

Japan: the land of a thousand conveniences

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washroom. It's chilly but don't worry: the toilet seat is heated.

Enjoyed by foreign celebrities and legions of tourists alike, Japan's multi-function toilets have an astonishing range of other features too, from jets to wash yourself, deodorisers or a flushing noise button to cover up embarrassing sounds.

But what if you're alone with a child and nature calls? Many [public toilets](#) (spotlessly clean, of course) have infant seats inside the stall. Park baby in the holder and you're good to go.

Japan's multi-function toilets have an astonishing range of features, from heated seats and jets to deodorisers and flushing noise buttons

Heated toilets that spray users clean, train seats that revolve so passengers can admire the scenery and a convenience store on every corner: welcome to Japan, where hospitality and customer service form part of the country's DNA.

Visitors readying to flock to Tokyo for the 2020 Olympics can expect a dizzying array of services in Japan where quirky, futuristic gadgets and everyday conveniences ease the passage through the stresses of daily life.

"Attention to others is at the root of Japanese culture," said Kazuhiro Watanabe, a consumer trends analyst at Nikkei BP consulting group.

It even has its own word in Japanese—*omotenashi*—or a focus on hospitality. "Here, we anticipate customers' desires," stressed Watanabe.

Don't believe it? How about this typical—if not exhaustive—day in Tokyo.

The alarm goes off. Bleary-eyed, you head to the



In Japan, quirky, futuristic gadgets and everyday conveniences such as umbrella holders and revolving train seats ease the stresses of daily life

Back at home, you're late for work and there's no time for breakfast.

So you head to the *konbini*—Japan's ubiquitous convenience stores—for some food. While you're there, why not pay that electricity bill and pick up fresh socks or underwear while you're at it.

Grab some yen from the ever-present ATM, which itself has a handy umbrella and beverage holder.

Needing a caffeine fix, you can buy a canned coffee—hot or cold—from a vending machine. You won't have to go far: Japan has more than two million drinks vending machines.

Perfection, but at a price

Eating out in Japan is also an exercise in convenience.

Most restaurants come complete with realistic plastic versions of the meals in the windows so the hapless tourist can just point.

And why wait to actually order your lunch? Many eateries have vending machines outside, so you can order your meal before even going in—speeding up the whole process considerably.



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Most places also give you a basket so your bag doesn't get dirty on the floor. A hot or cool hand towel—depending on the season—is standard and if you don't have a glass of iced water within a couple of minutes of entering, something has gone very wrong.

On the move, order and service smooth the journey even through the most packed station.

Commuters line up politely and wait for their train. What's the rush when they are always on time and there is always another one about to arrive.

The stress of long-distance travelling is also eased by a courier service known as takuhaibin that will ship bags to your weekend retreat for a modest fee.

Not weighed down by heavy bags, you can line up for the bullet train in an orderly fashion—painted markings on the floor will guide you—and enjoy the seats that rotate so you can watch the scenery at 300 kilometres an hour (186 miles).

"Japanese are very pragmatic—comfort and practicality are paramount," said Muriel Jolivet, a sociologist who has lived in Japan for four decades.

The country famously has its share of quirky objects too: a book-pillow that lets you catch a few winks in between reading, a shirt fan for those broiling summers, and pocket heaters for winter.

"These kinds of things have always existed," Watanabe said.



Visitors readying to flock to Tokyo for the 2020 Olympics can expect a dizzying array of services in Japan including ever-present ATMs

"(Japanese) are very good at making existing products better, rather than creating entirely new concepts from scratch."

Does that make Japan the perfect place to live?
Maybe not. There are rules, rules and more rules.

"People cannot do what they want—that's the other side of the coin," Watanabe said.

And perfection has a price, Jolivet added.

"There is a psycho-rigidity underneath all this," she said.

"Mistakes are not tolerated."

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