



# Asia in focus

## Glen Norris

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reporter**

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High above Tokyo's bustling streets, Ko Nagata's South Seafood & Grill serves a chilled pinot noir produced by Queensland's Sirromet Wines.

Sirromet's Mt Cotton winery, southeast of Brisbane, has a special place in Nagata's heart, being where he married concert pianist Ena Uotani last year.

Nagata can now consider himself a part of Japanese corporate royalty as Ena is the daughter of Masahiko Uotani, the boss of Japanese cosmetics giant Shiseido.

Affairs of the heart aside, Queensland is also a place where Nagata sees lots of business opportunities for his hospitality and education

company Global Sky Group in the years ahead.

Global Sky, which has invested in a string of childcare centres across Queensland and New Zealand, is targeting a listing on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in 2022.

Nagata's interest in the Sunshine State was sparked when he visited the Gold Coast as a 12-year-old with his parents. Nagata's parents have since retired to live on the Gold Coast and Nagata's boyhood introduction to Queensland has grown into a full-blown business focus.

The 39-year-old now divides his time between Tokyo and Queensland as he looks to

expand his business interests Down Under. He is not alone in seeing more opportunities for Japanese investors in Australia.

After a boom period of investment in Queensland in the 1980s, the Japanese retreated as the nation's economy hit a decades-long period of uncertainty. Now they are back. Japan is Australia's second-largest foreign investor behind the US. Foreign direct investment in Australia soared 78 per cent from 2010 to 2016 to reach \$91 billion, overtaking the UK.

Japanese brand names, such as Uniqlo and Daiso, are increasingly familiar sights in Queensland shopping malls while Japanese companies also are becoming big players in services, mining and logistics.

While a lot of his compatriots are also investing in China and other Asian economies, Nagata says he is focused on Australia because of its political stability.

"The Queensland economy is diversified," says Nagata. "People think it is only resources but it is totally different. About 70 per cent of

the economy is made up of the services sector."

After studying international law and urban planning at Tokyo's Keio University, Nagata worked on renewable energy projects for Nippon Oil Corp before starting Global Sky in 2012.

"I decided I did not want to be a salary man but an entrepreneur," he says. A "salary man" in Japan refers to a salaried office worker. He says while his corporate high-flyer father-in-law is a good source of advice, he can also rely on entrepreneurial genes. Both his father and grandfather were businessmen in their day.

Nagata says he will be looking for other investment opportunities in Queensland, particularly in education and hospitality.

The company currently has 10 childcare centres in Australia and New Zealand, including at Yeppoon, Rockhampton, Robina, Southport and Mudgeeraba.

Global Sky now also operates three Australian cuisine restaurants in Tokyo, including South Seafood & Grill, which opened last year on the 39th floor of the Yebisu Garden Place building. Nagata drew on his experience importing premium Australian and New Zealand wines in establishing the restaurants. Along with Australian wines, the menu at South Seafood & Grill features roasted Australian black Angus beef and rock oysters.



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**Glen Norris worked in Hong Kong from 2000 to 2011 as a business editor of The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News and the South China Morning Post**



**Ko Nagata takes a keen interest in the growing market in Japan for Australian food and wine.**  
Picture Mark Cranitch