

## *Japanese Toilets*

Part of experiencing Japan is to experience their toilets. First of all, let me emphasize that the toilets are usually very clean and well supplied with toilet paper and toilet seats were applicable. They are also usually in good working order. This can be said of public toilets in downtown areas, train stations, airports and public park areas.

There are two styles of toilets in Japan – the Japanese style toilet and the western style toilet. The Japanese toilet is basically a trough to squat over much like the dreaded “Turkish Toilets” in some European countries and I’d guess in Turkey too. A sturdy handrail is provided for balance. My theory is that many of the Japanese prefer this style because their bottoms do not touch anything. They probably consider this more sanitary. However, my experience was that the Japanese style toilets often had a strong urine odor. I think this approach is more prone to missing the target. Trying to use this style of toilet on a speeding bullet train going 160+ MPH is an experience not soon forgotten. The toilet facilities at Kinkaku-ji (The Golden Pavilion) in Kyoto were the worst that we encountered. All were Japanese Style and reeked badly of urine smell. The first time that I used one of these style toilets, I had no idea which way I should face. After I had positioned myself in what turned out to be the wrong direction, I saw a drawing on the door showing the proper position. FYI, face the raised end.

The western style toilets are the other end of the spectrum. They are like toilets that we are used to – the sit down type. However, the Japanese have taken this type of toilet to new levels. Most are equipped with a control arm off the seat. This control allows one to pick between butt hose down options. Most allow the user to pick between a bidet type flow and/or a back end flow. The water pressure and water temperature can also be controlled. Some toilets have heated seats. These are very nice in winter which is when we were there.

Just in case you are wondering, yes I did try the hose down feature. My conclusion is that it tickles and will never replace toilet paper. I know that this is more information that you needed.

Another observation about Japanese toilets is the custom of running water sound. On most of the hose down equipped toilets including the ones in my hotel rooms, they start making a running water or flushing sound as soon as you sit down on the thing. On some toilets not equipped with the hose down plumbing, a speaker is installed next to the toilet paper roll emitting flushing sounds. The volume can be controlled on these. Now the toilets in Tokyo train station rather than providing the running water sound in each stall had a speaker mounted over the door to the bathroom area providing the sound. Now picture this, you are standing in a long line of people waiting for the next available toilet, you really need to pee and while you are in this predicament, you are listening to the soothing sounds of running water.

Another thing that I found very strange about Japanese public bathrooms was what was lacking. Often there is no soap. There are almost never any paper towels. Narita Airport was an exception. I’m sure that this is for the comfort of foreign travelers. Often there are no hand dryers. This was the case on the Shinkansen train. They provided a sink with water, but no soap and no way to dry one’s hands. So bring you hand sanitizer with you.

The men in our group also were taken aback by the presence of cleaning women in the men’s room. They said they would be standing at a urinal and a woman would be cleaning the floor around their feet.

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**Above:** A Japanese style toilet.

**Top Right:** The symbol on the toilet stalls indicating that this is a Japanese style toilet.

**Center Right:** Symbols on a western style toilet indicating that it is western style toilet and a baby changing area. Not all western toilets had baby changing areas, but most of the baby changing areas were in western style toilet stalls.

**Bottom Right:** The western toilet with control arm. The toilet flush control is the square box on wall behind the toilet. To flush, you pass your hand in front of it without touching it. This particular toilet was a public toilet in the Kyoto train station.

**Below:** Control arm on western toilet. Options include butt spray and bidet spray with water pressure control, flushing sounds with volume control, powerful deodorizer, nozzle cleaner, warm water, warm seat and energy saver.

