

## Lost in Japan

Arriving in a new country is always an interesting experience, particularly when the population of said country don't speak English. One of the most "different" and complicated languages is Japanese and it was this war of words that I found myself engaging in after a sleepless 12-hour flight.

After disembarking at the international terminal, one of the first challenges was the old school, so 20th-century attitudes of my parents. My mother proceeded to rummage through her incredibly complicated 'theft' proof bags for a folder which looked like it belonged in a government archives centre. After several more minutes sorting through innumerable pages of small print, she found the travel page relating to our bus transfer to our hotel. I was informed that we were to take the number 12 bus to the hotel. It was but a 15 minute walk to what appeared to be an incredibly well-organised bus depot where my bag was ruthlessly tagged and precisely placed between colour coded lines immaculately laid out on the ground. After a relatively short wait, the bus arrived and a short queue later, we were aboard. One of the first things I noticed was that almost everyone, including a few toddlers that were around me, was wearing a mask. Initially, I had suspected some sort of endemic was occurring but after the behaviour of other people on the plane, it appeared to me that mask wearing could be some sort of cultural ritual, perhaps a widespread cult or maybe just paranoia.

After an hour on the bus, we arrived at our hotel, which on preliminary inspection (reading the size 100 gold lettering across the building) was not where we actually wanted to be. It was now left to me to brave the perilous sea of international data roaming to try and find where we actually were. In typical fashion, the 'brand new' hotel we had booked seemed to qualify as the most obscure in the city. Eventually, after trying a multitude of different spellings I finally found its location. Only 8kms away! Certainly walkable, if you had any local knowledge that is and every second of GPS usage wasn't costing you about a thousand dollars and a downpour of rain had not just begun the second you had started to get your bearings! With just one other option, we decided to flag a taxi from outside the hotel and joined a queue that began to form immediately after we made our decision.

Not unreasonably, I had expected language to be a challenge throughout the trip, but I thought that getting a taxi would be a fairly easy thing to do, I mean it's a pretty simple concept; driver asks you where you want to go, you tell them, they drive you there and then you pay them the amount it says on the meter. Wrong again. After repeating the name of the hotel several times to a blank, inscrutable face, I switched tactics and

asked for Osaka Central Station which was a couple of hundred metres from the hotel apparently. The driver didn't seem to know where this was either. Fortunately, at this point, my first sniff of good fortune unfolded on what was becoming an incredibly long night. A passing Japanese lady had seen our predicament as a dual Australian/Japanese citizen, spoke near perfect English. This saved me from resorting to Google translate. After a lengthy period, she managed to explain to the driver where we wanted to go and I learned that the concept of 'train station' was extremely complex for a taxi driver in Japan.

With this settled, we loaded our bags into the elegant 1980s Toyota Crown, leaving the lid of the rather small boot open to accommodate our modest luggage. Honestly, haven't these people heard of Holden Commodores? We were finally out of the bus stop car park but we were not yet out of the woods, with the driver relying on the google maps image on my phone that I was shoving through the gap between the front seats. By now, a taxi driver with such a poor sense of direction and absence of local knowledge had become more comical than irritating, rather in line with something you might see on Saturday Night Live.

At this point, I was seriously reconsidering whether or not Japan was such a good idea for a holiday, with my mind pondering 2 more weeks of pointing, talking slowly and hair pulling. But redemption was at hand: the driver finally woke up to where he was and navigated the last 200m of this epic journey with relative ease, even panache.

We were deposited outside a bustling train station with packed roads apparently devoid of pedestrian crossings, a google map with so many levels of streets it would be simply impossible to prove any actually exist..... and a \$10,000 phone bill.

## Open Letter

The Hon. Scott Morrison MP PM

I am writing this letter in an attempt to draw your attention to the inability of your policies to tackle current social issues, the ignorance demonstrated in your arguments and your overall weak leadership.

To begin with, I accuse you of failing to tackle the incredibly important issue of climate change. Accepting its existence based on evidence by this country's top scientists, yet failing to control the factions of your party that are in ignorant denial. Committing to the Paris Agreement yet completely failing to outline any strategy as to how we are going to achieve an emissions reduction of 26%. Outright lying about supposed economic damage caused by switching to renewable energy, despite the fact that it is now cheaper to produce, more efficient and less expensive to maintain than traditional fossil fuel energy generation.

I accuse you of engaging in a pitiful scare campaign over asylum seekers and foreign immigration. Of being too weak to accept responsibility for the hundreds of genuine asylum seekers you have left to rot on Manus Island and Nauru. Refusing to provide them medical assistance to deal with the disease and extreme psychological injury that has been caused by your policy of indefinite detention. Re-opening the Christmas Island detention centre in order to scare the public over the possibility of a renewed asylum seeker influx after the medical evacuation bill was passed referring to a completely different group. Closing the same centre a few months after spending \$136 million to reopen it; a wildly expensive stunt even by your government's standards, and all at the taxpayer's expense of course.

I accuse you of failure to care for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Capping the NDIS transitional staff in order to prevent people from transferring onto the service, allowing you to allocate the money to a forecast surplus which is little more than a political stunt. Your failure to acknowledge that 13.2% of Australians live beneath the poverty line, despite our 27th year of continual economic growth. Your inability to accept that \$245 a week is not enough for people on the New Start allowance to live on. That equates to just over \$35 a day, an amount that some members of your party say they could live comfortably on, demonstrating how out of touch you really are with the people of Australia.

To conclude, I accuse you of weak policy, failure of leadership and total and utter hypocrisy. You are the third leader of your party in 5 years, after criticising previous governments of leadership instability. The national debt has increased from \$170 billion to over \$300 billion under your leadership, despite repeated criticisms of previous governments who led during the GFC, for uncontrolled spending and then seek to take credit for 27 years of economic growth.

Yours Respectfully

*Thomas Derwent*

