
Osaka Renaissance News

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Welcome to “Osaka Renaissance News” - the email newsletter of the Osaka City Government’s “Urban Revitalization Task Force”.

The Osaka Urban Revitalization Task Force

We are the first *City Task Force* established in Japan to address urban regeneration and revitalization issues within a common framework. We also collaborate with the central government’s “Urban Renaissance Program”. The role of the task force is to coordinate and promote the set of initiatives that taken together form the Osaka Revitalization Plan.

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“Osaka Renaissance News” is distributed through multiple email channels to spread the word about important initiatives taking place in Osaka.

This Issue: Water Metropolis Osaka

The Osaka City Government has undertaken an ambitious project aimed at revitalizing the city’s traditional identity as a water based city as part of its overall Urban Revitalization program. A series of water-centered development projects have been launched to bring a back a historically important part of Osaka’s unique character.

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Water Metropolis Osaka

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INTRODUCTION

Most of us at one time or another has enjoyed one of the many “Water” attractions that Osaka has to offer. Osaka Foreign Business Networking Club members were treated to a cruise along the Okawa River in Feb., 2008 and before that a wonderful cruise around Osaka Bay.

Since ancient times, Osaka has been a center of water transportation for goods from throughout Japan as well as to and from China and Korea. Rivers flowed into the city center, with canals networked throughout the city.

Today, a number of rivers and canals still crisscross the city. In fact, Osaka is one of the few modern cities in the world with a “water corridor” through the heart of the city. It is still possible to tour most of the city by water.

The best way to get a feel for what the “Water Metropolis Osaka” project aims to accomplish is to visit the districts that are being revitalized. If you stroll around Dotombori, Nakanoshima, or Sakishima Cosmosquare, you can see firsthand the transformation that is in progress. Government-funded as well as private-sector projects are modernizing and beautifying these areas.

Completion of some of these projects are still years away, but as they take shape, Osaka’s potential as both a business and lifestyle city is emerging. Osaka’s location at the heart of the important cultural areas around the Kansai region means the potential for increased tourism is also tremendous.

Over the last century, Osaka slowly lost its position as the financial and business capital of Japan to Tokyo. In that time, city has searched long and hard for a new identity as it moves into the 21st century. It seems that it has finally found its future in its past.

Water was an integral part of Osaka’s past and is becoming an important part of its future. After decades of ignoring its water heritage, Osaka is now embracing its role as Japan’s “Water Metropolis.”

Tod Baudin

OSAKA RENAISSANCE NEWS

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Water Metropolis Osaka

In this issue we examine Osaka City's "Water Metropolis" Strategy

(1) A Short History

Osaka is located at the eastern end of the Seto Inland Sea, at the mouth of the Yodo River. The city's history as a "Water Metropolis" can be traced as far back as the late 4th century. Known then as Naniwa, Osaka developed the port of Naniwa-zu, which became a gateway of national importance.

When the Naniwa-no-Miya Palace was built in the 7th century, Osaka became the political and cultural center of Japan. It also became known as an international city where people from the Korean Peninsula and ancient China lived.

Through the ages, the port of Osaka grew as a hub for commerce and cargo transportation. So much of the nation's goods, especially food products, went through Osaka, it became known as the "Tenka-no-Daidokoro" (literally the "kitchen of the nation").

From the 15th century and into the beginning of the 16th century, numerous waterways were excavated for the purpose of marine transport and for discharging waste water.

After the Meiji Restoration of the late 1800's, factories began to emerge around the Port of Osaka. The port became an important base for international trade.

Taking advantage of its well-developed facilities for water transport, Osaka evolved into the center of the country's economy.

One major problem that the city faced was that Osaka was always vulnerable to massive flooding and other water disasters. So, the people implemented various flood control measures, including diversion of the Yamato River in the early modern period, and large-scale excavation work on the Shin Yodo River.

As the 19th century gave way to the 20th century, the role of rivers and canals became less significant for the people of Osaka as the distribution of goods shifted from water to land transportation, which led to the reclamation of canals for the construction of roads. Another reason for this diminishing significance was the construction of tide walls that separate rivers from towns.

Nevertheless, even today there are still some 33 watercourses in Osaka City, flowing a total distance of 146km, and occupying approximately ten percent of the total city area.

(2) Regenerating the Water Metropolis

In late 2001, the Japanese government decided to include the regeneration of the “Water Metropolis Osaka” in its urban renaissance project.

There are many cities called “Water Metropolis” around the world: Suzhou, China, Venice, Italy, and Amsterdam, the Netherlands to name a few examples. Osaka is working hard to justify its membership in this elite group of cities by promoting the optimum use of rivers, utilizing its cultural heritage and increasing its contemporary appeal.

With a total river area of 20.5 km², accounting for ten percent of the total area, Osaka qualifies as a genuine aquapolis. In fact, Osaka is the only city in the world whose downtown area is completely surrounded by water. The area is bracketed by a four-river system consisting of the Dojima-gawa/Tosabori-gawa, Higashiyokobori-gawa, Kizu-gawa, and Dotombori-gawa Rivers.

To increase the number of domestic and international visitors to Osaka, the city is actively utilizing these unique “water corridors” as tourist attractions and venues for various gala events. The City is also beautifying the waterfront areas, promoting water transportation and developing urban plans that focus on river views.

In this “water corridor” project, Osaka City is creating attractive waterfront environments and improving river water quality. The city hopes that the improved urban settings will attract more businesses to Nakanoshima Island and the southern downtown (Minami) area.

(3) Dotombori Development

The Dotombori canal was one of the first areas to benefit from Osaka City’s new “Water Metropolis” strategy.

The canal is a 3-km loop, starting at the Okawa River, which runs past Nakanoshima and connects back to the river below the island near the Osaka Dome stadium.

One important step in the revitalization of the canal was improving the quality of the water in the canal by building a new purification plant and adding better flood management capabilities. Now fish swim even in the densest part of the city.

Two of the main pedestrian bridges over the canal were refurbished, and a new Promenade on either side of the canal was completed at the end of 2004. There is also a new pier for sightseeing boats by the promenade.

In 2002 the city constructed a large concert hall which accommodates 2,000 people next to the canal called Namba Hatch. A wooden terrace reaches out onto the canal in front of Namba Hatch, providing space for a variety of outdoor events. The entire 1.8 hectare site is known as “Minatomachi River Place”.

Redevelopment of the Dotombori area has helped to regenerate the south of Osaka. The area has become a major addition to the commercial and tourist life of Osaka.

(4) Nakanoshima Development

Nakanoshima Island is located in the urban center of Osaka. It is located between the Dojima-gawa and Tosabori-gawa rivers, and covers an area of roughly 60 hectares.

For Osaka, the Nakanoshima District is the heart of the Water Metropolis. It boasts a rich historical, cultural and artistic heritage, surrounded by a beautiful water and green environment. It features a number of attractions and is also the headquarters to a number of corporations and organizations.

In and around Nakanoshima a number of urban redevelopment projects are progressing (See the ORN 31, March 2008).

One of the most beautiful places to relax in Osaka is Nakanoshima Park. This park was the first public park opened by Osaka in 1891, after its foundation as a city.

The city is planning a number of improvements to the park, including the construction of an open-air theater. The City also plans to rename the park Nakanoshima Suijo Park. The theater is to be built southeast of Osaka City Hall and will host various concerts and performances adding an atmosphere of liveliness to the area.

The Nakanoshima Rose Garden will also be redeveloped, becoming a main attraction for pleasure boats cruising along the rivers. The City is also considering developing a 100-meter stretch of Sakura trees near the park and constructing a fountain at its easternmost point.

(5) Sakishima Cosmosquare Development

Sakishima Cosmosquare is located where the western coastal areas of Osaka Bay intersect with the eastern inner city district. This area prospered for centuries as a hub of trade and logistics. 'Mt. Tempoan', an artificially made mountain and the namesake of Tempoan area, was constructed in 1831-1832 with the mud excavated from the river bottom to make way for vessels approaching downtown Osaka. It rises just 4.5 meters above sea level. Tempoan is the lowest mountain in Japan.

Sakishima Cosmosquare is home to cutting-edge technology development companies and various other business support functions. But at the same time it boasts a very pleasant environment despite its inner city location. It is surrounded by the sea, the Sakishima Canal runs through the district, and there is a network of green areas that serve as walkways for pedestrians.

Revitalization efforts in this area include expansion of the IT infrastructure to encourage universities, research institutes, and R&D-oriented high-tech companies to locate here. City planners hope that the zone will become a major center for academic-industrial R&D cooperation. Osaka also plans to create an attractive urban environment by introducing convenient services, and creating a scenic water landscape and attractive recreational spots.

(5) Tourism and Water Attractions

Osaka's history as a "Water Metropolis" is reflected in its many attractions and festivals.

Dotombori is famous for its numerous restaurants, shops and theatres. Tourists are awed by the vast array of colorful neon signs, the most famous being Glico's giant electronic display of a runner on a blue track.

The Tenjin-Matsuri Festival is one of the largest and well known festivals in Japan and has been celebrated for over 1000 years. The two-day event attracts thousands of participants and well over a million spectators. The climax of the festival begins after dark at the Tenjinbashi Bridge where participants board some 100 boats. The boats, filled with torches and lanterns, proceed from the Hononagashi Bridge on the Dojima-gawa River to Enokoshima. The spectacle of fire and water must be seen to be believed.

There are several options for those wishing to get a water level view of Osaka. You can enjoy a wonderful cruise along the Okawa River aboard the Aqua-liner aqua-bus. The cruise ship Himawari offers the chance to enjoy a fancy gourmet meal as you take in the riverside scenery.

In Sakishima Cosmosquare, the Osaka Maritime Museum resides in a stunning glass dome. It is a great place to learn about the history of local and international maritime trade. There are many exhibits that show the relationship

between maritime trade and Osaka's development. There is even a full-size replica of a 17th Century Japanese trade ship, the "Naniwa-Maru".

Also in the Sakishima area, the Osaka Wine Museum features a range of displays, outlining various aspects of wine culture and detailing each of Osaka's seven sister ports.

(6) Last Word

Throughout the world water is a source of purification. In many religions, one emerges from water in order to be reborn. Such is the ritual of misogi to Shinto and Japan. Because the people of ancient Japan believed that the sea was another world where gods lived, touching seawater was called "misogi", or purification of the self.

It is through harnessing water that Naniwa was born and it is through creative use of the resource that Osaka will continue to flourish.

As a Japanese saying goes, "water takes the shape of its container." A metaphor for the way in which people change to match their friends and surroundings like water conforms to a container's shape. By manufacturing a water friendly setting, it is possible for cities to foster an environment with an atmosphere worthy of a great city where its citizens to gather to live and work and play.

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