

Buyer Invitation Program in Takaoka City (2012)

JETRO's buyer invitation program is a trade promoting program which invites buyers from various countries to Japan for free; to meet with and discuss possible trade ventures with specially selected local companies in certain regions in Japan. The goal of the program is to match up the businesses between Japanese SMEs and foreign buyers, to promote export of Japanese SMEs.

In July, JETRO Toyama hosted representatives from European and American companies in the Toyama region of Japan for a five day showcase of the region and its SMEs. JETRO offices in Europe, the USA, and Toyama worked together to organize the trip and business introductions, to help promote Japanese SMEs to potential European buyers.

JETRO's buyer invitation program from the 14th until the 20th of July, concerning "Design and Traditional Products" took place in [Takaoka city in Toyama prefecture](#), inviting six participants from various countries including the USA, Germany, France and Belgium. There were about 25 SMEs at Takaoka city who presented their products to the potential buyers. Each buyer from the overseas had one-to-one business discussions at least with ten local SMEs during the program. The target products for this edition of the program were interior decoration products such as food implements, gadgets, household trinkets etc.

JETRO Brussels began the selection process several months ago and nominated [Scènes D'Intérieur](#) as the Belgian candidate for the buyer invitation program. *Scènes D'Intérieur* is an interior décor outlet, located just outside Wavre. The owner Mme Véronique Bary owns, runs, designs and finds the products herself. In the past she has designed and imported carpets, textiles for soft furnishings and various other products. She buys her products from over seven countries including Morocco, France, Thailand, India, Senegal, Germany and France.

Below is the interview JETRO Brussels undertook on 26th July with Mrs Bary on her return from her visit to Japan.



JETRO: What were your general impressions of the Program?

Véronique BARY: The organization was impeccable and the attention to detail was really fastidious. My expectations for the program were really surpassed by the program's execution. In fact I brought an empty suitcase with me for merchandise and interesting purchases and I thought it would be enough. After the first day it was full to the brim. The JETRO team then kindly took me around the town to buy a new suitcase in Takaoka City... In terms of the products themselves I have definite favorites and there were some products that I simply fell in love with.

If I had to make one criticism, it would be that the variety although good, could have been better; products were mostly industrially produced and expensive. I really went for all the artisanal hand-made products, which were all stunning.

JETRO: Which products did you like best?

Véronique BARY: There are several really wonderful products that I was impressed by. There was one company who presented boot inserts to dry and de-odorize boots. They were great! Ecological & sustainable and made from repurposed wood recycled from the debris of the tsunami. Everything about them was great, with great eco-value, and a really good cause behind it.

I also liked the products decorated with Washi paper (Japanese handmade paper) presented by one of the local participant companies. And I fell completely in love with their products. For me they really became a priority company and one of the main focuses for companies I want to work with. I bought about ten items from them while I was there and they are already on sale in my shop.



I was also interested in the local company who presented their eye-catching accessories. I have asked them to design a simpler necklace to sell in my stores. However I will probably buy them in reduced numbers and on a demand base as it is light and inexpensive to transport to Europe in small quantities.

For me these companies were the big three. Other notable mentions are for the lacquer manufacturer whose lacquer-ware products are gorgeous but a little too highly priced for my store. If their products were less expensive, they would perfectly fit in my outlet.

JETRO: What did you think of the local products?

Véronique BARY: We had the opportunity to visit local companies and actually saw how the products were made. I learned that all manufacturers are particular in their production of their handmade goods.

Not only I discovered local products, I also enjoyed local Sushi and bento (lunch box). I was amazed by the taste of authentic local sushi and tasted different from sushi in Belgium. I really liked the colorful bento with such a wide variety. I even thought of bringing back the lunch box's container as it was beautifully made with Japanese paper.

I was also surprised at the large number of Japanese media companies on site who reported on this program in their local newspapers and broadcasting.

JETRO: Did you find any other interesting products while in Japan?

Véronique BARY: Whilst heading back to Belgium in Narita I bought several things I really liked including a hand-painted hair clip, bamboo chopsticks, ice cream and rice paddles made of wood, bath salts for aches and pains, and a toweling covered notebook. I really loved these products and bought some for the store and some for myself.



JETRO: Would you recommend this program for other people?

Véronique BARY: Definitely, I had a great time and have come back with a really good impression. I do wish that the products had been more artisanal, but I have also made some very good connections with local companies.