

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 69):

Visit to Cairns

14 April 2022

I believe that Cairns is one of the most familiar towns in all of Australia to Japanese people. I was finally able to achieve my long-awaited desire to visit Cairns. This is my report about that trip.



Cairns' famous cableway – 'Skyrail'

1. The part of Australia closest to Japan

As you would see by looking at a map, Cairns is located in the northern-most part of the state of Queensland. People from Sydney and Melbourne refer to this region as the "Far North". It resembles the term "Deep South" which is used to refer to the southern regions of the United States.



(Source: OpenStreetMap)

As it is located in the north, Cairns is closer to Japan than most of Australia's other cities. It is approximately 7 hours direct flying time from Japan. It is closer to Cairns than Hawaii from Japan! Now, I clearly understand why over 240,000 tourists annually made their way there from Japan during the busy years before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. A long-awaited visit

There is a Consular Office of Japan in Cairns. This reflects the fact that Cairns not only attracts many visitors from Japan, but is also home to some 3,436 Japanese residents (as at October 2021). I myself wanted to visit the place as early as I could after taking up my post as Ambassador in Australia. However, I had to cancel several planned visits to Cairns due to either a cyclone or travel restrictions related to COVID-19. That is why my first visit as Ambassador had to wait until this time round.

As soon as I stepped out of the plane at Cairns Airport, surrounded by a slightly elevated, gentle mountain range, I felt a sense of nostalgia as if I had stepped out into the Japanese countryside. It is the sort of scenery that you just do not see in other Australian towns.

3. Reviving memories

I actually visited Cairns once around 20 years ago. At the time I was serving as Director of the Inspection Division within Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and participated in a business trip to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea in order to inspect the Japanese Embassy there. However, in Port Moresby, where the living conditions are extremely harsh, my superior, who was also taking part in the trip, was struck down by a serious illness that put his life in jeopardy. This necessitated an emergency evacuation to Cairns.

With its high level of medical care and fully equipped medical facilities, Cairns has played an important role as an emergency destination for the island nations across the Pacific for decades. Thanks to this function of Cairns as the regional medical centre, my superior was saved.

4. Cairns – a place blessed by both the sea and mountain ranges

In contrast with my previous visit when I was preoccupied with an emergency, this time I was able to fully experience the many delights of Cairns. While already famous as the focal point for Great Barrier Reef tourism with its abundance of coral and tropical fish, Cairns also possesses a rainforest which has been designated as a World Heritage site.



The Cairns rainforest with its verdant, luscious greenery

Thanks to the kind consideration shown by the City of Cairns and those who prepared

our visit, myself, Consul-General to Brisbane Mr ONO and Cairns Consular Office Director Mr MATSUDA all enjoyed the sweeping views looking down from the cableway above the rainforest. Later, after a pleasant walk along the boardwalk and viewing the giant waterfall, we were even treated to kaki-gori (a Japanese-style shaved ice treat) at the marketplace in Kuranda.



Our guide speaking perfect Japanese



Enjoying some delicious shaved ice at “Hayabusa of Kuranda”

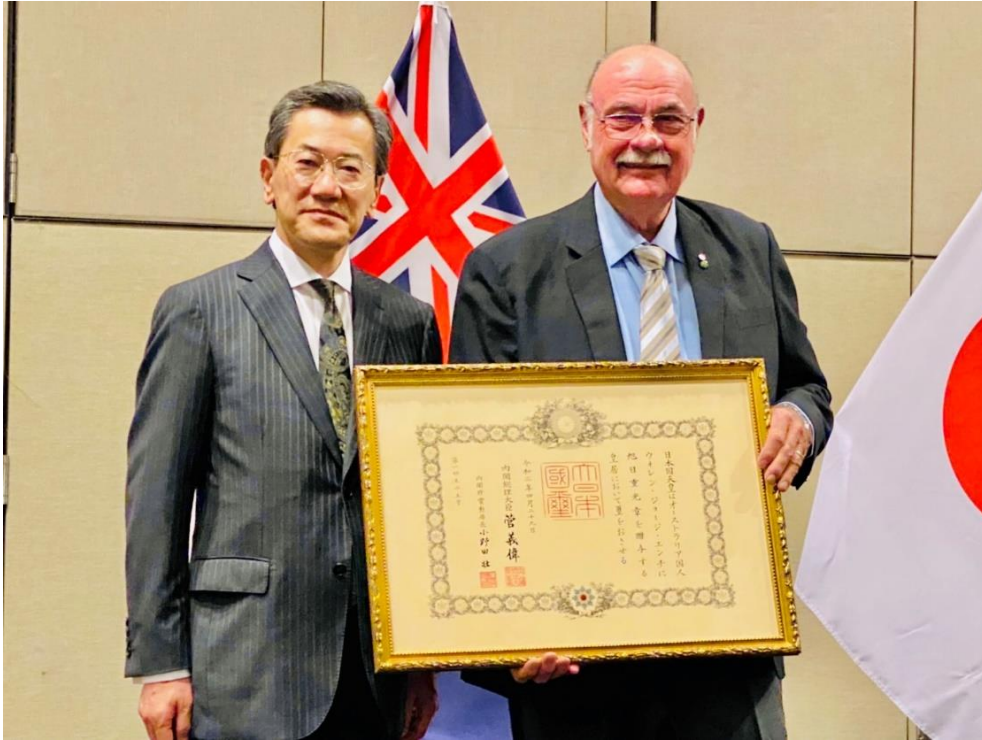
Via the see-through floor of our cable car we had an extremely sublime experience in mid-air, enjoying the many gradations in green made by the numerous species of trees that make up the dense rainforest. We were enthusiastically greeted not only by the television crews from local TV channels, but also a giant spider of the rainforest! I could see that there were high expectations for more tourists from Japan (footage of my visit was reported by [WIN News](#), [7 News](#), and [Tropic Now](#) respectively).



Giant spiders also constituted part of our 'welcoming' reception!

5. Conferment of the Order of the Rising Sun upon the Hon. Warren Entsch MP

A major reason for my visit to Cairns on this occasion was to hold a ceremony to confer the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star, upon the Hon. Warren Entsch MP, the long-serving federal parliamentary member for the electoral seat of Leichhardt, which encompasses Cairns.



The Hon. Warren Entsch MP receiving his award

With his 5 years as the Chair of the Australia-Japan Parliamentary Group in the Federal Parliament, regularly attending Obon festival ceremonies on Thursday Island, and 20 visits to Japan, Mr Entsch's knowledge of and connection with Japan stands out among his parliamentary colleagues. He is a straight-shooting self-made man who started from scratch with an extraordinarily diverse work history, from holstering a .44 magnum as a bank guard to catching crocodiles. His feelings and attitudes towards Japan are marked with both affection and kindness.

During the ceremony, Mr Entsch repeatedly said "there is no greater honour than this." Mr Entsch's 92 year old mother, his wife, children, and close friends were all by his side to congratulate him. It was a truly cozy and heart-warming event (my congratulatory remarks can be read [here](#)).

6. Re-starting tourism

The conferment ceremony was a showcase of the important role that Cairns has been playing in weaving the connections between Australian and Japanese people. Another instance during my trip that reminded me of this aspect of Cairns was my encounter with Mayor of Cairns Bob Manning OAM and his wife. I learned that the couple, who so warmly greeted my delegation during our visit, had actually taken in a number of Japanese exchange students over the years.



Enjoying a conversation with the Mayor and Mrs Manning

Moreover, making good use of my schedule, I was able to visit a shiatsu (Japanese style acupressure) clinic run by the President of the Japanese Society of Cairns, Mr SAKAGUCHI, and a conveyor-belt sushi restaurant run by Director Mr KORIYAMA, to cheer them on. In both places, I was left deeply, deeply impressed by the scenes of smiling Aussies enjoying quality shiatsu and sushi as authentic as those that one would have in Japan. I felt that this reflects the breadth and depth of the people-to-people ties that Cairns has nurtured over the years.



Exchanging views with members of the local Cairns Japanese community



At the conveyer-belt sushi restaurant “Sushi Train”, which is also popular among Aussies

I wholeheartedly hope that all travel restrictions will quickly be lifted, and mutual exchanges between Cairns and Japan can once again commence with vitality on a large scale. And so I made my way back to Canberra, vowing that I will definitely visit Cairns again.

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