

2025 Conference of New England Japan-focused Non-profits

Panel 4 - Transpacific Panel Participant Biographies

Jason Sardinha is a Massachusetts native who first came to the city of Tosashimizu in Kochi Prefecture through the JET Program, where a fascination with rural life, local language, and unique connections led him to settle there. Inspired by the story of John Manjiro, a native of Tosashimizu who unknowingly forged one of the earliest bridges between Japan and the United States, Jason now works in the Tosashimizu Board of Education. His focus is on promoting regional revitalization, cultural exchange, and youth education through the JET Program, helping connect the next generation of Japanese and Americans. Drawing on his background in tourism, he works to share Tosashimizu's history, natural beauty, and enduring friendship with his home state of Massachusetts. Jason is also an enthusiast of the local Hata-ben dialect and a believer in the power of small communities to inspire global understanding.



Contact: jason.sardinha@gmail.com

Marina Giordano is an accomplished wine and sake educator, as well as an award-winning director at 7 News in Boston. She also serves as the Executive Director of Sake Day East, New England's largest celebration of World Sake Day.

Marina holds top-level industry credentials, including the Japan Sommelier Association Sake Diploma, the WSET Diploma in Wines and



Spirits, and is a WSET Certified Sake Educator. Her expertise is backed by advanced training through programs such as the Japan Sake and Shochu Academy, Sake Scholar, and Advanced Sake Professional.

She has traveled extensively in Japan to study with leading experts from the National Research Institute of Brewing, further enriching her knowledge and passion for sake. Marina is dedicated to sharing that passion, helping to grow appreciation for sake through education, storytelling, and community.

Contact: winesakechick@outlook.com

Robert Lawler is the Manager of Regional Sales for Air Canada based in the company's Boston office. He began his airline career with Air Canada in 2003 spending much of his early tenure in Airport Operations. Over the years, he held roles in San Francisco, Washington DC, and Los Angeles before making his way back to Boston. In 2017, Robert stepped into a unique opportunity that led him to roles with United Airlines and Air France. He returned to Air Canada in 2022 as part of the Global Sales team. In his current role, he focuses on promoting 6th-freedom routes that connect the United States to destinations around the world through Air Canada's Canadian hubs.



Robert holds a Bachelor's degree in Music Education from Ohio Wesleyan University and a Master's in Education from Lesley University. He's an avid traveler, a devoted French learner and a musician at heart. He lives in Beverly, Massachusetts with his partner and their dog.

Contact: Robert.lawler@aircanada.ca, (351) 213-5551.

Jeff Cutler is a Director at Japanet Group, Inc., where he leads the launch and development of the U.S. office for Japanet's travel business, with a focus on introducing and expanding the company's cruise offerings in the American market. His role bridges cross-cultural collaboration, strategic market entry, and brand positioning as the Group brings Japanet's high quality travel experiences to a new audience.



In addition, Jeff actively promotes Nagasaki Stadium City, a major mixed use development project funded by Japanet, aimed at revitalizing the Nagasaki region. This includes fostering international partnerships, exploring opportunities for global collaboration, and positioning the destination as a premier venue for international events and tourism.

Andrew Wylegala has served since 2023 as the President of the National Association of Japan-America Societies (NAJAS), the largest and oldest umbrella group of its type, covering a network of about 40 independent nonprofit societies with over 12,000 corporate and individual members. He promotes the hugely important U.S.-Japan relationship across various subject matters with a focus on people-to-people or "grassroots" ties.



Andrew had a far-ranging government career, from a start as a Presidential Management Fellow to culmination as a member of the U.S. Senior Foreign Service, serving in eight overseas posts, including Hong Kong, Seoul, and Tokyo, where he led a team of 40 from the U.S. Embassy as Minister Counselor for Commercial Affairs from 2012-2017. As a Professor of Practice at the National Defense University, he taught economics and industry analysis to security policy practitioners. From high school through graduate studies, Andrew developed his passion for Japan as a Rotary

Exchange Student, a Japan-America Student Conference delegate and a Reischauer Center intern at the headquarters of Mitsui & Co. Andrew was also President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan, growing that organization through the challenges of the pandemic and Cross Strait tension. He is a graduate of Cornell University and S.A.I.S. and lives in Washington, D.C.

Contact: wylegala@us-japan.org, [LinkedIn](#), and (202) 594-2249