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**News from the Prime Minister's Cabinet**



**Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting in Washington D.C.**

On February 11, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met President Donald Trump at the White House and issued a joint press statement. The two leaders discussed security issues in the Asia-Pacific and how to further develop Japan-U.S. economic relations.

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**Culture Notes: Hanami**



*Hanami at Maruyama Park in Kyoto*

*Hanami* (lit. "flower viewing") is a popular springtime activity in Japan. *Sakura* (cherry blossoms) are most commonly associated with hanami. The practice of hanami dates back as far as the Nara period in the 8th century.

There are many varieties of sakura, each with its own unique color and number of petals. Each year, the [Japan Meteorological Agency](#) publishes a forecast of when and where the cherry blossoms will bloom. In most parts of Japan, cherry blossoms arrive between late March and mid-April.

The Japanese fiscal and academic years begin in April, when cherry blossoms arrive in many parts of Japan. For this reason, the cherry blossoms are associated with new beginnings in Japanese culture.

To read more, visit the [Japan National Tourism Organization \(JNTO\) website](#).

**Farewell Message from Consul Makoto Izakura**

Dear friends,

I am writing this letter to inform you of my impending retirement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 31st, 2017. Further, I will be departing from my role as the Head Consul at the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage in just a few days and returning to my home in Yokohama, Japan. While I am happy to have time to rest with my family, I will truly miss my time with my friends in Alaska.

During my two years in Alaska, I have had the pleasure of meeting many excellent people across the entire state, and enjoyed partnering with you through different efforts to promote the Alaska-Japan relationship. I thank each one of you for your support and guidance. The friendships and associations I have made here will remain a strong memory.

As I have come to count on your assistance, I know that my successor will rely on you to maintain our efforts to further the Japan-Alaska relationship. Please give my successor the same courtesies that you have so graciously extended to me.

Thank you and farewell.

Makoto Izakura  
Head Consul, Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage

**Featured Interview: Alex Salov**



*Alex Salov (center left) with tour guides at Kumamoto Castle*

Alexander "Alex" Salov is the Business Operations Manager of World Trade Center Anchorage and has been working at the Center since 2004. He has a master's degree in global supply chain management from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). Since 2005, he also teaches Japanese Language at UAA as an adjunct instructor.

Alex is an active member of Alaska's Japanese community and serves on boards of the following Japan-related organizations: Japan Alaska Association (Vice President), Alaska Association of Teachers of Japanese (Treasurer), and the Montgomery Dickson Center for Japanese Language & Culture (board member).

**How did you begin learning Japanese? What sparked your interest in Japan?**

My first encounter with the Japanese language was through my mother, an English professor, whose university had an exchange program with a college in the Niigata prefecture. When I was a kid, she introduced me to the English language, but, as I grew older, I started studying Japanese for my own personal enjoyment. My first encounter with the Japanese language was through children's books that my mother brought from Japan in the late 1980s. I was particularly curious about one math book for children that I got. It had many cute pictures and I was trying to figure out what was written in it. At home we had a Japanese-Russian dictionary and I began to translate those books and writing down some Japanese words.

In 1992, I started learning Japanese through a TV course. At that time, there was a daily TV program in Russia called *Komichiwa Nihongo* and a workbook for that show was on sale everywhere. Later, I took Japanese classes at the local Japan Center, where we studied using the *Shin Nihongo no Kiso* textbook (the predecessor of the *Minna no Nihongo* textbook that is being widely used nowadays). I also became involved in a Japanese club at my high school, where we sang a lot of Japanese songs. In addition, I had some Japanese pen pals with whom I could exchange letters in Japanese so I could practice my writing skills. Practice and repetition is key to learning a new language.

I first traveled to Japan in 1996 while performing with a Russian folk music orchestra. We toured the Aomori and Hokkaido prefectures playing Russian folk music and we also had some Japanese songs in our program. This was my first time traveling abroad. Since then, I have been to Japan about 15 times, and I would like to visit again this summer.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

**Editor's Note**

Happy spring! This is a beautiful time of year in Japan.

My first visit to Japan was just over seven years ago in March. While it was a little too early for cherry blossoms, I got to try plenty of sakura-flavored treats. I had sakura ice cream, sakura Kit Kat, and sakura mochi. Starbucks in Japan even has special sakura drinks in the spring. Those were quite delicious as well.

Hopefully next time I go to Japan I will be there just in time for hanami! I'd definitely recommend going to Japan in the spring if you have the chance.

- Nicole Ringland, editor

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