

REPORT: The “Festival of the Most Beautiful Villages in Japan” held in the Marunouchi area



●Aspiring to further energize Marunouchi area through event support

The Marunouchi area is located between Tokyo Station and the Imperial Palace at the center of business in Japan where many companies are gathered. Though blessed with an abundance of nature, the area has highly attractive facilities and unique venues that are very advantageous, including shopping sites, restaurants, and conference and event facilities.

DMO TOKYO Marunouchi facilitates attracting meetings, incentive travels, conventions, events, and exhibitions (MICE) to the Marunouchi area. We communicate the merits of the Marunouchi area as a place to hold events, and endeavor to support various events that use area facilities with the intent of helping energize the area as a whole.

One such event was the “Festival of the Most Beautiful Villages in Japan” that took place at TOKYO TORCH, the new block in front of Tokyo Station, on October, 2022. As the name says, the event was planned to highlight the attractions of beautiful villages in Japan. The main venue was TOKYO TORCH Park located. Locals from the “Japan's Most Beautiful Villages” Association (NPO)'s member towns, villages, and regions get together for this festival and featured a market selling local specialties and booths where participants could experience village lifestyles and work. A special stage was also set up to showcase unique traditional performing arts that can only be viewed at those towns and villages. This very lively event drew around 4,000 visitors in total.

What made this event unique was that a business event was held at the same time as the festival.

On the afternoon of the same day, "National U35 Future Creation Conference in TOKYO" was held at

Tokiwabashi Tower Conference by young leaders under 35 representing the member towns and villages to discuss future village development activities.

● **Hoping the festival becomes a new starting point, an opportunity to discover and encounters for villages**



Kaoru Ninomiya, Vice President of "Japan's Most Beautiful Villages" Association (NPO)

Kaoru Ninomiya, Vice President of "Japan's Most Beautiful Villages" Association (NPO) which organized this event, made an opening speech of this festival to greet the visitors. When the association was established in 2005, it started out with only seven towns and villages through the efforts inspired by the "Most Beautiful Villages in France" movement that took place in France. Today, the association has grown to 61 member towns, villages, and regions throughout Japan.

"The "Japan's Most Beautiful Villages" Association takes action through the efforts of locals for protecting the landscapes, culture, and beautiful activities of Japan's farming and fishing villages that should be passing them on to future generations. In the last few years, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, opportunities to meet others and create ties between regions have dwindled. By not holding festivals during the pandemic, people had lost chances to become familiar with the cultural treasures of villages and towns. I hope that today's festival becomes a new starting point for regional activities and a springboard for every visitor to discover and get to know our beautiful villages. We are extremely pleased to be able to hold this event in Marunouchi, a center for business in Japan."

● Marche of the Most Beautiful Villages in Japan



One highlight of this festival was the marche featuring booths from 18 member towns, villages, and regions all over Japan, from all over the country.

There was an array of all different kinds of products that make the most of each village's strengths, and every booth was packed with visitors. At some booths, their products were even sold out by noon.





This is our first time working as a member of ‘Japan's Most Beautiful Villages’ Association, but we decided to give it a try when we heard the activity from Kiso Town in Nagano.” It appears that there are also appealing collaborative products being created through exchange between member towns and villages.

●A special acts of traditional performing arts that have transcended time in villages



Traditional performing arts were presented by four towns and villages on a special stage, blanketing the venue with an air of excitement.

They were all invaluable arts, such as amateur theatricals that have been passed down since the Edo period and are nationally designated Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties, and traditional performing

arts with over 300 years of history inherited in many districts. Rays of sunshine through between high rises lit up the stage to further beautifully brighten the traditional performances presented by performers dressed in colorful costumes.



Oshika Kabuki theater (Oshika Village, Nagano)



Kiso-odori (Kiso dance) and Kiso-bushi (Kiso song) (Kiso Town, Nagano)



The rice-planting dance from the Komiya district (Iitate Village, Fukushima)



Shiiba Kagura dance (Shiiba Village, Miyazaki)



Booths offered hands-on experiences introducing lifestyles and work in the most beautiful villages. In addition to a workshop given by four towns and villages, there was also a “Tour Japan: Choose the destination using darts” by student supporters of the "Japan's Most Beautiful Villages" Association, as well as a booth offering PR for Matsuzaki Town in Shizuoka and a hands-on herbarium-making experience run by Waseda University students. The booths were buzzing with lots of people, from children to adults.

Meanwhile, the “National U35 Future Creation Conference in Tokyo” was being held in a conference room of Tokiwabashi Tower. Young leaders from nine member villages gathered to discuss how to utilize regional resources to ensure villages survive. It was a valuable opportunity for the participants to gain greater knowledge from one another. The event came to an end while still in full swing, followed by a networking gathering and after party where locals from the member villages and event supporters became better acquainted.

●The activities of the “Japan's Most Beautiful Villages” Association and village attractions that connect to the world resonated with youth



After the event was over, we spoke to Yoko Asada, Executive Director of the “Japan's Most Beautiful Villages” Association (NPO), and Takanobu Mukai who also works in the association’s office.

“Since 2018, we have held forums by the representatives of member town, villages and regions, but this was the first time holding a festival. That came about out of a desire for more people to get to know and enjoy what the villages have to offer. We’re a member of “The Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages in the World” that counts France, Belgium, Italy, and Spain among its members. We aim to share the attractions of beautiful towns and villages in Japan to the world and contribute to the preservation of regional resources and development of regional economies into the future. We decided to hold this event here since our aims are very compatible with the aspiration of TOKYO TORCH to communicate Japan’s attractions to the world from Marunouchi. The festival was a great success thanks to the many who lent a helping hand, such as DMO TOKYO Marunouchi which introduced us to this location and gave us an onsite tour before the event.”

They noted that the fact the festival was attended by many young people who took an interest in the association’s activities, the villages’ traditional culture, and specialty products provided new insight.

“Right now, it’s mostly older people who are involved in activities for “Japan's Most Beautiful Villages” in each town and village, but this was a happy discovery for us because we hoped the younger generation would take an interest. Everyone from the towns, villages, and regions that participated in the festival also

was really pleased with it. They said they were very glad to have been able to participate in an event held in such a wonderful location, and that they want to join next year, too. The theme of this event was “discovery,” and I think the villagers and people living in the metropolitan area were actually able to meet and successfully share the attractions of the villages through the market, traditional performances, and hands-on workshops. It would be wonderful if they go visit the villages they found interesting. There are many beautiful villages in Japan that are small but have amazing landscapes and culture. We want to continue joining together with the towns, villages, and regions that are association members to communicate the wonderful things small villages have and expand the association’s activities.”

To bring even more energy to Marunouchi area in the future, DMO TOKYO Marunouchi will continue contemplating and implementing plans that utilize the various area facilities and provide everyone with a sense of all the area can offer.