

Hiroaki Fujii, Executive Officer at DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi, talks about teaming up with city planners in central Tokyo to attract more area-wide MICE events to the capital

Developing OMY into an area that incorporates private venues and public spaces while crafting experiences with tie-ins to other parts of Japan

The Otemachi, Marunouchi, and Yurakucho (OMY) area is actively recruiting Japanese and international area-wide MICE events to take full advantage of what central Tokyo has to offer—and at the heart of these efforts is DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi. Since before the pandemic, DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi has been working tirelessly to attract major international conferences to Tokyo with the aim of hosting area-wide MICE events that showcase the diverse facilities in the area. We recently spoke with DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi's Administrative Director Hiroaki Fujii, who is working to promote MICE events in conjunction with city planning initiatives, about the kinds of MICE events that his organization is looking to create and the advantages that the OMY area has to offer.

(Interview by Naoki Okada, CEO of F-ness Group and Publisher for Travel Vision)



Hiroaki Fujii, Executive Officer at DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi

— Could you start by giving us a little background on how DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi came about?

Fujii: Stretching back to Japan's economic boom years and up to recent years, the OMY area was a business district that tended to empty out on the weekends. But as we headed into the new century, we decided to work on a new city planning concept with Mitsubishi Estate, which owns or manages about a third of the properties here, as well as other landholders and government agencies in the area.

The OMY Redevelopment Planning and Promotion Committee, which included nearly every landholder in the area, was formed in 1988 to come up with a set of redevelopment guidelines. The plan included a future vision for the OMY area as well as rules and strategies for getting there. It was a vision shared by both government and private stakeholders.

As the effort unfolded, a non-profit organization called Ligare (OMY Area Management Organization) was created in 2002 to promote the intangible aspects of urban planning. DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi was established in April 2017 to serve as the

administrative office for Ligare. In short, DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi is a destination marketing organization that came out of the city planning efforts in the OMY area.

– Tell us a little about yourself.

Fujii: I've been involved in city planning for a long time—ever since I joined Mitsubishi Estate in 1985. I spent six years working on the development, planning, and operation of the Yokohama Landmark Tower at Minatomirai. I later got involved in the redevelopment of Marunouchi, preparing Marunouchi Naka-dori Street for the reconstruction of the Marunouchi Building. I was then stationed in London for five years, and when I came back, was given my current position in charge of area management for the OMY area. Before, I was working on renovating Marunouchi Naka-dori Street —and now I'm figuring out how to make the most of it. It's a wonderful role to be able to play.

– What is DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi trying to accomplish with its activities?

Fujii: Our goal is to create area-wide MICE events. What that means is planning and hosting conventions and other business conferences that take advantage of everything the OMY area has to offer—its many worthwhile venues, street areas, other public spaces, and more.

To do that, we start by reaching out to overseas event planners to make sure they know about OMY area and what makes it such a fantastic destination. Another important role we play is supporting the actual hosting of MICE events, thereby bringing the benefits of these business conferences to the entire OMY area. We're also working hard to develop and put together engaging content to give participants an even more satisfying experience—and these options include tie-ups with other parts of Japan as well. Since the OMY area includes Tokyo Station, our idea is to act as the hub of a wheel, hosting activities with spokes that reach out into the many other areas we partner with.

– What makes the OMY area so perfect for MICE events?

Fujii: The OMY area is a densely-built urban district, with nearly a hundred structures in over just 1.2 square kilometers. Next year will mark the 20th anniversary of the Marunouchi Building, but just rebuilding it isn't enough to breathe fresh life into the area. To do that, we need to figure out how to make the most of not only the buildings themselves, but the public streets that connect them and other spaces and facilities in the area as well.



Sprinkling water over the Gyoko-dori Avenue

One of the concepts guiding our city planning efforts is the need to create an area that helps generate fresh business opportunities by bringing together people from Japan and around the world to interact in various ways. I think OMY has a lot to offer as a link between the companies in the area and with those outside of it, inspiring different forms of communication to take place.

The area is home to the Tokyo International Forum, as well as many other buildings that added a diverse array of conference halls when the area was redeveloped. There are also several large hotels here. Our efforts to attract MICE events are a way to make sure that we're taking full advantage of our resources and assets.

In 2015, the Japanese government designated Marunouchi Naka-dori Street and Gyoko-dori Avenue in front of Tokyo Station as National Strategic Special Zones, making it easier to plan events that utilize their public spaces. In July of that same year, the decision was made to restrict vehicular traffic along Marunouchi Naka-dori Street during daylight hours. Both of these initiatives were a tremendous boost to our efforts to draw big conferences to the region.

People who plan international MICE events want to include unique experiences for their attendees after the conferences are over, and that's where Ligare (which manages the public spaces) takes a key role in coming up with content and working with area shops and other key players. By teaming up with the many different venues in the area and making the most of public spaces, we're able to promote initiatives that are fully integrated with our city planning efforts—initiatives that in turn make the area an even greater draw for MICE events.

— [DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi certainly boasts a diverse roster of members.](#)

Fujii: We currently have 28 regular members and three supporting members. Our regular members include Mitsubishi Estate as well as the Tokyo International Forum, Palace Hotel Tokyo, Imperial Hotel Tokyo, The Peninsula Tokyo, and other hotels. Kanda Myojin Shrine is technically outside the area, but since Otemachi and Marunouchi are part of its parish, it decided to join us as well. We also have members who provide experiential content and unique venue spaces.

— [Tell us about some of the successes you've had with attracting and supporting MICE events so far.](#)

Fujii: In 2014, even before we created DMO, we hosted the International Bar Association at the Tokyo International Forum. We experimented with closing the streets to traffic at that event, setting up tables and chairs and teaming up with area restaurants to serve wine and so on. We made the street areas even more attractive in other ways as well, including inviting live jazz performances.

In September 2019, we hosted an international fintech conference called FIN/SUM 2019. Marunouchi Hall & Conference in the Marunouchi Building served as the primary venue, with breakout sessions, networking events, and parties held in member facilities throughout the area. The farewell party on the last day took place at Wadakura Fountain Park in the Kokyo-Gaien National Park (Imperial Palace Garden). The day after the event, we offered international guests the chance to participate in a day excursion to Minami-Boso in Chiba, where they enjoyed an immersive experience of Japanese culture. We also handed out coupon maps so that the participants could use them when shopping in the area, which made it fun for them.



The Farewell party of FIN/SUM2019

– How has the pandemic affected your work?

Fujii: It had already been decided that the Tokyo International Forum would not be used for the 2020 Summer Olympics, and that didn't change when the Games were rescheduled for this year. We've been hugely impacted by the pandemic. We were involved in just 21 projects in 2020—a decline of 83% over the previous year. We had many of our existing contracts cancel of course, but we also saw a dramatic decrease in new contracts as well. Still, we're already getting inquiries for 2025 and beyond, and are now seeing a steady increase in new projects.



– What's currently scheduled?

Fujii: The SIGGRAPH Asia international conference and expo for computer graphics and interactive technologies will be held at the Tokyo International Forum this December. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government is bringing Web Summit Tokyo in September 2022, and in April 2023, the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences will hold its 31st General Assembly (something they do every four years) at the Tokyo International Forum. For that event, we're planning to use the KITTE and Marunouchi Naka-dori street venues as well as set up an expo that targets the entire OMY area.

– Where have you been focusing your efforts during the pandemic?

Fujii: We've been putting a lot of energy into our digital marketing efforts, particularly on our website and social media

platforms—something that we weren't able to do before. We created two promotional videos to serve as communication tools, and have started distributing them. We've also been reaching out to international event planners, making use of the networks that we've built during our overseas sales negotiations over the years. The first video shares our thoughts and hopes for the area under the coronavirus pandemic. For the second video, we recruited a cast of representatives from DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi member companies to introduce a long list of attractive spots in the OMY area.

— Do you have anything new in the works?

Fujii: We're planning something called OMY District Barhopping Week in conjunction with several DMO members—the Imperial Hotel Tokyo, Tokyo Kaikan, Tokyo Station Hotel, Palace Hotel Tokyo, The Peninsula Tokyo, Marunouchi Hotel, and The Upper—to offer original cocktails in partnership with sake brewers and shochu distillers across Japan. We've already put together the menu, and we'll be finalizing the schedule once the Emergency Declaration is lifted.

— Do you have any final words to share with the conference and travel industry?

Fujii: The OMY area can only do so much on its own. When people come from overseas, we want them to learn about Japan and enjoy it to the fullest. For that, we need to partner with other regions—and it starts by getting to know one another. Many local governments in Tokyo and its surrounding prefectures, for example, are already involved in various efforts to encourage people to visit their areas—and I think the possibilities would really open up if we sat down and talked with each other. I would love to partner with other parts of Japan if it allows us to better meet the needs of MICE event planners.

— Thank you for speaking with us today.