

NEWSLETTER

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Japan Local Government Centre

Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR, Sydney)

Welcome to Odawara City

Odawara is located in Western Kanagawa Prefecture, it is about a 35 minutes train ride from Tokyo Station by Shinkansen (bullet train). The area is surrounded by Mt. Hakone, Sagami Bay of the Pacific Ocean, and it has a mild climate. The city serves a role as the gateway to Mt. Fuji, and Hakone and Izu which are Japan's leading onsen (hot springs) area.

Odawara prospered as a castle town from Sengoku period to Edo period, and is rich in history and culture. Odawara Castle, a landmark of the city was built in the 15th century, and has a key role in Japan's history as the home of Hojo clan in the Sengoku period, and as home of the Okubo clan in the Edo period. After 1870, majority of the buildings were dismantled, and the remaining structures were destroyed by the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. The current Odawara Castle was rebuilt in 1960 based on its appearance in the Edo period, and the surrounding buildings are gradually being restored to their original appearance.

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Odawara is also known as a base for the Fuma Ninja clan, who were active in the Sengoku period. Many Samurai and Ninja legends remain in Odawara. You can experience these cultures at SAMURAI-Kan where Katana, Yoroi (Japanese armor) are exhibited, or at NINJA-Kan you can learn about Ninja culture and experience ninjutsu such as shuriken throwing.



In Odawara, where the sea, mountains, rivers, and villages are all in one place, you can see traditional Japanese scenery of the four seasons, and enjoy Japanese cuisine in each season. At fishing ports and fish markets, you can enjoy fresh fish. In addition, there are local specialties such as kamaboko (fish cake), himono (dried fish), umeboshi (pickled plum), and Japanese sweets. Odawara's food culture is very vibrant thanks to the abundance of ingredients and the careful work of craftsmen.



Japanese traditional crafts such as Sikki (Lacquerware craft), Yosegi-zaiku (Marquetry craft), Imono (Casting craft) and Chochin (Paper lantern) are produced in Odawara. Their tradition and skills have been passed down to this day.

In Odawara, seasonal festivals and other events are held every month at various locations. We sincerely hope that you will visit Odawara and experience Japanese culture and traditions.



CLAIR Sydney March/April Activity Report

2023 CLAIR Forum(3Mar2023)

On 3 March, CLAIR Sydney held the CLAIR Forum 2023 in collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney's Institute for Public Policy and Governance (UTS: IPPG).

CLAIR Forum is an event for staff of CLAIR Sydney, UTS: IPPG and other local government representatives to present and discuss strategies of their organisations and their research outcomes concerning common challenges faced by local governments in Japan, Australia and New Zealand.



This year's theme was 'Multisectoral Approach for Regional Revitalisation'. At the event, two members from CLAIR Sydney, Carol Mills from UTS: IPPG and Andrew Francis from Parkes Council made a comprehensive presentation each on local government policies and strategies that have revitalised local communities and economies in Japan and Australia during the current ongoing pandemic.

Reception for JET Programme Returnees in Brisbane (3Mar2023)

On Friday 3 March, the Consulate-General of Japan in Brisbane hosted a welcome reception for JET Programme returnees, which was attended by CLAIR Sydney staff.

New returnees of the JET Programme, JET alumni such as State MP Linus Power, JETAA and people from Japanese companies attended the reception, where they discussed their experiences in Japan and deepened their relationships.

We hope that they will be able to use the experience they have gained in Japan to build bridges between Australia and Japan.



His Majesty the Emperor of Japan's Birthday Reception in Wellington(7Mar2023)



On 7 March, a reception celebrating the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan was held in Wellington, New Zealand, attended by approximately 300 people, including New Zealand government and local government officials, Japanese companies and people involved in exchanges between New Zealand and Japan.

CLAIR Sydney ran a booth at the reception to promote the JET Programme and introduce the work of CLAIR Sydney. We were able to interact with the guests

who visited our booth, they asked us for advice on introducing the JET Programme to their families and shared their memories of their visits to Japan.

Through activities such as these, CLAIR Sydney will continue to strengthen relationships with New Zealand officials and support exchanges between Japanese and New Zealand local authorities.



Third session of The Inbound Tourism Promotion Webinar (22Mar2023)

On 22 March, CLAIR Sydney held the third session of the Inbound Tourism Promotion Webinar series for staff of Japanese local governments and other relevant organisations. This webinar aims to promote inbound tourism to Japan after the lifting of border restrictions to Japan from 11 October. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Australian travellers to Japan had been steadily increasing and many new direct flight routes between Australia and Japan were being launched.



Moreover, Australians' average per-person tourist spending was the largest in Japan and the number of tourists from Australia to Japan ranked 7th out of all international tourists. Therefore, Australia is an important country for Japan's inbound tourism industry.

In the webinar session, Ms Kumiko Hardy, Director of JTB Australia delivered a presentation on attractive points in regional areas of Japan for Australian travellers, and effective promotion methods, from the perspective of a travel company which sells travel packages to Japan in the Australian market.

There were questions from the attendees about social media promotions for Australians before travelling to Japan and the best season of FAM trip.

CLAIR Sydney will continue to support Japanese local government organisations' inbound tourism promotion.

Perth Japan Festival 2023(25Mar2023)

On Saturday, 25 March, the ninth Perth Japan Festival was held in Perth, Western Australia. The festival attracted many visitors and there were booths selling Japanese food and drinks such as okonomiyaki, yakisoba, karage chicken and ramune. There were also booths where visitors could experience tea ceremony, Ikebana, bonsai, calligraphy and try on a kimono.



There were three stages in the venue: BIG STAGE, MARTIAL ARTS, and YAGURA. BIG STAGE features dances and performances of musical instruments such as taiko and shamisen, while MARTIAL ARTS featured archery, kendo, judo, karate, aikido, and Shorinji Kempo. At YAGURA, performers in yukata performed dances and Bon Odori. Visitors enjoyed walking around the venue while appreciating Japanese pop culture, kobudo (traditional martial arts), and dances.

When the Bon Odori dance was performed as the finale of the event, the venue, especially the YAGURA stage, was filled with excitement and it was the highlight of the day.

We promoted tourism of Japanese local governments which have a relationship with local governments in Perth and Western Australia.



The event was so successful that many people visited the booth as soon as it opened, and all brochures we had were distributed within two hours of the event opening. It



was a good opportunity for us to interact with local people, and for the visitors to get advice on travelling to Japan and gather information on tourism to Japan.

In addition to promoting tourism, we would like to place importance on introducing Japanese traditions and culture and with visitors at our booth in the future.



From the Executive Director

Cherry blossoms in Japan

I participated in the 9th Perth Japan Festival mentioned above. While promoting tourist destinations in various parts of Japan at such events, we are often asked questions about cherry blossoms, such as “When is the best time to see cherry blossoms?” , “Where can we view cherry blossoms?”. We are very pleased that many people are interested in cherry blossoms in Japan.

I believe cherry blossoms are very familiar to Japanese people and have been loved for a long time. Japan's oldest extant collection of poetry, Manyōshū, which was compiled from the late 7th to the late 8th century, contains poems about cherry blossoms. Even though we call them all as "cherry blossoms", there are many different types of cherry blossoms according to colour, shape, and size.

When is the best time to see cherry blossoms? I will introduce the example of this year. According to the website of the Japan Meteorological Agency (as of 22 May, 11:30am), this year, many areas seem to have reached full bloom in late March or early April. Hokkaido area seems to have reached full bloom in late April or early May. In almost all areas, the full time of bloom was earlier than usual years. In addition, compared with last year, in some areas the full bloom was about the same time, while in others it was 10 days earlier. Therefore, the best time to see cherry blossoms depends on the area and weather that year.

Where can we view cherry blossoms? I believe each area in Japan has cherry blossom viewing spots. When I lived in Japan, I visited several cherry blossom viewing spots in the prefecture according to the full time of bloom. I have also visited an acquaintance in a distant prefecture and viewed the famous cherry blossoms over there.

When you visit Japan next time, it might be interesting to visit cherry blossom viewing spots that you have never been to before, according to the period of full bloom.