

## **JAPAN TRIP OCTOBER 2014**

Mike and I decided to go this fall with Smartours to several cities and towns in Japan. I have always had the desire to visit this country and explore its cultures and landscapes.

Japan is an island nation in East Asia. Located in the Pacific Ocean, it lies to the east of the Sea of Japan, China, North Korea, South Korea and Russia, stretching from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north to the East China Sea and Taiwan in the south. The capital is Tokyo.

It was a good trip with 29 well traveled people and the weather was very nice for October, mostly in the 70s and high 60s. There was a mix up about the people arriving in Japan from New York and no one was there to greet us and Mike finally got a hold of the tour people and 8 of us went by bus to the hotel. The 18 people that left from California all missed their plane so they had to stay in Seoul for the night...the tour company thought all of the people from Smartours missed their plane and that was the mix up. Then it was a rush the next day so the people that came late got to do some things we did. We had a typhoon predicted one day but it turned out not to be a big problem.

I really liked the shrines and temples. The displays in the restaurants of plastic food on plates were interesting. The plastic food gave you an idea of what you could order. Even with the plastic examples unless it was labeled in English I still was not sure what I might get. They even sold the plastic food in stores in case you wanted to take some home as a souvenir. Toyko was very modern, it reminded me of New York City but much larger. Some of the streets were narrow and lined with shops and small little restaurants tucked here and there. We stayed at the Grand Prince New Takanawa Hotel. Our tour started with some of the highlights of Tokyo. One stop was to experience the view of Tokyo from one of the observation decks at the Tokyo Tower a 1,093 ft. tower the second-tallest structure in Japan. From the observation deck we could see the expansive view of the city. The tower acts as a support structure for an antenna originally intended for television broadcasting but the tower is now used to broadcast signals for Japanese media outlets. A taller digital broadcasting tower, known as Tokyo Skytree, was completed on February 29, 2012. We saw the Tokyo Skytree but did not go inside of it.

We continued on the coach to visit the historic Imperial Palace and its gardens. You could not see much of the Imperial Palace which is the main residence of the Emperor of Japan, but the gardens were pleasant. We strolled through the gardens and admired the Ninomaru Japanese garden with a pond where Japanese koi fish of several different colors were swimming. Leaving we did get a glimpse of some men practicing marshal arts in a building by peeking through a fence. The current Imperial Palace is located on the former site of Edo Castle surrounded by moats and massive stone walls. As we walked passed these stone walls we stopped to see the former quarters used by the samurai guardsmen, chosen from among the kinsmen and loyal retainers of each of the four main branches of the Tokugawa clan.

After leaving the palace our tour made a quick stop for us to see the Ginza entertainment and shopping district of Toyko. We made our way to one of the underground department store food halls. The place was filled with individual vendor stalls selling everything from beautifully packaged rice crackers, to imported chocolates, to freshly packed bento box lunches, exquisite teas, and a dazzling array of fresh pastries. I didn't know where to start. Mike and I were taking pictures till we were advised to stop by a staff of the food hall. I was taking some pictures of fancy boxes of fruit by a company called Sun Fruits because not only did the fruit look like it was plucked from the tree of good and evil from the Garden of Eden but the price tags reflected that. Grapes cost \$100.00 a bunch. As we left the fruit display we were approached by a crew that was looking for people to interview for a TV program or something. They asked to interview Mike and I. As a young lady asked us question in Japanese an interpreter asked us in English. She asked us what we thought about the market, how did we find out about it and why we were photographing the fruit. Mike and I told her it was a fabulous food hall and that we were amazed at the quality of the fruit and other items for sale. After our interview, which we believed the TV crew had fun filming us, we raced off to get some lunch to eat later in the coach. We settled on a \$25.00 food box of rice and crab, then a few spring rolls and for a desert a concoction called a 'Happy Pouch'. It was a delicious creation of a sweet dumplings filled with cream and custard shaped into a pouch. The clerk asked if I was taking it home and I said yes. She then preceded to put two tiny ice packs in the bottom of the bag and then wrapped my "Happy Pouch" in another box and placed it in the bag. I could have eaten everything in that store but we had to rush back to meet the group.

Our tour continued with a visit to Asakusa Kannon, also known as Senso-ji Temple, Tokyo's spectacular and sacred Buddhist temple. We entered through the main gate (Thunder Gate) that was being protected by two large statues. One was the God of Thunder and Lightning, (Raigin) and his counterpart, the God of Wind, (Fujin). I used information compiled from tour books that I had copied from home to navigate the complex. I suggested to Mike that we follow the path through the torii gate to a shrine dedicated to the fishermen who found the Kannon statue. I read to Mike that in AD 628 two fishermen fished a small gold statue of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, from the Sumida River. The shrine was built in 1649 and dedicated to those fishermen. So much activity was happening in the courtyard, not only was a traditional Japanese wedding just ending but worshipers were gathering to pay their respects to Kannon. I watched the worshipers purification ritual prior to the worship of Kannon. A stone wash basin was provided with fresh running water and ladles. The purpose is the purification of pollution or sins and uncleanness. You are to first pour water over your left hand then the right hand, then the mouth is rinsed with water from the left hand. You then proceed to the offering hall, ring the bell that hangs from a rope in front of the offering box (some shrines don't have a bell/rope) then bow twice, clap you hands twice (to wake up the gods), bow once more, and then throw coins into the offering box (100 yen is a typical offering). The prayer is made either before or after throwing money into the box. After watching a few worshipers Mike and I tried the rituals ourselves. Afterwards we admired the wedding party and their traditional wedding attire and took photos of the bride and groom and their family as their own photographer was having them pose so elegantly. Many weddings take place in the spring and fall. The bride was dressed in a traditional

Japanese wedding outfit of a white kimono. On her head she wore a 'Tsunokakushi' a traditional Japanese wedding headwear. This type of headwear is traditionally worn to veil the bride's horns of jealousy, ego and selfishness. It also symbolized the bride's resolve to become a gentle and obedient wife. The groom was dressed in a traditional black silken jacket length kimono over a striped black and gray hakama. In his hand he carried a fan for photos. The footwear for both were white tabi socks and white square-toe'd zori sandals.

A bit of trivia from the Cannon Camera Museum: When Goro Yoshida made his first prototype camera he named it the Kwanon, after Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, as he was a Buddhist and an ardent believer in Kannon. The camera's logo depicted a thousand-arm Kwannon Goddess, and even its lens was named "Kasyapa" which came from Mahakasyapa, a disciple of the Buddha.

Next to the shrine was a small counter where many Japanese charms were offered for sale. I saw a laminated sheet that showed pictures of the assorted talisman, good luck charms and was happy to see that it was in English and Japanese. I could choose charms for Wishes come true, Better fortune, Everything good deals, Successful Studies, Protection, Finding your best partner, Good direction, Luck with money, Happiness, Long life, Children grow up, Don't worry, Health, Safety birth and child-bearing, Warding off dangers and Safety Traffic and many others. I picked a few charms and we made our way to the temple's main hall that houses the original Kannon statue. You can't see the actual Kannon statue itself as it is protected from harm but a very ornate altar is in this building and worshippers are busy praying, bowing, clapping and throwing money into the offering box.

We made our way to the fortune area where tall metal containers were placed. Inside the containers were bamboo fortune sticks with Japanese characters painted on them. You insert a 100 yen coin in the money box slot then shake the container and through a small opening one of the sticks will fall out. In front of the containers are many many small drawers. You are to match the symbol on the stick you got from the container to the symbol on the drawer then open the drawer and inside you will find a stack of fortunes all the same, take one and read it. It was in English and Japanese. If it is a bad fortune don't take it home with you but leave it at the temple. Mike and I both had bad fortunes (#28 & 58) so we went over to the metal omikuji rack where you tie your bad fortune to some rods and leave it. We tried again and the next time we both got good fortunes and therefore took them with us. I had not had my fill of good luck charms so I made my way to another counter having more stuff to buy. I got a few more charms and a replica of the statue Kannon. We entered the grounds and saw one of the temple's focal points, a large incense burner surrounded by people wafting the smoke over them to keep them healthy. I got close and waved the smoke over myself and then Mike did the same. We saw the five-story pagoda a replica of the original constructed in the 1973 and went through a two-story gate with massive paper lanterns hung in the rafters. Nearby was the Nade Botokesan Buddha. "Nade" in Japanese, means "to touch", "to rub" or "to stroke" "Botoke" in Japanese is a variant of the word "Hotoke" meaning "Buddha." So "Nade Botoke" literally means "Rubbing Buddha" and it is believed to help people recover from

their sickness or injury when they rub it on the same part as the sick part of their bodies. I gave it a rub and a fellow tourist took a photo of Mike and I with Nade. We had just enough time to see some more statues and admired the Tokyo Skytree that was in the distant. We did not have enough time to explore the rest of the area with its restaurants and shops and ran back to the group meeting point. I did find it amusing that small children with bags were collecting the gravel used for landscaping at the complex, they must have believed the gravel was special or lucky because it was on the temple grounds. I also enjoyed seeing people dressed in traditional Japanese outfits and shoes while others were dressed to kill or like school children. Men dressed in business suits and ties were everywhere.

Today was our excursion was to Mt. Fuji and the hot spring resort town of Hakone before embarking on a scenic boat ride on Lake Ashi. We drove thorough Owakudani Valley for a sweeping view of Hakone National Park. We had good weather and the countryside was beautiful. Mt. Fuji was draped with fog that morning but the wind would sweep the clouds away sometimes and you could see Mt. Fuji from the platform at the visitors center. As we left Mt. Fuji came again in view from our windows and the coach driver stopped so we could jump off and get a quick photo before the fog and clouds returned. We went proceeded to our next stop to board a boat to take us for a short ride on Lake Ashi. We saw several replicas of man-of-war pirate ships on the lake. In the distance we saw cable cars going up the mountains. Hakone is the center for hot springs with options of indoor and outdoor baths, with and without bathing suits at different locations. Our time spent in Hakone was at Owakudani (Great Boiling Valley). Owakudani is a volcanic valley with active sulphur vents and hot springs. Our coach parked at the visitor's center just below the Kuro-tamago hot springs site. We hiked a trail to the actual site where the sulphur vents were. At the top of the hill was a vat filled with hot spring water bubbling up from the ground. Chicken eggs are hard-boiled in the vat to achieve a local specialty the Kuro-tamago (black egg). The egg shells turn a dark black color. After peeling the insides look like any other hard-boiled egg but smell slightly sulphuric; consuming the eggs is said to increase longevity. Eating one is said to add seven years to your life. You may eat up to two and a half for up to seventeen and a half years, but eating a whole third is said to be highly unadvised. Mike purchased a bag of five and he shared with me and some others. We watched as crates of raw eggs were brought up by rope and cable to the top of the mountain and after been cooked were repackaged and send by down by the same method.

Our tour did not offer us time to experience the baths in Hakone so Mike and I took a taxi from our hotel that night to the 'Spa LaQua' located by the Tokyo Dome. Spa LaQua was a spa of the highest class in the metropolis of Tokyo that takes advantage of natural hot springs bubbling up from a level 1,700 meters underground the source spring being the 'Koishikawa Hot Springs'. You make your way up the elevator to the spa area and immediately remove your shoes for storage. At the reception desk you tell them you what you want. You can pick from many beauty treatments and massages. We choice the hot spring baths and a zone called 'Healing Baden'. We were given some tokens to exchange for towels, spa clothes and a wrist band that opens and closes your personal locker. Men and women have their own separate rooms as bathing suits are not worn.

After cleansing your body you can use your small personal privacy towel to carry around with you or fold and place on your head, as many locals do, while in the baths. I went first in a nice warm bath and continued to a hotter one with minerals and then to a hot bath with jets. I then went in to one of the dry saunas till I got very hot and left to enter a cold bath. While in the cold bath a young pretty lady sat next to me and started giggling. She said to me “Are you gay?” And I said “No, I am just cold.” After that I left the cold bath and it finally sunk in what the person had just asked me...lol. After relaxing a bit more in the baths and then going to the clean up stations, loaded with bottles of shampoo, conditioners, soaps and lotions I went to the locker to changed into a different set of spa clothes. I left to meet Mike on the next floor where the restaurants were located. We chose a Japanese restaurant where the booths had cushions on the floor. After a pleasant dinner we went to the top floor where the healing baden rooms were. On this floor rows of cushioned lounging chairs were located inside and outside facing a large area that housed an amusement park. There was a ferris wheel, roller coaster and carousel. A musical fountain with colored lights performing a water show. You could see Toyko Done on the far side. After looking at the amusement park scene we continued to explore the healing baden rooms. One room had a heated marble floor with sections to lay down on the floor with a wooden block to put your head on. The room had colored lights lit low and soft music. The walls lined with tight wired screens held large black river stones. The next room was a sauna with cedar booths with tiered beds to lie on. The air was steamed with aromatic vapors. You could change the color of your booth as desired by a set of controls on the wall. Another room was very cold, the floor as cold as a freezer. I liked this room. On one wall was a tank full of jelly fish swimming and floating around with lights to illuminate them. We left this room and saw where there were several other areas where you could lay down on cushions on the floor covered with a gazebo structure. Mike told me about his adventure in the men’s spa area. He said he saw men going in one of the steam saunas that had a sign outside of it with a time written on it. Mike went in the sauna and he said a man came in and started shouting out some kind of announcement and then poured water on the hot rocks till steam started bursting out and then preceded to whip a towel through the steam till the room got hotter, he repeated this action twice more till it got so hot in the sauna that people started getting up and rushed for the door. Mike said he was dammed if he was going to be the first man to leave the room so he stayed till the exodus of the masses left. The next day Mike’s face was beet red from the heat he was exposed to in that sauna. We left and returned our spa clothes and checked out...feeling much more relaxed than when we came in.

Smartours offer an optional excursion to the town of Nikko or a day of leisure to explore Tokyo on your own. I had made plans at home at what I would like to do and see in Tokyo ventured off on our own. After a nice breakfast (which I had potato salad and Japanese fried chicken) and some other tidbits and green tea we were off. We took a taxi to Zojo-Ji Temple a Buddhist temple in the Shiba neighborhood of Minato. We walked pass the temple to a park where you could get a good view and photo of Tokyo Tower. We entered through the main gate at Zojo-Ji Temple built in 1622. In the courtyard were many statures and a tree that was planted when President George Bush Sr. visited the complex in 1982. Even today at the temple stands a pine tree planted when President Ulysses S. Grant visited in 1879. Inside the temple was a nice big altar, two smaller

altars, a big drum on a pedestal and bell. Monks were conversing and laughing behind the counter where several bins holding various charms for sale were located. I picked up a few 'Happy Bells' and protective charms. One of the altars had lion-dogs (Shishi) guardians carved on them, one with an open mouth (to scare off demons) and one with its mouth closed (to shelter and keep in the good spirits). Also on the same altar was another protective deity an elephant-like animal (Baku) that is known as the eater of nightmares in Japanese mythology. Some say Baku can devour dreams and nightmares. Japanese wood-block prints portray Baku with an elephant's head, tusks, and trunk, with horns and tiger's claws for feet. Six of the 15 Tokugawa shoguns are buried at Zōjō-ji. The graves and large stone pagodas are surrounded by a tall stone wall and a locked gate so we could not venture inside. In one particular garden (Unborn Children Garden) at the cemetery, rows of stone Jizō statues, figures representing the unborn children of Japan, including miscarried, aborted, and stillborn children are placed. Family members place the statue in the garden and decorate it with small clothing, knitted red hats and place toys or a message. Usually the statues are accompanied by a small gift for Jizō, the guardian and protector of the souls of unborn children to ensure that they are brought to the afterlife. Occasionally stones are piled by the statue, this is meant to shorten the amount of suffering a child has to go through on the way to the afterlife. In front of each statue is a colorful pinwheel. With so many statues, hundreds of them, when the wind starts up all the pinwheels start twirling and the effect is wonderful. Some of the knitted red hats are covered with moss reflecting that they were visited long ago.

We left Zojo-Ji Temple and took a taxi to Tsukiji Market the biggest wholesale fish and seafood market in the world and also one of the largest wholesale food markets of any kind. If you had the time and energy you could get up at 3:00 a.m. and get in line to get limited tickets to be able to go to the fish market when the fish are being sold to dealers only. The auctions start around 5:20 a.m. Bidding can only be done by licensed participants. We got there around 11:00 when the dealing was done but we did walk around inside the buildings where the fish of the day were being boxed up for deliveries around the world. The market was still pretty busy with tourists, customers and dealers. Down a few streets, produce, fish and seafood was being sold to taken home. Other shops selling teas and other goods lined the alley ways. Small restaurants, some about the size of a closet with just a counter and a row of seats sold sushi of all kinds and cooked seafood and fish. We cramped into one of the counters and Mike had some grilled freshwater Japanese eel (Unagi) glazed with a sweetened soy-based sauce, steamed rice and a bowl of Miso soup. The waiter was quite entertaining with his customers.

Our next stop was taking a taxi to the Iris Button Museum which to our disappointment was closed for renovation. We decided to walk to the nearest subway station and give it a try to our next destination the Ginza Antique Mall. I was looking for antique buttons for my collection. The stores we went into had articles for sale that demanded a hefty price. I saw lots of interesting things but only a few buttons. I asked to see one card of buttons that had some French enamels on them and I purchased (3) of them. We stopped in a small noodle shop and after depositing our money in a vending machine and pushing the button for the food we wanted to order and retrieving our food ticket we gave the person behind the counter our ticket and sat down for some pan fried dumplings. They were so

good Mike went back to the vending machine and got another ticket for another round of pan fried dumplings. We enjoyed watching the cook make other dishes for customers. One couple ordered some kind of ramen dish and the cook got the noodles out of the vat of hot water with a screened basket and proceeded to just fling the basket water on the floor till the noodles were drained well. Guess there was a grate in the floor for the water. We watched as the cook took care of the kitchen with all its big noodle cookers and busy grill.

We left and decided to walk to see some of the busy city and its array of vending machines. We passed a building with big glass windows and inside we saw lots of people sitting by what looked like slot machines. As we entered we were assaulted by the clouds of smoke generated by numerous smokers. The room was not that big and the people and machines were crowded in small aisles. The music playing was extremely loud. We figured out this place was where people played Pachinko a pinball-like slot machine game. It is officially not considered gambling because Japanese laws regard pachinko as an exception to the criminal code on gambling for historical, monetary, and cultural reasons. Pachinko parlors can be found all over Japan, and they are operated by private companies. As of 2011, there are about 12,480 pachinko parlors in Japan. In pachinko, when a player's ball makes it into a special hole to activate the slot machine and a jackpot is made, they are rewarded with more balls. Players can then exchange the balls for prizes of different value at a booth in the parlor. Money cannot be awarded at pachinko parlors as this would be in violation of the criminal code. However, players almost always exchange pachinko balls for special tokens, usually slits of gold encased in plastic, and then "sell" them at a neighboring shop for cash. Usually such shops are also owned by the parlor operators, but as long as the winners do not receive cash in the parlor, the law is not broken.

As we walked down the street we stopped at the Kabukiza Theatre and went inside to purchase a single act ticket for the next show. We had about 40 minutes till the next show lineup so we went next door to a tea and coffee shop that also served beer. Mike got a beer and I got a glass of delicious iced tea made with Earl Gray and Jasmine teas. After checking out the numerous button advanced exquisite bidet toilet, which Mike and I thought entertaining we went back to the theater and got in line. We purchased two headsets that gave us a summary of the plot of the show we were going to see. Throughout the show the actors dialog was translated into English so we could follow the story. The actors were magnificent in projecting with lines without any microphones. At one side of the stage were two men, the narrator and a person playing the shamisen a three stringed instrument similar to a banjo but without frets. Throughout the play you would hear a loud shout from the audience. This person was an expert audience member who was part of the play. His shout serves to both express and enhance the audience's appreciation of the actor's achievement. The play we saw was called 'Terakoya' (the Village School). Plot: The climactic act of one of the most famous historical plays from the Bunraku puppet theatre. This play shows the tragic struggles of various retainers of the court noble Sugawara no Michizane who is in exile due to the vile rumors spread by a rival. The very young son of Michizane is in hiding in a village school, protected by the teacher Genzo out of his loyalty to Michizane, his former master. But Matsuomaru, a

retainer of the enemy, is led to sacrifice his own son out of loyalty to Michizane, his family's old lord and, in the climactic moment of the play, must examine his own son's head and declare that it is that of Michizane's heir. I loved the play, costumes and makeup of the actors. The techniques and motions of the actors expressed the happiness and sadness of this play. Interesting was the stagehands always dressed entirely in black and are traditionally considered invisible as they position props on the stage during the performance.

After the play was finished we took a look at a shop across the street selling packages of rice crackers. I got a bag of individually wrapped rice crackers in various favors featuring designs on the covers of the 'Seven Lucky Gods of Fortune' Hotei (the fat and happy god of abundance and good health), Jurojin (god of long life), Fukurokuju (god of happiness, wealth and longevity), Bishamonte (god of warriors) Benzaiten (goddess of knowledge, art and beauty, especially music), Daikokuten (god of wealth, commerce and trade) and Ebisu (god of fishers or merchants). I guess my good fortune was with me this night as I found a Mikimoto sterling silver and double Akoya pearl brooch on the side walk. As we continued to walk back in the direction of our hotel we stopped to peek inside cozy neighborhood shops and restaurants serving local cuisine in the narrow streets away from the bustling main streets.

We packed up our main suitcase for transit to Takayama for our stay at the Hilda Plaza Hotel. With an overnight bag and personal belongings our group walked over to the nearby train station to board the super-express Bullet "Shinkansen" train headed for Nagoya. The bullet train was very nice, fast (maximum speeds of 150-200 mph), comfortable and quiet. We passed pretty countryside and went through many very long tunnels. When we reached Nagoya we transferred to a limited-express train for a scenic ride to Takayama. On the way we got a good view of Mt. Fuji that looked quite impressive from the train. At one point we saw a very large white statue in the distance. It could have been the 12-meter-tall Amitabha Buddha in Ibaraki, north of Toyko. Completed in 1885 it is one of the world's tallest statues with a museum inside and an elevator to four different levels. If I ever get back to Japan I will definitely check it out. After settling in our hotel in Takayama, a city in the mountainous Hida region of Gifu Prefecture, our group met for a guided walk through the narrow streets of the Kami-sannomachi district graced with old wooden homes, small shops and sake breweries, many of which have been in business for centuries. Takayama's old town has been preserved with many buildings and streets of houses dating from the Edo Period (1600-1868), when the city thrived as a wealthy town of merchants. The streets in old town are narrow and clean and are flanked on both sides by tiny canals of running water, which in centuries past were useful for fire prevention, washing clothes, and dumping winter snow. As you walk down the streets you'll notice huge cedar balls hanging from the eaves of several shops indicating one of Takayama's sake breweries. Our group was taken to one of breweries and a man explained to us how sake was made and pointed out the large tanks used to process the ingredients (rice, koji mold, yeast starter and water) necessary to make sake. It not being processed at this time but we were given several different kinds of sake to taste and given the opportunity to browse the shop selling all kinds of sakes, cookies, foods and souvenirs. There was a sake bar and the bartender

poured sake in wooden boxes (masu) and demonstrated on its use. We continued to visit the Folkcraft Museum and the Festival Floats Exhibition Hall featuring four of eleven huge festival floats used during the Autumn Festival. The floats are decorated with intricate carvings, gilded wood and detailed metalwork. The Autumn Festival runs October 9-10 and we just missed it by a day. I spied a fortune machine outside and inserted my coin in the slot. We watched as a mechanical lady dressed in a traditional outfit made her way to a cupboard which opened to reveal a box. The lady reached into the box and retrieved a rolled up scroll. She returned to the front of the display and dropped the scroll into the slot that had a shoot sending the scroll to me, like a gumball machine. I asked my guide to translate my fortune and she said it was a good fortune and good luck for me. If it had of been a bad fortune I would of tied it to a branch on a tree out front where other bad fortunes were blowing in the breeze by a small pond filled with koi.

After leaving the exhibition hall we were on our own and ventured through a large torii gate to a nearby purification area where water was provided to wash your hands. The source of the water was provided by an elaborate spout in the shape of a dragon's head. As you walked up the stairs to a large temple large lion-dogs (Shishi) guardians flanked each side of the entrance. A family was taking their young children inside the temple for some sort of ceremony. We watched as a Buddhist monk greeted the children and each was given some kind of a fresh tree branch. After a short ceremony the children left with their family and happily left out a side door to the courtyard. In the courtyard was another temple flanked on each side with statues of foxes (kitsune), with little red aprons, regarded as spirit messengers. Stories depict them as intelligent beings and as possessing magical abilities that increase with their age and wisdom. While some folktales speak of kitsune employing this ability to trick others—as foxes in folklore often do — other stories portray them as faithful guardians, friends, lovers, and wives. We left this temple and visited another smaller Buddhist temple on a nearby street.

It was getting to be around 5:30 and many shops were closing for the night. We did step into one shop still opened that sold Takayama world-famous lacquerware, although the lacquerware was nice it did not appeal to my tastes so I skipped buying. I loved Japanese cookies and did buy a few boxes of them. It was nice that the store had plastic boxes of samples of the cookies and candies so you could taste them before buying. I also was on a search to buy a medium size Sarubobo Doll, (monkey baby) the mascot of the Hilda region. These dolls were traditionally made by mothers for their daughters as charms blessing happy marriage and smooth birth delivery (monkeys' childbirth is easy). Sarubobo dolls also are said to prevent sickness and accident, due to the phonetic pair "saru," which means both monkey, and prevention. Sarubobos are red human-shaped dolls, with no facial features, made in a variety of sizes. The face of the Sarubobo is traditionally red, as is the face of baby Japanese Macaques. The reasons for this are unclear, but some have been suggested. One suggestion is that, originally, Sarubobos were made from left over cloth and made by relatives, so there was no need for them to be completely accurate. Another suggestion is that the absence of a face allows the owner to imagine it - when the owner is sad, they can imagine their Sarubobo to be sad too. Modern Sarubobo are now being made in assorted colors other than red. The

differently colored Sarubobos are each associated with different wishes for instance, green for peace and health, blue for luck in study and work, pink for luck in love, green for luck in health, orange for safe travel, yellow for luck in money and black to remove bad luck. Continuing back to the hotel we stopped at a local temple and we noticed lots of pairs of shoes outside and inside couples facing each other. We found out there was a speed-dating event going on. We were invited to enter. We quietly strolled up to the main altar. We were close to a young man that was looking at his watch for a specific time. When that time came he stuck a gong near him to signal that it was time for couples to change partners and continue their conversations about each other. That gong was pretty loud and startled us a bit. We smiled and left the temple.

The next day our guide took us in the morning to the Jinya-mae Morning Market by the Miyagawa River in the old town. This 200-year old market bustles with farmers selling fresh fruits, vegetables, flowers, foods and local crafts. Mike purchased a custard like pudding from a vendor and a hot steamed pork bun, that both tasted very good. At the rivers edge people were busy feeding ducks and koi. A massive torii gate stood in the distance by another bridge. The balance of the day was ours so we took off to Takayama's old town, where we had been previously at the sake breweries. We took our time exploring the shops and later had a nice lunch at Tenaga Ashinaga a local restaurant featuring traditional Japanese food. It was quite funny when the waitress gave us menus and then did not seem to be returning to take our order. I noticed a small electronic box near the soy sauce container. It had one button that said 'Push'. I thought I might as well press the button and see what happens. As soon as I pushed the button I heard the noise of a bird call and magically the waitress was at our table to take our order. That was the secret of getting served...lol. I had a local dish made with Hida beef sliced very thin on top of rice which was delicious. We had Hilda steaks the night before at our group dinner. Hida beef are raised in Gifu Prefecture, cattle must be at least 14 months old and the beef must be checked for quality and grade by both the Hida Beef Brand Promotion Conference and the Japan Meat Grading Association. Beef that does not make the grade is not sold under the Hida Beef label. Locals suggest the superiority of Hida Beef is down to a single bull named Yasufukugo. Although he died nearly 20 years ago, Yasufukugo sired many thousands of calves; more recently, he has successfully been cloned from frozen cells; his genetic heritage lives on in the continued excellence of Hida Beef.

After leaving we went to the Karakuri Museum where on display are over 800 shishi (lion) masks, instruments and drums related to festival dances. The main draw was the twice-hourly puppet shows where you can see five of the mechanical Karakuri Ningyo puppets in action. An introduction to the show was told by a lady that worked at the museum. A short film featured a man telling you about the construction of the Karakuri Ningyo puppets and his art and knowledge to preserve these antique puppets. The movie showed how the mechanics of the dolls particular actions and movements were controlled by the puppeteers. It was fun to watch the mechanical dolls in action. Once the curtains on the bottom of the portable box stage were opened so you could see the puppeteer in action. The puppet was painting Japanese characters on a scroll, later given to a person in the audience. One of the Karakuri dolls, the (Karakuir Tea Serving Robot) on stage was

a holding a saucer. The lady presenting the show put a tea cup on the saucer filled with tea and the doll moved forward attempting to serve the tea. She removed the cup of tea, the doll stopped and she asked me to step forward to the stage. I was asked to sip the tea and then put the cup back on the saucer. When I did the doll moved in a circular pattern and returned to its original starting position. The power source for the Karakuri doll is a winding spring mechanism. The spring is made from the whiskers (baleen) of a whale. This wound spring when sprung, supplies energy to the wooden cogs and gears connected to the moving mechanism which the doll uses to move forward or back to its original starting position. All the puppets were amazing to watch in action, the one that swung from trapeze bars was quite interesting. Some of the puppets are used during the Autumn Festival on the floats during their annual parades.

We stopped off at a bar on 30<sup>th</sup> Street in Takayama called 'Desolation Row' named after a 1965 song written and sung by Bob Dylan. Run by a local man named Ken the sign outside says: Desolation Row Bar with some music, never cover charge, sorry no food served. Beer-Whiskey, English spoken, U're Welcome!!! American/British, Rock 60' & 70s, Folc, Country, Blues on LP/CD. Scotch whisky, Bourbon whisky, Sapporo beer, Wine, Gin, Rum, Japanese Syochu, Sake and Japanese Hakushu & Yamazai Single Malt Whiskies. From Dusk to Dawn. Mike was disappointed that the bar was not open for business till later. I said, "You can go back later tonight." I stayed in my room to rest. The hotel did have some public hot springs baths for men and women but I did that in Toyko so I passed the offer. Mike went back to 'Desolation Row' and when he entered he was surprised that the place was empty except for the owner Ken. Mike and Ken sat and drank and listen to music for awhile and then Ken asked Mike if he would like to go to another bar and listen to a blues band that was supposed to be there. Mike said yes so Ken closed up his bar and they went to the other bar. Mike said that bar was small and full of people. He said the blues players did not have a stage but just stood around the bar in the aisles and played the guitar and saxophone. They had a good time and Mike came back to the hotel and told me all about his fun with a local.

One of the bridges in Takayama really caught my eye. In the middle of the Kajibashi bridge, spanning the Miyagawa River, located on each side were bronze statues. On one side of the bridge was a statue of Ashinaga-jin who has extremely long legs and on the other side of the bridge was Tenaga-jin who has extremely long arms. The pair is commonly described as people from two countries, the "Long-legged Country", and the "Long-armed Country". As the names suggest, the inhabitants of these two countries possess unusually lengthy arms and legs. The two work together as a team to catch fish in the river. In order to do this, the long-armed man, Tenaga-jin climbs onto the back of the long-legged man, Ashinaga-jin, then Ashinaga-jin wades out into the shorewaters, staying above water with his long legs, while the Tenaga-jin uses his long arms to grab fish from his partner's back. The plaque in front of each of the bronze statues was in Japanese, the translation stated that the statues were made by the artist Yoroku Taniguchi and placed on this bridge to inform readers of the folk tale about a long-armed man and long-legged man that fished together in the river. These characters were also found on one of the early festival floats that existed during the Meiwa era (1764-1771). Years ago I had purchased a netsuke of Tenaga-jin at an antique market and had been looking for a

netsuke of Ashinaga-jin but never found one. I looked in the stores in Takayama for an example of Ashinaga-jin but did not find one except a very expensive wood carving of the two of them with a price tag of \$302.00 which I passed one...took a photo instead.

Next day we boarded the coach for a scenic drive through the picturesque countryside to the rural region of Sirakawago, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The mountains were cloaked in clouds that reminded me of the Great Smokey Mountains in Tennessee. Sirakawago had fascinating examples of old steep thatched roof houses in the shape of praying hands. After crossing a bridge with a roaring river underneath you walk through a torii gate on your way to the village. I passed a sign that read, this historic Gassho-style house is extremely flammable (*sic*) please do not smoke in any area outside of the designated smoking areas in the village. The village gets a lot of snow in the winter and the roofs are steep to allow the snow to slide when it gets heavy. We walked down the main street lined with shops and made our way to one of the houses open to the public. Here we could experience and learn more about the daily lives in this remote area. It was starting to rain pretty good as Typhoon Vongfong, the strongest storm to hit Japan so far this year was passing thorough. Mike was fond of the idea that the typhoon was in the area, I was not. Oh how exciting he said. Now so exciting to me since 300 flights were canceled, while hundred of thousands had to evacuate their homes.

Our tour continued as we proceeded to the village of Gokayama where we stopped at a place where we were going to make traditional Gokayama Washi Paper. After a short video on the process of making Gokayama Washi Paper we were taken to another building where the workshop had vats of the mixture necessary to make the paper. The mixture is made of Kozo (paper mulberry) fibers and Tororo Aoi (hollyhock). We took turns dipping our specially made screens that were separated into four sections. We dipped the screen four times and gathered the mixture and the water drained out. We took the drained screens to another table and inserted bits of dried leaves and plant materials to our desired arrangement. The crew of the shop took over and processed our post card size papers and when they were dried and pressed our cards were packed and given to us when we left the shop. Of course in the shop were we were all frantically looking and selecting the Washi paper products, such as calligraphy paper, paper for sliding doors, letter paper, envelopes, notebooks, fancy cardboard squares New Year's gift envelopes, paper goods, and masks. I purchased a mask, made of Washi paper with hand drawn features, of one of the Seven Lucky Gods named Fukurokuju (god of happiness, wealth and longevity), and a couple of fans. Because our guide was not sure if we could visit the Kenrokuen Gardens located in Kanazawa the next day because of the threat of Typhoon Vongfong we stopped to take a brief tour of it on our way to our hotel. Kenroku-en (Six Attributes Garden), located in Kanazawa, Ishikawa, Japan, is an old private garden opened to the public. Kenrokuen, which means "having six factors", was given the name because of the six attributes that bring out the perfect landscape of the garden: spaciousness, tranquility, artifice, antiquity, water sources, and magnificent views from the garden. Along with Kairaku-en and Koraku-en, Kenroku-en is one of the 'Three Great Gardens of Japan'. It was raining but not really hard as we ran around in the garden to places shown on the map. The garden was indeed beautiful and on a nice day would have been a very relaxing place. As it was we darted around and tried to see as

much of the garden with its pretty tea house, waterfall, ponds, statues and pagoda as we could. It started to get pretty nasty with pelting rain when we had to dart back to the coach. As we arrived at our hotel ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel we made it just in time to get our luggage and go to our room that was on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. From our large window in our room we could see the street below as the rain fell heavily with trees bending from the force of the wind. Typhoon Vongfong had started losing power before it reached Kanazawa, the threat of it getting really bad was over.

Kanazawa was Japan's second largest city (after Kyoto) during WWII to escape destruction by air raids. We were dropped off at the Oumicho Market, a busy and colorful market with some 200 shops selling seafood, vegetables, fruits, flowers, cooked foods and more. We had to find some lunch so we wandered around and saw some cooked scallops and fish. We ordered a few of them. Later we saw other counters selling tempura foods and order some shrimp tempura. Mike saw a local woman ordering fresh oysters just shucked from their shells by a man working the counter. The lady put some kind of sauce on the oyster and put the morsel to her lips and supped the oyster down. It was over in a flash. She ordered another oyster...and smacked her lips and smiled when I asked her if it was good. Mike then ordered himself an oyster presented in its shell and said it was great. Mike then had a taste for some local sushi. We found a closet sized sushi bar and entered. We had been looking for sushi with crab. Once inside we sat on stools situated around a counter and small kitchen. On the menu we saw a picture of a sushi roll made with a base of wasabi, then a roll of rice topped with fresh cold crab. We ordered a round of that and it was so good we ordered another round. The lady behind the counter got a kick out of watching me use my chop sticks. I just speared my sushi roll with one stick and cramped it in my mouth in one scoop. On the way out of the market I saw a statue of an animal in front of a bar. I was trying to figure out what the animal represented. Our guide, Shioji, said it was a Tanuki, also known as a 'Japanese Raccoon Dog', in Japanese, is subspecies of the raccoon dog native to Japan. The Tanuki, has been significant in Japanese folklore since ancient times. The legendary Tanuki is reputed to be mischievous and jolly, a master of disguise and shapeshifting, but somewhat gullible and absentminded. Shioji said he is at the entrance of the bar to invite you come in to have some food, drink and to make jolly fun.

We boarded our coach to proceed to the Higashi Geisha district where geishas been entertaining people by performing dances and playing Japanese traditional musical instruments since the Edo period. As you enter the back streets, you will soon find a maze of continuous alleys. Quite a few old buildings have been renewed into restaurants, teahouses, gold-leaf and souvenir shops. On one of the streets was a kimono museum and workshop. We saw examples of how a outstanding kimono is made from the designing, design transfer, outlining with paste, painting, background dyeing, steaming, rising, smoothing to the finished product. The examples in the museum were of the highest quality and workmanship. It takes more than ten artisans to create one kimono and at least 3 to 4 months from when the order is placed to its completion; kimonos requiring more than half a year are not unheard of. Our last run was to go into a pottery store that had pottery made in this district. I found some obidomes (oh-bee doh-meh), a small decorative accessory that is fastened onto obijime. Obijime is a string about (4.9 ft)

long that is tied around the obi (sash) and through the knot and which serves as a decoration. Obijime can be a woven string, or be constructed as a narrow sewn tube of fabric. The obidome may have one or more holes or rectangular shanks through which the obijime is passed. Starting in the 1800s, Japanese craftsmen introduced the obidome as an accent piece attached to the obijime. It slides over the obijime cord or ribbon which holds the obi sash in place. It has the appearance of a belt buckle but serves only a decorative function. This is one of few jewelry items worn by Japanese women when they were formally dressed in kimonos. Rings, earrings or necklaces were uncommon. So small that it can be easily concealed in the palm of the hand, the obidome enhances the charm of the kimono garment and gives it a personal touch.

Our last and final designation of our trip was to the capital of Japan from 794 to 1868 when the Emperor lived in Kyoto. After 1868, the seat of the government of Japan and the location of the Emperor's home was in Tokyo. We went to the Nijo Castle the Tokugawa shogun's Kyoto home. The main building, Ninomaru Palace, has 33 rooms, some 800 tatami mats, all the sliding doors on the outside walls of the castle can be removed in summer, permitting breezes to sweep through the building. One of the castle's most intriguing features is its so-called nightingale floors. To protect the shogun from real or imagined enemies, the castle corridors creaked when trod upon. The nightingale floors were supplemented by hidden alcoves for bodyguards. Furthermore, only female attendants were allowed in the shogun's private living quarters. Ironically, it was from Nijo Castle that Emperor Meiji issued his 1868 decree abolishing the shogunate form of government. Outside the castle is an extensive garden, designed by the renowned gardener Kobori Enshu. The original grounds of the castle, however, were without trees – supposedly because the falling leaves in autumn reminded the shogun and his tough samurai of life's transitory nature, making them terribly sad.

Our next stop was one of my favorite sites visited in Japan, a Buddhist temple Sanjusangen-do officially known as (Renge-o-in: Hall of the Lotus King), but it's better known as "Sanjusangen-do", meaning "Hall of the 33 spaces between columns". This name refers to the 33 spaces between the pillars holding the roof of the 120-meter-long hall, considered one of the world's longest wooden structures. The number 33 has a special meaning in Buddhist religion. It relates to the 33 forms that Kannon, the Lord of Compassion, or the Goddess of Mercy, can adopt for the purpose of saving humans from danger and distress, and confer prosperity and happiness to those who pray. Sanjusangen-do belongs and is run by the Myoho-in temple, a part of the Tendai school of Buddhism. In January, the temple has an event known as the (Rite of the Willow) where worshippers are touched on the head with a sacred willow branch to cure and prevent headaches. The main deity of the temple is Sahasrabhuja-arya-avalokitesvara or the (Thousand Armed Kannon), the Buddhist deity. One-thousand life-size gold gilded Japanese cypress Senju Kannon statues stand in rows at the back side of the long hall on each side are ascending platforms in 10 rows of 50 statues. Among the standing statues, 124 were made in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when this temple was founded, and the remaining 876 were made in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the temple was renovated. In the center of the hall is a gigantic seated Senju Kannon, a statue coated with a lacquered finish and covered with gold leaf, where the altar is also placed. While we were visiting a Buddhist monk was

praying while ringing a bell, hitting a drum and chanting from his prayer book. The twenty-eight guardian deities that stand in front of the gigantic Buddhist Kannon have their origins in Sanskrit texts of Hinduism. They are the attendants or protectors of Kannon. At each end are two statues Raijin, (The Thunder God) and Fujin, (The Wind God). The images of these gods derived from people's fear of and gratitude for nature in the old days. People worshipped them as deities who controlled rain and wind, and brought about good harvest. These statues are representative masterpiece sculptures of the Kamakura Period (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries). For a small fee you can light a candle in memory of someone or write a wish on a flat stick and give it to the monks at the desk where at sometime during their prayer sessions they will ask Kannon for the favor in your place.

We went to Nishiki Market, a busy and colorful market selling seafood, vegetables, fruits, flowers, cooked foods and more. We sampled some scallops, shrimp, fish and a place that featured, made to order, round hot baby donuts topped with soft swirl ice-cream and caramel topping put in a Chinese take-away container. Mike and I made our way to the end of the food market and saw a torii gate entrance to a temple. Inside some ladies were putting money in a fortune machine and we watched as the mechanical little monk went and grabbed a very petite sized fortune from a bin and then inserted it in the slot for them to retrieve it. They did not look especially happy with their fortune. I gave the machine a try and got my petite rolled up fortune. When I removed the petite plastic tube holding my fortune I unfurled it and it was written in Japanese (of course). Without my guide to translate I asked the ladies still there if it was a 'good fortune' or a 'bad fortune'. When they looked at it one of the ladies just about fell over and a big smile developed on her face and she said 'Good' 'Good' 'Super lucky fortune' and shook her head up and down and laughed. I put a big smile on my face and said 'Good' 'Thank you'. I was surprised when she said back 'Have a nice day, see you tomorrow'. I guess that is the only English she knew, better than any phrase I could have said in Japanese. We continued to another lane in the maze of shops selling clothes and other items. We passed a game area for young adults and were invited in. Most of the machines were games of the Japanese characters popular with the young crowd. A couple of young girls were out front playing a game where you beat very large drums to some kind of rhythm. We saw a fashion show of the young adults strolling the market, some dressed like the Japanese cartoon characters.

Our last stop in the market was in a strange alleyway leading to another temple. We were surprised that the alley led to the outdoors and at one side of temple was a traditional Japanese cemetery with the most interesting tombstones with tall long and slim wooden boards (called sotoba) with Japanese characters of the posthumous name (kaimyo, or afterlife name) of the deceased written on them inserted in racks behind or in front of the tombstones. Kaimyo is given to a dead person as recognition that he or she has become a disciple of Buddha.

Our next stop of the day was to Kinkaku-ji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion) a Zen Buddhist temple, where photos were not allowed, but I did see a full video of it on the internet. The garden complex is an excellent example of Muromachi period garden design. During the Onin war, all of the buildings in the complex aside from the pavilion

were burned down. On July 2, 1950, at 2:30 am, the pavilion was burned down by a 22-year-old novice monk, Hayashi Yoken, who then attempted suicide on the Daimon-ji hill behind the building. He survived, and was subsequently taken into custody. The monk was sentenced to seven years in prison, but was released because of mental illnesses (persecution complex and schizophrenia) on September 29, 1955; he died of tuberculosis shortly after in 1956. The present golden pavilion structure dates from 1955, when it was rebuilt. The pavilion is three stories high. The reconstruction is said to be a copy close to the original, although some doubt such an extensive gold-leaf coating was used on the original structure. The top two stories of the pavilion are covered with pure gold leaf. The pavilion functions as a shāriden, housing relics of the Buddha (Buddha's Ashes). The first floor, called (The Chamber of Dharma Waters), is rendered in shinden-zukuri style, reminiscent of the residential style of the 11th century Heian imperial aristocracy. The second floor, called (The Tower of Sound Waves), is built in the style of warrior aristocrats, or buke-zukuri. The third floor is built in traditional Chinese chán (Jap. zen) style, also known as zenshū-butuden-zukuri and called the Cupola of the Ultimate. There is a large pond in front of the golden pavilion and reflection of the Golden Pavilion in the pond creates an amazing photo opt.

Continuing on we went to the Kiyomizu Temple and independent Buddhist temple in eastern Kyoto. After walking up a steep street lined with shops of all kinds you get to a series of steps leading up to the temple. The main hall has a large veranda, supported by tall pillars, that juts out over the hillside and offers impressive views of the city. Large verandas and main halls were constructed at many popular sites during the Edo period to accommodate large numbers of pilgrims. The popular expression "to jump off the stage at Kiyomizu" is the Japanese equivalent of the English expression "to take the plunge". This refers to an Edo period tradition that held that, if one were to survive a 13m jump from the stage, one's wish would be granted. Two hundred thirty-four jumps were recorded in the Edo period and, of those, 85.4% survived. The practice is now prohibited. The complex also offers various talismans, incense, and omikuji (paper fortunes). Are last stop was at the Handicraft Center where all kinds of Japanese arts, crafts, books, wood work, Japanese dolls and more were for sale. Beautiful kimonos in silk and assorted fabrics were upstairs.

Our last and final day in Kyoto was on our own and we decided to take a train from Kyoto Station to Saga-Arashiyama Station. We were staying at the Rihga Royal Kyoto Hotel which was located conveniently near Kyoto Station. At Kyoto Station we found the machines to get our tickets for the train. Mike was studying the ticket schedule and he saw a button that said "Assistance" so he pushed the button. He was surprised when a little door next to the ticket machine opened and a real live human being stuck his head out and asked what he could do to help. Mike told him and he pushed the correct button on the display and out popped out tickets to the Saga-Arashiyama Station. We walked from Saga-Arashiyama station to the Tenryū-ji Zen Temple a United Nations World Heritage Site. The temple was pleasant and the gardens surrounded a large pond filled with colorful koi. Butterflies were fluttering around the Japanese Joe Pye Weed bushes. Paths led up the hill side. It was a beautiful sunny day. We had a nice visit and left to go to the Iwatayama Monkey Park. We walked over a bridge with a river filled

with fishing and pleasure boats. When we got to the park entrance we paid a small fee and proceeded the steep hike up Mt Arashiyama to the top where the station is located. The area is home to over 170 Japanese macaque monkeys. The animals are wild but can be fed food at the station purchased by visitors. The choice of food for the monkeys ranges from bags of apple and banana slices, bags of biscuits, chestnuts and peanuts. To feed the monkeys visitors enter a hut with wire screens. The monkeys stick their long arms in the screens and you feed them. You put the food on the palm of your hand, not between you fingers as the monkeys might accidentally bite your fingers. The macaques gently pick the food from your palm. As soon as one monkey got his take another would push him down and take his place for his handout. You can leave the hut and walk around the grounds with the macaques and take photos if you wish. We spent some time here taking pictures and watching the macaques play and fight with each other. The view is spectacular, you can see Kyoto in the distance clearly.

We left the monkey park and took a taxi to our finally destination of the day Otagi Nenbutsu-ji a Buddhist temple in the Arashiyama neighborhood. Otagi Nenbutsu-ji was founded by Empress Shōtoku in the middle of the eighth century. Though it was destroyed by the flooding of the Kamo River, it was rebuilt as an offshoot of Enryaku-ji, a nearby temple. In the 13th century, it was again destroyed during a civil war. The temple was moved to its current location in 1922, later suffering typhoon damage in 1950. The gate of the temple contains two fierce-looking Nio statues. Inside the temple grounds are more than 1,200 Rakan, stone statues representing the disciples of Buddha. These statues, in keeping with Rakan traditions, are generally humorous. The sculptures were donated in 1981 in honor of the refurbishment of the temple. Most were carved by amateurs, taught by sculptor Kocho Nishimura. The place features 1,200 carved stone figures of Raka (enlightened beings), a pagoda housing the bells of the three treasures, (the Buddha, the Dharma and the priests), the statures of the ten disciples. The main hall had a nice altar, with the statue of Kannon, and since no other people were there except Mike and I it was very quiet and serene. On a small hill by the temple was the golden statue of Kokuzo Bosatsu, the Bodhisattva of Space who satisfies you with his wisdom and mercy that are boundless as space itself. He is one who removes obstacles, one who helps people recognize & overcome their errors, one who encourages the practice of the Six Perfections, one who fulfills all wishes.

We left Otagi Nenbutsu-ji and walked awhile before we could wave down a taxi. He took us the train station and we made our way back to the end of the line Kyoto Station. We had previous eaten at a ramen noodle restaurant at Kyoto Station on the top of Isetan Department Store. This department store was very impressive. You take escalators one at a time to the top. It is like the department store escalator to shopping heaven. The escalators go right in the middle of the floors with open shopping on each floor. When you get to the top on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> floors you will find many restaurants with views of Kyoto and Kyoto Tower the tallest structure in city. Tonight we ate at a nice restaurant that served great tempera shrimp, potato croquette and traditional Japanese foods. They had good high balls made with Japanese whiskey and ginger ale. For desert we stopped at a booth in the station that made crepes with lots of different filling options. I got the cream with chocolate crepe and Mike and I shared. We had to get back to the hotel to

pack and go home the next morning. We decided to walk back instead of taking the hotel shuttle that was available for our use. We passed a interesting bicycle parking garage where bikes were securely locked for patrons. Men in business suits strolled in and unlocked their bikes jumped on and off they went home or to another designation. Of course we passed several more bars, restaurants and bakery shops on the way.

The next morning after breakfast (where I had my usual of potato salad and chicken) we were transfer to the airport for our return to Seoul and then to New York where we spent the night to rest up for the rest of our trip home.

Great trip, good scenery, good food, lots of nice souvenirs and photos. Nice friendly country to visit.

On to other travels in 2015.

Audrey & Mike Lambert – October 2014.