

G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting, Sendai (Publicity)

Global economic experts to see recovery firsthand

The G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting is scheduled to be held in Sendai from May 20 through May 21.

During the two-day meeting at Hotel Sakan in the famed Akiu hot spring resort in a suburb of the Miyagi Prefecture capital, finance ministers and central bank governors are expected to discuss topics ranging from macroeconomic policy surveillance, the international finance system, development to emerging market economies.

Influential figures from international bodies such as the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank president are also slated to attend the Sendai meeting.

Held about a week before the G7 Ise-Shima summit in Mie Prefecture, the gathering carries gravity as it would lay groundwork for the summit in terms of topics of global econ-

omy and trade.

For Sendai, there are three purposes the city wants to achieve through hosting this internationally high-profile event; expressing gratitude for the support it received after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011; showcasing the charm of the city and the Tohoku region, including their recovery progress from the massive disaster; and further promoting the Miyagi capital as an international convention city.

"We'd like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the support we received from around the world after the Great East Japan Earthquake," Sendai Mayor Emiko Okuyama said.

The G7 countries are among those who extended a helping hand. An Italian school presented violins and violas, which are now used by the Sendai Junior Orchestra, while Britain's Prince William paid a visit to Ishinomaki and Onagawa in the prefecture in March last year,

providing encouraging words to the disaster victims.

The U.S. military in Japan joined in activities to clean up Sendai Airport, which was hit by tsunami, as part of their disaster relief mission, while France supported the revival of oyster farming in the Sanriku area and Canada helped build the Canada-Tohoku Friendship Pavilion, Maple Hall, in Natori.

For Germany's contribution, Frankfurt donated about ¥25 million, which was used to reconstruct Madoka, a welfare center for the disabled, in Sendai, while the EU's Netherlands donated bulbs of a new variety of tulip named TOHOKU to the city.

Mayor Okuyama also hoped the Sendai meeting would be a springboard for the city and the entire region to develop further by dispelling harmful rumors that stemmed from the disasters and increasing the number of international visitors, as well as encouraging more investment.

"We aim to show the world the reconstruction of Sendai and the Tohoku region five years after the disasters in ad-

dition to a variety of charms of Tohoku such as its rich history, culture, food, industries and hot springs."

Since the 2011 disasters, Sendai has steadily promoted reconstruction, which finance ministers, central bank governors and relevant officials are expected to observe during their visit.

The city has embarked on boosting disaster prevention with the idea of "building back better," featuring reconstruction efforts aiming to rebuild areas and facilities that are more resistant to natural hazards than before the disasters hit.

In a bid to reduce potential damage from large tsunamis in the eastern part of Sendai, the city has implemented several preventive measures, including a plan to raise the height of the Shiogama-Watari Line prefectural road in addition to other roads, which would serve as breakwaters.

On the energy front, the city launched a laboratory for an algal biomass development project in April 2013 at the disaster-stricken Minami-Gamo Wastewater Treatment Plant in a coastal area of Miyagino Ward, in collaboration with the University of Tsukuba and Tohoku University. The project aims to introduce a recycling system turning sewage treatment plants into energy-producing facilities.

Visiting the wastewater treatment plant is included in the itinerary for the finance ministers and central bank governors on the first day of the meeting, which enables them to observe reconstruction efforts by the city firsthand. They are also scheduled to visit the now-closed Arahama Elementary School in coastal areas of Wakabayashi Ward. The public elementary



A statue of Date Masamune on horseback at the Sendai Castle Ruins looks on the city, which hosts the G7 finance ministers and central bank governors' meeting. CITY OF SENDAI

school was heavily affected by the 2011 tsunami and its building will be preserved as a reminder of the disasters.

The G7 meeting in Sendai adds another honor to the list of an already impressive track record of holding major international conferences. To name a few, Sendai hosted the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction last year, which had around 6,500 participants; the third Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Senior Officials' Meeting III in 2010, which had about 950 attendees; and the first Asia Parks Congress in 2013, which had some 800 participants.

With not only hot spring resorts equipped with facilities suitable for international conferences, but also the Sendai International Center convention hall and a number of hotels capable of hosting large gatherings, Sendai hopes to shore up its reputation as a top-class international convention city by successfully holding this event.

In the meantime, the city launched a public-private committee in August in an effort to support the preparations for the meeting, foster a momentum of welcoming and send information about Sendai and Tohoku. The committee is comprised of relevant entities including the Miyagi Prefectural Government, Miyagi Prefectural Police, local economic communities, parties engaged in accommodation and transportation and the people of the Akiu district.

The committee has held several briefing sessions for the convenience of Akiu residents earlier this year, while the Finance Ministry — with the support of the committee — had an

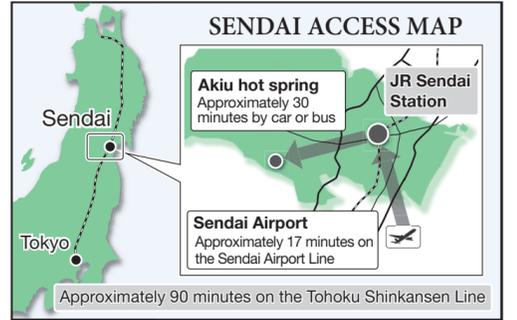
explanatory meeting for the G7 embassies in April.

To create the welcoming mood among Sendai residents, the committee has conducted various events and projects. In a project dubbed "Thank You to the World," area residents were invited in October and November to write words of thanks in various languages in appreciation of support after the disasters. The committee shot pictures of them holding their messages, which are exhibited throughout the meeting.

The committee also held events called "Cafe Summits" in January and February, in which participants enjoyed talks by speakers from six G7 countries and learned a variety of cultures. Besides such approaches to area residents, the committee has also made promotional efforts overseas. One instance was that for the emperor's birthday receptions at the Japanese embassies in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. last year, the committee provided brochures of the Sendai meeting. Another was that reporters from foreign media outlets were invited in March to get to know about the Sendai and Akiu hot springs area.

In terms of addressing communication in English, the committee has strived to nurture personnel with such skills in light of an expected increase in the number of international visitors.

The committee offered English lessons for taxi and bus drivers so they can conduct basic conversations when they serve international customers. Furthermore, 130 Sendai residents are registered as language volunteers and will be dispatched at various locations during the G7 meeting.



For those international visitors to the Akiu hot spring district, the committee set up information boards featuring multiple languages at several locations such as the Akiu Sato Center (tourist information center), Akiu Traditional Craft Village and Akiu Otaki Falls. In addition, newly created English maps of Akiu are available at facilities, including hotels there.

During the two-day meeting, information booths are set to be in place at Sendai Station, Sendai Airport, Hotel Sakan and the press center at the Iwanumaya hotel.

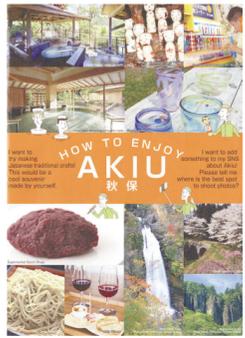
For journalists covering the event, the committee has planned to welcome them by holding the G7 Akiu Festival at Akiu Sato Center on the night of May 20. The event enables them to experience local culture and tradition such as wadaiko Japanese drumming and the carrying of portable shrines by area residents. Guests are expected to be served notable local dishes including gyutan grilled beef tongue, handmade soba noodles, sake and whisky produced at local distilleries.

Furthermore, a free study

tour and an excursion has been planned for meeting attendees and media personnel from May 18 through 22.

Lasting about three to four hours, the study tour takes participants to disaster-hit spots such as the Minami-Gamo Wastewater Treatment Plant and Arahama Elementary School to observe reconstruction efforts by the city and consider disaster prevention.

There are three kinds of excursions, one of which takes about an hour to experience traditional craft making at the Akiu Traditional Craft Village. Another 90-minute excursion takes participants to enjoy the Akiu Otaki Falls and traditional rural landscape in the Akiu area. In the other excursion, participants spend a couple of hours visiting famous spots, including the Sendai Castle Ruins, at which finance ministers and central bank governors are scheduled to take commemorative photos, and the Sendai Mediatheque public facility combining library and art gallery functions, which was designed by famed architect Toyo Ito.



Clockwise from top left: Sendai Mayor Emiko Okuyama speaks at an event in February marking 100 days to the G7 meeting; English maps of the Akiu hot spring resort are available to better serve international visitors; Volunteer guides attend a seminar to learn their duties during the G7 meeting; Employees at hotels and inns in the Akiu district practice serving customers in English to improve their conversation skills. CITY OF SENDAI

Thank You to the World

Expressing our gratitude for the warm support we received from the world

During the G7 meeting, we are holding exhibitions to express our gratitude for the warm support we received from countries all over the world after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March, 2011.

Many citizens of Sendai have participated in our project wrote messages to say thank you to the world.

Promotional Committee for the 2016 G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting, Sendai



G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting, Sendai

Idyllic nature, hot springs and fine food await visitors

Simone Chen
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

I lower myself into the steamy 42 C water of my outdoor tub. While my mind is not yet awake (it's just 5:30 in the morning), my body feels fully alive, charged instantly by the *onsen* hot spring water of Akiu Onsen, famously known as one of the three great hot springs of Japan. Since its origins some 1,500 years ago, Akiu's waters have demonstrated countless therapeutic effects. History tells the tale of Emperor Kinmei's incurable skin ailment that was miraculously healed after bathing in Akiu water, carried to the capital of Kyoto by the bucket.

Akiu Onsen is just one of the gems of the Tohoku region. Sendai, as the economic and cultural center of Tohoku, is known as the City of Trees, with its streets lined with lush zelkova trees and *hagi* clover flowers.

More somberly, areas near Sendai are also known as the areas most heavily affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. With the recent fifth anniversary, the areas have once again received attention, this time on the re-

building progress. As much as the extent of destruction should not be forgotten, the region's ability to rebound should be commended as a model of moving forward.

Indeed, Sendai is one of several cities chosen to host the G7 meetings this year. The Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting in Akiu is expected to bring great awareness to Sendai's charms. Sendai Castle's sweeping views, Matsushima Bay's hundreds of mystical islands and the delectable local dish of *gyutan* (charcoal-grilled beef tongue) along with other attractions will all be on display.

All this attention would surely have pleased Date Masamune, the charismatic and powerful daimyo that ruled the region in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, bringing economic prosperity to the northeast. After arriving at Sendai Station two days prior to my stay in Akiu, pulling in on the sleek-nosed Hayabusa shinkansen, I quickly learn that Masamune's presence is still very much at large to this day.

The first sign appears as I stop for a visit to Sendai Castle, perhaps better described as the site



At Hotel Sakan in the famous Akiu hot spring resort in the suburb of Sendai, one can enjoy a spacious open-air bath. HOTEL SAKAN

of the former castle, built in 1602 by Masamune but later mostly damaged by a large fire in 1882 and wartime bombings. Commanding glorious panoramic views of the city below, the site is now home to a magnificent statue of a horseback Masamune who attentively watches over the city from his perch.

After stopping for a quick lunch of regional favorites including smoky and tender *gyutan*, and *sasa-kamaboko*, a grilled fish cake shaped like a bamboo leaf, I run into none other than Masamune himself. A character, in period costume, that is. Mystified by the eye patch and helmet bearing a crescent moon rising from the top, I inquire.

"As a child, he lost his eye to an illness and to compensate for the handicap, he trained hard at fighting and became one of the best," explained my guide, a wealth of knowledge on all matters Sendai. "Hence, he was named 'the one-eyed dragon.'

The crescent symbolizes the waxing moon and potential for great growth and power," she explained. After snapping a few pictures with the overlord, we were off to explore more of Sendai.

We arrive at the port of Shiogama, literally "salt pot," where we prepare to board a boat for a cruise around Matsushima Bay. True to its name, Shiogama boasts a wealth of seafood, namely tuna and oysters, as well as a bustling fish market where the sushi is as fresh as it fairly priced.

"That island is where Date Masamune held moon viewing parties," said my guide, pointing to a precipitous rock formation overgrown with pine trees. As we chug along the bay, I am enthralled by the over 260 small and large islands that dot the blue-gray waters of the bay. Many are curiously shaped, the rock having been carved by centuries of lapping waves.

Aboard, I dine on a feast of

oyster *nabe*, a bubbling hotpot of plump juicy oysters simmered with local vegetables, fried oysters the length of my palm, and cold beer. Don't miss the oyster huts in the area offering all-you-can-eat oysters, in season from October to March.

We dock at Matsushima, a quaint town famous for pine trees and historical temples. Among these worth a visit are Zuiganji, a magnificent Zen temple, and Entsuin Temple. The latter's gardens are renowned for beautiful landscaping with rock gardens and paths lined with maple trees, camellia and roses.

Back in Akiu, the sun rises from behind the mountainous horizon and the sky is suddenly awash in light. To have a proper onsen experience, staying at a traditional *ryokan* inn is a must. Situated along the babbling Natori River, Sakan, with a history dating back more than 1,000 years, provided me with full *ryokan* hospitality, in-

cluding a lavish *kaiseki* Japanese traditional course dinner where succulent prawns, abalone and wagyu beef played center stage.

As much as Masamune relished power, he enjoyed life's pleasures. Akiu Onsen, and particularly Sakan, served as the Date clan's royal bathhouse for centuries. Today, with its 173 rooms, array of conference rooms, banquet spaces and onsen, Sakan is the natural choice to host this year's G7 Finance Ministers' Meeting.

Akiu is famed for its majestic natural beauty, including the 55-meter-tall Akiu Otaki Falls, famously known as one of the three best in Japan, and Rairai-kyo Gorge with its unusually shaped stone formations. In the nearby Akiu Traditional Craft Village, visitors learn how the region's famed *kokeshi* wooden dolls are created and can even try their hand at painting one.

Spring's glorious cherry blossoms, summer's Tanabata



Top, bottom: Visitors to the Akiu Traditional Craft Village can learn about the making of *kokeshi* wooden dolls. SIMONE CHEN

(star) Festival, fall's foliage and fruit-picking and winter's Pageant of Starlight make Sendai a year-round attraction, perfect for visiting in any season. Summer (August 6 to 8) is arguably the best time for celebrations in Sendai, ushering in the Tanabata Festival. Millions of visitors descend upon the city to celebrate the reunion of

two lovers in a legendary tale of star-crossed romance that rivals Romeo and Juliet. The streets are decorated with tall poles with meters-long *fukinagashi* streamers swaying overhead. Among the palpable merriment, a sense of hope is even more profound as the region's people optimistically look forward.



Sendai and the surrounding area have many culinary offerings such as the must-try oyster *nabe* hot pot (left) and *gyutan* grilled beef tongue. SIMONE CHEN, CITY OF SENDAI



The 55-meter-high Akiu Otaki Waterfall is known as one of the three best in Japan. CITY OF SENDAI



Ranked as one of the three most scenic views of Japan, Matushima is a group of pine-tree-covered islands. SIMONE CHEN



The Sendai Tanabata Festival, held from August 6 to 8, is one of the most popular attractions in Miyagi Prefecture's capital, with the entire city filled with elaborate decorations. CITY OF SENDAI

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