

My name is Masaru Aniya
and I am the Head of the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage.
My wife, Yukiko Aniya, and I arrived in Anchorage last May,
and thanks to the wonderful people in Alaska, have been leading
a happy life here since.



Mr. & Mrs. Aniya at the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage

To begin this message, I would like to give you a pop quiz. *Which state do you think is closer to Japan, Hawaii or Alaska?* This may be common knowledge for many Alaskans, but for those who don't know—please look forward to the answer later in this message.

The Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage was established in 1970, so 2020 was its 50th anniversary. On January 21, 2021, the office hosted an online event to commemorate this occasion, which was attended by 49 people and featured guest speakers and music performances. Actually, the year 1970 was a year of various events. The Beatles broke up in April, and Apollo 13 was launched that same month. But the biggest event for Japan was EXPO '70 / JAPAN World Exposition, held for 183 days from March 15 through September 13.

The first International Exposition in Asia, EXPO '70 had a total attendance of over 64 million from 77 countries, which is 88 times the population of Alaska. It was this international event with a theme “Progress and Harmony for Mankind” that, together with the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, pioneered Japan's rapid economic growth. Moving walkways, electric cars, videophones and more were introduced there for the first time. Long queues in front of the American Pavilion, which exhibited the ‘moon rock’ brought back by Apollo 12, were televised on news programs every day. At that time, people all over Japan were enthusiastic about buying



EXPO '70/ JAPAN World Exposition, Osaka
The venue for EXPO '70 is now the EXPO '70 Commemorative Park.
(Courtesy of Osaka Prefectural Government)

houses, cars, TVs, washing machines, and refrigerators. Japan's internationalization has progressed in parallel with its economic growth.

At that time, Japanese young people dreamed of going abroad someday, while absorbing foreign cultures. When I was in middle school, the popular foreign singers were the Carpenters and Stevie Wonder, and the popular foreign movies were ‘Airport 1975’ and ‘Jaws’. It was a time when everyone was full of hope.

Mr. Naomi Uemura was a young person full of such hope, and someone who truly embodied internationalization. In 1970, when the Consular Office was founded, he climbed the highest peak in North America, Denali, and became the world's first climber to ascend the highest peaks on five continents. He continued to take on various adventures and became a world celebrity. Then, in the winter of 1984, he climbed Denali again and disappeared. Mr. Uemura once said, “The real value of a person's life is not about money or title, but about pursuing dreams and living every moment.”

Since its establishment in 1970, the Consular Office has been engaged in various activities in addition to consular affairs, including politics, economics, and cultural engagement. To this day, the most important relationship between Japan and Alaska has been the economy, especially the fishing industry. Alaska's exports to Japan amounted to \$647 million in 2020, of which 65% were fishery products. Minerals followed at 32%. As for the total volume of trade, Alaska's exports to Japan are the third largest (14%) of its total, after China (25.5%) and South Korea (17.6%). The Japan Air Self-Defense Force also has close ties to Alaska. It has participated in the ‘Red Flag Alaska’ since 1996, and has participated in

practical training with the US Army since 2015. In addition, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force sent a training fleet of 312 members to visit Alaska last September.

The challenges in the Arctic are common concerns shared by the international community. I would also like to highlight the great cooperation that continues between Japan and the U.S. in regards to Arctic research. 2017 marked the 20th anniversary of the International Arctic Research Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, a cooperative research institute supported by both the U.S. and Japanese governments. Japan looks to continue its great research relationship with the U.S. into the future.

In my work as the Head of the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage, I would also like to support activities that focus the eyes of young people on international issues. I want young people to have ambitions and embark into the big arena of the international community. With this in mind, we established the ‘Japan-Alaska Sister Cities Forum’ in November of 2020. In Alaska, eight municipalities have sister-city relationships with municipalities in Japan. Through various activities by the Forum, we hope that young people will feel closer to their sister city relationships.



Participants of the Japan-Alaska Sister City Forum's first meeting

To this end, we conducted the “Japan-Alaska Friendship Video Campaign”, which ended on March 5. Considering the closeness of Alaska to Japan, conducting this event and deepening the Alaska-Japan friendship is only natural. On that note, here is the answer to my pop quiz at the beginning of this message: *Alaska is actually closer to Japan than Hawaii, and Alaska is also the closest state to Japan.* The distance between Narita and Hawaii is 4,108 miles (6,611 km), but the distance between Narita and Alaska (Anchorage) is 3,426 miles (5,514km). The average flight time between Narita and Honolulu is 7 hours and 18 minutes, but a direct flight from Narita to Anchorage lasts 6 hours and 45 minutes.

Over the years, in addition to our work at the Consular Office—programs to nurture young people's dreams have emerged at the local level in Alaska. One of these is the Anchorage School District's ‘Japanese Immersion Program’. The program started at Sand Lake Elementary School in 1989, and thanks to the efforts of great teachers, has expanded to Mears Middle School and Dimond High School. Currently, there are 600 students studying Japanese under this program every year. The program also organizes regular student exchanges with one of Anchorage's sister cities, Chitose.

Since the Consular Office is celebrating its 50th anniversary, I should also mention that Japan hosted its last Olympics about 50 years ago. This year, it will host the Tokyo Olympics, and in 2025 it will host EXPO 2025 OSAKA, KANSAI, JAPAN, increasing the momentum for exchanges between Japan and other countries

Beside the tombstone of Japan's great mountain climber Naomi Uemura stands a monument to his memory. Words from fellow adventurer Sir Edmund Percival Hilary read, “A BRAVE MAN AND GREAT ADVENTURER”.

In this spirit, the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage would like to help young people in Japan and Alaska to spread their wings to the world, and, through mutual respect and appreciation, to play an active role in the international arena.



Venue image / Bird's-eye view of “EXPO2025 OSAKA, KANSAI, JAPAN”
(©Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition)