



Hi everybody! Here are some pictures from a short trip to **Tokyo** on May 2005.
A longer version (in Spanish) is available at <http://www.chato.cl/2005/viajes/>

The first impression was absolutely **shocking**; here are the busy streets of *Shinjuku*, with several large screens showing advertising. Everywhere you look at there is people and colors. Japanese people were very kind and always willing to help, although very few speak English. I heard a lot of pop music, and there are lots of groups for teenagers.



Language is certainly an issue, specially when, for instance, metro stations are written in *Kanji* in the maps, but spelled in *Katakana* at the stations :-)

On the other hand, pattern-matching for Japanese characters is slow, but works quite well – after a few days you can see that they are not random, at least :-)



I loved this image: teams of **volunteers**, notably whole families, going on one weekend to the park to clean it and remove the weeds.

I also liked the fact that they have designated smoking areas in the parks, and are in general very ordered, well, sometimes a bit too **restrictive** ...



I **walked** a lot on the streets, and had the opportunity of attending a local festival in one of the neighborhood. I also tried a lot of stuff on the streets, like these vegetable waffles, very good.



And I could witness that there is a lot of people really crazy about **video games**, and some really good video games like this battery simulator, just to have a good reason to be addicted :-)



The most “touristic” spot in Tokyo I think is *Asakusa*, a large **temple** surrounded by stores selling postcards, cookies, souvenirs, and charms. Instead of approaching the altar and making the sign of the cross, as in Christian churches, they approach the altar, throw a coin, then pray, then clap twice, then pray again.



They also write prayers in wooden tablets, that are “blessed” by the monks every morning. At the entrance of every temple, I saw a small **fountain** where people washed their hands and mouth.



This was also very common for fortune telling: people shake a can containing several sticks, and draw one stick at random. In the stick a symbol (a number? an hexagram?) is written, so they go and open a small drawer with the same symbol.

Inside the drawer there is a paper, they read the paper and then they tie the paper to a wire.



I also went to *Kamakura*, a place famous for having a lot of temples, about one hour from Tokyo. It was very **peaceful** and beautiful on all scales: on the left a 12-meters tall statue of Buddha, on the right a 4-centimeters doll in memory of an unborn child.



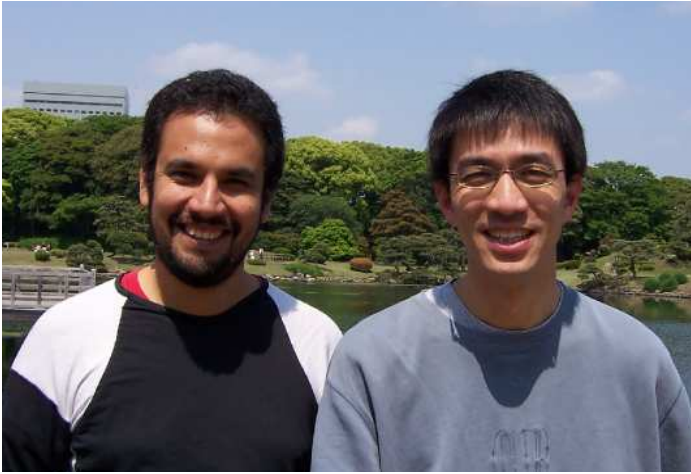
The **conference** was great, I gave two presentations, and the second one was quite good, received a lot of good comments and congratulations. I also met really nice people and attended a lot of very interesting talks.

I am actually working in some ideas that I got from the conference ... the nice thing is that you met the same people several times and at the end you get to know them. This is a small world, indeed.



On the way back to Tokyo I met a friend, we had a great time and he was very kind, he doesn't live in Tokyo but he traveled there in bullet train to meet me, thank you Ray!

We went together to the **bay** of Tokyo – because Tokyo is by the sea, haven't you see Godzilla? We also went to the park and to have dinner in the evening.



I finally tried **sake**. It is good, very soft and you can get tipsy without noticing it :-)

At the **fish market**, I saw this strange R2D2 transportation device. It is a 3-wheels cart in which the front wheel is fixed to a small diesel engine. For steering, you have to rotate the entire engine!

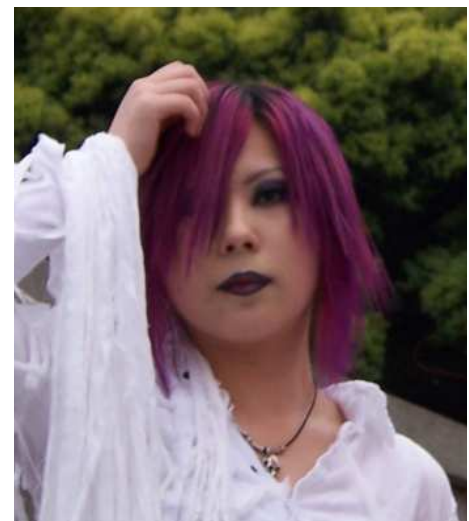


On the next day I also saw a **wedding**, with the couple in traditional attire.



The last day was the best for **photography!**

I went to *Harajuku* and in a bridge nearby, dozens of teenagers pose for the cameras in gothic, victorian, punk and post-modern dresses ... at the beginning I was very shy of asking for a photography ... but soon I discovered that they really like being photographed!



Well, that's all for now. I am currently in Barcelona, to be precise, at the top of the building I live in.

Thank you for your time! if you want a hi-res copy of any picture just let me know.

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