

Leon & Audrey's world trip 08/09

Part 2 The Great Escape

Years of planning, weeks of preparation and days of final adjustments and I'm at last sitting in the lounge waiting for the first flight of our trip. I was determined to leave with just 2 suitcases, but the barrage of last minute items started piling up and we ended up with one bag overweight at 33.1 kg and one at 29.9 kg. That's only 63kg total and with a bit of rearranging it should have been possible, but in the end we gave in and went for 3 bags. God knows what we will do when the weight limit reduces to 23 kg later in the trip, but that is months away and we will deal with it when we leave Europe.

Here is Audrey with our luggage. She is wearing her backpack and my camera bag is hidden, but you get the idea.

After running into someone from work as we strolled the airport waiting for our flight to open (yes, we were early, what did you expect!) we checked in and made an express run through customs and security. We ignored the duty free and headed for the lounge for a late dinner – cream of asparagus soup, beef stew with rice and fruit and chocolate cake to finish.



Finally I am relaxing with my computer and sorting out a couple of projects to keep me busy when I get some free time (probably very little, but I want to be ready) – upgrading my photo database to improve the import process and working on a plan for a coffee table book on marine invertebrates (years away at the current rate, but I'll get there eventually).

The flight took off at about the right time, a bit bumpy, but that can happen. They even stopped the meals service. As if I needed another meal. But they keep feeding us. Audrey and I both went for the herbed chicken. It was very nice. Audrey took fruit for desert, and I took the ice-cream (pistachio and strawberry). Then it was time for sleep, at least. I think I managed four hours before I woke up at the normal time. Body clocks, what fun!



Then we started the day of Hobbit eating.

First breakfast. On the plane. Chinese dumpling, citrus salad, and a hot chocolate.

Second breakfast. Dumplings in the Cathay Pacific lounge. These were very nice and every few minutes another 3 large baskets were brought out from the kitchen. There was also a selection of warmed pastries, a traditional Chinese breakfast of vegetable dumplings and sweetened soy milk and other stuff.

Elevenes. On the next plane. Noodles, salad, fruit, grilled beef with vegetables and cheesecake for dessert.

Lunch. Didn't bother. And didn't get to anything else until about 8 pm when we went to the department store across the road from the hotel and bought some cheap tempura/sushi/dumpling items that were being sold of cheap before the store shuts.



Going back to being in Hong Kong, however briefly. We took advantage of the change of planes to have a shower. It felt so much better to be clean. It was hot getting off the plane. 25 degrees at 7 in the morning (the air quality wasn't too good either). The pilots put up silver reflectors at the cockpit windows to keep the sun out while the planes are parked. We are hopeful that it will start to cool down before we are back there.





At Hong Kong we transferred over to a Cathay Pacific 747. The seats on the Cathay plane are a bit of a pain. They are lined up at 45 degrees so that everyone has an isle seat. And a window seat, except that you have your back to it and can't see out it. Each seat is its own cubicle, so you can't even talk to the person you are travelling with. And I won't even mention how weird it is to take off and land sideways! Luckily we don't have any more flights on planes with that sort of seating or we would have to think about changing to another plane.

Anyway we finally made it to Japan – a real destination. Went through immigration, collected our bags, went through customs. All the usual stuff and headed off to book our seats on the train to Tokyo (international planes land at Narita which is about 100 km away from Tokyo) and discovered we had missed a train by about 5 minutes and had 55 minutes to wait for the next. So we went for a walk around the airport while we waited and headed down to the train platform.

The train ride was interesting. We watched the landscape change from rice fields and market gardens to suburbs and the big city before we headed underground. A lot of the buildings could easily have been suburban Melbourne, but then you see one with Japanese features as if it's trying to hold on to its culture in a late 20th century world. Then there are the classical Japanese style buildings that stick up amongst the rest. If the windows were cleaner and I was sitting next to the window and I wasn't so tired I might have taken pictures, but I didn't. I get this way when dragging luggage around, it's why I don't like dragging luggage around.

We got to the hotel which is just across the road from the train station and had a bit of a wander around (we needed a bit of exercise too after travelling all day). We explored the Department store where we bought our dinner, decided we weren't hungry yet and kept wandering around for about 2 hours before going back to our room to wait for hunger to arrive to motivate us to buy some food. While in our room we had a quick look at Japanese television and watched a program that seemed to be about how to weigh an elephant with low tech options. After discovering that they couldn't convince the elephant to walk into a pool to measure the water that overflowed, they eventually got it to walk onto a floating pontoon and measured how far it sunk. They then replaced the elephant with weights until it sunk the same amount and ended up with the weight of the elephant.

Hunger finally struck and we wandered across the road and bought the aforementioned dinner, came back and ate it in our room and then had an early night. I slept for 8 hours and Audrey for 9 so it was almost 8 before we headed down to breakfast to start our proper visit to Tokyo.