

Oita—A City with Many Centuries of Overseas Ties

Steeped in a centuries-long tradition of forming ties with other countries through trade, the city of Oita today is flourishing with international exchange through friendly bonds with cities



Oita City (OITA PREFECTURE)

Oita Prefecture's largest and capital city, Oita is located in Kyushu, the southwestern part of Japan. In addition to having a long history as an industrial city, Oita is set among beautiful nature, facing the ocean to the north and being surrounded by mountains. Popular local gourmet seafoods are *Seki Saba* mackerel and *Seki Aji* horse mackerel, which are widely known as high-grade brands.

Looking over a sparkling blue ocean, the city of Oita is surrounded by forested mountains. While blessed with a warm climate and abundant nature, it is also one of Kyushu's major industrial cities. It has gained much admiration and drawn many observers from around the world for developing as a green

city while still being an industrial center.

About 450 years ago, when Japan was embroiled in the Warring States period, Oita flourished as one of Japan's prominent trading cities. The feudal lord governing at that time was Sorin Otomo, who was an avid Christian. As the first city in

Japan to embrace Western medicine, music, drama, its blossoming so-called *Nanban* culture (Western culture) was highly influential.

That inclination to actively embrace different cultures has been continuously carried down until today, a boom time for international exchange made possible through sister-city and similar relationships. Visitors from overseas often remark, "The city looks so beautiful!" Those impressions are swayed by not only the stunning nature, but also the various beautification activities that the city orchestrates. "Oita is



with Aveiro (PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC)



Exchange with the city of Aveiro in the strong soccer nation of Portugal can be very exciting for children.

an industrial city with many scenic attractions. The tours of world-renowned architect Arata Isozaki's buildings are also highly popular among visitors," says Kiichiro Sato, mayor of Oita City.

Currently Oita has Aveiro of Portugal and Austin of the United States as sister cities, and Wuhan of China as a friendship city.

Exchange with Aveiro, a city in central Portugal, can be traced back to the age of Sorin Otomo. In 2018, the two cities celebrated the 40th anniversary of sister-city relations. Through soccer exchanges and the like, many children of the two cities visit the respective sister city. By learning the history of cultural exchange that occurred a very long time ago, children from both cities can deepen their understanding.

The U.S. city of Austin in the state of Texas is a city well known for its music festivals and as a center for high-tech industry. Sharing so much in common, the two cities seem to have a natural affinity for each other. In addition to music exchange, where Country musicians from Austin are invited to Oita, and Japanese drum performers from Oita visit Austin, efforts are also being put into exchanges between young entrepreneurs of both cities with a focus on new business development.

The Chinese city of Wuhan, with which Oita has long had

with Austin (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)



In 2015, Oita and Austin celebrated the 25th anniversary of sister-city relations. Oita's mayor, Kiichiro Sato visited Austin where he conducted a planting ceremony with Austin's mayor, Steve Adler to commemorate the anniversary.

with Wuhan (PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA)



At a music festival held every October in Oita, many musicians perform on street stages in various spots around the city. Musicians from Wuhan City are invited every year to perform traditional Chinese musical instruments such as the Erhu.

active exchanges among steel industry engineers, is especially close geographically to Oita, and exchange is carried out on a much more frequent basis. The age range and the scope of activities in such exchanges are also diverse, with junior-high students going on short visits, musicians who play traditional Chinese musical instruments being invited to local musical events in Oita, and athletes being invited to compete in the Oita International Wheelchair Marathon.

"Because those various exchanges provide opportunities to learn different cultures and deepen mutual understanding, I think they serve a major role, particularly in the education of our children. I want to continue to highly value the relations that many predecessors have fostered

and carry them down to the next generation," says Mayor Sato. When the children who have gained that precious experience have their turn at shaping the future, there is no doubt that Oita will only further develop as a cosmopolitan city. ✿



Kiichiro Sato has served as the mayor of Oita City since 2015. He was born in Oita and grew up in the city until he finished high school. Inheriting Oita's centuries-long tradition of proactive exchange with the world, he is eager to even further expand the circle of international exchange in the future.