

News from Under the Southern Cross (Edition 71):

Cutting across Tasmania

3 May 2022

I recently revisited the island state of Tasmania, Australia's Hokkaido. It was my first trip there since June of last year. Sit back, relax and enjoy the tale of my second 'Tasmanian Story'.

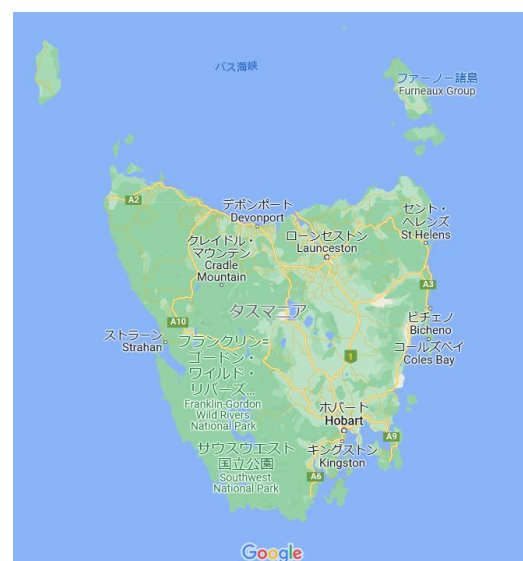
(My first 'Tasmanian Story' can be found in [Edition 18](#) of News from Under the Southern Cross).

(Note: *Tasmania Monogatari (Tasmanian Story)* is a 1990 Japanese movie about a father and son who visit Tasmania as they are intrigued by its abundant nature and native wildlife. The movie was instrumental in making Tasmania familiar to Japanese people.)



1. A Tale of Two Cities

All countries have cities with long-standing rivalries – not only London and Paris. In Japan, Hanshin Tigers fans passionately support their baseball team on one level because they want to beat the Tokyo Yomiuri Giants, but also because on a deeper level being from Kansai they cannot stand the thought of losing to Tokyoites.



(Map ©2022 Google)

In Australia, the best-known rivalry is probably that between Sydney and Melbourne. As you can see from the image below, Tasmania has two major cities, each with its own sense of pride: the state capital Hobart in the south, and Launceston in the north. Because my previous visit mainly focused on southern Tasmania, this time I wanted to see Launceston and the state's north, and planned my itinerary accordingly.

2. Cutting Across

After concluding my trip to Adelaide (discussed in [Edition 70](#)), I flew into Hobart, then drove 203km up to Launceston by car. For 198km of the journey, we did not encounter a single traffic light. I gazed outside and took in the tranquil autumn scenery of the Tasmanian countryside, passing by merino sheep, including some that were recently shorn and shivering in the cold.

3. Tassie Dairy

In my last trip to Tasmania, I went to see AEON's huge cattle feedlot. As Tasmania has both successful beef and dairy industries, this time I paid a visit to Ashgrove, a famous local cheese producer.



Seeing the wide range of cheeses



With Ashgrove's Mr Richard Bennett (Centre Left) and Mr Michael Bennett (Right)

At the family-run factory and visitor centre, I learned about the current state of the dairy industry, including how producers are moving towards beef production (said to be more profitable and easier to manage) and are having trouble securing staff. While there, I also had the chance to see the company's range of locally produced milk, cheese and ice cream – all made with an emphasis on quality to differentiate Ashgrove's products from those of the major dairy companies.

I was particularly impressed by the cheese snack, AmazeBalls and cheese flavoured with wasabi, and bought some of both as souvenirs to share with friends and colleagues back in Canberra.

4. Wasabi

Believe it or not, because of its clean air and plentiful rain, Tasmania is particularly suitable for growing wasabi. When I visited the largest commercial wasabi farm in Australia run by Shima Wasabi, I was blown away. In Japan, wasabi is grown in clear running streams, but here it is grown in specially designed greenhouses.



Viewing the rows of wasabi at Shima Wasabi



Wasabi leaves, stems and roots

I was amazed again when I saw the size of the freshly picked wasabi – it was huge! Chef OGATA, the chef at my residence in Canberra, accompanied me on this trip. Shima Wasabi kindly shared with him some wasabi stems and leaves. He took them back to Canberra, wondering how he could use them in his cooking at my residence.

5. Gin & Beer

Tasmania's incredible produce does not end there! I also visited Three Cuts Gin, a gin distillery which won first prize in an international gin competition, and the famous James Boag's Brewery.



With Three Cuts Gin founder, Mr Justin Turner

The Brewery is owned by Australian beverage company Lion, which in turn is a subsidiary of Kirin, a Japanese beverage giant. In addition to its classic James Boag-branded beers, the Brewery now also produces Kirin Ichiban Shibori and sells them under the name Kirin Ichiban'. (Note: *Ichiban* means 'first'. *Ichiban Shibori* means beer that brewed from the first press of the wort.)



They were very keen for me to taste some, so I caved in and gave it a try. It made me truly appreciate that nothing beats locally brewed beer.

6. Feeling the Pulse

Writing about tasty Tassie cheese and beer like this might give the impression I was just slacking off and enjoying a break. In reality, I was researching Tasmania's economic links with Japan and exploring possibilities for promoting tourists from Japan.

Furthermore, I chose to visit different parts of Australia, such as Perth, Cairns, Adelaide and Tasmania in light of the upcoming federal election scheduled for 21st May. Each trip allowed me to get a real sense of what is happening across the country and how people are feeling.

As the Mayor of Launceston was a COVID-19 close contact, I instead met and exchanged views with Deputy Mayor Danny Gibson and other members of the Launceston City Council. Our discussion was very fruitful and informative. I was encouraged to hear of the strong relationship between Launceston and Ikeda City in Osaka Prefecture, including the exchange of Japanese macaques (known in Japan as *Nihonzaru*) and wombats between the two sister cities.



The Japanese macaque enclosure, City Park



Dinner with Launceston City Councilors

As is always the case with my official trips within Australia, I got in touch with the local media as well. (My interview with *The Examiner*, the local newspaper, can be viewed [here](#)).

I sincerely hope that once travel restrictions are lifted many Japanese will visit Tasmania and each create their own unique 'Tasmanian Story'.

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