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Festivals around Japan: Vol. 6 Rokunohe Town, Aomori

- Rokunohe Autumn Festival in Rokunohe, Aomori



Giant decorative 'Dashi float'

On paper, Rokunohe is a small, quiet rural town in the big prefecture of Aomori. However, over the course of three days in late September, Rokunohe's Aki Matsuri (Autumn festival) transforms this quaint locale into a buzzing hive of energetic festivity. Most tourists are drawn to Aomori by the promise of bombast and spectacle at its famous Nebuta Matsuri where a large assortment of giant decorative *dashi* floats are paraded to stunning effect through the streets of the city. Not to be outdone, Rokunohe's Aki Matsuri also features a

stunning array of floats that give the festival a sense of grand scale that entirely belies the town's small size. Some of these floats are rented or borrowed from other parts of the prefecture; however there are also a number of floats made locally by dedicated teams from the neighbourhoods around the town. These home-grown Rokunohe floats often break away from the established tradition of being thematically related to and evocative of traditional Japanese folk lore, and instead are sometimes reflective of current trends in popular culture. In years past, even beloved *Nintendo* and *Yokai Watch* characters have made appearances.

While the larger Nebuta Matsuri famously put a stopper to the popular Star Wars float appearing in the main parade last year on account of it not matching tradition, Rokunohe Aki Matsuri is far more liberal and allows floats of any subject matter to take the stage.

This openness may be in part due to the fact that Aki Matsuri is less about displaying an idealised version of Japanese culture to an eager audience of onlookers from abroad, and more about celebrating more universal values such as family and a love of home. Proud grandparents are squeezed into small corners on the side of the road as they wave and smile with great pride at their children and grandchildren pulling the floats,

manning the drums and puffing away at the flutes that make up the busy parade. The procession is built around the return of a Japanese *Kami Sama* god from his current residence at a local shrine, to his former home - a sacred grove where he was enshrined centuries ago. This central theme of *satogaeri* or 'going home' is embodied by the many people who over the years have moved away from the town, but loyally return each year to partake in the festivities and to celebrate the place where their life began.

In this way, Aki Matsuri presents to us a more modest view

of Japan as a country of people who value their roots, love their families and enjoy a good party, too.



*Mikoshi, portable shrine,
for Japanese Kami sama god*

*JET Program Coordinator of International Relations in Rokunohe
Benjamin Wilson*

Information on Japanese Local Government System and JET Programme shared in New Zealand

Presentations by CLAIR on Japan's local governments, the JET Programme and the JET Alumni Association(JETAA)'s activities for Mayors, CEOs and other officials as part of the SCNZ Regional Focus Group Meeting were held at Rotorua Lakes Council. Participants were grateful for the information and were interested in collaborating with JETAA.



Talks on sister-city relationships were lively as they discussed a variety of different topics including difficulties, issues, benefits and how to best measure them, and how to engage different organisations and the community (particularly young people). They also talked about what activities are most popular between sister cities.



Support for Nagoya student delegation to Geelong City based on Wetlands Partnership Agreement



March 27-30, a delegation of 18 junior high school students flew to Geelong city from the City of Nagoya to investigate migratory birds in the region and the natural environment.

The students made presentations to local primary students and parents on the ways to protect a Ramsar wetland named Fujimae Tidal Flats, and local culture & food of Nagoya. After the presentation they, together with the local students, checked out Swan Bay Ramsar wetland, an important habitat for migratory birds.

Deputy Mayor Bruce Harwood, who was Mayor when the wetlands agreement was signed by the two cities, said in his greeting about this exchange program, which has now taken place five times, “Environmental issues are not constrained by borders or cultures – our agreement is in place to help protect the birds that rely on habitats in both our cities for their continued survival. Our collaboration not only means a better result for the birds but is a valuable and enjoyable cultural exchange as well.”

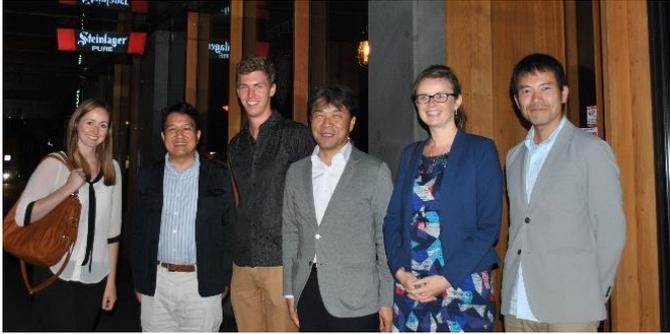


CLAIR Sydney not only helped organise the itinerary and provided information on possible places to visit, but also helped the students with their presentation by suggesting some useful Aussie phrases.

CLAIR's participation will help ensure further exchanges between these two cities.



Our chairperson visited New Zealand and Australia



On 2 March, CLAIR Chairperson, Mr Tamotsu Okamoto, met with committee members of the South-Island chapter of JETAA and on the following day he met with their counterparts at the Wellington chapter of JETAA.

During the meetings attendees discussed the JET Programme, especially on how to teach English with Japanese English teachers, get people excited about the 30th Anniversary of the JET Programme and use the programme effectively to promote the Rugby World Cup in 2019 from a New Zealand JET participants' perspective.

The JET Programme has a lot of participants from all over the world. After graduating the programme, many of them act as bridges between Japan and their countries. We felt that JETAA's activities will continue to get bigger and better and positively impact the programme thanks to these productive meetings.

On 2 March he laid a floral tribute to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the victims of the Canterbury Region Earthquakes in Christchurch.



On 5 March the Chairperson met with Mr and Mrs McClintock. Mr McClintock was a former president of the Australia-Japan Societies. We talked about ideas to strengthen ties between Australia and Japan. He was in Japan during the Japan World Exposition in 1970. That is the impetus for him to improve ties between Australia and Japan. In the near future, as Japan will host the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, we will do all we can to make it accessible for all members of the international community.



Promoting JET Programme at the Griffith University Career Fair



On 10 March, Tomohiro Koike, our Assistant Director attended a Career Fair at the Griffith University Gold Coast to promote the JET Programme along with members of JETAA QLD. The JET Programme offers university graduates the opportunity to live and work in Japan for up to 5 years. After passing some selection criteria, JET participants are able to work in Japanese schools to assist language teachers (mainly English), or in Japanese local governments to become involved in their international-relations projects and so on.

Many students who were interested in Japan came and asked JETAA members about what they could expect from the JET Programme. Not only students who knew about the JET Programme dropped by to say hi, students who had no previous knowledge or interest in the programme also came by for a chat. We hope that more and more people want to become JET participants and do great things in Japan.

For more information about the JET Programme, visit <http://www.jetprogramme.org>

JETAA Queensland Activities

~Article and photos from Laura Massingham, Vice President, JETAA Queensland~

On Thursday 10 March, JETAA Queensland committee members manned a booth at the Griffith University career fair to promote the JET Programme to soon-to-be university graduates.

We spoke with some great potential candidates from a range of disciplines. Some of our visitors already knew of the JET Programme and were keen to speak with us about our amazing experiences. Others were totally unaware of the Programme, spoke no Japanese, but went away with a new option to consider after they graduate. This is the first year we have attended the Griffith University Gold Coast careers fair. We have had a booth at the University of Queensland (UQ) careers fair in Brisbane every year for more than ten years, and we have found it to be a valuable promotional activity for the JET Programme.



At this year's JET Programme interviews, several candidates mentioned that they heard about the JET Programme at the UQ careers fair. That was us! Hearing that comment from quality applicants who have made it to the interview round reaffirmed in our minds that our annual careers fair activity is achieving one of our keys goals to promote the Programme. This year we thought we'd try a different university, and sure enough, the experience was just as successful. It is a tangible reward to see people's faces light up when they realise what a great opportunity the JET Programme offers, and that they have a real chance of being a part of it.

Next year we plan to ask CLAIR for funding for booths at both the UQ and Griffith careers fairs. We strongly encourage other chapters to do the same at their local universities.

Special thanks goes to Koike-san from CLAIR Sydney for joining us at the booth and providing the promotional materials.

Introducing New Staff Members



Yu Kawamura

Assistant Director

from Rokunohe Town, Aomori

Hello, I'm Yu Kawamura. I'm from a town called Rokunohe in Aomori Prefecture. Rokunohe is located in the northern part of Japan. The population of Rokunohe is about 11,000 people, so it is a very small town. The major industry of my town is agriculture, especially garlic, Chinese yams, carrots, and burdock root which are cultivated on a large scale. If you would like to learn more about Rokunohe please visit Rokunohe's website: <http://www.town.rokunohe.aomori.jp/english.html>

The website was actually made by a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) from Australia. We currently have one CIR from Sydney and previously had two other CIRs from Australia. It almost seems like it's my fate to be involved with Australia.

I'm excited for my new life in Sydney and I'm looking forward to meeting a lot of people from Australia and New Zealand. I consider Australia and New Zealand to be two of the most advanced countries in the world. I'm hoping to learn more about their way of thinking, government institutions and lifestyle and in exchange share my knowledge of Japan.

Hello, my name is Motohiro Suzuki. I joined CLAIR last September, and I was in the International Exchange Division for six months. I'm from Hokkaido Prefecture in Japan. Amongst Australians, Hokkaido is famous for skiing and snowboarding. In summer, Hokkaido is very comfortable because it doesn't get too hot. I recommend everyone to visit Hokkaido in summer as well as winter.

My hobbies are playing tennis and traveling. I look forward to traveling around Australia and New Zealand, and meeting new people. I will be staying in Sydney for two years from this April. I moved here with my wife and my one year old son. This is our first time living overseas. I am excited to be experiencing a lot of new things. I am looking forward to meeting you!



Motohiro Suzuki

Assistant Director

from Hokkaido Prefecture



Rina Okamoto

Assistant Director

from Ide Town, Kyoto

Hello, my name is Rina Okamoto. I was born and raised in a small rural town called Ide, south of Kyoto and north of Nara. My town has beautiful nature, warm countryside vistas, and friendly people. It's blessed with big cherry blossom trees. Please try and go there if you are interested.

This is my first time living overseas so I'm a bit nervous but I believe this will be a positive life-changing event. I will be working at CLAIR Sydney for two years from this April. I will try my best to get used to my new job and life.

I'm really looking forward to working with new people and learning about the local government system and culture in Australia.

I hope to share a lot of things with many people!

Hello, my name is Nanako Shimada. I am from Kobe City Government in Hyogo Prefecture. My city, Kobe - located near Kyoto and Osaka - is well known for Kobe beef, Nada sake breweries and Arima hot spring etc. You can find more information on sightseeing in Kobe through this link: <http://www.feel-kobe.jp/en/>

Furthermore Kobe is one of the major global trading ports in Japan and overseas residents from more than 120 countries live in Kobe. Therefore, I would like to do research on multiculturalism in Australia and New Zealand.

This is my first time to live in Australia. I am excited for my new life in Sydney and looking forward to meeting Australian and New Zealand people.



Nanako Shimada

Assistant Director

from Kobe City, Hyogo



Tetsuya Komatsu

Assistant Director

from Tokyo Metropolis

My name is Toshiya Komatsu. I was dispatched from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) to CLAIR Sydney. I was born and grew up in Tokyo. Tokyo has been a sister state of NSW since 1984. Tokyo and NSW have been keeping good relations, highlighted recently by the Premier of NSW, Mr Mike Baird's visit to TMG in 2015.

As the centre of politics, economics and culture in Japan, Tokyo has a lot of things which attract people. If you are interested in Tokyo, you can find information in the website: <http://www.metro.tokyo.jp/ENGLISH/index.htm>

I believe that I will learn many things during my secondment, like government policies in Australia and New Zealand and other things too.

My hobbies are practicing martial arts and traveling abroad; however, I'd like to try lots of different activities. I'm looking forward to having many experiences and interactions with new people.

From the Director

8 – Election in Local Governments - A Year of Local Governments in Japan

April is the season of local government elections. Last April, 10 governor and 41 prefectural assembly elections were held within 47 prefectures. Within 1,741 municipalities, 227 mayor and 706 municipal assembly elections were also held. The current Japanese local government system was introduced in 1947, and governors, mayors and respective assembly members began to be elected under the new system. Both prefectural and municipal terms are for four years, so elections are held every four years but simultaneous elections have gradually decreased due to resignations of some governors and mayors, dissolutions of assemblies and amalgamations of municipalities.

Almost all election days are Sundays because most workers have this day off. Holding elections on Sundays is also feasible in Japan as there is minimal religious influence, meaning most voters would be free to participate.

Polling stations are usually open from 7 am to 8 pm. Every voter has the option to vote before the election day making the process flexible whilst encouraging a higher turnout. However, the voting percentage remains between 30 to 70 percent.

Governors and mayors are directly elected and of course only one person is elected in each local government. This differs from the respective prefectural and municipal members' election where each tier sets a number of seats which must be filled. In most cases, municipal assembly members are elected from whole areas (all districts within a municipality combined), so some constituencies might even reach 30 or 40 seats. However, every voter has only one vote, so some candidates who obtain only 2% of votes can still win a seat as there is a seat limit to be reached.

Voters write down a candidate's name on a voting slip instead of choosing from a list. This means some slips risk being difficult to read during the counting of votes. Regardless, local government officers must persevere and count the votes on election day night and announce the results of the ballot counting as soon as possible.

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