

# Play it again, Samurai

WITH Tokyo featured heavily in the latest X-Men film, movie fans will flock to check out the amazing locations.

I was among the first inspired to follow in the footsteps of Hugh Jackman as The Wolverine, though the first Oriental experience I had was more dung fu than kung fu.

The toilet seat in my hotel room was pre-warmed. It was very disturbing. But in Tokyo, that seems to be the norm.

It doesn't mean the room turnaround was so quick the seat didn't have time to cool.

It's just that heated haunches are what the Japanese seem to demand from their loos.

Other gimmicks the techno-toilets employ include sprays, both horizontal and bidet style, and the equally unnerving drying function where a blast of hot air is jetted up your behind.

## WE PAY VISIT TO X-MEN FILM SIGHTS AND FIGHTS

Strangely, the mysteries of the modern Japanese toilet are not examined in detail, or at all, in *The Wolverine*.

But there are plenty of ancient wonders to see.

If you're fan of Samurais and ninjas - and who the hell isn't? - prepare yourself for a couple of hours of exhilaration.

I took myself to the Zojoji Temple.

The Wolverine's funeral scene and ensuing massive dust-up were filmed.

Originally established in the 9th Century, the Buddhist temple has stood in its current location - in the central Tokyo Shiba neighbourhood - since 1560.

It was badly damaged in the Second World War. In fact, the entrance, Sangedatsu Gate, was the only part of the building to survive US bombing.

Apparently, if you pass through the gate, you can free yourself from three vices or sins - ton, shin and chi - loosely translated as greed, hatred and foolishness.

As a greedy fool who hates everyone, this was particularly useful for

CUT ABOVE... top-level Samurai instruction. Below, Tokyo city centre



me. While there we attended a ceremony dedicated to the success of the *Wolverine* DVD, which is out tomorrow.

You can also pray for anything from success in your exams to a rise in price for your stocks and shares.

Presumably, you would use a slide entrance before these ceremonies as passing through the Sangedatsu Gate would render them unnecessary.

My trip to the temple was followed by a little lesson in the code of the Samurai. Now, I'm not claiming to be a natural but the instructor did ask if I'd done it before. And that was after I'd shown him my moves.

So later, when I visited sword-maker Yoshindo Yoshihara's studio in Kelsel Tateishi, I was half expecting him to look me in the eye and present me with a sword with which I was to fulfil my destiny.

He didn't. He's knocking on a bit now, mind. Maybe he just missed the signs.

The Samurai training session was great fun.

Luckily the sword was made of felt-covered bamboo, because if it had been a real one I'd have lost a couple of fingers and an ear.

So I learned how to draw and re-sheath my sword with some degree of style while maintaining a blood-free blade.

I also learned how to slice someone's head, chop their legs and stab them in the guts. So watch it.

Yoshindo Yoshihara is the tenth generation of swordmakers from his

family. He makes ten swords a year and was a little coy about the price of one - but you'd probably get yourself a very nice car for the cost of one of his entry-level weapons.

That's assuming you're lucky enough even to get on the waiting list.

I watched his son, Yoshikazu, who is preparing to be the family's eleventh master, at work.

As a hand-pumped bellows brought a furnace to unfeasible heat, under his supervision the steel, taking it in swift turns to bash the metal and tease it towards its final shape.

I wanted to test the sharpness of a Yoshindo blade but mercifully he wouldn't let me.

## A cruise is a great way to see the city

Later, I went for a look around. If you want to get your bearings in the city, try the top of the Tokyo Tower.

Inspired by the Eiffel Tower, it was built as a communications mast in the 1950s and there's a great observation deck.

You can see most of the city, including the Zojoji Temple and, in the distance, the familiar profile of Mount Fuji.

Another great way to see the city is to take the Yakatabune (Japanese house boat) Dinner Cruise in Tokyo Bay (from £20, see [visitor.com](http://visitor.com)).

The best sails around Tokyo Bay amid the random lightshow of the city's buildings as a relentless parade of raw fish and tempura plus saké - and any other kind of booze you would care to sample - appears before you.

I left, in a daze of great food and too much booze - rendered foolish by greed.

Plainly the Sangedatsu Gate had failed to cure me of at least two of the three passions.

PETE BELL



## GO: JAPAN

GETTING THERE: Virgin Atlantic flies daily from London Heathrow to Tokyo Narita. Return economy fares start from £395. See [virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com) or call 0844 2092 770.  
STAYING THERE: The Park Hotel has rooms from £90 per person, per night. See [en.parkhoteltokyo.com](http://en.parkhoteltokyo.com).  
MORE INFO: *The Wolverine* is out on Blu-ray 3D, DVD and DHD tomorrow from Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.



SWORD MEETING... Samurai class and, left, cherry blossom in Shinjuku

