

Welcome to Sendai!

The term “Yamato nadeshiko” (“Yamato” is an ancient name for Japan and “nadeshiko” is a type of carnation) is used to describe the ideal, quintessentially beautiful Japanese women. Traditionally, the term evokes very quiet and reserved females. However, a new kind of Yamato nadeshiko is emerging. They work actively in Japan and beyond as pioneers in different fields.

*The first part of this series, which looks at this new era of Yamato nadeshiko, features **Emiko Okuyama**, mayor of the city of Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture. Osamu Sawaji of The Japan Journal interviews this woman, who is working on the frontlines to help foster recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake.*



Emiko Okuyama, mayor of Sendai

How are the initiatives to reconstruct the city of Sendai progressing?

Mayor Emiko Okuyama: In March, we had infrastructure such as water supply, electricity, and rail transport down, as well as a fuel shortage that caused long waiting lines at filling stations. In April, however, the infrastructure was mostly back in operation and people were returning to their normal lifestyles, except coastal regions damaged by the tsunami and parts of mountainous regions.

At the peak, there were 105,000 people housed in evacuation centers. By the end of June, securing temporary houses such as pre-fabricated houses and other private apartments for victims who lost their homes lies within the purview.

We had a target of ensuring that domestic or overseas visitors to the Tanabata Festival in August would experience no inconvenience in Sendai, and we came very close to achieving

this. So, we look forward to welcoming tourists from around the country and from around the world.

In August, Tohoku is home to the Tanabata Festival and many other festive events.

The Tohoku summer is short. So the people of Tohoku use these festivals from early to mid August to celebrate their summer. It is a regional tradition that has existed for hundreds of years.

If you use Sendai as the pivotal point, the rail network offers easy access to other Tohoku cities with summer festivals, such as Yamagata, Morioka, and Aomori.

Tohoku has many attractions. Take cuisine for example. Not only seafood but also wild vegetables and mushrooms provide culinary delights. In the southern portion of Iwate Prefec-

ture where Hiraizumi is located, which was recently added to the World Cultural Heritage list, and in the northern part of Miyagi Prefecture, there is well-known rice cake cuisine. You can enjoy a wide range of rice cake dishes combined with sesame, walnut, grated *daikon* radish, and other ingredients.

Sendai is also well known as being home to the *hiyashi chuka* cold noodles dish. Since it is available in summer only, I encourage people to try it when you come to Sendai in summer.

What is your favorite place in the city?

I love the view from the promenade along the Hirose-gawa river that flows in the city of Sendai. Walking along the river, the sight of Tohoku University and Aoba-jo castle enables you to feel an atmosphere that is unique to our city. It is lovely to do so all through the year, on sunny days and on rainy days. I often did it when I was a university student, because it is free!

In summer, we have a fireworks festival. I think many people remember walking along the Hirose-gawa and watching fireworks together with their boyfriends or girlfriends.

You call Sendai the “City of Eternal Youth.” Where does the name come from?

In the Sendai metropolitan area, there are about twenty institutions of higher education and approximately 70,000 students. So we have a large population of young people. And because they are students, the young population is changing constantly. That is why Sendai is a city of eter-

nal youth.

The numerousness of young people is significant to the city’s culture. A large number of them take part as volunteers in, for example, the Jozenji Street Jazz Festival in September, the Michinoku Yosakoi Festival in October, and the Sendai Pageant of Starlight in December. Sendai is unique in that students are a symbol of the city.

The Sendai City Government announced its bid to host the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2015. What is behind this bid?

Sendai has a population of 1.05 million. I think it is unprecedented in world history for an earthquake of a magnitude of 9.0 and a massive tsunami to strike near a city with a population of this size. The earthquake caused water supply, electricity, rail transport, and other infrastructure to fail for a while. However, we managed to restore service very quickly. Traveling at a speed of 300 km per hour, Shinkansen trains stopped as soon as the preliminary vibrations were detected. This enabled them to avoid derauling. It is the duty of Sendai to share our experience, technical knowledge, and lessons for the future with other cities around the world.

In the badly hit coastal region, we hope to complete the removal of rubble within the year. And next year, we will be working to restore farmland, recover the drainage function of farmland, remove salt from the soil, and develop salt-resistant crops. I hope that the world will see a new kind of agriculture in the coastal area when the Conference takes place in 2015. 