

# Imparting the Spirit of Peace and Humanity to Future Generations



The Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall (Yaotsu, Gifu Pref.)



The Port of Humanity Tsuruga Museum (Tsuruga City, Fukui Pref.)



The Holocaust Education Center (Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Pref.)

Japan has a number of museums that preserve the lessons of history and teach each new generation the importance of peace and humanity.

One of these is the Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall. In 1940, crowds of Jewish people, fleeing persecution and death at the hands of the Nazis, flocked to their only hope for help, the Japanese consulate in Lithuania. They begged to be granted transit visas, even though they did not meet the official requirements. Sugihara, the diplomat assigned to the consulate, out of pity for his fellow humans and at risk of his career, disregarded the policy of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Working feverishly and with minimal rest until forced to close the consulate, Sugihara painstakingly wrote out visas that saved about 6,000 lives.

Sugihara's hometown, Yaotsu, nestled in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture, opened the Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall in 2000 to honor its native hero and impart his spirit of peace and humanity to future generations. Many

visitors from Japan and abroad, including about 2,000 from Israel, come here each year to pay respects and to learn. Yaotsu-cho Elementary School students participate in annual theatrical productions re-enacting Sugihara's courageous stand for his fellow humans. One student declared, "I am proud to know the spirit of humanity I learned from Chiune; I want to live it out. We have the responsibility to continue in his legacy when we grow up, and to share it with others."

According to museum director Daisaku Kunieda, "Sugihara did not save those 6,000 lives all by himself, but was part of a 'chain of goodwill' that includes all those who helped the refugees along their way." Leaving Lithuania, the Jewish refugees took the 9,258 km (5,753 mi) Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, and then crossed the Sea of Japan to the Japanese port city of Tsuruga in Fukui Prefecture.

To the weary refugees, "Seeing Tsuruga was like catching a glimpse of paradise after waking from a nightmare."



"An individual is limited in what he or she can do, but when everybody does as much as they can, a lot can be accomplished together. That was true back then and is true today," says Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall director Daisaku Kunieda.



Chiune Sugihara (January 1, 1900–July 31, 1986). Japanese diplomat. Worked for the consulate in Kaunas, Lithuania, during World War II. Sympathized with the plight of refugees fleeing Nazi persecution all over Europe and, disobeying orders from Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, issued a large number of transit visas that saved about 6,000 people. ©NPO Chiune Sugihara. Visas For Life



Yaotsu-cho Elementary School has been performing a play about Chiune Sugihara as part of yearly activities since 2006. Students in 5th and 6th grade act out a story in which they travel back in time from a park in their town to Lithuania during World War II, witness Chiune Sugihara agonizing over his decision to issue visas, and return to present-day Japan, where they meet descendants of the surviving Jews.

Residents of Tsuruga reached out to their guests. A teenage boy brought baskets of fruit, and a bathhouse owner opened his facility free of charge, giving the refugees refreshment before they continued on by rail to Kobe and Yokohama, and then to safe haven in other countries. The Port of Humanity Tsuruga Museum seeks to remind visitors of "the preciousness of life and peace when they learn about past events that trampled human dignity, and about the humane actions of ordinary people in Tsuruga and elsewhere in Japan under such conditions."\*

A third museum, the Holocaust Education Center in Fukuyama, Hiroshima Prefecture, was inspired by Reverend Makoto Otsuka's chance meeting in 1971 in Israel with Otto Frank, father of Anne Frank, the Jewish girl famous for the diary she kept while living concealed from the Nazis in the secret room of a house in Amsterdam. Otsuka and Otto Frank corresponded until Frank passed away in 1980. Taking to heart Frank's

words, "Please be a person to do something to create peace," Otsuka opened the center together with his colleagues in 1995.

Guests from Israel praise the center as "beautiful, delicate, and full of content." It "shows everything in a very simple way." You can read the written testimonies and letters of survivors, and observe photos of Jewish children that "stare out at you from the walls with wisdom, love, and hope." Teachers come to study in the well-stocked library to prepare their students for a visit. The exhibitions are designed for children's ease of viewing, and include a replica of Anne Frank's room.

These museums and the stories they tell call young and old alike, in Japan and from abroad, to reflect deeply and work with courage and kindness for a peaceful, more humane world.

\*See "We Are Tomodachi" Disaster Prevention Edition 2015 ([https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2015/disaster\\_prevention\\_edition\\_2015/tsuruga\\_port\\_of\\_humanity.html](https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2015/disaster_prevention_edition_2015/tsuruga_port_of_humanity.html)).



The Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall in Yaotsu, Gifu Prefecture is a two-floor wooden building with 300 m<sup>2</sup> (3,229 sq. ft.) dedicated to the history of the Holocaust, world affairs at the time, and the story of Chiune Sugihara, taught through exhibitions and archival materials. Passports from rescued Jews are on display as well. URL <http://www.sugihara-museum.jp/> TEL +81-574-43-2460



The Port of Humanity Tsuruga Museum opened in Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture, in 2008. It features testimony by townspeople that reveal the humane actions and feelings of ordinary people on encountering the Jewish refugees. Refugees' belongings and other historical objects are also on display. URL <http://www.tmo-tsuruga.com/kk-museum/> TEL +81-770-37-1035



The Holocaust Education Center in Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Prefecture displays items contributed from 60 countries around the world. Children visiting the center have commented, "I learned about the Holocaust for the first time" and "I want to think about what I can do for peace." URL <http://www.hecjp.org/> TEL +81-84-955-8001