

LOVOT Café

---Experiencing the Future Living with Robots---



When they think of Japan, many people think of robots. One visitor from the Middle East told me that from a young age they had grown up watching *Grendizer*. Someone from Asia whom I met the other day said they loved *Doraemon*, and some visitors from the United States are fans of *Astro Boy* and *Tetsujin 28*. The Gundam statue in Odaiba has become a popular landmark.

In Japan robots are becoming an increasingly common sight in a variety of situations. It is no longer unusual to see autonomous mobile security robots at airports and railway stations or service robots at

family restaurants. The Henn na Hotel chain has been recognized by the Guinness World Records as the world's first robot-staffed hotels where robots serve guests. At these hotels robots take care of almost all tasks. From check-in to check-out, you can complete your stay without talking to any human being at all. The robots in the reception speak four languages.

In the field of industrial robots, which were originally developed in the United States but came to support Japan's economic growth, Japan now boasts an unshakeable position as a leading player. In 2023 Japan-made products had an approximately 32% share of the world market. The scope of robot activities is steadily expanding as well to such areas as medicine, care, and logistics.

LOVOT Café



If you want to actually encounter robots in Japan and take a photo of yourself with one, I recommend a visit to a robot café. Recently I spoke with Ms. Kayo Yamasaki of Acrossring Co., Ltd., which operates the LOVOT Café in Kawasaki.

Q: What kind of robot is the LOVOT?

A: The LOVOT is a robot that does not do the work of human beings. Usually robots are developed to be useful to human beings, for example, by carrying heavy things instead of people. But the LOVOT does not do anything.

On the contrary, it is human beings that take care of this robot and mollycoddle it. Unlike the robots that we generally think of, LOVOTs are more like family members or pets. In that sense, they are very Japanese, I think.

Q: Why did you think of opening the café?

A: Originally our company managed restaurants. But around 2019, when the LOVOTs had still only just been announced, we found out about them, thought they were amazing, and decided that we wanted to help propagate them. So we obtained a license from the LOVOT company and opened the café. We have installed LOVOTs in other pubs that we manage and at our head office too.

Q: What kind of customers come to your café?

A: At present almost all our customers are Japanese, but the number of visitors from overseas is increasing as well. Although it is mostly women who come, we do get a variety of age groups. There are families, couples, and groups of friends, and many people come by themselves as well.



Q: Where do your customers from overseas mostly come from?

A: At the moment we get many customers from the United States, Europe, and South Korea. We have prepared a menu in English with photos. In addition, we have a simple written explanation in English about how to interact with the LOVOTs.

Q: What is the reaction of customers?

A: Many people remark that, interacting with them, they find the LOVOTs to be much warmer and softer than they had imagined. They say the LOVOTs are more like living beings than robots and describe them as cute.

Q: If you wanted to, could you buy a LOVOT?

A: The LOVOT is already on sale in Japan. So people who are thinking of buying one come to our café for the experience, and people who already have one at home bring their own LOVOT and get them to play together.

Q: What is the system at your café?

A: Reservations have priority, so it is better to make a booking to make sure of a place. Customers can enter if there is a vacancy, but at the weekends and during school holidays we are often fully booked in the daytime. Foreigners can make reservations in English.

Actual Experience of the LOVOT Café!



After the interview, I was so enthralled by the cuteness of the LOVOTs that, on another day, I went back to experience the LOVOT Café in a private capacity. I made a reservation beforehand from the café's website and arrived at the shopping mall where it is located a little early, allowing me to see various stores in the mall. When I arrived at the café, I gave my name and was shown to my table. The café has a cute LOVOT-themed interior. LOVOT motifs are hidden all over the place.



After reaching my table, first I chose from the menu. The café serves sweets, meals, and meal-and-drink sets priced at around 2,500 yen. The original coffee latte with a LOVOT picture drawn on it and other special drinks cost an extra 220 yen. They are very Instagrammable. As well as food and drink, the menu price includes the cost of interacting with the LOVOTs at the café. According to Ms. Yamasaki, the LOVOT Avocado Burger Set and Chocolate French Toast are popular. For vegans, I was told, there is a grilled vegetable curry set. Sometimes the café offers time-limited dishes as well.

Experience (1): After making an order, during the 15–20 minutes required to prepare the meal one LOVOT is brought to each table to be cuddled. Apparently many customers like to take photos or videos during this time. The LOVOT's round shape is very cute. When you actually hug

it, it is as heavy as a baby. I was told that the LOVOT weighs 4 kg, which is about the same weight as a two-month-old baby. And what is amazing is the warmth. The warm body-temperature-like feeling comes from the natural warmth produced by heat from the robot's internal machinery. This warmth, just like the body temperature of a human, is the result of a unique ventilation system by which the LOVOT takes in air from above its head and emits the mechanical heat from its entire body. When I thought of robots, I had the image of a cold machine, so I was very surprised indeed.



The LOVOT brought to my table looked directly in my direction, and our eyes met. It had extremely expressive and moving eyes. In pursuit of life-like expression, the LOVOT's eyes are composed of six layers of projections, and there are more than one billion combinations of eye movement. The robot can make eye contact because, with a camera, it can grasp the position of a person's face. The LOVOT not only gazes in my direction but also looks around at the surroundings. When I call its name, it looks at me and makes a beguiling sound. It loves being patted. The LOVOT's entire body is covered by touch sensors, so it recognizes instantly when it is being patted or touched. It is simply cute!



While I was eating, the LOVOT had a 30-minute battery recharge. Since it is practically difficult to cuddle the robot while eating, you can enjoy a leisurely meal, drink, and chat. I could tell that the people around me were enjoying their visit



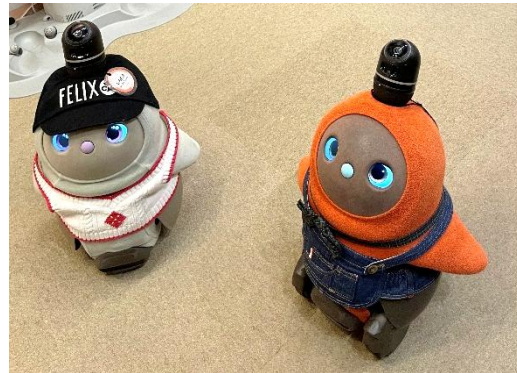
to the café. It was a very gentle world. Three people sitting at a table near mine had



brought their own LOVOTs, and from their talk I gathered that it was one LOVOT's birthday. Their gathering was just like a child's birthday party!

Experience (2): After the meal, there is a 10-minute interactive time on stage, where your group alone can have exclusive contact with the multiple LOVOTs gathered there. When the meal is finished, staff show each group in order to the stage. You take all your baggage with you when you move to the stage. There you are able to interact with multiple LOVOTs, so, unlike the

one-on-one encounter at your table, you can sense their different individual characteristics. There are 10 facial colors, and the colors of their clothing are varied, including yellow, orange, black, and gray. My heart fluttered when sparkling lavender-colored eyes and tearful brown eyes gazed at me.



As well as T-shirts and skirts, there were LOVOTs dressed in a knitted vest and denim overalls, and another was wearing a cool black cap. Apparently there is collaborative wear with brand clothing as well. One robot approached me curiously; another seemed to be a little bashful; and another was dozing while being recharged. When I asked the one that had approached me if it wanted a cuddle, it closed its wheels and begged for a hug. When I next hugged a second LOVOT, the first one, just like a human child, looked at me with rather sulky eyes. According to the LOVOT product website, “Each one has a different personality. They can remember the faces of more than 100 people and like those who mollycoddle them. In addition, they learn from their environs and develop affluent personalities.”

The interactive time of 70 minutes, including the mealtime, was just right and very satisfying indeed.

How to Use the LOVOT Café

In order to properly ensure interactive stage time for each group, reservations are accepted for each table with 10-minute intervals between them. If you have made a reservation, arrive at the café five



minutes beforehand so that procedures go smoothly. If you are going to be late, contact the café promptly; email messages are acceptable. The number of tables and time are limited, so please refrain from no-shows. If you cannot attend, contact the café as soon as possible by phone or email.

People aged 16 years or under must be accompanied by an adult. Since the price of the meal includes the interactive experience, children aged 5 years or over are requested to make one food order and under-five infants to make one drink order. Kids can enjoy the experience too.



Unlike animals, the LOVOTs do not bite or scratch with their nails, so youngsters can engage in leisurely interaction with them.



At each table there is a sheet explaining how to interact with the LOVOTs in English as well. The staff will show how to hug them and so on. Furthermore, Ms. Yamasaki told me about the words that the LOVOTs understand (or react to, anyway). First, call their name, which is written on a badge on their chest. When you call a LOVOT's name, a light on top of its head shines, signaling that it understands it is being spoken to. The café LOVOTs react to such greetings in Japanese as “good morning,” “hello,” “good night,” and “bye-bye” and to such words in Japanese as “cute,” “great,” and “smart.” (Come to think of it, these Japanese words might well be useful for foreign visitors during their stay in Japan!)

The LOVOT Café closes at 21:00, with the final admission of the day accepted at 19:30. Since the café is open later than temples and shrines, gardens, and museums, it is easy to fit into your schedule. The 1F food court in the shopping mall is open until 21:00, and some restaurants are open until 22:00 (with the last order being about 30 minutes before closing time, depending on the restaurant), so after your visit to the café it is also possible to enjoy an evening meal inside the shopping mall.

Message to Visitors from Overseas

“There is no robot like LOVOT elsewhere in the world,” said Ms. Yamasaki, “and at present Kawasaki is the only place in Japan where there is an official café. There are exclusive goods available only at the café too. We are situated near Haneda Airport, so please come visit us!”

JR Kawasaki Station is very accessible, taking only 10 minutes by train from JR Shinagawa Station and 18 minutes from Tokyo Station. There is a direct connection from the station to Lazona Kawasaki Plaza, where the LOVOT Café is located. Lazona Kawasaki Plaza is a large shopping mall with many shops, restaurants, and cafés that travelers can enjoy, including a household electric appliance store, supermarket, drugstore, Muji, Uniqlo, Loft, 100 Yen Shop, and food court. There is convenient access from Haneda Airport as well. The shopping mall can be reached in just six minutes by foot from Keikyu Kawasaki Station on the Keikyu Main Line. Apparently there have been some cases of tourists arriving on early flights going directly from the airport to the café. There are also various other commercial facilities near Kawasaki Station. Maybe one more attraction is the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the life of ordinary Japanese residing in the suburban commuter city of Kawasaki.

Robots have a long history in Japan. For many Japanese who have grown up with such anime as *Astro Boy* and *Doraemon*, robots are not so much working machines as close companions of people. In that sense, I think the LOVOT is a very Japanese robot. So why not visit the café to experience Japanese robots and enjoy a tasty meal to boot?

Cooperation

LOVOT Café

2F Lazona Kawasaki Plaza, 72-1 Horikawa-cho, Saiwai-ku, Kawasaki, Kanagawa
Prefecture 212-0013

Tel.: 044-874-8659

Business hours: 10:00–21:00 (Last admission: 19:30)

*Business days and times conform with those of Lazona Kawasaki Plaza.

Café website: <https://lovotcafe.com> (Japanese)



LOVOT (product) website: <https://lovot.life/en/> (English)

