

Hokkaido: Bridging a Bright Future with Russia

Hokkaido is the northernmost of Japan's four main islands and the largest of the country's 47 prefectures. Harumi Takahashi, Hokkaido's governor, states, "Hokkaido and the Russian Far East are geographical neighbors sharing a similar climate and natural environment. As a result, close ties in the form of private exchanges have existed between Hokkaido and Russia for some time. The Japanese language speech contest sponsored by the governments of Hokkaido and Sakhalin Oblast (province) was held for the 17th time in 2016. Municipalities are also actively promoting exchanges. Fourteen municipalities in Hokkaido have established sister city agreements with counterparts in Russia, more than any other prefecture. Such cities as Wakkanai and Nemuro with deep historical ties to Russia have added Russian to many of their traffic signs."

Hokkaido has been working in recent years to promote medical exchanges. Governor Takahashi notes, "The first medical exchange occurred when Hokkaido accepted a boy from Sakhalin Oblast who had suffered major burns for emergency care in 1990. Further exchanges have followed, such as providing training to young doctors from Sakhalin Oblast at medical institutions in Hokkaido." In October 2016, the Hokkaido-Sakhalin Oblast Cancer Symposium was held to promote medical exchanges and to improve medical technology. In fiscal 2017 (April 2017 to March 2018), seminars on medical technology will be held in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and Khabarovsk.

Hokkaido is currently promoting an initiative known as the Five-Point Cooperative Package to encourage further economic exchanges with the Russian Far East. At the May 2016 summit meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Japanese government presented an Eight-Bullet-Point Proposal for Economic Cooperation with Russia. Governor Takahashi states, "The Five-Point Cooperative Package covers such areas as the promotion of food safety, health, and longevity, along with technology for comfortable living in cold areas—items shared with the Japanese government's Eight-Bullet-Point Proposal for Economic Cooperation with Russia. Hokkaido intends to leverage these initiatives in working to step up the pace of exchanges."

Though over 70 years have passed since the end of World War II, Japan and Russia have yet to conclude a peace treaty. At the Japan-Russia summit meeting late in 2016, Prime Minister Abe and President Putin announced their sincere determination to end this abnormal situation during their generation. The biggest issue in this connection is the difference of standpoints with regard to the Northern Territories (Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomais) in eastern Hokkaido. The two leaders agreed to start talks aimed at implementation of joint economic activities in fisheries, marine culture, medical care, the environment, and other fields on and around these islands.

With a view to the prospects for these joint economic activities, Hokkaido will undertake its own initiatives starting in fiscal 2017, including the holding of seminars to provide information for interested parties.

In hoping for a bright future in bilateral relations, Governor Takahashi states, "Having maintained friendly and economic exchanges with the Russian Far East, Hokkaido's role is bound to increase in Japan-Russia relations. Governor Oleg Kozhemyako of Sakhalin Oblast and I agree that regional cooperation is the foundation for relations between nations, and I intend to expand friendly and economic exchanges going forward."



Governor Harumi Takahashi

Born in Toyama Prefecture. Graduated from the Faculty of Economics, Hitotsubashi University. Joined the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and served as a researcher at the Atlantic Institute for International Affairs in Paris. In MITI's successor, the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), she held posts including director-general, Hokkaido Bureau of Economy, Trade, and Industry, and director, Training Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry. Elected governor of Hokkaido in 2003; currently serving her fourth term—the first female prefectural governor to be elected four times.

Sister cities of Hokkaido and Russia

Hokkaido	Russia	Hokkaido	Russia
Sapporo	Novosibirsk	Wakkanai	Nevelsk
Hakodate	Vladivostok	Wakkanai	Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk
Hakodate	Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk	Monbetsu	Korsakov
Otaru	Nakhodka	Nayoro	Dolinsk
Asahikawa	Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk	Nemuro	Severo-Kurilsk
Kushiro	Kholmsk	Ishikari	Vanino
Kitami	Poronaysk	Teshio	Tomari
Rumoi	Ulan-Ude	Sarufutsu	Ozersky
Wakkanai	Korsakov		

There are 45 sister-city and friendship agreements between prefectures and municipalities in Japan and oblasts (provinces) and municipalities in Russia. Of these, 17 involve municipalities in Hokkaido, and Hokkaido itself has a friendship agreement with Sakhalin Oblast.



The Japanese language speech contest has been held since 2000. Laurita Dehtereva, the winner of the adult division of the 17th contest in 2016, gave a speech on what prompted her to begin studying Japanese and her struggles to master the language.



The annual Hokkaido Fair held in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk introduces Hokkaido food products and tourist spots.

Hokkaido's Proposed Five-Point Cooperative Package

1	Food safety; health/longevity
2	Comfortable living in cold areas
3	Environmental safety
4	Local production/consumption of energy
5	Introduction of regular direct flights

The Five-Point Cooperative Package is an initiative to propose solutions for social issues in Russia as a joint effort by industry, universities and other educational institutions, government, and financial institutions and to promote the participation of Hokkaido businesses.



In connection with food safety, health, and longevity, one area of the five-point cooperative package, the "Hokkaido Garden" has been established in part of a greenhouse facility run by a Russian national firm in Vladivostok. Here tests have begun on vegetable farming using Japanese growing techniques applicable in cold regions.