

# VISIT TO JAPAN ~ THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN ~ PART 1

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## FAST FACTS:

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Japan (Known locally as Nihon/Nippon)

**CAPITAL CITY:** Tokyo

**POPULATION:** 130 million

**RELIGION:** Many Japanese practise Shintoism and Buddhism together while some are atheists.

± 80% - Shintoism

67% - Buddhism

1,5% - Christianity

7% - Other, incl. Islam, Judaism

**CURRENCY:** Japanese Yen (JPY) ¥

**NATIONAL DISH:** Washoku, seafoods (sushi, sashimi)

**TIME DIFFERENCE:** 7 hours ahead of South Africa

**POSITIVES:** Home to several UNESCO World Heritage sites; leading industrial power; famous for gardens, traditional and martial arts, automobile, electronics exports; highly-regulated society; simple, minimalist culture

**NEGATIVES:** No work-life balance; high suicide rates; intolerant of foreigners living there

**BY THE WAY:** The country experiences 1 500 earthquakes annually and minor tremors almost daily

All praise is due to Almighty ALLAH, the Sustainer, Nourisher and Cherisher of the Universe. Peace, Blessings and Salutations be upon our Beloved Master and Leader, Nabi Muhammad Mustafa ﷺ.

## Arrival

Alhamdulillah, Fathima and I arrived at Narita Airport, Tokyo, on Monday morning, 25 Rabiul Awwal 1440 (3 December 2018) after a two-hour flight from South Korea.



From the start, I found that Japan compared favourably to South Africa and many Muslim countries we had visited. Everything at the airport was spick-and-span, well-organised and very efficient.

MashAllah, we found the Japanese to be highly respectful, humble people. We complied willingly with the customs officials' polite request to check our luggage, which they did in an orderly manner and, after questioning us briefly, welcomed us to the country.

Alhamdulillah, we had obtained three-month visas in South Africa and were allowed to visit for 15 days so, all our documentation was in order.

We were met by Moulana Umayr, my student and a Darul Uloom Zakariyya (DUZ) graduate, who initiated this visit. He had spent about five years in the country and could speak Japanese. He had arranged everything for us, with Allah's Help: transport, food and programmes, Alhamdulillah. May Allahu Ta'ala reward him for his dedicated khidmat, aameen.

His wife is Indonesian and they have a year-old son, Mu'aaz. His father, Ashfaqbhai, whom we met later, spends his time between DUZ and Japan.

Alhamdulillah, the weather was fine – above zero – and similar to Gauteng’s winter. Since it was their mid-winter, temperatures could go to minus 10, 15 or even minus 20, in some parts of the country.

We reached our small apartment in Ikebukuro after travelling 1½ hours by bus and train. I was struck by the efficiency of their public transport. Whether one used the metro system or the buses, everything was clean, punctual and cheap, too. It was an absolute pleasure to use and made our lives much easier, Alhamdulillah.



Ikebukuro

At this point, we must admit a huge failure in South Africa, during Apartheid and now, is that the public transport service was, and still is, a disaster.

Japanese humility and chivalry were apparent wherever we went. They bowed when thanking us, as is their custom. A passenger even offered me his seat on the bus when he saw me standing.

### Settling in

Since Tokyo’s population is approximately 10 million, space is at a premium. Most people, therefore, live in compact flats measuring about 36m<sup>2</sup> – 46m<sup>2</sup> each.

At the entrance of our quarters was the *genkan* – a place where we removed our shoes before proceeding so that the interior remained clean. Alhamdulillah, we found this practice ideal for salaah purposes.

The flat contained two beds and a tiny lounge into which was crammed a sofa and mini table. It also included a small basin, stove and miniature fridge. Even the bathroom and toilet were dwarfish. Being tall, I found it a bit challenging to adjust.

FEATURES OF A TYPICAL APARTMENT (From left to right) Genkan at entrance, kitchenette, bathroom with mini-tub, and toilet.



One would expect these small, basic apartments to be cheap. Not so. It costs \$1 000 (R12 000 - R15 000) per month to rent one on the outskirts of Tokyo, while parking bays could cost between R3 000 and R5 000 each. However, 80% – 90% of people do not own vehicles because of the reliable public transport system.

By way of comparison, our RDP houses are much bigger and would be considered luxurious. So, we need to be grateful and make shukr to Allah Subhana wa Ta’ala for the comforts we enjoy.

We learnt something new daily. For example, when we switched on the stove, we found that it was not working. Somewhat puzzled, we were directed to someone who explained that it was an induction stove. (Right: water boiling through newspaper layer on induction stove)



Although they are available in South Africa, we had never used one before. Briefly, it converts electricity into a magnetic field and only magnetic-based cookware can be used on it. Heat is induced in the cookware itself, SubhanAllah!

### Food

Two challenges we faced in South Korea and Japan were, firstly, the language and secondly, the food. Alhamdulillah, therefore, we were so grateful to MI Umayr. A simple thing like bread which we take for granted, could not be consumed there, he said, because 90% - 95% contained lard i.e. pork fat.

When I expressed concern that most visitors would be unaware of this, he said that they were usually informed beforehand. This is something we should all heed, Insha-Allah.

Our diet consisted primarily of fish, boiled eggs and whatever we knew to be 100% halaal.

### Shopping

Before buying anything, we needed to know the exchange rate. At that time it was USD 100 to JPY 11 316. R12 was equivalent to ¥100. MI Umayr accompanied us. Our first stop was Uniqlo which sells the exclusive HeatTech range: lightweight thermal winter wear.

Fathima and I bought several items as purchases to the value of 5 000 yen or more would be tax-free. Eligible customers received a certificate which was attached to their passports as proof. It was a good and unique experience.



There were also 100 yen shops selling many tiny items.

MashAllah, it was a paradise for Fathima who made several purchases.

100 yen shop

We admired some of their seemingly-strange customs and traditions. For example, they used a seal called *hanko* or *inkan* (right) instead of signatures. One would buy a personal seal and use it like a stamp whenever a signature was required.



### Law and order

MashAllah, crime and corruption are negligible in Japan when compared to the situation in South Africa.

I received numerous messages informing me of load shedding back home: LOL – Lots of Load shedding; another LOL – Lots of Looting.

Only Almighty Allah Jalla wa Ala can protect us all at all times in all places. Read FALLahu khairun Hafitha wa huwa Arhamur-Rahimeen abundantly – Almighty Allah Jalla wa Ala is the best Protector while He is the Most Merciful One to show mercy.

We observed the unique respect for, and complete compliance with, the law wherever we went. Motorists fully respected the rules of the road. People on escalators would stand on the left so as not to obstruct others. Similarly, train commuters boarded and alighted in an orderly manner by forming queues.

As we know, 80% – 90% of South Africans disrespect the law. Motorists disregard the rules, other motorists and even pedestrians. Our attitude and conduct leave a lot to be desired.

My first programme

Alhamdulillah, thankfully, MI Umayr did not schedule any programmes for Monday night as we were quite tired. On Tuesday evening we left for the Turkish masjid after Maghrib. In the 10 hours of daylight, salaah times were:

**Fajr:** 5.05 am - 6.35 am; **Thuhr:** 11.35 am - 2.10 pm; **Asr:** 2.15 pm; **Maghrib:** 4.30 pm; **Esha:** 5.50 pm.

Lectures were usually given after 6 pm. By 7 pm, one's salaah and supper would be done so one could go to bed.

We had to use three trains because taxis were extremely expensive: 10 000 yen, which was approximately R1 000.

On one platform, I suddenly found myself alone. MI Umayr is a bit short and I lost sight of him as he darted about in the crowd. Luckily, the train had not yet left before I spotted him on board. Relieved, I rejoined him and said jovially, "Moulana, you're short and I'm tall so you had better stick with me. Don't run away so fast!"

We reached the Tokyo Camii [Jami] Mosque & Turkish Cultural Centre (*right*) in the quiet residential area of Yoyogi Uehara in Oyamacho district, Shibuya. This is the largest masjid in Tokyo, MashAllah, and its Ottoman-style architecture is quite stunning. It is strikingly similar to the Nizamiye Masjid in Midrand.

Few of us know that there were Muslims in Japan as far back as the 1300s. Turkic ethnic immigrants from Russia, the Bashkir and Tatar, built the masjid and adjoining school originally. It opened on May 12, 1938.

Abdurreshid Ibrahim, the first Imam of the masjid, and Abdülhay Kurban Ali initiated the project.

In 1986, the masjid was demolished because of severe structural damage. The Turkish Government's Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı began rebuilding it in 1998. Construction was completed in 2000 at a cost of around 1.5 billion yen. The inauguration was held on June 30, 2000.

It comprises one basement floor and three floors above ground. The masjid attracts approximately 1 000 musallis for Jumu'ah salaah. This is a good number considering that the total Muslim population, including nominal Muslims, are approximately 100 000. Practising Muslims are less than half that number.

The Centre hosts a variety of activities for Muslims and non-Muslims.



I met the resident Turkish Imam, Hafith Nurullah Ayaz. I also met a Chinese Uighur, brothers from Yemen and elsewhere. MashAllah, a Zimbabwean jamaat, who had been working outside Tokyo for about two months, contacted me as well. May Allahu Ta'ala accept all their efforts, aameen.

#### REFERENCES

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