

Ambassador Kusaka's Message No.70

*2018 Canberra Nara Candle Festival*

*- Celebrating the 25th year of the Canberra -Nara sister city relationship -*

11 November 2018

Dear Friends,

I very much enjoyed participating in the 2018 Canberra Nara Candle Festival, which was held on 27th October at the Canberra Nara Peace Park, located on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin.



This year marks the 25th year of the sister city relationship between one of Australia's youngest cities and one of Japan's oldest. As the Japanese Ambassador to Australia, I cannot thank the ACT Government enough for their commitment to the sister-city relationship by bringing this festival to the people of Canberra year after year.

It is exchange at a community level, like this very festival, that supports the growing friendship between Canberra and Nara, and more broadly between Japan and Australia.



With the Candle Festival going from strength to strength each year, so too has Canberra's interest in Japan. In the course of one decade, the number of Japanese language learners in ACT public schools has tripled from around 3,000 to over 10,000 students.

This significant increase in Japanese language learners is a reflection of the ever-growing popularity of Japan with the younger generations of Canberra. For that reason, we have seen more and more visitors to the Candle Festival to experience and enjoy all things Japan, and celebrate the sister-city relationship.



2018 has been a big year for Japan and Canberra in the sporting arena. Japan's Sunwolves took on the ACT Brumbies for the second time at Canberra Stadium since joining the Super Rugby championships 2 years ago. And in baseball, Japan's Yokohama DeNA BayStars signed a partnership with the Canberra Cavalry in July this year, which will see Japanese players join the Canberra Cavalry during the baseball season.

The relationship between Japan and Canberra has been strengthened on the economic front with the involvement of Japan's Mitsubishi Corporation and the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ in Canberra's first light rail project. It is greatly encouraging to witness the tangible progress of the light rail project.

For the Japanese who reside here in Canberra, we are incredibly proud to be a part of the wonderful display of friendship between Canberra and Nara, and Japan and Australia. And as a member of the Canberra Japanese community, I am extremely grateful of how Canberra has warmly welcomed and embraced our community and its friendship with

Nara. I would like to thank the ACT Government for their efforts in creating an inclusive and cohesive Canberra that nurtures and celebrates its cultural diversity.



I was proud to see several Japan friendship groups present at this year's Candle Festival, namely the Canberra Japan Club, the Australia-Japan Society of the ACT, and the JET Alumni Association of Canberra, as well as the Rotary Club and Japanese exchange students and students studying Japanese from ANU and UC.

I would like to reiterate my gratitude to all those who were involved in this year's Candle Festival and to the thousands who joined us on a warm spring evening to celebrate Canberra and Nara's friendship.

I very much look forward to the next Candle Festival and seeing you there.

Yours sincerely,

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Sumio Kusaka

Ambassador of Japan to Australia