

Embassy of Sweden Conducts Official Visit to Hokkaido

Exploring new opportunities for cooperation in green transition, digital infrastructure and research

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From 2–8 March 2026, H.E. Viktoria Li, Ambassador of Sweden to Japan, together with a delegation from the Embassy of Sweden, conducted an official visit to Hokkaido. The delegation visited Sapporo, Ebetsu, Tobetsu, Tomakomai, Wakkanai and Asahikawa, engaging with local governments, companies and research institutions to exchange views and explore potential cooperation across a wide range of areas including green technologies, digital infrastructure, research collaboration and regional development.

Hokkaido and Sweden share many similarities: northern climates, vast natural environments, and a strong awareness of sustainability shaped by these conditions. The visit marked an important first step in strengthening ties between Sweden and Hokkaido.

Hokkaido's Growth Strategy and International Cooperation

Exchanges on the economy, sustainability and talent development

During the visit, the delegation held discussions with local government and business leaders, including Governor Naomichi Suzuki of Hokkaido and Mayor Katsuhiko Akimoto of Sapporo, to exchange views on Hokkaido's industrial policy and the future of the regional economy.



In discussions with Governor Suzuki, the delegation explored opportunities for sustainable economic development building on Hokkaido's strengths in food production and renewable energy resources. Hokkaido has one of the highest food self-sufficiency rates in Japan and abundant natural resources, giving the region strong potential in areas

such as green energy, environmental technologies and sustainable industries. The discussions also touched on talent development, education and the importance of securing international human resources to support regional economic growth, highlighting opportunities for cooperation with universities and research institutions.

In Sapporo, Ambassador Li met with Mayor Akimoto to exchange views on urban policy and innovation-driven economic development. Discussions focused on the shared conditions of northern climates and the potential for collaboration in sustainable urban development, green technologies and digital infrastructure.



The delegation also met with the Hokkaido Economic Federation (DOKEIREN), where discussions centred on industrial development and prospects for international business in the region. Opportunities for cooperation between Swedish companies and Hokkaido industries were highlighted, particularly in areas such as food, energy and tourism.



In these discussions, attention was also given to the growing importance of digital infrastructure, including data centres. Participants noted Hokkaido’s potential in this area due to its cool climate and access to renewable energy resources.

Cooperation in Arctic Research

Discussions at Hokkaido University on global challenges



In Sapporo, the delegation visited Hokkaido University and met with President Kiyohiro Houkin and leading researchers to learn more about the university's international research networks and interdisciplinary research initiatives. Discussions focused particularly on Arctic research and opportunities for academic cooperation.

Hokkaido University is one of Japan's key centres for Arctic research. Its Arctic Research Centre brings together multiple departments, including the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Engineering and the Graduate School of Environmental Science, to conduct interdisciplinary research.



Sweden, which also has territory in the Arctic region, considers Arctic research a national priority. Institutions such as the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat, Stockholm University and Umeå University conduct research on glaciers, marine environments, climate modelling and Arctic ecosystems, and international collaboration has expanded through EU research framework programmes.

The Arctic is widely recognised as one of the regions where the impacts of climate change are most visible, making it an area of growing global interest across science, policy and industry. The visit included participation from the Embassy of Sweden's Science and Innovation Office, and discussions with Hokkaido University researchers covered recent developments in Arctic research and international cooperation. Opportunities for researcher exchanges and further academic collaboration were also explored.

Swedish Technology and Culture in Hokkaido

From smart dairy farming to Nordic housing

In Ebetsu, the delegation visited the dairy farm Kalm Kakuyama, where automated milking robots developed by the Swedish company DeLaval have been introduced. The visit provided insight into smart dairy farming technologies.



Cows approach the robotic milking system voluntarily and are milked at their own pace. This technology reduces labour demands while also creating a low-stress environment for the animals. The system demonstrates how technology can support both improved working conditions and animal welfare, contributing to more sustainable dairy farming.

The farm also operates a circular approach to sustainability. Biogas generated on-site is used to produce electricity, while coffee grounds collected from companies are reused as bedding for the cows and as a deodorising material.

The delegation also visited “Sweden Hills” in Tobetsu Town, a residential area characterised by Nordic-style houses. They met with Mayor Masahiro Goto and representatives from Sweden House, a housing company specialising in Nordic-style homes. Located only about forty minutes from Sapporo, the area offers a landscape reminiscent of a Swedish town and is widely regarded as a symbol of long-standing exchange between Sweden and Japan.



The homes built by Sweden House incorporate Nordic approaches to housing design, including high insulation and airtight construction. The visit highlighted how Nordic housing culture and ways of living have taken root in Hokkaido, a region that shares similar climatic conditions.

Hokkaido as an Emerging Hub for Semiconductors and Digital Infrastructure



In Chitose, the delegation visited the construction site of Rapidus Corporation’s semiconductor manufacturing facility. The new plant, known as IIM-1 (Innovative Integration for Manufacturing), aims to produce next-generation logic semiconductors at the 2-nanometre node level. The project has attracted significant attention as a key initiative to strengthen Japan’s semiconductor industry, AI capacity and economic security.

Large-scale semiconductor investments such as this can create broader digital ecosystems by attracting suppliers, advanced manufacturing partners, research institutions and highly skilled talent. In Hokkaido, expectations are growing for the development of a new industrial cluster centred around the semiconductor industry.

Following the site visit, the delegation exchanged views with officials from the Hokkaido Prefectural Government's International Affairs Bureau and representatives from SoftBank working on digital infrastructure. Discussions focused on strategies to attract data centres and to strengthen next-generation digital infrastructure.

As demand for cloud services and artificial intelligence continues to grow worldwide, data centres are becoming increasingly important infrastructure. With its cool climate and access to renewable energy, Hokkaido is attracting attention internationally as a suitable location for data centre development.

Sweden has also seen significant growth in its data centre sector, supported by its cold climate and reliable electricity supply. Lars Hammarström, Science and Innovation Counsellor at the Embassy of Sweden, shared insights on how investments in digital infrastructure can support scientific research, innovation and economic security.

The visit provided an opportunity to deepen understanding of how semiconductor investments and digital infrastructure development may shape regional innovation and industrial transformation, while also exploring potential areas for international cooperation.

Natural Environment and Energy in Northern Hokkaido

Learning about sustainability in Wakkanai and Sarobetsu

In Wakkanai, Japan's northernmost city, the delegation paid a courtesy visit to Mayor Hiroshi Kudo to learn more about the region's initiatives and the characteristics of northern Hokkaido.



Wakkanai is known for its strong winds, making it one of Japan's most promising regions for wind power generation. The delegation learned about the potential for renewable energy development based on the region's natural conditions. Discussions also covered

historical connections with Sakhalin and the unique geography and history of the northern region.



The delegation also visited the Sarobetsu Wetland, where they learned about efforts to balance nature conservation with local industries and livelihoods. Sarobetsu is home to a rich ecosystem of plants and rare bird species and is an important site for environmental conservation and nature education.

Local experts explained that changes in migratory bird populations are already being observed, illustrating how the impacts of climate change can be seen most clearly in natural environments.

Final Destination: Asahikawa

Cultural exchange and regional revitalization



The final destination of the visit was the Asahikawa region, where the delegation explored initiatives linking regional development with cultural and sports exchange.

In nearby Higashikawa Town, the delegation visited the cultural facility WAKKA, which houses the internationally recognised Oda Collection of chairs. Collected over many

years by professor Noritsugu Oda, the collection includes design masterpieces from around the world, with a particular emphasis on Nordic furniture design.

Higashikawa has drawn attention as a municipality where the population has not declined, unlike many rural areas in Japan. The town promotes the concept of “teki-so” — a balance between depopulation and overcrowding — and has developed a community-building approach centred on culture, photography and design education.



The delegation also attended the Vasaloppet Japan cross-country ski race in Asahikawa. Originally founded in Sweden, the Vasaloppet is one of the world’s largest and most historic cross-country skiing events. Introduced to Asahikawa due to the region’s climate similarities with Sweden, the event has fostered long-standing exchange between the two countries.

Ambassador Li delivered opening remarks together with Asahikawa Mayor Kansuke Imazu and also served as a race starter and medal presenter. The event highlighted the importance of sports as a platform for international exchange.

Cultural, educational and sporting exchanges such as these continue to symbolise the long-standing relationship between Sweden and Hokkaido.

This visit is only the beginning

Expanding cooperation in economic and educational fields

The visit to Hokkaido marks an important first step in further strengthening cooperation between Sweden and the region. Future exchanges are expected to continue across a wide range of fields, including economic collaboration, research and education.

Ambassador Viktoria Li commented:

“Sweden and Hokkaido share many similarities in terms of natural environment, climate and our commitment to building sustainable societies. This visit has highlighted many opportunities for cooperation in research, green technologies, digital innovation and regional development. This visit is only the beginning, and we look forward to further deepening our partnership with Hokkaido.”