

How is everybody this month? I have heard quite a lot from locals “This winter is a warm one. You are lucky that this is the first Montreal winter you’re experiencing” with the nuance that it would normally be much colder. This too might be due to climate change impacting every region of the world.

- On January 21 and February 4, I was invited to attend the Hatsugama, symbolic first tea ceremony of the year, by the Quebec and the Montreal chapters of Chado Urasenke Tankokai respectively. Both were solemn affairs but also conveyed a sense of heartfelt hospitality. I am humbled by the sustained efforts of both associations’ teachers who, from the first ceremony and throughout the year, share with the local population in Québec and Montreal the essence of the Japanese cultural tradition of tea ceremony in a gentle, accessible, and at the same time rigorous way. It would be wonderful to see more Canadians coming into contact with Japan’s culture by knocking on the door of tea ceremony schools. The Consulate General will also continue to support the promotion of this Japanese art.



- On January 30 and 31, I attended a regular beginning-of-the-year two-day event for the Consular Corps held by the Ministry of International Relations and La Francophonie (MRIF), where I met many, including François Legault, Premier of Quebec, Martine Biron, Minister of International Relations and La Francophonie, and Nathalie Roy, President of the National Assembly of Quebec. Through those meetings, I was able to discuss Japan-Quebec relations. The event schedule was packed, offering activities such as policy presentations by ministers and public institutions’ executives, or guided tours for instance related to quantum computers. I would like to reiterate my thanks to everyone at MRIF and other institutions involved for their warm welcome of new Consuls General and their kind introduction to Quebec’s many charms.



- On February 2, I had the opportunity of holding an exchange of New Year's greetings reception with the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in Montreal, during which I discussed Japan and Canada's shared values towards a strict adherence to a free and open international order based upon the Rule of Law, as well as the demonstration of the federal and Quebec governments' focus on Asia through their formulation of Indo-Pacific strategies. I also reported on the Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa's visit to Montreal early this year and the strengthening of the personal bonds of trust between her and her Canadian counterpart, Mélanie Joly. Moreover, from an economic perspective, with the signature of a Japan-Canada cooperation memorandum relative to battery supply chains, and quantum and AI technologies last September, we can expect further deepening of relations in various fields such as that of energy, mineral resources, and science and technology. Exchanges flourished as well on the travel front as, according to Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) annual statistics, more Canadians entered Japan in 2023 than pre-pandemic averages, with a historic record of 426,000. The Consulate General will also spare no effort in sharing more broadly the appeal of Japanese culture, including gastronomy and sake.



- On February 11, "Japan Day" was being held in the municipality of Saint-Valentin, and I took this opportunity to visit the town. The latter is twinned with the city of Mimasaka in Okayama Prefecture and has designated Japan's National Foundation Day as "Japan Day", during which a wide variety of Japan-related events and activities are offered. I met with City Council member Luc Van Velzen and other municipality representatives, expressed my gratitude for Saint-Valentin's dedicated initiatives in fostering the sister city relationship, and reiterated the Consulate General's continued support of the municipality's efforts.



- On February 13, I exchanged ideas and opinions with members of the local Japanese drum group, Arashi Daiko. The latter has for around 40 years performed not only in Montreal but also throughout the province of Quebec, contributing to the dissemination of Japanese traditional Wadaiko culture. The ensemble is currently dedicated to nurturing the skills of younger generations in this art form, and we anticipate its sustained success for years to come. The Consulate General remains steadfast in supporting Arashi Daiko's endeavors aiming to promote Japanese culture.



Aside from the meetings listed above, I had the opportunity to exchange with a good number of individuals and different institutions' representatives from Canada and Japan on a variety of topics, making this month a most productive one.