



ON THE ROAD IN JAPAN: 2013

IAN HUGHES



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JAPAN 2013: THE FIRST BIT

I was reading email in a *Cairns* motel room in *August* when I found out about four *Elvis Costello Spinning Songbook* concerts in *Tokyo* and *Osaka* in *December*.

What better excuse to fly over and spend a little more time riding around on trains?

THE FROCKSTER FACTOR

Ever since the early stages of the *Hughesy-Madam* scenario, our acquaintance, the inimitable *Merry Frockster* has consistently babbled various *non-sequiturs* about *Madam's Swedish origins*, *Kobe carnations* and the desirability of *planting a Bowen mango tree on the summit of Mount Fuji*.

People who know *The Frockster* as well as we do will, in these circumstances, roll their eyes and mumble something about *Bloody Eylesy* and probably voice a mental opinion that he's *dribbling again*, but we know the gentleman and his quirks and foibles.

The deities and spirits who guard *Japan's sacred mountain*, on the other hand, have been denied the pleasures of *The Frockster's* mental ramblings and imaginative gymnastics.

It appears (or appeared) they seemed to believe suggestions the two of us should commit an act of sacrilege might equate to two travellers arriving *at the foot of the actual Mount Fuji* with an *actual mango sapling* or seed.

Caring for a national symbol would be, one suggests, the sort of responsibility that would make serious inroads into your sense of humour, assuming you happened to have one in the first place.

One suspects a certain humourlessness would be one of the key qualifications for a *Guardian of National Treasures*, so you wouldn't regard an affinity towards practical joking and *wizard japes* as desirable traits for anyone interested in the position.

That, in any case, is the theory that emerged after two days in *Hakone*, and a subsequent rail leg between *Tokyo* and *Nagoya* failed to deliver a sighting of *Fuji-san*.

Hakone, for a start, boasts a number of locations regarded as prime spots for *Fuji* viewing.

Promotional photographs show a speeding *Shinkansen* with a snow-capped *Fuji* in the background, but throughout our visit in *2008* the mountain was concealed under a blanket of cloud.

While it took us four and a bit years to bring *Hughesy* back to the *Land of the Rising Sun*, it seemed guardians of sacred mountains have long memories.

We passed the mountain on the way north to *Kitakami* and points beyond, and again on the way back, and, on each occasion, the weather forecasts seemed to suggest a reasonable chance of catching a glimpse (at least).

But, again, no dice.

On that basis, *Hughesy* wasn't exactly hopeful the *2013* visit would deliver anything different.

The way north runs through *Nagoya* and *Matsumoto* rather than *Odawara* and *Yokohama*, and I'm almost willing to bet that the route from *Tokyo* to *Osaka* on *14 December* will take us through sleet and snow, or, at least, enough of it to obscure the mountain yet again.

But maybe, just maybe, the actions of a contrite, penitent and respectful *Hughesy* in tapping out this little *mea culpa* in the lobby of *Kobe's Okura Hotel* might propitiate the guardians.

Something needs to...

THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES

Thursday, 5 December 2013

If I hadn't been to that *Elvis Costello* concert at the end of *January*, I wouldn't be writing this in early *December*.

Costello came up with the *Spectacular Spinning Songbook*, toured with it in the late eighties and revised the methodology, which almost guarantees the audience a substantially different show each night, in the Noughties.

I'd enjoyed *Sydney* so much that I announced, on my return, that next time he brought *The Wheel* back to *Australia* I was going to all the shows.

Fast forward six months or so and I was sitting in an apartment in *Cairns* checking the email when a message announced *Costello* would be playing four *Songbook* shows in *Japan* in *December*.

Significantly, it was right at the time when we were in overseas traveller mode, and the presence of *Madam's sister and niece* was what had brought us to *Cairns*.

So I'd blame them if *blame* wasn't too strong a word.



It was more a case of the penny dropping, and having allies on hand to push the idea forward.

I told *The Sister* about the four shows, three of them on successive nights in *Tokyo*, and suggested they might be doable, flying from *Cairns*.

She agreed, *Madam* was persuaded, and here I am tapping this out in a hotel room in *Cairns* at five-thirty in the morning.

It's actually *Day Two* of the trip, having driven up from *Bowen* on *Wednesday*, and the plane leaves in just under seven hours. I could well have started this a couple of days ago, but I was in the throes of finishing the *Travelogue* for our *second Tasmanian Odyssey*, and, anyway, I knew that early risers need something to do when further sleep is ruled out of the question.

So, having explained the basic *why*, we turn our attention to the *where*, which breeds an interesting set of destinations under the particular circumstances, which in turn requires further explanation.

So we start with the four concerts, three on successive nights in the *Roppongi* district of *Tokyo* (*Wednesday, Thursday, Friday*) followed by a fourth in *Osaka* on *Sunday*.

That brings the *JR Rail Pass* issue to the fore, with the key question being whether to buy the seven-day or fourteen-day version.

The flight from *Cairns* deposits us at *Kansai International*, and the rail journey has to start in *Kōbe* or *Osaka*. Given the seasonal factors, with the last show being on *15 December*, we need to make the *Tokyo > Osaka* leg on the *14th* the final leg of the rail trip.

We've only been back from *Tasmania* for a month, so a fortnight on the road, or rather the rail, is too long, so the *rail pass* goes for seven days.

And if we'd opted for the fortnight on the railways we'd have to leave a week earlier, which would have ruled out the *Leonard Cohen* concert in *Townsville* last *Thursday*.

That seven-day spell runs from *Sunday* to *Saturday*, with the flight in arriving on *Thursday* evening, and *Thursday* night spent in *Kōbe*.

Booking the train tickets for the week takes a chunk out of a morning or afternoon, so that takes care of *Friday*, with certain other logistical factors needing to be attended to, and on *Saturday* we move to wherever the train leg of the journey kicks off.

So where do we go?

To look at that side of things you focus on the other end of the rail leg and work backwards.

We want to be in **Tokyo** on **Wednesday** afternoon so we can book in and scope out the route between the hotel and the theatre, so whatever we do on **Wednesday** morning needs to be done somewhere around the capital.

Kamakura isn't that far south of **Yokohama**, which in turn abuts the south of the **Tokyo** conurbation, and our friend **The Interpreter** lives in **Yokohama**. That means dinner with **The Interpreter** on **Tuesday** night, which in turn translates to an overnight stay in **Yokohama**.

So we've got **Sunday** and **Monday** nights to look at, and a rail route that ends in **Yokohama** to nut out.

The concerts are **Hughesy's** part of the trip, so the days and nights leading up to **Yokohama** are **Madam's** reward for doing the organising. She loves the **onsen** experience, it's coming into winter, and there are any number of options, but the best seem to involve hot springs, mountains and snow, so that's where we're headed.

One night in **Matsumoto**, the other up in **Niigata**, both in **onsen** resorts, which in turn means **Japanese banquets**, probably served in the privacy of the room.

If that looks fairly straightforward, it is still the result of extensive and very detailed research, with most possibilities investigated and worked over with a fine tooth comb.

So it's **Thursday** as fly over day, **Friday** for sorting out tickets and such. **Saturday** should be an easy day, with a transfer to the northern side of **Osaka** in the afternoon.

Sunday morning has the transfer to **ShinOsaka** and a transfer from there we're off to **Nagoya** along familiar territory. We've been up and down that section of track every other time we've been in the country, and there isn't much choice about it. You're talking the **Tokaido line** that links **Osaka** and **Tokyo**.

From **Nagoya**, we're also on a track we've covered before.

Last time around we did **Nagano > Nagoya**, a spectacular run through the autumn mountains. This time, with winter on the way in, we won't get the coloured leaves, but the scenery as we head in the opposite direction should still be spectacular.

And I can keep track of things through the new, **camera-equipped iPad**, which has taken over the **Travelogue** role. I'm anticipating a much richer visual record this time around.

But we're not going all the way to **Nagano**.

Matsumoto is half an hour or so down the line from the city that hosted the **Winter Olympics**, and when we alight we'll be heading to **Matsumoto Castle**, one of **Japan's Top Three Castles**.

Japan's big on **Top Threes** and such, and this visit will mean we've been to all the castles.

After the castle, it's off to the *onsen*, and the *Japanese banquet*.

Monday's much the same, though the rail leg involves changes that might require split second timing, but given the punctuality of the rail services we should be right.

Monday ends in *Niigata*, another go at the hot springs and the banquet, and *Tuesday* brings us down through *Tokyo* to *Yokohama*.

Wednesday morning has been set aside for temple and shrine viewing at *Kamakura* before we head back to *Tokyo* for the first of the *Costello* triple-header.

Thursday has visits to art galleries and viewing platforms in Roppongi pencilled in before *Hughesy* takes himself to the *Costello* show, and on *Friday*, we take a look at the *Imperial Palace* before I toddle off for a third go.

Given the nature of the concerts, there's a slight possibility that I might be grabbed and hauled onto the stage to spin the wheel, but I'm not holding my breath.

Night One and *Osaka* are probably the most likely ones since we'll be there as a couple, but I guess hairy foreigners might attract attention on the other two.

I suspect that I'm in the wrong demographic and probably the wrong gender, but you never know. Maybe I'll get to request *Beyond Belief*, what with living next door to the *Great Barrier Reef* and all.

Saturday will be the *zoom down the Tokaido line on the Shinkansen* day, followed by the final concert on *Sunday*. In between we're having lunch with *The Sister* and *The Rowdy Niece*, before transferring to *Kyoto* for more temple and shrine viewing on *Monday* and *Tuesday*.

Wednesday afternoon will see us back in *Kōbe*, ready to prepare for the return flight, which arrives in *Cairns* around sparrow fart on *Friday* morning.

The experience last time around suggests driving all the way back to *Bowen* that day is not a good idea, so we'll overnight in *Mission Beach* and take our time getting there, stopping off for a pie at the *Mourilyan Bakery* along the way.

On *Saturday*, it's either breakfast at the accommodation or brunch at *Vivia Cafe* in *Cardwell*, followed by the run through *Townsville* back to *The Little House of Concrete* in time to prepare for the silly end of the silly season.

That, in a nutshell, is the plan. How it pans out forms the content of the next eighteen entries.



BOWEN > CAIRNS

Wednesday, 4 December 2013

Practice, they say, makes perfect, and we've probably had enough practice to get most things right when it comes to heading off for a week or two.

There are, of course, issues, many of them relating to two furry felines who are deprived of their regular indoor comforts when we head off, and tend to display a degree of resentful disdain when we return.

On this occasion, we've enlisted the help of a feline friendly volunteer and expect to return to find *LikLik* and *Ninja* are much more welcoming of strangers, having been feted with food and an appreciation of feline sensitivities over a period of just over a fortnight.

Or maybe not, but we did try.

On previous trips away we've questioned whether the hot plate on the stove has been turned off, had *Hughesy* fail to switch off the air-con before the cheap tariff down time kicked in, and have

been known to make the odd U-turn just to make sure whatever concern has just been raised has, in fact, been addressed.

Each time we do that, of course, we find another thing to add to the pre-departure checklist, and repeated practice has delivered a routine that should ensure all eventualities have been covered.

That was the way it seemed, anyway.

Both of us threw in suggestions that were met with a *checked that* from the other side, and it gave us something to do on a two hundred kilometre leg that has been done so often there's practically nothing short of major disaster that would provide anything out of the ordinary to remark on.

And we don't want major disasters, do we?

That doesn't mean there's nothing in the pipeline as far as things to comment on are concerned.

As usual we hit the shortcut just south of Ayr, where I was again foiled in my desire to have us pull over so I can get a photo of the sign advertising an entity called **Ayr Boring Company**.

When I've got the image I've got the caption (*The conversation's not that much better on the other side of the river either*) to go with it.

The short cut isn't that much shorter, but avoids traffic issues in downtown **Ayr**, and for the past year or so has delivered the added advantage of avoiding much of the road work going on to the north of **Brandon**.

For a good year before that it skirted past roadworks to the south of **Brandon** as well.

Those concerns delivered what amounted to a trouble free run from **Bowen** through **Townsville**.

We got a chance to liven things up with a momentary panic when **Hughesy's** reading glasses went missing after we'd checked the air pressure in the tyres at *the Servo near the **Townsville** race course*, but that resolved itself when they dropped out of my shirt.

We took the **Ring Road** after refuelling, and were crossing **Ross River** shortly after ten thirty, having left **Bowen** just before seven forty-five.

It was, as indicated, a clear run through, with a minor delay at the roadworks just north of **Brandon**, and things continued in the same vein as we headed towards **Ingham**.

We identified the scene of the accident that could have been infinitely worse on the last trip to **Cairns**, sailed through **Ingham** and over the **Cardwell Range** and were pulling up outside the **Vivia Cafe** in **Cardwell** shortly after twelve fifteen.



The **Vivia** has been the standard stop in **Cardwell** for a while now, and that's not likely to change after a minor incident last time we were passing that way. Somewhat shaken by the accident we'd just been involved with, I'd failed to notice my mobile drop out of the lap when we pulled up in **Cardwell**. It ended up in the gutter, where the management of the **Vivia** had found and held onto it.

Next morning, not realising what had happened, we tried the usual trick when you can't locate the mobile.

Call it and wait for the ring tone.

That didn't work, because we were in **Mission Beach** and the phone was in **Cardwell**.

The attempt resulted in a call back from **Cardwell**. When we got home I found a message on the answering machine as well.

So we got the phone back, and the very least we can do in the way of thanks is to call in for a meal when we're passing. This time the meal amounted to a Tex wrap for **Hughesy**, crab sangas for **Madam**, and a couple of coffees.

We were back on the road before one, having bought the loop that will hold the reading glasses around the neck, and preventing a repetition of the servo incident in **Townsville** on the way up.

On the leg between *Cardwell* and *Cairns* the only item of note was the discovery that *Hughesy's* new *iPad*, with *WiFi* rather than *3G* technology, lacks *GPS capability*, which is a pity since I was looking at it as a navigation aid in *Japan*.

We might still be able to use it in cases where we've got access to *WiFi* along the way, but the lack of the helpful blue dot indicating your actual *GPS-located position* limits the value as a navigational aid, and on that basis it looks like the old model will still be in use when we're travelling in *Oz*.

There were a couple of minor delays on the highway north of *Tully*, and we found ourselves rolling into the main conurbation at *Cairns* just after three.

With nothing on the agenda apart from checking into the accommodation at *Bay Village Tropical Retreat*, we made a booking for the restaurant at seven and eventually managed to squeeze *The Possum* into the parking space.

You'd reckon it should be easier to get it out again in the morning, but these predictions seem to have a habit of coming unstuck..

With five hours' complimentary *WiFi*, we settled down to read email, checked the odd link out of there, and, having passed that particular baton over to *Madam* I set about jotting down the start of the *Travelogue*.





The complimentary *WiFi* came with a few quirks that seemed to prevent two devices accessing the same connection simultaneously, so a tag team approach seemed the way to go.

In any case, after the drive *Madam* wanted a rest before engaging in brain-related activity.

We wandered through to the Balinese restaurant on the premises that had been the motivation for making the hotel reservation, and while dinner wasn't as gobsmackingly scrumptious as it was the previous time one suspects that might have something to do with the fact there were just the two of us this time around.

Our previous visit had *The Sister* and *The Rowdy Niece* with us and was, therefore, a matter of four shared dishes between us rather than the one each time around.

But the food was good, the service attentive and the *Mitchell Watervale Riesling* the way it usually is, so *Hughesy* went to bed a happy camper.



CAIRNS > KANSAI INTERNATIONAL > KOBE

Thursday, 5 December 2013

While it's nice to sleep in, disturbing dreams involving intricate manoeuvres across a landscape that bore a resemblance to a rectangular *Tonle Sap* are something you're not keen to go back to after you've got up for the regular early morning drink of water.

I tried, but around four-thirty, with no sign of somnolence I turned my thoughts to *The Whys and Wherefores* of this little excursion. Sometimes it works, and you find yourself nodding off again, but when it doesn't at least you're in a position to deliver a coherent narrative.

Tapping that out, once I'd surrendered to the inevitable around five, took me past six-thirty on a morning where the early agenda was based around reallocating the contents of two suitcases around a backpack, a carry on bag and the two items that had previously carried everything.

From there, having liberated the travelling clobber from the backpack and replaced it with a jumper and a travelling pillow it was

time to take a turn through the shower and wait until **Madam** had done the same.

A bit more moving and stowing and fussing over detail wasn't enough to get us to departure time, so a tag team approach to the complimentary **WiFi** was needed before we checked out.

The Possum had been booked into a medium term car park, and we were supposed to lob there around nine-thirty, which explains the need to kill a bit of time. We started to head out around five past, starting by ferrying everything to the car, checking out and negotiating our way out of a rather tight fit in the car park.

From there we set off to head along **Lake Street**, having forgotten the detour we'd encountered the previous afternoon. That produced a one block readjustment to the route, but failed to create any problems whatsoever when it came to finding the long term parking.

There's always a suspicion **Fate** is lurking around the corner fitting the lead into the boxing gloves, so when you've had no hassles booking **The Possum** into temporary accommodation, and an immediate shuttle bus transfer to the **airport** you have to expect something's going to interrupt the steady flow from point to point.

The theory expounded on the way up by **The Driver** was that we'd avoided the worst of the **Japanese School Excursion** traffic, but once we walked into **Departures**, it was obvious we hadn't.

They were checking in passengers to **Darwin** and points beyond, **Kansai** and **Tokyo's Narita** and the area was chockers, with a hefty queue in the **Japanese section**, many of them seeming to represent the rump of the homeward bound school excursion parties.

You need something to occupy the mind while you're standing in a lengthy queue.

Madam attempted to kill some time figuring out whether the welter of teenage school kids were on our flight by trying to pick up the use of either **Kansai** or **Tokyo** dialect. As it turned out they were on the 12:05 flight to **Narita** rather than the 12:25 to **Kansai**, but that didn't mean there was much room to spare on our flight.

Once we had checked in the process of passing through **Passport Control** and **Security** ran pretty smoothly, and we killed the waiting time by setting out in search of a merino jumper for **Yours Truly**. Once we'd accomplished that, shelling out *a substantial number of ducats* for a rather stylish number, a light brunch filled in a bit more time.

It also filled in a big of a nutritional gap, working on the principle that our arrival time in **Kansai**, the shuttle bus transfer to **Sannomiya** and *the courtesy bus* run across to the hotel would mean we weren't going to be having dinner.

The *boarding call* came on schedule, and once we filed into the fuselage I found myself in a window seat on the left, or *Cape York*, side of the aircraft, which meant I would have something other than *Coral Sea* to look at while we ascended to cruising altitude.

I was looking forward to watching the coast through *Cooktown* and beyond, but was distracted by the arrival of *Customs and Immigration* paperwork.

An attempt to fill them out and keep an eye on the passing coastline resulted in a need for another set of papers after one too many mistakes in the original lot.

Still, while I missed *Cooktown* and the *Endeavour River* I managed to catch a decent glimpse of the extensive dunes being mined for silica sand at *Cape Flattery*, around two hundred kilometres north of our point of departure.

News that lunch was on the way diverted my attention away from the *Travelogue*, and an anticipated post-prandial nap failed to eventuate. There was a further snack served as we headed past *Taiwan*, though we were well east of the island, and the overall result was that we were more or less sated as the aircraft approached the *Land of the Rising Sun*, which was, given the onset of winter, hidden by the shades of night as we neared.

As far as I've been able to figure out *JetStar* (or the aviation authorities) must have changed the flight path between our *2008 visit to Japan* and the follow up in *2012*.

The first flight made landfall somewhere along *Shikoku* and then ran along the archipelago, but in *2012*, and again this time we made the approach over the bay rather than along the archipelago, so there were no lights *et cetera* right up to the final approach.

It was hard to tell where we were in the dark, and the approach was across the water, but there was a spangled display of twinkling fairy lights over on the left as we descended into *Kansai International*, where an uneventful landing was followed by the regular lengthy taxi to the terminal.

Disembarkation, the transfer from air bridge through the terminal shuttle towards *Immigration* and *Customs*, and the administrative procedures that grant you entry all ran smoothly and totally without complications, though once we were through *Customs* an attempt to phone *The Mother* to advise of a safe arrival was unsuccessful because the pay phone *Madam* was used to wasn't there any more.

There's no use crying over spilt milk, so we headed outside to catch the *Limousine Bus* transfer to *Sannomiya*, had no hassle getting the tickets this time around. There were issues last time, and since the actual bus hadn't materialised *Madam* headed over to a nearby external pay phone for another attempt at the phone call.

That meant the bus arrived right on cue, though once we were aboard it took its time departing.

That time, of course, could have been used for the phone call, but there you go.

Or not, as the case may be.

The signs say sixty-five minutes for the trip to **Kōbe**, but that must take the volume of daytime traffic into account because we were disembarking at **Sannomiya** after about fifty minutes, heading across to join the queue for *the courtesy bus* to the **Okura** and the nearby **Meriken Park Oriental**.

It was relatively late, the queue was substantial, and the possibility of picking up a beer or two was floated while we were waiting.

There was a vending machine just over there, and the **Okura** is the sort of place where those handy devices are conspicuous by their absence. That doesn't mean you can't buy a drink there, but there were likely to be issues with dress standards and substantial mark ups.

Did I want beer? was a tempting question, but I was starting to fade, and the bus arrived while I was still being tempted.

Once we'd landed on the doorstep the check in procedure was accompanied by the regular formalities, though once we were in the list heading upwards the **Trainee Porter** turned out to be rather chatty, having spent a holiday on the **Gold Coast** when she was little.

Remarkably (or probably unremarkably, given the courteous service that's par for the course in the country) she was on duty and remembered us when we checked back in just under a fortnight later.

As it turned out I didn't need a beer, hitting the hay while **Madam** took a long soaking bath, and while the night's sleep could best be described as fitful I wasn't up with the larks the following morning.



KŌBE

Friday, 6 December 2013

After a rather large day that started early and ran well past the regular bedtime, you'd plan on sleeping in, and though I only managed a fitful sleep, at least it lasted until around six-forty-five.

Once I'd surged into action and resumed recharging the *iPad*, with the cable plugged in to the power point on the desk, while I plugged away at the *Travelogue* I ran into a couple of significant interruptions.

Madam delivered a copy of the *English-language Japan Times*, and I took time out to scan the contents.



At times like this you realise how insignificant certain domestic issues are on the world stage, and how little of the world's attention is directed towards matters that tend to occupy *Australian minds*.

The most important matter Down Under was, of course, the *Adelaide Test*.

I hadn't seen or heard a word or whisper about vital matters like the toss or a progress score since I'd woken up the previous morning.

Still, you'd reckon it just might rate a mention in a *Japanese English language newspaper* not least because there'd be a certain number of *Australian and English expatriates* among the readership.

As it turned out there was some cricket content, but it was limited to a report *New Zealand* batsman *Lou Vincent* was under investigation for match fixing.

My interest piqued, and I use that term deliberately, I turned my attention to other avenues.

I turned on the TV after checking the hotel compendium and learning there was an *English language BBC World Service* available, and discovered that we wouldn't be getting an Ashes update due to the overnight news that *Nelson Mandela* had died.

I spent the next while tapping away with one eye glancing over to the TV in the hope the ticker tape scroll across the bottom of the screen might have some news, but was still none the wiser when I was ordered into the shower.

After the ablutions it was time to head down to reacquaint ourselves with the *Breakfast Viking*, yet another example of the way the *Japanese* take a *Western* concept, rework and relabel it.

And *Viking* is, of course, a much easier word to work with than the *Smorgasbord* they've redefined it to mean.

We were about to turn into the *Camelia Restaurant*, which is where we'd been able to look out over the tasteful *Japanese garden* between forays to and fro between the table and the extensive array of foodstuffs, when we were redirected to the hotel's other catering space, usually reserved for wedding receptions.

We weren't sure why we were redirected, and the consensus was that it probably had something to do with the *Luminarie* that was currently lighting up a section of downtown *Kōbe* between *Motomachi* and *Sannomiya*.

On the way back to the room I noticed signs directing anyone connected to *Minamoto* jewellery to the *Camelia Room* so the people filing into breakfast may not have been the *Luminarie*-attracted overflow that wouldn't fit into the former venue.

The spread for the *Viking* didn't seem quite as extensive as it had been, but that was possibly because it was spread out across a far more extensive space.

After we'd been ushered to our table we set off in search of fruit juice to serve as a starter.

Right next door to a couple of jugs of tomato juice I spotted a bottle of vodka and another containing *Hughesy's* condiment of choice.

Yes, in a relatively confined space we had vodka, tomato juice and *Tabasco*, the key ingredients in a *Bloody Mary*.

Japan, of course, is a drinking culture, but you don't expect to find ingredients for a restorative hair of the dog alongside the fruit juice in the breakfast servery.

The two breakfast trays we ended up with made an interesting contrast, but things didn't quite head on from there without some crossover. *Madam* informed me that the salmon was particularly good, and when I headed off to verify the suggestion I found out she was right.

For her part, once the *Japanese breakfast comestibles* were done with, she was over to sample the selection of continental pastries.

There was a steady flow of *Japanese* looking to break their fasts, which raised another interesting point. Most of them headed straight towards the *Western* end of the catering, filling plates with hash browns, bacon and *chipolatas* rather than the *Japanese options* further down the room.



Now, it may be that they weren't familiar with the layout, or thought that what they saw straight in front of them was all that was on offer, but I don't think so.

Madam, initially bemused by their refusal to do what she'd just done, and head for the *Japanese staples*, probably hit the nail on the head.

Her suggestion that they'd gone for the *Western* side of things stemmed from the same source as her own determination to head for the *Japanese side of the catering*.

It all depends on what you can get in the course of your day to day existence.

Hughesy's breakfast tends to run towards *Weet-Bix* or toast and *Vegemite* during the week, which is why I go towards egg dishes on the weekend.

Madam's regular breakfast at home sits towards the standard Western cereal-based version, and the chance to *go Japanese* represents a welcome change and one suspects the people who were going for bacon, eggs and hash browns were probably enjoying a welcome treat.

A substantial breakfast will usually go close to keeping us going all day, which sits well with plans for the day. *Madam* took the subway out to *Myodani* to leave the blue suitcase with *The Mother, Hughesy* got to sit in the lobby at the *Okura*, tapping out a couple of hours worth of *Travelogue* that should have things pretty well up to date by the time she gets back.

We've re-sorted the luggage, whacking everything that's surplus to current requirements, like airline blankets and neck cushions into the bag that's on the way out to *Myodani*, and we've sorted the things that are going with us into the *Red Suitcase*, the *Red Travel Bag* and *Hughesy's* back pack.

The first two went into the cloakroom after the porter caught us as we stepped out of the elevator, the backpack is sitting beside me as I type. In around two hours *Madam* will be back to steer us towards *Sannomiya*, where we'll deposit most of what we're carrying at the next hotel and set out to sort out tickets for the week's worth of rail pass action.

As it turned out I had three and a half hours to catch up on the *Travelogue* and fill in details of *The Frockster Factor*, which will be the explanation if we fail to catch a glimpse or anything approaching a decent view of *Mount Fuji*. That was more than enough time to fill out the details, and with things more or less up to date (at, coincidentally, the end of the previous paragraph) I decided to head into *Settings* and check out the *WiFi* situation.

I'd attempted to do the same thing the previous evening, and failed to turn up as much as a hint of a network, but that was up in the room on the 13th floor. Here, down in the lobby there were signs of a couple with the little closed lock beside them and one called *Hydrangea*, which looked to be free.

And it was, which meant by the time *Madam* had made her way back from the wilds of *Myodani* I'd checked the email backlog and caught up on the cricket score from *Adelaide*. I'd tried to access the video feed, but it was geoblocked.

By this point *Australia* had progressed from an overnight 5-270 odd beyond the 550 mark on the way to a declaration on 570 and I was quietly jubilant, since, at this stage, it looks like the worst scenario has *Australia* going in to Perth leading 1-0 in the five Test series.

I wasn't going to be able to follow much more as the *iPad* went in the backpack, and we reclaimed the baggage and headed off to wait for the shuttle bus. That got us back into the heart of downtown *Kōbe*, and a brief stroll took us to the next night's accommodation at *Daiwa Roynet Sannomiya*.

The Perplexed Reader will possibly be scratching the noggin at this apparently wilful relocation, but you can sum it up, in one word: *Luminarie*.

I still wasn't sure what it was, but it seemed to be the explanation for a number of things, including changed traffic flow from *Sannomiya* to the *Okura*.

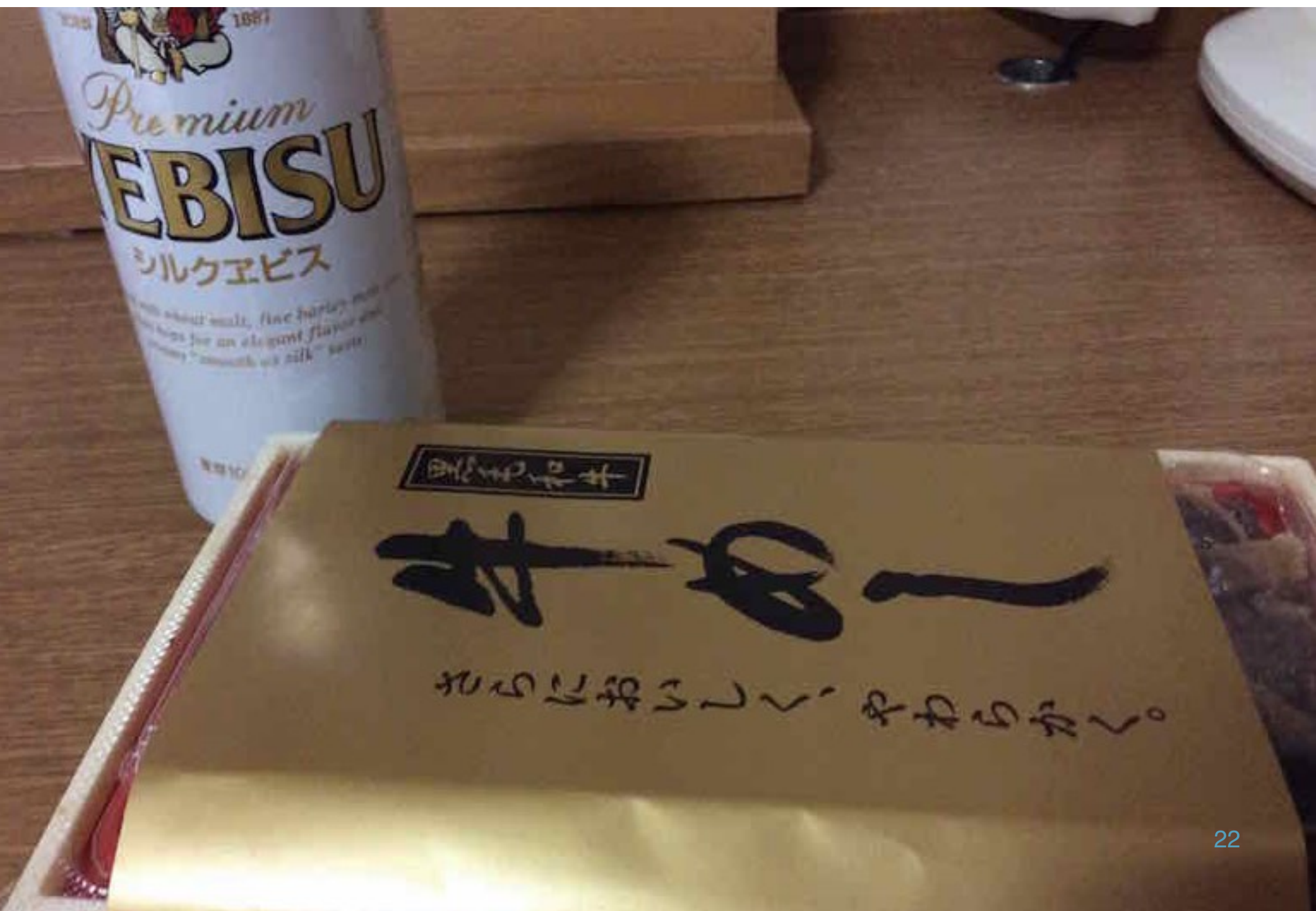
In any case, while the *Okura* is expensive and booking ahead allows you to access any bargains on offer, it was probably booked out on *Friday* night anyway. With the *Luminarie*, in town, you'd expect any specials on offer had long since been grabbed.

The *Luminarie Factor* meant we weren't going to be spending *Saturday* night in *Kōbe* since even a relatively modest establishment like the one I'm sitting in tapping this out on the *Friday* morning was already booked out when *Madam* went looking.

Once we'd checked in there was a spell of trying on the new layers of insulation before we headed back to *Sannomiya* to sort out the *Rail Pass* and tickets side of things.

That wasn't quite feasible at the time, given a queue that almost reached out the doors of a relatively small ticket office, and hunger pangs starting to kick in, so we headed off in search of sustenance.

We'd sighted a trattoria that opened at six a few doors down from the hotel, so that was an option, but we headed to the food hall at the *Sogo department store*, where I was told we could possibly taste some wine, and pick up dinner if there was something that caught the eye.





I'd left the reading glasses back in the hotel, so the wine shop we wandered through failed to deliver anything other than an obvious conclusion that *Australian wine* is, to *the Japanese observer*, pretty much a non-event.

Plenty of labels from *France* and *the Americas*, judging by the little flags on the price tags, and a smattering from a variety of other sources, with *Australia* being one of the also rans.

We weren't carrying a corkscrew, so that was one reason for avoiding a purchase, didn't know what was for dinner (*yet*, so that was another) but, most importantly, didn't know where to start.

I'm not inclined to head off and buy a bottle of something familiar just to have something to drink, and we were going to the *Luminarie* after dinner, so that was a fourth reason to stick to beer.

In the food hall there were a number of *I want to eat that* items that caught *Madam's* eye.

That was game, set and match in the decision making process.

I ended up with a *bento* tray with *Kōbe* beef, rice and pickles on the side.

The convenience store beside the hotel provided a tin of excellent *Yebisu* beer, so that was dinner.

After dinner, rugged up, we hoofed it over to the perfect example of the way *Japanese authorities* handle events that attract significant crowds.

Your average Australian, in situations like this, would wander towards the event looking for a way in.



That's fine if you've got around a hundred thousand people looking to get into the *Boxing Day Test* at the MCG, a venue where there are a number of entry points.

With 183 000 people queuing up to file under a spectacular light display on the first night, there are procedures that need to be put in place. That was the first night of the *Luminarie*.

This was *Friday*, guaranteed to attract an even larger crowd.

We headed towards the actual display, found the barricades put in place to direct the flow of pedestrians, and were directed towards the point where we could join the flow.



That involved making our way back, almost as far as the station at *Motomachi*, passing a steady flow of people headed in the opposite direction and wondering how much further the entrance to the queue might be.

We found it, and eventually made our way back to where we'd been redirected, which was, effectively, the first curve on an extended and reverse letter S.

The Inquisitive Reader should, at this point, grab a pen and paper and start a printed S.

Never mind the reversing bit, we're just looking at the concept, not the actuality.

Stop at the first curve. That's the point we were redirected. The start of the letter is the point of entry, and would have to be a good kilometre away. Now, continue your S, adding another loop at the end.



The last half of the last line contains the couple of hundred metres of spectacular illumination that probably pulled in around two hundred thousand people that night, and had booked out the hotels in *Kōbe* on *Saturday* night.

If two hundred thousand people are going to file through, you can rest assured there'll be an orderly progression to deliver them there, and that explains our letter S with the extra loop.

Getting those numbers there means streets have been blocked off to traffic, and that in turn creates issues if people want to cross the street.

An opportunist gatecrasher would probably rate one of these crossing points as a place to jump the queue and join the flow, but each crossing point had a wall of uniformed police on either side of the pedestrian flow, which could be halted when there were enough crossers to justify the disruption.

And, from a distance, I saw the disruption in action.

A placard was carried into the middle of the flow, the uniforms presumably moved across the flow, quite possibly moving the barricades as well.

The crossers crossed.

After a minute or two things were moved back the way they were and the progression towards the display resumed. If this seems too regimented and orderly, as you approach the display instructions from uniformed officers carrying megaphones exhort you to keep moving, which I suppose has to be said.

You're not, however, going to get a decent photo, or a series of decent photos, while you're moving, so everyone stops.

But not for very long.

You might be ignoring the bullhorn instructions, but you know why they're being issued and follow the spirit rather than the letter.

After all, there are a huge number of people behind you who are patiently waiting for the opportunity to do what you're doing.



Once you're through the illuminated arcade there are stalls and outlets offering a range of food, drink, lotto tickets and commemorative stamps, but we started to wend our way back towards **Sannomiya**, which raised the interesting question of what to do about the rail passes and tickets for the first few days' train travel.

What turns up in the mail when you've bought one online isn't your actual rail pass.

It's an order form that has to be converted into the document that gets you your actual tickets, so the first thing that needs to be done is the conversion.

You hand over the order and your passport, and, initially, you get a form to fill out.

Once you've done so, that gets checked against your passport, and part of it is attached to the Pass, which features a laminated ticket detailing the document's validity.

Once you've got that, you can collect your tickets.

As *The Astute Reader* will realise, this process is somewhat time consuming, and when you're in a crowded ticket office with a queue behind you, a sensitive soul will avoid buying the tickets for an extensive itinerary.

We collected tickets that would take us from **Osaka** to **Matsumoto**, and on to **Niigata**, and made room for other travellers with, possibly, more urgent needs.

From there, with everything that needed to be done duly done we headed back to the hotel, pausing *en route* to pick up more beer, and that, effectively, after a little more tapping and perusing of email, was that.



KOBE > OSAKA > KISHIBE

Saturday, 7 December 2013

When you're looking for a good night's sleep you need the right equipment, and *Hughesy* likes two pillows, thank you very much.

Maybe the lack of a second pillow accounted for a fitful slumber, but I managed to sleep in until around six-forty-five, and started by checking email and such before resuming *Travelogue* duties.

We don't want to get too far behind because we'll need all the time we can manage to fill in historical detail when we get home.

I've pencilled in a day by day web page process once we're back, but there will be external disruptions (*Christmas/New Year*, cricket) and quite a lot of historical material to be trimmed and edited, so we want to have the nuts and bolts of the travel side of things as close to complete as we can get them.

It was around eight-thirty when I took my turn in the shower as *Madam* investigated the tea and coffee facilities in the room.

A subsequent discovery that check out was at eleven rather than the anticipated ten meant we left the *Daiwa Roynet Sannomiya* with the day to day up to date, as of 9:16 am.

Once we'd checked out we set out in search of breakfast.

That came at *Boulangerie Comme Chinoise Honest Cafe*, a bakery on the first level of the way into the network of below ground level arcades beneath *Sannomiya*.

I didn't need a huge breakfast, just something that would keep me going. The *prosciutto and gorgonzola baguette* certainly did that very nicely.

From there I was after a cap or hat, something warmish to swathe the top of the head in situations where a beanie wouldn't be appropriate.

The felt cap that had been used for such purposes was sitting back in *Bowen* after it hadn't taken too kindly to being washed.

We found exactly what I was looking for by sheer luck rather than good management and with my requirements attended to I found a comfortable sofa and grabbed the *iPod*, figuring a *Kinks*-based soundtrack was the way to go.

Dedicated Follower of Fashion and all that.





I was able to riff slightly on the same theme as we made our way through the arcades.

I spotted a couple of outfits in trendy menswear outlets that would have most of my acquaintances rolling around in hysterics, first at the sight and then at the price paid.

There was one stunning little cashmere ensemble priced around the equivalent of \$A1200...

We were on our way into the upper levels of the station complex when I spotted that little gem.

The spotting may or may not have influenced *Madam's* move to steer me into a book shop on the seventh floor of a department store complex, pointing me towards a small, but rather wide ranging selection of *English* titles.

Surveying the selection produced a couple of titles I might actually have looked at buying if I hadn't sworn off further hard copies.

They were the sort of thing that should be useful for my **Interesting Times** project when I return to it.

From there it was time for lunch, and, with the luggage sitting back at the hotel, it seemed logical to eat at the little *trattoria* a couple of doors down, and the logic of the logistics forms a fair part of what follows.

Lunch was pasta and salad, a tomato based fish sauce for me and a fish and *Japanese basil* sauce the other way.

Mine wasn't *quite* authentic, with an odd flavour element that was noticeable but didn't intrude.

Based on the logical possibility that I might be enlisted to help **Madam** finish hers I had a taste, and it was immediately obvious that she was on her own in that department.

Having reclaimed **The Red Suitcase** and **The Red Travelling Bag**, we headed to **Sannomiya** and boarded a local JR express to **Osaka**, changing trains at **ShinOsaka** and arriving at the overnight stop, three stations along the line, just before two.

If you were to locate **Kishibe** and **Station Hotel**, you might find the decision to stay here strange, but there are a couple of things that kick in here.

For a start, with tomorrow being **the first Travel Day**, you want to be up and away reasonably early, and you don't want to miss that first train where there are connections involved.

Second, while we're heading off on a **Sunday**, there will be issues with subways and sets of stairs if we stay in downtown **Osaka**.

ShinOsaka is towards the edge of the city, as **Shinkansen** stations tend to be due to issues associated with putting new lines through densely populated areas.

Stay in **Osaka** and you're going to be doing a bit of crosstown travel.

The **Station Hotel** at **Kishibe**, on the other hand, is right beside the station, which is three stops from **ShinOsaka**, where a lift or escalator will deliver us up to the relevant platform for the train to **Nagoya**.

There's also **a coin laundry**, and that allows a load of washing.

Those jeans I'd been wearing since **Cairns** needed a wash, and there were socks and jocks and under layer items that needed the same treatment.

The laundry wasn't available until four, but there was free **WiFi** in the lobby, so I checked the email and the cricket score.

England had been bundled out for 176 on what was supposed to be a flat drop in track in **Adelaide**, with the supposedly unreliable **Mitchell Johnson** taking 7 for 40.

From there it was back to the **Travelogue** and a read before we headed out to dinner. **the dryer in the laundry** hadn't quite delivered, and there were items of clothing with varying degrees of dampness draped over everything that could accommodate something in the room when we left.

While progress had been made when we returned we left everything *in situ* rather than doing a check and rearrange thing in the evening.

On the evidence to hand things should be right by the morning.

There were a couple of possibilities for dinner:

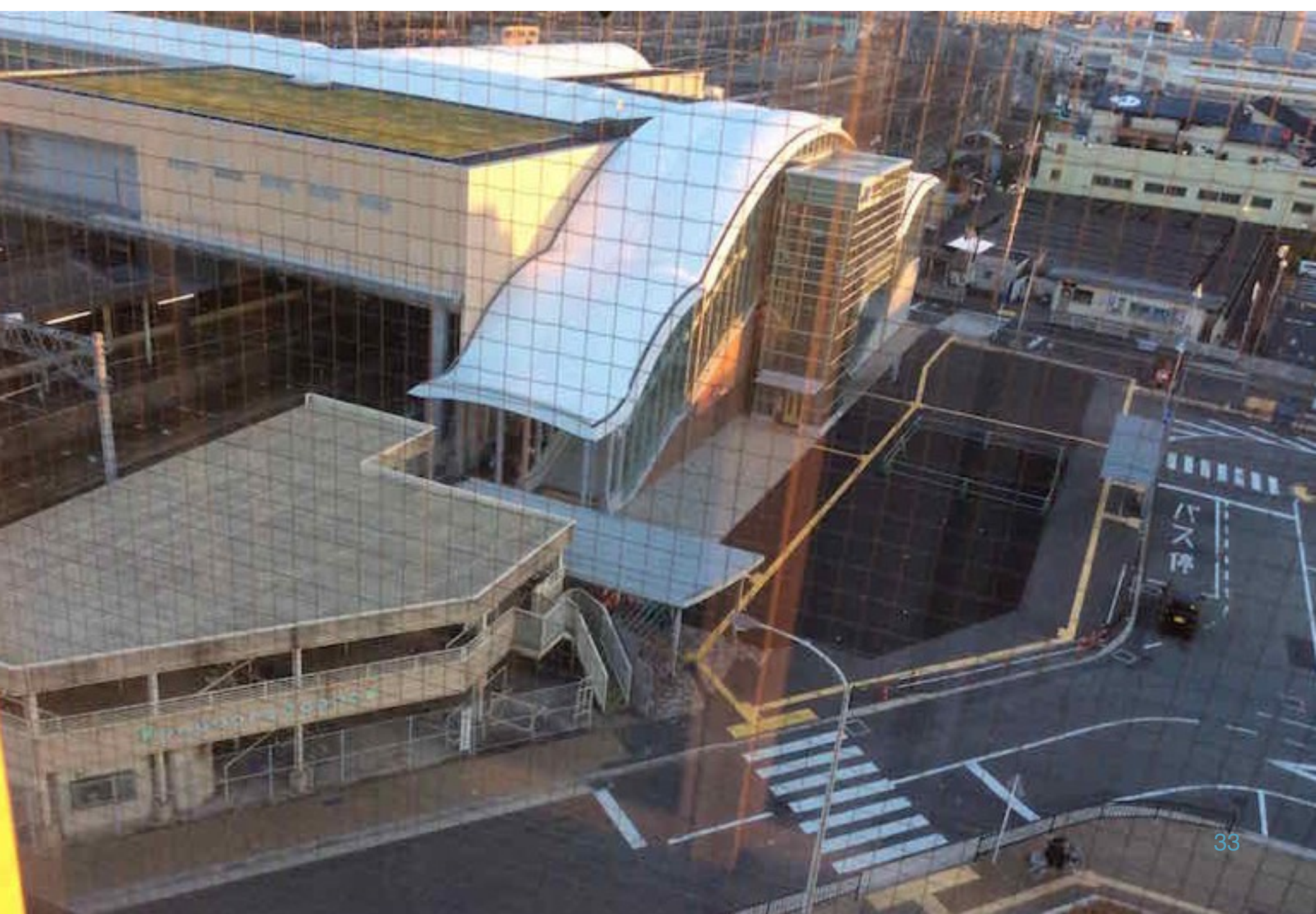
- a place near the hotel specialising in octopus balls,
- a sort of family restaurant chain operation,
- a *teppanyaki* establishment that might have served the purpose if we were up for a substantial meal, and
- a fourth place, which I was informed served fried oysters.

The Astute reader might sense *Madam's* logic in those descriptions, but the four also lay in a logical progression from the hotel to the other side of the supermarket that fronts onto the station parking lot.

I'm not a big fan of octopus, though I don't mind calamari.

The description of the second place suggested *Someone* was disinclined to eat there.

While we could have gone for the cook at the table option, I sensed the fried oyster place had some particular appeal, apart from the fact that *Hughesy* likes oysters and is quite happy to eat them fried.



I had a platter of four oysters, another of crumbed, deep-fried pork, both of them served on a bed of cabbage with chicken rice.

Before I'd selected anything, however, **Madam** had grabbed a plate that held a whole fish, something akin to a cross between a gar and a sardine that had been given a steroid treatment.

Long enough to be one of the gar family, but fleshed out along the body.

Obviously, I'm not a fisherman.

Madam, on the other hand, is a big fan of whatever it was, and announced that she'd been looking forward to this as the self service trays hit the table.

I was looking forward to an early night, but that didn't quite eventuate. A visit to the supermarket on the way back revealed large cans of **Yesibu** for ¥288 each.

At that price I couldn't have just one, could I?



2

JAPAN 2013: THE RAIL PASS



KISHIBE >
SHINOSAKA >
NAGOYA >
MATSUMOTO

Sunday, 8 December 2013

It was just after six when I eventually returned to the waking world, and after a spell tapping away at the *Travelogue*, it was time to *sort out the laundry*, repack the bags and try to answer the key question for the day.

How cold was it likely to be in Matsumoto?

There was, of course, a significant supplementary question along the lines of *how well Hughesy was going to handle it*.

Given the uncertainties those questions produced I ended up with a pair of insulated pants, the new merino jumper and a handy scarf in the backpack, having donned several layers of new thermal clothing to keep the upper portions cosy.

The insulated pants were there in case the jeans I was wearing failed to live up to the task.

The load included a couple of bottles of water since a man is not a camel, but in this case, with the backpack on I must have looked like one.

There was, however, one significant element that seemed to be missing.

A visit to the ***Kathmandu*** store in ***Townsville*** yielded a pair of gloves since I knew we were heading up into the mountains where the hands might need protection.

Now, with the prospect of temperatures in the low single figures, they were nowhere to be found. I was sure I'd packed them but was forced to concede that I may have left them on the living room table a couple of thousand kilometres away.

Still, there wasn't a great deal I could do about it when the time came to head down to the conveniently located ***Kishibe station***. The gloves question gave us something to occupy our minds while we were waiting for the train upstairs in ***ShinOsaka***.

We could probably have done something about breakfast in ***Kishibe***, and we needed something to tide us over through lunch before the ***Japanese banquet*** in the ***onsen*** resort that evening.

I ended up with beef sandwiches, which were *interesting*, and there was something ***more traditionally Japanese*** for ***Madam***.

Armed with breakfast supplies, we made our way up to the platform, where the ***Shinkansen*** was as punctual as you'd expect it to be.

Aboard the train, the fifteen-minute leg to ***Kyoto*** provided a window to get breakfast out of the way.

The ***iPad*** came out as we left ***Kyoto*** en route to a change of trains in ***Nagoya*** and notes for the first part of today's report were finished by the time we hit relatively open country for the next part of the fifty-three-minute run.

Outside the window, the countryside was greener than I expected.

The stubble from the last rice harvest in the paddy fields and the familiar jigsaw pattern of farmland, housing, commercial and industrial operations filled out the landscape.

At one point, we headed into a tunnel through a mountain range with an extensive quarry operation and a zigzag roadway ascending the range, something I thought I might be able to locate through **Google Earth**, but subsequent attempts haven't yielded results.

I need to make a more accurate assessment of where the **Shinkansen** line runs.

We alighted in **Nagoya**, and, initially, headed for the wrong platform in search of the connection that would take us up into the mountains. Once we'd been redirected, we arrived on the right platform to find ourselves beside the **Toyama** train that takes you through **Takayama**.

It certainly brought back memories.

The train that pulled in a couple of minutes later, so the Public Address system informed us, wasn't ours. A troop of cleaners swarmed aboard, set about their duties and were changing the seats around to face the other way when the train pulled out to make room for the **Shinano Limited Express**.

You'd reckon over three visits to the country I'd have sorted out issues relating to headroom, but as I pushed **The Red Suitcase** into a space designated for such objects, I managed to bang the top of my head against an inconveniently placed divider.

We hadn't been underway long when we made a brief stop at **Chikusa** in the northeastern suburbs of **Nagoya**, home to a number of university campuses.



Once we were under way again, on the sunny side of the train there was an excuse to remove my jacket.

I couldn't, however, hang it up the way you can on one of the *Shinkansen* services, where there are handy hangers provided. On the other hand, with the picture windows giving generous views as we headed into the evergreen mountainside forests, I wasn't in a position to complain.

Mostly, however, we passed through tunnels with spectacular little bits in between that promised spectacular things to come.

Once we were through the tunnels, it was back into the urban sprawl at *Tajimi*, a city in *Gifu Prefecture* best known for ceramics and pottery, and a temple (*Eihōji*) belonging to the *Nanzenji* faction of the *Rinzai* school of *Zen*.

There's also a *Catholic monastery* famous for its wine.

The train stopped there, and we were back in the tunnels again as we continued the northward journey.

Once we were out of them I reclined the seat to take in the view as the river valley we were following started to narrow, and the built landscape gave way to a natural one.

We got our first glimpse of snowy mountains came around 11:42.

There was another stop at *Nakatsugawa*, a former post town on one of two routes that connected *Edo* (modern-day *Tokyo*) to the old imperial capital of *Kyoto*.

That's a minor claim to fame alongside the city's latter-day status as the home of chestnut delicacies, including *kurikinton* (boiled and mashed chestnuts, mixed with sugar and reshaped into their original shape) and soft-serve chestnut ice cream.

As we wound our way up into the mountains, I started to get a tad drowsy, but not drowsy enough to miss the bands of bare deciduous trees running down the sides of the slopes interspersed with bands of evergreens.

Shiojiri, the last stop before our destination in *Matsumoto*, seemed to be a grape-growing centre.

Hughesy tends to notice things like barrels stacked on railway platforms.

The city's name apparently translates as *Salt Butt*, due to the fact that it marked the end of the road for salt merchants travelling inland from the *Sea of Japan*. It was the point where the mountain passes became too treacherous to cross in winter, and those on the other side of the range tended to draw their supplies of salt from the *Pacific Ocean* side.

Once we'd arrived in *Matsumoto*, the priority was to lock down the final train legs, from *Niigata* to *Tokyo* and, most importantly, from *Tokyo* back to *Osaka* on *Saturday*.

From there, we headed to the tourist information to grab a map, guide book and any other materials that might seem relevant, then off to a second intermediate stop to drop off the baggage.

Our accommodation is out on the edge of the city, and I'm tapping this out looking over the lights of *Matsumoto* towards the *Japanese Alps*, which were a magnificent sight before the sun went down.

Elsewhere you'd start looking for a coin locker, but here it was a case of heading to a hotel near the station hotel dropping the bags there.

The next time we saw them was in the lobby of the night's hotel.

I still had the backpack, however, working on the basis that the other stuff could go missing, but there was no way I was letting the *iPad* out of my sight. Some might quibble about the weight, but it was only a fifteen-minute walk over to *Matsumoto Castle*, and, in any case, I needed the exercise.

The walk took us through what seemed to be the outskirts of downtown *Matsumoto* before a left hand turn onto the street that leads up to the castle, but unlike some other places, the approach doesn't have the castle looming at the end.





We crossed the river, having passed a CD shop called *Beatniks*, which seemed strangely appropriate given the *Beat Generation* affinity with *Zen Buddhism*.

It was about a block from there to the approaches to the castle, and as we headed across the final intersection with the castle over on the left, I was bemused by an incongruous modern building.

Quite a big one, in fact, and something that didn't quite fit into the vibe of an old castle precinct.

Subsequent investigation using a sitemap *Madam* had failed to notice revealed it was the *Matsumoto Museum*, with displays of artifacts documenting the city's history and the ticket that got us into the castle was good there too.

Matsumoto (unsurprisingly, given where we were headed) is an old castle town that had grown into a modern city with a population around a quarter of a million, built up like other centres by gradually merging the old city with surrounding villages.

Surrounded by mountains, the city is noted for its apples, *soba* (buckwheat noodles) and *saké*.

A nearby wasabi farm is reputedly the world's largest and the area boasts a number of *onsen* resorts.

Matsumoto Castle (*Matsumotojō*, also known as *Crow Castle* or *Karasujo* due to its black exterior) rates as one of *Japan's Top Three Castles* alongside *Himeji* and *Kumamoto Castles* and houses a comprehensive exhibit on the *history of firearms in Japan*.



Given a lack of *English language signage*, that might not be such a big draw card, but *Matsumoto* is largely intact, unlike other sites that have been reconstructed in ferroconcrete.

It also differs in being a *flatland castle (hirajiro)* built on a plain beside a swamp rather than *on a hilltop* or *a river crossing*.

This lack of natural defences meant the castle ended up with three concentric moats and an extensive system of inter-connecting walls and gatehouses with an outer earthen wall almost around three kilometres in circumference designed to deaden cannon fire.

What you're looking at today, however, is the five-tiered, six-storied main castle keep (*tenshukaku*) and smaller, secondary *donjon*, built between 1592 and 1614 as an upgrade to a previous fortification (*Fukashi Castle*) which dated back to 1504.



In **1872**, after the *Meiji Restoration*, the site, along with other castles, was sold for redevelopment.

News that it was about to be demolished caused locals to start a campaign to save the building, and it was acquired by the city government.

It had been used as an aircraft factory during *World War Two*. but managed to avoid being damaged by American bombers. If it hadn't done so you'd probably be looking at a ferroconcrete replica.

Your tour of the interior reinforces the idea that seventeenth-century *samurai* weren't big strapping blokes. There are suits of armour on display that make that point, but as you make your way up and down the steep wooden stairs, it's obvious that conditions inside when the castle was under attack suited short, agile types.

You'll also pass openings that could be used by archers and musket bearers, along with others used to drop stones onto those trying to make their way into the building on your way to the observation deck which gives extensive views over the city.

I didn't make it all the way up there, given the size of the backpack and the single narrow staircase that was supposed to handle traffic in both directions, but the view from the fifth floor wasn't too bad.

The whole thing would probably be at its best in spring and autumn since there are hundreds of cherry trees in the grounds, but in prime **sakura** season it would certainly draw massive crowds. It's not recommended for people with dodgy knees either.

Once **Madam** made her way back down, we headed back towards the exit, taking in views across the courtyard. Back at ground level, there were still two hours before the bus to the hotel.

Making our way around the grounds we ran across a **samurai** in full regalia, there to provide photo opportunities.

Given the wearer's height one had to suspect the regalia was modern replica rather than genuine seventeenth-century relic.





With time up our sleeves, we made a quick visit to the *city museum*, which wasn't that impressive but provided familiar items in the twentieth-century section that were enough to make us feel, well, *old*.

We headed back to the station, veering left when we reached the river to head along an interesting street of shops selling antiques, second-hand books, foodstuffs and knickknacks.

There are frequent, and quite clever, references to frogs.

The street's mascots originate in the river, but it's also a pun on *kaeru* (the *Japanese* word for *return*).

Frogs were given as a charm to bring loved ones back home safely, and to encourage money and goods to make their way back into the shopkeepers' premises.

We made our way along the other side of the river, hooking back onto familiar territory on the way back to the station, where the shuttle was sitting, quietly waiting for passengers.



Once we were under way, the twenty-minute bus trip had more to do with traffic conditions than the actual distance.

The distance we travelled was considerably longer than a crow would have taken, but I wouldn't want to be walking it without a cut lunch and, more importantly, a compass or a good mud map.

Hotel Shoho is an impressively large structure on the eastern outskirts of *Matsumoto* that operates on a considerably larger scale than some *onsen*.

The girl who showed us to the room after we'd been reunited with the luggage stressed we had to use this particular lift on our way travelling between room, restaurant, lobby and *onsen* facilities.

I'm not the world's greatest fan of the hot spring experience, but I invariably surrender to the inevitable expectation, donning the bathrobe and making the obligatory excursion to the steamy facilities.

Interestingly, on my way there I observed a vending machine right beside the elevator.

Once I'd done what was required and made it back to the room, I thought a couple of beers would constitute a suitable reward.

Dinner involved a semi-private booth in the restaurant rather than the room, and arrived with the usual wide variety of dishes where I'm often unsure about the exact identity, but in a *damn the torpedoes* full speed ahead approach end up having a go at them.

There's the odd item that's obviously, and definitely, one to avoid and they're usually identified as such.

But by and large, I've found that if you're willing to give it a go the item you're not overwhelmed about works well with others around it.





In most cases they're bite-sized pieces, so it's down the hatch. There was *sashimi* to follow.

I'm not usually a fan, but the salmon and tuna were *good*, and the octopus, which I'd generally avoid, worked with *wasabi* and soy.

The attendant had fired up the hotpot bowl while we were working through the first courses, and things would have been better if we 'd got to it a little bit earlier.

There was a hot plate arrangement in the middle of the table that was less than satisfactory (as far as I was concerned) because the *wagyu* splattered fat across the rest of the area.

Frankly, it wasn't the best I've encountered and seemed to be fatty offcuts rather than prime steak.

Or maybe *extremely well marbled prime steak*.

It was something *Hughesy* and his shirt sleeves could have done without.

There was rice and assorted other tidbits to follow, and I had a sporadic go at them but, basically, I was pleasantly sated with what I'd had and didn't need any more.

Like most things, it'd probably be different if I was *Japanese*.

The local beer they were serving was good (I suspect a wheat beer), and I tried a red wine (*Concord*) that was semi-acceptable.

I was interested in identifying the variety, so we stopped by the retail section on our way back to our room on the eighth floor.

I was carrying the *iPad* and managed to locate *WiFi* in the lobby along the way, caught a cricket score and headed upstairs for a go at the massage chair, a bit more *Travelogue*, and polished off the other *Asahi* before heading to bed.

Madam claimed the in-room (or rather on-balcony) bathtub for a hot bath in the private enclosure overlooking the city and had her go looking out over the city lights.

For my part, I was happy to leave her to it, looking forward to using the facility to watch the Alps appear as the sun rose in the morning.





MATSUMOTO > NIIGATA > NIIZU > TSUGAWA

Monday, 9 December 2013

On what was going to be a significant travel day I knew I needed an early start, and was out of bed shortly after five-thirty, tapping out the next tract of *Travelogue*.

Hardly surprising, really.

If I was awake, that was the default task, but in this case, there was an extra element that needed to come into play.

The right side corner of the balcony at the front of the hotel room contained a bathtub, and I had visions of giving myself a long hot

morning soak and watching the sunrise hit a fairly spectacular view across *Matsumoto* towards the *Japanese Alps*.

On that basis, I definitely wanted to be on deck early, and the *Travelogue* tapping served to fill in time until it was time to fill the tub.

It was just after six when I roused *Madam*.

If that sounds a bit rough, I was under strict instructions not to set out on the operation without assistance or supervision.

I'd managed to get the *Travelogue* (note form, detail to be padded out later) up to date before that, and with the horizon still in darkness, I resisted the temptation to get an early start on the tub task and let sleeping partners lie.

I'd been intrigued by vinous matters the night before and wandered into the resort's retail section looking for the red and white they'd been serving in the restaurant. I'd managed to identify them as *Concord* and *Niagara*, and having shelled out for an expensive and authoritative reference tome thought this was the perfect time to bring it into play.

And, of course, it meant *Madam* got a good ten minutes extra sleep.

Ten minutes might seem an overgenerous time allocation, but while I could remember the *Concord*, the search was complicated by the fact that I couldn't remember the name of the other variety.

The *Jancis Robinson* tome, however, had the grape varieties listed in various configurations, including country of origin, and I had vague memories that the white definitely sounded American.

As it turned out t'other one was *Niagara*, which fitted nicely with those vague memories.

My research revealed both were grown for the table as well as the wine press, and the process brought back memories of references to something called *Sparkling Concord* somewhere back in the seventies or early eighties.

For some reason, the name had lodged itself in the memory bank in the exact way that the much shorter term recollection of *Niagara* hadn't.

And while I managed to sort that out the process lasted a little longer than it should have, so the day had already started dawning outside when I roused *Madam* to assist with the bath.

As it turned out I could have managed quite well on my own, but we were on the eighth floor of a large establishment, and there was, I guess, a significant possibility of creating a minor disaster if I turned something the wrong way.

Or something.

In any case, once the water was in the long slow soak was wonderful and could have been better.

*Hang on there, **Hughesy**, I hear **The Critical Reader** interject. You can't have both.*

Actually, I can and tender photographic evidence, m'lud.

Had I been able to watch this magnificent spectacle emerge from the darkness it would have been better, but the alignment of the bath in its little cubicle along with a wooden structure outside meant you couldn't quite catch the best of the view from the bathtub.

What you could see from there, under ordinary circumstances would have been magnificent, but the late start, when it came to filling the bath, meant I knew there was a better view tucked away on the other side of that inconveniently located wooden structure that I couldn't quite see.

From the chair where I sat while I was tapping this out, yes, fine. But not from the bathtub itself.

Still there was plenty to look at and ponder on.

Across **Matsumoto's** sprawling suburbs, there were plumes of what at first seemed like smoke.





*Possibly some round the clock industrial operation, you might suggest if you hadn't seen wisps of steam emerging from the enclosure beside me when **Madam** had her long soak the previous night.*

*No, I reckoned they were **onsen** plumes, and when **Madam** returned from her early morning dip in the communal facility, she confirmed it.*

We headed down for the breakfast **Viking** shortly with **Madam** suggesting a **heavy Japanese bias** in what was on offer and expressing concerns as to whether I'd be able to eat.

On the ground, however, tucked away behind an almost bewildering display of breakfast options were bacon, scrambled eggs, Vienna sausages and a couple of interesting possibilities.

There must be people out there who are up for *Japanese curry* for breakfast, but much as he likes the stuff, *Hughesy's* not one of them.

In any case, we had other fish to fry. They mainly involved packing and getting ourselves down to the lobby to access the *WiFi* once the checking out procedure was completed.

There wasn't anything of particular note in the incoming, and we headed out to *the courtesy bus* around ten to nine for the twenty-minute run into *Matsumoto station*.

With a 10:07 departure that left us with plenty of times up our sleeves and we killed the first couple of minutes by getting tickets *Madam* had forgotten. We're stopping for lunch in *Nagoya* on the way back from *Tokyo* on *Saturday*, and she'd forgotten about the *Nagoya > Osaka* leg.

There were a few other time-killing strategies employed when we got to a rather crowded waiting room with a good half hour to spare. The air outside was chilly, so no one seemed inclined to wait out on the platform, and the result was a waiting room where seating was at a premium.

Madam went looking for souvenirs, returned and directed me to *New Days* to check out some local wines. Not that there was any tasting or purchasing involved, you understand. It was all about taking a look and killing a little more time.

The investigation produced sightings of the aforementioned *Concord* and *Niagara* as well as *Black Queen*, another variety that had piqued *Madam's* interest when she'd gone looking.

Checking *Black Queen* in the handy *Jancis Robinson* reference tome revealed a *Japanese variety*, and showing the details demonstrated that *Hughesy's* birthday present (a \$50 *iTunes voucher*) had been put to good use. *Score one for diplomacy in the course of killing time.*

With the train due to leave at 10:07, we wandered out just before ten, and I managed to create a little drama on the escalator heading down to the platform as an attempt to coordinate feet, steps, hands and red suitcases sent me sprawling.

I'm still not sure exactly how I managed it, but it seemed to take place in slow motion.

The train we boarded was, effectively, the rest of the service that had brought us up to *Matsumoto* from *Nagoya*.

It was only thirteen months since we'd done the trip in the opposite direction, but an early onset of winter delivered impressive displays of snow on the highest peaks, and a dandruff-like sprinkling lower down.

From *Nagano*, we were back on a *Shinkansen* line that would take you into *Tokyo* if you were going that far, which of course, we weren't.



Yet.

We'd also done the bottom part of this leg travelling between *Sendai* and *Kurobe* on our last trip, and we'd disembarked to change trains at *Echigo-Yuzawa*. There were plenty who did the same this time around since the stop represents the intersection of the line to *Tokyo* and another that delivers you to *Toyama*, *Kanazawa* and points of interest in between.

That might change when the *Kanazawa Shinkansen* line commences operation in *2015*.

We changed trains a little further along, once again on a *Shinkansen* line that took us up to *Niigata*, higher up the west coast. It was one of the five ports opened for international trade in the *1858 Treaty*, though shallow water in the port delayed the actual opening until *1869*.

Niigata also served as a base for salmon fishermen who roamed as far north as *Kamchatka* and was one of four cities picked as targets for the atomic bomb.

Weather conditions and its distance from the bomber bases in the *Marianas* meant it was removed from the list of targets. *Nagasaki* was bombed instead.

Dominated by the steep snow-capped *Echigo Range*, *Niigata Prefecture* is liberally sprinkled with ski and *onsen* resorts and is home to a number of *saké* breweries due to the availability of high-quality rice and clear, fresh water.

From *Niigata*, we moved on to the local lines, first to *Niitsu*, and then to a line that wound its way up into the mountains to *Tsugawa*.

As you'd expect there were spectacular views along the way, given the coincidence of high mountains, snow, a clear day and an expansive river valley.

Earlier legs on *Shinkansen* lines included more than their share of tunnels, but here, heading into the back blocks there wouldn't have been the budget to go through things unless it was really necessary.

Twists and turns as the line snakes up the river valley towards the source have obvious scenic benefits.

In *Tsugawa*, we were met by someone from the *onsen*, who might have taken umbrage at *Hughesy's* surprise at the presence of traffic lights at an intersection just across the river from the station.

The place hardly seemed big enough to warrant them, but the station is actually on the wrong side of the river from a fairly substantial town that must generate its fair share of traffic.

Not that there was too much of it on the roads as we went through.

The *onsen*, when we arrived, was a classy establishment, with breathtaking views across the river towards snow capped mountains.

It offers outdoor baths, one for the gents, one for the ladies and one for family groups that look out at the same vista as the one we could enjoy from the room.

That spares you the effort of dragging the camera along to the *onsen* to record the view.

The view from the room, and I speak from experience, is clearer due to the absence of rising steam.

We had two items on the agenda for the rest of the day.

One was the predictable session in the *onsen*, which in this case was slated for eight, a private go at the family outdoor one, which would come after the *Japanese banquet*.



That, of course, was the other and promised to be similar to last night's, a set of localised variations on a well-established theme.

While I say we had two items on the agenda, *Hughesy* had three, *Madam* had four, and a fifth lurked around the corner.

I'd been close to nodding off a couple of times *en route* and wanted a chance to take a power nap, which sat nicely with the first of *Madam*'s additional intentions, which was, of course, to get into the heated waters ASAP.

The second, of course, was to get *Hughesy* into the same setting as many times as possible.

She returned with the news that the gentlemen's outside *onsen* seemed to be vacant, and suggested I could go there and enjoy the place on my own if I looked sharp about it.

There was, I was told, no need to change into the standard robe etcetera.

Bowing to the inevitable I was led down to the relevant chamber, which turned out to be empty.

You could tell by the absence of slippers outside.

So, in I went, and got the mountain view along with a fifteen-minute soak in the soothing waters.

It probably wasn't actually fifteen minutes - probably more like ten or possibly even five, but it certainly *felt* like fifteen.

In any case, I had been there and done that, so I was justified in asking about wireless broadband. *Madam* checked, and it seemed to exist, but only in the lobby.

We headed down to check, couldn't connect to the server though the network seemed to exist and headed back upstairs, where I attacked various electronic issues in non-network mode.

There were issues to settle as far as dinner was concerned.

The most important involved what *Hughesy* was likely to eat, or, more accurately, what I wouldn't be inclined to have a go at.

I explained to the helpful maid, who had *reasonably good English* thanks to a year working in New Zealand, that I would have a go at most things, which seemed to be the most appropriate and a reasonably accurate answer.

With a session in the outdoor *onsen* booked for eight, we weren't going to be drinking much before we went, but the *100% French wine list* had a half bottle of *Chateau Reysson* from the *Haut Medoc*, a *Merlot* that was definitely interesting.

We pottered about until dinner, which came with the familiar spread of little plates for starters, followed by more of the same through to the centrepiece, a *shabu-shabu* hot pot where the simmering liquid was soy milk rather than water or stock.

A more assiduous recorder would have captured all this on camera, but we were too busy interacting with the maid to do so before we started eating.

Once we started, and the array had been spoiled, there were used plates that hadn't been removed, so the photographic evidence is limited to the first course.



We needed to kill a little more time before the *onsen*, and one could have been tempted to sample the *Merlot*. It had been opened and was quietly breathing in the annexe near the bathroom, where it wouldn't cook the way it would have done in the heated main room.

Madam came up with one possible time killer, in a suggestion that with dinner underway the network was probably experiencing less traffic than it had been earlier, so we might be able to access it if we wandered downstairs.

We did, but we couldn't, so we headed upstairs.

I noted an anomaly after we'd had our turn in the *onsen*, where the contrast between the external chill and forty degrees in the water was interesting, to say the least.

We were booked in for three-quarters of an hour but barely managed fifteen minutes, which accounts for earlier remarks.

Given the darkness outside I'd changed seats and was in between switching apps on the *iPad* when I suddenly noticed forty emails that hadn't been there when we went downstairs.

A bit of further investigation revealed that, everything seemed to work, but only in that spot.

Strange.

In any case, having scanned the backlog it was time to pour a glass of *Chateau Reysson*.

It turned out to be deep-coloured, fairly straightforward, fruit-driven, full-bodied and pleasantly balanced without hitting any high notes. No wow factor and I definitely wasn't expecting any, but perfectly acceptable late night drinking, poking out into the inky blackness that had swamped the view across towards the mountains.



TSUGAWA >
KORIYAMA >
TOKYO >
YOKOHAMA

Tuesday, 10 December 2013

Despite the absence of a convenient bathtub on the balcony and an unwillingness to head down to the baths to take in the sunrise, there was another early morning rise to watch the sun play over the snow-capped peaks while I kept hacking away at the backed up *Travelogue*.

I probably could have been up slightly earlier, since I wanted to get the first rays hitting the snowy summit.

Although I was a tad late the view was still spectacular as I tapped away with regular pauses to enjoy the interaction between rising sun, snowy peak and cloud.

I suspected it was snowing up there, and the peak seemed to have acquired an extra coating overnight.

Madam, of course had another go at the *onsen*, and I had a shower once she was back in the room.

Three visits to the heated waters in two days was enough to be going on with and, in any case, water and electronic devices don't mix all that well.

Breakfast started arriving just before eight, and it was something I'd had reservations about, but I was OK once I sighted the *salmon*. Between that and the rice I was sure of enough to keep me going for an hour or three, but I picked at various other bits and pieces, none of which were impressive enough to have me eschewing the *Western* end of future *Breakfast Vikings*.

And if the *Western* end doesn't exist as long as there's *salmon* and rice I'll be cool. I'm acquiring a penchant for the orange coloured fish that'll go close to matching *Madam's*.





We headed back upstairs to pack, and, predictably back down to the lobby to check out and wait for the shuttle transfer to *Tsugawa station*

The transfer to the station came with a history lesson delivered by the driver that was incomprehensible to *Your Correspondent*, so I came to the conclusion that I'd have to do my own.

The attempt to do so, once I was reunited with the desktop machine, proved singularly unsuccessful, and delivered a timely reminder that the entire sum of human knowledge hasn't found its way onto the *Web*, and there are aspects of *regional Japanese history* that aren't accessible to *English-language Google* searches.

Contrary to expectations, we were travelling onwards from *Tsugawa*, which I'd been led to believe was the end of the line.



Our train the day before had terminated there, but the line did go on, taking a line through *Kanose* on the other side of the river from last night's *onsen*, then diving into a tunnel and emerging at *Hideya*.

From there, it passed through equally obscure localities: *Toyomi*, *Kaminojiri*, *Nozawa*, *Onobori*, *Ogino*, and *Yamato* as we moved from *Niigata Prefecture* into the nuclearly-known *Fukushima Prefecture*, but we were a comfortable distance from the troubled and troublesome reactor.

At least, I hoped we were.

The run to *Aizuwakamatsu* took the best part of an hour and a quarter, weaving its way along river valleys between snow capped ranges.



It wasn't quite spectacular scenery with constant **Wow!** factors, but a constantly changing vista with significant spots where the view was breathtaking.

Madam reckoned it was going to snow tomorrow, but I was glad we were there when we were there.

Once we'd changed trains in **Aizuwakamatsu** it was more of the same, though the weather started to close in halfway through the second hour long section.

By the time we disembarked at **Koriyama** it had closed in completely, a grey misty wall that meant there wasn't going to be much to see.

But we'd seen been along this next section of **Shinkansen** line a couple of times before, so that wasn't an issue.

Lunch, on the other hand, was definitely an issue, since I needed something and the first *bento* stall we ran across had run out of my preferred option.

I grabbed a spicy chicken roll and a can of *Yebisu Red* on the way to the *Shinkansen*.

Predictably, after we made the purchases the route to *Platform 13* took us past two stalls where I'd probably have found what I'd been looking for in the first place.

In any case, I wasn't worried.

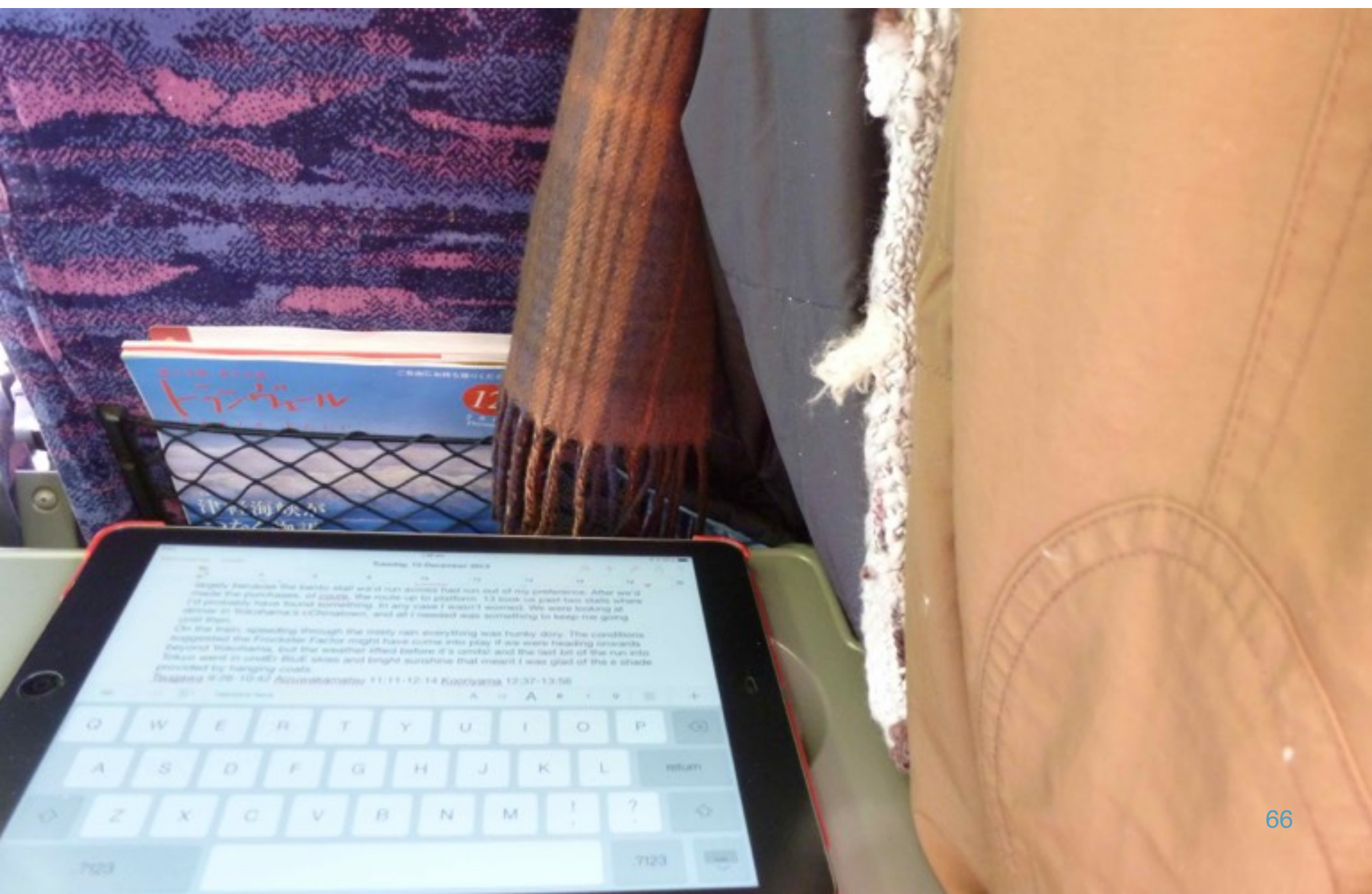
We were looking at dinner in *Yokohama's Chinatown*, and all I needed was something that resembled a snack to keep me going until then.

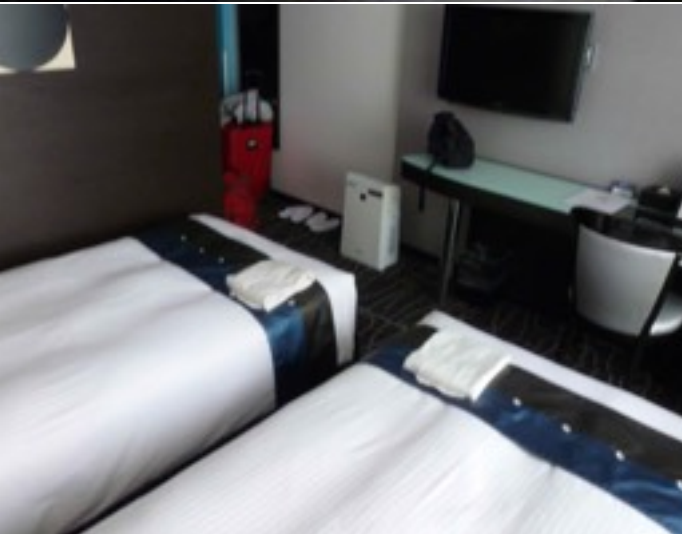
And, of course, *Yebisu*.

On the train, speeding through misty rain everything was *hunky dory*.

The conditions suggested that the *Frockster Factor* might have come into play if we were heading onwards beyond *Yokohama*, but the weather lifted before *Utsomiya* and the last bit of the run into *Tokyo* went in under blue skies and bright sunshine that meant I was glad of the shade provided by hanging coats.

Once we'd made our way into *Tokyo* and disembarked, the next issue involved finding the right line to *Yokohama*.





There are three of them, constructed at different times along different corridors with different numbers of stops along the way.

That last bit delivered the rub.

We ended up on the line that delivered the quickest transfer, switched lines in *Yokohama* and got off a stop later to take the brisk walk to the *New Otani Inn Yokohama*, a proper flash new turnout perched atop a retail complex, with further shopping, sightseeing and entertainment options proliferating around the environs.

It was an impressive locale, and while there was a degree of disappointment when we found that the room wasn't on the seaward side of the structure, that was soon alleviated by discovery the view from the window included the distinctive shape of *Mount Fuji*.

Not all of the mountain, as it seemed the deities hadn't been totally mollified.

Clouds covered the summit, but they'd relented enough to show us the distinctive shape.

Cloud and afternoon sun meant evidence to prove what we'd just seen wasn't quite forthcoming, but the chance of a look at *Fuji* shaped plans for after we'd accomplished two tasks we'd set ourselves for the next day.

It was a while before we were due to meet *The Translator* for dinner, and we killed part of the waiting time in the room before venturing out for a walk around the vicinity.

As soon as we were downstairs it started to threaten us with rain, so it was a case of back upstairs to grab the umbrellas before we went too much further.

That, at least, killed off a bit more time before we headed back to the station for the two-stop journey that landed us on the fringe of *Yokohama's Chinatown*.

The text message correspondence had arranged a meeting under the gate nearest the station, but those decorated gateways aren't exactly scarce in and around a *Chinatown*.



Yokohama's version is larger than most, and the supply of likely gates is correspondingly confusing. I reckoned we'd reached the right one as soon as we walked outside the station.

There was, however, no sign of our friend, and we knew she was already at the rendezvous, so the nearest gate to the station wasn't actually the nearest gate to the station, if you catch my drift.

It all, as it does so often when you're making your way out of a station with multiple exits, *depends on taking the right exit*.

Once we'd made the rendezvous it was a matter of finding somewhere to eat, a process that involved a lengthy wander through labyrinthine streets that seemed to have us going in circles.

I may well be wrong in that assertion, but we kept passing familiar-looking signs that were a little more common than you might have thought.

We eventually landed in a place where the food was good, and demolished a plate of stir fried greens, another of beef done the same way, *won ton soup* in between them and fried rice to finish, washed down by draught beer.

All in all, the substantial meal was nothing out of the ordinary but was quite satisfactory and reasonably priced.

It would have taken a cross country forced march to work off what we'd consumed, and while *cross country* was out of the question, a further wander covered a fair slice of *Chinatown*.

A wrong turn delivered us to the station between the one beside the hotel and the one where we'd disembarked on the way to dinner.

That meant, with everyone heading in the same direction and a train waiting and ready to go, that farewells were a fair bit more abrupt than they would otherwise have been, and within a couple of minutes of boarding the train we were back on the doorstep of the *New Otani*.

A glance around the neighbourhood had *Madam* keen on an excursion to look at the shopping centre's *Christmas lights*.

But I'd had enough for the day, declining a nightcap and settling down for a brief read of the *Leonard Cohen* biography before it was time for lights out, with the prospect of a view of *Fuji* in the morning.



3

JAPAN 2013: THE CONCERT LEG



YOKOHAMA > KAMAKURA > TOKYO

Wednesday, 11 December 2013

The Argumentative Reader might question *Hughesy's* use of the term *sleeping in* when you're talking a 6:40 rise, but by that time, under normal circumstances at home, I'm half way around the morning walk, after at least half an hour's computer time.

Being on the western side of the building helps, of course, but having emerged from a deep sleep, I raised the blinds to reveal distinctive snow on a distinctive shape veiled by a band of cloud half way up.

The deities, it seemed, hadn't quite forgiven us.

So it was straight onto the *Travelogue*, followed by the regulation showers, then, once again, the *Viking* breakfast.

I wasn't looking for it, but when I noted tomato juice in the array on offer I scanned the surroundings for vodka and *Tabasco*, both of which were conspicuous by their absence.

Two nights of *Japanese banquet* had *Madam* expressing a lack of desire for *Japanese food*, but that statement still didn't prevent a hearty breakfast that refused to go anywhere near the bacon and eggs end of the spectrum.

After breakfast, we piled the belongings back into *The Red Suitcase*, went down to check out, and once the luggage was consigned to the cloakroom, headed off to *Kamakura*.

The day's itinerary was centred around the *Elvis Costello* concert in the evening, but we weren't going straight back to *Tokyo*, and we needed something to fill in the morning and early afternoon.

Back on the rails, it was one stop back to *Yokohama*, and a change of lines that took us to *Kamakura*, a coastal town an hour south of *Tokyo* that was *the political centre of Japan* after *Minamoto Yoritomo* chose it as the seat of his military government in *1192*.

The *Kamakura government* went into decline in the 14th century as the focus shifted to *Kyoto*, but the city remained the political centre of *Eastern Japan* for some time.

Today, *Kamakura* is a popular tourist destination, sometimes labelled the *Kyoto of Eastern Japan*, with temples, shrines and other historical monuments as well as beaches that attract large crowds during the summer.

The historical significance stems, in part, from the fact that it sits in a natural fortress, surrounded to the north, east and west by hills with the open water of *Sagami Bay* to the south.

If you weren't coming by boat, in the days before modern engineering delivered tunnels and cuttings access over land was only possible through narrow passes.

The seven most important were tagged *Kamakura's Seven Entrances* or *Kamakura's Seven Mouths*.

Kamakura has some significant *Buddhist* temples and *Shinto* shrines, far too many to visit in a day, but much of the city was devastated by the *Great Kantō Earthquake* of *1923*.

The epicentre was deep beneath *Sagami Bay*, close to *Kamakura*, and the tremors devastated *Tokyo*, *Yokohama*, and the *Kantō region*. The combination of quake, *tsunami*, and fire destroyed many sites, and what's on view today is often a replica of what was formerly there.

We had two sightseeing options pencilled in, with the first involving a bus from *Kamakura station* to the vicinity of *Hokokuji*, where the signage on the main road was slightly misleading.

We've had the same problem before, but eventually we'll get these things sorted out.

We headed down the same road far enough to establish a total lack of temples within the designated distance, cast back to the signpost and had another go, heading the other way and crossing at a set of traffic lights to find another sign that pointed us in the right direction.



When we reached *Hokokuji*, we found a quiet shrine with its own charm. The temple, which dates back to **1334**, is best known for the bamboo grove behind the main hall.

The grove fills the space where founder *Tengan Eko* (posthumous name - *Butusjo Zenji*) meditated and wrote poetry.

It was the family temple of the *Ashikaga* and *Uesugi* clans, but most structures were destroyed by the *Great Kanto Earthquake*. The main attractions are strolling gardens and a grove of two thousand *moso* bamboo, *Phyllostachys edulis*, the world's largest growing and hardiest bamboo, which grow to a height of around 28 metres.

Maybe it was the time of year, but the temple lies slightly off the beaten track, which makes a visit a quieter and more enjoyable experience than you'll find in more easily accessible locations.

Visit in prime *sakura* season, or when the coloured leaves are at their best, and you'll probably find yourself being jostled.



But in early *December* there were still coloured leaves on the trees and the red, yellow and brown carpet around the base of the trees prompted a meditation on the subjects of transience and regeneration.

We could have taken the bus back, but *Madam* preferred to walk. I guessed this was meant to defer *Someone's* inclination to do the circuit and then keep moving to *Tokyo* and concert time.

The walk itself was reasonably straightforward, and quite pleasant tramping, and the exercise was, in the light of recent indulgences, overdue.

On the way, we diverted into *Kamakura's* main *Shinto* shrine, *Tsurugaoka Hachimangū*, which sits at one end of the city's main street, a thoroughfare just under two kilometres in length that runs up from *Sagami Bay*.



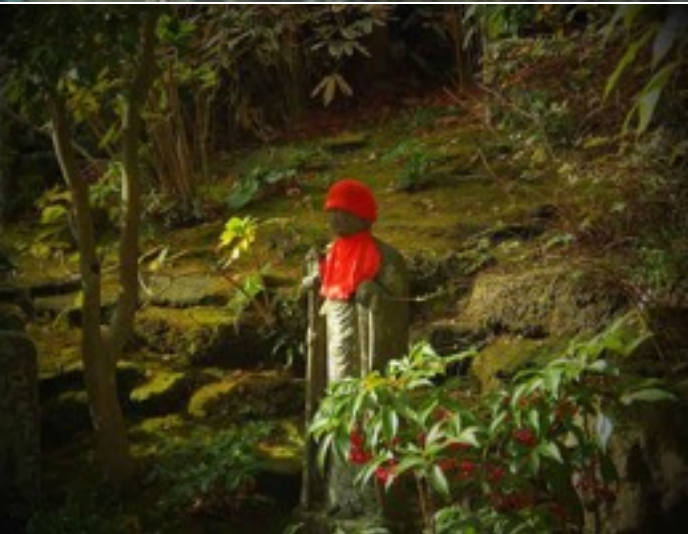
We paused for the inevitable photographic evidence that we'd been and were on our way back to the station when we were accosted by a polite elderly gentleman on a bicycle who asked whether I spoke *English* and proceeded to insist that I accept a couple of documents he'd prepared to practise his *English* composition skills.

We sighted him again at the station, obviously making his way around a regular circuit where he'd find opportunities to practice his foreign language skills, which were, in fact, quite impressive.

The main purposes from here, however, involved a visit to the monumental bronze statue of *Amida Buddha* at *Kōtokuin*, which involved a switch to a local tram line and a bit of a hike once we'd alighted.

There was also the possibility of catching a view of *Mount Fuji*, though as the tram made its way along it wasn't easy to see how we were going to manage it.

The landscape on that side of the vehicle seemed to be dominated by hills.



While *Madam* was certain there were views she wasn't sure where you needed to alight and how far you had to walk to avail yourself of them.

Once we were on the ground it was obvious the *Daibutsu* is a major crowd-puller, and when we arrived, while the statue itself is impressive and represents one of the standard *images of Japan*,

I must say I preferred the peace and tranquillity you get with a less readily accessible location.

The statue was originally housed in a temple that must have been an impressive structure, something along the lines of *Nara's Todaiji*, but probably not quite as large.

But the temple was destroyed by a fifteenth-century *tsunami*, and the *Great Buddha* has remained outdoors ever since.



Still, despite the crowd, I was glad we'd been, though I don't see any reason to call again.

Crowds, on the other hand, bring some benefits, and the road leading up to the *Daibutsu* was lined with shops selling souvenirs and such and, more importantly, refreshments.

Madam stopped for a drink at one of them, which turned out to have an impressive array of local beers to go with the softer options. There was a pear juice for *Madam*, an impressive *India Pale Ale* for *Yours Truly*, and a range of other options I could have tried.

Maybe we need to call back, after all, possibly diverting off the roadway to the hilltop site that had been suggested as a possibility.

But the day was getting on and *Hughesy* was experiencing a decided itchiness in the pedestrian equipment.

From there it was a question of using the tram to deliver us to the rail connection that would get us back to *Tokyo*.

If there was a decent view of *Fuji* on offer along the way, so much the better.

We headed a few stops further along and alighted at *Eni* when it looked like we weren't going to be unsuccessful.

On the platform at the tram stop, however, it seemed that the next tram to the terminus at *Fujisawa* was a better, and far closer option than heading all the way back to *Kamakura*. From *Fujisawa* we'd be able to catch a train on the *JR Tokaido* line, where the services were probably more frequent than on the line out of *Kamakura*. In any case, once we'd made our way there it was obvious conditions were too hazy for *Fuji* viewing.

Riffing on the theme that the gods were teasing us, trying to get us to show our hands provided a theme to fill in time while we waited for the train to leave.

We'd pulled the right rein as far as the *back to Yokohama* options were concerned, with the train pulling in within seconds of our arrival on the platform.





That got us to *Yokohama*, where we made the switch of lines that got us back to the hotel, followed by the trip back once we'd collected the baggage.

We switched lines again in *Yokohama*, and while we'd hit the right platform, we ended up on the wrong train, necessitating a further switch that got us onto on the right line, but created an issue with a falling red suitcase and someone's knee.

We got off at *Ebisu*, switching to the subway for the two stop ride to *Roppongi*.

There, it was a case of taking the western exit, turning right, and before I knew it, we were walking past the *Ex Theatre*, the concert venue for the next three nights. *Madam's* immaculate research had us booked into *Hotel S*, just a few hundred metres further along the same road.

Checking in revealed a rather trendy establishment, and it was obvious that we didn't sit anywhere near the target demographic.

Still, there was plenty of room in the room, and they'd provided most of the regular amenities.

Interestingly, that didn't include pyjamas, though there were bathrobes.

In any case, a relatively early arrival gave us the chance to take it easy for an hour or so before we headed out to find somewhere to eat before the concert. It was already dark at five, and a walk back along *Roppongi Street* towards the subway station didn't reveal much on the hotel side of the theatre.



There were undoubtedly plenty of interesting options in the back streets and side alleys, but at this stage of proceedings, a lengthy exploration of the options was not the name of the game.

We continued beyond the *Ex* as far as the *Oyster Bar*, which I figured would do *very nicely, thank you*. It wasn't as if either of us needed a huge meal.

An order went in for an *oyster puttanesca*, an *oyster and Japanese basil risotto* and a draught *Yebisu*, which looked to be the right combination to keep us going.

The *puttanesca* was very good, but I'm not a fan of *Japanese basil*, which worked its evil way through the *risotto*, overpowering everything else.

Different strokes for different folks but the draught *Yebisu* was, predictably, just what the doctor ordered.

From there, we headed back to the hotel, with *Madam* wanting to take her time.

For my part, I was only interested in one thing, namely getting to the venue and finding my way inside. Once I was there I was happy to wait, but you (or, I guess, I) want to be there and ready.

With the doors open at 6:30 (the *Lounge*, whatever that was, opened at five) we headed off just before half past and got there to encounter decidedly odd entry arrangements.

For a start, where you'd expect to be making your way into the venue, there was a sign advising this was not the point of entry for the general public and directing us towards a staircase.

That took us up to a space on the rooftop, where we were ushered towards a staircase that led back down to a point less than ten metres from the sign that sent us on the cross country ramble.

It didn't stop there. Once we'd descended, there was a fairly brusque demand for an extra ¥500 for what seemed to be a compulsory drink. *Madam* was not impressed, and while I wasn't totally pissed off by the demand, I prefer to exercise my discretion when it comes to buying things.

And neither of us impressed by marshals barking highly amplified instructions over bull horns.

It seems the conventional wisdom when dealing with crowds in *Japan* is that you can't organise large groups of people in an orderly manner without the high volume instructions, which is fine in open spaces like the *Luminarie* in *Kōbe*, where the same organising principle applied.



There had, after all, been around 180 000 people the night we were there.

Here, in a confined space, with a crowd that wouldn't reach two thousand, things were definitely over the top. You almost got a sense of an attempt to make the punter suffer for turning up since he or she was obviously incapable of making his or her way inside without specific instructions.

Having taken the tokens, we collected beer and white wine, drank and headed inside, one grumbling and t'other looking forward to two and a half hours of prime ***Costello and The Imposters***.

There had been some concern about the rather idiosyncratic system used to get seats in the pre-sale, which seems to have impinged on a lottery.

Suggestions we'd get better seats if we waited until they were released to the general public were countered with a fairly definite *I don't care* on my part, *largely because I wanted to get to all four shows, thank you very much*.

A glance at the seating arrangements as published online suggested there probably weren't any bad seats.

When we made our way into the auditorium, our seats were on the balcony, more or less dead centre, three rows back.

From where we were it looked like I'd been right, and there were no bad seats, but things may have been different on the floor if you're not inclined to stand up.

The front section was standing from the start.

When I checked the following night, there was a slight camber towards the back, but you'd probably have ended up on your feet once those in front of you were on theirs.

As predicted, the show was excellent.

One can find all the gory details, along with another exposition of gripes about bullhorns and compulsory drinks, here, but, if you're not into the arcane aspects of ***Costello*** fandom, a here's a brief explanation that semi-justifies ***Hughesy***'s four concert agenda.

For a start, with the proverbial *extensive back catalogue* to draw on, ***Costello*** tends to vary the set list quite a bit, so you're not going to get the same show night after night.

He'll prepare a set list before a regular show, largely for the benefit of the guitar technician who needs to know which particular instruments will be required, when they're likely to be required and what key they need to be tuned to.



But that's Elvis operating in regular mode, and while there's no guarantee he'll stick to what he's listed, it isn't exactly random either.

Which is where the *Spectacular Spinning Songbook* comes in.

Take what amounts to a gigantic chocolate wheel, replace the numbers you'd use to decide who wins the prize with the names of songs from the old *extensive back catalogue*, and you've got an interesting way of randomising what gets played.

Fill some of the slots with jackpots and bonuses (*Time*, *I Can Sing a Rainbow* or *Imperial Chocolate*) and you've added a further randomiser.

Time would produce two or three songs that include *Time* in the title, or, possibly, songs about the passage of time if you feel like going that way.

I Can Sing A Rainbow would give a little bracket of songs about colours (*Red Shoes*, *Green Shirt*, *Blue Chair* or even, I guess, *Yellow Submarine*) while an enigmatic combination like *Imperial Chocolate* would yield a song from the *Imperial Bedroom* album and another from *Blood and Chocolate*.

And, just to spice things up a little further, throw in a leggy blonde assistant in a gold *lame* minidress (*The Mysterious Josephine*).

Bring up a selection of punters from the audience to spin the wheel, and a performer with unfulfilled ambitions in the realm of stand-up comedy, and you've got an interesting package.

So that, in a nutshell, explains the all four shows scenario.

Some two and a half hours after *Elvis* and *The Imposters* took the stage the house lights came up, and that was that.

We headed more or less straight out through a side exit that delivered us into the path of the exodus headed towards the subway station.

We skirted around that and wended our way back to *Hotel S*, where the first task was translating scrawled notes into a typed up set list to go to the *Facebook Costello-L* group.

That, along with a *preliminary draft of a review*, took things up to eleven-thirty, which is when I turned in, expecting an earlyish start in the morning.



TOKYO

Thursday, 12 December 2013

Strange.

We're in a hotel room fronting a busy three level roadway, and I'm woken a couple of times through the early morning by traffic noise and other sounds from outside.

You wake, thinking it's around six or seven, comfortably before peak hour because there's no noise outside, check the time, and it's already twenty past eight.

Put a tick in the box alongside *Unexpected Sleep-In...*

After a shower, and a check of *Costello-L Facebook* comments where I discovered errors in the set list I posted the night before,

I corrected my copy, then headed down to a healthy breakfast with no sign of eggs, bacon or other mainstays of the standard *Western* breakfast.

I wasn't overly upset since it was relatively late, we were looking at a substantial lunch and I'd pencilled in a visit to the oyster bar before the night's concert.

Back upstairs, recent comments on *Facebook* suggested that *Costello-L's Japanese correspondent Ayako* made it into the show, and may have gotten to spin the wheel.

But there were more important fish to fry aside from wondering whether *Wheel-Spinning Ayako* and *Costello-L Ayako* are one and the same.

As it turned out, they were.

But after four days on the road, there were *laundry issues* that needed to be addressed.

That meant it was time to pack up the washing, and head off to *the coin laundry*.

A check at the front desk produced a set of directions that seemed rather complicated, an up hill and down dale and into side streets affair, but *Madam's* research has located a place in the basement of a building on the opposite side of the main road the hotel faces.

Far simpler. *Score one for Thorough Research.*

You could also *score one for inability to check pockets were empty* as an issue with tissues caused a delay in the drier proceedings.

Still, with the washing done and semi-dry, we headed back to *Hotel S*, where the room hadn't been made up, so there was no chance to drape the almost dry over every available surface.

Never mind, we weren't going that far.

When we headed back out reckoned there'd be plenty to see on a short walk around *Roppongi* With one major commercial development across the road (*Roppongi Hills*) and other a couple of hundred metres down the street past the Ex (*Tokyo Midtown*), we headed for the latter, intending to visit t'other on the way back.

You'll possibly conclude we're talking shopping centres here, and in a way we are.

But they're more than just a couple of retail developments in the sense that *Australian consumers* have become accustomed to.



There's a significant difference in size and scale..

Tokyo Midtown is a \$3 billion (¥370 billion) mixed-use development with more than half a million square metres of floor space on a 7.8 hectare (19.4 acres) site formerly occupied by the *Japan Defense Agency*.

Completed in *March 2007*, it's a mixture of office, residential, commercial, hotel, and leisure space, the tallest office building in *Tokyo* (the 248 metre *Midtown Tower*) and the new location of the *Suntory Museum of Art*.

So it's not just a shopping centre, though there's plenty of high-end shopping action available in the five-floor Galleria complex, along with a variety of restaurants and a wine bar *Coppola's Vinoteca*) dedicated to the wines of *Francis Ford Coppola*.

Office space tenants include *Fujifilm*, *Fuji Xerox*, *Yahoo! Japan* and international law firms, as well as a medical clinic affiliated with the *Johns Hopkins Hospital*.

The 250-room *Ritz-Carlton Hotel* occupies the 47th through 53rd floors of *Midtown Tower*, complete with a \$20,000 per night *Presidential Suite* and an authentic 200-year-old *Japanese teahouse*.

And if you're after a little peace and quiet after you've given the credit card a thorough working over, the complex includes *Hinokichō*, formerly a private garden attached to an *Edo Period* villa, reopened as a public park, and the cherry tree-lined *Midtown Garden*.

Less than a kilometre away, the older, but similarly scaled *Roppongi Hills* offers more of the same.

We weren't there for shopping. *Madam* was scoping the place out before an evening rendezvous with an old friend, and *Hughes* was up for something along the lines of lunch.

After a week on the road, I didn't need something substantial.





The lunch venue was a matter of debate, hardly surprising with the range of options.

We ended up at an *Italian eatery* where mozzarella was the main focus.

Lunch, as it turned out, was a fairly basic pizza and a *panini* with glasses of red and white that did the job quite nicely, and from there we wandered back towards *Roppongi Hills*.

Like where we'd just left, you can throw around impressive statistics about *Roppongi Hills*.

It's older (opened in **2003**), slightly larger (109,000m²), and a tad more expensive, constructed at a cost of \$4 billion on more than four hundred separate lots amalgamated by developer *Minoru Mori*.

The plan was to build an integrated development, an all-in-one live, work and play environment.



We weren't there for the shopping, heading more or less straight for the upper levels of the 54-storey *Mori Tower*, where we had an appointment with the *Tokyo City View*.

I don't have a great head for heights, so I wasn't keen on shelling the extra ¥500 that'd get us onto the open-air *Sky Deck* on the top level once we'd paid ¥1500 for the basic package.

That included admission to the *Moro Art Museum*, something I wasn't keen on given the fact that the featured exhibition was devoted to *The Art of Peanuts*.

Once we'd taken in the views, I'd sneaked in a *Trappist ale* before we went into the gallery to check out an exhibition that focused on new ideas from around the world.

It allegedly keeps the art accessible to the public, rather than making it overly obscure or esoteric.



That may be much the same territory as *MONA* in *Hobart*, where we'd been in the recent past, but I have to say this display didn't do a whole lot for me.

Back downstairs, we headed back to the hotel, where after ten minutes the room looked as if it had been the target of a major panty raid.

It would probably have made a decent display piece in the *Art Museum* if we'd been able to come up with a suitably postmodern metaphor for *airing not quite dry laundry*.

Madam had a six o'clock appointment with a friend from University days but left at five.

I walked her as far as the *Oyster Bar*, stopped for four of *Japan's* best prime oysters and a *Yebisu*.

I popped into the nearby gourmet store on the way back to pick up a half bottle of nondescript *2011 Bordeaux* (¥925, and you get what you paid for).

I had half an hour upstairs at the hotel, then headed down to the restaurant for dinner (*pasta con vongole bianco* with a glass of *prosecco*) and rocked off for *Night Two*, where the show was, again, highly enjoyable.



The concert itself is reviewed [here](#).

When I got back to the hotel just after ten-thirty *Madam* had reports of spectacular Christmas lights that I'd missed, what with the concert and all.

I took my time typing up the night's set list, sipping on a *French red wine* that was OK without hitting any altitude whatsoever.

As I said, you get what you pay for.

If you haven't paid much, you tend not to have great expectations.

And so to bed...



TOKYO

Friday, 13 December 2013

As we headed down for the *Ridiculously Healthy Breakfast*, I found myself musing on a seemingly incongruous matter.

I'd woken up a couple of times during the night and heard noises somewhere in the vicinity, yet, once the sun had risen I'd slept soundly despite the presence of a major arterial road carrying substantial traffic outside the window.

I'd crashed with intentions of knocking over *the review of last night's concert* before breakfast, but the late night and what seemed like impervious soundproofing had allowed me to sleep in until well after seven o'clock.

Yet, in the still of the night I'd heard things going on.

Strange.

I knocked breakfast over quickly, working on the principle that it wouldn't do any harm to cut back on the dietary input, and headed upstairs to knock over the rest of *the concert review*.

That took a bit longer than it might have done since *Madam* was intent on doing something during the daylight hours.

As a result, it became a question of *Where do you want to go?*

Actually I'd have preferred to go nowhere, maybe taking a walk through the back streets of *Roppongi* in daylight, looking for second hand collector CD stores and generally taking it easy.

That, it seemed, wasn't an option.

So, while I finished the *review*, *Madam*, being helpful, set out on a *Google* search for CD stores, which ended up sending us on a loop through *Tokyo Midtown* that failed to produce any results whatsoever.

Once I'd finished *the concert review*, of course.

Japanese neighbourhoods and back streets being what they are there's no guarantee I'd have found what I was looking for anyway.

You'd need local knowledge if you're going to conduct a successful search sortie in that sort of environment.

Since no one had wandered up to ask if I was the bloke from *Costello-L* who'd been posting on *Facebook* local knowledge was almost nonexistent.

Having drawn a blank on the music shops it was a case of heading off to the *Imperial Palace*.

Not that I'm a fan of royal families and their residences, you understand, but there were reports of rather impressive landscaped gardens, which are always worth a look.

That took us underground, to negotiate the intricacies of the *Tokyo Metro*.

We ended up at a station that, according to *Madam*, who had *Japanese commoner* background knowledge, should have been close to the iconic double bridge that forms the main entrance to the *Palace*, located on the site of *Edo Castle*, the seat of the *Tokugawa Shōguns* who ruled *Japan* from *1603* until *1867*.

When the *Shōgunate* was overthrown in *1868* the capital, along with the *Imperial Residence*, moved from *Kyoto* to *Tokyo*, and over the next twenty years a new *Imperial Palace* was completed.

That version went up in flames on the night of *25 May 1945* in a firebombing raid, but it wasn't the first time structures on the site had been razed,



Previous fires had destroyed the area containing the old *donjon* and the night of **5 May 1873** saw the *Nishinomaru Palace* (the former *Shōgun*'s residence) reduced to ashes.

The new *Imperial Palace*, a wooden construction incorporating a *traditional Japanese exterior* with a fusion of *Japanese* and *European* elements on the inside, went up on the same site.

Wartime destruction meant the new main palace and residences were constructed on the western portion of the site while the eastern part was renamed *East Garden* and turned into a public park in **1968**.

The current Palace has a number of interconnected steel-framed reinforced concrete structures, completed in **1968**, with two storeys above ground level and one below.

Having alighted at ***Nijubashi station***, we made our way across ***Kokyogaien National Garden***, the large plaza in front of the Palace that leads to the main entrance to the Palace grounds at the ***Nijubashi (Double Bridge)***.

The stone bridge in front is called ***Meganebashi (Eyeglass Bridge)*** while the one in the rear, formerly a wooden bridge with two levels was apparently the actual ***Nijubashi***.

As it turned out, despite sharing a name with the bridge ***Nijubashi station*** wasn't that close.

Once we'd hiked across the plaza and taken the photos to prove we'd been there we needed a guide book or map that would give us an idea of what we wanted to look at.

It wasn't as if we were going to gain admission to the actual ***Palace*** grounds.

They're only open to the public on ***2 January*** (the New Year's Greeting) and ***23 December*** (the Emperor's Birthday).

There was a policeman on duty, and he wasn't entirely sure about maps, guide books and such either.

He did, however, point us back the way we came, suggesting there were restrooms over that way, and, possibly, an information booth.

As it turned out, he was right, though the whole thing was a bit further than expected.

Once we'd investigated, got our bearings, checked out the options and made a decision we headed off towards the section of the complex that was open to the public, the old ***Honmaru, Ninomaru, and Sannomaru*** compounds that now comprise the ***East Gardens*** of the ***Imperial Palace***.

There was, however, a slight technical difficulty.

The East Gardens are open to the public throughout the year except on ***Mondays, Fridays*** and special occasions.

Predictably we'd made our way all the way along the outer moat to the bridge that takes you to ***Otemon Gate*** before we found that out.

I suppose we could have consoled ourselves by continuing around the moat towards the ***Kitanomaru National Garden***, where we could have checked out the ***Budokan Hall***, the ***Science Museum*** and the ***National Museum of Modern Art***, but lunch somewhere in the ***Tokyo Station*** complex sounded like a far better idea.

That turned out to be just as well, because when we retreated for lunch the two of us hit a surprising nutritional wall, becoming suddenly ravenous.

That happens from time to time, but in this instance it was a case of feeling fine as we descended the escalator into the underground complex that houses a myriad of eating options then feeling ravenous within the space of a further two minutes.

There were plenty of places to choose from, more than we actually needed as the hunger pangs made a decision imperative, but the proliferation of eateries made it difficult to choose.

After considering various *Italian* and *Japanese* options, we end up going for *Vietnamese*.

Pho and fried rice for *Hughesy*, chicken soup and salad for *Madam* and the problem was solved.

Better still, it was solved in a location comfortably close to the station, and from there we made our way back to *Hotel S*, arriving around three.

Back in the room after checking email and other matters, I managed a power nap until five, which was probably what got me through and beyond the evening's concert.

It was just after five when I suggested we head out in search of a post concert half bottle.

Rather than going straight to the gourmet supermarket where I bought last night's bottle, we ended up heading across the road into *Roppongi Hills*, where *Madam's* research suggested there was a pretty good bottle shop.

And as it turned out (hardly surprising, the only time she'd failed to deliver was the morning's CD shop question) the research was right, and we found our way into an upmarket operation, where I managed to sight a range of half bottles.

Closer inspection, however, revealed them to be *Bordeaux* first growths at around ¥14500 a throw. Given *Madam's* notional conversion rate of a hundred yen to the dollar a \$145 half bottle of claret doesn't seem like the sort of thing to sip on while you're typing out the evening's setlist.

So, back to the drawing board.

I needed wine and dinner, *Madam* had her own agenda, and we split up as she headed off to a cake shop somewhere in the *Hills* and I made for familiar territory across *Roppongi Street*.

The quest for the gourmet grocer turned out to be a bit harder to find than you might think since I wasn't paying attention to the surroundings as *Madam* led the way in.

Still, I was only thoroughly bushed for about thirty seconds and managed to find my way back by heading into the *Roppongi station* complex and casting around for a familiar looking exit.

That worked, and I was stowing a half bottle of *Medoc* in the room around ten to six.



There was a slight further complication when I made my way downstairs for dinner, and was ushered into the *shoes off* section adjoining the restaurant, which was set up for a catered event.

Not that it was a problem, but you'd guess they would have preferred not to have to deal with old hairy foreigners intent on pasta with clams and a glass of *prosecco* when they're readying things for a Christmas party.

Back upstairs to brush my teeth before heading down the street to the *Ex*, I found *Madam* battling with the corkscrew I'd borrowed the previous evening.

It was obvious she wasn't familiar with the old *waiter's friend*, but the bottle had plenty of time to breathe once we'd managed to extract the cork.

Predictably, having made my way into the venue twice and confident I had things under control, when I got to the concert, they'd changed the entry procedures slightly.

Not that it was a problem, but the changes produced a massive queue for the compulsory drink.

Maybe the changes had something to do with the fact that the night's show was going live to air on *Japanese pay TV*, which may in turn have had something to do with a great show that ran slightly longer than the others. Further details [here](#).

In any case, I was back upstairs at *Hotel S* around 10:40, around half an hour later than previous two days, tapping out the setlist, sipping red, and drafting *the concert review* until the 375ml had been polished off.

At which point it was time for bed.



TOKYO > NAGOYA > OSAKA

Saturday, 14 December 2013

On the last day of the seven-day rail pass, the agenda involved getting back to *Osaka*, with lunch in *Nagoya en route*.

The key question, however, involved views of *Mount Fuji*, and as I typed this, heading out of *ShinYokohama*, the omens looked favourable.

It seems the *Frockster Factor* has finally been overcome.

Breakfast downstairs at the hotel had offered the usual healthy array, but significantly omitted the chicken salad which had been the highlight the previous two mornings.

Just when I was starting to regard it as something to look forward to amidst the array of *Disgustingly Healthy Offerings*.

Upstairs, we packed and headed off to *Roppongi Station*, thence to *Ebisu* and *Shinagawa*, where we joined the *Shinkansen* line.

It's not that far from *Tokyo* to *ShinYokohama*, we'd shortened the distance by boarding at *Shinagawa*, and we already knew you could see *Mount Fuji* from a westward-facing room at *Yokohama's New Otani Inn*.

On that basis, it should come as no surprise to learn it wasn't long after we left *ShinYokohama* when the *Frockster Factor* was finally overcome.

That initial sighting of *Fuji-San* was the signal for *Hughesy* to put the *iPad* to rest while we enjoyed the view and worked through the difficulties associated with taking a decent photo from a speeding *Shinkansen*.

Variations in the surrounding landscape, and, particularly, power lines and such strung along the train line added to those difficulties.

So the photos mightn't be the best, but they're there to prove a point.

Actually, two points.

First, we actually did get a good clear view of the mountain, far better than I'd been hoping for.





That's because of the second, *Frockster*-related point.

These photos show exactly how close the mountain is to the main *Shinkansen* line.

I'd seen photos that suggested it was, but was aware they may have been *Photoshopped* or otherwise digitally modified.

We'd been along this stretch of railway three or four times and the mountain had been, to all intents and purposes, invisible.

Maybe there was something in that *Frockster Factor* after all.

Eventually, with *Fuji-san* receding, I turned back to the *iPad* to finish off *last night's concert review*.



The job needed to be wound up while details were fresh in my mind.

In any case, the run into **Nagoya** across the central plain doesn't offer a lot of visual interest once you've been over it a couple of times.

Still, it's pleasant to recline the seat, and just let the visuals wash over you once you've got more pressing matters, like **concert reviews**, out of the way.

We stopped in **Nagoya** for the dual purposes of lunch and catching up with one of **The Notorious Drinking Girls**, who **Madam** hadn't seen for twenty years.

This dynamic duo, on their travels around the **Australian countryside** apparently had a penchant for soaking up the amber fluid that would have amazed and impressed **the average Aussie**, but these things invariably go on the back burner when you acquire husbands and young families.

The presence of young kids in these circumstances, apart from cramping your drinking style, tends to influence your choice of lunch venue.

We ended up in an outlet of a chain that caters for ankle biters by offering buckets of plastic wrapped toys to amuse kids while their parents eat and drink.

I watched a six year old absorbed in what appeared to be a rather basic mobile phone video game, and a five year old explore the possibilities of a plastic crab while *Madam* and the *Former Drinker* chatted away and I waited for my serving of fried oysters and *Yebisu*.

Back on the train I jotted down a few further notes and settled back to let the landscape wash over me on the hour and a bit run into *Osaka*.

Once we were off the *Shinkansen* and onto the subway system, what we encountered reinforced the notion that you need a three level understanding of *a large Japanese city's* geography if you want to get around.

You need to have a fair idea of the physical geography, the various districts and what you're likely to find in each.

That interacts with the infrastructure that operates on the surface, the bus routes and train lines.

Those, in turn, intersect with the third element which is, of course, the subway.

Once you know where you are (physical geography) and determine where you want to go (ditto) it's the intersection of the last two that delivers you from point A on the surface, which in this case was *ShinOsaka*, to Point B, the night's hotel in *Kitahama*, the old merchant district and from there to point C, the former working class area of *South Osaka* that *our host* for the evening is keen to promote to all and sundry.

That meant off the *Shinkansen*, down into the subway, two stops along this line, change, and one more to *Kitahama*.

We'd stayed at *Brighton City Kitahama* last time, were very impressed by the rooms (large, with good bathroom and an actual tub) and look like making it the default stop in *Osaka* if the price is right and other factors don't intervene, which, of course, they do.

Which is why we stayed at *Kishibe* on the night before the rail pass leg began.

During *The Principal's* guided tour of *South Osaka* we learned there are several hotels in the neighbourhood that offer conveniently located accommodation (one stop from *ShinOsaka*) at very reasonable prices, but the area has, over the years, acquired a reputation.

That reputation might have been justified in the past, he explained as a less than supple and overweight foreigner tried to come to terms with the on the floor seating in a popular side street hotpot eatery, *but the population that created the reputation is ageing, and the area has become heavily populated by backpackers and Chinese* (both mainland and Taiwanese).



Walking the streets between locations suggested a rundown area that has seen better days and is probably on the verge of gentrification, the same way so many equivalent districts in cities around the world have gone.

The contrast between tradition and the new generation was reinforced at the next stop, an eatery specialising in deep fried things on skewers that featured a *VW Kombi van* as part of the decor.

And, yes, you can eat in the van.

That was about it on the food side of things, though there were nibbles along the way as we made our way through a couple of *Chinese karaoke* bars in the district.

Our Host is s learning *Chinese*, and the *karaoke* interactions with the people behind the bars seems to help.

The *karaoke* places we visited weren't quite what I'd become accustomed to in *Australia*

Not that I frequent such places, but I've been to enough to get a good idea of the *standard Australian version*, which tends to employ someone who can sing and fills in when no one in the audience is game to get up and have a go.

Fair enough if that sort of thing floats your boat.

The places we visited here were a case of being handed a microphone as you sit on your bar stool, singing along to a radio station selected by the customers.

No stage, no queue, just indicate you feel like a sing, select a song and away you go.

Hughesy's take on *The House of the Rising Sun* went down well with the clientele, though things came unstuck on *You've Lost That Loving Feeling* since I just don't have the range.

Maybe I should have gone for *I Was Born Under a Wandering Star*.

We wouldn't have got to the second place if *The Principal* hadn't picked up on a potentially nasty vibe and got us away from the first venue fairly smartly, but the whole experience delivered a very pleasant night.

I could have done with one or two fewer beers, and a more comfortable seating arrangement at the hotpot stop, but interesting.

Very interesting, and no one needed much rocking once we were back at *Brighton City*.



OSAKA

Sunday, 15 December 2013

It's always good to sleep in, and as previously noted *Japanese hotels* tend to have quite effective blackout curtains.

We'd had a late night, so there was a late rise and we set out for a light breakfast at a nearby *patisserie* though we could have done reasonably well at the hotel coffee shop.

Gokan patisserie was just around the corner and down the road in a former business house in the merchant district.

I've been in similar buildings elsewhere, with a large central space and an assortment of what were probably offices around the central space on two levels.

The central space housed the bakery retail operation and people after nibbles and coffee are ushered upstairs into one or other of the former office spaces.

The service is predictably attentive and the nibbles excellent.

The coffee wasn't bad either.

So that was breakfast done, and once we'd reclaimed the baggage there were three items on the agenda for the rest of the day.

The first was the inevitable relocation to the next hotel, which was just around the corner (okay, two) from **Zepp Namba**, which was the venue for item #3 on the agenda, the fourth **Costello** concert.

In between we had to meet up with **The Sister** and **The Rowdy Niece** for lunch, which didn't seem like a major source of difficulty, but we got ourselves into one of those circumstances where you don't quite manage to get the intersection of the physical geography and the underground infrastructure right.

We made our way to the right underground station in what should have been plenty of time to find the hotel, check in and then rock over to meet up with our visitors from **July/August**, who'd done more than their fair share of making sure this little odyssey had

(a) *happened* and

(b) *turned out well on the concert front.*

Tickets for four concerts came *via The Sister*. I wanted to reassure her that the local convenience store lottery (you'll find a **Family Mart** on every second street corner, or at least that was the way it seemed) had delivered good seats.

Having arrived at the right station your next task is to select the correct exit and have a fair idea where you're going. We weren't very strong on the second, and totally messed up the first, so it underlined the need to find your way to the correct exit and have a sense of where you're going from there.

We didn't have it quite nailed, and, consequently, we were late for lunch.

I've never been quite sure how late you need to be to qualify as *fashionably* late, but we were late to the point where it morphs into *surely they ought to be here by now?*

That had **The Sister** out on the footpath scanning the horizon.

Meanwhile, **The Rowdy Niece** did her usual non-disruptive thing upstairs in a very good restaurant, turning out very good food in the **French-Italian mode**, although the portions as limited in size as you tend to find when you head over towards fine dining.

The food went well with a **Gamay Pinot Noir** blend and the combination fuelled lengthy conversation.

After lunch was out of the way we wandered off into the streets around *Dotonburi*, which provided an opportunity for a little subtle ribbing of *The Rowdy Niece*, who was obviously itching (*not*) to head off and let out her inner bullhorn wielder as a demonstration about something to do with *Korea* made its way along a busy street a couple of hundred metres ahead of us.

You might attribute the fact that we found ourselves in interesting side streets rather than on major thoroughfares to the need to keep *Rowdy* from expressing revolutionary tendencies.

But it a desire to browse in an interesting shopping environment would be closer to the mark.

I happened to chance on a music shop along the way, the sort of place where I could easily indulge in an extended browse and probably part with a substantial sum of money.

When you've got people waiting outside on the footpath, and you're not familiar with the local geography that's not an option.

It wasn't long after that when we bade goodbye to our hosts on another footpath, outside the store where we were looking to buy pens to interact with our respective *iPads*.

Once we'd accomplished that task we made our way back to the hotel, landing there as much by good luck as good management.

Actually, if we hadn't spotted a familiar looking hotel on the other side of the road to reassure us we were headed in the right direction finding the place could well have been tricky.

We knew we were headed in the right direction, but weren't sure whether this was the right road.

But spot a familiar landmark, or, in this case, a name lodged in the memory bank, and everything's relatively cool.

We booked in, settled into the room, and *Madam's What time does the concert start?* produced a check of tickets and a much earlier departure than I'd anticipated.

If the question hadn't been asked we might have rocked up at least half an hour after the show started.

A lunchtime question about starting time had been answered with a *seven-thirty*, omitting an *I think* and failing to note the expression of surprise from someone who's rather more *au fait* with the way things run over here than her sister, who has spent the last twenty-odd years in *Australia*.

The conversation was, predictably, in *Japanese*, so I didn't pick up *that's late for a Sunday* (or words to that effect).

We'd also learned that the *¥500 drink charge* is, in effect, standard operating practice in these parts.



In any case, *Madam* checked at around four-thirty, we were out the door shortly thereafter and around an hour later we were seated in row G, enjoying the different ambience at a different venue.

Once we were inside it was obvious that *Zepp Namba* is a far more relaxed environment than the Ex in *Roppongi*.

The entrance was entirely devoid of people yelling instructions through bullhorns, and there were no PA announcements reminding us that photographs were forbidden.

I joined a stream of punters getting photos taken in front of the iconic item and was on my way back to the seats when I noted a familiar-looking bearded gentleman thanking someone who'd taken a happy snap.

Strange, I thought. Looks like Steve Nieve. Must be his brother.

As the figure who bore a remarkable resemblance to *Costello's* longtime keyboard playing associate headed off I remarked on the resemblance, and *Madam* pointed out that he'd been stopped by a couple of *Japanese girls* and was in the process of signing autographs.

Obviously, *Steve*...



And, a couple of hours, after yet another highly enjoyable concert we headed not quite straight back to the hotel.

There were other matters that needed attention, namely a search for beer, public phones and *gyoza*.

And so, eventually, with the set list typed and the *concert review* commenced, to bed.



4

JAPAN 2013: THE LAST PART



OSAKA > KYOTO

Monday 16 December 2013

There comes a time on every trip when mundane issues impinge on the travel arrangements.

Where such issues are concerned, they don't come much more mundane than the question of *laundry*, with particular reference to clean supplies of jocks, socks and other undergarments.

We had a relatively late check out at eleven the morning after the final *Costello* concert, *a coin laundry* on the site and breakfast to slot in between the commencement of *the laundry cycle* and the check on whether things were dry enough.

As it turned out, they weren't. *Quite*. That was the result of a slightly later than perfect start and a phone call from *The Sister* that ran right up towards checkout time.

We managed to negotiate a little more dryer time out of the front desk.

That wouldn't have required any negotiation at all if the lift didn't demand a room key to operate, but it did, and the front desk obliged with continued access after we'd officially moved into ex-guest status.

Some things weren't quite dry, but the haul to *Kyoto* was relatively short, and we were able to check in immediately after we arrived at the hotel beside *Kyoto* station around one-fifteen.

There was one other task that needed to be attended to after *the laundry* was done, and that was the now routine matter of shipping *The Red Suitcase* back to *The Mother*.

With three days to go and a couple of layers of warm clothing in use, what we needed for *Tuesday*, *Wednesday* and *Thursday* morning could go into what amounted to carry on luggage, so *The Red Suitcase* was temporarily surplus to requirements.

We were in the process of packing *Hughesy's gear* into the blue bag when we found the gloves I thought we left behind in *Bowen*.

Just in time, as it turned out because conditions on the ground in *Kyoto* were bitterly cold.

Not quite *freezing*, but cold enough to have you glad of an effective layer of pinkie protection.

There was a courier depot just around the corner from the hotel, so we resumed our peregrinations much lighter in the luggage department.

The switches between hotel and subway station, subway and *JR* line and between *Kyoto Station* and the *Century Hotel* ran like clockwork and, having checked in we found ourselves with a couple of hours we could devote to a temple visit.

Just across the river, definitely within walking distance, we had *Sanjūsangendō*, one of the leading attractions if temples are the kind of thing that floats your boat.

A little further up the road, *Chishakuin* offers another option, and a national museum is straight across the road but was undergoing renovations.

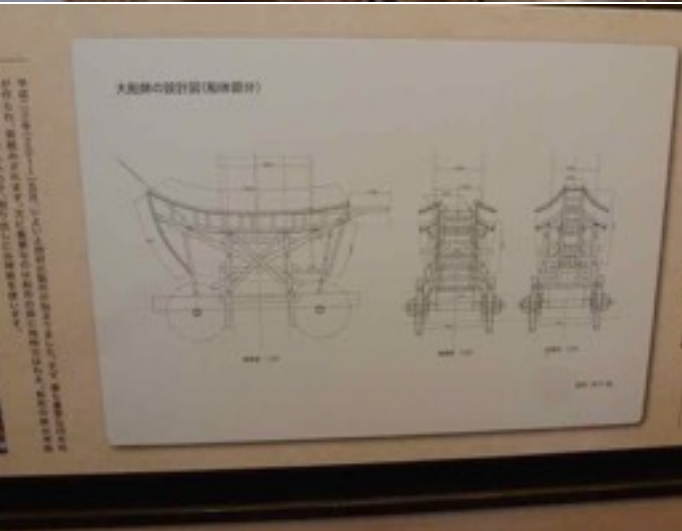
In any case, we've adopted a policy of limiting ourselves to one (or two if they're reasonably close) sightseeing options per day.

And as far as *Sanjūsangendō* is concerned, one is almost definitely enough.

Go anywhere else afterwards and the second site will probably pale in comparison, head elsewhere first and then on to *Sanjūsangendō* and you'll probably end up consigning the earlier visit to the dark recesses of vague memory.

Here's a prime example.

Until I went back to look at the photographic record, I'd forgotten all about this...



Walking gives you the opportunity to pick up on other things along the way.

An old guy on the footpath and a reference to a free display caused us to turn left into a ground floor shop front in downtown **Kyoto** where we found a group of people intent on reviving aspects of the city's cultural heritage promoting a project to restore traditional procession floats.

Or floats for traditional processions, either way, you probably catch my drift.

The recreated float is impressively huge, and should present an imposing sight as it makes its way through downtown **Kyoto** once it is finished.

Across the river and up the hill we had a choice of entrances when we reached the destination, but we looped around the perimeter fence rather than going in through what turned out to be the exit.



Predictably, where we were going is not *Sanjūsangendō* (*Hall with thirty-three spaces between the columns*) at all.

That name describes its most notable feature, the 120-metre main hall, which is either *the world's longest wooden building* or *Japan's longest wooden structure*.

Possibly, both. Either way, it's a truly monumental structure.

Counting the spaces between the supports was a traditional measure of a building's length.

The temple's official name is *Rengeōin*, *Hall of the Lotus King*.

Founded in 1164, destroyed by fire in 1249 with the main hall rebuilt in 1266, the temple's reputation is based on one of the most impressive assemblies of statues in the world.

You might be tempted to use *collection* instead of *assembly*, but with a thousand life-size statues of the *Thousand Armed Kannon* in fifty columns ten rows deep around a seated *Kannon Bodhisattva* (*Sahasrabhujaarya avalokiteśvara*) that dates back to 1254 *assembly* seems the way to go.

If a thousand and one *Kannons* aren't enough, the assembly is surrounded by twenty-eight statues of deities who guard the *Buddhist universe*.

They're *Kannon's* disciples and embody various virtues.



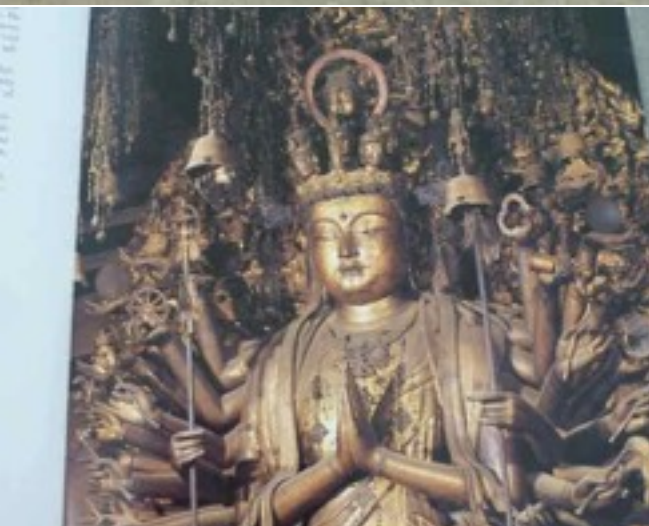
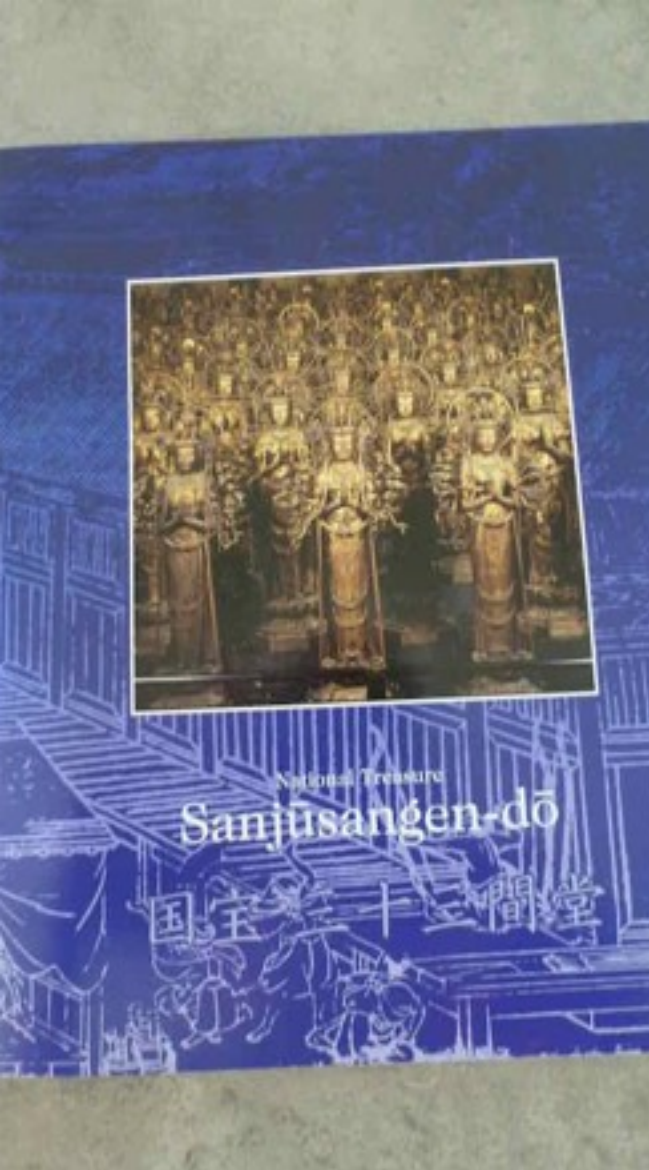
The collection is rounded out by two traditional *Buddhist temple guardians*: *Raijin*, god of thunder, and *Fujin*, god of wind.

Kannon is the *Bodhisattva of compassion*, and the statue radiates a peaceful and benevolent attitude.

The mathematics involved with the thousand arms takes a bit of explaining.

The sculptures show *forty-two arms* along with *eleven heads* that will give them a better grasp of the extent of human suffering.

The arms, according to *Buddhist* teachings, fight off suffering on twenty-five planes of existence. Two of them are required for everyday purposes, and *forty suffering-fighters* across *twenty-five planes* comes to *a thousand*.



Simple, once you accept the multi-plane notion.

Of the thousand statues, one hundred and twenty-four were rescued from the fire that destroyed the original structure.

The others, along with the centrepiece, were carved from *Japanese cypress* and covered with gold leaf as part of the reconstruction.

The temple is a venue for archery contests (*Tōshiya*) on the west veranda and the *Rite of the Willow*. Worshippers are touched on the head with a willow branch to cure and prevent headaches. Both take place in *January* each year.

The Inquisitive Reader could have been muttering *This verbiage is all very well, Hughesy, but where's the photographic evidence?*

if I hadn't taken steps to avoid the question. TIR might not be staved off with a statement about *cameras and video equipment being forbidden*.

But that's the way it is.



Anticipating the problem, I shelled out for the official booklet.

The possible breaches of copyright will have to do, along with the assurance it's something best experienced in the physical dimension rather than as a two-dimensional image.

The weariness factor was starting to set in as we left the temple, but there was a bus stop half way along the northern perimeter wall.

A bus appeared within minutes to whisk us back to *Kyoto station*.

When we checked in, we'd received a *voucher* that could be used in the hotel coffee shop.



After the walk, coffee and cake seemed like a good idea. The coffee shop turned out to be a stylish affair, and the delicacies served up were quite adequate for people who'd skipped lunch and needed something to keep them going until dinner.

Given the weather conditions we weren't inclined to venture very far in search of dinner, but a hotel located conveniently beside *Kyoto Station* meant there was no need to.

Like most operations in *Japan's* cities, the station encompasses a dizzying array of retail options, with a range of eateries covering most of the likely options of interest.

If you're after *Peruvian-Californian fusion food* you're probably out of luck.

But if you're looking to any of the variations on *Japanese*, along with *Chinese*, *Korean*, *American*, *French*, *English* or *Italian* you'll more than likely find something that offers *a Japanese take* on your fancy.

As it turned out, *Madam* had done the usual research.

She pointed us towards a niche section of the restaurant options where, along with the *French*, *Italian*, *Chinese* and *Japanese* operations, there was a *Spanish* eatery.



It delivered a quite tasty *tortilla* (the *Spanish omelette* rather than the *Mexican corn bread wrap*).

We also enjoyed a a creamy seafood stew and a seafood *paella* that went rather well with a bottle of *Spanish White*.

There was still enough room for half a litre of *Kirin* that I from the vending machine when we got back.

Actually, figuring on the regular consumption pattern, I bought two, but there was definitely no room for the second.

That, I reasoned, would do to celebrate reclaiming the Ashes the following afternoon.



KYOTO

Tuesday, 17 December 2013

An earlier night started a shift back towards the old body clock cycle, and while I'm usually awake comfortably before 6:15, that's usually the result of an earlier bedtime.

As it was, I crawled out of the cot, spent a bit of time on the *Travelogue* and promptly crawled back to the cot for another spell that lasted until I was told it was my turn for the morning shower.

After that, we were off to the *Number Three Breakfast Viking in Japan*.

We'd been in the coffee shop the previous afternoon and had the chance to get a glimpse of an impressively large serving area.

News that this was *#3 in the country* meant I wasn't going to be taking my time with the ablutions.

Downstairs, I was disappointed to note the lack of *vodka* in the area around the tomato juice.



The *Viking* offered the standard options but added a touch of luxury in the form of *foie gras*, *caviar* and *extremely rare roast beef*.

And *desserts*.

Yes, if you were that way inclined you could opt for sweets at the end of your breakfast.

I'd loaded up in the interests of avoiding lunch, and by the time the topic of dessert was raised I was at a point where I couldn't eat another thing.

I'd responded to a couple of remarks about the morning's intake with an *oink*.

I reckoned I was justified because I knew I'd need the fuel given the day's game plan, which involved a bus across to *Ginkakuji* temple, which we'd been to before and weren't planning to revisit.

We were, however, planning another walk along *The Philosopher's Path*.

Unlike the previous attempt, where crowds made us bail out before we'd completed the length of the canal-side stroll, this time, we were planning on doing the lot, and visiting a few temples.

One definite, possibly a second and, should we feel like more there were some possibilities we could visit on the way to the *Gion* district, where *Madam* needed to do some shopping.

With breakfast duly demolished we headed off, looking for a bus to get us to *Ginkakuji*.

There were a number of possibilities, involving a variety of routes.

When we asked the old bloke at the bus station, he didn't clutter us up with options. *Number One!* was the direction, in a tone that suggested there really weren't any alternatives.

There's nothing like a definite opinion.

We joined the appropriate queue, which wasn't that long when we arrived.

By the time it did, there was a good bus load of people behind us, along with the people in front who looked like they might have gone close to filling all the seats on the bus that pulled up.

Still, we wangled a seat, and as the rest of the queue piled on it was a definite case of squeezing room only. Quite literally, the bus was chocker.

It was a limited express affair, running straight from the station to *Kyoto's* most famous temple.

That's a significant statement when you consider the number of famous temples in *Kyoto*, but when we arrived, I figured I knew why the old guy had been so sure that this was the bus.

Quite simple. Everyone was going to *Kyomizu*.

Even if we'd boarded at the end of the queue at the station and suffered the sardine treatment on the first leg, there'd be no problem grabbing a seat after the first stop.

We alighted at *Ginkakuji* and headed off, enjoying the contrast to the earlier visit, which was slap bang in the peak of the *sakura* season.

The Philosopher's Path (Tetsugaku no Michi) runs beside a canal in the northern part of *Higashiyama* district and takes its name from philosopher *Nishida Kitaro's* habit of using the path for his daily walk on his way to work at *Kyoto University*.

With hundreds of cherry trees lining the canal, which was built during the *Meiji Period* to revitalise the local economy, and also powered *Japan's first hydroelectric plant*, the path is one of *Kyoto's* most popular *hanami* (*cherry blossom season*) locations.



The two-kilometre walk has more than its share of restaurants, cafes, and boutiques along the path, as well as a number of temples and shrines.

Last time there were thousands of visitors revelling in the *sakura*.

This time, we weren't quite on our own. If you wanted to be jostled, you'd have to go out of your way to find someone to bump into, but for a leisurely walk and quiet contemplation, this was the way to go.

Most of the leaves were gone, but you get a better view of the canal and surrounds without the mass of pink to distract you.

Do the walk in peak season and you'll be one of the thousands.

Here we were two out of what might have been a couple of dozen, at least until we diverted to *Honenin* temple, where the tranquility was only broken by a passing group of Junior High students and a subtle blast of punk rock emanating from someone's music player earbuds.



Things would be different in peak season, but it was quiet contemplation and enjoyment of the subtly landscaped scenery.

Back on the path, we moved on downhill, planning to end up at **Nanzenji**, but made a brief detour when we reached the end of the **Philosopher's Path**, sidetracking into a temple and graveyard that's not significant enough to feature on the city map but was nonetheless quite charming.

If you're into crowds and being jostled, then go for the obvious attractions, but **Kyoto** has thousands of sites, and some of the less acclaimed aren't that far short of the headliners as far as the aesthetics are concerned.

It's also down to the time of year when you visit it.



On our first visit, at one of the iconic **Zen** temples on a sunny **sakura Sunday**, we'd headed through the grounds with a couple of hundred other visitors.

It was the sort of environment where you want to take your time, but if you wanted to sit, gaze and ponder you had to wait for someone who was seated to get up,

When he or she did, it was a case of first in, best dressed.

Our primary destination, this time, was **Nanzenji**, one of **Japan's** most famous **Zen** temples, head temple of a school within the **Rinzai** sect of **Zen Buddhism**.

That's the one that emphasises the use of **koan** (*paradoxical puzzles*) to help the aspiring student of **Zen** to overcome the boundaries of logic.

Nanzenji dates back to 1264, when **Emperor Kameyama** built a retirement villa there and converted it into a **Zen** temple in 1291.

The buildings were destroyed during the **Onin War**.



Most of the present structures were erected after the seventeenth century.

Given the direction we were coming from, and unfamiliarity with the actual lie of the land we entered the complex from the side, rather than through the *Sanmon* entrance gate constructed in 1628 by *Todo Takatora* in memory of the soldiers who died in the siege of *Osaka Castle* in 1615.

The temple was affiliated with the *Tokugawa era Shōguns*, and it has been suggested the massive gate, with an excellent view across the city, served as an observation post to monitor imperial activity.

From the balcony on the gate's upper level, you can take in the same view, but you'll pay ¥50 to do it. The top floor also has statues and paintings, but the main attraction seems to be the view.



In the end, we ended up deciding to save the money, but if we're back, I'd be tempted to take a look and evaluate that observation post theory.

The gate was on our right as we came in, and we diverted from temple-viewing to investigate what must be the most recent construction within the temple grounds.

A brick aqueduct built during the *Meiji Period* is part of the canal system that was constructed to carry water and goods between *Kyoto* and *Lake Biwa* in neighbouring *Shiga Prefecture*.

In other words, a continuation of the *Philosopher's Path* canal.

We could have gone further, on to *Nanzenin*, one of *Nanzenji's* sub-temples located on the location of *Emperor Kameyama's* original villa.

With the emperor's mausoleum, a temple hall and a moss and rock garden, it might be worth ¥300 they charge for admission, but we had other fish to fry.



We headed on past the *Hatto* (a lecture hall not open to the public), to the *Hojo*, the abbot's quarters, where we were only too happy to hand over the ¥500 for admission to the former imperial palace building donated to the temple in 1611.

The building's chambers are separated by sliding doors (*fusuma*) with impressive wall panels, but the main attraction is the *Zen garden*.

It's in much the same style as the gravel garden at *Ryoanji* with its large rocks set against a plain white wall behind the raked gravel. The rocks are said to resemble tigers and cubs wading through water.

Regardless of whether you see the resemblance, the sight is something that needs to be taken in at leisure and was one of the highlights of this trip to *Japan*.



There are a dozen sub-temples on the grounds where American poet *Gary Snyder* (*Japhy Ryder* in *Kerouac's The Dharma Bums*) underwent *Zen* training.

Apart from *Nanzenin*, *Konchiin* and *Tenjuan* are noted for their gardens, and, predictably, they are said to be particularly attractive in autumn. They're lit up at night, so expect crowds if you're headed that way in peak season.

We'd managed to sidestep that one rather adroitly, thanks to the *Elvis Costello* scheduling.

When we got to *Nanzenji*, we were two out of a couple of dozen scattered around the extensive site.

After we'd paid to walk through the sand gardens, there were a handful of other visitors, all of them careful to avoid cluttering up everyone else's photographic record.

Predictably, you're asked not to photograph interior panels that wouldn't have shown up well without lighting, which is probably why the instruction is there.

Turn your attention towards the immaculate gardens of carefully raked gravel and you can snap away to your heart's content and preserve a record of quite sublime landscaping.

That, once we made our way back to the shoe-wearing zone, was enough for the day, at least as far as the temple bit was concerned.

But *Madam* had landmarks to look at, and gift shopping that had to be slotted in.

I had a headache, a drink of water was a high priority, and after a traipse through the back blocks to water pipes that had piqued *Someone's* interest, I managed to find a vending machine.

Managed to find might seem to be overdoing it since you'll find vending machines almost everywhere, but the particular section of back blocks and main urban thoroughfare we traversed was almost entirely bereft of them.

It wasn't exactly rolling in public transport options either, or at least, none that would take us where *Madam* wanted to go, so we hoofed it.

Our path took us past significant temples (*Shorenin* and *Chionin*) and through the grounds of *Yasaka* shrine. All would have warranted further investigation if we weren't effectively templated out.



We weren't that far from *Kodaji*, *Entokuin*, *Kenninji* and *Rokuharamitsuji* if those aren't enough next time around.

All of which underlines the point.

Kyoto has enough temples and other attractions to keep the visitor very busy for a very long time, so don't expect to do the lot in one or two visits.

Take a year, ensconce yourself in the city, familiarise yourself with the topography, seasonal variations and infrastructure and head out every day, weather permitting, and you'll probably still have things on the bucket list twelve months later.

We ended up on the verges of *Gion*, the *geisha district*, but *Madam's* focus was on gift shopping, which left *Hughesy* standing on the footpath watching the passing parade.

There was plenty to watch.

You might have hypothesised some occasion in the offing given the number of *kimono*-clad passers-by, but a check with *Our Resident Authority On These Matters* suggests it was just *business as usual* in the temple precinct and surrounds.

From there, with one bit of gift shopping complete we crossed into downtown *Kyoto*, diverted into an arcade, got things finished and took the *Number 5 bus* back to *Kyoto Station* and the hotel.

Madam's cash reserves needed replenishing, and I had plenty of *Travelogue* to catch up on, but once I'd managed to let myself into the room, there was more important business to be attended to.

A quick switch to *Safari* revealed the Perth Test had reached a satisfactory conclusion, with a five-nil drubbing of *The Old Enemy* a distinct possibility.

Under the circumstances, a celebratory ale seemed obligatory.

The *Travelogue* catch-up was postponed until the morrow, which promised to be bleak, drizzly, and unsuitable for walking anywhere where the views were the primary consideration.

We headed out for dinner just after six, not sure where we were going, but pizza had been installed as an odds-on favourite.

The best option seemed to be *Salvatore Cuomo*, an operation in the upper levels of the station complex with views across the city.

That was the first option we checked, and when it offered what looked like exactly what we were after there was no need to look any further.



An order for two pizzas produced a question from the waitress about our capacity to handle that quantity of pizza. As it turned out, we did it on our respective ears.

Hughesy would have been lining up for dessert if *Cassata* had appeared on the menu.

It had been there on the incarnation before last, and may well be included in the next one.

But it wasn't there this time around, and I headed back to the room via the vending machine, which yielded a post-prandial tin of *Asahi Super Dry*.

Nine o'clock saw the regular sawing of logs as *Madam* indulged in a hot bath.

It was well after the scheduled time to rise when I hit the new day the following morning.



KYOTO > KOBE

Wednesday, 18 December 2013

There are times when news that wouldn't be welcome under other circumstances comes as something of a blessing.

A bleak *Kyoto* morning, when checkout time is late, and the only item on the must do list is a transfer to *Kōbe*, is one of them.

Madam had pencilled in a visit to *Fushimi Inari Taisha*, which sits conveniently close to *Kyoto Station* and the hotel, but, to be frank, I wasn't that keen.

Leaden skies and drizzle, if not actual rain was enough to kill off whatever enthusiasm I could muster, and, in any case, I'd had my fill of temples and shrines this time around.

You can, after all, have too much of a good thing.

There was, however, one slight issue that could have been raised in the wake of the morning's descent to the lobby for another go at *Japan's Number Three Breakfast Viking*.

After two goes at it, we probably need something like a twelve-hour route march every day for the next week to work off the excess poundage.

That substantial intake every morning has, on the other hand, significant advantages since it keeps us going until dinner time and makes things like the previous day's temple ramble possible.

Part of the reason we covered as much territory as we did lay in the fact that we didn't have to divert for lunch.

In any case, something like this morning's selection will keep you going all day.

Admittedly, I went back for *smoked salmon* and pastries (two *croissants* and *a chocolate Danish*), but I had the self-control to avoid visiting the sweets section of the buffet, except for a passing snapshot just to point out that, yes, you can have dessert for breakfast.

Madam couldn't resist, and though she suggested I might enjoy the *chocolate mousse* that was on offer I was able to resist its siren song.

We headed back upstairs, where I busied myself with the *Travelogue* until around eleven-fifteen.

That seemed to be the right time to gather up the goods and chattels, bundle as much as possible into *The Blue Bag* and prepare for the two-leg trip to *Kōbe*.

Madam had purchases that needed to be made *en route* in *Osaka*, and we needed to kill some time. I added a sure fire time killer with a suggestion that I'd be interested in tracking down a copy of the remastered and vastly expanded *Rock of Ages*.

After we'd checked out, we made it over to the station without needing to bring out the umbrellas.

It was a brisk fifty-metre walk between the hotel and the nearest overhead protection from the station complex, and describing the weather conditions as mizzle was probably being overgenerous.

On the other hand, it was cold, and if you stayed out in it for a while, you would get wet.

We packed ourselves onto an *Osaka*-bound train, and after we'd alighted and joined the crowd at *Osaka Station* the first job was locating the coin lockers.

From there we were off into one of the new retail precincts, descending into the basement for the *World Beer* facility, where *Australian brews* were conspicuous by their absence in the display.

I needed something to keep me occupied while *Madam* headed off to make a few purchases and take the odd photograph, so she left me there with a draught wheat beer, which was eminently drinkable, but at the price (¥900) you won't be getting a skinful in a lengthy session.

I nursed one and was just finishing the dregs when she returned.



It wasn't so much the absence of *Australian beers* that prompted my inquisitiveness, more a matter of seeing which, if any, had secured a spot.

Looking at, for example, the *American beers* in the highly decorative sales pitch, I couldn't detect anything I'd heard of apart from the ubiquitous *Budweiser*.

I've seen suggestions that *Bud* hardly qualifies as beer at all...

A careful scan of the *all-in-Japanese* listing at the back of the folder revealed *three Australian brews* listed as #s 176, 177 and 178, and with the most likely translator away with the shoppers I was still no wiser as to what they were.



She returned with news that she'd found a wine place, and a **Subway** outlet that appeared to be growing its own healthy greens, so we went for a squiz at that.

I was cut loose to commence my search for the **Rock of Ages** rerelease if I could find the **HMV store** at the very top of the building.

It took some time, and I drew a blank, but I did locate an impressive railway modelling shop offering scale models of **Japanese rolling stock** at prices that translated into the several hundred dollars.

Not a hobby for school kids on a limited allowance.

We made our way back down the levels, with **Madam** stopping off to buy a belt along the way, then crossed the **JR Station** complex in search of **Tower Records** and a couple of used CD operations that eventually produced results, though the ¥14500 they were asking for what I was after seemed a little steep.

Subsequent research revealed it was available through **Amazon** for a tad under \$US62 though the freight impost would probably be substantial.

In any case, despite the relative lack of success, we'd walked a couple of kilometres and worked off some of the morning's breakfast.

When we returned to the station and made our way to the relevant platform, it seemed there had been some disruption to the network.

The express to **Kōbe** was running a whole three minutes late, prompting profuse apologies for any inconvenience caused on the PA and misgivings about whether we'd manage to find seats.

But we did, and we decanted ourselves at **Sannomiya**, moving smartly over to the bus terminal, where the shuttle bus for the **Okura** and **Meriken Park Oriental** was just pulling in.

That, in turn, delivered us to the hotel just after three-thirty, and we found the same girl who'd enjoyed a holiday on the **Gold Coast** when she was little on hand to convey our baggage to the room.

You don't need to be **Einstein** to figure out how the next hour and a bit was filled in, but just before five I put the tapping to one side as we made our way towards the evening's dinner rendezvous.

The notion **Madam** might head out by herself to pick up supplies of **green tea** with **Hughesy** to follow on a later shuttle for a six o'clock rendezvous had been floated earlier, but I ended up tagging along for the shopping expedition.

Which is just as well, because it turned out I didn't know the route between the point where the bus deposited us and the **JR ticket office** as well as I thought I did.

The shopping bit took us into the basement of **Sogo**, a major department store, and **Madam** left me to peruse the shelves at a convenient wine store.

The subject of **Australian wine** and an apparently low profile in what I've seen of **mainstream Japanese society** was something we returned to over dinner, and given the fact that the subject impinges on one of **Hughesy's** primary obsessions it's worth going into here.

Now, I have to admit I haven't done extensive research on this, but I've kept my eyes open as we've moved around, and sightings of familiar labels have been on the *very occasional* side of *extremely few and far between*.

In the wine shop whose shelves got a reasonably thorough perusal, they identified countries of origin by flags on the price tag, and I didn't sight a single **Australian flag**.

Before our cousins across **The Ditch** start gloating, while I did spot a **Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc** it took a very careful and rather lengthy search to locate a second.

A couple of hours later I was jotting down the names of a couple of **Australian wineries** that would be worth looking for, but I wouldn't be holding my breath as far as finding anything from **Cullen**, **Grosset**, **Rockford** and **Coldstream Hills** is concerned.

It was more an exercise of hope rather than an expectation of success, but you never know.

Our Hostess might do better with **Brown Brothers**.

I suppose *Jacobs Creek* is always a likely sighting, but based on very basic research I wouldn't be holding high hopes of success.

Once we'd been ushered into a shoes off private booth, I was relieved to find there was space for legs under the table.

The next couple of hours were comfortable with the food arriving in a steady flow of little dishes.

I managed to attack most of them with chopsticks, reserving the fork that was delivered just in case for the bits that were too tricky when it came to basic chopstick skills.

All in all, a very pleasant evening, with good food, wide-ranging conversation, and a steady stream of good draught beer that kept the inner beast satisfied.

It was shortly after nine-thirty when we decanted ourselves out of the eatery, and in what seemed to be par for the course arrived at the bus stand to find the shuttle ready and waiting, seemingly slightly ahead of schedule.

After several beers through the evening, there was no need to find a vending machine.



Not that such a device would be found in an establishment like the *Okura*.

On the other hand, I was out to get a photo of the Christmas lights at the front of the hotel, and once the bus deposited us, we headed down through the mizzle to fulfil that modest ambition, passing our friendly baggage handler on the way.

As a trainee, she'd obviously drawn the short straw as far as pavement guest greeting duties were concerned, and our brief exposure down there and back in the cold, with wind blowing the mizzle into places it wouldn't normally reach, suggested a need for warmer clothing for the designated guest greeters.

On the way back, I remarked that she deserved *a medal as big as a frying pan* for sticking to the task, a comment that produced a laugh.

Maybe, on some future visit when the trainee has moved up into senior management we might find ourselves recognized and upgraded to the penthouse.

Not, I hasten to add, *that there was anything wrong with the room we had*, but one can always aspire to greater things, without real expectations.

And, in any case, people who are sent to stand out in the cold need cheering up *n'est ce pas?*



KOBE > KANSAI INTERNATIONAL

Thursday, 19 December 2013

Flight day started around 7:40 with the *Japanese hotel room blackout* once again proving ultra effective.

Downstairs for another go at the *Viking*, we found ourselves back in the *Camelia Room*, where the spread was far more compact than our earlier visit, but just as extensive if you catch my drift.

They'd moved us into the wedding reception room last time, and the options were somewhat more spread out.

As I made my way towards the fruit juice, the tomato juice was again in evidence, along with the bottle of vodka and the handy batch of *Tabasco*. I refrained from the temptation to start with a *Bloody Mary*, opting for a dash of *chilli* in a common or garden tomato juice.

After two days attacking *Japan's Number Three Breakfast Viking*, I felt we were qualified to make a comparative assessment and, for mine, the *Okura* mightn't quite match the variety but definitely has the edge as far as quality is concerned.

Plus, of course, the possibility of a *Bloody Mary* should one be required.

We were back upstairs around nine-fifteen, and I was back in the lobby shortly after that, accessing the *WiFi* and filling in time before an eleven o'clock checkout.

We've got the final day routine down pat, with a transfer to *Sannomiya* followed by a subway trip out to *Myodani*.

That, in turn, melds into a foray into the shopping centre while *Madam* stocks up on things she can't buy in downtown *Bowen*.

This can take anything up to an hour, and as long as I can bring the *iPod* into play while I take up a seat, I'm reasonably happy.

There's plenty of passing parade to watch, and the soundtrack is better than what gets delivered over *the shopping mall PA*.

On this occasion, like every other time we've been out in public over the past fortnight the PA was ringing out the seasonal bells, and the *iPod* was a welcome variation.

The shopping process can take anything from thirty minutes to an hour and a bit and is followed by the taxi transfer into the high-rise dormitory suburbs.

Once we're there, and the time of arrival varies, so restowing and rearranging what we've been carrying has to be the first task.

It's a case of incorporating what's been recently added, what we've been hauling around with us and what was dispatched to the suburban wilderness earlier on into the two bags that will be checked in once we get to the *airport*.

At this point, we need to pause to consider the logistics of these trips, which explains a lot of detail I had thought was overly fussy but am increasingly inclined to view as entirely necessary.

There are, for a start, things that come with you that you won't be needing again until the homeward leg, and one of them is the second suitcase.

Given the need for speed when you're in transit and switching train services *two suitcases is one more than necessary*, and I'm increasingly inclined to put a large question mark over the other one.

In any case, anything that won't be needed until the return leg goes into the other suitcase, which then gets put out to pasture until it's home time.

From there, you cram everything you need into the other suitcase, a travel bag and a backpack, which is what gets lugged around up to the point where what you need for the rest of the travel leg can fit into the other two bags. *That's when the suitcase, loaded with everything else, is dispatched by courier to join its brother.*

By this point, we're usually back in a major centre, and increasingly using the subway to get around.

After a day or two of lugging a suitcase up and down flights of steps, you're quite happy about not having to do it anymore.

It would be easier if you could fit everything you need into one airline size carry-on bag, but we haven't quite managed that.

Yet.

Much of that comes down to how often you want to wash, access to coin laundries along the way and the effect taking a morning or evening to do the washing will have on your travel arrangements.

In any case, with the roaming done everything needs to be rearranged for the homeward leg. That *Australian mobile phone* that doesn't work overseas will be required after we disembark, and pillows and blankets needed for the night flight come into play as well.

Then, with everything stowed away, it's time to sit down and wait for the taxi to the *airport*.

That might seem like an extravagance but works better than the alternative, which would be a taxi back to *Myodani* station, a struggle with the stairs at *Sannomiya* and the *airport shuttle* the rest of the way.

You book *the cab*, which is actually a coaster bus, in advance, and they call you back with a pickup time. Experience suggests we're usually the first of at least two pickups along the way.

Hit the *airport*, and it's the regular processes that go with international travel. You proceed through the check in, the meal before we head off, the move through immigration on the way out, the wait in the departure lounge and, finally, the seven-hour flight that will deposit you in *Cairns* around five in the morning.

And that arrival time creates its own little kettle of fish.



CAIRNS > MISSION BEACH

Friday, 20 December 2013

There's absolutely no doubt about the undisputed nadir of a trip from *Cairns* to *Japan* and back.

It comes around three o'clock in the morning, not all that long after you've managed to nod off, when the cabin crew start doing their thing prior to a scheduled 5:10 arrival in *Cairns*.

Part of the problem, as far as I'm concerned, comes because the scheduled arrival time doesn't coincide too closely with the time the tyres hit the tarmac.

It'd be okay if they were late, or consistently late, anyway.

If five-ten managed to consistently creep towards six they mightn't need to start rousing people around three o'clock.

Last time, in *Business Class*, it was worse.

They'd plied us with dinner and wine, which meant it was that much later when you started the attempt to nod off.

Then, *since you might like something for breakfast*, they tapped us on the shoulder around three.

This time, in cattle class, when you're not looking for anything they more or less left us alone, and you could put the travel blindfold back over the eyes and attempt to drift off.

I think I managed to do that, but if I did, it wasn't a very long doze and wasn't deep enough to qualify as a power nap.

And when you're awake, looking out into the predawn gloom on the seaward side of the aircraft there isn't a whole lot to see until you're well into the descent and the street lights of **Cairns'** northern beaches appear beneath you.

We were on the ground at 4:30, and even with disembarking and formalities associated with entering the country it was still before six when we found ourselves in front of the **International terminal** giving the **Airport Parking** shuttle bus a buzz.

They weren't quite as quick out of the blocks as they could have been, but it was still well before seven when we hit the road, scratching our heads and trying to figure out what to do next.

We knew what we weren't going to be doing.

There was no way we were going to attempt the six hour road trip back to **Bowen**.

Tried that last time, thank you very much, and it could have been a total disaster.

We managed to pull over for a break a couple of times, but there's not much chance of a decent rest on the front seat of a **Corolla** when people who arrived in the rest area before you have snaffled the shady spots.

On that basis we'd figured we'd take a break somewhere handy like **Mission Beach**, stay overnight, and do the final leg in the morning, having had a decent chance to rest and refresh.

So we'd booked ourselves into **Licuala Lodge** at **Mission Beach**, advised them we were likely to be early, been told to call when we arrived in the vicinity.

We'd decided eight or nine in the morning was just a little too soon to do that.

Which explains the repeated use of the phrase *it was still* in the preceding narrative.

There wasn't a great deal of traffic about, but we were still inclined to head out through **Portsmith** rather than **Mulgrave Road**.

That decision produced some results as far as time killing was concerned when we passed **Rusty's Markets**. Since it was **Friday** morning they were open and since **Madam** has a penchant for fruit we stopped.

I'd have preferred to stop somewhere I could sit, but you can't have everything, and we managed to kill around half an hour.

We'd also identified a likely spot to stop in the form of a rest area on the banks of the *Mulgrave River* just south of *Gordonvale*, and it wasn't that long after seven-thirty when we arrived there, and not much before nine when we decided to hit the road again.

Put a tick beside *shade*, but a cross beside *comfortable place to rest in the front seat of a Corolla*.

That meant there was still a good three hour time span before we could reasonably expect *Licuala Lodge* to be available and as we hit the highway we ran into another little issue.

The skyline of the range that *Yarrabah* is nestled behind had a veil of grey drawn over it, and the veil was headed our way.

As we pulled out of the rest area the game plan had been to turn off at *Babinda* and take another break there.



It's a right hand turn that would involve issues with oncoming traffic and *Madam* didn't fancy it in the conditions that prevailed as we passed through *Fishery Falls* and *Deeral*.

It started to lift around *Bellenden Ker*, so there were no visibility issues, and we negotiated the right-hand turn and pulled up in the middle of the street outside the *Babinda Bakery*.

If I had my druthers we'd have been breakfasting at the bakery in *Mourilyan*, where the pies are excellent, but I've got to say the *Babinda* versions are almost as good.

We still have to get to the bakery in *Wangan*, which according to *Mad Mick* produces the best pies in the North. They'd want to be very good to beat the ones we had in *Babinda*, which were possibly as much as a short half-head behind *Mourilyan*.

I'd had *Babinda* on my list of places worth a visit since I started work on **Hughesy's North Queensland**.

[A website](#) had revealed the town gained a government sugar mill in **1915** and *benefited from the reformist Ryan Labor government's price control and state enterprise policies, and became a largely government town: residential and business sites were occupied under government lease, the freehold hotel was closed ... and the State Hotel established, the sole manifestation of a short-lived Labor policy to monopolise and eventually end liquor supply in the state. The hotel, the sole*





government enterprise established during this period of Labor government to turn a profit, is listed on the Queensland heritage register and boasts one of the longest bars in Queensland.

On that basis, you'd have to reckon the place was worth a look, and after breakfast we took a lap around the main street, past the ***State Hotel***.

When we'd finished the loop we figured we might as well head out to ***The Boulders***, the swimming spot at the foot of the ***Bellenden Ker Range*** with a reputation as a trap for unsuspecting swimmers.

A cat nap while the drizzle mizzled after we'd taken a walk around the area killed a bit more time.

But we were back on the highway around ten-thirty, looking to stop in ***Innisfail*** after ***Madam*** discovered an issue with the footwear that had spent the last fortnight tucked away in the car.

Innisfail's shoe shops failed to deliver what was desired, but the process of looking killed more time and we were pulling into the car park at the shopping centre at **Wongaling Beach** around a quarter to twelve, figuring there might be something suitable there.

And, in any case, we could probably handle some lunch.

Cafe RickKenJacs looked after that department quite adequately, and by the time we were finished a leisurely lunch it was around time to ring and check if the accommodation was ready for us.

As it turned out, it was, and by two we were checked in and comfortably pushing up Zs.

Just, in fact, what the doctor ordered, though I might have been slightly happier if the doctor had thrown in *airconditioning* as well.

I was back on deck about three hours later, considerably refreshed and inclined to start thinking about dinner.

Not that dinner was something I needed, you understand, but I figured if I didn't get something down the gullet I'd be waking up somewhere around three in the morning suffering from food withdrawal.

There was a fair wrap on the nearby **Spicy Thai Hut**, and we were there shortly after six-thirty, but the place was booked out.

We settled for takeaways and rolled around to the **Mission Beach Resort** bottle shop, where a bottle of **Semillon Sauvignon Blanc** looked like a good match for **Thai**, and a boutique beer seemed like something that would go with a spell in front of the TV screen in the guest lounge at **Licuala Lodge**.

As long as no one objected to **Hughesy** watching the first round of the **Big Bash**.

The wine and food did their thing very well, the cricket kept me awake until eight thirty, and the beer meant I wasn't feeling any pain when I toddled off for a serious spell of shut eye action.



MISSION BEACH > BOWEN

Saturday, 21 December 2013

The Argumentative Reader might be inclined to question whether we really need these *all the way back home* slices of narrative, but they are, in fact here for a purpose.

Firstly, as far as I'm concerned, a journey starts when you leave home and finishes when you return and writing one up that way delivers a sense of symmetry.

The departure marks a temporary end to your mundane, day to day existence while the return signals the resumption.

Second, there's the actual purpose behind these narratives, which, really, has nothing to do with *The Argumentative Reader* and his/her ilk.

It's all very well to gallivant around the countryside and catch all sorts of interesting and intriguing sights, but you need a way to remember them, and the discipline involved in sitting down and doing the writing is an enjoyable part of the process.

There'll be somewhere down the track when some vaguely-remembered happening comes up in conversation. *Cassowaries*, or *unusual multi-national couples*, perhaps, in a conversation that runs something like this:

That time we saw the cassowary in the yard.

Yes, that was on the way back from Japan. The Costello concert trip.

Not the coloured leaves trip?

No, that was the cassowary at Etty Bay. We bought pies in Mourilyan and needed somewhere to rest...

So the cassowary in the yard was Licuala Lodge.

That's the one. With the attractive Swiss-Brazilian couple...





And, of course, there's a third reason for including the back home leg in the narrative.

It gives you a chance to try a different tack when it comes to the actual write-up.

We weren't quite sure whether it was time to head across for breakfast.

I was biding my time waiting for **Someone** and doing something with the *iPad* when I noticed a movement down there on my left.

Not much of a movement, just the sort of thing that catches your eye.

Turning my attention that way, I wasn't entirely surprised to spot a **cassowary** picking its way across the driveway. They are, after all, one of the area's distinctive forms of wildlife.

What did surprise me was the emergence of **a dun-coloured chick**, which wasn't as remarkable as the apparent lack of concern on both parts when the gentleman who'd been cleaning the pool made his way back to the house.

I'd noted him heading that way a bit earlier, which was one of the reasons I wasn't sure whether it was breakfast time.



A cassowary in the vicinity, of course, is of great interest to the photographic fraternity, and I'd been careful to deliver a low volume advisory that **Someone** needed to come out on the verandah pretty quickly, and having the camera handy would be advantageous.

Both of us were ultra careful not to spook either of them, and I was just recalling advice about *what to do if you're confronted by a cassowary in the rainforest* when, lo and behold, here comes pool cleaning bloke and his presence is greeted with apparent and almost total indifference.

Still, I gave it a good few minutes after the feathered denizens of the rainforest disappeared into the undergrowth before I made a rather careful move across the space on the way to breakfast.

We'd settled into the breakfast rations when the other couple staying on the premises lobbed at the table.

I'd have been inclined to favour **Scandinavian or similarly Nordic** if asked for a national identity, which would have been reasonably close to the money in one case.

He was **Swiss**, probably **German Swiss** rather than **French** or **Italian**, but I'd never have picked **Her** as **Brazilian**.

Swedish with a good suntan, quite possibly, but not **Brazilian**.

The wry sense of humour got me as well.

Apparently she's not allowed to drive the hire car and expressed a degree of disdain for the sexist assumptions of *Australian hire car companies*.

Or maybe it was his fault, and he'd selfishly asserted a chauvinistic position when it came to driving long distances on the highway.

They were bound for *Airlie Beach* later that day, and from there had around a fortnight to get themselves down to *Sydney*.

Discussions about sights along the way had *our host* producing a self-prepared pamphlet about things to check in the area, including the *Bikini Tree* and the *Big Gumboot* in *Tully*.

I'd remarked on the fact that they'd be seeing *plenty of nothing* on their way between *Rollingstone* and *Airlie* and again between *Sarina* and *Rockhampton*.

That got us onto the subject of places to refuel, a matter that suggested a certain degree of paranoia on the part of our blonde *Brazilian*, who seemed to have a dread of roads where petrol stations were few and far between based on some experience of driving across the *Mato Grosso* or somewhere similar.

We were away from *Licuala Lodge* before they were, but an attempt to have us rejoin the highway at *El Arish* rather than *Tully* had us doing a U-turn to get back on the more appropriate route.

Having hit it, I thought the car ahead of us looked familiar (as in the one that had been parked next to ours five minutes before).

That, in turn, prompted speculation about whether they'd turn into *Tully* to check out the *Gumboot* that distracted me from keeping an eye out for *Bikini Trees*. As it turned out, the car did turn off at *Tully*, but since we didn't do the same I've got no idea whether the *Gumboot* was on the agenda.

With breakfast under the belt, there was no need to stop in *Cardwell* and by the time we were half way between *Euramo* and *Kennedy* we were driving through drizzle.

That raised the question of whether we'd stop at the lookout at the top of the *Cardwell Range*.

The *on again, off again, will it be raining when we get there* discussion took us through the town and much of the way to the final run up to the crest of the recent reconstruction.

We went through a patch of almost sun, reached the turn off without any spatters on the windscreen and pulled up to find it wasn't raining.

At the moment.

But it was by the time we left five minutes later.



So we'll be back because the photographs don't do justice to what used to be a quite magnificent view.

It probably still is, but we need to be back on a sunny day to make sure.

Once we were through *Ingham* the question of a route through *Townsville* raised its head.

Discussions about stocks of cat food at home took us past the spot where we had our accident back in *August* without The *Driver* noticing.

Seated on the passenger side I did notice the turnoff where the police car was sitting, but the cat food discussion meant I couldn't remark on it at the time.

The question of cat food, of course, brought with it the question of which way through *Townsville*, and since we reckoned stocks would last for a while there was no need to stop in at *The Domain*.

That, in turn, gave us the all-clear to loop around the *Ring Road*, giving a swifter transition between the wilds of *Deeragun* and the residential developments opposite *Lavarack Barracks*.

We did, however, stop to refuel at *Fairfield Waters* and made the obligatory comfort stop at *Home Hill*.

The return to base an hour or so later brought a sniffy response from a pair of felines who obviously felt they'd been neglected and subjected to unfair treatment as far as rations were concerned.

Feline memories, on the other hand, appear to be somewhat more ephemeral than human ones.

Perhaps it would help if they could write it down.

AKITA SHINKANSEN

The Akita *Shinkansen* line serves the Kantō and Tōhoku regions, linking Tokyo and Akita, the capital of Akita prefecture with hourly services. Akita *Shinkansen Komachi* trains have all-reserved seating and stop at Ueno, Omiya, Sendai, Morioka on the Tohoku *Shinkansen* 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 *Komachi* which turns off the Tohoku line for the rest of the run to Akita. From Morioka to Ōmagari uses the Tazawako Line, then the Ōu Main Line from Ōmagari to Akita. Since neither line was engineered specifically for *Shinkansen* services, the maximum speed is significantly reduced (to 130 km/h). Stations on the latter section of the route are Shizukuishi, Tazawako, Kakunodate, Omagari, and Akita. Trains reverse direction at Omagari as they change from the Tazawako Line to the Ōu Line.

The trip from Tokyo takes four hours, costs about ¥17,000 and is fully covered by both the Japan Rail Pass and JR East Pass. Since all seats require reservations there's a chance of 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 Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen

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Find Term

ASHINOKO LAKE

The scenic Lake Ashi, often referred to as Hakone Lake but formally Ashinoko Lake, in 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 boats that traverse the lake, providing views of the surrounding mountains and the floating torii of the Hakone Shrine. The Hakone Detached Palace Garden delivers the best panoramas across the lake with Mount Fuji in the background but clouds and poor visibility often block the view. Visibility tends to be better during the colder seasons in the early morning and late evening.

But even if you can't catch a good view of Mount Fuji, the cruises on the lake link to the Hakone Ropeway, which will take the visitor from Togendai on the northern end of the lake across The Great Boiling Valley to Sounzan. The Hakone Tozan Cable Car funicular railway in turn connects to the Hakone Tozan Line mountain railway which delivers you to Odawara.

Hakone Sightseeing Boats and Izuhakone Sightseeing Boats both operate cruises between Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi at the lake's southern shores and Togendai and Kojima. A round-trip cruise from takes roughly 30 minutes and the Hakone Free Pass is only valid on the passenger 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

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 *Ôdôri 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 (*ryôtei*), 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

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

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 Tokaidō 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 Centrai 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

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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

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

HAMANA LAKE

With an area of 65.0 km² 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 observatory 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 Arimachi 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

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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 Shinchī, within walking distance of Osaka Station, and famous for nightclubs, bars and late night restaurants, Minami Shinchī (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

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 the Great Kantō earthquake struck the region around Tokyo.

If that notion sounds far-fetched, you can probably ascribe it to the city’s centre, home to the widely considered Japan's most beautiful surviving feudal castle.

Designated both a national treasure and a UNESCO world heritage site, Himeji Castle remained intact for over 400 years, miraculously surviving a bombing raid that destroyed sixty per cent of the city on 3 July 1945. Travellers on the Sanyo Shinkansen from Osaka, Okayama and Hiroshima can catch a decent view of the castle since Himeji station is so close.

Other attractions in the city include Engyō-ji temple, Mount Seppiko, Tegarayama Park and Kokoen Garden in Tegarayama Central Park and Kokoen Garden.

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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 Jōetsu Shinkansen seems to have been the brainchild of Niigata-born Prime Minister Tanaka. Tanaka allegedly drew his proposed route on a map in red pencil. Tanaka's preferred option was the way into Tokyo, terminating at Shinjuku, but economic forces forced the railway authority to a line branching off the existing Tōhoku Shinkansen at Ōmiya. Services began in November 1982.

JR East operates two categories of train on the line: the faster *Toki* and double-decker *Tanigawa*. *Toki* services run between Tokyo and Niigata while the slower all-station *Tanigawa* and double-decker *Max Tanigawa* only travel as far Echigo-Yuzawa, with a winter only branch line to the nearby ski resort of Gala-Yuzawa.

From Tokyo, the services call at Ueno, Ōmiya, Kumagaya, Honjō-Waseda, Takasaki, Maebashi, Kōgen, Echigo-Yuzawa, Urasa, Nagaoka, Tsubame-Sanjō and, finally, Niigata, providing 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 Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōkaidō Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen

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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 Nanbokuchō 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.

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KANSAI

The Kansai in the south-central region of Japan's main island Honshū is centred on the cities of Osaka and Kyoto and stretches west along the Seto Inland Sea past Kobe, Himeji and Kōbe. To the east it reaches Japan's largest freshwater lake, Lake Biwa.

As a cultural and historical entity, the region is often contrasted with Kantō (Tokyo and surrounding areas). Kansai people are seen as pragmatic, entrepreneurial and down-to-earth (the influence of Osaka merchant culture) with a sense of humour, as opposed to the more sophisticated, formal and reserved Kantō people.

The Kansai region can claim to the earliest beginnings of Japanese civilization, the country's first capital in Nara, Kyoto's shrines and temples, and traditional forms of art that evolved in Kyoto (*Noh* and *Kabuki*) and Osaka (*Bunraku* puppet theatre).

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KINOKUNIYA

The Kinokuniya chain of bookstores, the largest in Japan, dates back to 1927 and the Great Kanto Earthquake prompted a lumber and charcoal dealer to move to a new building in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The business was refashioned into a book store and opened on 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 December of the same year. Postwar growth saw the business expand to the point where the chain now has 56 stores around Japan as well as branches in the United States, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates.

The Sydney branch was originally located in Neutral Bay but subsequently relocated to George Street in the Central Business District.

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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 developed 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

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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, ShinŌmura, 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

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.

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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 reclaimed parkland area known as Meriken Park home to some of Kōbe’s most iconic contemporary structures including the Kōbe Maritime Museum, the red Kōbe Port Tower and the Peace Memorial Museum to victims of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake that preserves a section of damaged waterfront as a reminder of the earthquake's destruction.

Half of the Kōbe Maritime Museum building is devoted to the Museum itself, with exhibits covering the port’s history and role as a connection between Japan and the outside world while the remainder of the building houses the corporate museum of Kawasaki Heavy 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 restaurant, a rotating cafe, with three observation decks that offer 360 degree views of the city.

Sightseeing cruises depart from the nearby Nakatottei Chuo Terminal.

Meriken Park takes its name from a rendering of *American* into Japanese, and refers to the eastern or seaward side of the Old Foreign Settlement.

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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

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Find Term

MYODANI

Dormitory suburb of Kōbe, home to a shopping centre adjoining the subway station. It is one of four campuses of Kōbe University.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

NAGANO SHINKANSEN

Built to connect Tokyo and Nagano in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics the Nagano *Shinkansen* forms the first section of the planned Hokuriku *Shinkansen* that will extend to Kanazawa, Tsuruga and eventually Osaka. *Asama* services, named for an active volcano alongside the line take a minimum of 79 minutes to complete the journey, travelling via the Tohoku and Joetsu *Shinkansen* to Takasaki before branching off onto the first stage of the Hokuriku *Shinkansen*. The services replaced the Shinetsu Main Line limited express 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*, Kumagaya, Honjō-Waseda and Takasaki on the Joetsu *Shinkansen*, then Annaka-Haruna, Karuizawa and Sakudaira on the run into Nagano.

The Hokuriku *Shinkansen* extension from Nagano to Kanazawa should open in March 2015 with the 113-km extension from Kanazawa to Tsuruga, approved for construction in February 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 Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tohoku 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

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 to 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

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

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

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PHILOSOPHER'S PATH

The two-kilometre-long Philosopher's Path (*Tetsugaku no michi*) in the northern part of Kyoto's Higashiyama district follows a canal lined by hundreds of cherry trees, making it 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 kilometers through the mountains to nearby Shiga Prefecture. The canal dates back to the Meiji era 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*. Along the way, it passes two temples (*Honen-in* and *Anrakuji*) and *Otoyo no Kuni Shrine*. With the temples at either end and nearby Eikan-do Zenrin-ji, a total of five temples and two shrines makes the path a popular attraction for sightseers at any time of year. It is particularly spectacular (and crowded) in spring and autumn. That popularity is reflected 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 using it as part of his daily stroll to work from the time he was appointed to the philosophy faculty in 1910 until he retired in 1928.

Related Glossary Terms

Ginkaku-ji

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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 Sannomiya 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 station.

JR West, Hankyu Railway, Hanshin Electric Railway, Kōbe Municipal Subway, and New Transit (the Port Island monorail) all use the station facilities, with two subways on the Seishin-Yamate and Kaigan Lines.

The area to the north of the station is a noted eating and drinking district. On the edge, Nankinmachi is the only Chinatown in western Japan and to the east, towards the port, the Old Foreign Settlement has a number of luxury brand shops and fashion. Center Gai Shopping Street runs west from Sannomiya through Motomachi and is an arcade lined with shops selling almost anything the average consumer is likely to want.

Related Glossary Terms

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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 Shin-Ōsaka, *Kodama* (the slower, all-station) services stop at Shin-Kōbe, Nishi-Akashi, Himeji, Aioi, Okayama, Shin-Kurashiki, Fukuyama, Shin-Onomichi, Mihara, Higashi-Hiroshima, Hiroshima, Shin-Iwakuni, Tokuyama, Shin-Yamaguchi (formerly Ogori, renamed in October 2003), Asa, Shin-Shimonoseki and Kokura, before arriving in Hakata around five hours later.

There are usually three *Nozomi* services per hour (two Shin-Osaka > Hakata and one Shin-Osaka > 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 Shin-Osaka and Okayama, while *Sakura* operate between Shin-Osaka 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

SHAMISEN

The three-stringed *shamisen*, a plucked instrument played with a plectrum (*bachî*) 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 *bachî* 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 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

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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

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 to 130 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

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, *konnyaku* 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 *tororo* 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

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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

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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>).

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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

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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 to 130 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

TŌKAIDŌ SHINKANSEN

Government approval of the *Shinkansen* project in December 1958 allowed construction of the line between Tokyo and Osaka to begin in April 1959 at an estimated cost of 1.5 billion yen. 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 October 1964, cutting the trip between Tokyo and Osaka from six hours and forty minutes to three hours. By 1965, it was down to just over three hours, and the service had an immediate impact, carrying one hundred million passengers up to 13 July 1967, and passing the 1 billion mark in 1976.

Today, with up to thirteen sixteen car 1,323 seat trains per hour in either direction, the *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 Shin-Ōsaka Station to Hakata Station in Fukuoka (the *Sanyō Shinkansen*).

Related Glossary Terms

Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen

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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 an important industrial region, initially producing medicine and paper, then moving into heavy 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 agricultural 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 Modern 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 to 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.

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UMEDA

The station complex comprising the JR Osaka Station and facilities shared by four 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 shopping and entertainment options in the world’s largest network of underground shopping malls, as well as above ground redevelopments in a former freight rail yard in northern Osaka. Recent developments include Osaka Station City, Grand Front Osaka, and Umeda Sky Building. The 2.6 kilometre Tenjinbashisuji Shopping Street is located nearby.

Above ground level, the station complex takes in the JR Osaka Station and Hanshin Umeda Stations, with Hanshin Railways, Umeda Station, Midosuji Subway Line’s Umeda Station, 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, Umeda only ranks as the fourth busiest station complex in Japan.

The equivalent on the south side of the city is Minami, centred around Namba Station.

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