

myriad leaves

MARCH 2006



Japan Study Tour participants in front of the National Diet Building, Tokyo

万葉

Myriad Leaves introduces Japanese local government and related issues to people working in local government in the UK. Its title comes from the earliest collection of Japanese poetry, and means "thousands of poems" or "thousands of leaves".

Japan Study Tour 2005

The Japan Study Tour is an annual programme organised by the Japan Local Government Centre in conjunction with our parent organisation, CLAIR in Tokyo. The principal aim of the programme is to promote mutual understanding between Japanese and UK local government. The 2005 tour was held between 20th-30th November, and its theme was 'The IT Revolution and Local Government'. Every year the tour incorporates visits in the Tokyo area and a short stay in a different region of Japan to observe the work done by local authorities. This year's tour visited Okayama Prefecture, situated in western Japan.

continued on page 2



Japan Study Tour	2
News	3
Short-Term Trainee Report	4

Impressions of the Japan Study Tour 2005

**Stephen Weigel, Chief Executive
Tandridge District Council**

Tandridge District Council has hosted a couple of events with Japanese delegates coming to see our modernisation programme and the way that we deliver high quality services, with continuous improvement at optimum price.

With the support of my local authority, I submitted an application to join the Tokyo and Okayama tour in November. The focus was on the inner workings of Okayama's local government systems and their specialism of the "IT revolution and local government".

During our tour we visited an incubation centre designed to create new jobs and support new businesses and the UbiquitaSQ, a centre of ubiquitous computing. We were shown many parts of Okayama where 70% is unspoiled countryside, dominated by areas of natural outstanding beauty – not dissimilar from Tandridge where I am Chief Executive. The region is known for its hospitality and this is something I certainly experienced during my stay.



Probably the most notable achievement locally is the installation of an optical fibre network maintained by the Okayama Prefecture and available to all within the area, providing an extremely low-cost, high-capacity network.

Japan also has advanced mobile telephone technology which came together at our visit to Okayama University Hospital. I saw these technologies being used together to support people who wanted to live independently at home. Through this system we saw a patient who had recently undergone surgery using a 3G video mobile handset capable of video conferencing. She was contacted by her surgeon and other healthcare professionals to assess her current condition and support needs. I witnessed her putting questions to her surgeon who discussed her condition with her, confirming whether or not health workers would be visiting that day and whether she had any particular needs or anxieties. This gave his patient reassurance that support was at hand, while allowing him and other

healthcare professionals to target their limited resources more effectively.

It was a very good partnership between the local authority, health authority, hospital and citizens. This was achieved through massive investment and was also possible because the local authority had sufficient capacity to sustain this type of activity and development. As a result, Okayama Prefecture is able to take forward the introduction of a whole host of innovations with this programme and drive up quality and support of local services and public confidence, creating a society that values its environment and supports one another, resulting in low levels of crime, clean streets and a good quality of life.

There were very many other things that we were able to see during our tour and I would certainly encourage others to apply to participate in this extremely enjoyable, rewarding and interesting study tour programme in the future.

Finally I would like to thank all of those involved in Clair and Okayama Prefecture for the superb organisation and wonderful hospitality that I and my 11 colleagues experienced during our 10 day study tour to Tokyo and Okayama in November 2005.



1. Visit to the Okayama Prefectural Government Building
2. Visit to the Panasonic Centre, Tokyo



Kobe and Kitakyushu get wings

On February 16th, the city of Kobe, which is located in western Japan next to Osaka, became connected to 7 cities around Japan when its municipally-owned airport was opened.

Kobe Airport opened as the 82nd airport in Japan and is to be followed by New Kitakyushu Airport scheduled to open a month later. A total of three major airports now serve the people of the Kansai region (which includes Osaka, Kyoto, and Nara), these being Kansai International Airport, Osaka Airport, and the new Kobe Airport. Kobe Airport is unique because it was constructed and is maintained by the City of Kobe, whereas the other two airports are maintained by the national government.



Kobe is linked with 7 cities by 27 flights per day, including 11 flights to Haneda Airport (Tokyo). Passengers can reach the airport in 18 minutes using the new transit system from downtown Kobe and the new ocean-link with Kansai Airport will begin operation this year.

Kobe Airport and New Kitakyushu Airport have attracted some low-cost airlines. Sky Mark Airlines, which was established in 1996, has chosen Kobe as its hub in western Japan and operates 7 flights to Haneda whereas other major airlines, Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airlines (ANA) each operate 2 flights per day.

Newly established airline, Star Flyer, decided to place 12 flights from Kitakyushu to Haneda including a late flight which departs Haneda at 23:50 and arrives at Kitakyushu at 1:15 a.m.

Another regional airport, Shizuoka Airport, will be open in 2 years.

Foreign Residents Have Their Say

In recent years in Japan there has been a sharp increase in the number of foreign resident advisory bodies and assemblies established at a regional level in Japan. One such body, the Kawasaki City Representatives Assembly for Foreign Residents was established in 1996 and this year celebrates its 10th anniversary.

The assembly focuses on issues of importance for foreign residents such as the efficient dissemination of local government related information, participation in the municipal system, and Japanese language education provision for children to enable them to participate fully in school life. There are a total of 26 members of the assembly, all of whom serve for 2 years and receive a daily fee for participation in meetings. These meetings take place four times a year and each session lasts for two days. Results of the discussion are submitted to the mayor in the form of a report. The mayor then presents the report to the members of the Kawasaki City Assembly, after which a meeting is held to decide on which departments of the municipal government will be in charge of looking into the

proposals. The measures are then introduced gradually into the municipal system.

A number of other local authorities in Japan have established advisory bodies made up of foreign residents. For example Hiroshima City set up a policy discussion group for foreign residents in 1999, and it has since met three times a year. Issues that have been debated include voting rights, and the general provision of information for foreigners living in the area. There have been calls for the group to be upgraded in status to an official council in order to increase its effectiveness in bringing ideas to fruition. Other cities which have set up similar advisory bodies include Okayama, Kobe, and Hamamatsu.

The Kawasaki City Representatives Assembly for Foreign Residents is the only body of its kind which was created under an ordinance. This means that it is enshrined in law and therefore can not be dissolved without a decision by the local assembly. The establishment of such bodies is likely to rise and play a vital role in aiding the integration into society of both newcomers to Japan and long term foreign residents.

New Year Municipal Mergers

On the 1st January this year a number of municipal mergers came into effect in Japan. A total of 43 new municipalities came into being as changes took place across 24 different prefectures in Japan. The drive towards municipal amalgamations was started in 1999 since which time the number of municipalities in Japan has decreased from 3232 to 1821 (end of March 2006). The 1st of January was seen as a fitting day for mergers to take place being a day full of hope for an auspicious and healthy new year.

The next spate of mergers is scheduled to take place in March of this year when a further 85 new municipalities will come into existence. Towns, villages and cities which go through the merger process by the end of March will also be entitled to a special government loan. The loan is primarily preserved for use in the construction of

public facilities, and is offered at a very favourable rate.

The central government of Japan is keen to promote municipal mergers as a way of improving the level of services offered to citizens. It has therefore created a number of special provisions, such as the loan mentioned above, to encourage areas to amalgamate.

The provision of these benefits has no doubt played a considerable part in the successful completion of such a large number of mergers in a relatively short amount of time. Indeed, in April of last year the government enacted a new legislation which requires each prefecture to establish a regional plan for promoting municipal mergers. The focus for the mergers is very much on the 500 or so smaller sized local authorities, with a population of 10,000 or less.

A Country of Tradition and Reform

Toshihiro Higaki

I am a local government officer in Kure City which is located in Hiroshima Prefecture, western Japan. Kure City is surrounded by the calm sea and greenery, and famous for its natural beauty. The population is about 250,000 people. At the present time I am working at CLAIR Tokyo as a trainee on a two year placement. I am responsible for supporting international affiliations between Japanese and foreign local governments. I participated in this Short-Term International Study Programme as a part of my training at CLAIR.

This was my first visit to Europe and the UK, although I had had the chance to meet with some local government officials from the UK during a study tour organized by CLAIR in November of 2004. I was impressed by their thoughtfulness and love of discussion.

When I arrived in the UK, my first impression was that the buildings and streets were far more traditional than I had expected. It seemed standard that buildings which were built a few hundred years ago remained to this day. In Japan we suffer from many earthquakes, therefore there are not many old buildings remaining. The way in which older buildings are renovated and maintained impressed me greatly and is a good example of the overall emphasis placed on preservation in the UK.

However, it has to be said that I did not find the central and local authorities to be as conservative and traditional in their approach as I had expected. I learned that the UK's central and local governments were aggressively adopting various structural reforms. In Japan, we are fairly conservative when pushing ahead with changes to the social structure, and we often hesitate with reforms.



Visit to the Chairman of Denbighshire County Council, Cllr John Smith, Leader, Rhiannon Wyn Hughes, and Chief Executive, Ian Miller

I found that there were some areas in which Japan is slightly more advanced than the UK. For example, food and nutrition management. During the visit I heard reports about reforms to school lunches, and a TV report I saw revealed that some pupils only eat potato crisps for lunch. In Japan almost every primary school offers a well-balanced school lunch, and we are brought up to value the importance of a well-balanced diet both at school and in the home. I think that the UK may be able to learn something from Japan in this area.

My impression of the UK through my time as a Short-Term Trainee can be summarized into two key words, "tradition" and "reform". Japan, like the UK, has a long history, and I think it is vital to maintain our respective cultures and traditions. On the other hand, we have to tackle the issues of social and economical reform accordingly. I think that local autonomy is a vital part of this. Next April I will go back to Kure City and work for the local government there. I am going to keep the two words, 'tradition' and 'reform', in mind as I continue my work back in Japan.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to all the people I met in the UK, in particular the staff at Denbighshire County Council where I studied for two weeks.

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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Issue 50

Message From the Editor:

This month sees the publication of the 50th issue of Myriad Leaves. We would like to thank everyone who has helped to make Myriad Leaves such a success over the years, and look forward to your continued support for the next 50 issues.. **Richard Kelner**