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Out on the Town Once Again

Live sports and in-person gatherings bring back a sense of normalcy

The scoreboard in Aoyama Gakuin Memorial Hall read 95–94 with 0.5 seconds remaining. The visitors had the lead. After a hard-fought game, it seemed that the Sun Rockers Shibuya of Japan's pro basketball B.League would fall a point short. The crowd cheered and then held its collective breath as a quick pass and a long three-point shot whooshed through the net and sent the Ibaraki Robots home with a 97–95 loss.

It was an exciting way to spend a Sunday in late November, and a reminder to me that life was starting to return to normal. Having spent most of the past three years

Having spent most of the past three years in my countryside studio, peering through a screen ... it was refreshing to take in a game in person.

in my countryside studio, peering through a screen to talk to friends and colleagues—and to watch sports—it was refreshing to take in a game in person.

It was also a chance for me to meet one of our new American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) company members, Sunrockers, Ltd., who joined the chamber in September. They provided courtside seats as part of the ACCJ's Member to Member Offers and put us so close to the action that I even caught a stray ball!

Chamber events have also added to the feeling of normality. The ACCJ Charity Ball returned to its in-person format at the Hilton Tokyo in Shinjuku, where the Charity Ball Committee put together a spectacular

Chicago-themed bash. It's clear from the photos (page 9) that all who attended had a blast, including US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, a Chicago native.

January brings us the ACCJ Shinnenkai at the Imperial Hotel for the first time since 2020. I remember that last gathering on January 29 and the energy that filled the room as we did not yet know of the pandemic that would soon come. It will be wonderful to properly kick off a new year together once again! The Kansai chapter will host their Shinnenkai in person for the first time in three years as well.



C Bryan Jones
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Photo: C Bryan Jones

And perhaps the biggest sign that we're getting back to normal is the number of people traveling again, in and out of Japan, heading home to see loved ones, and arriving to do business. It took a long time and a lot of effort to get to the point where Japan's borders reopened, but the benefits are already being felt. We look back at that journey, and to the path ahead, in our cover story starting on page 22. Here's to a happy, prosperous, and healthy 2023! ■

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**THE AMERICAN CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE IN JAPAN
THANKS OUR PRESIDENT'S
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Committee Matters

Together we can harness the energy of 2022 and advance ACCJ advocacy

Looking back at 2022, it was a year of great progress for the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ). I was honored to represent you as president and am humbled to have been re-elected for a second term. This year, I look forward to building on our progress, harnessing the energy of our members and leaders who so generously share their time and expertise.

At the heart of all we do are committees. They are the lifeblood of the ACCJ. As I began my first term, I met with each committee leader. That was time well spent, as I learned where the action happens and saw firsthand where our energy emerges.

At the heart of all we do are committees. They are the lifeblood of the ACCJ.

I learned your challenges. It was also a good reminder that all of us who serve on the Board of Governors must represent all members as our primary mission. What better way to do so than to have firsthand contact with the committee leaders? That is why we established the committee liaison program.

One ACCJ

The Board of Governors also took to heart building bonds of friendship across the entire chamber. Our board meetings have typically been in Tokyo, but the Chubu and Kansai chapters are key parts of the chamber and where a lot of critical business activity occurs. To strengthen our One ACCJ family, this year we also held meetings in Nagoya and Kobe.

As a board, we focused on transparency—transparency into what we discussed at board meetings and how decisions are made. To that end, I've enjoyed delivering video updates immediately after each meeting.

We also made changes to the Constitution to allow members easier access to the minutes.

Government Engagement

Our advocacy efforts with US and Japanese government officials often result in the greatest value the chamber brings to all its members. Unfortunately, the pandemic forced these interactions to become virtual. Resuming and reinvigorating these engagements in person was another highlight of 2022. We had more than 85 meetings with the Government of Japan, including a Diet Doorknock. We also took a delegation to Washington in June for our critical DC Doorknock after a two-year hiatus. It made quite a difference to have eye-to-eye contact and person-to-person conversations.

It was an honor to be in the room with US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida for the launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) on May 23, but more importantly it highlights what an important voice of US business we represent to Japan and the United States.

Looking Ahead

There are big events on the horizon, with Japan hosting the G7 Summit in May. The ongoing rollout of IPEF and the continued focus on economic security will also be front and center this year. I look forward to an exciting year ahead as we continue to build connections, engage with government, and help US businesses thrive. I encourage everyone to harness the energy we built up in 2022 and take the ACCJ to new heights in 2023.

On a personal note, one of the best parts of 2022 was getting out there and meeting all of you in person at our networking forums, at the Charity Ball and Champagne Ball, and at our numerous other in person gatherings. I look forward to building more mutual energy with each of you in the coming year! ■



Om Prakash
ACCJ president

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Winds of Change

First in-person Charity Ball since 2019 brings the ACCJ together



Barbara Hancock
Chair



Lori Hewlett
Vice-chair



Kevin Naylor
Vice-chair



Ryan Watson
Vice-chair

After two years in virtual space, one of the largest annual events held by the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) returned to its traditional in-person format on December 3, when chamber members and guests gathered at the Hilton Tokyo in Shinjuku for Chicago: An Evening in the Windy City.

The first live Charity Ball since 2019 kept some virtual aspects of the pandemic galas to give the whole chamber community—across the Tokyo, Chubu, and Kansai chapters—the opportunity to participate.

The goal was to raise funds for charity while also bringing one of the ACCJ’s most important social events back to life, and the evening was a roaring success thanks to a great venue; spectacular entertainment, in-

spired food, wine, and spirits; and a special guest: Chicago’s own Rahm Emanuel, US ambassador to Japan.

The Charity Ball Committee, with the help of the amazing ACCJ staff, worked together to make this event happen. But it would not have been possible without the support of our generous sponsors, all those who attended, and the many people who participated online in our raffle and auction.

With everyone’s support, we raised ¥4.5 million for charities, making a big difference in our ability to help those in need.

The Charity Ball Committee cannot thank our sponsors and the ACCJ community enough for making the event a success. We are grateful to each and every person involved, and extend a huge thank you to all! ■

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Photo of Ambassador Emanuel, US Embassy, Tokyo. All other photos: Media Sense K.K.

EVENTS



Photo: Andy Boone

- 1. Jesper Koll, Dave McCaughan, William Hall, and moderator Patrick Newell led a fun and informative session in the latest installment of their Now You Know Your... series on November 14 at Tokyo American Club, this time focused on economic, social, and cultural issues starting with V, W, and X.
- 2. On November 15, the ACCJ Sales Support Alliance returned for its first hybrid meeting in more than two years, a speed networking format designed to foster new introductions and share sales leads.

- 3. Special Representative Dilawar Syed met with the ACCJ Task Force on Innovation Leadership, Digital Transformation Committee, and connectFree CEO Kristopher Tate on November 9 to discuss startups and entrepreneurship in Japan as well as US-Japan collaboration in the space.
- 4. The ACCJ-Kansai Community Service Committee and Osaka YMCA International School (OYIS) held their Healthy Urban Gardening (HUG) workshop on November 27 at OYIS.



5. The ACCJ Board of Governors gathered for their November meeting in Nagoya on November 18 prior to the ACCJ/TJCS Champagne Ball.
6. The ACCJ met with Gunma Prefecture Governor Ichita Yamamoto on October 26 to discuss Gunma's regional revitalization through FDI as well as the prefecture's regional diplomacy initiatives.
7. Brunswick Group Senior Advisor and Hudson Institute Distinguished Fellow Dr. Kenneth

Weinstein spoke on December 9 about the impact of the US midterm results on the Indo-Pacific region.

8. The ACCJ Women in Business Committee hosted a lunch on November 9 at the Smachnogo restaurant in Nishi-Shinbashi, where Ukrainian refugees work and serve Ukrainian cuisine.
9. On October 14, 90 players from the ACCJ, CCCJ, and EBC competed in the 18th Annual Mercedes-Benz – Thomson Reuters Golf Cup, the first since 2019!

Leading the Way

The ACCJ recognizes exceptional contributions from across its three chapters

Each year, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) honors members who have shown extraordinary dedication. On December 20, recipients were recognized in person for the first time since 2019 at a special Leadership Forum networking event, chaired by ACCJ Governor John W. Carlson III, at The Tokyo Edition, Toranomon.

“ACCJ leaders set the bar high, but are incredibly generous about

sharing their knowledge and experience, and I have benefited so much from being a part of this community,” Leader of the Year Anne Smith told *The ACCJ Journal*. “To be recognized and to have my name officially added to the history of the ACCJ in this way is a career highlight.”

Steven Brown, who created the Ten Points on Business Dinner Series, said being named Leader of the Year for Chubu was “a great honor and quite a surprise.” He added that the most challenging

part of the year was overcoming the long hiatus from in-person events forced upon the chamber by Covid-19. “In truth, I was a bit nervous about whether the presentations would be a success, but the speakers have been excellent—both entertaining and informative.”

Kansai Volunteer of the Year Naomi Iwasaki said the award was “like receiving a Christmas present. But I know I am receiving this representing the D&I Committee. Without their love and support, I would not be here today.”

Leaders of the Year

Anne Smith

Dual roles led to Leader of the Year honors for Anne Smith, whose tireless work as vice-chair of both the Government Relations and Healthcare Committees has elevated the ACCJ’s relationships with US and Japanese government partners. She is the face of the Government Relations Committee, setting meeting agendas and running committee-hosted events, and she spearheaded several defining events of the year, including the welcome luncheon with US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, attended by more than 160 members and guests. And her work with the Healthcare Committee resulted in meetings with top-level government and industry leaders. Smith’s passionate dedication serves as an inspiration to others and the ACCJ is grateful for her impactful contributions to the chamber’s position as the voice for global business in Japan.



Akimasa Kataoka (Kansai)

Recognized for his superb leadership as co-chair of the Kansai Membership Relations Committee (MRC), Akimasa Kataoka revitalized the MRC and was a driving force behind the committee’s first in-person event in more than two years. Thanks to his efforts, the committee now has a growing membership base and many new events underway, including a young professionals mentorship program. Kataoka’s energy and commitment have created new opportunities for members to participate and get involved in the Kansai Chapter.



Steve Brown (Chubu)

As a founding member of the Chubu Independent Business Committee (IBC), Steve Brown served as the committee’s first chair. He returned to IBC leadership this year, determined to revitalize the Chubu Chapter, and provided exceptional leadership as co-chair. He conceived of the Ten Points on Business Dinner Series, in which experienced business leaders shared key insights that led them to success and mistakes that have proved educational. Brown’s enthusiasm and tireless efforts made these monthly events a tremendous success, reengaging members and reestablishing the solid foundation of the Chubu community, and he continues to inspire leaders in the Chubu Chapter and throughout the chamber.



Taking on the emcee role at the D&I Summit and Leadership Series “was exciting and challenging,” she explained.

The ACCJ also honored Ritchell Madikaegbu with a Special Recognition Award for her work as liaison from the US Embassy, Tokyo. Her valuable updates on women’s empowerment and leadership development initiatives—along with spearheading opportunities to connect and share best practices with other organizations supporting the committee’s shared goals—made a big difference in 2022. “I am truly happy about the honor, and it is a reminder of the importance of the US Embassy–ACCJ partnership,” she said. “I look forward to doing my part to advance US Embassy and ACCJ priorities in Japan in 2023.” ■



From left: ACCJ Vice President Victor Osumi, Rafael Dantas, Governor Andrew Conrad, Anne Smith, President Om Prakash, Ritchell Madikaegbu, Governor John W. Carlson III, Akimasa Kataoka, and Governor Frank Packard

Volunteers of the Year

Takako Onoki

Contributing endless energy and expertise to the Competition Policy Committee, Takako Onoki has made invaluable contributions, proactively organizing new speaker events and coordinating advocacy initiatives. She swiftly marshals the committee’s views on public comment opportunities to ensure that the ACCJ has a strong voice on key industry issues. As the committee’s most active member for several years, Onoki is an integral part of the committee’s leadership. The chamber is grateful for her passion and continued dedication.



Naomi Iwasaki (Kansai)

It is for her proactive and enthusiastic support of the Kansai Diversity and Inclusion Committee that Naomi Iwasaki was named Volunteer of the Year. She was critical to the success of the D&I Summit Series, where she managed the Day 2 networking session and served as emcee on Day 3. She also collaborated directly with committee leaders and the speaker for one of the popular Leadership Series speaker sessions. Iwasaki provides an important perspective during committee meetings and is an indispensable asset to leaders and members alike. Her inclusive workstyle encourages others to further participate in realizing the committee’s goals and inspires inclusive business practices.



Rafael Dantas (Chubu)

The ACCJ expresses its deepest appreciation to Rafael Dantas for his outstanding efforts in support of the Chubu Aerospace and Manufacturing Committee (AMC). He organized the Chubu Chapter’s first in-person networking event since before the pandemic, secured a venue where adequate social distancing was possible, and planned activities to facilitate networking among the participants. Due to his ingenuity and initiative, this and a follow-up event were resounding successes, resulting in three new members joining the ACCJ Chubu Chapter. Dantas’s positive energy, superb ability to organize, and strong networking skills are an asset to the entire chamber.



Healthy Ideas

Innovators empower elderly patients at ACCJ Healthcare x Digital Ideathon

Started in 2020, the Healthcare x Digital (HxD) initiative of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) has grown to become a key platform for collaboration among innovators, startups, entrepreneurs, and top pharma executives.

After hosting pitch events for the first two years, the first ever HxD Ideathon took place late last fall with a hybrid in-person and online kickoff at the Hilton Osaka on October 29. This was followed by two virtual sessions on November 5 and 12, then finalized by the hybrid pitch event on November 19 at the Hilton Osaka. The four-day event was inspired by the tagline “empowering elderly patients through digital health.”

Participants included university students from the United States and Japan as well as healthcare professionals and a panel of judges from healthcare fields. Their aim? To forge new partnerships and create solutions for some of Japan’s most critical challenges in community healthcare and individual patient care.

Ideathon

The 2022 HxD event was modeled on the concept of ideathons, or workshop-like gatherings of groups tasked with challenges for which they are to propose

solutions. Through this model, a total of 86 ideators, facilitators, and mentors worked together through a cyclic ideation process to identify root causes and develop the next big project in healthcare.

Day one began with opening remarks by Simone Thomsen, president and representative director of Eli Lilly Japan K.K. as well as ACCJ governor-Kansai, and continued with a panel discussion and ideation in groups to define problem statements and the healthcare challenges to be tackled. Ideation continued on days two and three, when teams focused on initial designs and worked to find agreement on a solution—one per group—that was to be presented on pitch day.

The event culminated on November 19 with a pitch contest in which nine teams presented their concepts, and engaged in question and answers sessions with judges, who then selected the best ideas. The winning teams will move forward to the next phase of the competition—a hackathon—to be held in 2023.

Pitch Day

The final day was divided into two rounds during which each group had five minutes to pitch their solution to a panel of judges.





Perhaps the biggest draw of HxD is the opportunity to present ideas directly to—and receive invaluable feedback from—industry leaders. There’s also the possibility of entering into a joint venture with, or receiving investment from, an industry player.

Winners also receive cash prizes and, this time, will have the chance to present their ideas at the 2025 Osaka Kansai Expo and as part of the Japanese government’s Super City Initiative.

Let’s take a look at this year’s pitches.

Kyocare

Presented by Hiba Abulgasim, Kyocare is a digital customer-to-customer and business-to-business platform that provides flexible, personalized, quality care.

In the pitch, Abulgasim noted that 28.9 percent of Japan’s population is over the age of 65—a record number that is growing. But the workforce tasked with caring for them is understaffed and overworked, and about 70 percent want to leave the profession.

This means care services are poorly coordinated. Many elderly people feel lonely and disconnected as a result, and family members tasked with their care feel stressed out.

The solution? Kyocare provides on-demand caregiving services for the elderly through an app that matches those who need long-term home care with nearby care workers.

Hi-Real System

A digital ecosystem pitched by Masato Suzuki and Sachiko Nakatsuka, Hi-Real System allows emergency-patient health records

to be accessed by healthcare professionals even before emergency care is provided.

In their problem statement, Suzuki and Nakatsuka asked, “How do we support emergency triage when medical resources, such as medical staff, are limited?” Their solution involves a blockchain emergency information transmission service that instantly shares patient information to the hospital before patient arrival, which can then be used for smoother emergency treatment diagnosis.

Maya Mind

Osaka University Assistant Professor Gajanan Revankar presented Maya Mind, a web platform accessible via smartphones, tablets, or personal computers that targets patients who suffer from dementia.

Revankar noted that, during early onset of dementia, diagnosis is time consuming and costly, while accuracy is low. Maya Mind seeks to tackle all these challenges.

The app uses eye tracking, speech processing, artificial intelligence (AI)-based analytics, and machine learning algorithms to create an index score for classifying different kinds of dementia, among other provisions.

AI Assistant

Ajinkya Takawale and Tomoko Mitsuoka pitched a voice-controlled AI assistant with a focus on early diagnosis of chronic kidney disease (CKD) and diabetes. The challenge before Takawale and Mitsuoka included how to leverage digital technologies to make the elderly more aware of their health risks through early diagnosis.

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Their voice-controlled robot uses non-invasive methods such as retinal imaging to track, record, and analyze an elderly person's healthcare data. Using the results, they provide a diagnosis and help the person plan their lifestyle based on the insights.

Toilet Light Sensor for CKD

Chisato Banno and Reiko Tsubaki, both third-year students at Tokyo Medical and Dental University, also pitched a digital solution for patients at risk of CKD. Their solution offers a low-cost yet accurate Internet of Things device that samples, analyzes, and visualizes a person's real-time health data, helping them to diagnose the onset of CKD early.

Their first prototype will use toilet-based light sensors that can analyze urine. The data gathered can be visualized via a smartphone app, which also can share data with a relevant healthcare provider, such as a hospital.

Helper-san

An avatar bot that identifies and neutralizes triggers that cause aggression in dementia patients, Helper-san is a digital platform that was presented by students and researchers Shobha Dasari, Allison Jia, Kanon Mori, Aarushi Patil, and Tsubasa Tanabe.

The students and researchers are part of a collaboration involving universities in Japan and the United States brought about by the Japan-American Innovators of Medicine, a four-month program in which medical innovators from both countries join to tackle a global healthcare issue related to dementia, such as aggression.

Their bot, which is embedded in a small, television-like device, can track a patient's behavior, iden-

tify aggression triggers, and defuse them. An example would be dimming or turning off a light source that has been identified as the trigger.

Parapul

A web app presented by Kasper Watanabe, Parapul helps caregivers obtain the information they need, build relationships with like-minded people, and support their caregiving lives.

As the portion of society classified as elderly increases, Watanabe noted, the physical, mental, and financial burden on family members will grow, and yet such caregivers often lack the information necessary to provide care.

The Parapul platform is based on three pillars:

- Providing customized information, such as nursing care, educational materials, or local service listings to family members who are caregivers
- Connecting caregivers so they can share their challenges on bulletin boards, question-and-answer boards, or via direct messaging
- Offering a caregiving management system that, for instance, allows users to schedule nursing care support

Mobile Health

Pitched by Jingwen Zhang and Nondo Jacob Sikazwe, Mobile Health (mHealth) is a community platform that allows those at risk of CKD to be inspired to connect and receive information that can help them manage the condition.

During their presentation, the ideators noted that there are few digital tools on the market to help patients prevent or manage CKD.

Why is this? First, individuals at risk, or who have early onset, of CKD have no or only slight symptoms that cause them inconvenience in daily life.

What's more, those with middle-to-low incomes often struggle with daily living, which leaves little time and few resources to access primary healthcare.

Lastly, current biomarkers used to screen for CKD are affected by many factors, so there is a need for regular checkups.

Their community platform solves these challenges by incentivizing elderly people and their caregivers in three key areas:

- **Motivation:** where you can collaborate with the local community and receive community rewards for positive lifestyle changes
- **Connection:** where you can communicate directly with a healthcare provider
- **Education:** participate in customized, immersive games, quizzes, audio guides, and more that shed light on the issues of CKD

Coupon Kun

The final pitch, by Zechen Zeng and Keita Tsuyuguchi, addressed loneliness among elderly, which has reached epidemic levels.

Zechen and Tsuyuguchi's solution is a social network being developed in four phases. Phase one is to create a "Groupon experience," through coupons for groups, that incentivizes elderly individuals to experience new things—such as hobbies, lessons, or traveling—with new social connections.

In phase two, the platform aims to introduce digital literacy to the elderly, including adoption of smart devices, while they undertake the group experiences.

In phase three, apps are used to monitor, collect, and share the health data of users with healthcare professionals following strict data privacy and security protocols.

And in phase four, insights gleaned from healthcare data are used to help users follow a healthy lifestyle.

Winners

With so many innovative ideas to consider, selecting the winners was not easy for the panel of industry professionals tasked with judging the 2022 HxD Ideathon.

Pitches were scored based on scientific innovation, relevance and timeliness, business feasibility, and how well they addressed the core issue.

Three ideas were selected to advance to the HxD hackathon in 2023:

- Maya Mind
- Hi-Real System
- Toilet Light Sensor for CKD

One other, Kyocare, was given special recognition and will also be part of the hackathon.

Overall, 119 ideators, facilitators, and students participated in at least one day of the ideathon, and connections were made with more than 22 universities for future events. ■



Judges

- 
Kozo Mori
 Director, Medical Industry City, Medical and New Industry Division, Planning and Coordination Bureau, Kobe City Hall
- 
Masayoshi Yamada
 Deputy director, Department of Smart City Strategy, Strategy Promotion Office, Regional Strategy Promotion Division, Osaka Prefecture
- 
Torsten Kanisch
 Executive officer and vice president, commercial excellence, AstraZeneca K.K.
- 
Christian Boettcher
 Consulting partner, health sciences and wellness, EY Strategy & Consulting
- 
Francisco Proano
 Head of strategy and digital transformation, Bayer Yakuin
- 
Yasuhiko Iida
 Senior director, Consumer Experience Team and Next Generation Customer Engagement Strategy, Eli Lilly Japan
- 
Hiroki Kayama
 Strategic partnership development manager, AI for Japan, Google G.K.

Japan Surprises 2023

Ten twists and turns that could make for an interesting Year of the Rabbit

Surprises are the spice of life that make us perk up and challenge our baseline assumptions. And what better time to sprinkle them on than the start of a new year? Of course, there will always be a surprise or two, but here is my annual list of possible surprises that could add up to a heaping load for Japan in 2023. Whichever may come to be, I wish a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year to all!

1. Growth of Japan's GDP outperforms that of the United States, the Europe Union (EU) ... and China.

It has been more than 30 years since Japan's economy last outperformed that of the United States and the EU, so it would be a real surprise if Japan climbs back up this year to become the top G7 growth performer.

Chances are better than ever. While both the United States and the EU poised to be pulled towards recession by the combined effects of rising interest rates and high inflation, Japan has kept interest rates

stable and boosted fiscal spending while private business investment has been accelerating. Thus, outgrowing the United States and the EU should be easy. And if, as I suspect, Japan's consumers open their wallets after three years of austerity, the country's GDP could even outperform China's in 2023.

2. The Bank of Japan (BOJ) maintains zero rates, but the Ministry of Finance insists on raising taxes.

By April, the BOJ will have a new governor. Many expect the new leader will, perhaps sooner rather than later, end Japan's extraordinary monetary policy. Of course, the BOJ will only change policy and step on the monetary brakes if the economy needs slowing down. A real shock would be if the Ministry of Finance insists that the policy braking must come via tighter fiscal policy in general and higher taxes in particular. In Japan, fiscal policy priorities tend to dominate monetary ones, no matter who runs the central bank.



3. Keidanren promotes pay-for-performance compensation.

For the past six years, prime ministers have been lobbying Japanese business leaders to increase wages. A positive surprise would be if the country's biggest business lobby, Keidanren, agrees not only to a three-percent hike in base pay for 2023 but, more importantly, endorses a push for a structural change in Japanese employment culture: merit-based compensation where possible.

Business leaders agreeing to a simple rise in base pay for workers would be good for one year only. Busi-

5. Young LDP leaders promote the abolition of the inheritance tax.

Over the coming 15 years, an estimated ¥500–750 trillion of household wealth will become unstuck due to inheritance. That's 1–1.5 times GDP. Much of this will be used to pay down the national debt.

At more than 50 percent, Japan's inheritance tax rates are famously high. While this makes the accountants happy, it does not create growth nor does it drive investments in future prosperity. A long-overdue, positive surprise would be if Japan's next-generation leaders started to demand reform of the inheritance tax.

A positive surprise would be if the country's biggest business lobby, Keidanren, agrees not only to a three-percent hike in base pay for 2023 but, more importantly, endorses a push for a structural change in Japanese employment culture: merit-based compensation where possible.

ness leaders pushing for reform of employee incentives, however, would create credible prospects for multi-year, productivity-led growth.

4. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida loses a vote of no confidence, calls a snap election.

In politics, Japan is a bastion of stability. In many ways, Kishida appears so much better off than most of his democratically elected peers. His Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has a de facto supermajority in the Diet and he faces no national election until 2025. A surprise would be if Kishida were forced to call a snap election in 2023. Typically, prime ministers exercise their power to dissolve the Diet for one of three reasons:

- They are riding high in the polls and think they can gain even more seats for the LDP
- They are threatened by a revolt from within and need to keep party members in line
- They want to minimize losses as the opposition begins to capitalize on growing voter dissatisfaction with LDP rule

For Kishida, the time of maximum pressure is poised to be right after he hosts global leaders at the Hiroshima G7 Summit in mid-May. If this event does not deliver the expected bounce in his popularity, he may well be forced to take dramatic action to keep his party in line.

Japan could take a clue from the otherwise much-admired Nordics. Recently, Sweden cut its inheritance tax to zero and Denmark dropped its to 15 percent—policies promoting ways to channel the accumulated wealth of the baby boomers into future investments. Now that's worthy of being called New Capitalism.

6. Japan wins major global defense contract.

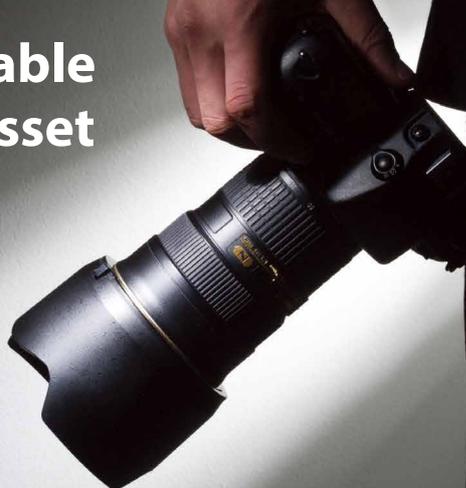
Japanese national security policy made a clear turn in 2022, and the defense budget will be more than doubled, from one to two percent of GDP. A real surprise would be if, on top of increased defense spending, Japan won a major global defense contract. The greater the evidence that Japan's spending on national security is actually an investment in global competitiveness, the happier taxpayers and investors will be.

7. Japan corporate governance goes global, Japanese on Wall Street boards.

Corporate governance reform continues to be on everyone's agenda, yet cross-national corporate board representation has basically been a one-way street. There are now just over 70 non-Japanese serving on the boards of Japanese listed companies—a healthy if small increase from last year's 60—but you can still count on one hand the number of Japanese nationals serving on the boards of US listed companies. There's Oki Matsumoto at Mastercard Inc., Jun Makihara at Philip Morris International Inc., Hiromichi Mizuno at

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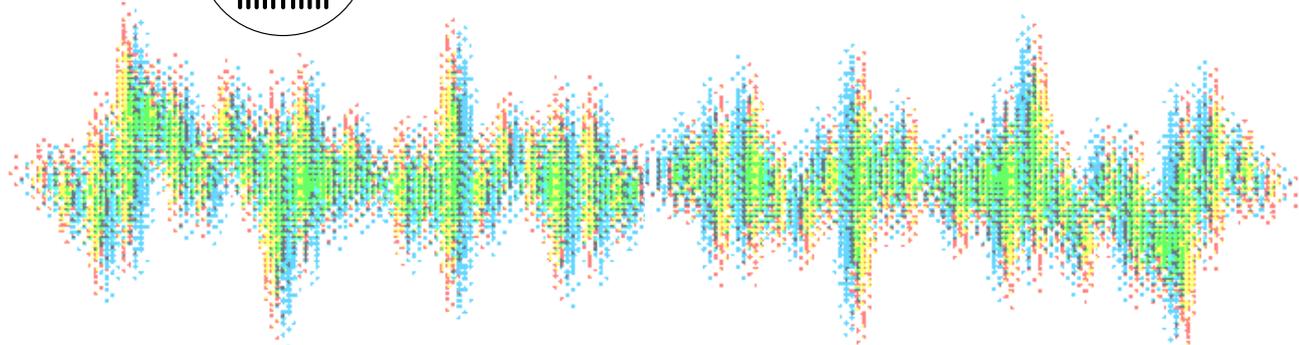
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Tesla, Inc., and Yu Serizawa at the Renault Group. A righting of this imbalance would be a real surprise.

Japanese corporate governance reform has gathered considerable momentum over the past decade. In my view, a good way to judge whether true progress has been made is by whether (or when) US companies begin to appoint Japanese to their boards. At the very least, it would prove that Japan's leaders have become

9. China starts an Asian currency war.

My biggest worry for a negative surprise in 2023 is China being forced to dramatically devalue its currency. Why? Unemployment is rising, the economy is slowing and, since last summer, China has been trying to stimulate growth by easing both monetary and fiscal policy. If China's economy does not respond and does not begin to accelerate by late spring, pressure will rise to use currency devaluation to help kick-start growth. China starting a currency war in Asia would force a dramatic disruption of the prospects for prosperity in Japan and around the world.

10. Kyoto receives more Michelin stars than Paris.

Since 2007, Tokyo has been the world's culinary supercity, consistently beating Paris in the annual Michelin star rankings. The 2022 tally was 263 stars for Tokyo versus 152 for Paris. Less known is that Kyoto has been gaining on Paris and, after receiving 129 stars in 2022, could well surpass the French capital in 2023 for a well-deserved Japan one-two finish in the gourmet

While the world is obsessed with speculating on whether the United States or China will win the race for technological supremacy, Japan has the potential to become a surprise champ in at least one big category: quantum computing.

more global, more open-minded, and are now capable of demonstrating to global peers how Japan-style corporate stewardship can be very relevant when building a better, more sustainable, and inclusive world. Perhaps an even bigger surprise would be US CEOs actually listening to their advice.

8. Japan develops a working quantum computer.

While the world is obsessed with speculating on whether the United States or China will win the race for technological supremacy, Japan has the potential to become a surprise champ in at least one big category: quantum computing. Specifically, Toshiba's engineering team is, by many accounts, consistently on the cutting edge of all things quantum computing, be it the manufacturing of a physical machine or the software needed to control it. Success in creating a scalable quantum computing solution would certainly mark a welcome return of the former crown jewel of Japan's engineering prowess.

world cup. Of course, the real surprise would be if this double defeat were to trigger a change in Parisian waiters' attitudes. How do you say *omotenashi* in French? ■



(RE)OPEN FOR BUSINESS

JAPAN'S LONG JOURNEY TO OPEN BORDERS AND WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR BUSINESS AND EDUCATION



It isn't easy to do business when you're standing outside staring through the window. But that's the situation so many found themselves in during much of the pandemic, thanks to some of the world's most stringent border restrictions. Japan's reluctance to allow non-citizens to enter the country, slowness in loosening the reins, and insistence on complicated and costly requirements once the trickle was allowed to start put both domestic and non-Japanese companies in a tough spot.

Getting these policies eased became a centerpiece of advocacy for the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) and other foreign chambers in 2021, and the efforts continued in 2022. It took most of the year to get the desired results, but Japan finally reopened its borders to mostly normal travel, including visa-free entry, just months ago, on October 11. And now we look ahead to 2023.

Long Road

When Japan placed visa restrictions on travelers from 38 countries at midnight on March 21, 2020, no one imagined the journey back to normality would take so long. There was still the feeling that this would be a short-term measure to minimize the duration of the pandemic, which itself was expected to pass within months if strict steps were taken. But by May 27, the list had grown to 111 countries, including the United States, and it had become clear that Covid-19 wasn't going away anytime soon.

The ACCJ, other foreign chambers, and the European Business Council in Japan set out on a long advocacy journey calling for fair and equal treatment of foreign residents. Eventually, two of the most influential domestic lobbies—the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) and the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai)—added their voices, and on November 8, 2021, the Japanese government temporarily loosened restrictions on business travelers and students.

The move was welcome, but many agreed more was needed. The ACCJ continued to

push for change in 2022, and the chamber's advocacy received broad exposure in media, with coverage by Bloomberg, Kyodo News, and *Nikkei Asia*, and in Japanese through the *Mainichi Shimbun* and NHK.

On March 3, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced that the daily cap on entrants would be raised from 5,000 to 7,000 on March 14. More phases played out as small-scale tours were allowed and the daily arrival cap raised to 20,000 in June. Another rise to 50,000 came in September, and the country fully reopened in October.

“Our experience during the pandemic demonstrated that the ACCJ remains the single most important vehicle in Japan for its members to address shared concerns with Japanese and US leaders and with the media,” Christopher J. LaFleur told *The ACCJ Journal*. LaFleur, who was ACCJ chair when the pandemic began and later served as a special advisor, often spoke to media on behalf of the chamber about the border issue and advocacy positions.

“We also demonstrated our unique capacity to bring together like-minded organizations to amplify our impact. Moving forward, the chamber should continue to monitor travel policies as it focuses on other high priority issues, such as economic security and digital transformation.”

Then and Now

Just before the November 2021 announcement, ACCJ members shared with *The ACCJ Journal* how the strung-out restrictions had impacted their businesses.

Kenneth Lebrun, a partner with the law firm Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP in Tokyo and co-chair of the ACCJ FDI and Global Economic Cooperation Committee, said his business had been impacted in two ways. “First, we have been unable to bring new employees to Japan, whether internal rotations from our US offices or external hires, because the government is not issuing new long-term work visas. This has impacted the ability of professional service firms to provide services to Japanese clients concerning their overseas operations,” he explained.



Kenneth Lebrun
Partner, Davis Polk
& Wardwell LLP
Co-chair, ACCJ
FDI and Global
Economic Cooperation
Committee



**Christopher J.
LaFleur**
Senior director
for Japan, McLarty
Associates



Catherine O'Connell
Founder, Catherine
O'Connell Law
Co-chair, ACCJ
Legal Services and
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“In addition, the blanket ban on foreign business travelers coming to Japan—and the quarantine requirements for Japanese residents traveling abroad, and then returning to Japan—has negatively affected the level of cross-border investment and M&A activity, which is a significant portion of our business.”

Revisiting these issues now, Lebrun said that the Japanese government’s resumption of issuing business visas in 2022 allowed the firm to bring new hires and rotations from its US offices to work in Tokyo and thus return normality to its services.

He also feels optimistic about M&A recovery. “As Japanese companies typically desire to conduct site visits and meet face-to-face with the management of potential acquisition targets, the easing of border restrictions has encouraged many Japanese

“Long before the pandemic, I was well placed to service corporate clients who need efficient, competent, and practical legal advice, tapping into a network of specialist Japanese lawyers to cover all aspects of the law. This has only gotten better during the pandemic for me, so I have full confidence the work will be consistent and rewarding.”

O’Connell, who serves as independent audit and supervisory board member for Fujitsu Limited—the first foreign woman to hold the position—also sees benefits in other areas as a result of the pandemic.

“Performing my outside board roles has also become far easier and acceptable to do remotely outside Japan when necessary—yet another pandemic silver lining,” she explained. “In my view, the border closure has not impeded the advancement in board governance as companies continue to hire

As Japanese companies typically desire to conduct site visits and meet face-to-face with the management of potential acquisition targets, the easing of border restrictions has encouraged many Japanese companies to resume their overseas acquisition activities.

companies to resume their overseas acquisition activities,” he said while noting a caveat.

“The rebound of outbound M&A has been tempered by the strong yen, which makes foreign assets more expensive, but I am optimistic that cross-border M&A will return to pre-Covid levels during 2023 as the macroeconomic and demographic trends underpinning Japanese companies’ desire for overseas growth remain unchanged.”

Catherine O’Connell expects that increased business activities involving non-Japanese companies and entrepreneurs will boost her own law practice, Catherine O’Connell Law. Co-chair of the ACCJ Legal Services and IP Committee, O’Connell believes that demand for fractional general counsel support for businesses will expand.

“As borders open, people need experienced, bilingual lawyers to ensure full compliance across all their business activities,” she said.

directors and statutory auditors who are based overseas for part of the year.”

Learning Again

Another sector significantly affected was education. Matt Wilson, president and dean of Temple University, Japan Campus (TUJ), expressed concerns to *The ACCJ Journal* in November 2021 over the impact on TUJ’s students and Japan’s reputation.

“Because of the borders being closed, we have had some long-term, degree-seeking students who decided they were going to attend other institutions, take an indefinite leave of absence, or simply abandon their plans to study here in Japan,” he said. “Our concern is that the patience of our current students who are unable to enter Japan will run thin, and they will burn out on online education at strange hours in their home countries. They could decide to take a leave of absence or pursue other opportunities.”



Matt Wilson
President and dean,
Temple University,
Japan Campus



Mark Davidson
Director of
government and
external affairs,
Amway Japan GK

Chair, ACCJ
Government
Relations Committee



Jiro Kawakami
Vice president and
chief of staff,
MGM Resorts LLC

ACCJ Vice
President-Kansai

Fortunately, the situation has improved greatly, he said when asked how things have progressed. “The reopening of the country to educators and students in March 2022 has turned the tide, and students seeking an international experience in Japan have flocked to our campus since the reopening while expert faculty from our main campus in Philadelphia have started asking about short-term teaching opportunities on our campus,” he explained.

“And due to a major influx of overseas students and increased interest among domestically based students, TUJ’s undergraduate program has soared to new heights, reaching a record 1,841 students. In 2020, TUJ’s undergraduate enrollment was about 1,250.”

change (CULCON)—to launch an online portal in 2019 where ACCJ member companies can post internship openings. He hopes the progress made on reopening entry into the country for students will spur development of more internship opportunities.

“In the post-pandemic world, I hope that both foreign-based and Japanese companies will redouble efforts to offer substantive, US-style internship programs to Japanese and foreign students alike,” he said. We need to get beyond the one-size-fits-all, lockstep *shukatsu* system and promote more flexible, practical, and innovative approaches to hiring. A serious internship program will help companies to win the war for talent and also contribute to cultivating the kind of

The reopening of the country to educators and students in March 2022 has turned the tide, and students seeking an international experience in Japan have flocked to our campus since the reopening while expert faculty from our main campus in Philadelphia have started asking about short-term teaching opportunities.

Mark Davidson, a board member of TUJ as well as the U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation, which awards scholarships to US undergraduate students to study in Japan for one semester or an academic year, said, “I’m delighted to say that inbound student mobility is back to pre-pandemic levels.”

Davidson, who also serves as vice-chair of the ACCJ Education Committee, is a strong advocate of internships and helped the ACCJ—together with the Embassy of the United States, Tokyo, and the US-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Inter-

globally talented young people that every company—and Japan as a whole—needs to succeed and prosper in the 21st century.”

TUJ’s remarkable recovery certainly points in a positive direction for young talent in Japan’s future. “With the borders open, TUJ is seeing strong demand for 10 undergraduate degrees and short-term study abroad programs from the United States and around the world,” Wilson explained. “In 2023, we anticipate that this will continue so long as Japan continues to prioritize entry for students and educators. Based on



Educational Recovery

Temple University, Japan Campus has seen undergraduate enrollment grow beyond pre-pandemic levels.

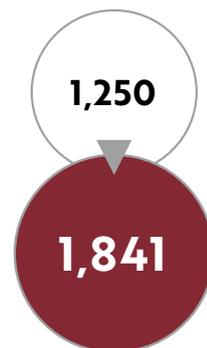




Image: MGM Resorts International

MGM Resorts' Osaka integrated resort concept.

a weaker yen and issues with China's approach to the pandemic, now is a prime time for Japan to attract students seeking higher education."

Have Ticket, Will Travel

Perhaps the most noticeable impact of the border closures was the end of tourism. Some 32.5 million tourists visited Japan in 2019, and the government had set a target of 40 million for 2020. But just 2,900 foreign nationals arrived in April 2020, down 99.9 percent from the same month a year before. It was the first time since 1964 that the monthly arrivals figure had slumped below 10,000. And it's been a slow climb out of that hole.

Now that tourists can once again enter the country, ACCJ Vice President-Kansai Jiro Kawakami, who is vice president and chief of staff at MGM Resorts LLC, is positive about Japan's prospects for a robust tourism recovery.

"The signs are starting to emerge in the form of high occupancy and rates at hotels, large crowds at tourist sites in Tokyo and Kyoto, as well as popular attractions such as Tokyo Disneyland and Universal Studios Japan," he said. "China was the largest source of inbound tourism before the pandemic, and we should see some of that segment return as their government eases outbound travel restrictions."

Prior to the pandemic, there was much talk of building Japan's first integrated resort (IR), and a number of companies were competing for the license to do so. While tourism came to a stop due to Covid-19, the IR process did not. MGM Resorts and Orix Corporation were awarded rights in September 2021 and Kawakami said they are now in the process

of applying for a license to develop Japan's first IR in Yumeshima, Osaka.

"Osaka's IR candidate site is the same location as the 2025 Osaka Kansai Expo," he explained. "We look forward to hearing back from the Government of Japan in the near future. In the meantime, we continue to work closely with tourism and hospitality stakeholders in Kansai to develop Osaka into a global tourism hub leading up to the 2025 Expo and projected 2029 opening of the IR in Osaka."

O'Connell is also confident tourism will rebound, and events such as the 2025 Expo may be well timed for what she expects to be a gradual recovery.

"Any tourist who traveled here for the Rugby World Cup in 2019 has Japan as their last fantastic, vivid travel memory," she said. "So I believe Japan is a very hot travel destination and people will be desperate to return. That said, I'm happy if tourism is slower and more controlled than before to prevent overtourism of Japan's scenic spots."

Resolution

LaFleur said that, through its advocacy on travel restrictions over the past three years, the ACCJ helped its members and the broader foreign community in Japan secure fair treatment and a reopening of borders that sustains both public health and the economy.

"Covid and its aftereffects remain global challenges," he added. "However, the ACCJ can and should continue urging Japan and its global partners to ensure their health policies enable the fullest possible economic recovery, not least because stronger economies are crucial to ensuring our countries have the resources to maintain global peace and security." ■

Stronger Together

The ACCJ promotes US, Japan, and regional collaboration for economic security

The US–Japan partnership is the cornerstone of peace, security, and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, and the alliance got a boost in May when US President Joe Biden, visiting Tokyo, launched the Indo–Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) with a dozen initial partners.

The launch came soon after the introduction of the Economic Security Promotion Bill in the Diet in February and was a welcome development for the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ), which believes that Japan's efforts to promote economic security represent an important opportunity to further strengthen the vital bilateral partnership.

IPEF is built on four key pillars:

- Connected economy
- Resilient economy
- Clean economy
- Fair economy

The ACCJ was honored to be present at the launch, with leaders in the room with Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while officials from 10 other IPEF member nations joined online.

The task force announced six principles to maximize the contributions of foreign companies to further enhance Japan's attractiveness as a place for business to invest, innovate, and grow.

In announcing IPEF, the White House said in a fact sheet that “the United States and our partners in the region believe that much of our success in the coming decades will depend on how well governments harness innovation—especially the transformations afoot in the clean energy, digital, and technology sectors—while fortifying our economies against a range of threats, from fragile supply chains to corruption to tax havens.”

In addition to Japan and India, those partners are Australia, Brunei, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam. There is an open invitation to other nations to join.

Task Force on Economic Security

Along with entry restrictions, digital economy, health-care, and sustainable society, economic security was one of the ACCJ's five key advocacy pillars in 2022.

With the Diet taking up the Economic Security Promotion Bill and IPEF approaching launch, in February the chamber formed a Task Force on Economic Security, led by Chair Arthur Mitchell and Vice-Chairs Shuichi Izumo, David Richards, Eric Sedlak, Megumi Tsukamoto, and Toshiki Yano.

On April 12, in support of the efforts by the Government of Japan (GOJ) to promote Japan–US economic security in the context of further strengthening the US–Japan partnership, the task force announced six principles to maximize the contributions of foreign companies to further enhance Japan's attractiveness as a place for business to invest, innovate, and grow. These are:

1. Maintain commitment to economic growth and free market principles.
2. Work with partner countries and ensure a level playing field.
3. Define critical infrastructure, equipment, and services narrowly and clearly.
4. Ensure transparent and fair processes
5. Leverage global best practices.
6. Reinforce US–Japan economic collaboration.

The first notes that the promotion of competitive and efficiently regulated markets, as well as open trade and investment, are essential to harnessing the dynamism of the private sector to drive economic growth, prosperity, and overall welfare in Japan. Ensuring predictability, consistency, and alignment across various regulations, while avoiding overly prescriptive, inconsistent, or duplicative measures that risk impairing market dynamism, is key.



From left: ACCJ Economic Security Task Force Vice-Chair Shuichi Izumo, then-Economic Security Minister Takayuki Kobayashi, ACCJ President Om Prakash, task force Chair Arthur Mitchell, and Vice-Chair Megumi Tsukamoto

The second points out that allowing new market entrants fair access and guaranteeing fair treatment of all market participants is critical. Any measures to introduce differential treatment on the basis of promoting economic security should be narrow, targeted, and not undermine the ability of companies from allied and like-minded countries to continue making important contributions to Japan's economic welfare and economic security.

The third requires that certain infrastructure, equipment, and services designated as critical be narrowly and clearly scoped, and not cover wide categories of offerings in Japan. This will help ensure that the right resources are applied to protecting the parts of the infrastructure that are most essential, and not extended to non-critical systems.

The fourth asks the GOJ to ensure ample opportunity for broad stakeholder engagement at all stages of development, implementation, and enforcement of rules related to economic security. Ensuring that procedures such as notification or reporting requirements are clear, simple, reliable, and appropriately scoped—and are informed on an ongoing basis by private sector engagement and expertise—will be critical, the task force says, to avoiding negative unintended consequences and achieving their intended goals.

The fifth notes that the adoption of global best practices will promote efficiency and sound regulation, thereby helping Japan benefit from innovation and expertise developed across the globe. By proactively engaging with like-minded countries, such as the United States, the GOJ can develop and elevate best practices as internationally recognized standards, including with regard to ensuring data free flows with trust.

The final principle calls for bilateral mechanisms for cooperation, such as the US–Japan Economic Policy Consultative Committee, established in January 2022, as well as multilateral groupings such as the G7 and IPEF, to be leveraged to share best practices and promote alignment and interoperability in each country's respective mechanisms for promoting economic security.

Task force Chair Mitchell, Vice-Chairs Izumo and Tsukamoto, and ACCJ President Om Prakash had the honor of discussing the principles directly with then-Economic Security Minister Takayuki Kobayashi on April 21.

With the passage on May 11 of the Act for the Promotion of Ensuring National Security through Integrated Implementation of Economic Measures by the Diet, IPEF underway, and Japan set to host the G7 Summit in Hiroshima in May, economic security will continue to play a key role in ACCJ advocacy throughout 2023. ■



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Perfect Powder

A luxurious winter escape from Tokyo is just a few hours away in Hakuba

Listening lakes and rivers in summer, flamingly vibrant foliage in fall, and delicate powder snow in winter have made Hakuba a top destination for Japan's international residents in recent years. The explosion of expats flocking to the valley for powder skiing and reconnecting with nature is boosted by other things that separate Hakuba from similar resort areas in Japan: its proximity to Tokyo and its international flair.

Hakuba Hotel Group (HHG) has been a driving force behind the development of the area over the past 10 years. Launched in 2012 with the purchase of the Hakuba Springs Hotel, HHG has grown from a small hotel operator to the Hakuba Valley's largest hospitality company. The group owns or manages hotels, apartments, chalets, travel agencies, and events, as well as restaurants and bars featuring some of Asia's most premium accommodations and dining. HHG is truly all things Hakuba.

Chalets and Apartments

HHG manages a portfolio of more than 50 premium chalets and apartments situated in prime locations surrounding the Happo-One Resort, host to downhill and Super-G Alpine skiing during the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. The properties combine the creature comforts of Western homes with the convenience of a fully serviced hotel. Guests can access a 24-hour concierge team, receive food and wine deliveries, and use complimentary resort and restaurant shuttle services.

The newest property is the ski-in, ski-out Roka Apartments. Completed in 2021, the eight serviced luxury units are the most exclusive in Hakuba.

Hotels

HHG hotels range from rustic and cozy to modern and sleek. The flagship property The Happo is among the most modern in Hakuba, having recently reopened after extensive renovation. With 30 rooms in the heart of Happo Village, 200 meters from the Happo-One slopes and surrounded by Hakuba's best dining and nightlife, The Happo features onsen and Finnish sauna, a restaurant, bar, café, rental shop, and retail store.



Dining

Mimi's Restaurant & Bar is the jewel of the Hakuba culinary scene and among the few true fine-dining experiences in the valley. This HHG venue has ranked as Hakuba's No. 1 restaurant on TripAdvisor for several years running. Other group restaurants include The Rabbit Hole, Blizzard Pizza, and The Grill.

Premium Partnerships

HHG is proud to be partnering with Land Rover to provide the most stylish shuttle service in Hakuba. Chalet and apartment guests receive complimentary shuttles to the ski slopes and local restaurants in Range Rover and Defender vehicles.

The group has also teamed up with Hyperice to help guests at The Happo recover and recharge with premium massage guns after a day of powder skiing. ■

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Yonezawa Artistry

Local textiles reflect a passion to create and determination to preserve

Legacy and vision. Two words that describe and drive Gentaro Nitta's Nitta Textile Arts and Michiko Yamakuchi's Yozando. Both are eminent textile enterprises based in Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture, and manifest a celebration of the past as the industry looks toward the future.

Nitta Textile Art Inc.

To fifth-generation head Gentaro Nitta, "the past is not a burden, but a window." Nitta Textile Art's forward-thinking production model triumphantly draws on the past to produce one-of-a-kind, hand-crafted elegance made from the highest quality silk, woven on wooden looms by local experts employing skills passed down for centuries. These silk masterpieces, painstakingly colored with locally sourced dyes made from hand-picked safflowers, radiate colors ranging from the subtlest hues of pearl to the company's renowned shades of crimson.

It's not that Nitta's traditions—its safflower cultivation and silk dyeing techniques—are separate processes; rather the agricultural and artistic traditions merge to form an integrated whole, developed together over centuries and applied organically and harmoniously in response to the land and local climate.

Conditions, Nitta explains, change throughout the year, according to the season. In sum, the human arts—be they agricultural or artistic—depend on and reflect the demands of the land and the challenges of the climate.



Photo: Nitta Fabric Art Inc.

Formal kimono safflower with luxurious crimson hue.



Photo: Yamakuchi Orimono Yozando

The Yoneori Komon range includes a wide variety of products with seasonal as well as traditional designs.

Yamakuchi Orimono Yozando

Designer, proprietress, and curator Michiko Yamakuchi leads a whirlwind tour of her multiple facilities, including a quaint retail shop, coffee-house art gallery, and petite cabin that houses her coffee bean roasting ovens. An extraordinary manufacturing site reveals the enormous Japanese-Italian weaving machines which bring Michiko's designs to life, while a cavernous art gallery houses art pieces by internationally recognized artist Hideo Yamakuchi.

Michiko's creativity is manifest in the intricate, unbroken patterns of her seasonal designs (shown above), be they purses, handbags, tablemats, coasters, or traditional *furoshiki* wrapping cloths. The seamless patterns echo the finest, perfectly aligned wallpapers.

Colors and designs are abundant and change with the seasons; winter holiday products are currently on view. Items are reversible—for example, red on white on one side, white on red on the other.

Most other products affirm the designer's emphasis on a practical aesthetic that instills beauty in everyday objects, such as bags for smartphones and temple diaries, and by using washable cotton fabrics and creating designs that reduce leftover materials.

Together, Nitta Textile Art and Yamakuchi Orimono Yozando provide a window not only into Yonezawa's artistic past but also its future. ■

Learn more about Yonezawa in English:





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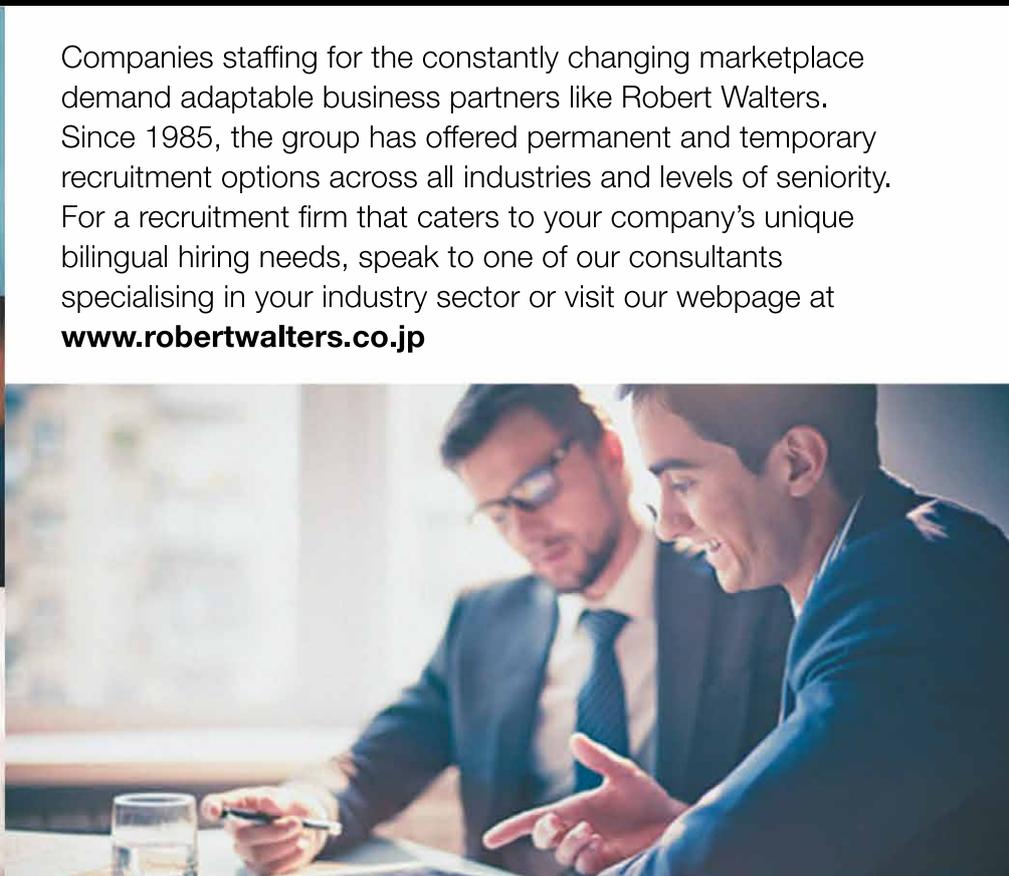
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