

REPORT: Hitomachi Ambassadors boost area hospitality The 22nd IUNS-ICN International Congress of Nutrition in Tokyo

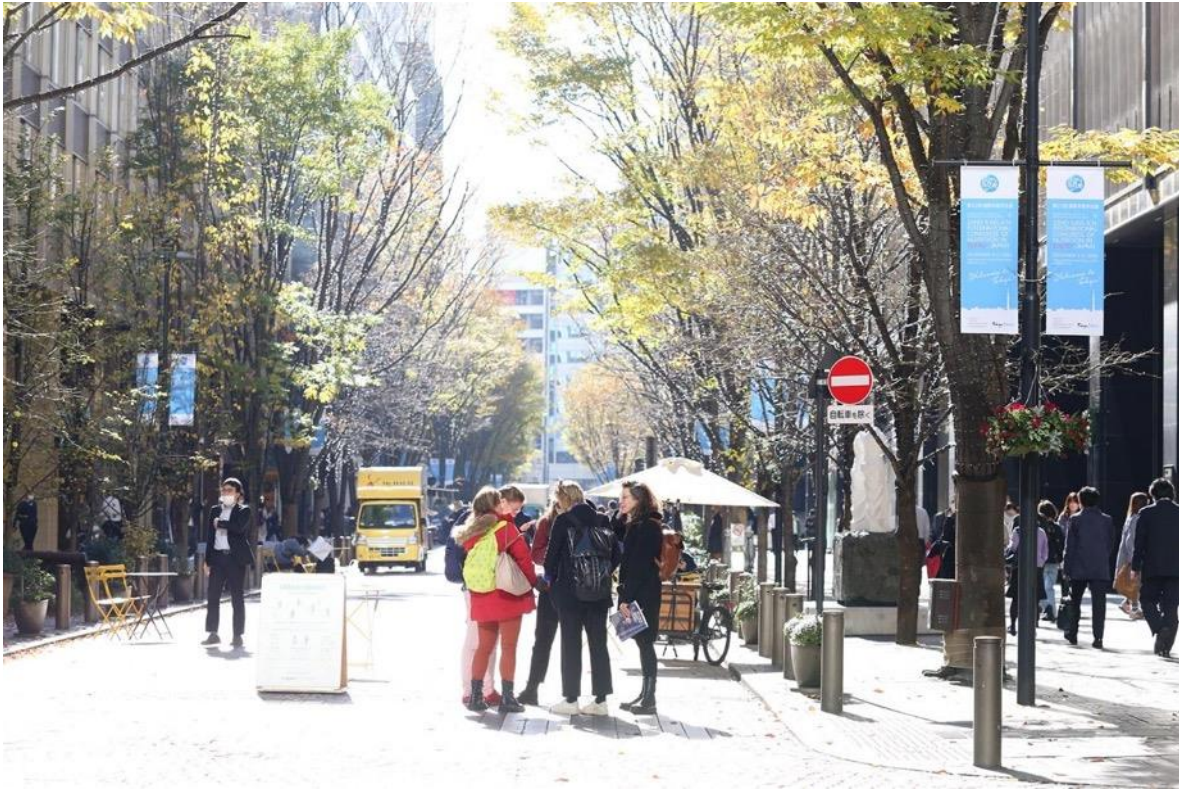


DMO TOKYO Marunouchi has been focusing on urban area-wide MICE to raise the global competitive strength of Tokyo as a city. During the 22nd International Congress of Nutrition in Tokyo (ICN2022) held at Tokyo International Forum from December 6 to 11, 2022, we introduced Hitomachi Ambassadors to a MICE site for the first time to boost area hospitality.

ICN2022 was originally scheduled for September 2021, but was postponed for over a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the first time ICN had been held in Japan since 1975 when it took place in Kyoto. Hisanori Kato (Graduate School Project Professor, The University of Tokyo) served as chair of the Organizing Committee for ICN2022 and made the following statement in his opening remarks given in the official program. “Tokyo is the most innovative city in the world, boasting outstanding convenience, infrastructure, cleanliness, and safety.” He went on to say he hoped participation in the Congress would not only increase academic success, but that attendees would also enjoy exposure to Japanese culture, history, and entertainment in the area around the Tokyo International Forum venue.

The theme of the Congress was “THE POWER OF NUTRITION: FOR THE SMILES OF 10 BILLION PEOPLE.” The numerous intense discussions held naturally included deliberations on the latest in the nutrition sciences, as well as ruminations on global-wide nutrition sciences of the future. They included the future of nutrition sciences as a discipline going beyond the

framework of traditional nutrition sciences, which handle chemical and physical workings, to comprehensively address people's well-being. The Congress brought together over 3,300 attendees from 111 countries around the world. During the event, Marunouchi became an area uncharacteristically overflowing with an international aura.



Banners adorned Marunouchi-Nakadori Street and attendees from overseas walked about during the event.

This is where Hitomachi Ambassadors played a role. The system of Marunouchi Ambassadors already being used in the area was tailored for urban area-wide MICE. Participants were volunteers enlisted from companies such as Mitsubishi Estate and Mitsubishi Property Management.

A lunch coupon was given to Congress attendees redeemable in the Marunouchi area. This made it necessary to provide guidance to the restaurants where the coupon could be used, rather than simply providing general information by enhancing information centers and building a dedicated website. There were 250 restaurants in the area accepting the coupon, and for people visiting from abroad for the first time, understanding where the restaurants are located was a nearly impossible task.

For this reason, DMO TOKYO Marunouchi created a dedicated website introducing the restaurants accepting the coupon in English. Making this website available prior to the Congress enabled participants to plan their meal experiences in Japan well ahead of the event, and guidance was provided by volunteers during the event. Hitomachi Ambassadors were assigned to fulfill the request of the host Organizing Committee and Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau

with the expectation of area workers can provide more knowledgeable information than temporary-hired staff for the event.

Approximately 130 Hitomachi Ambassadors were active during the three days between December 7–9 when there were many foreign visitors walking around the area and provided information on the area to the Congress attendees between 11:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

22nd IUNS-ICN

THE LIST OF RESTAURANTS AND SHOPS WHERE COUPON CAN BE USED.

12.7 wed-10 sat 2022

The dedicated website introducing restaurants where the lunch coupon could be used

Hitomachi Ambassadors underwent an orientation prior to the Congress to prepare so they could give sufficient guidance. They had to provide information on attractive Japanese restaurants, Japanese sweets shops, and restaurants suitable for people with dietary restrictions due to religious reasons is frequently requested by visitors from overseas. In addition to sharing necessary information in advance, a system using chat messaging was established to prepare for any possible problems and utilize information in the future by sharing what questions were asked, how they were responded to, and where there were problems. The accumulated qualitative and quantitative data is anticipated to help develop urban area-wide MICE going forward.

The ambassadors were not necessarily fluent in English, as having a sense of hospitality was of the greatest importance. During the orientation, the participants were addressed by Hiroaki Fujii, Executive Officer at DMO TOKYO Marunouchi.

He said, “You’ll primarily be giving information on restaurants for lunch, but I’d really like for everyone to make the most of your experiences and tell visitors about ways to enjoy the area. I’d also like for you to help ordinary tourists and visitors in addition to the Congress attendees. Above all, I hope you’ll also have fun in this area which will be full of energy during this event.”

● What is hospitality?

The ambassadors wore red vests to identify themselves and spread out over five blocks concentrated around Tokyo International Forum to provide guidance. Apparently, there were especially a lot of people asking for help in the vicinity of the Forum at lunchtime immediately after the main session ended. There was even an ambassador who was asked about restaurants by over ten people in less than 15 minutes.



Ambassadors providing various assistance

The English-speaking ambassadors responded one after another in this way, but there were some services that could only have been done by the non-English speaking ambassadors.

“I looked at a map and asked which restaurant they wanted to go to using gestures, but I wasn’t able to explain well in English, so I took them there. It must’ve been the right move, because we became friendly (laughs). Later, when we happened to pass by each other, they remembered me and said hello, which made me very happy.” (a volunteer ambassador).

Area hospitality is not limited to facilities alone but requires personal emotions. These kinds of experiences gained by the ambassadors will undoubtedly help improve area hospitality going forward. When it comes to attracting MICE, it can also be said that having and being able to use this kind of system for welcoming visitors to the area is an advantage.

Perhaps boosting the city's attraction should be tackled by the combination of hard skills and soft skills in hospitality. The use of Hitomachi Ambassadors turned out to be extremely consequential, not only outwardly, but also inwardly in terms of inner branding. We intend to continue boosting area hospitality while proposing the use of Hitomachi Ambassadors as a part of our welcoming services at MICE sites, and look forward to each ambassador's endeavors in the future.