

fishontheroad.

I guess I came to Tokyo expecting to be entertained. I was prepared for the obvious stuff – the luminous billboards that sing and dance, the karaoke bars where crazy people sing and dance, the sake-bombs that make you think you can sing and dance.* What I was not expecting were the many little moments of entertainment, the unexpected points of engagement that pop up and surprise you day and night.

Like the tube doors. Why have a beep-beep when the underground train pulls into a station when you can alternate a selection of tunes – a different one for each stop. Ever since my first ride on the very fast and very efficient underground jukebox yesterday, I've been wondering what the point of this is. Maybe it's a simple and yet entertaining way of letting blind people know which stop is theirs according to the tune that is playing. Maybe it's just for fun.

And then there's the vending machine. Why have a machine that just drops a can of fizzy into a shoot when you could invent a complex elevator and travelator system that creates an interesting journey for your can to embark on before it reaches your hands... and little automatic doors that open at the end for you to meet and greet your drink. Last night I lay in bed wondering why. Maybe it's designed so your drink doesn't get bounced and bumped and explode once you open it. Or maybe it's just for fun.

And the toilets. I'd heard about the self-flushing loos but I didn't realise you could also select your preferred sound effect according to your mood and situation. The sound of running water as you pass your own, the fake flush where the sound comes but no water or (you guessed it) the musical accompaniment. A bit tinny sounding, not a great range and no real party tunes, but amusing if you forgot to bring your book. And the point of all this? Well the Japanese are very dignified people and perhaps they don't want to let anyone know that they are using the toilet to go to the toilet. With all these cunning sound effects, your neighbour in the next cubical will never guess what you are doing in yours. Or maybe it's just

Ok, so I've managed to ruin all the fun by finding a reason for all this crazy random entertainment. That is until this morning. At 5am I am in a taxi on my way to the fish market and we stop very briefly at a temporary traffic light.

It's just a temporary light – metal frame, yellow power box at the bottom and lights that change colour. But rigged up to this traffic light is a hand-carved, wooden puppet man wearing a hand painted blue uniform and a painted white hat. When the light is red and you have to wait, he kindly keeps you entertained with a lovely little dance and a wobble of his head and when it's green ... well I don't know. We were gone.

All too soon.

It's night time now. It's hours since I last saw him but I still think of my little wooden friend and smile. I miss him and hope we meet again. Just once. Just for fun.

Take care, Olivia

*no you really can Eric