

Time for Yourself in Tourist-Filled Tokyo: This Daycare Caters to Traveling Families

Heading out on a city trip with the family, but planning an activity that's not exactly kid-friendly? In Tokyo, you can now drop your little ones off at a special daycare center designed for tourists. How does this concept work? And what does it say about modern parenting?

"Their play-cation, your vacation." That's the headline on the website of the brand-new ANO-NE Kids Club in Tokyo, which makes it immediately clear who their service is for: traveling families with young children.

Both in Japan and abroad, that type of tourist is easy to spot. Four to five people, often two parents, two or three backpacks, Google Maps in hand, practical shoes, and unmistakable weary expressions. Creating memories for life is sometimes just hard work.

That's exactly the kind of target group the people behind ANO-NE Kids Club found interesting. Families staying at apartment-style hotels under the Cosmos Hotel Management umbrella often gave feedback that it would be helpful to have a place where kids could be looked after for a few hours—so parents could enjoy a more "adult" activity, like shopping, visiting a museum, or indulging in an omakase sushi experience.

"There's a noticeable shift happening among young families," says Asami Sasaki, the manager in charge of ANO-NE Kids Club, speaking from Tokyo. "Parents are very child-focused, but they also value time with their partner and a bit of space for themselves when traveling."

Småland, Tokyo-style

Located on the fourth floor of a building in the bustling Ginza area, the ANO-NE Kids Club evokes memories of Ikea's Småland—with colorful climbing frames, slides, and bean bags. From the windows, children can watch Japan's famous bullet trains zoom past.

"While the facility is staffed by childcare professionals, all reservations and inquiries are handled in English by our head office team. Still, language isn't always necessary, Sasaki says. 'The Finnish children who visited recently had no trouble at all. With hand gestures and facial expressions, it's more than enough to communicate with kids.'"

The daycare is open from 2 PM to 10 PM on weekdays, and from 10 AM on weekends. Tourists pay 4,500 Japanese yen (about €28) per child per hour; Japanese locals pay a lower rate. Bookings can be made online, even on the same day. The service is for children aged 4 to 10.

"Famous areas in Tokyo such as Shinjuku, Ginza, and Shibuya can be intense can be intense—even for adults, and certainly with kids," says Sasaki. "If parents don't take time to recharge, the stress often gets unintentionally passed on to their children. And for kids, playing at ANO-NE Kids Club is a way to recharge too—to be in their own world, without their parents for a while."

Most children stay for around 1.5 to 2.5 hours—the club doesn't serve meals. "But we've already had kids begging to stay longer when their parents come to pick them up," Sasaki says with a wide smile.

Intensive Parenthood

One could argue that parenting is more mobile than ever—we bring our children just about everywhere. But at the same time, the need to "decompress" seems greater too. Does that mean parenting has actually become more demanding?

According to Caro Lemmen, a PhD candidate at Erasmus University Rotterdam, it's fair to say that parents *experience* parenting as more demanding than before. The term *intensive parenthood* is relevant here, she says.

"That concept, coined in the 1990s, refers to the increasing expectation that parents devote more time, energy, and attention to their children. Meanwhile, especially women are working more than before. What we see is that full-time working mothers today spend more time with their children than stay-at-home moms did decades ago. That seems to come at the expense of time parents feel they have for themselves."

Guilt and Shame

Parenting, Lemmen says, has become increasingly individualized. In the past, a child's wider network shared some responsibility for their upbringing. Now, that responsibility lies almost entirely with the parents, making it harder to ask for help.

Parents' self-imposed expectations have also risen, she adds. In her research project *Perfect Parents*, she focuses on the rise of parental fatigue and burnout and explores whether growing societal perfectionism plays a role.

"We see a lot of guilt and shame among parents," Lemmen says. "Admitting that it can all be really tough isn't easy." Wanting some child-free time while on vacation isn't new, by the way. A dataset Lemmen uses—which includes parenting advice from Dutch magazines—shows that even in the 1970s, parents struggled with the same thing.

Societal Perfectionism

At ANO-NE Kids Club, they're very aware of the guilt parents may feel. It might even be the biggest challenge for their new service, says Sasaki. "And the biggest obstacle in parenting? Not the child, but the way the parent thinks."

Still, according to Lemmen, this growing child-centeredness isn't necessarily a bad thing. "I assume that parents who bring their kids to ANO-NE Kids Club are also thinking, 'how can we make the day enjoyable for the child?' Not just to unburden themselves, but also to give their child the best possible experience. That's exactly the message this service conveys, and it aligns well with how parenting is experienced today."

At the same time, Lemmen thinks it's also valuable for children to watch their tired parents navigate a subway map. "And to learn that things don't always have to be perfectly fun."