



**Item Number:**

**Department:**

Councillors/Economic  
Development

**Portfolio:**

Sister Cities

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**Subject:**

14 - 25 September 2025, Sister City Diplomatic Visit to Nanning, China, and Settsu, Japan.

**Delegates:**

Deputy Mayor Cr Steve Cooper, Cr Carmen McEneaney and Cr Larine Statham-Blair.

**Background:**

Bundaberg Regional Council was formally invited to participate in the China-ASEAN Expo and Sister Cities Exchange Conference in Nanning, Guangxi Province, China.

The visit coincided with World Expo 2025 in Osaka, themed “Designing Future Society for Our Lives”. This Expo represents a major international forum for innovation, technology, and sustainable development.

Bundaberg’s participation was undertaken to strengthen sister-city relations, explore economic and cultural opportunities, and reinforce Council’s commitment to international collaboration and regional promotion.

Sister city relationships between local governments serve as strategic tools for community development, diplomacy, and regional integration. These partnerships are designed to deliver tangible benefits across several key areas:

1. Smart City & Sustainability Collaboration

- Share best practices in urban planning, disaster resilience, climate adaptation, and digital transformation.
- Co-develop pilot projects in areas like AI, renewable energy, and sustainable transport.

2. Economic Development

- Enable local businesses to access new markets through trade missions and investment forums.

- Support agriculture, tourism, and innovation sectors by connecting with complementary industries abroad.

### 3. Education & Youth Empowerment

- Facilitate student exchanges, scholarships, and joint school programs to build global awareness.
- Encourage language learning and leadership development among young residents.

### 4. Local Diplomacy & Strategic Positioning

- Strengthen Bundaberg's role as a regional connector within the Asia-Pacific.
- Align with Australia's national and international priorities, such as the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and Free Trade Agreements.

### 5. Community & Cultural Enrichment

- Foster mutual understanding through cultural festivals, art exchanges, and heritage projects.
- Promote inclusive community engagement, celebrating diversity and strengthening social cohesion.

Sister City relationships empower councils to act globally while delivering locally; enhancing Bundaberg's reputation, resilience, and opportunities for its residents.

## **Bundaberg & Nanning, China**

The sister city relationship began in 1997, following an invitation from Nanning's Mayor Song Fumin to Bundaberg's then Mayor Nita Cunningham.

#### Key Initiatives:

- The Nanning Chinese Gardens in Bundaberg were funded by the Nanning Municipal People's Government. The \$1.2 million landscape project symbolises the friendship. When the garden was complete, Bundaberg gifted a turtle statue to the city of Nanning, which was placed in their city gardens.
- Youth Exchange Programs, including cultural festivals and educational visits.
- Business Delegations and investment discussions, particularly in agriculture and property.
- Participation in events like the China-ASEAN Expo, strengthening ties through innovation and trade.

## **Bundaberg & Settsu, Japan**

The formal sister city agreement was signed in November 1998, after a delegation of 34 Settsu residents visited Bundaberg earlier that year.

#### Key Initiatives:

- The Japanese Garden at Bundaberg Botanic Gardens was designed to reflect traditional Japanese aesthetics and celebrate the partnership. A former Bundaberg-Japanese exchange student contributed \$8000 to the project, which was also supported by Bundaberg Lions Club and Council.

- Art Exchanges, such as children’s artwork from Settsu displayed at the Moncrieff Entertainment Centre.
- Ongoing business and cultural networking, including real estate and tourism collaboration.

**Recommendation:**

That the report be tabled and noted by Council.

**Report Author:**

**Councillor Larine Statham-Blair**

**Attachments:**

**[Bundaberg Region invited to economic expo – Bundaberg Now](#)**

**REPORT:**

**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September**

**Nanning Taikang Home Elderly Care Community.**

The Taiking Group is a fortune 500 company, providing health services, aged care and insurance. They opened their first aged care facility in 10 years ago in Beijing. The Nanning Elderly Care facility has been open for just three years and has five-star government accreditation. They pride themselves on being a community that supports elders from retirement to palliation. Residents pay about \$1100AUD rent per month, plus food, for one-bedroom independent unit. They also offer assisted living, and have 100 medical beds, specialising in post operative care and memory. Pharmacy, pathology, CT, laboratory and traditional Chinese medicine are all available on site. The Nanning center employs about 300 people.

**Nanning Enjoy Ages Elderly Community.**

This is a high-end facility is based on the American Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) model. They offer independent family apartments with an area of 54-88 square meters, and provide a range of health services including physiotherapy. They encourage visiting family and friends to stay on site with residents. The 100 staff make a point of calling residents grandma and grandpa. They have a karaoke studio, which can be reserved for functions, as well as an art studio, dance hall, library, ping pong table, volleyball court, and prayer rooms. The residents grow much of their own fruit and vegetables in the common green space.

**KEY OBSERVATIONS:**

- Despite occupying a much smaller lot size, both of these multi-story developments are more open than the sprawling relocatable lifestyle villages in our region. Each unit/room has an expansive outlook, rather than facing a neighbors’ fence. Building up rather than out, and placing parking underground, has enabled the developers to create wide open green spaces that create a leafy tranquil village feel.
- Both facilities have medical services on site, which reduces the burden on the healthcare system. In the Bundaberg Region, our healthcare system is not keeping pace with the number of retirement villages being built and there is no requirement for medical services to be provided inhouse (other than nursing care).

## POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES:

- There was interest from both organisations to facilitate an aged care exchange/familiarisation tour in the Bundaberg Region, in collaboration with local Australian operators. It would be advantageous for us to learn more about the successful business model they are using.

### Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September

#### **Meeting with the Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) of Municipal People's Congress and staff from the Foreign Affairs Office.**

DSG's remarks: 2025 is the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our strategic partnership and 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bundaberg-Nanning Sister City relationship. They funded and built the Nanning garden in the Bundaberg Botanic Gardens as a symbol of friendship. He said they are grateful for the turtle monument BRC installed in their gardens.

The current economic environment is great; steady GDP growth. Bundaberg and Nanning are very similar. Nanning is the biggest producer of fruit (150,000ha) and sugar (116,000ha) in China. They have been researching and developing practical benefits of using artificial intelligence (AI) in the agriculture sector. They want to explore these opportunities with Bundaberg. Eager to learn how they can better integrate and strengthen communications to improve livelihoods.

Nanning is the gateway to other ASEAN countries, and they want to strengthen trade throughout the region. They also want to increase the number of person-to-person exchanges and arts festivals to improve cultural understanding.

“Our friendship will deepen and be golden.”



#### **Guangxi International Sister Cities Exchange Conference**



About 100 people attended this conference from about 50 different provinces and cities, from 15 countries. Presentations covered a broad range of topics, including ASEAN trade, education, tourism, emergency management and disaster prevention, healthcare and AI. Several memorandums of cooperation were signed.

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September**

## **China-ASEAN Artificial Intelligence Collaborative Innovation Centre.**



The Centre was officially opened the same day we visited. It's a strategic initiative aimed at deepening AI cooperation between China and ASEAN nations. The Centre is intended to play a pivotal role in coordinating collaboration between industry, academia, research, and application. It currently supports more than 60 collaborative projects and is showcasing 450+ AI cases. Cases include vehicle automation, neuroscience, and translation.

AI is improving government efficiency in Nanning in the fields of traffic management, asset inspections, disaster management, and infrastructure renewal.

In China's agriculture sector, AI is helping identify and address pests and diseases, plotting land to map soil types, and regulating the application of water and fertiliser. It has resulted in a 20% efficiency in labour costs, and improved water and fertiliser efficiency by 25%.

Only the US and China are this advanced in AI R&D. Nanning wants to establish AI centers in other ASEAN countries to foster greater collaboration through practical real-life application. The host cities/countries would be able to control/lock their own data. They spoke about the importance of using AI ethically for good governance.

## **2025 Nanning-Hanoi Economic Corridor and Nanning Sister Cities Exchange Conference.**

The theme for this conference was "co-creating a digital silk road". More than 30 new cooperation agreements were signed and several new policies were unveiled, including the Nanning Vision for AI Cooperation with International Friendship Cities.

Ways in which AI is helping the Municipal People's Congress improve service delivery for the people of Nanning:

- Computing power
- Multilingual empowerment
- Talent building and education
- Smart city development
- Environmental protection
- Integrated smart transport
- Smart energy

This is a period of profound economic change that poses challenges and opportunities. With advancements in AI, we are on the cusp of a scientific and industrial revolution. ASEAN countries are at the center of this progress and by working hand-in-hand we will build AI capability for all. "Fast-More-Cheaper-Better - let's use AI as a bond to improve convenience, efficiency, accuracy and profitability."

Nanning is at a distinct advantage. As well as geographically being the gateway between China and other ASEAN nations, they are leading the AI revolution. They are proposing that Sister Cities pull resources from their AI Collaborative Innovation Centre to jointly build a region-wide AI eco-system. Standardise AI systems, processes and ethical standards. Together, let's build an ASEAN

hub for AI research, training and education to cultivate more AI professionals.

The Vision included a range of announcements, such as:

- Tax incentives for Chinese businesses and executives who are embracing AI to expand into other ASEAN markets
- Establishment of a one-stop support hub that helps Chinese businesses to 'go global', by matching businesses to collaborate and mentor, providing market research, providing business training and assisting with required certifications
- Defining an official ASEAN trade zone to facilitate Free Trade.



## Friday 19<sup>th</sup> September

### **2025 China ASEAN Expo & Nanning International Sister Cities AI Solution Scenario Bazaar Exhibition**

As part of the 22<sup>nd</sup> China ASEAN Expo, a new AI pavilion was added for the first time. Spanning 10,000m<sup>2</sup>, the bazaar featured about 1200 products from more than 100 leading technology companies from across South East Asia, including the world's first explosion-proof humanoid robot.



We sampled a range of foods and beverages from ASEAN countries. The Nanning pavilion was particularly impressive. There was only one Australian stall, a South Australian winery. It was disappointing there weren't more Australian representatives there: a missed opportunity.

**POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES:**

Several years ago, Bundaberg hosted a large contingent of local companies in Nanning. Post COVID, it would be worthwhile seeking expressions of interest from Bundaberg businesses to host a similar delegation during this term of Council. Particularly in the fields of agriculture, food and beverage, technology, education, health/aged care and tourism. In addition to opening export opportunities for Bundaberg businesses, it would enhance our international visibility, brand identification and promote the Southern Great Barrier Reef as a holiday destination.

**Guangxi Bingke Food Co. Ltd.**



This food manufacturing enterprise specialises in deep processing of Wogan oranges and R&D of agricultural and sideline products. The company has built a complete industrial chain covering raw material processing, production and processing, and quality control through intelligent production lines and digital management systems, with core products such as independently developed Wogan orange and apple compound juice. The company has a 16,000-square-meter factory and 13 production lines, forming an annual processing capacity of 10,000 tons of juice. They have only recently started exporting to a couple of countries.

**POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES**

They are interested in visiting Bundaberg businesses to learn from our leading beverage exporters, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September**

**Shuijin Shunzhuang Tourist Scenic Area & Homestay.** This is an eco-tourism facility, built surrounding a 10km canyon, offering five different levels of accommodation, from camping, to see-through igloos, hotel rooms and luxury apartments. Located 90 minutes out of Nanning, it is a popular weekend holiday spot. It has flowing streams and waterfalls for bathing, and a number of sporting facilities. The restaurant serves traditional Chinese fare, as well as some unusual local

delicacies (eg a broth made from the undigested stomach contents of a deceased goat). We concluded this tour with a brief visit to Jinlun Caves.

## Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September

**City Hall.** We were welcomed by the Mayor, staff and the Council Chairman with bouquets of flowers on the stairs. We enjoyed a tour of their Chambers and learned about the Japanese system of Local Government. The city of Settsu, Japan, has 86,300 residents in an area covering just 14.87sq km. The Council has 19 members who serve four-year terms. They hold formal meetings four times a year. We were fortunate to have multiple meetings and meals with the Mayor and Chairman, they were very generous with their time.



**Waterworks Authority.** The first of the Council's two new water reservoirs (3000m<sup>3</sup> each) has just finished being built. Each will take about two years to be built. They needed to be replaced to be resistant to earthquakes. They are in the process of replacing 240km of water pipes that are about 50 years old. They draw 20% of their town water from underground and the rest from 3 withdrawal sites on the river. Water security is an issue for them. The reservoirs have emergency shut down valves in the event of an earthquake, and the water is then trucked to evacuation centers. The aim of the new infrastructure is to minimize impact of natural disasters and help them recover more quickly. We were shown the laboratory process for turning ground water into drinking water. The well depth is almost 200meters.

**North Osaka Fire Command Centre.** Local government is responsible for fire and ambulance services in Japan. Before 2024, each Council had its own service. They've now integrated five cities and two towns (1.14million residents) into one call center. It has helped them rationalize their finances and manpower, and streamlined processes. They get 300 calls a day, 200 of which are medical. They have 50 call center employees, 720 firefighters on staff and 2174 volunteers.

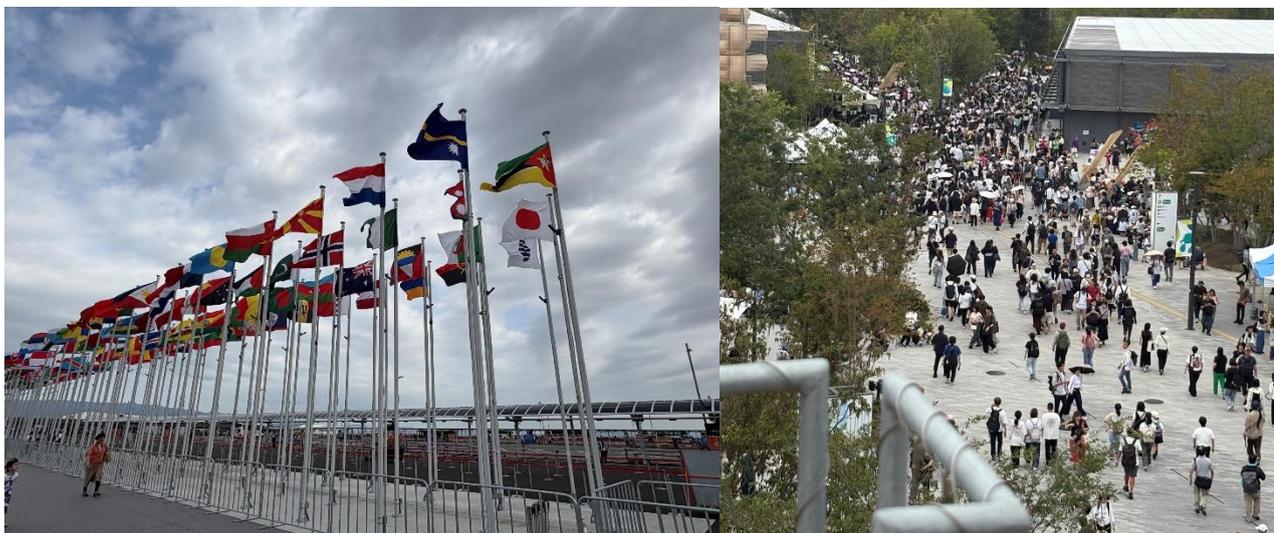
In Japan there are 432 individual councils and 288 emergency service collaborations, 29 of which are operated by volunteers.

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September**

**Osaka Kansai World Expo.** On the national holiday, Autumn Equinox, we attended the World Expo, hosted by Trade and Investment Queensland Commissioner to Japan Melissa Inooka. We enjoyed lunch with Nancy Gordon, Commissioner General for Australia. We convinced our Japanese hosts to try crocodile.

The Australian Pavillion was by far the best of those we visited. We visited multiple pavilions: Australia, Canada, Dubai, UAE, Thailand, Indonesia and several others.





## **POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES:**

The Council was very proud of their extensive display of Bundaberg memorabilia and gifts. They were surprised we could use chopsticks, and went to great lengths to take us to western restaurants so we would feel more at home. They were excited when we requested Japanese cuisine. With an energetic new Mayor in place (the youngest in Settsu's history), who is eager to learn more about Australia, there is interest from both parties to grow the friendship and expand on already successful exchange programs, in collaboration with a Bundaberg Rotary Club. Settsu City has forged strong partnerships with Bundaberg Schools directly, with the assistance of the Settsu Rotary Club. The program recently expanded to include Forestview Kindergarten. Preschool students have been communicating by video conference. BRC's visit was the start of strengthening the Bundaberg-Settsu Sister City relationship, which has waned a little in recent years due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the timing of elections, and a turnover of politicians.

### **Wednesday 24th September**

**Northern Osaka Health and Biomedical Innovation Town (KENTO) and the National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Centre.** We heard about Settsu City Council's Health and Welfare Department working closely with the Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare, as well as universities, research institutes and private medical providers to raise awareness about exercise and nutrition. They are working to reduce school intake in children because Japanese people have high salt diets (more than 10g a day). The World Health Organisation recommends no more than 6grams a day. They have created a low salt accreditation for packaging, similar to the Made campaign.

The Cardio Centre is ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in the world. They performed 232 of Japan's 956 heart transplants. Their survival rate is 78%, compared to 58% globally. They accept patients from around the world. They have robotic operating rooms, and have used 3D printers to make models of diseased hearts and healthy hearts for ultrasound diagnostic training.



## **CULTURAL IMMERSION/EXCHANGE**

**Transnational Mid-Autumn Gala in Nanning, performed by local youth and televised (pictured below).** It is likely a dozen of these performers and their guardians will be visiting

Bundaberg for Lunar New Year celebrations on 28 February, 2026, as part of Nanning delegation. The committee has recommended they visit a couple of local schools to engage with Australian students.



**Night tour on Yongjiang River in Nanning, aboard the Vegetable Fairy boat (below).** We had great interactions with local families, telling them all about the Bundaberg Region's natural beauty and why they should visit on holidays or consider a student exchange.



**Nanning high-density village walk through.** We visited a commercial and residential precinct, contained within one large street block, which is home to 2500 residents and has a Wall Mart and cinema. It was a great example of how higher density development can create community hubs that help address the housing shortage and reduce urban sprawl.

**And many more...**

*\*\* Disclaimer: information contained herein is published in good faith, assuming the information provided to the report's author was factually correct.*

[ENDS]