

# Y3/Winter/2/ Goodbye Japan

Goodbye, Japan!

To "celebrate 2023" and digest the experience and challenges I had in 2022, I took a break this winter — instead of taking on another internship — by going to Japan for 10 days in early-mid January. This trip has yielded me lots of reflections, and I wish to document them all on my flight back home.

## (i) My tour

Our trip consisted of a few parts:

- ① Kansai (関西) >> Osaka(大阪): We spent the first few days in Namba (難波), residing in an e-stay apartment. Went to 飯天寺 and a couple shopping districts. Had the first experience of dining in Japanese convenience stores/buying food in Supermarket. First time to put my (limited) Japanese in practical use — surprised that it was fairly comprehensible to locals. Went to Polaris Omelette (ポラリスオムレット) for treats, and UST for a whole day (5/1) for entertainment.
- ② Kyoto (京都): We took Osaka metro to Kyoto, and stayed in "Gozai" for another 2 days. We had temple visits (佛光寺), Ramen treats (拉麺), and walks along some streets in Kyoto. Those two days were full of inspiration in terms of the vibe there, the cultural elements in the vicinity (and the modes of transport there — some foreigners were cycling along the Sagano (嵯峨) River/near the temple).
- ③ Tokyo (東京): We then took Tokaido Shinkansen ( $\approx 500$  km, 2:15, ¥14,370/pp) to Tokyo, spending the next two days in Suginami (杉並) and the next three in Hakone (箱根). Period of high spending, especially for dining in urban areas, transportation towards the countryside, and intense temptations to shop for relatively cheap but high quality goods. Tried a few wagyu stores, sushi (Sushiro & 大支), and all the fast food stores in HK (and they seem quite a lot better!) Went to mt.Fuji (富士) in the last 2 days, before having a final round of shopping in Saitama (埼玉). Interestingly, I kept losing things as soon as my Tokyo part started — some painful times but luckily all are retrieved.

>> Cost breakdown / HKD

(i) Flight & Insurance

¥4550/pp: CX Flights (HKG → KIX on 3/1; NRT → HKG on 14/1)  
+\$230 for Insurance

(ii) Accommodation:

~¥2700/pp; 11 @ ~\$260/night/pp

(iii) Transport

Shinkansen: ¥1500 → Osaka/Tokyo metro  
Tour train: ¥3500  
Shinkansen: ¥14270 + NRT express: ¥1730  
Taxi: ¥6000  
~¥41000 / ¥2500 / pp

(iv) Food

~¥4K/day : 3~6/1  
~¥7K/day : 7~10/1  
~¥5K/day : 11~13/1

~¥57000 / ¥3500 / pp

(v) Souvenirs

~¥5~7K per spot, max. ¥30K on UST and outlet  
⇒ ~¥110000 / ¥6500

(vi) Museum/temple entry tickets

~4 spots @¥1000

⇒ ~¥4000 / ¥240/pp

Aggregate cost = ~\$20,500 / 11 days

→ Can be streamlined in terms of food/transport: A decent trip with \$18K/pp possible by minimizing food & transport expenses with more tourist knowledge!

## (ii) My reflections — thoughts

My original purpose of the trip was gain exposure to foreign ideas/experience while being able to give myself more space to reflect after my series of hardships and immense challenges in 2022.

- Itinerary-wise, this trip brought me many takeaways:

① Transport

- Compared to Tokyo/Osaka, the metro system in HK and the transport fares are already quite accessible. Parking fees in Japan were much more expensive (¥800~1000/1h), and many metro systems' beginning fares are ¥10~200. The Japan railway system is quite heterogeneous (monopolistic competition) — in an industry with high entry barrier, this could mean the railway costs are expensive already. However, the railway companies (especially JR) seem to be in better recognition compared to MTR. Maybe because of their strong focuses of user experience (customized music for each JR station/public announcements from train crews, Japanese' more amiable/grateful attitudes). This phenomena of having less efficiency, economical benefits, and service accessibility, but higher recognition do make me intrigued — why is that the case? (Oh yes, things like showing expected time of travel really do help!)
- Convenience in HK simply makes us forget how hard it was to become convenient.

② Self and Space

- I realized I am really not the type of people who enjoy constant stimulus when under pressure — especially with parts/practices I don't really like. While I was quite happy about the trip in the Namba/Izuto arcs, I was increasingly frustrated in Tokyo with my friends' spending habits, itinerary planning and overly assertive attitude. With me also under the pressure of ongoing work (no progress in my quantitative trading initiative with them, and the IB outlook summary I am making with two batches), my mind only became more occupied and less attentive to the surroundings, or in the position to enjoy every bit of the trip thoroughly. Maybe that's why I keep losing things in the second part — it was very lucky that Japan is a place of courtesy and passers near-by/policemen were soooo helpful — and luckily, I could express myself clearly with my limited Japanese and some Google translate.

- Maybe if there would be another trip to Japan for me, I will
  - Only advise setting the itinerary not that packed (7.5/10) — say two tourist spots a day — to fully enjoy and experience. I have to visit tourist spots. Each day, I had barely 6h of sleep (the last two days: 4.5), and feel quite rushed to follow my friends' itineraries. We spent an average of 4h travelling each day.
  - Spend 30 minutes each day in reflecting what I have done that day to declutter my thoughts: I was able to do so each day before I went to Tokyo — and I think my mood also worsened because of the lessened time of reflection to self.
  - Try to experience locals' life more, apart from injecting myself with tourism vibes and consumerism. More museum visits, walking down the streets, or cycling along rivers with rented bikes will do.

### ③ Attitude to life

I was impressed by Japanese' culture of gratitude. The most I said or heard was "おひつじ (お世話)" —— with most locals I met speaking the second part for additional courtesy. Regardless of whether this phrase is genuine or out of mere courtesy, the remarkably high occurrence of this phrase does remind me the importance of being grateful for everything around me —— something I, or HongKongers in general, lack. While I understand the Japanese model doesn't always work that well and the notion of always having to show that face could be stressful too, being just a bit more grateful and expecting a bit less from others do make you feel happier. I probably also should consider this very notion and simply deliver more if I could, less expectation, more output, feel more fulfilled.

### ④ Friendships

Finding good enough travelling partners is important —— at least they understand my needs more. In this trip I wasn't able to, unfortunately. My friends were overly assertive, and I feel they didn't really care about my feelings when I need space —— is it my fault of not telling them 100% what I think?

From the itinerary schedule to transport methods and spending habits, we had quite some disagreements —— I tried to voice, didn't work, and I thereafter chose to be silent —— they liked what they are doing anyway, and would tell me to "think positively". For real, I have become too tired of explaining myself clearly to people who decide/ is born to not listen.

I recalled that after each trip I had in the past, my relationships with "close friends" that went the trips with me would deteriorate —— either they find a truer, more authentic me being disconnected to them/cannot relate to their own ways of thinking/when I'm not of a rising sun to them and no longer can bring that much positivity.

I really hope to have someone that could understand me well —— yet as time passes this probability only diminishes. No matter how much support or love I tried to give (or fabricate) to people I used to love or find intimate with, I'm probably not gonna be able to feel intimate anymore. Maybe I just shouldn't expect anything. "No one cares", I recalled the me in FI saying. Maybe next time I'll just go on a trip alone, like I shouldn't demand being comprehended. My family couldn't. My love couldn't. Then why am I in a position to demand friends to?

Anyways, I am back to reality. Has to stop wishing and work, in order to buy myself time and trips to extend my horizons..

Goodbye, my thought-provoking trip.