

## Japan – 2018

**Saturday, 8 September.** The Scoot flight from Singapore was full, the seats not so comfortable. I had ordered a meal (at extra cost) for the original day flight from Singapore to KIX. But now, thanks to the closure of KIX due to a typhoon, I was on a night flight from Singapore to Tokyo; I didn't need (or want) a meal, but there it was, not what I had ordered (unavailable on this flight) and not very good: a bit of a bland curry and rice, a bottle of water, and a Ritter Sport. That interfered with the sleep I had hoped to get, but I still managed to sleep a while before we landed in Taipei. There we all had to get out, taking our carry-on stuff with us, walk from the gate exit to the gate entrance, go through security, and get back on the plane. I hoped to get some more sleep, but they came again with a meal — the same as before. I don't know whether they made a mistake in giving me a meal twice or whether it took two of these meals to make up the price of the meal I had ordered.

In any event there was not much time left for sleep, especially as it was almost sunrise and bright sunlight flooded in. We landed at Tokyo's Narita Airport around 11, about a half hour late.

Immigration and customs went quite fast. I tried a couple of ATM's, but one didn't like my card, and the other wanted to charge an administration fee. Not immediately needing yen, having changed my excess Polish money at the end of my trip to Krakow in the spring and my left-over Singapore dollars to yen, and remembering that the ATM's in the Seven-Eleven stores did not charge fees, I decided to wait to get more yen. I went downstairs to the train station, and bought my ticket for ¥13870 or about €110. (¥100≈€0.78≈\$0.88) Yes, the *shinkansen* is expensive. I was on the train at 12:48. I changed to a *shinkansen* at Shingawa and arrived in Nagoya at 15.48. But there was no wi-fi in the *shinkansen*! And the train crew didn't bow every time on entering or leaving the car!!

I had quite a bit of difficulty finding my hotel. I had thought I could load its location with the wi-fi on the train, but since there was no wi-fi, that was out. I remembered about where the hotel was, but rather than aimlessly wandering around the area I went to the tourist information office in the train station. They had never heard of the hotel, but with some searching they found its address and marked it on their little map.

So off I went. But, like most Japanese maps, this one involved a lot of guess-work, and I couldn't find the hotel. Finally I went into another hotel and asked them. They hadn't heard of my hotel either, but looked it up, found the address, and one of the hotel clerks took me there. It was just a block away. I would never have found it because only the Japanese name was on the front of the hotel.

With all the time wasted looking for the hotel, there was no time left for sightseeing. So I just walked around a bit, found a Seven-Eleven and got money from its ATM (with no administration fee), and ate at a little restaurant: 5 skewers with different meats and a skewer with half an eggplant, a cabbage salad similar to cole-slaw, and a beer. I bought my train ticket for tomorrow (¥7200) and turned in early.

**Sunday, 9 September.** I woke up early, ate a good breakfast at the hotel, and caught the 8:05 train to Kii-Katsuura, arriving just before noon. I had some problem finding my *minshuku* (a small family-run bed-and-breakfast generally serving both

dinner and breakfast), due to a Google Maps problem. I had printed a map which showed the directions from the station. But Google had the exit of the station on the wrong side of the tracks! So I headed in the wrong direction. I soon figured that out with the GPS and map on my tablet. Then it turned out that Google had the entrance to the *minshuku* on the back side, *i.e.*, one street over. On that street there was no sign of the *minshuku*. But finally I found it.

I left my suitcase and walked back to the station. I caught the bus to Kumano Naichi Taisha. I got off a few stops before in order to walk a bit of the Kumano Kodo pilgrim route which went steeply uphill through a nice cedar forest. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/o7hH9EzNpcp26iSy5>

Unfortunately, the main worship building was shrouded in scaffolding. There was a bit of light drizzle from time to time, and occasionally a short down-burst. The nearby Naichi Falls were nice, but I have become a bit jaded on waterfalls. As I approached the bus stop for the bus back to Kii-Katsuura, it started to pour. A nice young Japanese woman (I think she worked at one of the many souvenir shops) offered me half of her fortunately large umbrella.

Dinner at the *minshuku* was quite good. Since Kii-Katsuura is home to a tuna fleet, tuna figured prominently in the meal: three different tuna dishes (*shashimi*, tuna in some kind of broth, chunks of marinated tuna), a small fish with okra, broccoli, a sort of macaroni salad, a breaded pork cutlet, and rice. The tuna are caught not far away and are fresh, not frozen.

Then a nice soak in the hot bath (there are two: one for men, one for women), which I had all to myself. There had been someone in it when I came in, but he left as I was taking my shower.

**Monday, 10 September.** I was up at a bit after 6 for breakfast at 6:30. It was good, though not so good as dinner. Then at 7 to the (wholesale) fish market where the tuna caught by the local fleet are sold. This is where the restaurants and fish mongers from Osaka, Kyoto, *etc.* get their tuna. The tuna were laid out on the floor, and the buyers were walking around, checking quality, making bids, and those who had already made their purchases were packing their fish into large cool-boxes with lots of ice and loading them into their trucks. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Cn7DS1s2dC6dbMiy9>

Then I walked to the station and got the train to Shingu where I caught the bus to Kumano Hongu Taisha. It was pouring rain, but it stopped not too long after arriving. I could use the intervening time to look at the exhibits in the information centre.

After seeing Kumano Hongu Taisha, which is at the end of the Kumano Kodo pilgrim trail, I set out to walk a (short) stretch of the trail. Before long it started raining again, and I stood for maybe a half hour under my umbrella trying to decide whether to give up or continue. But the rain stopped and so I continued on. A couple who had passed by while I was standing there had given up, and they passed by again in the opposite direction. I finally got the chance to put good use to my folding cane. I had brought it with me with me, since my Swiss walking stick does not fit in my suitcase. I got as far as Fushigami-oji (about 3 km) before deciding that it was time to turn back, in order to be on time for the bus. The sun shone for the entire way back, though the path in places seemed more like a stream. In total it was just over 6 km, but it seemed like much more with all the ups and downs and uneven rocks. The bus back went all the way to Kii-Katsuura; so I didn't have to change to the train in

Shingu.

It was a nice meal again tonight with again tuna shashimi and two other tuna dishes plus a small fish (different from the preceding night). Again a good soak in the bath. I was quite happy with this *minshuku*—two nights with breakfast and dinner for ¥15600.

**Tuesday, 11 September.** A good breakfast, similar to the previous day's. I got the 8:55 train to Nagoya. I had no trouble finding my hotel (different one than before), dropped off my bag, bought a day ticket for the metro, and headed for the Tokugawa Art Museum, which has two *Michelin* stars. It houses on a rotating basis items from the family treasures of the Owari branch of the Tokugawa shoguns. But somehow, I can't figure out how, I ended up at a different museum, the Makuzu Museum, which proved to be rather interesting. I think I got off at the wrong metro station. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/FjUiM8KwHPbhReUY6>

As I entered the museum, a group of four or five Japanese men were being shown out of the museum. There was much bowing. I approached the ticket desk, and the woman behind it acted like she didn't know what to say. The man who had been shown the group out came back in, and asked me what I wanted. I was rather surprised by all of this. I said I wanted to visit the museum. He translated that to the woman behind the desk, and I bought my ticket. Then the man said he would show me around, apologizing that they did not yet have English labels on the displays although they were working on that. Nagoya was a central point for pottery export from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many pottery factories were located in the eastern part of Nagoya. Makuzu Kōzan was a leading ceramics maker, who had the idea of exporting to the West. Designed for export, his ceramics were for Western tastes, not Japanese, and were not sold in Japan. The museum is collecting examples of this export pottery, buying pieces in Europe and North America. He showed me around explaining the various styles. It was all quite interesting, and some of the items were unlike any I had seen before. Particularly amusing were the many pieces copying Norman Rockwell paintings. For some the Saturday Evening Post cover was shown alongside the pottery. They have about 650 pieces so far.

After his tour I said I would like to go back and look at some things again. When I was finished and was leaving he was there at the entrance. He thanked me for visiting the museum, I thanked him again, and he gave me his card, which said he was 'Director of Art Museum'. At first I had thought he was showing me around just because I needed translations, but I saw others (Japanese) also being shown around. Whether I was just lucky in getting the director, or whether there are several directors, I don't know.

After leaving the museum I took the metro towards the Atsuta shrine. By the time I got there it was starting to rain, and having foolishly believed the weather app that the rain would not come until the evening I had left my umbrella with my suitcase at the hotel. While taking shelter to wait until the rain stopped, a middle-aged Japanese lady came up and gave me her umbrella "I give to you," she said. I was quite amazed, so amazed that I almost didn't thank her. But I did, quite profusely. Maybe she was with a tour and the umbrella was from the bus, but still. So I could visit the shrine in the rain.

The rain let up as I left the shrine, and I got on the metro again to head up to

the castle. I got there a bit after 5, and it closed at 5, including the grounds around the castle. The guard at the gate (still open to let stragglers out) allowed me to take a picture from the entrance gate, but not 1 mm inside.

Back on the metro to get in the vicinity of the restaurant (in both *Lonely Planet* and *Michelin*) I wanted to go to. Finding it was a bit of a problem. *Lonely Planet* said to get off the metro and proceed under the expressway and there it would be. But it didn't specify which exit, and I apparently chose the wrong one. So the restaurant wasn't there. I finally figured out what the problem was. I had a delicious breaded pork chop, deep fried, and succulent with a nice barbecue sauce. Having no fish tonight seemed a bit strange.

**Wednesday, 12 September.** A fair breakfast in the hotel. Then I took a train (private line, seemed more like a metro) to Inuyama, about 15 km north of Nagoya. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Je59gZqpMvK9PGxq5>

The main attraction is the castle. The castle is on a hill next to the river, and it has nice views from the top. Built in 1537, it is the oldest surviving one in Japan. In 1617, during the Edo period, lordship of the castle was bestowed on Naruse Masanari. It was passed on to his descendents until 1871 (4<sup>th</sup> year of the Meiji restoration), when the clan system was abolished and replaced by prefectures. Subsequently most of the castle's surrounding buildings were torn down. In 1891 part of the keep and turrets were destroyed by an earthquake. The castle was given back to the former lord on condition that he would oversee the extensive repairs to the castle. Apparently that proceeded slowly until finally in 1961 an extensive reconstruction began and was completed four years later. From the outside it appears to have three storeys, but there are actually four. The second storey, the armory and storage area, is not reflected in the exterior.

After visiting the castle, I went to the nearby Uraku-en (recall that *en* means garden). Unfortunately it had started to rain, but at least this time I had an umbrella. The garden was nice, planted mostly with maples, camellias, and bamboo. A path winds through them. The garden contains a couple of tea houses, one dating back to 1618 though this is not its original location. It is very small, only 3 *tatami* mats. The garden was quite enjoyable despite the rain.

Next I took a 20 minute bus ride to the Meiji-Mura museum. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/JAo4zYimeZJB9Cv6> This is an open-air museum with about 65 buildings mostly from the Meiji era (1868–1912), though there are a few more recent ones such as the facade and lobby of Tokyo's Imperial Hotel, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1923. Unfortunately, it rained off and on during the whole afternoon there, though most of the time not hard. When it closed at 5, I took the bus back to Inuyama and the train from there back to Nagoya.

Dinner was fairly good sushi at one of the many restaurants in the towers of Nagoya station, having decided to pass up Paul Bocuse's restaurant there.

I'm still a bit tired from the Kumano Kodo walk. And my back is hurting some, but it's not too bad yet.

**Thursday, 13 September.** I took the 8:30 bus to Takayama, arriving at 11:15, with a short stop at a rest area along the expressway. It was a JR bus, quite a bit cheaper than the JR train—¥2980 rather than ¥5830 for a direct train or ¥3250 for

a train that took 4 hours and had one change. And it was only a few minutes slower than the direct train. And it was not crowded—lots of free seats.

I found my hotel and then headed for Takayama Jinja, which had two *Michelin* stars, only to find, after considerable difficulty locating it, that it had suffered considerable typhoon damage (the same typhoon that had closed down KIX), and most of it was closed. So, I skipped it. A pity, because it sounded quite interesting: Originally the residence of the Kanamori clan, it served as the regional government office. It is the only surviving building of its kind in Japan. It was used as courthouse and tax collection centre. Apparently ordinary people had to kneel behind a barrier and make their appeals to the authorities in the dark. Nearby was the torture room. The rest of the building was the residence of the local governor, his guests, and staff. There were also storehouses for the rice, wood, *etc.* collected in tax.

Then I walked to the Sanmachi district, a few blocks of buildings preserved from the Edo period. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/1somodmBSr3B8qM69> Most of the former merchant houses are now museums or shops, including several sake breweries, which offer tasting. Most have a free tasting limited to one or two choices and a more elaborate tasting for a few hundred yen. I stuck to the free tastings at two of the shops, selecting the dryer of the available sakes. There was also a *miso* brewery, including a free sample of *miso* soup. They had several different types of *miso* for sale and various things made from *miso*.

I visited the Hirata Folk Art museum, one *Michelin* star, but found it not worth the ¥300 admission. It was originally a large house of a merchant family, which sold candles and ointments, and thus an example of a middle-class home of the Edo period.

Being in the Hida region, home of Hida beef, I splurged tonight on Bistro Kanzo, a ‘French restaurant’: ¥2600 (+8% tax) for a 100 g skirt steak, a salad, potato soup, roast potatoes and a few different vegetables, a small scoop of ice cream, and coffee, plus two glasses of house wine for ¥1300 (+8% tax). The soup was excellent; I would have preferred the steak a bit more rare and the coffee stronger. But all in all it was pretty good.

My back was worse today—it gets very stiff, but a couple of minutes of stretching helps.

**Friday, 14 September.** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/AHcvJykne1Mvn8vY9> I got bought a croissant at a bakery on the way to the Hida Takayama Museum of Art, a world-class museum of Art Nouveau, 3 stars in *Michelin*. It is located well out of town, about 45 minutes walking but it would have been an hour’s wait for the next bus. It is a modern building built in 1997 on a hilltop with a nice view of the surrounding area. The prize exhibit is one of a pair of fountains by Lalique for the elegant Champs-Élysées shopping arcade in 1926. The arcade was developed with the purpose of redeveloping the Champs-Élysées to make it comparable to the then popular shopping areas of Place Vendome and l’Opera. Later it was torn down, and the fountains removed. The fountains were missing for some time and assumed destroyed. However one was found in almost perfect condition in a shed in a suburb of Paris in 1989. It was restored by fans of Lalique and exhibited as a main piece of the René Lalique Exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1989. The exhibition came to the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo in 1992. And somehow the fountain found its way to the collection of the Takayama Museum of Art.

The great names of Art Nouveau are represented: Louis Majorelle, Emile Gallé, Alfons Mucha, Hector Guimard (entrances to the Paris metro stations), Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Gustav Klimt to name a few. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit.

After the museum, I walked a bit further out of town to *Hida No Sato* (the Hida Folk Village), an open-air museum with houses from the Hida area. It has two *Michelin* stars. As a great fan of open-air museums, I found it very interesting.

I took the bus back into the city to see more of the old houses there. I visited the Yoshijima Heritage House (one *Michelin* star). It was built in 1907 and was the home of a sake brewer who was also engaged in money lending. The front part of the house was for his business. Then there were seven rooms lived in by the family as were most of the rooms upstairs. The upstairs rooms were mostly used by the children. There was also a room for the tea ceremony and four rooms on the second floor to entertain guests. There was a special entranceway in the garden wall for use by guests. They would pass through the garden on their way to the guest rooms. There were also rooms for the servants and employees of the brewery: a living room and three bedrooms, two of them upstairs. Finally, there were storerooms for the sake in a row behind the house, but they have been torn down.

I economized on dinner: noodles with some slices of pork, nothing to write home about. The weather today was reasonably dry, just occasional mild showers.

**Saturday, 15 September.** I checked out and took my suitcase to my new hotel—after changing my plans once, my first hotel in Takayama turned out to be full when I tried for a third night. The new one is just across the street from the train station and bus terminal, convenient for leaving tomorrow. It is a ‘business hotel’, *i.e.*, not too expensive, small rooms (but not too small), and with bath and toilet.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/RtyFs6gcLJuEEyqp8> I bought a croissant for breakfast (same bakery as yesterday). Then I went to the morning market along the river. It was rather a disappointment, mostly catering to tourists. I bought an apple for ¥310, a large apple to be sure, and the Hida apples are supposed to be special just like the beef, but still!. To compare, 1 l of petrol costs ¥150–160.

I then went to Takayama Yatai Kaikan (Memorial Floats Museum), a large hall containing, on an alternating basis, some of the 23 floats (*yatai*) used in the city’s festivals, the Sanno Matsuri on 14–15 April and the Hachiman Matsuri on 9–10 October (*matsuri* means festival). Different floats are used for the two festivals, 12 in the Spring and 11 in the Fall. The floats date from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are richly decorated with gleaming lacquer, gilt, mother-of-pearl inlays and have lanterns, drapes, and mechanized figures sitting on top. Four of the floats have marionettes, which are manipulated with strings and push-rods from within the float by expert puppeteers. The three marionettes on the *Hoteitai* (God of Fortune) float have 36 strings and need eight puppeteers to operate. The floats, when not on display in the museum, are stored in separate warehouses with huge doors in various districts of town. The ones I saw had photos of the float posted outside. The festival procession occurs at twilight of the first day of the festival, perfect for the many lanterns and bright colours.

The float which leads the procession (I’m not sure whether it leads both processions or only one of them) weighs 2.5 tons and is carried by 80 men, volunteers all of the same height. After 10 minutes they are exhausted and a new team of 80 men takes over. The other floats are on wheels and are pushed and pulled. Some are on three,

some on four wheels. The three-wheelers are easier to turn. To turn a four-wheeler, a fifth wheel is lowered and two wheels are jacked up.

The hall is next to (or, I guess within the precinct of the Sakurayama Shrine, which I think organizes the festivals. Next to the hall with the floats is another, smaller hall housing a one-tenth scale replica of the Ieyasu Tokugawa (the first shogun) mausoleum in Nikko (which I visited in 2011). Consisting of 28 buildings, it took 15 years to make (in 1910–1925) and employed 33 carpenters. The owner left it to the shrine. It was nice for getting an overview, since in real life you don't see everything at once.

Next I took a walk which went past several shrines and temples in the hills above the town. After about 3 km with a fair amount of ups and downs, I was pretty tired. Also it had been raining most of the time. So I gave up and went back to my hotel to drink a beer and relax a bit before dinner.

Dinner was a Hida beef stew with rice, miso soup, a cabbage salad, a small salad of (I think) seaweed and pickled vegetables. Not bad for ¥1970.

The hotel has something I have not seen before: a free smart phone you can use for the duration of your stay. It has free internet and free phone calls to selected countries. I almost called Ray and Marc, before I read the fine print with the list of countries you could call for free. International calls were only free to China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Spain, Taiwan, and Thailand. I wonder why Spain, and not Korea.

**Sunday, 16 September.** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/1HCAvtaQpD89vzCJ6> I took a bus at 8:20, which I had reserved in advance, to Shirakawa-go, a town in the mountains, arriving 50 minutes later. I left my suitcase at the bus station and proceeded to visit the town. The houses are of a style unique to the region: a thatched roof on an almost equilateral triangle A-frame for the second and higher floors, but vertical walls on the first (ground) floor. It is constructed completely of wood joined and tied together. The thatched roof of some of the houses has been replaced by more modern forms, I assume before the town decided to be a big tourist attraction. Apart from the town is an open air museum with a collection of houses in the same style moved from nearby when threatened by flooding when a dam was built. It was nice, less crowded than the town itself, probably because you had to pay to enter.

In the afternoon I collected my suitcase and took a bus to Ainokura. This was a local bus on ordinary roads, not an expressway like the bus this morning. It took about 50 minutes. The bus driver was very nice. He got my suitcase out of the baggage compartment, gave me a map, asked me where I was staying and found it on the map for me, and pointed me in the right direction.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/njyohxRioZxRpkwe6> Ainokura is a village much smaller than Shirakawa-go with much fewer tourists. I found the *minshuku* where I was staying. It has 5 rooms for guests on the ground floor—sliding doors, paper partitions, no locks. The rest of the building is occupied by the family. When I arrived one of them was slow-cooking some small fish on skewers at the sunken open hearth in the centre of the 'living room'. He asked if I would like a chair, rather than sitting on the floor for dinner. I said that that would be very nice.

Dinner was at 6. There were five places around the central sunken hearth. Two had chairs. I assumed the second one was for the other European, but it turned out it was for a not young, but younger than me, Japanese man. The other Westerner was a young man from the Czech Republic. And there were two middle-aged Japanese women. The dinner was very good and included the fish being prepared when I

arrived. During dinner the owner told us, in half Japanese - half English, about the house (in the family 300 years) and about the food. He also demonstrated some traditional music instruments.

He also told us that there would be a music and dance performance at a nearby shrine a bit later. So after dinner I went to see it. The performance had already started, but I don't think I missed much. The music and the dance both seemed rather repetitive.

After the performance I walked around the village. It was pleasantly cool and the village was lovely with many of the houses flood-lighted.

**Monday, 17 September.** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/ZwGtgwjK24WMF6BZA> Breakfast was almost as good as dinner. I walked around the village, which turned out to be even smaller than I had thought. As a result I got an earlier bus than planned back to Shirakawa-go. I had hoped that I could change to an earlier bus from Shirakawa-go to Kanazawa. But all the earlier buses were fully booked. So it was a four-hour wait for the bus I had earlier reserved.

In both Ainokura and Shirakawa-go there are no rubbish bins, but signs telling you of that fact and that you should take your rubbish with you. There are receptacles for cans and pet bottles.

In Kanazawa I found my hotel with little problem, thanks to Google Maps. It is about a 25 minute walk from the station. It is run by a very sweet couple. They speak a little English, and they said they had been to Amsterdam. Funny thing though: Although there is an electric water heater in the room, there is no tea.

I hadn't read the fine print in *Lonely Planet*—the restaurant I headed for is only open at noon. So I chanced a nearby restaurant. I had sushi to start with and then eel on a bed of rice. And a beer. It was not bad, but somewhat overpriced.

**Tuesday, 18 September.** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/K4AtYSGP8aKhZXzP6> I was up early, and since they don't serve breakfast at the hotel, I set out walking to Kenroku-en, three *Michelin* stars and one of the three most beautiful gardens in Japan. I had been to one of the other two two years ago in Okayama. I was hoping to find a bakery or convenience store on the way, no luck. I ended up buying a not so good snack at one of the many stalls outside the garden. The garden was originally the outer garden of Kanazawa Castle, located on the slope facing the castle. In 1676 the lord started to landscape it and built a rest house, all of which burned down in 1759. The 11<sup>th</sup> lord restored the garden in 1774, creating a waterfall and constructing a tea house. Later lords improved it further, creating winding streams and building stone bridges over them. The basic structure of the present garden was completed by the 13<sup>th</sup> lord. When the clan system was abolished in 1874, the garden was opened to the public.

The garden was nice (and free for seniors,  $\geq 65$ ). But it is almost all trees and streams, plus some hills. And while many of the trees and streams are very pretty, I could not help feeling that it would be much better later in the Fall when the leaves are changing colour or earlier in the year when there are more flowers. There were a few buildings at various places, tea houses and such. But I liked Koraku-en in Okayama much better. So, it took less time than I had expected.

Next I went to the Seison-Kaku Villa right next to the Garden. It was built in 1863 by the 13<sup>th</sup> lord as a retirement home for his mother. And since she would be



spending a great deal of time there, he spared no expense decorating the interior with delicate paintings on screens and walls, stained glass which was specially imported from Europe, and finely carved latticework. Ornate family heirlooms, dolls and kimonos are also on display. One of the highlights of this house is the long covered deck that runs along the garden. The deck is unusual because the roof has no supporting pillars. Thus the whole garden can be enjoyed without any pillars getting in the way of the view. It was nice to sit there for a time admiring the garden.

Upstairs there is a stunning tea room painted in vivid purple and ultramarine, and in another tatami floored tea room there is a specially made window in one of the sliding screens that is fitted with Dutch glass. Thus the view of the garden could be enjoyed even in winter. Also the ceilings of the rooms were nice, with different types of wood in different designs.

Not far away was the Kanazawa Folklore museum (reduced price for seniors) in what had originally been a junior high school. There is a classroom on display. One room had displays showing life before the war and another showing how it all changed after the war. It seemed to be aimed mostly at school kids. Other rooms contained examples of traditional crafts and craft making: a type of inlay of one type of metal in another, and inlays in wood, as well as other wooden items, dyed silk, lacquerware. According to *Michelin* there are regular demonstrations, but there were none while I was there. In one room there were folders and displays of examples of local vegetables and dishes. But the folders were only in Japanese. And Google Translate does not help much. However, the website of the local vegetable promotion has English versions of some of them, though not the receipts: <http://www.kanazawa-kagayasai.com>. So, this museum did not take so much time.

Somewhat further away is the large ultra-modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century of Contemporary Art (two *Michelin* stars). Though only built in 2004, it is, according to *Michelin*, already a major museum with work of Japanese and foreign artists. Something like *Centre Pompidou* in Paris, it caters to a large variety of arts: design, fashion, film, media laboratory, library, and is meant to be accessible to everyone. However, its permanent collection, which was my interest, was closed. So apart from eating a sandwich, which I had bought in a nearby shop, on a bench in the park outside the museum while watching kids play on some of the outdoor sculptures, there was little for me to do.

So, I went to the Prefectural Museum of Art (no *Michelin* stars) which had a reduced price for seniors, ¥290 instead of ¥360. It had some interesting displays of scrolls, lacquerware, porcelain, and kimonos as well as contemporary works by local artists.

It was a long day with lots of walking. So, an early dinner: at a sushi place in Omi-cho Market, a covered market, nearly 300 years old (with one *Michelin* star). There are hundreds of stands selling fruit, vegetables, fish. And numerous small, inexpensive restaurants. I went to one of these and had 10 pieces of sushi with a bowl of fish soup for ¥1880 plus a small (18 cl) bottle of sake for ¥530, the same price as a beer. It was all quite good, as it should be since sushi apparently originated in Kanazawa. It was evening and the market stands were all closed, and most of the restaurants were also closed or about to close. The one I went to was full, there being one remaining place at the counter. As in many sushi restaurants there was a conveyor belt to bring sushi dishes around—you take whatever you want, the price being indicated by the colour of the dish. However, since they were about to close (I

think I was the last customer to enter), the conveyor belt was no longer running and you simply ordered what you wanted. There was an English menu, which told what I had heard from a guide seven years ago, that it is acceptable to eat sushi with your fingers. However everyone I saw was using chopsticks.

On the way to the market I passed a Mister Donut and bought two donuts for breakfast. On the way back to my hotel I bought a beer at a 7-11 to drink after a shower and went to bed early at 9:30. Sunrise is at about 5:30 and sunset at 6. So one tends to get up early. Today was nice, finally a day with no rain. The high was around 27°C, but there was a nice breeze most of the time. It cooled off to 21 or 22 in the evening, very pleasant.

**Wednesday, 19 September.** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/XF64k3JQRMNr7gVu9>  
After my two donuts and tea in my room, I went to the nearby Higashi Chayamachi District (one *Michelin* star), one of two ‘pleasure districts’ in Kanazawa, dating from the Edo period. At 8:30 I was clearly too early. There was no one about, everything was closed. At 9:00 the two old tea houses, now musea, both one star in *Michelin*, opened. These are places where the *geisha*, called *geigi* here entertained their guests with poetry recitals, tea ceremonies, song and dance. Apparently there are still some 50 *geigi* practicing in Kanazawa. I visited one of these houses, Kaikaro Tea House, which was the largest tea house in the city. It dates from around 200 years ago. Inside are gold-fringed tatamis, a gleaming lacquered staircase, quite luxurious.

I also wandered through the Sakuda Gold & Silver Leaf Shop. Gold leaf is one of the craft specialties of Kanazawa, and most of the Japanese market is supplied from Kanazawa. It not only decorates altars of shrines and temples, but also fans, screens, and other objects. Gold powder is used as a decoration on lacquerware in a technique known as *maki-e*. I had seen some of this in the Prefectural Art Museum.

I headed for the Castle, but got side-tracked by some fish hawks diving for breakfast in the river. I took lots of pictures from a bridge. It’s not so easy to get a good frame-filling shot of a fast, swerving, diving fish hawk. A Japanese couple stopped to ask me if I was getting some good pictures (at least that was my interpretation of the man’s Japanese and his gestures). I showed him a few—he seemed dutifully impressed. Later I ran into them at the Castle, and we said hello.

I made a second visit to Kenroku-en and the Castle Park. Very little of the castle remains, only a monumental gateway. However the castle is being rebuilt. The arsenal and two turrets were completed in 2001 using traditional methods of construction—no nails or screws.

After that I headed back to Oni-cho Market to see it in action and to have lunch at a place only open at noon—a Chinese restaurant, which was good and not too expensive. The big surprise was an espresso for ¥50!

After lunch I went to the Nagamachi, the old samurai district with cobbled alleys winding between low ocher-coloured walls and canals. The residences appear quite sumptuous. I visited the Nomura Samarai House. Nomura was one of the lord’s closest associates back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Twelve generations of the family lived in this house, up to the Meiji restoration. The house is quite luxurious, built entirely of dark brown wood, with a nice ornamental garden including a miniature waterfall. Some of the rooms have wonderful latticework of a number of types of wood.

After that I went to the other pleasure district, Nishi Chayamachi. It is smaller than Higashi Chayamachi, only one block really, and rather similar..

Then I made the rather long walk back to my hotel. Since I had had a big meal at noon, I just picked up a sandwich and a muffin at the “German Bakery” and a beer at the 7-11. Also donuts for breakfast at Mister Donut.

The weather today was much like yesterday—great.

After eating my sandwich I walked over to the Higashi Chayamachi District to see if there was anything happening in the evening. There wasn’t, except for a photographer with a light crew making what must have been advertising photos of a huge SUV in a small square.

Finally, a shower, the muffin with tea in my room, and early to bed.

**Thursday, 20 September.** Someone has nicked my umbrella, the one given to me at the shrine in Nagoya. It was still in the umbrella stand of the hotel yesterday morning. On the bright side, it is one less thing to carry.

I took the 7:48 *shinkansen* to Nagano, arriving about 9. My hotel is just across the street from the station, a business hotel. I left my suitcase and walked 1.8 km to the Zenko-ji (three *Michelin* stars). <https://photos.app.goo.gl/jvmRhzgPXBG9Vy5A8> It is the second largest in Japan, after Todai-ji in Nara, and dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. But it has burnt down several times. The current structure, the 11<sup>th</sup> reconstruction, was built between 1707 and 1726. It has a unique layout: the temple runs from north to south, with Mount Omine (the symbol of the Western Paradise) behind it.

It is a very tolerant temple, having long been open to women (unlike other Japanese temples). Also, it accommodates both the Jodo and Tendai sects, which hold alternating services. An abbess is in charge of the Jodo branch.

I had a big lunch at a restaurant near Zenko-ji, which was in both *Michelin* and *Lonely Planet*. It was a sort of sabu-sabu: very thin slices of beef on some cabbage leaves with several local vegetables and mushrooms, all steamed together, plus a bowl of egg custard with mushrooms and small pieces of chicken(?), and a bowl of miso soup for ¥1960.

I noticed that rather than just beeps, some of the stop lights play a Scottish Highland tune when pedestrians are allowed to cross. Also one of the bus routes (or maybe bus companies) is the Highland Shuttle. But then Nagano held the Winter Olympics in 1998.

After lunch I walked back to the hotel. It had started to rain, and there is not much besides Zenko-ji worth seeing in Nagano. This hotel also had a free smart phone, and the list of countries you could call for free was different from the previous one: China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, U.S.—a list that makes more sense. As business hotels go, this one was the best I have ever stayed in. The room is slightly bigger than usual. But then, it also cost a bit more, ¥8100.

Since I had had a big lunch, I opted for a box from a store in the station: an 8-piece sushi set, a beer, and some mixed fruit, which I ate in my room. So, very early to bed.

**Friday, 21 September.** The breakfast in the hotel was very good, an extensive buffet of curries, barbecued chicken, rice, soup, various pickled vegetables, croissants, tea, coffee.

I caught the 7:56 train to Matsumoto. It was drizzling slightly. I walked about 1 km to my *ryokan*. Fortunately, my room was already free. The owner is a friendly

woman, who speaks fair English.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/GcRPv5hGzfMDtYqy7> Then out to Matsumoto castle (three *Michelin* stars), with the oldest wooden keep in Japan. It is surrounded by three moats, now occupied by carp and swans. In 1504 there was a small fortress here. Later, in 1582, when a different clan gained control, the fortress was remodeled and the great keep was added in 1593. It stands on an artificial rise in the middle of a wide moat. From the outside it appears to have five floors, but there is actually a sixth, a dark, low-ceilinged third floor, where the samurai would assemble in case of siege. The keep is flanked by two secondary towers linked by an elevated corridor. The steps are very steep, the angle of the stairs being 55–61°, and the rise between steps as high as 40 cm. It was more like climbing a ladder than stairs—not easy for me, but the school kids, visiting in large groups, raced up and down.

Four castles in Japan are classified as National Treasures: Hikone, Himeji, Inuyama, and Matsumoto. I have now seen 3 of the 4, the last two on this trip and Himeji on my first trip in 2000. Only Hikone is left.

Still raining, but harder, I went to the City Museum of Art, devoted to artists from Matsumoto. That includes Kusoma Yayoi. I really liked a few of her avant-garde works. And one installation was great: an hexagonal glass case, floor to ceiling, with a chandelier hanging in the centre. It stood in the centre of an hexagonal room whose walls were mirrors. The lights from the chandelier reflected endlessly back and forth—like you are in an infinite cosmos of lights.

There was also a nice exhibit (in exchange with sister city Fujisawa): about 80 wood-cut (*ukiyo-e*) all having something to do with Enoshima Island.

**Saturday, 22 September.** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/nEvkizz3TJHKTSaB7> This morning I went to the JUM—Japanese Ukiyo-e Museum. I just missed the train which would have gotten me fairly close to the museum. The next train wasn't for another 1½ hours. So I decided to walk it, 45 minutes through not particularly interesting suburban sprawl and into the countryside. Google Maps said I was there, but I didn't see it. I was sort of looking around, looking at my tablet. A woman driving by stopped and asked (I assumed) what I was looking for. I said, “museum”. She got out of her car and sort of pointed, but I still didn't see it. Then she said she would take me there (in Japanese) and goes around to the other side of the car to move all of the stuff on the seat to the back seat, and she motioned me to get in. As I was getting in I saw the sign—small sign, small letters—and the concrete building. I asked “is that it?” She motioned again to get in, and she drove me the 100 m to the building. I felt sort of foolish for not having seen it. The problem had been that the sign was pointing in the opposite direction to where I had come from, the direction I would have been coming from had I taken the train. Then she counted to 10 on her fingers and said something I couldn't figure out. She grabbed her tablet and the translate program came up with ‘open’—it opens at 10, and it was only 9:45. I thanked her, and she drove off.

I waited, and about 5 minutes before 10 a girl came to clean the glass doors before opening the museum. “Is OK,” she said and motioned me to come in. She sold me a ticket a couple of minutes before 10. So, the Japanese are not always perfectly on time to the second. Maybe that only holds for the *shinkansen*.

The prints were very nice, but I was disappointed in the number. The museum has only two rooms. Well, one of the rooms is quite large, so say three rooms. But still! I

had expected more, seeing as how their collection contains 100,000 prints, and seeing the entry price of ¥1000 (including the old-age discount of ¥100). They did have a nice museum shop though, with some reasonably-priced, high-quality reproductions. I almost bought a couple, but finally decided that I had still too much traveling to lug them around.

The train time was inconvenient again. So I walked back to Matsumoto. Still not raining, and up to 25°C—I started regretting wearing my jacket.

Back in Matsumoto, and since I was walking past the station, I bought my train ticket for tomorrow. There was a long queue at the ticket counter. So I was trying to use the machine, without success. But a young JR lady asked if she could help. I told her where I wanted to go and she operated the machine for me.

I bought a sandwich for lunch and went back to my *ryokan* to eat it and drop off my jacket.

Since the sun was still shining I went back to the castle to retake some of my pictures. By now it was up to 30°C, and with all the walking in the morning I was getting tired.

Then I went on to one of the first elementary schools in Japan, built in the Meiji period when the government realized that education was important to progress. The local population was all for progress, having many backers among the moneyed class. It had similarities to the middle school, now folk museum in Kanazawa.

Fortunately it cools down quickly in the evening, to 20°C or so.

Dinner was nice soba (buckwheat) noodles with a few pieces of chicken, shitake mushrooms, and leek at a restaurant at the edge of the Nakamachi District, a street along the river with former storehouses from the Edo period. Today most are souvenir shops or restaurants.

**Sunday, 23 September.** Like yesterday, no rain, up to 30°C in the afternoon, starting to cool down around 5. Nice.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/3uPWoeTpA3QgJiT26> I first took the train to Narai, an old stage stop on the Nakasendo road from Edo to Kyoto. Lots of nice Edo period houses along one street, about 1 km long. Most electricity and telephone cables are underground, which contributes to an authentic feeling.

Back to the station and the train further along the Kiso valley to Nagiso, and from there a connecting bus to Tsumago, another post town on the Kakasendo. But before seeing Tsumago, I had a ‘15’-minute walk, mostly up hill to get to my *ryokan*. It took me more like 30 minutes dragging my suitcase—wheels don’t work so well on an uneven gravel path. I left my suitcase and walked back to Tsumago.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/jGvA6mDGiywCE2iU7> Tsumago has more to it than Narai, and it is not flat. There are more flowers and trees. And also more tourists (and tourist shops).

Dinner was not bad, but I was slightly disappointed. Considering that this *ryokan* was nicer, and a bit more expensive than any I had been to so far this trip, I was expecting more. Then a shower and nice hot bath.

**Monday, 24 September.** Shortly after midnight I was woken by a sharp pain in one leg. I jumped up, turned on the light, threw off the duvet, and there was the culprit: about 10 cm long, red, with 10 or 20 legs. I chased it across the room hitting

it with an information folder from the room. Finally he was dead. I had a little bump, like a mosquito bite except that it didn't itch.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/RxuZhyrEUPX2ZYuE8> Breakfast was like dinner, a bit disappointing. I checked out, left my suitcase, and headed out along the trail (old post road) towards Magome, another post town. *Michelin* says 3 hours, *Lonely Planet* says 3 to 6. So I decided to go as far as I could and still get back in time for the bus. It was a nice walk in the woods along a stream. There were two waterfalls, called male and female. And there was a bell every so often to ring to scare off the bears. I took a wrong turn at one point, which cost me a half hour, but along which I saw a deer down below me, who ran for cover before I could get a photo.

I got to the outskirts of Magome but did not have enough time to see it before turning back. But I think it was rather similar to Narai and Tsumago. Actually, I should have gone further. Going back it was mostly downhill, and I did not stop to take so many photos. Also I made no wrong turns. So it took much less time than going. As a result it looked like I could catch an earlier bus, but it pulled away just as I arrived. That meant a 1½ hour wait.

From then on it went smoothly: train to Tokyo, first a local, then a rapid, then the *shinkansen* from Nagoya. The final stage was the metro from Tokyo station to Asakusa, with one change. But Tokyo station is huge, and I had the feeling I had walked half way to Asakusa by the time I got to the right metro. And it was not always possible to find an elevator or escalator. I found my *ryokan* with little problem. It is the same one I stayed at in 2011.

I went to an *okonomiyaki* (a sort of pancake) restaurant listed in both *Michelin* and *Lonely Planet*. For an old man like me they brought a little chair. So I didn't have to sit on the floor. But it was the worst *okonomiyaki* I have ever had. Eatable, but!

A nice hot bath ended the day—good for my back after all the walking and stairs and sitting.

**Tuesday, 25 September.** Nice breakfast. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/YAq8RqsDozfesNwn8> The forecast is rain. Optimistically I took the metro to Shinjuku and then walked to the National Garden, Shinjuku-Gyoen (three stars in *Michelin*). But it was closed. It is supposed to be open Tuesday through Sunday, but because Sunday was a holiday (Autumn Equinox Day), it is closed the following (normally open) day, in this case Tuesday, *i.e.* today.

I then went to the Seiji Togo Memorial Sonpo Japan Nipponkoa Museum of Art. It has only one *Michelin* star, but sounded interesting, *and* I was in the neighbourhood, *and* it had started raining. The museum belongs to the Yasuda insurance company, renamed Sonpo in 2002. It is on the 42<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Sonpo building. So even if the museum is not so interesting, there should be a good view. There is an interesting history told by *Michelin*: On 30 March 1987 the Yasuda Fire & Marine Insurance Co. bought Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* at a Christies auction for the then record amount of 5.3 billion yen. That may sound like a lot of money, but it was a bargain price for all the publicity the company got. But the follow-up was less than triumphant. The company ran out of funds. The foundation has about 650 pieces, Western and Japanese.

But only a few of the 650 were on view, including the *Sunflowers*. Almost the entire museum was given over to an exhibition, *Carl Larsson and His Home*, "Art of

*the Swedish Lifestyle*”, coinciding with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between Sweden and Japan. I must confess that I had never heard of Carl Larsson, but it seems he was very famous (at least in Sweden). He is known for his warm works of art for which he mostly used his family as models. He spent some time in France, as many artists of the time did, spent two summers in Barbizon, but never became interested in impressionism. He settled down with other Swedish artists in a Scandinavian artists colony at Grez-sur-Loing in 1882. There he met Karin Bergöö, and they soon married. In 1888 his father-in-law gave him a small house called Lilla Hyttnäs in Dalarna, a province where a lot of old traditions remain, and remodeled it into his ideal home with his wife Karin. Most of his subsequent paintings were made there and depict the house and its garden. Most often his family members served as models. Karin was also an artist, but Carl did not like her to paint and she gave it up. Instead she designed textiles, at which she was very successful. The exhibition showed many of her textiles as well as Carl’s paintings. The exhibition proved to be much more interesting that I had expected.

When I left the museum it started to really pour. So I decided to call it quits and go back to my *ryokan*. It was still raining, but not so hard, when I went for dinner to a *Lonely Planet* place. It has been serving *dojō* since 1801. The *dojō* or Japanese loach is a small fish (around 3 cm long), popular in the West for aquariums. The restaurant also served whale, but I chose the *dojō-nabe*, an iron rimmed plate full of the fish on top of an hibachi. The fish are covered in a special soy sauce. On top of that you add slices of leek. As you eat you add more leek and more soy sauce. Apparently this was a common dish in the Edo period, but not so much today. It was interesting, but I don’t think I would order it again.

**Wednesday, 26 September.** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/YAq8RqsDozfesNwn8>  
Another nice breakfast. And another cloudy morning with rain forecast for later. So, off to a museum. I walked to the Tokyo National Museum in Ueno. I had been there before in 2011 and liked it enough to repeat. It was free for 70+. I liked it this time too. Some of the stuff on display has changed (if I remember correctly): less samurai armour, which was fine with me; and more *ukiyo-e* prints, which I liked. There was also a nice collection of *netsuke*—the collection of Prince Takamado.

With the weather still dark with some rain, I next went to the National Museum of Western Art, only 1 *Michelin* star, which I agree with. Nevertheless, it was rather interesting, certainly given the rain outside.

Finally, in the rain, I walked back to Asakusa. I tried to go to a restaurant from *Michelin*, but within Google Maps accuracy there several little restaurants, and I couldn’t see which was the right one. So I sort of randomly chose one, which turned out to be rather overpriced for its shashimi.

**Thursday, 27 September.** Another nice breakfast. And another rainy day, but supposed to clear up in the afternoon. Since the rain was only a drizzle (at least for the moment), I decided to try the National Garden again. When I got there it had stopped raining, but it soon started to drizzle again. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/n7d19VAos1bNtdGX7>

There is a nice, modern greenhouse, seemingly quite innovative. Part of the old greenhouses are still standing, apparently unused. Then I walked around the garden in alternating rain and drizzle. The garden is actually divided into various parts, each

a different style of garden. The most interesting for me was the ‘traditional Japanese’ part.

Getting tired of walking in the rain (and just plain tired), I decided to quit the garden and go to the Tokyo Museum of Modern Art (two *Michelin* stars). There was a direct metro line. But, Shinjuko station is huge, with 3 or 4 rail lines and 5 or 6 metro lines connecting to it, and a warren of shops underneath. It is all too much, apparently, for signs to everything, and the metro line I was looking for seems to have low priority. I should have just taken one of the other lines and made a change, but I kept looking for the direct line. After an hour or more and covering a couple of kilometers underground I noticed that even if I did find the right metro there wouldn’t be time enough to see the museum (which closes at 5).

So I headed back to Asakusa. That metro line was well sign-posted. I did a bit of shopping, caught up on my e-mail, and went to dinner at the restaurant next door, a tempura place recommended by *Lonely Planet*. I had been there in 2011, and remembered it as being reasonably good. But I was disappointed. The batter was too thick, and it was soggy with oil. Looking back at my account of the 2011 trip I see that I had the same comment then. Funny thing, memory. And you would expect better, since tempura is supposed to be an Asakusa specialty.

**Friday, 28 September.** I woke up early and decided to take an earlier than planned train to Narita. That would give me plenty of time to spend my last few coins in the shops. Today it is nice weather. Typical—the bad weather ends just when you leave. But in this case maybe not for long—a typhoon is coming, but of course it may change direction enough to miss Tokyo.

Yesterday morning when I checked in for my flight I changed my seat from a middle one to a window seat where the aisle seat had already been taken in the hope that the middle seat would remain free. And the strategy worked, which made for a much nicer flight. It was one of the very few unoccupied seats in the plane.

We arrived a few minutes ahead of the scheduled 15.30. Passport control went very quickly, but that just meant a longer wait for luggage. Still, I just made the 16.00 train to Nijmegen.

All in all, it was an interesting trip, but there sure was a lot of rain.