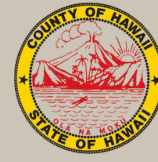


# 2023



## Sister City Program Annual Report



Prepared by  
Jane Clement

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[www.facebook.com/cohsistercities](https://www.facebook.com/cohsistercities)

To the honorable Mayor Mitch Roth and honorable members of the Hawai'i County Council,

I am pleased to present to you this comprehensive report, which details a series of milestones and achievements within our Sister City Program over the past year. This document not only chronicles our historic delegation's visit to Japan but also heralds the resumption of the student exchange program—a cornerstone of our cultural and educational exchange efforts.

We have reignited our friendship with La Serena, Chile, and were delighted to host their Ballet Folklórico, marking their inaugural performance in Hawai'i. The rhythms and dances of Chile have left an indelible impression on our communities, further enhancing our multicultural tapestry.

Furthermore, we solidified our commitment with Cabugao City through the reaffirmation of our agreement, emphasizing our shared values and the continued exchange of knowledge and goodwill.

In an era where travel has faced unprecedented challenges, we have found innovative ways to stay connected, as exemplified by the sustainable tourism webinar with our Japanese sister cities. This platform has enabled us to share insights and strategies to promote responsible tourism, which respects our natural resources and cultural heritage.

Each segment of this report reflects not just the activities undertaken but also the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect that is the foundation of our Sister City Program. Our achievements are a testament to the resilience and dedication of our communities in nurturing these international bonds.

Thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm for the Sister City Program. May we look forward to more years of fruitful partnerships and shared successes.

Sincerely,

Jane Clement  
Sister City Program Director

# Mayor Roth Celebrates Milestones in Japan with a Sister City Anniversary Tour



In an extraordinary series of visits that served to strengthen international ties and celebrate significant anniversaries, Mayor Roth embarked on a historic journey to Japan, solidifying the bonds with three of Hawai'i County's sister cities. Joined by a distinguished delegation including his wife Noriko, County Council Vice Chair Aaron Chung, Sister City Program Director Jane Clement, Island of Hawai'i Visitor Bureau Executive Director Ross Birch, and representatives from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Kiwanis of East Hawai'i, the mayor's trip was not just a formality but a heartfelt gesture of diplomacy and friendship.

This trip was more than a routine exchange; it was a rekindling of relationships that have weathered time and global challenges, including the recent pandemic. As Mayor Roth and his delegation traversed the breadth of Japan to visit Sumoto City, Izu Oshima Town, and Shibukawa City, they celebrated milestones that underscored the mutual respect, shared cultures, and common goals of their communities.



Sumoto City high school students who participated in the round table discussion

This historic visit, the first by a mayor from Hawai'i County in over ten years, underscored the special bond that has flourished over the years. The Sumoto International Friendship Association and the Kiwanis of East Hawai'i have been pillars in nurturing this relationship.

Over two eventful days, Mayor Roth and his delegation, which included key figures from Hawai'i's civic and tourism sectors, engaged in a variety of cultural and educational exchanges. A highlight was the round table discussion with local high school students, which provided a forum for youthful perspectives on the evolving sister city relationship.



The delegation posing in front of the historic Sumoto Castle

## Sumoto City Celebrates Two Decades of Sisterhood with Hawai'i County in Grand Gala Event

In a glittering gala event that marked the 20th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Sumoto City and Hawai'i County, Mayor Roth and Mayor Uesaki signed a reaffirmation agreement, renewing ties that have bound the two communities for two decades. The event, held in the heart of Sumoto, was both a celebration and a testament to international friendship, taking place after a pandemic-induced postponement of two years.



Mayor Roth, Mayor Uesaki, Council Vice Chair Aaron Chung and the Council Chair and Vice Chair of Sumoto City Council

The delegation also participated in a meet and greet with the mayor, vice mayor, and the 18 council members, and toured both Sumoto City and Awaji Island's most cherished historic and popular destinations.

The reaffirmation signing at the formal gala not only commemorated the sister city anniversary but also set the stage for future collaborations and exchanges between the two cities.

# IZU OSHIMA AND HAWAI'I COUNTY MARK 60 YEARS OF SISTERHOOD WITH A HISTORIC VISIT



Celebrating the longest-running sister city affiliation of Hawai'i County, Mayor Roth's delegation received a warm welcome from about 100 residents and officials, including Mayor Mitsuji, at the pier of Izu Oshima. This two-day visit had historical significance, not just for the 60-year anniversary but also as it marked the first time in 35 years that a Hawai'i Mayor has set foot on the island.

A poignant moment of the visit was the signing of a reaffirmation agreement at the memorial park, which commemorates the victims of the tragic 2013 landslide. The delegation was touched by the unveiling of a 60th-anniversary memorial plaque, a surprise orchestrated by Mayor Mitsuji and the townspeople.

Both parties participated in a presentation on renewable energy, showcasing their mutual commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. The visit was also a cultural exchange, with the delegation touring the island and savoring local cuisine, deepening the bonds of friendship that have lasted six decades.





## Shibukawa City Hosts Mayor Roth in Celebration of Sister City Relationship

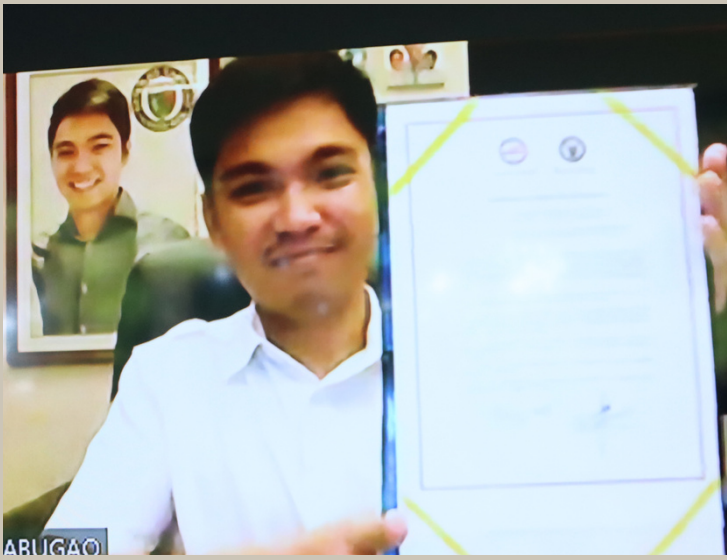
Delivering on a pledge made in 2021, Mayor Roth visited Shibukawa City to honor the 25th anniversary of sisterhood. Meeting Mayor Takagi in person, Mayor Roth celebrated the reaffirmation agreement, a symbol of continued friendship and collaboration.

This commitment was part of the short but significant visit to Shibukawa, coinciding with the vibrant Ikaho Hawaiian Festival. The festival's opening day featured Mayor Roth and his delegation, who also engaged in a meet and greet, an omiyage (gift) exchange, and a dinner reception with Mayor Takagi and the city council members.



The visit, which included a tour of Shibukawa's scenic spots, was an affirmation of the cultural and civic connections that have been fostered over a quarter-century, and a reflection of the two communities' dedication to maintaining and enhancing their long-standing relationship.





## MAYOR JOSH CABANGBANG JR. AND MAYOR MITCH ROTH CELEBRATE A DECADE OF SISTER CITY BOND

In October 2022, Mayor Josh Cabangbang Jr. of Cabugao City, Philippines, and Mayor Mitch Roth of the County of Hawai'i, celebrated a significant milestone in their cities' international ties - the 10th anniversary of their Sister City Agreement. The event was marked by a reaffirmation of their commitment to this enduring partnership.

In a virtual gathering, Mayor Cabangbang and Mayor Roth came together to sign a reaffirmation agreement, rekindling the spirit of friendship and cooperation that has defined the bond between Cabugao City and Hawai'i Island. This reaffirmation served as a testament to the enduring strength of the relationship and its positive impact on both communities.



During the virtual gathering, not only did Mayor Cabangbang and Mayor Roth commit to continuing their cooperation and cultural exchange, but the Big Island Filipino Community Council led by its president Miriam Guerrero also made a strong statement of their continued support for this special relationship. They too signed an agreement reaffirming their dedication to fostering connections between the two communities.

# STUDENT EXCHANGE

# RETURNS



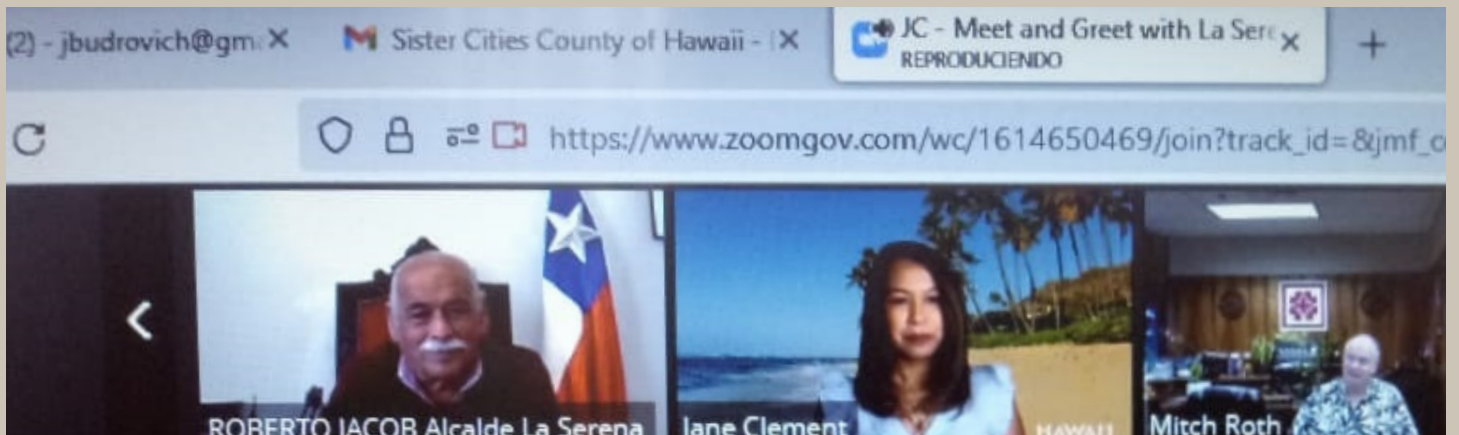
In August 2022, students from Nago City rekindled the student exchange program, paused during the pandemic, with a visit to Hawai'i. Their immersive experience included English classes by retired teachers and Hui Okinawa members, interactions with Hilo High School students, learning about Hawaiian culture, and meetings with local government officials, fostering international ties and cultural exchange.



In March 2023, the exchange came full circle as Hilo High School students traveled to sister city Oshima Town. The visit brought face-to-face interaction with Oshima High School students, building upon months of virtual engagement. The physical meeting enriched the already blossoming relationships, deepening cultural understanding and fostering a tangible bond between the distant peers. This exchange underscores the resilience and continuation of international friendship and learning amidst and beyond the pandemic's challenges.



# Mayor Mitch Roth Meets La Serena, Chile's Mayor Roberto Jacob Virtually



In a display of international camaraderie, Hawai'i County's Mayor Mitch Roth and La Serena, Chile's Mayor Roberto Jacob convened for the first time via a virtual Zoom meeting on August 31, 2022. The gathering highlighted the shared values and visions of both communities, as the two leaders enthusiastically pledged to continue the sister city relationship between Hawai'i County and La Serena. Recognizing the importance of fostering strong global ties and promoting cultural exchanges, both mayors also expressed their eagerness to visit each other in person in the near future. This commitment underscores the profound benefits of international cooperation and friendship in an increasingly connected world.





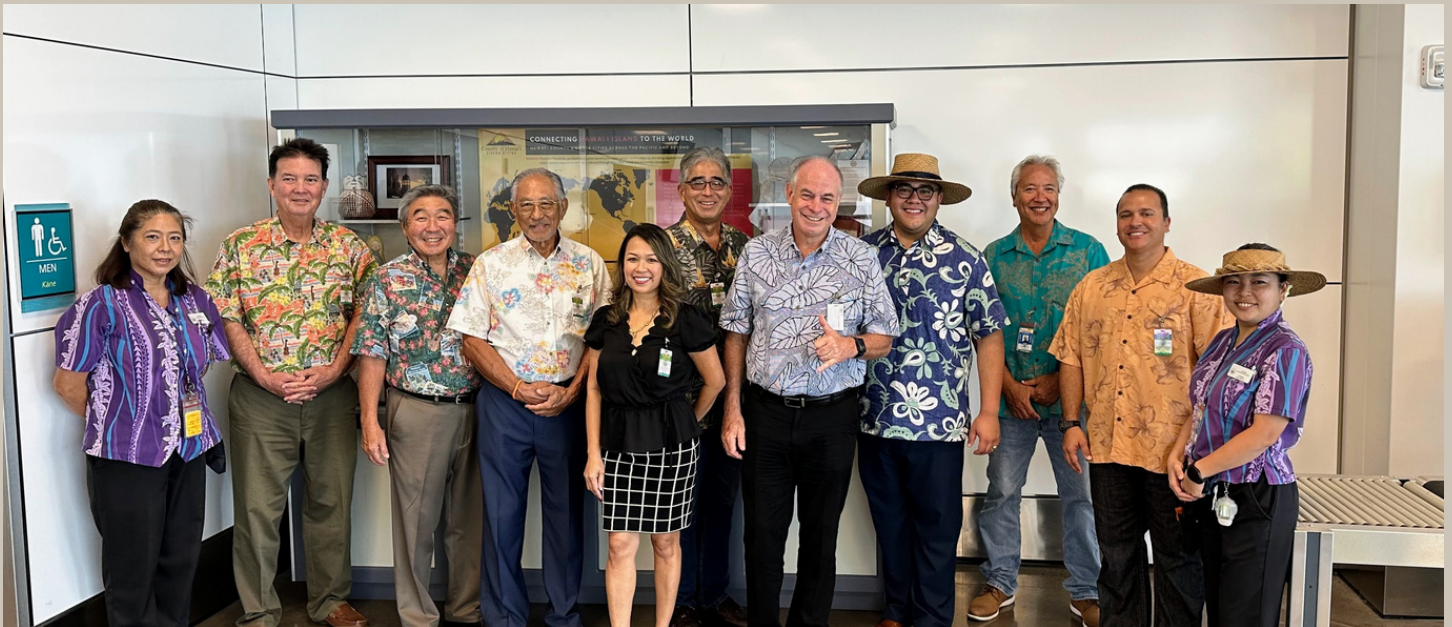
## A DANCE BETWEEN CULTURES: LA SERENA BALLET FOLKLÓRICO'S MEMORABLE HAWAI'I VISIT

"We're profoundly thankful for the cherished memories and the recognition as artists. Sharing our Chilean heritage with Hawai'i's welcoming community has been truly special."

For the first time, La Serena Ballet Folklórico visited Hawai'i, bringing the vibrant culture of the City of La Serena, Chile, a sister city of Hawai'i County, to life on the prestigious stages of the University of Hawai'i at Hilo Performing Arts Center and Kahilu Theatre in Waimea. Their performances, echoing the mystical tales of the Diaguita and broader Chilean cultures, mesmerized audiences.

But their journey was not confined to the stages; the group ventured into Hawai'i's iconic landscapes and beaches, absorbing the island's essence and fostering a deep cultural exchange. This dialogue was enriched as the artists learned to dance the hula under the guidance of Kumu Lorelei Katahara from the County's Arts and Culture Division of Parks and Recreation.

This interactive experience highlighted the visit's significance – a dance between two diverse cultures, proving the power of art to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.



## Sister City Display Unveiled at Kona International Airport

In December 2022, the Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport became home to a special sister city display case. A joint venture between the County of Hawai'i and the State Department of Transportation Airports Division, it was realized thanks to the collaborative efforts of Hawai'i District Manager Chauncey Wong Nguyen and Assistant Airport Superintendent Cy Duvauchelle.

Crafted by County carpenter Jamie Tonini, the display case houses a curated selection of mementos and information, each piece narrating the rich, interconnected histories of Hawai'i and its sister cities. It's not just a testament to international friendships but also an educational journey for travelers, offering insights into the global partnerships Hawai'i has cultivated.

The unveiling, attended by Mayor Mitch Roth, Deputy Managing Director Bobby Command,

Sister City Program Director Jane Clement, County Council Vice Chair Holeka Inaba and members of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Hawai'i, marked a celebration of unity and cultural exchange.

This display stands as a beacon of international harmony, underscoring the strength found in global togetherness and the enriching tapestry of the County of Hawai'i's international relationships.



County of Hawaii Office of the Mayor  
and  
Dept. of Research and Development  
present



**LIVE**

# WEBINAR

From Inspiration to Implementation:  
Best Practices for Sustainable Tourism





**Jane Clement**  
Moderator



**Reiko Hamano**  
Interpreter



**Naomi Sato**  
Kumejima Firely Pavilion  
Kumejima Town



**Masamichi Miyawaki**  
Mayor  
Yurihama City



**Hajime Takahashi**  
Planning and Information  
Sumoto City



**Rika Usui**  
Tourism Division  
Oshima Town



**Frecia Cevallos**  
Research and Development  
County of Hawaii



**13 March, 2023, 3PM HST**  
**14 March, 2023, 10AM JST**

**REGISTER NOW**

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808-323-4441 

## Hawai'i County and Japan's Sister Cities Unite for Sustainable Tourism

In March 2023, a transformative webinar was hosted by the Sister City Program, partnered with Research and Development and Japanese sister cities, focusing on the theme, “From Inspiration to Implementation: Best Practices for Sustainable Tourism”. Hawai'i County's Tourism Specialist Frecia Cevallos, joined by representatives from Kumejima, Yurihama, Oshima, and Sumoto cities, shared insights on integrating sustainability into tourism.

Key discussions revolved around the development of sustainable tourism products, engagement of local communities, and the balance between tourism growth, environmental protection, and social responsibility. The emphasis was placed on the crucial role of collaborative efforts and partnerships in overcoming challenges and innovating solutions.

This enlightening session underscored the importance of collective action, offering a pathway to transform inspiration into tangible, sustainable tourism practices, and highlighting the indispensable role of community engagement and international collaboration in this journey.

English and Japanese versions of the webinar can be found on our website at [www.hawaiicounty.gov/sistercities](http://www.hawaiicounty.gov/sistercities).



# UPCOMING EVENTS in 2023

- **Hawai'i-Japan Sister State and City Summit**  
July 27-28, 2023  
Honolulu, Hawaii
- **Japanese Sister City Goodwill Visit to Hawai'i Island**  
July 29-30, 2023  
Hawaii Island
- **Japanese Student Exchange Visits to Hawai'i Island**  
Nago City, Sumoto City and Yurihama Town  
August 2023
- **Launch of 'Ale Lau Loa - Global Youth Ambassador Program**  
August 2023
- **Establishment of Sister City Agreement between Hawai'i County and  
Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima, Japan**  
November 2023

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Connect globally. Thrive locally.

