

Host Town Initiative for Tokyo 2020



Katsuno Mie, Director General for Planning and Promotion, Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games of the Cabinet Secretariat
Photo: Courtesy of the Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Cabinet Secretariat

THE Host Town Initiative is an initiative for people across Japan to interact with the people of counterpart countries and regions that will participate in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games (hereinafter Tokyo Games) to be held this summer (2021). We spoke to Katsuno Mie, Director General for Planning and Promotion, Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Japanese government, about the purposes and activities of the Host Town Initiative.

What is the Host Town Initiative?

The Host Town Initiative is an initiative to promote exchanges between residents in local governmental areas of Japan and the people of other countries and regions participating in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games (hereinafter Tokyo Games) to be held from July to September this year. Local governments such as prefectures, cities, towns and villages across Japan can register as Host Towns. While events for the Tokyo Games will be held mainly in Tokyo, the Host Town Initiative is a nationwide initiative. Also, while the Olympic and Paralympic Games are festivals of sports, the Host Town Initiative involves not only sports but also a wide range of activities, including cultural exchange. Furthermore, it is intended that

exchange will continue even after the Games are over. One of the most appealing aspects of the Host Town Initiative is that it allows participants to gain a deeper understanding of each other's country and region by interaction with many different people, including athletes taking part in the Olympics and Paralympics.

In fact, the Host Town Initiative is the first initiative of its kind in the history of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The initiative was even introduced in the speech of the Olympic Truce Resolution for the Tokyo Games adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2019. Registration for the Host Town Initiative began in January 2016 and, as of May 2021, 528 local governments are registered as Host Towns and 184 countries and regions are registered as counterparts.

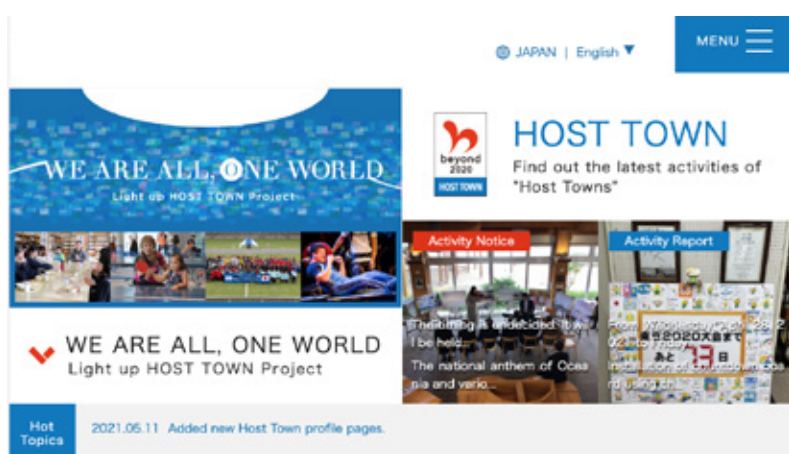
Incidentally, although people in Host Towns have not been able to meet in person with people overseas since the spread of COVID-19 in 2020, they continue to conduct exchange activities online.

What types of activities does the Host Town Initiative involve?

In addition to normal "Host Towns" conducting conventional exchange activities, there are several other types of initiatives. One is the 'ARIGATO' Host Towns for Supporting Reconstruction. In 2011, exactly ten years ago, the Great East Japan Earthquake brought devastation to the Tohoku region. Yet, after the disaster, Japan received tremendous support from all over the world. The 'ARIGATO' Host Towns for Supporting Reconstruction are Host Towns in local governmental areas in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures that sustained particularly severe damage where they interact with countries and regions from which they received support at the time of the disaster to inform them of how disaster recovery is progressing and express their gratitude for support they have received to date.



The Host Town logo



Website of the Host Town Initiative (<https://host-town.jp>)

Host Towns of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society are Host Towns that aim to realize a harmonious and inclusive society beyond national borders by taking the opportunity to conduct exchange activities with Paralympians. The Host Towns have engaged in initiatives such as town-building based on “universal design” and the concept of a “barrier-free mindset” to build respect for the individuality of all people and provide mutual support. Host Towns that show particular leadership through “universal design” in town-building and “barrier-free mindset” initiatives are certified as Leading Host Towns of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society by the Cabinet Secretariat.

What specific activities do Host Towns engage in?

As well as exchange activities with Olympians and



A collaborative event involving Japanese dancers and djembe (African drum) players in Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture, August 2019
Photo: Courtesy of Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games of the Cabinet Secretariat

Paralympians through sports, Host Towns conduct various cultural exchange activities in fields such as music, festivals, dance and food. For example, events have been held to enjoy Japanese dancing using musical instruments from the counterpart countries and regions. Some Host Towns also ran campaigns to introduce and serve the specialties and drinks of counterpart countries and regions at restaurants or events. In schools, there are classes to teach students about counterpart countries and regions.

Since the spread of COVID-19, this exchange has continued online. On February 20 and 21, 2021, the Host Town Summit, organized by the Cabinet Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, was held online at a virtual venue. A wide-ranging program was delivered online, including seminars on the Host Town Initiative, briefings on activities carried out by each Host Town, and cooking demonstrations of dishes created based on the food culture of counterpart countries and regions.

In addition, a virtual “Host Town House” venue will be set up online during the Tokyo Games. The plan is for this to disseminate various information, such as introducing activities of each Host Town and their support to athletes. I believe that those visiting the Host Town House online will see how warmly the people of the Host Towns support the athletes.

What has been the response from counterpart countries and regions?



Exchange program involving high school students and British track and field athletes in Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture, May 2019
Photo: Courtesy of Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games of the Cabinet Secretariat

Many athletes have said things like, “My Host Town was like my hometown,” or, “I felt relaxed staying in my Host Town.” I believe this is because they feel the desire of the people of Host Towns to create the best training environment for them and to provide the support they need to compete at their best level. The athletes really appreciate having their own cheering squad in the country where the Games are held.

Embassy officials and citizens of the counterpart countries and regions are also actively supporting the activities of the Host Towns. The Host Town Initiative is an excellent opportunity to deepen their relationship with Japan. One ambassador visited all the Host Town local cities for their country.

What is the vision for Host Town Initiative activities after the Tokyo Games?

Even in the midst of COVID-19, Host Towns continue to conduct exchange activities online. Even if the people in the Host Towns haven’t been able to meet the athletes of their counterpart country and region in person, their support for the athletes is unwavering. I believe that exchange activities online provide key examples for the continuation and development of Host Town Initiative activities after the Tokyo Games are over.

Many people both in Japan and overseas have gained new experiences through the activities of the Host Town Initiative, such as interacting with Olympians and



Virtual venue of the Host Town Summit held on February 20 and 21, 2021

Image: Courtesy of Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games of the Cabinet Secretariat

Paralympians, and participating in events to deepen understanding of each other’s culture. Children and young people are also actively participating in the Host Town Initiative. Based on their experiences, these people may in future become individuals who contribute to creating a better society, such as through the revitalization of communities and realization of harmonious and inclusive societies around the world. I firmly believe that the Host Town Initiative is a project with great potential and one compatible with the Olympic & Paralympic spirit of “mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.”

Interview (May 19, 2021) by SAWAJI OSAMU



A Moldova cuisine cooking class in Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture, August 2017

Photo: Courtesy of Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games of the Cabinet Secretariat



An event introducing Canada in Natori City, Miyagi Prefecture, July 19

Photo: Courtesy of Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games of the Cabinet Secretariat