

AJS FNQ Society History - Past Presidents

Mr Peter Cominos	1981-82	(12 months)
TBC	1982-94	
Capt. Terry Russell	1994-2002	(8 years)
Rebecca Wright	2002	(12 months)
Philip Turner	2003-4	(24 months)
Michael Waters	2005-6	(18 months)
Andrew McLean	2006-7	(18 months)
Colyn Huber	2007-8	(12 months)
Jeff Haynes	2009	(Current)

The **Australia Japan Society in Far North Queensland Inc.** was registered on **20th November 1981.**

Collection of Historical Documents

[AJS FNQ October 1998 Newsletter](#)



Bill Cummings' daughter Ruth welcoming one of first tour groups at Cairns Airport, about 1981.



Bill at Ibuski Resort near Kagoshima on 1st Queensland Tourist Promotion Mission to Japan, about 1981.



Bill with a member Kyushu Television Team & son Andrew, in Cairns, about 1981.



Bill with Janet at Saturday night dinner with one of early Japanese tour groups, at Kamsler's former Tradewinds Motel, Florence Street Cairns, about 1981.



Bill with Janet & school children in Tokyo on JAL inaugural flight, late 1980's.

Brief History of AJS FNQ in the 1980's

Courtesy of W S (Bill) Cummings of Cummings Economics

The following gives some background on the formation of the Australian Japan Society in Cairns from my perspective as the Manager of the then Far North Queensland Promotion Bureau (now TTNQ) from 1973 to 1982.

We were aware that Japanese tourism to Australia was increasing strongly in the late 70's but given lack of direct access, very few were coming to Cairns.

A breakthrough occurred when Air Niugini came to us about 1980 with a proposal to bring Japanese groups down to Cairns via their B707 flights from Kagoshima to Port Moresby and thence through to Cairns on their regular flights from Port Moresby.

We seized the opportunity with both hands and ran with it strongly. A motivation in the background included the tussle going on with Townsville about upgrading the airport to take long distance international flights by wide bodied jets.

The groups started arriving on a weekly basis. They would come down on Fridays, spend their weekend in Cairns before returning to Port Moresby for a number of days and then returning to Japan on Thursdays. We were so keen that we would organise local people (board directors, civic leaders, etc.) to attend a dinner with them on Saturday evenings and present them with an honorary citizenship certificate.

Despite the language difficulties, the dinners were a great success including for the locals participating.

Kinki Nippon were the tour organisers and only recently I had contact from one of the then young tour guides, Koh Fujiwara, now a well established photographer in Japan with a special interest in nature photography.

Ken Onishi was the other main guide. Attached are some photos of our daughter Ruth welcoming the groups at the airport and at one of the dinners.

We soon learnt that we were dealing with a very different market and needed to climb a steep learning curve. That included the industry and shops learning to deal with tightly organized groups with different perceptions about commissions.

A number of Japanese ladies in the area married to Australians were extremely valuable during this early phase in assisting with interpreting, helping produce brochure material etc., including Kay Fisher of the International Hotel, Shizue Pennicott and Mayumi Thompson.

As part of a concerted effort, we decided it would be a good idea to form a branch of the Australian Japan Society. We invited the then executive officer of the Society from Sydney to come up to Cairns. He addressed a meeting we called at the Bureau's then Visitor Information Centre in the converted former Fire Brigade building (now site of the parking station in Grafton Street next to the old Council Chambers, now Library).

It was resolved to form an Australian Japan Society in North Queensland. Peter Cominos, one of the leading businessmen in the city and a director of the Bureau, kindly agreed to be Chairman. The staff of the Bureau helped support it and organize regular functions.

As part of the promotion in the market, I went up on the first Queensland Tourism Mission to Japan along with representatives from the Gold Coast, Rockhampton and from Tourism Queensland in Brisbane.

We hosted travel agents and journalists from Japan and at one stage KTV (Kyushu TV) sent down a camera team and presenter to cover the area (photo attached).

However, time moved on. Air Niugini got into financial difficulties and ceased flying to Japan.

After 8 years in the position of Manager of what was in effect a wider development bureau with a strong tourism arm, I decided in 1982, it was time to do other things.

In the meantime, we had won the battle to get the airport upgrade. Initial flights were by Qantas to Hawaii and to South East Asia and it took a few years and an initial testing of the market with charters, before regular direct flights commenced.

Janet and I had the honour of being invited to be on the inaugural flight to Tokyo when JAL entered the market and were delighted to meet at the reception held in Tokyo one of the travel writers I had looked after during the early 80's.

Importantly, after the experiences in the early 1980's, the industry was ready and well geared to cater for Japanese visitors.

We had found the Japanese to be excellent, polite visitors, who we got on with, very well. Any early concerns about lingering animosities from World War II were soon dispelled.

Of course, when the direct flights commenced, visitor numbers rose rapidly and with very capable people like Geoff Donaghy as Bureau Manager, cultivating the market at the time, Japan became a major element in the region's tourism.

I have been delighted to see that others have kept the Society going. It can be proud of the role it has played over the years in helping lay strong foundations for a lasting relationship between this region and Japan.