

News from under the Southern Cross - Edition 34. Springtime in Canberra

23 September

Spring has finally arrived in Canberra. But it's not a "nothing-special-spring has to offer♪" (a line from the tune "*Erimo* (a southern tip of central Hokkaido) *Misaki* (cope)" by MORI Shinichi).

Although people suffering from the rainy weather and the residual heat of late summer in Japan might be thinking "why right now?", I've started tapping away on my keyboard to share with you the joys of spring on the other side of the Equator.



Flowering Japanese Quince and Tree Peonies in the Japanese Garden at the Ambassador's Residence, heralding the arrival of spring

1. Too Long a Winter

"Canberra winters are long"

This is what a now-retired Australian diplomat fully enjoying the warm weather in Queensland, otherwise known as the Sunshine State, once said to me.

It is true that I switched on my heater around Anzac Day at the end of April and even now it's still on. So heaters are running in Canberra for just about the same period of time as 'Cool Biz' (wearing short-sleeve shirts to work with no tie) in Tokyo.

2. The arrival of spring

I've just spent my first winter in Australia. Even though people use the term "mid-winter", the daily maximum temperature regularly surpasses 10 degrees, so you don't shiver from the cold as in North

America and Europe. Moreover, there are many days when sunlight brightly streams down from on high, so unlike some places in Europe there's no sense of being shut up in a dark and gloomy world.

Nevertheless, the approach of spring brings with it cheerfulness and a heightened sense of joy. First up are the plum blossoms. While standing in the Garden at the Ambassador's Residence, I was enveloped in a gentle aroma despite the absence of an 'East Wind' (a traditional sign of spring). It reminded me of Kairakuen Park in Mito, Ibaraki, where I spent 2 years.



Japanese plum blossoms

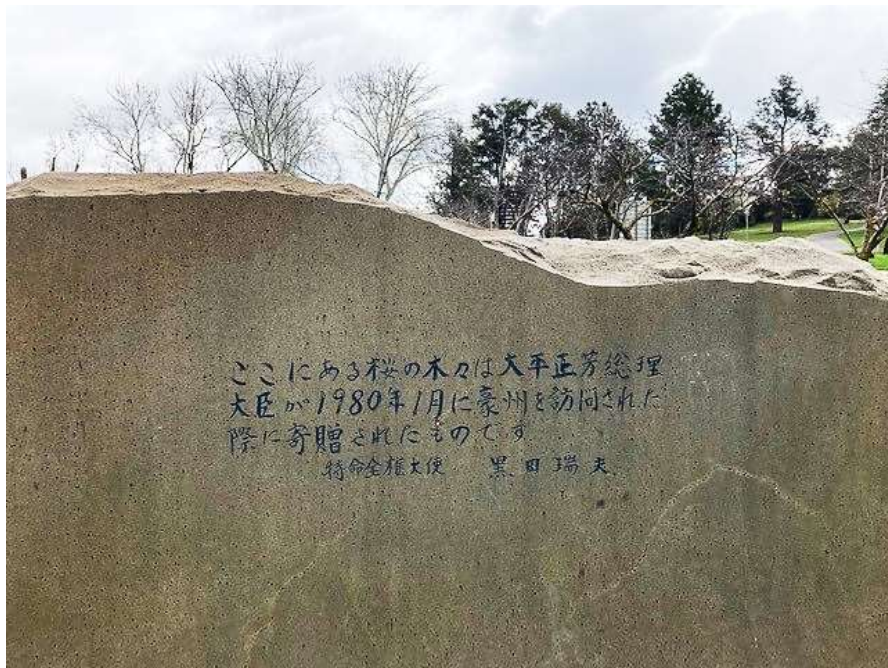
3. Open up, ye many-branched cherry blossom trees

Three weeks ago there were a series of days where the maximum daily temperature rose above 20 degrees. When this happens, out come the cherry blossoms. While they can of course be seen in the Residence Garden, there are a number of wonderful cherry blossom trees situated along the banks of the Lake Burley Griffin in the centre of the city. I look forward to them reaching full bloom.

The verdantly green boulevards of Canberra will soon be accented with canopies of white and pink, by cherry, pear, and plum blossoms. On the banks of the lake, there are cherry blossom trees that were donated and planted to coincide with the visit to Australia of Prime Minister OHIRA Masayoshi in January 1980. Once again I was made aware that cherry blossoms, of all things, are a precious source of soft power along with Japanese cuisine.



Canberra in spring



A memorial stone commemorating the donation of cherry blossom trees by Prime Minister OHIRA

4. A tough spring to endure

It's a really tough season for those who suffer from hay fever, isn't it? In the past, I was not affected at all, but a few years ago while living in Tokyo it seemed I was reaching my limits and I too started sneezing and exhibiting bloodshot eyes.

I did wonder what might happen given that the ecosystem in the Southern Hemisphere is different, but lo and behold it's here too. Loathsome cypress pollen also flies about the place. From what I've heard, quite a few Aussies suffer from this as well, so when I go to the chemist there's a line-up of all sorts of powerful medicines.



The flowers of the Golden Wattle tree, Australia's floral emblem, bloom at the same time as hay fever season, but apparently the actual cause of hay fever lies in the pollen from cypress pines and wild grasses

5. **Before the blossoms start to fall**

Actually, following my arrival in Australia, an Australian diplomat has been saying "let's do a *Hanami* (flower-viewing party)" whenever she sees me. Having lived in Japan for a long time, she seems strongly attracted to sensitively admiring falling cherry blossom petals and the tradition of enjoying *Hanami* with friends.

I therefore intended to open up the Residence Garden towards the end of this month in order to host a "*Hanami* reception". However the lockdown has been extended to 15 October, so holding a *Hanami* this year will be difficult.

Now that Australian society has also decided to start moving towards "Living with COVID", I hope we'll be able to commence this new lifestyle as soon as possible.



Yoshino and double-flowered cherry blossoms at the Residence

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