

Post



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# Hasta la vista, Tokyo - April 18, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

Beautiful, cool morning. Soon this nice weather will be a distant memory as we travel south towards high humidity and even higher temperatures. After breakfast we arrived, finally, at the highly touted East Garden of the Imperial Palace. Alas, it was a bit of an "Emperor's New Clothes" situation. Beautiful green lawns, bushes and trees but very few flowers, my measure of a "garden". A quick tour of Tokyo's electronic shopping and a delicious lunch before heading to our "home" for the next seventeen days: the Azamara Quest cruise ship. - Karen

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## ***DETAIL***

It's easy to tell the difference between a day on a tour and a typical day on our own. When on a tour there's usually a lot planned and you're always busy, go, go, go. On our own, we're more leisurely and we 'waste' time more.

Today we're on our own and we do not have a lot planned. We know we're supposed to be on the ship some time between 3:00 and 3:30. The boat castsoff at 4:30 (moved up from 5:00). Karen is very excited to be finally unpacking for a while, emptying her entire suitcase. She's confident she'll discover some outfit or some other thing she forgot she packed seven plus weeks ago.

Our room, while nice with a good view, doesn't include breakfast. That's bad in that we have to pay out of pocket to eat. It's good in that we will probably eat less. I come up with a likely looking spot in the Ginza on the way to the East Gardens of the Imperial Palace. We bathe and pack and give up our room and luggage.

On the subway we ponder the things we like and dislike about the transit here. The 'true' subway lines all have letters (U, T, M, etc.) in color-coded circles, which is nice. Each station has a number, so you'll be at the M8 station headed for the M11 station. No need to know that you're headed to the Yamagotchi station, which most of the time shows in kanji characters. The current and next stations are displayed, and announced, so it's really easy to know where you are and when to get off. All of the exit signs are in yellow with arrows.

But not all trains are subway/metro trains. There are also the JR train lines and others and they run in the same spaces as the metro trains, but the tickets we have do not work on those. Rook! And going outside the main area of Tokyo (like to the International Cruise Terminal) is extra. Thankfully it's not too many yen for that and the machines are easy to work with.

When boarding the metro cars they show you where to stand (to either side of the door) and most people do. The exiting passengers come out through the middle, running the gauntlet of the waiting riders who swoop in to fill the vacuum once all the the leaving passengers have gotten off. Signs and announcements ask you not to talk on your cell phone while riding and it's pretty quiet on the train. There are no 'impending doom' of fire and gas attack advertised on the metro here like there is in Seoul. Thankfully Japan isn't actively at war with any neighbor.

Breakfast is really good, an egg sandwich and coffee and soon we're off, again by metro, to the Imperial Palace's East Garden. Is this one of the three of four places our personal customized tour was going to take us, and where we tried to visit yesterday. After getting our bags checked for firearms or explosives we wind our way past 100 year old guard buildings.

There are lots of azaleas, but not too many more flowers than that. The rose garden is underwhelming. We're kept out of the Imperial Palace itself, sadly. We did get results of our covid test by email while at the garden. Yay! It's 100% in Japanese. Boo! We use the Google translator app on the one character that seemed to be result and the answers were "negative". Yay!

Soon we're heading out of the garden. Karen humors me and we head towards Akihabara. It's fun to say quickly, with practice, and it's the electronic gadget heart of Tokyo. Some of the stores are just deep jumbled retail outlets on the main level, selling every kind of wire, cable, connector, patch panel and conduit you could need. We head to the real gadget store. It's seven stories tall, bright white inside with lots of lighting. Each floor has it's own theme or group of products. We go floor by floor, someone greeting us with the Japanese Hello, or Thank you.

Floor one is computers, floor two is cell phones, further up we have smart watches, rice cookers, bidet toilet seats, games and action figures, drugs and cosmetics, hair driers, air conditioners, snack food, etc. etc. It's really overwhelming. We buy nothing because we need nothing and have zero extra room in our luggage.

At lunch time we metro/walk to a French restaurant. It's the same one we ate at the other day, but a different location. The food is as delicious as before. We again have the French onion soup, along with pan sautéed fish with a delightful beurre blanc sauce. We shouldn't have wine, but we do. Being seated outside we have plenty of time to enjoy the lovely sunny weather. We shouldn't have dessert, but we do. Two of them. Eventually we have to give up our table and get on with our day.

Karen seems to be relieved to be headed back to the hotel to pick up our luggage. Her legs (and mine) are tired from the many days of walking and climbing out of metro stations we've been doing. There have been lots of stairs.

The metro ride to the cruise terminal is fun. We're up high and the route includes a 360 degree loop, to get us up higher where we cross a long bridge over the Tokyo bay. At the terminal we're the only ones getting off. Back on terra firma we head towards the water. Soon our ship comes into view with it's 11 or more decks rising high above us.

We talk to a sequence of people, each wanting to know something or see some proof of who we are, what vaccinations we've had, what recent covid test we've passed. They offer to take our luggage, but we've schlepped it this far, we can schlep it a bit further.

Once signed in, and with key cards in hand, we're divided into two groups, A and B. It's not clear what the distinction is, but we're on team B. We soon learn these are muster stations. There are two of them, and two sides of the ship, so this makes sense.

In years past you'd grab the life vest from your room and go to your muster station where you'd try to hear your station leader tell you life and death instructions, which you invariably couldn't hear or understand. Post covid you now go to the dining hall in small groups, get sparkling wine or cranberry juice, and watch a safety briefing video. A couple of our fellow passengers take the juice so that they can joke this is the last non-alcoholic beverage they'll be consuming for a while.

Our video is accompanied by Kimmie, a recent Texas State University graduate who simultaneously does a live demonstration of the proper donning of the life vest. Her ample features cause the vest to stick out a bit comically, not intentionally, we're sure.

Karen happily unpacks her stuff, and then mine, into our 'cozy' room while I work on the day's blog. We go topside and shiver with G&Ts in hand while the ship slowly departs to the strains of a real live bagpiper. We joke with fellow shipmates that there'll be no more than four hours of bagpiping a day while underway.

At the spa Karen signs up for a massage while I sit nearby, ensuring she doesn't go overly crazy. Two couple nearby jabber away in what sounds a bit like French. At Karen's nudging, and emboldened by the G&T, I wander over and ask, in French, if anyone knows of a good place onboard to learn French. They all laugh and point at themselves. We chat for a while, in French, and learn that they're some Montrealers and Quebecois-ers. We're surprised that we're able to communicate so well. Our daily lessons are apparently doing some good.

Dinner is a seafood greatest hits buffet and we get plenty to eat, promising ourselves (disingenuously) that we won't consume so much at future onboard meals. A bit more imprudent wine and we're off to bed, the boat gently rocking from side to side.

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## Photos



On our walk to breakfast we saw this automated bike parking garage. You don't see the uniformed lady to help you, because she got out of the way. Wow. Smart robots to automatically park bikes!



The entrance to the East Garden at the Imperial Palace.



OK... they have azaleas...



And totes adorbs ponds with lantern  
statues



And more azaleas (where are the roses and cherry blossoms?)



Karen and myself and more azaleas. Not that we're complaining. OK, maybe a little.



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These aren't the droids, er, Star Wars Lego figures you're looking for. (OK, maybe they are)





Scott's face is anatomically correct. Those other two, no guarantees.



French lunch. Mmmm



Finally, to the Tokyo International Cruise Terminal. (Don't ask us how we knew)



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