

Of Special Note:

- Message from Paul Dupuis
- Together: Creating a More Vibrant Osaka
- Policy Highlights: Information Security
- Osaka Foreign Business Leader : Mr. Darren Morrish

Individual Highlights:

Together: Creating a More Vibrant Osaka...	1
Policy Highlights: Information Security...	2
Osaka Foreign Business Leader.....	5
About us.....	7

“Mokarimakka?": Tough challenges, and Survivors

The phrase of the day in Osaka and beyond is: “So, how’s business?”. Traditionally in Osaka, merchants and business folks greet one another with the phrase, “Mokarimakka?” (Are you making money?). The traditional response is “Bochi-Bochi dennaaa” (It’s so-so, here and there). Recently in Osaka, the phrasing has changed from “Are you making money?”, to the more cautious question: “Is your business OK?” The world has entered into what is arguably the largest financial crisis (& a pending recession) since WWII, but there will be survivors. In fact, some businesses continue to perform well in this environment and

inevitably some see the recent crash as an opportunity. Low cost and high quality products and the “experience” is a key to success in the current market. Consumers spend in good times and in bad, but they become more selective. From a corporate perspective, there is a drastic decrease in spending on fringe items; i.e. non-vital business trips, year-end bonenkai’s brought in-house & strict budgets imposed. But large infra projects proceed as do mid-career hiring plans, two key measurements of a company’s vitality. One fact remains – businesses & companies exist primarily to survive and thrive. 2009 will be a year of survival, for Osaka

SMEs and corporate giants alike, creativity and cost management will play key roles in the outcome.

In this issue of our newsletter we are pleased to welcome Mr. Darren Morrish the GM of the Osaka Ramada Hotel (at Nakatsu station) to our foreign business leader spotlight corner. Darren has an intriguing story to tell and some valuable advice for the city of Osaka.

This marks the final newsletter of 2008. Here’s wishing everyone a restful holiday and a profitable new year in 2009. As always, your feedback is welcome!

Paul Dupuis, Adviser to Osaka City Revitalization Task Force

Together: Creating a More Vibrant Osaka

Those of us who love Osaka may be forgiven at times for only seeing our city as the good, wonderful place that it is. This same love for our city should prompt us, from time to time, to take a long, hard look at ourselves and our city, and to find ways to make this good city great. As much as the municipal government is eager to take the lead in planning policies that would help transform the city, it makes sense, even

wise, to enlist all citizens towards the enterprise of refashioning the city upon a base of 1) economic strength, 2) culture and sightseeing, 3) unleashing children’s potential power, 4) safety and comfort.

Let’s spread the news that Osaka seeks to transform itself and that we will no longer accept some of the less than stellar images that are occasionally associated with our city.

Through the

cooperation of City and Citizens, Osaka can seek to reduce the number of bicycles that clutter our beloved city. Through the partnership of City and Citizens, Osaka can throw away the label of being the worst city for crime in Japan. And finally, through hard work on the part of City and Citizens, Osaka will no longer have to worry about being linked with garbage in anybody’s mind.

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AUTHOR

The Osaka City Revitalization Task Force has commissioned Paul Dupuis to author this series of newsletters.

Paul Dupuis, Director of West Japan for Wall Street Associates, is a business development adviser to Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture and is a key member of the Kansai Economic Federation Roundtable.

He is also an Adviser to the Osaka City Revitalization Task Force. Questions & suggestions about these articles can be directed to him at:

paul.dupuis@wallstreetjapan.com

Together: Creating a More Vibrant Osaka

Through the policy vision, Energetic City Osaka, being promoted by Osaka City, it is envisioned that Osaka will be able to reduce considerably the amount of garbage in the city, the number of bicycles that are illegally parked, and the amount of criminal activity in the city.

Policy Highlights: Information Security

Osaka City will endeavour to safeguard citizens' personal information. This means you should not worry about others accessing your personal information through the City's homepage/website. The only exception is where there is an overriding public welfare interest at stake.

The City's homepage has been designed to allow citizens to access information without the need to disclose personal information. In some cases, a limited amount of information will be collected; if so, it is likely only for statistical purposes and should not compromise the anonymity that you enjoy under this policy.

Moreover, in those cases where there is a real need to obtain personal information the situation will be clearly explained.

The use of Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology ensures that any information that is collected, if ever necessary, is protected from others.

Osaka City also undertakes not to use any information collected for purposes other than what is stated at the time of collection. This means that your personal information will not be shared with other cities, departments, or companies.

In addition, when the information collected no longer serves the purpose for which it was collected, it will be deleted from the City's system.

It must be noted, however, that if a user accesses another company or organization's website through the Osaka City homepage, the user will have to take full responsibility for any damage that the user incurs and that Osaka City cannot be held responsible in such instances.

In 3 Years: Building a Foundation for a Lively, Livable Osaka

Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.

- Jim Rohn

Man is a genius when he is dreaming.

-Akira Kurosawa

Osaka: Our Pride and Joy

Osaka has a reputation for being one of Japan's premier places for business. Those of us who live in this area also know that there are many other reasons for us to be proud of the city we call home. To get more people to recognize Osaka as a splendid place, one that Osakans and visitors alike can be forever proud of, we need to recognize what is terrific about the city while at the same time laying the foundation for possible changes in the future.

Osaka needs to set ambitious goals. And what good are goals if they are not set high enough, to challenge, and to stretch, and for them to lead to a better tomorrow? Osaka aims to be number one among livable cities – the first among equals! With such a goal it essential to have a timeline. After all, with a timeframe to guide us, we are more likely to push ourselves in order to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves as a community.

The Four Cornerstones

The four cornerstones of a lively, livable Osaka include:

- 1) recognizing the potential of the great mix of old and new cultural icons and sightseeing spots we have;
- 2) ensuring that we always have an economy that hums along in prosperity;
- 3) creating an environment where children, the future of our city, can have all the amenities they need to develop to their full potential; and;
- 4) making sure that we have a place of safety and comfort for all.

Together: Yes, We Can

Osaka should be active in reinventing itself while highlighting its existing cultural and natural assets. This can be achieved through the collective efforts and cooperation of the city government and the people, a *movement* of people with a shared passion, rather than the wishes of isolated individuals and government agencies. The notion of cooperation cannot be over-emphasized. Only by working together can we become number one.

1. Culture & Sightseeing

The Nakanoshima Park area, for example, provides a pleasant atmosphere that attracts numerous visitors throughout the year. It is refreshing to have greenery, water, and cultural activities in close proximity; it is also worth considering what additional cultural developments can fit in the area to enhance the area's image as a centerpiece of culture and the nerve centre of the city's administration.

A strong commitment to making Osaka a place of exquisite pleasure means paying attention to both the little and the big problems. We cannot present our best face to the world if we continually have bicycles illegally parked here and there or have them abandoned in parks or at roadsides without any consideration for safety, cleanliness, or how they mar the beauty of our city. . Likewise, it is difficult to tout Osaka as a livable city if we continue to have so much garbage that it overwhelms our ability to deal with it. It is imperative that we **reduce** the amount of garbage we generate in the city and find ways by which we can effectively **recycle** or **reuse**.

2. The Local Economy: Building Partnerships for Profit

In terms of business, creating a base of industries, including small and medium-sized businesses that provide high value-added products or services can contribute to Osaka's vision of vigorous engagement with Southeast Asia and the world through trade. Osaka has world-class technological institutes and research centres. Cooperation between these institutes and businesses can help lead to the creation of products that can help Osaka cement its place further in the world as one of innovation and creativity. Learning about the needs of clients and taking a problem-solving approach to product creation can lead to the design and creation of products with high market potential.

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In 3 Years: Building a Foundation for a Lively, Livable Osaka

Ensuring that our products reach foreign markets on a timely basis means that we must consider ways in which the city's port and waterfront can be further developed, for example, turning our attention to the existing container berth, ensuring that there is adequate parking, and that the area around the water, including pedestrian access, are intelligently planned and developed.

It must be noted that the City of Osaka stands in full solidarity with the businesses of this city; as we push ourselves towards business expansion we would do well to remember that there are many facilities in the city that we can take advantage of, including both public and private, and that as we take care of one another's needs we would be able to create the kinds of businesses and systems that bring in returns to enrich our city and our way of life.

3. Not Just a Cliché - Children are the future

Achieving the goal of a lively, livable Osaka means that we need to pay attention to both people and resources. We need to consider the needs of everyday living even as we consider how business can continue to serve as one of the powerful mainstays of our community. It is only through creativity that these challenging goals can be met – enhancing the charm of our city and its people and producing value that helps connect us to people in other parts of Asia and the world.

The City of Osaka is committed to providing vital systems of support for families with children in preschool and kindergarten so that they get the appropriate headstart they need in life. Children whose needs have been attended to at an early age are so much more likely to enter the school system with self-confidence and to enjoy learning. Providing children with opportunities to enjoy natural scenery, sports and cultural facilities, and recognizing the different personalities and needs of our young ones, can help us lay a foundation of confidence for those who will carry the mantle of growth and the protection of this city's heritage in the future.

The City of Osaka will provide opportunities for schools to benefit from the expertise of people in the business and research communities and to raise a new generation of children who are able to think deeply and to express their ideas in open forums such as debates and symposiums.

One of the ideas that the City aims to carry out is the reduction of class sizes so that teachers can pay closer attention to the needs of each student.

4. Home Safe Home – Disaster Prevention & Management

A home is sweet only when it is also a safe place to be. Home Sweet Home presupposes safety and a certain measure of comfort. Quite apart from our efforts to clean up the city and make it a shining example of visual beauty, it is essential that we raise our collective consciousness regarding such potential hazards as fire.

The City plans to organize fire prevention events that would help make all participants responsible for keeping themselves and the city safe. Some of the model fire prevention and safety events sponsored by the city can serve as models of local community action and initiatives. Osaka City will take into consideration that the needs of fire prevention and hazard management in a downtown area with high population density might differ from that of a suburb where people and homes are a little more spread out.

In addition, those of us living in Osaka are not unmindful of our place in the world and our responsibility towards contributing to a low-carbon world. Our very survival depends on it. Among the efforts envisaged by the city are the greening of the rooftops of various government buildings. The sweet potato plant, in particular, has been found to have a cooling effect. Furthermore, the spraying of dry mist around city offices should also help cool temperatures.

Osaka, in fact, aims to be no less than the leading city in Japan in the area of green initiatives. The City administration is committed to transforming this ambitious agenda and framework into reality. This lofty goal, however, is set with the full recognition that without the support of businesses and institutions and individuals in the Osaka area, nothing can be achieved.

Let's join hands to make Osaka an even better place by protecting the best of what we have in the way of culture and resources and by linking ourselves in trade with South east Asia and the rest of the world!

*Osaka Foreign Business Spotlight:**Darren Morrish, General Manager (Ramada Osaka)***Tell us a bit about yourself, home country, hobbies etc?**

I was born in a very remote and small country town in South Australia about half way between Melbourne and Adelaide in Australia's most famed Red Wine Growing District the Coonawarra!

Unfortunately my family's background was not in the Wine Industry but certainly they were involved in the Food and Beverage industry with my grandfather being a cheese monger; my great grandfather being a chef; and a few years later, my parents going into the hotel business by purchasing their first Hotel.

From that day on we moved extensively around Australia living in many different areas from Far North Queensland to Adelaide and many places in between. I still think today the longest I have ever lived in the one place is around 4 years and I don't think even that was in the same home.

After spending time working casually in our kitchens I decided becoming a Chef was where I wanted to be and then left school at the age of 15, so very young, but began my apprenticeship training in some of Sydney's well known restaurants.

Looking back I guess there were signs of my interest in management, having had to stand up and take control of different teams and also being responsible for 11 Cafes in the CBD (Central Business District) area of Sydney.

I later moved back to hotels and then had an opportunity to work very closely with an owner-operator as his right hand man to hone my skills. This property was later to be sold to the large French group Accor, which had then just begun to operate hotels in Australia.

Soon after that at the ripe old age of 25, I found myself in my first hotel GM's position. 10 years later and having worked in 8 different hotels across Australia an opportunity presented itself in Tokyo which was just too good to refuse.

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Osaka City Urban Revitalization Task Force

Toshimitsu Tanaka, Manager,
Office of Urban Revitalization
and Promotion

Tel: 06 6208 7837

Fax: 06 6202 0910

Email: info@osaka-saisei.jp

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.osaka-saisei.jp/eng/index.html

Osaka Foreign Business Spotlight: Darren Morrish

I had for many years prior to coming to Japan wanted to work and live in this part of the world; however, to be honest I did think it was more likely to end up in South East Asia or China, purely just given the growth and development in that region.

I have now been in Japan for just over three years and must say that I have very much fallen for the Japanese charm. I love the countryside, there is such a great range of food and beverage options, people are extremely friendly and it is incredibly safe.

As for hobbies and interests, my thing is motor racing. I have been involved in motor sports for many, many years starting on bikes then moving to cars which I still try and drive and race as often as possible. I have had the opportunity to drive some incredible cars and tracks and with some quite well known drivers so I am very grateful for that, however that's for another time.

Tell us a bit about your company!

Hotel groups are a little confusing to explain; however, the abridged version of our group is this. The Ramada Osaka has a long and interesting history, having formerly been known as the Toyo Hotel. However, after a full refurbishment from top to bottom was relaunched as the Ramada Osaka in January 2006.

The property has 550 rooms, 7 food and beverage outlets offering Teppanyaki, Italian, Chinese and International Style all day dining restaurant, Café and Deli, and naturally, Japanese and Izakaya styles.

We also have 15 banquet rooms which can accommodate everything from a small boardroom style through to a large convention of up to 300 people.

Our parent company, which is based out of Tokyo, however, has a portfolio of 29 hotels throughout Japan operating under brands such as Ramada, ANA Crowne Plaza, Hyatt, Sheraton and a few direct operated hotels. Additionally we have numerous properties in other countries throughout Asia and Europe.

What is your current role at Ramada Osaka?

I have been the General Manager of the Ramada Osaka for the past year and the role of a GM in a hotel is very broad. I oversee all the operational and management requirements of the property and lead a team of close to 300 dedicated and customer focused individuals. Naturally an operation the size of this hotel cannot be done alone so there are many others in the property who are also responsible for ensuring our guests enjoy their stay and experience at the Hotel.

What's your vision for the Future of your organization in Kansai and in general?

You know we would really like to put the Ramada Hotel Osaka on the map for what we believe is one of Osaka's, if not Japan's best International mid scale hotels. Internationally, the mid-scale level of hotels has seen incredible growth over the last 5-10 years; however, to date, it has not really taken off here.



Darren Morrish interview

Domestically, Japan is in fact very spoilt for choice and variety, however for many international travelers they still face many difficulties in traveling around Japan with issues such as language and just a sheer lack of catering to their basic needs. This is where international branding really adds value.

Domestically, as the Ramada Brand is still only very new to Japan from an awareness point of view we still have a lot of work to do to catch up to some of the more established 5 star Brands already in Japan. However, it has recently been announced that there will be another 7 Ramadas across Japan in the next 2-3 years, which will be great for brand awareness.

What is the attraction of Osaka as a place to do business and Kansai as a place to live?

Well I think you only have to look at the overall accessibility to other attractions of the Kansai area with the likes of Kobe, Kyoto and Nara really all within 40 minutes of the hotel. Other key points, I think, are the size of the city itself and again the ease with which one can get around.

Without a doubt I am sure that the cost of doing business here in Osaka is a major draw card, with things such as property prices, rent, etc., being a major attraction.

What opportunities do you see for the Osaka Kansai business area in regard to foreign investment?

I think with all the turmoil and fallout that is currently taking place around the world no doubt North Asia will need to also adjust in its efforts to rebound.

The stability and consistency of the infrastructure and operations in Japan really are something that should be seen as a major trump card and during these difficult times eliminates potentially some of the risks that may be associated with setting up or doing business in other countries in this part of the world.

Also the accessibility of Osaka to other key cities and countries really is a great selling point.

What weaknesses do you see for the Osaka Kansai business area in regard to foreign investment?

One of the disappointing things I guess you hear about is the number of companies that look straight to Tokyo or the Kanto region when looking at setting up in Japan.

Whilst I understand and appreciate the sheer numbers of Tokyo, there is so much more that organizations such as this one can use as a platform to attract other businesses to the area. I think personally that considering the level of competition between the three major cities of Kansai, I am sure that if we all worked together more as a region as opposed to being so independent I am sure that all areas would benefit.

Any final comments or advice as a member of the foreign network in Osaka?

As others have mentioned before me I think that this is a great initiative which is run by the mayor himself and one that really makes us feel a part of this great city! Whilst times may look a little challenging for the coming months I think if we all work closely together on bringing business and talking up Osaka the impact this has on all of us, including the outlying areas, will be great, a real opportunity.

Thanks again for the opportunity of speaking with you and I hope you can all get over to the hotel sometime in the near future.

About Our Organization..

Since 2003, **Osaka City Urban Revitalization Task Force** has been seeking to attract individuals, businesses, and educational institutions that can contribute to the dynamism, creativity, and vibrancy of the Osaka area. Contact us with feedback and suggestions at: info@osaka-saisei.jp