

Address

Presented by NAITO Yasushi, Consul-General of Japan in Perth
On the occasion of the 2023 Shinju Matsuri Floating Lantern Matsuri in Broome
Sunday September 3, 2023

(Acknowledgements)

Shire of Broome Councillor Phillip Matsumoto,
Nyumba Bruru Yawuru members,
President and Board Members of Shinju Matsuri,
Lotterywest representative, Kim Male,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Broome and Japan)

It is a great privilege to be here at Shinju Matsuri 2023. This is my second visit to Broome since March but I have a strange feeling of coming back home.

Japan and Broome have a long special history, which dates back more than 130 years to when Japanese Pearl divers first arrived here. Since then, families and descendants, facing and living through many challenges, became a bridge between our two nations. I am pleased that the multicultural tradition endures in Broome and that the Japanese connection is maintained.

Shinju Matsuri, or Pearl Festival started among Japanese residents in Broome prior to the 1970s during the 'Obon' season to honour the spirits of their ancestors. Now it has developed into a famous regional festival that symbolizes the proud multi-culturalism of Broome.

(Inspiration of Pearl Divers)

Last night, I had the honour of meeting a former pearl diver, Mr Akira Masuda who is 89 years of age. He is the oldest Japanese pearl diver in Broome. I was so moved to listen to the story of the last pearl diver of his venture to travel across the ocean at the age of 21 from Taiji of Wakayama in 1955 to come to Broome to become a pearl diver. In addition to being a shallow diver, he also did deep dives, which caused many of his colleagues to suffer decompression sickness and even to lose their lives while young. He must have had tough days and I asked so, but instead of nodding, he said repeatedly "Broome is a great place, the people, society and the freedom" and he bought me beers.

The resilience of the pearl divers community and their love for the land and people of Australia became a solemn inspiration. Many Japanese residents in Western Australia thereafter followed and contributed in forging friendship and trust with Australians through people-to-people bonds over the years.

(Visit by Students from Japan)

I am so happy to know the sister city relations student exchanges resumed after COVID suspensions, and that 11 students from Taiji-cho in Wakayama Prefecture visited Broome just last week, receiving a warm welcome by the citizens of Broome. Apart from the camel ride the students enjoyed, they seemed to have unforgettable exchange activities with St Mary's College students including demonstration session of calligraphy 'shodo' and left with an impressive phrase 「日本から海にかけて陸続き」 that shows the closeness of two coastal towns across the ocean.

Soon we have the resumption of All Nippon Airways Perth Tokyo direct flight next month, which will connect WA and Japan in less than 10 hours. More people from Japan are expected to visit Western Australian including Broome. Rika Hamaguchi, a famous model and dancer from Broome and a granddaughter of the late pearl diver, Hiroshi Hamaguchi, features in a promotional clip showcasing the beauty of WA to millions of people in Tokyo on a huge screen in Shibuya. Surely Japan and Broome are connected.

(Sound of Shamisen at the Lantern releasing)

Today, I am proud to present to you a famous Japanese Shamisen Artist, Noriko Tadano. She is not a stranger to Broome as she has participated in the Shinju Matsuri 16 years ago, and has even made songs dedicated to Broome. Her visit this time was enriched with the coinciding spectacular "Staircase to the Moon" last night at Town Beach, and also with hearing the voice of Japanese ancestors by joining me at a cleaning session at the Japanese cemetery with other volunteers.

So, please enjoy her further fine-tuned and emotionally enriched pieces tonight, while releasing your lanterns with your prayers to the Indian Ocean.

Thank you for your attention.

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