The International School of Asia, Karuizawa (ISAK) will become the first international boarding school in Japan after it received official government approval for its establishment.

The Japan Pavilion at Expo 2012 Yeosu Korea
“Our future is a tapestry of forest, village and sea” is the theme of the Japan Pavilion at Expo 2012.

Nurturing Global Talent

Dark Matter and the Meeting of Minds
A number of initiatives across Japan are helping to foster the sort of human resources needed for an increasingly globalized society. At the Kavli Institute for the Physics and Mathematics of the Universe, for example, researchers from around the world are together investigating the mysteries of dark matter.

Developing a New Generation of Global Leaders
The International School of Asia, Karuizawa (ISAK) will become the first international boarding school in Japan after it received official government approval for its establishment.

Young Pioneers of the JET Age
The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET Programme) is one of the world’s largest government-linked international exchange programs.

Drawn to Manga
Kyoto Seika University is drawing students from around the world to its manga drawing courses.

The Japanese Volunteer behind Olympian Figueroa
Judo coach and Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCSV) member Asami Togo will accompany El Salvadoran judoka Carlos Figueroa to the London Olympics.
Angelica Tabora was one of just three foreign nurses to pass Japan’s tough national nursing examination this year.

The Japanese government is pursuing policies to strengthen a human network linking Japan and foreign countries. A language-teaching program at Gunma University is one example.

Convenience store chain Lawson is actively recruiting foreign employees in response to the rapid progress in globalization and to the firm’s own growing presence overseas.

Tamanoyu in the hot spring resort of Yufuin is renowned for its outstanding hospitality, beautiful gardens, and exquisite food. Izumi Kuwano, president of Tamanoyu and chairperson of the Yufuin-Onsen Tourism Association, explains her approach to the hospitality business.

Stéphane Danton from France has established a unique business in Tokyo selling flavored green teas.

Workers at Saiei Orimono in Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, have rallied together and continue to produce some of the world’s highest-quality silk, despite the tough times.

Patients suffering from severe heart disease once had no choice but to rely on heart transplants or an artificial heart, but now they can return to good health using a new regenerative therapy developed in Japan. Takashi Sasaki reports.

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda shares his thoughts on issues of the day on "Prime Minister NODA’s BLOG": http://nodasblog.kantei.go.jp/
Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting

On May 25 and 26, 2012, the Sixth Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 6) took place in Nago City, Okinawa under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Japan Yoshihiko Noda and the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands Hon. Henry Puna. Including Japan, there were sixteen countries and one region whose leaders and representatives participated in the Summit.

The Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting is a summit-level meeting which has been held every three years since 1997. Leaders openly discuss various issues that Pacific island countries are facing in order to build close cooperative relationships and forge a bond of friendship between Japan and Pacific island countries.

At the summit, under the slogan of “We are Islanders — For Growing ‘Kizuna’ (Strong Bonds) in the Pacific,” the Leaders formulated five pillars for cooperation over the next three years: (1) response to natural disasters; (2) environment and climate change; (3) sustainable development and human security; (4) people-to-people exchanges; and (5) maritime issues. The Leaders engaged in lively discussions on these topics, and at the end of the Summit, the Okinawa “Kizuna” Declaration was adopted.

Prime Minister Noda announced Japan’s commitment of making maximum efforts to provide up to 500 million U.S. dollars of assistance over the next three years in order to push forward cooperation in accordance with the five pillars stated above. The Pacific island countries expressed deep appreciation for Japan’s continuing strong commitment to the region, even while Japan is faced with reconstruction challenges from the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Inauguration of the Second Reshuffled Noda Cabinet

On June 4, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda reshuffled the Cabinet, and the Second Reshuffled Noda Cabinet was inaugurated.

Prime Minister Noda explained at a press conference on the day that he felt he should create an environment that can advance the many issues, including the comprehensive reform of social security and taxation systems currently being debated in the Diet. He also said that he had reshuffled the Cabinet aiming at the above-mentioned goal from the perspective of strengthening its functions.

The Prime Minister emphasized, “I of course believe that the Cabinet will continue to pool its strength to do what must be done such as initiatives to overcome deflation and administrative reform.”
The Japan Pavilion at Expo 2012 Yeosu Korea

Expo 2012 is taking place in the South Korean city of Yeosu from May 12 to August 12 this year, based on the theme “The Living Ocean and Coast: Diversity of Resources and Sustainable Activities.”

Of the 104 countries and 10 international organizations taking part, Japan boasts one of the largest overseas pavilions at the event, with an exhibition space extending over approximately 1,000m². June 2 was designated “Japan Day” and saw a whole host of events linked to Japan taking place around the Expo venue, including a special concert featuring artists from Japan and South Korea, a fireworks display, and examples of traditional festivities and dances from all over Japan.

The Japan Pavilion itself is based around the theme “our future is a tapestry of forest, village and sea.” In spite of the devastation caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, the exhibition inside the Japan Pavilion draws on those experiences to emphasize the relationship between Japan’s forests, villages and seas, and the way in which mankind coexists with the sea. The big screen on the pavilion’s facade meanwhile is showing messages from people in the affected area, thanking everyone around the world for all the support they have given Japan.

The exhibition is divided into three zones. Visitors enter the pavilion via Zone 1, which features images of the richness and beauty of Japan’s coastal regions and footage of the tsunami in March last year, before moving on to the main part of the exhibition in Zone 2. The centerpiece of Zone 2 is “The Sea: Storybook Theater,” which is screening a film called “The White Bicycle.” The main character is a young boy called Kai, named after the Japanese character for “sea,” who has lost his family in the earthquake and ensuing tsunami. As his story unfolds, Kai, riding on his mysterious white bicycle, experiences the life force of the forest and the sea, which motivates him to start reconstruction. The film is based in part on true stories that actually occurred following the earthquake.

Some visitors have been moved to tears, with comments like “it was tragic to see what happened after the earthquake, but the story of Kai getting back on his feet was really inspiring.” Others have given a round of applause at the end of the film.

Zone 3 revolves around a “village” of knowledge and technology. It features a relief diorama exhibit and films depicting Japan’s lush forests, seas and the beautiful rivers that connect them, as well as Japanese people’s efforts to protect their forests and seas.
NURTURING GLOBAL TALENT
We live in an era in which people, goods, funds and information move freely across borders in all fields from politics through the economy to culture. At the same time, we face global issues connected with the population, environment, energy, natural disasters and public health. For Japan, as a developed country in this globalized world economy and society, it is essential to help develop the sort of global talent that is able to contribute to resolving the world’s challenges, while sustaining economic growth.

Against these backdrops, the government, corporations and schools in Japan are implementing various initiatives to nurture such globalized human resources. Examples include enhancing English-language studies in school education, supporting studies abroad for university students and adopting mandatory training overseas for young employees. Moreover, many universities have been accepting more overseas students in recent years, and it is apparent that Japanese corporations are proactively hiring students from abroad.

In this month’s Cover Story, we report on some of the programs geared to nurturing the human resources needed for international society. First up, we introduce the Kavli Institute for the Physics and Mathematics of the Universe at the University of Tokyo, which is arguably one of the most globalized institutions in Japan.

Number of International Students by Region of Origin (2011)

- **Asia**: 129,163
- **Europe**: 3,722
- **North America**: 1,742
- **Africa**: 1,136
- **Middle and Near East**: 1,018
- **Central and South America**: 886
- **Oceania**: 408

**Total**: 138,075

*Source: Japan Student Services Organization*
Dark Matter and the Meeting of Minds

The Kavli Institute for the Physics and Mathematics of the Universe (Kavli IPMU) is on the University of Tokyo’s Kashiwa campus, which is located in the suburbs of Tokyo about 30 minutes by train from central Tokyo. In the center of the Kavli IPMU building is the expansive networking plaza Piazza Fujiwara. As soon as the 3 p.m. bell rings, research workers congregate here. It’s teatime. The researchers converse freely over sweets and drinks.

“When conducting research, we inevitably run into a dead end. So when this happens, oftentimes, speaking with others or listening to their views helps to push my research a step forward,” says Kavli IPMU Director Dr. Hitoshi Murayama. “We would like this teatime to be a place where this type of breakthrough occurs.”

Kavli IPMU, which is a part of the World Premier International Center Initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, was established in 2007 as a research institute where experts in the fields of mathematics, physics and astronomy gather with an aim to solving the mysteries of the universe, such as the genesis and the future of the universe and the materials that make up the universe. While many experts in different fields of discipline, such as in mathematics, physics and astronomy, do conduct joint research on the universe around the world, it is rare for researchers to gather in one research laboratory to conduct their studies.

One of Kavli IPMU’s major research themes is dark matter. For example, the range of expanse of dark matter was a mystery, but in February of this year, Kavli IPMU researchers published a research result that dark matter is distributed throughout the entire universe.

Kavli IPMU has been addressing the mysteries of dark matter by utilizing facilities such as the Subaru Telescope site on the island of Hawaii and the XMASS experiment facility in Gifu Prefecture, central Japan.

Leading researchers from Japan and around the world have gathered at Kavli IPMU, with thirty-eight researchers from abroad out of the total of sixty-nine full-time researchers. Dr. Murayama also has been conducting research on the theory of elementary particles in the United States since 1993. He concurrently serves as a professor at the Department of Physics at the University of California, Berkeley, and frequently travels back and forth between Japan and the United States.

One of the director’s major roles is to gather talented researchers. In order to achieve this, Dr. Murayama has invited researchers to Kavli IPMU by directly contacting various researchers from around the world or through introduction by his acquaintances. He is also active with its publicity push in the mass media in Japan and overseas as well as within...
academic circles.

Kavli IPMU is also placing its efforts on supporting foreign people who live in Japan. For example, the Kavli IPMU website has detailed information on medical treatments and children’s education in English. The institute has also deployed staff that provide support in preparing the necessities for life in Japan, such as opening bank accounts, getting a mobile phone and searching for a home.

“To date, many foreign researchers have been uneasy about living in Japan, where the culture and the language is distinctive, and have been concerned about whether they could achieve results while conducting research in Japan. We focused on eliminating such concerns and gaining the trust of the researchers,” Dr. Murayama says. “Five years have passed since its establishment, and fortunately, we’ve produced numerous research results. Researchers from overseas have started to tell us that their research at Kavli IPMU has led to advancements in their career.”

Kavli IPMU is also serving as a gateway for Japanese researchers—who live in Japan but do not belong to Kavli IPMU—to exchange views with researchers from abroad. Moreover, graduate students at Kavli IPMU are improving their English-language speaking ability and expanding their overseas network through day-to-day contact with researchers from abroad. There is in fact an instance in which a Japanese graduate student who had been working on a doctoral course at Kavli IPMU utilized his personal connections at the institute to move to a top-level university overseas to continue his research as a post-doctoral researcher. Dr. Murayama believes that these exchanges with people around the world would enable young Japanese people to contribute more than ever to progress in the world’s scientific knowledge.

“When Japanese people live only among themselves, we end up being self-contained, so we are unable to foster our ability to appeal to others. For example, it is important to gain this type of ability in a natural manner by creating an environment in which we are in contact with foreign people on a daily basis,” says Dr. Murayama. “Japan’s declining birthrate will continue further from here on. I believe that Japanese people and society must also globalize in order to sustain economic vitality.”
Developing a New Generation of Global Leaders

The first fully residential international school in Japan, the International School of Asia, Karuizawa (ISAK) will open in Karuizawa-machi, Nagano Prefecture, in September 2014. Masaki Yamada spoke to Lin Kobayashi, executive director of the ISAK Foundation.

Supported by a large number of individuals, companies and organizations, ISAK will provide high-quality academic programs for first- to third-year high school students from around the world. There will be around fifty students in each grade, and ten to eighteen students in each class. ISAK received official permission from Nagano Prefecture to establish a boarding school in Karuizawa and also received approval from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to become a “special provision school,” which would allow students to receive a Japanese high school diploma. All classes will be taught in English. The school plans to have students receive an International Baccalaureate diploma when they graduate.

ISAK is developing a curriculum in cooperation with domestic and foreign educators. Located on a nature-filled campus in Karuizawa, the school will emphasize teamwork and leadership.

“The key qualifications next-generation leaders need to have are the ability to understand the true meaning of diversification among people of many different backgrounds and ways of thinking; a risk-taking attitude to meet new challenges; and the ability not only to solve problems, but also to recognize them,” says Lin Kobayashi, the ISAK Foundation’s executive director. “ISAK’s mission is to create a new frontier and cultivate leaders who can bring change to the Asia-Pacific region and to the global community.”

The ISAK Foundation has held an annual ten-day summer school in Karuizawa for potential students for the past two years. Last year thirty-one junior high school students attended the school. Of them, fifteen were Japanese students. The remaining sixteen students came from ten countries, including India, the Philippines, Myanmar and England. Students communicated in English.

The summer school program includes a variety of academic and extracurricular activities, including a leadership program, design thinking, math, drama, Asian studies, sports and agricultural activities. A total of fifty-seven students from seventeen countries are expected to attend the summer school this year.

“We would like to increase the diversity of ISAK even further by accepting more students from abroad,” says Kobayashi.

“The number of countries—seventeen—is not nearly enough. To increase this number, we have to expand our scholarships. We would like to receive more domestic and international support.”

Masaki Yamada is a freelance writer.
Scenes from the ISAK summer school program for junior high school students

NURTURING GLOBAL TALENT
In the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET Programme), local government organizations hire young people from overseas with the aim of promoting foreign language education and grassroots international exchange.

JET participants work either as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) helping Japanese teachers in foreign language classes, a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) working on translation, interpretation and foreign exchange programs at local government organizations, or a Sports Exchange Advisor (SEA) working in international exchange activities involving sports. Participants perform terms of one to five years.

Since the JET Programme began in 1987, approximately 56,000 participants from 60 nations have taken part. In FY2011 there were some 4,300 participants from 39 nations, dispatched to about 1,000 local government organizations throughout Japan. Over 90% of the JET participants are ALTs, and while the focus language of a majority of them is English, some also come to assist with French, Chinese and Korean.

“Foreign language activities became a requirement in elementary education in 2011 and English ALTs at elementary schools have increased since then,” says Noriaki Suzuki of the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR). “The role of CIRs is expanding as well. Since more people from abroad are living in Japan today, some CIRs offer...
consultation to expatriates in their area, and some are involved in economic exchange programs between their home country and the local government organization to which they are dispatched."

Globalization and JET

"Excuse me. I lost my watch. Could you help me find it?"

"Sure. What does it look like?"

In an English conversation class at the Tokorozawa Shogyo High School in Saitama Prefecture, ALT Bryan Darr uses big gestures as he helps tenth-grade students practice English conversation.

Darr, from the U.S. city of St. Louis, came to Japan in 2008 as a JET participant. He currently works as an ALT at Tokorozawa Shogyo High School and Tokorozawa High School.

"The JET Programme is very attractive for someone like me looking to live and work in a new environment," says Darr. "The program offers lots of support for the participants. It provides us with training on how to live and teach in Japan and counseling on work and life, in addition to networking and professional growth opportunities."

Darr had never taught English prior to coming to Japan, but through teaching many students since becoming an ALT, he was drawn into the enjoyment of the job. Darr always goes to the school cafeteria at lunch to talk with students, hoping to give them as many opportunities for interaction as possible beyond the classroom.

"It’s fun talking with students about the future or pop culture." Darr says. "I feel they’re discovering their interest in English and foreign culture and they take more initiative than before in trying to communicate with me both inside and outside class. It’s an extremely rewarding job," He also volunteers in the JET Programme to offer support to other JET participants and to improve teaching methods.

In Memory of Taylor Anderson

On March 11, 2011, two American participants in the JET Programme lost their lives in the Great East Japan Earthquake. Taylor Anderson, working as an ALT at elementary and junior high schools in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, was one of them. Her hometown high school, the St. Catherine’s School in the U.S. state of Virginia, established the Taylor Anderson ’04 Memorial Gift Fund to lend support to the stricken areas. Anderson’s family and the Tokyo American Club donated Taylor Anderson Reading Corners to the seven schools at which she taught. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, on his visit to the United States in April 2012, met with her parents to express his deep condolences and gratitude.
Kyoto Seika University was Japan’s first university to set up a manga faculty, in 2006. The Faculty of Manga is divided into the manga and animation departments. The manga department offers courses in cartoon art, comic art and manga production, and will launch new courses in gag manga and character design from April 2013. Manga faculty professors are prominent Japanese manga artists, animators and editors, who teach everything from the basics of drawing a line with a pen to the practical study of story production. Some students make their debut as manga artists while still in the school.

Out of a total of 820 students in the Faculty, 70

Increasing numbers of young people overseas are studying Japanese pop culture such as manga and Japanese-style animation, genres that are being popularized around the world. Kyoto Seika University is a leading place of education in these fields and has a large number of overseas students. Osamu Sawaji of the Japan Journal visited the university.
hail from overseas, mainly from Asia, including South Korea, China and Taiwan.

“I fell in love with Japanese manga when I was in elementary school. I was especially obsessed with Slam Dunk,” says Shin Daegyu, a second-year animation department student from South Korea. “When I was in junior high, I saw Ghost in the Shell and was genuinely amazed by the realistic images.”

Shin started to consider becoming an animator when he was in high school. He decided to go to school in Japan, the home of manga and animation that he had so admired since elementary school. After studying extremely hard in Seoul, his wish came true and he was able to enroll in Kyoto Seika University.

“It’s great that we can learn various things like acoustics and 3D that are needed to become an animator,” says Shin. “I would like to work at a Japanese animation company after I graduate, and in the future, I would like to produce my own work.”

A Bridge between Japan and Italy
Daniela Russo, a third-year student enrolled in the manga story development course, also became captivated by manga when she started to watch Japanese animated television shows broadcast in her own country and read manga translated into Italian. Russo especially likes shojo manga.

“The story line is interesting in Japanese manga. The pictures are also very unique,” says Russo. “In Italy, manga is considered to be a thing for children, but I consider it a form of art.”

Russo decided to study manga in Japan when she was in high school. She moved to Japan after graduating from high school, studied Japanese in a language school and entered Kyoto Seika University. It did not take her much time to assimilate since Japanese students there were also fans of manga, and she is now completely immersed in her life in Japan.

“It might be difficult for me to become a manga artist because there are a lot of people who are more talented than I am. But I would always like to be involved in some way with manga,” Russo says. “If I can’t become a manga artist, I would like to serve as a bridge between Japan and Italy by introducing more beautiful manga from Japan to Italy.”

Daniela Russo holds up one of her manga creations.

Shin Daegyu works on an animation.
One of Japan’s international cooperation activities is the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), implemented by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The mission of JOCV is to contribute to the development of the economy and society, and to address issues affecting the country with local people in developing countries, and this includes sports training. During the FY2012 spring recruitment period, developing countries have requested dispatch of JOCVs in a wide range of such fields, including physical training at high schools, swimming instructors for public swimming pools, and softball training for national teams.

Athletes the volunteers will train range from ordinary youths to highly skilled members of national teams. In a number of cases athletes trained by JOCVs have gone on to successfully participate in the Olympics. JOCVs trained eleven athletes in the Beijing 2008 Olympics Games, including a judoka who became Mongolia’s first gold medalist, a female track and field athlete from Djibouti, and a swimmer from the Maldives.

The 2012 Summer Olympic Games will soon take place in London. Osamu Sawaji of the Japan Journal reports on the work of a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) member training top-level judoka in El Salvador, including one man who will compete in the London Games.
Coaching Judo in El Salvador

Carlos Figueroa of El Salvador, another judoka who has received training from a JOCV, will participate in the London Olympics starting in July 2012, competing in the 66 kg class. The first JOCV judo coach was dispatched from Japan in 1969. Since then the JOCV coaches have been almost continually dispatched to El Salvador, apart from the period of civil war between 1980 and 1992, and five of its judoka have participated in the Olympics.

Asami Togo is currently training Figueroa. Togo, who was a member of the Tenri University Judo Club, one of Japan’s strongest, was dispatched to El Salvador in June 2011, and is training Figueroa and other national team members in the nation’s capital, San Salvador.

“When I was a university student I went to France and lived and practiced together with overseas judoka, and I started thinking I might like to teach judo overseas,” Togo says. “With the language barrier I went through some tough times when I couldn’t clearly express what I wanted to say and they would not accept my opinions. However, what supports me is my past experience and the fact that the judoka always communicate with me with respect. Their attitudes toward judo have greatly improved compared to when I was a new volunteer.”

As the opening of the Olympics draws near, local media are increasingly focusing on the nation’s judo team, which is also raising expectations. With the strong request of Figueroa, and the cooperation of the El Salvador Judo Federation and National Olympic Committee, it was decided that Togo would accompany him to London as a special coach.

“In the Olympics I want Figueroa to aim for the top eight by using all his abilities to fight without giving way to any of his opponents,” Togo says. “I know that he can continue to draw on his best techniques against his opponents and create winning opportunities in all his bouts, so I have really high expectations.”
Angelica Tabora, who had been working as a registered nurse in Manila, came to Japan in May 2009 under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between Japan and the Philippines. After studying Japanese for about six months, she started work as a nurse’s aide at the Kameda Medical Center in Kamogawa City in Chiba Prefecture.

“I came to Japan hoping to study the country’s advanced nursing technology, and also hoped to make use of the knowledge to practice nursing in the Philippines in the future,” says Tabora. “The first thing I noticed was that Japanese nurses are extremely thorough when it comes to a patient’s safety. They carefully and repeatedly check a patient’s condition and medication; I learned a lot from this. Also, another point is that nurses are ready to explain medical procedures and test results in a simple and gentle manner to each and every patient; it’s something to emulate.”

Tabora began studying for the Japanese state nursing exam while working as a nurse’s aide. She studied for eight hours a day in between work by waking up at 5 a.m. every morning and going to bed at midnight.

“The most difficult part was the kanji. I had to study by looking up the meaning of each and every kanji in a dictionary when I came across a kanji that I didn’t know,” she says.

Tabora, now having passed the state exam, continues to work at the Kameda Medical Center as a registered nurse.

“I am very happy when a patient approaches me to thank me or when a patient I had been looking after is sent home safely,” notes Tabora. “When I return to my home country in the future, I would like to go to graduate school and further deepen my knowledge of nursing and its techniques I learned in Japan.”

Masaki Yamada is a freelance writer.
Learning from One Another

The Japanese government is pursuing policies to strengthen a human network linking Japan and foreign countries. Osamu Sawaji of the Japan Journal reports.

One of Japan’s well-known foreign student assistance systems is the Japanese government scholarships system. Established in 1954, the system has provided scholarships to more than 83,000 students from approximately 160 different countries. In addition, to assist foreign students in finding employment in Japan, the government supports universities with essential “business Japanese” language classes, internships at Japanese companies, and other employment activities.

These human resource development systems have been devised to facilitate coordination between academia and industry. One example of this is Gunma University, which has been supporting foreign students’ education and employment by cooperating with local auto parts companies in a consortium. Employees of the participating companies teach foreign students Japanese business etiquette or support them by hiring them as interns. As a result, many foreign students are employed by local companies, invigorating local industry.

At the same time, the Japanese government sends young Japanese to work as interns overseas. For example, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry started the dispatch of interns through the Internship for METI Global Internship Program this fiscal year. This program provides young university students or workers under the age of thirty-five with internship opportunities at government-affiliated organizations related to infrastructure and local corporations in developing countries lasting three to six months. It is expected that 100 people will be sent to ten countries, concentrating on Asia, including Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar and the Philippines. Working adults will make up about 60% of total participants. They will be dispatched to government-affiliated public companies, such as electric utilities and railroads, and to private sector companies in manufacturing and other industries.

Among those companies hosting interns, there are many that wish to strengthen their relationships with Japan. As Japanese society becomes globalized, each country enjoys advantages and this is tied to the invigoration of every nation. This certainly can be said to be a “win-win” system.

ANNOUNCEMENT

New Residency System

Under the new residency system, beginning on July 9, 2012, Resident Cards will be issued to foreign nationals residing in Japan. The current Alien Registration System will be abolished. Persons residing in Japan who have been granted resident status for a period of stay of more than three months will be issued a Resident Card. Resident Cards will not be issued to persons with Temporary Visitor status or persons with Diplomatic or Official status.

For more on the new residency system, refer to the following Immigration Bureau URL:

An increasing number of Japanese companies have been proactively hiring foreign employees in recent years, among them major apparel manufacturer and leading Internet service company. Another notable example is convenience store chain Lawson, as Osamu Sawaji of the Japan Journal reports.

Convenience stores, with their abundant selection of goods and meticulous merchandise management, are almost indispensable in the daily life of the average Japanese. Japan has more than 40,000 convenience stores nationwide, and Japanese convenience store operators have also been expanding overseas, with the number of store openings abroad now exceeding that in Japan.

Lawson is a major convenience store operator that runs around 11,000 stores in Japan, about 400 in China, and 32 in Indonesia. The company has been proactive in hiring full-time foreign employees since 2008. The company has made it a policy that around 30% of its newly hired employees are foreign nationals. Out of ninety-eight new hires in FY2012, twenty-one were foreign. To date, the company has hired employees from ten countries and regions, including China, South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia.

“In order for a corporation to advance further amid the progress in globalization in society, we require employees who are aware of the need to proactively face challenges and who can flexibly respond to issues. To nurture this talent, diversity within a company is extremely important. This is why we are continuously hiring a certain percentage of foreign employees,” says Lawson’s Senior Vice President Kiyoteru Suzuki. “We do not discriminate just because they are foreign employees.”

Foreign employees who work at Lawson are pro-
ducing extremely good results. Many of those who score among the top in a test given at the end of a new employee training course are foreign employees. In 2009, a Chinese employee secured the top spot in nationwide sales of New Year’s *osechi ryori* dishes.

“There are a number of Chinese employees who have been sent to local subsidiaries in China. They are exercising their leadership skills and are fulfilling the role of managing their local staff,” states Suzuki. “The presence of foreign employees also motivates Japanese employees. In the past, only about 5% of Japanese employees wanted to go overseas, but now, 30–40% desire to work abroad.”

At Lawson, after completing new employee training, an employee is sent to a store to gain experience as a manager for one to two years, subsequently moves on to become an assistant supervisor (ASV), and then a supervisor (SV). An SV manages the operation of around ten stores and an ASV supports the SV. This career path is basically the same for both Japanese and foreign employees.

“The reason why I came to Japan was because Japanese people are accurate with time and they keep promises. I wanted to adopt this kind of culture,” says Nguyen Tuan Duong, who now works as an ASV at a Lawson South Chiba branch in Chiba Prefecture. “And the number of Japanese corporations is increasing in Vietnam; I thought what I learn in Japan would be helpful for my future.”

Nguyen was born in Hanoi, Vietnam, and moved to Japan in 2004. After graduating from a Japanese university, he joined Lawson in 2010.

“I thought it would be a waste to go straight back to Vietnam after graduating from university,” says Nguyen. “I wanted to work alongside Japanese people and learn how Japanese people work.”

One of the reasons Nyugen chose Lawson was because the company is pushing for overseas expansion. Currently as an ASV, while making the daily rounds to his stores, he is acquiring the expertise needed in convenience store operations, by making observations from a customer’s perspective and figuring out the best strategy to respond to a customer’s needs.

“There are few twenty-four-hour supermarkets or stores that service bill payments for things like electricity and water in Vietnam. If the number of Japanese convenience stores with this type of expertise increases in Vietnam, it will contribute greatly to the Vietnamese economy,” Nguyen states. “I would really like to be involved in opening a Lawson store in Vietnam in the future.”

*Both Photos Masatoshi Sakamoto*
Vast swathes of Japan are covered forestland.

According to statistics published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2010, forests actually account for 69% of all land in Japan. This puts Japan on a par with Sweden, with the second highest proportion of forestland of any advanced country, behind Finland (73%).

Japan is home to four forests that are registered as natural world heritage sites. The first of these is Shiretoko in Hokkaido, which is a veritable treasure trove of rare species such as the brown bear and Steller’s sea eagle. Shirakami-Sanchi meanwhile straddles Aomori and Akita Prefectures and is one of the world’s largest natural beech forests. The other two forests are the Ogasawara Islands, which are actually part of Greater Tokyo and were registered as a World Heritage site last year, and Yakushima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture. Although all four forests are home to indigenous species that cannot be found anywhere else, Yakushima for one is best known for its Yaku{sugi cedar trees. The forest’s biggest tree is the Jomon Cedar, which is 25 meters
The wood in the photo is known as “hodagi,” but what it is used for?

A. Building houses  
B. Growing mushrooms  
C. Fuel

It has long-since been prohibited to cut down trees in certain areas along the coast of Japan, but why is that? (The photo shows a forest on the Manazuru Peninsula in Kanagawa Prefecture.)

A. To preserve parkland for walkers  
B. To provide insects for food  
C. For the fishing industry

See the back page for answers.
CELL SHEETS are sheets of approximately 0.1 mm in thickness cultured from cells taken from the patient’s own body. They were first developed by Professor Teruo Okano of Tokyo Women’s Medical University in 1990. It was Professor Yoshiki Sawa who immediately expressed his interest in this success. He works at the Department of Cardiovascular Surgery at Osaka University Hospital.

Professor Sawa reports that when he learned about the research results of cell sheets twelve years ago at the Japanese Society for Artificial Organs, he thought he could apply them to his specialty, the field of heart disease treatment. He immediately proposed to Professor Okano that they establish a joint research project, and Professor Okano readily accepted his proposal. Professor Sawa noted that, at that time, the potential of cell sheets had not yet been fully evaluated, and he believed that his team would be the first to start clinical research.

As Professor Sawa continued to experiment, starting with mice and moving on to pigs and other animals, he found the results were better than he had anticipated. In 2007, Professor Sawa started clinical research on a human patient with heart disease.

HOW THE NEW THERAPY WORKS

The research group developed the following therapy. First, skeletal myoblasts in their early development stage are harvested from the patient’s thigh. They are then extracorporally cultured to form a sheet of approximately five centimeters in diameter. Four sheets are then stacked and affixed to about six parts of the patient’s heart muscle. After this operation, new vascular networks are developed in the patient’s heart and the weakened cardiac muscle cells start to become revitalized by protein and other substances released from the skeletal myoblast sheets.

The use of cultured myoblasts has been proposed in the past, but all of the proposals adopted a method in which cultured myo-
blasts were injected directly into the heart muscles. This approach, however, has not always produced the results expected, and has sometimes triggered cardiac arrhythmia and other problems. Professor Sawa has performed fourteen cell-sheet transplant surgeries over the past five years. Although all of these patients had serious heart problems or had artificial hearts implanted while they waited for their heart transplant, all reportedly regained their health and were discharged from hospital. In particular, two thirds managed to improve their condition so dramatically that they were able to have their artificial heart removed.

Professor Sawa comments that because the skeletal muscle and the heart muscle are different, myoblast cell sheets themselves will not start beating. However, they provide a variety of stimulation and nutrition to the heart cells, reenergizing the weakened heart muscle. Because these cell sheets are harvested from the patient’s own body, they can be used without concern about the immune system rejecting them. They can be regarded as a group that supports the heart muscle.

In the case of a heart transplant, in fact, because patients use the organs of other people, they need to take immunosuppressive drugs throughout their lives, at a cost of up to several million yen a year. If patients receive an artificial heart, the systems are very expensive and require regular maintenance. As a result, it is difficult for the patients to leave hospital and restart a normal life. For this reason, an artificial heart is really only a system that supports the patients while they are waiting for a heart transplant. On the other hand, surgery to affix cell sheets is low risk in itself, and the recovery in heart functions is noticeably good.

Professor Sawa believes that his patients appear not only to recover physically, but also become mentally energetic, happy, and positive, perhaps because they have been able to overcome a serious malady using the tissues of their own bodies. He takes great pleasure in witnessing the positive changes in patients’ attitudes.

**Toward Commercial Application**

Following these excellent outcomes from the clinical research, Terumo Corporation, a manufacturer of medical products, announced in February 2012 that it would start clinical trials of cardiac regenerative therapy using myoblast cell sheets. It expects to work with Osaka University to develop commercial products. In the meantime, to facilitate the development of cell sheets that regularly contract in tandem with the beating of the heart, Professor Sawa and his team have started research into developing cell sheets that use induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS cells) instead of femoral muscle myoblasts. When this type of cell sheet is developed, patients with extremely serious heart disease, in which the functions of the heart have fallen to a level beyond the ability of current cell sheets to help, will see some hope of a cure in the future.

*Takashi Sasaki is a freelance writer.*
What makes Yufuin so special?

Izumi Kuwano: Many onsen towns around Japan are little more than a collection of hotels, inns and gift shops. Here in Yufuin however, those facilities are mixed in with houses where regular people live, rice paddies and fields, as well as lots of unique cafés and galleries. The town is really compact too, so you can walk anywhere. We also have beautiful natural scenery, with stunning views of Yufu-dake mountain, which towers over the town, and the surrounding countryside. On top of all that, we have a full calendar of cultural events all year round, including film, art and music.

Tourists also come to Yufuin from outside Japan, particularly countries such as South Korea and China. Overseas visitors often comment that Yufuin is a really charming town. We even get repeat visitors coming over for a second or third time.
When you welcome guests to Tamanoyu, which aspects of hospitality do you particularly focus on?

I think that giving guests a sense of the current season in Yufuin is a key part of hospitality. For instance, we always have decorations linked to seasonal events in the inn and serve dishes made from local seasonal ingredients. That might include vegetables grown by nearby farmers, seafood from the waters around Oita or the local specialty Bungo beef, which is reared right here in Oita Prefecture. More unusual ingredients include sasanaba mushrooms, which we use in dishes in the fall. These have an extremely rich aroma, so they’re something of a delicacy like truffles.

As members of staff, we also try to maintain a sense of distance so that our guests feel more relaxed. Rather than bombarding our guests with detailed information about their meals or the gardens, we just make sure that we can answer any question that our guests may ask. We often get asked about the flowers in our gardens for instance, so we all spend time reading books and learning about flowers.

Overseas guests tend to be most impressed by the plants and flowers in our gardens. They really enjoy looking out at the gardens while eating or drinking in our bar.

You took over from your father in 2003. Have you made any changes from a feminine perspective at Tamanoyu since then?

Whereas my father planted lots of trees around the grounds to create a woodland feel, I have planted lots of flowers instead. As I mentioned a moment ago, we like to use flowers to give our guests a sense of the current season. I like drinking too, so I created a bar area where women can feel comfortable having a drink, even if they’re on their own. As a mother myself, another thing I wanted to do was create somewhere for children to come and stay. That’s why we’ve done things like putting more children’s picture books in our lounge areas.

What is your vision for Tamanoyu in the future?

We currently have seventeen rooms spread across our 10,000m² grounds here at Tamanoyu. Over the next few years, we are hoping to reduce the number of rooms by around two so that we can have more greenery. We want to create spaces in which guests can listen to music, read books, drink a cup of tea, or just come together and experience the unique culture of Yufuin.

As people are getting more and more health conscious these days, we also want to help our guests stay healthy. For instance, we are thinking of offering healthy food options and working with the local hospital in Yufuin to provide preventive medicine support services.
Stéphane Danton’s specialty Japanese teahouse Ocharaka is on a corner of a shopping district in Kichijoji, an area bustling with young people. The store’s interior, which is lined with boxes that encase various types of Japanese tea, has an ambiance of an elegant café, with mostly young women streaming into the shop.

“The general perception is that Japanese tea tends to be preferred by the elderly, but a lot of young women visit our shop. By drinking the flavored teas that I have created, these women, perhaps, might be discovering brand new flavors and ways to enjoy Japanese tea,” says Danton.

Danton, who was born in Lyon, France and had been interested in Japanese culture, moved to Japan in 1992. Having been certified as a sommelier in his home country, he came to Japan with the intention to work in a wine-related business, but ended up in a specialty tea shop in Aoyama, Tokyo. This shop carried 440 types of tea from around the world, including teas from China, Sri Lanka, India and Brazil. And also among these teas was Japanese tea.

“Just like wine, the flavor and fragrance of Japanese tea change ever so slightly depending on the source ingredient. This delicate characteristic of Japanese tea is what appeals to me. After working at the tea shop for some time, I started to wonder if there was a new way of drinking Japanese tea that could be translated to the rest of the world. But I barely had any knowledge of the types and source ingredients of Japanese tea. So I decided to visit tea-growing regions all over Japan.”

From Hokkaido in the north down to Okinawa in the south, Danton deepened his knowledge of Japanese tea by venturing to tea farms across the country, speaking directly with the producers and witnessing the conditions of tealeaves and trees on the plantations with his own eyes. This is how he happened upon Kawane tea, which is harvested in

A glass of cold Kyoho grape-flavored Japanese tea
Kawane-cho in Shizuoka Prefecture, one of the leading tea-growing regions in Japan.

“I found Kawane tea to be the kind of tea that satiates my sense of sight, smell and taste, but felt that in its original state, it wouldn’t translate that well into sales overseas. There is a strong sense in the western world that Japanese tea equates to matcha and so it’s bitter. And the impression is that one cannot enjoy Japanese tea casually like wine. So this is how I came up with blending fruit aromas into cold-brewed Japanese tea; in other words, flavored Japanese tea.”

Danton created and commercialized around thirty types of flavored tea that retain the flavor of Kawane tea but are blended with aroma extracted from fruit including that from summer tangerines, Kyoho grapes, peaches and blackcurrants. He opened Ocharaka in 2005 as a base for his overseas business. The name Ocharaka is a pun on the words ochà, meaning tea, and ocharakasu, which means to tease. At the world fair in Zaragoza, Spain, in 2008, Danton’s creation, the Valencia orange flavored tea, was a hit in the Japanese pavilion.

In fact, I tried the Kyoho grape flavored tea. The subtle sweet and sour aroma of the grapes and the refreshing sensation were indeed something I had not experienced before in a Japanese tea.

“We sell flavored teas overseas on the Internet now, but orders from abroad only amount to around 10% of overall sales. I think there are various ways to grow sales. I am focusing on direct sales because I would like to communicate the stories behind Japanese teas to my clients: like the allure of their source ingredients or how they are transformed into merchandise. So my dream, first of all, is to open a directly managed Japanese tea shop in my hometown in Lyon. I would like to continue increasing the number of flavored teas as well.”

Masako Yamada is a freelance writer.
At only 16 percent the thickness of a single strand of human hair, the Fairy Feather silk developed by Saiei Orimono of Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, can lay claim to being the finest available in the global marketplace. Winner of the Prime Minister’s Award at this year’s Monodzukuri Nippon Grand Awards, the ultra-thin silk is the latest development in a craft that is said to have existed in the Kawamata area for nearly a millennium and a half.

The secret to the company’s silk is its fine and light but durable qualities, according to Yasuyuki Saito, president of Saiei Orimono. The vertical and horizontal threads can also be woven with variations in the shades of the silk, giving the finished product a shimmering look that changes color slightly as it moves.

The company currently has seventeen employees, with five “masters” of the five crucial skills required for silk production. New staff must spend a year learning each of at least three of them.

The Kawamata area has been making silk scarves for export for more than a century, though they were known outside Japan as “Yokohama Scarves” after the port city south of Tokyo from where they were shipped. Saito’s father worked at a trading company in Yokohama which had sent silk to Fukushima for it to be made into handkerchiefs and then sent back to the port for export to the United States. He later decided to relocate to the Kawamata area where the companies with which he had been trading were located, and founded Saiei Orimono.

Like most companies in the apparel or fabrics business, Saiei Orimono has been vulnerable to the vagaries of trends and fashions.

“When the current Crown Prince married Princess Masako [1993], there was a ‘scarf boom’ in Japan because the princess liked to wear silk...
scarves, but since then they haven’t really been popular,” explains Saito.

The silk producers of the area have shifted their focus to traditional Japanese wear and wedding dresses. The lightness of Saiei Orimono’s silk has made it a popular choice with designer Yumi Katsura, who has been using it for wedding dresses for three decades. Due to Katsura’s penchant for the fabric, many other makers of bridal wear now also utilize the fine silk in their own creations, according to Saito.

The office and factory of Saiei Orimono were damaged by last year’s March 11 earthquake and tsunami, yet 80% of Saito’s staff came to the company the next day, despite it being a Saturday, and every one of the employees had turned up for work as normal within two weeks.

“The office and factory were a mess, with stuff all over place, things broken and the equipment out of alignment. But all the staff came to help clear up.”

On this note, Saito reflects, the biggest influence of the disasters has been that people have come to realize the importance of human relations, of friends and family, and the ties that bind them together.

Looking forward, the company is working on opening sales channels for its award-winning Fairy Feather silk in Europe, with one French company having already taken samples and now considering whether to begin using the unique fabric.

Gavin Blair is a freelance journalist living in Tokyo who writes for publications in the United Kingdom, United States and Asia.
O-hajiki is a traditional Japanese game popularized by girls in the Edo period (1603–1867). The game today is commonly played with small discs of glass resembling flattened marbles. There are many different ways to play o-hajiki. In one popular game, the discs are scattered on the ground and players take it in turns to flick (hajiki means to “flick”) a chosen disc along a stated line so that it hits just one other disc. If successful, the player keeps both discs and flicks again; any other outcome, and the next player takes her turn. The player with the most discs at the end of the game is the winner.