

OSAKA MEANS BUSINESS

Canadian tourists arriving from Tokyo at Kyoto to visit Japan's thousand-year-old temples, are probably not aware that they have arrived at the gateway to an industrial area rivaling the world's largest. Osaka, the heart of the Kansai region, is the home of one of the world's three largest banks, the third largest stock market, 30 of the world's largest corporations and produces 2% of both the world's GNP and the world's noncommunist trade, all packed into space no bigger than the size of the Fraser Valley but with almost the equivalent population of Canada!

One is not in Osaka long before one realizes there is a difference between Osaka and Tokyo. Kansai people are quick to point out that its highly competitive commercial businesses are more sensitive to customers' needs, more flexible and more direct in doing business, and always willing to try new ideas especially if it means profit. Japanese instant noodles, karaoke (sing-a-long bars), business hotels and cigarette vending machines saw their debut in the Kansai before Tokyo. The qualities of individuality and pride are the reasons why we are told, Japanese communities overseas are usually led by successful Japanese from the Kansai and perhaps why all six of Japan's Nobel Prize winners were born and/or educated in the Kansai.

Osaka people are especially proud of their cultural and social traditions which extend back to feudal times when the region prospered as a commercial centre built up through huge commercial monopolies and controlled by the same philanthropic industrialists whose names still identify the many bridges across Osaka's canals.

But there is a new sense of urgency in Osaka and city fathers are working feverishly to make the city more international in the face of Tokyo's dominant economic and political power. Stylish new hotels and other major facilities are now hosting big name international conferences, and trade shows and exhibitions are helping to both revitalize the local economy and attract foreign businessmen and officials to the region for the first time.

Hopes and New Projects for the Future

Hopes for Osaka in the next century rest upon three major projects largely financed in the region. The first is the construction of the Science City, doing for Osaka what Tsukuba, 100 km north of Tokyo is doing for the Kanto region. At its core will be two of the Kansai's important research organizations: The Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute which concentrates on artificial intelligence and optical telecommunications and the International Institute, which concentrates on basic research, particularly in biotechnology. Three companies have already committed to setting up research centres; Matsushita (Consumer Electronics), Fujitsu (Telecommunications) and Kyocera (Ceramics and New Materials). By 1997, the Science City is expected to be home to over 120,000 researchers