



On leaving the temple grounds we walked through a bamboo grove (which got a bigger billing than it deserved, we thought) and then we were back on the busy street.



Unfortunately we had an hour to kill before the bus left and there was almost a revolt by the group as we had been rushed through a very beautiful area (with no stops for explanation) and then we were to waste an hour on the street. We couldn't decide whether the guide was too new, or incompetent or whether to blame the Tour Company - but certainly they will be hearing from a large percentage of the 34 people on the bus

However, every cloud has a silver lining!!



We were compensated somewhat by our next stop which was at the Gion Kobu Kaburenjo Theatre where we had a brief tea ceremony (the same green tea we had enjoyed (!) earlier in the trip, served with a cookie on a ceramic dish—that we got to keep) before watching a wonderful performance of Japanese geisha dancing. The entire cast (dancers, vocalists and musicians) were female although a few male



characters appeared in the one hour performance. We were given earphones that gave us an English commentary throughout the show so we were able to understand what the



dances were representing. This was a great added touch but I think everyone felt that the unique dancing would have been excellent even without translation. Photography was not allowed inside the theater and we were given little upfront information as to exactly what we were to see and its history. Consequently, we have included (opposite page) a detailed description provided by the “Unmistakable Japan” web site, which puts the wonderful show in perspective.



Finally we had a hectic walk through very crowded Kyoto city streets to eat an equally chaotic dinner. This was Suki-yaki style which we somehow found our way through despite little by way of explanation as to what we were supposed to do.

In essence it was a “cook it yourself” meal of meat and vegetables in a pan shared between four people, something like the “Melting Pot” restaurant experience we enjoy at home. It was very good and we kept asking for - and receiving - additional beef and vegetables. Molly and I shared a small carafe of sake to

round out the meal.

Then it was a 45 minute drive back to the hotel where we arrived around 8pm after yet another series of beautiful and unusual experiences.

Miyako Odori

Japan's geisha are famous the world over, but as they usually perform only at small private gatherings in the teahouses of the geisha districts, it's not often that visitors from overseas get to see them. Even having deep enough pockets to pay for a private geisha party isn't good enough – you need an introduction from an existing client in order to gain admittance to the private and exclusive world of the geisha. Fortunately, Kyoto's geisha communities put on annual public shows, which provide an opportunity for less-privileged ordinary people to see the geisha perform their arts. The most famous of these performances is the Miyako Odori, at which the geisha of the Gion Kobu geisha community perform.

Geiko are women trained in dance and music, with an emphasis on grace, beauty and dignity. (Kyoto geisha prefer to be called 'geiko' meaning 'arts child', rather than 'geisha', which means 'arts person'.) Geiko communities are very traditional, and are governed by strict rules, and the Gion Kobu community is perhaps the most conservative of all. Geiko begin their careers as apprentices called 'maiko', usually aged fifteen. From then on, they move into a geiko house, and dedicate their lives to the geiko world. First they are trained in conduct becoming of a geiko – bowing deeply to show respect to their seniors, and undertaking everyday tasks with grace and elegance. They then move on to training in the geiko's arts, such as music, dance and calligraphy, and they begin to join the geiko in entertaining clients in Kyoto's teahouses. Around the age of twenty, maiko graduate from their apprenticeship, and become fully-fledged geiko.

Miyako' means capital city, and 'Odori' means dance, so 'Miyako Odori' translates literally as 'Capital City Dances', which makes sense when you consider that Kyoto used to be the capital of Japan, and that 'Kyoto' is still written with characters meaning 'capital city'. In English the dances are often referred to as 'The Cherry Blossom Dances', because they take place in April when the cherry blossoms are in bloom, or sometimes just as 'The Kyoto Dances'.

Despite the name, the dances began in 1872, four years after Tokyo took over as the capital of Japan. That was the first time that Gion Kobu's nationally-famous geiko performed in public. Since the second season in 1873, the dances have been held at the Gion Kobu Kaburenjo Theatre, and they continue to be popular with both Kyoto locals and visitors to the city. There are four hour-long performances each day throughout the whole of April – making the dances extremely hard work for the geiko and maiko – especially as they are expected to produce a flawless performance every time.

The geiko communities have built up a distinct style of music and dance over many years, and the geiko are required to adhere to the prescribed forms absolutely – there's very little room for the performers to introduce their own innovations. The highly stylized and tightly choreographed dance moves are slow and graceful, so there's no chance that speed of movement can hide any mistakes – every move must be (and almost always is) perfect. Participating in the dances is considered a great honour, so despite it being punishingly hard work, there is fierce competition amongst the geiko and maiko for the most prominent roles. (Maiko learn early-on in their careers just how demanding their chosen occupation is, so all the girls who make it through training must surely have an abundance of stamina and determination.)

Each performance has about eight scenes, each of which depicts some aspect of Japanese life, especially life in Kyoto and the geiko districts. There is a particular focus on traditional places such as shrines and temples, and on the changes seen in nature throughout the year. The performances aren't restricted only to dance – the geiko also sing and act out mini-dramas. A huge amount of work goes into producing lavish costumes, and the geiko and maiko are elaborately made-up with white-painted faces and ornate hairstyles. Throughout the performance, around 60 geiko and maiko take to the stage, each wearing exquisite kimono decorated according to the theme of their act. They are accompanied by an orchestra playing traditional Japanese instruments. At the end of the show, all the performers return to the stage for a magnificent finale.



Wednesday April 6

After breakfast we were driven to Kyoto railway station where we took a short (21 minute) bullet train ride to Maibare.



←

12

名古屋・東京方面

for Nagoya, Tōkyō

列車名 Train

列車番号 Train No.

時刻 Time

行先 Destination

のぞみ 218

9:26

東京

自由席 1-3号車

停車駅: 名古屋・新横浜・品川

ひかり 514

9:33

東京

自由席 1-5号車

停車駅: 米原・岐阜羽島・名古屋・豊橋・新横浜・品川

のぞみ 120

9:45

東京

自由席 1-3号車

←

12

名古屋・東京方面

for Nagoya, Tōkyō

列車名 Train

列車番号 Train No.

時刻 Time

行先 Destination

NOZOMI 218

9:26 Tōkyō

Non-Reserved

This train stops at:

Nagoya, Shin-Yokohama, Shinagawa

HIKARI 514

9:33 Tōkyō

Non-Reserved

This train stops at:

Maibara, Gifu-Hashima, Nagoya, Toyohashi, Shin-Yokohama, Shinagawa

NOZOMI 120

9:45 Tōkyō

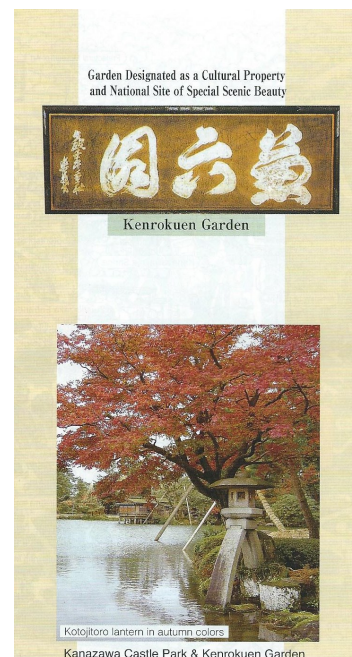
Non-Reserved

We were then met again by the bus and started a 2 ½ hour ride to Kanazawa, with just a short break at a service area. The drive took us again through some magnificent scenery with some steep climbs followed by descents to



sea level and glimpses of the Sea of Japan. The guide told us essentially nothing about the area we were driving through but the scenery allowed us to enjoy the ride. We were now as far north in the country as we would get on this visit and not far west of the Japanese Alps. In fact, the city of Nagano—site of the 1998 Winter Olympic Games—was only about 60 miles east of our next stop.

Once in Kanazawa we had lunch and then spent 1 ½ hours in the beautiful Kenrokuen Gardens. These gardens contained a couple of ponds, a waterfall, fountain and a number of sculptured stones as well as many small bridges.



The cherry blossom was still at its peak here and there were some magnificent groves as well as pine trees and

many other different flora. On a sunny and warm afternoon it was a very pleasant area to spend some time simply strolling. And, back on the street at the end of the walk we got some very nice views of the castle that is associated with the gardens. It certainly looked a lot like the one at Himeji.



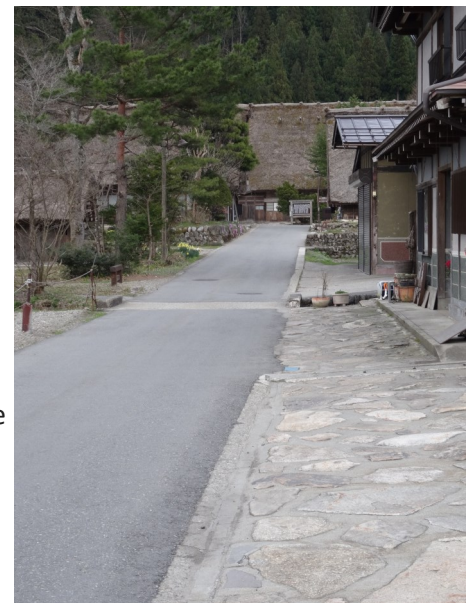
Then we had another 1 1/2 hour drive during which we climbed higher into the mountains and saw a number of snowcapped peaks, many with considerable amounts of snow still clearly visible.



Our last stop of the day was at a fairly large farm village (Shirakawa-go) with many preserved and restored farmhouses, most of



which had steeply pitched thatch roofs. This isolated community had once been famous for its silk industry (the worm breeding as well as silk manufacturing) but now is largely a tourist destination. It is, however, another UNESCO World Heritage site and is therefore going to be preserved in its original state as much as possible. We were told that this



village was from the Edo era of Japan's history (17-19th century).



*Apparently
the silk
worms were
cultivated in
the loft
space.*



Another 45 minutes brought us to Takayama ("Little Kyoto" as it, too, was spared in the war and is well preserved) where our only activity for today was dinner, which was another very good Kaiseki banquet dinner. Can't you just see the excitement on the faces of the diners?



We got to the hotel soon after 8pm and Molly and I wanted a nightcap but - despite being advertised as open until 11 - the bar was already closed. One of the many surprises we have encountered in Japan is the fact that drinking with meals or, as we were now attempting, as a late evening taste, just doesn't seem to be a big part of the culture. Not what we had expected based on businessmen visits to the US and what we had heard.

Thursday April 7

When we woke up this morning it was raining very hard and, unfortunately, it continued for the entire day. As it turned out, we visited only two places (each for over an hour with plenty of time to get wet!) and the rest of the day was spent driving through more amazing scenery. We were now in the northern area of the main island and

in the mountainous area near Nagano. We reached a maximum altitude of only 4500 feet but we saw many ski runs still covered in snow and even piles of snow in parking lots and on some of the slopes close to the road. Again we went through many long tunnels but these seemed to be older than most we had seen previously and certainly were much narrower.

Out of the tunnels we could see peaks on both sides shrouded in clouds and we passed at least three huge dams along the Azusa River. It was a wonderful drive and we could only imagine what it must be like on a clear and sunny day.

The first place we visited was in the town where we had stayed overnight. This was the Old Town of Takayama and, again, would have been a very nice place to stroll had the weather been better. Based on the street map we were given, there were many interesting buildings, including a number of temples and shrines. As it was, we spent about 40 minutes in what had been the Takayama branch (Takayama Jinya—see inset below) of the Edo

TAKAYAMA JINYA

The National Historic Site



TAKAYAMA JINYA was a branch office of the **Edo Bakufu** (government) from 1692 to 1868. It is designated as a **National historic site** and is the only existing building of its kind in Japan.

The warrior government actually wielded supreme power over the nation during the **Edo era** (1603-1868) for 15 generations of the **Tokugawa Shogun** for 265 years in ancient **Edo** (today's **Tokyo**). The **Bakufu** directly ruled about 60 domains in various important areas of Japan (known as **Tenryo** afterwards) while about 250 feudal lords (called **Daimyo**) ruled their own domains.

This site focuses on the period when **Hida** province (today's **Takayama** region) became **Tenryo** for 176 years. 25 generations of head official called **Daikan** (promoted to **Gundai** afterwards) were sent from Edo to perform administrative business, such as tax collection, finance, police action and judgment, and forest management.

In 1867, the **Bakufu** lost its political power and returned it to **Emperor Meiji**. Since this area was administered by the **Takayama** prefectural government office, and several provincial and prefectural government office until 1969, the precious historical heritage has been well-preserved. An ongoing effort is made to preserve **Takayama Jinya** now and for future generations.

government office from 1692 to 1868. It was a large complex with many rooms where the merchants came to pay taxes, where the magistrate sat, where fines were levied and where honors were presented. For reasons that weren't quite clear, we had to walk barefoot inside the buildings (just as though it were a temple) but the whole floor was covered with Tatami woven reed "carpet". It was another place that captured a long period of Japanese history and it would have been made much more interesting had our guide given us any information. In fact, at one point, Molly latched on to another group who had an English-speaking guide and she learned quite a bit about the home, its history and construction as she tagged along!. For the rest of us, there was the guide brochure.



We did manage to get a few rather damp pictures of the offices and contents as well as one of the temple complexes in this ancient town.





Rooms inside the Takayama



Temple Complex with huge bell



We had lunch in Takayama and then drove another two hours to Matsumoto where the only place we visited was the castle. Unlike the one in Himeji, this was black in color and the whole complex, although similar to Himeji, was far smaller. The grounds and the moat and huge stone walls were similar to Himeji but again on a much smaller scale.

Matsumoto Castle ("Crow Castle")

Black, strong *tenshu* (donjon tower) for warfare, graceful *tatsumitake-yagura* (scaffold in the southeast) and *tsukimi-yagura* (moon observatory scaffold) built during a time of peace. Many indispensable castle-building techniques are carried down to the present.



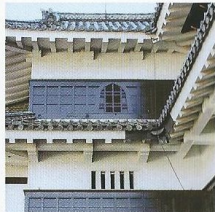
Dark room without windows, the 3rd floor of the *tenshu* (donjon tower). Although the *tenshu* (donjon tower) seems like it has five stories from the outside, it is actually six stories high inside. This floor is the safest area, as it cannot be seen from the outside; it was a secret to the castle's enemies. Therefore, warriors stayed here during wartime. This floor is dark with very little sunlight coming in through the south *kizare-goshi* (wooden grill).



Distinctive windows on the 2nd floor of the *tenshu* (donjon tower). This floor is much brighter than the others because of the three *tategoshi* (vertical grill) *musha* (warrior) windows at the east, west, and south walls. The floor has four rooms, which were believed to have been used as *musha-damari* (warriors' rooms), the place for warriors to assemble.



The armory of Matsumoto Castle on the 2nd floor of the *tenshu* (donjon tower) contains a harquebus collection and valuable related material donated by the late Michishige and Kayoko Akabane from Matsumoto City.



Two wings were extended during peacetime *Tatsumi-take-yagura* (scaffold in the southeast) (tatsumi) of the *tenshu* (donjon tower) was built at the same time as the *tsukimi-yagura* (scaffolding in the southeast) during the Kan'ei Era. The windows on the first floor are *musha* (warrior) windows, and the ones on the second floor are *kato* (flower-style) windows. Inside of the *kato* (flower-style) windows, there are shutters to keep out rainwater.



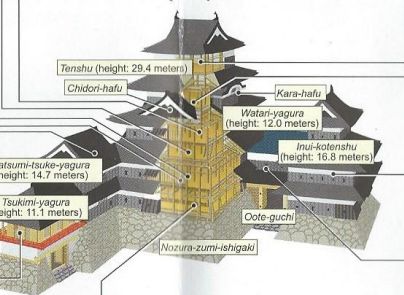
Tsukimi-yagura (moon observatory scaffold) This is the *yagura* (scaffold) used to view the moon. Three sides of the room (north, east and south) are open to the air when *mairado* (sliding doors) are opened. Vermilion-lacquered walls around the room and the ship-hull-shaped ceiling create a wide-open feeling. This area cannot be seen from the *tenshu* (donjon tower), *watari-yagura* (connecting scaffold), and *inu-kotenshu* (small tower in the southeast).



Stairs to the 6th floor, or the 5th floor of the *tenshu* (donjon tower). It is believed that this floor was used for tactical meetings of military officers during wartime. As the ceiling is 4.54 meters high, which is higher than the other floors, there is a staircase landing here that goes up to the 6th floor, and the stairs rise gradually.



Goza-no-ma (private residence) on the 4th floor of the *tenshu* (donjon tower). This room in the *shoin* style could be a temporary *goza-sho* (private area), where the lord stayed during emergencies. The room has a high ceiling with sunlight coming in from all four sides. The pillars are made of cypress wood smoothed out with a plane. There is a small wall above the door jamb, and the whole room was exquisitely built.



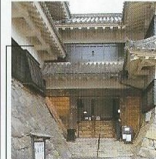
Pillars on the 1st floor of the tenshu (donjon tower) These pillars are made of hemlock, cypress and pine. It is believed that this room was used for the storage of food, weapons, and ammunition.



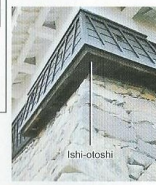
The top floor, the 6th floor of the *tenshu* (donjon tower), was used as a *bourou*, a watchtower for enemies during wartime. The ceiling was built using the *igeta-bari* (curved beam) technique. A god named *Nijuroku-ya-shin* (god of 26 nights), who protects Matsumoto Castle, has a dedication in the center of the ceiling.



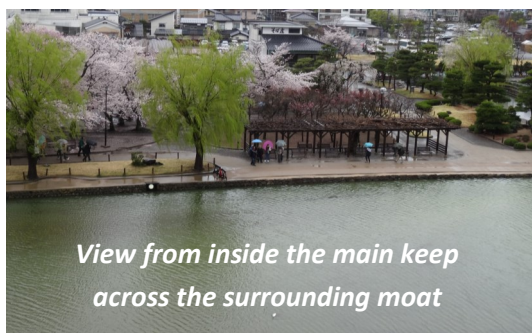
Maruta-bashira (bolt pillars) at the *inu-kotenshu* (small northeast tower). There are a number of *maruta-bashira* (bolt pillars) used inside the *inu-kotenshu*. Twelve of them on the 3rd and 4th floors are over 400 years old, which is about the time the castle was built.



Watari-yagura (connecting scaffold) at the entrance to the *tenshu* (donjon tower) connects the *tenshu* (donjon tower) and *kotenshu* (small tower). At the *oote-guchi* (main entrance), the *tenshu* (donjon tower) has a solid door that stops people from entering. The *kawara* (roof tiles) of the *tenshu* (donjon tower) and Japanese iron nails are exhibited on the 2nd floor.



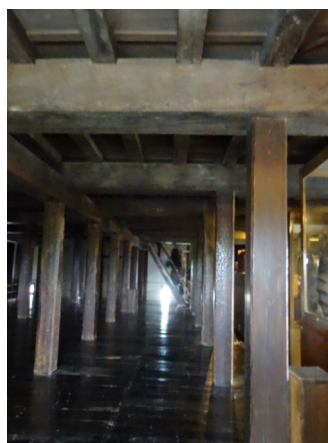
Ishiotoshi (stone drop) and sama (openings for archers) Visitors are able to see areas for war with firearms, which was the main weapon, at the *tenshu* (donjon tower). There are 25 *yazama* (openings for archers) and *teppo-zama* (firearm openings) on the thick wall, and there are *ishiotoshi* (stone drops) on the 1st floor of the *tenshu* (donjon tower), the *inu-kotenshu* (small northwestern tower), and *watari-yagura* (connecting scaffold). *Ishiotoshi* (stone drops) prevented enemies from climbing up the *ishigaki* (stone walls), and were used for repelling a firearm attack. They are similar to *sama* (openings for archers).



*View from inside the main keep
across the surrounding moat*



This time I managed to get through the main keep - a six storey high wooden structure that allegedly is original. This included climbing several steep (as steep as 60 degrees) staircases with 18 inch rises and maybe 9 inch steps and less than two feet wide in places. Most were one way staircases but the final two were two-way and had some low heavy wooden beams so it was something like climbing Ilkley Moor with occasional limbo dancing! There was very little to see inside apart from the structure itself, which was impressive, but there were a few displays of Shogun clothing, military hardware and some battle scenes on wall hangings, best depicted in the brochure opposite. I was glad I did it but expected to feel the effects tomorrow.



We then went to our hotel, which was back in the foothills of the mountains with little around it in the way of other civilization. However, it was a huge Western style hotel and very comfortable and we had another good Japanese meal to finish the day.

Friday April 8

Today was our day to visit Mt Fuji so we all breathed a sigh of relief when we woke to bright and clear skies. In fact, we got our first long shot of the sacred mountain (it is privately owned by one of the deity) from our hotel as we ate breakfast. As we drove closer we kept getting good views but of course we had to take pictures from a moving bus.



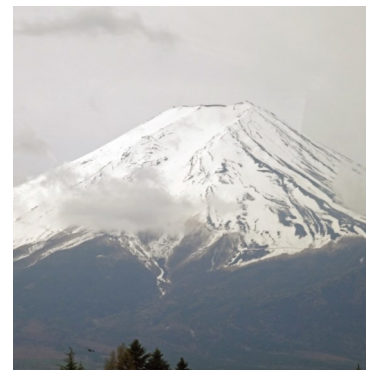
富士山



Our first distant, hazy glimpse

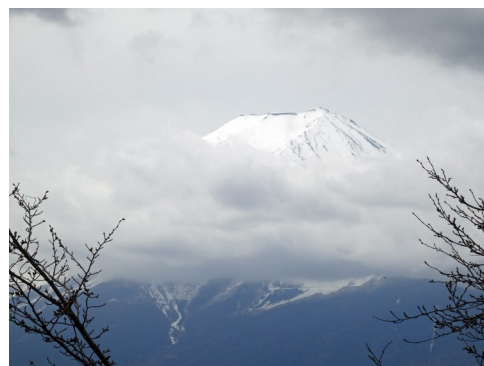


Mount
Fuji



As we approached the base of Mt Fuji our guide announced that it was very crowded on the road to the Fifth Station (of 10 if you were to climb it) so we would delay our visit until the afternoon. Questions about what would happen if it clouded over by then were dismissed, so we drove to Lake Kawaguchiko, which was a beautiful site in itself.

Here we took a cable car up Kachi Kachi “mountain” (it was only a three minute ride) and from the top we got some good views of Mt Fuji. However, by this time the clouds were beginning to shroud areas just below the summit and gradually the whole area covered in snow (the classical shot) was obscured. It was a warm and sunny day where we were but clearly that wasn’t going to last for too long. So, our closest pictures of Mt Fuji were not as clear as those we had taken from the bus, which was a shame, but we were thrilled that we had seen it on a relatively good day. Yesterday, for example, would have been a total washout! And the “official photo” was very clear!



View of Lake Kawaguchiko from the top of the Kachi Kachi Mountain cable car



We had lunch overlooking the lake (together with a large party of Japanese schoolgirls) and then started our drive on the toll road of the mountain but by now it was obvious that classic views were not to be and, in fact, by the time we turned around at the second station we were already in the clouds. Apparently the road was very busy further up and we had a schedule to keep but the mood of many on the bus was for going as far up the road as possible even if we had to miss other stops for the day.



All efforts to change the mind of Mr Koh were in vain, however, and we moved on to our final stop at the Gotemba Peace Park.

In the park was a fine white stupa which allegedly contains a relic from the Buddha that was presented by Prime Minister Nehru of India after World War II. Information on the rest of the park was scant but we gathered that a number of statues were presented to Japan by neighboring countries presumably as a sign of friendship and peace. Again, Googling was called for but this time revealed little except that—on a clear day (which by now we did not have) - the views of Mt Fuji are stunning! The park itself, however, is beautifully landscaped and worth a visit for that reason alone.



So, our tour for the day ended with a few unhappy campers still complaining about the organization and specifically about an opportunity missed but for our part we were happy that we had seen Mt Fuji in what was probably one of its clearer forms and got some almost quintessential pictures.

We arrived in Tokyo and our very large hotel before 5pm with just one more day of the tour left. After that Molly and I will be here on our own for two more days.

We booked to go to one of the hotel restaurants (a steakhouse) and then relaxed until dinner time. It was a very good fixed price five course meal with a decent bottle of wine. At over \$200 it was expensive but we expected that in the middle of Tokyo.

Saturday April 9

This was the final day of the tour and it was an action packed experience in the center of Tokyo. We started by visiting the Imperial Palace, the home of the Emperor and Empress. The grounds are open to the public on only two days of the year so all we were able to do was admire the moat and the walls around the grounds and one of the buildings within the grounds - presumably for staff. The wide open area in front of the grounds was very pleasant on a warm and sunny morning.



Above: Entrance to the Imperial Palace

Right: Ueno Park

Next we went to Ueno Park which is a favorite spot for Tokyo residents to view the cherry blossom trees and to stroll the area that has musicians and cafes in addition to the beautiful grounds. Molly and I found a small cafe here for coffee.



The next stop was at the Asakusa Temple which it appears is where Buddhism was established in Tokyo in 628AD, having been introduced into Japan from Korea about 75 years earlier. The temple itself is very ornate as are many of the surrounding buildings but perhaps the most interesting aspect of this complex is the very busy shopping area leading to the temple and the statue of Buddha. There is also a Shinto shrine within the large complex and, once again, the question of the differences between the two religions was raised. Clearly our guide was of no help in this regard so a little post-trip research has provided a partial answer which, together with more information on this temple, is shown on the next pages. Regardless, on a beautiful weekend day the whole area was absolutely packed with people.



The huge red and black paper lantern at the entrance to the Asakusa Senso-ji Temple

Sensō-ji (金龍山浅草寺) is an ancient Buddhist temple located in Asakusa, Tokyo. It is Tokyo's oldest temple, and one of its most significant. Formerly associated with the Tendai sect of Buddhism, it became independent after World War II. Adjacent to the temple is a Shinto shrine, the Asakusa Shrine.

The temple is dedicated to the bodhisattva Kannon. According to legend, a statue of the Kannon was found in the Sumida River in 628 by two fishermen, the brothers Hinokuma Hamanari and Hinokuma Takenari. The chief of their village, Hajino Nakamoto, recognized the sanctity of the statue and enshrined it by remodeling his own house into a small temple in Asakusa so that the villagers could worship Kannon.

The first temple was founded in 645 CE, which makes it the oldest temple in Tokyo. The Nishinomiya Inari shrine (Shinto) is located within the precincts of Sensō-ji and a torii identifies the entry into the hallowed ground of the shrine. A bronze plaque on the gateway structure lists those who contributed to the construction of the torii, which was erected in 1727.

During World War II, the temple was bombed and destroyed. It was rebuilt later and is a symbol of rebirth and peace to the Japanese people.

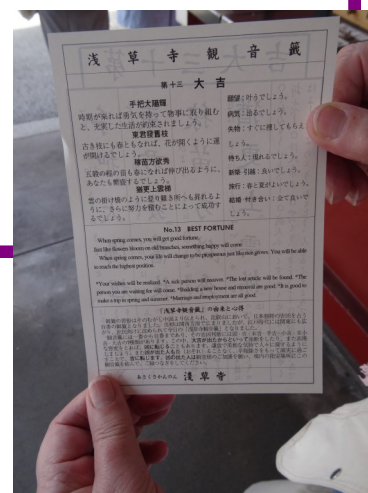
Dominating the entrance to the temple is the Kaminarimon or "Thunder Gate". This imposing Buddhist structure features a massive paper lantern dramatically painted in vivid red-and-black tones to suggest thunderclouds and lightning. Beyond the Kaminarimon is Nakamise-dori with its shops, followed by the Hōzōmon or "Treasure House Gate" which provides the entrance to the inner complex. Within the precincts stand a stately five-story pagoda and the main hall, devoted to Kannon.

Many tourists, both Japanese and from abroad, visit Sensō-ji every year. Catering to the visiting crowds, the surrounding area has many traditional shops and eating places that feature traditional dishes and souvenirs. These shops themselves are part of a living tradition of selling to pilgrims who walked to Sensō-ji.

Within the temple itself, and also at many places on its approach, there are o-mikuji stalls. For a suggested donation of 100 yen, visitors may consult the oracle and divine answers to their questions. Querents shake labelled sticks from enclosed metal containers and read the corresponding answers they retrieve from one of 100 possible drawers.



Molly had to see what was in store.....



るでしょう。

No.13 BEST FORTUNE

When spring comes, you will get good fortune.
Just like flowers bloom on old branches, something happy will come
When spring comes, your life will change to be prosperous just like rice grows. You will be able to reach the highest position.

*Your wishes will be realized. *A sick person will recover. *The lost article will be found. *The person you are waiting for will come. *Building a new house and removal are good. *It is good to make a trip in spring and summer. *Marriage and employment are all good.

浅草寺観音籤の由来と心得

The major differences between Shintoism and Buddhism

Shinto is an ancient religion from Japan whereas Buddhism is a tradition envisaged in India by Siddhartha Gautama.

Shinto originated from ancient Chinese inscriptions, whereas Buddhism has its inception in the thoughts and teachings of Gautama Buddha.

Shinto lays importance to religious actions and rites rather than words and preaching whereas the foundation of Buddhism is the words and preaching of Buddha. Buddhism focuses on an altruistic life that leads to salvation. Buddhism has religious branches in the form of Theravada and Mahayana whereas Shinto has no such religious sects.

Shinto worships the forces of nature, polytheism and animism whereas Buddhism is all about following an ethical code of conduct in one's life and practice meditation and renunciation.



金龍山浅草寺



Sensō-ji





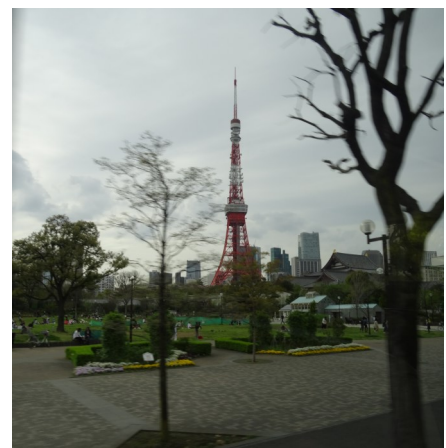
Quintessential Japan?

Then it was time for our final group Japanese meal (for which quite a number of the group was relieved) before the afternoon stops. The first of these was at the Edo Tokyo Museum where we visited just two floors which gave the history of the evolution of Tokyo from the relatively small town of Edo. Edo, however, had been the home of the Edo Shogunate which was perhaps the most powerful of the Shogunates throughout Japanese history and covered the period between the early 17th century and 1867 when the ultimate power of the Imperial family was regained. The museum was extremely well done and there were some fantastic detailed models of the town and its buildings as it evolved. It also helped that there were English plaques for virtually all of the exhibits.



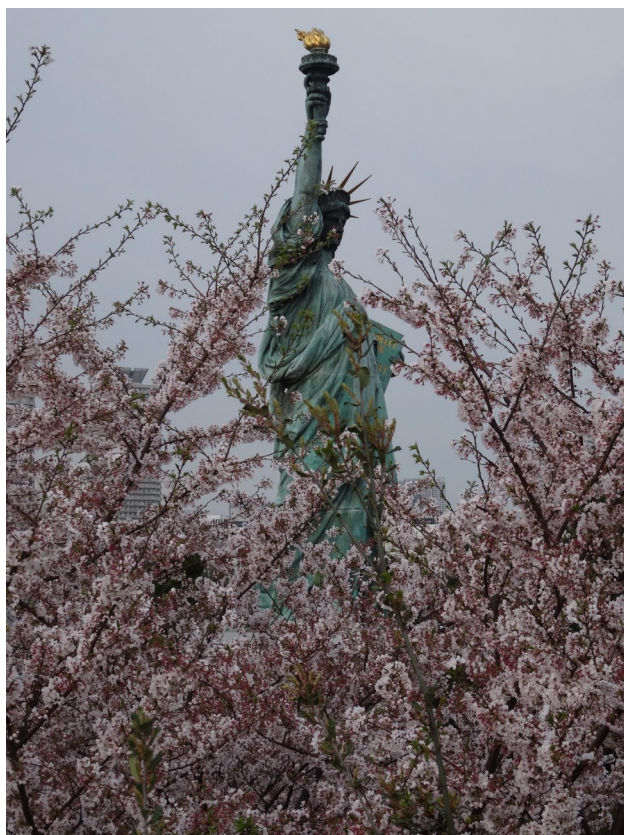
Tokyo Tower ***1092 Feet high***

Our final two stops were at the old Tokyo Tower (modeled on the Eiffel Tower but a little higher) where we went to the 150 meter high observation deck for some amazing views of the city.





Finally we went to an area near the sea on a manmade island. The main feature here is a small scale model of New York's Statue of Liberty, although it wasn't at all clear why it had been built. That mystery was solved on returning home and doing a little digging!



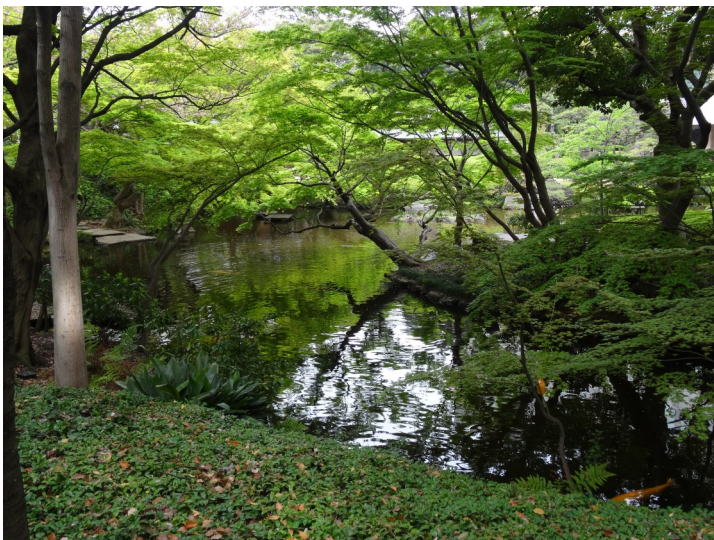
What's perhaps most surprising about the replica of the Statue of Liberty in Odaiba is that it's not Japan's only one. At least two more exist (one in Shimoda, one in Osaka), though neither command views as impressive as those afforded Tokyo's lucky Lady. Overlooking Tokyo Bay and Rainbow Bridge, she has held her ground since 2000, back by popular demand having originally been a temporary fixture for 'The French Year of Japan', 1998-1999.

That concluded our tour and we were taken back to the New Otani Hotel where six of us left the group. Two couples were flying out of Haneda later this evening and of course Molly and I were staying in Tokyo for two more days.

Tonight we ate at the Bella Vista restaurant on the 40th floor of the hotel. It was a very good Italian restaurant with canapes, appetizer, pasta, main and dessert courses, followed by coffee. It was costly, however, and with a bottle of wine the bill was pushing \$300.

Sunday April 10

Today we decided to have an easy day of sightseeing on our own and settled on a walk from the hotel to the East Garden of the Imperial Palace. But first, we spent an hour in the garden attached to our hotel which is a public area that has been established here for 400 years—and which was our breakfast view every day.



*The New
Otani Hotel
Gardens*

