

Ever keen to display their technological advancement, the Japanese took advantage of their tourist industry's busiest month to show off some of their latest innovations, including internet access on the train and some sharp new cameras. Martyn Williams investigates

The World Cup brought a lot to Japan. An influx of overweight, pale-skinned, topless soccer fans, Beckham-mania (among Japanese women at least) and an explosion of national pride not often seen among the Japanese. It also brought some experiments intended to show the world that Japan leads the world in information technology or, perhaps more to the point, that Japan leads co-hosts South Korea when it comes to IT.

Online on the main line

One such experiment took place on the Narita Express, a fast train that links Tokyo's main international airport in Narita to the city. The IPv6 Promotion Council had set up the trial that intended to provide travellers with internet access from their seats. The link from the train back to the internet was over NTT DoCoMo Foma 3G (third generation) cellular network at a speed of 384Kbps (kilobits per second).

The trial started just a couple of days before I was due to fly overseas so I decided, in the interests of journalism, to test out the service. The first thing I discovered was that it was only available in first class so, not wanting to miss a good story, I reluctantly upgraded my ticket and was on my way.

My notebook found the wireless LAN on board the train with few problems and I was soon logged into the onboard server and on my way. This server provided some basic information services and even enabled me to watch a preview of an upcoming movie, but failed when it came to full internet access. I am not sure what the problem was but I couldn't connect to anything on the web, despite what the advertising had told me.

It does apparently work. "We used it on the way in from the airport and it worked



pretty well," said David Ditzel, chief technology officer of Transmeta, who was in Tokyo in late May and had managed to get on the network a couple of days earlier.

Not to be foxed by technology, I decided to have a second crack at the service, this time from access points inside Narita Airport. Here it became more like a game of cat and mouse.

My laptop found a signal but I couldn't seem to get anywhere with it. The green light on my modem card flashed furiously – a bad sign. I'm never exactly sure what the different rates of flashing mean because of the woefully inadequate instruction pamphlet (thanks Cisco), but eventually I managed to find a seat in wireless LAN nirvana where the light flashed steadily and my computer found the net.

Then, of course, my flight was called and I had to rush off to the gate without having done anything useful through the service. Time was immaterial though, as with all the power that had been consumed trying to search for internet signals my computer was almost out of juice.

Happy snaps

Maybe it was in anticipation of all the parties and happy faces as teams took on and beat opponents during the World Cup that led several Japanese digital still camera makers to come out with new models. Among them, Casio rolled out a camera that should help shutter bugs capture the moment, and not the moment just after the moment as is sometimes the case. The company's new QV-R4 has a shutter lag time – the time difference between when the shutter button is pressed and when the image is recorded, of just 0.01 seconds.

Sony, too, updated its 3Mp (megapixel) class line with the new DSC-P7. The camera isn't a huge leap on the previous model but does add a couple of useful features, such as the ability to record video right up to the capacity of the memory card. The previous DSC-P5 camera could only manage 15 seconds of video in one clip, which wouldn't capture the highlights of a good football match.

You can't blame the camera makers for pushing out so many new models. This is one sector of the market here which is really going through a boom phase and the manufacturers want to make the most of it, especially as so many other products are not selling so well. ■

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