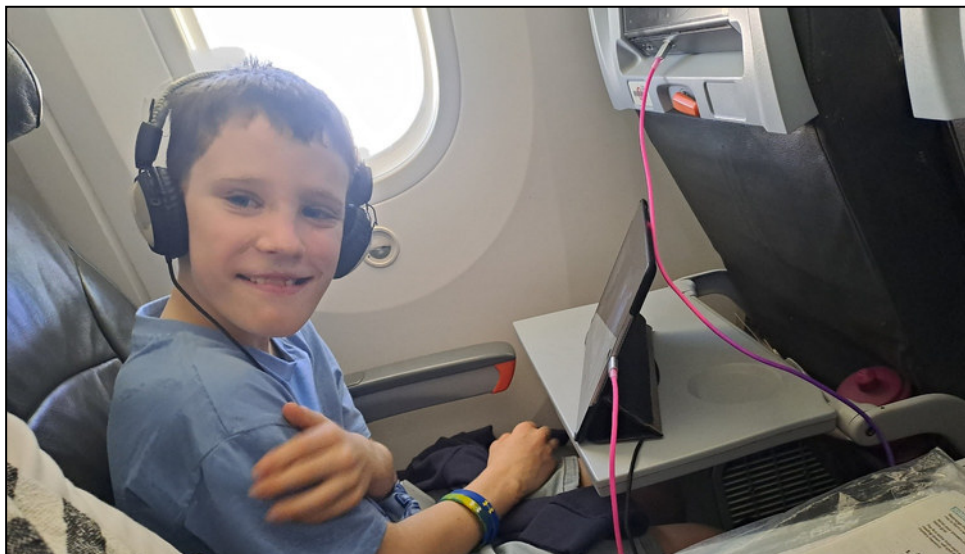


Tokyo for Kid (s) 2023

by

Paul and Janita O'Neill





Our grandson, Jack (10) is our special guest on this trip. We started a tradition of a Tokyo trip with his older sister, Abby when she turned 10. This is our eighth trip to Japan and we feel confident that we are experienced enough to take kids of 10 around Tokyo without terrifying them, or even worse, losing them.

Paul and Janita May 2023

16-17 May 2023

Airbnb, Tabata, Tokyo

Our flight from the Gold Coast arrived right on time at Narita airport last night but, unbeknown to us, at Terminal 2 rather than the scheduled, budget Terminal 3. Immigration and Customs were reasonably quick, although the new online registration process seemed to be having some teething problems.

Once we realised we were in Terminal 2, we quickly found the transfer bus to our hotel and were on our way just on an hour after landing.

We have found that stopping off for the first night in Narita after a late arrival, is far less stressful than hitting the rails for Tokyo, particularly with kids in tow. In the past we have taken a quick, local train to Narita town, stayed in a local hotel and returned to the airport the next day to sort out rail passes, seat reservations etc.

This time we stayed at the Tobu Narita Airport Hotel, close to Terminal 3. We caught the shuttle bus last night, only waiting about 10 minutes, but the drive to the hotel took at least 20 minutes more. Hunting for breakfast this morning, Jack and Paul headed off towards a hotel just up the road that had a Family Mart. They took a wrong turn and ended up after just a few minutes walking at ... Terminal 3! Loaded with a cheap breakfast, we figured that we could have easily walked to the hotel from Terminal 3 last night if we had landed



as per the itinerary, saving 30-40 minutes. Easily done if you, like us, travel with carry-on only, but give it more consideration if you are dragging half your wardrobe with you.

Not a free advertisement for the Tobu, but we are fans, because they were one of the hotels that gave us a full refund on our booking when we cancelled due to Covid in 2020.

Breakfast done, we elected to take the hotel shuttle back to the airport anyhow, because the bus was about to leave as we walked out the door.

From time to time, when Jack looks at us with that look that kids give their Very Aged Grandparents, we say, "This is not our first rodeo!" So, when we arrived at the JR Customer Service Desk, we stunned him and the triage person at the door, who probably also thought that this was our first rodeo, with the perfection of our preparations. We had booked and paid for all our passes and booked our reserved seats for our whole stay online. This was not possible on our last trip and what a difference it makes. Previously, we had to front up at JR Service Centres and book reserved seats for each trip as they came due. We left the Service Desk in about five minutes, all our long distance trips fully confirmed.

With that all done, we had a civilized cup of coffee and a fruit juice for our slightly stunned fellow traveller. The



trip to Tokyo on the NEX was Jack's first real experience of Japan. Just like his sister Abby, eight years before, he was reasonably cool about it all, until the city emerged from the semi-rural areas around Chiba and his eyes started to pop.

It was a long day, with the 60 minute trip on the NEX, changing to the Yamanote Line, finding our accommodation, unpacking and then shopping for food at a nearby supermarket, but we had some time for a stroll around our neighbourhood late in the afternoon. Our temporary home is in a narrow little street about five minutes' walk from Tabata station. Tightly-packed houses, some with small gardens, are the norm. It is more like a typical Japanese town than the 'burbs of an enormous city. We found a small local temple and cemetery just a few blocks away. The narrow streets were close to deserted, except for mums on bicycles pedalling home from day care, their little "munchkins" on board. We even saw some young carers pushing a large cart loaded with the little cuties. Primary-aged kids cruised the streets heading to the local parks and playgrounds in perfect safety. The small temple and cemetery freaked Jack out a bit. He wasn't sure we were allowed go in, but once again we reassured him that this wasn't our first rodeo and it would be fine.

18 May Tabata, Tokyo

A big day, as we took Jack on the Paul and Janita's one-day induction of Tokyo and Japan. We started with Asakusa with its temples and alleys of shops and of course the "big poo" at the Asahi



Brewery. While Jack was suitably impressed with the temples and the crowds, it was the big poo that was the highlight. He IS a ten year old boy.

Our usual impeccable planning ran true to form and the Metro station we were to take to our next venue was invisible to us. Try as we might, following the usually accurate station signs, we went round and round until, totally frustrated, we decided to walk to the next station. Jack was rapidly losing confidence in our rail navigation skills and it was a very hot day but, to his credit, he didn't whinge at all. The snacks Mama had prepared helped. We eventually found our way to Harajuku where he was beside himself to be in Takeshita Street!

The other side of the railway line, away from the razzle of Harajuku, is the Meiji Shrine and temple complex, surrounded by extensive parklands. By this time the temperature had climbed to the low thirties Celsius and we'd had to buy water to supplement our provisions. The shady gardens were a pleasant place to sit, eat and revive. Jack was more interested in the temples and the culture that surrounded them than we had expected. He did a ceremonial hand-washing and then the two claps and two bows performed by the faithful. We gave him two ten-yen pieces to throw into the prayer box, but he decided that was too much and handed one of them back. All the walking was rewarded by one of the famous Harajuku ice creams. They are more cream and custard than ice-cream and wrapped in a crepe, but he managed fairly well.







A quick visit to the Imperial Palace Gardens turned into a very long walk as, unaware of the extent of the gardens and the exact location of the exits in relation to the stations, we found ourselves well away from the nearest Metro when we exited. There is a surprising amount of open park lands in Tokyo and we probably discovered a lot of them today.

Our final stop for the day was the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, which has a free observatory on the 45th floor. We followed the recommended route out of Shinjuku station, but it ended up with us losing face with our grandson as it took a while to find the building. However we got there in the end and were rewarded by mind-boggling views of greater Tokyo, which stunned our small city Aussie companion. We walked over 22 kilometres today.

19 May Tabata, Tokyo

Disneyland today. Jack had a ball, even though the crowds and the queues were a bit of a downer. Waiting times were between 20 minutes and close to an hour for the more popular rides, but as we understand it, that isn't too bad.

Much cooler day today, though a few rain showers were about. The Grand Parade was simply spectacular. We found a good spot a little back from the path of the parade and avoided that crazy struggle to get "prime" positions that had people claiming a space along the route more than an hour before the start.







We elected to hit the rails soon after the parade, as rain was threatening, and the thought of all those thousands of people arriving at the small station at the same time was frightening. Good call as it turned out. By the time that Jack had successfully navigated us back to Tabata, even through Tokyo station, the rain was pelting down.

Tomorrow. Shinkansen to Nikko.

20 May, Tabata, Tokyo

Out the door by 8:00 am this morning for Jack's first Shinkansen ride, just a short run from Ueno to Utsunomiya, about 50 minutes. The early part of the trip is at normal city train speed, 70-80 kph. But once out of Tokyo the speed ramps up to 250kph. After our stop, it can cruise up to 300+kph. Jack was impressed. And why not? These are magnificent pieces of machinery, smooth and comfortable to ride in. From Utsunomiya, the last leg into Nikko is on a local train.

The JR station in Nikko is about two kilometres from the start of the temple complex and it is all uphill. The town was far more rustic when we first came here 12 years ago, which is a bit of a shame because it presented visitors who were only going to the Tokyo area with an opportunity to get a feel for small town Japan. Local Japanese tourism predominates here, so shops mainly feature items of interest to the locals.

The temples and monuments are spectacular and set in old growth pine forests. We have visited three or four times and still find it a worthwhile day trip from Tokyo.





Jack was very interested in the older cultural sites as he has been throughout this trip.

We had seen all we wanted to see in well under two hours and decided to head back to catch the local train to the Shinkansen station at Utsunomiya. As we started down the hill, we realised that we were cutting it a bit fine so we lifted the pace and made it with just a few minutes to spare.

While we were waiting on the platform at Utsunomiya, an express Shinkansen thundered through the station at 250kph+. Jack had been warned that this might happen, but as is the way with 10 year old boys, he was examining spiders on the station wall when the roar hit him. He is still brushing the dirt off his jaw! It is a sight and sound not to be missed. Further north on the line, where higher speeds are allowed, it is even more of a jaw-dropping experience. Being on a train closing on another at a combined speed in excess of 600kph is also something worth the ticket price, even though the passing of a 16 carriage Shinkansen at these speeds can take just a couple of seconds.



21 May Tabata, Tokyo

Big day today, left at 7:30am, home just before 6:00pm. Mt Fuji was our target and we managed to get some good views, but only from the train as we approached Kawaguchiko Station. The Red Bus to take us around the lake to a special viewing point for Mt Fuji co-ordinated well with the train. However, the return bus that was scheduled to meet our return train was to





arrive just six minutes before the train was to depart. Having witnessed the pandemonium that was the departure of the Red Bus, we decided to take no chances and take the return bus that would get us to the station one hour before the train was to leave. As it turned out Fuji was clouded over when we reached the viewing point, so there was not much to do except take the next available bus back to the station. No risk of missing the train, we were at the station two hours early! We couldn't catch an earlier one because they were all booked out. Not a lot to do in a small Japanese town with two hours up our sleeves!

The day wasn't a total loss though. We did get a good look at Mt Fuji and Jack had a 30 minute ride on the lake in a pedal-powered swan.

22 May Tabata, Tokyo

More relaxed day today on the last day of our JR Tokyo Wide Area Pass. The adult pass, at 10,000Y and the child's 5,000Y have more than paid for themselves. The Shinkansen trip to Utsunomiya and on to Nikko costs 6,000Y return, the trip to Mt Fuji 4,600Y (2,300Y). In just those two trips we more than got our money's worth and we could also use the pass in local trips for the three days.

Our trip to see the BIG Buddha and temples at Kamakura was on a non-reserved seat train. As we didn't need to catch a particular train, we headed off at the far more civilized time of 9:30 am. To get to the



temple areas around the small town of Kamakura, we needed to catch a small local train that was more like a tram. We had to exit the JR section of Kamakura station with our JR Pass, then use the Suica Card to enter the local train section, using the same machine. Even with the assistance of a station employee, our Suica cards had meltdowns, something to do with also using the JR Pass. This caused minor panic the next morning when we couldn't get into Tabata station with the Suica cards. But, as with all things Japanese, it was soon solved by the station staff.

Jack is extremely interested in Japanese culture and ploughed on through the hot, fairly crowded streets, happy to enjoy whatever was on offer. He once again washed his hands at the temple and donated a coin to do the two bows, two claps routine. This time he didn't go looking for change! He has also taken to using chopsticks like a professional and asked for Japanese food for dinner after the first night. There is no way he would even have imagined doing this before.

The walk/don't walk signs in our area have four light countdown system on them. Jack has taken to counting down with the lights and saying "dozo" as they turn green. "Dozo" is more like "go through" or "go ahead." But close enough!



23 May, Tabata, Tokyo

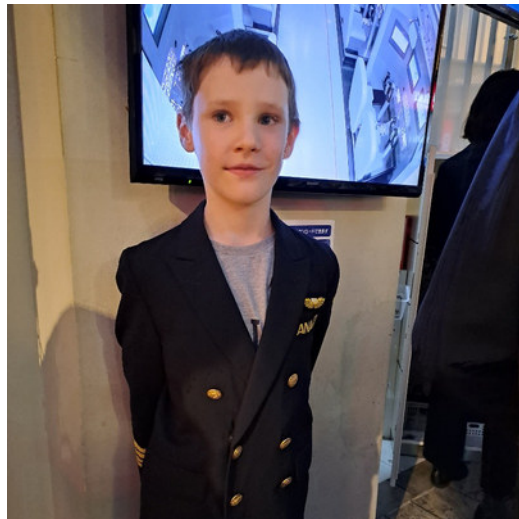
Headed out this morning to the Tokyo Police Museum and the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation. The Police Museum was a hit, with Jack hopping on a Tokyo Police motorbike and trying his hand at using crime detection tools like finger printing and tyre tread matching.

The journey out to the Emerging Science Museum was on the driverless Tokyo Monorail which was great fun. Not so much fun was the realisation that the museum was closed! We found our way to a local shopping mall and broke one of our cardinal rules about not eating at Western fast food joints. The Carl Jnr burgers were just too strong a temptation on a wet and cold day.

24 May, Tabata, Tokyo

Kidzania is a concept that originated in Mexico. It has taken off big time in Japan. Kids can engage in a wide variety of adult jobs ranging from making soft serve ice-cream to piloting a jet plane. Jack did both these and more! He drove a simulated Tokyo Metro train, completed a driver training program and was issued with an authentic-looking plastic Japanese driver's licence, trained as a security officer and made a Mos Burger. We chose the 9am to 3pm option, on Wednesday, when many of the activities are conducted in English. The price of AUD \$75 covered all activities and our two adult entry fees. During the morning Paul returned to Tokyo station to buy a set of Shinkansen chopsticks for Jack as a reward for his efforts in trying





so many new foods. About 30 minutes of the almost two hour trip was on the train, the remainder was spent roaming the miles of shops in Tokyo station. Persistence paid off as he returned with two sets of chopsticks.

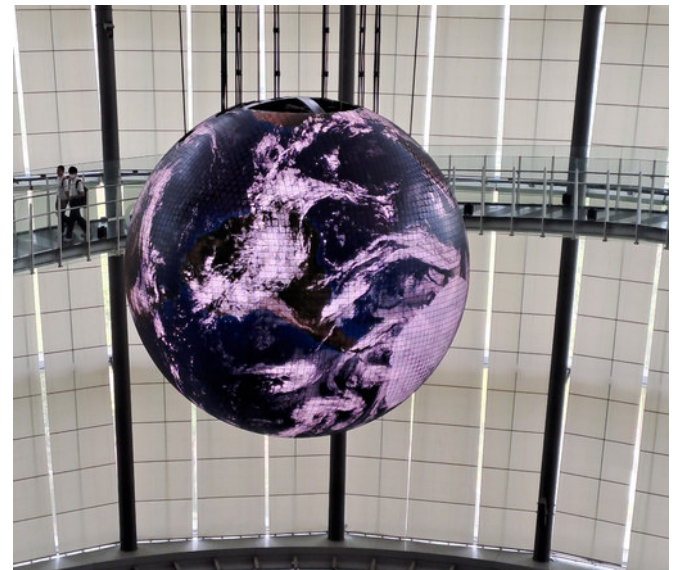
For our last night in Tokyo, we headed off to Akihabara, “Electric Town,” to see the lights and sights and have a totally Japanese meal in a restaurant. Jack once again surprised himself, woofing down everything on his plate including prawns!

25 May, Tabata, Tokyo

A full day to fill in today as our flight doesn’t leave until 9pm.

We returned to the Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation and this time it was open. Many interactive activities kept Jack amused for a couple of hours, but we were still left with a fair amount of time to kill. We eventually arrived at Tokyo station two hours early for our 5pm NEX train to Narita! Not a lot of fun to be had waiting on a station platform for two hours, apart from the ever-changing sights of people emerging from and boarding trains!

Eventually at the airport, our waiting was not yet over! Jetstar had installed a new system and as we have all come to expect, new systems always stuff up! We waited on the check-in line for close to an hour and we were close to the front of the queue. The new system was supposed to allow us to scan our passports and if



we had only carry on luggage, which we did, proceed to the gate. No such luck.

Eight years ago we took Jack's sister Abby on this same trip and had a great time with her. We thoroughly enjoyed this trip with Jack as well and we know he had a great time. These trips are great experiences for us and our grandchildren and we hope we are able to continue them in the future.



