

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Edition 3

~ Inbound Tourism: A Trip to Japan, Welcome to Japan, and Enjoy Japan ~

1 November

(Translation published 4 November)

Yesterday on 31 October, the Governor of Nagano Prefecture, Mr ABE Shuichi, visited this Consulate. I had the honour of briefing Governor Abe about Sydney, and later that evening, I attended a promotional event for Nagano products hosted by the Governor. The delegation comprised almost 30 people from Nagano: in addition to Governor Abe, members included Mayor TAKEFUSHI Yoshitaka (Yamanouchi Town), Mayor MARUYAMA Toshiro (Shiraba Village), Mayor TOMII Toshio (Nozawa Onsen Village), Mr YAMADA Hideki (member of the Nagano Prefectural Assembly), among others. The evening meal was an sublime marriage of products from Nagano Prefecture – including sake – and Australia.

It was a perfectly timed visit. It is anticipated that inbound tourism to Japan will lead to opportunities to greatly stimulate domestic consumption in Japan.



On 11 October, the Government of Japan significantly eased border measures. Since that date, Australians, who meet certain requirements such as vaccination status, no longer need to apply for visas for the purpose of tourism and Japan is welcoming visitors once more.

Since arriving in Sydney, I have heard so many Australians say, “I’m looking forward to my trip to Japan at the end of the year. It will be the first family trip there in a long time.” It seems people have been eagerly awaiting this time.

Pre-COVID, the number of Australian tourists to Japan had been growing exponentially: in 2011, there were around 150,000; in 2014, there were around 300,000; and in 2019, there were more than 600,000. Thanks to their long average stay (around 2 weeks) and average spend while travelling (around ¥250,000, the most of any country), Australian tourists were considered excellent clients, “respectful customers” and sponsors of the Japanese economy. I understand a special characteristic of the Australian inbound market for Japan was the high number of repeat visitors.

During the December and January ski season, many Australians use their summer holidays to visit Japan, and Nagano and Hokkaido prefectures are their two most popular destinations.

Nagano Prefecture is also a special place for me, because when I was in university, I became hooked on skiing. For a beginner, the wide and open ski fields of Tsugaike and Shiga Koen in Nagano were ideal. Nozawa Onsen Snow Resort – what a fantastic combination of skiing and hot springs! In Hakuba, the maximum slope of Happo-o-ne’s “TENBO course” exceeds 30 degrees. TENBO means observation or viewing, but the cliffs on that ski run leave no room to relax and enjoy the view. How my legs cramped on the TENBO course! All this seems most attractive to Australian skiers, so I have learnt from conversations that have blossomed after asking about favourite ski resorts. (My reply? “In addition to Hokkaido and Nagano, there are excellent ski resorts in the Tohoku region including Fukushima prefecture, as well as in Ibaraki and Gunma prefectures among others.”)

Of course, it’s not only skiing that draws Australians. I have heard that many stay on after skiing to enjoy more time in Japan. The spring cherry blossom season is also popular. When I am asked what season is best to go to Japan, I like to recommend late March to early April for the cherry blossoms and October for the autumn leaves. As it’s my own personal hobby, I am always sure to add, “Please do try a hot spring at least once while you’re in Japan.”



Japanese cuisine has long been popular in Sydney. Sushi, wagyu, katsudon, kara-age, ramen – I could list so many. I was delighted to learn just how popular different types of Japanese food are among Australians.

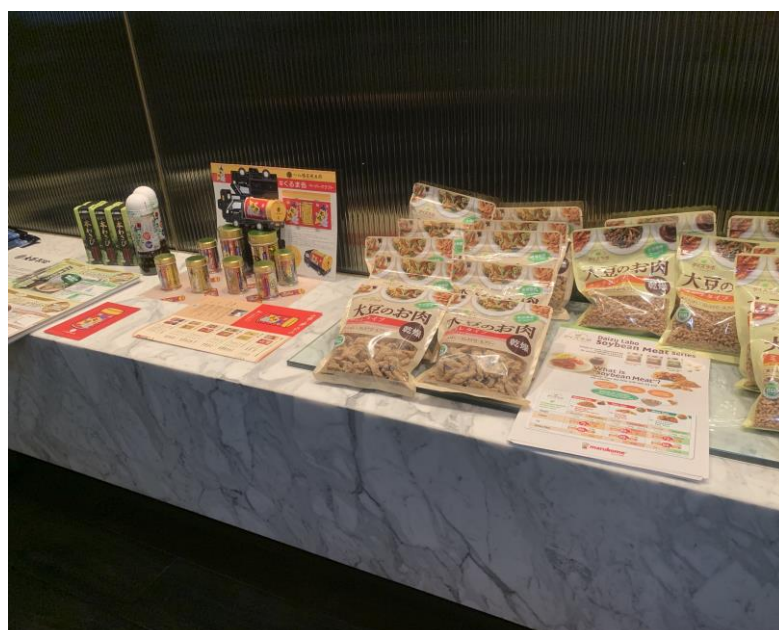
Japanese tea I have given as a souvenir has been received much more warmly than I imagined. A day after one meeting, a certain member of the NSW upper house sent me a photo saying, “With staff, enjoying the tea you gave.”

Sake imports are also increasing. The amount imported in 2021 was approximately 50% higher than the previous year. Soon after I arrived, I was invited to the “Australian Sake Festival”. I was so happy to see sake from my home prefecture there – namely from Kochi Prefecture on the island of Shikoku (and I did have a small taster). I could see that there is great potential to increase sake distribution even further.

For Australian travellers to Japan, I’m told WASHOKU or traditional Japanese cuisine is one of the things they most look forward to experiencing.

Perhaps it reflects a strong desire to be healthy, but I hear that there is a lot of interest in fermented food products such as miso. Eating authentic soba is apparently also high on the list, and there is certainly no shortage of different soba for Australians to try in Nagano Prefecture.

At the promotional event for Nagano products yesterday evening, food was served that had been prepared by Japanese chefs using Nagano products. Due to Australia’s strict quarantine, many products could not be imported, so ingredients were used that are already readily available locally. Despite such restrictions, the reception successfully achieved its aims, showcasing what the cuisine, culture and tourist attractions of Nagano and Japan have to offer, and above all, conveying the warmth of Japanese hospitality – a genuinely felt spirit of “OMOTENASHI”.



Currently, the weaker yen is an issue. For Japanese deployed overseas such as myself, the weaker yen is a blow. Volatile exchange rates are undesirable. However, looking at this issue from another viewpoint, the weaker yen can also provide opportunities to increase the demand for inbound tourism to Japan. Inbound tourism as a means of stimulating domestic consumption was a major inclusion in the package of economic countermeasures announced by Prime Minister Kishida last week.

After the COVID crisis, Japanese airlines (JAL and ANA) have resumed daily direct flights between Japan and Australia.

Japan is ready to welcome Australian visitors – as many as possible.

I hope that Australians will use these summer holidays, and any chance they have in the future, to visit Japan. Having been 'on hold' for some time, Japan has now reopened. I hope many Australians will experience for themselves all that Japan has to offer, will spend up big in Japan (warmly welcomed!) and will come to love Japan more and more.

