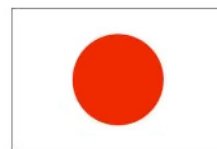




日本国



*Return to the
Land of the Rising Sun*

2007 | September 7th to 18th



RICHARD G RUSSO



日本国

*Return to the
Land of the Rising Sun*

2007 | September 7th to 18th



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Land of the Rising Sun*



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prologue

From the moment I parted from Japan in the late summer/early autumn of two-thousand and four, I knew some day I would find myself once again in the land of the rising sun. At the time I could not know when, where, or how that would come to be, only that it must be.

Taking my first steps in that land was the most fun and the most adventurous I had ever undertaken. I was instantly hooked. From the thousands year old history to the quirky pop-culture at warp-speed society of today, I was utterly captivated. Here was a culture so unlike my own and yet fully realized like none other I had seen before, there was no going back. I had to have more. The genie was out of the bottle as it were.

Though there were plans to visit other parts of the world after 2004's Japanese expedition, such as Australia/New Zealand in 2005, Peru or some other South American destination in 2006 (which would have also included a cruise to Antarctica), and the culmination in Africa for a safari in 2007, those campaigns never came to pass. Certain financial, social and other life-changing events took precedent, but there are no regrets. Truth be told, I entertained the notion I would return to Europe (which I had visited for the first time in 2003) before I ever returned to Japan...

Strange how things work out, isn't it?

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}



「A Voyage to Sumire」

september 8, 2007

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

Ahhhhhhh.

“You never know what events are going to transpire to get you home.”

Most everyone has heard of the infamous flight of Apollo 13: Lovell, Haise and Swigert, three astronauts on their way to the moon who experienced catastrophic failures in their spaceship, and the determination of Mission Control to bring them back safe and sound. Though their rescue would become NASA’s “finest hour”, the commander of Apollo 13, Jim Lovell, faced death many times before this flight. One of these experiences happened on his return from a mission during the Korean War. The fighter plane he flew had been severely damaged in a dog-fight; his radar and homing signal were smashed and he was just barely limping along. To make things worse, the aircraft carrier had its running lights off because of combat conditions over the Sea of Japan, so finding it without assistance was out of the question.

As he turned on his map light to check bearings, all of the lights in the plane’s cockpit shorted out and died, making his instruments nigh unreadable. Since he was unable to see his altimeter, there was a realistic possibility he could accidentally crash into the dark ocean. His outlook turned very bleak, very dark. Even though there was little chance of him being rescued at sea, Lovell knew that ditching his plane was quickly becoming his only option. But in his darkest hour a strange thing occurred. As he looked down into the raging waters, he saw a green trail of algae – the phosphorescent stuff that becomes churned in the wake of a huge ship – and it stretched out below him for miles and miles. Had his lights never shorted out he never would have seen the algae trail below him, laid out like a carpet, leading him home.

For Lovell, had things not gotten more complicated for him he never would have seen the solution to his problems, which prompted him to say “you never know what events are going to transpire to get you home.”

Although this is a bit melodramatic for an introduction to a trip, I've been reminded of the quote today. Because you certainly never know what will transpire to get you where you're going, or take you to where you hadn't really thought you'd be, especially with various factors working both for and against you. In my case where I wanted to go was out there – anywhere – and for a time due to a joyful happenstance, my travels beyond the boundaries of my own country were put on hold.

But as I now find myself once again out there – in the land of the rising sun – things have come to be a bit surreal. Who would have thought I would find myself here, now, sitting hunched over a small table in the middle of my tatami matted floor at Homeikan Daimachi Bekkan, 12-9-Hongo-5-Chome, Bunkyo-ku?

Though I imagine my chaotic thoughts are due in large part because I've been awake for more than 24 hours now. My body is preparing itself for a major meltdown. I'd been rather energetic all day up until right this moment, but my futon is starting to look more than just a might bit friendly, if you know what I mean. This was expected, but I had hoped to be able to muster up enough oomph to get out and run about the city after I settled in. Time here is of the essence and there's never enough of it; however, getting out is looking less likely by the minute.



On one hand I honestly don't want to push my luck and visit a location whilst so exhausted I can barely keep awake, thereby running the experience. But I do wish I had the energy to get up and do something. Anything. Other than whining about it. Even if only to see Shibuya crossing for a moment, then return back here. But that seems like it would take too much effort.

I just don't have the energy. Whine. Pout.

Be that as it may, it's nice to be back here in this strange and wacky world that is Japan (or will be by tomorrow, when I'm more coherent), though the feeling this go round is different. It's not a bad feeling really, just different. As if I should be out there hitting the pavement, discovering something new, meeting the Japanese, or, yes, just sitting at the bar over at the Cosmos Hongo Starbucks having a sip of kofi (コヒ), or coffee, with the locals. I'm not. Rather, I'm sipping on a 900ml bottle of Pocari Sweat I bought at the Sunkiss market across the street from the Starbucks and brought it back to my room... with a few other provisions as well.

And for some reason that just feels out of place. What's happened to my sense of adventure? Oh, lack of energy... yeah.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.

Even getting here was a simple measure, perhaps that's what makes this all different. Typhoon Fitow, which had been ready to strike and had just hit the coast as I was boarding the plane in the States, seems to have swept through without much of a fuss. There weren't any landing issues (turbulence, et. al) at Tokyo International Airport (Narita) and no detours to speak of. I quickly made my way through baggage claim and customs upon landing, grabbed a ticket on the N'EX train (the express train that takes less than an hour to traverse the distance between Tokyo and the airport), and then made my way to Tokyo-eki, the huge underground "megatropolis" of shopping, services, train links, shinkansen, metro platforms and offices to begin the next leg of the journey. Upon arrival at Tokyo-eki there was little to no trouble to be had finding the JR Rail office or in picking up the 7-day Rail Pass to use later in the week, nor was there much of a fuss in going further underground to the Marunouchi Line (Red Line) Tokyo Metro station platform, purchasing a ticket, and then traverse three stops up to Hongo 3-Chome.



It was all quite routine, really. I'm already quite familiar with the Yen (pronounced "en",) denoted with the Latin symbol (¥), which comes in paper denominations of ¥1,000, ¥2,000, ¥5,000 and ¥10,000, and coin denominations of all shapes and sizes in ¥1, ¥5, ¥10, ¥50, ¥100 and ¥500. I remembered the layout of Tokyo-eki, so navigating its various halls and turns did not daunt me. How could I forget how to use the Tokyo Metro system having used it so many times the last time I was in country, nor could I forget that my stop, Hongo San-chome (or Hongo 3-chome) is the forth stop going toward Ikebukuro (the terminating station in this particular direction), which takes me through Otemachi, Awajicho, Ochanomizu, and finally Hongo San-chome. And with my natural sense of

direction, though I hadn't been in here in three years, finding Homeikan through the maze of side streets in the 3rd ward (or -chome) of this part of Tokyo (the before-mentioned Benkyo-ku), was absolutely no trouble at all.

After a detour to the Sunkus mini-mart just past the turn-up toward Homeikan, I landed at the Ryokan's front door without further delay.

It was all too easy.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.

But even for all the differences in feeling, I can take refuge knowing that some things felt exactly the same, thankfully. The pachinko parlor and McDonald's were on the corner, just where I left them. The roadway that split off from them looked exactly the same as it did three years ago. My cats – a sign for a transit company that told me I needed to turn right up the hill toward Homeikan – were waiting for me at that corner, highlighting my journey onward. There were the smells – both spicy and sour – in the air as I made my way to Homeikan through the neighborhood that is Bunkyo-ku (文京区). And there's Homeikan itself, right where I left it.



Consequently, should you be looking for me, you'll find me in room 244; it's about 6 tatami in size and I've learned my room has a name – Sumire (菫, すみれ, スミレ), which refers to the Japanese Fuji Dawn Violet. Whilst I'm on the second floor again, I appear to be housed at a different part of the facility, so I don't believe I'm near the two rooms I held last time – #251-Shirasagi (白鷺) and #252-Chitose (千とせ).

The map of the grounds is a little strange and not all too clear, but I'm relatively sure that's correct.






*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.*

But if there's one thing I learned over the previous trip it's to come prepared. Though I took the time to research what I wanted to see before coming to Japan last time, I left it upon myself to discover how to get to those locations when I arrived, which, more often than not, turned into mini disasters. This time, however, rather than have to cut my losses because of lack of time, I planned everything out day-by-day, even hour-by-hour in some instances, creating a complete trip itinerary highlighting every stop I wish to make and how to get there. Going through all that trouble means I can get the maximum use out of my available time. Think of it – if I knew which bus to take, when, and how often it came by I could probably get to two or three more locations before the day had ended. That and knowing which side of the city they were on meant I didn't have to waste my time searching for that next step when it was already planned out for me.

Though I suppose you could say I lose a lot of self discovery along the way, or even a sense of spontaneity, with so much to see and do here (and having to leave some of the plans behind last time) I didn't want to risk it. With that in mind here's what I've got planned for the next ten days...

9/7/07	Fr	Depart for Tokyo		
		MCO --> EWR	6:45a - 9:16a	Continental #193
		EWR --> NRT	11:10a - 1:55p	Continental #09
9/8/07	Sa	Arrive Tokyo/Narita @ 1ish		
		NEX --> TOKYO-EKI	2:43p - 3:43p	NEX #24
		Check-in @ Homeikan	4:00p	
		Metropolitan Government Building	6:00p - 8:00p	Tocho-mae (Toei Oedo Line)
		Whatever After...		
9/9/07	Su	Tokyo		
		Asakusa Shrine / Sensoji Temple		Asakasa Sta
		Shibuya Crossing		Shibuya Sta
		Tokyo Tower		Onarimon Sta
		Zojo-ji		Onarimon Sta
		Sunshine City?		Ikebukuro Area
		And wherever else...		
		Takosan (Mountain)		Meet Rie
9/10/07	Mo	Tokyo		
		TOKYO --> MAIHAMA	8:11a - 8:26a	JR Keiyo Line 15 min
		Tokyo DisneySEA Park	9:00a - 10:00p	
		MAIHAMA --> TOKYO	10:21p - 10:36p	JR Keiyo Line 15 min
9/11/07	Tu	Tokyo / Nikko		
		TOKYO --> UTSUNOMIYA	7:16a - 8:06a	Shinkansen Tsubasa #103 50 min
		Layover in Utsunomiya	8:06a - 8:23a	17 min
		UTSUNOMIYA --> NIKKO	8:23a - 9:09a	JR Nikko Line 45 min
		BUS to SHRINE AREA		
		Tosho-gu	10:00a - 12:00p	
		Futarasan-jinga	12:30p - 1:30p	
		Rinno-ji	2:00p - 3:00p	
		Taiyuinbyo	3:30p - 4:30p	
		BUS back to JR NIKKO		
		NIKKO --> UTSUNOMIYA	5:35p - 6:17p	JR Nikko Line 42 min
		Layover in Utsunomiya	6:17p - 6:49p	32 min
		UTSUNOMIYA --> TOKYO	6:49p - 7:44p	Shinkansen Nasuno #278 55 min
		Ginza, Shibuya, etc.		
9/12/07	We	Tokyo / Kamakura		
		TOKYO --> KAMAKURA (get off at Kita)	7:12a - 8:06a	JR Yokosuka Line 54 min
		{KITA-KAMAKURA}		
		Engakuji (Zen #2) (8:00am - 5:00pm)	8:00a - 9:00a	
		Jochiji (Zen #4) (9:00am - 5:00pm)	9:15a - 10:00a	
		Kenchoji (Zen #1) (8:30am - 4:30pm)	10:20a - 11:00a	
		{KAMAKURA}		(walk to)
		Hachimangu (9:00am - 4:00pm)	11:45a - 12:45p	
		Jufukuji (Zen #3) (n/a)	1:00p - 2:00p	
		Zenarai Benten (8:00am - 5:00pm)	(if time)	
		{HASE}		
		BUS or ENODEN to HASE		
		Hase-dera (8:00am - 5:00pm)	3:30p - 4:30p	
		The Great Buddha (7:00am - 6:00pm)	4:45p - 6:00p	
		BUS or ENODEN to KAMAKURA		
		KAMAKURA --> TOKYO	7:04p - 8:04p	JR Yokosuka Line 60 min
		Ginza, Shibuya, etc.		

9/13/07	Th	Train to Kyoto - Leave 7am / Arrive 10am		Kyoto (12pm +)	
	JR	TOKYO --> KYOTO	7:06a - 9:43a	Shinkansen Hikari #401	2:37
		Stop at TIC for Map and Bus Passes	10:00a - 11:00a		
		Check-in @ K's House	11:00a - 12:00p		
	#	Sanjusangendo-ji	12:00p - 1:00p	Shichijo	
	#	Rokuharamitsu-ji	1:30p - 2:30p	Gojo	
	#	Kodai-ji	3:00p - 4:00p	Shijo	
	#	Kiyomizu-dera	4:30p - 5:30p	Gojo	
	#	Nishihongan-ji	(if enough time)	Kyoto-eki	
	#	Higashihongan-ji	(if enough time)	Kyoto-eki	
9/14/07	Fr	Kyoto			
		SHICHUO --> SANJO		Keihan Electric Railway	
		SANJO --> KEAGE		Tozai Metro	
	#	Nanzen-ji	9:00a - 10:30a	10-min walk from Keage	
		Tetsukaku-no-michi or BUS to Ginkaku		Walk?	
		BUS to GINKAKU-JI		#5 to Ginkakuji-michi	
	#	Ginkaku-ji	11:00a - 12:00p		
		BUS TO KINKAKU-JI		#102/204 to (1) Kinkakuji-michi	
	#	Kinkaku-ji	12:30p - 1:30p		
		BUS TO RYOAN-JI		#59 to (8) Ryoanji-mae	
		Ryoan-ji	2:00p - 3:00p		
		BUS TO NINNA-JI		#59 to (15) - Omuro Ninnaji	
		Ninna-ji	3:30p - 4:30p		
		BUS to DAITOKU-JI		#102 to Daitokuji-mae	
	#	Daitoku-ji	(if enough time)		
		BUS to DAITOKU-JI		#102 to Daitokuji-mae	
			(if enough time)		
9/15/07	Sa	Kyoto / Himeji / Osaka (Dralion - 4pm)			
	JR	KYOTO --> HIMEJI	7:42a - 8:27a	Shinkansen Hikari #391	45 min
		BUS to HIMEJI-JO			
	#	Himeji-jo (Castle) (open 9a - 4:00p)	9:00a - 11:00a		
		BUS to MOUNT SHOSHA		#8 from Himeji-Jo	
		ROPEWAY to ENGYO	12:00p - 12:15p		
	#	Mount Shosha / Engyo-ji (open 8:30a - 5:00p)	12:15p -		
		ROPEWAY down			
		BUS to HIMEJI-EKI		#11 from Enygyo-ji	
	JR	HIMEJI --> SHINOSAKA	2:02p - 2:40p	Shinkansen Hikari #376	38 min
	#	Cirque du Soleil: Dralion (4:00pm)	3:00p - 6:30p		
	JR	SHINOSAKA --> KYOTO	9:02p - 9:18p	Shinkansen Kodama #594	16 min
9/16/07	Su	Kyoto / Hiroshima & Miyajima			
		KYOTO --> HIROSHIMA	7:42a - 9:34a	Shinkansen Hikari #391	112 min
	JR	Layover in Hiroshima	9:34a - 9:49a		15 min
		HIROSHIMA --> MIYAJIMA-GUCHI	9:49a - 10:14a	JR Sanyo Line	25 min
		FERRY to MIYAJIMA			
	#	Itsukushima-jinja	12:00p - 1:30p		
		TRAM to PEACE PARK		Tram #2 - Red Line	
	#	Peace Park	2:30p - 3:30p		
		HIROSHIMA --> OKAYAMA	3:46p - 4:27p	Shinkansen Hikari Railstar #466	41 min
	JR	Layover in Okayama	4:27p - 4:33p		6 min
		OKAYAMA --> KYOTO	4:33p - 5:58p	Shinkansen Hikari #382	85 min

9/17/07	Mo	Kyoto / Tokyo			
			SHICHUO --> FUSHIMIINARI	Keihan Electric Railway	
	#		Fushimi-inari-taisha	8:30a - 10:30a	
	#		Tofuku-ji	10:45a - 12:00p	
			TOBAKAIDO --> SANJO	Keihan Electric Railway	
			SANJO --> NIJOJO-MAE	Tozai Metro	
	#		Nijo-jo	1:00p - 2:00p	
			NIJO --> SAGA-ARASHIYAMA	JR Sagano (San-in) Line	
	#		Arashiyama Area (Tenryu-ji & Bamboo Groves)	3:00p - 5:30p	
			Back to K's House Kyoto (Route TBD)		
			KYOTO --> TOKYO	7:00p - 9:43p	Shinkansen Hikari #384 2:43
	#		Get settled and go somewhere?		

9/18/07	Tu	Tokyo			
			NEX from TOKYO to NARITA	1:33p - 2:26p	NEX #23
			NRT --> EWR	4:35p - 4:30p	Continental #08 17J
			EWR --> MCO	6:00p - 8:58p	Continental #1792 8C
			Home ㄣ		

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

Ahhhhhhh.

I guess it is with some irony that I've already blown the schedule by not doing what I had on my itinerary tonight, but there you have it. A good mixture of new and old I think, don't you?

There's Nanzen-ji, Ginkaku-ji, Kinkaku-ji, Ryoan-ji, Nijo-jo and Fushimi-inari-taisha in Kyoto that I've visited before, but also plenty of new discoveries waiting, such as: Kamakura, Himeji and Hiroshima! Including those places I had envisioned visiting last time but didn't for one reason or another: the village of Nikko; Rokuharamitsu-ji, Nishihongan-ji, Higashi-hongan-ji, Kiyomizu-dera, Tofuku-ji and Tenryu-ji in Kyoto. So it should be quite an interesting adventure.

yaaaaawn You know, since I have a busy day out viewing Senso-ji in Asakusa, meeting Rie at Shinjuku by noon, and going with her and two of her friends out to Mt. Takao (then later to dinner), and of course, there's Tokyo Tower, the Metropolitan Government Building and a variety of other things to catch up on, I best be on my way to bed.

Besides, I'm beat.

Goodnight!

(Oyasuminasai!)

(おやすみなさい!)

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}



「Scaling Mount Takao」

september 9, 2007

ただいま！ (Tadaima!)

*Phew, I thought I'd never get back to Homeikan...
I'm beat.*

Japanese culture is replete with a number of customs and habits that can seem, to the uncultured eye, as if they border on the ritual. Though they may be routine to outsiders, these traditions (regardless of how habitual they may seem) make up the general thread of the Japanese. It helps define who they are as a people, keeping them connected with each other and civil to one another.

One such custom is the announcement of your comings and goings to those around you. Although we *might* announce our arrival home before setting down our bags and complaining about the awful trip home (traffic, people, etc.), in Japanese culture it is customary, polite and quite expected to announce yourself upon leaving from and returning to the homestead *before* doing anything else.

“Tadaima”, the word I used above, is employed to declare your return back home; it literally translates to “I am home” and despite the use of an exclamation point, it doesn’t need to be yelled out. In fact, depending upon a wide set of circumstances (intoxication, sadness or other general malaise), you might not be in a good enough mood to announce proudly to the household you’ve returned, but that shouldn’t keep you from saying the word – it is expected, after all. It is equally expected to receive the customary response of “welcome home” – “Okaerinasai” (おかえりなさい) or “Okaeri” (おかえり) – either formally or informally depending upon the personal relationship to the one returning, if anyone is there waiting for your return (and/or heard you).

Hi Rickey,

Hope you can read this before departure. Let's meet at Shinjuku at 12:00.

As you know Shinjuku is a huge station, our meeting point is 12:00 at Police Box outside of the station WEST exit, please see the attached map, there shows Taxi-Bus area, the police box is just beside.

There is always crowded, but it is easy to find for you.

Our plan is Takaosan and around, and a Japanese pub for the evening where Nori (Quidam skipping rope [performer]) recommend.

Have a safe flight!

Rie

Tadaima...

So I said, rather begrudgingly, as I slid Homeikan's hidden side-door open, stepped inside, relieved myself of my shoes and slipped into a pair of slippers, then made my way up to my room as quietly as humanly possible.

It's been one of those evenings... I am exhausted.

It's rather late here at Homeikan and once again at a belated hour (or wee hour, depending upon your point of view) I must profess to having quite an adventurous time this evening returning to Homeikan. Oh, not the out-painting-the-town-a-deep-shade-of-red-because-of-the-Sake-(さけ)-and-Biru-(ビール)-consumed-during-dinner (which was very delicious and quite cultural, but I'll get to that in a moment) kind of adventure. Rather, I'm bushed due in large part to the unexpected journey I was taken on after parting with the group.

Though I can't be sure exactly where I left my Japanese friends following the wonderful dinner they lined up for me – where I was offered (and tried) raw horse and deer meat (the horse meat was sweet and actually very good; the deer meat was tasteless to me), tuna rolls, cucumber rolls and other various sushi and sashimi, chicken skin (とりかわ; *torikawa*) and cartilage (なんこつ; *nankotsu*), tempura vegetables (天麩羅; battered and fried) and, of course, sake and beer – but it wasn't far from a metro station. In order to get back to Homeikan, I assured Rie and her friends that all I would need to do was take the Toei Oedo line to Tochomae (E-28), cross-over, and ride the line up just a few more stations up to Hongo-san-chome (E-8).

That sounded good in theory but in practice was a totally different animal.

I arrived at Tochomae (E-28) without incident; however, I failed to make the appropriate cross-over, and was taken on the ride of my life. For those not in the know, Tochomae is both the terminus and continuing station of the Toei Oedo line. The line starts there, then circles around Tokyo, returns to the station, and then continues on its way out of the city to parts relatively unknown to me.

Secured in the knowledge that I had made the appropriate transfer, or so I thought, I put my head down and rested, much like the rest of the Japanese on the train, and I didn't give the station names being called out another thought... for a while. The station I was looking for was, after all, eight more up the line, and some of those names were rather long and bizarre sounding too, such as *Wakamatsu-kawada*, *Ushigome-yanagicho*, and *Ushigome-kagurazaka* to name a few. So while strange names buzzed my ears, I remained relatively unnerved. Until the moment I looked up in an attempt to find the last name I heard called out on the metro map above me (*Ochiai-minami-nagasaki*), near where I thought we should be.

「ここはどこですか?」
“Koko wa doko desu ka?”
 (“Where am I?”)

I didn't know, but as soon as I reached *Nerima* (E-35) I knew I was headed the wrong way. So I bailed the train, waited in the station, then quickly crossed-over to the other side of the platform. At this time of night trains weren't running as frequently (and it didn't cross my mind that it might be too late for trains to run), but thankfully one came and whisked me back in the other direction, toward *Tochomae* (E-28) again. As soon as I reached the station I ran across the platform into the train waiting there, and then held my breath. The recording voice announced that *Shinjuku-nishiguchi* (E-01/M08) would be the next station and I knew then I was on the right path... finally. I put my head back down to rest my eyes, but kept my ears open for *Hongo-san-chome* for sure! Quite some time passed before I left the metro system tonight.

Strangely enough the arrival back at Homeikan was very much a repeat of the treatment I received the last time I stayed out and partied with Rie and her friends: a darkened Ryokan, a main front door that was closed and locked tight, and a brief thought of having to stay out on the sidewalk all night. Thankfully, and somewhat comforted, I remembered the side door, which was still outlined by the dim glow of a lamp placed just inside, would be unlocked for me. And without wasting too much time I scrambled inside.

Sadly there wasn't anyone left awake to welcome me back home upon returning to Homeikan tonight, but there were plenty of people to wish me a good day when I left this morning. Though it was a bit later than I had planned, there was just enough time to bathe the Homeikan way before setting out – using just a rag, a bar of soap, and standing naked in the room.

After the full-body wipe down I grabbed up my daypack, palmed the red-bean paste bun left for me, and with an “ittekimasu” (行ってきます) and the expected “itterashai” (いってらしゃい) response, I took my leave and began my very busy day.

Senso-ji in Asakusa

If there were any regrets about my previous visit to Tokyo it was that besides discovering Shibuya and Shinjuku – where Yoyogi Park and Meiji Jingu reside – I really didn't spend a lot of time exploring treasures in other parts of the city. Therefore, when planning this excursion, I made sure to include provisions for Tokyo Tower, an observation platform in the Shimbashi area; Zojo-ji, the main temple of the Jodo-shu (“Pure Land”) sect of Buddhism; Sunshine City, an even higher observation platform out in Ikebukuro, a north-western section of the city; and Senso-ji, Tokyo's most sacred and spectacular temple located in Asakusa. It is Senso-ji I decided to visit first.



Asakusa (浅草) is on the north-east fringe of Tokyo at the eastern end of the Ginza subway line, and for most of its history, has been the hub of the city's entertainment. The area blossomed when Tokugawa Ieyasu (Shogun) made Edo (a.k.a. Tokyo) his capital, becoming the 17th century equivalent of the city that never slept. During the time since Asakusa became a pleasure quarter in its own right with stalls selling toys, souvenirs, and sweets; acrobats, jugglers and strolling-musicians wandering the narrow streets;

and sake shops and teahouses – where the waitresses often provided more than just tea – were popping up on every corner. Eventually the Kabuki theaters came, followed later by the cinema; the two establishing Asakusa as the entertainment quarter of the city – a reputation it held virtually unchallenged until World War II, during which most of the area was destroyed. Asakusa is still Tokyo's oldest actively working geisha district. Much of what we associate with Japanese culture sprung from these grounds.

One of those peculiarities is the harmonious blending of Shintoism and Buddhism, and you'll find no better representation of this covenant than at Senso-ji.

According to legend, here along the banks of the nearby Sumida River in 628 AD, two brothers fished out a small golden statue of Kannon, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy. Having recognized the sanctity of their find, the village's chief (Hajino Nakamoto) converted his house into a small shrine so that the villagers could bestow their prayers upon the Kannon. The diminutive shrine was later converted into a full-fledged temple (by 645 AD) and through the years its fame, wealth and overall size grew. Its popularity further matured after Senso-ji became the tutelary (protectorate) temple of the Tokugawa family clan. Over the years Senso-ji survived the last shoguns of Japan, the Meiji Restoration, and the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 (関東大震災), but not World War II. Continued firebombing of Tokyo throughout the early 1940s resulted in much of its destruction. Therefore most of the main buildings you see today are relatively new.



Even with that being said, Senso-ji (金龍山浅草寺; *Kinryū-zan Sensō-ji*) is still an amazing sight.



The moment you step out of the station and round the street corner there's no mistaking that you've found this magnificent temple's grounds.

Kaminarimon Gate, with its bright-red color and huge 220-pound paper lantern, stands definitely amidst the modern world to greet you warmly. But beware: the god of thunder (Raijin, left) and the god of wind (Fujin, right) guard this path and they don't take kindly to evil-doers. Kaminarimon means "Thunder Gate" for a reason; besides the gods of

thunder and wind guarding the path, the massive lantern hung below its main loft is dramatically painted in vivid red-and-black tones to suggest the wind, thunderclouds and lightning associated with its protective gods.

So step lively.

Just beyond Kaminarimon is Nakamise-dori (仲見世通り), a 250-meter long glass-covered colonnade lined with scores of shops offering an abundance of traditional (and non-traditional) wares are offered to those making the pilgrimage here. Among these include, but are not limited to: obi sashes, hair combs, fans, dolls, ukiyo-e, kimonos, sweets, ice cream, t-shirts, toys, yakitori, and cell phones. A virtual *mélange* of anything and everything imaginable, and quite a treat to browse! (Do yourself a favor and do so!)





On the opposite end of the arcade is Hozomon, or “Treasure House Gate”, which marks the entrance to the inner complex. Built in 1964 of reinforced concrete, this two-story gate has a treasure house upstairs holding a number of 14th century Chinese sutras (or sacred texts), but it’s not as if you’ll be allowed to see them. Beyond that is the temple’s courtyard and the familiar trappings of a Buddhist temple: a

multi-level pagoda (in this case five stories), a belfry (which used to ring every hour in Edo), and the Hondo, or main hall.



Several structures in the temple complex survived the bombings of 1945. The largest, to the right of the main hall, is a Shinto shrine to the Hikonuma brothers (the brothers Hamanari and Takenari) and their master, Naji-no-Nakamoto – the putative founders of Senso-ji. The shrine, built in 1649, is also known as Sanja Sama (Shrine of the Three Guardians). Near the entrance is another survivor of WWII: the east gate to the temple grounds, Niten-mon, built in 1618 for a shrine to Tokugawa Iseyasu. Over in Awashima Hall, a small shrine in dedication to a deity who looks after women can be found. And in the courtyard, a tree that was hit by a bomb in the air raids has grown back in the husk of the old tree.

Did You Know?

Omikuji are random fortunes written on strips of paper. Literally meaning “sacred lottery”, these are usually received by making a small offering and shaking sticks from an enclosed box and read the corresponding fortune received from one of 100 possible drawers. The omikuji is scrolled up or folded, and unrolling the piece of paper reveals the fortune written on it, usually a general blessing.

Senso-ji is certainly a great place to sit and watch the masses, I tell you. From the worshipers wafting smoke over themselves from the temple's incense burner (called a *jokoro*) or rubbing a small statue of the Nade Botokesan Buddha (both done for good luck and to keep the body healthy), to those paying respects at the main hall by throwing coins and lighting candles or trying their hand at getting divine answers to questions via *omikuji* stalls, it's quite a bustling place and worth the visit.



I recommend picking up an ice cream cone from a vendor at the start of Nakamise-dori and stroll along from stall to stall, what's the rush?

End to End: The Ginza Line (銀座線)



The rush, actually, was making sure I arrived in Shinjuku in time to meet Rie, Yuki and Michiko. As Rie mentioned in her email before I left the United States (and from previous knowledge), Shinkjuku is one huge conglomeration of a station. In fact, it's the busiest train station in the entire world in terms of number of passengers and with my limited knowledge of the station (there are more than 200 exits mind you), I wanted to make sure I had plenty of time to arrive... and get lost... before being found again. And to get there I'd have to do something I'd never done before... traverse an entire metro line from beginning to end. In this case the Ginza Line, Tokyo's oldest subterranean line.

According to Wikipedia, the Ginza Line began as the brainchild of a businessman named Noritsugu Hayakawa (早川徳次) who, upon visiting London in 1914 and saw the London Underground, concluded that Tokyo needed its own underground railway. He founded the Tokyo Underground Railway company (東京地下鉄道; *Tōkyō Chika Tetsudō*) in 1920, and began construction in 1925. The first portion, between Ueno and Asakusa, was completed on December 30, 1927 and publicized as "the first underground railway in the Orient." It was so popular that passengers often had to wait more than two hours to ride a train for a five-minute trip. By 1934, the line reached its planned terminus in Shinbashi located in Tokyo's Minato ward.



On the other side of Tokyo, the Tokyo Rapid Railway (東京高速鉄道 ; *Tōkyō Kōsoku Tetsudō*), a company tied to the predecessor of today's Tokyu Corporation began service between Shibuya and Toranomon in 1938, later extended to Shinbashi in 1939. The two lines began a through-service interoperation in 1939 and formally merged as the Teito Rapid Transit Authority in July 1941. Today, the line is operated by the Tokyo

Metro Co., Ltd. (東京地下鉄株式会社; *Tōkyō Chikatetsu Kabushiki-gaisha*), a private company jointly owned by the Japanese government and the Tokyo metropolitan government. The company replaced the Teito Rapid Transit Authority (帝都高速度交通営団; *Teito Kōsokudo Kōtsū Eidan*), commonly known as Eidan or TRTA, on April 1, 2004.

The official name is Line 3 Ginza Line (3 号線銀座線 *3-gōsen Ginza-sen*) and is 14.3 kilometers long serving the wards of Shibuya, Minato, Chuo, Chiyoda and Taito. On maps, diagrams and signboards, the line is shown using the color orange, and its stations are given numbers using the letter “G”. Consequently, the name “Ginza Line” was applied only after 1953 to distinguish it from a new line under construction: The Marunouchi Line (denoted with the letter “M” and the color Red – the line I use most).



Riding from one end to the other took about 30 minutes and was quite an interesting experience. Although you don't see any sights being mostly underground, the differences that can be seen – albeit minute – in those entering and leaving the train as it traverses through the heart of Tokyo is fascinating indeed. From types and styles of dress and age of travelers to how much traffic the line receives from various points in between. The line is super busy from *Asakusa* (G-19) to *Ueno* (G-16), again from *Ginza* (G-9) to *Toranomon* (G-7), then again at *Aoyama-itchome* (G-4) and *Omote-sando* (G-2) before we all disembark at Shibuya (G-1). If you ever want to get the pulse of the city I suggest a ride though the Ginza line from one terminus to the other: you won't be sorry.





By now, of course, if you're familiar with Tokyo and its modes of transportation, you'll undoubtedly raise the following question: didn't you know you wouldn't get to Shinjuku by riding the Ginza line? My answer to that is: of course! Although my motive for doing so originally was an attempt to see Tokyo Tower (which would have required a transfer at Shimbashi to the Oedo line); however, having spent so much time browsing the shops along Nakamise-dori I no longer had the opportunity. There was just enough time to arrive in Shibuya, glimpse the infamous crossing, and perhaps visit one or two other quick sights in that area, before pressing on to Shinjuku.

I didn't even have time to stop at Starbucks!

Getting over to Shinjuku was easy enough, however. A quick backtrack to *Aoyama-itchome* (G-4) and transfer to Toei Oedo Line (E-24) platform was all that was required, and right into *Shinjuku* (E-27) I went. As promised, at noon I met Rie, Yuki and Michiko at the police box outside the west entrance of JR Shinjuku station (not without a little distress mind you – Shinjuku is a monster of a station) and off we went on our adventure outside of the city.

Takaosan (高尾山)

Takao, a 599-meter (1,965 foot) tall mountain in the village of Hachioji, some 40 kilometers west of Tokyo's center, is a popular destination for Japanese young and old alike. Due to its close proximity to metropolitan Tokyo, on average approximately 2.5 million hikers walk the paths here every year, making Takao the most climbed mountain in the world. Fresh air and unfettered wilderness isn't the mounts only distinction, however. Takao is closely associated with *tengu* (天狗) – monster-like spirits of Japanese folklore that inhabit and protect the forest – and the mountain's lone Buddhist temple, Yakuo-in, which was constructed in 744 on the order of Emperor Shomu. People have both worshiped at the temple and paid their respects to the great *tengu* Naigubu (内供奉) for more than 1,200 years!



Hachioji

The area can be reached by rail in a multitude of ways, though there are only two desirable methods: the easy way, via a direct on the Keio Railways lines, or the harder way, using JR East and transferring over to Keio for the final approach. As my JR Rail Pass was not yet in effect (I can use the pass for only seven consecutive days so I couldn't activate it for today's travels) a day-ticket would be required; therefore, since one route was cheaper and more direct than the other, our choice was inherently clear: Keio Railways.

Within moments of meeting and discussing tickets were in hand, then sandwiches for a picnic lunch once we reached the summit of Takao (purchased from the KIOSK on the platform), and before long the four of us were on our journey into the wilderness!

It took about an hour to reach *Takaosanguchi* station, the terminus of the Keio-Takao line, and though there wasn't much to see on the way out, the trip wasn't without its heart-pumping moments. One such came as we pulled into an unknown station half-way through our journey. One moment we were sitting there quietly waiting to depart and the next, before I knew it, my fellow travel-mates were up and sprinting over to the train across the platform, leaving me unexpectedly behind.

「ちょっとまってください!」
“*Oi, chotto matte kudasai!*”
 (“Hey, wait a minute!”)

It didn't take me long to figure out I needed to follow – poor Rie forgot I didn't speak Japanese that well and therefore didn't know I hadn't heard her say “let's jump over to the express train” – but by then it was almost too late. The annoying drone announcing the doors were about to close had begun to ring out; mere seconds from being caught in the closing doors of my train, I leapt out. Although safe on the platform, the same annoying tones began on the other side, and I barely made it across the platform and into my seat on the express before that train's doors closed. It took me a minute to collect myself from the quick hustle (there's nothing like darting across platforms to get the blood flowing!) and luckily that was the only unexpected detour of the day.

Upon arrival we quickly purchased our return tickets (this is a very smart thing to do, by the way; do it. You'll save yourself an enormous amount of time at the end of the day pushing through everyone else trying to purchase a ticket home) and proceeded to choose how we'd take on the climb to the summit.

There are six hiking trails maintained on Mt. Takao, excluding Inariyama Trail, which hugs the ridge of this mountain range. Each of these has been assigned a theme for year-round enjoyment and offers hikers their own unique natural experience. Trail 1: “The Nature of Mt. Takao”, takes hikers by the great Takosuji, a majestic 500-year old cedar named for its octopus-like tangle of roots, through rows and rows of grand cedars, and through Yakuo-in, the mountain's lone Buddhist temple (3.8 km; 90 min.); Trail 2: “Plants of Mt. Takao”, a trail that winds its way around a botanical garden and a monkey park (0.9 km; 30 min.); Trail 3: “Forests of Mt. Takao”, a pleasant, quiet walk through a grove of Japanese Judas trees on the way to the summit (2.4 km; 60 min.); Trail 4: “Forest and Animals”, takes you across a suspension bridge into a variation of birdsong and forestation to be enjoyed regardless of the season (1.5 km; 45 min.); Trail 5: “People and Nature”, a leisurely, “thought-provoking” hike that circumnavigates the summit (0.9 km; 30 min.); and Trail 6: “Forest and Water”, taking travelers along a mountain stream to the head of Biwa Waterfall (3.2 km; 90 min.).

Of these seven, only three start from Takaosanguchi station – Inariyama Trail (3.1 km, also known as the Panoramic Ridge Trail), Omotesando Trail (3.8 km, also known as Trail #1), and Biwa Waterfall Trail (3.3 km, also known as Trail #6) – all with their own unique experiences and vantage points. The most interesting approach, Omotesando Trail, unfortunately also happened to be the longest. Walking the first third of that trail would be an arduous affair; therefore, we elected to cheat (taking about 900 meters off our climb) by using the services provided by the Takaotozan Railway (高尾登山電鉄 ; *Takao Tozan Dentetsu*). And as there were two options – a funicular cable-car ride or a ropeway chairlift – we chose one method for the ascent (the ropeway) and the other for the descent (the cable car). What fun that was!



After a few minute's steep ascent up the mountain, the ropeway dropped us off at Sanjo station (see map above) along the Omotesando Trail. From the steps of the station we continued up its paved pathway – sometimes quite steep – through Joshin Gate (a wooden a four-legged torii), past Takosuji (that 500-year-old cedar tree revered as a living god), into Yakuo-in (the Buddhist temple dedicated to the Medicine Buddha Yakushi Nyora, where we cleansed our souls before passing), and eventually reached the summit of Mount Takao, where fantastic views awaited our every gaze, and our sandwiches filled our tummies!

It was one great hike.

Although Mt. Fuji, which can be seen from here on the clearest of clear days, could not be seen today, we couldn't have asked for a better picnic spot. Tokyo's western frontier opened up and with just a glance of the eye we could see all of Shinjuku, Shibuya and Roppongi from this vantage point. During our picnic we exchanged gifts – another customary Japanese convention. Rie and her friends gave me a whimsical gift of a USB Flash Drive in the shape of a roll of sushi, and I had for each of them trinkets from La Nouba, Orlando's resident Cirque du Soleil show: a programme book, the show's music CD, and a key chain featuring the Green Bird character. As fans of Cirque du Soleil as well, I hoped they would enjoy these items as much as I.



Before long we packed up our trash and made the descent down – only this time taking the alternate path across the suspension bridge and through the fir-tree forest – reaching the cable-car station (Takaosan station) in about an hour. The ride down was interesting – steep! – and the journey back into Toyko went without incident. Dinner soon followed and we made an evening of it drinking sake, eating sushi and sashimi, and trying new things!



* * *



With the day so full of adventure and my evening together with friends so fulfilling, I didn't want the fun to end. Eventually we did have to part ways – everyone was tired from our earlier excursions and life for my Japanese friends unfortunately had to continue on. Sunday for them, like for us back home, is the last day of the weekend and the hum-drum of the work-week would begin all too soon.

After saying our heartfelt goodbyes, as sadly we would not see each other again the remainder of my time here in Japan, our story comes full circle – my last adventure of the day was set in motion (the trip through the metro). Ahh, but I am here now, safe and sound and wrapped in my Yukata, preparing to call an end to this fantastic night.

Tomorrow the adventure begins anew out at Tokyo DisneySEA, and I hope for nothing less than a smashing day!

Sorry, Rie!
Ja ne!

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 千葉県 {Kanto / Chiba}



‘Lost on Mysterious Island; DisneySEA’

september 10, 2007

Contrary to popular belief (and the entry’s title) I am not lost.

Nor have I been lost in the city... today. No, no, no, quite the opposite in fact.

At the moment I’m sitting in a secluded cubicle atop the HMV building in Shibuya, in an ultra-cool internet café called NetCafe, just finishing up an email or two back home and ready to discuss more about my day before retiring to Homeikan for the evening.

Or actually it’s more like lying down than sitting, but you get the point.

There are no windows in here so I’m quite far removed from the hustle and bustle of what is now night-time in Shibuya. If I thought the crosswalks and sidewalks were a sight during the day, nothing seems to compare to Shibuya at night – busy just isn’t a word that accurately describes the goings on down there, but I’ll get to that in a little while.

In fact, there’s not much to say about the hustle and bustle in here – each cubicle appears to be secluded in a padded square space just large enough to spread out in but not totally comfortable to spend all day, or in my case night. The keyboard is giving me fits (it’s in Japanese but English letters are also present), but the computer has been working well enough. Despite wondering what might have gone on in here before I came in (and what might be going on in some of the other cubicles – seclusion breeds interesting behavior) it is a nice respite from the day’s activities, which included Tokyo DisneySEA out in Chiba and Tokyo Tower in nearby Minato.

Observation

English is ever popular here in Japan. Many Japanese wear T-shirts with jumbled up words and phrases in English (not so fondly referred to as ‘Engrish’) that didn’t seem to amount to much of anything. One such shirt caught my attention here in Shibuya, it said: “Running Hysterically Naked”. I’m not sure if that’s a motto or what...

The view atop the Tokyo Tower was somewhat less than advertised, but I’ll also get to that in a little while too. First up on today’s order of business was Tokyo DisneySEA.

Tokyo DisneySEA

Today was all about Tokyo DisneySEA, a beautiful gem in Disney's resort crown, located at 1-1 Maihama, Urayasu-shi, Chiba-ken, Japan, and there's little more than I can say in praise that I haven't already said in the past. This park is one of the most beautifully designed and executed parks in the Disney portfolio; from the Aquasphere that adorns the entrance plaza to the wonderfully themed "Ports of Call", the park is simply magnificent, a testament to Imagineering done right. Although the rain was a bit of a distraction for most of the day – I did sorely miss the sunny blue skies that I met here last time – it did not pull me down with it. I suffered through like everyone else (in my poncho) and took the lumps like a champ, having a grand time in the process. I got to ride or see all of my favorite attractions here (some of them twice), including: Journey to the Center of the Earth, Storm Rider, Indiana Jones and the Curse of the Crystal Skull, Mystic Rhythms, Under the Sea (Little Mermaid) show, and many, many more. I was even fortunate enough to take in a couple of new attractions: Sinbad's Voyage (retooled from last visit), Aquatopia, and the newly built Tower of Terror.



Chiba Prefecture

But before I get started I suppose a recap is in order for those unawares about Tokyo DisneySEA.



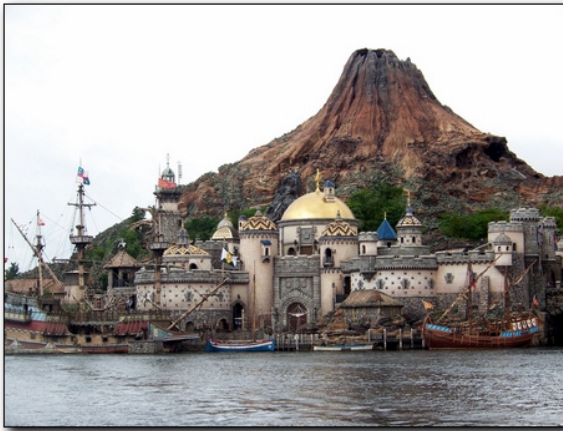
Tokyo DisneySEA (東京ディズニーシー), which is a take on DisneyLAND, opened next to Tokyo Disneyland Park on September 4, 2001 at a cost of ¥338 Billion, and is divided up into seven "ports of call", or themed lands: *Mediterranean Harbor* (offering the old-world charm of a romantic southern European seaport as its backdrop), *Mysterious Island* (a very foreboding, rocky and devoid place set within a South Pacific volcanic caldera of the 1860s – "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and

"Journey to the Center of the Earth" attractions are here), *Mermaid Lagoon* (a whimsical "under the sea" world of fun and play with Ariel, the little mermaid), *Arabian Coast* (a harking back 10 centuries to the mysterious enchantment of Arabian Nights – "Sinbad's Seven Voyages", "Caravan Carousel" and "Aladdin" are here), *Lost River Delta* (the foreboding jungles of Central America in the 1930s on the shores of El Rio Perdido, the 'Lost River' – "Indiana Jones and the Temple of the Crystal Skull" and "Mystic Rhythms" attractions are here), *Port Discovery* (the marina of the future as inspired by the futuristic writings of Jules Verne as seen from the 1800s – "StormRider" and "Aquatopia" are here), and *American Waterfront* (which recreates two distinct American harbors at the dawn of the 20th Century – New York and Cape Cod; "The Tower of Terror" is here.)

Styles, themes, attitude, atmosphere and ambiance of each land are all richly invoked and distinctly themed to the likes I've never before seen in a Disney Park. You'll literally lose yourself within it. I know I have, and enjoyed every moment doing so, as if I were a kid in a candy store! I could wax poetic about this place, and have, but there just isn't time for that in today's adventure. A peaceful twenty-minute train ride to the bay – destination: Maihama – on the JR Keiyo line is all that was needed to begin the adventure.



And I got right to the attractions.



Although the new re-imagined Sinbad's Seven Voyages was unique and cute (it's akin to *It's a Small World* meets *Peter Pan's Flight*), there was a second new installation since my last visit I was more interested in experiencing: a re-imagined version of the famed Twilight Zone Tower of Terror. The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (hereafter abbreviated to "Tower of Terror"), is a drop-thrill attraction that takes unsuspecting visitors on a journey from the relatively safe confines of their hotel ("The Hollywood

Tower Hotel") and drops them unbeknownst into another dimension, a dimension of sound; a dimension of sight; a dimension of mind. Moved into a land of both shadow and substance, of things and ideas... you've just crossed over into the Twilight Zone.

As you can imagine the attraction has an elaborate back-story and setup adapted from elements of the original American television series which ran from 1959 to 1964, and includes the hotel – a destination amidst the glitz and glitter of a bustling young movie town that was a star in its own right, a beacon for the show-business elite. As fate would have it something would happen one night that would change all that. On the evening of October 31, 1939, the hotel tower is struck by lightning sending a net of electrical energy spreading across the face of the hotel. The area struck warps, ripples, and begins to disappear mysteriously transporting an elevator full of passengers into the Twilight Zone.



The accident and resulting investigation caused the hotel to fall on hard times, ultimately closing the famous destination down for good. But our interaction with the shuttered

hotel begins anew; many years later on a night very much like the one that caused the accident. Amidst the cobwebs, the dust and the broken-down furniture is a maintenance service elevator... still in operation... waiting for us. We're invited to step aboard if we dare because tonight this elevator travels directly to the Twilight Zone. *Zooooooooom!*



The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror is one of my most favorite rides at Walt Disney World and since its opening in 1994 it has gained quite a following in theme park enthusiast circles. It took ten years (2004) for a version of the Tower to open at Walt Disney World's sister (and original) resort – California Adventure at Disneyland. And yet another three years for a version to open at the Disney Studios in Disneyland Paris (I always knew they'd be building one ever since my friends and I saw the HTH logo there in 2003!). However, the one here in

Tokyo DisneySEA was just recently completed (as of September last year) and calls for a different kind of introduction.

The storyline is completely different from its American counterparts.

Rather than themed to the Twilight Zone television series, which is not well-known in Japan, Disney Imagineers re-imagined the storyline as the Hotel Hightower, whose aristocratic owner (Harrison Hightower) is an adventurous traveler in the business of collecting rare and unique artifacts from the locales he visits. His hotel, featuring Moorish Revival architecture, sits triumphantly along the American Waterfront, close to the docked S.S. Columbia cruise liner, and stands as a showcase for these many treasures. Though relatively inviting from the outside (it bares none of the lightning scars or other ghostly features the other towers have), there's a sinister presence inside that will take unsuspecting guests on the ride of their lives.

Although most of the narration is in Japanese, and therefore largely out of my reach, most of the storyline can be gleaned by just observing the wonderfully themed hotel lobby and the many other hints dropped in details throughout the ride.

For example, the lobby features frescoes of Hightower on his multitude of adventures. Some of these paintings depict Hightower "recovering" a head from Easter Island, raiding tombs on the Giza Plateau and pilfering artifacts from the Inca and Maya, among other long-lost civilizations.



After one such expedition to Africa, Hightower brings home a prize that turns out to be the catalyst of our story here – an idol of a Golden Monkey (a hideous looking thing) by the name of Shiriki Utundu, a beloved god which he stole from the natives there. Unhappy to part with their god, the natives cast a curse upon Hightower, who naturally laughed it off.

Fast forward to New Years Eve, 1899: Hightower throws a huge party to ring in the New Year; there, with many of the press are in attendance, he boasts about taking the idol, denouncing its curse as rubbish, and goes so far as to insult the gods by putting out his cigarette with its forehead. Around midnight, Hightower entered the elevator to retire to his penthouse suite, exhausted from the party. But little did he

know something would happen that would change his life...forever. As the elevator neared the top, the idol inexplicably came to life, zapping Hightower and the elevator with a bolt of energy, causing the lift to drop and crash at the bottom of the hotel's large shaft. When the elevator was finally pried open, only Hightower's hat and the idol were found.

After the incident the hotel was abandoned and left to its solitude for many years, claimed by the locals to be haunted. After several years, in 1912, a woman from a New York restoration company reopened the hotel with paid tours available. It's on one of these paid tours that you enter the hotel... and into the Idol's grasp!

Much of the ride continues in the same vein as previous incarnations of the Tower. You see pieces of Hightower's life – his library, his study, his office – and see the menacing Idol and Hightower's ghost from time to time (much like you would the ghosts of those who disappeared in Hollywood). The ride mechanics are virtually the same (though the ride-cars are somewhat different requiring over-the-shoulder restraints), and the sequence of events is relatively the same: in the elevator, first level ghostly scene, and darkness until the drop sequence starts.



I understand the Tokyo version of the Tower, as far as ride mechanics go, is based on the California version. This version does not have the Fifth Dimension scene Florida has, in which the ride vehicles move horizontal from one part of the tower into the drop zone. Here (as I understand in California and soon Paris), you drop in the same zone as wince you boarded – there's no need to transfer from one shaft to the other... which is a little disappointing when I think about it. The Fifth Dimension scene is always eerie and the transfer from shaft-to-shaft always gets guests' blood pumping. But beyond those nit-picks, the Tokyo DisneySEA version of the Tower of Terror is not bad at all!



Another attraction experienced for the first time today was Aquatopia.



If “Aquatopia” sounds familiar, it should, as this attraction borrows its namesake from Disneyland’s Autotopia, which features cars on a track instead of boats. But don’t let that fool you: Aquatopia is a technical marvel. Not only do you have zero control over the watercraft, neither do the operators... at least not directly. “Aquatopia’s” ride mechanism is guided completely by a series of laser beams, which the boat’s systems use to navigate themselves through the various terrain

conditions in the shallow lagoon. Although that might not sound special enough, but when you consider those boats don’t go off course, you’ll see it’s the first of its kind and something unique to see, and ride!

Aquatopia was fantastically fun in its outward simplicity even in the misting rain. I can’t believe I left DisneySEA last time without riding it – I missed out on a fun time – but I feel fulfilled now that I had the chance. Besides, the wait was too long last time... nobody wanted to ride it much in the rain today – except me!

Besides Aquatopia, I was able to see the Mystic Rhythms show not only once, but thankfully twice!



“Mystic Rhythms” is one of those attractions that I almost bypassed for other attractions at the park last time; however, the heat of the day and the pain in my feet dictated I sit for a spell, thus I chose this show, located in a converted hanger supposedly far, far from civilization as a place to rest. I wasn’t sure what to expect, as the brochure didn’t describe the show well enough, but once the show began I was completely blown away. It’s a story about the powerful elements of wind, water and fire coming to life in a rainforest, such as the one we are located in at *Lost River Delta*. The theater is reminiscent of that found for the Tarzan Rocks! Show in Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World (now replaced with Finding Nemo-The Musical), but with a distinctly Japanese flair. Vines hang about, criss-crossing the theater walls, ceiling and various other locations... growing wildly just as real vines would do.



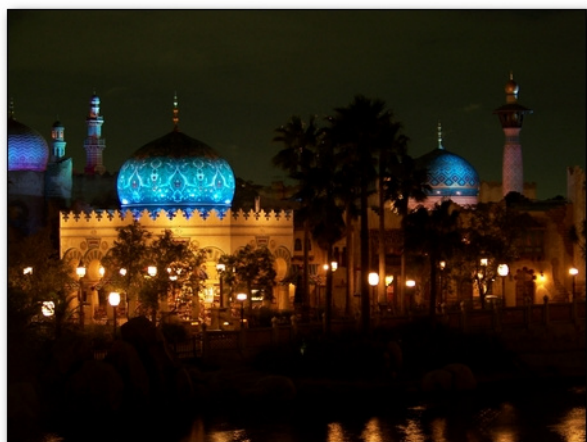
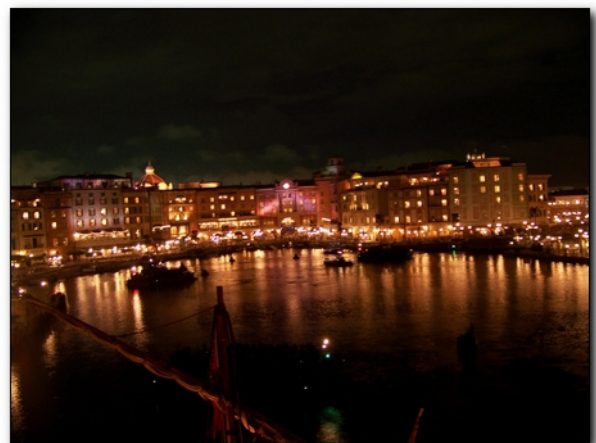
The performance stage is curtained off by what appears to be an old canvass cloth. Water trickles from somewhere. Noises of the jungle begin to slowly fill the space. And then the theater explodes with dance, music and special effects. Animals, characters and elements of the rainforest come alive in this 25-minute production that is truly one-of-a-kind. One doesn’t need to know the language of the land to understand the actions here, for “Mystic Rhythms” speaks to us in a universal language – the language of survival.

And, of course, I stuck around well into the evening to make sure to catch Tokyo DisneySEA’s famous night-time spectacular – BraviSEAmo! – one of my most favorite Disney spectacles following *Illuminations: Reflections of Earth*, the *Main Street Electrical Parade* and *Fantasmic!*

BraviSEAmo! conveys the romantic story of a “Spirit of Water”, an angelic, pure and beautiful soul, and a “Spirit of Fire”, a menacing, dark and powerful creature, meet on the waters of Mediterranean Harbor. The show opens with a greeting from our favorite mouse – “*Boku wa Mickey Mouse desu!*” – before the soft tones of the Water Spirit invade our souls. But her innocence, and ours, is shattered when the harsh, darkened Fire Spirit growls and flexes his might. The two look as if they are preparing to battle one another, but wait a moment longer and you’ll see this battlefield in a different light: it’s a passionate ballet of love and affection; the two spirits co-exist as one. As the DisneySEA website says, “Once you see the show’s grand scale and special effects, you too may find yourself calling out ‘BraviSEAmo!’” I agree!



When it was all said and done I had spent the majority of the day there – from opening to closing – but wished I could spend a little more. It's such a great park...



Tokyo Tower (東京タワー)

Riding back into Tokyo at night sure is pretty. Because you're not actually in Tokyo proper when visiting Tokyo Disneyland Resort (you're in Chiba), the entire enormity that is the Tokyo Metropolis opens up to you and is illuminated like a proverbial sea of pearls. On the twenty-minute or so ride back to Tokyo, though, I wondered... what else could I do tonight that I meant to do the night before? And then I spotted it, lit up against the backdrop of a number of countless other buildings: Tokyo Tower.



From the lattice-work of its super structure right down to its use as a communications (and observation tower), Tokyo Tower is the Japanese equivalent to Paris's Tour Eiffel, even if it is slightly taller than its inspiration. At 332.6 meters (1,091 feet), this white and orange painted tower is at this time the tallest artificial structure in Japan (taking the title from the Eiffel Tower by 13 meters; Eiffel Tower stands about 324 meters tall or 1,063 feet), and it has remained so since its construction in 1958. Besides its use as an

observation port, the tower acts as a support structure for a broadcast antenna. Originally intended for television broadcasting, radio antennas were installed in 1961 and the tower is now used to broadcast signals for NHK, TBS, NTV, Fuji TV, TV Asahi and TV Tokyo. But the best reason to visit the tower is for its observation platforms, of course.

So, the only question remained was: how do I get there from Tokyo-eki? Turns out, it's not that hard actually, but it is a bit of a walk once you find out.

In visiting I ended up doing something rare, something I haven't done thus far whilst in Tokyo – use the JR lines. Normally I'm content to use the metro system to get from point-to-point in this megatropolis of a city, as the JR lines are usually not as efficient (station location wise) than the subway system; however, after studying the route map on the way into Tokyo-eki, it quickly became clear that the most direct route, and the one with the least amount of hassle, was utilizing either the JR Yamanote Line (9) or the Keihin-Tohoku Negishi Line (4), rather than attempting a couple of the combined metro lines. And that even took into account that I couldn't yet use my JR Rail Pass – I'd have to buy a ticket!

Did You Know?

Hamamatsucho station – where I ended up - has a working replica of a “Manneken Pis” statue on one of its platforms. The statue is supposedly a great source of pride for station workers, who dress it in various costumes depending upon the time of year. “Manneken Pis” is a small bronze fountain sculpture depicting a naked little boy urinating into a fountain's basin in Brussels.



Thankfully that was relatively easy too. Having used the JR lines to go out to DisneySEA, using them to circle around Tokyo was exactly the same but still a daunting task. Especially when you have dozens of Japanese queued up, hurriedly trying to purchase their transit ticket and here is a gaijin messing around taking up precious time. At least no one got mad at me.

I can't quite put my finger on it, but I do have to say there is a different set of clientele that use the inner-city JR lines.

In either case, upon exiting the station it's a good fifteen minute walk (and that's if you come out of the right exit – it's the North exit for future reference) before you reach the base of the tower, although you can see it off in the distance. A number of smaller roads will entice you to go off in various directions in hopes of a shorter route, but don't heed their temptation, continue straight and strong and just round the corner the tower thrusts into view.

Structurally it's just as impressive as the Eiffel Tower – the tower weighs about 4,000 but is much lighter than its Parisian counterpart (Eiffel weighs about 7,000 tons); about 140 drums of paint are used for the tower, an equivalent to 28,000 liters. The tower is painted orange and white according to the Civil Aeronautic Law. And approximately one-hundred and seventy-six floodlights installed throughout various places on the tower help bathe it in orange light in winter and white incandescent light in summer. As it is closer to winter than summer, the tower appeared more orange (but there was some white there too...)

FootTown, a 4-story building located in the lower base of the tower between its massive feet, houses museums, restaurants and uniquely Japanese shops and it is from here visitors embark on their journey skyward. There are two observation decks one can reach depending upon the ticket purchased: the two-story "Main Observatory", located at 150 meters (492 feet) up or the smaller "Special Observatory", which reaches a height of 250 meters (820 feet). Naturally you're not allowed to reach the very tip of the tower, but I bet the views from there would be fantastic, ne? Since a private party closed down the secondary-but-higher "Special Observatory", the only platform I could reach tonight was the "Main Observatory" just 150 meters up. ¥800 spent and a moment later I was whisked up, up into the night sky on the promise of a beautiful view of Tokyo at night.



Alas, that's not what happened.



Although the view of the surrounding area was quite nice – there's nothing like seeing the lights from Tokyo's various "super downtowns" all twinkling in the night – the supposed fantastic view was marred by some kind of rope netting that sat over the windows like discarded drapes. Their crisscrossing action not only cut down visibility and reduced overall enjoyment of the view; it all but prevented any kind of pictures from being properly shot from the observation's windows. Had I known about the net I

probably wouldn't have paid to come up, but the journey was interesting nevertheless.

After a few moments I climbed down, snaked my way through the now closed FootTown area (you have no choice), and walked out toward the direction of the *Daimon* metro station (which I had seen on the way over from *Hamamatsucho*) and took its Oedo Line train to *Shibuya* after transferring to the Ginza Line at *Shimbashi* station.

Which is how I ended up here at HMV.

I said last time that one cannot prepare you for the chaos that is Shibuya, and that still rings true tonight.

If you thought the place was crowded during the daytime, it's completely packed – shoulder to shoulder – by nightfall. From static to flashers, and from screens to simple incandescing bulbs, all the lights come up in an explosive wave of color as if playing a Technicolor symphony that only technology could provide, washing over the masses below in every hue of the rainbow, and then some. The explosion of energy is almost as bright as that rained upon New York City's Time's Square; alas we cannot hold a candle to the amount of people flowing through here every second of every minute of every hour of every day.



Shibuya literally is the busiest crossing in the world.

And Shibuya's Center Gai (センター街) is the area's 120-foot long smorgasbord of fashion, food and fun. From this relatively small street you can find just about everything, from the high end Shibuya 109 and Tsutaya department stores, to cafes serving coffee, stands with ramen boiling, specialty electronics stores, arcades, book stores, a number of

plain old thing-a-ma-bob type businesses and much, much more. Including the HMV where I am now. Oh, and just between us, if you're looking for a whimsical condom for later use, might I suggest Condomania, it's just down the street, to the right. You can't miss it!

Tomorrow I'll be heading out to Kamakura. Although the initial plan was to visit Nikko first then Kamakura – a miscount in the number of active days the JR Rail Pass allotted me resulted in the need to swap day-trips. And since purchasing tickets to Kamakura is relatively inexpensive (and the JR Rail Pass isn't needed) it makes sense to switch. It's just a minor switch so don't worry, I'm not giving up on Nikko like I did last time!



So that concludes the day's activities. With that I think I'll sign off and rejoin the chaotic masses below. Besides, I've been in here for quite some time and though I know the only thing I'm doing in here is writing... the person next to me just might have a wild imagination and decide I'm doing something *hentai* in here! So it's out I go.

It's quite a ride back to Homeikan regardless of which line and direction I take, but I do know this for certain: there will not be a recurrence of yesterday's late-night journey.

Ja ne!

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 神奈川県 {Kanto / Kanagawa}



「Amida, the Great Buddha of Kamakura」

september 11, 2007

Ohayo Gozaimasu!

(おはようございます!)

Yaaaaaaaaawn...

Sumimasen! Sorry for yawning... It certainly is an early morning here in Kamakura – humid and muggy too, and already it's full of activity. Train after train after train of girls and boys alike, in a variety of school uniform colors and styles, arrive by the hundreds every three minutes or so, and get off here at the Kita-Kamakura station (北鎌倉駅).

It's quite a sight to be amongst a hoarding mass of school-bound children of all ages, but quite intimidating too. Who knows how they'll react to a *gaijin* in their midst, you know? Although I've found most people here very accommodating and quite curious of foreigners (especially those like me who are calm, quiet and courteous), I still try and keep a low profile. I find it is best not to call attention to oneself in any situation and being here has certainly put me out of my element.

Not that sharing a train ride from Yokohama southward with some of those same hundreds isn't just as nerve-wracking, but I digress.

Yaaaaaaaaawn... Ah, Sumimasen!

It rained overnight – stormed is more like it – which woke me right out of a deep sleep sometime in wee hours of the morning. Homeikan's care-taker, a crotchety but well meaning gentleman in his mid-forties or fifties, was up buttoning down the hatches and closing up shop, making a lot of noise in the process. As if the relentless rains pelting the sides of our windows or the persistent flash of lightning through them followed by the rumbling of thunder every thirty seconds didn't do enough to keep us awake? Thinking that a monkey wrench had been thrown into my plans for today, sleep was fitful at best. To be honest I couldn't wait for the sun to come up so I had an excuse to stop laying on my futon. Of course that meant I would get out here a little too early but that's actually worked out to my advantage.

I wouldn't have been able to enjoy breakfast otherwise – yeah, here on the platform. Oh it's not much – just a sandwich I purchased at the KIOSK and a Pocari Sweat back in Tokyo – but it hits the spot nicely. I wish I could say the same for the weather. Though the storm ended before dawn, the clouds it brought remained and have left behind such damp conditions that everything in my possession misted up as soon as I stepped from the train – glasses, camera lens, everything. I have a feeling it won't be too long before my clothes begin to stick to me: yuck!

Yaaaaaaaawn... Ah, Sumimasen!

The city of Kamakura (鎌倉市) is located some 50 kilometers (31 miles) south-west of Tokyo in Kanagawa prefecture, and is steeped in Japan's rich history. Although today the city's influence is rather small, Kamakura was once a rival center of political, economic and cultural power, as the seat of the samurai-dominated Shogunate during what is now known as the Kamakura Period (1185-1333). As such, during this period Kamakura was also known as Renpu (鎌府), short for Kamakura Bakufu (鎌倉幕府); *Bakufu* meaning Shogunate. This meaning comes from alternate Kanji readings for Kama (鎌) as Ren, and Fu (府) as Pu.

Did You Know?

Kanagawa prefecture is known world-wide in the famous "Giant Wave off Kanagawa" *ukiyo-e* print. The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 also devastated the prefecture. And it's here that Commodore Matthew Perry landed in 1853 and 1854 and signed the Convention of Kanagawa to force open Japanese ports to the United States.



Kanagawa Prefecture



Kamakura

Surrounded to the north, east and west by hills – there's Mt. Genji (源氏山; 92 m/302 ft), Mt. Rokkokuken (六国見; 147 m/482 ft), Mt. Ohira (大平山; 159 m/522 ft), Mt. Jubu (鷲峰山; 127 m/417 ft), Mt. Tendai (天台山; 141 m/463 ft), and Mt. Kinubari (衣張山; 120 m/390 ft) – and to the south by the open water of Sagami Bay (相模湾), Kamakura is a natural fortress. Before the construction of several tunnels and modern roads that now connect it to surrounding cities, on land it could be entered only through narrow artificial passes, among which the seven most important were called Kamakura's Seven Entrances (鎌倉七口). The natural fortification made Kamakura an easily defensible stronghold hence the base of operations of the Shogunate of the period.

Kita-Kamakura sits just outside this stronghold in a neighborhood known as Yamanouchi (山ノ内 or 山之内). Though smaller and never part of traditional Kamakura itself, it is notable for two things: the first, for being the northern border city and the important guardian of the *Kobukorozaka* and *Kamegayatsu* passes into Kamakura; and the second, for holding three of the five highest-ranking Rinzai Zen temples in the prefecture, known as the Kamakura Five Zen Temples, or Kamakura Gozan. These great temples were built here because Yamanouchi was the home territory of the Hojo clan, the family that ruled Japan during much of this period.

Kencho-ji, Engaku-ji, and Jochi-ji – ranked one, two, and four – all reside here at Kita-Kamakura. The other two, Jofuku-ji and Jomyo-ji (three and five respectively) are beyond the mountain passes in Kamakura proper. Though I can't claim to be able to see everything, these five, plus Hachimangu, Zenarai Benten, Hase-dera, the Daibutsu, and the region's Shogunate history are what have brought me to Kamakura.

Ahh, here comes another train-load of kids. This city must be known for its schools, or have quite a number of institutions, because these kids are coming from all parts of Kanto. These kids must not care about the humidity, not notice or maybe they're just used to it. They're just going about their morning as if nothing is amiss. Speaking on going about one's morning – it is almost 8:00am. The gates of Engaku-ji should be opening soon so I think I'll pack up and head over. I'll get back to you later!

{Kita-Kamakura}

Seikou! (成功) The first leg of exploration here at Kamakura has ended and I must say, other than miscalculating some distances from one location to the next, it's been a resounding success.

You'll currently find me here at Kencho-ji, sitting on a bench in the shadows of the temple's famous Tanuki-mon gate – there's a story behind that, which I'll get to in a bit – but let me first start with Engaku-ji, the first temple of the day.

Engaku-ji (円覚寺)

Engaku-ji, or more formally known as Zuirokuzan Engaku Kosho Zenji (瑞鹿山 円覚 興聖 禅寺), is one of the most important Zen Buddhist temple complexes in Japan, and is ranked second among Kamakura's Gozan system. The Gozan system here, much like that established in Kyoto, was a system of Shogunate supported and protected temples initially adopted to promote Zen throughout Japan. However, as Zen had already spread throughout Japan by the time the system was organized, the Gozan was ultimately used by the country's ruling class for its own administrative and political means. Thus the Gozan system allowed the temples at the top to function as de facto ministries, using the nationwide network for the distribution of government laws and norms, and for the monitoring of local conditions for their military superiors.

From what I understand the Hojo Regency in Kamakura, followed by the Ashikaga clans, and the Tokugawa that would later follow, used the system to advance their political will. Some of the temples I've visited in Kyoto in the past (and will visit once I get there this round) belong to that Gozan, so it's quite an honor to see part of this system today. Of course the Gozan system is more complicated than what I make it out to be, with layer upon layer of conditions and labels enough to make your head spin. The Gozan are the lead temples, followed by the Jissetsu (十刹) tier (of which 10 temples belonged) and lastly the Shozan (諸山) network of which there were literally hundreds. Each of these temples had specific functions and levels of authority.

Naturally over time the initial systems were broken and reformed, but suffice it to say five in Kamakura stood above all – Kencho-ji, Engaku-ji, Jufuku-ji, Jochi-ji and Jomyo-ji. But let's get back to Engaku-ji...

The temple was founded in 1282 by Hojo Tokimune (1251-1284), the de facto ruler of Japan at the time, following two failed invasion attempts by Mongol troops under the command of Khublai Khan (1215-1294), grandson of Ghengis Khan, in 1274 and again in 1281. Though they failed to invade Japan owing to timely typhoons (from which the word Kamikaze or "god's wind" originates), tens of thousands of warriors on both sides were killed during the battles. To propitiate the souls of those fallen in war, including those of the enemy's, he founded Engaku-ji. And since Zen Buddhism was well protected by Tokimune, and well accepted by the samurai class, the temple flourished throughout the entire Kamakura period.



Even after the Hojo regime came to an end in 1333, the chief priest was so influential as a Zen master, he earned confidence of the Imperial Court in Kyoto, as well as the new Shogunate, forever securing Engaku-ji's place in the Kamakura Gozan.



Though its influence was secured its fortunes were not. As was the case with other temples, Engaku-ji was ravished time and again by fires and earthquakes. Further, it had to bear hardships during the 14th to 16th centuries with little to no financial support from rulers then in power. Entering the Edo Period (1600-1868), the temple came under the wings of the Tokugawa Shogunate and was able to restore some of its prominence, but that too was washed away in two earthquakes – the last in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Therefore, most of the current structures you'll find here were rebuilt in the past three-quarters of the last century. In its heyday though, Engaku-ji spanned 42 sub-temples and its acreage reached approximately 200 hectares. Today there are only 17 sub-temples on its land, but accommodations for more than 200 priests!

Some of the most interesting features I found of this temple, were: the **Gates** - as is common in Zen temples, you'll find two gates here: the outer gate, the *Somon*, is a smaller, less impressive entrance way; and the *Sanmon*, the larger, generally most expressive of the two. Reconstructed in 1783 in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the founding priest's death, this magnificent double-decked *Sanmon* doesn't disappoint. A large tablet hanging above the gate inscribed by Emperor Fushimi (1265-1317) proclaiming the name of the temple – "Engakuji Kosho Zenji" – though much of it has faded over time, and on the second floor, a statue of the Eleven-headed Kannon is enshrined flanked by sixteen *Rakan*, Kannon's disciples (though you can't see them) are the *Sanmon*'s exceptional points of interest.



The **Butsuden**, the main hall, is dedicated to Hokan Shaka Nyorai and was rebuilt in 1964 out of ferroconcrete. The 2.6 meter-tall sedentary statue you'll find here is enthroned on a gigantic lotus support and although usually depicted in simple dress without accessories (such as coronet or jewelry of any kind), here the Nyorai has perfectly dressed hair topped with a crown, striking a pose generally reserved for a *Bosatsu*. The statue's head is original, made in the first half of the 14th century, but the body is a repair from 1625. Flanking the statue are *Bonten* and *Taishakuten*, Devas serving as the Nyorai's protectors. And the ceiling, which is painted beautifully with white dragons in a sea of clouds, is the work of famous Kamakura artist Seison Maeda

making a visit to the Butsuden, despite its lack of age, enjoyable.

The **Shariden** (舍利殿), or reliquary hall, is the oldest building in the entire Engaku-ji complex and the only building in Kamakura that is designated a National Treasure (due in large part because it is the oldest Chinese-style building left in Japan). The original Shariden, which no longer exists, was built in 1285 by Hojo Sadatoki but succumbed to fire in 1563. The existing structure was first built in the early 15th century as the main hall of a nearby nunnery and was later moved here after the nunnery fell into disuse. Its double-decked roof gives the illusion of two stories; however, there is only one. This style gives a bit of grandeur to its housed treasure: a lone tooth said to belong to Buddha himself.





Other buildings include the Kojirin (a drill hall for Kendo, Japanese Fencing), the Senbutsujo (an old exercise room turned shrine to a 14th century fashioned wooden statue of Yakushi Nyorai), the Dai Hojo (the priest's living quarters), the Hyaku Kannon (where 100 stone sculptures of Kannon are enshrined), the Kaiki-Byo (the mausoleum of Tokimune Hojo and his wife), Myokochi pond, and Byakurokudo (the legendary cave where it's said a herd of divine white deer emerged to listen to Priest Mugaku's opening ceremonies). Not to mention the temple's sprawling graveyard, it's as eerie as it is interesting.

And just beyond the Sanmon there is a flight of about 140 steps leading to the top of a hill where the temple's famous bell – Ogane – resides. It's the largest in Kamakura, measuring 2.6 meters high and 1.42 meters in diameter. Near the bell stands a wooden structure, which is *Benten-do*, or the hall sacred to the Goddess of Fortune.

A good start to a great day.

Jochi-ji (浄智寺)

寶所在近 (*Hosho Zaikin*)

"The treasure you are looking for is next to you"

Just across the tracks from Engaku-ji and south only a few hundred meters is number four amongst Kamakura's great Gozan: Kinpozan Jochi-ji (金宝山浄智寺), a quirky little temple if I ever saw one.

Officially, Hojo Munemasa and his son Hojo Morotoki founded this temple in 1283 as a normal Zen temple; however, due to Munemasa's untimely death, the temple was repurposed to honor him instead by his wife and younger brother (Tokimune), though their names are not in the founding charter. Furthermore, though they chose Priest Kokai Nanshu to be Jochi-ji's first chief priest, he felt himself too young to hold such an honorary position so he asked for Funei Gontan and Daikyu Shonen to be nominated as founding priests instead. Therefore, the temple has the distinction of having three official founding priests, placing its peculiarity in a super-majority amongst temples. Virtually all temples have just one founding priest, two at most... but not three.



Be that as it may, at its peak, Jochi-ji had eleven (11) structures including the main hall and other sub-temples with nearly 500 people living within its walls. Inside the temple's grounds today, however, there are few remaining structures. And what is still standing – the hall and other formations – was built after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

But what this temple lacks in historical conference, it makes up for in charm.

Much of the charm can be found in its intriguing and alluring approach; at the onset you'll find just a tiny pond, a stone bridge, a staircase and a diminutive gate.



Though the miniature stone bridge has been corded off, the pond it traverses is “Kenro no I” (甘露ノ井) said to be one of Kamakura's ten celebrated wells (鎌倉十井; *Kamakura Jussei*) in classic times. *Kanro* literally translates to “sweet dew in English; therefore, it is also known as the “Well of Sweet Dew” and at one point in time the waters flowing from here were considered to be in the top five of the entire region, they were that pure. Today's well is, however, far from celebrated. Most of its beauty has long since left; its waters still and muddy. Even so, with much of this temple falling under disrepair and eventual collapse under the Great Kanto Earthquake, it's agreeable to see a little of the temple's original treasures still celebrated.

The diminutive gate standing just beyond highlights the well's placement – 寶所在近 – “The treasure you are looking for is next to you”. Here too – like at Engaku-ji (though I neglected to mention it) – you'll find a number of white stamps affixed. Though I'm not sure what they're for, I am on the fence as to whether this is a good thing or not... Even so, this gate is but a small portal into a much larger realm. Pass through it and up the stairs for a much more interesting experience.



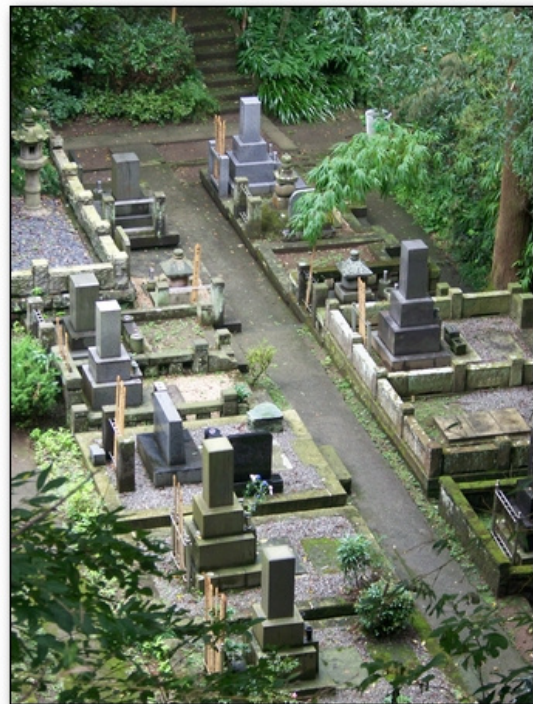
Continuing up the well-worn path (which clues us in on the temple's true age), one comes upon another unique feature: the *Shoromon* (鐘樓門) – a two-storied combination of a *shoro* (bellfry) and a *romon* (gate). This distinctive gate, in which no other temple in Kamakura can claim to have a similar structure, was recently restored (it looks brand new) and houses the temple's bell cast in 1340. The shape of the tower's windows give way to the attic's use: called *kato-mado*, these window designs were originally employed in Zen temples to suggest the flowering lotus and are found all across Japan. Though generally used as just windows or even as decorative portals, here they actually signify a bell.

The *Mitsu-oroko* of the Hojo family crest (or *mon*, shown above right) adorns the gate's gable.

Further in is the *Donge-den*, or main hall. In this 7.2 square-meter hall, three wooden statues of Nyorai are enthroned as the main objects of worship. Together they represent a trinity of the past, present and future respectively: Amida, Shaka and Miroku. Statues of priests also join the ensemble on the left and right sides of the main altar, respectively out of the focus of the Nyorai. You'll also find a statue of Kannon Bosatsu that is listed on the Kamakura thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage list enshrined at the rear of the hall.



Behind the main hall is Jochi-ji's graveyard, a bamboo grove, a number of caves (called *yagura*, used as cenotaphs for those less privileged), and a statue of Hotei, the god of good fortune and happiness (whose belly, left earlobe and index finger are dirty from centuries of rubbing by Japanese wishing to improve their luck).



Go ahead, give the *Hotei* a rub. I rubbed – why not? I too need to improve my luck!

After taking a walk around the graveyard, the main hall and surrounding environs, I made my way back down the stone steps and continued on my journey toward Kencho-ji – another 800-900 meters' walk.



Kencho-ji (建長寺)

Kencho-ji has the distinct honor of being the first Zen temple erected in Kamakura and the pioneer of Zen Buddhism in Japan, making it the oldest Zen training monastery in the entire country! As such it ranks first among the Kamakura Gozan and is the head of the 500-odd branch of temples belonging to the Kenchoji School of the Rinzaï sect.

The temple was constructed on the orders of Emperor Go-Fukakusa and completed in 1253, the fifth year of the Kencho era from which the temple takes its name. In its heyday, Kencho-ji had what is known as a full *Shichido Garan* (七堂伽藍), which has many interpreted meanings; however, from what I understand the general consensus is in order to qualify as a full *garan* temple the temple must have no less than a group of seven distinct buildings. What is counted in that group of seven varies greatly from temple to temple, sect to sect and even from era to era. As an example: according to a 13th century text explaining the system, a *garan* is a “temple with a *kondo* (金堂; main hall), a *to* (塔; pagoda), a *kodo* (講堂; lecture hall), a *shoro* (鐘樓; bellfry), a *jikido* (食堂; refectory), a *sobo* (monk’s living quarters), and a *kyozo* (經藏; scriptures depository).” But a 15th century text suggests you need a *butsuden* (仏殿; main hall), a *hatto* (法堂; lecture hall), a *kuin/kuri* (庫裏; kitchen/office), a *sodo* (僧堂; a building dedicated to Zazen), a *sanmon* (三門; main gate), a *tosu* (toilet) and a *yokushitsu* (bath).



Most temples included a selection from both doctrines and a few additions of their own. Another common element of a *garan* is the *kairo* (回廊), a long roofed portico-like passage that surrounds both the *kondo* and pagoda. Although it doesn't appear that Kencho-ji had a *kairo*, it did have another forty-nine (49) sub-temples and other structures, enough to house over 1000 people!

Of course, as was the case in other temples, one calamity or another destroyed all of the original buildings: fire, earthquake or war. Most of the structures present today were either rebuilt recently or brought from outside Kamakura with aid from the Shogunate during the Tokugawa era. Most, if not all, of the surviving structures are considered important historical or cultural properties – including some of the trees. As such, there are still plenty of interesting items of note here, such as: the temple bell, the Butsuden and Karamon gate, the Dharma hall, and the Hojo and its gardens.

The **Bonsho**, or temple bell, stands within its own stone and thatched-roof enclosure just to the right of the Sanmon. Cast in 1255, this historic bell (it is one of two bells in the city designated as National Treasures – the other is at Engaku-ji) measures 208.8 centimeters high, 124.3 centimeters in diameter and weighs approximately three tons. The bell bares an inscription from the temple's founder, Rankei Doryu. Although I'm not sure what it says, it adorns the bell beautifully and makes this particular belfry quite a treasure – it's the only original structure still standing from the beginning of the temple's founding. An interesting side note to ponder: at the end of the inscription the name "Kencho Zen-ji" appears. *Zen-ji*, or Zen temple, was used here for the very first time in history.

Did You Know?

Following Buddhist tradition, a temple bell is rung 108 times to announce the new year. This is done to dispel the 108 sufferings of humanity in a ritual called the *joya no kane*. The bell here is so old it can't be rung that many times, breaking tradition.

Butsuden and Karamon: These structures, both important cultural properties, were originally mausoleum buildings belonging to the Tokugawa Shogunate and were located at Zojo-ji temple in Tokyo. They were moved here piece by piece to their present location in 1647. The large Buddhist image inside the Butsuden represents Jizo Bosatsu, a beloved guardian normally associated with children. The sitting image is approximately 240 centimeters tall and reaches 496 centimeters if the pedestal is included. But it's not only the Bosatsu that sets this building apart from its surroundings. As Zojo-ji was a *Jodo* sect temple, this *Butsuden* reflects elaborate decorations unlike most Zen temples, which are usually simple with little-to-no ornamentation. The latticed ceiling here, for example, is decorated with paintings of phoenixes and the interior is lacquered.





The **Junipers**, which stand in front of the Butsuden, are also designated as National Treasures and were planted over 700 years ago from seed the founder brought with him from China. There have been some doubts cast upon their age but temple documents and diagrams from the 1300s do show the trees so that satisfies me. It's quite amazing they've been able to survive this long – and quite inspiring. Underneath the biggest (about 13 meters high) is a great stone monument surrounded by chains to commemorate those of Kamakura's citizens who died during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904/1905.

The **Hatto**, or Dharma hall, dates from 1814 and is where all major public ceremonies are performed in this temple. What sets this particular building apart from its surroundings is its size – it's the largest Buddhist structure in Eastern Japan. Inside a statue of Senju, the thousand-armed Kannon, resides, which ranks 28th on the thirty-three Kannon Pilgrimage in Kamakura. Also placed in the corner is a drum, which legend says Minamoto Yoritomo used when he and his hunting party went to Mt. Fuji (a particular tale in these parts). The Hatto also contains a magnificent dragon painting on its ceiling. Called "Un'ryu", or "A Dragon in the Clouds" it's a more recent construct (by Koizumi Junsaku in 2003) but it is spectacular.



The **Hojo**, like the Somon, was moved to Kencho-ji from its original location at the Hanju Zanmai-in temple in Kyoto. It was first used as the chief priest's residence, but is now used in the performance of religious services of Kencho-ji's followers. The image enshrined here is that of Shake Nyoroi and the hall itself is often called the *Ryuo-den* (龍王殿), or "Dragon King Hall". Out back is the temple's magnificent garden, designed by the Zen master Muso Soseki. The pond in this

garden is in the shape of the character representing "mind" (心), and thus the pond is also known as the *Shin-ji Iki* (心字池), or "Mind Character Pond."

And, of course, the Sanmon...

The **Sanmon**, built in 1754 with donations from all over the Kanto region, has a tablet hanging above its entrance containing the name of the temple – Kencho Kokoku Zenji – written by Emperor Go-Fukakusa (1243-1304) himself, indicating this temple was also once patronized by the Imperial Court (just like Engaku-ji).

On the second floor, rarely open to the public, are a number of treasures and relics, including: statues of Five-Hundred Buddha's Disciples (known as *rakan* in Japanese), who have attained the highest level of Buddhist enlightenment possible.

To be precise, there are 489 of these *rakan* statuettes ranging from 15 to 30 centimeters tall, and showing a host of different emotion, such as joy, anger, and pity, with a 44.5-centimeter tall bronze statue of Shaka Nyorai at the center. I only know this because I asked, not because I was allowed to visit the treasury there. Though that would be something, wouldn't it?

And it's name? Why call this gate Tanuki-mon?
(I bet you were on the edge of your seat on this one...)



Well, legend has it that a raccoon-dog (a *tanuki*) helped with the cause associated with building the temple's gate by transforming himself into one of the monks. This he did to repay the kindness he had been shown by the temple's priests and with his help enough funds and materials were collected to build the mighty gate. Therefore, in honor of the *tanuki*'s sacrifice and dedication, the priests bestowed this peculiar honor: dedicating the gate to the raccoon-turned-monk. And to this day the two-story, thirty-meter tall Sanmon is affectionately referred to as Tanuki-mon (狸門).



* * *

It's nice to actually sit and enjoy the surroundings here. But if you want more of a birds-eye view of the surrounding temple grounds, I do invite you to take the path and staircases behind the Hojo. After a climb of 15-20 minutes you'll arrive at Hansobo, Kencho-ji's protective shrine, upon where you'll also find an observation deck commanding great views of the city – and even to Mt. Fuji on good days.

Since the weather isn't so spectacular today I decided against the climb. Besides, it's going to take longer than I have here at Kencho-ji for the return trip, so I guess this brings me full-circle for this leg of Kamakura's explorations. Next stop: the Kamakura-eki area and Hanchimangu, Jufuku-ji and Zenarai Benten!

{Kamakura}

Phew, that was a hell of a walk... Permit me to sit right here for a moment, underneath a gnarled-looking but beautiful cypress tree planted right at the entrance to the shrine, and rest. Don't laugh; I'm not the only one! A gentleman of some age – a painter or sketch-artist – has also taken refuge here. And he, like me, has pulled out a pad and pencil ready to detail his experience at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu. The only difference between us will be his absence of words.



As for me, I'm quite full of them. We both couldn't have picked a more beautiful spot upon which to reflect: amongst three petite bridges and two ponds. One of the petite bridges – where the two of us are seated – is arched and from what I understand was to be used only by the Shogun and no other. I can imagine just the sight the Minamoto shogun had when he crossed it, with the trees and the stone pathway that must have led the way to the shrine's staircase, much as it does today. But I'm getting ahead of myself here...

Tsurugaoka Hachimangu

After another walk of a kilometer or so down a busy roadway, through a tunnel built for cars (but one of Kamakura's original seven entrances), and down a hill, put me at the back-door to Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, Kamakura's most important (and highly visible) Shinto shrine.

The shrine was originally founded by Minamoto Yoriyoshi in 1063, then enlarged and moved to its present location by Minamoto Yoritomo, the first shogun of the Kamakura government, in 1180. The shrine was dedicated to Hachiman, the Shinto god of war and patron of the Minamoto family, but over time also came to embrace Buddhist teachings. In fact, during its golden years, Tsurugaoka Hachimangu was a shining example of the wonderful blending of Shinto and Buddhist doctrine in Kanto and was known for a time as the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine-Temple.

Did You Know?

The concept of blending Shinto with Buddhist teachings was achieved by suggesting that Shinto deities were manifestations of Buddhist divinities. Most important of these was the identification of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu with Buddha Mahavairocana, harmonizing the teachings of both religions.

At its height, the shrine-temple had as many as 33 structures for both Shintoists and Buddhists, but an order during the Meiji era required separation of Shinto and Buddha and many of the shrine-temple's Buddhist buildings and cultural relics were destroyed, burned or out-right just discarded. Much of what can be seen today is a mere shell of what was, and isn't terribly notable. The grounds that survive, however, are the major attraction today.



From the rear of the shine, the first building one comes to is the Main Hall, which is divided into two parts: the Haiden (or the oratory hall, in front) and the Honden (or the inner sanctum, which is the most sacred part of a shrine). Built in an architectural style called Gongen Zukuri – the two-tiered gabled roofs convey an enormous sense of majesty and power. The vermilion color dominates the landscape, offering quite a beautiful contrast with the verdure of the surrounding trees. The inner sanctum does not contain any statues like those of temples; rather it is adorned with symbolical objects of worship important to the family. In this case a mirror made of polished metal and a sword (both regalia's of the imperial family). A tablet and zig-zag cuts of white paper called Gohei are also placed upon the altar.

On the left-hand side of the Main Hall, there is an entrance to the shrine's treasure house, where most of the remaining objects of value are exhibited in a controlled environment. Included among these treasures are: seven portable shrines made in the 17th century, ancient swords, two of Yoritomo's sedentary statues, a folding screen on which various stages of war between the Minamoto and Taira clans are painted, a twelve-layered robe for court ladies, a suit of armor, ancient calligraphy and various wooden masks.

The main hall and treasury (neither original buildings) rest upon the highest point of the shrine, which offers visitors one hell of a panoramic view of the shrine, the beach, and the special elevated walkway that brought visitors to the shrine (and still does from Kamakura station). It's an amazing sight!

Continue down the steps – all sixty-one now – and come upon a true treasure, and one I can safely say is an original piece of the shrine: a thousand-year-old ginkgo tree. A signpost in front of the tree tells of its age, height (approximately 30 meters high) and a story of a savage murder born out of jealousy... or was it a conspiracy?



Here, amongst the ginkgo's roots on a snowy winter's eve in 1219, is the exact spot where Minamoto Kugyo hid before running a sword through and beheading his uncle, Minamoto Sanetomo, the third shogun, on his way to the main hall to attend a ceremony in his honor. Though reasons for the assassination are not inherently clear, legend suggests Kugyo was jealous of his uncle's position and power. Sanetomo, having paid quite a bit of attention to the Imperial Court in Kyoto, was often promoted quickly through the ranks. And jealous of the titles and ranks awarded to Sanetomo (the ceremony Sanetomo was about to attend was in celebration of receiving one of the highest official titles conferred by the Imperial Court), not to mention feeling a bit slighted by being passed over as Shogun, pushed the kid over the edge.

For the act of brutally murdering the third Shogun of Kamakura, Kyugo was immediately put to death, thus bringing the Seiwa genji line of the Minamoto clan and their rule in Kamakura to a sudden end. Because of this, however, some suggest the murder was a conspiracy by the Hojo clan in order to gain complete power of the office. Their family did assume rule shortly thereafter so it's not a stretch of the imagination. In either case, for its role in the murder, the tree gained the nickname *kakure-icho* (隠れ銀杏; "hiding ginkgo").

The stone tiles leading down and away from the tree take you past the shrine's relatively large wash-basin, down a tree-lined corridor and between two man-made ponds to the three bridges and the entrance to the shrine. Do be careful here though, the pigeons are fierce!

The bridges, where I am seated with my artisan friend, span a canal that links the two ponds popularly called Genpei-ike (源平池) together. The term "*Genpei*" is deeply rooted in Japanese history as the portmanteau of two powerful family lines that clashed in a battle of supremacy. It comes from the alternate readings of the kanji *Minamoto* (源) and *Taira* (平) as "Gen" and "Pei" respectively and led itself to the war's nomenclature. Thus the battle is known as the Genpei war (源平合戦) and it's one of the quintessential conflicts of Heian-period Japan.



The Genpei War was the culmination of a decades-long conflict between the two aforementioned clans over dominance of the Imperial court, and by extension, control of Japan itself. The power struggle was focused on just three figures in 1155: Emperor Toba, Emperor Sutoku and Emperor Konoe.



The first real strike in this long, protracted conflict began after Toba forced his son, Sutoku, to abdicate the throne in favor of a son from another consort, Konoe. However, young Konoe died and though Sutoku harbored the expectation that his son would then ascend to the throne, his hopes were frustration by the elevation of yet another brother, he who would become known as Go-Shirakawa. The resulting conflict is known as the Hogen Disturbance of 1156. It's the

beginning of the hostilities between the Minamoto and Taira clans as loyalties within each house were split between two warring parties: those loyal to Go-Shirakawa and those loyal to Sutoku, who thought he got a raw deal.

Although Go-Shirakawa won the day, the animosity cultivated between the Minamoto and Taira during the Hogen (most of the Minamoto sided with Sutoku while most of the Taira sided with Go-Shirakawa), led directly to the Heiji Disturbance three years later.

The second round began the moment Go-Shirakawa abdicated his throne in 1158 to allow his son, Nijo, to ascend. When Taira Kyomori (head of the Taira clan at the time) left Kyoto on a personal pilgrimage, the Minamoto and their allies abducted cloistered Go-Shirakawa and Emperor Nijo, burning the palace in the process. Though strong at first, the Minamoto were completely unprepared militarily for Kiyomori's return to Kyoto. Thus the Minamoto were crushed; Minamoto Yoshitomo (the clan's head) was killed and his son, Minamoto Yoritomo was banished.

The result: the Taira were elevated and became a major force on the political scene. Taira Kiyomori established the first samurai-dominated administrative government in the history of Japan (the Kamakura Shogunate) and then began a series of executions, intended to eliminate rival factions. In 1177, relations between the Taira and then retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa became highly strained, and the latter attempted a coup d'état to oust Taira Kiyomori from office. Kiyomori defeated the former emperor and in the process abolished the Insei system provoking strong anti-Taira sentiment throughout.

In 1180, Prince Mochihito, a son of cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa, humiliated by the Taira because of the Taira-backed accession of the throne of his nephew, Emperor Antoku (who was half Taira himself) along with Minamoto Yorimasa sent out a call to arms to the various samurai families and Buddhist monasteries to rebel against the Taira. Kiyomori called for the arrest of Mochihito, who then sought protection at Mii-dera near Lake Biwa in the city of Otsu. The Mii-dera monks were unable to ensure him sufficient protection, so he was forced to move along. Taira forces then chased him to Byodo-in, just outside Kyoto in Uji.



And it's here, with a dramatic encounter on and around the bridge of the River Uji that the war began. The battle ended in Yorimasa's ritual suicide (*seppuku*) inside Byodo-in and Mochihito's capture and execution shortly afterward. This action, however, only invigorated the Minamoto; Yoritomo (who had reached Kamakura and married into the Hojo clan) decided to get involved, mostly to enact revenge for his banishment against the Taira.



After a number of confrontations from Kanto to Kansai and beyond, the decisive battle was played out five years later at Dan-no-ura. It became one of the most famous and important battles in Japanese history up to that time. Here the Minamoto engaged the Taira fleet in the Straits of Shimonoseki, a tiny body of water separating the islands of Honshu and Kyushu. The tides played a powerful role in the development of the battle, granting the advantage first to the Taira, who were more experienced and abler sailors, and later to the Minamoto.

The Minamoto advantage was considerably enhanced by the defection of Taguchi Shigeyoshi, a Taira general who revealed the location of Emperor Antoku (who had fled Kyoto) and the regalia. The Minamoto redirected their attention on the Emperor's ship, and the battle quickly swung in their favor. Many of the Taira samurai, along with Emperor Antoku and his grandmother Taira Tokiko, widow of Taira Kiyomori, threw themselves into the waves rather than live to see their clan's ultimate defeat at the hands of the Minamoto.

Following the battle of Dan-no-ura, the Taira clan was completely destroyed and the Minamoto victory was followed by the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate, right here in the center of town. Though Minamoto Yoritomo was not the first ever to hold the title of shogun, he was the first to wield it in a role of nationwide scope.

The end of the Genpei War and beginning of the Kamakura shogunate marked the rise of military (samurai) power and the suppression of the power of the emperor, who was compelled to preside without effective political or military power, until the Meiji Restoration over 650 years later.



Much of what makes up "*The Tale of Genji*", one of Japan's most celebrated classical novels, and "*The Tale of the Heike*" document the rise and fall of both the Minamoto clan (the Genji) and the Taira clan (the Heike) respectively.

They are fantastic reads if you get the opportunity.

As for the ponds – hatred runs deep: the larger right-hand pond is reserved for the Minamoto whilst the smaller left-hand pond is for the Taira. To further along this relationship, the right-hand pond has pure white lotus flowers whereas the left-hand pond has blood-red lotus flowers (obviously blood-red is a bad omen). Also, the Minamoto pond is dotted with three islets, and Taira pond with four. "Three" is pronounced "san" in Japanese, which can also mean "birth" or "creation", whilst "four" called "shi", an homonym for "death."

The two clans continue to be locked in an eternal struggle to this day: following the war and its aftermath, it established red and white, the colors of the Taira and Minamoto standards, respectively, as Japan's national colors. Today these colors can be seen on the flag of Japan – the *Hinomaru*. (The family crests of each are displayed right: the Minamoto (top) and Taira (bottom).)



Tsurugaoka Hachimangu has one other treasure to give up that I've not yet talked about – it's distinct approach. Starting just behind me at the three petite bridges and continuing 1.8 kilometers (1.1 miles) until it reaches the beaches of Sagami Bay, is the temple's magnificent approach easily identified by the placement of three relatively large torii. The first (or actually third) is right here at the entrance to the shrine, just over my shoulder; the second is just north of Kamakura-eki and marks the beginning



of the Dankazura, a central elevated walking path; the third just a few hundred meters from the water's edge marks the original start of the path. Each gate measures approximately six meters high and comes accompanied by a pair of stone-carved dragon/lion-dogs (狛犬; *Koma-inu*) standing guard at each.



Legend suggests the more current version of the Dankazura – the roughly 50 centimeter high, 3 meter wide and 460-meter-long avenue modeled after the Miyako Oji, the main boulevard in Kyoto – was constructed on the order of Yoritomo after his wife became pregnant. At the time he had two daughters but no heir apparent and under the Kamakura Shogunate system only the eldest male child was qualified to succeed to the Shogun's position.

The couple prayed to their Hachiman deity for a baby boy, dedicating the path to the shrine in 1182. Their prayer was answered! The newborn was indeed male, named Yoriie, who later assumed the seat as the second Shogun. The broad avenue approach, with Dankazura in the center, was thus renamed Wakamiya-oji, or Young Prince Avenue.

It's this elevated path that I'll take back to Kamakura-eki in just a little while.

The path is beautifully lined with some 300 cherry trees and azaleas. These cherry trees, which bloom beautifully in the spring, were planted 1918 as seedlings and, as I understand it, these are the same variety that are planted along the Potomac River in Washington DC, which were gifts presented to the United States by the Municipal Government of Tokyo in 1912.

I really have to return to Japan one day in the spring... I bet these are beautiful in bloom.

Jufuku-ji

About 800 meters away from the entrance of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, lying just on the other side of the JR Yokosuka Line tracks that between Kita-Kamakura and Kamakura stations, is a relatively small Buddhist temple known as Kikokuzan Kongo Jufuku Zenji (亀谷山金剛寿福禅寺), but usually just known as Jufuku-ji. Actually built almost half-a-century earlier than Kencho-ji, which is generally regarded as the first Zen temple in Kamakura, this simple temple ranks just third among Kamakura's prestigious Gozan.

That's because it did not employ the Zen tenet in the first place.

The temple was founded by Hojo Masako (1157–1225) in order to enshrine her husband Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), founder of the Kamakura shogunate, following his unexpected demise in 1199 (he fell from his horse). Having chosen Jufuku-ji's present site because it used to be Yoritomo's father's residence, she invited Myoan Eisai to be its founding priest. Ostracized by the Tendai school in Kyoto because the new ideas he had introduced there after coming back from China clashed with the Tendai's call for strength above all, Eisai agreed to come to Kamakura, where he was to stay and have great religious influence.

Did You Know?

Priest Myoan Eisai is a rather important figure in the Histories of Zen and Japan. It was he who, after being ordained in China, introduced the Zen concept to Japan. He is also known for introducing green tea to the country.



Though he is said to be the Japanese pioneer of Zen, the doctrine he introduced in Kamakura was mixed with Tendai, Shingon and Zen creeds, mostly focusing on incantations and prayers. But, he was so influential in preaching Zen that, in later years, a number of talented Zen priests were ordained here to spread his word throughout the country. In the latter half of the 12th century, Jufuku-ji was expanded into a full-fledged Zen temple and in its heyday had as many as 14 sub-temples. Today, however, it's the main hall that constitutes the bulk of its compound, which, unfortunately, is closed to the public and can only be seen from the inner gate.

Over the centuries the Main Hall burned down so many times that, in spite of the temple's great age, the present structure dates only to the mid eighteenth century. Inside it are three statues of Shakyamuni (Shaka) which are its main objects of worship. There is also a statue of Eleven-Headed Kannon and two enormous wooden Nio, brought here from Tsurugaoka Hachimangu at the time of the mandatory separation of Shinto and Buddhism following the Meiji Restoration.

Though none of these treasures are open to the general public, Jufuku-ji remains number twenty-four among the Thirty-Three Kamakura Kannon pilgrimage and number eighteen of the Kamakura Nijuyon Jizo temples (鎌倉二十四地蔵; a pilgrimage to Jizo sites in Kamakura).



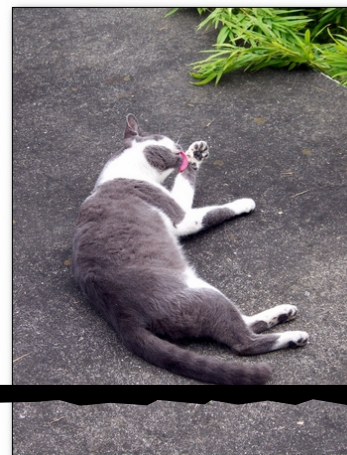
A graveyard sits out behind the main hall with more wonderful examples of Kamakura *yagura*; however, since I couldn't gain access through the secondary gate this was also a piece of the temple I could not see, much to my chagrin. So I returned to Tsurugaoka Hachimangu disappointed.

* * *

With this, the second leg of explorations here in Kyoto complete, I guess I should bid my artisan friend farewell and make my way down Dankazura to Kamakura-eki. There I'll take the Enoden, or Enoshima Electric Railway (江ノ島電鉄; Enoshima dentetsu), out to the third and final part today – the Hase area – where Hase-dera and Kamakura's famous Daibutsu await!



{Hase}



The sun is beginning to set on yet another full day of discovery and adventure here in Japan, and today I find I'm quite fulfilled with today's journey. After visiting the amazing Zen temples of Kencho-ji, Engaku-ji, and Jochi-ji – ranked one, two, and four of the Kamakura Gozan – at Kita-Kamakura, and Jofuku-ji and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu in the Kamakura area, I wondered how the Hase era would shape up in terms of excitement, but I needn't have worried. Hase turned out to be just as exhilarating, even if it doesn't really tie into the Kamakura Shogunate or its history.

As I wind my day down here with a vanilla ice cream cone, an ice-cold Coca-Cola, and a playful neko (猫; ねこ; cat) beneath my feet, let me bring this tale up-to-date on the travels from Kamakura-eki to Hase...

Kotoku-in: Home of the Great Buddha

About 700 meters from the Hase Enoden train station is when you'll come upon the rather nondescript entranceway to Kotoku-in (高德院), the home of the Great Buddha. It's only after you traverse its stone-lined path and meet the Nio-mon gate a number of steps inside that you know you've reached this particular temple.

But there's no mistaking where you are once you pass through the gate – the Daibutsu dominates its surroundings like no other, casting its shadow along the temple's grounds as it thrusts skyward. An incredible sight in its own right, it's the fact that the Daibutsu sits in the open air which makes it unusual amongst large Buddha statues in Japan. Not to mention an alluring draw for domestic and foreign tourists alike (the rest of Kotoku-in is closed to the general public so those who come here, come to see the Buddha).

The Daibutsu	
Height (w/platform)	13.35m
Height (Statue)	11.31m
Face length	2.35m
Eye width	1.00m
Mouth width	0.82m
Ear length	1.90m
# of Hair Coils	656
Weight	121 tons

And in doing so I've learned quite a bit about Buddhist statues.

Did you know Buddha's are said to have 32 physical signs that distinguish them from ordinary people? One of them is the byakugo, a round protuberance of clockwise-curved silver hair located between the eyebrows. Buddha's are said to shine light upon the people of the world from this spot. Another of the 32 signs is a sapphire-blue eye color. The eyes of this Buddha are carved essentially perpendicular to the face, giving them a peaceful downward gaze. In addition to the 32 major signs, which are obvious on sight, there are said to be an additional 80 minor signs.



One of these is a high, straight nose with inconspicuous nostrils. Accordingly the bridge of the Buddha's nose falls straight from his forehead, and the nostrils are visible only from directly under the statue. The Buddha's long pierced earlobes, which fall to his shoulders, are another of the 80 minor signs.

Hands and their placement are also an important characteristic; each Buddha has its own *mudras*, or distinct hand position. The Amida Buddha's *mudra* is two circles formed by his two hands: the index, middle and ring fingers touch while the thumbs and little fingers do not. This Buddha's *mudra* is slightly unusual in the sense that its thumbs do not rest on top of its index fingers. Amongst the nine different *mudras* that Amida displays, this *mudra* (called the

"Jobon-josho-in") is considered the highest rank. Further, in another of the 32 signs of a Buddha, there is a web-like membrane between the Great Buddha's fingers, known as *mammoso*.

Standing inside the Great Buddha (yes, he's hollow; for ¥20 you can go right inside!) one gets a renewed sense of the sophisticated technologies used to cast it. It is clear from the lattice pattern on the interior walls that the statue was made in a series of forty separate castings. Furthermore, as is pointed out, that three different variations of the *ikarakuri* welding technique were used to attach the separately cast parts onto different areas of the statue's infrastructure. While cast-in-bronze, the statue itself is made out of copper (68.8%), lead (20%), tin (9.3%) and trace amounts of iron and aluminum.



But I guess one of the biggest questions is... why is this Buddha here?

Legend suggests that after Minamoto Yoritomo and his wife, Masako, participated in the inauguration of the Great Buddha statue of Todai-ji in Nara (1195), Yoritomo wished to build a matching icon in Kamakura as a symbol to demonstrate his budding power. Unfortunately his wish never came true; he died four years later. His wish was materialized later through the efforts of his court lady – Inada – who asked Priest Joko to travel across the country in search of alms for the project. The Kamakura Shogunate, then controlled by the Hojo regents, did not give financial aid to the project because they patronized mainly Zen temples, the statue Yoritomo wanted was of Amida, which was venerated mainly by the Jodo sect. In either case, the Priest was able to collect enough donations to fund the statue's construction.

This statue, made of wood, was finally completed in 1243 but it was not long lived. Five years after its debut a violent storm completely destroyed the wooden statue. Unperturbed, Lady Inada and Priest Joko went on another fund-raising campaign and collected enough for the construction of a new statue, a bronze one this time, with the help of master Hisatomo Tanji and Goro-emon Ono. It took them more than a dozen years to complete their work (an exact date of completion is not known), which today we can still admire.

Consequently, the Daibutsu wasn't always out in the elements. At the time of its construction he was housed in a large wooden building not unlike the one at Todai-ji in Nara; however, it befell calamity (a number of storms, earthquakes, the lack of funds, and the fall of the Kamakura Shogunate) and was never reconstructed. But to commemorate Lady Inada's contribution, there is a cenotaph for her standing in the courtyard. Also bandied about are a number of *waka* and *haiku*-inscribed tablets.

One such tablet stands out amongst the crowd with a Tanka – a 31 syllable verse consisting of five metrical units of 5-7-5-7-7 – by Akito Yasano (1878-1942), a famous poetess of her age, inscribed upon it. Though weathered and worn, you can still read her first impression upon seeing the Daibutsu: *Here in Kamakura the sublime Buddha is of another world, but how like a handsome man he seems adorned with the green of summer.*

Ka-ma-ku-ra-ya Mi-ho-to-ke-na-re-do Sha-ka-mu-ni-wa Bi-na-n-ni-o-wa-su Na-tsu-ko-da-chi-ka-na

Even in September amidst a gloomy day he's of another world.

Hase-dera (長谷寺)

Hase-dera, known more formally as Kaikozan Jishoin Hase-dera (海光山 慈照院 長谷寺), is fourth on the thirty-three stations of the Bando Shanjusankasho pilgrimage circuit and twenty-second on the Kamakura pilgrimage circuit that is dedicated to the goddess Benzaiten (Kannon) and though I'm not following this or any other pilgrimage circuit here in Kamakura, the lure of one of the largest wooden statues of Kannon on display was enough to woo me to visit.



Legend suggests that Priest Tokudo (656-735), serving at Hase-dera in Nara Prefecture, commissioned two statues of the eleven-headed Kannon to be carved from a single block of camphor, which was felled from the forest behind the temple. The statue carved from the lower part of the camphor tree was enshrined there at Hase-dera near Nara whilst the statue from the upper-half (the larger of the two) was set adrift in the sea near present-day Osaka with a prayer that it would someday reappear to save the people. Fifteen years later, on the night of June 18th in 736, the second statue washed ashore at Nagai Beach on the Miura Peninsula not far from Kamakura, sending out rays of light as it did so.

Fujiwara Fusasaki (681-737), a court noble, rescued and enshrined the find at this present site in Kamakura and appointed Tokudo as the temple's founding priest. Historians cannot reconcile the legend of this temple's founding to records kept at the time, however, and there is doubt cast upon the age of the Kannon. Judging from the inscription affixed to the temple's bell – 1264, one of the oldest in Kamakura – it is relatively certain that the temple at least had existed in the late Kamakura period, but not earlier. Therefore, the Hase Kannon is designated neither a National Treasure nor an Important Cultural Asset.



Regardless, the magnificent statue of Hase Kannon is housed in the quite picturesque Kannon-do hall for all to see and worship. It stands approximately 9.18 meters (30.1 feet) tall and has eleven heads in addition to its main one: three in front, three to the left and three to the right, plus one at the top and another on back (which is said to be laughing, but, only the priests know). If you look closely you'll see each face has a different expression, signifying that the deity listens to the wishes of all types of people. Hase Kannon is unique in that it holds a staff made of tin in its right hand and a vase of lotus flowers in its left. In 1342, Ashikaga Takauji (1305-1358), the First Shogun of the Muromachi Period (1333-1573), had the statue gilded, and further in 1392, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408), the Third Shogun, had the halo added.

Right in front of the statue a smaller Kannon is enthroned. I was quite surprised to learn this particular piece is a life-size rendition: measuring as tall as 5-feet 11-inches. The main statue is so big that this one seemed like a statuette, but it's as tall as I am!



Next to the Kannon-do is the Amida-do hall, a building where a golden statue of Yakuyoke Amida Buddha, one of Kamakura's six principal statues of Amida, is enshrined. Commissioned in 1194 by Minamoto Yoritomo, the statue measures 2.8 meters (9.2 feet) in height (not including the halo). The Shoro Belfry stands adjacent to the Amida-do. And halfway down the steps to the lower level exist a small building where Fukuju Jizo, or "Happy" Jizo is enshrined. Here thousands of little Jizo stone statues stand in long rows, some wearing bibs or knitted caps and festooned with cute charms. Though these statues appear happy-go-lucky, this may be the saddest part of the entire temple. The statues are there to comfort the souls of those children who were miscarried, stillborn or aborted.



Other parts of Hase-dera include its vast gardens (which are fantastic to stroll by the way), the irregular shaped rotating sutra archive (the Kyozo) and the Denten-kutsu cave, which exists on the lower level of the temple. Found on the other side of Hojo-ike pond, the cave (and its accompanying hall) contains a small statue of Benzaiten with eight arms. According to legend, Kukai (monk, scholar, poet, and artist, founder of the Shingon or "True Word" school of Buddhism) carved it himself while in seclusion. Inside the cave you'll find an image of Benzaiten and 16 children chiseled out of the rock walls. Benzaiten is the goddess of knowledge, art and beauty (especially music) and is sometimes associated with the sea. She is the only female among the Seven Lucky Gods of Japan.

Did You Know?

The other six *Shichi Fukujin* (七福神) are: *Hotei*, the fat and happy god of abundance and good wealth; *Jurojin*, the god of longevity; *Fukurokuju*, the god of happiness, wealth and longevity; *Bishamonten*, god of warriors; *Daikokuten*, god of wealth, commerce and trade; and *Ebisu*, god of merchants.



* * *

And that's all the time I have for Kamakura today, regrettably. Hase-dera will be closing its doors shortly so it is best I finish up my Coca-Cola and snack, bid neko-san sayonara, make my way toward the front of the temple, and find the nearest bus stop. It should be a relatively short ride back to Kamakura-eki then an hour or so train ride back to Tokyo. I believe I'm going to have to switch trains in either Ofuna or Yokohama but we'll see when I get there!

Tomorrow it's definitely Nikko, so I think when I get back to Tokyo it's straight to Homeikan. Ja, ne!

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 栃木県 {Kanto / Tochigi}



「Mizaru, Kikazaru & Iwazaru」

september 12, 2007



Mizaru, Kikazaru & Iwazaru may not be words you'll immediately recognize upon hearing them, but it may come as a surprise to know that you are quite familiar with their meaning, even if you've never heard the names in their native Japanese; they are the Three Wise Monkeys (三匹の猿; *sanbiki no saru*, or *sanzaru*) and together they represent a pictorial depiction of the proverbial principle: "See no Evil, Hear no Evil, Speak no Evil". There's Mizaru (見猿), covering his eyes, who sees no evil; Kikazaru (聞か猿), covering his ears, who hears no evil; and Iwazaru (言わ猿), covering his mouth, who speaks no evil.

And I had a chance to meet these famous monkeys at Toshogu in Nikko today!

One question that might immediately come to mind is: why monkeys? The key lies in the kanji that represents the meaning "monkey" in Japanese: 猿. You see, *-zaru*, an archaic negative verb conjugation, is pronounced the same as *zaru*, the vocalized form of *saru* (猿), "monkey", so the saying can also be interpreted as the names of three monkeys and thus is a play-on-words. Sometimes a fourth monkey is illustrated, named Shizaru (し猿) – covering his crotch, symbolizing the principle "Do no Evil" – yet rarely is he included in the axiom. But more on the monkeys and Toshogu in a little bit.

When I last left everyone, I was finishing up a snack and a well-deserved drink at Hase-dera, overlooking beautiful Sagami Bay in the city of Kamakura located some 50 kilometers (31 miles) south-west of Tokyo in Kanagawa prefecture. Today you've caught me on the return trip from Nikko, a city approximately 140 kilometers (87 miles) north of Tokyo in the mountains of Tochigi prefecture, having just finished my exploits there for the day.



Nikko

Nikko (日光市) is an interesting city in that it has very little historical context on its own. It was never on the front lines in any war, was never involved in the political strife that constantly affected the nation, nor was the city in anyway notable for anything... until Tokugawa Ieyasu and his grandson Tokugawa Iemitsu built their mausoleum's here in the 1600s. Be that as it may, Nikko traces its roots to the establishment of Rinno-ji in 766 followed by the temple of Chuzen-ji in 784. The village of Nikko developed around these temples and remained a quiet and secluded village until the Tokugawa's came. Roads were built for better access then and later, during the Meiji era, the railways came. Nikko developed as a mountain resort (it's quite scenic here) and has become particularly popular among foreign visitors to Japan.

It was so popular with me that I must confess I seriously contemplated for more than an hour whether or not to find a hostel and stay the night! Rather, logic won out and I am, of course, on my way back to Tokyo... much the same way in which I arrived: under the cover of rain.

The weather, much like it was yesterday, was overcast and wet thanks in large part to the repeat of harsh storms overnight. The biggest difference from yesterday morning, however, was that it didn't stop. The rains kept coming, lifting just long enough for me to leave Homeikan and walk the distance between it and the Maranouchi line's Hongo San-chome station. But it was just rain so I went for it.

Most of Nikko's historical attractions are part of a small cluster just on the other side of Daiya River, located about 10-minutes away by bus (or 30 minutes or so away on foot) from either of the train's terminal stations. That's right; in Nikko there are two competing train lines servicing the city: JR and Tobu. Either one will get you from Tokyo to here in a couple of hours; however, it does come at a cost. Since I had a JR Rail Pass taking the JR train was my only real option (and, if you remember, the reason I swapped Nikko for Kamakura yesterday). Therefore, just as arranged, I took JR Shinkansen Tsubasa #103 out to Utsunomiya at 7:16am then caught the JR Nikko line after about a 20 minute wait, arriving at the end of the line – JR Nikko station – just a little after 9:00am.

After purchasing an umbrella at the Tobu Nikko station I hopped the bus out to the shrine area and began the day.

There are hundreds of structures that make up what is called the Sannai area, arranged in clusters of cryptomeria trees. Scores have been designated as National Treasures, dozens more Important Cultural Properties. By the looks of the map it is one huge mass, but you'll actually find four distinct precincts here: Toshogu, Futarasan-jinga, and Taiyun-in Mausoleum – all Shinto-based shrines – and Rinno-ji, a Buddhist temple. Collectively they're known as the Nisha-ichiji: two shrines and a temple (this adds up when you exclude Taiyun-in, which is administered by Rinno-ji).



Rinno-ji

After stepping off the bus at the foot of the hill you'll find yourself on Omotesando, the front approach to the complex. Unlike the Omotesando of Tokyo – a neighborhood avenue lined with shops and bustling with pedestrians – all you'll find here is a graveled pathway... and tourists. Rinno-ji (輪王寺), the first part of the complex you'll come across, lies along the Omotesando, but Omotesando isn't the approach for the temple; it's actually for Toshogu (which I'll get to in a minute). Rinno-ji is a compound of fifteen Buddhist temple buildings constructed around the year 766 by monks looking for a quiet retreat from which to study. Since Nikko was relatively isolated at that time retreating here made perfect sense. Believe it or not, though, Rinno-ji is not the name of the temple, but is a generic name given to Buddhist temples throughout Nikko. The Imperial Court bestowed the name Mangan-ji in 810; however, the name doesn't seem to have stuck.

Did You Know?

Omotesando isn't just a name of a street, a neighborhood or a subway stop. It actually serves as a descriptive: Omote (表) means "front" and Sando (参道) approach. When you blend them together you get "frontal approach". The term is generally used to refer to the approach to a shrine or temple, which is why the pathway here is referred to as Omotesando (and consequently, why the avenue in Tokyo is similarly named. The Omotesando in Tokyo is the frontal approach to Meiji-jingu).



There are a number of smaller points of interest here, including the **Shoro** (the Bell Tower); the **Honbo Omotemon**, the temple's front gate (also known as Kuromon, or "Black Gate" because it's lacquered in black all over); **Sorinto Tower**, a 13.2 meter high stylized copper structure used to mark the storage of Holy Buddhist Scriptures (there are approximately 1000 volumes of sutra stored under the tower); the **Kannon-do**, the Buddha hall enshrining Kanzeon Bosatsu; and the traditional pond and gardens you would expect to find at a Buddhist temple.

The most interesting feature of Rinno-ji in my opinion is the Hondo, also known as the Sanbutsu-do, or Three Buddhas Hall. At 26.6 meters high, 32.7 meters wide and 25.2 meters deep, it's the largest building of its kind in Nikko and houses three unique statues of Buddha – Bato Kannon, Amida Nyorai and Senju Kannon. Although Amida Nyorai and Senju-Kannon (the Kannon with a thousand arms) are traditionally depicted, Bato Kannon (whom I've not seen before) is a Kannon with a horse's head. Each sits eight meters high and is coated in gold leaf.

But it was just a warm-up of what was to come.



Tosho-gu (日光東照宮)

Tosho-gu shrine, built in 1617 as the mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, was once a rather simple and austere place of pilgrimage. Later, during the reign of the third Shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, the shrine was vastly enlarged and highly ornamented into the form we see today. Skills of the highest level available at the time were applied to the architectural decoration of the shrine – noted in its abundance of carvings and unique pigmentation – creating a unique resting place from which to venerate the man who helped bring Japan through a rather tough time.

The approach to Toshogu, the before-mentioned Omotesando, is a 300-metered graveled walkway that does more than just take you to the shrine's front gate. This advancing pathway prepares you, as the victory, for the journey you're about to take in reverence to the founding father of the Tokugawa Bakufu. Toshogu is that captivating and to say I was taken in by its lavishness would be an understatement. You'll find the shrine divided into three distinct sections (each requiring a separate ticket); these are: the Inner Shrine, which includes the Okushina (where the Tomb of Ieyasu and the Sleeping Cat carving are located) and the Honsha (which includes the Haiden, Honden, Karamon, and more); the Outer Shrine (which includes the Sacred Warehouses, the Three Wise Monkeys, and the Yomeimon), and the Main Approach (which takes you under the shrine's famed stone gate, past its uniquely constructed five-storied pagoda, right to the Nio-mon, Toshogu's front gate).



The Main Approach



Besides stone steps, the first thing to catch your eye as you approach is the stone torii. **Ishidorii** has remained in its original form since its construction in 1618. The torii gate, which is 9.2 m tall and 13.2 m wide, is made out of 15 blocks of stone, instead of wood, which is the material usually used for torii. The Ishidorii has a unique structure well designed to resist earthquakes; the primary top rail and the secondary top rail, called Kasagi and Shimaki, are hollowed in order to minimize the weight and a pair of grafted stone columns are set firmly to support them. The stone is said to be granite from Fukuoka, a prefecture in the extreme south-western end of the country, making it a rather well-traveled gate. As one of the three best stone gates in Japan (the other two are located at Yasaka-jinja in Kyoto and

Hachimangu shrine in Kamakura) you'll find the gate was dedicated by Kuroda Nagamasa (a daimyo of Japan who once served under Tokugawa Ieyasu in battle), and that it's calligraphic inscription (affixed on the 6-foot by 3-foot frame at the top) was written by Emperor Go-Mizunoo, the 108th emperor of Japan.

Stone steps leading up to the Ishidorii employ a simple yet effective force-perspective method to bolster the stone gate's grand appearance: the width of each step narrows and the height of each step becomes lower and lower as one ascends.

Although there are just 10 steps here, the staircase looks higher and appears to go on further than it really does thanks to this trick. Mixed in the center of the 10th step is the **Terifuri-ishi**, or weather-forecasting stone. Here it is said the weather will turn sour when the contrast of color between brown and blue becomes strong.

Since it had been raining off-and-on this morning, the contrast was quite stark.

Lying just on the other side of the stone gate, off to the left, is the shrine's **Pagoda**. Tadakatsu Saki, the governor of Fukui prefecture (now called Obama prefecture), contributed the pagoda to the complex in 1650. Unfortunately his was lost to fire some 165 years later. Sakai's descendant rebuilt this 36 meter high pagoda in 1818 where it has remained undamaged (though not necessarily kept up) since. In order to make the tower stable enough to resist wind and earthquake forces, the center pillar is suspended on the fourth story and held 10 cm above the ground – not resting on a foundation stone – thereby functioning as a dynamic counterweight which maintains the structure's center of gravity. Carvings of animals on the first level feature the twelve signs of the Chinese Zodiac help make this pagoda an important cultural property.

Continuing further will put you at the **Omote-mon**, or front gate. Here four-meter high Nio guard the entrance to the shrine from either side of the gate, showcasing a unique blend of Shinto and Buddhist beliefs (the Nio are Deva Kings, guardians of Buddhism); therefore, the gate is also sometimes referred to as *Nio-mon*. Also adorning the gate are eighty some-odd wood carvings; images of Karajishi (Chinese lions), tapir, giraffes and tigers. One thing of note here is the second tiger from the right: it has a different pattern than the others. It has the circular rosettes of a leopard, which was considered to be the female tiger in Edo period Japan. It too is an important cultural property.



The Outer Shrine



Straight beyond the gate lie *Kamijinko*, *Nakajinko* and *Shimajinko* – the Upper, Middle and Lower **Sacred Warehouses** of Toshogu. Collectively they're known as the *Sanjinko* and on the inside they are exactly as advertised: they store approximately 1200 samurai uniforms and accoutrements as well as the necessary equipment for the *Yabusame* (horseback archers) used in the shrine's festival reenactments. Between them is the

Saijo, the sacred rest room, which has been prepared for Tokugawa Ieyasu's use in the afterlife.

Yes, it's a potty, and there are 9 lacquered toilets inside, all in a line, waiting to be used – not that anyone would think to do so. The Saijo, like the rest of the Sanjinko complex, is not open to the public so if you've got to go you have no choice but to hold it.

Though the warehouses (-*jinko*) are rather large and impressively constructed, it's the outsides of these buildings that command the most attention, as the canvas for two imaginary elephants (the *Souzounozou*), which you'll find on the largest warehouse building. They're highly noted for their ears and tails; they're quite different from what you'd expect. You see, the chief painter – Tanyu Kano (whose legendary art can be seen all across Kyoto) – had never seen a real elephant before!



Opposite the elephants is the Shinkyu, the **Sacred Stable**, home to the shrine's white horses. At first there's not much to catch the eye – it's a rather unremarkable building – but further scrutiny reveals one of Toshogu's most famous treasures: the **Three Wise Monkeys**. Having heard about the axiom from various sources throughout my life (and their depiction as monkeys), I was intrigued to discover that the origin of this depiction lay here in Japan. You'll find the carvings on the stable's crossbars, part of an eight panel story that expresses a philosophy of life in which "See no Evil, Hear no Evil, Speak no Evil" is but just one part.



The first panel, far left, depicts a mother monkey and child together. Note the mother monkey is looking toward the future while the child is looking back at the mother, fully trusting her guidance and wisdom.



The second panel is the famous "See no Evil, Hear no Evil, Speak no Evil", obviously showing us how we should live.

The third panel shows a growing child preparing for independence by learning what to forage.

The fourth depicts the child looking up at the sky full of ambition (the blue clouds here provide the metaphor for ambition).



The fifth shows the child interacting with others, possibly showcasing the fact that life comes to a crossroads.

The sixth, seventh, and eighth panels show our child falling in love, becoming engaged and lastly pregnant, bringing the story, and the cycle of life, full circle.



Other notables in this part of the shrine are: the **Kouyamaki**, a huge 3-meter diameter black pine tree said to have been planted by Iemitsu himself (making it over 300 years old); the **Omizu-ya**, the purification wash basin supported by twelve granite pillars and adorned with sculptures of flying winged dragons called Hiryu (believed to be guardians of water); the **Karadou-torii**, or bronze gate (the first bronze torii in Japan believed to have cost Iemitsu a fortune to build); a number of stone, iron and hanging **lanterns** (there are over 100 throughout the shrine), all important cultural properties; the free-standing **Korean Bell**, brought as a gift to celebrate the birth of Iemitsu's son (later 4th Shogun Ietsuna), known as "Mushikunino-kane" (Worm-Eaten Bell) for the hole in its top; and the **Shoro** and **Koro**, the belfry and

drum tower respectively (built in Buddhist style, they each stand 12.6 meters high and contain a number of sculptures apiece; the Shoro has 78 carvings of cranes, dragons and waves and the Koro has 38 carvings, including turtles and dragons), which magnificently frame the Yomeimon, the shrine's most famous gate.

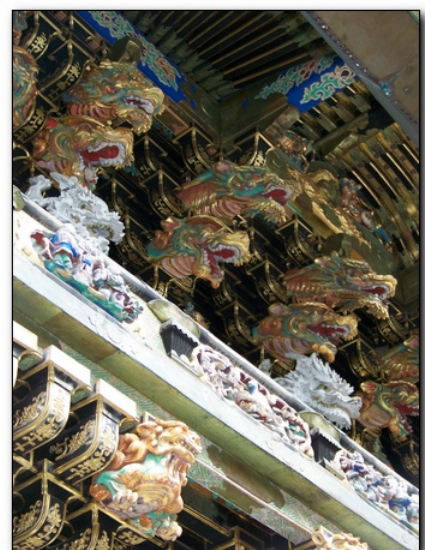
Besides the Three Monkeys, it's the gate that gets the most attention.



The **Yomeimon**, which takes its name from one of the twelve gates in Kyoto's Imperial Court, is not only an important cultural property but a national treasure outright and it's not hard to see why – it's stunning! Every centimeter of its 11.1 meter height 7 meter width and 4.4 meter depth is covered in wooden sculptures of all shapes, sizes, pigments and creatures. As an impressive array of ornamentation I am at a loss for words; they are simply remarkable. And there are over 500 different pieces just on this gate alone. You'll find dragons, iki (dragon-esque creatures), giraffe, lions, tapir, and even people – and that's just on the front side. The backside continues this motif in grand style adding even more imaginary and not-so-imaginary creatures to the mix.



Want more dragons? You'll find two – *Happouniramino-ryu* and *Shihouniramino-ryu* – painted by Kano Tanyu on the roof of the gate's passage. One is ascending to the sky whilst the other is descending to the ground. These dragons, plus the huge *Menukino-ryu* (-ryu, 竜, is the suffix to denote "dragon") on the white crossbar outside (said to have been carved out a single piece of wood) stand out amongst the crowd. Even amidst the colorful decorative pieces of the walls (the *kairo*) adjacent to the gate (with noted an exception or two – there are depictions of fowl and fauna aplenty).



The gate is truly a treasure-trove all onto its own – I could have spent all day staring at it and still wouldn't have been able to take it all in. In fact, it's that sentiment that's earned the gate its secondary name and meaning: *Higurashino-mon*, or "Twilight Gate", with a meaning something akin to one could look at it until sundown and not tire of seeing it. That's certainly the case here, but unfortunately I had to move further into the shrine.

The Inner Shrine (Honsha and Okushina)

Although the very heart of Tosho-gu is here – the *Haiden* and *Honden*, which are important in their own right – there are a number of treasures to be found throughout these courtyards, which are very much worth noting, such as:



The **Shinyosha**, the building seated left as you pass through Yomeimon, is where three portable shrines, 800 kg movable chairs for the Shogun and his party, are stored. The central chair with the Mitsuba-aoi crest of the Tokugawa family affixed, is for Ieyasu. The chair to the right is reserved for Toyotomi Hideyoshi, while the left chair is for Minamoto Yoritomo. A painting of angels in gleeful reverie appears on its ceiling, said to be the most beautiful angels in all of Japan.

The **Jumping Lion**, which can be found on the stone wall just behind the Yomeimon, is a statue carved to capture the image of a lion as if it had just jumped over the wall. Also called Tobikoeno-shishi, the hand-standing statue isn't just ornamental; it actually is keeping the wall standing!



The **Crying Dragon**, or Nakiryu. Found painted on the ceiling of the Honchi-do (also sometimes called the Yakushi-do); the dragon gets its name from the crying-like sound produced when clappers are struck beneath it. The Nakiryu was originally painted by Yasunobu Eishin but was later restored by Nanbu Katayama after it had burned down. The painting is 6 meters by 15 meters and crosses the 34 boards of Japanese cypress that were used to form the ceiling.

The **Karamon**, which functions as the shrine's inner gate, is a three-meter wide, two-meter deep lavishly decorated entryway for the Haiden and Honden complex reserved for use only by those considered upper-classmen during the Edo period. Even today the common Japanese cannot pass through this gate (never mind a gaijin like me); only by special invite can you gain access to the extravagantly decorated oratory. Though not nearly as impressive as its cousin, in my opinion, the Karamon does have its own singular charm. For instance it also makes extensive use of white on its pillars and employs dragons, lots of dragons, in its decorative elements.

Joining the dragons, further up, are reliefs depicting scenes from a Chinese legend (something called the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” and, on the other side, three of the seven lucky gods: Daikokuten, Juroujin, and Hotei. In all there are 611 exquisite carvings here.



And, the **Sukibei**, the roofed fence that surrounds the Haiden and Honden. Though not as decorated as the kairo which surrounds the inner shrine, it is replete with floral patterns on the latticed-windowed walls and open-works sculpture in the shapes of birds and flowers, which, added to the contrasting black, gold and various other colors within, make this 160 meter wall quite a sight.



In the eastern corridor, accessible from outside the main hall, is where you'll find *Nemurineko*, the **Sleeping Cat**, and the entrance to the Okushina area of the shrine. This most famous of Toshogu's carvings was crafted by Jingorou Hidari as a metaphor to the chaos that had predated the era of Tokugawa – the Warring States Period with its many failed attempts to unify Japan. With the cat here in peaceful slumber one can draw meaning to suggest that the chaos that had existed prior has now ended and peace flourishes across Japan. The paired carving of a sparrow on the reverse helps support this message – if the cat was awake it would no doubt eat the sparrow. Since the cat is asleep the two can coexist peacefully (the sparrows are not alarmed), just like the regions of Japan.



Just beyond the sleeping cat lie Sakashitamono, and the staircase which will transport you through a tangle of cryptomeria trees up to Iseyasu's final resting spot, a treasure tower set atop the temple's hill. **Sakashitamono**, like the other gates on property, is richly detailed and decorated. Constructed in 1636, Sakashitamono is also known as the "Non-Opening Gate" because, unlike today, it was only opened for the Shogun, no one else. The doors and transoms have exquisite carvings of peony blossoms and cranes;

the pillars and ceiling are decorated in grand metallic fittings covered in a Japanese form of cloisonné enameling called shippo-yaki; and as in classical times, its entirety is painted a stately, almost majestic white, a pigment made from sea-shells.

Two hundred meters and two-hundred-and-seven steps later and you've reached the pinnacle of Toshogu – its point and purpose – the mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Here too no expense in craftsmanship was spared. The **Sekisaku**, the stone fence along the right side of the ascending staircase, is made out of panels that were chiseled out of one large piece of stone. The **Torii**, the large gate that stands at the front of the approach, was constructed in 1650 completely out of copper (its pedestals contain beautiful carvings of *hasu*, lotus flowers, and the *mitsuba-aoi*, the family crest of Tokugawa).





The **Karamon**, the entrance to the Hoto, was also molded completely out of copper in 1650 (which also gave it the nickname *Inukimon*, or Molded Gate, because its pillars and beams were cast from one mold). Even the inner stone fence, which surrounds the Hoto, was chiseled out of the same huge piece of stone.

The soul may be enshrined in the Honden, but the body is enshrined here within the **Okusha-Hoto**, or treasure tower. This intricate marker stands five meters high and rests on a foundation of nine octagonal steps. A vase, an incense burner, and a candlestick in the form of a crane – gifts from the King of Korea – rest nearby, a somber reminder of the importance of Tokugawa Ieyasu.



As if right on cue, the skies opened up again as soon as I reached the Hoto...

And learned that I had promptly left the umbrella I purchased at the Tobu Nikko station on the bus. I didn't even have that umbrella five minutes! Go figure...

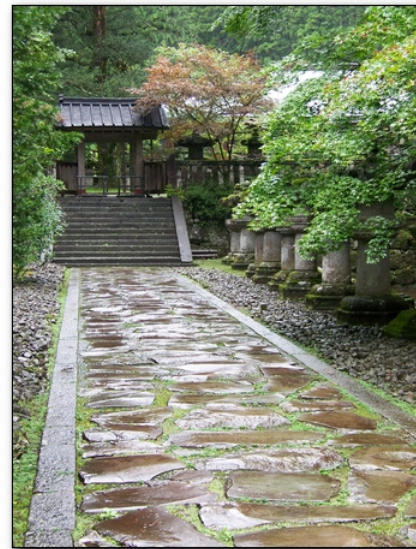


Futarasan-jinga



Just beyond the front gate of Tosho-gu is a stone-lantern lined path known as Kamishindo, and it takes pilgrims to nearby Futarasan-jinga (二荒山神社), a small Shinto shrine nuzzled next to the Taiun-in Mausoleum. Founded in 767 by Shodo Shonin (勝道上人), the shrine takes its name from nearby Mount Nantai (男体山), also called Futarasan (二荒山), and it enshrines three deities: Okuninushi, Tagorihime, and Ajisukitakahikone. Though it pre-dates any of the surrounding temples here in the Nikko UNESCO World Heritage Site, it received quite a bit of assistance from the Tokugawa family during their rule. In fact, the Honden was constructed in 1619 by Tokugawa Hidetada, the second shogun of the Tokugawa Bakufu.

Much of Futarasan-jinga reflects what you'd find at most Shinto shrines throughout Japan: worship halls, wash basins, gates, sake barrels, a spring, and the like, but after visiting the extravagantly decorated mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, I found much of Futarasan-jinga to be – how to put it delicately – rather quaint; therefore, I didn't spend as much time poking around the shrine as I thought I would. Saying that, though, doesn't mean it's without its treasures, quite far from it in fact. The shrine has a number of black pine trees that are over 1,000 years old (some of which legend suggests that infamous Priest Kukai planted in 820 when he visited Nikko), a spring with medicinal powers (said to help aid maladies of the eye), and an iron lantern scarred by the blades of countless guards spooked by its flicking flame.



The ghost lantern, known as *bake-doro*, is nothing more than a simple copper construct with the same kind of pattern and style found at various other shrines across Japan. What makes this particular lantern special, they say, is the strange way in which the fire moves when the oil inside is lit. By day nothing out of the ordinary occurs... but under the cover of darkness by night, it's said ghostly images appear within! It is designated an Important Cultural Property, scars and all. And possibly two of the swords used to mark up the lantern are those kept here, which are also designated Important Cultural Properties. Who knows!



Taiyu-in Reibyo



Futarasan-jinga's next-door neighbor – Taiyu-in Reibyo (大猷院霊廟) – is the last of the four distinct districts here and like Toshogu, it's a mausoleum. Taiyu is the posthumous name granted to Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third successive shogun of the Tokugawa Bakufu, and that would make Taiyu-in his final resting place.

Overseen by the fourth successive shogun, Tokugawa Ietsuna (Iemitsu's eldest son), construction techniques

mirrored those used for Toshogu without blatantly replicating the layout (though the mausoleum is similarly arranged), artistry or ornamentation. For this was Iemitsu's wish, to forever serve Ieyasu rather than eclipse him. As such Iemitsu's colors are darker – a gold, black, red motif – verses what you see at Toshogu, a much lighter white, gold, and black theme; a scheme evident from the moment you approach Taiyu-in's entrance, the Nio-mon gate.

Much of what you will see inside Taiun-in is a representation of Toshogu, though scaled-down. What I did find most impressive about Iemitsu's mausoleum were its attending gates.

First, the Omotemon — By the numbers this **Nio-mon** is 8.2 meters wide, 4.6 meters deep and rests on a series of eight wooden pillars, and though not as impressive as its cousin at Tosho-gu, this gate's enshrined Nio (仁王) stand out as more colorful, more accessible than what I found over there. And I actually learned something while I stood and admired these statues. Together they're called Kongorikishi (金剛力士) and are wrath-filled, muscular guardians of the Buddha himself.

On the right is Missahaku Kongo (密迹金剛), also known as Agyo (阿形), is a symbol of overt violence. He's always depicted wielding some sort of mallet and bares his teeth to those who would bring evil through the gate. He symbolizes overt violence, his mouth wide open in primal rage. On the left is Naraen Kongo (那羅延金剛), also known as Ungyo (吽形). He is depicted either bare-handed or wielding some kind of sword. He symbolizes latent strength, holding his mouth tightly shut. Interestingly enough, their mouths tell yet another story. The right Deva has his mouth open, pronouncing "A" (the first sound of Sanskrit), while the other has his mouth closed, pronouncing "UN" (the last sound). Thus is it thought that the Deva Kings represent the beginning and ending of things; the complete teachings of Buddha.



Secondly, the **Niten-mon** — Said to be the largest two-story gate in Nikko, it is 9.6 meters wide, 5.6 meters deep and enshrines no less than four gods. In fact the gate gets its name from the gods it enshrines. *Ni* is Japanese for "two" and *-ten* is the suffix for "god"; therefore, Niten-mon, the "Gate of Two Gods" (*-mon*, of course, is the suffix for "gate"). The two gods depicted on the front of the gate are Jikoku-ten and Koumoku-ten, two of the four Shitennou (the four Deva Kings). On the backside, you'll find the Japanese gods of Thunder and Wind, Raijin and Fujin respectively. These two gods give the gate its alternate name – *Kaminarimon*, or Thunder Gate!



Here it's easy to tell Raijin and Fujin apart – Raijin is red and Fujin is blue – but it should always be easy to tell them apart: Raijin carries a series of drums on his back, the drum stick in his hand, ready to pound out thunder; and Fujin shoulders a rather large bag, no doubt full of wind ready to be unleashed. Notice though that Raijin only has three fingers – these represent the past, present and future.

Fujin has four fingers, each for the cardinal directions: east, west, south and north. Both have two fingers apiece on their legs of all places, representing the sky and the ground accordingly.

The third gate is **Yashamon** — This 8.2 meter high, 5.5-meter deep gate gets its name from the Yasha in which it enshrines. Yasha are female beasts of burden and they guard each of the four cardinal directions. Color of each represents one of the four directions – North, South, East and West – though I’m not sure who is who. Having twisted and turned around in the shrine I’ve lost my sense of direction, though it’s not really important. Yashamon gate is lavishly decorated in an arabesque pattern arranged with the beautiful blossoms of peony. As expected this leads to a nick-name of Botanmon Gate; *Botan* (牡丹) is the Japanese word for Peony.



Fourth is the **Karamon** –
– Built in 1653, the
Karamon (唐門) serves



as the entrance portal to Taiyu-in’s Haiden. At 3 meters high and 1.8 meters wide, it is the smallest gate of this complex, but its design and ornamentation make it the most noble. The *kara*-(唐) in *karamon* denotes this gate is crafted in an elegant Chinese-style, characterized by the usage of *karakafu* (唐破風), an undulating bargeboard structure usually put in place to help strengthen the gate’s roof and gable. A number of exquisite carvings, such as a pair of cranes, a white dragon on golden waves, and other fauna and flora decorate the outside. On the inside, a pair of Zelkova-carved pillars, stand out.

And lastly, the **Kokamon** — This stately gate is constructed in a style reserved for emperors of Ming China, and it's like no other portal you'll find in the area—isn't it beautiful? Standing 2.2 meters high, 1.8 meters wide, the gate serves as the de-facto border between the Outer and Inner portions of the shrine (the Okunoin), where Tokugawa Iemitsu is interred. Beyond these closed gates (the public is prohibited to enter this sacred ground, unfortunately) lies Iemitsu's 3.6 meter high, 1.3 meter diameter copper Hoto; a 9 meter wide, 5.4 meter deep black-and-gold Haiden; and a 2 meter wide, 1.5 meter deep gate (*Inukimon*).



Of course, there are other structures of note here, including: the **Mizuya**, the shrine's wash basin (a twelve-granite pillared structure 6.3 meters high, 3.9 meters wide and 3 meter deep has an elaborately decorated copper-tiled roof.

Underneath is a fantastic painting of a dragon by Kano Yasunobu whose reflection upon the water below has given it a name – Mizukagaminoru: dragon in the water mirror); The **Shoro** and **Koro**, the belfry and drum house respectively (which are similar in style to those found at

Tosho-gu. Thirty-three pairs of lanterns made of stone and copper surround the towers, dedicated by the Daimyo of the age); and the Mizugaki, a roofed wall with open and latticed windows (the carvings of pine trees, bamboo, plum blossoms and the Hyakuma Hyakutai-no-Hato, one hundred forms of a dove, make this an exquisite sight).



Shinkyo: The Sacred Bridge

By now, of course, you've noticed that everything here in Nikko is prefixed with the label "sacred" – Sacred Shed, Sacred Chair, Sacred Rock, Sacred Tree, etc. – so it should come as no surprise to find that there's also a Sacred Bridge.

This bridge, Shinkyo (神橋), is the border between Central Nikko (the village) and the Sannai area (where the shrines and temples are located) and the beginnings of Nikko National Park. It spans 28 meters across, 7.4 meters wide and sits 10.6 meters above the surface of the water. Supported by stone pillars, its beautiful vermillion-and-black-lacquered arc rates as one of the three finest bridges in all of Japan, a distinction it shares together with Iwakuni's "Kintaikyo" and "Sarubashi" in Yamanashi Prefecture.



How the bridge came to be is filled with legend and traces its roots back to the beginning of Nikko itself. The bridge used to be known as *Yamasuge-no-Jabashi*, the "Bridge of Snakes with Wild Sedges", after an old legend concerning the priest Shodo Shonin, considered the founding father of much of the Sannai area of Nikko.



At seven years of age, a young Shoto received a striking vision: he was called upon to study Buddhism and to use that knowledge to civilize the area surrounding Mount Nantai (Nikko). In 766, thirty-one years later, Shoto (now a seasoned priest) together with ten of his disciples, found themselves on the banks of the Daiya River in Nikko, unable to cross due to the raging river's fervent flow. Just steps away from fulfilling his destiny, Shoto fell upon his knees and prayed. Suddenly, the god

of the river (Jinja-Daio), looking like a ten-foot tall devil with two serpents twisted about his right arm, appeared before them. "I will let you cross," he said, and released the vipers. The snakes, one red the other blue, intertwined to create a magnificent span across the swelled river. Thankful, Shoto and his party walked unscathed across the bridge, their path padded with sedge grass. By the time the last of Shoto's party reached the opposite shore, the Jinja-Daio and the bridge had already disappeared.



Shoto went on to found Hongu-jinja (later Futarasan-jinga, the current bridge's owner), Shihonryu-ji (later Rinno-ji) and many, many other shrines and temples in and around Nikko (he was quite prolific in this area I hear).

Consequently, during the Edo period, ordinary people were not allowed to cross the Daiya using Skinkyo; rather it was a privilege reserved only for the Emperor and certain members of the Shogunate. Today, however, ordinary

tourists (even gaijin like me) can cross the span – for ¥500 of course. And I would have... if there was anyone around to collect my toll.

Alas, the bridge was the last I saw of the Nisha-ichiji in Sannai before returning to the Tobu bus station...



Chuzenji Region

... but I didn't leave Nikko just then.

Exploring the Sannin region of Nikko took a lot less time than I had originally allotted for, even in the rain. So even with a walking excursion down to Shinkyo and back, I still had plenty of daylight left to see sights. The only problem was: where to and what?

After consulting the Tourist Guide to Nikko pamphlet I had picked up at the Tobu Nikko station, I settled upon Kegon Falls near Lake Chuzenji in what is known as the Chuzenji or Oku-Nikko (奥日光) region. Although the bus would take about an hour to get there from Tobu Nikko (and then take another 60 minutes to return), there would be just enough time to reach and explore the falls before the visitor's center closed for the day.

Like with many other snap decisions, traveling to Kegon Falls proved to be a great decision!

Reaching the Chuzenji Region requires a certain driving finesse – one I thankfully left to the talented bus driver – because to reach this area of the prefecture, one has to ascend the *Akechidaira* Plateau and the only way you can do that in a vehicle is to traverse the *Iroha-zaka*, Nikko's infamous winding roads. There are two twisted roads here – one for each direction (called First and Second) – and each has a count of anywhere between 30 and 48 curves. It's the number of curves that led to the roadway's nickname in fact, though that doesn't really help anyone navigate the slopes. To be honest, watching the bus cling to the sides was not a fun way to spend an hour...

Did You Know?

People of the 1300s began referring to the slope as *Iroha-zaka* because the number of curves equaled the number of letters in the alphabet at the time. Each curve is labeled using one of these letters, which can be seen on stone tablets to this day. 'I', 'ro' and 'ha' are an outdated version of our ABC's.



But the destination was well worth it – the views were majestic, the experience spectacular and the expectations shattered. Though the bus continued chugging on, a number of Japanese tourists and I departed at *Kegononotaki iriguchi*, the one and only stop near the falls. From here it was just a short walk down to the Visitors Complex, but before making the trek there I wanted to get a glimpse of the lake itself. I wasn't the only one. Besides the tourists the area surrounding the lake is also home to a number of free-roaming monkeys!

What makes Lake Chuzenji (中禅寺湖; *Chuzenji-ko*) special isn't just its picturesque qualities (although those don't hurt it any), it is how it got here in the first place and how long it's been here. Chuzenji-ko

was created some 20,000 years ago when an eruption sent lava surges from Nantai to the ravine at the mountain's basin, obstructing the Daiya into the form we see today. By the numbers: the lake has a surface area of 11.62 km² and a circumference of 25 km. The elevation at the surface is 1,269 m (4,124 ft), and the water reaches a depth of 163 m (508 ft). And it's the highest natural occurring lake of this size in all of Japan.

Kegon Falls (華嚴の滝; *Kegon-no-taki*) was created out of the same flow.

At 97 meters (326 feet) high and 7 meters wide, Kegon-no-taki is one of Japan's highest waterfalls; it ranks third. There are almost 2500 waterfalls in Japan with heights over 5 meters (2,488 to be exact) and the highest of them is *Ichi-no-Taki* in Wakayama Prefecture. *Ichi-no-Taki* is 133 meters high (436 feet) and 13 meters wide, dropping a ton of water over its crest every second. Fukuroda falls (袋田の滝) in Ibaragi prefecture ranks second at 120 meters high. And though Kegon is third, dropping over two tons of water per second, it is considered the most famous of not only those 48 here in Nikko, but of the thousands across Japan.





But Kegan falls is considered the most famous for more than just its looks.

Kegan Falls is also infamous for suicides. Misao Fujimura (1886 – May 22, 1903) a Japanese philosophy student and poet, is largely remembered due to his farewell poem directly on the trunk of a tree before committing suicide by jumping from the Kegan Falls. The story was soon sensationalized in contemporary newspapers, and was commented upon by the famed writer Natsume Soseki. This led the famed scenic falls to become a notorious spot for love-torn or otherwise desperate youngsters to take their lives.

Such tragic endings to have in such a beautiful place. About twelve smaller waterfalls are situated behind and to the sides of the Kegan, leaking water through the many, many cracks between the mountain and the lava flow that created the falls, which only adds to the visual. For ¥500 you can descend to a platform in the valley, which grants the ticket holder a one-of-a-kind view of the falls! I highly recommend it!

* * *

My time in Nikko came to an end following the visit to Kegan Falls. The hour bus-ride back down *Irohazaka* went without incident, and so far riding the rails back to Tokyo has also proven to be drama free. And mostly rain free from the looks of things, but it's getting dark now so I really can't tell. It doesn't really matter, though. As much as I enjoyed myself out at Kamakura (yesterday) and Nikko (today), I'm looking forward to going back home (to Homeikan) and getting a good night's sleep. For it's up-and-at-em early tomorrow morning to catch the 7:00am Hikari to Kyoto!

We should be pulling into Tokyo-eki shortly so I'll sign off here for now. Next time you'll hear from me I'll be at K's House in Kyoto!



Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 | 京都府 {Kansai / Kyoto}



「The Land of 1000 Kannon」

september 13, 2007

Oh my, that feels good! You don't realize how good a normal shower feels until you've gone without for 5 days...

Konbanwa (good evening), and hello from the hallowed halls of K's Backpacker House, Kyoto. It's a little bit after 8:00pm and, as the sun has long since disappeared behind one of the dozen mountains hugging the city, I've settled in for the night after what has been a rather long and busy day. I couldn't tell you how many kilometers I've walked since I arrived in Kyoto this morning, but my feet are screaming at me so I must assume it was way more than they anticipated on.

But it's been a great day. I've seen a number of cultural wonders today – the golden statues of Sanjusangendo, the lanterned approach of Choraku-ji, the tower of Gion at Dai-un-in, the mausoleum of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, wonderful maki-e at Kodai-ji, Geisha and Maiko along Ninenzaka, and the amazing views of the city from the noted deck of Kiyomizu-dera – all of which more than make up for any pain my poor feet may be feeling.

Of course, I've also seen the wonders of dormitories too.



< <http://kshouse.jp/kyoto-e/index.html> >

Check out the link above – it’s the official website of K’s Backpacker House, the hostel I’ll be staying at here in Kyoto. See the two girls at computers in the image at the top of the page? I’m currently seated in the one on the left, next to the tree. If you browse around the site you’ll get a little idea of where I’m staying and what it’s like here at K’s House. It’s nice; I like it here. Although I do prefer the solitude I had at Homeikan back in Tokyo, there’s nothing like bunking down with others and sharing in their travels, and I can only get that here. Dormitories are cheap, but you never really know what to expect (or who) when you’re assigned to one.

Case in point: earlier in the day, just after my arrival from Tokyo, I checked in and met my first group of roomies – a trio of girls from Ireland, and a young couple from Paris; I was the sixth. They’re the “first group” because, when I returned later, I was totally surprised to find three guys sleeping (ahem) in the buff in the girls’ place. So I must assume I have new roomies. I guess I’ll find out whether or not the French couple is still around when I go up for bed later on, but by the looks of things the guys don’t appear to be the social sort so I’ll probably never find out where they’re from. And why they’d be sleeping at this hour I cannot fathom, but there you have it.

I didn’t hang around to ask either: I grabbed my towel, a change of clothes, and had a wonderful hot shower. It’s my first real one in five days and what was not to love? The “Homeikan Cleaning Ritual” (a.k.a. full-body wipe-down procedure I described earlier), while effective, is just not the same. As it stands I already know more about them than I ever wanted.

Perhaps I should get on with discussing what I saw outside of K’s House today, rather than what I saw within...

Sanjusangendo (三十三間堂)

Just a half-mile’s walk from K’s House along Shichijo-dori, in the eastern part of the city, you’ll find a small temple affiliated with the Tendai school of Buddhism. Officially known as Rengeo-in (蓮華王院), or *Hall of the Lotus King*, the temple is more commonly known as Sanjusangen-do, *The Hall with Thirty-three Bays* (in Japanese, san-ju-san is 33; san = 3 and ju = 10). Though this name describes the architectural structure of the temple’s long main hall – at 120 meters (394 feet) in length, Sanjusangen-do is Japan’s longest wooden building – it’s what’s inside that sets Sanjusangen-do apart from all other nearby temples: this simple and austere structure is filled with no less than 1,001 statues of Kannon (観音), the Buddhist *Goddess of Mercy*, all beautifully carved from Japanese cypress and laden with gold leaf.

Did You Know?

The number 33 is sacred in Buddhism, for it is believed that Buddha saves mankind by disguising himself in 33 different forms. (Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra)



One of the more successful generals of the late Heian period, *Taira no Kiyomori* (平 清盛; 1118 – 1181; recall from the visit to Kamakura that he established the first samurai-dominated administrative government in the history of Japan), completed the temple under order of *Emperor Go-Shirakawa* in 1164 and dedicated it to *Sahasrabhuja-arya-avalokitesvara* or the “Thousand Armed Kannon”. The

statue of the main deity – standing at 131 inches high – was crafted in the 13th century by Tankei, a famous sculptor of the Kamakura Period. He crafted only 20 pairs of arms, though, but that’s okay because it’s said that each arm saves 25 worlds. This Kannon occupies the central focus of the dazzling display. These golden statues are what drew me to Sanjusangen-do and they’re quite an impressive sight.



Take off your shoes for a bit and venture inside the large pavilion. Within is an education in traditional building techniques. Sanjusangen-do, I’ve learned here, is an exquisite example of the “keshou-yaneura” construction method, prevalent since the Nara Period (710-794). This technique, which gives the appearance of an attic (yaneura), is attained through the use of the intricately placed beams and rafters you’ll see above you, strolling down the structure’s hallway. At the time of construction the interior of this hall was also beautifully decorated with a sea of colors and designs, though the wood’s natural color is what we mostly see today (a reconstruction of these striking designs is on display, however).



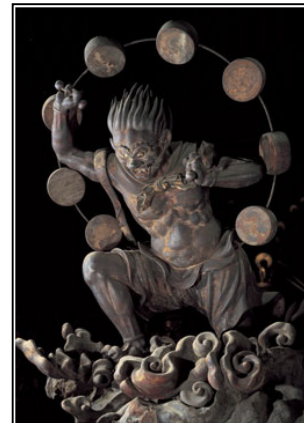
Though the paint has largely faded away to history, the glimmer of the multitude of gold-laden statues has not.



The principle image of Kannon is flanked on either side by 500 smaller statues in 10 rows and 50 columns; each stands about 66 inches high. Though each statue is quite similar in size and appearance with its neighbor, the facial traits of each are quite unique upon closer inspection. Only 156 of the statues are from the original temple – the original hall was destroyed by fire in 1249; the present structure dates from its rebuilding in 1266 (and it hasn't changed since) – the remaining 844 statues were re-constructed after by other equally as talented sculptors of the period (Koen, Ryuen, Shoen, Eien, Inkei, Insho, Inga and Gyokai). The central image spoken above (and pictured above-left) pre-dates the fire.

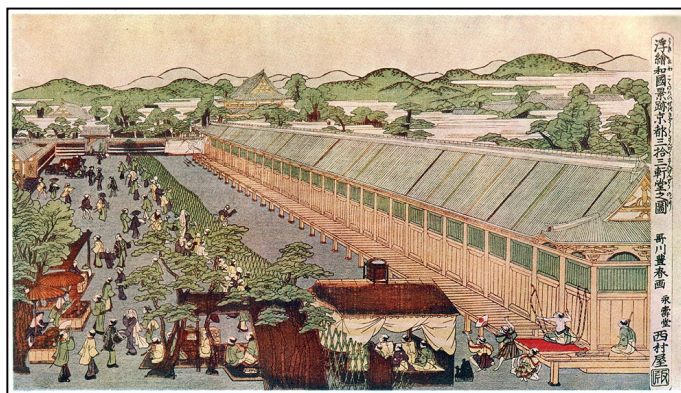


Twenty-eight very fierce-looking statues of Hindu gods are lined up in front of the Buddhist statues as guardian deities. Their names written in both Kanji and Romanized Sanskrit (such as Daibenkudoku-ten, Konpira, Kinnara, Toho-den, Birubakusha, Karura, Basu-sennin, Ashura, Magora, Sanji-taisho, Missha-kongo, and Naraen-kengo) let you know who they are if you're unfamiliar (though I can't say I am familiar I understand these are



gods or spirits of beauty, wisdom, prosperity, charity, strength and so on, who attend to Kannon and protect believers from unforeseen dangers). You'll even find representations of Fujin (left; the Japanese god of the wind) and Raijin (right; the god of thunder and storms), both from the vast mythology of the Japanese people.

Besides the statues, Sanjusangendo is also known for the Toshiya, an archery contest, which takes place behind the temple each January. The contest is said to have its beginnings in the late 16th century when, in 1606, a samurai named Asaoka Heibei is said to have shot 51 arrows in rapid succession down the length of the temple's hall.



Competitors came to challenge; the contest was born. Champions were honored with a certificate hung in the temple showing their name, age, the number of arrows fired, and the date of the competition. Although the contest fell out of favor at the beginning of the Meiji period, a ritual based on the Toshiya continues today. It is held on the second Sunday of January in conjunction with the temple's most important mass, the *Yanagi-no-Okaji* (柳枝のお加持), or *Rite of the Willow* (whereby worshipers are touched on the head with a branch from a sacred willow tree to cure and prevent maladies of the head), and Japan's *Seijin-no-Hi* (成人の日) celebrations, or *Coming of Age Day* (celebrating those who have reached 20 years old, the age of majority in Japan).

The hall and its statues are probably the most exciting part of visiting Sanjusangen-do today; however, the temple's grand entrance gate, its taiko-bei (earthen walls) and beautiful gardens make a pilgrimage here very worthwhile.



In search of Rokuharamitsu-ji

They say you never know when you'll make an impression upon people, and when I travel I attempt to at least behave like the locals. I try and not cause a fuss; I blend in and just go with the flow of things. While this may work in Seattle, Montreal, New York city and London ... it just doesn't quite work in Japan. The blending in part either way (though I didn't have too much trouble blending in with the students at Kamakura), but I can still make an impression. Apparently I did so attempting to purchase a guidebook on the temple and its treasures from the makeshift gift shop inside. Upon asking the shop keeper if she had any more of the English language guidebooks (asked culturally, of course, with a bow and in Nihongo), I was awarded with not only said guidebook, but a few "kawaii"s from a number of school girls nearby for my efforts.

Seems I made an impression on them. They thought I was cute!

I smiled, waived at them then took my leave and prepared to locate the next temple on my walk today: Rokuharamitsu-ji. Founded by the priest Kuya Shonin in 963, Rokuharamitsu sits at the edge of what was once Kyoto's largest graveyard, the Toribeno. As the original cremation grounds east of the city, it earned quite a gruesome reputation as being the crossroads of the mythological underworld. As I've learned today – in Japanese legend, souls wander throughout six realms of existence until they reach a state of enlightenment: the realm of hell, the realm of the hungry ghosts, the animal realm, the realm of titans, the human realm and the realm of the gods. Those who couldn't afford a proper burial (and thus attain enlightenment) were unceremoniously dumped here earning the crossroad the name of *Rokudo no Tsuji* – the "Crossroads of the Six Realms".



After Kuya Shonin's death in 972, the temple he left behind prospered under the care of his son, and the district gradually lost its gruesome reputation as the charnel ground of the poor and disadvantaged. It even became fashionable when the all-powerful Taira clan, headed by *Taira-no-Tadamori* (1096-1153), established its military headquarters here in the middle of the twelfth century. At the peak of its splendor, the temple complex covered the entire area from the Kamo River to the Toribe Mountains, and over five thousand people lived within its walls. Unfortunately, when the Minamoto clan destroyed the Taira in 1183 after one of the most epic struggles in Japanese history (known as the before mentioned "Genpei War"), the whole district was destroyed by fire.

The temple was eventually rebuilt but the fortunes of Rokuharamitsu-ji went up and down along with the prevailing political, military and religious winners and losers and never grew very large again, remaining just a neighborhood-sized temple. Toyotomi Hideyoshi extensively renovated the temple after the Onin Wars of early 17th century; however, when the Meiji Restoration implemented its State Shinto nationalist agenda, the temple was attacked and ruined. It remained in a ruinous state until the thousand-year anniversary of the temples founding, 1969.

The temple itself belongs to the Chizen branch of the Shingon sect of Buddhism and its principal image is an eleven-faced Kannon much like the one at Sanjusangen-do. It would have been nice to see; however, after an hour spent walking around housing developments, under an expressway, down alleys and through side-streets – completely lost by the way – by the time I actually did come upon the entrance gate to the temple I was quite disinterested. And out of time. If I was to be assured to see Kiyomizu-dera before it closed I had to press on.

Dai-un-in and Choraku-ji

But getting lost and walking hundreds of meters around side streets was the only constant for much of the afternoon.

After giving up on Rokuharamitsu-ji, I meandered a kilometer or more through even more side-streets to the nearest subway station (Gojo, on the Keihan main line) and took it to my next destination – the Higashiyama area of Kyoto (which included Gion, the Geisha district). There, hopefully, awaited Kodai-ji, a temple built in memory of the before-mentioned Toyotomi Hideyoshi – but I had problems locating it too.

My first mistake, really, was entering the area through Yasaka-jinja and Maruyama Park (円山公園; *Maruyama koen*); it put me quite a distance from Kodai-ji, but it seemed the only logical way to get there using Keihan main line. My second mistake, then, was in not knowing where the temple was located, exactly, before I set off on foot here. Though the area was replete with Japanese and gaijin tourists alike, I imagine I was quite a sight walking back, forth, back again, forth again, and again and again and again across the same part of roadway all the while getting more and more frustrated (and thirsty).

But all was not lost, as sometimes the best discoveries come when one gets lost. Had I not gotten myself misplaced I would never have seen Dai-un-in (and its lovely tower), Choraku-ji (and its eye-catching brick-and-lantern approach), or realized I was walking on one of the most historical paths in all of Kyoto: Nene's road, a flagstone paved walkway named after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's widow *Kita-no-Mandokoro*, also known as "Nene". Toyotomi Hideyoshi, consequently, was one of Japan's greatest historical figures, one I was able to learn about last time I visited Japan (and one I'd learn more about if I could find Kodai-ji).



First, **Choraku-ji** (長楽寺), with its magnificent approach, was founded at the behest of Emperor Kammu in 805 and enjoyed a respectful existence by the emperors of that age. According to displays present on site, the temple used to belong to the Tendai sect throughout the Heian Period (794-1191); however, at the beginning of the Kamakura period (1192-1333), a man named Ryukan-risshi, who admired the founder of the Jodo sect, left nearby Hiei

Mountain to stay at this temple. He found the Senshubu Nenbutsu Chorakuji School here and the temple transferred allegiances. Later, during the Muromachi period (1338-1573), the temple was transferred to a caretaker who belonged to the Jishu sect.

Fortunately, or unfortunately however one may see it, the temple's fortunes became mixed in with the Taira clan (the Heike), which I've been learning quite a bit about as late – we heard of them extensively at Kamakura the other day, today at Sanjusangen-do and again at Rokuharamitsu-ji. The temple took in Kenreimonin, the mother of the Emperor Antoku and a daughter of Taira no Kiyomori, following the defeat and offered a tempered kind of protection.

And some of that history happened in places I visited so far today.





Near to Choraku-ji is the Higashi Otani Mausoleum (東大谷 (大谷祖廟)), a huge cemetery and the present-day Toribeno discussed from Rokuharamitsu-ji. It looms over Higashiyama like a hawk and makes quite a solemn place to visit. I didn't linger long, but its approach is equally picturesque. A gigantic statue watches over the cemetery; it is Guanyin, known as the Ryozen Kannon (霊山観音), and is a war memorial commemorating the Japanese who died

in World War II. It was dedicated in 1955.

Secondly, **Dai-un-in** (大雲院), and its interesting looking tower, was established under the patronage of Emperor Ogimachi in 1587 by priest Teian for the purpose of holding the mass for the death of Lord Nobunaga Oda and his son, Nobutada. A few years later Hideyoshi Toyotomi moved the temple here and since then it had continued to be prosperous, until the middle of the Edo era when the entire structure was burned to the ground. It was later reconstructed in the Meiji era and reformed into modern fire-and-quake-proof buildings in 1954. On the 8th of April in 1973, on the anniversary of Buddha's birth, the temple was moved into the new site with Gion-kaku, the tower.



The tower itself is said to resemble the yamaboko floats used in Gion Matsuri, one of the most important festivals in Japan, as it is a purification ritual (goryo-e) used to appease the gods thought to cause fire, floods and earthquakes. As such the pagoda is adorned with wonderful paintings, but photography was not allowed so I was unable to capture them. But the view from the tower is a great one – all of Higashiyama opens up to you!



Kodai-ji (高台寺), the Maki-e Temple

Dai-un-in's tower, jetting just enough above the mass of humanity in Higashiyama, allowed me to pinpoint Kodai-ji, located, believe it or not, just down the street. My third mistake, then (if we're keeping count), was not going down Nene's road far enough.

Through a set of trees and up a small flight of narrow steps, Kodai-ji beckoned.



Formally known as Kodaijushozenji, establishment occurred in 1605 by *Kita-no-Mandokoro* in memory of her late husband, Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Tokugawa Ieyasu, Hideyoshi's chief vassal and later Shogun of Japan, extensively financed the temple's construction and the result is a temple renowned for its beautiful design and exquisite craftsmanship. But why name it Kodai-ji? *Kita-no-Mandokoro*

(known more familiarly as "Nene") was awarded the highest rank of nobility by Emperor Goyozai in 1588, and in 1603, was accorded the honorary name Kodai-in; it is from the latter that Kodai-ji's name derives. Following the custom among noble ladies of her time, she became a Buddhist nun after the death of her husband and adopted the religious name Kogetsu-ni. She died at the age of 76 on September 6, 1624 and is enshrined here with her husband.

The shrine is one of a number of objects designated as Important Cultural Assets the temple possesses. Among these others are the Main Gate and the Spirit Hall, noted for its use of *maki-e* (a Japanese style of lacquer that is sprinkled with gold or silver powder), a number of paintings, including one of Hideyoshi, as well as textiles, and a bronze bell with an inscription dating it to 1606. Kodai-ji was ravaged by a series of fires after 1789, and all that survive of its original buildings are the Kaisan-do (Founder's Hall), Otama-ya (Sanctuary), Kasa-tei (Teahouse), Shigure-tei (Teahouse), Omotetmon (Gate to Sanctuary) and Kangetsu-dai (Moon Viewing Pavilion). Fortunately these remain in an excellent state of preservation and most of them you can see with your very own eyes.



Visitors enter Kodai-ji through its main hall (or Hojo), which was originally adorned in lacquer and gold, but was rebuilt in a more modest style after it burned down in 1912.



The building is surrounded on two sides by the temple's famous gardens, redesigned by the renowned landscape architect Kobori Ensyu (1579-1647) from an older garden located on this site. Famous for its excellent stone layout, the rock garden is one of the finest gardens of its period and consists of raked gravel meant to represent the ocean. In the other, an impressive Tsukiyama style garden awaits featuring a pond,

man-made hills, decorative rocks and beautiful pine and maple trees. In the north section of the pond you'll find an island in the form of a turtle and a group of stones arranged to represent a crane in the south. Directly in the middle is the Kaisan-do, the memorial hall in which Nene would pray for Hideyoshi.

The Kaisan-do is dedicated to the memory of Kodai-ji's founding priest. His statue is located on the platform in the innermost section of the building. The two statues on either side of the steps are of Kinoshita Iesada and Unsho-in, *Kita-no-Mandokoro's* elder brother and his wife, respectively. The large outer section of the Kaisan-do is known as the Rai-do, or worship hall. The ceiling in the front part of the building is unique; it originally belonged to Toyotomi Hideyoshi's private sailing ship! The colored ceiling to the center of the building was constructed of materials from *Kita-no-Mandokoro's* court carriage.



The Moon Viewing Pavilion, or Kangetsu-dai, is the small four-pillared structure sitting in front of the Kaisan-do. It was designed to allow viewing of the moon's reflection on the surface of the pond underneath it. A special feature of its architecture is its Chinese-style cypress bark roof with three gables. On the far side of the garden is where you'll find the Otama-ya, the Sanctuary. This is the special memorial hall enshrining Toyotomi Hideyoshi and *Kita-no-Mandokoro*. Their wooden images can be seen in the small shrine at the rear of the hall – Hideyoshi to the right and *Kita-no-Mandokoro* to the left. The small shrine, and the dais upon which it stands, is decorated with a special lacquer work technique incorporating designs in gold. This is known as Kodai-ji lacquer and it represents the finest in Momoyama Period (1568-1600) lacquer art.



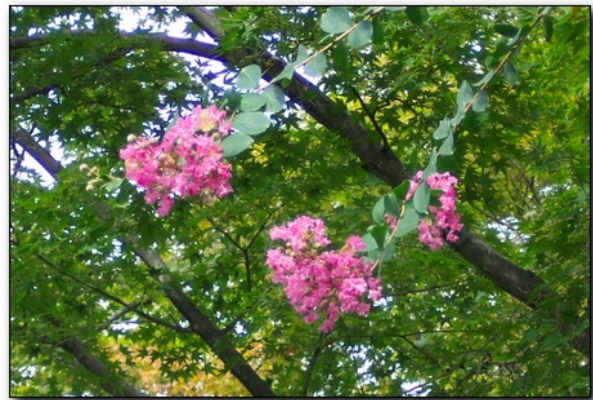
A wonderful corridor connects the Kaisen-do to the sanctuary (the Otama-ya) is known as the Reclining Dragon Corridor (or “Garyoro”) for its resemblance to the back of a reclining dragon. And further up the hill are two teahouses designed by Sen-no-Rikyu, the famous 16th century tea master. They were moved to their present location from Fushimi Castle in southern Kyoto. The Kasa-tei formally known as the

Anka-kutsu, derives its name from its unique ceiling construction, in which bamboo and logs are interwoven in a radiating pattern remarkably similar to a Japanese traditional umbrella. It is connected to the Shigure-tei by an outside corridor. Once you walk through the bamboo grove, you’ve made your exit and have seen Kodai-ji.

I hear the gardens are lit up during special illumination shows in the spring and autumn seasons. Since I know I’ll be back next year in November, I hope I get a chance to see these gardens all lit up – I bet it’ll be amazing!

Kiyomizu-dera (清水寺)

Believe it or not, despite the navigational problems I had up to this point today, there was plenty of time to not only see Kiyomizu-dera, but also properly take it in. But also unlike Dai-un-in, Choraku-ji and to a degree Kodai-ji, Kiyomizu-dera was inundated with people. Lots of them. From tourists of all denominations to bus loads of school children, the temple was crawling with humanity. And that made visiting somewhat of a challenge, but it didn’t sour my mood.



The approach to Kiyomizu-dera is taking steps through history. Here you’re along what is called Sannen-zaka (三年坂) and Ninen-zaka (二年坂), slopes upon which you’ll find traditional Kyoto-style houses lined on both sides of the flagstone that paves your way and staircases leading you upward in “sukiya” style, making you truly feel you’ve stepped into another era. And if the ambiance of the narrow alleys didn’t project that feeling upon you, perhaps the Geisha, Geiko, and Maiko you might spot along these roads will.

They did for me!



For those unacquainted, Geisha (芸者) are female professional entertainers whose knowledge of traditional arts, skill at verbal repartee, and ability to keep a secret win them the respect, and sometimes love, of their well-heeled and often influential male clients. The profession, dating from the 17th century, is in decline and blurred by the activities of so-called *onsen geisha* and others who offer more

sexual than classical arts, or who are more glorified waitresses than Geisha. Kyoto's proud geisha prefer the term *geiko* (芸子; "Child of the Arts") and less polished *geiko* are called *maiko* (舞子 or 舞妓; apprentices), and are a Kyoto only phenomenon. The city has four-to-five enclaves of geisha, in areas referred to as hanamachi (花街; literally "flower towns"): Gion-kobu, *Gion Higashi*, Pontocho (centers around one long, narrow, cobbled alley running from Shijo-dōri to Sanjo-dōri, one block west of the Kamo River), Miyagawa-cho (just south of Shijō along the Kamo River), and Kamishichi-ken (in northwest Kyoto).

Though it is rare you'll see geisha perform outside of private functions, you might get a chance to see and interact with one (albeit briefly) along this historical path. And it even delights the Japanese to do so!

Oh, but do take care on the steps. Local lore maintains that a slip here will bring two or three years' bad luck, and that simply wouldn't do.

After quite a long walk through this part of town (easily a kilometer), and interacting with the two young *maiko* in full regalia walking to their destination, I finally came upon Kiyomizu-dera – the pure water temple – and the fulfillment of a mission. Not only the culmination of today's mission, of course, but one from my previous visit to Kyoto. Kiyomizu-dera had been one of those locations I sought in 2004 but could not make due to time constraints. But now I too was finally making the pilgrimage, planning for it from day one.





For over 1,000 years, visitors and pilgrims alike have climbed the cobbled streets of Higashiyama to Kiyomizu-dera, which stands prominently on a steep hillside with fine views of the city, to pray to the temple's bodhisattva Kannon, the 11-faced goddess of mercy, and to drink from its sacred well-spring. Built around 790, the original temple, which today belongs to the Kita-Hosso sect, predates the founding of Kyoto by at least six years. Although Kiyomizu-dera honors the popular Kannon, to whom women pray for an easy childbirth, it has become over time a sort of everyman's temple. You'll see evidence of this throughout the grounds, from the stacked rows of little Jizo Bosatsu statues (representing the god of travel and children) to the many koma-inu (mythical guard dragon-dogs) marking the pathways. The current structure dates from

1633, thanks in large part to a restoration ordered by Tokugawa Iemitsu following the reunification; the militant monks of the Hiei-zan destroyed the original temple during one of their periodic bloody purges.

You enter the grounds through the Nio-mon or "Gate of the Deva Kings". These Deva Kings, along with the koma-inu, protect the temple from any evil that may attempt to slip by. Continuing past the Nio-mon and up a second flight of steps, and you'll come to the Sai-mon (the west gate). Two more Deva Kings stand guard at this eight-pillared gate (depicted with mouths open or closed accordingly). To the gate's left is the Shoro (or bell tower), built in 1596, and behind the Sai-mon rises Sanju-no-to (the three-storied pagoda). This brilliant vermillion three-tiered pagoda, rebuilt in 1633, is the tallest such in Japan; Chinese influences in the forms of colorful flowers, esoteric Buddhist symbols and ornate metalwork are contained upon it.



After the pagoda you'll find the Kyodo, or sutra hall, where the sacred scriptures are kept safe. If you take a moment to peek in you'll find the hall contains images of the Buddhist deities of virtue (Monju) and wisdom (Fugen), along with a ceiling painting of a coiled dragon. To the right of the Kyodo is Zuigu-do (or Jishin-in, the Temple of Mercy), the favorite place of worship for Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Rebuilt in 1728, the temple still contains some of his belongings.

The Founder's hall comes next after that, in honor of the temple's legendary founder (a man known as Tamuramaro), and another gate: Todoroki-mon. This gate, which also contains another pair of Deva Kings to protect the inner temple, is known as "the gate resounding to the call of the Buddha's teachings" – though I am not sure why. In front of

the gate is a hand-and-mouth washing station (with which you're to use to cleanse yourself before entering) with a spigot in the shape of a dragon. From the spigot comes what the Japanese refer to as "Owl Water". Though at first I wasn't sure why it was called that; however, there is an owl design on the base of the trough which explains why. (It's a cool trough though!)



bodhisattvas were not created early on), today your sins might all be forgiven if you notice the prints. And taking a closer look I also noticed several symbols imbedded within: a pair of fish, a conch shell, and a floral crest!

The main hall's veranda, where you'll find the Kannon (though one can only view this particular image every 33 years – one year for every vow Kannon took to save mankind), is supported by 139 wooden pillars (each 49 feet high), juts out over the hillside. An amazing feature of this veranda is that there is not a single nail used in the entire structure. The stage affords visitors a nice view of the numerous cherry and maple trees of the gardens, to the south you can see the Koyasu-no-to (the easy child-birth pagoda), which contains an image of Koyasu Kannon, and looking down, you'll find the sacred springs (the Otowa-no-taki; or "Sound of Feathers" waterfall). It's quite a viewpoint and very popular with the Japanese. Getting a spot to take in the magnificent view is not easy, and I had to fight my way in between Japanese and gaijin alike. But it was well worth it.

Below the veranda is the before-mentioned *Sound of Feathers* waterfall, believed to be the original source of *kiyomizu*, or pure water. Drinking the water from the three streams is said to confer wisdom, health and longevity; however, some Japanese believe you mustn't drink from all three (re: don't cross the streams), chose only two. If you are greedy and drink from all three, you invite misfortune upon yourself and possibly your family.

Further on, and to the left of this middle gate, is the Asakura-do. This hall, which includes an eleven-faced Kannon flanked by images of Kishamon-ten (the god of wealth) and Jizu (the guardian of children), has a unique feature: outside you'll find a set of foot prints said to belong to Buddha himself. Though this was sufficient reminder of Buddha's way in the early years of the religion (images of Buddha or the

Did You Know?

The popular expression "to jump off the stage at Kiyomizu" is the Japanese equivalent of the English expression "to take the plunge." This refers to an Edo period tradition that held if one were to survive the 13 meter jump from the veranda one's wish would be granted. Two hundred and thirty-four jumps were recorded in the Edo period and, of those, 85.4% survived. Though the practice is now prohibited. (Wikipedia)

We wouldn't want that... so I drank only from two as advised, though I cannot say the same for many of the kids who queued up and went by along with me. They were slurping up whatever they could find, whenever they could find it! And in the process they created quite a mess.



On the north side of the main hall is a small shrine called Jishu-jinja, dedicated to Okuni Nushi-no-mikoto, a land-ruling deity also considered to be a powerful matchmaker. Many young people visit the shrine to seek help in finding their life partners, though it is immensely popular with women. The goal is to walk a straight line between two stones, placed approximately 18 meters (59 feet) apart, with your eyes closed. If you're able to accomplish the goal without assistance then love is due to materialize for you. Should you need someone to guide you from one stone to the other, then that is interpreted to mean an intermediary will be needed in your love life as well. So choose wisely! (I already have love in my life so I didn't feel compelled to walk the line, as it were.)





There are more than 30 structures situated on approximately 130,000 square meters of land that make up Kiyomizu-dera, so please take your time to poke around. There are plenty of sub-structures and minor shrines and temples to make spending a couple of hours here a worthwhile proposition. Unfortunately, I had just enough time left to take in a final stroll through the temple's garden (which, by the way, is meant to suggest the

southern paradise of the bodhisattva Kannon) before the sun set and the temple's doors closed, ending one fantastic day of exploration in Japan's western capital.



* * *

... then I made my way back here.

You know, I'm still shocked that one of the markers used to find K's House is now gone, kaput, painted over. Which one? The crazy duck! The duck was an advertisement painted on the side of a building that attempted to capture your attention and advise that there was a video store around the corner.

What the duck and a video store had in common I did not know, but I used this mural to mark the point where I had to turn left, then look for the illuminated HONDA sign hanging in the alleyway. Should I find that sign I knew this is the side-street I needed to turn down to find K's House. Thankfully the route sign hanging above the side-street and the HONDA sign were both still there – but even if they weren't I'm sure I would have found my way back home.



And now that I'm here I'm going to finish up my egg sandwich, chips and "Thin Pocky" I procured from the waku-waku mart from down the block and relax as I'm a little sore, then run up to bed. I have an early morning ahead of me. Besides, I'm running out of 100yen coins so I can't feed the computer meter anymore tonight.

Tomorrow should go about as the schedule says – Nanzenji, Tetsugaku-no-michi, Kinkaku-ji, Ryoan-ji, Ninna-ji and Daitoku-ji. And we'll see what other adventures await. It's been such an exciting trip so far that I've already used up all the batteries I brought for my camera and I didn't count on *not* finding that type of battery here in Japan, silly me. Thankfully I had my older camera as backup so I wasn't totally without today; however, tomorrow I'd like to be able to use my new camera so I think I'll have to rush down to Kyoto-eki to see about batteries in the morning. I'm sure they have them down there... somewhere.

Until then...

Ja ne!

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

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「吾唯足知; *Learning only to be Contented*」

september 14, 2007

Looks like I won't make Daitoku-ji after all today...

Good Afternoon, weary travelers, or as I should say: konbanwa. I've taken a moment here at Ninna-ji to rest up, if you'll allow it, before taking the long bus ride back to Kyoto-eki and eventually return to K's Backpacker House, my home here in Kyoto.

It's been a trying day, but even with the setbacks from earlier this morning, it's not been a terrible one. Just one pressed for time. Alas now, with the sun slipping further and further beyond view, I can take a moment to breathe and soak in the serene nature of this side of Kyoto – the western side.



Known as Rakusai, the western side of Kyoto has been praised by Japanese poets and artists since ancient times, and is home to such famous temples as Kinkaku-ji, Ryoan-ji, and Myoshin-ji, to name just a few. There are so many temples and shrines in the area that date back to the beginning of Kyoto's founding, a traveler such as myself would wear himself out before visiting even a fraction of them. Thankfully I had already visited some the last time I was in Kyoto, though missing out on

explorations further west of Ryoan-ji. Ninna-ji, the only new shrine/temple on my list today (besides Daitoku-ji), turned out to be a pleasant surprise – but I'll get my investigation of the temple and its grounds in a little while. I'm getting ahead of myself here; I always do that...

Learning to be Contented

Yesterday, you might recall, I mentioned having to switch over to my older 3.1 mega-pixel camera because the lithium battery I purchased at Tokyo DisneySEA and the two I brought with me from the United States for the main camera had run out of juice. After failing to find replacements before setting off yesterday I had little choice but to rise even earlier to look for these items around Kyoto-eki, the main station.

Although doing so wasn't part of the overall plan, as it turned out I was also running out of usable cash; therefore, a visit to the Post Office was necessary to make an ATM cash withdrawal (the cash goes *woosh!*). While making the withdrawal (they'd changed the machines!), I spotted an advertisement for a huge electronics store nearby – problem solved, ne? Nearby it was; however, its doors did not open for business until later that morning.

Much later; 10:00am later.

By the time I arrived at the store's front doors, there was a two hour wait ahead of me.

Chikuso...what to do?!

The entire point of today's schedule was to re-visit previously explored temples and shrines in the hopes of using my new camera for exciting new pictures. And then, of course, have enough time left-over to visit a couple of new ones along the way. What would be the point, then, if I had to use the same camera I used in 2004? Although it worked quite well on the temples and shrines visited yesterday, I did not wish a repeat performance.



So I waited. Two. Grueling. Hours.

Waited on the hope that this store had the batteries I needed.

They did.

As soon as the doors swooshed open I funneled in with the rest of the Japanese (by then a rather sizeable line formed; we had to queue up outside) and immediately found the battery department; upstairs, in the rear. A few moments later I purchased three of the little buggers relatively cheaply (they're not AA's but for the type of battery these are the price was manageable) and made my way back to the streets and onto my next problem: how to proceed from here. You see, while I was able to remedy the battery problem it came at a terrible cost to "shrine time". And since I was down at Kyoto-eki I couldn't follow my planned schedule of using the Keihan railway and the Kyoto metro – the quickest way to get to Nanzen-ji.

I would just have to make the best of it from Kyoto-eki.

Now off-schedule at least two hours, I attempted to reach Nanzen-ji via bus #5 from the Kyoto bus station just outside Kyoto-eki. A half-hour ride in frustration later I entered the neighborhood, got off the bus and promptly... got lost. (*Chikuso!!*) Much like with trying to find Rokuharamitsu yesterday, I wandered the streets in this part of Kyoto for a better part of an hour. You see, the bus stop I was supposed to get off at – Nanzenji Eikando-michi – was not announced (nor was it a big eye-catcher, so it was easy to pass by), by the time I noticed, however, we were coming upon the next stop. Like any good traveler would do: I got off at the next one (Higashi Tenno-cho) and backtracked. This turned out to be the wrong thing to do as the road split into two separate directions between the two bus stops... and I took an unfortunate turn... for the worse. (*Chikuso!!*) Needless to say, after much cursing under my breath and even more frustration, I gave up on my search for Nanzen-ji. Rather, I made my way to the nearest bus stop, re-boarded bus #5 and sulked – traffic was backing up. Before long, though, I was pulling upon the shores of the terminus of the Tetsugaku-no-michi at Ginkaku-ji.



Ginkaku-ji, or the Silver Pavilion, is not quite aptly named but it would have been had it been completed as planned; it would have been clad in silver leaf. It has a long, rich history, which I had the privilege of entertaining on my last visit. Suffice it to say, Ginkaku-ji is the common name for the temple but its real name is Tozan Jisho-ji (慈照寺) and it, like Nanzen-ji, belongs to the Rinzai Zen sect of Buddhism. The grounds were a villa for Ashikaga Yoshimasa (足利 義政; 1436-1490), the 8th Ashikaga Shogun and grandson of Ashikaga Yohimitsu, the constructor of Kinkaku-ji (the Golden Pavilion – the next location on my schedule), who eventually did retire here. Construction is said to have begun in 1460, but postponed during the Onin Wars and eventually resumed in 1480 before finally being established in

1482. During this time the grounds were known as Higashiyamadono, or the Palace of the Eastern Mountains, and flourished to house up to 12 sub-temples and buildings, an expansive garden, and sand sculpture.

Having visited Ginkaku-ji on my last expedition and discussed its treasures in detail at that time I'll refrain from doing so again. Be that as it may, it was quite uplifting to explore the grounds and gardens of Ginkaku-ji once more – I got some great pictures too – even if I had to do so quickly. From the Silver Pavilion I boarded bus #204, rode west, and 30 minutes later was at the steps of its sister temple: Kinkaku-ji, the Temple of the Golden Pavilion.

Properly called Rokuon-ji, (Deer Park Temple) after the owner's posthumous name, this estate was built in the 1220s as a comfortable villa (Kitayamadai) for Saionji Kitsune (1178-1244), an aristocrat. The estate eventually withered and became the property of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (足利 義満; 1358-1408), the third shogun of the Ashikaga Shogunate. He turned this villa into a retirement estate he named Kitayamadono in 1398. Only after his death did the site become a Buddhist temple for the Rinzai sect, which is now dedicated to the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, Kannon (観音). Kinkaku-ji is known as the Golden Pavilion for good reason: it's covered in gold leaf. (Which, consequently, you can buy in a small vial at the pavilion's gift shop – I did not, but, now I wish I had if for nothing more than the conversation value).



By the time I reached the shores of Kinkaku's mirror pond the skies became a darkened grey and my mood was beginning to sour right along with it. In order to make Ryoan-ji and the later two stops I had to step lively through Kinkaku's beautiful gardens and grounds (much like with Ginkaku-ji), and that made me none too happy. But also when I last visited Kinkaku-ji the sun was shining brightly, reflecting off the golden cover of the temple's Kannon-den, and I waxed poetic: Kinkaku was singing. Today, unfortunately, there was no song; for there was no sun. Although the omission doesn't take away from the grandeur that is Kinkaku-ji, it does mute some of its more magical qualities. And what grandeur I could afford Kinkaku-ji would give way to Murphy's supposed law: whatever can go wrong, will. I fled Kinkaku-ji aboard bus #59 bound for Ryoan-ji next – in the rain.

Ryoan-ji, the Temple of the Peaceful Dragon, like so many in Kyoto, is recognized as a World Heritage site for its temple buildings and spectacular gardens, but what drew me here was not the promise of beautiful foliage, but its rock garden – a world renowned example of Zen creationism. The garden's simple design was laid out at the end of the 15th century, measuring 25-meters east to west and 10-meters south to north, consisting of only white sand and fifteen rocks. The rocks are arranged in groups of five, two, three, two and three and only 14 of the 15 can be seen from any one vantage point. It is said that only when you attain spiritual enlightenment, as a result of deep Zen meditation, can you see the last invisible stone.

Though I tried for the sake of finding contentment in my situation (of a rushed schedule), attaining enlightenment eluded me. The Rock Garden is just one part of Ryoan-ji's charm. The vegetative gardens are simply magnificent (though better viewed when it's not raining) and then there's Ryoan-ji's Tsukubai, a water basin used to cleanse the mouth and hands before partaking in tea. There's an inscription hidden in its construct – 吾唯足知 – ware tada taru wo shiru – which translates to “I learn only to be contented”, a very important concept in Zen Philosophy.



It's a concept I tried to keep in mind as the day wore on, without too much success. Although it did stop raining and the sun came out whilst I sat contemplating life, so perhaps I did attain enlightenment after all!

Ninna-ji (仁和寺), the Cherry Blossom Temple

By the time the rains welled dry and the sun peeked out behind the heaven's cloak of clouds, and I was done trying to see all fifteen rocks sitting at one angle, I had just enough time to make it down and visit a temple with a unique and rich story – Ninna-ji.



It's history can be traced back to the early part of the Heian Period (794 AD – 1185 AD), where here, along the foothills to the west of Kyoto, in a district extending from Kitano and Hirano to Saga, many nobles of the imperial court built their summer villas. As they were also followers of the newly flourishing Amida sect of Buddhism, a plea for a place of worship was also called for. Therefore, in 886 AD, an edict from then reigning Emperor Koko (光孝天皇; the 58th) decreed that the Imperial family's summer home in this district, at

the southern edge of the mountain, would be converted to enshrine the triad of the Amida Buddha and two attendant deities. Construction began on what Koko called his *Nishiyama Goganji* temple, but he never lived to see its completion. After the emperor's death, his successor and son – Emperor Uda (宇多天皇; the 59th) – took up the challenge and oversaw the completion of the temple's Main Hall, naming it “Ninna” after the regnal year – or era – of his late father's reign.

The Ninna era spanned the years from February 885 (when Kōkō-tennō assumed the throne) until April 889 (not long after Ninna-ji was dedicated). The inauguration of the new temple brought forth a brand new era in the Japanese political sphere. After April 889, the Ninna era gave way to Kanpyō (寛平), which later gave way to Shōtai (昌泰) in 897/898 following the ascension of Emperor Daigo (醍醐天皇; the 60th) to the throne.

This particular changeover added greatly to Ninna-ji's status because, in 897, Uda abdicated in favor of his eldest son – Prince Atushito (who would later become known as Emperor Daigo) – and entered the priesthood. He would later succeed and become *Monzeki* (門跡; Abbot or Head Priest), making Ninna-ji his home. From then on it became practice for reigning Emperors to have a son serve as the head priest here whenever there was a vacancy, a tradition ending with the 30th Monzeki (Junnin Hosshinno) following the Meiji Restoration in 1869 – so almost seven hundred years. This custom established Ninna-ji as one of the country's pre-eminent temples and helped bring together the energies of various sects of Buddhism across Japan. Today Ninna-ji is headquarters of the Omuro School of the Shingon Sect, one of the remaining major schools of Buddhist thought.

Did You Know?

When a highly significant event happens, such as a change in leadership, the *era* generally changes name to mark the occasion. The Japanese call it “year name” (年号, *nengō*). Prior to the eighth century the system was rather irregular; however, by the beginning of the eighth century, sequential era names developed without too much interruption and are still in use today. In fact, today Japan is in the Heisei era, and we are in the 19th year of that era (denoted H19 or Heisei 19). This specific era started in 1989 following the death of Emperor Hirohito (裕仁; the 124th). His son, Akihito, succeeded his father and ascended the throne thus beginning the new era.



Although its legend is well honored, Ninna-ji has not escaped the wrath of time. Many of the buildings and subordinate temples were lost to flame during the power struggle that became known as the Onin War. Though I cannot claim to understand all the intricacies of this particular civil strife, I can say: the war, so named after the *nengo* for which the period was in, started by the growing need for the selection of an heir to the Ashikaga shogunate, the ruling party of Japan at the time. Yoshimasa, the Shogun, originally had no children of his own; therefore, in order to successfully continue the reign of the Ashikaga, he had to select one posthaste. He initially persuaded his younger brother, Ashikaga Yoshimi, to abandon his monastic life and join the political court, and groomed him for the position accordingly. But an unexpected turn of events would up-end those plans a year later: in 1465, Yoshimasa's wife bore him a son thereby securing his own blood-heir and when favor transitioned, the house split loyalties.

Though this is an over-simplification of the events leading up to, during, and the cause of the conflict (many other factors and players were involved), both factions ultimately claimed the title of Shogun and civil war ensued.

The result was a protracted battle (1467-1477) that virtually destroyed Kyoto and many of its historical relics. Furthermore, the family strife later destabilized all of Japan and plunged the country into what is known as the *Sengoku jidai* (戦国時代; “Warring States Period”). This period was a long, drawn-out scuffle for domination by individual *daimyo*, resulting in a mass power-struggle between the various houses to rule the whole of Japan. It was during this period though that there would emerge three individuals who would unite Japan under one rule once again; they were Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu. The later established the last Shogunate before the Meiji Restoration, the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1600, and succeeded in re-unifying Japan.

Many of the oldest buildings standing today date from the restoration in the 17th century, carried out with the sponsorship of Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate. These include the five-story pagoda and a plantation of the temple’s famous grove of short, late-blooming Omuro-Zakura cherry trees (hence its nickname as the Cherry Blossom Temple). The temple itself features some beautifully painted screen walls, a striking walled garden, and a number of other wonderfully constructed structures.

Ninna-ji: a storied history indeed and a temple worth exploring, even on borrowed time.

The imposing Nio-mon (二王門; Deva Kings’ Gate) is one of these structures, and it serves as the entryway to Ninna-ji temple. Entrance is gained through one of its three “tiny” doors. Step lively through because the name of the gate refers to the warrior-like guardian statues enshrined to the immediate left and right of the entryway: the nio. Remember, they’re Kongorikishi (Ungyo; 吽形) and Shukongoshin (Agyo; 阿形), and they were constructed in the Kanei through the Shohou eras (roughly 1624 – 1648, in the early part of the Edo Period) by Tokugawa Iemitsu. Designated as an important cultural property, the structure is especially imposing, and along with the Sanmon Gate at Nanzenji Temple and the Sanmon Gate at Chion-in Temple in the Gion district, is considered to be one of the three most famous gates in all of Kyoto.



As soon as step through you’re instantly taken into a new realm of existence; from the Nio-mon through to a second gate (referred to as Chu-mon), an extended graveled path branches out in more than one immediate direction. And when I say long, I mean lengthy; the grounds, though sparse, appear to be quite massive now, deceptively hidden behind the walls of the complex. Exploring this temple would be a challenge in the remaining time I had before its closure (approximately thirty minutes) but I would see the majority of the grounds before the priests locked the doors for the night!

Honbo-Omolemon gate stands immediately to the left as the entrance to the Goten and Gardens of Ninna-ji. The Goten (御殿), as the High Priest's Private Palace area, is the most elegant part of the grounds, consisting of the main priest's residence (Honbo), the Shinden Palace (宸殿; Gosho), Koku Library (Kokushoin) and Haku Library (Hakushoin). Throughout the Goten you'll bear witness to a number of magnificent door and panel paintings (of trees and other natural wonders) by court artist Zaizen Hara; high-quality architecture; and, to the north and south of the Gosho, Ninna-ji's two lovely and equally renowned gardens.



On the south side, the Sakon-no-Sakura cherry on the right and the Ukon-no-Tachibana wild orange tree on the left overlook the Shinden. This, the Nantei (South) garden of rock and sand, also contains the wonderfully thatched Chokushimon gate and its walls. The walls on both sides of the Chokushimon Gate are made of earth, topped with tiles. The openwork screens above the sliding partitions between the rooms in the structure, and the interior roofs and the lintels of it are covered with delicate carvings of Chinese phoenixes and peony arabesques (easier to see from the outside rather than from within the Goten), which make the doorway a national treasure. To the north, there is the Hokutei Garden (North Garden), a purported famous scenic spot in Kyoto. The gardens here are constructed in the Chisenshiki Style, which employs water as one of its natural elements. And amongst the grasses you'll find a fantastic pond and pleasantly arranged foliage replete with stone bridges and a lovely waterfall – sit and contemplate a while, it's such a beautiful spot!

Did You Know?

The North garden was made by Muso Soseki, the most famous monk of his time. As a follower of the Rinzaï sect, he was a teacher, a calligraphist, poet and garden designer. If you look hard enough you'll find that, in the center of the North garden, is the letter “shin” – 心 – which translates to “heart”.



Don't linger too long, however. Also counted amongst the Goten's treasures (and one of Ninna-ji's beloved assets) is the image of Shakyamuni as a young prince, carved in 1252. Shakyamuni, legend dictates, was the very first Buddha image to arrive in Japan – around the year 538 – a gift from a Korean king. During the Asuka period, Shakuson (to which the Japanese refer) became one of the principal objects of reverence, so do look for it whilst you're here.

Beyond the Goten, and after passing through the smaller Chu-mon gate (中門 ; Central Gate), is where the Five-Storied Pagoda, the Kondo, the Mie-do and the Honden of Kusho-myojin reside.

Due to the limited amount of time I had left to explore the rest of the grounds, I could only breeze past many of these structures, but in doing so no way diminishes their cultural integrity nor my interest in them (I just simply didn't have time!)

There's the Kondo (金堂; Main Hall), which is listed as a National Treasure of Japan and where the Amida triads were once enshrined (not open to guests today); the Kannon-do (観音堂), where Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas, is enshrined (also not open to the public); the Kyozo (経蔵), a repository for Issai-kyo scripture; a small structure where the water diety Mizukake Fudo-son is enshrined; the Mieido (御影堂; Founder's Hall), where the holy image of the founder of Shingon Buddhism, Kobo-Daishi Kukai (弘法大師空海), is enshrined (check out the lovely golden flowers outside); and the Kusho Myojin (九所明神), a sacred place where nine gods are enshrined to protect Ninna-ji temple.

And although you couldn't see too much beyond the gates, the reds and blues here were simply stunning!





Last, but certainly not least, the Goju-no-to (五重塔 ; Five-storey Pagoda), an important cultural property. It was built in 1644 and is one of the oldest surviving structures at the complex, having withstood the carnage of the Onin Wars. The Pagoda, which stands about 36 meters tall, represents the technical peak of construction skills of the Kanei Period (1624-1644), so I've read. The tiles of each story are almost the same size, a characteristic of the Edo Period, and it is considered a perfect example of pagodas built in the 'modern' period of Japan (Edo Period). Apart from this pagoda, there are 5 other five-storied pagodas in Kyoto that have been designated as national treasures or important cultural properties: the pagodas at To-ji Temple, the pagoda at Daigo-ji Temple and the pagoda at Hoka-ji Temple (the Yasaka Pagoda).

Ninna-ji's pagoda is in very good company!

* * *

Though at the end of my journey today, and it was quite rewarding, I'm still quite disappointed that I wasn't able to see Nanzen-ji as scheduled – I really enjoyed exploring its grounds last time I was here and had hoped to experience them again today – as such I will attempt to work it into my schedule at a later date, but, that may mean cutting out something else I'd rather not. So, we shall see. I have a couple of long train rides coming up these next two days (Himeji and Hiroshima), so I'll have quite enough time to read up on my schedule and make changes then.



So, as for now I best be off. I've been watching the monks buttoning up the temple for the last few minutes and they've just now closed the huge doors of the temple's main gate. I'm not quite sure what this means for me – will I get in trouble? But one thing is for certain: I better go now before I'm permanently locked in for the night! Getting back should be easy enough: I'll re-board bus 26 – its stop is just nearby – and maybe hit up the Waku-Waku for a little dinner before retiring for the evening. It's going to be another early one. Tomorrow I'm off to Himeji and Osaka (for Cirque du Soleil's Dralion), which, of course, means another early day.

Until next time; Ja ne!

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 | 大阪府 {Kansai / Osaka}



Madhijerío: East Meets West

september 15, 2007

From the moment the rumor surfaced about a potential Japanese tour for Cirque du Soleil's Dralion in 2007, I waited with baited breath for the official announcements to be made. The reason for such a high level of anticipation on my part was simple: since I would be returning to Japan on a 14-day excursion that September, I stood a good chance of being onshore for some part of Dralion's tour - if the fates aligned properly, that is. Given that I had not yet experienced Cirque du Soleil in Asia - with the super new big tops, the interesting and new souvenirs, and famously demure audiences - having opportunity to do so was quite exciting, even if it was just a possibility. When the itineraries were finally published I had my answer: Dralion would be in Osaka from July 25th through October 14th - exactly in the middle of my trip and right about the time I would be in that region of Kansai. After perusing the show schedule in Osaka, I was able to settle on a date and time: Saturday at 4:00pm!

By the time Saturday, September 15, 2007 came round I had already spent seven days exploring the Japanese countryside. The first four were spent in the Kanto region - walking around Tokyo, Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo DisneySEA, and the magnificent cities of Nikko and Kamakura. I was now spending my remaining days in Kansai, discovering (or rediscovering as it were) the cities of Kyoto, Osaka, Miyajima, and Hiroshima, with all their historical richness. In fact, before immersing myself in Cirque du Soleil and exploring the wonderful castle (read: Grand Chapiteau) that was built for it, I spent the day exploring another magnificent castle: Himeji-jo.



Himeji, the White Egret Castle

To understand Japan you must first understand its vast history, its culture and its people. Since one could speak volumes about Japan for over a hundred years and still not cover all the many facets of Nippon, I will say for the sake of brevity that the Japanese are a very orderly and reserved people. Be that as it may, the pop-culture there is on a much higher and stranger plane than ours, and travels faster than the speed of light at all times. Technology is very much a part of everyday life to the point where it almost crosses over into the fanciful. The Shinkansen, the fastest of trains in all of Japan for example, will take you from one end of the country to the other – from Hachinohe in the north to Hakata in the south – in as little as 8.5 hours (with just one stop!). The trip from the “Eastern Capital” to the “Western Capital” – Tokyo to Kyoto – takes just under 2.5 hours. From Kyoto to Osaka – less than 20 minutes. Out to Himeji, the wonderful place to learn a little about Japan’s vast history that I mentioned, takes a little over an hour from Kyoto. That’s fast!



Thoughts about the ticket issue crossed my mind as I embarked for Himeji to explore its famous castle and possibly traverse the mountainside of Mount Shosha to Engyo-ji, a famous temple complex, that particular morning.

It crossed my mind because purchasing a ticket to Dralion in Osaka was precarious at best; it couldn't be done through regular channels online and by phone

would prove to be nothing more than an exercise being lost in translation. The only avenue offered to those in the English-speaking world (or for anyone outside of Japan for that matter) was purchase-by-email directly with Cirque du Soleil.

But it too proved to be questionable: a ticket, while reserved in your name, was not actually paid for - it was on hold. You could not ask for a specific seat, although a certain section might be guaranteed. And the ticket could not be paid for via credit card; it must be purchased directly in cash 1 hour (no later) from the start of the show directly from the box office. With all that uncertainty, one has to wonder: what would happen if they lost your reservation, or if you arrived a few minutes late? Your seat was not guaranteed, was the answer, and it would most likely be sold to those waiting in reserve.

So, I had to make sure I didn't spend too much time out at Himeji or I would miss my window of opportunity, and then where would I be?





Daybreak came at 6:30am granting just enough time to make a cash withdrawal at the Kyoto post office (for the ticket), grab a quick breakfast at the nearby Lawson (a convenience store), and rush to Hikari #391 bound for Himeji, a city about 45-minutes away on one of Japan's high-speed bullet trains, the Shinkansen. With the day's itinerary in hand, I stepped from the bowls of the beast Hikari and onto the streets of Himeji – I already could see the castle in the distance. A short walk up the

main street and I was on its doorstep, and what a magnificent castle it was!

Himeji-jo, or Himeji Castle, has escaped the ravages of war, earthquakes and fire-bombings to become the finest surviving example of early 17th century Japanese castle architecture, and as such is one of only four castles given the distinction of being a national treasure of Japan (the other three are Inuyama-jo (Near Nagoya), Hikone-jo (Near Kyoto), and Matsumoto-jo (Near Nagano). It's also one of the largest: The Himeji Castle complex has a circumferential footprint of 4,200 meters (2.53 miles) covering a large area of 233 hectares (2,330,000 square-meters or 576 acres) of land. From east-to-west, the complex has a length of 950 to 1,600 m (3,117 to 5,249 ft), and from north to south, it has a length of 900 to 1,700 m (2,953 to 5,577 ft).

While its origin is far earlier, the current compound dates to 1609 and comprises 83 interlocking buildings, with highly developed systems of offense and ingenious protection devices from the beginning of the Shogun period, but still remains quite stately to ensure a sense of opulence for its day.

Himeji castle's construction dates back to 1333, when a fort was constructed on Himeyama hill by Akamatsu Norimura, the ruler of the ancient Harima Province. In 1346, his son Sadonori demolished the fort and built Himeyama Castle in its place. In 1545, the Kuroda clan was stationed here by order the the Koderu clan, and feudal ruler Kuroda Shigetaka remodeled the castle into Himeji Castle, completing the work in 1561. In 1580, Kuroda Yoshitaka presented the castle to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and in 1581 Hideyoshi significantly remodeled the castle, building a three-story castle keep with an area of about 55 square-meters (592 square-feet).



Following the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 (popularly known as the "Battle for the Sundered Realm"; it was a decisive battle which cleared the path to the Shogunate for Tokugawa Ieyasu), Tokugawa Ieyasu granted Himeji Castle to his son-in-law, Ikeda Terumasa, as a reward for his help in battle. Ikeda demolished the three-story keep that had been created by Hideyoshi, and completely rebuilt and expanded the castle from 1601 to 1609, adding three moats and transforming it into the castle complex that is seen today. It is estimated that at least 30 million workers were involved throughout the course of this project, and the expenditure of labor involved in this expansion is estimated to have totaled 25 million man-days. Ikeda died in 1613, passing the castle to his son, who also died three years later. In 1617, Honda Tadamasu and his family inherited the castle. Honda added several buildings to the castle complex, including a special tower for his daughter-in-law, Princess Sen.



Many Japanese castles were destroyed by the conclusion of the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Himeji-jo was abandoned in 1871 and some of the castle's corridors and gates were demolished to make room for Japanese army barracks. And although bombed twice during World War II, the famous keep was spared; it's even survived a hellacious earthquake!



The confusing maze of paths that lead up to the main keep are one of Himeji's most famous defensive elements, and one I find most interesting. The 20 gates, 3 baileys (called *maru*) and outer walls (some reaching 1000 meters long!) are organized such to force an approaching opponent's army into a spiral pattern around the castle's keep, with many dead ends along the way for them to frustrate into.

In conjunction with other defensive systems (like the *ishi-otoshi*, or rock chutes – specially designed and angled windows that are open just enough to allow rocks to be dropped through), this kept all intruders within visual range at all times and allowed a barrage of fire to rain upon them for the entire approach. Since the castle was never

attacked in this way, the system has never been tested, but that does not take away any element of amazement from this preparation.

A masterpiece of construction, Himeji-jo combines function with aesthetic appeal, both in its elegant appearance unified by its white plastered earthen walls, its curved stone castle walls (called “fan curves”), and in the subtlety of the relationships between the building masses. Because of its striking white edifice, the castle is also fondly referred to as the *Hakurojō* (“White Egret Castle”) or *Shirasagijō* (“White Heron Castle”), and is generally considered to be the most beautiful castle in the entire country. I tend to agree.

There is much history here; so much so that I lost myself in the relic. This is what being in Japan for me is all about – exploring that rich and full history the Japanese have. It’s also probably one of the best examples of family crest (*mon*) history at one single location. You’ll find the Cross of Ykuroda oshitaka, the Five-Three Paulownia leaf of Hashiba Hideyoshi, the Butterfly with Raised Wings of Ikeda Terumasa, the Standing Hollyhock Trefoil of Honda Tadamasa, the Water Plantain of Matsudaira Tadaaki, the Three Tomoe Whorls of Matsudaira Naomoto, The Gengi Wheel of Sakakibara Tadatsugu and the Spear points around Wood Sorrel of Sakai Tadazumi in the eaves of the elegantly sloping roofs. But this is an entire subject all to its own and if you’re interested, I invite you to research more on the subject, it really is fascinating!



Beyond history, Himeji-jo is also surrounded by vivid folklore.



One such story is fondly referred to as the “Old Widow’s Stone” (姥が石; *Ubagaishi*). According to the legend, Hideyoshi Hashiba (the 15th lord) ran out of stones when building the original three-story castle keep an old woman heard about his trouble and sent him her hand millstone, even though she needed it for her trade. Soon her story of self-sacrifice for the greater good of the people spread and inspired many others, who also sent stones to the daimyo, speeding up the construction of the walls. The infamous stone, used in an inner wall of the keep, still exists at Himeji today, and can be seen just as white as when it was donated. It is protected by a wire enclosure and is considered a national relic.

A second, a ghost story known as “The Dish Mansion at Bancho” (番町皿屋敷 *Banchō Sarayashiki*) is centered on a non-descript fount known as “Okiko’s well” and is one of the most famous in Japanese feudal folklore, continuing to resonate with audiences to this day. According to this legend, a servant known as Okiku came upon the knowledge one day that the lord’s chief retainer was devilishly concocting a plan to dispose of the daimyo and kill him, taking his place. While she was able to prevent this plot from moving forward, the chief retainer found out it was she who foiled his plans and rounded on her his revenge by stealing one of the lord’s ten treasured dishes.



Okiku was later tortured to death on the charge of the missing dish, run through with a sword and her body disposed of in the well – all by the chief retainer. Her ghost remained to haunt the well at night, counting dishes in a despondent tone.

I took a picture of the well with my camera but thankfully didn't see or capture any ghosts! (a-la Fatal Frame). The well is also nearby a structure purportedly built as a place for "Harakiri" or "Seppuku" – the samurai's ritual suicide, which casts an even more eerie feeling over this part of the castle.

A feeling I was able to shake off by the fantastic views of the city from the top floor of the keep.

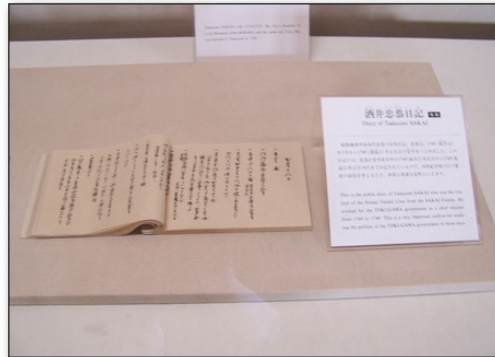
The castle keep (天守閣; *tenshukaku*) at the center of the complex is 46.4 m (152 ft) high, standing 92 m (302 ft) above sea level. Together with the keep, three smaller subsidiary towers form a cluster called *kotenshu* (小天守). Externally, the castle appears to have five floors, because the second and third floors from the top appear to be a single floor. However, the tower actually has six floors and a basement. Among the many interesting innovations you'll find here that are not seen in other castles are such facilities as lavatories, a drain board and a kitchen corridor.



The keep has two pillars, one standing in the east and one standing in the west. The base of the east pillar has a diameter of 97 cm (38 in). It was originally a single fir tree, but has since been mostly replaced. The base of the west pillar is 85 by 95 cm (33 by 37 in), being made of Japanese cypress. During the Shōwa Restoration (1956–1964) a Japanese cypress tree with a length of 26.4 m (87 ft) was brought down from the Kiso Mountains and replaced the old pillar. The tree was broken in this process, so another tree was brought down from Mount Kasagata, and the two trees were joined on the third floor. The first floor of the keep has an area of 554 m² (5,963 ft²) and is often called the "thousand-mat room" because it has over 330 Tatami mats. The walls of the

first floor have weapon racks (武具掛 *bugukake*) for holding matchlocks and spears. At one point, the castle contained as many as 280 guns and 90 spears. The second floor of the keep has an area of roughly 550 m² (5,920 ft²).

The third floor has an area of 440 m² (4,736 ft²) and the fourth floor has an area of 240 m² (2,583 ft²). Both the third and fourth floors have platforms situated at the north and south windows called “stone-throwing platforms” (石打棚 *ishiuchidana*), where defenders could observe or throw objects at attackers. They also have small enclosed rooms called "warrior hiding places" (武者隠 *mushakakushi*), where defenders could hide themselves and kill attackers by surprise as they entered the keep. (These were cool!) The final floor, the sixth floor, has an area of 115 m² (1,237 ft²) and offers a magnificent panoramic view; the culmination of my visit to Himeji-jo.



Osaka

By the time I walked away from Himeji-jo there was little time left to safely scale the side of Mount Shosha and see Engyo-ji (the journey would have been a rather long bus ride out to the edge of town then ascend a ropeway to a mid-point up the mountain, followed by a twenty minute walk to the peek), so I hopped the 1:02pm Hikari train into Osaka and begun my exploration of another of Japan's interesting castles: the new Fuji Big top.

Settled at the mouth of Yodo-gawa (淀川 ; Yodo River) and covering an area of approximately 1,890 square kilometers, Osaka is the second smallest prefecture in all of Japan (Kagawa prefecture is currently the smallest by area), but its population is



roughly 7% of the entire country – that's approximately 8.8 million people! That makes it the third most populous prefecture after Tokyo and Kanagawa. Osaka city itself, the capital of the prefecture, is the second largest metropolitan area behind the special twenty-three wards of Tokyo and third-largest by population, with an estimate of 2.7 million people inhabiting the city.

Consequently, a unique record that the city holds is the largest difference between daytime and nighttime population. There's 141% difference between the two, making Osaka the largest commuter capital in all of Japan - even larger than Tokyo. Now that shocked me!

Osaka city sprawls across the land in all directions, leading one to believe navigating it will be just as daunting a challenge as traversing the super-downtowns of Tokyo; but it's not. You'll find Osaka split into two geographical areas at either end of Midosuji-dori, Osaka's major thoroughfare: Kita (キタ ; north) and Minami (ミナミ ; south).

Kita is roughly the area including or surrounding the business and retail district of Umeda, which includes the Umeda Sky Building. Minami is home to the Namba, Shinsaibashi, and Dotonbori shopping districts.



Subway Lines of Osaka		
1	M	Midosuji Line
2	T	Tanimachi Line
3	Y	Yotsubashi Line
4	C	Chuo Line
5	S	Sennichimae Line
6	K	Sakaisuji Line
7	N	Nagahori-Tsurumi-ryokuchi Line
8	I	Imazatosuji Line



The entertainment area around Dotonbori Bridge with its famous giant mechanical crab, Triangle Park, and Amerikamura ("America Village") are also in Minami. And getting from one jurisdiction to the other is made easy by the Osaka Municipal Subway (大阪市営地下鉄) system, which is said to be the 8th busiest in the world according to rider-ship. For ¥200 to ¥360 depending on distance traveled, you can traverse the lines on the

system, all color-coded accordingly for ease of navigation. Getting to Osaka from any point in Japan is very easy – hop on the Sanyo Shinkansen (山陽新幹線) from Hakata or Kyoto operated by JR West or Tokaido Shinkansen (東海道新幹線) from Tokyo operated by JR East. In as little as three hours, you're there!

I just barely made it to Osaka the afternoon of my performance.

ドラリオン

For those lost in translation, Dralion is the fusion of ancient Chinese circus tradition with the avant-garde approach of Cirque du Soleil. Its creativity draws on the culture of two worlds, personifying their civilizations with two icons - a Dragon, representing the east; and a Lion, representing the west. The combination of these separate philosophies - Dralion - is thrust into a plane of existence that is neither past nor future. This realm is maintained by the four natural elements: 空 air (Azala), 水 water (Oceane), 土 earth (Gaya) and 火 fire (Yao). Together they weave a haunting tale on this ethereal plane, a celebration of life, where the seeds of creation are sewn and our imaginations born. By paying homage to the elements, Dralion derives much of its inspiration from Eastern philosophy, with its perpetual quest for harmony between man and nature. We are all invited to embark upon a fabulous journey through an extraordinary universe a timeless and allegorical place, ruled by magical laws.



And in Japan, it dances on a magical stage – within the Fuji Dome big top. I found the Fuji Dome perched near the Cosmosquare complex, in the heart of Nanko town, the port section of Osaka City.

A number of questions come to mind when you think about a Cirque du Soleil tour in another country – from language and cultural differences to site set up and execution. Largely, however, Cirque du Soleil tours are virtually the same whether they take place in Canada, the United States, throughout Europe, Mexico, Australia and South America. But there is one place where a Cirque du Soleil tour is different on all levels: Japan.



Cirque du Soleil's tours in Japan have always been somewhat different than those presented elsewhere in the world; they are rather more technically minded. Besides the obvious language and cultural barriers, one of the greatest examples of this ingenuity is the concept of the "New Big Top" venue. It is one of the first things that will strike you oddly immediately upon arrival to the site and it is most unlike anything you have seen used at a Cirque du Soleil performance before. No longer is Cirque du Soleil featured in their signature blue-and-yellow striped canvas, the contents of the big top are set under a specially designed structure by sponsors Fuji Telecasting and Nissan/Daihatsu.

What makes this venue so special?



Besides comfortably sitting approximately 2700 patrons, the structure is completely mastless; therefore, every paying patron is afforded a comprehensive unobstructed view of the show with a complete 270-degree view in the round. With a height of 28 meters (96 feet) and a diameter of 57 meters (187 feet), this is one impressive beast. I say impressive becomes there's nothing supporting the center of this enormous big top except its steel frame! And to support that, the big top actually sits on a concrete base (making it a semi-permanent structure). As such it takes approximately twice as long to set up than normal Cirque du Soleil big tops – it's so complex it requires the assistance of a crane or two.

In fact, the "New Big Top" concept has been evolving over time.

For example, for Cirque du Soleil's original tour of Japan ("Fascination"), Japanese spectators did not sit in the normal 270-degree semi-circle; instead, audiences sat in seats arranged in a square-like pattern in front of and on either side of the circular stage.

While this might seem wasteful, the presentation was completely unobstructed and presented all around the circular stage. This pattern was also used for Saltimbanco's 1994 Japanese tour inside the "Blue Special Tent".

And it was to the "White Theater" that Alegría came to when it toured Japan in 1996. White Theater and the theater used for Saltimbanco in 1994 were very similar in design and function; it wasn't until the next tour came round that the real innovation occurred. For Quidam's tour in 2003, Fuji expanded upon the concept and created an all white dome, which was used for both Quidam's 2003 and Alegría's 2004/2005 tours of Japan. For Dralion, the tour shrugged off the Cirque's trademark blue-and-yellow colors for a dark blue-and-white motif. It's very, very impressive.



For the most part the Fuji Big Top is constructed to look very much like the Funambule white tent that originally toured with Saltimbanco and Alegría outside of North America – with doors 1 and 2 accessible under a connected merchandise tent. I definitely couldn't wait to get inside.

At first glance, concessions for Japanese audiences are similar to that anywhere else in the world – there is food and drink to taste and a multitude of souvenirs for purchase. But if you take a closer look you'll find the items available are tailored to the spectator at hand much more so than they are elsewhere on tour (beyond the traditional CD/DVD items).



One of the most interesting items on the Japanese tour is its programme Book. While all other tours must be content with the same shape, style and photos of the current style of book (perhaps with some language updates depending on region), Japanese audiences are treated to a completely new type of book. Not only is the book spine flipped for traditional right to left reading, it's oversized and comes chock full of updated character and act pictures, information pertaining to the tour, behind the scenes elements (in Japan and wherever else the show was last), and, probably the most exciting aspect of all, an updated listing of the cast complete with in-makeup and out-of-makeup head shots! Truly a wonderful collector's item.

Another interesting item is 手ぬぐい, or Tengui.

If you ever journey to Japan during the warm summer months, one of the things you might quickly notice is that you are the only one sweating – the Japanese never seem to. Truth be told, they are sweating just as much as you are; it's just that they have *Tengui* to inconspicuously wipe the moisture away! As traditional cotton head cloths, *Tengui* come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Those for every-day use are not nearly as heavily ornamented or pigmented, and actually are more rag like than artful. You'll see many Japanese with *Tengui* in hand, or at least, not far from sight. So, for Dralion, Cirque du Soleil presented a small contingent of *Tengui* designs in two styles: three of which were non-descript (meaning other than the Cirque du Soleil tag there was nothing in the design to suggest Cirque) design available in red, green and yellow, and a fourth that was all blue with the Cirque du Soleil sun logo stitched in gold. For just ¥650 one of these could have been yours - I couldn't help but pick up the sun logo one for myself. *wipe-wipe*



And, naturally, there were accessories for cell phones, candies and chocolates to buy as gifts (the Japanese are very much into gift giving) and other such knick-knacks.

And what about the performance?



The performance itself was quite solid, one of the best I'd seen of Dralion in quite some time. I had great seats (equivalent to last row in section 103, far left seat) and I must say that any pre-conceptions I ever had about Japanese audiences was blown out of the water. I've been told that they're more reserved than American/European audiences and that they hardly ever express themselves. Well... not this crowd. Not in Osaka they don't! Now to be fair the

audience did not whoop and holler like they do in the USA, but they were very expressive of their gratitude during the show and its acts. They applauded at all the appropriate times and gasped, oooohed, aahhhed, and were very much into the show like any other audience. The biggest differences? It seems the Japanese like to rhythmically clap and there is no standing ovation after the finale. Other than that, Japanese audiences have the same energy as any other audience, it's just a little more reserved.

The music on the other hand was vastly different than what you hear on the CD or DVD. Where the Eastern influences prevailed in earlier sets, in Japan these have been remixed with rock or techno-like beats. I'm not quite sure if it's just for Japan or if that's how Dralion's live music has evolved over the years (the last time I saw Dralion performed live was in Seattle, August 2002). In some cases I enjoyed what I heard but in others I did not. Some of the songs were barely recognizable!

But at least the acts as presented were spot on: Hand balancing (シングル・ハンドバランシング; a slight and fragile young girl balances herself on a cane, constantly changing positions), Bamboo Poles (バンブー・ポールズ; six men maneuver 15.75-foot long poles demonstrating their keen sense of precision and synchronization), Juggling (ジャグリング; an amazingly



choreographed fast-paced juggling act – seven balls at one time - with hints of modern dance), Trampoline (トランポリン), Double Trapeze (ダブル・トラピス; an acrobatic trapeze performed by two couples)... Ballet on Lights (バレエ・オン・ライト; a unique dance presented for the first time in the world. Seven young woman perform a ballet on light bulbs using specially designed shoes), Dralions (ドラリオン; a dynamic and energetic tumbling sequence using wooden balls that artists roll under their feet), Spirits (a haunting synchronized ballet of four using wires), Foot Juggling (フット・ジャグリング; a young girl balances and twists Chinese umbrellas on the soles of her feet), Hoop Diving (フープ・ダイビング; a tribal flavored production whereby ten male artists dive and throw themselves through wooden hoops), and Skipping Rope (スキップینگ・ロープ; an undulating rope skipping to the beat of a tribal drum where artists perform flips, make pyramids and a three-person high column, all the while jumping).



While most of the numbers presented in Dralion have changed very little since their original staging, let me just say that the Trampoline number is fabulous. Integrated into the show in mid 2005, the Trampoline really kicks up the first half of Dralion, more so than the act it replaced: Teeterboard (which, some may remember, was ridiculed because of its overuse of safety wires). The acrobats here use the futuristic backdrop as both a diving board and landing pad for the twists, flips and tricks they perform by jumping on the trampolines below them. Think of the performance as a cross between Fast Track, as presented in Alegría, and “the Wall” in La Nouba – a high energy, crowd

pleasing piece that while not the best trampoline act in Cirque du Soleil (in my opinion), it certainly is fun to watch.

And though we all (meaning we Cirque fans) have cursed the use of guide wires in the show, I must say having them on Duo Trapeze is a must. Tonight one of the girls missed her catcher and she went flying. The wire caught her, of course, but I could just imagine what would have happened if she didn't have it! Although on the flipside, having those wires on the Ballet on Lights number is quite annoying. And let's not start on the clowns. They're just as lifeless as before although the crowd seemed to like them well enough.

Oh, and the Japanese audience plant really got them. Good stuff.

Not long after the show ended I made my way back to Shin-Osaka station to catch the next Hikari or Kodama train back into Kyoto, thankfully without incident. So here I sit.

* * *

I'd be lying if I said I came right back to Kyoto following the performance of Dralion. Much to my later dismay, I made an attempt to find the Umeda Sky Building off the Umeda subway station. Having visited this fantastic building with a wonderful vantage point on my previous trip to Osaka, though in the day-time, I had thought visiting the building to catch the Osaka skyline at night would be an enormous treat. What it ended up being was a treat in frustration. I spent 30 minutes wandering between the stations without finding so much as a sign of which way to go. So I gave up, came back to Kyoto and grabbed a shower!



Tomorrow I'm taking myself to Hiroshima and may make two stops on the way back if there's time – one in Himeji to visit Engyo-ji before it closes and to catch Himeji-jo lit up at night (it's not a far walk from the station to the castle grounds, so I could do that, catch a few shots and be back to the train station within 45 minutes or so I should think; Engyo-ji will take much longer so we'll have to see. And I may make another attempt at the Umeda Sky Building in Osaka. It is open until 11pm or so, so if I can find the right exit (I'm going to look that up right now) I might be able to find it quickly enough and then be on my way.

You know, there's been a song playing here at the hostel that I can't quite place but I'm sure I know the melody, and the words, but I can't for the life of me recall either. The song sounds like something I would have heard on an anime picture or series I've watched recently – but the melody itself sounds aged, as if the tune was crafted for a series or movie in the eighties. You'd think I'd know it – but for some reason I can't quite place my thumb on what it could be. And it's driving me absolutely nuts!

Talk about having an earworm...

Although I really should get to bed, I guess it'll give me something to contemplate whilst I go about doing a bit of laundry. It's another early day tomorrow so I best get started!

Until tomorrow...

Ja ne!

Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

中国地方 | 広島県 {Chugoku / Hiroshima}



「Itsukushima, One of the ‘Three Views’ of Japan」

september 16, 2007

clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack

It's a virtual never-ending journey I seem to be on here, with only the familiar sounds of a train in transit, chugging along its rail-line, carrying us, the mass of travelers from one city to the next as companions. Tonight it's ferrying between Osaka and Kyoto, delivering workers and explorers alike to their ports of call in between. And me, it shall deliver back to my Kansai home – K's House in Kyoto – in due time.



Wait... this all sounds too familiar, doesn't it?



And if you were contemplating the exact same thought (isn't this written passage from your previous journey to Japan, about traveling from Osaka to Kyoto?) you'd be absolutely correct.

Fitting then as I tip my hat, three years later, to that passage and find myself in a similar situation: having once again caught the much slower "local" train from Osaka that will stop at each station along the return to Kyoto-eki, and taking what would have been a 20

minute Shinkansen ride and stretched it to an hour or so trip home.

Though this journey back from today's certainly qualifies as the never-ending journey I only thought I was on in 2004, alas I'm getting a head of myself here. Today, as planned, I took myself to Hiroshima and the island of Miyajima (宮島) on the 7:42am Shinkansen Hikari #391 train but unlike yesterday's ad-hoc plans, I did not have enough time to stop at Himeji, Osaka or anywhere else in between for any length of time. To be quite honest, getting back to Kyoto was an adventure in and of itself, which I will gladly explicate in the next few pages. Suffice it to say it was a miracle that could make my way back to K's House at all. As for the day's adventure, what an interesting day it was!

Itsukushima (厳島)

Arrival at Miyajima-guchi, Miyajima's main JR train station, came a little earlier than the itinerary specified (10:14am specifically), thanks in part to the early departure time of the Hikari train from Kyoto and the early arrival at Hiroshima's JR train station, which afforded me an earlier train on the JR Sanyo line out to Miyajima. Although early and exited about the extra time (even if it was a few minutes – it's still a 30 minute ride from Hiroshima to Miyajima-guchi), I wish I could say that as soon as I stepped off the train I was greeted with a bright, sunny sky; alas it was not meant to be. Rain, it seemed, was in the forecast for my entire stay in Japan and today was absolutely no different than those that came before. Though it didn't start to pour right then and there; no, that came later.

To reach Miyajima and Itsukushima shrine, the first point of interest, one must take a ferryboat from the mainland. It's a minimal cost, but one included as a carrier of the JR Rail pass; therefore, and quite thankfully, standing in line for tickets like everyone else was not required. As the streets here in the village of Ono (大野町) weren't very active this time of day, the few meters walk from the train station to the ferry line in the brisk morning temperatures was a delicious treat. There was little need to rush (as boats come on a strict schedule) and that allowed for a very leisurely stretch of the legs. Those hours spent sitting on various trains this morning (not to mention the copious amount of walking I've been doing in Kyoto) caused a little cramping and I was very appreciative for the time to stretch them out. Not to mention peek into the store fronts.



When the appointed time arrived I queued up with all the other Japanese awaiting their journey and twenty minutes or so later (probably less but who kept count), I was pulling into the docks on Miyajima, "Shrine Island".



An approach is made from the ferryboat docks to the east along a non-descript sandy pathway that hugs the shoreline. What it lacks in scenic elements it more than makes up for in whimsy. Here just like out at Nara (visited in 2004), the island is inundated with deer. And as they're sacred, there's very little the populace does to control them. So they're very well acquainted with people, especially tourists, and love to come and

welcome each and every one to their island. I had quite an easy go of it getting through unmolested; I can't say the same for others. Especially one lady I couldn't help but stand and watch. The deer are no joke either. They have no qualms about coming right up to you and grabbing anything you may have on – your watch, your shirt, your snacks, even your ferryboat ticket! The lady seemed quite happy to surrender her guide map.



I did not and used it to navigate my way to the shrine. Not that this was a difficult task to master – the path was unmistakable (just follow the throngs of tourists) but also in that a huge stone gate announced your arrival. Pass through it (and the staring gaze of a dragon-dog statue) and you're on the sacred grounds of Itsukushima shrine.

Itsukushima Shrine, as a place of worship dedicated to the of *Susano-o no Mikoto*, Shinto deity of the seas and of storms and brother of the great sun deity *Amaterasu*, dates back to the sixth century A.D, or more specifically the year 593. Taira-no-Kiyomori (a general in the late Heian Period - 794 to 1185; he established the first Samurai-dominated government in the country's history) rebuilt the shrine into its present form in 1168, which is well known for its "floating" appearance. It's constructed on piers! This arrangement is due to the island's status as an ancient worshipping ground. Since commoners were not historically allowed to set foot upon the island, the only way to come was by boat and the use of the boardwalk.

Did You Know?

Retaining the purity of the shrine is very important to the Japanese. As such no deaths or births have been permitted near the shrine since 1878. To this day, pregnant women are supposed to retreat to the mainland as the day of delivery approaches, as are the terminally ill or very elderly whose passing has become imminent. Burials on the island are still forbidden.

Consequently, because of this construction, more than 300 meters of corridors connects the buildings – twenty-one remaining in total. Once you enter the shrine, you never leave the boardwalk (meaning, you never touch the beach) until you exit. In the past, of course, you would never have touched the beach, docking instead directly at the shrine; however, that begs the question: how would you visit nearby Senjokaku Hall and its five-storied pagoda, Goju-no-to?



Senjokaku, situated just outside the shrine's corridor complex but within its sphere of influence, is the creation of Hideyoshi Toyotomi (remember him from Kodai-ji in Kyoto?). His vision was to establish a large hall as a repository where sutra-chanting could be held in honor of those who perished in the reunification war. Work began on the hall in 1587 with plans to make it the largest building on the island (hence it's name: the Hall of One Thousand Tatami Mats). Though

construction of the hall was discontinued after Hideyoshi's passing in 1598, it still remains the island's largest building even in its unfinished form (though its floor size is only equal to the area of 857 tatami mats). The hall is accompanied by the vermilion-painted Gojunoto, which pre-dates Senjokaku hall by almost 100 years (it was built in 1407 to enshrine a Buddhist image), and towers 27.6 meters above the hall and shrine.



I suppose, as a visitor to Itsukushima, you wouldn't. One is a Shinto shrine (Itsukushima) and the other the remnants of a Buddhist temple; therefore, I would interject that only the priests and other nobles would be permitted to do so in time of old. Today, however, it's just as easy as walking from one side of the path to the other – although you enter Itsukushima shrine through the East Corridor (opposite side of

the path of Hideyoshi's Hall), you exit along the West Corridor on the complete opposite side of the shrine. So, take a look and you'll find a harmonious blend of Chinese and Japanese architectural styles. (And it looks nice too rising from the hills from Itsukushima-jinja.) Inside you'll find a full-color painting of Buddha; something a commoner (like me) will never see.

Itsukushima's East Corridor, which extends past the Marodo shrine and the Asazaya (the Morning Service Hall), serves as entrance to the shrine today. This passage, serving as the ticketed entranceway, is designated as both a "Specially Preserved Building" (since 1899 – the entire construct is on pillars and it's not hard to imagine those supportive structures rot and need constant replacing) and a "National Treasure" (since 1952).

Although the corridor is just a corridor, take a moment to really look at it. Besides being constructed to exacting standards – at 4 meters in width, the corridor has 108 ma (the term "ma" correlates to mean "span" or "bay" between the beams/pillars. In Japan, 8 ma is equivalent to 8 spans between 9 pillars. But, to add confusion to what appears to be a well-defined term, "ma" is not a defined measurement, and so the length of spans varies). Slight spaces between the floorboards here have been created to alleviate the buoyancy of waters at high-tide and to allow rain blown onto the corridor to drain. During extreme tides that accompany Typhoons, the nearby stone lanterns can be temporarily dismantled and carried onto the corridor to serve as ballast preventing the floor from being raised by the churning seas. This is necessary, consequently, because nails were not used to secure the floorboards – they rest in place!





Marodo Shrine is the first important piece of Itsukushima you'll come upon, as the shrine for the guest deity. These sesshas, or auxiliary shrines, are used to dedicate a deity (or deities) that have a deep and significant relationship to the god or goddess which is venerated within the main shrine. As the god of the seas and storms – *Susano-o no Mikoto* – is venerated here, the Marodo is dedicated to his children: Amenooshihomimi-no-mikoto, Ikutsuhikone-no-mikoto, Amenohohi-no-mikoto, Amatsuhikone-

no-mikoto, and Kumanokusubi-no-mikoto. What role they may play in Shinto spiritualism is, however, lost to me. But should you wish to make a request of them, or offer prayers, do so at the Haraiden, or purification hall – just stand and be purified!

The Main Shrine, dedicated to three descendants of the goddess Amaterasu (collectively known as the three Munakata goddesses) – Ichikishima-hime (市杵島姫神), Tagitsu-hime (湊津姫神) and Tagori-hime (田心姫神) – lies round the corner and is equally impressive and highly ornamented. Prayer offerings can be made at its Haraiden, though entrance into the Honden is restricted. Even so there are still plenty of other cultural riches to see, such as: wonderfully crafted stone lanterns, picturesque wooden bridges (one is a huge arched bridge, possibly used by imperial messengers to enter the shrine; another, less picturesque but no less important, was used to draw water from the inlet – notice the railing on the one side is higher than the other for safety in drawing the water), hanging corridor lanterns (my personal favorite), caskets of sake, mirror ponds (there are three), performance stages (a Noh stage and other music and dance halls), and other smaller shrines and dedications.

Did You Know?

Of the smaller shrines there's one to Tenjin (天神), also known as Sugawara-no-Michizane, the god of education and intelligence; to Daikoku (大黒天), the god of great darkness, one of the Seven Gods of Fortune; and to Toyoiwamado-no-kami and Kushiiwamadono-kami (to the right and left of Hitasaki, the front lantern), the gate guards.



Although the mirror ponds don't appear much at lower tides, when filled they are said to arouse even the least inspirational soul. Of the three mirror ponds at Itsukushima shrine, one Kagami-no-iki stands out as one of the eight views of Miyajima. It is said that the moon reflecting on the mirror pond nearest the Marodo is the most beautiful striking vision, a motif repeatedly taken up in Tanka (31-syllable Japanese poems) and Haiku of the

period. A second mirror pond – Sotoba-ishi – stands out for its association with the historical tale of the rise and fall of the Heike clan. Or, more precisely (according to a historical marker at the site), for the story known as the "Floating Sotoba".

According to legend, Taira-no-Yasuyori was exiled to Kikai Island (鬼界ヶ島; *kikai ga shima*), a remote island in historical Satsuma province following the discovery of a conspiracy to usurp power from his fellow clansmen (remember him?) While on this remote island, Yasuyouri crafted a number of beautiful poems expressing the idiocy of his actions, his longing to return to Kyoto and escape isolation, and confessed how much he missed his mother. These poems made their way onto 1,000 wooden tablets, called Sotoba, which he then released to the sea. One of these tablets floated to Miyajima, coming to rest upon this pond's largest rock. A priest carried the story to the Noble Court in Kyoto and Yasuyouri was allowed to return from exile. Other historical references abound here as well, including the unexpected.



If you're lucky, like I was, you might get a glimpse of an ancient court dance, called Bugaku, presented on the high stage. The actor, or actress, was in performance for a wedding that I also happened to witness right within the shrine itself! Imagine my surprise as I come across a small crowd in front of the main building watching what, at first, I thought was just a tea ceremony. But as I continued to watch and observe – the actions being transformed and those in attendance (who I assume were the

family) – the significance of what was transpiring hit me.

She poured the tea, he picked it up, turned the cup once... twice... three times before taking it to his lips, drinking a sip or two then enjoying the entire bowl of tea. Two or three times more this occurred as the priests played their flutes, chanted their incantations and prepared the couple of the next step. What a particular thrill it was to watch the shrine maidens present the ring boxes to the groom and to witness him place the ring on her left finger; and for she to do the same and during the entire process remain as composed as the young couple could. And once the rings and vows were exchanged, the couple, who had been sitting and standing apart until this moment, returned to the groom's table and took their seats side-by-side, a happy couple. From there more tea (or sake, I'm not sure) was consumed, prayers were offered and then the ceremony was complete. They were married!

I watched the entire ceremony, it was beautiful!

After the initial ceremony was complete the couple and party moved out to the stage where the actor or actress performed a heated dance for them. I stayed to watch a little of the courtship dance, but had to reluctantly push on. There was much more to see on Miyajima before the day was out.

But wait, what about the big huge red gate in the inlet, the reason for my being here in the first place? Do not worry. If there's anything I've learnt from my voyage to Japan this go round is that even the best of plans go awry. There'd been a change in the itinerary...



Daisho-in (大聖院),

Though I did not know I would be visiting this Buddhist temple in the foothills of Misen, one of the sacred mountains of Miyajima, before setting off this morning (or even weeks ago when I was preparing my itinerary), fate intervened the moment I set foot in the train station at Hiroshima this morning. I came upon a brochure for the temple whilst waiting for my connection and my interest was instantly piqued. I thumbed through the brochure and immediately said to myself: "this is a place to visit!" Why would that be? Because not only did the brochure highlight some very interesting sights to see at the temple, it also took the time to explain Buddhism in its most basic form, and for that I was really thankful. How could I not visit now?

And it turned out be a jewel of a destination.



For example, did you know that Buddhism was founded by Shakyamuni in India on the river Ganges in the 5th century BC? The supreme objective of Buddhism is to reach Buddhahood by attaining enlightenment and eradicating suffering through practicing Shakyamuni's teachings. It is believed that Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the 6th century AD and there are many sects (or ways of thought) of Buddhism in Japan. Daisho-in belongs to the Shingon Sect.

Believe me I was just as confused about the different sects until I visited. (Think of them as variations of Protestantism).



From the onset you have Early Buddhism, which split into *Mahayana* and *Hinayana*. The difference between the two is like Lutheranism to Catholicism: *Hinayana* is used by Mahayanists as a name to refer variously to one or more doctrines, traditions, practitioners or thoughts that are generally concerned with the achievement of Nirvana as an Arahant or a Pratyeka-Buddha, as opposed to the achievement of liberation as a Samyaksambuddha, wherein the

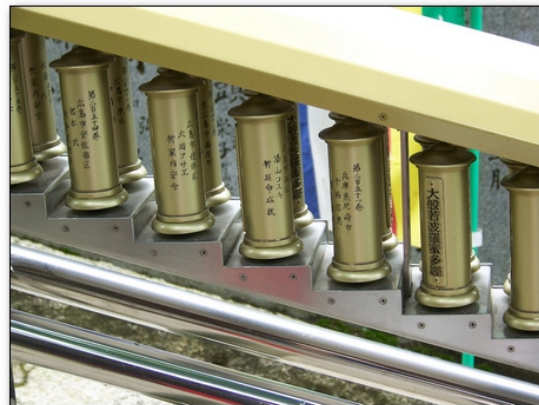
Samyaksambuddha (according to Mahayana lore) is deemed to operate from a basis of vowing to effect the spiritual liberation of all beings and creatures from the suffering of samsara (not just himself or a small number of others).

From that initial distinction, *Mahayana* Buddhism split into *Esoteric* and *Exoteric*. Many of the locations I previously visited in 2004 and during this visit have been schools of thought along the Exoteric form: the Rinzai Zen, Soto Zen, Jodo, Jodo-Shin, and Nichiren sects; however, the Shingon sect (and Tendai sect) belong to the Esoteric side, which teaches that humans can attain enlightenment through rituals combining physical, spoken and mental disciplines.



And what about its deities? In esoteric Buddhism, there are four groups of Buddhist deities, which the brochure gladly explains: Nyorai, Bosatsu, Myo-o and Ten:

- Nyorai, commonly called Buddhas, are the highest deities in Buddhism. They are the ones who have attained enlightenment. As a sign of their enlightenment and liberation from desire, all Nyorai images are without possessions such as jewelry or other ornaments.
- Bosatsu, or Bodhisattvas, are the ones who are undergoing ascetic training to attain enlightenment. However, Bosatsu are not ordinary ascetics. They are the ones who are committed not to becoming Nyorai unless all suffers on Earth are saved. To show their determination, Bosatsu images hold various objects.
- Myo-o deities are the envoys from Dainichi Nyorai (or Cosmic Buddha). Their fierce facial expressions show their strong determination to make humans follow Buddhist teachings. The frighteningly face Fudo Myo-o, or Immovable King, holds a sword and rope as manifestations of his determination.
- Ten are originally ancient Indian deities and are guardians of Buddhism. Ten images are often placed close to Nyorai or Bosatsu images, showing their commitment to protecting these divine entities. Bishamon Ten, symbol of victory and wealth, is among them.





As for the temple itself, Daisho-in is one of the most prestigious Shingon temples in the western part of Japan. It was founded in the year 806 by one of the most famous monks in Japan – Kukai – and the originator of the Shingon school of Buddhism. Over its history the temple has had a close relationship with the Imperial Family – beginning in the 12th century with Emperor Toba, who decreed it was the place to pray for peace and security of the nation, to Emperor Meiji in 1885,

who honored the temple with a stay. In fact, just last year the 14th Dalai Lama visited the island to celebrate the 1200th year of the temple, and stayed for five days.

The most striking features of Daisho-in aren't in its cultural wealth (though highly impressive in and of themselves), but in its religious holdings. Within you'll find a variety of features to explore, which include but are not limited to: Dai-hannyakyo Sutra (spinning wheels containing the six hundred volumes of scripture – see right), Rakan Statues (statues depicting the disciples of Shaka Nyorai), the Sand Mandala (a tapestry made using colored sand), 1000 Fudo Images (representations of Fudo Myoo, one of the Thirteen Buddhas in Japan; the "Immovable Wisdom King"), Mani Wheel (spinning wheels along the steps to Maniden Hall), Maniden Bodaisho (a room where 1000 golden images of Amida are kept), Shaka Nehan Hall, Henjyokutsu Cave (where dozens of dimly-lit lanterns illuminate 88 principal temples of the Shikoku Pilgrimage), a flame that has been burning since the temple's foundation more than 1200 years ago, and much, much more.

Did You Know?

An interesting Buddhist ritual can be performed walking up the temple's steps. In the middle of the stairs is a row of spinning metal wheels that are inscribed with sutra. Turning the inscriptions as one walks up is believed to have the same effect as reading them. So, without any knowledge of Japanese, you can benefit from the blessings that the reading of sutra is believed to entail.





Its grounds hold many buildings including the Daishido, Maniden, Chokugando, and Kannondo. Moreover, the temple houses many Buddhist statues such as Fudoumyoo, Juichimen Kannon Bosatsu, Kokuuzo Bosatsu, Sankidaigongen, Shakanehanzo, Juroku Rakan, Shichifukujin, and Ichigan Taishi. It turned out to be a very educational experience, one that I won't soon forget.

And after taking a brief part in some Buddhist prayers (I watched and listened as they were being performed), I then took my leave.

I had a new plan.



To Hiroshima...

It's actually quite a walk from the entrance to Itsukushima shrine to the ferry terminal; an even longer one from Daisho-in. But once visitation to Itsukushima-jinja then later Daisho-in had been concluded, returning to Miyajima-guchi via the JR ferry and riding back to Hiroshima to explore the Atomic Dome, Peace Park and the rest of Hiroshima's historically famous downtown seemed appropriate.

Besides, I was totally off schedule now, why not?

Although visiting the heart of Hiroshima was on the itinerary for the day, it was scheduled to take place in the early part of the afternoon, just following high-tide at Itsukushima. After that an impromptu plan to re-visit Himeji for a trek to Engyo-ji (which I missed out on doing yesterday because of the time spent at Himeji-jo) and to get night shots of the infamous castle was hatched on the train ride over. The secondary addition of the Umeda Sky Building in Osaka rounded out the new itinerary – if I had the time.



However, the earlier than anticipated arrival at Miyajima and the unexpected find of Daisho-in this morning threw not only the original schedule, but the new impromptu schedule into chaos. Furthermore and perhaps even more damning was the realization that the priests of Itsukushima light up the famous floating gate at night, something I didn't learn until I stepped foot on the island, and it was certainly something I didn't want to miss if I could stick around!

So, I grabbed a chicken yakitori stick (wow, salty!) from a vendor lying just beyond the roadway hugging the shoreline in Omotesando, the shopping arcade, and proceeded to Hiroshima (don't worry, I've saved the discussion on the Torii for my return).

To access the Atomic Dome and Peace Park areas in downtown Hiroshima, one must take a ride on the Hiroden Streetcar. Hiroden is short for the Hiroshima Electric Railway, Co (広島電鉄株式会社; Hiroshima Dentetsu Kabushiki-gaisha) and is a company that has been in operation since 1910. Unfortunately it lost all of its trains and services from the Atomic Bomb attack in 1945 so today it employs streetcars from all over the world. Trains on the line today have come from Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, Fukuoka, Dortmund, Hanover and, yes, San Francisco. It's part of the system's charm, really.

And to reach the Atomic Dome (原爆ドーム; *Genbaku Dōmu*), you need to catch the red-colored Miyajima line (Tram 2) from Hiroshima station (M1) to Genbaku Domu-mae (M10). Here you will be treated to the only building to be permitted to stand from the atomic blast, an old products exhibition hall. The nuclear explosion that erupted here at 8:15am on August 6, 1945 was almost directly above this building; detonated almost 490 feet (150 m) away and 1,968 feet (600 m) above ground). It was the closest structure within the zone to survive the blast.





Though it was mired in controversy from the moment rebuilding began (some inhabitants wanted it torn down, others wanted it saved as a memorial), today it serves as a poignant reminder of the devastation that occurred due to the bombing and stands as a memorial for the 70,000 people who were killed instantly (not to mention the untold thousands who suffered fatal injuries from the radiation), and as such as been designated the Hiroshima Peace Memorial.

A few minutes' walk from the Atomic Dome you'll find yourself at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park (原爆の子の像, Genbaku-no-konozo), a large downtown green-space.

Here you'll find various monuments relating to the nuclear blast including, but not limited to: the Children's Peace Monument, a statue dedicated to the memory of the children who died as a result of the bombing; the Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound, a grass-covered knoll that contains the ashes of 70,000 unidentified victims of the bomb; the Cenotaph for Korean victims, honoring the nearly 20,000 Koreans that were killed that day; and the Memorial Cenotaph ("Rest in Peace, for the error shall not be repeated"), which includes the Peace Flame (an eternal flame said to be lit until all nuclear bombs on the planet are destroyed and the planet is free from the threat of nuclear annihilation), the Peace Arch, a concrete, saddle-shaped monument that holds the names of all of the people killed by the bomb, and three peace bells. A museum stands at the opposite end of the park.



Unfortunately, while I did get to pay my respects at these various monuments and tried to comprehend the devastation that occurred here many years ago, the hard rains kept me from enjoying further walks in the park. From the moment I left the Atomic Dome until I arrived on foot at the Museum, it poured and poured and poured. (So hard, in fact, you'll be able to see the rains in a few of the pictures I took, no doubt.) It seemed I would spend the remainder of my day huddled under the elevated

halls of the Hiroshima Museum with dozens of other Japanese (and tourists alike); however, not long after I took refuge at the museum the rains ceased and I could return to the station in relative peace. All in all, though, the time spent in downtown Hiroshima turned out to be quite reflective.



Since my original itinerary called to take the Hiroden into Hiroshima from Miyajima for the afternoon's explorations (which I didn't do) I decided I should head back to the sacred island in that fashion. That way I would get to experience something different – what it's like to head home with the locals. It took quite a long time on Tram 2 to make it all the way back to Miyajima-guchi (in contrast to the JR Sanyo line), but it was an educational experience viewing the city's outskirts through the streetcar's windows, watching the skies getting darker and darker, and the lights at each house pop on as we rode by.

Even so, with darkness quickly befalling the area, it was making me nervous. Ferries to and from the island would be going less frequently now – so timing was key. And if I missed the proper ferry, not only might I not make it to the island, I might not make it off!

To hell with caution; full speed ahead!

...and Back Again



One of the most important reasons for my visit to Miyajima was for O-Torii, the dramatic vermilion-lacquered gate that sits just out in the Inland Sea mere meters from the shores of Itsukushima-jinja. Naturally it was one of the first sights I saw coming to the island earlier in the morning and I've waited to tell you all about it now because while it's fabulous during the day, it's simply breathtaking at night.

The gate itself is one of Japan's most popular tourist attractions and the image gained here is said to be one of the "Three Iconic Views of Japan" (日本三景; *Nihon Sankei*, which also includes the sand-bar of Amanohashidate in upper Kyoto prefecture, and the view of Matsushima Bay in Miyagi prefecture). A gate of some sort has been standing on this spot since 1168, but the current gate dates back to 1875 – the 8th iteration. It stands about 16-meters tall with its main pillars some 10-meters in circumference arranged in a four-legged style to provide stability and a dramatic sight. And just what kind of wood do they build these gates out of? Why Camphor of course! Camphor is a large evergreen-type tree found predominantly in Asia just in case you were wondering...

During high-tide the gate appears to float out in the sea (and I timed my morning visit specifically to the high-tide so I would be sure to see this wonderful effect – I did and took lots of pictures), by low-tide the waters retreat and one can take a walk along the beach sand to stand beside it, under it or behind it! And I did! The waters recede a good 7 feet from the base of the gate and you can reach out and touch it. I certainly did, cementing that experience as one-of-a-kind for me. At 6:45pm, long after the sun has gone down, the shrine threw its lights upon the gate, illuminating its pillars and turning the bay into a reddish-orangish glow.

It was definitely worth the wait. Even in the rain. Pouring. Which I did.





Fortunately I purchased another umbrella when I stepped back on the island so I had something to cover me while I waited. Unfortunately the umbrella didn't stop my bag and some of its contents from getting soaked. A few maps and some brochures got all wet and soggy, but thankfully my trip diary survived virtually unscathed! (How else would I be writing this?) Either way, about a half-hour later I was back on the ferry to the mainland (whew, made it), caught the 7:50pm train to Hiroshima and bid farewell to the city; but my adventure home was just beginning.

* * *

Only four minutes after I arrived in Hiroshima the next Shinkansen was tasked to leave: the #674 Kodama train bound for Shin-Osaka at 8:20pm. Anxious now to begin the trek back, I decided to hop on this train even though my destination really was Kyoto. I figured I could pick up another Shinkansen at Shin-Osaka once I arrived, but boy was I mistaken. Since the Kodama is considered the "local" of Shinkansen trains, it stopped at every station along the way: Higashi-hiroshima, Hihara, Shin-Onomichi and finally Fukuyama. Each time the train stopped my stress level rose; if we didn't pull into Shin-Osaka soon I didn't know how I would return home. Therefore, by the time I reached Fukuyama I had about had my fill with the Kodama train. It was too slow and time was ticking by so quickly that, I jumped ship at Fukuyama and waited for the next Hikari train.

I knew if I could get to Shin-Osaka early enough there would be a "late running" Hikari train to Kyoto... I just had to be there before their last departure (sometime after 10:00pm).

Thankfully I didn't have long to wait at Fukuyama; a Hikari train was right behind the Kodama by as little as six minutes. So I rode Hikari Railstar #482 into Shin-Osaka from Fukuyama and when I finally arrived there (at 10:20pm) I got the shock of my life – there were no more Kodama or Hikari Shinkansen going to Kyoto (meaning, bound for Tokyo) only the Nozomi trains (and only one more of those), which I could not use with the JR Pass (without paying a ton of extra charges.)

What was I to do? Recall that my plans were not to be out at Hiroshima this late, meaning I would have no problem getting back home, but now... now at 10:20pm at night... would I be stranded in Osaka? Having recalled the experience of traveling from Osaka to Kyoto via the local trains last time I was in Japan, I knew of the local JR Lines existing at the Osaka station. So the moment I hit the platform, I left the Shinkansen side and made my way down to the local lines. Surely there'd be something going in the Kyoto direction that I could take... surely I wouldn't be stuck in Osaka without a place to stay, right?

clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack

I arrived at the local platforms a moment later and quickly noticed a Super Express train on the JR Kyoto line queued up at 10:44pm – I was saved! And, as I said, it's been a virtual never-ending journey since.



Though this train is only scheduled to stop at two or three stations between Osaka and Kyoto, the journey is still scheduled to take a while. Even for a “super express” train, I still won’t roll into Kyoto until well after 11:30pm. Much, much later than I had planned. I suppose I should be grateful I won’t have to spend the night in Osaka (or elsewhere), but I’m still disappointed I didn’t get the opportunity to stop at Himeji for night photos (since I passed right through there on the Shinkansen) or had time to spend locating the

Umeda Sky Building while in Osaka (like I tried to do yesterday and failed to find following Dralion’s performance).

But the sorest spot in this mêlée is that I left my second umbrella on that damn Kodama train when I switched at Fukuyama...isn’t that the breaks? I’m two for two.

Until tomorrow.

Ja ne!



Return to the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}



「Homeikan, Morikawa Bekkan (鳳明館 森川別館)」

september 16, 2007

Now that was very refreshing...

Konbanwa!

Good evening fellow travelers. I'm calling once again from the hallowed walls of Homeikan in the grand metropolis that is Tokyo. If you've kept up with my travels thus far you know that by my being here, my sophomore excursion to the *Land of the Rising Sun* is rapidly coming to a close. I find myself saddened by the end of my journey but also quite ready to return home and share these experiences with my friends and family.

It's not a particularly late hour here at Morikawa Bekkan, the third house in the Homeikan clan, but I've just about done all I can do today (read: my feet hurt), so I've decided to stay close to home, grab a little dinner, have a shower, and rest, with a little contemplation of the end of my journey on the side if you please.



With not much to do here at Morikawa Bekkan but contemplate, I've done quite a bit of that in the last hour. It's interesting to note that at the beginning of this journey I was worried that I would be unable to crawl beyond the shadow of the previous one. As it was then my first time in Japan my expectations were totally exceeded and the experience was beyond anything I could have anticipated. I wondered as I began planning for this return trip: would the spark still be there? Would I

enjoy this trip as I had enjoyed the last? Although I was quite worried about it the first night of my arrival, all thoughts of this trip not being equal to the last floated away.

For better or worse this excursion was better planned for, better prepared for, and better executed. At times I can say the more rigid scheduling was more of a hindrance than an advantage, and a source of stress when I had no choice but to stray from it. In the end, though, I think having that schedule was more of a blessing than not.

I was able to determine what was important for me to see and do before I arrived and the schedule took out the grueling guess work getting from point A to B... most of the time. And thanks to that rigorous preparation I was able to see more, do more and be more while here and on that front I think I greatly succeeded.

But even with all the time spent planning I still could not see and do everything I had wanted, can you imagine that? In Tokyo, I couldn't find the time to see Sunshine City in Ikebukuro, Zojo-ji near the Tokyo Tower or the Metropolitan Government Building's observation post on the 45th floor. Nor did I have time to visit Nishinongan-ji, Higashihongan-ji, Daitoku-ji, Tofuku-ji, Nijo-jo, or Tenryu-ji in Kyoto, or Engyo-gi in Himeji. Not to mention those temples closed in Kamakura or I could find in Kyoto.



So what?



Ahh, but I have a Tsukimi Seto (月見バーガー) from McDonald's (マクドナルド; ma-ku-do-na-ru-do.) here in front of me and all is right with the world. Who can pass up a hamburger dressed with a poached egg (it's called a Tsukimi because the yolk of the egg represents the moon on an egg-white sky) nestled within the chain's famous sesame-seed bun, a strip of bacon and special teriyaki-like sauce, fries and a Coca-Cola? You simply can't! It's too delicious to pass up and therefore, as I rounded the Pachinko parlor to head up to Homeikan, the McDonald's on the corner called to me.

I couldn't help myself last time and this time... well, there was no reason to break with tradition. Besides, I did at least get a chance to make my last few hours in Kyoto accomplished indeed.

After waking up at the crack of dawn, I busied about attempting to pack – or in this case re-pack – my suitcase. This was a difficult endeavor because, admittedly, I've bought too many souvenirs and now there wasn't room for my clothes. What was I to do? It was either the mementos or the clothes; the clothes lost. I discarded all but two pairs of socks, a couple of pair of boxer shorts and a T-shirt or two before the carnage was done. Mostly all that was left were the clothes I had on my back, and the shorts I took to Japan. And I even planned to discard most of the clothes on my back when I reached Tokyo.

But once I was comfortable leaving most of my wardrobe behind, I picked myself up, left the suitcase at the front desk for safe-keeping and shot out across the Kamo River to the Keihan-Shichijo train station and took a train southbound toward Fushimi-inari-taisha, the shrine of the *Senbon Torii*...

* * *

Fushimi-inari-taisha

Ah! You've caught me. Give me a moment to pay for my ice cream cone and I'll get right back to you...

Senbon (千本鳥居) literally means “thousand” and at last count, there is said to be over 20,000 *torii* (鳥居), or Shinto gates, lining the paths up Mount Inari here in the foothills of southern Kyoto, creating a claustrophobic tunnel of vermillion that hugs the mountainside landscape and one of the most famous landscapes in all of Japan. Although the sight of these gates, one after another after another after another, for meters on end might conjure up images of rabid *kitsune* (foxes), *kami* (forest spirits) or just feelings of general ill-at-ease, but there's no reason for trepidation – this is a place of reverence. And visiting today is nothing less than a homecoming. Like Kinkaku-ji, Ginkaku-ji, and Ryoan-ji earlier in the week, Fushimi-inari-taisha is another I had visited the first time I stepped foot in Kyoto, and I've enjoyed every moment of exploring this interesting shrine now as I did then.



stairs. Each step is a labor, stepping up and up and up and up in what seems like an endless journey to the sky.

I am currently about half-way up the side of Inari-san, about a 30-40 minute hike up, at a crossroads called Yotsutsuji intersection. A number of nice views over Kyoto can be enjoyed from this spot – not to mention a satisfying bowl of udon in warm broth, rice balls rolled in fried tofu (a Kitsune favorite), or as you've already seen, a vanilla ice cream cone should you be interested. It's an arduous trek up the mountain side with no other way to get here but by climbing various flights of

So, although there are many other stops along the way, I do recommend you stop and get something here – even if it’s just a Pocari Sweat from the vending machine (yes, they’re here too) to re-hydrate – and sit for a while.

Where else can you get this kind of view of Kyoto?

Though Fushimi is the headquarters of some thirty-to-forty thousand shrines dedicated to Inari across Japan (the god of fertility, rice and wealth), and one of the most popular Shinto shrines in all of Japan, I must confess that on the previous visit I was more interested in the avenue of *torii* and *kitsune* than I was with the rest of the shrine’s buildings (even upon learning the towering gate at the entrance to this lined pathway was donated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi himself!) Like most shrines, Fushimi-inari has a variety of sub-buildings and gardens that are ages old. You’ll find the Sakura-mon Gate (桜門; a large Shinto-gate made of wood and painted vermilion) and Go-Hoden Shrine on the premises, but what makes this particular location special and exciting (and the reason for my visit) is the pathway that wanders 4km up Inari-san, the nearby mountain. Harking back to the 8th century and founded by the Hata family, this shrine and its stone walkway draw you in like no other I’ve visited (with, perhaps, the exception of Tosho-gu in Nikko and Itsukushima in Miyajima).



And this time round wouldn’t be any different. This time I came to claim the summit.

The climb up was rather uneventful and didn’t offer much variation beyond the intersection. Statues of menacing looking Kitsune (狐), or foxes, pepper about and break apart the Torii gates as you walk along. The Kitsune, which you’ll recognize as darkened statues with their tails held high and by the white and red scarf tied about their neck; they are the messengers of Inari, and they reportedly have magical powers enabling them to take possession of a human spirit. Never fear though, for he is revered as the guardian of harvest (of rice and cereals) and is busy guarding the sacred rice granary (and if you look closely, you’ll find he carries a key to the granary within his jowls).

The gates themselves are a marvel in their own right, lining the stone pathways that branch off again... and again... and again... crisscrossing the mountainside in a mystifying maze of light and shadow.

It is interesting to note that the gates are actually donated to the shrine individuals and companies of wealth, rather than built and erected by the priests and monks who reside here for prayer or other mystical purpose. The inscriptions on each of the legs are not prayers, poetic sayings or even messages to live by as I had once thought; rather it's the donator's name and the date of donation instead. Er, what?

Although knowing this now does take away some of the mythical pathway's mystique, the knowledge doesn't diminish their visual impact. Wandering through these groves of wooden gates is still an amazing experience. As is walking the entire path up to and around the summit of Inari-san.



As far as hikes go, though, so far, so good. I'm actually on the descent now, having reached the summit of Inari-san and been through the cross-roads already, so my climb is three-quarters of the way complete. The only complaint I have at the moment (besides dehydration) is the pain screaming out of my left knee. It does not appear to be enjoying the hike nearly as much as the rest of me. I am a little concerned about continuing the climb down but I have little choice but to take the descent a little more slowly from here

on out. There's only one way off the mountain.

If nothing else I'll develop a pretty healthy limp.

Consequently, should you be interested in purchasing one of the gates that line the path here, they run ¥400,000 (approximately \$4,000) for the smaller sizes to over ¥1,000,000 (approximately \$10,000) for the larger sizes. Both options are a little beyond my meager budget; however, I have discovered a means to acquire your very own gate. For about ¥1000 you can purchase a much smaller version to take home with you and since its cost is not astronomical, I couldn't resist. One more thing to push into my already over-crowded bag!



I'm going to finish up my ice cream cone here then make my final descent. I'll see you all again – hopefully – atop the Sanmon at Nanzen-ji!

Atop the Sanmon

“What a marvelous view, what a grand sight!” I made it! Wow, would you look at that view! I’m going to sit here a while and marvel at my surroundings for a while...

As you can imagine, I made it atop Nanzen-ji’s venerable Sanmon gate, perhaps in the very same way that Ishikawa Goemon did, enjoying the sun and the view despite all protestations that I wouldn’t be. Though I wouldn’t wish to be associated with Goemon (I’ll get to him in a moment), or his actions, sitting here amidst history is always a pleasant thought; a second homecoming of the day if you will. Though I’m not sure how much more time I can spend basking in this warmth. Time climbing Mt. Inari, while well spent has passed quickly. But what is done is done. And I’m not complaining, really, but there’s decision to make where to go next. Meanwhile...



The Sanmon, and all of Nanzen-ji, lies tucked into the foothills of Higashiyama (東山) (山 ; -yama for Hill/Mountain) in the extreme eastern lie of the city where it has been the center of Japanese Zen history since 1386, when it was placed in control of Kyoto’s Gozan (京都五山), or “Five Great Zen Temples”. As such the temple and its grounds are replete with a long, rich history filled with myth and legend. History records Nanzen-ji was first established in 1264 as a retirement villa for Emperor Kameyama (亀山天皇) and, like nearby Ginkaku-ji, was turned into a temple after the death of its owner. Legend suggests the villa became a Zen temple following the invitation of Fumon, a priest, to exorcise a spirit that had been plaguing the palace grounds. Instead of chanting incantations to drive out the malignant spirit, Fumon simply sat and meditated until the ghost left. The emperor was said to be so impressed with the strength of Zen meditation, he graced Fumon with his lower palace, allowing the priest to teach about the Zen way of life. The emperor himself later came to believe so deeply the palace became a temple following his death and thus Nanzen-ji was born.

Did You Know?

The temples of the Gozan are: Tenryū-ji (天龍寺), Shokoku-ji (相国寺), Kennin-ji (建仁寺), Tofuku-ji (東福寺), and Manju-ji (満寿寺) in order of rank. Nanzen-ji is not considered to be part of the Gozan, rather its presiding head as “First Temple of the Land”.

Throughout the years of its initial birth, Nanzen-ji prospered into 62 sub-temples and a number of gardens on roughly 378,902 square meters of land. But it has seen its share of calamity too. By the 14th century Nanzen-ji had become the most powerful temple in Japan, which spurred its ravishing by fire several times – in 1393 by the warrior monks of Mount Heiei (belonging to the Tendai sect of Buddhism) and during the Onin War of 1467 (recall: the civil war of the Ashikaga Shogunate, 足利幕府), and has been rebuilt at

least that many – lastly by the mother of Shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (徳川 綱吉) in 1703. Today, Nanzen-ji remains one of Kyoto’s most important temples, in part because it’s the headquarters of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, and consists of 12 sub-temples (of which only a few are open to the public) and several gardens (only three are open to the public) on roughly 112,087 square meters of land.

There are three main sights here at Nanzen-ji – the Hojo, Zanzen-in, and the Sanmon – each a unique treasure in their own right.

The Abbots’ Quarters, or Hojo, are divided into a larger (Daihojo) and smaller (Shohojo) building. The Daihojo building (originally called Seiryoden-do) was actually a gift to the Emperor by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and was relocated to the site from the Imperial Palace in 1611. The paintings on the *fusuma* (襖), or sliding doors, here are priceless; created by masters of the Kano school. But it’s the Shohojo that draws the most attention with its *fusuma* decorated in Chinese landscapes and tigers, and for the *karesansui* (枯山水), or dry-garden (rock garden) outside. The garden is believed to have been created by landscape architect Kobori Enshu (小堀遠州 ; 1579-1647) and while the garden’s name is somewhat of a stretch in translation – “Toronoko-watashi”, “Young Tigers Crossing the Water” – the lack of a moniker doesn’t detract from its beauty. Sit a spell and gaze into the garden scene, depicting tigers (three small rocks) accompanied by cubs (three smaller rocks) in a stream (the pure white sand) and contemplate its meaning.





The original palace residence built by Emperor Kameyama is now called **Nanzen-in**. Inside you'll find a portion of the remains of the Emperor, a statue of him dressed in priestly robes, and wonderfully adorned place settings. While small, it's the gardens outside that'll garner more attention. Reportedly created by Muso Soseki (夢窓疎石; 1275-1351), the garden is the epitome of peace and tranquility. The garden's pond contains several small islands, one even in the shape of shin, the

Kanji character for "heart", and a few *koi*. A brick aqueduct, built in 1890 as part of the Lake Biwa Canal Project, also exists on the grounds still ferrying water to a small Shinto shrine well concealed within the mountainside and beyond. Though you might be inclined to dismiss this uniquely "western" bit of construction, it's actually one of the bigger draws at Nanzen-ji, as it was one of the first and most important early construction works of the Meiji period, bringing water into the city from lake Biwa.

And finally the **Sanmon**, the reason for my return visit. Standing twenty-two meters tall, this impressive gate proudly guards the entrance to Nanzen-ji temple. Referred to plainly as Mountain Gate (because Buddhist temples are oft referred to as a "mountain", chiefly due to Zen beliefs and because that's where most temples were built – in the mountains) or with more flourish as *Tenka Ryumon*, the Great Dragon Gate (no doubt due to its sheer size; this Sanmon is counted as one of the three greats in Kyoto remember, along with the Sanmon at Chion-in and Goedomon gate at Higashi Hongan-ji), this two story behemoth will quickly capture your attention. Said to symbolize the three roads to Buddhist liberation, its history is as violent as the rest of Nanzen-ji: the gate was built in 1296, destroyed in 1447 and rebuilt later in 1626, as a memorial to the soldiers that died at the Siege of Osaka Castle. But it is steeped in just as much legend as it is abhorrent violence.



Did You Know?

A single *senja-fuda* measures 1.6 Sun (58 mm) in width and 4.8 Sun (173 mm) in height. The stickers bear the name of the worshipper and can be purchased pre-printed with common names at temples and shrines throughout Japan. A “sun” is a traditional Chinese measurement of the width of a person’s thumb at the knuckle.

Walking through the gate one immediately stumbles upon hundreds of *senja fuda* (千社札), stickers placed upon the Sanmon’s wooden walls. These are prayers, rather than public defacement I’ve learned, specially placed along these pillars by pilgrims who wished to have their prayers noticed by the gods. To aid those who are “vertically challenged”, or for those who are seeking extra visibility to pray for sick relatives or for success in special endeavors, there is an expandable stick that can be used to place your sticker even higher. It is believed that the higher up on a gateway the sticker is placed, the more likely it is to come to the attention of the gods. It’s humbling to walk through the gate and see hundreds of

these *senja fuda* clinging to the gate, hoping for an answer with namesakes that have long since ended their pilgrimage.

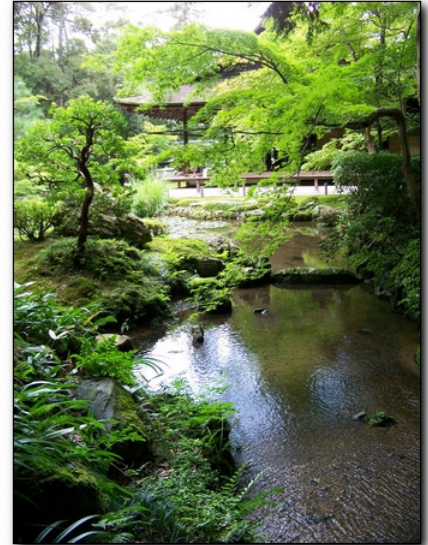
Climbing atop this magnificent wooden structure not only affords breathtaking views of the grounds and of Kyoto (you’ll still need to take off your shoes and ascend the wooden staircase in your socks, and you’ll also want to “mind your head” whilst doing so), you’ll find even more fable and fairy tale here.

The Sanmon hides a room atop its pillars, holding images of Buddha, Tokugawa Ieyasu, and Todo Takatora, fifteen other holy men and two bodhisattvas. Above them is a masterfully crafted painting of young maidens surrounded by phoenixes, created by Kano Tanyu and Tosa Tokuetsu of the Kano school of art. Besides its artistic value, the attic is also famous for its use in the story of Ishikawa Goemon (石川 五衛門 or 石川 五右衛門), a 1594 Robin Hood-style outlaw that tried but failed to assassinate Toyotomi Hideyoshi – he supposedly hid atop the Sanmon to avoid capture. Its depiction has become famous in many Kabuki dramas on the subject.



There’s plenty of myth surrounding Ishikawa Goemon’s origins and his motive for wishing to murder Hideyoshi – such as being born to a samurai family and having his parents killed by men of the Ashikaga shogunate, to just the leader of a band of thieves robbing rich feudal lords, merchants and temples, and sharing the loot with the oppressed peasants – there is little fact. There are also several conflicting accounts of Goemon’s public execution in front of this gate, including but not limited to: the events, the date, and even the season surrounding the execution. Regardless some elements do remain common among the various tellings: Goemon was captured, after which he was boiled alive in a cauldron of oil. And it’s this action that large iron kettle-shaped bathtubs are referred to today in Japan as *goemonburo*.

Not necessarily nice things to be contemplating whilst sitting up here, I agree, but interesting never the less. I mean, who knows, I might be sitting in the exact spot Goemon did as he proclaimed the grand view (“*What a marvelous view, what a grand sight!*”), or when he thumbed his nose up at the Shogunate, daring them to apprehend him. Not that *I* would do such a thing... I rather think it’s probably a good thing Hideyoshi and the Tokagowa’s reunited Japan, but I digress...



It’s time to press on. I’ve spent just about all the time I can resting up here, besides I’ve put off making this decision now for too long. Where to next? Due to the time spent at Fushimi-inari-taisha I think either Daitoku-ji and/or Arashiyama area excursions are off the agenda now, as is visiting both Heian-jingu and Nijo-jo... the question remains: which one?

Heian-jingu (平安神宮)

Though I am disappointed I won’t have the opportunity to once again walk along the squeaky (by design) corridors of Nijo-jo this trip, I am quite pleased to have made the choice to visit Heian-jingu. What an interesting place this is!

A subway ride one stop up to Higashiyama and a missed bus (#5) was all it took to reach the gates of Heian-jingu. Wait, missed bus you say? Naturally, of course, but to be honest the metro station wasn’t that far from the gates of Heian-jingu so rather than wait for the next bus (which would have been along in about 10 to 15 minutes), I took a little walk. Not a bad decision really, just a little hard on the feet.



But no bother. The call of the largest *torii* in all of Japan – built in 1929 at 24.2 meters high; top rail is 33.9 meters long – was too hard to ignore.



Like the gate that stands sentinel along Jingu-michi and Niomon-dori, everything else about Heian-jingu is big: big gate, big grounds, big gardens and a big internal courtyard. Built in 1895 to commemorate the 1,100th anniversary of *Heiankyo*'s/Kyoto's founding, Heian Jingu pays homage to the two emperors who bookend the city's era of national prominence: Kammu (the 50th emperor of Japan), who brought the imperial throne here in 794 (realizing that the capital of Heijo/Nara was small in scale and beneath the dignity of the country), and Komei (the 121st emperor of Japan), whose reign ending in 1866 saw the sun set on Kyoto's days as the capital (after which the capital was moved to Edo/Tokyo during the Meiji restoration). As an assertion of Kyoto's splendor, Heian Jingu was built as a slightly smaller replica, about 2/3rd scale, of the Imperial Palace, destroyed in 1227.

Although not as old as Itsukushima, Himeji-jo, Nanzen-ji, or a half-dozen other locations I've visited here in Japan, Heian-jingu still surprises in its grandeur. The imperial chrysanthemum which adorns the huge *torii* along the approaching avenue is made of gold. The Ote-mon, the shrine's two-story main gate, is a vermilion colored blue-tiled structure modeled after Rashomon (羅城門), Kyoto's original main city gate, which during its heyday stood 8 meters (26 feet) high, 32 meters (106 feet) wide with a 23 meter (75 foot) stone wall surrounding it. Then there's the main hall, or *shaden* (社殿), also vermilion-painted with blue tiles, designed to imitate the Kyoto Imperial Palace on a three-fourth scale.



Passing through this gate (don't forget to wash at the basin, it is customary to cleanse oneself before entering a shrine; don't let the menacing tiger perched atop it get the better of you) and into the massive courtyard your sight is immediately drawn across to the East and West Halls and the two Chinese-style towers that rise beyond them – they're known as Byakki-ro and Soryu-ro, White Tiger and Blue Dragon respectively. Through the courtyard is the Daigoku-den (the 33 meter long, 12 meter wide, and 17 meter tall "hall of state" replica; replete with a cherry tree to the right and a citrus tree to the left as they would have appeared in the Heian court), and the Honden (Spirit Hall), where the spirits of Kammu and Komei are enshrined.



And beyond them is the Shin'en, the gardens of Heian-jingu.

The *Shin'en* consists of four precincts that surround the main shrine buildings on the south, west, middle, and east sides. With a total area of approximately 33,000 square meters, these stroll-style landscape gardens are designated as a national scenic spot representative of Meiji-era (1868-1912) garden design and were shaped by Ogawa Jihei, a modern landscaper, to capture and represent the spirit of the Heian court.

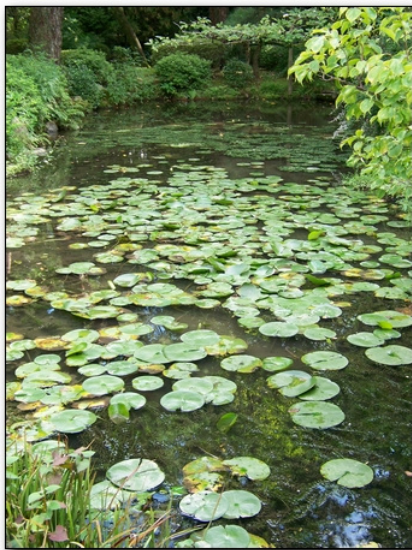
Nishi Shin'en (West Garden) - The focus of the Nishi Shin'en is a quiet pond named Byakko-ike. The irises around the pond bloom in all their glory in early summer, lending the garden an ethereal beauty. A tea ceremony arbor called Choshin-tei is located in the cluster of trees in the garden's southwest.

Minami Shin'en (South Garden) – This garden was designed for holding Kyokusui-nonen, a garden party during which aristocrats amused themselves by composing Japanese poems. In spring, the garden is bright with the deep pink blossoms of drooping cherry trees. In early summer, the cherry blossoms are followed by azaleas, and by hagi (Japanese bush clover) in autumn. The garden contains a smaller area called Heian-no-sono featuring plants and flowers, which appear in literary works of the Heian period.

Naka Shin'en (Middle Garden) – Visitors who pass through the cluster of trees behind the shrine's main buildings will find a beautiful garden called Naka Shin'en. This garden, as well as the Nishi Shin'en, was constructed in 1895. It contains the Soryu-ike pond which features the Garyu-kyo, a walkway consisting of stone pillars which once served as foundation stones for the girders of Sanjo Ohashi and Gojo Ohashi, famous bridges in the center of the city of Kyoto (fans of “Lost in Translation” may recall these stone steps from the film). The pond is also surrounded by an exquisite expanse of rabbit-ear irises.



Higashi Shin'en (East Garden) – This garden was constructed in the early 1910s. In the center of the garden there is a pond called Seiho-ike on which courtiers are said to have gone boating in ancient times. Borrowing the Higashiyama hills as background scenery, the garden contains two elegant old-style buildings – the Taihei-kaku and the Shobi-kan adjacent to it – which add to the garden's overall charm. The Taihei-kaku (Bridge of Peace) is a covered structure that is topped with a phoenix in a similar style to that featured at Kinkaku-ji and Ginkaku-ji.





I'm going to sit here a while and take it all in. The gardens here really are quite peaceful and tranquil, even if there were a few other strollers along the way. I imagine that come springtime, with all the weeping cherry trees, this garden blooms beautifully in pinks, purples, and whites!

* * *

Unfortunately, with time ticking away rather quickly, I had but only a moment to sit within the fabulous garden at Heian-jingu before being forced to press on. Doing so, though, allowed for just enough time to catch the RAKU 100 bus, a specially designated looped route for tourists, and reach the Gion area to look for interesting and desirable souvenirs before departing Kyoto. Walking through Gion's multitude of shops and markets had to be taken quickly; I had no choice but to catch either the 5:00pm or 5:35pm Hikari train to Tokyo in order to arrive with enough time to get to and check into Homeikan. If I arrived too late I'd be shut out for the night!

Truth be told not only did I come away from Gion empty handed – I couldn't find anything that piqued my interest – I also ended up missing the 5:00pm Hikari to Tokyo by just a few moments. The train literally pulled away from the station the moment my shoe hit the platform, but from the glimpses I received through the windows I could tell I was the lucky one – the train was packed tight. The 5:35pm Hikari didn't fare any better; there wasn't an empty seat to be found!

The first few minutes of the ride was harrowing, forced to stand in the cross-over section between the train cars with my luggage sitting in the eyes for the lack of rack space to stow it. Thoughts of having to stand the entire three hour ride to Tokyo raced across my mind as we pulled out of the station, but by the time we reached our first stop a few seats became free and there was a mad dash to claim them.

Guess who won that battle?

Did You Know?

There are three RAKU bus routes in Kyoto: 100, 101, and 102. Raku #100 goes to Kiyomizu-dera, Heian-jingu, and Ginkaku-ji. Raku #101 visits Nijo-jo, Kitano Tenmangu, and Kinkaku-ji. Raku #102 goes between Ginkaku-ji, Kinkaku-ji via Daitoku-ji.

I wouldn't be sitting here in *Irifune* otherwise.



Irifune (いりふね) is the name of my room here at Homeikan and although I'm not quite sure what it means, in searching for it I have learned a thing or two about the Homeikan complex: it consists of three separate buildings acquired over the last century by the present owner's grandfather. Honkan, the main building, was purchased almost 100 years ago; with 25 rooms, it is used mainly by groups of students and seniors today. Across the street from Honkan is Daimachi Bekkan. This house was built after World War II to serve as the family home. A beautiful 31-room property, it boasts a private Japanese garden with a pond, public baths, and wood-inlaid and pebbled hallways. This is where most foreigners stay. The third building, Moikawa Bekkan, about a 5-minute walk away from the other two buildings, was

originally built as an inn about 45 years ago and, with 33 rooms, is the largest of the complex.

This is where I find myself tonight.

It's the first time I've ever spent a night here; not that I had planned to, but it's a nice place never the less. I don't dare go out – I'll never find the place again! So it's a good thing I haven't plans to.

As it stands my second journey to the land of the rising sun is complete. Oh, sure, I have a few hours come morning to seek out Nakimise-dori in Asakusa, Mitsukoshi or the Apple store in Ginza, or grab a cup of Starbucks in Shibuya but who knows if I'll do any of those things. Whether I do or not really isn't the question, nor the answer. Though I'm ready to come home, I'm equally saddened to be leaving. This trip may not have started off with the bang I had hoped, or captured the singular vibe that permeated journey's past, this second voyage to Japan turned out all right in the end, don't you think? I do.



And I can't wait to come back next year and do it all over again!

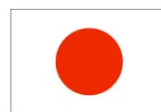
Sayonara, Japan!
I'll be back!



日本国

*Return to the
Land of the Rising Sun*

2007 | September 7th to 18th



the 36 views of mt. fuji, part 2

I leave you now with this last bit of cultural information pertaining to the Japanese – the highly celebrated *36 Views of Mt. Fuji* (富嶽三十六景, Fugaku Sanjūrokkei). You may have noticed that spearheading each chapter of my Japanese journal was an image depicting Mt. Fuji in differing seasons and weather conditions from a variety of distances and locations. These images were taken in part from an ukiyo-e (浮世絵; meaning: “Pictures of a Floating World”) series by artist Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎; 1760-1849), who first published the series in 1827. Their popularity grew and by 1837, 10 more images were added, bringing the total number of landscapes to 46; however, the title of the work remains unchanged.

In the first Japanese experience chronicles (『日本国 ; In the Land of the Rising Sun' -- Reflections of Life'), I chose to sample only 11 of the 46 – as there were only 11 chapters of the story. For my second outing in Japan I decided once again to showcase the infamous views of Fuji-san, choosing another 10 from the remaining 35. Although many of these aren't nearly as famous as “The Great Wave off Kanagawa” or more simply as “The Wave” (神奈川沖浪裏, Kanagawa-oki nami-ura), this next set of views of Mt. Fuji are just as spectacular, and just as culturally rich.



The other 10 I used from the series follow...



September 8, 2007
 江都駿河町三井見世略図 (#11)
Kōto Suruga-cho Mitsui Miseryakuzu
 A sketch of the Mitsui shop in Suruga



September 9, 2007
 東都浅草本願寺 (#28)
Tōto Asakusa honganji
 Asakusa Hongan-ji temple in Edo



September 10, 2007
 山下白雨 (#3)
Sanka hakū
 A Shower Below The Summit



September 11, 2007
 青山円座松 (#6)
Aoyama enza-no-matsu
 The Circular Pine Trees of Aoyama



September 12, 2007
 東都駿台 (#5)
Tōto sundai
 Sundai, Edo (Mishima Pass)



September 13, 2007
 甲州伊沢暁 (#45)
Kōshū Isawa no Akatsuki
 Dawn at Isawa in Kai Province



September 14, 2007
 相州江の島 (#17)
Soshū Enoshima
 Enoshima in Sagami Province



September 15, 2007
 東海道江尻田子の浦略図 (#18)
Tōkaidō Ejiri tago-no-ura
 Shore of Tago Bay, Ejiri at Tokaido



September 16, 2007
 登戸浦 (#23)
Noboto-ura
 Bay of Noboto



September 17, 2007
 甲州三寫越 (#33)
Kōshū Mishima-goe
 Mishima Pass in Kai Province

終わり？

(owari; "the end"?)