa (city of Miyagi prefecture located in Tohoku) ;Mr. Kidoura, CEO of KIDOURA SHIPYARD CO., LTD, Mr. Ishikawa, Managing Director of ISHIKAWA ELECTRIC CO., LTD, and Mr. Onodera, CEO of ONODERA IRON WORKS CO., LTD.

Kesen-numa is a famous fishery harbor in Japan, but it was severely damaged by the Tsunami after the Great East Japan earthquake in March 2011. The city and the harbor is now on the way to re-vitalize themselves. They are not aiming at a simple reconstruction. They want to create something more future oriented than before. And Mr. Kidoura decided to build the shipyard constructing the ship designed in Iceland! This project is named 'MIRAI (meaning future in Japanese) Shipyard' .

I learned that behind this story, there exists a human-bond between Kesen-numa and Iceland, through an Icelandic and Japanese couple (Egill and Yoko Thordarson). They visited Kesen-numa as volunteers right after the Great East Japan earthquake. Communications started and evolved to the idea of building a new shipyard to construct an Icelandic designed ship. The Future of Tohoku with Icelandic design.

Both Japan and Iceland face the enormous power of nature. It is not possible to concur the power of nature. We simply have to learn how to get along with the power and how to make best use out of it. -I believe there are no nations that know this better. Now, the future of North-East Japan is designed and built with Iceland, hand in hand. The ICEFISH provided a good opportunity to

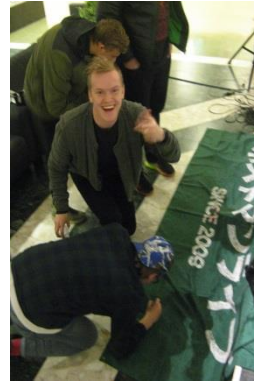
demonstrate the 'MIRAI Shipyard' as an example of Japan's recovery with a concrete project. I am very proud that I could introduce this nice project to President Grimsson and Minister Johannsson.

A small anecdote; Mr. Thordarson told me that Icelanders and the people in TOHOKU resemble in characters, they are both quiet and do not speak a lot. But once they open their mouth, they give short and precise answers. He mentioned, his wife is not from Tohoku but from Kyoto and speaks a lot, so he feels more comfortable with Tohoku people.

I feel something similar. People in Iceland do not offer a lot, but when it is needed, you will get the most friendly service well.

I look forward to see the progress of the MIRAI Project in Tohoku. The first ship in the 'MIRAI Shipyard' is expected to be set out to sea in 2016.

4. Postman live concert in Iceland



Mr. Ryoichi Higuchi performed live here in Iceland on 4th–6th October. He came here to deliver “a Letter, to the dearest children”. He names his concert as a Postman’s Live.

The message goes like;

“As getting older, I can do and remember less and less things. But please, do not be annoyed and accept me how I am changing. Like I gave you my hands when you start walking, please give your hands to me when I have difficulty to stand up. Like I read you your favorite story again and again, please listen to me, even if I repeat the same story again and again. It is not sad thing. I am just preparing for my departure. So please take your time and accompany me on my last days.”

Iceland is the first country abroad, that Mr. Higuchi wanted to deliver this message.

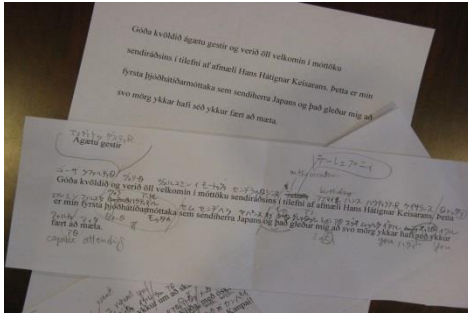
In order to deliver the message correctly, both the sender and the receiver have to share the common background and understanding. The words alone cannot necessarily deliver the message, correctly.

But I am certain, his message was well delivered to Icelandic People, since you value the importance of the family ties, too. You keep your ties between the Father/Mother and children in special way here. When you ask the 'last name', you ask “Who is your father?” don't you? To me, it is very unique way to confirm the family ties.

It was an excellent choice of Mr. Higuchi to choose Iceland as the first country abroad to deliver this message, wasn't it?

Mr. Higuchi's song was delivered together with the guitar. And our proud Guitarist was Counselor Uchida, from our Embassy. We, the Embassy, assist to deepen the good relationship of two countries, in many different ways!

5. Through new words, you can reach new world



At our national day's reception, I tried to address the guests in Icelandic... at least for a few sentences.

For Japanese people, it is very difficult to pronounce ð or þ. I struggled for several days practising with my speech cards.

I am lazy to learn the grammar of new languages, but I love to pick up simple daily words and conversations. Through learning a new language, you will discover something more than just the language.

If you do not have a word describing a certain good or feeling, you do not have the concept concerning that particular good or feeling. When you have a word, you can acknowledge the concept.

The second most popular foreign language in the University of Iceland is Japanese. I am very happy and proud of this fact. It shows how eager you are to expand and enrich your conceptual world. Through learning Japanese, you will encounter a different culture, a different society, and a different philosophy of life.

I am also curious to widen up my world, through learning Icelandic. I suppose winter in Iceland with this weather is the perfect time to stay at home and learn new words.

6. Fireworks



The New Year and New Year's Eve in Japan is a very serious and quiet time. It is the time for family gatherings. It is the time to meditate and look back over the events of the passing year, and renew your good will for the coming year. We will listen solemnly to the Jyoya-no-Kane, the New-Year's-Bell from temples, with our ears and hearts. There shall be no noisy, colorful fireworks at all!

A well known Japanese author, DAZAI Osamu, even described fireworks in winter as fatuous. In Japan, fireworks belong to the summer time.

But here in Iceland, so many fireworks, in every size and shape, are shot one after another by ordinary citizens. It is an amazing view. I feel a strong desire in people to have beautiful lights in the sky, to overcome the long and dark nights.

Apart from that, my Icelandic staff in the Embassy pointed out, that fireworks in the bright nights in Icelandic summer are fatuous indeed.

I totally agree.

7. Ice-Land



For these pictures, I don't have to add any words.

I simply wanted to show my Japanese friends, how beautiful this "Ice-Land" is!

8. On the field, we are 11 to 11.



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9. The Family Reunion at the Junction of Two Continents



Iceland is known as the place where two continents meet, one the Eurasian plate, the other the North American plate. But this summer two families, one from Japan – on the edge of the Eurasian plate, and the other from the USA were reunited together.

A young Japanese high school student, studying in the USA about 13 years ago, had a terrible accident during his ski trip. He got a serious injury to his head and he lost his memory and the ability to remember, completely. He was away from his family, alone in the foreign country. But he had a very good friend from school, who visited this Japanese boy in the hospital every day together with his family. Every day for 2–3 months!

Each day, when the father of the family paid a visit, he made it a routine to ask the boy, “Hey, you see the bridge over there? Do you know the name of it? It’s Zakim Bridge.” One day, the father recognized the struggle on the boy’s face. That was the clue to recover the memory. “Ummm, I feel like I know it... but I don’t.” “Well, it’s Zakim Bridge.”, said the father. Every day, for 2–3 months! And finally, the boy recovered his ability to remember.

Later here in Iceland, the young Japanese boy, who is now the father of a 3-year-old boy, visited the home of his American Father. The English name of this 3-year-old boy is Zakim, and the name of the American Father is Robert C. Barber, the Ambassador of the USA to Iceland.