Complete report on Cycle Around Japan presentation tour

by Michael Rice

Presentation locations:
#1 iRIDE -Wellington, New Zealand (June 11, 2019)
#2 City Gallery Wellington -Wellington, New Zealand (June 12, 2019)
#3 Parmelia Hilton Perth -Perth, Australia (June 14, 2019)
#4 Dexus Waterfront -Brisbane, Australia (June 17, 2019)
#5 Robina Community Centre -Gold Coast, Australia (June 18, 2019)

Successful and fruitful events at all 5 venues. Below are listed the good and weak points at each of the 5 venues. Following that, I wrote a summary of the overall purpose, reaction and result of these presentations. Of course all of these successful events were only possible thanks to the hard work of the Japanese staff on the ground in each city and others. The enthusiastic reaction at each location is thanks to their efforts combined with NHK and Telecom Staff for preparing the spectacular videos. Thanks to everyone’s hard work and preparation, my job was made easy.

Summary of each location:
**#1 iRIDE Wellington, New Zealand (Tuesday, June 11, 2019)**
- Audience: Expected 20-40, Actual 65-70 participants
- Location description: Local bike shop supporting events connected to cycling.
- Good: Friendly & laid back atmosphere, fellow cyclists, supportive shop owner. Conversational Q&A was very informative for everyone and I realized I needed to add more information to my presentations specific to “how” to Cycle Around Japan without support staff.
- Weakness: 1 Small TV screen, no microphone, not enough
seating, cold and raining outside.

- Overall: This cozy location and great local promotion to the cycling community in Wellington made this 1st event very successful and informative.

#2 City Gallery Wellington -Wellington, New Zealand (Wednesday, June 12, 2019)

- Audience: Expected ~100, Actual 145-155
- Location description: Incredibly well designed cozy theatre for presentations. It felt like a well-produced TED Talk.
- Good: Theatre design, seating style, lighting, location, staff, microphone, sound system, etc. were perfect! For me this was the most comfortable venue for public speaking and feeling the audience reaction.
- Weakness: The computer to run the videos was changed a few minutes before starting and none of the videos played automatically so had to be pulled into the player each time with the entire audience watching the “error” screen.
- Cycling: 60km Group cycling was a great way to interact with the community’s influential cyclists and see the differences in the country’s roads and cycling culture so I could understand what their needs and interests are.
- Overall: This would have been an absolutely perfect event without the computer problems. The venue and number of participants was the best of the 5 events.

#3 Parmelia Hilton Perth - Perth, Australia (Friday, June 14, 2019)
- Audience: Expected 70-90, Actual 75-85
- Location description: Hotel conference room/wedding reception room.
- Good: Central downtown location. Multi-Olympic Gold Medal winning cyclist in attendance added to the importance of the event. Sound system and video worked well. The Q&A was very active and there was a line of people wanting to greet and talk 1-on-1 until the venue was time to close.
- Weakness: Not a good venue for public speaking. The audience
felt far away with flat seating and lighting was too bright throughout the room for the audience to focus and see the presentation at the front.

- Cycling: (70km) 45km off-road (no traffic), 20 rider group cycling was a great way to interact and see the differences in the country’s roads and cycling culture and meet many cyclists who could not attend the previous night’s presentation. After that, I cycled the 25km back to my hotel on road and cycle paths guided by a head of the local cycling advocacy group. I learned a lot through our 1 hour of 1-on-1 cycling conversation.

- Overall: The enthusiastic audience interaction and excitement made this a very energetic and rewarding event.

#4 Dexus Waterfront -Brisbane, Australia (Monday, June 17, 2019)
- Audience: Expected 60-80, Actual 60-70
- Location description: 31st floor breathtaking, beautiful conference room.
- Good: Central location. The audience felt cozy and comfortable. Very active Q&A. Pin mic made it easy to move around and talk.
- Weakness: 2pm time during the work week was too early for many
who wanted to attend but had to work. The flat seating with no stage and breathtaking location distracted from the presentation. Would have been better to turn off the main room lights with only the front lit up.

- **Cycling:** 40km 5am~ group cycling was a great way to interact and see the differences in the country’s roads and cycling culture.

- **Overall:** I could see and feel a lot of excitement in the eyes of the participants. They wanted to keep asking me things even when it was time for the venue to close so I had dinner downtown with some audience members afterwards.
#5 Community Center Theatre -Gold Coast, Australia (Tuesday, June 18, 2019)

- Audience: Expected 50-80, Actual 55-65
- Location description: Community Theatre near shopping mall. There was a large high stage with folding chairs set up for the audience.
- Good: The high stage, large screen, and lighting made the audience focus better on the presentation. The Q&A was also very good and they were one of the most excited audiences after the presentation.
- Weakness: The few chairs in the large theatre felt strange and the audience looked uncomfortable before the start of the presentation. The audience was so far away that I thought my jokes were no longer funny because I couldn’t hear anyone laugh. It was difficult to pass around the cultural objects I presented.
- Cycling: 50km 5am~ Brisbane group cycling was a great way to talk to cyclists who could not attend and to learn about their roads and cycling culture.
- Overall: This turned out to be one of the best events. I was disappointed we couldn’t fill up such a large venue but I had my speech very smooth by the 5th time and the audience seemed to be very impressed! After the presentation and Q&A finished, there was still a long line of audience members asking me questions about touring Japan until it was time for the venue to close (similar to what we saw in Brisbane, Perth and Wellington).
In summary, for the entire week of traveling New Zealand and Australia, I must say the preparations at every venue were very good and all of the audiences were really great! Each audience showed very high interest in the subject and had enthusiastic Q&A sessions that showed real plans being made in their minds to discover a part of Japan they had not imagined touring in the Spring, Summer and Fall. To my great surprise, Oceania region people had a perception of the Japanese countryside as someplace to visit for snow sport tourism rather than during the warmer seasons of the year. However, by the end of each presentation, even audience members with no interest in cycling finally had a concrete vision of what they could discover traveling outside the more popular areas of Japan in the non-snow seasons. It was very rewarding for me personally to see how excited and interested the audiences became about traditional Japanese culture and the prospect of actually taking a trip to Japanese “inaka” or 「地方」 and even cycle around the Japanese countryside themselves! These presentations were really not about cycling so much as about promoting Eco-tourism to the less populated areas of Japan to discover the local people, foods, scenery and traditional culture being preserved in the countryside.

The presentations focused on these aspects of The Japan Brand:
1. Great potential for environmentally friendly tourism with little CO2 footprint
2. Unique Experiences at a human-powered pace
3. Safety of the entire country (especially for bicycle touring)
4. Regional Food
5. Lodging options
6. Traditions
7. Religion
8. Local regional crafts
9. Variety of Regional Cultures
10. The breathtaking beauty of the Japanese countryside

I believe we really achieved all of the goals of these presentations. Similar Cycle Around Japan speaking tours here as well as other countries and locations in the future could further expand a real boom of inbound cycle-tourism and eco-tourism that is not concentrated in the overcrowded cities. The result will be the Japanese countryside becoming a famous and highly valued destination. Thank you very much for this opportunity to share my 3 greatest passions with people all over the world: Ecology, Cycling and Japan!

Gratitudes,

舞氣  Michael J. Rice