

News from Under the Southern Cross - Edition 18. A 'Tasmanian Story'

28 June

On the week of June 6, I made an official visit to Tasmania, the last stop on my first pilgrimage of Australian states and territories.

1. Tasmania's characteristics

Japanese people of my generation would likely have seen 'Tasmania Story', a 1990 Japanese film about a boy who travels to Australia in search of his father, who in turn is in search of the elusive Tasmanian tiger. Yet there are still some in Japan who do not have a very well-defined idea about what kind of place Tasmania is.

When explaining to them, I often compare it to Hokkaido, which has a similar sized land mass albeit with a much larger population than Tassie's five-hundred and forty thousand. I tell them that Tassie is a scenic beauty with a treasure trove of fresh fruit, vegetables and seafood, and explain that it is a particularly popular destination amongst the community of Ambassadors in Canberra.

So then why not make it the first destination on my pilgrimage?

I wanted to save the best for last.



After experiencing it for myself I can confirm that Tasmania's nature is just as beautiful and its produce just as delicious as everyone says. It truly is the 'Hokkaido' of Australia.

The beautiful port capital of Hobart is located at latitude 42 degrees, which is about the same latitude as Hokkaido's capital Sapporo in the northern hemisphere. The photo shows the Tasman Bridge over the River Derwent, a five-lane bridge connecting the east and west of Hobart.

2. Tasmania: The bottom of the Earth or the gateway to Antarctica?

I found Tasmanian people to be humble and charming, with a good sense of humor. I was amused to learn that the phrase ‘Tasmanian Tuxedo’ refers to a puffer jacket.

But I was even more surprised to hear some Tasmanians refer to Tasmania as ‘the bottom of the Earth’. Perhaps this is because of how it is positioned when looking at a globe.

Another phrase I heard used to describe Tasmania was ‘the gateway to Antarctica’. In fact, this is one of Tasmania’s selling points and an area in which Japan and Tasmania share a deep connection. Japan's National Institute of Polar Research (NIPR) has research collaboration agreements with the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) in Hobart and the University of Tasmania. It is also due to Hobart’s position as ‘the gateway to Antarctica’ that the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology’s training and research vessel ‘Umitaka Maru’ has called in at Hobart port a total of twelve times.



We are greeted at ‘the gateway to Antarctica’ by the explorer Roald Amundsen, who led the first expedition to reach the geographic South Pole.



An Exhibition at the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD). Australia’s newly constructed Antarctic icebreaker, RSV Nuyina, is expected to arrive in Hobart this year. In palawa kani, the language of the native Tasmanian Aborigines, ‘nuyina’ means ‘southern lights’.

3. Brand Tasmania

Japan is certainly familiar with brand Tasmania through its imports of Tasmanian agricultural and seafood products. Tassie's distinct climate gives it the edge over other States and Territories, allowing it to collect fresh, high quality water which in turn allows it to produce high quality products.



The facilities for making feed.

A classic example is Tasmanian Beef. Japanese supermarket chain AEON has invested in this industry. It is the owner of Tasmania's only commercial-scale feedlot where it feeds over nine-thousand-five-hundred heads of Black Angus cattle. The meat from around twenty-thousand of these cattle are exported to Japan each year where it is gaining popularity in AEON stores, not as 'Aussie Beef', but as 'Tasmanian Beef'.



This photo shows the vastness of the feedlot where 'Tasmanian Beef' is produced

As I mentioned in my last 'News from under the Southern Cross', the quality of Tasmanian salmon is beyond comparison. But I must also say the same for the oysters and lobster! What's more, Tassie's whisky and wine have much to offer to connoisseurs. My guests are always

delighted whenever I serve Tassie wine at my official residence in Canberra.

4. Furthering our cooperation

With this familiarity between Japan and brand Tasmania as their foundation (over 20 percent of Tasmania's agricultural and seafood exports go to Japan), Tasmanian officials are now setting their sights on Japan as a production and export partner for hydrogen.

People are eager to see Tasmania, with its abundant sources of renewable energy including wind and hydro, begin producing Australia's first 'green hydrogen'.

Various parties have expressed their eagerness to construct an even closer cooperative relationship between Japan and Tasmania.



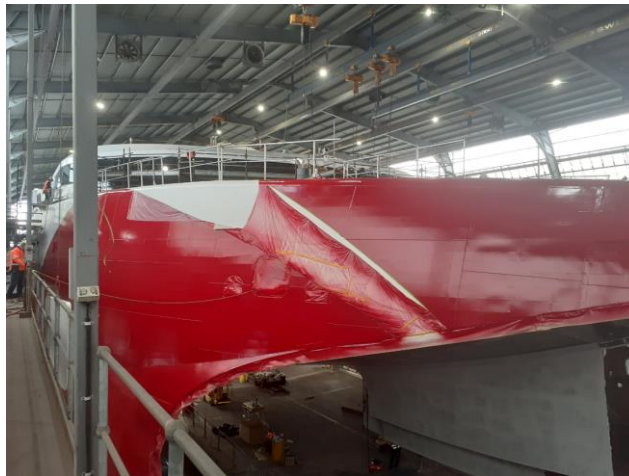
Meeting with Premier Gutwein



Meeting with Minister for Trade, Mr. Guy Barnett

Manufacturing Industry

One of the things I learnt from visiting Tasmania myself was about how Tasmania continues to manufacture high-speed catamaran ferries and export them all over the world. This was a particularly interesting discovery considering the ongoing discussions within Australia about the need to revitalise the manufacturing sector. I visited the factory of Incat Tasmania where I was impressed by the sheer scale of their manufacturing operations and the pride the manufacturers displayed in their work.



A new ferry was under construction when we visited.

It is an honor and an encouragement to have Ms. Kim Clifford, a Director at Incat Tasmania, serve as the Honorary Consul General of Japan in Hobart.



Ms. Clifford gave us a tour of the inside of one of the ferries.

'Perfection, perfection, perfection'

I also participated in a seminar on Tasmanian trade to Japan run by the Tasmanian government (the transcript of the speech I gave can be viewed [here](#)). One of the panelists, a consultant who has been involved in Japan-Australia trade for many years, used the words 'perfection, perfection, perfection' to describe how companies should approach business with Japan.



The seminar was attended by around 100 business people from all over the state.

I suppose that Australian exporters feel that way by facing up to the high standards Japanese consumers have towards quality, packaging and delivery time. And in turn, I tend to think that trade could be more expanded if Japanese side might be less stringent about minute details.



At the conclusion of the seminar, I participated in a press conference with Minister Barnett.

Whilst there I made sure to give potential exporters to Japan encouragement by letting them know (as per Frank Sinatra's famous words) 'if you can make it there, you'll make it anywhere'. While Japanese consumers are highly quality orientated, once exporters make it in Japan, they'll be well-placed to make it in other markets like South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Conclusion

Unfortunately we were not blessed with fine weather during our visit. But as rain is considered a blessing by many in Australia, perhaps you could say that we were.

Tasmania is a truly beautiful place, with much potential for its charms to be cultivated even further. I hope to have the opportunity to visit many more times and weave for myself my very own 'Tasmania Story'.



The view from Mount Nelson overlooking Hobart.

YAMAGAMI Shingo