

CLAIR Singapore Newsletter

Vol. 64 Mar. 2015

Japan-Malaysia Regional Exchange Promotion Program 2014

Against the backdrop of a rapid rise in international integration, the exchange of best practices and experiences among local governments from different regions has become increasingly preponderant for local governments to continuously reinvent themselves and achieve long-term sustainable growth. This is the key theme underlying the 'Japan-Malaysia Regional Exchange Promotion Program 2014', which was organized and implemented by CLAIR Singapore from 9 to 14 November 2014 in Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru.

Malaysia's strong foothold in the ASEAN region, coupled with its pioneer status in the development of halal certification and halal-related industries have caught the attention of many Japanese local authorities interested in learning from the Malaysia experience. As a result, a delegation of 17 members consisting of representatives from both central and local governments in Japan participated in the program to gain a deeper understanding on the many facets of Malaysia's growth.

The program focused on 3 aspects, namely local administration, economic development and cultural exchange. To enable the Japanese delegates to obtain insights on the latest reforms and developments of local administration in Malaysia, program participants were given the opportunity to visit the Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government, Kuala Lumpur City Hall as well as Johor Bahru City Council. In this regard, the Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government provided in-depth explanations about the structure of local admin-

istration in Malaysia, and at the same time enlightened program participants on the current issues as well as future direction of local governments in Malaysia. The meetings at Kuala Lumpur City Hall and Johor Bahru City Council saw program participants engaging in meaningful discussions with representatives from both local governments on topics relating to their urban planning policies. These visits have definitely opened doors for more prospective collaborations between local governments in Japan and Malaysia.

For the program participants to obtain knowledge on the factors contributing to Malaysia's economic advancement, especially with regards to the contributions made by Islamic tourism, halal certification as well as development of halal-related industries, meetings were held with representatives from Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, Halal Industry Development Corporation and also Era-One Travel Sdn Bhd. As the importance of promoting Islamic tourism and its related industries in Japan is increasingly gaining attention among the local authorities in their endeavours to revitalize the local economies, the Japanese delegation enthusiastically participated in discussions with the relevant counterparts during the meetings. Participants from Japan were also given the opportunity to visit the Iskandar

Program Itinerary

Date	City	Itinerary and places of visit
9 Nov (Sun)	Kuala Lumpur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Era-One Travel Sdn Bhd Study visit in the city centre
10 Nov (Mon)	Kuala Lumpur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embassy of Japan in Malaysia Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government Ministry of Tourism and Culture
11 Nov (Tue)	Kuala Lumpur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kuala Lumpur City Hall Joint meeting with Department of Islamic Development Malaysia and Halal Industry Development Corporation Dinner session with Alumni Look East Policy Society and Japan Graduates' Association of Malaysia
12 Nov (Wed)	Kuala Lumpur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Exchange Program with University of Malaya
13 Nov (Thu)	Johor Bahru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Johor Bahru City Council Iskandar Malaysia
14 Nov (Fri)	Johor Bahru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Port of Tanjung Pelepas



Participants of the program visiting the Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC)

Development Region and Port of Tanjung Pelepas in Johor Bahru, which are prominent economic hubs seen as the key drivers to Malaysia's future growth.

To promote friendly exchange between Japan and Malaysia, a Cultural Exchange Program was also implemented with Japanese Language students from University of Malaya. The students were given an opportunity to exchange views with participants from Japan on an array of topics relating to current issues in both countries. This program provided an invaluable platform for the participants from Japan to interact with young aspiring Malaysians who will

be the key persons to bridge the cordial relations between Japan and Malaysia in the future. Apart from that, a dinner gathering with the Alumni Look East Policy Society and Japan Graduates' Association of Malaysia was also held to foster ties between Japanese local governments and local alumni of Japanese universities.

CLAIR Singapore will continue to implement the Regional Exchange Promotion Program, and we aspire to strengthen the cooperative ties and widen the contact networks between local governments in Japan and ASEAN countries as well as India through this program.

Visit Japan Travel Seminar and Business Meeting Session in The Philippines

Organized by the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) and Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) Bangkok Representative Office, the 'Visit Japan Travel Seminar and Business Meeting Session' was successfully held in November 2014 in both Manila and Cebu, the two largest cities of the Philippines. As more and more Japanese local governments actively begin to organize various activities in the Philippines, CLAIR Singapore is most happy to step up support for them in their tourism promotion effort.

According to JNTO's statistics, the number of Japan-bound tourists from the Philippines in October 2014 increased by a stunning 78.4% year-on-year to an estimated 19,400 people, a record high for inbound tourists from the Philippines. This growth rate is also the highest among 6 major ASEAN countries.

In recent years, the Philippines have consistently registered high economic growth rates. The increase of flight connections between the two countries involving low-cost carriers (LCC) coupled with ongoing sales of travel products at competitive prices offered by the various airline companies are important contributing factors behind the astounding rise in tourist numbers. Moreover, the relaxation of visa requirements and simplification of application procedures for certain types of visa for Philippine nationals provide great motivation for travel to Japan, not to mention the depreciation of the Japanese

currency as well as an expansion of duty-free benefits to international travelers.

In the Manila session, a total of 26 groups from Japan including 14 Japanese local governments and related organizations, as well as 59 companies from various travel agencies and airline operators in the Philippines attended the event; while in the inaugural session in Cebu, 18 groups from Japan including 10 Japanese local governments and related organizations, as well as 35 Philippine travel agencies and airline operators were represented. Both venues saw much active exchange and interaction between all parties.

Such seminars provide an excellent opportunity for the Philippine travel industry to gather more information about travel in Japan and in turn, participating Japanese groups will be able to promote their tourism attractions to a fast-growing market. In fact, many Japanese participants expressed great satisfaction with the seminar and business meetings, and are confident that this will pave the way for positive outcomes in the future. As more Japanese local governments are seen shifting and enhancing their promotion efforts within Southeast Asia, CLAIR Singapore hopes to continue to collaborate with our various stakeholders in the implementation and support of such events, thereby contributing to the promotion of Japan-bound tourism in the region.



Business Meeting session in Manila



Business Meeting session in Cebu

Promotion of Local Signature Foods in CLAIR's Japan Local Specialty Fair in Bangkok

Japanese food has become an ubiquitous presence in Bangkok's restaurant scene. Hence, Thailand is emerging to be an important market in Southeast Asia for Japanese food manufacturers to export their products. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan, the total value of exports of Japanese agricultural, marine and food products to Thailand in 2013 rose 30% year-on-year to around 34.4 billion yen, the highest growth rate among Southeast Asian countries. New Japanese foodstuff and agricultural products always garner a lot of attention among Thai people and many trade shows, business consultation sessions and promotional fairs are frequently being organized for the Japanese food industry. In order to continue to support Japanese local manufacturers looking for new opportunities overseas, CLAIR held the Japan Local Specialty Fair in Bangkok from 14 – 24 November 2014 following the successful inaugural fair in the same city in November 2013.

This fair features local signature products sourced through local governments across Japan. Similar to last year, the main venue of the fair was luxury department store Siam Paragon in the heart of Bangkok. The location of the department store is very convenient as it is directly linked to Bangkok's BTS Sky Train system at Siam station, and is thus able to attract both local shoppers and tourists. Siam Paragon's customer base tends to be more upscale which is the exact fit for the promotion of high quality Japanese products. The fair was conducted in the food and grocery section 'Gourmet Market.' Since the Gourmet Market shares the same floor as the food court and restaurants, the fair was crowded on many days, particularly on weekends. A total of 8 food companies from 8 local governments participated in the fair, with the average sales per company surpassing that of the previous year.

In the fresh fruits category, since persimmons were the best-selling fruit in the inaugural fair, participating exhibitors doubled the number imported this time. Even then, the initial stock proved insufficient as the persimmons were flying off the counters, thanks to the many customers who

bought 20 at one go. An extra shipment had to be arranged at short notice to replenish the stock. Thai people's love of persimmons extended to the fleshy dried versions too as persimmon chips were also sold out by the end of the fair. By comparison, sales of the Japanese pears paled considerably which could be attributed to the high unit price.



Promoters explaining to customers about the various products on display

In the snacks category, ooba-flavored rice crackers sold surprisingly well as it is a novelty in Thailand and customers liked the herb's sourness when eaten with rice crackers. The famous Castella honey sponge cakes of Nagasaki were initially shunned for its intense sweetness but were gradually accepted after promoters introduced various serving ideas that complement the cake. Soup stock and udon noodles were also popular after samples were handed out to convince customers of their quality of taste.

For beverages, given that Japanese tea is already widely accepted by the health-conscious Thai people as a healthy drink, it is unsurprising that green tea as well as brown rice tea were among the bestselling items during the fair. Moreover, notwithstanding the numerous restrictions on the promotion of alcoholic beverages in Thailand, customers who were well aware of the taste and quality of Japanese plum wines were still eager to try out new wine flavors.

Japanese agricultural and food products generally have a good reputation of being safe and of superior quality. It is hoped that this fair would be able to provide local manufacturers with a platform to assess their products in a foreign market.



Crowds at the Japan Local Specialty Fair



Siam Paragon Bangkok

Specialist Dispatch Project in Surabaya, Indonesia

Emergency preparedness and response in time of natural disaster such as flood are the two critical keys to saving lives. Realizing the significance of flood readiness in maintaining the city's continuous advancement, Surabaya City Government once again collaborated with CLAIR Singapore in the Specialist Dispatch Project for fiscal year 2014. Mr. Koichi Tagomori, an expert in the field of river management from Japan's Fukuoka Prefectural Government was dispatched to Surabaya from 24 to 27 November 2014 in order to conduct training on four topics, namely, flood prevention measures, emergency response system, early flood warning system, as well as the coordination mechanism between various stakeholders when flood occurs.



Participants making the regional disaster prevention map

Around 30 employees from the various departments of Surabaya City Government that are involved with flood prevention, for example Civil Defence Agency, Department of Public Works, Department of Spatial Planning and Department of Environment participated in the training program. Based on his observations from site visits to flood prone areas, the specialist delivered lectures that focused on aspects such as methods of repairing flood-damaged river banks, establishment of an emergency response system, effective implementation of early warning system for flood, as well as measures in promoting public participation so as to prevent damages from flood.

The specialist also conducted a practical training session, whereby participants were divided into several groups to jointly create a 'regional disaster prevention map'. This exercise was aimed at enabling participants to identify and register in their minds the key locations that are prone to natural disasters in the local area, so that they will be more prepared when a disaster occurs. In his concluding remarks, the specialist emphasised the importance of implementing the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) Cycle in planning as well as implementing flood prevention measures.

Through the Specialist Dispatch Project, CLAIR aspires to promote a higher level of knowledge transfer between local governments in Japan and the ASEAN region as well as India. Kindly contact CLAIR Singapore for further information on the project.

Specialist Dispatch Project in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Environmental conservation in the context of solid waste management is one of the key focus areas of Kuala Lumpur City Hall in plotting its future plan for sustainable growth. Realizing the need to better manage wastes produced in the city, Kuala Lumpur City Hall participated in CLAIR's '2014 Specialist Dispatch Project' whereby Mr. Eiji Ono, an expert in the field of waste management from Japan's Oita Prefecture was dispatched to the Physical Planning Department of Kuala Lumpur City Hall from 3 to 11 December 2014 to conduct the relevant trainings.

Local Agenda 21 Kuala Lumpur Unit, a sub-section established under the Physical Planning Department oversees the development of comprehensive plans for managing solid wastes in the city. One particular initiative launched by the unit, namely the 3R Initiative (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) aimed at promoting awareness on the importance of recycling among local residents has achieved critical success so far.

During the term of dispatch, the Japanese expert shared his knowledge with participants from Kuala Lumpur City Hall on topics such as the Japanese system of solid waste management, programs to encourage public participation in reducing and recycling wastes, as well as conducting group discussions with the participants to leverage their

understanding in the subject matters.

From his findings, the expert from Japan has made a proposal to establish a pilot area in Kuala Lumpur for implementing 3R that focuses on educating the local residents with regards to the sorting and reducing of solid wastes. The expert also commented that it is imperative to plan solid waste management from a long-term perspective.

CLAIR Singapore looks forward to future collaboration with Kuala Lumpur City Hall so as to enhance the city's efforts in solid waste management.



The expert from Japan examining eco bags produced by the local residents as part of the recycling program

Specialist Dispatch Project in Sukhothai, Thailand

Sukhothai, or “Dawn of Happiness” in Thai Language, is a province located in northern Thailand with a rich history and a wealth of tangible as well as intangible heritages. For example, the Sukhothai Historical Park features ruins from the golden era of the Sukhothai Kingdom founded some 700 years ago, and the park was declared a World Heritage Site in 1991. Tourism has always been a key driver for economic growth in the province, hence the provincial government is constantly sourcing for best practices pertaining to tourism promotion so as to strengthen the province’s competitive edge in this field. This led to Sukhothai Provincial



The expert (far right) visiting the Sukhothai Historical Park

Administrative Organization’s participation in CLAIR’s Specialist Dispatch Project.

Mr. Yosuke Kuwatani, an expert in tourism promotion from Japan’s Tottori Prefecture was dispatched to Sukhothai Provincial Administrative Organization from 17 to 22 January 2015 so as to implement the project. During the early stages of the project, the expert had the opportunity to exchange views with the various stakeholders, including representatives from the provincial government, Tourism Authority of Thailand as well as local industries, whereby topics such as issues of tourism development were deliberated. The expert was also given the chance to observe the various tourism resources existing in the province. Finally, the project concluded with a lecture by the expert, where he shared with program participants some effective marketing methods through social media tools such as Facebook, as well as the importance of gathering feedback from tourists via survey form. The expert also stressed the significance of having more multi-language signboards and restaurant menus so as to create a tourist-friendly environment in the province.

Through the project, both Sukhothai Provincial Administrative Organization and Tottori Prefectural Government have expressed their intentions of expanding the collaboration to other areas such as education and cultural exchange. It is hoped that the Specialist Dispatch Project could serve as a catalyst to facilitate more such cooperation between local governments in Japan and the ASEAN region.

CLAIR Singapore Conducts Study Visit on Local Administrative System in Brunei

On 28 – 30 October 2014, a group from CLAIR Singapore visited Brunei to conduct an in-depth study on the country’s local administrative system, during which the group members visited Brunei’s Ministry of Home Affairs, Brunei-Muara District Office, Bandar Seri Begawan Municipal Department, as well as 2 Kampung (villages) within the district, namely Kampung Kapok and Kampung Sungai Matan.

Unlike Japan, there is no local government in Brunei, and local administration typically occurs through the country’s 4 District Offices and 3 Municipal Departments, which are considered as operational administrative departments that are under the purview of Brunei’s Ministry of Home Affairs. This distinctive local administration system of Brunei is vastly different from that of Japan’s, and is information that is largely unfamiliar among many in Japan, making this an extremely fruitful and rewarding study that CLAIR Singapore is looking forward to sharing with Japanese local governments.

Japan and Brunei have long been highly significant and valuable partners to each other. Japan has remained the

largest importer of Brunei’s liquefied natural gas (LNG) for over a decade, and it is fair to say that Brunei has been a key support to Japan’s growing energy sector. Similar to this long-term partnership between Japan and Brunei, CLAIR Singapore hopes to be able to continue to contribute towards a higher level of understanding and collaboration between local governments in the 2 countries through more of such exchanges.

The findings of CLAIR Singapore’s study on Brunei’s local administrative system shall be published and posted on our website and various publications in due time, and we would like to take this opportunity to once again sincerely thank all our counterparts in Brunei who had warmly received and assisted us during this study visit.



Courtesy Call to Brunei’s Ministry of Home Affairs

Japan Local Administration Seminar

The modernization of public sector management is widely regarded as a pressing issue that needs to be addressed by local governments in the Asian region, as reforms in local governance are essential in establishing the utmost important aspect of public service delivery, which is to ensure the welfare of the people. For constructive transformations to occur, it is vital for local governments in the region to tap into each other's wealth of expertise in implementing local administration. With this vision in mind, CLAIR Singapore established a new initiative entitled 'Japan Local Administration Seminar' which functions as a platform for academics as well as practitioners of local governance from Japan and local governments in the ASEAN region to exchange their insights on local administration.



Group photo of the speakers and participants

The inaugural 'Japan Local Administration Seminar' was held on 9 December 2014 at Universiti Utara Malaysia, a prestigious national university located in the northern state of Kedah, Malaysia. The School of Government under the College of Law, Government and International Studies of the university was CLAIR Singapore's counterpart in implementing the seminar. Aimed at introducing some leading best practices from Japanese local governments to the

Malaysian audience, the seminar succeeded in bringing new light to what local governance should be.

During the seminar, four Deputy Directors from CLAIR Singapore delivered their presentations in English on topics related to local administration. Mr. Tadamasu Kaneko, who is assigned by Yamaguchi City in Japan, talked about Japan's unique local government system and the key roles of such local authorities in improving the lives of local residents. On the other hand, Mr. Kotaro Mihara from Kagoshima Prefecture in southern Japan discussed the topic of tourism promotion implemented by the Japanese Government. Assigned by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Ms. Biwa Matsuda provided an in-depth outlook on the development of urban infrastructures in Tokyo. Lastly, Ms. Rika Okada from Kumamoto Prefecture examined the effective promotional strategies conducted by the prefectural government in revitalizing the local economy.

Dr. Phang Siew Nooi, a leading expert in the field of local governance from Universiti Utara Malaysia, shared with the Japanese delegation her expertise on the many facets of local administration in Malaysia. The seminar concluded with group discussions between representatives from CLAIR Singapore and students from the university on a wide array of topics. On the following day, the delegation from CLAIR Singapore had the opportunity of visiting Alor Setar City Council, where the various possible channels of mutual cooperation were explored between both organizations.

CLAIR Singapore looks forward to continue working with its counterparts in the ASEAN region to bring more such seminars to fruition.



Lecture by a Japanese representative from CLAIR Singapore



Group discussion



ABOUT CLAIR

CLAIR is a joint organization founded in 1988 by 47 prefectures and 20 major cities in Japan in order to assist Japanese local authorities with the implementation of their international exchange policies. With its headquarters in Tokyo, CLAIR has seven overseas offices in New York, London, Paris, Singapore, Seoul, Sydney, and Beijing.

CLAIR Singapore office was set up in October 1990. It supports and promotes international activities and friendly relations between local authorities in Japan and their counterparts in Singapore and the ASEAN countries as well as India.

For further information on our activities, please contact CLAIR Singapore

CLAIR TOKYO HEADQUARTERS

The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations
Sogo Hanzomon building (1st, 6th, 7th floors)
1-7 Kojimachi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 102-0083, Japan
General Affairs Department
Tel: 81-3-5213-1730 Fax: 81-3-5213-1741
<http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html>

CLAIR SINGAPORE OFFICE

The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations
Singapore 6 Battery Road #26-01/02
Singapore 049909
Tel: 65-6224-7927 Fax: 65-6224-8376
E-mail: info@clair.org.sg
<http://www.clair.org.sg>