



DOWN MEMORY LANE



Daisuke Matsunaga

► Daisuke Matsunaga, the former Consul General of Japan in Dubai, spoke to **Suchitra Steven Samuel** before he left Dubai, the city that was home for two-and-a-half years

While officiating as the Consul General of Japan in Dubai, Daisuke Matsunaga was always keen to introduce what is nice and positive about Japan like how kind the Japanese people are, how beautiful Japanese scenery is and how delicious Japanese food is. He is so proud of his country that he would like to see more people visiting Japan from the UAE and the Middle East. He is sure that they would fall in love with Japan and become repeat visitors.

"I will miss my friends in the UAE. However, I am trying not to become too sentimental about my departure as we are supposed to welcome new challenges and changes. Having spent the past two years and four months in the UAE, I have a better understanding of Dubai and the Middle East region in general. I will continue to remain interested in the region," says Matsunaga in an interview with *Khaleej Times*.

The former consul general introduced several initiatives to strengthen Japan-UAE ties. "I organised events to introduce Japanese culture to the local population. For example, in 2012, we held a workshop on Japanese confectionery. The participants had hands-on experience to make traditional Japanese sweets. Another example is the screening of Japanese movies and animation. I also tried to promote Japanese products to the local markets. The Hokkaido (northernmost island of Japan) food fair was a great success in introducing fresh and tasty products to local distributors and consumers," he informs.

Matsunaga confesses that he enjoys the convenience of the city as well as the diversity of people. "I enjoyed riding the Dubai Metro, for instance. We have perfect access to international communication means including the Internet and social media, so I did not feel separated from home so much during my stay here," he avers.

Matsunaga enjoyed becoming friends with people, among both Emiratis and expatriates. "Once an Emirati friend invited me to a desert safari. It was so exciting to drive on the sand with a 4-wheel drive. The starry night sky was

breathtaking," he recalls.

Matsunaga feels much closer to Dubai, the UAE and the Middle East. "So I will read articles or news about the region more carefully than before. I went to school to learn Arabic. Initially, the Arabic letters may look rather intimidating, but now I can read what is written on signboards on the street. I can also exchange greetings with people. When I see them smile after the greetings, I feel that I made the right decision of going to the school to study the language," he shares.



Dubai Creek

Matsunaga confesses that he will miss his friends even though with the Internet age, it is easy to remain connected. "I like the Creek and its vicinity. Watching the water is so relaxing. I particularly enjoy watching the shining ripples on the Creek."

He invites readers to visit Japan for sightseeing. "The country is stretched from north to south, so you can enjoy various climates from pristine high-quality snow, which is best for skiing and snow-boarding to sub-tropical coral reefs, where you can enjoy diving. You can enjoy the cherry blossoms in spring," he adds.

He wants expatriates, to try to understand local culture and learn how to exchange greetings in Arabic. "Thus you can make more friends and that would enable you to enjoy your life here even more. Wherever I am and whatever I do, I will enjoy making people happy. I would like to get involved in charity activities," he concludes.

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