

## **So Much More Than Cherry Blossoms**

by Art Rush

*“I’m always travelling, I love being free  
So I keep leaving, the sun and the sea”*

Peter Allen

‘I Still Call Australia Home’

Australians are some of the world’s greatest travellers. They can be found roaming the planet in places as culturally diverse as New York and New Guinea. It is hard to imagine a market with more potential when marketing overseas travel. Particularly when the country in question is as different to our own as Japan. So what is the marketing challenge in a Visit Japan Campaign?

Many Australians believe that visiting Japan is expensive, compared to say Thailand, which would offer similar cultural attractions. The marketing task is therefore to differentiate Japan from other Asian destinations and experiences and to convince the Australian traveller that Japan is excellent value.

For the sake of this exercise, let us break up marketing into mainstream advertising and other forms of marketing. Whether advertising to Australians or Eskimos, the communication experts tell us that the same broad principle applies:

*“The secret to good advertising is to tell them something they don’t know.”*

Alastair Crompton

*The Craft of Copywriting*

Ask the average Australian what they’d expect to see in Japan. and they’ll invariably tell you cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji, temples, gardens and modern cities. These attractions feature in most advertising for Japan. But there are other things Australians don’t know about.

Australians love theme parks, but few know about the impressive Tokyo Disneyland. With 42.6 hectares, 36 attractions, and 32 restaurants, plus the new DisneySea complex, the park is in fact bigger than its Florida counterpart. At Tokyo’s Disneyland, Australians can take in both the Disney magic and a new Asian culture at once. That’s something you cannot do at the American equivalent.

Most Australians also don't know about Universal Studios in the city of Osaka. This theme park has epic rides and experiences based on *Jurassic Park*, *E.T.*, *Back to the Future*, *Spiderman* and more recently *Shrek*, all of which made the top 100 of Australia's highest grossing films.<sup>1</sup> A fun-loving people by nature, Australians seek out these kinds of places. And they won't find them in Thailand.

Australians rarely get to enjoy snow, and flock to the Thredbo and Perisher Blue resorts in southern NSW for the opportunity. Most Australians aren't aware of the ski resorts on the island of Hokkaido. Light dry winds from Siberia hit Hokkaido and give the island the best soft, dry snow in the country. The Niseko Hirafu resort has Japan's largest lit area for night skiing, and all signs are in English, so it is easy to find your way around. This is perfect for Australia's extreme sportspeople, casual skiers, and families seeking a white Christmas.

Potential Australian tourists would be delighted to know they won't suffer jetlag when travelling to Japan. For Australians travelling to Europe or America it can ruin the entire first week of a holiday. Tokyo, however, is only one hour's difference from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. In fact, those living in Adelaide and Darwin would only need to adjust their watches by half an hour upon arrival in Tokyo. This makes Japan ideal for the two-week school holiday breaks.

Australians are aware of Japan's bullet trains, but what they don't necessarily know is how cheap and efficient *shinkansen* travel can be. From Tokyo it's only three hours by train to Osaka. And from there a mere 27 minutes to Kyoto. It is possible to see three of Japan's major cities with only 3 ½ hours travelling time. Not many Australians know about the great value Rail Passes available exclusively to foreign tourists. All those Australian travellers fond of Europe's 'Eurail' service would be very attracted to Japan's equivalent. This kind of exceptional railway service is unique to Japan, and would be a great feature to market to Australians, who are used to having their major cities isolated by great distances.

Since their Australian tour in 1964, Australians have loved the Beatles. The John Lennon Museum in Saitama would prove a popular destination to advertise in the Visit Japan Campaign. Approved by Yoko Ono, the 3,600m<sup>2</sup> museum comprehensively retells all the stages of John Lennon's life, with memorabilia on display including his guitars and hand-written lyrics.

All these lesser known facts about Japan can be presented in mainstream Australian advertising mediums such as magazines, newspapers, TV, radio, posters, brochures, billboards and on-line to make a persuasive campaign. Now for the other forms of marketing.

So-called reality programs, with products cleverly placed in them, are the trend for selling everything from power tools (The Block) to pizza (Big Brother). Recent studies from Audience Development Australia<sup>2</sup> show that viewers will buy the products placed in their favourite shows as long as they are a good fit with the style of the show.

‘Product placement’ in a reality TV show would suit the Visit Japan Campaign, especially if aimed at a younger audience. Imagine, for instance, approaching a TV channel to co-sponsor a karaoke talent quest in the style of Australian Idol. Perhaps a Tokyo channel could also hold a competition, and the two countries could compete each week.

The winners would meet in Tokyo for a grand final in an authentic karaoke bar. The show would incorporate Japanese style cartoons and other contemporary pop culture. Other co-sponsors would be famous Japanese brands such as Sony and Nintendo. This show could be run as part of the Year of Exchange 2006 celebrating the Nara Treaty of Friendship.

Australians are some of the quickest adopters of new technology in the world<sup>3</sup>, particularly in the case of mobile phones. Another reality show idea for this tech-savvy young audience might be a ‘Race around the World’ type concept where young Australians are given video phones and set loose in Tokyo with clues to find a series of mystery landmarks or even nightclubs. A simpler version of the idea would be give video phones to Australian exchange students, and encourage them to post footage in online ‘blog’ diaries.

Yet another way to promote Japan to young Australians would be to assist Australian rock bands to film their music videos in Japan, showcasing the vibrant youth culture and nightlife of Tokyo. This would be great for Aussie bands such as Jet, The Superjesus and Spiderbait.

In our Visit Japan Campaign let us not forget the older Australians, after all, the baby boomers have massive spending power.<sup>4</sup> In a recent article on baby boomers, a leading marketing specialist claimed that “the best marketing creates environments where consumers can experience the brand.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, if you hold a Japanese food

and film festival in leafy parklands with a koi pond setting, festival goers will be in the mood to take home your brochures promoting Japan.

The Bondi 'Festival Of The Winds' kite festival would be a ready made environment in which to promote Japan, perhaps with a guest kite-flying team from the land of kites. And of course, trendy Japanese restaurants are filled with baby boomers who would be receptive to Visit Japan Campaign posters telling them intriguing things they didn't know about Japan. You could even have promotions on take-away sushi containers.

Along with the Visit Japan Campaign, there's a more pragmatic approach to attracting more tourists. That would be to find ways to make visiting Japan a smooth and hassle-free experience.

For instance, Australians would appreciate having more tourist booths at airports and stations. A red dotted line painted on the footpath could lead tourists to the booths. More ATM's that take foreign cards would be helpful as Australians are famously big credit card users.

The Japanese people also love to travel and know what it's like to be in a land where few people speak your language. So, as a goodwill gesture to both parties, Japan could put up more English signs in their tourist districts and Australia could reciprocate.

These changes, together with the Visit Japan Campaign, would help persuade more Australians of all ages that only Japan offers such an affordable and unforgettable cultural experience reaching from the ancient to the ultra-modern.

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