

From Nagoya to Samurai City



Chris Glenn poses in a suit of samurai armor that he made from scratch by himself.
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Australian DJ, columnist and author Chris Glenn is promoting the history of Nagoya, birthplace of samurai generals of the Sengoku (Warring States) period (1467-1603), to local residents and to the world.

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NAGOYA'S FM radio station ZIP-FM's popular music program "Radio Orbit" features a segment called "History Mystery." The program's DJ is Australian Chris Glenn, who researches and presents stories on the historical personages and happenings in

the broadcast coverage area in an effort to teach the Japanese audience about their own history and culture.

"The Tokai region, including Nagoya, produced 70 percent of the early Edo-period (1603-1867) *daimyo* (feudal lords)," says Glenn. "Historically, it's an

extremely important area for Japan, and yet, surprisingly, people who live here don't really know the history or importance of their own town. I find that regrettable, so I pass on my research to the listeners. When I hear the amazed reactions of listeners when they discover that this is the birthplace of such exceptional samurai, or that their town is the setting for such an interesting story, it makes me happy," he says with a smile.

It was Glenn's grandfather, a teacher, who sparked Chris's love of Japanese history. "My grandfather had a high regard for Japanese history and culture. Unfortunately, he ended up fighting against Japanese troops in World War II, but as soon as the war ended he taught his students that it was important for Australia and Japan to improve relations," says Glenn.

Having heard about Japan's history and culture from his grandfather, Glenn came across an exchange program when he was a senior high school student, and came to Japan to study. At the recommendation of his teacher at the time, he read a novel depicting the life of the great seventeenth-century swordsman Miyamoto Musashi and became fascinated by the world of the samurai. "What



Glenn presents the popular “History Mystery” segment on Nagoya’s ZIP-FM amongst other media work.
Photo: KUMIKO SATO

I find appealing is that the samurai had great courage, passion and military skills yet at the same were highly educated and cultured with an artistic side, which they express through painting or poetry. Later, as I pursued my studies, I learned that the great generals of the Sengoku period, including Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu, were cultured people who performed noh dance and enjoyed the tea ceremony,” says Glenn.

After returning to his home country, Chris attended a media broadcast vocational school before commencing work as a DJ at an Australian radio station. But the desire to “go home” to Japan grew stronger, until seven years later he returned and got a job at a Tokyo radio station. In 1993, learning that a new radio station would be starting up in Nagoya, Chris applied for a transfer to the town that held such appeal for him as the birthplace of many samurai generals in the Sengoku period.

Chris has a growing collection of old samurai armor. He now has sixteen suits of armor, mainly from around 400 years ago. But one of them is newer – and larger. This is one he constructed himself to fit his size, having apprenticed himself to a traditional armor craftsman residing in Nagoya.

“I did everything myself, the way it was done in the old days, from beating the iron sheets to create the shape, to producing the lacquered finish. Now, whenever I see lacquer tableware or furniture, I can understand just how sophisticated and difficult the techniques required to make them are,” says Glenn. “That applies to all Japanese things – items made to be used are all so beautiful they are also works of art. I think this is a particular talent of the Japanese.”

When he has the opportunity to appear at events, Chris wears his armor and imparts his knowledge of the samurai spirit and culture. He also utilizes his long experience

in the media to work as an advisor at municipalities across Japan on inbound tourism and urban design to appeal to tourists from overseas.

Says Glenn, “My proposal is to market Nagoya as ‘Samurai City Nagoya’ in order to promote Nagoya to the world. Right now a program is underway to properly restore Nagoya Castle, the symbol and foundation of Nagoya, based on old documents. In the same spirit, I think we should cultivate Nagoya’s roots as the birthplace of Sengoku period generals by reviving the old place names of Teppochō [“teppo” means gun and “cho” means town in Japanese] and Kajiya-cho [“kajiya” means blacksmith], for example, so that local people understand that this is where the samurai were active. I’d like everyone in Japan to learn about the history of their own town and take pride in it.”

Glenn’s message eloquently expresses how we can rediscover the appeal of Japan. **U**