



# JLGC NEWSLETTER

Japan Local Government Center (CLAIR, New York)  
Issue No.81 March 2015



*CLAIR FELLOWSHIP  
EXCHANGE PROGRAM 2014  
ISSUE NO.81 MARCH 2015*

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## *CLAIR Fellowship Exchange Program 2014 was held from October 19 to October 29 in 2014*

This program has been affording senior state and local government officials an opportunity to experience Japanese government administration first hand. This year the program was held in Tokyo and Amagasaki City, Hyogo Prefecture.



### Theme: Promotion of the tourism industry

Amagasaki City is known as an industrial city, but not well known as tourist destination. Now, promoting tourism in Amagasaki City has become an important issue, improving not only the local economy but also reenergizing the local communities. They would like to exchange opinions and share information about promoting tourism with senior officials who have experience or knowledge in the field.

Participants exchanged their opinions, especially on the tourism industry. Also they experienced home-stays and traditional Japanese culture.

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Mr. Bob Gatt  
Mayor, City of Novi, MI

In October, 2014, I set out for a trip of a lifetime. Although the flight was long and went through the night, I could not sleep because of the excitement that I felt coursing through my veins.

Upon arrival in Tokyo, I was met by Jasmine, a CLAIR employee who could not have been any nicer or more helpful. She put me on the correct bus to my hotel, where I was met by yet another CLAIR staff member who saw to it that my room was ready and that I could finally rest.

The next 11 days are a whirlwind of memories, excitement and pleasurable experiences. We traveled to Amagasaki City via Shin-Osaka, the Japanese bullet train. We met the Mayor of Amagasaki who could not have been nicer. The Amagasaki staff showed us around their city and the pride they felt shined through. We saw parks, theatres, factories and even stayed at the Takeyasu Inn where many of us experienced the traditional Japanese baths. Finally, as a group, we shared thoughts, ideas and opinions about what we saw and learned with Amagasaki City officials.

Although it is always a good feeling to “go home”, when the end of our trip came, I felt a deep sense of sorrow. The Japanese people could not have been more hospitable. I will definitely return to Japan and spend more time in that most beautiful country.



Ms. Michelle Smibert  
President, Association of  
Municipal Managers, Clerks  
and Treasurers of Ontario

I had the distinct pleasure of being a participant of the 2014 CLAIR program and exchange. It is without question that this program has been the highlight of my career for so many different reasons but all relate to the people aspect. First of all, I was so very impressed with the highly organized CLAIR staff members who go way out of their way to greet you, make you feel at home and who take the time to ensure that you are exposed to all of the great “experiences” that Japan has to offer. Secondly, it was such an awesome experience to get to know so many great people from some really great organizations and Associations from North America. The program helps to put in perspective the great number of organizations that have such positive impacts on Local Government and how we should be networking more so that we can learn from each other’s experiences and perspectives. Finally, the staff and the Mayor of Amagasaki City were amazing as they let us into their world of challenges and spoke to us about their hard work on capitalizing on their opportunities within their beautiful City. There was no doubt that a lot of hard work and planning had gone into the program and we were fortunate to be able to see the progress on projects and also look at adopting these approaches to our own local governments here in North America. I am truly grateful that I had this opportunity to meet such great people!

## JAPAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTER (CLAIR, NY)

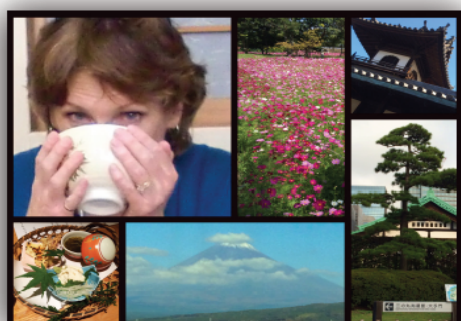
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Ms. Julie Lays

Editor / Group Director, National Conference of State Legislatures



The CLAIR fellowship exchange program with the city of Amagasaki was an absolutely wonderful way for me to see, experience, taste, enjoy and learn about Japan—even with an undiagnosed broken heel bone at the time!

During the classroom lectures on Japanese government and onsite inspections of forest and water projects, to the weekend stay with a wonderful Japanese family, I gained perspective on local challenges and the varied day-to-day life of the typical Japanese citizen.

Viewing the immensity of the world's biggest city from the Tokyo Tower, the unexpected beauty of factories all lit up at night in Amagasaki and the down-to-the-second accuracy of the bullet train, I was reminded of the great power of Japan.

From the sacred shrines to the museums of candy molds and piggy banks, to the mood-tingling night spent in a Ryokan Inn during a lightning and thunderstorm, I experienced the richness of Japanese culture, tradition and spirit.

From the serene Imperial Gardens in Tokyo to the endless sea of Cosmos flower gardens in Amagasaki—with Mt. Fuji rising tall in between—I caught a glimpse of the natural beauty of Japan.

From the smiling raw fish and chopstick-sized bites of wiggly tofu to the omnipresent Miso soup, green tea and sake, I got a taste of Japan.

But, best of all, from exchanging business cards and gifts to sharing beer and laughter with new CLAIR friends and North American colleagues, I experienced the warmth of Japan.

I am so grateful to have been given this unique opportunity.

Thank you. Arigatou gozaimasu!

Julie Lays





**Mr. Sam Mamet**  
Executive Director, Colorado  
Municipal League

This trip was a once in a lifetime experience. I had some doubts prior to going not having done this type of trip before. I kept asking myself, "what on earth did I get myself into!" However, I would tell anyone who is given this honor of participating to do so without hesitation.

The trip itself was well organized; the group participants were an absolute delight to be with; and the cultural exchange was extremely rewarding and enriching.

There were so many highlights, and I will name a few:

- Japan is a marvelous country with wonderful and kind people. I knew very little about the country before going. I will come back again someday. I especially enjoyed the rich and deep history of Japan, and the respect for tradition.
- It was fascinating to learn about the legal and political structure of Japan and how the national government, the prefectures, and the municipalities all interact.
- The lectures and presentations were terrific and informative.
- Japan understands the importance of infrastructure, just take a ride on the "bullet train" sometime and you will know exactly what I mean.
- Amagasaki is a wonderful city with a great vision and direction for the future. We spent a lot of time looking at the city's many projects and giving feedback. I hope to go back and see the progress I know that those dedicated city officials will continue to be making over the years ahead.

- The home stay was a sheer delight. If every family on this planet could do at least one home stay with another family, perhaps this world might be a better place. I hope that my home stay results in a long and lasting friendship.

- Tokyo is a world class city. It is amazing and worth a visit. It will be a fabulous Summer Olympics host city in a few years.

I want to thank the Japan Local Government Center, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, and the National League of Cities for this opportunity. I will cherish the memories for a long time to come.



**Mr. Justin Fisk**  
Policy Associate for Federal  
and International Affairs,  
Council of State Governments

I had the pleasure of participating in the CLAIR program last November. We spent about a week and a half in Tokyo and Amagasaki Prefecture where I had the opportunity to learn the nuances of Japan's governmental system at the federal, state, and local levels. The CLAIR staff packed our days and nights with visits to government ministries, private sector companies, and local attractions. During the trip, I was surprised to learn that local governments in Japan are utilizing innovative and creative solutions that can be adopted by local governments in America to solve many common problems, such as turning an illegal landfill into a beautiful public garden. It is clear that local government officials from the U.S. and Japan can learn a lot from each other, and the CLAIR program provides a very useful platform for our governments to do this and to exchange best practices.





Mr. Jon Branson  
Deputy City Manager,  
City of Pearland, TX

On behalf of the International City/County Managers Association and the City of Pearland, I would like to take this opportunity to give a hearty Texas "Thank You" to CLAIR for the great opportunity to participate in the 2014 Local Government Exchange in Tokyo and Amagasaki City. The Staff at CLAIR was absolutely fantastic and made sure that our trip went off without a hitch. They did an outstanding job of making sure all the details were taken care of and we had everything we needed for a successful tour of Japan.

Although this was my first visit to Japan, I can say with all certainty, that it will not be my last. What I enjoyed the most during the Exchange were the Japanese people. Throughout the trip they were polite, respectful, open, helpful and genuine. The manner in which I felt welcomed in their country was simply overwhelming. One of the many highlights for me was the homestay with the Nakishi family. From the moment that they welcomed me into their home, I felt like I had known them for years. Shortly after my arrival, they had me in their kitchen cooking a Japanese meal comprised of Octopus, ham, eggs, onions and peppers. I will not forget the joy that I had sharing this unique experience with them. Another highlight of my homestay was visiting the cities of Nara, Kyoto, Kobe and Osaka with my host family.

A good portion of our time in Japan was spent with officials from the City of Amagasaki City. The City is an industrial City with a unique feel and vibe. We had the great pleasure to meet the Mayor, Ms Kazumi Inamura, the former co-spokesperson of Greens Japan and the youngest female Mayor elected in Japan. During our exchange we discussed challenges that we both face in local government and through the exchange, shared ideas and methodologies that will assist each other in growing our communities.

Japan is a great country with amazing people, an outstanding transportation system, a unique history with numerous temples and attractions. The CLAIR staff lead and outstanding trip packed full events and tours that allowed us to experience the Japanese culture first hand creating an experience that will be remembered for a lifetime. I commend CLAIR for a great program and wish continued success in the exchange as you promote Japan and allow the western world the opportunity to see what a great country you have.







**Ms. Lauren Crawford**  
Program Manager,  
International City/  
County Management  
Association

A big and sincere 'Thank you' to the Japan Local Government Center, CLAIR staff and the everyone involved from the City of Amagasaki for organizing such a well thought out program! I found everyone we interacted with to be open and sincere in wanting to exchange opinions and ideas. Our home family stays provided our group with unforgettable memories that helped to deepen our understanding of Japan and Japanese culture. I want to thank Amagasaki for hosting an opinion exchange to delve deeper into issues that are facing their wonderful city. It truly was an incredible and unforgettable experience that I have talked to numerous colleagues about. The experience provided me with great professional development and allowed me to think creatively about problems I face in my day to day operations. I can't wait to continue to follow along with JLGC / CLAIR in their future programming. One final and big hearty 'Thank you' again!



**Mr. David O'Hara**  
Manager, Fort York  
National Historic Site,  
City of Toronto

I want to thank everyone at CLAIR for making the 2014 Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar such a wonderful experience. The CLAIR staff and the organization and thought that went into the seminar were truly beyond compare. Participating in the Tokyo seminar and the study tour in Amagasaki City provided such a unique opportunity to learn more about Japan's history, culture, and government administration. The exchange of information and ideas with representatives and travel colleagues throughout the seminar was invaluable and I return home with lessons I'll certainly be able to share with others and apply in my own endeavours.

A special thank-you to the Kaneko family for making the homestay such a wonderful experience and to the Canadian Urban Institute for making it possible for me to attend the seminar.

I certainly look forward to returning to Japan again in the near future.



## *New York Times Travel Show 2015*

New York Times Travel Show was held at the Jacob Javits Convention Center from 23rd to 25th January. Over 500 exhibitors from all over the world attended this event and showed off to the participants travel information to everywhere in the world. JLGC staffs also attended this event on January 24th and 25th as the exhibitor of the Japan Booth and introduced Japanese travel information to participants who are interested in Japan.

In this event, a lot of people who love or used to be in Japan came to our booth in order to get the travel information to Japan. Many people seemed to be interested in visiting big cities in Japan, such as Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto. Some of them don't know where these cities are located, how to get there and how long it takes, so we explained to them by using a Japan map the idea of traveling in Japan.



For example, we have the Shinkansen (a bullet train) in many prefectures. It is fast, it is reliable (always on time), it is comfortable and it will be the best way to see Japan. And the Hokuriku Shinkansen will start working between Tokyo and Kanazawa city, Ishikawa prefecture, which is located northwest from Tokyo, in March 2015. So, we may have many opportunities to take the Shinkansen during travel in Japan.

I was impressed many people were interested in the travel to Japan, I hope they will come to Japan in the future and have great experiences, such as eating wonderful Japanese food, watching beautiful scenery and experiencing Japanese cultures.





## Japan Week 2015

"Japan Week" is an annual event, held in New York City's iconic Grand Central Station's Vanderbilt Hall. It is of short duration; this year it was held from 18th to the 20th February. But, packed into that short amount of time is a veritable smorgasbord of everything Japanese. It is truly amazing how much can be squeezed into such a short amount of time. If the number of visitors is anything to go by, then the celebration of Japan was an enormous success.

Vanderbilt Hall is split into two parts by a hallway to the main concourse of the station. So, one of the entrances from the street means that one has to pass through the Hall on the way to catching one's train. Thus, the Hall is an ideal place to hold exhibitions and other events to capture the attention of the travelling public. "Japan Week" is organised to take advantage of that split. On one side, there are all sorts of vendors enticing the public to sample their wares. On the other side, a stage was set up for special performances.

So, what was included in the celebration of Japan? On the food side, long lines were seen waiting to try 'Dotonbori' from Japan (these are grilled dumplings filled with fresh octopus). Or, what about the crispy 'daigaku imo' (these are deep fried sweet potatoes on a stick, often eaten cold). Then there was 'Beard Papa' cream puffs, a delicious dessert. Sun Noodle satisfies the ramen desire that is Japan's comfort food. Though made in the United States for the past 30 years, they are as close to authentically Japanese as the chief executive officer, Hidehito Uki, says he can make them. For those who already know, Mitsuwa supermarkets displayed a whole array of Japanese foods and gifts. Mitsuwa supermarkets are quite popular all over the United States, with a local one just across the Hudson River in Edgewater, New Jersey. One feature of a lot of Japanese department stores is the 'Depachika'. 'Depachika' are food markets in the basement of Japanese department stores. They sell snacks, sweets and all sorts of what we would call street foods.

What about a marusei butter sandwich (a Hokkaido cookie sandwich filled with rum-raisin butter)! Then there is haginotsuki (a Sendai cake-like sweet with custard filling). I am sure that many Americans have tasted green tea ice cream – let me assure you it is fabulous. But what about eating green tea chocolate cake (a favourite of Kyoto or Hyogo)? Finally, one should try an Okinawan delicacy – beniimo tart (made from purple yams).



Japan Week 2015

Famous manufacturers were there to show off products that are very familiar to the American market. Seiko showed off a grand number of their special watches. Sharp is introducing a one-cup green tea machine. Incidentally, it can make green tea latte, hot or cold and, unlike the green tea (matcha) often provided in Japanese hotels, this machine will prepare the tea leaf and then dispense the tea all in one process. As an inveterate tea drinker, I for one am looking forward to having this machine in my kitchen! Ito-en, another very familiar product in the United States, was displaying all sorts of new tastes for Americans – including the famous green tea ice cream. No Japanese event would be complete without the chance to savour her most famous drink – Sake. And so, "Japan Week" provided visitors with a sampling of a variety of Japanese Sakes. Not to be outdone, visitors could also get a chance to taste the many types of Japanese beers.



## *Japan Week 2015*

"Japan Week" was much more than food, however. The history of Japan and its culture, both ancient and modern, is unique in this world. So, "Japan Week" gave the visitor a sample of the ancient and the modern. These were the performances on the stage set up in the other half of the exhibition. From Wednesday afternoon to Friday evening, there were short performances of various aspects of Japanese culture and history. A demonstration of traditional wedding attire by Watabe Weddings was a beautiful sight. Watabe Weddings even offered a special chance for a couple to travel to Japan for a romantic getaway by modelling the traditional wedding costume. Here are the winners!



Presentation of Kabuki © Insider Images

Then there was traditional music. Even though located in New York, Masayo Ishigure and her students gave a stirring performance on the Koto and Shamisen instruments – another tribute to ancient custom. Then there was that masterful presentation of another ancient art-form – Kabuki.



Japanese traditional wedding costume © Insider Images



Performance on the Koto



## Japan Week 2015

But modernism was not to be outdone. First, there was a cool display of kawaii fashion. Then, there was the ever popular characters Doraemon and Domo. There were images of the queen of J-Pop, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, proudly announcing the best innovation for visitors to Japan in quite a while: もしもしにっぽん (or, in English, Moshi Moshi Nippon, which means 'hello Japan'). This is an attempt to spread Japan's pop culture to the world through fashion, music, anime, food and a whole lot more. The MOSHI MOSHI BOX is part of this reaching out to the world by becoming the go-to place for visitors to Japan and the would-be visitors to Japan in many other countries. The first MOSHI MOSHI BOX was launched in 2014, right in the middle of Japan's pop-culture mecca, Harajuku. More are planned in various cities around the world.



MOSHI MOSHI BOX, youth culture welcomes visitors to Japan



Bullet-train: The E-7 © East Japan Railway Company

Finally, what would Japan be without its most famous technological feat – the Shinkansen? Japan Railways East was there to show off its newest bullet-train: The E-7. All in all, compressed into a short three-day event, “Japan Week” was able to encompass so many different aspects of Japan – its culture, its technological achievements, its ancient wisdom and enduring traditions, its modernism and, perhaps most important, its sense of vitality as a nation. I can imagine that next year's celebration will be just as wonderful.



## *What Japanese food do you like best?*

Some of you know that Japanese cuisine (Washoku) was included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list in 2012. Japanese cuisine is not only sushi, however. It has a lot of variety, including dishes such as sukiyaki, shabushabu, tempura, yakitori, teriyaki, and many others.

Many Japanese municipalities try to promote their local products to the world and want to know what kinds of foods are loved abroad these days.

Since I had to make a short presentation in Tokyo about 'Japanese Cuisine Trends in the US and Canada' in October 2014, I asked members of JETAA USA and JETAA Canada, "What Japanese food do you like?" Why did I ask them? Because they have all stayed in Japan more than one year, and they had a lot of chances to have authentic Japanese food. I thought it likely that the food they love can be enjoyable for many Americans and Canadians.

JETAA members, from north to south and east to west, answered my survey. I appreciate their support. Thank you very much!

The survey's Top 3 answers are as follows:

No.1 Sushi

No.2 Ramen

No.3 Okonomiyaki (kind of like pancakes, and containing a variety of ingredients)



Okonomiyaki

Sushi and ramen are popular in New York, of course. However, I hadn't known that okonomiyaki is also popular with JETAA members.

Other popular foods include tonkatsu (a breaded, deep-fried pork cutlet), yakisoba (fried noodles), soba (Japanese noodles), korokke (croquette), izakaya food (small dishes, kind of like tapas), and onigiri (rice balls).

The alumni clearly love typical Japanese foods, which are usually homemade.

Please come to Japan and enjoy a variety of delicious Japanese foods at their source!