

News From Under the Southern Cross Edition 79:

Queensland Dreaming

30 June 2022

(This is the translation of the original Japanese text, which was drafted on 21 June 2022)

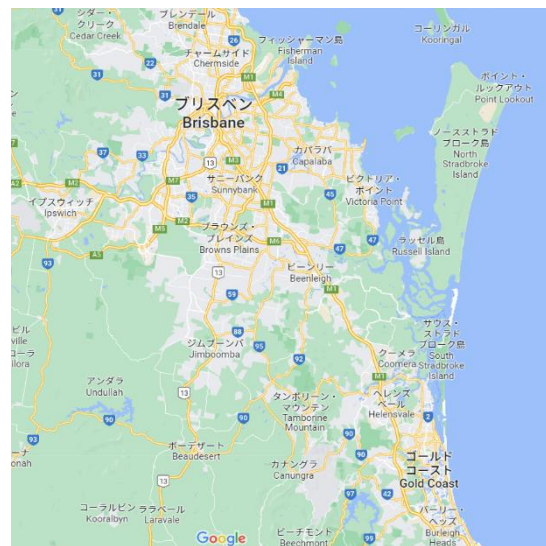
In my year and a half as Ambassador to Australia, I have visited each of the six states and the Northern Territory twice. My Ambassador colleagues in Canberra are often surprised to hear how much I get around. Last week, I embarked on my third round of travel across Australia, starting off in Queensland.



The Gold Coast as seen from above

1. Australia's Sunshine State

Queensland is nicknamed Australia's 'sunshine state'. It's known for its blazing sunny weather and temperatures that rarely drop below 20 degrees even in the middle of winter. This year, winter in Canberra has been particularly chilly, with the mercury often dipping below zero overnight. The other day, the minimum temperature was minus 4.5 degrees.



Map data ©2022 Google

For the most part, Canberra has clear skies during winter. Though not as gloomy as the brown leaves and grey sky the Mamas and Papas sang of in ‘California Dreaming’, the freezing cold makes one long for warmth and sunshine. And so I found myself naturally drawn to Queensland. This time, I travelled to Brisbane, the state capital, and the Gold Coast, the sixth largest Australian city, with a population of almost 630,000.

2. Japan-Queensland Relations

After landing in Brisbane, I first went to a joint luncheon hosted by the Australia-Japan Society (AJS) and Queensland Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QJCCI) where I gave a speech about the current state and future of Japan-Australia relations. [You can read the speech [here](#).]

For many years, Queensland and Japan have had classic complementary trade relations. Queensland exports sugar, beef, coal and other commodities while Japan exports vehicles and machinery. In recent years, Japan has been Queensland’s second largest trading partner, and is now the state’s largest export market according to the most recent annual trade statistics in April 2022. Without a doubt, Japan and Queensland have grown together.

My visit to the Komatsu Distribution Centre allowed me to appreciate that without funds from Japanese trading companies, long-term purchase by Japanese energy companies and the ingenuity in Japanese machinery companies the Queensland coal industry likely would not have grown to the point where it is today. Seeing a massive electric truck with huge wheels far taller than me, I felt pride and respect for how *monozukuri* (Japanese spirit and attention to detail in manufacturing) has evolved alongside technological changes over time.



At the Komatsu Distribution Centre’s Innovation Hub



Group photo in front of a huge Komatsu truck

3. Gold Coast Real Estate

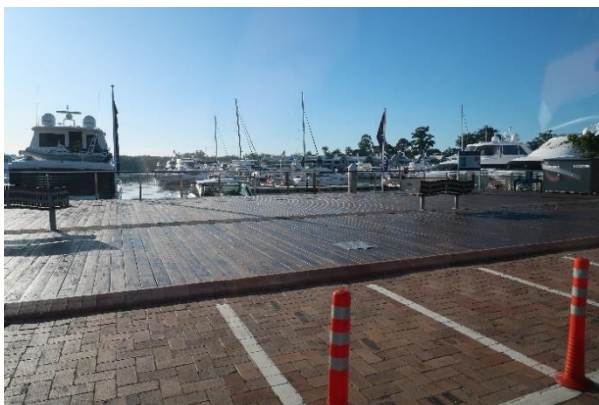
One thing that I was looking forward to on this trip was the chance to look around some real estate on the Gold Coast. On my previous Brisbane trip in March last year, Mr Sunakawa (President of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Gold Coast) and a local politician told me that thanks to massive investment from Japan, three main pieces of infrastructure — luxury hotels, golf courses and marinas — were built rapidly on the Gold Coast in a matter of years.

Mr Sunakawa kindly showed me around the large-scale Sanctuary Cove and Hope Island Resorts, built by Japanese companies during the 80s economic bubble. I received a tour of The Star Residences, a popular apartment hotel. In addition, I went all the way to the top of the SkyPoint Observation Deck. The view was incredible — 40km of white sand beach stretching as far as the eye could see, with high-rise hotels and condo towers reaching up into the brilliant blue sky.



With Mr Sunakawa (GCJCCI)

Looking down across the cityscape of the Gold Coast from above, there is a striking contrast between the vivid green of the trees and the dazzling blue of the sky, ocean and inlets. The scenery of golf courses showered by sprinklers, and luxury boats leisurely anchored was spread out in front of me like a *byōbu* (Japanese traditional folding screen painting). I was stunned by the lavishness of Australia's wealth and the comfortable, high-quality lifestyle that so many Aussies enjoy. Anyone who lays eyes on the Gold Coast will find themselves irresistibly drawn in by its enchanting charm.



The Hope Harbour Marina



The view from the SkyPoint Observation Deck

Hawaii was once my main holiday destination of choice and I went to Maui several times in my younger days. However, after experiencing the Gold Coast — the pleasant weather with 300 days of clear skies a year, the well-developed infrastructure, the safety, the excellent food, and the down-to-earth friendliness of Aussies — the more I find myself wanting to walk on its shoaling beaches as the sun rises over the Pacific to the east, far in the distance. It would certainly make a nice holiday or semi-retirement spot for anyone looking to get away from the gunmetal grey of Tokyo offices.

Speaking of infrastructure, Japanese company Marubeni is supporting the construction of light rail on the Gold Coast, linking the city's north and south. I tried it out, and appreciated firsthand how its cleanliness, safety and reliability could only be achieved with the contribution of a Japanese company's wealth of experience and uncompromising precision behind the scenes. It was charming to see that the trams had a rack to put a surfboard, found only on the Gold Coast. I look forward to seeing the line extended to the Gold Coast airport in the near future.



Gold Coast light rail

It was also encouraging to see that Misawa Homes, a Japanese home building company, had expanded its business locally. Misawa Homes purchased a 51% share of Australian company Homecorp and has significantly boosted construction of Gold Coast homes. In addition to providing safe and comfortable homes to live in, I hope that Misawa will share Japan's culture of cleanliness and comfort with Australians by, for example, installing Japanese washlets.

Now I can see why so many Japanese celebrities have secret holiday homes on the Gold Coast. I bet you want to know who, right? As a former Director-General of the Intelligence and Analysis Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I managed to get the facts from a local source. I can't share them though – it's top secret!

4. Japanese Studies in QLD

Given how close ties between Japan and Queensland are, naturally, there are many Queenslanders studying Japanese. Australia is the country with the highest number of Japanese learners per capita in the world, and one third live in Queensland.

I visited Robina State High School in the Gold Coast suburbs, and was deeply moved to be welcomed by students with bright greetings of “*Ohayougozaimasu*” (Good morning) and a lively taiko performance. Seeing the Aussie high school students lined up in uniform and even bowing to welcome us was very eye-opening to me, bringing up memories of my high school days forty years ago when I was a bit engaging in ‘rebel without cause’.

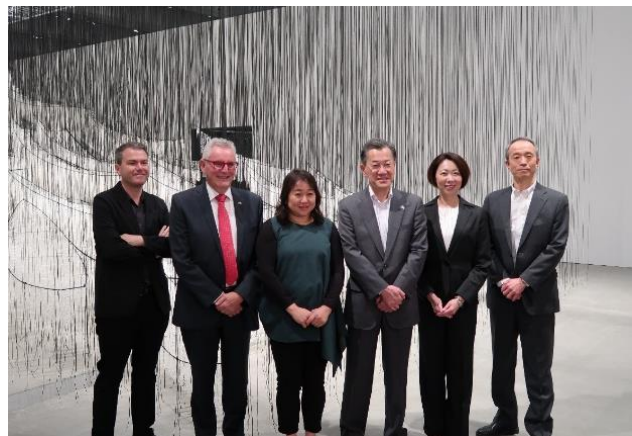


Robina High School students



Ema (wooden plaques) containing the wishes of Robina SHS students

The experiences during my trip revealed that there is an undercurrent of strong affection toward Japan in Queensland. At QAGOMA in Brisbane, Ms SHIOTA Chiharu is opening a special exhibition from June until October. Despite showing up in the busy period right before the exhibition’s opening, I received detailed explanations of numerous artworks. As many as 660,000 people came to see her exhibition at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. Using abundant quantities of thread, each artwork creates a unique world, stimulating the viewer’s memory and imagination. Having such a wide space for the exhibition in Brisbane surely allows one to appreciate the artworks on an even deeper level.



At the QAGOMA “The Soul Trembles” exhibition, with artist SHIOTA Chiharu (third from left)

5. Sports Diplomacy

Baseball players are without question a minority in Australia. Cricket, AFL, rugby and soccer are the most popular sports down under. Nevertheless, 36 Australians have played in Major League Baseball in the U.S., reflecting how Australia is a strong sporting nation. That reminds me — Jeff Williams, former pitcher for the Hanshin Tigers (a popular Japanese professional baseball team), was Australian.

I was invited to meet with California-raised, former rugby player with the Wallabies and Kobe Steel, lawyer Ian Williams. Knowledgeable on both rugby and baseball, we had a long conversation about the latter. This November the Australian national baseball team will go to Sapporo to play a match against Samurai Japan (Japanese national baseball team). In spring next year, Australia will return for the Japan-hosted World Baseball Classic.



With Glenn Williams, Baseball Australia CEO (left) and Ian Williams, Baseball Australia Director (right)

When I visited Robina State High School, I had the chance to see the school's impressive baseball training facilities. Philanthropist Danny Maruyama donated a grass playing field, a "field of dreams" for practising baseball. The field is also used for exchange programs with Urawa Gakuin and Tsuchiura Nihon University High Schools, which both have strong reputations for baseball. I heard that many Aussie high school baseball players also dream of playing at Koshien Stadium, where the Japanese National High School Baseball Championship is held.



Robina SHS students practice on the school's baseball field, donated by Danny Maruyama

Japan has suffered a bitter defeat to Australia in Olympic baseball once before. As Australia successfully qualified for the soccer world cup shortly after Japan, looking forward, I hope our two countries cultivate a friendly baseball rivalry together too.

YAMAGAMI Shingo