

Part 1

Japan: A great nation



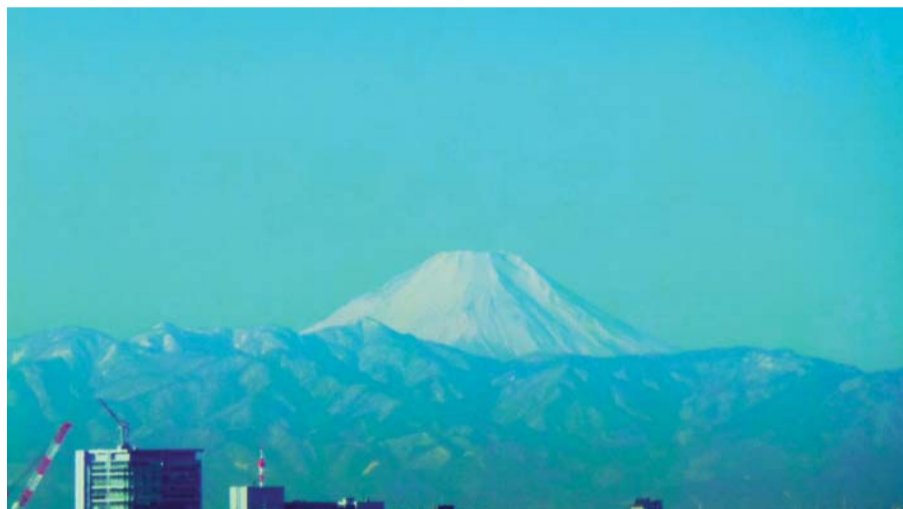
The New Otani Hotel



Tokyo: The wonderful capital



Buddist temple in Asakusa



Mount Fuji



Prayer room in Nagoya airport



A general view of the capital

Inspiring Japanese rituals and traditions

- The visitor will notice that the Japanese do not use phones in restaurants, and many restaurants, especially those frequented by foreigners, put signs asking to refrain from using mobile phones while at the table.
- Daily meal timings are fixed. Most citizens eat quietly, and we cannot find anyone having a sandwich in the streets.
- All car passengers use seatbelts whether in the front or back seats.
- The Japanese work in all fields and professions, such as taxi drivers, guards and waiters, without being embarrassed and with total honesty, and always with a smile.
- There are signs at the airport that places designated for Japanese citizens can be used by those who are not Japanese nationals if they are not occupied.
- At public transport stations, passengers stay on one side and leave the other side for those in a hurry and may miss the train or trip.
- Total compliance with traffic laws, and all places that require queuing, eg elevators, restaurant reservations, train stations and payment areas in stores.
- Major hotel restaurants put explanatory drawings if the food contains pork.

No tipping

Most books and tourist instructions draw the attention that a tourist does not have to pay tips for any service he receives, except if it was extra. The majority of workers at restaurants and hotels rejected tips if offered, and others will not accept it until after strongly insistence.

A rumor: Japan is the most expensive country

The first thing one notices while roaming through Japanese markets is that what is said that this country is the most expensive place in the world is not true. Prices at prestigious and popular markets are moderate and highly acceptable, compared with similar ones in the West and some Arab countries.

By Mohammed Bassam Al-Husseini

In the middle of the sea, amidst volcanoes and on top of earthquakes, are people who wrote one of the most beautiful stories in history, transforming danger into security, challenges into success, and exporting sublime human values ahead of the highest quality goods.

The Japanese know about us more than we expect them to know, and during an era of IS and terrorism, we find Japan declare that it is proud of its Muslim citizens and opens the doors wide for visitors from Muslim countries by educating its people about the principles of halal food and the importance of facilitating services related to prayers, such as signs for the direction of qibla, means of ablution (wudu) and prayer timings. At Nagoya airport, for example, all the above services are provided and can be considered a clear welcome message.

They meet you with a smile and a bow, wherever you go, which proves that

glory comes from humbleness, and the sun in the "Land of the Rising Sun" or Nihon (Nippon) as pronounced by its citizens, is more than just a red circle on a white flag - it is work that starts and never ends, and a group of instilled values that couples modernization with originality in the best way possible.

You are as successful as the achievements you accomplish, and also as much as you are inspired for more success and the ability to rise, and this is what Japan confirms by word and deed. We spent nine days at the kind invitation from an intense program at the Japanese foreign ministry for Al-Anbaa, and the doors of Japan were opened for us, so that we could enter its world that is named by some in respect as "Planet Japan". We met a large number of officials and visited many places, but were asked to finish all stops in the program quickly, so we were inspired by the bullet train which links Japan cities. And why not, as every-

thing in Japan is possible!

The Etihad Airlines flight from Kuwait to Tokyo via Abu Dhabi landed at Narita International Airport, and the journey to discover the city started from the New Otani Hotel, one of the most prestigious hotels famed for its gardens that are decorated with lakes and waterfalls and which overlooks Mt Fuji, the symbol of Japan that is linked to legends and history.

The Japanese capital Tokyo is a modern city that has everything - a vibrant day that people fill with vitality in various neighborhoods; and a living night that has many touristic choices. Restaurants serve all what the tourists imagine or hope for from around the world, and of course there are halal restaurants and shisha cafes.

Amongst the most beautiful neighborhoods in the city is Roppongi, where the Tokyo Tower is located, which was seared in our minds as children when we used to see Japanese cartoons. The

Shinjuku and Shibuya neighborhoods are most famous for nightlife and restaurants. The prestigious Ginza district is where the most famous brands are. It is an integrated world for shopping, going for sushi, noodles, teppanyaki and the traditional Japanese sweets that are mostly made of rice, and green ice tea. Chiyoda district is where the castle and imperial palace can be visited.

The ideal place for popular shopping is Asakusa, which has a distinguished market in which we can find all that is related to Japan's heritage, specially kimonos, and is located inside a famous Buddhist temple. There are, besides skyscrapers and the Tokyo Tower, high-rise buildings such as the Skytree, which is one of the tallest towers on earth, the metropolitan building, which is the seat of the Tokyo local government, and from it all, tourists can look at the capital from above and buy souvenirs, besides taking pictures along the way.

Improvement in relations with China despite tensions

Takako Ito, the foreign press secretary and official spokesperson of the foreign ministry, is a seasoned diplomat, and her charismatic personality and belief in the Japanese woman's ability qualified her for this high-ranking position.

She said during a lunch she invited us to at one of Tokyo's prestigious restaurants, that the duty of a spokesperson is complicated, but is a challenge that she always works to win. Ito insisted on Japan's belief in the freedom of expression and its encouragement of a free and responsible press. She spoke about several political issues including Japanese-Chinese relations over the tensions that followed escalations at the disputed Senkaku islands, which is under Japanese sovereignty.

The official Japanese Foreign Ministry

spokesperson said that despite tensions, matters, one year after the APEC summit, have witnessed notable improvement at the level of meetings between the two countries' leaderships, the two foreign ministers, and the restoration of action of the joint working committees following a lengthy freeze in various political, security and financial fields.

Ito said despite the drop in the number of Japanese tourists in China to nearly 2.5 million in 2015 compared to 3.98 million in 2007, and drop of direct investment volume by China in Japan by nearly 25.2 percent in 2015, the number of Chinese tourists rose to more than 5 million in 2015, which is double than the previous year.

Ito alluded to relations with Russia, confirming Japan's clear stand in rejecting

Russian action in Ukraine and the unilateral annexation of Crimea. She said the issue will be discussed again during the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Japan to attend the G7 summit.

Ito reminded of her diplomatic beginnings when she worked in the Japanese embassy in Canada in 1990, when the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait took place. She was newly married, and had to work long hours to follow events as they happened and send reports. She said history proves the humanitarian stands Japan took at the time were correct. Amendments were made to legal texts that were keeping Japan from joining wars, until it became possible to participate in humanitarian support operations to help victims of disputes and fulfill the core of Japanese values.



Mohammed Al-Husseini with members from the Japanese Foreign Ministry

Part 1

MP Koike: The UN charter is no longer acceptable

Yuriko Koike is Japan's strongwoman, former defense minister and national security advisor, and continues as member of the National Diet legislative establishment and a major personality in the country's political life, and one of the main pillars of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, besides being a well-known media personality before getting into politics.

She is an outstanding friend of Kuwait and chairperson of the parliamentary friendship committee between the two sides. She told me jokingly: "I visited Kuwait a few years ago, but my first visit was before you were born, as I visited it with my father, a businessman, in 1972. Then I went to study in Cairo, and lived the Oct 6 events, and was attached to the region and Arab world, which was our focus in recent years during the Arab Spring.

Koike described her feelings towards happenings in the region as "worried", explaining: "I hoped the Arab world becomes more democratic, but this has not happened yet, so we consider what is going on as a transitional stage to take the region from one experience to a richer one, we hope. We consider Kuwait an example of a democracy that is able to accommodate the people, especially after granting full opportunities to women, and I usually describe it as the leader in the region.

"We know the Amir of Kuwait, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, and he is a person we highly respect in our country, and I had several meetings with him. I also met the Crown Prince HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad during my last visit to Kuwait. Before that, when I was advisor of national security, I met the Prime Minister HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak when he was defense minister after the Iraq war. I visited Ali Al-Salem air force base, as Kuwait gave a base for the Japan defense forces, which worked on providing freshwater to some areas of Iraq as part of humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, in which we participated and we are thankful for that," said Koike.

"When I visited Kuwait, relations between GCC and Iran were tense as the case is today, and Kuwait's stand was cautious, and we hope things calm down in the region," she added. Koike described relations between Japan and Kuwait as old and well-established. She said Kuwait suffered major marine pollution in 2000 because of natural problems with the oilfields that threatened the marine environment. But a professor from Japan, which is a nation surrounded by water and has experience and vast studies and many experts, was able to find the cause of the problem and gave valuable recommendations to deal with the situation, and helped in putting an end to a challenge that worried the country, as there was a major worry with regards to the consumption of fish, which is used extensively in Kuwaiti dishes. "We cannot



Managing Director Mohammed Al Hussaini with MP Koike in her office

forget, on our side, Kuwait's generosity in supporting Japan following the major earthquake tragedy and the tsunami that hit it in 2011. I received a call at that time from Kuwait's ambassador, who said: We want to stand with you, so how can we help? I told him we wanted oil, so Kuwait donated five million barrels of oil, which contributed to helping us get through the crisis, and this is a stand that we will not forget and always remember," Koike said.

Daesh

We spoke with MP Koike about terrorism and Islamic State (Daesh), and whether Japanese officials worry about its expansion to their country following the threats in Malaysia and blasts in Indonesia, which proved that this terrorist organization is everywhere. "Daesh is not a religious group, rather they are terrorist gangs and have nothing to do with religion and true Islam, and we know this. They are moving from one place to another in Syria and Iraq taking the opportunity of any void that occurs in any area, like water that goes down when we pour it, so it is not wise to discuss the issue of Daesh from a religious point of view, rather our work should be to restore legitimacy and power to areas they control so as to push them out," she said.

"All what we see are negative results of the spread of Internet and mobile phones and their misuse, as the coordination that links Daesh gangs around the world was not possible in the past. We in Japan do not have a large Muslim populace, with

regret, among our citizens, so it is difficult for Daesh to infiltrate here. Besides that, the explosives control system in Japan is strict and it is not easy to get them here. We used to face some sort of terrorism in the past from certain organizations through the use of chemicals. We must be vigilant, cautious and always ready to confront any scenario if it takes place.

Amendment of the constitution and North Korea

About the amendment of the constitution, particularly article 9 that is related to banning participation in wars, and if the matter is related to North Korean threats, she said: "The constitution amendment is something normal and all countries of the world agreed and even encouraged it, except for China and North Korea for their own goals, who wish Japan does not play a larger role in the international arena. "North Korea causes us much worry, as it is being led today by a person aged 33 years old, and we see that he has no experience and cannot predict what he may decide. Pyongyang is not a compliant member of the United Nations and international community, and it is hard to communicate with them. They are doing this instead of developing their country, as we are seeing millions of hungry people compared to the very few of the rich that benefit from the state. They have detained Japanese citizens for a long time, and this is unacceptable."

United Nations charter is no longer accepted

Koike said Japan is looking

forward to work actively during 2016/2017 when it joins as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, and will try to mediate in many disputes and problems at the international level. "We look with great regret at the UN which still considers Japan as 'an enemy country' in its charter. The Security Council today is made up of countries that won the war along with China, but Japan and Germany are described as enemies although Japan is the second largest donor to the international organization, and Germany is known for its humanitarian actions, the latest of which is its stand on refugees," she said.

"So the situation at the organization is not fair and illogical, and needs many amendments, including making Japan a permanent member of the Security Council. Also, it is not realistic to have five countries monopolize global decisions, so we seek an amendment, though we realize that the issue is very complicated and not easy," Koike added. "We do not see anything positive at the UN, and the organization's management is highly expensive along with may ineffective activities."

Japanese economy

Koike commented on the government's efforts to emerge from the economic crisis that dragged the Japanese economy for many years, by saying that Japan is suffering from deflation, "which means that when we want to buy today, we expect prices to drop tomorrow, so we do not buy, and wait for a cheaper price".

So the government is

attempting to reshuffle things through several incentive policies that may restore life to the economy. Koike said the drop in oil prices is beneficial to Japan, as it reduces the oil bill. She expressed optimism towards abilities to overcome the crisis, and having the Japanese economy restore its vitality, as Japan is creative and able to create opportunities.

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Schools set up for Syrians in Turkey



MP Koike intergrates the school project in Turkey

On the Syrian issue, Koike expressed sympathy with refugee children. "I am touched because of the children, so I personally collected donations and established an elementary school that provides education to 222 students in the Hatay region of Turkey, using Arabic curricula, because it is difficult for Syrian students to study Turkish curricula. The project provided job opportunities for 19 teachers, who are also refugees. We must help the children there, because they are living in darkness and if we do not provide them with education, they will be without a future, and we must help countries where they live including Europe which faces many problems due to the war in Syria," she said.

National Diet is the legislative establishment in the country: The most beautiful building in Tokyo



The building of the Japanese legislative establishment, known as the National Diet, is an architectural marvel, and was built between 1920 and 1936. It is one of the most beautiful buildings in Tokyo and has beautiful halls including a hall for the emperor to rest when he visits the building to open legislative terms, and is open for his majesty and state visitors only.

The National Diet is made up of two chambers. One is for the representatives, who comprise of 475 members who are elected every four years according to a system that combines majority voting with proportionality. The other is the advisors council, which has 242 members elected for six-year terms, who are elected every three years.

The National Diet legislates laws, approves the budget, ratifies international treaties, appoints the prime minister and amends the constitution.

Japan Foreign Ministry: Extreme concern for Middle East

Contrary to the extreme quietness that shrouds the building of Japan's foreign ministry located in the center of Tokyo, inside, it is like a beehive that does not rest, as the case is with the general policy of the Japanese administration and people: Discipline and productivity. A large group of employees monitor all what goes on around the world and the Middle East minute by minute, and from contacts with accredited embassies in the region.

On the first official day of our visit to Japan, we went to the foreign ministry building and met five officials in charge of the region's issues:

Coordinating diplomatic and popular efforts

The first was the advisor of public relations Ruriko Suminaga, who set up the following four meetings, starting with director of popular diplomacy Ayoshiro Mori, who told us about the work of his department in coordinating efforts between embassies and consulates to present the correct information to the people of the world about Japan, its policies and values, communicate with intellectuals around the world and exchange views with them so the correct image of Japan can reach the largest groups of people, and project attractive factors which are of interest to people about the country. Mori spoke about the Japan Up Close website, which shows what is being published about Japan.



Ruriko Suminaga

Kuwait and Japan

This was followed with a meeting with Kunyochi Sakai, the official of the second division at the Middle East and Africa Department at the Foreign Ministry, where his division covers the Arabian Gulf, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen affairs. Sakai spoke about bilateral relations between Japan and Kuwait. These relations began on Dec 8, 1961 following Kuwait's independence, and Kuwait's embassy in Tokyo opened in Feb 1962, and Japan's embassy in Kuwait in March 1963.

The year 2011 witnessed the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations between the two countries, which were proven strong through experience, especially through Japan's stand towards the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and Kuwait's stands in helping Japan face natural catas-



Ayoshiro Mori

trophes including the earthquake that hit Japan in March 2011 when Kuwait announced its donation of five million barrels of crude oil, in addition to the contributions of the Kuwait Red Crescent following the meltdown of the Fukushima reactor. Sakai said Kuwait oil and oil derivatives exports to Japan in 2014 reached \$12.386 billion, representing 8 percent of Japan's oil imports, making Kuwait the fifth most important source in this field, compared with Kuwait's imports of \$1.891 billion (most of which are cars, electric appliances and industrial material).

Sakai spoke about the distinguished relations between the Japanese leadership, specially Emperor Akihito and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad.



Kunyochi Sakai

Fighting terrorism

The fourth meeting was with the deputy director of security and protection at Japan's foreign ministry Kintaro Minami, who spoke about Japan's policy in the field of fighting terrorism, as he affirmed his country's intention to present all possible support to the international community to uproot terrorism. He said his country condemns all terrorist acts and pointed out that the issue will be on the agenda of the G7 Summit to be held in Japan in May. Kintaro presented a paper that set three bases for Japan's policy in the field of fighting terrorism:

1- Boosting measures of facing terrorism through direct material support to Middle Eastern and African countries, as Japan allocated \$15.5 million, for example, to improve the process of controlling



Kintaro Minami

borders, investigation and legal systems in the region's countries, and work on providing the legal umbrella to face terrorism as the case was in backing the issuance of resolutions 2178 and 2253 in the Security Council, bilateral cooperation with countries and protecting Japanese citizens abroad.

2- Supporting stability and growth efforts, and strengthening intelligence cooperation in the field of fighting terrorism.

3- Contribute to building societies that are opposed to terrorism.

Refugees crisis

The fifth meeting was with the deputy director of the first division in the Middle East Affairs and Africa Department Masunari Takano, who spoke about the role of his country in facing the refugee crisis and



Masunari Takano

Japan's great interest in this humanitarian issue, which made it allocate \$810 million to support international efforts to face its repercussions.

Takano spoke about Japan's support to the Palestinian people both in Palestine and abroad, adding that total Japanese aid to the Palestinians since 1993 (the date of signing the Oslo accord) has reached \$1.5 billion.

On the Syrian crisis, until Oct 2015, Japan has given \$1.147 billion to support refugees in the countries that host them (Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq). This shows the large support in aid Japan gave and is giving to all people of the region. Japan projects higher humanity and a sense of major international responsibility, which characterizes this country.