

Saturday 19th November 2016 - Kyoto Day 2

Silence and sleep. I had forgotten how quiet these neighbourhoods are despite living on top of one another. I slept soundly until 1:54 am, then intermittently till 7:30 am when there was chanting from the temple complex, this was preceded by two wooden boards being clapped together. I will be more awake another morning to go and see them.

We had a leisurely sort out of information and possessions before heading out to explore more of the local area. It had rained in the night, and the pavements were covered in golden ginkgo leaves. We ended up finding the old onigiri (rice ball) shop that Jacoba had told us about, and bought a couple of varieties each for lunch. They were extremely tasty, but we had consumed a huge amount of rice with them. The back streets all around here are charming and quiet, and around each corner you come across reminders of how to use a tiny space to the maximum. The houses are packed together, but somehow each will have a little garden in pots at its front. If there is space there will always be a Nandinia (heavenly bamboo) plant to ward off evil spirits. Right now these have berries, and years ago I would never have recognised them.



At 2pm, Midori, an old colleague of Jean's from Kyoto International School (Midori still works there), and her husband John arrived to go walking. They live very nearby, and we walked from here to the Nanzenji Temple complex, which is in the northern Higashiyama area. Even as we got closer the houses had huge gardens and it was an area where the noblemen used to live. The autumn colours were at their best, and the crowds were there to appreciate it. John, who is the founding editor of the Kyoto Journal, gave us an introduction to the structure and layout of this

'Platonic' form of Japanese Zen complex of temples and sub temples before we began exploring. The setting in the Eastern hills and East- West orientation is unusual as they normally have a north - south axis. We went into three of the sub temples all of which had fantastic gardens full of symbolism, which I appreciated much more from researching for my talk on Chinese and Japanese gardens. To enter these sub gardens you pay a fee (¥300 - ¥500) and it is well worth it. I found the layout and colouring of the trees superb, and appreciated the visionary aspect that those laying them out in the first place must have had, when like many of our own landscape gardeners they would never actually see the fruits of their labours on maturity. We took many, many photographs. Some of the locals had turned out in kimono, and there were lots of selfies going on – I had never seen so many selfie sticks in action. We thoroughly enjoyed the whole afternoon and the company of old Kyoto hands.





We arranged to eat out together, and went to an Izakaya restaurant near the University called Kushihachi, where we sampled lots of favourites like yakitori, kushikatsu, sashimi, tofu and talked travel tales. Another strong memory came back as we walked to and from the restaurant about 20 minutes each way – how great to do those '70' paces after eating to help settle the food, and to see the Akachochin (red lantern) restaurants and glimpse through their windows into another world at night.



Sunday 20th November 2016 - Kyoto Day 3

Up much more normally today at 6am. The newspapers were delivered around the neighbourhood by motor bike at 4:30 am, and a neighbour left with one of those wheelie cases down the pavement at 5 am, but otherwise there was silence, and we slept well. We had made a plan to cross the city from East to West and head for the Arashiyama area which is in the foothills and famous for the autumn leaves. Last night John Einarsen had told us about the number 93 bus which would take us all the way from here to Arashiyama, so we were out ready to catch one about 8am. Of course at that time on Sunday the roads were pretty deserted and we made good progress through the yellow ginkgo lined streets.

The traditional Japanese pastime of *Momiji-gari* means viewing the autumn foliage, in the same way that *hanami* is viewing the cherry blossom. Today being a Sunday in the peak of the season, we expected to encounter the crowds, and indeed we did, but we were all out to enjoy the special season. Tenryu-ji was our destination where the Zen garden is a world heritage site, and rightly very famous. It has borrowed landscape in the Arashiyama mountains, which were colourful in themselves, but it also had all the features we had seen



yesterday but on a much bigger scale. One of the pine trees has been trained to look like a dragon, and is reflected in the water. The backdrop is an amazing bamboo grove, so after wandering around the garden for an hour we exited into the very extensive bamboo grove. The thick and tall green bamboo stems were so tall the sky was invisible, and despite the crowds it was a magical place. The Japanese are actually surprisingly quiet in large numbers, so the peace was not shattered!



As we hiked through the foothills beyond here we gradually found fewer and fewer people. There were interesting artisan stalls in houses along the way, many old traditional ones like those found along the Tokkaido trail, so we wandered in and out admiring pottery and paper goods. There was one remarkable stall where they had made a whole scene out of silk cocoons which was reminiscent of a Chinese painting. At some point along the way we headed up into the hills and over Rokucho Toge (pass) before heading down to the Kinreikyo gorge, where we followed a trail along the river to Kyotakibashi bridge, where we crossed the river and found our way up to the bus stop. There was no time to spare as the buses were not that frequent and we had to hurry for one, and we were on our way back down to Arashiyama.

We had thought of finding somewhere for lunch there, but it was an absolute zoo, so we hopped on a bus heading back into town. After a couple of false stops, we picked up an onigiri and headed home, chancing on a Shinto shrine where there was a ceremony in progress, so we stopped to watch the ritual which involved a bit of sword blessing, then a burning of sticks who knows what it was, but of course it was interesting to us.



Back for a coffee and photo perusal before heading out for a local shop for breakfast, dinner and picnic lunch items.

As you can imagine, we are taking vastly more photos than we can include in this blog and even some of the best ones won't be seen here. However, all of our best photos can be seen in our Kyoto album on Flickr - you can see them here: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskNVX2Yy>

We are also posting some others on Facebook if you want to befriend Stephanie Lee and/or John Raby.

Stephanie & John