

~ At the start of 2025 ~

Did you have a good start to the New Year?

As for me, it was my first Christmas and New Year holidays since assuming my post as Consul-General here and I saw in the New Year in the heat of a Sydney summer. When you think of New Year's Eve in Sydney, you think of the fireworks on the Harbour Bridge. While there was talk at one point of the fireworks being cancelled, which did make me nervous, I watched the magnificent fireworks as Sydney became one of the very first cities in the world to see in the New Year, and I faced 2025 with a renewed sense of determination.

For lunch on New Year's Day, I ate traditional *o-sechi ryori* and *o-zoni* dishes¹, spending a Japanese-style New Year, but it appeared that Sydney had used up its energy with Christmas, Boxing Day and the New Year's fireworks, and New Year's Day itself passed quietly. It seemed to me that from the second day of the year, the city largely returned to normal, and I felt that it was quite different to the first three days of the year in Japan².

This is how I saw in an exciting New Year and spent a Japanese New Year's Day in Sydney with its season the complete opposite of Japan's, and as I did so, I once again became aware of the importance of promoting Japanese culture to Sydneysiders and engaging their interest in it. With this in mind, I would like to introduce some the Japanese cultural events that I was invited to during my first two and a half months since arriving here.

Firstly, on 24 October, I attended the opening ceremony of the Japanese Film Festival which is presented annually by the Japan Foundation, Sydney. I was impressed by a comment made by Cr Philippa Scott who represented Inner West Council where the film festival is held. She explained that in the Inner West, which is home to many immigrants and where less than half of the residents have both parents born in Australia, multiculturalism is valued. The various communities actively hold cultural events and the Japanese Film Festival was part of such activities.

The opening movie (*Mom, Is That You?! こんにちは、母さん*) was set in a typical downtown area of Tokyo and depicted a love story between seniors and the difficulties a middle-aged man in his 50s faced in his administrative job and his place within his family. Such universal content would also resonate with

¹ *O-sechi ryori* お節料理 is the term used for Japan's traditional New Year's cuisine. A feast for the eyes as well as the tastebuds, the various *o-sechi* dishes often have auspicious associations. You can read more about it in this Nippon.com [article](#). *O-zoni* お雑煮 is a type of soup which includes *mochi* rice cake.

² The first three days of the year in Japan are referred to as SAN-GA-NICHI 三が日 and many businesses and organisations close over the period.

Australians, and I think the film was a balanced portrayal of the characteristics of a Japanese downtown area and of common worries that average people experience in life.



On 26 October, I attended the annual *chakai* (tea ceremony) of the Chado Urasenke Tankokai Sydney Association. I am not well versed in the tea ceremony, and as I listened to the explanations by two Australians, the association president, Dr Peter Armstrong, and Mr Robert Davies, I was somewhat embarrassed by my lack of knowledge, however, I enjoyed the unique *ichi-go ichi-e*³ experience with the appreciation of tea items made by Australian artisans. I also took part in a tea lesson with Australian participants, and together we learnt how to whisk tea and we enjoyed drinking the tea with lovely Japanese sweets (*nerikashi*). As I prepared my own bowl of tea, my interest was further aroused, and I felt that I had glimpsed one small part of the depths of *chado* or “the way of tea”.



On 21 November, I participated in Ikebana International Sydney Chapter’s Christmas Meeting. Ikebana International (II) Sydney Chapter’s activities date back to 1959 and it is made up of 5 ikebana schools. II members brought beautiful flowers from their homes to the meeting; some members came from as far as the foothills of the Blue Mountains. Not even knowing the Japanese names of the plants, for me the English names don’t come easily to mind, but that lack of knowledge didn’t prevent me from truly appreciating the wonderful arrangements that II members created. I also took part in their workshop to

³ 一期一会 *ichi-go ichi-e* is a fundamental philosophy of the tea ceremony. It can be translated as ‘one time, one meeting’ and basically means to appreciate each and every encounter for each is unique and cannot be repeated.

make Christmas decorations using holly and candles. Here I was a little pained by my lack of manual dexterity, but thanks to the skilful help of the instructor, I think I was able to complete the task well enough. I felt that this sort of creative activity is one way to engage the interest of Australians.



On 1 December, I attended the Matsuri Japan Festival, and then on 14 December, Japan Expo 2024.

Matsuri Japan Festival was held for the first time since COVID-19, and moreover, for the first time ever, it was held indoors. The evening before the festival, there was heavy rain, and on the day itself, the weather was unsettled and it rained during the afternoon, but the festival was a great success. Inside the venue, which was brimming with enthusiasm, I delivered a speech at the opening ceremony and took part in the traditional breaking-open of a sake barrel, known as *kagami-wari*.



I also gave a speech and participated in *kagami-wari* at the opening of Japan Expo 2024. This event was another great success, and the crowds confirmed the increasing interest in Japan in line with the growth in the number of Australians visiting Japan. Of particular note this time was the presence of the Reconstruction Agency which had booths right in the middle of the venue introducing the attractions of Fukushima. I think the event was an excellent opportunity for Australian tourists to not only become interested in the major areas of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, but to also look to Japan's many regions and all they have to offer.



Taking part in these events, I again realised that universal elements of Japanese culture are appreciated by Australians and people around the world. This year will again see many Japanese culture related events held around NSW and the NT. Here in Australia, which promotes multiculturalism, I would like to make every effort, no matter how small, to further deepen the understanding and acceptance of Japanese culture among Australians in order to create ever closer ties between Japan and Australia. To that end, I would be very grateful for your ongoing support and advice in the year ahead.