

Where Do We Park at Ghibli Park?

Text and photos by Dr Clive Tan, Editorial Board member



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"We must go very early. They say that when the car park is full, you would have to park far away and walk quite a distance," my wife explained.

"But our ticket is for 11 am. What are we going to do if we were to reach there at 9.30 am?" I thought aloud.

It turned out that our abundance of caution was unnecessary. There were ample parking lots at Ghibli Park on the two days we visited.

The magical world of Ghibli

Ghibli Park is a Japanese theme park that depicts the fictional world created by Studio Ghibli. *My Neighbour Totoro*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle* are some of the studio's popular works, and are currently available on Netflix. We visited the park in December 2023 during

winter, and it was very cold in the open areas where there was no protection against the wind. Everything about the park and its attractions was very orderly, tidy and classically Japanese.

The park features five areas: Ghibli's Grand Warehouse, Hill of Youth, Dondoko Forest, Mononoke Village and Valley of Witches. Our first stop was at Hill of Youth, an area based on *Howl's Moving Castle*. The stop was slightly shorter than expected though, as the World Emporium house exhibit there was quite small. No photography was allowed inside the exhibit, so we only took a photo outside. One insider tip I have is to wait for the *karakuri* ("カラクリ" in Japanese) clock to chime, which happens hourly or half-hourly (do check with the staff for the specific timing). True to the Singaporean and Japanese

affinity for queuing, we waited in front of the clock long in advance of the chime so that the children would have a good view of the *karakuri* clock's performance.

After that, we wandered around the park and found the Cat Castle Playground. We had to buy a ticket for each child, which costs only ¥100 (about S\$0.90), and they could play freely within the hourly timeslot. My three children clocked in at 12 noon, and at 12.55 pm, the signal came that their playtime was over. It was all very orderly, and the set-up kept the playground from becoming overcrowded. Meanwhile, my wife and I took the chance to have some couple time while the children had fun at the playground. We had a leisurely walk around the park and found a spot to



have lunch at after the kids were done with the playground.

We did not manage to get tickets for the other attractions on the same day, so we had to come back to the park for them another day. That was doable for us, as we drove and also stayed nearby. When we next visited, we spent about three hours in Ghibli's Grand Warehouse where there was lots to see and do. One thing that puzzled me was that the gift shop was located within the ticketed area – so it was packed! In some ways, it may have created a FOMO (fear of missing out) situation because you cannot re-enter once you leave the shop. You could see shoppers either taking their time to make calculated purchases or overbuying for those “just in case” situations. My wife generally tries to restrain herself and the kids from buying toys and souvenirs, but in this unusual situation, we agreed that everyone could have an allowance of one item each (adults included).

Potential obstacles to prepare for

For most pilgrims who are planning on visiting, there are a few challenges to consider.

Location

Ghibli Park is located east of Nagoya, between Tokyo and Osaka, so you have to plan your travel route carefully. We

rented a car and started our journey from Osaka, then drove to Nagoya and stayed in the area for a few days. We met a friend who came instead from Tokyo via the Shinkansen bullet train. If you are staying in the area, you can also consider making a side trip to the Toyota Automobile Museum, which is located in Aichi prefecture as well. We missed out on visiting the museum due to an oversight, as they turned out to be closed on Tuesdays.

Planning (and sincerity)

Ghibli Park tickets are sold online and released two months before the entry date, so a certain degree of forward planning and sincerity is needed when organising your trip. Tickets to special attractions are sold separately, and we only managed to get tickets to Ghibli's Grand Warehouse, Mononoke Village and the Hill of Youth. We missed out on the tickets to Dondoko Forest, and the Valley of Witches was still under construction at the time. However, there are now day passes available, which allow you access to all five areas. Also, please bring your passport along to the park. The staff need to match it with the name on your ticket, otherwise you will not be let in (and that almost happened to us)!

Time allocation

Within Ghibli's Grand Warehouse, there were Disneyland-like queues for certain

photo opportunities, and also some exhibits that are better enjoyed at a leisurely pace. The park itself is massive and provides a great opportunity to clock your daily steps. On weekends, there is a lively food market, with more than ten food trucks serving various foods like curry rice, ramen, *donburi* (Japanese rice bowls), ice cream and other desserts. We explored the park and its attractions over two days. But for most people, I believe allocating one full day to the park would be the sweet spot. ♦

Dr Tan is a father of three, and the designated travel planner for family holidays – a job that he enjoys and (based on feedback) excels at.



Legend

1. A scene from Howl's Moving Castle in the Ghibli Grand Warehouse
2. The carpark and train station at Ghibli Park
3. Family photo outside the Hill of Youth area
4. Mononoke Village: located in the outdoor area