

October 15 Philadelphia to San Francisco

I went to bed about 1:30 AM without having finished packing. I woke up late and rushed to pack the rest of my stuff which was spread out on a big trash bag on the floor. Before I could finish, the Rapid Rover arrived 10 minutes early. I grabbed what I thought was essential, threw it in my suitcase and we left about the time we were supposed to be picked up. There was a young couple in the van who were going on their honeymoon and one more stop to make. That last pickup was Lucy!

We checked in and went to the gate area where we found Jo. I bought a bagel and a drink since I didn't have time for breakfast at home. We boarded the plane and had an uneventful flight. I slept most of the time. We collected our luggage at San Francisco and called for the free shuttle to the Dylan at SFO. We had quite a long wait. Once it came, it was a very short ride to the hotel. We checked in and a short time later, our friend Natalie Heling, who joined us on our Costa Rica exchange in 2006, came up from San Jose on the Caltrain and we went to a Vietnamese restaurant down the street for lunch – La Petite Camille, 170 El Camino Real, Millbrae, CA 94030. We had a delicious meal and a nice visit before she took the train back home.



I went back to the hotel and checked on Jo who wasn't feeling well. Larre took a walk and when he returned,



Larre and I took the BART to San Francisco and met our daughter Robyn for dinner. Jo joined us. She had taught at the school our girls attended and had last seen Robyn when she was a 6th grader! We ate at a restaurant called Wayfare Tavern in the financial district. We ate on the second floor – nice atmosphere but dimly lit. I could hardly read the menu. The free popovers were delicious and we had a very nice waitress. Larre, Jo and Robyn enjoyed their meals but I when mine came I had no appetite and I hardly touched my food. I did eat one of the delicious freshly baked cookies that came with the bill. Robyn took my meal to give to a homeless person. After dinner Robyn walked us to the BART and had to get home to her sick cats. We

went back to the hotel and had an early night. *Sue Hoke*

Hotel: The Dylan at SFO, 110 South El Camino, Millbrae, CA 94030 Tel: (650) 697-7373

October 16 San Francisco to Osaka

Woke up, finished packing and went down for breakfast. Mary, Jo and Lucy were already there. They had quite a nice buffet but I still had no appetite so I just had a cup of tea and took a bagel in case I was hungry later. We took the free shuttle to the airport and checked in for our flight. We found Gwen, Fay, Val and Arlene in the departure area. The flight boarded early, but after the doors were closed, they told us that there was some problem with clearance and we had to wait as the captain went to deal with the problem. We finally took off two hours late. The rest of the flight was uneventful. We had dinner and breakfast and in between I watched lots of movies and slept quite a bit. *Sue*

October 17 Arrive Osaka

We arrived at Kansai a few hours late. After Immigration, we got our luggage and we went to pick up our JR West Kansai Rail Passes. We took the Haruka train to Kyoto which took about 75 minutes. We arrived in the huge



Kyoto Station, and, after seeking some help, we found the correct exit from the station and walked out into the drizzly, dark night. We started on our way to the hotel. At a corner across from the station I asked a man if we were headed in the right direction. He said that he wasn't from Kyoto but he asked the people waiting to cross the street if anyone knew where the hotel was and a woman headed off and seemed to indicate that she would show us. We

followed her and were soon at the hotel. If only someone had said to walk down to the Lawson's and turn right, we

could have found it ourselves. We walked into the lobby and a man came rushing over with a clipboard that had all our names on it. They don't get many Westerners. We checked in and went up to our rooms. They were really tiny with very little room between the beds. It looked like a ship's cabin. The bathroom was up a step (as were the bathrooms in our all our hotels) and had a deep narrow tub and a fancy toilet. We met Molly Anthony who had left the US on October 8 and had been in Kyoto for a few days. She had checked in earlier and had been paired with Lallie Hoke. By the time we got in, she had gotten that switched. We went to Lawson, a convenience store down the street from the hotel, and bought some juice and pastry for breakfast for the next morning. We returned to the room and went to



bed. Sue

We arrived in Kyoto after a 12 hour flight and a 2 hour delay from San Francisco. The first sign I saw in Japan was an ad in an elevator stating totally in English "Premium Outlets." Our hotel was the Kyoto Tower Hotel Annex about a block and a half from an enormous modern train station with a mall with restaurants, a department store and shops. Our room is so tiny two people can't walk side by side. There is a tiny tub which a normal-sized person can't stretch out in. *Jo Romeo*

Hotel: Kyoto Tower Hotel Annex, 600-8216 Kyoto, Shimogyo-ku, Shinmachi-dori, Shichijo-sagaru, Japan (4 nights)



October 18 Kyoto

We were scheduled to meet our Good Samaritan Guide in front of the hotel at 9:30 AM. We got up, had our juice and pastry in the room. What I had thought was a cheese Danish turned out to have a fish paste and not sweet cheese. I could only eat half of it. We went down to speak to the guide Kana since I had made the arrangements. Larre and I were not going on the tour since we had visited all the sights they were going to. We walked to the station with her and she showed us where to get bus tickets and train tickets. The others bought Kyoto bus passes and went off with Kana. Larre and I decided we would look for a tourist office to find out about train options. The tourist office was supposed to be on the opposite side of the station but we walked to the left side of the station and couldn't find a way to get there. We walked back and went around to the right of the station but again couldn't find a way to get where we wanted to go. We tried again and got to the back of the station but we didn't find a tourist office. We finally went inside and asked and found a tourist bureau but they really just dealt with tours in Kyoto and bus passes. We bought bus passes and picked up some tourist information. I wasn't feeling very well so we went back to the hotel. I rested and Larre took a walk. When he returned, we went to Lawson and bought some hot prepared food they had. We didn't know what we were getting, but it was good.

After lunch, we found the bus and took it to the stop near the Heian Shrine. The bus was really easy to use – stops were announced in English as well as Japanese and all the attractions were listed, too. We walked to the Fureaikan, the Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts. This is a free museum in the basement of the Kyoto International Exhibition Hall. We followed the signs to it and watched an excellent video showing many kinds of traditional crafts. I watched at least 40 minutes of it. The only problem was that there was no place to sit. I finally went into the museum. During the whole time I watched the video, no one entered the museum except Larre, who went in earlier because he was tired of standing. The exhibits were very nice showing examples of many crafts including dyed cloths, bags, pouches, obis, paper lanterns, many kinds of dolls, bamboo crafts, ceramics, lacquer ware, woodblock prints, musical instruments and candles. In a few places there were craftspeople working. Many groups of children were walking around, looking



at the displays and talking to the craftsmen. The permanent exhibition showed various kinds of crafts with explanations of the manufacturing process and actual crafts were displayed. In the gallery there were some people making jewelry and selling their work. When we finished with the exhibition and walked through to the museum shop, we saw tables filled with students creating traditional crafts. The items for sale in the shop were beautiful.

We left the museum, walked back to the bus stop and took a bus to the stop near the Kawai Kanjiro Museum. We went into a pottery shop right near the bus stop which had beautiful works and then headed for the museum. I had read that it was difficult to find as it was on a narrow unmarked lane but we did manage to locate it. We had to take our shoes off and put on slippers which were too small for us. The museum is in the traditional house of Kawai



Kanjiro (1890-1966). The house/museum is in Gojo-zaka, an area that has long been famous for its high-quality ceramics district, established here because potters could easily obtain good clay nearby. Also, since it is near Kiyomizu Temple, many merchants and tourists have come to buy their pottery here, and Kiyomizu-yaki, as the pottery is known, is prized as one of the best types Kyoto has to offer. The main reason Kawai built his house in Gojo-zaka is that it suited the structure of an updraft kiln. This kind of kiln is divided into

several "rooms", one above the other along the slope, and the distance of each of these from the main fire, resulting in several distinct intervals of heat, uniquely affects the design and gloss of the ceramics.



We took the bus back to the train station. After a rest, we went back to Porta – the shopping mall below Kyoto Station – to find a restaurant for dinner. We went to one that served donburi. When we sat down, they brought us glasses of a brown liquid. It tasted like the barley tea that some of the Japanese women in my International Women's Friendship Group bring to meetings in the summer. I looked up barley in my dictionary, showed it to the waitress and she checked with the kitchen and it was barley tea – omugicha. They were surprised I knew it. After dinner Larre went back to spend more time on the computer in the Tourist Bureau Office and I went back to the hotel and fell asleep. *Sue*

Val, Arlene, Fay, Gwen, Lucy, Mary, Molly and I went with our Good Samaritan guide Kana for the day's

sightseeing. We took the bus to Ginkakuji Temple and gardens. Then we walked along a lovely shaded pathway covered with moss called the Philosopher's Walk. Next we visited Eikando Temple and gardens and Nazenji Temple. Before lunch Kana left and our new guide, Tomohiro Otonashi, led us to a nearby restaurant where we removed our shoes and sat on pillows. Most of us had heaping bowls of various kinds of noodle soup. After lunch we visited the Heian Shrine. We had a brief trip to a handicraft store with many beautiful and expensive objects including kimonos. Then we rushed to the Kawai



Kanjiro house which we couldn't visit because it was too close to closing. *Jo*



October 19 Kyoto and Nara

After breakfast in the room Gwen, Mary, Larre and I met our guide Yumiko Ohno in the lobby and walked to the train station to take the train to Tofukuji. It was only about a 5-minute train ride. Yumiko led us on the 10-minute walk with lots of turns and no signs pointing the way to Tofukuji, a large Zen temple in southeastern Kyoto that is particularly famous for its spectacular autumn colors. The temple was founded in 1236 at the behest of the powerful Fujiwara clan. Its name is a combination of the names of two great temples in Nara that were also associated with the Fujiwara, Todaiji Temple and Kofukuji Temple.

In autumn, people come from all over Japan to see visit Tofukuji. Since very few of trees have turned yet, there was no crowd and we were able to enjoy the serenity and beauty of the grounds. The most popular view is of the **Tsutenkyo Bridge**, which spans a valley of lush maple trees. The most impressive buildings we saw were the 22 meter tall **Sanmon Gate** which is the oldest Zen gate of its kind, dating back to 1425. Behind the gate is the **Hondo** (main hall), which is even larger but is a recent reconstruction completed in 1934. We spent most of our time in the **Hojo**, the head priest's former living quarters. The gardens at Tofukuji's Hojo are unique for surrounding the building on all sides. Each garden has a different character, using pebbles, large rocks, moss, trees and checkered patterns. The Hojo was most recently reconstructed in 1890 while the gardens are relatively modern creations dating from the late 1930s.



We left Tofukuji Temple and strolled through the town and on to Fushimi Inari Shrine, which is the most important of several thousands of shrines dedicated to Inari, the Shinto god of rice. Foxes are thought to be Inari's messengers, resulting in many fox statues across the shrine grounds. Fushimi Inari Shrine has ancient origins, predating the capital's move to Kyoto in 794. It is famous for its thousands of vermilion torii gates, which straddle a network of trails behind its main buildings. The trails lead into the wooded forest of the sacred Mount Inari, which stands at 233 meters and belongs to the shrine grounds. The trail starts with two dense, parallel rows of gates called Senbon Torii ("thousands of torii gates"). The torii gates along the entire trail are donations by individuals and companies, and you will find the donator's name and the date of the donation inscribed on the back of each gate. The cost starts around 400,000 yen for a small sized gate and increases to over one million yen for a large gate.



We walked across the street to the JR Inari Train Station and took a train back to Kyoto Station. Gwen and Mary decided not to join us on our afternoon excursion to Arashiyama. They were planning to meet the others in Gion later and didn't want to have to rush back on their own. Yumiko, Larre and I took another train to Arashiyama. Yumiko is a delightful 19-year-old college student who volunteers as a Good Samaritan Guide. We were talking and missed our stop so we got off at the next station, walked up the steps, over the bridge and down to the other track so we



could go back one stop to have lunch and do some more sightseeing. The area has a lot of unspoiled natural beauty – mountains, rivers, gorges and rapids. We ate lunch in a little noodle shop – delicious! Then we walked through the town to take some photos of the Togetsukyo Bridge ("Moon Crossing Bridge") - Arashiyama's most iconic landmark. It

was originally built during the Heian Period (794-1185) and most recently reconstructed in the 1930s. We walked back through town past shops selling special sweets but didn't try any since we had just had lunch.

Next we visited Tenryu-ji Temple which is the head temple of the Tenryu-ji branch of Rinzai Zen Buddhism and one of Kyoto's five great Zen temples. It was established in 1339 by the shogun Ashikaga Takauji (1305-58). The temple is one of Kyoto's 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In addition to its temple buildings, there are attractive gardens with walking paths.

The temple has been destroyed by fire eight times in its history so most of its present buildings date only to the Meiji period (1868-1912). However, the landscape garden behind the Hojo (Main Hall) is one of the oldest in Japan, retaining the same form as when it was designed by Muso Soseki in the fourteenth century. Known as the Sogenchi Garden, it was the first Special Historical Scenic Area named by the Japanese government, and in 1994 it was designated by the United Nations as a World Cultural Heritage site.

We strolled through the gardens and sat on the tatami in the Hojo enjoying the views of the pond and arranged rocks and Mt. Arashiyama and Mt. Kameyama which were designed into the garden as Shakkei (borrowed scenery). It was such a serene place – lovely to just relax and soak in the atmosphere and beauty. We also visited the Hatto (the Lecture Hall) where we saw the Cloud Dragon painted on the ceiling. Next we walked through the stroll garden and left the temple grounds. We took the walking path through the bamboo groves and ended up at the train station for the Sagano Scenic Railway. We debated about taking the train but decided to



do it rather than walk all the way back to the JR train and we were very glad we did. The scenic railway runs along the Hozu River with nice views of the river and canyons and passed through many tunnels. At the end of the scenic ride we had a 10-15 minute walk past rice paddies, fields and egrets to the JR train station where we caught a train back to Kyoto Station. We had originally planned to visit some other temples and sights but it was late and we were tired so they will have to wait for our next trip to Kyoto.



At the station we said goodbye to Yumiko, went to McDonald's for a quick meal and walked back to the hotel, stopping at Lawson to pick up tomorrow's breakfast. This time we chose a small loaf of sweet bread.

My back was bothering me so I decided to soak in the tub. The problem is that the tub was too short to stretch out my legs and very narrow. I sat in it with my legs up against my chest and my head leaning back. With the hot water I was very relaxed and fell asleep but I had a terrible time trying to get out when I woke up. It was a wonderful but exhausting day. *Sue*

We had a free Goodwill college student guide, Kana, who was a geography major but accepted a bank job when she graduates. We bought roundtrip train tickets and had no difficulty. We went to the



Todai-ji Temple that was burned in the 8th century. Elements of rope (nature), white (lightening), yellow (moon), green (leaf) and orange (sun) were common in the Shinto shrine. 100 large lanterns lined the path to the shrine and there were 2000 lights. Trees as old as 400 years grew in the area as well as many red deer. Kasuga Taisha shrine was red. Many school children were also touring the facilities and those learning English



bombarded tourist to answer questions. They also liked taking our picture, especially Arlene and Fay. *Molly*

Today Val, Arlene, Fay, Lucy, Molly and I took the hour train ride to Nara. We met our guide Kana at the train station in Nara. Many of the cultural sights in Nara are located in a vast park with free roaming deer. We first visited Kasuga Shrine, which is Shinto, and took pictures of the many lanterns and ancient trees. Next we went to Todaiji Temple to see the Great Buddha. We did not go inside the Isuien Garden but did visit the



Yoshikien Gardens and rested in the gazebo. The garden was exquisite as usual with many different kinds of mosses. There are three unique gardens within Yoshikien: a pond garden, a moss garden and a tea ceremony garden.



We walked to the Nara National Museum to view its collection of Buddhas. We saw Kofuku-ji Temple and its 5-story pagoda and Octagonal Hall and visited the Kofuku-ji National Treasure House. Back in Kyoto we went to Gion Corner and the show. Jo



Kasuga Taisha is Nara's most celebrated shrine. It was established in 710 at the same time as the capital and is dedicated to the deity responsible for the protection of the city. Kasuga was also the tutelary shrine of the Fujiwara, a powerful family clan that helped establish Nara. Kasuga Taisha had been periodically rebuilt in identical fashion every 20 years for many centuries, but the current structure has been preserved since 1863.



Kasuga Taisha is famous for its lanterns, which have been donated by worshippers. Hundreds of bronze lanterns can be found hanging from the buildings, while as many stone lanterns line its approaches.



Todaiji ("Great Eastern Temple") is one of Japan's most famous and historically significant temples and a landmark of Nara. The temple was constructed in 752 as the head temple of all provincial Buddhist temples of Japan. Todaiji's main hall, the Daibutsuden (Big Buddha Hall) is the world's largest wooden building, despite the fact that the present reconstruction of 1692 is only two thirds of the original temple hall's size. The massive building houses one of Japan's largest bronze statues of Buddha (Daibutsu). The 15 meters tall, seated Buddha represents Vairocana and is flanked by

two Bodhisattvas.

Nara Park (Nara Koen) is a large park in central Nara. Established in 1880, it is the location of many of Nara's main attractions including Todaiji, Kasuga Taisha, Kofukuji and the Nara National Museum. The park is home to hundreds of freely roaming deer. Considered in Shinto to be messengers of the gods, Nara's nearly 1200 deer have become a symbol of the city and have been designated a natural treasure.



Kofukuji was one of the "Four Great Temples" of the Nara period (710-794). Founded in 669 AD by a member of the Fujiwara clan to pray for the clan leader to recover from illness, Kofukuji became the head temple of the Hosso sect of Buddhism. Kofukuji was moved to its present location when Nara became the capital in the year 710. The temple prospered, but when the Fujiwaras' power faded in the 12th century, the temple lost its influential patrons and began to decline.



Today only a handful of the temple's 175 buildings including a five story pagoda remain standing, most of which date from the 15th century. Kofukuji was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998 along with other historic sites in Nara. The five story pagoda is Japan's second tallest and is both a landmark and symbol of Nara. It was first built in 730, and was most recently rebuilt in 1426.

October 20 Kyoto

Our first stop today was to Sanjusangendo Temple to see the 1,000 wooden Buddhas erected by an emperor to rid himself of a headache as told to him in a vision. Then we strolled through the Nishiki Market which sold just about everything and we had lunch in a noodle restaurant that had Western-style tables and



chairs and we had dessert at a great pastry shop next door. After lunch we visited Nijo Castle* – a shogun’s castle – a very large beautiful castle encased in a garden. There were magnificent screen paintings and intricately carved wooden scenes above the transoms. The day finished with a view of the Golden Pavilion*. The building is covered in gold leaf and sparkles amidst a park. The building was originally used as a place of contemplation by the shogun. But it is now used by monks as a temple. Jo



** Nijo Castle was built in 1603 as the Kyoto residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo Period (1603-1867). His grandson Iemitsu completed the castle's palace buildings 23 years later and further expanded the castle by adding a five story castle keep. The **Ninomaru Palace** served as the residence and office of the shogun during his visits to Kyoto. Surviving in its original form, the palace consists of multiple separate buildings that are connected with each other by corridors with so called nightingale floors, as they squeak when stepped upon as a security measure against intruders. The palace rooms are tatami mat covered and feature elegantly decorated ceilings and beautifully painted sliding doors (fusuma).*



**Kinkakuji is a Zen temple in northern Kyoto whose top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf. Formally known as Rokuonji, the temple was the retirement villa of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu acquired in 1397, and according to his will it became a Zen temple of the Rinzai sect after his death in 1408. It has burned down numerous times throughout its history including twice during the Onin War, a civil war (1467–1477) that destroyed much of Kyoto; and once again more recently in 1950 when it was set on fire by a fanatic monk. The present structure was rebuilt in 1955.*

This morning Yumiko met us at the hotel and so did our other guide, Zikang Zhang. We bought our train tickets for Tokyo for tomorrow. Then we went to the bus station and bought our Kyoto City Bus One-Day Passes. We took a bus to Sanjusangendo, a temple which is famous for its 1001 statues of Kannon, the goddess of mercy. The temple was founded in 1164 and rebuilt a century later after the original structure had been destroyed in a fire.



The temple hall is Japan's longest wooden structure. In the center of the main hall sits a large, wooden statue of a 1000-armed Kannon (Senju Kannon) that is flanked on each side by 500 statues of human sized 1000-armed Kannon standing in ten rows. It was an impressive sight.

Next, we walked to the Kyoto National Museum but didn't have time to go in.

We went to the Nishiki Market, a narrow, five blocks long shopping street lined by more than one hundred shops and restaurants. The market specializes in all things food related, like fresh



seafood, produce, knives and cookware, and is a great place to find seasonal foods and Kyoto specialties, such as Japanese sweets, pickles, dried seafood and sushi. The market has a history of several centuries, and many stores have been operated by the same families for generations. Yumiko, Larre and I had lunch in a special noodle shop. The others went with Zikang to a different restaurant. We found Gwen and went to Museum of Kyoto which is housed in the former Bank of Japan-Kyoto Branch, built during the Meiji Era.



The Permanent Exhibition has a historical museum introducing history and culture. It had very good displays and they gave us a guide who was so enthusiastic about her city and country and happy to be speaking English. We checked out the art gallery and gift shop and then went to the Nishijin Textile Center. We went upstairs and saw many lovely kimonos in a showroom and then went downstairs for the



free Kimono Fashion Show. The kimonos and the models were beautiful. Interestingly, most of the people watching the show were men who wanted their pictures taken in front of or with the models. The museum is dedicated to the weavers who for centuries produced elegant textiles for the imperial family and nobility. The history of Nishijin silk weaving began with the history of Kyoto itself back in 794; by the Edo Period, there were an estimated 5,000 weaving factories in the Nishijin District. Today, the district remains home to one of Japan's largest handmade weaving industries.





After the show we caught a bus back to the station, said good-bye to Yumiko and went to Kyoto Tower to use the free tickets that came with our rooms. The tower is the tallest building in Kyoto and has a viewing platform 100 meters above ground that offers a 360 degree view of Kyoto.



We went back to the hotel and arranged to have our luggage sent to Ota. The girls at the desk helping us didn't know much English but I happened to have a business card of my host written in Japanese. When she wanted to do the next person's, the girl came to me and wanted cards for them. Unfortunately, I only had cards for 2 hosts. After we finished several of us went out for dinner at Quatro, an Italian bar and restaurant around the corner. It was very crowded and smoky but our pizza was good. We went back to the hotel, packed our carry-on and went to bed. *Sue*

October 21 Kyoto to Tokyo

We had breakfast and walked to the station. We met the others at the station and boarded our Nozomi for Tokyo. The train was fairly empty. The weather was good and the day was clear so we had a nice view of Mt. Fuji as we passed it. We got off the train and changed to Yamamoto Line which we rode to Ueno Station. Then we transferred to the Ginza Subway Line which we rode to Asakusa Station. We started walking toward the hotel. Gwen and a few others found a cab and the rest of us continued on foot. At one point a Japanese lady walked up to Lucy and asked if she knew Sue Hoke. She said she had a message from my friend Rumi Takashima about the time to meet at Edo-Tokyo Museum. How she picked us out on a crowded street in Tokyo was a mystery. We found the hotel and the others were sitting in the lobby since it was a little after noon and they wouldn't let people into rooms until three but they were happy to take our money for the rooms. We left our luggage in the lobby, had the hotel call some cabs for us and headed to the museum. Molly and Mary didn't come with us. Molly was meeting a friend and Mary wasn't feeling well.



We entered the museum and the others quickly went to find something to eat. Larre and I were supposed to meet Rumi and her son Shuta at the ticket counter. We went to a ticket counter and they weren't there so we checked out two more ticket counters. When we came back downstairs I saw them entering the museum. Shuta wasn't feeling well so he husband Yoshi drove them there. We had planned to tour the museum but since Shuta was sick we just went to the restaurant and had something to eat. Shuta ran around the restaurant and found the rest of our group in the other room. He went in to visit them several times. A little later Mami Iwashita came and met us. Mami and Rumi had lived in our area for about 3 years when their husbands were assigned there by their Japanese companies. The women belonged to my International Women's Friendship Group. I had gifts for Shuta and Rumi but I didn't know Mami was going to be there. They had gifts for me which took much more room than the ones I had given away. Mami gave us two boxes of a seasonal sweet called *Kuri-kinton*, which is made from mashed chestnuts and sugar. Rumi and family left to get Shuta home, and Mami took us around the museum.



The Edo-Tokyo Museum is a beautiful museum that traces life in Edo and then Tokyo, as Edo was renamed in 1868. There are life-sized reconstructed buildings, including the facades of a Kabuki theater and a Meiji-era newspaper office. They also had wonderful scale models and live entertainment. Later in the afternoon, Tamami Sahara, another IWFG lady, came to take over from Mami, who needed to get home. Tamami had returned to Tokyo at least 3 years ago. Tamami showed us the rest of the museum and we took a rest and talked until the museum was closing. Then Tamami took us back to Asakusa on the subway and we treated her to dinner at KFC right near the station. Then she walked us back to our hotel. We stopped at a Lawson for breakfast food. We had a great view of the new Tokyo Sky Tree Tower. *Sue*



Hotel: Smile Hotel Asakusa, Taito-ku, Asakusa 6-35-8, Tokyo, 111-0032 Japan (2 nights)

October 21 Tokyo

Asakusa, Tokyo Kaminari-mon(gate) and under lantern view



This is a famous temple and gate in Asakusa area and our guide explains some of the history and we witness the crowds at the temple and stalls. From here we go on the river cruise and cross under many bridges and see surrounding life and sky line.



The downtown park has gardens, duck blind, tea house and 300 year tree.



We stop near the fish market, then head off via two subways and a short walk to the top of city building for a city view from all directions. Returning to the hotel we decide on a Japanese restaurant for dinner to end our relaxing day.

Molly Anthony, FF Central VA

We met our Tokyo Free Guide, Senichi Nagai, a 72-year old retiree, at Nitenmon at Sensoji Temple at 9 AM. Sensoji Temple, commonly called "Kannon-sama" among locals, is the oldest and one of the most popular temples in the urban area of Tokyo. It is said that the temple was built in 628 to be dedicated to the statue of Kannon that was found in the Sumida River. After a brief walk around the temple grounds we walked down Nakamise Dori, a famous

shopping street, but it was too early for most of the shops to be open and we were in a rush to get to the boat to Hama Rikyu Garden. We did see the beautiful paintings on the shutters of the stalls. I later found out that art students from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music painted all the shutters.



After Tsukiji fish market, we took the train to a stop near the Rikugien Garden, stopping in a convenience store to pick up lunch. We walked to the garden and had a picnic lunch before walking through the garden. From the number of pictures Senichi took, I think it was his first visit there, but he did a good job leading us all around the beautiful place. When we left there, we went to Shinjuku where we went up to the observation tower of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government offices and had a great view of Tokyo. The others left with Senichi but Larre and I were supposed to meet some FF friends from the Tokyo club at 5 PM so we stayed in the observation area. They didn't have very



comfortable seating and my back really hurt so I bought an expensive soda at the bar and we sat in nice leather club chairs for 1½ hours. When our friends Teruko and Hiroko Kato arrived, they said that they had a surprise for us – more friends were joining us – Sumiko Sato, who hosted Isabel Strasser on our 2002 exchange to Japan, and her husband Kenji. We walked around to see the view once more and then we walked to the Nomura Building where we had dinner in a traditional Japanese restaurant on the 49th floor. When we were waiting for a light on the way there, I saw a LOVE statue. We took our shoes off and were shown to our table. We had a wonderful meal and great company. In addition to treating us to dinner, Teruko gave me a beautiful silk bag she had made from her mother's antique kimono.



After dinner, our friends walked us to the train and took us to the station where we had an easy ride back to Asakusa on our own. We walked back to the hotel stopping at a Lawson to pick up breakfast for tomorrow. Sue

October 23 Tokyo to Ota

We had breakfast and met everyone in the lobby. Arlene, Val, Molly and Fay went off to the Imperial Gardens. Mary stayed at the hotel, Gwen wanted to shop, Lucy was meeting a friend and Jo, Larre and I headed off for our morning adventure. We checked out, stored our luggage at the Tobu Station. We took the subway to Ueno Park, walked from the station across the street to the park where we were greeted by a guy giving out maps and answering questions.



He told us how to get to the Tokyo National Museum. It was a long walk through the beautiful park. There was a light drizzle. We bought our tickets – or I bought mine. Larre and Jo were free. The Tokyo National Museum, established in 1872, is the oldest and largest museum in Japan. The museum collects, houses, and preserves a comprehensive collection of art works and archaeological objects of Asia, focusing on Japan. The museum holds over 110,000 objects, which includes 87 Japanese National Treasure holdings and 610 Important Cultural Property holdings (as of July 2005). The parts of the museum we saw had interesting objects



displayed with English explanations of most. The exhibit on the Ainu was excellent as was the one on treasures.



We spent about 2 hours at there then walked back to the subway in a heavier rain. When we arrived in Asakusa, we decided to check out the Burger King to get a quick lunch. There



were several young men trying to get people into the restaurant. They said it was a special day and we could have anything we wanted for free. We were doubtful but they ushered us in, helped us order, seated us and then brought over our food – all for free. It turned out that it was a trial run for the staff. It hadn't really opened yet. After lunch we walked across to the station, claimed our luggage and waited for the others. We boarded Ryomo 21 at at 2:10 and arrived in Ota 90 minutes later. We were met at the station by our hosts and Kyo Miyazaki, the ED, who was supposed to host Mark and Roz. A group picture was taken and we went off with our hosts.



It was quite a long ride and the area became much more rural with very narrow lanes. We pulled up at a house and got out. Val and Arlene were already there with their host Haruo Kasukawa. Kyoko was in Tokyo at an art class. I was confused because I thought Mieko had said we were going to Kyoko's house but it turned out that we were at her house. Mieko and Kyoko are sisters and Larre and I had hosted them in 2009. Kyoko's married daughter Megumi had also come on that exchange with her husband Ogu. Jo is staying with Megumi but the 5 ambassadors and two or more of the family members do everything together. Kyoko and Haruo have another daughter, Aya, who lives at home and Mieko's elderly mother Kou lives with Mieko and her husband Yoshitaro.



We brought our small suitcase into the house and the other two bags which we had sent by the delivery



service were already in the room. We all sat down in the living room/dining room and had the first of many, many cups of green tea we would share. And there were always sweets or fruit to go along with it. I shared the rest of the sweet called *Kuri-kinton* that Mami had given me. It turned out to be a favorite of Grandma. We all had dinner together after Kyoko and Yoshitaro and Aya arrived. Haruo did much of the cooking. It was late when we finished dinner. After the others left, we talked a little, unpacked, had some more tea and went to

bed. Sue

October 24 Ota

In the morning of Oct 24th, our group of 10 met at the Gunma Kokusai Academy (GKA), an English language immersion school. Started in 2005 it now includes pre-school, elementary, junior high and high school. The school was established by the mayor, Masayoshi Shimizu, with the goal of providing skills and



knowledge needed to contribute to the advancing global community.

We were able to tour the school while it was in session. Teresita-Salve Tubranosa, principal of the elementary school, spoke about the school. We had time for questions when our tour was over.

GKA has many open space classrooms where students and teachers can move around to watch or participate in different activities that are available. Most subjects are taught in English. English speaking teachers come from all over the world. English is taught in context by



observing and doing rather than in formal English classes.

We observed a music class where the young children were singing and dancing in a circle. We also saw older elementary children singing and playing instruments in an

ensemble. Music is studied beginning in first grade. In grade 5, instrumental music is begun and students can choose to learn a woodwind or percussion instrument. The school follows the "Virtues Project." This is a list of 52 neutral virtues that are taught at age level appropriate times. I was very impressed by the school, students and faculty that we met. At this time because the school is so new and still paying off debt, there are no

tuition scholarships available.

We went to the Ajinomoto Frozen Foods Co. Inc. in the afternoon. In preparation for the tour, in order to keep foreign objects and dust away from the food production area of the plant, we had to remove personal accessories such as watches and rings and put on special lint-free clothing. In addition we walked on sticky lint- remover pads. Our group also walked through air blowers before being allowed to enter the food production area.

Most of the food prep is automated. Some of the cutting is done by hand. For example large whole cabbage heads were cut into smaller pieces by hand. The pieces were then boiled and chopped by machine. We saw chicken pieces on a conveyer belt being visually checked by employees. Machines fold the dumplings. 175 pieces are completed per minute. There are also taste tests done by the workers.

In the US Ajinomoto plants are located in New Jersey and Seattle. Some of the company's frozen foods are used in restaurants. Others are for household use, e.g. dumplings (gyoza) which can be prepared in a frying pan without using oil or water. At the end of the tour, our group enjoyed samples of Ajinomoto foods-- dumplings, shumai, fried rice, and cakes. *Lucy Sheffield*

I loved the sign on the pre-school where we parked the car while we were visiting Gunma Kokusai Academy. Halloween is very popular in Japan. After we left the school we were in a caravan to go to lunch but somehow our car driven by

Mieko ended up at the home of a member of the FF. Arlene and her hosts Susumu and Yayoi were there, too and the lady who owned the house. She had a beautiful backyard and a large garden in front of the house where she grew lots of vegetables and fruits. She picked some

for lunch, a table and chairs materialized in the yard and we had a lovely picnic. On the drive home from the afternoon's activities we stopped at a mall where Megumi, Kyoko and Mieko went grocery shopping and we explored the mall or sat at some tables and waited. I

wandered around the grocery store which was huge and had many interesting choices of prepared foods in addition to regular groceries. I was especially impressed by the bakery. We all went to Kyoko's house for dinner. There was another couple there with their teenage son. The man spoke English well and was interested in talking about life in America. More delicious food and interesting company. A long but wonderful day. *Sue*

October 25 Ota

This was a very busy day, which started at 7:25 AM when my hosts Susumu & Yayoi Yanagihara and I left their home in Saitama to join the group in Ota Gunma. It was a cloudy day, so I missed seeing Mt Fuji which we usually do on the drive to Ota.



Our first visit was to the Subaru car factory in Ota which started with a presentation and the history of Subaru. Their Fuji Heavy Industries has four divisions, Aerospace, eco Technologies, Robin engines and the largest – Subaru car manufacturing.

To our surprise, Subaru actually started as an airplane manufacturer with the Nakajima aircraft in 1918. They added the Rabbit scooter in 1946, P1 Prototype in 1954 and car production in 1958 with the Subaru 360. Subaru produced the first all-wheel drive with horizontal engine in 1972 and is known for their Boxer engines, helicopters and snow mobiles. An old airplane is displayed in the front yard of the office building.



Robots are used to construct and attach body parts and the employees maintain the robots. They believe in reducing waste by recycling and reusing. We took a short bus ride to the 5th Trim Shop & final assembly. Here workers attach doors, check underneath, test and drive off the cars. At the Stamping Shop we



observed robots assembling and welding car bodies. Our tour ended with a visit to a show room of all types of Subaru cars.



Our Ota Gunma hosts treated us to lunch in a restaurant in Ota City Hall overlooking the city of Ota. After lunch we visited the Daikoin temple built in 1613 to view the beautiful chrysanthemum displays. We loved the bonsai arrangements made of chrysanthemum plants and took a lot of pictures. We drove to see the old Kanayama Castle ruins dating back to 1469 and had a 29 minutes nature walk.



At 3 PM we made a courtesy call on the mayor of Ota Gunma at city hall.

The mayor, Masayoshi Shimizu, (using an interpreter – Elon Simon, an American) welcomed us and stated that he was



very happy to meet us. The city has strong ties to Lafayette, Ind. because of the Toyota & Subaru factories there. Ota/Japan is weaning off nuclear power and moving to solar and wind. They also cherish their friendship and good partnership with USA. Sue Hoke ED stated that our visit to Ota was to continue friendship because Ota FF visited New Jersey 3 years ago. Gifts were exchanged and pictures taken. After the mayor left, we were invited to the meeting room of the city assembly for a question and answer session. They have four permanent committees.



Various issues are discussed at the four period meetings. Elections are held on Sundays. There are 34 members representing the executive bodies. 100 seats are open to the public but they cannot participate in the discussions.



At 6 PM other members and their families of the Ota club joined us at Restaurant Daniel for a Welcome Party. The menu was Italian and we were entertained by a member of the club who was a storyteller. He told humorous stories, acting out all the parts with a few props. This art form is called rakugo. Three Ota members dressed in beautiful kimonos played the koto - traditional Japanese harp -and the samisen and sang. We ended the party by joining in a local folk dance.

A great ending to a long and fruitful day!!!! *Arlene S. Hanson-Young Central VA*



October 26 Ota

Today was a free day with our hosts. We had our usual large breakfast (Mieko's insistence) – soup, vegetables, fruit, cereal for Larre, breads, delicious jam, peanut butter and other assorted things. We live 45 minutes to an hour from Ota City in traffic so we had to leave quite early for 9 AM starts the past two days. Today was more leisurely. Megumi and Jo came to our house just before 11 and we met Kyoko, Haruo, Val and Fay on the road near their house so we could follow them. We went in two cars today, Mieko driving one and Haruo the other. Our destination was the Tomioka Silk Mill. It was about a 1½ hour drive. We stopped in a convenience store on the way. What I found most interesting there was the very large display of beautifully packaged gifts of foods – candies, cookies, crackers, cheeses – some of them very expensive – that must be for gifts to take if you are visiting people.

We got to Tomioka and parked in a lot at City Hall. Haruo got a map and we headed for the silk mill with a stop in a small restaurant for lunch – huge bowls of noodles or curry. We went to the very modern visitor's center then continued to our destination.

Tomioka Silk Mill is the first model silk-reeling factory which Japanese government established in 1872 (the 5th year of the Meiji Era) in Tomioka City, Gunma Prefecture. It contributed much to the modernization of Japan. At the end of the Edo period of Japanese history, in the mid-19th century, Japan opened its doors to the world and in 1859 began to trade with Western countries. At that time, the most important Japanese export to the West was raw silk. To meet the demand, the government decided to set up a model factory equipped with modern silk-reeling machines from Western countries to enable mass-production of high-quality raw silk and to train Japanese people in the techniques of machine-reeling. Local residents agreed with the construction of a factory which would be directed by foreigners.

The main original buildings such as the silk-reeling mill, the east and west cocoon warehouses, the dormitory for French female instructors, the dormitory for French male engineers and the director's house (Brunat House) are still preserved in excellent condition in situ. Tomioka Silk Mill is the only one of the government-operated factories built by the Meiji government which is still in near-perfect condition. In 1872 the government began to recruit women to work as mill hands at Tomioka Silk Mill.



We bought our tickets and followed the map to walk around the complex. In the East cocoon warehouse they had a history of the mill on large photographic panels and a small shop. In the silk-reeling mill we were able to see long rows of automatic silk-reeling machines under plastic sheets and an interesting video of the mill in action. One of the other buildings had artifacts and art from the mill. We walked back to the cars and started home. On the way to Tomioka I had seen something tall on the hills we passed. I only got a glimpse and asked if it was man-made. When we were returning home, our hosts turned off the highway and drove toward the hills. We stopped to take a



sunset picture and then drove on up the mountain, stopping near a very tall statue of a lady. It is a Kannon statue of the Goddess of Mercy built in 1936. It is about 136 feet high and the inside is divided into 9 floors where twenty images of Buddha are enshrined. There is also a small temple. It was dark when we got there, but as we were about to leave they lit up the statue. It was beautiful, as was the very bright moon.



We headed back home with a stop at a supermarket to pick up dinner. We ate at Kyoko and Haruo's house. We had a choice of sushi or chicken. There were more sushi boxes than chicken so I took a sushi. I had never eaten raw sushi before, but it was delicious except for one which I couldn't chew. It looked like the other white fish I had already eaten but they said it was squid. We went home after dinner, had some tea, spent some time on the computer and went to bed. Sue

October 27 Ota

What was supposed to be my full day tour to Nikko, turned out to be my FREE day in Ota, after a very, very full day to Nikko on Friday with Molly Anthony and our tour escorts, Kyo and Yasuko Miyazaki. After that day of

touring and climbing a plethora of temples in the pine treed mountains of the Nikko area, I needed a down day, and it ended up with a pleasant unexpected and rehabilitative evening. My host, Misae Kanai, suggested that perhaps I would like to join the family that evening, for a “picnic” and soak at an “Onsen”!!! (Now mind you, I was supposed to be gone 12 hours this day in Nikko, so this was a change in plans for both Misae - me being home all day and evening – and myself- getting to meet her neighbors, joining them for a “picnic” and social experience at an “Onsen”!!) I said YES YES at once to this special honor and responded that I had no problem/or any inhibitions about going to a Hot Spring Bathhouse.

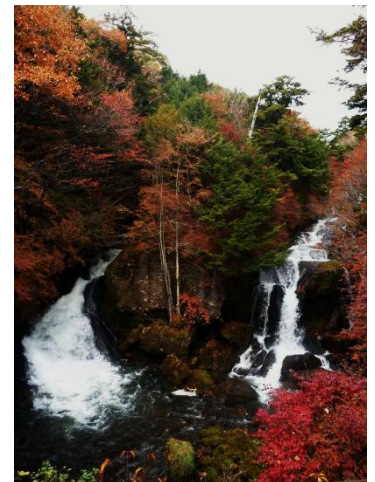
Misae is her Block # 19 chairwoman/president (a system of neighborhood watch that goes back to “Daimyo” village era) and meets once a month with the other officers/elders. So this day she left for her meeting and then I waited for Mr. M to return from work (on Saturday!) What was mentioned as a “picnic” became a Saturday night dinner as Block # 19 took over 2 Tatami rooms for dinner at this version of the Ota YMCA. I was introduced to the neighborhood elders, married couples and children. (Thank goodness I had a “grab-bag” of gifts including my Salt Water Taffy to give out!!). The older men laughed at my American Flags and talked among themselves. (My dad suggested as I related this to him, that maybe they had relatives that had fought in WWII!!! and here I am giving them American flags). The children ate in another adjoining room and ran about to the arcade and playroom and TV area. Then came the time for the BIG SOAK. We women went to the locker area and undressed and got our towels. It was wonderful to see the little girls with their mothers and grandmothers, bonding; something sooo different than in America. First we washed at the stations with soap and shower heads, sitting on stools in front of mirrors, (NO Shame). Misae washed my back and I reciprocated. Then into the various pools, of different temperatures, some with whirlpools; and finally out the door (Brr!!) to the outside spring, surrounded by stones, looking up at the FULL MOON!!!. I could feel myself being observed (Being that DIFFERENT American lady), and I peeked too!! Mr. M and their son, Iyota (Yota Coda as I called him), had their soak with all the men. It was wonderful; a true SOCIAL experience, relaxing and therapeutic, too. What a great and wonderful surprise to the day; a true experience of Japanese culture!!!! *Mary Karen Horvath*



Today we went to Nikko. Originally the Nikko trip was supposed to be a group bus trip but the buses were being used for Sports Day purposes so hosts took their ambassadors on Friday or Saturday in their own cars. Megumi had to work today so there



were nine of us - Jo, Mieko, Yoshitaro, Larre and I in one car and Kyoko, Haruo, Val and Fay in the other. I must admit that I slept most of the drive but Larre said the scenery was beautiful. We stopped to look at the Senjogahara Moor. We followed a short trail from the parking lot to an observation deck. The grasses were reddish yellow and the larch trees were gold. Next we visited Ryuzu Falls whose name means “dragon head waterfall”. The name comes from the shape of the falls. We walked from the parking area down a trail along the river. It was paved and had many steps. There were views of the falls and the beautiful trees from the trail and the small observation deck in the back of a rest house. Yoshiharo and Haruo walked back to get the cars and met us at the end of the trail.



views of the falls and the beautiful trees from the trail and the small observation deck in the back of a rest house. Yoshiharo and Haruo walked back to get the cars and met us at the end of the trail.



Mieko gave everyone in our car sandwiches and fruit and told us to eat. Then about 10 minutes later we stopped at a restaurant across from Lake Chuzenji (Chuzenji) which is a scenic lake in the mountains above the town of Nikko. It is located at the foot of Mount Nantai, Nikko’s sacred

volcano, whose eruption blocked the valley below, creating Lake Chuzenji about 20,000 years ago. We went in because the group in the other car hadn't eaten. It was a quaint restaurant and very crowded. Those who hadn't eaten had nice meals and the rest of us had a coffee or tea set - a piece of cake and a drink for a price less than the 2 items. After lunch we walked across to the shore of the lake. Chuzenjiko' shores are mostly undeveloped and forested except at the lake's eastern end where we were, the small hot spring town of Chuzenjiko Onsen. The lake was very picturesque and they had swan boats for hire.



Next we went to the almost 100 meter tall Kegon Waterfall (Kegon no taki) which is the most famous of Nikko's many beautiful waterfalls. We walked to an observation platform and had wonderful views. We were there at the peak of fall color. Then we drove to Nikko which is a town at the entrance to Nikko National Park and most famous for Toshogu, Japan's most lavishly decorated shrine and the mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, which ruled Japan for over 250 years until 1868. The town had been a center of Shinto and Buddhist mountain worship for many centuries before Toshogu was built in the 1600s.



We parked and walked to the temple complex. First we passed Rinnoji – the first temple founded at Nikko in 766. Since reconstruction was being done and we didn't have a lot of time, our hosts suggested that we just visit Toshogu. First they stopped to get us souvenir picture books which turned out to be a wise move since the stands were closed when we left. The complex consists of more than a dozen Shinto and Buddhist buildings set in a beautiful forest. Although it was a simple mausoleum when it was built, Toshogu was enlarged into the spectacular complex seen today by Ieyasu's grandson



Iemitsu during the first half of the 17th century. It was decorated with countless wood carvings and large amounts of gold leaf in a way not seen elsewhere in Japan, where simplicity has been traditionally stressed in shrine architecture. I preferred the simple stone lanterns, which are now moss-covered, to the ornate gilded buildings.



After walking up the steps through the granite torii, we first saw the 5-story pagoda donated by a daimyo in 1650. Each story represents an element – earth, water, fire, wind and heaven-in ascending order. Then we walked around the complex past many of the other buildings and through more gates and torii and visited the sanctuary.



It was dark by the time we left the shrine. It took a little less than 2 hours to get back to our area and since it was late we stopped at a restaurant for dinner. We had to wait for a private room. When it was ready, we stopped to take off our shoes which we put in lockers and we were shown to a tatami room with a long table with a well for our feet. They had many choices from simple noodles to multicourse meals. After we decided what we wanted, one of the hosts entered our choices in a machine at the table. Our meals were soon delivered. Even the simpler meals were huge! Everything was very good. Sue



October 28 Ota

This morning, I woke up to heavy rain, just as the mayor had predicted on our visit to his office. My host, Misae, had gotten her son, Iyota (Yoda Coda) and her husband off to an all-day soccer elimination tournament. But they were back by 10:00 AM as the field flooded out!!! So the four of us headed out to the scheduled Ota City Sports Festival in the pouring rain.

Misae gave me her vinyl boots, in which my feet and legs got stuck in. (I had to get them off in a VERY UN Japanese way !) We met at the Friendship Force booth around noon, and everyone was waterlogged by then. People were packing up throughout the festival. We walked around somewhat and then called it a day.



The neighbor who drove us (the Kanai family does not own a car) took us afterwards to Jee's coffee/internet/music café. (He is a man of many trades, and also an excellent musician). Many of his guitars hang on the wall, including a very expensive Martin that he played for me (Eric Clapton, "Heaven" and Led Zeppelin, AND flamenco too). I gave him a pamphlet about Ralph Stanley (Bluegrass) and a bumper sticker from my friend's radio station show in Kentucky. We made a great musical connection!!!

Afterwards I was taken to the neighbor's house (the one who drove us), and given a tour. I considered that an honor; to be invited to another house (I had gotten the boots off by then!!). I also met her husband. After that, back to the Kanai's home for a quiet Sunday evening, with some computer time, (where I started monitoring Hurricane Sandy and getting very very worried). Oh, my house on LBI was one of the lucky ones.... NO damage....when I finally got over to it on Nov 11th!!! *Mary Karen*



When we got to Sports Day it was raining. The Ota FF club had a booth where they were selling drinks. We huddled in the booth and some of the members brought us some noodles they had purchased from another booth.

The little girls in Molly's host family were there and I gave them little bags of candies and toys. The young boy in Mary's family arrived and I gave him one, too. When we finished our lunch, we ventured out in the rain and watched the dancers perform before taking a quick look at what other booths were selling. All of the sports events were cancelled because of the weather. We went back home and watched a DVD of *The Sound of Music* while the hosts went off to the supermarket. Tonight we ate at Mieko's house and had a stir-fry cooked by Fay and Harou. It was delicious. There was a Japanese baseball game on and Kou was mesmerized. She hardly ate until the game was over and her team had won. Larre got to watch the World Series a few days and she enjoyed that, too. *Sue*



October 29 Ota

Today Larre, Sue, Fay, Jo and I visited a doll factory and museum with Ogu, Megumi and Mieko. First we posed in the doll figures outside – putting our heads in the holes in the dolls. We then had free time in the shop - Usaburo Kokeshi. Products ranged from simple inexpensive souvenirs to beautiful expensive dolls and other wooden objects like bowls, cooking utensils, chopsticks and jewelry. They also had food to sample or buy and games to play. Upstairs there was a large museum of absolutely beautiful dolls. After we left the museum, we took a self-guided tour through the factory which had signs in English and Japanese



explaining the steps in making Kokeshi dolls. Then we drove a short distance to a park that had outdoor picnic tables with a nice view of the area and a covered pavilion. It was a bit windy and cold to eat outside and the man inside the pavilion invited us in, cleaned off the tables and gave us seat cushions. We had the delicious sandwiches, fruit and cookies that Megumi brought. After lunch we stopped in a small market right next to the park and then we went to a glass blowing studio where we saw a demonstration then had time to shop. Our next stop was an onsen but by then it was quite late and most people didn't want to go in, so we went home to get ready for our dinner.



We went back to the restaurant we had visited on Saturday. This time the ambassadors were treating our host families and there were 13 of us – the 5 ambassadors, our six hosts and Aya and Grandma Kou. We had a private room with a long table with a well for our feet. They had an extensive menu. You chose your meal and someone entered it into a little keypad and the wait staff brought it to you. Servings were very large and the food was very delicious. After dinner we said goodbye to Jo, who was returning home tomorrow. The rest of us are going on to Hiroshima. *Val Bolan*



October 30 Ota to Hiroshima

6:30 AM: This is the last day of our 7-day visit to Ota Gunma. The day started very early with our host driving Val and me for an hour to the bus station to catch the 8 AM bus to Kumagaya Train Station where we arrived 8:45 AM.

We took the Tokyo train but Arlene was not at Omiya when the train stopped there. The Ota hosts traveling with us searched the train but she hadn't boarded. They called and found she had missed the train because there was some confusion about the time. She and her host took the next train and met us in Tokyo.

10:30 AM: Took Super Express Train #25 bound for Hakata. We rode this train for 4 hours to Hiroshima to attend Friendship Force International Conference, arriving at 2:35pm.

Our group took the local tramcar to our hotel, The Comfort Inn. Then we walked to the Crown Plaza to register for the conference. I went to dinner with Arlene, Gwen, Molly and Val. We all went for a walk after dinner, then called it a day and went to bed. *Fay Harrison*



Something that surprised me on this trip was the difference in behavior of young people from our 2002 visit to this one. On the earlier trip they would jump up from seats on public transportation if someone older got on. Now they fight you for the seat. At the Ota bus station everyone was lined up and two young women walked from the very back of the line to the front and got on and took seats. They sat there and played with their phones while many of our people had to stand in the aisle for the 40 minute ride to Kumagaya.



When we were standing on the platform in Tokyo waiting for our train to Hiroshima, Yoshiko Takahashi and Mitsuko Sawada, two of the FF Tokyo members who came to our club in 2009 with the Ota group, showed up just to spend a few minutes with us and pass on some gifts to be delivered to their hosts. It was wonderful to see them if only for a short time. Six members of the Ota club accompanied us to Hiroshima and Kyo Miyazaki helped those of us who were going to Fukuoka for the post-Conference homestay buy our train tickets.



Then we all took the tram to the hotel. Tonight all nine ambassadors were going out for dinner together, but we didn't seem to be going in the right direction so Lucy, Mary, Larre and I turned around and went back to the main street. Just as we reached the corner, a large group of



Japanese delegates arrived and one of them was Aki Sugaya from the Tokyo club. We had been roommates at the FFI Conference in LA in 2004. They were going to an okonomiyaki restaurant and invited us to join them. We walked a few more blocks and went into a building which had several small restaurants with a counter behind which stood the chef. There were seven Japanese, the four of us and a couple from Costa Rica. The chef put on a performance while preparing 13 special Hiroshima style vegetable pancakes with other things added. After dinner we walked back to the hotel and got a coffee from the machine in lounge off the lobby and talked to some delegates from Ehime before going to bed. *Sue*

Hotel: Comfort Hotel Hiroshima, 3-17 Komachi Naka-ku, Hiroshima, JP, 730-0041 (5 nights)

October 31 Hiroshima Conference Day 1

After breakfast at the hotel, we met Kyo and some of the other Ota people and walked over to the International Conference Center Hiroshima located in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. We checked to see whether they had located our official conference badges but they never did find them.

The Friendship Force International 2012 World Conference brought together over 370 participants from 22 countries around the world to celebrate peace and friendship. The Opening Plenary began with a spectacular drumming by Yanaguni Daiko, the Japanese Drum Club of Hiroshima Prefectural Kurose Senior High School. There is something about the beat of Japanese drumming that is very moving. The feeling was heightened by the darkened auditorium and the shadows of the drummers on the screen behind them. FFI President George Brown then welcomed each of the 22 delegations. The Friendship Force of Manitoba, Canada, was recognized with the Roadrunner Award for the club with the largest delegation travelling the longest distance. The Host Cup was passed from Germany to Japan. There was an official welcome to Hiroshima by an official of Hiroshima Prefecture, Toko Yomura gave greetings from the FFI Board of Directors and Sherry Mueller, President Emerita of the National Council for International Visitors



gave the keynote address. Dr. Mueller's speech was titled "Sakura and Citizen Diplomacy." She began by wondering whether the Japanese officials who presented the cherry trees 100 years ago realized what an incredible and enduring gift they were giving—a gift that has added beauty to the lives of millions of people. She related this story: "More than 3000 cherry trees were shipped from Yokohama to Seattle on board the S.S. *Awa Maru* and transported by train to Washington D.C. The first trees were planted on March 27, 1912 by the wife of the Japanese Ambassador Chinda and the wife of U.S. President Taft. Washington's renowned annual Cherry Blossom Festival grew from this simple ceremony in citizen diplomacy." Ms. Mueller went on to talk about citizen diplomacy - the concept that the individual citizen has the responsibility to shape foreign relations "one handshake at a time." She went on to say there were two kinds of citizen diplomacy. The first is spontaneous citizen diplomacy, where you might see someone looking lost and offer to help. "The second type of citizen diplomacy is intentional or deliberate citizen diplomacy. We join organizations like Friendship Force International, and participate in exchange programs designed to be educational—to teach us about cultural differences, and, more importantly, to enable us to appreciate our common human aspirations." She concluded her speech saying that the friendships all of us forge are the best guarantee that our children and grandchildren will live in a more peaceful world.



We broke for coffee and returned for George Brown's talk and video presentation "Friendship Force 35th Anniversary: Looking to the Future." The new video was very good and will be available for view on the FFI website. It combines the history shown in the old video and then added information about the Global Expansion which hopes to add 45 new clubs in existing Friendship Force countries and add new clubs in countries which have not had a FF presence in places like Malaysia and Myanmar to mention a few. The three people from the Malaysia club were in Hiroshima. Other initiatives include expanding themed exchanges, leadership training, and promoting the Friendship Force globally using technology and social media to share our story with the world.



We had lunch – many kinds of Japanese and possibly Chinese foods on a turntable on each table. After lunch we had two workshop sessions. Several of our people attended one or two of the Hands-On Japanese Culture workshops. FF Hiroshima members demonstrated calligraphy, origami, the tea ceremony, a kimono fitting and children's games and let the delegates try these activities. I attended the workshop – *We're in the News*





– a really interesting presentation about the Global Winter Exchange held in Winnipeg which generated lots of press and media coverage. A step-by-step guide is available on the FFI website. After coffee break, I attended *Getting Connected with Social Media*. This workshop was also useful and provided instructions on how to use FFI’s Facebook page to connect with friends around the world. Jillian Walters, FFI Communications Coordinator, also suggested setting up a Facebook page for your own club. She said you can use it to share messages and photos, communicate with members and attract new ones. FFI will promote your Facebook page if you let them know you have one.

We walked back to the hotel after the afternoon session. Larre spent some time on the computer and I went up to take a rest. Lucy, Fay, Val, Arlene, Larre and I went to dinner at a restaurant where you pick what you want, put money in the machine in the entry and get a ticket. You take your ticket to your table and the waiter brings you your meal on a tray. I wasn’t sure what I had but it turned out to be fried oysters and the meal was very good. We went back to the hotel then we walked to the ANA Crowne Plaza for karaoke. Lucy did a song with a man and the Ota group did a song. People had to put on costumes to sing. We left about 10 PM and returned to the hotel. *Sue*



November 1 Hiroshima Conference Day 2



Keynote on different perspectives on Hiroshima bombing and recovery made you think about the horrors of war and the long-time recovery needed for people who experience the battlefield. In the afternoon we went to the Peace Park and toured the Museum.


I attended workshops on *Lifelong Learning* and *Have Fun with Hosting* that both offered some information that can be useful to other clubs. ***Lifelong Learning with Friendship Force*** focused on the teacher training programs with Indonesia. This is a cooperative effort for foreign English teachers to be exposed to more class work and home environments in an English speaking country. This could be possible if we had more relationships with a four year college program for teachers and build on our relationships with the adult English as a second language programs.

Have Fun Hosting with Dave Kalan (Milwaukee) talked about your hosting as a reflection of the club personality. Start really working your environment to set up special themed exchanges or a week that shows your diversity. Focus on food and beverages for your programs that represent the region. Offer choices to potential guests

but also keep your membership interested and participating. Eco exchange, activity exchange, food and wine exchange, Audubon, gardening, Lake Cottage experience or grandchildren theme all worked well. **Mix it up so your members stay involved.** Try new things for younger people and keep learning or provide a service. Be enthusiastic for your community and connect with others. Work from your strengths.

Use **Day hosts and Night hosts** as folks often like to get out in the evening and party (especially younger people). Offer a free day on their own (popular with the <65 crowd). Consider a split of the week into two with a tour in the middle (e.g., everyone wants to go to NY, DC or Kyoto); this allows two families to host for a shorter period of time and is a good arrangement for workers with 3-4 days of a guest. Create a guidebook of your options and use this as a way to recruit club members too. Lots of clubs do a great deal of driving as it was common for 1.5 hour distances in the 2 Japan clubs I visited so we should not complain.





The Lantern making and evening launching as a group was a powerful symbol coming together for world peace.

Molly

Walking to the lantern ceremony we ran into a group of delegates from Sendai. We talked for a few minutes then went on to the river. The ceremony was very beautiful. After it was over we walked with the crowd over the bridge toward the hotel. A delegate said something about dinner and mentioned that there was a nearby mall that had many reasonably priced restaurants. We walked several blocks and found the place he was talking about. It wasn't really a mall – it is the Hondori Shopping Arcade. It starts near the Peace Park and runs east about half a kilometer. It is lined with shops and restaurants but we didn't see anything



that interested us in the first several blocks. We just went past another cross street when a man handed us a piece of paper and said it was for a discount at an Indian restaurant that was up the stairs. We decided to try it. It was called Ganesh and was very small and mostly empty. They had English menus and reasonable prices. We had some curry and wonderful naan. We were pleased with our choice. We walked back to the hotel and Larre went on the computer. I had some coffee and talked to some people in the lobby. Our group seemed to be the only Westerners in the hotel and we were also the only people who spent much time on the computers. *Sue*



November 2 Hiroshima, Iwakuni and Miyajima Conference Day 3

Closing Plenary Session



The Plenary Session started at 9 AM with the Hanayagi Hiroi Dance Group. The dance group did a traditional dance with flowers. It was very graceful and colorful with red as the dominate color.

At each World Conference, two Friendship Force volunteers and two clubs are honored as Outstanding Volunteers or Clubs of the Year. This year Larry Kurtz, FF of Greater Hamilton and Burlington, Canada and Ramona McGee, FF of Sarasota, USA won for Outstanding Volunteers. Larry has been described as an excellent strategist, quick thinker and a person with initiative. Ramona currently is playing a role in the Global Expansion Plan by mentoring a

group in Ukraine who are working to start a new club. Both Outstanding Volunteers have been club president, experienced exchange directors, ambassadors, as well as holding many other officers in their local clubs. The Outstanding Clubs for 2012 were FF Louisville, USA and FF Taupo, New Zealand. Both clubs have had very successful membership growth strategies and the Louisville club hosted an emergency exchange group from the Netherlands when they were left stranded when their second host club was hit be a tornado. There is always a team looking for two very friendly people in a sea of very friendly people. This year one of the two delegates from the Costa Rica, attending his first conference, Heriberto Morales Bolanos, won for the men and a woman from Japan won for the ladies.



The most interesting development at the conference was a visit from Mark Twain. Ed Helm of FF Florida Suncoast, impersonating Mark Twain in costume, gave the special invitation to the 36th World Conference in New Orleans, which will be held from November 22nd to 25th, 2013. He gave the rich history of New Orleans and his fascination with the bayou. Ed was so good as Mark Twain that I want to attend the conference just to see and hear him again as well as the newly rebuilt New Orleans. As the plenary session came to an end, so did the business session of the conference, and we held hands and sang "Let There Be Peace on Earth."



The Iwakuni & Miyajuma Half Day Bus Tour

Iwakuni Tour

After eating a very nice box lunch on the bus, there was just enough time to take a nap before our first stop on the bus tour. The highlight of the Iwakuni part of the tour was the extraordinary Kintai Bridge. The Kintai-kyo Bridge has been Iwakuni's most distinguished landmark and a subject of admiration for hundreds of years. Completely made of wood and without the use of any nails, the bridge makes five bold arches onto massive stone pillars as it crosses over the Nishiki River. Plans for the bridge were first drawn up when strong currents destroyed the previous bridge. The bridge was completed on October 1, 1673 and has been destroyed or damage at least 5 times over the last 340 years. The last time it was renovated was in 2004. The biggest concern is decay of the wood, so periodical surveys are conducted to check the soundness of the bridge. Can you believe that the bridge is one of the few foot (no cars) bridges in the world that you have to pay a fee to cross?



Miyajima Tour

Itsukushima is the official name for Miyajima, which means “shine-island.” The small island is less than an hour from the city of Hiroshima. Miyajima is most famous for its giant torii gate, which at high tide seems to float on top of the water. Itsukushima Shrine and the torii gates are unique for being built over water. The shrine complex consists of multiple buildings, including a prayer hall, main hall and a noh theater stage, which are connected with each other by boardwalks and are all supported by pillars above the sea.



Closing Banquet

The Gala Dinner, hosted by Hiroshima, included a traditional sake cask breaking ceremony and an evening of fun and dancing. The FFI Board of Directors held a raffle during the dinner to raise money for a special exchange between FF Miyagi, FF Koriyama & FF Sunshine Coast, which will bring child survivors of the recent tsunami in Japan to spend spring vacation in Australia in 2013. *Gwen Deas*



November 3 Hiroshima FREE DAY

It was nice to wake up and not have anywhere that you must go. However, the group did not want to do nothing on our last day in Hiroshima. After much discussion our group sets out on foot. Well, on foot and the local trolley car. Everyone except Molly who left for her next exchange and Mary went to Shukkeien Gardens, the historical ruins of the Hiroshima Castle and the Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum.

Today happened to be some type of a holiday – Culture Day - and most of the museums in Hiroshima were free. We picked a great day to go on an adventure.

Shukkeien Gardens (literally “shrink-scenery garden”)

Ueda Soko, a famous master of the tea ceremony, started construction on the garden in 1620. The garden is a miniaturized landscape modeled on Xihu (West Lake) in Hangzhou, China. In the center of Sukkeien is Takuei Pond, containing more than 10 islets large and small. Around its circumference mountains, valleys, bridges, tea cottages and arbors are skillfully arranged, all connected by a path by which one can stroll around the entire garden. Gardens of this type are known as circular-tour gardens.

In 1945 the garden was destroyed by the atomic bomb, but the Hiroshima Prefectural Board of Education instituted repairs to restore its scenery to its condition prior to the bombing. Now about 180,000 visitors come to the gardens making it a very popular



sightseeing spot. It is easy to walk around because it is contained in a very small area compared to other gardens we have seen on this trip.

Historical Ruins of Hiroshima Castle (Carp Castle)

Originally constructed in the 1590's, the castle was destroyed in 1945 and rebuilt in 1958, a replica of the original which now serves as a museum of Hiroshima's history prior to World War II. I was very surprised when we arrived at the castle. It was nothing like anything we had seen before. It was original made with stone, wood and plaster walls. The reconstruction materials are concrete, steel stone, plaster and a little wood. The outside did look old but the inside was very modern. The castle has served as the home of three families of *daimyō* or feudal lords: Mōri (1591 – 1600), Fukushima (1600 – 1619) and Asano (1619 – 1869). It later served as a military facility and the Imperial General Headquarters. The 5-story building was filled with old military things. I could have missed this castle.



The Hiroshima Museum of Art

The museum opened in 1978 in a specially designed building at one end of Central Park located in the heart of Hiroshima City. The paintings in the museum are European Modern concentrating on those by French Impressionist and Japanese oil paintings from after the Meiji Period to the present. These paintings are exhibited permanently in the Museum from Gallery 1 to Gallery 4 of the Main Hall. The Museum offers special exhibitions at an additional fee.

Gallery 1 From Romanticism to Impressionism with painters like Eugene Delacroix, Jean-Francois Millet, Camille Corot, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro

Gallery 2 Neo-Impressionists and Post Impressionists like Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat

Gallery 3 Fauvism to Picasso with many Pablo Picasso paintings as well as Henri Matisse, Andre Derain, Edgar Degas, Albert Marquet and George Rouault.

Gallery 4 Ecole de Paris had Amedeo Modigliani, Marie Laurencin, Jules Pascin, Leonard Foujita and a few others.
Gwen

We were a bit worried about finding our way on the tram but the driver was very helpful. When we came to the stop where we had to transfer, the driver got off and showed us where to catch the next tram. I enjoyed the garden very much. It was so peaceful and beautiful and easy to navigate. The bridge in the center of the pond, Koko-kyo, was very popular with the children visiting.



After we strolled around the gardens, we walked to the Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum next door. The museum was renovated in 1996 and is one of the largest art museums in Western Japan. There are several lounge areas on each floor where you can relax and enjoy the view out over the garden and a big open space on the first floor where they had a musical performance while we were there. The permanent collection contains some 3,500 works which are displayed on rotation in exhibitions organized along various themes. The collection can be divided into four sections, Japanese nihonga painting, traditional Asian art crafts and art from the 1920s and 1930s. The museum also tries to include the work of artists with connections to the Hiroshima region.

The first exhibit space we visited displayed sculptures and avant-garde ceramic art works, including pieces by Entsuba and Yagi. The next space had Japanese oil paintings and western art from the 1920s and 1930s, including works by Kobayashi, Minami, Ai-Mitsu, Kandinsky and Dali's *Dreams of Venus*. The third room had selected pieces from the genres of Japanese paintings and handicrafts,



including lacquer art, jewelry, ceramics, metalwork and paintings. I especially liked the *Figures of Horse in Kakiemon-style*. The next exhibition was on landscape expressionism with works from their own collection and pieces on loan from Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art. It included a variety of landscape/scenery paintings from the Muromachi era to the present focusing on water and mountains. There were also scenes from foreign countries by both Japanese and western artists. The third gallery explored the world of optical illusion.

We stopped to listen to the concert and then people visited the gift shop. We had lunch outside the museum and then walked to Hiroshima Castle. I thought the exhibit in the castle on the life of a samurai was interesting and the view from the top was great. We left the castle and stopped at the Hiroshima Gokoku Jinja, a Shinto shrine on the grounds, where we saw many children in kimonos. Boys aged 3 and 5 and girls aged 3 and 7 are traditionally dressed in kimonos and taken to the shrine for a blessing to celebrate Meiji-sai (Emperor Meiji's Birthday celebration). This day is well known as a day to take pictures of children. All the children looked adorable.



We stopped to look at the chrysanthemum displays before leaving the castle grounds and walked on to the Hiroshima Museum of Art. Some of our group chose not to go in. The first building housed four galleries of western art off a central rotunda. Then we walked outside to the building that displayed contemporary Japanese paintings. I enjoyed that collection.

For dinner we planned on going to the Indian restaurant Larre and I had gone to a few days before but since it was a Saturday night it was completely full and we all went back to the ticket machine restaurant for our final meal in Hiroshima. Sue



November 4 Hiroshima to Fukuoka

This morning we said farewell to Hiroshima and departed for a 4-night home stay in Fukuoka (Hakata). The train trip took just over 1 hour on the Sakura 547.

We had 7 of our original group participating in this home stay and we were joined by Robbie and Kathy from Honolulu, and Ana from Rio do Janeiro, Brazil. Our group was met in grand style by our hosts who carried signs to welcome us to Fukuoka and then took a group photo.



We were driven to the lovely home of Sachiko Koto, a member of the Friendship Force of Fukuoka. We enjoyed a wonderful meal outdoors, consisting of a bento box, rice, pizza, chicken, salad, fruit, and a decorated cake that read "Welcome to Fukuoka." We admired the beautiful trees and flowers on the property.



Some of the group learned how to make decorative flowers and adorable animals out of clay. We then drove to the homes of our host families where we spent the rest of our day. Lucy



Our hostess, Kazumi Kodama, and her neighbor took our luggage back to her house. Kayo Nakamura, our day host, drove us to the luncheon. When everyone was ready to leave, Kayo drove us to our hostess' house. Kazumi lives in a nice house with her daughter, Akiko, and their dog, Shibao. Another daughter, Miyuki, lives just a three minutes' walk away. Kazumi and Akiko welcomed us, and Akiko gave us the first of the many cups of tea we shared. We spent most of our time in the sitting room/dining room which had a Western table and chairs and a couch. There was a tatami room, a large kitchen and a bathroom that we saw on the same floor. After our tea and conversation, Akiko showed us to our room (or house). We had to go outside and through the garage to get to our separate accommodations. On the first floor there was a toilet and a bath. Up a curved staircase, there was a hallway and a large room half covered with tatami and half with a wooden floor that had Western furniture. Akiko helped us set out our futons and told us when to be down for dinner.

We unpacked and went back to the main house. Some of the guests were already there. Besides Kayo, there were several ladies and two men who were neighbors and members of Friendship Force. Akiko was the chef and served a wonderful meal. Kazumi doesn't speak much English but Kayo and Akiko both speak excellent English and most of the others also spoke some. After dinner one of the ladies performed a traditional Japanese dance for us. We sat around the table talking and drinking tea until quite late then went up to bed. *Sue*



Tonight Gwen and I joined Yaeko and her daughter and her family at a (New Age Type) church. The minister & family are from Washington State. This Sunday was the day they hold a once a month service held in English. The minister that evening was also an American, married to a Japanese lady and had a son who also took part in the service. I met a Japanese man who told me that he was not a Christian but attended because he was learning English. The minister asked questions and I answered them. There was a little reception afterwards. *Arlene*

November 5 Fukuoka

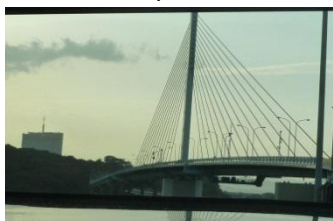
Today we went to the Welcome lunch at Nishitetsu Inn. The restaurant was on the top floor and had wonderful views of Fukuoka or Hakata on 3 sides. We were greeted by Noriko Nakamura and Sachiko Koto. Our food was delicious and beautifully presented.



After lunch we went to a meeting room in the International House building where we tried on kimonos. The club members brought tatami mats, many kimonos and outer coats and everything else they needed plus drinks and snacks and most of us were dressed in kimonos – not an easy task with some of us. Then there were pictures taken.



After the kimono fittings, many of us were taken on the Fukuoka Open Top Bus Tour of the city. Most of the hosts who were planning to go didn't because there weren't enough seats. Lucy's host came with us and the women hosts went to a tea room. We rode on the top. It was a little chilly. We started in front of a shopping mall, went past Fukuoka City Hall, drove over the Aratsu Ohashi Bridge, past Fukuoka Yahoo! JAPAN Dome, Fukuoka Tower, Ohori Park, the Art Museum, Fukuoka Castle ruins and the Tenjin area before returning to our starting point. Some hosts met us and we all went into the mall which was decorated for Christmas and up to the tea room to get the others and proceeded to a restaurant on a different floor. We all sat at a counter and course after course of soup, salad, rice, and various fried things on sticks appeared. It was delicious. This type of food is called *kushikatsu*. Kayo Nakamura treated everyone. *Val*



November 6 Fukuoka

Today was a day off with our hosts, so Gwen and I took a leisurely drive to the country with our hosts Yaeko and Takumi Ueda. The area is very picturesque with mountains all around.

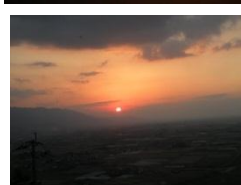
Our first stop was to visit Yaeko's sister – Yasuka, who runs a nursery and kindergarten in Tanushimaru Town in Kurume City, for children aged 6 months to five years. The children were very happy and excited to see and talk with us. After coffee with Yasuka we drove to the area noted for persimmon and grape orchards.



We ate a delicious lunch at Budou-Notane (seed of grapes) restaurant in a persimmon orchard. After lunch we visited an orchard in Ichinose in Ukiha and picked persimmons. Gwen and I discovered that these were perhaps the most expensive persimmons we will ever eat. But there is nothing better than eating fresh fruits picked from the trees. The farmers cut the tops of the trees so they spread their branches which make it very easy to pick the fruits, which you cut off from the stems with clippers.



We made a brief stop at a farmers market to see the various vegetables for sale. After admiring the displays on the grounds we drove into the hills and watched the beautiful sunset from the lobby of Heisei View Hotel at a famous hot spring resort, Harazura Onsen. To our surprise we were served tea and I found the ginger I was searching for in the gift shop. After sunset, Gwen and I took our hosts to a Japanese restaurant for dinner. The owner of the restaurant went to college in Oregon, hoping to be a baseball coach. However, he did not complete his studies but returned home to take over the business from his father. Surprise – he offered us persimmons for dessert. Sorry – it was no comparison to the ones we picked!!



Home, packing and early to bed – early rise in the morning to watch the Sumo wrestlers at practice! *Arlene*



Last night Akiko told us that we would be going to a town called Yufuin today and staying overnight there at a hotel with her mother Kazumi and our day host Kayo Nakamura. This morning Kazumi's oldest daughter, Miyuki, who lives a few minutes from here, came over to say hello to us. She brought her little dog, Shuna. We didn't see her before because she had to go to Osaka.



Kayo picked us up about 11 AM, and we drove to the famous spa town. I missed most of the scenery because I kept falling asleep. We arrived at our hotel - Yufuin Club - at the foot of Mt. Yufudake. We had lunch at a tiny restaurant near the hotel where we sat at the counter and ate huge bowls of ramen (delicious!) and chatted with the owners. Then we went on a walk through the town with its quaint shops, art galleries and eating places. Although it was a weekday and not peak leaf season, the streets and shops were filled with people. We went in many shops – more looking than buying – and





then walked to a beautiful lake. Some of the trees had turned and it was a lovely day. Several times we were approached by men pulling rickshaws (not sure that's what they call them in Japan) to take a ride, but we declined. We went into many shops but bought very little. We visited the Kotoin, shosoin-style warehouse built with only Yufuin wood. The museum has a collection of thousands of pieces of the most famous chinaware of the Edo era and chinaware from China and Korea as well as a jade collection. The museum was in the Kyushu Yufuin Folkcraft Village, which was built in 1980 by people who want to preserve the traditions of creating handicrafts by the use of soil, fire, wood and papers. We visited the shop and I bought some traditional children's toys which were made in the village.

We went back to the hotel and Kazumi registered and got our keys. We stopped in front of room 412 and they gave us the keys to the room next door. We walked to the next room but they looked at their key and called to us that they should switch with us because they knew Americans didn't like the number 13 and they thought we were in 413 but we were actually in 411. It was so nice of them to offer, though. Our room was very large with a sitting area, twin beds and a balcony that faced the mountain. We took some photos then rested until we met for dinner.

We took a taxi because they said they wanted to have some sake with our meal. The restaurant was called Yunotakean, run by Kemenoi Bessou, a well-known Japanese style hotel in Yufuin. The restaurant offers local foods. In the restaurant we were shown to a little private room. Kazumi and Kayo ordered sake for themselves and a set meal for all of us. Their sake came in square wooden boxes filled to the brim. Our dinner had many courses – all of them delicious.



After dinner we took a taxi back to the hotel. I put on my kimono and jacket and slippers and Kayo and I met at 9:30 PM and went to the outdoor Japanese bath. We undressed, took our tiny little towels and went into the water. It was very hot but felt good once I got used to it. The stars were so bright! Kayo got out at some point, went to one of the sinks and poured some cool water on herself and then came back. I stayed in the water. When we finally got out and went back to the room, I was so relaxed! Make that limp! I took a shower, got ready for bed and fell asleep. Sue

Hotel: Yufuin Club, 2952-1 Kawakami, Yufuin-cho, Yufu, Oita Prefecture 879-5102

November 7 Fukuoka



We met for breakfast in the hotel – a very nice buffet and then Kayo drove us up the mountain to an overlook so we could enjoy the view before starting back to Fukuoka. This time I stayed awake on the drive.

We stopped in stopped in Dazaifu and visited the Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine. The shrine is dedicated to Sugawara Michizane who is known as the god of learning. It is busy all through the year with visitors praying for success in exams and academic achievement. Six thousand plum trees which were dedicated to the shrine from the temples of all around the nation are planted on the site. There are many stalls selling popular local specialties such as Umegae-mochi (sweet rice cake with bean jam) which is associated with the plum trees. We had tea and a plate of freshly grilled cakes which were delicious. After our snack, we visited the shrine and saw many little children in kimonos visiting the shrine. We went through the Raumon or Main Gate and walked



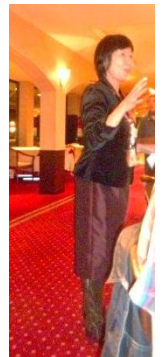
over the Taikobashi – the arched bridge. There were many little shrines and a beautiful lake. We walked on and saw groups of students rubbing the head of a statue of an ox (said to make you more intelligent) before praying at the shrines to do well in their studies.



We next stopped at Komyozenji Temple. The temple was founded in the middle of the Kamakura Period (1192-1333) by a disciple of the founder of Kyoto's Tofukuji Temple and belongs to the Tofukuji school of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. Komyozenji has two beautiful abstract rock gardens - a front garden and a rear garden. The front garden is the smaller of the two and is composed of fifteen rocks laid in a plot of raked pebbles. The rocks are distributed so that they form the Japanese character for "light". We viewed the rear garden from the main temple building. It is larger, and incorporates a lot of plant life in addition to its stones and pebbles. The garden's moss patches, rocks and pebbles are laid out as an abstract representation of large land and water bodies. Branches of maple trees hang over the garden and make the temple a popular autumn leaf spot around mid-November. We sat on the porch of the temple and enjoyed the back garden. It was so peaceful and the trees were just starting to turn. It was really beautiful. After we left the temple, we walked through the little town and went into some of the shops. We walked back through the grounds of the shrine where we saw a monkey walking on stilts and doing tricks before we went back to the car.



Kayo drove us all back to Kazumi's house. We sat in the living room and talked and watched election returns until they declared Obama the winner. Our hosts were very happy. Then we did some packing and I changed my clothes before we went to the Farewell Dinner which was held at Restaurant Mori located on a mountain overlooking the city. It was a beautiful setting. The President of the Fukuoka Friendship Force, Noriko Nakamura, welcomed us and I gave a brief speech. There was a toast by Hiroyuki Hoashi, their club Vice President. We then enjoyed a delicious dinner followed by our presentation of "Ode to New Jersey" with a Japanese translation by Noriko. After that we all said good-bye and we went home with our hosts, watched election returns and went up to finish packing for our early departure after a wonderful day. Sue



Today waking up early in the morning we went to Fujishima– Beya (stable) to see sumo morning practice.

They wear only a special loincloth for sumo and a top-knotted hair. At the practice we had to remain quiet and could not take pictures. We sat on cushions on the floor. Later we visited the Sogetsu school Ikebana master, Mrs. Miura, who is 85 years old, for a lesson. She also made us tea. Then we made a visit to a recreation center and an English class taught by my host's friend, Takaharu Matsumoto. We observed an English class and then answered questions and sang American songs. We saw the Sumo wrestlers at the station on our way home after the farewell dinner. Yaeko asked me if I would like a picture and she asked them. Two agreed to pose with us. *Arlene*

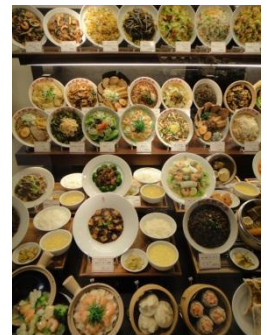


Today my day hosts took me to Yanagawa where we went on a canal boat tour. We rode in a donkobune – a low flat boat which is poled like a gondola. Yanagawa was an old castle town. The boat goes through the moat around the ruins of old Yanagawa Castle. As the boat slowly goes downstream, we enjoyed views of red brick warehouses of the early 20th century and traditional Japanese-style storehouses with 'namako' walls, covered with square tiles jointed with raised plaster. Yanagawa was originally constructed in the mid-16th century by the Kamachi clan. Before then, it had been a traditional farming village, with the canals used for irrigation. There are nearly 300 miles of canals originally built hundreds of years ago for irrigation. *Lucy*



November 8 Fukuoka to Kansai to San Francisco to Philadelphia

This is our last day In Fukuoka where we spent four nights with our host and the last day of our trip to Japan. Once again this was a very early start of the day to catch a Jetstar flight to Osaka. We were up at 5:00 AM and had breakfast at 5:30 AM. At 6:30 AM we arrived at Fukuoka airport at with our host and waited for everyone else to arrive. The group all made the flight and we arrived in Osaka 9:45 AM. We then waited at the airport for 8 hours before our 6:20 PM flight to San Francisco. People shopped and Larre went and got McDonald's for himself then came back and watched everyone's luggage and the rest of us had our final Japanese meal in one of the many restaurants in Kansai Airport. We arrived in San Francisco at 11:00 AM local time after traveling all night and gaining our day back as it was still Nov 8th. We went through customs, made our connecting flights to Philadelphia, PA and Newark, NJ. *Fay*



Ota Ambassadors and Hosts
October 23 – 30, 2012



Yoshitaro & Mieko Watanabe, Sue & Larre Hoke



Fay Harrison, Val Bolan, Kyoko & Haruo Kasukawa



Lucy Sheffield, Hachiro & Sachiko Okumura



Yayoi Yanagihara, Arlene Hanson-Young, Susumu Yanagihara



Masakazu Kanai, Mary Horvath, Iyota & Misae Kanai



Naoki & Yukiko Kobayashi, Gwen Deas



Jo Romeo, Megumi Ogura, Katsuyoshi Ogura



Molly Anthony, Takeshi & Etsuko Kanai
Kokomi & Nanase

**Fukuoka Ambassadors and Hosts
November 4 – 8, 2012**



Larre Hoke, Kazuko Kodama, Sue Hoke



Val Bolan, Mikiko Sanui



Lucy Sheffield, Yasuko Suito



Fumie Yonekura, Fay Harrison



**Takumi Ueda, Gwen Deas
Kathy Fujimori, Robbie Gee, Takako Watanabe**



**Gwen Deas, Yaeko Ueda, Arlene Hanson-Young
Nobuko Kako, Ana Caetano**

