

MAEBASHI FOCUS

Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) Newsletter

Howdy y'all!

This month's newsletter is coming out a little late, but I have a good excuse: I was in Italy for a week!

After months of preparation, several people from the Policy Planning Division, the Gunma Franco-Japanese Association, and I participated in the 5th Conference of the International Network of Michelin Cities (INMC), held in Cuneo, Italy, from October 5th to 9th.

This was my first overseas business trip, so I was quite nervous and wondered whether I would be up to the challenge.



Maebashi Delegation

Of course, I had built up plenty of experience translating and interpreting since I started working in Maebashi. Even so, I was still a little worried about whether I would be able to make full use of those skills on an international stage. My coworkers were nervous as well, as many of them had little experience traveling overseas, let alone visiting somewhere as unfamiliar as Europe. Those worries, however, soon disappeared.

After a 13-hour flight and a transfer in Germany—which we nearly missed, with only a few minutes to spare before our connecting flight—we finally arrived safely in Italy.

At the airport, we were greeted by representatives from INMC, who kindly guided us to Cuneo. This warm hospitality was something we would experience many times throughout the trip, as nearly everyone we met welcomed us warmly and went out of their way to be kind to us.

At the conference, we shared knowledge and initiatives related to sustainable energy, food, and water, while also discussing how cities and companies could work together to share knowledge and experience and apply what they learned in their own communities.

Over the course of the week, we, the Maebashi City delegation, learned a great deal and had the opportunity to connect with people from all over the world.

We also participated in a variety of interesting activities as part of the conference.

This includes a visit to an apple orchard, where we heard from researchers and company CEOs about the crops grown in the region,



Streets of Cuneo

a tour of the factory of a local company that produces chocolate and marron glacé, as even a chestnut farm where research is being conducted on chestnut cultivation.

Through these visits, we were able to learn more about agriculture, food production, and the work being done by local businesses in and around Cuneo. And, of course, we were given plenty of delicious food to try at every stop along the way.

While the conference kept us busy throughout the week, we also had some time to take in the sights and enjoy the local culture.

We were able to enjoy both the beautiful streets of Cuneo and the wonderful food culture of the Piedmont region, where Cuneo is located. Stone and brick buildings that seemed to have remained unchanged for many years surrounded the town square, with a statue standing in the center. It felt as though we had not only traveled to another country, but had also traveled back in time 100 years.

In between the conference activities, we were treated to multi-course meals at various restaurants almost every day. Every dish was absolutely delicious, and each time I found myself thinking, "This one is even better than the last!" However, the most memorable part of the trip for me came on the final day.

That being, our last dinner, which was a gala dinner held at a castle built in the 13th century.



Gala dinner

After traveling by bus for about an hour from Cuneo, we arrived at the foot of the castle. Unfortunately, it suddenly started raining, and by the time we made our way up the hill to the castle entrance, everyone was completely soaked.

However, the tour of the castle and the dinner that followed were so incredible that I soon forgot all about getting wet. According to our guide, the castle contains some of the best-preserved frescoes in Europe, and its walls and ceilings gave us a glimpse into its long and fascinating history.

And then came the dinner we had all been waiting for: a buffet!

There was an incredible selection of fine local cheeses, meats, delicious wines, and all sorts of other wonderful dishes. Of course, I ate everything I could and have absolutely no regrets.

Through this trip, we, the Maebashi City delegation, were able to learn a great deal about INMC, connect with delegations from around the world, and experience the beautiful streets and culture of Italy. And most importantly, we got to eat a whole lot of great food!

This experience has undoubtedly become the most memorable experience I have had since becoming a CIR on the JET Program. I hope I will have more opportunities to participate in experiences like this in the future!