

HOKKAIDO - ALBERTA RELATIONS



PROFILE

Capital: Sapporo

Population: 5.69 million (5% of Japan's total population)

Major Cities: Sapporo (1,792,167), Asahikawa (362,785), Hakodate (289,806), Kushiro (193,833), Obihiro (173,488), Otaru (153,394)

Language: Japanese

Government: Unicameral legislature with Governor as head

Head of Government: Governor Ms. Harumi Takahashi (Elected in April 2003)

Currency: \$1 CDN = 95.82 Yen (October 2005)

Key Industry Sectors: Agriculture (rice, wheat, beans, potatoes, onions, dairy), housing and construction, tourism, forestry, seafood, and transportation.

DID YOU KNOW?

- 2005 marks the 25th Anniversary of the Hokkaido – Alberta sister province relationship.
- Facing increased international competition, Hokkaido industries are seeking to strengthen their regional scope. With support from the Hokkaido government, this has translated into an active policy to encourage industrial research and collaboration across industries.
- Alberta played a key role in helping Hokkaido develop into the curling capital of Japan. The town of Tokoro, Barrhead's twin, produces most of Japan's top curlers.

RELATIONSHIP OVERVIEW

- Alberta relations with Hokkaido began in 1972, with an Alberta government economic mission to Japan. Hokkaido formally became Alberta's sister province in 1980.
- Hokkaido and Alberta have many similarities: both have resource-based economies, similar climates and topography, were settled in the same era, and surveyed by the same individuals in the late 1880's.
- Japan is Alberta's 2nd largest trading partner, and a significant share of Alberta exports to Japan, go to Hokkaido.
- Hokkaido and Alberta are members of the Northern Forum, an organization of sub-national governments in northern regions.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

- Trade between Hokkaido and Alberta has grown from the sister province relationship. Annual Alberta exports to Hokkaido have been in the range of \$60 million CDN.
- Hokkaido can be an entry point for Alberta businesses seeking to access the larger Japanese market.
- There have been a number of initiatives between the two provinces, focusing on sectors such as construction, housing and wood products, manufactured goods and food products.

Agriculture

- Agriculture was the primary focus for commercial activity when the twinning agreement was initiated.
- Dairy exchanges formed an important part of early activity under the twinning agreement.
- Alberta and Hokkaido plant breeding institutions were involved in joint venture wheat-breeding programs in the 1990's.
- Recent years have seen interest in new areas such as food processing technology.

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunities exist in housing and building products and services, processed foods, consumer goods (particularly for the aged), information technology and services, biotechnology and pharmaceutical products and services, health care products and services.
- Hokkaido's proximity to the offshore oil and gas industry in the Russian Far East presents a good opportunity for Alberta businesses.

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

- A number of Alberta post-secondary institutions have developed joint study programs in Japanese and English language training, building and construction techniques and Canadian studies.
- Hokkaido and Alberta annually award a post-secondary scholarship to students from each other's province.
- Each year Hokkaido sends two teachers under the REX program to Alberta schools to provide Japanese language training.
- The University of Alberta and the Hokkaido Board of Education have an agreement to train Hokkaido teachers in Alberta, to learn the basic practices of teaching English as a Second Language. This program is known as the Hokkaido Teacher Exchange Program (H-TEP).
- In 2002, two researchers from the Historical Museum of Hokkaido were at the Provincial Museum of Alberta (PMA) for 6 weeks. The PMA reciprocated by sending two researchers to Hokkaido. The research is primarily focused on the examination of indigenous and dominant cultural interactions.
- Twenty-two Alberta schools are twinned with schools in Hokkaido.

VOLUNTEERISM

- In August 2001, a group went to study volunteer driven organizations in Hokkaido. The exchange coincided with the 'Volunteer Ai-Land' conference (similar to Alberta's 'Vitalize' conference). Negotiation between the two groups included research and cooperation involving the volunteer sector.
- In June 2002, Hokkaido sent seven delegates to attend Alberta's 'Vitalize 2002' (a provincial volunteer conference) organized by the Wild Rose Foundation.
- In November 2004, Alberta sent a delegation to Hokkaido to look into ways to further enhance information exchanges on volunteerism.

AGREEMENTS

- Alberta – Hokkaido Sports Exchange Agreement (1979).
- Alberta - Hokkaido Proclamation of Friendship and Affiliation Agreement (September 1980).
- Volunteer exchange agreement (1992) between Hokkaido and Alberta's Wild Rose Foundation, renewed in 2005.
- Cooperation agreement between the Provincial Museum of Alberta (PMA) and the Historical Museum of Hokkaido (March 1998).
- Agreement between the Leduc Food Processing Center and the Hokkaido Food Processing Research Center (February 2001). A one year project designed to collaborate on research and development of new beef products, specifically shelf stable meat snacks. The project is completed.

Medical Exchanges

- Sapporo Medical University and the University of Alberta are currently cooperating on tele-health, the delivery of medical and health services through telecommunications technology.
- The Sapporo Medical University and the University of Alberta cooperate in areas such as nursing, rehabilitation medicine and sports medicine.

Sports

- With a winter similar to Alberta's, skiing, hockey, skating, and most recently, curling are popular activities in Hokkaido. Sports exchanges between Alberta and Hokkaido have been active for 30 years. These exchanges have become an integral part of the sister province relationship, with a focus on developing athletes, coaches and sports medicine expertise.
- In 2001/02 and 2002/03, a baseball exchange took place between Alberta and Hokkaido.
- In August 1999, an Alberta peewee hockey team went to Sapporo to participate in the International Ice Hockey Tournament. That year Hokkaido sent a men's basketball team to play against Team Alberta. In 2000, Team Alberta played hockey in Hokkaido.

SISTER CITIES

Alberta and Hokkaido Twinned Municipalities:

- Rocky Mountain House & Kamikawa (1984)
 - Stony Plain & Shikaoi (1985)
 - Camrose & Kamifurano (1985)
 - Lacombe & Rikubetsu (1986)
 - Slave Lake & Kamishihoro (1988)
 - Canmore & Higashikawa (1989)
 - Stettler & Okoppe (1990)
 - Wetaskiwin & Ashoro (1990)
 - Barrhead & Tokoro (1991)
 - Whitecourt & Kamiyubetsu (1998)
- With support from the Alberta Government, the Alberta Japan Twinned Municipalities Association was established in 1998 and works with Alberta communities to promote Alberta-Japan relations at the community level.

Other Sister Provinces / States:

- Hokkaido has sister province relationships with Heilongjiang, China and Massachusetts, USA and friendship and economic cooperation affiliation with Sakhalin, Russia.

RECENT VISITS

- July 2005: Alberta's Minister of Municipal Affairs, Rob Renner, led a mission to celebrate Alberta's 25th anniversary of Alberta-Hokkaido sister province relations.
- October 2002: Alberta's Minister of Learning led a mission to Japan and Hokkaido; representatives from basic and adult learning sectors also participated.
- April 2002: Alberta's Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations led a mission to Hokkaido and met with Governor Hori.
- April 2001: Five members of the Legislative Assembly of Hokkaido visited Alberta.
- September 2000: Hokkaido's Governor led a 20th Anniversary delegation to Alberta.
- June 2000: An Alberta delegation visited Hokkaido to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the twinning relationship. A return Hokkaido delegation visited in September 2000.
- September 1999: Premier Klein met with Hokkaido's Governor Hori in Tokyo during the Team Canada mission to Japan.
- October 1998: Alberta's Advanced Education and Career Development Minister led a mission to Tokyo and Sapporo to promote education and training programs.