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## Correspondence

### Spring in **Toyama**: Great Walls of *Yuki-no-Otani* and Other Fulfilling Experiences

#### *Yuki-no-Otani* (“Snow Canyon”): Giant Snow Walls That Approach 20 Metres



*Yuki-no-Otani* is a spring attraction of the world-famous Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route. The sight of buses driving between giant snow walls nearly 20 metres high is simply spectacular. Visitors are not only able to view the scene from inside bus windows; from 17 April to 10 June, about 500 metres is specially open to pedestrians in the “*Yuki-no-Otani Walk*,” allowing you to feel the grand scale of the snow walls from up close.

*Yuki-no-Otani* is located in Tateyama Murodo-daira, at 2,450 metres high. This area receives some of the heaviest snowfall in the world, and winter brings approximately 8 metres of snow. Snow is especially likely to accumulate in the “*Otani*” area due to the wind, sometimes reaching 20 metres per second.

The “walls” that are created by removing snow on the road here become what is called “*Yuki-no-Otani*.” There is so much snow that walls of snow almost 10 metres high remain into late June.

#### Creating the *Yuki-no-Otani*

Wooden poles that are placed in autumn to mark both sides of the road are sought out using GPS, and snow removal operations begin. The road, buried in snow, is slowly dug out using a large bulldozer to create the “*Yuki-no-Otani*.”

Springtime in Toyama also has wonderful food. *Hotaruika* (firefly squid) has a distinctive texture and sweetness, and Toyama Bay *shiroebi* (white shrimp) is known as the “jewels of the sea” from its glistening white appearance. Delicious dishes that make ample use of these ingredients are sure to satisfy you.

Also highly recommended is Toyama Bay sushi, which has some of the best fish and shellfish in Japan.



Get out and enjoy spring in Toyama!

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## Spring in Toyama: Fields of Tulips and Rows of Cherry Blossoms



Toyama cultivates the most tulip bulbs in Japan.

In the Tonami region, you can see vast fields of tulips blooming in the spring. At the Tonami Tulip Fair, held from 25 April to 6 May, you can enjoy the sight of a million tulips.

The Tulip Gallery, located within the fairgrounds, is a botanical garden that focuses on tulips. Tulip related exhibits, a café, and a gift shop are available. It is the only facility in the world where it is possible to enjoy flowering tulips all year round.



From early to mid-April, Toyama's cherry blossoms are in full bloom. The cherry blossom trees along the Matsukawa (River) in Toyama City is a perfect place to *hanami* (flower-viewing party). You can ride the boat for a refined cherry blossom appreciation experience. Also, Takaoka Kojo Park boasts 27,000 cherry blossom trees. These two places are both listed in "Japan's Top 100 Cherry Blossom Spots."

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### Contact Information:

Tourism Division, Toyama Prefectural Government: +81-76-444-8752

Toyama Tourism Navigator: <http://www.info-toyama.com> (available in Japanese, English, Korean, Chinese [Traditional and Simplified] and Russian)

## Mayor of Yaizu visits Hobart

~ Photo and Article by Hobart City Council ~

In November 2013 the Mayor of Yaizu, Hobart's sister city in Japan, Mr Hiromichi Nakano visited Hobart, Tasmania and attended the 2013 Myer Hobart Christmas Pageant.

The Hobart-Yaizu Sister City Committee and local schools participated in the pageant carrying a custom built *Omikoshi* (portable shrine) which had been constructed by Hobart high school students for this special event.

This was Mr. Nakano's first visit to Hobart since being elected as Yaizu Mayor in November 2012.

Over the three days of the visit, the Mayor and his accompanying Yaizu City staff visited the City of Hobart's Tip Shop and new Waste Management Centre, toured Cascade Brewery and did some shopping at Salamanca Market.

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After a meeting with the Lord Mayor of Hobart, Alderman Damon Thomas, both Mayors listened to stories from eight Hobart students who participated in the student exchange trip to Yaizu that took place in October 2013.

Alderman Thomas said "This vibrant and ongoing relationship is enriched by students and the community visiting each other's countries and helps to develop an understanding of another culture and language".

The City of Hobart and Yaizu City have developed a strong sister city relationship over the past 35 years. One ongoing initiative between the sister cities is the annual student exchange which has taken place over the past 24 years and has involved hundreds of students. Visitors from Yaizu, City of Hobart staff and the Yaizu-Hobart Friendship Association also worked together to participate in the 2012/2013 Taste of Tasmania Festival.



*Image courtesy of Eric Graudins*

### ***Would you like to share your activities in our newsletter?***

If your organisation is interested in having your article in our monthly newsletter, please feel free to contact us at [mailbox@jlgc.org.au](mailto:mailbox@jlgc.org.au).

## **Delegation visits Tokyo and Aomori for the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar**

Six people from Australian and New Zealand local governments and related organisations visited Tokyo and Aomori as part of the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar.

In Aomori the seminar's theme was winter tourism, which makes the most out of the regional resources. Among other activities highlighting Aomori's tourism resources, the participants went to Hakkoda and experienced snow trekking through "Snow Monsters" (pine trees covered in snow and ice) and later got on the "stove train", which has coal stoves on board. After returning home, the participants told us that they wish to advertise positively about Aomori, and proposed to help Aomori attract more tourists.



*A media release was published by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) at UTS about its Director Associate Professor Roberta Ryan and her recent visit to Japan for the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar.*

<ACELG Media Release - Friday 14 February, 2014 - >

## **Promoting Australian tourism to Japan leads the discussion at the CLAIR Local Government International Exchange and Cooperation Seminar in Japan**



Associate Professor Roberta Ryan, Director of the UTS Centre for Local Government (UTS: CLG) and Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG), recently headed a delegation of Australian and New Zealand government representatives to Aomori Prefecture, Japan.

The delegation was organised by The Japan Local Government Centre (CLAIR Sydney). The group participated in the Local Government International Exchange and Cooperation Seminar that focused the role of local government in regional economic development and enhancing local government international alliances.

The CLAIR Seminar presents an opportunity for local and state government executives from around the world to come together with their Japanese counterparts to engage in discussions regarding the current conditions and challenges facing local governments.

CLAIR Sydney Director, Mr Yasuhiko Tanabe said:

“I think this year’s Seminar was a great success and can be a model for learning from each other about challenges local governments face. All the participants learned a great deal about Japanese local governments’ activities, especially to do with local tourism promotion.

“The Aomori prefectural government received valuable suggestions for assisting building of the tourism industry. I express my special thanks to Roberta for leading the delegation.”

The role of local government in regional economic development was the main topic of discussion at the seminar. In Japan, tourism is a major component of driving regional economic development and was thus the focus of the seminar in Aomori Prefecture.

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'How can we increase the number of Australian travellers to Aomori Prefecture?' was the question posed to the Australian participants.

Associate Professor Roberta Ryan commented:

"Australia and Japan have much to share on local government and the role of local government in economic development. At present, ACELG and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) have established a new research partnership aimed at enhancing local government international alliances, and the input from our CLAIR colleagues will inform this work.



"It was tremendous honour to lead this delegation and meet our counterparts in Aomori Prefecture. On behalf of the delegation I thank CLAIR Sydney and their associates in Japan for facilitating such a professionally engaging and truly remarkable experience."

At present, tourism from Australia to Japan takes place predominantly during Japan's winter months for the skiing and snowboarding enthusiasts. In January 2013, a total of 31,700 Australians visited Japan, compared to 22,192 in January 2012, a record high. The strong Australian dollar and the corresponding weak yen make Japan an attractive and cost effective travel destination for Australians, where they can get more for their dollar. However, for Aomori Prefecture, as few as 1,000 Australians visit the region annually.

Aomori Prefecture offers a cultural experience all year round – the Nebuta summer festival which attracts more than 4million visitors; ski resorts and world heritage listed parklands which are ideal for nature lovers; and an amazing selection of local specialties including seafood - scallops, flounder, tuna and yam. For Australian foodies, it is a culinary paradise. One participant summed up her experience of Japanese food from Aomori as '*an intangible cultural asset*'.



ACELG's current research will explore the policy context for international relationships and identify the essential elements that underpin successful arrangements. As part of the research, Australia – Japan sister city relations will be the basis for exploring greater strategic alliances with local governments in Japan.

Top photo Caption: *The 2014 CLAIR delegation with Professor Shunsuke Kimura.*

From left to right: James Walker (Alderman, Clarence City Council); Professor Shunsuke Kimura (Hitotsubashi University, Graduate School of Law); Neil Selmon (Director Planning Coordination & Support, NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure); A/Professor Roberta Ryan (University of Technology, Sydney); Annie Riordan (Director, Corporate & Community Services, Shire of Augusta-Margaret River); Nicola Burgess (Promotions Officer, Whakatane District Council, NZ), Sim Hayward (Chair, Cairns Sister Cities Advisory Committee).

Media Release Link: <http://www.acelg.org.au/news/director-leads-local-government-delegation-japan>

## Support for **Aomori Prefecture** in its Tourism Promotion

CLAIR Sydney assisted Vice Governor of Aomori Ikuo Sasaki and four other government staff, who visited Sydney to promote tourism to Aomori. In order to do so, we visited travel and airline agencies and held a ski seminar aimed at travel agencies and the tourism press. At the seminar the region was introduced as an area with untouched nature, beautiful four seasons and culture. Assistant Director of CLAIR Hiroaki Seino, who is himself from Aomori Prefecture, told the audience that Hakkoda is one of the area in Japan with the most snowfall and that Hakkoda has incredibly deep powder snow. An impressive skiing footage was then screened, followed by a talk from an online journalist who has first hand experience skiing in Hakkoda. Mr. Neil Selmon, who has

just gotten back to Australia from the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation seminar, then took the stage and shared his Aomori winter tourism experience. Participants in the seminar highly rated the Aomori tourism seminar, noting that they found it very informative and were very impressed with the talks.



## Assisting delegates from **Oita Prefecture**



Between 24-25 February staff from Oita Prefecture as well as accommodation operators from Oita visited Sydney and Melbourne to promote tourism to their region.

Jetstar Airways has recently begun a service between Oita and Narita, this visit thus being a very good opportunity to promote Oita tourism to the Australian market.

The delegation visited JNTO Sydney, Jetstar Airways and some local travel agencies. They promoted Oita tourism, especially the hot springs, and researched about the Australia tourism market.

## Supporting **Kochi Prefecture**

Kochi Prefecture held an event to promote Kochi products such as Yuzu (Japanese citrus fruit), eel and sake (rice wine). CLAIR Sydney assisted the delegation with their activities.

The event was held at the RACV Club in Melbourne CBD on 27 February. This event, to which 129 people including local chefs and the press attended, featured four famous chefs who cooked 17 modern Japanese dishes and sweets.

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This event was triggered by previous visits to Australia, and is part of a promotion that is ongoing. Kochi would like to explore new business opportunities in Australia. Yuzu from Kochi accounts for half of Japan's Yuzu production and it is already being exported to France and Singapore, with huge success.



## Supporting Dr. Yoshida and her research into **refugee and asylum seeker assistance** in Australia (24-26 February)

From 24-26 March 2014 CLAIR Sydney assisted Assistant Professor Michiyo Yoshida of Setsunan University, Department of Foreign Studies, by making – and accompanying her to – appointments with several organisations. Dr. Yoshida is researching into issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

In Adelaide, where there are two Immigration detention facilities, we visited 7 non-profit organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers. They were interviewed about the influence the new Government's policy has on accepting refugees, the methodology when dealing with people with trauma, the cooperation with governmental bodies and other related organisations, and their efforts to gain the understanding from citizens.

This research mission served to be a very useful reference in building a convivial society based on diverse backgrounds.

We would like to thank all visited organisations for their cooperation with Dr. Yoshida's research.



~ Photos and Articles by JETAAWA ~

### kaiWA

In around 2007, JETAAWA was looking for a way to maintain its activities on a regular basis, rather than simply holding key events every few months. Of course, all being volunteers, we needed to make sure the idea was not prohibitively labour-intensive.

We also wanted to make sure that we were catering to the interests of our ex-JET members in preserving their links to the real, living Japan. The best way to do that, we thought, was to devise an event that attracted Japanese residents of WA, through discussions with whom our members could get their Japan 'fix'.

Of course, that meant the event needed to be able to offer something to those Japanese residents too!

The solution was 会 WA (kaiWA), a casual language and cultural exchange event that has been held every fortnight since.

The venue is an inner-city pub, which is convenient and attractive for both ex-JET professionals working in the city, and local Japanese people.

We bring a lot of business to the venue, so room hire is free. We 'charge' a \$2 donation for entry, which we then use to buy snacks for everyone from the bar.

Being open to the public, kaiWA is also a great way to promote the JET Programme itself (and related events) to potential applicants – as well as to Japanese visitors who are then proactive in making contact with and supporting current JETs when they return to their homes in Japan. It's win-win!

See <https://www.facebook.com/kaiWAJETAAWA>



### World of Food – Japan Festival



In November 2013, JETAAWA was fortunate enough to be invited by the Perth Consulate-General to participate in the 'World of Food Festival', an event organised by the consular bodies of various countries in Perth.

While the Consulate itself prepared yaki-soba, JETAAWA catered to the thirsty masses by selling かき氷 (kaki-gori), or shaved ice, a staple of any Japanese summer festival.

The idea proved a great fundraiser for JETAAWA, so in February 2014 we repeated it at the first Japan Festival in Perth's Forrest Place. We sourced high-quality syrups and a number of ice crushers, and again took advantage of the Perth summer to sell around 1,000 serves of kaki-gori, including our own recipe for a green-tea speciality!



We were also able to use our stall to promote our activities and the JET Programme in general, via word of mouth, flyers and a specially prepared video presentation.

## Examples of advanced policies of Japanese local governments

To learn from each other about advanced policies of local governments is very important not only domestically but also internationally.

One of the missions of CLAIR is to conduct international research about local governments' challenges of other countries and introduce them to Japanese local governments.

CLAIR also started introducing the unique policies of Japanese local governments in English. I would like to show you the case of Kanagawa prefecture.

Since 2011, Kanagawa Prefecture has promoted the "Kanagawa Smart Energy Concept" that promotes "energy creation," "energy saving" and "energy storage" in a comprehensive manner toward establishing a distributed energy system led by local communities. As part of the efforts for widespread introduction of solar power systems, a key measure for "energy creation," the Prefecture has been committed to operation of a "Kanagawa Solar Bank System" since December 2011. This is the first approach among local governments in Japan that aims to ensure citizens can introduce residential photovoltaic (PV) systems at reasonable cost without any concerns through collaboration between the Prefecture, solar panel manufacturers, distributors and construction contractors.

For more detail and examples, please visit <http://www.clair.or.jp/j/forum/pub/docs/2014fact.pdf>.



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