

Chiba City & Houston



Chiba City Logo

This year marks the 30th anniversary of a sister-city agreement between Chiba City, Japan and the City of Houston, USA. Festivities celebrating the event were held this past July in Houston. The mayor of Chiba City, Keiichi Tsuruoka, led the visiting Japanese delegation which also included Hiroshi Ichihara, Chairman of the Chiba City Municipal Assembly, and members representing the public, private and academic sectors.

Chiba City, the capital of Chiba Prefecture, is located on the Boso Peninsula, approximately 40km (25 mi) east of Tokyo. Blessed with a moderate climate, the city has grown recently, and its population now exceeds 900,000; as a result, in April of 1992 Chiba was named a “designated city.” Chiba has an international outlook that embraces cultural diversity and has made twinning agreements with seven cities around the world.

The City of Houston, situated in southwestern Texas, has likewise grown tremendously over the last ten years and has a current population of approximately 1.9 million people. It is the largest city in the Lone Star State of Texas and the fourth largest in the United States. Houston also has a very international orientation and has entered into 14 sister-city relationships.

Interaction between the two cities began in March 1972. Invited to Japan by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), a Houston delegation approached the Japan Municipal League for International Friendship

to ask about partnering with a Japanese city with similar interests and characteristics. Chiba City recognized that it had many commonalities with Houston. Both are port cities with strong industrial bases. Chiba accepted the offer and after a short but fruitful courtship, the cities completed a sister-city agreement on October 24, 1972.

The 30 year relationship has continuously deepened, and has been punctuated by numer-



The Japanese citizens delegation and Houstonians in attendance enjoyed classical Japanese music during their anniversary celebration in Texas.

ous successful exchange programs that have blossomed into annual events. Some of the mutually rewarding exchanges that have taken place are:

- Exchanges of junior high school students, a program started in 1983
- High school student language exchanges including home stays with foreign families
- Mutual good will ambassadors from the cities' respective mayors
- Visits by citizens at each others' international festivals

- Baseball games between little league teams from the two cities
- An agreement starting in 1990 between the University of Houston's College of Business Administration and Chiba University's Faculty of Law and Economics for joint research studies and faculty and student exchanges

Mayor Tsuruoka, Chairman Ichihara and the Japanese anniversary delegation met with Houston Mayor Lee Brown in his office at City Hall last July. After the meeting, commemorative photographs were taken and the City of Houston hosted a public anniversary celebration during which the two mayors spoke and exchanged gifts. Houston's gift to Chiba was a miniature Japanese flag that had been flown during the mission of a Japanese astronaut, and a photograph of Chiba taken from outer space. The mayors cut the anniversary cake, and attendees then enjoyed a mini

concert by Japanese performers playing the *koto* and *shakuhachi*, traditional Japanese musical instruments, enjoyed by all. The Japan-America Society of Houston hosted a reception for the official delegation the same evening.

The 30th anniversary commemorative event was extremely successful and full of promise for the future relationship between the citizens of these two cities. It was seen as the first step in the 21st century toward intensified cooperation between Houston and Chiba.

MIE Prefecture



Mie Prefectural Emblem

Mie Prefecture is located on the eastern side of the Kii Peninsula of Honshu Island, near the center of the Japanese archipelago on the Pacific Ocean (southern) shore. The prefecture is narrow but long, extending only about 80 kilometers (50 miles) from east to west but 170 kilometers (just over 105 miles) from north to south. More than a third of the land in the prefecture has been set aside as natural park districts, which are richly blessed with beautiful and varied scenery, including mountains, ravines, rivers and ocean.

Mie is home to numerous historical and cultural sites of interest, including the Ise Grand Shrine and Ueno, the cradle of the *ninja* tradition and the birthplace of Matsuo Basho, one of Japan's greatest masters of *haiku* (seventeen-syllable poems). Since ancient times Mie has served as a crossroads since people from all over the country have frequently come and gone by way of the historic Tokaido Road from Osaka, Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo), along the Sangu pilgrimage route to visit the Ise Grand Shrine during O-Ise Mairi (visits to Ise Shrine to pay respect to the god).

Mie is also the location of the Suzuka Circuit, which has become well known as a mecca for motor sports and attracts many people for international competitions including the Formula-1 Grand Prix and the Suzuka 8 hour Endurance Race. Due to the prefecture's abundant natural resources, agriculture, forestry and fishing all thrive in Mie, which is famous for Ise tea, Matsusaka beef, Ise shrimp, and Matoya Bay oysters. It is also famous around the



Pictured here is part of the Kumano Ancient Road known as "Kumano Kodo" in Owase City.

world as the source of the cultured pearls of Ago Bay.

Mie's prefectural government is actively working to establish Mie as an advanced prefecture in the fields of information technology, environmental protection and other areas of improvement. There is currently a movement under way for registration of the "Sacred Kii Mountain Area and Pilgrimage Road" as a World Heritage Site. Including the Kumano Ancient Road and the Ise Road, recognition and designation will, it is hoped, protect and preserve this area permanently. The official World Heritage registration is expected in 2004.

For more information and background, see the Mie Prefectural Government web-site: <http://www.pref.mie.jp/ENGLISH/index.htm>.

Mie tourism information will be found at: <http://www.kankomie.or.jp/kanko/discover/index.html>

