

Two weeks in Japan

By William Corden

I've visited China many times but this was my first visit to Japan and it was all it was hyped up to be! My wife has a friend who lives there and she showed us the ropes.

In Tokyo Station I saw more people in one place than I've ever seen in my life, no druggies, no beggars hardly any fat people at all and, without a single exception while we were there, as polite as can be!



I know it's ridiculous to say it, but if I were the winner of November's election here in the States, I would contract the entire operation of Government out to Japan and sit back to watch how marvellous it would turn out to be.

If they're suffering a recession over there, then bring some of that stuff over to our side of the Ocean because every store we went into was heaving with customers and staffed with impeccably clad and professional staff. It was like a throwback to the fifties and sixties in North America when businesses bent over backwards to please you.. such an eye opener for me.

Then there were the prices! Tell me if you can, why two Egg McMuffin meals in Tokyo can be had for about \$12 when it would be \$24 in the US. Tell me how I am able to buy 5 pieces of high quality clothing for a total of just under \$100 when the same items with much lower quality would set me back \$300 in my home town?

The streets were absolutely immaculate, nobody drops litter as

it's in their culture to take it home with them. I saw no graffiti in all of our daily travels, no weirdos on the trains or buses and seemingly everybody dressed as if they were going to a formal occasion.

The public transit system is mind boggling in its density and complexity , trains just whoosh through the city centre at breakneck speeds only a matter of feet away from residential buildings , buildings which just go on uninterrupted for mile after mile cheek by jowl.

The trains themselves are spotlessly clean inside and out, as were most of the vehicles (trucks and Vans included) as I looked at them from the bus on the freeway. It seems like dirt is against the law in Japan.

Almost every vehicle you see is of Japanese manufacture, the only foreign ones I noticed were high end Mercedes. No wonder the US Auto industry went down the drain, allowing Japanese cars to be sold in their own country while not driving a hard bargain to sell theirs in Japan.

Drivers are courteous and patient, I never heard a horn honk while I was there and pedestrians routinely bow with a thank you to a driver who has let them cross. You have to remember that they drive on the wrong side of the road□.

No homeless tent camps to be seen , even though I'm told that there are some vagrants and human flotsam and jetsam around, I didn't see any and I walked quite a lot. You rarely see tattoos and guns don't seem to be part of the culture, police stations all over the place and walking patrols.

It's hard to get your head around the size and density of the metropolis that is Tokyo but in my own mind's eye, having been many times to Manhattan, I would say that it's like 20 Mannhattans stuffed into an area maybe 5 times the size, just awe inspiring in the industry it takes to keep it all running smoothly.

How tightly are people packed in? Well in my modest Vancouver home we have a single family house on a lot size of about 32ft x 120 ft , most people who occupy this type of home comprise a single family unit.

In a residential district in Tokyo I measured out a building that sat on roughly the same dimensions, but this building was a six storey multiplex with four apartments on each floor so there were TWENTY families living on the same space as my

single family home in Vancouver.

The amazing aspect of it all is that they all seem to be able to live in such proximity with a minimum of disharmony. That many people stuffed into a North American environment would have the cops there every day.

The thread I felt running through this teeming society was that everyone has some sort of personal responsibility to avoid offending their co-citizens, whereas in our neck of the woods you just do what the hell you want, and who gives a fuck about your neighbours, but I digress.

Before I went I was told that the food in Japan was an experience not to be missed but to tell the truth I wasn't that impressed, readers will criticize me for wolfing down an Egg McMuffin meal with coffee but let me tell ya it was more tasty than some of the crap that turned up on my plate.

Most of the restaurants I saw were fast food and the fast food they served up (usually with a robot doing the serving) was a mash up of North American junk food served alongside Japanese noodles or rice. Not much did I see of fish or Ramen Noodles, in fact the Japanese food in my home town is much much better than the day to day fare in Tokyo. But it was OK and the prices were about the same as they were here some 20 years ago.

I didn't enquire about rents and other living expenses in the city but it seems that they haven't been hit with the same inflation we've had in our monthly layouts. They have a lot of public housing so rents are subsidized and home ownership isn't the dream that it is in the West.

Although it's only a two week impression I must say that I found them to be much more efficient in getting things done, they seem to be very tolerant and patient, although they're not particularly good at English as a second language like they are in China. You would think that the fact that they have millions of English speaking tourists each year that they would make an effort to be bilingual but no, they prefer "Google translate" which is like a comedy show if you get the wrong interpretation.

A much more sophisticated and dynamic population than China I think, and of the two countries I would have to say that it would be easier to live in Japan... I think I could live there quite happily if I had to.

I'd go back there at the drop of a hat if someone anted up the ticket for me.