

# myriad leaves

JUNE 2005



万葉

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE JAPAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTRE, LONDON

**Myriad Leaves** is the English-language title for the earliest collection of Japanese poetry. It contains 4,516 waka poems, the last of which is dated AD759. There is uncertainty over the intention of the title: it could mean either 'Collection of ten thousand leaves' or 'Collection for ten thousand generations'.

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## Bank set up by Tokyo Metropolitan Government

On 1st April, a new bank "ShinGinko Tokyo Ltd" was established by Tokyo Metropolitan Government. The venture aims to fill a gap in the market, targeting small to medium sized businesses to offer loans without collateral. Of particular attraction to customers are the "Smart" cards which will function not only as their bank cards but as credit, railway and frequent flyer cards.

Five branches will open by the summer, however Tokyo intends to close its department responsible for setting up the bank and withdraw its staff on secondment, so they can take the role of shareholders and the bank can be managed independently.

Altogether there are 64 regional banks in Japan, which continue to maintain popularity by tailoring their business to the demands of their region.

## Cheshire targets Japanese tourists with new website

Cheshire County Council launched a new website aimed exclusively at Japanese tourists on 12th April 2005. The website is unique as it is the first county tourism website to be designed and written specifically with a Japanese audience in mind, unlike other UK tourism websites in Japanese which are simply translated from English.

Ideally situated between the Lake District and the Cotswolds, Cheshire is already



a target for stopovers from Japanese tourists. The website not only highlights attractions which are particularly popular among the Japanese; such as Chester Rows, the historic shopping streets; the cathedral; flowers and gardens; and the racecourse, which is the oldest in Britain; but it also contains a section devoted to business in Cheshire, aiming to attract investment from Japan.

The website is part of an initiative to recover and improve upon tourist numbers to the area following the decline after foot-in-mouth disease, SARS and 9-11. In 2003, 19,000 Japanese visitors came to Cheshire, contributing £8 million to the economy. The target is to reach 36,000 visitors and £17 million.

## jlgc news

- 9 May** JLGC staff attended the **British-Japanese Parliamentary Group Annual Reception**
- 31 May – 1 June** JLGC staff attended the **Council of Europe Congress of local and regional authorities.**
- 4 – 7 July** **The JLGC will be manning a booth at the LGA Annual Conference.**
- July – August** **The JLGC will meet with JET Alumni Association regional representatives to offer support to their activities and conduct opinion exchanges.**

Last November ten people from UK local government travelled to Japan for nine days to participate in our annual study tour. The first few days were spent in Tokyo, touring the city and taking part in a seminar on international exchange, with the chance to meet local government delegates from various countries.

*was obvious that Japanese local government has the provision of facilities for its citizens high on the agenda. The quality of the public facilities we have visited during our stay can only be dreamt of by UK local government officers. Visiting Japan and studying its culture by many methods has been an experience I will never forget.*

**Linda Larter,**  
Weston-super-Mare Town Council

# *japan study tour*



The tour then moved on to Shizuoka prefecture, home to Mount Fuji, as well as internationally known companies such as Yamaha pianos, Honda and Suzuki. Following the theme of "International Cooperation in Cultural Education", participants visited arts and cultural facilities in Shizuoka, as well as learning about the prefecture's policies and cultural administration. Each participant had the opportunity to experience a short homestay with a Japanese family.

## Comments from Participants

*The administration and local government studies were very thought provoking. It*

*The tour has been excellent! I found the whole programme very informative, educational and thoroughly interesting. I particularly enjoyed the visit to the Prefecture and to [Tokyo] City Hall. One of the highlights –among many- was my stay with my host family. A truly unforgettable experience. I am looking forward to*



*welcoming them to my house in Derbyshire! I found every aspect of the study tour exceeded my expectation.*

**Rod Cook, Derbyshire County Council**



1. Participants meeting their host families
2. Observing lessons at a school in Shizuoka
3. Shizuoka is home to Mt Fuji, shown here in the background

## Would you like to visit Japan to study local government?

This year's tour will be held from Sunday 20th to Wednesday 30th November 2005.

The tour will begin with a visit to Tokyo where participants will get an introduction to local government in Japan. Then, following the theme: "The IT revolution and local government", participants will travel to Okayama prefecture in Western Japan, to learn about local government in Okayama and participate in visits and meetings relevant to the theme.

Participants will also experience a short homestay with a Japanese family.

For further information please visit our website:  
[www.jlgc.org.uk](http://www.jlgc.org.uk)

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# feature

## Mergers in Japan

Cities, towns and villages all over Japan hurried to finish paperwork allowing them to officially merge this spring. While in the UK a mixed system of two-tier areas and unitary areas exists side-by-side and a move towards a completely unitary system looks increasingly likely, in Japan a uniform two-tier system is rolled out across the country, and it is within this two tier system that mergers are taking place.

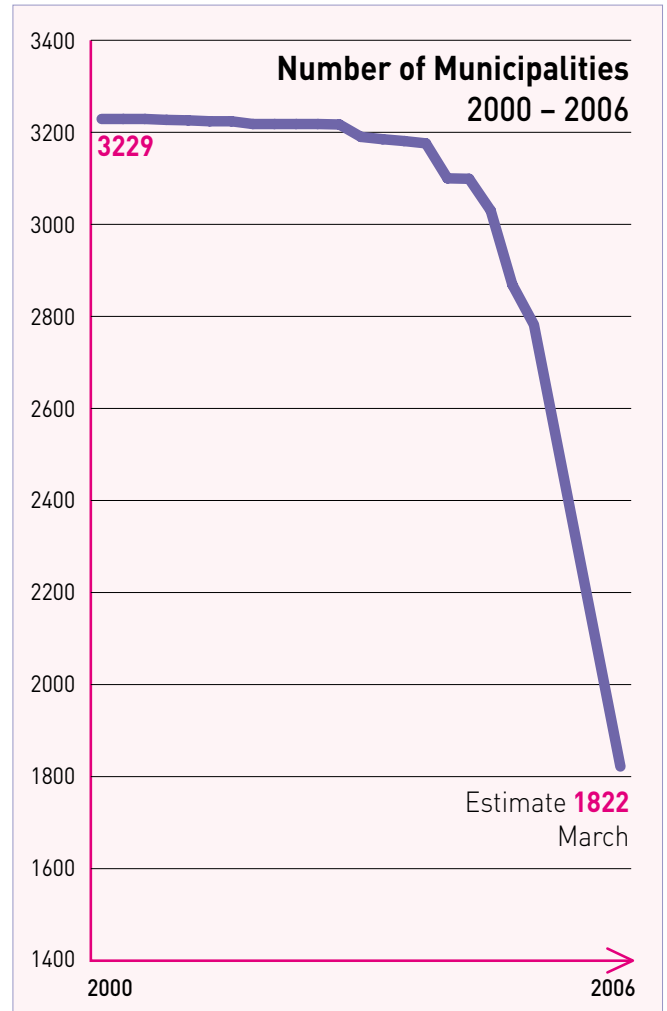
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As of 1 January 2005, there were 47 prefectures (roughly equivalent to UK counties), and 2869 cities, towns and villages (the municipalities) which loosely correspond to districts in the UK. Mergers are occurring in the first tier of government which is closest to citizens; the cities, towns and villages.

Local autonomy is guaranteed according to the Japanese constitution, so although there is plenty of encouragement from the government, it is down to each city, town or village and their inhabitants themselves to decide whether to merge or not.

There are many reasons as to why the government is supporting and encouraging mergers, however the principal reason is to promote regional decentralisation of power. Japan has double the population of the UK, living in one and a half times the area. The UK has just over 400 local authority units, whereas Japan has almost 3000, many of which are small municipalities, the smallest having only 200 inhabitants. It is becoming increasingly difficult for small units such as these to meet the demands of their citizens. Until recently the government provided tax allocation grants, the equivalent of UK revenue support grants, to ensure that basic services such as education, welfare, water and waste collection can be provided for citizens. However, local authorities will have to increase their financial independence due to the national government's severe financial situation as well as efforts to devolve and decentralise.

Municipalities in Japan carry out a wide range of administrative functions, however, acquiring the right staff to



support their work is becoming a struggle. In particular, there is a shortage of skilled workers such as building engineers and civil engineering inspectors. On another note, due to the rapidly ageing society, it is becoming more and more difficult to meet demands such as providing long-term care insurance, and other new administrative services. Local authorities need to work together to cover a wider area as a result.

So following much consideration and discussion, many neighbouring cities, towns and villages all over Japan decided to merge together, expanding in scale. The number of employees and assembly members were cut back as municipalities pressed on with administrative reform to ensure better efficiency, still aiming to meet citizens' demands for a high standard of service.

The government accordingly offered support in the form of financial assistance towards the new expenses that mergers generate. Prefectures also devised necessary support measures to aid mergers, and as a result the number of municipalities will decrease by 40%, from 3200 in 1999 to approximately 1900 by 2006.

With the end of fiscal 2004 marking the deadline for government financial aid, this spring saw a rush of completed mergers, followed by around 80 mayoral elections to determine the leaders of the newly merged municipalities. (In Japan all mayors are elected directly by citizens.) Not all mergers got past the planning stages however; in some cases proposed mergers were abandoned due to citizens' concerns over the deterioration of the community.

As change to local government boundaries is an issue closely involving citizens, it is always controversial. Many communities are concerned about the loss of democratic representation and control, although interim measures have been put in place everywhere to ease into the changes – for example, the number of elected councillors will only be reduced gradually. However, it should be an effective way of improving services to citizens.

Shigeru Naiki, JLGC Director



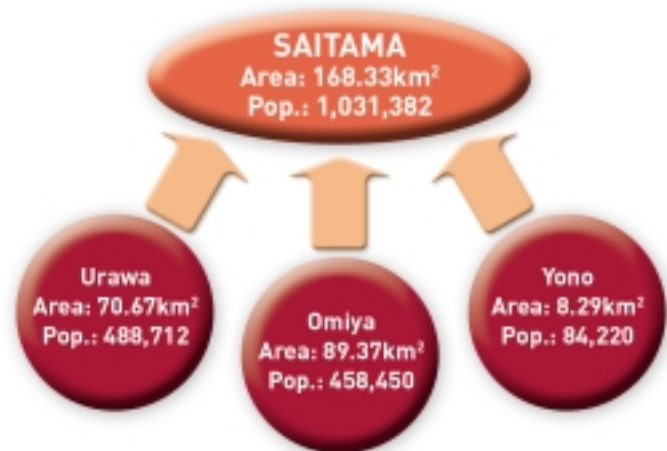
## Creating new cities

The rush of mergers leading up to 31st March 2005 has created several new "designated cities". According to the Local Autonomy Law; cities with over 500,000 inhabitants can legally become designated cities, however, in reality only those with populations over 700,000 stand a good chance of being nominated.

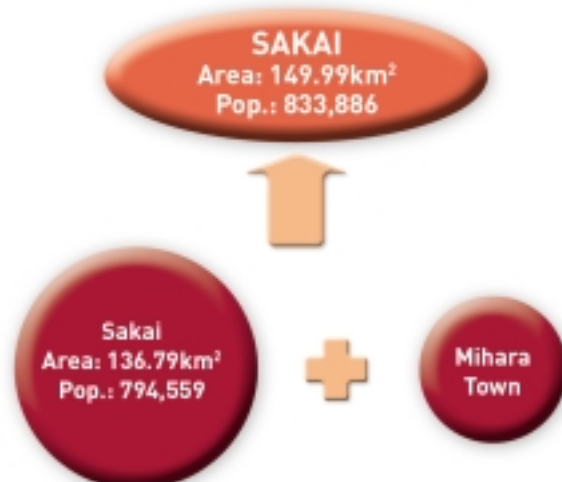
After the three cities of Urawa, Omiya and Yono to the North of Tokyo merged together in April 2003, the newly formed city of Saitama was nominated as a designated city. Likewise, after Sakai city (near Osaka) completes its merge with neighbouring Mihara, a much smaller town, the boost in population should be enough for it to become a designated city.

How are designated cities different from ordinary cities? Usually some services within a city will be provided by the prefecture (county) to which it belongs, but designated cities manage all their affairs as a unitary authority, independent of the prefecture within which they are located.

### Saitama City Merger



### Sakai City Merger



**Kumamoto Prefecture**

**Population: 1,855,000**

**Area: 7,404.31km<sup>2</sup>**

Kumamoto prefecture is situated on the large southern island of Kyushu. Known for its spectacular natural beauty, Kumamoto is home to the world's largest caldera, Mount Aso. Mt. Aso stretches 24km from north to south, and one of its peaks, Nakadake, belches out smoke, reminding the 50,000 people living in the vicinity that it is still active.

Over 60% of Kumamoto is covered by forest. The region also boasts the most delicious water in Japan, from four natural underground springs.

The economy relies heavily on its rich agricultural resources, producing vegetables, rice and fruit. Kumamoto is Japan's biggest producer of watermelons, tomatoes, and also rushes used to make tatami mats. Electronics, vehicle manufacturing and food processing are also significant secondary industries.

Kumamoto faces similar problems to many other cities in Japan; an ageing society (the ratio of the population over 65 is 22.8%, a little over the national ratio of 19%); a decrease in population due to the low birth rate; and depletion of the young workforce as more young people move away to bigger and more central cities. The prefectural government is taking steps to counter these problems, aiming to improve the region to attract new residents and entice current inhabitants to stay.

During the last few years the city centre has been revitalised to create a vibrant downtown area, with shopping arcades and a new contemporary art museum.

# Kumamoto – Fire and Water

Plans to better connect Kumamoto with the surrounding region by transport are already under way with the new bullet train line which is due to be completed in 2012. The government is tackling everything from policies to encourage growth and competition in local industries, to dealing with the effects of the ageing society, such as funding for special housing for the elderly. Protecting the natural environment is also a priority: the government is working to clean up Ariake and Yatsushiro bays.



1. Carp flags hung out to celebrate Children's Day in May
2. Boating on the Kumagawa
3. Iwato Kagura Festival

Photos courtesy of Japan National Tourist Organization

Tetsuya Fukushima, one of JLGC's Assistant Directors and born and bred in Kumamoto, says his favourite part of Kumamoto is Amakusa, a cluster of 120 islands off the coast where his hometown is located. "The area used to be home to Japanese Christians as Christianity was introduced to Japan through this area, so there are many old Christian cemeteries. But nowadays Amakusa is a paradise for marine sports, fishing and dolphin watching."

## Letter from a JET

This issue we catch up with Victoria who is coming to the end of her second year as a Coordinator of International Relations (CIR) as part of the JET programme. Victoria is based at Yamaguchi Prefectural University.

Local government. When I think about these two words my first thought is the man that pays my wages. Other than that I feel local government has had little impact on my life. This prompted me to dig a little deeper into the mystery that is Yamaguchi Local Government. Little did I realise that the local government is responsible for just about every aspect of my existence here in Japan. Education, tourism, town regeneration, even down to rubbish collection - it appears that their work is evident everywhere.

A project that influences me more noticeably is the recent forging of sister city relations between Yamaguchi and Navarra, Spain. This has been a project ongoing for over two years now and last November we were able to finalise and sign the sister city agreement when the Navarra mayor visited Yamaguchi. This would not affect my university much; however, we are also setting up an exchange programme with the State University of Navarra. This has created a lot of hard work for all involved and the letters flying back and forward in no common language also create hard work for me! There is rarely a day that goes by when a member of my office doesn't sigh and say "Tori, if only you could speak Spanish"!

When I first started as a CIR in Yamaguchi and heard about the Navarra sister city and exchange project I assumed that some high-level bureaucrat had merely stuck a pin in a map and that's how we ended up with a sister city in Spain.



As I was always warned, assuming is a mistake. To better understand the project and the motivations behind it I started to look into the history of Yamaguchi and also Navarra, somewhere I knew nothing about. It turns out that Yamaguchi and Navarra have a deep history that stretches back to 1549 when Saint Francis Xavier landed in Japan as a Christian missionary. According to the accounts of his missionary, he loved Japan and the kindness of the Japanese people and more than anywhere else he loved Yamaguchi for the fruits of his teachings were richer here than anywhere else. So in his memory stands the Yamaguchi Xavier Memorial Church



despite Yamaguchi prefecture having one of the smallest Christian populations in all of Japan.

Although, starting with the church, there are many more links between our two local governments now and the future is looking bright, but busy, for the two regions. With frequent modern day missions being made by politicians to ensure the continuance of a smooth and profitable relationship and both teachers and students preparing to leave for Spain for their exchange programmes the university office and the related branches of the local government are working flat out to ensure a prosperous relationship between the two. Furthermore the local community and government's interest in all things Spanish is palpable; there is an abundance of Spanish foodstuffs in the shops, many people have Navarra-Yamaguchi pins on their suits, Spanish films, programmes and articles are appearing in the local media and even the local Flamenco club is flourishing. So when I now wonder how the local government affects my life, I realise that the local government is, in this case, indirectly responsible for the internationalisation of our community and the increased interest in Spain. And this in turn makes my job easier and my community better rounded. In turn, I find I now spend less time pondering the mystery that is local government!



*Victoria Bentley*

## about jet

The JET programme was set up by the Japanese government 18 years ago, with the aim of promoting grass-roots international exchange. The programme enables local authorities in Japan to employ young people from countries all over the world, to work in foreign language education, sports education, and promoting international exchange at the community level. In 2004 over 1000 participants from the UK joined the programme. The programme is administered by CLAIR in Japan.

For further information please visit the JET programme website: [www.jetprogramme.org](http://www.jetprogramme.org)

# THE 2005 WORLD EXPOSITION AICHI, JAPAN

Open from 25 March –  
25 September 2005

With the participation of 121 countries and 4 international organisations, the exposition in Aichi has been open since March. With around 100,000 people visiting per day, the EXPO has been rated a tremendous success, clocking up over 6 million visitors by the end of May. The theme of the EXPO is "Nature's Wisdom" as it pools wisdom and ideas from around the world to provide new directions and alternative lifestyles for humankind to follow in the 21st century.

There is something for everyone among the engaging pavilions at the EXPO: learning, entertainment, future technologies, even gourmet food from around the world.

## About Aichi

The EXPO is located in Aichi prefecture which is in the centre of Japan. The venue covers a huge 173 hectares and so is shared by Nagakute Town, Toyota City, and Seto City. This area is famous for its long history of manufacturing, and Toyota motor company's head office and factories are in this area now.

Famous sightseeing places in the vicinity include the historical city of Kyoto, Gero (famous for hot springs), and Takayama.

## Highlights

Throughout 185 days, 7000 events, live performances and shows are taking place.

One of the most spectacular attractions is the Yukagir mammoth which was discovered as part of a joint Japanese-Russian excavation project in the Siberia tundra.

Working robots are in action to greet and entertain visitors; guide robots can give information to visitors and



communicate in four languages; child-care robots will keep kids busy while parents enjoy some free time; and wheelchair robots drive automatically to their destinations, avoiding obstacles along the way.

## UK Pavilion

There are pavilions representing countries all over the world, international organisations and famous Japanese companies.

The UK Pavilion will combine art and science to highlight global environmental issues, all set within a British woodland. The wood will include a diverse range of British plant life which will change with the seasons.



## UK National Day

Each country pavilion celebrates its national day as a special event. UK national day was held on 22nd April, and to mark the occasion Prince Andrew came to the EXPO. Performers from the musical STOMP gave a show, which was followed by a concert performed by the children of Toyota City.

Photos courtesy of Toyota City

## Information

For more information about the EXPO please visit the official home page:

<http://www.expo2005.or.jp>

## About the UK Pavilion:

<http://www.my-earth.org.uk>

## Sightseeing:

<http://www.aichi-kanko.jp>

<http://www.hidatakayama.or.jp>

<http://www.kyokanko.or.jp>

The Japan Local Government Centre is the UK office of CLAIR – the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. Founded in 1988 with the support of Japan's Ministry of Home Affairs, now the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, CLAIR is a joint organisation of local authorities, working to promote and provide support for local internationalisation.

With its head office in Tokyo, CLAIR has branch offices in each of Japan's 47 prefectures and 14 designated cities, and also has 7 overseas offices – in Beijing, New York, Paris, Singapore, Seoul, Sydney and London. Each overseas office is responsible for a specific area; the London office covers the United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

The main functions of the JLGC in London are to conduct research on local government in the UK and northern Europe, and to promote exchanges between individuals, including government officers and local government representatives, in the UK and Japan. We are also involved in implementing the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme, which employs UK graduates in the fields of international exchange and English language education in Japan.



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