

## **Chiba Prefecture Monitor Tour for Japan-Based Foreign Diplomats ---“Attractions Galore at Your Doorstep”---**

On Saturday, October 27, 2012, IHCSA took a total of 33 foreign diplomats stationed in Japan and their family members (from 13 countries and the European Union), including 4 ambassadors, to Chiba Prefecture to get a taste of the prefecture’s art, culture, and seasonal culinary delights. The tour, which was commissioned to IHCSA, was sponsored by the Chiba Prefecture International Tourism Promotion Council and organized with the cooperation of the Chiba Prefectural Tourism and Local Products Association.

On a fine autumn day, the group’s first destination was the popular Hoki Museum, Japan’s first art museum specializing in contemporary Realist paintings. After a welcome by the museum’s director, Masao Hoki, the participants, listening to explanations by a curator, admired the paintings displayed in the white, gently curving corridors. This unusually designed building, part of which seems to be floating in space, received the fiscal 2011 grand prize of the Japan Institute of Architects. The participants spent a soothing time in this unique three-story corridor-style gallery.

The participants had lunch at the Hakkaku-Tei, a restaurant built on the shore of Lake Hakkaku, which is a popular cherry-blossom viewing spot in spring. After welcoming addresses by Hidemi Shoji, executive director of tourism in the Chiba Prefectural Government, and Yasuo Maejima, chairman of the Togane City Tourist Association, the diplomats, many of whom were self-proclaimed gourmets, tucked into the delicious dishes prepared by the head chef, Tatsuya Ikenaga, using seasonal ingredients from Chiba Prefecture. While eating dessert, the participants were also treated to some entertainment in the form of energetic singing and dancing by the young girls’ group YASSA Comachi, who serve as tourist ambassadors for Togane City.



Hoki Museum



In the afternoon the group headed by bus for the town of Otaki-machi, listening on the way to a talk on the history of Chiba Prefecture and highway tales given by Masaru Haba, the director in charge of cultural properties in the Cultural Education and Properties Division of the Chiba Prefectural Government’s Education Agency.

In Otaki-machi, the participants first of all visited the Handmade Armor Studio, which exhibits armor

made of paper, and the Akinai Museum, which displays daily-life utensils and other items recalling the lifestyle of the past. Outside the Akinai Museum, one girl was seen sitting in a rickshaw, an unusual vehicle for foreigners, and posing for a photo.



At Otaki-jo Castle, the participants were greeted by a koto performance and the smiling faces of female student members of the tea ceremony club of Otaki Senior High School. They then went up to the second floor of the castle to see the exhibited Buddhist statues and painting from the Kazusa region (now the central part of Chiba Prefecture).

Then came the climax of the tour---a demonstration of martial arts by three teachers of the Katori Shinto-ryu school. The participants watched the mystical and dynamic action with bated breath. Before leaving the castle, they also enjoyed a little “cosplay” experience in which they themselves donned armor or kimono. The atmosphere became euphoric as one of the diplomats, beaming, cried, “The last samurai!”



Finally the participants visited the Toyonotsuru Sake Brewery, where they listened attentively to an explanation by the 16th-generation owner, Toyohiko Tajima. After a sake-tasting session, many of them purchased souvenirs to take home with them.

On the way back to Tokyo, the group stopped at the Boso Shiki-no-Kura roadside rest area to buy souvenirs of their trip, including fresh seasonal seafood.

As shown by the local television and newspaper coverage, there was a lot of media interest in this tour and recognition of its importance.



The tour was reported in the October 31, 2012, morning edition of the *Chiba Nippo* newspaper and in the Weekly Chiba Prefecture program on Chiba TV on November 3, 2012.