

## Japan – 2016

**Saturday, 3 September.** The flight from Busan was more or less on time, and Japanese immigration went quickly. Then the customs inspector wanted to search through my suitcase. That took a while. There must be something about me—five years ago they also did that. They are very strict on bringing in plants and food.

Then I took the subway into Fukuoka. That may have been a mistake, since first one had to take a (free) shuttle bus from the international terminal to the subway, which was at the domestic terminal. And it turns out that they are very far apart. Anyway, I finally arrived at a stop near my inn, which they called a *ryokan* though a *ryokan* is much fancier. However, I took the wrong street. I passed by the right one because it looked like it was just the entrance to a parking lot. But I finally found it with the help of Google Maps. However, standing in front of it I was still unsure if it really was my inn, since there was no sign. But I went in, and it was indeed the place I had reserved. It was a bit run down, but spotlessly clean, as is everything in Japan.

Fukuoka is the name of the modern city which was formed out of a few smaller ones, including where I was: Hakata. The main train station, which is in Hakata, is still called Hakata station, not Fukuoka station. Hakata has the most interesting things to see. That, plus the convenience of the train station was the reason for my choice of inns.

Since it was getting a bit late, I just picked a nearby restaurant which looked nice, and it was. I had mixed stir-fried sea food, prepared right in front of me: octopus, squid, big prawns, scallops with some vegetables.

**Sunday, 4 September.** The breakfast this morning was not as good as some I had on my last trip to Japan. But it was OK: rice, *nori* sheets, a piece of salmon, an egg, a small piece of sausage, something that looked like a kind of pea or bean held together by something sticky (that was the only thing I didn't eat all of), a banana, and tea. Not caring for a raw egg, I noticed a microwave on a table and cooked it.

I walked to the bus station, which is next to the Hakata train station, and caught a bus to Dazaifu, a city 15 km or so from Hakata. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/Y7ijpyzwt27H5cKU9>.) There I first visited the Dazaifu Tenman-gu, a shrine founded in 905. But the present buildings are, of course, much more recent. Then I went to the Kyushu National Museum (free for me since over 70). It is a large, striking building, but the exhibition seems to take up only a small part of it. Nevertheless, the exhibition was very well done. It highlights the influence of the rest of Asia on Japan from ancient times, which is appropriate considering that Kyushu is the closest part of Japan to the rest of Asia.

When I had asked for a map at the tourist office in Dazaifu, the woman warned me that there was a typhoon approaching and that if it was severe, transportation might be stopped. So I shouldn't stay too late as it was expected in the late afternoon. No problem as the shrine and museum took less time than I had expected. I was back in Hakata by 3. I went to the train station and exchanged my voucher for the JR West rail pass, which is a good deal, and also bought tickets for Nagasaki and back, that part of the Japanese rail network being not part of JR West but of JR Kyusuh. The typhoon seems less severe than feared and to be passing further south. So the train to Nagasaki tomorrow should run.

Then I went to a little folk museum, which showed some of the history of Hakata. *Michelin* had given it one star, but I would not have. After that I went to nearby Kushida-jinju (photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/YqzCmaec8Pob1apt5>), a shrine founded in 754, the present buildings from 1587, and the starting point every summer for the Yamagasa Matsuri. This is a festival, held every year for the past 700 years from July 1 to 15. The highlight is a race between teams of 26 men, each team representing a different section of the city. Each team carries a float weighing almost a ton over a 5 km course. The men wear a simple costume consisting of a *shimekomi* (or *fundoshi*), the loincloth that is worn by sumo wrestlers (legs and buttocks exposed), a light cotton jacket bearing the insignia of their team, and sandals made of rice straw. The crowds cheer and throw water over them as they pass. The float carried by the team from this section of town was on display at the shrine. I would not have appreciated all this if I had not watched the video (in Japanese, without subtitles) at the folk museum. So maybe the museum was worth its star.

Hakata was a center of silk weaving, and attached to the folk museum was a typical home of a silk weaver from around 1920. This was an artisanal industry, with individual weavers working in shops at home.

I ate a curry tonight at a place recommended in *Lonely Planet*, feeling a bit guilty about not eating Japanese. But then this fit in with the thrust of the National Museum exhibits, the influence of the rest of Asia on Japan. It was pretty good, although I let the waiter talk me into ordering the normally spiced version—a slightly hotter version would have been better.

**Monday, 5 September.** Breakfast this morning was like yesterday except a different kind of fish. Also midway through they brought me a miso soup with half a dozen small clams in it—good.

I got the train with no problem and was in Nagasaki precisely on time at 10:49 I found my *ryokan* with no problem. It was just a few blocks from the station. I left my suitcase, it being too early to check in.

(Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/fmmT16B5GcAvJdJ69>.) I took a tram up to the area of the Peace Park and Atomic Bomb Museum. Although it is only in the low 30s, the bright sun makes it seem much hotter. The Peace Park has various statues, supposed to inspire the message of peace. I managed to find the primary school, not far away which was the closest school to ground zero. Of course, the present school is completely new, but a few artifacts of the school destroyed by the bomb are still to be found. The Atomic Bomb Museum didn't really tell me anything I didn't know except that the bomb was yellow.

I took the tram back, past the station and almost to the end of the line to get close to what I hoped was my next visit, the Siebold Museum. It is next to the site of his house, which no longer exists. A commemorative plaque and a statue mark the place. Unfortunately, the museum was closed. Typical for much of Japan, the only signs were in Japanese. I assumed that it was just closed because it was Monday, but it could have been some other reason.

I next walked along a stream, very picturesque with the nine stone bridges crossing it, one every 100 m or so. Six of the nine were washed away in a flood in 1982 but were rebuilt using the recovered stones.

Finally, a nice *kaiseki* meal, albeit a small one—only 11 dishes plus rice, beautiful and varied. It included a glass of apricot wine, which I think was supposed to be an

aperitif, but since it was very sweet I saved it for with dessert.

I took the tram back to my *ryokan*. The room is really nice—9 *tatami* mats in size plus an alcove for hanging clothes, *etc.*, and with a little refrigerator. And there is my own bathroom. Very nice, but also relatively expensive, ¥6600 (€60) plus ¥800 for breakfast.

The owner is an outgoing man whose exuberance more than makes up for his broken English. When I first came this morning, he spontaneously gave me maps and sightseeing info. And in the room there was more, as well as instructions on the proper way of wearing the *yukata*: men and women cross it oppositely and tie the belt on opposite sides.

**Tuesday, 6 September.** The breakfast was nice, the best so far. It's too bad I will have to skip breakfast tomorrow. Breakfast begins at 8, and I have a train at 8:24

I first went to Dejima (photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/hK7g4xEESqYg7BSYA>), the, at that time, artificial island where the Dutch trading mission was confined back when Japan, afraid of outside influences, had a self-imposed isolation. The Dutch, being more interested in trading than in converting heathens to Christianity, were the only Westerners allowed to trade with Japan. However, they were confined to Dejima island except for an annual visit by their head to the shogun in Edo—a trip which took 2 or 3 months.

After the opening of Japan, Dejima was no longer necessary. Western traders and industrialists introduced new ideas to Japan, making a good deal of money in the process. They had their own section of town, for a while self-ruling, as did the Chinese. Much of the area around Dejima was filled in. So now the only water is a river on one side.

The idea is to eventually restore Dejima to the way it was under the Dutch. Currently less than half is done, although there are a few buildings nearing completion. It appears to be proceeding in a careful manner with great attention to historic accuracy. I found it very interesting.

After Dejima, I visited the nearby Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum, which was supposed to have a nice collection of Spanish art collected by a Japanese diplomat stationed in Spain during World War II (running a spy ring—Spain being neutral was a great place for that). After the war he was held as a war criminal but escaped execution. Part of the collection is still in Spain. The Spanish don't want to let it leave the country. Unfortunately the museum was having a special exhibit on animation, which apparently used up a lot of floor space normally occupied by the Spanish collection. So there were only three rooms left, and that was not at all impressive—lots of 'Spanish unknown' artists.

(Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/RatfBUgDU4sLWdvi6>.) Next, I proceeded to the Hollander slope. This was a road up a hill to the European section of town, and so was often travelled by Europeans. Hence the name; the only Europeans known to the Japanese having been the Dutch, they referred to all Europeans as Hollanders, *i.e.*, Dutch. There are still quite a number of European style buildings in the area.

From there I headed for Oura Catholic church, a wooden mock-gothic building built in 1865 by Japanese carpenters under the direction of a French priest, who became the first bishop of Nagasaki. Practically next door to it was a Buddhist temple and cemetery and a Shinto shrine. It is quite unusual to have the different faiths so close to each other.

After that it was a trudge uphill to Glover Gardens. They are nice gardens, which contain a number of houses which used to belong to wealthy European industrialists in Nagasaki. The most impressive was that of Glover (a Scotsman), who had had several money-making projects. One of them was the first brewery in Japan. The Asahi brewery is its descendant.

I passed up the Brasserie Paul Bocuse and headed for a *Lonely Planet* recommendation, which was supposed to be below the Victoria Hotel. I couldn't find it, so asked in the hotel. A nice receptionist told me it had moved and showed me on a map where it was: on the second floor about a block away. I never would have found it, and as so often the name was only in Japanese. No one spoke English, so I sort of blind-ordered and ended up with six small dishes as starters followed by a piece of broiled fish with a sort of bechemel sauce over it and then passed under the grill and a bowl of what looked like wild rice. It was quite good. Not as good as last night, but then it was only half the price, ¥1500.

Today was hot and sunny. It was nice to get back to the *ryokan* and soak in a nice hot bath.

**Wednesday, 7 September.** I was up early, ate a doughnut and cherry-filled pastry I had bought the night before and drank a couple of cups of tea. I would have much preferred the *ryokan*'s breakfast. I caught the 8:24 train for Hakata where I changed to the *shinkansen*. It brought me to Yokoyama where I transferred to a limited express to get to Matsue by 15:43.

At the information office at the station I asked for a map and where my hotel was. The girl asked where I was from and I said the Netherlands, at which she got all excited and said "Oh, one of our staff is from Netherland". She went to the back office and fetched him, a young man from Rotterdam who studied Japanese at university, went to Japan, married a Japanese girl and has no plans to return to the Netherlands.

However, the girl's directions to my hotel were to the hotel and not to the hotel annex, which is where I had booked a room. The girl as the hotel reception told me it was a block away, gave me a little map, but then decided to go with me to make sure I found the place, which was probably a good thing, since there were only Japanese signs on the building. She said she was the only one at the hotel who spoke English, that she had been to the Netherlands and that she knew someone here from the Netherlands. At that point we were at the hotel annex and I had to check in. So I didn't get around to asking her what she had done in the Netherlands or whether the person she knew worked at the tourist information office.

After putting my suitcase in my room I headed for the castle, a couple of kilometers away, high on a hill. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/CnUQiEcNnHpDCGbr8>.) Unfortunately only the castle remains, without most of its subsidiary buildings. But it is real, one of only 12 remaining castles in Japan. The folder says that of the 12 it is the second largest, the third tallest, and the fifth oldest. Nevertheless, *Michelin* only gives it one star. Most of the interior is now devoted to various exhibits such as armor, weapons and clothing.

Most of the castles were dismantled after the Meiji restoration, and some have suffered from fire or worse. But this one was saved by a local citizen's group lead by a wealthy farmer and a former samurai. However, much of the land belonging to the castle was sold off.

After visiting the castle I went to the near-by house of a middle-rank samurai. It was quite large, but not at all lavish—rather spartan in fact.

Then I tried to find restaurants from *Lonely Planet*. Eventually I succeeded. The first one was full, the second not. It was only so-so, somewhat of a let-down after the nice places in Nagasaki.

I had planned to buy something for breakfast in one of the stores by the station, but they were all closed except for a convenience store, which did not have much to choose from. I guess I'm in the sticks now, not cosmopolitan Hakata or Nagasaki.

**Thursday, 8 September.** It was raining when I woke up, and it was supposed to continue to do so for a couple of hours. So I decided to take a later train to Izumo Taisha, the oldest existing shrine in Japan—it is mentioned in the earliest known Japanese writing (seventh century). It is the second most important shrine, after the one in Ise, which I will get to in two days.

On the train I met a Scotsman. He asked where I was from, and when I said The Netherlands he started to speak Dutch, and continued to do so even after he found out I was American. He had studied design in Glasgow, but there were no jobs in the UK for someone without experience. So he answered a Philips ad and went to work in Eindhoven, later in Groningen. So if you didn't like the look of Philips appliances 15 years ago, you can probably blame him. When Philips decided to move the design group to someplace in Friesland he was given the choice of moving or taking early retirement. At 55 he chose the latter. While at Philips he had a year in Japan on an exchange program. He liked it, and now spends about half of his time in Japan. He teaches two days a week at a day-care center for mentally handicapped, which he finds very rewarding.

But back to the shrine: For the month of October all the gods are believed to come to Izumo Taisha for a yearly reunion. So in all Japan October is known as the month without gods, except in Izumo Taisha.

It was still raining enough that I had used my umbrella walking to the private train station. With almost perfect timing the rain stopped shortly before getting to Izumotaishamae, and the sun came out as I walked to the shrine. The rain had cooled things off though, and it was only about 25°C, which was nice.

(Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/TPbex7ao5pBZK4SK8>.) Much of the shrine is behind a wooden fence. Only the priests are allowed there. One can only see the upper half of the buildings over the fence. As mentioned in the guidebooks, there are quite a lot of young women at the shrine, since one of the local gods has 'being married' as an 'area of attention'.

Coming back I made a mistake where I had to change trains and ended up going the wrong way. That cost me an hour. I had shown my ticket to the conductrice and she had waved me onto the train. My ticket was, I thought, a round trip ticket from Matsue to Izumotaishamae. That is what I understood from the few words of English the ticket seller could manage. And so she should have seen that I wanted the other train. But later I think maybe it was a day pass, which would have been about the same price, in which case I can't blame the conductrice.

After I got back to Matsue I went to the provincial museum. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/M8YKmXea29NkKpTS9>.) They were having a special exhibit on Belgian modern art, since this year marks 150 years of Belgian-Japanese relations. I skipped that and just looked at their permanent collection: one room with nice screens and

scroll paintings and one with nice wood block prints. There was also a room with porcelain and photography, which was less interesting.

Tonight I ate at an *Lonely Planet* recommendation. It was almost as good as the *kaiseki* place in Nagasaki, ¥2700.

I made train reservations for the coming days and went to bed early.

**Friday, 9 September.** I was up early to catch the 7:51 train to Okayama. Finding my hotel posed a bit of a problem. I took the wrong exit from the department store next to the station. Fortunately, my tablet came to the rescue. Of course I couldn't check in yet, but I could leave my bag. Then I headed for the famous Koraku-en garden (third best in Japan according to many sources and a *Michelin*\*\*\*).

Before entering the garden I made a quick visit to a couple of nearby musea. First the Yumeji Art Museum (*Michelin*\*), which is dedicated to the works of Takehisa Yumeji. I had seen some of his works at a recent Japanese exhibition at the Rijksmuseum. It was nice, but very small, a bit too small for the ¥700 entrance fee. Then the prefectural museum. It was also small with mostly Buddhist statues and paintings, but perhaps worth the ¥150 entrance fee for seniors. Both musea had almost everything behind highly reflective glass (grrr).

The garden lived up to expectations—fantastic—and only ¥140 for seniors. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/gY6Ya1gtShZkDNey8>.) It is on an island in the Asahi River, across from the Okayama castle. The garden was created in 1700 by the *daimyo* (lord) and developed over a period of 14 years. It was his private garden reachable by boat from his castle. It gave him a place to relax, receive guests, and practice riding and archery. It covers about 13 hectares (32 acres)

The garden is beautiful with the view constantly changing as you walk through it. There are wide lawns, hills, ponds, a stream, a waterfall, tea houses. The former fields and rice paddies have been replaced by lawns, though a small area of rice remains along with a tea plantation. Japanese cranes are raised here. The vegetation is varied, and there is always something in bloom. Although it was in the low 30's, there were enough clouds to make it a pleasant day.

Again tonight I ate at a *Lonely Planet* restaurant, much less expensive than last night—only ¥1300. It had a rather amusing system. You order at the entrance from a vending machine where you make your choice and pay. From the machine you get a ticket which you give to the waitress. She takes one half of it to the kitchen. After a while she brings you the food and takes the other half. The choices are all a variation of fried breaded pork cutlet and a bowl of rice, the choice being small, medium, or large and with or without a shredded cabbage salad. I took the large with a salad and miso soup. The large bowl of rice had a thin layer of cabbage on top and on top of that the pork cutlet and a tasty demiglace sauce. It was quite good, and filling.

**Saturday, 10 September.** I got the 8:53 *shinkansen* to Shin-Osaka where I changed to a slower train via Kyoto to Kusatsu. There it went miss. I got off one stop too early—Kusatsu West, or some such. By the time I realized my mistake, my train had already left. Another one came along in a few minutes and I took it. But by then, with Japanese clockwork railroads, I had missed my next train a Kusatsu. So I had a wait of nearly an hour. Fortunately the platform was covered. So I was in the shade in a surprisingly comfortable seat and with a nice breeze.

After finding my *ryokan*, which was about a 20 minute walk from the station I walked back into town and went to Ise-Jingu Geku, the “outer shrine” of Ise-Jingu. There is also an “inner shrine” a few kilometers away.

The Ise-Jingu shrine is the most important shrine in Japan. It is directly associated with the Imperial household, and since ancient times the office of high priestess has been held by an imperial princess. On his official travels the emperor never sits with his back in the direction of Ise. He symbolically grows rice in the palace in Tokyo and sends it every year as an offer to the goddess Amaterasu, to whom the inner shrine (Naiku, or Kotai-jingu) is dedicated. The outer shrine (Geku, or Toyouke Dai-jingu) is dedicated to Toyouke-no-omikami, goddess of agriculture and industry and protector of harvests and the home. She also has the task of offering Amaterasu and the other *kami* (gods) the sacred food that the priests of Ise leave morning and evening in a pavillion behind the principal shrine. It is no wonder then that Ise-Jingu has always been the destination of pilgrimages. In Edo times it numbered in the millions per year.

All of the shrines in both the inner and outer shrine are rebuilt every 20 years. So next to each of the buildings is an open area where the previous shrine was and the next one will be. In all it takes some 10000 trees more than 200 years old to rebuild the shrines. The last time (the 62nd) was in 2013.

Just outside the shrine area there was a small museum with nice displays on the history of the shrine, the rituals, and the building methods, including a large model of the main shrine. Unfortunately all of the explanations, including the videos, were only in Japanese.

The buildings are very sober: bare and primitive, which the Japanese consider the height of beauty and purity. The ordinary visitor cannot see much; there are fences around the shrines and only the priests and special visitors may enter. Only the Emperor and Empress and the highest priests may enter the inner sanctum. This was also true in Izumo, but here there are also guards around (with uniforms that looked to me to be quite a lot like those of the Imperial Household) to make sure you don't go where you are not allowed to and don't take photos over the fence.

Nevertheless, the outer shrine, situated in a nice forest, (photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/SRPuQhbYcr2rpE8r6>) is very pleasant. The inner shrine even more so (see tomorrow).

Eating was a bit of a flop. It seems most visitors to Ise come on a day trip, and practically everything closes at 5. I ended up eating rather tough sashimi in a noisy place where everyone was continuously smoking. Also the *ryokan* was disappointing: over-priced at ¥5900, though the people were nice.

**Sunday, 11 September.** I took the bus to Ise-Jingu Naiku, the inner shrine. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/uhdSKQ9LzUud7avH7>.) It is in a 5500 ha (13591 acres) forest of giant cedars, camphor trees and cypresses. Access is by a bridge over the Isuzu River. Like the shrines, the bridge is rebuilt every 20 years. I liked the inner shrine more than the outer shrine. It is more peaceful, and the guards were a bit less up-tight about photos.

I arrived in Nara, not having made any mistakes changing trains, at 15:00. And after some searching I found my *ryokan*.

Then I walked around some shrines and temples on the outskirts of Nara, which I had seen before on my first trip to Japan in 2000. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/>

photos/QzXRqfugaetnGzrw6.) First was Kasuga Taisha, famous for its 3000 lanterns, donated by the faithful over the centuries. These moss-covered stone lanterns line the broad path from the giant *torii* to the entrance. Other, bronze, lanterns hang in the corridors of the buildings. It must be quite spectacular when they are all lit during the Mantoro festivals, which take place twice a year.

I continued on to the Tamukeyama-hachimangū shrine and the Sangatsu-dō and Nigatsu-dō halls, which lie next to each other. The view out over Nara from the Nigatsu-dō is nice.

By this time it was getting dark, as I walked further to Tōdai-ji. It had closed, but I had seen it in 2000. The two Niō guardians at the Nandai-mon gate were fierce, as ever. I could not see much of the Isui-en garden, as it was now completely dark. So there was not much left to do except head for dinner.

I had a nice dinner in a *Michelin* recommendation: a box of appetizers (you might call it Japanese *tapas*), one each of 10 or so small dishes (the recognizable ones were a shrimp and a piece of octopus or squid tentacle), most of which were good, a few so-so; sashimi (about as much as last night, but much better); 3 pieces of tempura (shrimp, sweet potato, a piece of fish); rice; some pickled things; miso soup with clams—all for ¥1450.

**Monday, 12 September.** It was a nice Japanese breakfast this morning: spinach and tuna; egg salad; two things I couldn't identify, but which were good; pickled seaweed (I think) which looked like curls of brown spaghetti; pickled cabbage; omelette; miso soup; and as much rice as you wanted.

I walked to JR Nara station keeping track of the time and route in preparation for tomorrow morning when I can't afford any mistakes on my way to the airport. I took a train to Hōryū-ji station from which it was a 20 minute walk to Hōryū-ji. But in the 30°C heat with high humidity so that it felt more like 35 or more, it took more like 30 minutes. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/sLExAjtFNenEAsDo7>.) Hōryū-ji, 'Temple of the Flourishing Law', has a number of the oldest wooden buildings in the world, built in 607 on the order of Empress Suiko and Prince Regent Shotoku, although some of them may have been destroyed by a fire in 670 and rebuilt in the following century. You could walk around the grounds for free. The main hall was completely covered up for renovation. You could still go through it to look at the famous contents for ¥1500 (an increase in price of ¥500 over the *Lonely Planet* price). But considering that *Lonely Planet* said they were so poorly lit that you couldn't see a thing without a flashlight, I decided to be content with the grounds. The grounds were indeed nice: nice buildings, trees, woods.

On leaving the temple I noticed a sign pointing to Fujinoki Korun, a tumulus about 400 m away. It was not in *Michelin* or *Lonely Planet*, but I went to it anyway. Compared to those in Gyeongju, Korea, it was not very exciting—much smaller, 50 m in diameter and 9 m high. It dated from the late sixth century, so about the age of the earlier Gyeongju tumuli. And unlike Gyeongju, there were quite informative signs. Walking to and from it took me through the outskirts of the town, which was interesting for its houses interspersed with small rice paddies and gardens.

But walking back to the station I started to have some pain in my lower back, extending down into my right leg. It occurred only briefly, but was annoying. I took the train back to Nara, and then, feeling refreshed, foolishly decided to walk to the next sight, another temple, Tōshōdai-ji. That took longer than expected. It was hot with a



full sun beating down, and the section of Nara through which I walked was decidedly uninteresting—car dealers, do-it-yourself stores, *etc.* And the pain in my back came more frequently. One bright point was that it only cost ¥600 to enter the temple. The grounds were nicely wooded and mossy, and you could fairly clearly see the Buddhist staturary in the halls. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/n3cHtrWoETaGWGpD6>.)

I then proceeded to another temple, Yakushi-ji, about 500 m to the south. Like Hōryū-ji this morning, buildings were covered up for restoration and the price had gone up from ¥500 to ¥800. I decided not to bother. I did see the free northern area, which only had new buildings and was not particularly interesting.

I took the bus back to central Nara and looked without success for souvenirs and presents. I was getting pretty tired, it was hot, and my back pain was becoming more frequent. I guess it showed, for a Japanese lady asked me if I was OK.

Tonight's dinner was none too good. I went to a *Michelin* recommended place: "the best *okonomiyaki* in Nara". But I was unimpressed—I've had better: the first time I was in Nara in 2000 at a *Lonely Planet* place, the one I made myself on the ISMD Hiroshima excursion in 2011, and this trip the Korean one on my first night in Seoul. I did a bit of shopping at a supermarket near my *ryokan* and turned in early.

**Tuesday, 13 September.** I woke up early, as I have been doing the last few days, ate what I had bought the night before (too bad there is no time for the *ryokan*'s breakfast this morning). And, after walking through a light rain I was at the station 20 minutes early. I noticed that there was a train 15 minutes before the one I had planned on taking. It was apparently traveling the same route, so I took it. But 15 minutes before the time my planned-on train was scheduled to arrive at Tennoji we stopped at a different station. That was nerve wracking. But 8 minutes later we did get to Tennoji, where I could change for the train to Kansai airport. So, it was good that I had caught the earlier train, because otherwise I would probably have missed the one to the airport. Lesson: Japanese trains are sometimes late!

The Air France flight took off on time at 11:00 (4:00 back in Europe) and arrived on time at Paris Charles de Gaulle at 16:00. What a long, boring flight. And they insist on everyone lowering the blind on the windows and dim the lights so that people can watch their video screens. As if there were something worth watching! It could just have well been a night flight. Then a wait for the flight to Amsterdam at 18:00. In Amsterdam I had a bit of luck, just making the train to Nijmegen at 19:31. I was home, exhausted, by a bit after 9 pm.