

What Will Make the 2022 WMH World Cup in Tokyo So Special?

Those of us, who have played in Masters Hockey tournaments for a number of years, can testify that Masters Hockey tournaments are very special in one way or another. Even if your team loses every match and you are frustrated by the seeming lack of success, there is a magic about competing or participating as a player, or an official, or a manager, or a coach or a physio, or as a spectator. It is very difficult to quantify the impact of all the memories which have fully stimulated our emotions. It is only when you try to describe some of your experiences that you realise just how much happened and how the sensory overloads render recalling all the important little details a challenge! The impact does not lessen over the years and the memories are nearly always positive!

You are enveloped by a buzz, a camaraderie and an indescribable atmosphere that permeates your very being. When you watch hockey being played in so many different styles and approaches by so many colourful characters from all over the world, there is an overwhelming feeling of being part of something magical. Being part of the Hockey Family is not dissimilar to being with your own family back home. The time-gap between World Cups just disappears when friends you haven't seen for a few years greet you with a warmth and sincerity that induce hugs, handshakes and smiles, which take your breath away.

One of the things I love most is observing interactions that always surprise me, even though it shouldn't after all these years. Masters Hockey compatriots, with no common spoken language, successfully engage in conversations using gestures, smiles, signs and the odd word they have picked up, and they understand everything!

So, what else can we expect from Tokyo, apart from the joys and excitement of participating in one of the first ever WMH Masters Hockey World Cup tournaments and competing against the best players in the world at any particular Masters age group? Well, each host country offers completely different cultural and geographical opportunities and unforgettable memories, both on and off the field of play – read on.

Tokyo - Japan

The capital of Japan is the largest city in the world with over 38 million people in the greater Tokyo area. Not bad for what was a tiny fishing village called Edo in 1600! Despite the size of the city, the transport infrastructure system is one of the most highly organised and efficient in the world. The average distance between Tokyo vending machines is 12m! Crime rates are amongst the lowest in the world and it is normal for lost wallets and mobile phones to be handed into a local police station. It is very safe to move around as an individual or in groups by day or night.

There are 233 Michelin rated restaurants in Tokyo and the quality of food is excellent. There is even a hotel which is run by robots. The Shibuya crossing is the busiest road crossing in the world with 2,500 people using it every time the lights turn green! Tokyo has the highest number of neon signs in the world. The metro / subway can be so busy that sometimes people have to be pushed into the carriages for the doors to close! This suggests that choosing the right time to travel will be important! The biggest challenge for most of us will be the Japanese language and signs. However, Tokyo is known as the 'English City' because the major streets, subways and stations have signs and announcements in English, and stations are colour-coded and sequentially numbered. If you move out into the country, the signs in English tend to disappear, except at international airports and when travelling on mainline intercity trains. If you intend to use the metro, plan your exit from any station in advance. Some of the exits are many blocks away from where you want to be!

There are so many wonderful places to visit in Japan and the sights, sounds and smells of these volcanic islands are too numerous to list. There is something special about the way this country and its people have blended amazing mind-blowing technical development and traditional ways of life in such a way that the visitor is both excited by the experiences and becalmed by its charm. It is so easy to travel the length and breadth of these islands, but it will use up a lot of your financial resources to do so. The weather will range in temperature from 18-22°C, but there is the chance of rain at some point.

Mount Fuji, an active volcano which is actually a number of overlapping volcanoes, lies 100km south west of Tokyo. It is visible from the city on clear days. Earth tremors are common, but the last eruption was in 1708. Fuji's activity is monitored daily and despite a lot of recent earthquakes around Japan, the seismologists have not recorded any signs that suggest changes in the volcano's level of activity anytime soon!

The hosts have worked hard with the local government to set up the hockey facilities, some of which were used at the recent Olympic Games. The Covid-19 impact on Japan was similar to that of every other country in the developed world, but it was rather delayed due to the imposition of very tight government restrictions on foreigners gaining access to the country. However, when the virus eventually penetrated these defences, the infection and

hospitalisation rates were very high. This was partly due to the reluctance of the population to accept the need to be vaccinated. When the population changed its mind-set, the vaccination programme was very effective. However, because the pandemic was a late arrival in Japan, the country is only now reaching peak infection rates which are likely to drop quickly in the coming months. It is expected that the government will lift restrictions on foreign visitors in June, providing they are fully vaccinated. What is certain is the quality of the accommodation on offer. It is of a very high standard and reasonably close to the hockey stadiums. However, please be aware that most hotel rooms tend to be smaller than that which most of us might expect. Given the density of the city's population, you are advised to use public transport as getting anywhere quickly on foot is almost impossible!

The Japanese culture, the availability and quality of the international cuisine and the highly organised approach to daily life will have a huge impact on your sensibilities. You generally experience a level of politeness long forgotten about in the western world, but please do not feel insulted if you find that outside the main cities, country folk tend to stare at you. You are not what they are used to seeing in their daily life. If that happens in the cities, it is more likely that you will have unwittingly broken some social norm. Try to learn some simple Japanese greetings and use them. Although most Japanese are not used to hearing Japanese spoken by foreigners, making the attempt will help you be more accepted!

WMH are confident that the Tokyo tournament will be successful and very enjoyable, the only uncertainty is the wait for the promised lifting of Covid restrictions in June! Everything else is in place and ready to go.

Glenn Paton
WMH President