

Hospitality infused with Kaga pride

By Rie Tagawa / Japan News Staff Writer

KANAZAWA — Tourists have been flocking to Kanazawa since the Hokuriku Shinkansen began operations last month. Once four hours away from Tokyo by train, the bullet train takes visitors to the central city of the Hokuriku region in about 2½ hours.

Some tourists may feel like they are not so welcome in Kanazawa as few salesclerks call out to customers from the shops here, which is common at other tourist spots. However, warm hearts can be found among local people once the visitor steps closer. Fortunately, such opportunities are increasing here.

“This geisha district is preserved for a long time and designated as a historical street,” said local volunteer guide Junjiro Matsuoka to a group of nine Australian students aged between 11 and 13 at the Higashi Chaya District in Kanazawa last month.



Matsuoka, 74, is a member of the Kanazawa Goodwill Guide Network (KGGN), a local volunteer group that offers English guides in Kanazawa free of charge. The group comprises about 100 members, who are sent to help tourists when requested.

KGGN was established in 1992 to offer foreign tourists the opportunity to enjoy Kanazawa and the traditional culture intrinsic to the city by welcoming them in English. During fiscal 1992, it conducted tour services for 51 foreign tourists, which increased to 906 in fiscal 2014, according to the group.

The Australian student group was introduced to KGGN through its travel agency, said Daniel Blomeley, 56, a teacher who headed the group. Matsuoka accompanied them from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., taking them to famous sightseeing locations, including Kenrokuen, one of the nation's most beautiful gardens. Although his English was not perfect, students listened, rapt, to his explanations.

“His English was simple, and easy to follow,” said Riley Monahan, 11. “It was interesting because we don’t have old buildings in Australia.”