

Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

*Tokyo Girls Collection (TGC) has attracted fanatical support from legions of young women ever since it was first held in August 2005. Chief Producer **Maki Okuda**, who has been involved in the event since the 2nd TGC, spoke to the Japan Journal's Osamu Sawaji.*

What is the theme the 13th TGC, at Saitama Super Arena on September 3?

Maki Okuda: We did wonder if we should go ahead because the Great East Japan Earthquake was so tragic. We decided to do so however because we felt that people need events to lift their spirits, now more than ever. The theme is going to be Smile For “ ”. We have left that last part blank so that people can insert whatever message they want, whether they be family members, those affected by the earthquake, or countries that have supported Japan, as well as those producing the fashion. We also want to send out a smile to as many people as possible, all over the world, via TGC.

One particular section of the venue will feature booths where people can sample cosmetic products and buy drinks and foods such as local dishes from the Tohoku region. This will enable people to make themselves pretty and have their hunger satisfied before the main event, so that they can enjoy TGC with a smile on their face. We are also planning to hold a charity auction in support of those affected by the earthquake.

Why do you think TGC has become such a success?

Basically, we just created somewhere for girls to have fun. Before TGC, there wasn't anywhere girls could go and spend about six hours enjoying fashion and entertainment.

We also introduced a system that was unlike any other fashion show, enabling people to use their mobile phones to buy clothes right away, just like those being worn by models on the catwalk in front of them. Buying clothes intuitively like that really fits in with how girls behave. I think that is another of the main factors behind our success.

What kind of response has TGC received from overseas?

The 12th TGC, which took place shortly before the earthquake of March 11, was covered by the media in countries such as China, Taiwan,



Maki Okuda, chief producer of Tokyo Girls Collection

South Korea, Germany and the United States. I once gave a talk about TGC in Germany, and everyone was amazed by the way in which people could buy clothes immediately via their mobile phones. They had never envisioned fashion and technology working together like that.

Every TGC event attracts upwards of 20,000 people. I would say that at least 1,000 of those are from countries other than Japan. One of the best compliments that I ever received was from someone who had come over from Hong Kong, who said, “I envy Japan, because Japan has TGC!”

You studied in the United Kingdom before getting involved in TGC.

After quitting my job at an advertising agency, I spent one year studying communication at the London School of Economics, focusing particularly on providing information to victims of crime. I felt that victims in Japan were unable to obtain sufficient information about crimes they had been involved in and those responsible.



A scene from the March 2011 Tokyo Girls Collection at Yoyogi National Gymnasium, Tokyo

13th Tokyo Girls Collection 201 | Autumn/Winter

Date: 15:00, September 3 (venue open from 13:00)

Venue: Saitama Super Arena

Access: Close to Saitama Shintoshin Station. 30 minutes from Tokyo Station on JR lines.

Expected attendance: Approx 30,000 people (total)

Featured models: At least 40 (As of Aug. 1)

Participating brands: At least 17 (As of Aug. 1)

When I came back to Japan, I was planning to get a job working for an NPO or as a civil servant, so that I could put what I had learnt in the United Kingdom to good use. I ended up getting involved in TGC however after I got a call from Chief Producer Ayako Nagaya (now head of the TGC Executive Committee), who I knew from my days with the advertising agency. She asked me to help out with TGC, which was just getting off the ground at that time.

I had always been interested in fashion and had seen for myself that Japanese fashion was popular overseas. I love traveling overseas, and have often been asked about my clothes by people in other countries. On three separate occasions during my time studying in London, women from completely different age groups came up to me when I was wearing a top I had bought from 109 (a department store in Tokyo's fashionable Shibuya district that is popular with young people) and asked me, “Where did you get that top?”

I think that Japanese girls' fashion is becoming more and more popular overseas. We don't have any specific plans as yet, but I would love to broaden the appeal of TGC in areas that are culturally similar to Japan, in East Asia for instance, particularly Southeast Asian countries. 