

A message from Consul-General Masato Takaoka

Dear Readers, On 20 January, I attended the entrance ceremony for students starting their school life as part of the international stream at the Sydney Japanese International School. In the hot summer weather, it was a rather strange feeling because in Japan the start of school is in the cool of early spring. The mix of nerves and excitement that I saw in the young students' faces was very much the same as their counterparts in Japan.

By the time you read this, the academic year is well underway and business is back to usual. It was my first summer in Australia and I was surprised to see how quiet the city becomes in January.

In contrast, the last month of 2014 was very busy and there were several highlights.

More than 200 guests attended His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday Reception held on 2 December at my official residence. It was a wonderful opportunity to say thank you to so many friends and supporters of the Japan-Australia relationship.



Emperor's Birthday Reception—After speeches by the Consul-General and the guest of honour, the Hon. Bradley Hazzard MP, Attorney-General of NSW, *kagamibiraki* was performed. It is a Japanese custom in which people open the wooden top of a sake barrel with wooden mallets wishing for good fortune and harmony.

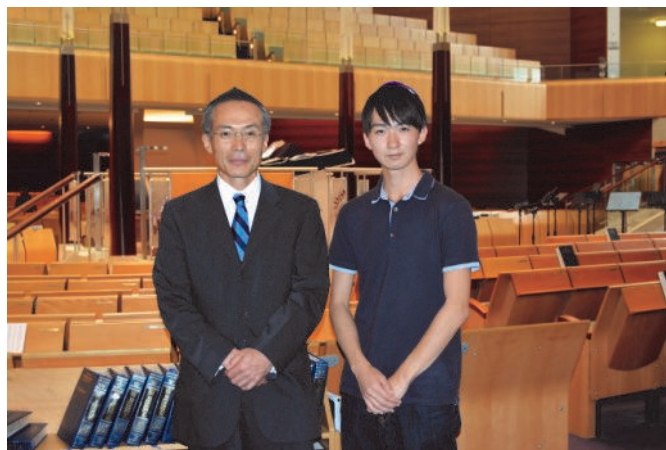
Many more people attended *Matsuri* in Sydney on 13 December. Around 25,000 people came to Tumbalong Park in Darling Harbour to enjoy the summer festival which is a great way for Japanese people to enjoy and share their culture with others.

In the last half of January, I was one of many keen supporters at the Samurai Blue's 2015 Asian Cup matches. Of course, it was disappointing that they didn't get through to the final, but I'm happy for my Australian friends that the hosts made it all the way!

Masato Takaoka

Ceremony to honour Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara at the Sydney Central Synagogue

On 6 December at the Sydney Central Synagogue, a ceremony was held to honour Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara for his efforts in issuing special transit visas to Jewish refugees during the Second World War, which saved thousands of lives. The ceremony was attended by Mr Sugihara's great-grandson, Keisuke Sugihara.



Consul-General Masato Takaoka and Mr Keisuke Sugihara

The ceremony was presided over by Rabbi Levi Wolff, whose maternal grandfather was saved by one of the visas issued by Mr Sugihara. He expressed his undying gratitude for Mr Sugihara's courage and humanitarian actions, without which, his own family would not be alive today.

Consul-General Masato Takaoka was also invited to speak and he praised Mr Sugihara for being a "courageous diplomat of humanity" and for building a bridge between Japan and the Jewish community around the world.

The descendants of those saved by Mr Sugihara's "Visas of Life" expressed their tearful and heartfelt gratitude and a Japanese flag was displayed in the Synagogue to mark this important occasion.

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JAPANESE RESIDENTS ARE ALSO ENCOURAGED TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE MAIL MAGAZINE 「メールマガジン」.

Letters to the Editor

The Editor of *Japan Reports* welcomes any comments and suggestions you may have. Tell us about your experiences of Japan or Japanese culture in Australia.

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