

Promoting Local-Level International Exchange Around the Sea of Japan

Toyama Prefecture: Making the Sea of Japan a “Sea of Peace and Exchange” Together with Russia

Toyama Prefecture, an area with a lively manufacturing sector, is about two hours from Tokyo on a newly opened line of Japan’s high-speed Shinkansen railway network, and it faces Russia across the Sea of Japan. Russia has for many years been a major trade partner for Toyama. The history of exchange between the two is long, dating back to the late nineteenth century. Also, Toyama is second only to Hokkaido in the number of residents who relocated from the Northern Territories (islands northeast of Hokkaido that were seized by the Soviet Union after World War II), and the prefecture is actively promoting participation by children and others from Toyama in the visa-free exchange program, under which they visit the Northern Territories and meet with local residents. In 1992 the prefecture entered into a sister-region relationship of with Primorsky Krai (Maritime Province), the region of Russia that faces the Sea of Japan. Since then the two have deepened their friendly interactions, both governmental and civilian, through personal exchanges, such as the mutual dispatching of municipal civil servants and youth exchange programs in fields like sports and culture.

Economic ties with Russia have also been developing vigorously. Toyama leads within Japan in imports of Siberian timber and is also actively involved in imports of nonferrous metals from Russia. On the export side, Russian demand for used cars is strong. Fushiki-Toyama Port plays a major role in supporting this lively bilateral trade. This port is served by seven regularly scheduled monthly container ship and roll-on/roll-off ship services to the Russian Far East, and its connections with Vladivostok have been expanding. In 2010, as the result of approaches to a major shipping company in Vladivostok, Fushiki-Toyama was changed from the first port of call to the last port of call. This cut the lead time for export containers from Japan from about 10 days to about 2 days, and it has supported business by lowering costs for Russian importers. In addition, the prefecture has been promoting bilateral trade via the Siberian Railway in support of the “Siberian Land Bridge” concept, linking Europe and western Russia with Japan and other East Asian locations by transporting goods not by sea, as up to now, but via the Siberian Railway. In 2014 it designated a portion of its subsidies for testing of trial shipment methods to be used in this connection. Meanwhile improvements to Fushimi-Toyama Port have been progressing. Thanks to this support, the number of containers handled by the port grew by a factor of 3.8 in the five years through 2015.

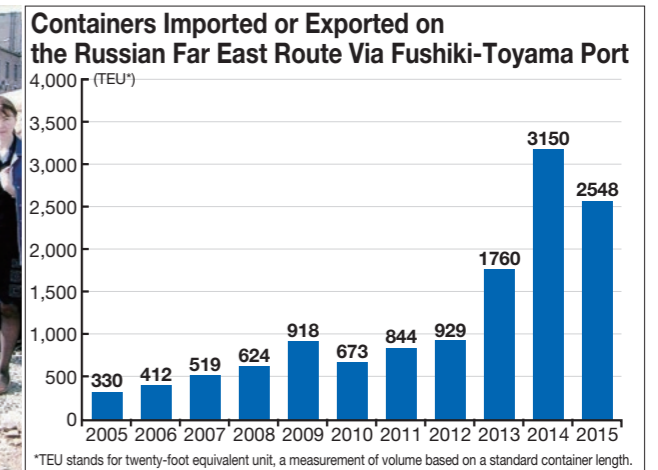
Taking advantage of its proximity to the other countries surrounding the Sea of Japan, Toyama is promoting marine environmental cooperation in collaboration with international institutions, notably the Association of North East Asia Regional Governments (NEAR), a grouping of 77 regional government bodies from six countries, including Japan and Russia. The prefecture has been the local government coordinator directing the activities of NEAR’s Subcommittee on Environment since the subcommittee’s launch in 1999. In this capacity it has taken the lead among the Japanese prefectures in NEAR. And it has strengthened its relationships of trust with the local governments of other countries through such activities as broad monitoring of yellow dust, research on shoreline driftage, and the Northeast Asian Region Hands-on Environmental Program, which aims to promote the training of young people.

Now that Japan-Russia relations are entering a new stage, Toyama, which has built friendly ties with Russia over the course of many years, hopes to assist in further deepening international exchange among the regions facing the Sea of Japan. The prefecture is seeking to do what it can as a local government in contributing to global peace and stability by helping to turn the Sea of Japan into a “Sea of Peace and Exchange.”

Toyama Prefectural Government official website
<http://www.pref.toyama.jp/english/>
<http://www.pref.toyama.jp/russian/>



Looking at this map rotated from the usual orientation, we can see that Toyama Bay is at the focal point of the fan-shaped Sea of Japan. The distance from Fushiki-Toyama Port to Vladivostok is about 830 kilometers (520 miles). Ships can travel between the two ports in two days. The Sea of Japan region encompasses Japan, Russia, China, South Korea, and North Korea.



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1. In 2004, a row of Japanese cherry trees were planted in Vladivostok at the initiative of Toyama Prefecture. 2. A graph showing the number of containers for the Russian Far East route handled at Fushiki-Toyama Port. The number has increased greatly since Fushiki-Toyama was made the last port of call, and it is now 7.7 times what it was 10 years ago. 3. Young Japanese and Russian athletes pose at a Sea of Japan regional inter-high school athletics meet held in Vladivostok in 2014. These regional meets have been held annually since 1993, hosted in turn by Toyama Prefecture, Russia’s Primorsky Krai, South Korea’s Gangwon Province, and China’s Liaoning Province, with the aim of promoting friendship through sports. 4. The 2016 Northeast Asia Environmental Partners Forum in Toyama. This forum brought together environmental specialists from Japan, Russia, and other countries. The attendants adopted the “Declaration for Environmental Partnership in Toyama,” calling for active contributions in addressing environmental issues and for use of the NEAR framework.