

JAPAN (KOREA) TRAVELOGUE

APRIL 9 TO APRIL 30, 2016

Perhaps a few words of explanation for why I've put Korea in parentheses. I have two reasons:

(1) Our Tauck tour begins in Kyoto, but this city has no international airport for direct flights from the U.S. The closest large airport is in Osaka, but it has no non-stop flights from Seattle. One choice for us is to fly non-stop to Tokyo and then on to Osaka. But it turns out that it is enormously cheaper to fly Korean Air from Seattle to Seoul and then from Seoul to Osaka. So ... we *will* be in Korea, but only for about two hours on the way to Japan and for another two hours on our return to Seattle.

(2) The 14-day Tauck tour that we've signed up for ("Cruising the Land of the Rising Sun") begins in Kyoto and terminates in Tokyo; the ship makes port at eight locations in Japan and one in South Korea, so this justifies my listing the latter country in the title, but only parenthetically. Does the ship make its brief Korean stop just for the fun of it? Certainly not. Maritime law requires it! For the details, *vide infra* (which is Latin for see *below* in less highfalutin English, p. 22).

In the days just before our departure, both Lee and I have come down with colds, complicated by attacks of hay fever more severe than any we've ever before experienced. Aside from the sneezing and wheezing (nice rhyme, eh?), our eyes are swollen and filled with tears that leak continually and make seeing difficult; also, our eyes itch and burn. The April 7 *Seattle Times* explains that the warm, dry weather that Seattle has recently experienced is the main cause for a profusion of pollen from the alder, birch, and cedar trees that surround us <http://tinyurl.com/gt8ztoy>. We're hoping that we'll get some relief from these symptoms once we get away from the northwestern U.S. Surely Japan doesn't have any trees, does it? (For the unfortunate answer, *vide infra* - which is translated for you, *vide supra*.)

The paragraphs above were written on April 7, two days before departure. It is now April 8 and, although both of us are feeling a little better, the allergic reaction of our eyes persists. Using lubricated eye drops helps a little ... I guess.

To make our departure a little more "exciting," last week (April 1) I got a phone call from MasterCard that my KeyBank card had been used fraudulently and was, therefore, cancelled. This was *not* an April Fool's joke! I told the agent that I needed the new card no later than April 8 so that I'd have the use of it in Japan and so that I could notify those companies that do automatic withdrawals. *Mirabile dictu*,* it arrived today

*A colleague in the English Department at the University of Tennessee tells the story of a rather mediocre student who, one day, turned in a remarkably good paper. My colleague wrote *mirabile dictu* on the front page and returned it to the student. A day or so later, the faculty member got a call from his department head - apparently the student had gone directly to the main office to complain that his professor had called him a miserable dick.

... and (be still my heart) it's chip enabled!

Today, I borrowed two Kindle books (Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*) from the Pierce County Library/Amazon service. It's not clear why but seven other books, borrowed over the past couple of years, are *still* in my Kindle directory even though they're well past the expiration date of their loans: Olen Steinhauer's *All the Old Knives* and Jo Nesbø's *The Devil's Star* from September, 2015; Meg Wolitzer's *The Interestings* from March, 2015; Joan Didion's *Blue Nights*, Jim Lynch's *Border Songs*, and Christopher Hitchens's *The Portable Atheist* from July, 2014; and Jasper Fforde's *A Thursday Digital Collection* from September, 2013. In fact, the Amazon web site shows all of these as "Borrow Expired." So why have they not been deleted from my Kindle? I have no idea. I just hope that they don't disappear suddenly while I'm in the midst of reading one of them.

In my many earlier travelogs, I've paid tribute to my wife for her brilliant planning of our journey. This time, however, most of the work was done by our intrepid travel agent (Stefan Bisciglia of *Specialty Cruise and Villas*, a family-run travel agency in Gig Harbor), who reserved our cabins on the Tauck cruise ship, booked us for an extra night at hotels in Kyoto and Tokyo, arranged for all of the plane tickets and seat reservations, and put us in contact with *Windows to Japan*, a Kyoto-based travel agency who helped us plan our post-Tauck excursions to Takayama and Kanazawa.

Nevertheless, we (i.e., Lee) did yeoman (yeowoman? Yo, Woman!) work in selecting our staterooms on the cruise ships, deciding on which cruise excursions to choose, and finding points of interest when we were not under Tauck's loving guidance.

In the course of the trip, I took some 2083 pictures!! Oh, the joy of using a digital camera that does not require purchases of film and the cost of film processing! Only a relatively small number* have been

*By this I mean a mere 1667 or so. Well, I did say *relatively* small.

uploaded to my Picasa account: some of the rejected pictures were poorly focused; others were poorly lit; some were very very very very repetitious; and some showed the two intrepid travelers in a less than flattering light. On the other hand, one can never have too many pictures of Japanese cities and scenery, right? I've posted the pictures in six separate albums at <http://picasaweb.google.com/ronmagid>

Saturday April 9 to Sunday April 10

On departure day, we leave home at 10:00 am, eyes still watering and noses still sneezing, and arrive at Seatac airport in remarkably good time at 10:50. We find a parking space in the airport garage just a few steps from one of the elevators (a good omen, I'd say), check in and deposit our suitcases at the Korean Air desk, and make it through security at 11:25. Then, it's on to the Delta Lounge (shared with Korean Air) where we lounge (well, what would you expect?) prior to the 2:15 flight departure. Lee partakes of some soup and salad whereas I make do with coffee and a few snacks. I pass the time by working some crossword puzzles and beginning the March 21 issue of *The New Yorker*. At 1:30, we head to the departure gate.

The plane is a Boeing* 777-300. In fact, on all four legs of our flights this month, Korean Air will use

*I'm pleased that it is a U.S.-built plane and not an Airbus. Once upon a time, Boeing was located entirely in the Seattle area, but in recent years it has migrated: corporate headquarters to Chicago, some manufacturing to South Carolina (and other "third-world" - i.e., non-union) places, but still the bulk of its operations are in cities near Seattle, so we still have a feeling of pride for "our" company, although as more of it disappears to far-off places the pride will undoubtedly decrease.

either the 777-300 or 777-200. The seats in Prestige Class (Korean Air's name for Business Class) are arranged 2-2-2 and are positioned cleverly. We have seats 10A and 10B, which would suggest that they are side-by-side, which is almost the case but not quite. My window seat (10A) is not only a little forward from Lee's aisle seat (10B) but also has a mini-aisle of its own so that I can get in or get out without stepping over my traveling partner. And, if my partner is not my partner (i.e., is a total unknown), there is a shield that can be raised so that neither person can see/hear/smell/... the other. Both seats have enough room in front that the passenger can fully recline (or nearly so) when the proper buttons are pressed on the side of the seat.



One disadvantage of this arrangement is that I'm sitting a good three feet away from the monitor (in the panel in front of me). With my increasingly poor vision, made even more challenging by my allergic

reaction, I find that I have trouble reading what is on the screen. This is of very little consequence except when I decide to play the chess game that's built into the entertainment system and mistake my virtual opponent's bishop for a pawn. Not good.

All announcements on the public address are in Korean and then in English. The safety film is shown on the TV with Korean as the spoken language and English appearing only as subtitles. The flight attendants are numerous (I think that I counted ten for our cabin) and their uniforms are distinctive. The dominant color is either beige or light blue. Each of them has a kerchief (of sorts) with a sharp pointed end that could be used to defend against an attacker. On the back of their heads, each sports a ribbon of the type that we usually associate with "Support our Troops" or "Donate to Stop Breast Cancer." I suppose that these are traditional Korean outfits, although I must confess that we never saw them except on the plane. What was most disconcerting is that just before the safety video is shown, one attendant at the front of each aisle does a deep bow. A very deep bow. (We will see many more bows when we are in Japan and I confess that I never got comfortable with them.) The captain announces that our expected flying time to Seoul is 10 hr 28 min (an hour shorter than we had anticipated - or maybe I just can't do arithmetic).



The flight tracker function on the monitor shows that we will fly NNW out of Seattle, hug the coast of British Columbia (the Inside Passage), then proceed along Alaska, cross the Aleutian Islands, then head due west and finally SSW over the Kamchatka Peninsula, across Japan, and finally to Korea. We push back right on time (2:15) and after a long taxi to the other end of the airport are air-borne at 2:33. We take off in a southerly direction (I do hope that the pilot realizes that he's going 180° the wrong way) with a great view of Mount Rainier and right over Gig Harbor (I try to find our house, but fail) where we turn to the north and proceed as mentioned above. The flight tracker does offer useful information (maps, speed, altitude, etc.) along with annoying ads for hotels and restaurants in Seoul, for chartered buses, for energy drinks, for baby lotion, etc. etc. etc.

At 2:50, menus (in English, Korean, and Japanese) are distributed. Although the hours and which day it is will be totally mixed up during the flight, the menus have a page for "lunch" and another for "dinner." We are asked to make our selections for both meals. For "lunch" my main course will be grilled beef tenderloin (with potatoes and various veggies) but Lee, brave girl that she is, chooses *Bibimbap*!! These are not the sound bites from a Batman comic strip or movie, but rather a traditional Korean dish. According to Wikipedia, it "is served as a bowl of warm white rice topped with *namul* (sautéed and seasoned vegetables) and *gochujang* (chili pepper paste), soy sauce or *doenjang*, a fermented soybean paste. A raw or fried egg and sliced meat (usually beef) are common additions. The hot dish is stirred together thoroughly just before eating." The menu comes with an instruction sheet in three languages and, mercifully, with pictures. There are five steps: "(1) put the steamed rice into the bibimbap bowl; (2) add *gochujang* (Korean hot pepper sauce); (3) add sesame oil; (4) mix the bibimbap; (5) enjoy it with the soup and side dishes." For "dinner" both of us opt for a main course of ricotta stuffed chicken breast wrapped with bacon and served with mashed potatoes and veggies.

The "lunch" menu begins with roasted bell pepper roll with cream cheese followed by an appetizer of seared prawn and scallop salad. I will then get green asparagus soup, but for Lee "No soup for you" (because your Korean meal has soup as an integral part). There is dessert (ice cream or cheese cake), coffee, and wine. Serving of lunch begins at 3:15 and is finished by 4:00. (Lee survives her bibimbap, I'm pleased to say.) Following the meal, I finish the March 21 *New Yorker* and begin Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. On the Kindle, it's difficult to know how long or short a book is, but it turns out that I'll finally finish the Bryson at the very end of our April 30 return flight. In the intervening days, I'll start and finish Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and a number of magazines. It will turn out that Tauck

keeps us pretty busy and there's not a lot of free time to devote to reading.

At 4:30, the cabin lights are turned off and the window shades are drawn, even though there is bright sun outside. I had surmised that we'd be in daylight for the entire trip, which turns out to be the case. Even though it's only the late afternoon, I'm a bit drowsy and so I close my eyes and manage to sleep until 5:40 when I open my eyes and return to the Kindle.

[Taken out of context from *The New Yorker*, words I never expected to read: "Doering, who is sixty-four, has a graying pixie cut and wears electric blue eyeglasses." Now back to the travelogue.]

UGLY AMERICAN STORY Seated in 2A but a fair distance from me is a large man: very tall, very broad, he resembles an NFL defensive tackle. Shortly after I awaken, a foul aroma fills my nasal passages. The big man, who is responsible for this, gets up and goes to the bathroom. (Too late, I think.) A woman in 2B, who is not traveling with him - I think - is apparently fully reclined, but I see her arm extend above the height of her seat and she is waving a handkerchief to clear the air. I can't help being reminded of the strange husband and wife on our 2014 Norwegian cruise. I will quote from my travelog about an incident on the Amsterdam to Seattle return flight (<http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/NorwayCruise2014.pdf>):

And then a truly strange event takes place. Around 12:15 pm, I make my way to the bathroom. Although the lighted green icon indicates that the lavatory is vacant, it isn't. In fact, there's even a line to get in (if one person waiting can be considered a line). And that person is Glee, whom you may remember from pp. 2, 9, 31, 32, and 42. You do remember Glee, don't you? After a while, a man exits and Glee goes in. When she comes out, she says to me "Don't go in there. Someone puked all over the toilet. And it wasn't me!" Well!

So I walk toward the rear of the plane and find a flight attendant (male) who accompanies me to the befouled lavatory. He enters, then comes out immediately and says that nothing is wrong, there is no mess of any kind. Huh? He asks me who was the person who had warned me of the problem; I point to Glee, sitting in the front row alongside her husband, already asleep. He decides not to confront her. I suggest that perhaps she was just having a bad dream; and I thank him for his trouble and proceed to use the bathroom. He says, "When I took this job, I didn't realize that a large part of it would involve waste management."

A light meal is served at 2:30; I choose a hot chicken Parmesan sandwich, which turns out to be larger and more tummy-filling than I had expected. At about 3:00, while I'm reading, this same "waste management" flight attendant comes down the aisle. I (jokingly) ask if there have been any other weird incidents. I tell him that Glee and her husband had exhibited some strange behavior on the flight from Seattle on July 8 and on the cruise ship. He said, "I'm so glad that you told me that. The two of them have been a constant source of trouble ever since they boarded." To begin, they were unhappy that they were not seated together, so they appropriated seats on their own. When told that they'd have to move, the flight crew did manage to secure them side-by-side seats in the center section of the front row, Seats 1C and 1E." I don't know if there were problems (as on the earlier flight) in ordering from the menu, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were, given his comment about "constant source of trouble."

For other incidents involving this woman and her husband, go to the 2014 travelog (URL given above) and search for Glee.

At 6:40 (still on PDT), a flight attendant offers chocolate chip cookies, obviously recently heated in the microwave and having an overpowering aroma. (A nicer aroma than from the man in 2A, I should add.) I decline. At 7:00 I try, again, to get some sleep. I keep my eyes shut, but finally at 8:00 I give up. It's at this point that I decide to play chess on the entertainment system (see my earlier description of my dismal failure at this endeavor). So I start reading *The Hours*, even with the difficulty of having burning eyes as a result of the allergy.

At 9:00, the cabin lights are turned on and we are given hot towels to freshen up. We are served "dinner"; mine is interrupted by a sneezing spell accompanied by a bloody nose from the right nostril - oh, great! We finish dinner at 10:00, still PDT. Again the crew dims the cabin lights (this is beginning to resemble a test of the circadian rhythm of laboratory mice) so I succumb for a very short nap; the lights are turned on again at 11:30 after I've had, maybe, a few winks of sleep. We are now crossing Japan, north of Tokyo, and will soon cross the Sea of Japan on our way to Korea. Meanwhile, my eyes continue to itch and burn and ooze, making it a challenge to read from the Kindle. It's fortunate that this device allows the user to vary the font; by making it like a large print book, I can read more easily. At 11:45, I have another sneezing spell with a flow of blood from the left nostril (equal opportunity bleeding, I say).

At 12:30 am PDT, I move my watch 16 hours ahead to 4:30 pm Japan/Korea time. I'm enjoying both the Bryson and Cunningham books, now that I've discovered that I can enlarge the font to make the words legible. At 5:00 we enter Korean air space; the expected arrival in Seoul is 5:45, more or less as anticipated. We land at 5:45 in a sea of fog and mist. It takes about 15 minutes, but we taxi to the terminal and disembark. It's a very long walk to International Transfer and the gate for our flight to Osaka, scheduled to leave at 7:15. My eyes are burning, my ears are blocked, my nose is stuffed (but I'm afraid to blow it lest I have another nose bleed), and the terminal is hot and humid. Aside from this, everything is just fine! Oh, yes, I see my first New York Yankees cap with that logo that stirs up such horrible memories of the 1940s-50s when my beloved Brooklyn Dodgers were defeated in World Series after World Series by the *evil empire*! As I noted in my NorwayCruise2014 travelog

<http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/NorwayCruise2014.pdf>, the narrator in Joshua Ferris's *To Rise*

Again at a Decent Hour is a long-suffering Boston Red Sox fan. He says this about his nemesis "... the Yankees of all teams – probably objectively the most crass and reviled team in the history of sports, with that obnoxious logo so well known, the interlocking N and Y you can find on swag in every part of the world, a symbol so offensive that only the Nazi swastika compares with it, and yet still regarded by so many as benign, something to admire, even worship, revealing the true extent of the human capacity for mass delusion ... " Couldn't have said it better myself. Over the next two weeks, we'll see many New York Yankee logos on a variety of garments, but we'll also see (mainly on the backpacks of high school students) the word Brooklyn. Alas, we never see Brooklyn Dodgers.



I don't recall (nor did I write it in my notes) where this happens, but either on arriving in Seoul or in leaving Seoul or in arriving in Osaka, we pass a desk with the sign "temperature being taken." Do they quarantine travelers who are running a fever?

Our Osaka flight uses a Boeing 777-200 in which the Business (Prestige) class seats are a traditional side by side and arranged 2-3-2. There are only a few Caucasians on board. Are these our fellow voyagers on the Tauck tour? The majority of the passengers are either Korean or Japanese (I can't distinguish); a surprising number - mainly young women - are wearing surgical masks (to protect themselves from ... what?) The plane pushes back at 7:35, a little behind schedule and we are air-borne 10 minutes later. I reject the dinner that is offered, although I do accept a fresh fruit plate. We land in Osaka at 8:58 and after another very long taxi we arrive at the terminal at 9:15. Immigration is a slow process and baggage retrieval is even slower. Eventually, however, we and our suitcases are reunited. We meet a Tauck representative in the arrivals hall. We also meet eight of our fellow Tauck passengers.* They include

*Because none of the Tauck travelers whom we meet authorized the use of their names in this travelogue - not that they even know of its existence - I'll refrain from identifying them by name. But if you were on the Tauck trip and you happen upon this travelogue, you may well see your images in the Picasa pictures of the various venues that we visit.

three couples, all long-time friends: two pairs from California and one from Arkansas; and there is a pair of women from Florida.

There are two ATMs in the arrivals hall, but one of them does not accept* international credit cards. The

*We have to be careful to find ATMs that will accept our bank cards. It turns out that these are operated by only two organizations: the Japanese post office (JP) and, of all things, 7-Eleven stores. But I guess that it makes sense in that 7-Eleven is owned by a Japanese company, and of its 58,300 stores, worldwide, over 18,000 are in Japan. In fact, we'll make three withdrawals over the course of the trip. The first in the Osaka airport uses a JP machine, the second at the Tokyo train station has a 7-Eleven logo on it, and the third in Takayama is at a 7-Eleven store.

other does, so we withdraw 30,000* JPY.

*It takes some getting used to, dealing with a currency with so many zeroes. The simplest thing is to divide by 100 and, for example, to equate 100 JPY with \$1 US. I had been tracking the currency rate from January to the end of March and it did not vary much: 100 JPY was trading in the range 0.85 to 0.89 USD. It's not clear why, but the yen strengthens during our time in Japan. When I get home and examine the exchange rate for the three ATM withdrawals that we make, 100 JPY was equivalent to 0.92 USD. (And it continues to strengthen - as I write, this, four days into May, the exchange rate is now 0.94.)

Currency is available in coins of ¥500, ¥100, ¥50, ¥10, ¥5, and ¥1, the latter being worth less than 1 cent, US. There is also paper money in amounts of ¥10,000, ¥5,000, ¥2,000, and ¥1,000; undoubtedly even larger bills are available, but these suffice for our needs.

The Tauck representative directs us to a waiting bus which takes the ten of us to our hotel in Kyoto, arriving at 11:30. Tauck has selected the Westin Miyako Kyoto <http://tinyurl.com/7umrgqc> which turns out to be very elegant, both in its public spaces and in our room. However, we are so tired that we crash almost immediately, promising ourselves to admire the ambience tomorrow when we're awake.

Alas, my typical sleep pattern for the first night or two in a far-off country holds true to form: I awaken at 3:00, but instead of getting out of bed to read for a while, I stay in bed, hoping that sleep will come. And although I'm startled to waking several times, I do manage to make it to 7:45 when our alarm clock goes off. So my sleep is fitful, made even more challenging by the damned allergy that is causing my eyes to tear and burn, my sinuses to hurt, and my nose/throat to be congested; just for the "fun" of it, I have two more nosebleeds, one during the night and the other in the morning.

Monday, April 11

The hotel boasts five restaurants. Our Tauck accommodation authorizes us to have a buffet breakfast each morning at Aquablu (which sounds more like an aftershave than a place for food, but what do I know?). The range of foods is impressive and includes both Western and Japanese dishes.

When we checked into the hotel, we were given a packet with information from Tauck: a timeline of the history of Japan; a sheet with "curiosities, symbols, and pop culture"; sights to see in Kyoto; and introductory information about Tauck's schedule for our days here in Kyoto. We also received a guest list with about 70 names, half assigned to Tim Lentz and half to Elise Lentz, married Tour Directors; tomorrow I'll ask for a list* of the other 70 guests who are assigned to Tour Directors Charlie Watson and Michael

*I brought with me the list of participants from Tauck's Adriatic tour last fall. None of the guests on that journey are on this one, as it turns out.

Soncina. We are in Tim's group, which proves to be highly pleasing. Over the course of the trip, his laid-back style, his wry sense of humor, his knowledge of "important" things (such as which public bathrooms are suitable for use by pampered Westerners and which others should be avoided), his calm demeanor, and his attention to the smallest detail will endear him to those of us who are fortunate to have found ourselves in his group. In return, he would praise us (maybe he does this for all of his tour groups, but I suspect not) for being on time, for not wandering off, and (most important!!) for turning off the battery-

operated listening devices that we will use on every excursion. In fact, he sets a wager with the other three directors that his group would consume the fewest batteries - by the end of the tour, we are informed that we've won in a landslide. In the other groups there were people (often more than just a small number) who would leave their units running during the night, therefore consuming batteries. This was so bad in Elise's group that at the end of one especially frustrating day she collected all of the units, made sure that they were turned off, and did not return them until the next day. Tim also tells us that several people in Elise's group were unmanageable - it's not that they were aged and couldn't keep up, but rather that they were aged and kept getting lost. (We actually witnessed a bit of this bewildered behavior at the times when our two groups were at the same venue at the same time.) We also learn that some of Charlie's lost souls have, at times, failed to board the bus and had to take a taxi back to the ship.

Tim and Elise are at a welcome desk in the hotel lobby from 9:00 until noon, today. We meet the two of them and chat briefly. Lee had already decided that we should explore The Philosopher's Walk this afternoon (more about this shortly); Tim gives us a map and clear (at least we think they're clear) instructions on how to get from the hotel to the nearby walk.

Because our allergies and/or colds are not any better, I begin taking cold/sinus pills that Lee had secreted in her suitcase. (We had heard, correctly or not, that medication with ephedrine or pseudoephedrine would be confiscated at immigration, so we brought Mucinex with us.) We also ask the hotel's concierge to suggest a doctor who is nearby. She makes a phone call and sends us to Goto-In Clinic which she describes as a "hospital, about a 10-minute walk from here"; she also provides a Google map.

Well, like so many Google street maps in the U.S., this one is ... how shall I say it ... not quite accurate. It falsely places the "hospital" on a side street off the main thoroughfare which is shared with the hotel and along which we are walking. We soon realize that we are lost, but a very nice woman comes up and asks (in excellent English) if she can help. She tells us that we made a wrong turn, that we need to be back on the main thoroughfare. When I compliment her on her English and ask where she learned it, she replies that she learned it when she went to college in the U.S. "Where?" I asked. "In Seattle - at the UW!" She had hoped to stay in the U.S., but her visa ran out and she had to return to Japan.

Thanking her, we return to the main road, turn to the left (as directed), and walk some distance but still never see a "hospital." So I stop in a small shop and, with sign language and pointing and some English, we learn that we've passed it ... again; it's about 30 meters to the right. So we retrace our steps - and although we see nothing resembling a hospital, we do find a building that houses a small clinic with one doctor and a few clerical staff. We enter at about 11:15.

The first surprise is that we are required to remove our shoes. We had anticipated having to remove shoes in temples and shrines, but not in a clinic. Fortunately, they provide slippers* so I am able to avoid

*Prior to coming to Japan, a friend recommended that I read *Dave Barry Does Japan*, written by the wonderful humorist in the 1990s. Admittedly it's out of date, but many of his observations are still pertinent. And every chapter is filled with laugh-out-loud humor ... except for one - the chapter about Hiroshima, which I'll discuss in good course. Barry convinced his publisher, Random House, to send him, his wife, and their son to Japan to gather information for a book (the one that I read). He recommends that all of us should similarly send our bills and invoices to Random House in the hope that they will pay them. What is relevant to the present situation is that he complains that the slippers he's offered are always too small, causing him to mince (defined by Webster's as "to walk with quick, short steps in a way that does not seem natural and that is often meant to be funny"). Like Barry, I mince as I walk about the waiting room of this clinic.

walking on my bare feet, protected only by thin socks.* We hand the clerk the papers that we'd been given

*Over the course of the next two-and-a-half weeks, we'll be removing shoes many times. Lee had convinced me to buy a pair of slip-on shoes, but today I'm wearing my regular laced shoes. I'm also not carrying a shoe horn, something that I'll make it a point to do every day from here on, but there is a

shoe horn provided by the clinic. And why is this an issue? Well, Dear Reader, in addition to having ancient legs that don't work or walk as fast as they once did and aside from having legs that are numb below the knee, I have painful calluses on both soles. They're not usually painful, except when I'm forced to walk on hard surfaces with no shoes on. In some of the venues that we'll visit, there will be tatami mats that ease the pain, but in most others there will be wood or stone surfaces. I'm sure that this tradition goes way back in history and probably has to do with cleanliness and hygiene, but one wonders how effective it is when many female tourists, who are wearing sandals, walk around in their bare feet with no stocking or sock or slipper.

at the hotel; she indicates that we should take a seat. The waiting room is very warm and humid. There are about five other people, several of them quite old and decrepit, who (like us) wait patiently to be called in. I rue the fact that I didn't think to bring some reading material with me. (Yes, there are magazines available, but they are - surprise! - entirely in Japanese.) In the waiting room, "peaceful" music is piped into the room, including some Debussy and a Mozart string quartet. But when it breaks into Stephen Foster's *Old Folks at Home* (you know: ♪ Way down upon the Swanee River ... ♪) I begin to question the choice of play list.

At about 11:40, we are invited into the doctor's office. He has but a few words of English (which is more than I have of Japanese) but we make it clear that we are tourists and that we think we're suffering from allergies. With words and sign language, we indicate tearing of the eyes, coughing, and sneezing. He seems content with our self-diagnosis of allergies and he gives each of us an inhaler and some eye drops. He demonstrates the use of the inhaler and has us prove to him that we do understand it by squirting the medicine into our nostrils. He also has us put the drops in our eyes. Both items have nothing but Japanese written on them, so we have no idea of what sort of medication he's providing. It could be pure water, for all we know ... or, if we're in luck, *sake*. He indicates that the inhaler should be used twice a day, the eye drops four times. We are then told to sit in the waiting room again - finally at about noon, we are presented with a bill for the office visit and medications, ¥9240 (or about \$90 for everything).

We walk back to the hotel, hoping to relax in our room only to find out that it's not yet been made up. When we enter to retrieve some reading material, a maid comes in to deliver fresh bottles of water; she bows all the way in and bows some more as she backs out. This is going to be a long, long three weeks!

At 1:00 we set out to find The Philosopher's Walk (aka The Path of Philosophy). According to an information sheet provided by Tauck, "The path takes its name from one of its most famous strollers: 20th century philosopher Nishida Kitarō, who is said to have meandered lost in thought along the path." The operative word may well be "lost" because we are unable to find the beginning or the middle or the end of the path, even though armed with an excellent map from Tim that begins with turning right from the hotel and crossing the street with a tunnel. What tunnel? We never find a tunnel. But we do enjoy our non-philosophical walk, coming upon such venues as Kyoto's zoo, a shrine, and a water treatment plant. The highlight (or lowlight) of our stroll is when Lee's hat blows off in the strong wind that is whipping us around; quick action by Mrs. M retrieves it. It's a shame that we never find the walk because another information sheet tells us that "... it passes a number of shrines and temples along the way. It takes about 60 minutes to complete the round-trip walk, although many people spend more time visiting the retailers, artisans, small eateries along the way."

One positive note, however. This will be essentially the last* time that we'll try to find anything on our own.

*Well, there'll be another time tomorrow afternoon when we wander in search of a famous food market. Eventually, we will succeed, but only after asking numerous people for directions.

From here on, we'll be in a group with an experienced tour guide (one who speaks Japanese!) to direct us. But it *is* embarrassing that we can't follow Tim's clear instructions and map. It reminds me of the cartoon in which a man is instructing his dog: "Don't trample our neighbor's flower bed!" and what the dog hears is "Trample!"

We return to our hotel room at 2:15, only to find that it has *still* not been made up. So we take reading material to the lobby and find some comfortable chairs. (I begin the April 11 issue of *The New Yorker*.)

AN OBSERVATION OR TWO Dave Barry in his book about Japan commented that when he and his family walked about town, they felt like "large, loud water buffaloes" compared to the Japanese around him. Some twenty years later, we do not have that same impression. Most Japanese are of "normal" height, with many of the younger generation quite tall. But it is true that elderly men and women are often quite short. On our failed attempt to find The Philosopher's Walk, we encounter many people, mostly young, wearing traditional Japanese garb. It seems that this is a tradition during cherry blossom time (which is drawing to an end this week). In fact, we learn that when Tauck ran this same tour (but in the opposite direction) last week, the demand for bookings was very strong because it occurred at the peak of cherry blossom season (or so people guessed).

Although not in my notes, I assume that we finally make it to our (now cleaned) room. My eyes are still tearing badly and, as on previous days, the oozing liquid tends to crystallize on the lashes and in the corners of the eyes, causing significant pain. (I'm sure that you, Dear Reader, are fascinated by this.) At 5:00 we find the hotel's Cocoon Room where Tim is hosting a reception for his group. We meet a few of our fellow tourists, but the meeting concludes precisely at 5:30 when Elise and her entourage take over the room.

Dinner, tonight, is free (that is, we've already paid for it in our Tauck fee) and we have the choice of eating at either of the hotel's western-style restaurants: Aquablu (where we had breakfast) or the more formal Grand View. Reservations were recommended, but when we tried earlier in the day to reserve at the latter, we learned that it was already full. So we eat buffet-style at Aquablu. Following dinner, we read in our room and use the internet to learn the latest news, then head to bed early (9:00) because neither of us is feeling very well. Lee has a fairly restful sleep, but not I. At one point I awaken with a severe coughing spell that goes on for more than an hour. When I finally get to sleep again, I am quite restless, awakening often and then dozing off. At 4:00 I give up and get out of bed to read.

In the Helpful Tips section of the information distributed by Tauck, there is this about toilets:

Toilets in Asia can be part of the overall adventure of learning a new culture. Don't be shy - have fun with the buttons. What's the worse(sic) that can happen? When outside of the hotel, carry an emergency supply of tissues, as there will be times when you (or your friend) will be happy you did.

In fact, the toilet in our hotel room (see Picasa pictures) has controls only slightly less complicated than

the space shuttle. The picture to the right, captured from an online source, is typical, although not all of those that we encounter have as much English as this one does. You have to love the cartoon representation of the buttocks, eh? On the tour bus, either tomorrow or the next day, Tim will encourage everyone to explore the wonders of the hotel's toilet. He says that the cruise ship will have conventional plumbing, but we'll find an even more elaborate arrangement at our hotel in Tokyo. He also says that when he first encountered these contraptions, he was horrified at the thought of electricity and water coexisting in one device, but he said that we owe it to ourselves to give it a try. "What can possibly go wrong?" he asks, rhetorically. (He warns, however, to remember to shut it off the water before rising from the seat!) Oh, did I mention that the toilet seat is also warmed? Well Lee, brave girl that she is, does experiment with the toilet in our room. I resist, but finally on the day when we check out, I give it a try. It is an experience. Of a sort. Do I want to do it again? Doubtful. Do I want to spend thousands of dollars to have such a unit installed at home? Definitely NO! But if you, Dear Reader, are of an adventurous sort - and have some spare cash just crying out to be spent - you can purchase a TOTO washlet, as they're called, at Amazon (and other



venues); the price of installation, wiring, plumbing, and carrying insurance in case guests are injured or electrocuted, is not included.

Tuesday, April 12

The day begins with bright sun, but is a bit chilly. We have an early buffet breakfast in Aquablu with a few of the people whom we met on the bus from Osaka, then assemble in the hotel lobby for a 7:55 departure from the hotel. Our tour guide is Junko Murata, who will be with us on all of our Tokyo excursions. She is excellent - very knowledgeable and with perfect English, having lived in the U.S. from age 3 to 11. She will also travel on the ship (as she heads to her home to Tokyo) but, alas, will be the assigned tour guide for one or another of the other three tour groups. This morning the bus takes us to a Buddhist temple for three activities: a calligraphy lesson, a Japanese tea ceremony, and (can you believe it?) drumming. What these are doing in the various rooms of a Buddhist temple is not clear, but the resident priests do collect fees for renting out their space. Of course we are required to remove our shoes and plod around in stocking feet, but this time I'm ready for it with my new slip-on shoes and a shoe horn in my pocket.

At Picasa I've posted pictures from all three events. The *calligraphy* lesson was ... how shall I say it? ... humbling. Japanese children begin learning the craft in the second grade, but we tourists (all of us well past second grade) are not as dextrous as we might be. There is an instructor at the front of the room, showing the technique for inking the block, gathering ink on the brush, and drawing the brush across the page, producing a precise thickness of line that heads in a defined direction. We are allowed to keep our "masterpieces" - perhaps Lee will let me hang mine in the garage. The *tea ceremony** is instructive and

*Lee, who always reads extensively before we embark on a trip, learned that it's traditional to wear white socks at tea ceremony. So I pack a pair of white athletic socks, only to discover that they're too thick for me to slip my shoes over them. So I violate etiquette by wearing dark socks.

(surprisingly) lengthy - it's not just a matter of dipping a Lipton's tea bag in some hot water. One woman narrates while her colleague carries out the numerous steps. Both women are on their knees; we Westerners are spread across the room on low chairs or benches. When it comes time to sample the concoction, a series of women, also on their knees and scooting around while kneeling, give each visitor a cup of the vile brew. I don't like tea, but good sport that I am I drink the damned stuff, even slurping the last drops (as we were instructed to do) to show how much I "enjoy" it. As for *drumming*, this is something that I really enjoy. We have two instructors, a young man and a young woman, both quite athletic and possessing of good stamina. The man describes the action and demonstrates it, then implores us to follow along and copy his beat and intensity. A video will demonstrate just how energetic one has to be to play properly: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsKqBy2uJ34> These Taiko drums are large floor-standing models and we are issued large drum sticks - and we all work up a sweat by the time it is over. At Tim's urging, most of us have taken our tenugui* and wrapped it around our heads so that we look

*It is described thus at Wikipedia: "A Tenugui is a thin Japanese hand towel made of cotton. It is typically about 35 by 90 centimeters in size, plain woven and is almost always dyed with some pattern. It can be used for anything a towel could be used for – as a washcloth, dishcloth, but often as a headband, souvenir, decoration, or for wrapping items such as bottles.

like fearsome Samurai warriors (or not). - the Picasa pictures will reveal the truth of the matter.

The bus then takes us to the Gion district where, accompanied by Junko, we have a nice walk. Wikipedia informs us "The district was built to accommodate the needs of travelers and visitors to the shrine. It eventually evolved to become one of the most exclusive and well-known geisha districts in all of Japan." It is studded with restaurants, teahouses, and shops, along with old houses and art galleries. Tauck's information sheet cautions "Don't expect flea market prices here."



The shuttle bus returns us to the hotel at 12:25. On the bus, Tim explains that *geisha* is the term used throughout Japan, except here in Kyoto where the women are called *geiko*. He tells us not to confuse the word with Geico, an insurance company, or gecko, a cute lizard, or (I would add) Gordon Gekko, the principal character in the movie *Wall Street*. Wikipedia helpfully adds this information: "While the term *geisha* means 'artist' or 'person of the arts,' the more direct term *geiko* means essentially 'a child of the arts' or 'a woman of art.' " Well that explains everything - or not. Despite my attempts, several times, to determine if *geisha* also refers to courtesans (a milder word than others that one could use) or just to entertainers, I am stymied and never get a clear answer.

Lee and I eschew lunch, then get on a shuttle bus for an unsupervised and unchaperoned tour of the Teramachi Shopping Arcade. This arcade is laid out on a north-south axis. At its southern terminus, and running east-west, is the Nishiki Food Market. Even with a map on which the arcade and food market are marked with a highlighter pen, we walk right past the end of the arcade and onto a major shopping thoroughfare, not finding the food market. We wander into several shops, asking "Where is the Nishiki market?" Nobody speaks English but everyone seems eager to help. We finally determine that we have walked too far - that the food market is not really at the very end of the arcade - so we return to the arcade and find it. It lives up to its hype, as it offers all sorts of edibles (and things that may well be edible but I'm not the one to find it out). It is also very crowded with both locals and tourists. (Should I mention that my eyes are burning terribly from the crystallized effusions? OK, I won't.)

By the time we finish, we are too late to take the shuttle bus back to the hotel so we hail a taxi. The driver has no English, but we indicate somehow where we need to go. Fortunately, given that the smallest currency I have is one of the original ¥10,000 notes, he takes credit cards. (Tomorrow I'll get some smaller denomination bills from the hotel staff.) Back in our room, I lie down at 4:30, hoping for a little sleep, but sleep does not come.

At 5:55, we meet in the lobby to take a bus to Fortune Garden Restaurant for a welcome reception and dinner <http://www.fortunegarden.com/en/>. The set menu begins with *Marinated Salmon with Japanese Pepper*, then *Pot Roasted Clams with Mugwort* Puree and Caviar*, followed by *Foie Gras and Spring*

*Wikipedia informs us that "Mugwort is a common name for several species of aromatic plants in the genus *Artemisia*. In Europe, mugwort most often refers to the species *Artemisia vulgaris*, or common mugwort." But you knew all that, right?

Vegetable Pot-au-feu, and then *Sautéed Butterfish with Olive Tapenade*. The main course is *Grilled Sirloin with Tasmania Grain Mustard and Madeira Sauce*. For dessert, we have *White Chocolate Parfait*. At some point during the dinner, there is a demonstration by a *geiko* and a *maiko* (an apprentice *geiko*). The two do a traditional dance, accompanied by a woman playing a *shamisen* (a three-stringed musical instrument). At the conclusion of the performance, the *geiko* comes around to each table and answers questions (about her training, her costume, her makeup, etc.) using Junko to translate.

Back to the hotel at 9:30 (my eyes are burning badly and it's difficult to read) and to bed at 10:15. This time I sleep straight through to 5:15. Hooray.

Wednesay, April 13

A good night's sleep does not "cure" my allergic reactions: I'm still stuffy, sneezy, wheezy, coughy (sounds like Snow White's dwarfs, eh?) and my eyes still burn. Using the good doctor's magic inhaler spray and eye drops has not produced a miracle cure. I send a message to my Gig Harbor doctor, using Franciscan Health's MyChart program, asking him if it's "normal" for allergies to linger as long as this one has. By the time we're onboard the ship tomorrow, every attempt that I make to see if he's replied on MyChart is greeted with "Proxy Error" (whatever the hell that is). When, finally, we have a fast internet connection at our Tokyo hotel on April 22, I get to read his reply which says, yes it can last and yes keep using the

medicines (even if we can't read the labels).

We have the regular buffet breakfast at Aquablu, then meet in the lobby at 8:25 for today's excursions. Our destinations today are the Kiyomizu Temple and the Golden Pavilion; we are warned that we'll need to remove shoes at these venues. The former ("Pure Water Temple") dates from 780 AD and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as are most of the other temples and shrines that we'll visit. One of the temple's most interesting features is a wooden stage that juts out over the hillside and holds many visitors without crashing into the valley ... so far. (On a positive note, the views of the town below are breath-taking.) It is a revered place, but the long uphill path leading to it is strewn with all sorts of tacky shops and restaurants to appeal to visitors ... like us. (There are also scrums of school kids everywhere, obviously on an outing that will require them to write a report by day's end. They wear school uniforms: military-school style for the boys, sailor suits for the girls. They also frequent the many stores to purchase sweets and other items.) When finally we reach the temple, we are confronted by steps. Many steps. By the time this trip is ended, we will have climbed many staircases, most of them longer and higher and slipperier (is that a word?) than this one. Fortunately, we do have our shoes on while climbing outside the temple.

Back on the bus,* we drive to the Golden Pavilion (*Kinkakuji*), "a Zen temple whose top two floors are

*It is Tauck's shtick to rotate people on the bus so that nobody has the best seats (whichever they may be) every day. This was also true on the Adriatic excursions last year. Every morning, Tim prepares a typed list of assigned seating and tapes it to the bus door; he also tapes little name tags for each of us (either couples or singles) above our assigned seat. Lee and I begin in the 4th row on the side away from the driver. (In Japan, as in England, Australia, and many other "backward" countries, drivers sit on the right of the vehicle and they drive on the left side of the road, so we are on the left.) The rotation then proceeds as follows: tomorrow we'll move two seats forward; the next day we'll wind up on the driver's side; and each day after that we'll move two rows to the back, eventually shifting over to the passenger side again. By the last day of tour, we will have achieved Nirvana: row one on the left!

completely covered in gold leaf. The temple was the retirement villa of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, and according to his will it became a Zen temple after his death in 1408." (I copped the preceding sentence from the Tauck information sheet.) But it had a checkered history. Quoting again "It has burned down numerous times throughout its history including twice during the Onin war, a civil war that destroyed much of Kyoto; and again more recently in 1950 when it was set afire by a fanatic monk. The present structure was rebuilt in 1955."

Perhaps this is a good time to learn a bit about Japanese history. I'll begin "fairly" recently (i.e., in 300 AD) and do only a brief rundown of events. From 300 to 645 there was the *Kofun* period where government was centralized and the imperial dynasty begun. From 645 to 710 there was the *Asuka* period when the emperor's powers were strengthened. Another short period was the *Nara* (710 to 794) in which the capital was moved to Nara and the emperors were both Shinto chiefs and patrons of Buddhism (which is an example of hedging one's bets). The *Heian* period (794 to 1185) saw the imperial court move to what is now Kyoto, but cracks in the establishment began to show during *Kamakura* (1185 to 1333) when a military government was formed in Kamakura while the emperor remained as a figurehead in Kyoto. The *Muromachi* district of Kyoto served as the base for Shogun Ashikaga Takauji's military government (1333 to 1568). *Azuchi-Momoyama* (1568 to 1600) was the time of civil war and wars of conquest against Korea and China fomented, mainly, by Toyotomi Hideoyoshi (1536-1598); the arts flourished during this period. From 1600 to 1868, this is the *Edo* period under the new shogunate at Edo (now modern Tokyo); commerce flourishes and Japan opens its borders when Commodore Perry arrives in 1853. But in the *Meiji* period (1864 to 1912) the emperor is restored to power, the military is strengthened, and there are wars with China, Russia, and Korea. *Taisho* (1912 to 1926) followed by *Showa* (1926 to 1989) found Japan increasing its commercial and military might, leading to the ill-begotten war with the United States in 1941; it is also a time of opening to the world again and has featured both summer and winter Olympics. The present period is called *Heisei* and the only notable feature listed on Tauck's handout is "2016: Your Tauck Tour of Japan!"

We are taken to lunch at Shabu Zen in the Gion district for a traditional *Shabushabu* meal, described as a "one-pot dish made at the table, with beef, seasonal vegetables, and mushrooms." We are supposed to be instructed in the proper way of cooking our food, but nobody comes around and so we make do on our own. There is a very hot pot of water in front of each person, along with a supply of raw vegetables and very thin slices of beef. The beef is cooked piece by piece for a short time in the very hot water; as for the vegetables, most of us put them in the hot water even if we aren't supposed to. According to Wikipedia, "*Shabu-shabu* is a Japanese hotpot dish of thinly sliced meat and vegetables boiled in water. The term is onomatopoeia, derived from the sound emitted when the ingredients are stirred in the cooking pot and served with dipping sauces." Despite our confusion, I'm pleased to report that no tourists were harmed in the cooking of the food.

MORE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT JAPAN AND ITS PEOPLE

- The Japanese are fascinated by (even addicted to?) vending machines. Everywhere (in cities, on country roads, wherever) there are machines, frequently two or three or even more, dispensing cold drinks (soda, iced coffee, iced tea, juice, beer) and warm drinks or food, often for as little as ¥130 per item.

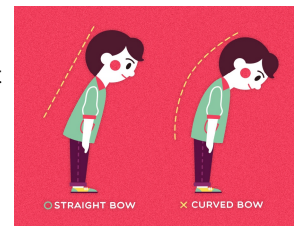


- The Japanese are fascinated by cats. On streets, in both small towns and large, there are feral cats wandering about, seeking food, but shying away from human contact.

- They are also fascinated by "virtual" cats, the most familiar of which is Hello Kitty whose image adorns clothing, backpacks, store windows, and (for all I know) toilet seats. But there is also "Beckoning Cat" (*maneki-neko*) whose paws, to our western eyes, seems to be saying good-bye, but on this side of the international date line it's a welcome. And then there is *Tanuki*, who is not a cat, but apparently a dog that looks like a raccoon (or vice versa). Often positioned outside restaurants, he/she/it sports a favorite drink in either or both hands or sometimes a drink in one hand and an account book in the other.



- Let us now learn a bit about the Japanese practice of bowing. Several of our tour guides educated us about the differences between the depth of the bows; and there are several useful web sites (e.g., <http://tinyurl.com/jeyrak2> or <http://tinyurl.com/huchwkt>) The 15° bow (*eshaku*) is used when greeting a friend or a coworker of "equal rank"; when doing this, you must "lower your hands 3 to 4 cm down the front of your legs and keep your gaze in line with the bend of your body and look at a spot about 180 cm (6 ft) in front of you." The 30° bow (*senrei*) shows a "moderate level of gratitude or respect." The 45° bow conveys even deeper respect for someone who is "higher-ranking or has some sort of power over you." And the 70° to 90° bow (*futsuurei*) shows deep reverence and might be used by a titan of industry who apologizes on TV for making cars whose brakes don't work or for a husband whose wife catches him in an assignation with his young, comely, shapely, sexy secretary. My favorite is "The Begging for Your Life Bow" (*dogeza*); this is done on one's hands and knees with the face pressed into the ground.



- Admission to museums and cultural venues is surprisingly inexpensive. A few examples for places that we'll visit over the next few days: Matsue Black Castle ¥560; Hiroshima A-Bomb Museum ¥200; and Tokyo Edo Museum ¥600. The fee for school children and for us (gasp, pant) elderly is even less.

- On one of the first days of the tour, Junko tells us that we'll not find trash receptacles along the street (except in front of convenience stores). The reason: following the terror attack by Aum Shinrikyo on the Tokyo subway system in 1995, trash receptacles were removed so that they could not be used to hide bombs.
- I couldn't remember if it is the English letters R or L that Japanese have trouble pronouncing. After listening to the English spoken by several tour guides, I come to the conclusion that they have trouble with *both* of them. The most striking example was one guide's calling a saline body of water a "blackish rake"!

The bus takes us back to the hotel at 2:30. Lee and I go to the concierge to ask for a dinner recommendation (we are on our own tonight). We settle on a rather pricey (but what the hell, we're on vacation,* right?) place called *Tempura Endo* <http://www.gion-endo.com/english/>, situated in a former

*A question of terminology: Given that the Magids retired from meaningful work in 2006, can it really be said that they are on vacation? I think not.

geisha house. The slide show at the restaurant's web site is a delight, including captions such as "A splash of splendid feat performed." Huh? Making the reservation takes "forever" - the concierge fills out a long document with our names, room number, credit card, and (probably) high school diplomas before calling the restaurant, but at least making our reservation took less time than whatever the couple to our right were trying to arrange with another concierge - they were there before us and still there after us. We relax in our room for the rest of the afternoon.

At 5:30, we head to the front door where there are always many taxis. This time, however, we have to queue up at the end of a long line of young businessmen, all in black suits, who seem to have come from some boring conference and are getting ready for an evening of gluttony and debauchery, or so I guess. As each taxi comes by, only one or two people enter it, so it's quite a while before our turn comes. We do witness an interesting interaction between several of the young men and a person who may have been their boss. Said boss comes out of the hotel to talk to them and the bowing begins - the young men, deeply, toward the boss and he, only 15° to them; one person bows *very* deeply (I didn't have a protractor with me, but I'd estimate 75°) but by this time the boss has turned away and so the bow is wasted. (I wonder if each person is allotted a given number of bows that are parceled out over a lifetime; if so, this young man has squandered one of his.)

The taxi takes us to the Gion district (where we had been yesterday and earlier today) and to the narrow street (really an alleyway) on which the restaurant is located. We are met outside by a hostess in traditional dress who is carrying an umbrella (it has begun to rain) and ushers us inside. Of course we remove our shoes. We have a private room with a moderately low table and two chairs (but at least we're not on our knees during the meal). A tray is placed in front of each of us; on it are several bowls and dishes with solid condiments and liquids for dipping: soy sauce, green tea powder, rice flour and salt, a lemon slice. As each new course is brought, the server instructs us (with hand gestures and few pseudo-English words) about which condiment or sauce to use for that particular piece of tempura. (I thought that we had the same server for all of the courses, but Lee insists that there were three different ones. She's probably right.)

When it's time for the each new course, the door slides open and the server (in traditional dress) brings in the food and, while on her knees, lays it out before us and issues instructions. A true highlight is a tempura that tastes like a corn fritter; others were veggies, prawns, unrecognizable fish objects, and who knows what else. The tempura batter is much lighter than any we've experience in the U.S. I make an attempt to keep track of the nine courses; here is my list, for better or for worse:

1st course: tofu/salmon roe/wasabi/pickled relish; 2nd: corn tempura and corn fritter; 3rd: two prawns with heads detached, but we are supposed to eat everything (which we do) except the tail/shell; 4th: whitefish/mushroom caps with shrimp paste/bean bundle; 5th: two sardines with eyeballs still attached

(yes, we eat it all); 6th: spring vegetables/bamboo shoots/sea eel/butter bean; 7th: salad with bean sprouts and sweet potato fries. At this point green tea is served. Back to the tempura: 8th: tendon*

*Tendon is an abbreviation for tempura donbori, literally a Chinese rice bowl. We'll learn later (p. 32) about the Japanese love of inventing ing abbreviations for all sorts of things.

which is rice with shrimp and mixed vegetable tempura/teriyaki sauce/miso soup/Japanese pickles; 9th: grapefruit sorbet.

It is all delicious, although I doubt very seriously that it's kosher. The bill is approximately ¥26,000! What amazes me is how the servers knew exactly when to come in to clear the previous course and bring the new - is it possible that they were spying on us?

At the end of dinner, we ask them to call a taxi. We step out of our little room and head to the front door, only to be shoed back into our room to wait until we're called. (This is, yet, another of the many *faux pas* that I'll make during the trip.) The taxi arrives and as we exit, I warn Lee to watch out for the low doorway ... just as I manage to clobber my head on the same doorway, leaving a red bruise of honor.

What an experience! We are in the restaurant from 6:00 to 7:45. When we return to the hotel room, we pack our suitcases to place them outside the door so that they can be taken away tomorrow morning. In order that I'll have nothing to carry, I not only tag my carry-on for them to take away but I also place my briefcase (with the laptop, kindle, flash drives inside) inside my hard-sided suitcase. We go to sleep at 10:00 but I awaken at 4:00 and can't sleep any more. For both of us, there is lots of coughing throughout the night.

Thursday, April 14

I'm still quite congested during the night, so I continue with the Japanese inhaler, the eye drops, and the Mucinex that I had begun yesterday. I awaken at 5:00; Lee is also restless, so we both get out of bed. After showering, etc., we head downstairs for an early breakfast. By the time we return to our room (7:10), the suitcases are already gone. (One does hope that they were taken by Tauck people; we'll find out later today when we board the cruise ship.) It is at this point, when we are about to check out of the hotel, that I take the "plunge" and let the high-tech toilet seat wash my undersides. What a thrill!

At 8:30 we check out of the hotel and wait until 8:55 to board Tim's bus. Today we'll do two final attractions in Kyoto: Nijo Castle and Heian Shrine. My eyes are a bit less crusty and painful - a good sign? The day begins partly cloudy, but it's not likely to rain.

PUN ALERT: Often several buses are lined up, so it's important that we take the one with the TIM sign in the window. Some of us began calling it Tim Bus. So I guess that we can take Tim Bus To Timbuktu, eh?

We arrive at the Nijo castle at about 9:30. It dates from 1603 and was the Kyoto residence of the first Shogun of the Edo Period. Shoes off, *natürlich*. To offer the Shogun protection against enemies, the connecting corridors are built with "nightingale floors" that squeak as one steps on them. (An video cam would have been better, but that would be anachronistic.) We (along with many tourists and school groups) are visiting this morning, so it's difficult to hear the squeaking floors. The outside grounds, including the moat, are most beautiful.

And then it's off to Heian Shrine where we arrive at about 10:50. In the Japanese scheme of things, this structure is relatively new, having been built in 1895 to commemorate Kyoto's 1100th anniversary as the capital of Japan. It is a Shinto shrine, fronted by the traditional Torii gate (resembling the Greek letter π, which is not a sly comment on its being irrational). Shoes off, of course, once one gets inside. Junko introduces us to the application of sin-cleansing waters and the proper style of praying, neither of which I partake of (such a heathen)! There is a wall with pieces of paper tied to it - these are "fortunes" that

people received but did not like, hence their being discarded. The grounds, again, are beautiful, including waterways with lots of ducks and very happy (at least they look happy) carp and koi. On the outside grounds is a wall on which are displayed 48 sake barrels. These are traditionally given to Shinto shrines by local brewers. A web site answers a question asked by a visitor: "If those barrels are full, wouldn't they be dangerously heavy, particularly in case of an earthquake?"

Answer: Those are indeed sake barrels ... When displayed near a Shinto shrine, such barrels are called *kazaridaru*, which means "decoration barrels." As you surmised, the barrels on display are empty, at least in physical terms. Spiritually, they're chock full of significance.

The bus takes us to Ganko Restaurant where we are ushered into a room with long wooden tables; in front of each seat is a tray with a meal called *Kaiseki*, "a traditional multi-course Japanese dinner" according to Wikipedia. There is a picture of a typical tray and contents at Picasa. From a menu that I appropriate, the items on my own tray (although I'll be damned if I know which word refers to which item) are: Japanese style clear soup; sashimi; pickled, salted and chopped fish; stew of dried tofu in soy milk; deep fried [say what?]; seasonal rice; tomewan (soup traditionally served at the end of a Japanese dinner); cake; coffee. Well, I do the impossible - I actually try eating at least a little of everything. One of the dead (I hope) raw fish is edible but one I deem absolutely unchewable. The rice is good. So are the soup and chopped fish. We're supposed to make our own tofu by adding vinegar (or some other coagulant) to soy milk which is heated for 5-10 minutes over a flame. Bottom line: I do sample everything, but I'm also glad that I ate a good breakfast this morning.

We get on the bus and head to Maizuru, the port where our ship is waiting. Tim distributes little magnetic "buttons" that we can wear to identify our "Tauckiness" when on board the ship. I warn any newbies to keep their powerful little magnet far from their magnetic room key, lest entry to one's cabin be foreclosed (as happened to us on the Adriatic cruise last year and will happen again on this trip - *vide infra*). The bus stops at 2:45 for a bathroom break (Tim refers to each such potty break as a "Happy Stop") and we are the first of the buses to arrive at the port at about 4:00. But before describing the ship and our cabin, we need to have a bit of a lesson in the geography and demography of Japan (see the map on the next page).

According to Wikipedia:

Japan is a stratovolcanic archipelago of 6,852 islands. The four largest are Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku, which make up about ninety-seven percent of Japan's land area. The country is divided into 47 prefectures in eight regions. The population of 126 million is the world's tenth largest. Japanese make up 98.5% of Japan's total population. Approximately 9.1 million people live in the core city of Tokyo, the capital city of Japan, which is the sixth largest city proper in the OECD and the fourth leading global city in the world. The Greater Tokyo Area, which includes Tokyo and several surrounding prefectures, is the world's largest metropolitan area with over 35 million residents and the world's largest urban agglomeration economy.

The map (next page) shows the several islands and most of the major cities. Our cruise begins in Maizuru which, although not shown, is on the Sea of Japan, north of Kyoto. From here, we will cruise westward to Sakaiminato and Matsue. We'll then continue across the Sea of Japan and disembark at Pusan in South Korea. From there, it's south to Nagasaki on the island of Kyushu. The next day will find us in Kagoshima, also on Kyushu. We'll then head to the north and the port of Uwajima on the island of Shikoku. From there, it's on to Hiroshima on the largest island, Honshu. And, then, staying on Honshu, we'll visit Kurashiki (not shown, but just south of Okayama) before ending the cruise in Osaka.



When boarding our Tauck cruise in Venice in 2015, we had to run the gauntlet through passport control (which was staffed by a host of pompous officials). This time, in contrast, we arrive at the port, proceed directly to the gang plank, present ourselves at the front desk, are issued magnetic room cards, and get our pictures taken. How pleasant! Oh, yes, we surrender our passports to the ship's personnel.

The ship is *Le Soléal*, a sister ship (<http://en.ponant.com/Ships/Le-Soleal>) to (and a couple of years older than) *Le Lyrial* on which we sailed last year. Both are part of the fleet owned by Compagnie du Ponant, a French firm. Indeed, the layout, decor, style, size, ... everything seem so similar that it's difficult to tell the two ships apart. That being the case, I'm going to do something "tricky" - you may applaud me for my efforts at efficiency or you may criticize me for my laziness but I'm going to "lift" the description that I wrote for *Le Lyrial* from my 2015 travelogue and transpose it to here. Surely it's not plagiarism if the words and pictures that I'm "stealing" were originally written by me, right?

The ship carries about 220 passengers (of which about 150 will be Tauck cruisers, the rest mostly French) and has a crew of 139, two restaurants (one full service on Deck 2 and one buffet-style on Deck 6), a theater, two lounge/bars, a small pool, and other amenities.



When we booked our passage for *Le Soléal*, we requested a Deluxe Suite (290 sq ft). Last December, however, Stefan got a call from Tauck, asking if the Magids would "mind terribly" being transferred to a Prestige Suite (398 sq ft) consisting of two Deluxe Staterooms, 200 sq ft each, joined in marital bliss (or some such thing) .. and at no increase in price! Well, it was a tough decision, but we (reluctantly) accepted their offer. (Last year, we also had a Prestige Suite, but were "forced" to take it - at its higher price - because the Deluxe Suite we had requested was not available.) Our room is on Deck 6 toward the stern, very close to the casual restaurant, staircases, and elevator. Our cabin is huuuuge (D. J. Trump's favorite word): of the two



adjoining rooms, one has the bed and the other has the couch, reading chairs, and table; an identical dresser is in each, as are identical closets, sinks, and toilets. One thing new this year: one of the rooms has a shower, the other a bathtub. Lee likes this! So, we take advantage of all of this space by each using his/her personal bathroom and his/her personal dresser and closet; we do, however, share the bed.

This being a French ship, each of the decks has a name: Deck 2 *Cassiopee*; Deck 3 *Andromède*, Deck 4 *Pégase*, Deck 5 *Equinoxe*, Deck 6 *Solstice*, Deck 7 *Céleste*. And as if the Greek themed names were not enough, the two restaurants are called *Le Pythéas* (Deck 6) and *L'Eclipse* (Deck 2). But wait - though these names come from Ponant's *Journal de Bord* (Daily Program) for April 14, a separate information sheet from the company lists the restaurants' names as *Le Rodriguess* (Deck 6) and *Le Coromandel* (Deck 2). I'm suspicious - these names, despite the use of a French article, do not sound very French!

The captain, however, is most definitely French: Étienne Garcia and nearly all of his crew are also French, although a few central European names (and one Austrian, as we'll note later) appear. At the front desk, we are issued small pieces of paper with the login name and password for 100 minutes of internet use; as slow as the ship's connection is, it's easy to spend the 100 minutes just waiting for conventional web sites to load. The good news is that Tauck travelers have unlimited free internet, so it's possible to get new login names and passwords when needed, as we will do two or three more times.

Shortly after entering our cabin and beginning to unpack, there is a knock at the door by our butler, Hassan. We have a butler??? Who knew? And it's a good thing we do, because shortly after finishing our unpacking, we have a safe that malfunctions. This seems to happen to us on every trip and on every ship, ranging from *Le Lyrial* and Uniworld's *S.S. Catherine* to the larger ships of Regent Seven Seas and even some hotel rooms. So what goes wrong this time? Well, following carefully the instructions* inside

*Here they are, *verbatim*: (1) push the red button inside the safe and release it; (2) enter a new code (3 to 8 letters) followed by button B; (3) enter your code followed by button B once again; a green light must appear on the panel; (4) your safe is now ready to use.

the safe, the bolts spring out when the safe is still open, thus preventing our closing it. (With every new safe, we always test our ability - or lack thereof - with nothing of value inside, and that's the case this time.) So I call the Reception Desk (on Deck 3) and explain my problem. They promise to send someone to fix it - and who shows up but Hassan. He has a set of maybe 50 keys on a ring; he fumbles around and selects one (my suspicion is that they're identical, but what do I know?), opens a panel, inserts the key, and *voilà* restores the safe to its starting position. In my defense, I tell him that I followed the printed instructions *to the letter*. Apparently we were supposed to close the safe door first. But nowhere in the

instructions, Your Honor, *nowhere* does it say "close the safe door." Also, we were supposed to turn a black knob, the existence of which is not even mentioned in the instructions! Your Honor, I rest my case. (Two days from now, Lee will experience an identical malfunction with the safe in the other room, even though she insists that she was following the revised directions and did have the door closed. The indefatigable Hassan will come to our rescue, once again.)

At 5:30, we are summoned to the theater for an introductory speech (in French and in English) by Simone Mele, the Cruise Director. He's not as personable as was Glenn O'Neill, the Cruise Director on *Le Lyrial*. His jokes are less well-received and he doesn't have the human touch that Glenn had. But we endure. We're then sent back to our cabins to await the ship's alarm, signaling that we are to don our life jackets and re-assemble in the theater. We dutifully follow orders. After a while, we are led outside onto the deck where the lifeboats are located. Finally, we are dismissed as the ship is not sinking, after all.

I'm feeling rather ill, so I take two more Mucinex along with nasal spray and medicated eye drops before dinner. This is becoming really really annoying. At 7:00, we head to the buffet restaurant on Deck 6. The ship departs at just about that time; we expect to be in Sakaiminato at 7:00 tomorrow morning, 122 nautical miles* (NM) away. At dinner, we eat with a couple from the D.C. area and with the same couple

*"What is a *nautical mile*?" I hear you ask. Well, you should have learned the answer to that one from my travelogue on last year's Adriatic cruise. So should I! But I confess that I've forgotten. So here is the answer, "purloined" from the 2015 travelogue. Wikipedia gives this extremely "clear" description: "A nautical mile (symbol M, NM or nmi) is a unit of distance that is approximately the length that spans one minute of arc on the surface of the Earth, measured along any meridian. By international agreement it has been set at 1,852 metres exactly (about 6,076 feet)." Now aren't you glad you asked? Perhaps it would be clearer if I told you that 1 NM is 1.1507794480235 mile? (The laptop's conversion calculator doesn't know about significant figures. does it?) I think it would be safe to say, simply, that a nautical mile is a bit longer than a mile by about 15%. Now some smarty-pants is going to ask "What is meant by a *knot*?" Well, my children, one knot is a speed of one nautical mile per hour. Right? Right. That's 1.852 km per hour or 1.151 miles per hour.

from California with whom we ate at the reception dinner in Kyoto. We go to bed at 10:20 and sleep straight through to 6:30.

Friday, April 15

First the health news: my eyes are still tearing but less than on previous days; and my congestion is less ... well, congested. (I continue with my medicated eye drops, my inhaler, and Mucinex.) When we awaken, we are already docked at Sakaiminato. It is a partly cloudy day with some haze. We'll stay docked here until 7:00 tonight when we depart for Busan, South Korea. Following a buffet breakfast in the Deck 6 restaurant, we head to the Main Lounge on Deck 3 for a 9:15 departure; the Daily Program notifies us that we'll need to remove shoes for the morning activity.

On board the bus, our guide is Koto, a delightful woman with excellent English and a superb sense of humor who will join us two more times in other ports. She is the master of large posters that she holds aloft in the front of the bus. One poster explains the phenomenon (and correct pronunciation) of *GeGeGe no Kitaro* (see the explanation next page). Another teaches us the fight song for the Hiroshima Carp.*

*There are twelve teams in Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB), the professional baseball league. They are arrayed in two six-team divisions: The Central League and The Pacific League. Eleven of the twelve are owned by wealthy corporations or individuals. The Hiroshima team is not. We're told that it is owned by the citizens of Hiroshima, but in fact Wikipedia tells us "The team is primarily owned by the Matsuda family, led by Hajime Matsuda, who is a descendant of Mazda founder Jujiro Matsuda. Mazda is the largest single shareholder (34.2%), which is less than the portion owned by the Matsuda family (about 60%). Because of that, Mazda is not considered as the owner firm. However, the

company connection is highlighted in the club name—until 1984, Mazda's official name was Toyo Kogyo Co., Ltd." Whatever, it *is* true that it has the smallest payroll, plays in the smallest stadium, and has not won the league championship since 1991. Fun fact - Randy Johnson played for the Carp in 1987-8. Alas, this is not the Hall of Fame pitcher who won 303 games and struck out 4,875 batters in the major leagues, but rather a journeyman infielder who had three mediocre seasons with Atlanta in the 1980s.

The cheer is really difficult to learn, but somehow we master it: "Carp Carp Carp Hiroshima. Hiroshima Carp!"* (Interestingly, the city's name has the second syllable stressed in the first sentence, the first

*Of course YouTube has it. How could it not? Check out this video of the 7th inning stretch at a Carp game: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeZHkbKR3lw>

syllable in the second. Koto confirms that both pronunciations are correct.) One of the passengers asks Koto why she seems to be adding an -oo- sound to the end of Carp in the cheer. She has no answer, but your 'umble srvt (moi) found the following online: the Japanese words, transliterated for English speakers, are "Kaapu kaapu kaapu Hiroshima, Hiroshima Kaapu,"

Junko, Koto and other tour guides teach us useful Japanese phrases, such as *konnichiwa* = hello, *ohayo gozaimasu* = good morning, *sayonara* = goodbye, *arigato* = thank you, and (most important) *benjo wa doko desu ka?* = where is the toilet? (OK, nobody included that one, but they should have.) Junko also had told us that the principal visitors to Japan are from China. They arrive on large cruise ships and spend much of their time shopping. Why? Because they know that when they buy name brand items (Louis Vuitton, Prada, Gucci, etc.) they are not getting cheap knock-offs. And she suspects that they arrive on cruise ships because there is no limit on the amount of baggage that is brought back home.

This city is the home of Shigeru Mizuki, the creator of *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, a character created in 1960 whose image is displayed in comic books, anime, video games, manga, and on posters all over the country. *Kitaro*, his short name, is a spirit monster whose father was an eyeball! This explains Koto's use of an eyeball on the pole that she holds above her head as we walk about. The bus takes us down Kitaro Road where there are some 100 bronze statues of the characters from Mizuki's stories. The pictures taken from a moving bus and posted to Picasa are somewhat disappointing.



Our destination, this morning, is the Matsue Castle (also known as the Black Castle). Built in 1607, it is one of only twelve original castles remaining in Japan. (There are other castles of more recent vintage that have been erected but only twelve trace their origins to earlier centuries.) To get to the castle, we need to climb some 6.02×10^{23} * steps, showing no fear of the Samurai warriors who guard the entrance

*Chemistry students all over the world will recognize this as Avogadro's number. It's a big number. A very big number. For example, the population of Earth is about 7×10^9 , so it would take 8.6×10^{13} Earth populations to equal Avogadro's number. Or, as another example, an Avogadro's number of organic chemistry textbooks would cover the surface of the United States to a depth of 200 miles (which many students would agree is an idea whose time has come).

(see Picasa). Once inside, we remove our shoes* and we begin climbing. The castle's keep houses a

*Tauck's Daily Program, on every occasion but today, warned that we'd need to remove shoes at one or more venues. There was no mention of this for Matsue Castle, so I not only wear my lace-up shoes but also have no shoe horn. Also, I have a hole in the tip of one sock. Tim, proving to be the superior tour director that he is, finds a collection of shoe horns at the entrance/exit to the castle.

museum of ancient arms, armor, saddles, and other artifacts. There are six levels, each of which is more difficult to reach than the preceding one because the wooden steps are getting steeper and more slippery. Think pull-down staircase from the attic in order to imagine something comparable. But finally ... *finally* we

make it to the top level. I get some nice photos of the town from the sixth floor, but then it's necessary to begin the perilous descent. So that I don't slip, I hold onto both handrails (where there *are* handrails) and make it to the bottom. Others, less mountain-goat than I, choose to back down while holding the handrails. The good news is that no tourists were injured in the ascent and descent. The bad news is that my callused feet are hurting terribly and my calves are burning. Tourism is not for wimps!!

We return to the ship at 12:30. My eyes are itching and my nose is stuffy, so I take some more medication. Once again, I try to access MyChart to see if Dr. Khan has answered my inquiry, but (as before) no internet connection can be made; all that I see is "proxy error." After a quick lunch on Deck 6, we return to the bus at 1:50 for the nearly hour-long ride to Adachi Museum of Art, described in its brochure as Japan's Top Garden. It is a most unusual venue - most of the time we walk the halls inside a building that has huge picture windows looking out on various parts of the surrounding landscape; in a few cases, there is no window pane separating the viewer from the scene. Apparently it is the intention of the curators to use these openings to "frame" what one sees. In any event, it is very striking and very beautiful. The grounds are immaculately cared for (we see a video of workers using tiny scissors to prune one of the bushes). There are also indoor displays, largely of lacquerware. The pictures at Picasa show the meticulously manicured bushes, trees, flower beds, and walking paths - very unnatural but also very striking.

The second floor justifies, I suppose, calling it an Art Museum because there are walls of paintings by Japanese artists. It is quite traditional, with many ink drawings of landscapes, often involving Mount Fuji. There is one particularly striking watercolor - titled "Felicitations." it is one of several showing a Japanese tree with branches and blossoms and with birds standing on the branches - not realistic images of birds (as one might expect), but cartoon birds of the type that one might see in a video game. Picture-taking by visitors is not allowed, nor could I find this painting online.

At 3:30, we board the bus and return to the ship. On the trip back to the port, Tim informs us that last night an earthquake of magnitude 6.2 rattled the island of Kyushu and destroyed several buildings; this is only about 100 km from where we are. There'll be another quake, magnitude 7.0, in the same region tomorrow. The first quake killed 9 people, the second one 16.

For reasons that are not at all clear, before boarding *Le Soléal* this afternoon, we need to pass through immigration and customs, even though we are still in Japan. I suppose this is because the next time we leave the ship we'll be in South Korea.

The "big event" for tonight is the captain's "welcome reception and gala dinner" which is scheduled to begin at 7:00. Captain Garcia, however, decides that it's more important for him to steer the ship out of the harbor than to attend the reception. I agree wholeheartedly. He finally arrives at about 7:15 and over the next 45 minutes everyone, in turn, gets to stand next to him and have a picture taken. (I suspect that he enjoys this as little as we do, but it's included in the admission price so who can complain.) After being photographed, we sit in the theater and enjoy the munchies and champagne that are being offered. Finally the picture-taking is over and Captain Garcia takes the stage to greet us all (didn't he do this just yesterday?) and to introduce the ship's officers. This takes some time, as all of the introductions are done in French and in English. As I mentioned on p. 18, all of the senior officers but one are French. The exception is Executive Chef Erwin Unterberger who, Captain Garcia informs us, is Austrian. Suddenly, two very well-turned out women in the second row stand up and start cheering for the poor man. How strange, think I to myself. Later in the trip, we'll learn (from a wonderful Australian man with whom we share common political views) that the women are Trump supporters and are very much pro-gun. Their view is that the U.S. (and every other country) has fallen into moral and political decline because of "weak" leadership, that what is needed is a strong man ... like Trump. (I don't need to remind you, Dear Reader, that Austria was the birthplace of one Adolf Hitler who was, indeed, a strong man.)

Finally we proceed to the Deck 2 formal restaurant for a fixed menu meal. Each of the courses tends to be on the "precious" side, but I have confess that the beef for the main course is as tender and tasty as any I've ever eaten. The downside is that this meal finds us still in the restaurant at 10:30, although I

confess that it isn't the slow service that held us back. Rather the "culprit" is an extended conversation with two delightful Australians (not the ones mentioned in the preceding paragraph), he a practicing lawyer and she a law professor, both of them Jewish and immigrants from totalitarian countries in Europe. We find that we and they have much in common, including an intense dislike of one Donald J. Trump.

Back to our room, Lee is putting items in the safe when the same malfunction (see p. 18) occurs. It's too late to call for help now, so we put items in the other safe (the one that's still functioning) and tomorrow we'll ask to have the remarkable Hassan come up to get us out of our dilemma. We collapse into bed at 11:30 and sleep through until morning.

Saturday, April 16

The sailing from Sakaiminato to Busan, South Korea covers 220 NM; we don't expect to reach port until early this afternoon. For breakfast, we decide to avoid the buffet on Deck 6 and opt, instead, for the lighter fare in the Deck 3 lounge where there is coffee, juice, fruit, and pastries. It's a quieter place than either of the restaurants and also faster. We'll do the same every morning from now on. Occasionally, we'll be joined by friends we've already met (some of whom seem to be having their second breakfast) and at other times there will be some Tauck passengers who are stand-offish and barely acknowledge our presence. "Anti-Semites!" I say. The only downside is that on some mornings the non-Tauck passengers will congregate here before beginning a very early excursion, but still we're able to find places to sit and enjoy our "meal." As for today's medical news, I have post-nasal drip, unfocused eyes, and a stuffed nose, but none of these is likely life-threatening. Lee is suffering as well. Damned allergies!

We stop at the reception desk to report yesterday's safe deposit box malfunction. At 9:00 there is a lecture for Tauck passengers on "Japanese Life," delivered by the wonderful Junko. She is entertaining and informative - what more could one want out of a lecturer, eh?

We fill out forms for immigration into South Korea and for our return to Japan. Tim warns us that the process upon disembarkation is complicated, that we should just follow the lead of whatever the person in front of us is doing. There will be two forms, one of which is for a "family group" so Tim cautions that such groups stay close to one another as they pass through immigration and customs.

Perhaps you are wondering "Why are you going all this distance to visit South Korea, when one could easily imagine an itinerary that stops only at Japanese ports?" Well, my uninformed Dear Reader, clearly you are not conversant with maritime law! (Tim had mentioned this on yesterday's bus ride, but I needed to learn more and so I do so using the web after returning home.)

There are, what are called, *cabotage laws* (which have nothing to do with preparing cole slaw). Many countries have them. In the U.S., according to a helpful web site, "The law in question is the Merchant Marine Act of 1920. This is a U.S. Federal statute which regulates maritime commerce in U.S. waters and between U.S. ports. Section 27, known as the Jones Act, deals with the concept of 'cabotage' (coastal shipping). The law requires that all goods transported by water between U.S. ports be carried in U.S.-flag ships, constructed in the United States, owned by U.S. citizens, and crewed by U.S. citizens." This law also applies to transporting of "goods" like people. So, for example, a foreign-registered ship (like the French *Le Soléal*) cannot just operate in Japan but has to "touch" (as Tim put it) another country. Russia and North Korea would have been possibilities, but are not likely to be high on the list.

From another web site: "Any guest who insists on embarking (due to unforeseen circumstances outside the guest's control, for missing the ship) or *debarking* (for emergency reasons), which violates the Jones Act, will accept responsibility for any resulting penalties (\$300 USD per person). Important Note: Guests cannot pre-plan or purposely embark or *debark* a ship in a U.S. port that will violate the Jones Act." Does "debark" sound weird to you? Apparently it's a legitimate synonym for disembark, but it sounds to me as if one is removing a dog's vocal cords. That aside, the entirety of the instructions within the quotation marks would receive a grade of C from any teacher who cares about syntax and grammar.

Back in our room after the lecture, we do some reading and I make an outstanding discovery. Because I have trouble reading with my glasses on, even when increasing the size of the font in the Kindle, I take my glasses off ... and I can read perfectly! I feel like someone who has cast away his crutches after visiting Lourdes. Are the tears that fill my eyes responsible for changing my lenses enough that glasses are not needed? All that I can say is *Mirabile Dictu!!!* (the first time in the history of my travelogues where I've employed this useful Latin phrase twice, the first having been on p. 1).

At 11:30 we have some lunch in the deck 6 restaurant (salad for me, salad plus a hot main course plus dessert for Lee - and I thought that she wasn't feeling well). We dock in Busan a little after noon. Nearby is the Maritime Museum, an unusual structure in the shape of a huge container ship. Busan is Korea's second largest city with a population of about 3.5 million. According to Wikipedia, "Busan has Korea's largest beach and longest river, and is home to the world's largest department store, the Shinsegae Centum City." Oh, wow!

Tim's group is the first to "debark" (at 1:00) - and after negotiating immigration and customs we board a bus where we meet our tour guide, Grace. This is the most tricked-out (pimped?) bus on which I've ever ridden. Pictures at Picasa, from both the beginning and the end of our excursion, reveal a garish overhead display of purple flowers vines, and sea creatures(?) with green/red/yellow/blue flashing lights above and below; and (at the front of the bus) a female singer bathed in colors that fluctuate from purple to orange to green to blue ...

As the bus proceeds through the city, we note a truly garish profusion of signs and ads, all written in some foreign language (which I assume is Korean). Our first stop* is the Jagaichi Fish Market, which begins on

*As the bus pulls up to the curb, the nice Australian lawyer (male) of the pair of nice Australian lawyers (p. 22) stands to retrieve a backpack. The bus then lurches forward and he is thrown against a very hard rail. He is in a great pain (it will turn out that he has five broken ribs), so Tim makes arrangements for him to return to the ship where the onboard doctor can examine him. The pain notwithstanding, he actually rejoins the group for its various excursions - not tomorrow, but the day after. These Aussies are tough!

a city street and continues inside a huge building. There are water-filled tanks upon tanks upon tanks, each manned by people wearing serious boots and rubber aprons. The variety of fish and seafood is overwhelming. I've posted numerous pictures at Picasa. At one point a small octopus escapes from its tank (and is immediately retrieved by the owner) but I'm too slow to capture it on film (or memory stick).

At about 2:30, we return to the bus which takes us to the UN Memorial Cemetery. (On the way, the bus ascends a spiraling ramp that takes us to a very high bridge.) The memorial is located on beautiful and well-kept grounds. Soldiers from sixteen countries fought here during the 1950s war; some 2300 are buried here, but only 36 from the U.S.; most of the Americans are in Arlington. There are several meaningful and powerful sculptures here on the grounds. There is also a wall with the names of the war-dead, very reminiscent of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC.

We are back onboard the ship at 4:30, in time for a lecture by one Thomas Shinn on "South Korea's Relations with Japan, China, North Korea, and the United States." The presentation is halting and not well-rehearsed; and the take-home message (that the U.S. should invade North Korea *now*) is not well received, at least by this listener.

At 6:30 we set sail for Nagasaki, 220 NM, back across the Korea Strait. At 7:00, we have the buffet dinner in the Deck 6 restaurant, joined by a very pleasant English couple,* he a retired MD and she a

*According to Lee's notes (and who would dare challenge her), it was this couple and not the Australians (p. 21) who "outed" the Trump sympathizers from Austria. Indeed, their views may be even more extreme than we imagined. They are convinced that Hillary Clinton murdered (or at least ordered the murder of) her friend and White House Counsel Vince Foster in 1993. And that the

Tavistock Institute is plotting world domination. Now I think that I'm pretty much up on most current events, but I'd not heard of either this institute or the alleged conspiracy. But the world is filled with all sorts of folk and some of them are convinced that unless we stop the evil-doers, all is lost. If you've got the stomach to read some of the conspiratorial crap that appears online, you can sample it at various web sites. I'm not going to do the courtesy of giving you any URLs.

nurse. The ship is encountering rough waters, which become rougher as the evening progresses. We go to bed at 10:30 to the rock-and-roll motion of the ship and the sounds of creaking doors, water washing over the bow, and bottles of water in our room falling over and rolling about. It's a real adventure to maintain my balance when I get up during the night to use the bathroom.

Sunday, April 17

We get up early because we expect to disembark at 8:15 and will have to face the weird immigration process when re-entering Japan. When the alarm goes off at 6:15, it's clear that we are still plowing our way across the choppy waters. The reason? During the night, the captain reduced the ship's speed so as to keep the rocking motion to a minimum. He announces that instead of arriving at 7:30, we're not likely to reach Nagasaki until 9:00. So I guess that we'll not disembark at 8:15 after all.

The lurching is considerably less than it had been, but still brushing teeth and taking a shower do present some interesting difficulties. I conclude that we are *not* seasoned sea people. Well, the ship finally arrives, we disembark, pass through immigration, and are on the bus by 10:15. Today's tour guide is Yukiko. Nagasaki (population about 500,000) is a very busy seaport with lots of large ships and the cranes to load/unload them. The city's name is well known to Americans because it was the target of the second atomic bomb in 1945. According to Wikipedia:

For 12 months prior to the nuclear attack, Nagasaki had experienced five small-scale air attacks by an aggregate of 136 US planes which dropped a total of 270 tons of high explosive, 53 tons of incendiary, and 20 tons of fragmentation bombs While the damage from these few bombs was relatively small, it created considerable concern in Nagasaki and a number of people, principally school children, were evacuated to rural areas for safety, thus reducing the population in the city at the time of the atomic attack.

On the day of the nuclear strike on Thursday, August 9, 1945, the population in Nagasaki was estimated to be 263,000, which consisted of 240,000 Japanese residents, 10,000 Korean residents, 2,500 conscripted Korean workers, 9,000 Japanese soldiers, 600 conscripted Chinese workers, and 400 Allied POWs. That day, the Boeing B-29 Superfortress Bockscar, commanded by Major Charles Sweeney, departed from Tinian's North Field just before dawn, this time carrying a plutonium bomb, code named 'Fat Man.' The primary target for the bomb was Kokura, with the secondary target, Nagasaki, if the primary target was too cloudy to make a visual sighting. When the plane reached Kokura at 9:44 a.m., the city was obscured by clouds and smoke, as the nearby city of Yawata had been firebombed on the previous day. Unable to make a bombing attack on visual due to the clouds and smoke and with limited fuel, the plane left the city at 10:30 a.m. for the secondary target. After 20 minutes, the plane arrived at 10:50 a.m. over Nagasaki, but the city was also concealed by clouds. Desperately short of fuel and after making a couple of bombing runs without obtaining any visual target, the crew was forced to use radar in order to drop the bomb. At the last minute, the opening of the clouds allowed them to make visual contact with a racetrack in Nagasaki, and they dropped the bomb on the city's Urakami Valley midway between the Mitsubishi Steel and Arms Works in the south, and the Mitsubishi-Urakami Ordnance Works in the north. After 53 seconds of its release, the bomb exploded at 11:02 a.m. at an approximate altitude of 1,800 feet. This was the second and, to date, the last use of nuclear weaponry in combat, and also the second detonation of a plutonium bomb. The first was tested in central New Mexico, USA.

Within less than a second after the detonation, the north of the city was destroyed. Roughly

39,000–80,000 people were killed. About half of these died immediately, while the other half suffered lingering deaths ... The industrial damage in Nagasaki was high, leaving 68–80 percent of the non-dock industrial production destroyed. The bomb was somewhat more powerful than the 'Little Boy' bomb dropped over Hiroshima, but because of Nagasaki's more uneven terrain, there was less damage.

At 10:45, we reach the Nagasaki National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims. On foot, descend via a spiral path, much like that at New York's Guggenheim museum, going backward in time until we read 1945. The first sign that we see indoors reads (in 12 languages) is "Nagasaki must be the last place exposed to an atomic bomb." Inside there are displays, videos, artifacts collected after the blast. We then proceed outside to walk the grounds of the Nagasaki Peace Park with its powerful sculptures and memorials donated by many countries https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagasaki_Peace_Park. (An information sign identifies December 8, rather than December 7, as Pearl Harbor Day. Well, it's correct, given that Japan is 19 hours - and often a full day - ahead of EDT. And it's not as bad as the time that President George H. W. Bush said that Pearl Harbor was attacked on September 7.)

Following lunch onboard the ship, Tim's group leaves at 1:30 to visit Dejima Island and Glover Garden. (Lee decides to nurse her allergies, so she stays behind.) According to Wikipedia:

Dejima was a small fan-shaped artificial island built in the bay of Nagasaki in 1634 by local merchants. This island, which was formed by digging a canal through a small peninsula, remained as the single place of direct trade and exchange between Japan and the outside world during the Edo period. Dejima was built to constrain foreign traders as part of *sakoku*, the self-imposed isolationist policy. Originally built to house Portuguese traders, it was used by the Dutch as a trading post from 1641 until 1853.

We wander about the streets of Dejima, enter several of the houses, enjoy the appearance of the people dressed in the costumes of the time (as well as modern couples in traditional dress and carrying selfie-sticks.) There is also a museum with artifacts from the 17th century.

The bus then takes us a half-hour away to Glover Garden, but to get there one has to ascend a gentle slope that has shops of every imaginable kind on both sides, all there to tempt the unwary tourist to part with his/her fortune. I resist ... but I cannot resist taking pictures of the displays. And then it's up some thousand of stone staircases, interspersed from time to time with escalators, until we reach the summit.

According to the promotional material we're given, Thomas Blake Glover was a Scotsman who came to Nagasaki in 1859 where he made a fortune in shipbuilding, coal mining, and the tea trade. In the park are the Glover residence (part of which we're allowed to explore) and paths that lead past gardens and ponds, the latter well-stocked with carp and koi. There is a statue of the composer Giacomo Puccini. Our guide Yukiko's fanciful story notwithstanding, Wikipedia bursts the bubble by writing "Thomas Glover has been linked with Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*, which is set in Nagasaki, but there is no historical evidence to support this claim, except the fact that, in some photographs, Glover's wife Tsuru appears wearing a kimono with a butterfly design on the sleeve."

Although we could have walked from the gardens to the ship, the lazy among us choose to ride the tour bus. We get back onboard at 4:45.

A new crisis!! As Roseanne Roseanadana (the alter ego of the infinitely creative Gilda Radner) used to say, in response to Jane Curtin, "Well, Jane, it just goes to show you, it's always something — if it ain't one thing, it's another." That's how I feel* when I get back to Deck 6 only to discover that my key card

*The same thing happened, more than once, on the Adriatic cruise last fall. The card is easily demagnetized. I've been careful to keep it as far away as possible from my magnetic Tauck pin. Perhaps some other "demon" is responsible for this.

won't open the door. I ring the bell to our cabin, but Lee doesn't hear it (she's taking a nap), so I go to Deck 3 where they perform some magic ritual with the card and return it to me. But it still doesn't work. This time Lee does hear both the bell and my frantic knocking and lets me in.

At 6:30, we depart Nagasaki and sail 166 NM to Kagoshima. The captain promises smoother sailing than last night. In the Deck 6 buffet restaurant, we're joined by a delightful couple from Australia, both immigrants from England some 40 years ago; she is a midwife and he is a professional cartoonist, mainly involved in providing visual images to help companies tell their story and deliver their message. Like all of the other Aussies whom we've met on this cruise, the two are flaming tree-hugging pinko commie liberals. In my memory, he's the one who outed the right-wing Austrian women (p. 21); Lee is convinced that it was the English couple at dinner last night (p. 23). Regardless of which is the correct version, Lee and I are in agreement that these Aussies are the ones who will "out" an American couple with whom we'll have dinner on April 19 and 20. Be patient, Dear Reader, and all will be revealed. We talk with the Aussies for a good two hours. The man carries a sketch pad with him on the excursions. He shows us some excellent drawings of his tour guide, Charlie, and of some of his fellow passengers. He also drew a pair of Samurai warriors, one labeled 11th century and the other 21st century. They are identical, except for a cell phone in the hand of the latter. Following our conversation, we retreat to our room and get to bed early at 9:45.

Monday, April 18

We sleep until 6:45. At 7:00, the ship docks at Kagoshima; the captain's announcement contains the gloomy assessment that it may rain today. Boo! As before, we eat a light breakfast in the Deck 3 lounge. Upon returning to our room, I discover that my key card won't work. Again! The desk issues me a brand new card. It works ... for now. And yesterday's "miracle" where I regain my ability to read without glasses persists today. Can one hope that the change is permanent? Unlikely, but ...

Our group leaves the ship at 9:10. On the pier, there are cheerful vendors who are hawking flags of many countries; one vendor sports a pink Afro wig. We board a bus (with local guide Michiko) and drive to the Chiran Peace Museum for Kamikaze Pilots, about 45 minutes away. What a strange thing to celebrate! But somehow it all makes sense. Both outside and inside the museum there are planes from World War II, but picture-taking is not allowed indoors.* For obvious reasons, the planes belonging to the

*Displaying her independent spirit and reluctance to follow restrictions, Lee takes pictures of the toilets in the public restroom. These are posted at Picasa.

"successful" pilots are not on display. I (and several others) remark that these were the first suicide bombers, preceding by half a century the people who attacked NYC on 9/11. This museum is not an official government venue; rather it was begun by the families of the pilots as a memorial to them.

We learn that over one thousand pilots "sacrificed themselves in the name of the emperor" (as one brochure describes it). What I didn't know is that each pilot had a specific U.S. Navy vessel to attack; if this proved impossible (e.g., if the weather was bad), the pilot returned to base. But if he returned with his plane too many times, he was shot. What I also did not know was that the families who lived on the base were required to kill themselves at war's end, lest they be captured and taken prisoner. (I can't find confirmation of this online.)

At about 10:45, the bus takes us on a 15-minute drive to the Chiran Samurai Gardens where we get to inspect Samurai houses and learn a bit about the history of these warriors. As the Picasa pictures show, Captain Garcia's rain prediction was correct: many people are sporting umbrellas or have hoods pulled over their heads. We walk the narrow streets of the Samurai village, peek inside the courtyards, ooh and aah over the gardens, and sample some green tea (which at least one of us refuses).

PUN ALERT: At one of the Samurai gardens we see a Japanese yew. I rename it Embraceable yew.

ANOTHER PUN ALERT: Lee points to a tree and informs her ignorant soul-mate that "Those are horsetails" to which the man of the family replies "Well, at least they're not a horse's ass." (Yes, I know, this is not a pun. Deal with it.)

And then, at long last, we are rewarded with a tour of the Satsumamusō distillery* that makes *shōchū*, a

*An information sheet tells us that "Our *shōchū* was named "Satsuma-Musō" by an open call in Kagoshima prefecture and it means 'nothing matches to in Satsuma' in Japanese" ... (if not also in recognizable English). Also, after telling us that the spirit can be diluted with hot water or drunk straight or over ice, we are informed "Please dilute *shōchū* as you like. Japanese people like to." (Isn't something missing from this sentence?)

vodka-like distilled spirit made from yams! And even better, we get to sample some of the product. Well, it *is* pungent, but it's also an acquired taste. We don't buy any of the semi-lethal stuff but Lee cannot resist buying some potato chips.

We get back to the ship for a quick lunch and at 1:30 we are on the move again. A close-up view (confirmed in a Picasa photo) tells us that what I earlier thought was a pink Afro wig atop a vendor is actually a hat with pink roses. But the effect on us visitors is similar. The drive takes us to a ferry terminal for the short ride to Sakurajima, the site of an active volcano. Well, "active" is a relative word - although visitors earlier this year did witness smoke coming from the crater and some even saw actual eruptions, we could only watch a film about it. But we do have the much-treasured opportunity of climbing many steps and walking up steep inclines before we can return to the ferry. There are ash-covered rocks everywhere (so maybe this really is an active volcano); in fact, we are told that school children carry umbrellas or even wear hard hats during an eruption so as not to be covered with ash.

We are back onboard *Le Soléal* at 4:30. At 5:30, we look down from our balcony onto the pier. Most of the flag-waving vendors are still present. But also there is a small orchestra called The Little Cherry Jazz Band. These are all high school students, ages 10-15, and they are excellent musicians. Represented are trombones, trumpets, flutes, saxophones, electric bass, keyboard, drums, and cymbals. Even when it begins to rain hard, their spirit is not quenched and they continue to perform. In typical jazz band fashion, soloists come forward to do brief riffs on their instruments; my favorite was a diminutive girl who played a bass sax that was almost as large as she was.

At 6:00, the ship sets sail for Uwajima, 227 NM away. At 7:00, we have dinner in the buffet restaurant on Deck 6, apparently alone - at least neither Lee nor I mentions any dinner partners in our notes. At 8:30 we are back in our cabin and by 10:30 to bed.

Tuesday, April 19

As we get up, I notice that we are still at sea. Captain Garcia announces that we'll not reach Uwajima until about noon. But does Tauck let us relax for the morning? Certainly not! Following our now traditional light breakfast on Deck 3, we proceed to the theater at 9:00 for a lecture by Junko on "The Japanese House" and then at 10:30 to the Observatory Bar on Deck 6 for a lesson in origami. Following breakfast, I do some Kindle reading and, as on the past two days, I find that I can read without glasses. Hooray!

Junko's lecture is delightful. I am amazed at how small Japanese houses typically are, how compact the furniture, and how minimal the appliances in the kitchen. But of most interest is the bathroom. Japanese tend to take showers to wash themselves, then step into a bathtub to relax. This has very little impact, today, but will be highly significant when we get to our hotel in Tokyo on April 23 (*vide infra*). As for the origami lesson, Elise and Tim try to teach all of us how to fold colored paper to make a crane. Lee and I find ourselves in Elise's group and I blame our instructor for my ineptness in following her spoken and written directions; I'm certain that under Tim's guidance I would have been a star. Or not. My two attempts lead to objects that vaguely resemble cranes but look more like Sherman tanks. Oh, well.

We have a quick lunch at 11:30 so that we can board the bus at 12:35. Our guide is the remarkable Koto, back with us for the second time. There are no fewer than four activities planned for the afternoon, in this order: (1) visit a pearl farm; (2) stroll through a food market; (3) visit a shrine with its flying squirrels; (4) visit a bullfighting ring. As we disembark, there are drummers on the pier, using the kinds of drums and sticks that we became so adept with at the beginning of this tour. Their outfits are flashy, but don't look especially "traditional." Also present to wish us well is a "mascot" who looks something like Hello Kitty with an early 20th century leather football helmet and carrying a fish of some sort. The pictures at Picasa reveal all.

After about a 30-minute drive, we are at the pearl farm. It is a beautiful sunny day and the setting is, of course, right on the water. First, we are shown how a large number of oysters are pulled from the sea in nets and how the shell is opened, sometimes (but certainly not always) to reveal a pearl inside. A pearl farmer talks about this work and Koto translates. Then, it's indoors to the "hospital" where a delicate operation (equivalent to surgery) takes place. A technician removes pieces of the mantle from a living oyster and uses it to prime several dozen other oysters which are also given a ceramic ball to serve as the nucleus on which to make a pearl. Wikipedia explains the difference between natural and cultured pearls:

A pearl is formed when the mantle tissue is injured by a parasite, an attack of a fish, or another event that damages the external fragile rim of the shell of a mollusk shell bivalve or gastropod. In response, the mantle tissue of the mollusk secretes nacre into the pearl sac, a cyst that forms during the healing process. Chemically speaking, this is calcium carbonate and a fibrous protein called conchiolin. As the nacre builds up in layers of minute aragonite tablets, it fills the growing pearl sac and eventually forms a pearl. *Natural* pearls are formed by nature, more or less by chance. On the other hand, *cultured* pearls are human creations formed by inserting a tissue graft from a donor oyster, upon which a pearl sac forms, and the inner side precipitates calcium carbonate, in the form of nacre or 'mother-of-pearl'.

We leave the pearl farm at about 1:40 and drive some 20 minutes to an small indoor market that sells packaged products, fresh fruits and vegetables, and uncooked fish and meats. It's always fun to wander through food markets in other countries, no more so than in Japan where there are so many unfamiliar (and seemingly inedible) items for sale. Koto is a superb guide for explaining what these products are.

From there, it's about a 40-minute drive to *Musasabi-dera* (literally Flying Squirrel Temple). Shoes off, of course. We are welcomed by the presiding Buddhist priest, whose words are translated by Koto. Because the squirrels fly from the trees only after dark, he can only show us videos of the event. His father, also a priest, was an inventor - we get to see some of his inventions, although the claim that he invented the washing machine and a solar-powered generator demand confirmation from an independent source; all that I can find is <http://fais-japan.org/newpage31.html>* After viewing the inventions and

*At Picasa I've posted pictures of some of the inventions, but I'm not sure that the English titles really help us to figure out what they are or what they're good for. For example, there is a device called "earthquake gas suspend" and another "seasickness prevent room."

seeing the man's incredible collection of cameras and touring the garden, we are invited to have tea. The more adventurous (and limber) of our group sit on the floor at a long table; others of us, lacking in "limberosity" (if it's not a word, it should be!) sit on small stools. Having decided on April 12 that green tea is not to my liking, I choose not to partake of the stuff.

And then it's a 40-minute drive to the bull-fighting ring. Uwajima is one of nine venues in Japan that has such events. But unlike the brutal sport that takes place in Spain and Mexico, these fights involve bull vs. bull ... and no animal or human dies. We meet the champion bull, one that has vanquished foe after foe. (Vanquish seems to mean "if one bull walks away or refuses to fight" he is declared the loser.)

Tournaments consist of 10 matches. In a weird reversal of expectations, the owners of the losing bull receive more than 50% of the purse, the idea being so that he doesn't feel bad. Really? The champion bull is held tightly with ropes by two handlers but he seems "friendly" enough - indeed, he seems to have

taken a liking to a woman in our group who, when she strokes him under the chin, elicits a sexually-charged moan from the beast. (We think that he wants to mate with her, but the handlers prevent consummation of the act.)

And then it's back to the ship. Koto leads us in one more rehearsal of the Hiroshima Carp cheer (see p. 20) so that we can serenade our guide tomorrow morning. On the pier are dancers doing a stylized slow dance to the accompaniment of three musicians and a singer (see Picasa pictures). Lee and I read on our balcony until it gets too cold. Now there is a new problem - the miracle of reading without glasses has come to an ignominious end but I also cannot read *with* my glasses on (unless I greatly increase the font size on the Kindle). This is not good!

At 6:30 the ship sails to Hiroshima, 114 NM away. We eat dinner in the Deck 6 restaurant where we're joined by a man and woman who were students at University of Tennessee (she in botany, he in physics) at the time that Lee and I joined the chemistry department. The evening is pleasant enough (as will be tomorrow when we sit with them again), but a day or so later one of our new friends from Australia will tell us that this couple are gun-rights activists who are convinced that Obama wants to confiscate their guns. I'm relieved that this topic did not come up during the meal because it would really have poisoned the atmosphere. Following dinner, we return to our room and are in bed at 10:15.

Wednesday, April 20

We awake at 7:00. The ship is docked in Hiroshima. The day is sunny and relatively cool with an expected high of 58°. Following our traditional light breakfast on Deck 3, we return to our cabin to read; having finished the March issue of *The Progressive* last night, this morning I begin the April. We leave the ship at 9:10 for a full day's activity, including lunch at a very special sort of restaurant. Our guide today is Amy (full name Enami, or something like that). As she enters the bus, Tim leads us in the Hiroshima Carp cheer. Amy seems delighted.

A bus ride of some 30 minutes takes us to the ferry terminal for a short ride to Miyajima Island. Our destinations are the partly submerged Torii gate and the Itsukushima Shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. But first, we must walk through a shopping area (as is the case with nearly every shrine, temple, or whatever that we visit). I take many pictures of the goods for sale, but even more of the deer who wander everywhere, begging for food and making general nuisances of themselves. But they are cute.

Shoes do not have to be removed to view the Torii gate (unless one wants to get wet) but they are removed upon entering the shrine. It is guarded by "fierce" stone lions. One has its mouth open and the other has its closed; these represent, respectively, the first sound of an infant and that final gasp of a dying person. There is, as we've seen before, a place where one can cleanse oneself of one's sins with water before praying and entering the grounds. I do neither, probably a severe break of protocol.

Returning on the ferry and traveling to the center of Hiroshima by bus, we go to the 6th floor of a building called Full Focus where we encounter an *okonumiyaki* restaurant. This is a traditional Japanese meal, but each city has its own variant. Hiroshima's is reputed to be the best. We are broken up into groups of twelve. In each room, twelve patrons are seated around a heated griddle (see Picasa) which we are warned not to touch, as it is very very hot. A young man and a young woman are the cooks, he more than she. He begins by pouring some pancake batter at twelve locations, moving my left to my right. For each subsequent step, he returns to the origin and proceeds left to right. The second step is to dump cabbage on top of each pancake. Third, chopped-up tempura batter is placed on top of the pile. Fourth, a slice of bacon is laid across the heaping pile. Fifth, the entire thing is turned upside down so that the bacon is on the bottom and the pancake is on top. Sixth, piles of noodles are placed next to the main stack of food. Seventh, shrimp are cooked on the grill, then placed on the noodles and, using a large spatula, the main stack is lifted and put on top of the noodles. Eighth, an egg is cracked alongside the stack and allowed to fry. Ninth, the stack is turned over (the pancake now on the bottom) and the egg placed on top. And now, after turning the whole thing over and lathering on some sort of dark liquid (teriyaki sauce?), it's ready to

eat. Each person has a plate, a metal spatula with which to break off large sections, and chopsticks with which to eat. It is delicious!

A half-hour's bus ride takes us to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, located in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Last week (on April 11), U.S. Secretary of State had visited the Peace Memorial, along with diplomats from the G7. According to *The New York Times*, "Japan has never demanded that the United States apologize for the bombings, and Mr. Kerry did not do so on Monday. Still, the Japanese foreign minister, Fumio Kishida, who is from Hiroshima, called the visit by Mr. Kerry and other Group of 7 officials 'a historic day.' 'I want to deliver a strong and clear message of peace from Hiroshima to the world,' Mr. Kishida said."

As this journal is being written, we learn that President Obama will visit both Hiroshima and Nagasaki next month. Like attack dogs primed to spew out nonsense, GOP partisans bray that Obama is on his apology tour and will apologize to the Japanese just as he has done to the Arab world, to Iran, to Iraq, and to other peoples. Yet another vile canard, that one is. But it's out there and many gullible people believe it. According to an article in the May 8 *New York Times*, "Mr. Obama has sought to make fundamental changes in foreign policy by challenging long-held assumptions about relations with Cuba, Myanmar, and Iran, and many observers predict that he will do the same with Japan. He and his closest advisers are often disdainful of what they see as the think-tank consensus in Washington about how the United States should behave on the world stage. In a speech in Prague in 2009, Mr. Obama made clear that he believed the United States had a unique role arising from Hiroshima."

Before discussing what we see at the Peace Memorial Park, I want to return to the book that I've mentioned a couple of times, *Dave Barry Does Japan*. In chapter after chapter, Barry relates "laugh-out-loud" vignettes about the experiences he and his family have in their 1991 visit. But one chapter is stone-cold sober and it's the one about Hiroshima.

The Barry family visits Hiroshima on August 6, the anniversary of the atomic bomb attack, to attend the annual memorial ceremony. "There was an unusually large contingent of media people on hand for the ceremony because ... the mayor of Hiroshima ... was going to include, for the first time, a brief statement acknowledging Japan's guilt for the suffering it had caused in Asian countries during World War II." The speech was given and, in fact, the mayor did apologize for "the great suffering and despair on the peoples of Asia and the Pacific ... There can be no excuse for these actions ... starting with the attack on Pearl Harbor."

But, as Barry relates, then the Prime Minister and other politicians in identical dark suits rose to give "virtually identical, mechanical, banal speeches. All of them were sorry, from the bottom of their hearts ... offered condolences ... hoped it would never happen again... were in favor of peace. I guess politicians, from all over the world, attend some school where they learn how to reduce anything - *anything* - to verbal sludge." Following the speeches, Barry, et al., went to the memorial museum. "I found myself weeping, out of sorrow and helplessness and guilt. But I also felt anger. Because the way the museum presents it, the atomic bomb was like a lightning bolt - something nobody could foresee, and nobody could prevent. It was as though, one day, for no reason, the Americans came along, literally out of the blue, and did this horrible thing to these innocent people. I don't know if it's possible to justify what happened to Hiroshima - I certainly wouldn't try to justify it to the victims' families. But I found myself wanting to shout to the other museum visitors: Do you know WHY my country did this? Do you wonder what would make a civilized country do such a thing? I'm not sure that I know the answer, but the museum doesn't even address the question."

When we exit the bus, we are at the edge of a beautifully green expanse, but in the distance we get our first view of the "A-Bomb Dome," the iconic image with which everyone is familiar. This is what remains of the "Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall" which was close to the hypocenter when the bomb was dropped; it was the only structure left standing. Detonation of the bomb occurred at an altitude of about 2000 feet. According to Wikipedia, "Because



the atomic bomb exploded almost directly overhead, the building was able to retain its shape. The building's vertical columns were able to resist the nearly vertical downward force of the blast, and parts of the concrete and brick outer walls remained intact. The center of the blast was displaced 150 m (490 ft) horizontally and 600 m (2,000 ft) vertically from the Dome, having slightly missed the original target, the distinctive 'T'-shaped Aioi Bridge. The Dome was 160 meters from the hypocenter of the atomic blast. Everyone inside the building was killed instantly."

Posted at Picasa are many pictures of the dome, some from a distance and others (later on) when we walk right past it. There are also pictures of the Aioi Bridge, the surrounding gardens, various monuments, but none inside the museum (picture-taking is forbidden). We get to spend much too short a time inside, so there is not much opportunity to read about the damage by radiation, by heat, and by the power of the blast. The most poignant exhibits are of watches stopped at the moment of detonation, clothing tattered by the blast, human-shaped shadows on walls caused by people who were standing there at the time of the explosion. Estimates are that only about 2 pounds (out of the total 141 pounds of U-235) detonated; the rest contributed nothing to the energy yield. For a complete account, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Boy

Our guide, Amy, tells us that her parents lived in Hiroshima, but were out of town visiting relatives when the bomb was dropped. When they returned to the city, a day after the bomb, they did what they could to attend to those wounded who had a chance of survival (Amy's father was a doctor). Amy is considered a survivor of the blast because she was in her mother's womb when her parents returned to the city; Amy was born the following December, so we know exactly how old she is. (She actually looks like she's not much more than 50!) Her parents died of old age, so they probably did not absorb lethal quantities of radioactive materials. In fact, in contrast to the plutonium bomb that destroyed Nagasaki, this uranium bomb produced very few radioactive isotopes with long half-lives to contaminate the soil.

There are huge crowds around the site of the Peace Park. Many are Japanese women, well-dressed with high-heeled shoes. Others are tourists (like us), dressed more casually. And there are many school groups. One group asks me and one of the female Tauck tourists our names, where we're from, and so on. Their English is pretty good. We write our names on their tablets; in return, they give us brochures that describe their school. This was probably not as spontaneous as it seems - students were probably required to gather as many names as they could.

We return to the ship at about 5:30 where we discover that neither my magnetic key nor Lee's opens the door to the cabin! The front desk is getting tired of seeing us but we're getting tired of having this problem again and again and ... There is a small cocktail party for all of the Tauckers, but the four groups tend not to mix very well. Lee and I squander our inheritance by each ordering a Lagavulin (14€ each, but it is Happy Hour and the drinks are two-for-one). At 7:00, we have dinner on Deck 6 with yesterday's gun-enthusiast couple; again, the topic of the second amendment never comes up. In fact, we spend much of our time talking about the Brooklyn Dodgers of sainted memory. Not only are our dinner partners great fans but the woman met Dodger alumnus Eddie Stanky who was the baseball coach at the University of South Alabama, where she taught. So there are some redeeming features of these gun lovers. At 9:00, the ship sets sail to Tamano, 110 NM away. We return to our room and are in bed by 11:00

AND STILL MORE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT JAPAN AND ITS PEOPLE

- Lee had read (and we observe it ourselves) that the Japanese have a fascination with KitKat candy bars. As the various Picasa pictures will confirm, we found KitKat bars in several cities and in flavors that would astound Americans who (fools that we are) think that the only flavor will be chocolate. Upon our return home, I read an article in the May 15 issue of *The Seattle Times* that informs us that there are 300 (300? Yes!) varieties of KitKat sold across Japan. It is the country's most popular candy. It is so popular that it is sold at high-end department stores. And in December of 2015, there was a limited release of single dark chocolate sticks coated with gold leaf, and selling for ¥2016. Here is a partial list of the varieties (from among the 300): Adzuki Bean, Apple, Blueberry, Butter, Cheesecake, Chili, Coconut, Edamame, Green Tea, Green Tea (Sakurai), Green Tea (Uji), Hazelnut,

Kobe Pudding, Matcha, Miso, Passion Fruit, Pear, Perfect Balanced Citrus (a mixture of orange, lemon, and lime), Plum, Purple Sweet Potato, Roasted Tea, Rum Raisin, Strawberry Maple, and Wasabi! Don't it j's' make yo' mouth water?

- Tour guide Michiko in Kagoshima talks about the different kinds of raw fish and meat that Japanese like. Among these is raw chicken! Several of our fellow passengers are repelled by this, telling her that eating uncooked chicken is a recipe for ... *death*. But she maintains that when the chickens are raised in a clean environment and are slaughtered carefully, there is no danger of a consumer's getting sick. According to a helpful web site: "Several Japanese restaurants offer chicken sashimi on their menu, and it's exactly what you'd expect. There are no secret Japanese food preparation methods used with this dish, it's literally a plate of raw chicken. For those of you who are trying to recall the incubation period for salmonella, prepare to be amazed. This dish is not only safe, but it's delicious! Many people compare the texture of chicken sashimi to that of raw tuna, but its flavor profile is more closely related to bigeye ... So what's the secret to avoiding salmonella poisoning? While several factors are present, one of the most important to inquire about is how long ago the chicken was killed. Reputable Japanese eateries will be able to tell you exactly how fresh their meat is, and should only serve it before salmonella begins to cultivate. There is also a stark difference in the way Japanese chickens are raised in comparison to the over-pasteurized American chickens that many people are used to, leading to a significantly diminished risk of salmonella poisoning." Now don't you feel better?

- Grace (our guide in Busan) told us that not only is raw fish considered a delicacy, many people like to eat seafood that is still alive! They report that swallowing octopus tentacles and feeling them move as they pass through the gullet is the experience of a lifetime. (I'd agree with that statement, but would not consider it a pleasant experience or one that I'd like to try.) For those who have a stomach (in both senses) for it, you can peruse the different kinds of raw seafood that people eat at various web sites such as https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eating_live_seafood

- According to several of our guides, the Japanese love to abbreviate or contract familiar phrases. For example, *Nissan* is an abbreviation of *Nippon Sangyo* (who knew?). But it's not just companies. For example, *rimokon* = *rimōto kontorōrā* (remote control); *pāsokon* = *pasonaru konpyūtā* (personal computer), *sumaho* = *sumato fon* (smart phone), and *famiresu* = *famiñ resutoran* (family restaurant). For a fuller list, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_abbreviated_and_contracted_words

Thursday, April 21

When we arise at 7:00, we note that yesterday's sunny day has given way to clouds and rain. We are already docked at Tamano. During our "breakfast" on Deck 3, we talk with Johanna Stansfield, the ship's Guest Relation Manager. I remember her from last year's Adriatic cruise and I had overheard her telling someone that she's from Nantes, so I stop her to chat about our visit to Bretagne in 2011. What I didn't expect was her frank admission that she is so overworked and tired that she is on the verge of burnout. Not only does she work 15-hour days, 10 months a year but among her other responsibilities is organizing the daily schedules for the non-Tauck travelers and writing the English-language version of Tauck's Daily Program. She wants to marry (she has a fiancé) and have children but Ponant has no maternity leave policy.

Because of the miserable weather and because her allergies are acting up, Lee chooses to skip the morning excursion. Tim's group disembarks at 8:50 and we walk to the bus. One of the Australian travelers (not one of those already "identified") cooks up a trick for us to pull on Tim. Because he has complimented us so many times on how brilliantly we follow instructions (in striking contrast to the behavior of the other groups), she suggests that all of us not only sit in seats that are not assigned to us but that we pair up with spouses other than our own. (As Lee is not with me, this causes no problem.) After all of us are in place, Tim is the last to board - it takes him about a nanosecond to realize what we've done. And he bursts into laughter.

We take a rainy ride to a ferry that will bring us to Naoshima Island. We are instructed to remain on the bus during the short passage. The bus then drives to the Art House Project, a collection of private homes that have been architecturally transformed by famous artists. The impetus for this is the Benesse Corporation which, if I surmise from online materials, is much like Mitt Romney's Bain Capital. But still what they've done for the enjoyment of art is commendable. There are sculptures all along the road to the project, but I'm sitting on the wrong side of the bus, both going and coming, to get a picture of one of the most famous (infamous)



installations, a huge pumpkin submerged in the water. Our guide, Kubo, takes us up and down the streets of the project, then to the Ando House/Museum where we spend some time (shoes off, of course), Tadao Ando is one of Japan's most prominent architects. A winner of the Pritzker Prize, he continues at age 74 to produce edgy buildings around the globe. Our group is large, so some continue with Kubo and the rest of us are with another guide, Maimie. Because it is raining hard and the wind is whipping up, it's hard to be attentive (note-taking and picture-taking are a challenge) while manipulating an umbrella that turns inside out two or three times. When we return to the ferry, we are instructed to walk on and leave the bus behind. The logic? It will be used by Charlie and Michael's groups when they come in the afternoon. We walk back to the ship, getting drenched by the driving rain and fierce winds that turn my umbrella inside out three more times. (A cat may have nine lives, but how many does an umbrella have?) Lee is watching this with great amusement from the dry warmth of the ship's door, silently congratulating herself on not having gone on the excursion.

Back on board, I dump my umbrella (which has come back from death at least six times today) in the shower stall and hang up my soaking jacket to allow it to dry somewhat. We eat a quick lunch on Deck 6 and then it's off at 2:00 for a visit to the Ohara Museum of Art. The bus arrives in the town of Kurashiki just before 3:00. We walk about the city with our two-time (now three) guide, Koto. As always, it's fun to take pictures of what's on sale in the food and souvenir shops that we walk by. The Ohara Museum is proud of its collection, the centerpiece of which is "The Annunciation" by El Greco. There's even a Café El Greco in town. As Tim explains, the collection is wide-ranging but not deep: we are likely to see one work, only, from each of a number of well-known artists, ranging from Renoir, Monet, and Gauguin to Pollock, Matisse, and Johns.

PUN ALERT: Lee "bit" on this one when I first sprang it on her in Dresden in 2000 and again on a later trip. I know that it won't work on her now, but I figure that Tim is a likely mark as he is enthusiastic about El Greco. So I say to him, "Despite his adopted name, do you know where El Greco was born?" Tim doesn't, so I tell him the answer: "Crete. And do you know what he was called when he left Crete to live in Spain?" Tim doesn't, so I tell him: "An Excretian!"

According to Wikipedia, the Ohara Museum "was the first collection of Western art to be permanently exhibited in Japan. The museum opened in 1930 and originally consisted almost entirely of French paintings and sculptures of the 19th and 20th centuries. The collection has now expanded to include paintings of the Italian Renaissance and of the Dutch and Flemish 17th century. Well-known American and Italian artists of the 20th century are also included in the collection. The basis of the collection was formed by Ohara Magosaburo," a Japanese businessman and philanthropist. So we visit the museum and enjoy works by Picasso, Matisse, Sisley, Gauguin, Renoir, Warhol, Cézanne, and many others (including, alas, Rothko whose art I will never ever ever understand). I recount these names because, as you've probably guessed, picture-taking is not allowed.

When we leave the museum, it is still raining (although not anywhere near as hard as it was in the morning). We board the bus at 4:30 and are back onboard *Le Soléal* at 5:30. Tonight (be still my heart) is the Captain's Farewell Cocktail (at 6:30 in the theater) followed by the Captain's Gala Dinner in *L'Eclipse* on Deck 2. It begins with the captain's calling the name of every single person who works on the ship (from the engineers to the cooks to the cleaning crew to the reception desk and so on) and there seem to be hundreds (if not thousands*) of them who gather on stage and then march off to the accompaniment of

*Ponant's web site claims 139 crew, but the parade of bodies makes it seem as if there are many many more. Has anyone actually done a count?

festive music. Well, it's a shtick - and one that is re-enacted on every cruise of every type. The captain gives special recognition to Johanna Stansfield for her last day with Ponant (see above) and gives her a huge embrace. It seems that this was more than just a collegial Gallic squeeze (Johanna is quite attractive) although honesty compels me to add that he also gives exuberant hugs to all of the other female employees and officers.

We have dinner with the Australian couple, mentioned on pp. 21, 26, and 29; it is at this dinner that they tell us that our dinner partners the past two evenings were gun-totin' conspiracy theorists. We go to bed at 10:30, just after the ship sets sail for Osaka, only 87 NM away. We need to get up early to place our suitcases outside the door for pickup at 6:30 tomorrow morning. (Large suitcases are not allowed on the bullet train that we will take to Tokyo. Rather, they'll arrive by truck, several hours after we've already checked into our hotel ... or so it is promised.)

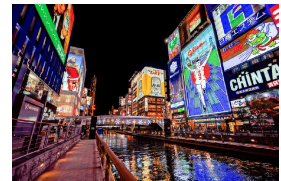
Friday, April 22

It is a sunny, bright day (a welcome change from yesterday). We are docked at Osaka, having traveled a total of 1206 NM over the past eight days. This is a very busy port - container ships, cruise ships, cranes, etc. We have our regular quick breakfast on Deck 3, then retreat to our room which we are required to vacate no later than 8:00. We gather in the theater and wait for our disembarkation, scheduled for 8:30 but it turns out to be later. We collect our luggage at the cruise terminal, take it through Japanese customs, and deliver it to the trucks that will take it to Tokyo.

Dumb, dumb, dumb!! All of my reading materials (magazines, books, the Kindle, laptop) are safely stashed in my briefcase which is safely stashed in my suitcase which is already off the ship and on its way by truck to Tokyo. I hope that Lee will talk with me on the train ride from Osaka to Tokyo. Please!

Our guide on the bus is Nobuko who tells us about Osaka while the driver makes his way to the Dotonbori district. Osaka is the second largest city in Japan; the city itself has "only" 2.7 million inhabitants, but the greater metropolitan area holds over 19 million. It is a seaport and a center of commerce. One of its major tourist attractions (and our destination right now) is the Dotonbori district, described by Wikipedia as "... historically a theater district, it is now a popular nightlife and entertainment area characterized by its eccentric atmosphere and large illuminated signboards. One of the area's most prominent features, a billboard for confectionery company Glico displaying the image of a runner crossing a finishing line, is seen as an icon of Osaka within Japan."

Even in the morning light, the billboards, neon signs, and garish displays tend to assault one's senses; I can only imagine what it's like at night. The image to the right is one of many that I could have borrowed from Google. As we walk alongside the souvenir shops, stores, bars, and restaurants, we see enormous displays intended to lure the visitor to come inside: a huge lobster over one doorway, a pufferfish* over another, and dragons everywhere (see Picasa). Restaurant



*Also known as "puffers, balloonfish, blowfish, bubblefish, globefish, swellfish, toadfish, toadies, honey toads, sugar toads, and sea squab" these are for the most part toxic. They are also, how shall I say it without being accused of speciesism, plug ugly! Wikipedia tells us that In Japanese restaurants, despite the toxicity "the meat of some species is considered a delicacy in Japan (fugu) when prepared by specially trained chefs who know which part is safe to eat and in what quantity." Every year, there are a significant number of hospitalizations and deaths from consuming this "delicacy" - well, "ya pays yer money and ya takes yer chances" as the saying goes. By the way, for those who've had a course in



organic chemistry, the poison is called tetrodotoxin; even for those who've not had a course in organic chemistry, that's still the name.

windows show plastic food that one can point to, even if one can't speak the language. (We are gratified to see Honolulu Coffee and, of course, Starbucks.) A vendor is making "octopus dumplings" (for want of a better name) by pouring the batter into what looks like a muffin or ebelskiver pan. With only two sets of chopsticks available (I mean, who can worry about hygiene at this point in the trip?) most of us enjoy the delicacy, accompanied by *sake* that Tim has bought.

There is very little English on the signs, but when there is it can provide chuckles. I take a picture of "Front Horse Building," one of whose stores is "menber's(sic) bar" and another is "Brazillian(sic) Bar and Restaurant" which offers Drinks, Foods, Music, Karaoke.

At 10:00, we are back on the bus and heading for the train station (which we reach in about 30 minutes) to take the bullet train to Tokyo, some 400 km away. On the way, Tim reminds us of what he's told us before: the bullet train's operation is very different from anything we've experienced with train travel in the U.S., in Europe, or on Mars. The train pulls into the station, the doors open, exiting passengers need to get out within 30 seconds so that entering passengers have a full 30 seconds of their own to board. Tim says, "These trains run on time! If one is even five minutes late, it's reported on the evening TV news." Is this an exaggeration? Who knows.

So ... here's our battle plan. We're to exit the bus, enter the train station, and meet near a Starbucks at 10:20. (That there is more than one Starbucks complicates the matter, but it works out.) We're then to march together to the platform, where we'll arrive at 10:45, and line up two by two (Noah, are you listening?) at the spot where a door to our reserved car will open. When the train arrives at 11:03, we're to let people exit and then we're to enter as quickly as possible, taking seats as Tim indicates: "two here, two more her, two over here ..." Dear Reader, it's not even close to this exciting, although Tim does enjoy building it up.

Tauck has sprung for a first-class car (green) and reserved seats. You can read about the bullet trains (Shinkansen) at this URL <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2018.html> Had Osaka been the origin of the train trip, we'd have had a more leisurely time to board. But this train came from Hiroshima; hence the frantic nature of boarding. Our trip will make stops at Kyoto, Nagoya, shin-Yokohama, and Shinagawa before arriving in Tokyo. The trip takes about 2.5 hours; at times, the speed of the train will reach 320 km/hr (200 mph) but the ride is so smooth that the motion is not noticeable.

When we leave the train and make our way to the exit of the station, we walk across the street to the Kitte building and take the elevator to the 6th floor for Arcana Restaurant where we have a fixed menu lunch, pretending to be French. We begin with an *Amuse Bouche* (Parmentier veloute, green peas, 7 perfume tea scum*); next is *Viande* (Chicken supreme, green asparagus, Paris mushrooms duxelles, eggs,

*Yes, that's what it says on the menu that I took with me.

Chasseur sauce); finally, we have *Dessert* (Strawberry-Pistachio cake, strawberry ice cream). Following this, we climb on the bus even though the restaurant and train station are essentially across the street from the hotel. (In fact, on April 25 we will walk from hotel to the station to take the train to Takayama, and we will do so without being struck by a passing vehicle.) But it is a very very very crowded intersection - rather than having people get lost or, worse, run over Tim opts for a ride. Because of one-way streets and traffic, the bus travels a circuitous route around several city blocks, finally entering down a ramp into the garage level of our hotel, the Shangri-La <http://www.shangri-la.com/tokyo/shangrila/about/>

There are numerous doormen/women and bellhops available, although as we are luggage-less they're not needed. We proceed to Floor 26 where our check-in materials are found and then, via a different elevator, to Floor 28 where we register, leave a credit card, etc. Our room is on Floor 35. It has a spectacular view of the city (well, part of the city) and it is huge, it is beautifully furnished ... in fact, this

may well be the most elegant hotel we've ever stayed in.

The most notable features are the toilet and the shower/bathtub room. First, the toilet. As one approaches it, the seat rises in greeting as if to say, "Hello, may I serve you?" The seat is warmed (as was true in our Kyoto hotel) and there are controls for under-carriage washing, as in Kyoto. (Well, not quite, Here the panel instructs the user, in Japanese and in English, on whether to get a strong or soft spray of water, whether to use the bidet function, whether to choose "oscillating" - what??? - and whether to use the "power deodorizer"!)

But what is really new is that it flushes automatically (if one is too lazy to lift a finger to press a button) and it chooses a small flush or big flush depending on what has been deposited. As one walks away, the seat goes back down again (so that one's wife can't yell "Harry - you left the damned seat up again!") I do discover how to outwit the beast - if you approach, let the lid rise in greeting, then walk away ... the lid goes down and the toilet flushes even though nothing was put into it. (I do this several times, just to prove my mental superiority.)



What can I say about the shower/bathtub room. I have a picture at Picasa, but it doesn't really do justice. The room is (as Donald Trump would say) HUGE!! The bathtub, suitable for a Westerner's ample rump, is up a step from the floor. The rest of the room (which is as large as the guest bedroom in our home) is for the shower. Overhead, there is a rain shower; on the wall there is a shower wand. One uses either or both and floods the entire room. A drain takes most of the water away. Then, if one were Japanese, the now cleansed person would soak in the bathtub (see Junko's lecture on p. 27). Well, we're not Japanese, so we use the facilities in the "Western" way - I take a shower and Lee takes a bath. So there!

The blinds on the bathroom and bedroom windows are electrically operated (by controls that we can't find until I call the desk for help). The door from the hall opens by pressing our "key" against the knob. The first 25 floors of this building are office and meeting space. Floors 26 to 37 are for the hotel. The first three have conference rooms, the desk for check-in, and the restaurant. Floors 29 and above are for the guest rooms. A welcome change from what we found in Kyoto: every employee whom we encounter at the hotel speaks excellent (often unaccented) English.

In each of the three hotels that we'll visit in the coming days, a drawer in one of the end tables will have two religious books: one devoted to Shinto, the other to Buddhism. (These are the Japanese equivalents of Gideon bibles, I assume.) But not in this hotel! What I find is a book whose text is entirely in Japanese but whose cover reveals the title: *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton, written in 1933. I had read this when I was still in high school and I still recall much of the plot: a plane carrying four British citizens is hijacked in Peshawar and flown to Tibet where it crashes; the party seeks shelter at a religious place called Shangri-La where they meet the Lama and "find peace" (or so I recall it). Apparently, Shangri-La was Hilton's invention and the name was adopted for a chain of hotels, one of which is in Tokyo.

Is there a downside to the hotel? Alas, there is. The hallways and especially the elevators reek of a fragrance of which the hotel is so proud that they sell spray cans for guests who want to take the aroma of the Shangri-La with them. Ungrateful and uncultured boor that I am, I think that it smells of a French bordello atmosphere of cheap perfume and perspiration - not, mind you, that I've ever been in a French bordello. (I wonder if the other hotels of the Shangri-La chain also have this fragrance.)

Of course our suitcases have not yet arrived (we're told not to expect them until about 7:00 this evening) so at 4:30 we return to the garage level and take a short bus ride to the Ginza district, a crowded glitzy street with high end stores (with familiar names), restaurants, and department stores. Our guide takes us into Mitsukoshi Department Store and we proceed down several levels to the extensive food court called "Ginza Food Garden" (essentially an upscale grocery store) offering selections of every possible genre (fruits, vegetables, cheese, breads, fish, meats, desserts, etc.) on two levels. I take several pictures until a clerk tells me not to do so when we approach the counter with expensive cuts of beef.

So we exit the store and walk past some of the high-end establishments. Because we have some free

time before the bus will take us back to the hotel, Lee and I return to Mitsukoshi and hope to take pictures of food counters other than the expensive beef. But when we do this, we do get several more pictures of cheese, cold cuts, vegetables, candies, etc. before a clerk tells us to stop. Why? I have no idea. It must be a very Japanese thing.

Our luggage arrives at 7:00. Hooray! Dinner is on our own, tonight. We had already arranged to meet the Australian lawyers (p. 22) in the lobby. Our plan is to find the Daimaru department store inside Tokyo Station; the top floor is alleged to have a host of restaurants from which to choose. Well, damn, we never find Daimaru, despite asking a couple of store employees inside the station for directions. But we do find a food court in the station itself. There are several restaurants, all featuring unfamiliar looking food. How to choose? Easy - we go to the only one that has a line of people waiting to get in.

So we are seated and given menus (no English, but lots of pictures). None of the staff speaks English. So the female lawyer does the next best thing - using as little English and as much sign language as possible, she asks the customers at the table to our left and at the table to our right what they are eating, is it good, and please point to it on the menu. Well, it works. We each get a tray of food with some vaguely recognizable items (e.g., sobe noodles, a tempura soft-boiled egg, raw tuna, rice, and what appears to be eel with tempura coating), but it is all very good. With beers, the total bill for the four of us is ¥8400, quite a bargain.

An aside - I mentioned (p. 1) that one of my Kindle books is Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. Bryson covers topics ranging from astronomy to quantum mechanics to evolution to nuclear energy to ... catastrophic events like earthquakes and volcanoes. Living as we do in the Seattle area, we're frequently reminded of the major fault that lies just off shore and is "overdue" to express its true nature; and of Mt. Rainier, currently a dormant volcano but potentially a destroyer of everything that lies around it. I bring up these dreary reminders because Bryson writes "Tokyo stands on the boundary of three tectonic plates in a country already well known for its extreme instability" ... Tokyo has already

*The book dates from 2004, seven years before the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami.

suffered one of the most devastating earthquakes in modern times (1923) ... In general, the longer the interval between quakes, the greater the pent-up pressure and the greater the scope for a really big jolt. This is a particular worry for Tokyo, which Bill McGuire, a hazards specialist at University College London, describes as 'the city waiting to die' (not a motto you will find on many tourism leaflets." Gulp!!

We return to our room and unpack (up to a point - we'll be leaving in two days) and take advantage of the first fast internet connection since leaving Kyoto on April 14. We head to bed at 10:30.

A BRIEF TREATISE ON RELIGION IN JAPAN

Having visited several Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines already, with several more such visits planned over the next few days, let us take a pause to discuss the nature of religious observance in Japan. Most of the following we learned from several tour guides; it is also enhanced by contributions from that font of all knowledge, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Japan

Shinto is an ancient religion and is specifically Japanese in origin. Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the 7th century. There is no "official" religion in the country. In fact, religious freedom is guaranteed by the Japanese constitution. Nevertheless, we read in Wikipedia "Shinto is the largest religion in Japan, practiced by nearly 80% of the population, yet only a small percentage of these identify themselves as 'Shintoists' in surveys. This is because 'Shinto' has different meanings in Japan: most of the Japanese attend Shinto shrines and beseech kami* without belonging to an institutional 'Shinto'

**Kami* refers to "a multitude of gods, suited to various purposes such as war memorials and harvest festivals.

religion ... since there are no formal rituals to become a member of 'folk Shinto' ... Shinto has 81,000 shrines and 85,000 priests in the country."

Wikipedia further explains "Most Japanese participate in rituals and customs derived from several religious traditions. Life cycle events are often marked by visits to a Shinto shrine. The birth of a new baby is celebrated with a formal shrine visit at the age of about one month, as are the third, fifth, and seventh birthdays and the official beginning of adulthood at age twenty. Wedding ceremonies are often performed by Shinto priests, but Western-style secular weddings are also popular. These use Christian-like liturgy but are usually not presided over by an ordained priest. Japanese funerals are usually performed by Buddhist priests, and Buddhist rites are also common on death day anniversaries of deceased family members. 91% of Japanese funerals take place according to Buddhist traditions."

The preceding paragraph is in accord with what all of the guides told us. Also, according to Wikipedia:

"There are two categories of holidays in Japan: *matsuri* (temple fairs), which are largely of Shinto origin and relate to the cultivation of rice and the spiritual well-being of the local community; and *nenjyu gyoji* (annual feasts), which are largely of Chinese or Buddhist origin. During the Heian period, the *matsuri* were organized into a formal calendar, and other festivals were added. Very few *matsuri* or annual feasts are national holidays, but they are included in the national calendar of annual events. Most *matsuri* are local events and follow local traditions. They may be sponsored by schools, towns, or other groups but are most often associated with Shinto shrines.

"Some of the holidays are secular in nature, but the two most significant for the majority of Japanese—New Year's Day and Obon—involve visits to Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples, respectively. The New Year's holiday (January 1–3) is marked by the practice of numerous customs and the consumption of special foods. Visiting Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples to pray for family blessings in the coming year, dressing in a kimono, hanging special decorations, eating noodles on New Year's Eve, and playing a poetry card game are among these practices. During Obon, *bon* (spirit altars) are set up in front of Buddhist family altars, which, along with ancestral graves, are cleaned in anticipation of the return of the spirits. People living away from their family homes return for visits with relatives. Celebrations include folk dancing and prayers at Buddhist temples as well as family rituals in the home."

And now you are as knowledgeable about Japanese religion as anyone on our Tauck tour.

Saturday, April 23

This is our last full day with Tauck ... and a very full day it turns out to be. We arise at 6:30 and have the buffet breakfast in the hotel's 28th floor restaurant. It provides an ample (although not spectacular)* variety

*I wrote, earlier, that "this may well be the most elegant hotel we've ever stayed in." True enough, although the Adlon Kempinski in Berlin might rival it: <http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/Germany2012.pdf> pp 6ff and Picasa pictures in the album Germany 2012 Berlin Part 1; but no breakfast buffet could compete ... or even come close ... to what we experienced at the Hotel Bareiss in Germany's Black Forest (see <http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/Europe2015.pdf>, p. 34, and the Picasa pictures in the 2015 album for Germany Black Forest).

of cheeses, meats, breads and rolls, fruits, cereals, etc. Although surrounded by many fellow Tauckians, we are seated at a table for two. From our window, we see a thick haze over the city - it's hard to tell if it's fog and mist or pollution. The spaghetti bowl mass of highways at ground level is filled with cars and trucks, even on a Saturday morning. (I wonder what a weekday rush hour is like.) As for our "health," I

seem to be over my allergies but Lee is still suffering with coughing and lots of phlegm; to compound the problem, she managed to pull a muscle in her back when picking something up off the floor. Did I mention that old age sucks? Yes, I think I did.

At 8:30, we proceed to the garage level where we find Tim, our guide Nobuko, and our bus. Our first stop is the Asakusa Temple which we reach in about a half-hour. There is, of course, the now expected bevy of souvenir shops and restaurants as we make our way to the temple. Huge numbers of children, all in their school uniforms, are also walking with us. Each carries a backpack - I am intrigued that many of the packs sport the word BROOKLYN, so I can't resist taking pictures (see Picasa). Do these kids even know what/who/where Brooklyn is? (The "era of good feeling" is shattered when a schoolboy and a schoolgirl walk by with the Yankees NY logo on their backpacks.)

From Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senso-ji> "*Senso-ji* is an ancient Buddhist temple located in Asakusa, Tokyo, Japan. It is Tokyo's oldest temple, and one of its most significant. Formerly associated with the Tendai sect of Buddhism, it became independent after World War II. Adjacent to the temple is a Shinto shrine, the Asakusa Shrine ... Dominating the entrance to the temple is the Kaminarimon or "Thunder Gate". This imposing Buddhist structure features a massive paper lantern dramatically painted in vivid red-and-black tones to suggest thunderclouds and lightning. Beyond the Kaminarimon is Nakamise-dori with its shops, followed by the Hozomon or "Treasure House Gate" which provides the entrance to the inner complex. Within the precincts stand a stately five-story pagoda and the main hall, devoted to Kannon. Many tourists, both Japanese and from abroad, visit Senso-ji every year. Catering to the visiting crowds, the surrounding area has many traditional shops and eating places that feature traditional dishes (hand-made noodles, sushi, tempura, etc.). Nakamise-Dori, the street leading from the Thunder Gate to the temple itself, is lined with small shops selling souvenirs ranging from fans, ukiyo-e (woodblock prints), kimono and other robes, Buddhist scrolls, traditional sweets, to Godzilla toys, t-shirts and mobile phone straps. These shops themselves are part of a living tradition of selling to pilgrims who walked to Senso-ji. Within the temple itself, and also at many places on its approach, there are o-mikuji stalls. For a suggested donation of 100 yen, visitors may consult the oracle and divine answers to their questions. Querents shake labelled sticks from enclosed metal containers and read the corresponding answers they retrieve from one of 100 possible drawers. Within the temple is a quiet contemplative garden kept in the distinctive Japanese style." And after the crowds within the temple itself, it's a pleasant diversion to walk through the gardens and observe the koi in the water. See Picasa for many pictures of this visit.



After about 75 minutes, we board the bus and drive to the Tokyo Edo Museum. <https://www.edo-tokyo-museum.or.jp/en/> It tells the history of the Edo period (1603 to 1868) through exhibits, artifacts, maps, etc. At Picasa I've posted pictures of a replica of the bridge that led to Edo, of a theater for Noh plays, of maps and charts (that have enough English to be meaningful to us), of scale models of a home and of the city, and of a theater where music is being performed by a drummer and koto player.

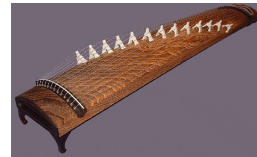
We are taken to lunch at Dynamic Kitchen and Bar (cool name, eh?), a Japanese gastropub (*Izakaya*, in Japanese) run by the Hibiki liquor distilling company. A tray is placed before each of us. The only reason that I know its ingredients is that I lifted a menu which reads: "Zara Tofu" from a well-known tofu shop in Kawashima; Salad; Sashimi Combo; White fish and Tempura of Seasonal Vegetables; Cooked meat and potato; Rice; and Miso Soup. I try to match up these names with the Picasa pictures that I took, but I fail miserably. (I think that the pictures were of different plate combinations.)

Following lunch, we are driven to Meiji Shrine, where we arrive at about 2:15. On the walk to the shrine, there are sake barrels (which we've encountered at other shrines) and also wine barrels offered by wineries in Bourgogne. An excellent description is found at <http://www.meijijingu.or.jp/english/> Both before and after visiting the shrine, we encounter wedding processions led by two priests (in clog shoes?) and followed by the wedding party, the bride and groom in traditional dress. We see another young

couple who are having their official picture taken, supervised by a team of busy-bodies who keep running over to adjust a cuff, move a lock of hair, change the lighting, and so on. We return to the hotel at 3:45.

Nearly everyone on the cruise will be leaving tomorrow using transportation to the airport provided by Tauck. We, however, are staying for a few extra days so we will not be checking out of the hotel until April 25. When we get to our room, we find a large envelope from *Windows to Japan*, the tourism group whom we hired to plan the rest of our journey. Enclosed is information about Takayama and Kanazawa (our next two destinations), the name of the guide who will be with us for four days (Hiro), tickets for the baseball game tomorrow, tickets for the three train trips that we'll be taking (two with Hiro to help, one on our own), a sheet of recommended etiquette in Japan, and other sheets with suggestions for tipping, instructions for getting on the bullet train (we're already "experts" at that!), reservations for the next three hotels, a subway map for Tokyo, recommended nightlife and restaurants in Tokyo. There is even a sheet filled with Japanese characters that (allegedly) say "I have an allergy to cumin"; the recommendation is that I give this to a waiter in a restaurant but I choose not to do so.

At 5:45, we board the Tim Bus for the "farewell event" at Ueno Seiyo-ken Restaurant, a multi-story building with a pleasant outdoor garden where we begin with wine and snacks. It is a pleasantly warm evening. A woman is sitting on the grass, playing the koto (a 13-string traditional Japanese instrument). After about an hour, we re-assemble in a large room with tables for eight set up. Dinner is a fixed menu that seems much more French than Japanese: Mousse of Cauliflower and Seafood Marinade; Pumpkin Potage; Gratin Provençal of Pacific Cod; Beef Tenderloin Steak with a Sauce of Green Peppers; Mixed Salad; Crème Brûlée of Cheese Cake with Cassis Ice Cream; Bread; A Demi-tasse of Coffee. Well, just between you and me, it's good to be eating western food because I just know that when we resume our travels tomorrow the fare will be largely (or exclusively) Japanese. The koto player has brought her instrument indoors and she serenades us during the meal.



Like an *idiot*, I neglected to bring my camera, so I have no pictures of her and her elaborate instrument. And then I realize what a **WORLD-CLASS IDIOT** I am because we are also treated to a Sumo demonstration that I cannot capture on film for posting to Picasa. (See *addendum* on p. 60) Two large men, one of whom looks to be in decent physical shape, the other who has rolls of excess avoirdupois hanging here and there (much like the specimens to the right). A commentator has them demonstrate the basic moves, stances, rituals, and ploys that a Sumo wrestler would use. And then they engage in a two out of three match, which is probably "staged" but looks and sounds frightfully real, as first one of the competitors and then the other gets the leverage to fling his opponent out of the ring. Of course each of the warriors is buck-nekkid, save for an elaborate loin cloth that covers his nether regions (and seems to have no tendency to fall off). One of the men, in preparation for each collision, gives a loud slap to the leather of his "garment" which, if I were his opponent, would have caused me to soil my pants and run out of the room. But that's just me. At the conclusion of the match, guests are invited to meet and have pictures taken with the wrestlers. Many of the female (and a few of the male) tourists take advantage of this. As a special "treat" many of the women are lifted and swung to and fro by the sweaty behemoths.



We are back at the hotel at 9:30 and in bed at 11:30. As for medical news, my eyes (for better or worse) are back to normal - that is, I can read with my glasses and I don't need to enlarge the Kindle font. Too bad - it was nice, for a short while, managing with no glasses.

Sunday, April 24

It is a rainy, foggy, cloudy, ugly day. We have breakfast at 7:45 and say good-bye to some of our fellow tourists who are returning home today. We then return to our room to await the arrival of the *Windows to Japan* (herein abbreviated WtJ) guide, Hiro. At 9:00, he is in the lobby, waiting for us. He's a relatively

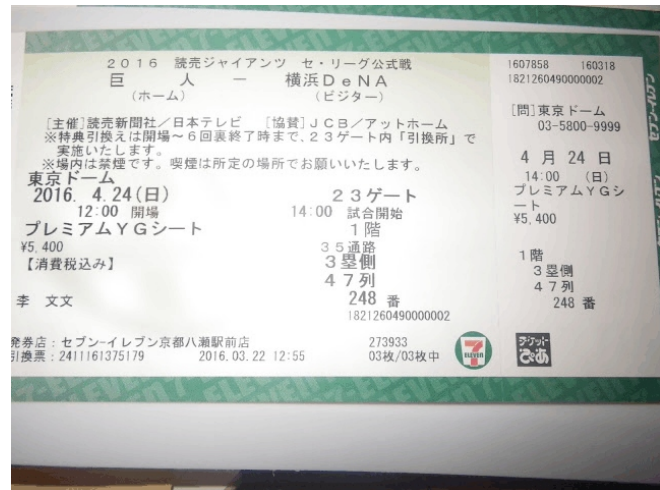
young man (of indeterminate age, maybe 40s) who is pleasant, very knowledgeable, and often quite ambitious in the number of things he wants this elderly couple to see before the day comes to a close. His English is excellent - either he learned it very well in school or he picked it up during his one visit to the U.S. a few years ago when he spent two weeks in New York City visiting the many art museums and galleries. We never do figure out if Hiro is his first name, last name, or nickname; the only "clue" is that the WtJ material identifies him as "Mr. Hiro" on the first page of their literature but simply as Hiro from then on. It's difficult to draw him out on his personal life, but we learn that he's married, that his wife works, and that they have no children.

For a set fee to WtJ that is never broken down or itemized, all of our transportation, museum admissions, train travel, taxi rides, and so on are covered. We are responsible only for our meals. Every day Hiro accepts our invitation to be our guest at lunch. We also invite him to dinner, but he turns us down except on the penultimate day that we'll tour with him. Here in Tokyo and also in Takayama and Kanazawa, he stays at a hotel different from ours, presumably to save some money. Today, he will hail taxis to take us everywhere.

Our first stop is at Tokyo National Museum (in Ueno Park, quite near where the farewell dinner was held last night). This is a superb art/history museum, showing collections of Japanese art and artifacts from the preceding centuries. There is lacquerware, ironware, ceramics, paintings, prints, vases, and on and on. Picture taking (to my surprise) is allowed, so I get to post the images to Picasa. We spend nearly two hours at the museum, then make our way to Yanaka Old Town (described as a typical and active Japanese neighborhood) for a stroll. Next is Asakura Museum of Sculpture (the former residence and studio of sculptor Fumio Asakura); the human figures are spectacular, but picture-taking is not allowed (and, worse, shoes are removed); but someone obviously was allowed to take pictures, as seen at this web site: <http://www.japanvisitor.com/japan-museums-art-galleries/asakura-museum-sculpture>

A taxi then takes us to the vicinity of Tokyo Dome where we will see a baseball game. Because the food inside the stadium is not so good (according to Hiro), we walk across the street to a convenience store and buy sandwiches to take inside with us. The stadium is part of a huge entertainment complex, surrounded by roller coasters, a parachute jump, a ferris wheel, and all sorts of other amusement park activities. But we are dead set on seeing a baseball game and so we make a beeline to the Dome.

I hand Hiro the three tickets that WtJ had provided. Of course, they're printed entirely in Japanese except for occasional numbers. When we made our arrangements with WtJ, we requested the most expensive seats at ¥7000 (a bargain, as compared to the prices of U.S. stadiums) but I can make out on the ticket that the ones that were purchased for us were only ¥5400. What I cannot make out is which gate we're to enter, which section we're in, and what row our seats are in. Supposedly Hiro can do this. After all, that's why we hired a guide, right? The only thing that I can discern is that we have seats 247, 248, and 249 (as these are the only numbers that change from one ticket to the next).



We cross the street (sandwiches in hand) and enter Gate 23. This stadium (capacity 45,000, built in 1988) is a lot like the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis, now just a bad memory and finally replaced by a real ball park. The Metrodome had a fabric roof that was held up by air. Thus it is with the Tokyo Dome. So instead of having a large door through which ticket holders can enter, we are ushered one by one through a rotating door. It is also very hot and humid inside - I wonder if the stadium is air-conditioned. Then Hiro misreads the tickets and takes us to Section 47, which is somewhere in left field. An usher tells him that we're in Section 35. (My confidence in his ability to read the ticket is fading.) Alas,

we're in Row 47, the very last row before the standing room section. But at least we're in the lower deck. The seats are smallish (because Japanese tend to be smallish?) meaning not much butt room but also not much separation from the back of the seat in front. Directly in front of my is a rather large Japanese man whom I manage to poke (inadvertently) several times with the cardboard on which I'm keeping score. Also the lighting is very poor way back here in Row 47, so I'm often guessing at what I'm writing down.

The Giants' web side <http://www.giants.jp/en/rules/> has all sorts of rules concerning fan behavior. For example they warn that "We may also conduct a body search or inspection by a metal detector to strengthen the security in response to a social condition." Gulp. There are rules for the size banner that one can hold (e.g., a cheering flag must measure no more than 600 mm in either direction and cannot be on a pole). They can expel you from the stadium for, among other things, "Destructing(sic) or damaging the facilities and equipment" or "Unnecessarily boosting morale and making noise in and outside the stadium" or "Excessive cheering causing other audiences trouble" or "Use cheering implements that are not particularly bigger than your seat." Huh? Most of all, "Please refrain from any actions to demean the other team and possibly to provoke the fans of the other team (such as breaking, dragging and stomping the mascot goods of the other team) in and outside the stadium not to cause trouble." Yeah! They also warn you to watch out for batted balls and broken bats: "In professional baseball games, attendants blow an 'alarm whistle' to warn of danger when a foul ball or a home run ball during practices flies." At the game, we never hear such a whistle but every time that a ball goes into the stands, either as a line drive or a pop up, a bright red message appears on the scoreboard, all in Japanese except for the exclamation points that are universal.

The ballpark is just plain ugly. It is symmetrical, like the cookie-cutter MLB parks of the 1970s (Cincinnati, St. Louis, Pittsburgh and, sad to say, Shea Stadium, home of the blessed Mets) and the fence is a uniform height (I'd judge 15 feet); it is 328 feet to both foul poles, 360 feet to both power alleys, and 400 feet to centerfield. The turf is artificial; and instead of having a dirt infield, there are only dirt cutouts around the bases, the pitchers' mound, and home plate. There is but one scoreboard, in centerfield, thus making it difficult for people seated in the outfield to get information. And, of course, all of the information (except for the numbers) is in Japanese. Well, there is *some* English: the letters B, S, and O (for balls, strikes, and outs) and the letters R, H, and E (for runs, hits, and errors). The names of the players and umpires are in Japanese (even those who are Americans) so I keep score by putting the numerical position for each player (1 for pitcher, 2 for catcher ... 9 for right fielder) in lieu of the name. (Over the course of the game, however, I'm able to get the names of all of the Tokyo players either from the backs of their uniforms or when the name and picture are displayed on the scoreboard as each comes to bat.) I'm pleased to see that there is no designated hitter rule (i.e., the pitcher comes to the plate). This game will be between the Tokyo Yomiuri Giants and the Yokohama DeNA Bay Stars, both of the Central League. (The other four teams in the Central League are the Tokyo Yakult Swallows, the Hiroshima Toyo Carp, the Chunichi Dragons, and the Hanshin Tigers.)

The Giants' web site engages in hyperbole and self-promotion: "The oldest and most popular team in Japan, the Yomiuri Giants have won more pennants and Japan Series titles than any other team. While most other teams don't have the money to negotiate with free agents, the Giants sign some of the best players in Japan. Although the Giants spend a lot of money, they don't always spend it wisely. Many of their free agents have cost more than they were worth, and the team has a habit of giving large contracts to foreign players who often don't fit the team's needs. The Giants usually come out on top during the annual amateur draft. Because of the 'reverse designation' system, which allows college and industrial league players to designate their preference of a professional team, Yomiuri usually can sign the best amateur players. Founded in 1936 as the Tokyo Kyojin, the Giants became Japan's first professional baseball team. From 1965 to 1973, the Giants won nine straight Japan Series championships at a time when the economy was booming. Even today, the thought of a Giants victory reminds many Japanese fans of better times. In 1988, the Giants moved into Tokyo Dome, Japan's first indoor park."

In other words, the Giants are the equivalent of the New York Yankees (aka The Evil Empire, in my own estimation).

But what makes them irredeemably despicable (in my prejudiced eyes) is that the word GIANTS in block letters on the front of their uniforms (on the left) is *identical* in color and font to that worn by the hated New York Giants (on the right), the nemesis and chief rival of my Brooklyn Dodgers. I don't hold a grudge for ... very long, but Bobby Thomson's 1951 home run not only shattered my 12-year-old life but still haunts me to this day. But carry a grudge? Nah, not really.



When we get to our seats (which are just on the outfield side of third base), we note that the field is filled with grounds keepers and many many dancing mascots.* Beyond the left-field fence is the Yokohama

*The team's web site tell us that "At Yomiuri home games, you'll likely see the team's mascot, a half Y & G logo, half rabbit. The odd creature goes by the name 'Giabbit' (Pronounced 'Jabbit')." Every team has its own equally "adorable" mascot - for pictures, see <http://tinyurl.com/gu5nqeh>



cheering section, not far (I should say "not far enough") from where we are sitting, and they are very very loud; far across the field behind the right-field fence is the Tokyo cheering section.* Etiquette mandates

*For an example of the raucous (but hardly spontaneous) shenanigans of a cheering section, check out this one for the Hiroshima Carp <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fcdr3aiLGpU>

that the Yokohama section remain silent when Tokyo is at bat, and vice versa for the Tokyo cheering section when the visiting team is at bat. Within each cheering section there are drums, brass instruments, cheer leaders with white gloves who orchestrate well-rehearsed cheers and songs, and perhaps a hundred passionate fans with leather lungs who make their presence known. The good news is that the game actually begins without the playing of the national anthem or the equivalent of *God Bless America* in the 7th inning. How refreshing!

Oh, yes, there's a game to be played. The ceremonial first pitch is thrown by a female softball pitcher who whizzes a fastball across the plate. Once the game begins, the scoreboard registers the speed of each pitch: these seem to range from 120 km/hr (75 mph) to 140 km/hr (87 mph), considerably below MLB speed; one pitch, however, registers at 148 km/hr (91 mph). Tokyo has two non-Japanese players in the starting lineup: Luis Cruz, who seems not to have had any MLB experience, and cleanup hitter Garrett Jones, who is hitting a "robust" .225 but who seems to be a fan favorite; he played in 911 major league games, mostly with Pittsburgh, hitting more than 20 home runs in three seasons and finishing with a lifetime batting average of .251. Of course, I can't make out the cheers of the Tokyo cheering section, except when the name Garrett Jones is chanted to the accompaniment of drums and trumpets.

Tokyo will win the game 3-0, aided enormously by four (count 'em, four) errors by Yokohama. My enjoyment of the game is hindered greatly by the young man sitting in front of Hiro (to my right). He is an American, a millennial (if I judge correctly), who is more interested in his Japanese girlfriend (to his right) and his American and Japanese friends (in the row in front of him) than in the game. In fact, I doubt that he's even aware that he's at a ball game. When he sits perfectly still (which is rare), he is positioned exactly between the pitcher (over his left shoulder) and the batter (over his right). But rarely does he sit still. He bobs and weaves, feints and ducks, much like a prize fighter trying to avoid getting hit. Is it ADHD? That's a distinct possibility. He is a human wall around whom I can only barely see. (Also, he laces all of his sentences with "like"!)

A curiosity of a different kind - at the end of the 3rd inning (and again after the 6th, if I recall), a dozen female cheerleaders come onto the field to dance and to lead the crowd in raucous yelling. (It's not just those in the designated cheering sections who make noise.) And there's a violation of baseball etiquette, at least as practiced in the U.S.: after registering a put out and the ball is being whipped around the infield, the first baseman (rather than the third baseman) tosses the ball to the pitcher. (Maybe it's because they play on the other side of the international date line?) Finally, I see no bullpens anywhere, even though

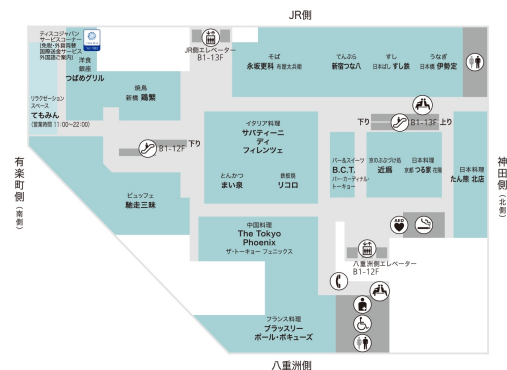
both teams bring out new pitchers. Are they under the stands? The game moves quickly; despite being televised, there is little time wasted between innings nor do the pitcher and batter engage very much in American-style stalling techniques.

Lee, who tolerates my love for baseball, is most fascinated by the ability of the beer girls who roam the aisles. Each of them sports a keg on her back and carries two or three plastic glass in one hand. She would use the other hand to direct the spigot to one or two glasses and use the third class as a repository for the foam that she pours off. Then, using the hand that held the spigot, she would take the money and even make change.



The final surprise comes when we exit the stadium. I go out through the same rotating door through which I entered. But there are Japanese on platforms using megaphones to urge (in Japanese, of course) patrons to also use the regular doors which have been flung open. Lee and Hiro do this and are nearly knocked flat by the wind that rushes out behind them. There are employees standing nearby to catch those who fall.

Hiro manages to hail a taxi and we return to the hotel at 5:30. Having failed last night to find the restaurant level of Daimaru Department Store, today we are determined! And we find it, some distance beyond which we gave up last night. We ascend to the 12th floor and are confronted by a dozen or so establishments. It's hard to decide which to choose, given that all of the writing is in Japanese. Shown to the right is the floor plan; note that the only English is for The Tokyo Phoenix. So we use the same method that we employed last night - we pick the restaurant that has local people waiting to get in. It is a tonkatsu restaurant (pork cutlets) in which our tray also comes with rice, miso soup, and cabbage.



Returning to our hotel room, we read, surf the internet (will we have such a fast connection at the next three hotels?), and pack our large suitcases for transfer to the Narita Hilton where we'll arrive on April 29. We're "allowed" to bring only carry-on luggage on the train to Takayama. (We had already made arrangements for the Shangri-La to handle this transfer for us for a fee of ¥1304 per bag.) And then it's time for bed.

Monday, April 25

It is sunny this morning with much less haze than yesterday, so we can see the Tokyo skyline clearly from our hotel room window. The breakfast room is a lot less crowded today (them damned Tauckers are finally gone!) and quieter, allowing us to hear (but *not* enjoy) the so-called music that is piped in via the public address. It is the same sort of unmelodic, vaguely rhythmic, minimalist, repetitious, new age stuff that I objected to in England (pp. 22, 69 in <http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/England-Rhine2013.pdf>) and again in Australia (pp. 6, 7, 14, 43 in <http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/Australia2014.pdf>). It's everywhere!!

As I finish closing up the big suitcase, a thought occurs to me that I've expressed in several earlier travelogues. Here it is, in slightly modified form:

Here's a suggestion for an enterprising electronics whiz who wants to make a fortune. We need a *universal charging device* for the numerous devices that we carry with us when we travel. As it stands, I now pack plastic bags that hold the chargers for the camera, laptop, shaver, my cell phone, and Kindle; and Lee has the chargers for the iPad and her cell phone. On top of this, there are the

converter plugs for adapting U.S. configurations to whatever weird outlet configuration a country has (this is not an issue in Japan, but is in Australia, New Zealand, and Europe). And there are various cables (e.g., for connecting the camera to the laptop). Wouldn't it be nice to be able to charge and/or cable all of these things with one device? Yes it would. Please get working, you geeks out there.

So I stuff my stuff into my large hard-sided suitcase, hoping that I've not packed away any "essentials" because I won't see it again until Friday. We check out at 8:45, leaving our large luggage with the front desk for delivery to the Narita Hilton. Hiro is waiting for us. We walk to the train station, although we're really too early for our 9:40 departure. We'll take the bullet train to Nagoya, then change to a conventional train for the remainder of the trip to Takayama (population about 95,000 swelling to much larger numbers during the tourism season). The first train is scheduled to arrive at 11:21 and will cover about 350 km; we will then have just 22 minutes to find the second train, which will deliver us to our final destination at 2:08 (about 160 km away).

This bullet train is the reverse of the one that we took from Osaka to Tokyo on April 22. It is the Nozomi, the fastest train that stops only at Shinagawa and Shin-Yokohama before arriving at Nagoya. We are heading in a west-southwest direction. WtJ has reserved seats for us in an "ordinary" car (i.e., not first class, as the seats are 3-2 rather than 2-2). Hiro tells us that we're lucky because we're seated on the "Fuji-side." Indeed, we will see Mt. Fuji, about halfway between Tokyo and Nagoya, over a period of fifteen minutes as it "appears" and "disappears" behind buildings and hills. I take 21 pictures* of the iconic peak

*The 18th century artist Katsushika Hokusai made a series of wood blocks entitled "47 Views of Mt. Fuji"; my digital images are my modest (*very* modest) contribution to the genre. We will see some of Hokusai's prints at the Ukiyo-e Gallery later today.

and have now posted them all to Picasa. I also take pictures of some of Tokyo's tall buildings as we begin the journey, but these are not attractive.

It's a good thing that Hiro is with us, because I'm sure that on our own we would have completely screwed up the correct use of the train tickets. In our packet from WtJ, there was an envelope with no fewer than nine* stiff-paper train tickets, each about 3" by 2", paper-clipped in groups of three; I surmise (correctly, as

*There is another set of tickets for use when we travel from Kanazawa to Tokyo on April 29.

it turns out) that each of these three groups is for each of the travelers: Hiro, Lee, and me. One ticket is for the Tokyo to Nagoya trip (let's call it **A**); a second (**B**) is for Nagoya to Takayama; and a third (**C**) is an overall fare ticket. At the turnstile in the Tokyo station, Hiro instructs us to put **A** and **C** (pointing in either direction and with either side up) into the slot; the gate opens and both tickets are returned to us. When we arrive in Nagoya, we again put **A** and **C** into the slot at the exit turnstile, but only **C** is returned. Then we head to the platform from which the Takayama train will depart. We insert **B** and **C** into the slot at the turnstile and both are returned; but when we arrive in Takayama and insert **B** and **C** into the slot, neither is returned. Amazing! (Lee and I will be on our own when we travel from Kanazawa to Tokyo on April 29, but we feel confident(?) that we'll understand how to use these tickets.)

Our train pulls into Nagoya right on time (of course!) and although there is only a 22-minute period for us to find the platform for the Takayama train, Hiro insists that we stop to buy lunch. So at a convenience store at the station, we buy sandwiches and drinks for all of us, planning to eat on the train. The two drinks that Lee purchases are distinctive enough that I've posted their pictures to Picasa: one is a "Mont Fuji Mineral Water of Japan" (complete with an image of the peak) and the other is ... wait for it ... "Caffè Latte" (with an incorrect accent mark) with the brand "Mt. Rainier: The Mountain of Seattle" (with an image either of Mt. Rainier or some other snow-capped mountain)! Those of us who live closer to Tacoma than Seattle object to calling Rainier "the mountain of Seattle" - granted that it can be viewed from Seattle (if the skies are very very very clear) but it is in Pierce County (where Tacoma resides) and not in King County, the home of Seattle. (When Lee and I were house-hunting in 2004-6, we looked in Puyallup, which is really close to Rainier, but decided against it because of all of the streets that had the designation "lahar escape route.")

This train travels slower (and bumpier) than did the bullet train and makes several local stops, but eventually we get to Takayama. It is a relatively scenic trip, as it makes its way north through a gorge with a rushing river and dams and through towns with flooded rice fields. As was true in Tokyo, Hiro has a hotel reservation near the train station; Lee's and mine is some distance away, high in the hills. So that we don't have to lug our small suitcases everywhere with us, we stash them in lockers outside the train station. We begin by walking through some local streets, past interesting stores, over the city's river, and reaching *Takayama Jinya*, a former government house and Shogun palace. It's an imposing structure and surprisingly large. (Alas, we are required to remove our shoes as we walk, fortunately on tatami mats, from one room to another.) Many interior and exterior photos are posted at Picasa.

Next, we walk to an Ukiyo-e(wood block) gallery where neither shoes nor picture-taking are allowed. Damn! But we do get to see some excellent prints, including several from the set "47 Views of Mt. Fuji" by Katsushika Hokusai (see above). We wander into a souvenir shop, just to see what we can see, and then down narrow streets lined with interesting shops and *sake* distilleries, winding up at the Takayama Festival Floats Exhibition Hall. A word or two of explanation. There are two festivals each year, one in April (two weeks ago) and one in October. Enormous floats, very tall and looking quite precarious, are wheeled through the streets after dark. I quote from Wikipedia because picture-taking is not permitted inside the hall:

The floats date back to the 17th century, and are decorated with intricate carvings of gilded wood, and detailed metal-work, rich design, similar in style to art from Kyoto during the Momoyama period, and blended with elements from the early Edo period. Detailed carving, lacquering and beautiful decorative metal-works is found not only on the outside of the floats, but inside as well, under the roof and behind the panels, where the work is amazingly detailed. The floats are also gorgeously decorated with embroidered drapery. The Yatai floats are lined up before dusk, and once the town becomes veiled in the evening darkness, as many as 100 chochin lanterns are lit on each of the floats. The unique ornaments of the yatai floats look even more resplendent in the darkness of the night. The floats are moved around the city by people [using] wheeled carts and the bearers are not required to endure the load. The floats are lit by traditional lanterns and escorted on a tour of the city by people in traditional kimono or hakama. Each float reflects the district in Takayama to which it represents.

And although I was not allowed to take pictures (I attribute this to anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism) others obviously were, as can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/jpffbgq> . Our final stop for the day (recall, we arrived after 2:00 and it is not yet 4:00, so Hiro is determined to pack in as much activity as possible) is at the Hida Kokubun-ji Temple (of course, no picture-taking!), with a gingko tree which is 1200 years old.

We make our way back to the lockers where we recover our luggage. Nearby, there is a shuttle bus that takes people from the train station to Hotel Associa Takayama, about 15 minutes away and at the top of a hill: <http://www.associa.com/english/tky/> Hiro comes with us to make sure that the check-in is smooth, but turns down our invitation to join us for dinner. (He tells us that we need to eat at the hotel because there are no restaurants in the immediate area.) Our room is large, but tired looking and a far cry from the Shangri-La. We make a reservation for the buffet restaurant at 7:00, hoping to beat a huge tour group that is arriving. (In fact, when we get to the restaurant and look down into the parking lot, we see numerous cars and no fewer than ten tour buses, with more arriving.)

After the day's travel, my feet hurt (calluses), my legs are tired (too much walking), and I'm hot and sweaty. Travel is not for wimps! Like me. But at least our room's air conditioner is working well and the lighting seems as if it will be ok for reading. Most of the signs in the room are in Japanese but here's one in English (more or less): "Internet usage falls under the customer's responsibility and any results under that usage will be born (sic) by him/her." Noted.

Although there is a Japanese restaurant that serves a fixed menu, we choose the Rosiere Room (where did they get that name?) with its ample buffet. The room is *enormous* (clearly this place caters to large tour groups). There are offerings of all types of salad (lettuce, macaroni, sushi, tempura) at one table, hot food (chicken, pork, rice, vegetables) at another, and dessert (cakes, ice cream, coffee) at a third. The food is

decent but not especially memorable. We finish eating at about 8:00 and return to our room. We are delighted to find that the internet connection is as fast as it was at the Shangri-La. After using the laptop and reading a bit, we get to bed at 10:00.

Tuesday, April 26

We awaken to bright sun and the unwelcome news that the high temperature today may be 80° - that's °F, not °C. The breakfast buffet is in the same huge dining room as last night's dinner. We are even assigned to the same table. (Coincidence or evil plan?) The dining room is much too hot, partly because the heat is on and partly because the morning sun is blasting through. The array of food choices is excellent, but I'm eager to get back to our air-conditioned room. (We've set the thermostat at 20.5°C; I hope that the maids don't change it when they clean.)

Hiro greets us and introduces today's driver, Mr. Iwata, who is driving a white van bearing the company name: Salon Car Medix Taxi <http://www.joyful-taxi.com/english/>. We'll be with him today and tomorrow, and although we invite him to have lunch with us he seems to always have had his lunch already. He also disappears whenever we visit some site, but re-appears when Hiro calls him on his cell phone.

We begin the morning by visiting an open-air food market at 9:15 along the Miyagawa River that cuts through the city. The variety of foods is staggering ... and Hiro is there to tell us what these weird vegetables, fruit, meat, and fish items are. At one stand, a man asks where we come from. When I say Seattle, his eyes light up and he says, "Ichiro!" (As everybody knows, Ichiro Suzuki was a major star in Japan and continued his excellence for 12 years with the Seattle Mariners; although now in the twilight of his career, he is a sure-fire first-ballot Hall of Famer.) The man's enthusiasm was partly due to Ichiro's growing up in Toyoyama, not far from here. At another stall, next to some unrecognizable products, there is a sign in English: "I have the obligation to recomend(sic) high quality items. You have the right to choose a favorite one. When your tongue isn't the high quality, I'm powerless." I think I understand the meaning but I'm not sure. At a counter selling Hida* beef, there is are large white sheets of paper on which

*According to a web site, "Hida Beef is the specific name given to beef from black-haired Japanese cattle that have been raised in Gifu Prefecture for at least 14 months." Right. Many chefs consider it the equal of (or better than) the better known Wagyu beef and Kobe beef.

visitors have left messages in their native languages. I see Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Polish, even English. My favorite is the German "Die Empfehlung Hida Fleischspiese und Kölsch! Einfach klasse!" (which Google-translate renders as "The recommendation Hida skewers and Kolsch. Just great!" Duh.)

Lee is fascinated by KitKat bars and we see a nice variety (although far short of the alleged 300 types that are available, p. 31). Lee buys the Shinsu Apple flavor but says that it tastes like rest stop air freshener. Everybody's a critic! We drive to another market, not far away, but it is much less impressive than the first. After an hour at the two markets, Mr. Iwata drives us some 15 km to Furukawa-Cho (an old name for the new town Hida Gifu) and to a *sake* distillery called Watanabe Brewery Co. It is located in the old quarter in a building that is 150 years old and has been a brewery for 146 of those years. The owner is 9th generation and lives on-site with his family. Above the entryway is a cedar ball that designates a *sake* distillery; brown now, it was green in November. We are greeted by the very tall brewmaster, Cody Brailsford who, you will surmise, is not Japanese. In fact, he's from Sundance, UT but moved to Japan with his Japanese wife. He takes us on a tour of the distillery. Much to my surprise (and dismay) we are required to remove our shoes, but at least we're given slippers on one floor and a different pair of slippers upstairs. (Mounting the steep staircase ... and, especially demounting ... is a challenge.) He talks about the harvesting of the rice, the fermentation* process, and so on. On the second floor, we



*According to Wikipedia: "Unlike wine, in which alcohol (ethanol) is produced by fermenting sugar that is naturally present in grapes, *sake* is produced by a brewing process more like that of beer, where the starch is converted into sugars before being converted to alcohol. The brewing process for *sake* differs from the process for beer in that, for beer, the conversion from starch to sugar and from sugar to alcohol occurs in two discrete steps. Like other rice wines, when *sake* is brewed, these conversions occur simultaneously. Furthermore, the alcohol content differs between *sake*, wine, and beer. Wine generally contains 9%–16% alcohol-by-volume, while most beer contains 3%–9%, and undiluted *sake* contains 18%–20% (although this is often lowered to about 15% by diluting with water prior to bottling). For further details, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sake>

look down into huge vats that are bubbling with their witch's brew. It's hard to hear his explanations because a radio is blasting at ear-shattering volume a Japanese comedy show with canned laughter. Cody explains that some brewmasters prefer classical music (like Mozart) to soothe the brewing process while others like to rouse the fermentation enzymes with raucous laughter. It's easy to determine which is favored here. (We are co-opted into posing with large *sake* bottles for posting to the company's Facebook page. Maybe we'll be a sensation, the static equivalent of cat videos.) Cody tells us that the company will begin selling their *sake* in the U.S., using a distributor located in the Soho neighborhood of Seattle.

We spend about an hour at the distillery, then walk down the street to have lunch at a place recommended by Cody. Our path takes us alongside a canal that's filled with koi. At the restaurant, Lee and I have shrimp tempura with rice, salad, and miso soup; I don't recall what Hiro eats. (And Mr. Iwata, as I've mentioned, disappears and eats elsewhere.)

Hiro tells us something that we find surprising. He says that he usually cannot tell the difference between Japanese, Chinese, and Korean people, just by looking at them. There has been so much back-and-forth migration and intermarriage that any initially distinct ethnic characteristics are gone. (He does say, though, that he can often tell if someone is from China because of the person's beaten-down and gloomy mien from living in such a controlled society.) So ... the racially insensitive joke about not being able to distinguish among the waiters in a Chinese restaurant may have some basis.

Mr Iwata drives us some 50 km to the twin towns of Shirakawa-Gō and Gokayama which, together, are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The villages date from the 11th century. An online Japanese travel guide informs us: "The Shirakawa-Gō and neighboring Gokayama regions line the Shogawa River Valley in the remote mountains that span from Gifu to Toyama Prefectures. Declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1995, they are famous for their traditional *gasshō-zukuri* farmhouses, some of which are more than 250 years old. *Gasshō-zukuri* means 'constructed like hands in prayer,' as the farmhouses' steep thatched roofs resemble the hands of Buddhist monks pressed together in prayer. The architectural style developed over many generations and is designed to withstand the large amounts of heavy snow that falls in the region during winter. The roofs, made without nails, provided a large attic space used for cultivating silkworms." Indeed, as we wander through the village, we note that the thatched roofs are very thick - one meter thick, according to several web sites.

We arrive at 2:25 and park on a hill above the town for a nice picture. We then make our way down a steep path (I'm praying that Mr. Iwata's taxi will be able to gather us down in the valley rather than at the top of the hill.) We spend the next couple of hours wandering about the village, taking pictures, looking inside homes and barns. A short taxi ride (courtesy of Iwata-san) takes us to another village. Lee and Hiro explore a Shinto Shrine (I put down my foot - literally - and decide that I've already taken off my shoes enough times for one day). [Dear Reader - my notes on today's activities are, shall we say, minimal, especially in comparison with Lee's. In fact, by the time we are finished, we will have had a number of taxi trips between a number of closely spaced villages. Anyone who cares what their names are or what is in them is free to ask Lee to photocopy the relevant pages of her journal.] Hiro takes us to a house in which a woman plays traditional instruments and sings a song for us, this after explaining (in Japanese which Hiro translates) the nature of the music and the instruments that we're about to experience. The song is called *Kokiriko* and it is a folk song that is performed at the time of rice planting. She accompanies her song with a percussion instrument called *Kokiriko-Take* (a pair of bamboo sticks that she strikes one against the

other).

Another percussion instrument that she uses to accompany her song is called a *sasara*, described by Wikipedia as " a traditional Japanese percussion instrument used in folk songs, rural dances and kabuki theater. The instrument uses many pieces of wooden plates strung together with a cotton cord. With handles at both ends, the stack of wooden plates are played by moving them like a wave." Lee and I pick up a *sasara* and try to play it; she is much better than I. (Mr. Iwata, who has made a sudden appearance, is much more adept than either of the Americans at the instrument.)



At 5:00, we drive back to Takayama, arriving at the hotel at 6:20, just in time for our dinner reservation in the buffet restaurant. Once again, there are many tourists in the restaurant - they are hogging the buffet tables and they speak a variety of languages, some of the quite unrecognizable but likely from central Europe. The food offered is identical to last night's - I'm glad that we'll *not* be here another evening. Following dinner, we read and surf the internet, then go to bed after a long day.

On balance, I think that we made the correct decision in choosing conventional hotels for our days in Takayama and Kanazawa. Both Michelle (at WtJ) and Stefan tried to sell us on the idea of staying in a *ryokan*. Here is how a typical *ryokan* is described by Wikipedia:

A *ryokan* is a type of traditional Japanese inn that originated in the Edo period (1603–1868), when such inns served travelers along Japan's highways. They typically feature tatami-matted rooms, communal baths, and other public areas where visitors may wear yukata and talk with the owner. Guest rooms are constructed using traditional Japanese methods: flooring is tatami, and doors are sliding doors. Even if the inn uses hinged doors for security, it usually opens into a small entranceway where guests can take off their shoes before stepping onto the tatami floor, which would be separated by a sliding door. Many *ryokan* rooms also feature a porch or balcony, also set off with a sliding door.

Almost all *ryokan* feature common bathing areas or *ofuro*, usually segregated by gender, using the water from a hot spring (*onsen*) if any are nearby. (Areas with natural hot springs tend to attract high concentrations of *ryokan*). High-end *ryokan* may provide private bathing facilities as well. Typically *ryokan* provide guests with a yukata to wear; they might also have games such as table tennis, and possibly *geta** that visitors can borrow for strolls outside.

**Geta* are a form of traditional Chinese-Japanese footwear that resemble both clogs and flip-flops.

Bedding is a futon spread out on the tatami floor. When guests first enter their room, they usually find a table and some supplies for making tea. The table is also used for meals when guests take them in their room. While guests are out, staff (usually called *nakai*) will move the table aside and set out the futon.

It all sounds exciting and interesting and adventurous and all of the other adjectives that one might apply to it, except for the feature of sleeping on a futon that is on the floor. When one (i.e., Lee and I) reaches a certain age (i.e., ancient), getting up from the floor can present problems unless there is a nearby chair or table or Sumo wrestler on which to pull oneself. I have visions of our being unable to rise in the morning, essentially "glued" to the floor, where we die a few days later from lack of food and water.

The communal baths also are a moderate cause of concern, although Junko (in her on-board lecture) told us that Japanese are not embarrassed by nudity. Dave Barry (in the book already mentioned) has a different viewpoint:

The Japanese like to soak in wooden tubs filled with extremely relaxing water, hot enough to melt Formica; this is one of the first things you're supposed to do when you get to the *ryokan*. I almost did

this the first evening. I minced* down the hallway to the bath area, and I started to go in, and although

*Barry is always "mincing" through Japan because people are continually giving him slippers that are too small. At least he got slippers - on our journey, it was rare to be given anything substantial to wear on our stockinged feet.

there was a lot of steam in the air, I was able to determine the following: 1. There were people in there. 2. I did not know these people. 3. These people were naked. 4. These people represented all the major genders.

So, we use our own judgment and Dave Barry's sage advice to choose a conventional hotel. One other piece of advice offered by Barry, first mentioned on p. 7, which we didn't choose to follow was:

... flying from the United States to Tokyo takes approximately as long as law school. But the flight is not so bad when you do it the way we did, namely first class on Japan Air Lines, with Random House paying for it. Just tell your travel professional, "I'd like to fly first class, and send the bill to Random House." Don't mention my name.

Wednesday, April 27

Again, we begin the morning with the buffet breakfast in the large dining room. And, as was true yesterday and the day before, it is quite crowded with people who've arrived on the many tour buses that we see in the parking lot.

UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATIONS(NOT THAT THEY'RE NOT WELL DESERVED) ABOUT OUR FELLOW TOURISTS

Last night, a large contingent of low-class (ooh, how judgmental!) Eastern Europeans (of some unknown country) made their presence known by their loud conversation, their crowding at the buffet tables, and the way one of the women (to make room for her friends) ordered some fellow travelers to a different table even though the hotel's staff directed them otherwise.

This morning, three women from that same group are seated near us. One of them, a short linebacker-like fireplug of a humanoid, had already pushed me out of the way at the buffet table when she saw some food item that she desperately needed to acquire. (This occurred when, instead of taking her place at the end of a queue, she barged into the middle where I was already standing.) Another of the three women was observed by Lee, last night, reaching for a pickle with her bare hand, biting it, then rejecting it and putting it back in its tray.

So I'm politically incorrect. Deal with it. (If Trump can get away with ethnic and racial insults, then so can I - the difference is that I'm reporting facts whereas he's reporting what he read on the internet or heard from someone.)

Speaking of politically incorrect ideas, Hiro tells us that when Japanese men speak (or try to speak) English, they worry too much about getting the grammar right, whereas women say anything that they want without worrying about linguistic niceties. Is he right? (Of course, Hiro's judgment is suspect, as he thinks that Ted Cruz would make an excellent president. Oy!)

At Hiro's suggestion, we get an early start by checking out of the hotel at 8:30 and heading to Mr. Iwata's taxi for the drive to Kanazawa,* some 115 km to the northwest. We are on a fast toll road that travels

*This is the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture and the home for some 460,000 people.

through mountainous terrain and through many many tunnels, some as short as 800 meters and some as

long as 11 kilometers. It is a sunny day, with some haze. I hope that it's cooler than yesterday, although yesterday was hot only because of all of the walking and the fact that only one building was air-conditioned.

Along the way, I do my best to take pictures of the flooded rice fields as we zoom past. We arrive in Kanazawa at about 10:00. We stop at Kanazawa Castle Park, the home of Kanazawa Castle and Kenrokuen Garden. We briefly examine the outside grounds and stone wall of the castle before spending all the rest of our time in the very spacious garden. It is beautifully landscaped, with rolling hills, trees, and creeks and lakes well-stocked with koi.* There is a venerable pine tree, its branches held up with stakes,

* At various times during the trip, I've been confused about the difference between koi and carp. Apparently my confusion is shared by others, because there are several web sites that attempt to address the difference (if any). According to one of them: "Koi is an ornamental variety of common carp, *Cyprinus carpio*. They have stout and elongated bodies, and their fins are short but full of colors ... Carp or the common carp, *Cyprinus carpio*, is predominantly a freshwater bony fish species, but very few of their relatives live in seawater." Is that clear? No.

that is over 500 years old. A special treat is our viewing several herons who are stalking prey at water's edge. We stay in the park for some 1.5 hours, fighting the crowds and the groups of school children on outings.

Dear Reader - A tragedy of Brobdingnagian proportions has occurred! My handwritten notes suggest that a brilliant (or so I believe) pun was created while we were walking through the park. As bad as my handwriting normally is, I can almost always decipher anything that I've written. This time, however, I was writing while we were walking - and as a result I can make out only a few words. What I think they say is:

Lee (pointing): "The temp ... "
 Ron (answer): "It's not ... "

So you'll just have to take my word that it was a brilliant pun. I mean, what choice do you have, eh?

At 11:15, we board the taxi and Mr. Iwata drives us to a covered food arcade. As in earlier food markets, we have no idea what most of these vegetables, meat, and fish (raw or cooked and packaged) are but Hiro is our hero and explains everything. At one stand, there is a sign in English (more or less) whose meaning I'm still unable to discern: "Please see it!! This is a flower living for 3-5 years!! What attach to the top. It is paper made of the pure gold made with Kanazawa! Because it is available only at this place. I take a souvenir by all means." Say, what?

We stop for lunch at a restaurant inside the arcade where Lee and Hiro have lunch; I'm full and have only coffee (and a little nosh from Lee's plate). We then wander among the food stands a little bit more. Lee is looking for the wonderful rice crackers with green tea icing that Tim distributed to his flock on one of the bus rides. We go into various stores, but find nothing despite Hiro's asking all of the clerks if they have anything that fits the description.

Kanazawa is a big city. Its main street looks like it could belong in any major city of the world. It has all of the upscale stores (Gucci, Prada, Vuitton), but best of all it has a Seattle's Best Coffee shop (I fail to get a picture of it).

Mr. Iwata drives us to a narrow street on which is found *Shoukyuzan Myouruji*, a Buddhist temple that dates from 1643. Hiro puts our names on a waiting list, so we have a few minutes to wander about and see all of the other temples and shrines. (A local guide tells us that Kanazawa is called "Temple Town" because of the large number of temples.) Of course shoes are removed and cameras are forbidden when we go inside. A guidebook tells us "Famous for its nickname, this temple has many contraptions such as hidden staircases and floor traps to defeat attacking enemies." A woman leads a group of us (about a dozen) through the various rooms and points out the "contraptions," speaking in Japanese, of course. The house

rules forbid translating the Japanese into another language during the tour!!! Why? But we are given a set of sheets, in English, that we are supposed to use to figure out where we are and what the "contraption" is. That they are not in the order that the guide takes us makes following them somewhat of a challenge. (Methinks that this building is a tourist trap and not a house of worship - but what do I know?)

At 3:10, we leave this pseudo Disney attraction and drive, courtesy of Mr. Iwata, to the geisha district - it is less crowded and noisy than was Gion in Kyoto, although we do encounter Japanese couples wearing traditional garb; there are even female hawkers, trying to lure us naive visitors to their geisha shows. We head to Sakuda Gold Leaf Shop. (Shoes are removed. Why?) This consists of a glitzy show room, where one can leave many ¥ in exchange for gold-leaf covered products; and, off to the side, the "factory" in which gold leaf is pounded and pounded to a thickness of 0.0001 mm. One of the artisans interrupts his work to demonstrate the technique and to explain it, in Japanese of course. (Once again, I conclude that it would be nearly impossible to be a tourist in Japan without a guide who can translate signs, speeches, menus, etc.) It turns out that 99% of the gold and silver leaf sold worldwide comes from this city. Lee makes two purchases: a small lacquerware box with gold leaf flowers on the lid and some jewelry. She also takes a picture of the store's bathroom whose walls are covered in gold leaf.

It's getting cloudy and it begins to feel as if it might rain. The forecast for tomorrow, courtesy of Hiro's magical smart phone, is "90% chance of rain before noon." We wander a bit more before Mr. Iwata drives us to our hotel. How does Mr. Iwata find his way around a city in which he doesn't live? There are narrow streets, unmarked, and he doesn't use a map or GPS device. Maybe the city streets are embedded in his DNA? We say goodbye to him, but give a nice tip (¥3000)* which elicits a 90° bow!

*WtJ recommends a tip of ¥1500-2000 per day for a private car driver. Hiro said that we should give only ¥1000 a day, but we are really pleased with Mr. Iwata's work. Does he have a first name? Does Hiro have a first name (or is it a second name)? Tomorrow, we'll give him a tip of ¥25,000 (¥5,000 a day), the amount recommended by WtJ

Our hotel is ANA Crowne Plaza Kanazawa, a large city hotel with 249 rooms on 19 floors. It is far more elegant than the hotel in Takayama and, unlike that hotel, it gives us a king bed instead of two (separated) singles.

<http://www.anacrowneplaza-kanazawa.jp/lang/english/> It has a Western style restaurant on Floor 1 (where we'll have breakfast two times and where we'll have dinner tomorrow), a Chinese restaurant on Floor 2, a Japanese restaurant on Floor 5, and a Teppanyaki restaurant on Floor 19. Before beginning our trip, I read some rather devastating reviews of this hotel on *Trip Advisor* - it's hard to believe that the complainers were writing about the same hotel where we are staying.



As on previous days, Hiro is staying somewhere else, but we make plans to meet at 6:30 in our hotel's lobby because tonight he's agreed to be our guest at dinner. It has begun to rain and the wind is picking up as we walk (very briskly) past the main train station (as was true of the train station in Tokyo, it is very close to our hotel) to Forus Shopping Mall.* An elevator to the 6th floor opens onto a food court with about

*The Forus web site lists some of its services as: "1. An eating and drinking floor is 11:00-23:00. 2. You can get Japanese yen with a card of the overseas issue. There are 2 ATM airplanes on the first floor." I'm sure that this makes sense ... to someone.

a dozen restaurants. This time, we don't have to "guess" about each venue nor do we have to see which restaurant has the longest lines of customers. We have Hiro to guide us. Unfortunately, he is indecisive (because he doesn't want to push a place that might not suit his western guests) and we wander from window to window until finally ... *finally* ... we choose a place that specializes in Ramen noodles. We get very capacious bowls of noodles, along with some pot stickers and rice covered with some sort of chicken concoction. I watch some of the locals at nearby tables. The most popular technique for getting the

slippery noodles from bowl to mouth is to grab a bunch with chopsticks and "inhale" them with a loud slurp! (One nearby customer is eating rice - his technique is to hold the bowl just inches from his mouth and use his chopsticks as a shovel.)

Following dinner, we ask Hiro to take us inside the train station so that we can locate the platform for our train to Tokyo, two days hence. Back at the hotel, we take advantage of the internet (fast again) and we consume the contents of the small bottle of Hibiki Suntory single malt that was purchased from Shangri-La's mini-bar; we read a bit and get to bed fairly early at 10:00.

Thursday, April 28

Today will be our last day for tourism. And it's raining. Hard. In fact, the rain hitting the window was so loud that I was awakened at 6:00 and couldn't get back to sleep. I'm pleased to report that the shower/tub area is similar to, but a bit smaller than, the one at Tokyo's Shangri-La. Nevertheless, it drains better but the floor is still a bit wet when Lee comes in for her bath.

We head to the first floor restaurant (Cascade) for a nice buffet breakfast with a good variety of hot and cold offerings, both Western and Japanese. The dining room is much smaller than the airplane-hangar-sized restaurant in Takayama, but we easily get a table when we arrive at about 7:00; by the time we leave (7:45), the tables are filled and there is a waiting line to get in. Two surprises: (1) Lee and I are the only Caucasians eating here. All of the others are Asian, whether business people or families with children; as close as this hotel is to the train station and as large and cosmopolitan as Kanazawa seems to be, I would have expected to see more Westerners. (2) There are no chopsticks on the tables, just western-style fork and knife and spoon. Some of the Asians are having difficulty with the implements.

We return to our room to wait for Hiro's arrival and for our morning tours to begin. I get an email from Amazon saying that my two Kindle loans have ended, but both books that I borrowed three weeks ago have not disappeared from my Kindle - and I ain't gonna ask Amazon why. So this pair joins the seven books (see p. 1) from previous "loans" that have not been retrieved by the all-powerful and all-knowing Amazon.

I should mention that the toilet seat in our room behaves like the one at the Shangri-La - when one approaches the toilet, the lid opens in greeting. Lee says that she's expecting to read a pithy (pissy?) comment from me, along the lines of "Are you happy to see me?" And as was true of the space-age plumbing in Tokyo, when one finishes "doing one's business" (as the expression goes), the cursed thing flushes all by itself as if to say, "Stupid American, you don't know that you're supposed to flush, do you?" As I walk away from the evil thing, the lid goes down by itself ... but if I linger too long (e.g., in pulling up my pants), the lid opens again (thinking that I'm a new arrival) and then, if there is no further activity, the toilet flushes all on its own and the lid goes down. I think that this is beyond weird. And it's freaking me out!

We take a taxi* to Kanazawa Utatsuyama Craft Workshop (<http://www.utatsu-kogei.gr.jp/data/utatsu.pdf>)

*I should have mentioned this when we first took taxis in Kyoto and several more in Tokyo, but throughout Japan when a taxi arrives to pick up a fare, the rear passenger side door (on the left - recall that the cars are right-hand drive) swings open and then closes (as if controlled by the same magical spell that operates the toilet seats); and upon arrival at the destination, the door opens and closes again. Truly truly weird!

Founded in 1989, it is an interesting place that is dedicated to the arts and crafts of the region. No pictures are allowed (sorry to say) but the web site and an excellent brochure serve to remind me that the upper floor is a gallery devoted to crafts of the region, some of them quite old; and the lower floor houses the workshops where students and apprentices learn their craft (and where we can peer in through large windows and watch them at work). There are separate rooms (each with all of the appropriate large-scale equipment) for ceramics, urushi (lacquerware), dyeing, metal working, and glass blowing. Lee is particularly intrigued by the urushi studio where objects such as covers for smart phones, Zippo lighters, card cases,

and skate boards(!) are made; a young man, who apprenticed here, is selling these items commercially from his company, Urushi Freaks. At the company web site, he writes:

Lacquer is snuggle in daily life, we have continued to support life. But the family of the table, I think that moments with friends, the opportunity to see in place to connect the people and people have become less. So "URUSHIFREAKS" is the theme of the new whereabouts of lacquer, it has devised I would like to deliver to the young generation. Little opportunity to touch the lacquer usually they be to dissolve the item to be frequently used in daily life, has been commercialized as across more of the hand.

It continues in pretty much the same style. I feel somewhat guilty making fun of his English because my knowledge of Japanese consists of, perhaps, five words (for which I can't even begin to reconstruct the Japanese letters).

We stay here for nearly two hours, then take a taxi to the Nomura Samurai House. The *good* news is that picture-taking is allowed, both inside and out; the *bad* news is that shoes must be removed. As the Picasa pictures reveal, the gardens are beautiful as is the interior - and the tatami mats make walking in stockings tolerable ... until we need to step on rocks and head outdoors. I leave this latter activity to Hiro and Lee, deciding that saving my feet is more important than seeing a new sight. According to a web site:

When the feudal system collapsed at the end of the 19th century, samurai privileges were soon abolished, and many of their houses were destroyed. It was the class of the merchants who finally took a leading role in the crucial transformations of modern Japan, and the wealthiest of them were soon able to acquire the remaining parts of those grandiose estates, symbolic marks to demonstrate their position in the Meiji restoration aftermath. The Nomura clan's residence, originally owned by Nomura Denbei Nobusada at the end of the 16th century, was finally bought by a rich industrialist, Kubo Hirobei in the city of Kaga. It remained there for many years until the city of Kanazawa acquired and restored it to be accessible for visiting. The house gives a good idea of the life-style of samurai during the Edo period, when Japan was secluded from the outside world. The pacification of Japan gradually led the samurai warriors to escape their social uselessness and compete in the fields of art and *savoir-vivre*. This is particularly evident in the estate's drawing room, which enlightens the elegance of cypress wood frameworks, allied with exquisite motives designed in rosewood and ebony. Sculpted persimmon wood motifs are used to keep the framework's nails out of sight, and the doors show masterfully painted landscapes by Sasaki Senkei, a highly reputed artist from the end of the 17th century. The Nomura sought for further refinement by using paulownia* for the design of alcove panels and Indian ironwood

*I had to look this up: "Paulownia is a genus of 6 to 17 species (depending on taxonomic authority) of flowering plants in the family Paulowniaceae ..."

frames, features which were fairly unusual for the time, for the sliding thick-paper doors that open up the room to the garden.

There is a small museum attached to the house. We see the "usual" things: writing tablets with ink pads for calligraphy, lacquerware boxes, smoking pipes, swords, bits of armor. Most intriguing are letters written by Japan's rulers to the Samurai warriors. One is translated: "Thanks for taking the time to kill high-ranking soldier xxxx in the battle of yyyy and to send his head to us." It's nice to know that proper etiquette was observed in those violent days. Today's children are not very good about sending thank-you notes for gifts (like severed heads).

We next take a taxi to downtown where we get to see all of the ritzy shops. It's raining pretty hard. On the 6th floor of the Daiwa department store* we find a place for lunch. I'm not very hungry (I really just want

*This seems to be following a pattern that we've seen many times. Are there *any* department stores that do not have large food courts?

coffee) but Lee shares her tonkatsu meal with me. Nearby we come across a local television crew (camera person, interviewer, director), taking videos of ... what?

And now, we walk (in pretty heavy rain) to the *21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art*, a remarkable place with much edgy art, but because of an upcoming major exhibit many of its rooms are closed off. Nevertheless, I do manage to take many pictures (although I don't recognize the names of the artists). Quite a few of the sculptures and paintings refer to the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima by the atomic bombing of 1945 or to the destruction caused by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

We leave the museum at 2:45 and seek a place for coffee. The coffee house that Hiro wants to take us to is closed on Thursdays, so we walk to the *Ishikawa Museum of Art*, not for its collection, but for its restaurant* where we have coffee and cake. And then it's off in the rain again, this time to the *Museum of*

*Hiro consults his smart phone and learns that this eating establishment claims that it is "the most popular café in Kanazawa." One's credulity is stretched, here.

Traditional Arts and Crafts. Again, picture-taking is permitted, so I can post to Picasa images of lanterns, bowls, ceramics, fireworks, musical instruments, dolls, masks, and much much more.

We stay at the museum until 4:30, then take a taxi back to our hotel. On the way, we see a tavern advertising CAFÉ + DINNING (sic) + BAR. (We suspect that Hiro has some more exciting venues in mind for us, but enough is enough especially on a gloomy, rainy day.) We wish Hiro a safe trip back to Tokyo (we won't return until tomorrow). Because of the rain and wind, we decide to stay indoors (and stay dry) by having dinner at the hotel's Cascade Dinning (sic, it's contagious); the menu and the prices seem reasonable. We have the buffet dinner, a mixture of Japanese and Western offerings - but I have no notes, no pictures, and no specific memories of it. But at least it *is* dry indoors. And in her notes, Lee declares that the food was good: tossed salad, smoked salmon, shrimp and vegetable tempura, Chinese dumplings, paella with shrimp and mussels, pork with mustard sauce, and fish 'n' chips. Surely we didn't eat *all* of that! Surely, she was just listing what was available at the buffet. Following dinner, we read, consume the second small bottle of single malt (Yamazaki) purchased at the Shangri-La, use the internet, then get to bed at 10:30.

Friday, April 29

Today we have bright sun. The buffet breakfast room is less crowded than yesterday and there are many fewer family groups (I wonder why). We are one of only two tables of Caucasians (I don't say "Americans" because the others might be something weird ... like Australian). The weather changes rapidly: at 10:20, the sun makes a quick exit and the rains arrive; but at 11:15 we have bright sunshine again. We hang around our room, reading and using the internet until 11:00 when it's time to check out. (Our Tokyo-bound train doesn't leave until 12:46, but the hotel's check-out time is 11:00. So we sit for a while in the hotel lobby, reading and marking time before walking to the train station..)

The train station is a sight to behold. We couldn't appreciate it, two nights ago, when we walked to dinner as quickly as possible to minimize our exposure to the wind and rain. The station was built in 1898 but completely remodeled in 2005. Its most striking features are the *Tsuzumi Gate*, the design of which is based on traditional Japanese hand drums and the large glass-and-steel lattice work of the "Welcome Dome."



We are looking for Platform 13 from which the bullet train, Kagayaki 583, will depart on a 2.5 hr, 300 km journey to Tokyo, with stops at Toyama, Nagano, Ōmiya, and Ueno. We are "experts" on the use of train tickets (see p. 45) so we know to put both the fare card and the ticket into the slot of the turnstile. We arrive on the platform at 12:20 and sit in the small waiting room. Unlike the hectic boarding of the bullet train in Osaka (p. 35), this train originates in Kanazawa. In fact, it arrives at the platform at 12:39, leaving us a leisurely seven minutes to board it and find our seats. (Lee can't resist buying something from one of the vending machines on the platform: "Tully's Coffee Barista's Latte" which she deems as "not very good.") Our car has 3-2 seating; we are in seats 18D and 18E on the two-seat side of the aisle.

We arrive in Tokyo at 3:20, right on time, and now we have to leave the JR Shinkansen platforms (reserved for bullet trains) to find the Narita Express that goes from downtown Tokyo to the Narita Airport. We walk briskly (because it's some distance away and involves going up and down several staircases) but we arrive in time for a 4:03 departure. Alas, the train does not! Sign boards indicate that it will be delayed; unlike bullet trains that keep to the schedule within microseconds, this train will be late. It finally arrives at 4:11, which means that we'll miss the 5:00 shuttle bus to the hotel. On the platform, all of the announcements are in Japanese except for "Stand Clear - The Doors Are Closing" spoken by the same New York-accented female voice that delivers this very same message in Seattle. Oh, well, the bus does leave every 30 minutes, so it's not so bad.

The train arrives at Tokyo station at about 5:00 and so we begin another very long walk to find the exit that will lead us to the hotel shuttle buses. We know that we need to find Bus Stop #26, but upon exiting the station we see that we are at #9. So we walk and walk and walk, eventually getting to #21 where it's clear that the sidewalk is ending and there are no more bus stops. At this crucial moment, Lee needs to go inside the airport terminal to ... (well, you-know-what) so I ask one of the employees at #21 where the Hilton bus is. Fortunately, he speaks English (*Gott sei Dank*, as the Japanese would say) or at least enough of it to tell me that we're on the wrong side of the road and we need to cross over to the other sidewalk and walk back in the direction from which we had come. So when Lee emerges from you-know-where, we cross the street and traipse in the opposite direction to #26. With all of this to-ing and fro-ing (and you-know-what-ing) we actually manage to get to #26 before the bus does.

It's a 12-minute ride to the hotel. We check in and go to our room (yes, the big suitcases did arrive from the Shangri-La and are delivered to our room). The room is blah and down-market, a typical American-style room; the bathroom is not very clean (some hairs and dental floss are in the sink); but worst of all, it smells of cigarette smoke. No, worst of all, it charges for internet use: ¥900 for 24 hours. But, we figure, it's only for one night.

We head to the first floor to the Terrace Restaurant, but before going into the restaurant, we stop at the desk and ask why we were not given a non-smoking room, as requested by WtJ. The clerk says that it *is* a non-smoking room, that the entire floor is non-smoking. We reply that a previous resident (perhaps several previous residents) had indeed smoked cigarettes (a great many cigarettes) and that there was no sign (at least in English) anywhere in the room or on the door stating that it was non-smoking. He offers to give us another room, but having already unpacked it doesn't seem worth it (especially since there's a good chance that the next room would also reek of cigarette smoke). He then gives us a can of some spray that is supposed to dissipate the odor; it doesn't!

The Terrace features a buffet dinner (with offerings of Japanese and Western food: Japanese BBQ, salmon, seafood au gratin, penne in tomato sauce, roast beef, roast pork, chicken with vegetables, Japanese stir-fried vegetables, make your own sundaes, various cakes). The selection and quality are good, although the price is steep: ¥4100 for each of us and ¥900 for each beer. A noisy trio of obese Brits at an adjacent table demand cheddar cheese and crackers from the waitress. Really?

UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT JAPANESE WOMEN AND JAPANESE IN GENERAL

- Upon surveying the crowd in the dining room (and having surveyed crowds in other restaurants, stores, temples, shrines, and museums) I've noticed that many women (from young adults to middle-

aged matrons to "senior citizens") are bow-legged! Why is this true? Is it diet? Is it the nature of exercise? Does yoga cause it? Surely someone should do a scientific study of this phenomenon. Now don't get me wrong - I'm not in the habit of staring at women's legs, although I do confess to taking a peak now and then.

- Prior to coming here, we had read that it's considered very impolite to blow one's nose in public and that Japanese do not do this. Not so, as we've observed several times.
- Another myth that's not true: the guide books all said that Japanese do not speak loudly in public places (like airport waiting rooms). Although this might hold for most of the population, we can attest that it is not "universally" the case. (Of course, one or two loud people in a crowded room can make one think that nobody in the room knows to keep his/her voice down.)
- And finally, it is not true that Japanese do not use their cell phones in public. Yes, we did observe some who would politely step out of a room (such as a restaurant) to make or receive a call, but we all saw many others who were just as rude as Americans in carrying on loud conversations in public.

In the evening, we use the ridiculously expensive internet, read a bit, pack for tomorrow's trip home, and get to bed at a decent hour.

Saturday, April 30

It's another sunny morning. We go to breakfast in the Terrace room. It's very crowded and we have to wait a while for a table to open. There are many airplane captains and flight attendants having breakfast. An uncharitable and politically incorrect comment (which doesn't quite warrant the bold face font in upper case letters) is that the female flight attendants from Finnair are, shall we say, beefy. Not that beefy is necessarily bad - the Magids can be so described if someone wants to be uncharitable. But we have an excuse - we are of "advanced" years and we are not as physically active as we were when we toiled (*toiled*, I tell you) as chemistry professors.

Following breakfast, we return to our room to finish packing. We plan to take the 10:20 shuttle bus to the airport. Our flight doesn't leave until 1:55, but we figure that Korean Air will have a nice lounge, assuming that we can actually check in at the counter this many hours before departure. When we check out at the hotel desk, a different clerk sees that we had registered a complaint about the smell of cigarette smoke in our room. Like last night's "automaton" of a loyal employee, he reiterates the company line that the entire floor is non-smoking.* The bus delivers us to the airport at 10:35 and, to our delight, we are allowed to

*Upon returning to the U.S., Lee will write about this on Trip Advisor. A reply comes from the hotel manager who insists that it was a non-smoking room and that nobody, at least back to Medieval times, had ever smoked a cigarette in there. Lee, restraining herself and her usually curse-strewn language, calmly replies that he was full of shit (without using this word) and said that any one of the housekeeping crew with a pair of nostrils should have reported the problem to him. She reiterates that there was NO sign inside the room; and she adds that the drapes and furniture all had the tell-tale "aroma" of cigarettes.

check our luggage, pass quickly through security, and go directly to the lounge where we arrive at 11:05. (Not bad, in light of the two-hour - and longer - delays in the TSA lines that are being reported at many U.S. airports.)

The lounge is surprisingly cool (the A/C is working full time) but I like it. I have a glass of juice and a few snacks, given that there is not much variety in the offerings. The room is also understaffed - dirty plates and glasses remain on the tables for a long time. For the reasons mentioned earlier, while it would be convenient (and quicker) to fly nonstop from Tokyo to Seattle, it's much much cheaper to fly Korean Air from Tokyo to Seoul and from there non-stop to Seattle, both flights on Boeing 777-300 planes. The

former has 2-3-2 seating in Business class (we have seats 14A and 14B); the latter has 2-2-2 seating (we're in 10A and 10B).

[STOP THE PRESSES! As this part of the travelogue is being written on May 27, we hear on the radio that a Korean Air plane, also a Boeing 777 scheduled to fly from Tokyo to Seoul (with 302 passengers and 17 crew) had to be evacuated at the Tokyo airport because one of its engines caught fire; a few passengers suffered minor injuries. Could this be Flight 0704, the same one that we took on April 30? Well, no. The plane that caught fire was leaving from Haneda Airport, not Narita. Unlike Narita, which is 75 km from downtown Tokyo, Haneda is only 20 km away. Haneda is the fourth busiest airport in the world, trailing only those in Atlanta, Beijing, and Dubai.]

I'm still trying to wrap my poor brain around the following seeming paradox. We are scheduled to leave Tokyo at 1:55 pm, fly to Seoul, and arrive in Seattle **the same day nearly two hours earlier**. This, it seems to me, is tampering with the natural order of things - no wonder the world is being visited by increasingly violent weather systems and Donald Trump.

At 1:15, we make our way to the gate for our 1:55 departure. This is an older style of B 777 in that Lee and I are seated side-by-side rather than in the staggered configuration that I described on p. 2. The plane fills up quickly such that the doors can be closed at 1:50 and we can push back at 1:52, and are air-borne at 2:10. The flight attendants offer lunch, but Lee and I reject it because we are sure that we'll be fed quite well on the overseas leg of our journey. It is a sunny day with only a few clouds, but as we near Seoul we are descending through clouds and fog.* We touch down at 4:20, right on schedule and arrive at

*I recall that Seoul was also shrouded in fog when we arrived on April 10. Surely, a blanket of fog is not a 24/7 occurrence here in South Korea's capital ... is it?

the terminal 10 minutes later. We are surprised that we have to go through airport security (but not passport control) which requires us to show our passports and boarding passes, empty our pockets, and go through a full-body scanner.

Following this, it's a long walk* to the Korean Air lounge, where we arrive at 5:00. Prestige class

*Our plane arrived at Gate 35, but we need to walk to Gate 11 to find the lounge. Fourteen gates might not sound like a lot, but it really is quite a hike. And then we'll need to traipse back to Gate 23 for our 6:20 flight to Seattle. Well, at least we don't have to take our shoes off!

passengers are in a separate room from those in first class - and who knows where those in steerage are stashed as they wait for the flight. But even this "second-class" Prestige lounge is much larger than the KAL lounge in Tokyo, with many more seats and a better assortment of food, including full meals. (I resist having more than a few nuts because I'm anticipating a "feast" when we get on the plane.) But as with the lounge in Tokyo, there are far too few personnel: cups, plates, and glasses accumulate on tables, waiting for someone ... anyone ... to pick them up.

Well, I don't know what curiosities the first-class passengers might see in their lounge, but sitting right in front of us in the Prestige lounge are two Buddhist monks, each wearing a saffron robe and carrying a saffron bag and sporting saffron shoes (and, for all I know, saffron socks and underwear) - and both of them are using smart phones. (Do you suppose that they have the Buddha on fast dial?) I wish that I could have taken a picture, but that would have been impolite, eh?

I assume that we're actually going to make it to Seattle, so while in the lounge I change my watch to 1:10 am (PDT), but keep the date the same (April 30). Our final health report: I seem to be completely recovered from the allergic reaction but Lee is still coughing and tearing. (It will be a relief not to have to ask the flight attendants for extra tissues, as I had to do with the colds that I acquired in France (last September) and in England (the preceding March).

We make our way to the departure gate (noting that the Seoul airport remains blanketed by fog) and board the plane at 1:50 am (i.e., 5:50 pm Seoul time). The seats (with their staggered arrangement and opportunity for lie-flat sleeping) are the same as on the flight from Seattle (hell, this might even be the same airplane!). We in the "privileged" classes (i.e., First class and Prestige class) are permitted to board the plane before the riff-raff are herded to their seats.

A FINAL UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATION, THIS TIME ABOUT KOREANS

Unlike the Japanese who do not push ahead, who do not cut in line, and who patiently wait in queues (as we saw on so many occasions during the past three weeks), the Koreans are much more aggressive. They progress down the aisles of the plane by pushing and jostling one another, all probably to get to an overhead bin before it is filled. In this regard, they're more like Americans. I'm thinking not only about the human wall who interfered with my watching the baseball game (p. 43) but of a scene that took place as we were checking out of the hotel this morning. Two American men (millennials, again, sad to say) were on line ahead of us and were directed to proceed to an available agent. While we waited patiently for our turn, a friend of theirs tried to crash the line by joining his buddies at the desk. A hotel employee, who was controlling the lines, walked over and told the interloper to leave. He ignored her but then when the clerk behind the desk ordered him to go to the back of the queue, he finally acquiesced.

Music is being piped into the airplane's sound system, but it is barely audible above the noise of the passengers and the "swooshing" air of the ventilation system. I think it may be classical music, but it's impossible to tell. So what is the point of delivering it if nobody (not even RMM with his acute hearing) can hear it? Eventually the plane pushes back, the flight attendants do their deep bows, the safety film (with more bowing people) is shown, and a flight attendant comes down the aisle with newspapers. I take an *International New York Times* but find it difficult to read because it is so much wider, especially when opened up, than a typical American paper. Also, I had already read many of the articles online back in the hotel.

After a long long long taxi, we are air-borne at 2:45 am PDT (6:45 pm Seoul time); the flight tracker indicates that our ground speed just before take off is 338 km/hr (210 mph), just in case you were as curious as I about how fast a plane is going while still on the runway.

At 3:20 PDT, dinner is served. We are given menus in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and (fortunately) English. Like the big meal on April 9, this one arrives in separate courses: shrimp with bell pepper aioli; grilled tuna steak with orange; coconut carrot cream soup; grilled beef tenderloin* with mashed potato and

*When asked, I requested "medium" but what arrives ranges from medium rare to very very rare. Nevertheless, it is an excellent piece of meat, very tender and tasty, if also bloody.

vegetable; dessert. Lee, again very bravely, opts for the Korean Bibimbap, but unlike the offering on the earlier flight this one comes without an "instruction manual"; smart girl that she is, she remembers (pretty much) the sequence from before. As the meal is served, I notice that we are passing into darkness, unlike the flight from Seattle when the sun stayed out for the full time.

Several times in this journal, I've mentioned that Amazon plans to snatch my two most recent book loans from my Kindle because the three-week loan period has expired. Well, I'm pleased to report that Amazon is *not* all-powerful - not only are my two recent loans intact but so are the seven from earlier years (see p. 1). It will take the full extent of this flight, but I will finally finish Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. I'm so glad that I chose it to download. Bryson not only writes very well but he has educated himself about a wide range of scientific and technological topics that he explains clearly to his readers. I also greatly enjoyed the other Kindle book, *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham, which I finished quite early during our travels.

According to flight tracker, we fly east across Japan, thus avoiding Russian air space, a good thing,

considering the horrible downing of a Korean Air Lines passenger plane by the Russian military in 1983. I don't know if this is the reason that we've flown this path, but it does seem reasonable. (No explanations are required for why we also avoid North Korean air space.)

At 5:00 PDT, the cabin lights are turned down. I stretch out and close my eyes - I think that I manage as much as 90 minutes of fitful sleep before I finally return my seat to its upright position. At 8:00 PDT, an attendant brings around cookies and juice; the outside is still pitch dark.

PUN ALERT Lee awakens from her sleep, sees the map on the monitor's flight tracker, and announces "We're now along the Aleutian Islands." "No," say I, "It's only an illusion."

So I continue reading Bryson and working several NYT crossword puzzles, but (to my surprise) I'm feeling drowsy. So I recline my seat and actually sleep for an additional 90 minutes.

At 10:15 PDT, breakfast is served. There is a Yoghurt selection followed by the main course: either "Korean style seafood soybean paste soup" (which neither of us is inclined to try) or scrambled egg with asparagus ragout and potato, bacon, tomato, and vegetables. Accompanying this are rolls, pastries, jams, etc. Korean Air Lines is determined that nobody perish from malnutrition during the flight. (We are at an altitude of 10,668 km and flying at 980 km/hr if anyone cares - or even if nobody cares.)

At 11:35 we begin our descent. It takes a while to figure out the route that the plane is flying but finally we realize that we are flying eastward over the mountains of the Olympic Peninsula, then turning south over Puget sound (and its many many islands, more than I realized were there), past Bremerton and (be still my heart!) alongside Gig Harbor and the two Narrows Bridges before doing a 180° turn and heading back north over Tacoma, Des Moines, and into Seatac airport where we land at noon (15 minutes ahead of schedule). As wonderful a trip as it was, it's good to be home.

We manage to make it through passport control, baggage reclaim, and customs and are actually in our car (right where we left it in the garage) and at the pay window at 12:45. Of course there's heavy traffic on I-5 heading south, but still - IT IS INDEED GOOD TO BE HOME.

NOTE ADDED IN PROOF

The **WORLD-CLASS IDIOT** who forgot to bring his camera to the Sumo exhibition (p. 40) got a reprieve.

Do you recall the ♀ practitioner of the  from  who was mentioned on pp. 22, 23, and 27?

Well, guess who was *not* a **WORLD-CLASS IDIOT** and actually remembered to bring her camera to the farewell dinner where the Sumo wrestlers displayed their prowess and their girth. She was kind enough to send me two pictures that she took that evening. Impressive specimens, eh?

