

# REPORT OF HOBART'S VISIT TO YAIZU, AUGUST 2017

## Day 1 - Friday 11th August

The delegation, along with what seemed like several million locals, squished onto a morning train bound for Shizuoka. We nearly missed the train, due to the crowding, but thanks to Tim's insistence that we get on this particular train, and the JR train pusher-oners, we all made it in time to Shizuoka.

Our first group outing was to Dohtonbori, an okonomiyaki chain. We got to chat and have lunch with Mai, Eliza and Ken, from the Yaizu council. They were our three main guides for the duration of the trip! Okonomiyaki was the second meal I ever had when I went to Japan the first time, back in 2002. It was the height of summer so I remember not being able to understand why would all sit over a burning hot plate. I don't actually remember making the pancake, so I felt like a total beginner. I just watched and copied Fumiko. However, she scrambled her pancake...as did I. It was still tasty. It was at this meal that I made a deal with myself to eat everything put in front of me...when in Rome, etc. Initially I was a bit apprehensive, as I don't like octopus, which was in our okonomiyaki, but I survived the tentacles. All through lunch I felt I had been transported back to Hokkaido, because of the restaurant's tanuki mascot.

After lunch, we visited the Study Centre of Disaster Prevention. I have not been to an Australian equivalent of this centre, and it made me think about what natural disasters we may be threatened by here in Tasmania. A few delegation members discussed this, and we decided that floods and bushfires were our main risks in Tasmania. Japan has many more natural disasters to contend with: earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunami. This centre had a lot of information in various languages about what to do in various emergencies. It also hit me that I have not seen very many bilingual signs in Hobart, about anything. For me, the most 'memorable' activity at this centre was the earthquake simulator. This was an enclosed area, with a shock-absorbing floor and sturdy handrails, that could fit about 6 people. We got to experience the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake on this machine. Even with a handrail, the knowledge of when the shaking would get worse and the fact we could see the end was in sight, it was a scary experience! Personally, I really had to brace my back and found it very uncomfortable. How must this earthquake have been for people who were not lucky enough to be able to grab onto a strong hand rail. It made me feel quite sad. Outside of the centre we were then shown a demonstration of a drone. This drone had quite a range and battery life, and would be very useful in surveying damage in a disaster.

We also visited Yaizu Shrine, which was being prepared for the Aramatsuri on Sunday. The priest of the shrine told us of its history, and its importance in the 'Nihon Shoki' and 'kojiki'. I learnt that the kanji for the word Yaizu comes from the work 'to burn' and 'giant wave'. It seemed that the town got its name from someone swooshing a sword with special powers that could produce flames...We also got a glimpse of teenage girls practicing the *kagura* dance for the Aramasturi. I was really looking forward to seeing the dance performed at the festival.

The first day's activities ended with a dinner at the Richmonds, a function centre, built in a western style, popular for wedding receptions. This was the first of many dinners with the Yaizu City Council, the Sister City Friendship group and other members of the community who have connections with Hobart. I was fortunate to be seated at a table with Joanna Matsunaga, and her husband, Takayuki. Joanna is from Hobart and has lived and worked in Yaizu for over twenty years! We talked about Japanese antiques and made arrangements to meet up on the 'free day' to go shopping.

## Day 2 - Saturday 12th August

Today was the 'official' day of the delegation's visit, and it was quite a full and varied day! Today we were introduced to a group of students who had been to Tasmania only a week or two prior to our visit to Yaizu. And then we proceeded to officially open 'Hobart Street' (ホバート通り). From Hobart Street, on a clear day, you can see Mt Fuji. In many ways, it felt just like at home, where you can see Mt Wellington from nearly everywhere in the greater Hobart area.

We also got to walk inside an enormous fish freezer, where it was a refreshing -65 degrees. This freezer was full of tuna; the tuna came from all around the world, including Western Australia. It also contains tuna which is caught in Japan. The tuna is caught, gutted and frozen on the fishing boats, then transported to this big refrigeration facility. The tuna then goes to fish markets around the country, including Tsukiji Market in Tokyo. Although I had never seen a tuna 'in the flesh' before, I watched 'Tsukiji Wonderland' on the flight to Japan, and so I felt I had seen them before. This film also happened to be part of the mini Japan Film Festival that made it to Hobart just as I was leaving for Yaizu. The freezer was certainly cold - I think anyone with a respiratory illness would have struggled to breathe in there!!

Next we went to the Yaizu City Council chambers, where we received a welcome from the alderman of Yaizu City. It was certainly an honour to be able to go inside the chambers: it is not something I would be able to do as a tourist. An official gift exchange occurred during this meeting, with Hobart City giving Yaizu City a small but extremely heavy bronze Tasmanian Tiger sculpture. How did that fit in someone's luggage??? Perhaps the loveliest thing was that each member of the Yaizu council stood up and greeted us in English and wished us an enjoyable stay. I wonder if we could have returned the favour, in the form of a very basic Japanese greeting?

After group photographs with the heavy Tiger sculpture, we went to lunch which was sponsored by the local fisheries association. It was a delicious kaiseki-style meal, using all local ingredients. Eliza translated for us, what each component was and from what area it came.

Next, we went to a community/welfare centre. This was a large, modern building which seemed to be offices for many organisations, such as a single mothers' group, students with disabilities, unemployed youth, and seniors. Several dances were performed for us, by a group of junior/senior school aged teenagers. These dances were VERY ancient Japanese dances. There was a large number of dances in the set, but we only saw three of them. The dances were for things such as hoping for a good harvest and humble, everyday things. I didn't understand the dances at all, and could not understand the Japanese used (I think it was older Japanese), but seeing young people perform in their tracksuits, with modern, sparse costumes, performing small actions made me think I was watching something avant garde. I REALLY enjoyed this!

On Saturday evening was the official official Welcome Dinner and celebration of the 40th anniversary, held at the Hotel Shofukaku. On a clear day, you are able to see Mt Fuji from this hotel. However, it was cloudy and so I couldn't see the actual Mt Fuji. I did, however see some good replicas in the car park...

The welcome dinner was spectacular and very warming. I did not expect so much entertainment! It included a dragon dance, a blessing of a giant Daruma and a



master of a 500 year old sword. I don't think I had ever been to a dinner quite like it. The most memorable performance, for me, was seeing the Furi Kamome perform (a children's choir). They performed 'Waltzing Matilda' in Japanese, as well as 'Sakura', a very famous and traditional Japanese song. When the evening ended and we were leaving, the lobby of the Hotel Shofukaku was full of children and families playing an enormous game of bingo. It was even more unexpected than the sword demonstration.

### **Day 3 - Sunday 13th August**

Today was the Aramatsuri - the big summer festival at Yaizu Shrine. It was so fun to see all of the colourful food stalls and hear the cicadas - it was a very 'natsukashi' feeling. We watched the leaving of the omikoshi before indulging in a kakigori to beat the heat- most of us had melon flavour. It was too early in the day for festival activities, and so we drove out to Shimizu to the hotel Nippondaira. This was quite a beautiful location on top of a hill, where we had lunch. This was another location where you could get a fantastic view of Mt Fuji. Unfortunately I had to use my imagination and visualise where it might be, as it was super cloudy again. On the way to this hotel, we passed a large number of strawberry farms or businesses. For some reason I found this unusual...

In the evening we went to Aeon shopping mall. I had no idea, but this company bought a feedlot here in Tasmania over forty years ago and sell Tasmanian beef in their supermarkets. I had never heard this and no one I knew had ever heard this either. It made me think, 'why don't people in Tasmania know about this??'. It might make people understand what some of the benefits that can come of sister city relationships. In fact, most people here do not know where Hobart has sister city relationships with, and had never heard of Yaizu. We had our photo taken in front of the 'Friendship Forest' in the carpark, and then went inside to have dinner in the shopping mall! Again, it felt very 'natsukashi' - I do like Japanese supermarkets. This dinner was with the delegation who came to Hobart in early 2017 and it was very funny and relaxed. Here we were given lots of gifts, such as tenugui, dried bonito flakes from Yaizu and some snacks. As much as I love receiving gifts, I always feel bad when I cannot give anything in return. We then went souvenir shopping in Aeon, and I was accosted by a lady who spends several months of the year in New Zealand! We had a good chat in English and she helped me buy some Yaizu omiyage.

### **Day 4 - Monday 14th August**

Today was a 'free day' for the community members, so I spent the day with Joanna and Taka. We went to a great second hand store in Fujieda, the neighbouring town, and then went back to their house for a coffee and a chat. I really enjoyed the day, and, naturally being both from Hobart, we had friends in common!

In the evening, we went to a ryokan called Migiwaya for our final evening meal. Again, it was a kaiseki-style meal and was amazing! Here, it hit me how lucky I was to be able to partake in all of this. I really enjoyed chatting about the food to other delegates at this dinner, and it was such a beautiful inn. We then got back on the bus to watch the fireworks down by the water. Although traffic was so bad we got out and walked down to the waterfront! Whilst comparing Yaizu's fireworks to Hobart's NYE fireworks, I longed to have something like this back home, but it was due to the nature of the crowd and the community. It was very pleasant to be amongst the entire population of the city, and there was no aggressiveness or fear or hardly any rubbish. Really, it was a perfect way to end our visit!

### **Day 5 - Tuesday 15th August.**

Today we went to a tea ceremony centre in Fujieda. It was in a beautiful tea house which had many motifs of the the moon and gourds. I guess I should hardly have been surprised at the attention to detail, but it was pointed out that in the tea room, the sliding window and wall panels,



when all closed, were decorated to show the waxing and waning of the moon!!!! This got me very excited as it made me feel that I CAN use design in small everyday gestures. Again, this mind set is so different to here in Australia. Seeing this design, as well as the door handles that also showed the transition of the moon reminded me of the concept of Japanese design firm, Nendo:

*Giving people a small "!" moment.  
There are so many small "!" moments hidden in  
our everyday*

We didn't have too much time to spend here as we had to go to our final final lunch, and then head back to Shizuoka station. We nearly missed our train so we literally had to run from the bus stop to collect our bags and then through the gates. There was not even time to say a proper thank you and goodbye to Mai, Eliza and Ken. We made the train just in time, then onwards to Narita Airport.



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