

Tourism

Tourism remains a largely untapped market in Tohoku. Traditionally, workers took short vacations between rice harvests, with Southeast Asia the main holiday destination. Habits are changing, however, and with expansion of Sendai's airport, Canada is expected to become an increasingly popular destination.

(Tohoku and Canada are not entirely strangers. Three British Columbia communities have twinning arrangements in the region. They are: Victoria and Morioka City, Iwate; Vernon and Towa, Miyagi; and Oliver and Bandai, Fukushima.)

With improved access from the capital and with the advent of the two-day weekend, Tohoku is evolving as a playground for Tokyo residents. The region's many natural endowments as well as cultural events are its main drawing cards. The region has 10 national parks, and smaller communities offer preserved streetscapes, traditional festivals and other heritage-based attractions. As well, Tohoku boasts 533 hot-springs — a Japanese favourite.

Today, development activity is concentrated on construction of ski and golf resorts that offer both cottage and chalet accommodations. Currently there are 100 golf clubs and 156 ski resorts in the Tohoku region. More are in the planning and development stages.

These resorts present an opportunity for Canadians with expertise in resort design and planning and log-home production, as well as possible markets for leisure products and services.

Tokyo-based Listel Corporation, which runs a ski hotel in Whistler, B.C. and a ski resort in Bandai, Fukushima, has hired Canadian ski instructors to work in Tohoku. In itself, this may not represent a significant gain for Canadian exporters, but it is a good example of how Japanese resort operators look to Canada for leisure-life models.

Foreign Trade

In 1988, the value of goods exported through Tohoku ports was ¥41.9 billion (0.12 per cent of the national total), while imports were valued at ¥462.3 billion (1.93 per cent of the national total) on a customs-cleared basis. According to 1987 statistics, there was a marked decline in shipments to the socialist countries and an increase in exports to Southeast Asia and Australasia.

Several factors contribute to these low trade figures: most of Tohoku's foreign trade moves through Tokyo and other centres; the majority of production is for the domestic market; and many items that are produced for export are components that are added to goods finished elsewhere in Japan.

Among identifiable exports are ships, iron and steel, fish, minerals, and forest products. In 1989, major imports from Canada included copper concentrates (¥14.9 billion), lumber and wood products (¥14.4 billion), pulp (¥7.2 billion), and cereals (¥3.4 billion). In addition, Tohoku Electric Power Company is a major importer of Canadian uranium (approximately C\$10 million annually). Canada/Tohoku trade figures are covered by Table 7.

Table 7

Canada/Tohoku Trade — 1990 (Customs-cleared Basis)

Prefecture	Imports (¥ billion)	Percentage Growth (year on year)	Exports (¥ million)
Fukushima	33.8	127.1	30
Yamagata	23.0	-	0
Miyagi	19.7	89.0	12
Aomori	15.0	111.4	0
Iwate	6.7	123.1	0
Niigata	5.8	106.1	-
Akita	3.7	128.5	383
TOTAL	107.7	685.2	425