

The Movement to Establish a SWYAA and Its History

1. Building an International Network of Ship for World Youth Ex-Participating Youth

The Ship for World Youth (SWY) program began in 1988, marked its 21st voyage in 2009 (fiscal year 2008). Over the years, approximately 2,380 Japanese youth and 3,230 youth from 62 overseas countries have participated in the program. It is hoped that all these ex-participating youths (ex-PYs) will make use of the valuable experience they gain through the program, to engage in international exchange activities in their community, work place and school. It is hoped that by participating in youth activities, they will build bridges of friendship and goodwill between Japan and their respective countries.

At first, the structure, capital and know-how to provide the foundation for alumni post-program in each country were scarce. However, with each subsequent SWY program, the depth and breadth of the alumni have increased, and as more information has been gathered and the effects of the Internet spread, slow but sure progress could be seen towards inspiring activities in each country, and building a global network.

Beginning with the 12th program, the eastern route and the western route countries were united with participating countries representing both hemispheres. However, the style of alternating between the eastern route (North, Central and South America, Oceania) and western route (Southwest Asia, Middle East, Africa) has not changed. Since the ports of call and the participating countries are not set, the capacity to build the foundation necessary for real activism on a global scale is difficult. It is nevertheless thought that it is important to proceed towards a structure of international networks.

2. The Beginning: Greece

The fundamental first step towards this vision took place at a gathering in February 1994, during the 6th SWY program in Piraeus, Greece, a port of call. Through correspondence with Japanese alumni from the 4th program, ex-PYs from Hungary and Sweden converged at the docked Nippon Maru. Because of lack of preparation, funds, limited correspondence etc., ultimately, only a few people were able to assemble, making it impossible to even plan a meeting. Nonetheless, the experience proved invaluable for planning in the future.

3. The Ship for World Youth International Reunion

Building on our past experience, the first official Ship for World Youth International Reunion (eastern route) was held over two days in Acapulco, Mexico from March 2nd to 3rd, 1995, on board the 7th SWY program. At this gathering, a total of 56 people, including the Mexican ex-PYs, participated and deepened their friendships with one another. During the meetings, each country discussed the development of their Alumni Association and the various activities that could be organized through this association. This was followed by a dialogue about how to develop multiple and holistic ties between each country and Japan, and to build an international network. Lastly, as an outcome of this gathering, it was agreed to submit a proposal for future activities, symbolizing the first step in the development of the Alumni Associations.

After this first reunion in Mexico, and the International Reunions have taken place at one of the ports of call of during subsequent SWY programs. Although in the beginning, it was a 2-day program that was held on board the ship, as of 2000 in New Zealand, it has become an event that spans 5 days and 4 nights, and includes discussions on board and activities in the port of call. Altogether, the international reunions have been held three times in Acapulco, Mexico (1995, 1997, 1999), once in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (1996), once in Muscat, Oman (1998), once in Cape Town, South Africa (1999), once in Auckland, New Zealand (2000), once in Vancouver, Canada (2002), once in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (2004), once in Sydney, Australia (2005), and once in Port Louis, Mauritius (2006). For 2001, a reunion was planned in Kenya, and for 2007 in Fiji, but due to a change in the sailing routes for the SWY programs, the events were cancelled.

4. The Founding of the Ship for World Youth Alumni Association

The original document outlining the Ship for World Youth Alumni Association (SWYAA) was compiled by ex-PYs from the 3rd and 5th programs who attended the 1st Ship for World Youth International Reunion (eastern route), and the members of the 7th SWY program. Following this, heated discussions took place on board the 7th SWY program resulting in the selection of 3 Key Persons per participating country, and decisions regarding the establishment of SWYAA in their respective countries, and their positions on networking and maintaining ties. Consequently, Ecuador demonstrated their decision to launch SWYAA-Ecuador, and several other countries followed suit. In 1998, a mailing list for SWYAA representatives was set up for the two E-mail Recipients of each SWYAA.

5. The Commencement of the SWYAA Tokyo Conference (Eastern Route)

Following the guidelines set during the 1st Ship for World Youth International Reunion, the Tokyo Conference for the Ex-Participating Youth of SWY Program (hereafter, Tokyo Conference – later changed its naming to Ex-PY Conference) was held on January 16th to 21st, 1996, with the purpose of not just promoting activities within each country, but also to build a concrete international network among the ex-PYs.

14 people from 13 countries were invited by the Japanese Government to participate in the conference. They and members of the IYEO engaged in an animated discussion over the direction of future activities. The results of the debates were summarized in the SWYAA Agreement (East), which was signed by all members.

6. Organizing the Ex-PYs (Western Route)

Up to this point, the activities of the ex-PYs from the eastern route had been progressing. However, on March 1st and 2nd, 1996, on board the 8th SWY program in Dubai, a conference was held for the ex-PYs of the western route, during which time, the activities of the eastern route participants were explained. Furthermore, from January 16th - 21st, 1997, the Tokyo Conference (western route) was held, and after intense discussion, the results were summarized in the SWYAA Agreement (West).

7. The Institutionalization of the SWYAA Network

In keeping with the development of the east and west SWYAA, the Ex-PY Conference and the Ship for World Youth International Reunion are being held, alternating between the eastern and western routes. Originally, the Ex-PY Conference representatives were invited to a conference held in Tokyo. However, from 2001 to 2006, representatives were invited to board the ship at the final port of call of the SWY program. While on board, conference representatives take part in discussions, as well as talk with participating youth of the program about post-program activities. After arriving in Tokyo, representatives, together with Japanese organizing committee members, continued with further discussions and finally, summarized the outcome of the conference. Since 2007, the Ex-PY Conference has been held entirely in Japan again, instead of aboard the ship during the SWY program. In 2005, seeking to have a common mission for all the SWYAA member countries, a SWYAA Charter was formed, revising and merging the two existing Agreements for the eastern route and the western route.

8. Exchanging Information Through the Internet

Mirroring the move towards electronic information, a mailing list was set up in 1996 to encourage sharing of information and resources among the ex-PYs. Furthermore, based on the Ex-PY Conference held in 1999, a common SWYAA website was developed in 2000, which provided a forum to introduce various projects and activities taking place in different countries. In addition to this, there have been many mailing lists set up for ex-PYs to share information on a variety of topics.