



日本国

*Exploring the  
Land of the Rising Sun*

2008 | November 4<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>



---

**RICHARD G RUSSO**

---



日本国

*Exploring the  
Land of the Rising Sun*

2008 | November 4<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>



---

"'日本国 ; Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun' --  
Reflections of Life" is a journal depicting real-life  
events. Names, places, and events are real and  
have not been fabricated.



"'日本国 ; Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun -- Reflections of Life" is Copyright © 2004-2011 by Richard Giovanni Russo (Author) and kept by Vortex/RGR Productions, Inc. (Publisher), a subsidiary of Communicore Enterprises. All Rights Reserved, including the right to reproduce this body of work or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. Any unauthorized reproduction of this material without the expressed written or otherwise permission from the author and Vortex/RGR Productions, Inc., is strictly prohibited and will be challenged to the full extent of the law.

*The events pertaining in this collection is the intellectual property of the author and is hereby Copyrighted. Unauthorized use of author recanted events and situations within this work are prohibited by registered marks. Failure in complying may result in penalty under law.*

**Editions:**

**I.O: November 15, 2011**

**Version: I.O**





日本国

*Exploring the  
Land of the Rising Sun*

2008 | November 4<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>



---

## table of contents

---

### PROLOGUE

.....	04
-11/06/08: "For Miles and Miles..."	06
-11/07/08: "Dreams Within - Tokyo Disneyland's 25th"	18
-11/08/08: "ZED, a Timeless Evocation"	30
-11/09/08: "Akiba Denki Gai"	46
-11/10/08: "Higashiyama's Corridors of Light"	58
-11/11/08: "Autumn in Kinki"	81
-11/12/08: "The Warring Monks of Mt. Hiei"	98
-11/13/08: "Koyasan, Japan's Sacred Mountain"	120
-11/14/08: "The National Treasure Castle Tour"	140
-11/15/08: "Matsumoto, Crow Castle"	155
-11/16/08: "Seoul, One of the Three Kingdoms of Korea"	170

### THE THIRTY-SIX VIEWS OF MT. FUJI (PART 3)

.....	185
-------	-----



日本国

Exploring the  
Land of the Rising Sun

2008 | November 4<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>



---

## prologue

---

*Finally, a quiet moment here at Gate 78 inside the Orlando International Airport; Most of the folks around me just boarded a flight to Cincinnati, taking with them a majority of the noise makers (read: children). Night is finally beginning to take hold now on this very bizarre day. It's bizarre first and foremost due to the peculiar weather we've had today. Our weatherman promised us clear-blue skies, bright sunshine and a temperature just shy of 80-degrees F. What we ended up with instead was a dreadful day, full of dreary and cloud. I dare say the temperature hasn't reached above 70F today. And the sun? Haven't seen him. Secondly, however, is the election of our 46<sup>th</sup> President taking place as we speak; and like everyone, I too sit curiously watching the news waiting to hear who the victor of this race will be – Barack Obama or John McCain. Either way, whoever wins the election tonight, I'm sure America will be better off. Change is needed.*

*Anyway, let's dispense with the politics and gloomy weather and move on to something more cheerful?*

*Tonight I'm embarking on another great journey to the land of the rising sun. From today, November 4<sup>th</sup> through Monday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, I once again will find myself in Asia. Although the real journey to Japan begins tomorrow morning, tonight's flight isn't any less important. Tonight I'm off to LAX to meet friend and fellow traveler from upstate Washington, Rich Alford. There he and I will hop across the pacific and explore the Japanese island in full. And while I have been to the country twice before, this trip still holds many special aspects: first, it will be Rich's first time to Japan, and second, it will be my first time to South Korea.*

*Wait, what? Yes! The return path takes us to Seoul, SKR for a 24 hour period, but what a great 24 hours it will be!*

*Where else are we headed? Well, after LAX we land at Narita to spend a few days in the Tokyo area. Two of these three days will be spent out at Maihara and the Tokyo Disneyland Resort (TDL). CirqueCon 2008 is being held in Tokyo this year, which is partly the reason for the trip – we’re celebrating the arrival of Cirque’s newest resident show: ZED. After ZED, we’re off to Kansai for a few days, exploring Kyoto, Osaka, Otsu and many other townships in that part of the country. While there we’ll even traipse up the top of Koya-san, a sacred mountain in Wakayama Prefecture. On our way back to Kanto we’ll visit Nagoya, Inuyama and Matsumoto, with a few surprises in between. And to finish off the trip – an overnight in Seoul, South Korea, for Cirque du Soleil’s Alegria!*

*So we’re really in for an exciting couple of weeks in Japan; I can hardly wait to get there!*



## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}



「For Miles and Miles...」

november 6, 2008

*After traveling for miles and miles and miles and miles over the deep blue waters of the Pacific Ocean (most of it in deep cover of darkness) – there's definitely magic in my eyes – yes, we're here, in Tokyo!*

(Thanks to Pete Townshend of The Who for the inspiration...).

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.*

*Ahhhhhhh.*

Traveling to Japan is not for the faint hearted. I say this because being cooped up in nothing more than a flying aluminum toaster is probably not the best way to spend twelve hours. But if you want to travel sometimes you have to take on a few uncomfortable truths. Prior to flying to Japan my first time, the seven-hour flight to London was the longest I had been on, and prior to that, a four-hour cross-country flight to Las Vegas and back. But traveling to Japan takes longer still and even with this being my third flight over, it's still hard to be cooped up for that amount of time, unable to hop off for a minute or even step outside for some fresh air. Dehydration is also one's enemy on a long-haul flight like this. Thankfully Pocari Sweat – a local sports/energy drink that I've absolutely fallen in love with – is good at re-hydrating you; I'm already nursing my first big bottle of the stuff don't you know!

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.*

*Ahhhhhhh.*

It's actually the first real moment we've had to just sit and relax since our arrival. From the moment we got in to just a few short moments ago we've been on the go, go, go! From landing, getting through customs, riding the N'EX into town, getting our JRail Passes validated, to navigating the massive Metro and finding Homeikan, it's a massive undertaking. And perhaps if that had been all we'd done tonight I'd be singing a different tune. But we didn't rest on our laurels – we hit the streets of Tokyo at large just as soon as we had checked in and shown to our rooms! This is our second, and I think final, return for the night. It's time to clean up, organize our things and get some rest. To that end, Rich is downstairs in Homeikan's communal shower/bath, whilst I'm up in our room waiting for my turn. He seems to be holding up well, but I'm not so sure Ryokan life is going to be for him...



Contrary to what I was earlier told, we are not located in Honkan, the first of three buildings of the Homeikan complex; rather, once again I'm in Daimachi Bekkan. Our room is #243-Botan (牡丹 {ぼたん}), which means "Tree Peony" – a kind of flower, and it's just a few feet down the hall from Sumire (すみれ), the room I occupied last year. I cannot tell you the overwhelming sense of home I feel wandering the streets of Bunkyo-ku. And it seems that I am not yet in Tokyo until I've walked its alleyways on my walk up to Homeikan, dazzling in the lights and reveling in the sounds and smells of the residential neighborhood. For better or worse – sweet or sour – the aromas here are unforgettable. Rich was introduced to the neighborhood's chaotic smells on the way up... which were quite the experience for him not doubt, as the pungent smell of waste was a little strong tonight.



Ahh, but regardless of the smell or of our location: we've come a long way, but we're here. Alas it hasn't been without a hiccup or two; it never fails, right? So while I'm waiting for my turn in the shower, let's get the adventure started, shall we?



*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.*  
*Ahhhhhhh.*

“It never fails” is a part of a saying that suggests, much like Murphy’s Law, that whatever can go wrong in fact will. And last night as we settled into our Los Angeles abodes, we were treated to a little taste of this axiom. Or rather, Rich was as he prepared to check into his flight to Tokyo from LAX from the hotel’s business computer.

As friends and fellow travel partners, we both planned and organized the purchase of our flights together to ensure not only that we alighted the same flight, but also shared accompanying seats. But purchasing and paying for our tickets separately meant we had to maintain constant conversation during most of the process, and in fact were the moment we made the initial purchase.

Our plan was going swimmingly until the moment Rich attempted to check-in – there were no seats assigned to him. Guessing that his itinerary had not been officially completed by our travel agent (Expeida) and since we were using a foreign airline to make the journey – Korean Air – the discrepancy prompted a rather urgent call to Expedia for assistance.

A five-minute hold never felt so long.

But in the end we were able to have itinerary problem sorted out, get my seat assignments changed to match his, get confirmations on all flights and head to bed knowing that in a few short hours we’d be on our way. Come to find out, though, there was no need to get excited about the lack of a seat assignment on his itinerary. The plane, which probably held up to 500 people or more fully sold, was only half-full at take-off. There was so much room, in fact, that I secured a whole empty row in the center seating section for myself! Imagining the hours of sleep I would be able to get stretched out along the rows of chairs pushed the seating debacle from my mind. Luckily it was the only problem we would have.

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.*  
*Ahhhhhhh.*



Being on a foreign airline can be a great experience, if you let it. Korean Air is one of the classiest airlines I’ve ever flown. The seats are nicely-spaced leather, their stewardess sharply dressed in long, but properly fitted gowns, and everyone is treated with the utmost courtesy and respect. Part of this respect is shown in the amenities the airline offers its passengers to ensure a safe and happy flight (and their return business). Complimentary drinks, sure, but something more interesting: a comfort package. Rich’s hilarious reaction to the contents of the petite grey zipper pouch – an eyeshade, a pair of night socks and a foldable tooth brush – also did much to push away the seating debacle. Because as innocuous as all that sounds, it’s the folding toothbrush that captured Rich’s attention – he thought it was a tampon and couldn’t fathom what he was going to use it for! Although definitely not a tampon, as I demonstrated to him, we did get quite the chuckle!

But he wasn't the only one to get quite the laugh.

I too was subject to a chuckle as I waited in line to check-in for the flight at LAX, doing a double-take as I ran into friend and fellow Cirque du Soleil fan, Mark Wyrick. He and I met in Montréal during the premiere of Cirque du Soleil's *Varekai* in 2002, and remained friends since that fateful meeting. Much like our bumping into each other at the airport, our initial meeting was rather auspicious – we just happened to be seated next to each other at L'Aventure, a restaurant in the Old Port of Montréal following the premiere of *Varekai* and noticed that we both saw that evening's performance and started talking...). Mark actually hails from the Los Angeles area (yes, he works in the movies) and usually follows Cirque as much as he can. Mark has been a patron of Cirque since Le Cirque Réinventé came to Santa Monica in 1987 and he was also on his way to Tokyo to see ZED as part of the CirqueCon contingent.

And if you thought just running into him on a whim was cool, hold on, because, he was also on our flight! Knowing he was around helped us settle into a mostly Korean compliment.

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.*  
*Ahhhhhhh.*

Being part of a mostly Korean compliment of air flyers wasn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact it meant being introduced to more Korean food fare. Though there were Americanized choices on hand, traditional Korean cuisine was also on the menu. And when the cart came round I chose a traditional meal for lunch.

Known as Bibimbap, the meal is served as a bowl of warm white rice topped with *namul* (sautéed and seasoned vegetables) and *gochujang* (chili pepper paste). A raw or fried egg and sliced meat (usually beef) are common additions. The ingredients are stirred together thoroughly just before eating. It can be served either cold or hot. Vegetables commonly used in Bibimbap include julienned cucumber, zucchini, mu (daikon), mushrooms, *doraji* (bellflower root), and *gim*, as well as spinach, soybean sprouts, and *gosari* (bracken fern stems). Dubu (tofu), either plain or sautéed, or a leaf of lettuce may be added; chicken or seafood may be substituted for beef. For visual appeal, the vegetables are often placed so that adjacent colors complement each other.



The version of Bibimbap served aboard Korean Air consisted of a sea weed salad, rice, cucumbers, sprouts and more mixed in a bowl, a selection of melon and green tea accompanied. It was interesting to say the least and quite a kick-off for this latest Asian excursion. Following lunch it was time to turn in and... streeeeeeeeetching out was fantastic! Not only was I able to rest comfortably enough, I actually fell asleep!

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.*  
*Ahhhhhhh.*

Getting sleep, even if it was a couple of fleeting hours, was an immense help once we arrived at Narita. It meant that not only would I be fresh enough to get through the rigors of customs and baggage claim, but also have enough energy to get out and hit the town once we checked into the Ryokan. To that end, getting to Tokyo-eki from Narita was no trouble; we breezed right through Immigration & Customs in fact, climbing aboard the 3:45 N'EX to Tokyo-eki before we knew it! Getting our Rail Pass vouchers exchanged at the station though proved to be quite the adventure, though – they moved the exchange office again. But after a few minutes wandering aimlessly around and an attempt at using my Japanese to ask for help, we finally located the booth, made the exchange and returned to the metro system.

From there we had plans to meet up with Heather & Jim near the exit gates from the N'EX, and if not there, than on the Maronouchi Line Platform – alas we never spotted them, so we made our way to Hongo san-chome, my neighborhood, checked-in and turned right-round and hit the pavement once more. First stop: the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building off of Tocho-mae on th Oedo line.



The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (TMG), or natively Tokyo Tochosha (東京都庁, or “Tocho” for short), Building is essentially Tokyo’s City Hall, where all of Metropolitan Tokyo’s 23-wards and outlining areas are governed. The complex consists of the main office building - Building #1, which is easily the tallest in Tokyo, standing at 243-meters (797-feet) with 51-floors; an Annex – Building #2, which stands at 163-meters (535-feet) and has 37 floors; the Metropolitan Assembly building – Building #3, standing 41-meters (135-feet) high; and a huge central courtyard. But if their size doesn’t impress you, perhaps their cost will: reportedly a staggering ¥157 Billion (\$1 Billion US) and all of it public taxpayer’s money. There are two extraordinary observation decks here: one on the north tower and the other on the south. Both platforms are open to the public

and, most importantly, are free of charge.

There’s Shinjuku, Shibuya, Roppongi, Ginza and Yoyogi Park as big as day. Over there is the Park Hyatt Tokyo, made famous for appearing in the motion picture “Lost in Translation” starring Bill Murray. Off in the distance is the Tokyo Tower (the largest structure in Tokyo prefecture, standing 333-meters tall – 9 meters taller than the Eiffel Tower!), and even Tokyo Bay, where Tokyo Disneyland and DisneySEA are located (We’ll be going out that way tomorrow for Disney and, of course, Cirque).



The view from the North tower in conjunction with a somewhat hazy night made for lackluster views. Still it was nice to get out and do something instead of immediately falling asleep.

From there we made our way to Roppongi (六本木), one of Tokyo's "super downtown" districts, located in Minato-ku. The name "Roppongi", which appears to have been coined around 1660, literally means "six trees" and legend suggests that six very old and large zelkova trees used to mark the area, giving rise to the area's name. Yet another legend suggests that the name comes from the fact that six daimyo (lords) lived nearby during the Edo Period (1603-1868), each
















with the kanji character for "tree" or a kind of tree in their names. Regardless, Roppongi was not extensively populated until the Meiji Restoration (1868+). In 1890, the Third Imperial Guard of the Imperial Japanese Army was moved to a sight near Roppongi; the influx of soldiers led to the area's rise as a nightlife district, briefly disrupted by the Great Kanto Earthquake (of 1923) and World War II (in which the United States leveled the area in air raids). During the Occupation, the United States Army and Allied government officials occupied several facilities in the area, beginning Roppongi's reputation as a neighborhood with large numbers of non-Japanese – A distinction still in full-force today. Although the area has seen its bit of financial troubles, it has recently bounced back as one of the hottest places in Tokyo for night-life.



Rich and I, however, didn't visit here for the night-life, but for one of the city's two Hard Rock Café locations. Eating there was fun too, though I can't say much for the band that began to play drowning out our conversation, but it is what it is. And what is it with all the Nigerians trying to peddle "good times" with young girls?

After Hard Rock we made our way back to Homeikan to end the evening.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg of what we've got planned for the rest of our time here. There's quite a bit!

11/4/08	Tu	Depart for LAX Overnight			
		 MCO → LAX	6:45p - 9:17p	Delta #1473	19C
11/5/08	We	Depart for Tokyo			
		 LAX → NRT	10:10a → 3:10p	Korean Air #2	50B
11/6/08	Th	Arrive Tokyo/Narita @ lish			
		 NEX → TOKYO-EKI	4:13p - 5:16p	NEX #30	60 min
		 NEX → TOKYO-EKI	4:43p - 5:42p	NEX #32	60 min
		 NEX → TOKYO-EKI	5:13p - 6:16p	NEX #34	60 min
		# Pick up JR Rail Passes at Tokyo-Eki			
		# Check into Homeikan - Homeikan Honkan			
		# Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building	(North Tower)	Take Oedo Line to Tocho-mae	
		# Shinjuku		Take Oedo Line to Tshinjuku-nishiguchi	
		# Harajuku		"F" Line from Shinjuku 3-Chome to Meijjingu-mae	
		# Shibuya		"F" Line from Meijjingu-mae to Shibuya	
		# Hard Rock Café: Roppongi			
11/7/08	Fr	Tokyo / CirqueCon 2008			
		 TOKYO → MAIHAMA	whenever	JR Keiyo Line	15 min
		# CirqueCon - Meet & Greet (Rm #1070)	(9:00a - 10:30a)		
		# Tokyo Disneyland Park	8:30a - 2:00p	(Open: 8:30a - 10:00p)	
		# CirqueCon - ZED Training / Q&A	2:30p - 3:30p	@ ZED Theater	
		# CirqueCon - Group Meal / Rainforest Café	4:00p - 6:30p	@ Ikispari	
		# CirqueCon - ZED "Official CirqueCon Show"	7:30p - 9:45p		
		 MAIHAMA → TOKYO	12:32a - 12:49a	JR Keiyo Line [Last Train until 5:13am!]	17 min
11/8/08	Sa	Tokyo / CirqueCon 2008			
		 TOKYO → MAIHAMA	whenever	JR Keiyo Line	15 min
		# Tokyo DisneySEA Park	8:30a - 11:00a	(Open: 8:30a - 10:00p)	
		# CirqueCon - Lunch at Magellians	11:00a - 1:00p		
		# Cirque du Soleil: ZED (2nd Viewing)	2:00p - 4:15p	Block C, Row 9, Seats 56 & 57	
		# Tokyo DisneySEA Park	4:45p - 10:00p	BraviSEAmo @ 8:05pm	
		 MAIHAMA → TOKYO	11:02p - 11:15p	JR Musashino Line	15 min
11/9/08	Su	Tokyo / CirqueCon 2008			
		# CirqueCon - Kaffeekatch (Rm #1070)	9:30a - 11:00a		
		 MAIHAMA → TOKYO	12:21p - 12:40p	JR Keiyo Line (every 10 min)	19 min
		# Asakusa: Sensoji / Nakamise-dori			
		# Ueno: Hard Rock Café: Ueno / Ueno Park			
		# Ginza: Kabuki-za, 4-chome, Nihombashi & Marker			
		# Shinjuku: Tokyo City View & Skywalk			
		 TOKYO → KYOTO	7:33p - 10:14p	Shinkansen Hikari #427	2h 41m
		 TOKYO → KYOTO	8:03p - 10:56p	Shinkansen Hikari #387	2h 53m
		 TOKYO → KYOTO	8:40p - 11:22p	Shinkansen Hikari #429 [Last Train to Kyoto]	2h 42m
		# Check into K's House before 10:00pm		Reception closes at 10:00pm	

11/10/08	Mo	Kyoto, Day 1		
CHOICE ONE: We stay in Tokyo overnight and go to Kyoto early 11/10				
JR	TOKYO --> KYOTO [First Train]	6:23a - 9:14a	Shinkansen Hikari #401	2h 51m
	TOKYO --> KYOTO	7:03a - 9:58a	Shinkansen Hikari #361	2h 45m
#	Check into K's House (Leave Bags)	9:15a - 9:45a		
電車	SHICHUJO --> SHUJO	9:53a - 9:56a	Keihan Line	4 min
#	Chion-in (9:00a - 4:00p)	10:00a - 11:00a		
★	HIGASHIYAMA --> NIJOJO-MAE	11:12a - 11:19a	Kyoto Tozai Metro	7 min
#	Nijo-jo (9:00a - 4:00p)	11:30a - 12:30p	[May have to skip for Daitoku-ji]	
★	NIJOJO-MAE --> KARASUMA-OIKE --> KITAOJI	12:36p - 12:56p	Kyoto Tozai & Karasuma Metro	20 min
#	Daitoku-ji (Daitoku-in / Koto-in / Ryogen-in / Zuhio-🍁)	1:00p - 2:00p	** Special Cultural Openings **	
バス	BUS to GINKAKU-JI	:1, :16, :31, :46	#204 via Kitaoji Terminal	30 min
#	Ginkaku-ji (8:30a - 5:00p)	2:45p - 3:35p	** Special Cultural Opening **	
バス	BUS to NANZEN-JI	3:46p - 3:54p	#5 (Every 10 minutes at 0:06)	8 min
#	Nanzen-ji (8:30a - 5:00p) 🍁	4:00p - 5:00p		
★	KEAGE --> HIGASHIYAMA	5:11p - 5:13p	Kyoto Tozai Metro	2 min
バス	BUS to KIYOMIZU-DERA	:2, :16, :30, :44, :58	BUS #202 to Kiyomizudera-mae	8 min
	BUS to KIYOMIZU-DERA	:10, :25, :40, :55	BUS #206 to Kiyomizudera-mae	8 min
#	Kiyamizu-dera (open until 6:00pm) [If Time]	5:30p - 6:00p	Taxi from Nanzen-ji??	
#	Gion Area (Eat, Shop, Relax)			
#	Kodai-ji (Night Viewing: Sunset - 9:30pm) 🍁			
#	Entoku-in (Night Viewing: Sunset - 9:30pm) 🍁		Near Kodai-ji	
#	Eikan-do (Night Viewing: 5:30p - 9:30p) 🍁		Near Nanzenji	
#	Yasaka-jinja (Open 24/7)			
電車	SHUJO --> FUSHIMI-INARI	7:01p - 7:08p	Keihan Line Express	7 min
#	Fushimi-Inari-Taisha (Open 24/7)	At Night		













11/11/08	Tu	Kyoto, Day 2		
#	Higashi Hongan-ji OR Nishi Hongan-ji	6:00a - 7:00a	(If so, catch #205 from this temple)	
	BUS TO KINKAKU-JI	7:02a - 7:35a	#205 to Kinkakuji-michi	33 min
	BUS TO RYOAN-JI	7:53a - 7:58a	#59 to Ryoanji-mae	5 min
	BUS TO KINKAKU-JI	6:50a - 7:23a	#205 to Kinkakuji-michi	33 min
	BUS TO RYOAN-JI	7:34a - 7:39a	#59 to Ryoanji-mae	5 min
#	Ryoan-ji (8:00a - 5:00p)	8:00a - 9:00a		
	BUS TO KINKAKU-JI	:13, :28, :43, :58	#59 to Kinkaku-ji Mae/Michi	5 min
#	Kinkaku-ji (9:00a - 5:00p)	9:30a - 10:30a		
	BUS TO KITAOJI STA	:11, :26, :41, :56	Bus #12 to Kitaoji	8 min
	BUS TO KITAOJI STA	:02, :17, :32, :47	Bus #204 to Kitaoji	8 min
	BUS TO KITAOJI STA	10min @ :03	Bus #205 to Kitaoji	8 min
	KITAOJI --> DAIGO	10:51a - 11:29a	Kyoto Karasuma & Tozai Metro	38 min
#	Daigo-ji (9:00a - 4:30p)	11:45a - 12:45p	(10 min walk from sta) ** CULTURAL **	
	DAIGO --> ROKUJIZO	1:06p - 1:11p	Kyoto Tozai Metro	10 min
	ROKUJIZO --> UJI	1:23p - 1:32p	JR Nara Line	9 min
#	Byodo-in (Temple / Phoenix Hall)	1:45p - 2:45p	(10-15 min walk from station)	
	UJI --> KYOTO	3:11p - 3:26p	JR Nara Line	15 min
	KYOTO --> SAGAARASHIYAMA	3:42p - 4:00p	JR Sagano Line	18 min
#	Tenryu-ji (8:30a - 5:00p) / Koken-ji	4:20p - 5:00p		
	Bamboo Groves	(No Closing Time)	Seems to be illuminated	
#	Dinner in Arashiyama	(Whenever)		
#	Daikaku-ji (for night viewing)		Bus #28 "Daikakuji" (Arashiyama)	
	Back to K's House Kyoto (Route TBD)	After Dinner	(No set time, really)	

























11/12/08	We	Sakamoto Area & Osaka/Koyasan		
		KYOTO --> HIEIZAN-SAKAMOTO	7:25a - 7:42a	JR Kosei Line 17 min
		SAKAMOTO to ENRYAKU JI (15 min walk down)	8:00a - 8:11a	Sakamoto Cablecar (0 and 30 on the hour) 11 min
		# Enryaku-ji (#1) (8:30a - 4:30p)	8:30a - 11:15a	
		ENRYAKU-JI to SAKAMOTO	11:30a - 11:41a	Sakamoto Cablecar 11 min
		# Hiyoshi-taisha (Sakamoto) (#6)	12:00p - 1:00p	
		HIEIZAN-SAKAMOTO --> KYOTO	1:15p - 1:32p	JR Kosei Line 17 min
CHOICE ONE: TOFUKU-JI then OSAKA/KOYASAN [PREFERRED]				
		KYOTO --> TOFUKU-JI	1:50p - 1:52p	JR Nara Line 2 min
		# Tofuku-ji / Tentoku-in	2:10p - 3:20p	(5-15 min walk)
		TOFUKU-JI --> KYOTO	3:37p - 3:39p	JR Nara Line (every 10 min) 2 min
		KYOTO --> SHIN-OSAKA	3:49p - 4:03p	Shinkansen Hikari #373 14 min
		KYOTO --> SHIN-OSAKA	4:16p - 4:30p	Shinkansen Hikari #415 14 min
		# Hard Rock Café: Osaka		
CHOICE TWO: HIMEJI then OSAKA/KOYASAN *OR* If there's time after Tofuku-ji				
		KYOTO --> HIMEJI	1:49p - 2:44p	Shinkansen Hikari #369 55 min
		# Himeji-jo & Gardens (9:00a - 4:00p)	3:00p - 4:00p	
		HIMEJI --> SHIN-OSAKA	4:25p - 5:05p	Shinkansen Kodama #646 38 min
		# Hard Rock Café: Osaka		

11/13/08	Th	Koyasan / Osaka		
		# Up at 6:00am to Pray with Monks?	6:00a - 7:00a	
		# Okuno-in (6:00a - 5:30p)	7:30a - 9:00a	
		# Kongobu-ji (8:30a - 4:30p)	9:30a - 10:30a	Head Temple of Koya Shingon sect
		# Danjogaran (8:30a - 5:30p)	10:45a - 11:45a	Walk from Kongobu-ji (5 min)
		BUS from TOWN CENTER to KOYASAN	12:00p - 12:20p	
		KOYASAN --> GOKURAKUBASHI	12:32p - 12:37p	Nankai Cablecar 5 min
		GOKURAKUBASHI --> HASHIMOTO	12:42p - 1:26p	Nankai Electric Railway (Koya Line) 44 min
		HASHIMOTO --> NANBA (OSAKA)	1:38p - 2:22p	Nankai Electric Railway (Ltd. Ex Rinkan) 44 min
		Walk from Nanba (Nankai) to Nanba (Subway)		7 min
		NANBA (OSAKA) --> SHIN-OSAKA	2:30p - 2:45p	Osaka Subway 15 min
		# Floating Garden Observatory		
		# Sight-see in Osaka		
		# Hard Rock Café: Universal Citywalk		
		SHIN-OSAKA --> KYOTO	10:03p - 10:18p	Shinkansen Kodama #596 (Last Shinkansen) 15 min
		# Kiyomizu-dera (Night Viewing: 6:30p - 9:30p)		
		# Sleep in Kyoto		

TIMES TO KOYASAN				
	NANBA (OSAKA) --> HASHIMOTO	5:12p - 5:57p	Nankai Electric Railway (Ltd. Ex Rinkan)	45 min
	HASHIMOTO --> GOKURAKUBASHI	6:03p - 6:42p	Nankai Electric Railway (Koya Line)	39 min
	GOKURAKUBASHI --> KOYASAN	6:47p - 6:52p	Nankai Cablecar	5 min
	NANBA (OSAKA) --> HASHIMOTO	5:58p - 6:41p	Nankai Electric Railway (Koya Line Exp)	52 min
	HASHIMOTO --> GOKURAKUBASHI	6:45p - 7:24p	Nankai Electric Railway (Koya Line)	39 min
	GOKURAKUBASHI --> KOYASAN	7:28p - 7:33p	Nankai Cablecar	5 min
	NANBA (OSAKA) --> HASHIMOTO	6:20p - 7:14p	Nankai Electric Railway (Koya Line Exp)	54 min
	HASHIMOTO --> GOKURAKUBASHI	7:17p - 7:54p	Nankai Electric Railway (Koya Line)	37 min
	GOKURAKUBASHI --> KOYASAN	7:59p - 8:04p	Nankai Cablecar	5 min
	NANBA (OSAKA) --> HASHIMOTO	7:05p - 7:53p	Nankai Electric Railway (Ltd. Ex Rinkan)	48 min
	HASHIMOTO --> GOKURAKUBASHI	7:59p - 8:38p	Nankai Electric Railway (Koya Line)	39 min
	GOKURAKUBASHI --> KOYASAN	8:43p - 8:48p	Nankai Cablecar	5 min
	BUS to TOWN CENTER		When is the last bus?	
#	Sleep at Rengejo-in		There is no curfew here.	

11/14/08	Fr	Lake Biwa (Otsu & Hikone)		
	#	Higashi Hongan-ji OR Nishi Hongan-ji	6:15a - 7:00a	(opens at 6:00am)
		KYOTO --> ZEZE	7:31a - 7:43a	JR Biwako Line 12 min
		KEIHAN-ZEZE to MIIDERA	7:45a - 7:53a	Keihan Ishiyama Sakamoto Line 8 min
	#	Onjyoji (Mii-dera) (#6) (8:00a - 5:00p) 	8:00a - 9:00a	(10 minute walk from station)
		MIIDERA to ISHIYAMADERA	9:12a - 9:31a	Keihan Ishiyama Sakamoto Line 19 min
	#	Ishiyama-dera (#7)	9:40a - 10:40a	(10 minute walk from station)
		ISHIYAMADERA to KEIHAN-ISHIYAMA	10:50a - 10:53a	Keihan Ishiyama Sakamoto Line 3 min
		ISHIYAMA --> HIKONE	11:13a - 11:46a	JR Special Rapid Service 33 min
	#	Hikone-jo & Genkyu-en (8:30a - 5:00p)	12:00p - 1:00p	
		HIKONE --> MAIBARA	1:16p - 1:21p	JR Special Rapid Service 5 min
		MAIBARA --> NAGOYA	1:28p - 1:56p	Shinkansen Kodama #558 28 min
		MEITETSUNAGOYA --> INUYAMA	2:12p - 2:43p	Meitetsu NagoyaInuyama Line 31 min
		INUYAMA --> INUYAMAYUEN (no transfer)	2:43p - 2:45p	Meitetsu Kakamigahara Line Local 2 min
	#	Inuyama-jo / Urakuen	3:00p - 4:00p	
		INUYAMA --> MEITETSUNAGOYA	4:20p - 4:45p	Meitetsu NagoyaInuyama Line 35 min
		Walk from MEITETSUNAGOYA to NAGOYA		4 min
	#	Hard Rock Café: Nagoya		
	#	Other quick sights in Nagoya		
		NAGOYA --> MATSUMOTO	6:40p - 8:47p	JR Shinonoi Line (#23) 2h 7 m
		NAGOYA --> MATSUMOTO	7:40p - 9:47p	JR Shinonoi Line (#25) 2h 7 m
	#	Matsumoto-jo at Night		
	#	Sleep in Matsumoto   Nunoya Ryokan		

11/15/08	Sa	Matsumoto / Fuji-san / Yokohama		
	#	Matsumoto-jo (8:30a - 4:30a)	8:30a - 9:30a	
		CHOICE ONE: MOUNT FUJI FIVE LAKES AREA --> YOKOHAMA		
		MATSUMOTO --> KOFU	9:54a - 11:05a	JR Azusa Line (#12) - Limited Express 71 min
		KOFU --> OTSUKI	11:29a - 12:04p	JR Kaiji Line (#108) - Limited Express 35 min
		OTSUKI --> KAWAGUCHIKO	12:08p - 1:03p	Fujikyo Railway Line 50 min
	#	Sight-see in the Five-Fuji Lakes area	1:15p - 4:15p	
		KAWAGUCHIKO --> OTSUKI	5:06p - 5:49p	Fujikyo Railway Line 50 min
		OTSUKI --> HACHIOJI	6:03p - 6:31p	JR Kaiji Line (#120) 28 min
		HACHIOJI --> SHINYOKOHAMA	6:43p - 7:29p	JR Yokohama Line 47 min
		CHOICE TWO: NAGANO, HAKONE --> YOKOHAMA		
		MATSUMOTO --> NAGANO	10:05a - 10:52a	JR Shinonoi Line (#3) 60 min
		NAGANO --> TOKYO	11:09a - 12:52p	Shinkansen Asama #522 1h 43m
		TOKYO --> ODAWARA	12:56p - 1:32p	Shinkansen Kodama #557 36 min
		TOKYO --> ODAWARA	1:26p - 2:01p	Shinkansen Kodama #559 35 min
		ODAWARA --> HAKONE-YUMOTO	2:16p - 2:31p	Hakonetozan Railroad 15 min
	#	Sight-see in Hakone / Mt. Fuji	2:30p - 5:30p	
		BUS to ODAWARA	6:00p - 6:45p	40 min
		ODAWARA --> SHIN-YOKOHAMA	7:11p - 7:27p	Shinkansen Kodama #570 16 min
		EITHER WAY...		
	#	Hard Rock Café: Yokohama		
		SHIN-YOKOHAMA --> TOKYO	9:58p - 10:17p	Shinkansen Kodama #580 19 min
		SHIN-YOKOHAMA --> TOKYO	10:22p - 10:40p	Shinkansen Hikari #386 18 min
	#	Sleep in Tokyo		Homeikan

11/16/08	Su	Tokyo --> Seoul, SKR			
		 TOKYO-EKI --> NARITA	6:30a - 7:29a	NEX #1	OR
		 TOKYO-EKI --> NARITA	7:00a - 7:54a	NEX #3	
		 TOKYO-EKI --> NARITA	7:15a - 8:09a	NEX #5	
		 TOKYO-EKI --> NARITA	7:30a - 8:37a	NEX #7	
		 NRT --> ICN, Korean Air #706	9:20a - 12:00p		2h 30m
		 "AREX" train from ICN to Gimpo Airport	1:00p - 1:30p		30 min
		Subway Line 5 from Gimpo into Seoul	1:40p - 2:00p		20 min?
		# Check in to LEE & NO	2:30p - 3:00p		
		# Go Somewhere!			
		# Cirque du Soleil: Alegria (7:00pm - 9:30pm)	6:00p - 10:00p	JamSil Olympic Stadium - Sports Complex (Line 2)	
		# Seoul Tower (open until Midnight)			
		# Hard Rock Café: Seoul			
11/17/08	Mo	Home			
		 ICN --> LAX	11:20a --> 7:40a	Korean Air #1	50B
		 LAX --> MCO	10:06a --> 5:55p	Delta #1470	13C

So we're going to be quite busy over these next few days – I can't wait to really get started. We're going to have a blast!

Oh, Rich is done with the shower so it's my turn.

Until next time.

Ja ne!

## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

千葉県 | 浦安市 {Chiba / Urayasu}



### 「Dreams Within: TDL's 25th Anniversary...」

november 7, 2008

Today was a rather full day with activities pertaining to CirqueCon, ZED and Tokyo Disneyland. Since we have plans to see the show again tomorrow afternoon, and the events that took place today were standard CirqueCon activities – a meet and greet, a Q&A with a couple members of the cast, a group meal, and a group show – I'll touch on more about them tomorrow. In the mean time, since this was Rich's first trip to Japan, and as a recent Disney convert, I wanted to make sure we had plenty of time to see Tokyo Disneyland park! And, at the same time, see a few new attractions I missed the last couple of times through the area...

Of the many ways of getting to the park – rail, car, taxi, and bus – I could only champion for one: the rail. But while there are many rail-lines throughout Tokyo interconnecting the city's wards, there isn't a single metro line that runs all the way out to Tokyo Disneyland. Only a JR Railway line (the Keiyo line) connects the resort with the main city. In fact, Tokyo Disneyland Resort isn't even in Tokyo; it's located in Urayasu, Chiba prefecture some 45-miles from downtown. Unfortunately there's only one place to catch the Keiyo line: Tokyo-eki, one of the busiest and most massive underground and aboveground stations in all of Tokyo. There's only one station in the city larger – Shinjuku – and both Shinjuku and Ikebukuro handle more passengers on a daily basis; hence the adventure.



If yesterday was an intimate lesson in Tokyo's metro system for Rich, with its many different (and colorful) routes, today was a study in the city's other major transportation alternative: the Japan Railways Group (or JR for short). The JR Rail, as I explained, is a private holding group of seven different rail companies operating in six different regional zones: JR Hokkaido (JR 北海道), JR East (JR 東日本), JR Central (JR 東海), JR West (JR 西日本), JR Shikoku (JR 四国), JR Kyushu (JR 九州), and JR Freight (JR 貨物). Only the JR East operates in the Kanto and Tohoku regions (the region existing of Tokyo and surrounding environs) and it's one of their lines – Keiyo line – that traverse out to Disneyland.





Thankfully we were able to find our way around Tokyo-eki without too much trouble (and indulge in a little sip of Pocari Sweat (ポカリスエット) on the way, which Rich thought was “vile” but as you know it’s my personal favorite drink). Many of the signs were in just enough Kana so that we could translate them and, when that wasn’t enough, some could be found in romaji to aid in navigation, although they weren’t necessary – I knew exactly where to go. We found the Keiyo line after a long

walk across the station’s main floor, down a flight of stairs, across yet another long hallway, then down another staircase before arriving at two unsuspecting and rather deserted platforms. Well, one platform really with dual tracks; one on each side. Only an illuminated sign above pointed out the platform number and the train’s destination. Since the Keiyo Line terminates at Tokyo-eki, all platforms (and thus trains) lead to the same destination – toward Soga, in Chiba Prefecture (its other terminus).

The Keiyo trains have a reddish exterior and one was waiting, vacant, just as we stepped onto the platform. Wasting little time in boarding one, the doors soon closed and we were on our way. As the train later pulled into Maihama station and the doors opened to omit us onto the platform, two things greeted us: rather ominous weather conditions and the rush and noise of patrons trying to get into the park. We pushed through the masses, rode down to the next platform (which contained the platform for the Disney Line Monorail and a Guest Services building), shuffled by Bon Voyage (a giant suitcase and hatbox shaped store full of Disney souvenirs) and passed through the gates of Tokyo Disneyland unceremoniously (well, eventually. We had one stop to make at the Tokyo Disneyland Hilton hotel to drop off something for the CirqueCon Meet & Greet we weren’t attending, but eventually made it through the gates... unceremoniously.)

To bring this part into perspective, Tokyo Disneyland (東京ディズニーランド) opened on April 15, 1983 and became the first (of many) Disney parks to be launched outside the United States. One of the many things I did not know about the park was that it’s the only resort destination (at the time of this writing) bearing the Disney name that the Disney Company does not outright own. Its theme is licensed by the Oriental Land Company, which developed the land and resort into a magnificent destination consisting of the two parks: Disneyland and DisneySEA, a plethora of hotels: two that are Disney’s own-- the Ambassador Hotel and Miracosta Hotel -- and five other non-Disney brand hotels (Sheraton Grande, Hotel Okura, Hilton Tokyo Bay, Tokyo Bay Hotel Tokyu and the Sunroute Plaza), Ikspiari: a multi-level shopping mall similar to Downtown Disney, and an AMC Theater (which seems to be a staple of all Disney parks).







Circling the entire property is the Disney Resort Monorail Line, which features unique Mickey Mouse-shaped windows and hand straps. You can identify each monorail on the system, much like you can at Walt Disney World, by the color sported on its nose and sides. There are five different trains on the system: blue, green, peach, purple and yellow. Riding the monorail is not free; single-ride fares are ¥200 for adults. There are many options, though, like multi-day passes or a book of single tickets in order to

obtain fare. Either way, you must pay for this train just like you would for any other train in Japan. It may seem strange to have to pay for transportation at a Disney park, but this is but one key difference between Japan and the United States. Buy it. It'll come in handy on the route's four stops: Resort Gateway (which is adjacent the JR Maihama station), Tokyo Disneyland station, Bayside station (for the hotels on the bay) and the Tokyo DisneySEA station.

Despite the on-again, off-again weather problems, we had a blast!

For such a gloomy day, though, the park was quite crowded. Marked wait times were easily 50-70 minutes long at most of the major attractions. The highest wait time (or I suppose the longest to be more correct) was 120 minutes for the Winnie the Pooh ride. Because of the long wait times and severe dislike of waiting in those lines, mutually loathed I assure you, we didn't have much experience with the rides themselves. But that's okay because many of the rides you'll find at Tokyo Disneyland are similar in nature to those found at Disneyland in Anaheim, California and the Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Florida.



That being said we did run into Heather & Jim (friends and fellow Cirque du Soleil fans, here for CirqueCon) and had a great time with them seeing three attractions I had not yet seen at the park before –The Enchanted Tiki Room (re-imagined as “Stitch Presents Aloha E Komo Mai!”), followed by the Haunted Mansion (in full on “Holiday Nightmare” mode), and the Mickey Mouse Revue (a throwback to classic Disney park attractions).

## The Tiki Room

The original Tiki Room show opened in Tokyo Disneyland with the rest of the park on April 15, 1983. It was originally a Japanese version of the “Tropical Serenade” show at Disneyland until 1999, when it was replaced with a new incarnation entitled “The Enchanted Tiki Room: Now Playing Get the Fever!” This version featured the Tiki Room in a Las Vegas nightclub setting and removed the four host birds from the original show (José, Michael, Pierre, and Fritz),

replacing them with four lounge host birds: Danno, Scats, Buddy, and Lava (the first female host bird). The story involved the birds trying to wake up the sleeping Tiki Gods, which was accomplished by Lava singing ‘Fever’ to them.



Get the Fever closed in January 2008 and was replaced earlier this year (July 25, 2008) with “Stitch's Aloha e Komo Mai!” adding Stitch from the “Lilo and Stitch” film and subsequent cartoon series to the Tiki Room show. As a big fan of “Lilo and Stitch” this attraction was as the top of my list as a must-see, but in true Japanese fashion, it turned into a “what-the-hell-did-I-just-see”.

The show begins with an introduction to our hosts, the four Birds of Paradise – Hanoli, Manu, Mahina, and Waha Nui – who welcome the audience to the Tiki Room by singing “Hawaiian Roller Coaster Ride”, one of the non-Elvis tunes from the Lilo & Stitch movie. The lights abruptly flash off just as they finish the first verse, interrupting the song. When they come back on, the birds see that someone has written messages and painted pictures all over the walls and windows of the Tiki Room. Suspecting that one of the drawings is of the Big Kahuna, the leader of the Enchanted Tiki, the birds become ruffled believing he has been angered.



But Mahina points out that the messages also say “Aloha e komo mai”, Hawaiian for “Hello, welcome.” Hanoli is amused that the phrase also happens to be the name of their next song, and wonders how the vandal knew that. Mahina guesses that the Tiki Gods know all, and proceeds to sing “Aloha E Komo Mai” from Lilo and Stitch: The Series.





At the end of the song, Waha Nui suspects that maybe the Tiki Gods are anxious because they are singing out of tune. Manu, who has become paranoid, tells him to watch his words or he could make the Big Kahuna angry and doom them all. Waha Nui shrugs and says “Hakuna Matata” and starts the next number, which is part of the Hawaiian War Chant from the original Tiki Room show. However, Stitch disrupts the song by singing his arms out of the flower beds and sounding off

various air horns. Waha Nui tries to stop him, shouting whenever he reaches out of the flower beds, but Stitch gets the upper hand by sounding off a large foghorn. Mayhem ensues.

The lights go out and lightning cracks. Stitch comes out of the fountain in the center of the room, obscured by the low red lighting in the Tiki Room. He pretends to be the Big Kahuna at first, but soon reveals his true self. He confesses to being a menace; however, only doing so to be part of the show. The Birds of Paradise scold him, advising he should have said something before the show started, but considering their good nature, they allow him to perform on the condition that he no longer interfere. Stitch agrees, asking the Birds of Paradise and the audience if they want to join his “ohana”. They do and the new ensemble closes the show with a reprise of “Aloha e Komo Mai”. Stitch declares “Everyone... ohana!” and the show ends with him spitting out of the fountain.

Strange indeed, as I said, but Stitch is a very popular character here in Japan and this show, despite its content, is also very popular. To be honest, the show lost me after “Hawaiian Rollercoaster Ride” ended, as I am not familiar with songs or content of the film’s sequels or the cartoon series based from it, and I just assume erase it from memory.



## The Haunted Mansion

In a previous outing to Tokyo Disneyland the unfortunate pleasure of visiting the park during the attraction's change-over from regular Haunted Mansion to "Holiday Nightmare" was had. As the Haunted Mansion is one my most favorite of all Magic Kingdom-esque attractions – uniquely tied with "Pirates of the Caribbean" – you can imagine my utter disappointment over being denied the simple pleasure of a ride-through. Although an exact carbon-copy of the Magic Kingdom's mansion, one I could (and did) ride more frequently, I was still not totally sated. For this mansion was still unique in its construct (though not nearly as unique as, say, Disneyland Paris' Phantom Manor): its grounds were more over-grown, some of its façade was slightly altered, and this mansion had one other difference: the Nightmare Before Christmas overlay was in full swing.



Originally created for the Magic Kingdom's mansion, in Orlando, Florida, "Holiday Nightmare" asks and then answers the question of which Disney character would celebrate Christmas in the Mansion should Santa Claus ever land there on his journey.



Blending the settings and characters of the original Haunted Mansion attraction with those from Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas, the overlay follows Jack Skellington, usually in charge of the spectacular Halloween celebrations in Halloween Town, growing tired of these annual routines. One day, he accidentally discovers Christmas Town and is inspired by the new ideas and sensations there. He then sets out to take over for "Sandy Claws" and run the mansion's Christmas celebrations in his own twisted style, with

the help of the citizens of Halloween Town, of course.

When the "Haunted Nightmare" overlay is in place, the outside of the Mansion is covered in both jack-o-lanterns and Christmas decorations. The outside of the Mansion has been covered in both jack-o-lanterns and Christmas decorations, but otherwise is left to its normal disheveled place.

In the foyer, which has been decorated with skull wreaths and such, the Ghost Host begins to tell the story of the attraction in rhyme – a painting of Jack transforming from the Pumpkin King to his Sandy Claws guise replaces the Aging Man changing portrait normally seen here.

The stretching portraits, normally found in the Portrait Room (a.k.a. the windowless chamber, or “the stretching room”), have been replaced with stained-glass pictures depicting innocent Christmas scenes, with wreaths as their frames. When the doors close, the chamber goes dark and begins to stretch. The pictures make sounds, as if bursting into shards, and luminescent portraits of Halloween's Christmas vision emerge, depicting Sandy Claws riding his coffin sleigh, a man-eating wreath, scary toys, Sandy Claws opening a giant sack as ghosts rise up and a giant carnivorous snake. The Ghost Host begins reciting a dark variation of “’Twas the Night Before Christmas” as eerie music plays, extensively featuring a choir. The suspense builds until lightning crashes and Jack’s face appears above, cackling, “Happy Holidays, everyone!” replacing the hanging body of the ghost host.

His laughter fills the room, a woman screams and everything goes pitch black. The doors open, leading us to the loading area, which is decorated with orange Christmas lights and Halloween pumpkins. After boarding, we glide underneath a landing where Jack, Sally and the Vampire Teddy Bear greet us. The ride through the Portrait Chamber features portraits of the film’s characters performing various activities, and watches as we pass by. Orange Christmas lights wrap around the staring busts in the library as Zero, the un-dead dog, wraps a floating tree made out of books with tinsel garland. In the music room, a life-size audio-animatronic Sally awaits us, seemingly depressed. She sits in the chair next to the ghostly piano that the Vampire Teddy plays. The doom buggies then move up the stairs, passing terrified green cockroaches in cages, with gift tags that read: “For Oogie.” At the top of the stairs, Oogie Boogie’s shadow appears and turns into a Christmas tree shape in the full moon above.



As the Ghost Host continues explaining the story (unfortunately in Japanese), Zero is now seen floating in the endless hallway. The moving suit of armor wears a pumpkin mask and has garland wrapped around it. In front of the hallway lie a pile of dog bones – tagged “to Zero” – and a wreath made of dog bones adorns the top of the hall. Further along is the corpse trapped in the coffin; Vampire Teddy is here keeping him company, hammering nails back in. A tag reading “Do Not Open Till X-Mas” hangs from the lid.



The dead funeral flowers have sprung to life and now choir the song “Kidnap the Sandy Claus”. The flowers and their song continue through the corridor of knocking doors until we pass underneath a large, yellow-eyed wreath with teeth into Madame Leota’s séance room.

The demonic grandfather clock still remains, ticking the 13<sup>th</sup> hour, and Madame Leota floats along covered in candles, with Lock, Shock, and Barrel appearing in the back of the room.

In the ballroom, the table is set for a Christmas party. A huge gingerbread house sits in the center, and an immense dead Christmas tree (with one live branch at the top) covered in candles and spiders with lights now sits in the middle of the dance floor, but the ghosts waltz right through it. Zero floats above the scene near the tree and Jack and Sally’s shadows are seen exchanging presents behind the curtains at the top of the staircase in the back of the hall. Up in the attic, where most of the usual props and characters have been replaced with a clutter of all sorts of creepy toys and presents, a huge snake coils around the room with a “naughty and nice” list in its mouth. As we pass by, more and more of the evil toys come to life, including three jack-in-the-boxes: one featuring a stylized skull, a black cat’s head in another and a jack-o-lantern. Further a field is a bullet hole-ridden duck, a cymbal-crashing Oogie Boogie doll and a monstrous train on tentacle-like tracks.

Leaving the attic and heading out onto the balcony, snowflakes are seen falling instead of the usual ghosts rising from the grave and a number of other insignificant changes, such as: Vampire Teddy chewing on Christmas lights, threatening to blow a fuse; an audio-animatronic figure of Jack in his Sandy Claws outfit, wishing the guests a merry Christmas; the graveyard is now covered in snow, and the spiral hill from the movie is featured as a centerpiece, covered in glowing pumpkins; the Singing Busts are replaced by singing jack-o-lanterns; and instead of the familiar “Grim Grinning Ghosts”, the refrains from “Jingle Bells”, “We Wish You a Merry Christmas” and “Jolly Old St. Nicholas” can be heard.

We’ll see Oogie Boogie one more time, standing next to a roulette machine, offering a game, before the hitchhiking ghosts make their normal appearance, and in the place of Little Leota, a tiny version of Sally is in her place, thanking Jack and telling us all to “hurry back...” I didn’t. While it was quite a surreal experience to say the least, I can’t say that I’m a huge fan of the overlay. I would have preferred to see Tokyo’s Haunted Mansion in its normal configuration; alas I probably shouldn’t look a gift horse in the mouth. I should be glad I had the opportunity to ride-through at all!

Consequently, the “Haunted Nightmare” overlay was originally created for Disneyland’s Haunted Mansion and for the Magic Kingdom; however, the powers that be governing the Magic Kingdom decided not to install the overlay and since Tokyo’s mansion is a carbon-copy of the Magic Kingdom’s, Tokyo got the props.

## Mickey Mouse Revue

The third and final new attraction we had the opportunity to catch was a Disney parks classic: Mickey Mouse Revue. The Mickey Mouse Revue is an indoor stage show acted by audio-animatronic performers in the Fantasyland area of Magic Kingdom Park and was one of three original attractions on its opening day at Tokyo Disneyland. The original attraction opened in 1971, closed in 1980, and re-opened in Tokyo in 1983. The basic premise of the show is a musical concert in which Mickey Mouse conducts an orchestra made up of various Disney characters.



Minnie Mouse – violin, Daisy Duck – cello, Pluto – high-hat cymbal, Goofy – bass viola, Huey, Dewey, and Louie – trumpets, Scrooge McDuck – ukulele, Mad Hatter & March Hare – bass clarinet, Winnie the Pooh – kazoo, Rabbit – slide whistle, Piglet – harmonica, Monty (city mouse) – clarinet, Abner (country mouse) – saxophone, Gus & Jaq – trombone, Dumbo & Timothy – tuba, Kaa – his own tail, King Louie – xylophone, timpani, etc., and Baloo – flute.

Although corny and at times downright boring, watching the Mickey Mouse Revue brought back a lot of memories. The pre-show video and some of the in-show video was original 1970's Magic Kingdom footage!

## A Key to the Kingdom

With Tokyo Disneyland celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, the park was beautifully decorated in the finest of fashions, with a number of souvenir opportunities for guests of all ages and tastes. For instance, one shop had re-creations of Tokyo Disneyland's Coupon Book (with A, B, C, D and E tickets inside) – did you know that Tokyo Disneyland was the last of the Disneyland type parks to retire the coupon books? They were running ticket sales will into the late 1990s. Other shops had paper products (note pads, pens and books), but in addition to these knick-knack and other throw-back items, there was one that caught the attention of Rich and I – a “key to the kingdom” featuring the park's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo as the key's bow and an elongated blade that allowed for the addition of specially designed beads for personalization.





With the amount of space allotted you could make virtually anything you wanted, even spell a word or two so long as it was a short name and something not offensive. We took to it immediately, placing our orders as soon as possible. Actually, truth told, Rich had to twist my arm into buying into the prospect but I'm so glad he did – they're the most interesting souvenirs I've bought in Japan yet!

For as long as I was on the fence, I ended up purchasing two keys – one for Nicole and one for myself – while Rich picked up one for himself.

By the time we finished up ordering the keys and waiting for them to be made, it was time to leave the park for CirqueCon activities. Though we missed the earlier "Meet & Greet" being held in Keith and Lucy's hotel room at the Tokyo Disneyland Hilton to come into the park today, we did plan to attend the rest of the activities for the day; therefore, we left the park and made our way to the Cirque Theater for the Q&A post-haste!





## CirqueCon

It was quite a healthy walk from inside the park to the Cirque du Soleil Theater, but the moment we caught it glistening in the sunlight all thoughts of the laborious walk immediately left our minds. Also helping shoo the negative thoughts away were Rie, Yuki and Michiko, my three wonderful Japanese friends (who also just happened to be fans of Cirque du Soleil). As this was the first meeting between me and these three lovely girls since my last visit here last year, we took the few minutes waiting for everyone else to show up to catch up – it was great spending time with them and talking about the theater and show.

By 4:00pm it was time for us to temporarily part the world of ZED to attend our next CirqueCon group activity, the Group Meal at Rainforest Café at Ikspiari, Tokyo Disneyland's version of Downtown Disney. Before we left the theater, however, Cirque had one more surprise for us (as if watching the flying trapeze crew rehearse wasn't enough) – a traditional folding fan with the ZED poster logo adorning one side. These fans, a wonderful little gift by the way, were given out to VIPs during the show's premiere on October 1<sup>st</sup>! They're much nicer than the ones we made as gifts for CirqueCon attendees...



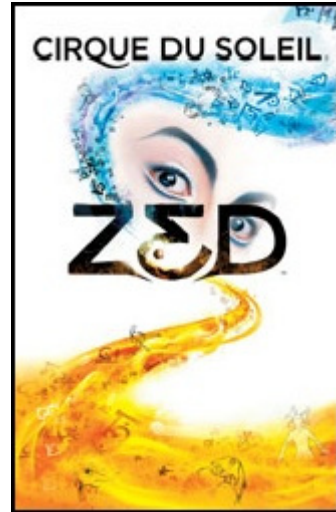
One of the highlights of CirqueCon is when Cirque fans gather at a local eating establishment, enjoying a meal and getting acquainted (or re-acquainted) with each other. It's something that brings us together as a community. This year we were fortunate to find a Tokyo location of a famous American franchise close to the Cirque Theater in the Tokyo Disney Resort! And we reserved the "Cave" room especially for us! We had...

1. Our choice of four of the following.
  - a. Entree: Rice Pilaff, Dry Curry or Curry and Rice
  - b. Salad: Mixed Salad or Caesar Salad
  - c. Pasta: Meat Sauce Pasta, Tomato Sauce Penne or Cream Pasta
  - d. Sandwiches: Tuna Sandwich, Egg Sandwich or Ham Sandwich
2. An assorted selection of deep-fried foods (Squid, cheese potato, white fish, and waffle potato fries)
3. Two kinds of pizza (Tomato sauce, mushroom, olive, tomato, mixed cheese, smoke chicken, or Pepperoni)
4. Stewed Hamburg (hamburger steak cooked with tomato sauce)
5. Teriyaki Chicken
6. Drinks: Oolong Tea and Orange Juice



The group was split into two long tables in the smallish “Cave” room and it turned out to be an awkward arrangement, splitting the group up in an unfair way. As Rie, Yuki and Michiko were the only Japanese fans as part of our contingent, I spent as much time as I could with them at the meal. It turned out to be a nice social gathering despite the strange table arrangement, but the meal itself lacked – there appeared to be tons of food left after we adjourned.

At 6:30pm we sat for ZED and found the stage completely covered in white canvas – a stark contrast to the condition we saw just a few short hours earlier. But when the show started that hardly matter – it was amazing! ZED completely exceeded my expectations. I will definitely need to collect my thoughts on the show before I speak about it (Rich and I will also see it again tomorrow so I’ll discuss the show then).



Following the show, we stuck around for what is becoming a CirqueCon tradition: stepping onto the stage for an exclusive group photograph with some of the ZED cast! It was a great time but as always I get relegated to the back. And, of course, we couldn’t just take one or two shots with a single camera – oh no – we had to take shots with multiple con-goers cameras!

What a pain that was.

Either way it worked out. I got to take a nice personal picture with Reda, the person playing the main character Zed. It was awesome and well worth the effort.

By 11:00pm, Rich and I were headed back to Homeikan, arriving here about thirty minutes later.

It’s been a long day so we’re just going to crash.

Until tomorrow.  
Ja ne!

## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}



### 「ZED – A Timeless Evocation」

november 8, 2008

#### The Meeting of Two Worlds

*“Hey, I saw you guys running around before the start of the show... what happened?”*

With only a few moments to spare before the curtain would again rise on ZED, Cirque du Soleil’s then newest resident production in Tokyo, Japan, my friend (and fellow Cirque du Soleil fan) Rich Alford and I entered the theater complex on the afternoon of November 8, 2008 in triumph, though huffing and puffing from the rather long and extensive walk we took from inside this beautiful gem in Disney’s resort crown, located at 1-1 Maihama, Urayasu-shi, Chiba-ken – 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 into seven “ports of call”, or themed lands, containing a number of unique as well as time-honored Disney attractions: *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* (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” can be found here), and *American Waterfront* (which recreates two distinct American harbors at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – New York and Cape Cod; “The Tower of Terror” can be found 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 park, and have on multiple occasions in the past, but there just isn’t time for that here.

Getting back on point, we found ourselves at Tokyo DisneySEA, that morning as hosts to a CirqueCon lunch for a table of eight patrons at Magellan’s, a fantastic exploration-themed restaurant under the golden globe of Fortress Explorations, the citadel anchoring Mediterranean Harbor on the foothills of Mount Prometheus, the park’s signature volcanic icon.



The atmosphere of the restaurant recalls the glory days of oceanic explorers, with a deeply detailed décor that screams refinement, but the food is distinctly western. CirqueCon held three tables for lunch for the maximum accompaniment (eight), at three different times: 11:00am, 12:00pm and 1:00pm. Rich and I hosted a table of 8 at 11:00am, Keith hosted at Noon and Lucy

at 1:00pm. Heather & Jim and the Duval party made up our eight; it was a great time to socialize. Rich and I chose the early table so we would be free to attend ZED’s early show, and once the hour struck Noon, we were on our way to the Cirque du Soleil Theater as soon as we could say our goodbyes (likely we’d not see many of these people again on this trip) and make our way over.





But I'm getting ahead of myself.

CirqueCon - the Unofficial Gatherings of Cirque du Soleil Passionates – is a fan-organized assembly of like-minded individuals who share a singular passion: that of the Québécois circus arts.



Our humble story began with fans proposing a small gathering in 2004 during the Vancouver run of Quidam, a show which had just delighted audiences throughout the Japan the year prior. Add a little ingenuity and hard work by the fans, and a touch of folly from Cirque du Soleil and viola – CirqueCon came to be. While the tale of our genesis is somewhat more complicated than just a “coming

together”, since our inaugural event we’ve made similar journeys across the continent seeking out our favorite avant-garde circus whenever possible. It’s a drive which has taken us to a number of cities across two continents: Vancouver (2004), Montreal (2005), Las Vegas (2006), Orlando (2007), Tokyo (2008), Monterrey (2009), New York City & Montreal (2010) and Hollywood (2011).

When the announcement that Cirque du Soleil was creating a new resident show specifically crafted for and performed exclusively to audiences in Japan fell upon the council chambers at CirqueCon (of which I am a founding member), we knew exactly where our group was headed in 2008: Tokyo!





Thus ZED, the name of this new creation, became the impetus for yet another return to the Land of the Rising Sun.

Although the lunch at Magellan's was not the last official CirqueCon outing of the weekend – most of the important activities having occurred the day before – it was also not the last. The day before we held a Meet & Greet at our Headquarters Hotel (the Tokyo Disneyland Hilton) from 10:00a – 11:30a, allowing Passionates to mingle with one another; followed by a Training Session/Q&A at the Cirque Theater from 2:30p – 3:30p. Inside we watched a rehearsal with members from the artistic staff to explain what was going on (which wasn't necessary – we know a flying trapeze when we see it!), but we did appreciate the time spent with us answering our questions and pandering to our curiosity about all things Cirque; then a Group meal at the Ikispari Rainforest Café from 4:00p – 6:00p, set by ourselves in the "Cave" room; ZED from 7:00p – 9:45p, a show that completely exceeded my expectations; and lastly, a Group Photo with some of the cast and crew atop the stage just after the show bows.

Good stuff!

Despite our hurried nature, as both Rich and I looked very much forward to our second performance of the show (we, of course, attended the official CirqueCon performance the previous evening), we paused in the sprawling lobby only to compose ourselves before entering through the portal gates and into the theater proper.



After gaining control of our heaving chests, we entered the theater, spotting a number of our friends from various corners of the North American continent – Wayne Leung from Ottawa, Canada; Rodolfo Elizondo from Monterrey, Mexico; Heather Smith & Jim Strain from New York City, USA and many, more. But what we never expected was to spot someone sitting comfortably in *our* seats. With a quick glance at our tickets, our worst fears were realized...

*"Oh man, these are not our tickets!"*

The billets issued to Rich upon arrival were not only not from the show we had requested – today's 2:00pm performance – rather, they were for the later 6:00pm time-slot, a time we couldn't see the show! They weren't even in Rich's name! With only a few short minutes before the start of the show we were at a loss of what to do. Figuring out that we received the wrong person's tickets, we dashed down to guest services to try and straighten things out. Had we been in America, the urgency wouldn't be quite as pressing, but here in Japan, where everything is virtually lost in translation, what should

have been a simple check at the box office turned into a very stressful fiasco for all parties involved.

Unfortunately the theater folks did not understand our sense of urgency – the show would be starting any minute and someone was in our seats! – nor did they seem to comprehend we paid for tickets to that particular showing.

*“It’s all sold out,”* we were advised, over and over.

We knew that, of course. That’s why we bought tickets in advance.

With about a minute before curtain call and with the box office on the phone to Kyoko Hasegawa (our friendly contact at Cirque Tokyo), we dashed back into the theater advising them we were going to take a set of secondary seats they offered us while it all got straightened out. We weren’t about to miss the opening of the show!

And we didn’t... they found us another set of alternative seats, which we took quickly, settling down to gaze over the white canvas that keeps the world of ZED tightly wrapped.



### **From A to ZED: A Technical Journey**



The journey from A to ZED began with an announcement on April 7, 2005 that Cirque du Soleil came to an agreement with the Walt Disney Company and Oriental Land Co., Ltd (the company that administers Tokyo Disneyland Resort) to open a permanent theater in Tokyo. Ground was broken on the \$140 million USD, 2,000 seat project on April 18, 2006 and blessed by a Shinto priest from nearby Seiryu shrine. By October 1, 2007, construction was far enough along to

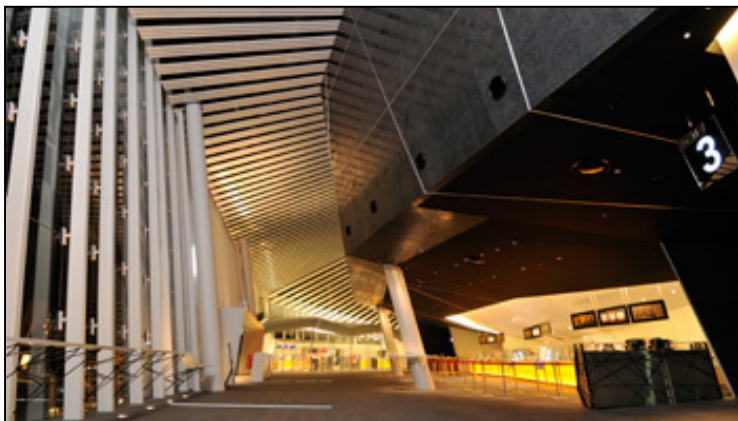
announce the show would officially open on

October 1, 2008, during the Resort's 25th Anniversary celebrations.

“ZED” became the show's official name on June 3, 2008 (though it had been leaked to the fandom some time before the official announcement). ZED would go on to premiere on time to rave reviews and spectacular attendance. Since its premiere (and over 1,000 performances), ZED has proven to be very popular and reached the one-millionth guest milestone faster than any other show in Japan.

However, the effects of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami event, which took place on March 11, 2011, greatly changed the business environment for the theater (and all of Japan). Based on a review of the expected results and the long-term viability of the show, it was mutually agreed on July 25, 2011 to indefinitely close the Cirque du Soleil Theater Tokyo and cease performances of ZED as of December 31, 2011. The show, which premiered on October 1, 2008, marks Cirque du Soleil's twenty-second production overall, the first permanent theater and show in Japan and its first permanent venture outside of North America.

The story of ZED blossoms in an environment that recalls antique astronomical and navigational instruments set in an ancient cosmos that is at the same time new and somehow familiar. In fact the set takes its inspiration from many eras and influences: ancient science, the inventions of Leonardo da Vinci, the products of the early days of the Mechanical Age, nautical instruments and astronomy all play a part in creating an atmosphere of solidity and tradition, floating in space that looks toward the future. As an example, on the floor of the stage is a representation of the Milky Way, with symbols referring to the different phases of the moon, and star placements. An alphabet of 26 symbols, known as the Zed Alphabet, appears throughout the set and spells out the periodic table of the elements as well as other words related to the production. And five spheres of various diameters, each displaying their own special effects, form a miniature representation of an Astrolabe – a micro world that reflects the macro world. Made mostly of steel, the suspended astrolabe weighs 19,504 kilograms (43,000 pounds) and is fitted with a net that can deploy and retract as needed.





The theater is quite unique as it is the first permanent Cirque du Soleil Theater outside of North America (they're either located in Las Vegas or Orlando). It opened after about two years of construction and a total business cost of 14 billion yen. The distinctive Theatre roof formed with polyhedrons is designed in the image of a circus tent, the very beginnings of *Cirque du Soleil*. It is specifically designed to harness the sun's rays from any direction and its glass exterior definitely presents an appearance befitting *Cirque du Soleil*, the Circus of the Sun. By the numbers: the building stands about 35 meters high, has approximately 5,400 square-meters of building area and 14,000 square-meters of total floor space to get lost on.

Inside is equally impressive.



Cirque du Soleil Tokyo's stage is one of the largest in Japan with a width of about 35 meters, a depth of about 20 meters, and a height to the ceiling of about 21 meters. The open, semi-circular stage thrusts out into the audience allowing guests to feel even closer to the action. A grid above the audience covers about 1,700 square meters of the ceiling and can support a load of 750 kilograms per square meters. This grid is used for special mechanical equipment and devices that make possible various stage effects.



Such as the “basket” winch from Fisher Technical, a custom ten horsepower counterweight assist winch that provides the means for rigidly securing a four ton piece of scenic and acrobatic equipment through an enormous range of loading conditions; the “net” winches, used to deploy and tension the safety net system for the trapeze (It is a two stage machine, with the first stage rotating a large drum to pull the stage width net into its initial slack position. After engaging a huge ratchet backstop on the first stage, the second stage drives a large ball screw to pull the entire winch system backward (riding on heavy duty FTSI FastTrack) to put over 7 tons of tension on the net); and the “vortex” winches that breathe life into the breathtaking opening curtain effect (done using 25 hp motors coupled with huge drums that are over eight feet in length and four feet in diameter. At over 25 linear feet per second, the drums collect almost an acre of fabric in the blink of an eye!). Underneath the stage is one of the world’s largest trap rooms with a depth of six meters. All these elements make it possible to present a show that can only be staged at a permanent theater.

The theater’s 2,170 seats are arranged around the semi-circular stage with the seats at the back of the theater about 30 meters away, giving the audience a sense of being close to the action. The seats at the front of the theater are designed to allow a good view of Cirque du Soleil’s spectacular aerial acrobatics and other effects by having seat backs that recline and extra space between rows. All the seats have cup holders so that guests can enjoy refreshments while they watch the show. These elements all help provide a comfortable and enjoyable ambience in the theater.



To ensure that the highest quality performance can always be presented, the backstage area includes dressing rooms that can accommodate a total of 70 performers, a training room for physical care and treatment, and a rehearsal room with a 10-meter-high ceiling where acrobats can rehearse. Also backstage are acrobatic and other equipment, a metal workshop for maintaining special equipment, and a costume shop where costumes are maintained.



### **A Living Poem: Characters and Acts**

ZED is a timeless evocation that draws together an imaginary world based on the Tarot and its arcana. It is a world that conjures the vitality of the human condition and holds up a mirror to our true selves.

As a living poem, ZED is the meeting of two worlds: the heavens - where iridescent colors, paler shades and pearl and silver predominate – and the earth, which emphasizes ochre, green, turquoise, gold and Venetian blue explode before us. At the center of it all is a wide-eyed, white-clothed harlequin named Zed (played with energy and innocence by



Reda Guernick), who represents all of humanity in all its guises: from wisdom to folly and from discovery to adventure. Zed grows as he discovers the world on his journey of initiation, bridging the gap between the People of the Sky and the People of the Earth.

This world of the arcana, in which ZED finds its inspiration, teems with life and vibrant characters, including the Great Goddess, The Magician, The Sphinxes and the Satyrs – all engaged in a lyrical odyssey to the heart of the human experience. And through eleven different performances, featuring an eclectic cast of mixed progeny one expects from

Cirque du Soleil, these characters weave an incredible story of the human condition – from birth, to discovery, to the realization of purpose - sharing and growing.

He takes us through eleven different performances (Bats, Bungees, Lassos, Poles & Trampoline, Solo Tissue, High Wire, Juggling, Banquine, Straps, Hand-to-Hand and Flying Trapeze), featuring the eclectic cast of mixed progeny one expects from Cirque du Soleil. But he doesn't merely walk us through the individual numbers; he helps thread the tapestry that binds them to each other, and us all, completing stunning images framed in breathtaking tableaux from which an entire world is sewn.

Though the stage upon which this story takes place is impressive, above all ZED is driven by its vast characters, which've drawn their inspiration from the mysteries of the Tarot.

### ***ZED – the Traveler***

Inspired by “The Fool” of the Tarot, Zed resembles a Pierrot. Wearing a Rasta wig and dressed in all white, his paleness allows him to take on the coloring of the various tableaux in which he appears, and reflects his eagerness to know everything. Called to undergo a transformation, he is both multiple and omnipresent. The initial state of Zed is associated with the unconscious and chaos: his imbecility is obvious, but his silliness is touching because it reveals his vulnerability and naivety. By the end of the journey, Zed represents consciousness, restored harmony and the reversal of the order of things through laughter.



### ***NOUIT – the Great Goddess***

The creator of the firmament, Nouit (Johanna Lillvik, singer) is the incarnation of the Great Goddess, Mother of the Sky and of all beings who inhabit it. As a representation of the starry sky (she is fitted with wings, decorated with 400 LEDs), Nouit expresses an infinite compassion for all beings and is an ally of Zed, whom she understands and quietly watches over, making every effort to help him achieve his quest.



### ***ABRAKA – King of the Earth***

Inspired by “The Magician” of the Tarot, the magus Abraka (Kevin Faraci) is the Father of the Earth and procreator of all the creatures who inhabit it. Abraka is all-powerful – he wears a chain mail coat and a large royal collar. When he raises his arms, his four wings, which range gradually from purple to gold, spread out over 18 meters – but his power is earthbound and subject to the omnipotence of the Shaman. He is the guardian of the liberating, jubilant power of Zed.





### ***THE SHAMAN & DJINN – Masters of the Arcana***

Inspired by “The Pope” of the Tarot, the Shaman is clad in a transparent copper-colored outfit coupled with white-painted tribal patterns that contrast with his black skin. As the carrier of the magic incantation of the universe, he presides over the birth of Nouit and Abraka, who submit to him. It is also he who awakens the elements. In him, Zed finds a guide to initiate him into the secrets of the arcane and accompany him on his path to self-realization. The Shaman is accompanied by Djinn, his accomplice and apprentice. Covered in gold leaf and smartly adorned, Djinn is the bringer of light and fire, opening the way wherever the Shaman may go.



### ***KERNOUN – the God of Hell***

Kernoun, inspired by “The Devil” in the Tarot, embodies the troubled forces of the unconscious. Covered in the burning hues of reds, oranges, yellows and ochres, he reigns over the subterranean depths, a kingdom that is one of fire where the Satyrs are his unwitting subjects.



### ***CLOWNS – Playing the Fool***

Oulaï and Nalaï; one is a vindictive petty dictator who seeks to control everything, while the other is just plain lazy and always finds a way to do as little as possible. Together, they form an inseparable duo of buffoons with the splendid naivety and great poetry to both move us and make us laugh.

And through eleven different performances, these characters weave an incredible story of the human condition – from birth, to discovery, to the realization of purpose – which they then share with us all.



### ***BATONS – Meeting of the Two Worlds***

ZED is the meeting of two worlds: the heavens – where iridescent colors, paler shades and pearl and silver predominate – and the earth, which emphasizes ochre, green, turquoise, gold and Venetian blue. And Djinn, the baton master, marshals this big bang by combining dance and gymnastics, and demonstrating great agility and exceptional control as he spins three batons around his neck, arms and legs. In the darkness, light or fire, he tosses and spins the batons high into the air and catches them just as easily.



### ***BUNGEE – Birth of the Sky***

As the energy from the meeting of the two worlds begins to dissipate, Nouit descends from the heavens to spread her wings, beautifully framing four artists suspended from bungees who fall precipitously from the heights above the audience to dance a wonderful ballet of happiness, as their movements leave trails of light in their wake.



### ***LASSOS – Birth on Earth***

Just as the heavens exuberate in their new-found creation, the earth also comes into its own. Here six guardians of Abraka, master of the Earth, operate lassos with incredible dexterity, their undulating waves helping to harness and amplify the energy of this pristine land to further its existence along all creation.



### ***POLES AND TRAMPOLINE – Reaching Up***

Combining Chinese Poles with the Trampoline, the earth-bound stop at nothing to reach the heavens above where The People of the Sky reside. Using the trampoline as a springboard, the artists bounce high in the air, precisely criss-crossing each other on their way to grab the poles.



### ***SOLO TISSUE – First Sight***

In a stunning display of agility and strength, the graceful performer becomes one with the column of blue fabric that supports and cradles her female form. This breathtaking aerial dance combines elements of acrobatics, contortion and movement to create a stirring and powerful image... one that catches Zed's attention.



### ***WIRE - Pendulum***

A wire is suspended 8 meters over the floor. Above it, a mesmerizing burning pendulum swings back and forth, back and forth. Through balance and precision the tightrope walkers pass each other at a frenetic pace and perform death-defying leaps and breathtaking columns all while trying to keep from plummeting to their doom.



### ***JUGGLING – Kernoun's Fire***

Ascending from Kernoun's lair, a father, mother and their children juggle bowling pins and plates at a dizzying speed, on the floor, in columns of two and three. Then the family transforms juggling into an unforgettable moment of drama using flaming torches that illuminate the stage with a huge dome of fire.



### ***BANQUINE – Babel***

Highlighting the extraordinary agility of the human body, the house troupe mystifies by performing acrobatics and human pyramids in a series of dramatic movements and perfectly synchronized crossings that depend on absolute trust. Sure to astound, Banquine is one of Cirque du Soleil's signature pieces of performance art.





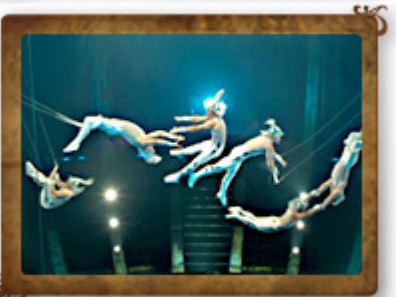
### ***STRAPS – Zed in Love***

Two artists use straps to bring the game of seduction to life with Zed in this amazing routine. Their movements show incredible agility, balance and great strength as they soar into the heavens hand-in-hand. One represents the People of the Air, the other the People of the Earth; separate they are longing, but together they bring about the concept of love.



### ***HAND TO HAND – Two Worlds Meet***

With strength and flexibility, two artists in constant contact move almost imperceptibly to take positions that demonstrate an infallible sense of balance. In their quest for harmony, the performers rely on their intuition and concentration to present a moment of pure serenity.



### ***FLYING TRAPEZE – Celebration***

A combined group of trapeze performers from two different family troupes came together to present a spectacularly energetic aerial ballet. (It's very fast-paced!) Perched on two parallel platforms, they soar in acrobatic flight to reach the hands of their catchers on the trapeze over and over and over again. The speeds at which they fly across the skies of Zed are astounding!



### ***CHARIVARI – A Fond Farewell***

The whole troupe gathers to present an acrobatic parade of strength and elegance with a series of impressive numbers that combine gymnastics and aerial acrobatics. Among the highlights in the number: human pyramids, flying and daring dives achieved through individual strength.

### **Images: ZED's Tableau**

As we've seen thus far, ZED's tableau is replete with amazing and stark images, an area that many claim Cirque du Soleil has been lacking in a number of its newest productions. Though I can't claim to enjoy every act, nuance and moment in the show unconditionally, a number of images within ZED both greatly surprised and impressed me. One such image is the dramatic opening of the show, a gasp-inducing moment guaranteed to send chills down even the most rigid unfeeling spine.

Void, null and invalid are words that help define for us the concept of nothing, the very state of the world as we first come upon ZED in Cirque du Soleil's beautiful theater in Tokyo. But the notion of nothingness is merely a misnomer, as much of this world is merely hidden from us behind the behemoth of white canvass known as "the Vortex", a scrim which comprises more than 5,600 square materials of material.

The Vortex evokes images of what the world might have looked like before the heavens met the earth. For a moment it is a peaceful existence, interrupted only by the cries and laughter of Zed, our guide. But when Zed falls from the heavens into the fertile plains of the earth below – the impetus of the big bang, the Vortex is whisked away at more than six meters per second, making the entire surface vanish in 25 seconds flat. The spectacular birth is one of the most jaw-dropping reveals in a Cirque du Soleil show since the "O" curtain.

Another comes as the energies from the creation of the universe begin to dissipate. Nouit (Johanna Lillvik, singer) – the incarnation of the Great Goddess, descends from the heavens to spread her silvery wings. It's a striking image, beautifully framing four artists suspended from bungees who fall precipitously from the heights above the audience to dance a wonderful ballet of happiness.

A third comes during the Lassos number. Although this number is lifted from the traditional Chinese circus (and performed roughly the same there as here at Cirque du Soleil), it's the staging and what's going on around the act that commands the most attention. Towering above all, his massive wings outstretched and undulating under the power of his fierce voice, is Abraka, providing the song of earth's creation. As he crescendos and holds that final powerful note, his wings (long, colorful capes that radiate in every direction from his core), break away and fly off into deep space, crafting not only a commanding conclusion to an act, but a powerful transformation for the character.

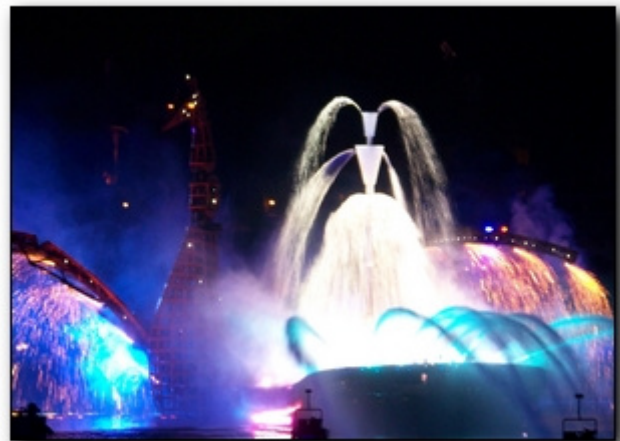
Another comes during the juggling act; Kernoun ascends from the depths of the stage as the entire area is awash in yellow flame. But one of the most spine tingling has to be at the conclusion of the Hand-to-Hand act, performed by Quidam alumni Yves Decoste and Marie-Laur Mesnage. As the act progresses, dozens of performers on wires descend from all points of the theater and converge together on stage. After the entire cast gathers, they perform as a chorus the last verse of the act's song "The World's Meet". It was such a beautiful moment that I couldn't help but shiver in goose-bumps.

\* \* \*

Immediately following the show we met our friends out in the lobby, regaled them with our tale of ticket woes, and discussed the show. Though stress-inducing, I was at least able to calm down after the show's fantastic reveal; however, Rich advised me he could not – still mad over the mix-up that simply shouldn't have happened. In either case our second viewing of ZED was just as good as the first – if not better. Cirque truly has a hit on its hands. As for the rest of the day – back to DisneySEA of course!



Much like yesterday it was very cloudy in the morning, but unlike yesterday, rather than clearing off and giving way to clear skies and sun, it rained instead. Even with that bit of damage, our time in the park was okay never-the-less. After running into Heather & Jim early on (prior to the Magellan's lunch) we stuck with them (or they us) for the remainder of the day. We even ran into Keith & Lucy for a bit – in line at 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.



Due to the nature of the day's schedule, and the rain, we had just enough time to experience a limited number of attractions in the park, but, the good side is that we either did new attractions I hadn't yet experienced or old favorites, like: Journey to the Center of the Earth, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, and Aladdin's Show. Unfortunately Mystic Rhythms was closed for the period and Raging Spirits, the one other attraction at DisneySEA I've never ridden, had a huge line. So I have something to look forward to do next visit!

Naturally I was all about BraviSEAmo come evening and after its rousing performance, we called it a day.



## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}



「Akiba Denki Gai」

november 9, 2008

*Ah, Sumimasen! Give me a moment while I take this then I'll be right with you...*

*Konbanwa!* Good evening and greetings from *Botan* here at *Homeikan Daimachi Bekkan*. It's been an interesting day today and rather fulfilling too, but with our time in Tokyo coming to an end, we've settled in for the night here at the Ryokan – doing some laundry, packing things up and generally decompressing. As to the decompressing: I'm not sure how lucid I will be – or for how much longer – since I've taken a dose of Nyquil, so I tend warning: reading further could be an adventure you weren't seeking to take tonight. But to tell you the truth I'm quite happy to be doing so; I really, really need some sleep.

Before I'm pegged as an addict let me defensively say that I do this reluctantly. It's not because I've caught a snivel, nor have a case of jet-lag, rather it's due to my travel companion's tendencies to snore rather loudly at night. Our close proximity here in our Tatami-matted room spells disaster for anyone looking to catch forty or so winks. Oh he's doing just fine it's me who's having the problems. So although probably not recommended as a sleep aid, the constant interruptions to R.E.M. sleep have had me close to “walking zombie”; therefore, I was desperate for something, anything to assist me. Nyquil is “so you can rest medicine” after-all, so I gave it a try. The pills worked like a charm last night – I woke up early this morning well rested and refreshed – so I'm looking forward to doing so again tomorrow morning.

Hence tonight's dose...

Come now, it's not like I'm laying blame at his feet, it's just a fact of traveling life and I've come up with a solution to help make the problem go away. My trip (no pun intended) on Nyquil is almost over though. We'll have separate rooms in Kyoto, so I won't need to resort to drugs for sleep those nights! So with that out of the way let's talk about today before I become delirious, okay?

Let's see... oh, yes. After wrapping up our business with CirqueCon yesterday – hosting the lunch-in at Tokyo DisneySEA's Magellan's restaurant, seeing ZED again and exploring the park – today was spent in and around the Tokyo Metropolitan area, the first either of us had a chance to do so since the night we arrived. Once we got up and moving about, we ventured out of Homeikan for the north-eastern part of the city – to Asakusa – as planned.

## Nakamise-dori & Senso-ji

With the time allotted last year in Tokyo I made visiting Asakusa one of my top priorities. The discovery of Nakamise-dori and Senso-ji during that outing made the effort not only satisfying but tremendously enjoyable. Repeating that exceptional jaunt only made sense; it would make an ideal area to introduce Tokyo to a new-comer, without the hustle-and-bustle of super clusters like Shinjuku, Shibuya, and Ginza (though we'd get there later). Asakusa has life, it has history, and it has shopping. Though I wasn't sure how well Rich would receive the kitschy nature of the shopping arcade approach, I wanted to be sure he would enjoy visiting historical confines – like shrines and temples – since most of Kyoto's itinerary would be spent doing just that.



So you could say Asakusa was an experiment of sorts while at the same time an introduction to a little slice of Tokyo. Would you believe he liked the kitschy shopping arcade better than exploring the temple? Shocking, I know!



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 offerings. The area blossomed when Tokugawa Ieyasu (Shogun) made Edo (a.k.a. Tokyo) the capital, which transformed Edo into the 17<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of the city that never slept and Asakusa was ground zero. Asakusa became a pleasure quarter in its own right with stalls selling toys (not that kind),

souvenirs, and sweets; acrobats, jugglers and strolling-musicians wandered the narrow streets; and sake shops and teahouses – where the waitresses often did provide more than just tea – were set up on every corner. Eventually the Kabuki theaters came, followed later by the cinema; the two forms establishing Asakusa as the entertainment quarter of the city – a reputation it held virtually unchallenged until World War II.

Though much of the area was destroyed during World War II, Asakusa is still Tokyo's oldest actively working geisha district, and much of what we associate with Japanese culture that sprang from these grounds can still be found here. 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 Sumida River, two brothers fished out a small golden statue of Kannon, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy in 628 AD. 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.



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, some say, the wind, thunderclouds and lightning associated with its protective gods.

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 defiantly amidst the modern world to greet you warmly. But beware: the god of thunder (Raijin, sitting left) and the god of wind (Fujin, right) guard this path and they don't take kindly to evil-doers.

Kaminarimon means "Thunder



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 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!



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 14<sup>th</sup> century Chinese sutras (or sacred texts), but it’s not as if you’re allowed to see them. Beyond that is the 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), and the Hondo, or main hall.



Several structures in the temple complex survived the horrific fire-bombings and are as original as they can get. The largest of these structures, 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 the shrine of the Three Guardians (*Sanja Sama*) due to the role the brothers and their master played in its founding. Near the entrance is another survivor of WWII: the eastern gate, *Niten-mon*, built in 1618. Though it is original, it was not originally meant for this temple. The gate originally stood at a separate shrine built for Tokugawa Ieyasu – this is the only survivor. 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 continues to grow.

#### 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.

There’s never a loss for something to see here.



Senso-ji is certainly a great place to sit and watch the masses. From the worshipers wafting smoke over themselves from the temple’s incense burner (called a *jokoro*) or rubbing the 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? Try the Banana flavored ice-cream! Oh, and pick up a red bean paste pancake doll or two along the way – you won’t be sorry. They’re yummy!



## Hachiko!

After spending some time viewing the historical attractions of Senso-ji and shopping the various stalls of Nakamise-dori, we reluctantly returned underground and doubled back along the Ginza Line to Ueno station, another cluster of Tokyo's masses, for that location's Hard Rock Café. Our time here was short, however, as there was no time or want to grab a "Fuji Burger" – we came only for a souvenir. Once Rich's token hunting was complete, we met Wayne Leung, fellow friend and Cirque du Soleil fan (who came to Japan from Canada for ZED separate from CirqueCon), out in Shibuya for lunch. Riding out there – all the way across the city, traversing the Ginza Line from end-to-end – would be interesting to say the least.



Although you don't see any sights being mostly underground, if you ever want to get the pulse of the city, I suggest a ride through the Ginza line from one terminus to the other: you won't be sorry. The differences that can be seen – albeit minute – of 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 reveals much. 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).



The terminus is, of course, Shibuya station and if you thought you had the pulse of the city by now I'm sorry say you're sorely mistaken. The ride provides a glimpse but Shibuya puts it into perspective. And one cannot prepare for the chaos that is Shibuya – I love it. The first time I stepped into this world of fashion, flash and fast-pace in 2004 I thought I was more than equipped to experience this chaotic expanse of urban Tokyo life, but I was wrong. This place ebbs and flows to the tune of the latest J-POP craze and changes just as quickly. And it does; what was hip one minute is last decade's news the next and somehow something new is always around the corner. The populace keeps on chugging along with the changes without missing a step – or stepping on each other as they cross the zebra stripes.



As this was Rich's first trip to Shibuya, it would be interesting to see his reactions to the hustle and bustle of one of the busiest crossings in Japan – I wasn't disappointed. As for Shibuya itself, it *is* one of the most complex and busiest stations in all of Tokyo, ground zero for a huge commercial and entertainment district the likes of which completely ensnares the senses. You'll find various department and specialty stores right outside the station gates, including HMV, Tower Records, an Apple and a Disney Store, with many, many more just within reach on foot, down various avenues that fan out from the central behemoth.

The most infamous of these is Shibuya 109, with its unmistakable round tower thrusting itself skyward almost in defiance of those (square) around it. A homegrown fashion statement is 109; it's a hangout of young Japanese girls and teens alike. Here a techno fashion culture has been cultivated that is largely responsible for the girls of Harajuku (原宿): young ladies who dress in outlandish and eccentric clothing with equally bizarre accessories, makeup, and hair. You'll hear them referred to as Harajuku girls because they tend to gather in and around Harajuku station, which is not far from Shibuya. You'll know when you meet one; I've met several at Harajuku itself and in some of the various shops here in Shibuya on previous trips.

#### Did You Know?

Did you know that the name of the store 109 is actually quite a clever one? "to" is the Japanese word for 10 and "kyu" is the Japanese word for 9. Join the words and you get "Tokyu," the name of the company that owns the store. It means to be a snub to Seibu, the company that owns the other half of the stores in the district.

They'll definitely catch your attention, so if you see one: admire, but don't gawk.



Besides Shibuya 109, one of the other most famous buildings here is the one that Starbucks occupies. It sports a giant video screen, which gives the crossing – also reportedly the world's busiest – its distinctive glow (two other are attached to nearby buildings). While the neon, the flicker of the big screens and flashing lights will dazzle (even in the daytime), nothing will frazzle more than a mass of scurrying Japanese crossing this 4-way intersection at one time. For 30 to 45 seconds every 2 to 3 minutes, the

intersection of Dogenzaka, Bunkamura-dori (文化村通り) and Koen-dori (園通り) comes alive and opens up to the pedestrian; hundreds upon hundreds of them, all rushing to get to the other side, whichever one that may be. It can be a daunting experience to be in the middle of it all and if you get a chance, and you will if you want to browse any of the stores, I highly recommend taking a moment to experience it. There's not a lot of pushing and shoving, but being in the midst of such a crowd of people isn't an experience to be missed.

Besides shopping and café's, you'll find a wide variety of other "sites" in Shibuya to explore – "Love Hotel Hill" is just down the block (home to the infamous capsule hotels and various other "love" establishments for those who need a quick rendezvous.); there's "Condommania" down the central "gai" or road (they specialize in condoms of all shapes, sizes, colors, flavors and uses); and many, many other establishments foreigners probably shouldn't attempt to peek into.



And if you're looking for a place to meet, look no further than the statue of Hachiko at the square named in his honor.



The plaza, right in front of the Shibuya station, is dedicated to and named after an Akita dog that faithfully saw his owner off every morning and greeted him at the end of the day. Even after his master's death (in 1925), Hachiko (忠犬ハチ公) returned every day to wait for him and reportedly did so for the next eleven years until he died. The story so touched the people of Tokyo (and all of Japan) that he was honored with a statue, which exists today and is one of the better-known meeting spots in all of Tokyo. In fact,

when Wayne and I were talking about meeting up in the city we both thought of Hachiko.

That's where we found him.

We ate a more traditional set lunch today within the first floor of the Saito department store – not far from Hachiko. I had chicken and onion Udon noodle soup with rice and tofu as my sides and this wonderful apple Jello with Fiji apples at the bottom – so juicy! Rich had the same whilst Wayne had a bento set of some kind. It was very delicious and a nice treat. Following lunch the three of us wandered about Shibuya together – walking by some of those places I mentioned earlier – and even tried to get pictures of the famous crossing at Starbucks (but I got yelled at for making the attempt). We left for Ginza soon after – browsing the gadgets at the Sony showroom, emailing from the Ginza Apple Store, and generally walking about town without much of agenda (which was true, we were open for anything). But it's where we ended up next that was the most interesting – Akinhabara – the first time I've ever walked those streets.

## Akinhabara: the Electric City

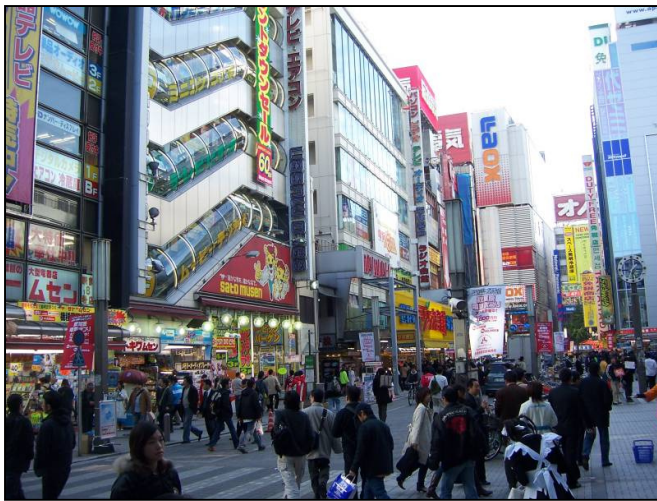
Walking along the streets of the Ginza, eating Udon in Shibuya and shopping along the streets of Asakusa was interesting in their own right; nothing prepared us for the whimsical nature of Akinhabara, the absolute number one place in Tokyo to shop for all things diverse. And there are many things of that nature here – from computers, phones, cameras, robotics and console gaming shops to gambling halls (pachinko parlors for example), computer arcades, anime stores (for the otaku), cafés and, yes, even adult sex toy shops (probably also for the otaku).

This mélange has given rise to my nickname for this area – “The Eclectic City” – but it does have a more official one of its own – “The Electric City” (電気街; Denki Gai) – due in large part to the various stores dedicated to all things electrical. Historically speaking the area was just outside of Sujikai-gomon, the big city gate where present-day Mansei bridge spans the river. It was the gateway from inner Edo to northern and northwestern Japan and Kan’ei-ji temple in Ueno. Many dealers, craftsmen and relatively lower class samurai lived here.

### Did You Know?

While there is an official locality named Akihabara nearby, part of Taito-ku, the area known to most people as Akihabara (including the railway station of the same name) is actually Soto-Kanda, a part of Chiyoda-ku.

A great fire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century burned most of the area to the ground, which prompted the officials to clear thousands of acres bare in order to further protect the city from fire. And it’s in this once barren wasteland that the area gets its name.



A small Shinto shrine once held in old Edo Castle was built in this cleared land. Known as “the extinguisher shrine” (鎮火社), many misunderstood its purpose. Many in Tokyo thought that the deity Akiba or Akiha (秋葉), which was the most popular fire-controlling deity in central and eastern Japan, must have been enshrined in it. Therefore, the residents of the city referred to the cleared land as “Akiba ga hara” or “Akibappara”, which translates to “the deity Akiba’s square”. The area

didn’t become known as the Electric City until following World War II, when a black market developed around the first school of electrical manufacturing here. Clustered around here were various stores selling vacuum tubes, radio goods, and electrical items to the students. With the advent of wireless, computers, gaming, anime (otaku), and more, Akinhabara has changed with the times.

Today its name is frequently shortened to just Akiba (アキバ) by the locals.



Akihabara is centered around Akihabara Station, located on the JR Yamanote, Keihin-Tohoku, and Chuo Local lines. Getting to Akihabara by subway is also quite easy; travel to Akihabara Station by the Hibiya line (H15), or Suehirocho Station by the Ginza line (G14). The Toei Shinjuku line is also a 10 minute walk to Akihabara from the Iwamotocho Station (S08). Just take the conveniently labeled “Akihabara Electric Town” exit to be dropped into the middle of the action.

One of the first things we saw was that before-mentioned adult-oriented store.

Based on the anime and manga I’ve seen and read over the years I can safely say that the Japanese have always been a little hentai. The sex store we walked into tonight proves it without a doubt. Not only do they have pornographic magazines, DVDs, and other similar materials you’d normally find at a sex shop, they also had a number of different lubes (in a number of viscosities, flavors and compounds), various cock sleeves (a.k.a. “holes”, also in various shapes, sizes, lengths, materials and compounds) on display for anyone to come pick up and play with, prostate stimulators, complete vaginal sets, dolls, costumes, and last but not least, an automatic robotic masturbator machine – all for sale and all right in plain view. Topping off the experience was a video of a young Japanese girl riding a dildo machine playing over and over in the stairwell.

I’m not sure who was the most uncomfortable – the young kid trying to hide in the back while flipping through the Japanese equivalent of Hustler on the bottom floor, the older guy browsing the rack of costumes and accoutrements on the top floor, or the business man contemplating one of the “holes” and its accompanying lube on the second floor. As for me I just found the whole thing amusing – and quite informative. I thought I’d seen it all, but that automatic robotic masturbator machine was quite a surprise. *Ikura desho ka?*



Ahem. So...

Other than the sex store, the other place of note we visited on the streets of Akihabara was the Sega “GiGo” building (池袋ギーゴ), an amazing arcade palace if I ever saw one.

GiGo without a doubt stands for the old computer axiom – Garbage In, Garbage Out – which has been used primarily to call attention to the fact that computers will unquestioningly process the most nonsensical of input data (garbage in) and produce nonsensical output (garbage out).



The term was most popular in the early days of computing but still applies to today's most powerful systems, as they can spew out mountains of erroneous data in a relatively short time. And with more and more people granted access to more and more powerful technology there's a lot of GIGO going on.

As a choice for an arcade name, GIGO was perfect.



Make no mistake: GIGO is not your typical arcade. This place had machine types I had never seen! One type I took notice of immediately was a "pod", a contraption the player sat in while the display (a curved panoramic screen) engulfed you in all its arcade goodness; a Gundam game no less. Another type I had never seen was some kind of cross between the "Pokemon type" card games and a regular arcade machine. A pad on the machine is somehow used in

conjunction with the cards. Move the cards across the pad and they move on screen. This way you use the cards you have to form strategies, fight groups and various other execution methods in order to play and ultimately win the challenge. Way cool! Had I been less apprehensive and more playful I would have attempted to play one of these machines, but I was too self conscious about doing it wrong or getting help with making it work to actually go through with it. But boy did I want to!



\* \* \*



After a doughnut break at Mister Donut (ミスタードーナツ), it was time to call it a day. So as I said, now we're back at Homeikan, doing laundry and packing things up. Tomorrow we're Kyoto bound on 6:23am Shinkansen Hikari #401!

Consequently, about Mister Donut, did you know that in 1955 two brothers-in-law – Harry Winoukur and Bill Rosenberg – broke off their partnership to each found their own chain of coffee and doughnut shops? Harry Winoukur founded Mister Donut and Bill Rosenberg founded Dunkin'. Can you believe that? Today Mister Donut is a brand all but lost in the United States (though I remember them) – most locations today are Dunkin' Doughnuts – but the brand is alive and well in Asian markets and they're yummy!

And the Nyquil is now definitely kicking in...

On that note then...Oyasuminasai! (Goodnight!)



## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 | 京都府 {Kansai / Kyoto}



### 「Higashiyama's Corridors of Light」

november 10, 2008

バン！

The words “ban”, “baki” and “ba” in the Japanese nomenclature all help to describe the sound of a sudden impact, what we in the English speaking world would generally label with “BANG!”, “POW!” or “BOOM!” But like “pow” or “boom”, “bang” can also intransitively be used to express excitement or thrill in some event or thing (like the signature catch-phrase of a certain chef), or as an announcement of something unexpected. Navigating through the distinctions and differences, thus deciphering the distortions in word meanings, is probably one of the hardest lessons to master of the English language – but like with the Japanese, the implied meaning of what we say lies in the context and sub-context of the conversation. So when I say today started and ended with such a bang – two figuratively and one quite literally – we’re looking for context.



The literal “bang” occurred at the crack of dawn (no pun intended) while Rich and I prepared to leave for Kyoto. During perhaps an ill-advised attempt to take a quick picture of the Ryokan’s gardens before departing, I just about put my head through a thin pane of glass – (バン!) It didn’t hurt much – I was more surprised by what I’d done than harmed – and nothing shattered, but the loud sound quickly set off a sequence of events that no doubt completely woke the entire house compliment. Homeikan’s care-taker, a crotchety but well meaning gentleman in his mid-forties or fifties (which Rich has taken to calling “Grumpy Guy” because he never, ever smiles or looks remotely happy about being there), suddenly appeared and rushed about (also rather noisily) trying to figure out from whence the clatter came.

Meanwhile, I returned to our room to hide; so much for slipping our silently, you know? The very second I entered the security of the room I broke down in a fit of giggles. Mostly in stunned shock because I couldn’t believe I had face-planted myself against a window – (ばか; “baka”; stupid) – and some due in part to the stern look “Grumpy Guy” had on his face as he made his rounds. All this because I thought the window was open! Ahh, but I did snap that picture I wanted...

The first figurative “bang” occurred not far out of Odawara, on our Shinkansen Hikari trip from Tokyo to Kyoto. It was as if it came out of nowhere – (バン!) – our first glimpse of Japan’s most honored mountaintop, Fuji-san (富士山). Mt. Fuji, named for the Buddhist fire goddess Fuchi and sacred to the Shinto goddess Sengen-Sama (whose shrine is found at the summit), is the tallest mountain in Japan, rising to 12,388 feet, and the biggest round, with a circumference of 78 miles, a base diameter of 25-30 miles, and a 1600 foot diameter crater at the top. The mountain also has the distinction of being the holiest of Japan’s “Three Holy Mountains” (三霊山; “*Sanreizan*”).

#### Did You Know?

Fuji-san is not only the holiest of Japan’s “Three Holy Mountains”, or (三霊山 “*Sanreizan*”), it’s also the tallest of the trio, which include Mount Tate and Mount Haku. Mount Tate (立山; *Tateyama* - located in the southeastern area of Toyama Prefecture, Japan) stands 3,015 meters / 9,892 feet high, and Mount Haku (白山; *Haku-san* - located on the borders of Gifu, Fukui and Ishikawa prefectures), stands 2,702 meters / 8,865 feet high.

Spotting Mt. Fuji looming in the not-so-distance is such a breathtaking experience; an encounter I unfortunately missed the two previous visits in country, but no so today! Too awed to find a moment to snap a photo (like a gaijin no less) all I could do was stare. From the foothills of its base to the snow-filled cap at the top, Mount Fuji stood triumphantly as we streaked by at roughly 300 kilometers an hour. By the time I did get my wits about me, Fuji-san was gone, hidden once again behind cloud and earth (his normal clothes). Though disappointed in my lack of response (catching a glimpse of Fuji-san isn’t ever guaranteed so spotting him can be rare), it wouldn’t have mattered anyway – I was on the opposite side of the train! What a fantastic peek never-the-less, and a good omen according to legend.



The second figurative “bang” came as I prowled Kyoto’s Gion district tonight taking in a number of the city’s fabulous gardens in all their nighttime illuminated glory – (バン!) – a special event that happens twice a year in some of Japan’s well-regarded gardens, but I’ll get into that a bit later on. With all those “bangs” I’d like to suggest to you now that I’m too tired to explain it too you – the word “tired” really doesn’t cover how I feel after this

long and active day – but I can’t quite head off to bed yet either. There’s still laundry to be done (leftovers I didn’t get to from last night) and a shower I’ve got to take (um, yeah), so since I’ll be up a little while longer, waiting for the wash to finish its spin cycle (and then later dry), I might as well provide the context to the rest of this story, ne?

Well, for a moment it seemed as if our travels were blessed by Fuji-san himself, but when the schedule I laid out for us today started going awry the moment we arrived in Kyoto, I began to question that assumption.

First thing we had to accomplish upon arrival was getting a map of the city from the tourist office (located in Kyoto-eki's sprawling structure) and to pick up our special Kansai Thru Pass Cards we had ordered weeks in advance. Although it wasn't a huge hassle to get the city map, getting the Kansai 2-day (¥3850) and 3-day (¥5000) vouchers exchanged proved to be more of an adventure. The Kyoto Bus Station's information booth was the one and only location in which to make this exchange. And it was busy, confusing and irritating. Once we got the attention of someone who could help us, though, the exchange was rather painless. However, between the time spent getting help at the bus station and then checking into K's House we'd already slipped an hour behind.



As a side note: The Kansai Thru Passes are wonderful tickets to have. Not only is the pass valid for all Kyoto subway and busses, but also Kintetsu Rail, Keihan Rail and Sakamoto Cable Car (which will come in handy later), and Osaka subway and busses, Nankai rail, Koyasan Cablecar and Koya busses further afield. The tickets will save us a lot of time and effort along the way as there will be no need to buy separate tickets for each line and no need to figure out distances and costs, it's all included!

After checking in to K's House we immediately went back out in the direction of Gion, where a temple known as Chion-in stood its ground.

### Chion-in

At the foot of Kachozan, one of the thirty-six mountains in Kyoto's Higashiyama district, lie the one hundred and six large and small buildings that make up Chion-in (知恩院), the head temple of the Jodo Shu (Pure Land Sect) founded by Honen (1133-1212), who proclaimed that sentient beings are reborn in the Western Paradise (Pure Land) by reciting the *nembutsu*, Amida Buddha's name. Appropriate for the birthplace of the Jodo Shu, the stately appearance of Chion-in welcomes those who visit with a serene air amidst solemn surroundings.



The original temple was built in 1234 by Honen's disciple Genchi (1183-1238), in memory of his master. While the temple was affiliated more closely in the early years with the Seizan branch of Jodo Shu, its 8<sup>th</sup> head priest (Nyoichi, 1262-1321) was deeply influenced by the priest Ryoku, a disciple of Roychu who was the 3<sup>rd</sup> head of the Chinzei branch of Jodo Shu Buddhism. By 1450, Chion-in had fully come under the control of the Chinzei branch, but had little direct control, due to the outbreak of the Onin War. The War, so named after the *nengo* (name) 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.



Ashikaga 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 oversimplification 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. The family strife further 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 also a long, drawn-out scuffle for domination by individual *daimyo* (lords), resulting in a mass power-struggle between the various houses to see who would rule the whole of Japan. It was during this period that three individuals would emerge to unite Japan under one rule again: Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu.



(Some of the places I'll be visiting in the coming days are old strongholds of one of these men, so I'm sure we'll get more into this story later on).



As for Chion-in, numerous buildings in the complex were burnt down in 1633, but were entirely rebuilt by the third Tokugawa Shogun Iemitsu (1604-1651). It is why the buildings here today are adorned with the Hollyhock crest of the Tokugawa's. Most visitors are drawn to Chion-in for the complex's massive wooden gate – I cannot lie, so was I – and it's one of the complex's most celebrated attractions. This colossal Sanmon was erected in 1621 by Tokugawa Hidetada, the second Tokugawa Shogun, and

comes with impressive credentials: it stands at a height of about 24 meters, a width of about 50 meters, and contains about 70,000 tiles on its roof. Enough credentials to offer this Sanmon up as one of the largest wooden gates left in Japan. Designated as an important cultural property, the structure is especially imposing, and along with the Sanmon Gate at Nanzenji Temple and the Niomon Gate at Ninna-ji, it is considered to be one of the three most famous gates in all of Kyoto.

Though a visitor's experience with the gate is fleeting, the atmosphere here is one of solemn magnificence. Within is a Buddhist worship hall and images of Shakamuni with sixteen of his disciples. The ceiling beams and pillars are intricately decorated with images of heavenly maidens and flying dragons, all brilliantly colored. And further inside, closed off to the prying eyes of the public most of the time, are the Shiraki-no-hitsugi (the Plain Wood Coffins) of Gomi Kin'uemon and his wife, one of Chion-in's "seven wonders". They're here because Gomi Kin'uemon and his wife were ordered to construct the Sanmon by the Tokugawa family. It is said that they carved wooden statues of themselves, poured all of their energy into building the gate, then committed suicide once the gate was completed. Although a gruesome tale, it is said that people weep at the sight of these statues to this day.



Although not on public display (and therefore we could not weep over them), the rest of Chion-in's "seven wonders" were available to us.





Reach them by passing through the Sanmon and climbing to the top of the stone steps that await you. When you do so, a rather magnificent structure with an enormous roof will come into view on the left-hand side of the complex. This is the Mieido (-do, remember, translates to “hall”) so named because the *miei* (sacred image) of the founder Honen is housed here. Although the building was destroyed with much of the rest of Chion-in in 1633, Tokugawa Iemitsu rebuilt it in 1638 in the mix of Japanese and

Chinese architectural elements we see today. With a length of 35 meters, a width of 45 meters, and a three-meter wide veranda encircling the entire structure, the massively scaled Mieido functions as the center of the temple complex, but it is by no means the largest wooden building in Japan (you’ll find that, remember, in Nara – Todaiji)

That being said, this magnificent hall is still filled with many things to see, such as the *wasuregasa* (the “forgotten umbrella”, one of the seven wonders of Chion-in) and door stoppers shaped like water imps, turtle and cicadas.



But it’s the *wasuregasa* that caught my attention. As one of the “Seven Wonders” I expected something grandiose, but it’s true to label: it’s just an umbrella, but a rather important one too. There are two legends surrounding the umbrella – one, it was simply forgotten by Hidari Jingoro, a master carpenter; two – it was left behind by a white fox as a sign of gratitude to Reigen, who protected his nest during the construction of the Mieido. Either way, since the umbrella has a

relationship with water it is thought to protect the temple from fire; therefore, no one dares remove it. You’ll find it between the eaves on the southeastern corner of the *Mieido*.

Other buildings at this level of the temple complex are the *Shue-do*, *Amida-do*, *Kyozo*, *Ohojo*, *Kohoho*, and *Daishoro* – the Assembly Hall, Amida Hall, Sutra repository, Large Guest House, Small Guest House and Belfry respectively.





The *Shue-do* was reconstructed in 1635; the primary image housed here is a statue of Amida said to have been created by the bishop Eshin (also known as Genshin). You'll also find, in the front of the hall, images of Tokugawa Iemitsu and Tokugawa Ietsuna (the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tokugawa Shoguns). With an area equal to that of one thousand *tatami* mats, this building has been used over the years as a training area for monks and, in 1872, served as the site for the Great Kyoto Exhibition, a cultural exchange held in hopes of revitalizing the city after the capital had been moved to Tokyo. Another image of Amida, a 2.7 meter tall statue, appears in the *Amida-do*.

Located southeast of the *Miei-do* is the *Kyozo*, or Sutra repository. This building was constructed in 1621 (the same as the *Sanmon*) and is a mixture of Japanese and Chinese architectural styles like the *Miei-do*. Although the exterior is rather subdued, the interior is alive with color. Students from the famous Kano School of Art festooned the ceiling and walls with a number of painted works, many of which are recorded cultural heritage pieces today. And in the middle is the octagonal sutra wheel, which contains the Sung Chinese edition of the entire Buddhist scriptural canon. Six thousand volumes can be found here, donated to Chion-in by Tokugawa Hidetada (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tokugawa Shogun), and it is said that if you turn the sutra wheel once, you gain the same benefits as if you actually read them all. Unfortunately I wasn't even allowed in the building.



The same can be said for the dual guesthouses – the public is not allowed inside – but learning about them was interesting though.



The *Ohojo* was built in 1641 and is known throughout Kyoto as one of the most famous examples of *shoin-zukuri* (書院造) architecture. This style, which forms the basis of today's traditional-style Japanese house, was established in the late Muromachi period (1336-1573) and refined during the ensuing Momoyama period (1573-1603) and is characterized by the use of square posts and tatami-matted floors. The style takes its name from the *shoin* (書院), a term that originally meant a

place for lectures on the sutra within a temple, but which later came to mean just a drawing room or general study.

A *shoin* has a core area surrounded by aisles, and smaller areas separated by *fusuma* sliding doors, or *shoji* partitions constructed of paper on a wooden frame or wooden equivalents, *mairado* (舞良戸) and *sugido* (杉戸). The main reception room is characterized by specific features: a recessed alcove (*tokonoma*); staggered shelves; built-in desks; and ornate sliding doors. Generally the reception room is covered with wall-to-wall tatami, has square beveled pillars, a coved and/or coffered ceiling, and wooden shutters protecting the area from rain (雨戸; amado).

With the fifty-four *tatami* mat-sized *Tsuru-no-ma* (Crane Room) in the center, the *Ohojo* consists of ten rooms, including *Jodan-no-ma* (Upper), *Chudan-no-ma* (Middle) and *Gedan-no-ma* (Lower) rooms, as well as the *Matsu-no-ma* (Pine Room). Each of these rooms exudes magnificent *fusuma-e* (sliding door paintings) by the Kano School of art.



Built in 1641, the same year as the *Ohojo*, the Small Guest House (*Kohojō*) is also known throughout Kyoto as one of the most famous examples of *shoin-zukuri* architecture. The *Kohojō* consists of six rooms and are all decorated with *fusuma-e* (sliding door paintings) by the Kano School. Compared to the *Ohojo*, the *Kohojō* is immersed in a light, tranquil air. Surrounded by the *Hojō* garden, which exudes the moods of the four seasons, the contrast to the *Ohojo* is quite striking.

Three more of the temple's "seven wonders" are here.



The first, inside the *Ohojo* (and therefore not privy to public eye) is the *Nukesuzume*, the "Sparrows that Flew Away" painting. Painted on the *fusuma-e* in the *Kiku-no-ma* (Chrysanthemum Room) of the *Ohojo* by Kano Nobumasa in such a life-like manner, it is said they came to life and flew away. All that is left of them on the *fusuma-e* is the mark they left behind. The second, which can be seen from the outside, is the *Sanpo Shomen Mamuku-no-Neko*, the "Cat That Sees in Three Directions" painting.



This picture of a cat, painted on the cedar doors in the hallway of the *Ohojo*, is said to represent the dictum that humans must always keep their eyes forward, as well as representing the heart of a parent who protects their child (which in turn represents the compassion of Buddha). The painting is unique because the mother cat always appears to be looking in your direction no matter what angle you view her from.



And the third: the 550 meter long *Uguisubari-no-roka* (“nightingale hallway”) that connects the *miei-do* (the hall which houses the image of Honen) to the *Shuedo* (Assembly Hall), *Ohojo* (large guest house) and *Kohijo* (small guest house). Like the “nightingale hallway” at Nijo-jo here in Kyoto (which I experienced in my first visit to Japan in 2004), stepping down this hallway in complete quiet is nigh impossible. When you walk through the corridors here they make a sound similar to that of a nightingale (hence their name). The less noise you try to make, the more the floorboards creak. This effect is created by specially constructing the clamps of the boards and affixing nails in strategic locations so that when depressed the two metallic structures grate against one another. Therefore the floorboards served as a burglar alarm that the Tokugawa’s, no doubt, appreciated when they stayed here. Also, since the cry of the nightingale sounds like “ho-kiki-yo”, listen to the Buddha’s teachings, it is said to serve as a reminder to... listen to the Buddha’s teachings.



Consequently, the other two “seven wonders” are the *Oshakushi*, a rice paddle affixed in the rafters of a building (said to symbolize the depth of Amida’s compassion since the Japanese word for “scoop” and “save/rescue” are pronounced the same), and the *Uryuseki*, a cucumber-shaped rock in front of the Kuromon (or black gate). Last of the notable structures in this area, but not least of those, is the Daishoro, or Bell Tower.

The tower, which supports the temple bell, was built in 1678 during the time of Genyo Manmu, the 38<sup>th</sup> chief high priest of Chion-in. This quiet, yet dignified design makes the tower well suited to house one of the largest bells in Japan. The bell, with a height of 3.3 meters and a diameter of 2.7 meters, places it alongside other famous large bells, those that can be found at Hoko-ji (in

Kyoto) and Todai-ji (in Nara). This massive bell, weighing in at seventy tons, was cast in 1636, but due to its massive weight could not be hung to be rung.



Legend says that one day Masamune and Muramasa, who were master sword-smiths, came to worship at the temple, heard about the bell's history, and cast a set of rings from which to hang the bell. They held and the bell could finally be rung, which is only done during the memorial services for Honen (held in April) and on New Year's Eve (where it is rung a symbolically 108 times), no other time.

Further afield (or more appropriately, up another flight of steps) you'll find the *Seishi-do* and *Gobyō*.



The *Seishi-do*, the oldest building on Chion-in grounds, enshrines the *bodhisattva* Seishi, and is said to be the *honiishin* (original form) of Honen, the temple's founder (therefore the building is also known as *Honii-do*). Originally the site was the location of Honen's Otani meditation chamber, where he propagated the teachings of *nembutsu* during his final days. A placard hanging in the front interior of the hall written by Emperor Go-Nara reads "Chionkyoin", and it is said to be the origins of the temple's name. The *Gobyō*, where Honen's remains are interred, is a stylish mausoleum built with a Chinese-style gate and a hedge surrounding it. Lavishly decorated, the railings have magnificent Momoyama period carvings beautifully done with themes such as "dragon in the clouds" (pictured), "phoenix in the paulownia", "nightingale in the plums", "kirin in the clouds" and "peacock in the peonies".



back out onto the street. I collected Rich on a nearby bench and we were off to our next destination – the Daitoku-ji complex!

Chion-in also sports two wonderful gardens – *Yuzen* and *Hojo* – which are open to the general public for strolling. Unfortunately, with the delay in getting started this morning and having spent most of the "allotted" time browsing already, I decided against doing so. And with Rich sitting in the shadow of Chion-in's massive *Sanmon* waiting for me, I didn't feel like pressing it. So without further adieu I made my way back down three flights of stairs, through the *Sanmon*, and

## The Daitoku-ji Complex

Due to the business with procuring our Kansai Thru Passes, Nijo-jo, which was on the visitation schedule “if there were time”, was removed. There wasn’t, so we moved on to Daitoku-ji, the next site on the itinerary. Daitoku-ji is one of fourteen autonomous branches of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, and as one of the largest temple complexes in Kyoto, it operates some twenty-two sub-temples within its stone walls. Be that as it may, only four of those twenty-two are generally open to the public – Daisen-in (大仙院), Koto-in (高桐院), Ryogen-in (龍源院) and Zuiho-in (瑞峯院) – and I wanted to see each and every one.

**The Sub-Temples of Daitoku-ji**

Daiji-in (大慈院)	Ryōgen-in (龍源院)
Daikō-in (大光院)	Ryūkō-in (龍光院)
Daisen-in (大仙院)	Sangen-in (三玄院)
Daigyō-an (大用庵)	Shinju-an (真珠庵)
Gyokurin-in (玉林院)	Shōgen-in (松源院)
Hōshun-in (芳春院)	Shōju-in (正受院)
Jukō-in (聚光院)	Shōrin-in (昌林院)
Kinryū-in (金龍院)	Sōken-in (総見院)
Kōrin-in (興臨院)	Tenzui-ji (天瑞寺)
Kōtō-in (高桐院)	Tokuzen-ji (徳禅寺)
Nyoi-an (如意庵)	Yōtoku-in (養徳院)
Ōbai-in (黄梅院)	Zuihō-in (瑞峯院)

Rich and I arrived at Daitoku-ji using both the subway and the bus system; the first use of both so far on this trip (we used the Keihan railway to get to Gion earlier). It was just a quick ride from Higashiyama to Kitaoji station, crossing at Karasuma Oike, then another jaunt via bus from Kitaoji to Daitokuji-mae, but Rich was definitely out of his element. Never fear, we arrived without getting lost (hooray!). And in the process we found a nice café along the stone walls of the temple to grab some hot tea, a bite to eat, and a little respite from the crisp air. Then with our tummies full and our bodies warmed, we sucked it up and went exploring...

Daitoku-ji (大徳寺) was established as a small monastery in 1319 by Shuho Myocho (宗峰妙超) but began to grow in prominence after becoming frequented by Emperor Go-Daigo. Through association with the Emperor, Daitoku-ji became a supplication (prayer) hall for the imperial court and its compound was counted as one of the five sacred mountains of Kyoto. (The “five sacred mountains”, or the Kyoto Gozan, 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.)

But Daitoku-ji fell from favor after the Ashikaga Shogunate was established; the Ashikaga’s lent support to those temples who didn’t outwardly oppose them, as Daitoku-ji had done. The monks accordingly decided to stay away from meddling in politics and focus on Zen practices instead. Unfortunately politics came to them; like many other temples in Kyoto, Daitoku-ji suffered severe damage during the Onin War.

The temple grew into a center of arts after its reconstruction – especially in tea – and ultimately became linked with Sen-no-Rikyu and Kobori Enshu, masters of the tea ceremony. Noblemen such as Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, both of whom were fond tea practitioners, became regulars. In fact, Oda Nobunaga's grave is located at Soken-in, one of Daitoku-ji's sub-temples, but it isn't regularly open to the public. Over time the complex grew to encompass more and more sub-temples (which is a semi-autonomous temple set within the jurisdiction of a larger monastery organization, having its own abbot and responsible for its own support and maintenance) so that today the whole of Daitoku-ji covers more than 23 hectares (56 acres) of land.

Much of Daitoku-ji lay closed to the public (as previously known) and what are accessible features the standard characteristics of all Buddhist temples – a Sanmon, Butsuden, Hatto, and Hojo.

As a fan of the huge gates, I immediately flocked there. The Chokushi-mon (Gate of Imperial Messengers) originally served as the south gate of Kyoto's imperial palace when it was constructed in 1590. Then Empress Meisho in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century bequeathed it to Daitoku-ji. The Sanmon is also noteworthy due to its addition of a 3<sup>rd</sup> story, designed by tea master Sen-no-Rikyu. Sen-no-Rikyu is also buried in the complex; legend suggests he was ordered by Toyotomi Hideyoshi to commit seppuku over other additions he made to Daitoku-ji's Sanmon (something along the lines of a statue of himself).



But what was most impressive about the grounds (and the sub-temples) was its plethora of Zen gardens. And the four sub-temples open to the public were well known for their gardens – it's a win-win situation!

#### Daisen-in (大仙院)

One of the most celebrated among the sub-temples of Daitoku-ji is Daisen-in. Built between 1509 and 1513, it is the head of the North School of Daitoku-ji and claims priest Kogaku Soko (古岳宗玄) as its founder. Though on the smallish side, Daisen-in has a couple of unique treasures worth a visit: Screen paintings, by respected ink landscape painter Soami, decorate the temple's fusuma (sliding doors) and help bring the visitor into a state of Zen by depicting soothing naturalistic scenes one might find just outside. Complimenting (or perhaps continuing the theme from) is the temple's rock garden, which wraps around the temple building. In such a small space – about 100m<sup>2</sup> – Kogaku-Zenji was able to express the abstract essence of nature crafted out of nothing more than rock and sand, and it is generally considered to be one of the best examples of its kind. The garden is designed to resemble a landscape replete with towering mountains (represented by vertical stones) and islands divided by white sand waterfalls and streams. Uniquely, the stream continues to flow through to the temple's other gardens (continuing the theme) before emptying into an expansive ocean of white gravel.



## Ryōgen-in (龍源院)

Complimenting Daisen-in is Ryogen-in. Constructed by Priest Tokei in 1502 today it is the headquarters of the South School of Daitoku-ji. The Hojo, gate and porch found here are all unique and listed as historical structures (the meditation hall is the oldest in all of Japan), and you'll find statues of Shaka Nyorai (sculpted in 1250 by Gyoshin), celebrated *fusuma* paintings by Soami (one entitled "The Dragon" is the temple's signature inked image), the oldest gun in Japan (called "Tanegashima"), and the Go board that Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu used in a match between them; however, it's the gardens that garner the most attention. There are five gardens adjoining the abbot's residence, including Totekiko, Isshi-dan, Koda-tei, and Ryugin-tei.



Isshidan (一枝垣) – This garden and its main tree, which had flourished for more than 700 hundred years untouched, became withered by 1980; therefore, Katsudo, the current head priest, had the garden reconstructed into the horai-san style rock garden (枯山水; *karesansui*) we see today. Amongst the raked white gravel representing the sea are three sets of "islands". The center rock (Horaisan), and the tallest, represents Mt. Horai (where the mythical immortals were

said to dwell). The two on the right represent Crane Island (Turushima) whilst the moss-mound in the middle is Tortoise Island (Kameshima). Both are symbols of longevity and health. The garden gets its name from the founding priest's Zen master's name: Ryozen-issshi-no-ken.

Ryugin-tei (龍吟庭) – This beautifully moss-covered garden is located to the north of the Hojo is called Ryugin-tei, the dragon flute garden, and is claimed to be the oldest such in the entire Daitoku-ji complex. Its image attributed to Soami, the ink-artist, the set of three rocks standing about the middle symbolizes "Shumisen" (須弥山), the name of Mount Sumeru which rises up in the center of the universe. According to Buddhist cosmology, the summit of Shumisen reaches into the sacred world of gods and is surrounded by seven mountains of gold, the Tecchi-san, and eight oceans. These oceans are elegantly represented by the sheet of moss you see here.



Totekiko (東滴壺) – Claimed to be the smallest rock garden (坪庭; tsubo-niwa) in Japan, it was laid out by Nabeshima Gakusho in 1958. Concentric gravel circles around stones placed at each end of the garden are connected by parallel ridges and furrows. The sandy ripples on the right are the main point here: they symbolize a teaching of Zen that the more powerful a stone is thrown in, the larger the ripples emanating from it will be. An alternate reading, I've found is that the drips of water dropping down from rocks assemble together to be a mountain stream, such mountain streams gather together to be a great river, and great rivers concentrate to be the open sea at last, which is to say many little efforts realize a great result in the discipline for enlightenment.



Koda-tei (滹沱底) – This stone garden was designed in so-called “a-un-no-niwa” style to represent the truth of the universe. The moss-covered stone and ground represent the waterside of the Koda River, the Chinese river which flows near the temple where Rinzai Zen was established. The white gravel symbolizes the ruffled surface of the river. Two “island” stones represent the alpha (A-no-ishi) and omega (Un-no-ishi), the heaven and earth, positive and negative, male and female – the “A-Un”,

the two inseparable forces. “A” means the root entity from which entire existence originates, “Un” the ultimate wisdom to which entire existence attains; therefore, the garden shows the essence of the universe and the essence of Zen. Consequently, the two stones here were repurposed from Jurakudai, the once lavish residence of Toyotomi Hideyoshi.





## Zuiho-in (瑞峯院)

Zuiho-in was dedicated in 1546 by its patron, feudal lord Otomo Sorin, as his family temple. Shortly thereafter, Japan experienced the first arrival of Spanish and Portuguese Catholic missionaries who attracted a considerable number of converts here in Japan. In addition to the religious experience, conversion to Christianity brought with it potential economic and political opportunities for trade with Europeans, and not a few influential people embraced the new religion. Otomo converted to Christianity, was christened “Francisco” and was thereafter known as the “Christian Daimyo”. Not long after, Christianity was outlawed in Japan and remained so for over two hundred years. Though Christianity was never taught at Suiho-in, this aspect of the life of its founding patron is both honored and respected as a part of Otomo’s legacy. An example of this honoring was the creation of the Garden of the Cross, an amazing blend of Zen and Christian imagery.



As you pass through the gate of Zuiho-in and walk through the semi-formal entry garden, notice that you were turned three times before reaching the temple door. This is a transition device designed to maximize your sense of having “traveled” some distance, thus aiding in your inner, spiritual transition from a public and formal “outer” space to a private and intimate “inner” space. Other points of interest here is the temple’s formal gate (original 1546 structure used now only for special occasions), the entry hall (lined with planks of Indian rosewood), wooden screens (made of Chinese quince), and the main hall (also an original 1546 structure).

Besides the tea room gardens, Zuhio-in has two others of note – the before-mentioned Garden of the Cross and the temple’s main Zen Garden. The temple’s main garden faces the main hall and is a *karesansui* (“dry”) garden. Designed by Mirei Shigemori in the 1960’s it is characterized by its vigorously raked sand, giving the impression of rough seas. The stone placement is equally vigorous, featuring numerous pointed stones. Whereas flat stones convey a calm and solid feeling, tall pointed stones project a strong and active mood. The combination of the vigorously raked “waves” and the pointed stones infuses this garden with energy. But it’s the Garden of the Cross that gets the most attention.









Located behind the main hall, the Garden of the Cross was also designed by Mirei Shigemori, and was dedicated to the temple's founder Otomo Sorin. Viewed from the walkway located at the south-eastern corner of the garden, rocks symbolizing hills form an asymmetrical cross. The peaked stone in the distance is the top of the cross, the stone in the fence is the right side and the pyramid-shaped stone is the left side. The peaked stone nearest to the viewing position is the bottom of the cross. It's quite an image. Under the stone lantern straight below the vertical part of the cross, is buried a statue of the Virgin Mary. The buried "hidden" statue is said to be a poignant reminder of the two hundred years during which Christianity was banned.



#### Koto-in (高桐院)



Last, but not least, is Koto-in. Koto-in was established at the behest of the famed military leader Hosokawa Tadaoki (細川 忠興) in 1601. Hosokawa was one of the greatest warriors of his time, and one of the few to survive the bloody wars which culminated in the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Tadaoki fought under the banner of Toyotomi Hideyoshi in Korea, was present on Hideyoshi's side in the Battle of Komaki and Nagakute (1584) and the Odawara Campaign (1590), where he took part in the siege of Nirayama, and was a leading figure in the wars which lead to the establishment of the Tokugawa house. In addition to his martial skills, he was a man of great intellectual attainment and taste. Although his wife, Gratia (1563-1600) was a devout believer in the outlawed Catholic faith he did not love her any less.

Rewarded with vast domains following the war, in his later life he devoted himself to the study of Zen under the famous Daitoku-ji abbot Seigan and was also noted as one of the most distinguished disciples of the eminent tea master Sen Rikyu.

Koto-in's famous tea-house, also known as *Shoko-ken*, was built by Hosokawa himself. Equally admired is its cousin, *Horai*. Next to it stands a now famous wash-basin, hollowed from a stone brought to Japan from the Imperial Palace in Korea.

And a stone lantern, which Hosokawa loved, stands as a marker to his and his wife's grave. Koto-in also has in its possession numerous rare paintings and objects d'art from both Chinese and Japanese lineage. Many are classified as National Treasures and Important Cultural Assets. Even the garden qualifies as a natural property, celebrated for their *momiji* (maple trees), especially in autumn.

Though the trees weren't all in color, there was enough here to please me – look at that, leaves do turn colors!



### Night-time Follies



After our explorations at Daitoku-ji, the plan again changed mid-stride, which required an elimination of the rest of the day's original activity. By this time we wouldn't have made the Ginkaku-ji/Nanzen-ji route I originally envisioned (because we would be running up to closing time by the time we got near that area), so I opted for something a little closer – The Golden Pavilion. Kinkaku-ji is always a treat to see and I had hoped for a little autumn color, but unfortunately there was none.



Even so it was nice to give Rich a chance to see this particular Kyoto splendor; once we concluded touring the grounds I took Rich back by the Hostel before setting out on the next leg of today's journey: my night time viewing itinerary of Kodai-ji, Entoku-in, Eikan-do and Fushimi-inari-taisha.



One of the things I quickly learned when researching sights to see for this trip was that besides certain temples highly noted for autumn colors, others were well revered for their special nighttime illumination. Temples and shrines that might otherwise be closed by sundown were specially lit this time of year for patrons and other Japanese alike to celebrate the autumn equinox. Although subtle colors of red and orange would be bled away by the use of bright white lights, the temples (and their grounds and gardens) would surely take on a new dimension. Upon learning about this phenomenon I immediately enlarged my schedule – not only could I see temples and shrines during the day, but I could revisit others to take in this special viewing opportunity by night!

And I would be kept busy well into that night...



Busy I was, naturally things didn't go as expected. After dropping Rich off back at K's house and after I began to make my way (with haste) toward the Keihan Shichi-jo station I came to notice that the 2-day Kansai Thru Pass ticket I purchased earlier today was missing. Without the ticket I would be hard-pressed to ride the Keihan train so I turned an about-face and returned to K's House to retrace my steps: shoe locker at K's, my room, outside, and down to the convenience store – no luck.

Trying not to give up on the night excursions despite the setback, I threw caution to the wind, went out to Keihan Shichi-jo anyway and purchased an old friend in the Kansai Day-Pass for ¥1000 (approx. \$10.00), which would be just enough to take me where I wanted to go. (I discovered the Kansai Day-Pass on my first excursion to Japan in 2004).

First order of business was pushing my way through the drunkards in Gion to reach Yasaka-jinja (just the outside), Kodai-ji (which was nicely lit up), Entoku-in (a new stop which turned out to be totally fabulous), Dai-un-in (the tower I visited in 2007; seen this time just from the outside) and Chion-in (I couldn't pass up its enormous gate all lit up at night) out in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto. Although it was troublesome shoving my way down Shijo-dori to Maruyama-koen, once I reached the corner where Yasaka-jinga proudly stood, all became well.



Since I've previously visited Dai-un-in, Kodai-ji (in 2007) and Yasaka-jinja (in 2004) I won't delve into their histories, descriptions, or legends here tonight – I'll let the pictures, which are worth 1000 words anyway – tell their story. But Entoku-in was new to me and although I'd like to expound on it a little more, there's not much I can say about it, so in retrospect I'll also have to let photos of its beautiful illuminated garden to help tell its story. But from what I've learned: Entoku-in (圓徳院), known for its elegant Momoyama-style garden, is a sub-temple of Kodai-ji and is located immediately across from what is known as Nene's road. Nene's road, a flagstone paved walkway named after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's widow *Kita-no-Mandokoro*, also known as "Nene" who built not only Kodai-ji but also Entoku-in, is one of the most historical paths in all of Kyoto.



Visiting this part of Kyoto at night was certainly a treat. Walking along Nene's road turned out to be a fantastic nighttime excursion which, unfortunately, really can only be shared via images rather than words.

Following my stay at Entoku-in (I didn't want to leave, really, the gardens were so beautiful), I made my way past Chion-in and submerged into the underground of Kyoto's metro system, using the same route Rich and I had walked earlier in the day – up the road to Higashiyama station and a ride in the metro. Only this time I was going to Keage, in the opposite direction of this morning's commute.



Those who have read my 2007 exploits here in the Land of the Rising Sun (titled “Return to the Land of the Rising Sun”) might recall me getting lost attempting to find Nanzen-ji and points beyond then. Of course by the end of that journey I learned not to trust the bus system to stop at each stop and I had also learned not to take said bus out to Nanzen-ji in the first place when riding the metro was easiest. Keeping that knowledge to heart, I learned my lesson and rode the metro.

Though Nanzen-ji was not one of those special night-time luminary temples, Eikan-do was and it was “just a stone's throw” from Nanzen-ji's venerable Sanmon along the *Tetsugaku-no-michi*, a pathway I used to walk from Nanzen-ji to Ginkaku-ji in 2004.





Because Nanzen-ji was not one of those temples participating in nighttime illumination, everything surrounding the place was pitch-black. The only light came from the streetlights hung far above the roadway, and even they were fleeting at best once I passed through the gates into Nanzen-ji's periphery. But lord I didn't want to get anywhere near Nanzen-ji itself. The entire complex was spooky as hell; that Sanmon just looms in the darkness, bathed in the eerie glow of florescent street lamps

far, far away, and screams "go away!" Although I bet it is quite peaceful at night (and I don't think anyone would have minded if I poked around – though it does close at sundown) I wasn't going to take my chances. Too many spirits about...



\* \* \*

In either case, after passing Nanzen-ji, I continued down the very, very dark road toward Eikan-do but after walking for virtual hours (just a few minutes in practice), I had to turn back empty-handed. I figured I would be able to find an illuminated temple in the middle of the night without too much trouble but I was wrong. I must have walked a mile or more back in Nanzen-ji's neighborhood without as much as a sign (of light) from Eikan-do. Therefore, I had to tread lightly past Nanzen-ji's sanmon again, down its entrance corridor, and back to the metro station at Keage.

After the failed Eikan-do excursion I gave up. Fushimi-inari-taisha will have to wait for another day; perhaps tomorrow night. And Eikan-do? Maybe I can find some way to visit the temple during the day... I'm done for tonight!

In the meantime, I'm going to check my clothes in the dryer and take that shower. As soon as I'm done there (and the clothes are confirmed dry) it's off to bed, finally. Tomorrow is going to be a full day – Rich let me know that he would stay around K's House tomorrow and rest up – so I will once again be on my own exploring the wondrous treasures of Kyoto!

Ja ne!

## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 | 京都府, 宇治市 {Kansai / Kyoto, Uji}



### 「Autumn in Kinki」

november 11, 2008

*Sigh... it never fails.*

I think the fates are working against me. Here I've laid out a wonderful itinerary full of exploration this year, and whether I can't find the specified location or the location I end up at isn't as advertised, something always seems to go... to borrow a phrase from a time-leaping friend... a little ca-ca. Why is it I can't stick to the schedule even for a little bit?

Yesterday the schedule had to be switched up due to time constraints. Today, although I only had to make one substitution (Ginkaku-ji for Kinkaku-ji), further time constraints because of a location lost in time, or space, or whatever caused further divergences. And that lead to an interesting trek through the throngs of Kyoto's underbelly out to the area known as Arashiyama, a district on the western outskirts of the city. And why? Why am I mad mind you? Because the location wasn't as advertised – where were the lights, oh Daikaku-ji, where were the lights we were promised?



Oh, never mind... I digress.

Please forgive me. I've just spent the better part of two hours on the Kyoto City Bus system riding to and from *Daitoku-ji* and coming away empty handed. Although it was a unique experience – isn't everything? It certainly was not the way to end the evening. And couple this with getting lost earlier today it's safe to say I didn't accomplish everything I set out to. But even with that said there's still plenty to be proud of. Ryoan-ji and Kinkaku-ji made nice morning stops; Eikan-do near Nanzen-ji turned out to be an interesting place to visit (in the day time this time) and Byodo-in in Uji was magnificent. So despite any setbacks in the plans the day turned out all right after all.



## A Crisp Morn



Because yesterday's plans were changed up whilst in motion, and I wanted to be sure to visit those places we missed, as soon as I was ready to go this morning – at about 6:45am – I hit the pavement for the Kyoto Bus Terminal. Rich, much like he did yesterday afternoon following our visits to Daitoku-ji and Kinkaku-ji, sat this day's excursions out leaving me to tool around at my own pace. And at this time of the morning that was a good thing; I was a man on a mission – it's autumn in Kinki (Kinki, 近畿地方, by the way is the classical name for Kansai, the region Kyoto exists in); the region is well known for its fall colors – and my mission this morning was to reach Ryoan-ji, a temple most noted for its Zen garden, and one of my favorite spots in Kyoto.

The temple opened at 8:00am sharp – one of the few temples to actually open that early – so in order to get a jump on the day's schedule (and get caught up) I didn't figure I had much choice then but to reach the Terminal bright and early. I wondered... would there be color here amongst Ryoan-ji's vast gardens?

I would soon find out. Bus #205 from Kyoto-eki to Kinkaku-ji and #59 to Ryoanji at 7:02a-7:35a and 7:53a-7:58a accordingly took me there.

In the crisp morning air under the just risen sun, the temple and its grounds take on a totally different flavor than one finds in the afternoons, or even at sunset when I usually visit. Perhaps it's every one of the temple's staff bidding you a welcoming good morning ("Ohayo Gozaimasu!") when they see you, or the fact that every blade of grass and leaf in the foliage gardens is dripping with new morning dew, or perhaps it's just because that, besides the before-mentioned staff, there's really no one else around to

bother you. Yeah, that's it... the rock garden – the famous Zen garden of its kind in all of Japan – is always full of visitors. But at this time a day, at eight-o'clock in the morning, I didn't have to share the portico with three dozen Japanese young and old shuffling to find a spot to contemplate; I could sit in my socked feet and reflect on my place in life, and do it with no other persons near me.



It's an experience so special – so uniquely Zen-like – its one I highly recommend.



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 always draws me here is 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 (as it always does).

The Rock Garden is just one part of Ryoan-ji's charm. The vegetative gardens are also uniquely magnificent (but sadly devoid of fall colors), and then there's Ryoan-ji's *Tsukubai*, a water basin once used to cleanse the mouth and hands before partaking in tea. Though no longer used for this purpose, it like much of everything here has some knowledge to impart. 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, with more success this time round than last, but doing so was still fleeting at best (I'll expound more on that later).



Suffice it to say, after making the rounds through the foliage gardens (a little disappointed that there were no fall colors to be found) and finished up contemplating philosophies at the rock garden (one of these days I'll see that fifteenth rock!), I wrestled myself away and continued onto the next destination: hopping bus #59 back to Kinkakuji-michi (getting off at the wrong stop, naturally) and taking an entirely different bus over to 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. Construction began around 1460, but postponed during the Onin Wars and eventually resumed in 1480 before finally being established in 1482. Believe it or not, Ginkaku-ji is the common name for the temple, its real name is Tozan Jisho-ji ((慈照寺) and it, like Nanzen-ji, belongs to the Rinzai Zen sect of Buddhism. In years past 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. 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.



Only the main pavilion, sand sculpture and some of the gardens – including the signature hedge – remain today. Having visited Ginkaku-ji on my last two expeditions and discussed its treasures in detail the first time round 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 again – especially with some of the trees a bright red! But with the main building under reconstruction (the roof of the pavilion was getting some TLC following a storm, perhaps

Typhoon Fitow from last year), there wasn't much else different to see (color, anyone?), so I pressed on again, to the first new destination of the day.





## Eikan-do

Although Nanzen-ji was my real destination following the visit at Ginkaku-ji, its distinct lack of fall colors (the reason I wanted to drop by) gave me pause. Having visited the grounds twice before (on both previous trips), climbed atop the Sanmon and strolled through the gardens then, I didn't see the need for further explorations; therefore, I continued on to see if I couldn't locate Eikan-do with the help of the mid-day sun.

I did. You'll find Eikan-do just a stones-throw away from Nanzen-ji along the frontage of the Tetsugaku-no-Michi (believe it or not), a gravel and stone path that sits atop the eastern hillside, so named after philosopher Nishida Kitaro (西田 幾多郎; 1870-1945) – the path has become one of the most popular spots to view the cherry blossoms in the spring and fireflies in the summer. To get to Eikan-do from Ginkaku-ji one can simply walk down the Tetsugaku-no-Michi, or take Bus #5, which runs every ten minutes starting at 0:06, to the Nanzenji-Eikandomitchi station.



Eikan-do Zenrin-ji (永観堂禅林寺) is the head temple for the Seizan branch of Japan's Jodo-shu (Pure Land) Buddhist sect. The temple got its start when Shinjo, a pupil of Kukai, aspired to found a temple for the worship of the Gochi Nyorai, or Five Wisdom Buddha. In 853 AD, he purchased Fujiwara-no-Seiko's mansion for this purpose, but as temple construction was forbidden at the time, he reluctantly had to place his dreams on hold. Ten years later Emperor Seiwa granted former Imperial approval and Zenrin-ji – the “Temple in a Calm Grove” – was formally founded. Since then, Shinjo authored various resolutions and trained many virtuous priests to send out into the world.

Among them was Yokan (永観, 1033-1111), commonly known as “Eikan”, who would go on to play an important role in the temple's evolution as its seventh head monk (and not just in the addition of his name to the Temple's moniker).

Though originally devoted to Esoteric Buddhism of the Shingon sect, beginning in the time of Yokan the temple began to shift towards Jodo shu, a sect formally established roughly a century later in 1175.

Yokan had trained at a number of temples of different disciplines in Nara, and was a passionate devotee of the Amida Buddha. In 1072, he established a Yakuo-in (薬王院) on the grounds, which organized giving to the needy and caring for the ill. He also introduced the practice of *Nenbutsu*, a Chinese observance which was quite new in Japan, and cultivated its observance amongst the monks and devotees. This concept, if you recall from the visit to Chion-in yesterday, is reciting Amida Buddha's name in reverence (because it is proclaimed that sentient beings are reborn in the Pure Land by reciting the *nembutsu*).



As a school in flux (teaching both the Esoteric Buddhism of the Shingon sect and also the Pure Land teachings of the Sanron sect, one of the six sects of Nara Buddhism), there was still much to be done. It wasn't until Johen (1166-1224) came to deeply believe in the teachings of the Jodo sect after reading *Passages on the Selection of the Nembutsu in the Original Vow*, written by Honen, the founder of the Jodo shu, that the temple began its final transition. Johen designated Honen as the 11<sup>th</sup> nominal priest of Eikando then passed the post on to Shoku (証空; 1177-1247), one of Honen's famous disciples. Shoku gave birth to the Seizan branch of the Jodo sect and after that, Joon (1201-1271), a disciple of Shoku's, officially converted the temple from Shingon to Seizan-Jodo, where its allegiances lie to this day.

Besides being referred to as just "Eikan-do" (永観堂, "View of Eternity Hall" or "Hall of Yokan") or "Zenrin-ji" (禅林寺, "Temple of Forest of Zen"), it also has two other names: "Shoju-raigo-san" (聖衆来迎山), which translates roughly to "Mountain of going across to the saints", and "Muryosu-in" (無量寿院), which roughly means "Temple of Immeasurable Fortune".



Regardless whichever name you wish to use in reference to the temple (I call it Eikan-do exclusively), the compound itself is interesting to behold. Its buildings, most of them connected by covered walkways and staircases, are scattered among a range of heights here in the foothills of Higashiyama, Kyoto's Eastern Mountain. These are:

- Main gate – the *Korai-mon* (高麗門) is named after the ancient Korean kingdom of Goguryeo (*Korai* in Japanese). The current structure dates from the late Edo period (mid-19th c.).
- Inner gate – the *Yakui-mon* (薬医門), along with the *Korai-mon*, derive from the fortress gates that would have surrounded the aristocratic mansion before it became a temple. Their placement and architecture are said to still reflect these origins today. The current structure dates to 1744.
- Founders' Hall (御影堂, *Goedō*) – enshrines and honors Honen, the founder of Jodo shu. The current structure was completed in 1912, and is larger than the Amida Hall (which I'll speak about in a moment).
- Zen Chief Priests' Chamber (方丈, *Hōjō*) – despite Zenrin-ji's name, it is not a temple of Zen Buddhism; nevertheless, the compound includes this priests' chamber in the Zen style (ten feet square). Its construction is said to have been ordered by Emperor Go-Kashiwabara (r. 1500-1526), but was not built until the Edo period. There are six rooms inside, each decorated with gorgeous fusuma such as the Matsutori-zu and the Gunsen-zu.
- *Tahoto* (多宝塔) – the temple's tower is situated at the highest point in the compound, and offers the greatest view of the surrounding valley. The current structure was completed in 1928 and has a circular upper part and lower square. Inside, Shaka Nyorai and Taho Nyorai are enshrined.
- Garyuro – a corridor made by joining the wood together and running along the contours of the mountain slope is a sight to see. Because it resembles the form of a sleeping dragon (*garyu*), it was given this name.



(1185-1333), is now thought to have been carved somewhat earlier in the 12th century (Heian period, 794-1185). A change recently discovered after reviewing Song dynasty (960-1279) sculptures in Sichuan Province China which show strong similarities in style.

Last, but certainly not least, the Amida Hall (阿弥陀堂, *Amida-do*) where the famous Amida statue, the temple's central object of worship, is enshrined. This hall, which is seated higher on the mountain than the founders' hall, was built at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and moved to its present location from Osaka, some thirty-five miles away. The wooden Amida statue enshrined here is 77 cm in height, and though for a long time believed to date from the Kamakura period



This statue of Amida is one of the more famous due to its unusual state, looking over its shoulder rather than straight ahead. In Japanese this is called the *Mikaeri Amida* or the “Looking-Back Amida” and is drenched in legend. According to tradition, in the freezing-cold early-hours of the morning of 15 February 1082, while Yokan was intoning the Nembutsu whilst walking around the statue, Amida came to life, looked over his shoulder and said “Yokan, you are slow!” By then the fifty-year-old priest was taken aback and halted his ritual in surprise. Ever since then, so goes the story, the posture of this statue has remained in that position and Yokan, devout to Amida, never stopped practicing the Nambutsu.



In addition to the famous Amida statue, which is designated an Important Cultural Property by the Japanese government; there are a great many other cultural treasures stored in Zenrin-ji's *Tahoto*. These primarily consist of paintings of a variety of Buddhist subjects, including images of Amida, Shakyamuni, Yakushi nyorai, and the Parinirvana of the Buddha. The temple also keeps paintings by Kano Motonobu, Tosa Mitsunobu, and Hasegawa Tohaku.

And if touring the various structures doesn't tickle your fancy, the grounds are replete with natural wonders – ponds, bridges, pine trees (remarkable for their needles which are split into three; it is said if you have this needle you will receive the three blessings of knowledge, mercy and sincerity), and plum trees (planted by Eikan, who gave the fruit they bared to the poor and underprivileged; the trees have become known as *Hidenbai*, the “hi” and *hiden* meaning “mercy”).



Quite a well-rounded and very enjoyable temple complex to explore, and though it would have been satisfying to see at night, visiting during the day was much more pleasurable. By the time I left here I was thoroughly satisfied and looking for more.

**Daigo & Uji**

I wouldn't have to go too far to find more.

Two cities located in an extreme south-eastern end of Kyoto prefecture – Daigo and Uji – were perfect choices. Both satisfied my cravings to see more outside of Kyoto city proper and they both contained two famous and historical temples to enjoy.

Due to its “close” proximity, Daigo was first.

There's really only one way to reach this area of town – the Kyoto City's Tozai metro line. In fact, Daigo used to be the final stop along this winding line (a two-stop extension further south opened just after I left in 2004), so it takes quite a while to reach this end of town, even traversing from Keage station near Nanzen-ji.

Daigo-ji was founded in the early Heian period (874) by Rigen-daishi (Shobo) as a hermitage to which Kannon statues of Juntei and Nyoirin were dedicated atop Kamidaigo Mountain, where the temple rests. It is there, atop this mountain, that Shobo discovered a well of spiritual water through inspiration from Yoko Daimyoin, a local god. Daigo-ji gained more of a prominence through the support of Emperors Daigo (897-930), Suzaku (930-946) and Murakami (946-967) who all contributed greatly to the temple's development during their reigns. Further distinction was granted to the temple after then Emperor Daigo fell ill and abdicated in 930. He entered the Buddhist priesthood here, taking the name Ho-kongo, and shortly thereafter, died at the age of 46. You'll find him buried at the temple, which is why his posthumous name was Daigo.

Wishing to visit the temple the first (2004) and second (2007) times I visited Kyoto, then having learned a little about Emperor Daigo during my explorations at Ninna-ji last year, visiting the temple which bears his name (or I guess the other way round) definitely piqued my interest. Visitation also didn't hurt knowing that Daigo-ji held a number of Natural and Cultural treasures (the five-story pagoda, for instance, was built in 951 and was one of the few buildings to survive the Onin War; therefore, making it the oldest building in Kyoto) and it's one of the more prominent temples from which to view autumn colors.

But I'm sorry to say Daigo-ji will end up on the next trip's itinerary...

Silly me forgot to bring along the extra maps for today's trek here, and upon arrival in Daigo I promptly lost my way. Perhaps lost isn't the right word to describe that predicament, but having walked in the wrong direction for so long that I came upon another subway station of the same line counts as being lost in my book. And the worst part about coming upon that station? It was Ono; I passed through it to get to Daigo in the first place! That being said I think I have plenty to be proud of – I wasn't deterred and took the subway back to Daigo station. Alas, I had just missed “a bus” that could have taken me out to my destination once I got there so, growing tired and cranky – not to mention unsure in which direction to walk next – I gave up on Daigo-ji.

I found greater success at Uji.



Reaching Uji required a transfer to a longer-distance rail line, as the city is at the extreme southern end of Kyoto prefecture. Even so, reaching Uji wouldn't be a difficult endeavor however; a transfer at Rokujizo was all that was necessary. The only question that needed answering was this: transfer to Keihan rail to be placed on the northern bank of the Uji River, or transfer to the JR Nara line to be placed on the southern bank. Either terminal had their pros and cons.

Keihan rail, for instance, was conveniently located close to Uji's "Tale of Genji" town, a statue dedicated to the famous literary work, and to Uji Bridge, the location of three famous battles during the Genpei War (and its aftermath). JR Nara line's Uji station, however, was on the same side of the river as Byodo-in, the destination.

The deciding factor, really, was in whose station I would come upon first at Rokujizo – Japan Rail's. And considering the JR Rail Pass I procured once again in Tokyo was now active, riding JR Nara line for free didn't hurt either.

Byodo-in (平等院) is unique amongst Buddhist temples as far as they go: today it is jointly a temple of the Jodo-shu and Tendai sects and it's the only one featured on the back of Japan's currency – the 10 yen coin.

Originally, the temple was built in 998 as a rural villa of Fujiwara-no-Michinaga, one of the most powerful members of the Fujiwara clan. The villa changed to a Buddhist temple by Fujiwara-no-Yorimichi in 1052. The following year the temple's most famous structure was built – the Phoenix Hall (鳳凰堂) – which, consequently, is the only remaining original building in the complex. The rest were destroyed by various battles, from the Genpei War to the Onin War.



Though there are a couple of other notable buildings still standing at Byodo-in, visiting Uji held fascination for me two fold. The first, for Byodo-in, the city's famous "Phoenix Hall" so famous that it adorns the reverse of Japan's 10 yen coin, and the second, for the Battle of Uji, which I learned about on my previous visit to Japan. But for those not well versed in Japanese history, especially when it comes to the creation of the bakufu (shogunate), let me explain the battle and what lead to it.





During what is known as the Heian Period (794-1185), Japan was united under the authority of the Emperor, though power largely resided with a single family clan – the Fujiwara. Other families were vying to take their place, however, which sparked one of the most quintessential conflicts of this period in Japan: the Genpei War (源平合戦). The term “*Genpei*” is deeply rooted in Japanese history as the portmanteau of the two powerful family lines that clashed in that 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. The declaration of war itself was only the culmination of a decades-long conflict between the two clans over who would dominate over the Imperial court, and by extension, control Japan itself. Although there were many players during this campaign, much of the struggle for power 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. He did so but young Konoe died. Though Sutoku harbored the expectation that his son would then ascend to the throne, his hopes were frustrated by the elevation of yet another son of Toba (another of his brothers), 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 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 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.



Naturally the conflict didn't end there.

In 1180, Prince Mochihito, a son of cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa, humiliated by Taira-backed accession of his nephew, Emperor Antoku (who was half Taira) 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 also 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 Tokiko, widow of 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. 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.



Phoenix Hall, modeled after the palace in the Land of Happiness, features unique architecture and consists of the rectangular Chudo (central hall), left and right L-shaped wing corridors, and a tail corridor. Though its official name is Amida-do – the hall was originally constructed to enshrine a statue of Amitabha Tathagata – it began to be called Hoo-do, or Phoenix Hall, in the beginning of the Edo period. This name is considered to derive both from the building's likeness to a phoenix with outstretched wings and a tail, and from the pair of phoenixes adorning the roof. The entire structure is beautifully framed by a Suhama (sandy beach), Hirabashi (flat bridge), Soribashi (arched bridge), and Kojima (small island), all parts of a Jodo-shiki garden.



Inside the Phoenix Hall, a single image of Amida is installed on a high platform. The Amida sculpture is made of Japanese cypress and is covered with gold leaf. It was executed by Jocho, who used a new canon of proportions and a new technique, *yosegi*, in which multiple pieces of wood are carved out like shells and joined from the inside. The statue measures about three meters high from its face to its knees, and is seated. Applied to the walls of the hall are small relief carvings of celestials, the host believed to have accompanied Amida when he descended from the Western Paradise to gather the souls of believers at the moment of death and transport them in lotus blossoms to Paradise. Raigo paintings on the wooden doors of the Phoenix Hall, depicting the Descent of the Amida Buddha, are an early example of *Yamato-e*, Japanese-style painting, and contain representations of the scenery around Kyoto.



The Byodo-in museum, Hosyokan, stores and displays most of the temple's national treasures, including 28 of the 52 wooden Worshipping Bodhisattvas on Clouds (these delicately carved national treasures are the only exiting group of Buddhist statues from the 11th century. They're depicted riding on clouds whilst dancing or playing various musical instruments), the temple bell (named "Sugata no Byodo-in" is counted as one of the three famous temple bells in Japan. Although it is a huge bell about

two meters in total height, shape of its outline from top to bottom is broadening toward the end in a graceful, gentle curve. Patterns of arabesques and celestials are inscribed all over the bell body; there is no other temple bell showing patterns no densely as this.), the south-end Phoenix, a number of fusuma and wooden door paintings, scrolls, texts and other historically noteworthy items too many to mention.

For an additional ¥300 visitors can embark on a special guided tour inside the Phoenix Hall itself. Beyond getting an up-close and personal look at Amitabha Tathagata, you'll also see where the Bodhisattvas on Clouds used to sit, the painted doors spoken about above, and see (although faded now to time and the elements) exactly how colorful and opulent the Phoenix Hall in its hey-day really and truly was. It was fantastic (but pictures were not allowed!)

## Nishi Hongan-ji & The Ride to Nowhere

I returned to Kyoto via the JR Nara line following the excursions at Byodo-in. Originally scheduled then for Tenryu-ji in the Arashiyama district (the western edge of the city), schedule changes and the unexpected issues finding Daigo prevented me from getting there before it closed for the night; therefore, I decided to try for Nishi Hongan-ji, a temple complex very close to Kyoto-eki, and one I had intended to see the previous two times I visited Japan. Rather than walk the few blocks to the compound I elected to take a ride on the Raku Bus, which would take me by the outskirts of the temple complex on its way round the city's perimeter. And after a brief walk from the bus stop I found myself at the gates to this rather large compound.



The Hongan-ji complex was established as a temple in 1321, on the site of the Otani Mausoleum, where Shinran, the founder of the Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) sect of Buddhism was buried. The mausoleum was attended by Shinran's grandson (through daughter Kakushinni), Kakue. Kakue's own son, Kakunyo, became the first chief priest of the Hongan-ji and 3rd Monshu, and dedicated the temple to the worship of Amida Buddha. Hongan-ji first gained power and importance in the 15th century, when Rennyo became its eighth chief priest. However, the Tendai sect, based on Mount Hiei (a place I'll be visiting tomorrow), saw this expansion as a threat and attacked the Hongan-ji three times with their army of warrior monks. Rennyo fled to Yoshizaki, where he established a new temple compound.

During the Sengoku period, fearing the power of the monks of the Hongan-ji, Oda Nobunaga also tried to destroy it. For ten years, he laid siege to the Ishiyama Hongan-ji in Osaka, one of the two primary temple fortresses of the sect. In 1602, just after Tokugawa Ieyasu became Shogun, he declared that the Hongan-ji be split in two.





Kyonyo, the 12th chief priest, became the first of the new Higashi Honganji (東本願寺), or Eastern Temple of the Primal Vow, while his younger brother Junnyo became the 12th chief priest of the original Homba-Honganji (本派本願寺), or Western Temple of the Primal Vow, often called Nishi-Honganji (西本願寺).

Nishi Hongan-ji (西本願寺) features a huge Goei-dō (御影堂), Founder's hall and a smaller Amida-do (阿弥陀堂), or Buddha hall, housing an image of the Amida Buddha. It's Kura (倉), or storehouse, houses many National Treasures, most of which are not on public display. The shoin (書院), or study hall, is also quite famous; it is split into two sections, the shiro-shoin (白書院), or white study hall, and the kuro-shoin (黒書院), or black study hall. Nishi Hongan-ji also contains a large shogun complex from the medieval period, which was largely moved into the temple from elsewhere in Kyoto in the 16th century. This includes Hiunkaku (飛雲閣), a large tea pavilion, four Noh stages, one of which is thought to be the oldest in existence and the other being the largest outdoor Noh stage, and the Kokei no Niwa (虎溪の庭) garden.



There weren't many people there and part of it was still under re-construction (I swear, they were doing that the last time I was in Kyoto!), so much of the temple was out of reach. And being such a late hour, much of the rest of the temple was closed up tight.

Disinterested in exploring the grounds further, I left aboard bus #28 Local to Daikaku-ji in Arashiyama via the famous bridge, to explore that temple in all its autumn night-time goodness. And boy what a trip that turned out to be.

Any time one spends forty minutes or more on the same bus and your destination turns out not to be as advertised, you can imagine the trip up isn't a good one.





Picture it: me on a local city bus full of people on their way home from work or play – the only gaijin on board – watching the city (and some of its more colorful citizens) come and go. And after what seems like forever (or a drive to the end of the earth, pick your metaphor), the only fools left aboard the bus were myself and three adventurous Japanese ladies of a more seasoned citizenship, cameras in tow. I could tell they were excited about going on this trip; I, however, had long wondered if doing so was a good idea. When we pulled up to the final stop and prepared to get off, finding that there was no one else around but the four of us, we were taken aback. There was absolutely no activity, or anyone, in sight!

The four of us alighted from the bus anyway, a little bewildered, and watched as it drove away, becoming nothing more than a pin-prick of light on this darkened roadway we found ourselves upon. Undeterred (with the experience at Daigo still fresh in my mind), I watched these ladies beat a path toward the direction of the temple, and then I followed. What we found upon arrival at the temple's gates was a whole lot of darkness. The moon was mostly full, yes, but seeing the grounds in the cover of moonlight was hardly what I would call a good time. My new Japanese lady friends continued to beat down the path toward the temple's innards, but I ventured no further. Rather, I turned right round and returned to the bus stop, finding a coach waiting – on line #91 – so I hopped aboard with a hot chocolate in hand (from a nearby vending machine), thanking the gods I would not be left out here alone tonight.

And just as the bus driver and I were pulling away (yep, I was the sole traveler for quite some time actually), here came the three ladies from earlier – they missed the bus! I'm not sure when the next bus arrived at that stop (Daikakuji-mae), if one ever arrived, but it was back to K's House for me post-haste!

I certainly hope tomorrow's excursions to Mount Hiei and the Sakamoto area near Lake Biwa fair much better than today's outings, or I just may have to scream. But I guess I should look on the bright side in all of this – these detours make grand stories!

Until then.  
Ja ne!

## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

滋賀県 | 大津市 {Shiga / Otsu}



### 「The Warring Monks of Mt. Hiei」

november 12, 2008

*Give me a minute to scramble under these blankets - it's cooooooold – and I'll tell you all about our day!*

I'm seated at a table called a *Kotatsu* (炬燵) and it is a low, wooden table frame covered by a futon or other heavy blanket upon which a table-top sits. Underneath is a heat source, often built into the table itself, but could be separate depending on the era. There are two kinds of *kotatsu* used in Japan today, differing in their configuration and heating type: the more modern electric style (*oki-gotatsu*; 置き炬燵), which consists of a table with an electric heater attached to the table's underside (which evolved from a clay pot with hot coals placed under the table); or the more traditional charcoal style (*hori-gotatsu*; 掘り炬燵), which is a table placed over a recessed floor and a charcoal heater is thus placed somewhere in the pit's floor or walls.



Ours is a more modern creation, but it's quite toasty-warm!

Most Japanese housing is not insulated to the same degree as a western domicile. And with no central heating, most Japanese primarily rely on space units for their heating needs. Due to the lack of insulation heating is very expensive; therefore, a *kotatsu* is a relatively inexpensive way to stay warm in the winter, as the futons trap the warm air inside. The *kotatsu* was designed for

people wearing traditional Japanese style clothes, where the heat would enter through the bottom of the robes and exit around the neck, thus heating the entire body.



I'm also wearing one of these – a Yukata (浴衣). During the Heian era (794-1185), *yukata* were worn after bathing by court nobles and by Japanese warriors during periods of rest. By the Edo period (1600-1868), the public at large wore *yukata* after public bathing became popular. Today the *yukata* is worn during festivals, at Ryokan (a traditional Japanese inn), and temples... following a communal bath. And since we're staying at an actual temple (more on that in a bit), we've been furnished with our very own special *yukata* tonight! (Homeikan also furnishes them each night and they're nice to wear about).

Consequently, the name *yukata* comes from the word for “bath” (湯; *yu*) and “under clothing” (*katabira*), and is very comfortable. It's a light-weight cotton material that easily moves with you, breathes well and is nice to snuggle into after a warm bath (even if it's cold outside). Speaking of which, I just had my first communal spring-bath, bath. Can you believe it?

In the previous two times I've visited Japan I've not allowed myself the pleasures of a Japanese style bath (I'm not really into disrobing in front of Japanese men or other foreign travelers for that matter), but I thought... what the hell. I threw a little caution in the wind and figured it was about time I took on this particular foreign pleasure. So I swallowed my pride and went down to try it out.

Bathing in Japan is a singular experience, though. For here the bath has been elevated to a serious endeavor; taken not just to cleanse the body, a bath in Japan is also used to purify the soul, to allow for the stresses of the day to ease away into the warm, spring waters. Therefore, the typical Japanese bath consists of two rooms: one that is used to undress and prep, and a second where the tub itself is located. As with everything in Japan there is proper etiquette that must be strictly adhered. Failure to do so could find the bather a lot of disgusted stares and lead to embarrassment, which must be avoided at all costs. To take a Japanese bath: you must first disrobe completely in the disrobe room then discretely enter the bathing area (taking care to cover any matters of privacy). Next, rinse your body thoroughly using a washbowl, a rag, and water from the tub (don't mix the waters). Once you've carefully rinsed, you may then submerge and soak in the tub's hot spring waters. Cleaning does not take place in the tub; leave the bath when you're ready to soap up and be sure to rinse thoroughly before returning. The Japanese frown on soap bubbles in their bath.





When you're done soaking, simply get up and leave – never drain the tub yourself as others will use the water for their baths.

Although it sounds like quite an enterprise, it's actually quite simple. Sliding into the warm spring waters was simply fantastic! Especially so considering we've been on the rails for hours-and-hours tonight just for the opportunity to stay at this bona-fide Buddhist temple (with the monks and everything), here on one of the most sacred mountains in all of Japan – the center of Japanese Buddhism – Koyasan. And as beat-up as we are, slipping into these warm waters here was simply heavenly, no pun intended.

How could I have let myself miss this?

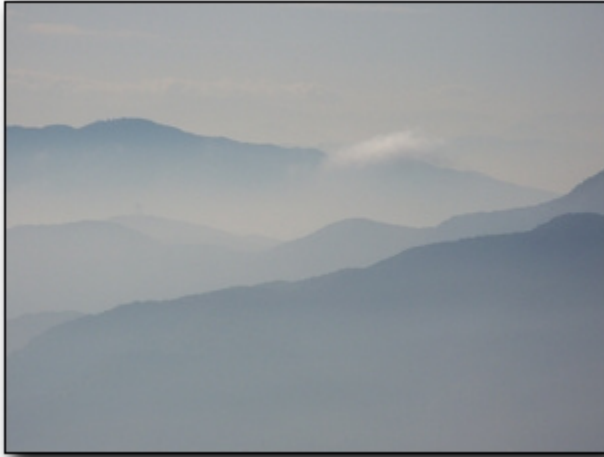
It was murder getting out though, hence the *yukata* and *kotatsu*; I couldn't get in and under fast enough! In either case, the real fun of exploring Koyasan begins tomorrow morning and I can't wait to see what the town looks like (we arrived under the cover of darkness tonight), but for now why don't I tell you how we got here and the places I visited during the day, which were equally exciting.

### Enryaku-ji

Over the previous two visits to Japan I've been introduced to a number of minor and major pieces of Japanese history – visiting Kamakura, the seat of the Ashikaga Bakufu, and getting an introduction to the Genpei Wars; to Nikko, the sacred grounds of the Tokugawa family, becoming aware of their opulence and power even in rest; to Hiroshima, the site of the first atomic weapon detonation, witnessing first-hand the destruction of the weapon dropped there; and, of course, throughout Kyoto where not only the Onin Wars were fought but where countless other maladies came to bear. In those travels a number of themes remained constant regardless of where I went.



Sometimes it was the devastation caused to a particular temple, shrine or grounds due to the Onin Wars. Sometimes it was the Genpei. And sometimes it was just warring sects determined to extinguish the other for some reason or another (generally having amassed too much power). And when that reason was the case, I usually heard it was the Tendai sect and the warring monks of Mount Hiei. Just who were these monks and what kind of compound did they have atop that mountain? Although I can't say much about the monks themselves, since the warring period has long ended, their compound still exists to this day – Enryaku-ji – and this time I had to see the place for myself.



Reaching Mt. Hiei via public transit can be accomplished a number of ways: first, via the Kyoto bus system, and second, by a combination of train and cable car systems. The bus will take you all the way from Kyoto-eki to the top of the mountain, to the temple (and its three individual sections) and back down again, but the time to travel that distance – roughly an hour and a half – and a fleeting departure schedule made the bus option prohibitive for me. The

second option, involving trains and cable cars, is more easily accessible but brings along its own set of obstacles to work around: there are two competing Cable Car systems – one on the west-side (in Kyoto prefecture) and one on the east-side (in Shiga) and getting to either would still require a trip on the Kyoto Metro, Keihan rail or JR Rail Lines, which would also take time. But after careful consideration I chose the Shiga route to ascend and descend; first, because I hadn't explored that area yet, and second, because using that route was supposed to be shorter.

I guess it was...

Even though I was quite well exhausted from last night's excursion, I had risen at the appointed time (6:30am), dressed and prepared for the day's activities as planned. I took the JR Kosei train from Kyoto-eki to Hieizan-Sakamoto station from 7:25a – 7:42a as intended, what I did not plan for was the laborious walk to the cable car station, the every 30-minute ride that would take me to the top of Mount Hiei. I had been advised the 1,500 meter walk was no more than a fifteen minute hike between stations (which is why I opted for the earlier departure from Kyoto-eki, and the early rise-and-shine call) but I did not expect the path to be uphill the entire way. Nor did I expect it not to be adequately signed, though I'm not sure what I was thinking there.



So off I went – on foot – throbbing, throbbing!



As strangely humorous as it no doubt is to be faced with a long walk with hurting, blistered feet, it's equally hilarious to learn the way to the Sakamoto Cable Car station also appears to be a major walkway for students en route to school; therefore, much like with Kamakura last year, I was surrounded by tons of kids – of all ages – for the majority of the 1.5 kilometer walk up. First the middle school-aged kids dropped off (at Hiyoshi Junior High School, behind the JR Station), then the little ones disappeared (at Sakamoto Elementary School, about three blocks from both the JR Station and the Keihan Rail station), and lastly the High Schoolers (at Hieizan High School) further on up the roadway. By the time they settled in for their first class, I finally found the cable car – it was behind the high school!

The Sakamoto Cable (坂本ケーブル, *Sakamoto Keburu*), or more officially known as the Hieizan Railway Line (比叡山鉄道線, *Hieizan Tetsudo-sen*), is a Japanese funicular line and the only line Hieizan Railway operates. The service opened in 1927 as an eastern route to Enryaku-ji and today it remains the longest funicular line in the country. It takes just ¥840 and eleven minutes to traverse the mountainside, a distance of 2.0 kilometers (1.2 miles). Of course those who wish to walk up can do so via moss-covered steps but I wouldn't recommend it. You'll miss breathtaking views of Otsu and Lake Biwa from the Cable Car's wonderful European-style gondolas! (Besides, it's a long walk up...)



The ride up to Mt. Hiei isn't a rough one – in fact, it's quite pretty, as you get glimpses of Biwa-ko (琵琶湖; 湖; “ko” for lake) and the surrounding areas from the car – it's the walk after you get there that will kill you. Once you pull into the cable car station and disembark it's another 1.2 km walk to the temple's gates, all uphill of course, through what the temple describes as “atmospheric forest”. By the time I reached the temple I had quite enough of the “atmospheric forest” thank you very much, but the walk proved to be worth the effort. Eventually I found myself on the doorstep of the Tendai.





Enryaku-ji (延暦寺), literally “Long Calendar Temple”, which is the headquarters for the Tendai sect of Mahayana Buddhism, was founded during the early Heian Period by the Chinese priest Saicho (767-822), also known as Dengyo Daishi, who at the request of the Emperor Kanmu, built the complex atop Hieizan to protect Kyoto from the evil spirits believed to come from the northeast. Saicho ordained a hundred disciples in 807 and, maintaining a strict discipline on Mt. Hiei, his monks lived in seclusion for twelve years of study and meditation. After this period, the best students were retained in positions in the monastery and others graduated into positions in the government. The founders of Jodo shu, Soto Zen, and Nichiren Buddhism all spent time at the monastery.

At the peak of its power, Enryaku-ji was a huge complex of as many as 3,000 sub-temples and had at its disposal a powerful army of warrior monks (僧兵, Sohei). In the tenth century, succession disputes broke out between Tendai monks of the line of Ennin and Enchin. These disputes resulted in opposing Tendai centers at Enryaku-ji and at Miidera, known respectively as the Mountain Order (山門, sanmon) and the Temple Order (寺門, jimon). Warrior monks were used to settle the disputes, and Tendai leaders began to hire mercenary armies who threatened rivals and even marched on the capital to enforce monastic demands.

By the 16th Century, the temple and its military force were powerful enough to threaten Kyoto, the city it was originally responsible for protecting. Most of the structures were destroyed in 1571 when Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), in his efforts to unify Japan, attacked the temple, killing thousands of monks and soldiers in the process. As it presently stands, the temple represents a small fraction of its original size. Enryaku-ji’s current structures date from the late 16th century through the first half of the 17th century, when the temple was reconstructed following the end of the Onin War and the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate.





Today, most of Enryaku-ji's buildings are clustered in three areas: To-do (東塔, "East Gate"), Sai-to (西塔, "West Gate"), and Yokawa (横川). The monastery's most important buildings are concentrated in the East Pagoda section, or lower section.

The To-do, or Eastern Area, is where Enryaku-ji was originally founded and is the center of the three temple areas on the mountain. As such there are a number of sights here, including: the Konpon Chu-do

(Central Main Hall), the Kokuho Den (National Treasures Repository), Kaidan-in (Ordination Platform Temple), Dai Ko-do (Great Lecture Hall), and the Hokke Soji-in (Lotus Sutra Holding Temple).

- The **Konpon Chu-do** (根本中堂) is the central hall of Mt. Hiei. Originally founded by Dengyo Daishi in 788 with the name "Ichijo Shikan-in", Temple of the Calming and Contemplation of One Vehicle, it allegedly marks the spot where Saicho built his first hut. The central figure in the hall is Yakushi Nyorai (the medicine Buddha), said to be the work of the founder himself, but is not on public display. An unusual feature of the hall is that the altars are in a sunken area below the worship floor, creating the illusion that they are floating amidst an undulating haze of incense smoke. The hall also contains the "Inextinguishable Dharma Light" (不滅の法灯), three lanterns aflame which legend suggests has been burning without interruption for the past 1200 years, ever since Saicho himself first lit them. There is always a monk (known as a "Fumetsu no Hoto") assigned to tend the fire.
- The **Kokuhoden**, for which there is a separate admission fee of ¥450, contains an extensive array of statues, among which is an elegant 13th Century Amida Buddha, as well as a beautiful Senju Kannon (1,000 armed Kannon), which dates from the 9th Century. Here one can also see a scroll that apparently is an account of Saicho's trip to China in the year 804.

#### Did You Know?

Although legend suggests the flames burning here have been doing so uninterrupted for more than 1200 years, others maintain the lanterns were extinguished during Oda Nobunga's raid, making it necessary for monks to journey to Yamadera to bring light back from the sacred flame, which itself originally came from Enryaku-ji.



- The **Kaidan-in** is for giving precepts to new priests of the Tendai School. Permission to build the hall was given after the founder's death by the Emperor of the time. The hall was finally completed in 828 and features an image of a sitting Shaka Nyorai in the center with two Bodhisattvas flanking its side: Monju Bosatsu and Miroku Bosatsu.
- The **Daikodo**, or Great Lecture Hall, is where the monks attend lectures on the sutras and have discourses on doctrinal points. The most traditional of these debates known as the *hokke daie* (Kogaku Ryugi) are convened here every five years. The former building was burned down in 1956; the current building consists of the Sanbutsudo, which was relocated from Sakamoto and reconstructed here. You'll find life-size statues of Eisai, Shinren, Honen, Hichiren and other illustrious names from the past within.
- The To-do, Kanjo-do, Amida-do and Jakko-do are collectively referred to as the **Hokke Soji-in**, a collection of buildings representing the esoteric teachings of the Tendai School. Originally planned by Enryaku-ji's founder, the buildings were later constructed by a disciple in 862 following Dengyo Daishi's death. The original hall was burnt down during an attack by Oda Nobunga, but was restored 400 years later in 1987.

Other buildings and structures, including a number of monuments, a couple of gates and/or towers, a picturesque bell tower (Shoro) and other notables surround the main buildings mentioned above. A stone path from the Hokke Soji-in will take you to the second area of the complex, known as Sai-to. The Sai-to is located 1 kilometer north of the To-do and is centered around the Shaka-do, the oldest hall on Mt. Hiei.







Along the stone path that leads to the Saito, you will come across a red lacquered building standing in the middle of a meticulously tended enclosure. This is the Jodo-in, the mausoleum that houses Saicho's remains. Further down the path there stand twin structures, the Jogyodo (Hall of Perpetual Practice) and the Hokkedo (Lotus Hall), which are used for different types of meditation. In the Jogyodo, monks walk around the altar for days, reciting the Buddha's name.

In the Hokkedo, monks alternate between standing and sitting meditation while studying the Lotus Sutra. Together, these two buildings are called the Ninaido or, roughly translated, "shoulder carrying hall". The name apparently is a reference to Benkei, a famous fighter and swordsman of Japanese mythology, who possessed such physical strength that, according to legend, he once lifted two buildings onto his shoulders like a yoke.

Further down the path, beyond these two buildings, is the Shakado (Shaka Hall), which dates from the Kamakura Period, and which marks the center of the Saito. The Shakado was originally built on the shores of Biwako, but was moved to its present location in 1595 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi to replace the earlier hall destroyed by Nobunaga's armies.



The structure, though much older, is not as large or as atmospheric as the Kompon chudo. The building enshrines a figure of Shaka Nyorai (the Historical Buddha), but again, this is kept from public view. Otherwise, the Shakado is the same as the Kompon chudo, with the sunken altars and the three lanterns.

Last, but not least, is Ruri-do, the Lapis Lazuli Hall. This is the only hall that was left intact after Oda Nobunga's attack in 1571. It is located on the way down to Seiryu-ji in the Kuro-dani (Dark Valley). Ruri-do is a small building of only two square meters, but it contains a statue of Yakushi Nyorai and is treasured as a rare artifact of the typical architectural style of the Muromachi period (the 16<sup>th</sup> century).

The Yokawa area and its collection of halls and structures lie another four kilometers north of the Sai-to, but I never reached them. The thought of the 2.5 mile walk to its boundary didn't appeal to me. Besides, I didn't have the time. After touring the first two areas of the compound I felt I was done and left for the bottom of the mountain – an hour early no less!





## Hiyoshi-taisha

Retreating back past the High School and round the bend in the road there put me at the entrance to Hiyoshi-Taisha (日吉大社), a shrine of the Shinto faith, which has existed here at the foothills of Mt. Hiei since the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Commonly known as Sakamoto-shrine, the roughly 430 hectare compound enshrines Sanno Gongen (山王権現), the guardian deity of Mount Hiei, and functions as the head shrine of all Sanno-san, of which there are more than 3,800 nationwide.



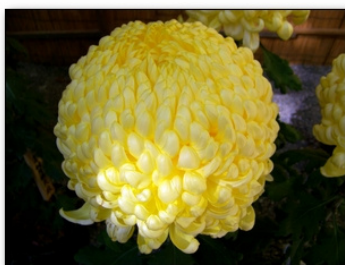
During the late Heian period Hiyoshi Taisha had very close links with the powerful Enryakuji Temple on Mount Hiei. When monks came down from the mountain to demonstrate in the capital and make demands of the emperor they would first stop at the shrine and take a *mikoshi* (神輿) with them for protection. A *mikoshi* is a portable shrine by which the shrine's deity could travel from place to place; no one would dare attack the monks while they accompanied it.







Since the shrine lies in the shadow of Enryaku-ji, the temple has pressed upon it a number of Buddhist influences. Though many of the buildings and bridges you'll find here are reconstructions (they were also burnt when Oda Nobunga destroyed Enryaku-ji in 1571) the essence of the Buddhist influences can still be seen today. The existing buildings were constructed in the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; the bridges reconstructed with the help of Toyotomi Hideyoshi – said now to be the oldest stone bridges in Japan. There's Ninomiya, Hashirii and Omiya, each with distinctions and ornamentations, from simple to more complex.



Much of the shrine is divided into two precincts – Higashi-Hongu (東本宮; the East Hall of Worship) and the Nishi-Hongu (西本宮; the West Hall of Worship – each with their own collection of buildings. And though the buildings themselves are interesting and unique (you can see an actual *mikoshi* on display in the Portable Shrine Building), what I found most interesting about the shrine were its colorful foliage and other flora. The shrine has been designated one of the best places in Shiga Prefecture and all of Kansai for viewing autumn foliage, and I was not disappointed!

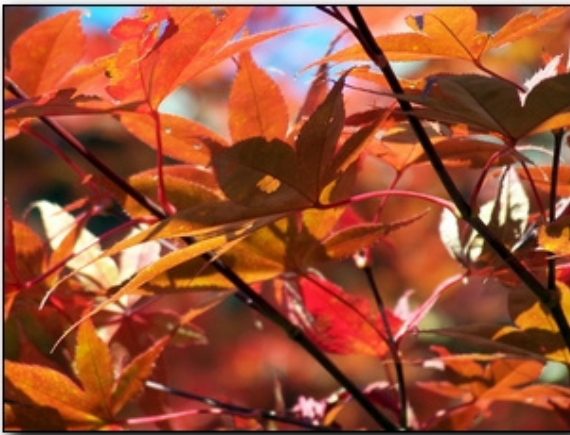






## Tofuku-ji, of the Kyoto Gozan

There is no better feeling in the world than meeting and/or exceeding a goal. For me, visiting Tofuku-ji had been one of those goals since the first time I stepped foot on Japanese soil. Having heard a great many things about the temple complex, and with a desire to see it with my own eyes, it's been on the top of my to-do lists each time I've been here. But it's been a hard one to accomplish. Tofuku-ji eluded me on my first trip to Kyoto – I jumped off the train but couldn't find the complex through the maze of side streets for the life of me. The temple was ushered out of reached on my second trip – I reluctantly had to forgo the visit to make up for changes in the schedule. But there'd be no stopping me on the third try; it did not elude me this time. So I guess the old adage “the third time's the charm” turns out to be true after all!



Tofuku-ji is a very popular place in autumn. With its abundance of maple trees – whose leaves turn all shades of color this time of year – all types of people are drawn to the temple complex. So many people visit the area during this time of year, in fact, that the local force polices the area. More for directing the public masses than in fear of any kind of altercation though; crime committed is relatively low here in Japan than anywhere else in the civilized world, but I digress. After taking copious amounts of pictures of

Hiyoshi-taisha's red leaved maple trees, I returned to Kyoto-eki via the JR Kosei line, switched over then to the JR Nara Line and exited at JR Tofukuji station and hit the streets of the neighborhood for the third time in search of the temple. But as I said, the third time was the charm, and I found it easily. Who needed maps (which I forgot again today)? All I had to do was follow the people!

While there wasn't a whole lot of wide-spread color, what there was of it was satisfying. Besides, the grounds themselves were so interesting that they completely overshadowed the lack of color. But let's check out Tofuku-ji, shall we?



Tofuku-ji (東福寺) is a rather large Zen temple complex of the Rinzai sect located in Higashiyama-ku in south-eastern Kyoto. The temple and the 200,000 m<sup>2</sup> grounds upon which it sits was founded at the behest of the powerful Fujiwara clan, although there appears to have been an earlier temple on the grounds prior to Tofuku-ji, Hosshou-ji built in 924. In either case, Tofuku-ji's name is a combination of the titles of two great temples in Nara that were also associated with the Fujiwara: Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji. And as one of the principle Zen temples of the land, Tofuku-ji is also a member of the prominent Kyoto Gozan, or "Five Great Temples" system.

#### Did You Know?

The temples of the Kyoto Gozan are: Tenryu-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. Nanzenji (南禅寺) leads the Gozan.



The Gozan was a system of Shugunate supported and protected temples initially adopted to promote Zen throughout Japan. However, as Zen had already spread throughout the country by the time the system was formally 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 their nationwide network for the distribution of government laws and norms, and for the

monitoring of local conditions for their military superiors.

Of course the Gozan system is more complicated than that brief overview, with layer upon layer of conditions, labels, subordinates and smaller branches that numbered in the thousands – enough to make your head spin. The Gozan themselves are the lead temples, followed by the Jisetsu (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. Over time the initial systems were naturally broken and reformed, but suffice it to say five in Kyoto stood above all. There was a similar system in use at Kamakura, a city near Tokyo, when the Shogunate (or Bakufu) was in power there.



But back to Tofuku-ji; the temple was founded in 1236 by the imperial chancellor Kujo Michiie, and appointed the monk Enni as founding priest, who studied Rinzai Zen Buddhism in China under Wuzhun Shifan.

As with many temples in the Kyoto area, it was burned during the Onin War but quickly rebuilt according to original plans. Currently the Tofuku-ji complex includes 24 sub-temples, though in the past the number has been as high as 53. Amongst the 24 only a hand-full are open to the general public, and they join a number of support buildings and structures strewn about the grounds, which make visiting Tofuku-ji an interesting place.



But only a few caught my eye.



The Sanmon was one of those (I'm a sucker for a gate). This national treasure is two stories high (22 meters), five bays wide (the central three bays are its doors), and has met fire at least three times since its establishment: in 1319, 1334, and 1336. The present Sanmon was rebuilt in 1425, making it the oldest Zen main gate in Japan. A signpost nearby suggests a number of other interesting facts about the Sanmon: The framed picture on the tower was painted by Ashikaga Yoshimochi (足利 義持), the

4<sup>th</sup> Shogun of the Ashikaga Shogunate (who reigned in Kamakura from 1394 to 1423); the picture on the gate's ceiling was drawn by Cho Densu, famous Zen artist, and his pupil, Kan Densu. Interestingly, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Shogunate of the Ashikaga Bakufu and father to Yoshimochi, was also a pupil of Cho Densu's. And the sculpture of Buddha on the front with Sixteen Monks is said to have been made by a monk named Teicho, although I'm not sure how famous he may be.

Behind the gate is the Hondo, or main hall, which is even larger than the Sanmon but a more recent reconstruction (completed in 1934). Inside you'll find images of the four heavenly kings (gods who watch over one cardinal direction of the world – Jikoku-ten (east), Zojo-ten (south), Komoku-ten (west) and Tamon-ten (north)), a statue of Buddha, and a huge painting of a Ryu (dragon) on the ceiling 6.2 meters in length.





Surrounding these two massive structures are a number of temple buildings that date back to the early Muromachi Period (1333-1573) and are rare examples of surviving Zen architecture from that era, including the Zendo (meditation hall), Tosu (lavatory – yes, a potty), Yokushitsu (bathing room) and the Shoro (the Bellfry, which contains a bronze bell 1.4 meters high, 1 meter in diameter and 8.5 centimeters thick). Other structures like Kyoza (or sutra hall, which contain over one thousand

books from the time of Song), and the guardian shrine are other notable locations on the grounds, but are rarely open to the public. Only the guardian shrine I was able to see.

The Hojo (priest's quarters) is next and it is also a recent reconstruction (including its gardens) but they, however, you can visit through a sequence of interconnecting wooden corridors that begin at the Hondo. The Hojo, as one of the more important buildings of the temple, was founded in 1235, was reconstructed in 1890, and the gardens arranged at the four quarters around the building (a unique construct for Zen gardens) were laid out in 1939 by Mirei Shigemori (a famous garden-builder). His intention was to express the simplicity of Zen of the Kamrakura period with the abstract construction of modern arts and techniques through each of the corners...



- The southern garden, in the front of Hojo, is the most contrived work among the four gardens and is composed of four rock-composites symbolizing Elysian islands – from the east to the west named “Eiju, Horai, Koryo, and Hojo” – placed on the sand garden-floor “Hakkai” (meaning the eight rough seas) and five moss-covered sacred mountains at the right corner, the west side.
- Compared with rigidity of the southern garden's Zen-style (dry stone-garden), the western garden has a gentle style composed of moss and azalea-shrubs trimmed in a checkered pattern in imitation of “Seiden”, a Chinese way dividing the land.



- Square-cut stones and moss are distributed in a small-sized checkered pattern in the northern garden. This garden faces the “Tsuten” bridge and gorge noted as an autumn-tinted valley called “Sengyokukan”.
- Seven cylindrical stones are arranged in the moss field in the Eastern garden so as to represent main stars of the constellation “The Great Bear”. These stones were originally foundation stones used at the other places throughout the temple, repurposed here to reflect the heavens.



And, of course, there's the Main Temple Hall itself. But it's not the hall or the other building there that makes the journey to it so special; to reach the main temple hall area one first has to cross the spectacular Sengyokukan Ravine (洗玉澗) via the Tsuten-kyo (通天橋), a 100 meter wooden bridge known as the “Bridge with Passes to Heaven”. The view of the foliage in all its colors – oranges, reds, browns and everything in between – was simply stunning, and the very reason I came (not to mention the reasons everyone else came, the bridge was jam packed with onlookers – but who could blame them!) The bridge and its connecting corridors do have a destination, that of the Main Temple Hall known as the Kaisando, which serves as the mausoleum of the temple's first head priest. The stone path in

front of the Kaisando is flanked by contrasting gardens (about 300 square meters) on both sides, a dry rock garden on the left and a lush pond garden on the right, both lastly reconstructed during the Edo Period (1603-1867) and equally spectacular.

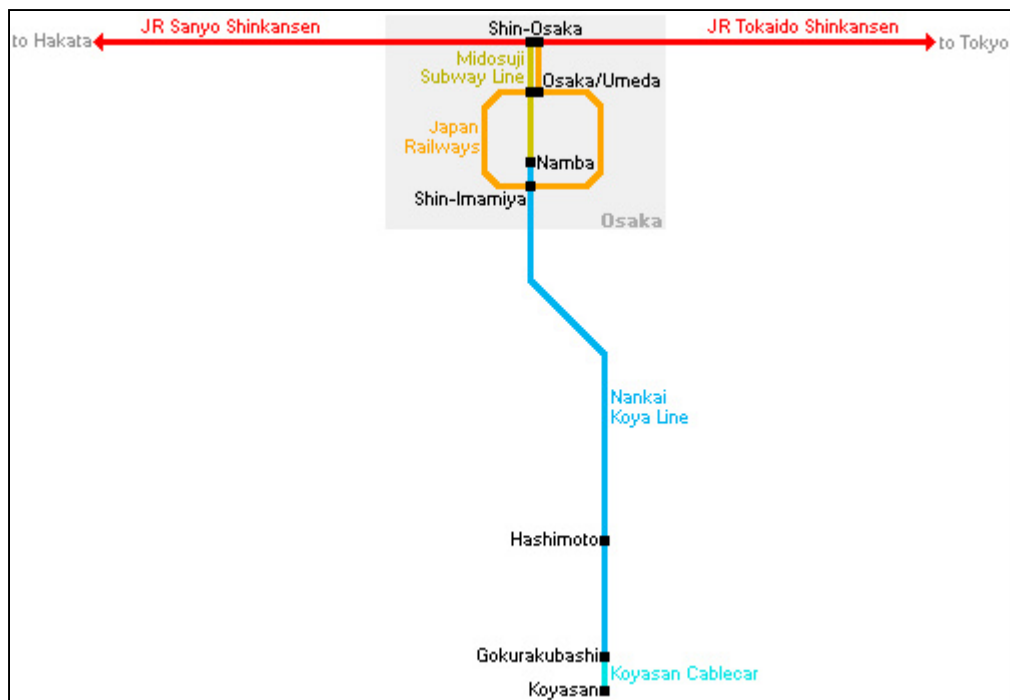
Retreating away from the Kaisando takes you down into the ravine itself where other corridors, bridges and walkways await your discovery amongst beautifully changing Japanese maple trees – the perfect ending to a perfect visit!





### **Journey to Koyasan**

While I would agree that there is no better feeling in the world than meeting and/or exceeding a goal, perhaps an even better feeling is the accomplishment of something new, something untried, or something far beyond your normal comfort level. By the time I returned to Kyoto-eki from Tokfuku-ji, a little early thanks to the earlier-than-expected departure from Mt. Hiei this morning, I was preparing to do just that: take on something new, untried, and something very far beyond my normal comfort level. For Rich and I were about to traverse the countryside for hours for the opportunity to stay at a bona-fide Buddhist temple (with the monks and everything) on one of the most sacred mountains in all of Japan – the center of Japanese Buddhism – Koyasan.



Mount Koya (高野山) is the name of mountains in Wakayama Prefecture to the south of Osaka. First settled in 819 by the monk Kukai, Mt. Koya is primarily known as the world headquarters of the Koyasan Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism. Located in an 800 m high valley amid the eight peaks of the mountain (which was the reason this location was selected, in that the terrain is supposed to resemble a lotus plant), the original monastery has grown into the town of Koya, featuring a university dedicated to religious studies and 120 temples, many of which offer lodging to pilgrims.

Reaching the mountain and our temple of choice – Rengejo-in – would be quite an undertaking and required us to make our first leg from Osaka, a major city no more than 15 minutes to the west of Kyoto by Shinkansen. For this leg he and I would be riding the Shinkansen to Osaka, then take its metro system to the Namba area hub, then take a ride on another train, a second train after that, a cable car, and then a bus before reaching our destination.

Alas, returning to Kyoto-eki from Tofuku-ji early allowed some time to take care of a few housekeeping items before departing – such as withdrawing cash from the nearby Postal ATM and to procure some provisions from the nearby Lawson (I was hungry) to keep me sated on the journey. I collected Rich just a bit later (we planned to meet at Kyoto-eki around 3:15pm) and after collecting our day packs (most of our luggage would be left at K's House for the over-night adventure), we were off to Osaka on a Hikari train, earlier than expected.



Once we hit Osaka, about 15-17 minutes later, we immediately made our way to Namba station and the Nankai lines, the routes that would take us into the depths of Wakayama Prefecture. The Kansai Thru Pass tickets procured on our first day in Kyoto worked here too (and had been working for me all day out in Sakamoto), but unfortunately I couldn't tell what line or train to take right away, so even though we got there early enough, we still had to wait for the Limited Express Rinkan train, which was due to depart at 5:12pm. But wouldn't you know it's an all-reservation train?

This means, of course, that on-top of having a ticket to ride one must also have a ticketed seat, or in this case, an assigned seat. One only gets that by making a reservation in advance, and since neither of us had an advanced reservation you know what that meant... the two of us had to rush around to get those assignments at the very last minute, with only five minutes to spare! We did so, at the Nankai Automated Machine, but it was very much a touch-and-go operation for quite some time, and full of some very tense moments. Needless to say, because of the oversight, we couldn't sit together... there just wasn't two seats next to each other anywhere to be found on the entire train. But we got seats on the train so I guess we should look at the bright side here.



Perhaps we shouldn't have been lollygagging around the station for an hour, but I digress.



The first train we rode went as far as Hashimoto, a 45-minute ride away from the bright lights of the big city (by now night had fallen) and into various suburbs and outer villages. Then it was onto a local train, on Nankai's Koya line, to Gokurakubashi, a 39-minute ride. This train, consisting of only two traversable cars, was noisy as any train I have ever been on and also seemed to be slipping through the rich forests of Wakayama more often than not. An observation which prompted the question

mid-ride: who the hell lives out where anyway? Meeting us at Gokurakubashi was the cable car that would take us up to Koyasan (also Nankai), a five minute ride. And from there a Nankai bus into the main area of Koya (because, due to religious reasons, one cannot simply walk into town from the cable-car station), and our temple: Rengejo-in. A drive in that took another ten minutes or so.

Where I am currently!

\* \* \*

Upon arrival we were greeted warmly by the monks, whose heads were indeed shaven and were dressed in traditional orange-robed garb, shown to our rooms and given a tour of the facilities they had to offer – the toilets, the bathing room and springs, the chapel, and various other areas. We paid our dues – ¥11,550 each (approximately \$115.00 USD) – then ushered into a rather large tatami-matted room and asked to sit down. Due to our later departure out of Osaka, and subsequently our later arrival at Koya, we originally missed dinner, which is served promptly at 6:00pm. But true to their hospitality, our hosts prepared some for us anyway! The spread available to us was good stuff too – nothing with meat, so a lot of tofu varieties, a couple types of beans, soba noodles and, of course, white rice. And believe it or not I ate the tofu, even the weird looking ones!

Following dinner Rich and I retired to our shared room and prepared to settle in for the night. Intrigued by the warm spring bath as mentioned earlier, Rich and I took turns. He went down first then I followed and my, oh my... it's such a fantastic feeling just submerging yourself in that hot, hot water, allowing your poor, tired, beat-up body to relax almost instantly. I found the experience quite intoxicating; one I plan on repeating again in the near future – probably when we get back to Homeikan in Tokyo. In either case I didn't stay too long. Before I could really relax I was interrupted by a couple of the temple's young helpers – I found them shaving each other's heads in the disrobe room, so I figured it was time to go.

In conclusion – Rengejo-in is really a nice looking place with modern facilities for its overnight visitors, something I hadn't really expected. And though there are a number of modern touches (the bathroom facilities notwithstanding), I hope to see more of this temple's grounds in the morning's light. For now I can say it's everything we expected and more. Our room is fabulous; not only do we have a heater – a must because, as I said, it is very cold outside – but a table with a heated indenture for your feet and legs (the before-mentioned *kotatsu*, which is where mine are right now), a television set (but who needs that), a vanity and some tea (although I don't expect to be brewing any).

We'll be turning in, in a minute or two here. We've got a very early morning ahead of us – up at 5:30am to be ready to pray with the monks at 6:00am (though we don't have to, but who can miss that opportunity?) And then there's the rest of Koya to see.

I hope tomorrow goes just like today. Today has been the only day to be on schedule thus far – amazing! And if it does, tomorrow should be exciting indeed!

Until then.  
Ja ne!

## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

和歌山県 | 高野町 {Wakayama / Koya}



### 「Koyasan, Japan's Sacred Mountain」

november 13, 2008

*Wow, what a glorious day. Koyasan turned out to be everything we expected and more!  
Give me a moment to settle down, collect my thoughts, and I'll see if I can't do the  
experience justice...*

The town of Koya is on an alpine basin located about 1,000 meters above sea level in Wakayama Prefecture, southwest of Kyoto city and Prefecture and on the northern edge of the Kii Mountains (紀伊山地). Surrounded by those mountain peaks on all sides, the town is 5.5 kilometers east-to-west, 2.3 kilometers north-to-south and very quaint by normal village standards. But even for its lack of sophistication, Koya is a very pedestrian friendly town – it's quite walk-able (highly recommended actually) and a wonderful place to explore in the cold, in the sunny afternoon, and even in the twilight of sunset.



Koya

History of the settlement can be traced back to Kukai, the enigmatic monk, scholar, poet and artist who, after becoming acquainted with a copy of the esoteric scripture known as the *kokuzo-gumonji-no-ho*, set himself down an entirely different path. Growing disappointed with the arid nature of his formal education, whose sole aim was the training of government officials, Kukai left the collage and began devoting himself to the practice of Buddhist asceticism, entering the priesthood at the age of 20.

In July 804, at the age of 31, Kukai boarded the first of four ships bound for China on a diplomatic mission to the Tang Court. The small fleet, which was led by the official envoy of Fujiwara Kadamomaro, crossed rough seas and entered the capital at Chang'an (present day Xi'an) at the end of the year. Kukai visited with many learned priests throughout China and through careful instruction, mastered the teachings of orthodox Esoteric (Tantric) Buddhism (and granted a master title for his efforts in mere months rather than in the normal span of two decades). Upon his return to Japan, he began the task of propagating the mysteries of Esoteric Buddhism throughout the country.





But with the Tendai monks of Mt. Hiei favored within the Imperial Court, spreading the word of Shingon Buddhism was difficult. In 810 AD, Kukai emerged as a public figure when he was appointed administrative head of Todai-ji, the central temple in Nara (visited in 2004), and head of the Sogo (僧綱), Office of Priestly Affairs. The following year he presided over ordination rites for the eminent priest Saicho (known posthumously as Dengyo Daishi), a Tendai monk. By participating in an ordination ceremony conducted by Kukai, Saicho (the leader of the Tendai sect and one of Japan's most important) had in effect made himself Kukai's disciple. And at once Kukai increased in esteem at the Imperial Court and throughout the religious community.

He rose from private to public to an influential figure (I've encountered his name on more than one occasion in Nara, Kyoto and Kamakura) and by 816 AD had the influence to petition the Imperial Court to allow for the establishment of a monastery at Mt. Koya. Emperor Saga accepted Kukai's request for a retreat from worldly affairs there and three years later the ground was officially consecrated with rituals lasting a full seven days.

Interestingly, there is no single mountain called Mt. Koya. The descriptive is a general term for the eight mountains surrounding the area called "*hachiyo-no-mine*" (八葉の峰: "the Eight Peaks Looked Like a Lotus Flower with Eight Leaves") whose heights are around 1,000 meters above sea level: Dempoin-san (伝法院山), Jimyoin-san (持明院山), Chumonzen-san (中門前山), Yakushiin-san (薬師院山), Miyashiro-yama (御社山), Jin-ou-kyu (神応丘), Shishi ga-oka (獅子丘) and Shorengain-san (勝蓮華院山).

Kukai's vision was for Koyasan to become a representation of the two mandalas that form the basis of Shingon Buddhism: the central plateau as the Womb Realm mandala, with the peaks surrounding the areas as petals of the lotus; and located in the center of this would be the Diamond Realm mandala in the form of a temple, which he later named Kongobu-ji – the Diamond Peak Temple. At the center of the temple complex would sit an enormous statue of Mahavairocana Buddha who represents the personification of Ultimate Reality.





As many surviving letters to patrons attest, fundraising for the project began to take up much of Kukai's time, and financial difficulties were a persistent concern. Indeed the project was not fully realized until after Kukai's death in 835.

Today, Koyasan is one large seminary of Shingon ("True Word") Buddhism that has kept its lanterns burning since its founding. Its traditions are carried on by 117 sub-temples sprinkled about the plateau – including fifty-three *shukubo* (宿場), or temples that provide lodging accommodations and dining to foreign and domestic guests. But unlike a Ryokan (like Homeikan), service such as waiting on guests and preparing and picking up bedding is done by young men who are training to be Buddhist priests (which explains the young guys I came across at

the bath last night). Rengejo-in is one such *shukubo* and having a chance to stay within its 900-year-old walls was an once-in-a-lifetime experience!



Part of that experience was an invitation to rise early for morning prayers with the monks and disciples of the temple. How early is early? Try 6:00am! We knew of this last night, of course, which is why retired as early as we did; we still struggled to crawl out of our warm futons and into the bitter cold temperatures the room had dropped into overnight anyway. But it was worth it – prayers (おいのり; *oinori*) with the monks were highly interesting, hypnotic and quite intoxicating. Up and ready at no later than 5:30am, we were allowed into the prayer hall only after the priest and his fellow monks were properly seated, and then ushered into a small section of the hall's western end when they were so. A few moments after we all were settled they began the intricate ceremony of bell ringing, gong banging, incense burning, scripture reading and chanting. Though I've caught a small portion of similar services in previous visits to Japan (out at Miyajima), that was nothing like this. Here we received the full pomp and circumstance that these monks do on a daily basis – from the gongs to the robes – and it was unreal.



Surrounded by the temple's relics and symbols, inhaling the exotic incense burning throughout the prayer hall coupled with the low drone of their determined chanting, thrumming forever forward, placed me in a quieted state of reflection. For many minutes I was aware yet unaware of thought, caught between total consciousness and induced hypnosis, until one of the priests rang a bell. So completely relaxed by then, the tolling of the bell didn't even startle me, its knell softly breaking into my subconscious and gently bringing me back from whatever esoteric land I had retreated into.

Needless to say it was quite an experience.



In addition to being present for the hour-long prayer service, we gaijin were also allowed to take part by accepting an invitation to come down and kneel on the floor closer to the monks and offer up our own silent prayers. I chose instead to watch and observe all that was going on around me, but that didn't stop some of the compliment from doing so. Rich also did not partake.

A complete vegetarian-style breakfast was served immediately following prayers in similar fashion as dinner – kneeling on the floor in front of a small tray. Imagine the lot of us shuffling out of the now very cozy and warm prayer hall back out into the brutal cold in our bare feet (or socks) and you might get the idea how crazy we all were to be doing this at such an early hour. But when we re-entered the main sitting hall and caught sight of the wonderful meal laid out before us, our hearts warmed again. Brought to us were miso soup, rice, tofu in multiple varieties, and a number of other specialties I did not recognize. Each of us giving thanks in our own way, we all ate heartily – that's all there was, but it was all very good!





Following breakfast, Rich and I loaded up the packs and walked into town, thus beginning our adventure.



We're back at K's House in Kyoto now, of course, and though I should already be in bed – tomorrow is yet another packed day: Hikone-jo along Biwa-ko, then a complete departure from Kyoto to Nagoya (for Inuyama-jo) then another train trip off the beaten path to Matsumoto, where the last of the four great castles of Japan still stands – I'm still so wound up from today that I couldn't fall asleep now if I wanted to. So I might as well tell you about the rest of Koya, ne?

Besides the 117 sub-temples strewn about the plateau of Koyasan, three official monasteries exist: Kongobu-ji (金剛峯寺), the head temple of the Koyasan Shingon; Danjogaran (壇上伽藍), with its pagoda that represents the central point of the mandala spoken above covering not only Koyasan but all of Japan; and Okunoin (奥の院), the mausoleum of Kukai surrounded by an immense graveyard (the largest in Japan). And although I would have wanted to see them all, only a small hand-full of what Koyasan had to offer was available to us today.



There's just never enough time is there?

## Kongobu-ji (金剛峯寺)

It's safe to say we were ready to hit the town from the moment the sun cracked over one of the eight mountain peaks (who knew which one really) and our tummies were full of rice, tofu and other delicacies from the morning's meal; however, the biggest problem we faced early on was that most of the town didn't wake for business until about 8:30am – stores, busses, and temples. We solved this problem by walking to our first destination, which was only about 700-meters from our temple's front door.



Though walking was a perceived inconvenience at first, our decision to set out on foot allowed an opening up to the unique experience that is Koyasan, to connect with it in a way we might not have otherwise had had we rushed down via bus. The protracted pace also allowed us to take in a number of smaller sights (smaller pagodas, other over-night temple's entrance gates and accoutrements) and really allowed us to get a feel for this mountain town. By the time we finished a nice warm can of hot chocolate from the vending machine in the center of town (you've got to hand it to the Japanese for their ingenuity on these machines) we were ready, and stepped onto the grounds of Kongobu-ji, the ecclesiastic head temple of Shingon Buddhism.

First constructed as *Shodempo-in* in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Abbot Kakuban (under permission by Emperor Toba), the precinct later became known as Teihatsu-ji when, in 1593, Toyotomi Hideyoshi built a new temple here to memorialize his recently deceased mother (a lock of her hair was enshrined there). Though later lost to fire many times, the area was eventually repurposed into two separate temples – *Seigan-ji* and *Kozan-ji* – which later merged in 1863. The temple was given its present name – “Temple of the Diamond Mountain” – in 1869 when it became the head temple for all of Shingon Buddhism.

### **Did You Know?**

The name Kongobuji was originally intended to refer to all of Mt. Koya and its many sub-temples. The origin of the name came from Kukai himself and it is said that he would refer to the entire mountain as Kongobu-ji as a way of naming the large confines of this Buddhist community. The name “Kongobu” also means “Vajara Peak” and its roots can be traced to the title of a sutra called “Kongo Rokaku Issai Yuga Yugi Kyo”.

The area of the entire complex spans 160,000 square meters and consists of a number of remarkable structures, including but not limited to: the Butsuden, Shin-butsuden, Okuden (lecture hall), a tea room, a meditation room (for Ajikan (阿字觀), a form of Shingon-style of meditation), a Kyoza (scripture repository), Shoro (bell tower), the Fire Ritual Hall, a storehouse and the Mausoleum of Shinzen Daitoku (the priest who succeeded Kukai); some of which you'll see from the inside by taking the temple tour.





Visitors enter the compound through Kongobuji's main gate. Though unremarkable at first glance this particular gate has remained the same since it was constructed in 1593. Emperors, royal family members and the Abbots of Koya were the only ones allowed through this main gate. Priests of the temple and the common folk used a much smaller entrance, just to the side of the gate, which is the portal used to enter today. Once you walk through, however, strolling along the cobblestone walkways will lead you to the entrance of the Hondo, Kongobu-ji's main hall structure. After entering the building, taking off your shoes and paying the admission fee (¥500), you'll first come across the **Ohiro-ma** room, used for important rituals and religious ceremonies in its day. Objects of note here include the room's gilded sliding doors

(*fusuma*), which are adorned with cranes attributed to Kano Tanyu, a famous artist from the Kano School of Art in Kyoto (his and the work of others from his family can be seen throughout the Kansai region.)

Next to the Ohiro-ma are the **Plum** and **Willow rooms**, both so named after the paintings adorning their walls and *fusuma*. Kano Tanyusai Morinobu (1602-1674) is accredited with painting the beautiful artwork for the sliding doors in the Plum Room (seen right); the Willow Room is named after the "Willows in Four Seasons", a remarkable painting by Yamamoto Tansai. But it is a horrific tragic event that took place within these beautiful walls that have given this room a darker name: Toyotomi Hidetsugu (豊臣 秀次; 1568 –1595), a nephew of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and a high ranking military official in his own right, ended his life by committing ritual suicide (*seppuku*) right here in this room, July 15<sup>th</sup> 1595.



The events that lead to this tragic ending are convoluted, but easy enough to follow.



In 1591, after Hideyoshi lost his legitimate heir, he gave Hidetsugu (the son of Hideyoshi's elder sister) the position of Kanpaku, regent to the Emperor. This resulted in a so-called "dual system of government" (二元政治) run by the pair respectively, with the assumption that Hidetsugu would eventually succeed his uncle. However, in 1593, Hideyoshi's mistress gave a birth to a new heir (Hideyori) and the relationship between Hidetsugu and Hideyoshi began to deteriorate.



Rumors then spread of Hidetsugu committing repeated and unjust acts of murder, earning him the nickname “life-killing kanpaku” (殺生関白). Finally, in 1595, Hidetsugu was accused of plotting a coup d’état and was then ordered to commit suicide for this and all previous actions. He did so, and this room with its striking illustrations will be forever known as “the room where Hidetsugu committed suicide”.

The next room, the shin-butsuden, is a rather long corridor built in 1984 to accommodate the faithful who gathered for the 1150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kukai’s entrance into eternal meditation (a.k.a. his death). Visitors here are invited to enjoy some tea and one of the temple’s famous rice cookies, but I didn’t indulge. The adjacent Butsuden (佛壇 or 仏壇, literally “Buddha altar”) is another large building featuring rooms whose sliding doors are decorated by 20<sup>th</sup> century paintings of seasonal flowers and birds as well as scenes detailing the story of Kukai, his sojourn in Tang dynasty China and his founding of Koyasan.

Behind this building is the temple’s modern Banryutei (蟠龍庭) rock garden, Japan’s largest at 2,340 square meters. Also built in 1984, its large rocks from the island of Shikoku, the birthplace of Kukai, represent a pair of dragons emerging from a sea of clouds to protect the temple. The dragons are made of 140 individual granite rocks whilst the sea contains white sand from Kyoto, another place significant to Kukai during his lifetime.



Kongobu-ji also has a natural garden said to have the power to heal in all four seasons.



This garden was created in the Edo period and contains many of the common flowers and plants found in Koyasan. Japanese andromeda and rhododendrons are a few of the various flowers that grow around a central pond. You’ll also find the six trees of Koyasan represented in the courtyard: Japanese cedar, Hinoki cypress, Japanese Red Pine, Tsuga (Hemlock Fir), Fir, and Koya-maki (Umbrella Pine). Just beyond the natural garden, returning inside the main building, you’ll pass by the extravagant Shonin Jodan-no-

ma, an audience room used in the past for receiving visiting dignitaries. Presently important religious ceremonies are held here; the room’s walls and sliding doors are gilded in gold and the ceiling features carved flowers – a room so sparkling it’s hard on the eyes in heavy light! On the right hand side of the room, there are small sliding doors with tassels (pictured above). Behind these small doors there is another room, called the “Musha-kakushi-no-ma”, that is just for the guards.

The before-mentioned meditation room is also nearby, for *Ajikan* (阿字觀), a Shingon-style of meditation on the form, sound and meaning of the syllable “Ah”. In Shingon teachings, “Ah” is the symbol of Dainichi Nyorai, the Supreme Buddha, and the symbol of the ultimate reality. In fact, the syllable itself is called “the king of all mantras” in one of the most revered Shingon texts, “*The Commentary on the Dainichi-kyo*”. Kobo Daishi called it the wellspring of all Buddhist teachings. *Ajikan* exists in many forms with over 100 explanatory texts. In its simplest form, taking only 10 minutes, the practitioner sits in front of a hanging scroll painted with a Sanskrit “A” superimposed on the disk of the full moon above a white, eight-petal lotus. Visitors can attempt the *Agikan*; however, I did not.

The tour ends in the temple’s massive kitchen. Though you might not find anything special at first glance – look again, there are several features that make this kitchen unique amongst its peers elsewhere. One of these is the huge tank made of *koya-maki* trees (高野槇) used to store pure spring water from which to cook (its sheer size makes it unique); the ovens next to the tank are still used today. A specially designed shelf, surrounded by white paper suspended from the ceiling, is an innovative method used to prevent rodents from sharing in the meal’s preparation. Perhaps the most interesting are the huge *nigoku-gama*, or rice cookers. Almost 98 kilograms of rice can be cooked at one time using these cookers, enough to serve approximately 2,000 people!



After a few pictures of the offerings outside I wrapped up my tour of Kongobu-ji and rejoined Rich to continue to our next destination, Dai Garan. And with it only a few meters away from Kongobu-ji, it was an easy walk down.



## Dai Garan (伽藍)



Legend has it that Kobo Daishi (Kukai) threw his *sankosho* (a double-ended, three-pronged Buddhist ceremonial tool) from China, where he had been studying, toward Japan. Upon his return to Japan and while in search of a place to headquarter his new religion, he came across his *sankosho* stuck in the branches of a pine tree here on Koyasan and started construction of the Garan, Koyasan's central temple complex, right on the spot. Though he started building the Kondo Hall and Daito Pagoda, the two most prominent buildings of

the Garan, Kukai was not able to finish them himself. His successors completed their construction and continued to expand the grounds of what became known as the Danjo Garan (壇上伽藍) with multiple additional halls and pagodas over time.

The Garan was and still is the center of ritual life here in this religious community, and together with Okuno-in (奥の院; the area surrounding Kobo-Daishi's tomb) it is considered one of the two holiest spots on the mountain. This extensive compound includes the following structures: The Great Stupa (or Pagoda; 根本大塔), the Kondo (金堂; originally a lecture hall), the Western and Eastern Stupas (西塔, 東塔), a shrine for Myo-jin (明神; the local mountain deity), the halls known as Mie-do (御影堂), Juntei-do (准胝堂), Kujiyaku-do (孔雀堂), Sammai-do (三昧堂), Aizen-do (愛染堂), Daie-do (大会堂) and Fudo-do (不動堂), the bell tower known as "Koya-Shiro" (高野四郎) and the Rokkaku Kyozo (六角経蔵, the hexagonal depository of the Chinese Buddhist scriptures). Each interesting in their own way:



- To-to (東塔), or the Eastern Stupa, was completed by the vow of ex-Emperor Shirakawa (白川法王) in the 2nd year of Daiji (大治 2 年) or 1127 AD. The central-cared divinity is Vijayosnisa (尊勝仏頂). The building was burnt in the 14th year of Tempo (天保 14 年) or 1843 AD and was rebuilt in 1983.



- The big bell, called *koya-shiro* (高野四郎), has been located in front of the Konpon Daito, the Great Stupa, since the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Tenbun (天文 16 年) or 1547 AD.



- Sai-to (西塔), or the Western Stupa, was originally built by Daitoku Shinzen (真然 大徳) in the 2nd year of Ninna (仁和 2 年) or 886 AD. The present building was erected in the 5th year of Tempo (天保 5 年) or 1834 AD.

- Daie-do (大会堂) Hall was constructed by the daughter of Emperor Toba (鳥羽天皇) in the 12th century – Princess Itsutsujisai-in (五辻斎院 内親王) – in memory of her father. The main image enshrined is of the Amida Buddha (阿弥陀如来), seated, about 4.8 meters tall, attended by the bodhisattvas: Kannon (觀世音菩薩; Avalokitesvara) and Seishi (勢至菩薩; Mahasthamaprapta). The hall was rebuilt in 1848 (嘉永元年).

- Sammai-do Hall (三昧堂), or the Meditation Hall, was reconstructed in 1816. The name comes from the fact that the abbot Saiko (濟高 座主, 870-942) engaged in meditation (三昧; sammai) here. The monk-poet Saigyō-hoshi (西行法師, 1118-1190) also mediated here, and in front of the hall is a cherry tree that he is said to have planted.



- The Aizen-do Hall (愛染堂), was originally built in 1334 under the order of Emperor Go-Daigo (後醍醐天皇), who instructed that in order to expel enemies of the nation both an extended lecturing on Buddhist scriptures as well as the constant performance of a ritual Goma (護摩) offering (using fire) to the deity Aizen-myō-ō (愛染明王; Ragaraja) had to be held. The present building dates from 1848 (嘉永元年) and enshrines a figure of Aizen-myō-ō made to the proportions of Emperor Go-Daigo himself.

- The Fudo-do Hall (不動堂) or the Acala Temple, was built by Gyosho-shonin (行勝上人) in accordance with the wish of the daughter of the Retired Emperor Toba (鳥羽上皇), Hachijo-nyoin (八条女院), in 1197 (建久 8 年). It is 13 meters wide, 10.6 meters deep, and in the style of residence houses of the Heian Period. It was moved to the present location in 1910 for the purpose of repair from Isshin-in Dani (一心谷). The main image enshrined is Fudo-myo-o (不動明王; Acala; the God of Fire) and Hachidai-Doji (八代童子; the Eight Young Boy Attendants), all carved by the famous sculptor Unkei (運慶).
- And the Juntei-do Hall (准胝堂); it enshrines Juntei Kannon (准胝観音) carved by Kobo-daishi Kukai (弘法大師 空海). The style of the carved image is from the early Jogan Era (貞観年間; 856-876).

But the three most prominent buildings of the Garan are the Kondo Hall, the Mie-do (the before-mentioned founders' hall) and the huge Konpon Daito Pagoda.

The Kondo Hall (金堂) is a large wooden temple hall where major ceremonies are held. The building has burned down multiple times over the centuries; the current building is the seventh reconstruction of the original and was completed using the Irimoya-style in 1932, 28.8 meters wide, 30 meters long, and 23.73 meters tall. It enshrines an image of Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Medicine and Healing, which you can see for a small admission fee. Other treasures inside include pictures painted by Kimura Buzan (1876-1942). The Daibutsu was carved by Takamura Koun (1852 - 1934).

#### Did You Know?

A xieshan style or irimoya (入母屋) roof in Japanese architecture is a hip roof (sloping down on all four sides) integrated on two opposing sides with a gable. When however the angle of the hip-and-gable roof is greater at the gable, the roof is said to be a shikoro-buki (鋳葺) or shikoro-yane (鋳屋根).



Another building of note is the Mie-do (御影堂), a descriptive that literally means “hall of the honorable portrait.” This hall originally was used by Kobo Daishi to enshrine his Buddhist images and for his personal spiritual training. Today enshrined inside this building is a portrait of Kobo Daishi, painted by *shinnyo*, one of his disciples, and then other portraits, all Kukai’s disciples. These two facts make the Mie-do one of the most important and sacred buildings in the

Danjo Garan. As such it is closed to the public every day of the year save one: March 21<sup>st</sup>, the day of *Kyu-sho mie-ku*. *Kyu-sho mie-ku* (旧正御影供) is a memorial held then to celebrate Kukai’s entrance into eternal meditation and, as expected, is one of the most important festivals on Koyasan.



Next to the Kondo Hall stands the vermilion Konpon Daito Pagoda (大塔), a 45-meter tall, two tiered, *tahoto* style (the first of its kind) pagoda that stands out on the hillside as a beacon of light.



Construction of the Daito was begun by Kobo Daishi in 816 and was brought to completion in 887 by Shinzen Daitoku, the before-mentioned first successor of Kobo Daishi. The massive structure is said to represent the ideals of Shingon Buddhism as it stands, and is known throughout the land as the “Fundamental Great Stupa”. A large golden statue of the Dainichi Nyorai (Cosmic Buddha, also known as Variocana), the central Buddha in Shingon Buddhism, stands in the middle of the pagoda’s interior as a representation of the Womb Realm, surrounded by four Buddhas from the Diamond Realm and sixteen Bodhisattvas (Bosatsu), one painted on each pillar (with phoenixes, peacocks, hawks and clouds) that encircle the statues. Together the works combine to make up a rare three-dimensional mandala (a metaphysical map of the cosmos). Mandala are usually two-dimensional paintings.



Another striking work of art is the pair of fierce statues located behind the main enshrined image. These two statues, named Tamon-ten (多聞天) and Jikoku-ten (持国天) respectively, are the original guardians created during the Edo Period. Both are a member of the “Four Heavenly Kings”. In the Buddhist faith, the Four Heavenly Kings (四天王) are four guardian gods, each of whom watches over one cardinal direction of the world.



These statues used to reside in the main entrance to the Danjo Garan, known as the Middle Gate; these two were the only ones that could be saved from an unfortunate fire that struck the gate in 1843. Tamon-ten guards the North whilst Jikoku-ten guards the East. Zojoten (増長天) would have guarded the South and Komoku-ten (広目天) would have guarded the West.

For a small fee you can go inside and see this wonder for yourself (but no pictures please!); doing so came as quite a surprise to me – I didn't know you could visit inside until I walked up its steps!

You know, after spending some time here, it's safe to say that Kukai, or Kobo Daishi whichever you prefer, has a very rich legacy and continues to fill a very important role in not only Japanese spirituality but its history as well. Kukai is famous as a calligrapher, an engineer and is said to have invented the *kana*, the syllabary in which, in combination with Chinese characters (*kanji*), the Japanese language is written (although this claim cannot be proven). His religious writings, some fifty works, expound the esoteric Shingon doctrine without fail. And according to tradition, Kukai wrote the *iroha* (いろは), one of the most famous poems in Japanese because it is a perfect pangram, using every phonetic kana of the Japanese syllabary exactly once.

#### Iroha

以呂波耳本へ止  
千利奴流乎和加  
餘多連曾津祢那  
良牟有為能於久  
耶万計不已衣天  
阿佐伎喻女美之  
恵比毛勢須

いろはにほへと  
ちりぬるを  
わかよたれそ  
つねならむ  
うみのおくやま  
けふこえて  
あさきゆめみし  
ゑひもせす

Iro wa nioedo  
Chirinuru o  
Wa ga yo tare zo  
Tsune naramu  
Ui no okuyama  
Kyō koete  
Asaki yume miji  
Ei mo sezu.

*Even the blossoming flowers  
Will eventually scatter  
Who in our world  
Is unchanging?  
The deep mountains of vanity—  
We cross them today  
And we shall not see superficial dreams  
Nor be deluded.*



While evidence suggests that Kukai didn't really write the poem (as it has lately been dated after his death), scholars still don't know who may have actually written it; therefore, it continues to be part of Kukai's legacy and legend to this day. Consequently, that pine tree that caught Kukai's *sankosho* I spoke about earlier? It still exists, growing as it has for hundreds of years. You'll find it next to the Kondo Hall though I daresay you won't find a dagger lodged in it.

After a quick once-around Rich and I boarded a bus in the direction of our *shukubo* to make one last stop before departing Koya – the Tokugawa Mausoleum.

## Tokugawa-ke Reidai (徳川家霊台)

With so many Tokugawa regents and shoguns looking for their final resting spot (they were in power for quite some time), there's no surprise then to find mausoleum's dedicated to the powerful family dotting the countryside. The two most famous I found in Nikko during my previous visit to Japan, both ornamented beyond my wildest dreams (Tosho-gu, the mausoleum for Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, is lavishly decorated with a number of items designated cultural properties today, including, but not limited to: the famous Three Wise Monkey carvings, the Sleeping Cat carving, and the magnificent Yomeimon gate); I hardly expected another here on Koyasan.

But I should have known. The Tokugawa's were the last of the Shoguns and highly respected for their role in shaping Japanese society.

But the answer to the unasked question – why here at Koya? – is easily answered. Koyasan is a sacred mountain. Since its opening it has attracted people from all walks of life as a haven for the heart and soul, regardless of the sect. Thus Tokugawa-ke Reidai was built here to enshrine the spirits of the first and second Tokugawa shoguns to help bring them closer to Kobo Daishi. The mausoleum's two identical buildings took twenty years to be built – completed in 1643 by Tokugawa

Iemitsu, the third generation Shogun of the Tokugawa family – and were constructed in the extravagant style of the early Edo Period with graceful sloping roofs, rich ornamentation, intricate carvings, lacquer, gold leaf, and metal work in every conceivable place, which highlights the spectacular beauty of the architecture. The two buildings stand side by side. The one on the right enshrines Ieyasu and the one on the left Hidetada.



Both Ieyasu's and Hidetada's Mausoleums are in the single-story *hogyo-zukuri* style, which features a pyramidal style roof constructed over a square building, and are listed as designated important cultural assets as representative mausoleum architecture of the Edo era. Each mausoleum features verandas and railings that surround the building, with the prayer step canopy on the front of the building having an undulating bargeboard.

The copper-tiled roof has a “roban”, box-like structure, placed over the peaked roof to prevent leakage. The beautifully decorated interior features marvelous gold and silver lacquer work and richly colored metal ornaments across the walls, ceilings and on the miniature shrines. Unfortunately, however, the interiors are not open to the public.



Although with neither the massive compounds found in Nikko, nor any of its cultural heritage-like carvings (the before-mentioned “Three Wise Monkeys” and “Sleeping Cat”), beyond the buildings – and we couldn’t go inside those – there might not be much to see here for the casual observer. For me, however, having come to know the Tokugawa name through my previous travels, visiting their Koyasan Mausoleum was a treat. Had I not done so, I may not have been clued into a rather unique way of marking your visit to a Buddhist temple – through a calligraphy book.

Rich and I came across a lady having one of these books “signed” at the Dai Garan earlier, but we weren’t sure how to go about doing it ourselves at the time. With time, and the ticket booth available to us, I asked how it was done. And it turned out to be the best decision I’ve made this trip – *sugoi-sugoi!*

The practice is referred to as Goshuin (御朱印), which literally translates to “red seal”, but features much more than a stamp in a book – it’s a complete work of art. No one goshuin is the same – not from temple to temple nor from the same temple. The reason for its uniqueness is simple: it’s done by hand (except the stamp part), so variances with brush stroke – thickness, ink, etc – will always be found.



Kongobu-ji



Dai-Garan



The origin of the Goshuin is unknown, I understand, but it is widely believed that a more primitive version worked as a receipt for handwritten sutras offered to temples by pious believers. Nowadays, the calligraphy books (or *goshuin-cho*) are brought with the devotee to receive the Goshuin on it in exchange for a small sum of money (in this case ¥300). This seal is regarded as the god of the shrine or temple, so some pious followers make it a rule to get one every time they pay one of these institutions a visit for the purpose of placing them on their *kami-dana*, or home altar, as an offering.

The Goshuin you'll find at today's temples show a combination of orange stamps and a shrine's or temple's name with a date of visit written in "sumi" black ink. It was so amazing to watch the monk work the quill as he laid down the name of the mausoleum, then placed the shrine's seal, followed by other symbolic stamps, that I knew I had an amazing keepsake now. My only regret: I didn't know about this sooner! I could have gotten all the stamps from Koyasan. What a missed opportunity, no?

So you'd think.



Though Rich doesn't usually like to run through temples or shrines like I do – I certainly understand, you can become "shrine-shocked" easily (a term I coined to define a condition I invariably slip into after touring dozens of shrines and/or temples in my visits to Japan) – but he does have a knack of finding that one cool thing then giving me permission to run wild. He talked me into that wonderful key keepsake at Tokyo Disneyland (which I'm so glad we worked

through the language barrier and other confusions to get it made), put up with my incessant ramblings about BraviSEAmo at Tokyo DisneySEA, and suggested, without blinking an eye, that we hop back on the bus and revisit each and every one of the places we had visited so far today and grab their stamps.

So I did and it was the best thing ever!

\* \* \*

After getting the book filled out as much as I could – at Tokugawa-ke Reidei, Kongobu-ji, Dango Garan, and even Rengejo-in (our *shukubo*) – we reluctantly prepared to depart the plateau (missing a few sights in the process, such as Okuono-in and Daimon but we had run out of steam). Unable to spend any more time we began the long trek back to Osaka, striking out on the same journey from yesterday using just about every piece of Japanese transportation alternatives available, only in reverse:

1. Bus ride from town to Koyasan station (高野山駅),
2. Take the Nankai Cable Car (高野山ケーブル) and ride it down to Gokurakubashi (極楽橋駅) at the foot of the mountain,
3. Transfer to Nankai local train, the Nankai-Kosaku line (南海鋼索線), from Gokurakubashi to Hashimoto (橋本駅),
4. Catch the Nankai Rinkan train (特急「りんかん」) from Hashimoto into Namba (難波駅), then
5. Ride the metro from Namba to points within Osaka.



We spent the rest of our time in Osaka hunting down both Hard Rock Café's in the city (for Rich) – actually eating at the one at Universal Studios Japan (ユニバーサル・スタジオ・ジャパン) City Walk complex; their cheeseburgers were a wonderful sight let me tell you – and taking a trip to the Floating Garden Observatory atop the Umeda Sky Building for a fantastic view of Osaka at night; a wonderful way to close out the evening, wouldn't you say?

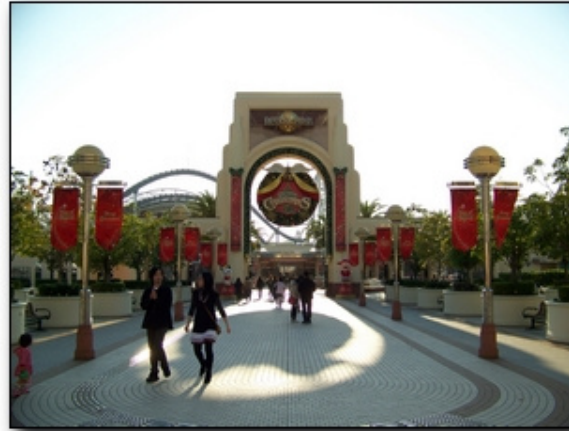




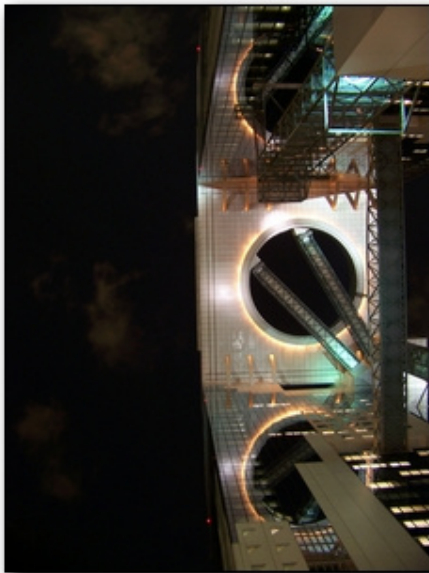
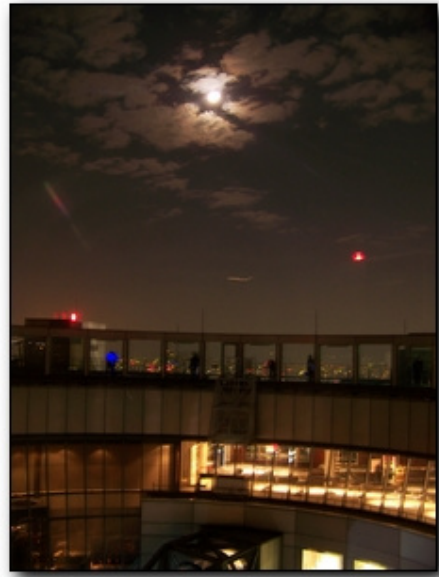
Truth told we seriously contemplated going into Universal Studios Park itself, but neither of us could really justify the added expense. With another early day and our departure from Kyoto it was just as well.

Besides, I'm pooped.

But we did enjoy some unique popcorn flavors – including, but not limited to: Sea Salt, Black Pepper, Curry, Honey and Chocolate – there's a whole store! It's bizarre to eat Chocolate popcorn but it works, it really does!







Until tomorrow.

Ja ne!

## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

滋賀県, 愛知県 | 彦根市, 犬山市 {Shiga, Aichi}



### 「The National Treasure Castle Tour」

november 14, 2008

“Rarely does anything go as planned” is one of the unspoken truths to traveling. Regardless of the destination, it’s one that even the most prepared travelers must face. The mark of a good traveler is being able to roll with those changes, whether they’re schedule amendments to accommodate a travel partner, or adjustments for other mishaps due to circumstances beyond your control (like being unable to locate the subject, spending too much time at a location, or forgetting to pack extra batteries for your camera – something I found out last year). Making changes to a planned itinerary – losing out on a destination for the lack of time or an accommodation – can be both challenging and frustrating, and sometimes very necessary.

It’s a truth that I’ve come to understand and expect as trips as big as this continue forward. Today I was faced with a choice caused by circumstances both in and beyond my control – simple exhaustion, the other unspoken truth of hard traveling. The exhaustion I let creep up forced a choice upon me this morning: get up and try to complete the day’s activities as scheduled, possibly becoming more run-down in the process, or take in a little more rest and see just the most important of today’s attractions. With Higashi Hongan-ji, Hikone-jo, Ishiyama-dera, Mii-dera and Inuyama-jo on the party list for the day, my dance card was undeniably full.

Each stop was timed down to the hour, to the minute even. And the entire day’s schedule depended upon me getting up at the right time, meeting the train or bus at the appointed moment, and walking through the gates of the temple, castle, or shrine just as I had planned... months ago. Sleeping in would wreck all that careful planning, so I had no choice but to get moving, right?

But saying all that I must admit – I slept in this morning.

わかった！わかった！（Wakatta! Wakatta!）(I know! I know!)

Being constantly on the go has taken its toll on me. My feet hurt. My body hurts. My mind is numb. It’s tired. I’m tired. It’s taking longer and longer to get motivated each morning. And with still a few more days to go on this adventure I figured I had no choice: I had to sleep in. Doing so omitted my Otsu run this morning – sadly Higashi Hongan-ji, Mii-dera and Ishiyama-dera were culled – but taking in the extra hour or so of sleep went far in reviving my spirit. In retrospect I’m glad I made that choice, Hikone-jo and Inuyama-jo surprised with its historical as well as with its aesthetic perspective.

So, rather than the day starting bright and early at Higashi Hongan-ji (they opened at 6:00am), it started rather subdued, hopping aboard a Shinkansen Hikari somewhere around 8:00am bound for Hikone, a city in Shiga.

But changes don't always happen to schedules, though.



One of the biggest challenges in planning this year's itinerary came to the subject of luggage and the question of what to do with it upon transferring out of Kyoto. We solved the sleep-over at Koyasan by paying for the night at K's House and leaving most of our luggage there in our rooms, but traversing the countryside and exploring attractions along the way *before* we reached our intended housing accommodations added another level of complexity. I initially toyed with employing a shipping company to mail our bags from Kyoto to Homeikan in Tokyo and make do with an overnight bag in the same fashion as with Koyasan at Matsumoto, but cost and logistics made this option prohibitive. The second option, and the only one remaining really, was to employ the use baggage lockers inside of train stations. The only real problem here was making sure the stations we would

be visiting had lockers and in the size to accommodate our burdens.

After arriving in Kyoto the first day – in what seems like an eternity now – I made sure Kyoto-eki had a number of these lockers to accommodate us. And if Kyoto-eki had said lockers, so would Nagoya-eki.

Therefore, since we were scheduled to depart Kyoto for Nagoya by no later than mid-afternoon, rather than try and return to K's House, check-out and pick up my suitcase then walk back to Kyoto-eki, I decided the easiest thing to do would be to pack up everything I had the night before (discarding clothing items I would no longer need – a time honored tradition for me here in Japan) and have Rich meet me at the train station by the appointed time and we'd take off from there. Though this was not how the transfer was originally going to take place. The original thought process (following the discarded idea of using a transport or shipping company) was to have me take my luggage with me (or have Rich transport my suitcase along with his) and meet me in Maibara. Once the two of us met up there we'd take the Shinkansen to Nagoya, find lockers, then hop the local trains to Inuyama and continue our adventure.





It looked good on paper, but in practice it wouldn't really have worked. What was I thinking? So in order to make things work out for both of us I advised a new plan: I'd stuff my suitcase in a locker at Kyoto-eki, thereby releasing Rich from having to tote it to the station on my behalf and freeing me from having to walk all the way back to K's House from the station then back to the station from K's House with said luggage. I'd just meet him there.

With that plan in motion I worked my way to Hikone.

### Hikone-jo

The impetus for visiting Hikone-jo can actually be traced back to 2007's trip. During that visit I took a journey to a town called Himeji for a tour of its world-famous castle complex. It was there I learned that Himeji-jo (-jo is short for 城郭 "jokaku", meaning castle) was one of only four castles designated National Treasures, a title awarded to the most precious of Japan's tangible cultural properties. The other three: Hikone-jo in Hikone, Shiga Prefecture; Inuyama-jo in Inuyama, Aichi Prefecture; and Matsumoto-jo in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture. What made these four special beyond those castles found in Osaka, Wakayama and many other cities across Japan was that, amongst their ferroconcrete peers, these four castles were the real deal, not modern reproductions. That made visiting all four and completing the Japan National Treasure Castle Tour that much more desirable.



With Himeji-jo's visit in 2007, and if I can stay close to schedule these next couple of days, I should accomplish that goal starting with Hikone-jo. It took about 30 minutes to reach Maibara from Kyoto by Shinkansen, and another 5 minutes on the JR Biwako line to the center of Hikone. By the time I reached the city it was a little after 9:00 am. A good healthy walk got me to the steps of Hikone-jo not long thereafter and the exploration of this castle complex began.

Hikone Castle (彦根城) is one of the most famous historical sites in Shiga Prefecture. This Edo period castle traces its origins to Mt. Sawa, about 2 km to the northeast. Ishida Mitsunari, then lord of the castle, was defeated at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 and was forced to forfeit the castle. For his participation in the Battle of Sekigahara, Ii Naomasa (one of the four most distinguished generals of the Tokugawa Allied Forces) was awarded Sawayama castle and surrounding lands.

Due to its inconvenient location and poor condition, he soon started planning for a new castle on Iso Mountain, but unfortunately Naomasa died before realizing his dream.

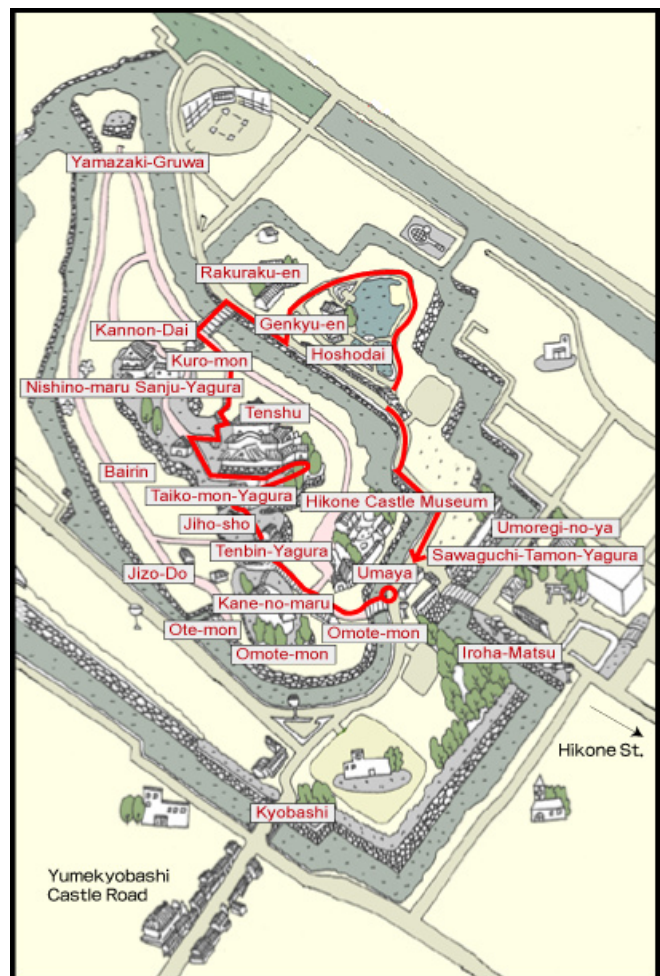


His son Naotsugu changed his father's plan and with the permission of Tokugawa Ieyasu, began to construct the castle that would become Hikone castle on its current spot. The keep was originally built in 1575, as part of Otsu castle, and was moved to Hikone by the Li clan (family *mon* pictured left). Other parts were moved from Nagahama castle as needed. All told Naokatsu's brother Naotake later assumed the role of Daimyo and was able to complete the castle in 1622 by collecting stones from the former Sawayama castle. It took 20 years and stood as a symbol of prosperity for many years after. When the Meiji era began in 1868, many castles were scheduled to be dismantled, and only a request from the emperor himself after touring the area, kept Hikone Castle intact. Today it remains one of the oldest original-construction castles in Japan.

There was so much to see and do here (between the castle and the garden) I overstayed my welcome (schedule speaking); here are the highlights:

After walking the long approach to the castle, you'll eventually come upon what is called the **Irohamatsu**, an arrangement of evergreen pine trees that line the outer moat. There used to be forty-seven planted pine trees, the same number of letters in the old Japanese alphabet (called *i-ro-ha* after the first three letters, thus the name of this arrangement). Trees were not usually planted alongside moats because enemies could easily hide behind them to attack the castle, but at the height of Hikone-jo's influence, frequent neighborhood flooding made recognizing the road difficult; therefore, it is said that the pine trees played their part in marking the boundaries allowing for safe passage.

Another interesting building just prior to entering the proper castle grounds is the **Umorigi-no-ya**. This is the lodge where Ii Naosuku, the 13<sup>th</sup> lord of the Hikone clan, spent his days applying himself to the pursuit of knowledge and martial arts. Later he was promoted to an important office (Prime Minister) in the Tokugawa Shogunate and played a crucial role in deciding to open up Japan to the outside world.



The tour, marked in red, begins at the Umayu.



Built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, here at the stable a dozen horses belonging to successive lords of the Hikone clan were always kept. Though dismantled and reconstructed in 1968, the roof was shingled just like the original style, helping to preserve its iconic status – the only stable of its kind in Japan that has been preserved within a castle site today. As you ascend the slope from *Omotemon* (front gate), you will cross *rokabashi*, a corridor bridge, uniquely constructed to be demolished in emergencies. Forming a symmetric shape with the bridge at its center is the **Tenbin-yagura**, one of Hikone's unique towers (-yagura; 櫓 or 楼; "tower"). The tower is so named because of its uncanny resemblance to a balance scale, or *tenbin* (天秤). Though just a tower, it is said to be the reconstruction of the main gate of

Nagahama-jo, originally constructed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hikone-jo has the only example of such a construction, making it rather unique in castle architecture.

Just Beyond the tenbin-yagura is the **Jisho-sho**, the castle's bell.

Originally located in *kane-no-maru*, the bell was later remolded (out of several gold coins) and moved to its present location by order of the 12<sup>th</sup> lord Ii Naoaki, so the sound of the bell could reach the surrounding settlement. Selected as one of the best 100 sounds of Japan, today the bell is still rung up to five times a day, marking the time just as it had done during the Edo Period. At the attached tea house, *Chosho-an*,

visitors can enjoy *usucha* (powdered green tea) and Japanese sweets if they're inclined. As always I did not partake (though now I wish I had...)



Not far off the beaten path from the bell is the **Jizo-do**, the guardian hall. Buddhist deities (including *Jizo*, a guardian deity) were gathered and enshrined in the temple hall when the castle was built. It is believed that if you can lift the round stone placed in front of the Jizo, your wish will come true. Continuing on, you'll come across the **Taiko-mon-yagura**. This solidly built yagura-gate guards the front entrance leading to the Hommaru, or the main keep.





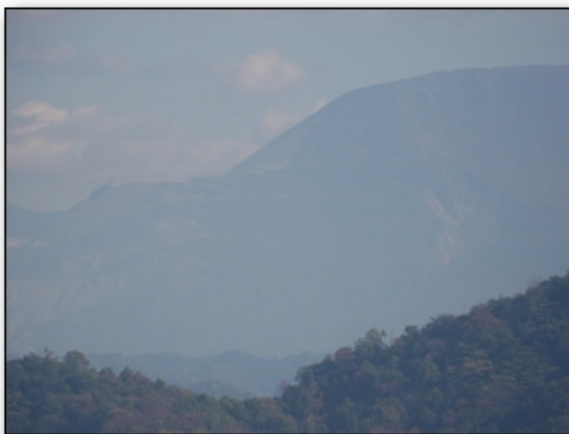
seen from mid-to-end of March – what a sight that must be! The trees were planted in commemoration of Hikone Castle having been chosen as one of the new 100 Best Sightseeing Places in Japan. This day, though, they're turning colors...

Just beyond the plum grove is the **Tenshu**, the most important part of the castle. Serving as the main structure of Hikone Castle, this three-storied keep rises to a height of one meter. Though comparatively small in scale, the structure demonstrates the superior design required of a castle during periods of war. With its artistic arrangement of different roof styles and elaborately-designed windows, the external appearance of the main keep is spectacular. The exterior is elaborately decorated with gables in various styles, gorgeous, golden ornaments, and graceful *Katomado* (Bell-Shaped Window). A pair of golden Shachi (imaginary fish-shaped beast), sit on both ends of the rooftop ridge, believed to protect the building from fire. In contrast, the interior is not decorated, as it is uninhabitable. Embrasures for matchlocks and arrows are secretly placed in the wall. Narrow staircases lead to the top floor – what a view you can get from here!



The west-side of the Honmaru quarter is called **Nishi-no-maru**, or the west-wing fort. And at the far end of the area stands **Sanju-yagura**, a tower built on a stone wall exceeding 10-meters in height. In the area just below the tower stands a grove of cherry trees, enchanting visitors in the spring with their exquisite blossoms (though not so enchanting in autumn).

Some of its unique features include the fact that it has no eastern wall but does sport a bridge railing in the hallway between pillars. Atop the tower was placed a *taiko* drum, used to send coded signals or announce urgent needs of the Daimyo, hence the tower's name. The **Bairin**, the place once used as the rice storehouses (obtained from the Tokugawa administration) comes up next, though currently it is a plum grove. Annually about 450 pink-or-white plum-blossoms are



Though the castle itself was not nearly as impressive as Himeji-jo (how could it be really?), its gardens were quite striking and picturesque.

Located at the foothill of the castle in the north-east quadrant, this chisen-kaiyu style garden (a garden landscaped around a large pond) is the creation of Ii Naooki, the 4<sup>th</sup> daimyo, and was designed and modeled on the detached palace of Emperor Genso of the Tang dynasty in ancient China. Constructed in 1677, buildings such as the Rinchi-kaku, built to watch over the large pond, and the Hosho-dai (a guest house), built on a man-made hill, and trees and rocks imitating the “Eight Views of Omi Region” and representing Chikubu-jima (island) and the “White Rocks of Oki”, are beautifully laid out here. So much so that this garden has been designated one of the rare places where you can really experience the atmosphere of the gardens in the Edo period; it’s the reason I spent so much time in Hikone!



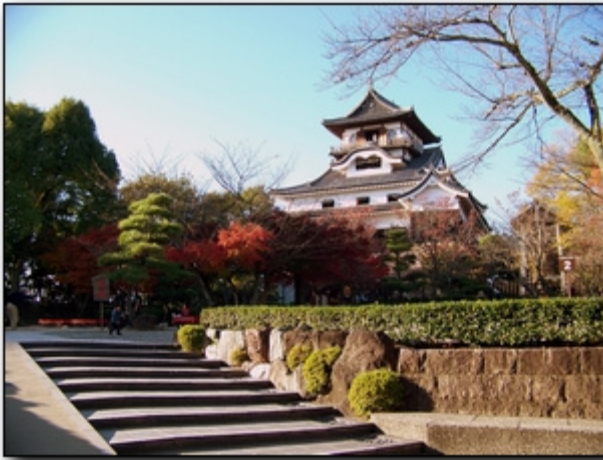






## Inuyama & Nagoya

By the time I pried myself out of the gardens, and made the return trip to Kyoto (using the JR Biwako line rather than the Shinkansen), it was just about time to meet Rich and continue unceremoniously on our way (Inuyama closed to visitors by 4:00pm so we had to make our way quickly). After gathering him up at Kyoto-eki, it was back on Shinkansen Hikari (#372; 12:56p-1:32p) bound for Nagoya, a city in nearby Aichi prefecture. Upon arrival we shut our bags in lockers at the station and braved the Meitetsu Lines to Inuyama (犬山市), a town located in the extreme north-western territory of Aichi (the smaller red-colored territory). Literally meaning “Dog Mountain”, Inuyama lies along the Kiso River and is full of a number of National Treasures, Cultural Heritage sites and other shrines and temples, but my purpose for going there, my one and only reason really, was to see Inuyama-jo and continue the National Treasure Castle Tour.



Inuyama castle was built at its present location in 1537 by Oda Yojirou Nobuyasu, an uncle of Oda Nobunaga (one of Japan's greatest samurai warriors; he attempted to unify the nation during the Warring States Period and his name is generally mentioned along with Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu). As such it is the oldest standing castle in Japan. In the years following its construction, lordship of the castle changed frequently due to war. All three men

– Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Tokugawa Ieyasu and Oda Nobunaga – sought to bring an end to the Warring States period, a period of total political unrest following the collapse of the Ashikaga Shogunate during the Onin War (1467–1477).

And it's here, in the history of conflict, which allows Inuyama to stand out.

The upheaval following the Onin War resulted in the further weakening of central authority, and throughout Japan regional lords, or daimyo, rose to fill the vacuum. In the course of this power shift, well established clans such as the Takeda and the Imagawa, who had ruled under the authority of both the Kamakura and Muromachi bakufu, were able to expand their spheres of influence. There were many, however, whose positions eroded and were eventually usurped by more capable underlings.

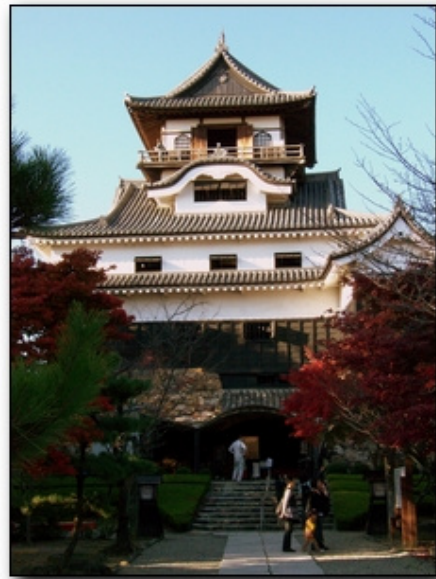
This phenomenon of social meritocracy, in which capable subordinates rejected the status quo and forcefully overthrew an emaciated aristocracy, became known as *gekokuujō* (下克上), which literally means “the underling conquers the overlord.” One of the earliest instances of this phenomenon was Hōjō Sōun, who rose from relatively humble origins and eventually seized power in Izu province in 1493. Building on the accomplishments of Sōun, the Late Hōjō clan remained a major power in the Kantō region until its subjugation by Toyotomi Hideyoshi late in the Sengoku period. Other notable examples include the supplanting of the Hosokawa clan by the Miyoshi, the Shiba clan by the Oda clan, and the Toki by the Saito.

After nearly a century and a half of political instability and warfare, Japan was on the verge of unification by Oda Nobunaga, who had emerged from obscurity in the province of Owari (present-day Aichi Prefecture) to dominate central Japan when, in 1582, Nobunaga fell victim to the treachery of one of his own generals, Akechi Mitsuhide. This in turn provided Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had risen through the ranks from *ashigaru* (footsoldier) to become one of Nobunaga’s most trusted generals, with the opportunity to establish himself as Nobunaga’s successor. Hideyoshi eventually consolidated his control over the remaining *daimyo* and, although he was ineligible for the title of *Seii Taishogun* because of his common birth, ruled as *Kampaku* (関白) – chief advisor to the Emperor.

But Hideyoshi’s consolidation of power would not quiet the countryside for long.

In May 1583, a former general of Nobunaga’s named Shibata Katsuie coordinated a number of simultaneous attacks on Shizugatake, a series of forts held by Hideyoshi’s generals known as the *Battle of Shizugatake*. In this battle Hideyoshi supported Nobukatsu, the second son of Oda Nobunaga, and defeated Shibata Katsuie, who supported Nobunaga’s third son, Nobutaka. After winning the battle, Hideyoshi invited Nobukatsu and other generals to his residence at Osaka Castle, which he had just completed that same year. The meaning of such an invitation was for all the men to pay homage to Hideyoshi, which would reverse the roles between Hideyoshi and Nobukatsu. Therefore, Nobukatsu broke his bonds to Hideyoshi and did not go to Osaka Castle.

Hideyoshi offered reconciliation to three of Nobukatsu’s chief retainers (Tsugawa Yoshifuyu, Okada Shigetaka and Azai Nagatoki), which led to rumors that they were all in support of Hideyoshi. This in turn led to Nobukatsu becoming paranoid and executing the three men on the sixth day of the third month. These actions gave Hideyoshi the justification for attacking Nobukatsu and, in response, Nobukatsu went to Ieyasu asking for auxiliary forces. The next day Ieyasu sent his forces out to battle and it became a battle between Hideyoshi and Ieyasu: *The Battle of Komaki and Nagakute* (小牧・長久手の戦い).



Hideyoshi and Ieyasu had both served Oda Nobunaga and had not previously come into conflict; this would in fact be their only period of enmity. Ultimately Tokugawa Ieyasu withdrew and hostilities eventually subsided but they rarely ended.



Konishi Yukinaga. Tokugawa Ieyasu took advantage of this situation, and recruited them, redirecting the animosity to weaken the Toyotomi clan.

Hideyoshi had on his deathbed (he died in 1598) appointed a group of the most powerful lords in Japan — Tokugawa, Maeda, Ukita, Uesugi, Mōri — to govern as the Council of Five Regents until his infant son, Hideyori, came of age. An uneasy peace lasted until the death of Maeda Toshiie in 1599. Thereafter, Ishida Mitsunari accused Ieyasu of disloyalty to the Toyotomi name precipitating a crisis that led to the *Battle of Sekigahara* in 1600 (The largest configuration of the castle was completed around this time). Generally regarded as the last major conflict of the Sengoku period, Ieyasu's victory at Sekigahara marked the end of the Toyotomi reign. Three years later, Ieyasu received the title *Seii Taishogun*, and established Japan's final shogunate, which lasted until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Even though Toyotomi Hideyoshi unified Japan and consolidated his power following the Siege of Odawara in 1590, his failures in his invasions of Korea significantly weakened the Toyotomi clan's power as well as the loyalists and bureaucrats that continued to serve and support the Toyotomi clan after Hideyoshi's death. Hideyoshi's and his brother Hidenaga's presence kept the two sides from anything more than quarreling, but when both of them died, the conflicts were exacerbated and developed into open hostilities. Since the Toyotomi clan was known to be descended from peasant stock, neither Hideyoshi nor his heir Hideyori would be recognized or accepted as Shogun. Most notably, Kato Kiyomasa and Fukushima Masanori were publicly critical of the bureaucrats, especially Ishida Mitsunari and

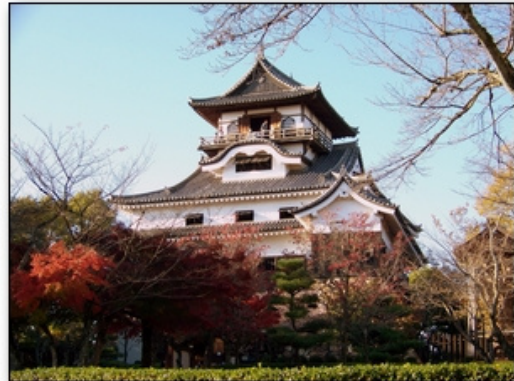




It should be noted that the Tokugawa Shogunate was a period of lasting peace and much prosperity for the Japanese people, but enough history...

Rather than walking from the train station to Inuyama-jo, which appeared to be about a 15-20 minute walk from the Metetsu Inuyamayuen station (or about a mile or so), we opted for alternative transportation. And it affronted us our first Japanese taxi ride, which thankfully, went very smoothly. Our new-found friend dropped us off at the foot of Inuyama-jo and we began our exploration.

The three-tiered (four stories in the main tower and a two-story-high stone wall) Inuyama-jo covers an area of about 600m<sup>2</sup> including the gateways on the lower ground levels and is quite a marvelous sight to behold, standing there as it does shining down from its lofty position. In fact, Inuyama Castle is also known as Hakutei Castle ("White Emperor Castle") due to its coloring and regal stature. It was so named by Sorai Ogyu, a Confucian scholar from the Edo Period, who took the name from a well-known Chinese poem written by Rihaku. And as I made my way through the castle I was sure to take in all of the exhibited items (weapons, screens, and other interesting facets) displayed on each floor.



On the first level, the "Nando-no-Ma" or storage closet chamber, covers an area of about 282 m<sup>2</sup>. The center portion of the first story is partitioned into four chambers, with a raised floor of 7-sun (about 21 centimeters) in the south-west section. The "Jodan-no-Ma" faces south and serves as a special chamber today, though previously it was the sitting chamber for the lord of the castle. The 8-mat chamber north of the "Jodan-no-Ma" is called the "Mushagakushi" or warrior's hiding place. This room served as the barracks for those warriors tasked to guard the daimyo and would then protect him in emergency situations. The two chambers on the east are 6-mat and 8-mat closet chambers. The four chambers are surrounded with 2-ken (3.64 m) wide wooden floors called "Mushabarashiri". Here you'll also get a glimpse of the "Ishi-Otoshi-no-Ma", or stone-throwing chamber. It is from here a number of small and large stones were thrown, dumped and tossed to fend off encroaching invaders below.

The second story features the 246 m<sup>2</sup> "Bugu-no-Ma" facility. The center area is the armory; storage shelves are installed along every wall except the one facing south and a number of weapons and the description of their use are on display.

The third story is an 82 m<sup>2</sup> chamber known as the "Hafu-no-Ma". Seventy-seven years after the donjon was constructed (in 1537), extension work began on the "Kara-hafu" or Chinese gable, which you can see here. Otherwise the floor is filled with exhibits that continue the exploration of the castle's vast heritage.

The fourth story is the “Koran-no-Ma”, the balcony chamber, a roughly 50 m<sup>2</sup> area which commands an exquisite view of the city below the castle’s walls. To the east and northeast respectively are Mount Kiso Ontake, Mount Ena, the expansive Nobi Plain and Mount Komaki to the south, Gifu Castle and Mount Ibuki to the west and the Mino mountains to the north. And with Rich waiting in the courtyard below, he was in a perfect position to grab a picture of be looking out from the balcony. Great stuff!



Within a few minutes I climbed down, meeting Rich at a nearby picnic table, and enjoyed an ice cold drink (a Natchan orange drink from Suntory – it’s a very happy looking drink) from one of the vending machines, also nearby, before making the trek back to Inuyama station via taxi. Since we hailed a cab in coming here we thought we’d return the same way. But what we hadn’t thought of was the fact that there wouldn’t be a taxi stand to hail a return cab from, nor would there be a cab just waiting for us out front when it was time to return to the station. The moment when that bit of truth hit us, and our eyes met with silent resignation, was something I’ll never forget.

Nor will I ever forget our elation when a taxi showed up, dropping off a couple of gaijin tourists! We wouldn't have to walk back to the station after-all, it seemed. Inuyama City taxi service came to the rescue!

Minutes later we were safely back on the platforms at the Metetsu Inuyama-yuen station and almost an hour later, back at Nagoya-eki in search of this city's Hard Rock Café.

**Nagoya** (名古屋市) is the third-largest incorporated city and the fourth most populous urban area in Japan if you can believe it. Located on the Pacific coast in the Chubu region on central Honshu, it is the capital of Aichi Prefecture and is one of Japan's major ports along with those of Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, Yokohama, Chiba, and Moji. Like Tokyo and Kyoto, Nagoya is made up of individual Wards (-ku) that help in the administrative functions the city's populace requires, they are: Atsuta, Chikusa, Higashi, Kita, Meito, Midori, Minami, Minato, Mizuho, Moriyama, Naka, Nakagawa, Nakamura, Nishi, Showa and Tempaku.



Knowing very little about Nagoya myself, Rich and I had to brave the Nagoya Subway system. (Just look for the logo to the left to find a station!)

There are six main lines to the Nagoya Subway system – Higashiyama, Meijo, Meiko, Tsurumai, Sakaura-dori and Kamiida – but many other light rail networks intertwining about that make Nagoya's public transportation system a rival to those found in Tokyo and Kyoto. Unfortunately I didn't have too much time to study the system; the Hard Rock Café in Nagoya is located at "Fushimi", which was only one stop up from Nagoya-eki on the H line.

<b>H</b>	Higashiyama
<b>M</b>	Meijo
<b>E</b>	Meiko
<b>T</b>	Tsurumai
<b>S</b>	Sakaura-dori
<b>K</b>	Kamiida

Since it was easily enough found, and we had time before boarding the train to our next and final destination of the evening (Matsumoto), we decided to grab a bite to eat there, and take a moment to rest up. Dinner was smashing, of course. Tasting the familiar and heartwarming flavors of home in a hamburger with cheese revitalized us in a way tofu and miso soup could never do, and we relished it.

What we didn't relish, however, was rush hour in the subway following dinner (yikes!), and the fetching of our bags, which turned into yet another memorable moment for us to talk about years from now.

*"Anyone remember which lockers we used?"*

It wasn't too difficult locating a locker big enough to handle my rolling bag earlier this afternoon – in fact, there are a number of rather large suitcase-style lockers to be had here – it was in finding it again that proved the most difficult.



With signs not well labeled and with multiple pockets and clusters of lockers all across the rather large hub of rail, bus and subway, it left Rich and I scratching our heads. At the time a certain level of panic started to set in. I mean to say, what would happen if we couldn't locate our bags? But after criss-crossing the station platform a couple of times (really, who kept count), we found our wayward bags, picked them up and hopped aboard the JR Shinano (ワイドビューしなの) Express #23 bound for Matsumoto. It's a 2 hour 7 minute ride through the picturesque Kiso Valley (木曾谷; -dani, 谷 = valley), though much of it unseen due to the long set sun.

We arrived at Matsumoto station in the dark (8:47pm), and after a brief taxi ride, we're here at Nunoya Ryokan (ぬのや旅館), 4500-5250, 3-5-7 Chuo (Nakamachi), 0263-32-0545, our accommodations for the evening!

\* \* \*

Like at Koyasan a night or two before, we were warmly welcomed by the Ryokan's proprietor (a very nice younger lady), led on a quick tour of the facilities, and then shown our rooms – we're in singles! It's quite nice here. I can't be sure if there are others staying tonight or not, but, it's very, very quiet. Sleep should come easily tonight. Tomorrow is my early-morning excursion to Matsumoto-jo, which will complete the Castle tour, and then... yes, another change to the schedule. We're forgetting about Hakone and the Mt. Fuji area and returning to Tokyo as quickly as we can. We're going to see if we can't get tickets to the Lion King. Yeah! Okay, time to crawl into my futon. Oyasuminasai! (Goodnight!)



## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

長野県 | 松本市 {Nagano / Matsumoto}



### 「Matsumoto, Crow Castle」

november 13, 2008

*“Hayaku ousama ni naritai!”*

Rich and I have just returned from a rousing (dare I say roaring?) presentation of Disney's The Lion King, performed right here in Tokyo. It was a decision Rich mulled over as he spent his days relaxing at K's House whilst I was out taking in the sights. As hesitant as he was to suggest yet another change to my well-prepared itinerary, I must say making the change was easy and has been one of the best changes to our schedule yet. Being a fan of The Lion King in general, especially the musical, and having and listening to the Japanese cast recording on more than one occasion – it was too fun! And you know I belted out the tunes as best I could... in their native Japanese of course (much to the annoyance of Rich I'm sure), but who cares? It was fun! And bringing the concept from initial idea to fruition turned out to be more complex and frustrating than we could have known, but I'll get to that in a little bit.



It was fun! Not.

Suffice it to say we're back here at Homeikan and settled in for the night, but earlier in the day I was having just as much fun bringing the National Treasure Castle Tour I was on to a smashing and successful closure at Matsumoto.



## Matsumoto

Matsumoto Castle (松本城), also known as “Crow Castle” (烏城) because of its dark exterior, is one of Japan’s premier historic castles. You’ll find it in the city of Matsumoto (松本市), in Nagano Prefecture (長野県), where it’s said that nine out of the twelve highest mountains in Japan can be found. Nagano is also the prefecture which is bordered by the highest number of other prefectures and it contains the location which is the furthest point from the ocean anywhere in Japan. Nagano (both the city and prefecture) gained world-wide attention as the host of the 1998 Winter Olympics.



Matsumoto



Although we arrived last night, it is unfortunate that I can’t say too much about the city of Matsumoto itself. Beyond touring the castle, my interest in exploring the rest of the town was dulled (limited due to time, not desire). Be that as it may, though I was anxious to begin the final explorations as soon as I awoke this morning, Mother Nature saw fit not to cooperate. It was dark, damp and clouded over – but I went anyway; the moment I spotted its black-and-white structure thrusting into the sky like a samurai sword, I

failed to acknowledge the weather. It sat there brooding in the grey-colored darkness of overcast cloud-cover, which somehow twanged me as being more appropriate than finding it drenched in sunlight. It oozed its mysterious history...

The origin of Matsumoto-jo traces back to the *Sengoku* period, the time of the Warring States following the the Onin War and the collapse of the Kamakura Shogunate. It was during those troubled times that the head of the Ogasawara clan moved his manor from *Igawa* to what was then called the Hayashi district, at the eastern foot of the mountains nearby. He called his estate Hayashi Castle and took to building up his new home on the Matsumoto plain (then called Shinano Fuchu).







Sometime later Shimadachi Sadanaga, also of the Ogasawara clan, built a fort in front of Hayashi-jo (in 1504) as means to protect the Daimyo; he called his establishment Fukushima Castle, and for a time it did its job. By 1550 the castle came under the rule of the Takeda clan; after Sadayoshi Ogasawara retook the castle, he changed its name to the present Matsumoto-jo.

Many more notable changes came when Toyotomi Hideyoshi transferred Tokugawa Ieyasu to the Kano region after defeating Hojo Ujinao at Odawara Castle in 1590, and placed Ishikawa Norimasa in charge of Matsumoto. Norimasa and his son Yasunaga built its three towers: the *tenshu* (donjon tower), *inui-kotenshu* (small tower in the northwest) and the *watari-yagura* (the connecting

tower); the *goten* (residence); *taikomon* (drum gate), *kuromon* (black gate), the *tsukimi-yagura*, the *hori* (moat), the sub-floors in the castle, much as they are today, and was also instrumental in laying out the castle town and its infrastructure.

It is believed much of the castle was completed by 1593–94 and for the next 280 years, until the abolition of the feudal system during the Meiji Restoration, the castle was ruled by the 23 lords of Matsumoto, representing six different daimyo families: Ishikawa, Ogasawara, Toda, Matsudaira, Hotta and Mizuono.

Today much of the castle's grounds are public parkland, but in the late 16th century and for most of its history, the castle was surrounded by a triple moat and strong ramparts. The inner citadel and the secondary citadels served as retrenchments, while the tertiary citadel formed an outer fortification. All told the castle covered an area of 390,000 square meters (39 hectares / 96 acres). Within the retrenchment were the facilities for the fiefdom and its daimyo, including the donjon, main residence of the daimyo and numerous storehouses for munitions, valuables and records. In the less secure outer fortifications were the homes of elite *samurai* – those who formed the daimyo's personal guard and his advisors. This area was surrounded by another earthen wall (designed to withstand cannon fire) that was some 3.5 kilometers in circumference. Adding to these defenses was another moat, which completely surrounded the ramparts.



The only way to enter or leave the castle grounds was through two heavily fortified gates called Masugata and Umadashi, which are no longer standing today.

After a grand look at both areas of the castle from its former outer walls, I returned to the Masugata area of the grounds and crossed over into the inner bailey. Here much of what you see are mere shadows of the *honmaru-goten* and *ninomaru-goten*, remains in outline form only. The most interesting part of the castle is the main donjon/keep which rises above these ruins in grand form.



And I couldn't wait to get inside.

To enter you first pass through a separate minor keep called *Inui Kotenshu* (because it stands *inui* or northwest of the main tower) that from the outside appears to have three stories but actually has four, the hidden floor conceals defenses. This minor keep is structurally independent of the main tower (standing 16.8 meters) but is connected via a roofed passage (the *wataru-yagura*). Look closely at the round wooden pillars here; these were rough hewn by a hand tool shaped like an axe (the entire castle being made by impressed labor) from hemlock, spruce and fir trees. There are 10 round pillars supporting the 1st and 2nd floors, 12 pillars support the upper floors. They're notable for being over 400 years old.

The roofed passage is level with the floor of the *Inui Kotenshu*, but you will notice that you need to descend about 1 meter as you go through the "warrior running passage" or *mushabashiri*. This is due to efforts to conceal defenses and confuse infiltrators. Entering the main keep, the first floor of *Wataru-yagura* is 1.4 meters lower than the "warrior running passage". You may also notice that it is wider than other passages in the castle, as it was designed to allow *samurai* in full armor to run, carry and reposition weaponry, and redeploy. If the passageway is not crowded with other visitors have a careful look at the pillars made of hemlock, cypress and pine supporting the outer wall – notice that the wall is slightly curved. This is because the wall follows the stone foundation below, strengthening the structure against earthquakes.



Holes in the pillars allowed the room, which covers an area of 12.95 meters (42 feet) by 10.9 meters (36 feet), to be divided into different storage bays for food, gunpowder, projectiles and other weaponry as required.

Speaking of the holes, as you walk through the donjon you'll start to notice holes carefully positioned in the walls, through which you often get wonderful views of the moats and the surrounding mountains. Matsumoto Castle was built some 50 years after the introduction by Portuguese traders of firearms into Japan. For this reason the walls of the turrets (*Nurigome-zukuri*) are thick enough to withstand bullets, and the defenses were built en masse. As firearms were also used to defend the castle, the donjon has 55 square holes called *teppozama*, from which matchlock muskets (and in some cases small cannon) could bring fire to bear on an assaulting force. Look closely at the *teppozama* as you will notice that on the inside they can be pivoted slightly, enabling a *samurai* to swing the barrel at a wider angle to cover fire lanes and bring enfilade fire upon attacking troops. Some were positioned to maximize the use of *hazama* guns, which have a longer barrel and could be fired with a more powerful charge, providing effective fire at ranges of 300 meters.



In addition there are 62 long rectangular loopholes called *yazama* – positions from which *samurai* could fire arrows at an enemy. These days the *teppozama* and *yazama* are mostly used by visitors for “aiming” cameras – a time-honored tradition I sheepishly partook in. The only holes that do not provide good camera angles are the ones called *Ishiotoshi*. This does not mean that the holes are useless – far from it. They were designed to enable defenders to drop rocks onto enemy attempting to scale the walls – smashing their ladders (and no doubt their heads) and sending them plummeting into the moat below. You can try to get a picture through these holes if you wish, but, all you'll see is the ground beneath your feet... how picturesque is that?

Staircases abound inside; watch your head as you climb them. The *samurai* were generally smaller in height than today's populace, so hitting your head here is a real threat. You'll also notice that the staircases are not connected to one another and are randomly located about each floor. They are also extremely steep (55-61 degree incline) and quite narrow. This is deliberate – making it more difficult for someone to quickly ascend the floors and providing more security against infiltrators. Think about it: decentralizing your staircase makes it harder for invaders to scale the *donjon* and detain the *daimyo*.

The second floor has identical dimensions to the first, and can be partitioned into eight rooms. This time it's not for storage (weight would have caused a problem for the floors) but for *samurai* to stay in during emergencies and alerts.



These days it is host to an interesting gun museum, the *Teppo Gura*. All of the guns, armor and other weapons you will see here were the personal collection of Akahane Michishige, a local citizen, who built the collection with his wife Kayoko over a period of more than 30 years. Akahane was a member of Japan's Firearms and Swords Inspection Board of the Agency for Cultural Affairs and the Society of Firearms History of Japan, and an expert in the field.



Most of the weapons are in working order, as Akahane was a skilled rifleman and a member of the Rifle and Muzzle-loader (Matchlock) Shooting League and maintained the weapons personally.

The main articles in the collection are matchlocks manufactured in the period from 1543 (when guns were introduced by the Portuguese through Tanegashima island) through to the late Edo period during the long Tokugawa peace. In total there are 141 guns of different design, caliber and period, and 230 pieces of armor. Of particular importance in the collection are the "Tanegashima Matchlock", and the "60 Momme Zutsu", which played an important role during the massive battle for Osaka Castle in 1615.



Also on the second floor, have a look at the lattice windows. Called *mushamado* or warriors windows, they are hinged so that they can be easily opened or closed – either by pushing outwards or pulling them in. Streams of light pour through the lattices during the day, illuminating the dark interiors and creating beautiful designs on the floorboards. This is in stark contrast to the third floor, which is actually called "dark" floor (*kurayamijuu*) because it has no windows. This is a

hidden floor, invisible from the outside and used for storing food and munitions for the floors above – making resupply easier through the two staircases leading upstairs than if all stores had to be brought up from the first floor. The lack of windows is why the castle tower appears from the outside to have only five floors instead of six.

The fourth floor is a completely different style to all to the others. It has fewer pillars, more windows and light, and a higher ceiling to give it a spacious feel. Even the pillars have been carefully selected (cypress wood) and planed smooth – in contrast to the rough hewn timbers below. The lintels, curtains and screens suggest that the large space could be divided into three rooms and a surrounding corridor if need be. In fact, as the goza-no-ma (or private residence), the daimyo stayed here during emergencies, hence the exquisite nature of the room.

The fifth floor was designed for the leaders of the castle garrison to use as a conference room to coordinate defenses and decide on tactics. It has 30 pillars (all are original) and windows on all sides, to provide observation of the defenses and better views of signals. The staircase leading up to the sixth floor would have been particularly busy, for during a battle the garrison commanders would have communicated with the daimyo himself – who commanded from the top floor. The sixth floor is 22.1 meters (72.5 feet) above the entrance and commands wonderful views.

As I wound my way back down to the first floor something remarkable occurred – the miserable looking cloud-covered sky gave way to nothing but blue and sunshine. I couldn't believe it! I raced down those narrow, heavily inclined staircases like a man possessed, wanting nothing more than seeing the castle illuminated by nature's light. And you know what? The castle was equally impressive (and downright beautiful) in full natural sunlight. The revelation added at least an extra hour to my tour as I meticulously revisited each and every one of the angles I had previously to shoot photos of the castle again, and again, and again, and again!

#### Did You Know?

There is a small shrine nestled in the rafters of the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the donjon. On January 26th 1618, one of the young vassals on guard duty had a vision in which he saw a woman dressed in beautiful kimono. The woman handed him a brocaded bag and said "If the daimyo enshrines me with 600 kilograms of rice on the 26th night of each month, I will protect the castle from fire and enemy".

It's a strange dream but those were superstitious times. Every month the rice was enshrined as directed, and is still even today. The rice is not wasted though; it is consumed after it is enshrined. It is still believed that the offering is the reason why the castle has survived intact. Who's to argue?



### Pridelands wa doku desu ka?

Before long the excursions made inside and outside the walls of Matsumoto-jo had to come to an end, and I met Rich back at Nunoya Ryokan to gather up our belongings and to make our way to Matsumoto-eki, no more than a twenty minute walk away. There the JR Shinano #5 (11:05a – 11:52a) to Nagano then the Shinkansen Asama #524 (12:09p – 1:52p) awaited to take us back to Tokyo proper – unfortunately again we wouldn't have any time to explore Nagano. As a Shinkansen buff, though, riding Asama (あさま) into Tokyo was a particular thrill – I'd finally have a chance to ride a new line, the Nagano Shinkansen Line (長野新幹線). Though I admit it's probably only of interest to me...



By now, of course, Rich and I had decided to forgo any travels to the Fuji area – either the Five Fuji Lakes area out in Kawaguchiko, or the hot springs of the Hakone area – for an attempt at seeing Disney's The Lion King musical in Tokyo. Although it meant I would have to push off visiting this area again (I had wanted to see the area in my first visit to Japan in 2004, then again in 2007), it would also mean that Rich would have to forgo one of his Hard Rock Café's – in

Yokohama – in order to make this work. Ahh, but who cared about Hard Rock Cafés, he said, when there was the Lion King! I had to agree.

The only problem in our well-thought out plan was this: we had absolutely no idea where the Lion King was playing in Tokyo, nor how to get there, nor if there were tickets available, or even how to get tickets in the first place! Okay, so I guess that's more than one problem, but a set we felt confident could be solved rather quickly upon arrival. All we'd require to get those answers was an internet connection (which we discovered we'd have at Homeikan) then make our way to the box office for tickets. Easy-peasy, right?

Wroooooong.



Deviation from our new plan started the moment we departed the Shinkansen platform and hit the turnstiles at Tokyo-eki; Rich wondered: could we find a hotel close to the station, rather than go all the way up to Homeikan for the night? It was a possibility; having the JR Rail Pass brochures with me I knew the JR Group administered more than just the rail lines and stations therein, they also owned and operated hotels along those routes. Perhaps Tokyo-eki had one? Flipping through the brochure showed me that, yes, there was a hotel operated by JR near Tokyo-eki. The only trouble: the hotel was located at the opposite end of the station from our current position, and our attempts to find it were thwarted heartily. Even a station attendant couldn't be of much help when he politely informed us that the JR Hotel was no longer in operation.

*Honto!?*

Deflated, but not defeated, as we contemplated our next move we happened upon a hotel phone-concierge spot near the exit to where the taxis stand and attempted to procure a room from there. But a lost-in-translation moment coupled with a convention of some kind had all the rooms surrounding Tokyo-eki booked solid – there wasn't a single room to be had... anywhere!



Having wasted precious time disregarding our already-paid-for reservations at Homeikan, we conceded that returning there was better than nothing at all and decided, rather optimistically, to take a taxi to Homeikan rather than walk the thousands of steps through the metro and above ground to get there. Our previous experiences with taxis in Japan proved to go without incident – both in Inuyama and Matsumoto – so what was the harm in attempting it in Tokyo, right?

This proved to be our second biggest mistake of the day.

Our cab driver, as nice and patient a man as he was, had little to no clue as to the location of our destination, nor did he have much of an idea what I was trying to tell him: where to go. The three of us traversed the city streets for at least two hours, stopping occasionally so he could ask for directions from a convenience store, another driver, and lastly a police box. As the minutes ticked into hours I became more and more visibly aggravated, irritated and frustrated. Frustrated in that 1) getting to Homeikan from Tokyo-eki was no more than a 20 minute affair by subway and foot and because we took this taxi, 2) we'd miss the show for sure at this rate. And Rich, who was certainly at his limit as well, was unsure what to do. Do we bail and try and find something else or stick it out?

To say the cab ride was the most frustrating thing ever is an understatement.

We stuck it out and I almost had a coronary in the process. But once we arrived at the crossroads of Hongo-3-chome (which is where I wanted our driver to go in the first place), I was able to guide him past the pachinko parlor, down the street to the delivery service's cats sign, then up the hill to the tee-in-the-road where we finally arrived at *Homeikan Daimachi Bekkan*.

The moment we arrived I went through the check-in procedure with "grumpy guy" while Rich popped on the ryokan's internet service to glean more information about the show's performance schedule, location and transportation alternatives (there was no way I was hopping back in a taxi to go to the show... no way!). This exercise also proved to be one of futility – he couldn't find any information in English! Eventually, through trial and error (and much wasted time), we discovered that the show was being staged at the Shiki Theater HARU somewhere in *Minato-ku*, near the *Hamamatsucho* JR station, and it would take a bit to get out there.

*"Do you still want to try for it?" Rich asked.  
"Oh why not," I replied. "Let's go for it--  
Ikimasho!"*



So we ran.

Or rather we walked very quickly back to Tokyo-eki.

With just a little under 20 minutes to go before the show was scheduled to start, Rich and I arrived at the appointed metro station in Minato ward; the theater, however, was still a 5-10 minute walk a direction in which we really had no clue. We took a gamble and set off on foot arriving at the ticket booth with about 10 minutes to spare – HOORAY! Thankfully the line wasn't too long; a few moments later we had tickets in hand and a hard truth to swallow: the show didn't really start for an hour yet... can you believe it? Go figure. But we did it. Through all that adversity we made it – the Lion King in Japanese would be our last hurrah in Tokyo. And what a fantastic show it was!



## The Lion King



The Lion King musical could be considered the crown achievement of Disney's musical banner, which first tested the performance waters with *Beauty and the Beast* – turning its famed animated feature into a full-fledged musical experience (and a fantastic one at that, by the way). After finding success with *Beauty and the Beast*, Walt Disney Theatricals in conjunction with Elton John & Tim

Rice (the duo that wrote the music and lyrics for the original animated film), Lebo M, Mark Mancina, Jay Rifkin, Hans Zimmer, Michael Curry (puppets) and Julie Taymor (costumes and direction), they set out to adapt one of Disney's most successful animated features to date – *The Lion King* – to greater success.

Released to theaters on June 15, 1994, the original film immediately gained acclaim; the film climbed the box office charts around the world creating a global phenomenon in the process. Its premise is relatively simple: a retelling of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* using anthropomorphic animals on the African Serengeti plains. The film immediately struck a chord with its audience, allowing an animated film to reach the top of the box office charts world-wide for the very first time.

*The Lion King* takes place on a swatch of the Serengeti plains known as the Pridelands, which are ruled over by Mufasa, benevolent king of his pride of lionesses. At the start of our story, a wise old mandrill named Rafiki anoints Simba, the newborn cub of Mufasa and his queen, Sarabi, and presents him to a gathering of animals at Pride Rock; they've all been summoned there by a thunderous roar from the lion king to witness the continuation of the royal line and to pay tribute to young Simba, as the next lion king. As the dust settles, and young Simba grows, Mufasa takes him around the Pridelands, teaching him about the "Circle of Life", the delicate balance between life and death affecting all living things, and how one day he, Simba, will be charged with protecting the Pridelands and this delicate balance from those who seek to tip it, such as those "slobbering, mangy, stupid poachers" – the hyenas.





The hyenas aren't the only party interested in tipping the balance, however. Simba's uncle Scar, who desires the throne and all its power for himself, places a most heinous plan into motion: to rid the pride of Simba, Mufasa's only male offspring. This plan is further perpetuated by a secret alliance with the hyenas, which eke out their living on the outskirts of the Pridelands within the shadowed place on the northern border where no one dares venture. Scar preys on Simba's ever growing sense of curiosity and tells the young cub about an elephant graveyard lying within that shadowy place. And knowing that Simba will disobey his father's wishes by going there, Scar arranges for a surprise in wait in the form of Shenzi, Banzai and Ed, three spotted hyenas ordered to kill him. The plan is thwarted when Mufasa rushes in at the last moment to save his son, and Nala, his son's companion (and future Queen).



Scar gains the loyalty of the hyenas by claiming that if he becomes king, they'll "never go hungry again". They acquiesce leadership to him; Scar tells the hyenas to kill Mufasa and Simba, thus establishing his plan of regicide. Later on, Scar lures Simba into the gorge while the hyenas create a wildebeest stampede. Alerted to the herd on the move by Scar, Mufasa races to rescue Simba from the stampede. He saves his son but is left clinging to the edge of a cliff,

spent. When Mufasa calls out to Scar to help him, Scar flings Mufasa into the stampeding wildebeest below. Watching his father fall to his death, Simba panics, this allows Scar to convince him that his latest action of disobedience was responsible for Mufasa's death. To atone for this, and to escape his mother's unforgiving wrath, Scar convinces Simba his only course of action is to "run, and never return". Simba flees from the Pridelands. Scar once again sends Shenzi, Banzai and Ed to kill Simba, but he escapes from their clutches. The hyenas never alert Scar to their failure, thus Scar informs the pride that he is ascending to the throne, as both Mufasa and Simba were killed in the stampede.

Meanwhile, Simba is found unconscious by Timon and Pumbaa, a meerkat-warthog duo who adopts and raises the cub. Simba has an interesting childhood with these two, learning new concepts ("Hakuna Matata; it means no worries") that go against all that he was taught, and for a while his life is fun and full. One day, after Simba has reached adulthood, he is discovered by Nala who left the Pridelands in search of help. Simba shows Nala around his home and the two begin to fall in love. Nala then tells him that Scar has turned the Pridelands into a barren wasteland; she asks Simba to return and take his rightful place as king, but Simba refuses.



They feud and part, but Rafiki, the wise old mandrill from earlier, arrives and “knocks some sense” into Simba, further aided by Mufasa’s presence in the stars pressing Simba to “remember who you are”.



Once back at Pride Rock, Simba (with Timon, Pumbaa and Nala) is horrified to see its condition. After seeing Scar strike his mother, Simba announces his return with a snarl. Although shocked to see Simba alive, Scar has one last card to play: he tells the pride that Simba was responsible for Mufasa’s death and corners him at the edge of Pride Rock. As Simba dangles over its edge, Scar whispers to Simba his secret: “I killed Mufasa”. Enraged, Simba leaps up and pins Scar to the ground, forcing him to admit the truth to the Pride. Once known, a raging battle then ensues between the hyenas and the lionesses, which results in Simba cornering Scar. Begging for mercy, Scar blames the hyenas for Mufasa’s death, but Simba orders Scar into exile. Scar, pretending to adhere to the rule, lowers his head to leave, but turns back to attack Simba, resulting in a final duel. Simba triumphs over his uncle by flipping him over the edge of Pride Rock. Scar survives the fall but finds himself surrounded by the now-resentful hyenas, which attack and devour him. The film concludes with the Pride Lands turning green with life again and Rafiki presenting Simba and Nala’s newborn cub. The Circle of Life continuing...

And every moment of this glorious story is told on stage, and then some, with the help of ingenious puppetry, costumes, music and atmosphere.

The main theme of The Lion King is “the Circle of Life” and that is translated within the framework of the musical as things in perpetual motion. Pride Rock ascends out of the theater floor like a towering beacon, devices are left uncovered so we can see their workings as they float (or wheel) across the stage, characters are not merely dolls but a blend of performer and puppet, and even become the grasses, plants or other scenic elements as required. All the major scenes from the movie are represented here – from the amazing Circle of Life sequence through to the final battle – and then some. And although certain licenses had to be taken into consideration to bring the animated story to life, one cannot dismiss the enormity of it all.



Beyond the joyous Circle of Life sequence that begins the show – as Rafiki sings, the sun rises behind her and two giraffes and a cheetah walk out onto the stage, shortly followed by a zebra, birds, antelope, and ostriches, as two elephants, more birds, a rhino and wildebeest walk through the aisles – many other segments of the musical touched my heart, such as: “The Lioness Hunt”, which depict the lionesses of the pride on a hunt is wonderfully choreographed, taking advantage of the performer’s headdresses; “The Live in You”, a touching scene between Mufasa and Simba, whereby the King simply becomes Simba’s father for a moment; “The Stampede”, where Mufasa is killed is depicted in a multi-level forced-perspective motif, featuring regular costumed character on the lower level and a paper drum on top, creating an illusion so compelling it brings shivers down my spine; “Rafiki Mourns” shows the incredible loss to the pride, as the lionesses bellow out in sadness. The lionesses cry using a Japanese puppet mourning technique (called Bunraku) in which ribbons flow out of the eyes to symbolize tears. The moment those tears are shed I cannot help but join them; and “Endless Night / He Lives in You” depicting a lost Simba calling out to his father, and his father answering from the heavens. This amazing staging, which re-creates the Mufasa’s Ghost scene from the original animated film, is something to behold. Created with special lighting effects, the visage of Mufasa suddenly thrusts out of thin-air, assembled from multi-fractional pieces of flotsam by the cast and crew. The effect is spellbinding, as is the rest of the musical.

And it plays out just the same on the Japanese stage as it does on tour in North America, on the West End in London, or on Broadway in New York City. The only difference is the songs are sung in Japanese!

\* \* \*

Seeing the Lion King tonight was, without a doubt, one of the most fantastic ideas we’ve come up with yet – I’ve been singing the songs ever since we left the theater! A practice to the annoyance of my friend and fellow travel partner, no doubt, but that’s the way things go around here sometimes.

We’ve settled into Homeikan for the night, here in #266-Irifune (入船), with what has become a conventional send-off for me: a meal at the local McDonald’s. Although I’ve probably had more western-style food on this trip than in the two previous years combined (thanks to all those Hard Rock Café visits), it’s hard to argue with what has quickly become tradition. That and there’s no getting around that the McDonald’s chips are just about the best fries on the planet no matter where they’re cooked up. They’re tasty!

That being said the mood is somewhat somber.

### Circle of Life

Kono chikyuu ni  
Umare ochite  
Kagayaku hikari  
ni deau  
Ikiru yorokobi  
Motomete yuku  
Kono sekai o  
Uke iretai

Kono sekai o  
Rikai shitai  
Demo ooku no  
Fushigi ga  
Sapphire iro no  
Sora no naka de  
Taiyou wa  
Eien no toki to  
Seimei o umi dasu

Inochi wa meguru  
Nozomi to ai to  
Kurushimi koete  
Ikite yuku  
Michishirube

Inochi wa meguru  
The Circle of Life  
The Circle of Life  
Inochi wa meguru

Nozomi to ai to  
Kurushimi koete  
Ikite yuku  
Michi shirube  
Inochi wa meguru  
The Circle of Life



Our time in Japan has come to an end, and that in itself is a rather sad site to ponder, even with one more stop to make before it's all over. Tomorrow we leave Tokyo bound for Seoul on a 9:20am Korean Air flight arriving just a little after Noon, local time.

What takes us to South Korea?  
Cirque du Soleil does.

Cirque du Soleil's 1994 touring production – Alegría – has set up its white Grand Chapiteau in the shadows of South Korea's Olympic Village. It's not something Cirque fans like us could pass up with its close proximity to Tokyo.



Rich and I will be attending the 7:00pm performance of Alegría tomorrow night (it's a very quick twenty-four hour turn-around for us in Seoul) so upon our arrival our plan is simple: we'll check into our accommodations, hit the town to see a few sights, see the show, then get to sleep – we depart Seoul very early the following morning!

Keeping with the true traveler's spirit, we've opted for a backpacker's guest house near central Seoul – LEE & NO. Lee & No is run by a young family who are also long-time travelers; they have graciously opened their residence to us for the night, as they have for other visitors over the years. We'll be quite well taken care of.

It'll be the first time either of us has ventured to Korea so it should be quite a fun time.

Until tomorrow.

Sayonara, Japan!  
And Hello (안녕하세요) Korea!

## Exploring the Land of the Rising Sun

대한민국 | 서울 {Republic of Korea / Seoul }



### 「Seoul, One of the Three Kingdoms of Korea」

november 16, 2008

*We've had quite the interesting day in the "land of morning calm"...*

Seoul, with a population boasting well over 10 million people, is the capital and largest city of South Korea. It is also one of the largest and most densely populated cities in the world, currently ranked 11<sup>th</sup> on that list, behind such worldly destination as Shanghai, Karachi, Istanbul, Delhi, Mumbai, Beijing, Moscow, Sao Paulo, Tianjin, and Guangzhou. Tokyo is 14<sup>th</sup>, Mexico City 15<sup>th</sup>, New York City 18<sup>th</sup>, London 20<sup>th</sup> and Hong Kong 25<sup>th</sup> for comparison. In fact, the Seoul National Capital Area – the administrative region that contains the districts of Seoul, Incheon, and a large part of an area referred to as Gyeonggi-do – is the world's second-largest metropolitan area with over 29.5 million inhabitants. Tokyo ranks first in this category with Mexico City, New York City and Mumbai third, fourth and fifth respectively. So it should really come as no surprise to learn that almost half of South Korea's population lives within this 605.25 sq km (233.7 sq mi) area.

And we're smack-dab in the middle of it.

Though probably one of the most advanced technological societies on the planet (even rivaling the Japanese in modernization and technological prowess; Samsung and LG are based here), Seoul has not abandoned its roots, historically speaking. There has been a major settlement here for over 2,000 years, with the city's foundation dating back to 18 BC with the establishment of the Baekje capital (one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea) here in what is now south-east Seoul. As such you'll find grand palaces, magnificent gates, and a number of ruins to explore from one end of the city to the other, without getting bored. Discovering Seoul is a wonderful reflection on the peninsula's history.

Though I know very little of Korean history, the Three Kingdoms of Korea in this instance refer to the ancient native kingdoms of Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla, which dominated the peninsula and parts of Manchuria for much of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium. But like most national histories – be it Asian or European – much of the political landscape changed over time. Reigning from 57 AD until Silla's triumph over Goguryeo in 668 AD, the Three Kingdom's period gave way to the North and South States period of unified Silla in the South and Balhae in the North. This division, however, did not give rise to the current North and South Korea. After the North and South States Period (668 AD – 926 AD) there was the Dynastic Period (918-1897), the Korean Empire (1897-1910) and

subsequent Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and lastly a Provisional government period that following World War II gave way to the division of Korea we know today.

And it's this division – Communist North versus the Democratic South – that I am most familiar. Probably due in large part to the continuing incidents between them, but mostly thanks to American TV show M\*A\*S\*H. Adventurous travelers can visit the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) should they be well inclined; however, Rich and I decided to stick closer to the city – in fact we never left it once we arrived.

### Getting to Seoul

Tired and frightened but excited, Rich and I departed Tokyo bound for Seoul on Korean Air flight #706 arriving at Incheon International Airport straight-up twelve o'clock noon, just as promised. As this was our first visit to Seoul and all of South Korea, a number of questions, uncertainties, and feelings rose to the surface as we deplaned, giving us a belly full of butterflies: how would we be treated as tourists, as Americans, how would customs work, and could we navigate this behemoth of a city?



Strangely enough, these were all the same kinds of questions I used to have about Tokyo and Japan when I first came to visit in 2004. Having visited twice more since then (including this trip), I've come to look at Japan as a second home, and therefore feel little to no trepidation coming into Narita, using the N'EX to get to Tokyo-eki and navigating around the country at large by myself. What an interesting feeling then to have felt little confidence about entering South Korea, North Korea just a mere 60 miles away be damned.

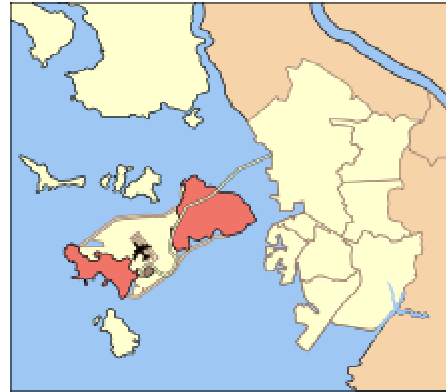
But equally strangely, all trepidations were laid to rest the moment we stepped from the plane and into the surprisingly modern (and clean!) world that is Incheon International Airport – it was like stepping into the a science fiction movie. Holy cow!

Incheon International Airport (인천국제공항), located 70 kilometers (43 miles) west of Seoul, is the largest airport in South Korea, the primary airport serving the Seoul national capital area, and one of the largest and busiest airports in the world – Asia's eighth busiest airport in terms of passengers, the world's second busiest airport in terms of international cargo and freight, and the world's ninth busiest airport in terms of international passengers if you're interested. Besides serving as an airline hub, the airport has a golf course, spa, private sleeping rooms, an ice skating rink, a casino, an indoor



gardens and a museum of Korean culture. But the inner-child in me sprang loose at the futuristic and totally modern décor – with some of the machinations not even yet working! Any and all previous conceptions of what South Korea would be like flew out the door, replaced with a very modern society and a sense of ease.

The airport itself speaks to the modernization and not just in its appearance. ICN, the airport's code, is located west of Incheon's city center, on an artificially created piece of land between Yeongjong and Yongyu islands. The two islands were originally separated by a shallow sea, but the area between the two was reclaimed for the construction project, and the airport (with its connecting bridges and train network) built to support it. The airport opened for business in early 2001, replacing the older Gimpo International Airport, which now serves mostly domestic destinations plus shuttle flights to Tokyo (Haneda), Shanghai (Hongqiao), Osaka (Kansai) and limited service to Nagoya and Tsushima.



Navigating the airport turned out to be a breeze, Customs was quick and painless (we had no trouble getting accepted into the country), but getting into the city at large? Well...

Since the airport is located out on a reclaimed spit of land in the middle of a sea, transportation alternatives are not quite prepared. There is a highway network, of course, and a train system in development, but it's not yet finished. Therefore, getting to Seoul and our hostel – Lee & NO – would require getting to know some of the transportation alternatives right off the bat. The first is the A'REX, an express system similar to the N'EX at Narita – it takes passengers from the airport to the center of the city (or will). Here, though, because it is largely unfinished, our journey will begin here for ₩3100 (approximately \$1 = ₩1000) but end at Gimpo Airport about 30 minutes later (a distance of 37.6 kilometers), where we'll catch the Seoul Metro system's Number 5 line (purple) from Gimpo to a location called "Yeongdeungpo-gu", switching there to the Number 2 line (light green) and following it up to a station called "Hongik University" where Lee & No was located. We'd be on foot from there.

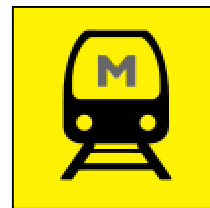
It actually proved easy enough.



And since we needed to get local currency to buy the train ticket, it gave me my first glimpse of the Korean Won (₩). "Won" is a cognate of the Chinese yuan and Japanese yen; All three names derive from the Hanja 圓(원), which means "round shape." The currency comes in both coins and bills: coins in 1, 5, 10, 50, 100 and 500 denominations; and bills in 1000, 5000 and 10000 – and they're quite colorful!

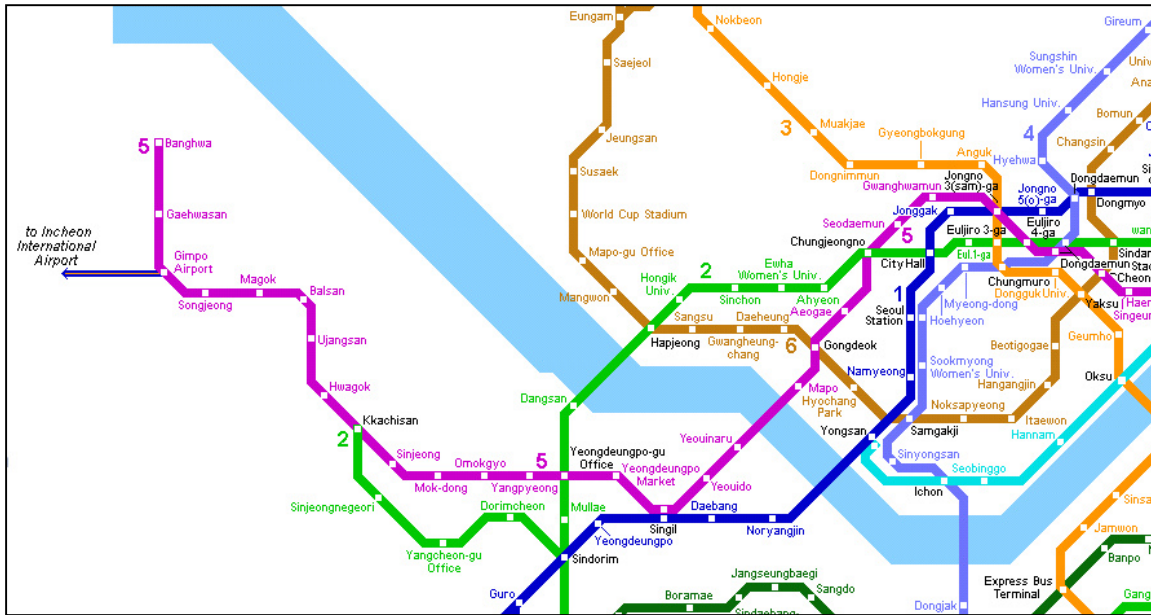


The switch-over to regular subway at Gimpo was also relatively painless – walk from one terminus into the other, pay your dues, and hop on the train; however, riding the Seoul Subway system in the future was going to be a mess – it's a sprawling beast and I was intimidated! And I should be – it is one of the most heavily used rapid transit systems in the world, with well over eight million trips daily on the system's thirteen lines. But I would come to master it.



And similar too, but vastly different from its Japanese counterpart, the network is operated as two types (urban rail and wide-area rail) by six different organizations: Seoul Metro (서울메트로), Seoul Metropolitan Rapid Transit Company (서울특별시도시철도공사) – also known as SMRT (서울도시철도), The Seoul Metro Line 9 Corporation, the Incheon Metro, Korail (코레일), and the A'REX. This vast network serves Seoul, Incheon, Gyeonggi-do, northern Chungcheongnam-do, and western Gangwon-do. Over 70% of the total metro track length is underground and most of the stations within Seoul itself have screen doors installed for safety. All directional signs in the Seoul Subway are written in both Korean and English. Station signs and some maps also display Hanja. The pre-recorded voice announcement in the trains indicating the upcoming station, possible line transfer and exiting side are all in Korean followed by English, and in some cases Japanese then Chinese.

Seoul is quite the tourist-friendly city!

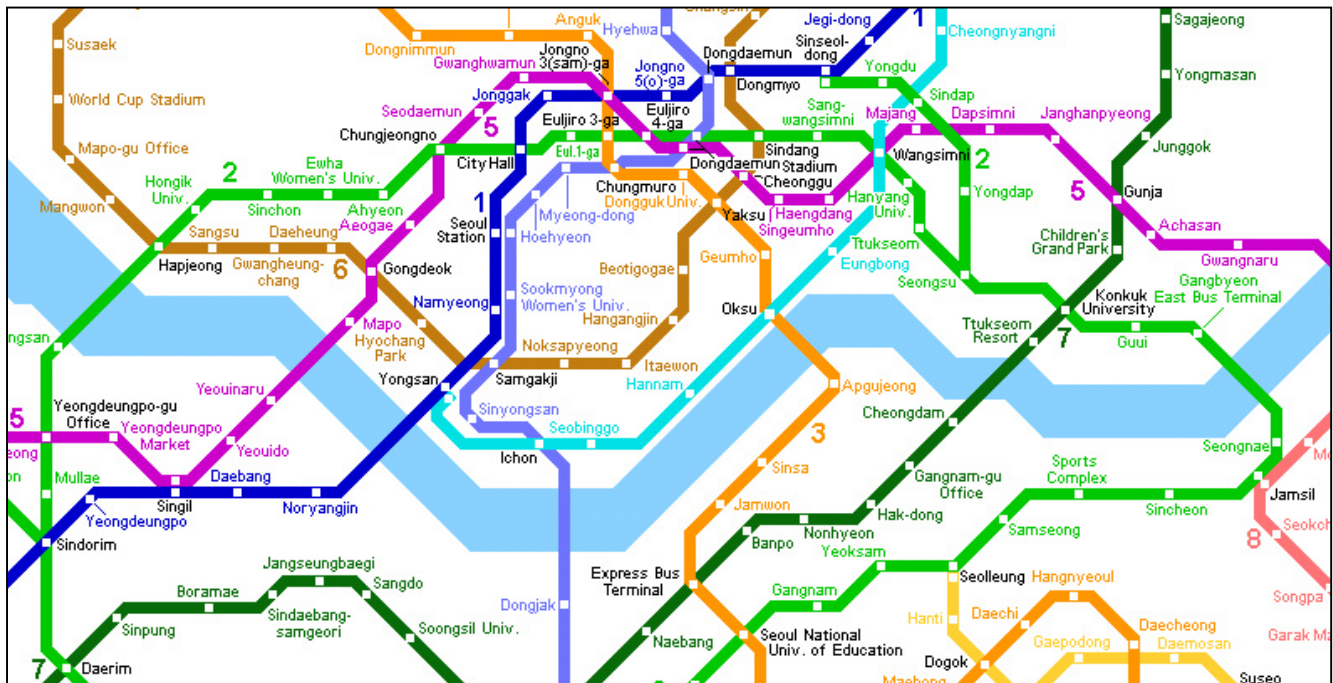


(Just a small cross-section of the Seoul Subway Map)

Though there are thirteen-plus lines of the subway networks with the addition of Korail and other systems, I'll highlight just the first 8 (number 9 is currently under construction).

The Lines of the Seoul Subway System				
Line	Starting Station(s)	Ending Station(s)	#	Len
1호선	Soyosan	Incheon/Sinchang/Gwangmyeong/Seodongtan	97	198.4 km
2호선	City Hall/Seongsu/Sindorim	Sinseol-dong / Kkachisan	52	60.2km
3호선	Daehwa	Ogeum	43	57.4 km
4호선	Dangogae	Oido	48	70.5 km
5호선	Banghwa	Sangil-dong / Macheon	51	52.3km
6호선	Eungam	Bonghwasan	38	35.1km
7호선	Jangam	Onsu	42	46.9km
8호선	Amsa	Moran	17	17.7km





(Cross-section of the Subway map featuring lines we used the most)

## To LEE & NO

Administratively, Seoul is divided into 25 districts (구 *gu*), each with an area and population comparable to a small city. The districts are then further subdivided into 522 sub-districts (동 *dong*), but that's getting things a little too complicated for just a twenty-four hours visit. It's easier, however, to divide the city into the following areas (as suggested by Wikipedia):

- **Jongno (종로)** – On the north-side of the Han-gang (river) is the historical core of the city, containing most palaces and government offices. You can also find **Insa-dong**, which is a popular street area to find souvenirs and within walking distance to many of Seoul's historic cultural landmarks, in this district.
- **Gangnam (강남)** – An area south of the river that is more “uptown” and modern. It is Seoul's most popular area for tourists and where the largest hotels can be located.



- **Yeoui-do** (여의도) – As an island in the Han River, it is the closest Seoul gets to Manhattan with skyscrapers. You'll find the National Assembly and the Seoul Stock Exchange here.
- **Hongdae** (홍대) and **Sinchon** (신촌) – Located west of Seoul Station in the *gu* of Seodaemun (서대문) and Mapo (마포), Hongdae and Sinchon are two of the areas most frequented by hip college students and foreigners. Features hundreds of restaurants, bars, and night clubs. West of Mapo-gu you can find the Seoul World Cup Stadium.
- **Dongdaemun** (동대문) – Once home to Korea's first modern sports stadiums, Dongdaemun is now a fashion shopper's paradise. With literally hundreds of vendors across dozens of buildings, you can find just about anything on sale here.
- **Hyehwa** (혜화) – colloquially known as Daehangno (대학로), this is Seoul's performing arts center, with dozens of small theaters with live dramatic and comedic performances lining every street.
- **Yongsan** (용산) – Yongsan is home to the US Army Military Base as well as one of the largest electronics markets in the world. This is also where you'll find **Itaewon** (이태원), perhaps the most culturally diverse area on the entire peninsula and home to dozens of restaurants featuring cuisine from the world over, numerous shops selling everything from custom-tailored suits to antiques, and several Western pubs and bars.
- **Songpa** is where you'll find Lotte World, Olympic Park, and Seoul (Jamsil) Sports Complex [where Cirque du Soleil's Alegria is playing]. Songpa is one of the richest districts in Seoul.
- **Jung** rests to the south of City Hall--but still north of the Han River--and is where you'll find the 262-meter peak of **Namsan** (남산), a structure similar to the shape of Seattle and Shanghai's most popular skyscrapers and the National Theater.



**By Subway**  
 Take Subway line number 2  
 and get off "Hong ik Univ." station  
 and then come out using exit number 2.  
 Leela's guesthouse is located 6minutes way by walk.  
 Please check Leela's guesthouse Map.

**By Bus**  
 Take Bus number 6002 from Incheon Airport  
 and get off "Hong ik Univ." station.  
 Leela's guesthouse is located 6minutes way by walk.  
 Please check Leela's guesthouse Map.

**To Taxi Driver**  
 기사님께  
 연남동 기사식당 골목에 위치한  
 코롱 하얏트 아파트  
 105동과 106동 사이에  
 내려주시면 됩니다.  
 감사합니다.  
 밤 9시 이후에는 전화를  
 받지 않습니다.

To, new guests

hello!! nice meet you !!  
sorry!! you are going do not ride to family  
business  
but don't worry!! you can go do inside  
3 you digital how come 2 (9:00)  
2 you friends (1:00 & 2:00)  
2 other come 12 hours  
2 go do 2 hour

Richard's know is "C"  
beal & kind know is "B"  
born guy's know is "B"  
see will be look 2 know  
see you soon

if you have any question call me at  
My cell - 704-611-1122

No Smoking  
No drinking  
after 9 PM be good  
Please ... *Thank*

177





## Out & About

Once we left Lee & No, we would not return until much later tonight – possibly after midnight. Though we hoped we wouldn't disturb our new hosts, and we hadn't yet settled the bill, it couldn't be helped – they weren't there and we had to be out. I wanted to see a number of curiosities within the city's limits with the remaining time we had; however, due to the nature of travel (uh, so where do we go again?) coupled with not really understanding the true nature of distances from point A to B within a new city, we only got to one of them: Namsan Tower.

**Namsan Tower**, officially known as N Seoul Tower (and even more officially known as the CJ Seoul Tower), is a communication and observation platform located on Namsan Mountain (South Mountain), a wonderful green-space located in central Seoul. Built in 1969 at a cost of approximately \$2.5 million, it measures 236.7 meters (777 feet) in height (from the base) and tops out at 479.7 meters (1,574 feet) above sea level. Since it opened to the public in 1980, the tower has become the de-facto international symbol for the city at large, much like the Space Needle for Seattle, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Statue of Liberty in New York City, the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, the Kyoto Tower in Kyoto, the Tower Bridge (and Big Ben) in London, and so on, and so forth.

There are a number of ways to reach the tower – from taking the paved roadways that wind up and through the wooded greens, a concrete staircase, to walking on foot via one of the park's numerous marked trails – but whatever the means, there's no easy direct route up... and it's quite a hike. Many visitors, then, choose to ride the Namsan Cable Car up the mountain for a small price, and then walk the rest of the way there. This mode of transportation looked like our best bet, but finding it would prove to be most problematic. The closest you can get to it is Seoul Central Station on Subway line 1 (take exit 10) or line 4 (take exit 2 or 3 to street-level). But where to set off on foot from there was a complete mystery... even with the tower looming in the distance.

We set off on foot in one direction, hoping the cable car station was nearby... then turned round when we didn't come across any signage letting us know we might be going in the right direction. Then we tried the opposite direction, of course, but turned up about as much that way as we had the first – nothing. With the clock ticking and frustration growing, we opted for a taxi ride to the mountain's summit, hoping as we did so that this cab ride wouldn't be a replay of our more recent Tokyo jaunt. Though the ride was rather long (it seemed as if we went round the mountain's base at least once before starting up the two-lane road to the top), we made it to the tower in one piece. The last few hundred steps or so we took on foot, an arduous affair at a 45-degree angle.

The first thing we noticed once catching our breath was the tower terminus of the Namsan Cable Car; walking over, we peered down the side of the mountain and found the city terminus... quite a distance from Seoul Station.

*"We wouldn't have made it there even if we knew where it was!"*

The base of the tower is awash in activity but it was the confines, and hopefully quietness, of the observation galleries far above us that we looked for. There are four observation decks here (the first and second are the public observatories, the third is a revolving restaurant, rotating at a rate of one revolution every 48 minutes – reservations are needed to see the view from here, and the fourth is actually a roof-top deck, not accessible today), as well as gift shops and two other restaurants. It only takes ₩7000 to experience the observation galleries and they're well worth the price. The experience getting to the top was straightforward – elevator trip up with some information about the tower and Seoul along the way – all of Seoul opens up from here unlike any other observation platform I've seen in Japan, Europe or North America. A spectacular panorama of the jewel of the orient!





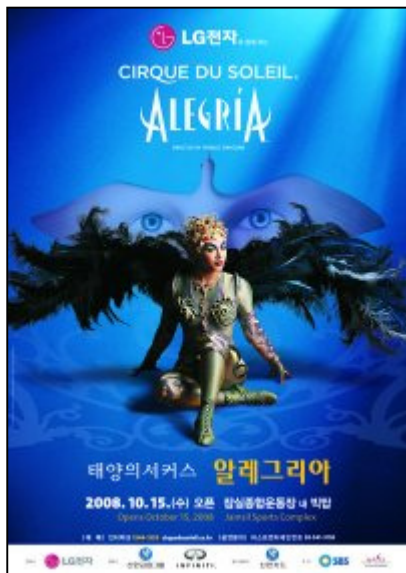




Due to the time involved getting to N Seoul Tower, and the time we now thought it would take getting to Alegría at the Sports Complex (since we'd have to get down from the mountain), we didn't have a lot of time to spend at the tower itself; we opted for a taxi ride down and a continuance to the Jamsil Sports Complex(잠실종합운동장). Serviced by Subway Line 2, the complex consists of the Olympic Stadium, Auxiliary Stadium, Jamsil Arena, Jamsil Baseball Stadium, Jamsil Indoor Swimming Pool, Jamsil Inline Skating Rink and the Sports Park. The complex is steeped in history as the successful hosts of the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympic Games. Though it's not hosted a major world event since then (and there's not much to see), visiting the grounds of an Olympic park was thrilling.



**Cirque du Soleil's Alegría** was set up nearby in its sparkling white grand chapiteau; standing nearby were our friends: Heather Smith & Jim Strain, and Rie Sugawara and her friends from Japan. We all gathered here to see this amazing show in a new land.



Like a bolt out of life, Alegría thunders to life with an unsociable need to tell its story – the need for a better world. Spanish for “elation”, “exhilaration”, “jubilation”, and “joy” Alegría is an impassioned celebration of life in its most primitive form - the power to transform society.

In developing Alegría, Cirque du Soleil saw in the world around them a society in flux – uncertainty – in constant upheaval. They saw a world of contrasts – power and powerlessness, cruelty and kindness. They saw the irony of globalization, where a constantly shrinking world left individuals more isolated than ever before. They saw the irony of progress as though the sum of evil and hardship in the world remained forever constant.

But through this uncertainty is the glow of the human spirit, an unconquerable force; resolute in its strength, relentless in the face of adversity. Thus the stage is set where old age and youth collide, where fantasy and magic are integral parts of everyday life, where a rallying cry-out for change takes shape so that together we can shake established foundations and build a better, brighter tomorrow.

A number of characters inhabit this world – Fleur: An unpredictable and dangerous madman who believes he is king. He is the guide to the world of *Alegría*. Nostalgic Old Birds: The Nostalgic Old Birds have lived in the palace for as long as it has existed. They are empty-shelled courtiers who admire their reflections in mirror-less frames.



Tamir and Little Tamir: Appears when needed, only to disappear once he has fulfilled his mission. Nymphs: These exuberant, infectious characters celebrate each breath of life. Bronx: Young and tough, they are the next generation. White Angels: The guardians who are the youth of tomorrow. White singer: The storyteller who echoes in song everything she sees around her. Black singer: an alter-ego who has wickedness about her and hides many secrets in her dark heart. And the Clowns: The show's social commentators.

*Step up to the front; tap your toe to the beat. Let the music move your limbs. That's right... a step to the right; a step to the left; two steps back. Alegría is about to begin! A crash of cymbals and the pounding of drums announce a procession... the musicians march into view, creating mayhem wherever they go. They are dressed in white and are followed by an overly rounded man dressed in red: Fleur. He is our guide, carrying a magical stick (lit at its tip) ready to show the cruelty and loneliness of the world to us. Fleur struts about like an ill-mannered man before appearing on stage. And then, as he looks out at the spectators who have come to see his play, he takes a deep breath and yells out with all his might: "ALEGRÍA!"*

"Mirko" fills the air as characters of all shapes, sizes and colors fill the stage. A trio of clowns waddles out and sits upon a suitcase, only to be frightened away by a big bolt of white light. Enigmatic characters in white fill and then leave the stage. The two singers, White and Black, come to us and fill the world with melodies. The Nymphs join the chorus, strutting about in birdlike fashion. We're introduced to Tamir and little Tamir; followed by the Fire Man. And then the most aristocratic characters of them all: the Old Birds. The nostalgic Old Birds observe the goings-on as though they were still young and beautiful and the future was still theirs. They admire their reflections in mirror less frames, but are only empty shells, shadows of their former selves. They are the old aristocracy, still convinced of their power and beauty. But they are twisted, deformed and ugly. And thus Alegría begins!

Through the two and a half hour performance (with intermission), Cirque du Soleil presents eleven spectacular acts – Synchro (Duo) Trapeze, Fast Track, Fire Dance, Hoops, Strong Man, Snow Storm, Flying Man, Russian Bars, Contortion, and High Bar – but our show was a little interesting. Attendance was very low (seeing most of the Grand Chapiteau empty for the performance was strange to say the least; I would put our attended performance at less than 40% attendance), and the show was a little short (a number of signature acts were replaced or shortened throughout the show's entire run tonight.

Rather than Duo Trapeze we got Solo Trapeze and I must say I prefer Solo to the normal Duo; she twisted about that trapeze bar like I've not seen in ages! Trapeze was followed by Fast Track, which was just as good as ever. Fire Dance followed that and both guys came out to give a good performance.

Hoops/Manipulation was canceled and in its place was Hand-balancing, a very, very good act! Strong Man was also out, replaced by Juggling (which was very, very lame! It is an act performed by a young artist from the Russian Bars troupe who, from what I understand, wanted to develop his own act. With that being said, he wasn't very good at all and basically threw his balls on the stage, letting them drop there, rather than catching and juggling them as one would expect – very sloppy performance. The Snowstorm closed out the first-half of the show as normal.



The second-half of the show also contained a number of cuts and shortages. Devoid of Flying Man; after Danse Vazoule (a dance piece that opens the second-half of Alegría), we immediately went into Russian Bars, which itself was woefully short of both presentation and skill set. The choreography used here might have been a derivative or mix-mash of previous presentations, as it was neither the latest nor the original – only a few tricks and then they were off – I was

very disappointed! The Contortion girls came out next and this was probably the best part of the show. It had been so long since I'd seen this act perform as a duo that I almost forgot just how beautiful the act was! High Bar was the final act and the song "Alegría" closed the show as usual.

Though it was nice to see Alegría again, and experience it in a foreign country, the small turnout combined with the lack of care and energy from the performers, turned out a rather lack-luster and very forgettable performance of the show. I've seen a number of "off-night" shows in my time but this one takes the prize as the worst-ever.

I was disappointed.

\* \* \*



After getting a few good-bye photos with our Japanese friends, Heather, Jim, Rich and I followed out of the Jamsil Sports Complex and had a late dinner at Seoul's Hard Rock Café, allowing Rich the singular experience of visiting the restaurant here. Following dinner we went our separate ways, with Rich and me returning to LEE & NO for the evening.

In a moment we'll turn in, as we must be up very, very early in the morning to catch our flight back to the states, but before I do so I'd like to say spending twenty-four hours in Seoul was not nearly enough time. Our time here was just "okay". I was impressed coming in – everything was very modern and clean – but I'm not as impressed as I get ready to leave. Perhaps it's because the people here seem so grumpy. It could just be my perception of them because the Japanese are so nice and polite, going out of their way to help you. Koreans in contrast, at least the couple we ran across in certain purchasing situations, seemed rather blasé about helping their customers, or even talking to them. But that could be because Rich and I were American rather than Asian. And perhaps they haven't yet let the ills of the Korean North/South Conflict leave them.



Whatever the reason, I will say this: I do like Lychee Fanta!

Goodnight Seoul.  
Goodnight Asia.  
We'll come again!



日本国

Exploring the  
Land of the Rising Sun

2008 | November 4<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>



---

## the 36 views of mt. fuji, part 3

---

I once again leave you 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 this experience is 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 a ukiyo-e series (浮世絵; meaning: “Pictures of a Floating World”) by artist Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎; 1760-1849), who first published them in 1827. Their popularity grew and ten more images were added by 1837, bringing the total number of landscapes to 46; however, the title of the work remains unchanged.

In the first Japanese expedition ("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, once again I decided to showcase the infamous views of Fuji-san, choosing another 20 from the remaining 35. And again, in this third installment, another 11 fantastic views of Fuji were incorporated. 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 third set of views of Mt. Fuji are just as spectacular, and just as culturally rich.



These next 11 used are...



November 6, 2008  
 東海道程ヶ谷 (#26)  
*Tōkaidō Hodogaya*  
 Hodogaya on the Tokaido



November 7, 2008  
 従千住花街眺望の不二 (#39)  
*Senju Hana-machi Yori Chōbō no Fuji*  
 Pleasure District at Senju



November 8, 2008  
 東海道金谷の不二 (#44)  
*Tōkaidō Kanaya no Fuji*  
 Fuji from Kanaya on the Tokaido



November 9, 2008  
 常州牛掘 (#36)  
*Jōshū Ushibori*  
 Ushibori in the Hitachi Province





November 10, 2008  
 隅田川関屋の里 (#22)  
*Sumidagawa Sekiya no sato*  
 Village of Sekiya at Sumida River



November 11, 2008  
 御厩川岸より両国橋夕陽見 (#12)  
*Ommayagashi yori ryōgoku-bashi yūhi mi*  
 The Ryogoku Bridge at Onmagayashi



November 12, 2008  
 下目黒 (#15)  
*Shimo-Meguro*  
 Below Meguro



November 13, 2008  
 武州玉川 (#27)  
*Bushū Tamagawa*  
 Tama River in the Musashi Province



November 14, 2008  
 相州箱根湖水 (#24)  
*Sōshū Hakone kosui*  
 Hakone Lake in Sagami Province



November 15, 2008  
 東海道品川御殿山の不二 (#37)  
*Tōkaidō Shinagawa Goten'yama no Fuji*  
 Tokaido Shinagawa



November 16, 2008  
 信州諏訪湖 (#35)  
*Shinshū Suwa-ko*  
 Lake Suwa in Shinano Province

終わり？

(owari; "the end"?)