

# REPORT:

## Local staff working for the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs around the world gather for a study tour in Tokyo.

Last year I was very fortunate to be one of thirty people chosen to participate in a five-day study tour conducted at the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in Tokyo from 16 to 20 November 2009.

Japanese embassies and consulates currently employ around 5,300 local staff in total. The thirty people taking part in the 2009 study tour came from all corners of the world. There were three groups: a senior group, a cultural and public relations group and a consular group. I was in the second group; I am employed within the information and culture section at the Sydney consulate.

For many participants it was their first ever trip to Japan. This included some people who had worked for their embassy or consulate for more than twenty years.

It was not my first time to Japan. I lived in Japan for seven years from 1992, having first gone over as an Assistant Language Teacher on the government-run Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET). I am aware of another person who was a Coordinator of International Relations on JET and there was also a former Monbukagakusho scholar among us. In other words, there were people with varying degrees of in-country

experience, but needless to say, people were very excited by this opportunity to visit Japan, the country they had been promoting or assisting in various ways over so many years.

The first half of the week consisted of a range of briefings and lectures conducted by people from within MOFA and other organisations. Topics included challenges for Japan's diplomacy, Japan's public diplomacy, the role of local staff, information security, internet PR, exchange programs, international law for local staff and a basic understanding of mental illness. The creator of the *Ghost in the Shell* animation TV series and movies, Mr Yoshiaki Sakurai of Production IG, explained how anime are produced and the industry itself. Dr Takanori Shibata of the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science explained the development and use, in Japan and overseas, of the 'mental-calming robot' Paro.

An excursion on Wednesday afternoon included brief stops at the outer grounds of the Imperial Palace and later the Kokugikan, the home of sumo wrestling. In between, we went to Akihabara and toured Digital Hollywood University—a four-year university, established in April 2005, that is dedicated to Japanese pop culture and digital content as

academic disciplines. The final stop was Sensoji Temple, Tokyo's oldest temple, in Asakusa. The next day's excursion to Odaiba included an excellent tour of the Panasonic Centre which introduced some of the latest developments in technology.

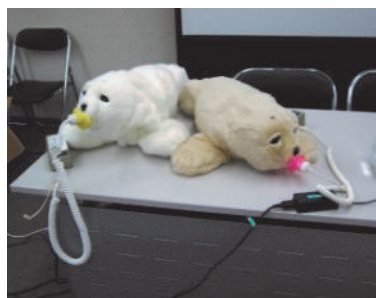
That afternoon, we paid a courtesy call on Mr Koichi Takemasa, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs. We were later presented with a certificate of participation from Mr Kazuhiro Suzuki, Director at the Overseas Establishments Division (MOFA).

The final day was left for individual study and free time. I chose to do and see things not covered by the formal part of the program. One place was the Institute for Nature Study which gave me an idea of Tokyo's original natural environment. I also visited several art galleries showcasing early Arita export ceramics and *Nihonga*, Japanese style paintings.

I really appreciated the opportunity to take part in the study tour. It was a beneficial and positive experience for me, and I feel my participation on the study tour will enable me to perform my duties with renewed confidence.

On a more personal level, I enjoyed meeting new people and those I had worked with during my more than nine years at the Sydney consulate.

Jennifer Schroeder



Sumida Ward is one of the Tokyo districts that bans smoking outside in certain areas as this sign set into the footpath lets you know [left to right]; Asakusa's Sensoji Temple; powering up—two robotic 'mental-calming' seals used in nursing homes in Japan and overseas; the Institute for Nature Study gives visitors an idea of the original forest and marshland habitats of Tokyo.