

Showing the World Taking on Tokyo

When Lise-Anne Veillette arrived in Tokyo 18 months ago to open an office focusing on customs issues for the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), she set about connecting with counterparts and colleagues in the field of trade-chain security.

Today Veillette, 39, a border integrity officer with the CBSA and first secretary at the Canadian embassy in Tokyo, is an integral part of the Japanese and international customs community, as well as of the mission team representing Canada on the world stage. She is implementing trade-chain security programs, which, while facilitating trade, safeguard Canada from shipments that pose a national risk. Her work in such vital areas as intelligence allows Canada to intervene in the illegal trade in counterfeits and other contraband goods. To do this, she works closely with a “holistic” group of mission colleagues from DFAIT and other government partners, such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the RCMP and the Department of National Defence. “It really demonstrates the power of Canadians abroad,” she says.

A big part of her job involves sharing information and working on strategies with other customs agents in Japan. A measure of her success is that in January, she was appointed president of the Foreign Customs Council of Japan, a collaborative network of law-enforcement officials. This role has its honours: in April, Veillette presented trophies to the winning teams at the All-Japan Customs Judo and Kendo Competition.

A Vancouver native, Veillette has always loved to travel. She spent two years in Ireland and England on student work-abroad programs, became a flight attendant with a charter airline, then joined the CBSA in Vancouver in 2001 in the field of marine operations. She was posted to Ottawa and then Seattle before moving to Tokyo in January 2009.

Her work is demanding—especially given the language and cultural differences—yet always eye-opening. “Japan is a remarkable country, with so many layers—I learn something new every day.” She’s visited ports in the farthest reaches of Japan to meet customs staff, for example. “Here you can’t call people on the phone. The face-to-face relationship is key.”



Lise-Anne Veillette (top row, fourth from left) attends the All-Japan Customs Judo and Kendo Competition.



Many layers: Lise-Anne Veillette sits atop Japan's Mt. Fuji at sunrise.

Cultural differences extend to the fact her mostly male Japanese counterparts take a strong interest in her personal life. “They have no qualms about asking why I am not married and whether I worry about becoming an old maid.”

A constant companion is her dog Maya, whom Veillette’s cousin rescued as a puppy from a Mexican beach and presented as a gift to her after she joined the CBSA. Maya is a black Labrador mix weighing more than 70 pounds, which creates a stir in a country of small dogs, and she likes Japanese cuisine, especially sushi. In the high-pressure field of customs and intelligence, the dog helps Veillette to lead a balanced life. “She makes sure I’m home at a reasonable hour to walk and feed her.”

Did you know?

Lise-Anne Veillette is one of more than 2,500 staff, both Canada-based and locally engaged, working for some 22 “partner” government departments and agencies as well as nine “co-locators” in DFAIT’s international mission network.

She is part of the operational arm of the CBSA that delivers liaison and international border integrity efforts in areas such as irregular migration, fraud detection, supply-chain security, national security and strategic intelligence activities. The CBSA has 68 Canada-based employees working in 40 countries.