

Samantha Lassaux, international sales manager at Meiji Kinenkan



A French Employee at a Japanese Event Venue

Frenchwoman Samantha Lassaux is a sales manager for Meiji Shrine's event hall, known as Meiji Kinenkan. Lassaux talks about her work at the historic venue, which was built in the Meiji Period and originally served as a state guesthouse.

TAMAKI KAWASAKI

SAMANTHA Lassaux has lived in Japan for the past five years. Originally from France, she came to Meiji University as an exchange student from Aix Marseille University. She now serves as the international sales manager in the corporate sales department of Meiji Kinenkan, the splendid event hall associated with Meiji Jingu Shrine. Lassaux also promotes tourism in Japan in French and English through various media and at business seminars.

“I was interested in Japan and began studying Japanese when I was at university,” Lassaux recalls, “and then I was selected as an exchange student. These days I’m surrounded by my Japanese colleagues and mostly speak Japanese all day, aside from the times I converse in English with non-Japanese-speaking customers. Because of that, I’m gradually starting to lose my French,” Lassaux adds with a laugh.

She returned to France to attend graduate school and took a position for a short period



Japanese culture and business are now second nature to Lassaux



Lassaux manages banquets and public relations with foreign businesses for the event venue

in a French company, but her longing to work in Japan was overwhelming, and she used a working holiday visa to return. As she continued to study Japanese culture, she became more interested in Shintoism, shrines and temples. Her desire to work at Meiji Kinenkan was strong. She took on the challenge, conducted her job hunt like any Japanese person would, and was hired. With the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics coming up and with them a great influx of inbound customers, Lassaux plays a pivotal role at Meiji Shrine and Meiji Kinenkan.

Constructed in 1881 as a state guesthouse for foreign dignitaries, Meiji Kinenkan was later used as the meeting hall for the Meiji Constitution deliberations, making it a place of great historical value. Opened to the public as a wedding hall in 1947, the hall has retained its tradition of high etiquette and impeccable service.

Lassaux has gone all out to balance her own values and work style with Japanese values and manners within a work environment rich with history and culture. Now in her third year at the wedding hall, she manages banquets as well as public relations with foreign businesses. Thanks to understanding colleagues, her ability to perceive Japan as a non-Japanese and her curiosity and creativity for work, Lassaux has fashioned a career she enjoys and feels good about.

In Japan, many people are involved in the decision-making process when planning a banquet. This very controlled process typically ensures a perfect result. Since Lassaux comes from a different background, at first she was surprised at the Japanese practice of having people representing their business or organization apologize, even if the representative hadn't done anything wrong themselves. Now she understands that this is part of Japanese organizational manners. Unlike France, Japan often still assigns jobs according to gender and age. After studying about work, temples and shrines, Lassaux has realized that Japanese culture has the rare distinction of incorporating two religions harmoniously, Buddhism and Shintoism, and therefore does have the flexibility and adaptability that can lead to change.

To gain more physical strength and an ever greater understanding of the culture, Lassaux has been thinking of studying aikido. Focusing on the upcoming 2020 Olympics and Paralympics, she says: "I hope I can assist visitors from outside Japan that visit Meiji Shrine, or perhaps take on projects at international research centers, stadiums and museums." As an expat living in Japan, Lassaux clearly wants to share her love and fascination for her adopted country with the world. 🇯🇵