

## 2011 Nikko-Kinugawa Tourism Promotion Tour for Foreign Diplomats in Japan

# Nikko/Kinugawa Tourism Promotion Tour

On June 25–26, 2011, IHCSA conducted a tour to Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture, a district with World Heritage sites and abundant nature. A total of 63 foreign diplomats stationed in Japan and their family members from 20 countries, including 4 ambassadors, participated in the tour, which was sponsored by the Kinugawa/Kawaji-Onsen Tourist Association Inbound Committee; co-sponsored by Tochigi Prefecture (Tochigi Prefecture International Tourism Promotion Council), Nikko City, the Federation of Nikko District Tourist Associations, and IHCSA; supported by the Japan Tourism Agency; and co-supported by Ashikaga Bank, with the cooperation of East Japan Railway Co., Tobu Railway Co., and the Nikko City International Association.

Amid the luxuriant fresh greenery of this time of the year, the participants visited such places as Nikko Toshogu Shrine, which is a World Heritage site, and enjoyed the natural scenery on the shore of Lake Chuzenji, which served as a diplomatic stage in the past, when many foreign embassies would use this area as a refuge from the summer heat of Tokyo. On the second day the program included visits to a miniature park where replicas of famous buildings from around the world are exhibited and a theme park that whisks visitors back in time to the Edo period (1603–1868). Over the two days the local people extended warm and enthusiastic hospitality to the tour participants from overseas. Since the tour was held in the middle of the rainy season, umbrellas were needed at times, but nevertheless the participants were able to fully enjoy the various attractions at the places visited.

### Day One

The first stop was Nikko Toshogu Shrine. After a commemorative photo, the participants viewed the “Three Monkeys” sculpture and “Crying Dragon” painting and were given a guide’s explanation of these famous works of art. Also, they listened to a priest’s explanation in the Shogun Chakuzanoma (the shogun’s room), entry to which is usually forbidden, and visited the Gomado Hall of Rinnoji temple, where they witnessed at firsthand the flames rising from the sticks being burned in a ceremony of invocation (*goma*).



Next the participants went by bus to the Oku-Nikko area, listening on the way to an explanation of

Nikko's wonderful nature from a representative of the Forestry Agency's regional forest office. After viewing the Senjogahara swamp and Lake Yunoko from the bus, they visited Yutaki Falls, where they were clearly amazed by the abundant clear water and natural beauty, so much so that one participant even asked, "This waterfall surely must be artificial?"

During the 30-minute boat ride on Lake Chuzenji, blue sky appeared from behind the clouds, and the participants, invigorated by a pleasant breeze, were able to fully enjoy the natural scenery around the lake.



Evening dinner was provided at the Kinugawa Grand Hotel Yume no Toki, where the participants stayed overnight. The participants entered the dining room to the jaunty sound of music performed by local children and then heard welcoming addresses from Japan Tourism Agency Commissioner Hiroshi Mizohata, Tochigi Prefecture Governor Tomikazu Fukuda, Nikko City Mayor Fumio Saito, and Ashikaga Bank President Satoshi Fujisawa. Attractions included the thunderous sound of Ryuo Taiko Japanese drums and dancing, geisha dancing and parlor games typical of a hot spring resort, and commemorative photos with characters. Many participants also showed interest in an exhibition of Tochigi Prefecture's agricultural products, samples of local sake and wine, and shaved ice using the natural ice of Nikko. The dinner party ended with all the participants performing the Nikko Waraku Odori folk dance around the spacious room. It was a very pleasant evening indeed.



As the final event on the first day, those participants who wished to do so entered reserved hot spring baths at the hotel and other places (cooperation: Kinugawa Plaza Hotel Akebi, Asaya Hotel). Even participants who usually hesitate to use public baths because they are unaccustomed to Japanese hot spring ways were able to enjoy relaxing in a real onsen. It was the perfect end to a marvelous day.

## Day Two

In the morning of the second day, after viewing the hot spring resort from their bus, the participants walked across the Tateiwa Suspension Bridge, a “power spot” in Kinugawa Onsen. Looking down at the Kinugawa Gorge far below, they were able to see the famous tourist boats plying their way down the river.

The group then visited Tobu World Square, where the participants, at their own pace, looked round the replicas of World Heritage sites and other famous buildings reproduced on a scale of 1:25. One young boy ran off, shouting excitedly, “I’m going on a trip around the world!”



Next the participants went to the Edo Wonderland (Nikko Edo Village) theme park, where the cast lined up on both sides of the entrance checkpoint to greet them. As they entered the park, they were also “attacked” by ninja and amused by the cute antics of Nyan-mage, the park’s mascot. In a courtesan show titled “At the Ichiriki Teahouse in Gion,” one of the participants appeared on stage dressed as Oishi Kuranosuke (1659–1703), the leader of the “Forty-seven Ronin” and hero of *Chushingura*. His banter with the courtesan and comical acting delighted the Japanese members of the audience as well. In a ninja show, meanwhile, the participants were simply amazed by the nimble and daring acts of the ninja staged right before their eyes.



Since the tour condensed the many attractions of Nikko and Kinugawa into a two-day overnight stay, certainly not everything was covered. Nevertheless, hearing the many exclamations of “Wonderful!” during the trip and seeing how obviously delighted the participants were by the warm hospitality of the local people, we are sure that everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

(The tour was reported by the *Shimotsuke Shimbun* and the Tochigi editions of the *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, *Tokyo Shimbun*, and *Sports Nippon* in their morning editions on June 26, 2011, as well as by news programs on the NHK, FNN, and Tochigi Television TV channels.)