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The Japan Pavilion at the Janadriyah Festival

# Visiting Japan

## at the Janadriyah Festival

From April 13 to 29, the 26<sup>th</sup> Janadriyah Festival was held in this suburb of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The annual heritage and folk culture festival is organized by the National Guard and opened by King Abdullah. Pavilions for different provinces, government agencies and corporations line the 1.5 square kilometer grounds. Events and exhibitions demonstrate Saudi Arabia's traditional culture, including folk dances, camel races, arts and crafts. It is reported that the attendance each year runs into several millions.

Every year since 2008, one foreign country is invited as a guest of honor to the Janadriyah Festival. This year Japan was invited as the first guest country from Asia. The Japanese Government, in cooperation with private companies,

"Recovery, Bonds, Hope": The Great East Japan Earthquake panel display



set up the Japan Pavilion under the theme, "Cool! Japan for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

The Japan Pavilion was divided into four sections with a distinct theme for each, displaying the allure of Japan from a variety of perspectives, from traditional culture to leading edge technology. For example, the "present day" zone introduced things having to do with the everyday lives of Japanese, such as fashion and food, through displays of actual items and visual images. In the "future" zone, Japanese corporations put on display cutting-edge products such as automobiles and home appliances. In addition, on the stage built like a Japanese traditional room, the demonstrations of Japanese culture such as the tea ceremony and flower arranging were very popular.

Every day on the outdoor stage various events



A taiko drum performance on the outdoor stage

Arabians were often to be seen dancing in time to the rhythm.

Panels that displayed photos from the Great East Japan Earthquake that struck just before the festival opened made a deep impression on visitors. Many viewed the panels for long periods of time, and some even gave handwritten condolences to staff members. Around 300,000 people visited the Japan Pavilion where long lines formed every day.

In 2009 a special television program about Japan was aired that evoked a great response in Saudi Arabia, therefore there was already much interest in Japan. Among young people as well, Japanese manga and anime have become known through the Internet and have grown extremely popular.

"Thanks to the influence of manga and anime, there were many young people who could speak simple Japanese," says Yoko Kamiyama of the Second Middle East Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "I think that the exhibitions in the Japanese Pavilion provided opportunities for not just these people of the younger generation, but the older generations as well to learn more about Japan."



A demonstration of traditional Japanese-style painting

were held such as *taiko* drum and *shamisen* performances, Iwami Kagura dance and karate demonstrations. During the music performances, Saudi