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Local Cuisine around Japan: Vol. 7 Kumamoto

Takamoridengaku

In this article we will be introducing "Takamoridengaku", the popular dish of Takamori Town, Kumamoto Prefecture.

Dengaku is a sweet miso paste glazed and grilled tofu skewer.

Long ago, a custom began in rural areas to pray for prosperous grain harvests. This usually meant dancing to the sound of traditional Japanese drums during planting season and harvest festivals. The dancers wearing traditional white "hakamas" (trousers) and earth tone tops are called dengaku performers.

Not only do they dance to the sound of drums, they also dance and jump around on traditional bamboo stilts. The colours of the sweet skewer delicacy, originally being a skewer of grilled tofu glazed with miso, closely resembled the attire of the dengaku performers and as such the dish was called dengaku.

How about Takamoridengaku? Well, 250 years ago, people from Takamori that travelled around Japan ate dengaku in places like Kyoto and Izumo and came up with the idea to include local produce in the recipe. This led to the inclusion of Takamori taro or "tsuru no ko imo", fish, konyaku jelly and many other delicious foods in the recipe.



Salmon raised in crystal clear streams, tofu lovingly crafted using Takamori's famous spring water, konyaku jelly with its delightful texture and umami-packed flavour profile, and seasonal vegetables are generously coated in special homemade miso sauce and then slowly roasted over traditional Irori fireplaces giving this dish its beautiful aroma.

Slipping back into ancient Japan is easy when you stop by one of Takamori's lush farm villages to eat dengaku at a traditional and picturesque thatched roof house.

As is the case with many traditions, the popularity of dengaku has diminished with the passage of time and overall change in lifestyle of many Japanese. However, the perfectly preserved nature of Takamori Town along with its continual observance of traditional customs means that the taste of Takamori dengaku remains the same as it was centuries ago.



Participating in the Networking Event “Shaberanaito”

“Shaberanaito” (Japanese Language Practice Night) was held on the evening of 7 April. The Australia-Japan Society (AJS) and JETAA NSW organised this networking event which aims to foster relationships between Japanese people living in Australia and people who are interested in Japan.

Our Deputy Director and eight members from CLAIR Sydney joined in and conversed with attendees about Japanese and Australian culture and the environment. It was fun and relaxing for new staff members of CLAIR Sydney to speak in Japanese and connect with locals. We would like to thank AJS and JETAA NSW for holding such a wonderful event. Our Deputy Director and staff members had a fun time and are grateful to have been part of a great evening of idea exchanges and networking.

Union of Kansai Governments

On 19 April, a reception was held at the Intercontinental Hotel Sydney by the Union of Kansai Governments which included the Governor of Kyoto Prefecture, Mr. Keiji Yamada, and the Governor of Shiga Prefecture, Mr. Taizo Mikazuki. The



reception was held to welcome the visiting government officials and to promote tourism in the Kansai region. The visiting officials exchanged views and opinions with Australian travel agents and media stakeholders that were invited to the event.



A group of samurai actors from the Toei Kyoto Studio performed a samurai sword sequence for the attendees and even got some volunteers from the audience to participate in the performance. Overall, the reception was a great success.

Prior to the attending the reception event, members of the

delegation visited CLAIR Sydney and were briefed by Director Katsunori Kamibo on the Australian government system and economy. After the briefing, delegates visited the neighbouring GPO heritage building.

On 20 April, the delegation of the Union of Kansai Governments departed for Auckland to participate in the opening ceremony of the 2017 World Master Games as Kansai will be hosting the next games in 2021.

Samurai Performance at Chatswood

On 20 April, Japanese Samurai actors from Toei Kyoto Studio Co.,Ltd in Kyoto performed a samurai street show at Chatswood Mall in Willoughby which included a sword action sequence.

The Union of Kansai Governments organised it as one of their special feature events to promote tourism in the Kansai region. CLAIR Sydney supported the union by assisting with the application to Willoughby Council to use the venue, guiding members around the event space and administrative duties on the day.



The professional samurai actors performed a powerful 'Tate' or sword fight sequence and even got members of the audience to join in. A lot of people enjoyed the performance. Even though it was a short one hour performance, it was an effective media opportunity for the Union of Kansai Governments as the performance was picked up by local Japanese media outlets.

Supporting Kobe City



On 20 April, Mr Satoshi Torii, Deputy Mayor of Kobe city and Mr Junichi Hoshijima, Director of Kobe city's Tourism department visited Sydney to promote Kansai region tourism and research sightseeing activities around Sydney's CBD. We accompanied them to the QVB (a good example of heritage buildings being used for tourism and commercial purposes) and Taronga Zoo (hands-on experience with animals).

They were especially interested in the way Taronga allowed its customers to interact with animals which was different to zoos in Japan.

CLAIR Forum Magazine research - World Masters Games

From 21 to 30 April CLAIR Sydney visited Auckland to conduct research about the World Masters Games 2017 in order to help Japanese local governments to prepare for the 2021 World Masters Games in the Kansai region. It is the biggest international multi-sports event for people over the age of 30 (over 25 for some sports), with more than 25,000 athletes from over 100 countries participating this year.



During the event, CLAIR Sydney staff participated in a four-day observer programme and met with representatives from each department of the World Masters Games 2017 office. We also met with staff at Waipa District council to learn more about their efforts as hosts for rowing and track cycling at this year's games.

We will publish a report about the event in the August edition of our monthly magazine "CLAIR Forum".

Minoh Art Association members visit Lower Hutt

~Article and photo from Mayoress Linda Goss-Wallace, Hutt City Council~

In 2015 members of the Minoh Art Association travelled to Lower Hutt on a Mayoral delegation to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Minoh and Lower Hutt's Sister City relationship.

During that visit, Mr Minoru Kugo, President of Minoh Art Association met Mr David Balm, President of the Hutt Art Society and they discussed the possibility of exchange and exhibiting each other's artworks.

Last year Minoh City exhibited 24 pieces of Lower Hutt's art and this year the Odlin Gallery in Lower Hutt is exhibiting 39 pieces of Minoh's art.

The exhibition "Different Body, Same Minds" officially opened on Monday 1 May by the Japanese Ambassador Toshihisa Takata after speeches from Mr Kugo, Mr Balm and Mayor of Lower Hutt, Ray Wallace. It will run for 4 weeks until 28 May.

A delegation of 10 guests from Minoh Art Association were hosted during the day by Hutt City Council's Sister Cities Projects Manager, Linda Goss-Wallace where they experienced local sightseeing, history and facts around the city, a visit to Hutt Minoh Friendship House, Southlight Studio, ArtSpace Gallery, The

Dowse Art Museum, and an afternoon tea reception with Mayor Ray Wallace, Deputy Mayor David Bassett, Trustees of the Hutt Minoh Friendship House and Senior Council Staff.

A special walk along the Hashimoto Memorial Walkway beside the Civic Buildings was also enjoyed as the group remembered their former Mayor who signed the original document of Cooperation between the two cities 22 years ago.

The highlight of the day was of course, attending the opening of their exhibition of amazing art works at The Odlin Gallery that evening. The opening was attended by around 80 people including Lower Hutt's Deputy Mayor, Councillors and SCNZ's President Hiromi Morris who enjoyed meeting the delegation from Minoh and seeing their beautiful art works.

Presidents' Kugo and Balm have discussed the possibility of future exchanges of tutoring artists between their organisations.

Mayor Ray Wallace said "The Art Exchange has been a great way to further enhance and strengthen our relationship with Minoh City."



Photo:
Minoh Art Association delegation on
red bridge leading to Hashimoto
Memorial Walk (*photo by Linda Goss-
Wallace*)

JETAA Western Australia Activities

~Article and photos from JETAA WA~

JETAAWA's year of celebrating JET, Japan and more
Will Perera (President) & Richard Southern (Treasurer)

JETAAWA had a busy but fruitful year in 2016, as we continued to develop and improve our range of activities and events to help the people of Western Australia to learn more about Japan and the JET Programme.

A highlight of our year was receiving the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation Award, which was kindly presented by CLAIR at an event hosted by Consul-General Hirayama. We also welcomed back our 2016 returnees at the same time, several of whom have since joined our committee.

Along with the award, the 30th anniversary of the JET Programme was also an opportunity for all of us to reflect on how this unique experience has shaped us and our lives. JET really was a special time that has inspired us to continue and deepen our relationship with the country and culture back here in Australia.

In 2016 JETAAWA joined with other JETAA chapters throughout the Oceania region and the world in contributing to the Arigato campaign, and also in holding a special 30th Anniversary celebration in Perth's Hyde Park surrounded by jacaranda trees, which was well attended by JET Programme alumni, members of the local Japanese community and members of the general public.

At this event, we also had the pleasure of being entertained by the Perth Sanshin Club (a local group who celebrate Okinawan culture and music through this unique instrument), and also a performance by Taiko-on, a wadaiko ensemble led by JET Programme alumni, Simon Vanyai. Taiko-on in particular drew a lot of attention as other picnickers and park neighbours came to see this impressive (and percussive) performance. This of course gave us the opportunity to further promote the JET Programme to the local community!

The last event for our 2016-17 committee was the JETAAWA Kakigori (snow cone) stall at the fourth annual Japan Festival, which attracts crowds of over 10,000 people in the middle of the Perth CBD. Together with many other Japanese community organisations and interest groups, JETAAWA helped create a true 'matsuri' (festival) feel to the event; our homemade matcha kakigori continued to be the most popular way to cool down on a warm Perth summer's day. Our committee members also helped with organising the grand event, as well as providing volunteer interpreters for the concurrent Perth Sake Week.

This year we're exploring how we can best continue to engage with JET Programme returnees and continuing committee members. Our activities this year will include our annual charity quiz night, a tour of Western Australia's Swan Valley, a Japan related careers night, the Hanami picnic, the JET participant sayonara and welcome back events and our increasingly popular fortnightly KaiWA conversation nights.

None of this would be possible without the efforts of our committee, both new and not-so-new. As some of our members take a backseat to welcome new members to their immediate family, it's been great to see more recent returnees accept roles and become part of our JET Alumni family. We're looking forward to another great year in 2017-18.



JETAAWA and friends created this contribution to the Arigato JET campaign



Taiko-on helped us close our 30th Anniversary of the JET Programme with a bang!



The Afternoon Team still smiling after a busy day of shaving ice at the 2017 Perth Japan Festival

From the Director

19 – World Masters Games 2021 in Kansai

- A Year of Local Governments in Japan

The World Masters Games 2017 was held in Auckland from 21 to 30 April. Many athletes participated making the games a great success. CLAIR went to Auckland to learn about the operation and atmosphere of the games as the next games will be held in the Kansai region by the Union of Kansai Governments.

The Union of Kansai Governments was established by eight prefectures (Shiga, Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, Nara, Wakayama, Tottori and Tokushima) and four designated cities (Kyoto, Osaka, Sakai and Kobe) in central Japan. (It includes my hometown Nara and my former offices Sakai and Wakayama!)

These local governments are very close to each other, so they decided to establish this union which deals with wider regional matters such as tourism promotion, environmental protection and medical cooperation. This is the first extended inter-prefectural association of its kind in Japan.

The Kansai region has many famous temples (Kinkaku-ji, Kiyomizu-dera, Todai-ji), castles (Himeji-jo, Hikone-jo), ancient mausoleums and pilgrimage routes (Kumano-kodo). Moreover, it is famous for delicious Japanese cuisine such as *Shojin-ryouri* and Kobe beef. The next World Masters Games is going to be held from 15 to 30 May in 2021 and the number of participants is estimated to be about 50,000. Please join in the Games and come see and taste Kansai!

Katsunori Kamibo
Director