## **Exploring Japanese at the** Nihongo Tanken Centre

The Nihongo Tanken Centre was established by the NSW Department of Education in 1998 to support Japanese language education.

The name Nihongo Tanken means 'exploring Japanese', in the sense of an adventurous expedition into Japanese language and culture.

The centre is located on the grounds of Kirrawee High School in Sydney's south, and provides a stimulating and authentic Japanese environment where students from Kindergarten to Year 12 can use and further develop their

The centre features many Japanese elements including a genkan and a large tatami room with tokonoma and shoji screens. There is also a fully equipped technology room and a Japanese garden.

Upon arrival, staff demonstrate how to enter a Japanese house. Students may have heard that shoes need to be taken off, but they may not know the exact etiquette. Through situational cues, including gesture and watching their peers, students can understand what they need to do. This is the strength of an authentic setting.



Japanese language skills. Each year, approximately 2,500 students visit the centre. Students come from up to 120 schools across NSW, ACT and QLD.

From the initial welcome to the last goodbye, all communication is in Japanese and students are immersed in a complete Japanese experience. Even if students do not fully understand the Japanese language used, they understand through the teachers' gestures and the conversation with other students. Ms Mieko Shida, the centre's coordinator, often hears the students happily say to each other "I actually understand what they are saying!"

The centre's aim is to provide students with the opportunity to enjoy communicating in Japanese and to deepen their interest and understanding of Japanese language and culture. Students practise and extend their skills through engagement in a four-hour program of activities.

Students and teachers experience intercultural language learning and the look and feel of Japan. The program is customised to suit each school's needs. The focus of the program varies to include language skills activities, cultural awareness tasks, craftwork and art, or a combination of all of these.

Visiting teachers and students complete an evaluation after their excursion, with feedback guiding modifications and improvements to the program. The centre aims to ensure that every student has an engaging, enjoyable and successful day.

"I am privileged to be the coordinator of this unique facility and to have the opportunity to meet and communicate with so many different students," says Ms Shida, "and we hope the centre assists, encourages and motivates students and teachers to continue on to the next stage of their Japanese language learning."

Text and images kindly contributed by the Nihongo Tanken Japanese Language Centre

## Australia-Japan **Relations Essay** Contest 2017

Mr Brandon Yoon is the 2016 winner of a trip to Japan. He won the senior division first prize in the 2016 Australia-Japan Relations Essay Contest. When asked for a comment, Brandon was looking forward to travelling in June, his family taking the chance to join him.

I am very thankful to be given the opportunity to travel to Japan, a country that I've always wanted to visit. I look forward to exploring the distinct culture of Japan and immersing myself in a surrounding that is different, or perhaps similar, to that of Sydney.

We hope that he has a great time on his trip and that many students will enter the contest to try for the prize this year!



Tanzaku wishing strips are a major part of tanabata celebrations. While the ancient imperial court once wrote poems, today's tanzaku are more likely to carry wishes for success at school, family happiness, travel and toys.

### Topics announced for the 2017 contest

The aim of the Australia-Japan Relations Essay Contest is to encourage and develop a better understanding of Japan, and Trip to Japan, courtesy of Japan Airlines and JTB Australia Australia-Japan relations, amongst secondary school students A free return economy class air ticket from Sydney to Tokyo in New South Wales and the Northern Territory. Narita, 7-day Japan Rail Pass and 3 nights' accommodation The contest is open to students enrolled in New South Wales at Shiba Park Hotel in Tokyo.\*

and Northern Territory secondary schools, both public and private, including seventh year primary schools in the Northern Territory.

#### Senior Division (Years 9-12): 1300-1600 words

Japan is due to host the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the Olympic Games in 2020. What are some of the lessons Japan can learn from Australia's own hosting of these major sporting events, to lead to the success of the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Olympic Games?

#### Junior Division (Years 7-8): 700-1000 words

Japan is becoming a popular tourist destination for more and more Australians. For example, many Australians enjoy visiting Japan during the winter months for skiing and snowboarding; "Kumano kodou" in Wakayama prefecture is a famous pilgrimage route; and "Edo Wonderland" in Tochigi prefecture is a popular venue for school trips. What advice can you give to enhance Japan to be a friendlier environment for tourists from Australia?

# 七夕祭Tanabata—the star festival

In Japan, 7 July is Tanabata or the Star Festival. Tanabata originated from a legend of two thwarted lovers who were turned into stars and can only meet once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month. Today their annual reunion is seen as a time to make wishes to the heavens.

Stories of star-crossed lovers are as old as time, and Tanabata has existed in Japan for more than 1,200 years. It is thought to have come to Japan during the Nara Period (710-794), but it was during the Edo Period (1603-1867) that it came to be widely observed. It was designated by the Tokugawa Shogunate government as one of five seasonal festivals to be celebrated. Three of those five are still common today and are well known to many students of Japanese in Australia. They are the third day of the third month, today known as the Hinamatsuri or Dolls Day, the fifth day of the fifth month, now known as Children's Day, and Tanabata itself.

While the aristocracy may once have composed poems for the occasion, in modern Japan, Tanabata has in many ways become a children's festival. At kindergartens and primary schools throughout the country, even at local

railway stations, you can see bamboo branches hung with paper ornaments and colourful wishing strips. These wishing strips are known as tanzaku and the wishes written on them

PHOTOS [clockwise from top]: a sake store in historic Takayama displays bamboo Tanabata decorations; simple red lanterns form a wonderful sight in Yamaguchi city during Tanabata; examples of Sendai's spectacular decorations © Y. Nishi / © JNTO | © JNTO | © Yasufumi Nishi / © JNTO



https://education.nsw.gov.au/curriculum/languages/nihongo-tanken-centre

Further information is available at:



#### **Prizes**

#### First Place—Senior Division

\$300 worth of books

First Place—Junior Division School of the Year

\$400 worth of books

Outstanding and Highly Commended prizes will also be awarded in each division.

Entry forms and guidelines are available on our website. or email a request to cginfo@sy.mofa.go.jp to have the documents sent to you.

www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp

DEADLINE: Wednesday 23 August 2017

The contest is grateful for the ongoing support of sponsors Japan Airlines and JTB Australia and its supporter Kinokuniya.

\*Terms and conditions apply. See website for full terms and conditions of travel and other prizes.



range from new toys to luck in exams and health and happiness for the family.

Japan's best known Tanabata festival would have to be Sendai City's in Miyagi Prefecture. Its spectacular decorations are a far cry from simple bamboo branches. Vibrant and intricate designs seem to defy gravity, towering overhead and dwarfing visitors to the festival. There are many





events held as part of the celebrations in Sendai. Sendai's Tanabata festival is held from 6 to 8 August, not on 7 July. Falling one month later is in

keeping with the original seasonality of Tanabata. The date of the festival was based on the lunar calendar, which was used in Japan until the Meiji Restoration (1868).

Today more than 2 million people visit Sendai every year to enjoy the Tanabata festivities. With Tanabata celebrated throughout Japan, the festival is certainly something to consider should you be planning a summer trip to Japan.