

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 60):

Official Visit to Victoria

4 March 2022

Upon leaving Darwin (see Edition 59 which you can read [here](#)), I flew directly to Melbourne, where I visited from February 20 - 22. It was my fifth trip to Melbourne since my arrival in Australia as Ambassador.

1. An official visit

All foreign Ambassadors stationed in Canberra is entitled to at least one official visit to each state and territory during their term. The practice of “official” visit to a state/territory may sound alien to my Japanese reader, but one should be reminded that Australia has a federal system. When it comes to an official visit, the respective state/territory government’s protocol team is in charge of the preparation from the hosting side, including the arrangement of meetings with the Governor, Premier, and other important people.

I have a debt of gratitude to the Governor of the State of Victoria, the Honourable Linda Dessau AC, and her husband, whom I met once before (included in Edition 45 which you can read [here](#)) on my last trip to Melbourne when I had the honour of lodging overnight at Government House. This time, to return their hospitality, we invited the couple to a gathering hosted by Consul-General SHIMADA at his Residence. Again we had a great conversation with them.

Thanks to the ingenious idea of Consul-General SHIMADA and Mrs SHIMADA, the evening turned out to be quite eventful and sophisticated. The couple treated us to a *koto* instrumental quartet, and a demonstration of *kyudo* (traditional Japanese archery) by Mrs SHIMADA herself. It was a truly exquisite evening.



In the middle of both pictures is Governor Dessau. The *koto* group in the left-hand photo consists of 1 musician of Malaysian background and 3 Japanese musicians, an example of the multiculturalism of Melbourne.

2. Exchanging opinions with Premier Andrews

Due to Victoria's long months in lockdown, it was the only state to which I had not yet been able to pay an official visit. This time I was able to meet with The Honourable Dan Andrews MP, Premier of Victoria for a lively conversation on a number of topics including the economic relationship between Japan and both Victoria and Australia, the HESC (Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain) Project, hydrogen fuelled cars, infrastructure development, and sister city exchanges between Victoria and Aichi Prefecture.

We came to an agreement that this fruitful discussion would be continued at the Consul-General's Residence. The Premier's last visit to Japan was back in 2016. I am prepared to work for his next visit to Japan, hopefully, in the not so distant future.



With Premier Andrews. Due to COVID restrictions we are wearing masks indoors.

3. Melbourne: The Coffee Capital

The pride of Melbournians is not just that this beautiful city is a sporting hub, but also its reputation as the coffee capital.

While devoting myself to discussions with people, including the Hon. Nazih Elasmr (President of the Victorian Legislative Council), the Hon. Colin Brooks (Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly), the Hon. Martin Pakula (Victorian Minister for Trade, Tourism, Sport.) as well as Federal Senator Kimberley Kitching, I was again struck by the high quality of Melbourne's renowned coffee and multicultural cuisine. The city will no doubt impress even those Japanese connoisseurs who are very particular about taste.



In the 2km radius of Melbourne's centre, there is such a large number of coffee shops.

(from Google Maps)

4. An interview with the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) Victoria

As I always dedicate myself to public speaking at least on one occasion whenever I go on business trips, this time I undertook an interview with the AIIA's Victoria branch.

In addition to being conducted by former ABC political reporter Jim Middleton, the interview featured many questions and opinions from the audience in the venue as well as online, and it was a good opportunity for me to experience first-hand how Australians perceive international issues. (The interview can be viewed [here](#).)

5. Supporting Japanese businesses

(1) UNIQLO

Taking advantage of a great opportunity on this Melbourne trip, I visited as many Japanese businesses as I could to listen to their views, which are so valuable to my work. UNIQLO opened its Melbourne store in 2016, and has vastly expanded its operations to cover Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and Perth.

The characteristics of Australia as a market for apparel is that the consumers enjoy a high average income while having a preference for casual clothes. I explained to them how the Embassy and Consulates-General are working hard to promote "Japanese brands". I hope we can continue to work closely together.



The talented and capable UNIQLO employees (left). They take to heart the idea of “the Democratisation of Fashion” in tackling the Australian market.

(2) Toyota

Another highlight of my visit to Melbourne was making my way to the nearby suburb of Altona to tour Toyota’s Hydrogen Centre, and experience a test drive in the hydrogen-powered *Mirai 2*.

It was as silent as a library, and ran so smoothly. I felt overwhelming power as soon as I pressed the accelerator. It really is a car on another level, representing *mirai* (meaning “future” in Japanese). To my surprise the hydrogen replenishment process (refuelling) was complete in only a few minutes, and it can run for over 500km on one tank. It really made me clearly understand the difference between electric cars and hydrogen-powered cars.



The *Mirai 2* is a smooth ride and has a short refuelling time. The Hydrogen is kept at -40°C , so the fuel nozzle is pleasantly cool to the touch.

I learned Toyota’s market share in Australia is over 22%. Soon we will often see the sporty and dynamic *Mirai 2* coming and going on the city streets.

YAMAGAMI Shingo