

## Farewell Message from Consul General Mr. Matsunaga

I am writing this message to say good-bye to my friends in Dubai and the Northern Emirates because I was recently instructed to go back to Japan to assume a new duty. I would like to ask you to give the same support and cooperation, which I have enjoyed during my tenure, to my successor, Mr. Hisashi MICHIGAMI, a veteran diplomat who has served in many important posts in the past.

It is hard to believe that more than two years have passed since I arrived in Dubai. I still vividly remember the night I landed at Dubai Airport. At that time, I was hopeful and yet anxious about the life to come, but my anxiety turned out to be unnecessary as I was welcomed by so many kind people thereafter. Now I look back on the past twenty-eight months with great satisfaction. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who enriched my posting so much.

Why did I feel so at home in Dubai? One major reason is the fact that Japanese culture has a lot in common with local culture. To be specific, both societies value interpersonal relationships and personal bonds. In both cultures, people are expected to live up to the trust that their friends have in them. Furthermore, “family” is of paramount importance, and respect for one’s elders is an important virtue. In fact, an Emirati friend of mine makes the round visiting his parents, parents-in-law, the two sets of his own grand-parents and both sets of his grand-parents in-law, visiting each house every night.

Secondly, both societies try hard to preserve traditional values in the face of rapid modernization. Oftentimes, modernization is equated with Westernization. But both our societies refuse to give up our traditional culture/values for the sake of modernization. In other words, we are trying hard to reconcile our traditional culture/values with our material growth typically symbolized by skyscrapers, computers, highways and modern infrastructure.

For my part, I did my best to learn more about the country and make many local friends. The best way to become friends is always to speak the local language, no matter how little or broken your language may be. That is why I began to take lessons in the Arabic language. Fortunately, a very good Arabic school is housed in the World Trade Centre, where the Japanese Consulate is located. I didn’t even have to go outside to go to the class! Thanks to the lessons, I gradually became able to exchange greetings in Arabic. Every morning I greet the policemen who guard the Consulate. Seeing a smile on their faces was a great way to

start a new day.

I am going back to Japan not only with great satisfaction but also with a deeper understanding of Dubai and the Northern Emirates. Let me give you an example. Although Dubai and the UAE are world-famous for their economic strength, the fact that the country is also a center of artistic activity is not so well-known. I was personally very impressed with the Sharjah Biennale, which is an international exhibition of modern art, held most recently in spring last year. Not only did many big-name artists such as Ryuichi Sakamoto (a world-famous composer from Japan) take part in the event, but I was also inspired by its broad definition of modern art .

For instance, an artist set up an ice cream stall across the creek in Sharjah, where ice cream with salt/pepper was sold. Visitors boarded a small boat to cross the creek seated side by side with sweating fellow passengers. This whole experience was presented as a form of art. The concept of modern art is expanded to include anything to enrich our life and generate “joie de vivre.” I firmly believe that such free artistic expression by Emirati and international creators, most typically represented by the chic galleries in Al Quoz and the DIFC art space should be more widely publicized.

Dubai and Japan have something in common in the future as well. In 2020, Dubai will host the World Exposition, while Tokyo will host the Summer Olympic Games. In other words, our two great cities will be hosting two of the world’s major events in the same year. Rest assured, though, that we will not be competing for visitors as the Olympic Games will be held in the summer, while the World Expo will be taking place from the autumn through early 2021, so as to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the nation, Itihad.

It is thrilling to watch the growth of Dubai and the UAE. I will keep watching it from Japan even after I return there. I also intend to treasure my friendship with my Emirati friends for a long time to come. In closing my farewell message, let me reiterate my thanks to all of you for your unwavering support and cooperation. May you be blessed and may you be happy.

With warm regards,

Daisuke Matsunaga  
Departing Consul General of Japan

