

CLAIR Sydney Newsletter

Aug 2026 - Vol. 203 -

CONTENT

- ◆ Discover Japan (Fukuoka Prefecture)
- ◆ CLAIR Sydney's Recent Activities
- ◆ Local Government Exchange & Cooperation Seminar
- ◆ Message from the Executive Director ..and more!

Cover Photo

Miyajidake Shrine, Fukuoka Prefecture

©Fukuoka Prefecture Tourism Association

Located in northern Kyushu, Fukuoka Prefecture has long served as one of Japan's key gateways to the Asia-Pacific region. With its strong sporting culture and commitment to international exchange, the prefecture continues to create opportunities for athletes and coaches to build connections, develop their skills, and learn from one another across borders.

One example is Fukuoka Prefecture's growing swimming partnership with New South Wales, established through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in December 2023. The following contribution from Fukuoka Prefecture highlights the exchanges undertaken to date, including training camps, competitions, and cultural activities, as well as plans to continue the programme and open the Fukuoka International Training Centre in 2029.



Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in December 2023 between Fukuoka Prefecture, the Fukuoka Swimming Association, and Swimming NSW, Fukuoka Prefecture and New South Wales have continued to foster exchanges between athletes and coaches from both regions through swimming. This ongoing partnership aims to promote participation in swimming and enhance competitive performance.

In November 2024, Fukuoka welcomed 10 swimmers representing NSW and 5 coaches to participate in a training camp ahead of the Japan Open held in Tokyo. In addition to the training sessions, participants enjoyed sightseeing and cultural experiences in Fukuoka, while coaches from both regions also had the opportunity to connect with one another and deepen mutual understanding and friendship.



In December 2024 and December 2025, Fukuoka sent a delegation of 8 selected swimmers and 2 coaches to NSW. The delegations were warmly welcomed by students and staff at Knox Grammar School in 2024 and Trinity Grammar School in 2025. During their stay, the athletes took part in joint training sessions and shared meals with the schools' swimming teams, competed in local age-group championships, and participated in other cultural exchanges. These experiences provided valuable international exposure and contributed to the further development of their competitive skills.



Fukuoka plans to continue this exchange programme in 2026 by sending selected swimmers and coaches to NSW. Through joint training sessions, interactions with world-class NSW athletes and coaches, and participation in competitions, Fukuoka aims to further strengthen the sporting abilities of its athletes while fostering the next generation of globally minded individuals.

Furthermore, Fukuoka Prefecture is currently preparing for the opening of the Fukuoka International Training Centre in 2029, with the aim of enhancing international competitive performance. The centre will bring together athletes and sports professionals from Japan and overseas, including across the Asia-Pacific region, providing world-class support in training, recovery, and sports nutrition. Fukuoka looks forward to welcoming athletes and organisations from around the world to this new centre, where they can train, connect, and further strengthen international sporting partnerships.



Learn more about Fukuoka Prefecture:

- Official tourism website "VISIT FUKUOKA"
<https://www.crossroadfukuoka.jp/en>
- Fukuoka's comprehensive multilingual website "FUKUOKA IS OPEN"
<https://www.fisop.net/>



Farewell Reception for New JET Programme Participants (July 2026)

From late June to early August, CLAIR Sydney attended farewell receptions for new JET Programme participants hosted by Japanese embassies and consulates in Australia and New Zealand.

Ahead of their departure for Japan, the new participants received advice from former JETs and engaged with fellow participants and reception attendees, building connections before embarking on their new journey. We had the pleasure of hearing not only their goals and aspirations for their work on the JET Programme, but also their excitement for life in Japan, including hopes to travel throughout the country and experience traditional festivals.

During their time on the JET Programme, we hope that the participants will gain a wide range of professional and personal experiences, contribute to the internationalisation of communities throughout Japan, and continue to serve as vital bridges connecting Japan with Australia and New Zealand long after they return home. Good luck!



For more details about the JET Programme, please visit the official JET Programme website below:

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

Supporting Oyama City, Tochigi Prefecture (21 July)

On Tuesday, 21 July, CLAIR Sydney conducted an online briefing for two delegations from Oyama City that will visit their sister city, Cairns, in late August. The delegations included the Oyama City Citizens' Delegation for the 20th anniversary of the Oyama-Cairns Sister City Agreement, and the Oyama City Junior High School Student Delegation.

The briefing covered an overview of Australia, including its government, economy, and history, as well as information on sister city exchanges, the cost of living, and practical tips for daily life in Australia. During the Q&A session, participants asked a wide range of questions covering topics from government and public administration to Australian culture, customs, and everyday life. Their enthusiasm and eagerness to deepen their understanding of Australia ahead of their visit were evident throughout the session.



In addition to the briefing, CLAIR Sydney also provided support in arranging appointments with organisations that the delegations plan to visit during their stay. We wish them a rewarding and memorable visit to Cairns.

CLAIR Sydney Attends Welcome Reception in Campbelltown for Koshigaya City Junior High School Delegation (27 July)

The City of Campbelltown in New South Wales and the City of Koshigaya in Saitama Prefecture have maintained a sister-city relationship for more than 40 years since signing their partnership agreement in 1984. Over the years, the two cities have strengthened their ties through initiatives such as opening parks named after each other and reciprocal student exchange programs.

On 27 July, a reception was held in Campbelltown to welcome a delegation of junior high school students from Koshigaya. During the event, the students performed “Soran Bushi”, a traditional Japanese folk dance, and hosted a quiz about Japan and Koshigaya, creating a lively and enjoyable atmosphere.

A delegation of students from Campbelltown is scheduled to visit Koshigaya in September. The event provided a valuable opportunity to reaffirm the strong bonds that have been built between the two cities through decades of continuous exchange. We hope that the friendship between Campbelltown and Koshigaya will continue to grow and flourish in the years to come.



* The third photo features CLAIR Sydney staff alongside the Mayor of the City of Campbelltown, Lord Mayor Cr Darcy Lound (centre), President of the Sister City Association Mr Terry Crotty (far left), and Consul Ikuta from the Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney at the welcome reception.

Join us for this 7-day seminar offering a unique opportunity to learn about the Japanese government system and visit a local government area in Japan to explore best practices and innovative initiatives!

The **Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar** aims to promote a deeper understanding of Japanese local governments and culture. The programme brings together participants from Australia, New Zealand and Japan working in local governments and related organisations to exchange knowledge on current local government challenges and practices.

Below are the details of the upcoming seminar and information about **Goka Town in Ibaraki Prefecture**, the host local government of the 2026/2027 Seminar.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXCHANGE & COOPERATION SEMINAR 2026/2027

Learn from Japanese Local Governments

Building an Attractive and Sustainable City for the Next Generation



DATE

14 Feb (Sun) –
20 Feb (Sat) 2027



LOCATION

Tokyo &
Goka Town,
Ibaraki Prefecture,
Japan



DURATION

7 Day
Programme



CLAIR
Japan Local Government Centre
(CLAIR, Sydney)



Information and
Application



PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

DAY 1

- Arrival in Tokyo, Japan
- Programme Orientation

DAY 2

- Briefing on the Japanese local government system
- Welcome Reception and Dinner (Tokyo)

DAY 3-5

- Thematic discussions & site visits (Goka Town, Ibaraki)

DAY 6

- Return to Tokyo
- Free time

DAY 7

- Departure

*Participants may enter and depart from Japan at their own convenience before and after the official Seminar period. However, CLAIR will only cover expenses incurred during the Seminar period.



THEME

Building an Attractive and Sustainable City for the Next Generation
— Challenges of Small Local Governments and the Potential of Industry–Government–Academia Collaboration



ELIGIBILITY

- Local government executives
- Executives of organisations involved in regional promotion or international exchange
- Applicants from national organisations, research institutes, or other relevant organisations may be considered provided their background is relevant to the themes of the Seminar

Up to 4 participants from AU & NZ



COST

✓ COVERED BY CLAIR

- Domestic transportation in Japan
- Accommodation (during the official Seminar period)
- Group attended meals
- Travel insurance in Japan

✗ NOT COVERED

- Roundtrip airfare to Japan
- Personal expenses (e.g. telephone & internet expenses, meals)

FOCUS

- Japanese local government system
- Community-based initiatives for waste management
- Site visits and discussions to learn best practices

CONTACT

 **Japan Local Government Centre**
Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR Sydney)

 Level 13, 115 Pitt Street,
Sydney NSW 2000

 TEL: +61 2 9241 5033

 E-mail: mailbox@jlgc.org.au

For more information and application
Please scan the QR code or visit our website



Learn more about Goka Town:

- Goka Town Official Website: <https://www.town.goka.lg.jp/>



Kitakyushu Manga Museum is now accepting entries for its Four-Panel Manga Competition.

Send us your great four-panel manga!!

General Division / Junior Division (Age 12 or under)

Theme for 2025, "Iron"
"Horizontal Bar" By Reiyoku (Japan)

2025 Grand Prize

Put all your power into the four panels.

Application period: 6/1 Mon to 9/2 Wed 2026
Not later than 11 AM (Japan Standard Time) / Not later than 2 PM (Japan Standard Time)

Theme: "Sing"
The theme is the same for both general and junior categories.

Chief Judge: Seizo Watase (Honorary Director, Kitakyushu Manga Museum)
Judges: Tachi Ueyama (Manga artist), Mutsumi Hagiwara (Manga artist), Koji Tabuchi (Editorial Department at Kodansha's Weekly Morning)

General Division (one work for each prize): Grand Prize 300,000yen and other
Junior Division (about five works): Junior Award Manga Artist Introductory Set

U15 Special Prize (1 work) / Prize item (30,000 yen value) For applicants aged 15 or younger as of April 1, 2027

Entry Details

- ◆ Divisions:
 - General Division
 - Junior Division (for participants aged 12 or under as of April 1, 2027)
* Open to both professional and amateur manga creators
- ◆ Theme: "Sing"
- ◆ Eligible Works: Original, unpublished works created by the entrant themselves
- ◆ Entry Period: From 1 June 2026 to 2 September 2026

Announcement of Award-Winning Works

The winners will be announced on the official Kitakyushu International Manga Competition website from late November to early December 2026. The winning entries and selected outstanding works will also be published on the website.

How to Apply

All entries must be submitted through the official website.
Entrants should complete the online entry form and upload a digital file of their work.

Website and Contact details

(EN) <https://kitakyushu-mangataisho.com/en/>
(JP) <https://kitakyushu-mangataisho.com/>

- For inquiries about submissions: manga@kitakyushu-mangataisho.com
- Other inquiries: manga@city.kitakyushu.lg.jp





- Fukushima Today - Steps for Reconstruction and Revitalization in Fukushima Prefecture



Fukushima Prefecture's 150th Anniversary: Illuminating the Future

This year marks a major milestone, with 15 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear accident, as well as celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Fukushima Prefectural Government. In this significant milestone year, through events such as the Grand Van Gogh Exhibition and the Fukushima Destination Campaign, we will encourage many visitors from Japan and abroad to come, and to see, experience, and feel the various charms of the prefecture, thereby promoting "Fukushima today" as it progresses towards revitalization.

Opening Event for the 150th Anniversary of the Prefectural Government: On 21 Aug. 2026, Fukushima Prefecture will mark its 150th anniversary since the merger of the former Fukushima, Iwaki, and Wakamatsu provinces which gave rise to the current shape of Fukushima Prefecture. As a kick-off event for the anniversary, a calligraphy performance was held by VISIT Fukushima Ambassador Ms. CHIBA Seiran and the calligraphy club of Fukushima Nishi High School.

Grand van Gogh Exhibition (21 Feb.–10 May 2026): The Grand Van Gogh Exhibition is currently being held at the Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art. This event was planned with the aim of enriching the hearts of children who will lead the next generation through the works of van Gogh, an artist who continued creating despite a life of hardship. It also seeks to inspire and uplift many visitors, providing the momentum to move forward into the future. The second phase is scheduled to be held from 19 Jun. to 26 Sep. 2027.

Fukushima Destination Campaign (1 Apr. to 30 Jun. 2026): The JR Group, the prefecture and its municipalities, and local tourism operators, etc., will come together as one to launch a tourism campaign to promote the attractions of local regions. During the campaign, various special trains will run in collaboration with JR, and over 300 special events will take place throughout the prefecture, where all of Fukushima stands ready to welcome you. Photos show the "Nicchu Line Weeping Cherry Blossoms (Kitakata City)" and "Revived Hamayaki (Soma City)".

Fukushima Prefecture

25 Mar. 2026
New Fukushima Revitalization Promotion
Headquarters

In order to clearly explain the current state of Fukushima's recovery to both domestic and international audiences, the Prefecture has created "Fukushima Today; Steps for Reconstruction and Revitalization in Fukushima Prefecture", which summarises the progress and challenges since the Great East Japan Earthquake. The English version is now available on our website.

This issue features various initiatives, including the Grand Van Gogh Exhibition, the Fukushima Destination Campaign, and commemorative events, as Fukushima Prefecture marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of its prefectural government and the 15th anniversary of the disaster. Through these efforts, the prefecture welcomes many visitors to experience its attractions and see the current state of its recovery, while also widely sharing its hopes for the future.

In addition, the Fukushima Revitalization Information Portal Site provides information on the current status of Fukushima's reconstruction and revitalization in 10 languages: English, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Korean, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Thai. "Steps for Reconstruction and Revitalization in Fukushima Prefecture" is also available on their portal site (you can change the language using the button in the top-right corner.) Please feel free to explore other pages on the portal site as well.

For more details, please feel free to visit the website below:

Fukushima Revitalization Information Portal Site Top Page:
<https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal-english/>





The Sapporo International Art Festival (SIAF) is an international art festival held once every three years at various locations throughout Sapporo City, including public facilities, parks and underground spaces. SIAF2027 will envision Sapporo as a single planet known as Planet Snow, encouraging reflection on its ways of life, history, culture and future as a whole. Planet Snow's theme can be expressed through two Ainu phrases, the language of Japan's Indigenous Ainu people, who have long nurtured a distinct and rich culture.

For those who live in Sapporo, Planet Snow is envisioned as "upas mintar (snow garden)," and for those visiting from afar, it is "upas nociw (snow star)."

Bringing together artworks and new forms of expression from Japan and around the world, SIAF2027 will take place from 16 January (Sat) to 21 February (Sun), 2027.

Winter in Sapporo Transforms into "Planet Snow."

We look forward to welcoming you to an art festival enveloped in white snow.

*Some venues will be closed on certain days. Please refer to the link below for venue-specific exhibition dates and opening schedules.

For more details, please feel free to visit the website below:

(EN) <https://siaf.jp/en/>

(JP) <https://siaf.jp/>





Located in the Northern Hemisphere, Japan is now in the height of summer.

Many people may associate summers in Japan with intense heat and humidity that can be difficult to endure. Compared to Australia and New Zealand, Japan's summer climate is generally hotter and more humid, which may not always feel as comfortable.

However, there's so much to enjoy in Japan during the summer that you will soon forget all about the heat and humidity. Every year, vibrant festivals, energetic traditional celebrations, and spectacular fireworks displays are held across the country. These events provide the perfect opportunity to experience the history and culture of each region, as well as the unique atmosphere of a Japanese summer.

In this article, I would like to introduce several memorable summer events that I discovered while living in different regions of Japan.

Akita Kanto Festival: Illuminating Akita's Summer Night Skies

Located in Japan's northern Tohoku region, Akita Prefecture is home to a traditional summer festival known as the Akita Kanto Festival, which has been celebrated for approximately 270 years.

Every year from 3 to 6 August, the streets of central Akita City are transformed after sunset as around 280 giant bamboo poles, known as *kanto*, fill the streets, each adorned with rows of illuminated lanterns.

The kanto are designed to resemble heavy stalks of rice bending under the weight of abundant grains, symbolising a bountiful harvest. The largest poles stand up to 12 metres tall, weigh around 50 kilograms, and carry approximately 50 lanterns.

Performers, known as *sashite*, demonstrate extraordinary skill by balancing these towering poles on their palms, foreheads, shoulders, and hips while praying for a bountiful harvest.

The sight of nearly 10,000 golden lanterns glowing against the summer night sky is truly breathtaking, and the entire venue comes alive with energy and excitement.



Sources: Akita Kanto Festival Official Site

Nishimonai Bon Odori: One of Japan's Three Great Bon Dances

Also in Akita, the town of Ugo hosts the Nishimonai Bon Odori from 16 to 18 August each year.

This traditional event is said to have a history spanning more than 700 years and is regarded as one of Japan's Three Great Bon Dances.

From dusk into the evening, dancers dressed in beautiful patchwork kimono perform graceful and elegant movements while concealing their faces with woven hats or black hoods. Unlike the lively atmosphere of typical festivals, the Nishimonai Bon Odori has a mysterious and enchanting quality. Illuminated by bonfires, the dancers seem to emerge from the darkness, creating a captivating spectacle that leaves a lasting impression on all who watch.



Source: Ugomachi Town Office

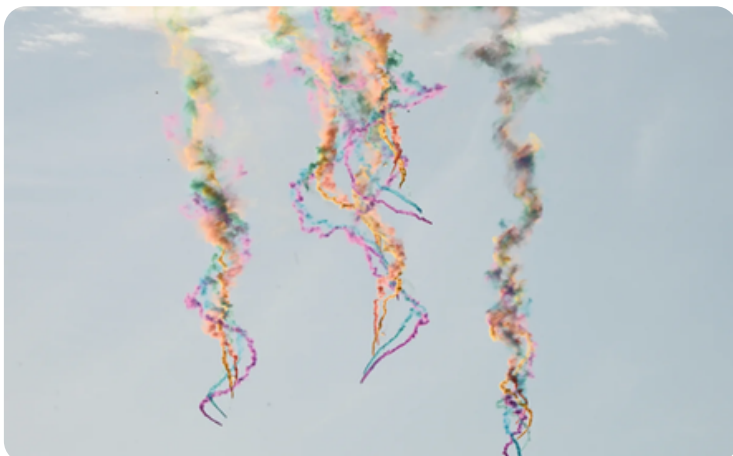
Omagari Hanabi: A Gathering Place for Fireworks Enthusiasts from Across Japan



Another highlight of Akita's summer is the National Fireworks Competition known as Omagari Hanabi, held annually on the final Saturday of August.

Widely regarded as one of Japan's premier fireworks events, it features spectacular displays by some of the country's finest pyrotechnicians, selected from across the nation, who captivate the enormous crowds that gather at the venue each year. Watching the fireworks burst overhead while hearing the thunderous sound echo throughout the venue is truly an unforgettable and powerful experience.

One more unique feature of Omagari Hanabi is its daytime fireworks show, which allows spectators to enjoy colourful smoke patterns and their changing forms in the sky, something rarely seen elsewhere.



The grand finale consists of approximately 2,500 fireworks launched over about 6 minutes, synchronised with music and based on a different theme or concept each year. For me, the end of Omagari Hanabi was always when I truly felt that summer was drawing to a close.

Source: Omagari Hanabi Official Site

Abare Festival: Japan's Wildest Festival

In the Town of Noto, Ishikawa Prefecture, the Abare Festival is held annually on the first Friday and Saturday of July and is one of Japan's most unique festivals.

With a history believed to span around 350 years, this festival is held to ward off illness and pray for the prosperity of the local community. Around 40 giant lantern floats, known as *kiriko*, each standing approximately 7 metres tall, parade through the town. At night, they gather in the central square and make their way around enormous bonfires.

It is believed that those who are showered by sparks from the bonfires will receive blessings. As a result, the Kiriko bearers strive to bring their floats as close to the flames as possible and circle them repeatedly in search of good fortune.

The festival reaches its dramatic finale when two *mikoshi* (portable shrines) are thrown into the sea, rivers, and even fires, or slammed onto the ground until they are almost completely destroyed.

This extraordinary ritual stems from the belief that such acts please the deities residing within the mikoshi and allows people to deepen their connection to them.

The Abare Festival is an energetic celebration where, amid its wild and powerful displays, visitors can experience the deep-rooted history, culture, and pride of the local community.



Source: Abare Festival Official Site

The Magic of Japanese Summer

Many people may hesitate to visit Japan during the summer. However, as highlighted above, this season offers unique events and experiences that can only be enjoyed at this time of year. Through these festivals and celebrations, visitors can experience the distinct histories, cultures, and community spirit of different regions across Japan, making the opportunity to encounter these local traditions one of the greatest highlights of a Japanese summer.

If you have the chance to visit Japan during the summer, I highly encourage you to experience the festivals and fireworks events held across the country. They are sure to leave you with unforgettable memories that make you forget the heat and humidity, along with a deeper appreciation for the richness of Japanese culture that has been carefully preserved and passed down through generations.



Yuko Mitsunaga
Executive Director