



J.CLAIR Singapore

Newsletter

Vol.72 March 2018

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The Japan Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (J.CLAIR), Singapore

6 Battery Road #26-01/02 Singapore 049909

Tel: +65-6224-7927 Fax: +65-6224-8376

Email: info@clair.org.sg

HP: <http://www.clair.org.sg/>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/clairsg/>

◆Recent Activities

Regional Exchange Promotion Programme in Thailand



Thailand and Japan have always maintained strong economic and cultural ties. Among all the Southeast Asian nations, Thailand was the top destination for Japan's fresh agricultural produce and foodstuff in terms of total export value in 2016¹. There are more than 2,700 premises offering Japanese food in Thailand, reflecting a vibrant yet highly competitive environment for Japanese restaurants. Japan's share of foreign direct investment in Thailand at the end of 2016 was 36.2%, the highest of all countries. Thailand also remains one of the most favourable locations for Japanese manufacturers and most of the 5,444 Japanese companies currently operating in Thailand are manufacturing-related companies². Japanese culture and businesses are widely accepted in Thailand and with an anticipated continual increase in the country's economic growth, Thailand has become a prime destination for Japanese local governments to promote cultural and economic exchange.

It is against this backdrop of sustained interest towards Thailand that J.CLAIR Singapore implemented the Regional Exchange Promotion

Programme in Bangkok and Sukhothai from 10 to 20 January 2018, in collaboration with the Japan Intercultural Academy of Municipalities (JIAM) as well as other related organisations. The programme aims to provide a constructive platform for Japanese local government officials to interact with other government officials, entrepreneurs, and local residents in Southeast Asian countries and India. Through the programme, Japanese local government officials will not only be able to gain first-hand knowledge pertaining to the many administrative and economic problems in the local context, but they will also have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives and establish important contacts with local counterparts which may lead to future cooperation.

To obtain a basic understanding of Thailand's central and local administration, the delegation first visited the Ministry of Interior's Department of Local Administration where they were able to learn about the local administrative structure and its problems. The visit to Bangkok Metropolitan Administration after that allowed the delegation to grasp the myriad urban issues that Bangkok has to tackle daily as the political and economic centre of Thailand, and to appreciate the solutions that the city is initiating.

To promote friendly exchange between Thailand and Japan, a cultural exchange programme was held with students studying Japanese language at local language schools. The Japanese delegates and Thai students were divided into several groups to discuss and exchange opinions about contemporary topics such as Japanese food, pop culture, sports etc. Many students began picking up Japanese language because of their passion for Japanese pop culture like anime and pop music. Their in-depth knowledge of anime content and little-known pop artists even surpassed many of the Japanese delegates. This exchange session was an invaluable opportunity for the Japanese delegates to interact with young Thai students to deepen mutual understanding of the cultural similarities and differences between the two countries.



Cultural exchange with students studying Japanese language

With a mind to expand mutual bilateral exchange beyond the big cities, the Japanese delegation also visited the province of Sukhothai in the northern part of Thailand where they were warmly welcomed by the Mayor and staff of the Sukhothai Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO). Sukhothai was the political and administrative capital of the first kingdom of Siam and boasts a plethora of tourism resources such as monuments, wall paintings, sculptures and artefacts that depict the beginnings of Thai architecture, local traditions and local industries.

Thanks to the detailed briefings provided by the staff of the Sukhothai PAO, the delegation learnt about the tourism promotional campaigns being planned by the local government to promote Sukhothai as the next must-visit tourism destination in Thailand. For example, there are plans to build more paths for bicycles, cultivate enthusiasm for sports in the province and create greater awareness for Sukhothai's unique traditional ceramic art. The delegation visited various historical sites and craft workshops related to the ancient ceramics industry in Sukhothai. As Japan also faces similar difficulties in finding successors to carry on its traditional art and crafts, Sukhothai's efforts to promote and revive its traditional ceramics industry elicited much interest from the Japanese delegates.



Visit to a traditional ceramics workshop in Sukhothai

Thailand and Japan commemorated 130 years of diplomatic relations in 2017. As the two countries continue to maintain close bilateral ties, it is hoped that the Regional Exchange Promotion Programme would have contributed to building stronger cooperative sentiments at the local level.

J.CLAIR Singapore will continue to implement this programme every year and through such activities, we aspire to strengthen the cooperative ties and widen the contact networks between local governments in Japan and ASEAN countries as well as India.

¹ Data from Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan

² Data from Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO)

A Fulfilling Experience in Thailand with the Regional Exchange Promotion Programme

*~ Message from a 2018 programme participant, Junichi Inagaki,
Chief Staff of New Industry Promotion Division,
Commerce, Industry & Labour Department, Yamaguchi Prefecture ~*

From 10 to 20 January 2018, I joined in the Regional Exchange Promotion Programme as part of a group of 15 municipal officials and international exchange association staff from Japan. After 3 days of preparation and training in Japan, we proceeded to visit Bangkok and Sukhothai in Thailand.

From Thai governmental organisations to Japanese government-related organisations and enterprises, the site visits arranged in the programme were indeed very stimulating and fulfilling. We exchanged opinions with the officials from the Ministry of Interior's Department of Local Administration, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and the Sukhothai Provincial Administrative Organization. Besides Japanese companies and industrial estates managed by Japanese staff, we also visited the Embassy of Japan, Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the Tokyo Metropolitan Small and Medium Enterprise Support Center for briefings on their organisations' activities and the economic situation in Thailand. There was even an opportunity to interact with local students learning Japanese language when we visited the Old Japan Students' Association of the Kingdom of Thailand.



Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

I was interested in learning about the different fields that offer prospects for Japanese companies to advance in Thailand in the future. However, the first thing that struck me on this first visit to Thailand was

the pressing need for infrastructure development because of problems such as chronic traffic congestion, land subsidence due to excessive extraction of groundwater and dangerous, loosely-hanging electrical wires in the urban areas.

On the investment environment, I learnt that there are currently more than 5,000 Japanese companies in Thailand and recently, more non-manufacturing companies are venturing into the market than manufacturing companies. This is due to an increasing need for businesses such as consultancies and accounting firms that support other Japanese businesses, in addition to retail and service providers such as food and beverage premises and private tutoring schools for Japanese students. Competition is already intensifying among these businesses. High prices and high quality of service are expected from them and new entrants into this industry need to distinguish themselves from the others.

Similarly to Japan, Thailand faces a declining birthrate and aging population with an unemployment rate of around 1% which implies a labour shortage problem. In order to compensate for the lack of workers, the need for niche industries is expected to increase. For example, robotics industries for factory automation, smart electronics and digital industries, as well as medical, health foods and nursing care industries that cater to the elderly.

These are all fields in which Japan has the experience and technology. I felt it was important to first understand local needs, think about how to add value to the current situation and start building personal connections in the country.

For me, I was able to build connections with the other participants and local people through this programme. I would definitely make use of this experience for my work in future.

The Inaugural Japan Local Specialty Fair in Kuala Lumpur

J.CLAIR Singapore conducted the “Japan Local Specialty Fair in Kuala Lumpur” from 10 to 19 November 2017 at ISETAN The Japan Store, located in Malaysia’s capital of Kuala Lumpur. Through this event, Japanese food companies looking to expand into overseas markets were recruited by local governments all over Japan, and they were given the opportunity to conduct test marketing of their products overseas.



Crowds at the fair

Popular products

The fair saw an active participation from 14 food companies recruited by 11 local governments in Japan. Among the wide array of food products available during the fair, the 2 products that stood out were grilled eels as well as oysters which were prepared and served on the spot to the customers. Visitors of the fair were attracted by the delicious aroma of the various food products.

Another popular product during the fair was packaged dried noodles. These were sold out before the event ended, and many customers bought them in bulk quantities. The relatively reasonable price, whereby 1 set of 4 packets was sold at RM 6.30 (about US\$1.60), was considered to be the main reason for the product’s popularity. This showed that local customers were price-conscious.

Feedback from the exhibitors

Though there were differences in the amount of sales

turnover among the exhibitors during the fair, most of the exhibitors saw it as a good opportunity to conduct test marketing of their products overseas. Some commented, “Even though the sales volume was not very high, I got to know the actual preferences and needs of the local consumers. I would like to further improvise my products so that they can fulfil the demands of local consumers”. “There were local customers who told me that my products will be more delicious when paired with Japanese sake”, commented one exhibitor.



An exhibitor carefully explaining the characteristics of his product to a customer

Tourism promotion of regions in Japan

To entice local visitors of the specialty fair to visit Japan, a lucky draw giving out a pair of return tickets to Japan was conducted. In addition, Japanese local governments involved in the specialty fair also distributed giveaways such as stickers, key chains as well as travel pamphlets at the fair venue.

Some local visitors of the specialty fair commented that they would like to visit the areas where the exhibited food products were made, and they hope to gain new experiences while visiting these areas. Local visitors showed a keen interest towards these new areas that they have never been before. It is hoped that through this event, more locals will visit Japan in the near future.

Specialist Dispatch Project on Agriculture to Yogyakarta, Indonesia

The Specialist Dispatch Project implemented by J.CLAIR Singapore is carried out with the aim to improve the quality of local administration and technical expertise in foreign local governments, as well as to strengthen the friendly ties between Japanese and foreign local governments. The project involves dispatching Japanese local government officials as specialists to meet the requests of foreign local governments for expertise in Japanese governance through lectures, practical training, and so on.

From 28 November to 5 December 2017, an official specialising in agriculture from Yamanashi Prefecture was dispatched to the Special Region of Yogyakarta in response to their request. The specialist gave lectures to government officials from the Special Region of Yogyakarta and other stakeholders, as well as conducted training at related institutions and production sites.



Field guidance at the strawberry farm

In November 2016, The Special Region of Yogyakarta and Yamanashi Prefecture signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Friendly Cooperation to promote stronger ties between the two parties in fields such as culture, agriculture, education, and tourism over the next five years. This Specialist Dispatch Project serves as the first exchange in the field of agriculture under the MOU.

The issues faced by the Special Region of Yogyakarta are namely raising productivity, and

developing an agritourism facility, the “Jogja Agro Techno Park”.

Concerning the first point, the Special Region of Yogyakarta requested for advice on the type of crops suitable for its various regions and agricultural techniques (especially with regard to methods of preventing disease and pests, and administering fertilizer in organic farming). The specialist explained how suitable crop types can be identified by trial and error from crops that have been known to flourish in similar climate conditions. In order to address the concerns in agricultural technique, he also explained how to effectively use pesticides and fertilizers, as well as recommended putting in place coverings to shelter the crops from rain and nets to protect them from pests.

The Special Region of Yogyakarta is also planning to develop an agritourism facility, the “Jogja Agro Techno Park” on the slopes of Mount Merapi, and the specialist gave advice on the types of fruits and vegetables that are suitable for growing at the proposed site as well as growing techniques.

J.CLAIR Singapore plans to carry out the Specialist Dispatch Project in the upcoming fiscal year as well. It is hoped that this project will not only serve to address the issues faced by foreign local governments, but also help foster exchange with Japanese local governments.



A lecture by the specialist

Forum for Local Government Officials Held in the Philippines

A Knowledge-Exchange Forum titled “Harnessing Community Involvement through Tourism Promotion and Development” was held in Leyte, Philippines, on 30 January 2018. Targeted for local government officials in the Philippines, this forum was co-organised by J.CLAIR Singapore together with the Local Government Academy (LGA), a training arm for local governments in the Philippines that is under the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

Three speakers were invited from the Province of Samar, Province of Sorsogon, and the Province of Batanes in the Philippines and two speakers were invited from Ama Town of Shimane Prefecture and Aya Town of Miyazaki Prefecture in Japan. During the first half of the session, speakers took to the stage to give a presentation on some of the best practices at their respective local governments.



Presentation by the speaker from Aya Town

Participants eagerly listened to the presentations by the Japanese speakers as the topics of rejuvenating an island community through inviting more people to settle there and the revitalisation of a town using nature are of great interest to them.

Following that, to allow all speakers and participants an opportunity to further exchange their views and experiences, a group discussion session termed the “Knowledge Café” was also incorporated into the

programme. In this session, all participants were given the opportunity to visit and rotate around these “cafés” to learn and share more insights about the topics with both the speakers and other participants. As expected, all participants were very keen and eager to share about the various challenges and issues faced by their own local governments, as everyone gathered in their groups together with the speakers to have a lively exchange and discussion on the topics. The “cafés” for the Japanese speakers received much interest. Participants expressed comments such as “I would like to visit the site” and “We would like to become Sister Cities with you”. We can look forward to more future exchanges at the local government level between the Philippines and Japan.



The Knowledge Café session

On the second day of the Forum, participants inspected the sites of community-based tourism in the Province of Samar. The potential of community-based tourism was witnessed through the warm hospitality of the people in Samar and experiencing the exciting activities using natural resources.

With the warm participation from all our speakers and participants, the programme ended on a highly successful note and can be said to have helped contribute in further leveraging the collaboration between local governments in both the Philippines and Japan into greater heights.

WASHOKU

~Spreading Japanese Local Charms through Cooking~

Surrounded by nature such as mountains, seas and rivers, Japan with its distinct four seasons is full of a wide variety of produce and ingredients. Each prefecture has its own specialty produce such as fresh seafood, wild vegetables as well as seasonings that help to enhance the flavour of a dish.

Japanese cuisine is very popular in ASEAN countries including Singapore, and places that sell Japanese produce have also been growing in recent years. On the other hand, there are still many locals who do not know how to cook these Japanese produce and ingredients, so while they enjoy eating Japanese cuisine outside, most have never tried cooking Japanese meals by themselves at home.

For this reason, in FY2017 J.CLAIR Singapore decided to carry out our first ever cooperative project with ABC Cooking Studio Singapore (hereinafter referred to as “ABC Cooking Studio”), to encourage more foreigners to better appreciate the wonderful flavours and diversity of Japanese produce.

This project involves holding a series of cooking lessons using specialty produce provided by different prefectures in Japan, while following recipes that are specially created by ABC Cooking Studio. The aim is to allow Singaporean participants to learn how to cook and prepare meals using the Japanese produce and tasting them at the same time.



Participants enjoying the cooking lesson

For each series of lessons, a total of 60 cooking classes with 4 participants per class are conducted by ABC Cooking Studio over the duration of one month. The first series of lessons were conducted in November 2017 and featured local produce from Hyogo and Fukuoka Prefectures. This was followed by a second series of lessons in December featuring

produce from Kochi and Saitama Prefectures, and a final series of lessons in February and March 2018 that featured foods from Akita, Gunma and Shizuoka Prefectures. Through a cross-collaborative effort with several Japanese prefectures, a total of about 720 people participated in these cooking lessons.

Some of the dishes on the menu in November included baked seafood stew and oyster chowder, which use seafood that are popular among Singaporeans. Octopus and oysters from Hyogo Prefecture as well as red sea bream from Fukuoka Prefecture were directly imported from Japan to be used for the classes. Both the participants and cooking instructors had high praise for these produce that were not only huge in size, but also had a firm texture and rich taste. In addition, many participants had asked, “Where can I buy this produce?”, or “How much does it cost?” which shows that the experience of handling and cooking these ingredients could potentially lead to a higher inclination among consumers to buy these produce themselves.



Completed dishes by a participant

In addition, in line with the theme of “Japanese New Year”, *Osechi* (traditional New Year’s cuisine in Japan) was featured in the cooking lessons that were held in December. During the lessons, the instructors carefully explained how Japanese eat *Osechi* and the meaning behind each dish, which helped participants to understand the Japanese culture that lies behind the dish while learning how to cook and appreciate these ingredients at the same time.

J.CLAIR Singapore plans to carry on this project in the next fiscal year and continue to help raise consumers’ awareness of Japanese produce and ingredients and consequently, bring about a higher level of sales of these produce in the local market.

◆Events introducing JAPAN

~In ASEAN countries and India, events promoting Japan are often held.
We will introduce a few of them here~

“Fukuoka Yangon Festival 2017” in Myanmar

On 3 November 2017, the inaugural “Fukuoka Yangon Festival” was held at Junction City, a shopping mall located in Myanmar’s Yangon City. The festival was implemented to commemorate the first anniversary of the sister cities agreement between Yangon City and Fukuoka City.



Yangon Festival 2017”. During the opening ceremony, the Mayor of Fukuoka City introduced the many fascinating facets of Fukuoka and showcased how the city lives in harmony with the environment.

At the event venue, in addition to Japanese *taiko* (drum) performances, yukata

Yangon City and Fukuoka City became sister cities on 7 December 2016, making it the first sister cities agreement signed between Myanmar and Japan.

In fact, the relations between the two cities started in 2012, when Fukuoka City dispatched a technical staff in the field of water supply and sewage management to Yangon City. Currently, a staff dispatched from Fukuoka City is working as an “Urban Planning Support Advisor” at Yangon City.

The Mayor of Yangon City and Mayor of Fukuoka City both graced the opening ceremony of “Fukuoka

wearing as well as origami experiences, visitors could also enjoy delicious pastries from the popular Japanese bakery “La Vie En Rose” and from the ramen restaurant “Ippudo”, both of which originated in Fukuoka and had opened stores in Yangon City. The festival was a success and the event venue was bustling with many local visitors. This festival provided an invaluable opportunity to the local people in Yangon City to know more about Fukuoka City in Japan. It is hoped that the cordial relations between both cities will be further enhanced in the future.

“Cool Japan Festival 2017” in Mumbai, India

The 6th “Cool Japan Festival 2017” was held in Mumbai from 25 to 26 November 2017, with the aim to promote the captivating cultural facets of Japan, including its traditional culture, food culture as well as pop culture such as animation and cosplay.



At the event venue, visitors could find booths exhibiting Japanese processed foods as well as other products made in Japan. There were also booths selling freshly-made sushi and miso soup. In addition, visitors could also buy postcards of Japanese landscapes as well as learn more about Japanese anime and manga at the relevant booths.

During the event, programmes such as a J-POP concert, a photo session with Japanese anime characters, a cosplay fashion show etc. were held.

Many local visitors participated in the programmes, and this proved that the level of interest towards Japanese pop culture is high in India.

One of the visitors commented, “I am interested in Japanese anime culture and I am currently studying the Japanese Language. I am more captivated

by Japanese anime and manga than those in India. I hope I will have an opportunity to visit Japan in the future.”

Currently, Japanese food products are not widely available in India, and it is difficult to purchase such products at supermarkets in the country. Therefore, it will be an important future task for both countries to popularise Japanese culture and Japanese food in India.

◆Do you know Japanese Local Foods ?

~In Japan, each local area has its own local food that cannot be found in other areas. We will introduce a few of them here~

“Kibidango” of Okayama Prefecture

Located 45 minutes west of Osaka by the Shinkansen (bullet train), Okayama Prefecture is blessed with an abundance of delicious foods that are available throughout the four seasons, including sweet fruits such as white peaches and shine muscat grapes, as well as fresh seafood like mackerel and octopus.

Among these, the food that I would like to introduce to you today is “Kibidango”, which can be readily eaten and serves as a perfect souvenir.

Kibidango is a traditional Japanese sweet that appears in the story of “Momotaro” (also known as “The Peach Boy”), which is one of the most well-known folk stories in Japan. The story is believed to have its origins in Okayama, and as a result, Kibidango has been a very recognised and familiar food item among locals since the olden days. Kibidango is a soft rice cake with a slightly sweet taste to it and is widely produced by many local manufacturers, including one that has received halal certification. Recently, some manufacturers have also come up with new flavours of Kibidango, such as



muscat or peach flavours which are specialties of Okayama, and even salt-flavoured ones.

As Kibidango is essentially made of raw flour, rice and sugar, it does not have a very long shelf life and is hard to be sold overseas. To enjoy Kibidango, I recommend you to come to Okayama and enjoy the sweet while touring some of our famous shrines or historic sites that are associated with the story of Momotaro. Do not forget to also bring some Kibidango back as a souvenir for your family and friends, for I am sure they will be delighted with it.

“Kawara Soba”, Soul Food of Yamaguchi Prefecture

Lush in nature such as mountains and seas, one can enjoy beautiful sceneries throughout the four seasons in Yamaguchi Prefecture, which is located at the westernmost tip of Japan’s main island.

Surrounded on three sides by the sea, Yamaguchi Prefecture is abundant in fresh fish and is one of the most famous breeding grounds of the natural Tiger Pufferfish, a fine delicacy in Japan that attracts people from all over the country to come to Yamaguchi just for a taste of it. Contrary to the exclusive pufferfish, the dish that I would like to introduce today is a more casual fare that is readily available and well-loved by locals in Yamaguchi, called “Kawara Soba” (Roof tile Buckwheat Noodles).

Just as its name suggests, Kawara Soba is a *cha-soba* (tea buckwheat noodle) dish that is served on a heated plate of *kawara* (stone roof tile) and topped with ingredients such as thin omelette strips, meat and green onions. Taken together with a warm dipping sauce, the refined fragrance of the cha-soba and



savoury aroma of the meat, coupled with the sizzling sound from the kawara tile is bound to stir up your appetite.

Furthermore, the vivid contrast of colours from the green and yellow of the cha-soba and omelette strips against the black kawara tile also makes this dish extremely pleasing to the eye and great for that perfect Instagram shot.

Do visit Yamaguchi next and try the Kawara Soba for yourselves!