

The East Gardens are not the traditional Japanese style but are more like a large English park with lawns, pathways, trees and flower gardens. Unlike an English park, however, these gardens are set within the palace walls and moat so are within the Imperial compound.

The compound originally had three moats with the Imperial residence (to which we saw the gate yesterday) inside the innermost. The gardens we visited today are between the inner and second moat and we were told that the third, outermost moat has been filled in and built upon.

We got two maps from the concierge at the hotel - one to get out to the main street and the other showing the civic center of Tokyo. Both were in English but nevertheless were still a little difficult to follow and it took us two tries just to get outside the hotel complex itself.

Once on the main street we were soon walking alongside the moat with beautiful views of the old walls and some very nice civic buildings across the street. This walk goes all the way around the palace grounds and is a favorite of joggers and cyclists so was very crowded on a warm and sunny Sunday morning.



A beautiful walk along the path outside the palace moat

The 40 minute walk suggested by the concierge took us well over an hour to get to the main entrance to the gardens. On the way we passed the old police station and another civic building in a very open and pleasant part of the city.



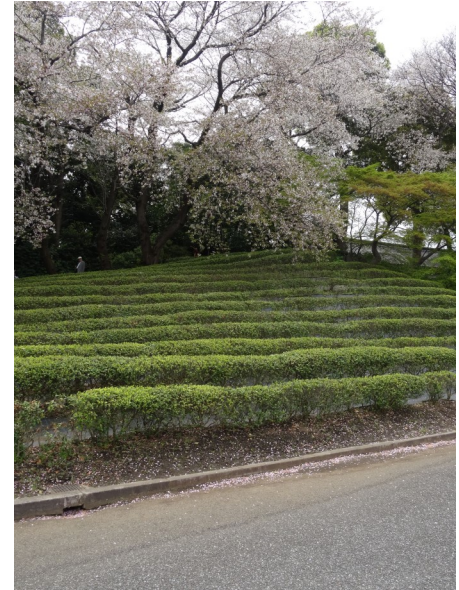
We were looking forward to a coffee and sit down once inside but there were no such facilities; just the ubiquitous vending machines. So a cool drink and ice cream and a rest on a bench had to suffice.



The gardens were very pleasant and there were a lot of families enjoying the warm weather so it was fun to people watch and stroll around the pathways. We didn't cover the whole park by any stretch but around 2pm we de-



cided that we had had enough walking so we made our way to the nearest subway station. With good signage and ticket machine facilities we found our way back to the station nearest the hotel with minimum difficulty and rewarded ourselves with coffee and cake (\$20+) in the shopping area adjacent to one part of the hotel. The Hotel New Otani is huge and has several blocks and is made even more difficult to navigate as the lobby floor on one block is actually the 7th floor in another. Back in the room we relaxed and even had an afternoon nap for the first time on this trip. Tonight we walked about ¼ mile to a small Italian restaurant where we enjoyed salad, pizza, dessert and espresso as well as a bottle of wine and a glass of limoncello (Molly) and grappa to finish. This cost about \$100, by far the cheapest so far in Tokyo.

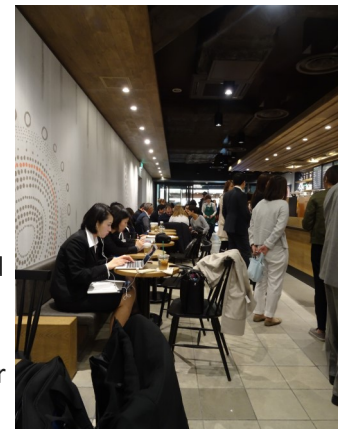


Monday April 11

Today we decided to take the Hop on/Hop off bus tour which made a stop at our hotel so was very convenient. We normally do this as our introduction to a new city but even done at the end of our visit it provided an interesting overview of this city of contrasts. Obviously we had seen a good deal of the city in our previous two days here and it wasn't always conducive to taking photographs from a moving bus. So, we simply captured a few sights of the city as memory joggers of this wonderful tour.



We took two of the three routes (with a Starbucks stop between—with most of the clientele in dark business suits) so we saw a lot of the civic, shopping, Imperial and river and sea areas of the city. It proved to be a tribute to the tour



we had taken as we saw many of the places we had visited on the final day last Saturday, as well as much of the area we had walked on our own yesterday.



A city of contrasts

It was cool and generally cloudy for much of the day which made for a cold ride at times but the sun came out in the afternoon. All in all it was a very good way to end our sightseeing.

Tonight we dined on the seventeenth floor of the hotel in the Sky rotating restaurant which served a buffet of Japanese, Chinese and Western dishes and provided us with another panoramic view of the city at night.

Tuesday April 12

There were long lines for breakfast when we first tried around eight so we spent some time in the room and finished packing before trying again soon after nine when things had quietened down. We still had time before checking out at 11 and that process was quick and painless with staff on hand to help every level.

We had purchased tickets for the shuttle bus to Narita and it left promptly at 11:35, stopped at two more hotels downtown and then proceeded quickly to the airport. Check-in and security also went smoothly and we had time to spend our last few Yen before going to the Delta lounge to await our 4:40pm flight to Seattle.

The flight left just a few minutes late but was smooth all the way and, after a good dinner, we slept much of the way. We arrived in Seattle on time (it was now Tuesday morning again!) and had plenty of time to make our connection to Los Angeles. This left the gate on time at 12:15 but there was a maintenance issue that forced us back to the gate and we had about a two hour delay. Since we were overnighing in LA this wasn't a major issue - except that it made our onboard lunch a little late. We arrived at LAX about 4 pm and quickly got our bags and the shuttle to the Airport Marriott. We unpacked and were soon asleep and slept until dinner time.

We ate at the Steakhouse in the hotel and then retired around 10pm.

Wednesday April 13

We were up around eight, had a light breakfast in the Concierge Lounge and then caught the shuttle to the airport where we had an hour in the lounge before our flight to Detroit. On this flight we had lunch and arrived in plenty of time for our final leg back to Cincinnati.

Elizabeth was there to meet us and we were home around 10:30 after a wonderful trip to Japan. The country was far more interesting and beautiful than we had anticipated and has far more historical and cultural aspects than we could have imagined.

We hope that this journal has captured some of the excitement we felt throughout our visit and that the pictures do justice to the sites and sights we so much enjoyed.

ありがとうございました

A Few Final Thoughts

We have mentioned that Japan presents contrasting views of itself and certainly it offered a number of contradictions to the picture that we had before our visit.

Things Japanese (notably electronics and cars) have the reputation for quality and the latest in technology so we were expecting everything to reflect that image. Indeed, there were obvious examples of high tech (notably the toilets!) and efficiency (the organization of our tour and the quality of the bus drivers, for example) but they sat alongside practices that we might consider a little archaic. Cash is far more accepted and used than credit cards and paper tickets were the norm at all the sites we visited. Indeed, a physical paper trail seems to be not only the norm but an essential part of everyday Japanese life.

While traditional shops could be seen in virtually all towns and cities and the Ginza District of Tokyo has every world-class store name imaginable, it is the Convenience Store that is by far the thickest on the ground, with US giants Seven Eleven and Lawson competing side by side with Japan's own Family Mart. In addition, drink and food vending machines are ubiquitous (literally on every corner) and dispense almost anything you may desire in a very high-tech fashion—but, again, primarily for cash.

The Japanese stylish and luxurious cars that we see in America are far less common on their home turf and most cars on the roads are very small boxes on wheels, with little aesthetic appeal. Although we didn't really note the appliances in hotel rooms, they were certainly not "outlandish" or ultra-modern and the television sets were generally very small. WiFi was in almost all hotel space but was not available on our buses, for example, nor indeed on the high speed bullet trains.

The subway system in Tokyo (to the extent that we experienced it) was a mixture of "old" and modern and ticketing was once again of the paper variety—not like the contactless card system of Singapore and Hong Kong, for example. There's nothing wrong with the older system, of course, but it was just one more picture of a highly advanced country shattered.

What was as expected, based on guide book and personal statements by others who have been, was the cleanliness and politeness throughout the country. No trash, very few untidy areas around homes, little evidence of eating or drinking on the streets and white-gloved bus and taxi drivers in immaculate vehicles. And, of course, the respectful bow of the head (and often a deep bend from the waist) was standard everywhere and by everybody. As our bus left every day, several members of the hotel staff would be outside to bow as the door closed—and then to wave (two arms widely opened) until the bus was out of sight.

Yes, we in the West have benefitted greatly from the productivity and technology that Japan has given us. We could do worse than import a little of their culture and respect. It is an amazing country with amazing people.



*Convenience
Stores
and Vending
Machines*



Small Cars



Cleanliness and Efficiency



Culture, Tradition, Politeness

