

Natasha Asghar MS international trip to Tokyo, Japan

Overview

Having met with several Japanese businesses based in Wales, I was strongly encouraged to visit to explore the differences, and similarities, between the two countries.

Between March 22 - 26, I was in Japan to do just that and meet with an array of individuals, businesses and schools as part of this fact-finding mission.

It also gave me a great opportunity to explore best practises and see what could be introduced back in Wales to improve things.



Meeting with the UK Ambassador to Japan

I started my trip with a meeting at the British Embassy in Tokyo with UK Ambassador to Japan, Julia Longbottom.

We discussed a range of topics including Japan's education system, public transport network, economy, and health service.

One area I was particularly interested in finding out more about, was the 'Silver Centres', which have proven to be incredibly popular in Japan.

Newport, a destination the Ambassador visited not too long ago, was also high up on the agenda and we discussed the area's highlights and ways to regenerate Welsh towns and city centres.

I then joined the Ambassador for a short reception at her official residence.



Meeting with Central Japan Railways

Staff at Central Japan Railways welcomed me onboard the Shinkansen - also known as a bullet train - to get a taste of modern-day transport.

I joined the train driver in the cab for the journey from Tokyo to Shin-Yokohama to get an in-depth insight into the inner workings of the high-speed train.

This followed a meeting with senior staff at Central Japan Railway in their Tokyo headquarters.

We discussed the company's history, plans for the future, logistics of high-speed railways, affordability, and efficiency.

I received an exclusive viewing and Q&A at the company's general control centre which looks after train operation, rolling stock, electric power, infrastructure, signals, and telecommunications.

Not only that, but the centre gathers and analyses information when it comes to things like rain, earthquakes, maintenance and makes decisions before giving orders to the field.

With a maximum speed of 285km an hour, more than 470,000 passengers use the Shinkansen every day with some 373 daily departures.

Since launching in 1964, there have been zero fatalities or injuries and the annual average delay per train is less than one minute.

The Shinkansen visit also provided an opportunity for me to experience truly integrated transport - something I strongly believe in - and will be raising with the Welsh Government going forward.

I invited representatives from the company to visit Wales and see first-hand the stark difference in the public transport offering back home.



Meeting with the British School in Tokyo

Students at the British School in Tokyo took time out of their busy day for a talk and Q&A session with me.

I gave them an insight into workings of the Welsh Parliament, an overview of the Senedd building, we discussed my career journey, some of the many highlights of the job so far and of course 20mph speed limits.

It also gave students, many from the UN Model, the opportunity to share what they thought worked well in Japan and could be replicated in Wales.

I then fielded questions from the group on a range of topics including the UK Government's Rwanda policy, the use of AI, the cost of living and showcasing Wales to the world.

With some of the students planning to head to the UK, I offered them all the chance of work experience and a tour of the Welsh Parliament as well as some 'useful tips' if they ever wished to embark upon a career in politics.





I also visited the Meiji Shrine, which is the Shinto shrine dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shōken.

Whilst there, I wrote a votive tablet on behalf of my constituents across South Wales East.

During the trip I also met with staff at Samsung to discuss technology, visited Shibuya Women's International School, explored the city's tech district, and toured the National Diet, Japan's Parliament.

