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Press Release

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Preparations underway for Asia's Biggest St. Patrick's Day Celebration

- **Embassy of Ireland announces renewed support for *I Love Ireland Festival***
- **Festival to have new 'eco' theme**

Ireland's Ambassador to Japan, Her Excellency Ms Anne Barrington, today announced the Embassy of Ireland's renewed support for the *I Love Ireland Festival* and the decision of the Embassy of Ireland and the Ireland Japan Chamber of Commerce (IJCC) to enlist La Ditta Limited as event organisers on a multi-year engagement.

The *I Love Ireland Festival* is a family-friendly event held annually in Yoyogi Park and Omotesando in March, coinciding with St. Patrick's Day celebrations - Ireland's national holiday. The festival has grown year-on-year and is Asia's largest celebration of Irish food, music, dance and culture. The festival attracted over 50,000 attendees in 2016. La Ditta Limited have stated their ambition to build on this success and are aiming to attract 100,000 visitors over two days in central Tokyo in 2017.

As part of the expanded 2017 programme, the festival will build on Ireland's reputation for fresh, 'green' food, delicious drink and fantastic unspoiled landscape, and will include a new 'eco' theme.

Speaking today, Ambassador Barrington said: "The Embassy of Ireland in Japan is delighted to join the Ireland Japan Chamber of Commerce and La Ditta Limited in setting out an ambitious and exciting proposal for the 2017 *I Love Ireland Festival*. The festival has gone from strength-to-strength, and is Japan's largest celebration of Irish culture.

"The expanded 2017 festival comes as Ireland and Japan prepare to celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations, and is just one part of a larger plan to renew and invigorate the strong links between our two island nations. I am honoured to see so many Japanese people embrace Irish culture every year and it is my hope that 2017 will be the biggest and best *I Love Ireland Festival* yet."

Her Excellency Mrs Mari Miyoshi, Ambassador of Japan to Ireland, commented: "I would like to congratulate the Ireland Japan Chamber of Commerce on this wonderful festival and the commitment they are making to strengthen Ireland-Japan relations through the sharing of cultural and historical information in a family-oriented environment."

Mr Gerard Mulligan, President of IJCC, added: "While helping to support the development of business relations between Ireland and Japan is the primary objective of the Chamber, it is equally important for us that we promote and support greater awareness of Ireland, Irish culture and Irish history in Japan. The Chamber has organised the *I Love Ireland Festival* for the last three years and we are delighted to welcome La Ditta into our team as we seek to grow Asia's premier Irish festival even further."

About St. Patrick's Day and the *I Love Ireland Festival*

St. Patrick's Day is Ireland's national holiday and is celebrated by millions of people worldwide each year on 17 March. Huge parades and festivals are held across Europe, the USA and Asia, where people of all ages and nationalities come together to experience Ireland's world-famous music, dance, food and drink. In 2016, St. Patrick's Day parades and festivals were held in 12 cities in Japan alone, attracting thousands people, and 2017 looks set to beat that record.

The *I Love Ireland Festival* is the centre of the celebrations in Japan and is Asia's biggest celebration of Irish culture. Entering its fourth year, the event has become a mainstay of the Tokyo festival calendar and 2017 promises to be the biggest and best yet.

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Related Websites:

Embassy of Ireland: www.dfa.ie/japan

Enterprise Ireland: www.enterprise-ireland.or.jp

IDA Ireland: www.idaireland.jp

Ireland Japan Chamber of Commerce: www.ijcc.jp

I Love Ireland Festival: <http://www.iloveireland.net/>

Irish Network Japan (St Patrick's Day Parade organisers): <http://inj.or.jp/>

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