

Monday 21st November 2016 Kyoto Day 4



Heading out to the Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine, one of the iconic photos one sees of Kyoto but also of Japan with endless arcades of persimmon-coloured orange torii (shrine gates) spread across a thickly wooded mountain in the south east of the city. It stems from the eighth century when it was dedicated to the gods of rice and sake and is the head Inari Shrine for the whole of Japan. The other feature everywhere are stone foxes – apparently the fox is considered the messenger of Inari, the god of cereals, so the foxes themselves are referred to as Inari, and they often have a key in their mouth, which is for the rice granary.

Well, to get here we took the subway, and of course the area was already busy when we got there at 9am, and on the way up to the shrine were lots of food stalls and tack shops, so already it was full of atmosphere.



I do remember how tacky I used to think the bright orange torii were at Shinto shrines versus the Buddhist Temples, but after living in Taiwan I did change my mind. I think John still found the orange a bit overwhelming (JR: gaudy, tacky, hardly describe it!).



There are 4 kms of these torii going all the way up the mountainside – the good news was the higher we got, the fewer the people there were, and as soon as we set off on a hiking trail from near the summit we lost everyone!



We spent the rest of the day following a trail through the mountains – I had forgotten how many ups and downs there were on Japanese trails, and ours was following the Eastern hills from temple complex to temple complex. We did not divert into every one, but had to see the famous Kyomizu, which features on so many cards being a huge wooden construction with a red pagoda at the far end. We had a spectacular sighting of it from the hiking trail entrance, and briefly joined the massing crowds taking their photos, mostly selfies. Many of them had hired kimonos, so they did look the part. We stayed long enough to appreciate the sight, it then headed back up into the hills above to rejoin our trail.



We hiked for five hours before coming off the trail at a suitable place where we could get home in 20 minutes – what a great day with a good balance of culture and countryside. It is so good to become 'home' to relax before heading out later for dinner.



Blog 4 Part 2

□ Dinner on Monday night took a bit of finding. We had around an hour's walk (good exercise, but not after a five-hour hike!) and a false start, but we did end up in the University area again, and found Kureshima, which was a traditional Izakaya-style restaurant where you sit at the counter and all the food is cooked behind, so it is so fresh. We chose some old favourites such as grilled aubergine, hoke (fish), sashimi, yakitori, kushikatsu, edamame and of course some beer. It was a great meal in an intimate setting, which we thoroughly enjoyed. The walk home only took around 20 minutes which was quite welcome.

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Tuesday 22nd November 2016 Kyoto Day 5

Today we headed for the cedar forests in the north of Kyoto for a day of hiking and enjoying the autumn colours. First a walk to Demachiyangi Station, and then a thirty-minute train ride on the Eizan Dentetsu train line into the countryside. We got off at Kibune-guchi Station (guchi means entrance so the equivalent of a 'road' or 'parkway' in English parlance), and began with a 20-minute walk up to the village. The autumn leaves were showering down like confetti, making us realise that we have been incredibly lucky to catch this moment of colour – they will possibly be gone in the mountains by next week. There were cedar forests either side, and it reminded me that by the time I left Japan 1986 many of my

friends were beginning to have allergies to tsugi, as so many are planted in the countryside.



The village was very old fashioned with many tea drinking houses, some with seating overlooking the river which was rushing down. They have evening leaf viewing illuminations, so there were lights along the way and by the river. Being in a valley the sun did not get up till later, but I imagine in the summer it is cool up here.



We wandered up past various shrines, and on up the road until we were way in the country and realised we had missed our hiking trail back in the town! Back we went to a small red bridge across the river where we had to pay 300 yen to enter the Temple property to climb the mountain. It was really steep, but stepped for the first half an hour, and we tended to

pass people coming down the other way, so there were lots of 'konnichiwa' and 'gambatte' to be exchanged. Many of the people are definitely older than us but very active.



We came across several small temples along the way, which created a diversion to the climb, and then unexpectedly we came to the ridge, and it was all downhill from then onwards towards Kibune temple. This is quite a large complex over the mountainside and there is even a temple funicular to get people up the mountain to the most important part. We wended our way down and down till eventually we hit the small town and the end of the trainline.

The train journey back through a tunnel of maple was just half an hour into the city. We found a small place for a lunchtime teishoku (set meal). John had tonkatsu (pork) and I had kaki fry which is fried oysters which are in season. John had found a brilliant bus route from the train terminal home. This took around 20 minutes. We went to the German bakery for breakfast bread en route back. The sun was still shining and all our towels were dry.

We were invited to Misa's house for dinner at 4 pm She lives about half an hour away by bus and on foot, and we found it just about on time. Her house is in a lovely position along a small canal which is lined with maple trees for autumn alternating with cherry trees for springtime. She has a modern two-storey Japanese house with views out to distant hills. Misa

had put a sign on the door, and of course made us totally welcome. She has had a very busy time with her daughter and husband having been down for a couple of days and her annual university reunion since we last saw her. Almost immediately after we arrived obento were delivered - very special lacquer-ware boxes, divided into sections with a whole

variety of Japanese delicacies, which we all slowly picked through. It was perfectly entertaining as we had time to talk as we ate around the low kotatsu table on the tatami floor.



Over the three and a half hours we were there we shared the obento, Hoji cha (wheat tea), birthday cake and coffee. Misa has loaned us one of her daughter's telephones for emergencies within Japan. We spoke to Hisami and George in Tokyo and had time for a long chat and catch up. They may come down to Kyoto and stay with Misa while we are here. The connection is quite circuitous as Hisami and I worked together at the International School of the Sacred Heart in Tokyo for nine years from 1977. John worked with George at ILC in Tokyo from 1977. Misa worked with Jean at Kyoto International School, and after I left Japan at Sacred Heart in Tokyo with Hisami. They came to England together to help us celebrate four hundred years of Japan/England relations in 2013 at Marigold Cottage.

Misa brought us home in her little smart Nissan car, and we absolutely collapsed into the ofuro and then futon (bath and bed). We already have plans to get together again.