

# **SPEECH**

**Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo**

**Ambassador of Japan to Australia**

**On the occasion of *Spring Reception***

**Ambassador's official residence, Canberra**

**Friday 23 September 2022**

Senator Catryna Bilyk, Chair of the Australia-Japan Parliamentary Group

Mr John McCarthy, former Ambassador of Australia to Japan

Councillor Bill West, Mayor of Cowra

Mr Alf Moufarrige AO OAM, CEO of Servcorp

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening.

It is wonderful to see so many new and familiar faces here tonight for our *Spring Reception*.

Thank you to those who have travelled all the way to Canberra from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, the Gold Coast, and Perth.

The spring season has a particularly significant meaning in Japanese culture.

Spring brings a sense of renewal and revitalisation.

Students start the school year, graduates enter the workforce, and the new fiscal year begins.

But most noticeably, spring brings cherry blossoms into full bloom.

For many friends of Japan, I'm sure you have fond yet perhaps slightly hazy memories of enjoying a cheeky tippie under the cherry blossom trees!

And so to enjoy the arrival of spring here in Canberra while building on the success of last year's *Sharing Your Experience of Japan Reception*, we've decided to do it again.

And I have to say you are making it harder for me to impress you because I'm no Great Gatsby of Canberra!

So to up our game, we've gone bigger and better!

Tonight we have two very special guests from Japan; Head Chef, Mr FUKUDA from Cerulean Tower Tokyo Hotel, and world-class magician and my friend, Mr MAEDA.

FUKUDA-san – a real Iron Chef – has generously donned his chef's whites so that he can bring his superb culinary skills to you, including the serving of Yanchep beef.

And MAEDA-san will be giving guests a very special performance of his world-renowned close-up magic.

Having FUKUDA-san and MAEDA-san here this evening is an absolute treat for us all, but I would like to highlight why we are here this evening.

We are here to celebrate the strong and robust ties that have been forged between Japan and Australia through people-to-people exchange.

To put it simply, it is an occasion to show our gratitude to you.

Because the friendship our two countries enjoy to this very day would not have been possible without you all.

You are the very foundation of Japan and Australia's relationship and because of you, this relationship has never been better.

And just a *gentle* reminder of what I said last year; there is no such thing as a free meal.

I asked you all then to continue strengthening the important ties between Japan and Australia.

This year, let's embrace the essence of spring – renewal and revitalisation – and go even further with these ties and build new ones.

The pandemic has been a massive disrupter to our lives, but as we settle into this new normal now is

our chance.

By taking small steps, Japan is re-opening to the world.

And I know you are all very keen to get back there.

But as the Japanese Ambassador to Australia, please don't blame me for taking time!

However, I do have some very exciting news for you all.

Only just yesterday, Prime Minister KISHIDA announced visa-free and individual travel to Japan will resume from October 11 for fully-vaxxed Aussies!

In just over two weeks, you will be able to travel to Japan to freely visit all of your favourite places and even discover new ones, perhaps bringing back memories and indeed the excitement of your very first visit.

So with Japan's ski season only two months away, now is the time to start organising skiing holidays in Niseko, Hakuba, Nozawa Onsen, Shiga Kogen and any of the many other ski destinations.

Japan is waiting for you.

Many of you here already have deep connections with Japan.

Some of you formed these connections through education and exchange, whether that be at high school and university in Australia or through programs like Japan's MEXT Scholarship and Ship for World Youth and Australia's New Colombo Plan.

Others have connected with Japan through their chosen career paths in business, diplomacy, government, science and technology, academia, and education.

Many of which started their careers by participating in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme.

Since arriving in Canberra, I have visited all Australian states and territories as well as the capital cities at least twice.

Not only that, I have been fortunate enough to visit some far-flung places across this wide brown land.

And what has been the most special about these places are the unique and often long-held celebrations of their own individual connections with Japan.

These include festivals like the Lismore Lantern Festival, Cairns Japan Bon Dance, Broome Shinju Matsuri, and of course the Canberra Nara Candle Festival.

Others honour the deep historical connections that predate Federation, such as the Japanese pearl divers in Broome and Thursday Island.

And of course, there is the Sakura Matsuri and its sister-event, the Koyo Matsuri in Cowra, the spiritual home of Japan-Australia relations.

And just by coincidence, Cowra will hold the Sakura Matsuri tomorrow in their wonderful Japanese garden, which I believe is the best garden of its kind outside of Japan.

So I hope to see many of you there.

I can honestly say that a true highlight of my time here in Australia is seeing the wider Aussie community embrace their Japanese neighbours in celebrating Japanese traditions.

And speaking of traditions, Chef OGATA has prepared a real treat for you all this evening.

Earlier this year, my wife, Kaoru and I together with Chef OGATA and staff from Canberra and Melbourne travelled to Tassie.

On our way from Hobart to Launceston, Chef OGATA – a big fan of *Kiki's Delivery Service* – insisted on dropping into the famous Ross Bakery.

It was there we came across the beloved Aussie pastry, the vanilla slice.

The bakery proudly proclaimed it was the best vanilla slice in all the land.

Turns out, many bakeries across Australia lay claim to this title.

This inspired Chef OGATA to throw his chef's hat in the ring and join this fierce competition with his matcha-flavoured entry for the best vanilla slice in Australia!

I hope you try his take on this traditional Aussie pastry, and remember a vote for Chef is a vote for Japan and Australia!

Before I conclude, I would like to share the last haiku written by the Buddhist monk, Ryokan.

散る桜 残る桜も 散る桜

*Falling cherry blossoms*

*Those remaining*

*Are destined to fall as well*

Cherry blossoms bloom to their fullest for the briefest of moments.

If we think of this in terms of the time we spend on this earth, then our time is also brief.

That is why I ask you to join me in doing whatever we can in our respective roles to take Japan-Australia relations to the next level in the limited time given to us.

But for now, I ask you to join me in raising a glass in celebration and appreciation of the outstanding contributors to the Japan-Australia relationship.

乾杯！