

## **Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter**

### **No. 16 Alice Springs and Uluru : Looking beyond COVID-19**

29 May 2020

Here in New South Wales, schools returned to full time face-to-face learning from this week. From next week, pubs and restaurants will be able to have up to 50 people dining in, and travel within the state will be permitted. These are significant steps forward. In Sydney, the city's former vibrancy is gradually returning.

Initiatives towards economic recovery for the post-COVID era have also started to be implemented. In his speech at the National Press Club, Prime Minister Morrison announced the JobMaker Plan. He spelt out five basic principles to lead to the success of the Australian economy over the next 3 to 5 years, explaining that these emergency support measures, which draw on future tax revenues, can only be temporary. The Prime Minister also announced concrete measures focusing on skills and industrial relations.

I would like this consulate to begin its journey towards "the time after COVID". Let me start by reporting on something that occurred just before major COVID-19 measures took effect. In mid-March, I made my first business trip to the centre of Australia – to Alice Springs and Uluru in the Northern Territory (NT). There I met with government officials and Japanese residents.

Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock) is very popular with Japanese tourists, having been the setting for a popular drama and movie "Crying Out Love in the Centre of the World" (Sekai no chūshin de, ai o sakebu). Since October last year when climbing the Rock was banned, the number of visitors has decreased. However, by visiting Uluru, you can gain an understanding of Australian history and an important facet of Australian culture, because in this region Aboriginal culture remains strong.

The Northern Territory has strict border restrictions in place, but it was announced yesterday that from 15 June (Monday), the 14 days of mandatory, monitored quarantine for interstate arrivals will transition to 14 days of mandatory, self-

quarantine. Going forward, the challenge is how to further relax state and national border restrictions. In anticipation of restrictions being lifted, I would like to convey the attractions of Central Australia in order to deepen understanding and encourage many Japanese people to visit Alice Springs and Uluru in the future.



**With Alice Springs Mayor Damien Ryan in front of the Town Council  
(12 March 2020)**

Alice Springs (population approx. 30,000) is the largest urban centre in the NT after Darwin (population approx. 130,000). It lies almost at the half-way point between Darwin and Adelaide.

It was here in 1872 that the largest telegraph station was opened on the overland telegraph line that linked north and south. Close by the telegraph station was a spring, and it was named Alice Springs after the wife of the postmaster general of South Australia, which had jurisdiction over the NT at that time. Later, Alice Springs became the name of the town itself.

In 1929, Adelaide and Alice Springs were linked by rail. Then in 2004, the line was extended to Darwin and “The Ghan” made its first transcontinental journey. This began a new era of NT tourism.

In Alice Springs, I first paid a courtesy call on Mayor Damien Ryan. Ten years ago, he visited Ishikawa Prefecture as part of a local government exchange and study tour, and as a result of this connection, he became fond of Japan. We exchanged views about strengthening ties with Japan, including in the areas of tourism, people-to-people exchanges, and energy development.



**Meeting with the NT Minister for Renewable Energy, the Hon. Dale Wakefield  
(12 March 2020)**

I also had a meeting with the NT Minister for Renewable Energy, the Hon. Dale Wakefield, who is from Alice Springs.

Currently, under the cooperation between Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the NT Government, the University of Miyazaki and Sumitomo Electric Industries are preparing to conduct experimental demonstrations of agriculture utilising solar-generated hydrogen in Alice Springs. I was encouraged to hear the Minister explain that the intention is to work actively for the development and utilisation of renewable energy, including the project just mentioned.



Recently, the NT Government announced its “Operation Rebound” economic recovery strategy and the establishment of an Economic Reconstruction Commission in order to overcome the difficulties caused by COVID-19. Minister Wakefield received a new portfolio, appointed the new Minister for Central Australian Reconstruction, and she will have a significant role in the reconstruction. Japan will also do all it can towards its success.



**The main Papunya Tula Gallery  
(12 March 2020)**

In the centre of Alice Springs, there are many art galleries showcasing Aboriginal art. I heard about the history of how the art market has been developed while respecting Aboriginal culture and way of life, and I also learnt some of the meanings behind the imagery in the paintings I saw.

One such gallery is Pupunya Tula, which began its activities in 1972 and is owned by Aboriginal artists. It currently supports around 120 artists. Art works in the gallery possess great character and make you feel the years of history behind them.



**Observing a Japanese class at a local school  
(13 March 2020)**

Japanese language education is flourishing in Alice Springs. I had the opportunity to observe a Japanese class at St Philip's College. I was impressed by how the teacher got the students to 'physically' acquire practical Japanese, by mixing images with hand gestures and body movements and creating a sense of fun in the lesson.

Many students are interested in Japanese language because of anime or travelling to Japan. However, when I reflect of my own experience as a student, one of the major reasons I grew to like a subject was the enthusiasm and character of my teachers. I am delighted to know that in central Australia too there are young people interested in Japan and teachers who teach Japanese language with dedication and enthusiasm.





**Receiving an explanation from the National Park Management Director and an Aboriginal member of the board of management  
(13 March 2020)**

Next, I went to Uluru, where my first visit was to the Cultural Centre to learn about the culture of the local Aboriginal people, Anangu people. I was guided around the centre by the National Park Management Director, who explained that Anangu people first had contact with settlers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and today there is still an ongoing process of dialogue and coexistence.

Uluru was handed back to its traditional owners, Anangu people, in 1985. At the same time, a 99-year lease was agreed to, and the park is managed jointly by Anangu and Parks Australia. The management of Uluru pays greatest respect to Anangu autonomy. The Cultural Centre building symbolises a sacred being, and as such, no photography is allowed within the Cultural Centre precinct. The reason why the ban on climbing Uluru was enacted in October last year is that Uluru is a sacred place for Anangu.



**At a hotel in Uluru  
(14 March 2020)**

At Uluru, I also met with Japanese residents who work in tourism and discussed with them recent trends in the industry. Last year (2019), out of all overseas tourists to the NT, Uluru was most popular with tourists from Japan (US was 2<sup>nd</sup>, UK 3<sup>rd</sup>, Germany 4<sup>th</sup>, China 5<sup>th</sup>). Since climbing Uluru was banned, the number of Japanese tourists has halved, and as of March 2020, there had been no improvement.

However, listening to the background of this trend, it seems that many Japanese travel companies marketed package tours by saying “The great attraction of visiting Uluru is climbing the Rock”, and more recently, packages were promoted saying “Soon you won’t be able to climb Uluru”. Since Uluru closed to climbers, tour companies are unsure how to sell the idea of travelling there. From the perspective of tourists, who heard explanations such as these, climbing Uluru gave a “sense of accomplishment” and became the goal of their trip, and many of them did not see much beyond the climb itself.



Hearing these explanations, I felt that the very fact climbing Uluru is now banned presents an opportunity for Japanese people to discover new attractions at Uluru.



**A shop selling craft products within Ayers Rock Resort  
(14 March 2020)**

At Uluru, Aboriginal culture is well maintained and you can experience this surrounded by nature at its most majestic.

Not only at the Cultural Centre mentioned above, but also within Ayers Rock Resort, there are art galleries and craft stores. While you will find souvenir shops with Aboriginal art in Sydney and at airports, I felt the range of items at craft stores in Uluru was of high quality and great variety – as you would expect in such a location.





**Panoramic view of Uluru  
(13 March 2020)**

When I visited Alice Springs and Uluru, I felt the significance of Aboriginal culture to Australia. I think it helps define what is unique about Australian culture as well as an important part of Australia's perspective of its history and the world.

This week happens to be National Reconciliation Week. National Reconciliation Week was established in 1996 to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community, and it commemorates the 1967 referendum relating to the status of Aboriginal people and the 1992 High Court decision recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' land rights.

As the lifting of state and national borders lies not too far away, I hope that many more Japanese people from Japan, and from wherever they may live in Australia, will travel to Alice Springs and Uluru. I hope this experience will make Japanese learn more about Aboriginal people in Australia, and further deepen mutual understanding and exchange between Japan and Australia.

Transcript of Prime Minister Morrison's address at the National Press Club on the JobMaker Plan

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/address-national-press-club-260520>

Guide to Alice Springs (Tourism Australia)

<https://www.australia.com/en/places/alice-springs-and-surrounds/guide-to-alice-springs.html>

University of Miyazaki's experimental demonstrations of agriculture utilising solar-generated hydrogen (Japanese)

[https://www.miyazaki-u.ac.jp/tech/mediadata/pdf/topic\\_20200129.pdf](https://www.miyazaki-u.ac.jp/tech/mediadata/pdf/topic_20200129.pdf)

Punya Tula (Aboriginal art gallery)

<https://papunyatula.com.au/>

NT Government develops "Operation Rebound" economic recovery strategy and establishes Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission

<https://business.nt.gov.au/business-reforms-and-initiatives/jobs-first-an-economic-vision-for-the-territory>

Minister Wakefield appointed Minister for Central Australian Reconstruction (media release)

<http://newsroom.nt.gov.au/mediaRelease/33324>

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

<https://parksaustralia.gov.au/uluru/>

National Reconciliation Week

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/national-reconciliation-week/>

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