

After the Peace Park we took a short ferry ride to Miyajima Island where there is a beautiful Shinto shrine and a very impressive tori standing in the sea and which appears to float at high tide. This is another UNESCO World Heritage Site.



*The Itsukushima Shrine has been destroyed several times, but the first shrine buildings were probably erected in the 6th century. The present shrine dates from the mid-16th century, and is believed to follow an earlier design from the 12th century. That design was established in 1168, when funds were provided by the warlord Taira no Kiyomori.*

*The shrine was "devoted to the worship of goddesses to whom Kiyomori owed thanks, he felt, for his success in life." Originally it was a pure Shinto shrine "where no births or deaths were allowed to cause pollution". Its treasures include the celebrated Sutras which consist of thirty-two scrolls, on which the Lotus and other sutras have been copied by Kiyomori, his sons, and other members of the family - each completing the writing of one scroll. Kiyomori lavished great wealth upon Itsukushima, and he liked to show the place to his friends, colleagues and royal personages.*

*The shrine was designed and built on pier-like structures over the bay so that it would appear to be floating on the water. The dramatic gate, or torii, of Itsukushima Shrine is one of Japan's most popular tourist attractions, and the most recognizable and celebrated feature of the Itsukushima shrine and the view of the gate in front of the island's Mount Misen is classified as one of the "Three Views of Japan". Although a gate has been in place since 1168, the current gate dates back only to 1875. The gate, built of decay-resistant camphor wood, is about 16 meters high. The placement of an additional leg in front of and behind each main pillar identifies the torii as reflecting the style of Ryōbu Shintō (dual Shinto), a medieval school of esoteric Japanese Buddhism .*

*The torii appears to be floating only at high tide. When the tide is low, it is approachable by foot from the island.*

The weather was most uncooperative (heavy rain) as we walked past dozens of souvenir shops and cafes on our way to the shrine but the visit was still worthwhile. We saw a group of several dozen businessmen and women



## Itsukushima



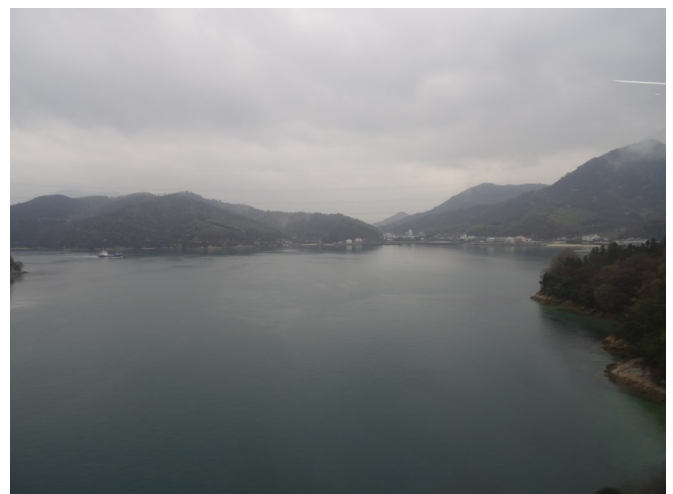
## Shrine

厳島神社

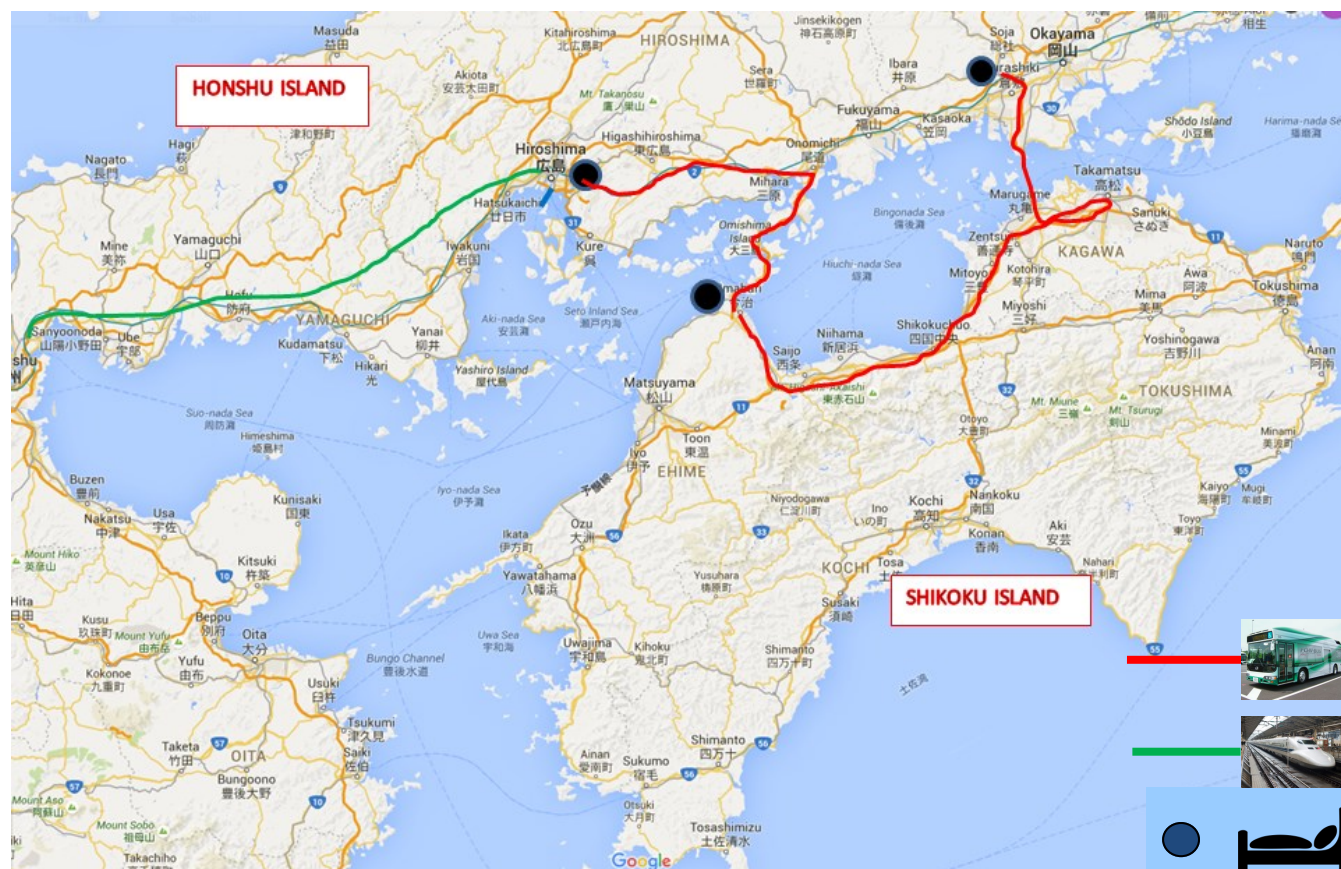


(all in black suits and bearing briefcases) who had come to the shrine to receive a blessing from the Shinto priest as this was the first day of the Fiscal Year and presumably they were hoping for a prosperous new year. We did our first souvenir shopping and had a coffee break before returning to Hiroshima port and the bus ride to our next destination.

The bullet train that had brought us to Hiroshima yesterday had crossed from Kyushu to the biggest island of Honshu but we were to stay on that island for just this one day—at least at this stage of our tour. On leaving Hiroshima, we drove a little further east before heading south to Shikoku Island. (See map opposite page). This is the fourth largest of the group in Japan and to get there we had to cross several smaller islands connected by







magnificent road bridges. Although it was still cloudy and rainy at times, the views were spectacular, particularly when we climbed to a Kirosan panoramic viewpoint near the end of the journey. The cherry blossom trees here were also spectacular.

We reached our hotel in Isabara at 5pm and had a communal dinner at 6:30. This one was especially good and noticeably better than all our previous traditional Japanese meals. Molly and I enjoyed a nightcap in the lounge before returning to the room to catch up on journal writing and our first post





Saturday April 2



We left Matsuyama for another two hour drive through beautiful scenery to our first stop in the town of Takamatsu. Here we visited Takamatsu-village (see brochure map below) comprising a couple of dozen houses and other buildings that represented life in the old feudal system on this island three to four hundred years ago. The buildings had been brought here from various parts of this island but I suspect a good deal of renovation had taken place in many of them. Nevertheless it was a pleasant - if hilly - stroll and the setting was attractive.



## Step back in time to scenes of traditional Japan and encounter a bygone era.

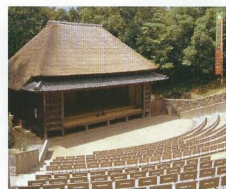
Experience for yourself at Shikoku-Mura how life in times past was imbued with the wisdom of our ancestors. Thirty-three traditional buildings from all over Shikoku have been reconstructed in their original forms, and are placed here and there throughout the village. Take the time to stand and gaze a little as you stroll from one to another, and encounter the almost-forgotten past of traditional Japan.



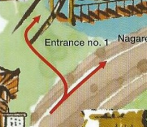
**Shikoku-Mura Gallery**  
The gallery exhibits a wide range of artworks including paintings, sculptures, Buddha figures, bronzes and calligraphy. The building and its inner water garden were designed by architect Tadao Ando.



**Sugar cane press**  
An ox would be yoked to a beam that turned the millstones in the center of the hut to grind the sugar cane. The hut is therefore circular in construction.



**Shodoshima Farmers' Kabuki Theater**  
This kabuki theater comes from the village of Ozu on Shodoshima Island. Farmers' kabuki theaters are common throughout Shikoku. During festivals the villagers could take a break from their backbreaking labor and amuse themselves by watching kabuki performances.



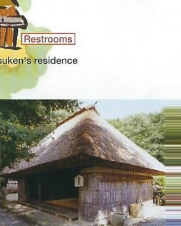
**Western-style house of Wase Down**  
Built in Meiji 38 (1905) in Kobe as the residence of Mr. Wase Down, the interior of this house is a fine example of the distinctive architecture of Kobe in the early 20th century.



**Lighthouse keepers' house from Nabeshima**  
Designed in 1871 by British architect R. H. Branton, this building combines both Western and Japanese architectural techniques. Its thick walls are of piled Yoshima granite.



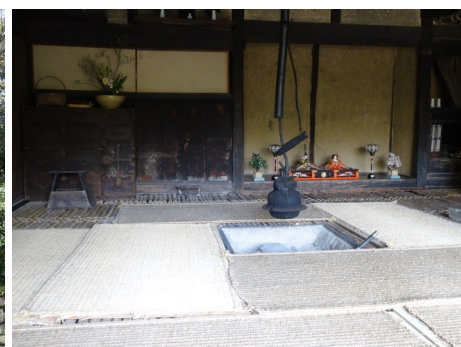
**Shimokita family house**  
This farmhouse formerly stood in Ichu village on the northern slopes of Mt. Tsunagi. Its construction features broad beams that cross each other to create a powerfully attractive space.







*Although Takamatsu is not technically a shrine, it is customary to purify oneself on entering. Maybe it was because they knew our way in was via the rope bridge!*



*The village had a number of thatched roof homes and a theater — with an entire model cast set up on stage.*

We then went to lunch - but this one was quite different from others we had enjoyed. This was at a cooking school for the local noodles (Udon) and we were taught how to prepare the noodles for cooking in a very hands on way. We kneaded the dough, rolled it flat, dance on it (!) and then cut it into the noodles using a very sharp and lethal-looking knife. This was done under the instruction of a very energetic lady (with translation by our guide) and at times with musical accompaniment and ourselves on tambourine. It was an interesting experience and was followed by the lunch itself which was excellent. In fact, I felt that the supplemental dishes were far better than the noodles and broth that we had prepared, although most seemed to enjoy this local specialty.



***Singing for your supper? Or dancing for your lunch!***





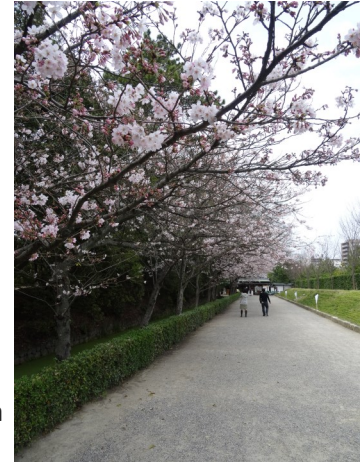
### ***Preparing Udon Noodles is a very energetic process!***

**Udon** is a type of thick wheat flour noodle of Japanese cuisine.

Udon is often served hot as a noodle soup in its simplest form, in a mildly flavored broth which is made of dashi, soy sauce, and mirin. It is usually topped with thinly chopped scallions. Other common toppings include tempura or a type of deep-fried tofu seasoned with sugar, mirin, and soy sauce. A thin slice of kamaboko, a half-moon-shaped fish cake, is often added.

The flavor of broth and topping vary from region to region. Usually, dark brown broth, made from dark soy sauce is used in eastern Japan, and light brown broth, made from light soy sauce is used in western Japan.

After lunch we drove a short distance to a beautiful Japanese garden (Ritsurin) that was first built for the feudal lords and is said to have been several hundreds of years in the making. The area where most people were gath-

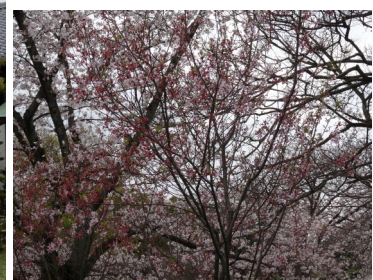


ered was a





lawn with dozens of cherry blossom trees at just about their peak. This being Saturday there were many families picnicking on the lawn and admiring the trees on a warm and sunny afternoon. The temperature today went over 70F for the first time on the trip. The rest of the garden (or at least the area that we had time to visit) was filled with trees, lakes, bridges and flowers in what everyone would recognize as quintessential Japanese. Our one hour stroll was extremely pleasant.



Legacy of Nature. Centuries of Tradition.

Ritsurin Garden  
栗林公園

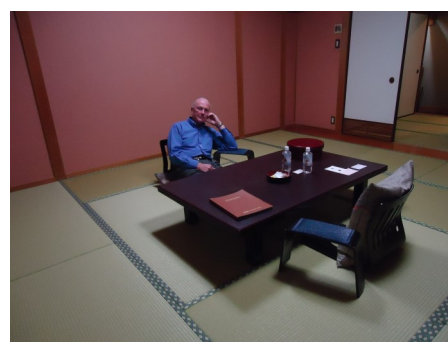
Ritsurin Garden is a superb cultural asset that conveys the characteristics of the daimyo strolling gardens that were typically seen in the 17th and 18th century.

A daimyo strolling garden is a type of traditional Japanese garden in which ponds and hills are expertly constructed over a vast tract of land, and you can enjoy the garden's space as you leisurely walk around inside.





The driving day ended by crossing back to the main island, once again by way of several smaller islands connected by ultra-modern road bridges. We made one stop in a rest area to view the bridge and some of the many islands. Our hotel was just on the main island (Honshu) and we had magnificent views of the bridge again from our room. This was another Japanese-style bedroom!



This had been another terrific day of sightseeing and, together with yesterday, was the highlight of the trip so far. And the fun wasn't over. Tonight we had a traditional Kaiseki banquet (with sake) which started out looking very much like all previous dinners with about eight dishes on the table at each place setting. However, when these were finished, we were presented with about six more courses each of which were much heartier than the first eight "appetizers". A small steak, a large bowl of fish and several other unidentifiable dishes (including one that contained eel we were told) came successively - followed by soup and dessert!

Fortunately after 1 1/2 hours of continuous eating we were invited to go downstairs for a presentation of Japanese drumming. The 10 minute show was very well done with masked drummers and fluorescent sticks performing in a darkened room and keeping up a tremendous pace - but perhaps the more interesting was the time that four young children were invited to try drumming, followed by four adult volunteers (three of whom were from our group). The entire performance was introduced and commented on in Japanese but we had no difficulty understanding exactly what was being said. It was a fun way to end the evening.

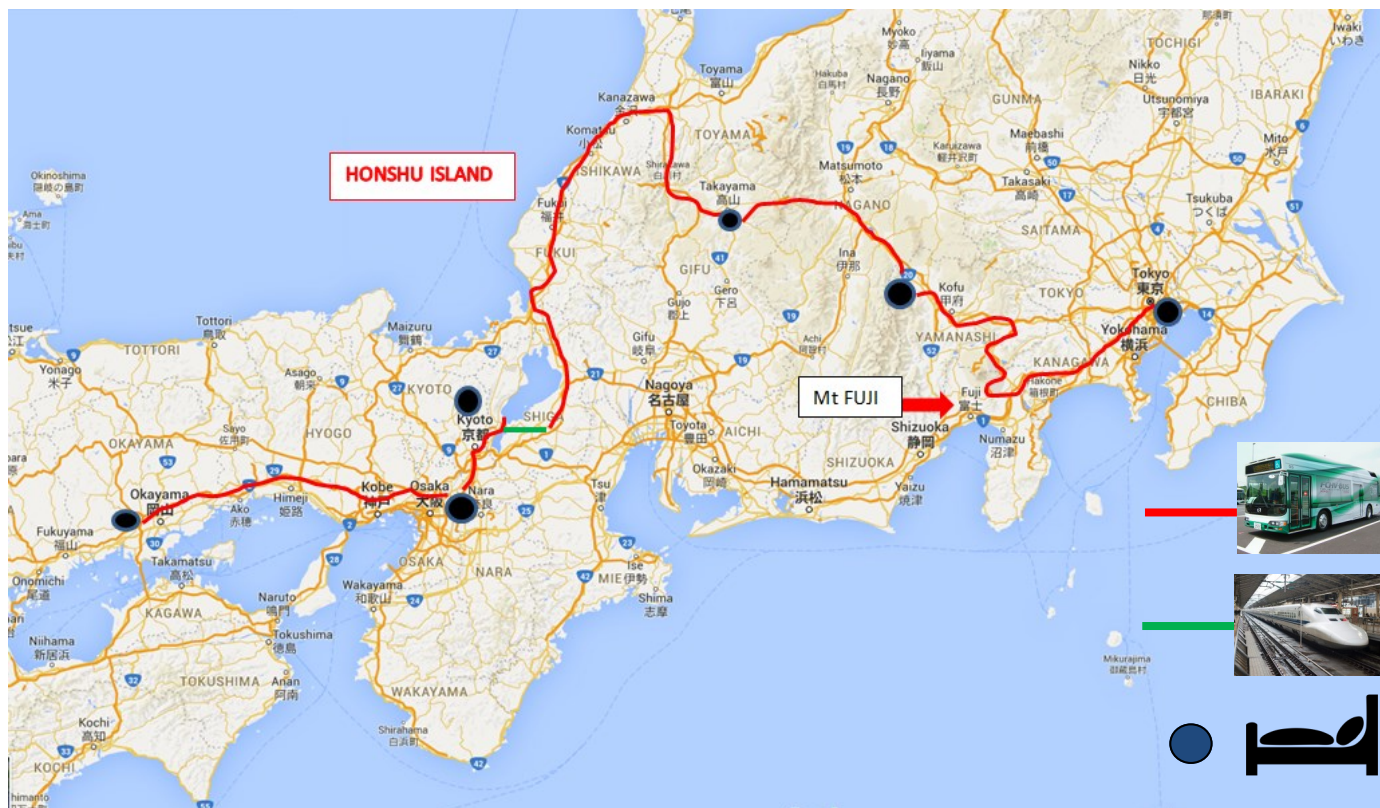
### Sunday April 3

**We were now back on the big island of Honshu (see map on opposite page) where we would stay for the rest of the trip. However, we still had a week of touring and there was a lot more to see.**

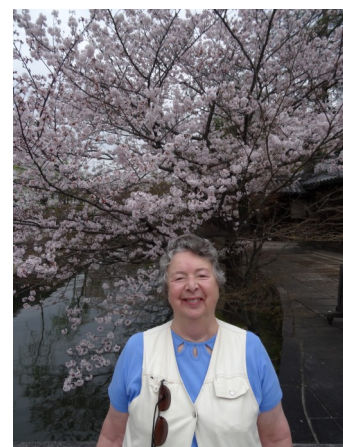
After breakfast we drove just a short distance into the city of Kurashiki to visit a scenic area alongside a canal. The town had been a port but the area we visited is essentially a few streets with buildings of the earlier times (19th century) which were mostly two storey in black and white. The area that we walked was very attractive and we saw several groups taking short canal boat rides (complete with what we would classify as "rice paddy" hats), several in beautiful traditional Japanese dress and







lots of “local” tourists out for a Sunday stroll with their families. This being cherry blossom time - which was about at its best here) - there were a lot of people on the streets on a warm and bright morning.







We also spent an hour in the Ohara Museum of Art. This had been formed at the beginning of the 20th century to bring Western art to Japan and contained many paintings by Monet and his contemporaries and a lot of Impressionist work. In addition, there was a collection of more modern art (right up to this day) and a section of Asian art work. We found the time spent here was interesting and just about sufficient for us to see all we wanted. We were also present in this area at the start of a vintage car parade, apparently held here every year at this time. Many were sports cars from the early 20th century but a number were classic cars from Europe such as Mercedes and Rolls Royce.











姫路城

*Himeji Castle*





We were told that we could walk up to the keep and then through the six floors of the castle itself in a clockwise fashion to return to the entrance but that today (the busiest of the year!) we may not have time to do the whole circuit. Once again our tour guide was somewhat ambiguous in his instructions - except the one to be back at the bus by 4pm! So, we all set off at a pace that suited us with the knowledge that we could always turn around if the going got tough (it was a steep hill and many stairs) or too crowded.

In our case, we reached the main keep at which point the line stopped. We chatted with a Californian lady who had been here before on far less crowded days and, after a brief discussion, she advised us to start our way back as we would not be able to complete the circuit in time.

So, we - and several others in the group - strolled at a leisurely pace and admired the outside of the castle and the cherry blossom and, as a sudden downpour started, went back to the bus. Others (perhaps half the bus) made the entire circuit and were back in time so we may have been able to make it. However, we enjoyed the views we had and apparently didn't miss much insofar as the interior of the castle was concerned but did not get the panoramic vistas from higher up.

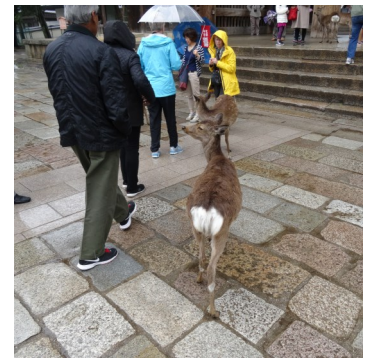
From the castle we drove to Kobe where we had a very good Japanese dinner with the famous Wagyu beef as its feature. This was thinly sliced and we cooked it ourselves on individual heaters on the table. I thought it was excellent as were the rest of the dishes provided. Others were less impressed, mainly because the meat didn't look like a typical US steak.

From Kobe we drove another 45 minutes to our hotel in Sakai, which is very close to Osaka. There was some mix-up with the check-in and Molly and I had to wait about 30 minutes for our keys but we finally got to the room soon after eight. Since we had eaten dinner, we opted to have a drink in the hotel bar (good but expensive) after first taking a short walk to find an ATM. We got to bed before 10:30 after another great day of sightseeing.

#### Monday April 4

After breakfast we drove to the city of Nara which had been the first capital of Japan before it was moved to Kyoto. In Nara we visited the largest bronze statue of Buddha which stands about 50 feet high within the wooden Todaiji temple. The site is also famous for its large deer population but it was the Buddha and the surrounding buildings that were the highlights of this visit.

*Tōdai-ji is a Buddhist temple complex that was once one of the powerful Seven Great Temples, located in the city of Nara. Great Buddha Hall houses the world's largest bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocana, known in Japanese as Daibutsu. The temple also serves as the Japanese headquarters of the Kegon school of Buddhism. The temple is a listed UNESCO World Heritage Site as one of the "Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara", together with seven other sites including temples, shrines and sites in the city of Nara. Deer, regarded as messengers of the gods in the Shinto religion, roam the grounds freely.*







## Tōdai-ji 東大寺



We then went to a Japanese tea ceremony where we made two types of tea; one with conventional leaves (green tea and quite good) and the other made from tea powder. The fun in this one was in the making; whisking the powder with warm water until it foamed or bubbled. When made the drink was a dark green and, although we drank it, it would not become standard for our afternoon cuppa at home. This tea ceremony was followed directly by another traditional Japanese lunch but this one had no raw fish so everyone was happy!



*Preparation of Green Tea at a riverside tea room.*

*The location won!*





We then drove to Kyoto which was the capital of Japan for 1000 years before Tokyo took over about 150 years ago. Apparently the move to Tokyo was a sign of strength by the “Revolutionary” victors in a Civil War.

The first stop in Kyoto (Japan’s third largest city and very busy) was at the Fushimira Inari Shrine which is atop a long hill along which are lined hundreds (literally) of orange torii gates. Unfortunately time didn’t allow us to walk the whole 4Km length of these gates to the temple itself but the pagodas and other buildings along the way were interesting and very colorful.

***Fushimira Inari Taisha is the head Shinto shrine of Inari, located in Fushimi-ku, Kyoto .***

***The earliest structures were built in 711 on the Inariyama hill in south-western Kyoto, but the shrine was re-located in 816 on the request of the monk Kūkai. The main shrine structure was built in 1499. At the bottom of the hill are the main gate and the main shrine. Behind them, in the middle of the mountain, the inner shrine is reachable by a path lined with thousands of torii. To the top of the mountain are tens of thousands of mounds or private worship. It is said that each of the tori (over 5000) was donated by a Japanese businessman.***





Our final stop for the day was at the Kiyomizu Temple. **Kiyomizu-dera** is an independent Buddhist temple in eastern Kyoto. The temple is part of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto (Kyoto, Uji and Otsu Cities) UNESCO World Heritage site.

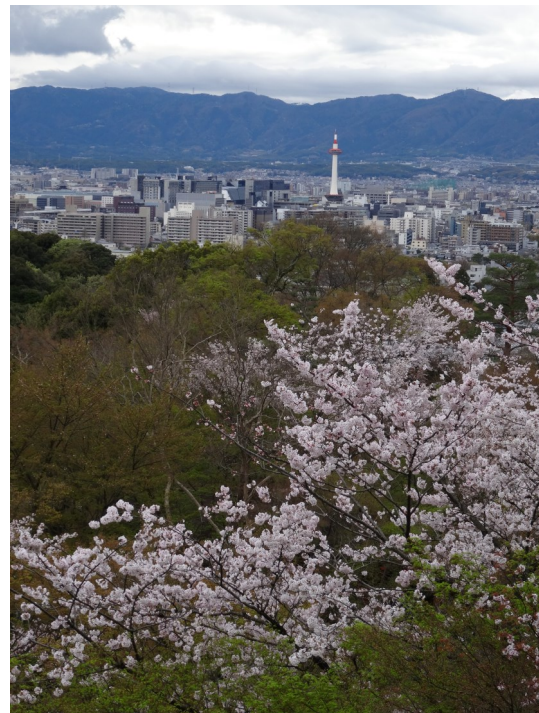


The main gates and entrance to the area (above and left) were a relatively easy walk from the bus but once again the Buddhist itself shrine was at the top of a half mile long climb but the views from the observation area were worth the walk. The shrine itself was interesting to see (and was being used as a house of prayer by lots of visitors) but the views over the city of Kyoto were spectacular. Since this is the height of the cherry blossom season and Kyoto was anticipated as the best display for the time of our visit we were treated to some beautiful flora that provided a perfect backdrop for the high rises and tower of Kyoto. Also, apparently the city of Kyoto is encouraging the use of the kimono for touring the sites of the area so we were treated to hundreds of beautiful girls (and a large number of men) dressed in traditional Japanese outfits. Wonderful!



*The main shrine, a distant pagoda and a smaller shrine*





## Kyoto



We were staying tonight (and tomorrow night also) just outside the major sprawl of Kyoto in the city of Otsu which sits on the edge of the largest lake in Japan. In fact our hotel room had a wonderful view of the lake and the mountains across the other side.

Molly and I decided to eat in the only restaurant in the hotel which provided basically two set meals - one Japanese and one Western, We chose the latter which consisted of appetizers, soup, salad, beef and vegetables and coffee and dessert. With a bottle of wine to help it down we found the whole meal to be very good and not that overpriced at a total of \$130. Surprisingly (or not) we were the only ones of our group of 34 who were in the restaurant, the rest opting for buying something from a local supermarket which our guide had described as the only feasible option to eating in. We have often found that tourists who are willing to spend thousands of dollars to get to a foreign land are unwilling to spend another \$100 or so to get a meal that is not included in the tour.

Each to his own!

Speaking of that; we had actually volunteered to take one of the three Japanese rooms available for this two-night stay.





**Tuesday April 5**

We both slept very well on our beds on the floor and have enjoyed the experience.

*Kinkaku-ji is a Zen Buddhist temple in Kyoto. It is one of the most popular buildings in Japan, attracting a large number of visitors annually. It is designated as a National Special Historic Site and is one of 17 locations comprising the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto World Heritage Site.*

*The Golden Pavilion is a three-story building on the grounds of the temple complex. The top two stories of the pavilion are covered with pure gold leaf. The pavilion functions as a shariden housing relics of the Buddha.*

After breakfast we drove about an hour to the Kankakuji Temple which is a beautiful pavilion covered in gold and standing at the edge of a small lake. The gardens of the grounds were absolutely fantastic and they together with the pavilion made for some beautiful photographs, especially as the water was still so we got perfect reflections. We spent an hour there but could easily have wandered the grounds for a longer time.







However, we had to get to our next stop where we were presented with a 10 minute kimono fashion show, which was quite interesting and (obviously) was followed by the chance to buy the goods.



After the show we were driven to a beautiful area (Arashiyama) on the edge of the Hozu River, along which were lined dozens of cherry trees were. The hillside was also dotted with cherry trees in blossom, although we were told that these uncultivated ones did not have so large a blossom as the ones at street level.

We had a good lunch (Italian!) sitting outside before walking a short distance to the Tenryuji Temple.





The Tenryuji Temple is a Zen Buddhist temple set once again in some magnificent grounds with trees and plants as well as examples of Zen landscaping. We walked right by the temple itself (thanks to our guide's pace) but the grounds (The Sogenchi Gardens) were absolutely stunning and worthy of a much longer visit.

