



Dear Reader!

I am very happy to share with you my experiences in Japan. My trip has taken me to a magical country with a wonderful culture, fascinating history, gastronomy, full of experiences and beautiful natural sights.

Japan is one of the most exciting places I have ever visited in my life and a country very close to my heart. During my trip I saw and experienced many interesting things and made new friends.

This trip was originally planned for 2020, the year of the Olympics. Unfortunately, Covid ruined all our plans. We had to wait until now to make the trip a reality. A week of roaming around Japan and a week of martial arts seminars and demonstrations with my martial arts association, who we embarked on this trip with, to attend events of Japan's oldest Budo organization.

I hope that my experiences will help you to feel that Japan is one of the most wonderful places in the world.

The departure

We arrived at the airport on time, but unfortunately we ran into difficulties right from the start. Airport security wanted to see the swords we had brought with us for demonstrations and practice. The well-packed and carefully sealed sword storage box had to be opened and the swords checked one by one by the airport staff to make sure they were not real swords. (The swords we had were all practice swords, not made of steel but of a kind of aluminium alloy.)



To control the blades, a magnet was used and placed on the blades one by one. There was another group in the queue who had also come to this event. There were about eight of them, so the three of us and them caused quite a congestion at the check-in desk. For some reason, the staff did not move aside us to allow others to do the check in peace, but we were inconveniently held up the line while the stuff checked the more than ten swords one by one.



Picture is for illustration

If you find yourself in such a situation, ask the airline staff if they can't think of a way to let you go aside during the procedure. On the way back, they checked our swords in the same way, but there I was not surprised but politely asked them to us move away so as not to hold up the line during the inspection.

With great difficulty we made it to the plane and the journey to Tokyo began. The journey was uneventful.

Some advice for first time travellers to Japan.

The flight

As this is a very long journey, taking around 14-16 hours, choose your seat in the last row, directly next to the toilet. Why? Because there, if you stand up to stretch your legs, no one is staring. If you buy a ticket somewhere else, as soon as you stand up, all eyes are on you.



As you can see on the picture, we can stand up comfortably in the last seat without disturbing anyone. You can also stretch your legs a little behind the seats, which is very useful.

The window can be tinted so that when you want to relax, you don't have to worry about the sun in your eyes. You can adjust the blackout with a small switch.



On the picture you can see the switches, if you press the grey one the glass darkens, if you press the light one it lightens.

We left at 9am and were served hot meals twice on the way. In any case, I would recommend taking a snack and a drink with you in case you get hungry between meals. Of course, if you are thirsty you just have to call the staff.



You can follow your flight from the start on a screen mounted in the back of the seat in front of you, and see which country you are passing over.



Headphones are provided on the flight, but they are of very poor quality so it is worth bringing your own. We also get a blanket and there is a USB socket next to the tablet and a power socket under the seat. So we can charge our electronic devices.

Arrival in Japan

After 14 hours of flying, we finally arrived in Tokyo to board our flight to Osaka.



Haneda airport

We had to move to another part of the airport, as our flight was departing from another terminal. The queue was at least 20-30 minutes to enter the country.

They checked our passport and our negative Covid test. We then rushed to find out how to get to the other terminal. Needless to say, hardly anyone at the information desks spoke English to direct us. Communication is difficult and we have to carefully scan the signs. The dash to get to the other flight has begun. What followed was not for the faint-hearted and physically weak. Better to prepare for a good marathon with two suitcases before leaving for Japan.

It was terribly difficult to find the shuttle train and when we got off it to rush on, there was nowhere properly signposted where to go...we picked a direction at random and looked for someone who told us in broken English where to go.

When we finally arrived at the baggage claim area, we were drenched and praying that we wouldn't have to take a later flight, because then the taxi we had already booked would have to wait. Well, who would have thought it, but here again they had to unzip the sealed sword bag and check the swords again one by one.

We barely made it to the plane and were on our way to Osaka for the taxi to Kyoto. The journey took about an hour and fifteen minutes. The plane did not fly too high so we had a good view of the landscape and the island's coastline. Then we arrived at Osaka airport.



Kansai International Airport

The taxi was on time and spotless as always. If you have a lot of luggage and are not familiar with Japan, it is worth ordering a taxi. We booked in advance because we had a lot of luggage and didn't want to risk finding a taxi big enough for our luggage. The driver was waiting on the arrival side with a sign in his hand. We packed into the minibus and headed for the hotel.



The hotel check-in time was at three o'clock so we went for a walk as we arrived early. We left our suitcases at the reception.

A word of advice. When you book your rooms, remember to write in the comment section that you want the rooms close together and that if you arrive early you want to leave your suitcases at reception for safekeeping.

When I checked in to the hotel, I had an interesting surprise waiting for me when I was about to pay for the rooms. I had to pay a 10 percent tax on top of the room rates. Which wasn't much, it was just unexpected.

When shopping in Japan, be prepared to pay not the normal price, but tax on everything. So be careful when looking at prices, because you may be in for some unpleasant surprises.



The plan for the next day is to return to Gion in the morning and check out Nishiki Market.

To be continued...

