



Fed choice morsels using chopsticks, this dog has the undivided attention of its owner.

From culinary delights to spa treatments, *Tokyo Dogs* takes a look at dog pampering taken to new heights in Japan. ZACK YUSOF reports.

**A** NEW craze is sweeping Japanese society in Tokyo: pampering dogs. Last year, the Japanese bought more than one and a half million dogs, a staggering figure by all accounts. And like all new fads, this one has brought on an associated boom in canine commerce.

This month, Animal Planet takes a candid look at how Tokyo folks' affection for dogs has led to some surprising and unlikely enterprises in *Tokyo Dogs*, a one-hour special directed by French documentary maker Antoine Lassaigue.

Quite simply, the citizens of Tokyo have taken to the pampered pooch craze in impressive fashion.

There are caterers and bakeries specialising in gourmet treats

exquisitely prepared according to Japanese custom for the lucky pups; deluxe hotels and relaxation centres that provide dogs with an endless array of choices: jacuzzis where master and dogs can unwind together; massage salons and Shiatsu massages.

One centre even boasts a doggy wedding chapel, complete with traditional dog-sized marriage costumes and Shinto priest. High fashion dog grooming is another booming market with the number of dog stylists also skyrocketing. In *Tokyo Dogs*, Animal Planet takes viewers to a salon in the hip neighbourhood of Ebisu that offers matching hairstyles for dog and owner.

Japan's famous high-tech industries have also been quick to jump

on the bandwagon. *Tokyo Dogs* reveals one company's state-of-the-art automatic dog feeder, which is complete with a webcam so that the master can keep a watchful eye while away at work.

While another company has designed a dog collar with a difference: it incorporates a GPS Tracking System to locate a wayward four-legged friend at a moment's notice.

Also, in order to keep lonely dogs from being driven to distraction during their master's absence, video makers have developed a range of films tailor-made for a canine audience.

Tokyo also has a funeral home that provides round-the-clock customised services and includes an urn for the dog's ashes.

Vets are also taking advantage of this growing market too.

*Tokyo Dogs* introduces viewers to one doctor in Yokohama, who is famous for practising traditional Chinese acupuncture to cure his canine clientele.

"I think the Japanese are very sentimental, affected people but very shy in another way," mused Lassaigue during a telephone interview organised by Animal Planet.

"So, in the company of pets, they can involve their affections and their sentiments. Do you see what I mean? They are quite alone and stressed with life in the big city."

Despite encountering some highly eccentric activities on the part of Japanese dog owners, Lassaigue does not think that the lengths that

they go to pamper their dogs are in anyway preposterous.

"It is merely the expression of the affection of the sensibility that they have. Some people might think that's ridiculous."

And finally, what did Lassaigue think was the craziest dog related enterprise that he encountered?

"I think the most crazy thing I saw in Tokyo was the washing machine because the idea of going inside one with your dog is simply crazy. But then again, why not? If the dog is happy and the owner is happy, then why not?"

■ *Tokyo Dogs* premieres on Animal Planet (Astro Channel 51) at 8pm this Sunday, with a repeat on Sept 26 at 10pm.



Dogs being pampered at a Tokyo salon.