

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 101):

The Power of “Team Japan”

28 February 2023

We certainly had our work cut out for us earlier this month. I am referring, of course, to the Emperor’s Birthday Reception (EBR), which was held at my Residence on 14 February. Needless to say, this is the biggest event on the Embassy’s calendar, and is treated in Japan as a National Day. For me, this was my third Emperor’s Birthday since I took up my post here. Calling upon all the experiences and personal connections I have cultivated since my arrival, I employed the full force of “Team Japan”. Here is my report from this occasion.

1. Top-tier guests from all walks of life

There is something that has been pointed out to me by many a guest at my Residence in Canberra. That is that compared with other ambassadors’ residences around, the building of the Japanese one does not necessarily stand out – however, its greatest strength is its spacious Japanese garden.

Indeed, in addition to a sizeable lawn, the Japanese garden at my Residence also boasts a pond, stone garden and a pavillion, making it perfect for a stroll. Utilising this space to the maximum, I endeavoured to invite as many people as possible, so that they might enjoy the pleasant weather of February in the southern hemisphere, which is ideal for outdoor functions.



A view of the many guests who flocked to the Reception, enjoying the beautiful weather.

Naturally, I reached out to many in the Australian political, business, public service, academia and journalism, as well as Japanese people (and their spouses) residing in Australia, and those Ambassadors and military attachés from other countries who have close ties with Japan. As a result, over 600 guests attended, blowing last year's figure of 400 completely out of the water.

I was also heartened by the number of people who came from all over Australia, including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Perth, to attend the reception.

2. An impressive line-up of VIPs

Guests of Honour, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Hon Richard Marles MP, and Minister for Trade and Tourism Senator the Hon Don Farrell, made speeches during the official ceremony. Both Ministers have not only made visits to Japan since assuming office last May, but have also shared meals with me at my Residence. I am grateful to swift responses from both upon inviting them to speak at the Emperor's Birthday Reception.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Hon Richard Marles MP (above), and Minister for Trade and Tourism Senator The Hon Don Farrell (below) speaking at the Emperor's Birthday Reception.

Usual custom dictates that toasts be made by the Chief of Protocol of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Ambassador of the host country. Nevertheless, to demonstrate that the Japan-Australia relationship goes beyond the realm of diplomacy, we heard (from the Australian side) from the Chair of the Australia-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group, and Labor Senator for Tasmania, Senator Catryna Bilyk, and (from the Japanese side) President of the Chado Urasenke Tankokai Sydney Association, Mr MATSUNAGA Yoshiaki.



Toasts from Senator Bilyk (left) and President MATSUNAGA (right).

I was also greatly honoured to have in attendance two former Prime Ministers (and good friends of Japan), Hon Tony Abbott AC and Hon Scott Morrison MP. What is more, there were appearances from a number of other distinguished politicians, including Leader of the Opposition, Hon Peter Dutton MP, two former speakers of the House of Representatives - Hon Tony Smith and Andrew Wallace MP, and Shadow Foreign Minister (and former Trade Minister), Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham.



With former prime minister Tony Abbott



With former prime minister Hon Scott Morrison MP, and the CEO of doq Mr SAKUNO Yoshinori



With Leader of the Opposition, Hon Peter Dutton MP

I received positive feedback from a number of Australian guests, who told me, “The VIPs from both sides of Parliament demonstrate how much effort the Embassy puts into networking”. I would say this is also proof that, regardless of political views, the importance of the Japan-Australia relationship is something that everyone can agree on.

I was also delighted to see most of the heads of intelligence organisations and Australian Defence Force service chiefs assembled as well. Seeing this, you can understand the exponential progression of Japan-Australia cooperation in the fields of intelligence and national security.

3. The great power of Japanese businesses

As you can see, this was an exceptional gathering of impressive Australian VIPs. Never ones to let an opportunity like this pass by, 30 Japanese companies and organisations from the motor, apparel, manufacturing, energy, transport, tourism sectors and more came to my Residence to display their wares, show videos and distribute pamphlets about their endeavours.

Gifts from companies such as UNIQLO, Kikkoman, Yakult, Suntory, ITO-EN and JR East also created quite the splash. In UNIQLO's case, not only did they set up their own exhibit inside of a shipping container, but they also gave out down jackets to all guests. I could hear the sounds of jubilation from those who regularly suffer through bitter Canberra winters, and are waiting with baited breath for a store to open here.

There was also a demonstration area for Japanese company WOTA, who brought samples of their cutting-edge water purification technology all the way from Japan. They received much attention from guests, as a company whose solutions match well with Australia's perennial drought problem.

Guests were also treated to two demonstration flights from a Yamaha helicopter-style drone. It was easy to imagine how this would be an indispensable piece of equipment for Australian farmers as it demonstrated water sprinkling. In my speech, I warned the military and intelligence personnel present not to shoot it down and, sure enough, the drone made it safely back to its exact landing point.

(You can read my speech [here](#))



UNIQLO's shipping container display, which drew the attention of many guests.



WOTA's water recycling unit (left two photos), Yamaha's drone (right two photos).

Two great examples of Japan's cutting edge technology.

4. The power of Japanese culture

The theme of this year's Emperor's Birthday Reception was Japan-Australia collaboration.

Because of this, I contacted my friend, Ms Tae Gessner, who put together a well-received kimono show 'WABORI' which was performed both at Japanaroo in 2021 and at last year's Spring Reception at the Embassy. Performers clad in kimono adorned with Indigenous art drew the audience into a world of mysterious beauty. I saw for myself the amazement and excitement of those who enthusiastically watched the performance.

The reception also buzzed with energy and cheer from lively demonstrations by an Australian aikido master, and wonderful musical performances (including the Japanese and Australian National Anthems) from the Royal Australian Navy Band.



The kimono show ‘WABORI’ which fuses Japanese and Australian traditional cultures (top two photos),
the powerful demonstrations from Aikilife Dojo (bottom left),
and beautiful music from two members of the Royal Australian Navy Band (bottom right).

5. The power of Japanese cuisine

Of course, an invaluable part of any reception like this is the food and drink. This is also considered the Embassy of Japan’s biggest ‘selling point’.

Days before the event began, Chef OGATA and staff at my Residence were already giving up their weekend to begin preparations, working hard to ensure that guests could eat their fill of Japanese delights. This included making some 600 plates of sushi and 1800 gyoza dumplings. Seeing my wife and a fair few diplomatic spouses banding together to carefully fold gyoza, I resolved to make sure this reception was a success.



Guests enjoying the food. Minister Farrell also tried the roast beef.

In the midst of this came reinforcements from afar. A very large amount of beef was very generously donated by a farm run by Tokyu in Yanchep, an outer suburb of Perth, Western Australia. Chef OGATA, who originally worked for the Tokyu-run Cerulean Tower Tokyu Hotel in Shibuya, gathered his courage and set about preparing this beef to the best of his ability. I was glad to see that so many guests had the chance to sample this scrumptious dish.



Chef OGATA working hard to prepare the beef. This dish was a huge success – disappearing off plates before you could blink!

To top it off, green tea ice cream from MATCHAMATCHA – a regular EBR favourite – was snapped up in record time. And I need not even mention that Kirin and Asahi beer – both firmly-rooted favourites in Australia – as well as sake from many places including the Tohoku region, quickly gathered a crowd of willing samplers.



The very popular green tea icecream from MATCHAMATCHA (left),
and the various sake served in a very summery fashion (right).

6. The Media

Was the devotion and hard work of all those involved in making the Emperor's Birthday Reception a success adequately conveyed? Just prior to the Reception, commentator Mr Paul Monk wrote a very positive piece for The Australian newspaper, which set the scene like never before.

(You can read Paul Monk's article [here](#))

What is more, Mr IIJIMA Hiroki of TBS rushed down from Sydney with his wife to capture every aspect of the Reception in minute detail for broadcast.

(You can watch the TBS broadcast [here](#))

7. Towards even greater heights

As I have outlined, it was an Emperor's Birthday Reception which symbolised the broadening and deepening of our Japan-Australia relationship.

As I have already been in Australia more than two years, it is likely that this was my last time addressing such a large audience of my friends and acquaintances. Thus, while throwing the usual jokes into my speech, I also opted to sing (rather than read) a few quotes from Frank Sinatra's 'My Way'. Although I tried my best, I was told by Minister Farrell afterwards that I shouldn't give up my day job!



Speaking in front of a serious line-up of VIPs. As an ambassador,
this is one of my most important duties.

This aside, at the 2023 Reception, thanks to those across all levels of society coming together to form “Team Japan”, the Japan-Australia relationship has been boosted to even greater heights. I was engulfed by a sense of achievement as I sipped a glass of Japanese whisky with my guests until after midnight.

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