

ON THE ROAD IN JAPAN: 2015

IAN HUGHES

1

JAPAN 2015: THE FIRST PART

THE PRELIMINARIES

Once we've sorted out a few basic parameters, ***Hughesy*** tends to stay out of the planning procedure, especially on ***Japanese trips***. Things are a little more involved for other destinations but the basic parameters as far as ***Japan*** is concerned are ***when to go*** and ***how long for the Rail Pass***.

The ***When*** isn't too hard. It's either ***April/May***, which lands you in the ***Sakura and new leaves*** season, or Autumn. That can be anywhere from ***mid-October to early December*** depending on the destination.

Sakura and new growth start, as you'd expect, from the south and gradually spread north. The approach of winter has the leaves changing colour in the opposite direction.

There's also a crowd factor that comes into play here, but that doesn't quite account for the fact that three of our four visits have been in the autumn.

Last time, we were there in ***December*** for ***four Elvis Costello concerts***. With the same circumstances (***Costello*** and a run of ***Spinning Songbook*** shows), ***Hughesy*** might even be tempted to brave the heat and oppressive humidity of a ***Japanese summer***.

Fortunately, Mr ***Costello*** has more sense than that.

Sakura season, as one might expect, is relatively short-lived, as the flowers are only at their best for a couple of days. Factor in a sunny day on a weekend and you can find sixty thousand people gathering in the grounds of ***Himeji Castle***.

As we did.

And things were even more crowded in ***Kyoto*** the following day.

Autumn leaves, on the other hand, stick around for a while longer.

The other factor in the When side of the equation comes with ***Jetstar.*** Having decided to go, one waits for a ***Japan Sale*** and works from there.

This time around, ***Madam*** sighted another, subsidiary, sale that would get us to ***Sapporo*** cheaply, and that, in turn would have implications for the ***Rail Pass*** side of things.

So the timing isn't all that complicated.

The ***Rail Pass*** question is rather straightforward as well.

The choice is either ***seven*** or ***fourteen days***.

Having maxed out a fortnight on the second trip, ***Madam*** is firmly in the ***one week is enough camp***, and given the tiredness factor, ***Hughesy***'s inclined to agree.

The only way I can see us doing a fortnight again would be if we chose to base ourselves in ***Tokyo*** for (say) three nights and use the pass to shuttle back and forth to various locations that aren't too far away.

Find a hotel near a major station and that shouldn't be a problem.

So the ***Rail Pass Question*** is pretty straightforward.

But surely, I hear ***The Critical Reader*** interjecting, *you could be a little more proactive*.

Well, I reply, *I could. But it's better if I don't.*

While I could probably work out a reasonable fortnight around the archipelago, it would be heavy on ***Obvious Suspects*** and ***repeats of familiar routes***.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, and would probably have coincided with some bits of this itinerary, but what we are looking at here is, ***IMHO***, *far superior*.

And, in any case, having come up with a suggested list, I'd probably learn ***this leg*** *wouldn't quite work*.

And ***that leg*** would take you *right past such and such*, which is really worth stopping to look at, *but wouldn't allow you to get all the way to there, so you'd have to...*

No, better to leave it all to someone with a better grasp of the geography, the configuration of the railway system, and a lifetime's worth of background knowledge.

So, where are we off to on this one? And, as an aside, how closely does it coincide with what ***Hughesy*** might have done?

After the regulation day sorting things out in ***Kōbe***, as previously intimated, we fly to ***Sapporo***.

After two days on the ground there, the ***Rail Pass leg*** kicks off. That takes us to ***Hakodate***, and under the ***Tsugaru Strait*** to ***Aomori***, which would probably have been ***Hughesy***'s stopping point for the night.

I have unfinished business with sea scallops there.

Instead, we head on to the castle town of ***Hirosaki***, and then head on to ***Furukawa***, where I wouldn't have dreamed of stopping.

That, of course, is because I would have been blissfully unaware of ***Naruko Onsen*** and its gorge, which means we can (hopefully) get out into the autumnal countryside the following morning before moving on to the ***five lakes*** at ***Goshikinuma***.

I wouldn't have thought of them either, choosing to head on to ***Sendai*** or somewhere around Fukushima.

I wouldn't have thought of the next leg to ***Bessho Onsen*** either, though I'd have been thinking in terms of ***Kanazawa*** after ***Sendai*** or wherever. Last time we were there the weather kicked in and abbreviated a visit to ***Kenrokuen*** and ***Kanazawa Castle***.

The following day takes us on to ***Amanohashidate***, one of the ***Three Great Views***, and the rail leg finishes in ***Himeji***, via the old port city of ***Onomichi***.

From there we're in ***Kansai***, so the remainder ticks off a few more must-dos and removes several items from the bucket list.

So, with the preliminaries done and dusted, it's on to the main event.



Sunday, 11 October 2015

It was just on 8:12 when we hit the ***Don*** on the way out of ***Bowen*** after a smooth start to ***the Odyssey*** and almost bang on ten-thirty as we turned left onto the Bruce after the ***Ring Road***.

With a pause at the ***Comfort Stop*** in ***Home Hill*** and a slow down onto the shortcut around ***Ayr***, that's pretty good going.

The slow down allowed me to fulfil a long-held ambition to capture an image of the sign features above.

It will end up on ***Hughesy***'s ***FaceBook Timeline***, along with a remark along the lines that *the conversation's not all that brilliant across the river in Home Hill either.*

Along the way, we managed to sort out the question of *whether the shortcut actually saves any time*.

That had exercised our minds repeatedly on journeys up and back. I don't know why I hadn't turned to the obvious solution.

Monitor the progress on the iPhone.

I was checking the email when ***Someone*** returned from the ***Comfort Stop***.

As she popped into the driver's seat I rather smugly pointed out that nearly eight months after I bought a ten gig chunk of data I still had 80% of it left.

On that basis, I reckoned, *I was totally justified in tracking our progress along the route today*.

Not necessarily monitoring it carefully with a beady eye, but maintaining interested observer status.

So we slowed down to snap the ***Ayr Boring Company*** sign and with that in the bag, I switched over to Maps as we continued along ***Giddy Road***.

And there was the proof, if any proof was needed.

The Bruce was there as a clear green line.

Since I hadn't zoomed in to get the detail I could track the progress of the blue dot while keeping the highway in view.

I didn't need a close-up view.

The twists and turns as we exited ***Giddy***, made our way past ***MaidaVale School*** and banked left onto ***Ivory*** would only have muddied the waters.

I reckoned I could see where we were going to rejoin the highway, and if we were, we had what amounted to a ***capital D***.

The U-shaped loop was, believe it or not, the track the highway takes through ***Ayr*** and ***Brandon***.

The short cut, more or less (and more rather than less) equates to the downstroke.

Which means it has to save time. It's considerably shorter.

I reported this to ***The Driver***, who expressed the expected scepticism.

I'll show you when we get to Cardwell, I responded, and promptly forgot all about it.

We were finished lunch at the ***Vivia*** and turning our attention to the onward journey when the matter was brought to my attention.

And, twenty seconds later there was agreement.

Which underlines the notion that not much of interest happened on the increasingly mundane northern leg of the odyssey.

Even the rain we hit out of ***Cardwell*** that continued right up to the edge of the ***Cairns CBD*** was more or less par for the course.

It cut out from time to time, but only for a kilometre or do, and built up beyond a drizzle often enough to have the windscreen wipers switch up to maximum for thirty seconds or so.

But we were pulling into the ***Royal Palms Villas*** right on three o'clock with ***Hughesy*** pondering dinner at the now-regulation ***Bayleaf Balinese***. Did we need to book?

With the ***Day One Travelogue*** complete up to this point, that's a definite *Wait and See*.

We didn't, however, wait too long, heading out around five forty-five and landing on the doorstep just before the doors opened.

And just as well, as we rounded the corner out of ***McLeod Street***, ***Hughesy***'s stomach started transmitting ravenous rumblings I've come to label as ***Need Food Right Now Syndrome***.

Evidently, the round of crab a gas and the quarter of ***Madam's bagel*** I'd downed in ***Cardwell*** a mere five hours earlier hadn't been enough.

It was almost spot on 5:58 when we arrived, so the doors weren't quite open.

Madam took a look at the menu board while we waited, but I already knew what I wanted.

A ***sate lilit*** (*seafood sate with fresh lime*, $19), ***sambel udang*** (*prawns with chillies, lime and tomatoes in coconut cream*, $27.50) and a bottle of ***Mitchell's Riesling*** looked like the way to go.

That plan went out the window under the influence of ***Madam***'s intentions, ***NFRN Syndrome*** and a change in the wine list.

A suggestion that ***Someone*** felt like a different selection (***sate*** and ***sambal kacang***, a *mixture of chicken, beef and pork with sate and peanut sauce*) took care of the entree, but the actual wine list was utterly bereft of ***Mitchell***'s.

Never mind.

The ***satay sticks*** came in two options, regular ($14) and large ($19), so the choice was obvious once you factored the ***NFRN Factor***.

Madam expressed an interest in the ***Josef Chromy Sauvignon Blanc***, which would have put paid to the bottle, but the website wine list had the ***Riesling*** by the glass, so that wouldn't have been a problem.

But with that option withdrawn, a glance further down the list revealed a ***Pikes Pinot Grigio***, which wasn't ***Riesling***, but wasn't an unacceptable substitute.

And a glass meant I could try something else.

Madam had been right on the money with *Mr Chromy's SB*.

Mark *Tasmania* down along with the *Adelaide Hills* if you're over the flood of Kiwi products from the same variety.

And the food was excellent.

There isn't much you can do with deep fried prawn crackers except mess up the frying and providing a substandard dipping sauce.

The ones that arrived to fill in the waiting time were done right and came with a ***chilli*** dip that might have been too hot for *Madam* but ran out before the last cracker went down the *Hughesy* gullet.

The ***mixed satay*** was just what the Doctor ordered as far as the ***NFRN*** was concerned, and the peanut sauce that arrived with them was just right.

Possibly not ***quite*** *divine or exquisite, but the combination ticked all the boxes and rated a couple of gold stars.*

I might have been able to polish off the last of *Madam*'s ***nasi goreng*** ($21.50) if I hadn't been busily mopping up the last skerrick of sauce that came with the seafood curry.

Cut and paste the description of the satay sticks here, folks, and make it *at least three gold stars*.

Put that all together and you've got a decent gustatory send off on a trip where food and eating are going to be significant agenda items.

Which was another reason not to finish off that leftover fried rice.



Monday, 12 October 2015

We hadn't headed straight for the cot when we got back to ***Royal Palms***, but it wasn't long after eight when we did.

Factor in seven or eight hours and ***Hughesy***'s regular home routine, and I was probably due to surface around three-thirty or four in any case.

That was just about on the money, but I maintained a semi-doze until five in the interests of domestic harmony and all that.

Let sleeping drivers lie.

She surfaced just before six, around the time I started on ***Monday***'s ***Travelogue***, which gave us a comfortable two hours before departure time.

That's enough to turn the attention to ***The Preliminaries*** and should mean we finish a seven-hour flight with close to a final version of **Japan Travelogue 2015**.

With **Europe 2014**, **Southeast Asia 2015** and last month's **Northern Odyssey** still in the production and formatting pipeline, that's an important consideration.

And *The Narrator* takes up the tale just under two hours into the flight.

We managed, for once, to get ourselves all the way through to boarding with ***a single hiccough***.

That, to the best of my recollection, is a first.

Once we realised one pair of slip on shoes intended for use in *Japanese inns* and *onsen* were still sitting beside the door at *The Little House of Concrete* and shrugged the shoulders everything else ran reasonably close to plan.

Drop the car at the car park. ***Check.***

Transfer to International Departures and get details about the arrangements when we return in eighteen days' time. ***Check.***

Complete check-in and collect boarding passes. ***Check.***

Exit through Immigration. ***Check.***

Security. ***Check,*** but I was caught for a full body scan.

And there we were with around an hour and three-quarters to kill.

I had passing thoughts about a bottle of *Liqueur Muscat* or *Topaque* and diverted to take a squiz at the *Duty-Free* options.

This didn't quite sit with *Madam*'s intentions, but it only took a moment to scan the *Port and Fortified* section of the display to render the point moot.

There was plenty of what we used to call *Port* in 750 mL bottles, but not a single example of *Rutherglen*'s finest in a 500.

Cue vision of another scheme going down in flames.

From there we found a seat, and I set off to find something to keep me going to lunch.

We had skipped breakfast since it didn't come with the accommodation and weren't inclined to venture out in search of same.

I could have skipped the morning meal, but yesterday's *Need Food Right Now* episode suggested it might be a good idea to grab something.

In any case, *Madam* was still replete from the night before.

A quick perusal of the ***WiFi*** options revealed an hour's free time for a single device if you spent $15 at the nearby cafeteria, which sounded semi-tempting.

Things looked fairly tempting too, with a roast beef baguette at $11.30.

That wasn't quite the $15, so I looked at the drinks options.

It was too early for beer. I could grab a long black for $3.60. Lattes and flat whites were over the $4 mark, but I'm a black man these days.

Falling ten cents short of qualifying for the ***WiFi***, I went for a ***pepper pie*** instead.

Would I like anything to drink with that?

The question received a polite reply in the negative.

While I had been away, ***Madam*** had been cornered by an older dude doing one of those customer surveys that seem to be *de rigeur* these days.

I got back just in time for ***Is there anything that's lacking in International Departures?***

Free WiFi was the utterly predictable response and elicited a rueful *We get that one quite frequently*.

The next question concerned items ***Someone*** *might have bought if they were on sale at the airport*.

I refrained from interjections about ***Liqueur Muscat*** but was sorely tempted.

From there, with the pepper pie downed it was off to the ***Departure Gate*** and another perennial gripe. With the proliferation of digital devices, there's a need for electrical outlets to recharge the things.

And, of course, airports around the world are increasingly offering facilities to do just that.

But not at ***Cairns International Departures***.

So while we waited, I managed a bit with the ***iPad*** hooked through the ***iPhone*** as an Internet hotspot, but that seemed to be running both devices into the ground, so it didn't last long.

So it was a case of sit, take the occasional wander and wait.

Boarding seemed to be on time, and while we were a little late into the air, it wasn't a major concern.

I had visions of taking in the view as we ran along the coast north of ***Cairns***, but a relatively solid layer of cloud put the kibosh on that notion.

I filled out the immigration paperwork instead.



That got us well into the *Coral Sea*, where a temporary patch of blue sky revealed a sandy island, possibly something on the outer reef though identifying a likely suspect will prove difficult.

Trying to reconstruct these things a couple of weeks later with the assistance of the digital ***National Geographic Atlas*** failed to reveal anything much apart from the strong likelihood that it was one of the coral atolls scattered across the eastern part of *Torres Strait*.

There are plenty between *Murray Island* (*Mer*) in the east and *Saibai* off the ***New Guinea*** coast.

The river mouth I sighted shortly afterwards might not have been the *Fly*, but it was substantial.

There are a swag of them between *Saibai* and *Cape Blackwood*, all emptying into the *Gulf of Papua* and all of them likely suspects.

Massive cloud banks kicked in as we hit the New Guinea coast which put an end to the view out the window, but lunch would have accomplished the same feat when it arrived a few minutes later. Clearing that away took time, and catching up on the interim details brought us to this point.

Two hours and fifty-two minutes after departure, with 2353 km under the belt, four and a bit hours to go and *Palau* over somewhere on the left, it was time to run the *iPad* battery down a bit more with some AV content.

It was down to 60% when *Madam* drew my attention to some food and wine freebie content in the onboard video system. Nothing particularly new or absorbing, and I had other fish to fry, but the sidetrack did point me towards having a squiz at what else lurked in the free section apart from the handy where your aircraft is content.

That squiz revealed that the *USB connection* could be used to power digital devices.

It didn't seem to charge them, as the top right-hand corner of the *iPad* pointed out, but it should allow you to run them without further running down the precious battery reserves.



That allowed me to get a fair chunk of the new ***Matthew Condon*** account of the ***Bjelke-Petersen era*** out of the way before we were advised the ***seat belt sign*** was about to be turned on.

I could probably have continued reading for a while, but took the opportunity to stow things away ready for disembarkation in anticipation of a spell looking at the coastline on the way into ***Kansa***i.

That didn't quite work out either, thanks to a mix of the afternoon sun, patchy cloud. Still, it meant we were going to be all set up and ready to go when the time came to get ready to disembark.

We seemed to be making a looped, rather than a straight-in approach this time, and while the viewing conditions weren't the best, there was still something to look at on the way down.

The taxi around the terminal seemed shorter than usual, too.

We got to ***Immigration*** without anything approaching a hassle, found the configuration down there slightly different as well, but negotiated the formalities without a hint of a hitch.

Just, in other words, *the way you want it.*

We encountered a slight holdup at ***Customs*** but found ourselves outside in almost record time.

Better still, as soon as ***Madam*** bought tickets a ***Sannomiya***-bound bus pulled up right in front of us.

The run into ***Kōbe*** seemed to pass quickly as well. That may have had something to the discussion that drew the attention away from the array of lights outside the window.

We were 't far into the bus leg when I sighted what looked like a lit up ***Japanese style castle*** among the fairyland array of lights.

It reminded me of something from the first time we made this trip, when we sat on the other side of the bus. ***Someone*** pointed out something on the right-hand side that was, allegedly, ***Osaka Castle***.

I hadn't even managed a glimpse of the alleged structure, and the incident meant I resolved to sit on the other side next time.

So we did, and although we had managed to do so, I failed to sight anything resembling a castle.

But there was something there, so I thought I'd ask. The response was a somewhat terse negative, delivered in a tone that suggested the whole notion was absurd.

After I explained the reason for asking, I got a strenuous denial the previous sighting had occurred at all.

That, in turn, prompted a bit of to and fro that killed a bit of time, and it seemed no time at all before I spotted a building lit up with a sign saying ***Kōbe*** *Something Or Other*.

It took a few minutes to work down from the freeway to ground level, and the drop off point at *Sannomiya*, but we were still remarkably early into *Madam*'s hometown headed for a hotel in the heart of downtown *Kōbe* rather than the waterfront periphery.

Admittedly, where we were headed was a slightly less glamorous operation, but it was almost brand new and was very handily located.

I've always sung the praises of the *Okura* and the *Meriken Park Oriental* as a smooth entry to a *Japan trip*, but I now have a new benchmark.

We were booked in and ready to think about dinner just before a quarter to eight, and *Madam*'s researches had revealed a highly rated eatery just around the corner from the hotel.

That sounded good to me.

I had visions of a couple of beers, a couple of grilled chicken skewers and a good night's sleep to follow, which ticked all the boxes in my personal agenda.

KoKoRoYa wasn't quite where she thought it was, but proved reasonably easy to track down.

It doesn't look like much from the outside, and there's not too much about the interior to set it away from the run of the mill small scale *Japanese backstreet eatery*.









It's not exactly on a back street, tucked in underneath the railway line running into ***Sannomiya***, but subsequent research reveals we were sitting in ***TripAdvisor's #2 rated restaurant*** in ***Kōbe***.

I didn't believe it either, but it's there on the TripAdvisor website.

And I'm not inclined to argue.

The food was excellent, the beer was cold, and the wine list should have given the game away. It wasn't what you'd expect in a place that size, which would be flat out seating twenty, but there you go.

I know where my preferences now lie, and despite the lack of a substantial breakfast ***Viking*** at the ***Villa Fontaine***, I know where I want to start the gustatory side of proceedings in the future.



KŌBE

Tuesday, 13 October 2015

Although it tends to be a day when not much happens, ***Day Two of the Japan leg*** of the trip is one of the most important.

For a start, it's usually the day when ***Rail Pass vouchers*** are exchanged for workable documents, even if the ***Rail Leg*** doesn't start on ***Day Three***.

More significantly, it's the day when two suitcases become one.

There's limited room for luggage on your average *Shinkansen*, and you'll always take the extra leg room for passengers ahead of space for stowing suitcases at floor level.

The Coppertone Container might fit into the overhead racks, but I'm disinclined to try.

And there's no way *Madam's Blue Behemoth* is ever likely to fit up there.

So it goes off to the wilds of *Myodan*i, along with travel pillows, blankets and anything else adjudged to be surplus to requirements over the next fifteen or sixteen days.

So with breakfast out of the way and *the laundry options* reconnoitred, we turned our attention to sorting out the luggage.

The breakfast *Viking* at the *Villa Fontaine* isn't what we've become accustomed to at the *Okura* or *Meriken Park*, but delivered a perfectly sound foundation to fuel the first part of the day's activities.

This time around, the arrival time in *Kōbe* was a good hour and a half ahead of the usual.

Those other places where we've tended to stay on the way in might be flashier, but they're expensive.

And they don't have a nice little *Izakaya* tucked under the railway lines a hop skip and jump away.

So a couple of little omelettes, a splash of salad with thousand island dressing, a cup of minestrone and assorted pastries got the day off to a solid start.

No tomato juice, but it's not the sort of place where you're going to be expecting the chance to make a Bloody Mary for breakfast. So no vodka either.

Upstairs, with the contents of *B. B. the Blue Behemoth* sorted, it was time to tackle the toothbrushes and head for the ticket office at *Sannomiya*.

That's good. It also provides a chance to reorientate oneself.

Two chances, in fact. We started by sorting the *Rail Pass* side of things and managed to hit the *Sannomiya JR* ticket office at just the right time.

We arrived to find ourselves shooting straight through to one of the operators, and were too absorbed in paperwork to notice the *party of Italians* next door who were doing much the same as we were.

So we set about filling in the paperwork, the clerk set about doing the transformation, and *Madam* set about maintaining a wary eye on proceedings.

For my part, with nothing much to contribute to anything, I acted as an interested observer.

The Italians next door had sorted out their questions by this time, and were ready to start booking.

The bloke who must have been the tour guide handed over a wad of ***Rail Passes*** and the clerk started counting.

Hughesy, as an interested observer, counted as well. It was a round dozen.

This was just after our ***Rail Pass*** processing had been completed.

Madam took a glance at the non-existent queue and decided to go ahead with the booking.

The long and short of it was that we walked out of the ticket office ten minutes or so later with tickets that would cover every major leg of the first six of the seven-day duration.

There are a couple of legs that aren't ticketed, but they're local services or ***non-JR sectors***.

For local services without reserved seating you just present your ***Rail Pass*** and you're on.

For ***non-JR services***, we'll have to buy the tickets at the station.

But, basically, with one fell swoop, there we were with tickets to cover everything bar Day Seven.

By the time we'd done that the queue had materialised, but ***the Italians*** had departed with whatever tickets they required, and another operator was dealing with the customers, so we weren't holding things up too much.

In any way, once you've started and put the request for these however many legs in, I guess there's no going back.

We had a minor hiccough on the first service we were after, which was full, but that was solved by taking an earlier train that would give us an extra hour and a half in ***Hakodate***.

And with all that sorted, how could ***Hughesy*** object to being dragged along for a bit of shopping?

I came out of it with ***a new lightweight umbrella***, so I could hardly object anyway.

And there were enough places to sit and plenty of things to look at, including a passing parade that's substantially different to the one in downtown ***Bowen***.

So, for example, ***Madam*** got her tea while ***Hughesy*** browsed the wine shop.

And we were back at the ***Villa Fontaine*** around eleven, with ***Housekeeping*** still to arrive on the doorstep, though they were just down the corridor.

With ***B. B. The Blue Behemoth*** sorted, it made sense to accompany ***Madam and suitcase*** as far as the station precinct, wheeling the suitcase beside me and picking up a bit more of the local geography.



Having seen the *Myodani*-bound party off I headed back along a slightly different route, via last night's ***Izakaya***, since I hadn't picked up an external shot.

Predictably' when I made my way back to the hotel, ***Housekeeping*** was in full swing inside the room, so I took myself for another loop around the neighbourhood, managing to complete it successfully without resorting to the *GPS* aspect of ***Maps*** on the *iPhone*.

But the process was somewhat draining, and a n***ana nap*** was required soon after I got back.

I thought about lunch, too, but decided that the nap was a better option.

Assuming ***NFRN Syndrome*** doesn't' kick in over the rest of the afternoon, that means I should be right for a serious go at the ***Korean barbecue operation*** we're reportedly headed for tonight.

And later in the afternoon, with ***Madam*** still somewhere *en route* between ***Myodani*** and ***Sannomiya*** I took a bit of time to expand the existing notes from ***Monday*** afternoon and then turned my attention to further tales of ***Queensland corruption***.

There wasn't much in there that surprised me.

And there wasn't much that surprised me when ***Madam*** wandered in just after five, either.

The rendezvous with one of her oldest friends was set for six, which maximised the catch-up time, and we would have to get ourselves to ***Motomachi***.

The only question was when to leave.

Since ***Motomachi*** is the next station along from ***Sannomiya***, I guess you could take the train.

Practical citizens of Kōbe, however, would walk to avoid wasting money. ***Madam's a practical citizen of Kōbe***, so we hoofed it.

For a start that gave me a little more on the ground local geography.

Previous essays towards the same destination had been from the ***Okura***, so it was effectively new territory as far as I was concerned.

The walk took us past the stop where tomorrow's bus to ***Kansai Domestic*** would depart, so that was handy info for a start.

But not long after that we diverted into the narrow shopping arcade that runs under the railroad tracks.

Given the nature of the ***Japanese cityscape***, it should come as no surprise to learn that railway lines tend to run above or under the ground and over or through anything that gets in the way.

That, of course, means there's space under the above ground lines.



On my earlier diversion towards last night's dinner destination, over on the other side of ***Sannomiya***, I'd seen a variety of uses for the space, which is useful real estate.

You could fit an eatery in there, for a start, and a couple of businesses had.

Most of it *over that way* seemed to be devoted to storage.

Lots of roller doors, one of which were open, and a variety of materials and substances stashed away where they were simultaneously easy to access and relatively out of the way.

Fair enough, it's on the edge of the CBD, with what looked like residential development between the railway line and the mountains.

On this side of ***Sannomiya*** on the other hand, on the other side of the line, we were on the edge of the downtown shopping precincts.

That's prime real estate, and would, one guesses, attract fairly hefty rents for space in a high profile location.

Here, under the railway lines, someone had run a shopping arcade down the middle.

Makes sense.

The result is what looks like low-rent space for businesses offering products that hit niche markets and wouldn't be viable in a major shopping centre.

We'd headed out just before five-thirty, figuring we'd have time to spare when we got here, but when ***The Mother's Mobile*** rang, we were only about two-thirds of the way there.

Predictably, the call was informing us that the other participant in the evening's festivities had arrived at the rendezvous and was checking on our whereabouts.

I'd taken a quick look on ***Maps*** earlier in the afternoon, aiming to see if my recall from last time was accurate.

Mind you, given the nature of the thoroughfare we were following, I wasn't sure where we were *vis a vis* ***Motomachi station***.

When we turned left out of the arcade, there was a familiar looking corner on the other side of the intersection, with ***Madam's friend*** bang in front of it.

And, having made the rendezvous we headed straight downstairs for a couple of hours worth of discussion, beer and an array of dishes.

Predictably, the gustatory side of proceedings started with a salad.

Beef steak and guts followed, and things got blurry from there as dishes arrived in a flurry and got rearranged on the table.

And the discussion romped across a variety of topics, at first largely in ***Japanese***, but once the old friends had finished the old friends catch up bit, things changed.

We spent a good half hour on sport, largely *Rugby in its two versions vs. AFL* with diversions onto the *comparison between cricket and baseball*.

It was well after eight-thirty when we decanted ourselves from the basement eatery.

Given the hour, it made sense to divert to see ***Our Host*** safely to the car park, before proceeding back to base.



Wednesday, 14 October 2015

Although we weren't exactly back early the night before, we were up and about reasonably early to tackle one of the perennial issues when you're on the road.

Laundry.

On ***Day Four***, having packed clothes for around seven, it mightn't have been strictly necessary, but we knew we had access to ***a coin laundry*** here.

The next known availability was on ***Sunday***, which would be stretching things a tad.

So there was a definite case for *doing the laundry while you have the chance*.

While the washing machine was doing its thing, ***Hughesy*** tackled ***Travelogue*** duties and ***Madam*** crawled back to the cot until it was time to make the switch to the dryer.



With that accomplished, the ***Breakfast Viking*** was a logical step, with a check on the dryer's progress on the way back upstairs.

Madam had a bottle of wine to send to a friend, but apart from that, an afternoon departure for ***Kansai Domestic*** and an eleven o'clock check out the agenda was entirely empty.

We'd need lunch, and it didn't take long to find an appropriate time killer.

Kōbe isn't overendowed with sightseeing options, and since we were heading to ***the airport*** in the middle of the afternoon rather than later in the piece we didn't want to travel too far afield.

On that basis, it was a case of ruling out options rather than counting them in.

We decided to take a walk around the hillside ***Kitano*** district at the foot of the ***Mount Rokko*** range.

We'd canvassed it as an option right after the rail leg of our first trip in ***2008***, and promptly added it to the too hard basket, opting for brunch at the ***Freundlieb Bakery Cafe*** in the former ***Kōbe Union Church*** instead.

From a hotel beside ***ShinKōbe***, the slopes looked a little intimidating. This time around I figured we/d get a gentler introduction to the terrain.

In any case I didn't mind heading back to the ***German bakery*** for lunch.

Kitano-chō or *Kitano Ijinkan* is the part of town where foreign traders and diplomats settled after *Kōbe* was opened to international trade.

Hakodate and *Shimoda* were the first ports opened in *1854.*

Kōbe, along with *Yokohama*, *Nagasaki*, *Osaka*, and *Niigata* was added to the list in *1858*.

More than a dozen former mansions (*Ijinkan*) remain in the area, open to the public for an admission fee that tends to range between ¥550 to ¥750.

There are *Ijinkan* districts in other locations (most notably *Hakodate* and *Nagasaki*), but *World War Two* and natural disasters have wreaked havoc in most of them.

The district is rated as a pleasant location to visit, with views out across the port and a range of cafes, restaurants and boutiques.

That meant we weren't necessarily bound for the bakery for lunch though the midday repast would be needed.

We weren't due on the ground in *Sapporo* until 8:35 in the evening.

Since we were walking, rather than catching a bus, there were a few points of interest along the way.





One of them was ***Ikutajinja*** shrine, possibly one of the oldest ***Shinto*** shrines in the country.

According to the **Nihon Shoki** (**The Chronicles of Japan**).the shrine dates back to the 3rd century.

It is said to have been founded by the ***Empress Jingū*** to enshrine the ***kami*** (*deity*) ***Wakahiru-me-no-Mikoto***, who was either the peaceful spirit of the *Sun Goddess* ***Amaterasu-Omikami*** or her sister.

Other temples in the area that date back that far include the city's ***Nagata Shrine*** and the ***Hirota Shrine***, in nearby ***Nishinomiya***.

According to legend, when diplomats from ***Korea*** arrived in ***Japan*** in the ***Heian Period*** they were served rice wine brewed by the shrine's head priest from rice drawn from each region in ***Japan***.

A smaller shrine (***Matsuno***) within the ***Ikuta*** precinct dedication to the deity responsible for brewing ***saké*** commemorates the legend.

The vicinity also saw parts of the ***Battle of Ichi-no-Tani*** during the ***Genpei War*** of ***1184***, commemorated by markers in the small forest behind the shrine, though the growth of the city of ***Kōbe*** around the site makes it difficult to determine precise locations for skirmishes and events.

Since it sits right on the edge of the ***Sannomiya*** district, these days ***Ikutajinya*** serves as a neighbourhood shrine for the residents of downtown ***Kōbe***.







Two ***Noh*** plays, ***Ebira*** and ***Ikuta Atsumori***, which retell aspects of the ***Genpei War***, are performed every year at ***Ikuta***'s ***Autumn Festival***.

The shrine has suffered significant damage over the years, most recently as the result of massive flooding in ***1938***, ***World War Two*** air raids and ***1995***'s ***Great Hanshin Earthquake*** but has repeatedly been rebuilt.

You're not looking at an ancient structure, but it is worth a visit if you're in the area.

And there are echoes of the ***saké*** brewing story in the bars and restaurants in the nearby drinking quarter centred on ***Higashimon*** Street.

It was too early for those establishments to be opening their doors as we headed along the street and up the hill, pondering how much actual climbing we felt like doing.









We had a ready-made point of comparison after our ***2012*** visit to ***Hakodate***, where the ***Ijinkan district*** shares much of the same architecture.

The ***Hakodate*** version, however, offers much better views since the city hasn't quite prospered the way ***Kōbe*** has.

Still, there wasn't too much to complain about.

The views would have been quite spectacular without the high rise development between the hillside and the port, which is a bit further away than it is in ***Hakodate***.

One also suspects the northern city was chosen in an attempt to minimise disruptive influences from foreigners, and the relative isolation put the dampeners on prospects for substantial growth.



So, of course, did the development of ***Sapporo*** as a more centrally located administrative hub for the northern island of ***Hokkaidō***.

In the end, we were forced to do a fair bit more climbing than might otherwise have been the case. Increased elevation delivered better views across the harbour.

Not necessarily *great* views, but they were there, and getting there worked off some of the kilojoules.

And, of course, the old merchant houses were well worth a look in themselves, though we weren't tempted to pay and head inside.

Another time, perhaps.

But the need for sustenance to keep us going until tomorrow was looming large on the horizon, so we started to work our way downhill with one key question in mind.

Where did we want to go for lunch?

We had a readymade option, but there was always the possibility of striking an interesting option on the way to the ***German bakery***.

Take a look here and ***The Inquisitive Reader*** will find some interesting possibilities (*Caribbean and Chilean cuisine, really?*) but, as you do, we ended up somewhere else.

Interestingly, ***Ristorante Donnaloia*** is not in ***TripAdvisor's*** Top 150 restaurants.

That's what I found when I went for a look to get the spelling right. It rates ***#359***, which probably says more about ***TripAdvisor reviewers*** that it does about the restaurant.

It deals in ***very old style Italian***, possibly *a tad too traditional* for some, but that's the way I like it.

Of course, the presence of an aged gentleman who could be reasonably described as ***Richie Benaud's shuffling doppelgänger*** might have something to do with the fact that I liked the place a lot.

But it's all about the food.

Pasta with marinara sauce (the tomato rather than the seafood version), and ***chicken breast with salad*** mightn't sound overly awe-inspiring, but everything was done just right (in my estimation), and there was a sting in the tail.

There was a small bottle of pepper oil (actual ***chilli***, and quite superb), and a smattering went into the ***marinara sauce***. That, I think, was what won me.

It needs to go on in small doses (or *will need to go on in small doses* from the bottle I took away with me) but has a stunning depth of flavour..

One of the best things along those lines I've ever encountered.

As we paid the bill and collected the bottle I was taking with me, I said *I'd be back to eat properly*.

We will be waiting, was the response.

We'd spent longer than we planned to linger over lunch, and the result was a rapid transit back to the hotel.

Once we'd reclaimed the baggage, we moved on to ***Sannomiya***, where there was a potentially alarming development.

There was an exchange in ***Japanese*** as an elderly worker stowed ***The Coppertone Container*** in the luggage compartment. It was enough to leave ***Someone*** worried and ***Yours Truly*** wondering what was going on.

Then we got to the door.

The Driver was the definite bearer of bad news.

Even though I had no idea of the contents of the conversation, it was evident this was Not Good News.

Mere capitalisation in the manner of **1066 And All That** doesn't quite fit the bill here.

Italicise it, and the portent isn't quite delivered either.

It needed full-on bold face. This was **Not Good News**.

In a nutshell, the situation was this: *There were roadworks on the freeway between **Kōbe** and Kansai International and an accident somewhere had complicated matters further*.

There was, we were informed, *no guarantee of arriving at the scheduled time*.

Now, you might think, as I did, that with around four hours until the flight departed, and a one-hour trip, things should be okay, but, I guess you never know.

Madam, who has a much better grasp of the nature of ***Japanese traffic snarls***, was worried, but we hadn't considered other options and nervously hopped on the bus.

It was one of those situations where, even without direct ***WiFi*** access, ***Maps*** on the ***iPhone*** delivers a degree of reassurance.

The app had our current position, and, fortunately, the data that was already on board extended past ***Kansai International***.

Once we were under way, one nervous passenger worried while the other monitored the progress of the blue dot on the screen as ***Maps*** continued to deliver without ***WiFi*** connection.

It was fairly obvious, based on previous experience, where we should have been heading.

*The freeway runs more or less along the shoreline all the way to **the airport***.

As we headed off the highway and down to ground level, it was obvious we weren't going *that way*.

We headed up again, and down again as the driver sought an alternative route, but, at least in my eyes, things looked promising.

Firstly, the bus kept moving.

Admittedly it slowed down almost to a crawl here and there, but at least it was moving.

And the general direction of movement was ***towards the airport***.

Finally, when we looked to be just about through the ***Osaka*** conurbation, there was an announcement that we would be arriving at four.

That was a mere half an hour late, but it could have been far worse and the delayed arrival wasn't a problem for us.

And we had still managed to arrive before ***check-in*** was open.

That allowed me to set about pinching power from a convenient power point to replace what I'd used monitoring our progress *en route*.

Once we'd checked in there was still a fair time gap to fill.

Others might have looked further afield, and I went about ten metres past the wine bar I found on the edge of the eatery quarter, but that was always going to do me.

It was fairly obviously associated with ***the Pieroth group***, and while I've had no dealings with the German-based marketer, I knew it offered selections from a worldwide portfolio that were, predictably, dominated by wines from their home country.

But I know people who've dealt with them, and I knew their business model runs on premium lines at premium prices.

On that basis, since I was just going to savour one time-killing glass, ¥1100 for a dry ***German Riesling*** didn't seem too far over the top.

And it was an interesting drop, contrasting nicely with the lime dominant ***Clare*** and ***Eden Valley Rieslings*** I've come to know and love.

More akin to some of the ***Tasmanian*** takes on the variety, I thought.

But over to my left, ***an American couple*** obviously wasn't aware of a few basic points of information.

At least, I *assume* it was an American couple. He had *a definite Stateside accent*, but I didn't hear a word from her as her better half asked, somewhat forcefully about .beer at happy hour prices.

I took my time savouring my ***Riesling*** before returning to where ***Madam*** was sitting and turning the attention to the inevitable passage through ***Security***.

That got us into a relatively deserted ***Departure Lounge***, but any thoughts of spare seats and sparse populations on the flight evaporated just before the first ***boarding call***.

It was preceded by a massive influx of (we suspected) ***Chinese*** tourists.

Things proceed smoothly through boarding, but we were slightly behind schedule when we finally departed.

The flight path involved a sharp right hand turn over city lights followed by almost total darkness, which you can put down to altitude, cloud, an engine in the way and the fact that we would have been crossing the mountains that run down the centre of ***Honshū***.

So I turned my attention back to the ***Condon*** *iBook*, with occasional glimpses out the window.

As we begin the descent into ***New Chitose***, lights on our right could well have been ***Hakodate*** which looked like it should be close to the flight path.

The shape of the coastline certainly seemed to match a higher altitude equivalent of the view from the top of ***Mount Hakodate***, but it's hard to be sure.

The looping descent banking around to the left revealed a patchwork of lights with some odd anomalies.

That mass of lights over on our right was probably ***Sapporo***, and the cluster that followed a few minutes later may well have been ***Chitose***.

Once we were on the ground, it was obvious ***New Chitose*** is a massive operation, though, surprisingly, when we disembarked the luggage carousel is right in front of us.

Five kilometres south-southeast of ***Chitose*** and about fifty kilometres south-east of downtown ***Sappor***o, ***New Chitose Airport*** (CTS) is not the only air facility in the area.

Right next door, the ***Self-Defense Force Chitose Air Base*** is the old ***Chitose Airport***, a joint-use facility that catered for passenger flights between ***1963*** and the opening of ***New Chitose*** in ***1991***.

The two facilities are interconnected by taxiways, which allows ***Old Chitose*** to handle additional traffic when the weather intervenes to close down runways and delay incoming flights and departures.

The ***Japanese military*** handles air traffic control duties for both facilities.

A more centrally located airport, at ***Okadama***, serves a small number of flights within ***Hokkaidō***.

Since ***1994 New Chitose*** has operated 24/7 though noise issues restrict the umber of flights to a mere half dozen between ten at night and seven in the morning.

Predictably, it is is ***the largest airport in Hokkaidō***, in land area, facilities and passenger numbers.

It has to be.

After ***Tokyo***'s ***Narita*** and ***Haned***a, it's ***Japan's third busiest airport*** and ranked#64 in the world in terms of numbers of passengers.

Every year around nine million of them travel between *New Chitose* and *Haneda* on the world's busiest air route.

Since it sits along the *great circle route*, it is an ideal stop to refuel *heavy cargo flights between Asia and North America*.

International services are mostly restricted to *Asian destinations* though there were formerly long-haul services to *Amsterdam* and *Cairns*.

International flights to *Honolulu* resumed in *2012*.

While we were too late to take in the facilities in the terminal, they're rather impressive on paper.

There's even a hot spring *onsen* bath house (*Onsen Manyonoyu*) alongside a playground and amusement park (*Doraemon Wakuwaku Skypark*), *Royce' Chocolate World* and a range of over two thousand plush toys and collectables at *Steiff Nature World*.

Throw in the cafes, restaurants and souvenir shops that are par for the course at *Japanese transport hubs* on top of two themed food zones (*Hokkaidō Ramen Dojo* and the *Streetcar Dining District*) and you have a very substantial commercial operation.

If that's not enough shopping and souvenir action for you, there's also the *Rera Chitose Outlet Mall* with hundreds of local and international and brands just outside the airport complex.

It's a ten-minute ride on the free shuttle bus or a short walk from *Minami-Chitose Station*.

Not that we'd be alighting at the first stop on the spur off *JR Hokkaidō*'s *Chitose line* that takes passengers on the thirty-five minute run between *New Chitose* and *Sapporo Station*.

It costs ¥1,070 for a one-way ticket, with four trains every hour.

Reserved seats cost an additional ¥310 but the services are *JR* and *Hokkaidō Rail Pass* friendly.

So while the luggage carousel for our flight might have been *just there*, it was a fair step to the train station, and we didn't hang about to check out the shopping and dining options along the way.

And once we were aboard, it was hardly surprising to find the service passing through *ShinSapporo*, though it would be another couple of months before the *Hokkaidō Shinkansen* kicks into action.

When it does, one suspects the trains will run all the way out to *New Chitose*.

After all, the station under the terminal is labelled *ShinChitose-Kūkō*.

Once we'd decanted ourselves at the terminus, and made our way out towards where we reckoned the hotel had to be, we were faced with a thorny question.

Where do we go from here?

More precisely, *do we head out the doors in front of us*, or *venture down these stairs that look like they should connect to a subterranean network?*

Since it didn't seem to be that cold outside, we walked out the main doors and spotted the hotel building just over on the right.

It wasn't that chilly along the way, but when you're checking in well on the way to eleven at night you're not going to waste too much time along the way.

Or between the front door and the cot.



SAPPORO

Thursday, 15 October 2015

Reporting a latish rise would hardly seem surprising after a late night, and the chance to sleep in made for a welcome break from the day to day routine.

In any case, even if we hadn't been up well past *Hughesy*'s regular bedtime, the *Travelogue* notes were pretty well up to date, and I reckoned I'd have time to catch up on the backlog while *Others* were in the shower.

To facilitate the task I set about piecing together a narrative from boarding time to the present while I took my turn in the R***ain Room***.

If I hadn't turned the thoughts in that direction, other matters might have attracted the attention, like the toiletry labelled *Mystic geranium*.

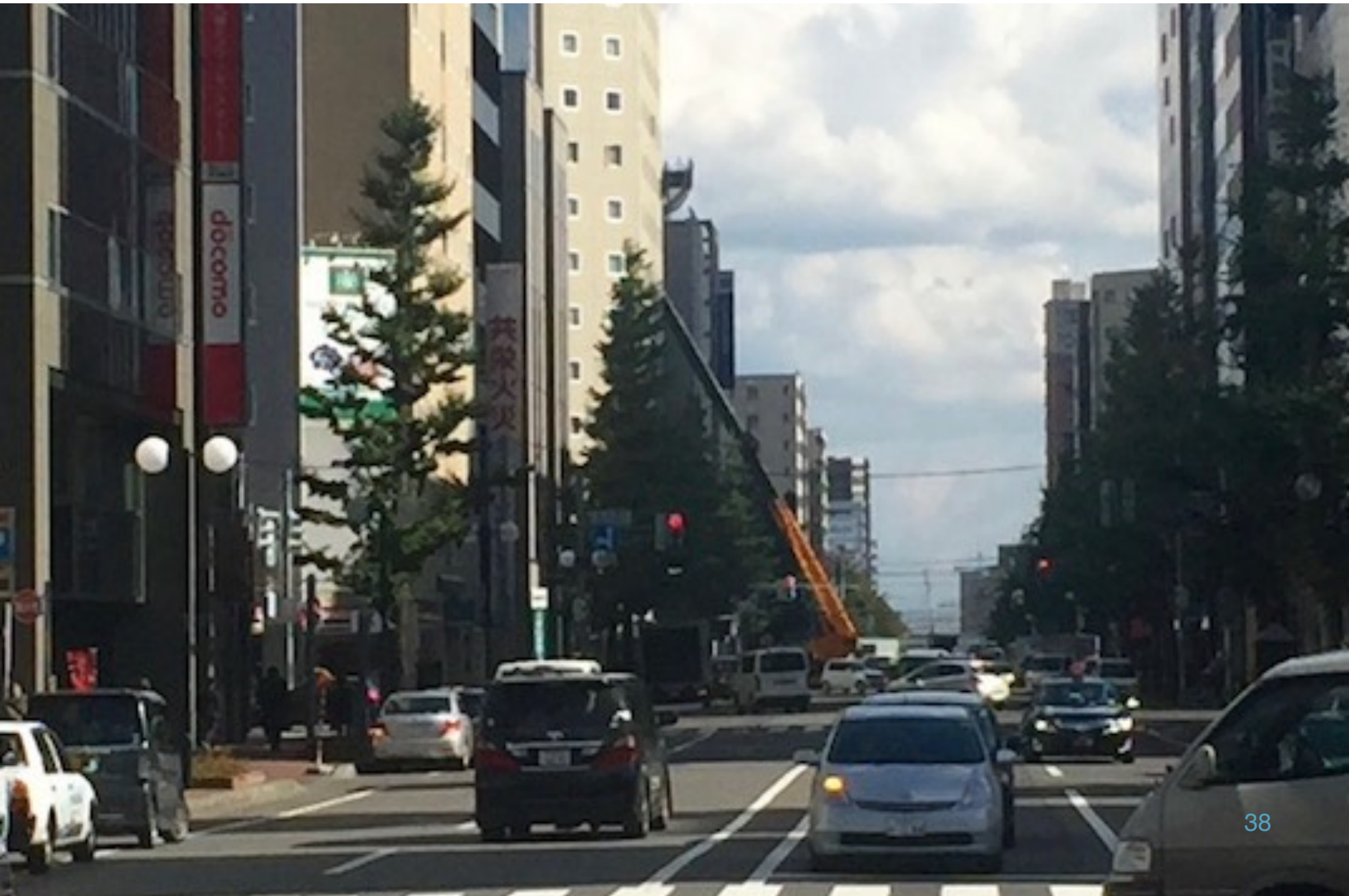
Sounds like something from the Age of Aquarius, I noted in passing, before directing the thoughts back towards ***Kansai Domestic***.

In any case, I managed to bring things up to date before we ventured downstairs to raid the very impressive ***Breakfast Viking***, which included an extensive range of ***Hokkaidō delicacies***.

Many of them, predictably, flew right under ***Hughesy***'s gustatory radar, thanks to unclear labelling or a disinclination to try something I could more or less decipher.

In most cases, the labels were rather small, and there were enough people around to leave you disinclined to peer myopically through the reading glasses for too long.

But there was a very ***Hughesy*** friendly supply of venison and a supply of the island's softest water.



Overall, it might not have been the best *Viking* I've encountered but it was almost certainly the most extensive, thanks to an abundance of small platters of *niche Hokkaidō options*.

Back upstairs the big question involved external temperatures, with a predicted maximum of 15 and an itinerary that was likely to involve heights as we set out on the first of two full days in and around a city that, surprisingly, isn't as old as *Hughesy*'s current hometown.

I'd been riffing on that topic with this bit of overnight doggerel.

Sapporo.

It's impressive, and colder,

But Bowen is older.

With *Tokyo* in a class of its own, *Sapporo* is *Japan's fourth largest city* (after *Yokohama*, *Osaka* and *Nagoya*) with a population nudging two million.

That puts it around half a million ahead of the next contenders (*Kōbe*, *Kyoto*, *Fukuoka* and *Kawasaki*).

Hokkaidō's next largest cities, *Asahikawa* and *Hakodate*, slot in at #58 and #80 on the list of the country's largest cities, with populations under four hundred thousand.

So, predictably, it's the capital of *Hokkaidō Prefecture* and the island's transport hub.

Located on the *Ishikari* flood plain on the alluvial fan where the *Toyohira River* flows into the *Ishikari*, *Sapporo* is a new city *by Japanese standards*, so traditional architecture, historic temples, imposing castles and ancient shrines weren't going to be part of the itinerary.

On the other hand, the location on the northern island right next to *Siberia* makes it a prime spot for coloured leaves in the early autumn and the long winter with substantial snowfalls makes it a mecca for *skiing and winter sports*.

The city hosted the *Winter Olympics* in *1972*, and the facilities that went in then are still in regular use for similar, lower-profile events.

The *Sapporo Snow Festival* (*Yuki Matsuri*) held in *February* draws more than two million visitors from around the world each year.

The festival's ice sculpture competition in *Sapporo*'s central park, attracts artists from around the world. They produce artistic sculptures and elaborate large-scale replicas of well-known structures and landmarks from ice and snow, and the spectacular displays attract worldwide media attention.

There had been hunting and fishing settlements in an area the indigenous Ainu people named ***Sari-poro-netsuke*** (*river running along a plain filled with reeds*) before the ***Tokugawa Shōgunate*** established an official trading post there in ***1821***.

As ***Japanese interests*** spread into the northern island, at the end of the ***Edo Period*** work began on a canal through the area. That, in turn, encouraged further settlement,

In ***1868*** the ***Meiji government*** decided ***Hakodate***, the existing administrative centre, was poorly located, and they needed a capital in a more central location. The ***Ishikari Plai***n provided an unusually large stretch of flat, well-drained land in mountainous ***Hokkaidō*** and was, therefore, the logical location.

Once the decision had been made, outside assistance was called in to lay out the new city, and the result was a well laid out grid of wide tree-lined streets with ample public parklands on a strategic plan drawn up by ***American urban planners***.

Construction began around ***Ōdōri Park***, which remains as a twelve block (1.5 kilometre) ribbon of green parkland bisecting downtown ***Sapporo***. It is flanked by ***Ōdōri Street***, which forms the east-west axis of the street grid.

Addresses are expressed as *North* or *South* of ***Ōdōri*** and *East* or *West* of the other axis, which follows ***Sōseigawa*** (Creation River) Canal, flanked by ***Ekimae-dōri*** (Front of the Station Street).

Landmarks, such as ***Tokeidai*** clock tower (N1W2) are identified on the grid, but those addresses cover the whole block, so businesses will provide maps to assist with more precise navigation.

But compared to other, older cities it's relatively uncomplicated.

Still, we didn't get to explore the grid too much when we headed out.

The first stop the ***Tourist Information Centr***e in ***Sapporo Station***.

That was a straightforward almost mirror-like retracing of our track the night before. But the mirror, if ***The Attentive Reader*** catches my drift was the surface.

We'd tracked above ground from station door to hotel the previous evening.

Now, in the morning, we followed what must have been very close to the same route from hotel basement to the stairs where we'd stood and debated which way to go in the evening.

It probably comes as no surprise if the subterranean thoroughfares match the streets and footpaths on the surface. Most of the buildings, after all seem to have basements.



Once we'd arrived at the ***Information Centre***, two very helpful ladies delivered useful information and a bit of cause for concern that turned out to be wrong.

But the first part was spot on, as you'd expect it would be.

They had the logistics of getting ourselves out to ***Okurayama*** exactly right.

We would have been following the written advice to the letter if a warning about likely hilltop temperatures hadn't sent us scurrying back upstairs to pack extra layers in case we needed them.

As it turned out, we didn't, but a couple of minutes up and down meant we just missed the particular bus we'd been pointed towards.

We might well have made it if we'd proceeded to ***Ōdōri Station*** without stopping along the way to take photos of the ***Old Hokkaidō Government Office Building***.

It's an obviously American-style red brick structure known locally as ***Akarenga*** (*red bricks*).

It dates back to ***1888***, built to replace the former headquarters of the ***Kaitakushi***, the commission established to supervise the development of ***Hokkaidō***.

The commission's central office moved to ***Sapporo*** in ***1871*** and the original ***Hokkaidō Development Commission Sapporo Main Office*** (***Kaitakushi Sapporo Honchōsha***), was built in ***1873***. At that point, it

was *one of the largest buildings in Japan* but was gutted by fire in *1879*. There's a restored version of the original incarnation in the *Historical Village of Hokkaidō*.

After some administrative restructuring, a new building went up on the site in *1888*.

Another fire in *1909* gutted the interior but left the external walls relatively undamaged.

Restoration work saw the building back in use two years later, but it took until *1969* to get the building registered as an *Important Cultural Property*.

The octagonal dome on top is based on a similar feature atop the *Massachusetts State House* in the United States, and these days the structure houses historical exhibits, conference rooms and libraries. Admission is free, and the building stays open until 6:00 p.m.

We were satisfied, however, with a look at it from a block away, *en route* to *Ōdōri Station*.

The couple of minutes we lost there might have been the difference between catching this train or the next one. Even if it was, we may still have made it if we hadn't stopped to ponder which of the entrances would take us to the right subway line.

As it turned out, they both did.

This one took you to the one we wanted and a platform on another line going one way.





That one took you to the one we wanted and a platform on the other line running in the opposite direction.

And, of course, *this one* meant a slightly longer walk to the relevant platform.

Those things combined to have us hearing a departing train as we headed down the last flight of steps. I assume that train was headed where we were going since the platform was devoid of passengers when we arrived a few seconds later.

At the other end of the short excursion to ***Tozai Subway***'s ***Maruyama Koen*** Station, we stepped into the bus terminal to find we'd just missed the bus that featured on the written directions.

They run every half hour, so we had a bit of a wait.

Never mind, there'd be another one in a while. There wasn't that much on the agenda.

When it arrived, ***Hughesy*** had a stress free reminder about the ticketing system on ***Japanese buses***.

You grab a numbered ticket as you board and then watch the electronic board at the front of the vehicle. Assuming you joined the service at the terminus, your fare will be the first figure shown, and will gradually increase as the sectors pass.

When you alight you place ticket and money in the box beside the driver, and you set out to have the right amount since they don't give change.

If you need to break down a note to get the right change, there's a machine to do that, too. But you do it before you get to your destination while the bus is stopped at traffic lights or whatever.

So it was a handy reminder about the way things work on a trip that wasn't hurried.

We alighted, along with most of those on board, at *Okurayama Kyogijo Iriguchi* bus stop, the nearest stop to the *Okurayama Ski Jump*, which will have *The Puzzled Reader* scratching his or her head if he or she is aware that winter sports don't rate highly on *Hughesy*'s sporting interests.

TPR, however, would have had his or her bewilderment answered if he or she had been on the ground with us.





Admittedly, we were headed for the venue for the 90-metre ski jump competitions in the ***1972 Winter Olympics*** but nowadays, when the stadium is not being used for ski jump events, the ***Observatory*** on the top of the hill can be accessed by chair lift for spectacular views of ***Sapporo***.

So the stop wasn't just about the ski jump.

In a way, it wasn't about the ski jump at all, apart from the fact that the top of the jump is where you head for your *excellent panoramic views across* ***Sapporo***.

Getting there involved a bit of a hike, and those who alighted from the bus started off as a relatively substantial group.

There was a party who seemed to be travelling together and appeared to know where they were going, so we followed them.

Another trio, a mother and her two daughters, apparently weren't sure of the way, started well behind and passed up around the half way point.

By that stage we were lagging behind the other party, taking our time to take in the autumn foliage.

But it wasn't that far until we were looking up at the ski jump.

We walked around a corner, and there it was, towering above us. The 50,000 seat *Okurayama Ski Jump Stadium* (*Ōkurayama Janpu Kyōgijō*), a. k. a. *Ōkurayama-Schanze* on the eastern slope of *Mount Okura* has hosted a number of winter sports events apart from the *1972 Winter Olympics* and is still in use today.

It wasn't there by itself, of course.



International sporting facilities are rarely stand alone structures. In this case buildings around the bottom of the jump house, among other things, the *Winter Sports Museum* and the *Ōkurayama Crystal House*, which houses a restaurant and a souvenir shop.

The three-storey *Winter Sports Museum*, completed in *December 1999*, and open to the public since *April 2000* has exhibits about the *1972 Winter Olympics* and winter sports in general.

There are a variety of simulation games (ski jump, speed skating and hockey) included in the ¥600 entrance fee.

It probably comes as no surprise to learn we didn't venture inside.

For those who might be inclined to do so, it's open 9:00 to 18:00 (*May* to *October*) and 9:30 to 17:00 (*November* to *April*), and most of the content is in *Japanese*, with *minimal English content*.

We headed past the entrance on our way to buy tickets for the chairlift to the top at the shop in front of the *Crystal House*, then took a while gazing upwards, and indulging in the odd flight of fantasy.

From the foot of the slope, it's predictably awe-inspiring, even if you're not into winter sports.

We snapped a couple of photos from the bottom, then headed on to the ski lift for the ascent to the viewing platforms some 300 metres above sea level.

The chair lift runs 8:30 to 18:00 in summer, basically *May-October* and 9:00 to 17:00 from *November* to *April*, with a spell for maintenance in early *April*.

If you're not inclined to pay the ¥500 for the return trip on the chairlift, there's a trail leading to the viewing platforms on second and third floors of the *Observatory*, but it's a steep climb.

And for those of us with vertigo issues, the ground remains reassuringly close to your feet. *Hughesy*'s shoes brushed the tops of the odd clump of grass.

Officially, the ski jump is classed as a large hill jump with a total height from top to bottom of 133 metres. The current record is 145 metres, achieved by *Japanese jumper Yūsuke Kaneko* in *2005*.

The venue opened in *1931* after *Emperor Hirohito*'s brother *Prince Chichibu*'s first visit to *Hokkaidō* in *February 1928*.

He had promised to assist the head of the *Hokkaidō University* ski team with a ski jump facility for the *Winter Olympics* with hotel magnate *Baron Kishichiro Okura* providing the funds.

Major General Olaf Helset, the captain of the *Norwegian team* in the *1928 St. Moritz Olympics*, provided technical and design assistance.







Construction cost more than ¥50,000 and the facility was donated to the city of ***Sapporo*** when it was completed.

The stadium was remodelled into an 80-metre jump in ***1952***, and further renovations in the lead-up to the ***Winter Olympics*** saw the change to 90 metres.

In the process, seats for 50,000 spectators went in. The work cost ¥770 million, and control of the facility was transferred to the ***Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology***

The first ski lift went in ***November 1982***, reducing the time to the summit from twenty minutes to four. With fifty-five carriages traversing a diagonal length of 285.25 metres, it could move 450 people an hour. Total cost was around ¥180 million.



Rule changes saw modifications to the landing slope and borders in *1986*, and the arena was remodelled again at a cost of ¥2.6 billion ten years later. In the meantime, ownership had been transferred from the national government to the *City of Sapporo* in *March 1995*.

Further tinkering saw the ski lift extended, and lighting for night competitions installed in *1998*, when the old ski lift was dismantled and an upgraded sixty-seven carriage lift installed with a travel time of five minutes per 346.39-metre one-way-trip.

The current incarnation can move 900 people an hour and cost approximately ¥250 million to install.

There weren't *quite* nine hundred people up at the top when we arrived, but it was still a decent crowd under the circumstances.

While the autumn leaves were in the turn between standard green and the range of reds, browns and yellows you expect in the fall, they were on the way.

Give it a couple of days and there'd probably be a queue down below.

Still, the view to either side delivered a fairly decent autumnal vista, and, for some reason most of those gathered on the level below the observation deck were enjoying ice cream cones.

I was slightly less than half inclined to join them and put the question to ***Someone***.

That, you understand, was on the basis of being just below the tipping point.

But ***Someone*** was more interested in heading upwards, so upwards we went.

On the way up we encountered a woman in a wheelchair with an old bloke who was probably the husband. They were getting assistance with the stairs





Any offer of help from ***Yours Truly*** would have raised language issues, and the situation looked to be under control, but it did raise an interesting question.

We knew how she got up there.

With assistance, in the two seater chair lift gondola. Same as the rest of us.

But what about the wheelchair? Did they stop the whole box and dice and strap it into another one?

That was the likely scenario, and I would have liked to have been a spectator when it happened.

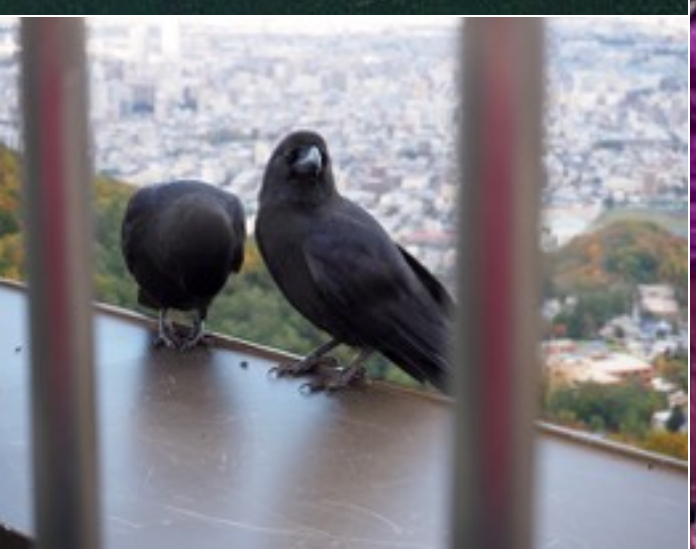
But we carried on upwards and were rewarded with magnificent views from a position that looked straight down ***Ōdōri Park***.

At least I assumed it was ***Ōdōri Park***. It was long and narrow enough to fit the bill.

On the other hand, my knowledge of ***Sapporo***'s geography is on the vague side of sketchy so I couldn't be sure at the time.

I confirmed the suspicion the next day as our bus turned across the park. There was a ski jump over to the west, and a quick check on ***Maps*** suggested it was the right ski jump.







We also had a minor diversion in the form of a couple of black birds on the edge of the lookout.

Rather tame ones, too, if their failure to be fazed by the proximity of photographers and kids was any indication.

They may have been crows, but *Hughesy* was more inclined to identify them as ravens. There's a bit in **The Hobbit** when *Bilbo Baggins and thirteen dwarves* arrive at the *Lonely Mountain* on the verge of winter and gain some assistance from ravens.

So if there's any misidentification there, *The Pernickety Reader* can attribute it to seasonal and literary factors that meant *The Author* wasn't inclined to look too closely.

And from there, with the photographic record attended to, the only way was down.

The only option in that department was the way we'd arrived. While the trip in the opposite direction was slightly more intimidating the ground remained reassuringly just underfoot.

You could, however, see where you'd be rolling if you separated yourself from your gondola.

Maybe that explains the next five minutes.

Madam headed off for further photographic action while I indicated I was heading indoors to find a seat.

There was a cafeteria behind the ***Sports Museum***, and there were chairs nearby.

But it seemed a little rude to barge in and claim a seat, even though there were plenty to spare.

A glance at the cafeteria revealed a choice of beer or ice cream for those looking to justify grabbing a seat. And ice cream had already been ruled out.

I was just about to take a seat and wait when ***Someone*** strolled into view on the other side of the picture window. There was a definite *Sprung* on the face, but there was no way I was feeling any guilt whatsoever.

It wasn't my fault that the outlook over that way had failed to pique ***Someone***'s photographic interest. If it had, and the result was a half hour wait, I could always have another ***Sapporo***.

But the purchase gave ***Someone*** time for a quick phone call.

Information back downtown suggested the bus service we were planning to catch tomorrow had been affected by upcountry snow. That was something we needed to check out. Her inquiry brought a somewhat curt response to the effect that *it was, indeed, running and had been all week*.

Once the beer was gone there wasn't much to hold our interest in the immediate vicinity, and a brief discussion ensued. There was no choice about walking the first bit, and it was all downhill.

But once we arrived at the bus stop there was a choice to make.

Wait for a bus? Or walk?

It took all of about five seconds, what with the downhill bit and all.

And maybe it was just as well.

We took our time on the descent, sighted a single up bound bus, and failed to notice anything resembling a bus sailing past us in the right direction. And it's not as if we were moving downhill at a fair clip.

As far as I was concerned I was taking my time as I took in the autumn leaves, which mightn't have been quite at their peak, but still delivered a range of hues in the red to yellow end of the rainbow.

Somewhere along the way the sound of a public address system in action seemed suspiciously like something you'd hear at a school sports carnival. Sure enough, as we passed ***Sapporo City Maruyama Athletic Field*** something along those lines was in progress.









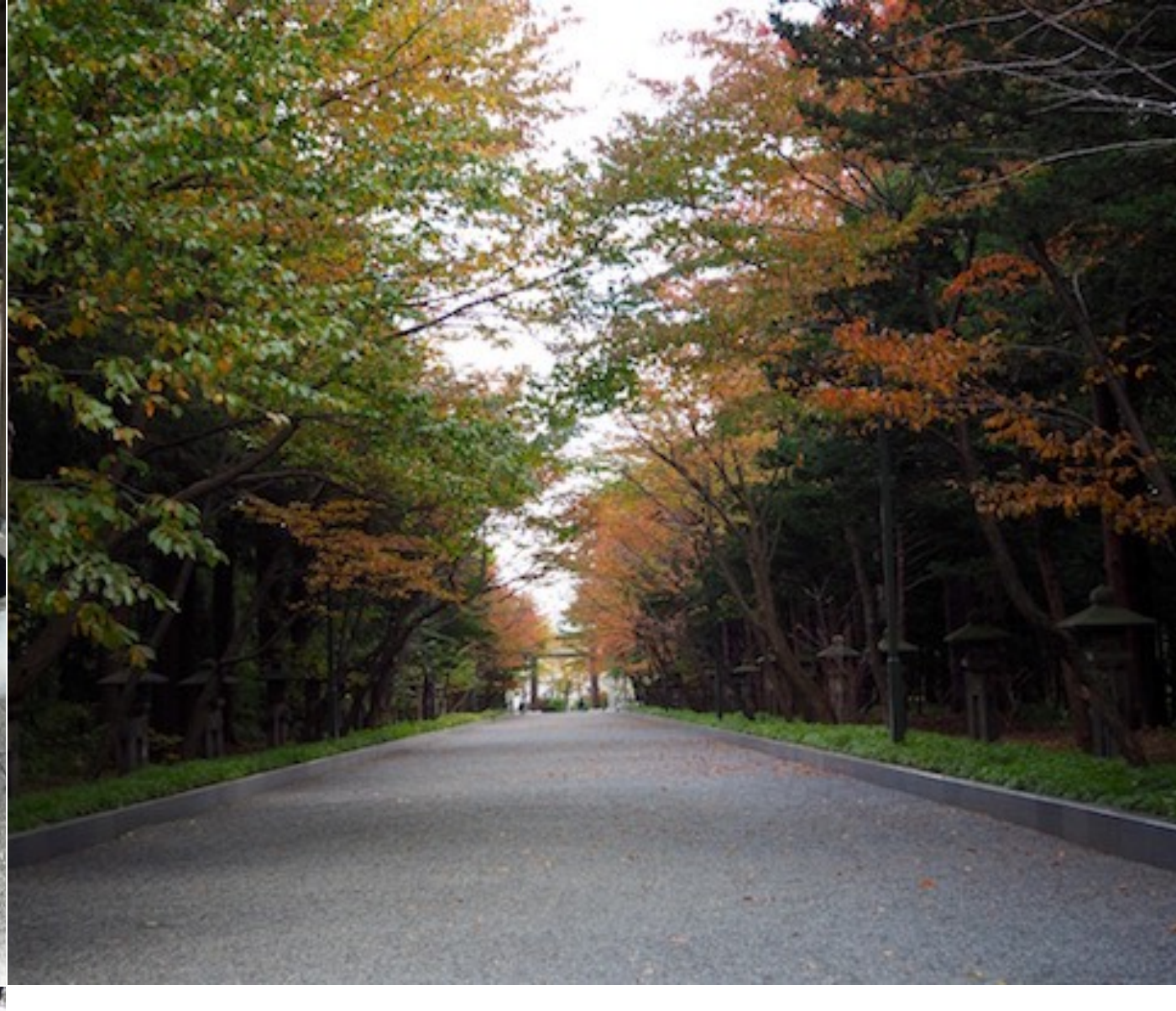
I wasn't inclined to investigate the actual details, just like I wasn't inclined to investigate ***Sapporo Maruyama Zoo*** (***Sapporo Maruyama Dōbutsuen***), which lies across the road. It's ***Hokkaidō***'s oldest zoo, heavy on animals indigenous to the island including bears, eagles and wolves. There are around a thousand animals on the 22.5 ha site, and admission is a reasonable ¥600.

But I had other priorities, and they lay just a little further along the road.

The ***Hokkaidō Shrine*** (***Hokkaidō Jingū***) in ***Maruyama Park*** dates back to the early days of ***Japanese expansion into the northern island***.

It was originally established in ***Tokyo*** in ***1869*** on the orders of ***Emperor Meiji*** to enshrine three ***kami*** (***Shinto*** *deities*) associated with the development of ***Hokkaidō***.









The three deities (*Ōkunitama*, *Okuninushi*, and *Sukunahikona*) were moved to a temporary shrine in *Sapporo* in *1870* and relocated to the current site the following year.

At that stage, the shrine was known as *Sapporo Jinja*, but when the soul of *Emperor Meiji* was enshrined there In *1964*, the name was changed to the current moniker.

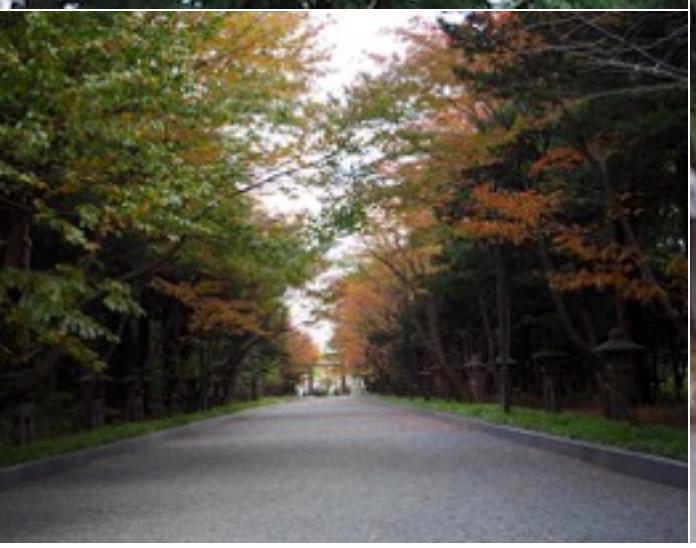
Some those who contributed to the exploration of *Hokkaidō* and the lands to the north of the island, including *Mamiya Rinzō* are also enshrined there.

Fire destroyed the building in *1974*, but it was restored in *1978*.

The shrine's 180,000 square metres adjoin *Maruyama Park* and the nearby Zoo, and 1,500 cherry trees make it a popular destination for blossom viewing parties during the *sakura* season.

The shrine draws substantial crowds for *Hatsumōde* (the first visits of the New Year to shrines and temples) and a number of festivals.







The main festival, between ***14 and 16 June*** is ***Sapporo Matsuri*** (***Sapporo Festival***), one of ***Japan's ten biggest***, attracting over a million people each year.

Three festivals in ***February*** commemorate the ***beginning of spring*** (***3 February***) and the ***founding of Japan*** (***11 February***) and ***prayers for industrial prosperity and the fertility of crops*** (***17 February***).

Other festivals and ceremonies through the year involve self-purification and recharging the spirit (***30 June***), pioneers of the settlement of ***Hokkaidō*** (***15 August***), ***the three enshrined deities*** (***1 September***), the birth of ***Emperor Meiji*** (***3 November***), the ***first rice crop of the year*** (***23 November***) and ***the present Emperor's birthday*** (***23 December***).

There are also monthly festivals on the ***1st***, ***10th***, ***15th*** and ***20th*** of each month.









We diverted across the road after that, since that section of the park looked semi-interesting, and it got us away from he road for a while, but didn't waste much time on the way to the station.

There comes a time when you need to rest your eyes after exposure to autumn leaves.

We mightn't have been quite there yet, but with the prospect of more of the same tomorrow it made sense to give it a break.

At the station. a choice between a ¥200 ticket back to *Ōdōri* or a change of line and ¥250 to *Sapporo* was a total no-brainer, but not only for the proximity to the hotel.

Madam wanted to visit a camera store since the new camera needed a bag, and there was one just on the other side of *Sapporo Station*.

A slightly shorter walk, of course, meant we could get back to base a tad sooner and squeeze in a bit more rest before we set off for our evening appointment.



Uncertainty about temperatures later in the piece saw extra layers go on before we headed out to rendezvous with ***Local Travelling Lady***, and that brought a straightforward question.

Seibu department store runs right across the block near ***Sapporo Station***, so the question was, *Which side of the store?*

Obviously, given the fact that we were catching a bus, *it's the one with the bus stop*.

Since there was no sign of one on the first side, it must be t'other one.

The ***Loop 88 Factory Line*** is the one you're looking for if you're bussing it to the ***Sapporo Beer Museym***, with departures every twenty minutes and a flat rate ¥210 for the trip.

Alternatively, you can walk it in twenty-five minutes from ***JR Sapporo*** and risk getting lost on your way to ***North 7, East 9***. Another alternative is a fifteen-minute walk from the ***Toho Subway Line***'s ***Higashi-kuyakusho-mae*** Station.

But the bus is straightforward.

The bus also takes you past the ***Sapporo Factory*** (***Sapporo Fakutorī***), the old ***Sapporo Brewery*** that has transmogrified into a complex that includes a shopping mall, offices, a movie theatre multiplex and a museum.

The original brewery building dates back to *1876* and remained in use until the brewery operations were moved to a new location in *1993*. But that's not where we were headed.

Our goal was the *only beer museum in Japan* operated by *the country's oldest brand of beer* though it's obviously not located in the original premises.

We'd just gone past those.

The red-brick building that houses the *Sapporo Beer Museum* (*Sapporo Bīru Hakubutsukan*) was originally built as a factory for the *Sapporo Sugar Company* in *1890*.

We're talking beet sugar rather than cane sugar here, and a project that had its origins back in the *Meiji Era* days of the *Kaitakushi Development Commission* which set about establishing business enterprises on the island as it was incorporated into the *Japanese Empire.*

William Clark, the president of *Massachusetts Agricultural College* and an expert on beet production, was hired to help establish beet cultivation in *Hokkaidō* in the late *1870s*.

When Clark went back to the U. S, the *Kaitakushi* delegated the task of supervising beet cultivation to *Sapporo Agricultural College*, the predecessor of *Hokkaidō University*.

They built a *sugar factory* on another site in *1879*, and the enterprise was privatised in *1888*.

The new *Sapporo Sugar Company* established the factory that later became the *Sapporo Beer Museum and Beer Garden*, but competition from *Taiwanese sugar* after the end of the *First Sino-Japanese War* in *1895* saw the company liquidated.

The *Sapporo Beer Company* bought the sugar factory in *1903* and remodelled it as a brewery.

The Interested Reader may have surmised that beer, which requires hops for the brewing process, isn't indigenous to *Japan* though its history in the country goes back to the *Edo Period*.

Dutch traders in *Nagasaki* opened a beer hall to slake the thirsts of sailors on the route between *Japan* and the Dutch East Indies.

As *Japan* was opened to foreign trade during the *Meiji Period*, imported beers became available in limited quantities in the foreign settlements, and trained brewers from overseas arrived to establish a local industry.

Spring Valley Brewery in *Yokohama*, set up by a *Norwegian-American* named *William Copeland* in late *1869* went on to become *Kirin Brewery Company*.

The country's largest producer, *Asahi Breweries* traces its founding heritage to the start of the *Osaka Beer Brewing Company* in *1889*, and the launch of the *Asahi* brand in *1892*.

The history of *Sapporo Beer* dates back to the *Meiji Period* when the *Kaitakushi* established a number of breweries.

The first wasn't even located in *Hokkaid*ō.

In *1875*, the *Kaitakushi* constructed a brewery at their *Aoyama garden* in *Tokyo*, created in *1871* to cultivate imported plants and vegetables before transporting them to *Hokkaidō*.

There were doubts about the chances of *European plants* surviving the northern island's growing conditions unless they were allowed to acclimatise first.

Kaitakushi officials also set out to acquire modern agricultural technology in much the same way as the *Japanese military* set about reorganising itself along *Western* lines. The *Royal Navy* provided the template for *a Japanese version*, and the *Army* was modelled on *Germany*'s.

And if you were looking to brew beer it made sense to head in the same direction.

Seibei Nakagawa, who studied brewing in Germany, was appointed chief brewer in *Aoyama*, with *Hisanari Murahashi*, one of the *Satsuma students* who travelled to *England* in *1868*, in charge of the garden.





Nakagawa knew ice was an important part of *German brewing techniques*, and that led *Murahashi* to request that the brewery be relocated to *Hokkaidō*. As a result, the *Kaitakushi Brewery* opened for business in *Sapporo* on *23 September 1876*.

At that point in time, the population of *Sapporo* was only around 2,500.

The first building was a wooden structure but was later enlarged with a red brick facade as *Sapporo beer* gradually became popular throughout the country.

Financial difficulties saw the *Kaitakushi* disbanded in *1882*.

The brewery ended up with the newly established *Hokkaidō Prefectural Government*. It was privatised shortly afterwards, and the *Sapporo Beer Company* was founded in *1888*. The brewery operated until *1993* when the company opened a new facility in *Eniwa*, and the site was redeveloped as a commercial complex (the *Sapporo Factory*).

As one might suspect, *Sapporo Beer* is not necessarily brewed in *Sapporo*.

The company owns *five breweries in Japan* (in *Sapporo*, *Sendai*, *Chiba*, *Shizuoka*, and *Kyushu*) as well as the *Sleeman brewery* in *Ontario*, and *Sapporo Brewing Company* in *Wisconsin*, which cater to North American markets. There's also a subsidiary in *Vietnam* with a brewery in *Đức Hòa, Long An*.

And the company doesn't just make *Sapporo Beer*.

The company acquired the *Yebisu* brand (*Hughesy*'s personal favourite out of the *Japanese beers* I've sampled) after a complicated series of mergers but left it dormant until it was resurrected in *1971*. *Yebisu*, brewed initially by the *Japan Beer Brewery Company* in *Tokyo*, dates back to *1890* but now serves as *Sapporo*'s luxury line.

Much of the history is, predictably, covered in the *Sapporo Beer Museum* displays which, equally predictably, are light on for *English language content*, but a leaflet delivered the guts of it in *English*. While that was a slight drawback, there was plenty of visual interest, with an especially effective display of historical advertising material.

The Museum, which opened in *1987*, operates six days a week (closed *Mondays*, or *Tuesday* if *Monday* was a public holiday) from 10:30 to 18:30 though the doors close half an hour before closing time.

That half hour allows the management to clear the punters out of the *Tasting Room*, which is where the three of us found ourselves after *the Japanese contingent* had their fill of the content in the *Museum* itself.

It probably comes as no surprise to learn that *Hughesy* opted for three samples for ¥ 500, rather than one of the three at ¥200. Incidentally, I had paid ¥550 at the ski jump, but that came in a larger glass.

So, with my three samples and a glass each for the girls, we found a table and sat down to talk about, among other things *High School French*. I'm not entirely sure how we got there, and we didn't remain in the vicinity very long.

When the conversation veered off into the local lingo I was quite happy just to sit, sip and ponder.

As the tasting room moved into closing down mode we moved off to sample one of the region's top-rated food items, the oddly-named *Jingisukan* (*Genghis Khan*).

There are three venues offering variations on the same theme in the *Sapporo Beer Garden*.

Despite the name, the *Beer Garden* seemed to be an all-indoor affair, but with the climatic conditions that pertain in these parts that isn't a particularly surprising discovery.

We were pointed towards the popular one, the second floor *Kessel Hal*l, where we were seated and issued with the regulation bibs that protect most of your clothing from flying fat.

We're not talking fine dining here, folks, just robust tastes delivered in largely carnivorous bulk.

It's based on the *Mongolian barbecue* concept, which helps explain the moniker, and is also said to be popular in *mainland China* and, oddly, *Thailand*.



In *pre-war Japan*, it was widely assumed that *barbecued lamb* was the staple diet of *Mongolian soldiers* as they ravaged their way across the countryside. This take on the concept probably didn't originate in *Hokkaidō*. *Tokyo*, *Zaō Onsen* in northern *Honshū*, and *Tōno* in *Iwate Prefecture* are the prime suspects).

There's also a stew that shares the name (recipe here).

The first *Jingisukan* restaurant, *Jingisu-sō* (*Genghis House*) opened in *Tokyo* in *1936*.

That's almost twenty years after the *Japanese government* planned to increase the national flock to a million animals and established five sheep farms to achieve the goal.

Only two of the properties survived, and both of them (*Takikawa* and *Tsukisamu*) are in *Hokkaidō*. That factoid may have something to do with the prevalence of lamb and mutton across the northern island when neither are widely consumed further south.

The *Jingisukan* concept is simple enough.

There's an odd-shaped a convex metal skillet in the middle of the table with gas burners below. It looks to be a non-stick surface, but would have been cast iron in the original incarnation.

You do your own cooking with a pair of chopsticks, which was presumably about all the ***Mongols*** would have had at hand out on the steppes. The dome-shaped skillet represents the soldiers' helmets that served as barbecue plates when they settled down to bivouac for the night.

In an unusual touch of local flavour, they've managed to include an outline of ***Hokkaidō*** on the helmet.

While the ***Mongol hordes*** were probably ***carnivores*** rather than ***omnivores***, and would have been cooking with ***slivers of lamb or mutton***, the platter of meat arrived with a selection of vegetables.

The menu included other options, including ***venison*** and ***scallops***, which might have been interesting alternatives, but we were there for the sheepy side of things.

That came with a variety of choices, including an all you can drink option, assuming you were going to be sticking around for a hundred minutes.

At ¥1700, compared to the regular ¥500 a throw it obviously pays to buy in bulk.





The combination of barbecued lamb, the odd vegetable and quantities of draught beer could hardly be described as *haute cuisine*, but it worked nicely enough.

But it's not the sort of place to go if you're averse to smoky lamb fat laden air, *but there you go*.

Or, if you don't fancy the smoke and the aroma you end up carrying away with you, *there you don't*.

I'm not a hundred per cent inclined that way myself, but I've done it once.

If I'm back, I might be heading upmarket and going for something slightly leaner.

Venison or scallops have definite appeal in that regard.

Once the hundred minutes were up, and we'd demolished the lamb and vegetables we paid and headed outside for obligatory commemorative photographs and the bus back to the downtown area.

Local Travelling Lady walked us back to the hotel with a stop along the way at an unusual mailbox.

It's allegedly the only one of its kind in the world, and the photograph doesn't quite do it justice, but we were back for a daylight snap later in the piece.

And, before we parted, ***LTL*** gave a glowing review to the eatery we happened to be standing outside, right there in the hotel basement on the underground passage that takes you back and forth when the snow lies piled deep up there on the surface.

It sounded like a viable alternative.

Upstairs, ***Madam*** decided she needed a bath, and I could probably have done with a shower. Sleep, however, was singing its siren song.

Nine-thirty meant three days well past the regular bed time, and I suspected the body clock would be doing its normal thing in the morning.





Friday, 16 October 2015

At three-fifteen, that's how it seemed, but after a drink of water I managed to crawl back into the cot and drift back off until just before six.

At that point, when consciousness returned, it was time to start filling in the *Travelogue* backlog until it was time for showers and breakfast.

Breakfast threw up a potentially thorny issue.

The Century Royal offers not one but two *Breakfast Vikings*.

There's one on a lower floor that we'd visited yesterday, and I'd found thoroughly satisfactory.

But there's another, with *a more Japanese approach* and a view on an upper floor.

Madam was inclined to head that way. Understandable. There'd be plenty of choices that mightn't be available under normal circumstances.



On the other hand, with lunch as a doubtful starter, I was inclined to head for familiar territory.

The solution was obvious, but there was, for a brief moment, a significant question.

Was ***Japanese language deficient Hughesy*** capable of looking after himself in the ***Breakfast Viking*** situation?

I reckoned I could, being *au fait* with the protocols and all.

Madam didn't seem so sure, but the lure of the delicacies that awaited her upstairs looked after those concerns, thank you very much.

I was escorted as far as the entrance to the lower ***Viking*** and left to fend for myself

And I fended rather well.

While there were lunch options that could have been investigated it was well after five in the afternoon when the thoughts turned to the next meal.

That was the result of ***Hughesy***'s standard two tray approach to the ***Viking***.

The first go around delivers the staples that'll fuel you through to lunch time and, hopefully, beyond. The second fills in spaces and provides the possibility of getting through to dinner time if lunch fails to materialise over the horizon.

In this case, the second tray was dominated by some of the ***Hokkaidō delicacies*** I'd skipped yesterday. There's a certain *je ne sais quoi* about venison for breakfast.

And there were the inevitable pastries to round things off.

I was thoroughly replete when I handed the docket to the *maitre d'* and headed for the agreed rendezvous in ***Reception***.

Our first destination on the day's itinerary was ***Hokkaidō University*** campus, which, for a variety of reasons was not my preference.

Given my druthers, I'd have headed for the ***Hokkaidō University Botanic Garden*** (***Hokkaidō Daigaku Shokubutsuen***) which was significantly closer to the hotel. ***North 3 West 8*** is three blocks south of ***JR Sapporo***, five blocks west and considerably closer to the ***bus station*** than the ***University campus***.

It's a large garden spread over fourteen hectares and incorporated in ***1886***. With two rock gardens, a rose garden, a lilac display, a greenhouse, and various other odds and ends I figured it would kill an hour or two fairly well.

Not, perhaps, one of the country's great gardens, but a worthwhile time killer.

There's also a section on devoted to the ***Ainu*** equivalent of bush tucker though it doesn't come with ***English signage***.

And if it didn't quite kill enough time, the various other odds and ends include ***Batchelor Kinenkan*** (***Batchelor Memorial Museum***) named after Rev. John Batchelor, a ***19th century English missionary*** who spent decades researching the Ainu in ***Hokkaidō*** and ***Siberia***.

With a collection of artefacts dating back to the ***Meiji Period***, the museum doesn't charge for admission, so if you're looking to kill a couple of minutes it doesn't raise financial issues.

But, instead, we were off to the University.

I'm not suggesting that there was nothing to see there, but, on the other hand, ***Hughesy***'s not strong on unfamiliar academia.

But the institution is one of the country's leading universities and has an interesting back story.

Hokkaidō University (***Hokkaidō daigaku***, or ***Hokudai***) began its career as ***Sapporo Agricultural College***

(***Sapporo nōgakkō***) in ***1876***.



The founder was an American, ***William S. Clark***, president of the ***Massachusetts Agricultural College***. It started life with five faculty members and twenty-four students.

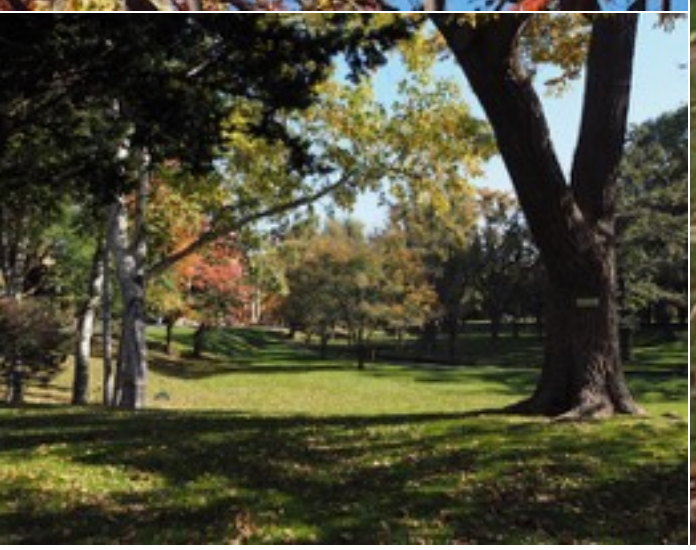
It became the ***Agricultural College*** of ***Tohoku Imperial University*** in ***1907***, a year before ***German*** teacher ***Hans Koller*** introduced the ***Western two-blade ski*** to ***Japan*** on the University campus.

Another transformation saw it turn into ***Hokkaidō Imperial University*** in ***1918***, one of seven ***Imperial Universities*** established by the ***Japanese government***.

A diversification of academic pursuits resulted in the establishment of schools of ***Medicine*** (***1919***), ***Engineering*** (***1924***) and ***Science*** (***1930***).

A new campus in ***Hakodate*** saw the ***School of Fisheries*** transferred there in 1935. Research institutes included one devoted to ***Low-Temperature Science*** (***1941***) and ***Catalysis Research*** (***1943***).





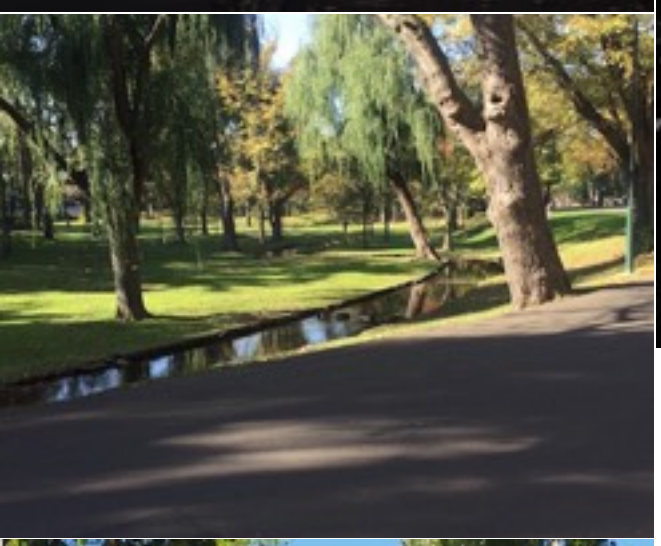


Postwar developments saw the institution renamed *Hokkaidō University* in *1947* and a further reorganisation in *1949* produced schools of *Law and Letters*, *Education*, *Science*, *Medicine*, *Engineering* and *Agriculture*, along with the *Fisheries Sciences* school in *Hakodate*.

Diversification through the fifties through the nineties resulted in a myriad of other schools, graduate schools, and research institutes. They cover areas including *Tuberculosis Research* (*1950*), *Veterinary Medicine* (*1952*), *Pharmaceutical Sciences* (*1958*), *Dental Medicine* (*1967*), *Environmental Science* (*1977*), *Slavic Research* and *Isotope Science* (*1978*), *Molecular Genetic*s (*1985*) and *Quantum Integrated Electronics* (*1991*).

One could go on at length about such matters, but that's probably enough to point out that what we're looking at was pretty much your typical highly rated large scale university located on a campus









that includes some ***American style buildings*** that may date back to the ***1890s*** and, possibly, beyond.

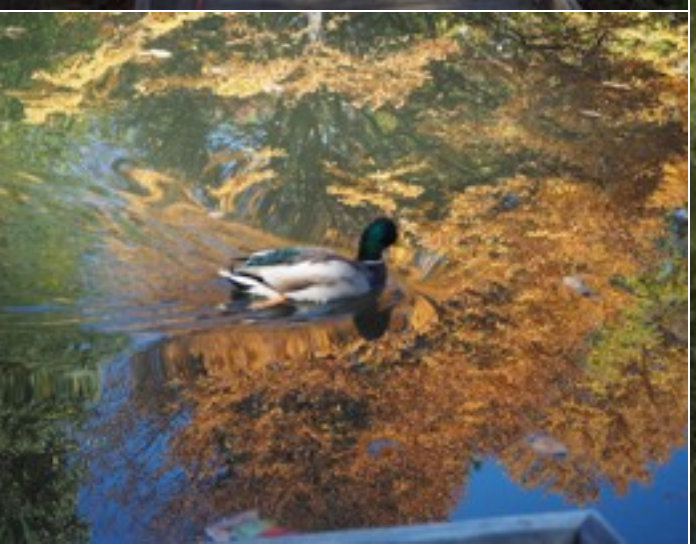
So, while it might be of interest to ***University*** freaks, there wasn't a whole lot that floats the ***Hughesy*** boat in the neighbourhood.

Things picked up a little after the first couple of buildings as we made our way onto the ***Poplar Avenue***, planted as a wind break in ***1912.*** That delivered an attractive vista that would, *In My Humble Opinion*, have been far better without the buildings that flanked it on either side.

It would also have been much better without the masses of inconsiderate students who parked their bikes all over the footpath.

But don't get me wrong.







As we made our way between the poplars, I was enjoying myself, playing an elderly curmudgeon role that would have been thoroughly familiar to *Bowen State Schoo*l's Year 4H back in *2004*.

And there were a couple of highlights on the scenic and sightseeing side of things.

Slotted in between the *School of Engineering* and the *Faculty House* on the west side of *Poplar Avenue*, made our exit, *Ono Pond* is a relatively recent (*August 2008*) development. T

The pond is part of the *Eco-Campus Promotion Project* that reflects the natural surrounds of the area before buildings the *University*'s buildings arrived on the scene.

Maybe that explains its appeal to someone who thought, only half in jest, that the place would be better without the buildings.



This was (supposedly) what it was like before the buildings when a spring flowed into the nearby *Sakushukotoni River*, which flowed southeast to northwest across this part of *Sapporo* from a source on the northern side of the *University's Botanical Garden*.

There's not much of the river left, and the spring supplied water for horses and cattle in the *Faculty of Agriculture*'s *Model Barn*, which was our eventual destination on this little jaunt.

The animals drank there until the *School of Engineering* and assorted research facilities went in around the watercourse in the fifties and sixties.

The area gradually deteriorated into a degraded dump site until *Professor Kazuo Ono* from the *School of Engineering* set about restoring the devastated pond to something approaching its original, pristine, state in the *1970s*.

And he succeeded, delivering a location that provides quality recreational open space for staff, students and visitors.

So we took a break beside the pond before heading off to the nearby *Model Dairy*, which was the one part of the campus that had piqued my interest. *Ono Pond* was a bonus.

It was, officially, the *Sapporo Agricultural College Farm No.2*, established in *1876* by the College's first principal *Dr. William Smith Clark*.

The plan was to introduce up to date, *large-scale Western-style agriculture and livestock production* to immigrants to *Hokkaidō*, who would have had no experience with that method of farming and, quite possibly, no background in dealing with the northern island's climatic conditions.

Clark wanted a facility where students could gain practical experience in managing livestock.

The buildings, most of them dating from the period between *1877* and *1911*, weren't all in their current locations when they went in.

The centrepiece is the so-called *Model Barn*, designed by the College's second principal W. M. Wheeler, who modelled it on a barn at Massachusetts Agricultural College.

Completed in *1877*, the two-storey wooden building had cattle and horse stalls on the ground floor, hay storage above and a total floor area of 555 square metres. The balloon frame structure building has no supporting beams and similar lightweight, practical buildings spread across the *American Midwest* around the same time.

There probably isn't that much difference between winter in *Minneapolis*, *Milwaukee* or *Lake Wobegone* and conditions in *Hokkaidō*.











The *Model Barn* was registered as an *Important Cultural Property of Japan* in *1969*.

Since it is the oldest, most symbolic building in the farm, the *Model Barn* became the common term to describe the whole group of buildings.

All up there are about ten buildings in the area between the *University administration office* and the *Graduate School of Environmental Science*, with the earlier structures moved to their present positions in *1910*.

The facility was the university farm until *1969*, when the buildings were renovated by the *Agency for Cultural Affairs*. They currently serve as exhibition facilities displaying hundreds of farm implements imported since the start of the *Meiji Era* and other tools donated to the University. The buildings are open to the public daily between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

By this stage, we were close to the northern end of the campus, two kilometres from our starting point and rather further from the location where we needed to catch a bus in the very near future.







That prompted a mad scramble back to the station, where we needed to get ourselves to the bus terminal's ***Platform 12*** by around eleven-fifteen

It wasn't *quite* a *skin of the teeth* job, but when we arrived there was a lengthy queue and a definite demonstration of the value of pre-booking your excursion in these circumstances.

We were off to ***Jozankei***, an ***onsen*** resort area that sits southwest of downtown ***Sapporo***.

It's a little more than an hour by bus, and the area is rated as a prime destination for coloured leaves, so you have three factors that are bound to attract crowds kicking in together.

Proximity means you can decide *it's a nice day for it* and take yourself off to the bus terminal, more or less on spec.



Jozankei has a number of *onsen* resorts that will open their doors to day visitors.

That's probably enough to pack the *it's a nice day for it* crowd in anyway.

And then there's the coloured leaves factor.

If you haven't booked it's a case of *first in, best dressed*, and it looked like there were large numbers of punters who may well be missing out.

That number didn't, however, include us.

Madam left me on the end of a queue that must have had a good forty customers and headed off to investigate.

She was back about a minute later with a *Follow Me*, and we were aboard in time to grab the last couple of regular seats at the back of the bus.

Some of the queue we'd just passed managed to clamber aboard and claim the jump seats in the aisle, but there was a substantial number left in the line waiting for the next departure when our bus departed.

And there was a substantial scrum outside the ticket office.



It looked like the sort of situation that could turn ugly if you had the odd cluster of impatient hotheads in the area, but ***Japanese people***, by and large, seem remarkably patient in these circumstances.

While our destination lay to the southwest, a question about the direction of travel would have brought an *East* from ***Yours Truly***.

Maybe I was out of breath and disorientated after the mad scramble that got us to the bus station.

But I wasn't disoriented enough to fail to note the presence of the ***Okurayama Ski Jump*** in the distance as we crossed ***Ōdōri Park***.



It wasn't long until we were into the foothills and the autumn leaves, on our way to an ***onsen*** area that dates back to the early days of ***Sapporo***, when an ascetic monk named ***Miizumi Jozan***, discovered the springs and opened a spa on the upper reaches of the ***Toyohira*** River. That was in ***1866***.

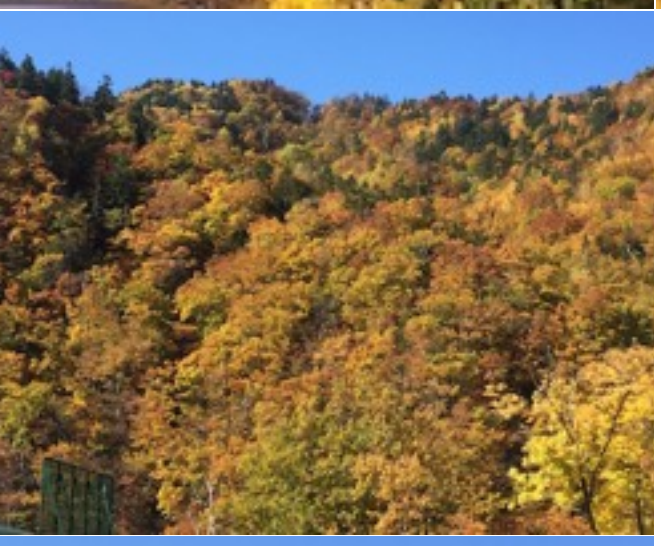
If the notion of a spa operation doesn't quite sit neatly with ideas of asceticism, the intention was to use the waters for ***healing*** rather than ***recreation***.

While ***Jozan*** put a great deal of effort into setting things up for the injured and sick to take the waters by building roads and bridges, the spa's reputation spread.

Mining and timber getting brought more people into the area.









In *1918*, when a mine opened in *Toyoha* thirty kilometres of railway line opened things up further and the area now boasts dozens of *ryokan*, restaurants and shops catering to *onsen* tourists.

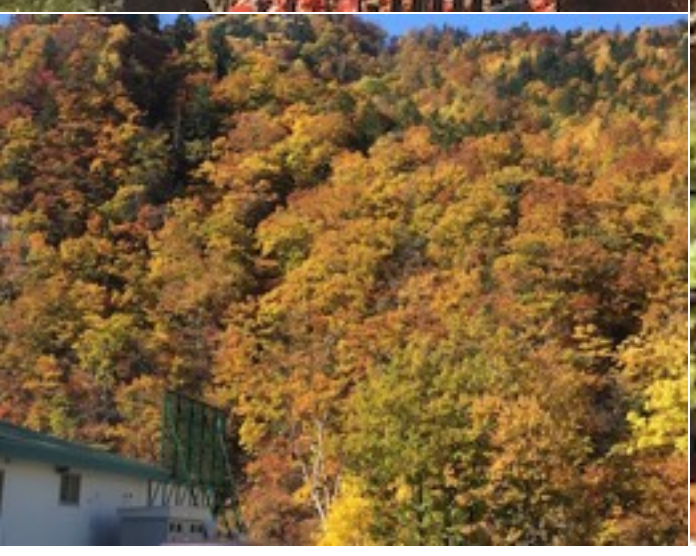
A location between the high cliffs of the *Toyohira* valley inside *Shikotsu-Toya National Park* just an hour outside central *Sapporo* certainly helped.

As a result, *Jozankei* is more developed than smaller *onsen* towns elsewhere in *Hokkaidō*.

Many *ryokan* are open to day visitors for a nominal fee (usually in the vicinity of ¥1000). If you're disinclined to shell out for the full *onsen* facility, there are *free foot baths* around the town for footsore travellers.

In a cave next door to one of those free foot baths, the *Iwato Kannondo* temple commemorates road workers killed while building a tunnel. The 120-metre cave contains thirty-three statues of *Kannon, the Bodhisattva of compassion*.







Interestingly, the temple has a vending machine selling towels for users of the neighbouring foot baths.

People soaking their feet for free may well have been trekking around nearby ***Lake Toya***, the scenic ***Hoheikyo Dam***, or the ***Shikotsu-Toya National Park***'s ***active volcanoes***.

Mount Usu erupted as recently as ***2000***), and ***Showa Shinzan*** is ***Japan's youngest volcano***, formed between ***1943*** and ***1945***. The lake's ***Windsor Hotel Toya Resort & Spa*** was the venue for the ***G8 summit*** in ***July 2008***.

So there's plenty to draw the visitors in apart from the waters. ***Hughesy***'s categorisation of the place as ***an obvious onsen resort, with plenty of high rise*** should come as no surprise.









Having arrived just after midday, we had a couple of hours to spend in the vicinity, not long enough to take in the lake or the dam before we headed back just after three.

Still, there was sufficient time for a ramble along the river valley among the autumn leaves. While there mightn't have been a lot of action or activity, I was quite content to wander in a leisurely fashion and enjoy the seasonality.

We didn't go all that far either, crossing a handy bridge before heading uphill, and looping back to the ***onsen*** development.

Once we were back, it was a case of killing time, with the ***foot baths*** as an obvious avenue for doing so.

We could have stopped at the first one, which was set in an attractive garden setting, but it seemed uncomfortably crowded.

As a result, we hoofed it a little further, taking ourselves through the town centre and past the bus stop on our way to the ***foot bath facility beside the temple***.



There was plenty of room there though it started to fill up about half an hour after we'd settled ourselves in.

That seemed like a reasonable excuse to whack the shoes back on and head back downhill looking for a snack and, possibly, beer. That didn't quite work out, and I ended up killing time in the little park beside the river while *The Photographer* snapped away.

Not that I was objecting. It was very restful.

Since we were booked to go back at 3:09, we started moving again around half an hour before the scheduled departure time. With the benefit of hindsight, we could have stayed longer, since the shop that *Madam* steered us into had absolutely nothing of interest to *Yours Truly*.

There wasn't much to interest *Madam* either, so she headed back towards temple for more snaps while *Hughesy* joined the bus queue, although I didn't actually need to.

Madam was back just before the bus arrived though there wasn't a great deal in it. There wasn't a great deal of room in the bus either, which proved the wisdom of making a definite booking.

With a vehicle that was almost chocker when it arrived, *Hughesy* got to claim the last seat while *Madam* ended up on a jump seat in the aisle.



That put her on a par with the first half of the queue. Everyone else was left to wait for the next bus.

I managed to doze off on the hour and a bit run back to downtown ***Sapporo***, regaining consciousness just before we alighted and walked back to the hotel to drop the backpacks.

From there, with ***Someone*** feeling peckish, we took ourselves off to the sweet shop, where ***Someone*** needed to pick up gifts for family members. Asked whether I felt like an ice cream, I wasn't going to respond in the negative.

I wasn't, however, expecting to be ushered to a seat in the upstairs cafeteria. Neither, I guess, was ***Madam***, who had no interest in any of the flasher options on the menu presented to us..

Both of us just wanted an ice cream, something to tide us over until dinner time, when we probably wouldn't be looking for anything substantial. Explaining the circumstances saw us pointed to the appropriate area near the entrance to the cafeteria, where the product was obviously of rather high quality but not to my taste.

It was one of those situations where you *know* something sits *at the top of the range*, but you *aren't fussed about it*.

And once ***Someone*** had stocked up on gifts for the family it looked like it was time to turn the thoughts to dinner. There didn't seem to be much in the way of alternatives.

Madam had floated the possibility of *a very good* ***ramen*** *place*, but it was a good ten-minute walk, and neither of us felt like making that much effort.

In any case, ***Japanese fare*** would be featuring over the next few days, so both of us reckoned we'd prefer something else. In any case, we needed an early night after three late ones with another one looming just over the horizon.

We took a quick circuit around the lower levels of the station complex to scope out the options but quickly came to the conclusion that the ***Belgian beer cafe*** that had been pointed out to us the previous evening sounded just right.

And it was. We opted for draught beer, roast chicken and ***salad liegeois***, and found the quantities just right. I washed my portion down with a second beer while ***Elmore James*** or his almost identical cousin brother played in the background.

But even with a quality soundtrack, neither of us was inclined to stick around.

Once we 'd paid and made our exit, it was a case of heading straight upstairs.

Juggling the charging of digital devices delayed the actual bed time, but ***Hughesy***, for one, was well and truly ready to crash by eight fifteen



2

JAPAN 2015: THE TRAIN LEG



SAPPORO > HAKODATE > HIROSAKI

Saturday, 17 October 2015

A good nine and three quarter hours of pretty sound sleep, punctuated by strange dreams involving the *Australian Senate* and overseas travel saw some of us up and about around six on *Day One* of the *Train Leg*.

That gave a bit of *Travelogue* tapping time before *The Supervisor* rose and we set about packing before the first rail sector. It was a substantial travel day, and while there wasn't a great likelihood of missing the train you do tend to be ultra-cautious.

Especially when you're leaving a little earlier than the original game plan. The preferred option was all sold out when we booked the tickets back in ***Kōbe***, and we were leaving a good hour and a half earlier.

Miss this one and we'd miss the connection in ***Hakodate*** as well.

So we were all ready to go by the time we headed down to breakfast just after seven.

Under the circumstances, a queue outside the dining room was probably something you'd prefer not to encounter, but the wait was minimal. In any case, once we'd gained admission and attacked the buffer it was obvious there was plenty of room to spare inside.

It seemed fairly obvious that the queue was a case of managing the crowd around the food options. I'd thought of sneaking a quick photograph of the spread on each of the three mornings I'd been there but invariably felt like I'd be getting in the way.

Unfortunately, after the previous day's effort, the buffet was light on for venison, and I was forced to take it easy on the variety side of things.

I didn't *quite* fill the first tray, and there was no thought of going on to a second.

But I engaged in a minor pastry pig out, just in case I needed it later on.

And we were back upstairs around 7:34 with an hour until departure time. That gave me a chance to continue on the ***Travelogue*** backlog.





But I didn't get too long at it. After half an hour ***Someone*** was getting restless, and so we took our time pottering around and taking our time on the way out, which should mean we had everything.

Experience suggests you can't be too careful in that regard.

In any case, it got to the point where there was nothing for it but to collect the goods and chattels and head downstairs to check out.

Once we were out of the foyer, the station was the obvious destination, but we diverted ever so slightly to see ***Thursday*** night's unusual ***Post Office*** letterbox, which didn't seem quite so attractive in the cold hard light of ***Saturday*** morning.

From there, the path took us into the regulation massive station complex, the sort of affair you come to expect in ***a major Japanese city***.

Since we were at the terminus, our ***Hokuto 6***, Car 4 was there, ready and waiting as we ascended to the platform, with our carriage, ***Car 4***, conveniently positioned right beside where we left the escalator.

We weren't, however, the first passengers to board, and we weren't the first with large luggage either.

That meant we had to address the question of where to stow ***The Coppertone Container.***

As things turned out, it fitted into the overhead luggage rack. *Just*.

But it fitted, so there was an obvious alternative next time space behind the last seats at the back of the carriage had been claimed.

On-time departures are par for the course on *Japanese railways*, and we were o on time, crossing *Odori Street* and heading into the *regular urban Japanese cityscape*. Nothing remarkable there, but around ten minutes later the cityscape had given way to an industrial area. That, in turn, morphed into light industry with residential towers on the way into *ShinSapporo*.

With services commencing in *2016*, there was a fair amount of promotional material for the *Hokkaidō Shinkansen* in and around *JR Sapporo*, and while the trains mightn't have quite reached there yet, the infrastructure seemed to be in place.

As far as I could see, anyway.

Our stop at *ShinSapporo* was at your average common or garden station platform. It seemed safe to assume that the *Shinkansen* station will be a proper flash turnout, and entirely separate to the existing station facility. It will be interesting to see whether the *Shinkansen* has any effect on the busy air corridor into *New Chitose*.

With no visible sign of actual *Shinkansen* line, it seemed safe to assume it will probably sit above ground level, the way such lines superimpose themselves over the existing landscape.

When, that is, they're not running through the landscape.

By 8:48 we were into the autumn foliage, which I noted would probably be the theme for the next three and a half hours. Letting those elements wash over me as we headed towards the coast through familiar elements spread a little more than on the main island with more vegetated space.

There's room to move and expand in *Hokkaidō* though the structures remain much the same as elsewhere.

We were beetling along just a little too fast to pick up station names but stopped long enough at *Minamichitose* for *Hughesy* to tap out the name in the travel notes.

From the name I figured that put us almost out at *the airport*, and shortly afterwards I could make out what looked like a control tower over on the horizon.

Or it maybe it was a *high rise airport hotel*. But as it turned out, by 9:10 we were passing right beside *the airport*, which meant that the building must have been something else.

It was just over a quarter of an hour afterwards when we stopped in *Tomakomai* the fifth largest city in *Hokkaidō* with a population around 180,000.

The station came after a belt of light industry and sat close to a golf driving range where, for once, I managed to glimpse the facilities. *The Observant Traveller* will notice the netting rising above the cityscape, but usually that's as much as you can make out.

By this time, we were on *Hokkaidō*'s east coast. *Tomakomai* is an important ferry port, but we were on the wrong side to catch glimpses of water though it couldn't have been far away.

Unfortunately, people over on that side have blinds drawn, and someone has decided to run the line slightly inland, so there are buildings in the way too. One thing that was totally obvious, looking at the map, was that the *Shinkansen* won't be coming this way.



The line, when services start up, will be coming from ***ShinAomori*** and passing under the ***Tsugaru Strait*** because it has to. For the same reason it will pass through ***Hakodate*** on the way to ***Sapporo***, but that's it.

Massive construction costs will see it following the closest possible approximation to a beeline between the two centres.

Not an actual beeline, however. There's a substantial body of water (***Uchiura-wan***) in between, and the line will have to go *around*, rather than *under*, it. At the same time, technological advances since the line we were on went in will allow the new line to pass *through* and *under* anything substantial that geology has thrown up along the way.

And if ***Tomakomai*** is the island's fifth largest city with a population below 200,000 there won't be too many centres large enough to justify a ***ShinStation*** and a diversion from the shortest practical route.

The politics of ***Shinkansen*** routes and any possible relevance to the question of ***Very Fast Trains in Australia*** provided food for thought as we headed off.

Until, that is, 9:35, when I noted large arrays of solar panels and maybe sea over there on the left. We were passing through a rural landscape, with mountains in the distance, complete with what may be snow but is probably bare rock.

There are some things you can't help noticing, assuming you're on the appropriate side of the train. Two perfect examples appeared as we made our way into ***Noboribetsu***.

Just before the station, a large fairground caught the eye, but what really got the brain cells working was an impressive approximation of a ***French chateau*** that almost screamed ***Onsen Resort***.

At least, it seemed safe to make an assumption along those lines. Elsewhere, an alternative hypothesis might have involved a winery, but ***Hokkaidō***'s hardly wine grape territory.

Noboribetsu, as it turns out, is ***Hokkaidō***'s most famous hot spring resort thanks to the waters from springs in the ***Jigokudani*** (*Hell Valley*) just above the town, which sits within ***Shikotsu-Toya National Park***.

There are actually ***nine different waters***, containing varying quantities of minerals including ***sulphur***, ***salt***, and ***iron***. The area is apparently ranked among ***the world's most exceptional hot springs***.

The ***Jigoku Valley***, where yellow-grey volcanic gas seeps out of the rocks is a 450-metre-wide mouth of a volcano, which delivers three thousand litres of hot water every minute, times sixty, times twenty-four, times three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter.

That's a lot of water, and there's plenty more of it on the other (seaward) side. That was around 9:54.



It was around ten minutes later when we hit *Higashi Muroran* and another twenty to *Datemombetsu*, part of a city (*Date*) established around *1869* by the clan who had been the dominant force around *Fukushima* and *Sendai* (*Miyagi Prefecture* and the southern part of *Iwate Prefecture*) on the main island from the *12th century*.

They had been one of the most influential *daimyō* clans by political changes associated with the *Meiji Restoration* forced a branch of the family to relocate to the south coast of *Hokkaidō*.

Nearby, *Mount Usu* an active stratovolcano in *Shikotsu-Toya National Park* has erupted four times since *1900*.

The *1910* eruption created the *Meiji-shinzan cryptodome*, forty-five craters on the northern side of the volcano, and a number of hot springs. The activity was triggered by magma intruding into a shallow area where groundwater was abundant, so the *onsen* side of things doesn't come as any surprise.

Another eruption between *28 December 1943* and *September 1945* formed the *Shōwa-shinzan*, the country's youngest volcano as earthquakes shook the area around *Lake Tōya*. Some days there were up to two hundred tremors, though the authorities kept the news to themselves, fearing it might be seen as an omen of impending wartime doom.

A local postmaster *Masao Mimatsu*, however, kept detailed records as wheat fields were uplifted and fissures started to appear. One of them was six hundred metres long.

On a single day (*22 June*) in *1944*, there were 250 tremors as the ground rose one and a half metres. Lava flows broke through the surface over the next two days, and a pyroclastic surge on *7 July* reached the northern shore of *Lake Tōya*, destroying houses and forests along the way.

By the end of *October*, the postmaster recorded seven craters, seventeen major and countless minor eruptions as volcanic ash landed up to a kilometre away from the vent and the ground continued to rise by up to two metres a day.

The activity continued until *September 1945* when the birth of 398 metre *Shōwa-shinzan* was complete though it continues to emit smoke.

Subsequent eruptions in *1977* and between *March 2000* and *September 2001* suggested things haven't settled down. The most recent activity forced the authorities to evacuate 13,000 residents.

Still, *Mount Usu* and *Shōwa-shinzan* are significant tourist attractions within *Shikotsu-Toya National Park*. A ropeway takes visitors up to viewing platforms that look out over *Shōwa-shinzan* if that sort of thing floats your boat.

We; of course, weren't stopping for any length of time and by 10:32 we were looking at *Toya Station* in the town of *Tōyako* on the western shore of *Lake Tōya*.

The ten-kilometre volcanic caldera is nearly circular and is reputed to be the country's second most transparent lake and the *northernmost lake in Japan that never freezes over*. You can probably put that down to the volcanic activity.

The water wasn't always in sight as we looped out way around the bay to *Oshamambe* (10:59) and *Yakumo* (11:19) That left us with about an hour to go and an expectation that we about to divert inland after following the coastline around the bay.

But it didn't quite work out like that. At 11:33 we still had water out there on the left as we slowed and seemed to be starting to climb. Actually, we weren't. Each time I sighted water we seemed to be about the same height above it

The Casual Observer might not consider that particularly strange, but *TCO* wasn't hearing the sound of an engine that seemed to be straining.

Rather like something going up a hill, in fact.

Except, it seemed, we weren't, though we were definitely slowing down. The reduced speed might have been more conducive to photographs, but the light had become an issue.

At 11:44 in *Mori*, settled by the *Japanese* as a herring fishing base as far back as the 15th century we still had still water over on the left side. The fishermen came up from *Hakodate*, and the town was administered from there.



The town played a minor part in the *Boshin War* (*1868 – 1869*) at the end of the *Tokugawa Shōgunate* when naval commander *Kōbō Abe* (*1836 – 1908*) fled from *Edo* with the remnants of the *Tokugawa Navy*. His fleet of eight steam warships called in *en route* to a new base at *Hakodate* and the town joined the *Republic of Ezo*.

But that didn't last long. *The Republic* was defeated in the *Battle of Hakodate* in *1869*, and *Hokkaidō* ended up under the rule of the new *Meiji central government*.

A few minutes later at 11:50 we were finally away from the coast, and it definitely felt like we were starting to climb though I seemed to recall something along those lines a while back.

Still, there were embankments where there used to be water, and the note of the engine suggested the strain that comes with climbing.

Five minutes later we had *Ōnuma Quasi-National Park* coming up on the left. The 90 square kilometre park is the smallest *Hokkaidō* includes the *Hokkaidō Komagatake*, a 1131-metre stratovolcano that kicked back into activity in the *early 17th century* after around five dormant millennia.

The renewed activity delivered mudflows that dammed up depressions at the foot of the volcano and, in turn, created the *Ōnuma* and *Konuma* ponds, which abut the western slope of the mountain.

And with the mountain over there, between the train and the water, we were away from the coast.







We hit the water again on the way into *Ōnuma Kōen*, some twenty-five kilometres north of *Hakodate*, where a semi-flash station is evidence of the town's role as the coastal city's mountain and lake playground. Three lakes, *Ōnuma*, *Konuma* and *Junsainuma* all draw their share of daytrippers.

International visitors have been calling there since the early days of the *Meiji Era*. At that point, with *Hakodate* as one of the few ports open for foreign trade, members of the *German and Italian royal families* visited the area.

Things took off after the *Emperor Meiji*'s visit in *1881* attracted national attention.

It wasn't difficult to see why.



Birch and maple forests surround the lakes, and there are impressive vistas away to the left across towards what may well have been *Hakodate*.

There were mountains, or at least hills, too, with motorways to the right, along with farmland and patches of woodland. There was an extensive plain, or perhaps water beyond that, but it was hard to tell with glare and haze over in that direction.

It wasn't long until we found ourselves coming in through suburban *Hakodate* from the north.

Once we'd manipulated *The Coppertone Container* down from its eyrie and alighted from the train, the next question involved ways to kill the next ninety minutes.

Anything in the sightseeing department was going to be hampered by time constraints and *The Coppertone Container* though it could always go in a coin locker.

But we'd done most of the obvious things close to the station last time around, and anything else brought there and back travel time into the equation.

As it turned out killing time wasn't that difficult when you have a series of seemingly insignificant tasks that all add up.

For a start *Madam* needed to queue for the toilet.

That successfully took care of a couple of minutes. Then, with the cash resources running low, *Madam* headed upstairs to replenish the reserves, which took care of a couple more.

When she returned, she asked if I wanted to head outside to get a photo of something.

I didn't, particularly, but figured a snap or two would be handy.

So I headed out to get a couple of *in Hakodate* shots to insert in the *Travelogue* hereabouts.It only killed ninety seconds at the outside, but every little bit helps.

And when I got back, the ticket office beckoned.

We still needed tickets for the last day. of the train leg. The process of queueing and purchasing what we needed killed ten minutes or so, but no one was counting. But there was still time to kill.

Madam felt peckish, but I wasn't hungry at all.





Thirsty, definitely, but solid food held no attraction whatsoever. So I found a seat and waited while ***Someone*** inspected the *bento* options. She returned with references to ***scallops***, which was enough to pique a degree of interest.

That lasted until it was obvious that ***scallops*** come with ***rice*** and ***pickles***.

That was too much for this little black duck. But we managed to reach a compromise. If ***Someone*** bought a *bento* box, ***Hughesy*** could eat a ***scallop*** or two while ***Someone*** gets the rest.

That was the right quantity as far as I was concerned.

But we'd be eating later, on the train. I was left holding the *bento* while ***Someone*** headed outside for photographic purposes.

She returned via the via sweets shop with an entirely unnecessary question.

Did I want a beer?

Ridiculous question.

But it was followed by something more specific. ***Did I fancy sampling a special Hakodate brew?***

This wasn't something that really needed to be asked either, but I was directed over there to inspect the options. They looked good and certainly hit the spot very nicely when the time came to knock one over arrived.

But the to and fro, along with ***Someone*** picking up the things she wanted, killed much of the remaining time. I ended up with a bottle of ***Hakodate Ale*** and a ***Sapporo Classic***, the ***Hokkaidō***-only brew that you can't buy elsewhere.

That whole process got onto the train with about seven minutes to spare. I wouldn't have minded about twenty minutes writing time before departure, but with those two brews to console, me no one was suffering.





The train departed, entirely predictably, right on time and there was nothing remarkable about the first leg since we'd passed this way before.

But as we hit the choke point before the tunnel we encountered obvious ***Shinkansen*** construction.

We were on the wrong side of the train for views across the bay, and ***Shinkansen*** structures tend to fit into a pattern when you look from the outside. ***26 March*** next year is the scheduled opening day, and certainly looked like things are under control at this end.

Interestingly, it seems like the ***Shinkansen*** tracks will coincide with the regular ones through the tunnel, at least at the start. It certainly looked like there was an intersection as we pulled out of the last stop before the tunnel.

With not much to distract inside the tunnel, I was able to tap out ***Travelogue*** notes up to this point.

I had the basics in place by the time we hit the deepest point. That gave me ten minutes before we hit the surface on the ***Honshū*** side to work back over things and add a little padding. *Handy*..

And we were back on the surface almost right on schedule, though the clock might have ticked over to 3:15. That left us around forty minutes until ***Aomori*** and what was possibly going to be a tight little switch of services.

Three minutes was about all we had up our sleeves though one suspected they'll hold the ***Aomori > Hirosaki*** service if we're running late. We probably weren't the only ones looking to make the changeover. Hopefully, the connecting train will be on the other side of the platform.

After all, ***Aomori***'s not that big. Still, in the interim, there was nothing to do but sit back and enjoy the trip as we made our way in and out of frequent tunnels.

We were into ***Kanita*** at 3:33, and the stop brought thoughts of changing to a seat towards the front of the carriage to expedite that change in ***Aomori***.

We had water right beside the track on the left, but we were sitting on the right, where the afternoon sun created some issues.

There was a definite haze towards the mountains on that side, with the ***Tsugaru Plain*** in between.

Numerous irrigation canals running from the ***Iwaki River*** provide water for irrigation, and the area is a noted producer of quality rice and apples.

There was evidence of the ***Shinkansen*** line over on the right as we made our way into ***Aomori***, but that was hardly surprising.

ShinAomori lies south of the city, and the new line would have to loop around its outskirts o the way to the tunnel under the ***Tsugaru Strait***.

And when we pulled up at ***Aomori***, things ran relatively smoothly.

Until, that it, ***Hughesy*** was delegated to deposit ***The Coppertone Container*** in the space at the back.

The train was moving before I could do that, and things were complicated by a flood of incoming geriatrics who weren't looking fo stash luggage there but were intent on finding seats further along..

The new train was bound all the way to ***Akita***, but we were alighting at the first stop after ***ShinAomori***, just under half an hour down the track.

As we moved off it looked like the plain didn't last that long as we moved into hillier terrain and the sun hovered above the horizon just far enough up to cause an issue if the hills dropped out of the equation.



The conditions weren't ideal for a photographic record, but the speed factor and a bit of jolting would have rendered the camera inoperative anyway.

So, he wrote, *there was nothing to do but sit back and enjoy the view*.

And, predictably, we immediately hit a tunnel. On that basis, ***Hughesy*** packed away the ***iPad*** and prepared for what promised to be a rapid alightment at our overnight stop.

Predictably, as soon as I did the terrain flattened out and we were back on the flat. ***Tsugaru Plain*** obviously stretches well inland.

The stop in ***Hirosaki*** was predictably brief and deposited us on a platform that seemed to have more than its share of uniformed ***Junior High*** students, both on the platform and up in the station itself.

We needed a map to get us to the hotel, which was around a kilometre from the station, so we stopped into ***Tourist Information***. While the directions to the hotel wouldn't have been that difficult and might have got ourselves to the hotel without it, it was a handy acquisition.

The railway station is well away from the sights, which fall into two distinct geographic areas. The ***Hirosaki Park Hotel*** sits in the middle of the three, seemingly equidistant from the ***Castle Park***, the temple district and the station.

With all morning and a fair chunk of the afternoon to explore the sights the next day, there was the prospect of a decent walk in the morning.

That might, in ***The Speculative Reader***'s mind, have prompted suggestions about taking on sustenance the night before. Fuel for the morning and all that, but I was definitely in *Good Paddock territory* and wasn't looking for anything substantial at night.

What I was looking forward to was a ***Tsugaru shamisen*** performance around dinner time.

Inquiries, as we booked into the hotel, produced a suggestion that it might be crowded on a ***Saturday*** night, but a phone call got us a table.

Along with a warning.

With the ***Saturday night*** crowd, the view might not be all that flash.



That didn't faze me at all, as long as I could see enough to get the gist of the instrument and the manner in which it was played. The sound, after all, is what matters.

On the way up to ***Room 810*** I suspected the room would be compact. Noting the spaces between the pairs of doors along the passageway. I hoped our position at the end of the hallway might give a little more breadth (it didn't), and that the room might be somewhat longer than expected.

It was, but not by much. The bed was one of those *up against the wall climb in on one side or clamber over the end* jobs that I prefer to avoid, but there was nothing we could do about it.

Not on a ***Saturday nigh***t, anyway.

There was, however, a more significant issue. Despite the sticker in the room that gave the password for the ***Free WiFi*** I couldn't find any sign of a network.

Madam was keen to do some shopping and left me to my own devices, which meant I managed to recharge both ***iPhone*** (camera) and ***iPad*** to close to 100% before we headed out for our ***shamisen*** show.

Before she did she contacted ***Reception*** about the ***WiFi*** issue and received a noncommittal response along the lines that *it was probably best in the lobby*.

On that basis, I copied the password into ***Notes*** before we departed.

It wasn't that complicated (nine digit numbers tend not to be) but I wasn't going to trust the memory on this one.

Despite the warnings, the room downstairs was about half full when we moseyed in just after six-thirty, but the tables were well spaced and even tucked away at the back of the room we got a clear view of proceedings. Not that there was a lot of action in the performance.

As you might suspect, given the nature of the performance, the food fell into the ***Japanese regional traditional sphere***, and ***Madam*** went to some lengths to ensure that I was adequately fed.

She really didn't need to.

A small snack and a couple of beers constituted an elegant sufficiency.

That might come as a surprise, but my share of a beef and onion dish and a deep fried ball of minced squid were all I needed.

And before ***The Critical Reader*** starts speculating about filling up with beer, the count was *three*. Glasses, not jugs, and probably around the old ten-ounce mark.

The performance started at seven and didn't last very long, which was also the way I liked it. There are apparently a number of venues across *Hirosaki* where the eager listener can catch *Tsugaru shamisen* at length, but I'd already decided we would probably be needing an early night.

And that's the way it turned out. A small meal, three beers, one of which came after the show, and an early night saw *Hughesy* hitting the sack just after eight.

From which *The Inquisitive Reader* might suspect the performance was something of a non-event.

It wasn't.



I'd already encountered the instrument in a ***Kyoto*** context, where it provides the accompaniment to vocal performances in ***geisha establishments***.

What we encountered here was a horse of an entirely different hue.

I suspect the instrument had been modified a tad as well, with a larger sound box at the base of the neck. The first few notes, in fact, had much the same *timbre* as your common or garden ***banjo***.

The first selection had me intrigued since there were echoes of something familiar, and those matters clarified themselves in the second.

The performance pieces were interspersed with lengthy explanations of the how, when, where and why of the ***Tsugaru shamisen***, and although ***Madam*** did her best to provide a running translation, I figured I could catch up with the stylistic details online somewhere.

What intrigued me half way through the second piece were elements that sounded rather like ***John Fahey***. Now, I'm not suggesting ***Fahey*** as an influence on this particular player.

As a musicologist, I suspected ***Fahey*** encountered some forms of ***Japanese music*** along the way and incorporated elements into the playing.

I'd already managed to establish a working connection to the Internet and was in a position to check these things out.

So while the player delivered his spiel and ***Madam*** tried to render it intelligible to a not overly interested listener, I was doing a ***Google*** search for ***John Fahey*** and ***shamisen***.

And, unsurprisingly, I got a match.

Not a conclusive one by any means, but something that suggested a connection that I plan to follow up. ***Fahey***'s recordings tend to be heavily annotated, so I have a definite agenda item for when we return to base.

On that basis, hunger assuaged (if it had been there in the first place) and comfortably sedated after three beers, I headed upstairs. ***Madam*** wasn't quite ready to hit the sack and opted for a bath.

But before she'd finished filling the tub I suspect ***Hughesy*** was pushing up Zs.



HIROSAKI > FURUKAWA

Sunday, 18 October 2015

The *iPhone* was showing 5:57 when I grabbed it on the way out of the cot.

It took a casual hour or so to fill in details while *Someone* showered and headed down to the Lobby to check out internet matters. I headed into a very compact *Rain Room* around seven-fifteen, reflecting that whoever designed this exercise in compact to the max could have made it smaller.

But only by a matter of a few millimetres.



Once I emerged, the weather report suggested minimal layering for a maximum of 22.

That prompted some rearranging of the backpack as we readied ourselves for departure after breakfast.

And breakfast was something of a mystery. One suspected a semi-***Viking*** arrangement, heavy on the ***Japanese options*** and light on for anything that might tempt a foreigner's taste buds.

As it turned out, I was wrong.

The ***Western options*** weren't abundant, but they were there.

In any case, I have yet to encounter a ***Viking*** that's light on for ***croissants***. And, if you need space filler, there's always the ubiquitous ***rice***.

So I managed a *substantial*, rather than *excessive* breakfast that would probably keep me going through a day where the agenda involved a pleasant walk around interesting destinations before a 3:42 departure for ***ShinAomori***.

That gave us around six hours to get a look at the castle town that had been the power base for the ***Tsugaru clan***, the former rulers of most of ***northern Tohoku***'s northern parts.

The Kyoto of the North is said to have the ***most elegant*** (***or most difficult***) ***dialect in Japan*** and (allegedly) the country's ***most beautiful women***.

I probably wasn't going to be in a position to judge the veracity of either allegation.

The city sits in southwest *Aomori Prefecture*, south of *Mount Iwaki* on the border of *Akita Prefecture*, flourished during the *Edo Period* but went into a slow decline as political power shifted to *Aomori*.

These days it remains the cultural and educational centre of *Aomori Prefecture* and a significant drawcard, thanks to cherry trees, the city's *Cherry Blossom Festival* and the remains of *Hirosakijo*.

Lightning destroyed the main castle keep 16 years after it was built. A replacement dates from *1810* contains a *samurai museum* with swords, suits of armour, historical documents and historical items from the *Edo Period*. The castle grounds were donated to the government in *1894* and were opened to the general public a year later.

Substantial plantings of cherry trees after *1903* saw the park develop as a prime *sakura* site.

The *Hirosaki Sakura Festival* is held in late *April* and early *May* every year.

Today's 49.2-hectare *Castle Park* includes three concentric moats, earthen fortifications, five gates, three corner turrets (*yagura*) and the three-storied *Tenshukaku* tower built to replace the original structure, along with more than 2500 cherry trees.





The history of the area around the castle town has been the usual *to and fro argy-bargy* you associate with ***Japanese history***.

Controlled by the ***Northern Fujiwara*** in the ***Heian Period***, it went to the ***Nambu clan*** early in the ***Kamakura Period*** after ***Minamoto Yoritomo*** defeated the former lords in ***1189***.

The ***Sengoku period*** saw one of the ***Nambu***'s local representatives, ***Ōura Tamenobu***, declare his independence in ***1571***.

He sided with ***Toyotomi Hideyoshi*** at the ***Battle of Odawara*** (***1590***), had his independent status confirmed, and saw his revenues bumped up substantially. Increased status allowed him to change his name to ***Tsugaru***,

His rise continued after he picked the right side (***Tokugawa Ieyasu***) at the ***Battle of Sekigahara***.

That increased his revenues again and allowed him to set about building a castle in present-day *Hirosaki*. He died in *1607*.

Work on the castle was suspended until his son *Tsugaru Nobuhira* resumed the project in *1610*. *Nobuhira* finished the structure quickly by cannibalising materials from nearby castles in *Horikoshi*, *Daikoji* and *Ōura* and work was completed in *1611*.

A lightning strike in *1627* started a fire that reached the main keep's gunpowder magazine and prompted a massive explosion. Ninth *daimyō*, *Tsugaru Yasuchika* rebuilt the keep as a more modest three-storey structure in *1810*.

The *Tsugaru clan* picked the right side again in the *Boshin War* during the *Meiji Restoration*, took another slug of additional revenue from the new government.









But they lost out when *Hirosaki Domain* was replaced by *Hirosaki Prefecture* in *August 1871*.

Two months later the entity was renamed *Aomori Prefecture*, and the capital went to *Aomori*. *Hirosaki* remained the commercial centre for the southwest of the region.

Apple trees were introduced to the city in the *1870s* by an American teacher at a local school and today the area produces *20% of Japan's apple crop*.

The game plan involved a departure after checking out around nine, but the best-laid plans ran astray again. It was around a quarter past when we hit the road and a slight difference of opinion.

Hirosaki has *a church district* that *Someone* wanted to have a look at, something *Hughesy* felt was completely surplus to requirements.









Especially if it restricted the number of temples that we could visit later in the piece.

But it wasn't all wasted.

The *Protestant* structure looked solid, but not much more. It seemed to have a school attached, judging by the number of uniformed high school aged students seemingly rocking up for the *Sunday* service.

The Catholic church was rather nondescript, and, in my reading of things, hardly worth the diversion, but on the way towards the day's main objective we passed the *Aomori Bank Memorial Hall*.

Built in *1904* the building was the headquarters of the *59th National Bank*, and was impressive enough to blow away lingering criticism of *Someone*'s priorities.

And it got better from there.

Just around the corner we found some of *Hirosaki*'s original *Western-style buildings*, including the *Former City Library*, constructed in *1907*.







To save you a walk, and give you a better perspective, there were a cluster of miniature buildings surrounding a full sized structure that might have provided a lunch venue if we were passing back that way.

Even better, and not just because the price was right, was the *Parade Museum*.

There are two museums devoted to the annual *Neputa Matsuri*, the city's biggest event, held in the first week of *August* each year.

It's s a lower-key equivalent of *Aomori*'s *Nebuta Matsuri*, with extravagant illuminated floats accompanied by dancers.









On the other side of the castle on the edge of the ***samurai district***, *Tsugaruhan Neputa Mura* displays floats used in *Hirosaki*'s famous festival and introduces some of the city's other specialties, including the ***shamisen***, local handicrafts and toys.

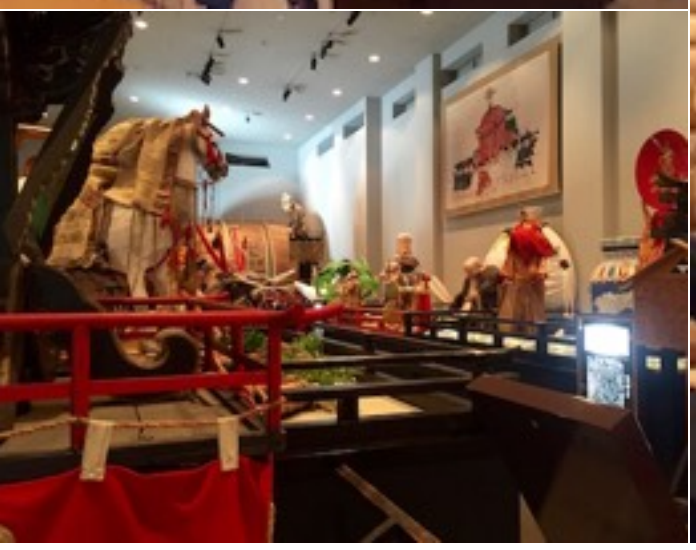
There is also a *19th-century teahouse*, a *Japanese garden* and a ¥550 admission charge.

But we were at the *Otemon Square* outside the castle's main entrance at the usual starting point for visitors.

Since that's the case, it probably comes as no surprise to find an *Information Centre* offering pamphlets, maps and advice about the city's attractions.

There is also the *Festival Float Pavilion*, constructed in *1994* as part of the *Municipal Tourist Centre* with floats from towns and neighbourhoods in and around the city, representing festivals that have been held since the *Edo Period*.







Also on display is *Joppari-Daiko* (*Big Stubborn Drum*) *Japan's largest drum*, 4.5 metres in diameter, and big enough for fifty people to pound on as it is hauled through the streets during the *Neputa Festival*.

Admission is free, and based on this experience, the display's big brother might be worth paying for.

But this was quite enough to do us for the time being.

From there we headed through a used clothes market into *Hirosaki Castle Park*, which was expected to provide the day's highlight.

The ***South Gate*** took us into the botanic gardens section, where a variety of activities associated with the ***Hirosaki Chrysanthemum and Maple Leaf Festival*** were set up to cater to the crowds drawn in by the autumn foliage.

For the kids, there was a train that ran around a rectangular circuit, but this big kid train freak managed to stave off the temptation to take a ride.

We made a leisurely circuit around the rest of the gardens and ended up back at a collection of models and dioramas displaying aspects of the ***Hirosaki Castle*** story.









That might have been of interest for someone with a slightly better background as far as the personalities of the historical figures were concerned, but I had a somewhat different priority.

And an almost total lack of the requisite background.

From there we progressed into the castle grounds where there was the prospect of an unusual sight.

Major renovation work that began in ***2013*** and were slated to take a decade to complete has seen the castle moved, lock, stock and barrel and three storey barrel while work is carried out on the foundations.

They started by draining the moat to allow the workers to get at the stone retaining walls.









Then, beginning in *May 2015* the keep was gradually moved seventy metres to allow the workers to get at the foundations.

The moving process took around five months and had just been completed when we got there.

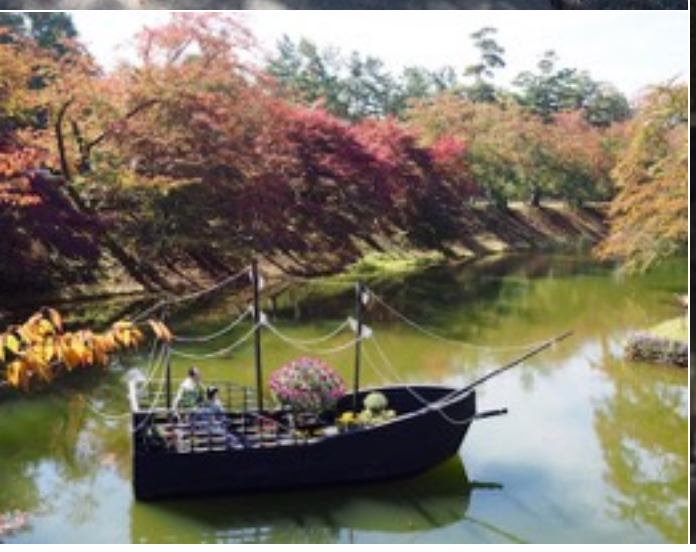
While the structure was being relocated, the castle museum was closed to the public, but now that the moving process is complete it will reopen in the new location in *2016*.

Things will stay that way for five years while the renovation work is carried out.

Then, when they're done, they'll do it all in reverse as they restore the structure to its rightful place.

Looking at it that way, it's an impressive feat of engineering, though one suspects the gradual progress from the original location to the temporary site wouldn't have offered a lot of in progress action.







With the museum removed from the equation, there wasn't much to keep us there once we'd snapped the obligatory record, and we headed off to take in the rest of the castle grounds.

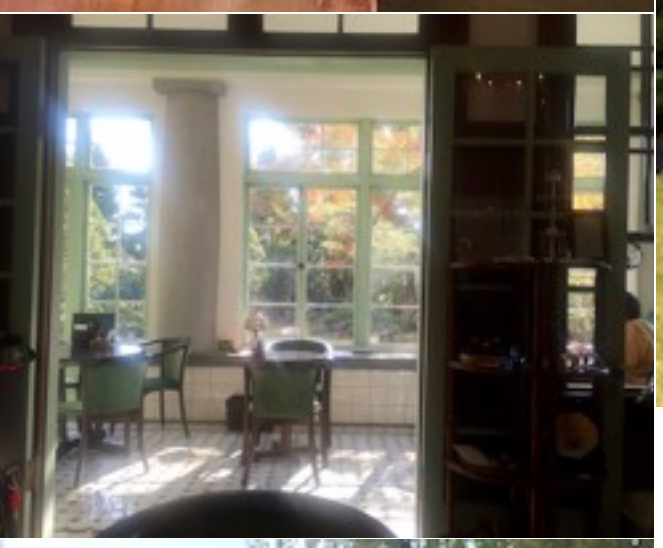
Views of nearby mountains would have been better without the haze we'd noted the afternoon before.

We made our exit and looped around the outside edge of the ***Castle Park*** on the way to lunch.

Madam's research had pointed us to a small cafe near ***Fujita Kinen Teien*** garden, just across the road from the ***South Gate***.

It's a fairly obvious site near a major attraction, and it was lunchtime on a ***Sunday***, so it probably comes as no surprise to find the place was packed.









But we weren't going anywhere else, so they pointed us to a waiting room, where we could sit and cool our heels.

That was fine with me, and the wait, as things turned out, was minimal.

Knowledge of local specialities saw ***Someone*** headed straight for apple pie. My consultation with the menu got as far as *pasta with a meat and **chilli** sauce*.

I'm not sure cider was the right match for that, but I went for it.

It mightn't have been right, but it was an exceedingly nice drop, bone dry, refreshing and thoroughly enjoyable.

I was quite happy with the meal too.



Madam, on the other hand, hadn't read the menu carefully enough.

As things turned out, she could have sampled ***four different apple pies***, but only ended up with one.

From all this, ***The Astute Reader*** will have picked up a significant fact. ***Hirosaki*** is *famous for apples*.

After lunch, we headed into the ***Fujita Kinen Teien*** garden, commissioned back in ***1919*** by entrepreneur ***Kenichi Fujita***, the first chair of the ***Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry***.

The ***Edo-style stroll garden*** was designed by a gardener from ***Tokyo*** and went in around ***the Fujita residence***. ***Hirosaki*** city took over the property in ***1991*** and opened it to the public.

Covering more than two hectares, it's the second largest garden in the ***Tohoku region*** and works on a couple of levels.

If we'd scouted around a little, we might have tackled things in a slightly different order.

We probably should have gone to the upland garden first, then descended to stroll around the pond that forms the centrepiece.

If we had, we could have walked out on ground level *en route* to the next destination rather than making a reasonably steep ascent into the uplands.









As it was, we went down for our stroll around the pond, then back up the hill to the uplands, and gradually downhill again on our way to the ***Temple Quarter***.

Actually, there are two temple quarters, one for the ***samurai*** and a separate area catering to the devotional requirements of ***the general population***.

Zenrin-Gai (*Zen Forest Street*) is a lengthy, tree-lined avenue that would have taken us to ***Choshoji***, the ***Tsugaru*** clan's family temple.

It was built in ***Ajigasawa*** in 1528 but moved to the present location in 1610 to protect ***Hirosaki Castle***, which was under construction at the time.

Given the destruction of the keep in 1627, it doesn't seem to have been an effective insurance policy, but there is another explanation.

While the ***Shōgun*** and the ***daimyō*** were nominally ***Buddhists***, the clergy were potential rivals for political power and influence and



temples were often forced to relocate to ***teramachi***, or *temple quarters*, where the ***daimyō*** could keep a watchful eye on their operations.

And it wasn't just ***Choshoji***.

Temples from all over the entire ***Tsugaru region*** were relocated as the new *head honcho* consolidated his power.

Thirty-three ***Zen*** temples line the avenue, starting with the ***Sazaedo***, an octagonal tower donated by a wealthy merchant named ***Nakata Yoshibei*** in ***1839***.

Octagonal temples are relatively rare; There are only two of them in the entire ***Tohoku area***.

Once you're past the octagon, the most prominent feature of the temples that line the avenue are their cemeteries, extensive forests of black and grey marble monuments that discouraged us from going much further.







It might have been different if we hadn't diverted into the Church quarter in the morning.

That might have left us with a bit more time up the sleeve. ***Hughesy***'s bellyaching about the diversion probably didn't help either.

But here we were, looking along a lengthy avenue lined with graveyards with limited time on our hands, other places to go and additional sights to see

So we didn't end up at ***Choshoji***, built on a bluff overlooking the surrounding plain and ***Mount Iwaki***.

The temple features a sixteen-metre gate meant to repel *greed* and *complaints*, a bell that dates back to the ***Kamakura Period***, and five hundred polychrome statues depicting the ***Buddha***'s disciples.









The naturally mummified body of the twelfth ***Tsugaru*** lord is on display in the main hall.

But, disinclined to do the *down and back again the same way* thing, we didn't go. Instead, we turned ourselves to the *ordinary folks' temple quarter*, and accidentally on purpose picked the right one for last.

We turned right out of ***Zenrin-Gai*** and made our way along a quiet thoroughfare, across a bridge and made a left turn onto another street that was quite liberally sprinkled with temples.

Along the right-hand footpath, I stopped to peer in at ***Shorenji***, ***Tokuzoji***, ***Saikoji***, ***Jugenin***, ***Honjakuin*** and ***Jotokuji*** but didn't get to do too much else.

Someone was hustling towards a definite destination.

One quiet little temple along the way did cause a brief diversion, but time and distance factors kept us moving fairly smartly.

That meant we didn't spend as much time at ***Saishoin*** as I would have liked, but we had long enough to get a decent look at the







five-storey pagoda, built around 350 years ago to commemorate those who died in battle during the 17th-century disturbances that shook the *Tsugaru clan*.

So while a longer stay could have been justified, the distance and time factor involved with getting back to the hotel would have been an issue if we happened to take a wrong turn on the way back.

But we didn't.

I'd been scanning the skyline for the distinctive shape of the high rise structure with the restaurant on the top, and then, suddenly, we turned the corner and there it was.

From there it was a solid kilometre to get us to the station, but we knew the way and arrived to find the local service to *ShinAomori* sitting there waiting.









And filling steadily.

We hopped straight on, found seats and settled back for the forty minute run to the first ***Shinkansen*** leg of the trip.

Under other circumstances once we'd arrived on the elegant platform in ***ShinAomori*** I'd have snapped a memento to sit somewhere around this point in the text, but we hustled on board, and that didn't happen.

It didn't happen when we alighted in ***Morioka*** either, but that was a function of a cross platform switch from the *faster only stops here and there* ***Hayate*** service to the *slower all stops on the way* ***Yamabiko*** service.

As noted elsewhere, all stops services call at relatively insignificant locations with a population of a mere hundred thousand or so.

It was darkening when we hit ***ShinAomori***, and fully dark at ***Morioka.***







I had a bit of a tap at the *Travelogue*, finished the relevant section and left the next bit for later, which wasn't the smartest string to pull.

That's because a combination of factors hit preconceived notions out of the ballpark.

Furukawa was a designated washing stop, and that was going to involve *the coin laundry* at the *Route In Hotel*.

We arrived, checked in and learned that, since it was *Sunday*, the restaurant was closed.

Not that we had any great expectations in the gustatory department.

But it would have meant we could start the washing, eat and check on *the laundry* from time to time.

With that option ruled out we would have to *eat out now and wash later*.

Further problem. ***Hughesy*** wasn't hungry.

Wasn't even remotely interested in a substantial feed.

The notion of a *bento* box had been floated on the train, but that was way too early to warrant even a brief consideration.

Now, with time as a factor I was inclined to just grab something but the question was what to grab.

We should have grabbed something from the nearby convenience store, but opted for an ***isakaya*** where we had to order a couple of dishes that arrived in a staggered flow in the ***Japanese eat and drink*** manner.

And, not being sure how hungry I was, and respectful of local custom ***Madam*** over-ordered and the resulting spread was more than was strictly necessary.



With the staged arrival, that maxed out the delay to ***the laundry process.***

I was determined to stick around and offer what assistance I could (largely in the peering into high mounted dryers department) but that notion went down in flames as well.

The ***Route Inn*** offers ***onsen*** facilities, one for men and one for women.

And two coin laundries.

Guess where those are located?

So ***The Astute Reader*** will realise that ***Madam*** couldn't use the one outside the Men's, and ***Hughesy*** couldn't enter the space outside the Women's.

So he might as well go to bed.

And there was a further complication.

The ***onsen*** facilities were slated to close down at ten.

An inquiry revealed that you could still use ***the laundry*** after that, but things didn't quite get dry.

And that, folks, was ***Sunday***.



FURUKAWA > NARUKO GORGE > GOSHIKINUMA

Monday, 19 October 2015

I surfaced just after six to learn that the washing was finally under control. On a morning when there wasn't a lot of time to spare, that meant it was time to shower, pack and discover that one pair of jeans were not quite dry.

That, under other circumstances, might not have been an issue, so the safest workaround involved a change of costume.

It pays to be flexible.

We headed down to breakfast just after 6:44, but were back in the room almost immediately to rearrange an upper layer by adding a warm jacket.

That meant we were slightly late into the breakfast room, but when we arrived the place was close to full.

And most of the crowd were seated so the slight delay may have been for the best.

The breakfast options were limited, but time was at a premium.

While breakfast might have been short on variety the quantities on hand were quite adequate, and we were out just after seven, gathering pace as we went.

It was a case of straight up, collect the gear, head down and check out, a process that may have taken about five minutes all up. It was about the same to the station, and we needed to be there by 7:27, so there wasn't going to be any messing around.

We'd scoped out the geography the previous evening, and headed straight for the omnipresent coin lockers you'll find in every station.

Stowing ***The Coppertone Container*** and the ***Little Blue Number*** set us back ¥900 all up, thank you very much. And that's just for a couple of hours' secure storage.

Nice work if you can get it, I thought as I wondered who had the nationwide JR coin locker franchise.

Probably cost them an arm and a leg to set it up, but you'll almost invariably find someone storing or removing their goods and chattels. It must be a reasonable money spinner, disguised as a valuable public service. You'd reckon they'd have recouped the outlay long ago.

Those thoughts were enough to occupy the mind on the brief descent to ***Platform 1*** on the lower level since we were catching a local train for the short excursion to ***Naruko Onsen***, where we had an appointment with autumn leaves and a gorge.

Like most similar operations across the country, ***JR Furukawa*** works on three levels.

The ***Shinkansen*** facility sits sit on the top layer, with facing Platforms 11 and 12 facing each other across the four ***Shinkansen*** lines.

In places like ***Furukawa*** you need the four lines so the faster services can rattle through at speeds approaching 300 kilometres an hour. The ***JR main lines*** are on an intermediate level, with the ***local lines*** tucked away on the bottom.

We had around five minutes to spare when we arrived down there, so we wouldn't have wanted to lose any significant time *en route*.

When the train arrived it disgorge a mass of incoming school students and workers, which threw me for a minute.

A subsequent check revealed that ***Furukawa***, a relatively insignificant location, is home to factories owned by two major corporations.

One of them, ***YKK***, is the world's largest manufacturer of zippers. The other, ***ALPS Electric*** produces around 40,000 components, including ***switches, sensors, and touchpads*** used in the electronic and automotive industries.

So you'd reckon they'd need the odd worker or three.

As we boarded, I remarked that we *seemed to be going in the right direction to avoid a crowd*, which meant we experienced a significant influx of school students at the next stop.

I wasn't sure where they were heading since I hadn't managed to unearth a great deal of information on the city of ***Furukawa***.

That's hardly surprising. Although the trains stop in ***Furukawa***, that city doesn't exist anymore.

Back in ***2006***, ***Furukawa***, along with the nearby towns of ***Iwadeyama***, ***Naruko***, ***Kashimadai***, ***Matsuyama***, ***Sanbongi*** and ***Tajiri*** was merged into a new municipal entity called ***Ōsaki***.

Those nearby locations provide part of the workforce for the factories in ***Furukawa***, and the city of ***Osaki*** includes significant chunks of farmland.

Modern-day ***Ōsaki*** was part of the ancient ***Mutsu Province***, with a human history that goes back to the ***Jomon period***.

The ***Emishi*** people were the original inhabitants.

Gold was discovered there during the ***Nara Period***, and it ended up under the control of the ***Northern Fujiwara*** towards the end of the ***Heian Period***.



The *Sengoku period* saw various *samurai clans* vying for control of the region, with the *Date clan* from *Sendai* emerging as the dominant force during the *Edo Period* and the *Tokugawa Shōgunate*.

While *Furukawa* is substantial in comparison to its neighbours, settlement in the area is well spread, and it's a low-rise environment, surrounded by rice paddies. Some of the fields are close to the CBD, so it doesn't feel like a place with a population around the 80,000 mark.

As we headed off, there was no shortage of rice paddies on a plain that gradually narrowed as we reached the foothills. The *JR East Rikū-Tōsen Line* took us more or less along the valley of the *Oyagawa River*, with forested slopes on either side.

The leaves were starting to change at the lower levels, with the colour increasing as we ascended towards *Naruko Onsen*, which was where we were getting off.

It's not the end of the line, which runs almost fifty kilometres further to meet up with the *Yamagata Shinkansen*, and the lesser *Ōu Main Line* and *Rikuu West Line* at *Shinjō*.

The next train going beyond *Naruko Onsen* wasn't until 10:40, so once we were on the ground around 8:18 we were on the bus for the next stage to *Narukokyo Gorge*.

The location we were leaving is *one of the largest onsen resorts in Japan* with a history stretching back to the *Mount Naruko* eruption of 837. Any area that has been around that long would have attracted many significant visitors over the years.

Minamoto no Yoshitsune, probably the *most famous Japanese historical figure* of the late *Heian Period*, and *haiku* poet *Matsuo Bashō* are two of the most notable visitors to *Naruko*.

There's even a possibility that the location's name can be traced back to *Minamoto* though it was well after 837 when the fugitive *Yoshitsune* passed through the area after an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow his brother, the first *Kamakura Shōgun*.

Pursued by his brother's soldiers, *Yoshitsune* wandered for several years, often disguised as a monk. When he reached *Kamewari Pass*, his wife is said to have given birth to a boy (*Kamewaka-maru*) who was unable to cry until he was bathed in the waters of *Kawarayu* hot spring. Since that time, the area was supposedly called *Nakiko* (*crying baby*), which gradually morphed into the current *Naruko*.

Eventually, *Yoshitsune* found refuge under the protection of *Fujiwara no Hidehira*, head of the *Northern Fujiwara* clan in *Hiraizumi*. When *Hidehira* died in *1187*, his son had promised to protect *Yoshitsune* but feared his brother.

There are various versions of what happened next.

The generally accepted one has the son sending soldiers to force *Yoshitsune* to suicide.

His head was then preserved in ***saké*** and sent to his brother, but ***Yoritomo*** wasn't placated and went on to bring all of ***Japan*** under his control, destroying the ***Northern Fujiwara*** in the process.

Another version has ***Yoshitsune*** faking his death and escaping to ***another part of Japan*** with the woman he loved. That, according to ***Ainu*** legend brought him to ***Hokkaidō***, where he acquired the name of ***Okikurumi*** or ***Oinakamui*** before sailing to the Asian mainland and morphing into ***Genghis Khan***.

Still, it's a good story.

With ***Matsuo Bashō***, the details are more definite.

Travelling with his disciple Sora, he called in on the journey described in his masterpiece, **Oku no Hosomichi** (**The Narrow Road to the Deep North**). In the book there is a sentence that reads (in translation) *Passing Mizunokojima in Ogurogasaki, I proceeded to the barrier-gate of Shitomae from Narugo hot springs, aiming to enter the country of Dewa*.

During the ***Edo Period***, ***Naruko*** was an important location at the intersection of the ***Dewakaido*** and ***Ugokaido*** roads. One of the ***Four Tamatsukuri Post Stations*** (***Shitomae***, ***Kajiyasawa***, ***Nakayama*** and ***OniKōbe***). ***Shitomae*** provides another link back to ***Yoshitsune***.

Shito translates as *urine* and according to legend ***Yoshitsune***'s son ***Kamewaka-maru*** took his first pee at ***Shitomae***.

When ***Bashō***'s party visited, they are said to have had a hard time explaining their presence to suspicious border guards.

Although the original post stations are long gone, approximately nine kilometres of road between ***Shitomae no Seki*** and ***Sakaida*** in ***Yamagata Prefecture*** have been preserved as the ***Oku no Hosomichi*** (***Walking Trail***) through the forests.

There's a bronze statue of ***Bashō*** at the start of ***Oku no Hosomichi*** and a stone tablet inscribed with one of his noted haiku *Nomi-shirami Uma-no-barisuru Makuramoto*. (*Flees and lice, Horses urinating, Close to my pillow*.)

The statue dates from eighty years after ***Bashō*** passed through the area.

Naruko is also one of the many places claiming to be the original home of the ***kokeshi***, cylindrical wooden dolls made on spindles and then painted. The ***Japan Kokeshi Museum***, located towards the eastern end of the nearby gorge, displays about seven thousand of them, drawn from the various prefectures of ***Tohoku***, highlighting regional differences in shape and design.



And for more than 350 years the area has been the source of ***Naruko lacquerware*** with shops offering aa wide variety of lacquer-painted goods ranging from traditional eating utensils to high-class lacquerware.

Several ski resorts operate in the nearby ***Kurikoma*** mountain ranges in winter.

So the area has a number of claims to fame apart from the ***onsen*** waters.

There are five ***Naruko Hot Spring Villages*** (***Naruko***, ***Higashi-Naruko***, ***Kawatabi***, ***Nakayamadaira*** and ***OniKōbe***) that draw water from four hundred separate water sources based around nine distinct springs.

In most ***onsen*** towns, the ***ryokan*** and hotels draw their water from a common source, but in ***Naruko*** each has its own source. The waters cover eight of the ***eleven different types of water found in Japan*** with varying mineral composition and different healing qualities.

Treating nervous tension is a specialty and waters with a high sulphur content are reputed to be good for ***high blood pressure and hardened arteries***. Alkaline salts are said to remedy ***skin disease***s.







And it is not just hotels and *ryokan*. Public baths like *Takinoyu*, have a history stretching back a thousand years. That one opens between 7:30 and 21:30 and charges a modest ¥150 per adult customer.

There are also free public foot baths.

We, however, weren't there for the waters.

Northwest of the town, the hundred-metre-deep *Naruko Gorge* stretches for three kilometres along the *Otani River*. It's one of *Tohoku*'s most scenic gorges, offering a picturesque landscape all year round.

But it becomes breathtaking in late *October* and early *November*.









A location just seventy kilometres from ***Sendai***, with a ***Shinkansen*** stop in ***Furukawa*** and ***National Highways 47 and 108*** passing through the area.

A reputation as one of the best spots for coloured leaves in Miyagi Prefecture is always going to pack them in.

Even before nine o'clock.

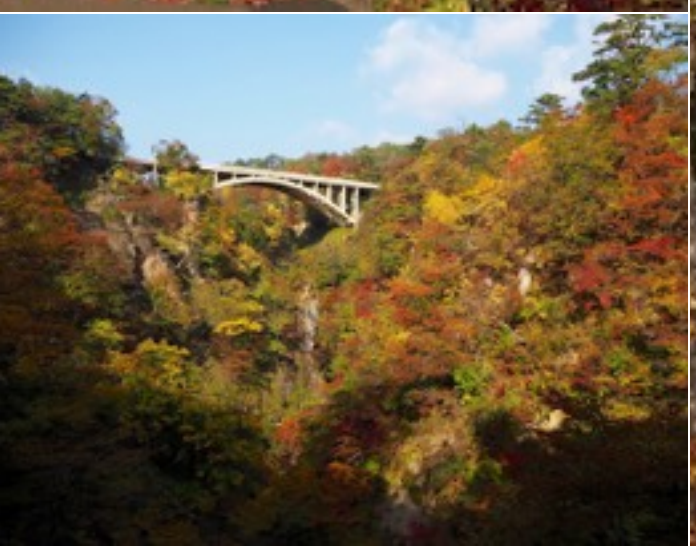
We could have walked it in twenty minutes or so, but with a limited time available we took the bus to the best area for viewing autumn leaves, around the ***Narukokyo Resthouse*** near the western end of the gorge.

On the way in the bus took us across a bridge packed with a crowd of photographers all set up and waiting for that 10:04 train.

Or perhaps an earlier one running in the opposite direction.

Off the bus, we headed to the extensive car park and the nearby observation deck, where the focus for most of the attention was the ***Ofukazawa Bridge*** (the one with all the photographers)







.A few steep paths lead down from the road to the bottom of the gorge, and from there a walking trail runs the length of the ravine.

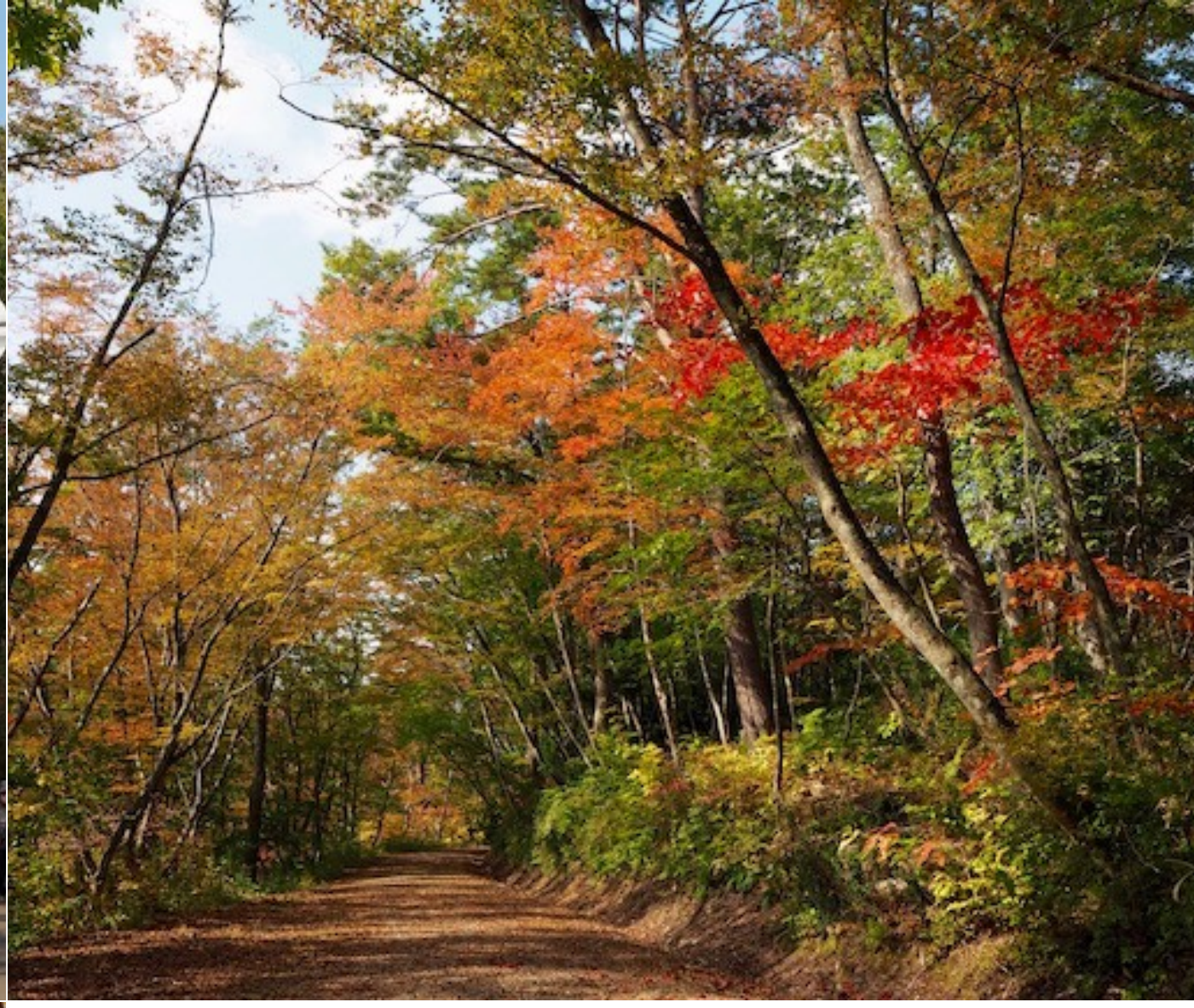
It would probably be the best way to see the whole of the gorge, but it's currently closed due to the danger of landslides and falling rocks

But the bridge we'd come across was the centre of attention. It was hard to ignore it, sitting in the middle of an autumnal array where the colours looked to be just about hitting their peak.

So we headed along the lookouts, snapping away.

And even though the signs said the walking track is closed until further notice there wasn't a barrier across the way.









With plenty of people around us making the descent, we joined them, but only for a little way.

Knowing the path was probably blocked somewhere down there we went down far enough to get decent snaps of the bridge from a few different angles, and then headed back to the observation deck.

From there the logical move seemed to involve crossing the bridge.

There's a walking track on the other side that loops around to the west of the main road and comes out on the other side of the bridge at the *Narukokyo Resthouse*.

It supposedly takes forty-five minutes to complete the loop if you're inclined to go that way.

We, however, didn't have forty-five minutes to spare, and needed to get ourselves to *Nakayamadaira Onsen*, the next station on the line after *Naruko Onsen*, and we needed to be there by 11:10 to catch the train back to *Furukawa*.







Things might have been slightly different if it had looked like we might be following in *Bashō*'s footsteps, but the trail obviously didn't go all the way to *Yamagata Prefecture*, so it probably wasn't the poet's road.

It would probably be a pleasant stroll if you have all day, but we didn't have all day.

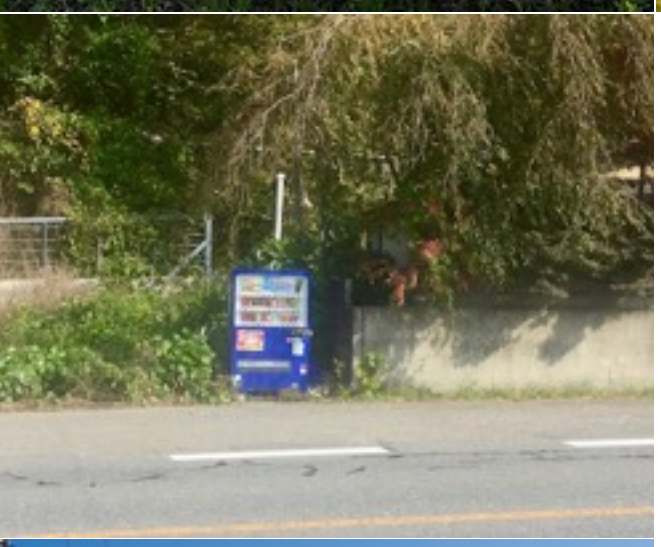
That meant we headed back across the bridge and walked on towards *Nakayamadaira*.

I had thought we would be walking through the forest, but as it turned out our path ran along beside the highway. Still, there were stops along the way for photos, so it was probably just as well we were not surrounded by trees and interesting subjects.

So we made our way into *Nakayamadaira* past sulphurous *onsen* fumes riding from pipes.









That, I guessed, was par for the course in an environment where the ***onsen*** water bubbles up at temperatures around 80°C and has to be diluted.

You'd reckon they'd also need to let the air get at it to cool things down a little.

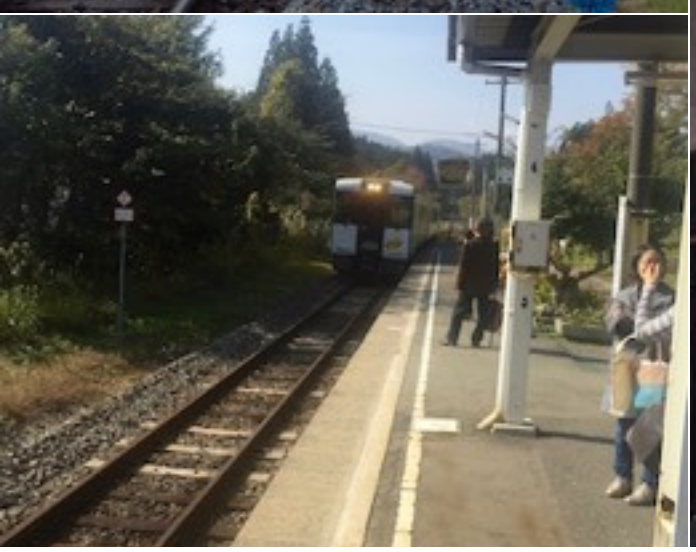
But that was understandable. I failed to comprehend the positioning of a particular vending machine in what you would have thought was a most unlikely position.

We headed on to the station, turning off the main road down into what would have been a tranquil little village if it wasn't for a couple of car loads of political campaigners.

They hit us on the bridge just before the village first up, blaring past us with a message that echoed around the hillsides, so loud that *The Photographer* failed to register the presence of an old dude on his bike.

But he waited patiently until she was finished, seemingly aware that any sound that tinkled out of his bicycle bell would have been drowned by the passing racket.







We reached the station, but couldn't get away from the sound of political spruiking.

It continued to echo off the slopes as the little caravan made its way around the village before looping onto the street past the station and heading off to harass another corner of the electorate.

It was certainly annoying but seemed to be very effective.

Repetition seemed to have etched the candidate's name into ***Someone***'s skull, even though she wasn't going to be voting in the election. It probably would have etched itself into mine as well if I'd had any idea of what was being spruiked.

When the train after a fifteen-minute wait, it turned out to be much more crowded than either of us expected, with much of the throng on board belonging to an obvious tour party.



That underlined the drawing power of things like ***sakura*** blossoms and autumn leaves to the average ***elderly Japanese*** who doesn't have to clock on from nine to five.

Weekends would have packed the crowds in as well but on a ***Monday***...

And there was no doubt about why people were there. The train stopped on the rail bridge down below the photographer laden ***Ofukazawa Bridge***.

At least, I assume there was a crowd up there on the bridge to photograph the train.

It was a little too far to make out the finer detail as the people around me snapped away, looking up. It seemed reasonable to assume there was another crowd up there doing the same in reverse.

The situation reminded me of an old R&B track, the one with the chorus that runs: *I was looking back to see if she was looking back to see if I was looking back at her*.

Then the train moved off. The tour party alighted at ***Naruko Onsen***, where they presumably piled onto a bus so they could head up to the bridge to do the other half of the photographic thing.

In any case, things were much less crowded once they were gone.

As we wound our way back down onto the plain, the haze we'd noted yesterday was noticeable, but the focus was entirely on the transfer from the basement to the ***Shinkansen*** line.

We had thirteen minutes to do it, assuming the local train ran on time, but the rest of the day's movements worked around getting this one tight.

As it turned out, the whole thing ran sweet as a nut. We found our way towards the front of the local as it pulled into ***Furukawa***, and managed a smooth and seamless transition back in ***Furukawa***, that must have taken all of about ninety seconds.

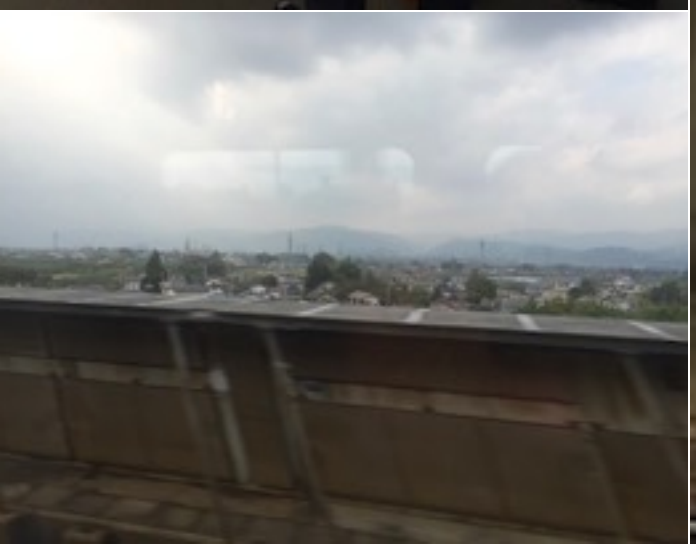
That covered alighting from the local, moving through the barrier flashing ***JR passes***, ascending to the coin locker level, retrieving the luggage, flashing the passes again on the way up to ***Platform 12*** and the ride up the escalator that got us there.

We arrived just in time to catch the whiz of a northbound super express.

Our southbound train arrived a couple of minutes later, and the leg from ***Furukawa*** gave me a chance to catch up on some ***Travelogue***.









It was less than an hour from *Furukawa* to *Koriyama*, and there wasn't much point in gazing out across reasonably familiar countryside.

After all, we'd passed back and forth across this particular stretch in *2008* and again in *2013*.

And the haze did a rather thorough job of blotting out the mountains over on the left.

Our *Yamabiko* service was one of the non-power outlet variety, but the *iPad* was on 100%.

Typing up the day's notes up to this point drained it to 94, and, once I was up to date, there wasn't much to do except look out the window.

The haze was still in evidence as we slowed down into *Fukushima*.

With *Koriyama* as the next stop, it was time to pack *iPad* away, so there wasn't going to be much more in the way of *Travelogue* tapping for the next little while.

At this point, we can underline, yet again, how far off the beaten foreigner track we were heading.

Disembarking at *Koriyama*, we headed almost straight to the local train that would take us to *Inawashiro*.

Feeling a bit peckish, *Someone* suggested we pick up some chips to snack on along the way, but, as we sat on the train waiting for it to head off it was obvious I was the only visible foreigner.

That had applied for much of the day already, and to a lesser extent through our time in *Sapporo* and *Hirosaki*, but there was a slightly different vibe hereabouts.



Maybe it was the presence of the Visible Foreigner with the Big Luggage. *The Coppertone Container* stood out like *the proverbial canine genitalia*.

And we were getting into the back blocks, relatively speaking, on the half hour run to *Inawashiro*.

Then it was going to be another half hour on a local bus to our overnight stop, with nary a visible foreigner to be seen.

And if *The Argumentative Reader* wants to query the back blocks, relatively speaking, I would respectfully point towards a forty minute wait for the bus. We weren't quite out in territory where the buses don't run.

They do, but only once an hour.

But there are ways to kill time even if you're not inclined to tap out *Travelogue* given an initial lack of seating space.

Aboard the bus at three, we headed into the uplands, stopping to pick up kids just coming out of school along the way. The route took us across broad farmlands before we wound up into the slopes below *Mount Bandai*.

Located just north of *Lake Inawashiro* in western *Fukushima Prefecture*, the dormant 1816-metre tall, dormant stratovolcano *Mount Bandai* (a.k.a. *Bandai-san*, *Aizu-Fuji* and *Aizu Bandai*) is one of the hundred most famous mountains in *Japan*.

Aizu-Fuji used to refer to a neat conical shape that bore a remarkable resemblance to *Mount Fuji* until an eruption in *1888* drastically reshaped the mountain and the surrounding landscape. It was the most devastating volcanic eruption in *recent Japanese history*.

Formerly known as *Iwahashiyama* (*a rock ladder to the sky*), these days *Mount Bandai* is used to refer to the central peak along with subsidiary peaks including *Akahani* (1,430m) and *Kushigamine* (1,636m) in the *Bandai Asahi National Park*

The *Fuji*-like profile stemmed from an eruption in *806*, but its history goes back a long way.

It was inactive until the influence of *Nekoma*, which was somewhere to the west (active 1.1 million to 350,000 years ago).produced two scoria eruptions about 290,000 years ago. Further eruptions of pumice and volcanic ash after that ran through to a period of continuous pumice eruptions forty to fifty thousand years ago.

In between, thanks to the *Okinajima* (90,000) and *Zunashi* (50,000 years ago) pyroclastic flows, the river that had flowed through the *Inawashiro basin* south of the mountain was dammed, the water level went up, and *Lake Inawashiro* was the result.



While the *Fuji*-shaped cone that emerged in *806* was relatively recent in geological terms, it seems to have developed from similarly-shaped earlier features.

But that changed in J*uly 1888*.

There were three small earthquakes on *July 8, 9, and 10*, and stronger, but still moderate, tremors on *July 13 and 14*. But earthquakes are a common occurrence *all over Japan*, so no one was unduly concerned.

Then, *around seven a.m. on the 15th*, there was another earthquake, followed by the actual eruption, with fifteen to twenty explosions every minute, three-quarters of an hour later.

Hot groundwater had undermined the north side of the mountain, which collapsed in a *phreatic* or *steam-blast eruption* about one hundred metres above the *Kaminoyu hot spring resort*.

That, in turn, produced a *pyroclastic flow* that buried five villages and devastated the eastern part of the region. Then, around ten o'clock, hot rain started falling, transforming volcanic ash into *lahar mudslides* with the consistency and density of *wet concrete*.

Lahars can move large quantities of material, carve their own paths and destroy virtually anything that happens to be in the way. Think of a wall of hot wet concrete moving at a speed that may reach *100 km/h*.

In this case, 1.5 cubic kilometres of the mountain had collapsed and flowed northwards.

The flow locked existing rivers and created three large lakes (*Hibara*, *Onogawako* and *Akimotoko*) and hundreds of ponds and marshes.

When the ash fall ceased around four in the afternoon, at least 477 people were killed with hundreds more injured or left homeless.

The eruption was very similar to *1980 Mount St. Helens* eruption in the United States, and the infamous *1883* eruption of *Krakatoa* that created the biggest bang in recorded history.

While the damage could have been much worse, the eruption still destroyed hundreds of square kilometres of farmland and forest, claimed hundreds of lives and transformed the area around the mountain into a wasteland with an entirely different topography.

It was the *worst volcanic disaster in recent Japanese history* and the first major disaster the *Meiji government* and the newly established *Japanese Red Cross* had to deal with.

Visitors keen to learn more about the *1888* eruption can do so at the *Mount Bandai Eruption Memorial Museum* in *Urabandai*. Most of the content is reported to be *in Japanese*, but the *body sonic simulation* that recreates the blast when the eruption occurred would probably be language-neutral.

Across the street is the *Mount Bandai 3D World* theatre a three-dimensional film about the mountain. plays twice an hour on a circular screen 4.5 metres high and 42 wide. The *Japanese language narrative* focusses on the sights and seasons around the mountain rather than the eruption.

Twenty years after the disaster, a local merchant family began a tree-planting campaign, and since then the district known as *Urabandai* or *Bandai-kōgen* has become a tourist destination.

The major attraction, the multi-coloured lakes of *Goshikinuma*, were what brought us into the area.

The bus eventually dropped us at *Goshikinuma*, and a five-minute walk wheeling *The Coppertone Container* took us to the night's accommodation at *Pension Frasier*.

With another day where we'd need to be on our toes and out and about early, we stopped there just long enough to check in and headed back to the *Tourist Information centre* since we needed a map and a final check on logistics for the morning.

From there we could have headed into the countryside, or more particularly the wetlands near the *Visitor Centre* but two factors intervened.



For a start, it wasn't that long until dusk.

We were in the semi-back blocks, without much in the way of street lighting or knowledge of the local geography. In circumstances, that might have produced an *OK, but not very far. It's getting dark.*

But, lurking in the lower levels of ***Pension Frasie***r, there were ***onsen*** facilities.

That, effectively, settled the question.

We headed back and once we were there ***Madam*** was bound straight to the ***onsen***. I was a less enthusiastic participant but managed a good soak and three-quarters of an hour tapping away before dinner.

And, at seven we were downstairs, ready for serious eating.

We'd done our share of walking in the morning after a lightish breakfast with a packet of chips in the middle, so ***a four-course Italian spread*** with wine was jut hat the doctor ordered.

It was a set menu affair, exquisite and definitely ***Italian-Italian*** rather than ***Japanese-Italian***, the work of someone who was out to deliver authenticity rather than an approximation.

We had a lengthy talk with the cook after the meal, as I slowly worked my way down an excellent *Montepulciano*.

Madam got an hour-long discussion with ***our hostess***, which was ***conducted entirely in Japanese***, but I got the gist of it later.

Our host was conversing with another couple so that probably put the kibosh on anything resembling a nightcap.

And I didn't mind at all. ***Madam*** doesn't get much chance to talk in her native tongue, and when the opportunity arises I'm not inclined to get in the way.

Put together, it all meant ***Hughesy*** was well and truly ready to crash when we headed upstairs just after nine.

Madam, of course, took herself off for another go at the ***onsen***.



GOSHIKINUMA > BESSHO ONSEN

Tuesday, 20 October 2015

After a night of strange dreams, I surfaced around six to be greeted with the news that we were ***onsen*** bound.

That didn't quite fit in with my plans since I'd figured *Madam* would take another leisurely turn through the spa, and I'd get a good hour's *Travelogue* tapping.

But I was back in the room by six-forty-five and managed to fit in half an hour before it was time to pack before breakfast.

And, of course, you pack before breakfast when you're making your departure immediately afterward on a day when switches between different modes of transport need to be co-ordinated with a fair degree of precision.

At that point, the ***Travelogue*** notes had progressed as far as back in ***Furukawa*** after ***Naruko***, which didn't leave much of a backlog, but you don't want to let it grow.

After all, I'm looking to have a full note form summary of the whole trip that can be expanded and worked into a final draft when we get back to base in ***Bowen***.

There was another reason ***Hughesy*** wasn't inclined to quibble about being left out of conversations the night before.

It related directly to breakfast, the morning activity and the bus back into ***Inawashiro***.

Breakfast at the ***Pension Fraisier*** was pencilled in for ***seven forty-five***, which was pushing it a bit when you're looking at catching an eight-twenty bus where we alighted yesterday. You have to allow five minutes to get there, and *a quarter to for breakfast* would probably be cutting it pretty fine.

Fortunately, ***our hostes***s had moved breaky time for us forward to seven-thirty, and it's just as well she did. In the haste to knock things over I failed to take a photographic record, but it came in no less than three courses with toast, and was probably the best non-***Viking*** morning repast I've had in donkeys' ages.

And better than your run of the mill ***Viking*** as well.

It was just after eight when we headed off to the bus stop.

We needed to be back to check out at ten to catch a ten-thirty bus after a walk that was slated as *a good ninety minutes*.

That meant there was not much time to mess around.

Fortunately, there was one major factor in our favour.

When the bus reached ***Kitashiobara***, it decanted two other walkers along with the two of us.

We hit the trail with practically no one else around, and for the first part of the walk we ran across the odd hiker or couple headed in the opposite direction.

And while there was a definite time limit, the purpose of the exercise was primarily photographic.

So we alternated spells of fairly brisk walking with pauses for camera action, passing the occasional individual or couple with a bit more time on their hands.







We were, as *The Attentive Reader* will have noted, walking through the aftermath of the *Mount Bandai* eruption in *1888* which disrupted the previous course of the *Nagasegawa* River and created a group of different sized lakes and ponds on the highland plain north of the volcano.

There are three big lakes (*Hibarako*, *Akimotoko*, and *Onogawako*) as well as some relatively large ponds (*Nakasenuma* and *Oguninuma*), and extensive areas of marshes and wetlands. We'd flirted with the notion of exploring some of them, close to the *Urabandai Visitors' Centre*, the previous afternoon.

With over one hundred ponds and lakes in the *Bandai-Asahi National Park*, we obviously didn't have time to cover them all but were focussing our attention on the jewels in the crown, the *five coloured ponds and lakes* known as *Goshikinuma*.









While the name translates as *five* (***Bishamonnuma***, ***Akanuma***, ***Midoronuma***, ***Rurinuma***, ***Aonuma***, ***Ryunuma***), the 3.7-kilometre nature trail we were following takes you past *a dozen or so*.

It's not the only route we could have taken.

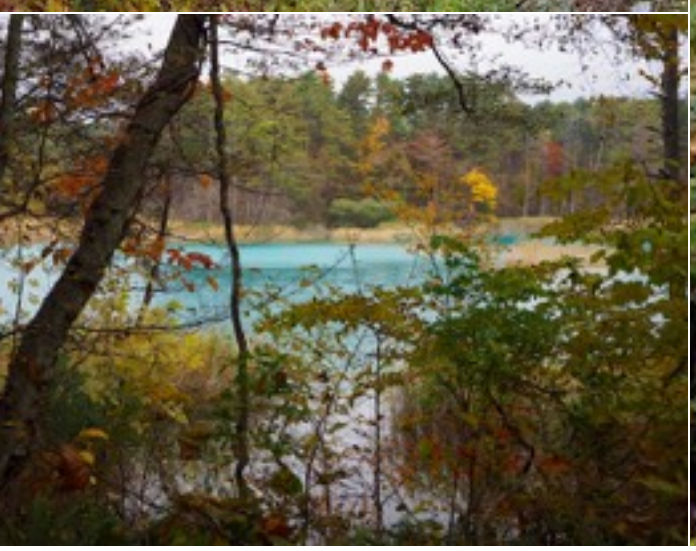
The ***Nakasenuma Promenade*** starts near the ***Urabandai Site Station*** and takes visitors around one of the substantial ponds.

The area can also be accessed by the ***Bandaisan Gold Line***, a sightseeing road that circles the southwestern side of the mountain and then descends into ***Urabandai***.

It has branch trails for hikers who are out to reach the summit of ***Mount Bandai*** or some other vantage point.

Other trails start from the western end of the ***Goshikinuma*** walk we were taking (three to four hours to the summit, slightly quicker on the downhill return), ***JR Bandaimachi Station*** (seven hours to the top), and there are trails from most of the ***ski resorts***.







Depending on where you go and how you count them, you may pass *five ponds*, or *dozens of ponds*, as many as *forty different lakes and ponds*, or, if your path takes you up the mountain, none at all.

As far as the ***Five Coloured Lakes*** are concerned, the visual interest is due to volcanic material dissolved in the water, giving each of them their colour, ranging from *cobalt-blue* through *emerald-green* to *reddish-brown* that changes with the weather, and the time of day.

But the predominant colour (***Aonuma***, ***Rurinuma***, ***Bentennuma***, ***Ryunuma***, ***Midoronuma*** and ***Bishamonnnuma***) is a bluish-white, thanks to a mineraloid called ***allophane***.

It's a substance mainly composed of ***aluminum*** and ***silica*** that leached into the lakes and collected in the sludge at the bottoms of the lakes. The combination of ***allophane*** and other chemicals gives the waters their ***distinctive dark blue*** that changes subtly with the changes in light through the day.



Iron dioxide sediments adhering to the roots of reeds growing in the water and ***thick reddish-brown moss*** deliver a reddish tinge that's particularly evident in ***Akanuma*** (***Red Pond***), which, despite its name, is ***predominantly light green***.

But with red tints.

So each lake or pond is slightly different, all are unusually vivid in colour and the day to day changes throughout the year make the seventy-minute walk a popular destination for a distinctive section of the ***Japanese tourist market***.

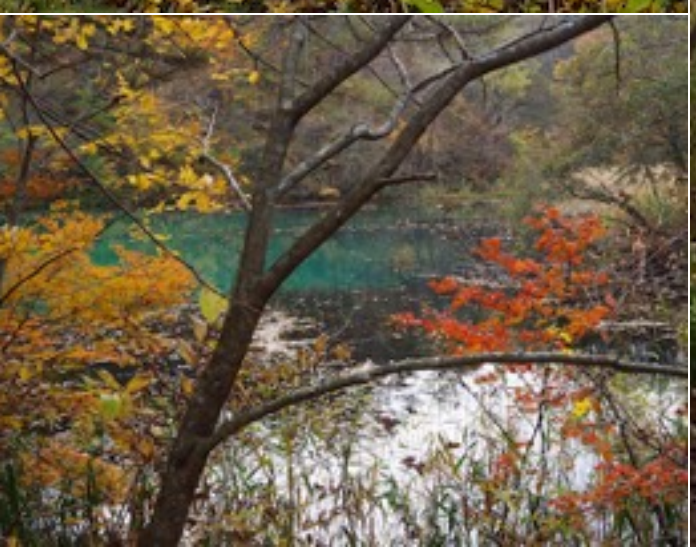
That's particularly applicable in spring, when the trees are covered with fresh leaves, and in autumn as the leaves begin to change colour.

In between, ***June*** is said to be the best month for birdwatchers.

Given the demographic that's most likely to emerge from the tour buses as they arrive at he ***Urabandai Visitors' Centre***, it comes as no surprise to learn that the trail is wheelchair friendly with very slight gradients (a maximum of 5%) with large sections of boardwalk around ***Bishamonnuma***.

It's the largest of the five ponds, an attractive cobalt-blue with views of ***Mount Bandai*** to the south, and facilities to go boating on the *mere*.







That, along with proximity to the ***Urabandai Visitors' Centre***, accounts for the fact that it's probably going to be the most crowded.

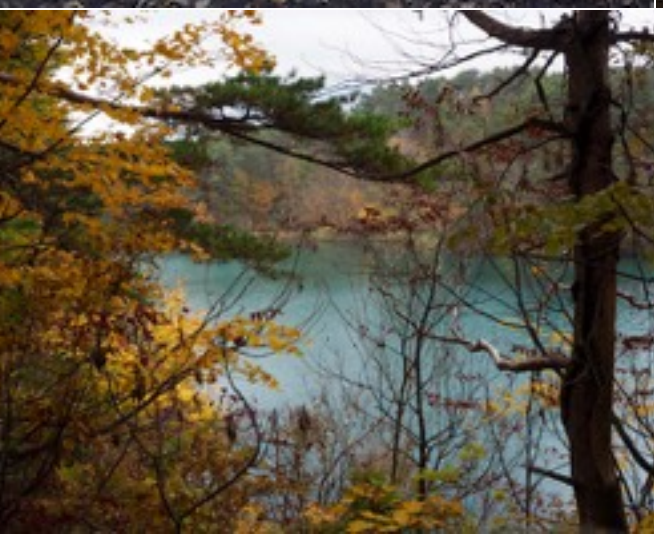
But we were starting from the other end and were starting early.

The odd walker or couple was heading in the opposite direction, and we passed the odd couple or individual bound to the same destination we were heading for with a bit more time on their hands.

Alternating periods of brisk walking with pauses for snapping got us more than half way along the trail before ***Madam*** uttered the fatal comment about *being up early enough to beat the tour groups*. As soon as she did, sure enough, around the next corner we encountered the first of many, a ***shambling crocodile of elderly Japanese*** out for a day in the countryside.









But there was space after them.

They must have been from somewhere relatively close. It was a couple of minutes before we encountered a second, and a bit less before the third appeared.

By the time we reached ***Bishamonnuma***, there was an almost continuous stream of them.

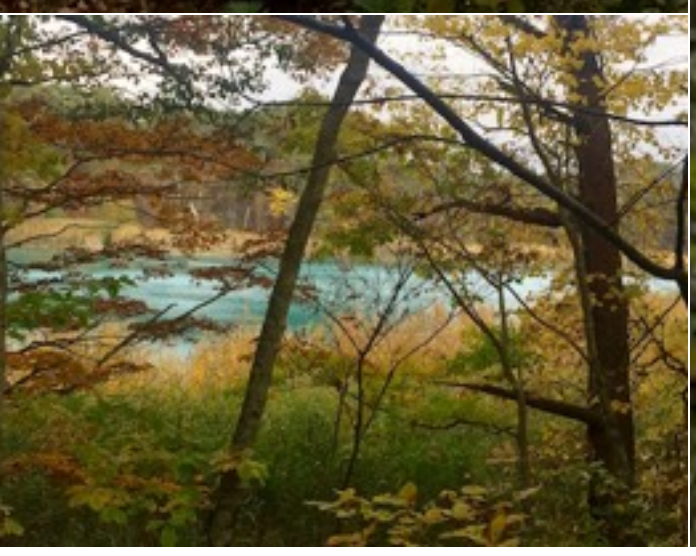
It made heading in the opposite direction along a relatively narrow boardwalk an exercise in getting ahead where you could and waiting for a break in the flow.

Use the occasional wider bit or places where there was a bit of footing off the path to the left and you could still get ahead.

In the meantime, it was a case of polite right of way and greetings of *Ohio gozaimus* (*Good morning*).

One of those, ***according to Madam***, saw the waiting foreigner identified as one Chuck Wilson. Another geriatric female asked her companion if he was *that foreigner on TV.*







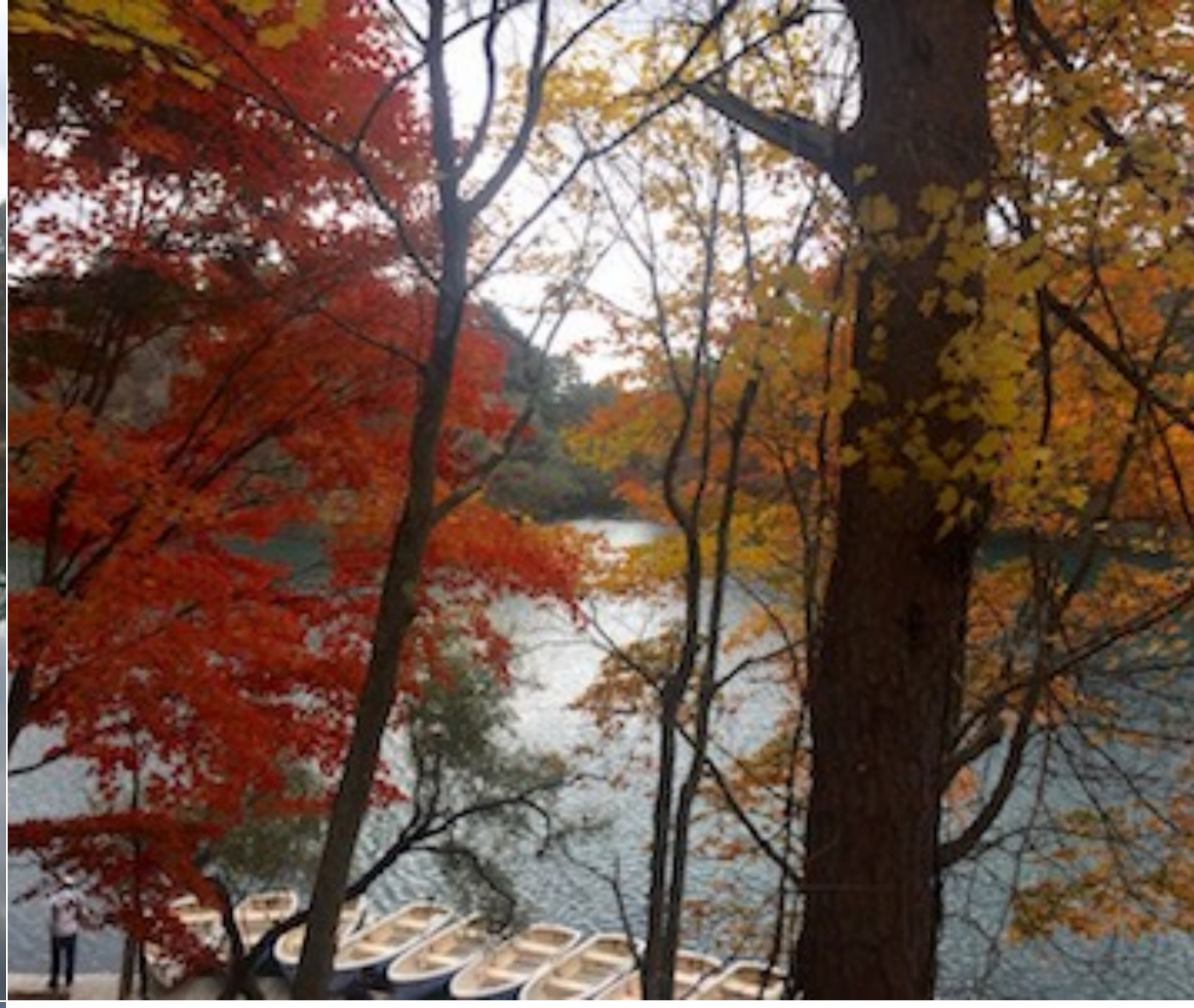
From which *Madam* concluded these particular parties were from some unsophisticated corner of the back blocks, where encounters with aliens were few, far between, and largely confined to the television screen.

We reached a point, about half way along *Bishamonnuma*, where the trail branched, with one path, we guessed, heading off to wetlands near the *Visitor Centre* and the other running along the shore. We followed the shore.

That's where the crowded boardwalk factor maxed out, with numbers stopped to take in the views across the water and the carp that surfaced almost at their feet.

One suspects there was a degree of anticipated feeding involved there.









Once we reached the end of the trail and headed towards the car park, it was obvious what we had already encountered was merely the vanguard of a host of day-trippers out for a look at coloured ponds and autumn leaves.

You couldn't blame them.

The combination made for a memorable experience, even if it was one largely enjoyed with a multitude of fellow travellers.

We, however, had other fish to fry as we made our way back to the Pension, collected the luggage and bade farewell to ***our host and hostess.***

There was a further bit of chat, but we were gone just after five past ten and back at the bus stop with what we assumed was a good quarter of an hour to spare.

It didn't, however, quite work out that way.

Madam was just asking why I was standing on the wrong side of the shelter when the answer became obvious.



From where I was standing you could see the road and there, heading towards us, was a bus with its blinker on heading to pick up passengers.

Of course, it could have been the wrong bus, so *Someone* asked.

But it was going to the right destination, so we piled on, with no idea whether we'd misread the timetable. Personally, I don't think we did, but you never know. Some imponderables are better left unpondered.

The trip back was, of course, a mirror reverse of the run in, but in slightly better light.

Under other circumstances, you might have tried to gather a bit more in the way of a photographic record, but the battery on the *iPhone* was running down, and *Hughesy* was forced to use one hand to keep hold of *The Coppertone Container*.

Back in *Inawashiro*, we would have had a wait in any case, but now we had a slightly longer one.

The train, when it arrived, wasn't as crowded as we'd anticipated and we had no trouble finding a seat across the way from a mother and son combination who popped up on the radar a couple of times between here and the *Shinkansen*.

The half hour on the train was much the same as the half hour on the bus.

A mirror reverse excursion across yesterday's landscape with better light but *The Attentive Reader* will have grasped the reason it's unrepresented in the photographic content.

We grabbed some sandwiches at *Koriyama* before heading up to the *Shinkansen platforms*, and, lo and behold, at the head of the queue for *Car Six* on the next service, were the mother and son combo from the train. You couldn't put a figure on the probability of that sort of thing occurring.

When it came to boarding time, it turned out they were a little further down the carriage.

The *first Shinkansen leg* was across familiar territory, so we sat back with the sandwiches and watched the landscape zoom by.

The haze noted earlier was there again, and gazing out towards where you knew the mountains were, the horizon, or what passed for it, was a blurry nothing.

There's always a bit of a haze in these parts, but I couldn't remember anything thick enough to almost block out substantial mountain ranges.



We had two intermediate stops on the day's ***Shinkansen*** leg, the first of them at ***Ōmiya***, about twenty-five kilometres north of downtown ***Tokyo***.

Omiya station is a major interchange station for ***JR East***, and the associated infrastructure helps make the city ***Saitama Prefecture***'s commercial, transport and business hub.

Ōmiya translates as ***great holy house or shrine***, a reference to the ***Hikawa Shrine***, which dates back (according to tradition) to ***473 BC*** and the reign of ***Emperor Kōshō***. More recently, ***Emperor Meiji*** made it the main ***Shinto*** shrine (***ichinomiya***) in the ***Kantō region***, with fifty-nine branch shrines in ***Tokyo*** and one hundred and sixty-two in ***Saitama Prefecture***.

More contemporary claims to fame include the ***Omiya Bonsai Village*** in neighbouring ***Kitaku***, *a Mecca for bonsai enthusiasts from around Japan and overseas* with ten *bonsai* gardens relocated from ***Tokyo*** after the ***Great Kantō Earthquake*** in ***1923***.

There's also a ***Railway Museum***, the multi-purpose ***Saitama Super Arena*** and the ***Tobu Zoo*** which also offers amusement park, swimming and equestrian facilities.

Local culinary specialities include ***Higashi Matsuyama Yakitori***, a porcine variation on the widespread grilled chicken skewers, a variety of offerings based around the ***satsumaimo*** sweet potato and ***Zeri Fry*** (*deep fried potato and tofu lees with a dipping sauce*). The name, however, translates as ***fried jelly*** though there's no jelly or gelatin in them,

Omiya Bento, sold only at JR Omiya, features *unagi* (freshwater eel), *ayu* (sweetfish) and *miso*-pickled salmon and tea-steamed rice, aesthetically arranged with a special treat of red-bean *ohagi* (sweet rice balls) for dessert.

We changed trains at ***Omiya*** without stopping to pick up a *bento* and headed on to ***Ueda*** on a section of the old ***Nagano Shinkansen*** line that doubles as the new ***Hokuriku Shinkansen*** to ***Kanazawa*** and beyond.

We would be back on that line just after midday tomorrow for the leg to ***Kanazawa***, which explains the lack of ***Ueda*** content hereabouts but first we needed to move off the main rail system *en route* to the night's stop in ***Bessho Onsen***.

That took us onto a rather swish private line with newish rolling stock and a route that passes through villages at close quarters with everyday life. We've done a fair bit of third sector rail travel, and ***Ueda Electric Railway*** (***Ueda Dentetsu***) with its single line between ***Ueda*** and ***Bessho Onsen*** is definitely the most impressive we've encountered as far as the rolling stock is concerned.

Looking for obvious reasons, you'd have to go with easy access to ***onsen*** facilities in an area that's a popular summer holiday spot for well-heeled ***Tokyo*** residents.



At least that's how it seemed.

Bessho Onsen village is one of the oldest ***onsen*** areas in ***Nagano Prefecture*** and ***one of the oldest in all Japan***.. It's a compact locality, where are at least four hot springs within easy walking distance of each other, along important cultural monuments including three temples (***Anrakuji***, ***Jorakuji*** and ***Kitamuki Kannon***, a collection of cultural assets that made the village the ***Kamakura of Nagano***.

That stems from the actual ***Kamakura Period*** when the mountain town was the headquarters of the governor of the ***Shinshu Region*** (***Nagano Prefecture***). He built the temples, brought ***Kamakura*** culture to ***Bessho Onsen*** and made it a significant centre for education and religion,

The healing and restorative powers of the waters, however, are what brought the dignitaries there, and Its sulphurous waters are even said to have healed arrow wounds after medieval warriors.

As an aside, since the springs well up between ***Megami*** (***Goddess Peak***) and ***Ogam***i (***God Peak***) they are also known as *matchmaking hot springs*. ***Aizenkatsura***, a 1200-year-old ***katsura*** tree in the grounds of ***Kitamuki Kannon*** is also said to have matchmaking powers that might prove beneficial for a good marriage.

The ***Takeno Nobori*** (***banners festival***) held every summer to pray for rain has been designated as intangible national treasure.

There are a number of separate hot springs, each with its individual properties and small traditional public bath houses (***Ishiyu***, ***Daishiyu***, and ***Oyu***) offer visitors a chance to experience them all at a very reasonable ¥150 a throw.

Aisome, no Yu public bath house, near the railway station at the entrance to the town, is larger and offers ore facilities.

Arriving at the terminus, we were pointed towards a shuttle bus, where ***Madam***'s name was on a list along with our destination. With ***The Coppertone Container*** in tow we doubted we'd fit on board, but we managed it, thanks to a helpful driver.

If we'd tried to walk, we'd have been walking for quite a while.

That's assuming we didn't manage a single wrong turn along the way.

When we arrived at our particular ***onsen***. ***Ryokan Katsuraso***, a lengthy discussion about logistics delivered some very useful information that padded out tomorrow's itinerary. There's nothing like well-informed local knowledge.

But once the ***check-in*** was complete and ***The Coppertone Container*** had been heaved upstairs, we were straight back our again, headed for the ***Kitamuki Kannon Temple***, located right next door.









Maybe we didn't quite have to (it's open *24x7x365*) but it's right on the way to the other points of interest and free to enter, so you may as well.

The main object of veneration in the temple is a statue of *Kannon*, the *Bodhisattva* of mercy.

Buddhist temples usually face south, but this one faces north with the statue aligning directly with the *Buddha* statue in *Nagano*'s *Zenkoji*.

The *Kitamuki Kannon* is also said to answer prayers to avoid misfortune in this life rather than requests regarding the hereafter.

It's a *Tendai sect* temple founded by the ninth-century monk *Jikaku Daishi*, who is said to have bathed in the waters of *Daishiyu* while the temple was under construction.









That might have been enough for some people, but there are another two significant temples in ***Bessho Onsen***, so we headed off to take a look at one of them in the afternoon.

The other could wait until morning.

And there was a little surprise along the way.

A shop that seemed to specialise in cat-related images and statues had an item that bore an uncanny resemblance to a certain ***LikLk*** on display out on the footpath.

He was, however, a little too large to come home with us, so we continued on our temple-viewing mission, crossing the stream that flows through the village and making for the hills.



That involved a little dog leg once we'd passed through the temple gate that brought us to the foot of a simple, but utterly elegant, entrance,

Anrakuji belongs to the *Sōtō* school and is the oldest standing *Zen* temple in *Nagano Prefecture*,

It is said tho have been founded fin the *8th or 9th century*, and at its peak in the *Kamakura Period* was a centre of learning and culture.

The highlight of the complex is *Hakkaku Sanju no To*, built in the *13th century* in the *Chinese Sung* architectural style during the *Kamakura Period*.







Japanese pagodas are usually square, but this one, built faithfully in the original *Chinese* architectural style is octagonal. Eaves known as *mokoshi* (*lean-to*) on the first floor, make the three storey 18.75-metre structure appear to have four stories.

It stands in the graveyard in the back of the temple and as the *only example of its kind in Japan* it was designated as a *National Treasure* in *1952*.

Other significant buildings in the complex include the Main Hall (*Hondō*), with an image of *Sakyamuni* flanked by *Manjusri* and *Samantabhadra* and the *Denpodo* hall.

The latter enshrines two prominent priests. *Isen Osho*, who went to study in China and returned in 1246, and *Enin Osho*, a *Chinese* monk who *came to Japan* with *Shōkoku Isen* and became the second abbot of *Anrakuji*.









The two are depicted in realistic wooden seated statues made in *1329* by a carpenter named *Hyobu*. Both have been designated as *Important Cultural Properties*.

The complex also includes a two-storey bell tower (*shōrō*) built in 1769 that is one of the largest in the area.

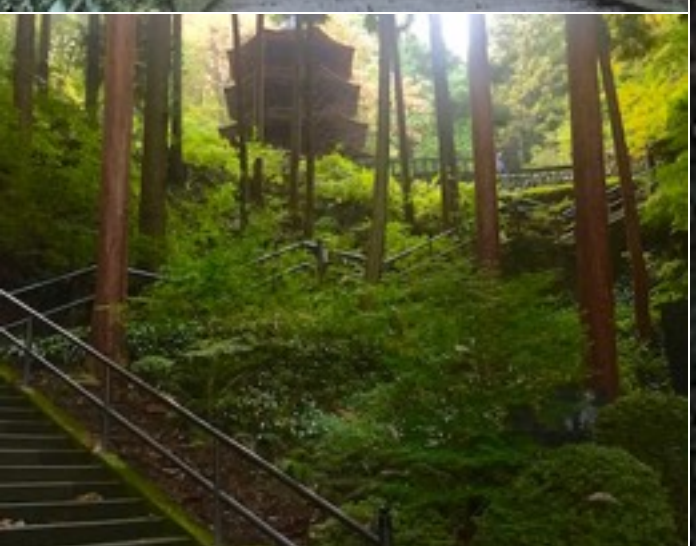
While the original *Edo Period* bell ended up as scrap metal during *World War Two*, a replacement was cast by *Katori Masahiko* in *1957*.

There is also a *Buddhist library* (*Kyōzō*) built after 1784 to store *sutra* copied by the priest *Tetsugen* purchased from *Mampuku-ji* in *Kyoto*.

The 5.4-metre square building contains an octagonal revolving shelf (*rinzō*) said to have been designed by *Fudaishi*, the *Chinese* monk later deified as the patron deity of libraries.

Revolving *sutra* shelves offer a combination of ease of access to the stored texts and the ability to revolve the library shelves.







That was thought to deliver visitors and pilgrims the same benefit as actually reading the sacred texts therein, but the visitor needed to be in prayer mode while the wheel turned.

The library went in well after the temple's heyday, which ended when the *Hojo clan* in *Kamakura* was overthrown in *1333*. And while its importance may have waned during the *Muromachi Period*, it was rebuilt in the *1580s*

These days it's open 365 days a year from 8:00 to 17:00 (16:00, *November* to *February*) for a modest ¥300 (extra for an *English pamphlet*, with the money going to a charity in *Cambodia*).

But that, and particularly the climb to the cemetery and the octagonal pagoda was about enough for the day.



We took our time on the way back, and the footsore and leg weariness factor saw us heading straight to the ***onsen*** facility.

Ryokan Katsuraso isn't a large operation.

Along with the ten ***Japanese-style*** *tatami* mat rooms, there are gender-specific hot spring baths and a *family bath* where you hang a sign outside to show that it's occupied.

The sign wasn't there when we arrived, but went up shortly afterwards.

A good soak restored and refreshed muscles and feet.

There was a short spell afterwards that might have been used, under other circumstances, for a bit more ***Travelogue***, but a half-hearted attempt saw inspiration sadly and totally lacking.

We were downstairs for dinner at seven.

That meant the odd restorative ale as a helpful hostess pointed out the details of an extensive multi-course spread based on fresh seasonal produce.

It would have helped if I'd been able to record what we had, but I'd left my phone upstairs.

In any case, even with the photographic record you'd still need to remember what each little platter contained.

But I do remember a ***shabu shabu*** affair with marbled beef as one of the highlights along with a ***sashimi*** of what could have been trout or something similar.

Both were quite wonderful

And, as usual, in our absence the room had been transformed.

With the ***futons*** spread out in front of us, I was always going to be heading straight to bed.

I figured ***Someone*** would have been heading back to the ***onsen***, but learned that overindulgence at the table ruled that one out.

And if that situation had changed I wouldn't have known.

Once the head hit the pillow, ***Hughesy*** was out like a light for close to the regulation eight hours.



BESSHO ONSEN
> KANAZAWA

Tuesday, 20 October 2015

After surfacing very briefly at four, I managed to extend the snooze to almost nine hours before getting up for a session that brought the *Travelogue* notes right up to date.

An almost undisturbed hour-long session finished right on the dot of six and allowed *Hughesy* to drop a minor bombshell.

I was ready for another session in the *onsen*.

At this point, we probably need to turn ourselves towards *Hughesy*'s attitude to the *onsen* experience, which is very much a two-edged affair.

Sure, it's enjoyable under comfortable circumstances, which the private family baths certainly deliver. I'm still not comfortable with the public version.

Put that down, if you like, *to the fear of an unclean foreigner polluting the pristine waters*.

While I'm not necessarily averse to a dip in the waters, it's still not something I go out of my way to get to if ***The Astute Reader*** catches my drift.

And if there's something that rates higher on the list of priorities, like ***Travelogue*** tapping when there's a substantial backlog that needs reducing, that gets the priority.

But, in this instance, I was done, there was a private bath, and the room lacked shower facilities, so why the hell not?

And, of course, there are a certain amount of ***Brownie points*** available to those who volunteer..

Back up in the room by six forty-five, we completed the preliminary tidying up before departure. Breakfast was slated for eight thirty, so we were out the door by seven to catch up on the remaining temple.

We stopped off along the way to catch ***Kitamuki Kannon*** in the early morning light.









The afternoon sun had been an unwanted element yesterday. In the early morning, the surrounds were tranquil, the sun was yet to climb over the mountains to the east.

The morning mist, if that's what it was, added to the mysticism.

The view out towards ***Ueda*** had been hazy yesterday, and seemed to be misty this morning, which was what prompted the *if that's what it was*.

So we took our time getting to the junction where the paths to ***Anrakuji*** and ***Jorakuji*** diverge.

There were a few locals out and about, but one suspects the ***onsen*** tourists were enjoying the waters or settling down to breakfast rather than wandering the streets.









Jorakuji dates back to the *Kamakura period* and ties in closely with *Kitamuki Kannon*.

The two temples share the same founder, the *Tendai Sect*'s *Jikaku Daishi*, the head priest at *Enryakuji* in *Kyoto*. It may come as a surprise to learn that this one is the head temple of the *Kitamuki Kannon* complex, but there you go.

Maybe that's the appropriate response when the name translates as *free from worry*.

The temple was rebuilt a number of times most recently three hundred years ago. One of the main features is a famous 2.8-metre *Kamakura Period* stone tower that stands in cedar trees on the hillside at the back of the premises.

Predictably, it's an *Important Cultural Asset*.

Apart from the temple, which has a thatched roof (unusual) the complex includes *Jorakuji Art Museum* (*Jorakuji Bijutsukan*).







It's a small museum with *ema* (wooden plaques) painted by ***Hokusai*** along with old roof tiles collected by former head priest ***Koukai Handa***, statues, and images of ***Buddha*** and ***Ukiyoe***.

The temple doesn't open its doors until 9:00, so there was no question about whether we should pay the ¥100 admission fee for the main hall.

The ¥500 for the museum was another moot point, but the combination of relative solitude, almost total silence and the early morning light made for a minor highlight of the whole trip.

And if you're looking for a summary of the experience, it's right there in my notes.

Tall cedars and elegant simplicity.



We roamed as far as the National Treasure on the hillside, then headed back down and around to the entrance to ***Anrakuji*** on the way back for breakfast.

It was a leisurely stroll that took most of the hour and a half we had to spare.

Back at the ***ryokan***, we were upstairs for as long as it took to stow the gear in the room before we headed back down for ***a very Japanese breakfast***.

The walk meant the camera needed recharging, but it really should have come down to record some of the detail of what arrived on the table.

There was absolutely no sign of bacon or eggs in any recognisable format though they were there, and toast was equally conspicuous by its total absence.

Rice filled that slot, but the rest of the meal came in an array of little dishes with a variety of tastes.

As stated (repeatedly) elsewhere, ***Hughesy***'s not good with ***Japanese food*** in a restaurant setting where you order one of these and one of these, but put him into this environment and he'll have a go at most things.

Sometimes it helps not having prior knowledge of what's about to go down the gullet.

In any case, once again the amount that managed to disappear out of the different bowls surprised myself and *Someone Else*.

Upstairs we finished packing and headed back down to check out.

Given the steep flights of stairs and the wooden environment, large clumsy foreigners were always going to be asking for assistance with the luggage, but neither of us expected assistance down to the station.

But it was there, seemingly as a matter of course.

Our hostess hustled us into a courtesy vehicle and would have dropped us off there dropped us off there if a lively discussion about rail passes and similar matters hadn't intervened. It lasted a good ten minutes or so, and only concluded when it did because the train arrived.

The conversation was the second one along the same lines within about thirty-six hours and underlines the fact that details of the *JR Rail Pass* are *unfamiliar to many Japanese*.



Both conversations began with a *where have you been* and continued with a *so what's after this* and in both cases the reaction was a fair degree of amazement.

At this point, the answer to the first question had read ***Sapporo*** > ***Hakodate*** > ***Hirosaki*** > ***Morioka*** > ***Furukawa*** > ***Naruko*** > ***Furukawa*** > ***Goshikinuma*** > ***Omiya*** > ***Ueda*** > ***Bessho Onsen***. You'd have to describe that as a reasonably impressive itinerary.

And the second question elicited a response of ***Ueda*** > ***Kanazawa*** > ***Amonohashidate*** > ***Kyoto*** > ***Onomichi*** *and back to* ***Himeji***, ***Osaka*** *and* ***Kyoto***.

Faced with that evidence, ***your average Japanese*** would be inclined to look at you and think you ***must be rather well off.***

Or, at least, ***well-heeled.***

Oh no, we respond. ***It's nothing like that. We have this Rail Pass, and it works like this.***

It is fair to describe the reaction to the details as ***gobsmacked***.

That's hardly surprising.

The rail authorities wouldn't be shouting the details of what they're giving away to foreigners from the rooftops, and there's been at least one adverse reaction to someone who is ***obviously Japanese*** picking up large numbers of expensive rail tickets.

But the different passes on offer to foreigners are obviously ***an essential element in the overseas tourist market***. I hadn't noticed so many people clutching items with the familiar panel attached to the back on previous trips, but ***this time I spotted them all over the place***.

Many of them seemed to be ***Chinese***, particularly from Taiwan and ***Hong Kong***.

While the train cut the conversation short by arriving, it took its time leaving on he run down to ***Ueda***. It was a thoroughly enjoyable little ride on a train company that was obviously doing rather well.

I had previously remarked on the newish or recently refurbished rolling stock, and ***Madam*** noted that the ticket machines are new too.

Car parks at stations along the way seemed to hold numbers of commuter vehicles, which suggests part of the answer. You could live in the country, and take this line into ***Ueda*** if you worked there.

Beyond that, ***Nagano*** is the next stop on the ***Shinkansen*** line, and you could just about commute to ***Tokyo*** if you had to.

The other third sector lines we'd used, being more out towards the back blocks, wouldn't have had the same customer base.







Once we'd made our way into Ueda, there was an obvious first stop.

With just over two hours to kill before the 12:18 to ***Kanazawa***, we needed to locate the coin lockers, stash the luggage and make our way to Tourist Information.

Based on information from ***our hostess up the road***, we thought we ought to take a look at what remains of ***Ueda Castle*** and needed at least a mud map to get us there.

Our inquiries pointed us towards a pleasant little circuit that would serve to kill two hours very nicely, thank you.

But we didn't head straight to ***Ueda Castle***. A slight diversion gave us a look at a gate in the grounds of a high school that was a remnant of the former lord's residence.



While the castle was his power base, this was the entrance to where he lived.

From there we moved on to the castle park and surprising crowds of tourists.

Surprising, that is, if you don't know ***Ueda*** is the setting for a prime time historical drama that will be going to air next year. It will run all through ***2016***, and the civic authorities hereabouts are obviously out to maximise the benefits.

Blind Freddy would have spotted the evidence of a very active volunteer program.

So, at this point, we turn our attention to the ***Ueda*** story.

Around two hundred kilometres from ***Tokyo***, ***Ueda*** has seen its status rise gradually through the ***20th century***. The current entity stems from a merger with neighbouring towns and villages in ***2006***.

Old Ueda city dates back to ***1919***, and it was designated as a town back in ***1889***.

With a population around 160,0000 (158,187 in ***June 2011***) it's hardly a big place.

It's the fifth largest city in ***Nagano Prefecture*** and certainly seems like a *go ahead* locality, with a healthy economy that started out based on the ***silkworm*** and diversified from there.







Ueda was one of the country's top silk producing areas until silkworm eggs were exported around the world. The *Uedatsumugi* silk weaving tradition goes back three hundred years to the *Edo Period* and is rated as one of the *top three traditions in Japan*.

By the *Meiji Period*, *sericulture* was a major industry and *silk* accounted for 60% of the country’s exports. Rapid industrialisation changed that, and production gradually declined.

But it's making a slight comeback.

The *Faculty of Textile Science and Technology* at the Ueda campus of *Shinshu University* is working to build on tradition through research into fibre technology and the technology of textiles.

There's also a drive to establish *Ueda* as a multimedia city and there's a strong *IT sector*, centred around the *Ueda City Multimedia Information Centre*, which opened in *1995*.

But the city owes its existence to *Ueda Castle* (*Ueda-jō*), the power base of the *Sanada clan*, built by *Sanada Masayuki* in *1583* during a turbulent era when the *Tokugawa* and *Toyotomi* families fought for control of the country.

It wasn't long before *Ueda Castle* found itself in the front line.

The castle was besieged by *Tokugawa forces*, in *1585* and again in *1600*.

The defences held up both times, and the second siege, when 2500 defenders repelled 38,000 *Tokugawa* warriors meant *Tokugawa Hidetada* failed to arrive in time for the *Battle of Sekigahara*.

That didn't change the outcome, which brought about *a unified Japan* under *Tokugawa* rule.

Members of the *Sanada* clan fought on both sides of the conflict, and the castle ended up in the hands of *Sanada Nobuyuki*, who was ordered to demolish it and relocate to *Matsushiro Castle*.







Once *Tokugawa* rule was consolidated across the country, *Sengoku Tadamasa* was transferred to the area and started rebuilding the castle in *1622*. The moat was excavated again but *Tadamasa* died during the reconstruction, and the castle remained unfinished.

And that's the way it stayed.

The castle was abandoned in *1871* and sold off in *1875*, with various bits and pieces removed and relocated. The North and South Turrets ended up back in their original locations after being reclaimed in *1949*, but once you've made your way through the rather impressive gate, there isn't a lot to appeal to dyed in the wool castle freaks.

The grounds, on the other hand, have been developed into a prime spot for cherry blossom viewing in the *sakura* season and contain community and sporting facilities.



We didn't get as far as the baseball ground or the athletics field though with a bit more time on our hands there would have been a couple of interesting possibilities.

Ueda City Museum (*Ueda Shiritsu Hakubutukan*) has exhibits that go right back to the Stone age, along with *samurai armour* used by members of the *Sanada cla*n.

Next door, the *Kanae Yamamoto Memorial Art Museum* (*Yamamoto Kanae Kinenkan*) celebrates the works of n artist who worked in oils and woodblock prints, pioneered a peasant/agrarian art movement (*Nomin Bijyutsu*) inspired by the *Russian Farmers Art Movement* and developed a radical *Art Education method for children*.

Visitors can access both, along with the *South Turret Museum* on the same ticket (¥250)

The castle grounds also contain the *Sanada-jinja shrine*, which commemorates and enshrines *Sanada Masayuki* and his son, *Yukimura*, who built the castle.

So there's a bit to see within the castle grounds if you've got the time.

Other attractions within the city limits include the 8th century *Shinano Kokubunji Temple* with its *15th-century three-storied pagoda* and *19th-century main building*.

Slightly further afield, ***Utsukushigahara Kogen Highlands*** in central ***Nagano Prefecture*** sit 2,000 metres above sea level with panoramic views across ***Matsumoto*** and Ueda and an open-air art museum, ***Sugadaira Heights*** is ***one of Japan's largest ski resorts***. It's an hour by bus from Ueda Station.

So tourism is big business in an area that draws in around 2.2 million visitors annually.

It certainly looked like the city authorities were gearing up to handle an extra influx after that TV show starts going to air.

We only walked as far as the remains of the castle, and given the time constraints, with not much to see after the gate and the pagoda decided to keep moving.

There was a great deal of refurbishment going on in the area, and we passed tour groups halted while a guide expounded on what they are seeing or might have seen in the site's heyday.

But, of course, it was Greek to me.





Back outside the castle gate, we set off on a loop through the streets to ***Yanagi Street***, a merchant street that seemed to be in the process of being *recreated* rather than *restored*.

That's the way it appeared to me.

Having seen similar areas in other centres that have either been restored or remain as they were, I knew where they were coming from, but the street seemed relatively artificial.

Still, one suspects it will look authentic enough when the TV associated promotion of the city kicks into overdrive. One also notes that it rates #8 out of 36 *things to do in Ueda*, so my reaction might have been influenced by obvious work in progress.

And if we'd headed across the intersection at the other end we could have visited ***Ueda Daijingu shrine*** or the ***Okazaki Brewery*** but time was getting on, and we turned our heads back towards the station.

By this stage of the proceedings it was unseasonably hot, and we were on the sunny side of the street, so we weren't inclined to waste any time.

And when we reached the station there was an opportunity for a little photographic silliness on the way to the coin lockers.



Once we'd reclaimed the baggage, we headed straight up to the *Shinkansen* platform, where it seemed there weren't that many headed to *Kanazawa*.

Aboard the train, the first priority involved recharging the batteries on various *iDevices*.

Since I was sitting in the window seat with a power point beside me, I started on the process. *Madam* needed to recharge her camera battery, and since I was hogging the outlet on this side, she headed to the vacant seats across the aisle.

That was just before the helpful trolley made its way past and I picked up a little thirst quencher. I was about half way down the tin of *Asahi* when *Madam* discovered these *proper flash new* ***Shinkansen*** sets have additional power outlets in the backs of the seats in front of you.

As far as either of us could tell there seemed to be one per passenger, which eliminates one of the minor irritants when you end up with an aisle seat.

She had just moved back to complete recharging the camera battery when the ticket inspector passed through looking for people in spaces where they aren't supposed to be.

That, I figured, was easier than checking everybody's tickets. I was mulling over those matters when the combination of exercise, heat, beer, the early afternoon sun and tunnels delivered a pleasant drowsiness.

I consciously shut my eyes in one tunnel, was roused by the warmth of the sun as we left it, then did it again and dosed almost all the way to ***Kanazawa***.

We'd been to ***Kanazawa*** back in ***2008***, but this time we were staying somewhere different, slightly further from the station. On that basis, it made sense to stop at ***Tourist Information*** for directions before ***Madam*** headed for an ATM to cash up.



Outside, as we set off in search of the accommodation it was obvious the past seven and a half years had brought significant changes.

Much of that must be due to the new ***Shinkansen*** line, but ***Kanazawa*** has always been popular with ***Japanese travellers***.

The city now appears to be well and truly on the radar for foreigners.

It would be fair to describe the walk to the ***Kanazawa City Hotel*** as a compass and a cut lunch affair, but since we were too early for ***check-in*** we needed another navigational device and a separate prepared meal for the hike back to the station.

The game plan for the afternoon involved catching a bus to ***Kenrokuen Garden***, and we had a particular service in mind.

Unfortunately, as we found when we arrived at the bus station, ***Madam***'s watch had stopped for some reason.

So we weren't catching that one. Never mind, the JR buses to the garden run fairly frequently, and the wait wasn't *that* long.

When the bus dropped us across the road, it was obvious we were going to be joining the throng.

Last time around the weather had been overcast, and it was threatening to rain late in the afternoon in the ***sakura*** season, so people had their attention focussed elsewhere. Here, we were in the middle of the coloured leaves in the middle of a sunny afternoon.

So it's no wonder there were a few more people around.

There were other changes too.

Last time admission had been free because it was cherry blossom time. This time, we were paying to get in. Last time, apart from being late, overcast and rainy, we also had issues with camera batteries. This time, the afternoon sun was an issue.

On that basis, we may have to come back again.

Actually, we need to come back again because the ***Kenrokuen*** complex is too big to take it all in.

Not in a single visit. There's only so much *Wow factor* the average body can take and ***Kenrokuen*** has lots of subtle *Wow factor*.

As it should.



Along with ***Kairakuen*** (in ***Mito***, capital of ***Ibaraki Prefecture***) and ***Okayama***'s ***Korakuen***, it's is one of ***Japan's Three Great Gardens*** and probably the most famous sight in all of ***Kanazawa***,

The name translates as the ***Garden of Six Attributes***, the qualities desirable in gardens: ***spaciousness***, ***serenity***, an air of ***antiquity***, scenic ***views***, subtle ***design*** and abundant ***water***.

That's not the sort of thing that can be achieved in a hurry and it comes as no surprise to learn the outer pleasure gardens where the ***Maeda Lords*** strolled developed over a couple of centuries and gradually expanded to take over the entire block across from ***Kanazawa Castle***'s ***Ishikawamori Gate***.

Work on what became ***Kenrokuen*** began in the ***1620s*** and was not completed until the last years of the ***Edo Shōgunate***. The garden was opened to the public in ***1871***.

The grounds are open ***365 days a year*** during daylight hours (7:00 to 18:00 from ***March*** to mid-***October***, opening an hour later and closing an hour earlier through the rest of the year).

Early birds can get in free up to three hours before the official opening times but have to be gone before the paying customers start flowing in.

The ¥310 entrance fee doesn't apply through the ***sakura*** season.

The garden seem to have developed in stages (as you'd expect with a two-century time span), with the first significant development coming when *Maeda Toshitsune*, third *daimyō* of the *Maeda clan* completed the *Tatsumi water channel* in *1632*.

Gardening, however, probably didn't feature in the decision to draw water from the upper reaches of the *Saigawa River*, ten kilometres from the castle.

A fire in *1631* had destroyed the castle, along with a thousand other buildings in *Kanazawa* and *Toshitsune* didn't want to see his stronghold burn down again.

The water flows downhill past *Kenrokuen* and is then drawn up to the castle through a reverse siphoning arrangement.

It was a remarkable feat of engineering, with a very gentle gradient (4 in 1,000) one-third of the channel passing through an underground tunnel and completed very quickly using wooden pipes. They were replaced with stone channels at the end of the *Edo Period*.





So ***Kanazawa Castle*** gained water for fire-fighting purposes.

A water supply for an elevated garden's ponds and streams (***Kenrokuen*** is 53 metres above sea level and looks out over the surrounding city) was a side benefit.

Then, around forty years later, the fifth ***daimyō***, ***Maeda Tsunanori*** built a the house on the slope facing the ***Kanazawa castle***, called it ***Renchiochin*** and named its garden ***Renchitei***, or ***lotus pond***.

Given the presence of a ***Renchimon Gate*** on the castle side of the garden, I guess that's roughly where the house was. That was in ***1672***

Most of ***Renchitei*** was destroyed by another massive fire in ***1759***, but documents suggest the garden was used for banquets, tea ceremonies, viewing the moon and enjoying the coloured leaves in autumn.

But it wasn't totally destroyed.

The ***Shiguretei teahouse***, built in ***1725***, miraculously survived the fire and continued to be used until it was relocated and completely restored in the ***Meiji Period***. It still sits in its new position in the ***Renchitei*** section of the garden today.

Another, older structure that survived the 1759 fire is the ***Kaisekito Pagoda***, which sits on an island in ***Hisagoike Pond***. The structure is reputed to have been built by the third lord, ***Toshitsune***, which means it would have predated ***Renchitei***, but there are a couple of theories about its origin.

One suggests it was part of a ***13-tiered pagoda*** in ***Kanazawa Castle***'s ***Gyokusenin*** garden.

Another suggests it was brought back from a military incursion into Korea and presented to *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* who passed it on to the first ***Maeda daimyō***.

Both theories, of course, could be true, with the structure within the castle relocated to its current location by a later ***daimyō***.

That may have happened after the 1759 fire, but if it did, the pagoda would have needed to survive the earlier fire that took out the castle and prompted the construction of the ***Tatsumi water channel***.





After the fire, restoration work began in *1774* with the eleventh *daimyō*, *Maeda Harunaga*, adding the *Midoritaki Emerald Waterfall* and *Yugaotei teahouse*.

Water from the *Tatsumi channel* came into play in *1822* when the twelfth *daimyō*, *Maeda Narinaga*, installed the garden's winding streams.

His successor, *Maeda Nariyasu* added more streams, expanded *Kasumi Pond* and brought the garden up to its present 11 hectares.

That, you might figure, makes it a little too large to register as a *garden*, and there are those who'd claim it's *more like a park*.

In a way it is, but it's *a park that's comprised of a series of interlinked gardens*. That's my take on it,

Following the changes the *Meiji Era* rang in, *Kenrokuen* was opened to the public in *May 1874*.

The grounds also include the *Ishikawa Prefectural Museum for Traditional Products and Crafts* covering thirty-six types of traditional arts and crafts for an additional ¥250 entry fee (¥200 for seniors, and ¥100 for children). In an interesting exercise in consumer education, the displays feature examples of lacquerware, dyed silk, pottery, musical instruments with price tags attached.

But they're not for sale. The labels indicate what consumers should expect to pay for something similar elsewhere.

Right next door at the southern corner of the garden, and rather more expensive at ¥700 is the *Seisonkaku Villa*, built in *1863* by the thirteenth *daimyō*, *Maeda Nariyasu* for his mother, *Takako*.

It was originally known as *Tatsumi Goten* (*Tatsumi Palace*), and though much of the structure has been dismantled, there's apparently enough left to give a fair indication of traditional *daimyō* palace architecture.









The lower floor has formal receiving rooms with walls coated in gold dust, and the paper doors have Dutch stained glass insets, but upstairs things are significantly less formal and far more colourful. The grounds include a teahouse, a garden and streams that meander underneath the veranda.

But we didn't go in.

Didn't venture out the *Zuishinzaka Gate* to the *Prefectural Museum of Art* and the *Prefectural History Museum* and *Honda Museum* either. Or out the *Mayumizaka Gate* to the *21st Century Museum*.

There's only so much you can do in half an afternoon.



After paying our money at the ***Katsurazaka Gate,*** our path took us past the iconic two-legged stone lantern known as ***Kotojitōrō*** because it is shaped like the bridge of a ***koto*** and the ***Karasaki pine tree***, planted from seed by the thirteenth ***daimyō***, ***Maeda Nariyasu***.

Depending on how you look at it, the eleven stones of ***Gankoubashi***, the flying goose bridge, looks like a squadron of geese flying in formation or a more earthbound arrangement.

The shapes of the stones resemble turtle shells, so it's a matter of what works best for the beholder.

We continued past the ***Meiji Monument***, the statue of ***Yamatotakeruno-Mikoto*** dedicated to the soldiers who died in the civil war that followed the ***Meiji Restoration***. Erected in ***1880***, it is believed to be the ***first bronze statue installed in Japan***.

There's a monument to the great haiku poet ***Bashō*** at the northern foot of ***Yamazakiyama hill***, with a haiku from **The Narrow Road to the Deep North** inscribed on a stone tablet.

Bashō visited ***Kanazawa*** on his famous journey and wrote this particular *haiku* on the road to a village called ***Komatsu***, southwest of the castle town.

These days ***Komatsu*** has ***the main airport*** for ***Ishikawa Prefecture***, but the name is probably most familiar from the construction and mining equipment company named after the city.







Back in ***Bashō***'s day it was best known as the site of ***Maeda Toshitsune***'s retirement castle. The castle is long gone, but its garden is one of the prefecture's best spots for viewing ***sakura*** blossoms in spring.

Bashō's thoughts were turning to autumn when he wrote

Aka aka to

Hiwa tsure naku mo

Aki no kazu









The Inquisitive Reader will find various translations of the *haiku*, but I liked this one from my copy of **The Narrow Road** (Shambhala, Boston & London, 2012, translation by Sam Hamill):

Intense hot red sun,

heartlessly - but already

autumn in the wind

That was back in ***July 1689***.

The haiku was inscribed at the foot of the hill by local poet ***Sakurai Baishitsu*** in ***1846***.

The ***Komatsu*** earthmoving connection seems strangely fitting since we moved on from the gazebo at the top of the hill past a five-tiered stone *pagoda* at the bottom towards ***Shichifukujinyama*** (*Seven Lucky Gods Hill*), created from material excavated when the nearby pond went in.

From there, we looped around the bottom of ***Hisagoike Pond***, the second largest of ***Kenrokuen***'s four ponds, ninety metres from



east to west and forty-five from north to south with a circumference of 270 metres and (probably) a remnant of ***Kenrokuen***'s predecessor, ***Renchitei***.

The ***Kaisekito Pagoda*** sits beside a weeping cherry tree on an island in the middle of the pond.

By that time we'd had enough for one day and were more or less ready to head straight out but it was difficult to tear ourselves away.

We stopped to photograph the ***Midoritak***i waterfall, which was in place as far back as ***1774***, as does the nearby ***Yūgaotei*** teahouse, the oldest building in the garden that survives in its original form.

Headed for the exit, we passed crowds of foreigners in a tour group clustered beside the fountain.

It was not, in itself, a particularly impressive fountain with a jet that shoots a mere 3.5 metres high, but it's the ***oldest fountain in Japan***.

It operates by natural water pressure with no assistance from mechanical pumps thanks to the drop in elevation from nearby ***Kasumigaike Pond***.

But if we'd stopped to take in the fountain, something else in the surroundings would have caught the eye, and after that...

So we headed out and crossed the bridge to ***Kanazawa Castle***, heading in through the rather impressive ***Ishikawamon***, but we didn't have the time or energy to explore too far.

Kanazawa Castle may have been ***one of the largest in feudal Japan*** but another fire destroyed most of it. Only the armoury and the rear gate we'd just come in through survived the blaze.

In the meantime, the castle had become the property of the ***Meiji government***, who weren't overly concerned about symbols and relics of the outmoded feudal system and tore a lot of them down.

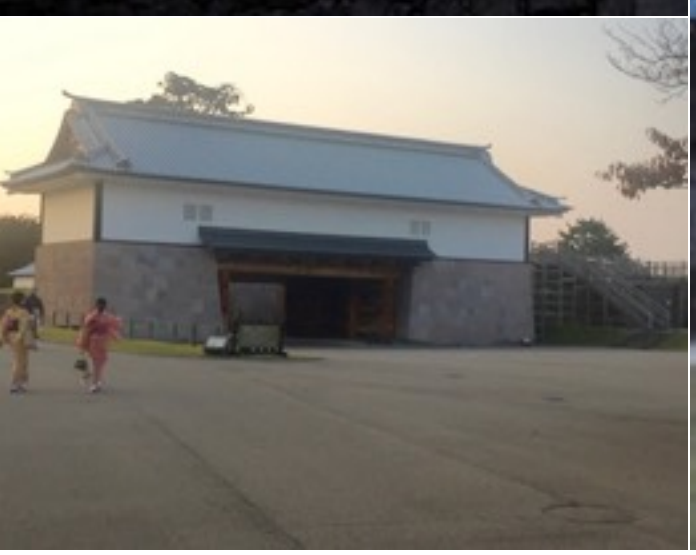
Kanazawa Castle became the base for the Imperial Army's Ninth Division and any buildings deemed surplus to requirements were torn down. Most of the rest perished in the fire in ***1881***.

After World War Two, the site became the new campus of ***Kanazawa University***, which stayed there until operations were transferred to a new campus in the hills that surround the city in ***1998***.

The castle site is now a public park. Sections of the castle were partially restored as of ***2001*** and there are long term plans to re-create much of the original castle grounds.









So we weren't going to stick around very long.

Still, what we saw was only a small part of what's there on the ground, so ***Hughesy*** has to pencil in another excuse for a return visit to ***Kanazawa***. In any case, we need another look at ***Kenrokuen***.

We made our way back down to the bus stop, but the timetable suggested there wouldn't be a JR bus for a while.

Given a choice of waiting or shelling out for a leg on the ***Kanazawa Loop Bus***, which runs clockwise around all the city's key sights. It charges a flat fee of ¥200 regardless of where you get on and off and offers a full day pass for ¥500.

Unsurprisingly, we went for immediacy of service and made a mental note about further options for a return visit.

Back at the station we set out on the hike to the hotel, which didn't seem quite as far as it had earlier hen we weren't sure how far it was.

That's hardly a remarkable phenomenon, has been remarked on before and almost certainly will be again.

Once we'd checked in and headed upstairs to the room I had guessed we were in for a decent sized room.

You can predict things like that from the spacing of doors along the passageway, but I wasn't expecting something as big as what we found.

Some Japanese people live in apartments smaller than this big space with twin beds. There was a generous bathroom too, and a desk well away from beds so I could tap away without disturbing *Someone Else*.

Entirely satisfactory, with the only possible reservation relating to the distance from the station.



We were slated to meet up with one of ***Madam***'s old friends, and were expecting a phone call or text message, but, on the other hand, we knew she was probably busy.

Since there'd been no contact leading up to dinner time, it seemed safe to assume that it would come later, and the meet-up would come in the morning.

That meant we were looking after ourselves for dinner, and the distance from the railway station kicked into considerations once again. We knew there were plenty of possibilities down that way, and I could easily have been inveigled into heading to ***Forus*** over on the other side of the station.

On the other hand, we'd done the station and back leg twice in the space of a couple of hours, and weren't inclined to tackle it again.

On the way back to check in, however, we'd spotted a drinking place on the corner.

That', we decided, would do, and we managed to time things just right. A large party had arrived just before us, and there were no unoccupied tables.

Would the counter be all right?

Actually, it turned out to be very handy.

We ended up tucked up in a corner beside unfinished bottles of ***saké*** with direct access to the busy chef in the kitchen. It would have been interesting to have had a mirror on the wall behind him because we couldn't see over the counter.

Or maybe not.

There are things you're better off not knowing, and some of them may involve busy people pushing out large quantities of snack sized plates for thirsty customers.

We weren't looking at *haute cuisine* or ***its Japanese equivalent*** by any stretch of the imagination, but ***Madam*** got her favourite cheap fish, and ***Hughesy*** could have snacked away on repeated batches of fried oysters rather than the variety of platters that arrived.

And three beers washed it all down very nicely

Back in the hotel, ***Madam*** had eyes on the onsen.

Hughesy had eyes for bed and was just dozing off when ***The Mother's Mobile*** buzzed, signifying something.

I managed to clutch onto consciousness until ***Someone*** returned but awoke in the morning completely unaware of the outcome of the incoming data.



KANAZAWA > KYOTO > AMANOHASHIDATE

Awake just before five, I moved directly into *Travelogue* mode without passing *Go* and had things up to date by 6:10 with *Madam* in the shower.

Last night's late night calls had modified *Someone*'s plans for the morning, which were centred around the *samurai quarter*.

The original intention had been to catch a bus, but subsequent developments suggested it would be easier to walk.

That phone call while *Hughesy* slept had arranged a rendezvous for 8:10 outside the hospital. That sounded good.

Our train was leaving at 9:53 so everything looked to be dovetailing nicely.

Checking in yesterday had revealed the presence of a ***Viking*** if we were willing to shell out another ¥700, so that had the breakfast department covered.

But only just.

When we headed down to sample what we'd paid for we found an ordinary spread that lacked quite a few of the things that seem more or less de rigeur in such operations.

There was, however, plenty of what was there, and that meant there was no need to stop and pick up something for lunch.

Having demolished the breakfast and packed before we went down, a flying visit upstairs looked after the fang polishing, and we were on the way to the rendezvous by ten to eight. Our path took us into the back blocks, which can prove disastrous, given the nature of ***Japanese laneways*** and questions like *how many intersections is that?*





But the directions were clear, the track reasonably straightforward and we arrived at the entrance to a large hospital comfortably before eight-fifteen.

The ***Nagamachi Samurai Quarter,*** despite being promoted in tourist brochures as the ***samurai area***, presents some interesting anomalies, as I found when I dug a little deeper.

For a start, the overwhelming majority of the houses we walked past are not ***samurai houses***, but modern housing built since World War Two.

That doesn't mean there are no ***samurai houses*** left in ***Kanazawa***.

There are, but there aren't many of them. And they're not where we were.

On the other hand, there's no doubt that people made a great deal of effort to recreate the feel of ***a samurai housing area***.

Even though none of the ***original samurai houses*** remain the tourists still flock in.

As they should.

It mightn't be ***authentic***, but it ***looks that way***, and it's ***certainly picturesque***.







Add it to an itinerary that includes the ***Higashi Chaya geisha district*** and ***Kenrokuen*** and visitors will probably leave ***Kanazawa*** reasonably happy.

But if ***The Pernickety Reader*** wants to mumble about ***lack of authenticity***, here's how it panned out.

Kanazawa was the capital of the old ***Kaga fiefdom***, shielded from outside influence by a location between the mountains and the sea and reasonably prosperous thanks to an ample yield of rice.

When the authority of the ***Shōguns*** in ***Kyoto*** started to wane in the ***fifteenth century***, their regional governors set about assuming even greater powers and carving out their own personal, semi-independent fiefdoms.



That might have been the intention as far as the hereditary regional governors, the *Togashi*, were concerned, but their power was on the slide, and there was a new player in the area.

A priest named *Rennyo*, from the *Jodo Shinshu* sect, arrived to proselytise a brand of *Buddhism* that spread rather quickly among the *samurai* and peasants. His followers were known as the *Ikko*, or *Single-Minded* sect and managed to increase their political influence to the point where the last *Togashi* governor suicided in *1488*.

For the next hundred years, the area was ruled by the *Ikkō-ikki* peasants, who created an egalitarian republic known to history as *The Peasants' Kingdom* in the southern part of modern-day *Ishikawa Prefecture*.

Their main stronghold was a natural fortress located on the top of a ridge, backed by high hills, flanked on two sides by rivers.

It was the site subsequently occupied by *Kanazawa Castle*.

A fortified temple town grew up on top of the ridge, with priestly residences and religious buildings in the centre, surrounded by merchant areas that have survived to the present day, even if only in name. It would have borne a fair resemblance to similar towns in *mediaeval Europe*, with a church in the middle, enclosed by a high wall and surrounded by a moat.









That arrangement lasted until *1580*, when *Sakuma Morimasa*, one of *Oda Nobunaga*'s generals, overthrew the *Peasants' Kingdom* and set about turning the town into a military base.

Then, in *1583 Toyotomi Hideyoshi* arrived on the scene and incorporated the area into his territory. *Maeda Toshiie* commanded his advance guard and was appointed the new *daimyō* of *Kaga*, adding it to his own power base in the nearby *Noto peninsula*.

The *Maeda clan*'s stewardship lasted nearly three centuries thanks to a combination of diplomacy, strategic marriages and an awareness that the family were sitting on the largest domain outside the *Shōgun*'s lands and would be carefully watched.

Maeda Toshiie's grandson and his successors carefully avoided any hint of military ambition and channeled their wealth into cultural pursuits rather than military activity.

That may explain why all the *samurai* in the domain, rather than living on their own estates scattered across the countryside, lived





in ***Kanazawa***. By the late 17th century, more than three-quarters of the city was ***samurai*** housing.

A major reorganisation in ***1611*** had seen the richest families moved out of the castle onto massive estates scattered around the city, with their retainers, in turn, housed nearby.

As a result, ***Kanazawa*** was filled with huge mansions with the estates of the ***Eight Houses*** (the chief vassals) closest to the castle and there were another dozen families whose income warranted a similar status. Those families all had their own men, in some cases hundreds of them, in houses that usually adjoined the primary residence.

That situation lasted until the ***Meiji Restoration*** when the ***samurai*** lost their traditional income.









Many were forced to sell off their estates, which were subsequently redeveloped as modern housing in the years before *World War Two*.

In the process, astute investors would have seen the benefit of building something that resembled one of the *former samurai residences* or restoring one that came into their hands.

Nomura House is one example, restored by a shipping magnate, who added part of a *samurai house* he owned in his hometown to the structure in *Kanazawa*. The restored house is open to the public (¥500) and has a garden of rocks and watercourses rated as a masterpiece of miniature landscaping.

A purist might grumble and give the area a big miss but although it might be historically dubious, it is a pleasant area to walk around and, for the reasons outlined above, there aren't *that many samurai districts left in Japan*.

The city has relocated and restored two houses formerly owned by *ashigaru* (the lowest ranked *samurai*), which are open to the

public (and free), and they seem to have gone to some trouble to make sure the tourist facilities fit in.

While we were rambling through the area, I noticed ***a particularly swishy looking toilet block***.

Regardless of actual historical accuracy, I thought the area ***looked to be authentic***, *in a way that the reconstruction in Ueda yesterday didn't*. Even relatively new elements like the toilet block seemed to have been given enough time to pick up a bit of a *patina* and blend in with the existing components.

In these cases, it's all about *consistency of look and feel*.

And it pays to get there early so you can avoid the tour parties. Remember that since the ***Shinkansen*** came to town ***Kanazawa*** is well and truly on the radar for foreign tourists.







It has always been on the radar for ***Japanese tourists***.

So we walked along, usually with ***Hughesy*** ahead of the others, snapping away while two old friends caught up. It had apparently been something like thirty-five years.

Somewhere along the way we passed the ***Nagamachi Kaga Yuzen Silk Centre***, a former ***samurai house*** set up to produce ***Kaga Yuzen*** silk for formal ***kimonos*** using a resist dyeing process.

Given the relatively tight schedule, it was probably just as well we were there early in the day.

We continued to ramble through the back blocks until we reached a string of lanes that would take us almost right back to the hotel. That's where we parted company with the old acquaintance after getting pretty clear directions.









Follow this street until you find yourself back at your hotel seemed to be the gist if it when I asked.

But we didn't quite manage to do that.

There was a point where you might have thought *we'd come far enough, and that street down there on our left certainly looked like the Main Street where the hotel was situated*.

But there was another alley straight ahead. I thought it was *that one*, but ***Madam*** thought we should head for the road.

As it turns out, we were both right.

I'm guessing here since we didn't follow the alley to see where it debouched, but the route we took ended up following two sides of a right-angled triangle.

Following the hypotenuse might have been shorter, but not by that much.

It took all of about five minutes to make our way up to the room, collect the baggage and check out.

The hike to the station seemed to be shorter again though I can't figure why.

Last time we'd headed that way I hadn't been wheeling a *Coppertone Container*.

Given the fact that I knew *Kanazawa* is the current terminus of the *Shinkansen* line, and we were headed onwards to *Kyoto* I can't figure why *Someone* headed for the *Shinkansen* platforms when we reached the station either.

But I guess it's understandable.

The *Shinkansen* line will eventually hook through to the *Tokaido* line, although the actual route is yet to be determined. You would guess it will go to *Osaka*, *via* *Kyoto*, but details are still to be finalised.

Those considerations and the politics of *Shinkansen* routes gave me something to think about on the first part of the two-hour leg to *Kyoto*, the reverse of the first big train leg from our first trip, passing attractive countryside, though that haze continued to cloud details in the distance.



Having passed this way before, I wasn't inclined to worry too much about taking notes until we encountered ***Lake Biwa***, the country' largest freshwater lake.

From memory, last time we were on the other side of the train, heading north. This time, headed in the opposite direction I had this very substantial body of water over on my left and made a note to find out more about it.

And when you look into it, there's often plenty to find.

Just northwest of ***Kyoto***, the lake turns up in all sorts of contexts, with a fourteenth-century monk named ***Kōsō***, linking it to the goddess ***Benzaiten*** who reputedly lived on an island in the lake.

Her choice of residence may have been based on the similarity between the lake's shape and her favourite musical instrument, *a short-necked fretted lute* called a ***biwa***.

The consensus seems to attribute the lake's name to that resemblance though it was also known as the ***Awaumi*** (*Freshwater Sea*), the ***Chikatsu Awaumi*** (*Freshwater Sea Near the Capital*) and ***Nio no Umi*** (*Little Grebe Lake*).

The four-million-year-old 670 square kilometre lake is the result of tectonic uplift and is reputedly one of the world's twenty oldest.

It collects the runoff and meltwater off the surrounding mountains and lets it out into the ***Seta River***, which merges with other streams and eventually discharges into the ***Seto Inland Sea*** at ***Osaka Bay***.

At that point the ***Seta*** has morphed into the ***Yodogawa***, the large stream we cross on the freeway between ***Kansai International*** and ***Kōbe***.

That's not the only time water from ***Lake Biwa*** have crossed our path. We've probably encountered it coming out of a tap in ***Kōbe***, ***Osaka*** or ***Kyoto*** since the lake provides the drinking water for around fifteen million people in the ***Kansai*** region.

We'd also encountered the terminus of the ***Lake Biwa Canal*** when we visited ***Nanzenji*** back in ***2013***. The canal delivered the water that drove ***Japan's first public hydroelectric power station*** and did much to revitalise ***Kyoto***'s industrial sector, which had been in the doldrums after the national capital was transferred to ***Tokyo*** at the start of the ***Meiji Era***.

The lake is also a breeding ground for freshwater fish with a diverse ecosystem that includes over a thousand species of fish, molluscs and aquatic insects, not all of them ***native to Japan***.

Introduced species including the ***black bass*** and the ***bluegill*** have threatened the lake's biodiversity and environmental legislation has been needed to counter the oversupply of nutrients from agricultural, industrial, and household sources.

With large population centres less than an hour away by train, you'd expect the lake to be a popular destination for day trippers and holiday makers, and there are some popular beaches.

Lake cruises depart from *Otsu*, the capital of *Shiga prefecture* just over the range from *Kyoto* and the old castle town of *Hikone*, further north on the route between *Kyoto* and *Nagoya*.

That, of course, means the visitors don't just come from *Kansai*.

And they're not just there for the swimming boating and water sports.

The lake attracts scores of birds, so birdwatching is another drawcard.

Hikone has *one of Japan's twelve remaining original castles*, while *Nagahama*, towards the northern end of the lake, boasts many historical attractions including *Japan's oldest preserved railway station*, a reconstructed castle and some important shrines and temples.

At the other end, not that far from *Kyoto*, *Sakamoto* has two prominent temples, the *World Heritage* listed *Enryakuji* and *Ishiyamadera*, and serves as the gateway to *Mount Hiei*, home to the *Tendai* sect of *Zen Buddhism*.

Across the bay, *Omihachiman* has a restored historic canal and museums while out in the middle *Chikubu* and *Takeshima* are popular pilgrimage destinations.

Throw in sunsets, best viewed across the water from the eastern side with the sun setting over the mountains behind the other shore, and hot springs and *onsen* resorts around the lake and you've got a regional destination that offers plenty of attractions to *Japanese and foreign visitors*.

But I found all that out much later in the piece.

At the time, I was quite happy to spend the long run along the shoreline gazing across the waters and pondering whatever it was I happened to be considering at the time.

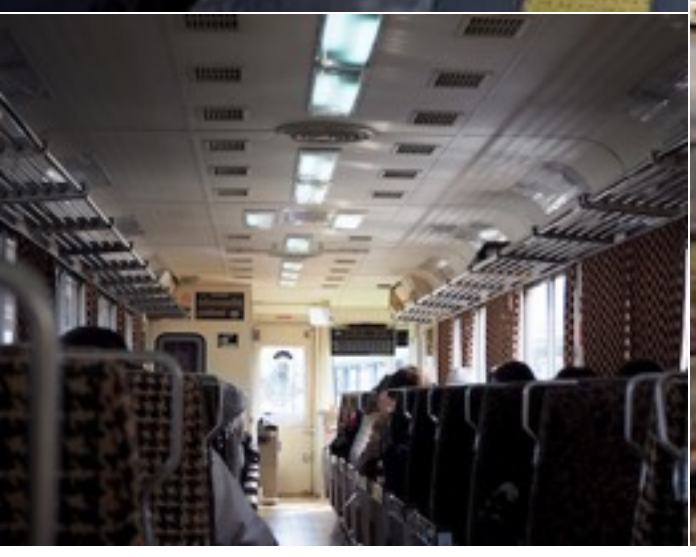
The tranquil views across the lake contrasted nicely with the hustle and bustle as we decanted ourselves Into *Kyoto station* and set out transferring ourselves up, along and down to the very minor lines in what amounted to the basement.

With sixteen minutes to do it, we weren't pushed for time, but at he same time you didn't want to get held up along the way.

The run along the *Sanin Main Line* on the way to *Ayabe* in the northern part of *Kyoto Prefecture* took us through the mountains that ring *Kyoto*.

Then we diverted onto the *Maizuru Line* for a twenty-kilometre run to *Nishi-Maizuru*.





The line was built to transport troops and war materiel to the naval base and port at *Maizuru* during the *Russo-Japanese War*, and the port is still a significant transport hub. The *Shin-Nihonkai* Ferry runs from *Higashi-Maizuru* to *Otaru* in *Hokkaidō*, though it takes twenty hours to get you there.

The naval base dates back to *1901* and played a key role in the *Russo-Japanese War* since it's right beside the *Sea of Japan*. These days it's still a significant district headquarters for *Japan*'s *Maritime Self-Defense Force*.

But we weren't going quite that far. We alighted at *Nishi-Maizuru* and transferred to the third sector *Miyazu Line* operated by the *Kitakinki Tango Railway*, which would get us to *Amanohashidate*.

It's very much a local line, winding along the coast after *Higashi-Kanzaki*, passing through *Yura*,



Nakatsu and ***Miyazu***, picking up and dropping off passengers *en route* to one of the ***Three Great Views of Japan***.

A big influx of high school students, a couple of stops before our destination, underlined the local service aspect of things, and there wasn't that much to indicate we were headed for a significant tourist destination.

At ***Amanohashidate Station***, which is actually in ***Miyazu City***, but gets a clear identity for branding purposes, we headed up and down the stairs and, predictably, then noticed the elevator at the other end of the platform.

Outside the station, I guess we could have stopped for information, and it might have saved time i we did, but ***Madam*** was determined to head straight to our ***ryokan*** accommodation at ***Amanohashidate Taikyourou***.

Very ***Kyoto***, she remarked when we arrived.

It was a comment that seemed to relate to ***Hughesy***'s failure to follow ***strict Japanese etiquette*** in the shoe-removing department and suggested an expectation that things would be done *just so*, in a very formal manner.



That's fine, as long as you know your *just so*, which, of course, ***Hughesy*** doesn't.

But those concerns dissipated when we reached our room, with a pleasant view of the southern end of the iconic sand bar across the swinging bridge.

Then, having checked in and dropped the luggage, we headed back to the station for a couple of concession tickets to the local facilities.

Once we had those in our hot little hands, another loop took us back past the accommodation.

At that point, you couldn't help thinking that we might have saved a bit of time if we'd done things a little differently.

Still, it didn't matter.

It wasn't a lengthy hike, and we'd have abbreviated it significantly if ***Madam*** had followed my suggestion about a back alley that looked to debouch at a clearly visible landmark just on the other side of our ***ryokan***.

I guess ***Someone*** hadn't spotted the landmark.







Still, in the end we managed to do just about everything we wanted to do in the afternoon, and a few more minutes in hand wouldn't have made that much difference.

In ***Japanese mythology***, the four-kilometre sand bar we were about to cross is the spot where the gods conceived ***the Japanese islands***.

According to the ancient **Ko-Fudoki**, the deity ***Izanagi no Mikoto*** built a ladder to allow him to climb down from the heavens to visit his lover ***Izanami no Mikoto*** on earth.

But there was a catch.

While he could slip down to the terrestrial sphere for a bit of divine dalliance, he had to be back up the ladder before nightfall.









The Astute Reader will have guessed where the story heads from there, and would probably add a bit of prurient detail.

Temporarily shagged out, in *Hughesy*'s version of events, *Izanagi no Mikoto* dozes off, misses the deadline and fails to make it back upstairs.

The ladder falls to the ground, the link between heaven and earth was sundered, and we ended up with four kilometres of sand spit and the *Japanese archipelago* to which *Izanami no Mikoto* gave birth a while later.

So *Amanohashidate* translates as *bridge of heaven* and the pine-studded landform separates *Miyazu Bay* on the *Tango Peninsula* from *Asoumi lagoon*. It's all part of the *Tango-Amanohashidate-Ōeyama Quasi-National Park*.

As one of *Nihon Sankei*, the *Three Views of Japan* (the others are *Matsushima* and *Miyajima*), you might expect *Amanohashidate* to pack the visitors in (and, in a way it does), but it's a slightly different kettle of fish when you compare it to the other two.

Matsushima lies just outside *Sendai*, accessible by local train from a major station on the *Tohoku Shinkansen*. It's easily accessed, and you could do it easily on a day trip from *Tokyo* if you leave early enough in the morning and don't mind getting back to base in the dark.

Miyajima is a local train ride from *Hiroshima*, another major city, and while it isn't quite as day tripper friendly if you're not in the area, it's not really out of the way either.

In both cases, you can tack the view onto other things that may have brought you into the area.

Amanohahidate, however, requires you to go out of your way to take in the view.

Foreigners, as a result, are relatively thin on the ground, though it's firmly on *the Japanese itinerary*. That was evident when we sat down to dinner at the *ryokan* later in the evening.

The area is famous for its traditional *saké* with two distilleries open to visitors. The *Hakurei Shuzou Saké Brewery* is the more famous of the two while the *Ine Shuzou Saké Brewery* produces coloured brews, including *saké* made from red rice.

At the southern end of the spit, the train station sits in the village of *Monju*, which offers *ryokan* inns as well as the predictable shops selling noodles, dried fish and touristy knickknacks.

The standard *modus operandi* when visiting the area involves a walk across the sand bar, combined with a boat ride across the lagoon.











The jetty on the southern side sits beside the *Chienowa Toro*, a granite monument that symbolises wisdom and has been adopted as the town's emblem.

On the other side, in the village of *Fuchu*, *Konojinya*, guarded by a pair of *Kamakura Period* stone dogs, is the oldest shrine in the area .

A nearby cable car at the base of *Kasamatsu Park* takes visitors to its hilltop lookout on the lower slopes of *Mount Nariai*.

From there, assuming you've got time (we didn't) a shuttle bus can take you on to *Nariaiji*, founded in *704*, dedicated to *Kannon*, one of thirty-three temples on the *Saigōku Kannon* pilgrim route.

But the hilltop section of *Kasamakoen* is the main lookout point.

While you're there, you're supposed to turn your back to the spit, bend over and take in the upside down view from between your legs.

That way, the land bridge appears to be floating up to heaven.







The equivalent view on the south side is from ***Aminohashidate View Land***, which has a chair lift and a monorail that ferry visitors up and down the hill. There is a small amusement park up there as well if you're into that side of things, but, really, it's all about the view.

So the standard itinerary works around the hilltop view from either side, the boat ride across the lagoon and a walk across the spit itself.

That will take you past the ***Isoshimizu*** fresh water well which dates back to the ***Heian Period*** and was selected as ***one of the hundred best springs and rivers in Japan*** by the Environmental Agency in ***1985***.

The spit also has the attractive wooden ***Amanohashidatejinja***, a ***Shinto*** shrine depicted on a scroll dated from ***1251***.









It was originally located inside of the nearby ***Buddhist temple*** of ***Chionji***, and dedicated to ***Hashidate Myojin***, a local deity.

And the sandbar is liberally dotted with around eight thousand pine trees.

It makes for an enjoyable one hour stroll, or twenty-minute bicycle ride if you're inclined to shell out at one of the numerous bike rental places.

If you've got all day, there are reasonable swimming facilities, including beach showers, as well as toilet facilities, picnic benches and covered rest areas.

At the southern end, the rotating bridge has a middle section that turns through ninety degrees to allow boats to pass through.

We started with a brisk stroll across the two-kilometre sand bank with frequent pauses along the way.

Really, I reflected at one of them as ***The Photographer*** snapped away, *what had brought us here was just a glorified sand bar*.



But it was a sand bar that has been treated with a bit of respect and maintains a natural look and feel.

In Australia, I mused as I moseyed along, *some developer would have plonked high-rise units on this bit of prime real estate.*

If that hadn't happened, I went on, *the local authorities would have turned it into a park, with lawns regularly whipper snipped, and some bastard laying poison to kill off the weeds.*

When we reached the other end there were a couple of blokes with *whippersnipper*s, but one hoped they steer clear of the ***Roundup***.









From there we made a hurried cross to the cable cars, which run every quarter of an hour.

With the next one due to leave at five-thirty we had a couple of minutes to wait.

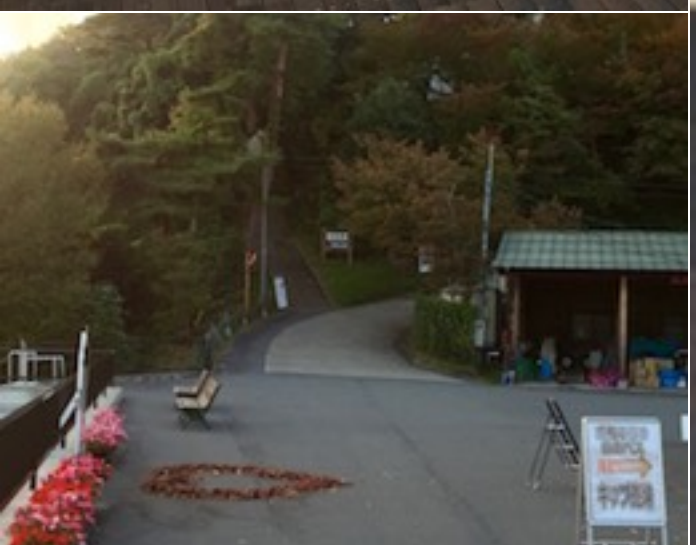
Not long, but long enough to ponder whether we might have made the previous one if we'd saved a bit of time along the way.

I wasn't sure about that and suspected we'd probably have arrived just in time to see the doors closing as the 5:15 headed off up the hill.

Up at the top, when we got there, the view was as great as the advance publicity suggested though the *upside down camera between the legs* view didn't seem to be working out the way it was supposed to.

And from there, under other circumstances, we could have gone on further, but the daylight was fading fast and time wasn't going to permit even a preliminary consideration.







We would probably have needed a good half hour, at least, so those minutes we could have gained back through the afternoon didn't make that much difference.

And that would have applied if we'd caught the 5:15 cable car as well.

So we headed down on the 5:45, having caught the view from the northern side and made our way back to the boat terminal through the grounds of ***Kono Shrine*** (***Motoise Kono Jinja***).

It’s the most important shrine in the region and the former shrine of ***Shinto***'s most venerated deity, ***Amaterasu*** *the Sun Goddess*.

She was enshrined there, along with a local deity (***Toyoukehime***) responsible for clothing, food and housing.









Both were subsequently relocated as as the main deities at *Isejingu* in *Mie prefecture*.

Since that was the case, and the shrine is believed to date back to the age of the gods, *Kono* frequently carries the tag *Motoise* (*Origin of Ise*).

The shrine's main hall closely resembles *the Inner Shrine* at ***Ise*** and smaller shrines on the site are dedicated to deities including *Ebisu*, *Inar*i, *Sarutahiko* and the *Kasuga* gods.

Within the grounds a garden ornament (***suikinkutsu***) produces sounds that resemble a ***koto*** as water drips into a cave.

The shrine deserved more attention than it got from us as we snapped away and kept ourselves moving towards the ferry terminal, where buying two tickets on what looked to be the last service for the day was a straightforward affair.

But the service wasn't quite ready to depart yet.



I spent a few minutes outside, largely undisturbed while *The Photographer* roamed slightly further afield, snapping away, and the boat operators gradually shut up shop for the day.

I could see her heading back around the time I detected signs of life within the terminal, so I headed inside.

Working on the principle that the presence of a customer might make sure they didn't leave before *Someone* managed to get back, you understand.









There was a young bloke there, patiently waiting to collect tickets. I politely declined to hand mine over, pointing out that I was *waiting for* ***The Boss***.

Regardless of the guy's ***English vocabulary***, I reckoned ***The Boss*** would work.

Better, at least, than ***The Supervisor***.

There was a delay of something like thirty seconds before ***Someone*** hove into view, delivering reminders that certain people who had got there earlier needed to make sure they stayed behind the yellow line.

I turned back to Ticket Dude.

See? I said she was Boss.

I understand, came the reply, delivered in a tone that suggested familiarity with the phenomenon.

As it turned out, late in the day we had our own personal ferry across the bay., just like we'd had our personal cable car up and down the hill just beforehand. It made for a pleasant cruise in the twilight.

We headed back to the ***ryokan*** by way of the shrine, but it was only a fleeting encounter.

Having taken a gander at the outside, it was obvious things would look much better in the morning.





So we headed inside, with ***Hughesy*** a little more careful in the shoe removal department. Maybe the concentration on making sure everything was done in the *correct* ***Kyoto****-style* was what made me lose track of where the room was.

But once we were safely upstairs in the correct quarters, I could take it easy.

Madam took herself off to the ***onsen***, as you do when you're a fan, and the facilities are there just waiting to be used.

Those of us who *weren't exactly fans* were quietly hoping we'd be able to give it the flick pass, but returning bathers arrived with the news that ***Hughesy*** would be required to change into appropriate ***ryokan*** attire before we went down for dinner.

And since I was going to have to change, I may as well have a dip in the ***onsen*** as well.

Having reluctantly conceded defeat I set off and managed to get through the proceedings without doing anything that was obviously disgraceful.

I think. But there was no one around to notice if I had done.

It was straight to dinner from there, and when it arrived there was a predictable and entirely understandable orientation towards dishes featuring seafood.

Madam had chosen the smaller of the two menus, and probably just as well as far as ***Someone*** is concerned. I was fine.

There was ***Yebisu*** on tap, and I could pick away at most of what arrived.

Someone managed to tuck in heartily, which was why the smaller option had been the way to go.

The ***shabu shabu*** side of things, for those who are interested in the details, was *octopus*, thank you very much.

It came with regular warnings about *what happens when you overcook calamari*, which took a bit of an edge off things as far as ***Yours Truly*** was concerned.

Back upstairs, ***Someone*** headed straight to bed and while I tapped away for a bit and had a read for a couple of minutes I wasn't that far behind.





AMANOHASHIDATE > ONOMICHI > HIMEJI

Friday, 23 October 2015

And so we arrived at the *last day of the rail pass*, a day where *maxing out the mileage* was the name of the game.

I could have surfaced earlier, but lay semi-doggo until at 5:58, snapped a quick photograph out the window and sat down to catch up on the *Travelogue*.

There are some jobs you can't postpone because it's going to be a big travel day, and I figured that a good run at the notes would keep the narrative reasonably close to where we were.



That plan got a kick along when ***Someone*** headed off to the ***onsen*** without any suggestion that H***ughesy*** should do likewise

There were shower facilities in the room, which was the basis for yesterday's hope that I could skip the ***onsen*** before dinner.

I tapped away until I reckoned the ***onsen*** contingent would be close to emerging and prepared to hurl myself at the shower facilities after they had returned.

Someone, after all, needed to be available to open the door.

There had been suggestions that we might get to the temple down the road before breakfast, but we didn't quite make it, thanks to the need to repackage and rearrange the baggage to stash additional items that needed laundering.

Ordinarily, that wouldn't have been much of an issue, but the attempt was complicated by a lack of room to move in an area where *tatami* mats were a significant consideration.

A ***traditional Japanese breakfast*** saw ***Hughesy*** filling up on rice, with enough bits and pieces to pick at to pad things out. Relatively ample padding around the waist suggests there was no need for a massive intake.

Diplomacy suggested I try and sample as much as possible and leave an impression of having had a good go at most of it.

That's not as hard as you might think when there's someone across the table who volunteers to clean up a few odds and ends that she knows aren't quite to my taste.

Teamwork is a beautiful thing.

Back upstairs we finished the preparations for departure and checked out.

The bags could come down later after we'd done a lap around the southern end of ***Amanohashidate***.

The train wasn't leaving until 10:39, so we wanted to be back around twenty minutes before that.

On that basis, we had just under two hours to hit the temple, zoom up to ***Amanohashidate View Land*** when it opened and would probably end up killing time on the sand spit.

We got part of the timing right, arriving at the temple before the first tour groups arrived on the scene.









I'd been admiring ***Ogonkaku***, the temple gate just along from our ***ryokan*** since I set eyes on it.

It's an impressive piece of work, on a par with similar structures elsewhere, though I'm disinclined to believe that it was *the result of seven years labour by 8780 carpenters*.

According to that story (here) they finished the work in ***1767***, which makes the gate one of the newer features of a temple that dates back to the 9th century.

Chionji was originally built in 808 during the reign of ***Emperor Heizei***. It formerly belonged to the ***Shingon*** sect but ended up in the hands of the ***Rinzai*** after the ***Namboku period***.

The temple is home to one of *Three Important Statues of* ***Monju Bosatsu*** (a.k.a. ***Kiredomonjyu*** or ***Kusetomonjyu***), the ***Bodhisattva*** *of wisdom and intellect*.









He is often depicted holding the sword of wisdom in his right hand.

He uses it to cut through illusion, shed light on unenlightened minds, destroy mistaken ideas, evil thoughts and actions, correct ignorance and delusion, dispense wisdom, and deliver joy to the human race.

That's a significant set of responsibilities, but pilgrims to the temple tend to seek more direct assistance.

Students and other visitors to the temple purchase ***omikuji*** (personal fortunes shaped like folding fans), which they leave hanging from the branches of pine trees in anticipation that they'll deliver wisdom and, more particularly, academic success when exam time rolls around.

He is also believed to help with your calligraphy.

Other structures around the temple a two-storey ***tahoto*** style pagoda, built in the ***1500s***.







It's the oldest remaining structure in the temple grounds and the ***oldest pagoda of its kind in Japan***.

The temple grounds also hold the tomb of *Izumi Shikibu*, a ***Heian Period*** poet, courtier and courtesan.

She is also memorialised at ***Seishinin*** temple in downtown ***Kyoto***, but her tomb here is rated as an important cultural asset.

The visit to the temple killed enough time to have us at the head of a non-existent queue when we arrived at ***Amanohashidate View Land***.

The cable rail ride up a steep slope delivered us to a vantage point that provided a better view of the sand bar than yesterday's lookout on the other side, but that may be a function of morning rather than afternoon light.



Still it seemed to be a trifle higher and significantly closer to the sand spit.

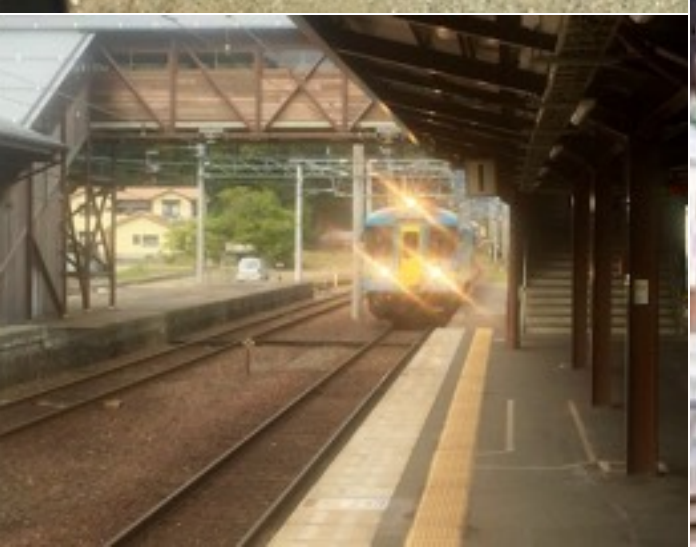
With plenty of time on our hands, both of us indulged in the upside down photo between the legs routine, but thanks to the wonders of modern technology, today's digital cameras self-correct, so what's the point.

I guess you can always use your image manipulating technology to fake the shot.

Then again, if your camera auto-corrects you don't have a choice about it.







There's more up at the top of ***View Land*** than the view itself, but the variety of hilltop attractions had limited (*i.e. zero*) appeal, so we headed back down for a wander around the southern end of the sand spit.

It was a pleasant little stroll in the area where tour groups aren't likely to tread. While we were there, a sign advising the public about gardening-type maintenance work and apologising for any inconvenience left ***Hughesy*** with the impression we were looking at *petty criminals doing Community Service orders*.

At least until ***Someone*** provided an accurate translation.

And that took us nicely up towards departure time.

It was around 10:15 when we headed back to the to *ryokan* to collect our bags, and from there we headed straight on to the station.

Well and truly early for the third sector line, we ensconced ourselves in a shady spot on the platform and settled down to wait.

In fact, we were so early that they hadn't started checking tickets for the third sector service we were waiting for.

That meant we had to go back inside to show the tickets before boarding the train for a reverse of the previous day's two legs out of *Kyoto*.

The change of trains at *Nishimaizuru* required a bit of slick footwork, scrambling up the stairs and back down again to catch the connecting train.

It was much the same story in *Kyoto* though that exercise involved a sprint to get ahead of the pack followed by a dodging and weaving move through crowds headed across our path from Platforms 30 and 31 right down on ground level to *Platform 6 or 7* on the intermediate tier.

The *Shinkansen* platforms (11, 12, 13 and 14), of course, are on an entirely separate plane.

So we barrelled down the escalator and hit the *Thunderbird 16* in time, so that had the most significant issues covered. We had five legs to go, but the major disrupters had been passed.

The *Thunderbird* took us into *ShinOsaka*, where we needed to move reasonably smartly up to the *Shinkansen* platforms but had a little more time to do it.

Our *Sakura* service was bound for *Kagoshima* and was still in the hands of the cleaners when we arrived at the relevant door.

I had time to head off to buy beer while they did their thing, and when *Madam* had picked up a bottle of water, we joined a motley queue of passengers, all bound for somewhere on a *Friday* afternoon.

There weren't many of them bound for *ShinKōbe*, the first stop along the way, and there weren't many unoccupied seats when we stopped there.

There were even fewer when we left.

The *Sakura* sailed straight through *Himeji*, a city of a mere half million and too insignificant for a rapid service to concern itself with before a stop at *Okayama*, which mightn't be that much larger (what's around two hundred thousand between friends) but serves as an important transport hub.

I spotted the line that takes you off to *Shikoku* as the train picked up speed out of the station.

Our intermediate destination on the way to the historic port town of *Onomichi* was *Fukuyama*, on the *Ashida River* towards the eastern end of *Hiroshima Prefecture*. The city is known for an annual *Rose Festival* in *May*, the Prefecture's *Museum of History*, and *Fukuyama Museum of Art*.

It's a commercial, industrial and communications centre producing machinery, rubber products, electronics, textiles, processed foods and *koto* (*Japanese harps*), about an hour from *Osaka*, with a population nudging the half million mark.

*Fukuyama starte*d as a castle town in *1619* when *Mizuno Katsunari*, cousin of *Tokugawa Ieyasu* needed a new castle-town as the capital of *a territory in western Japan* that included southern *Bingo Province* and southwestern *Bitchu*.

Fukuyama became a prefectural capital after the *han system* was abolished in *1871*.

Fukuyama Prefecture was renamed *Fukatsu*, and then merged with *Kurashiki Prefecture* in *1872* to form *Oda Prefecture*. Three years later that entity was merged into *Okayama Prefecture*, and when the border between *Okayama* and *Hiroshima* prefectures was re-aligned in *1876*, *Fukuyama* became a part of *Hiroshima Prefecture*, which is where it has stayed.

Attractions in the city include *Fukuyama Castle*, *Myōōin temple*, which dates back to *807* and the *Nara Era Bingo Kokubunji* Temple.

The medieval town of *Kusado Sengen* near the *Ashida River* was a minor port on the *Seto Inland Sea*. That was back in the *Kamakura* and *Muromachi* periods, and after that, it quietly disappeared. Evidence of the port's existence was unearthed in *1931* while engineers were re-routing the stream. The site was buried by a sandbank, but excavations after *1961* have revealed wells, garbage pits, ponds, graves, ditches, and a wide range of objects used in daily life.

The fishing port of *Tomonoura*, fourteen kilometres south of *Furukawa*, has some impressive temples and shrines including *Taichōrō*, with a hall on the hill built at the end of the 17th century to house *Korean* delegations.

The town is also noted for a traditional red sea bream netting display held in *May* and *Homeishu*, a sweet liqueur, made in the area for a thousand years.

We alighted at *Fukuyama* and headed back down to the lower levels for the next service to *Onomichi*, about midway between *Okayama* and *Hiroshima*.

Today, *Onomichi* is a relatively nondescript industrial port on the northern shore of the *Inland Sea*.

But go back eight hundred years and you would have been looking at a significant commercial port established in *1168*.

The port prospered from trade with *Ming Dynasty China* during the *14th century* and remained an important centre for shipping agents and ferries to *Shikoku* until the end of the *Edo Period*.

*Wealthy merchant*s flocked to the port during its prosperity, building temples on the steep slopes overlooking the sea to celebrate their wealth.

All up, there were eighty-one of them in the town's heyday.

Twenty-five of them remain today, forming the route of *Onomichi*'s famous *Temple Walk*, which was my main point of interest hereabouts.

But there's also quite a view, stretching across the neighbouring islands and the *Shimanami Kaido*, a sixty-kilometre series of bridges linking the city with *Shikoku* passing over small islands in the *Inland Sea* along the way.

It's the only land connection between *Japan's main island* and *Shikoku* that can be used by cyclists and pedestrians. As a result, it's a popular cycling route, and bicycles can be rented at various points along the way if you don't have one with you.







But we wouldn't be doing that. *Madam* isn't bicycle-friendly.



Ferries operate between *Onomichi*, *Shikoku* and the nearby islands, adding to a nostalgic port town atmosphere.

The city's decline started when the first railway lines in the region were constructed.



They passed further inland, and the town's trade stagnated as other centres went ahead.

Still, that's a two-edged sword.

Relative obscurity meant American bombers also passed by.

When the *Shinkansen* route was mapped out, *Onomichi* did get a guernsey, but *ShinOomichi* lies on the outskirts of the city rather than in the CBD and is only served by *all-stops* ***Kodama*** trainsets.

That's why we opted to alight in *Fukuyama* and take the twenty-minute ride on the *San'yo Main Line* to the more centrally-located *JR Onomichi*. We'd have needed a bus to get to and from *ShinOnomichi*.

But despite its slide into relative obscurity, *Onomichi* has retained much of its pre-*Meiji Era* heritage.

Today the town economic base is primarily industrial, with a shipyard and a motor factory.

Ships and ferries shuttle back and forth to *Shikoku* and islands in the *Inland Sea*, but although that activity is down from the pre-*Meiji* heyday, the former status as a temple town has left a legacy.

The city has been favoured by writers and intellectuals since the *early 20th century*, and some of *Japan's more famous authors* have lived there.

Since it is better preserved than most towns of its vintage and retains a retro ambiance, *Onomichi* has also been the setting for numerous movies and television dramas.

That history is celebrated in the *Onomichi Motion Picture Museum* in a renovated warehouse along the eastern seafront.

The literary side of the city's heritage is celebrated in the *Bungaku-no-Komichi* (Path of Literature) which winds its way downhill from *Senkōji Park*.





There are twenty-four stones along the way, each carved with quotes from ***Japanese authors*** linked to ***Onomichi*** exalting the views out across the bay.

Or so I've been lead to believe.

The quotes are, unsurprisingly, ***in Japanese***, and they'd be Greek to me.

On a less savoury note, the city is the headquarters of the ***Kyodo-kai*** *yakuza* syndicate, the second largest *yakuza* group in the region after the ***Hiroshima***'s ***Kyosei-kai***.

The first thing we needed to do, once we were on the ground, was to deposit everything in a coin locker. We found a large economy size one for a mere ¥700, around 200 less than we'd had to spend elsewhere for two.

And it fitted my backpack, which was handy since the next bit was going to involve a fair bit of up and down climbing.

According to the ***iPhone***'s ***Health*** app, I walked 9.86 kilometres during the day.

Most of it was yet to come.









The climbing didn't kick in immediately, though. Inquiries at Tourist Information produced a handy map and an indication of an old shopping street that was more or less along the way to the chair lift.

That was ***Ichibangai Shōtengai***, a classic covered shopping arcade that runs for about a kilometre parallel to the shoreline.

It was probably going to contain an interesting mixture of shops, and other circumstances I'd have been giving a *Why not?* If someone suggested, we would head that way.

Shopping streets, however, can turn into time sinks because you never know what you're likely to find.

But while it didn't quite fit in with ***Hughesy***'s temple viewing aspirations, when ***Madam*** decided the shopping street was the way to go there wasn't much I could do about it.

On the way out of the station, I spotted a pizza place that was ***Someone***'s preferred dinner destination, and we sidetracked to have a closer look and verify that it seemed OK to me.

We took a sidetrack about half way along for a look at the harbour, something I regarded as a waste of time since the view would be far better from the heights where we were bound.

But the shopping street was interesting in itself.

It's a remnant of the days when lengthy covered arcades were features of ***most Japanese cities***.

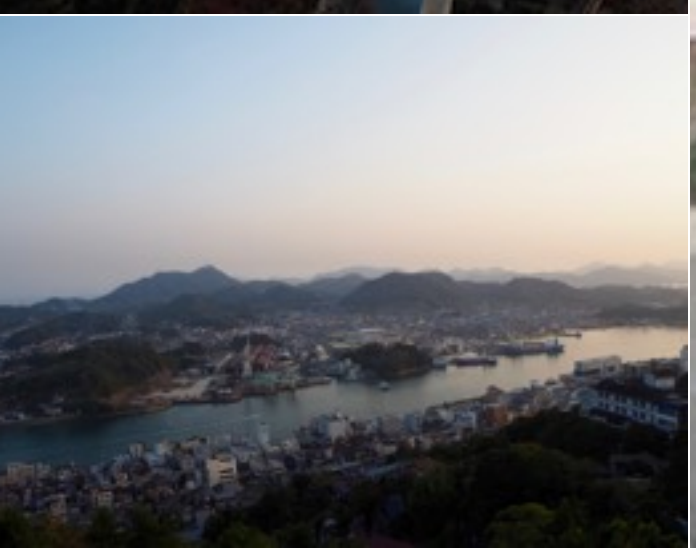
Most of the smaller ones have succumbed to competition from shopping malls and similar developments, but where they survive they almost invariably make an enjoyable experience provided you've got the time to take it in properly.

A fair number of businesses were closed though ***Madam*** hypothesised they were on their *off day*. That makes sense given the likelihood of optimum business on weekends.

There was a museum about half way along where we could have sunk a bit more time, but I have to admit I was growing impatient because there wasn't much daylight left.









We exited the shopping street at the right point and made our way to the ropeway that would take us up to the view. That had always been our destination, but I would have preferred a more direct approach. I figured we could have followed the shopping street on the way back.

The 361-metre ***Senkōji Ropeway***, operated by the city government, opened for business in ***1957***.

While the destination (***Senkojikoen*** park) isn't that high at around 115 metres above sea level, it has a couple of things going for it.

It's famous for cherry blossoms and azaleas in the right season, but the view out across the water will bring the tourists and sightseers in three hundred and sixty-five days a year, so you'd have to reckon the ropeway would be a definite money spinner.



Having done the descent, I wouldn't advise anyone to hoof it up the slope.

So the view's one thing.

As it turned out a couple of shots as we made the ascent were the last contribution to the photo archives from the ***iPhone***.

We reached the top, where the views were truly magnificent, and I found a phone that was, effectively, completely frozen.

I couldn't open the ***Camera*** app or any of its brothers or sisters, and I couldn't switch it off.

And it was fairly obvious what had happened.

With less than 500MB of space left on the device, ***the system software*** *had decided to shut up shop*.

A brief consideration of relevant matters produced the conclusion that I would probably have to wait until I got home to fix the problem.

The solution would probably involve plugging the phone into my ***iTunes*** on the desktop machine and deleting enough material to restore the device to working order.







And, based on that conclusion, it seemed that all I could do was to sit down and take in the view while ***Madam*** snapped away in the sunset.

That produced ***allegations of sooking***, by the way, though the actual reason for sitting and looking rather than standing and doing the same thing was that it *kept me out of other people's shots*.

Apart from the lookout, the extensive parklands contain ***Senkoji*** temple, founded in ***806***, the first year of the ***Daidō era***.

The temple is the tenth site of the ***Chūgoku Thirty-Three Kannon Pilgrimage*** route, which includes thirty-three sites sacred to the ***bodhisattva Kannon*** stretching across the ***Chūgoku region*** from ***Okayama***, ***Furukawa***, ***Onomichi***, ***Hiroshima*** and ***Miyajim***a.



From there it follows the coast all the way around to *Tottori* on the northern shores of the island more or less north of *Himeji*.

The route is a relatively recent development (*1981*) and lacks the historical aspects of *similar courses elsewhere in Japan*.







Nearby ***Jōdoji*** (#9) a two-storey *pagoda* with a ***Zen*** garden and tea ceremony room transported from ***Fushimi Castle*** in ***Kyoto*** and ***Kōjōji*** (#11), a complex of vermilion buildings that date back to 616 on one of the offshore islands are also counted in the thirty-three.

Saigōkuji, *the temple with giant straw sandals on either side of the entrance* thought to have been built about ***739*** isn't counted among the thirty-three, but is one of four *special sites* added to the list.

We'd already determined that we'd make the descent on foot, and started out along the ***Path of Literature***, which we probably followed all the way down.

If we didn't, it was because ***diversions to look at temples and shrines*** saw us figuring out the way on from there rather than heading back to resume the downward track we had been following.

Reconstructing the path we followed and identifying the places we'd passed would have been easier if I could locate the footbridge that got us over the main street, but the satellite view on ***Maps*** has buildings casting shadows across the road.

With the ***iPhone*** in action, there's the slight possibility that the ***built-in GPS equivalent*** might have delivered data about photographs that might have helped.

But it wasn't, so the actual path remains something of a mystery.

The temples and such *en route* also remain significantly under-documented since ***Hughesy*** wasn't the one operating the camera.

Things that attract my attention don't always catch ***Madam***'s eye.



But the downhill ramble as night fell around us was enjoyable enough, with the odd cat minding its own business along the way.

In the end, our route got us down the hill, across the major thoroughfare, and back to the shopping street.

And that brought us back to the pizza place, where the product was excellent, and a glass of perfectly acceptable ***Sangiovese*** deadened the pain associated with non-functioning ***iPhones***.

The proprietor, according to ***Madam***'s thorough research, had learned his trade in Italy, so this ***relatively small Japanese city*** has a legitimate pizza operation.

We'll be back if we're in the neighbourhood again.

The music, which may have been Marcia Ball, wasn't bad either.

We could have gone a second pizza if ***Hughesy*** was willing to devour most of it, but my share of one had been just about enough.

I could have finished another slice or possibly two.

But there was no way I could handle five after a fortnight's ***Good Paddock Syndrome***.

Back at the station, we emptied the coin locker and joined the ***Friday*** night commuters on the local line to Fukuyama, where we managed to get seats. I suspect there were a few resentful locals though no one said anything.

A ***slower Shinkansen service*** brought us back to ***Himeji*** on the last leg of the Rail Pass Week. It wasn't our preferred destination, but ***Kōbe*** was booked out on ***Friday*** night, and a two-night stopover in ***Himeji*** provided an excuse to take another look at the castle.

And possibly something else.

If we had time.

3

JAPAN 2015: THE LAST LEG



HIMEJI

Saturday, 24 October 2015

We'd been to ***Himeji*** before, back in ***2008*** when ***Madam*** had hauled me along to join around 60,000 people who'd decided to use the grounds of ***Himeji Castle*** for a spot of ***hanami*** (*cherry blossom viewing*).

Well, it *was* a ***Saturday***, and the blossoms were at their best.

But it had been a crowded couple of hours, and there were things that we'd missed. We hadn't been able to make it all the way up to the top of the central ***donjon*** keep, for a start.

So when *Madam* floated the notion of staying in *Himeji* for two nights at the end of the *Rail Pass leg*, *Hughesy* was 100% in favour.

The city had been an important centre since the *Nara Period*, initially as the heart of *Harima Province*. The castle dates back to *1333*, but the current incarnation goes back to *1580* when *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* added a three-layer castle tower.

That was enlarged thirty years later by *Ikeda Terumasa*, who was awarded the castle after his father-in-law, *Tokugawa Ieyasu*'s forces defeated the *Toyomi* armies in the *Battle of Sekigahara*.

Apart from adding the castle's central five-storey *donjon* and three smaller *donjons* and building up the surrounding town, *Terumasa* established *Himeji Domain*.

That administrative entity became *Himeji Prefecture* (later *Shikama Prefecture*) after *1871*, but the subsequent rearrangements saw the prefecture merged with *Hyōgo* in *1876*.

The city of *Himeji* was established in *1889* and was considered as a candidate for a relocated national capital after the *1923 Great Kantō Earthquake* hit *Tokyo*.

Since the city had an important rail terminal and contained two significant military zones, it was targeted by the *American XXI Bomber Command*.

One hundred and seven aircraft dropped 767 tons of incendiary bombs on *Himeji* in a raid on *3 July, 1945*, destroying almost two-thirds of the built up area.

Miraculously, the single firebomb that landed on the top floor of the castle failed to explode.

The castle also remained intact throughout the *1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake* and a number of typhoons.

Other attractions in the city include the *Engyōji* temple, *Mount Seppiko*, a safari park, *Himeji City Tegarayama Botanical Garden* and the *Kokoen* garden.

And at this point we should underline the importance of expert local advice, even when we're carrying our own reasonably local semi-expert and master researcher.

Himeji is the second city in *Hyogo Prefecture*, after *Madam*'s home town, so you might be inclined to go along with her priorities.

They revolved around a return visit to the castle, a walk around the *17th century complex* of moats, walls, keeps and corridors, a climb right up to the top and, from there, a decision about what else we had time for.

I'd managed to ditch the backpack before we set out, and replaced the ***iPhone*** with ***Madam's Other Camera***, which had been almost entirely unutilised to this point of the trip.

Early morning inspiration had me sitting down and deleting a lot more email on the ***iPad***, continuing a process that I'd started the night before.

Miraculously, when I tried the ***iPhone*** after an hour or so, it kicked back into life, so I spent the next hour deleting photos and email there so that it stayed that way.

It wasn't going to be getting a lot of photographic action, but I could use it if I needed to,

And I had ***Madam's Old Camera***, with an empty SD card that would more than handle any photographic action over the rest of the trip.

Win-win.

Breakfast in a chain operation in the station was more like brunch, thanks to the delay brought on by dealing with ***a week's worth of laundry***. We ordered a couple of omelettes and salad with toast and tea for one, coffee for t'other.

Good Paddock Syndrome meant it was almost enough to keep ***Hughesy*** going until dinner time.

From there we hit the Tourist Information for a map.

That was all we were looking for, but we received two matching pieces of very sound advice from two elderly volunteers.

Save the Castle for later. Hit the ropeway and head up to ***Enkyoji***.

We'd had the temple in the plan of attack, but *as an additional activity, if we had time*.

It was, we were told, *a good three-hour round trip*, which was why we were advised to do it first.

In the end, we were away for five and a half, returning just before the Castle shut down for the night.

The most convenient way to tackle this little excursion involved taking ourselves off to the ticket counter at the ***Shinki Bus Terminal*** in the ***Sanyo Department Store*** in front of ***Himeji Station***, where we shelled out ¥1300 each for tickets that covered *the return bus trip and the up and down on the ropeway.*

Alternatively, I guess you could pay separately.

The return fare on the ropeway is ¥900 (¥500 one way if you're going to walk back down).

You could skip the ropeway altogether though you'd want to be fit with plenty of time on your hands.

The climb is said to take at least three-quarters of an hour though it would undoubtedly be quicker on the way down.

But you'd still be up for the ¥270 fare each way to and from the *Mount Shosha Ropeway* terminus on the Number 8 bus. They depart every fifteen to twenty minutes, and it's a half-hour ride, so you probably don't want to walk that one.

The half hour journey through *Himeji*'s suburbs to the foot of a mountain on the edge of the city wasn't the most inspiring experience of the trip, but it's one of those things you have to do, so you do it.

Being a *Saturday*, the bus was fairly crowded, as was the ropeway car that took us up the slope.

The cable-car ride lasts a couple of minutes, and comes with a description of what you can see as you look out over *Himeji*, with the *Inland Sea* beyond the city limits and mountains to left and right.

The story, of course, was completely unintelligible as far as *Hughesy* was concerned, but I'm led to believe it delivers a potted history of *Engyoji* as well.





The views on the way up would have been better in a less crowded conveyance, but you'd need to do away with the oft-noted haze if you were going to get a good view across the cityscape.

As is so often the case, regardless of crowds on the journey, once you arrive there's room to move.

There certainly was in this instance as we headed across to pay the admission fee for the temple complex.

After all, there's a whole sprawling complex spread across a spacious, densely forested mountain top for the crowds to disperse cross.

That was evident as soon as we'd paid the fee and set out on a gravelled, hilly path that would be disappointing to people who like their temple approaches smooth and paved.

Rough and ready wasn't quite the right pair of descriptors, but the path conveyed a timeless feel as we ascended through the pines and passed a succession of statues.

Behind us, the bell tolled though ***Hughesy*** wasn't sure the frequency was entirely appropriate.

There was a ***Chinese*** couple there when we passed the bell.

From what I could gather, they were still there, probably making repeated attempts to get the right photo.

When I tracked down the detail a little later, I found it probably wasn't ***quite*** that way.

Possibly *was*, *partially*, but not *quite*.

The bell's name is ***Jihi no Kane***, the ***Bell of Compassion***, which ***The Attentive Reader*** may recall is the principal attribute of the ***bodhisattva Kannon***, who appears here in the form of ***Nyoirin***, or ***Wish-granting Kannon***.

Pilgrims are encouraged to ring the bell, and when you do, you are supposed to make a wish for ***world peace and compassion***.

One can't help suspecting, however, that an inability to get the shot just right means you have to strike the bell again, on the principle that *the world needs all the peace and compassion it can get*.







From the top station on the ropeway, it's a ten to fifteen-minute walk to the ***Niomon Gate***, which marks the demarcation between the spiritual world of the temple complex and the secular world outside.

From there, it's another ten to fifteen minutes to reach the ***Maniden*** at the centre of the temple complex.

We'd have gone close to doubling that as we stopped every few metres to snap a memory of one of the statues that line the eastern path into the temple complex, which is ***Number 27*** on the ***Kansai Kannon Pilgrimage*** trail.

There are ***thirty-three temples*** on *that* trail, and ***thirty-three images*** on *this* trail leading into ***Number 27***. Each image, as far as I can gather, is a replica of the main image in one of those temples.









In another bit of *one-stop merit building*, passing each image is believed to convey the same benefit as visiting the temple it represents.

On that basis, having stopped to admire and photograph each of those images, ***Hughesy*** would have done himself a power of good.

After all, *you can never earn enough merit*.

On the way, we were also passing small trees donated by pilgrims and believers.

As we progressed, with a relatively steady trickle of passers-by passing us in both directions I realised it was just a well the ***iPhone*** decided to throw in the ***iOS*** towel yesterday.







If it had happened amid this wealth of visual interest, the consequences would have been disastrous.

And I wouldn't have had ***Madam's Other Camera*** with me as a backup.

If you're not up for the walk, there's a minibus shuttle that runs back and forth between the ropeway station and the ***Maniden*** every twenty minutes if you feel like shelling out ¥500.

But if you do that you're going to miss out on the little details along the way.

And, when you've got a temple complex (or, more accurately, a complex of temples) with a thousand year history, there's a lot of little detail.








千手千眼観世音菩











Shoshazan Enkyoji was founded in 966 by the ascetic monk *Shōkū Shōnin*, who comes with his own story.

He is said to have turned to religious pursuits relatively in life after an incident at the *Fujiwara* court. At that stage, he was known as *Kotaro Chuta* and was employed in the service of *Fujiwara no Tokihira*'s young son.

When *Chuta* broke an imperial ink stone that had been in a *Fujiwara* family heirloom the son took the blame and was beheaded by his father.

So, at the age of thirty-six, *Kotaro Chuta* became a hermit, intending to achieve enlightenment by purifying himself through ascetic austerity.







In the process, he reputedly hoped his efforts would help the unfortunate youngster attain *Buddhahood*.

According to the stories, there was *a degree of predestination* involved,

It is said that he was born with a clenched fist.

When his parents eventually succeeded in prising his fingers open, they found the infant was clutching a needle, which was interpreted as a connection to the the ***Bodhisattva*** *of Wisdom*, ***Fugen*** a.k.a. ***Kongoshin*** (***Diamond Needle***), and a sign ***Shoku*** was fated to direct people onto the right path.









For the next sixty years, ***Shōkū Shōnin*** lived an ascetic existence intended to loosen his attachment to his six senses (*his eyes, ears, tongue, nose, body and mind*).

He went to the mountains where he practised ***shugyo*** (*an intense study of* ***Buddhist scripture***) austerity,

Then, when he came to ***Mount Shosha*** he found a sacred cherry tree inhabited by a spirit and carved it into the six armed ***Nyoirin Kannon*** housed in the ***Maniden***.

That may have been the avenue through which he received enlightenment from the ***Bodhisattva*** *of Wisdom and Intellect*.

The mail was that anyone who climbed the mountain would be purified in body and spirit, and that prompted him to establish the temple.





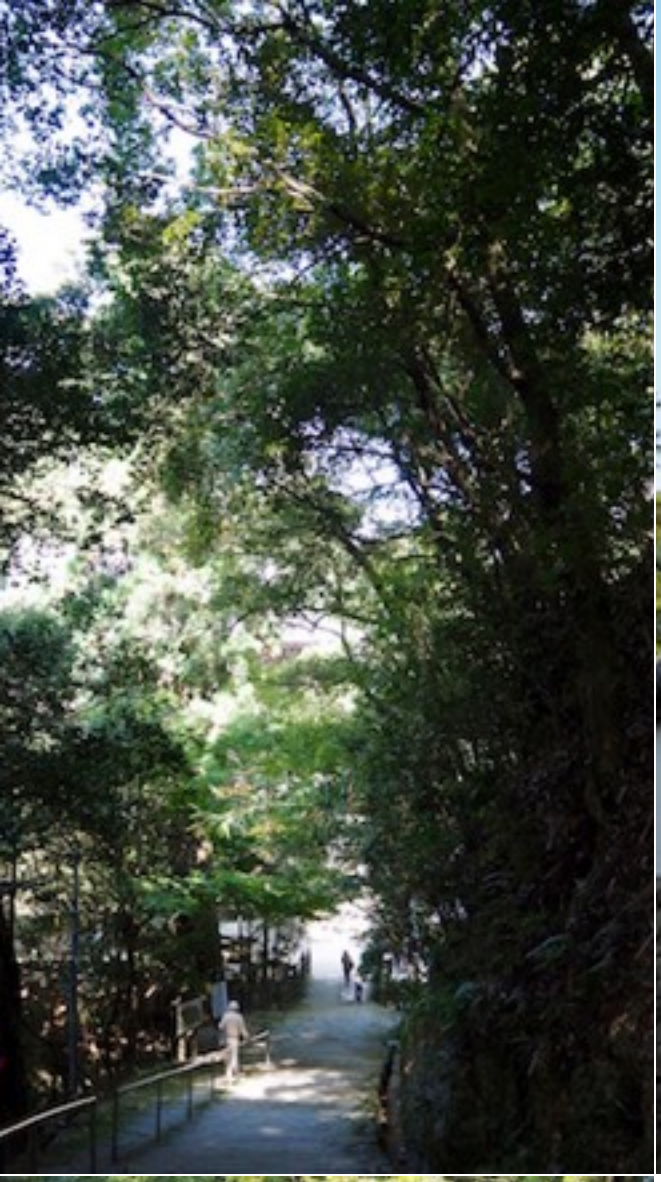


As the location's fame spread and people climbed the mountain seeking divine favours the temple prospered and it developed into an important training centre for priests in the western *Kansai* district.

When *Shoku Shonin* died at the age of ninety-eight his image was enshrined in the *Maniden*'s *Founder's Shrine*. A lantern in the shrine lit after his death has reputedly burned for more than a thousand years without being extinguished.

The path took us past *Juryoin*, a sub-temple set uphill from our path where we could have stopped for *shojin ryori*, a vegetarian meal served in traditional red lacquerware.

Put the reluctance down to *a surfeit of Japanese tucker* over the past couple of days if you like, but it was still rather soon after breakfast. And, it seems, they only cater for parties of five or more.









But I was definitely peckish.

If we'd turned left and headed downhill at the intersection where the shuttle bus track crosses the path we would have passed ***Myōkōin***, another sub-temple noted for its ***shōjin ryōri***.

It's another set menu based on seasonal ingredients and natural ingredients. But a turn there would have had us on the way out, heading away from what we were there for.

Just after the intersection we encountered ***Jūmyōin***, another sub-temple and ***Important Cultural Property*** built in ***1558***.

That listing comes thanks to the *fusuma* paper doors decorated with Kano school ***Chinese-style*** landscapes by ***Einō Kanō*** (***1634 – 1700***).

We turned a corner and found ourselves at the foot of the steps leading up to the temple's main structure, the ***Maniden***.

The massive support pillars that underpin the structure mean that it bears a more than passing resemblance to ***Kiyomizudera*** in ***Kyoto***.



It's the site where the *Nyoirin Kannon* is enshrined, but the original building, constructed in *970*, burned down in *1472*.

When it did, a spring appeared where the cherry tree had stood, and (I'm guessing here) that's probably the source of the water features at the bottom of the slope.

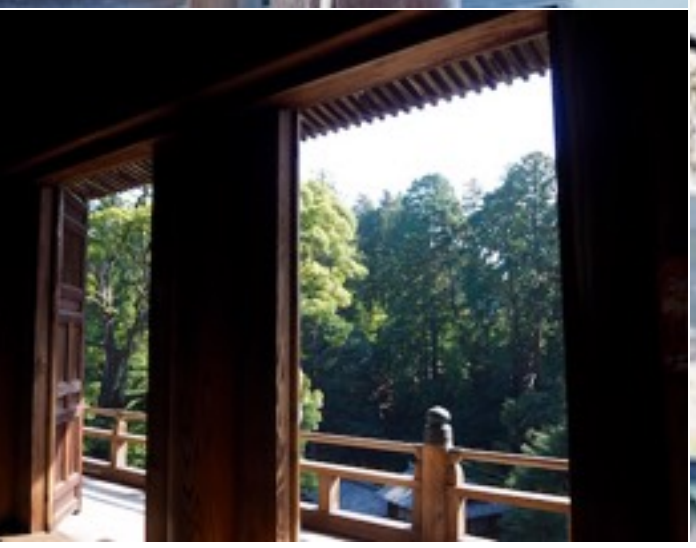
The structure was, of course, rebuilt, as it has been every time fires or war destroyed it over the intervening centuries.

The present incarnation dates from *1933*.

Inside the hall, you will not see the *Kannon*, unless you happen to be on the spot on *18 January*, the only day of the year when it goes on display

So the *Maniden* towers above you on the steep hillside, while down below the shops and stalls do a







steady trade while people, most of them eating ice creams, stand around admiring carp in the pond.

I joined them.

After all, *when in Rome you do as the Romans do* and I was feeling slightly peckish.

After that spot of refreshment, we climbed up to the ***Maniden***, which might be relatively recent but had a definite *patina* that delivers an impression of age.

Maybe it's just old (or oldish) timber.

That was the way it looked on the somewhat weather-beaten exterior. Once we were inside the *patina* was almost non-existent, at least to my inexperienced eyes.


南無阿彌陀佛
奉祈願







From there, we continued on our way around the mountaintop, making our way towards the cluster of buildings that form the heart of the monastic complex.

Another five minute walk along the forest trail that passes the graves of ***Himeji Castle***'s feudal lords brings you to three massive temple halls, the ***Mitsunodo***:

• the ***Daikodo*** or lecture hall, where the monks studied ***sutra*** and learned about the ***dharma***;

•the ***Jōgyōdō*** or gymnasium, built around ***1330*** and used, among other things, for a meditation practice that involved monks circling the enshrined ***Amida Buddha***, chanting the ***Nembutsu*** (the ***mantra*** associated with the deity) for up to ninety days;









• and the ***Jikido***, a two-storey hall where the monks lived and ate, which is now a museum which displays treasures of the temple complex.

All three are ***Important Cultural Properties of Japan***, built in the ***Muromachi period*** and used as sets for ***The Last Samurai*** movie in ***2003***.

It came as no surprise to learn that the mountaintop complex is regularly used as a location for films and TV drama.

The combination of authentic heritage listed buildings, scenic backdrops and an almost total lack of modern infrastructure that would need to be moved or covered make it an obvious choice for a director taking on historical content.

We exited the ***Mitsunodo*** by making our way along the track between the ***Daikodo*** and the ***Jikido***, looping around past the ***Fudōdō*** and the ***Gohōdō***, dedicated to the memory of ***Shōkū Shōnin*** and the two deities who are said to have helped him.





Throughout the founder's life two beings, ***Wakaten*** and ***Ototen***, the ***Shinto*** gods of treasure and fire, frightened away any encroaching evil spirits through their extreme ugliness.

Readers troubled by the overlap of ***Buddhist*** and ***Shinto*** entities (you shouldn't, the borderlines are vague and it happens all the time) can be reassured.

The duo are said to have been incarnations (***keshin***) of two ***Buddhist*** deities ***Bishamonten***, chief of the ***Four Heavenly Kings***, and ***Fudō Myō***, the *immovable deity* who *converts anger into salvation* and *seeks to frighten non-believers into accepting* ***Buddhist teachings***.

That brought us to the ***Gohōdō haiden***, rebuilt in 1589 and ***Kaizandō***, another ***Important Cultural Property of Japan*** rebuilt in the ***Edo Period*** where a helpful monk went to some trouble to point out the finer points of the intricate carvings and such above our heads.









In Japanese, of course, so the content shot straight over the *Hughesy* cranium.

But at the same time, it's not all genteel antiquity.

As our learned friend expounded at unintelligible length (not that I'm knocking, more wishing I had access to a **Hitch-hikers' Guide** *Babel Fish*) a sign over there on the wall invited visitors to like the temple complex on ***FaceBook***. Don't believe me? Click *here*.

From there we looped around to the south, passing the Muromachi period ***Kongodō***, another ***Important Cultural Property***, the ***Kamakura Period Yakushido***, which is the oldest building on the site, the ***Hokkedō*** *Lotus Sūtra hall* and the ***Shōrō bell tower***, yet another ***Important Cultural Property***.

There were other side tracks we could have taken.

We might have headed further into the forest to check out the ***Hakusan Gongen*** shrine further up the mountain, tucked away





along a stony path with the *torii* gates that identify it as a *Shinto* shrine despite the *Eleven-headed Kannon* on the premises.

By that stage, however, we were ready for a change and I was prepared to acknowledge that you can't do everything, even if you night be inclined to try.

We still had some ambitions as far as *Himeji Castle* was concerned.

The downhill leg, however, had its moments.

Just as we passed the bus road, a crocodile of schoolkids appeared. I gave them a *konnichi-wa*, as you do under such circumstances.

Apparently the delivery elicited a *You speak very good Japanese* in response, though, of course, ***Hughesy***'s ***Japanese vocabulary*** doesn't extend far enough to allow me to register, or, indeed to acknowledge the compliment.

We were moving pretty smartly downhill through the ***Niomon Gate*** but broke into a run as we approached the ***Ropeway terminal***.

It was getting late, and we weren't keen on waiting for another quarter-hour.

Back at the bottom, we were moving rather smartly towards the bus stop as well.

You don't want to spend a half-hour bus trip on your feet. But the crowd in the ropeway gondola managed to disperse between the bottom terminal and the bus depot, so finding a seat wasn't an issue.

And the ride back to downtown ***Himeji*** gave plenty of time to muse on changing priorities and complete reversals of intentions.



We alighted at the castle at a quarter to four, so we had around fifteen minutes until the castle closes its doors.

Once you're in, of course, you have another hour to do the circuit, but we'd been there and (mostly) done that, so we contented ourselves with a couple of shots of the renovated castle and headed back towards the hotel.

But, having gathered the detail, we can expound a little on the history of ***Japan's finest castle***, which was, at one point towards the end of the ***1500s***, *the biggest castle in Asia*.

It's rated as the most impressive surviving example of prototypical castle architecture out of the dozen such structures that have survived into the twenty-first century.

The Studious Reader may have encountered references to the castle as ***Shirasagijō*** (***White Heron Castle***) or ***Hakurojō*** (***White Egret Castle***) thanks to a brilliant white exterior and a theoretical resemblance to a bird taking flight.

As the largest and most visited castle in the country, it was designated as a national treasure in ***1931*** and went onto the ***World Cultural Heritage*** list in ***1993***.

Predictably, it features extensively in film and television productions where an ***archetypical Japanese castle*** is required. A partial list of places where ***The Viewer*** may have sighted the castle includes the *1967 James Bond* ***You Only Live Twice***, *Akira Kurosawa*'s ***Kagemusha*** and the ***Shōgun*** television miniseries.

The sprawling complex of eighty-three keeps, turrets, storehouses, gates and corridors, has a circumference of just over four kilometres, covers 233 hectares and measures between 900 and 1700 metres east-west and north-south.

It's fifty times as large as the ***Tokyo Dome***, which, when you look at it, explains why they can fit sixty thousand people in there to view the ***sakura*** on a ***Saturday***.

Of the eighty-plus buildings, no less than ***seventy-four*** (eleven corridors, sixteen turrets, fifteen gates, and thirty-two earthen walls) are designated ***Important Cultural Assets***.

So, apart from the ***sakura*** in season, there's plenty to look at. It comes as no surprise to learn that it draws in over 820,000 visitors every year.

The castle's story goes as far back as ***1333***, when ***Akamatsu Norimura***, ruler of ***Harima Province***, built a fort atop the 45-metre ***Himeyama*** hill.

His son ***Sadonori*** demolished that structure and built ***Himeyama Castle*** on the site in ***1346***.



That incarnation lasted until *1545*, when the *Kuroda* clan took over the area.

Kuroda Shigetaka remodelled the existing structure into *Himeji Castle*, finishing the work in *1561*.

Kuroda Yoshitaka handed the castle over to *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* in 1580 and the new owner set about remodelling the castle, adding a three-story keep.

After the *Battle of Sekigahara* in *1600 Tokugawa Ieyasu* awarded the castle to his son-in-law *Ikeda Terumasa*. The new proprietor demolished *Hideyoshi*'s three-story keep and completely rebuilt the castle between *1601* and *1609*.

He added three defensive moats in an expansion program believed to have required *twenty-five million man-days*.

After *Ikeda* died in *1613,* the castle passed to his son.

When he passed on, *Honda Tadamasa* inherited the castle, and added several buildings to the complex in *1617* and *1618*, including a tower for his daughter-in-law, *Princess Sen*.

And that's more or less the way things stayed for the next four centuries, despite typhoons, the bombing of the surrounding in *World War Two*, and the *Great Hanshin Earthquake* in *1995*.

Over the years, *Himejijo* was home to forty-eight successive lords until the *Meiji Restoration*.

Through the *Meiji Period*, the new government was in the business of ridding itself of relics from the feudal past, so many castles were sold off and destroyed.

Himeji Castle was abandoned when the feudal system was abolished in *1871*. When the site went up for auction a local resident bought it for the relative pittance. The buyer wanted to demolish the castle and develop the site, but demolition would have cost far more than he could afford.

So it's still there, and rates, along with the castles in *Matsumoto* and *Kumamoto* as one of *Japan's three premier castles*.

It has been renovated twice since the War, with work that started in *1956* requiring 250,000 man-days to complete at a cost of ¥550 million.





A recently completed five-year restoration set the authorities back *24 billion*.

After that little lot, the castle was reopened to the public on ***27 March 2015***.

The work removed decades of dirt and grime from the exterior, restoring the roof to its original brilliant white colour.

It certainly looked much whiter.

But, all things considered, we decided to leave the interior for next time.

And there was a vital piece of research that needed to be carried out.

We hadn't noticed anything obvious as far as the eating options were concerned on the way to the hotel the night before.

Since we'd skipped lunch today, we were definitely in the market for a reasonably substantial dinner, but the question was *Where?*

So we took a side track just outside the station complex to scope out the dinner options.

There were plenty of them in the basement of the department store on the castle side of the station complex. It didn't take long to decide that the ***Beer Cafe*** looked to be the most likely prospect.

But it seemed just a tad early as far as eating was concerned, so we turned our steps towards the hotel.

Maybe it was the extra little bit of foot action, but almost as soon as we were back at the hotel. M***adam*** decided she was hungry, so, after a quick turnaround, off we went again.

And maybe it was just as well.

For a start, we were seated in time to fit in two beers at happy hour prices.

A plate of skinny potato chips, a steak, something for ***Madam*** and a couple of items from ***a drink and nibble oriented menu*** mightn't have been a topic of homeward correspondence, but they did the job quite adequately.

We were out the door soon after seven, heading back for yet another early night before a relatively easy day on the morrow.

The Critical Reader might question the early night bit, but we had (according to the ***iPhone***) covered 9.45 kilometres and climbed the equivalent of 24 flights of stairs through the day.

On that basis, one might be entitled to plead leg weariness.

In any case, the judge's decision was final, and there wouldn't have been any time for correspondence between the time the door opened and the time ***Hughesy*** was pushing up Zs.



HIMEJI > KYOTO

Sunday, 25 October 2015

It was around 5:57 when I surfaced on a day that didn't offer much on the sightseeing front but had the prospect of significant socialising over an ***Italian lunch*** with ***The Sister*** and The Rowdy Niece.

We'd been late for the last rendezvous, so ***Madam*** wasn't taking any chances this time.

An eleven-forty-five appointment might permit some sort of sightseeing under other circumstances, but we had to get ourselves from ***Himeji*** to ***Kōbe***.

That would be a good forty minutes now that the ***Rail Pass*** seven days were up and the ***Shinkansen*** had exited the equation.

And there was no choice about using a local service between *Kōbe* and the shopping centre at *Kitaguchi* where we were making the rendezvous. It's most of the way to *Osaka*, so there's a fair chunk of another hour.

After lunch, we were on the local services again on the way to *Kyoto*, where we'd be back on *WiFi* after being without connectivity for most of the last week.

No prizes for guessing what we'd be doing once we had it back.

So that ruled out sightseeing, now that we'd covered the major options in *Himeji*.

The first priority, however, was shedding *The Coppertone Container* from the goods and chattels, along with anything that wasn't strictly necessary for the next three days.

A courier service would be looking after delivery from the hotel in *Himeji* to *The Mother*'s place on the outskirts of *Kōbe*.

We'll see it again, along with *B.B.The Blue Behemoth* around lunchtime on *Wednesday*.

We were slowed down a little when it turned out *Madam*'s preferred breakfast option didn't open on *Sunday* but heading back to where we broke the fast on *Saturday* only lost a bit of extra walking time.

After checking out, things worked smoothly, and we looped through *Sannomiya* on the way to *Kitaguchi* without incident although one might have preferred to sit down along the way.

But standing probably comes with the territory unless you board a service at the point of origin.

We didn't, not at *Himeji*, and definitely not in *Sannomiya*, where there could have been an issue getting onto this particular train.

At the head of the queue, we would have been right for the next one, but we were determined to be early.

We ended up with a good forty minutes to kill once we'd disembarked and made our way into the *Ishinomiya Gardens* shopping centre at *Kitaguchi*.

I managed to kill most of it in *HMV Records*, while *Madam* browsed the bookshop next door, discovering once again that the stock on the shelves at *Japanese chain CD* stores throws up some interesting anomalies.

Multiple editions of Kevin Ayers albums in a clearly marked section of the shelves. Really?

Once the rendezvous had been made we were off to *an Italian restaurant*, following a winding route through the back streets.

Lunch wasn't the greatest version of ***culinary Italiana*** I've encountered, but the bottle of Aglicianico that arrived with it was rather good and washed away any sense of disappointment.

But in any case, these occasions aren't so much about food. They give two sisters a chance to catch up, and ***Hughesy*** gets an opportunity to indulge in a bit of teasing ***The Rowdy Niece***.

Last time we were ***in Japan***, she'd been a high school student with a fervid devotion to One Dimension, and now she's at University you might have expected a change.

Hughesy, however, had conflated the notion of sixties student radicalism with One Dimension fandom and posited the existence of ***radical groups*** out to destroy ***Western hegemony*** and replace it with ***the dictatorship of the One Dimensional proletariat***.

Most of it flew over everyone else's heads, but I enjoyed it almost as much as floating the notion that ***her next visit to Australia*** would see The Rowdy Niece riding ***The Savannahlander*** to the wilds of ***Einasleigh*** and ***Forsayth***.

All of which reinforced the notion of ***Mad Uncle Hughesy***, who is, of course, *far madder than anyone else's mad uncle*.

We took ourselves back to the shopping centre after lunch for more of the same, and eventually headed our separate ways around three.

Getting to the right part of ***Kyoto*** from there was a two-stage process, with a change of trains.

Fortunately, the ***Hankyu*** station at ***Shijo Karasuma*** was a mere hundred metres from the ***Daiwa Roynet*** hotel, and we were safely checking out the email and Facebook backlogs by four.

After the substantial lunch, the old ***Good Paddock Syndrome*** saw notions of dinner go out the window. The best part of a litre of beer kept the ***Hughesy*** stomach filled and prevented any disturbing rumblings through the night.

All told, the result was nine hours of solid sleep and a significant recharging of the batteries.



Monday, 26 October 2015

It was around six when I surfaced and set about filling in the gaps in the ***Travelogue***, which had mysteriously managed to acquire a two day gap since the last time it was fully up to date.

That gap wasn't entirely closed when I hurled by self at the plumbing around seven and wasn't going to be closed any further.

Not if we were going to reach ***Kyoto****'s Number One Destination for Foreign Tourists* before the pack arrived.

And we needed breakfast, which ***Madam*** had pencilled in at a cafe not far from the railway station that would get us to ***Inari station***, a short walk from ***Funami Inari***, the ***Shinto*** shrine with the *thousand and one wooden* ***torii*** *arches*.

No, make that the *ten thousand and one* ***torii*** *arches*.

There are ***forty thousand shrines*** dedicated to ***Inari***, the ***Shinto*** deity of rice and ***saké***, ***around Japan***, but this one, said to have been founded in the eighth century, is the head shrine of the ***Inari*** cult.

It sits at the foot of the 233 metre ***Inariyama*** hill in southwestern ***Kyoto***, covers a substantial area and includes a four-kilometre maze of trails that lead up the mountain to smaller shrines dedicated to other deities.

It's a two-hour walk if you're inclined to cover the whole circuit.

As you head towards the upper reaches, you pass under thousands of red ***torii*** gateways presented to the shrine by devotees past hundreds of statues of foxes scattered across the landscape, many of them carrying the key to a rice granary in their mouths.





Foxes, in Japan, are regarded as sacred, generally helpful but mysterious figures, capable of bewitching humans (with the magic spell entering the victim's body under their fingernails).

On that basis, if you're superstitious it might be best to avoid Inari shrines around, or after, sundown. Of course, the late afternoon light will also impart an air of mystery, and it's just possible the crowds will have started to thin.

So, assuming you're up for it, a superstitious visitor might be inclined to encourage a friend to tag along.

Just to be on the safe side.

Foxes are also believed to be the messenger of *Inari*, who might have started looking after *rice*, *saké* and *plentiful harvests* but has morphed into the *patron of business and wealth*.



Merchants and manufacturers traditionally worshipped the deity.

A Japanese firm donated each of the ten thousand or so vermilion *torii* gates on the site.

Each *New Year* millions of worshippers (reputedly 2.69 million over three days in *2006*) pray at the shrine for good fortune in their commercial enterprises. The shrine's *Sangyo-sai* festival on *8 April* sees prayers, offerings and dances to ensure prosperity for industries across the nation.

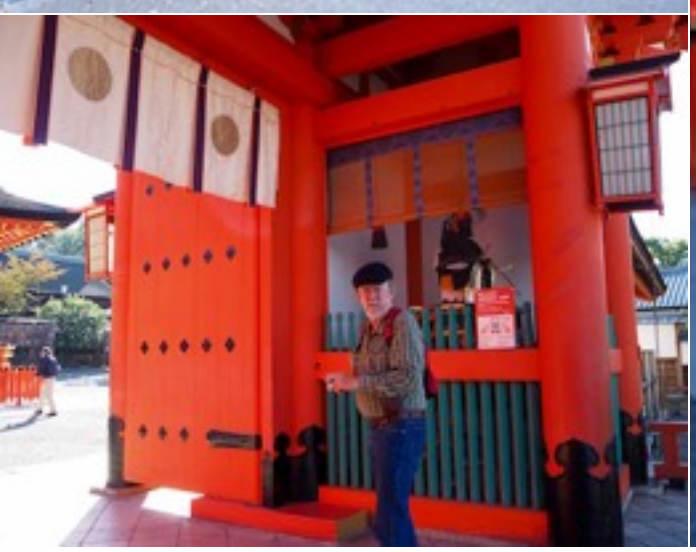
It's one of *Kyoto*'s oldest and most revered shrines and predates the relocation of the national capital to K*yoto* in *794*. The shrine's earliest structures were built on the top of the hill by the local *Hata clan* in *711*, but the shrine was relocated to the current site at the foot of the mountain in *816*.

The shrine's main building (*go-honden*), built in *1499*, is comparatively recent.

When we made our way into the compound through the *Rōmon Gate*, donated to the shrine by leader *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* in 1*589* there was already a decent crowd in the courtyard, so we didn't hang around long before we started on the ascent.

Making your way uphill along the *torii*-covered hiking trail comes with a substantial *wow factor* that expresses itself (at least it did in my case) in a repeated urge to stop and snap away with the camera.







On ***Saturday*** I'd remarked that it was probably just as well the ***iPhone*** had decided to spit the dummy the day before. The same considerations came into play here.

And, unlike ***Saturday***, where the people were scattered across the countryside here, within the confines of the trail, there was a continuous stream of people headed up and down.

At one point, having reached a T-junction I spent a good five minutes waiting for a clear shot at one particular image that had caught the eye.

I wanted a clear run, without anyone in between the camera and the target, but it just didn't happen.

Fortunately, I gave up.









If pigheadedness had persisted, I'd probably still have been there in the witching hour with *foxy influences seeping in under the fingernails*.

And the flow continued through the morning. It actually seemed to be increasing when we made our way out of the temple precinct around three hours later.

That T-junction came just before the density of ***torii*** gates started a gradual decrease.

That really kicks in around the ***Yotsutsuji*** intersection about halfway up, where you can stop and enjoy a rather decent view across ***Kyoto***, ***Inari sushi*** or ***Kitsune Udon*** (*Fox Udon*).

Both dishes feature fried *tofu*, so ***Hughesy*** was forced to have a cleansing ale instead.

From there, the trail forks into a circular route to the summit.

You don't actually *need* to go on from there, and many visitors don't.







But, assuming you're there to do the whole thing, the smart visitor will do the circuit travelling anticlockwise.

That way you get a relatively gentle climb to the top followed by some rather steep descents along rather impressive flights of stairs.

Climbing them is only recommended for those who are determined to ramp up their exercise quotient.

After the crowds we needed a bit of a break from people, and took ourselves for a walk through the side streets to *Tokofuji*, the *Zen* temple founded back in 1236 and the headquarters of the *Rinzai* sect's *Tofukuji* school.









If we'd headed a further mile or so north we'd have been back in, the middle of the crush at ***Kiyomizudera***, which packs them in twelve hours a day, seven by fifty-two

If we'd arrived at ***Tofukuji*** a couple of weeks later the crowds would have been there, too.

The view from the platform over the ravine behind abbot's quarters (***hojo***), looking down on the ***Tsūten-kyō*** bridge is rated one of the most delightful views in a city that has more than its fair share of spectacular views.

It was evident, once we'd paid the admission and made our way onto the bridge across the gorge, that it was going to be a prime spot for autumn leaves once the colours of the ***Momiji*** (*Japanese maple*) leaves set in through mid- to late-***November***.

It was, as the evidence suggests, rather spectacular as it was, and thoroughly worth a visit at any time of year.



But you don't have to stretch the imagination too far to visualise what the man-made mini-valley in the ravine would be like when the green turns to red and gold.

At that point, of course, the hundred-metre walkway and the bridge *down there* would both be packed with visitors drawn from all over ***Japan***.

The grounds are also noted for for their hydrangea in summer.

The temple was founded in 1236 under the auspices of the ***Fujiwara*** clan's imperial chancellor ***Kujō Michiie*** (***1193-1252***).

The ***Kamakura Period***'s great statesman wanted a temple to honour the soul of his late grandfather. He was after something that would match ***Tōdaiji*** and ***Kōfukuji*** in ***Nara***, and named his project by taking the starting *kanji* character from one and the concluding *kanji* of the other.

The chancellor designated ***En'ni Ben'nen*** (***1202-1280***), who had studied in China under ***Wuzhun Shifan*** as the founding priest in ***1243***.





The construction work was completed in *1255*, but most of the buildings went up in flames in a succession of disastrous fires in *1319*, *1334*, and *1336*.

The temple was rebuilt from the original plans, and .several structures remain from that time, with the *Butsu-den* (*Buddha hall*) completed in *1347*.

It was rebuilt again after another fire in the late *Meiji Period*.

The two-storey, twenty-two metre *Sanmon Gate* was also rebuilt soon after the fourteenth century fires. Completed in *1425* it is the oldest example of *Zen* gate architecture still standing and was designated *one of Japan's National Treasures* in *1952*.









It has seen some minor restoration work over the centuries, and an extensive refurbishment between *1969* and *1978* saw the structure taken apart, fixed, and reassembled at a cost of 2.5 million dollars.

Behind the gate, the *Hondo* (main hall) is larger but is a recent reconstruction.

Another blaze in *1881* destroyed the *Hojo* (Abbot's quarters), *Buddha hall*, *Hatto* (lecture hall) and *Kuri*.

The *Hojo* was reconstructed in *1890*, with new gardens laid out by *Mirei Shigemori* in *1939*, while the *Kuri* was rebuilt in *1910*. Work on the the *Hondo*, which doubles as *Butsuden* and *Hatto* commenced in *1917* and was finally completed in *1934*.

The other temple buildings that surround those two structures, the *Zendo* (meditation hall), *Yokushitsu* (bathing room), *Tosu* (lavatory) and *Shoro* (belfry) are also survivors from the early *Muromachi period* and are rare examples of *Zen architecture* from the era.

The complex also includes a number of sub-temples,

There are currently two dozen of them though in there have been as many as fifty-three.

But we were there for the gardens, particularly the ***Zen sand gardens*** and the valley that runs up to the up to the ***Kaisando*** (founder's hall, the mausoleum of the first head priest).

A small stream, (***Sengyokukan***) runs through the valley, spanned by three bridges.

They're the focus of attention when the autumn leaves to draw the crowds in.











The most famous of the three, ***Tsūten-kyō***, features in a ***ukiyoe*** by the artist ***Hiroshige*** now held in the Library of Congress.

While much of the complex is accessible for free including the areas around some of the largest, most impressive buildings, you'll have to pay to access the main attractions.

It'll cost you ¥400 to enter the ***Hojo*** and surrounding gardens and the ***Tsutenkyo Bridge*** and ***Kaisando Hall*** will set you back another 400, but both are worth the relatively modest admission fee.

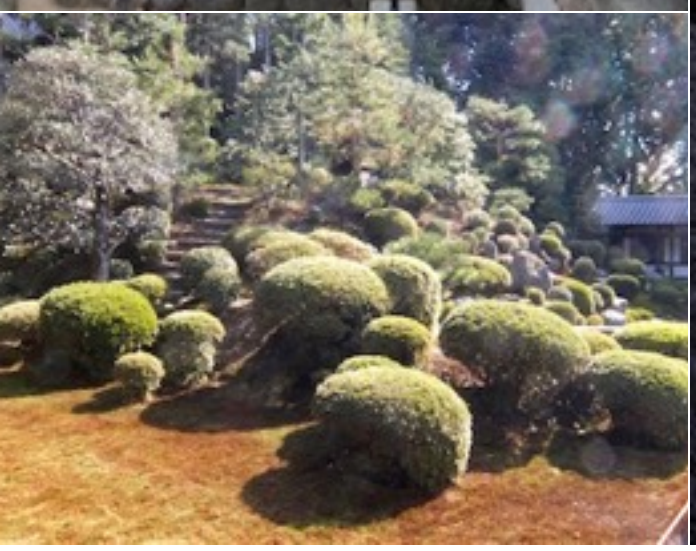
Rock gardens alongside a temple's ***Hojo*** (are relatively common, but here the gardens surround the building on all four sides.

The gardens take their names from the cardinal points.

Each has its own character and design, featuring pebbles, large rocks, moss, trees and checkered patterns.

The ***karesansui*** gardens are relatively modern creations designed by landscape architect ***Mirei Shigemori*** in the late ***1930s***.







They are rated as excellent examples of ***contemporary Japanese garden design***, blending the simplicity of ***Kamakura Period Zen*** with modern elements and abstract shapes in the moss and gravel.

The eastern garden, representing the ***Hokutō Shichisei*** (the seven stars of Ursa Major) has seven cylindrical rocks previously used in the foundations of some of ***Tofukuji***'s buildings.

In contrast, the ***Kaisando*** and its gardens are more traditional and were last reconstructed during the *Edo Period*.

As one of the ***Kyoto Gozan*** or *great* ***Zen*** *temples of Kyoto*, ***Tofukuji*** ranks beside ***Kenninji***, ***Manjuji***, ***Nanzenji***, ***Shokokuji***, and ***Tenryuji*** in the ***Kyoto*** version of the ***Five Mountain System***.









The Observant Reader, having done a quick count, will have been muttering about six names on the list, but ***Nanzenji*** sits in a separate classification to its supposed peers.

Opening times vary through the year (9:00 to 16:30 from ***April*** to ***October***, 8:30 to 16:30 pm in ***November*** and early ***December***, and 9:00 to 16:00 from late ***December*** through to the end of ***March***.

Although we only spent a fraction of the time at Tofuku-ji, both of us enjoyed it as much, if not more than the considerably longer visit to ***Funami Inari***.

Outside, the fundamental question involved how to get ourselves across to ***Kyoto Station***.

It didn't look that far on the map, or that complicated, but the network of alleys and backstreets and some construction work combined to throw the navigator off course.

With the benefit of hindsight, of course, we should have taken ourselves back to the station and caught a train.



Later on, we realised there was a subway option as well, which just underlines the complexities of navigating in an environment where several layers of transport intersect.

Still, we reached the station eventually and descended to the subway for a two stop trip that brought us back to ***Shijo Karasuma*** and a late lunch.

Looking at the quantities on ***Someone***'s plate made me a little dubious about the dinner prospects, but the fact that she demolished the lot underlined reports that ***Someone*** *was feeling very hungry*.

By contrast, my plate of *spaghetti Napoletana* was enough to fend off hunger pangs for a while, but there was still room for something later.

And with lunch out of the way, we took a walk back to the hotel for a bit of a break.

Still, I wasn't feeling overly hopeful when we sat down to discuss the options for dinner.

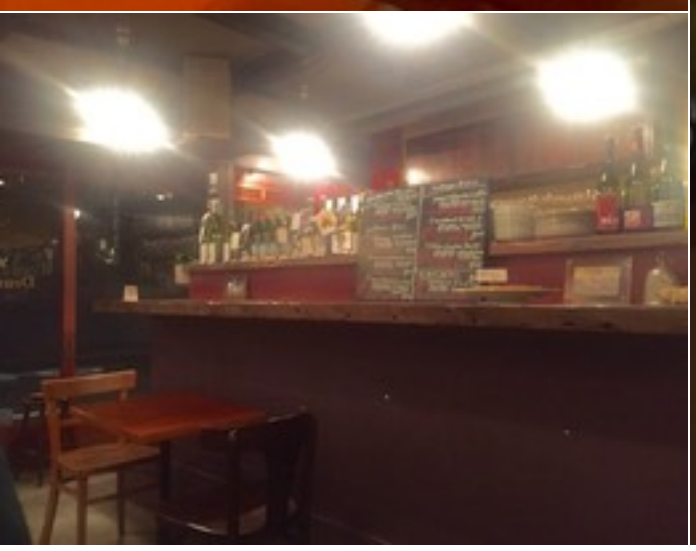
Predictably, ***Someone*** wasn't up for a meal as such, just something to nibble on over a glass of wine.

A careful perusal of ***tapas*** type options revealed a wine bar called ***Deux Cochons***, which attracted good reviews and looked to be a perfectly viable option.

Getting there involved a bit of a hike, but that would help work up an appetite.

We arrived to find the place almost deserted, but you'd put that down to the relatively early hour.







We worked our way through a *Sauvignon Blanc* from the *Loire*, a *Cotes du Rhone* blend of *Viognier* and *Roussanne*, salami and prosciutto, a *Gamay Chaudenay*, which *Hughesy* misread as *Chardonnay*, vongole in white wine., a lamb and tomato dish, a *Carignan Grenache* blend and a *Cabernet Franc*.

Not bad, when you take *Good Paddock Syndrome* into account, and I'm definitely in for a return visit.

The walk back to the hotel took the day's tally to a rather impressive 17.85 kilometres (according to the *iPhone*) with a substantial up and down element in the form of 53 flights of stairs.

No wonder we were both able to handle a couple of substantial meals, and, of course, someone was pushing up Zs rather soon after the return to base.



KYOTO > KOBE

Tuesday, 27 October 2015

Having made three previous trips to the *Land of the Rising Sun*, one tends to settle into a routine around the beginnings and ends of trips, and we've found ourselves with a fairly simple itinerary as we come to the tail end of the journey.

The day before an evening departure could be reasonably categorised as *Back to Kōbe Day*, but that's an afternoon activity, so the morning was free.

These matters had been looked at well before we left *Australia*.

The *Kyoto* accommodation tends to fit in with the last day's morning activity (you don't want to go too far afield), and that needs to tie in with relatively easy access to the transport network that will end up delivering us back to *Sannomiya*.

So we needed something close at hand that would fill in a morning, follow it with a decent lunch if we're not catching up with anyone in *Kōbe*, and then do the *Kyoto > Osaka > Kōbe* train leg.







Nijojo looked to be just the ticket to fill the bill.

Being in *Kyoto*, of course, one expects crowds, and, therefore, plans for an early departure but various issues saw us checking out about half an hour later than we would have liked.

By the time we arrived outside the castle, the tour buses were lining up to disgorge their tour groups.

It was a significant contrast to the quiet back streets along the way.

Breakfast needed to be fitted in along the line and came in the form of pastries bought from *a neighbourhood bakery* and consumed sitting down rather than on the move.









The castle consists of two concentric rings of defensive stone walls, the ***Ninomaru Palace*** and the ruins of the ***Honmaru Palace*** along with various support buildings and several gardens.

It covers 27.5 hectares, with 8000 square metres of buildings.

It is one of seventeen ***Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto*** designated by ***UNESCO*** as a ***World Heritage Site***.

They might call it ***Nijo Castle***, and classify it as a ***hirajiro*** (*plains*, rather than *hilltop, castle*) but the complex we were here to see was ***more palace than fortification*** and a relatively under-utilised one at that.

We've run across places with a link to the ***Battle of Sekigahara*** at various points over the past week, and here we were again at a location that relates to the victory that ushered in the ***Tokugawa Shōgunate***.

Tokugawa Ieyasu's ally ***Oda Nobunaga*** started work on a castle on the site back in 1569, and with the ***Tokugawa*** ascendancy, the new overlord wanted something to demonstrate his dominance.

With the ***Shōgunate*** based in ***Edo*** (***Tokyo***), the ***Shōgun*** naturally spent the majority of his time there but needed an official residence and reception area during his visits to ***Kyoto***.

He also seems to have wanted something *to remind the* ***Emperor*** *where the power and authority actually sat*.

That, one often reads, explains the opulence that went into ***Nijojo***'s ***Ninomaru Palace***.

It seems to have gone a little beyond *not-too-subtle reminders about the pecking order*.

The victorious ***Ieyasu*** *assigned* the ***daimyō of Western Japan*** to start work on the site of ***Oda Nobunaga***'s ***Nijô*** palace in 1601. The work took twenty-three years and was completed during the reign of ***Ieyasu***'s grandson ***Tokugawa Iemitsu***, with the ***daimyō*** footing the bill.

Nijojo was never attacked and, indeed, was rarely visited by the ruling Shōgun.

Ieyasu made three visits to the castle and used it as his headquarters during the ***Siege of Osaka***, which destroyed the ***Toyotomi*** clan and wiped out the last significant resistance to the ***Shōgunate***.





Iemitsu visited the castle twice and made substantial modifications from *1624* to *1626*.

He ordered the removal of the original five-storey *tenshu* (central tower), which went to *Yodo castle*, with the *tenshu* from *Fushimi Castle*, along with a few other odds and ends from the same location, taking its place.

Much of the work tied in with *Emperor Gomizuno*'s visit to *Nijojo*, which seems to have been more *command performance* than *social call*.

Iemitsu and his father, former *Shōgun Tokugawa Hidetada* were still consolidating the pecking order.

Forcing the *Emperor* to leave his palace for the first time since *1588* served to signify the submission of the *Imperial family* to *Tokugawa* authority.

The five-day visit in *September 1626* was a lavish affair, with elaborate entertainments and sumptuous meals.

Iemitsu was back in *Kyoto* eight years later with a force of three hundred thousand men to remind the western provinces, and the *Imperial Court* who was in charge. It must have worked because it was another two hundred and thirty years before a *Shōgun* set foot in the place again.

Ironically, another royal visit, from ***Emperor Meiji*** in ***1867***, saw the last ***Tokugawa Shōgun*** resign

Still, although he was going to spend most of his time elsewhere, the cautious ***Shōgun*** was disinclined to take chances with his personal security.

The ***Ninomaru Palace***'s buildings were connected by corridors with creaking floors (***uguisubari***) as security against intruders, sneak attacks and assassins.

The floor was suspended above the building's framework, held in place by special iron clamps so it would move up and down when someone walked across them. The movement underfoot produced a tell-tale sound said to resemble the song of a nightingale.

The distinctive sound is different to the creaking you would hear in an older houses, so the security detail would not be able to dismiss the noise with a *forget it, it's just the building*.

All the floors, from the entrance to the ***Ohiroma***, the ***Shōgun***'s *audience chamber*, have this built-in security feature. Concealed chambers and hidden alcoves allowed bodyguards to monitor proceedings, and the ***Shōgun***'s living quarters were a restricted area staffed by female attendants.

While the ***Shōguns*** were conspicuous by their absence, the castle served as the headquarters of their man on the ground, the ***Shoshidai*** (*Governor of* ***Kyoto***), who was responsible for monitoring the thirty-three western provinces under his control.

That was his official job description, but the governor's real function was to keep the ***Imperial family*** under control and prevent them from interfering in national politics.

Members of the court had to apply at ***Nijôjo*** for permission to leave central ***Kyoto***, where they were otherwise obliged to live.

So while the military government operated out of ***Edo***, the castle remained an important centre of power. Hiring the finest artists to fill the premises with sumptuous golden screens, elegantly decorated ceilings and beautifully painted *fusuma* (sliding doors) in the best ***Momoyama style*** reminded an increasingly impoverished emperor, his court and hangers-on, and the ***daimyō*** of the western provinces who had paid for it, where the real power lay.

The castle fell into disuse after the ***1626 Imperial visit***, with many of its buildings and structures donated to local temples.

An earthquake took its toll on what was left in ***1663***; the five-storey keep was destroyed by lightning in ***August 1750***, and most of the ***Honmaru*** compound went up in flames in ***January 1788***.

That part of the castle remained empty until a princely residence was transferred from the ***Imperial Palace*** in ***1893***.

With *Tokugawa Iemochi* turning his attention back towards *Kyoto* in the early *1860s*, the *Ninomaru Palace* got some maintenance and restoration work before the *Shōgun* entered the city in *1863*.

He stayed, and his successor, the fifteenth *Tokugawa Shōgun*, was installed in the castle's grounds in *1866*.

He didn't last long. In *October 1867* representatives of forty clans gathered in the *Ninomaru Palace* to hear *Tokugawa Yoshinobu* announce the *Taiseihokan* (*restoration of imperial rule*).

January 1868 saw the *Dajokandai* (*central government*) take up residence in the palace, which became the seat of the *Kyoto* prefectural government in *1871*.

The castle was renamed *Nijo Rikyu* (*Nijo Imperial Villa*) in *July 1884*,

The vacant space formerly occupied by the *Honmaru Palace* was filled when *Katsuranomiya Palace* was relocated from the grounds of the *Imperial Palace* as a home for *Prince Katsura* and rebadged as today's *Honmaru* in *1893*.









Four years later the *Ninomaru Palace* was given a makeover while the *Minamimon Gate* was added in *1915* in conjunction with the coronation of the *Emperor Taisho*.

Ownership was transferred to the *City of Kyoto* in *1939*, and the castle was opened to the general public in *February 1940* as *Onshi Nijo Castle*.

As one of the best surviving examples of *feudal Japanese castle architecture*, *Nijojo* went onto the *UNESCO World Heritage List* in *1994*.

When you arrive on the doorstep, you're looking at two concentric rings of castle walls, each with its own moat.

There are three gates in the outer wall, with the ***East Gate*** serving as the primary point of entry, and two in the inner wall, which contains the ***Honmaru Palace***, its garden and the foundations of the five-storey keep that burned down in ***1750***.

Ninomaru Palace, along with the kitchens, guard house, several gardens and groves of cherry and ***Japanese plum trees***, sits between the two rings of fortifications.

We made our way into the Castle, along with the predictable crocodiles of tour groups being disgorged from a steady stream of coaches, through the ***Higashi Otemon*** (*East Gate*).

The tour groups take a while to organise themselves, so there wasn't too much congestion as we made our way around to the left, where the ornately carved ***Karamon Gate*** takes you into a courtyard in front of the ***Mikurumayose*** (*Carriage House*), the entrance to the castle's main attraction.

The five buildings that make up the 3300 square metre ***Ninomaru*** (*Second Palace*) are built almost entirely of ***Hinoki*** cypress and date back to the original ***17th century*** construction work.

The five are staggered along a curved northwesterly line, connected by covered corridors with thirty-three rooms, around eight hundred *tatami* mats and elegantly decorated ceilings.

You enter through the ***Kurumayose*** (*entranceway*), passing through the ***Tozamurainoma*** (*Samurai Hall*), effectively the guard house and waiting room for ***daimyō*** visiting the castle.

There are several chambers, which were related to the visitor's status including the ***Chokushinoma*** (*Imperial Messenger's Chamber*), ***Yanaginoma*** (*Willow Room*) and ***Wakamatsunoma*** (*Young Pine Room*).

Sliding screen doors (*fusuma*) allowed the rooms to be reconfigured and rearranged as necessary.

Once the incoming visitors had been sorted, they might have progressed further, to the ***Shikidainoma*** (*Reception Hall*) with three chambers where the visiting ***Shōgun*** might greet members of his council of elders and accept gifts.

The next building, the ***Ohiroma Yonnoma***, has four main rooms as well as the ***Mushakakushinoma*** (*Bodyguards' Chamber*), ***Sotetsunoma*** (*Fern-palm chamber*) and the audience hall where the ***Shōgun*** would meet with visiting ***daimyō***. It has spectacular screen paintings by ***Kano Tanyu*** and was the room where the fifteenth ***Tokugawa Shōgun***, ***Yoshinobu*** announced the restoration of imperial rule.

One of the chambers became audience seating for a ***Noh*** stage built in the garden for ***Emperor Gomizunoo***'s visit in 1626.

Next comes the ***Kuroshoi***n study where the Shōgun could meet ***daimyō*** from feudal domains that belonged to the ***Tokugawa clan*** or one of the family's long-term (pre-***Battle of Sekigahara***) supporters.

It's a small room, elaborately decorated with black lacquer and sliding doors with pictures of birds painted by *Kano Tanyu*'s younger brother, *Naonobu*.

Finally, the modern day visitor makes his way into the *Shiroshoin*, which contained the *Shōgun*'s private apartments, his living room and bedroom with paintings of landscapes, lakes, and mountains with a snowscape mural by *Kano Koi* showing sleeping sparrows in a bamboo grove.

The Astute Reader will, of course, have picked up one significant point.

Back in the day, you and I wouldn't have gotten anywhere near this far into the palace complex. There's a definite progression involved.

The only visitors permitted to progress beyond the *Reception Hall* were high-ranking individuals, and how far anyone proceeded from there was directly related to how close they were to the *Tokugawa*.

The highest ranked non-*Tokugawa* visitors would have been ushered into the main audience hall where the *Shōgun* or his representative sat on an elevated floor, flanked by bodyguards.

Lower ranked visitors got as far as the adjoining rooms without direct access the main hall.

There's also a fairly obvious restriction on photography and a determination to keep *Important Cultural Properties* safe.

The screen paintings and such you see on your way through *Ninomaru* are replicas. The original screens can be viewed in a separate gallery to the north of the *East Gate*.

But it's totally obvious what was going on here.

The lavish decorations, the gold leaf and elaborate wood carvings are there to underline the power and wealth of the *Tokugawa Shōguns* and to amaze and to impress visitors.

Still, having seen palaces that set out to perform the same function in *Europe*, here there's an understated elegance and a refreshing degree of flexibility.

Having made out way through the first complex in the *Second Palace* we looped back around the outside, stopping for a short shopping interlude.

After *Madam* had done the rounds of the stalls and I had been inveigled into a *saké* tasting, we headed onto the path through the *Ninomaru Garden*.

We were on our way to the inner defensive wall that encloses the *Honmaru Palace* and the ruins of the five-storey keep destroyed by lightning in *1750* but took our time getting there.

The garden design was the work of landscape architect and tea master *Kobori Enshu* (*1579-1647*), a seminal figure in *Japanese garden design*.









The garden contains a large pond with three islands, topiary manicured pine trees and carefully placed ornamental stones.

The grounds were formerly treeless since falling autumn leaves are said to have reminded the ***Shōgun*** and his ***samurai*** warriors of the transience of life.

It's rated as ***one of the most beautiful traditional gardens in Japan***.

The palace that originally stood inside the two-hectare ***Honmaru*** (main circle of defence) enclosure was very similar to the ***Ninomaru Palace***, with a five storey castle keep tucked into the southwest corner of the enclosed space.

Both went up in flames in the ***18th century***, and neither was rebuilt.

But there's a structure in there now, the former residence of ***Prince Katsura*** relocated from inside the ***Imperial Palace*** compound to this site from ***1893*** to ***1894*** and renamed.

In the original location, the palace had fifty-five buildings, but most of them remained *in situ*.







Unlike ***Ninomaru***, the ***Honmaru*** is only open to the public on special occasions, although visitors are quite welcome to walk around the gardens and climb the stone foundation of the former castle keep for views over the castle grounds.

The original five-storey ***tenshu*** (*keep*) on the site was relocated during the ***1624-26*** renovations, and replaced by the ***tenshu*** from ***Fushimi Castle***.

Around it, in the lead-up to the ***1626 Imperial visit***, the compound was expanded with buildings for guests added, including accommodation for the ***Emperor***.

After that, however, with the ***Shōgun***'s attention focussed elsewhere and with the immediate agenda accomplished the area went into decline.









Earthquakes, fire, lightning strikes and donations of its buildings to other locations within *Kyoto* gradually emptied the grounds, which were virtually empty when the Imperial family set about relocating *Prince Katsura*'s residence.

That job meant the rest of the enclosure needed landscaping, and the result makes for a pleasant stroll, even if you can't enter the palace building.

We exited through the ***western gate***, crossed the bridge and looped around to the north on the way back to the main entrance through the most recent addition to the castle compound.

The ***half-Japanese***, ***half-Western-style Seiryūen*** garden was constructed in ***1965*** in the northern section of the outer compound as a facility for tea ceremonies, civic receptions and a venue for cultural events.

Seiryūen has two tea houses and over a thousand carefully arranged stones.







Tree-lined paths within the outer walls include hundreds of maple, *ginkgo* and other trees that offer brilliant autumn colours through the second half of ***November*** and hundreds of late-blooming cherry trees that mean the ***sakura*** season at ***Nijojo*** usually lasts from late ***March*** right through ***April***.

There's also a plum orchard, which kicks off the springtime colour from the end of ***February*** to early ***March***.

Combine the historic ***Ninomaru***, the landscaped grounds and gardens, autumn leaves and springtime ***sakura*** and it's obvious why ***Nijo Castle*** is one of ***Kyoto***'s major tourist attractions.

If we'd been inclined, we could have turned southwards after we exited the castle grounds and made our way to ***Nijo Jinya***, formerly the home of a wealthy rice merchant and subsequently used as an inn by visiting ***daimyō*** looking for accommodation close to ***Ninomaru***.









To guarantee the safety of distinguished guests who might be the targets of an assassination attempt, the building was fitted with a variety of avenues for guests to escape or hide and a plethora of disguised staircases, trapdoors, false walls and ceilings, escape hatches and *nightingale floors*.

These days it's a private house owned by the ***Ogawa*** family, designated as a public cultural asset in ***1944***.

If you book, it's possible to have a ***Japanese-language one-hour tour*** conducted by a family member or by a tour guide. Their website has a facility for foreigners to arrange for an interpreter.

But we hadn't booked, so ***Nijo Jinya*** will be one for next time.

In any case, it was getting close to lunch time, and ***Madam*** had booked us a table at a highly-rated ***French restaurant*** that was close at hand.

Leaving the castle grounds we headed eastwards rather than south, found ourselves on the wrong street and made

inquiries.

As you do when you're lost.

But even when we'd found our way onto the right street the restaurant wasn't easy to find.

It's not easy to find on the ***English language side of the Net*** either, and it took a fair bit of subsequent searching to pin it down on ***Google Maps***.

Still, at lunch on a ***Tuesday***, the place was almost full.

It wasn't difficult to see why.

Given a choice of two set menus, ***Madam*** went for the smaller A and pointed me towards the slightly larger four course B.

She opted for a glass of white, which was obviously ***Chardonnay***, but my glass of red threw me.

Given the multiplicity of appellations, varieties and other complications there are significant gaps in my knowledge of ***French*** and other ***European wines***.

There was something familiar about the red that I couldn't quite place.

When we asked, it turned out to be ***Montepulciano de Abbruzzi.*** Hence, I guess, the familiarity and inability to line it up with something ***French***.

It took a while for the first glass to arrive, which was just as well since it wouldn't have gone with the entree, a trio of seafood-based mouthfuls.

It mightn't have been a great match for the sweet potato soup, either, but by the time the salad had been and gone, so was the glass.

Ordering another brought the information about the identity, and it arrived almost simultaneously with the main, which was obviously wagyu with a smattering of trimmings.

I took an evaluatory mouthful of dessert, and followed it with another so ***Madam*** would only have to eat a bit over one and a half of them. *Creme brûlée* isn't my thing.

But it was obviously an excellent *creme brûlée*, in line with the standard of everything else that crossed the table.

Quantities were just right, and neither of us needed much topping up later in the day.

From there we headed back to collect the luggage, with a couple of diversions along the way.

The first was another temple where there's a discrepancy between the official name and the one everyone uses.



Located just south of ***Karasuma-Oike Station***, right in the very centre of downtown ***Kyoto***, the temple is officially known as ***Shiunzan Chōhōji***, but the hexagonal shape of the ***Hondo*** has prompted the nickname ***Rokkakudō***.

The temple's most significant claim to fame lies in its status as the birthplace of the art of ***ikebana*** (flower arranging) and a hexagonal stone known as the *navel stone* south of the main temple is said to mark the centre of ***Kyoto***.

It's also the eighteenth temple on the ***Saigōku 33 Temple Pilgrimage***.

But, like most such structures it comes with its share of stories and legends.

For a start, it's believed to be older than the city that surrounds it today, which would seem to sit comfortably with that notion of a navel stone.

Traditionally, the foundation date for the temple is given as 587, when ***Shotoku Taishi*** (*Prince Regent Shotoku*) visited the area looking for suitable timber to build ***Shitennoji*** temple in ***Osaka***.

According to legend, when the prince was a child he found a small ***Chinese*** chest that had floated ashore on ***Awaji Island***. Inside he found a 5.5 cm gold image of the ***Nyoirin Kannon*** (our old friend the ***Bodhisattva of Mercy***), which he decided to keep as an amulet.

In his prayers to the ***Kannon*** for success in his future endeavours, he promised to build ***Shitennoji*** temple if things worked out the way he hoped.

They did, and his quest to pursue those obligations brought him to a pool on a scorching day.

Needing to cool off, he decided to take a swim, stripped off his clothes and placed the amulet beside them.

When he dressed after his bath, he went to put the ***Nyoirin Kannon*** back in his pocket but, for some reason, it had become too heavy to pick up.

Since he wasn't going anywhere without the amulet, he decided to stay put overnight and see how things panned out in the morning. It had, I guess, been a long hot day.

Then, while he slept, ***Nyoirin Kannon*** appeared in a dream, announcing a desire to remain in this location enshrined in a six-sided temple where people could come to be healed.

So, predictably, ***Prince Shotoku*** built the ***Hondo*** and enshrined his ***Nyoirin Kannon*** amulet within it.







And, since the temple already existed when the decision to relocate the capital from ***Nara*** in *794*, it probably made sense to build the new capital around the site.

The status as the birthplace of ***ikebana*** stems from the floral offerings the temple's ***Buddhist priests*** made at the altar each morning and evening.

The priests lived near the pond (the ***Japanese*** for *pond* is *ike*) in a small hut (*bo*), so the locals referred to them as ***Ikenobo*** with the artistic manner in which they arranged their floral offerings being labelled ***ikebana***.

So the temple grounds feature several monuments to the birthplace of ***ikebana*** and a building north-west of the temple on ***Karasuma Dori*** serves as the headquarters of contemporary ***ikeban***a. It's the location for the ***Ikenobo Ikebana Spring Exhibition*** held in ***April*** each year.



Rokkakudō also played a role in the foundation of the *Jōdo Shinshū* sect of *Buddhism* after the movement's founder *Shinran Shonin* spent a one hundred day retreat there after coming down from *Mount Hiei*'s *Enryakuji* Temple in *1201*.

He was on the ninety-fifth day of seclusion when *Prince Shōtoku*, who had come to be regarded as an incarnation of *Avalokiteśvara*, the *Bodhisattva* said to embody the compassion of all *Buddhas*, appeared to him in a dream.

The *Bodhisattva* directed him to forego his vow of celibacy, marry, seek out a monk named *Hōnen* and found a new sect of *Buddhism* based on clerical marriage and family life. There are two statues of *Shinran* at *Rokkakudo*, one seated in a dreamlike trance and the other standing with a walking staff and beads.

And while the temple goes way back, the structures you see at ***Rokkakudo*** today are relatively recent, dating from a ***Meiji Period*** reconstruction in the ***1870s***.

The compact temple grounds include large stone lanterns, willow trees, a couple of ***Shinto*** shrines and a reconstruction ***Shotoku Taishi***'s pond with *koi* carp swimming in the water.

The bibbed statues lined up outside the ***Ikenobo*** Headquarters are ***Jizou***, the ***Bodhisattva*** said to look after children who have died.

We didn't spend that long at ***Rokkakudo*** because there's not a lot there, and, in any case, the real objective lay a little further along the street.





Running between *Teramachi* and *Shinmachi*, a block north of *Shijo*, *Nishiki Market* (*Nishiki Ichiba*) is a longish, narrow, five block four hundred metre ***shotengai*** (shopping street) that specialises in food-related products. It's *Kyoto*'s largest traditional food market with more than a hundred shops and restaurants, ***Kyoto's Kitchen*** and the place to go for seasonal foods and regional specialities.

On that basis, it comes as no surprise to find the market pencilled into the itinerary at this point. It was more or less on the road back from ***Nijojo*** to the hotel though a slight diversion was necessary.

More significantly, for ***Someone***, with the train trip back to ***Kōbe*** as the next item on the agenda, she wasn't going to carry whatever she's stocked up on very far.

Under the circumstances, when ***Someone*** has a shopping list, ***Hughesy***'s job is to tag along and not get in the way too much.

That's a little tricky when you look at the crowds than are bustling up and down the arcade, but it means I didn't have a lot of scope to investigate or pursue my own agenda. I'm not that big on ***Japanese speciality foodstuffs***, and what might pique my interest probably won't be on ***Madam***'s shopping list.

And time was, after all, limited.

And some things were out of the question.

Regardless of ***Hughesy's biases*** and ***Madam***'s tastes, fresh produce, particularly fresh seafood was out of the question as far as we were concerned.

It's a great place to find seasonal foods and ***Kyoto*** specialties that would tickle ***The Mother***'s fancy.

But fresh seafood is for today or this evening or tomorrow morning at the very latest, so ***Someone***'s focus here was always going to be on sweets, pickles, dried and preserved items, most of which would be lugged back to ***The Little House of Concrete*** rather than seafood and ***sushi***.

The stores along the way range in size from narrow stalls to two storey shops but most specialise in a particular item, and almost everything is locally produced or sourced.

The operation started as a wholesale fish market as far back as ***1310***, and many of the businesses have been operated by the same family for generations.

Over the centuries, the focus has changed from wholesale to retail, and from fish to food in general. While souvenir shops and other non-foodie operations are starting to infiltrate the focus is still on ingredients for traditional ***Kyoto*** cuisine: ***tsukemono*** (pickles), ***Kyoyasai*** (***Kyoto*** vegetables), ***wagashi*** sweets), tea, *tofu* and fresh fish and shellfish.

If you're after takeaway tucker, there are stalls selling ***yakitori*** skewers or ***sashimi***.

But it was just after lunch so we weren't in the market for either.

We weren't in the market for hand-crafted knives either, although I did stop tor a glance at ***Aritsugu***, founded by swordsmith ***Aritsugu Fujiwara*** in 1560.

And, with a bit more time, I might have been tempted by ***Dintora***'s ***Japanese spices*** or ***Mochiyaki Sembei***'s fiery red ***chili*** pepper ***osembei*** (rice crackers).

But under the circumstances, I was better off just tagging along and trying to keep out of everyone's way, which wasn't as easy or straightforward as it sounds while ***Madam*** stocked up on gifts and items to lug all the way back to ***Bowen***.

And when she was done, we beetled back to the hotel, collected the luggage, and made for the subway. It was a two-stop trip to ***Kyoto Station***, where the plan was to switch to JR because there'd be a better chance of getting a seat.

While we were out of rail pass territory, there were still cheap ticket options.

Madam set off to find an outlet that offered reduced fares, and with the luggage in tow,

Hughesy was directed to wait in an out of the way position just outside the JR gates.

That was fine, and provided an opportunity for people watching, although that started to pall after awhile. I thought about going over to look at a map over towards the middle of the thoroughfare but decided against it.

I'd probably be getting in the way of someone who was in a hurry.

So I waited..

Madam returned with tickets, and we made our way onto platform to find large queues.

After we'd attached ourselves to the end of a line, when the train arrived, it was almost chocker.

Still, we managed to squeeze on.

I was standing, minding my own business as the train pulled out of the station when an elderly gentleman grabbed the jump seat behind him and indicated that I should do the same.

So I got to sit all the way from ***Kyoto*** to ***ShinOsaka***, where the crowd thinned a tad, and onto ***Osaka***, where the train emptied and ***Kōbe***-bound passengers could claim a pair of regular seats.

Once we alighted at ***Sannomiya***, we weren't quite done with the shopping, though most of the unfinished business could wait until tomorrow.

What couldn't involved overnight supplies, which were minimal and mainly wine-based.

On other trips, the final night in ***Kōbe*** has been an eat out and meet up with people affair, and we'd booked ourselves into a reasonably swish hotel close to the downtown dining districts, somewhere that was either walkable or had a half-hourly shuttle bus or similar operation in place.

This time, there meeting up for dinner agenda wasn't an issue, so we were staying out on ***Port Island*** in the ***Portopia Hotel***.

There was, predictably, a shuttle bus operation. There had to be. Otherwise, we would have had issues getting there, but we wouldn't be doing a *back in and back out* for dinner.

Which was part of the logic behind the ***French restaurant*** lunch.

Madam wouldn't need anything much, ***Hughesy*** would be quite happy with wine and nibbles, and we could probably manage an early night in congenial surroundings that would deliver a hefty chunk of solid snooze.

So I needed wine and nibbles, and found the first in a familiar bottle shop outside the equally familiar gourmet section of a ***Sannomiya*** department store.

I was flying almost blind in an area where the only things I was familiar with were items I wasn't going to be purchasing, and wasn't going to be making lengthy deliberations.

A *2012 Gamay Noir* from *Burgundy* ticked a couple of boxes and looked to fit the bill reasonably well.

Since *Madam* didn't need anything in the food department, and, realistically, neither did I, the quantity of bread and cheese we ended up buying was probably just a tad over the top.

But it's better to be safe than sorry where replenishments involve a twenty-minute shuttle bus ride there and back, or, alternatively, expensive room service or dine on the premises options.

Neither of us saw any value in that.

Armed with the evening's provisions we reached the bus stand in time to see the *Portopia* shuttle pulling out of the parking bay, but it was only a twenty-minute wait until the next one.

And, when it arrived, another twenty minutes saw us out at a reasonably swish and sprawling hotel complex that would have to be the largest operation of its kind I've ever encountered.





Check the website and you'll find a complex with around seven hundred and fifty guest rooms, three dozen banquet and meeting rooms, the 1,702-seat ***Portopia Hall***, and no less than thirteen different restaurants and bars.

And they had us booked into the ***South Wing***, which almost involved *a compass and cut lunch job* just to get to the elevator.

Upstairs, on the ***14th floor***, we encountered what was possibly the largest hotel room we've met anywhere. And a scenic view of the nearby ***Ikea*** store.

If we'd been on the other side of the building, we'd have had views across to the city or out over ***Osaka Bay***, but would probably have been paying significantly more for them.

But that was fine.

All that I needed was wine and an easy night.

Which I managed comfortably after a spell of ***Travelogue*** tapping, a bit more reading and the odd ***Sudoku***.



Wednesday, 28 October 2015

And if parts of yesterday were relatively routine, the last day of the trip slots into a rhythm that's almost entirely predictable.

After we've done the ritual visit to the ***Viking*** breakfast, everything else fits the same pattern as it did last time and the time before. That, at least, is the intention, and any variation is likely to be the result of a nasty surprise.

And we're not in the market for nasty surprises, thank you very much.

Anyone inclined to question ***Hughesy***'s assessment of the Portopia as the largest hotel I've encountered should take heed of the range of breakfast options on the premises.

There were three buffet arrangements to choose from, and there may well have been other possibilities around the place.

Madam could have opted for the *Japanese breakfast* in *Kōbe Temura* and left me to a *Viking*. But that, of course, would involve setting *Hughesy* free in an unfamiliar environment.

So scratch the *seasonal Japanese optio*n.

On the *Viking* side of things, there were two possibilities.

The *Italian-themed Dining Cafe SOCO* might, given *Hughesy*'s Italian-flavoured tastes, have seemed a logical likelihood but it sits down on the second floor.

But why confine yourself to the lower levels when the alternative is the *Sky Lounge Plein d' Etoiles* up on the 30th floor with panoramic views, a full range of *Western options* and a variety of *Japanese dishes*.

And, with not much on the morning agenda, when we made our way up there, fashionably late, we were able to snaffle a window-side table with excellent views across the bay to *Kōbe* and the mountains beyond.





If we'd been on the other side, we'd have caught the morning sun and the activity in and around ***Port Island*** and ***Kōbe Airport***.

Since we weren't anticipating lunch, I took the regulation three goes at the ***Viking***.

The first delivers the bulk so that you won't be feeling peckish for a while.

The second fills in the gaps with delicacies like a freshly made omelette, while the third, the pastries and coffee, is there to round things off nicely.

After that little lot, ***Hughesy*** wouldn't be needing lunch.

We headed back to the room, and since we had an eleven o'clock checkout, there was plenty of time to bring the ***Travelogue*** notes more or less up to date and scroll back to add extra detail.

Just after eleven we were checked out and on the bus back to ***Sannomiya***, where it was time for ***Someone*** to start the serious shopping.

Everything up to this point was something we had to lug around with us.

From here it was a subway ride, a taxi and an ***airport shuttle***.

So the first stop was a rice store near the hotel where we'd spent the first night of the trip.

Madam bought rice, and *Hughesy* sat in the courtyard outside the *Library* tackling a *Sudoku* and then watching pigeons fighting over what may have been scraps of a potato chip.

It made for moderately entertaining viewing until an intruder frightened them off just before *Someone* returned.

From there we took the subway out to the wilds of suburban *Myodani*, where an enclosed shopping centre kept the pigeon quotient down to zero.

That meant I had no choice but to sit and read while *Madam* continued stocking up and the *Japanese version of the world* went on around me.

I had time to finish the Matthew Condon title I'd been tackling through the trip and turn my attention towards the parts of *Bill Gammage*;s **The Greatest Estate on Earth** that relate to *North Queensland*.

And when *Madam* returned it was time to take a taxi to *The Mother's Apartment*.

When we got there, we still had a good two and a half hours to kill.

Having rearranged my portion of the baggage, I was left without a great deal to do.

Someone was much busier, with another excursion to the shops to stock up on odds and ends.

She returned with *Yebisu*, so that was *Hughesy* looked after thank you very much, along with an unspecified quantity of other odds and ends.

I didn't know the precise details of what was being stowed into *The Blue Behemoth* and was cagey enough not to ask.

Madam has been through Customs enough times to have a fair idea of what's allowed and what is strictly verboten.

After changing into the outfit I'd be wearing on the flight, I was left without much else to do except turn my attention to *Yebisu*.

We headed outside to wait for shuttle taxi a good fifteen minutes early, which turned out to be just as well since it was a good ten minutes early.

We were the only passengers, which may explain why the pickup time was around an hour later than usual.

The transfer to *KIX* ran smoothly with no traffic holdups and reminiscences about the similar trip a fortnight earlier.

Even though the pickup was much later than usual, we were still into ***Departures*** comfortably before the check in opened. When I went over to investigate ***F6-12***, the queue was already forming. We moved over to join them once I'd changed into the ***DVT socks***.

That only took a couple of minutes, so the queue was only slightly larger than it was, moving in fits and starts.

There were apparent complications with some parties seemingly unaware of baggage limits.

One couple ahead of us were shunted off to the sidelines to sort things out, and they were still there, laptop open, obviously logging on to something, after we'd farewelled our luggage for the next twelve hours or so.

Presumably, they were purchasing additional capacity or something since there was no way they were going to rearrange everything they had with them into two standard checked baggage plus standard carry on allocations.

So we headed off to eat after checking in.

That involved going our separate ways though the contents of the meals consumed would have had similarities. It would have been ramen for ***Madam***, *spaghetti* for ***Hughesy***.

Mine came with a creamy prawn sauce that contained exactly three prawns.

When I made my way back to the agreed rendezvous, a bloke was hogging the middle of the couch, which was the only seat within coo-ee. *Not the most considerate of individuals,* thought ***Hughesy*** as he stood around, trying to stay out of the way on a reasonably busy thoroughfare.

Still, I didn't have to wait that long.

After a short detour through the souvenir section for gifts etc. and the obligatory exit through ***Passport Control***, we headed on to Gate 35.

When checked the boarding passes, 35 turned up again, but this time with a B and a C after it.

That begged the obvious question. *Will there be anyone in 35A?*

That was something to ponder as the lines started to form, but we weren't in any great hurry.

We joined in as soon as the relevant when the call came, and there were still plenty of people behind us, but we had, I reckoned, given anyone allocated to 35A a decent chance to get in before us

But no one there when we claimed our seats.

Watching the flow of incoming passengers for signs of a claimant gave us something to do until the doors closed. And when they did, no one had appeared to claim the vacant seat.

At that point, I should have made the switch to the empty seat, but decided to wait until the ***seatbelt sign*** went off.

I could probably have still done it after the long taxi from the terminal to the runway commenced, but ended up waiting.

As it turned out, after takeoff there was a brief view of lights over towards ***Kōbe***, or over in that direction, but when the ***seatbelt sign*** did go off I realised it wouldn't have made a great deal of difference if I had moved earlier. That window offered a scenic vista right over the middle of the wing.

So I filled out the ***Border Protection*** paperwork when it arrived. Once I had, there was nothing to do but put on the blindfold and attempt to sleep.

I was not hopeful about the prospects.



CAIRNS > BOWEN

Thursday, 29 October 2015

I was awake just after four, which suggested around five and a half hours of reasonable quality slumber. Whether that would be enough to get me through the slings and arrows the next thirty-six hours were likely to throw our way remained to be seen.

I checked with ***Madam*** to see how she was travelling after it was obvious she had surfaced too.

THat's a significant consideration, given the likelihood that we'd be on the highway by seven.

On the approach to ***Cairns*** through the darkness, there was never going to be much to see when you're sitting on the seaward side of the aircraft.

And, of course, I had my scenic view of the wing as we started the descent into ***Cairns***, so that blocked out the Northern Beaches as we made our first and final approach around twenty to five.

That got us into Arrivals around five. but managed to get ourselves separated at Passport Control, where things never seem to operate in the same manner as they did last time. Maybe it's down to the different person who's on point duty where the passenger stream divides into ***Australian Passport holders*** and the rest of humanity.

Still, I found myself processed through re-entry relativelt quickly and sighted ***The Coppertone Container*** almost as soon as I arrived beside the baggage carousel.

Then, as you'd come to expect despite the fact that the two pieces of luggage were sitting beside each other when we farewelled them at ***KIX***, there was a lengthy wait for ***The Blue Behemoth***.

Long enough for ***Madam*** to make her way through the mass of people in the Other Passport Holders queue and divert into the toilet as well.

But BeeBee appeared eventually, and we took ourselves over to ***Customs***, where it was fairly obvious they were checking things today.

The standard response to the question about foodstuffs got a Well, let's just have a look.

Everything, as far as either of us could make out should have been cool, but we ran across an unexpected hitch.

Brown rice is a problem, thanks to the bit of husk that remains on the grain. .

Madam wasn't happy, but there was nothing that could be done about it, and it's not as if she'd shelled out big time on the prohibited item.

The packet of brown rice had been given to ***The Mother*** as a present, and she doesn't eat the stuff. So ***The Daughter*** had generously and very helpfully offered to *take it off Mum's hands* and see it didn't go to waste.

But that was the only hitch and a couple of minutes later we were outside phoning the ***off-site airport parking*** and letting them know we'd be where they'd asked us to wait for them.

WE'd been waiting for a bit longer than you might have labelled a reasonable time when my mobile rang. It was the off-site parking person calling to advise that previous arrangements hadn't panned out the way they were supposed to, and we needed to meet him on the other side of the terminal.

So we headed over that way and made the predictable polite inquiry when we got there.

The explanation, which seemed to be evidence of extreme anti-competitive practice on the part of ***the airport's on-site parking operation***, was enough to have us assuring our driver that he would be getting our business for the foreseeable future.

It seemed that new fobs to get his vehicle through the gates into the bus parking area ere a good week late, the old ones no longer worked and there was a hefty fine if he attempted to pick anyone up right in front of the terminal.

That was the explanation we got, anyway. And given other income-grubbing arrangements involving airline passengers and on-ground transport arrangements (like train fares to ***Brisbane*** and ***Sydney airport terminals***), it rang pretty true.

It wasn't long, however, before we were back in the car and contemplating the best road out of town.

Given a choice between ***Portsmith*** and ***Mulgrave Road***, ***Someone*** chose ***Mulgrave Road*** and then asked about the difference once we were headed that way.

I wasn't sure but suspected there might be fewer traffic lights if you head out through ***Portsmith***.

Two trips back ***Ukulele Lady*** and her husband had collected us from ***the airport*** and guided us back that way, and I reckoned that was based on local knowledge since they lived out that way.

In any case, we managed to hit every set of lights between where the question was asked and ***Edmonton***. We would probably have continued to hit them if we hadn't run out of them at ***Edmonton***.

And, sure enough, we encountered another red light just before the ***Mulgrave River*** at ***Gordonvale***.

We turned off the highway on the other side of the river, looping around down to a rest area where ***The Driver*** wanted to stop for a snooze. I couldn't quite manage to doze right off, but ***Someone*** managed a good fifteen minutes of audibly sound sleep.

Back on the road, we were feeling peckish and turned off at ***Babinda***, where the bakery yielded a ***hot chilli and beef pie*** for ***Yours Truly*** and an apple turnover. Then, under my understanding of the general game plan, I suggested we head across to ***The Boulders*** for another rest break.

Our first trip, back in ***2008*** when my father was still with us had taken us back to the Gold Coast rather than ***Cairns***, but we'd had two versions of this trip since then. The first time we'd done the ***Cairns*** to ***Bowen*** bit in a day, and there were issues with drivers threatening to nod off. Not good.

So last time we'd stopped at the Mulgrave rest area, ***Babinda***, ***The Boulders***, ***Innisfail*** and pulled up at ***Mission Beach*** around lunch time. Booking into a ***B&B***, a solid snooze in the afternoon and a good night's sleep after dinner had worked out pretty well that time, so the game plan here was somewhat similar.

We'd make multiple stops along this stretch of highway, stop for lunch at lunch in ***Bingil Bay*** and go as far as an overnight stop at ***Mission Beach***.



Or so we thought, but it was soon evident that plan was headed out the window since ***Someone*** didn't feel like stopping at ***Innisfail***, ***Mourilyan*** or ***Etty Bay***.

Or turning off towards ***Bingil Bay*** and ***Mission Beach***. We continued to ***Cardwell***, where rest was indicated, but it was hard to find a shady spot.

Maybe, if we'd found one and stuck around until we could think about checking into some form of accommodation, we might have had lunch and overnighted there.

But there was no shade, the sun was kicking the temperature into the thirties, sleep was out of the question, so on we went, over the range to ***Ingham***. I guess if we'd taken the time to look we might have found a shady spot in ***Ingham*** away from the main drag and the traffic noise.

But my ***Herbert River*** geography isn't that flash, so we kept going until the rest area at ***Francis Creek***, where we were pretty sure of shade, and the prospect of a decent break.

Whether or not you class half an hour as *a decent break* is, at this point academic. Half an hour there seemed like enough at the time and turned out to be enough to get us through another three and a half hours on the road. We took another short stop in ***Home Hill*** for a late lunch, but as far as the rest of the trip goes, that was that.

Back on the road after the bakery and ultra-flash new ***IGA*** in ***Home Hill*** and the regulation visit to the ***Comfort Stop*** sighting a familiar caravan from well before the shortcut that bypasses ***Ayr*** underlined the time save by turning off just before ***Brandon***.

Of course, they probably stopped somewhere on the way as well, but they probably only did it once.

So there we were, counting off the ten-kilometre blocks along a thoroughly familiar highway.

Lake Eyles a.k.a. ***The Frockingdam*** was totally empty, but there was not much else to remark on.

A cautious inquiry about dinner plans around ***Guthalungra*** revealed an inclination towards fish and chips. That suggestion wasn't going to prompt any argument from me.

We pulled into home around three-twenty to find absolutely no sign of two cats. That was hardly surprising given the likelihood that one of them had taken himself off into the stormwater drain, but the absence prompted a phone call to our friendly ***Neighbourhood Cat Feeder***.

That produced an answering machine rather than a human response, so the process of unloading the car and opening up the house continued apace.

So there we were, unpacking and getting things back up and running when the phone rang. It wasn't, as you might have expected, ***Cat Feeder*** answering the earlier call. That one came ten minutes later and brought an *I'll be right down*.

This one was ***Warbo***, who'd driven past on his way back from the boat, spotted the car was back and was making a polite inquiry about the trip.

And about a quarter of an hour later we were getting a cat report that indicated *I'll be right down*, which might have been cause for concern, was more about catching up on the news on other fronts.

Ninja reappeared just after five, but with no sign of the presumably drain-dwelling ***LikLik***, the notion of fish and chips looked to be headed for the back burner.

We obviously couldn't head out for takeaway until he was back, but the interval did provide the chance to introduce ourselves to the new neighbours.

But there was, I reckoned, a sure-fire way to lure the rover back. I announced that fish and chips was bound for the too hard basket, and was halfway through peeling two cloves of garlic to go into the old standby ***pasta con tonno*** when an *Oh there you are!* restored fish and chips to the agenda.

And it wasn't long after ***Hughesy*** bundled the wad of fish and chip paper into the wheelie bin that two travellers were nodding off, bringing ***Japan Trip #4*** to a conclusion.

AKITA SHINKANSEN

The Akita *Shinkansen* line serves the Kantō and Tōhoku regions, linking Tokyo and Ak
the capital of Akita prefecture with hourly services. Akita *Shinkansen Komachi* trains h
all-reserved seating and stop at Ueno, Omiya, Sendai, Morioka on the Tohoku *Shinkan*
line, travelling at speeds of up to 320 km/h.

Up to Morioka, trains come in two sections, an Aomori-bound *Hayate* and a 7-car *Ko*
which turns off the Tohoku line for the rest of the run to Akita. From Morioka to Ōmaga
uses the Tazawako Line, then the Ōu Main Line from Ōmagari to Akita. Since neither l
was engineered specifically for *Shinkansen* services, the maximum speed is significa
reduced (to 130 km/h). Stations on the latter section of the route are Shizukuishi, Taza
Kakunodate, Omagari, and Akita. Trains reverse direction at Omagari as they change
the Tazawako Line to the Ōu Line.

The trip from Tokyo takes four hours, costs about ¥17,000 and is fully covered by bot
Japan Rail Pass and JR East Pass. Since all seats require reservations there's chance
getting in the wrong half of the train in Tokyo.

Route details and maps: http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/routemaps/akitashinkansen.html

---

Related Glossary Terms

Chūō Shinkansen, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkansen**, **Kyushu Shinkans**
Nagano Shinkansen, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **Tōh**
Shinkansen, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

Index Find Term

ASHINOKO LAKE

The scenic Lake Ashi, often referred to as Hakone Lake but formally Ashinoko Lake, i
Hakone lies along the southwest wall of the caldera of Mount Hakone formed after the
volcano erupted 3000 years ago. The name means "lake of reeds."

A popular tourist destination, the lake is known for views of Mt. Fuji and pleasure boat
traverse the lake, providing views of the surrounding mountains and the floating torii o
Hakone Shrine. The Hakone Detached Palace Garden delivers the best panoramas a
the lake with Mount Fuji in the background but clouds and poor visibility often block th
view. Visibility tends to be better during the colder seasons in the early morning and la
evening.

But even if you can't catch a good view of Mount Fuji, the cruises on the lake link to th
Hakone Ropeway, which will take the visitor from Togendai on the northern end of the
across The Great Boiling Valley to Sounzan. The Hakone Tozan Cable Car funicular ra
in turn connects to the Hakone Tozan Line mountain railway which delivers you to Oda

Hakone Sightseeing Boats and Izuhakone Sightseeing Boats both operate cruises be
Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi at the lake's southern shores and Togendai and Koj
cruise from takes roughly 30 minutes and the Hakone Free Pass is only valid on the p
ship shaped Hakone Sightseeing Boats.

Related Glossary Terms

Hakone, **Mount Fuji**

CHŪŌ *SHINKANSEN*

Construction work on the *maglev* Chūō *Shinkansen* was due to commence in autumn 2014, with 86% of the initial 286 km route running through (as in under) the Japanese Alps from Tokyo's Shinagawa Station to Nagoya. The line will extend the existing Yamanashi research track and should connect the two cities in less than half the time taken by services on the Tokaido line, with trains running at speeds of up to 505 km/h.

That section is slated to open in 2027 with the next section to Osaka completed by 2045. The journey to ShinOsaka should take sixty-seven minutes (currently a minimum of two hours and nineteen minutes). The project is expected to cost ¥9 trillion, but the economic impact of reduced travel time between Tokyo and Osaka has been estimated at between ¥5 and ¥17 trillion over the line's first fifty years of operation.

The project is as an alternative to the Tokaido *Shinkansen*, where tight schedules leave little room to add extra services, and there's a need for cover if that line is blocked by a natural disaster. With the underground sections passing through soft bedrock earthquakes are an issue, but JR Tokai claims tremors will not affect levitating trains and shocks are supposedly less severe when you're underground. Plans include forty-seven emergency exits from the tunnels, spaced about 5 kilometres apart in urban areas, with high-strength concrete and bolts attached to bedrock bolstering resistance to tremors. Still, the Chuo *Shinkansen* will run across several active fault lines.

There are other concerns. Excavations will produce over 62 million cubic metres of material that will need to be disposed of, environmental geologists suggest tunnelling will affect the above-ground environment and maglev technology requires much more electric power (35,000 kilowatts compared to 10,000 kilowatts for a single run on the Tokaido *Shinkansen*). Concerns with possible noise pollution will see above-ground sections of the line covered by concrete hoods, but JR Tokai will consider allowing open views of Mount Fuji and the Southern Japan Alps from the scenic Kofu basin in Yamanashi Prefecture.

The initial 18.4 kilometre test track between Ōtsuki and Tsuru in Yamanashi Prefecture was extended by 25 kilometres in June 2013. JR Tokai is considering opening services from a station in Kōfu on a 6 kilometre extension of the existing track to carry tourists visiting Japan for the 2020 Olympics to experience the train ride through the Yamanashi mountains.

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkansen**, **Kyushu Shinkansen**, **Maglev Trains**, **Nagano Shinkansen**, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **Tōhoku Shinkansen**, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

EKI-BENTŌ

Google *eki-bentō* (as I did, looking for material for this note) and you'll find any number of links to commercial operations, restaurants and the like. That's because *eki-bentō* represents a subset of a much larger entity (*bentō*, the single portion meal, usually rice, fish or meat with pickled or cooked vegetables in a box-shaped container) sold at railway stations (*eki*) or on trains. If you're at an airport and want something to sustain you on the flight it will be *sora-bentō*, and you'll have the same problem with Google.

Produced in a number of styles and packaged in a variety of containers from mass-produced disposable packages to hand-crafted lacquerware. *Bentō* boxes are, essentially, convenience food. The word originates from a Chinese Southern Song Dynasty (twelfth and thirteenth century) slang term that translates as *convenient*. The earliest forms of *bentō* can be traced back to the late Kamakura Period, when cooked rice was dried (*hoshi-ii* or *dried meal*) eaten in that form or reconstituted by boiling in water.

Wooden boxes with the contents eaten at a tea party date back to the sixteenth century Azuchi-Momoyama Period. Edo Period travellers and sightseers often carried a *koshibentō* of *onigiri* rice balls wrapped in bamboo leaves or stored in a bamboo box. Theatre-goers consumed makuno-uchi bentō between acts of *Noh* and *Kabuki* performances and similar packages were prepared for *Hanami* (cherry blossom viewing) or special occasions such as *Hinamatsuri* (Doll's Day or Girls' Day).

Eki-bentō date back to the In the Meiji Period, with the earliest version (two *onigiri* and a serving of daikon wrapped in bamboo leaves) possibly sold at Utsunomiya station on 16 July 1885. Schools did not supply lunch teachers and students took *bentō* to school, a practice that lasted until schools started providing lunches after World War Two. Aluminium *bentō* boxes became popular during the Taishō period since they were easy to clean and looked classy.

Contemporary *bentō* may take the form of a home-prepared lunch box, but the term usually refers to commercially prepared boxes sold in convenience stores, specialised takeaway outlets such as the Hokka Hokka Tei and Hotto Motto franchise chains, railway stations, and even department stores. Varieties of bentō include:

- *Chūka bentō* (Chinese appetisers or snacks);
- *Hayaben* (*early bentō*), eaten before lunch with another lunch afterwards;
- *Hinomaru bentō*, plain white rice with *umeboshi* (*Japanese salt plums*, pickled *ume* fruit) in the centre in an arrangement that resembles the *Hinomaru* or Japanese flag;
- *Hokaben*, freshly cooked hot rice served with freshly prepared side dishes sold at takeaway *bentō* shops;
- *Kamameshi bentō* sold at stations in Nagano prefecture, cooked and served in a clay pot with the pot as a souvenir;
- *Kyaraben* (*character bentō*) decorated to look like characters from *anime*, *manga*, or video games;
- *Makunouchi bentō* with rice, pickled fruit, broiled salmon etc;
- *Noriben*, with *nori* (seaweed) dipped in soy sauce with cooked rice;
- *Oekakiben* arranged to look like people, animals, buildings, flowers and plants;
- *Saké bentō* (broiled salmon);
- *Shidashi bentō* prepared in a restaurant and served at funerals or social gatherings;
- *Shōkadō bentō* in a traditional black-lacquered box, the inspiration for IBM's ThinkPad;
- *Tori bentō* (cooked chicken with rice).

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

GEISHA

When I sighted a distinctively clothed woman in Kyoto's Gion district and placed a mental tick in the box beside *geisha*, I was immediately wrong on at least two fronts. First, I was in Kyoto, where they're *geiko* in Kansai dialect. Second, the white make-up, elaborate *kimono* and hairdo that form the popular image of *geisha*, usually signifies a *maiko*, or apprentice (alternatively *hangyoku*, or *half-jewel* since they are paid at half the rate of a full *geisha*). Fully fledged geisha only wear the characteristic makeup for special performances.

Regardless of the label we are talking about traditional entertainers who act as hostesses. during meals, banquets and special occasions The word *geisha* is drawn from two *kanji*, *gei* (art) and *sha* (person or doer) so an accurate translation would be *performing artist*, one whose skills covered a range of traditional Japanese arts including music, dance and games, trained to make guests feel at ease with interesting conversation, drinking games and artistic performances.

The *maiko* apprenticeship does not appear to be strictly necessary, since women over the age of twenty-one are deemed too old to go through it, but it seems a year's training (formal or informal) is the minimum needed before a *maiko* or *geisha* can make their debut in the community. Completing the apprenticeship, however, is said to yield greater prestige later a *geisha*'s career.

While modern labour laws prohibit girls from beginning an apprenticeship until they are eighteen (though fifteen-year-old girls can become full-time *maiko* in Kyoto) the training process used to start much earlier, progressing through stages as *shikomi* (servant) and *minarai* (watching apprentice) as they developed communication and hospitality skills and techniques.

Elements that combined to develop the *geisha* culture started to coalesce after the imperial court moved to Kyoto in 794. By 1617, there were designated walled-in pleasure quarters (*yūkaku*) that offered sex, along with accomplished performers who entertained customers with dancing, singing, music, poetry and calligraphy.

The early *geisha* who appeared around the eighteenth century were men who entertained customers while they waited to see the courtesans (*oiran*). The female equivalent of the original *geisha* were teenage *Ōdōri ko* (dancing girls) in unlicensed districts that sprang up all over Japan, unrestricted by the strict etiquette associated with the pleasure quarters. Many such areas developed close to shrines and temples, and offered refreshments and entertainment to pilgrims. As teahouses became regulated, the services they were allowed to offer were defined and became ritualised.

The first known female *geisha* was a singer from Fukagawa, who appeared around 1750, the first of a number of women who worked as entertainers rather than prostitutes, often alongside male *geisha*. They were forbidden from sexual activity ith the customers, which would have encroached on the business of the *oiran*. As the courtesans dealt with sexual matters, *geisha* created their own niche as artists and cultured female companions.

The distinction blurred after World War Two, when prostitutes began dressing in *kimono* and imitating the *geisha*'s appearance to attract customers from American servicemen, referring to themselves as *geisha girls*. Since their clients could not tell the difference between the legitimate *geisha* and the fancy dress imitations, *geisha girl* became a general term for prostitutes, bar hostesses and streetwalkers.

Today, *geisha* still live in *geisha* houses (*okiya*) in "flower towns" (*hanamachi*), during their apprenticeship, though successful *geisha* may choose to live independently. They are hired to attend parties and gatherings in *ochaya* (tea houses) or traditional Japanese restaurants (*ryōtei*), with the venue providing the *tatami* room where the entertainment takes place. Food and performers are ordered in. Traditionally, *ochaya* were exclusive venues that did not bill guests at the end of the night, but ran a tab that covered all costs (down to taxi rides) and billed the client's bank account every month.

Changing times have modified the standard practice. Tourists and other interested parties can now, apparently, book *geiko* dinners through travel agencies and hotels. The customer can expect (again, apparently) around ¥50,000 for each *maiko* or *geiko* and somewhere between ¥10,000 and ¥30,000 per head for the meal. Since the entertainers probably won't speak English or any other foreign language, interpreters are an additional expense. The highlight of the evening will be a seasonal dance, accompanied by a *shamisen* played by second *geiko*, so the bill will probably start around the ¥100,000 mark.

Related Glossary Terms

Hanamachi, **Shamisen**

Index Find Term

GERO

The *onsen* town of Gero on the banks of the Hida River in Gifu Prefecture is the centre of a larger entity, the city of Gero, established in 2004 by merging of the former town of Gero with the towns of Hagiwara, Kanayama and Osaka, and the village of Maze, all of them from Mashita District. As a result, the city has eight railway stations (Hida-Kanayama, Yakeishi, Gero, Zenshōji, Hida-Hagiwara, Jōro, Hida-Miyada and Hida-Osaka) along a stretch of JR Central's Takayama Main Line.

Located between Nagoya and Takayama, Gero is about forty-five minutes by limited express or an hour on a local service from Takayama, which makes it a possible alternative during the Takayama Festival, when accommodation is at a premium in Takayama. From Nagoya, it's about 90 minutes on the JR Wide View Hida limited express. Those trips are fully covered by the Japan Rail Pass.

One of Japan's Three Famous Springs (along with Kusatsu in Gunma Prefecture and Hyogo Prefecture's Arima) as listed by Confucian poet Hayashi Razan, not to be confused with the Three Great Springs or Three Old Springs (see http://wikitravel.org/en/Japan's_Top_3) the town has been drawing in visitors since the Engi Era (901-923) and while tourism is the city's major industry, attracting more than a million Japanese visitors every year, forestry and agriculture play significant roles in the local economy.

Predictably, there are many hotels and *ryokan*, most of them on the northern side of the river (the train station lies to the south of it) and most including their own bathing facilities, and there are a number of inexpensive, convenient *onsen* near railway stations, residential areas, and shopping centres along the valley, as well as three public bath houses in the town itself. The southern end of the Gero Bridge has a large (free) *rotenburo* (open-air bath) if you don't mind bathing in full view of people crossing the bridge.

Visitors can sample three baths of any of about thirty participating ryokan by purchasing a *Yumeguri Tegata* spa pass, a wooden amulet sold all over Gero at the tourist information office, ryokan, souvenir shops and convenience stores which is valid for six months.

There are also numerous free foot baths, which may offer welcome relief after a hard day's walk. The mountainous backdrop attracts sightseers in both *sakura* and coloured leaves seasons, and the hillside Onsenji Temple for a view across the city and Hida River.

Another attraction is Gassho Village Open Air Museum, located just above town with steep roofed houses *gasshozukuri* farmhouses, traditional folk art and a museum of *komainu* (guard dog statues used at shrines).

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

GIFU

Located on the northern edge of the Nōbi Plain in southern Gifu Prefecture. Gifu prospered as a castle town during the Kamakura Period and serves as the prefectural capital. The Nagara River runs through the city from the northeast to the southwest and much of the city lies on the river's flood plain and is consequently susceptible to flooding when typhoons or heavy thunderstorms affect the area. Dykes and levees help control the excess water. The rich soil of the river valley is prime farmland

The city played an important role in Japan's history because of its location in the centre of the country. *Control Gifu and you control Japan* was the catchphrase during the Sengoku period, when various warlords attempted to unite and control Japan.

The region had been under the control of the Toki clan until 1542, when Saitō Dōsan took control of Mino Province and built the first incarnation of Gifu Castle atop Mount Kinka. Dōsan's daughter Nōhime married Oda Nobunaga, who unified half of Japan under his rule. After consulting with a Buddhist priest, Nobunaga renamed the castle, the surrounding Mino Province and the mountain in 1567.

Gifu continued to flourish as a post station along the *Nakasendō* highway connecting the capital at with Kyoto via central Honshū (modern-day Saitama, Gunma, Nagano, Gifu and Shiga prefectures). The local economy also benefited from its location at the centre of Nobunaga's sphere of influence.

Gifu was officially established as a city on 1 July 1889, a small city that grew as Japan industrialised despite earthquake damage (the Mino-Owari earthquake on 28 October 1891). The city's first industry was textiles, and it rivalled Tokyo and Osaka as a leading fashion centre.

During Japan's military buildup in the 1930s, the city became an industrial centre, aided by nearby Kakamigahara's status as the country's aeronautical centre. During World War Two, Gifu was the home of paper-based fire balloons that were supposed to use the jet stream to traverse the Pacific Ocean and bring terror to the continental United States. The city's status as an industrial centre made it a firebombing target, culminating in the Gifu Air Raid of 9 July 9, 1945.

Gifu remained prosperous in the post-war years. While the fashion industry declined, the city's industrial facilities support automotive plants and heavy industry in Aichi Prefecture. A construction boom has improved the economy and the city serves as a satellite of Nagoya.

JR Central's Tōkaidō Main Line connects Gifu with Tokyo (around two and a half hours) and Nagoya (twenty-five minutes). The city is just over an hour from Kyoto and Osaka. Limited Express trains on the JR Takayama Line run from Gifu to Gero and Takayama. There are also JR connections via Maibara to Kanazawa and Toyama and a rail link to Chūbu Centrair International Airport. An alternative link to Nagoya is the private Meitetsu Railway, which also services Kakamigahara and Takehana from Meitetsu Gifu Station.

In addition to modern industries, the city also has a range of traditional products, including fans, lanterns and umbrellas, *Mino washi* paper and foods created from the *ayu* sweetfish (river trout), which have been caught using cormorants for more than 1,300 years.

Cormorant fishing is a tourist attraction, with visitors watching six fishing masters from boats or the banks of the river most nights until nine o'clock between 11 May and 15 October each year. Visitors who have watched the spectacle include haiku poet Matsuo Bashō and Charlie Chaplin.

The Nagara River is the venue for two firework festivals, sponsored by rival newspapers, which attract large crowds to the river's banks. The ***Chunichi Shimbun*** Nagara River All-Japan Fireworks Festival is held on the last Saturday of July, with the ***Gifu Shinbun*** Nagara River National Fireworks Display a week later. Approximately 30,000 fireworks are set off at each event.

Mt. Kinka, the 329-metre peak next to Gifu Park, provides a backdrop to the fireworks. The summit, accessible via a ropeway or hiking trails, delivers a 360-degree panoramic view across the Nagara River and the city below and is home to Gifu Castle, a castle museum, and a squirrel park.

Oda Nobunaga used the castle as his headquarters when unifying Japan, but the castle was destroyed in 1601, after the Battle of Sekigahara. The current castle only dates back to 1956. At the foot of Mt. Kinka, Gifu Park, contains a three-storied pagoda, the Gifu City Museum of History, the Kato Eizo-Toichi Memorial Art Museum, the Nawa Insect Museum, and the boarding area for Kinka-zan Ropeway.

Gifu City Museum of History, predictably, focuses on Gifu's past, with a model of the castle town as it was in the Warring States Period and a recreation of the *Rakuichi-ba* Free Market established by Oda Nobunaga to promote the town's economy by drawing in merchants. Associated with the history museum, the Eizō & Tōichi Katō Memorial Art Museum, founded in 1991, is dedicated to works by Eizō and Tōichi Katō, well-known Japanese artists who were both born in Gifu. The Yanaizu Folklore Museum in the Yanaizu-chō area of the city is the other branch of the Museum of History. The Nawa Insect Museum, founded in 1919 by Yasushi Nawa, Japan's *Insect Man*, provides a closeup look at rare and attractive species from around the world. Other museums include a Science Museum, with a planetarium and rooftop observatory, the Museum of Fine Arts, devoted to local art and artists although it does contain pieces from around the world and the Sanko Art Museum houses tea utensils and paintings by Renoir, Chagall, and Ryuzaburo Umehara.

Gifu is also home to a number of other festivals through the year:

• The Dōsan Festival and Gifu Festival on the first weekend in April, both of which include street vendors, flea markets, and floats paraded through the city.

• Gifu Nobunaga Festival on the first weekend in October with a procession of horses and warriors through the city's main streets.

• Tejikara Fire Festival on the second Saturday in April at Tejikarao Shrine and the second Sunday in August at Nagara River Park. Portable shrines are carried aloft amidst a rain of falling sparks.

• Near the end of August Takigi Noh, a traditional form of Japanese theatre takes place on the banks of the Nagara River, lit by bonfires and the fires aboard cormorant boats.

Other attractions include:

• Bairin Park, with over fifty types of plum trees which form a popular springtime attraction.

• *Onsen* and *ryokan* inns located along the Nagara River. Springs with a high iron content are thought to be beneficial for a variety of ailments.

• Mount Dodo, north of the Nagara River, is the tallest mountain in the city, with numerous hiking trails. At the mountain's southern base, Matsuo Pond is a popular autumn coloured leaves attraction.

• The ruins of Kanō Castle, built after the Battle of Sekigahara, and designated a National Historic Site.

• The ruins of Kawate Castle, used as a meeting place for the cultural and social elite from Kyoto during the Muromachi period.

• Inaba Shrine, Kogane Shrine, and Kashimori Shrine, considered to be a family since the god at the first is married to the goddess at the second, and they're the parents of the deity at the third.

• Kanō Tenman-gū shrine, built to protect Izumii Castle (predecessor to Kanō Castle).

• Tejikarao Shrine in the east of the city, dating back to 860.

• Buddhist temples include Jōzai-ji, Zuiryō-ji, Jōdo-ji and Shōhō-ji, home to the Gifu Great Buddha, the first and largest basketwork-style dry-lacquered Buddha in Japan, and one of the three largest Great Buddha images in Japan.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

GINKAKU-JI

Officially *Jishō-ji* (Temple of Shining Mercy), *Ginkaku-ji* (Temple of the Silver Pavilion) is an elegant Zen temple associated with the *Shokoku-ji* branch of the Rinzai sect. Located in the foothills of Kyoto's eastern mountains, the temple is an outstanding example of Japanese landscape architecture.

Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1435–1490), the eighth Muromachi *shōgun*, built his retirement villa on the site of an abandoned monastery in the grounds of today's temple. He modelled it on *Kinkaku-ji* (Temple of the Golden Pavilion), his grandfather's retirement villa at the base of Kyoto's northern mountains. The villa was converted into a Zen temple in accordance with his will and named *Jishō-ji*, taken from his Buddhist name, Jishōin, after Yoshimasa's death.

Plans for the villa date back as far as 1460, and the intention to built it was announced in 1465, when orders went out to find materials of the highest quality for his new home. Shortly afterwards the Onin war (1467-77) reduced much of Kyoto to ashes. Yoshimi's home went up in flames as well, and when the war was over he set about building a new residence on the site. He moved there formally when construction was completed in 1483 and the villa served as his home from 1484 until his death on 27 January 1490. He had become a Zen Buddhist monk in 1485.

Ginkakuji is famous for the main building on the site, the two-storey Kannon Hall (*Kannon-dono*), the Silver Pavilion, which is said to take its name from Yoshimasa's plan to cover the pavilion with silver leaf in imitation of *Kinkaku-ji*, although no silver was applied, possibly due to financial considerations or the increasing severity of the Onin War.

Alternatively, the nickname may have evolved as a reference to the silvery appearance of moonlight on the black lacquer which made up the building's exterior.

The building’s lower storey contains the room where Yoshimasa practised meditation while the upper storey holds a gilt statue of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy,. The interior of the building is not open to the public.

The nearby *Tōkudō* (Buddha Hall) served as Yoshimasa’s home and private chapel.

Yoshimasa spent much of his retirement pursuing the arts, including the tea ceremony and the northeast corner of the building has a tearoom, reputedly the oldest in Japan and the prototype on which future tea ceremony rooms were based. It overlooks a moss garden that was originally modelled on *Saihō-ji* temple built by Muso Soseki (1275-1351) in Kyōto's Nishikyō Ward. The garden was redesigned during the Kan'ei Period (1624-1644).

According to temple records, *Ginkaku-ji* originally consisted of twelve buildings, but only two, the Kannon Hall and the *Tōkudō* survived a disastrous fire in the Tembun Period (1532-1555). By the start of the Meiji Period (1600-1868), the temple had fallen into disrepair but was restored with municipal support assisted by private donations.

Today, *Ginkakuji* consists of the Silver Pavilion and half a dozen other temple buildings. Walking a circular route around the grounds takes the visitor past the meticulously maintained Sea of Silver Sand and the massive sand cone said to symbolise Mount Fuji.

Beside the sand garden the *Hondo* (main hall) displays paintings on its *fusuma* sliding doors but is off-limits to visitors. After passing by the *Tōkudō,* the path takes visitors through Ginkakuji's moss garden and then climbs the hill behind the buildings which delivers views of the temple grounds and the city beyond.

Related Glossary Terms

Philosopher's Path

Index Find Term

HAKONE

Located less than a hundred kilometres from Tokyo in the mountainous southwestern part of Kanagawa Prefecture, Hakone is part of the volcanically active Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, centred around Lake Ashinoko. Noted for hot springs, natural beauty and views of nearby Mount Fuji, Hakone is a popular destination for Japanese and international tourists.

During the Edo Period, *Hakone-juku* was important checkpoint to control traffic along the Tōkaidō highway between Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto. The checkpoint formed the border of the Kantō region.

Travellers on the Tōkaidō had their travel permits and baggage examined under laws that restricted the travel of women and weapons. A short, cedar lined section of the highway and a reconstructed Hakone Checkpoint with gates, housing for officers and soldiers, a prison chamber and a lookout tower are located between Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi on the southern shore of Lake Ashinoko. The nearby Hakone Sekisho Shiryokan museum has related exhibits.

Some of the original highway between Moto-Hakone and Hakone-Yumoto. remains today, with the best preserved section running from Moto-Hakone to Hatajuku via the Amazake Chaya, a tea house serving *amazake* (hot, sweet rice wine) and Japanese snacks. It's a bit under a two hour walk, just under half way to Hakone-Yumoto, but from there the modern road runs over the old highway and there's no footpath for pedestrians.

There are half-hourly buses along the route, so it seems you can still walk the good bit of the ancient highway and use the bus to get you the rest of the way.

The traveller's most likely way into Hakone is through Odawara, and Hakone-Yumoto.

Personal experience (weather conditions permitting) suggests an anticlockwise progress through the area. Odawara, on the main Tōkaidō *shinkansen* line, is an obvious starting point, though the private Odakyu railway offers services from Tokyo's Shinjuku station all the way to Hakone-Yumoto, including the Romancecar limited express.

From Odawara, the Hakone Tozan Line runs along the Hayakawa River valley on the way to Gora, with switchbacks as it makes its way up the steepest gradient on a Japanese railway line. From Gora, the Hakone Tozan Cable Car goes up the mountainside to Sounzan, at one end of the Hakone Ropeway, which carries visitors on a thirty minute two leg journey to Tōgendai, on the shore of Lake Ashinoko.

With ropeway cars departing at one-minute intervals, given the right weather conditions, visitors can enjoy views of Mount Fuji as they cross the Ōwakudani geysers in the Great Boiling Valley.

A stop at Ōwakudani provides a chance to try the black eggs, boiled on site, with the shells turned a mottled black by to a chemical reaction with the sulphurous water. According to legend, each one you eat will add seven years to your life..

From Tōgendai sightseeing cruises cross Lake Ashinoko (the crater of the Hakone Volcano) in highly decorated Disneyland-style pirate ships pass the lakeside Hakone Jinja Shrine, with *torii* gates in the water, *en route* to Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi. A clear day will deliver views of Mount Fuji but they're not guaranteed.

From there, a Hakone Tozan bus can deliver you back to Hakone-Yumoto or Odawara.
Other attractions in the area include:

- Hakone Detached Palace, a summer palace for the Imperial Family, on the southern shores of Lake Ashinoko between Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi. surrounded by a park with walking trails and views across Lake Ashinoko towards Mount Fuji.

- Hakone Botanical Garden of Wetlands in the highlands of Fuji Hakone Izu National Park with over 1700 varieties of marsh and alpine plants native to Japan and boardwalks through different types of marshland. The gardens are accessible by bus from Gora, the terminus of the Hakone Tozan Railway.

- Hakone Open-Air Museum with a variety of sculptures and artwork in a parkland setting and a substantial collection of paintings, prints, sculptures and ceramics by Picasso

- Pola Museum of Art with paintings, sculptures, ceramics and glassware by Japanese and European artists and rotating displays from the permanent collection which includes works by Cezanne, Monet, Picasso and Renoir.

- Hakone Museum of Art in Gora with displays of Japanese ceramics from prehistoric times through the Edo Period, a moss garden and the Sekirakuen landscape garden (only open on weekends, national holidays and through November).

- Hakone Komagatake Ropeway from Hakone-en on Lake Ashinoko to the summit of Mount Komagatake, where a mountaintop shrine (Mototsumiya) is an attraction. The ropeway's main claim to fame are the views it offers towards Mount Fuji and back towards the coast.

The area's main claim to fame, however (apart from the Fuji-viewing side of things) lies in the numerous *onsen ryokan*, traditional Japanese inns with hot spring baths. Facilities vary, prices are relatively high due to proximity to Tokyo, and if your accommodation doesn't have its own onsen, something nearby can be arranged. T

here's even a hot spring theme park (Hakone Kowakien Yunessun) at Hakone-machi, a Mediterranean-style public bath divided into two sections (with or without a bathing suit) with unique baths including a coffee bath, a wine bath and a cypress bath.

Getting around is made easier through the Hakone Free Pass, which delivers unlimited use of most forms of transport for two or three days as well as discounts at many hot springs, museums, restaurants, and other locations.

The Free Pass can be bought at a number of outlets, including Tokyo's Shinjuku Station, the stations at Odawara, Hakone-Yumoto, Gora, Sounzan and Togendai Station, and the ports at Moto-Hakone Port and Hakone-Machi. Japan Rail Pass holders are best off traveling to Odawara on a JR service and picking up the Free Pass there.

Related Glossary Terms

Ashinoko Lake, **Mount Fuji**, **Odawara**

Index Find Term

HAMANA LAKE

With an area of 65.0 km^2 and a circumference is 114 km, Lake Hamana, near the southwestern end of Shizuoka Prefecture is Japan's tenth largest lake. It was a fresh-water lake until an earthquake in 1498 cut the sandbank that had closed it off from the Sea of Enshu.

A 16th century tsunami opened the mouth of the lake further, and the result is a salt lake with an intricate shoreline that is a significant source of cultivated eels, oysters, nori and soft-shelled turtles along with wild caught sea bass, whiting, blowfish (*fugu*), pike, conger and flounder. The region is also known for strawberries and mikan oranges.

The lake has been developed as a resort area, with the major drawcards concentrated around Kanzanji-onsen Hot Spring, a relatively new hot spring resort on the northeast of the lake with more than a dozen hotels and *ryokans*. Most of the baths are found in hotels, and many are accessible to day trippers for a small fee. Kanzanji also attracts wind surfers, sea kayakers and parasailers in summer.

Since the Tokaido *Shinkansen* crosses the southern end of the lake, it is easily accessed from Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka, but the fastest *Nozomi* do not stop in Hamamatsu. Using the next fastest option (*Hikari*) it is around an hour and a half from Tokyo, slightly less from Osaka and roughly half an hour from Nagoya. From Hamamatsu it's a 40 minute bus ride to Kanzanji Onsen (frequent departures at least twice per hour) but the bus trip is not covered by the Japan Rail Pass.

Nearby attractions include:

• Kanzanji temple, believed to have been founded in 810 by the famous monk Kobo Daishi (Kukai). The grounds extend over the forested peninsula with walking tracks through the forest, a large statue of the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy and views across the water.

• Hamamatsu Flower Park, with some 100,000 plants covering 3,000 different species. There is a western garden with a fountain, a rose garden, lawns, a western garden with glass houses, Balinese and Mexican gardens, as well as a Japanese garden with pine forest and a stream.

• Hamamatsu City Zoo, with over 450 animals including gorillas, orangutan and other monkeys in one of the largest collections of primates in Japan.

• Hamanako Pal Pal Amusement Park with a Ferris wheel, roller coasters, merry go rounds and water slides and merry-go-rounds.

• Kanzanji Ropeway, connecting Hamanako Pal Pal with the summit of Mt. Okusa-yama, which offers a free observatiory and Hamanako Music Box Museum.

• Sightseeing boats offer thirty minute or one hour cruises out of Kanzanji's inlet. Boats can be boarded at Kanzanji Temple or the entrance to Hamamatsu Flower Park.

• Bentenjima island, where the sea meets the lake, was originally a small peninsula of the lakeside, and was formed by cutting off by the earthquake in 1498. It is a popular spot for fishing, digging clams and water sports.

• Former Arai Checkpoint on the Tokaido route between Tokyo and Kyoto, located on the southwest side of the lake 700 metres west of JR Araimachi station. The buildings were rebuilt in 1855, making it the only remaining Edo Period checkpoint. The historic Kinokuniya Inn is close by.

On weekends, a free tourist bus (the Flower Go) connects Kanzanji Temple, Hanasaki no Yu public baths, Pal Pal Amusement Park, Hamamatsu Flower Park and Okusa-yama's upper ropeway station, running hourly. It operates every day during peak tourist season.

Attractions slightly further afield include:

• Maisaka Shukuwaki-honjin, an inn for *samurai* and commoners, the only such inn left on the Tokaido.

• The Nakamura Residence, a preserved samurai house north of Bentenjima over the Ufumi Bridge.

• Makayaji Temple, dating back to the Kamakura Period with Heian-style garden and historic wooden statues, short walk or shorter taxi ride from Mikkabi Station on the private Tenryu Hamanako Line, which runs from along the north coast of the lake between Kakegawa and Shinjohara.

• The Sakichi Toyoda Memorial House, the birthplace of the founder of the Toyota company with a museum that includes Toyoda's shed, where he worked on his inventions.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

HANAMACHI

Hanamachi or *flower towns* are the *geisha* quarters of Japanese cities, containing *okiya* (*geisha* houses), *ochaya* (teahouses where *geisha* entertain customers) and a *kaburenjō* (meeting place, including a theatre, rooms where classes can be held, and offices that deal with payments and regulations).

Hanamachi are separate from and not to be confused with courtesan districts (*yūkaku*, pleasure quarter or red-light district) where prostitution was the name of the game. There were originally three such districts, established in the 17th century: Shimabara in Kyōto (1640), Shinmachi in Ōsaka (1624–1644) and Yoshiwara in Edo (modern day Tokyo, 1617). While the *geisha* culture, which emerged in the mid-18th century, may have started there, the practitioners weremoved into separate areas.

Kyoto has five *hanamachi*, referred to as *kagai* or *gokagai* in the local dialect, mostof them clustered around central Kyoto (Gion Kōbu and Gion Higashi, Miyagawachō and Pontochō) with Kamishichiken, separated from the others, near Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in the northwest of the city. Shimabara, the courtesans' district in the west of the city, dating back to before the *geisha* culture emerged, is now defunct but remains as a tourist attraction.

Of the five districts, Gion Kōbu, Pontochō and Kamishichiken have the highest status and are subsequently the most expensive, attracting powerful businessmen and high-ranking politicians (Gion Kōbu seems to have the very highest ranking).

Kyoto *hanamachi* stage annual public dances (*Ōdōri*) by *maiko* and *geiko* over several weeks, usually in the spring. Tickets are relatively inexpensive (¥1500 to ¥4500) with a number of performances. *Miyako Ōdōri ,* in Gion Kōbu, runs through April and has the greatest number of performances. *Kitano Ōdōri* in Kamishichiken covers the last week of March and first week of April, *Kyō Ōdōri* in Miyagawachō runs through the first half of April with *Kamogawa Ōdōri* in Pontochō running through most of May. *Gion Ōdōri* in Gion Higashi is much later in the year, in early November.

The five districts combine for special performances on a weekend in late June at a larger venue, and tickets for these are significantly more expensive.

Tokyo *hanamachi* include Shinbashi, Akasaka, Asakusa (the city's oldest *geisha* district), Yoshichō, Kagurazaka, Mukojima and Hachiōji, with the latter about 40 kilometres west of central Tokyo.

There are three *hanamachi* in Osaka, Kita Shinchi, within walking distance of Osaka Station, and famous for nightclubs, bars and late night restaurants, Minami Shinchi (only one teahouse) and Shinmachi, the city's first licenced pleasure quarter.

Kanazawa, second only to Kyoto as far as active *geisha* are concerned, has three well preserved *hanamachi*, Higashi Chaya (Eastern Teahouse), Nishi Chaya (Western Teahouse) and Kazuemachi. Higashi Chaya is the largest and best known, with many houses used for high-class entertainment and others converted into speciality shops and cafes. Shima and Kaikaro Teahouses are open to the public. Nishi Chaya is smaller, effectively a single street, and Kazuemachi is smaller again.

Related Glossary Terms

Geisha

Index Find Term

HIMEJI

With a population over half a million, Himeji is the second largest city in Hyogo
and was reportedly considered as the site of a relocated national capital after t
Great Kantō earthquake struck the region around Tokyo.

If that notion sounds far-fetched, you can probably ascribe it to the city's centre
widely considered Japan's most beautiful surviving feudal castle.

Designated both a national treasure and a UNESCO world heritage site, Himeji
remained intact for over 400 years, miraculously surviving a bombing raid that
sixty per cent of the city on 3 July 1945. Travellers on the Sanyo Shinkansen fro
Okayama and Hiroshima can catch a decent view of the castle since Himeji sta
raised.

Other attractions in the city include Engyō-ji temple, Mount Seppiko, Tegarayan
Garden in Tegarayama Central Park and Kokoen Garden.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

HOKURIKU *SHINKANSEN*

With the first 228km section scheduled to open in March 2015, the Hokuriku *Shinkansen* is an extension of the Nagano *Shinkansen*, opened on 1 October 1997 in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics, branching off the Jōetsu and Tōhoku lines at Takasaki. The first extension from Nagano to Kanazawa will be followed by a second extension to Fukui and Tsuruga. Work on that section started in 2012 and should be completed by 2025.

The section between Nagano and Kanazawa will include stops at Iiyama, Jōetsu-Myōkō, Itoigawa, Kurobe-Unazukionsen, Toyama and ShinTakaoka while the second extension will add Komatsu, Kagaonsen, Awaraonsen, Fukui, Nan'etsu and Tsuruga to the *Shinkansen* network.

A further extension looping back to Osaka is planned, but the route is yet to be decided. There are three possibilities, linking to the Tokaido *Shinkansen* at Maibara, Kyoto, or Shin-Osaka, and they're worth a look because they provide insight into issues surrounding the routing of *Shinkansen* lines.

The Maibara route, with a standard *Shinkansen* track to Maibara is the shortest, with good access to Kyoto and Nagoya but mean a longer travel time to Shin-Osaka along existing, Tōkaidō Shinkansen tracks that are already running at close to maximum capacity. That may become less of an issue when the Chuo *Shinkansen* opens as far as Osaka in 2045.

The Kyoto option would upgrade the Kosei Line to Kyoto, by regauging the line to support *Mini-Shinkansen*, or using Gauge Change Trains. With no new construction to *Shinkansen* standards that would be the cheapest option, but would limit train speeds to a maximum of 160 km/h so the trip would be slower.

The Wakasa route would involve building a *Shinkansen* track along the shortest route to Osaka, but would bypass Kyoto. With all-new construction it would be the most expensive.

The Hokuriku line will offer four levels of service: *Kagayaki* (Tokyo - Kanazawa, limited stops), *Hakutaka* (Tokyo - Kanazawa, all stations) a shuttle between Toyama and Kanazawa (*Tsurugi*) and a continuation of *Asama* services from Tokyo on the Nagano Shinkansen line.

When the first part of the new line opens, travel time between Tokyo and Kanazawa will be cut from 3 hours 47 minutes on the existing route (take the Joetsu *Shinkansen* to Echigo-Yuzawa and switch to a narrow gauge train with a maximum speed of 160km/h) to 2 hours 30 minutes.

JŌETSU *SHINKANSEN*

Built to connect Tokyo and Niigata and to *promote regional development* the Jōets
Shinkansen seems to have been the brainchild of Niigata-born Prime Minister Tana
allegedly drew his proposed route on a map in red pencil. Tanaka's preferred optic
the way into Tokyo, terminating at Shinjuku, but economic forced the railway author
a line branching off the existing Tōhoku Shinkansen at Ōmiya. Services began in N
1982.

JR East operates two categories of train on the line: the faster *Toki* and double-dec
Toki services run between Tokyo and Niigata while the slower all-station *Tanigawa* a
double-decker *Max Tanigawa* only travel as far Echigo-Yuzawa, with a winter only b
line to the nearby ski resort of Gala-Yuzawa.

From Tokyo, the services call at Ueno, Ōmiya, Kumagaya, Honjō-Waseda, Takasaki
Kōgen, Echigo-Yuzawa, Urasa, Nagaoka, Tsubame-Sanjō and, finally, Niigata, prov
tourists with access to onsen hot spring and ski resorts in Gunma and Niigata.

Route details and maps: http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/routemaps/joetsushinkansen.htm

---

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Kyushu Shinkans**
Nagano Shinkansen, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **T**
Shinkansen, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

Index Find Term

KAMAKURA PERIOD

The Kamakura Period saw Japan ruled by the Kamakura Shōgunate, established in 1192 by Minamoto no Yoritomo. Japanese politics was refashioned as the emperors and their scholar-courtiers in Kyoto lost power and a feudal system built around the *samurai* warrior caste emerged. The period lasted until the emperor Go-Daigo revolt against the Shōgunate in 1331. The brief reestablishment of imperial rule became the Ashikaga Shōgunate.

Conflict between the Minamoto and Taira clans over dominance of the Imperial court (the Gempei war) ended when the Taira were defeated by Minamoto Yoshitsune in 1185.

Minamoto Yoritomo's headquarters in relatively remote and easily defended Kamakura, about 50 km south of Tokyo, became the effective centre of government. While the emperor reigned as the cultural and religious figurehead in Kyoto, Yoritomo created his own military administration (*bakufu*, or tent government) and reorganised the country, appointing local governors and officials and demanding absolute loyalty from his vassals.

His authority was confirmed when he was granted the official rank of *Shōgun* in 1192. After Yoritomo's sudden death in 1199, his son Minamoto no Yoriie was unable to control the other warrior families. Yoritomo's in-laws, the Hōjō clan, took over. By the early thirteenth century, a realignment within the *bakufu* saw the Hōjō establish a regency, with the head of the clan wielding real power while the *Shōgun* became a powerless figurehead in a direct reflection of the changed relationship between emperor and *Shōgun*. The arrangements did not go down well in Kyoto. Tension between Kyoto and Kamakura saw the Jōkyū War, also known as the Jōkyū Disturbance or the Jōkyū Rebellion, break out in 1221.

Retired Emperor Go-Toba sought out allies from the Taira, other enemies of the Minamoto and the monasteries and set out to overthrow the Shōgunate. There was a battle outside Kyōto, which the Hōjō forces won and the imperial court came under the direct control of the Shōgunate.

The Hojo installed two of their own military governors in Kyoto, seized the imperial court and manipulated the imperial succession. Toba was exiled, and Toba loyalists forfeited their estates which were redistributed to Hojo allies. The result bolstered the transformation of Japanese society, which was further strengthened in 1225.

Third regent Hōjō Yasutoki set up a Council of State to exercise judicial and legislative authority at Kamakura. In 1232, the Council adopted the *Goseibai Shikimoku*, a new legal code that underlined the shift towards a concise statement of duties and punishments that remained in effect until the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

These arrangements brought peace, which lasted until the Mongols turned their attention to Japan. Having established the Yuan Dynasty, Kublai Khan looked to expand China's sphere of influence and demanded that Japan pay tribute, threatening reprisals if they failed to do so. In rejecting the demands, Kyoto cited Japan's divine origin, dismissed the messengers, and prepared to deal with the threatened reprisals, which came in 1274.

Six hundred ships carrying more than twenty thousand Mongol, Chinese, and Korean troops reached Kyūshū and engaged the Japanese forces at Hakata, but were forced to pull back when a typhoon, the *divine wind* (*kamikaze*) decimated their fleet. Kublai launched a second invasion in 1281, which saw seven weeks of fighting in northwestern Kyūshū before a second typhoon took out the Mongol fleet.

Kyūshū remained on alert for a possible third invasion, but the Mongols had problems closer to home to worry about. Still, years of preparations to defend the country were a drain on the economy. New taxes levied to maintain preparations exacerbated financial stresses and inheritances divided family properties. As landowners were forced to turn to moneylenders Kamakura loyalists who had fought the invaders turned to the Shōgunate looking for rewards that failed to eventuate.

The end of the Kamakura Shōgunate came about through its own attempts to hold on to power by allowing other clans to increase control of their own regions and alternating the throne between different lines of the imperial family. The scheme worked until Emperor Go-Daigo defied the arrangement by naming his son as his successor.

The Shōgunate responded by exiling Go-Daigo in 1331. Loyalist forces rebelled, and the siege of Kamakura saw Nitta Yoshisada conquer the city, but the rebellion was an anti-Kamakura rather than pro-Imperial movement.

When Go-Daigo set out to restore imperial authority and reassert the throne's political power, Ashikaga Takauji, from the Minamoto clan, drove him from Kyoto, set the Northern Court contender on the throne and established the Ashikaga Shōgunate, which, despite sixty years of struggle between the Northern and Southern Courts (the Nanbokucho period) lasted until 1573.

The Kamakura Period saw changes in Japanese society and culture as Buddhism, which had been limited to the elites in the imperial court, spread through the wider community. New sects were introduced as Zen, with its emphasis on self-discipline, concentration, and simplicity found followers among the samurai and the *Jōdo* (Pure Land) sect which assured salvation to commoners found followers among the wider populace.

KANAZAWA

With a population that's nudging towards half a million, Kanazawa, apart from its status as the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture, ranks as the biggest city in the Hokuriku region, which takes in Toyama Prefecture and Fukui Prefectures as well.

Ruled by the Maeda family, the second most powerful feudal clan after the Tokugawas through the the Edo Period, the former castle town's cultural achievements almost rivalled Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo). Like Kyoto, the city escaped Allied bombing during World War Two, so parts of the old town, including the *geisha* entertainment district, have survived and the city boasts many historical attractions and museums.

Kanazawa's main attraction is, however, *Kenrokuen*, one of Japan's three best landscape gardens, located directly opposite Kanazawa Castle in the centre of the city. It was originally the castle's outer pleasure garden and comprises ten hectares filled with trees, ponds and waterfalls.

Kenrokuen, along with the city's historical attractions, traditional handicrafts and performing arts and its proximity to the Japan Alps, Hakusan National Park and Noto Peninsula National Park makes the city a major tourist destination, attracting around seven million travellers every year.

With castles regarded as symbols of the feudal system during the Meiji Period, Kanazawa Castle became the base for the Ninth Division of the Imperial Army, with many buildings torn down and much of what remained destroyed by fire in 1888. After World War Two, the site became the main campus of Kanazawa University until a new site was developed and opened in 1998. The *Ishikawa* Gate and the *Sanjikken* Longhouse survived all that, and part of the site has been rebuilt with plans to recreate much of the rest.

Also known for traditional cuisine, high-quality gold leaf and lacquerware, the city isn't easy to reach from Tokyo (despite the seven million tourists), but that should change when the Hokuriku Shinkansen commences operating in 2014.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

KANSAI

The Kansai in the south-central region of Japan's main island Honshū is centre
cities of Osaka and Kyoto and stretches west along the Seto Inland Sea past K
Himeji and Kōbe. To the east it reaches Japan's largest freshwater lake, Lake B

As a cultural and historical entity, the region is often contrasted with Kantō(Toky
surrounding areas). Kansai people are seen as pragmatic, entrepreneurial and
down-to-earth (the influence of Osaka merchant culture) with a sense of humou
opposed to the more sophisticated, formal and reserved Kantō people.

The Kansai region can claim to the earliest beginnings of Japanese civilization,
country’s first capital in Nara, Kyoto’s shrines and temples, and traditional form
that evolved in Kyoto (*Noh* and *Kabukî*) and Osaka (*Bunraku* puppet theatre).

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

KINOKUNIYA

The Kinokuniya chain of bookstores, the largest in Japan, dates back to 1927 a
Great Kanto Earthquake prompted a lumber and charcoal dealer to move to a r
in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The business was refashioned into a book store and opened
of five in January 1927 with an art gallery on the building's second floor.

That building burnt down during an air raid in May 1945 but reopened in Decer
same year. Postwar growth saw the business expand to the point where the cha
56 stores around Japan as well as branches in the United States, Taiwan, Indon
Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates.

The Sydney branch was originally located in Neutral Bay but subsequently relo
George Street in the Central Business District.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

KITAKAMI

Australians might be disinclined to call a city with a population nearing 100,000 *a small place*, but if Kitakami, a city located in Iwate Prefecture was a more significant location the faster *Shinkansen* services would stop there, wouldn't they?

Kitakami, at the junction of the Kitakami and Waga Rivers, is on the Tōhoku *Shinkansen* and the Tōhoku Main Line, both of which connect Tokyo and Aomori Prefecture.

But even small places have their attractions and claims to fame. Kitakami is famous for the *sakura* that bloom in the riverside Tenshochi Park, one of the best hundred places in Japan to view cherry blossoms.

There are more than 10,000 cherry trees planted alongside the Kitakami River, and they come into blossom for one to two weeks towards the end of April. The result is a tunnel of cherry blossoms that earns the park a rating among the Tohoku region's best three cherry blossom locations alongside Hirosaki Castle and Kakunodate.

During the *sakura* season, visitors can stroll along a two kilometre riverside path, enjoy the vista from one of the sightseeing boats that operate from a jetty at the south end of the park, sample the wares of food vendors at both ends of the path and enjoy *sakura*-related festival events.

Other attractions include the Michinoku Folklore Village, an open air museum next door to Tenshochi Park where thirty preserved farmhouses and other buildings are set up to display aspects of traditional life in the Tohoku region, the nearby Kitakami City Folklore Museum, with displays of Buddhist art, and the region's natural and the cultural history, and Kitakami Michinoku Traditional Dance Festival, held in the summer.

Kitakami also boasts a site reputed to be the grave of the Heian Period *waka* poet Izumi Shikibu.

Related Glossary Terms

KŌBE

The capital of Hyōgo Prefecture, Kōbe is the fifth-largest city in Japan, thirty kilometres west of Osaka on the north shore of Osaka Bay, stretching onto the lower slopes of Mount Rokko. Part of the Kyoto-Osaka-Kōbe conurbation, the city has a population around the 1.5 million mark but did not officially exist until 1 April 1889.

Hyōgo Port was opened to foreign trade at the same time as Osaka on 1 January 1868, and had earlier links to the outside world as one of the ports from which imperial embassies to China departed. During the Kamakura Period, it was an important hub for trade with China and other countries.

Much of the shipping activity is centred on Port Island and Rokkō Island, reclaimed islands developeded to give the port room to expand.

The main transport hub is Sannomiya Station, with Kōbe Station to the west and ShinKōbe Shinkansen Station to the north. Kōbe has two subway lines, with the Kaigan Line running along the coast, and the Yamate-Seishin Line towards the mountains.

The city is the point of origin of Kōbe beef, a noted centre for saké production thanks to nearby mountain water, and the site of one of Japan's most famous hot spring resorts, Arima Onsen.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake on 17 January 1995 killed thousands of people, rendered over two hundred thousand homeless, flattened tens of thousands of buildings, destroyed much of the city’s transport infrastructure and diminished much of Kōbe's prominence as a major port though it remains Japan's fourth busiest port for container shipping.

Kōbe's recovery from the 1995 quake is celebrated every December with the *Luminarie*, where the city’s commercial centre is decorated with illuminated metal archways.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

KYUSHU *SHINKANSEN*

A logical extension of the Sanyō *Shinkansen* linking ShinŌsaka with Hakata in Fukuoka, work on the Kyushu *Shinkansen* that runs parallel to the Kagoshima Main Line began in 1991 with the section from Kagoshima to ShinYatsushiro opening on 13 March 2004. That brought a reduction in travel time despite the need to change to a narrow gauge train for the rest of the journey to Hakata. Travel time between Kagoshima and ShinYatsushiro went from 130 minutes to 35, and the four hour trip between Kagoshima and Hakata was halved. When ShinYatsushiro to Hakata opened on 12 March 2011 the trip was further reduced to an hour and 20 minutes.

A line from Fukuoka to Nagasaki, the Nagasaki *Shinkansen*, was included in the 1973 Basic Plan but was renamed the Nagasaki Route and then the West Kyushu Route. The plans were modified after concerns over the need to duplicate existing narrow-gauge Nagasaki Main and Sasebo Lines, and local opposition to the final section in Nagasaki. Construction of the 45.7 km section from Takeo-Onsen to Isahaya began in 2008, and work on the 21 km section from Isahaya to Nagasaki commenced in 2012. The line is due to open by March 2023, with Gauge Change trains running on the narrow gauge line between ShinTosu and Takeo-Onsen and standard gauge *Shinkansen* lines either side of it.

The 1973 Basic Plan included an East Kyushu *Shinkansen* line from Hakata to Kagoshima, and a Trans-Kyushu *Shinkansen*, from Kumamoto to Ōita connecting with the proposed Shikoku *Shinkansen* to Matsuyama, Takamatsu and Osaka. Those plans have been shelved and are unlikely to be reconsidered until lines under construction have been finished.

Stations on the Kagoshima Route are Hakata, ShinTosu, Kurume, Chikugo-Funagoya, ShinŌmuta, ShinTamana, Kumamoto, ShinYatsushiro, ShinMinamata, Izumi, Sendai and Kagoshima-Chūō.

Three levels of train run on the line, with *Tsubame* (named for the former Hakata-Kagoshima limited express service) running once or twice hourly stopping at all stations between Hakata and Kumamoto. Some services go on to Kagoshima-Chūō.

Sakura services run hourly throughout between ShinOsaka and Kagoshima-Chūō making the journey in 4 hours 10 minutes, with one or two additional services an hour between Hakata and Kumamoto or Kagoshima-Chūō.

The fastest *Mizuho* services operate a limited number of services between ShinOsaka and Kagoshima-Chūō, stopping at Hakata, Kumamoto and Kagoshima-Chuo. Although *Mizuho* cannot be used with the Japan Rail Pass, the JR Sanyo-Shikoku-Kyushu Pass and Kyushu Rail Pass are valid.

On the West Kyushu or Nagasaki Route construction of stations at ShinTosu and Saga is on hold but when the line is completed in 2023 trains will stop at Takeo-Onsen, Ureshino-Onsen, ShinŌmura, Isahaya and Nagasaki.

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkansen**, **Nagano Shinkansen**, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **Tōhoku Shinkansen**, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

Index Find Term

LUMINARIE

Reputedly Japan's best display of lights, Kōbe *Luminarie* runs through early to mid-December, attracting large numbers of visitors (between three and five million every year over the past decade) and raises, according to ***Wikipedia***, $1.3 million in donations and $6.1 million in sponsorship and merchandise sales.

Luminarie is the plural of *luminaria*, which my ***Dictionary*** app defines as: *a Christmas lantern consisting of a votive candle set in a small paper bag weighted with sand and typically placed with others along a driveway, sidewalk, or rooftop as a holiday decoration* or, *in New Mexico a Christmas Eve bonfire*.

The flamboyant light displays began in 1995, a bare eleven months after the Great Hanshin Earthquake devastated Kōbe in January that year. Two hundred thousand individually hand painted lights were donated by the Italian Government and the installation was produced by Valerio Festi and Hirokazu Imaoka.

The original intention was a one-off display that would be a symbol of hope, recovery, and renovation and run through December, but popular demand has seen it become an annual event, scaled back to twelve days covering two weekends in early December.

Each light is said to represent a life lost during in the earthquake, and the whole display is powered by electricity generated from biomass in order, so it's environmentally friendly.

Corporate sponsors include JR (Japan Rail) West, Hankyu Corporation, Nestle Group Japan and Hanshin Electric Railway.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

MAGLEV TRAINS

The spread of shinkansen-like services across the globe means a number of countries are looking towards using magnetic levitation rather than conventional wheels and axles to drive the next generation of Very Fast Trains. With vehicles levitated above a single track (guide way) by magnets creating lift and thrust, maglev trains should prove faster and quieter than wheeled systems and deliver a smoother ride. They should be able to accelerate and decelerate more quickly, should be unaffected by weather and would be more energy-efficient. The big plus lies in the fact that the system is relatively quiet, with minimal noise impact and no air pollution in a dense urban setting.

However, while maglev technology negates wear and tear on tracks and rolling stock in conventional systems, maglev tracks are much more expensive to build, requiring completely different infrastructure along the entire route.. On the other hand, they require less maintenance and have lower operating costs. Maintenance schedules, in fact, are more akin to those applying to aircraft, based on hours of operation, rather than speeds reached and distance travelled.

Still, it is hardly a new technology. The earliest patents for a train that ran along these lines were awarded to German inventor Alfred Zehden in 1905 and 1907. There have, however, only been a handful of practical commercial applications. The first was a low-speed shuttle that ran 600 metres from Birmingham International Airport to the nearby railway station between 1984 and 1995, when obsolete electronic systems made it increasingly unreliable.

Preceding it, and considerably faster, were pilot projects built in Hamburg (a 908 m track for the first International Transportation Exhibition in 1979) and a 31.5 kilometre test track in Emsland where trains regularly reached speeds approaching up to 420 kilometres per hour. The company's licence for the latter facility expired at the end of 2011. Similar demonstration systems went in at Expo 86 in Vancouver and West Berlin, and trial versions of maglev technology have been installed in the USA.

But despite widespread activity and investigation there are currently only two maglev systems in full-time commercial operation, with two under construction. Shanghai's high-speed Transrapid system began operations in April 2004, linking Pudong International Airport with Longyang Road Metro station on the eastern edge of the city. The system operates over a hundred services every day, covering the 30 km line in 7 minutes at a top speed of 431 km/h. Plans to extend the line to Shanghai Hongqiao Airport (35 km) and then to the city of Hangzhou (200 km) have proved controversial and subject to repeated delays.

Just under a year later, in March 2005, the low-speed HSST Linimo line commenced operations in time for the 2005 World Expo in Japan and carried over 10 million passengers in its first three months. With a top speed of 100 km/h, but on a 9 km line with nine stations that was never the main issue. Similar systems are under construction in Beijing and at Seoul's Incheon Airport.

The most interesting project as these pages are concerned, however, is the Chuo Shinkansen maglev. Slated to take some of the pressure off the Tokaido line by cutting tunnels at an estimated cost of US$82 billion to build, it's subject to the usual pressures associated with shinkansen routes in Japan. A maglev line along the existing Tokaido corridor would be much cheaper, but there are issues with noise pollution and speed-related technical difficulties. Eventually, the trip between Tokyo and Osaka may be reduced to an hour. Trains would travel via Nagoya at speeds up to 500 km/h, but the Tokyo-Nagoya link is not slated to open until 2025 with another twenty years needed to complete the line to Osaka.

Related Glossary Terms

Chūō Shinkansen, **Shinkansen**

MERIKEN PARK

Apart from the Hotel Okura Kōbe and Kōbe Meriken Park Oriental Hotel the recl
parkland area known as Meriken Park home to some of Kōbe's most iconic cont
structures including the Kōbe Maritime Museum, the red Kōbe Port Tower and
to victims of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake that preserves a section of dar
waterfront as a reminder of the earthquake's destruction.

Half of the Kōbe Maritime Museum building is devoted to the Museum itself, wit
covering the port's history and role as a connection between Japan and the out
while the remainder of the building houses the corporate museum of Kawasaki
Industries, with exhibits devoted to the history of the company and its products.

To the west of the Maritime Museum the 108-metre Kōbe Port Tower offers a res
a rotating cafe, with three observation decks that offer 360 degree views of the

Sightseeing cruises depart from the nearby Nakatottei Chuo Terminal.

Meriken Park takes its name from a rendering of *American* into Japanese, and
eastern or seaward side of the Old Foreign Settlement.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

MISHIMA TAISHA SHRINE

Eight hundred metres east-southeast of JR Mishima Station, the Mishima Taisha Shinto shrine is reputed to be the grandest shrine on the Izu Peninsula. According to tradition and Nara period records, the shrine was originally located on Miyakejima and transferred from place to place before being moved to the present site in the mid-Heian Period. With the building repeatedly destroyed by fire and earthquakes the current structure dates from 1866, rebuilt after the 1854 Ansei Tōkai Earthquake. The shrine consists of three parts: the Haiden (oratory), the Honden (sanctum where the shrine deities dwell), with the Heiden in between.

In his youth Yoritomo Minamoto (1147-1199) had been exiled from Kyoto to Nirayama, ten kilometres south of Mishima and is reputed to have worshipped at Mishima Taisha seeking divine assistance in the war against his arch-rivals, the Taira clan. After nearly twenty years in exile, he rose up in arms against the Taira in 1180 and went on to establish the Kamakura Shōgunate in 1185. Since he believed he had won the war thanks to the deities of the Mishima and Hakone Shrines, he made annual visits to both on New Year's Day and rebuilt the Mishima shrine, which was extensively patronized by the Odawara Hōjō, Imagawa and Tokugawa clans.

During the Edo Period, Mishima Taisha and the post town of Mishima-shuku was a famous pilgrimage stop on the Tōkaidō highway, with travellers about to cross or just down from the 15 kilometre stage through the Hakone pass resting there.

The temple precinct includes a 1,200 years old fragrant olive tree designated a national natural monument, monuments engraved with haiku by Bashō and Wakayama Bokusui. A small museum holds significant cultural items including a lacquerware casket donated to the shrine by Masako Hojo (1157-1225, wife of Yoritomo) containing cosmetic utensils and articles from the late Heian Period listed as one of the National Treasures of Japan.

Related Glossary Terms

MOUNT FUJI

One of the country's Three Holy Mountains and, at 3,776 metres the country's highest peak, Mount Fuji's almost perfectly symmetrical cone is arguably the most common symbol of Japan. Situated 100 kilometres southwest of Tokyo Followers of Shinto have worshiped Mount Fuji since at least the 7th century. To Japanese people it's *Fuji-san*, but the apparent honorific (*-san*, as in ***Hughesy****-san* or *Suzuki-san*) translates as *mountain*.

Call it Mount Fujiyama and you're committing tautology (literally *Mount Fuji Mountain*).

There are a number of explanations for the name, including suggestions that it translated as *immortal*, *without equal* or *never-ending*. Edo Period scholar Hirata Atsutane favoured *a mountain standing up shapely as an ear of a rice plant*. As a national symbol, the mountain appears in countless artworks, with Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige producing collections called ***36 Views of Mt. Fuji***. Hokusai also managed ***One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji***.

The mountain itself is an active stratovolcano 50 kilometres in diameter at the base, rising to a summit crater 500 metres wide and 250 metres deep, the result of four phases of activity. The first, *Sen-komitake*, provided the mountain's core, followed by a basalt layer (*Komitake Fuji*) several hundred thousand years ago. *Old Fuji* formed over the top of that around 100,00 years ago with New Fuji believed to date back around 10,000 years. The volcano sits above the junction of three tectonic plates (the Amurian/Eurasian, the Okhotsk/North American and the Filipino)which form, respectively, western Japan, eastern Japan, and the Izu Peninsula.

Its most recent eruption (16 December 1707 - 1 January 1708) deposited volcanic ash over the Kanto plain, Tokyo, and as far as the northwest Pacific coast 280 kilometres away. The eruption formed a new crater halfway down the mountain's east flank. While there has been no activity for three hundred years recent activity, including the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and *tsunami*, has prompted some concern.

As the focal point of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park the mountain is the most popular tourist site in Japan. More than a quarter of a million people make the ascent every year, most planning to catch the sunrise (*goraikō*, or *arrival of light*) by making the ascent during the night or staying in huts scattered along the four major access routes to the summit. Peak climbing season is from July to August. Visitors are discouraged from attempting the ascent at other times due to extreme weather conditions and the risk of avalanche.

The ascent passes through ten stations, with the first located at the foot of the mountain and the tenth at the summit. There is, however, no need to climb all the way.

Sealed roads go as far as the fifth station, predictably around halfway up the mountain, around 2,300 metres above sea level. There are four, with four routes to the summit: the Lake Kawaguchi, Subashiri, Gotemba, and Fujinomiya routes and four more from the foot of the mountain to the fifth stations (Shojiko, Yoshida, Suyama, and Murayama).

Assuming you're not interested in climbing all the way, the most popular fifth station takes you on to the Kawaguchiko route. It's not the closest to the summit (that is on Fujinomiya) but it has a larger car park, is most easily accessed from Tokyo and has the most mountain huts where climbers can rest or stay. Depending on your starting point, the ascent from the fifth station takes between three and eight hours with from two to five hours needed for the descent. It takes about an hour to get around the crater and its eight peaks.

Assuming you're not interested in the climb and possible issues with altitude sickness, popular Fuji-viewing locations include the Fuji Five Lake (*Fujigoko*) region on the northern side of the mountain.

Slightly further away, Lake Ashi and the Hakone region also provide highly rated views of the mountain. In favourable conditions it can be seen from Yokohama, Tokyo, and as far away as Chiba, Saitama, Tochigi and Lake Hamana.

It can also be seen from trains travelling between Tokyo and Nagoya (and thence Osaka and Kyoto) with the best view around ShinFuji Station. But there's no guarantee. Clouds and poor visibility often obscure the mountain, even from the relatively close *shinkansen* line (speaking from experience). Visibility is said to be better during the cooler seasons than in summer, and early morning and late evening are reckoned better prospects than the middle of the day.

Related Glossary Terms

Ashinoko Lake, **Hakone**

Index Find Term

MYODANI

Dormitory suburb of Kōbe, home to a shopping centre adjoining the subway st
one of four campuses of Kōbe University.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

Find Term

NAGANO *SHINKANSEN*

Built to connect Tokyo and Nagano in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics the Nagan
Shinkansen forms the first section of the planned Hokuriku *Shinkansen* that will exte
Kanazawa, Tsuruga and eventually Osaka. *Asama* services, named for an active vo
alongside the line take a minimum of 79 minutes to complete the journey, travelling
the Fohoku and Joetsu *Shinkansen* to Takasaki before branching off onto the first st
the Hokuriku *Shinkansen*. The services replaced the Shinetsu Main Line limited exp
services which took 2 hours 50 minutes from Tokyo's Ueno Station to Nagano.

After leaving Tokyo, trains stop at Ueno and Ōmiya on the Tohoku *Shinkansen*, Kum
Honjō-Waseda and Takasaki on the Joetsu *Shinkansen*, then Annaka-Haruna, Karu
and Sakudaira on the run into Nagano.

The Hokuriku *Shinkansen* extension from Nagano to Kanazawa should open in Mar
with the 113-km extension from Kanazawa to Tsuruga, approved for construction in
2012 scheduled to be completed in 2025.

Route and maps: http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/routemaps/naganoshinkansen.html

---

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkanse**
Kyushu Shinkansen, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **T**
Shinkansen, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

NAGOYA

Located in the centre of the fertile Nōbi Plain plain at the head of Ise Bay, around two-thirds of the way between Tokyo and the Kyoto/Osaka conurbation, Nagoya is the industrial hub of Japan's third largest metropolitan region, the Chūkyō Metropolitan Area (population over 8.75 million). Just under two and a half million people live in the city, which dates back to 1610 and Tokugawa Ieyasu's decision to move the capital of Owari Province from Kiyosu, around seven kilometres away, to a more strategic location.

Nagoya Castle was constructed as the seat of the Owari branch of the Tokugawa clan and the town of 60,000 people, complete with shrines and temples was relocated to the new site. Around the same time, the nearby Atsuta Shrine was designated as a way station on the Tōkaidō road linking Kyoto and Edo (modern Tokyo) and Nagoya developed as a combination castle and shrine/transit town.

The second-most venerable shrine in Japan, Atsuta dates almost two millennia and houses the sacred *Kusanagi no mitsurugi* sword, one of the three imperial regalia of Japan. Not something that you'd put on public display, but there are over four thousand other artifacts on the grounds and the shrine hosts around seventy festivals every year.

Geographic position coupled with political clout saw the city develop as the hub of the surrounding region. At first it was cotton, ceramics and timber that drove the growth, but when Japan started to transform during the Meiji Era, Nagoya became an industrial centre.

A local company that made looms for textile mills moved into the automobile business in the 1930s. That was Toyota, and Honda and Mitsubishi grew up in the same area.

World War Two saw the city's manufacturing infrastructure turn towards military hardware, with around 25% of its workforce working in factories that produced almost half of the country's combat aircraft. That would have been enough to ensure U.S. Army Air Force attention, but the area also produced machine tools, railway equipment, tanks and military vehicles. The result was a series of bombing raids that destroyed much of the city and had almost half the population flee to the countryside.

Most of the city's historic buildings were destroyed, but the firebombing resulted in wide streets bulldozed through the rubble that make modern Nagoya a remarkably car-friendly city. That also means the city's public transport infrastructure isn't as highly developed as it is in other major centres (notably Tokyo and the Kansai region).

Nagoya Castle was hit on 14 May 1945, but postwar reconstruction of the main building was completed in 1959, and the concrete replica even has lifts. Other attractions include the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology, built on the site of one of the company's original loom factories near Nagoya station, the Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Tokugawa Art Museum and surrounding Japanese garden, Nagoya City Science and Art Museums, and Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, where the collection includes works by Picasso, Matisse, Paul Klee and an assortment of Expressionists, Surrealists and postwar US and Japanese artists as well as Edo-period paintings and traditional crafts.

Temples and shrines include *Kōshō-ji*, founded in the 17th century by the Tokugawa family, *Shiroyama Hakusan* Shrine, formerly Suemori Castle, sixteenth century *Togan-ji,* where a huge wood block is said to purge sins if you touch it, *Nittai-ji*, *Arako Kannon* (the oldest building in Nagoya, with *Tahoto* pagoda intact after 472 years) and *Osu Kannon* Temple, which dates back to the Kamakura era but was moved to its current location in 1612.

Home to the head offices of, among others, Toyota Motor Corporation, Brother Industries, Makita, Suzuki Motor, Noritake, Olympus Optical and Yamaha, the city is also known for incredibly hot and humid summers, the fifteen-day Nagoya Sumo Tournament, the World Cosplay Summit for fans of Japanese animation, *miso* sauce, shrimp *tempura*, broad flat *kishimen* noodles and an eel dish called *hitsumabushi*.

ODA NOBUNAGA

Oda Nobunaga (23 June 1534 – 21 June 1582) was a powerful warlord from the Fujiwara clan. Through a combination of strategic alliances and military conquests, he overthrew the Ashikaga Shōgunate and unified half of Japan at the end of the Warring States period. He restored stable government and established conditions that allowed Toyotomi Hideyoshi to become the first ruler of the whole country since the Ōnin War. Tokugawa Ieyasu went on to establish the Shōgunate that ruled Japan until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Oda Nobunaga was the second son of Oda Nobuhide, a deputy *shugo* (military governor) in Owari Province. In 1549, he succeeded to his father's estate. Though Nobunaga was Nobuhide's legitimate successor, the clan was divided into many factions. The clan was technically under the control of Owari's *shugo*, Shiba Yoshimune, but Nobuhide's brother Oda Nobutomo used Yoshimune as his puppet. He challenged Nobunaga's succession, then murdered Yoshimune when he supported and attempted to aid Nobunaga.

Nobunaga persuaded another uncle, Oda Nobumitsu, to join his side, killed Nobutomo in and then formed alliances with Shiba Yoshikane, Yoshimune's son, the Imagawa clan from Suruga Province and the Kira clan of Mikawa Province to ensure his borders were secure.

He still had internal rivals in the form of his brother Nobuyuki and his supporters, who rebelled, were defeated, and then pardoned when Nobunaga's mother intervened. They planned another rebellion before Nobunaga faked illness to get close to Nobuyuki, and then assassinated him in Kiyosu Castle. By 1559, Nobunaga had eliminated opposition within his clan and province.

Then, in 1560 he defeated Imagawa Yoshimoto, who was moving towards Kyoto, allegedly planning to bolster the Ashikaga Shōgunate. His forces outnumbered those of the Oda clan, but a mixture of enemy complacency, cunning and helpful weather saw Imagawa defeated and the clan's influence on the wane.

Nobunaga strengthened his position by forging an alliance with Tokugawa Ieyasu, *daimyō* of the neighbouring Mikawa province and leader of the Matsudaira clan.

In 1567, Nobunaga moved north, capturing Inabayama Castle and renaming both castle and the surrounding district Gifu. It became his centre of operations as he became involved in Ashikaga Yoshiaki's quest for revenge after his brother, the thirteenth Ashikaga Shōgun was murdered. Nobunaga marched on Kyōto and made Yoshiaki Shōgun.

But the new Shōgun had no intention of being anyone's puppet. Yoshiaki set about secretly forging an anti-Nobunaga alliance and persuaded Takeda Shingen to move on Kyoto through Tokugawa territory. Ieyasu was defeated at the Battle of Mikatagahara, but night raids caused Takeda to pause. He died shortly afterwards, victim, according to different sources, of an old war wound, a sniper's arrow or pneumonia.

With their leader dead, the Takeda forces retreated, which left Nobunaga free to deal with Yoshiaki. Nobunaga deposed him and sent him into exile. That was the effective end of the Ashikaga Shōgunate, although it officially lasted until Yoshiaki died in 1597. Around the same time Nobunaga destroyed the Asakura and Azai clans, leaving the Takeda clan, now led by Takeda Katsuyori as the centre of resistance to his ambitions.

Nobunaga destroyed them in 1582 and was about to launch invasions into Echigo Province and Shikoku when one of his allies, Akechi Mitsuhide, ambushed him on an overnight stay at Honnō-ji temple in Kyoto. Nobunaga committed *seppuku* in one of the inner rooms, but the coup d'etat was short-lived. Eleven days later Mitsuhide was killed when his army was defeated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi at the Battle of Yamazaki.

Nobunaga instituted a number of changes in Japanese military and economic customs which, in turn, contributed to his success in bringing the country towards reunification.

Military victories stemmed from tactical innovations, new technologies and developments in castle fortifications. He built up the warrior class, appointing officials on the basis of ability rather than social status or personal relationships. Many of his innovations went on the form the basis of practices by the Tokugawa Shōgunate.

Other changes moved the economy from a rural base with the growth of castle towns linked by roads that facilitated trade and also the rapid deployment of military forces. International trade was encouraged and expanded. A move towards a market economy saw monopolies and tolls abolished and closed guilds and associations opened.

Nobunaga's headquarters at Azuchi Castle beside Lake Biwa was reputedly the greatest castle in Japanese history, and practices inside the complex established the tea ceremony as an environment to where business and politics were discussed. An interest in Western art and weaponry extended as far as support for Jesuit missionaries and the first Christian church in Kyoto, though Nobunaga was not a convert himself. That support reflected a long-standing rivalry with the Tendai Buddhist sect, a powerful force in traditional politics, and the Ikkō sect, who formed a major obstacle to his ambitions to unify the country.

Related Glossary Terms

Sengoku period

Index Find Term

ODAWARA

Located on the Ashigara Plains, in the far west of Kanagawa Prefecture, with the Hakone Mountains to the north and west, Odawara is a logical point of entry to Hakone hot springs resorts and Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park. The Yugawara area within the city boundaries is a well-known hot spring resort.

Five railway lines pass through Odawara, with the Tokaido *Shinkansen* offering a 35 minute trip from Tokyo Station on *Hikari* or *Kodama*, though the fastest *Nozomi Shinkansen* does not stop there, Rail alternatives are the regular Tokaido Line, with a 100-minute journey passing through Shinagawa, Kawasaki and Yokohama or the private Odakyu Line, where the Odawara Express from Shinjuku takes two hours to make the journey. From Yokohama Station, it's 16 minutes by *Hikari* or *Nozomi* or 56 minutes on the JR Tokaido Line, transit times that make it possible o live in Odawara and commute to Tokyo or Yokohama.

A castle town, Odawara was the capital of the Hōjō clan during the Sengoku period. After the Hōjō had been defeated in the Battle of Odawara in 1590, the territory came under the control of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Odawara flourished as a post town on the Tōkaidō highway connecting Edo (Tokyo) with Kyoto.

After the Meiji Restoration, Odawara Domain became Odawara Prefecture, which was in turn merged with Ashigara Prefecture and incorporated into Kanagawa Prefecture in 1876. As the economic and political focus in Kanagawa shifted north to Yokohama, Odawara went into decline, a situation that was exacerbated when the original route of the Tōkaidō Main Line bypassed the city.

The Great Kantō earthquake of 1923 devastated Tokyo and the surrounding prefectures (Chiba, Kanagawa, and Shizuoka) and caused widespread damage. Ninety percent of the buildings collapsed, and fires in the rubble took care of most of what survived the quake.

Things started to revive when the Tanna Tunnel brought the Tōkaidō Main Line through the city in 1934 and on 15 August 1945, Odawara was the last Japanese city to be bombed during World War Two.

As suggested above, visitors are most likely to pass through Odawara *en route* to Hakone, but Odawara Castle is rated as the best example of a castle in the immediate area around Tokyo. It is a popular sightseeing spot, with the castle tower offering views over the city, and a highly-rated venue for *sakura* viewing in spring.

Odawara is known for *kamaboko* (steamed processed fish), *himono* (dried fish made from a type of horse mackerel) stockfish, *umeboshi* (salted plums), traditional herbal medicines, paper lanterns, and lacquerware.

Related Glossary Terms

Hakone

Index Find Term

ŌNIN WAR

Although it only lasted a decade and was largely restricted to the Kyōto region the Ōnin War (1467–77) ushered in *Sengoku jidai*, the Warring States Period (1490–1590), a struggle between the *daimyō* houses that ended when Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu managed to unite Japan towards the end of the sixteenth century.

Triggered by a disputed succession to the Shōgunate, the war resulted from longstanding factional rivalries between Hosokawa Katsumoto, prime minister (1452–64) for *Shōgun* Ashikaga Yoshimasa, and his father-in-law Yamana Sōzen. The Onin War was thus a conflict between the two most powerful *daimyō* families, the Hosokawa and the Yamana.

Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa's rule had seen cultural developments known as *Higashiyama Bunka* (the Culture of the Eastern Mountain) including the tea ceremony and developments in flower arrangement, noh theatre, poetry, garden design and architecture.

Yoshimasa was just fourteen when he succeeded his elder brother, Yoshikatsu, and by age twenty-nine he seems to have had enough. He planned to retire (which may not have been unusual in itself) and give up real authority (which, it seems, was), a decision that may have been prompted by another succession dispute between the Hatakeyama and Shiba clans which had drawn in the Hosokawa and Yamana. His desire for a quiet life, based around the tea ceremony, poetry and meditation, may have been understandable but was never a realistic prospect.

The problem was that he didn't have an heir, and he adroitly solved the problem by appointing his younger brother Yoshimi, who had taken monastic vows, to the position in 1464. That would have been fine if his wife Tomiko hadn't adroitly produced a son, Yoshihisa, in 1465. Naturally, mother wanted son to take over from father and, predictably, father seems to have changed his mind.

Younger brother Yoshimi was allied to the Hosokawa, so their Yamana rivals supported the infant's claim to the Shōgunate. In 1466 Yamana Sōzen and Hosokawa Katsumoto began to gather troops near Kyoto. Both called for support from their relations and vassals, with the Yamana lining up 80,000 supporters against 85,000 on the Hosokawa side, armies that were the largest seen in Japanese history up to that stage.

But no one wanted to be held responsible for starting the war, and Yoshimasa remained as Shōgun. As the clans raised their armies and marched them to Kyoto, he issued a decree in an attempt to defuse the situation. Whoever attacked first would be declared a rebel, which carried with it the threat of execution and, more seriously, the confiscation of all the clan's property.

Yoshimasa may have been weak, but this was a powerful threat when the two sides were closely balanced and still in the process of recruiting allies. The threat was never going to be enough to defuse the situation as the niggling between the two sides intensified. Raids were followed by retaliation, retaliation by raids.

A Hosokawa mansion burned to the ground. A Yamana rice shipment was intercepted.

Rumours that Yamana Sozen was going to attack the Imperial Palace prompted the removal of the Emperor and the Imperial family to the Shōgunate's headquarters in the Muromachi District. Yamana attacked the Imperial Palace,

Hosokawa supporters burned a Yamana general's mansion, along with the block in which it was situated, to the ground.

By July, northern Kyoto was in ruins in a medieval equivalent of the Western Front in World War One. By September anyone who could get out of the city was gone as reinforcements for the antagonists flowed in.

A realignment in 1468 when Yoshimi broke with his brother, who duly declared his son the favoured successor, did nothing to stop the fighting, which continued unabated.

Katsumoto scored a political victory when he convinced Shōgun and Emperor to denounce the Yamana as rebels, but the carnage continued, unaffected by the deaths of Hosokawa Katsumoto and Yamana Sozen in 1473.

Two years later Yoshimasa emerged from seclusion and began to order feudal lords on both sides out of Kyoto. Many obeyed and began to disengage, but the fighting continued until 1477 when Yamana leader Ouchi Masahiro agreed to leave. He burned the section of Kyoto he'd controlled, the last one that had remained reasonably intact, on the way out.

In the end the war finished because no one had the strength to carry it on.

In the meantime, Yoshimasa had been planning *Ginkaku-ji*, the Silver Pavilion that would match his grandfather's *Kinkaku-ji*. His complacent attitude to what had been going on around him effectively sanctioned private wars and skirmishes between the *daimyō*. As they made their way back from Kyoto, no part of Japan escaped the violence. Fighting in the provinces continued for another century until Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu were able to reunite the country in the late 16th century.

Related Glossary Terms

Sengoku period

Index Find Term

ONSEN

Although *onsen* is the word for hot springs in Japanese, the term usually refers to facilities and inns around the springs as much as the springs themselves. Volcanic activity means there are thousands of *onsen* across the archipelago, a key element in the domestic tourist market.

Onsen come in many forms, with outdoor and indoor baths operated as public or private concerns, with the latter often part of a hotel, *ryokan* or bed and breakfast operation. While *onsen* are often found in the countryside, there are establishment that offer similar facilities in many major cities. They are a major attraction for Japanese couples, families or company groups who want to relax.

Traditionally, *onsen* were located outdoors, using water from geothermally heated springs, as opposed to *sentō* (indoor public bath houses where baths use heated tap water). Water in an onsen must contain at least one of nineteen designated chemical substances and be warmer than 25 °C before any reheating takes place. Major resort hotels feature themed spa baths and artificial waterfalls. An *onsen* may have separate baths with different waters offering differing mineral compositions and healing properties.

Men and women bathed together until gender separation was introduced during the Meiji Restoration. Mixed bathing persists at some *onsen*, which usually also provide the option of women-only baths or different hours for the two sexes. Bathers are not usually allowed to wear Swimsuits are not permitted in most onsen, though some require guests to wear a swimsuit in mixed baths.

Guests are expected to wash and rinse themselves at bathing stations equipped with stools, hand held shower heads, wooden buckets, and toiletries before entering the water and entering the *onsen* with traces of soap on the body is unacceptable.

Guests usually bring a small towel with them to use as a wash cloth and set the towels off to the side of the baths, or fold the towels and place them on their heads. It is unacceptable to place a towel in the water, or to wring a wet towel into the baths.

Many *onsen* ban tattoos, which are associated with the Yakuza and the rule is often strictly enforced, foreigners included.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

PHILOSOPHER'S PATH

The two-kilometre-long Philosopher's Path (*Tetsugaku no michi*) in the northern part Kyoto's Higashiyama district follows a canal lined by hundreds of cherry trees, mak one of the city's most popular *hanami* (cherry blossom viewing) spots.

The canal the path follows is a branch of the Lake Biwa Canal which tunnels 20 kilo through the mountains to nearby Shiga Prefecture. The canal dates back to the Me and was used to power Japan's first hydroelectric power plant. The aqueduct in the grounds of *Nanzenji* is part of the canal.

The path begins just down the hill from *Ginkakuji* and ends at *Nyakuoji Jinja* Shrine *Nanzenji*. Along the way, it passes two temples (*Honen-in* and *Anrakuji*) and *Otoyo* Shrine. With the temples at either end and nearby Eikan-do Zenrin-ji, a total of five and two shrines makes the path a popular attraction for sightseers at any time of ye is particularly spectacular (and crowded) in spring and autumn. That popularity is r in the number of restaurants, cafes, and boutiques along the way.

The path gets its name due to Kyoto University professor Nishida Kitarō's habit of u as part of his daily stroll to work from the time he was appointed to the philosophy f 1910 until he retired in 1928.

Related Glossary Terms

Ginkaku-ji

Index Find Term

SANNOMIYA

The name of a district as well as the station that acts as the transport hub of the
Sannomiya is, in effect, downtown Kōbe, having superseded Motomachi and S
which lie just to the west of Sannomiya. The district's rise to prominence began
when the Sogo Department Store moved to a new location beside the existing s

JR West, Hankyu Railway, Hanshin Electric Railway, Kōbe Municipal Subway, a
New Transit (the Port Island monorail) all use the station facilities, with two subw
on the Seishin-Yamate and Kaigan Lines.

The area to the north of the station is a noted eating and drinking district. On th
edge, Nankinmachi is the only Chinatown in western Japan and to the east, tow
port, the Old Foreign Settlement has a number of luxury brand shops and fashi
Center Gai Shopping Street runs west from Sannomiya through Motomachi and
arcade lined with shops selling almost anything the average consumer id likely

---

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

SANYŌ SHINKANSEN

In the wake of the Tōkaidō *Shinkansen*'s success, it was extended westward to connect Shin-Ōsaka with Hakata Station in Fukuoka, a project that was completed in 1975, bringing Kōbe, Himeji, Okayama and Hiroshima onto the system. The fastest (*Nozomi* and *Mizuho*) services on the line can take passengers from Hakata to Osaka in less than two-and-a-half hours, and with the right connections the trip to Tokyo can be done in under six hours.

From Hakata, the Kyushu *Shinkansen* continues south to Kagoshima.

After ShinŌsaka, *Kodama* (the slower, all-station) services stop at ShinKōbe, Nishi-Akashi, Himeji, Aioi, Okayama, ShinKurashiki, Fukuyama, ShinOnomichi, Mihara, Higashi-Hiroshima, Hiroshima, ShinIwakuni, Tokuyama, ShinYamaguchi (formerly Ogori, renamed in October 2003), Asa, ShinShimonoseki and Kokura, before arriving in Hakata around five hours later.

There are usually three *Nozomi* services per hour (two ShinOsaka > Hakata and one ShinOsaka > Hiroshima) with most northbound trains providing a through service to the Tokaido Shinkansen. The other super express service (the *Mizuho*) provides a through service to the Kyushu Shinkansen to Kagoshima with six round trips per day in mornings and evenings. *Nozomi* and *Mizuho* trains cannot be accessed by Japan Rail Pass holders but they are covered by the JR Sanyo-Shikoku-Kyushu Pass and JR West Sanyo Pass. A *Hikari* service from Tokyo continues as far as Okayama every hour, serving all stations between ShinOsaka and Okayama, while *Sakura* operate between ShinOsaka and Kagoshima-Chuo stopping at a few more stations than the faster services.

In practical terms, the Tokaido, Sanyo and Kyushu lines run more or less as a contiguous southbound line. Services run between the Tokaido and Sanyo lines, so it is possible to travel from Kagoshima to Osaka, for example, though you'd need to change trains if you're going on to Tokyo.

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkansen**, **Kyushu Shinkansen**, **Nagano Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **Tōhoku Shinkansen**, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

SENGOKU PERIOD

Lasting from the Onin War (1467-77) to the reunification of Japan at the end of the sixteenth century, the Sengoku period was marked by social and political upheaval until political power was consolidated under the Tokugawa Shōgunate. A century and a quarter of almost-constant civil war mean it is also known as the Warring States period.

The aftermath of the Onin War saw a weakening of central authority, with regional *daimyō* including the Shimazu, Takeda, and Imagawa, establishing independent domains to fill the vacuum. While some clans were able to expand their spheres of influence, others were weakened and toppled by more capable underlings in a process termed *gekokujō* (literally, "low conquers high"). With the Emperor a marginal ceremonial and religious figure and the Shōgunate less powerful than it had been everyone else was out to secure their own niche in the pecking order. At the same time, despite political instability there was economic growth as the *daimyō* built up their armies and their support base through flood control and land reclamation. Agricultural production expanded, and harvests increased substantially. New gold, silver, copper, and iron mined fostered the development of foundries. Cultivation of cotton, which had been imported, started in Mikawa Province and cotton became the principal fabric. Those advances produced surpluses that generated trade with China and Korea and the domestic economy developed as the use of currency became widespread.

Commercial considerations saw the rise of centres where commodities were exchanged and distributed. Kyōto resumed its role as the country's industrial and commercial hub, and powerful merchants attained a degree of autonomy as towns grew up around the castles of influential *daimyō*. The desire for freedom also saw peasants weary of debt and taxes unite with monks from the Pure Land sect in uprisings (*Ikkō-ikki*) seeking to set up independent domains, with the most successful, in Kaga Province, remaining independent for nearly a century.

But despite the positive aspects of these developments, it was obvious someone needed to reimpose central authority. Oda Nobunaga re-established the Muromachi Shōgunate after his armies entered Kyōto in 1568. Nobunaga's attempt to unify the country ended when he was assassinated by one of his generals in 1582.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi continued the process, conquering Shikoku and Kyushu, and while he united Japan in 1590 by defeating the later Hojo clan in the siege of Odawara he died in 1598 without leaving an adult successor.

After Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory at the battle of Sekigahara in 1600, it took another fifteen years to finalise the process with the end of the Siege of Osaka. The ensuing Tokugawa Shōgunate lasted until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Paradoxically, over a century of civil war, Confucianism, classical Chinese poetry and ink painting and the Japanese classics diffused across the country, spread by Zen priests and poets invited to the provinces by the new Sengoku *daimyō* and wealthy merchants. Zen-influenced poetry and art flourished, along with landscaping and the tea ceremony in an era that brought a transition from a decentralized feudal system to a centralized state.

Related Glossary Terms

Kamakura period, **Oda Nobunaga**, **Ōnin War**

Index Find Term

SHAMISEN

The three-stringed *shamisen*, a plucked instrument played with a plectrum (*bachi*) can be played solo, or in ensembles with other *shamisen*, flute, *ko-tsuzumi* (a small, hourglass-shaped shoulder drum or large floor drum (*taiko*) as an accompaniment to *geisha* dances and Japanese dramatic forms, notably *kabuki* and *bunraku*.

The *shamisen* derives from the Chinese *sanxian* introduced to Japan through the Ryūkyū Kingdom (Okinawa), where it became the *sanshin* around the sixteenth century.

The instrument was introduced to *geisha* culture in the mid-eighteenth century, and *geisha* are expected to learn to play the instrument, which takes years to master.

The instrument is similar in size to a guitar or banjo, with a fretless neck and strings stretched across a resonating drum-like rounded rectangular body (the *dō*), which amplifies the sound of the strings. The *bachi* is often used to strike both strings and skin, creating a highly percussive sound.

The *sao*, or neck of the instrument is usually divided into pieces that fit together, since most *shamisen* can easily be disassembled and stowed away. The pegs used to wind the strings were traditionally fashioned out of ivory, but are increasingly fashioned out of of wood and plastic. The three strings were traditionally made of silk (more recently, nylon) stretched across the *dō*, raised from it by a bridge, or *koma*, which can be made of bamboo, ivory, ox-bone, rosewood, buffalo horn, *kōki* wood or plastic and rests directly on the taut skin. The lowest string is laid lower so that it buzzes, creating a characteristic timbre similar to the buzzing of a sitar). Rather than working from a set tuning, as with a guitar or a violin, the *shamisen* is tuned according to the register of the singer, or the player's personal preference.

Related Glossary Terms

Geisha

Index Find Term

SHINKANSEN

You might think *Shinkansen* translates as *bullet train*, but the term means *new trunk line*, and applies to a network of high-speed lines operated by the Japan Railways (JR) Group of companies. All services except the Akita and Yamagata *Shinkansen* run on tracks built for and exclusively used by high speed trains.

Services on the main routes operate at three levels:

• ***fast***, stopping only at major centres, badged as *Nozomi* (Tokaido and Sanyo), *Mizuho* (Sanyo and Kyushu), *Hayabusa* and *Hayate* (Tohoku)

• ***semi-fast***, stopping at intermediate centres, *Hikari* (Tokaido and Sanyo), *Hikari Rail Star* (Sanyo), *Sakura* (Sanyo and Kyushu), *Yamabiko* or *Max Yamabiko* (Tohoku)

• ***local***, stopping at all stations on the Shinkansen line, labelled as *Kodama* (Tokaido and Sanyo), *Tsubame* (Kyushu), *Nasuno* or *Max Nasuno* (Tohoku)

Services on other lines run as *Komachi* (Akita), *Tsubasa* (Yamagata), *Toki* or *Max Toki* and *Tanigawa* or *Max Tanigawa* (Jōetsu) and *Asama* or Max *Asama* (Hokuriku/Nagano)

Shinkansen services have carried nearly 10 billion passengers, but the only injuries and the single fatality have been caused by closing doors. Passengers have, however, suicided by jumping both from or in front of moving trains. There are also issues with noise, particularly with the problem of tunnel boom, caused by trains coming out of tunnels at high speed.

For convenience, frequency, punctuality and passenger comfort *Shinkansen* services are hard to beat. Trains depart with split second punctuality, carriage interiors are spacious, seats usually face forward but can be turned 180 degrees to create a group of seats facing each other. Most trains have both non-reserved seats and reserved seats in two classes, but reservations are required for *Hayabusa*, *Hayate* and *Komachi*.

Regular seats are laid out in threes on either side of an aisle and offer generous leg room. The equivalent of airline business class on airplanes comes in Green Cars, with two seats on either side of the passageway, foot rests, reading lights, electrical outlets for both seats and a seat warmer. The newest trains on the Tohoku *Shinkansen* offer the equivalent of first class with single seats and additional amenities.

Trains have overhead shelves that handle airline carry on baggage and there is space for two or three suitcases behind the last row of seats in each carriage on a *first in best dressed* basis. There's probably enough room to fit a suitcase into the space in front of your seat, though it's not the most comfortable solution.

For travellers who live outside Japan discounts offered by the Japan Rail Pass make *Shinkansen* travel an extremely cost effective means of travel on all services except *Nozomi* and *Mizuho*, but you can only access regular seats.

Most trains are served by food carts with a selection of snacks, drinks and boxed *bento* meals. WiFi is available on some trains between Tokyo and Shin-Osaka, but requires a subscription or a one-day pass that has to be purchased before you board the train.

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkansen**, **Kyushu Shinkansen**, **Maglev Trains**, **Nagano Shinkansen**, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **Tōhoku Shinkansen**, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

Index Find Term

Shinkansen (History)

The *Shinkansen* network dates back to a pre-War proposal for a standard gauge railway line between Tokyo and Shimonoseki. There were plans to extend the line to Korea through an undersea tunnel and on to Beijing, connecting with the Trans-Siberian Railway, possibly even extending to Singapore. Those plans were abandoned in 1943, but there had been some construction work and some tunnels on the network date back to the original project.

As the post-war Japanese economy rebuilt, traffic on the Tōkaidō Main Line grew steadily and by the mid-1950s, the line was operating at full capacity. The Railway Ministry decided to revisit the standard gauge *Shinkansen* project after a newly introduced train set a world speed record of 145 km/h for a narrow gauge train. A standard gauge line would deliver higher speeds and government approval in December 1958 allowed construction of the first segment of the Tōkaidō *Shinkansen* to begin in April 1959 at an estimated cost of ¥200 billion. The final cost was nearly double that figure.

Completed in time for the Tokyo Olympics the line began service on 1 October 1964 and had an immediate impact, carrying one hundred million passengers up to 13 July 1967, and passing the one billion mark in 1976. As a result, it was extended to connect Shin-Ōsaka with Hakata (Fukuoka). That line, the Sanyō *Shinkansen*, was further extended when the Kyushu *Shinkansen* from Hakata to Kagoshima was completed in 2011. A West Kyushu route to Nagasaki running Gauge Change trains capable of running on an existing narrow gauge line between is under construction and should open by March 2023.

Work on the Tōhoku *Shinkansen* connecting Tokyo with the north of Honshū commenced in November 1971, and the line opened in stages from June 1982. The line reached Aomori in December 2010. An extension passing through the Seikan Tunnel should reach Shin-Hakodate, on Hokkaidō in March 2016 and Sapporo by 2035.

Branch lines of the Tōhoku *Shinkansen*, the Yamagata *Shinkansen* (Fukushima – Shinjō) and Akita *Shinkansen* (Morioka – Akita) run on the Tohoku line from Tokyo, then branch onto lines where the original narrow gauge has been upgraded. Since these are not purpose built Shinkansen lines the maximum speed is limited to130 km/h, but travel time is reduced since passengers no longer need to change trains at Fukushima and Morioka.

Planning for the Jōetsu *Shinkansen* connecting Tokyo and Niigata was initiated in 1971 by Niigata-born Prime Minister Tanaka, and services began on 15 November 1982, branching off the Tōhoku *Shinkansen* at Ōmiya.

Completed in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics, the Nagano *Shinkansen* branches off the Jōetsu and Tōhoku lines at Takasaki and forms the first section of the Hokuriku *Shinkansen*, with an extension from Nagano to Kanazawa scheduled to open in March 2015. From there, the line should proceed on to Tsuruga and will eventually loop back to Osaka.

Work on the Chūō *Shinkansen*, a *maglev* (magnetic levitation) line from Tokyo to Osaka via Nagoya was due to commence in 2014, with the line following the shortest route through (as in under) the Japanese Alps from Shinagawa to Nagoya with 86% of the 286 km route underground.

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkansen**, **Kyushu Shinkansen**, **Nagano Shinkansen**, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Tōhoku Shinkansen**, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

Index Find Term

SHIZUOKA

Shizuoka, centrally located between Tokyo and Nagoya along the Tokaido Corridor is the capital of Shizuoka Prefecture and the prefecture's second-largest city. The prefecture is wet by Japanese standards, but Shizuoka is the sunniest of Japan's major cities due to the absence of summer fog and a location that shelters it from northwesterly winds off the Sea of Japan. The name is made up of two *kanji*, *Shizu* ("still" or "calm") and *oka* ("hills").

Shizuoka Domain was created out of the older Sunpu Domain in 1869, and the name was retained when the city was incorporated. The area has been inhabited since prehistoric times, and the Toro archaeological site indicates a significant Yayoi period (400 BC-300 AD) settlement in what is now the central city.

Shizuoka is on the Tōkaidō Main Line from Tokyo to Osaka and is served by the Tōkaidō Shinkansen, limited express and regional trains.

Since the modern city was founded in 1889 Shizuoka has seen its share of misfortune.

The day the Tōkaidō Main Line connection opened (1 February 1889) a fire destroyed most of downtown Shizuoka. Post-typhoon floods in 1914 inundating the downtown area and the city had been rebuilt after a 6.4 magnitude earthquake in 1935 when another fire destroyed much of the central business district. Since there were few significant military targets in the area, the city was largely unaffected by air raids until a firebombing raid on 19 June 1945 inflicted high casualties and significant destruction.

The city is known for high-quality green tea, strawberries grown on inclined stone walls, wasabi, citrus fruits especially Satsuma, lotus roots, roses and peaches. Local delicacies include *oden* (boiled eggs, *daikon* radish, k*onnyaku* and fish cakes stewed in beef stock and dark soy sauce), *zōni* soup (rice cakes cooked with vegetables in broth) and *tororo* (grated yam soup). A t*ororo* restaurant named Chojiya in the Mariko-juku area of Shizuoka dates back to 1598 and was depicted by Hiroshige in his prints of the fifty-three stops along the Tōkaidō.

Scenic attractions include:

•Nihondaira, a scenic plateau in the centre of the city, with views of Mt. Fuji, Southern Alps, Izu Peninsula and Suruga Bay.

•The Nihondaira Ropeway connecting Nihondaira to Kunozan Toshogu Shrine.

•The ruins of Sunpu Castle, built in 1599, destroyed in 1869 and subsequently turned into a park which is a popular venue for hanami (*sakura* viewing).

• Kunōzan Tōshō-gū shrine, the burial place of Tokugawa Shōgun Tokugawa Ieyasu, might have lost a number of structures but thirteen remain. The Honden and Heiden, built in 1617, are protected as Important Cultural Properties. The museum has displays, including *tachi* (Japanese swords) and suits of armour.

• Shizuoka Sengen Jinja, a group of three Shinto shrines that enjoyed the patronage of the warrior clans who dominated the area through the Kamakura and Muromachi: periods. The complex burned down in 1804 and was subsequently rebuilt in the Momoyama style, with extensive lacquer, wood carvings, and gold leaf.

• Mariko-juku, the twentieth of the fifty-three stations along the Tōkaidō road in Suruga Ward, was one of the smallest post stations on the Tōkaidō. It's a 30 minute bus ride from JR Shizuoka Station, with row-houses from the Edo Period and the aforementioned long-established Chojiya tororojiru restaurant. The post station is the subject of a classic ukiyo-e print by Ando Hiroshige. The neighbourhood is also home to Sumpu Takumishuku, a try-it-yourself facility for traditional crafts and can be previewed here.

• The Toro archaeological site in Suruga Ward dates back to the late Yayoi period in the first century. The remains were discovered in 1943 by workers constructing a World War Two munitions plant, excavated in 1947 and 1948 and re-excavated between 1999 and 2004. Today, the site has reproductions of ancient pit-houses and high-floored granaries as used as far back as the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C., along with reconstructed rice paddies and associated canals and waterways. The site is preserved as a National Historic Monument with a museum displaying artifacts unearthed in the dig.

• Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art at the foot of Nihondaira includes a Rodin wing with a collection of the sculptor''s works along with other European sculptures.

• A 25-minute walk from JR Yui Station, Tokaido Hiroshige Art Museum features Utagawa Hiroshige's ***Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido*** ukiyo-e woodblock prints.

• The Miho Peninsula in city's Shimizu Ward features *Miho no Matsubara*, a seven-kilometre stretch of seashore is lined with pine trees designated as one of New Three Views of Japan and added to the World Heritage List in 2013.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

SHIZUOKA PREFECTURE

Shizuoka Prefecture in central Japan halfway between Tokyo and Osaka stretches along the Pacific coast between Suruga Bay and the Minami Alps and east to the Izu Peninsula, a resort area sometimes referred to as Japan's Riviera. Shizuoka has a subtropical climate, hot and humid in summer and, being close to the warm Kuroshio Current, wet by Japanese standards.

The Fuji volcanic belt extends to Izu Peninsula, so an abundance of hot springs makes the prefecture a tourist attraction, alongside features, including Suruga Bay, the Sea of Enshu and Lake Hamana. Tea is the prefecture's most famous product.

The province of Suruga dates back to the early Nara period. Early in the eighth century, the capital was relocated to a more central location on the Abe River at Sunpu, which became the capital of the Imagawa clan during the Muromachi period.

The city changed hands several times after the Imagawa clan were defeated at the Battle of Okehazama, and ended up being controlled by Tokugawa Ieyasu, who made Sunpu the site of a secondary court after he retired from the Shōgunate in 1606.

For the next two hundred and sixty years, Sunpu was *tenryō* (directly administered by the Shōgunate), ruled by the *Sunpu jōdai*, the Shōgun's nominee, officially based in Sunpu.

In 1869, after the end of the Tokugawa Shōgunate, Tokugawa Iesato was assigned the short-lived Sunpu Domain, which became Shizuoka Prefecture in 1871, and expanded to absorb Hamamatsu Prefecture and the western part of Ashigaru Prefecture in 1876. The merger brought the city of Hamamatsu and the Izu Peninsula into Shizuoka.

Scenic and tourist attractions include Mount Fuji, Lake Hamana, the sand dunes in Hamamatsu and Omaezaki and the rickety suspension bridges in Sumatakyo Gorge.

Oigawa Railway operates one of a handful of steam engines operating in Japan between Kanaya Station in Shimada and Senzu Station in Kawanehon on a line built to carry workers and materials upstream to a dam construction site. The line runs through a mountain area with no cities or towns. Most passengers are tourists visiting one of the *onsen* resorts along the way, hikers bound for the Southern Alps, train enthusiasts or photographers. The line operates a variety of historic locomotives and period carriages. From Senzu, the company's Ikawa Line is the only rack-and-pinion railway in Japan, running north as far as Ikawa, at the foot of the Southern Alps with 61 tunnels and 51 bridges in just 25.5 kilometres. Both lines are highly rated scenic routes during the *sakura* and autumn leaf seasons.

The prefecture is host to a number of festivals and special events

• During the *sakura* season on the first weekend in April the Shizuoka Festival recreates Tokugawa Ieyasu's custom of taking daimyō to view the cherry blossoms at Sengen Shrine. A flower-viewing procession with four hundred performers, a cherry blossom dance in the evening and costumed merchants selling food to visitors are some of the highlights.

• In Shimoda, the southern-most city on the Izu Peninsula the three-day Kurofune Matsuri (Black Ship Festival), held on the third weekend of May, is the city's major tourist attraction. The festival commemorates the arrival of Commodore Perry and the Shimoda Treaty which opened Shimoda and Hakodate to American ships in 1854 with a parade of marching bands and naval officers in period costumes. Events emphasising Japanese art and culture feature *origami*, *ikebana*, martial arts, Japanese Tea Ceremony and *taiko* drums.

• Shizuoka City's Abekawa Fireworks display on the banks of the Abe River upstream from Abekawa Bridge on the last Saturday of July features 15,000 aerial fireworks and fifty ground-based set pieces.

• *Shimizu Minato Matsuri* (Shimizu Port Festival) on the first Friday, Saturday and Sunday in August commemorates the opening of Shimizu port to international trade with mass dances featuring 30,000 performers on the first two days and a seaside fireworks display on the Sunday.

• The biggest event on the calendar, however, is the Daidogei Street Performance World Cup, an annual international busker's festival held in November in central Shizuoka City. The competition attracts over two million visitors each year to watch street performers from around the world in performance spaces around downtown Shizuoka City, with a main stage in Sunpu Park (*Sunpu kouen*).

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

SŌAMI

Painter, art critic, poet, landscape gardener, and master of the tea ceremony Sōami, also known as Kangaku Shinsō (1472-1525) was the last of three generations of connoisseurs who served as artistic custodians of the Ashikaga Shōguns' art collection.

As the son and grandson of painters and connoisseurs (Geiami and Nōami, respectively), he is a significant figure who specialised in landscapes painted on screens and sliding doors in Muromachi-period mansions and temples. Some of his greatest pieces covered over twenty *fusuma* panels, depicting Japanese landscapes using Chinese techniques.

As a critic, in 1511 he revised his grandfather's famous catalog of Chinese paintings, the *Kundaikan sayū chōki* (compiled in 1476).

Sōami's work was strongly influenced by the philosophy of Zen and his landscape work can be seen in two of the most celebrated Zen temple gardens in Japan, *Ryōan-ji* and *Daisei-in*, both in Kyōto, and both outstanding examples of *kare sansui*, dry landscape combinations of stones and sand used to suggest mountains and water. He is also believed to have planned the garden of Ginkaku-ji, the temple on the site of the villa built by his patron, Ashikaga Yoshimasa.

Daisen-in also holds a set of landscape *fusuma-e*, but with the paintings done on sliding doors in environments where flash photography is forbidden there are few examples of his work available to view away from their original setting. The reader can get a sense of his work from the *Landscape of the Four Seasons* (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/41.59.1,2).

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

TAKAYAMA

The name means *tall mountain*, and in a mountainous country, predictably, there's more than one of them. To avoid confusion, the Takayama in the mountainous Hida region of Gifu Prefecture is commonly labelled *Hida-Takayama*. With a population around the hundred thousand mark, Takayama is a compact city with a downtown area that's easy to cover on foot, though some attractions (Hida Folk Village, for example) are best accessed by bus. Interestingly, a series of local government mergers since the mid-1930s have made Takayama the largest city in Japan as measured by surface area.

Located in the heart of the Japanese Alps, Takayama is the major transport hub for the Hida region, and the surrounding ski resorts and *onsen* have delivered a high (three star) rating in the **Michelin Guide**. The city is well worth visiting for its beautifully preserved old town, festivals held in spring and autumn, *sakura* (mid- to late-April, around three weeks after Nagoya) and autumn foliage (late October into the first week of November).

Takayama is part of the heavy snow area with snowfall on most days throughout the winter. The annual snowfall comes in at around five metres between the end of November and early April.

The city rose to prominence during the feudal period as a source of high quality timber. Skilled carpenters from Takayama are believed to have worked on the Imperial Palace in Kyoto, and many temples in Kyoto and Nara and the city was important enough to be placed under the direct control of the Tokugawa *Shōgun* in the seventeenth century.

As a result, in spite of relative isolation, it was a prosperous centre that developed its own regional culture over a period of some three centuries.

Takayama is famous for its well-preserved merchant quarter (*Sanno-machi*, three narrow lanes lined with wooden buildings housing *saké* breweries, boutiques and museums), *Takayama Jinya* (the building from which the *Shōgun*'s representative administered the area), *Takayama Yatai Kaikan* (Takayama Festival Float Exhibition Hall, where the festival floats are stored), the Hida Folk Village (an open-air museum that recreates a traditional mountain village), *ramen* noodles and Hida beef.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term

TŌHOKU SHINKANSEN

Construction work on the 674 km Tōhoku *Shinkansen*, connecting Tokyo with Aomori on the northern end of Honshū, commenced in November 1971, and the line opened in stages from June 1982. The line runs through a more sparsely populated region of Japan's main island and reached Aomori in December 2010. An extension of the line passing through the Seikan Tunnel should reach ShinHakodate, on the northern island of Hokkaidō in March 2016 and Sapporo by 2035.

Branch lines running off the Tōhoku *Shinkansen*, the Yamagata *Shinkansen* (Fukushima – Shinjō) and Akita Shinkansen (Morioka – Akita) are labelled mini-*shinkansen* routes.

Services on both lines run on the Tohoku Shinkansen line from Tokyo, then branch onto lines where the original narrow gauge has been upgraded. Since these are not purpose built *Shinkansen* lines the maximum speed is limited to130 km/h, but travel time is reduced since passengers no longer need to change trains at Fukushima and Morioka.

Planning for the Jōetsu *Shinkansen* connecting Tokyo and Niigata was initiated in 1971 by Niigata-born Prime Minister Tanaka, and services began on 15 November 1982, branching off the existing Tōhoku *Shinkansen* at Ōmiya.

Completed in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics, the Nagano *Shinkansen* branches off the Jōetsu and Tōhoku lines at Takasaki and forms the first section of the Hokuriku *Shinkansen*, with an extension from Nagano to Kanazawa scheduled to open in March 2015. From there, the line should proceed on to Tsuruga and will eventually loop back to Osaka.

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinkansen**, **Kyushu Shinkansen**, **Nagano Shinkansen**, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen (History)**, **Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

Index Find Term

TŌKAIDŌ SHINKANSEN

Government approval of the *Shinkansen* project in December 1958 allowed co
the line between Tokyo and Osaka to begin in April 1959 at an estimated cost o
billion. The final cost was nearly double the original figure.

Completed in time for the 1964 Olympics the 515.4 km line began service on 1
1964, cutting the trip between Tokyo and Osaka from six hours and forty minut
hours. By 1965, it was down to just over three hours, and the service had an im
impact, carrying one hundred million passengers up to 13 July 1967, and pass
billion mark in 1976.

Today, with up to thirteen sixteen car 1,323 seat trains per hour in either directio
Tōkaidō Shinkansen is the world's busiest high-speed rail line.

As a result of the line's success, it was extended westward to connect ShinŌsa
Hakata Station in Fukuoka (the *Sanyō Shinkansen*).

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, **Chūō Shinkansen**, **Hokuriku Shinkansen**, **Jōetsu Shinka**
Kyushu Shinkansen, **Nagano Shinkansen**, **Sanyō Shinkansen**, **Shinkansen**
Shinkansen (History), **Tōhoku Shinkansen**

Index Find Term

TOYAMA

Capital of Toyama Prefecture, located on the coast of the Sea of Japan coast in central Honshū, Toyama is about 200 km north of Nagoya and 300 km northwest of Tokyo.

Traditionally an agricultural area, modernisation after the Meiji Era saw Toyama become a important industrial region, initially producing medicine and paper, then moving into heav industry and chemicals as power generated by hydroelectric projects in the mountainous hinterland became available.

The city's importance as a centre for aluminium, ball-bearing and steel production saw an air raid that destroyed 99.5 percent of the city in August 1945. Postwar reconstruction, based around a plentiful water supply, a well-developed drainage system and agricultura forestry, fishery, commercial and manufacturing activity has seen Toyama become one of the most influential cities on the Japan Sea coast.

Attractions in the city include the Botanic Gardens, Toyama Castle, the Museum of Moder Art, Toyama Folk Village and Gohyaku-rakan, the Hills of 500 Buddhas.

Rail access will become easier when the Hokuriku (Nagano) Shinkansen line is extended Toyama in 2015. Current access from Tokyo involves taking the Joetsu Shinkansen to Echigo-Yuzawa and transferring to the Hakutaka limited express train. Rail access to and from Osaka and Kyoto is delivered through a spectacular service that crosses the central cordillera by way of Takayama.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

UMEDA

The station complex comprising the JR Osaka Station and facilities shared by fo
railway companies is one of Osaka's two transport hubs.

As a result, it forms the centre of a bustling district with an abundance of shopp
and entertainment options in the world's largest network of underground shoppi
well as above ground redevelopments in a former freight rail yard in northern Os
developments include Osaka Station City, Grand Front Osaka, and Umeda Sky
The 2.6 kilometre Tenjinbashisuji Shopping Street is located nearby.

Above ground level, the station complex takes in the JR Osaka Station and Han
Stations, with Hanshin Railways, Umeda Station, Midosuji Subway Line's Umeda
Yotsubashi Subway Line"s Nishi-Umeda Station and Tanimachi Subway Line's
Higashi-Umeda below ground level.

While more than 2.3 million passengers pass through the facilities every day, Ur
only ranks as the fourth busiest station complex in Japan.

The equivalent on the south side of the city is Minami, centred around Namba S

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index Find Term