

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 85):

A Tale of Two Cities

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The two major cities representing Australia are Sydney and Melbourne. We have all been told that the planned city of Canberra was chosen as the capital as a result of the tug-of-war between Sydney and Melbourne. In this edition, I will take a look at the appeal of these two cities.



Sydney's beaches and Melbourne's cityscape (Source: Tourism Australia)

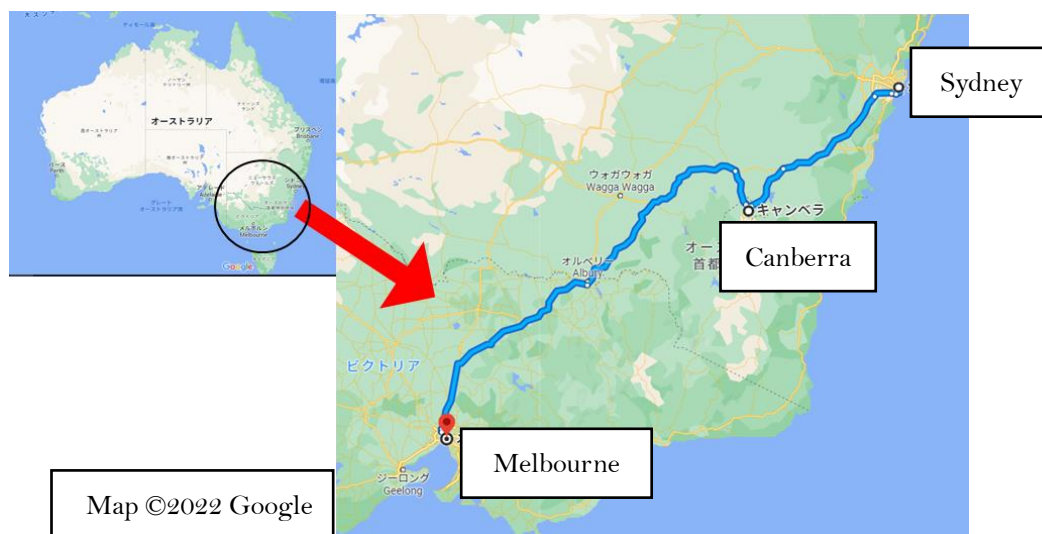
1. Frequent visits

As an ambassador in Canberra, I am frequently required to visit Sydney and Melbourne. This is because many of the politicians, business people, academics, think tankers, journalists, and cultural figures I am required to meet are often based in one of these two major cities. International conferences with participants from abroad are also often held in these two cities.

In the year and a half or so since my arrival, I have travelled to Sydney nearly 15 times and to Melbourne nearly 10 times. Usually, I only travel to one of these cities at a time, but I recently had the opportunity to visit both Melbourne and Sydney. Going straight from one city to another, it is only natural to want to compare the two.

2. Distance

First of all, location. The distance between Canberra and Sydney is about 280km by car. In Japan, this is about the same as the distance going west of Tokyo on the Tokaido Shinkansen to the Toyohashi area before Nagoya. Canberra to Melbourne is just over 650km by car. If Canberra were Toyohashi, this distance would be about the same as Toyohashi to Hiroshima.



If this is the case, you can drive (about 3 hours) or fly (about 1 hour) from Canberra to Sydney. When going to Melbourne, it takes too long to drive (about 7-8 hours), so flying (about 1 hour) is the main option.

Both cities are air gateways to Australia. There are also direct flights from Japan. Because of the large number of flights, I go to Sydney more frequently which is closer to Canberra. The number of visitors from Japan to Sydney is higher than that to Melbourne because of its superior number of direct flights.

In terms of the number of Japanese residents, Sydney has over 33,000 and Melbourne has over 24,000.

3. Beautiful harbour

Sydney's charms can be summed up in two words; Sydney Harbour.



Sydney Harbour – one of the three most beautiful harbours in the world

(Source: Tourism Australia)

When I first visited Sydney from Canberra, I was really impressed by the glistening blue of Sydney Harbour. When I was in elementary school, I had to memorise that the three most beautiful harbours in the world were in Sydney, San Francisco, and Rio de Janeiro. I have since had the opportunity to visit all three, and now that I have found solace in Sydney Harbour, I can't help but give Sydney the nod among these three.

On the recommendation of an Australian, I recently hopped on a water taxi from the busy wharf of Circular Quay and took it to a restaurant in another inlet of the harbour. The view from the water of the CBD's skyscrapers in their night-time glow, and the sound of the waves kicked up by the motorboats, was a truly brilliant experience.

On another occasion, I followed a Sydneysider's recommendation and climbed the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge. The idea of putting on a harness and walking up the structure of a bridge is something you would not find in Japan. It was an extremely thrilling experience for me.



Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb (Source: Destination NSW)

4. Sydney's Gatsby

What also impresses me about Sydney is that the waterfront has been developed and beautified, which makes the buildings (offices, residences, hotels, restaurants and cultural facilities whose important elements are the view of the harbour), the water transportation (water taxis and ferries) and marine sports (the yachts, cruisers, and surfing) all co-exist there.

Warehouses on the wharf that have outlived their time have been converted into restaurants, apartments, concert halls, and other facilities. I was deeply amazed at the concept and execution.



Sydney Harbour Wharf (Source: Destination NSW)

I was once invited to the Hunters Hill residence of a well-known gentleman of great wealth. Not only was I surprised to find that two of my fellow guests were two Sydney-residing former Prime Ministers of Australia, but I was absolutely amazed by the sight of the lush green lawns with a 20-metre pool and a jetty for a cruiser extending out into the bay.

I am deeply convinced by the words of a former Prime Minister who said, “This is the most beautiful city in the world”. So impressed, I told the owner of this grand residence, “You are the Gatsby of Sydney, aren’t you?”. This gentleman, who also owns a splendid villa in Karuizawa, nodded his head happily. It was in this moment that I realised Australia’s unfathomable wealth and the playful spirit of Aussies to enjoy life to the fullest.

5. Comfortability

In contrast with Sydney, Melbourne’s weapon of choice is its comfortability.



Comfortable Melbourne (Source: Visit Victoria)

In light of the recent surge in real estate prices, a Melbournian says, “In Sydney, you can enjoy the best of the city if you can live in a place with a view of the harbour, but that’s only for the rich. In Melbourne, everyone can enjoy the city”. This is due to the confidence in the quality of life in Melbourne, which has consistently ranked among the world’s most liveable cities.

Incidentally, Sydney and Melbourne have produced successive Prime Ministers throughout Australia's political history. This has only sharpened the narrative of each city. This is something I would like to see supporters of Japan's regional cities, who are only prone to anti-Tokyo messages, learn from this!

Certainly, there are events that many people eagerly await each year, such as the Australian Open, which takes place in Melbourne; the AFL grand final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), which seats 100,000 raucous fans; and the Melbourne Cup, a horse racing event. It is also an outstanding Australian city with high quality food, including Italian and Greek cuisine.

It also seems certain that there is more space in Melbourne than in Sydney, where space as a city is limited due to being sandwiched between bays and inlets. In Melbourne, the streets are wide, many freeways have multiple lanes, and the city is set out spaciouly.



Melbourne is the setting for the Australian Open (Source: Tourism Victoria)

6. Long lines for popular shops

Walking along Russell Street, the main street of Melbourne's CBD, I noticed two shops with long lines.

One is a croissant shop that is very popular among the locals. Using the animal instincts I developed as a police officer, I jumped in line when it got short to investigate what was happening. And what a delicious treat! The aroma of freshly baked croissants and their unique crispy texture were mesmerising. Melbourne is indeed the food capital of Australia. I enjoyed the croissant to the fullest with a flat white, which is Melbourne's pride and joy.



Melbourne is proud of its flat white (Source: Visit Victoria)

7. Ramen competition

The other shop attracting a long line was a very popular tonkotsu (pork broth) ramen restaurant from Hakata. After many months away from my home country, I was so happy to be reunited with my long-awaited taste for ramen that my wife and I completely forgot about our conversation and immersed ourselves in it!

Incidentally, Sydney also gives Melbourne a run for their money. The ramen restaurants in Surry Hills and on George Street would surely be popular even if they were in Japan.

So, let me just say that the level of ramen restaurants in Melbourne and Sydney is superior to those in New York, London, and Paris. I am convinced that this level is maintained not only by Japanese residents in Australia, which boasts the third largest number of Japanese residents globally, but also by the Aussies who visit not just Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto, but as far as Nakasendo, Niseko, and Hakuba one after the other. This is why the lifting of entry restrictions on tourists to Japan is much-desired.



Of course, as you can imagine, it is not limited to ramen. The level of authentic Japanese restaurants favoured by Japanese companies in Sydney and Melbourne is very high! What is especially exciting is that these restaurants are also crowded with Aussies.

The level of ramen restaurants in Australia is so high. (Source: Visit Victoria)

8. To sum up

So, the competition between Sydney and Melbourne is currently very close.

Don't accuse me of sitting on the fence. I have to consider the position of Consul-General SHIMADA of Melbourne and Consul-General KIYA of Sydney (Consul-General TOKUDA is his successor)!

If I have one request to make of my Aussie friends, it is they should do something about transportation. These two cities are separated by a distance equivalent to that between Tokyo and Hiroshima. The only means of transportation we have now is by plane or car. During this business trip, both the Canberra-Melbourne and Melbourne-Sydney flights were cancelled, probably due to staff shortages as a result of COVID-19, and I was worn out from trying to secure alternative flights.

Isn't it about time to connect these two major cities each with a population of 5 million by high-speed rail? Japan's experience of aeroplanes and bullet trains coexisting between Tokyo and Hiroshima can be put to good use.

Imagine high-speed rail connecting Sydney and Melbourne. This would be a new chapter in this Tale of Two Cities.

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