

SPEECH

**Presented by HE YAMAGAMI Shingo, Ambassador of Japan to Australia
On the occasion of the Canberra Nara Candle Festival
Saturday 3 December 2022 – Canberra Nara Peace Park**

Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs
Mrs Narelle Hargreaves, Chair of the Canberra Nara Sister City Committee
Ladies and gentlemen
Boys and girls

Good evening

It is wonderful to be here with you all this evening.

Since coming to Canberra, I have heard so much about the Candle Festival.

I have been lucky enough to go to many festivals across Australia that celebrate Japanese traditions and culture as well as our many sister city relationships.

But as someone who now calls Canberra my home away from home, this is the festival I have been holding out for.

And so I congratulate the team at Events ACT, Mrs Hargreaves and the Canberra Nara Sister City committee, as well as the many volunteers in overcoming the challenges to bring back the Candle Festival after four very long years.

Following the success of Floriade, it is great to see Canberra's vitality return greater than ever, despite the recent chilly weather.

During my almost two years in Australia so far, there has been one thing that has stood out the most.

That's the strength of people-to-people exchange in Japan-Australia relations.

And we have you – the very foundation of this relationship – to thank for our increasingly stronger ties.

In under six months of becoming Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese has visited Japan not once, but twice.

And in October, Prime Minister KISHIDA paid his first ever visit to Australia as leader.

It is expected that Prime Minister KISHIDA will come back to Australia for the Quad Leaders' Meeting next year.

Hopefully this time he can pop into Canberra for a quick visit.

Not only to experience the beauty of the Bush Capital, but also because we know that resources cooperation, in areas such as natural gas, is one of our key areas of cooperation.

And Canberra does have a lot of 'hot air'.

Of course, I am talking about the hot air balloons over Lake Burley Griffin!

This festival is a celebration of the sister city relationship between one of Japan's oldest cities and one of Australia's youngest.

It is also a celebration of the ties within this community.

With cooperation from the local Japanese community, many people across Canberra have gathered to bring you a celebration replicating that of a typical Japanese summer festival.

From tasty Japanese festival food to fun cultural activities, there is something for everyone.

And we hope you drop by the Embassy of Japan stall for a range of fun activities, like origami and calligraphy.

With the sister city relationship approaching its 30th anniversary next year, I hope many people in Canberra will have a special affinity with Nara.

And now that Japan's borders are open, now's the time to visit Nara for yourself!

So if you plan on hitting Japan's ski slopes in the next few months, perhaps you could tack on a few days to explore Japan's ancient capital.

I am sure Canberrans will feel right at home in this quiet, charming city where you can escape the hustle and bustle of Tokyo and Osaka.

The famously playful and curious free-range deer are waiting for you, especially if you have some crackers hidden in your back pocket!

So too is Mt Yoshino, which features heavily in Japanese literature, poetry, and song, and becomes covered in cherry blossoms in the spring

And you cannot visit Nara without seeing the Great Buddha statue inside Todaiji temple. This awe-inspiring statue is just a little bigger than the Big Merino in Goulburn. And here we were thinking Australia was the only place where they build 'big things'.

While you are at Todaiji temple, you may even want to try crawling through the hole in one of the pillars there.

It is said the hole is the same size as the Great Buddha's nostril and brings health and happiness to those who successfully crawl through it. I'd recommend attempting this *before* feasting on some of the many delicious foods Nara is famous for.

So after enjoying yourself here at the Candle Festival, I hope you start planning your next trip to Japan and of course, Nara.

Japan is waiting for you!

Thank you.