

## News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 92):

### Back to Japan on Business

20 October 2022

COVID travel restrictions have meant opportunities for Japanese Ambassadors stationed overseas to return home are few and far between. Last week, for the first time in a long while, I received one of these rare opportunities. During these periods when I seldom return home, I am often amazed to see things I had not noticed before. Yet, after a few days, I am able to accept that “this is the way Japan is” and readjust completely. Looking back over my career as a diplomat, I feel that I have repeated this pattern many times.

#### 1. Speech to the Chubu Association of Corporate Executives

One of my reasons for going back to Japan was to present an address requested by the Chubu Association of Corporate Executives, or CACE, based in Nagoya (Chubu is the central region between Kanto and Kansai). As CACE will send a delegation to Perth and Melbourne in mid-October, my speech also served as a pre-departure briefing on the current situation in Australia.



Giving a speech to CACE

To make the most of my valuable time with CACE Chairs Mr ODO, Mr AMANO and Mr MIYAZAKI, as well as those others who work diligently night and day on the front lines of Japanese business, I decided to stray a little from my run-of-the-mill talking points. From the perspective of ‘the value of Australia to the Chubu economy’, I presented my personal opinions, including:

1. Reaffirming the importance of Japan as views towards China change;
2. The growing importance of Australia in the international community; and
3. Business opportunities for Japanese companies in hydrogen, infrastructure, space and tourism.

## 2. Culture shock

I left Sydney on a night flight, reaching Haneda Airport early in the morning. As I arrived at Shinagawa Station to take the Tokaido Shinkansen (the bullet train between Tokyo and Osaka) I was bowled over by the sheer number of people! The waves of people spread out before my eyes, stretching all the way from the station's north side to the south exit, were enough to make even a Tokyo native like myself – who grew up listening to 'Nearly Broken Radio' (a 90s single by singer-songwriter TOKUNAGA Hideaki) – feel overwhelmed.

Of course, this is a scene you would never come across in Canberra – or even Sydney or Melbourne, for that matter. It made me appreciate how tightly packed Japan truly is (it has a population density 100 times that of Australia, after all).

Another thing that surprised me was the bullet train. The distance from Tokyo to Nagoya is 350 kilometres, significantly further than the 280 kilometres from Canberra to Sydney. However, if you take the Nozomi bullet train from Shinagawa Station, you will make it to Nagoya less than a mere hour and a half. The scenery was so impressive that I pressed my forehead to the window, enchanted by the glistening, vibrant green landscapes. My Aussie friends, it's about time you introduced bullet trains down under!



A Japanese bullet train

### 3. Australia-Japan Business Cooperation Committee (AJBCC)

The main purpose of my trip back to Japan was to attend the 59<sup>th</sup> AJBCC Conference, held in person for the first time in three years.

Every year, Japan and Australia alternate in hosting this important conference, which brings together major business representatives. This time, I heard that more than 180 people registered to attend on the Australian side. I was touched by the delegates' excitement at the reception and dinner held beforehand, and the enthusiasm from both the Japanese and Australian delegates towards Japan-Australia relations. I have experienced a number of similar Japan-US and Japan-UK bilateral business conferences – however, this year's conference was even better than any of them.



At the AJBCC Conference

There is no doubt that the main pillars underpinning the growth of our bilateral partnership to today's heights are ties in trade and investment. These have been built up over years thanks to the tireless efforts of AJBCC Chairman MIMURA Akio and other members of the business community.

(The congratulatory address that I presented on behalf of Prime Minister KISHIDA in Japanese is available [here](#).)

4. Discussions with major businesspeople

The thing that I was most grateful for was the opportunity to talk thoroughly with key people of leading companies that have been closely involved with Japan and Australia's economic ties.

This trip has proved to be a unique opportunity for learning, and I shared valuable discussions with representatives from across a wide variety of industries, including Chairman MIMURA, Tokyo Gas Chairman Mr. HIROSE, INPEX Chairman Mr. KITAMURA, Mitsubishi Chairman Mr. KAKIUCHI, and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation Senior Managing Executive Officer Mr. IMAEDA. I would like to sincerely thank all those involved.

5. VIP attendees at the AJBCC

Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Minister NISHIMURA Yasutoshi delivered the keynote speech at this year's AJBCC Conference. Many Australian VIPs were also present, making for an impressive line-up: Trade and Tourism Minister Don Farrell, Victorian Governor Linda Dessau, and South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas.



Australian Minister for Trade and Tourism, Don Farrell, speaking at the AJBCC Conference

I was also present at the meeting between Japanese Foreign Minister HAYASHI and Minister Farrell held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The ministers' meeting reinforced to my encouragement that Australia will continue to be a trusted and reliable exporter and investment

destination for Japan. In addition, both ministers were on the same wavelength while discussing economic security, the CPTPP, IPEF and other elements of our regional economic order.

#### 6. 11 October

Looking back, I believe the timing for this year's conference could not have been better – it was held at the same time as entry requirements for overseas visitors to Japan were lifted (from 11 October). Now, after waiting with bated breath through more than two years of the pandemic, and encouraged by the weak yen, Australians are unimaginably eager to visit. At the same time, the border reopening also brings a valuable business opportunity.

During my brief return to Japan, I was invited by an Australian businessman nicknamed 'Sydney's Great Gatsby' to dinner at his residence in Karuizawa. I was stunned by the bold decision to build an 18-metre indoor swimming pool and sauna at his house in the extreme cold of Karuizawa, where the temperature drops as low as minus 15 degrees – no Japanese person would ever think of such a thing. But of course – we must expect this from those of the great swimming nation that produced Ian Thorpe! I am convinced that in order to improve the quality of Japanese resorts, we need an Aussie's imagination and finance.

I was touched to learn the lengths at which the local Japanese construction workers went to to fulfil his challenging requests, and particularly happy to hear that he appreciated the workers' attention to detail and refusal to compromise on quality, which reflect the skill and determination involved in Japanese craftsmanship.

#### 7. Connecting via cultural exchange

Of course, there is no reason for all of the enthusiasm surrounding travel to Japan to be exhausted on business conferences and tourism. To make the most of my first visit to Karuizawa in two years, I paid a visit to the famed Ohga Hall and had a discussion about the possibility of an Australian orchestra performing there.



The Karuizawa Ohga Hall during autumn

I sincerely hope that in the future, countless Australian artists, such as the Sydney-based Australian Chamber Orchestra (ACO), will come to Ohga Hall to share their wonderful music with the locals of the mountain villages of Shinshu.

In Karuizawa, the leaves were starting to take on their autumn colours.

*In the deep mountains*

*Deer tread through the fallen leaves*

*When they cry*

*One feels the sorrow of autumn*

(Japanese poem by SARUMARU Dayu)

I am sure the beautiful string music of Richard Tognetti and the other musicians of the Australian Chamber Orchestra would captivate even the deer of Karuizawa.

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