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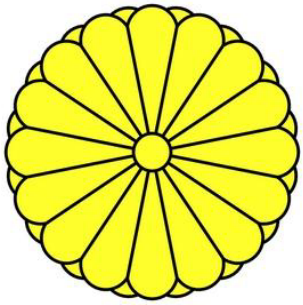
Touring the Land of the Rising Sun

2015 | April 8th to 21st

richArd G Russo



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"'日本国 ; Touring 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.

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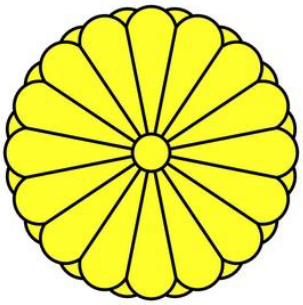

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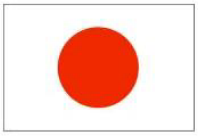

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「Along the Sumida-gawa」

Friday | April 10, 2015

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.

32,586 steps
15.16 miles

It's the little things that make me happy, you know? Like simply enjoying a can of *kohi* (コヒ) on a little secluded bench in crisp morning air, with little to worry about except to enjoy and cherish the moment. And that's because you'll find us in Asakusa, under the looming presence of Sensoji's Hondo, enjoying our first full morning in Japan. We're back!

やった! (*Yatta!*)

Though I may be amongst history here, there's no getting around that I've very much looked forward to this first sip of coffee. Sure, I can get coffee back home, but, the novelty of having a hot can of coffee dispensed at my pleasure from one of the ubiquitous vending machines peppered about, and then sipping it whilst sitting here without a worry in the world is a great feeling to have. And one I've looked forward to these last couple of years. Besides, we're a bit early to actually enjoy any of the usual goings-on here – partaking in the foods and other goods available in *Nakamise*'s various stalls, strolling about the sacred grounds of *Senso-ji*, or even benefiting from the incense the monks usually burn – and that's because the sun rose very early this morning (5:16am precisely here in Tokyo), rousing us from our slumber right along with it. Though that may seem rather early to most people, it's not the earliest time the sun can rise here – it's been known to vary between 4:25am (earliest, in June) to 6:52am (latest, in January); both are still too early for our tastes. We're used to much later times in our part of the world, but sunrises there vary by latitude too… as Nicole mumbled as she crawled out of bed this morning: "this is a Maine-type sunrise." (The sun peeks relatively early there too.) *I guess heading off to bed early last night was not such a good idea after all?*

I must confess that an early bedtime really wasn't part of the plan. After an on-time landing and a quick-step through customs, there were hopes we'd have time to do a little sight-seeing upon arrival. Unfortunately, the N'EX had other plans and a ride in Tokyo proper that should have taken no more than 60 minutes took over two hours. We were deposited at Tokyo Station right in the middle of evening rush hour! Fighting through the throngs of people with luggage in tow took its toll on us very quickly. But we did manage well enough to pick up our JRail passes at the Marunouchi North Exit/Entrance-way, and then brave the subway – at rush hour, mind you – to Homeikan. But I digress…

Those of you who may have followed our previous exploits in Japan know this is exactly how our first full day in Tokyo began – with coffee, from a vending machine, on a bench – and it's a similar beginning to the three solo trips I took to Japan – with coffee, from a vending machine, on a bench – and so it continues today.

Perhaps this very notion – coffee, from a vending machine, on a bench – will become a new tradition Nicole and I can share when visiting Tokyo again in the future? Even if not, my wife and I very much missed the fun and convenience of Japan's abundant but unassuming legion of vending machines, so we were quite excited to partake in their exploits as soon as we could. Why? While this might sound clichéd, but, it's fun! Not only are we, as tourists, unfamiliar with most of the products sitting neatly inside them, trying something new can sometimes be a huge unexpected treat! The diverse contents of Japan's vending machines – called *jidohanbaiki* (自動販売機)– has been thoroughly chronicled by travelers and tourists alike, as the existence of *jihanki* (for short) selling pornography and panties makes for perfect fodder for the writers and consumers of expositions detailing the quirks and eccentricities of the Japanese culture. But these represent a small fraction of the 5.58 million or so of these innocuous machines peppered throughout the countryside.

You'll find them outside subway stations, on train platforms, near bus stops, along sidewalks, down dark (but safe) alleys, and even atop Mt. Fuji. There are probably more vending machines in this country than there are people – and that's saying something! Annual sales reach almost 6.95 trillion yen, so it's no wonder they're ubiquitous. The first vending machine in Japan sold cigarettes, and was introduced in 1888. Since then, a wide variety of vending machines have been developed to sell products such as drinks, food, stamps, magazines, flowers, electronics, and daily sundries. They're becoming increasingly high-tech too; flashier, and more digital. But no matter how advanced they get I hope to never be far from one… when you're on the go and feeling hungry or become thirsty, having one every few feet helps a lot! *But I'm sure you're not interested in hearing about our love for the vending machines, not with Asakusa all around us, right?*

ASAKUSA: Nakamise & Sensoji

Asakusa (浅草) can be found 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) his base of operations in 1603, which transformed Edo into the 17th century equivalent of the city that never slept; Asakusa was ground zero. It became a pleasure quarter. 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 WWII. Though much of the area was destroyed during the war, Asakusa is still Tokyo's oldest actively working *geisha* district, and much of what we associate with Japanese culture sprang from these grounds and can still be found here.

One of those peculiarities is the harmonious blending of Shinto and Buddhism, and you'll find no better representation of this covenant than at Senso-ji. It was here, according to legend, 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 clan. Over the years Senso-ji survived the last shoguns, 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; *Kinryu-zan Senso-ji*) is still an amazing sight.

The moment you step out of the station and round the street corner there's no mistaking that you've found this magnificent temple's grounds. The 11.7m tall and 11.4m wide **Kaminarimon** Gate (雷門), with its bright-red color and huge 1500-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 Gate” for a reason; besides the gods of thunder and wind guarding the path, the massive lantern (a *chochin* that is 4m tall, 3.4m in circumference) 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 original gate, built by military commander Taira Kinmasa in 942, stood just south of here. It was erected in its present location during the Kamakura Period (1192-1333), whereby the statues of *Fujin* and *Raijin* came to rest at either side. People initially offered prayers to these two statues for the protection of the temple against natural disasters. Over time, they became the subject of prayers for the benefit of the people, such as for a bountiful harvest and for peace in the world.

Just beyond Kaminarimon is **Nakimise-dori** (仲見世通り), a 250 meter long 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** (宝蔵門), or “Treasure House Gate”, marks the entrance to the inner complex. Built in 1964 of reinforced concrete, this two-story gate has a treasure house upstairs holding a number of 14th century Chinese sutras (or sacred texts), but it’s not as if you’re allowed to see them. It stands 22.7 m (74 ft) tall, 21 m (69 ft) wide, and 8 m (26 ft) deep. 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. And these are just the structures in the main part of the complex. Others such as the *Yakushido*, *Rokkadio* and *Yogodo* (with its nice water feature), the *Zenizuka Jizo-do hall*, monuments in memory of three haiku master poets, the tomb of *Toda Mosui* and the “*Shibaraku Statue*” are located to the left of and behind the main hall. There’s never a loss for something to see (or learn) here!

Unless you arrive a little too early, but even so, sitting here drinking my coffee (and Nicole her tea) has enlightened us to another part of Tokyo we rarely see: kids going off to school. More precisely: mothers and fathers walking their kids to school. Although I have been part of a massive group of school-aged kids walking to their respective schools in Kamakura (in 2007), in the Sakamoto-area of Kyoto (in 2008), and elementary-age kids in the neighborhood Homeikan is in (*Bunkyo-ku*, in 2013), rarely have we seen individuals zipping through areas such as this on their way to school.

We've seen dozens of small boys and girls walk by with who we can only assume are their parents or guardians, on their way to school. And we can't help but think perhaps this may be us someday soon!

Consequently, the Japanese school uniform, called a *seifuku* (制服), traditionally consist of a military style uniform for boys (called a *gakuran* (学ラン) or *tsume-eri* (詰襟)) and a sailor-type outfit for girls (called a *sera fuku*, セーラー服). These uniforms are based on Meiji-era formal military dress, themselves modeled on European-style naval uniforms. They consist of a white shirt, tie, blazer with school crest, and tailored trousers (often not of the same color as the blazer) for boys and a white blouse, tie, blazer with school crest, and tartan culottes or skirt for girls.
Regardless of what type of uniform any particular school assigns its students, all schools have a summer version of the uniform (usually consisting of just a white dress shirt and the uniform slacks for boys and a reduced-weight traditional uniform or blouse and tartan skirt with tie for girls) and a sports-activity uniform (a polyester track suit for year-round use and a T-shirt and short pants for summer activities). Depending on the discipline level of any particular school, students may often wear different seasonal and activity uniforms within the same classroom during the day. And while not many public elementary schools in Japan require uniforms, many private schools and public schools run by the central government still do… and they're cute!

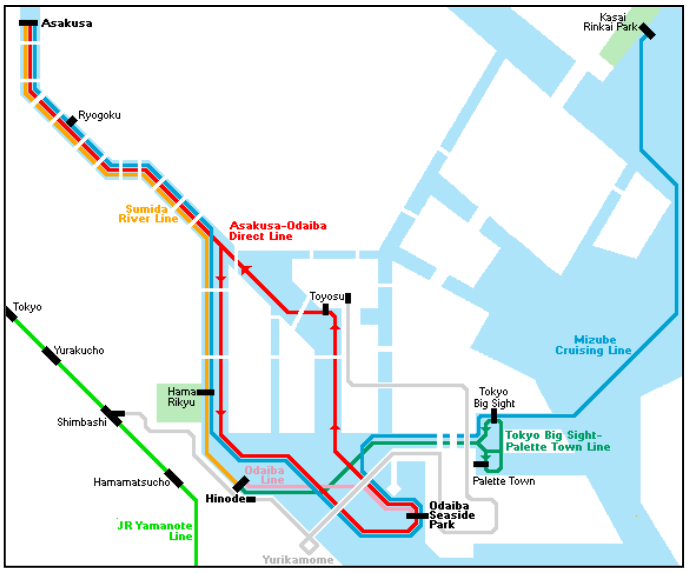
Yes, Senso-ji is certainly a great place to sit and watch the masses. From the worshipers wafting smoke over themselves from the temple's incense burner (called a *jokoro*) or rubbing the small statue of the Nade Botokesan Buddha (both done for good luck and to keep the body healthy), to those paying 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. But do wait until at least 9:00am – that's when the vendor stalls open for business, and that's when the crowds come!

SUMIDA: The River & Skytree Aquarium

Since our early arrival met with little in the way of open shops or business at the temple – everything was closed up tight (the only other activities in the area were business men walking to their offices to begin their day's work, and the occasional temple staff preparing to receive the throngs of visitors that would no doubt come during the day) – we decided to uproot ourselves from Sensoji's benches and stroll down Kaminarimon Street (which runs across the entrance to Nakamise-dori), to see the Sumida River and what else there might be to see along its banks. Down at the river we ran across the Tobu station where we hope to take the train to Nikko later in our trip, and the Tokyo Water Bus terminal, should we want to take a "water bus" down to Hama Riku later this afternoon.

Did You Know?

The Sumida River (隅田川), branching from the Arakawa at Iwabuchi, runs through northern and eastern parts of Tokyo city. Interestingly enough, its banks were previously the path of the Arakawa; however, work was carried out to divert the main flow of the Arakawa to prevent flooding toward the end of the Meiji-era. The Sumida runs through Tokyo for 27 kilometers, under 26 bridges spaces at about one bridge per kilometer. The bridge we crossed is called the Komagata; dating from 1927, this 146.2 meter-long bridge takes its name from Matsugata temple dedicated to Bato-Kanon, deity of mercy, and a bodhisattva associated with compassion.



The **Water Bus** is exactly what it sounds like: a sight-seeing boat that ferries passengers down the Sumida River to various ports of call along the way. Tokyo Water Bus operates a number of these ships every 30 to 60 minutes or so and can be enjoyable alternatives to trains or subways when traveling between destinations that are near the water – like Asakusa and Hama Riku are. There are three lines in operation here: The Asakusa-Odaiba Line, The Sumida River Line, and the Odaiba Line. The Asakusa-Odaiba Direct Line (50 minutes, ¥1560; 2-4 boats per day) is one of the most popular routes because of its boldly designed Himiko boats with panoramic windows. The Sumida River Line runs from Asakusa to Hama Rikyu garden (35 minutes, ¥740; about 12 boats per day). The dock at Hama Rikyu is located within the garden's paid grounds, so disembarking means that travelers also have to pay the garden's entry fee (¥300). The boats then travel a further five minutes to the Hinode Pier, where a transfer can be made to boats bound for Odaiba. The Odaiba Line travels from Hinode to Odaiba Seaside Park (20 minutes, ¥480; 10-15 boats per day). The Tokyo Big Sight-Palette Town Line travels to both the Tokyo Big Sight and Palette town attractions (about 30 minutes, ¥410; 7 boats per day).

Properly informed, we continued on, but didn't stray too far after reaching the other side of the bridge, retuning after finding ourselves mere steps from the Asahi Breweries Headquarters building. (It's the one with the "Asahi Flame" on top.)

The Asahi Flame, consequently, was created by French designer Philippe Starck in 1989, and is one of Tokyo's most recognizable modern structures. The golden structure is said to represent both the "burning heart of Asahi beer" and a frothy head. The 360-ton golden *Flamme d'Or* was made by shipbuilders using submarine-construction techniques; it is completely hollow. Unfortunately it's often colloquially referred to as "the golden turd" (金のうんこ; *kin no unko*) and the building itself as "the poo building" by many Tokyo residents, but I digress.

With the shops at Nakamise still not open when we walked back through at 8:30am, we decided to transit over to **Oshiage** (Skytree) station to visit – you guessed it – the Tokyo Skytree building. The Tokyo Skytree is a relatively new television broadcasting tower and landmark of Tokyo. It is the centerpiece of the Tokyo Skytree Town in the Sumida City Ward. With a height of 634 meters (634 can be read as "Musashi", a historic name of the Tokyo Region), it is the tallest building in Japan and the second tallest structure in the world at the time of its completion.

The highlight of the **Tokyo Skytree** (東京スカイツリ) is its two observation decks which offer spectacular views out over Tokyo. The two enclosed decks are located at heights of 350 and 450 meters respectively, making them the highest observation decks in Japan and some of the highest in the world. Tembo Deck, the lower of the two decks is 350 meters high and spans three levels with great views from all of its floors. The top floor features tall, broad windows that offer some of the best 360 degree panoramic views of the city. A second set of elevators connects the Tembo Deck to the 450 meter high Tembo Gallery. Dubbed "the world's highest skywalk", the Tembo Gallery consists of a sloping spiral ramp that gains height as it circles the tower.

The construction of the steel and glass tube allows visitors to look down from the dizzying height of the tower and out over the Kanto Region to spectacular distances. At the top of the spiral ramp is a more conventional observation deck floor with lounging areas and tall windows from which to look out over Tokyo. This floor is officially located at 451.2 meters and constitutes the highest point of the observation decks.

Although we didn't ascend the tower for a visit (it was a bit too cloudy for that this morning), we did manage to find the **Sumida Aquarium** (すみだ水族館), which we were here to visit. This moderately sized, and beautifully designed modern aquarium houses over 10,000 sea creatures on the 5th and 6th floors of Tokyo Solamachi, a shopping and entertainment complex at the base of the Tokyo Skytree. Based on the theme of the "Cradle of Life", the Sumida Aquarium as a whole was designed to be a large nurturing aquatic environment. The centerpiece of the aquarium is its 350 thousand liter tank, the largest open indoor tank in Japan, which is home to dozens of penguins and several fur seals. But that's not all you'll find here. The aquarium is divided into a number of zones of self-discovery: "Natural Aquascape", for example, features beautifully designed tanks by famed Japanese aquaria aquascaper Takashi Amano; "Cradle of Life" is where numerous jellyfish swim and in the "Aqua Gallery", an array of tanks is arranged like paintings in an art museum. "Nurturing Light and Water" is a consecutive series of tanks featuring various scenes created by alluring coral reefs and the colorful spectrum of aquatic life they attract. As you travel along the approximately 50m-long access slope connecting the 5th and 6th floors, "Chain of Life" employs views of marine life native to Tokyo's seas. In collaboration with Ogasawara Village, the aquarium has created a tank steeped in rich, deep shades of transparent blue that penetrate every corner. It was a nice visit to say the least.






UENO: Park & Zoo

Although we found the entire aquarium interesting, our reason for visiting was to see tanks designed by famed Japanese aquaria aquascaper Takashi Amano. So, once we took those in, we toured about the rest of the aquarium relatively quickly. Afterward we hopped the Ginza line from Skytree to Ueno – about four stops down – for a jaunt around Ueno Park (上野公園, *Ueno Koen*), a rather large green-space established in 1873 as one of the country's first public parks. The park occupies lands formerly belonging to the temple Kanei-ji, which used to be one of the city's largest and wealthiest temples (and a family temple of the ruling Tokugawa clan during the Edo Period. Kanei-ji, founded in 1625, stood in the northeast of the capital (the "demon gate") to protect the city from evil, much like Enryaku-ji temple does in Kyoto (I visited there in 2008).

During the Boshin Civil War, which followed the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Kaneiji suffered nearly complete destruction in a battle between the victorious forces of the new Meiji government and loyalists of the overthrown *shogunate* (known as the Battle of Ueno). After the battle, the temple grounds were converted into one of Japan's first Western style parks and opened to the public. A statue of Saigo Takamori, one of the generals in the Battle of Ueno, stands near the park's southern entrance. Remnants of the original temple complex, such as its five storied pagoda and Toshogu shrine, are scattered around the park. The current Kaneiji is a relatively unremarkable, small temple located in the northwest corner of the park. You'll also find **Kiyomizu Kannondo** (a shrine inspired by the magnificent Kiyomizu-dera in Kyoto), **Gojoten-jinja** (a shrine dedicated to Okuninushi (大国主), who is often associated with match-making and marriage.), **Kanazono-inari-jinja** (a shrine dedicated to *Inari*, the Japanese *kami* (god) of foxes, of fertility, rice, tea and Sake.), **Ueno Daibutsu** (the face of an Edo-period giant seated statue of Shaka Nyorai), and the **Benten-do** in the middle of Shinobazu (the pond) – all of which we visited in our last turn in Ueno Park in April 2013, so I won't go into detail this time.

Ueno Park is also famous for the many museums found on its grounds, especially the Tokyo National Museum, the National Museum for Western Art, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and the National Science Museum. It is also home to Ueno Zoo, Japan's first zoological garden, and our reason for visiting.

Opened in 1882, the 35-acre **Ueno Zoo** (恩賜上野動物園; *Onshi Ueno Dobutsue*) is Japan's oldest Zoo, and has more species on exhibit than any other zoo in Japan (it is home to more than 2,600 individuals representing over 460 species of animal.) The Sumatran Tiger, Chinese Pandas, and Western Lowland Gorilla head the list of the zoo's population, but they're far from the most exciting. the zoo is also home to pheasants, red pandas, snow owls, raptors, Asiatic Lions, gibbons, dholes (red dogs), mouse deer, leopard cats, slow lorises, bats, cranes, California sea lions, Polar Bears, Hokkaido brown bears, Sun bears, Japanese black bears, Asiatic elephants, Japanese macaques, white-mantled black colobuses, ring-tailed lemurs, black-handed spider monkeys, llamas, capybaras, South American tapirs, American bison, prairie dogs, hippos, reticulated giraffes, zebras, okapis, maned wolves, aardvarks, Hoffmann's two-toed sloths, aye-ayes, otters, fennec foxes, toucans, kangaroos, anteaters, crocodiles, turtles, flamingos, pelicans, puffins, white rhinoceroses, zebras, red-crowned cranes, white-tailed eagles and king penguins, along with goats, sheep, pigs, llamas, ostriches, and rabbits. And more! The zoo was really spectacular, and a rare treat I'm happy we allowed ourselves to explore today.

On our way out of the park I picked up an *ema* at the Ueno Daibutsu shrine; a giant bronze Buddha statue once stood here from 1631 – 1923. It was toppled in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and its remains, which sat in the park for many years, were melted down for metal in World War II. The face is all that remains of that today, and his face is on the *ema*. As a unique collectible I couldn't pass it up. After acquiring that we took a quick stroll down nearby **Ameyoko** (アメ横), a busy market street along the Yamanote Line tracks between Okachimachi and Ueno Stations.

Short for "Ameya Yokocho" (candy story ally), as candies were traditionally sold here – and alternately, "Ame" also standing for "America" because a lot of American products used to be available here when the street was the site of a black market in the years following World War II and Japan's occupation – today, various products such as clothes, bags, cosmetics, fresh fish, dried food and spices are sold along this narrow alley-way, making Ameyoko quite crowded. So packed in fact we barely stepped into its heart before turning around and heading off to our next destination Hama Riku.

CHUO: Shiodome & Hama Rikyu Gardens

With the cloudy, overcast skies continuing to hang over our heads, rather than take the journey down the Sumida via the Water Bus as I'd planned, we chose instead to take the lack-luster Metro option. From Ueno station it's just a quick jaunt down the Ginza Line to Shimbashi station, but after arriving, finding Hama Rikyu took a bit of effort.

That's because Hama Rikyu is located in the **Shiodome district** (汐留), a recently redeveloped city district in Tokyo's Chuo ward. Shiodome was originally a tidal marshland separating the Imperial Palace from Tokyo Bay. During the Edo Period (1603-1867), the marshes were dried up and developed into residential land for feudal lords. The district's history remains reflected in the name Shiodome, which literally means "halt the tides". In 1872, Shiodome was chosen as the site of Shimbashi Station, the Tokyo terminal of Japan's first railway line. When the railway tracks were later extended to Tokyo Station, Shimbashi Station was moved to its current location and Shiodome converted into a freight yard, which it remained into the 1980s. Today the district features modern city planning with divided motorized and pedestrian traffic on different levels, and elevated walkways and underground passages that connect most of the buildings. Its spectacular skyscrapers accommodate many offices, the headquarters of Nippon Television, and a large variety of shops, cafes, restaurants, theaters, hotels and other attractions.

There’s Caretta Shiodome, a shopping, dining and entertainment complex, located in the elegant 51-story Dentsu Building, the headquarters of Japan's leading advertising company Dentsu. (Caretta features a musical theater, a museum on advertising and a range of shops and restaurants, including the "sky restaurants" on the building's top floors); Shiodome City Center, a 42 floor office building that is headquarters to some major Japanese companies such as All Nippon Airways and Fujitsu. (The building's lower floors are filled with shops and restaurants while the top two floors house elegant restaurants with beautiful views over Tokyo); Nippon Television Tower (Nittele Tower), the headquarters of Nippon Television. (A NTV goods shop and an Anpanman shop are found here along with a few restaurants and cafes.); Italian Town, an area spanning a couple of city blocks that vaguely resembles an Italian neighborhood. (the district is home to a number of restaurants, cafes, small shops, and fashion boutiques.

And, of course, Hama Rikyu.

Hama Rikyu (浜離宮恩賜庭園; *Hama-rikyu Onshi Teien*) is a decent example of an Edo-era strolling garden, although not without its scars. The gardens were first laid in 1654 by Matsudaira Tsunashige, the *daimyo* of Kofu. As a relative of the shogun (the Tokugawa being essentially the core branch of the Matsudaira families), and as part of the *sankin kotai* system, he spent six months out of the year in Edo, with the rest of his time administering the feudal domain in Kofu. So, looking for somewhere to relax, Matsudaira decided to fill in some of the tidal flats near the mouth of the Sumidagawa, and laid out the original garden and buildings. He called it the *Kofu Hama-yashiki* (Kofu Beach pavilion).

When his son, Ienobu, succeeded as *daimyo*, the garden became an important location for meetings. And later, in 1709 when Tokugawa Tsunayoshi died without a male heir and Ienobu was made Shogun (as he was the only lineal descendant of Tokugawa Ieyasu), the garden was re-laid, re-named (Hama Goden, or Beach Palace), and became a respite of the Shogunate until re-appropriated after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 (when it was re-named the Hama Detached Palace). Various shoguns made changes to the garden over the years, often adding tea houses, reaching its final form during the reign of Tokugawa Ienari, (the 11th Tokugawa shogun; 1787-1837). Though heavily damaged during the Great Earthquake of 1923, and scorched in the fire-bombings of World War II, the remnants of the garden were donated by the imperial family to the City of Tokyo in November 1945. A year later, the 25,000 square meter garden was opened by the Allied Occupation Forces and subsequently became a public park.

Did You Know?

In pre-modern Japan, *Daimyo* were powerful feudal lords that ruled over their clan's lands as a matter of birthright. Even though subordinate to the Shogun, Daimyo's were still quite powerful. In order to ensure their loyalty, the *sankin kotai* (参勤交代) system was instigated. Daimyo were compelled to spend 6 months in Edo (keeping up residences, which would keep them busy), placing them where the Shogun could keep close watch. Consequently, Toyotomi Hideyoshi had earlier established a similar practice of requiring his feudal lords to keep their wives and heirs at Osaka Castle (his headquarters) as hostages for loyal behavior.

Cultural Note

Tokugawa Tsunayoshi was the fifth shogun of the Tokugawa dynasty. He was the younger brother of Tokugawa Ietsuna, thus making him the son of Tokugawa Iemitsu, the grandson of Tokugawa Hidetada, and the great-grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu. He is known for instituting animal protection laws, particularly for dogs. This earned him the nickname of "the dog shogun."

The main entrance into Hama Rikyu is over the Otemonbashi, a bridge which crosses the Tsukijigawa (the famous Tsukiji fish markets are just to your left). One of the first things you'll see upon entry is a 300 year old pine tree (*sanbyakunennomatsu*) planted during the extensive renovations the gardens received by Tokugawa Ienobu in the late 1700s. Although you might think this is just an ordinary tree, it's not. It's the largest black pine tree in Tokyo and believed to be the oldest! Many of its branches are propped up to help support tree's massive weight and to keep its branches from snapping. Even so you can see the various repairs undertaken over the years. It's simply magnificent!

Directly after the pine you'll cross a small bridge leading you over the inner moat into a wide open field. Here is where the Tokugawa's villa resided, surrounded by extensive flower beds. The Peony Garden comprises around 800 plants among which are 60 different types of peonies. Spring is usually the best time to visit, as this is also when the main field is seeded with some 300,000 rapeseed flowers blooming with a great profusion of colors. (Unfortunately neither was true for us.) Further down this path is the is the Inabu Shrine (an *inari* shrine, no doubt the Tokugawa's private shrine), and an *ume* (plum) grove.

Hama Rikyu's key feature though is the *Shiori-no-ike*, a large saltwater pond with islands, graceful bridges, and teahouses. What makes this pond unique, besides the saltwater, is its tidal fluctuations – the water rises and falls slightly, regulated by a sluice gate. As the seawater is refreshed twice daily you'll find many types of fish (and the waterfowl that hunt them) inhabiting the pond, such as: black mullet, striped mullet, crabs, sea bass, eels and gobies. Built in the early stages of the garden's history, this is the only tidal garden pond left in Tokyo, and one of only a handful in Japan that remain in their original state of design.

There were several teahouses adjoining the pond. As you approach you first encounter the site of the *Matsu-no-chaya* (pine tea house), which was constructed during the reign of Tokugawa Ienari, the 11th shogun. A thicket of pines was planted around the tea house, and images of pines, a favorite Tokugawa motif due to their longevity, were painted on the paper *shouji* doors inside the structure. Also named "*Suishou-tei*", this tea house was one of the buildings lost during the heavy air raid on November 29th 1944. If you stand on the site of the tea house and face the center of the pond, the forested mound to the left is called Mt Fujimi, named because from the top of the mound it was possible to see Mt Fuji on clear days – unfortunately this is no longer possible due to air pollution and tall buildings obstructing the view.

In the center of the pond, connected by wooden pedestrian bridges, is the small island called *Nakajima*. The teahouse here is naturally enough called *Nakajima-no-ochaya*. First built in 1707, the shoguns and other members of the Edo and Tokyo elite would come here to relax and contemplate, escaping the noise of the city and enjoying the ocean view (little of which remains). Damaged several times by fire, and totally destroyed in 1724 and 1944, the tea house was restored to its original state in 1983, and you can enjoy tea and macha for 500 yen. Many guests of the shogunate were entertained here, and after it became a detached palace of the imperial family, it was also used to entertain foreign guests, including notable Meiji period visitors such as former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant.

Another key feature of the garden are its two *kamoba*, freshwater (though brackish due to the high water table) ponds designed specifically for hunting ducks with nets. There's Koshindo, which was built in 1778, and *Shinsen-za*, built on the other side of *Shiori-no-ike*, in 1791. In the center of each of these ponds is a small flat island called a tame, densely vegetated, and is ideal for nesting. The water around the island protects the birds from cats, and on all of the other banks there are thickets of evergreen trees, bamboo stands and reeds. The Shogunal family members also used the garden for falconry, so to some extent the thick vegetation was also there to protect the young chicks from the falcons and goshawks.

Duck hunting was surprisingly simple, needing only patience, rice, and decoy ducks. Leading from each of the ponds there are dozens of small narrow duck blinds called *hikibori*. Koshindo has 14 and *Shinsen-za* has a further six. These are water channels about one meter wide and 20-30 meters long, each leading to a dead end. On each side of the narrow *hikibori* there are small earthen banks, designed so that a duck could not see the hunters crouching silently in wait. At the end of the duck blind there is a small shed with a narrow slit for an observer, these are *the ko-nozoki*, and only one example remains.

From the *ko-nozoki*, rice could be fed into the blind while attracting the quarry (this was generally done by beating a wooden board to attract the decoy ducks, who were accustomed to finding rice in the blinds). The decoy ducks were basically domesticated ducks, raised in the ponds, and returned safely to the water after each hunt. When wild ducks would follow them into the *hikibori*, the observer would signal for a small iron door submerged near the entrance to be raised, and when the startled wild birds took flight they were caught in the nets thrown by the waiting hunters. So many ducks were successfully captured (and lovingly roasted and eaten) that to assuage guilt, a duck grave (*kamozuka*) was built in November 1935 to comfort and console the spirits of the ducks. You'll find the *kamozuka* near the second duck hunting pond (*Shinzen-za*), as well as remnants of an area once used to exercise the shogun's horses.

From Fujimi-yama, the farthest southern and eastern point of the gardens, if you walk north along Tokyo Bay, you'll come to an area where you can see across the bay to Odaiba, the Rainbow Bridge, and other harbor facilities (the *Shin hinokuchi yama*). Here you will find the site of another lost teahouse from the 1707 garden of Ienobu, the *Umite-chaya*. Named for its views of the sea, it was built as a rest house for watching the fishing, and for recreational boating; it was lost during the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. Next to the *Shin hinokuchi yama*, there is a small stone staircase edging down to the water. This is the *Shogun Oagariba*, the landing where the shogun would board or disembark river boats. Part of the stairs collapsed into the bay due to wave action during a severe typhoon in 1949, and the gate was lost, but otherwise it remains intact. And the last point of interest, basically bringing us full circle, is the waterbus landing.

* * *

Unfortunately, rain caught up with us as we strolled around the gardens, so we ended our excursions there, rather than press on to Zojo-ji and Tokyo Tower in nearby Minato, or tram over to Odaiba to see the Rainbow Bridge and large Gundam statue, or even walk through the Yurakucho area to see the business men swarm the authentic *izakaya* and *yakitori* restaurants that reside under the elevated Yamanote Line tracks (known in Japanese as *Gado-shita*, from "below the girder", these favored watering holes of Tokyo businessmen occupy virtually all of the free space under nearly 700 meters of track on both sides of Yurakucho Station), we returned here to Homeikan to wait it out.

Consequently, we're not at Daimachi Bekkan this time round. We're at Morikawa Bekkan, their second annex, located about 500 meters north and east from the other two buildings, at 23-5 Hongo 6-chome in Bunkyo-ku. I've actually stayed a night here one time before, back in 2007, on the return from Kyoto, so I know where we are in relation to known landmarks, but it means we won't be walking through the neighborhood we've grown accustomed to, sadly (and like I've done each and every time I've come to Tokyo), but we'll manage. In fact, when we showed up at Daimachi Bekkan last night and the proprietor told us we were in another building I knew then where we'd be, and my heart sank a little, but I was too amused at his indecision on how to tell me directions to be too disheartened. Before he could work himself into a lather I came to his rescue, said Morikawa's name, and pointed in that direction. At first he was surprised, but recovered quickly, and confirmed so we zig-zagged through the neighborhood to end up here. It's nice knowing where to go! It's only 200 meters more to walk to from Hongo-sanchome station, so it's not that bad. And there's three *conbini* nearby to choose from: a Family Mart, a Lawson, and, of course, the Sunkus.

So far it doesn't appear that the rain is going to stop falling, but we remain optimistic we can get back out a bit later and see Akihabara in all its night-time glory. So, if you're in the neighborhood, drop on by for a visit. We're in *Suhiro* (すヒロ).

Until then! (Ja ne!)

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}

「Kanagawa's Harvest Moon」

Saturday | April 11, 2015 (part 1)

Shito-shito (しとしと)...
Shito-shito (しとしと)...

23,442 steps
10.92 miles

The Japanese language, referred to as *nihongo* (日本語), is as amazing as it is bizarre. It's an agglutinative language with simple combinations (called phonotactics), a pure vowel system, phonemic vowel and consonant length, and a lexically significant pitch-accent, but little is known of the language's prehistory, or when it first appeared in Japan. Chinese documents from the 3rd century recorded a few Japanese words, but substantial texts did not appear until the 8th century. During the Heian period (794–1185), Chinese had considerable influence on the vocabulary and phonology of Old Japanese. Although Japanese has no genetic relationship with Chinese, it makes extensive use of Chinese characters, or *kanji* (漢字), in its writing system, and a large portion of its vocabulary is borrowed from Chinese. Along with *kanji*, the Japanese writing system primarily uses two syllabic (or moraic) scripts, *hiragana* (ひらがな or 平仮名?) and *katakana* (カタカナ or 片仮名?). Latin script is used in a limited fashion, such as for imported acronyms, and the numeral system uses mostly Arabic numerals alongside traditional Chinese numerals, but otherwise, Japanese is a self-contained language. Late Middle Japanese (1185–1600) saw changes in features that brought it closer to the modern language though, as well as the first appearance of European loanwords. And the standard dialect moved from the Kansai region (Osaka-Kyoto) to the Edo (modern Tokyo) region in the Early Modern Japanese period, following the ending of Japan's self-imposed isolation.

Due to the nature of the language, they have words and phrases to describe just about anything phonetically. We label such words as onomatopoeia in English, and did you know there's literally thousands of onomatopoeia (オノマトペ) in Japanese? There's so many they are broken up into five distinct categories: *Giseigo* (擬声語) for animal and human sounds, *Giongo* (擬音語) for sounds made by inanimate objects and nature, *Gitaigo* (擬態語) to describe conditions and states, *Giyougo* (擬容語) to describe movements and motions, and *Gijougo* (擬情語) to describe feelings. *Giseigo* and *giongo* are just like onomatopoeia we have in English: "moo", "meow", "roar", "buzz", "bang", "boom", "snap", and so on. They represent real sounds you can hear. The last three describe what's called mimetic words, or idiophones. They describe or represent something that has no sound, such as: the way you feel, the way you walk, and even how your skin feels.

Shito-shito is an example of an onomatopoeic ideophone, one used to describe the pitter-pattering of a steady, but calm rainfall. *Zaa-zaa* (ざーざー) is used to describe a sudden downpour – its harshness makes it easy to see why. There are others, of course: *potsu-potsu* (ぽつぽつ) can be used to describe the drip-drip-drop of the start of a rainstorm, *goro-goro* (ごろごろ) is used to describe the rumbling of thunder, and there's *para-para* (ぱらぱら), which is similar to *potsu-potsu*, but is used more to describe the sound at the end of a rainstorm.
In the same way you'll hear *ban-ban* (バンバン) used to describe the sound of a bang, *wan-wan* (ワンワン) represents a barking dog, *pachi-pachi* (パチパチ), the sound of clapping hands, *nyan-nyan* (ニャンニャン) a meowing cat, *iso-iso* (いそいそ) moving around with liveliness, *utsura-utsura* (うつらうつら) to descry be drifting between sleep and wakefulness, *odo-odo* (おどおど) a sound of uneasiness, *musha-musha* (ムシャムシャ) eating or crunching, *pika-pika* (ぴかぴか) to shine, sparkle, or glitter, and *gaya-gaya* (ガヤガヤ) the sound of a crowd.

Shito-shito (しとしと)... *Shito-shito* (しとしと)...

Since our trek around Tokyo yesterday was interrupted by rain at Hama Riku, Nicole and I decided to return to Homeikan to wait it out, with food in hand. After refueling (*musha-musha*) my body began to shut down I was so exhausted (*odo-odo*); I could hardly keep my eyes open and I was shivering uncontrollably (*buru-buru*). Resting helped but as the evening wore on it was apparent I was in no shape to do anything else (*uto-uto*). Nicole was a bit tired too (*utsura-utsura*). And no wonder… we'd gotten an early start yesterday. Too early actually! So we chose to take a hot bath (*kopo-kopo*, which helped my shivering quite a bit), and returned to the room all snug as a bug in a rug. By then, though, there was no stopping the sleep train (*gutara-gutara*). So we went to bed... with the rain still pitter-pattering way outside (*shito-shito*).
We were awakened some time later and it felt like we had slept for hours, but only an hour and a half went by in reality – it was unbelievable! Has that ever happened to you? And it was still raining (*goro-goro*). When more people blundered in to the Ryokan (*gaya-gaya)* about midnight (and woke us up again) it was raining. And when some drunk folks stumbled in at 2:00am (and woke us up again) it was raining. In fact, it rained (and stormed, *zaa-zaa*!) all night, and well into the morning, when we finally decided to get up (at 6:30am) and make our way down to Kamakura by a little after 8:00am, despite what we said we'd do (which was sleep in, not get up too early.)

* * *

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

Did You Know?

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

Kanagawa Prefecture

Kamakura

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

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

The Gozan was a system of *shogunate* 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 Jissetsu (十刹) tier (of which 10 temples belonged), and lastly the Shozan (諸山) network of which there were literally hundreds. Each of these temples had specific functions and levels of authority. Over time the initial systems were naturally broken and reformed, but suffice it to say five in Kamakura stood above all. There is/was a similar system in use at Kyoto when the *bakufu* was in power there (after Kamakura's *bakufu*, but that's a story for another time.)

Did You Know?

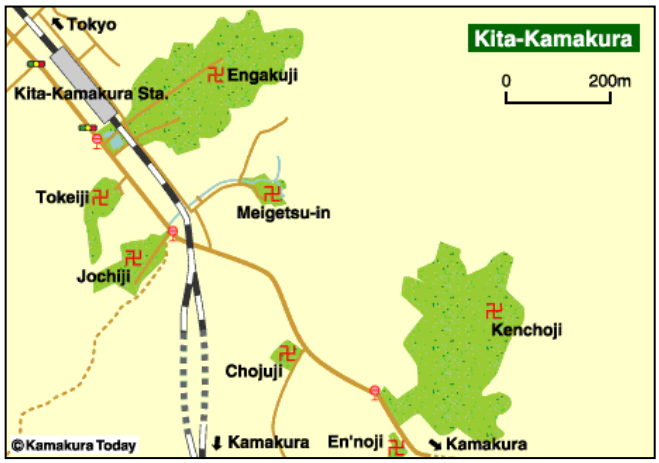
The Jissetsu were generally powerful institutions of great prestige and were tasked to help the Bakufu financially and in other ways. After many changes, in 1386 the system was divided in half between the Kantō Jissetsu (those in Kamakura) and the Kyoto Jissetsu (those in Kyoto).

The Kyoto Jissetsu were then Tōji-in (等持院), Rinsen-ji (臨川寺), Shinnyō-ji (真如寺), Ankoku-ji (安国寺), Hōdō-ji (宝幢寺), Fumon-ji (普門寺), Kōkaku-ji (広覚寺), Myōkō-ji (妙光寺), Daitoku-ji (大徳寺) and Ryūshō-ji (竜翔寺).

The Kanto Jissetsu were Zenkō-ji (禅興寺), Zuisen-ji (瑞泉寺), Tōshō-ji (東勝寺), Manju-ji (万寿寺), Taikei-ji (大慶寺), Zenpuku-ji (善福寺), and Hōsen-ji (法泉寺) in Sagami, plus Kōsei-ji (興聖寺) in Mutsu province, Tōzen-ji (東漸寺) in Musashi Province and Chōraku-ji (長楽寺) in Kozuke.

There's plenty history in Kamakaura. And while we can't claim to be able to see everything here we will see some highlights, including: *Meigetsu-in* and *Kencho-ji* in the Kita-Kamakura area, plus *Hachimangu*, *Hase-dera*, and the *Daibutsu* in greater Kamakura. And first on that list was *Meigetsu-in*, about 700m from Kita-Kamakura station.

Meigetsu-in (明月院)



The story of *Meigetsu-in* begins as *Meigetsu-an*, a small retreat founded by Yamanouchi Tsunetoshi as the "Bright Moon Hermitage" in the year 1160 in order to console the departed soul of his father, Toshimichi, who died in the Battle of Heiji (1159) – a power struggle fought between the Minamoto and Taira clans (don't worry, I'll explain later). After almost a hundred years of solitude and respite, the site was taken over by Hojo Tokiyori (北条時頼; 1227-1263), the fifth regent of the Kamakura Bafuku, who transformed it into a Buddhist temple he called Saimyo-ji (最明寺). (He built a small prayer hall here, but it was demolished after his death.)

By 1269, the lands formerly occupied by *Saimyo-ji* would become part of "Fukugenzan Zenkokoshozenji" or Zenkoji (禅興寺) for short, a much larger temple complex built by Hojo Tokimune (北条時宗), Tokiyori's son and Kamakura's eighth regent. And for more than a century after the lands remained on the fringes of this new complex, in 1380 Shogun Ashikaga Ujimitsu ordered his assistant Uesugi Norikata to promote the Zenkoji complex by constructing new buildings, expanding the grounds, and establishing subsidiary temples. What was *Saimyo-ji* and *Meigetsu-an* would be reborn as Meigetsu-in, becoming a full-fledged subsidiary of Zenko-ji in the process. (Meigetsu-in was named after Norikata's posthumous name and became the family temple of the Uesugi's in Kamakura. *Meigetsu* means "full moon".)

Over time Zenko-ji would become a temple of considerable prestige, being one of the Rinzai Zen temples classified as one of ten major Zen temples in the Kanto region (*Kanto Jissetsu*; 関東十刹), which were second in importance only to Kamakura's so-called Five Mountains (*Kamakura Gozan*; 鎌倉五山). The complex continued to thrive well into the late 16th century, getting patronage from the country's most powerful people.

It did not necessarily flourish thereafter however, and Zenko-ji would not survive the anti-Buddhist clampdown (*Haibutsu kishaku*) that followed the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This left only minor *Meigetsu-in* to remain as an individual temple. Today it belongs to the Kencho-ji branch of Rinzai Zen. (A temple we'll be visiting next.)

One of the first impressions you might have upon entering Meigetsu-in is how unassuming and unpretentious the grounds are. The entrance gate isn't all that prominent. Signage pointing out its location is virtually nonexistent. (You could easily miss the little sign in Hiragana hovering by its entrance.) And the walk to it isn't all that spectacular either. (The stream that mirrors the walk isn't all that much to look at – it's country-residential.) And yet this is exactly how I expected to find Meigetsu-in: nestled into a hillside off a fork from the main road with little to offer.

But I couldn't have been more wrong.

Beyond the *somon* and the approach upwards to the *sanmon* (notice the name *Fukugensan* (福源山) on the beam – that's part of its full name: *Fukugensan Meigetsuan*), you'll find a priest's living quarters and the Butsuden – called the **Shiyoden** (紫陽殿); this is the main hall. As its appearance indicates, the hall is relatively new (it was rebuilt in 1973) but it's the main object of worship inside that's the most important here. It's a sedentary statue of Sho Kannon, or Avalokiteśvara in Sanskrit. The inscriptions affixed to the 54-centimeter tall wooden statue tell us that it was chiseled in 1309 and enshrined at a Zen temple named Jion-ji, which unfortunately no longer exists. The statue was brought here in 1520 and has been the object of worship here ever since. But it's got an even more interesting history: Until 1992, the statue was thought to be *Nyorin Kannon* and identified as such. A study that year concluded (after much argument among various experts) that, from an academic perspective, it wasn't Nyorin – it was Sho. The temple recognized the change and today it's worshiped as Sho Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion.

In the arena of Buddhist piety, no other Buddha is worshipped by as many people as is Kanzenon Bodhisattva. As indicated by his name he/she is the *Bodhisattva Who Perceives the Sounds of the World*, who made a vow to hear the voices of the people and the sounds of the world, to immediately grant salvation to the suffering and the afflicted, and dispel the evil and calamities that surround us. As a result Avalokiteśvara can change into many different forms. There are thirty-three of these forms (which lends to the origins of the thirty-three pilgrimage stages worshipers go through), but the most fundamental forms are the following seven:

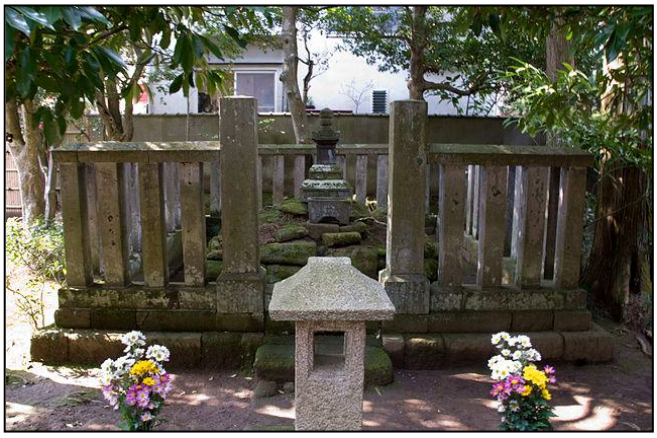
1) Aryâvalokitesvara (Shô Kannon) – the Sacred Avalokiteśvara; 2) Ekadasamuhka (Jûichimen Kannon) – the Eleven Faced Avalokiteśvara; 3) Sahasrabhuja (Senju Kannon) – the Thousand Armed Avalokiteśvara; 4) Cintâmanicakra (Nyoirin Kannon) – the Wish Fulfilling Avalokiteśvara; 5) Hayagrîva (Batô Kannon) – the Horse Headed Avalokiteśvara; 6) Cundi (Juntei Kannon) – the Mother Goddess Avalokiteśvara; and 7) Amoghapasa (Fukûkenjaku) – the Avalokiteśvara with rope and net. The statue was misidentified is all; still the same savior! The building also features a nice circular window, which frames the scenery of the inner garden behind it, the view I came here to see. And it's fantastic! In front lays the beautiful *karesansui*, a garden of raked sand, rocks, and plants that represent Shumi, the legendary Buddhist Mountain.

To the left of the Butsuden is the **Soyudo** (宗猷堂), a thatched roof building built at the height of Zenkoji's prosperity and later designated as *Kaisan-do*, a Founder's Hall. Enshrined here is a wooded sculpture of Zen Master, Misshitsu Shugon (deceased in 1390), founding priest of Meigetsu-in and fifth generation dharma descendant of Kenchoji Monastery founder Rankei Doryu (Daigaku). To the left of the sculpture are the mortuary tablets of the past resident priests of Saimyoji, Zenkoji and Meigetsu-in. The well to the right of Soyudo Hall is called **Kame no I** (瓶ノ井) – also known as *Tsurube-no-I*, one of the Ten Wells of Kamakura (鎌倉十の井).

Did You Know?

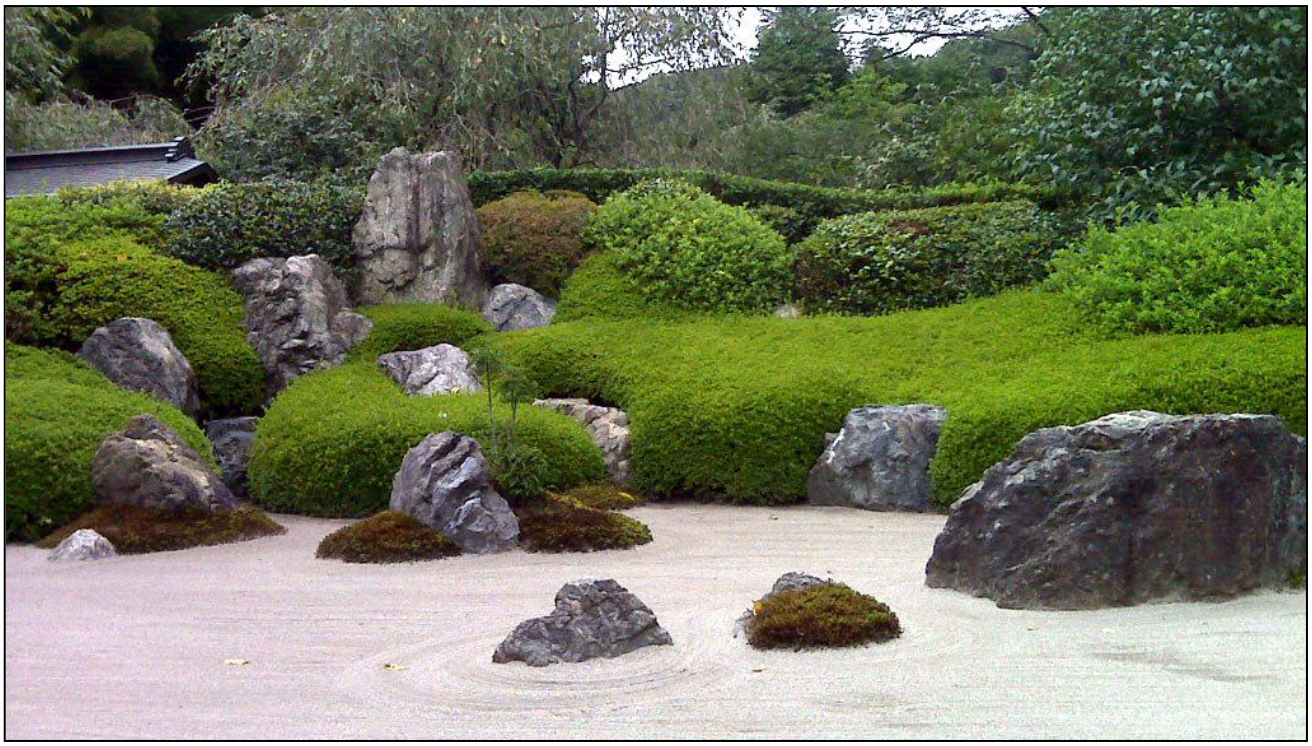
The Ten Wells (鎌倉十の井) – *Sokonuke-no-I*, *Izumi-no-I*, *Kurogane-no-I*, *Kanro-no-I*, *Munetate-no-I*, *Hoshizuki-no-i* (also known as *Hoshi-no-i*), *Chōshi-no-I*, *Rokkaku-no-I*, *Ohgi-no-I*, and, of course, Kami-no-I (*Tsurube-no-i*) – were celebrated for having the best, sweetest, and most purist water available to drink.

Nearby is the **Meigetsu-in Yagura**, a rather large cave. (The term *yagura* refers to the cave tombs built commonly in medieval Kamakura.) Seven meters in width, three in height and six in depth, the Meigetsu-in Yagura is one of the largest remaining in the city. Legend has it that it was built by Yamanouchi Tunetoshi – the site's original founder – as a tomb for his father. Uesugi Norikata erected his own gravestone here some 220 years later, but time has erased the inscriptions in the *yagura* and so the exact circumstances of construction remain a mystery. Figures of Shaka Nyorai (Shakyamuni), Taho Nyorai (多宝如来), and the Sixteen Rakan (十六羅漢), or *Arhats* (those who have attained nirvana), are carved in relief on the walls, and at the center is a *hogyointo*-type (宝篋印塔) gravestone tower belonging to Uesugi Norikata, restorer of Meigetsu-in. In front of the gravestone is an incense burner of the Zen Buddhist style. Noritaka was a great-grandson of Uesugi Shigefusa (上杉重房) and an ancestor of the Yamanouchi-Uesugi clan. Defeated in Battle of Hojosoun, his descendant Norimasa gave the family name to Nagao Kagetora of present-day Niigata Prefecture. Kagetora thus became Uesugi Kenshin (上杉 謙信), the famous military leader of medieval Japan.



You'll also find the grave of the aforementioned Hojo Tokiyori, and lots of rabbits. Yes, rabbits. Due to the temple's name's connection to the moon (*Meigetsu* literally means "bright moon" or "full moon"; and phonetically can also mean "harvest moon"), and the fact that rabbits are associated with the moon through Japanese folklore (which depicts a rabbit pounding a rice cake on the moon), you'll find a number of rabbit motifs abound – and a few real ones too! Don't worry about stepping on one, as they're not running loose, but do take a moment to go see them. Additionally, while Meigetsu-in might be the temple's official name, it is also known as *Ajisaidera* – Hydrangea Temple – because hydrangea bloom in abundance on the temple grounds during the rainy season around June. 95% of the hydrangea here are of the Hime Ajisai ("Princess Hydrangea") variety; they are thus named because of their pretty blue colors. Although it is raining (*potsu-potsu*) today, we've come at the wrong time of year - April versus June; and thankfully so. Had we come in June we'd be a pair amongst throngs of people visiting to see the blooms. And we'd miss out on this temple's charms: there's a peace here you won't find elsewhere in Kamakura: solitude.

Despite the weather Meigetsu-in was an interesting temple to explore in the rain; it gave the place a certain atmosphere that only seemed to enrich the grounds, something that wouldn't be there otherwise. The grounds themselves were okay, but Meigetsu-in is known for its circular window and the view held there, which is award-winning to be sure!



Kencho-ji (建長寺)

A few hundred meters walk from Meigetsu-in is Kencho-ji, a temple with the distinct honor of being the first Zen temple erected in Kamakura and the pioneer of Zen Buddhism in Japan, making it the oldest Zen training monastery in the entire country! As such it ranks first among the Kamakura Gozan and is the head of the 500-odd branch of temples belonging to the Kenchoji School of the Rinzai sect.

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

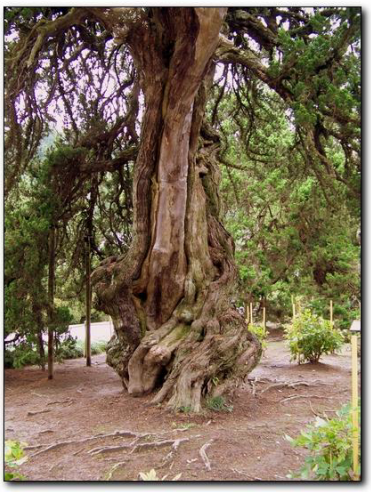
Most temples included a selection from both doctrines and a few additions of their own. Another common element of a g*aran* is the *kairo (*回廊), a long roofed portico-like passage that surrounds both the *kondo* and pagoda. Although it doesn't appear that Kencho-ji had a *kairo*, it did have another forty-nine (49) sub-temples and other structures, enough to house over 1000 people! Of course, as was the case in other temples, one calamity or another destroyed all of the original buildings: fire, earthquake or war. Most of the structures present today were either rebuilt recently or brought from outside Kamakura with aid from the Shogunate during the Tokugawa era. Most, if not all, of the surviving structures are considered important historical or cultural properties – including some of the trees. These are…

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

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

Did You Know?

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



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

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

The **Sanmon**, built in 1754 with donations from all over the Kanto region, has a tablet hanging above its entrance containing the name of the temple – Kencho Kokoku Zenji – written by Emperor Go-Fukakusa (1243-1304) himself, indicating this temple was also once patronized by the Imperial Court (just like Engaku-ji). On the second floor, rarely open to the public, are a number of treasures and relics, including: statues of Five-Hundred Buddha's Disciples (known as *rakan* in Japanese), who have attained the highest level of Buddhist enlightenment possible. To be precise, there are 489 of these *rakan* statuettes ranging from 15 to 30 centimeters tall, and showing a host of different emotion, such as joy, anger, and pity, with a 44.5-centimeter tall bronze statue of Shaka Nyorai at the center. Interestingly, though, the gate is fondly referred to as Tanuki-mon. Legend has it that a raccoon-dog (a *tanuki*) helped with the cause associated with building the temple's gate by transforming himself into one of the monks. This he did to repay the kindness he had been shown by the temple's priests and with his help, enough funds and materials were collected to build the mighty gate. Therefore, in honor of the tanuki's sacrifice and dedication, the priests bestowed this peculiar honor: dedicating the gate to the raccoon-turned-monk. And to this day the two-story, thirty-meter tall Sanmon is affectionately referred to as Tanuki-mon (狸門).

And, of course, the Hojo...

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

Tsurugaoka Hachimangu (鶴岡八幡宮)

After another walk of a kilometer or so down busy route 21, through a tunnel built for cars (but one of Kamakura's original seven entrances), and down a hill, put us at the back-door to Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, Kamakura's most important (and highly visible) Shinto shrine.

This shrine was originally dedicated by Minamoto Yoriyoshi (源 頼義, 988-1075) in 1063 to Hachiman kami, the Shinto god of war, as a thank you for his family's success in the Zenkunen War. The Zenkunen War (前九年の役), also known as the Former Nine Years' War or the Early Nine Years' War, was fought from 1051 to 1063 in Japan's Mutsu Province, at the far north of the main island of Honshu. Like the other major conflicts of the Heian period, the Zenkunen war was a struggle for power within the samurai clans. While most provinces were overseen by just a Governor, Mutsu, in what is now the Tohoku region, had a military general in charge of controlling the Emishi natives, who had been subjugated when the Japanese took over the area in the ninth century. Historically, this post was always held by a member of the Abe clan, and there were many conflicts between the Abe general and the Governor over administrative control of the province.

Throughout 1050, Abe Yoritoki, the general overseeing the area, levied taxes and confiscated property on his own whims, rarely paying any heed to the wishes of the provinces governor. As a result Minamoto Yoriyoshi was appointed both Governor and commander-in-chief of the area. He was sent with his son Yoshiie, then age fifteen, to stop Abe. The fighting lasted for twelve years, or nine if one subtracts short periods of ceasefire and peace. Skirmishes were fierce and many, but few major battles were fought until the Battle of Kawasaki in 1057. Abe Yoritoki had been killed shortly before and the Minamoto were now fighting his son, Abe Sadato, who defeated them at Kawasaki and pursued them through a blizzard. The government forces, led by the Minamoto, had much trouble for quite some time, due to the harsh terrain and weather, but were eventually reinforced with new troops. By 1062, Minamoto Yoriyoshi, along with his son, led an assault on an Abe fortress at Kuriyagawa. They diverted the water supply, stormed the earthworks and stockade, and set the fortress aflame. After two days of fighting, Sadato surrendered. Although a relatively minor siege, it paved the way for the ending of the war, and the dedication of Hachimangu here in Kamakura.

Did You Know?

Minamoto no Yoshiie considered the founder of the Minamoto clan's great martial legacy, and is worshiped as a particularly special and powerful ancestor kami of the clan. As a kami and a legend, he is often called Hachimantaro, "Child of Hachiman, the god of war."

The current shrine owes its origins to one of Yoriyoshi's descendants, Minamoto Yoritomo (源 頼朝, 1147-1199), who came to Kamakura in 1180 to raise the flag of revolt against the Taira clan, which had come to dominate Japanese politics in Kyoto, especially after 1160 (we'll learn more about this in a moment). The reason Yoritomo chose Kamakura as his base was because it was here that his great ancestor had successfully put down the 1063 rebellion. He moved the shrine to the present site and built a more magnificent complex. This new shrine was called Tsurugaoka Wakamiya (鶴岡若宮), which means the new shrine at Tsurugaoka.

The worship of Hachiman is interesting. Since ancient times, Hachiman (八幡神) was worshiped by the masses as the god of agriculture, and by fishermen who hoped he would fill their nets with much fish. After the arrival of Buddhism in Japan, Hachiman became the syncretistic deity of archery and war, fusing elements of the native kami worship with Buddhism. In the Buddhist pantheon of the 8th century he became Hachiman Great Bodhisattva (八幡大菩薩; Hachiman Daibosatsu). Although often called the god of war, he is more correctly defined as the tutelary god of warriors. He is also the divine protector of Japan; the Japanese people, the Imperial House, and most samurai worshipped him. The name means "God of Eight Banners", referring to the eight heavenly banners that signaled the birth of the divine Emperor Ojin. In fact, the Hachiman faith owes much to Yorinobu (Yoritomo's ancestor) who publicly announced that Hachiman is the guardian kami of the Minamoto clan. His reasoning? "The Genji (Minamoto) clan are descendants of Emperor Seiwa. Emperor Seiwa is a descendant of Emperor Ojin. Emperor Ojin is the main kami enshrined in Hachimangu. Therefore, Hachiman shrine is the guardian shrine of the Genji clan." Because of this proclamation Hachiman is very, very popular. Out of the 80,000 or so Shinto shrines throughout Japan, 20,000 or so are dedicated to him.

During its golden years, Tsurugaoka Hachimangu was a shining example of the wonderful blending of Shinto and Buddhist doctrine, known for a time then as the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine-Temple. And at its height, the shrine-temple had as many as 33 structures for both Shintoists and Buddhists, but an order during the Meiji era required separation of religions and many of the shrine-temple's Buddhist buildings and cultural relics were destroyed, burned, or out-right just discarded. Much of what can be seen today is a mere shell of what was, and isn't terribly notable. The grounds that survive, however, are the major attraction today. Let's take a look, shall we?

The Upper Shrine

From the rear of the shine, the first building one comes to is the **The Hongu** (本宮), or Main Shrine {12}, which enshrines Emperor Ojin and Empress Jingu (Ojin's mother). Within you'll find three halls – the Main Sanctuary (本殿, *Honden*), the Offering Chamber (幣殿, *Heiden*), and the Worship Hall (拝殿, *Haiden*) – all interconnected. Built in an architectural style called Gongen Zukuri – the two-tiered gabled roofs convey an enormous sense of majesty and power. The vermillion color dominates the landscape, offering quite a beautiful contrast with the verdure of the surrounding trees. The inner sanctum does not contain any statues like those of temples; rather it is adorned with symbolical objects of worship important to the family. In this case a mirror made of polished metal and a sword (both regalia's of the imperial family). A tablet and zig-zag cuts of white paper called Gohei are also placed upon the altar. On the left-hand side of the Main Hall, there is an entrance to the shrine's treasure house, where most of the remaining objects of value are exhibited in a controlled environment. Included among these treasures are: seven portable shrines made in the 17th century, ancient swords, two of Yoritomo's sedentary statues, a folding screen on which various stages of war between the Minamoto and Taira clans are painted (we'll get to that later on), a twelve-layered robe for court ladies, a suit of armor, ancient calligraphy and various wooden masks.

You may also notice that the main shrine itself is higher than the worship hall, and that the decorations are more elaborate here, to reflect the greater religious importance of the main sanctuary. For example, the worship hall eaves are decorated to represent metal fittings, whereas the eaves of the main sanctuary have gilded metal fittings. Both the inside and the outside of the main shrine buildings are covered in decorative carvings, such as: eagles (the strength and braveness of the eagle was believed to have the power to expel evil spirits), tigers (with and without bamboo), rabbits (since rabbits have short front legs and long back legs, they were believed to be better at going uphill than down, and were used as a reference to things going well) and bellflowers (the bellflower was considered lucky since the two Chinese characters for bellflower can also be read to mean "even luckier"). But perhaps the most interesting ones of note are a carving of a monkey-eating eagle (a non-native species), a bird-of-prey trio: a white falcon, a white eagle and a white hawk (it was considered good luck to find three different types of white bird together), and a Chinese lion surrounded by peonies (the combination of the king of beasts and the king of flowers is considered auspicious).

Around the main hall are three smaller shrines: the **Maruyama Inari Shrine** (丸山稲荷社) {14} – in dedicated to the kami associated with success in business, and a good harvest; the **Imamiya Shrine** (今宮) {17}, which enshrines Emperors Gotoba, Tsuchimikado, and Juntoku, who were all banished from the capital after the Jokyu Disturbance in 1221 in which they and the retired Emperor Go-Toba tried to overthrow the Kamakura Shogunate; and the **Takeuchisha Shrine** (武内社) {13}, in dedication to Takeuchi Sukune, a legendary figure in Japanese history who is said to have lived for as many as 360 years, and thus is famous for his longevity as well as his loyalty. People come and pray for good health and longevity. The shrine's building is designated as a nationally important cultural property and comes highly decorated. You'll find pine trees painted on three sides of the shrine. The pine tree is green all year round and is therefore considered a symbol of long life.

Upon further investigations you may notice that there are always an odd number of pine branches depicted. That's because odd numbers are considered to be propitious in the East. On either of the sides of the shrine you'll find large sculptures of sages – more symbols of longevity. The left features a sage under a banana tree with a crane (the symbol for 1,000 years of longevity) and the right features a sage on a turtle (the symbol for 10,000 years). There is a carving of a peony on the right-hand side of the shrine (and therefore not visible), a crane with pine branches at the front of the shrine, a squirrel with *biwa* fruit above the doors to the shrine building, and a squirrel with grapes to the left of the shrine, both of which symbolize a good harvest. The squirrel and grape combination is believed to have been transmitted down along the Silk Road from the West. Under the eaves, on either side of the front of the shrine are large carvings of leaves. These are the leaves of the paulownia tree, in which Fenghuang (the Chinese Phoenix) are said to reside.

The **Romon** (楼門) {11}, or great gate, acts as a border between the lower and upper shrine areas, but don't be too much in a hurry to pass through. You'll miss the treasures of the gate itself, such as two large flanking statues, gifts from Tokugawa Hidetata (the second Tokugawa Shogun) in 1624. They represent *toyoiwamado* and *kushiiwamado*, protectors from evil spirits. Around the gate are a number of carvings as well. Above the main entrance rests a dragon amongst the clouds, flanked by two tigers amidst bamboo. The dragon symbolizes the main entrance into the shrine, and the tigers are there to prevent evil from entering the gate. Furthermore, the tigers are a reference to this world, whereas the dragon represents the heavens (which is why he's "amongst the clouds"). On either side of the gate you'll find a pair of cows and a pair of horses. Cows symbolize the kami of transportation and agriculture whilst horses are associated with the Buddha that deals with all destructive and disturbing emotions (called *kleshas*). Inside the gate are three fierce-looking guardians, there to expel devils. The back of the Main Gate building faces North-East which was considered to be the direction from which devils come. And since we're not devils – or evil spirits – we can pass through the gate without fear, and take in the view from here.

Did You Know?

Above, under the gate's eaves, is a rather large black lacquered plaque bearing the shrine's name, written in 1629 by Prince Ryoujo, who was famous for his calligraphy. Note the first character – for the number eight (hachi) – is written in the form of two doves. This was done quite on purpose as doves are the messengers of the Hachiman kami.

* * *

The main hall and treasury (neither original buildings) rest upon the highest point of the shrine, which offers visitors one hell of a panoramic view of the rest of the shrine, the beach, and the special elevated walkway that brought visitors to the shrine (and still does from Kamakura station), forming the backbone of the city as intended by Yoritomo. It's an amazing sight! Now, with the last little bit of our bento dinner tucked away it's time for our nightly bath, so I'll continue with the lower shrine upon our return!

...つづく

「Home of the Great Buddha」

Saturday | April 11, 2015 (part 2)

I can't tell you how relaxing a hot spring bath is. No, wait, I can. And I have. Nevermind!

To reach the lower shrine area, pass through the great gate and continue down the steps – all sixty-one now – and come upon a true treasure, or rather the remnants of one – an original piece of the shrine. When I visited Kamakura last, a 30-meter tall **Ginko** (大銀杏) {10} stood tall and proud right here at the bottom of the staircase, where it stood the test of time for a thousand years or more. Alas it stands no more. The mighty tree was uprooted by a fierce storm in the wee hours of March 10, 2010, and greatly damaged. According to an expert who analyzed the tree, the fall was due to rot. Both the tree's stump and a section of its trunk replanted nearby have produced leaves, however, so there is hope the legacy will live on. The great Ginko did stand in a spot that was shrouded in a fantastic legend, a tale really of a savage murder born out of jealousy… or was it a conspiracy?

<u>The Lower Shrine</u>

Here, amongst the gingko's roots on a snowy winter's eve in 1219, is the exact spot where Minamoto Kugyo hid before running a sword through and beheading his uncle, Minamoto Sanetomo, the third shogun, on his way to the main hall to attend a ceremony in his honor. Though reasons for the assassination are not inherently clear, legend suggests Kugyo was jealous of his uncle's position and power. Sanetomo, having paid quite a bit of attention to the Imperial Court in Kyoto, was often promoted quickly through the ranks. And jealous of the titles and ranks awarded to Sanetomo (the ceremony Sanetomo was about to attend was in celebration of receiving one of the highest official titles conferred by the Imperial Court), not to mention feeling a bit slighted by being passed over as Shogun, pushed the kid over the edge. For the act of brutally murdering the third Shogun of Kamakura, Kyugo was immediately put to death, thus bringing the *Seiwa genji* line of the Minamoto clan and their rule in Kamakura to a sudden end. And it's for that reason some suggest the murder was a conspiracy by the Hojo clan in order to gain complete power of the office. Their family did assume rule shortly thereafter so it's not a stretch of the imagination. In either case, for its role in the murder, the tree gained the nickname *kakure-icho* (隠れ銀杏; "*hiding ginkgo*").

Did You Know?

Also the base of the great staircase is two of the shrine's ***koma-inu*** (狛犬) {9}, more commonly known as dragon-dogs. The one on the right has its mouth open and is uttering the sound 'A'. The one on the left is uttering the sound "Un", and thus has its mouth closed. "A" is the first sound in the Sanskrit Alphabet, and "Un" is the last sound. Thus, the two dogs signify the beginning and the end, expressing a deep religious meaning.

There's a small shrine here dedicated to Sanetomo's spirit, which you'll find tucked away behind the staircase and across a small bridge – the **Shirahata-jinja** (白旗神社) {16}. Two rituals are held for this shrine, both in praise of Minamoto Sanetomo. The original shrine is said to have been founded in May, 1200; the two kami were moved to the current site in 1888. The rather large building on the way over is **Wakamiya Shrine** (若宮) {15} – the original one from the beach-front (although it was rebuilt after a fire so it's not the original building, but you get the idea).

Although somewhat difficult to see, there are carvings of Chinese lions all around the building. These depictions became common at the end of the Muromachi period (1336-1573), and are often coupled with the peony (as with the Hongu, the combination of the king of beasts and the king of flowers is considered auspicious, and rightfully so, as Emperor Ojin's children and spouse are enshrined here.) The lions are often colored blue since the Monju Bosatsu, bodhisattva of wisdom, is normally found seated on a blue lion.

Directly ahead, after descending the staircase, is the **Maiden** (舞殿) {7}, or lower worship hall. Many rituals are performed here throughout the year, and it is also here that dedicatory dances and music are performed. This building is again lacquered in red and black, but instead of metalwork under the eaves, the ends of the wooden supports are painted to represent metalwork. Above the entrance you will find carvings of a waterfowl amongst irises. The whole building is also painted all over with flowers and leaves to symbolize the presence of water to succor the plants, and by inference, the protection of the building from fire. Which didn't help its predecessor any. The original was lost in a fire of 1191, but was significantly (and culturally) more important than this replacement. It's in that building where the famous dancer, Shizuka, performed her dedicatory dances in 1186.

If you don't know who she is do not worry because neither did I. Her story is a very poignant one, and one the shrine tells on-site: The Lady Shizuka was a famous 12th century court dancer, who features extensively in a number of plays – the Tale of Heike and the Chronicle of Yoshitsune, for example – making it difficult to separate fact from fiction with regards to her real life. But what they do know is that the Lady Shizuka was the mistress of Yoshitsune, brother of the first Kamakura shogun Yoritomo.

After Yoshitsune disagreed with his brother after the end of the Genpei War and the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate (as I said before, I'll get to that in a minute), Yoshitsune fled Kyoto in 1185, leaving Shizuka at Yoshino (near Nara). She was captured by Hojo Tokimasa and forces loyal to Yoritomo and was forced to dance for the shogun here at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu. She did so, performing dances which she accompanied with songs telling of her longing for Yoshitsune, which – naturally – angered the Shogun. About to be put to death, Shizuka was rescued by none other than Yoritomo's wife, stating that if the situation were reversed, she would have sung of her longing for her husband too. Incidentally, Yoshitsune later betrayed Yoritomo and joined forces with retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa, was defeated in battle, and forced to commit suicide with his wife and daughter, in 1189.

The stone tiles leading down and away from the tree take you past the shrine's sake barrels – **Sakadaru** (酒樽) {8} – and relatively large wash-basin – **Temizuya** (手水舎) {6} – down a tree-lined corridor and between two man-made ponds to the three bridges – the **Taiko-bashi** (太鼓橋) {2}, so called because the bridge resembles a taiko drum; only the Shogun could originally tread here – and the entrance to the shrine. (Do be careful here though, the pigeons are fierce!) The bridges span a canal that links the two ponds popularly called **Genpei-ike** (源平池) {3} together. The term "*Genpei*" is deeply rooted in Japanese history as the portmanteau of two powerful family lines that clashed in a battle of supremacy. It comes from the alternate readings of the kanji *Minamoto* (源) and *Taira* (平) as "Gen" and "Pei" respectively and led itself to the war's nomenclature. Thus the battle is known as the Genpei war (源平合戦) and it's one of the quintessential conflicts of Heian-period Japan.

The Genpei War

The Genpei War was the culmination of a decades-long conflict between two of Japan's most powerful families of the age – the Minamoto (源) and Taira (平) – over dominance of the Imperial court, and by extension, control of Japan itself. The initial players in this power struggle were none other than Emperor Toba and two members of the ruling (and thus powerful) Fujiwara clan: Fujiwara Tadamichi and his younger brother Fujiwara Yorinaga. The first strike in this long, protracted conflict began after Emperor Toba forced his son, Sutoku, to abdicate the throne in favor of a younger son from another consort, Konoe. Konoe later died and while Sutoku harbored the expectation that *his* son would then ascend the throne, his hopes became dashed by the elevation of yet another of his brothers, he who would become known as Go-Shirakawa. This created animosity within the Fujiwara regents, splitting them – Tadamichi sided with Go-Shirakawa while Yorinaga sided with Sutoku. Each rival side in turn beckoned the Minamoto and Taira clans of samurai for help.

It's the beginning of the hostilities between the Minamoto and Taira clans as loyalties with each house were split between the two warring parties: Minamoto Tameyoshi, head of the Minamoto clan, and Taira Tadamasa sided with Sutoku and Yorinaga, while Minamoto Yoshitomo, first son of Minamoto Tameyoshi, and Taira Kiyomori, head of the Taira clan and nephew of Taira Tadamasa, sided with Go-Shirakawa and Tadamichi. The resulting conflict is known as the Hogen Disturbance of 1156. 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.

And that got started the moment Go-Shirakawa abdicated his throne in 1158 to allow his eldest son, Nijo, to ascend. As soon as 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 to the ground in the process. Though strong at first, the Minamoto were completely unprepared militarily for Kiyomori's return. Thus the Minamoto were crushed; Minamoto Yoshitoro (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, replacing the Fujiwara clan in the role of most powerful regent. 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.

By 1177, though, 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 (cloistered rule) system provoking strong anti-Taira sentiment throughout the land.

Thus, in 1180, Prince Mochihito, another son of cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa (humiliated by the Taira because of the Taira-backed accession of the throne of his nephew), Emperor Antoku (who was half Taira himself) along with Minamoto Yorimasa sent out a call to arms to the various samurai families and Buddhist monasteries to rebel against the Taira. Kiyomori called for the arrest of Mochihito, who then sought protection near Lake Biwa in the city of Otsu.

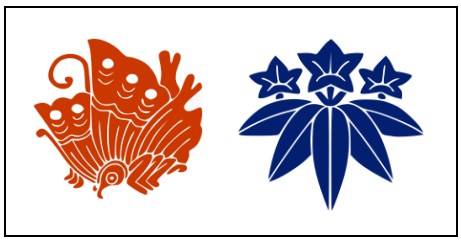
The Mii-dera monks were unable to ensure him sufficient protection, so he was forced to move along. Taira forces then chased him to Byodo-in, just outside Kyoto in Uji, where with a dramatic encounter on and around the bridge of the River Uji that the Genpei War officially began. The battle ended in Yorimasa's ritual suicide (seppuku) 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 Danno-ura. It became one of the most famous and important battles in Japanese history up to that time. Here the Minamoto engaged the Taira fleet in the Straits of Shimonoseki, a tiny body of water separating the islands of Honshu and Kyushu. The tides played a powerful role in the development of the battle, granting the advantage first to the Taira, who were more experienced and abler sailors, and later to the Minamoto.

The Minamoto advantage was considerably enhanced by the defection of Taguchi Shigeyoshi, a Taira general who revealed the location of Emperor Antoku (who had fled Kyoto) and the regalia. The Minamoto redirected their attention on the Emperor's ship, and the battle quickly swung in their favor. Many of the Taira samurai, along with Emperor Antoku and his grandmother Tokiko, widow of Taira Kiyomori, threw themselves into the waves rather than live to see their clan's ultimate defeat at the hands of the Minamoto. Following the battle of *Dan-no-ura*, the Taira clan was completely destroyed and the Minamoto victory was followed by the establishment of the Kamakura Shogunate. Though Minamoto Yoritomo was not the first ever to hold the title of shogun, he was the first to wield it in a role of nationwide scope. The end of the Genpei War and beginning of the Kamakura shogunate marked the rise of military (samurai) power and the suppression of the power of the emperor, who was compelled to preside without effective political or military power, until the Meiji Restoration over 650 years later.

Much of what makes up "*The Tale of Genji*", one of Japan's most celebrated classical novels, and "*The Tale of the Heike*" document the rise and fall of both the Minamoto clan (the Genji) and the Taira clan (the Heike) respectively. They are fantastic reads if you get the opportunity. Consequently, the term "Genpei" is a portmanteau of the alternate readings of the kanji Minamoto (源) and Taira (平) as "Gen" and "Pei" respectively, which gave the war – one of the quintessential conflicts of Heian period Japan – its name. As for the ponds – hatred runs deep: the larger right-hand pond is reserved for the Minamoto whilst the smaller left-hand pond is for the Taira. To further along this relationship, the right-hand pond has pure white lotus flowers whereas the left-hand pond has blood-red lotus flowers (obviously blood-red is a bad omen). Also, the Minamoto pond is dotted with three islets, and Taira pond with four. "Three" is pronounced "san" in Japanese, which can also mean "birth" or "creation", whilst "four" called "shi", an homonym for "death."

The Minamoto pond is also highly ornamented. You'll find a **Peony Garden** {5}, completed in 1980 to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, lines it's outer edges, and a shrine in honor of the syncretistic deity Benzaiten, the **Hata-age Shrine** (旗上弁財天社) {4}, residing in its middle. You'll also find a plethora of large white flags with two black lines across the top here and there, completing the decorative ensemble. This was the flag that Yoritomo's army took into battle in 1180, so worshipers use the motif as a means to connect their wishes to his accomplishments. Consequently, if you get a chance to walk around the garden, watch out (on your left hand-side if you enter from the archery course) for a special type of bamboo here. The stems are similar to the shells of turtles and since the turtle is a symbol of longevity in Asia, this bamboo is prized for the reference. And next to the bamboo is a special display featuring a number of large, strangely-shaped standing stones. These stones were a present from the Chinese government in 1984, and came from the Taihu Lake in Jiangsu Province in Eastern China.

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



Tsurugaoka Hachimangu has one other treasure to give up that I've not yet talked about – it's distinct approach. Starting at the three petite bridges and continuing 1.8 kilometers (1.1 miles) until it reaches the beaches of Sagami Bay, is the temple's magnificent approach easily identified by the placement of three relatively large torii. The first (or actually third) is right here at the entrance to the shrine, the second is just north of Kamakura-eki and marks the beginning of the **Dankazura** (段葛) {1}, a central elevated walking path; the third just a few hundred meters from the water's edge marks the original start of the path. Each gate measures approximately six meters high and comes accompanied by a pair of stone-carved *koma-inu* standing guard at each. Legend suggests the more current version of the Dankazura – the roughly 50 centimeter high, 3 meter wide and 460-meter-long avenue, modeled after the Miyako Oji, the main boulevard in Kyoto – was constructed on the order of Yoritomo after his wife became pregnant. At the time he had two daughters but no heir apparent and under the Kamakura Shogunate system only the eldest male child was qualified to succeed to the Shogun's position. The couple prayed to their Hachiman deity for a baby boy, dedicating the path to the shrine in 1182.

Their prayers were answered! The newborn was indeed male, named Yoriie, who later assumed the seat as the second Shogun. The broad avenue approach, with Dankazura in the center, was thus renamed Wakamiya-oji, or Young Prince Avenue. The path is beautifully lined with some 300 cherry trees and azaleas. These cherry trees, which bloom beautifully in the spring, were planted 1918 as seedlings and, as I understand it, are the same variety that are planted along the Potomac River in Washington DC, which were gifts presented to the United States by the Municipal Government of Tokyo in 1912. We missed our opportunity to see these blooms in 2013 and again this year thanks to the finicky blossom schedule. It was torn to pieces anyway – I guess they're replanting the trees? It's not due to be reopened until Mid-2016!

Goshuin: Red Seals

Before we departed, however, there was one last thing I needed to do: find a *goshuin-cho*, or temple calligraphy book, and collect here and elsewhere throughout the day. I discovered these books in 2008, watching a lady have hers "signed" at the *Dai Garan* in Koyasan. Having seen these books at other locations in Koya I became intrigued, but unsure how to go about participating. Eventually I bit back any uneasiness I had about inquiring and asked. And it turned out to be the best thing I could have done! The practice is referred to as Goshuin (御朱印), which literally translates to "red seal", but features much more than just 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. The origin of the *goshuin* is mostly 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 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.

I just think it's quite a unique souvenir to take with you. Nicole and I had such great fun filling our book last time, so we wanted to recapture that fun again. To create the *shuin*, the writer presses down one or more large stamps, and then uses black ink to write, in his distinctive calligraphy, the name of the temple, the day of the visit, and other messages on and around the stamped portions. There are still temples where one cannot receive a *shuin* without having donated a sutra, but the majority of the temples will now accept a small amount of money for one. It usually costs ¥300, though there are some places that charge up to ¥1000! That wasn't the case here so I was able to get the stamp without too much trouble, although the exchange was a bit lost in translation as the person doing the stamps asked a question about what to write on the front of the book and I had no idea what it was he was asking, or what he expected me to say. But it wasn't my name he wanted, that's for sure!

Kotoku-in: Home of the Great Buddha

From here we walked down Dankazura – the aforementioned long, wide approach that leads from Kamakura's waterfront to the shrine – toward Kamakura station, which is located in the middle of town. At Kamakura station we boarded what is known as the Enoden, which is a tram-like railway line from Kamakura station that travels along the coast toward Enoshima and Fujisawa. We hopped off at Hase for Hase-dera and the Daibutsu.

About 700 meters from the Hase Enoden train station is when you'll come upon the rather nondescript entranceway to Kotoku-in (高徳院), the home of the Great Buddha. It's only after you traverse its stone-lined path and meet the Nio-mon gate a number of steps inside that you know you've reached this particular temple. But there's no mistaking where you are once you pass through the gate – the Daibutsu dominates its surroundings like no other, casting its shadow along the temple's grounds as it thrusts skyward. An incredible sight in its own right, it's the fact that the Daibutsu sits in the open air which makes it unusual amongst large Buddha statues in Japan. Not to mention an alluring draw for domestic and foreign tourists alike (the rest of Kotoku-in is closed to the general public so those who come here, come to see the Buddha).

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

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

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

One of these is a high, straight nose with inconspicuous nostrils. Accordingly the bridge of the Buddha's nose falls straight from his forehead, and the nostrils are visible only from directly under the statue. The Buddha's long pierced earlobes, which fall to his shoulders, are another of the 80 minor signs. Hands and their placement are also an important characteristic; each Buddha has its own *mudras*, or distinct hand position. The Amida Buddha's *mudra* is two circles formed by his two hands: the index, middle and ring fingers touch while the thumbs and little fingers do not. This Buddha's mudra is slightly unusual in the sense that its thumbs do no rest on top of its index fingers. Amongst the nine different *mudras* that Amida displays, this *mudra* (called the "Jobon-josho-in") is considered the highest rank. Further, in another of the 32 signs of a Buddha, there is a web-like membrane between the Great Buddha's fingers, known as *mammoso*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hase-dera (長谷寺)

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

Legend suggests that Priest Tokudo (656-735), serving at Hase-dera in Nara Prefecture, commissioned two statues of the eleven-headed Kannon to be carved from a single block of camphor, which was felled from the forest behind the temple. The statue carved from the lower part of the camphor tree was enshrined there at Hasa-dera near Nara whilst the statue from the upper-half (the larger of the two) was set adrift in the sea near present-day Osaka with a prayer that it would someday reappear to save the people. Fifteen years later, on the night of June 18th in 736, the second statue washed ashore at Nagai Beach on the Miura Peninsula not far from Kamakura, sending out rays of light as it did so. Fujiwara Fusasaki (681-737), a court noble, rescued and enshrined the find at this present site in Kamakura and appointed Tokudo as the temple's founding priest. Historians cannot reconcile the legend of this temple's founding to records kept at the time so there is doubt cast upon the age of the Kannon. Judging from the inscription affixed to the temple's original bell – 1264, one of the oldest in Kamakura (you'll find it in the shrine's museum) – it is relatively certain that the temple at least had existed in the late Kamakura period, but not earlier. Therefore, the Hase Kannon is designated neither a National Treasure nor an Important Cultural Asset.

Regardless, the magnificent statue of Hase Kannon is housed in the quite picturesque **Kannon-do** hall for all to see and worship. It stands approximately 9.18 meters (30.1 feet) tall and has eleven heads in addition to its main one: three in front, three to the left and three to the right, plus one at the top and another on back (which is said to be laughing, but, only the priests know). If you look closely you'll see each face has a different expression, signifying that the deity listens to the wishes of all types of people. Hase Kannon is unique in that it holds a staff made of tin in its right hand and a vase of lotus flowers in its left. In 1342, Ashikaga Takauji (1305-1358), the First Shogun of the Muromachi Period (1333-1573), had the statue gilded, and further in 1392, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408), the Third Shogun, had the halo added. Although Kannon is usually described in English as "the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy," strictly speaking it is neither masculine nor feminine. Kannon is Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva–a Bodhisattva is a future Buddha, destined for enlightenment, who has vowed to save all sentient beings–and represents compassion, mercy, and love.

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

Next to the Kannon-do is the **Amida-do hall**, a building where a golden statue of Yakuyoke Amida Buddha, one of Kamakura's six principal statues of Amida, is enshrined. The statue was commissioned in 1194 by Minamoto Yoritomo; it measures 2.8 meters (9.2 feet) in height, not including the halo. **The Shoro Belfry** stands adjacent to the Amida-do, containing Hasedera's massive bronze bell. The thatched roof belfry was constructed in 1955, an attached sign says, but the current bell was cast in 1984 – so not as old as I thought!

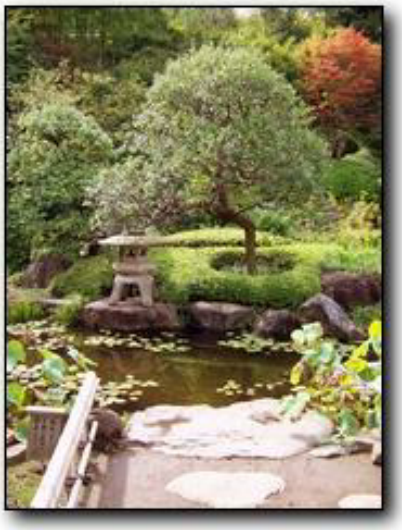
And halfway down the steps to the lower level exist a small building (**Jizo-do hall**) where Fukuju Jizo, or “Happy” Jizo is enshrined. Here thousands of little Jizo stone statues stand in long rows, some wearing bibs or knitted caps and festooned with cute charms. Though these statues appear happy-go-lucky, this may be the saddest part of the entire temple. The statues are there to comfort the souls of those children who were miscarried, stillborn or aborted for one reason or another.

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

Did You Know?

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

Nearby is also an observation deck with views over the coastal city of Kamakura and a small restaurant where Japanese sweets such as *mitarashi dango* (small rice flour dumplings covered with a sticky sauce made of sugar and soy sauce), and other meals, snacks and beverages are served. Nicole and I couldn’t resist a nice hot bowl of *udon* noodle soup here. *It was mmm-mmm good!*




弁財天

Back to Tokyo: Shinjuku & Ikebukuro

Visiting the Daibutsu and Hase-dera concluded our originally scheduled time in Kamakura and by 2:00pm we were on a JR train bound for Shinjuku. In all honesty, had I been thinking straight we could have seen and done a little more in Kamakura, but it seemed as if we were ready to get back to more familiar ground. Shinjuku, one of Tokyo's twenty-three special wards, really can't be counted as familiar ground, but at least the station – the world's busiest don't you know – is familiar enough, as I've been through its multitude of platforms a number of times. But even saying that, we weren't making a stopover here to catch a new train, rather to disembark and explore the station's many attached department stores – Keio, Limine, Takashimaya, and Odakyu – the reason for stopping by.

Odakyu Department Store consists of 16 floors, including a wonderful food department in the basement and restaurants on its top floors. The department store belongs to the Odakyu Group, which also operates a suburban railway line from Shinjuku to Odawara (Odakyu is an abbreviation for "Odawara Express" – and we took the Odakyu line last time out to Hakone and Mt. Fuji.) Today, however, we were here to find a shop I'd read about on RocketNews24 – an English-language Japanese News and Culture site. The draw: the store features *onigiri* (or rice balls) from all 47 of Japan's prefectures. We were armed with only a name (Momochi), an address (Odakyu Hyakkaten Shinjuku B2F, 1-1-3 Nishi, Shinjuku), and a basic idea of where the shop might be located – and off we went. Unfortunately, after minutes of browsing through the Odakyu Department Store attached to the station and its annex buildings west of the station, we were forced to give up. It was crowded for one, but more importantly we had absolutely no idea where the store might be located. So we pressed on to Ikebukuro.

Ikebukuro (池袋) is also one of Tokyo's multiple city centers, found in the northwestern part of the city. At the district's center stands Ikebukuro Station, a busy commuter hub traversed by three subway lines and multiple urban and suburban train lines. The station handles over a million passengers per day, making it the second busiest railway station surpassed only by Shinjuku Station. Ikebukuro offers plenty of entertainment, shopping and dining opportunities. It is the battle ground between the Tobu and Seibu conglomerates which operate large department stores on each side of the station, as well as train lines from Ikebukuro into the suburbs. Seibu furthermore has a stake in the Sunshine City, a large shopping and entertainment complex not far from the station – our destination.

Opened in 1978, **Sunshine City** (サンシャイ ンシティ) is Tokyo's first and thereby oldest city within the city. The focal point of the complex is the 240 meter tall Sunshine 60 skyscraper, a mixed-use high-rise that contains a variety of things. Floors 1 through 9 are used as commercial space and house a post office, banks, showrooms, cafeterias, a health care center, and a day care. Office space occupies floors 10 through 57. Restaurants are located on the 58th and 59th floors. And on the 60th floor, visitors can see as far as 100 kilometers on a clear day from the tower's observation deck. The rest of the complex also contains shops and restaurants, an aquarium (which exhibits creatures from seas, oceans and tropical forests around the world, including stingrays, sunfish, frogs, snakes, penguins, seals and otters), a planetarium, museum, indoor theme parks (Namja Town and J-World), as well as the Sunshine Prince Hotel, but who cares about those.

Did You Know?

It takes just ¥620 to visit the Sunshine 60 Observation Deck. To get visitors quickly to the top, one of the tower's 40 elevators takes passengers directly from the lobby at a speed of 600 meters per minute, or 22 mph, making them some of the fastest elevators in the world.

Our reason for stopping by Sunshine City was, of course, the **Pokémon Center Mega Tokyo** – the largest Pokémon store in Japan! With 8 locations across Japan, the Pokémon Center sells over 2,500 different officially-licensed products for every type of Pokemon fan. This new location is the result of relocating from Hamamatsucho, and it lives up to its "Mega Evolution" concept by occupying 698 square meters of real estate. If you haven't been keeping up on Pokémon, it is a franchise that started with a black and white video game for the original Nintendo Gameboy, and now it has over a dozen movies, a trading card game, over a half-dozen anime series, and dozens more video games, all of which are still going strong today. My wife is a huge Pokémon fan and it's for her that we ventured out into this wild zone of otaku-ness. Here you can find all sorts of limited edition goods, like a plush toy Pikachu dressed as Charizard, special edition figurines, card packs, toys, and much, much more. If you're a fan of Pokemon this is your Mecca!

While not as large or well known as Akihabara, Ikebukuro is also a center of otaku culture, but unlike Akiba, Ikebukuro caters more to a female clientele. As such you'll find butler cafes instead of maid cafes, and anime, manga, and cosplay related shops such as Animate, Mandrake, and K-Books dedicated to female otaku. The center of it all is located along Otome Road just north of Sunshine City, so after collecting all the Pokémons, we thought about taking a stroll to check it out, but, our early morning was beginning to catch up with us. We were getting irritated at the throngs of people, so rather than push on there, visit the Aquarium (it was just too pricy, and noisy!), or even attempt a stroll at Shibuya or Akihabara, we returned to Homeikan via the Marunouchi Line, grabbed dinner at a *conbini*, had a shower (the bath was just too hot tonight). Now we're preparing to turn in, discussing our day. Out of all the amazing things we saw today, the one item we both went back to: the strawberry-custard sandwiches we had as a snack right off the Enoden at Kamakura station. They were a unique find, and quite yummy!

Ja ne!

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}

「The Café's of Akihabara」

Sunday | April 12, 2015

Konbanwa and good evening! Please excuse us for being in our pajamas already… we've got an early start in the morning. Although this is our last evening in Tokyo for now, we've had our bath already and despite a hiccup to speak of that almost resulted in missed opportunities (I'll share that story in a bit) we are feeling quite pleased with ourselves.

23,283 steps
10.86 miles

For those who know, you know traditional baths here are simply heavenly. But for those of you who don't know… well, bathing in Japan is a singular experience. 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 when using a bath of this nature. Failure to do so could find the bather a lot of disgusted stares and lead to embarrassment of all parties, which should be avoided at all costs. To take a Japanese bath: you must first make sure you've entered the right bathing area. The entrance to baths are often marked by *noren* (暖簾) curtains; blue for male and red for female.

Most baths require you to take of your shoes or slippers before entering. Then you must undress 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 (but don't mix the waters). Once you've carefully rinsed, you may then submerge and soak in the tub's hot 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 nor attempt to modify the temperature of the bath water as others will use the water for their baths. Although it sounds like quite the enterprise and could potentially lead to some embarrassment for those unfamiliar, it's actually quite simple, and highly recommended at the end of a very long day. *Aaahhhhhh.*

Suffice it to say the weather was absolutely gorgeous today – sunny, with blue skies – which hung around until the evening: no rain today! We got started a little later than our other two days here, but still early by all other standards, with a walk through Yoyogi Park to visit Meiji-jingu. I'd not been there since my first visit to Japan in 2004, and it was quite nice to see the area again. I've learned to navigate the area better in the intervening years, so we avoided getting lost like I did the first time (that's a story for another time). Yoyogi Park is one of Tokyo's largest city parks, featuring wide lawns, ponds and forested areas. Before becoming a city park in 1967, the area where Yoyogi Park is located served as the site of the Olympic Village for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and before that, as a residential area for US military personnel.

The shrine was completed and dedicated in 1920, eight years after the passing of the emperor and six years after the passing of the empress. Emperor Meiji was the first emperor of modern Japan. He was born in 1852 and ascended to the throne in 1867 at the peak of the Meiji Restoration when Japan's feudal era came to an end and the emperor was restored to power. During the Meiji Period, Japan modernized and westernized herself to join the world's major powers by the time Emperor Meiji passed away in 1912.

The main complex of shrine buildings is located a ten minute walk from both the southern entrance near Harajuku Station and the northern entrance near Yoyogi Station. Entry into the shrine grounds is marked by a massive torii gate, after which the sights and sounds of the busy city are replaced by a tranquil forest. The approximately 100,000 trees that make up Meiji Jingu's forest were planted during the shrine's construction and were donated from regions across the entire country. At the middle of the forest, Meiji Jingu's buildings also have an air of tranquility distinct from the surrounding city. A large area of the southern section of the shrine grounds is taken up by the Inner Garden, which requires an entrance fee to enter. We gladly paid it, as I hadn't toured the gardens when I visited here before – and they were quite nice!

Meiji-jingu (明治神宮**)**

At Kamizono-cho Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku, and nestled within the 175-acre Yoyogi-koen (代々木公園; 園 = park) is where you'll find Meiji-jingu, a memorial of the most unique kind because it's not a shrine devoted to an ages old deity, it's one in dedication to a very influential and important man. Established in 1920, and later rebuilt in 1958 after suffering devastation during World War II, Meiji-jingu was constructed as a means to enshrine Emperor Meiji and his consort Empress Shoken.

Emperor Meiji was a significant figure in Japanese history and to say otherwise would be an understatement in terms. He is credited for the many reforms that brought Japanese society into modern times, including a doctrine called "The Five Major Policies," which established deliberative assemblies, involved all classes in carrying out state affairs (there were four distinct social classes in Japan at the time), provided freedom of social and occupational mobility, replaced what he thought were "evil customs" with the "just laws of nature" and opened up dialogue with international forces to search for knowledge to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.

In 1869, his legacy was fulfilled in what history refers to as the Meiji Restoration. To comprehend this one must have a historical understanding of Japan's past, its pre-industrial society matrix and how the Shogunate form of government was executed. It's a fascinating subject but it's not something I can speak about knowledgeably. Suffice it to say, the Restoration was a yearlong coup d'état (called the Boshin War, or "The War of the Year of the Dragon" due to the year in which it took place, 1868-1869) of the Tokugowa Shogunate, which had ruled Japan for over 250 years. The Restoration ended the feudal system of military rule (that the Shogunate fostered for over 675 years) and returned sovereign power, at least in theory, to the Emperor. In reality power passed to an oligarchy of the Daimyo (大名, baron) instead of passing powers to the Emperor, but it was he who constituted the reform that followed.

The Emperor's body is buried in the Fushimi Momoyama Ryo (graveyard) in Kyoto, but his soul has been enshrined here. You can pay your respects to Meiji (or any deity at a Shinto shrine) in a number of ways, but there are generally four rules of conduct one must follow in order to do so properly. They were so detailed in the information pamphlet provided on site (listed right). If you hang around long enough you'll be able to witness this procedure being performed at the main hall, as we did. It's quite interesting and refreshing to see how other peoples and cultures worship their gods, or how religions that differ from Christianity conduct their affairs.

1.	Enter through the torii gate and be appropriately dressed; respect the deities in your best dress. Bow once.
2.	Rinse hands and mouth by using water from the stone basin, called Temizusha, but do not place your lips directly on the dipper.
3.	Proceed to the main building in reflection; you may toss some coins in the Offering Box if you wish.
4.	Bow twice, clap your hands twice, and then bow once more again to pay your respects in prayer.

While I know this is just a small peek into these other religions, it's one of the great cultural experiences we were glad to have witnessed. And if you get a chance, hang around for a while or even practice the prayers yourself.

Prayers don't have to involve such a ritual though. One can purchase a small block of wood that is used to write offerings or wishes upon them then attach or hang them to a special designated tree or spot specified by the shrine. These are called *ema* (絵馬); such tablets can be obtained at the juyoshu (amulet office). There are two types of *ema*: *Kigan-ema (*祈願), which bears the crest of the shrine on their front and the world *kigan* on their back, and *Eto-ema (*干支), which depict the current year's *eto*, or zodiac. Priests will then burn these blocks during special ceremonies at special times to help make your wishes come true. There is one of these camphor trees on the grounds – you can't help but be drawn to it – with hundreds of these prayer blocks attached to it. It's a fascinating sight!

There's other ways to get and receive blessings though. Many shrines have what are referred to as *ofuda* (御札 or お札), a household charms, talismans, or amulets, which are usually hung in the house for protection – called a *gofu* (護符) or *shinpu* (神符). These are generally made by inscribing the name of a *kami* (神; spirit) and the name of shrine, or of a representative of the kami, on a strip of paper, wood, cloth, or metal. They're good for a year and are usually attached to a door, pillar, or ceiling. They may also be placed inside a private household shrine, a *kamidana* (神棚). It is believed *ofuda* protect the family in residence from general harm, such as a disease. A more specific *ofuda* may be placed near particular objects such as one for the kitchen to protect from accidental fire. A popular *ofuda* called *jingū-taima* (神宮大麻) or simply *taima* (大麻) is issued by Ise Shrine (near Nagoya). It is made from hemp cloth; the use of hemp as a material was common from antiquity.

A portable form of *ofuda*, commonly called *omamori* (お守り or 御守) is typically given out wrapped in a small bag made of decorated cloth. This originates from Onmyodo and Buddhism, but was subsequently adopted by Shintoism. While an *ofuda* is said to protect a whole family, an *omamori* offers support for personal benefits. The word *mamori* (守り) means protection, with *omamori* being the *sonkeigo* (honorific) form of the word. Originally made from paper or wood, modern amulets are small items usually kept inside a brocade bag and may contain a prayer, or religious inscription of invocation. Omamori are available at both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples with few exceptions and are available for sale, regardless of one's religious affiliation. Omamori are then made sacred through the use of ritual, and are said to contain *bushin* (spiritual offshoots) in a Shinto context or *kesshin* (manifestations) in a Buddhist context.

There are charms for all kinds of occasions and purposes, such as traffic safety (*kotsu-anzen*), avoidance of evil (*yaku-yoke*), luck and better fortune (*kaiun*), for education and passing of examinations (*gakugyo-joju*), for prosperity and success in business and in matters of money (*shobai-hanjo*), for the acquisition of a mate and marriage (*en-musubi*), protection for pregnant women, for healthy pregnancy and easy delivery (*anzan*), and for the safety of one's family, for peace and prosperity in the household (*kanai-anzen*). Such amulets can be kept in or attached to one's bag, pocket, or purse. They are usually kept until their purpose is fulfilled. Customarily, *omamori* should never be opened in order to avoid losing their protective benefits, and should be carried on one's person. Amulets are replaced once a year to ward off bad luck from the previous year. Old amulets are usually returned to the same shrine or temple they were purchased at so they can be disposed of properly. Old *omamori* should not be placed in trash with other commonly discarded rubbish, but rather treated with respect. Usually they are burned. Burning the old amulet is meant to be a sign of respect to the deity that helped out the person throughout the year. So if you can't get back to Japan or the shrine you bought the amulet from, burn it… but with respect!

Omikuji's (おみくじ) are also available. These are random fortunes written on strips of paper, which you can find at both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Literally translated to mean "sacred lot", these are usually received by making a small offering (generally a five-yen coin as it is considered good luck) and randomly choosing one from a box, hoping for the resulting fortune to be good. The *omikuji* is scrolled up or folded, and unrolling the piece of paper reveals the fortune on it. It includes a general blessing, which can be any one of the following: Great blessing (*dai-kichi*, 大吉), Middle blessing (*chū-kichi*, 中吉), Small blessing (*shō-kichi*, 小吉), Blessing (*kichi*, 吉), Half-blessing (*han-kichi*, 半吉), Ending blessing (*sue-kichi*, 末吉), Ending small blessing (*sue-shō-kichi*, 末小吉), Curse (*kyō*, 凶), Small curse (*shō-kyō*, 小凶), Half-curse (*han-kyō*, 半凶), Ending curse (*sue-kyō*, 末凶), or Great curse (*dai-kyō*, 大凶). It then lists fortunes regarding specific aspects of one's life, which may include any number of the combinations (list right).

方角 (hōgaku)	auspicious/inauspicious directions
願事 (negaigoto)	one's wish or desire
待人 (machibito)	a person being waited for
失せ物 (usemono)	lost article(s)
旅立ち (tabidachi)	travel
商い (akinai)	business dealings
学問 (gakumon)	studies or learning
相場 (sōba)	market speculation
争事 (arasoigoto)	disputes
恋愛 (renai)	romantic relationships
転居 (tenkyo)	moving or changing residence
出産 (shussan)	childbirth, delivery
病気 (byōki)	illness
縁談 (endan)	marriage proposal or engagement

The *omikuji* predicts the person's chances of his or her hopes coming true, of finding a good match, or generally matters of health, fortune, life, etc. When the prediction is bad, it is a custom to fold up the strip of paper and attach it to a pine tree or a wall of metal wires alongside other bad fortunes in the temple or shrine grounds. A purported reason for this custom is a pun on the word for pine tree (松; *matsu*) and the verb 'to wait' (待つ; *matsu*), the idea being that the bad luck will wait by the tree rather than attach itself to the bearer. In the event of the fortune being good, the bearer has two options: he or she can also tie it to the tree or wires so that the fortune has a greater effect or he or she can keep it for luck.

Last time Nicole and I were in Japan we bought an *omikuji* at Sensoji in Asakusa, tying it to the wires for good luck, but we didn't do so here.

Meiji-jingu Garden

Meiji-jingu is one of the most famous and important shrines in Tokyo, as well as one of the most-visited. The shrine's inner gardens, however, are often an overlooked feature to the beautiful shrine grounds, and are definitely worthy of a visit. I overlooked them in 2004 but we rectified that oversight today. Meiji Jingu Garden is essentially a "stroll garden". The paths wind through strands of bamboo, and are carefully laid out to show off the flowers (azaleas, iris, roses, water lilies, and wisteria) at their best. The clear water of the pond is also used to maximum effect, reflecting the greenery much like a mirror. Apart from the occasional noise from the nearby traffic, you would never believe you were in the heart of Tokyo. The garden is a sanctuary not only for residents and visitors looking for some peace and quiet, but also for birds. Apart from those living in the pond, many birds can be seen in the trees, especially during the nesting seasons.

The gardens are quite extensive, covering 8.3 hectares (approximately 20.5 acres). Both the grounds and gardens were originally part of a daimyo's *yashiki* (a mansion of a feudal lord) during the Edo Period. Meiji Jingu garden was originally owned by Kato Kiyomasa, whose perfectly positioned well continues to supply water to the garden and the pond to this day. After Kato Kiyomasa, the garden passed into the hands of the Ii family. Due in part to their history as retainers to the Tokugawa, and in part to their position during the days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the head of the Ii family had substantial lands and privileges. In addition to these gardens, the Ii also owned the gardens that now form the foundation of the current "Japanese Garden" at the New Otani Hotel. Neither of these two Tokyo gardens is quite as brilliant as the Ii's Genkyuen garden adjoining their home castle in Hikone, but they are still amongst the best gardens remaining in Tokyo.

In addition to serving as the feudal lords of Omi Province (present day Shiga Prefecture) the powerful Ii served on the council of ministers for the Tokugawa Shogunate. Heads of the Ii family were amongst the few eligible for the post of Tairo. As demonstrated in 1860 by the assassination of Ii Naosuke outside the Sakuradamon gate of Edo Castle, these responsibilities in the latter years of shogunate rule were not without risk.

In 1868 when the Tokugawa Shogunate fell from power, the gardens were confiscated from the Ii to become part of the imperial estate and were named Yoyogi Gyoen (Yoyogi Imperial Garden). Although located some distance west of the Imperial Palace, this garden was a favorite of the Emperor Meiji & his wife, the Empress Shoken, and that alone was the key reason why Meiji Jingu was built in its current location after the Emperor passed away. The garden's rural atmosphere is reflected in poems (*waka*) written by Meiji, and Shoken spent many afternoons in the garden, in fact the *Otsuridai* (fishing platform) at the pond was actually built for her. The original *Kakuuntei* (a tea house) and the *Shobuda* (Iris flowerbeds) were also added during that time.

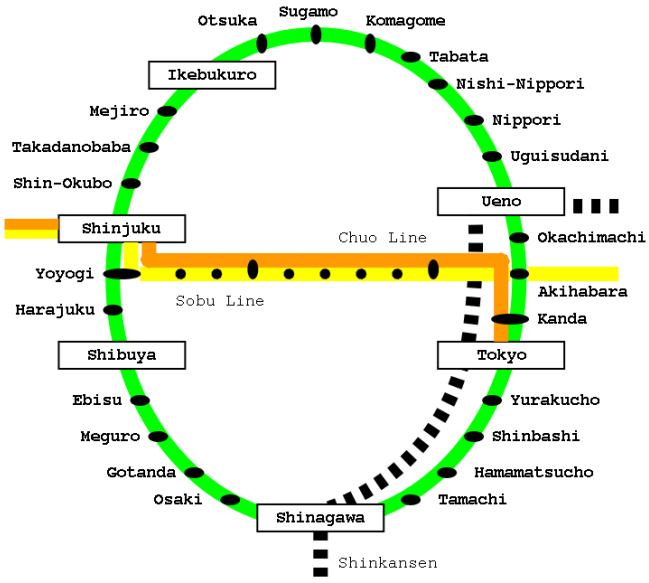
The garden is worth visiting all year round since the seasonal variations ensure that it is different each visit. For example in the winter the garden is absolutely magical if there is snow, as it is usually both empty (of people) as well as beautiful. However the best time to visit is probably during June (rainy season) when the iris beds are a riot of color. The iris beds were put in around 1897, with 80 different species of iris planted. Although not as extensive as the iris flowers in say, Higashi Park in Okazaki, the best thing about the iris flowers in the Meiji Jingu garden is that instead of contrasting with the greenery of Okazaki, they are contrasting with the concrete, plastic and noise of bustling Harajuku and Omotosando just outside the gates. When visiting the iris beds, walk first up the sloping path to the end of the garden. To this day, the iris beds are being watered by the steady stream gushing from the Kiyomasa-ido. This is one of the most historic wells in Tokyo. Sunk deep into the earth on the orders of Kato Kiyomasa, the waters spring from the ground without pumping. The water is sweet to taste (just help yourself), and perfectly safe unless the water flow is weak (as is sometimes the case if there has been little rain in Tokyo during the previous months). We didn't.

Other points of interest in Meiji jingu garden are the Kakuuntei and the Otsuridai. The Kakuuntei (a tea house) was originally built on the order of Emperor Meiji in 1900. Unfortunately the building was destroyed (along with Meiji Jingu itself) during the terrible fire-bombings of 1945, and the current teahouse is an identical reconstruction dating from 1958. The Otsuridai (fishing platform) was also built by Emperor Meiji, primarily for his wife (Empress Shoken) who enjoyed fishing in this pond. The Kakuuntei, Otsuridai and the iris beds are the main changes to the Kato/Ii garden of the Edo period, so you can see that very little has actually changed.

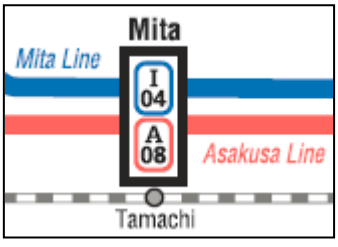
Admission to Meiji Jingu garden is 500 yen per adult, 200 yen per child and the garden is open to the public year round. On a beautiful sunny morning as this one was, we had a fantastic time strolling around the gardens. Unfortunately, the area has lost much of the tranquility I remembered from my previous visit, but I guess that's the difference weekends make at sights like this in Tokyo. That being said, we had a good stroll at the main shrine and its accompanying gardens. At the main shrine there was even preparation for a wedding due to take place shortly, so all in all a great visit to the shrine. It's in leaving and getting over to Akiba to meet Rie and Michiko where things begin to go awry.

Trouble on the Yamanote Line

Although the area surrounding Meiji-jingu has lost much of the tranquility I remembered from my previous visit (perhaps that's the difference weekends make at sights like this in Tokyo), we still had a good stroll around the grounds, and the attached gardens. We even stumbled into preparations for a wedding at the main shine! So all in all we had a great visit. It's in leaving and getting over to Akiba to meet Rie and Michiko where things began to go awry.



We probably should have left the park a few minutes sooner – as it was we were pushing our luck on time, but it was JR itself that really threw us for a loop. To get to Akihabara from Harajuku I opted for the JR Yamanote Line, which circles the city in about an hour. Where we'd be going – the other side – would take about 30 minutes, so we boarded when the train came and took off as planned. We didn't get our first clue something was wrong until a couple of stops in, when the train lingered at Osaki station much longer than it should have. I thought all was well when we moved on to Shinagawa, but it wasn't. A long hold there made us miss our meeting time of 10:30am. At Tamachi, they told us to vacate the train; that the Yamanote Line was completely out of service. Later we learned there was a "track obstruction", which could be anything from debris to a person who jumped, but it was nothing more than a pole that had collapsed onto the tracks.



Regardless of the cause, we were left stranded there at Tamachi station with little recourse. Fortunately the Toei Mita Line (denoted "I") and the Asakusa ("A") Line was nearby at Mita Station, so we hoofed it over there. (And hoof is a good descriptive word to use here as there is no quick connecting between these stations. You exit the JR Tamachi station onto an over-street platform that hugs the buildings in this district's alleyway, to the opposite side of an eight-lane highway. There, tucked around the corner, is where you'll find the Mita stations' platforms.)

The plan: take the Asakusa Line to Higashi-ginza, and then switch there to the Hibiya ("H") line, which would take us straight into Akihabara. It was executed brilliantly, if I say so myself, but along the way we began to wonder if Rie and Michiko would still be there waiting for us. And they were! Michiko spotted us first and rushed right over to us when she saw us, then guided us over to Rie. It's now 11:08am and we're late to our owl café reservations, but Rie tells us that if we hurry over we might be allowed in. So we made our way over there and luckily we were within the entry window, so we went right up!

Akiba Fukuro

Akihabara is 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 *Sujikaigomon*, 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'eiji temple in Ueno. Many dealers, craftsmen and relatively lower class samurai lived here. A great fire in the 19th 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 cityfrom 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. Just take the conveniently labeled "Akihabara Electric Town" exit to be dropped into the middle of the action. And what action there is to see! Akihabara has emerged as a center of Japanese otaku and anime culture, and dozens of stores specializing in anime, manga, retro video games, figurines, card games and other collectibles have filled the spaces between the electronics retailers. In addition to shops, various other animation related establishments have become popular in the area, particularly maid cafes where waitresses dress up and act like maids or anime characters, and manga *kissaten* ("comics cafes"), a type of internet cafe where customers can read comics and watch DVDs in addition to having access to the internet.

Maid cafes are cosplay themed restaurants where guests are served by waitresses that are typically dressed as French maids. In addition to serving food, the maids engage in conversation and games with the customers and treat them with the care and respectful language due to the master of a house. Maid cafes are popular with both men and women, and some cafes, like the @Home Cafe, offer English speaking maids. In addition to themed cafes featuring people, there are many others featuring animals, such as cats, dogs, rabbits, and a plethora of other cute animals… including the one we visited – a rather new trend here in fast-paced Tokyo – the owl café.

You'll find Akiba Fukurou at 67 Kanda Neribeicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo-to, 101-0022 in a rather small building, but one that is easily enough to spot – it's the one with pictures of owls in the window. You enter at your allotted timeslot and after a brief introduction in Japanese – no flash photography (but regular pictures are okay), no sudden movements, don't squeeze the birds – you then have about an hour to spend with the owls. There are about twenty owls in the cafe, perched on bars throughout the room. Each has a name and with that, presumably, comes a personality. Some are small and sweet, others bigger and evil-looking with vibrant eyes that are constantly watching their surroundings. There are owls that seem sleepy and owls that seem more alert, owls that barely move and others with heads constantly bobbing. It's quite the interesting experience!

I expected a small amount of time for refreshments, then some time with the owls, and finally a quick bite to east before we left the establishment, but that's not exactly what happened. In fact, while there were bottled waters to be had for refreshments, no snacks of any kind were offered. And the owls were out all the time, though clipped to their perches so they wouldn't fly off. So not your typical café as we would define it, but fun never the less! I held a barn owl (named "Queen of Heart") for the majority of the time; Nicole and Rie held various from time to time. (One of Nicole's pooped on her – ha!) The second owl Nicole held was called "Cherry Tomato", and was a little small one. And for the majority of the time we held our owls, petted them, and kept them from attacking one another. It was good fun! To cap the experience they took a few photos of us with our owls – couples then groups (which they made me scooch down for since I'm taller than the three girls). Then they then presented one to me as a birthday present, complete with happy birthday in Japanese. How nice and unexpected!

Strolling Fabulous Chuo City

Although our time at the owl café was truncated (thanks to the train mishap), we had a lovely time with what was left to us. It turned out to be a great little experience. From here we walked down to Iwamotcho (S-8) Station on the Shinjuku Line and took it down to Hamacho (S-10) so Nicole could visit **Suiten-gu** (水天宮) is a Shinto shrine in Chuo devoted to conception and safe childbirth. And since Nicole and I are looking to conceive following this trip, we thought a little help here wouldn't go amiss. In 1818 the ninth daimyo of the Kurume Domain established the Suiten-gu in Edo as a branch of a shrine of the same name in Kurume, Fukuoka. It was inside the grounds of the domain's mansion in the Mita district of what is now Minato, Tokyo, and the domain opened it to the public on the fifth day of every month. In 1871, the Arima family moved from Mita to Akasaka, taking the shrine with it, and in the following year they moved the shrine to its most recent location, on a site that had been the family's middle mansion.

The location of *Suitengu* has moved again recently, to a temporary location, as its original location is completely under construction. In fact, on a satellite view it appears to be nothing but a hole in the block. I'm not sure they'll even move back, but, the temporary nature of the new location hasn't stopped families from visiting. And why not?

Suitengu is one of the most important and most visited shrines in Tokyo. During the fifth month of pregnancy (which is the American fourth month because in Japan, months are counted as having four weeks, while in the west some months are 4 and some are 5), women often go with a mother or grandmother to a shrine that is dedicated to safe childbirth. Suitengu is one such shrine. Here the women pray for a safe childbirth and purchase a special pregnancy sash, or obi, to wrap around the abdomen. The obi is meant to protect the uterus from the cold, keep the fetus stable, and prevent it from growing too large. This tradition is carried out any time after you hit the 5th month of pregnancy but ideally on the first *inunohi* (犬の日), or dog day (*inu* = "dog", *hi* = "day"), and dog days fall on every 12th day in accordance to the old school Chinese calendar. This time is chosen because by this time the mother-to-be has successfully reached *anteiki* (安定期), which is considered the stable period in a pregnancy – morning sickness subsides and you're less likely to have a miscarriage. In the west we call it the end of the first trimester. And so praying on this day is very auspicious indeed!

Our visit to Suitengu today was not on a dog day – one was near but our schedule wouldn't have accommodated for it – but that didn't keep any expectant mothers away. The place was packed! So much so that all we did was a little cursory walkabout then left to wait for Rie and Michiko's return. Wait, where did they go? To make a reservation at a nearby restaurant for lunch!

In the middle of Chuo City is **Ningyocho Imahan** - a famous restaurant (with many locations now) from the Meiji era that prides itself on its preparation of wagu beef. Imahan was established in 1893 (Meiji 26) as a Gyunabe (Sukiyaki) restaurant. Its name is a combination of two kanji characters: "ima" from Imasatocho, a neighborhood town known as Shirokane today, where a meat processing factory used to stand; and "Han", which is derived from the founder's first name, Hantaro. The location we visited - Ningyocho Imahan - was established in 1952 (Showa 27) as the Nihonbashi branch of their family's Asakusa Imahan location. In either case, as tradition dictates, Emperor Meiji tasted beef for the first time on January 24, 1872 (Meiji 5) and from that day onwards, beef nabe became a national sensation. Back then, the beef nabe was a simple affair of just beef and Japanese leeks, but over time people used higher grades of meet and added more vegetables, evolving the dish into sukiyaki today.

All four of us had the Teppan Sukiyaki don course, which is Sukiyaki beef cooked on a Teppan grill, with a house salad, grilled garlic chips, miso soup, and Japanese pickles. The main dish was the sukiyaki beef, grilled, with shitake mushrooms, leeks, and, of course, rice – all in a bowl. And later, after we ate about half the meal, a semi-soft boiled egg (which was done so in the shell on the grill) was given to us to mix in with the rice for added flavor. Wow! It was very, very tasty!

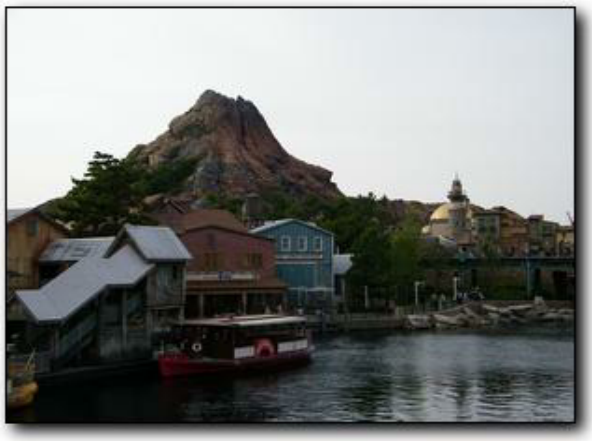
After the meal, green tea followed, and the exchange of gifts. Rie went first and presented me a bag with a wrapped box inside. The wrapping was blue-and-yellow – Cirque colors. Unwrapped it turned into quite the surprise – Kit Kat's personally printed with photos of me (and Nicole) to celebrate not only our trip but my birthday! How awesome! I love Kit Kats too so it's doubly sweet! We were anxious and excited to share our gifts though. Last time we had a shirt for Rie but nothing for Michko, as we didn't know she would be joining us at that time. This time we were prepared. Nicole crocheted two Ameneko cats – one yellow, the other permission. Additionally, we found two cloth bags at The Container Store to use as gift bags, but mostly as kitty-totes (my idea), and added in a few Easter-themed candies to round it all out.

We weren't sure whether they'd like the kitties or not, but we shouldn't have worried – they loved them! The yellow one, which Nicole originally made for Rie, went to Michiko and the Permission-colored (which Nicole originally made for Michiko) was taken by Rie. Go figure! Either way they loved them, so we were really happy and pleased about that. It also seems we caught poor Michiko off guard, as she rummaged in her purse to find something to give us in return, but that wasn't necessary.

* * *

After lunch we parted ways. Nicole and I went off to Tokyo DisneySEA – arriving about 2 hours earlier than I had anticipated, but that turned out to be a good thing. We spent the remainder of the evening there, exploring the park and having a good time riding Aquatopia, Fortress Explorations, and Sinbad's Sing-along Voyage. And Nicole got what we went out there for in the first place – a Gelatoni plush (Duffy's cat friend) to hang from her purse!

We left a few minutes before Fantasmic was set to start and returned here to Morikawa for our bath, and to pack. Well, as I said at the beginning, we've got an early departure scheduled for tomorrow so I think I'll close out here. So we'll see you in Kyoto!



関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}

「Tale of the Potted Trees」

Monday | April 13, 2015 (part 1)

Woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-BOOM!

You've guessed it… we're on the Shinkansen – Hikari #468 if you must know – bound west toward Japan's ancient capital of Kyoto, and we're already half-way there. I must say I haven't been paying much attention to what's been going on outside… I've been doing a bit of reading!

One of the more interesting blurbs I picked up from our visit to Kamakura on Saturday is a story about Hojo Tokiyori (北条 時頼; 1227-1263), the fifth *shikken* (執権; regent), or de facto military dictator of Japan during what is known as the Kamakura era. And though he's been lauded as a good administrator and overall decent person (who championed reforms through new regulations and setting up a new legal system), he also led campaigns to destroy the powerful Miura clan in the Battle of Hochi, and solidify his power base by crushing a coup plot by former shogun Kujo Toritsune. So, he was still a tyrant, riding his wave of power for 10 years before, curiously, stepping down to become a Buddhist priest. But it's during this period of his life where things get interesting. There are various legends that Tokiyori traveled incognito throughout the country to inspect actual conditions and relieve people of their hardships. One such legend is even the impetus for a Noh play… I looked it up, figuring it'd make interesting reading on the crossover from Tokyo to Kyoto. And so far it has!

The play itself is in two parts. In the first half features Tokiyori as a travelling monk, lost in the snow in the dead of winter. He happens upon the meager residence of Tsuneyo Genzayemon, a man formerly in Tokiyori's employ. (Tsuneyo once owned the land in this area called Sano, but lost it through a relative's deception.) Tsuneyo and his wife, hesitant at first, quickly welcome their guest warmly, offer what miserable accommodation they have to the traveler, and share a poor peasant's meal of a little boiled millet. To provide heat for this special occasion, Tsuneyo decides to burn his only three dwarf potted trees – an *ume*, *sakura*, and *matsu* – in order to cook the meal and keep the room warm. And to the silently listening monk, Tsuneyo tells his story of suffering and poverty, and his long-held loyalty to the Shogunate "Because my land was taken away, I am hardly able to make ends meet. But, I keep my horse and a set of arms in good condition in case of emergency," Tsuneyo proudly said. "When and if an emergency occurs I will be the first to rush to Kamakura to fight against any enemy to my last drop of blood."

The second half of the play takes up six months later and we discover that the monk was actually Tokiyori himself, traveling in disguise. Impressed with Tsuneyo's kindness, and wanting to test his claims of loyalty, Tokiyori spreads a rumor from Kamakura that war is imminent. An army of the finest and bravest soldiers assembles there to protect the shogun, in all their polished glory, on fattened steeds, with grooms beside them. Tsuneyo is also there, by himself, in worn-out armor, with a rusty sword, and leading a slow, emaciated horse. But he is there, just as he said he would be. Moved by the old man's proven loyalty, Tokiyori rewards the impoverished samurai by restoring to him his former lands as well as three other pieces of land – the names of which include the words *ume*, *sakura*, and *matsu*, in gratitude for Tsuneyo's sacrificed trees. Now, whether any of this is true or not is irrelevant; it makes a great story! And it's a rather well known one throughout *Noh* tradition as Hachinoki Monogatari (鉢の木物語), "The Tale of the Potted Trees." But that begs the question… what is *noh*? I thought you might be interested, so I took the liberty of researching that as well…

Did You Know?

The phrase "Iza Kamakura (いざ鎌倉)," literally, "in an emergency" or "when it comes to the crunch, (I will rush to Kamakura as fast as possible)," finds its origin in this story.

What is Noh?

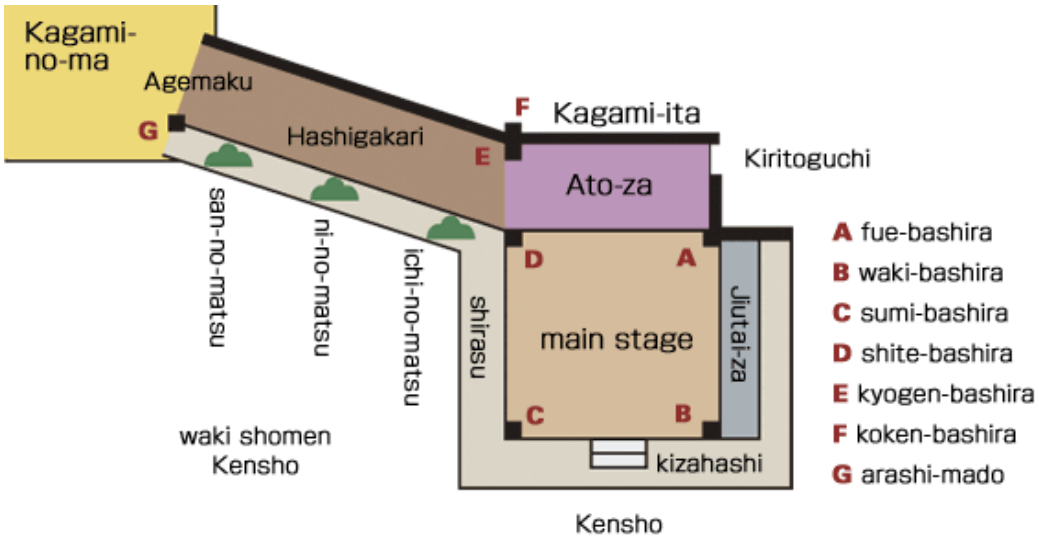
Noh is a major form of classical Japanese musical drama that has been performed since at least the 14th century, making it the oldest major theatre art still regularly performed today. *Noh* is often based on tales from traditional literature with a supernatural being transformed into human form as a hero narrating a story. *Noh* uses masks, costumes and various props in a dance-based performance art, requiring highly trained actors and musicians. Emotions are primarily conveyed by stylized conventional gestures while the iconic masks represent the roles. And there are four major categories of Noh performers:

- **Shite** (仕手, シテ) is the main protagonist, or the leading role in plays. In plays where the shite appears first as a human and then as a ghost, the first role is known as the *mae-shite* and the later as the *nochi-shite*. There's also...
    - Shitetsure (仕手連れ, シテヅレ). The shite's companion.
    - Koken (後見) are stage hands, usually one to three people.
    - Jiutai (地謡) is the chorus, usually comprising six to eight people.
- **Waki** (脇, ワキ) performs the role that is the counterpart or foil of the *shite*.
    - Wakitsure (脇連れ, ワキヅレ) is the companion of the *waki*.
- **Kyogen** (狂言) perform the *aikyōgen* (間狂言), which are interludes during plays.
- **Hayashi** (囃子) or hayashi-kata (囃子方) are the instrumentalists who play the four instruments used: the transverse flute (笛; *fue*), hip drum (大鼓; *otsuzumi*), the shoulder-drum (小鼓 ; *kotsuzumi*), and the stick-drum (太鼓 ; *taiko*). The flute used for *noh* is specifically called *noh-kan* (能管). More on this in a bit.

A typical Noh always involves the chorus, orchestra, and at least one *shite* and one *waki* actor.

The Noh Stage

Unlike Kabuki or modern theatre, the stage for *noh* does not contain large set pieces or many props. In addition, the audience is not cut off from the open stage by a curtain. Itsukushima's Noh stage is one of the oldest such stages in the entire country, so seeing a play there would be special indeed! A *noh* stage is an extremely simple space in which there is no curtain between the playing area and the audience. Originally, *noh* was played in open fields, so in order to retain the idea of performing outdoors, the modern *noh* stage is designed complete with details such as a roof, bridge with a handrail, and a pine tree painted on the back wall (even though it may be indoors.) A noh stage is constructed from *hinoki* (Japanese cypress). At the back of the stage is the *kagami-ita* (back panel, usually displaying a painted pine tree). In the front of the stage is the *kizahashi* (decorative staircase). Coming off the left side of the stage is the *hashigakari* (bridgeway). At the end of the *hashigakari* is the *agemaku* (curtain) which marks the entrance to the backstage area. There is also the *hon-butai* (main playing area), *ato-za* (seating section for musicians and stage attendants), and the *jiutai-za* (seating section for the chorus). The main playing area is 5.4m per side.



- ***Bashira*** – The main stage has four columns: the *sumi-bashira*, *waki-bashira*, *shite-bashira*, and the *fue-bashira*. As the *shite* wears a mask while performing, the *hashira* are a very important tool for the *shite* to gauge their location on stage. The *sumi-bashira* is a particularly important marker; it has the name *metsuke-bashira* or "eye-fixing column."
- ***Kagami-ita*** – The back wall is called the *kagami-ita* on which a pine tree called the *oi-matsu* is painted. The Yōgō Pine Tree is said to be the model for which the *kagami-ita* is based, and can still be found at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara. While the *noh* stories may change, the backdrop does not. All *noh* are performed in front of the *kagami-ita*.
- ***Jiutai-za and Ato-za*** – Off to the right side of the main playing area is the *jiutai-za* (seating for the chorus). The back of the stage is known as the *ato-za* and is the spot reserved for the *hayashi* (musicians) and the *koken* (stage attendants). In contrast to the main playing area where the boards lie vertically, in the *ato-za* the boards are laid horizontally, and is also known as the *yoko-ita*.
- ***Hashigakari*** – Running from the *ato-za* off to the left of the main playing area is the bridgeway. The *hashigakari* is used not just for entrances and exits, but also as another playing area for some important scenes. As opposed to the openness of the main playing area, the *hashigakari* is linearly laid out and consequently aids in creating a feeling of depth. The *shite* then can use the *hashigakari* to better express their mental state.
- ***Agemaku and Kiridoguchi*** – There are two entrances to the *noh* stage, the *agemaku* and the *kiridoguchi*. The *agemaku* is located at the end of the *hashigakari* and is the five-colored curtain that is raised and lowered for the entrance and exit of the *shite*, *waki*, *tsure*, *waki-tsure*, *kyogen*, and *hayashi*. The *kiridoguchi* is located on the right side of the *ato-za* and is a small sliding door that is used for entrances and exits of the *koken* (stage attendants) for both the *shite* and the *hayashi*, as well as for the *jiutai* (chorus).
- ***Kagami-no-ma*** – The mirror room is located behind the *agemaku* and is where the *shite* puts on the mask. This is also where the *hayashi* play *oshirabe* (warm-up music). It can be said that when the *shite* and *hayashi* enter this area, the *noh* has begun.

- ***Kensho*** – The audience seating area is called the *kensho*. The seats located in front of the stage are called *shomen*, while the seats on the left side of the stage are called the *waki shomen*. Audience members sitting in the *shomen* section have the best view of the mask effects, while the advantage of sitting in the *waki shomen* is the close proximity to the *hashigakari*. In between the two are the *naka shomen* seats which lie in front of the *metsuke bashira*.

The Music

In the singing of *noh*, the leadership responsibilities on stage are shared between the chorus and the musicians. The music, like the movement, is stripped down to create a sparse, concentrated atmosphere wherein the vocal and instruments can better express through nuance. Noh music is made of two parts: *utai* (vocal) and *hayashi* (music). Utai is performed by the *shite* and members of his school, while the *hayashi* is performed by *hayashi-kata* (musicians).

While the *shite* or *waki* sing to move the story forward, the *ji-utai* (chorus) sing as an accompaniment to the dance or sometimes for the inner thoughts of the *shite*, however, they themselves are not characters. Unlike Western music, there is not a set pitch or musical scale in *utai*. The pitch is set by the *shite* and adjusted by the *ji-gashira* (the chorus head). The group that makes up the *ji-utai* sings as one voice. In contrast to Western music, there are no harmonies. It is the role of the *ji-gashira* to adjust tone and be clear with the timing to control the overall feeling of the noh. *Utai* is generally based on a 7-5 or 12 syllable count sung over an 8 beat measure.

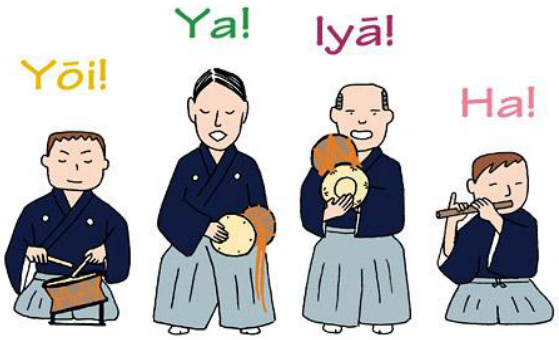
There are three different types of *hyoshi-ai* (matched) rhythms in noh: *hiranor*i or *konori*, *chunori* and *onori*. *Hiranori* employs the standard 12 syllables over 8 beats, has the most variation and is the most complicated. *Chunori* is a rhythm in which there are two syllables for each beat and *ōnori* uses one syllable for one beat. In the *hyoshi-awazu* (unmatched) sections, the drums and the singing do not correlate with regards to beats and syllables. In terms of the singing style, there are two main categories: *Tsuyo-gin* or *gogin* (lit. strong singing) is a non-pitch oriented singing style that tends to be classified as solemn and dynamic. *Yowagin* or just *wagin* (lit. weak) is a melodic singing style that can be used to express sentimentality or beauty.

The music is played by the *hayashi*, which is made up of four instruments: *fue* (flute), *kotsuzumi* (shoulder drum), *ōtsuzumi* (hip drum), and *taiko* (stick drum); together these four instruments are also known as the *shibyoshi*.

- ***Fue (Flute)*** – The transverse flute used in *noh* is made of bamboo and called the *fue* or *noh-kan*. And while among the four instruments it is the only one with a melody, in *noh*, rhythm is in some ways more important than melody. It is this emphasis on rhythm rather than melody that makes the *fue* unique. In order to de-emphasize the melody of the flute, every *noh-kan* is made slightly differently by varying the length of the body as well as the positioning of the fingering holes. This in turn makes the melodic range and the quality of the sound different from instrument to instrument. In performance, the *noh-kan* is striving to create a sound that will ornament the singing and to help express the feelings of the *shite*.
- ***Kotsuzumi*** – The *kotsuzumi* (lit. small drum) is held in the left hand at the right shoulder and struck with the right hand. Through the manipulation of the *shirabeo* (chords used to hold the drum heads onto the hour glass shaped body), four distinct sounds can be made. In order to create a beautiful sound, the drum-heads must be kept slightly moist. To maintain this moisture during a performance, a drummer will diligently either blow hot air on the drum head or more directly, apply saliva to small pieces of paper that have been stuck to the rear drum head.
- ***Otsuzumi*** – The *otsuzumi* (lit. large drum) can be considered the leader of the two hand drums. The *shirabeo* are tied very tightly and therefore the sound produced is sharp and hard. The variation of the sounds is determined by the strength of the hit and whether the drummer's hand remains of the drum after striking it. It is held in the left hand and rests on the left hip while being struck by the fingers of the right hand. To produce the desired sound the drum heads need to extremely dry. This is achieved by heating the drum heads over charcoal for about one hour before performances. The contrasting sound of the soft *kotsuzumi* with the sharp *otsuzumi* creates a harmony on stage.

- ***Taiko*** – The *taiko* is a barrel-type drum that sits on a wooden stand and is hit with *bachi* (wooden drum sticks). There are two overall methods of playing *taiko*. By leaving the *bachi* on the drum head after striking, the drummer can dampen the sound; or to create a resonating sound, large, medium or small strokes can be used. By using the two *bachi* to create complicated, driving rhythms, therefore, it is often used to accompany characters of extreme grace or vibrant characters such as gods, demons or possessed spirits.

The sound of hitting the drum is not the only way to keep rhythm, the drummers also use their voices to create drum calls or *kakegoe* which are used before hitting the drum to help adjust the timing and drive the rhythm. The sounds, "yo, ho, yo-ii, ii-ya" and others can be heard from the drummers while they are playing.



Kata, the Basic Movement

Kata are the basic movement patterns of *noh*. The most basic posture from which all other movement is based is called *kamae*. In the lower body, the knees are slightly bent, lowering the center of gravity of the performer. In the upper body, the arms are slightly bent, elbows out, making a kind of circle shape with the arms and in the right hand a fan is held. The basic form of movement is called *hakobi*. While maintaining the same center of gravity as in *kamae*, the feet are slid across the floor one after the other, without lifting them. In order to change direction, for example to turn left, the right foot is hooked around the big toe of the left. Then by twisting on the ball of the feet, one foot at a time, the feet will become even and the turn is complete. In order to express sadness or grief, the *kata shiori* is used: the head is slightly bent down and with either one or two hands (depending on the severity of the grief) the eyes are covered indicating the shedding or stifling of tears. *Sashi* is another *kata* in which the hand holding the fan is brought back even with the body, and then in an arcing motion, is put in front of the eyes, essentially pointing off in the distance. *Sashi* can be used for pointing up at the mountains or down at the sea, and may coincide with the descriptive text being sung by the chorus. *Noh* performers take finely detailed *kata* and within the dance (*mai*) turn them into a series of successive, fluid, emotive motions, that in turn give emotional expression to *noh*.

The *mai*, or dance of *noh*, then is the foundation of the form. It's not simply the expression of the body moving through space; it has a much deeper meaning. Depending on whether the character is male, female or other, and depending on the category – *shugen-mono* (god-theme), *shura-mono* (warrior-theme), or *kazura-mono* (woman-theme) – the *mai* in a *noh* will be different. In many ways, the melody and rhythm of the flute in a *mai* are responsible for setting the tone.

There's… ***Chū-no-mai*** – A medium tempo dance that the other *mai* are modeled from. There are two versions: the *daisho-mono* (with the two hand drums and the flute) and *taiko-iri* (which utilizes all the instruments). ***Jo-no-mai*** – An extremely slow-tempo dignified *mai*. Types of characters who dance this are: *shirabyōshi* (traveling female dancers wearing male attire), traditional female dancers, ghosts of noblewomen, female spirit or deity. ***Otoko-mai*** – This is a fast tempo, lively, strong dance used for male characters living in the present and therefore not wearing a mask. ***Kami-mai*** – It is an extremely fast tempo dance performed with gallant dignity. ***Gaku*** – Drawn from the music and dance of the imperial court, *gaku* is used in *noh* that have a Chinese theme and for *noh* in which an imperial musician is the *shite*. The dance starts slowly, but gradually builds into a quick tempo, stately dance. And ***Kagura*** – This is a dance performed by a female deity or a Shinto priestess. Its origins are said to be from Shinto ritual dance and the flute plays that were adapted from the *kami-mai*. Depending on the school, the *shite* may hold a Shinto wand while dancing.

Apart from the above examples other *mai* include *banshiki-hayamai, kakko, kyu-no-mai,* and *ha-no-mai,* in addition to: *mai-bataraki,* in which a dragon, goblin or the like display its power; or the *kakeri,* which displays the struggles of a tormented soul. Depending on the heavy or light nature of the *noh*, one of these many *mai* are chosen to best represent the beauty of the form and the freeness of the expression.

Subjects, Style, and Theme

As you can see, everything about Noh is defined and described down to the minutest of details. And now that we've taken a look at the performance space, music, and movements that you would see in a *noh* play, there's just a few divisions left.

Of the 2000 or so *noh* plays known to be in existence, they can call be classified into three relatively broad categories: *Genzai* (現在能; "present"), which feature human characters and events unfolding according to a linear timeline; *Mugen* (夢幻能; "supernatural"), which involves supernatural worlds, featuring gods, spirits, ghosts, or phantasms in the *shite* role. Time here is often depicted as passing in a non-linear fashion, and action may switch between two or more timeframes from moment to moment, including flashbacks; And *Ryokake* (両掛能; "mixed"), which, as you would imagine, is a combination of both; the first act being a *genzai* and the second a *mugen* play. While *Genzai Noh* utilizes internal and external conflicts to drive storylines and bring out emotions, *Mugen Noh* focuses on utilizing flashbacks of the past and the deceased to invoke emotions. All *Noh* plays can be further categorized by their style: *Geki* (劇能) is a drama piece based around the advancement of plot and the narration of action, while *Furyu* (風流能) is little more than a dance piece characterized by elaborate stage action, often involving acrobatics, stage properties, and multiple characters. Additionally, *noh* plays are divided by their themes into the following five categories:

- ***Kami-mono*** (神物, god plays) typically features the *shite* in the role of a deity to tell the mythic story of a shrine or praise a particular god. Many of them structured in two acts, the deity takes a human form in disguise in the first act and reveals the real self in the second act.

- ***Shura-mono*** (修羅物, warrior plays) takes its name from the Buddhist underworld. The protagonist appearing as a ghost of a famous samurai pleads to a monk for salvation and the drama culminates in a glorious re-enactment of the scene of his death in a full war costume.
- ***Katsura-mono*** (鬘物, wig plays) depict the *shite* in a female role and feature some of the most refined songs and dances in all of *noh*, reflecting the smooth and flowing movements representing female characters.
- There are about 94 "miscellaneous" plays traditionally performed in the fourth place in a five-play program. These plays include subcategories *kyoran-mono* (狂乱物, madness plays), *onryo-mono* (怨霊物, vengeful ghost plays), and *genzai-mono* (現在物, present plays.
- ***Oni-mono*** (鬼物, demon plays) usually feature the *shite* in the role of monsters, goblins, or demons, and are often selected for their bright colors and fast-paced, tense finale movements.

In addition to the above five, Okina (or Kamiuta) is frequently performed at the very beginning of the program. Combining dance with Shinto ritual, it is considered the oldest type of Noh play.

* * *

And there you have it – *Noh* in a nutshell. If we're lucky when we're out at Itsukushima we might get to see a *noh* play in action. In the meantime, we've got all of Kyoto to explore! We should be there soon, so I'm going to sign off now and get prepared.

Woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-BOOM!

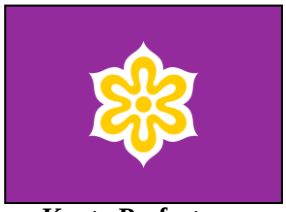
「Maru, Sankaku & Shikaku」

Monday | April 13, 2015 (part 2)

Greetings from the second floor lounge at K's House Kyoto. We just finished up a 30 minute session with the computers – Facebook and the like – and have a load of laundry spinning in the washing machine. And so far things are going okay. Rain is the key word for this trip – more than I ever encountered here before – and according to the forecast we've got plenty more to deal with. And that's okay… we're dealing with it. We're not happy about it necessarily, but we're rolling with it. What else can you do?

22,321 steps
10.39 miles

In any case, as I previously mentioned, we left Tokyo on Hikari #468, which left Tokyo-eki at 8:07am, reaching here at around 10:48am. Sure this was an hour later than expected, but it felt good sleeping in a bit, and the late start didn't really hamper much. We did get to do all the important things on today's agenda; however, we didn't have time for the market and shopping arcade (although in retrospect, those would have made better choices than trapesing through Higashiyama today, but I digress...). After checking in at K's House, and dropping off our luggage, we made our way down to *Fushimi-Inari-Taisha* via the Keihan Line. It was crowded there despite the rain. Annoyingly so. So much so that it ruined the peaceful and tranquil atmosphere we usually find there. But we accomplished what we went there to do: fox charms for Nicole and gifts for her friend Cupertina.



Kyoto Prefecture

Kyoto City Flag

The celebratory atmosphere was still going despite the rain. A few stalls of various foods were about. One that caught my eye was a meat wrapped rice ball. Alas I settled for a chicken yakitori stick, which was a little disappointing but okay nevertheless. By the time I got to it the chicken was cold, but it was somewhat satisfying. On our way back to the Keihan station, we stopped at a *conbini* (コンビニ) for a couple of things for Nicole. It turned out be a good stop because not only did we find a *tamago* (玉子) rice ball, but also a chocolate and cream sandwich! Yep, that's right; the sandwich was filled with chocolate sauce and cream! And you know what? It was yummy! Then we made our way up to Gion and took a second stab at trying to find Kennin-ji…

Kennin-ji (建仁寺)

You'll find *Kennin-ji* nestled in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto, near Gion (the city's "pleasure district" – pleasurable only in the spirits that flows out its doors rather than the other kind), at the end of Hanamikoji-dori (花見小路) – a four-tenths of a mile walk from Keihan's Gion-Shijo rail station. Founded in 1202 AD at request of Emperor Tsuchimikado, Kennin-ji is considered to be one of the oldest Zen temples in Kyoto (it stakes its claim as being the oldest) and is one of the so-called Kyoto Gozan or "five most important Zen temples of Kyoto." Let's take a peek…

First, the *Gozan Jissetsu Seido* (五山十刹制度) was a system of *shogunate* 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. Naturally the Gozan system is a bit more complicated than that brief overview allows, with layer upon layer of conditions, labels, subordinates, and smaller branches (that numbered in the thousands) – it's enough to make your head spin. However, to help clarify: The Gozan themselves are the lead temples, followed by the Jissetsu (十刹) tier (of which 10 temples belonged) and lastly the Shozan (諸山) network of which there were literally hundreds. Each of these temples had specific functions and levels of authority. Over time the initial systems were naturally broken and reformed, but suffice it to say five in Kyoto stood above all. Recall there was a similar system in use at Kamakura when the *bakufu* was in power there.

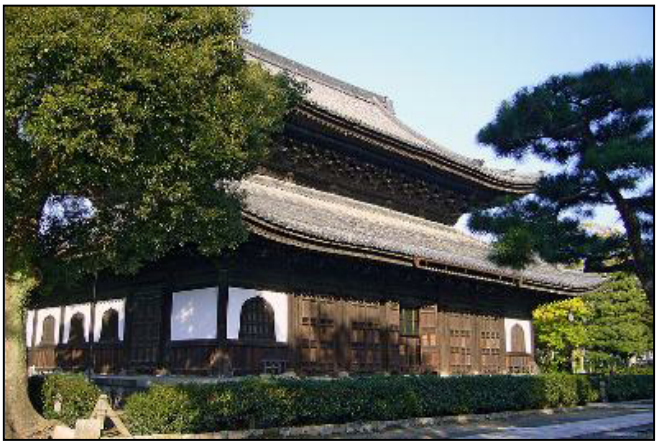
Did You Know?

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.

Now, Kennin-ji Temple was established as the first temple in Japan to include Zen teachings, but it was not a specific monastery for Zen. Mindful of the wishes of other Buddhist powers such as Enryaku-ji, it started as a school that combined Zen with the Tendai and Shingon sects of Buddhism. The first head priest was Yousai (Esai) who brought the teachings of Zen from China and established Jufuku-ji Temple in Kamakura two years before Kennin-ji's establishment. (The Kamakura Shogunate appreciated Zen more than the Tendai or Shingon sects so Zen stuck.) Yousai was ordained at age fourteen and entered the major monastic center on Mt. Hiei to study under the Tendai tradition. He made the voyage to China twice during his lifetime, the first time to pursue Tendai studies and the second time with an intention to reach India. His voyage to India was unrealized because of unstable conditions in Central Asia at the time; however, he was able to come into contact with the Zen sect, which was at its height in China. Like green tea? He brought back seeds from China and popularized the practice of drinking green tea. He is also recognized as the founder of the tea ceremony because of his efforts to encourage the cultivation and consumption of tea.

Did You Know?

Buddhism, founded approximately 2500 years ago in India by Shakyamuni Buddha, teaches that the inherent suffering of life can be transcended through equanimity, wisdom, and compassion. The Zen sect, dating back to sixth-century China, seeks the realization of this ideal through a strict training system stressing work and meditation. At present, there are three branches of Zen in Japan – the Rinzai, Soto, and Obaku schools. Kennin-ji belongs to the Rinzai tradition.



When first built, the temple contained seven principal buildings, but it has suffered from fires through the centuries. Today *Kennin-ji*'s buildings include the Abbot's Quarters (Hojo), given by Ankoku-ji in 1599; the Dharma Hall (Hatto), built in 1765; a tea house built in 1587 to designs by tea master Sen no Rikyu; and the Imperial Messenger Gate (Chokushimon), said to date from the Kamakura period, and still showing marks from arrows. It also has 14 sub-temples in its precincts and about 70 associated temples throughout Japan. Here are some of the other amazing things you'll see at Kennin-ji:

- Images of the Wind and Thunder gods – by Tawaraya Sotatsu – are a distinctive mark of *Kennin-ji* and often considered the quintessence of Sotatsu's work, which depict the gods on special *fusuma*. On the right side of the screen, the green-colored *Fujin* (風神; the God of Wind) is depicted running across the sky with his large bag of wind. On the left, the white-colored *Raijin* (雷神; the God of Thunder and Lighting) is depicted making thunder by beating his large ring-shaped drums. The contrast of speed and power, green and white, and parallel and horizontal movements is amazing, making this one of the most important and well-known paintings throughout all of Japan. (These are just re-creations; you can see the originals in Kyoto's National Museum.)

- The *Cho-on-tei* (潮音庭), "the garden of the sound of the tide," is a simple and refined Zen-style garden nestled behind the main building. The garden's San-zon-seki (三尊石; a set of 3 stones that represent Buddha and two Zen monks), Zazen-seki (a stone for seated meditation), and maple trees are all placed to afford the visitor a beautiful view from each direction. In fact, the stones are placed in such a way that no matter which direction they are viewed, the front is always visible.

- The *Maru-Sankaku-Shikaku-no-niwa*, or Circle-Triangle-Square (○△□) garden, is a rock garden formed by the priest's living quarters, abbot's quarters, and reception room. Its design is based on the famous C-T-S calligraphic work by Sengai Gibon (1750-1837), abbot of Shofukuji (a temple also founded by Eisai). The idea behind the "circle, triangle, square" is that all things in this universe are represented by these forms.

- The garden in front of the Hojo/Hondo, with its placement of large rocks and green moss on white gravel, is a style of garden known as the "dry landscape garden" (*karesansui*, 枯山水, a style of garden that depicts landscapes using only rocks and sand), which is often found around Zen Temples. Inside are many painted *fusuma* (襖) from renowned artists Hashimoto Kansetsu and Kaiho Yusho. There's Cloud Dragon, Flowers and Birds, Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, The Four Elegant Pastimes, and Landscape.

- The Hatto, or Dhamra Hall, was built in 1765 and is also used as Kennin-ji's main hall. This impressive Zenshu-style (禅宗様) building is comprised of 5 bays by 4 bays separated by a single wall, and with a pent roof. The front-facing altar enshrines a seated image of *Shakyamuni Tathagata* and attendant statues of the Buddhist priests *Mahakasyapa* and *Ananda*. It's also the home of *soryu-zu*, the Twin Dragons. Measuring 15.7 meters in length and 11.4 meters in width (the size of 108 tatami mats); the painting portrays the two enormous intertwined dragons as the protective guardians of Buddhism. Drawn with the finest quality ink on thick traditional Japanese paper, the painting was created in the gymnasium of an elementary school in Hokkaido. It took the artist just two years to complete. The "Twin Dragons" was dedicated in 2002, celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Kennin-ji's founding. [NOTE: Kennin-ji has a funny system to reach the dragons. You have to use a code on a keypad to traverse through two gates (and a change of slippers), but the code is very, very simple and explanations are provided in English, so don't worry…]

Did You Know?

Zenshuyo is a Japanese Buddhist architectural style derived from Chinese Song Dynasty architecture. Named after the Zen sect of Buddhism which brought it to Japan, it emerged in the late 12th or early 13th century. Together with *Wayo* and *Daibutsuyo*, it is one of the three most significant styles developed by Japanese Buddhism on the basis of Chinese models. Its most typical features are a more or less linear layout of the garan, paneled doors hanging from hinges, inter-columnar *tokyo*, cusped windows, tail rafters, ornaments called *kibana*, and decorative pent roofs.

- The Main Gate, Boketsuro, is actually comprised of three gates, called Kumon, Musomon, and Musakumon. The name Boketsuro means "tower overlooking the palace". Images of Shakyamuni, Mahakasyapa, and Ananda are enshrined at the top of the tower. An Imperial Messenger Gate, the Chokushimon, is nearby. The structure of this gate, a four-legged building with copper roofing simulating tiles is in an outspread configuration, provides valuable evidence of the architectural style of the late Kamakura period. The Chokushimon is sometimes called "Ya-no-ne Gate" or "Ya-date Gate" in reference to the marks left on the pillars and doors by arrows during feudal wars.

Higashiyama Stroll

And besides containing Zen gardens, *Kennin-ji* is known for being the place where Zen Master Dogen set out on his path to China and where his remains are buried. Dogen, who lived from 1200-1253, founded the Soto Zen (曹洞宗) school, the largest of the three traditional sects of Zen in Japanese Buddhism (the others being Rinzai and Obaku). It emphasizes *Shikantaza* (只管打坐) meditation with no objects, anchors, or content. The meditator strives to be aware of the stream of thoughts, allowing them to arise and pass away without interference. Much of these teachings are found in the temple's art and infrastructure, which we were finally able to see. It really lived up to its hype so I'm glad we found Kennin-ji this time.

After Kennin-ji we spent the rest of our soggy day in Higashiyama.

The Higashiyama District, along the lower slopes of Kyoto's eastern mountains, is one of the city's best preserved historic districts. It is a great place to experience traditional old Kyoto, especially between Kiyomizu-dera and Yasaka-jinja, where the narrow lanes, wooden buildings and traditional merchant shops invoke a feeling of the old capital city. Recent renovations to remove telephone poles and repave the streets have further improved the traditional feel of the district. The streets in Higashiyama are lined by small shops, cafes and restaurants which have been catering to tourists and pilgrims for centuries. These businesses retain their traditional design, although many have been renovated through the years, and they continue to serve customers today, selling local specialties such as pottery, sweets, pickles, crafts and other souvenirs.

The approach to Kiyomizu-dera is taking a number of steps through history. Here you're along what is called **Sannen-zaka (三年坂)** and **Ninen-zaka (二年坂)**, slopes upon which you'll find traditional Kyoto-style houses lined on both sides of the flagstone that paves your way and staircases leading you upward in "*sukiya*" style, making you truly feel you've stepped into another era. And if the ambiance of the narrow alleys didn't project that feeling upon you, perhaps the Geisha, Geiko, and Maiko you might spot along these roads will. For those unacquainted, *geisha* (芸者) are female professional entertainers whose knowledge of traditional arts, skill at verbal repartee, and ability to keep a secret win them the respect, and sometimes love, of their well-heeled and often influential male clients.

The profession, dating from the 17th century, is in decline and blurred by the activities of so-called *onsen geisha* and others who offer more sexual than classical arts, or who are more glorified waitresses than *geisha*. Kyoto's proud *geisha* prefer the term *geiko* (芸子; "Child of the Arts") and less polished *geiko* are called *maiko* (舞子 or 舞妓; apprentices), and are a Kyoto only phenomenon. The city has four-to-five enclaves of *geisha*, in areas referred to as *hanamachi* (花街; literally "flower towns"): Gion-kobu, Gion Higashi, Pontocho (centers around one long, narrow, cobbled alley running from Shijo-dori to Sanjo-dori, one block west of the Kamo River), Miyagawa-cho (just south of Shijo along the Kamo River), and Kamishichi-ken (in northwest Kyoto). Though it is rare you'll see geisha perform outside of private functions, you might get a chance to see and interact with one (albeit briefly) along this historical path. Though I cannot say we saw many real *geisha*, *geiko* or *maiko* on our stroll here, there were a number of visitors dressed in *yukata*, dress kimono and other traditional garb, out enjoying the spring weather, making the atmosphere along the slope a little more like it was a few hundred years ago. Oh, but do take care on the steps. Local lore maintains that a slip here will bring two or three years' bad luck, and that simply wouldn't do!

After quite a long walk through this part of town (easily a kilometer), and checking out the area's fine merchants (to duck out of the rain), we finally came upon **Kiyomizu-dera (清水寺)** – the pure water temple.

For over 1,000 years, visitors and pilgrims alike have climbed the cobbled streets of Higashiyama to *Kiyomizu-dera*, which stands prominently on a steep hillside with fine views of the city, to pray to the temple's bodhisattva Kannon, the 11-faced goddess of mercy, and to drink from its sacred well-spring. Built around 790, the original temple, which today belongs to the Kita-Hosso sect, predates the founding of Kyoto by at least six years. Although *Kiyomizu-dera* honors the popular Kannon, to whom women pray for an easy childbirth, it has become over time a sort of everyman's temple. You'll see evidence of this throughout the grounds, from the stacked rows of little Jizo Bosatsu statues (representing the god of travel and children) to the many *koma-inu* (狛犬; mythical guard dragon/lion-dogs) marking the pathways. The current structure dates from 1633, thanks in large part to a restoration ordered by Tokugawa Iemitsu following the reunification; the militant monks of the Hiei-zan destroyed the original temple during one of their periodic bloody purges.

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

After the pagoda you'll find the Kyodo, or sutra hall, where the sacred scriptures are kept safe. If you take a moment to peek in you'll find the hall contains images of the Buddhist deities of virtue (Monju) and wisdom (Fugen), along with a ceiling painting of a coiled dragon. To the right of the Kyodo is *Zuigu-do* (or Jishin-in, the Temple of Mercy), the favorite place of worship for Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Rebuilt in 1728, the temple still contains some of his belongings. The Founder's hall comes next after that, in honor of the temple's legendary founder (a man known as Tamuramaro), and another gate: Todoroki-mon. This gate, which also contains another pair of Deva Kings to protect the inner temple, is known as "the gate resounding to the call of the Buddha's teachings" – though I am not sure why. In front of the gate is a hand-and-mouth washing station (with which you're to use to cleanse yourself before entering) with a spigot in the shape of a dragon. From the spigot comes what the Japanese refer to as "Owl Water". Though at first I wasn't sure why it was called that; however, there is an owl design on the base of the trough which explains why.

Further on, and to the left of this middle gate, is the Asakura-do. This hall, which includes an eleven-faced Kannon flanked by images of Kishamon-ten (the god of wealth) and Jizu (the guardian of children) has a unique feature: outside you'll find a set of foot prints said to belong to Buddha himself. Though this was sufficient reminder of Buddha's way in the early years of the religion (images of Buddha or the bodhisattvas were not created early on), today your sins might all be forgiven if you notice the prints. And taking a closer look I also noticed several symbols imbedded within: a pair of fish, a conch shell, and a floral crest!

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

Getting a spot to take in the magnificent view is not easy – even in the rain – and we had to fight our way in, but it was still worth the effort.

Below the veranda is the before-mentioned Sound of Feathers waterfall, believed to be the original source of *kiyomizu*, or pure water. Drinking the water from the three streams is said to confer wisdom, health and longevity; however, some Japanese believe you mustn't drink from all three (re: don't cross the streams), chose only two. If you are greedy and drink from all three, you invite misfortune upon yourself and possibly your family. With so many people we couldn't drink from any of the fountains this visit, though I cannot say the same for many of the others who queued up and went along. They were slurping up whatever they could find, whenever they could find it! There are more than 30 structures situated on approximately 130,000 square meters of land that make up Kiyomizu-dera, so please take your time to poke around. There are plenty of sub-structures and minor shrines and temples to make spending some time here a worth-while proposition – unless crowds aren't your thing… and today, with the throngs of Chinese tourists (and their umbrellas), we just couldn't do it. So we left a little disappointed.

* * *

Actually, if I'm being honest, we returned to K's House here greatly disappointed. Our original plan for the afternoon was two-fold: first, find and touch all the *Furebotoke* statues that exist in Higashiyama (we saw many of them last time we were here, but not all); and second, collect the area's temple's prayer beads in order to make a pilgrimage bracelet. Both courses were suggested by Kyoto's tourism agency the last time we were in town, but we didn't find out about them until the end of our journey. Alas, thanks to the rain, we did neither of those things today. To be honest it's not the rain so much as it's the umbrellas. Their use in a very populated area makes for nothing but a cluster. And that saps the majority of the fun out of things, especially if you've been there before, as we have. So there's little incentive to push on. The other factor in our disappointment today is the sheer number of foreign tourists – Chinese in particular – who have the worst manners when it comes to a crowd of people I have ever seen!

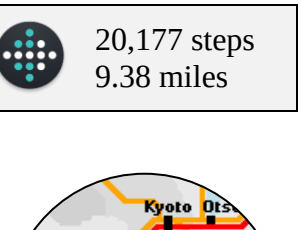
And couple them with rain and umbrellas and the situation becomes unbearable. Therefore, after Kiyomizu we made our way back to K's House to shower, eat, do a bit of laundry, and decompress. With that being said… our dryer is almost done, so I'm going to close out here. We'll be off to bed soon and that sounds really, really nice. Hopefully all the frustrations we felt today will melt away and we'll have a better time of it tomorrow. We're off to Nara and Osaka tomorrow, so, let's hope so! Ja ne!

関西地方 | 京都府 {Kansai / Kyoto}

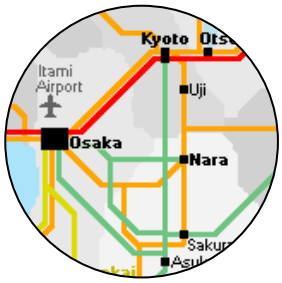
「Rain, Rain, Go Away!」

Tuesday | April 14, 2015

Nara city (奈良市, Nara-shi) is located about 42km (26mi) south of Kyoto and is easily reached via JR Rail and Kintetsu rail lines. But Nara isn't just some small village, post town, shrine pilgrimage, or unimportant city in the hills. Ancient imperial capitals of unified Japan – the very first in fact – were built on the lands here, chronicles written here became the basis of Japanese Imperial mythology, and where the upper classes began to pattern themselves after the mainland, including adopting Chinese written characters (*kanji*), fashion, and the religion of Buddhism, which was just beginning to flourish. All of this defined an entire period of Japanese history named – you guessed it – the Nara Period. So, yes, Nara is important – both historically and culturally – as what happened here informed Japanese history for a thousand years or more. As such the area has the extinction of having more UNESCO World Heritage sites than any other Prefecture in Japan, and seeing as it borders Kyoto, that's saying something. Therefore, you'll find a number of religious relics throughout the numerous historic temples, making Nara an important political and cultural destination to visit. We arrived there a little before 10:00am.



20,177 steps
9.38 miles



The moment we stepped from the Nara Kotsu Bus at the Daibutsuden stop, we thought we'd had beaten the rain. It had been cloudy most of the morning but it was at least dry. After yesterday's slog in the rain we were hoping for better weather. (We were downright gloomy guses!) And wouldn't you know it started to sprinkle the minute we stepped foot off the bus. And though we only returned to Nara just to play with the deer, pay our respects to Buddha at Todai-ji, and to tour Kasauga Taisha before pressing onto Osaka, the rain would definitely make our time here in the Southern Capital a little difficult, but not impossible.

Todai-ji (東大寺)

The origins of Todai-ji lie with a temple called Kinsho-ji, which was founded here in 738 for the repose of the spirit of Prince Motoi, son of Emperor Shomu. Later, in 741 when the Emperor issued an edict ordering the construction of a national system of monasteries (known as the *Kokubunji*), Kinsho-ji was elevated in status (and renamed *Kinkomyo-ji*). Two years later Shomu issued another proclamation, this one for the erection of an image of the Great Buddha, and by 749 the colossal image of Vairocana (the Daibutsu as we know it) was completed. Construction of the Great Buddha Hall took place concurrently and the image was dedicated in 752 with a lavish consecration ceremony. Because Todai-ji was the chief temple in the Kokubun-ji system, it was a center for rituals for the peace of the nation and the prosperity of the people; it also functioned as a center for the training of monks who studied Buddhist doctrine. And like just about every temple in Japan, a number of calamities have befallen upon it.

Did You Know?

The Seige of Nara, as it's called, happened because warring monks from temples throughout the town took part in the Battle of Uji, on the side of the Minamoto. This so enraged the Taira that once they won at Uji, the laid siege to Nara. 3,500 people died as a result.

In 855 the head of the Great Buddha fell off in a major earthquake (but it was quickly restored). In 1180, more than half of the compound was destroyed in a fire that resulted from the attack on Nara temples by Taira Shigehira. Taira Shigehire was one of the clan's chief commanders during the Heian Period. Following the Battle of Uji (which begat the Genpei War – Taira against Minamoto), Shigehira ordered the burning of Nara. Restoration of the temple was begun by Chogen soon thereafter and by 1185 everything was back to normal… at least for a time.

The main entrance to the temple is through the **Nandaimon**, or Great Southern Gate. What you see here is a rebuild, as the original, erected during the Nara period, was destroyed by a Heian-period typhoon. The present structure, which dates to the Kamakura period (in 1203), was built using what is known as the "Daibutsu style" first introduced by priest Chogen; it's a type of construction based on Song Dynasty (China) architecture which represented the antithesis of the simple and traditional styles that pervaded before. With its double hip-and-gable roof is five bays wide and two bays deep.

The eighteen giant pillars that support the roof measure twenty-one meters and the entire structure rises 25.46 meters above the stone plinth on which it rests. Even the gate's two muscular deities (known as the *Kongo Rikishi*, or *Ni-o* – the "Two kings of Todai-ji") are oversized, each measures more than 8.4 meters tall. Yeah, it's huge; it's the largest temple entrance gate in all of Japan – quite suitable for the great hall!

The Daibutsu		
	m	ft
Height	14.98	49.15
Face	5.33	17.49
Eyes	1.02	3.35
Nose	0.50	1.64
Ears	2.54	8.33

Once you go through the gate, the sweeping horned roof of the **Daibutsuden** comes into view. Todai-ji is well known for housing what the Japanese simply call Daibutsu (大仏; "great Buddha"), a 500 metric ton (551 standard ton) copper and bronze statue of Buddha. This image of Buddha, depicting Vairocana ("The Buddha of Light"), is probably one of the most culturally treasured in the nation. It certainly is the largest; it was completed in 752 and consumed nearly all of Japan's bronze production at the time and had consumed it for several years prior, leaving the country virtually bankrupt. It's been recast over the years as various natural disasters have damaged the original statue: in the 9th century, an earthquake knocked over the Buddha's head and in 1180 (and again in 1567) his right hand melted during a fire, which also destroyed the building housing this great figure. His intricate hairstyle is made of 966 bronze balls.

Even today at 66% its original scale, the Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall) is the largest wooden structure in the world and that is really saying something. You'll find that it is 57.1 meters (187 feet) wide, 50.48 meters (165.4 feet) deep, and 48.7 meters (159.4 feet) high. The original building took 15-years to construct and had two 100m pagoda's standing beside it. Alas, they fell by earthquake and the temple succumbed to fire twice during its lifetime – the last in 1692. Even if the building is smaller (seven bays wide versus eleven bays) than it was in ancient times it will still marvel; it dominates the entire landscape!

The completion of the statue itself was an extraordinary achievement. Emperor Shomu, his wife (Empress Komyo), and the reigning Empress (Kogen) all gathered to dedicate the statue by "opening his eyes", which is accomplished by having a priest actually paint the eyes, using a gigantic brush. They weren't just spectators though: from the end of this brush were hung colored strings, which ran down to the VIPs below, enabling them to take part in the ceremony too. Local monks, numbering in the hundreds, as well as ambassadors from China, India and more distant lands were also in attendance. They brought a dazzling assortment of gifts; many of them are still preserved in the Shoso-in treasury, along with the original paint brush (it's the log-cabin-on-stilts looking structure behind the Daibutsuden).

Cultural Notes

The term Bosatsu or Bodhisattva, is bestowed upon those who are dedicated in assisting all sentient beings into achieving Nirvana, by delaying their own entry.

The Twelve Heavenly Generals function as protectors of the faithful, delivering them from illness and harm. Their malevolent faces express violent anger directed at malicious spirits and enemies of Buddhism.

The Four Diva Kings are warrior demigods; their function is to protect the structure in which they are placed by warding off evil spirits. They are known as: Jikoku-ten (Dhrtarastra), Zocho-ten (Virudhaka), Komoku-ten (Virupaksa) and Tamon-ten (Vaisravana).

On the lotus petals on the base of the Great Buddha are engravings of the World of the Lotus Treasury (*Rengezo sekai*), pictorial representations of the "world of enlightenment" described in the sutra. They are beautiful representations of the notion that each individual is not an isolated existence, but that all phenomena have limitless connections and dimensions and that the entire universe is enveloped in the light of Vairocana's wisdom. Oh, and should you see someone attempt to squeeze through a whole in Daibutsu's support pillars, do not worry. The Japanese have a belief that if one is successful in squeezing through, they are guaranteed a place in paradise.

Although the Daibutsuden is the main draw, there are other buildings of note here:

Located to the west of the Daibutsuden is the **Kaidanin**. Chinese monk Jian Zhen (Ganjin) arrived in Japan in 754 and introduced proper Buddhist precepts for the first time. On that occasion, the earthen platform in front of the Daibutsuden where the Emperor and his consort had received the Buddhist precepts was moved to this location and the country's first and principle ordination hall was built as part of a larger compound. Over the years many monks took their vows here. The present complex consists of the Senju-do, Kaidan-do, and priests' living quarters, all rebuilt in the Edo period. The hall includes small clay statutes of 8th Century representations of the Four Heavenly Kings, beautifully carved, each standing on a different fiendish beast, while protecting a small Buddha in a wooden pagoda.

The **Hokke-do** (also known as the *Sangatsu-do*) is significant because it is the oldest structure at Todai-ji. Built between 740 and 747, the hall is composed of the *Sho-do* (image hall) and the *Rai-do* (worship hall). These halls were of great importance to Todai-ji's predecessor: Kinsho-ji. It is believed that the first lectures in Japan of the Avatamsaka Sutra were given here. The original name of this hall was Kensaku-do, originating from the main image housed here, the Fukukensaku Kannon. The name of the hall was later changed to Hokke-do (Lotus Hall) when the Hokke-e (Lotus Sutra) ceremony began being held here every March. Inside the Hokke-do stand ten statues crowded around the main image of Fukukensaku Kannon. The statues are the quintessence of Nara Period sculpture and it is said the atmosphere evoked by them eventually leads those who lay eyes upon them to the solemn "world of the Buddhas."The imposing image of Fukukensaku Kannon, a deity that was believed to be willing to go to whatever length necessary to save those who were suffering, stands with a composed expression. The two Kongo Rikishi (with their angry faces and menacing postures), and the Four Divine Kings (with their varied expressions) guard the world of the Buddhas. At the rear of the hall is the secret image (an image rarely on public view) of Shukongo-jin, who with the vajra in his raised hand and angry expression, protects people from enemies of the Buddhist faith.

The **Nigatsu-do** (Second Month Hall) gets its name from the fact that the Shuni-e Ceremony, more commonly known as "Omizutori", is held here during February. The hall was originally built during the eighth century but burned down in 1667 during an Omizutori, ironically. The current structure dates from 1669 and is known for its excellent acoustics. The Omizutori ceremony began in 752 as a rite of repentance to the Juichimen Kannon (Eleven-headed Kannon) for human qualities of greed, anger and ignorance. These "offenses" of human nature contaminated the spirit, making people ill and unable to see truth. Through the ceremony people could then repent their misdeeds, cleanse their spirits and obtain well-being. When this ceremony was first practiced, illness was broadly interpreted to mean natural disasters, epidemics, and rebellions, thus the ritual was held as a state affair to guarantee the welfare of the people.

The Bell Tower which soars conspicuously into the sky was built between 1207 and 1210 by the Zen priest Yosai (1141-1215), who succeeded Chogen, the figure who made the greatest mark in restoring the temple at the start of the Kamakura period. The elegant structure combines certain aspects of the Zen style of architecture with the Daibutsu style. The bell (梵鐘; *bonsho*), which weighs 26.3 tons, dates from the time of the founding of Todai-ji. It's also one of the three famous bells of Japan; it is known for its long ring.

Bonsho are cast in a single piece using two molds, a core and a shell, in a process that is largely unchanged since the Nara period. The core is constructed from a dome of stacked bricks made from hardened sand, whilst the shell is made using a *strickle* board.

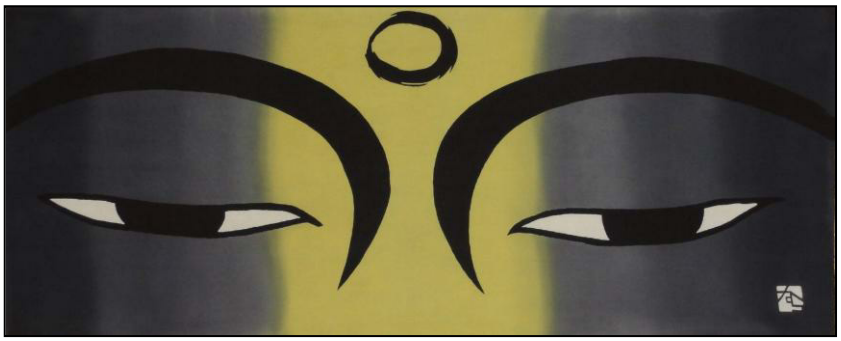
This is a large, flat, wooden board shaped like a cross-section of the bell, which is rotated around a vertical axis to shape the clay used for the mold. Inscriptions and decorations are then carved or impressed into the clay. The shell fits over the core to create a narrow gap, into which the molten bronze is poured at a temperature of over 1,050 °C (1,920 °F). The ratio of the alloy is usually around 17:3 copper to tin; the exact admixture (as well as the speed of the cooling process) can alter the tone of the end product. After the metal has cooled and solidified, the mold is removed by breaking it, therefore a new one has to be created for each bell. The process has a high failure rate; only around 50 percent of castings are successful on the first attempt, without cracks or imperfections. The casting is traditionally accompanied by the chanting of Buddhist sutras, which may go on for several hours.

Did You Know?

There are several parts to a temple bell: Ryūzu (竜頭) is the dragon-shaped handle at the top of the bell by which it is carried or hung. Kasagata (笠形), the domed crown of the bell. Chichi or nyū (乳), are the bosses around the upper part of the bell that improve its resonance. Koma no tsume (駒の爪), the lower rim. Tsuki-za (撞座), a striking panel, a reinforced spot where the bell is struck. It is often decorated with a Buddhist lotus motif. Tatsuki (竜貴), the decorative horizontal bands. Mei-bun (銘文), is the inscription (often giving the bell's history). And the Shu-moku (手木), the hanging wooden beam used to strike the tsuki-za.

And let us not forget about The **Octagonal Lantern**, which you'll find in front of the Great Buddha Hall. Dating from the time of the founding of Todai-ji, the distinctive large fire chamber is covered with a sloping roof surmounted by a jewel-like form. It rests upon a stone base supported by a stone post emanating from a loti-form pedestal. The eight panels of the fire chamber are grilles of diamond shapes. The four stationary panels are ornamented with celestial musicians while the four pairs of hinged doors are decorated with lions running across clouds. The conception of the celestial musicians is particularly wonderful with their lithe poses, well-realized foreshortening of their chests and their hands that hold instruments, and the movement of the scarves caught by the wind. The post bears an excerpt from a Buddhist text extolling the merits of lighting lanterns.

Yes, even in the rain, Todai-ji is a fantastic site to explore.

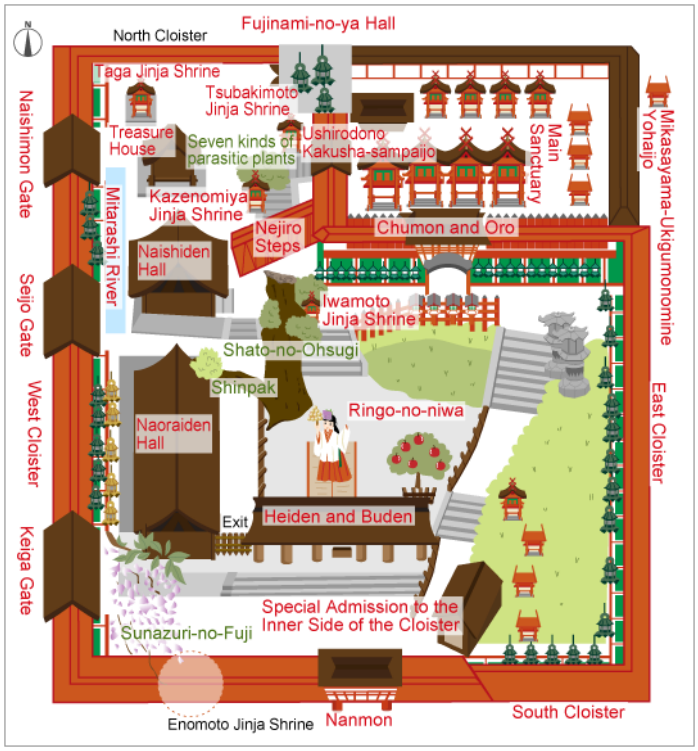


Kasuga Taisha (春日大社**)**

One of Nara's most interesting features is the plethora of "tame" deer that wander about. There are approximately 1200 of them roaming around Nara and they're quite friendly. Too friendly, in fact, as they'll just stand there and watch you, let you pet them, and for ¥200, you can buy little "deer biscuits" to feed them. One of the reasons for returning to Nara this trip was to once again play with the deer, so following our walk about Todai-ji, we stopped for Nicole to buy some deer biscuits. They swarmed around her (biting her once or twice in the process) but she had fun with it never-the-less. Besides petting and feeding the "sacred" deer (yep, they're revered as messengers of the spirits and thereby protected by law), she also wanted to find a few more deer charms to replace the one that broke last year. We looked and found some, but they weren't quite the same ones. She was bummed so we pushed on, climbing the steps to Kasuga Taisha.

The approach leads through a truly primordial forest (春日山原始林; the Kasugayama Primeval Forest) covering the hillside of Nara's mountain range in verdant greens. You'll find around 175 different kinds of trees here, 60 types of birds, and over 1100 species of insects. A forest like this survived because hunting and logging have been prohibited here since 841. The wide gravel paths are lined with thousands upon thousands of stone lanterns. Those lanterns have been donated by devotees as a token of faith. In ages past they are said to have been lit every night, but nowadays they're lit only on a few shrine festival dates throughout the year. Lit or not, take your time walking the slight incline up the hill and breathe in the magical atmosphere of this unique UNESCO World Heritage site.

Kasuga is a shrine of the Shinto following and was founded by the Fujiwara clan (in 768); although, records indicate the site may be slightly older - dating to around the beginning of the Nara period. Ancient myths suggest that when the capital was in Nara, the god Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto came all the way from Kashima Shrine (in Ibaraki Prefecture) to Mt. Mikasa, which is considered a holy mountain, to dwell on its summit ("Ukigumo-no-mine") for the prosperity of the nation and happiness of the people. (It is said that here, at the foothills of Mount Mikasa and Mount Kasuga, are where the Shinto gods are said to have first descended upon the Earth.) Later on, when Tempyo Culture flourished (a more cosmopolitan culture), the political leader Fujiwara-no-Nagate built a number of magnificent buildings on what is now the present site of the shrine, as ordained by Empress Shotoku. On November 9, 768, he enshrined several gods here, namely Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto and Futsu-nushi-no-mikoto, as well as two deities of the Fujiwara family, Ame-no-koyane and his consort Hime-gami. As such Kasuga Taisha is one of Nara's most celebrated shrines.



The shrine halls' bright vermillion columns, white walls, and roofs of *hinoki* cypress bark contrast beautifully with the green of the surrounding ancient woods. The serene beauty of the buildings has not changed since its inception. This is because of the "Shikinen Zotai" ceremony which takes place every 20 years. The buildings of the shrine are repaired, the tools and instruments used are renewed, and ceremonial rituals are held strictly according to their traditions. Through such efforts, a solemn and peaceful atmosphere fills the entire precinct. Kasuga Taisha is a distinguished shrine with 3,000 auxiliary shrines across the country and 3,000 donated lanterns, demonstrating how widely and deeply worshipped the shrine is. Beyond the shrine's offering hall, which can be visited free of charge, there is a paid inner area which provides a closer view of the shrine's inner buildings. Furthest in is the main sanctuary, containing multiple shrine buildings that display the distinctive Kasuga style of shrine architecture, characterized by a sloping roof extending over the front of the building. Let's take a look…

The Outer Sanctuary

One of the first things you'll note about the shrine once you pass through the **Nanamon**, the twelve-meter tall, two-storied south gate, is that the central complex is completely surrounded by covered walkways, or **cloisters**. There's the 45 meter south cloister (that you just walked through), the 37 meter long east cloister (with the *Yogo* gate in the middle, ending where it meets the east side of the *Oro*, or open veranda), the 27 meter long north cloister (near the Main Sanctuary), and the 57 meter long west cloister (which has three gates within its structure – *Keiga*, *Seijo*, and *Naishi* – located from south to north respectively.

To the left, closest to the *Keiga* gate, is a **wisteria tree** called *Sunazuri-no-fuji*, ("wisteria flowers drooping down to reach the sand on the ground") as the flower clusters can be seen to hang down for more than one meter when in bloom. The tree is a variant of the Japanese wisteria, and is said to have been planted by the Konoe family, making it over 700 years old. In fact, the tree was mentioned in the *Kasuga Gongen-genki*, a picture scroll offered to the shrine back in 1309. Further in are the **Heiden and Buden**, the shrine's offering hall and traditional music and dance halls respectively. The Heiden is a smaller two-bay construct, whilst the Buden is three-bays; however, the Heiden is further distinguished by its coffered ceiling. It is the more important of the two, but both saw service by the Imperial Family at one time or another.

Past the Heiden and Buden are the Shato-no-Ohsugi and the Ringo-no-niwa. The **Ringo-no-niwa** is a smallish garden where ceremonial dances and music were performed. The garden borrows its name from the apple tree that stands at its southeast corner. It's said the tree was received as a gift from Emperor Takakura, also about 800 years ago. The **Shato-no-Ohsugi** is an 800-1000 year old tree 8.7 meters in girth and 25 meters in height. It's depicted as a young sapling in the aforementioned picture scroll. Another tree, known as *Shinpak* (also called "Ibuki"), grows from its roots. A hole has been built into the roof of the nearby Naoraiden Hall so as not to hinder its growth. The tree has another important significance though. The Iwamoto Jinja, located at its roots, enshrines three deities: *Uwazutsu-*, *Nakazutsu-*, and *Sokozutsu-no-mikoto*.

The Main & Inner Sanctuaries

The outer sanctuary of Kasuga Taisha is free to all visitors, but for ¥500 you can continue exploring the Inner Sanctuaries. Here is where the treasures of the shrine can be found.

The Main Sanctuary, for all that it is named, is so important most – if not all – visitors are not allowed to step foot within it. But you can see this part of the shrine through the **Chumon** (middle gate), and the **Oro**, which separates the districts. If you look sharply you'll find that the Oro extends in a form that resembles a bird spreading its wings. Today, priests take seats here during ceremonies, but in the former days, priests would recite Buddhist sutras here. Inside are the Kasuga Taisha's most **important shrines**, that for: Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto (first hall), Futsunushi-no-mikoto (second hall), Amenokoyane-no-mikoto (third hall), and the consort Himegami (fourth hall).

Coming around, you'll pass by the **Nejiro Steps**, which connect the Naishiden Hall and Oro. This used to be called the "Noborito", although I'm not sure why. The steps are built obliquely, and most of the components are parallelogram. Again, I'm not sure why. But they were supposedly created by Hidari Jingoro, the most famous carpenter of the 17th century. The *Naishiden* was once a building for the "naishi" court ladies who served in the shrine. It's also called the "Utsushidono" because the deities of the main shrine were moved to this building during the time of *Zotai*, or rebuilding that takes place every 20 years. Even more shrines and plants await your discovery as you continue touring…

Located to the west of the Main Sanctuary is the **Kazenomiya Jinja**, a shrine that houses deities that rule the wind ("kaze"). Traditionally it is said that the wind deity in the west is able to protect the Main Sanctuary from the arm of the western winds, and from enemies. And that's why you'll find *Shinatsuhiko-no-mikoto* and *Shinatsuhime-no-mikoto* enshrined within. Standing at the northwest of the Main Sanctuary, the **Tsubakimoto Jinja** shrine represents the deity *Tsunofuri-no-Kami*, who is related to the main deities here. The shrine is also known as "Hayabusa Myojin", the deity who protects the world from disasters. It's called Tsubakimoto today because there was a *tusbaki*, or camellia tree, nearby when the shrine was first built. Between them is a rare tree upon which grows seven kinds of plants: "isunoki" (Distylium racemosum), mountain cherry, camellia, nandina, elder, wisteria and maple.

It is believed that the power of the wind deity gathered the seeds of those plants and deposited them here. Cherished as a sacred tree of childbirth, people write their wishes on a piece of thin paper and tie them around the branches.

To the west of those is Kasuga's **Treasure House** – it's hard to miss. It's a log building built in the "azekura style", completely painted vermilion. It stores treasured items (mirrors, swords, spearheads, bows and arrows, and the like), that are used to adorn the Main Sanctuary for the Kasuga Festival in March. And its door is usually closed with a seal, as it was today. But you can pray to *Izanagi-no-mikoto*, the god who gives people long life, at the **Taga Jinja** nearby.

And last, but certainly not least, is the **Naoraiden Hall**. Besides the historical and spiritual significance, this shrine offers two uniquely Japanese cultural curiosities. First, and foremost, are the vermilion colored corridors that surround the outside of the shrine's buildings (there are 30 in all). Like the red-stained torii of Fushimi-inari Taisha in Kyoto, these corridors stand out in contrast to the woods of cedar they inhabit. The shrine is also noted for its 3000 toro (灯篭; lantern). You'll find 2000 of these made of stone lining the path from the mountain base to the central atrium. This 1km walkway is said to function to provide an appropriate atmosphere for visitors to clear their mind of errant thoughts and prepare the soul for worship. The lanterns, then, help illuminate the proper path and state of mind for those who come. The other 1000, made of bronze, can be found adorning the eaves of the shrine's main halls.

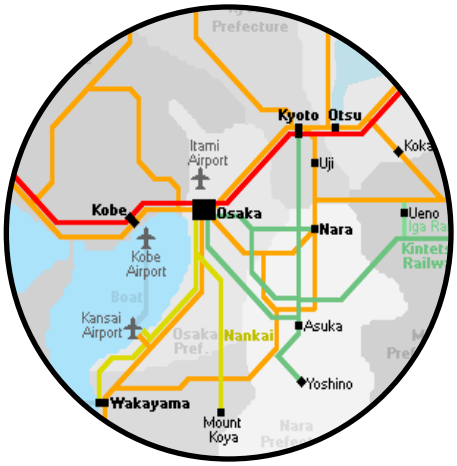
While the vermilion lacquered halls are very impressive (if not colorful) it's the lanterns that garner the most attention. If you're lucky enough to visit the shrine while these are lit - only on February 3rd or 4th, and August 14th and 15th - you're in for a real treat! Unfortunately, our journey did not fall on either of these days, but having witnessed 3,000 lanterns of various shapes and sizes, I can almost imagine how illuminating an experience it must be. Visitors to the shrine will also find traditional dance performances in the Kagura, Bugaku, Dengaku and Sarugaku styles in the central atrium. And there's even a little quiet place where you can take off your shoes, settle upon a nice fluffy pillow and rest for a moment or two.

Feeling a bit peckish, we returned to the Daibutsuden bus stop area and had lunch at one of our favorite haunts in Nara. I can't tell you the name of the restaurant, but their food is a welcome sight. Once again I had the *tonkatsu* rice bowl and Nicole the shrimp *udon*. It was yummy and just what we needed on this rainy morning: a hot meal!

To Osaka!

When my wife expressed interest in visiting Nara again I wasn't sure how that would affect some of our other plans for the area, especially those with regards to Osaka. Although I've never been fond of Osaka – and spend as little time as I can there when I'm in country – one of the hopes for this trip was to alleviate that oversight. To that end I had already drawn up the itinerary and it did not include a half-day in Nara. Alas I'd have to go back to the drawing board to fit Nara in, but in doing so actually helped the plans for Osaka. You see, it's not hard to get from Kyoto to Osaka – 15 minutes or less on the Shinkansen will do it – but that'd leave us at Shin-Osaka station, the furthest away from where we wanted to be. Traveling from Nara to Osaka via Kyoto on the same day would be temporal suicide, or would be without the JR Yamatoji Rapid Service Train. This train does in 30 minutes what would take two plus hours by returning to Kyoto. The reason for this is simple: what I wanted to see in Osaka was buried deep in the southern part of its rail loop at Tennoji, the furthest away you could get from Shin-Osaka station and still be in the city loop. So the discovery of the JR Yamatoji Rapid Service from Nara to Tennoji station in southeastern Osaka was not only a time-saver, but a life-saver as well!

And then just as we planned we left Nara at 1:02pm on the Yamatoji train bound for Osaka.



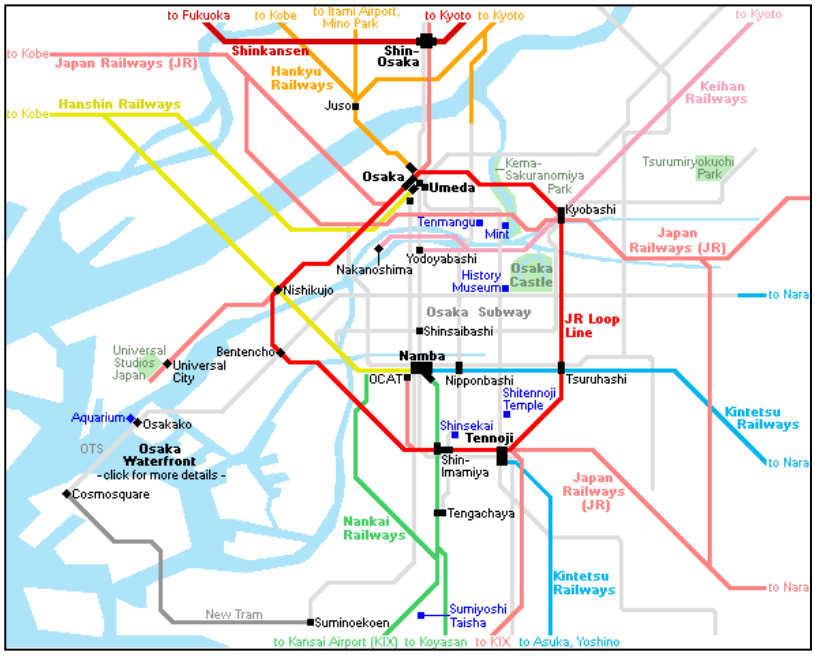
Settled at the mouth of Yodo-gawa (淀川; Yodo River) and covering an area of approximately 1,900 square kilometers, Osaka (大阪府; *Osaka is one of the two "urban prefectures" - 府 fu - of Japan, Kyoto being the other. Tokyo became a "metropolitan prefecture", or 都 to, in 1941*) is the second smallest prefecture in all of Japan (Kagawa prefecture is currently the smallest by area), but its population is roughly 7% of the entire country – that's approximately 8.9 million people. That makes it the third most populous prefecture after Tokyo and Kanagawa! Osaka (大阪市) city itself, the capital of the prefecture, is the second largest metropolitan area behind the special twenty-three wards of Tokyo and third-largest by population, with an estimate of 2.7 million people inhabiting the city. It's the largest component of the *Keihanshin* (京阪神), the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe metropolitan area, the second largest metropolitan area in Japan after the Greater Tokyo Area, and among the largest in the world with over 19.3 million inhabitants (containing approximately 15% of the country's population). Interestingly, the name *Keihanshin* is constructed by extracting a representative kanji from Kyoto (京都), Osaka (大阪), and Kobe (神戸), but using the On-yomi (Chinese reading) instead of the corresponding Kun-yomi (Japanese reading) for Osaka and Kobe, and the kan-on Chinese reading of the character for Kyoto instead of the usual go-on Chinese reading. Although second in size to Tokyo, the metropolitan area does hold the distinction of holding the largest difference between daytime and nighttime populations. There's 141% difference between the two, making Osaka the largest commuter capital in all of Japan – even larger than Tokyo and that's saying something!

Osaka dates back to the Asuka and Nara periods. Under the name Naniwa (難波), it was briefly the capital of Japan 645-655, 661-667 and finally 744-745 AD. Even after the capital was moved elsewhere, Osaka continued to play an important role as a hub for land, sea and river-canal transportation. During the Tokugawa era, while Edo (now Tokyo) served as the austere seat of military power and Kyoto was the home of the Imperial court and its courtiers, Osaka served as "the Nation's Kitchen" (天下の台所; *tenka-no-daidokoro*), the collection and distribution point for rice, the most important measure of wealth. Hence it was also the city where merchants made and lost fortunes and cheerfully ignored repeated warnings from the shogunate to reduce their conspicuous consumption.

Did You Know?

Many districts in Osaka derive their names from the Tokugawa-era bridges that were built during the city's reign as transportation hub for the country. Today, Yodoyabashi (淀屋橋) and Kyobashi (京橋) still retain their crossings, while the bridges in Yotsubashi (四ツ橋), Nagahoribashi (長堀橋) and Shinsaibashi (心斎橋) are long gone.

During Meiji era, Osaka's fearless entrepreneurs took the lead in industrial development. A thorough drubbing in World War II left little evidence of this glorious past — even the castle is a ferroconcrete reconstruction — but to this day, while unappealing and gruff on the surface, Osaka remains one of Japan's most interesting cities. And in legend (if not in practice) Osakans still greet each other with *mokarimakka*, "are you making money?"



Osaka city sprawls across the land in all directions, leading one to believe navigating it will be just as daunting a challenge as traversing the super-downtowns of Tokyo; but it's not. The city is administratively divided into 24 wards (区; ku), but in common usage the following divisions are more useful: Umeda (梅田), Namba (難波), Tennoji (天王寺), and the Bay Area. You'll find Central Osaka split into two geographical areas at either end of Midosuji-dori, Osaka's major thoroughfare: Kita (キタ; north) and Minami (ミナミ; south). Kita is home to the Umeda district and its immediate surrounding neighborhoods, a major business and retail hub that plays host to Osaka Station and a large subterranean network of shopping arcades. Kita, and nearby Nakanoshima, contain a prominent portion of the city's skyscrapers and are often featured in photographs of Osaka's skyline. Minami, though meaning "south", is geographically central within the city. Well known districts here include Namba and Shinsaibashi. The entertainment area around Dotonbori Bridge with its famous giant mechanical crab, Triangle Park, Nipponbashi Den Den Town, and Amerikamura ("America Village") are also in Minami.

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

The business districts between Kita and Minami such as Honmachi and Yodoyabashi, together called Semba (船場), house the regional headquarters of many large-scale banks and corporations. The city's west side is a prominent bay area which serves as its main port as well as a tourist destination with attractions such as Kyocera Dome, Universal Studios Japan, and the Tempozan Harbour Village. Further south of Minami are neighborhoods such as Shinsekai (with its Tsutenkaku tower), Tennoji and Tennoji Zoo. And getting from one jurisdiction to the other is made easy by the Osaka Municipal Subway (大阪市営地下鉄) system, which is said to be the 8th busiest in the world according to rider-ship. For ¥200 to ¥360 depending on distance traveled, you can traverse the lines on the system, all color coded accordingly for ease of navigation. Getting to Osaka from any point in Japan is very easy – hop on the Sanyo Shinkansen (山陽新幹線) from Hakata or Kyoto operated by JR West or Tokaido Shinkansen (東海道新幹線) from Tokyo operated by JR East. In as little as three hours, you're there!

You can, of course, ride the JR Loop around Osaka, but I find the city's Subway lines to be more than effective in getting around the city. There's also the Kintetsu and Nankai railways to use, but these generally serve the suburbs and are of little use within the city itself.

Our port of entry into Osaka today, as previously mentioned is in the south-eastern quadrant of the city, known as Tennoji (天王寺). It's generally known as home to the tallest skyscraper in Japan, the Abeno Harukas building, but it's not for the Abeno Harukas that we came today, rather for Shitennoji. Alas, if it was only raining in Nara, it was pouring in Osaka, and that made visiting Shitennoji a miserable experience.

Shitenno-ji (四天王寺)

Shitenno-ji (also known as *Arahaka-ji*, *Nanba-ji*, or *Mitsu-ji*) is one of Japan's oldest temples and the first ever to be built by the state. It was founded in 593 by Prince Shotoku (remember him from Nara?), who was noted for his profound Buddhist faith and supported the introduction of Buddhism into Japan. The temple gets its name from a very basic Buddhist precept – the Four Heavenly Kings – four gods, each of whom watches over one cardinal direction of the world and who are vowed to protect the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Buddha's followers from danger. In Chinese, they are known collectively as the "Fēng Tiáo Yǔ Shùn", but in Japan they're called the *Shitteno* (四天王), and are known as:

Did You Know?

Just before Shittenoji was founded, it was a tumultuous time for Japanese clans. The Soga, represented by Prince Shotoku, wanted Japan to adopt Buddhism, and the powerful Monobe were opposed, supporting instead the ancient Japanese religion. The Prince, according to legend, achieved his victory by praying to the Four Heavenly Kings, and it was to mark that victory that in 593 A.D. he ordered the construction of Shitennoji.

- Tamon (多聞天), or Bishamon (毘沙門天): This is the chief of the four kings and protector of the north. As ruler of rain, his symbolic weapon is the umbrella. Wearing heavy armor and carrying the umbrella in his right hand, he is often associated with the ancient Indian God of wealth. And he's associated with the color yellow or green.
- Zocho (増長天): King of the south and one who causes good growth of roots, he is the ruler of the wind. His symbolic weapon is the sword which he carries in his right hand to protect the Dharma and the southern continent. Associated with the color blue
- Jikoku (持国天 / 治国天): King of the east and God of music, his symbolic weapon is the pipa (a stringed instrument). He is harmonious, compassionate, and protects all beings. He uses his music to convert others to Buddhism. Associated with the color white.
- Komoku (広目天): King of the west and one who sees all. His symbolic weapon is a snake or red cord that is representative of a dragon. As the eye in the sky, he sees people who do not believe in Buddhism and converts them. His ancient name means he who has broad objectives. He is associated with the color red.

Although the temple Prince Shotoku built was in honor of the Four Heavenly Kings themselves, it also had four institutions within – called Shika-in (四箇院) – to help the Japanese attain a higher level of civilization. Centered on the seven-building garan (the complex inside the walls), it included a *Kyoden-in* (an Institution of Religion and Education), a *Hiden-in* (a Welfare Institution), a *Ryobyo-in* (a hospital), and a *Seiyaku-in* (a Pharmacy) to provide essential care to all the people of Japan.

Today, in the pebble covered courtyard of the inner precinct, there is a five-story pagoda, which can be entered and climbed, a main Golden Pavilion (*Kondo*) housing an image of the Prince as statue of Nyorai Kannon, and a *Kodo* (Lecture Hall), under a covered corridor holding three of the temple's magnificent gates (the Deva Gate, the Western Gate, and the Eastern Gate). Surrounding this central complex are the Great South Gate (*Nandaimon*), and a Great East Gate (*Higashi-no-o'mon*). To the west is the Great West Gate (*Nishi-no-o'mon*), also known as Gokuraku-mon (極楽門). And in the North lies a huge cemetery.

Unfortunately most of these buildings are not original. Many burnt down – several times in fact – throughout the centuries, but they were always carefully reconstructed to reflect the original 6th century design (the last reconstruction occurring in 1963). That being said, the stone *torii* gate at the main entrance dates from 1294 and is the oldest of its kind in the country.

A short walk away is the **Gokuraku-jodo Garden**, which was designed based on descriptions of the Western Paradise of the Amida Buddha, but with the skies not letting up, after our cursory look around – and climb up the pagoda (which is also a re-creation) – we returned to Shitennoji-mae Yuhigaoka station and made our way underground.

Once we made it back to the metro station I knew the jig in Osaka was up. Our next location, Sumiyoshi Taisha, was all outdoors. Everything we'd planned to do in Osaka this afternoon was outdoors in fact! So rather than pushing on with the original plan (what was the point, really? Even if we'd continued I doubt we would have enjoyed it much), we scurried underground and made our way to Namba, then Umeda, and eventually Osaka Station before tucking tail and taking a train back to Kyoto. Although we did end up poking around Osaka Station for a few minutes, we got lost in its maze of shops and malls, so we returned to more familiar ground. A half-hour or more later we were back home in Kyoto, but rather than return to K's house straightaway (and call it a day), we took our time exploring Kyoto Station itself. I'd always wanted to see the Skyway and Rooftop Park, so that's what we did!

Exploring Kyoto Station

Did you know there's a LEGO replica of the station (to scale) inside? Yep! But I'll get to that in a moment.

Kyoto Station (京都駅; *Kyoto-eki*) is a major railway station and transportation hub. It has Japan's second-largest station building (after Nagoya Station) and is one of the country's largest buildings, incorporating a shopping mall, hotel, Movie Theater, Isetan department store, and several local government facilities under one 15-story roof. The first inklings of a station came about on September 5, 1876 when the governmental railway from Kobe reached Kyoto. The station was still under construction so a temporary facility – called the Omiya-dori Temporary Station – was used until it opened five months later on February 5, 1877. In 1889, the railway became a part of the trunk line to Tokyo (Tokaido Main Line), and eventually became the terminal of two private railways: the Nara Railway (in 1895, present day JR Nara Line), and Kyoto Railway (in 1897, the present day JR Sagano Line), that connected central Kyoto with its southern and northern regions respectively. The station was replaced by a newer, Renaissance-inspired facility in 1914. Although it survived WWII – since allies did not bomb Kyoto for its historical significance – it did, like most other buildings in Kyoto at one time or another – burn to the ground in 1950. It was replaced with a much loathed utilitarian concrete structure in 1952.

The current Kyoto Station opened in 1997, commemorating Kyoto's 1,200th anniversary. The building's futuristic design and atmosphere was conceived by the Japanese architect Hara Hiroshi. Hara's design attempts to convey historical Kyoto through a modern aesthetic. Architecturally, it exhibits many characteristics of futurism, with a slightly irregular cubic façade of plate glass over a steel frame. The station's large main hall with its exposed steel beamed roof, called the Matrix, is meant to reflect both the structure of the station and the grid like layout of Kyoto's street network. Hara also designed the Umeda Sky Building in Osaka. In Fact, Kyoto, one of the least modern cities in Japan by virtue of its many cultural heritage sites, was largely reluctant to accept such an ambitious structure in the mid-1990's, and lobbied heavily for the project's dismissal. Alas it got built anyway and its completion began a wave of new high-rise developments in the city.

The current Kyoto station is 70 meters high and 470 meters from east-to-west, with a total floor area of 238,000 square meters. It's huge! And there are two sides to the station: Karasuma and Hachijo. The busier Karasuma side to the north faces downtown and is named after the main street just outside. The calmer Hachijo side to the south provides access to a few more hotels, the Toji temple, and a few highway bus stops. Aside from the main building on the north side of the station, the Hachijo-guchi building on the south side was built to house the Tokaido Shinkansen. The underground facilities of the station, including the shopping mall Porta beneath the station square, were constructed when the subway opened in 1981. In addition to government facilities and shopping malls, the station is the city's transportation hub, served by Japan railways, Kintetsu Railways, and the Karasuma Subway Line. It is also the site of a large bus terminal for city busses and long distance and overnight highway busses. Besides the station facilities, the building's 15 floors offer several other attractions and conveniences including the Granvia Hotel, an art museum, and a vast array of shopping and dining options at Itesan, Porta, and The Cube.

JR Kyoto **Isetan Department Store** occupies 10 stories in the western portion of the station building. Goods on sale include clothing, accessories, fresh food, local souvenirs, stationery and more. Isetan also has a small art museum on its 7th floor as well as a range of restaurants on the 11th floor. Kyoto Station extends underground into the **Porta shopping mall**.

The mall is located under the bus terminal and plaza on the Karasuma side of the station and offers roughly 100 shops and restaurants, as well as access to the Karasuma Subway Line. **The Cube** is a shopping mall in the basement of the Kyoto Station building. It offers a lot of local souvenirs, such as sweets and pickles on the first basement floor, and fashion and accessories on the second basement floor. Some of the restaurants on the building's 11th floor are also considered part of The Cube.

Additionally, besides the malls and dining options, there are two attractions within the station the public can access free of charge: an Observation deck, and the Skyway. Reached via a long series of escalators and a final flight of stairs, you'll find the open air **observation deck** located on the top floor of the station building.

Unfortunately, the views from the deck are not very attractive, because they are only possible through heavily toned windows, but you can get a rather good look at the area surrounding the station. There's also a terrace (called the "Happy Terrace") to enjoy a little green at, if that's your thing. All in all it's a nice change of pace. The **Skyway** tunnel, also located at the top of the station, allows visitors to walk the length of Kyoto Station, 45 meters above the central hall. The Skyway's glass windows provide views of the city and station below. It starts from the restaurant floor on the 11th floor of the station building and follows the lay of the station.

We explored them all. Including that LEGO replica of the station I mentioned earlier; it was cool! Oh, and don't miss the LED light display on the 171 steps near Itesan. They're fun to watch!

* * *

We've been fed, watered, showered, had our time on the Internet here at K's House, and alas our evening is winding down. The only excitement left in our lackluster day is now we're using our room's dehumidifier to dry our things, and soon we'll head off to bed. We're party animals, I know! Alas I guess this trip is going to go down as the one I/we complain about the weather. Usually I'm complaining about my feet, but with the new shoes and insoles I got before the trip, coupled with the mole skin and other foot accoutrements, they're in really good shape! Sore, yes, but really not that bothersome. I guess poor weather is my tradeoff. Still, we'd be a lot happier if it would let up, you know? Makes going places a bit more of a chore than they were already, and then once you're there, it makes being there a miserable experience. But we're trying.

Tomorrow is another day, ne? We hope for better weather…

関西地方 | 京都府 {Kansai / Kyoto}

「The Forests of Arashiyama, Part 1」

Wednesday | April 15, 2015 (part 1)

24,876 steps
11.56 miles

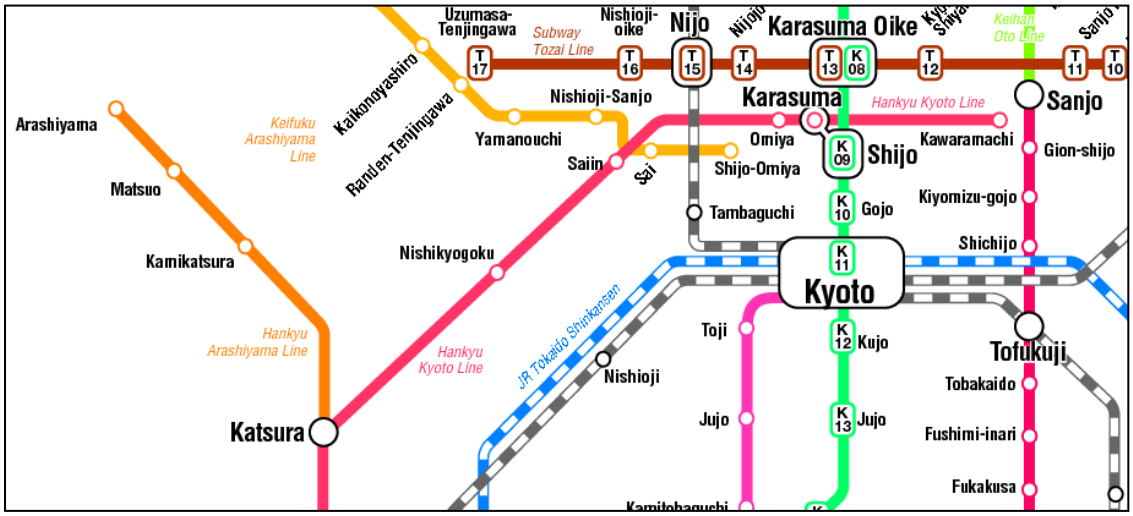
Konbanwa, and welcome once again to the lounge here at K's House Kyoto. Though we're now at the end of our day – we're already snuggled in our PJs, our tummy's full, and the laundry is sloshing around the washing machine – I must say it was quite an excellent one! It was a welcome change. You know, while all days on vacation are inherently good days, because, let's face it, you're not at work or at home doing whatever it is you'd normally be doing, sometimes circumstances present themselves that may sour the mood of a vacation, such as a fight, getting lost, or bad weather. When the weather is good, the day is generally good. When the weather is poor… well, you try to make the best of it. When life hands you a lemon make lemon aid, right? Well, for the last two days we've been trying to do just that: make the best of it. It's been hard to do though, as you've heard me whine, but today we've had a much better time of it. For most of the day… it wasn't raining! In fact, the sun came out to shine!

Today we were back in Kyoto to explore the Arashiyama (嵐山) area, a pleasant, leafy suburb in the city's western outskirts. Literally "Storm Mountain", Arashiyama was originally a place for imperial relaxation, away from the main court in central Kyoto, where Heian Period (794-1185) aristocrats indulged in pursuits such as poetry-writing, boating, hiking, and hunting in the area's natural setting. (The area is particularly popular during the cherry blossom and fall color seasons – today, though, it was just busy.) The palaces here were later converted into Buddhist temples and monasteries, while the smaller, quieter residences retained a more intimate appeal. The town's most interesting sights (including *Tenryu-ji* and Arashiyama's famous bamboo groves), as well as the majority of its shops, restaurants, and transport facilities lie close to the town's heart just north of *Togetsukyo* (渡月橋; "Moon Crossing Bridge"), a long, classically designed bridge that spans the river that winds its way through here, but there are all sorts of gems to discover on both sides of the river.

Built during the same historical period (and most recently reconstructed during the 1930s) the bridge offers a splendid view up and down the river which varies dramatically from season to season. With Mt. Arashi serving as a backdrop, visitors can enjoy cherry blossoms in the spring, vibrant summer greens, and colorful autumn leaves on the mountain slope. Although I bet you wouldn't be surprised to learn *Togetsukyo* is not the bridge's original name. Nope, originally referred to as "Horinjikyo", as it led to Horinji Temple; the bridge takes its current name from the romantic notions of Emperor Kameyama in the 14th century, who noted that throughout the night it seemed like the moon was making its way across the bridge. And so the name was changed.

And speaking of the river flowing under *Togetsukyo*, did you know its name changes depending on its location! It is called *Oigawa* (大堰川; Oi River) in the upper course, *Hozugawa* (保津川; Hozu River) in the middle course (the west side of the bridge) , and *Katsuragawa* (桂川; Katsura River) in the lower course (the east side). North of central Arashiyama the atmosphere becomes less touristy and more rural, with several small temples scattered along the base of the wooded mountains. The area north of the Togetsukyo Bridge is also known as Sagano, while the name "Arashiyama" technically just refers to the mountains on the southern bank of the river (but is commonly used to name the entire district).

We explored both sides today.



Getting to the area was a quick study in Kyoto's alternative rail systems: the Keihan lines (albeit, which we were familiar), and the Hankyu lines (which we were not). Although switching between the two was not the most convenient task to complete (the station for the Keihan line – Gion-Sojo – is not connected to Hankyu's Kawaramachi station; 200 meters and the Kamo River actually separate the two), I was really excited about using the Keihan railway – I'd never done it before! And after a little confusion on the Hankyu platforms, a helpful uniformed guide put us on the right train to Katsura station (where we'd have to transfer to the Hankyu Arashiyama line… unless we wanted to go all the way into Umeda, Osaka… which we did not.) Once at Katsura, we switched to another Hankyu train to reach Matsunotaisha-mae, and the shrine that's there.

Cultural Note

I don't think I will ever cease to be amazed by the Japanese's service and technical prowess. While the Hankyu railway may be a commuter system, its trains are still quite impressive. Since Kawaramachi is the terminal station here in Kyoto, as soon as the train cars clear, the seats automatically switch directions with a loud flip – all in unison. No muss, no fuss!

Matsunoo-taisha (松尾大社)

Matsunoo-taisha ("Matsunoo Grand Shrine") is a Shinto shrine located at the far western end of Shijo Street, approximately 1.3 kilometers south of the Arashiyama district's heart. Founded in 701, this shrine is one of Japan's oldest, and is most popular with the residents of nearby Nishikyo-ku, Ukyo-ku, Shimogyo-ku, and Minami-ku wards; about one-third of Kyoto's population. Unlike most shrines, it features a massive outer gate with two guardian deities, and among its other treasures are three of the oldest and best preserved solid wood carved images, presumably representing three enshrined deities: *Oo-yama-gui-no-kami* (male), *Nakatsu-shima-hime-no-mikoto* (female), and *Tsukiyomi-no-mikoto* (male). These statues alone are worth a visit, and along the way one passes through various gardens and can visit the numinous waterfall tricking down from Mount Matsuo (also known as "*Yakeikazuchi no Yama*").

The main enshrined *kami* here is called *Oyamakui no Mikoto* – the deity of water – and according to legend, the shrine was created when *Hata Imikitori* invited its divine spirit from nearby Mt. Matsuo (Matsuosan) to be the guardian deity of the Hata Clan and constructed the shrine building for it. While that in and of itself is interesting, what makes the Hata clan more so is the fact that they are/were essentially Korean immigrants to Japan, rising to the status of *miyatsuko* for certain groups of villages in the area during the pre-Heian era, governing the surrounding lands before Kyoto was even a gleam in anyone's eye.

They introduced many agricultural and technological principles to Japan, and were instrumental in bringing sake brewing techniques from Korea. To this day the shrine has a deep and long association with sake brewers, who still take water from the sacred wells here to bless their brew. (Hence the large stacks of sake barrels you'll find strewed about.) The Hata also founded the famous Fushimi Inari Shrine, but that's a story for another time.

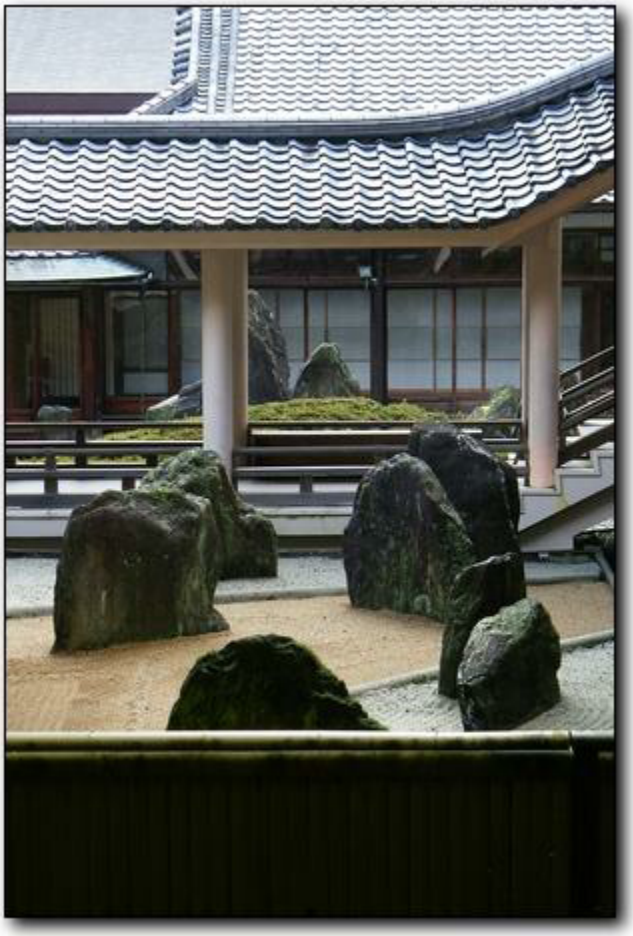
The shrine gained further importance during discussions on moving Japan's capital from Nagaoka-kyo to Heian-kyo (present day Kyoto), when a lord of the Hata clan happened to be riding in the area and spotted a turtle in the area and spotted a turtle bathing under the spring's waterfall here. Since tortoises have long been revered in China, Korea, and Japan as emblems of good fortune – particularly long life and good health – the shrine was blessed, worship followed, and the capital was moved. Matsunoo-taisha became the object of Imperial patronage during the early Heian period, when in 965, Emperor Murakami ordered that Imperial messengers were to report important events to the guardian *kami* of Japan. These *heihaku* were initially presented to 16 shrines including the Matsunoo Shrine. And from 1871 through 1946, Matsunoo-taisha was officially designated one of the *Kanpei-taisha* (官幣大社), meaning that it stood in the first rank of government supported shrines!

The water from this spring is said to be healthful, as I mentioned already, and the shrine is visited both by ordinary people, to get good water and its benefits, and by manufacturers of miso past and sake brewers, who pray for the success of their enterprises. Throughout the precincts one will see figures of tortoises, the most famous of which is the “Kame-no-I”, Tortoise Well, near the entrance to the first garden. The pure spring water that spews from its mouth is designated “one of the 100 best in Japan”

In addition to the wells, Matsunoo-taisha has three gardens to explore, built in the Showa era (1975) at great expense and personal effort by Mirei Shigemori, a notable modern Japanese landscape architect. They are referred to as the “Three Shofuen Gardens” and each is a reconstruction of a garden representative of its era: The “Jiko-no-niwa”, representing the Ancient era, is a re-creation of a wild mountaintop, with rugged vertical rocks symbolizing alighting-places of a god and goddess); the “Kyokusui-no-niwa”, representing the Heian period, features rocks and azaleas entwined with a many-curving stream, recreating an entertainment garden for aristocrats during the 8th to 12th centuries; and the “Horai-no-niwa”, representing the Kamakura period, imitates the ancient Chinese concept of paradise, with a phoenix-shaped pond (with islands) and a fountain of eternal youth gushing forth.

Jiko-no-niwa

The “Jiko-no-niwa”, representing the Ancient era, is a re-creation of a wild mountaintop, with rugged vertical rocks symbolizing alighting-places of a god and goddess)



Kyokusi-no-niwa

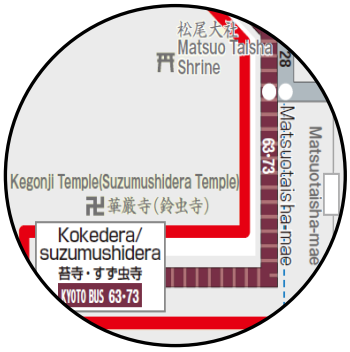
The “Kyokusui-no-niwa”, representing the Heian period, features rocks and azaleas entwined with a many-curving stream, recreating an entertainment garden for aristocrats during the 8th to 12th centuries.

Horai-no-niwa

The “Horai-no-niwa”, representing the Kamakura period, imitates the ancient Chinese concept of paradise, with a phoenix-shaped pond (with islands) and a fountain of eternal youth gushing forth.

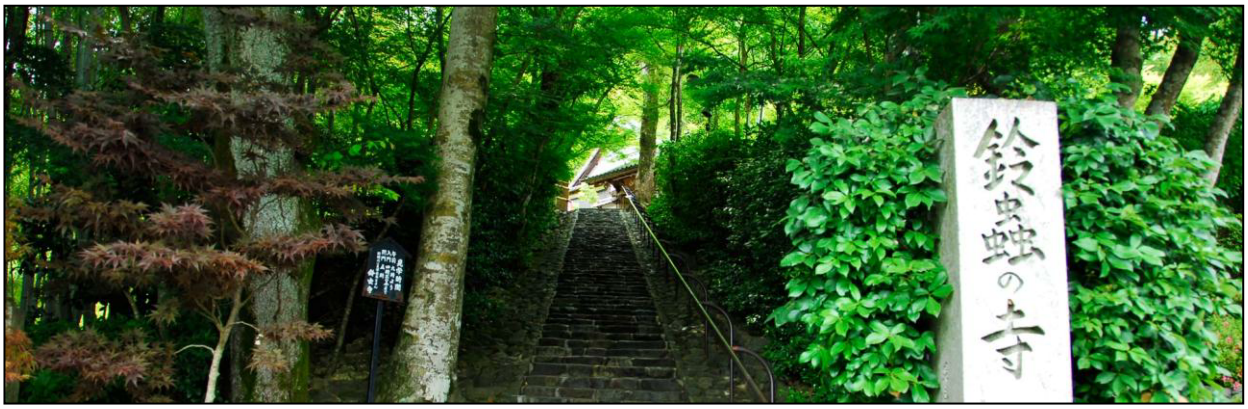
The gardens constructed using ¥100 million are the last works of Mirei Shigemori, a genius of modern landscaping, are must-see works of art. The shrine complex’s oldest building, the inner shrine, dates back to the Muromachi period (1397) and is famous for its unusual roof, which is known as Matsuo-zukuri (Matsuo style) and has been designated an important cultural asset. The size of the grounds was impressive, but a lack of direction, especially in English, made visiting a little off-putting. Still, we managed to traverse its water gardens and buildings before moving on to Suzumushi-dera, the Cricket Temple, by Kyoto Bus.

Suzumushi-dera (鈴虫寺)



The Arashiyama area of western Kyoto is often ignored by foreign travelers, but Japanese tourists flock there because there are several hidden treasures waiting to be explored. One such delightful oddity is Kegon-ji, or more famously known as Suzumushi-dera – the "Cricket Temple." The temple priests do not view the cheerful crickets as some kind of kami or deity, but rather the crickets are appreciated most for their whimsical chirping. Let me explain…

Kegon-ji is a Buddhist temple founded in 1723 that first had nothing to do with crickets, that is until one hard working priest, who would meticulously maintain the temple grounds, wanted to enjoy the chirps of crickets year round. Often times, you see, he would work until the late evenings and he particularly enjoyed the summer nights because he could hear the cricket's chirps while enjoying the warm evening weather. One problem though is that there needs to be a constant warm temperature for crickets to thrive, let alone chirp. So after decades of research, training and breeding crickets, and making some modifications to the temple, the monk succeeded and Kegon-ji received a new nickname: Suzumushi-dera. And it drew curiosity seekers far and wide. Even today, travelers are allowed to visit and stay inside the temple to hear the chirping for themselves. After hearing this I knew we had to check this place out.



Getting to Kegon-ji isn't the easiest, but the quickest way is to take a Kyoto City bus (#63 or #73) to the Kokodera/Suzumushidera stop and walk a bit until you come across a stone staircase that leads you up a secluded hillside. Here you'll find eighty steps – the same number as the steps climbing to heaven in the Buddhist faith – which will bring you to the entrance of the temple. As soon as we reached the last step we were descended upon a staff member who immediately asked if we understood Japanese, in Japanese. At first this flustered Nicole, but I was able to respond with "sukoshi", which means "a little". He then began to advise us (in English) that we would be listening to a talk about Buddhism – in Japanese only – for about 30 minutes if that was okay with us. Of course! That's why we came! So, we were seated in a medium-sized tatami-lined room lined with pillows (as seats) next to rather long – but short in height – tables. On the tables sat cups of green tea and a square, wrapped "treat" of some kind. Meanwhile, a young monk spoke rather comically (judging by the crowd's reaction to him) about Buddhism and, perhaps, the story of the temple's creation.

We sat and listened, sipping our tea occasionally, feeling completely out of place. The tea was nice refreshment, but, the sweet held a strange texture and taste. (Nicole didn't even eat hers!) But the crickets – the star attraction here – were okay. And they were loud! We learned later that the hard-working priest I mentioned earlier wanted to share the crickets with others because they represented Buddhist values.

Crickets have a very short life span of just a few months, you see, but each day they live fruitfully and enjoy life to its fullest. "We can learn a lot from our buggy friends," he was noted to have said.

Afterward we were allowed outside to tour the gardens, following a little stone path that weaves in and out of meticulously maintained trees, plants and flowers. (Notably expressing the Vipśyin, Sikhin, Viśvabh, Krakhuccanda, Kanakamun, Kāśyapa of Buhddism.) It was truly a peaceful experience to be surrounded by the hushed sounds of nature, which made for a welcome change from the endless chirping inside the temple. At certain points in the garden you can see a spectacular panoramic view of Kyoto!

Cultural Note

Most Jizo are barefoot, but this one actually wears sandals. The reason for this is that he will personally deliver your wish to you, so it is important to remember to give him your address when praying.

The path winds its way back toward the entrance of the shrine and to the shrine's other claim to fame: the famous Jizo statue called *Kofuku-jizo* (幸福地蔵菩薩, or the "happy Jizo"). Apparently, people travel from all over Japan for its ability to grant wishes. There's an 80% chance that your wish will come true, more specifically related to love, but, of course, you can make any wish of your choice. Before making a wish, it's recommended to purchase a yellow *omamori*, and then clasp your hands against it in a praying gesture while making your wish, followed by a short bow. You keep this charm until your wish comes true, and if/when it does, you are expected to return the *omamori* to the Jizo and thank him. Unfortunately we didn't know about this before arrival, so we didn't have the *omamori* with us. Next time though!

From here we took the bus back northward to Seiryo-ji and Daikaku-ji.

Seiryo-ji (清涼寺)

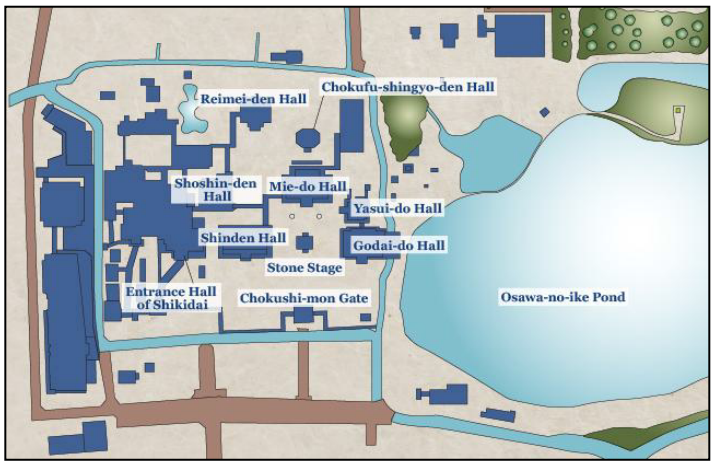
The approach to Seiryo-ji leads along a road traversing a pleasant residential area with some small shops; at the end of which the temple's main gate is inviting the visitor to enter the premises. Commonly known as Saga Shaka-do and situated on what was once Saga Moor in Kyoto, Seiryo-ji is devoted to the practice of Yuzu Nenbutsu today. (Initially the temple belonged to the Kegon sect, and then it became a Pure Land temple.) Constructed in 895 as a replica of Wutai Shan or Qingliang Shan of China, Seiryo-ji has a sandalwood image of Shaka (Shakyamuni), the historical Buddha, as its principal image. Standing just 162 centimeters high, it is one of the three most famous *nyorai* in all of Japan. As such it is highly venerated, has been designated as a National Treasure, and comes with quite an interesting story:

When the Buddha was away visiting his deceased mother Maya in heaven, the Buddha's absence made Udayana, his disciple, very sad. So he made a statue of the Buddha as he looked at the age of 37. Many centuries later a Chinese priest brought this statue over the Himalayan mountain range from India. During the day the priest carried the statue on his back, but at night the statue carried the priest on its back! And after many difficulties, the two finally reached China. Years later (983), Chonen, a Japanese priest, went to China to study Buddhism. There he found the sacred statue of Buddha and asked craftsmen to make a replica. They obliged and after it was completed, he brought it to Japan.

The Japanese thought the statue was alive, however, that the original wanted to come to Japan. They believed the original had replaced the replica! So more and more believes came to pray to this statue of Buddha. In 1953, research discovered many artifacts inside the statue, including internal organs made of silk. This shows that ancient Chinese people already knew and understood anatomy. How interesting! Seiryō-ji also possesses National Treasure statues of the Amitābha (Amida) trinity, and other National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties. Originally it was the home of Toru Minamoto who is believed to be the man that the famous Tale of Genji's protagonist Genji was inspired by.

Daikaku-ji (大覚寺)

Daikaku-ji is a very old and rather large-ish temple in the northern part of Kyoto's Sagano district. It was originally built in the early 800s as the detached palace of Emperor Saga (785-842), who thoroughly enjoyed spending time in this calm area on the outskirts of the county's newest capital – Heian-kyo. (His father, Emperor Kanmu, was responsible for moving the capital here consequently; a good move since it remained so for over 1,000 years.) In 876, thirty-four years after the emperor's death, his daughter – Princess Masako (正子内親王; 810-879), consort of Emperor Junna – converted the villa into a temple, giving it the name Daikaku-ji. The official name of the temple is *Kyu Saga Gosho Daikaku-ji Monzeki* (the Old Saga Imperial Palace Daikaku-ji Temple), which belongs to the Shingon Buddhism sect founded by Kobo-Daishi (Kukai).



Daikaku-ji has had a role in several significant historical events. Over the years it became the retirement home of several emperors, such as Emperor Go-Saga, Emperor Kameyama, and Emperor Go-Uda, who could be ordained as monks, but continued to wield power in what became known as cloistered rule. In the 12th century, the temple hosted peace talks that reunited the Northern and Southern Imperial Courts after 50 years of civil war. In 1336, during the upheaval between the Kamakura period and the Muromachi period, the temple burned down, but was later rebuilt. During the Edo Period, Emperor Go-Mizunoo brought in Momoyama period buildings from the Kyoto Imperial Palace. Daikaku-ji is also the birthplace of the Saga Goryu school of Ikebana (named in honor after Emperor Saga, it still has its headquarters here), has one of the oldest Japanese garden ponds to survive from the Heian Period (Osawa Pond), and is featured in the Tale of Genji (Emperor Saga's grandson, *Minamoto no Toru*, is thought to be an inspiration for the novel's protagonist). Today the temple is one of the best places to still feel the ancient court atmosphere described in the novel, and is often used for filming historical dramas.

Daikaku-ji is made up of several buildings connected by elevated wooden walkways. The covered corridors, like the "nightingale floors" of Nijojo's Ninomaru Palace, squeak quietly as you walk over them. Many of the buildings are decorated with painted *fusuma* doors by the famous Kano school. Let's take a look, shall we?

Entrance Hall of Shikidai – The ceremonial entrance, which was moved from the Kyoto Imperial Palace in the Edo period, is open only on special occasions. The entrance room is called *Matsu-no-ma*, which has a luxurious *kinpekiga* (painting on gold foil-pressed paper) of *matsu-ni-yamadori-no-zu* with two large central pieces on the north front wall.

Shinden – This important cultural property was presented by Emperor Go-Mizunoo in the Edo period. Tofuku-mon-in Masako, a daughter of Tokugawa Hidetada, who was the second shogun of the Tokugawa Dynasty, entered the imperial court and used it as a *shinden* (residence) of the Imperial Palace for the consort of the Emperor. *Uguisu-bari* (nightingale floor) is applied to all the corridors and verandas.

Chokushi-mon – This gate, for the Imperial messenger, is opened only when the Emperor comes to visit.

Mie-do – Originally a banquet hall for the coronation of Emperor Taisho that was moved here in 1925 and renovated, the hall played a huge role in the history of Daikaku-ji. Mie-do enshrines the statues of Kobo-Daishi, Emperor Saga, Cloistered Emperor Go-Uda, and Gojaku the Prince among others.

Yasui-do – This building used to be the Mie-do of Yasui Monzeki Renge Koin temple located in Higashiyama, Koyto. It was moved to Daikaku-ji during the *Haibutusu-hishaku* (the movement to abolish Buddhism during the Meiji period) to save it. It houses a life-sized figure of Emperor Go-Mizunoo at the front.

Godai-do – This hall, decorated with statues of the Five Wisdom Kings (including Fudu Myoo), was rebuilt in the Late Edo period. Although a Main Hall, it also functions as a sutra-transcription hall. Sessions are held here on the 1st, 11th, and 21st days of every month.

Chokufu-shingyo-den – And speaking of transcriptions, one of the temple's most important treasures – a transcription by Emperor Saga himself – is found in this hall. According to tradition, at a time when Japan suffered a serious epidemic, the monk Kobo Daishi suggested the Emperor personally copy the Heart Sutra (*Hannya Shingyo*) to appease the gods. He did so and the epidemic is said to have ended. That handwritten sutra is kept here; it is well defended. The *Murasame-no-roka* corridor linking the buildings has low ceilings so that no one can swing swords or spears, and floor is *uguisu-bari* (nightingale floor) so that you will hear invaders. Consequently, the sutra is displayed to the public every sixty years (the next time being in 2018) should you be interested in a pilgrimage!

Reimei-den – The main hall of Nichibutsuji Temple in Tokyo was moved and built as Reimei-den in 1958. The temple enshrines the statue of Amida Nyorai as the principal image, as well as the spirit tablets of people who contributed to Daikaku-ji. The entire building is lacquered in vermilion to defy evil spirits.

Shoshin-den – Designated as an important cultural property, the building has 12 rooms reflecting Momoyama-period *shoin* architecture. During the period of the Southern and Northern Courts, a peace conference between the courts was held here.

And next door is the *Osawa-no-ike* Pond, a 1200 year old man-made body of water that is the oldest and last surviving (albeit incomplete) example of a Shinden style garden. The 2.4 hectare pond was originally built for Emperor Saga's villa, and was used to throw elaborate parties and for recreational activities such as boating and fishing. One theory holds that the pond was created for moon viewing, as an old saying goes: "at Daikaku-ji, you don't look up at the moon, but instead look tastefully down at the reflection in Osawa-no-ike".

There's even a moon-viewing pavilion to do so: the *Kangetsu-dai*. The pond is supposed to reflect the outlines of Dongting Lake in China, which has a special significance in Chinese culture. It was an imperial garden of the style known as *chisen-shuyu*: a garden meant to be seen from a boat, similar to the Imperial Chinese garden of the period. The lake was created by damming a stream which came from the Nakoso waterfall. At the north end of the pond are two islands, one large and one small - the small island being known as Chrysanthemum Island.

Between the two islands are several small rocky islets, meant to resemble Chinese junks at anchor. On a hillside north of the lake is what appears to be a dry cascade (*karedaki*), a kind of Japanese rock garden or zen garden, where a real waterfall is suggested by a composition of stones. Several Buddhist statues, a small shrine and the Shingyo Pagoda, a two tiered, *tahoto* style pagoda (a small, two story pagoda) erected to commemorate the 1,150th anniversary of Emperor Saga writing the Heart Sutra, populate the garden grounds.

Did You Know?

The garden was celebrated in the poetry of the period. A poem by Ki no Tomonori in an anthology from the period, the Kokinshu, described the Kiku-shima, or island of chrysanthemums, found in the Ōsawa pond:

I had thought that here
only one chrysanthemum can grow.
Who therefore has planted
the other in the depths
of the pond of Ōsawa?

Another poem of the Heian period, in the Hyakunin isshu, described a cascade of rocks, which simulated a waterfall, in the same garden:

The cascade long ago
ceased to roar,
But we continue to hear
The murmur
of its name.

Visiting Daikaku-ji today righted a wrong from my third trip to Japan back in 2008. Back then I had heard the temple was throwing an evening illumination party to light up its autumn leaves; however, after the hour-long (or more) bus ride from Kyoto station (which I shared with three older Japanese ladies), we arrived to find the area completely dark and uninviting. While the ladies pressed on and turned into a path that would take them around the pond, I returned to the bus stop and hopped on one that would return me to civilization. By the time the ladies returned, the bus I was on had already gotten underway, and the next wouldn't be by for another half-hour! So, seeing this temple in the day time was an accomplishment, and a decent one at that.

* * *

Following our time at Daikaku-ji it was time for lunch, so we rode back into Arashiyama proper to grab a bite to eat, finding a great little place on the main strip there that served – you guess it – *tonkatsu* rice bowls! I totally devoured mine while Nicole took heartily to her shrimp version. It was yummy and satisfying, fueling us for our afternoon adventures. Up until this time it was our only meal of the day, so we definitely needed the break… and the sustenance. And it's the perfect time to pause while I go check on the laundry, so I'll be right back!

…つづく

「The Forests of Arashiyama, Part 2」

Wednesday | April 15, 2015 (part 2)

And we're back!

While you might not think this is important, the laundry facilities here at K's House are quite nice – they're free, but they're also limited. And you have to supervise your clothes. Back in the old building, when I first started coming here, there was only one washer and two dryers. The washer was right off the lounge area – quite like they are here in the annex – with the two dryers located outside on the balcony (of all places). I'll never forget the dude who kept bothering me about the washer (and then the dryer) the first time I came here: sorry, dude, I got there first! Times have changed, of course, and now there are more washers and more dryers to be had than ever before. But that doesn't mean we're talking laundromat numbers here. In the annex there are now three of each – in a stackable design – and that's still not enough. If you're not careful someone will come by and snatch the dryer from you without asking, or take your clothes out of the washer and push theirs in. It's crazy!

Alas, where were we… oh, right, lunch! With the morning excursions now out of the way, we returned to Arashiyama proper to fill our bellies. We ducked into a restaurant we saw as we walked along the strip and took our chances. Thankfully everyone inside was courteous enough to foreigners and we had a good meal of it. Then, to let it all settle down, we took a stroll along the main strip there, browsing into a few shops along the way, before continuing the rest of the day's activities on foot: to Tenryu-ji (here the sun shone brightly, illuminating the gardens Nicole loves so much) and then through the bamboo forest to Jojakko-ji, Nisson-in, and Gio-ji. *Ikimasho!* (Let's go!)

Tenryu-ji (天龍寺)

Tenryu-ji is perhaps the most important temple in Kyoto's Arashiyama district. Formally known as Tenryu Shiseizen-ji (天龍資聖禅寺), it is the head temple of its own branch of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. The temple was founded by Ashikaga Takauji in 1339, primarily to venerate Gautama Buddha, but the temple was also dedicated to Emperor Go-Daigo, who had just passed away. The two important historical figures used to be allies until Takauji turned against the emperor in a struggle for supremacy over Japan (the Ashikaga Shogunate). By building the temple, Takauji intended to appears the former emperor's spirits. As a temple related to both the Ashikaga family and Emperor Go-Daigo, the temple is held in high esteem, and is ranked number one among Kyoto's so-called Five Mountains. In 1994, it was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as part of the "Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto".

A Little History

In the early Heian period, Empress Tachibana Kachiko, wife of Emperor Saga, founded a temple here called Danrin-ji (檀林寺), which was historically significant of being the first Zen temple in Japan. Unfortunately the temple fell into disrepair over the next four hundred years. In the mid-thirteenth century, Emperor Go-Saga and his son Emperor Kameyama (龜山; 1249–1305) turned the area into an imperial villa, which they called "Kameyama Detached Palace" (亀山殿, *Kameyama-dono*). The name "Kameyama", which literally means "Turtle Mountain", was selected due to the shape of Mt. Ogura, which lies to the west of Tenryu-ji—it is similar in shape to that of a turtle's shell. In fact, all Japanese temples constructed after the Nara period have a *sango*, or mountain name, used as an honorary prefix. Tenryu-ji's *sango*, Reigizan (霊亀山) – "Mountain of the Spirit Turtle" – was also selected due to the shape of Ogura-san.

As a villa, it was here that Go-Daigo, Emperor Kameyama's grandson, was raised and educated. After Emperor Go-Daigo (後醍醐; 1288-1339) died in the mountains of Yoshino following the civil war that brought the Ashikaga family to power (recall this was the "Kemmu Restoration", a coup d'état that overthrew the Kamakura or Minamoto Shogunate, reinstituting Imperial rule, but it didn't last long), the ruling shogun Ashikaga Takauji (足利尊氏; 1305–58) re-established the villa as a temple in 1339 in the Emperor's honor. It is said that the temple was originally going to be named Ryakuo Shiseizen-ji (暦応資聖禅寺), "Ryakuo" being the name of the reign of the emperor of the

northern court at that time. However, Ashikaga Takauji's younger brother, Tadayoshi (直義; 1306–1352) supposedly dreamt about a golden dragon flitting about the Oi River (also known as the Hozu River), lying just south of the temple, and the temple was named *Tenryu Shiseizen-ji* (天龍資聖禅寺) instead —the term "Tenryu" literally means "dragon of the sky". Today the temple is known as the "Temple of the Heavenly Dragon."

In order to finance the temple's construction, Takauji's younger brother Tadayoshi and Muso Soseki (the temple's first priest) commissioned a vessel, known as the "Tenryu-ji Ship," on a trade mission to Yuan-dynasty China.

By 1345 the major buildings of the temple were complete, and the temple was opened in a great ceremony combined with a memorial service for Emperor Go-Daigo. A year later Soseki constructed a Sodo (Monk's Hall) capable of accommodating a thousand monks. Although Tenryu-ji was at first designated number two in the Five Mountains system, in 1386 it was accorded the top position, only to lose it in 1401 to Shokoku-ji. In 1410, however, it recovered its number one ranking and has remained in that position ever since. Soseki's lineage prospered, and came to play a leading role in the flourishing Zen literary culture known as *gozan bungaku* (五山文學).

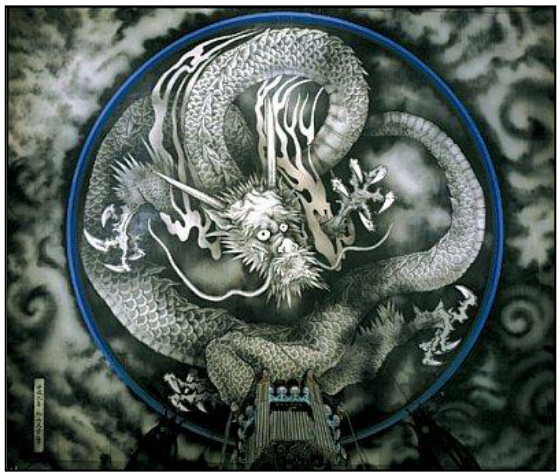
The temple prospered as the most important Rinzai temple in Kyoto, and the temple grounds grew to roughly 330,000 square meters in size, extending all the way to present-day Katabira-no-Tsuji station on the Keifuku Railway. At one time, the massive grounds were said to contain some 150 sub-temples, however, in the centuries since its founding, Tenryu-ji has been ravaged by fires a total of eight times, first in 1358 and again in 1367; on both occasions the Zen master Shun'oku Myoha (春屋明葩; 1311–1388), Muso Soseki's disciple, helped restore the temple. Fires occurred again in 1373, 1380, 1447, and 1468 (when it was torched during the Onin War). Some reconstruction occurred following, but it was not until after 1585, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豐臣秀吉; 1536-1598) lent his support to the temple, that full scale restorative works began. Further fires occurred in 1815 and 1864 (when Tenryu-ji was again torched during disturbances surrounding the end of the Tokugawa *shogunate*).

Touring the Grounds

Today, most of the present buildings – the main hall (*Hojo*), drawing hall (*Shoin*) and temple kitchen (*Kuri*) with its distinctive small tower – date from the relatively recent Meiji Period (1868-1912). However, the landscape garden behind the Hojo (Main Hall) is one of the oldest in Japan, retaining the same form as when it was designed by Muso Soseki in the fourteenth century. Known as the Sogenchi Garden (曹源池), it was the first Special Historical Scenic Area named by the Japanese government, and in 1994 it was designated by the United Nations as a World Cultural Heritage site.

Last time we were here the main hall was under renovation, so it wasn't possible to enter to see the mystic dragon painted on its ceiling, only the garden was open. This time, however, we were able to see it all four major buildings: the Hatto, Kuri, Hojo, and Tahoden:

Hatto (Dharma Hall) – Originally, the Hatto was where the master delivered his sermons and teachings, but in present times it is used primarily for important ceremonial functions. Tenryu-ji's Hatto, like most of the temple's major buildings, was destroyed by fire in 1864 during the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate. However, following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Tenryu-ji's large Zendo (Meditation Hall) was relocated to serve as a replacement. In 1899 the Hatto's paneled ceiling was adorned with a large painting of a cloud dragon by the Meiji-period artist Suzuki Shonen. This was replaced in 1997 with a new cloud dragon painting by the renowned artist Kayama Matazo, as part of a large-scale renovation commemorating the 650th anniversary of the death of Tenryu-ji's founder, Muso Soseki. On the altar inside the Dharma Hall are images of Shakyamuni Buddha and his two chief bodhisattva disciples, Manjusri and Samantabhadra. On the altars at the back of the building are statues of Muso Soseki (the founding priest of Tenryu-ji) and the shogun Ashikaga Takauji (the founding patron), along with memorial tablets honoring the memory of Emperor Kogon and the successive abbots of Tenryu-ji.



Kuri (Temple Living Quarters) – The Kuri is one of the major buildings traditionally counted among the "seven halls" (*shichido garan*) that constitute the ideal Zen monastic compound. Tenryu-ji's Kuri, constructed in 1899, presently houses the temple's main kitchen and administrative offices. With its high, gently curving gable roof framing a half-timbered, white-plastered facade, the Kuri is the most commonly photographed of Tenryu-ji's buildings and has become something of a symbol for the temple itself. Inside the Kuri's entrance hall is a large painting of Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who, according to Zen tradition, transmitted the Zen teachings to China 1,500 years ago. This style of Bodhidharma painting is seldom seen outside of Tenryu-ji, and in this sense represents a kind of "face" for the temple.

Hojo (Abbot's Quarters) – The Hojo (方丈) is made up of two sections, the Daihojo (Large Hojo – actually Tenryu-ji's largest building) and the separate Kohojo (Small Hojo), both of which are connected to the Kuri. The Buddha image enshrined on the altar is that of Shakyamuni, and is registered as an Important Cultural Property. It is believed to date back to the late Heian period (794-1185), and is thus far older than Tenryu-ji itself. Having escaped damage in all eight of Tenryu-ji's major fires, it is the most ancient of all the temple's Buddha images. The inside of the Daihojo is partitioned into six sections in the traditional Hojo architectural style, with three sections in the front and three to the rear. The front-central section, with the Shakyamuni image in the back, covers an area of 48 tatami mats, while the sections to either side cover an area of 24 tatami mats each. These sections can be used together as a single room, or partitioned into three separate spaces using sliding doors. The large cloud dragon on the sliding doors facing the Sogen Pond was painted by the artist Wakasa Butsugai.

Tahoden (Hall of Many Treasures) – The Tahoden, located at the end of the long, covered corridor that winds up the slope of the precinct, comprises a worship hall in the front, a shrine displaying a statue of Emperor Go-Daigo in the rear, and an intermediate room connecting the two. At the front of the building a pent roof covers a staircase leading up to a wide veranda. The Tahoden's elegant hip-and-gable roof brings to mind the medieval residence of an aristocratic family. The Tahoden is located on the site where Emperor Go-Daigo (1288-1339) studied when he was still a prince living with his grandfather Emperor Kameyama (1249-1305). The present building was built in 1934 and follows what is believed to be the design of the Shishinden (Hall for State Ceremonies) at Emperor Go-Daigo's Southern Court in the mountains of Yoshino. The emperor's statue here is flanked on both sides by the mortuary tablets of the successive generations of emperors.

<u>The Two Gardens</u>

While the buildings themselves are quite impressive (not to mention the dragon), Tenryu-ji's gardens are equally striking. You'll find the *Sogenchi Teigen* (Sogen Pond Garden) and *Hyakka'en* (Garden of a Hundred Flowers) within the precinct:

Laid out nearly seven hundred years ago by Zen master Muso Soseki and still retaining its original appearance, the Sogenchi Garden was the first place in the country to win designation by the Japanese Government as a Site of Special Historic and Scenic Importance (Shiseki, Tokubetsu Meisho). It is designed as a strolling pond garden, in which a level path surrounding a picturesque pond allows guests to appreciate the scenery from a variety of perspectives. The Sogenchi Garden also employs "borrowed scenery" (shakkei), in which nearby mountains are used to give the garden a sense of added depth.

The garden is included in the Miyako Rinsen Meisho Zue (Illustrated Guide to the Famous Gardens and Scenic spots in the Capital), an early sightseeing guide to the sights of Kyoto published in 1799. The accompanying woodblock print shows that the garden's appearance has remained substantially unchanged in the centuries since then.

Looking directly across the pond from the center of the Hojo's veranda, the visitor can see an arrangement of several large standing rocks. These represent the Dragon Gate Falls, a waterfall on the Yellow River in China. Chinese legend has it that any carp able to scale these falls turns into a dragon, a transformation that in Zen has come to symbolize enlightenment. A number of Zen gardens feature similar stone arrangements, generally with a number of smaller “carp stones” placed at the foot of the falls. However, the Sogenchi Garden is unusual in that the carp stone is placed to the side of the falls, to show a fish in the process of turning into a dragon.

The pond received the name Sogenchi (曹源池) when Muso Soseki, while removing mud to deepen the water, discovered a stone stele inscribed with the characters for “Sogen itteki.” The expression “Sogen itteki” refers to the living truth of Zen that, like a steady trickle of water, has continued through the centuries to the present day.

To the north of the Tahoden on the path to the North Gate is the Hyakka'en, a garden of flowering trees, bushes, and herbs laid out simultaneously with the construction of the North Gate in 1983. The garden path rises up the gentle slope of the hill toward the road along the north boundary of Tenryu-ji, on which the visitor, once leaving the gate, may walk through the famous Sagano bamboo forest, which we did. Jojakuko-ji, Nisson-in, and Gio-ji lie down this path.

Jojakuko-ji (常寂光寺)

The temple of Jojakko-ji is situated on the side of Mount Ogura and was established as a Nichiren sect temple at the end of the 16th century. The Founder, Priest Nisshin, was born in 1561 in Kyoto, the son of a high-ranking aristocrat, Hirohashi Kunimitsu. In his childhood, he studied under Priest Nissei, the 15th head priest of Honkoku-ji, the head temple of the Nichiren Buddhist sect in Kyoto. Excelling in academic work, Nisshin took over as the 16th head priest of the temple when he was only 18 years old. From that time on, Priest Nisshin's reputation stood high as an outstanding leader. Both Kyoto townsfolk and distinguished samurai warlords such as Kato Kiyomasa, Miyoshi Yoshifusa and Koide Hidemasa became devout believers. In 1595 when the Nichiren sect split into two groups over the issue of attending a Buddhist service held at Hoko-ji temple that Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the former Imperial Regent, had erected, Priest Nisshin (36 at the time) refused to bend to his whims, left Honkoku-ji, and founded Jojakko-ji here on land donated by the head of the Suminokura family. Mt. Ogura had been a place famed for poetry since olden times, favored by such distinguished poets as Fujiwara Toshinari, Fujiwara Teika and Priest Saigyo. Because Priest Nisshin himself excelled in poetry, he chose Mt. Ogura for his retreat.

Enter through the Nio-mon (a gate with Nio, two guardian gods) and into the grounds. This gate originally served as the south entrance to the guest hall (kyakuden) of Honkoku-ji temple, built during the Jowa era (1345-1349). It was moved to Jojakko-ji in 1616. It is easily the oldest structure of all the buildings on the temple grounds and its thatched roof is a rarity. The nio statues within are 210 cm tall, and are attributed to the renowned 13th century Buddhist sculptor Unkei. Since Nio guardian gods are believed to have divine power to cure diseases of the eyes, lower back, and legs, devotes in the neighboring villages come to offer a pair of straw sandals and pray for recovery from illness. The steep stairway upwards from the thatched Nio-mon leads to the main hall which enshrines a Buddhist image, the Myoken-do, and the Taho-to pagoda (which enshrines, among other things, the Buddha).

With the financial support of Kobayakawa Hideaki, the guest hall of Momoyama Castle was moved here during the Keicho era (1596-1615) to serve as the main hall. According to illustrations found in literature and other material from the Edo period, the Main Hall had a two-layered hon-gawara-style roofing (the style using round and flat titles overlapping alternately). When major repairs to the Main Hall took place in 1932, it was converted to the present hira-gawara-style roofing (the style using flat tiles only). The accompanying belfry was constructed by the 4th chief priest, Nissen, in 1642. The original temple bell was appropriated during World War II to make use of its metal; the present bell was cast in 1973. It has the classic style of acoustics called *ojikicho*, and every day the bell is struck at noon and at 5pm.

The Main gate, Niomon gate and Main Hall are arranged in a straight line, and on its extension the Tahoto Pagoda can be seen standing on a small hill in the back. The pagoda, which is designated an Important Cultural Property, is a relatively new structure (built in 1620); it is built, however, in the gorgeous 16th-century Momoyama style. It has a well-proportioned, beautiful figure of two stories with a pavilion roof of cypress bark. The total height of the pagoda is approximately 12m, and the width of the square walls on the lower story 5.64m on each side. Inside the pagoda are enshrined two Buddhist statues: Shaka Nyorai and Taho Nyorai.

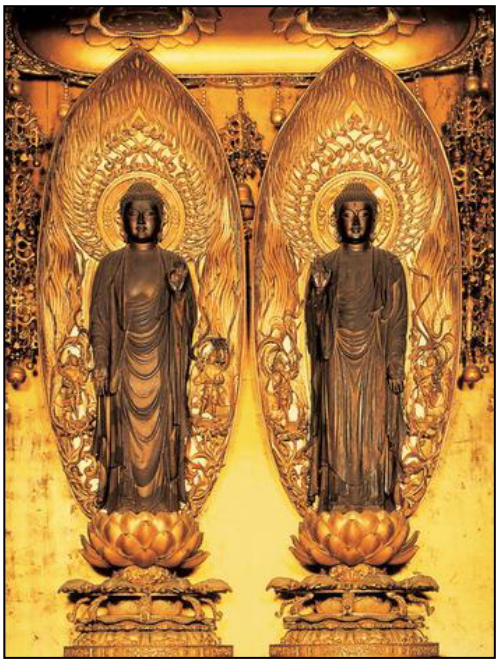
And among the temple treasures is a *kurumagoto* (a small portable *koto* stringed instrument), which was granted to the lady Kogo-no-Tsubone by Emperor Takakura (1161-1181), but it is not on public display. Usually deserted, except in the fall foliage season, Jojakko-ji Temple is a fine spot to sit and gather your thoughts while exploring Arashiyama. It's got a fine little pagoda and is surrounded by soothing greenery. Like nearby Nison-in Temple, it's not a must-see, but it's good for those of a solitary mindset.








Nison-in (二尊院)



Often overlooked by travelers who descend on Arashiyama's more famous spots, Nison-in is a scenic temple that offers not only pleasant strolling, particularly during the cherry blossom and fall foliage seasons, but also religious enlightenment and Imperial prestige. The name Nison-in, meaning "two revered images," derives from the temple's two principal standing deities: Shaka Nyorai (often referred to as the "Gautama Buddha of Hakken, who sends those who've died from this life to the afterlife) and Amitabha Tathagata (called the "Amitabha of Raigei", who welcomes those into the Pure Land – Buddhist heaven.) The 78.8 cm-high statues appear to be symmetric at a glance but contain subtle differences (such as the shape of their fingers), which are infused with religious meaning. You'll find Shaka Nyorai on the right and Amitabha Tathagata on the left. Formally known as *Ogurayama Nison-in Kedai-ji*, the temple was founded in the early Heian period – around 840 – under the patronage of Emperor Saga, and grew to great power. Nison-in enjoyed a very good reputation and was one of the four temples that had mastered the court formalities to a point where it could host imperial Buddhist ceremonies – an honor it held up until the Meiji Restoration. At times, when a High Priest was nominated, it was customary for him to visit the imperial palace and to receive the purple robe, the symbol of the highest rank in Buddhism.

In a neighborhood famous for red-tinged autumn leaves and rich greenery, *Nison-in* is steeped in history too: not only was it devastated during the Onin War (none of the original structures survived the 10-year battle, but neither did most of Kyoto), it also became obliquely involved in the complex fabric of events which unfolded after Commodore Perry's "Black Fleet" sailed into Edo harbor in 1853. For the first time in more than two centuries, the Tokugawa *shogunate* actively sought advice from the emperor in how to deal with the newly assertive foreign powers. But it seems one Minister of the Imperial Court was a little too assertive in his arguments; Sanjo Seki was ordered to retire to the life of a monk here. Nison-in is so connected with the Imperial family, a large number of graves of court nobles can be found here, as well as three of its Emperors: Tsuchimikado (1196-1231), Go-Saga (1220-1272), and Kameyama (1249-1305) – the 83rd, 88th and 90th Emperor respectively. You'll find their ashes in the San-Tei Ryo ("Cemetery of the Three Emperors"). The Somon Gate was removed from Fushimi Castle and relocated here in 1613, as a gift. And a number of signs were provided by Emperor Gokashiwabara (1464-1526) and Gonara (1495-1557) – the 104th and 105th Emperors.

Did You Know?

Some believe that Shigure-tei, in the back hillside, is the place where Fujiwara Teika (1161-1240), a famous *waka* poet put together his famed anthology "A Hundred Poems by a Hundred Poets" (Hyaku-nin-isshu).

It's not one of the major sights in Arashiyama, but if you desire to escape the crowds, Nison-in is a good bet.

Gio-ji (祇王寺)

A little further down from Nison-in, around the corner and down a street I have no name for (but follow the signs), you'll find Gio-ji, a quiet temple surrounded by dense trees and a luxuriant moss garden. Although small and somewhat understated today, Gio-ji is as beautiful as it is tranquil. Gio-ji was built in a precinct of Ojo-in (a temple founded by Ryochin, a disciple of Honen, the founder of Jodo-shu sect of Buddhism), but before long that huge temple became dilapidated and the present day Gio-ji survived as a tiny nunnery. By 1868, the temple was fully abandoned and much of its treasures (and graves) were relocated to Daikaku-ji. The head priest there lamented the situation and planned a reconstruction of the temple, but it wasn't until Kitagaki Kunimichi, an ex-governor of Kyoto Prefecture, donated one of the buildings of his villa in 1895 that some semblance of reconstruction began. In fact the hall you see today is that building and there's not much else… save for the moss, which the temple is beautifully known for. You'll also find a statue of Dainichi Nyorai, the Buddha of Light, inside as well as other statues connected to the temple's place in Japanese history and literature.

Did You Know?

In the "Tale of the Heike" there is a story told about Gio, a 21-year old Shirabyoshi dancer who fell in love with the Heike clan's powerful leader Taira-no-Kiyomori (1118-1181). When he ended their relationship, Gio retreated to this temple to spend the rest of her life as a Buddhist priestess, along with her sister (17 year old Ginyo), mother (Toji), and another of Kiyomori's spurned lovers (Hotoke-Gozen). The four women lived here for the remainder of their life; wooden statues of the four women are also enshrined in the main hall and the sone gorin-to (stupa of five elements representing earth, water, fire, wind, and air) is said to be the grave of Taira-no-Kiyomori.)

A stroll back along the bamboo path returned us to central Arashiyama.

The Kimono Forest

Western Kyoto is without a doubt a place of beauty that attracts many people from around the world. Here you can experience its charms in so many ways. There's Mount Arashi itself, the big Oi River, and of course the famous bamboo forest of Arashiyama. Fact is there's another forest in Arashiyama that you may not know about. Although it's not as famous as the Bamboo forest near Tenryu-ji, it certainly is a delight for the eyes! It's called the Kimono Forest, and it's a collection of gorgeous pieces of textile dyed in the Kyo-yuzen style, covered with acrylic fiber and shaped like two-meter tall "trees", which frame the lane to the Randen tram station on Kyoto's Keifuku Arashiyama Line. There are about 600 of them installed all over the station grounds, and the view is truly impressive – especially at night! (LEDs inside the pillars illuminate them in the evening.)

The Kyo-yuzen textile used for this exhibition was created by Kamedatomi, a long standing textile factory whose history dates back to Taisho period (a period in the history of Japan dating from July 30, 1912, to December 25, 1926, coinciding with the reign of the Emperor Taisho.) There are 32 different textile patterns here, each selected by Yasumichi Morita (the artist of this project), whose original idea was to "give a fresh air to the station while still keeping the old tradition." He wanted to give new life to a place where lack of daylight used to mean lack of visitors. The "Kimono Forest" plays an especially important role for that. The evening illumination has become a valuable tourist attraction for this station, which didn't receive much attention at nighttime.

Did You Know?

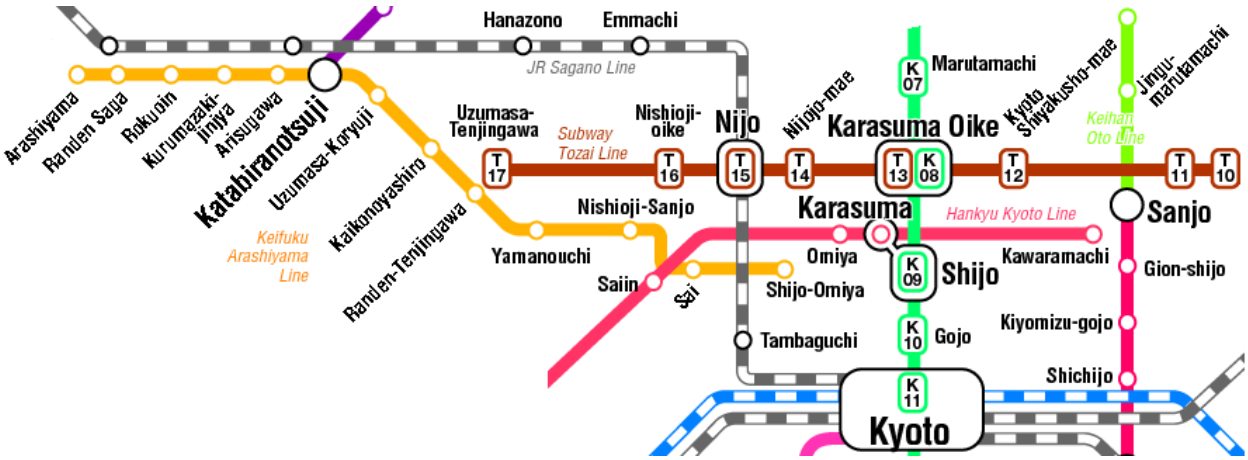
The traditional Japanese costume, the kimono, is known for its distinctive shape and its complicated openings, but also for the extreme sophistication of its prints. The flowery or graphic patterns, in bright or pastel colors, entirely covering the material or scattered here and there, are the result of a complex, ancient technique: the Yuzen dyeing method. A genuine symbol of sophistication, "tagaki yuzen" (hand painted yuzen) was developed at the beginning of the 18th century by Yuzensai Miyazaki, who gave the technique its name. During the long process, different handicrafts are brought into play, each stage being worked on by a specialist artisan.

On the panels of the white kimono, before they are assembled, the patterns are drawn in ink, which will afterwards be covered with a line of glue made of rice paste; this glue, called "itome nori" allows the dyes to stay in their confines. Another glue is later applied to the surfaces which are to be dyed, to adjust the intensity of the colors. The threads are soaked in the dye – using brushes – and then steamed with boiling water. These stages are repeated over and over until the exact color is obtained. To finish the work, the steaming is followed by rinsing – ideally using pure water.

Walk through the Kimono Lane and you will come across a small pond surrounded by the Kyo-Yuzen art objects. That's Arashiyama Station's energy spot – a fountain named "Ryu no Atago". Its name comes from nearby Tenryu-ji temple and the common belief is that if you pray in front of it your wish will come true. If you dip your hands into the water you will feel relaxed, refreshed, and blessed with happiness. The water springs from 50 meters below ground and comes from sacred mountain Atago. This natural spring of cold water never dries and is seen as the protector of the station and its visitors.

* * *

One final item on the list for today was a shrine called Tokiguchi-dera, which is located right across from Gio-ji. The history of this temple reads like the romance of Romeo and Juliet. Takiguchi-dera was founded by Heian-era nobleman Takiguchi Nyūdō, who entered the priesthood after being forbidden by his father to marry his peasant consort Yokobue. One day, Yokobue came to the temple with her flute to serenade Takiguchi, but was again refused by him; she wrote a farewell love sonnet on a stone (in her own blood) before throwing herself into the river to perish. The stone remains at the temple. Although we were finished with Gio-ji and should have had enough time to visit there, a number of signs about "correct change only" for the entrance fee, "don't come here unless you have time" and the like were very off-putting. So, rather than bother with all that we turned around and walked back the way we came, returning to Arashiyama proper. Along the way we stopped in another shop or two, one of which gave us tea as we browsed, so we felt obliged to buy something (probably a sales tactic), but it wasn't too much of a problem. Before too long we were on our way back to Kyoto via the Randen Arashiyama Line, crossing to the Hankyu Rail at Omiya, then finally the Keihan Lines to K's House.



With such a good day now behind us we really didn't want it to end (we met by a very nice staff member at Nisson-in, who made sure to tell us all about the statues / images inside. We couldn't find them, but ringing the temple bell was fun!), but with some laundry to do we decided to retire to K's House with an option to head back out to Fushimi-Inari after dark. So we'll see!

Until next time…

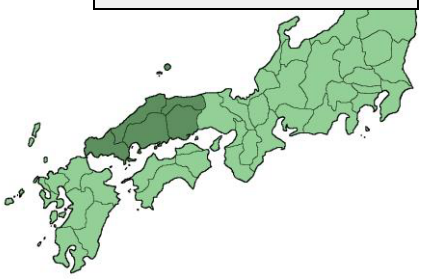
Ja ne!

関西地方 | 京都府 {Kansai / Kyoto}

「Chokoku-The Central Country, Part 1」

Thursday | April 16, 2015 (part 1)

24,486 steps
11.39 miles



The Chugoku region (中国地方; *Chugoku-chiho*) is the westernmost region of Honshu, the largest island of Japan. It consists of the prefectures of Hiroshima, Okayama, Shimane, Tottori, and Yamaguchi where over 7.5 million people live. “Chugoku” literally means “middle country”, but the origin of the name is unclear. Historically, Japan was divided into a number of provinces called *koku*, which were in turn classified according to both their power and their distances from the administrative center in Kansai. Under the latter classification, most provinces were divided into “near countries” (近国; *kingoku*), “middle countries” (中国; *chūgoku*), and “far countries” (遠国; *ongoku*). Therefore, one explanation is that Chugoku was originally used to refer to the collection of “middle countries” to the west of the capital. However, only five (less than half) of the provinces normally considered part of Chugoku region were in fact classified as middle countries, and the term never applied to the many middle countries to the east of Kansai. So an alternative explanation is that Chugoku referred to provinces between Kansai and Kyushu, which was as historically important as the link between Japan and mainland Asia.

Thus Chugoku referred to the 16 provinces of San’indo (山陰道) and San’yodo (山陽道), which existed west of Kansai and at first everything was in order. But after the founding of the Republic of China, the characters 中国 in Japanese and the reading Chugoku began to be used to mean “China”. The same characters are even used in Chinese to refer to China, but are pronounced Zhongguó, which literally translates to “Middle Kingdom” or “Middle Country”. So in order to avoid confusing the Chugoku region of Japan with the whole of China, in some cases you’ll find this area also known as the “Sanin-Sanyo Region”, after the old provincial names, and in accordance with the yīnyáng-based place-naming scheme. This works out well because the Chugoku region is divided into two distinct parts by mountains running east and west through its center. San’in (“yīn of the mountains”) is the northern part facing the Sea of Japan.

Did You Know?

The yīnyáng-based naming scheme is easy to understand. Etymologically, yin (陰) translates to “shady side (of a mountain)” and yang (陽) the “sunny side (of a mountain”). Many Chinese place names, or toponyms, contain yang or yin. In China, as elsewhere in the Northern Hemisphere, sunlight comes predominantly from the south, so the south face of a mountain or the north bank of a river will receive more direct sunlight than the opposite side and be the yang.

San'yō ("yáng of the mountains") is the southern part facing the Seto Inland Sea. And the two areas couldn't be any more different. The Sanyo region is heavily urbanized and industrialized while the Sanin region is quite rural, with an agricultural-based economy.

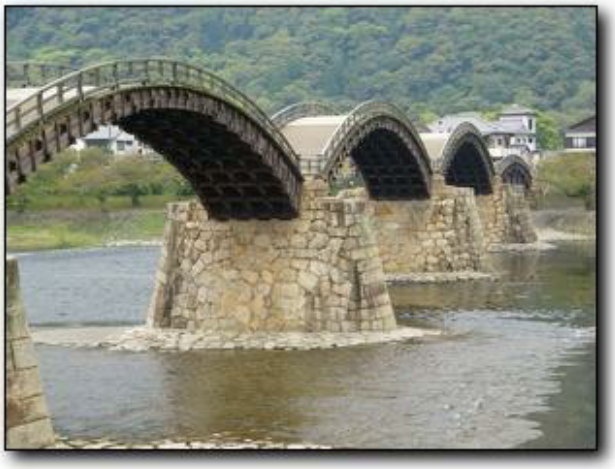
We visited the Sanyo Region today, with stops in Iwakuni, Miyajima, and Hiroshima.

Iwakuni (岩国市)

Yamiguchi Prefecture

Iwakuni Flag

Iwakuni, a small city of 105,000 people in southeastern Yamaguchi Prefecture, is best known for its structurally unique **Kintai-kyo Bridge**, the city's most distinguished landmark and a subject of admiration for hundreds of years. Completely made of wood and without the use of any nails, the bridge makes five bold arches onto massive stone pillars as it crosses over the unpredictable Nishiki River. Plans for the Kintai-kyo were first drawn up in the late 1600s when strong currents continuously destroyed earlier bridges that crossed here. Undeterred, Kikkawa Hiroyoshi, Iwakuni's third feudal lord, commissioned a more durable bridge. Hiroyoshi's bridge stood on this spot untouched until 1950, when the city was struck by a violent typhoon. With the country still exhausted from the Second World War, maintenance of historical and cultural properties suffered neglect, so the bridge that had stood for almost 400 years, collapsed. Desperate townspeople looked on and futilely tried to divert the ferocious current, but they were unsuccessful. But like Hiroyoshi, they too were undeterred. Shortly thereafter, determined residents began constructing a precise reconstruction of their cherished bridge, which they completed in 1953.



Although a recent reconstruction (dating from March 2004), the uniqueness of the bridge's construction, and my lack of knowledge about this part of Japan's Chugoku Region, drew us to Iwakuni today. Reaching Iwakuni isn't too difficult a task: Iwakuni has a station along the JR Sanyo Shinkansen (Shin-Iwakuni), but only Kodama trains stop here. So in order to reach the city, Nicole and I had to board a Hikari train out of Kyoto rather early (#491, at 7:20am) and switch over to a Kodama train at Hiroshima station. But two hours later we had arrived and were waiting for a bus to take us to the city's center. A 20 minute bus ride (at ¥250) dropped us off at the foot of the famous bridge. And what a sight it is to see!

After crossing the Kintai-kyo Bridge (which you can do for a few hundred yen), visitors are greeted by the statue of the man who initiated the bridge's construction, Kikkawa Hiroyoshi, the third lord of Iwakuni. In the area behind the statue, there are a number of sites of interest centered around **Kikko Park**, a spacious park with walking paths, plants and fountains. During the Edo Period, the residences of the ruling Kikkawa family were located where Kikko Park now stands, and the retainers of the ruling family were located nearby. Because of this, the area is now blessed with former samurai residences and museums featuring historic artifacts, such as: the Choko-kan Museum (focusing on articles of everyday life, but also some scroll paintings and displays about the Kintai-kyo Bridge), the Kikkawa Museum (a small museum that displays the possessions of the Kikkawa family, including documents, swords, and other weapons), the Iwakuni Art Museum (which includes glassware, samurai armor, ceramics, and the furniture of Iwakuni's feudal lords), the Mekata Residence (which is still in use), and Kikko Shrine (the Kikkawa family shrine). And in the north-eastern corner of the park is where you'll find the ropeway taking visitors up the mountain to **Iwakuni Castle**, the Kikkawa's seat of power.

Did You Know?

Kintai-kyo is over 193.3 meters in length end-to-end (if laid in a straight line), and 5 meters in width. The arches are most impressive, at 35 meters in length.

The Park itself isn't much to look at as far as greenspaces go, but the Castle – built in 1608, at the beginning of the Edo Period - is worth your time to visit.

The Kikkawa family originated from the Kanto plain region of Japan near present day Tokyo. In the late 16th century, they allied themselves with the Mori Clan from Izumo province (present day Shimane Prefecture, north of Iwakuni), and there's a bit of a story there. During the late Sengoku period, following the fall of the Ashikaga Shogunate in 1573, the country was in turmoil politically.

Factions began to fight for power and control. 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 Oda himself 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 a lowly foot soldier to become one of Oda's most trusted generals, with the opportunity to establish himself as Oda's successor. Toyotomi 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. During his short reign as Kampaku, Toyotomi attempted two invasions of Korea. The first spanning from 1592–96 was initially successful but suffered setbacks to end in stalemate; the second begun in 1597 was less successful (as the Koreans and their allies the Ming Chinese were prepared for the Japanese the second time around) and ended with Toyotomi's call for retreat from Korea on his deathbed in 1598.

When, in 1598, Toyotomi died without leaving a capable successor, the country was once again thrust into political turmoil, and this time it was Tokugawa Ieyasu who took advantage of the opportunity. Toyotomi had on his deathbed appointed a group of the most powerful lords in Japan — Tokugawa, Maeda Toshiie, Ukita Hideie, Uesugi Kagekatsu, and Mōri Terumoto — 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 in 1599. Thereafter a number of high ranking figures, notably Ishida Mitsunari, accused Tokugawa of disloyalty to the Toyotomi regime. This precipitated a crisis that led to the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, during which Tokugawa and his allies, who controlled the east of the country, defeated the anti-Tokugawa forces, which had control of the west. Generally regarded as the last major conflict of the Sengoku period, Tokugawa's victory at Sekigahara effectively marked the end of the Toyotomi regime, the last remnants of which were finally destroyed in the Siege of Osaka in 1615.

Now, I say all this because as was decreed, many of those in power attempted to keep that power by holding hostage the children of their vassals, and in 1583, Kikkawa Hiroie was sent to Toyotomi Hideyoshi for that purpose. You'd hardly be disloyal to a leader who also happened to have your child's life in the palm of your hands, would you? In any case, Hiroie grew up and made a minor name for himself on the battlefield. Unlike his father and his elder brother who were known for their battlefield bravery, Hiroie preferred strategy and diplomacy to win and was highly praised by Hideyoshi for his efforts. All was well. In the Battle of Sekigahara, Hiroie judged that the Tokugawa side would win. However, as one of the five leading elders of the Toyotomi government, Mori Terumoto and several of the Mori clan's retainers was supportive of the pro-Toyotomi forces. And as the Kikkawa family aligned themselves with the Mori, it meant he would soon be on the losing side.

So in order to ensure the survival of the clan, Hiroie made a secret pact with the Tokugawa side promising Mori neutrality during the battle in exchange for guarantees of the existing Mori domains.

On the day of the battle, with the Mori army deployed along the Tokugawa's flank, when the order came to begin the assault, Hiroie refused to comply, and used the vanguards under his command to block off the attack routes. Thus Hiroie was able to prevent the bulk of the Mori army from engaging the Tokugawa troops. However, after Tokugawa Ieyasu emerged victorious, several documents incriminating Mori Terumoto was found in Osaka Castle. Ieyasu believed the documents showed that Terumoto was involved more deeply in the western army than Hiroie had presented, and thus voided their secret pact. Initially he wished to completely confiscate all Mori domains and give two provinces to Hiroie as a reward. Eventually Ieyasu relented, and instead reduced the Mori clan's domains to just two provinces under the condition that Mori Terumoto retired. Although Hiroie succeeded in keeping the Mori clan's daimyo status, the Mōri clan lost over 3 quarters of its former territories.

Because Hiroie had proceeded with the secret negotiations without the clan's approval or knowledge, once the events came to light he came under intense attacks from within his own clan. Many considered him a traitor, especially since it was felt that his actions during the battle were instrumental in the Tokugawa victory that led to the disastrous punishment. After the battle, Terumoto gave a portion of his much reduced domain to Hiroie, here at Iwakuni. Under the rule of Kikkawa Hiroie, the Iwakuni domain became distinguished for its many cultural achievements. In addition to developing human resources by actively promoting the literary and military arts, he carried out major land reclamation projects, promoted industry, and encouraged good citizenship. As a result, the Iwakuni domain's economic strength increased to more than 100,000 koku within sixteen years.

Did You Know?

When the domain was first established, Iwakuni was worth only 30,000 *koku*. Koku was the economic standard of feudal Japan. One koku equaled 180 liters of rice, or 5 US bushels.)

Hiroie began construction of the castle in 1603. The white structure was built in the architectural style of the Momoyama period, reflecting European influences. Towering above the lush green mountain, Iwakuni Castle was to serve as the symbol of the feudal lord's power as well as a watch tower for protection of the domain. The site of the castle was chosen for its natural defensive advantages on top of Mount Shiroyama and half surrounded by a natural moat, the Nishiki River. The castle keep is four stories high, and looks out onto the city 200 meters below. Probably a source of considerable frustration for those who built it, the original castle lasted only slightly longer than the time it took to construct it. Being built over the course of five years, the castle was torn down by decree of the shogun a mere seven years after its completion. The castle was dismantled as per the *Ikkoku-ichijo* (一国一城, "One Castle per Province") order established by the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1615. (The Shogun wanted to consolidate his power, go figure.)

Kikkawa chose then to live and administer the Iwakuni domain from his manor house, which he had built in Yokoyama, the castle town laid out at the foot of the mountain.

After World War II, a growing public interest in reconstructing the castle led to an organization for just such a thing and after almost three and a half centuries, the reconstructed Iwakuni Castle was completed. The present reconstruction dates from 1962, and has already outlasted the original castle by a considerable factor.

It is a ferro-concrete construction, and inside displays samurai swords, armor and other items related to the castle's history. There are also displays on Kintai-kyo Bridge and other famous bridges across Japan.

Its present location is a little south of the original castle site to take advantage of the spectacular view from atop Mt. Shiroyama. The mountain itself is a treasure house of nature. Its spectacular flora is primarly evergreen and the climate is temperate. More than 200 species of trees, over 350 herbaceous plants, and more than 100 ferns are to be found in this natural preservation, many of which are of great scientific interest. In 1973, a unique tree called “Kimino-tamamizuki” was discovered on Mt. Shiroyama. Its colorful spring blossoms yield an abundance of golden fruits each fall.

Reaching the castle marked the conclusion of our time at Iwakuni, so once we had taken in the exhibits offered inside, we made our way back down the ropeway and across the bridge to the bus station. But returning to Shin-Iwakuni station was out of the question. Where we wanted to go next we couldn’t reach via Shinkansen; therefore, we’d leave via JR Iwakuni station instead (on the opposite end of town), to take a local train to Miyajima-guchi, the starting point to visiting Miyajima.

Itsukushima (厳島)

Miyajima, a small island less than an hour outside the city of Hiroshima (itself 361 km from Kyoto), has been revered and worshipped as an Island of the Gods since ancient times. It's also one of the most scenic spots in Japan, and as part of the Seto Island Sea National Park, Miyajima has received several distinctions, such as: a place of extraordinary scenic beauty, of exceptional history, a scenic preservation area, and a natural monument. It is romantic as it is historical, where virgin forests neighboring Mt. Misen, Mt. Komagabayashi, and Mt. Iwafune are representative of the lush greenery and abundance of nature are infused with numerous preserved shrines, temples, and historic monuments. Take a stroll in town, and the sights of the souvenir shops and ryokan (Japanese-style inns) will remind you of the liveliness and prosperity of an old-timey port town lined up with stores and houses.

Did You Know?

Miyajima Island is roughly rectangular, with a length of 9 kilometers and a width of 4 kilometers. Even as a small island you'll find three mountains here (Mt. Misen, Mt. Komagabayashi, and Mt. Iwafune), and three rivers (Shiraito-gawa, the Omoto -gawa, and the Mitarai-gawa) that flow down from the Misen Massif.

But you'll find that many visit Miyajima for Itsukushima and its famous giant *torii* gate.

While officially named Itsukushima, the island is more commonly referred to as Miyajima, Japanese for "shrine island", because the island is so closely related to its key shrine – Itsukushima Shrine – in the public's mind. Like the *torii* gate, the shrine's main buildings are also built over water, and are magnificent to see at high tide. At low tide, the water drains out of the bay, and while this is not the most picturesque time, it does allow visitors the opportunity to walk out and see the large tori up close – and even reach out and touch it. We arrived at low tide today, so we didn't get to see Itsukushima floating this time round, but walking out to the gate was quite an experience!

The gate itself is one of Japan's most popular tourist attractions and the image gained here is said to be one of the "Three Iconic Views of Japan" (日本三景; *Nihon Sankei*, which also includes the sand-bar of Amanohashidate in upper Kyoto prefecture, and the view of Matsushima Bay in Miyagi prefecture). A gate of some sort has been standing on this spot since 1168, but the current gate dates back to 1875 – the 8th iteration. It stands about 16-meters tall with its main pillars some 10-meters in circumference arranged in a four-legged style to provide not only stability but to wax a little dramatic too. And just what kind of wood do they build these gates out of? Why Camphor of course! Camphor is a large evergreen-type tree found predominantly in Asia just in case you were wondering. But I'm getting ahead of myself here…

From Miyajimaguchi Station it is a short walk to the pier, from where ferries depart frequently for the island – as it's separated from the mainland by the 500m wide Onoseto strait, it's the only way to get there. The streets here in the village of Ono (大野町) weren't very active this time of day, so the few meters walk from the train station to the ferry was a delicious treat. There was little need to rush (as boats come on a strict schedule) and that allowed for a very leisurely stretch of the legs. The hours spent sitting on various trains this morning caused a little cramping and we were very appreciative for the time to stretch them out. Not to mention time to peek into the store fronts that line the way from the station to the pier.

At the pier you'll find two competing ferry companies readily operating from this port: JR and Matsudai. Both companies' ferry rides take 10 minutes from shore-to-shore for a similar cost – about ¥180 one way; however, the Japan Rail Pass is valid on all JR Ferries too, so, if you have one like we do, the choice is moot… take the free JR ferry.

A few short and windy minutes later we anchored at Miyajima Pier and began our explorations of this sacred island.

The shrine is located in a small inlet, while the *torii* is set out in the bay. Stone lantern-lined paths (the lanterns are called *toro*; 灯籠) lead around the inlet, and visitors can enjoy walking along them while looking out onto the sea. The shrine complex consists of multiple buildings, including a prayer hall, a main hall, and a Noh theater stage, all of which are connected by boardwalks and supported by pillars above the sea (as originally, the island was so sacred, you were forbidden to even step foot upon it.) Deer were about the only living creatures allowed to do so, and the last time I was here the island was inundated with them. However, since then the local government has curtailed feeding the deer in this area (because they got so aggressive – I watched one snatch a guide map out of a tourists hands the last time), which has caused their numbers to dwindle. But if you look hard enough you'll still spot one or two.

An approach is made from the ferryboat docks to the east along a non-descript sandy pathway that hugs the shoreline. The path is unmistakable (just follow the throngs of tourists) but it's also marked with a huge stone gate. Pass through it (and the staring gaze of a lion-dog statue – a *komainu*; 狛犬) and you're on the sacred grounds of Itsukushima shrine.

As previously mentioned, Miyajima has been considered a holy place for most of Japanese history. The island's highest peak, Mount Misen, was worshiped by local people as early as the 6th century, or more specifically the year 593, when Saeki Kuramoto is said to have constructed the main shrine. Later, in 806 AD, the monk Kobo Daishi ascended Mt. Misen and established the mountain as an ascetic site for the Shingon sect of Buddhism. In the years since, the island's Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines have maintained a close relationship. The first record of Itsukushima Shrine as a place of worship dedicated to *Susano-o no Mikoto*, Shinto deity of the seas and of storms, and brother of the great sun deity *Amaterasu*, was in the Nihon Koki (Notes on Japan), dated 811.

Later still, in 1168, *Taira no Kiyomori*, the most powerful man in Japan during the end of the Heian Period (he established the first Samurai-dominated government in the country's history, recall), selected the island as the site of his clan's family shrine and rebuilt Itsukushima.

As the power of the Heike clan increased, the number of worshippers at the shrine increased, and the shrine itself began to become known among the members of the Imperial Court. Its grandeur became more and more magnificent. The emperor and the Imperial Court paid visits to the shrine, and the culture of the Heian Period (794-1185) was amiably incorporated. Bugaku, ancient Japanese musical court dance, also began during this period, and you'll find a stage for it here as well. (There's a Noh stage here as well, but I'll get to that later). Even after the fall of the Heike clan, the culture of the Heian Period was warmly accepted by the Genji and the shrine continued to experience a stable and prosperous era.

The main shrine was damaged by fire in 1207 and 1223, and although restoration was done, it is believed that with each restoration, the scale of the shrine was changed. Thus, in an illustration showing the shrine which was drawn during the Koan Period (1278-1288), the layout of the shrine is different. It is recorded that the shrine was damaged by a typhoon in 1325, and from that time on, the layout became similar to its current state. From the Kamakura Period (1185–1333) through the age of civil wars (Sengoku Period) when the political situation throughout the country was unstable, the shrine's influence gradually declined. Although there was a period when it fell into ruin, when Mori Motonari won the Battle of Itsukushima in 1555, under his control the shrine regained the reverence it had before and once again its grandeur was restored into its present form, which is well known for its "floating" appearance.

This arrangement is due to the island's status as an ancient worshiping ground. Since commoners were not historically allowed to set foot upon the island, the only way to come was by boat and the use of the boardwalk. Due to its unique construction, more than 300 meters of corridors had to be built to connect the buildings – twenty-one remaining in total. Once you enter the shrine, you never leave the boardwalk (meaning, you never touch the beach) until you exit. In the past, of course, you would never have touched the beach, docking instead directly at the shrine; however, that begs the question: how would you visit nearby Senjokaku Hall and its five-storied pagoda, Goju-no-to?

Did You Know?

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

Senjokaku, situated just outside the shrine's corridor complex but within its sphere of influence, is the creation of Hideyoshi Toyotomi, one of the most famous figures in Japanese history (we've heard a lot about him in Kyoto). His vision was to establish a large hall as a repository where Senbu-kyo sutra chanting and copying could be held. Work began on the hall in 1587 with plans to make it the largest building on the island (hence its name: the Hall of One Thousand Tatami Mats). As Tokugawa Ieyasu took power thereafter rather than the Toyotomi heirs, the building was never fully completed. The building was not yet completed when Hideyoshi died in 1598. As Tokugawa Ieyasu took power thereafter rather than the Toyotomi heirs, the building was never fully completed. Though construction of the hall was discontinued after Hideyoshi's passing, it still remains the island's largest building even in its unfinished form (though its floor size is only equal to the area of 857 tatami mats). Had it had been completed, it would have shown us the great flamboyance of the Azuchi Momoyama era, as you can partly see in the gilded roof tiles of the hall, and the dynamic character of Hideoyoshi himself.

Its bare appearance may not intrigue you at first – only unfinished walls and a hundred pillars – but fact of the matter is, the uniqueness of the structure's unpainted nature and the exact date of its founding makes it a valuable gauge of the passage of time. The traces of weathering on its pillars and floorboards can be used to determine the approximate age of any other wooden structure on Miyajima.

In addition to its exceptional ceiling, its main corridor looks out on the island's bay and famous floating *torii*. If you know where to look you'll discover a piece of wood that was used as a measuring device in the reconstruction work of the *torii* in 1873 hangs on a pillar under the floor of the south part of the shrine. The hall is accompanied by the vermilion-painted **Goju-no-to**, which pre-dates Senjokaku hall by almost 100 years. It was built in 1407 to enshrine the Buddha of medicine, accompanied by the bodhisattvas Fugen and Monju, and towers 27.6 meters above the hall. The pagoda as a whole was constructed in Japanese style as evidenced by the ornamental caps of the railing posts as well as in the placement of the rafters; its roof is covered with layers of Japanese cypress bark shingles.

However, Chinese influence can also be seen in such parts as the top of the wooden pillars supporting the eaves, as well as in the tails of the rafters. Elaborate *giboshi* (擬宝珠) decorations (decorations resembling leek flowers) are found on the railing posts of the first story, while Gyaku-ren and Kaika-ren decorations (resembling lotus flowers) are placed on the railing posts from the second story to the fifth.

The interior of the pagoda is decorated with auspicious motifs such as the Kannon Bodhisattva, Eight Views of Shohshoh, a dragon, lotus flowers and the Shingon Hasso sutra painted on the ceiling, the Raigo Wall (the special name for the wall behind the Image of Buddha) and the rest of the interior wooden walls. However, it is not open to the public. One of the unique structural features is the central pillar of the pagoda, (one of only five examples in Japan) which extends from the peak of the roof only to the second story -- instead of to the foundation. This allows the pagoda to resist horizontal oscillation caused by earthquakes and typhoons. You'll find the names of donors carved on each of the sixteen pillars of the first story. Fourteen of these were women.

The shrine did not yet exist at the time of the Battle of Itsukushima in 1555 when the Mori clan defeated the Sue clan to unify the Chugoku region (more on this later), but the headquarters of the Sue clan was located on this hill, which was then called *to-no-oka* (Pagoda Hill). Starting in the Meiji era, the hill was developed through the establishment of stone steps, among other additions. So, take a look and you'll find a harmonious blend of Chinese and Japanese architectural styles. (And it looks nice too rising from the hills from Itsukushima-jinja). Inside you'll find a full-color painting of Buddha; something a commoner (like me) will never see.

...つづく

「Chokoku-The Central Country, Part 2」

Thursday | April 16, 2015 (part 2)

The incredible concept for building a shrine standing in the sea was either an attempt to build the mythical Ryugu-jo (Dragon Palace) because the enshrined goddess is the goddess of the sea. Or, it was built as a manifestation of the faith in the Buddhist belief of Pure Land during the Fujiwara Period. It was believed that when people died, their soul cross over by boats the "next world" to go to Gokuraku Jodo (paradise, Buddhist Pure Land). Whichever may have been the reason, the shrine is a truly magnificent sight that combines the harmony and beauty of human craftsmanship and nature. Itsukushima's **East Corridor**, which extends past the Marodo shrine and the **Asazaya** (the Morning Service Hall), serves as entrance and ticket gate to the shrine today. This passage is designated as both a "Specially Preserved Building" (since 1899 – the entire construct is on pillars and it's not hard to imagine those supportive structures rot and need constant replacing) and a "National Treasure" (since 1952).

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

Marodo Shrine is the first important piece of Itsukushima you'll come upon, as the shrine for the guest deity. These *sesshas*, or auxiliary shrines, are used to dedicate a deity (or deities) that have a deep and significant relationship to the god or goddess which is venerated within the main shrine. As the god of the seas and storms – *Susano-o no Mikoto* – is venerated here, the Marodo is dedicated to his children: *Amenooshihomimi-no-mikoto*, *Ikutsuhikone-no-mikoto*, *Amenohohi-no-mikoto*, *Amatsuhikone-no-mikoto*, and *Kumanokusubi-no-mikoto*. What role they may play in Shinto spiritualism is, however, lost to me. But should you wish to make a request of them, or offer prayers, do so at the Haraiden, or purification hall – just stand and be purified!

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

Did You Know?

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

Three round ponds are located around Itsukushima Shrine as well. The ponds served as water reservoirs for fires that occurred when the tide happened to be low, but they also lend a unique character to the shrine. Although the ponds don't appear to be much at lower tides, when filled they are said to arouse even the least inspirational soul. Of the three ponds at Itsukushima shrine, one stands out as one of the Eight Views of Miyajima – the ***Kagami-no-iki*.** The moon reflecting on the mirror pond nearest the Marodo is said to be the most beautiful striking vision, a motif repeatedly taken up in *Tanka* (31-syllable Japanese poems) and *Haiku* of the period. A second mirror pond – ***Sotoba-ishi*** – stands out for its association with the historical tale of the rise and fall of the Heike clan. Or, more precisely, a stone in the pond (according to a historical marker at the site), is associated with the story known as the "Floating Sotoba".

According to legend, Taira-no-Yasuyori was exiled to Kikai Island (鬼界ヶ島; *kikai ga shima*), a remote island in historical Satsuma province following the discovery of a conspiracy to usurp power from his fellow clansmen. While on this remote island, Yasuyouri crafted a number of beautiful poems expressing the idiocy of his actions, his longing to return to Kyoto and escape isolation, and confessed how much he missed his mother. These poems made their way onto 1,000 wooden tablets, called Sotoba, which he then released to the sea. One of these tablets floated to Miyajima, coming to rest upon this pond's largest rock. A priest carried the story to the Noble Court in Kyoto and Yasuyouri was allowed to return from exile. Yasuyori showed his gratitude by donating a stone lantern to the shrine. The lantern, so named Yasuyori Toro, stands within the shrine enclosure near the large rock that is said to mark the spot where his lucky poem was found. On the surface of the base of the lantern, rising and declining dragons are carved. Hibukuro (the box-like space in the fire box, where the fuel is burned) is octagon-shaped and is carved roku jizo, six guardian deities of children.

Other historical references abound here as well, but they're sneakily placed… How about atop the **Noh stage**? The play we saw, although unidentified, is part of the shrine's *toka-sai*, or spring dance festival. The three days of Noh performances that are performed here are said to have been begun by Motonari Mori in 1563 as part of the extensive purification rites that he had conducted on the sacred island after the bloodshed of his victory over the Sue clan in the Battle of Itsukushima / Miyajima.

The 1555 Battle of Miyajima (厳島合戦; *Itsukushima Kassen*) was the only battle to be fought on the sacred island. It was the turning point in a campaign for control of the Ouchi clan and of Aki Province, a strategically important province for establishing control of western Honshu. It was an important step for the Mori clan in taking the foremost position in western Japan, and cemented the reputation of Mori Motonari (毛利元就) as a cunning strategist. Here's what happened:

The Emblem (mon) of the Ouchi clan

It starts with a man named Yoshitaka (大内義隆), the eldest son of Ouchi Yoshioki. He became *daimyo* following the death of his father in 1528 and worked to solidify Ouchi (**大内氏**) influence over northern Kyushu during the 1530's. He also moved to cement his family's domination of overseas trade, and it was partially to this end that he entertained Francis Xavier in 1550 (two years after the end of the 'official' China trade). He sent Sue Harukata (陶晴賢) to lift the Amako's siege of Koriyama in 1540, and personally led an army into the Amako domain in 1542.

This campaign foundered at the walls of Gassan-Toda Castle and ended in a bitter defeat for the Ouchi and their allies the Mori. This reverse prompted Yoshitaka to largely withdraw from military affairs, leaving them in the hands of the Naito and Sue clans.

He devoted himself instead to cultural pursuits and further spared little expense to turn Yamaguchi into a “western” Kyoto. His retainers grew dissatisfied with his activities and so in 1551 Sue Takafusa (Harukata) rebelled, forcing Yoshitaka to flee to a temple in Nagato, where, abandoned by most of his retainers, he committed suicide along with his young son Yoshihiro.

Mori Clan

Sue installed the next lord of the clan, Ouchi Yoshinaga, but effectively led the Ouchi family and its armies, intent on military expansion. In 1554, Mori Motonari, as a vassal of the Ouchi clan, wanted to avenge the betrayed Yoshitaka, and so he rebelled against Sue, whose territorial ambitions were depleting clan resources. The heavily outnumbered force under Mori attacked and defeated Sue at the Battle of Oshikibata. Mori then departed from the mainland to build a fort, known as Miyao Castle, on Miyajima while proclaiming publicly his woe that it would not hold out long against an attack. (It’s built on a hill near Itsukushima Shrine and facing the mainland, making it a visible and tempting target.) Sue commandeered a fleet of merchant vessels and prepared the troops of the Ouchi clan to cross the channel. In the early hours of 15 October, Sue attacked Miyao Castle in an amphibious frontal assault. Meanwhile, Mori took advantage of his absence to seize Sakurao Castle, Sue's castle on the mainland.

With an embarkation point secured, Mori Motonari continued with his elaborate plan. He had enlisted the aid of local pirates who agreed to transport his troops to Miyajima. The fleet carrying the Mori forces set out in a driving thunderstorm. Their approach thus obscured, Motonari and two of his sons, Kikkawa Motoharu and Mori Takamoto, landed on the east side of the island, to the rear of the Sue force. Meanwhile, Motonari's third son, Kobayakawa Takakage, sailed straight toward Miyao Castle in a feint, and then retreated so he could be in a position to return the following day, his attack synchronized with the overland assault. At dawn, Takakage and his 1,500 troops landed before the small fortress, and the sound of shell trumpets signalled that all units were in position and the attack commenced.

As Takakage's force rushed the front gate of Miyao Castle, Mori and his troops hit the Ouchi position from behind. Caught completely by surprise, many of the Ouchi troops scattered in disarray. Hundreds tried to swim to the mainland and drowned in the attempt. Many more saw that defeat was inevitable and committed seppuku. By October 18, 1555, resistance had ended at a cost of about 4,700 dead among the Ouchi army. Sue Harukata escaped from the confines of Miyao Castle, but when he saw that escape from the island was not possible, he also committed suicide by seppuku.

Scroll Depicting Battle of Miyajima

Immediately after the battle, Mori Motonari ordered that the bodies of the fallen troops be removed to the mainland, and then ordered that the entire battlefield be cleansed of the blood that was spilled, to the point that buildings were scrubbed, and blood-soaked soil was removed from the island. (The entire island is considered to be a Shinto shrine, and no birth or death is allowed on the island after all.)

The **Noh** play, as I mentioned at the beginning of this text, is a direct result of Mori Motonari's purification rites. The Mori clan later funded several construction or renovation projects on the island. The remains of Sue Harukata were transported back to the mainland and positively identified at Sakurao Castle before being accorded a funeral and burial in the cemetery of a nearby Buddhist temple in present-day Hatsukaichi city, Hiroshima Prefecture. The Sue forces at Miyajima are estimated to have been about 20,000 to 30,000 men, and though estimates of the combined forces under Mori Motonari range widely from 4,000 to 10,000 troops, it is clear that Mori was heavily outnumbered. This victory brought the Mori clan into a preeminent position in western Japan, and established their reputation for strategy and naval tactics.

As for the Noh, well, it gave us this amazing play, which has been performed here ever since. According to historical documents, the Noh play was performed on the shore on what was likely a temporary stage next to the shrine. In 1605, the feudal lord Fukushima Masanori donated a stage, which became the shrine's first permanent Noh stage. In 1680, the feudal lord of the time, Asano Tsunanaga, built the current Noh stage in the ichiju-kiritsuma style, with a thatched Japanese cypress roof, a bridge-like passageway and a dressing room. Normally, a *tsubo* (large pot filled with water) is beneath the floor of a Noh stage for resonance, however since the stage is constructed over the sea, a *tsubo* cannot be used. Instead, the floor has been constructed so that it is like a single board for improving the sound.

The floor functions similarly to the skin on a large drum since the floorboards have been laid on top of a wide-interval floor joist (the crossbar that intercepts the floorboards) and a closing which is assembled in the fashion of a well crib (the boards that intercept the floor joist), so with every marked and measured footstep, the sound resonates clearly. Furthermore, the sound tone changes with the ebb and flow of the tide, and without exception, this is the only Noh stage in the whole country that uniquely rests upon the sea. Today's performance was the first, and performed by the nearby Kita School. I say they did a great job!

Visitors exit Itsukushima Shrine through the West Corridor. Although non-descript, the architectural style of the gables here are of note – they're called *kara-hafu*, or Chinese gable. According to a document from the Nin'an era (1166-1169), the total length of the corridor was about 205.4 meters. It was later extended to about 210.9 meters, and then to about 327.2 meters, indicating that the corridors were extended over time. Today, however, the total length is only about 194.5 meters. In 1541, a landslide reached the shrine, drastically changing the surrounding geography and damaging shrine buildings, making restoration impossible. According to the documents following this incident, the total length of the corridor became about 196.3 meters, and when the shrine was repaired again in 1784, the corridors were shortened further.
The floor boards of the West Corridor were restored in 1556 by the famous warlord Mori Motonari. The Chinese gables may have been added at that time.

Daisho-in (大聖院)

Beyond Itsukushima is Daisho-in, one of the most important (and prestigious) temples of Buddhism not only on this island, but in all of Japan. Founded in 806 at the base of Mount Misen, on which the sect's founder, Kobo Daishi, first began the practice of Shingon Buddhism on the island, you'll find a variety of buildings, statues, and other religious objects to admire. These include the Kannon-do Hall, the Maiden Hall, a sand mandala made by visiting monks from Tibet, a tea room, and a cave filled with 88 icons representing the temples of the Shikoku Pilgrimage, amongst hundreds of statues of Jizo, the guardian of children and patron deity of those children who have died. He's hard to miss… he's here, there, and everywhere!

Did You Know?

Over its history the temple has had a close relationship with the Imperial Family – beginning in the 12th century with Emperor Toba, who decreed it was the place to pray for peace and security of the nation, to Emperor Meiji in 1885, who honored the temple with a stay. In fact, just last year the 14th Dalai Lama visited the island to celebrate the 1200th year of the temple, and stayed for five days.

When I first visited Miyajima in 2007, I had come just for Itsukushima and its *torii*. (I had also hoped to ascend the nearby ropeway to visit the crest of Mount Misen, but the poor weather that day prevented me from doing so.) However, when I arrived at Miyajima-guchi station that morning, as I bumbled about I happened upon a brochure for Daisho-in. I hadn't heard of it in my research for visiting the island but nevertheless was intrigued, so I figured once I had finished touring Itsukushima and admiring the gate I would attempt to find Daisho-in. I was so glad I did; I enjoyed my visit immensely! So when Nicole and I were talking about re-visiting Japan, and Miyajima came up as a possible destination, I knew Daisho-in had to be on the itinerary. It's a jewel of a destination, and such a quirky temple, too; I knew Nicole would love it!

Simply standing here and being exposed to the serene atmosphere may enhance your peace of mind. And you'll find countless Buddhist teachings throughout its precincts.

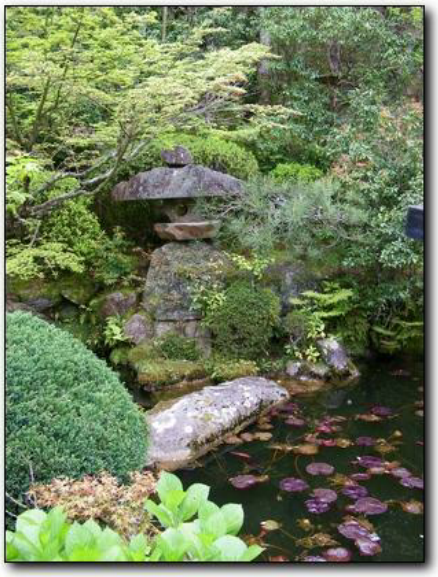
For example, did you know that Buddhism was founded by Shakyamuni in India on the river Ganges in the 5th century BC? The supreme objective of Buddhism is to reach Buddahood by attaining enlightenment and eradicating suffering through practicing Shakyamuni's teachings. It is believed that Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the 6th century AD and there are many sects (or ways of thought) of Buddhism in Japan. Daisho-in belongs to the Shingon Sect. Believe me I was just as confused about the different sects until I visited. Here's a brief summary between the two:

From the onset you have Early Buddhism, which split into *Mahayana* and *Hinayana*. The difference between the two is like Lutheranism to Catholicism: *Hinayana* is used by Mahayanists as a name to refer variously to one or more doctrines, traditions, practitioners or thoughts that are generally concerned with the achievement of Nirvana as an Arahant or a Pratyeka-Buddha, as opposed to the achievement of liberation as a Samyaksam-buddha, wherein the Samyaksam- buddha (according to Mahayana lore) is deemed to operate from a basis of vowing to effect the spiritual liberation of all beings and creatures from the suffering of samsara (not just himself or a small number of others). From that initial distinction, *Mahayana* Buddhism split into *Esoteric* and *Exoteric*. Many of the locations I previously visited have been schools of thought along the Exoteric form: the Rinzai Zen, Soto Zen, Jodo, Jodo-Shin, and Nichiren sects; however, the Shingon sect (and Tendai sect) belong to the Esoteric side, which teaches that humans can attain enlightenment through rituals combining physical, spoken and mental disciplines.

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

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

Then there's the Tengu. With wings and a long nose, Tengu have been considered to possess supernatural powers since ancient times. Various tengu legends and faiths were created, leading them to deification. As such, they are indispensable to holy sites in the mountains and you'll find a number of them stashed around Daisho-in.



Although Daisho-in is not as well-known as Ituskushima Shrine, the most striking features of Daisho-in aren't in its cultural wealth (though highly impressive in and of themselves), but in its religious holdings. Within you'll find a variety of features to explore, which include but are not limited to: Dai-hannyakyo Sutra (spinning wheels containing the six hundred volumes of scripture – see right), Rakan Statues (statues depicting the disciples of Shaka Nyorai; each has a unique facial expression), the Sand Mandala (a tapestry made using colored sand by Buddhist monks from Tibet), one of the oldest sitting images of Fudo Myo-o with braided hair, 1000 Fudo Images (representations of Fudo Myoo, one of the Thirteen Buddhas in Japan – the "Immovable Wisdom King" – commemorating the succession of the current head priest), Mani Wheel (spinning wheels along the steps to Maniden Hall believed to invite blessings equivalent to reading one volume of the Hannya-shinkyon, or Heart sutra), Maniden Hall (the main prayer hall where Sanki Daigongen, or the Three Awesome Deities of Mt. Misen, are enshrined), the Maniden Bodaisho (a room where 1000 golden images of Amida Nyorai, or the Buddha of Infinite Light, believed to take the deceased to Paradise, are kept), Shaka Nehan Hall (where Shaka Nyorai is depicted entering Nirvana surrounded by his sixteen disciples), Henjyokutsu Cave (where dozens of dimly-lit lanterns illuminate 88 principal icons representing the temples of the Shikoku Pilgrimage), Hakkaku Manpuku Hall (where Miyajima's famous Seven Deities of Good Fortune are enshrined), a flame that has been burning since the temple's foundation more than 1200 years ago, and much, much more.

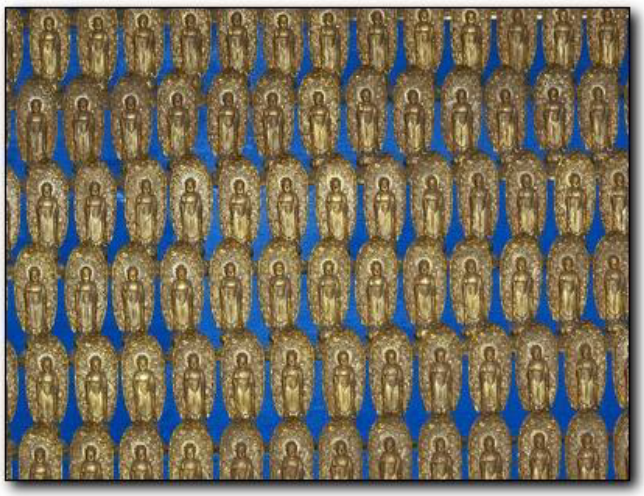
Did You Know?

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

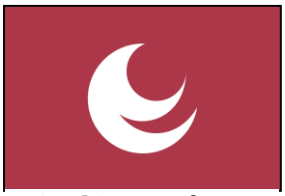
It turned out to be a very educational experience, one that we won't soon forget.








Hiroshima (広島市)



Hiroshima Prefecture

Hiroshima City Flag

Besides visiting Itsukushima Shrine and Daisho-in, the plans for the day also included taking a ride on the ropeway to the top of Mount Misen, but unfortunately the weather wasn't cooperating any more today than it was back in 2007, so once we concluded poking into all of Daiso-in's various buildings and other nooks and crannies, we returned to the main area in search of a snack (we were increasingly becoming more and more famished) before departing the island. On the way in we spotted a restaurant that piqued our interest but at the time we weren't quite hungry enough to attempt ordering, but by the time we'd returned from Daiso-in, we were ready for all the foods. But although we went looking for it, we were left wanting; not only couldn't we find it again, but most of the other eateries on the island were closing up for the day. Alarmed, we backtracked and returned to a yakitori stand we'd passed earlier, ordering in desperation. Luckily they were not closing up so I got a beef yakitori stick while Nicole settled for one of pork. Unfortunately, hers was a bit too fatty for her taste and mine wasn't as warm as I would have liked, but it would serve to tide us over until we reached Hiroshima.

Hiroshima is the principal city of the Chugoku Region. When the first atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, the city was forever etched in history. The destructive power of the bomb was tremendous and obliterated nearly everything within a two kilometer radius. After the war, great efforts were taken to rebuild the city. Predictions that the city would be uninhabitable proved false, and today its home to over a million inhabitants. Destroyed monuments of Hiroshima's historical heritage, like Hiroshima Castle and Shukkeien Garden, were reconstructed. In the center of the city a large park was built and given a name that would reflect the aspirations of the re-born city: Peace Memorial Park. This is what we came to see.

To get to the area you must take a ride on the Hiroden, the city's trolley network. Hiroden is short for the **Hiroshima Electric Railway**, Co (広島電鉄株式会社; *Hiroshima Dentetsu Kabushiki-gaisha*). In fact, Hiroshima has Japan's largest currently operating tram network, with eight tram lines crisscrossing the city, connecting JR Hiroshima Station with most of the city's attractions. The first trolley rolled along the streets in 1910, but unfortunately it lost all of its trains and services from the atomic bomb blast.

And that makes this service unique: it employs streetcars from all over the world. Trains on the line today have come from Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, Fukuoka, Dortmund, Hanover, and, yes, San Francisco. It's part of the system's charm, really. From Hiroshima Station (M1), take tram line 2 or 6 to Genbaku-Domu Mae (M10). The ride should take no longer than 15 minutes (but you're riding in a tram so traffic might create delays) and costs 160 yen. Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park is one of the most prominent features of the city. Even visitors not looking for it will likely stumble upon the large 120,000 square meter park. Its trees, lawns, and walking paths are in stark contrast to the surrounding downtown area.

Here you will be treated to the only building to be permitted to stand from the atomic blast, an old products exhibition hall. (today referred to as the **Atomic Dome**). The nuclear explosion that erupted here at 8:15am on August 6th was almost directly above this building; detonated almost 490 feet (150 m) away and 1,968 feet (600 m) above ground. It was the closest structure within the zone to survive the blast. Though it was mired in controversy from the moment rebuilding began (some inhabitants wanted it torn down, others wanted it saved as a memorial), today it serves as a poignant reminder of the devastation that occurred due to the bombing and stands as a memorial for the 70,000 people who were killed instantly (not to mention the untold thousands who suffered fatal injuries from the radiation), and as such as been designated the Hiroshima Peace Memorial.

A few minutes' walk from the Atomic Dome you'll find yourself at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park (原爆の子の像; *Genbaku-no-konozo*), a large downtown green-space. Here you'll find various monuments relating to the nuclear blast including, but not limited to: the Children's Peace Monument, a statue dedicated to the memory of the children who died as a result of the bombing; the Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound, a grass-covered knoll that contains the ashes of 70,000 unidentified victims of the bomb; the Cenotaph for Korean victims, honoring the nearly 20,000 Koreans that were killed that day; and the Memorial Cenotaph ("Rest in Peace, for the error shall not be repeated"), which includes the Peace Flame (an eternal flame said to be lit until all nuclear bombs on the planet are destroyed and the planet is free from the threat of nuclear annihilation), the Peace Arch, a concrete, saddle-shaped monument that holds the names of all of the people killed by the bomb, and three peace bells. A museum stands at the opposite end of the park.

Before the bomb, the area of what is now the Peace Park was the political and commercial heart of the city, which is why it was chosen as the bomb's primary target. The park's main facility is the Peace Memorial Museum. Consisting of two buildings, the museum surveys the history of Hiroshima and the advent of the nuclear bomb. Its main focus though is on the events of August 6th. The aforementioned A-Bomb Dome, also known as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, is what remains of the former Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall. The building served as a location to promote Hiroshima's industries, today it's a hollowed out skeleton, a solemn reminder of the devastation the bomb wrought. (When the bomb exploded, it was one of the few buildings to remain standing, and remains so today. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the A-Bomb Dome is a tangible link to Hiroshima's unique past.)

The Children's Peace Monument, a statue dedicated to the memory of the children who died as a result of the bombing; the Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound, a grass-covered knoll that contains the ashes of 70,000 unidentified victims of the bomb; the Cenotaph for Korean victims, honoring the nearly 20,000 Koreans that were killed that day; and the Memorial Cenotaph ("Rest in Peace, for the error shall not be repeated"), which includes the Peace Flame (an eternal flame said to be lit until all nuclear bombs on the planet are destroyed and the planet is free from the threat of nuclear annihilation), the Peace Arch, a concrete, saddle-shaped monument for those who died, either from the initial blast or exposure to radiation afterward, a stone chest that holds a register of those names (of which there are over 220,000), and three peace bells.

Despite the location, it was a nice stroll.

As darkness fell we decided to leave Hiroshima and return "home" to Kyoto, rather than stay the night at K's House Hiroshima, as originally planned. This meant we'd forgo exploring Hondori (a pedestrian arcade that is closed to traffic and lined with shops and restaurants) and wouldn't be able to try Okonomiyaki (one of Hiroshima's food specialties), in the process tonight, and Hiroshima Castle and Shukkeien gardens tomorrow morning.

It also meant that our stop at Onomichi, a quaint port town located along the Seto Island Sea, for tomorrow afternoon, was also out. I'd originally planned for us to tackle its Temple Walk (a two and a half kilometer long stroll up and down the town's slopes that take visitors past twenty-five small temples), but, considering we still have plenty of temples and shrines to see in the Kyoto area, having already seen quite a number of them, and having less than stellar weather today (although it didn't rain), returning to Kyoto was a much more desirable decision. So we went.

* * *

Getting back to Kyoto was interesting though. Due to the late evening hour, we could only find a Shinkansen – the Sakura train – to Shin-Osaka. Nothing else but Nozomi trains, which we couldn't ride, was going through to Kyoto. This meant if we weren't lucky, we could be in for quite the surprise at Shin-Osaka: stuck there or scrambling for a local train into Kyoto! But thankfully a Kodama train was waiting at Shin-Osaka going our way (in the direction of Nagoya), so we had no trouble connecting upon arrival. We were also quite concerned about getting seats on the Sakura train out of Hiroshima, since it was obviously one of the last few non-Nozomi level trains we (and everyone else) could board, but that was also not a problem. The only drama on the entire trip back was in having to sit next to a drunken Japanese businessman who wandered into our car and sat down next to us at the next station east. He came in belching at first, sighing a lot, and then he eventually fell asleep in his chair, slumped over across the armrest toward the aisle (thank goodness!). He was still asleep as we pulled into Shin-Osaka station, so he may still be on the train as far as we know!

We made it back home so that's all that matters.

I'm not that disappointed in losing Onomichi tomorrow. It was my choice to cancel the visit after-all – Nicole was still open to staying the night in Hiroshima – but doing a temple walk in a sea-side city I knew nothing about at that moment was very unappealing. We've seen plenty of shrines and temples already, as I said. And we'll see even more, later, as I also said. So a special stop just didn't seem necessary anymore. Yes, I'll miss the special ride we were going to take from Mihara to Onomichi – the local JR Sanyo Line train actually hugs the coastline, offering up fantastic views of the inland sea and its islands – but if the weather isn't going to be good, what's the point, you know? And sure, doing the seven-temple Shuin "red seal" run, which involves visiting certain temples and collecting their red seal stamps and Buddhist rosaries for a special gift at the end, but that sounded exhausting. We're tired, and being tired like this makes neither of us feel like we want to be here in Japan, so getting back to K's House and sleeping in our own room appealed to us greatly. And since we're not going to be at Onomichi tomorrow, it means we can sleep in a bit, and then have a great day in Kyoto, where it's going to be sunny and clear skies!

Until then. Ja ne!

「Fifth Time's the Charm!」

Friday | April 17, 2015

20,922 steps
9.74 miles

I've said it before and I will say it again, Japan is the land of convenience. Public transportation is in abundance, it's really easy to navigate even if you don't read the language, and train schedules are accurate to the second. Basically, Japan is a society devoted to making the group comfortable. This has good sides and bad sides, of course, but I just want to talk about one of the good sides of this convenient society: ample *conbinis* and the food you can find inside. There's no better friend to travelers in Japan than a conbini. What's a conbini you might ask? If you are not familiar with a conbini (written in Japanese as コンビニ), it is basically a convenience store. The world conbini itself is derived from the English word "convenience".

Yes, a *conbini* is a convenience store, but it is also so much more. It is a place to pay your utility bills. It is a place where you can grab an anti-hangover drink before going out drinking with friends, pick up your latest favorite magazine, pay for and pick up your concert tickets, withdraw money from your foreign bank account without a problem (if you are ok paying a $5 service fee), get a salad or full freshly-cooked meal, and find all sorts of little knick-knacks. Virtually anything you want! And when you're looking for a quick snack and a cold drink to wash that down with, any one of the more prominent *conbini* will do. There's 7-11i Holdings, Family Mart, Lawson, AM/PM, Circle K, Sunkus, Mini Stop, and many, many more! We've been enjoying them immensely since our arrival – (In fact, they're basically all I subsisted on when I first came to Japan years ago) – and today was no different. In fact, we enjoyed a fantastic snack at one called the Daily Yamazaki near Fushimi Inari Taisha, a チョコクリーム＆ホイップ, which is a small crust-less sandwich with chocolate pudding and whipped cream inside – yum, yum, yum!)

In either case, rather than stay overnight in Hiroshima and visit Onomichi as originally planned, as you could have guessed by now, we stayed around Kyoto today since the city was forecasted to have awesomely good weather. And you know what… it didn't disappoint! We had clear blue and sunny skies all day today (with only a few rain clouds moving in briefly, but no rain), so it was with glee that we returned to Fushimi-Inari-Taisha. But boy was it busy! Tourist and school groups were aplenty this morning, but even with all the throngs of people, without the rain and the umbrellas that come out when it does so, it was much easier to navigate.

Fushimi-inari-taisha (伏見稲荷大社**)**

Once again we took a ride on the Keihan Rail line from Shichijo station. The Keihan Electric Railway – known as “Keihan” (京阪), “Keihan Dentetsu” (京阪電鉄) or “Keihan Densha” (京阪電車) – is one of the hundreds of private, secondary railway operators in Japan. Keihan started operations between Osaka and Kyoto in 1910 with the first electric railway to connect the two. Today, the company has seven lines that service Kyoto, Osaka and Otsu – making it rather popular with those commuting to Kyoto or to and from Osaka into these communities. It’s one of the quickest and best ways to go North and South in eastern Kyoto.

Exit Fushimi-inari Station and come upon *Fushimi-inari-taisha*, the head shrine of no less than thirty-to-forty thousand similar shines in all of Japan, each dedicated to Inari (稲荷), the Shinto god of fertility, rice, and wealth.

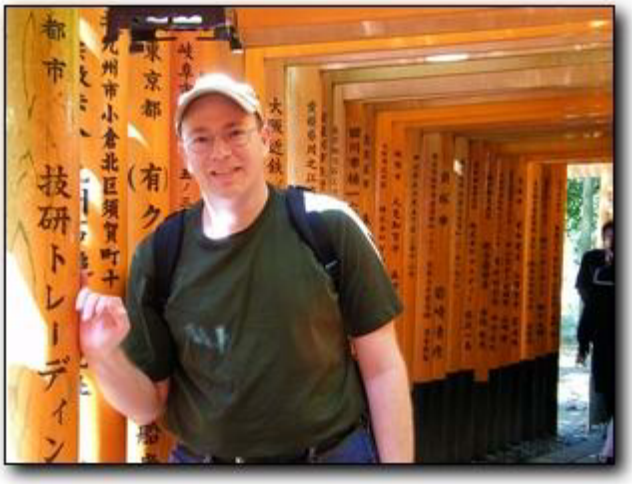
Like most shrines, Fushimi-inari has a variety of sub-buildings and gardens that are ages old. You’ll find the Sakura-mon Gate (桜門 ; a large Shinto-gate made of wood and painted vermilion – donated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi) and Go-Hoden Shrine on the premises, but what makes this particular location special and exciting (and the reason for our visit) is a pathway that wanders 4km up Inari-san, the nearby mountain. Harking back to the 8th century and founded by the Hata family, this shrine and its stone walkway draw you in like no other we’ve visited thus far (with, perhaps, the exception of Tosho-gu in Nikko and Itsukushima in Miyajima). Thousands upon thousands of Torii (鳥居), or Shinto gates, line the walk creating a claustrophobic tunnel of vermilion that hugs the mountainside landscape. Eerie? Perhaps. Awesome? Indeed so. It’s like you’ve stepped into another realm!

Statues of menacing looking Kitsune (狐), or foxes, pepper about and break apart the Torii gates as you walk along. The Kitsune, which you’ll recognize as darkened statues with their tails held high and by the white and red scarf tied about their necks, are the messengers of Inari and they reportedly have magical powers enabling them to take possession of a human spirit.

Never fear though, for he is revered as the guardian of harvest (of rice and cereals) and is busy guarding the sacred rice granary (and if you look closely, you'll find he carries a key to a rice granary within his jowls). Consequently, a popular sushi dish "o-inari-san" is named for these guardian foxes, for it is written that foxes love rice balls rolled in fried tofu, which is what you get when ordering "o-inari-san".

Besides the foxes you'll find a number *ishi-doro* (石燈篭; stone lamps), several small waterfalls and two large ponds hidden on the pathway depending on which trail you take. And while that might be a strange thing to say, while the path starts out as one, it branches off again... and again... and again... criss-crossing the mountainside in a confusing maze of vermilion. If you take up the 2.5-mile walk you'll end up on the other side of the mountain and at the gates of Tofuku-ji, a Buddhist temple. I highly recommend a trip to Tofuku-ji (especially in Autumn) as it is as impressive as it is expansive – we didn't make the visit this time either, however. It's a strenuous climb should you decide to head there from here, however, so come with your walking shoes and a good sense of direction. Any signs are in Japanese and it's quite easy to forget from which way up you came. But, if you do find yourself wandering the gates, sit a spell and take in the serenity or stop and grab a bite or drink at the dozens of stops along the way!

As for us, well, we came to pick up a few things for friends and for us as well. With Fushimi-Inari one of Nicole's favorite shrines in Japan, she left with a Kitsune-themed hand towel called a Tenugui (手拭い). Tenugui are thin Japanese hand towels made of cotton, typically about 35 by 90 centimeters in size, plain woven, and almost always died with some pattern. They can be used for anything a towel could be used for – as a washcloth, dishcloth, but often as a headband, souvenir, decoration, or for wrapping items. This Tenugui is of a slightly different sort – squarer and made of thicker material – but it's uniquely Japanese and a wonderful souvenir to take home with you.




奉拝
伏見稲荷大社
平成弐十七年 四月十三日

UJI: Byodo-in (平等院)

Uji City Flag

Immediately following Fushimi-Inari, and after enjoying that fantastic snack at the Daily Yamazaki *conbini*, we hopped aboard a JR Nara Line train headed down to Uji (宇治), a small city situated between Kyoto and Nara, two of Japan's most famous historical and cultural centers. Its proximity to these two former capitals resulted in Uji's early development as a cultural center in its own right. At the height of political power of the Fujiwara clan in the Heian Period (794 to 1192), buildings such as Byodo-in Temple and Ujigami Shrine, the oldest extant shrine in Japan, were constructed in Uji. Uji is also famous for its green tea. While Kozanji Temple in Kyoto is believed to be the original site of tea cultivation in Japan, Uji's tea became better known for its superior quality in the 1100s. Today we were here to see Byodo-in.

Byodo-in (平等院) is unique amongst Buddhist temples as far as they go: today it is jointly a temple of the Jodoshu and Tendai sects and it's the only one featured on the back of Japan's currency – the 10 yen coin. Built in 998 AD as a rural villa of Fujiwara Michinaga, one of the most powerful members of the Fujiwara clan during the Heian Period, the villa was converted into a Buddhist temple by Fujiwara 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. Originally, the pond's beach stretched up to the Uji River, with mountains on the opposite side of the river as a background. The entire scenic area encompassing the temple was a representation of the Western Paradise (or Pure Land) on earth.

The **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. [Left, the Amida Naori, seated; Right, tomb of Minamoto Yorimasa]

The Byodo-in museum, **Hosyokan**, stores and displays most of the temple's national treasures, including 28 of the 52 wooden Worshiping 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. But it's a fantastic museum that I highly encourage visitors to take their time with. You won't be disappointed.

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. (We did not do this, however. But I did last time I visited in 2007 and can recommend doing so.) Nicole seemed quite impressed with the museum, more than the building itself, which I spent some time attempting to get a panoramic shot of with the sun shining!

What are Furoshiki?

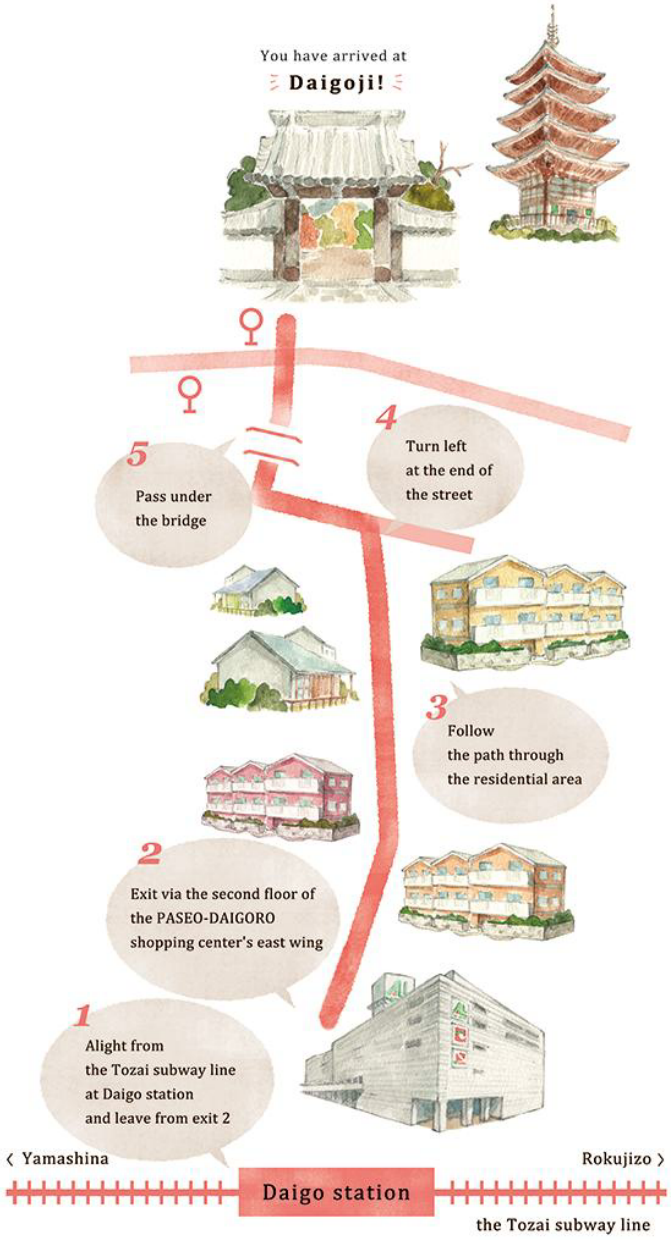
On our way back to JR Uji Station, we came upon a Furoshiki shop, which Nicole deftly maneuvered us into before we moved on. Although she didn't find what she was looking for, we got quite an education on Furoshiki, Tenugui, and Hachimaki, and their uses.

Furoshiki (風呂敷) are a type of traditional Japanese wrapping cloth traditionally used to transport clothes, gifts, or other goods. Furoshiki began to be used in the middle of the Nara period, in traditional Japanese baths (*sento*; 銭湯; public bathhouse – or *onsen; 温泉; hot springs*). To prevent a mix up of the bathers' clothes, the removed clothing was tied up in *furoshiki*. Before becoming associated with public baths (the name translates to "bath spread"), *furoshiki* were known as *hirazutsumi* (平包), or flat folded bundle. Eventually the *furoshiki*'s usage extended to serve as a means for merchants to transport their wares or to protect and decorate their goods or gifts. Modern *furoshiki* can be made of a variety of cloths, including silk, chirimen, cotton, rayon, and nylon. They are often decorated with traditional designs or by *shibori* – a tie-dyeing of fabrics in different shapes to make different patterns. There is no one set size for *furoshiki*; they can range from hand sized to larger than bed-sheets. The most common sizes are 45 cm (17.7 in) and 68–72 cm (26.7-28.3 inches). And they're quite beautiful!

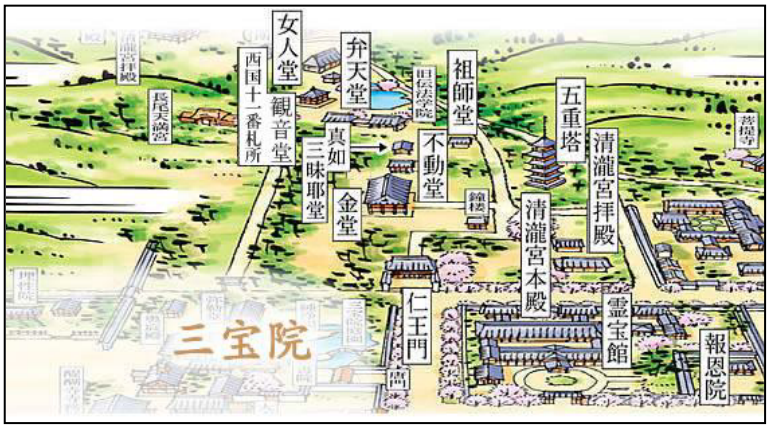
A Hachimaki (鉢巻, "helmet-scarf") is a stylized headband (bandana), usually made of red or white cloth, worn as a symbol of perseverance, effort, and/or courage by the wearer. These are worn on many occasions, for example, by sports spectators, by women giving birth, students in cram school, office workers, expert tradesmen taking pride in their work, bōsōzoku (teen biker gangs), and even rioters. Fukusa (袱紗, also written as 帛紗 and 服紗), are a type of Japanese textile used for gift-wrapping or for purifying equipment during a Japanese tea ceremony. Fukusa are square or almost square pieces of lined fabric ranging in size from about 9 inches to 36 inches on a side. And, of course, the Tenugui (手拭い), which we were acquainted with at Fushimi-Inari.

The Daigo-ji Complex

From Uji, we continued northward toward Daigo, for Daigo-ji, an important temple of the Shingon sect (and a designated UNESCO World Heritage site). The Daigo area is located, conveniently enough, just off of the Daigo station on the Kyoto Metro system. To reach that from Uji, though, we'd have to switch from JR to Kyoto Metro at Rokujizo, alight at Daigo station, and walk about 15 minutes east into the hills. This all sounds well and good, but, if we managed to find the temple, it would end over 10 years and 4 previous attempts by me to visit. And after reaching Tenryu-ji for the first time in 2013 (after three previous attempts), reaching Daigo-ji on the fifth try would be an awesome achievement.



During my first visit to Japan in 2004, the temple was on a list of sights I wanted to visit, but as it was my first trip to Japan, I wouldn't really get a realistic opportunity to do so, as I was most infatuated with attractions in central Kyoto. In 2007, my second visit, I made what I would consider a valiant attempt, but got lost on the streets of this area of town, never finding the temple. I placed Daigo-ji on my list of possibilities again for the 2008 trip, but this area of Kyoto quickly dropped from my radar once I was in-country. In 2013, the next visit, room was made for Daigo-ji on the itinerary, but after running late at Fushimi-Inari and having excruciating pain in my feet, I canceled the attempt and we pressed on with other more centrally located attractions. So once again I found myself at Daigo, just outside the train station. Would I be able to locate Daigo-ji this time? Why, yes. Yes, I would! And it couldn't have been simpler. Just turn right out of the station, right again at the next lighted intersection, and follow the road all the way back!



Daigoji Temple (醍醐寺) is the headquarters of the Daigo branch of the Shingon mission. It was built by a Buddhist monk named Shobo Rigen Daishi who was a pupil of the famous Kobo Daishi, in 874. (Kobo Daishi, you may recall, is also known as Kukai – a Japanese monk, civil servant, scholar, poet, artist, and founder of the Shingon or "True Word" school of Buddhism. At one time he was appointed administrative head of Todaiji in Nara, and established a mountain retreat at Mount Koya, one of the most sacred sites in Japanese Buddhism.) When Shobo climbed Mt. Kasatori (also known as Mt. Daigo), another sacred mountain in terms of Japan's tradition of mountain worship, the local god Yokoo Myojin, appeared in the guise of an old man and proclaimed the mountain and its sacred springs (Daigo-sui), were his. Shobo carved two Kannon statues of Juntei and Nyoirin and dedicated them atop of the mountain. Viola, Daigo-ji temple.

Over time, owning to the deep devotion of Emperors Daigo, Suzaku, and Murakami, a number of halls, pagodas, and other buildings were constructed to complete the complex. But like everything else in Kyoto, Daigo-ji has suffered from several fires. In particular, the fires caused by the Onin and Bunmei wars virtually destroyed the lower part of the complex, save its five-story pagoda. The upper complex was also similarly ruined. Much of Daigo-ji lay left unrestored for many years until the spring of 1598 when Toyotomi Hideyoshi and his son Toyotomi Hideyori rebuilt what is known as the Kondo, Sanboin, Kaisando, and Nyorindo. (Apparently Hideyoshi wanted to impress the natives during his cherry blossom viewing party. The direct result was a revitalized temple and worship to the mountain increased.

The large temple complex stands at the base of a mountain and are connected via hiking trails to several more buildings around its summit. That being said, most of the culturally important areas are located around Daigo-ji's base camp, so there's no need to climb up the mountain. We didn't. In either case you'll find Daigo-ji is actually divided into three districts - **Sanboin**, **Shimo Daigo**, and the **Reihokan Museum** – each with a price of ¥600 to enter. Or you can see all three with a ¥1500 combo ticket, which is what we did. Upon entering the main temple grounds, visitors will first come across the Sanboin, the elegant former residence of the head priest, which was originally constructed in 1115. The current building, along with its outstanding landscape garden, dates to 1598 when it was reconstructed and expanded for Toyotomi Hideyoshi's famous cherry blossom viewing party held here. The building remains an excellent example of extravagant Momoyama architecture and should not be missed; however, photography is strictly prohibited. Thankfully, post cards of the Sanboin's beautiful gardens are available in its lobby. (But more on that in a minute.)

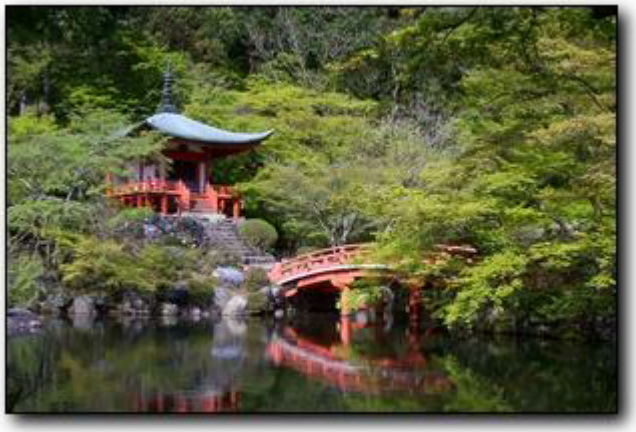
A short walk further into the temple grounds gets you to the Shimo Daigo (Lower Daigo) area where most of the temple's other important buildings stand.

Among them is the ***Saidaimon*** (or Niomon), the main gate, which was rebuilt when Toyotomi Hideyori restored the Kondo in 1605. The Nio statues that accompany the gate were sculptured by Seizo and Ninzo in 1134, and were originally located in the Nandaimon. The ***Kondo Hall*** or main hall was originally built in 926 upon the request of Emperor Daigo. The hall, which was called Shakado in those days, was twice burned down during the Einin and Bunmei periods. The current building was relocated to Daigoji from Yuasa in Wakayama prefecture in 1599 and stores the temple's main object of worship, a Yakushi triad (Yakushinorai, the healing Buddha), together with Nikko and Gakko bodhisattvas. The four statues on both sides of the triad are Shiten'no, the deities of world guardians to protect the four cardinal directions. Then there's the ***Fudodo***, where five statues of Myo-o (Vidyaraja) with Fudu Mayo-o (Acalanatha) in the center, are enshrined. Also in the Shimo Daigo area stands a five storied pagoda (the ***Goju-no-to***) that is Kyoto's oldest verified building. Emperor Suzaku, the oldest son of Emperor Daigo, started construction on the pagoda in 936 for the repose of Emperor Daigo's soul, and was completed by Emperor Murakami, Daigo's second son.

Ryokai-mandala (Mandala of the Two Realms) and Shingon-hasso (Eight Patriarchs of the Shingon mission) are painted on the first story of the pagoda, which provide invaluable information about the origin of arts in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism.

Finished in 951, the pagoda is the only structure to survive the fires that have repeatedly destroyed Daigoji over the centuries. The pagoda is about 38 meters tall, including the approximate 13-meter *sorin* (the finial) on the roof. The *sorin* accounts for one-third of the pagoda's height, giving it a sense of stability.

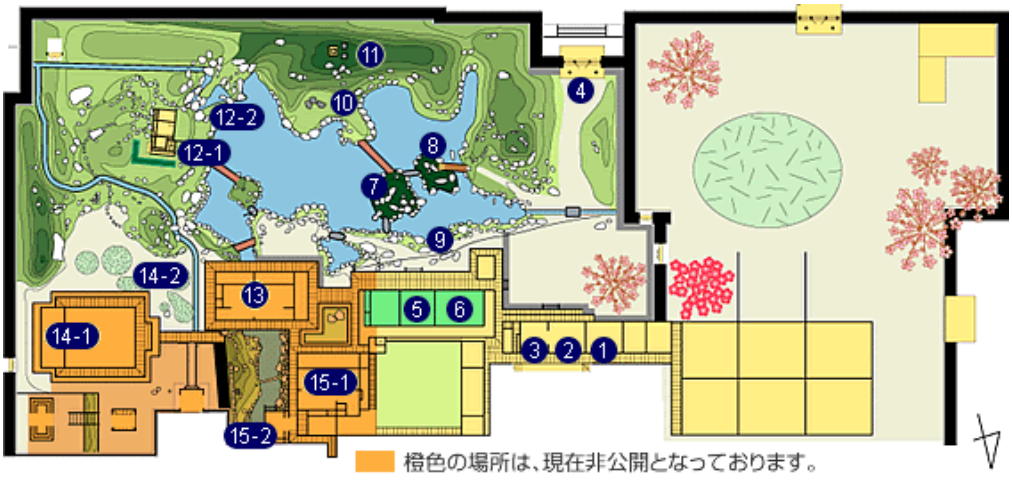
And last but not least there is the ***Bentendo Hall***, probably Daigoji's most photographed building, next to a pond in the very back of the Shimo Daigo area. The hall is dedicated to Benzaiten (Sarasvati), the goddess of knowledge and liberal arts (such as music), and is generally known as one of the Seven Deities of Good Fortune (Shichifukujin). Unfortunately we had to wait around for quite some time to get a few good shots of it, as some girl on her cell phone was sitting on the pagoda's steps – oblivious that she was in the way. Eventually she moved on and I could get some great shots. The hall is especially beautiful around late November when it is surrounded by autumn colors, but even in the spring, it's a sight to behold!



Also located on the main temple grounds at the base of the mountain is the ***Reihokan Museum***, an elegant treasure house, which preserves and displays the temple's large collection of historic documents and art objects, including statues and paintings. There are some forty thousand national treasures and important cultural assets, as well as non-designated cultural assets, preserved and on display in the Reihokan. Many are exhibited to the public in the spring and fall, but we came just after the major exhibition, so there was little to see inside. In the very back of the lower temple grounds, not far from the Bentendo Hall, is the trailhead to the ***Kami Daigo*** (Upper Daigo), Daigoji's original temple grounds, which are located around the summit of the mountain. It takes about one hour to climb the steep trail through the forest, should you be inclined. We, of course, were not. Before we go, though, let's take a closer look at the Sanboin, shall we?

<u>Daigo-ji Sanboin</u>

Sanboin was built in 1115 by Shokaku, the 14th archbishop of Daigoji temple. As the main house, the building has been used as the residence of successive archbishops since that time. The present Sanboin was reconstructed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1598. Most of Sanboin's buildings are designated as important cultural properties. Of those, Omote-Shoin, which commands a view of the entire garden, is designated as a national treasure for its importance in transmitting the *shinden-zukuri* style of architecture of Heian Period Japan.



It is unfortunate that photography within the Sanboin was restricted, therefore, I shall use the descriptions in the pamphlet provided to give you a peek into this amazing place:

0. ***Entrance Halls*** – there are both main and minor entrance halls here at Sanboin. The room at the front of the smallish entrance is called the *take-no-ma* (bamboo room), the room at the front of the main entrance is called *fugaku-no-ma* (sitting room), and the adjacent room is called *nichi-gekkai-no-ma* (meeting room). The paintings you'll find on the sliding screens here were painted and dedicated by the Japanese master artist Hamada Taisuku in 1997 for the 400th anniversary of the Sanboin gardens.

1. ***Aoi-no ma*** – The Aoi-matsuri, together with Gion-matsuri and Jidai-matsuri, represents one of the three big festivals in Kyoto. The procession of the Imperial envoy and his followers going from Shimogamo Shrine to Kamigamo Shrine during the festival are shown on the walls of the lower right side of the room, which continues to the front four panels of the sliding screens.

2. ***Akikusa-no-ma*** – A depiction of spacious scenery with scattering of the seven autumnal herbs is painted on the sliding screen.

3. ***Chokushi-no-ma*** –A scene of a bamboo forest with flowers and birds is painted on the sliding screen here. The painting is a work of the Momoyama period and is believed to have been painted by an artist group related to Hasegawa Tohaku.

4. ***Karamon*** – This is the Chokushimon, the gate for the imperial envoy. Built in 1599 and renovated to the original form in 2010, it is in the Hirakara-mon style, with *sangen-ikko* (it's a 3x2 bay gate). It is entirely black-lacquered and employs four large chrysanthemum and paulownia motifs impressed with gold foil. Its

gorgeous design reflects the atmosphere of the Momoyama period (1568-1615).

5. Omote-Shoin – The Main Drawing Room looks towards the garden. It is very unique, for the railing in the veranda and a detached room in the southwest shows the adoption of shinden zukuri (architecture of aristocrats) from the Heian period. There are lower, middle and upper rooms here; 26, 18, and 15 tatami mat sized respectively. The gedan (lower) room is also known as "Agebutai-no-ma," which can be used as a Noh stage when the tatami mats are removed. The middle and upper rooms are one-step higher than the lower room to be able to see the Noh and Kyogen performances from a higher position. The upper room also enshrines the statue of Amidanyorai.

6. ***Fusuma-e in Omote-Shoin*** – The fusuma here is a painting with a motif of willows in the four seasons. The painting on the sliding screen in the middle room represents a mountain field. The paintings in the upper and middle rooms are said to have been painted by an artist group related to Hasegawa Tohaku. The painting of a peacock and a cycad in the lower room is a work of Ishida Yutei.

7. Kameshima (亀島) – The entire Kameshima island is covered with Japanese white pine trees with large trunks, said to be more than 600 years old. The effect makes the island appear like a tortoise shell, hence its name (turtle island). On the right side of the island is a round calmly-looking head stone, in the center of the island a mountain-shape turtle shell stone, and to the left side of the island an erected turtle tail stone are placed. The island then represents the “quietness” of a tortoise.

8. ***Tsurushima*** (鶴島) – is an island located west of Kameshima. The trees here are also white Japanese Pine, but notice the stone placement: triangle shaped plate stones erected in the center of the island seem to resemble wings, no? And the stone bridge on the left could

represent the neck of a crane, right? It represents the "dynamism" of a crane that is about to take off. Makes sense since *tsuru* is the Japanese word for crane!

9. ***Kamo-no-Sanseki*** – there are three rare-shaped stones placed in the dry garden style in front of the pond. The left, middle, and right stones represent “fast flow”, “stagnant water”, and “breaking water” of Kamo River, respectively.

10. ***Fujito Ishi*** – These stones are located in the center of the garden and represent three Amitabha Buddha. They are known as “celebrated stones” because they have been handed down from one feudal warlord to another. Hideyoshi ordered the stones to be brought from Jyurakudai.

11. ***Hokoku Daimyojin*** – Hokkoku Daimyojin is the sacred title posthumously given to Taiko Hideyoshi Toyotomi by Emperor Goyozei. To recognize Hideyoshi’s commitment to the restoration of the whole of the Daigoji Complex, Gien Jyugo dedicated the shrine to Hideyoshi enshrining his sacred spirit (which, consequently, was moved from Hokoku Shrine, where it was originally enshrined on January 18, 1600 – the date of his death.)

12. ***Chinryutei & Sandan-no-Taki*** – The Chinryutei is a tea room in the southeast part of the garden. The doorway of a Japanese tea room is usually a *nijiri-guchi* (a crawl-through doorway) but the doorway of Chinryutei is a *kinin-guchi* (a walk-through doorway), so guests can enter and exit the room without bending down. There are three rooms within, namely the upper room, middle room, and preparation room. Rare trees such as palms and chestnut trees are used for columns. The waterfalls in the corner of east-south of the garden compliment the tea room.

13. ***Junjokan*** – It is said that the Junjokan was used by Taiko Toyotomi Hideyoshi when he held cherry blossom viewing parties. Paintings of cherry blossoms and maple leaves on the sliding screen were painted by Hamada Taisuke after 1989.

14. ***Hondo & Kokeniwa*** – The principal image of Hondo Hall is Mirokubosatsu (Maitreya bodhisattva) carved by Kaikei, so Hondo Hall is also known as "Mirokudo". The statue on the right is of Kobo Daishi, the founder of the Shingon mission, and the statue on the left is of Shobo Rigen Daishi, the founder of Daigoji Temple. There is a *goma-dan* (altar used for holy fire), known as "Gomado" Hall, behind Hondo Hall. Next to the Hondo, there is a garden called "Sakazukushi" which is arranged only with moss and white sand and represented "hyotan", "sakazuki" and "sake".

15. ***Okushinden & Shogetsutei*** – The Okushinden Hall was built in the beginning of Edo period. The rooms are arranged just as a Chinese character "田". The main room is equipped with an extra space for reading (called *shoin doko*), shelves (called *shoin dana*), and a groove in the alcove commonly called *musha gaeshi*. A chigaidana (a set of staggered shelves), known as "Daigodana," forms one of "Japan's three finest shelves" together with "Kasumidana" in Shugakuin Rikyu and "Katsuradana" in Katsura Rikyu. The Shogetsutei is a tea room in the northeast of the Okushinden Hall. It was built in the end of Edo period. Its uniqueness lies in the four-and-half (Japanese) mat room and a round window in the east. The roof is a kiritsuma (gable) type made of shingles.

Items 12, 13, 14 and 15 were all off-limits to the public, but that's okay. The gardens here were simply beautiful!

* * *

And after viewing the artifacts at Reihokan Museum we made our way back to Daigo station, and returned to Kyoto via Rokujizu and the JR Nara Line.

We concluded our day tending to some things around Kyoto Station, such as: visiting the nearby Post Office to make a withdrawal from its banks of ATM machines, browsing the Bic Camera store for replacement batteries for my camera (and to play in their toy department), making reservations with JR Rail for our trip to Amanohashidate tomorrow, braving the Isetan department store to look at baby things (for Nicole's friend), and lastly, finally giving in to the tantalizing aroma of flavored waffles by grabbing a small handful from Manneken there at the station, we just couldn't help ourselves!

Bic Camera generally has the batteries in stock – I've gotten replacements there every time I've come – but finding them today was quite the adventure. Turning to the staff for direction wasn't much help either, as even they couldn't find any. Thankfully I did not give up – I found three on the ground floor just as we were walking out.

Unlike the other variety of Belgian waffles, which are soft, fluffy and doughy on the inside, the ones from Manneken are actually the liege-style variety, which are smaller, denser and very crispy, with a nice caramelized finish that gives it a satisfying crunch. And the shoppe sells a whole range of these style waffles in more flavors than you can shake a stick at: anything from chocolate-coated to Matcha and even sesame-seed sprinkled! The strawberry flavored ones are what drew us to them, but we also tried the chocolate-covered and maple-flavored before me moved on. They became the desert to our normal *conbini*-style dinner, which we consumed after we returned to K's House. Laundry, Internet, and Waffles rounded out another very good day!

「Amanohashidate: The Bridge to Heaven」

Saturday | April 18, 2015

streeeeeeeetch
Ahhh, that feels great!

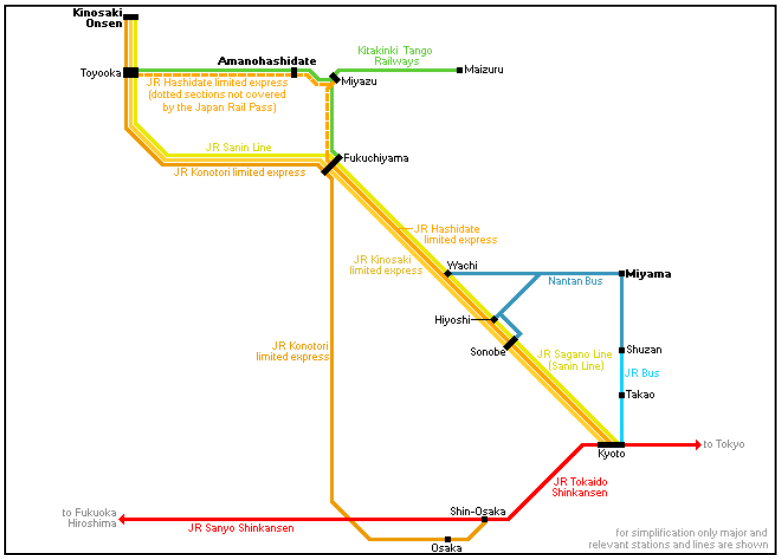
Sadly, tonight is the last night we'll get to stretch out here in the lounge at K's House here in Kyoto, and I'll have you know I've become quite fond of this couch. It's comfy, spacious, and comforting after a long day's walk around… well… wherever! It's become home, much like K's House has, but tonight's our last night here so I'm going to have to give it up. I have mixed emotions about that. I love Kyoto, even in the rain, but it's been a bit taxing being here and I think I'm looking forward to heading back to Tokyo, and then home. But that doesn't mean we've not had a good trip, or a good day. Far from it!

24,764 steps
11.51 miles

Miyazu City Flag

For our next-to-last day in the Kansai region, we took our planned excursion to **Amanohashidate** (天橋立), a beautiful, three-kilometer long, pine-covered isthmus that spans the mouth of Miyazu Bay in the scenic, northern coastal region of Kyoto Prefecture. Amanohashidate roughly translates to "bridge to heaven", as sandbar resembles a meandering pathway connecting heaven and earth when it is viewed from the mountains at either end of the bay. It's a view that's been admired for centuries, and one counted among the **Nihon Sankei** (日本三景), or three most famous scenic views in Japan – alongside the Torii at Itsukushima shrine on Miyajima in Hiroshima Prefecture (which we saw the other day) and the pine-clad islands of Matsushima in Miyagi Prefecture (which I've never seen). The narrow sandbar, which measures as little as 20 meters across at its narrowest point, is lined with nearly 8,000 pine trees and is also considered among Japan's finest pine tree spots too. Some of the trees exhibit unique shapes and have been given names such as *Meoto Matsu* (Couples Pine), *Nakayoshi no Matsu* (Friendly Pine), and *Chie no Matsu* (Wisdom Pine). A tranquil dirt road runs underneath the trees for the length of the sandbar and takes about 45 minutes to walk end to end. Throw in a couple of temples, a shrine, and two observation platforms and we have ourselves a full day, ne?

There are three ways to get to Amanohashidate by train: First, by using local services, by taking the JR Sagano Line (嵯峨野線) from Kyoto to Sonobe (園部), transfer to the San-in Line (山陰本線) from there to Fukuchiyama (福知山), and then the KitaKinki Tango Railway from Fukuchiyama to Amanohashidate (a 3 hour one-way trip); or, secondly, by taking the JR Kinosaki Express (きのさき) train from Kyoto to Fukuchiyama, transferring over to the KitaKinki Tango Railway for Amanohashidate (a 2 hour, 30 minute trip); or, lastly, travel end-to-end via the JR Hashidate Limited Express Train (2 hours one-way).



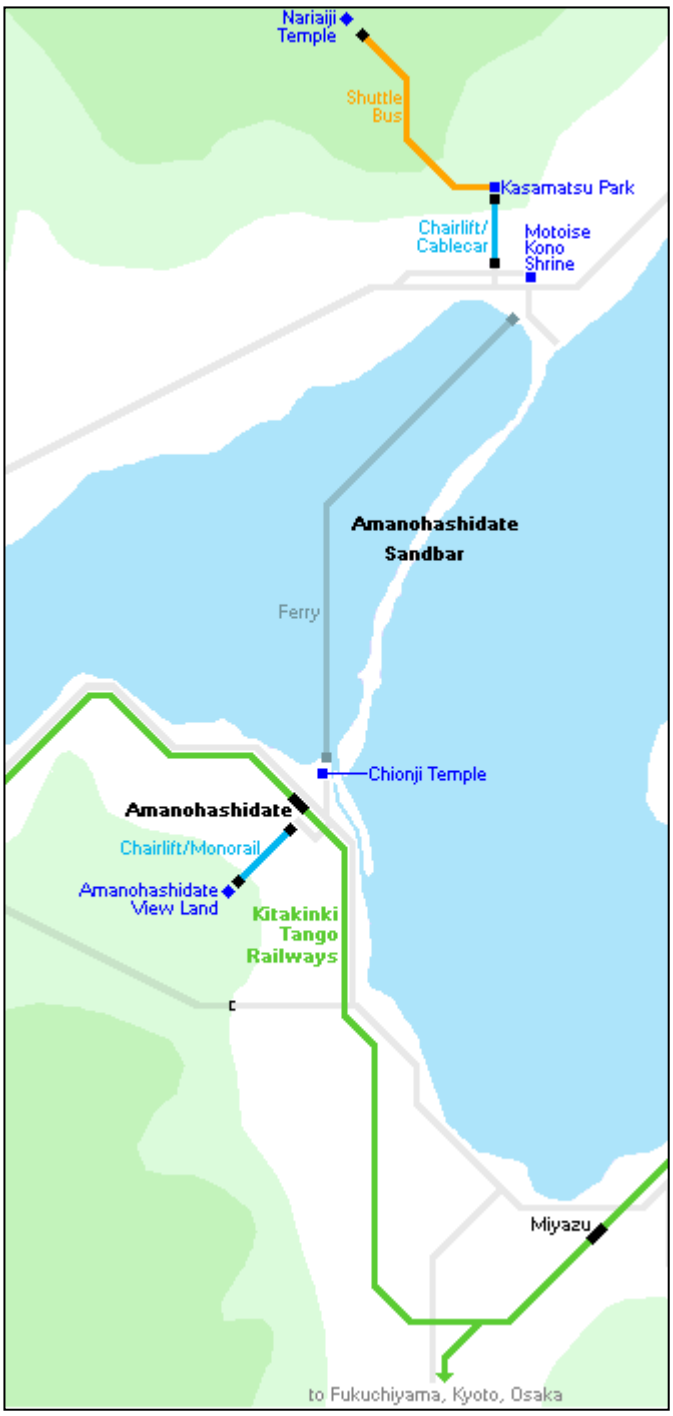
Naturally the third option sounds like the best choice, but there are a few caveats: the JR Hashidate services are infrequent – there are only five trains up and five back a day, and the first train departs Kyoto at 9:30 in the morning (arriving just before Noon, which doesn't give a lot of time for exploration) with the last train departing Amanohashidate at 6:46pm – miss that train and you're going to be stuck there! Furthermore, while the JR Rail Pass covers most of the rail in the area, the JR Hashidate services run on the KitaKinki Tango rail lines past Fukuchiyama, which means the JR Rail Pass does not cover the full extent of the trip – there's a surcharge to pay along the way.

Using the local routes was our original plan, as they would put us there just after 9:00am – plenty of time to see the sights before having to catch that last train home, but as fate would have it, neither one of us really wanted to get up as early as it would require for us to catch those first trains, so I made reservations for the first Hashidate Express train instead. You'll find the JR Hashidate (はしだて) express trains moored on Track 31 at Kyoto-eki, alongside their brethren that take passengers to and from Kansai International Airport close to Osaka. And as riding this train and visiting Amanohashidate would be a first for me, so would using this part of the station – who knew there were tracks over here too!

Did You Know?

The Kyoto prefecture is roughly divided in half – north and south – by the Tamba Mountains (丹波高地). The southern part, formerly called Yamashiro Province (山城国), is centered on the Kyoto/Osaka Basin, an urban jungle that is also part of the *Tokaido Megalopolis* (東海道　メガロポリス), the heartland of Japan that also consists of Tokyo and Nagoya. The northern part, formerly called Tamba (丹波国) and Tango (丹後国) provinces, is composed of rural townships and villages amongst the Tango Mountains (丹後山地) and the coastal areas along the Sea of Japan.

We boarded the train at 9:25am and quickly left the city behind, replacing its cars, busses, highways, and high-rises (or what goes for high-rises in Kyoto), for charming modest towns, quaint little farms, and lots and lots of mountains. These are the Tamba Mountains (丹波高地) and they're considered the "Roof of Kyoto" – dividing the prefecture in half between the urban environment of the Kyoto/Osaka Basin and the rural townships of the north. Valleys, streams and waterfalls are plentiful here, as well as wide-open highlands, primeval forests, and verdant nature. Much of the area is arable too, and as such you'll find rice, vegetables, and floriculture prospering here. *Kitayama* cedar, *Matsutake* mushrooms, *Tamba* chestnuts, and *Shiitake* are also grown in the area in towns such as Kameoka, Sonobe, Ayabe, and Fukuchiyama, which were along the route. The weather today was absolutely perfect for the ride too – one of the most picturesque and traditional looking areas I have ever seen in Japan!



<u>The Village of Monju</u> <u>(文珠)</u>

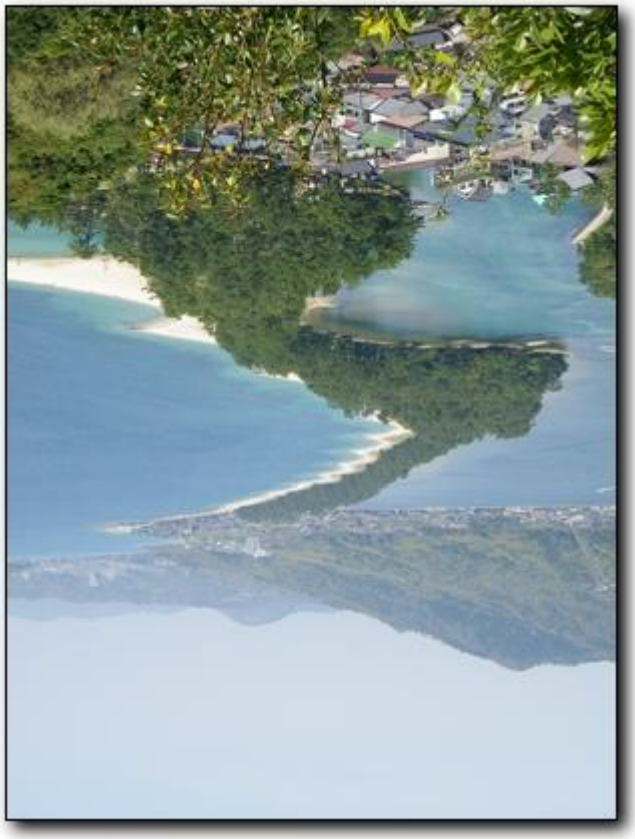
Two hours later, and a crossover and back (reversing directions… strangely enough) at the city of *Miyazu* (宮津市), we arrived at our destination: Amanohashidate station, in the village of *Monju* on the southern-side of the isthmus. Stepping off the train and onto the platform was a unique experience. Amanohashidate is a rinky-dinky little station! And what of it there exists is currently under awash of reconstruction efforts. Of course the station and its tracks here aren't owned by JR Rail, they fall under the ownership of a company called the KitaKinki Tango Railway, as I mentioned earlier, which is why after we passed Fukuchiyama, Nicole and I had to pay a supplement of ¥1480 each. But it seems to work for the folks living here, so I can't knock it. Alas we didn't come to admonish the train station; we came to admire the isthmus…

Our first order of business was to do just that – admire the vista – which is best viewed from parks, located on the hills of either side of the bay. **View Land** (天橋立ビューランド) – one of these parks – is the southern observatory, some 130 meters up atop Mount Monju just behind the station. From the foot of the mountain (via a 0.7 kilometer walk from the station), the park is accessed by chairlift or cable-car (we chose the chairlift and the ride up was pretty smooth, if bland – all you see are the chairlift's machinations; the Ghibli music was fun though), and features a variety of amusements, such as a Ferris wheel, a kiddie roller coaster, go-karts, and a miniature golf course.

Much of View Land is for the younger set, but we weren't here to take advantage of its pleasures. Rather, there are several viewpoints from which to look out over the sandbar – all rather breathtaking. From here it's easy to see the majesty of *Amanohashidate* – its white sandy beaches combined with the deep blue water, lush green pine trees, and thrusting mountains – makes for some beautiful scenery. Many consider this the better of the two views, as from this perspective the sandbar is said to resemble a dragon flying up to heaven (*Hiryukan*). But you shouldn't just stand there and take it all in. No, the traditional way to view the sandbar is to turn your back towards the bay, bend over and look at it from between your legs. If you do this you'll be in what is called the ***matanozoki*** stance (股のぞき; *mata* meaning "thigh" or "crotch" and *nozoki* meaning "look"), a practice that originated here, so go ahead and bend over… don't worry how you'll look. Visitors have been following this tradition for hundreds of years. There's even a special platform to use. We did. Who are we to argue with tradition!

Did You Know?

Amanohashidate is called the "bridge to heaven" for a reason. According to the "Tango no kuni fudoki", an ancient manuscript that documented the culture, geography, myths, rituals, and other traditions of this area (the aforementioned Tango province), Izanagi-no-Mikoto, a goddess of both creation and death, created a passage to connect the heavens and earth; however, while she slept one day it fell onto the sea and became a long, narrow spit of land.



After taking a small drink break, and a plethora of pictures, we decided to descend. Rather than take the monorail/cable-car down we again opted for the chair-lift. On the way up we faced the mountain and the lift's workings, which wasn't much of a view as I said. But on the way down we'd be facing the sandbar itself, which offered a much more picturesque ride; memorable too, but for all the wrong reasons. Nicole was up first, and with a *zip* she was off and on her way down. I stepped up next and prepared to go as soon as the chair swung around to take me. I too expected to be off with a *zip*…

But instead of zipping out of the station like Nicole did (and like I'd done on the way up) I was unflatteringly swept along with the chair, not fully secure, and not fully in the seat! One swing; *scraaaaaape,* a second; *scraaaaaape,* then a third, and – *BAN!* – I fell right out of the chair and onto the concrete platform. The guide immediately came over and pulled me out of the way of the next oncoming chair and asked if I was okay – *daijobuka?* – which I understood but could only answer with a smile and a nod. Yes, I was okay, but I was embarrassed as hell. And it didn't help that I'm bigger than your average Japanese person. Alas I collected myself and after a couple of chairs were allowed to swing by, I gave it a second try – CONNECT! And down the lift I went… the right way.

But there went the tranquility of the view…

Despite being a big, tall guy, I normally don't have problems with lifts of this type, generally speaking. Not that I've ridden many lately. That being said I feel I have to clear the air about the experience before I continue: first, the chair was not made for someone my size (and no, I'm not talking about weight). Rather, it's my height, leg length, and overall build that put me at a distinct disadvantage here. Furthermore, one expects the back of the chair to be the lowest center of mass, so as to scoop you up as it swings along, but that wasn't the case here; the chair was tilted forward. And I also expected the chair to tilt back when occupied, cradling the occupant. However, the chair dropped considerably as I sat down, trapping my legs and entangling them underneath me – which were then dragged along as the chair lurched forward. The dragging began to unseat me, which I couldn't correct in time for the next drag, and so on and so forth until – POP – out I came. The second time I just plopped into the chair, allowing the mechanism to take my full weight, and then held out my legs so they wouldn't get in the way. That worked nicely, although I'm sure it was as every bit as strange to see as it was to do. In the end I was no worse for wear. The only knock I received was a scrapped up knuckle, which I bandaged on the way down, and a bruised knee. But let's move on, shall we?

Five minutes' walk north of Amanohashidate station (200m), at the end of a shopping street leading towards the sandbar, is the attractive temple **Monjudo-Chion-ji** (智恩寺), dedicated to the Buddhist saint Chie-no-Monju. Part of the Rinzai School of Japanese Zen Buddhism, the temple houses one of Japan's "Three Important Statues of Monju Bosatsu", the Buddhist god of wisdom and intellect. As such, students and scholars come here to pray for both wisdom, academic, and personal success. They do this through the purchase of special fortunes (*omikuji*) shaped like folding fans, which many leave hanging from pine trees all around the temple grounds. (We got one ourselves just to see what they were all about.) Between the main gate (which is called "The Golden Tower") and the hall (*Monjudo*, which houses the revered image of the saint), stands a squat two-story tahoto-style pagoda dating from the 1500s (it is the oldest surviving structure on the grounds.

Did You Know?

The Chie-no-wa toro is a ring-shaped stone lantern. It was originally set up to keep ships entering the bay safe during the 18th century. Today it is said if you pass your head through the ring three times you'll get wiser. "Chie-no-wa" translates to "ring of intelligence".

And further in the temple precinct (which was founded in 808), near the ferry jetty, you'll also see the ***Chie-no-wa***, a large granite ring lantern that symbolizes wisdom, which has been adopted as the emblem of the town. The grounds also serve as the tomb of Izumi Shikibu, a famous poet from the Heian Period (710-1185); however, her tomb we did not get to see. While the temple grounds were free to enter, you couldn't enter any of the buildings, so access was very limited. We pressed on.




Amanohashidate (天橋立)

To reach the pine-forested sandbar itself you must first cross the red hued **Kaisenkyo**, an interesting if not overly picturesque connection between the mainland and the isthmus. This 36-meter long bridge, completed in 1923, has a unique feature: it swings around a 90-degree angle to allow boats through the narrow channel to the open sea. Only a few movable bridges of this type are in Japan, which makes it a rarity and worth noting. While today's bridge (built in the 1960s) is moved via electricity, not too long ago it used to be turned solely by human power, a historical reference marked on site through a poem by Akiko Yosano (a Japanese author, poet, pioneering feminist, pacifist, and social reformer, active in the late Meiji period as well as the Taisho and early Showa periods. She is one of the most famous, and most controversial, post-classical woman poets of Japan.) Akiko said: "When people push and open the rotary bridge / Amanohashidate too swings blackly."

Still, *Kaisenkyo* – and it's much larger (and more traditional) cousin *Daitenkyo* – are your gateways onto Amanohashidate. From here we walked the entire 3 kilometer sandbar end-to-end, but we didn't always stick to the forested trail. Although there are a number of marked things to see along the way (mostly small shrines and other markers of interest) there's also the beaches. (Besides being one of Japan's "Best 100 Roads", the area is also designated in the "Best 100 White and Blue Pine Ocean Scenics" list as well.) And we quite enjoyed the beaches. With the spectacular weather, why not? The only thing we needed to be mindful of was the jellyfish – a number of which we spotted floating just below the bay's clear water surface. So rather than dip our toes in the water, we hunted for sea glass.

Sea glass, for the uninitiated, is a product of both nature and man. It begins as broken glass bottles or jars that get tossed onto the shore or even into the sea itself. Nature then acts like a big rock tumbler, smoothing the glass shards through water currents and waves. It can take anywhere between 7 to 10 years in a constant surf environment to produce adequate sea glass. A quality piece of sea glass has no shiny spots, is well frosted, and has smooth tactile edges. We found quite a number of nice pieces walking along the beach here. Most of it was of the clear glass variety, but some of the shards we found were brown, one was green, one purple and one was a piece of pottery. Hunting for sea glass does not appear to be a Japanese pastime, so we had quite a good haul indeed!

Another notable attraction along the path is the **Iso-shimizu**, a water well. What makes this particular well notable is, despite being surrounded by the sea on all four sides, the water in it not salty at all. So, due to its strange and mysterious properties, *Iso-shimizu* is alluring to peoples past and present. In fact, it is been commemorated in many Haiku: “A single mouthful / of the jewel Iso-Shimizu”, so it is clear that people have prized this fresh water for a long time. The water was also recognized in 1988 as one of the “100 Best Waters in Japan” by the Environment Ministry. (You’ll find it as entry #55.)

The Village of *Fuchu* (府中)

On the opposite shores is the village of *Fuchu*, a slightly larger township than its opposite neighbor, but equally as touristy. Here you'll find the trappings of a number of outlets: stores, restaurants, cafes, and more, but also Motoise Kono Shrine, Kasamatsu Park and Nariai-ji.

Motoise Kono Shrine (元伊勢籠神社), which stands near the northern end of Amanohashidate, is historically the most important shrine of the Tango Region in northern Kyoto Prefecture, as it once enshrined Shinto's most venerated deity, the Sun Goddess (Amaterasu); and Toyoukehime, a local deity of clothing, food and housing. Both were later enshrined as the main deities of the Inner and Outer Ise Shrines respectively (which you'll find along the Shima Penninsula, a couple of hours south of Nagoya by train). As a result, Kono Shrine is also referred to as Motoise (literally: "Origin of Ise").

The shrine's main hall closely resembles that of the Inner Shrine at Ise, including the ten *katsuogi* roof logs and the jewel-shaped decorations (*suedama*) on its railings, not seen at any other shrines besides Motoise Kono Shrine and Ise Jingu. (In fact, it's not permitted to be used anywhere else but those two shrines.) Next to the main buildings stand several smaller shrines built in various architectural styles and dedicated to various deities, including Amaterasu, Sarutahiko, Ebisu, Inari and the Kasuga gods. But, like at Chion-ji, once you reached inside the gates there was hardly anywhere the public could venture into. That being said, the shrine did have an interesting feature – a pipe stuck in the ground which you're beckoned to put up to your ear. The *suikinkutsu*, as it's called, is supposed to produce a beautiful sound like a *koto* harp, as water drips into an underground cave. Alas all we heard of its "mysterious tones echoing from underfoot" was just the dripping sounds of water.

Also on the mountain slope here on the opposite side of the bay is **Kasamatsu Park** (天橋立観光協会) which is accessible by chairlift or cable-car. Although it too is an amusement park like its cousin across the bay, from its observation platform the sandbar is said to look like the kanji for "one" (一); however, after seeing the asking price for a ride up, we decided not to make the journey – the previous "accident" notwithstanding.

The park is also the departure point for shuttle buses to **Nariai-ji** (成相寺), a Buddhist temple of the Shingon sect, further up the mountain. The temple was originally located near its peak, but was moved to its current location further down after a landslide about 250 years ago. The current temple grounds are still high enough on the slope to offer some nice views over the bay below, but we didn't get to see it either. The walk across Amanohashidate did us in (we'd also have to walk back), and the costs involved in ascending (as I previously mentioned), kept us from going. However, Nariai-ji is known as the place where wishes come true, according to Kannon's word. It is one of the 33 temples visited along the Kansai Kannon Pilgrimage in Western Japan (the 28th to be exact). Appropriately, the temple's main object of worship is a carved wooden statue of the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy (the Aryavalokitesvara Bodhisattva which is represented by Kannon in the form of a beautiful woman); it dates from the Heian Period. It is said that those who come to the temple are granted a beautiful body and spirit. Below the main hall you'll also find a small wooden bell tower. The bell inside is referred to as the "bell of neutrality" for it has never been struck. Legend states a baby was accidentally dropped into the molten metal used to cast the bell and to atone for that loss the bell was cast, but never used.

Return to Kyoto: The KitaKinki Tango Railway

Ascending Mount Tsuzumigatake would have concluded our time at Amanohashidate, but since we opted not to, all that was left was for us to walk back across the sand bar, return to the station, and figure out how to reach Kyoto now that we were leaving quite a bit earlier than anticipated. Three hours earlier actually, so our reservations aboard the JR Hashidate #10 would not do. Since we didn't want to pay the high supplemental fare again either, we checked our options at the station and discovered riding the KitaKinki Tango Railway lines out to Fukuchiyama was actually much, much cheaper.

The company runs two rail lines in this area of Kyoto Prefecture – the Miyafuku Line (宮福線) and the Miyazu Line (宮津線), but they are signed as three: the Miyafuku Line (Green), Miyamai Line (宮舞線, Blue) and Miyatoyo Line (宮豊線, Red).

So, for us to return to Kyoto, we actually had to board the Miyamai Line from Amanohashidate to Miyazu (a 4.5 kilometer trip), and switch there to the Miyafuku Line, riding it end-to-end to Fukuchiyama (a 30 kilometer trip.) The trains were so diminutive I wondered if we'd be able to fit in them; they were the quintessential picture of rural Japan! And to say some of these stations were out in the middle of nowhere would be an understatement as well. It seemed as if they just popped out of existence along the mountain side or in the middle of a valley, just as you please. Some of the platforms were also so high in the air we had no idea how they were reached, but the ride was beautiful, peaceful, and picturesque. I wouldn't have changed anything about the trip out – it was quite the experience! Oh, and how about this name? One of the stations along our ride home was actually named "Fukuchiyama-shimin-byoin-guchi" (福知山市民病院口) – now that's a mouthful!

Having managed to get out of the Amanohashidate area, our plan then was to see a JR representative at the Fukuchiyama station with regards to our reservations, and then take the next available Hashidate Express train back to Kyoto. But those plans fell apart the moment we arrived. Not only was this station really small too, there wasn't a JR representative here to speak with at all! The only person on hand was a representative of the KTR, and the only action he was interested in was taking the paper ticket assigned to us back in Miyazu. Rather than be deterred by this, we just winged it and walked out onto the platforms available to us. There we found a JR Kinosaki Train (#18) bound for Kyoto just waiting there. And once we saw they had unreserved seat cars we hopped right aboard!

A few minutes later we were on our way back to Kyoto. The only prolonged stop we made on the return was somewhere half-way between the two stations when our train linked up – quite literally – with another. It was quite an interesting experience to see the locomotive section of our train (where we were sitting) become the middle of the train. My guess is that this happened in Sonobe (our journey took us from Fukuchiyama to Ayabe, Hiyoshi, Sonobe, Kameoka, and Nijo before arriving at our terminal station: Kyoto).

Upon arrival in Kyoto, we grabbed a couple *bento* from the nearby Family Mart and returned to K's House to eat (I had a katsu-something bento with scrambled eggs and ground turkey or chicken meat – it was tasty!) And once again we were tagged with the free drawing contest the *conbini* was having, but this time we lost.

Returning to K's House didn't mark the end of our day, though. After we finished eating we went back out to Gion to see how the area transformed itself at night (it's busy and crowded, but not nearly as much as I expected), for Nicole to do some shopping should she be interested in doing so, and to see if Entoku-in was still having its night-time illuminations. They were.

Entoku-in (圓徳院) is a sub-temple of Kodai-ji, which sits just up the hill across *Nene-no-Michi*, rewards the adventurous visitor with a tight warren of narrow corridors and exquisitely decorated reception and meditation halls. Entoku-in was founded in 1605 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's wife (Nene, for whom the road is named) to mourn her husband's death, but has now been swallowed up by the shops that fill every square meter of the area. While Nene spent her last few years here, the temple is known today for its elegant Momoyama-style rock gardens. The first one you will see is in front of the main hall, and consists mostly of raked gravel grounds. The second one is in the second part of the temple, and has more moss and trees, in other words it is greener, but the stones here were brought by the samurai so Nene could make this garden, which is impressive on its own.

However, the more interesting aspect of this temple to me is its *fusuma* (screen paintings) by artist Hasegawa Tohaku, which are quite colorful! There's "Sansuizu-husuma" (top-right), a landscape depicting the artist's home town; "Hakuryu" (second –right), the white dragons that personify Toyotomi Hideyoshi; "Setugetuka" (third), a beautiful scenery painting with snow, the moon, and cherry blossoms; and "Syoutikubai" (bottom-right), pine trees and bamboo with plum-blossoms. Spectacular!

After out turn at Entoku-in we returned to Gion (stumbling upon the three little Jizo statues part of the Higashiyama Statue Route in the process), and returned to K's House. Now we're going to get ourselves organized for tomorrow's departure, and then head off to bed!

「The Shrines of the Kamo Clan」

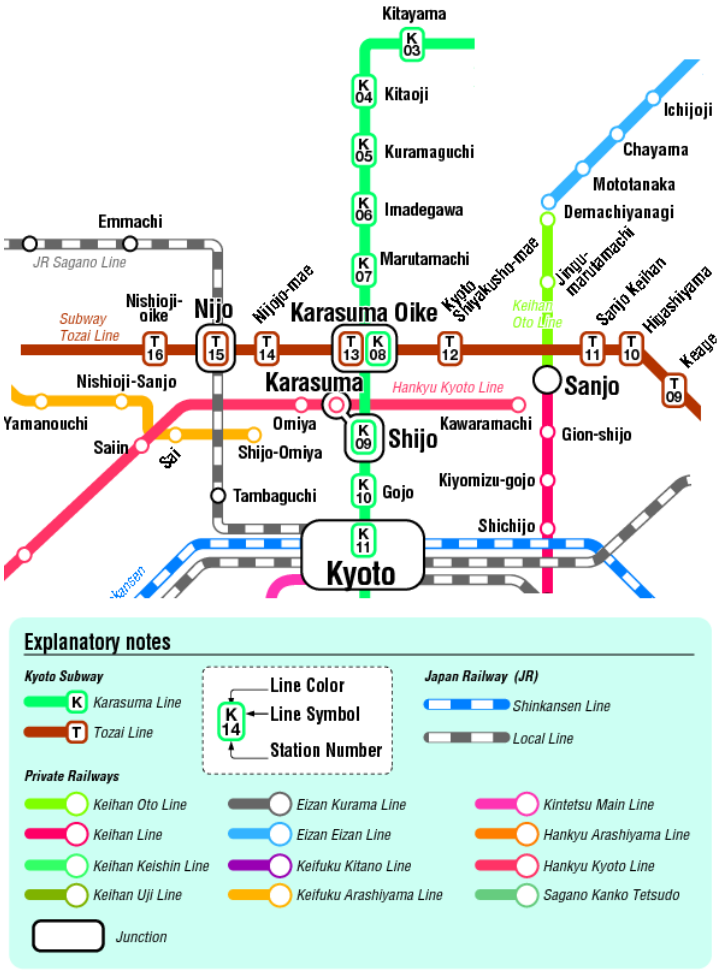
Sunday | April 19, 2015 (part 1)

Clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack.

25,638 steps
11.92 miles

We started our last few hours in Kyoto by – you guessed it - first checking out of K's House (but leaving our bags there), then we caught the Keihan Rail train to Demachiyanagi for our first set of shrines: The Kamo Shrines.

The Kamo Shrines – Kamomioya-jinja (賀茂御祖神社) which literally means the shrine for ancestors of Kamo clan – are a pair of Shinto sanctuaries consisting of Kamigamo-jinja (上賀茂神社; "Upper Kamo Shrine") and Shimogamo-jinja (下鴨神社; " Lower Kamo Shrine"). While they are a pair of shrines, they are not located together, rather they're around two-kilometers apart. Both are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites and are two of the most important and oldest shrines in Kyoto. In fact, the Kamo Shrines even predate the city's establishment as national capital in 794. As such they are also among the oldest shrines in Japan. Throughout the thousand years that Kyoto served as Japan's capital city, the Imperial Court even patronized the shrines as establishments dedicated to the city's protection and prosperity. Both shrines are dedicated to Kamo Wake-ikazuchi, the kami of thunder, and both feature prominently in the Aoi Festival, which occurs in May and involves a procession between the two shrines, horse races, and archery.

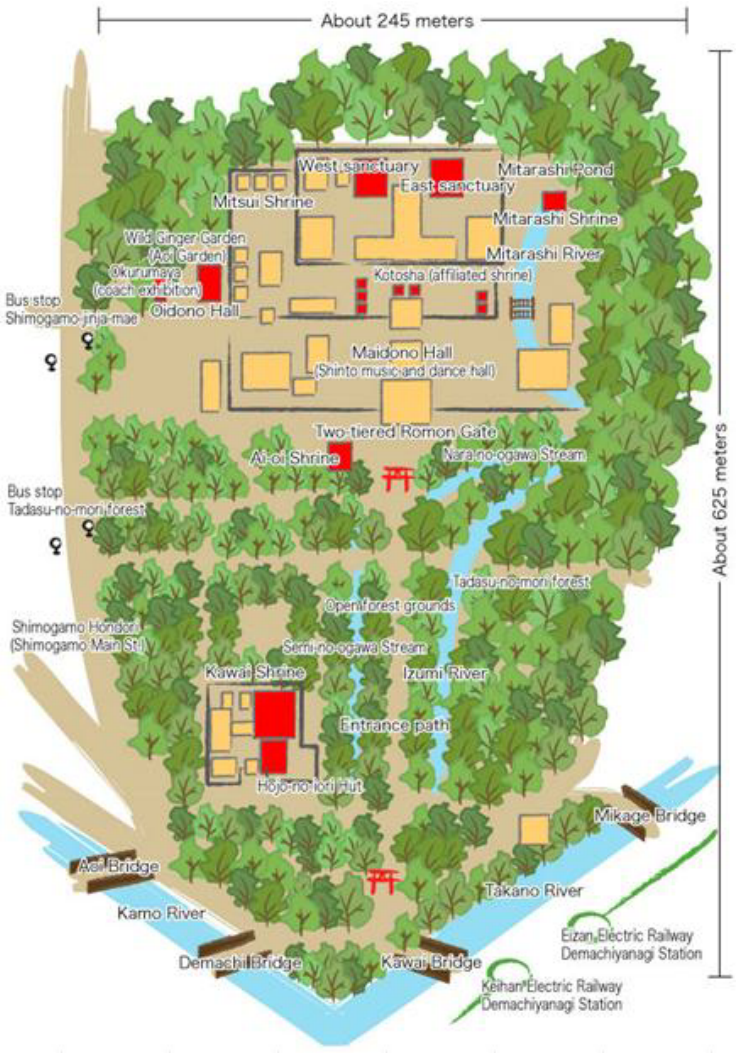


Shimogamo (下鴨神社)

Nestled within the junction of the Takano and Kamo rivers, Shimogamo-san both reflects and inspires Kyoto City. Even its common name is a product of the city that now surrounds it: “Shimo-” meaning lower, and “-gamo” after the city’s central river, yields the familiar Shimogamo. The creator and guardian of the city, *Kamotaketsunumi-no-Mikoto* (賀茂建角身), is enshrined in the main sanctuary of the shrine, along with his daughter *Tamayorihime-no-mikoto* (玉依姫; “the spirit-inviting maiden”), a mythical figure with her own repute. Together these deities welcome and protect all who visit the shine. Shimogamo is but a five-to-ten minute walk from the Demachiyanagi (出町柳駅) station along the Keihan Company’s rail line that transits alongside Kamogawa, although mostly underground. Pop up to the surface and you’ll find yourself on the east side of the river – or, the Yanagi side – which forks off right here before your eyes. Cross the bridge, turn right up Shimogamo-higashi-dori, and continue heading north will bring you to the shrine’s boundaries.

Did You Know?

The name "Demachiyanagi" is the combined name of "Demachi" in Kawaramachi Imadegawa, the west side of Kamo River, and "Yanagi" around the station, the east side.



The inner shrine is approached along a shady path through the lovely *Tadasu no Mori* (糺の森), a primeval forest which has its own legends and stories to tell. The word *tadasu* can be translated to mean “to correct” or “to purify”, and legend suggests that the god enshrined here listened to the villager’s complaints and responded to their prayers, leading to the present name of the forest. This name then is further translated to mean “Forest of Truth”, upon which legends suggest is a place where lies and deceptions cannot be concealed. Thus it is considered a prime location to sort out disputes of all kinds. In ancient times the woodland comprised approximately 4,950,000 square meters of virgin forest, but today it only encompasses about 124,000 square meters, which are preserved as a national historical site. It is one of only a handful of primeval forest remnants that is reputed to never have been completely wiped out, but the forest has suffered damage over the centuries – mostly by fire when all of Kyoto was aflame during successive and wars (Genpei Wars, Onin Wars), but the forest grown has rebounded again and again.

As such much of the forest is left to grow in its natural state – it is neither planted nor pruned – therefore many trees within are up to 600 years old! The 40-plus species of tree you'll find within this forest – such as the *keyaki* (a Japanese Elm tree), *ume* (Japanese plum trees), *yamazakara* (Japanese wild cherry trees), hydrangea, Japanese maple, and more – and a number of streams and rivers with pure flowing water – like the *Nara-no-ogawa, Semi-no-ogawa*, *Izumi-gawa*, and *Mitarashi-gawa* – combine to produce a beautiful scene, creating a wonderful place to relax for those who seek it. And in the rain it's pretty tranquil!

As you walk through this refuge toward the north, you will come upon a cinnabar red Torii gateway and, beyond it, a two-tiered gate just as red. Pass through the *Romon* and you'll find yourself within the grounds; the twin main halls you're seeking stand father inside… it's these main identical halls that are most important. The right hall, or the East Shrine, is dedicated to *Tamayori-hime* and the West Shrine, the one on the left, is dedicated her father, *Kamo-taketsunumi-no-Mikoto*. Both are national treasures, but that's not what makes them important. It's their affiliation with Japanese mythology and shrine lore that gives them importance…

In this realm, *Kamotaketsunumi-no-Mikoto* is an ancestor of the Kamo clan who is said to have descended to earth on the grounds of Mt. Mikage, a mountain east of Kyoto. And according to Shinto beliefs, this god metamorphosed into the three-legged deity *Yatagarasu* (八咫烏). In this form, he led the legendary first emperor of Japan – Jimmu, himself a descendant of the sun goddess *Amaterasu*, through her grandson *Ninigi*, as well as a descendant of the storm god *Susanoo* – throughout the Kyoto countryside and to finally settle at the site of what would become Shimogamo-jinga. Once Jimmu fully established his empire, *Kamotaketsunumi* would cohabit with a mortal *(Kamuikakoya-hime*) and sire a daughter – *Tamayori-hime-no-Mikoto*. And one day, legend suggests, as his daughter was tending to her shrine-maiden duties (purifying her body in the Kamo river), she picked up a red-lacquered arrow that came floating down the stream. Unbeknownst to her, the arrow was the embodiment of the kami *Hono-ikazuchi-no-Mikoto* (火雷神), or perhaps better known as Raijin, the God of Thunder and Lightning; became impregnated, and later gave birth to a boy. When the child grew into a man, his grandfather, *Kamotaketsunumi-no-Mikoto*, prepared a banquet feast for him and suggested that he offer a cup of *sake* to the man whom he believed to be his father. Without hesitation the son raised his cup toward the sky, and then ascended to the heavens, whereupon the grandfather named him *Kamo-Wake-ikazuchi-no-Mikoto* (賀茂別雷; the "thunder divider of Kamo"), who, consequently, is enshrined at Kamigamo.

Did You Know?

A Yorishiro (依り代, 依代, 憑り代, or 憑代) in Shinto terminology is an object capable of attracting spirits called *kami*, thus giving them a physical space to occupy during religious ceremonies. Once a *yorishiro* actually houses a *kami*, it is called a *shintai*. Ropes called *shimenawa* decorated with paper streamers (called *shide*) often surround *yorishiro* to make their sacredness manifest. The most common *yorishiro* are swords, mirrors, ritual staffs decorated with paper streamers called *gohei*, comma-shaped jewels called *magatama* (勾玉 or 曲玉), large rocks called *iwasaka* (岩境) or *iwakura* (磐座), and, of course, sacred trees. Persons can also play the same role as a *yorishiro*, and in that case are called *yorimashi* (憑坐 or 憑巫) or *kamigakari* (神懸り or 神憑). They can also be known as *Tamayori*, a maiden who cohabits with a *kami* and gives birth to his child.

Still with me?

Both the east and west main shrines face south, a tradition begun in the Heian period. Indeed, these halls typify the architectural style of the period and are prime examples of *Nagare zukuri*, a flowing roof style that is distinguished by the long gabled roof that covers a porch on one side of the building, a technique that has been replicated widely in main shrine structures throughout the country. In addition to these halls, there are fifty-five other buildings that are important cultural assets, such as the Maidono, Shinbukuden, Ooidono, Mikage Shrine, Mitsui Shrine, Izumo Ioheno Shrine, Koto Shrine, Mitarashi, Hosodono, Reiji-sha, Aka-no-Miya, and the Kawai Shrine.

- **Maidono** – Scores of emperors have visited Shimogamo, praying for the welfare of the entire country and its people; however, the emperor himself would rarely enter the shrine, stopping at the red torii marking just outside the Maidono. His messengers would carry his prayers and gifts inside until his role was redefined in the 1600s – then all emperors would enter the Maidono. The current building, constructed in 1628, has hosted all of these emperors. Today the vast veranda is used as a dance stage during ceremonies and official functions.

- **Shinbukuden** – Though clothes for the gods were once sewn here (the name of this hall reveals its original purpose: *shin* means "god" and *fuku* means "clothes"), the hall drastically evolved with time. The *shinbukuden* was eventually designated as the emperor's temporary housing should the palace catch fire. Though it never fulfilled this purpose, the hall was used as a resting place during the emperor's visits. Consequently, the Hosodono was used as the resting place for noble visitors.

- **Ooidono Hall** – This hall serves as the traditional preparation site for all religious offerings. Its garden abounds in *aoi* (hollyhock), thus giving the garden its name: "The garden of Aoi."

- **Aioi-sha shrine and Sakaki tree** – This shrine is dedicated to the god of good marriage and the guardian of engagement, *Kamumusub-no-Kami*. People come both to pray and to pick a fortunes based on lines from "The Tale of Genji", hoping their marriage will fare better than the protagonist's. The romance lingers in the trees nearby, where one mysterious holly is actually the product of two intertwined trees. This "Renri no Sakaki" tree is the subject of one of Kyoto's Seven Myths. It is said that whenever this tree dies, its successor will rise again in the *Tadasu-no-mori*. The current tree is believed to be the fourth such tree, an example of lasting ties itself.

- **Mikage shrine** – This shrine takes its name from Mt. Mikage, which pilgrims climb during the Mikage festival, one of the oldest rites in the Shimogamo tradition. The festival began as a rite of *miare*, or energy and life. It was an agricultural ritual of renewal, and regeneration is still at the core of the modern-day festival. For this reason the Mikage shrine is also known as the Miare shrine.

- **Mitsui shrine** – Three gods - *Kamotaketsunomi-no-Mikoto*, *Tamayorihime-no-Mikoto*, and *Ikakoyahime-no-Mikoto* – are enshrined here. As is the god of Kemari, a Japanese sport the object of which is to keep one ball in the air, and the 35 spirits of the Saino. (Unfortunately, I don't know who they are!)

- **Izumoi-no-heno** – This shrine, also known as Hiraki shrine because the surrounding trees have serrated leaves like the holly plant, is dedicated to the regional guardian *Susano-no-Mikoto*, the god associated with good fortune (and the Japanese tea ceremony, of all things). The attachment is dedicated to the god of artistic innovation, especially in *tanka* (poetry).

- **Koto shrine** – The Koto shrine is dedicated to *Okuninushi-no-mikoto*, the god of national affairs. There are seven names for *Okuninushi-no-mikoto*, and at Shimogamo, a separate shrine has been dedicated to each name. Each of these shrines, all specified as important cultural properties, is popular for prayers to the god of the twelve zodiac signs and the god of prosperity in business. The east *hitokoto* serves those born in the years of the Snake and the Sheep, while the west *hitokoto* serves those born in the year of the Horse. The north *futakoto* is for those born in the year of the Rat, while the south is for those born in the years of the Cow and Boar. The north *mikoto* is for the Rabbit and the Rooster, the south is for the Sea Horse and Monkey, and the middle is for the Tiger and the Dog.

- **Mitarashi** – Formally known as the *Inoue-sha*, this shrine is dedicated to the god of purification and clean water. Its pond is appropriately the location of the autumnal purification festivals.

- **Reiji-sha** – This shrine is dedicated to the god of seals and contracts. The personal seal is the most important signature one can apply to a document of course, it's a sign of loyalty and commitment, and thus is venerated here.

- **Aka-no-Miya (Kamohani shrine)** – The red clay in the surrounding area may have been used to make ceramic plates for religious offerings. These locally made ceramics were used until the Edo period, but the shrine remains dedicated to the god of pottery.

Last, but not least, is **Kawai shrine** (which is actually one of the first groups of buildings you come to upon entering the forest). The shrine is dedicated to *Tamayorihime-no-Mikoto w*ho,

despite sharing the same name as the main deity enshrined further in, is quite different and distinct from her. This *Tamayorihime-no-Mikoto* is the goddess associated with Emperor Jimmu, and is one thought to promote good child rearing and serves as the guardian for women; her shrine has long been considered one of the most important. Jimmu, as I mentioned before, figures as a direct descendant of the sun goddess *Amaterasu*. *Amaterasu* had a son called *Ame-no-Oshihomimi-no-Mikoto* and through him a grandson named *Ninigi-no-Mikoto*. She sent her grandson to the Japanese islands where he eventually married *Konohana-Sakuya-hime*. Among their three sons was *Hikohohodemi-no-Mikoto* (*Hoori* for short), who married *Toyotama-hime*, the daughter of *Ryujin*, the Japanese sea god. They had a single son called *Hikonagisa-Takeugaya-Fukiaezu-no-Mikoto* (also known as *Ugayafukiaezu*). The boy was abandoned by his parents at birth – *Toyotama* requested her husband not watch while she gave birth; he agreed, however, curiosity got the better of him; she discovered the treachery, and unable to forgive *Hoori*, abandoned both and returned to the sea). So, consequently, he was raised by *Tamayori-hime*, his mother's younger sister. The two eventually married (yes, the boy married his aunt) and had four sons. The last of these, *Kan'yamato Iwarebiko*, became Jimmu, the first Emperor of Japan.

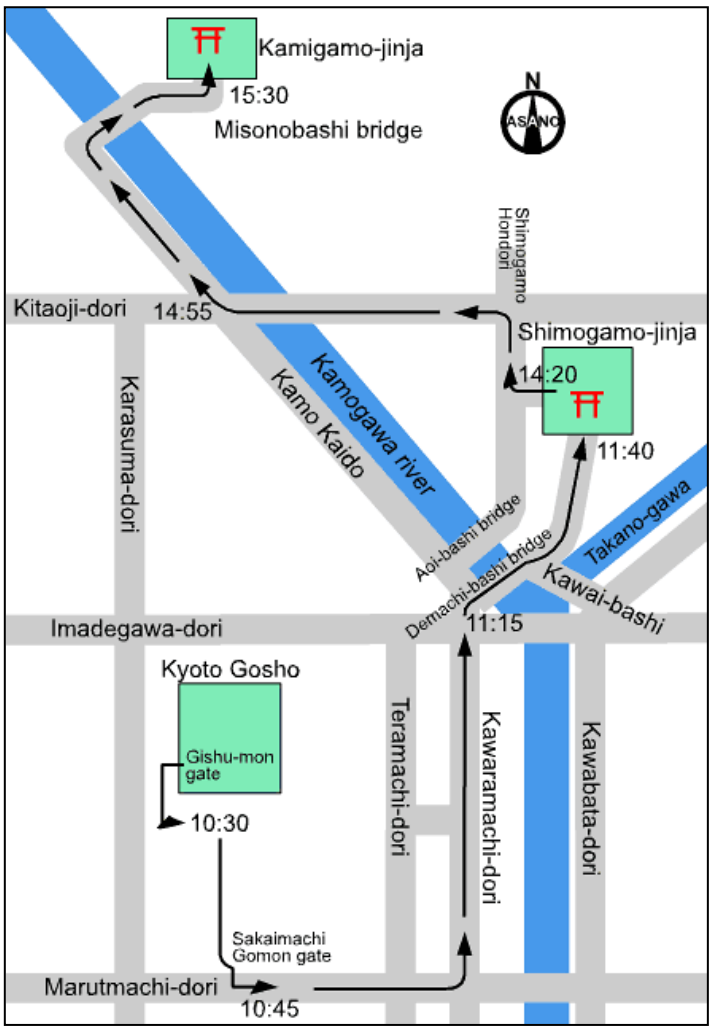
While the shrine exists to venerate *Tamayorihime-no-Mikoto*, she is by no means the shrine's only important historical figure. Another, named *Kamo-no-Chomei*, was born to the family running the Kawai Shrine, but after a number of unfortunate circumstances, he decided to distance himself from the world and become a recluse. It is said that he wrote the famous historical document *Hojoki* in his despair, which was written from his portable hut located deep in the seclusion of the surrounding mountain forest. The hut covered about 2.73 *tsubo*, the equivalent of about 5 and a half *tatami* mats. From the entrance, the hut was about 3 meters deep and 3 meters wide, which is why it is known as the *Hojo* (a square unite of floor measurement). A replica of the *Hojo-no-iori* (Chomei's hut) is on display on the grounds here.

Did You Know?

The Hata clan (秦氏) was the most prominent inhabitants of the Kyoto basin at the time the area entered into history. They are said to have been adept at financial matters, and to have introduced silk raising and weaving to Japan. For this reason, they may have been associated with the kagome crest, a lattice shape found in basket-weaving. During the reign of Emperor Nintoku (313-399), the members of the clan were sent to different parts of the country to spread the knowledge and practice of sericulture. Originally landing and settling in Izumo and the San'yo region, the Hata eventually settled in the areas where Japan's most important cities are now. They are said to have aided in the establishment of Heian-kyo (modern-day Kyoto), and of many Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, including Fushimi Inari Taisha, Matsunoo Taisha, and the Kamo Shrines.

Although it was during the reign of Emperor Temmu (675-686) that many of the above-mentioned sub-buildings were constructed, the history of Shimogamo itself extends at least two thousand years. The shrine grew in stature as the powerful Hata family adopted it and its sister shrine, Kamigamo, as two of their most favored shrines. Since then, the shrine has enjoyed considerable attention from important and indeed, imperial, families. Records from the time indicate one *cho* of land (about one hectare) was given to the shrine to cultivate food for religious offerings; three hundred years later, Shimogamo owned 689 *cho* of land.

Shimogamo grew important during the reign of Emperor Kinmei (539-571), a time where a succession of disastrous rains with high winds ruined grain crops, causing epidemics to sweep the country. Because priests placed the cause on divine punishment by the Kamo deities, the Emperor sent his messenger with a retinue to the shrine to conduct various acts to appease them, in prayer for a bountiful harvest. Part of this rite included riding a galloping horse. It became an annual ritual and over time the galloping horse developed into an equestrian archery performance. As time went on so many people had come to view this equestrian performance that, during the 3nd year of Emperor Mommu's reign (697-707), the event was banned!

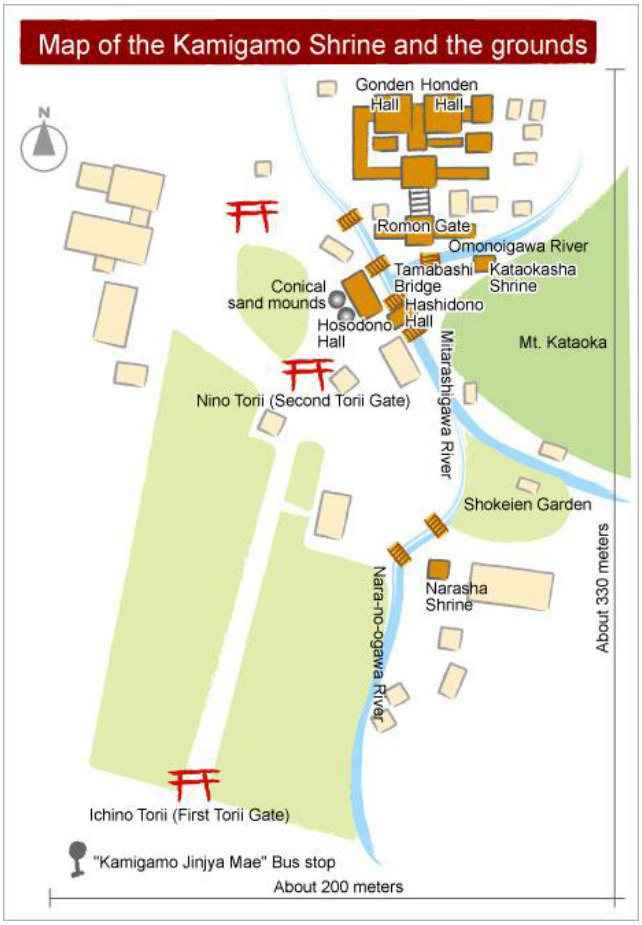


The shrine's influence rose to new heights when Emperor Kanmu moved his capital to the site of modern day Kyoto. At the founding of the imperial capital, priests gathered at Shimogamo shrine to worship for its success. Imperial culture flourished in Kyoto during the Heian period (794-1185) and the Shimogamo shrine alongside. The shrine was its most prosperous during the reign of Emperor Saga (809-823). Many of the shrine's elaborate architectural designs and traditions come from this time. Emperor Saga was the first to dedicate one of his daughters as a *Sai-in*, or maiden of the shrine, following a similar custom as established at the Ise shrine. The Sai-in would only come once a year, in a grand procession with an imperial messenger. The shrine priests would decorate the buildings and their own costumes with branches of *aoi* (hollyhock), and so re-started the Aoi Matsuri as an annual imperial event. This event became so famous than it was known as "the matsuri" or "the festival", throughout Japan. It is mentioned under this name several times in the classic Heian-period Japanese epic *Tale of Genji*. Tempestuous love rivals rammed their ox carts in battle during one *matsuri* and contented couples strolled through another. Noble by noble, Shimogamo shrine cultivated the good favor of the imperial court and aristocracy for several hundred years. The festival saw its peak of grandeur in the middle of the Heian Period, but this waned in the Kamakura Period and the following Muromachi Period, and as the nation entered the Sengoku Period, the festival procession was discontinued. The festival is called the Aoi festival for the hollyhock leaves used as decoration throughout the celebration. These leaves were once believed to protect against natural disasters.

Today, the Aoi Matsuri (葵祭), or "Hollyhock Festival," is one of Kyoto's three main annual festivals, the other two being the Festival of the Ages (Jidai Matsuri) and the Gion Festival. It is held every May 15th, and consists of two parts: the procession and the shrine rites. The procession, which starts from the Kyoto Imperial Palace and slowly works its way toward Shimogamo (and then finally Kamigamo) is led by the Imperial Messenger. Following the imperial messenger are: two oxcarts, four cows, thirty-six horses, and six hundred people, all of which are dressed in traditional Heian period apparel. When they finally arrive at both shrines, the Saio-Dai (an unmarried maiden who goes through several ceremonies of purification before the procession) and Imperial Messenger perform their rituals. The Saio-Dai simply pays her respects to the deities and the Imperial Messenger intones the imperial rescript praising the deities and requesting their continued favor.

It's quite interesting, no? Maybe one day we'll see the Aoi Matsuri for ourselves!

Kamigamo (上賀茂神社)



Just like the procession of the Aoi Matsuri, our time at Shimogamo had come to an end and it was time to move on. We exited this UNSECO World Heritage site through its upper western gate, which conveniently dropped us near the Shimogamo-jinja-mae bus stops, upon which we'd use to catch a Kyoto bus to Kamigamo, three and a half kilometers upriver. Since vehicles operate on the opposite side of the road than in North American, we hopped over Shimogamo-hon-dori, the rather large thoroughfare winding through this part of Kyoto, to find the appropriate stop in that direction. After locating the right area to stand for Bus #4, and having a few minutes to wait, we ducked into the nearby Lawson to grab a couple of *onigiri* and pastries – we felt a bit peckish. Even though it was raining, consuming our goodies outside the store's provided tables was still a nice treat. Eventually the bus came to pick us up and soon we were on our way. And though all of that sounds simple enough, we were actually wondering – and debating – whether or not bus #4 would actually arrive at all! The stop's drive-by schedule was a bit off time wise and it was raining, so we weren't sure we really wanted to stick around. We did, though, and were rewarded with a bus ride through the Kita (北区) area of Kyoto – a place I'm not all that familiar with, so it was a nice ride.

About thirty-five minutes later we arrived.

Kamigamo Shrine covers a large area just east of the Kamo River north of Kitayama Street (totaling 690,000 square-meters). It is easy to get to by bus and the entire surrounding area is full of interesting ancient things to see and experience. Most of the shrine complex has been designated as Preservation Area of Historic Landscape by the municipal government and as a Historic Site by the national government. The area contains many large trees such as *ichii* oaks, *suda* chinquappins, and weeping cherry trees. Here, nature and culture coexist in harmony.

The large torii gate that stands at the southern end of a huge lawn-covered approach leads to the main buildings. This pathway is called the Sando, and although it is unusually constructed of grass rather than gravel, it allows visitors time to calm and compose their minds for worship. On either side of the gate is a sign. The left-hand sign warns visitors not to ride horses, catch birds or fish, uproot bamboo or disturb the sand-raked patterns that they will encounter in the shrine grounds. The right-hand sign has huge red numbers on it that indicate the so-called "unlucky" years for men and women: women on the left column, men on the right. The most dangerous time for a woman is thirty-three. For men it is forty-two. Many thousands of people of these ages come to this shrine and countless others around the country to ask the gods for assistance in these difficult times. Thankfully neither of us is of those ages, so we're safe for now.

After passing through the second torii, you come to an area of thick forest. The Hashi-dono spanning a clear flowing stream near the second torii, is where the imperial envoy presents a message from the emperor during the Aoi Matsuri. On the left here, is the *Hosodono* and on the right is the *Tsuchi-no-ya* building where people engaged in rituals and ceremonies to purify themselves before participating. After crossing *Negi-bashi* (bridge) and walking through the *Ro-mon* and then *Chu-mon* (gate, open only new year), we see the *Honden* (main sanctuary, on the right). The present building was constructed in 1863 by the Emperor Komei, retaining its classic Heian design. As an excellent example of a *nagare-style* shrine structure, it has been designated as a National Treasure. *Gon-den* is an exact replica of the main shrine building and serves as a kind of reserve or emergency shrine, to house the deity in the event that main shrine building is destroyed or damaged. The other 34 buildings on the shrine grounds, last restored in 1628, have all been designated as Important Cultural Properties.

And this is about what you'll learn when visiting the shrine, but I've dug deeper and have learned a few interesting elements about Kamigamo, such as: The entrance displays both compliance with and resistance to the totalizing process of imperial power. The main walkway (sando) running between the grassy fields from the first to the second torii, is on a straight compass line (as are the torii themselves) with the original imperial palace – a very public acknowledgement of a period of shrine-court cooperation. As a tutelary shrine of the city and protector against *kimon* influences from the northeast, Kamigamo enjoyed for many centuries a close and profitable relationship with the court. However, once inside the second torii, a subtle shift begins northward toward the center of Kamo power, the sacred mountain of Koyama. The first hint of this imperial displacement is in the *tatesuna*, or standing sand cones, symbols that evoke important and fundamental relationships that precede as well as take precedencies over those with the courtly rulers. The worshiper's path to the inner sanctuary then zigs and zags, first over one bridge and then over another, characterizing one of the kami's dominant powers, the lightning bolt. But there is also *feng-shui* influence that avoids straight lines whereby evil influences can penetrate, or so I've read.

Another resource for asserting Kamo hegemony can be found in the second half of the "wind and water" combination that is *feng-shui*. As a deity of thunder, storms, and lighting, Wake Ikazuchi was ritually petitioned to intervene on behalf of his clan and influence the flow of the river. Further upstream, from the mid-Heian period onward, Kamigamo came to control the ancient Kibune Shrine as a kind of base camp leading into the higher spiritual elevations and recesses of deity-dwelling water-sheds. Therefore, the last finger of high ground-overlooking the point at which the Kamo River enters the floodplain – was positioned strategically as a viable and auspicious location to remind the lower-valley dwellers (including the imperial court) of the authority of Kamo Shine (with its access to a powerful deity). In the early years of the Heinkyo court, messengers and representatives visited often with goodwill offerings they hoped would promote bonds of reciprocity and mutual assistance.

In fact, water plays a key role in Kamigamo's existence. Its inner sanctuary and surrounding courtyards are nestled between the Mitarashi-gawa on the west and the smaller Omoni-gawa to the east – in a floodplain. And shrines as a barrier to misfortunes and an aid to purification, the properties of water were and continue to be essential in Shinto cosmology. Consider: washing one's hands and rinsing one's mouth are still integral parts of the preparations for ritual participation or worship at shrines today. And floods did occur in the area, necessitating an architectural style and technology for the middle courtyard structures that harmonized with rather than obstructed the flow of water. (Flowing water is good, stagnant water is bad!) Visitors are frequently struck by the airy lightness of the inner spaces of the Tsuchinoya, Hashidono, and Hosodono. In one sense, they are open-air stages, buildings without walls (or a floor, in the case of the Tsuchinoya). However, there is a utilitarian dimension to their positioning and architecture as well. Each building has hooked iron rods that can swing down from below the eaves from the roofs when threatened by flooding. If these rods are anchored to pitons buried just below the gravel of the courtyard, the pavilions can withstand the current's pressure against their pillars by allowing it to flow through their interiors.

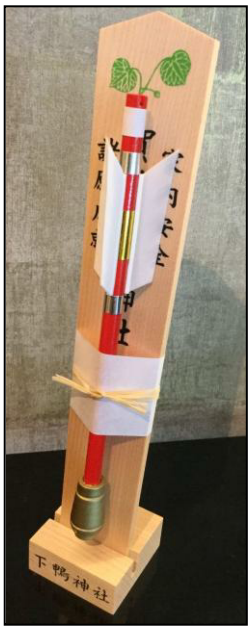
In a great flood shortly after the war – caused in part by a massive felling of trees and clearing of groundcover to make a golf course north of the shrine – these buildings (whose present incarnation dates to 1628) emerged with little damage, as their massive roofs, like peaked islands, hovered calmly above the waters.

Perhaps more interestingly than the shrine's architecture, is its overt sexual iconography and symbols; it's literally covered from top to bottom with them! The entire landscape as well as its architectural structures comprises an elaborate sexual metaphor reflecting a model of and for the world. Here these themes are grounded in three principal sources from which life-essences were thought to issue: mountains, human beings (women as life givers, men as life sustainers), and the vegetative world. Venerated throughout the long history of Shinto ritual practices, these sources are today emphasized in varying degrees, ranging from overtly obvious aspects of the sacred landscape (mountains) to the covert fundamentals of sexual reproduction.

In the latter case, which is at present knowingly consigned to the background by the shrine's priests, is rarely mentioned or written about in any shape or form, nor are most visitors even vaguely aware of an all-encompassing sexual dimension of the shrine. Of all the various "guises" of contemporary Shinto, the book "*Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan*" goes on to say, this one is the most cryptic, and yet its overtness is breathtaking.

For example, a visitor emerging from the open grassy fields and passing through the second tori is struck by two beautifully symmetrical cones constructed of off-white sand, both about 120 centimeters high, standing in front of a graceful, open-air pavilion, the Hosodono. One could assume that they symbolize the "breasts of mother earth," but a nearby sign indicates nothing of the sort. It says instead that the *tatesuna* represent Koyama, the sacred mountain of the Kamo clan, where the *kami* was worshiped before the present-day shrine was developed. While generally accurate, this too-brief explanation is only a small part of the larger picture. The book's author was able to speak with one of the priests, who explain that the two *tatesuna* cones, like miniature pyramids, are pivotal points of reference for the landscape of the outer courtyard and key symbols representing the shrine.

"These cones do represent the sacred mountain Koyama, but also signify the act of gathering sand on top of the mountain at the site where the kami are thought to descend (*himorogi*). This act is performed to steady the bamboo branch that is put up into the sky for the *kami* to alight on. But note that the sacred tree of this shrine is a pine, and that there are needles [sticking out of the top of the tatesuna]. These symbolize the sacred pine as well as the forest on Koyama, a place where no one is allowed to go. These cones also symbolize yang and yin, so you'll notice the left one is 'male' (*on-matsu*) with two needles while on right is the 'female' (*me-matsu*) with three – corresponding to the respective genital organs of each gender. Their merging (*gattai suru*) creates the power of life."



Even the legend we learned about at Shimogamo takes on new meaning here: according to a large sign beside the Tower Gate, "The shrine worships *Wake Ikazuchi* because of a mythological event in which Princess Tamayori was playing beside the little stream called Mitarae-gawa and noticed a white-plumed arrow drifting by. She took it back to her palace and then put it under her pillow and eventually delivered a baby boy. Later on, this little boy, while worshiping, ascended to heaven via a hole he broke through the ceiling and became the great kami of thunder, lighting and rain." As in many cultures worldwide, an incident of impregnation (which, in this case, is thought to be rather scandalous, since the basis for the myth seems to be the seduction of a Kamo princess by a prince from the rival Hata clan) receives ambiguous treatment. Here, in language Freud would have enjoyed, a penis becomes a "floating arrow" and sexual intercourse becomes the act of putting this arrow under a woman's "pillow". Not unexpectedly, the shrine sells little red arrows at its information and amulet counters. Those who purchase them mistakenly assume that they are a miniature version of the arrows sold to dispel bad fortune and to ensure good luck, instead they are metamorphosed phalluses!

Even the hollyhock symbol represents this sexuality: two leaves at the base of a single, long stem with a slightly red dish, bell-shaped flower! The *aoi* motif provides one further dimension of the sexual landscape to be found at Kamigamo Shrine – namely, the striking architectural layout of the inner sanctuaries. Constructed in the aoi-style, the main and secondary halls are said to represent the leaves of the *aoi* flower. Shrine architecture usually places the main sanctuary on the left and the secondary or additional ones to the right. At Kamigamo, however, because each building is a leaf of the aoi and the leaves of this plant grow in a twisting fashion, the locations of the buildings are conceptually as well as structurally reversed.

With the "leaves" now in place, what of the erect "flower"? Rather than pointing upward, the flower's stamen is inverted downward at the walkway between the buildings, used in every ritual as the stage where priests kneel before performing their duties. Although there is also a side walkway said to represent the less-than-erect flower, the central walkway is oriented to be on a direct line with the summit of Koyama.

The unknowing visitor, standing in front of the walkway at the Middle Gate, may think he or she is bowing to a sanctuary that enshrines a powerful deity, as one does at shrines all over Japan. But from the perspective of those privileged to understand the shrine's layout (as we now do), floral iconography, and founding myths, the visitor is positioned directly in line with an architectural rendering of the *aoi* phallus. The revitalizing energies the visitor seeks originate from the sacred mountain, but they are channeled through the two sanctuaries that are simultaneously leaves and testes. "*Could one conclude, then, that every blessing received and all energy revitalized is, thanks to the poignant symbolism of the aoi construction, a kind of spiritual ejaculation that sanctifies the worshiper?*"

Wow. That's… I… Interesting.

Learning all that was definitely a lot to contemplate along our bus ride back toward Shimogamo, but it does go to show you how very important these two shines were and are to the people and City of Kyoto. And speaking of the people of Kyoto, with the Kamo Shrines now under our belt, it was time to visit a place where a lot of people congregate for a different form of nourishment: Nishiki Market, colloquially known as the "Kitchen of Kyoto". But I'll get into that in a little bit. Bear with me!

...つづく

「Nishiki, Teramachi & Shinkyogoku」

Sunday | April 19, 2015 (part 2)

So, why do they call Nishiki Market the *Kitchen of Kyoto*? Because this lively retail market specializes in all things food related, like fresh seafood, produce, knives and cookware, and is a great place to find seasonal foods and Kyoto specialties, such as Japanese sweets, pickles, dried seafood and sushi! You'll find it located in Downton Kyoto on a covered-roadway one block north of and parallel to Shijo Street (条通; Shijo-dori), and just west of Teramachi Street (寺町通; Teramachi-dori), Located in Downtown Kyoto on a road one block north and parallel to Shijo Street (条通; Shijo-dori) and running east-to-west from Karasuma-dori (烏丸通) to Teramachi Street (寺町通; Teramachi-dori). And rather than go all the way back to Shimogamo and ride the Keihan rail back to Gion, we alighted at Kitayama-mae, which just so happened to be right next to the Kitayama subway station, and took a fifteen minute subway ride southbound to Shijo-mae, on the western end of the market.

Nishiki Market

Nishiki Market is a narrow, five-block long shopping street lined by more than one hundred shops and restaurants. The Market has a pleasant, but busy atmosphere that is inviting to those who want to explore the variety of culinary delights that Kyoto is famous for. The stores found throughout the market range in size from small narrow stalls to larger two story shops. Most specialize in a particular type of food, and almost everything sold at the market is locally produced and procured. Some of the shops freely give out samples or sell sample dishes and skewers meant to be eaten then and there. There are also a few small restaurants and food stands selling ready-made food. A few are sit down establishments, although some consist of no more than a couple of stools and a bar. They usually specialize in one type of food, and are often attached to a store of the same specialty. The market has a history of several centuries, and many stores have been operated by the same families for generations. It all started as a fish wholesale district, with the first shop opening around 1310. A larger variety of shops moved in later, and the area changed from a wholesale market to retail. Today it remains an important market for Kyoto and is often packed with locals and tourists alike.

Nishiki's charm is in its immediacy. There are a few hundred shops, some no bigger than a breadbox, crammed into the long, narrow cavern, which runs parallel to Shijo-dori. The two streets are like chalk and cheese. Where Shijo-dori is lined with luxury stores, banks and chain shops, Nishiki is all hustle and bustle. Competition for your senses is everywhere. The air is filled with the smell of fresh fish, pickled vegetables, roasted chestnuts, ground sesame and tofu doughnuts, as well as cries from the workers pounding *mochi* (rice cakes) and people speaking in all kinds of tongues. Nishiki is where you'll find an A-Z of what goes into *washoku* (Japanese cuisine). And just like any good food market, the produce keeps pace with the seasons.

At Kyotanba, for example, the rich musty smell of roasted chestnuts fills the air. Tanba, a region in northern Kyoto abutting the Sea of Japan, is synonymous with chestnuts and matsutake. The chilly mornings and hot days there are ideal growing conditions for nuts and fungus. At Hale, accessed via a wood-paneled entranceway off the market thoroughfare, the food is all vegetarian, much of it derived from *tofu*. (Yuba, the gossamer-like tofu skin, takes center stage). Uchida, near the western end, has been selling pickled vegetables in Nishiki since 1937. In the process of pickling many vegetables become unrecognizable, especially *naradzuke uri*, a pickled gourd (which may not be for everyone). However, there is plenty that could be, from eggplant to radish and pumpkin. Another Nishiki old-timer is Miki Keiran, famous for its *dashimaki* (omelet) made with *konbu* (kelp) stock. Nomura Tsukudani specializes in sweetened *konbu* and *wakame*. The *tsukudani* (food simmered in soy sauce and *mirin*) is presented as if it were high-class chocolate. It is delightfully sweet and will give you a new appreciation for edible seaweed.

For foreign visitors to Kyoto you might be a little put-off by all the hustle and bustle, but many of the shops offer free samples, especially those selling *tsukemono.* Try something – it won't kill you. A language barrier needn't stop you from picking up *takotamago*, a quail egg embedded in octopus. This skewer dish is miniature-sized, but so much is squeezed into it — just like Nishiki Market!

At the eastern end of Nishiki Market lay two streets that form the heart of Kyoto's main shopping district. The eastern street, known as **Shinkyogoku**, is filled with tacky souvenirs of almost every description – need a shirt reading "Ichi-ban" (Number One)? This is the place to go. The western street, known as **Teramachi**, is an altogether more refined place, with a variety of art galleries, cafés, bookshops, and clothing shops both traditional and modern. In addition, you'll find several shops selling religious goods like incense, images of Buddha, prayer beads and the like. The street's name literally means "Temple Town", and reflects the large number of temples moved there during Toyotomi Hideyoshi's remodeling of Kyoto in the 16th century, following 100 years of war, all in an effort to control the clergy. As such you'll find *Nishiki Tenmangu*, *Yata-dera*, *Seigan-ji*, *Tako-Yakushijo*, and *Honno-ji*,– all relatively small and understated – along the route.

First one you'll probably come to is **Nishiki Tenmangu** (錦天満宮), as the front side of this shrine faces the market's exit onto Teramachi-dori directly. The shrine is dedicated to Sugawara no Michizane, the deity of scholarship and good business, where students go to pray for good results. It has existed since the Heian period (built in the year 1003), and was established originally in the home of Sugawara no Koreyoshi, father of Sugawara no Michizane (Tenjin). It was later moved to the estate of Minamoto no Tôru (son of Emperor Saga, and a possible model for Hikaru Genji, the eponymous protagonist of the "Tale of Genji"). Despite being one of the most famous & important Tenjin shrines in Kyoto, it has turned away from being a shrine of scholarship and literature, and is instead a shrine dedicated to love. The worship hall holds old calligraphic plaques, Chinese lions, and attendants. Flowers bloom in the precincts in all four seasons, and a number of other small shrines, including an Inari shrine, a sun shrine, one for commercial prosperity, and others can also be found at the site.

Did You Know?

The shrine's stone torii, which was built in 1935, has a unique distinction: due to lack of space in this part of Kyoto, part of its gate is incrusted in the surrounding buildings!

Furthermore, the famous capital water "Nishiki water" bubbles up naturally from the ground. Celebrated because the water in that well comes from 100 *shaku* (over 30 meters) below the ground, is about 17-18 degrees Celsius (62-65 F), and has no flavor, no smell, and no bacteria.

Yata-dera (矢田寺) is a small temple squeezed between a number of larger buildings just before the Sanjo-Teramachi intersection; it's hard to miss so look for the big crab. Formally called Kongô-zan Yatadera, the diminutive temple is also known as Yata Jizô, due to the bodhisattva enshrined within, making it one of the Nishiyama Jodo-shû sects. According to histories passed down within the temple itself, the temple was founded in the early Heian period as a branch temple of Yata-dera in Nara. It moved to its current location thanks to the aforementioned urban planning changes by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The temple's chief object of worship is a two-meter tall standing figure of the bodhisattva Jizô, said to have bene carved from the dark earth of the underworld by Mankei (aka Manmai), the founder of the temple, who met the true Jizô there, and copied his likeness or form. Worshippers gather to pray to this statue as the Jizô who saves those who have died and are in hell. In keeping with the theme, the temple's bell is called the "Sending Bell" and is rung to help send the spirits of the dearly departed to the afterlife without them getting lost along the way.

Seigan-ji (誓願寺) is located in the middle of Shinkyogoku and today is the headquarters of the Nishiyama Fukakusa School of the Jodo sect. Originally built in Nara under the orders of Emperor Tenchi in 667, it was moved to Kyoto at the beginning of the Kamakura Period, and later to its present location by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1591. During its long history, many important Buddhist priests chose this temple as their holy place for training and attaining enlightenment. Many local people also worshipped at this temple too, including noteworthy female court offices and literati such as Sei Shonagon, Izumi Shikibu and Matsunomaruden. As a result, women particularly worship at the temple. It also has a noteworthy garden, with a story… A man was traveling to the west (heading to Gokuraku Jodo, a paradise). Then he turned around, feeling a premonition, and saw thieves and beasts (a metaphor of evil or temptation) were following him. He ran away and reached a place where two rivers were in front of him. The river to the south was burning with a great fire (a metaphor of human anger or complaints), and the river to the north was a river with deep water (a metaphor of human greed).

He didn't know whether he should proceed or turn back. However, when watching the river precisely, he found a white path (a metaphor of a pure belief, a yearning for paradise) 15cm wide between the two rivers, leading straight to the west. Then he heard a voice (the teachings of Buddha) from the east bank, and a shout (teaching of Amidabutsu) from the west bank. Thanks to them, he could successfully go across on the white path to the paradise, reciting "Amidabutsu" enthusiastically. In the garden, the near side, which is the Hondo side, is regarded as the east and the far side is regarded as the west (Seiho-jodo, the west paradise). The left side of the stream flowing in the middle of the garden expresses the river with fire, and the right side expresses the river of deep water, shown using red stones and blue stones respectively as the bank stones. In addition, a stone bridge built over the stream represents the white path, and three garden stones at the end of the bridge represent Amida Sanzon (the statue of Amida Triad). Thus, the garden completely expresses the teachings of "Nigabyakudo." There's even a Noh play about Seigan-ji! Seigan-ji is free to visit so don't feel shy about popping in.

The next two – *Tako-Yakushijo* and *Honninji* – have stories that are a little more interesting...

Tako Yakushijo

In ancient times there once lived a rich man in the center of Kyoto who wanted nothing more than to seek refuge in the Yakushi Buddha that resided atop Mt. Hiei at Enryakuji. Year after year he'd make monthly pilgrimages to pray, but one day, as the years went by and he became old and weak, he pleaded with the Buddha: "I'm getting too old to continue my practice of monthly pilgrimages," he said. "Please let me have your image to place in my home!" That night the Yakushi Buddha appeared to him in a dream. "In a certain place," it said. "A stone Yakushi statute carved by the founder of Enryakuji and Tendai Buddhism himself had been buried. You can take that home." Full of joy, the next day he returned and indeed found a holy image hewn from stone where he was told to dig – it emitted a wondrous light! He brought the image home and built a hall of six-by-four bays to house it, calling his new temple Eifukuji (founded 1181), the Temple of Eternal Bliss. And it flourished; young and old, men and women, flocked in great numbers to pay their respects.

Later, in the Kencho Period under Emperor Go-Fukakusa (1249-56), a monk called Zenko lived within the temple. It happened at one time that his mother fell ill, and although he took good care of her, she did not recover. However, it is said that on her death bed she asked a strange thing of her son: "If only I could eat some octopus (*tako*) my illness might get better!" She loved octopus from her childhood, you see, and had hoped its taste would lift her spirits.

Unfortunately, Zenko was not allowed to buy octopus – a living being – as this was expressly forbidden in the Buddhist rights. Distressed, and thinking of his sick mother, took a wooden box in his arms and went to the market to find her octopus. As he returned, some people became suspicious that he, a monk, had bought a living creature for food and followed him all the way to the gate of his temple, pressing him to see what was in the box. Zenko could not refuse and prayed with all his heart: "I have only bought this octopus to help my mother recover from her illness. Lord Yakushi, please help me out of my difficulty!"

When he opened the box, the eight-legged octopus that had been inside was transformed into a set of eight sutra scrolls, and a light shone from them in all four directions. Those very same hecklers pressed their hands together in prayer then, and sang the praises of Lord Yakushi, the Buddha of the Lapis Lazuli Paradise. Strangely enough, the scriptures turned again into an octopus who then jumped into the temple's pond where he changed into the form of the Yakushi Buddha. He emitted a green Lapis Lazuli light and when this struck the head of Zenko's mother her illness was immediately healed. She rose from her bed and in a loud voice sang the praises of the Lapis Lazuli Buddha, over and over again. Thus the temple came to be known as Octopus Yakushi (*Tako-Yakushi*). From then on, when people visited and prayed for relief from illness, they were immediately healed; when women prayed for children, they were blessed with offspring; and all difficulties and problems were eliminated.

When news reached the ears of the Emperor in 1441, the temple received an Imperial License, and since then prayers have been said here for bountiful harvests, the Emperor's long life, and the peace of the nation. When one prays ardently for divine protection, no wish is left unfulfilled: in the present world the seven ills are immediately dispelled and the seven blessings immediately granted!

Honnoji (本能寺)

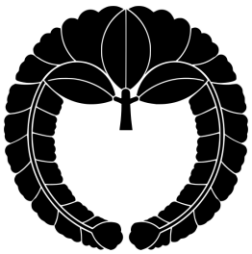
Honnno-ji was founded in 1415 and is part of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. Originally it was located a short distance south of its current location, at the intersection of Shijo and Nishinotoin streets, but like with much of Kyoto, it was destroyed by fire many times. It was moved to its current location in 1589 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who at the time had instigated an urban renewal project within the city. Hideyoshi erected an earthen wall (*odoi*) that surrounded central Kyoto and had temples transferred to the north and east within this area. The eastern area became a temple town named Teramachi, and Teramachi-dori was born. Honnoji was another temple Hideyoshi ordered moved, but despite its understated appearance today, that's not why it features prominently in Kyoto's history. Rather it's significant because Honnoji is best known for being the place where Oda Nobunaga met his end in an event called The Honnoji Incident (本能寺の変) in 1592.

People like Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Oda Nobunaga are important figures in Japanese history, and as a visitor to Kyoto (and its surrounding areas), you're bound to run into them again and again. So let me put them into historical context before I move on.

Power, and those who control it, is the underlying threads in the tapestry that is Japanese history. And rightfully so, as power above all else gives a body politic or an individual immense control over the general public. So, naturally, power becomes a central theme in everything that has gone on around us. Recall from our visit to Nara that the capital of Japan used to reside there, until the monks tried to exert their influence politically – and gain power. Emperor Kammu recognized this and moved the capital away from them, establishing Heian-kyo (平安京, "tranquility and peace capital") in what is now present-day Kyoto. This simple task brought about the beginning of a new period of Japanese history – a golden age if you will – in the process. It is called the **Heian Period (794-1185)**, and it's something I've mentioned often.

Noted for its art, especially for its poetry and literature (Lady Shikibu Murasaki's "The Tale of Genji" was written during this period), it was a time when the Imperial Court was at its greatest heights, but so were those of the court's regents. Political power was in the hands of powerful aristocratic families (called *kuge*), such as the Fujiwara clan, who ruled under the titles Sessho and Kampaku (imperial regents). The Fujiwara clan obtained almost complete control over the Court during this time, ascendency gained through matrimonial links with the imperial family. Indeed, because of the number of emperors that were born to Fujiwara mothers, the Fujiwara Regents became so closely identified with the imperial family, that people saw no difference between the "direct rule" by the imperial family and the rule of the Fujiwara, which ultimately begat trouble.

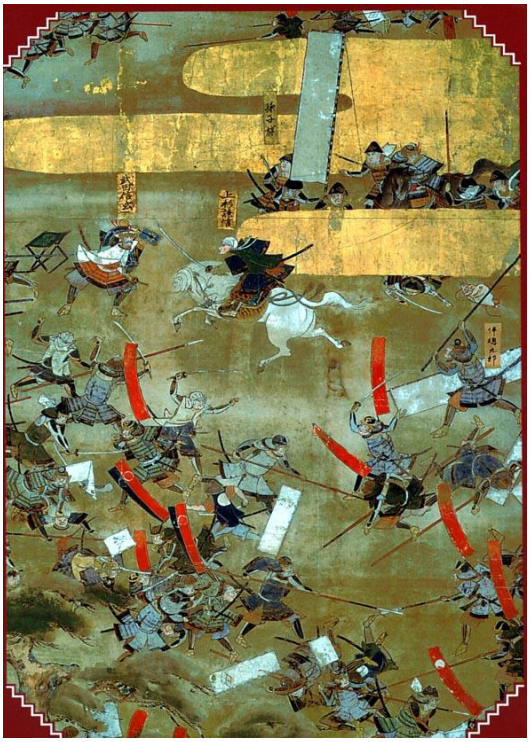
Not everyone liked the powerful Fujiwara's; therefore, the end of the period saw the rise of various military clans, three of which were most powerful: Minamoto (源氏), Taira (平氏), and Tachibana (橘氏). Accordingly, when dissatisfaction with the government arose resulting in the Hogen Rebellion (1156–1158; Fujiwawa vs. Taira & Minamoto), the Heiji Rebellion (1160; Taira vs. Minamoto), and the Gempei War (1180–1185; Minamoto vs. Taira), the target of the dissatisfaction was the Fujiwara Regents, as well as the Imperial family, and later with the other family clans.



Now, recall our time at Kamakura – with the fall of the Taira at the end of the Gempei War, the Court appointed Minamoto Yoritomo to a number of high positions, which he later consolidated. This allowed Yoritomo to become the first person to be designated the *seii-tai-shogun*, or "Shogun", from which emerged a society led by samurai clans under the political rule of the shogun—the beginnings of feudalism in Japan.

Although society in Kyoto was regarded as more refined and cultured than the rest of the country, Yoritomo established his base of power, called the bakufu, in the seaside town of Kamakura, moving administration of national affairs there and thus establishing what is commonly referred to as the **Kamakura Shogunate (1185-1333)**. For almost 140 years successions of Minamoto's (and later Hojo's) ruled Japan from Kamakura, enjoying absolute power in the governing of the country. This monopoly of power, as well as the lack of a reward of lands after the defeat of the Mongol invasion, led to simmering resentment among Hojo vassals. Eventually Emperor Go-Daigo ordered opposition to Hojo rule in favor of Imperial restoration. To counter this revolt, the Kamakura bakufu sent Ashikaga Takauji to quash the uprising. For reasons that are unclear, possibly because Ashikaga was the de-facto leader of the powerless Minamoto clan, while the Hojo descended from the Taira clan the Minamoto had previously defeated, Ashikaga turned against the Kamakura bakufu, and fought on behalf of the Emperor. By 1333, the Kamakura shogunate was overthrown and the Imperial House was restored to full political influence. This did not last however.

The warrior class throughout Japan was in tumult. Furthermore, Go-Daigo was not a gifted leader, tending instead to alienate people. Ashikaka Takauji, realizing his tenuous position, seized the opportunity and, after some initial setbacks, was successful in defeating Go-Daigo and his forces at the decisive Battle of Minatogawa (1336). The **Ashikaga Shogunate (1333-1568)** was born. Although located in Kyoto, the Ashikaga bakufu was very weak. Unlike its predecessor, Ashikaga Takauji had little personal territories with which to support his rule. Therefore, this shogunate was thus heavily reliant on the prestige and personal authority of its shoguns. Eventually the structural weakness of the Ashikaga bakufu was exposed by numerous succession troubles and early deaths. This became dramatically more acute following the **Onin War (1467-1477)**, after which the Ashikaga became reduced to little more than a local political force in Kyoto (and Kyoto itself was reduced to little more than rubble…).



The era that would follow is called The **Sengoku Period** (**1467-1603**) – the Time of Warring Kingdoms. It was a time of intense internal warfare as many regional lords (*daimyo*) rose up in an attempt to fill the power vacuum left by the withering Ashikaga's. Oda Nobunaga, a rather ambitious daimyo himself, rose above the pack and pushed out the 15th and last shogun of the Ashikaga bakufu, Ashikaga Yoshiaki, in 1573. And this brings me back to the Honnoji Incident. You see, by 1582, Nobunaga was at the height of his power, central Japan was firmly under his control having destroyed the Takeda family earlier that year. His only rivals were the Mori clan, the Uesugi clan, and the Late Hojo clan, each weakened by internal affairs.

It was at this point that Oda Nobunaga began sending his generals aggressively into all directions to continue his military expansion (one of which was Hideyoshi). When Nobunaga received a request for reinforcements from Hideyoshi, whose forces were stuck at the Siege of Takamatsu, he ordered Akechi Mitsuhide to go to Hideyoshi's aid, and travelled to Honno-ji, his usual resting place when he stopped by in Kyoto.

Did You Know?

The reasons for Mitsuhide's coup d'état have been a source of controversy and speculation. Although there have been several theories, the most common ones maintain that Mitsuhide bore a personal grudge, acted out of fear, had the ambition to take over Japan, was simply acting to protect the imperial court whose authority was not respected by Nobunaga, or was trying to remove the iconoclastic revolutionary. Many think it was a combination of at least some of the above assumed reasons.

Upon receiving the order, Mitsuhide, who was chomping at the bit to rebel, saw an opportunity to act with all the other major daimyo and the bulk of Nobunaga's army occupied in far off parts of the country. Therefore, Mitsuhide led his army toward Kyoto, claiming that Nobunaga wanted to show a procession. It was not the first time that Nobunaga had demonstrated his modernized and well-equipped troops in Kyoto so nobody doubted the excuse. As Mitsuhide approached he announced "The enemy awaits at Honno-ji!" (敵は本能寺にあり; *Teki wa Honno-ji ni ari*!) and the siege began. Nobunaga, his servants, and bodyguards naturally countered, but they came to realize rather quickly that their resistance was futile against the overwhelming numbers of Akechi troops. So, Nobunaga committed seppuku. His last words were reportedly, "Ran, don't let them come in..." (Referring to his young page, Mori Ranmaru who set the temple on fire as Nobunaga requested so that no one would be able to get his head). Ranmaru then followed suit. His loyalty and devotion makes him a revered figure to this day. Nobunaga's remains were not found, a fact often speculated about by writers and historians.

After Nobunaga's death, Mitsuhide himself was killed by farmers following the Battle of Yamazaki, where his forces were defeated by an avenging Toyotomi Hideyoshi. For a brief period of time Japan was stable under Toyotomi, but when he died after years of failing health, with no appointed shogun over the armies, left a new power vacuum to fill. Tokugawa Ieyasu emerged victorious at the Battle of Sekigahara (1600), seizing political power. This action led to the third and final bakufu, the **Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867)**, which would see the capital moved to Edo (present-day Tokyo), and usher in another period of peace throughout Japan. The rest, as they say, is history. The grounds of the temple are free, but there is a ¥500 fee to enter a small building (*Honnoji Takuramonokan*) on your right as you enter from Teramachi. The second floor contains items related to Nobunaga: *byobu* screens, swords, decorative scrolls, and more.

* * *

Regardless of why you stroll here, do come! It's an amazing amalgam of day-to-day stuff and goods. We saw plenty of sweets to eat and even a restaurant selling a burger made of sukiyaki, and another made from Kit-Kats. What an interesting place!

Following our time here we decided our time in Kyoto had come to an end. So, we collected our things at K's House and made our way to Kyoto Station. I hit the ATM one last time (to be sure we'd have enough cash on hand in Tokyo), we made reservations for Shinkansen Hikari (#470, 1:56pm – 4:40pm), and then we visited Mannekan Waffle one last time to procure a few goodies to bring with us on the ride back to Tokyo. And this is where you'll find us – on the Shinkansen back to Tokyo. We've just passed Shizuoka so there's still plenty of ride left to enjoy. In the meantime, we're going to tuck into this Tonkatsu bento we bought on the platform – it looks delicious!

See you in Tokyo!

Clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack...

「The Shinjuku Skyscraper District」

Monday | April 20, 2015

21,375 steps
9.98 miles

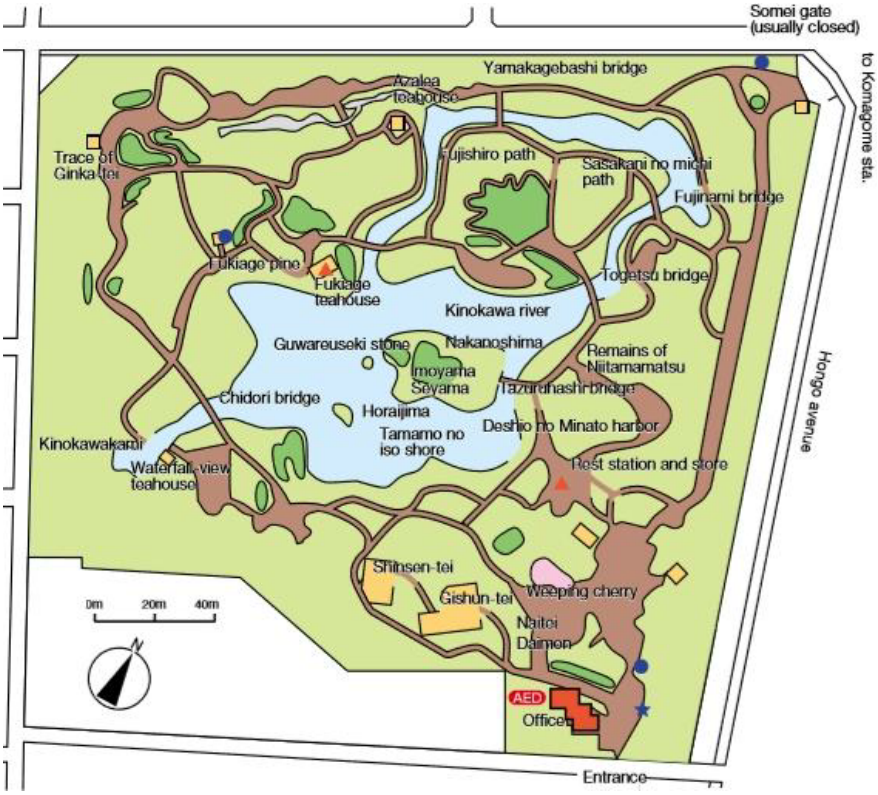
Greetings and salutations fellow travelers, or how about a good evening (*konbanwa*), does that work instead? Last we spoke we were on the Shinkansen bound for Tokyo, looking forward to getting back to the hustle and bustle of the big city. You'll be pleased to know that we made it without incident, and found ourselves once again in the auspices of Homeikan's trio of ryokans. Rather than returning to Morikawa however, we've been booked at Daimachi Bekkan, so you'll find us in Room #224 – Sachikaze (さちかぜ) – which is the name of a Japanese cucumber. Yeah, we're in the cucumber room. Go figure! We've had our bath (in the private family room) and are feeling good about ourselves and the day, despite the fact that we were supposed to be exploring Nikko today.

Nikko is a small town located about 125 kilometers north of Tokyo, most famous for Toshogu, Japan's most lavishly decorated shrine, and the mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate. (His grandson – Iemitsu – is also enshrined there.) Nikko had been a center of Shinto and Buddhist mountain worship for many centuries before Toshogu was built in the 1600s, and Nikko National Park continues to offer scenic, mountainous landscapes, lakes, waterfalls, hot springs, wild monkeys, and hiking trails. It's a place I visited in 2007 with much appreciation, and found it as nice a retreat for me as it was for the Tokugawa shoguns. It really is a beautiful area… but only if it isn't raining. (You might have already guessed by the title of today's journal that we didn't visit Nikko today.) Only after we checked the weather report for the area did we decide to forgo the day's trip and stay in the greater Tokyo area instead. It rained here too, though, but at least here in Tokyo we had multiple indoor (or underground) places where we could seek cover; not so in Nikko. We didn't remain dormant though. As a matter of fact, we had quite the busy day out at Rikugien-goen, the Studio Ghibli museum in Mitaka, walking around Shinjuku, and exploring Harajuku.

Rikugien-goen (六義園)

The sun may have tempted us awake around 5:30am but we didn't heed it. In fact, even after my watch-alarm went off at 8:00am we stayed comfortably ensconced in our futons, not wanting to stir. Only after a few more minutes of tossing and turning did we get ourselves moving and out to Rikugien-goen, just off the Tokyo Metro Komagoma Station (N-14) on the Namboku Line.

Built around the year 1700 for the 5th Tokugawa shogun (Tokugawa Tsunayoshi), Rikugien is a great example of an Edo Period strolling garden (*kaigu*-style). It features a large central pond surrounded by manmade hills and forested areas, all connected by a network of trails. Its creator, Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu (柳沢吉保), toiled for almost a decade tilling the land, creating the lake, and even procuring enough water to fill it. (It was rather flat land after all.) His ambitions paid off handsomely – *The 88 Scenic Views of Rikugien* are often considered to be Tokyo's most beautiful Japanese landscape garden.



Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu is an interesting character. He was a Japanese samurai and an official in the Tokugawa shogunate. He served Tsunayoshi from an early age, becoming his *wakashu* (although this term has many meanings, in this context Yoshiyasu became Tsunayoshi's protégé) and eventually rose to the position of *soba yōnin*. He was the *daimyo* of the Kawagoe *han*, and later of the Kofu *han*; he retired in 1709. Having previously been named Yasuakira, he received a kanji from the name of the shogun, and came to call himself Yoshiyasu. Yanagisawa played a pivotal role in the matter of the 47 Ronin. He was also quite a literature buff. The 88 "scenic views" of the garden are not just there to be pretty, but evoke 88 images of the oldest Japanese poetry anthology, the Manyôshû (万葉集).

Rikugien literally means “six poems garden”, a name derived from the six classifications of *waka* poetry (詩の六義; *shi no rikugi*): allegorical (風), enumerative (賦), metaphorical (比), allusive (興), plain (雅), and congratulatory (頌). Unfortunately only 32 of them have survived to this day, but don’t despair, they’re all labeled in modern signage, although in some cases I’m not sure why… but that’s just a personal interpretation.

After the Meiji Restoration, the gardens became the property of the Iwasaki family, founders of Mitsubishi. They were donated to Tokyo City in 1938 and opened to the public. And in March 31, 1953 they became a nationally designated scenic spot. Rikugien is quite spacious (it covers an area of 87,809.41 square-meters; yes, that precisely), and it takes about an hour to cover the garden's entire network of walking paths at a leisurely pace. The trails wind around the gardens, through forests and open lawns, and lead to several teahouses which are open to the public – none of which we partook in, but it was raining after all. Some highlights:

- **Deshio-no-Minato** – This beautifully curved shoreline hugging the garden’s large central pond is named after an ancient Japanese poem, which says: “A crane cries sadly as the moon rides and tide washes the shores of Wakanoura.”

- **Horaijima (蓬莱島)** – Arranged stones in front of the *Tamamo no Iso* is the *horaijima*, an island named after Horai, a Chinese island important in Japanese mythology. As you know, Japanese gardens typically include a body of water, several islands, bridges, meditation spots, a few human structures and many types of plants. The *horaisan* (or *horajima*) remains unconnected to any other part of the garden: it has no bridges nor does it have any paths or structures. This combination of inaccessibility with the island's beauty symbolizes the realm of happiness not available to mortals. It is thought to be built at the time of the Iwasaki family. The long and thin stone at the left side is called Garyoseki (臥龍石) although I am at a loss as to say why.

- **Nakanoshima** – There are two hills built on this central island. These represent men and women, and wishes of good relationship and prosperity of the descendants. In contrast to *horaisan*, *nakajima* refer to those islands which people may visit. They are connected to each other, and to the mainland, by bridges. The only bridge to the island is Tazunohashi Bridge, but don't make an attempt to cross it – Nakanoshima is off limits to the public.

- **Fujishiro pass** – This pass is about 35 meters high and is the highest artificial hill in the garden. It's an imitation of a similar hill – Fujishiro-toge (*Fujishiro no Misaka*) – in present day Kainan City. The views from here are spectacular.

- **Sasakani-no-michi path** – Another path named after a poem; this one says: "My beloved is to come tonight. The spider's sure movement seems to foretell it" by Sotoori Hime. A wish of eternity, to last for a long time even it may be thin like a spider's web, is expressed.

- **Azaleas** – In the Edo period, there were Somei Gardeners, who sold *someiyoshino*, right next to the Rikugien. In the Genroku period, azalea sold by them also created a gardening boom in Edo. Most popular of those were Honkirishima, a modified Rhododendron *obtusuma*. There are other rare old species of azalea in Rikugien. The Tsutsuji teahouse is a thatched teahouse built during the Iwasaki family period and is a rare building which azalea is used for pillars and joists.

Museo d'Arte Ghibli Redux

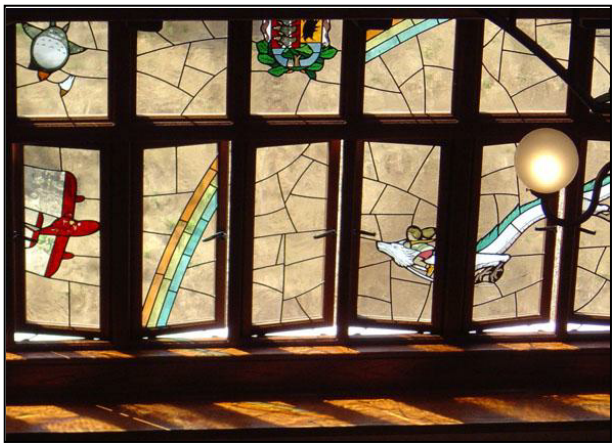
Mitaka City Flag

From the gardens we made our way to the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka, but through an unusual route. Rather than head over to Shinjuku or some other JR station, we took the Namboku metro line from Komagome through to Korakoen (and why the "take me out to the ball game chime?") and on to Lidabashi; switching to the Tozai Line there (T-6) and riding it west to the end of the line: Nakano (T-1). From there we hopped off, went through the gates, brought a JR Ticket and resumed our ride. The metro train did provide through service to Mitaka along the Chuo Line, but, we weren't sure how to go about the fare adjustment so we just did it the long way. We'd hoped to save a little on the fare – we didn't, really – but it did afford us an opportunity to pick up a snack at Nakano station, so it wasn't all in vain.

In about twenty-to-thirty minutes, we arrived. The Ghibli Museum (三鷹の森 ジブリ 美術館, *Mitaka no Mori Ghibli Bijutsukan*) is the animation and art museum of Miyazaki Hayao's Studio Ghibli, one of Japan's most famous animation studios. Located in Inokashira Park in Mitaka, a western suburb of Tokyo, the museum is a must-see for fans of these fantastic films. The museum is a fine arts museum, but does not partake in the stuffiness of that concept. Rather, it's centered around the motto "Let's become lost children together" (迷子になろうよ，いっしょに, *Maigo ni narō yo, isshoni*), or "let's lose our way together"; the museum is whimsically designed in the distinct style of the studio's films, with many features that are child-oriented and a sprawling and occasionally maze-like interior. This would be the second time we paid a visit to the museum; the 1200 meter, twenty minute walk to Miyazaki's front gates along Kichijoji Avenue was a little easier this time.

Standing proud amongst Mitaka's Inokashira Park's tall green trees is the most whimsical building – the museum. Miyazaki's aim was to make the building part of the exhibit, and he succeeded brilliantly, which seems to bubble out of the forested park with its gorgeous curves, and brilliant colors, contrasting starkly with the prefabricated buildings that exist across its street. Standing in front of a sign that says "Ghibli Museum, Mitaka", a very large Totoro welcomes you. Below him are portholes full of soot-black Dust Bunnies from "My Neighbor Totoro" and "Spirited Away". But this is not the real entrance… look where Totoro is pointing. Open the doors around the corner and welcome yourself to Ghibli wonderland!

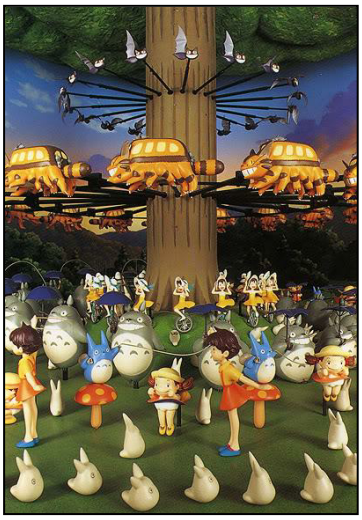
Every window and lamp is lovingly hand-crafted with beautiful and colorful stained glass using Ghibli characters, pretty plants and flowers, and forest animals. And when the sun is shining, your way is blanketed with the glass' vivid colors as they splash along the stone floors below them. Looking up, you'll find the ceiling covered in a fresco featuring a shining, smiling sun in the center of a rich, blue sky. Trees stretching up toward that sky are filled with grapes, melons, deliciously ripe fruits, and beautiful blossoms.



And if you look carefully, you may see Kiki (from "Kiki's Delivery Service"), zooming around on her broom, Nausicaa on her jet glider, or other characters zipping through the sky above you.

Upon receiving your ticket you're beckoned into the central atrium of the museum. Here a towering open space extends up through the entire height of the facility. In the glass dome at its center, a yellow whale swims in the ocean and the blades of a giant fan rotate overhead. Taking in the whole room from bottom to top, you will discover a maze of spiral stairways (which you'll find shining marbles of colored glass fitted into the ironwork), bridged passages, overhanging terraces, a giant fan rotating overhead, and in the glass dome at its center, a yellow whale swimming in the ocean. This marvelous space instantly transports you into the world of Hayao Miyazaki, and the strange buildings which often appear in his films. Since we've been here before – and I discussed the museum at length last time – I'll just share the highlights of what you'll see should you choose to visit…

The Highlights

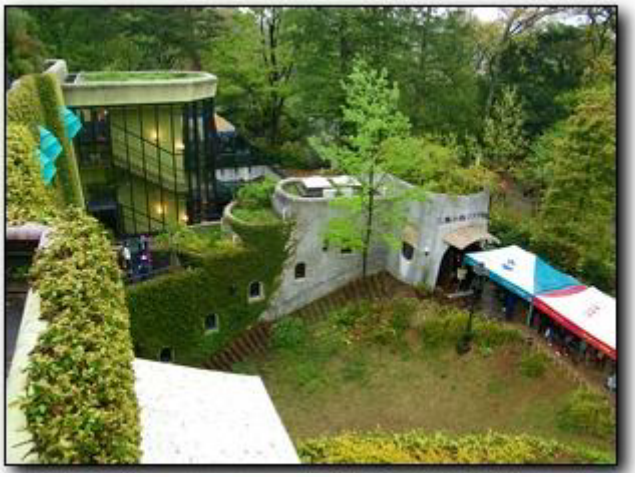


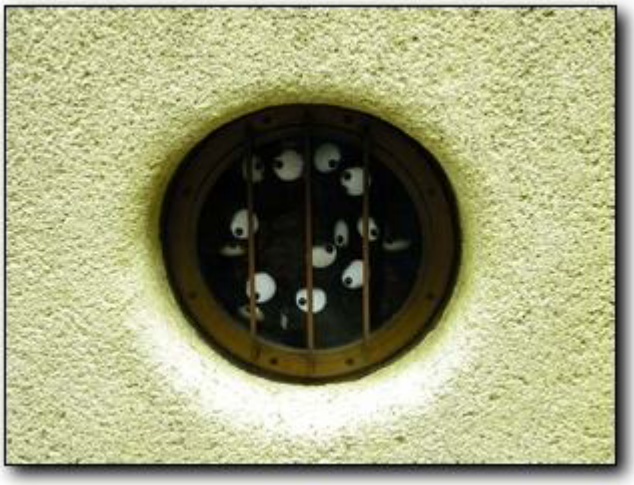
- **Bouncing Totoro**: The history and science of animation is on exhibit on the bottom floor, featuring a three dimensional zoetrope as its centerpiece. A flickering stroboscope flashes in time with the rotating modules of the Cat Bus, Satsuki, Mei and various Totoro, each in a slightly different pose, arranged in rings, illuminating each as they pass the same spot (counter-clockwise), creating an illusion of movement (clockwise) that shows how animation works as a series of quick-timed shots.

- **Where a Film is Born**, is an amazing room, filled with books and toys (references used in making the films). The walls are all covered with illustrations and sketches (actual storyboards from a wide variety of their most celebrated films), and hanging from the ceiling are models of all sorts. With a little bit of an idea and a flash of inspiration, after walking through its five rooms, you should have a firm idea how a film-maker struggles with his work and ultimately completes the film (from sketching, storyboarding, key-framing, cleanup, coloring, background painting, and more.)
- **Tri Hawks**, a pun on the name of the city Mitaka, which literally translates to "three hawks", is a reading room and bookstore. It was created to communicate the Museum's wish to have children see, touch, and feel strange and mysterious things through books.

- The **Cat Bus** is waiting for you in a room on the second floor. This room is phenomenal; a slightly downsized version of the Cat Bus from "My Neighbor Totoro" fills the room while a bunch of soot-black Dust Bunnies accompany, just waiting to be played with. Unfortunately only those twelve and under can take a ride here…
- From the terrace off the Cat Bus Room, a spiral stairway leads to the roof, and there you will find the museum's grassy **Rooftop Garden**. From this lofty post, a serene five-meter tall Robot Soldier (from "Laputa: Castle in the Sky") looks down on Inokashira Park. But have no fear – he's a gentle giant. The keystone from the movie "Castle in the Sky" can also be found nearby, on a path behind the robot soldier.

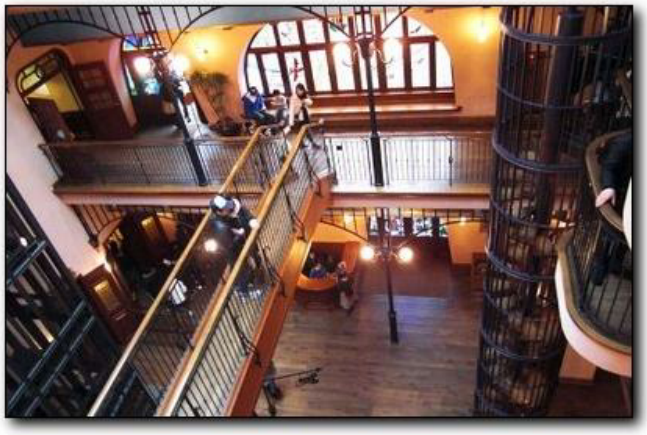
And, of course, there's a Café (**Straw Hat Café**) and a Gift Shop (**Mamma Aiuto**).





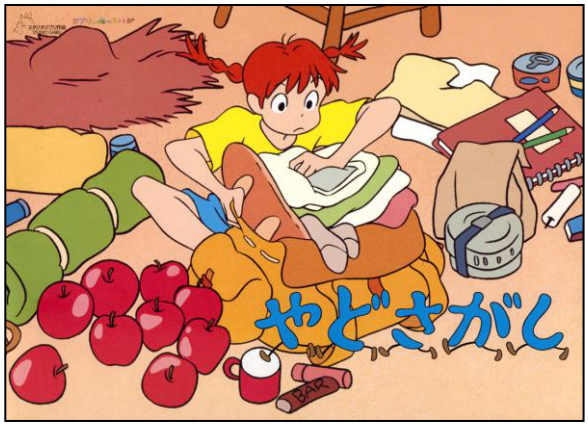
The Saturn Theater

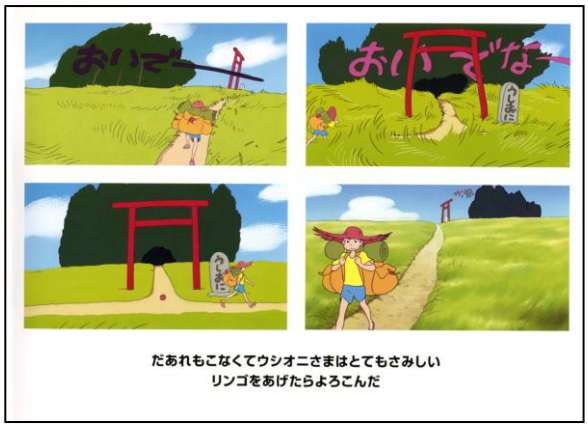
Besides the exhibits, library, café, and store, the Ghibli Museum is also known for one other important thing – its film theater. Right there on the first floor is where Studio Ghibli showcases some of its short-films – the only place in the world many of these can be seen. Shorts on the reel are: “Koro’s Big Walk” (コロの大さんぽ), “Water Spider Monmon” (水グモもんもん), “Mei and the Kittenbus” (めいとこねこバス), “The Day I Harvested a Star” (星をかった日), “The Whale Hunt” (くじらとり), “Looking for a Home” (やどさがし), “A Sumo Wrestler’s Tail” (ちゅうずもう), “Mr. Dough and the Egg Princess” (パン種とタマゴ姫), and “Treasure Hunt” (たからさがし). Last time we had the honor and privilege of partaking in a projection of “Mei and the Kittenbus”. This time we were shown “Yadosagashi”, or “Looking for a Home”. Also known as “House Hunting”, it, like “Mei and the Kittenbus”, was written, directed, and produced by Hayao Miyazaki for the museum.



The short 12-minute film features Fuki, a girl living in a big, noisy, and polluted city, setting out with a big rucksack in high spirits on a journey into the countryside to look for a new home. Along her way, Fuji encounters and befriends numerous manifestations of the natural world, from fish to insects to kami (all of which she appeases with apples from her rucksack). When it begins to storm, Fuji seeks shelter in a nearby cabin. Inside are cacophonies of insects that become instantly enthralled with their new visitor. Unperturbed, Fuki shares her tea and ramen with them, who leave her in peace when she needs a rest. By morning she’s awakened by a Totoro-style spirit, who safely sees her on her way. Or something like that. All the sound effects in this film were done by human voice.

This short film contains little to no spoken Japanese, and the story is conveyed almost entirely through art and sound effects. Sound is also depicted on screen as animated writing (in onomatopoeia). It was cute!





We left the museum soon thereafter, but before departing I picked up a few over-sized post cards of some of the more recognizable spots around the museum (since pictures inside are forbidden), and also a “Mei to Konekobasu” book for us to translate later. The museum was certainly a treat once again and well worth the added hurdle of procuring tickets: picking a date well in advance and having vouchers mailed to us. It was simply one of the best museums ever. A total treat and one I recommend you visit if you’re ever in the Tokyo area, especially if you’re a fan of Studio Ghibli films. You can’t let it pass you by! (And say hi to Totoro out front for us!)

Momochi Onigiri, Take Two

With our visit to the Ghibli Museum having come to an end, we moved on to our next exploration excursion in Harajuku. However, since the rail route would take us through Shinjuku station, we thought we'd give locating Momochi Onigiri a second try. And to help us in this endeavor, before we even left Homeikan this morning, I made sure we noted the shop's exact address. The moment we arrived in Shinjuku we set out on foot in the high hopes we'd locate the store in no time. But Shinjuku is a really big place.

Did You Know?

Shinjuku is often known as the "second center of Tokyo", or fukutoshin (副都心), which is where the Fukutoshin Line (F) – that runs through Shinjuku from Ikebukuro to Shibuya – gets its name.

Shinjuku (新宿) is one of the twenty-three special wards of Tokyo, with an estimated population of 340,000 people covering a total area of just over eighteen square-kilometers, but the name commonly refers to just the large entertainment, business, and shopping area located atop its large railway station complex. Shinjuku Station is an immense terminal with a concentration of various rail lines: the JR Chuo, Yamanote, Sobu and Saikyo lines; the Toei Shinjuku and Oedo Subway lines; and private railways such as the Odakyu, Keio and Seibu Shinjuku lines. Handling over four million passengers every single day, Shinjuku not only bills itself as the world's busiest railway station, it has the statistics to back it up (and registered as such with Guinness World Records)! The station itself has 36 platforms, including an underground arcade, an above ground arcade, and numerous hallways. Another 17 platforms there are well over 200 exits. Another 17 platforms (for a total of 51) can be accessed through hallways to 5 directly connected stations, without surfacing outside. In addition to the traffic the railways bring to the area, Shinjuku is also one of Tokyo's major stops for long-distance highway and city buses, and taxis. So the area is quite chaotic!

Shinjuku Ward

Historically speaking, Shinjuku can trace its ancestry (if you will) back to the early 1600's when, during the period, a number of temples and shrines moved to this area of Edo. The area slowly began to build and became a new (*shin*) station (*juku*) on the Koshu Kaido, one of the five major highways of that era – and the name stuck. (*We learned all about the Five Routes, or the Gokaido – the five centrally administered routes that connected the capital of Japan with the outer provinces – when we visited Nihonbashi in 2013. So I'll spare you the lecture*.) The station was also known as Naito-Shinjuku, so named after the local family – Naito – who had a mansion that stood in the area (whose land, consequently, is now a public park – the Shinjuku-gyoen – which we also visited in 2013). By the early twentieth century, the town of Naito-Shinjuku, which comprised large parts of present-day Shinjuku, was integrated into Tokyo City. The area as a whole began to develop into its current form after the Great Kanto earthquake in 1923, since the seismically stable area largely escaped the devastation. (It's why you'll find many skyscrapers here – the land is stable.) The air raids during World War II destroyed over 90% of the buildings in the area. So much of what you see here was rebuilt after the War. The present Ward was established on March 15, 1947 and since that time has gone on to become Tokyo's second center and the location of Tokyo's Metropolitan Government.

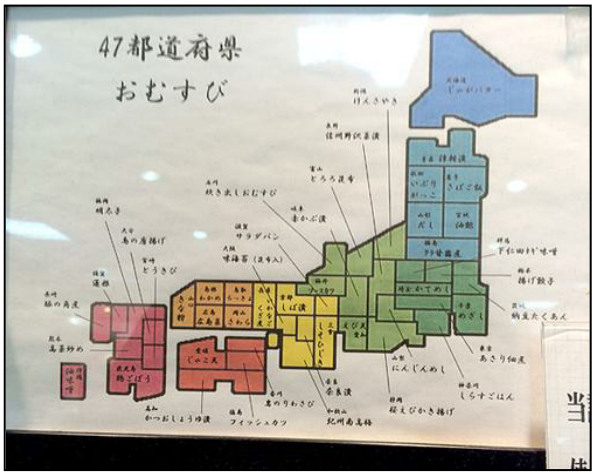
No matter which direction you walk in from any of Shinjuku station's multitude of exits (there's over 200 of them), you'll find a different Tokyo.

The east side of Shinjuku is devoted to nightlife in all forms, and includes Tokyo's largest red-light district – Kabukicho (歌舞伎町). Named after a kubuki theater whose construction plans have never been realized, Japan's largest red light district features countless restaurants, bars (host, hostess, themed, or otherwise), nightclubs, pachinko halls, massage parlors, love hotels, and a wide variety of sexual establishments for all genders and sexual orientations. It's really old Tokyo at its "finest", or at least rawest, so do be careful should you venture down here after dark. While the area may be known as the "Sleepless Town" (眠らない街), it's not for the faint hearted. Watch your wallet. And don't under any circumstances be led into one of the establishments against your better judgment. You never know what kind of mischief you're being led into! The area west of Shinjuku Station is by and large much more approachable. It is home to a large number of skyscrapers including the gargantuan Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, the curved form and webbed façade of the Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower, and leading hotels such as the Keio Plaza, Hilton, Hyatt Regency and Park Hyatt (featured in Lost in Translation). Several of the skyscrapers have shops and restaurants on their ground floors and additional restaurants with great views of the city on their top floors. Many department stores are also in this area, including Keio, Lumine, Takashimaya, and Odakyu. And to the north lies nearby Ōkubo (大久保), one stop west of Shinjuku on the Chuo line (also Shin-Ōkubo, on the Yamanote), has many Korean-owned restaurants and grocery stores. Takadanobaba (高田馬場), the next stop on the Yamanote Line after Shin-Ōkubo, is popular with students from nearby Waseda University.

The address we had in hand suggested we head west – again.

All we had to go on was Nishi 1-1-3. Searching for a location by address is very difficult in Japan don't you know? Addresses in neighborhoods are noted by a Section (丁目; *chome*) and Block (番地; *banchi*). Houses/buildings are then assigned Numbers (番; *ban*) by the order in which they were built, not by any logical numbering scheme. Therefore, it is possible to have a

building with a ban number of 20 next to one with a ban number of 1. This is why many Japanese don't rely on the actual physical address of locations when giving directions, rather, they provide cross streets and landmarks. Even so, there's some logical order to it all… just not one that's apparent at first glance. And not one that's easy to navigate when you're walking all around a part of Tokyo you've never really walked around before. To make a long story short: after walking block after block, ducking into buildings we knew not what, going below ground and back above it – in the rain of course – we eventually found Momochi Onigiri. Wouldn't you know it was in the first place we looked when we arrived in Tokyo two weeks ago? Yep! Odakyu Department Store! Second-Level Basement! We couldn't believe it.



Oh, sure, we got a tour of the neighborhood, a lesson in Japanese addresses (self-taught), and a nice story to tell, but once we finally found the store we were in no mood to attempt to order anything, so we pushed on for Harajuku via the Yamanote Line.

Harajuku (原宿)

Harajuku refers to the area around Tokyo's Harajuku Station (原宿駅), which you'll find between Shinjuku and Shibuya on the Yamanote Line. Today it's known as the center of Japan's most extreme teenage culture and fashion styles (such as Lolita, punk, gothic, and hip-hop), but during the Edo period, the area was nothing more than a small post town on the Kamakura Highway. It became a little more famous when, during the Gosannen War, the Iga clan spirited *Ieyasu Tokugawa* away to safety when *Minamoto no Yoshiie* mustered his soldiers here in an attempt to kill the Shogun. The surrounding lands were then gifted to the Iga clan as a reward for their loyalty, and thus became home to the clan's residence.

(The Iga clan is synonymous with *ninja*, as many of their male members were professionally trained in covert arts.) At the start of the Meiji Restoration, the land around Harajuku (including the towns and villages of Shibuya) were placed under the jurisdiction of the Tokyo Prefecture sparking the modern age. The Yamanote Line, which we used to get here, was established in 1906; Meiji-jingu, which we'd visited earlier in our trip, was established after that (in 1919). The area was virtually leveled – burned to the ground – during World War II, but recovered relatively quickly afterwards. During the post-war occupation, military housing was constructed on land now occupied by Yoyogi Park, and shops that appealed to the US soldiers and their families, such as Kiddyland and Oriental Bazaar, opened along Omotesando during this period. It's grown into what you see today ever since then.

So with the rain letting up significantly, we alighted at Harajuku station and set off on foot.

The focal point of Harajuku's culture mélange is ***Takeshita-dori*** (竹下通り) a narrow 400-meter long pedestrian-only path lined by many trendy shops, fashion boutiques, used clothes stores, crepe stands, and fast food outlets geared towards those fashion and trend conscious teens. Although these days it seems the area has become more of a tourist trap than a genuine trend-filled area, Harajuku offers shopping for adults and some historic sights, so it's still an interesting part of Tokyo to visit.

The most well-known (and therefore crowded) part of Takeshita is the segment that runs between Harajuku station and Meiji-dori, and most people who visit here think that's where it all ends… but it doesn't. *Takeshita-dori* actually continues on for several more blocks, finally coming to an end on some perpendicular street that runs alongside Omotesando Hills. But that's okay… most of what you're looking for is within the first segment anyway, like Daiso – the 100 Yen shop. This is one of the largest 100 Yen Shops in central Tokyo, offering a wide variety of (obviously cheap) goods, including clothing, kitchenware, food and stationary on multiple floors for, yep, just 100 Yen.

Did You Know?

Opened in 2006, Omotesando Hills consists of six floors (three are underground) of about 100 upmarket shops, cafes, restaurants and beauty salons. The shopping complex is Omotesando's most prominent establishment, stretching along about one quarter of the avenue. Apartments are located above the shops.

Just south of Takeshita-dori and over twice its length is **Omotesando**, a broad, tree lined avenue sometimes referred to as Tokyo's Champs-Elysees. Referred to as Tokyo's Champs-Elysees, Omotesando is a one kilometer long, tree lined avenue, serving as the main approach to Meiji Shrine. Numerous stores, boutiques, cafes and restaurants, including several leading fashion brand shops, stand along the avenue. This area generally caters to an older, wealthier and more adult clientele than the rest of Harajuku. But even amongst the high-end fashion boutiques you'll find such treasures as The Oriental Bazaar and KIDDY LAND. We visited both.

Decorated accordingly for each season, **KIDDY LAND** offers a variety of year-round available toys, as well as seasonal ones such as Halloween, Valentines and White Day-themed items. They have a fantastic selection of toys and other products to amuse kids of all ages. Everything cute and undeniably *kawaii* can be found here: from Sanrio, San-x, Ghibli and Miffy, to Mediocomtoy, Blythe and Pullip. You can even find some cute Doraemon goods, magical Disney gifts, Rilakkuma, and even some special brand collaborations like Eva x Hello Kitty. KIDDY LAND is a Tokyo institution. The main Harajuku shop is a noisy, heaving maze of mascots, dolls, cuddly toys, furry toys, action figures, Moomin, Gundam, Godzilla and more. There are five floors of it! It's a total kawaii-overload, but it's worth every moment! KIDDY LAND is definitely an all-in-one souvenir shop where all your fandoms and *kawaii* characters collide.

The Oriental Bazaar had its beginnings back in 1916, with the opening of a small antique shop. Overseas customers began visiting the shop to catch glimpses into the everyday life of old Japan. In 1951 they moved to the current location in Omotesando, re-establishing themselves as a souvenir shop for the residents of Washington Heights, the neighboring U.S. Army barracks, and the rest is history. It's become quite popular with tourists from all countries, and is stocked with your typical Japanese souvenirs: kimono, tableware, lamps, dolls, furniture, *furoshiki*, and other knick-knacks. The shop sports three floors but we hardly found it impressive. Gaudy is what I'd call it (the outside is modeled after shrine architecture), but it does exist for the tourist dollar!

* * *

After browsing through the bazaar, we made one final stop before returning to Homeikan – in Shinjuku. But rather than take the Fukutoshin Line (which runs deep underground and takes you through a hellish maze of corridors upon arrival, which we discovered the last time we were in the area), we made a hop along the Chiyoda Line at Meiji-jingu-mae (C-3) to Omote-Sando Station (C-4) and then skipped over to the Ginza Line (G-2) to make our arrival into Shibuya (G-1). The Ginza Line's Shibuya terminal is much easier to navigate, and quickly deposits riders at the famous crossing – so long as you exit the right door. Way better than that Futukoshin nonsense! In either case, we came to Shibuya for one thing: the Disney Store. After not finding it the night before (yeah, after we got back to Tokyo from Kyoto we ventured out), we tried again today.

In fact I made sure to look up its location at Homeikan's computers before leaving this morning, so we walked right up to it. I wanted to see if they had any Baymax stuff that was unique to Japan, but they had absolutely nothing – I was shocked! So we left presently and returned to the station. In the span of a few minutes the weather turned from calm to stormy, so we decided to head back here – to Homeikan – grabbing McDonald's from the Bunkyo stand (Quarter Pounders), and taking a respite here.

It was yuuuuuumy!

Our return to Homeikan was to be temporary, alas the bad weather had not subsided so we canceled our Akiba walkabout. As such our last night in Japan is a bit subdued. But we've got to get organized yet, and there's always a nice hot bath to look forward to. So it's not all bad, right? We'll get a few more hours yet around Tokyo in the morning before we leave for home. So there's that.

Until then.
Ja ne!

関東地方 | 東京府 {Kanto / Tokyo}

「さようなら, 日本. じゃ また こんど ね!」

Tuesday | April 21, 2015

13,240 steps
6.18 miles

Well, fellow travelers, this is it. Our time here in Japan has come to a close. We're officially done now; on board the N'EX heading toward Narita as we speak. If all goes as planned, our plane will depart later this afternoon – around 5:30pm Tokyo time – and deposit us rather unceremoniously back in the United States some fourteen grueling hours later. Although not overly excited about being cooped up in an aluminum can flying through the air for that length of time, we are looking forward to getting home. We really are. Our time here has been fun, despite the rainy weather, but we're ready for dryer climes too, and the familiarity of home.

You know how to say goodbye in Japanese, right? *Sayonara*! Believe it or not, Japanese people don't really say that to one another. Although s*ayonara* (さようなら) may be the direct Japanese equivalent of saying goodbye, it's not commonly used by native Japanese speakers because *sayonara* has a strong sense of finality to it. *Sayonara* means there's a good chance you might not be meeting again for quite some time, if ever. So saying *sayonara* to a boss or loved one may leave them feeling confused or upset. And if you've learned out to speak Japanese conscientiously and behave tactfully in tune with Japanese etiquette, you definitely don't want to offend now. Of course, neither do the Japanese, so they've come up with a number of ways to say goodbye without really meaning to say goodbye, all based on certain social situations.

If you are leaving your home, you should say ***itte kimasu*** (行って来ます), which literally means "I'm going". It's usually shouted out as you slip your shoes on in the *genkan* (玄関), the entranceway of your home. The usual response is *itte rashai* (行ってらっしゃい), or "go and come back" by those remaining in the house. In the office, you'd say ***osaki ni shitsurei shimasu*** (お先に失礼します), or excuse me for leaving first. It is well known that Japanese people work long hours. There might be a mad rush to the door when it is time to finish work in western countries, but in Japan people will usually keep working away at their desk.
Eventually even they need leave the office, so people politely excuse themselves from leaving, which they do using the phrase above. You can also just say the abbreviated form – *osakini* (お先

に) – but only to close colleagues, never your boss. And, naturally, there's a general response expected from those who are remaining in the office: ***otsukaresama deshita*** (お疲れ様でした), or thank you for your hard work.

There are also many phrases that relate to the time you will meet the person again, such as ***mata ashita*** (また明日) or ***mata raishu*** (また来週) – see you tomorrow and see you next week respectively. They are still considered casual forms, so they shouldn't be used as a replacement for the more formal phrases discussed above. Though, just before New Year, you will get a few laughs from your friends if you say *mata rainen* (また来年) – see you next year! For those who might be leaving temporarily, like going on holiday, you could say ***ki wo tsukete*** (気をつけて), or take care. If someone is going on a longer trip, or moving to a different place, you'd say ***genki de*** (元気で) – "take care of yourself" or "all the best". And if someone is sick you'd probably want to say ***odaiji ni*** (お大事に), or get well soon.

With friends you can be more casual, of course. You can say ***ja ne*** (じゃあね) or *mata ne* (またね), which basically means "see you". It's the phrase I commonly use to close out each day's entry. But you'll also hear younger people – especially girls – use the English phrase ***bai-bai*** (バイバイ) to part ways. Or you might even hear ***saraba da*** (さらばだ), a very old expression (think samurai times) for saying goodbye. The closest equivalent expression is "adios!" so it's not something you would ever say to your boss, but you could use it as a joke amongst close friends. Or, you could say what I did… ***gokigenyo, mata kondo ne*** – which translates to fare-thee-well, until next time! Even though we are a little subdued here on the train, we did have a pretty decent morning. After bidding our goodbye's at Homeikan (and having our picture taking on the steps by its proprietor), we stashed away our luggage in a pair of lockers at Tokyo station, then set off toward the shrine known as Yasukuni.

Yasukuni (靖國神社), a Shrine to Summon the Souls

Sitting right in the middle of Tokyo, in Chiyoda-ku, just off the Kudanshita station along the Tozai (T7), Hanzomon (Z6), and Shinjuku (S5) lines, is the rather large, and somewhat controversial, Yasukuni shrine (靖國神社). Founded by the will of the Emperor in 1869, it is where the *kami* of some 2,466,532 men, women, and children who have died in service to the Empire of Japan (the country's name from the time of the Meiji Restoration until the nation was renamed during the Allied Occupation in 1947, following the end of World War II) – in the Boshin War, the Satsuma Rebellion, the First Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, the First World War, the Manchurian Incident, the Second Sino-Japanese War, and the Pacific War (WWII) – are enshrined in the form of written records, which note name, origin, and date and place of death of everyone enshrined. What you'll find here isn't just one structure, but a complex of buildings that include the Main Hall and the Hall of Worship – both built in the simple, unadorned style of the ancient Shinto shrines at Ise – as well as a museum of documents and war memorabilia, a Noh theater, a Sumo Ring, and more.

The site, previously known as Tokyo Shokonsha (東京招魂社, "shrine to summon the souls"), was chosen on order of and named by Emperor Meiji in the wake of the Boshin War (the civil war between forces of the ruling Tokugawa shogunate and those seeking to return political power to the imperial court) in order to honor the souls of those who died fighting for the Emperor (who, of course, won that battle and ushered in the Meiji Restoration – the restoration of practical imperial rule over Japan.) It initially served as the "apex" of a network of similar shrines throughout the country that had originally been established for the souls of various feudal lords' retainers, and which continued to enshrine local individuals who died in the Emperor's service. In 1879, the shrine was renamed Yasukuni-jinja after a qhote from the classical-era Chinese text Zuo Zhuan (Scroll 6, 23rd Year of Duke Xi) – 「吾以靖国也」- which literally means "Pacifying the Nation" and was chosen by the Meiji Emperor.

The shrine did not attract much attention until around 1979, when it was revealed that 1,068 war criminals – 14 of whom are considered Class-A – had been secretly enshrined there a year earlier. Emperor Hirohito, who visited the shrine at the time, was privately displeased with the action, and subsequently refused to visit the shrine again. No Emperor of Japan has visited Yasukuni since 1975, but the Emperor and Empress continue to attend the National Memorial Service for War Dead annually. Many Asian governments, particularly those of South Korea, China and Taiwan, regard the memorial as a glorified relic of Japanese imperialism and atrocities committed in the name of the emperor. (They suffered greatly under Japanese colonialism.) Furthermore, visitations by several Japanese prime ministers and cabinet members since 1975 have caused concerns given that the Japanese constitution expressly renounces both militarism and state sponsorship of religion. And so it goes…

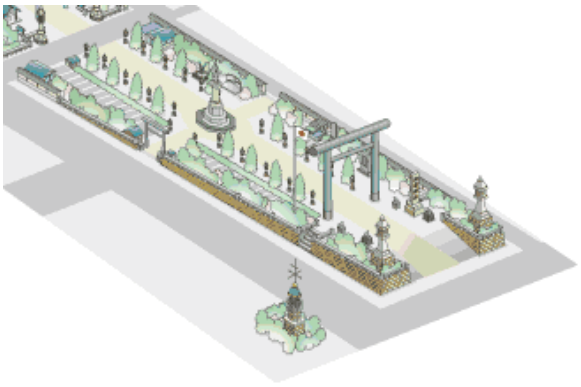
Did You Know?

A tribunal was convened following World War II to try the leaders of the Empire of Japan for three types of war crimes: "Class A" crimes were reserved for those who participated in a joint conspiracy to start and wage war, and were brought against those in the highest decision-making bodies; "Class B" crimes were reserved for those who committed "conventional" atrocities or crimes against humanity; "Class C" crimes were reserved for those in "the planning, ordering, authorization, or failure to prevent such transgressions at higher levels in the command structure".

Now that's about as much I as I knew about Yasukuni before today – and only that much because I'd planned to visit the shrine the last time we were in Japan (it's one of Tokyo's best cherry blossom sites – in fact, the 600 or so *somei yoshino* and *yamazakura* cherries that you'll find here were planted back in 1870. And each year the Japan Meteorological Agency bases its cherry blossom flowering forecasts on them.) We'd hoped to see the cherries blooming on our previous visit but when we had arrived late we re-arranged our schedule, which precluded us from visiting Yasukuni then. But with little desire to stray too far from central Tokyo on this, our final day here, visiting Yasukuni now was perfect.

The shrine is made up of a number of districts, or precincts in shrine parlance (which we all should be up on by now, don't you think?): the approach, the outer shrine, the inner shrine, the garden, the ancillary monuments, and the Yushukan.

<u>Approach</u>



Let's start with, most logically, the approach.

Perhaps the first things your eyes will be drawn to as you make your way toward the shrine are the two large stone lanterns that mark the beginning of the four-hectare long main approach. You'll find them atop a set of rather high stone walls that flank either side of the walkway – it too rather overly wide (if you ask me). But don't miss the tall stone lantern that peeks up over the tree-line across *uchibori-dori* – it is part of the shrine too.

Called the ***Jotomyodai*** (常燈明台), or Lighthouse of Kudan Hill, it's an interesting combination of western architecture with Japanese traditional elements. Take the elevated walkway across this busy roadway to reach it, and when you do you'll find the lower contingent is similar to what you'd find in Japanese castles (the fan-sloping walls) while the upper, octagonal-cylindrical part, is more typical of Atlantic seaboard lighthouses. That's because after the Meiji Restoration, a large number of Western-style buildings started to make their appearance here, blending the best of what each culture has to offer. The lighthouse was built for the Tokyo Shokonsha, the forerunner of Yasukuni, but as the light was visible from Tokyo Bay and Sumida River in those days, it is said to have served as an aid of navigation. The tower stands at the top of the Kudan-zaka (九段坂) slope – just a rather large hill in the area – hence its name.

Further in you'll pass the **Shagou Hyou (社号標)**, the large stone pillar the shrine's name is carved in. (Notice that it's spelled using obsolete (pre-war) *kyujitai* character forms - 靖國神社) and the shrine's first huge stone torii – the **Daiichi Torii**. This large steel structure was the largest torii in Japan when it was first erected in 1921. Described in a poem as "the great gate that seems to pierce the sky", it was very popular amongst the populace. However, due to damage caused by exposure to wind and rain, the gate was removed in 1943. The present version stands just 25 meters tall and 34 meters wide. The **Hitachi Maru** (常陸丸) was a 6,172 gross ton combined passenger-cargo ship built by Mitsubishi Shipbuilding in Nagasaki, for NYK Lines in 1898 and you'll find a monument to the ship on the right, just past the gate. Hitachi Maru was placed into service with NYK on its European routes for almost six years. In February 1904, she was requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Army to transport men and war materials from Japan to ports in Korea and Manchuria in support of the Russo-Japanese War. While transporting 1,238 people, including 727 men of the 1st Reserve Regiment of the Imperial Guard of Japan and 359 men from the IJA 10th Division and 18 Krupp 11-inch (280 mm) siege howitzers, she was shelled and sunk by the Imperial Russian Navy armored cruiser Gromoboi in the southern Korean Strait between the Japanese mainland and Tsushima in what has been come to be called the "Hitachi Maru Incident" (常陸丸事件). Their lives are honored here in this monument.

Dominating the center of the causeway is the **Statue of Omura Masujiro**.

Omura Masujiro (1824-1869), was born in what is now part of Yamaguchi city, in the former Choshu Domain, where his father was a rural physician. From a young age Omura had a strong interest in learning and medicine, travelling to Osaka to study *rangaku* under the direction of Ogata Kōan at his Tekijuku academy of western studies when he was twenty-two. He continued his education in Nagasaki under the direction of German physician Philipp Franz von Siebold, the first European to teach Western medicine in Japan. His interest in Western military tactics was sparked in the 1850s and it was this interest that led Omura to become a valuable asset after the Meiji Restoration in the creation of Japan's modern army. Omura not only introduced modern western weaponry, but he also introduced the concept of military training for both samurai and commoners. The concept was highly controversial, but Omura was vindicated when his troops routed the all-samurai army of the Shogunate in the Second Choshu Expedition of 1866. These same troops also formed the core of the armies of the Satcho Alliance at the Battle of Toba-Fushimi, Battle of Ueno, and other battles of the Boshin War of the Meiji Restoration from 1867-1868.

Did You Know?

Rangaku (蘭学), literally "Dutch Learning", and by extension "Western Learning", is a body of knowledge developed by Japan through its contacts with the Dutch enclave of Dejima, which allowed Japan to keep abreast of Western technology and medicine in the period when the country was closed to foreigners. Through Rangaku, some people in Japan learned many aspects of the scientific and technological revolution occurring in Europe at that time, helping the country build up the beginnings of a theoretical and technological scientific base, which helps to explain Japan's success in its radical and speedy modernization following the opening of the country to foreign trade in 1854.

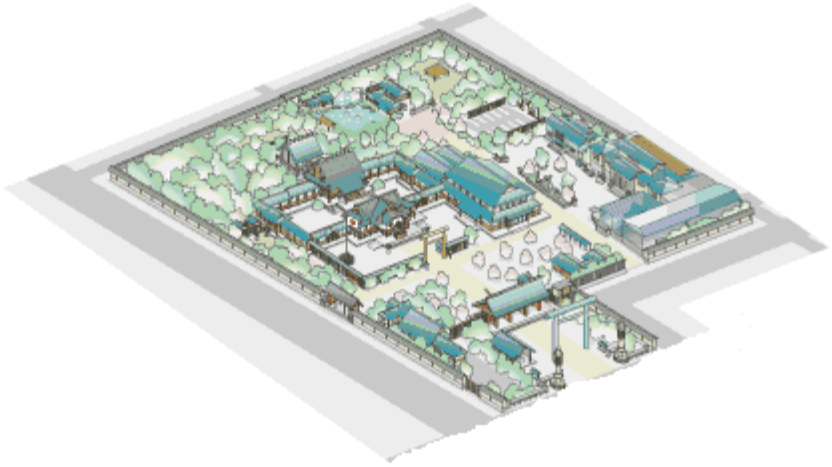
After the Meiji Restoration, the government recognized the need for a stronger military force that placed their loyalty in the central government as opposed to individual domains. Under the new Meiji government, Ōmura was appointed to a post equivalent to the role of Vice Minister of War in the newly created Army-Navy Ministry. In this role, Omura was tasked with the creation of a national army along western lines. Omura sought to duplicate the policies he had previously successfully implemented in Choshu on a larger scale, namely, the introduction of conscription and military training for commoners, rather than reliance on a hereditary feudal force. He also strongly supported the discussions towards the abolition of the *han* system, and with it, the numerous private armies maintained by the *daimyo*, which he considered a drain on resources and a potential threat to security. During a council meeting in June 1869, Omura argued that if "the government was determined to become militarily independent and powerful, it was necessary to abolish the fiefs and the feudal armies, to do away with the privileges of the *samurai* class, and to introduce universal military conscription."

Omura's ideal military consisted of an army patterned after that of the Napoleonic French armies and a navy that was patterned after the British Royal Navy. He faced opposition from many of his peers, including most conservative samurai who saw his ideas on modernizing and reforming the Japanese military as too radical. What Omura was advocating was not only ending the livelihood of thousands of *samurai*, but also the end of their privileged position in society. It was the opposition of some of these samurai that led to his demise in the late 1860s.

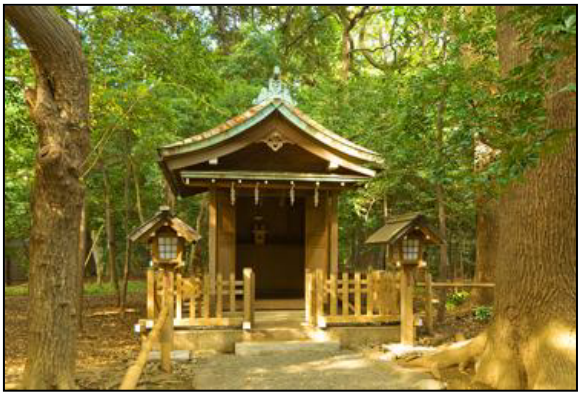
While in the Kansai region looking at sites for future military schools in September 1869, Omura was attacked at an inn in Kyoto by eight disgruntled ex-samurai, ironically, mostly from Choshu. Wounded in several places, he barely escaped with his life by hiding in a bath full of dirty water. The wounds on his leg would not heal, and although he had traveled to Osaka to get a leg amputation, before the operation could be performed, he died of his wounds. Omura's assassins were soon apprehended and sentenced to death, but were reprieved due to political pressure at the last moment by government officials who shared their views that Omura's reforms were an affront to the samura i class. They were executed a year later. The statue appeared here in 1893 and is in fact the first Western-style statue in all of Japan. You can't miss it.

One monument you might miss if you're not looking for it is the **Irei-no-Izumi**, or soul-comforting spring. This modern looking monument is a spring dedicated to those who suffered from or died of thirst in battle.

Outer Shrine



As soon as you pass through the **Daini Torii** (*Seido Otorii*) or second shrine gate, you're in the outer precinct. This gate was built out of bronze in 1887 to replace a wooden one which had been erected earlier. In fact, it's the biggest bronze torii in Japan. Immediately following the Daini Torii is the **shinmon** (神門). A 6-meter tall *hinoki* cypress gate, it was first built in 1934 and restored in 1994. Each of its two doors bears a Chrysanthemum Crest measuring 1.5 meters in diameter. To the left is the **Otemizusha** (大手水舎), or main purification font. This basin was presented to Yasukuni in 1940 by Japanese residents of the United States. It's made of granite and weighs more than 18 tons. Before you press on to pay your respects at the main hall within the inner precinct, please rinse your hands and mouth here. Use the cup to scoop out water and clean your hand, then use the scoop again to put a small pool of water into your cleaned hand to rinse your mouth out with. Do not take a drink from the scoop! Other items of note just beyond the gate are the **Dove Cote**, where almost 500 doves live (stand still for a moment and you'll spot a few hanging out in the trees above your head), and the **Nogakudo**. Built in Shiba Park in 1881, this Noh Theater was presented and moved to Yasukuni in 1903.



Noh dramas and traditional Japanese dances are performed on its stage from time to time, but today the shrine was displaying samurai sword skills as part of the it's spring festival. Walking further in, and to the extreme left, are two other interesting – and virtually hidden – tributes: the **Chinreisha**, or Spirit-Pacifying shrine), which was built in 1965 to console the souls of everyone who died in wars fought anywhere in the world; and the **Motomiya** (元宮), a small shrine that was originally established in Kyoto, in secret, by sympathizers of imperial loyalists killed during the upheaval that arose in the early days of the Meiji Restoration. Seventy years later, in 1931, it was moved here. It's called Motomiya, or the original shrine, because it was the prototype of what later became Yasukuni – if you can believe that!

Inner Shrine & Garden

Through the wooden **Chumon** (中門鳥居) gate (rebuilt in 2006 out of cypress harvested in Saitama Prefecture) and you've entered the inner sanctum. This is where you'll find the Honden, Haiden, and many other important religious structures of the traditional Shinto shrine. The first building you'll come to is the **Haiden**, the main hall, is where worshipers come to pray. Originally built in 1901, in styles of *irimoya-zukuri*, *hirairi*, and *doubanbuki* (copper roofing), the building was last renovated in 1989. Behind it is the Honden, the main shrine, where the enshrined deities reside.

Built in 1872, like the Haiden, it was last refurbished in 1989. Inside is where the shrine's priests perform their rituals, so the building is generally closed to the public. (We didn't get a peek either.) The building located on the right side of haiden is the **Sanshuden** (参集殿), or the Assembly Hall. Reception and waiting rooms are available for individuals and groups who wish to worship in the Main Shrine. The building located directly behind the Sanshuden is the **Tochakuden** (到着殿), or Reception Hall. And directly behind the Honden is a building known as the Reijibo Hoanden (霊璽簿奉安殿), the repository for the symbolic registers of divinities – a fancy way of saying a handmade Japanese paper document that lists the names of all the *kami* enshrined and worshiped at the shrine. It is the most important building here.

Around back is the shrine's strolling garden. Despite its rather small size, the **Sinchi Teien** (神池庭園) is one of the most celebrated in Japan. It is a strolling garden, and its centerpiece is a waterfall setting so serene that visitors may think they are deep in the mountains. As such you'll find a number of teahouses dotting the periphery – the Senshintei (洗心亭), the Seisentei (靖泉亭), and Kountei (行雲亭) ; *-tei* denotes teahouse.



Ancillary Monuments

Exiting the garden brings you to the right side of the complex. There's a **Sumo Ring** here; in 1869, a sumo wrestling exhibition was held here and since then, exhibitions involving all professional sumo wrestlers, including grand champions (or *yokuzuna*) take place at the Spring Festival almost every year. The shrine's **Archives** are also here; the collection includes reference material that describes the circumstances under which the divinities of the shrine died, as well as source material for research on modern history. The Museum – the **Yushukan -** can be found nearby. The Yushukan is a controversial facility that stores and exhibits relics, such as the weaponry of the Imperial Japanese Navy (notably including a Zero fighter plane, and Kaiten suicide torpedo. The museum has come into great controversy owing to its revisionist depiction of Japanese history, particularly of the militarist period from 1931 to 1945, in which it is perceived as denying Japanese war crimes and glorifying Japan's militarist past.

But just outside the Yushukan are some fantastic memorials:

- **Statue of Kamikaze Pilot** – A bronze statue representing a kamikaze pilot stands to the left of the Yushukan's entrance. A small plaque to the left of the statue was donated by the Tokkotai Commemoration Peace Memorial Association in 2005. It lists the 5,843 men who died while executing suicide attacks against Allied naval vessels in World War II.

- **The Statue of War Widow with Children** – This statue, completed in 1974, is a tribute to the many war widows who did such a fine job of raising their children in the face of incredible hardship and loneliness. It was commissioned by their children, now adults, and symbolizes their gratitude to their mothers.

- **Monument of Dr. Pal** – This monument was completed in 2005 to honor Dr. Radha Binod Pal, who was a representative judge from India during the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (commonly known as Tokyo Tribunal). Among all the judges of the tribunal, he was the only one who submitted judgment which insisted all defendants were not guilty.
- **Monuments to Animals Killed in Service** – These three life-sized statues were donated at different times throughout the twentieth century, but they're no less important to the Japanese people. The first, a bronzed life-size statue of a fine steed, was presented in 1958 to honor the memory of the horses that served the military so well. The statue of a carrier pigeon atop a globe honors the birds that were such faithful messengers in wartime. Wrought of bronze and named "Pigeons of the Globe", it was presented in 1982. The statue of a German shepherd, also bronze, represents the soldier's beloved canine comrades, arrived in 1992. Opened, full bottles of water are often left at these statues in silent tribute.

* * *

Although much of the shrine is shrouded in controversy, as I've alluded to already, we found none of that atmosphere present in our visit today. The skies may have been overcast but the mood here was not and that's all that matted I guess. Yasukuni may have been our only big destination for the morning, but not necessarily our only cultural one. After taking the time to tour the shrine, we withdrew to other areas of Tokyo to bid them a fond farewell as well, or rather "until next time", which included the multi-level Mitsukoshi store in both the Ginza and at Nihonbashi. (Who could resist a little shopping? I mean, who knows when we'll be back! And, I needed a little reading for the journey home – see the Big Hero 6 book at right). But, as I said in the beginning, our time here came to a quick close. So…

御機嫌よう!
(*gokigenyo!* – fare-thee-well!)

じゃ また こんど ね!
(*ja mata kondo ne*! – until next time!)

日本国

Touring the Land of the Rising Sun

2015 | April 8th to 21st

ukiyo-e prints by hokusai

Once again permit me to leave you with one final bit of cultural information pertaining to the Japanese - *ukiyo-e*. Ukiyo-e is a genre of art that flourished in Japan from the 17th through 19th centuries. It's artists produced woodblock prints and paintings of such subjects as female beauties, kabuki actors and sumo wrestlers, scenes from history and folk tales, travel scenes and landscapes, flora and fauna, and, yes, erotica. The term itself (*ukiyo-e;* 浮世絵) means “Pictures of a Floating World”. And perhaps one of the best known *ukiyo-e* artists both inside and outside Japan is Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎; 1760-1849).

Born in Edo (now Tokyo), Hokusai is best known as author of the woodblock print series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (富嶽三十六景; *Fugaku Sanjuroku-kei*), which includes internationally iconic print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (神奈川沖浪裏; *Kanagawa-oki nami-ura*). Hokusai created the "Thirty-Six Views" in 1827 both as a response to a domestic travel boom and as part of a personal obsession with Mount Fuji. Depicting Mt. Fuji in differing seasons and weather conditions, from a variety of distances and locations, their popularity grew ten more images were added by 1837, bringing the total number of landscapes to 46; however, the title of the work remains unchanged. It was this series, specifically *The Great Wave* (above right) print and *Fine Wind, Clear Morning* (below right), that secured Hokusai’s fame both in Japan and overseas. While Hokusai's work prior to this series is certainly important, it was not until this series that he gained broad recognition.

Now, you may have noticed that spearheading each chapter of this experience is an image depicting life in Japan in differing seasons and weather conditions, from a variety of distances and locations. This continues a tradition I began with the very first Japanese expedition I chronicled. In 2004's "'日本国 ; In the Land of the Rising Sun' -- Reflections of Life", I chose to sample those images from of the celebrated *36 Views of Mt. Fuji* series, using the first 11 of 46 - as there were only 11 chapters of the story. For my second outing in Japan (2007), I chose another 10 from the remaining 35. In the third installment (2008), another 11 views from the series were incorporated. And in the fourth (2013) - and first visit with my wife Nicole - the final 14 were shown.

So where are these new 17 from? The images for this collection were taken from two of Hakusai's other *ukiyo-e* series - "*Oceans of Wisdom*" (千絵の海; *Chie no umi*), a 10-image fishing-themed series that comprises one of Hokusai's rarest sets; and "*A Tour of the Waterfalls of the Provinces*" (諸国滝廻り ; *Shokoku taki meguri*), an 8-image set considered the first to approach the theme of falling water.

Oceans, which feature scenes of fishing including shellfish-gathering, whaling and fly-fishing, allowed Hokusai to explore one his favorite themes, that of man expressing himself through labor and harmoniously working with the forces of nature. This is particularly evident in the print Choshi in Shimosa Province, which shows fishing boats struggling in a stormy sea, echoing his roughly contemporaneous Great Wave. The series' use of color differs from other landscape prints of the time with richly overprinted shades and an unusual palette of yellow, green and varying red pigments. Hokusai also employs the rare technique of using black for color and not just line, suggestive of the influence of Western oil painting.

Waterfalls was acclaimed for its innovative and expressive depictions. The waterfalls take up most of each sheet, dwarfing the scenes' human inhabitants, and are rendered with a powerful sense of life. Using newly imported blue Prussian pigment that was fashionable at that time, Hokusai paints each waterfall differently, in order to emphasize the unique beauty of each site and to outline his belief that water was sacred. The waterfalls Hokusai chose to illustrate are located in the central, western and eastern parts of Japan's main island (Honshu); three of the waterfalls, Kirifuri, Amida and Yoro, are among Japan's 100 most beautiful even today. All the prints are in vertical format and in their composition there is sometimes included human or animal forms which appear to be insignificant in front of the plummeting water. Unlike most of his other works, in the Waterfalls series Hokusai uses more color, in order to highlight the new and main theme: the falling water. Besides using imported blue pigments, the artist also adds contrasting yellows, browns and greens to paint the surrounding forested mountains.

April 10, 2015
"Oceans of Wisdom"
相州浦賀 - Sōshū Uraga
Fishing at Uraga in Sagami Province

Attractive view of the bay at Uraga, with fishermen casting lines from the rocky peninsula jutting into the water. A small lighthouse can be seen at the end of the rocks at center. The shore curves around into the distance, with mountains on the horizon beneath streaky white clouds. The scene portrays the lighthouse in the harbor at the entrance to Tokyo Bay. Five men are shown fishing for flounder, while a sixth collects clams in the foreground.

April 11, 2015 (Part 1)
"Tour of the Waterfalls"
木曾路ノ奥阿弥陀ケ滝 - Amida-ga-taki
The Amida Waterfall on Kiso Road

From the round hollow between two steep undercut banks, the rush of water drops against the dark, rugged cliff. The falls is seen in an extreme close-up view that abruptly cuts off its lower half, leaving a sense of its full height to the viewer's imagination. The falls are so named because the hollow from which it spills seems to resemble the head of Buddha. Its exact location is not known; it could have been a product of Hokusai's imagination. The rugged cliffs are asymmetrically balanced; on the left cliff, a pine tree precariously hangs on. On a ledge, picnickers have spread a rug and enjoy the view, while their servant prepares their meal. They are the only human touches to the forbidding and overwhelming natural scene. Framed by yellowish cliffs, the darkness behind the cascade looks even more mysterious and fearsome. This work is the most dramatic, bizarre composition of the Waterfall series, but it is effective in expressing the power of nature.

April 11, 2015 (Part 2)
"Oceans of Wisdom"
五島鯨突 -Gotō kujira tsugi
Whaling off Gotō

This rare print depicts a historical event, when a whale was stranded on a sandbank off the coast of the Goto Islands in western Japan. Hokusai has drawn the whale with a walrus-like beard, huge slit eyes and spiky projections along the spine. Hokusai conveys the vast size of the whale by setting it within a ring of tiny ships.

April 12, 2015
"Tour of the Waterfalls"
木曾海道小野ノ瀑布
The Falls at Ono on the Kiso Road

Ono Falls is noted throughout Japan as one of the eight famous views on the Kiso Road, the overland route between Edo and Kyoto. Placed at the left side in this print, the falls appears magnificent, dropping straight down in numerous streams. The small building at the center is a shrine. Five travelers are on the bridge. The bizarre, craggy cliffs and the thick white mist create a feeling of a high and remote mountain, though the falls is actually only 30 feet high. The water's powerful torrents are poetically compared to "Flying dragons biting the rocks"

April 13, 2015 (Part 1)
"Oceans of Wisdom"
甲州火振 - Kōshū hiburi
Fishing by Torchlight in Kai Province

Many of Hokusai's prints emit a surreal quality, at the same time as depicting a real life episode. This print does just that. Eight fishermen in the foreground of the painting are struggling against the smoothly rippling waves, trying to pull fish from the water. Although night sky is black, it gives off a strange yellow glow, which allows the fishermen to see what they are doing. Hokusai's method of creating swirling lines in the water make it seem as if it contains a quickly moving current, which threatens to pull the fishermen down, and let their newly-caught prey escape.

April 13, 2015 (Part 2)
"Tour of the Waterfalls"
東都葵ケ岡の滝
Aoigaoka Waterfall in Edo

Here Hokusai tries his hand at depicting an urban type of falls; it is in fact not a natural falls, but a spillway for the release of the overflow of a pond above it. Located in Aoigaoka near the Toranomon Gate in Edo, what Hokusai calls a waterfall is a short, broad drop of water from Tameike Pond to the outer moat of the shogun's castle. The slope along the moat is the Aoizaka, which leads to the top of the hill, where ironwood trees (enoki) grow. Though not shown in this image, at the right side of the spillway is Sanno-Jinja, one of the oldest Shinto shrines. This entire area is now included in Minato Ward, Tokyo. In the lower foreground, men are cleaning houses. Here we see nature in a controlled urban setting, but the composition is no less effective--an arresting change of pace from the forceful and bold falls in other prints.

April 14, 2015
"Oceans of Wisdom"
総州銚子 - Sōshū Chōshi
Chōshi in Shimōsa Province

Chioshi is a district formed by several villages which extend along two miles approaching the south bank of the mouth of the Tone River. The river suddenly narrows here, forming a sandbar which is sometimes dangerous to cross. It is this juncture that is depited, with one boat caught in the hollow of clashing waves. The men are fishing for iwashi, a species of sprat, which are caught in drag nets.

April 15, 2015 (Part 1)
"Tour of the Waterfalls"
和州吉野義経馬洗滝
The Waterfall at Yoshino Where
Yoshitsune Washed His Horse

The background consists of a magnificent waterfall flowing powerfully through a deep valley of trees and foliage, its assumed roar almost palpable for the viewer. The two tiers of water resemble giant hands embracing the earth with fingers spread open. Although the two small figures washing the majestic horse are positioned in the foreground, Hokusai cleverly succeeded in making the waterfall the focal point of the image through his use of thick, bold brushstrokes of white against the blue water. The specks of white perfectly typify the bubbles and agitated foam of a natural waterfall.According to a common Japanese legend, the warrior General Minamoto no Yoshitsune washed his steed at this location while trying to hide from the enemy in the highlands surrounding the waterfall. Since Hokusai based his woodblock print ‘The Waterfall where Yoshitsune Washed his Horse, Yoshino, Yamato Province’, on this renowned tale, one wonders why he chose to portray two peasant-like men instead of a mighty warrior.

April 15, 2015 (Part 2)
"Oceans of Wisdom"
待チ網 - Machi-ami
Waiting Nets

Here the location is not given and men are shown grasping machi-ami, or sukui-ami, "holding nets", named after the scooping motion with which they are handled. Fishermen are depicted driving fish downstream while others scoop them up from below.

April 16, 2015 (Part 1)
"Tour of the Waterfalls"
Kiyo Waterfall by the Kannon Shrine at Sakanoshita

Pouring from an opening at top center, a thin stream releases its water in vein-like cascades. In the right half a steep path by the waterfall goes up to the cave shrine dedicated to Kannon, a benevolent and much loved Buddhist deity. Travelers are making a difficult to climb to the shrine. Hokusai focuses on both the waterfall and the Kannon cave shrine and its pilgrims. A wonderful composition.

April 16, 2015 (Part 2)
"Oceans of Wisdom"
下総登戸 - Shimōsa Noboto
Noboto in Shimōsa Province

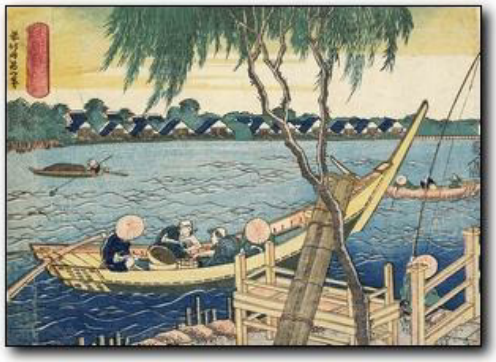
The view is taken from the Chiba side of Tokyo Bay, almost opposite today's Tokyo. Figures in the foregaround gather clams, fish, etc. at low tide, while a boat is shown in the water and a small village on the opposite shore.

April 17, 2015
"Tour of the Waterfalls"
Yoro Waterfall in Mino Province

Yoro Falls exists in present-day Gifu. The waterfall is 32 meters high and 4 meters wide. It was chosen as one of Japan’s Top 100 Waterfalls. The water from the falls is praised for its high quality, and is mentioned in a legend that tells the story of a dedicated son who offered the water, which tasted like sake to his ailing father who, upon drinking it, was revived. The Empress Gensho, who visited this area, renamed the period of her reign "Yoro" saying, "Rei Springs art beautiful springs. And so doth nourish the old. Perhaps it be the spirit of the waters. I do [hereby] give amnesty under heaven, and fix the third year of the Reiki (era) anew to year 1 of the Yoro (era)."

April 18, 2015
"Oceans of Wisdom"
蚊針流 - Kabari-nagashi
Fly-fishing

April 19, 2015
(Part 1)
"Tour of the Waterfalls"
Roben at Oyama in Sagami Province



April 19, 2015 (Part 2)
"Oceans of Wisdom"
宮戸川長縄 - Miyatogawa nagawa
Fishing in the Miyato River

Two boats can be seen in the river, while in the foreground, beneath a willow on the bank, another boat contains fishermen preparing *naga-nami*, long hemp ropes of varying lengths, to which hooks were attached at regularly spaced intervals. The foot of the bridge seen at the bottom right of the foreground is the base of the Yanagibashi.

April 20, 2015

"Tour of the Waterfalls"
下野黒髪山きりふりの滝
Kirifuri Waterfall on Mount Kurokami

Falling Mist Waterfall (Kirifuri no taki), on Mount Kurokami ("Black-hair") in Shimotsuke province (now part of Tochigi prefecture) is one of the famous falls of the mountainous Nikko area. It descends about 100 feet in two steps, each about 33 feet wide, and as it falls, the water, broken up by the craggy cliff, spreads itself like a moving tapestry into many cascades, creating a mist that chills the air. In this print, Hokusai presents the falls in an extreme close-up view as a bizarre pattern. The broken, turbulent falling water splashes into the pool beneath. Looking up from below, travelers dwarfed by its scale are stunned at the sight, while others make the difficult climb to explore the origin of the falls. The falling streams, splashes, and choppy water in the pool are superbly printed in shades of blue.

April 21, 2015

"Oceans of Wisdom"
総州利根川 - Sōshū Tonegawa
The Tone River in Shimosa Province

An evening scene is portrayed with a solitary fisherman using a yotsude ami, or four-armed net. The boat is moored to an oar stuck into the shallow river bottom. When the net is raised it traps all kinds of small fish which thereupon drop into the boat.

終わり？

(owari; "the end"?)