



# Newsletter



## DISCOVER JAPAN Welcome to Matsudo City

Located in the north-west part of Chiba prefecture, 20km from the heart of Tokyo, Matsudo City was established in 1943. Now, with a population of about 500,000 people, the city has grown into a residential city near the capital, where the richness of lush green spaces and natural reserves co-exists effortlessly with the vibrancy of urban life and a multi-generation population. During the Edo period, the region flourished as a key transport hub and post town. Many historical sites remain today, including the Tokugawa family's *Matsudo Tojo-tei* House and Garden, designated as a National Important Cultural Property, built by



Akitake Tokugawa, the younger brother of Yoshinobu Tokugawa, the 15th shogun of the Edo Shogunate. The *Hondoji* Temple, where approximately 50,000 hydrangeas bloom in late of June, is another notable site in Matsudo City.

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# Welcome to Matsudo City



In spring, the Cherry Blossom Festival; in summer, the Fireworks Festival and *Matsudoshuku Sakagawa* Votive Lantern Offering Festival; in autumn, the Matsudo Festival and the Tourist Pear Orchard; and in winter, the Matsudo Christmas Music Festival are held, attracting many people. Moreover, the “Forest and Park for the 21st Century”, an expansive 50.5-hectare green space in the heart of Matsudo City, offers a variety of seasonal activities year-round, including physical exercise activities, bird watching, barbecuing, and music appreciation. The park also features cultural facilities such as the civic museum and the “Hall of the Forest 21” music hall. Matsudo City is also known for a variety of distinctive local specialties, lovingly crafted by passionate local farmers and producers.

These include fresh produce such as spring onions, pears, strawberries, as well as local favourites such as ramen and freshly baked bread. The city also preserves traditional crafts such as *Kumihimo* (braided cords) and *Yuzen* Dyeing. For more information, please visit the official Matsudo City website.



[Web Page of Matsudo city](#)



Moreover, Matsudo City was designated an “SDG Future City” by the Cabinet Office in 2022. Under the concept of “A Sustainable and Compassionate City”, the city has been actively working to create a safe and inclusive living environment for people of all generations.



• Green Tree Day – Whitehorse City of Australia



Matsudo City and Whitehorse City established a sister city relationship on 12 May 1971, making this year the 54th anniversary. Remarkably, it all began with one letter. In 1958, a junior high school student wrote to the Australia Embassy, requesting seeds of a Eucalyptus tree. This small gesture eventually led to the formation of the sister city relationship between Matsudo and Whitehorse. Both cities have designated 12 May as “Green Tree Day” to promote friendship and greening. On this day, events such as commemorative tree planting

and online meetings are held to strengthen the bond. In addition, junior and senior high school students from Matsudo have taken part in exchange visits to Whitehorse through the Sister City Youth Exchange Program. Matsudo City not only promotes exchanges between sister cities, but also aims to foster mutual understanding between countries and nurture young people with a global outlook.



• Sister City with Australia

In celebration of the sister city anniversary in May, Matsudo City has traditionally held events with a focus on Australia. These have included sports and art, concerts, and food-related events at commercial facilities throughout the city. During the event period, participating restaurants in the city helped deepen residents’ understanding of the sister city relationship by offering special menu items made with Australian ingredients.



In addition, citizens from both cities have been engaged in Girl Scout exchanges, which will mark their 40th anniversary next year. Through their respective cultural activities, participants have deepened their interest and understanding of different cultures, helping to foster an international perspective. There is also an ongoing exchange of *etegami*—hand-painted postcards featuring messages of local pride and warm greetings—between the citizens, strengthening bonds across borders. The postcards sent by Matsudo City were displayed at the Japan Festival in Whitehorse City, while the postcards sent from Whitehorse City were displayed in the connecting corridor of the city hall, where many people stopped to admire the works. In 2026, the cities will be celebrating the 55th anniversary of their sister city relationship. Matsudo City will continue to strengthen the bond between the two cities through various exchanges and uphold their wonderful friendship.



# News from CLAIR Sydney

## School Exchange Opportunities

To support cultural exchange between schools in Japan and Australia/New Zealand, CLAIR Sydney has a dedicated page on our website that lists schools in Japan that are interested in initiating cultural exchange with schools in Australia/New Zealand. Please click on the link or scan the QR code below for more information on the respective schools.

Should you be interested in a particular school, please get in touch with them!



[Schools interested in exchange opportunities - CLAIR Sydney \(jlga.org.au\)](https://www.jlga.org.au)



## Announcement from Iwate Prefecture Government

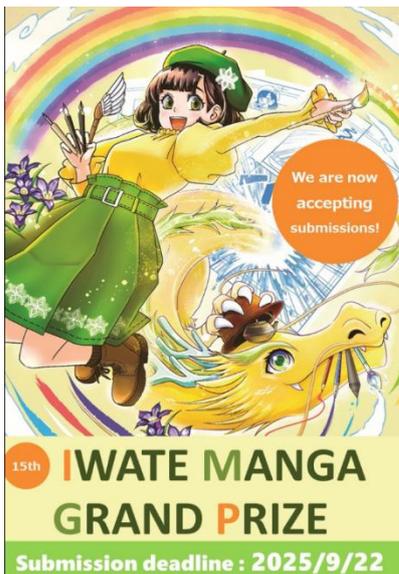
### The 15th Iwate Manga Award

The 15th Iwate Manga Award contest invites artists to celebrate the spirit of Iwate through the power of manga. This contest aims to showcase the unique charm of our prefecture and highlight the richness of Iwate's vibrant manga culture.

All submissions must be original, unpublished works that feature a connection to Iwate in some way.

Entries are welcome across all genres. Participants may submit their work in one of the following categories:

- General category: create your own short story that focuses on anything related to Iwate.
- 1-4 panel manga category: create one or more panel manga about Iwate.
- Illustration category: create illustrations on anything related to Iwate.



In addition to receiving a monetary prize, the winners of the Grand Prize and Excellence Award in the General category will have their work published on the Comic Iwate WEB. Artists whose entries pass the first screening, will also have the chance to receive constructive feedback from a panel of professional comic magazine editors.

The 1-4 panel manga category will be further divided into two categories: the General Division (for high school students and above) and the Junior Division.

Each division will be judged separately.

Artists of all ages and experience levels—whether beginners or professionals—are welcome to submit their work.

Selected entries may be featured on the Comic Iwate WEB page.

We welcome multiple entries in the Illustration category —so feel free to send us all your wonderful creations! We're excited to see artworks that creatively and freely express the spirit of Iwate! For digital submissions, you can easily upload your work using the online submission form available on the official website. We look forward to receiving many entries from aspiring artists across Iwate, Japan and around the world.

<https://www.iwatemangaggp.com/global/english.html>

# CLAIR Sydney June Activity Report

## JFC FOOD & SAKE EXPO 2025: Support for the City of Hachinohe (9 June)

On Monday, 9 June, the JFC FOOD & SAKE EXPO 2025 was held in Melbourne to showcase Japanese food and sake to locals in the food and hospitality industries. Hachinohe City from Aomori Prefecture participated with a dedicated booth, supported by CLAIR Sydney in its operations. The booth attracted strong interest from many attendees, including industry representatives and buyers eager to explore authentic Japanese flavours. Visitors were treated to tastings of Aomori-grown rice, succulent scallops, and delicately vinegared mackerel. CLAIR Sydney staff provided detailed explanations about each product, including how the rice can be used, the rich texture and quality of the scallops, and the distinctive flavour of the vinegared mackerel. Attendees engaged enthusiastically, asking in-depth questions about the use of rice in restaurants and bento meals, showed great interest in preparation methods and serving styles



for scallops, and gave positive feedback on the vinegared mackerel, especially in terms of its compatibility with sake, underscoring the strong appeal of Hachinohe's culinary offerings. CLAIR Sydney is proud to continue supporting the promotional activities of Japanese local governments in Australia.

## CLAIR Sydney at the Lismore Lantern Parade 2025 (21 June)

On Saturday, 21 June, a Lantern Parade was held in Lismore, New South Wales, and we were honoured to be invited to take part. Representatives from the CLAIR Sydney office joined Lismore councillors, officials from the Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney, and exchange students from Kansai University in carrying a lantern of "Miku-chan", the mascot of Yamato-Takada City in Nara Prefecture. Yamato-Takada is Lismore's sister city and holds the distinction of being the first official sister city relationship established between Japan and Australia.



An estimated 30,000 people lined the parade route to see the Lantern Parade. Once again, Miku-chan was a crowd favourite, delighting attendees with her presence. Prior to the parade, we visited the Japan Centre at Southern Cross University, where we were warmly welcomed by university staff and exchange students. We also had the opportunity to meet with the Mayor of Lismore and hear about the city's ongoing recovery efforts following flood damage. CLAIR Sydney remains committed to actively supporting sister city exchange initiatives and fostering deeper connections between communities in Japan and Australia.

## Participation in Pre-Departure Orientations for New JET Participants (June 2025)

In June 2025, JET Programme Pre-Departure Orientations were held at embassies and consulates in Australia and New Zealand for new JETs, who will be departing for Japan from late July to early August.

▼About the JET Programme (JET Programme official website):

<https://jetprogramme.org/en/about-jet/>



The orientations featured informative sessions led by embassy and consulate officials, travel agencies, and JETAA (JET Alumni Association) covering travel procedures, key points to note, and offering advice and Q&A sessions.

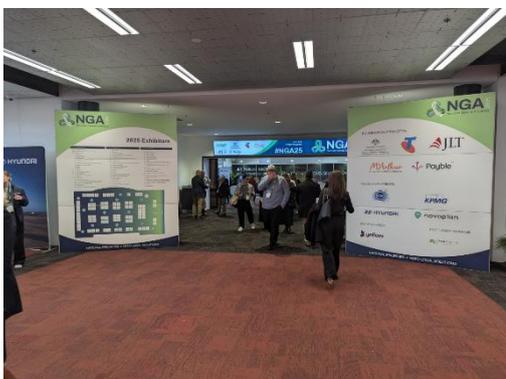
CLAIR Sydney provided an overview of our role in the JET Programme, including the support system and training we offer, and shared important information for new JETs before their departure.



We sincerely hope that the JETs will not only broaden their horizons through their experiences in Japan but also play an active role in fostering mutual understanding and lasting friendships between Japan and Australia/New Zealand.

## Strengthening Understanding and Connections on Local Issues at the 2025 National General Assembly of Local Government (Canberra) (23-27 June)

From 23 to 27 June, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) held its 2025 National General Assembly (NGA) in Canberra, bringing together local government representatives from across Australia to share insights and exchange views on pressing local issues.



This year's theme, "NATIONAL PRIORITIES – NEED LOCAL SOLUTIONS," highlighted regionally led approaches to address key challenges such as disaster response, climate change, housing policy, and the integration of AI in public services. Practical initiatives were showcased, including a visual mapping method that uses community and staff feedback on sticky notes to break down complex issues, as well as examples of AI tools supporting urban planning and streamlining approval processes. CLAIR Sydney hosted a booth at the event to introduce our activities, share information about sister city relationships between Japan and Australia, and promote the upcoming Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar to be held in Kuroishi City, Aomori, later this year. Many attendees visited our booth, demonstrating strong interest in building relationships with Japan.



We will continue to engage with local governments in Australia and New Zealand to deepen mutual understanding and foster collaboration with their Japanese counterparts.

# From the Executive Director



## A Message from the Executive Director, Yuko Mitsunaga

I am very honoured to introduce myself as the new and 11th Executive Director of Japan Local Government Centre (CLAIR Sydney).

CLAIR Sydney has contributed to the promotion of cultural, social and economic exchanges between Japanese local governments and those of Australia and New Zealand through activities such as administering the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, supporting sister city and school exchanges, promoting Japanese destinations and events, and implementing the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar since we were established in 1994.

As the new director, I am committed to strengthening relationships between local governments in Japan and Australia/New Zealand, exchanging information about challenges both local governments are facing, and supporting former and future JET Programme participants.

In our office, we have 8 staff members seconded from Japanese local governments including Nagoya City, Kuroishi City in Aomori Prefecture, Tokyo Metropolis, Kurihara City in Miyagi Prefecture, Hokuto City in Yamanashi Prefecture, as well as Okayama, Ehime and Fukuoka Prefectures. Each of them is a dedicated professional with expertise in local governance, and they are well-equipped to assist you with your inquiries. If you are interested in our work and Japanese local governments' matters, please feel free to contact us.

On a personal note, I have worked for both central and local governments in Japan. Half of my career was spent at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, while the remainder was with three prefectural governments: Okayama, Akita and Ishikawa.

From April 2022 to March 2025, I worked for Ishikawa Prefectural Government. During that time, a devastating earthquake struck the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa, which took more than 600 lives and many people lost their homes. The disaster areas are slowly recovering, but it will take a long time to be fully restored.

The other day, I went on a business trip to Christchurch, New Zealand, where I learned about various aspects of the February 2011 earthquake, including the damages caused by the disaster and the progress made towards recovery. This progress offers valuable insights for the affected areas of the Noto Peninsula earthquake, and once again, I have recognised the importance of learning from each other across borders on common challenges.

I look forward to sharing my experiences so far and I am eager to discuss a range of issues related to local governments of both countries with you all.

I also love travelling and eating delicious food, so I would like to visit and explore many parts of Australia and New Zealand and enjoy my life here.

Once again, I am very happy to be working with you and look forward to seeing you soon.