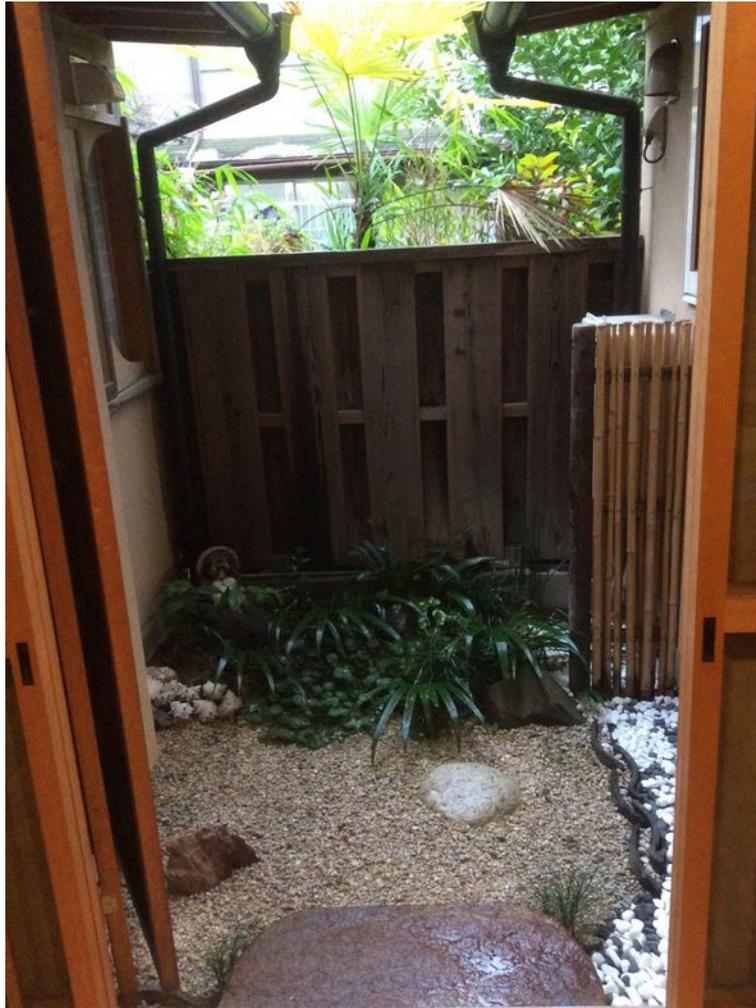


Friday 18th November 2016 - Kyoto Day 1

We arrived at our traditional Japanese house around 2pm to be warmly greeted by Jacoba and Misa. The flight to Osaka from Amsterdam is 10 hours 45 minutes and the time difference is nine hours ahead of UK. The airport in Osaka is on a man-made island in the Inland Sea, and super modern. The efficiency of immigration was so impressive – there is even an internal train to take you from the plane to the immigration desks. Everything was spotlessly clean and the transition was smooth.

Misa had booked our transport through Yasaka Shuttle which is a door-to-door to Kyoto, and it is a shared system, so there were 8 of us in a mini bus. The journey was excellent, and took about two hours. The sun was shining and we had great views along the Inland Sea, over Osaka, and then through the mountains to Kyoto. The first glimpses of yellow ginkgo trees and then red cherry trees, and finally 'momoji', (the fabulous acers in autumn) was the promise of things to come.

The house is in the Northern Higashiyama district of Kyoto, between the Heian Shrine and Kurodani Temple complex, so a very traditional part of town. It is both charming and familiar with a large genkan straight off the street through sliding doors. There is a small kitchen/dining room with wooden floor boards, and slippers to wear as you step in. The bathroom (with traditional ofuro) and washing machine area off the kitchen, with a tiny and beautifully-made Japanese garden. There is a tatami room downstairs with sliding screens, then steep wooden stairs take you up to an airy tatami bedroom with a balcony for hanging wash out the back. It is absolutely perfect for us. Jacoba had laid out the futon beds upstairs, and bought tiny narcissi for the table, while Misa had brought fruit including kaki (persimon) sent from her uncle in Fukui. I had forgotten how people send boxes of seasonal fruit from the countryside to their relatives in the city. There were also nashi (Japanese pears) and bananas, and she had bought pizzas for the fridge, and lots of information on Kyoto.



Almost immediately we set off for lunch on foot. Misa had chosen her mother's favourite noodle shop, which was very traditional in a back street near here. You entered through a Noren curtain on the street into a perfect little garden with lantern and stream. It was called Kyo-ryori. We were given the best room overlooking the garden, and were brought tea and oshiburi (hot towels) before ordering our bowls of noodles. The cost each was around £6.50, and was absolutely delicious- the fact that Misa rated it so highly too was important. Misa gave us a very special gift of two day-bus-passes, which means we can spend a day exploring all over the city, and also an IC card which is like an Oyster card, and can be used on buses and trains – both of these are fantastic for our stay here. She said on the card that it was a thank you for everything we had done for her at Marigold Cottage.



Our next stop was a traditional Japanese sweet shop where we were given mochi and tea – the latter was quite bitter, which took away some of the sweetness of the mochi! We then walked to the Kurodani Temple complex just behind our house, where the autumn leaves were being enjoyed by one and all. Not only were the autumn colours on the acers fantastic, but also for us everything about the wonderful huge wooden temple gate and buildings as well as the roofs, lanterns and traditions. We had a marvellous meander, guided by Jacoba who knows everything about the area having brought up her children playing around there. One of the special places was a monk's house and garden with a giant Buddha placed under the acer – we are seeing it all at its best. We continued to Shinnyo-do, and walked back to the Kurodani pagoda. This is all in our own backyard, so we can easily return, but this first visit with the most fantastic sunshine light and warmth was special.



On our return, Misa left and Jacoba went over the details of the house and then took us round the neighbourhood to find the supermarket, convenience store and even a German bakery. By now we were pretty exhausted, so she cycled home and we came in and had the pizza with a beer. More importantly we had a wonderful Japanese bath, and slipped under the futon and fell deeply asleep around 8:30 pm.



It feels wonderful to be back in Japan.

Stephanie & John