

RANI'S REPORT 2020

- JET CIR (COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS) IN KANAZAWA -

Hello everyone. It's me again.

2020 has finally come to a close and it is time to look back on what happened in my time here in Kanazawa.

■ In Winter Season

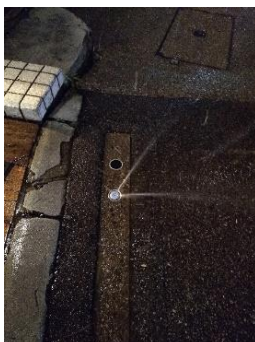


I actually started the year in Belgium, going home over the holidays and visiting my family. Being able to see everyone again was absolutely amazing. I took a lot of photo's that I can use when introducing Belgium during my school visits here and brought back a lot of snacks and cooking ingredients to Japan.

When I returned to Kanazawa in early January, it was time to double down on my winter preparations. The coldest time of the year was coming but I was ready with my *kotatsu*, blankets and bucket loads of Belgian chocolate.



The whole city was getting ready for winter, though it proved to be a mild one. I was very glad whenever we had some snowy days because most of the time it was just ice. I finally got to see the water sprinklers on the ground in action.



For those who have never seen what I'm talking about: Kanazawa doesn't salt the roads during winter but uses water to melt the snow before it stays. Sometimes these things spray quite high or they go on the fritz and spray unpredictably, turning any short walk into a dodge-weave-and-jump exercise to avoid getting drenched (while trying not to slip on hidden ice). It's a lot of fun if you're not trying to get somewhere on time.

For the most part, January was a quiet month. The weeks rolled by with frequent translation and interpretation requests, some school visits, and the occasional lecture on Belgium.

Our first international event started near the end of January; a group of motivated students from four of Kanazawa's sister cities, including Ghent, visited Kanazawa for two weeks and learned about the city's history and culture.

Their training program took them on a journey along famous locations while participating in cooking and music classes. They had a kimono experience, sampled a wide array of food, learned about the local arts and crafts, and even watching a dance performance. My colleagues and I guided them around and supported them where we could.



I personally enjoyed our visit to the Yoshiro and Yoshio Taniguchi Museum of Architecture the most, because I can officially add it to my list of architecture that I love here in Kanazawa.

I also loved learning how to cook *jibuni*, a duck hotpot that's a staple of the local cuisine. It was a busy two weeks and I hope the students had a great time while they were here.



One of my greatest joys this year was participating in a *hatsugama* ("first kettle"); the first formal tea gathering of the year.

I have loved tea ceremony since my study exchange to Fukuoka, and was delighted to learn that Kanazawa City Hall has a tea ceremony club. Obviously, I joined immediately and dragged one of my colleagues with me. As a small and casual club, we practice with a very relaxed attitude. Maybe this is why we were quite late with our *hatsugama* and held the ceremony halfway through February instead of earlier in the year. Ours was in a small tea room by the 21st Century Museum; Shoutou-an.

Kanazawa is, as you probably know, famous for its strong link to traditional culture and one of the traditions that truly bloom here is tea ceremony.

Some examples of this are the wide variety of *wagashi* stores and shops in the city, as well as the *Ohi* Pottery which the Ohi family has been making in Kanazawa for over 350 years. Their old family home is now a museum where the first pieces on display were made in the Edo period but by the end you are looking at works made very recently by the current master.

Kanazawa also boasts many, many, many tea rooms scattered throughout the city. The sheer number of these rooms make it easy to have your tea gatherings in a historical location. That being said, the popularity of tea ceremony in Kanazawa also means there are many groups who would like to do exactly that, so it is usually difficult to get a reservation for popular times such as during seasonal festivities.



I am told that people from outside Kanazawa who rent a tea room here are always surprised by how cheap it is to use these beautiful rooms because there are just so many here. Suffice it to say that I had an amazing first “First Kettle”. Thanks to the support of our teacher and the other wonderful members of our club, I was even allowed to play a small part in the proceedings!



From matcha straight to chocolate because before I knew it, **Valentine’s Day was around the corner and I became fully absorbed in preparations for a combined cooking-class-and-lecture on Belgian chocolates, more specifically, Belgian pralines.**

I am no professional chocolatier by any means so I spent weeks researching some easy-to-learn praline recipes, the proper technique of melting and cooling chocolate (tempering the chocolate), as well as simple ways to explain why tempering is necessary when working with chocolate (and when it isn’t). I was trying different tempering techniques and recipes for ganache at home and practiced how to explain all this in four hours or less. After quite a few failed attempts and some sad looking pralines I managed to create something presentable in time for the event. **Thankfully, chocolate makes people happy no matter what shape it comes in and everyone seemed to have a great time making their own pralines. We ended the whole thing by sitting around the tables, drinking hot chocolate and talking about the different chocolate customs in Japan and Belgium.**

■ After the COVID-19 outbreak

The biggest news from March was sadly the COVID-19 outbreak. For Kanazawa, the first sign that things were getting bad was when masks and toilet paper became sold out in all stores. Soon after, the schools had to close to protect the children and their graduation ceremonies and goodbye parties were cancelled as they moved on to different classes or even different schools in April.

However, some positive stories were spread around as well. At some point, people started to work together to sell tons of cabbages and help out the local farmers whose income were at risk due to the virus, which made me smile when I read about it in the local paper.

March was also when the first flowers started to bloom. The weather turned warmer and the city started to fill with color. Because of the low infection rate in Ishikawa, we were always allowed to walk outside, something I am very grateful for.



I spent quite some time wandering outside during these months and enjoyed the peace and quiet of the nature around Kanazawa.

Once again, I feel compelled to mention the beauty of the *Sai river*, which I have now experienced in all four seasons and am yet to be disappointed by.

After almost a year in Kanazawa, I finally got around to visiting *Uchinada beach* (which is technically not Kanazawa, but very close by). It's a wonderfully peaceful beach less than half an hour from Kanazawa station.





I also decided to take a walk up *Utatsu mountain* and discovered a new favorite place up there. Though it is called a mountain, it stands only 141 meters tall. One panoramic point has a small grassy area with a few benches (and a bear warning sign in summer) which is very beautiful and peaceful (I didn't come across any bears at least). From another spot you can see Kanazawa Castle and Kenrokuen.

This lookout point is marked with a plaque that explains the "Ansei Tearful Insurrection" of 1858, a riot by 2000 peasants who climbed the mountain (something that was forbidden because the mountain overlooked the castle) and shouted their demands for lower rice prices at the leaders of the region. The riot was successful and the prices were lowered. The ringleaders, however, were executed at the time and later memorialized in a temple at the foot of the mountain.



■ New Normal

Events in Kanazawa started up again around August. It took us a few months to adapt to the new normal but we took our time and looked into teleworking systems, online meetings and other ways to have international exchanges in a safe fashion.

Our first event was an online introduction of Kanazawa's different sister cities to young children. This was soon followed by an online discussion on fair trade in Kanazawa and ways to spread awareness on Fairtrade products. We also started a Sister City Gazette on Facebook, sending heart-warming messages from and to our sister cities that have CIRs at city hall. Before we knew it, we had a steadily increasing number of online events, videos, and messages to keep in touch with all our friends overseas.

(オランダ語)
[De Zustersteden Gazet]
Voor Gent is het jaar 2020 een jaar van kunst en van Eyck. De toonaangevende tentoonstelling die 4 jaar in de making was bracht tussen 1 februari en 12 maart bijna 130.000 kunstliefhebbers naar Gent voor ze helaas de deuren moest sluiten.
Nu is "Van Eyck - Een Optische Revolutie" online toegankelijk in een 360° virtuele tour: meertalig, volledig gratis en nog zeker te bezichtigen tot het einde van 2020. Ook wie in Kanazawa woont, kan nu via het internet even naar Gent reizen en deel zijn van deze once-in-a-lifetime ervaring.
De tour: <https://virtualltour.vaneyck2020.be/nl>
<https://virtualltour.vaneyck2020.be/jp/adults/room-1/room-0-1>
#kanazawa #gent #sistercity #coronavirus #virtualltour #金沢 #グント #姉妹都市 #バーチャルツアー



VIRTUALTOUR.VANIEYCK2020.BE
ファン・エイクの一視覚の革命バーチャルツアー
グント美術館の一年に一度の展覧会を360°バーチャルツアーで体験し、...

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As things progressed, we started to explore ways of safely holding real live events again. By the time September rolled around, we were ready to try our new versions of events and visits around the city.



We held our annual International Festival, there was an outside jazz event, a Car Free Day to promote environmentally friendly transport, an open-air introduction to Fair Trade, as well as multiple Special Ambassador events for teaching foreign students about Kanazawa culture.

We were visited by the Belgian ambassador to Japan and got to enjoy two art exhibitions by Belgian (and Dutch) artists at the 21st Century Museum for Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; one with art by Michaël Borremans and Mark Manders, the other with pieces from the Dr. Guislain Museum.

International cooking classes started again after a six-month long break, and the Olympic and Paralympic promotion section held a promotional event for Paralympic sports where I tried my hand at Boccia.

On top of this, the season for school visits came around again, which was followed by our usual onslaught of translations and interpretations.

One thing I love about my job are those requests we get for translations by different sections and departments at city hall. Not only are they a great way to brush up on neglected Japanese phrases and grammar, they also concern a wide variety of topics which makes them a great way to discover new things. This year I learned a lot about the city's canals and waterworks, reconstruction efforts on the city walls, the main gates of temples up in the mountains, some of the Kanazawa city designated cultural property, newly opened tourist spots, and this year's changes to the garbage collection. I actually got inspired to buy a book on the history of Ishikawa and started reading it in my free time.

Did you know that the oldest traces of writing in the Hokuriku region came from early 7th century pottery found around modern-day Komatsu? Pottery is thought to have been the main export of the region in those days. Early ink writings showed up about half a century later. I also learned that the configuration of *kofun* burial mounds in Noto and Kaga were quite different, implying that the 4th century Kaga area was united under a central power, while the Noto area from the same time likely had a more federation-style ruling class of headmen who worked together with different responsibilities each.

Lastly, I leave you with these photos of not 7th century, but 17-18th century houses in *Shirakawago*. *Shirakawago* and *Gokayama* are UNESCO world heritage sites near Kanazawa, though they are in the Gifu and Toyama prefectures respectively. They are small villages up in the mountains made up of traditional farmhouses, some of which are over 250 years old.



This style of farmhouse is called “*gassho-zukuri*” and is recognizable by the heavy thatched roofs that are designed to withstand the heavy snowfall of the cold winters.

I hope you had some fun reading this, I definitely had fun writing it and I hope you’ll be back for the next report.

Wishing you all warm and sunny days this spring and a peaceful and healthy 2021.

Until next time,
Rani

