

News from under the Southern Cross - Edition 20

Winters in Canberra

9 July

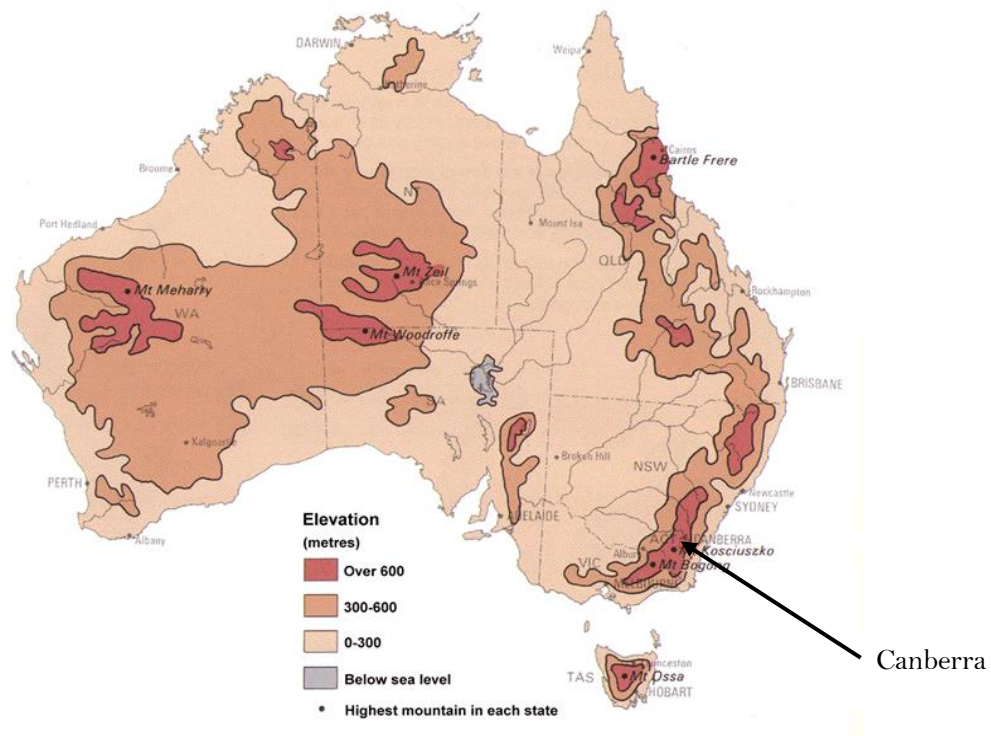
“It’s really cold, isn’t it?”

This is a question that is put to me whenever I say that “I’ve come from Canberra” while travelling around Australia. In this edition of News from under the Southern Cross, I’d like to shed a bit of light on winter days in Canberra.

1. The coldest region in Australia

When looking at a map, there are a number of cities that have a higher latitude than Canberra. In the Southern Hemisphere, a “high latitude” means southerly, which is to say close to Antarctica. As a rule, given that the sun shines from the north in Southern Hemisphere-located Australia, the further south you go, the colder it gets.

However, when examining temperatures in weather forecasts, in most cases Canberra has a lower temperature than either Melbourne or Hobart, both of which are further south than Canberra.



(Picture Caption: Source: Geoscience Australia website)

Canberra is not only located inland but also has a high elevation. It sits 600m above sea level. I suppose it's the same as if you were living on top of Mt. Takao (599 m) located in Tokyo. That gives you some idea of the harshness of the cold here.

2. Abundant Sunlight

For a person such as myself, who spent many years enduring the frozen winters of Nagano Prefecture, Canberra winters are mild. One happy addition is the abundant sunlight that shines down almost daily. Even though early morning temperatures might dip below freezing, during the day they usually surpass 10 degrees or more.

My former posting was to London. Compared to the winters there with its drizzling cold rain that cast such a dark shadow over the minds of many intellectual giants such as Natsume Sōseki and Etō Jun, nothing beats being bright and sunny.

An art critic, when comparing landscape pictures of the United Kingdom and Australia, expressed the dichotomy of the “strong greens and weak yellows” of the UK with the “weak greens and strong yellows” of Australia. Now I certainly understand what he meant.

3. “It is a pleasure to receive friends from afar”

One thing that made the Canberra winter a lot brighter was a visit last weekend by SAIGŌ Teruhiko (a renowned Japanese singer and actor) and his wife. As Mr Saigō himself explained on his Youtube channel, he has come all the way to Sydney to receive treatment for his prostate cancer given that the treatment method itself is not yet approved for use in Japan. And so taking advantage of a gap in his treatment schedule, he was able to pay a visit to Canberra.

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, which has resulted in very few visitors making their way from



Reunion with SAIGŌ Teruhiko

Japan to Australia, Mr SAIGŌ and his wife were the second pair to visit me following a visit by my old acquaintance Professor TAKAHARA Akio of the Graduate School of Law and Politics at the University of Tokyo and his wife in February-March this year.

Mr Saigō is a master of his craft, whether it be as a singer or an actor. He has a different aura about him. One of the highlights of my role as Ambassador is being able to meet outstanding talent from many different fields. Every time I listen to their stories, it reminds me of how small the well is in which I swim.

4. Re-discovering Canberra

As my everyday activities are always so busy, I have had surprisingly few opportunities to get out and take a look around Canberra. So taking advantage of the arrival of guests, I joined Mr and Mrs Saigō and his wife on a tour of various tourist spots around town (such as Parliament House and the National Gallery etc.).

Neat rows of avenues that flow outwards under the almost piercing crystal blue sky, meadows that enclose this scene, a region of hills. The view from Telstra Tower that enables one to see all this in one sweeping glance is certainly breathtaking.



A view of Canberra looking down from Telstra Tower



Picture Caption: Parliament House of Australia

While out and about, we came across dozens of kangaroos, including one whose joey peeked its bright, wide eyes over the top of its mother's pouch. I wonder if they all wanted to meet a Japanese star of samurai dramas who had cut a path to Canberra? While looking upon this spectacle arrayed outside of Canberra in the company of the Saigōs, I truly felt that I was in Australia.



A mob of kangaroos

5. A Final Word

There haven't been any locally acquired COVID infections in Canberra for 11 months or so. In a city with no traffic jams or pedestrian congestion, nobody struggles to keep their stress-levels down or furiously honks their car horn. In Canberra, centered as it is around a lake and blessed with verdant greenery and sunshine, there's a unique sense of liberation.

Canberra – where time rolls comfortably by. Once the COVID pandemic settles down, it will attract a lot of tourists.

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