

Subj: Japanese Journey

Date: 5/20/2012

Hi Everyone,

So, we arrived in Japan on Wednesday, 16 May 2012, ready for a big adventure! Our friends Kenji & Nobuko Shibata were at the airport to meet us when we arrived a little before our 8pm schedule. Customs & Immigration and baggage pick up were seamless due to the Japanese efficiency! Hopped in their car and using their GPS, we headed to the Shinjuku district of Tokyo for our first couple of nights. They actually stayed the first night in the hotel with us so that we could easily do visiting Wednesday night and sightseeing on Thursday. Our hotel room was wonderful. The Keio Plaza hotel is huge and used quite often for tourism as it's near the main Shinjuku Station. They had arranged for us to stay in one of the special floors and our room had a king bed and a wonderful view of the city. Just like we do to folks in our RV, first off, we had to have "toilet training." The toilet (as most of them throughout Japan are) is digital with buttons for a duvet, water spray, and seat warming!! And the window curtains were powered also!

Anyway, enough talking -the next morning dawned a little hazy, but mostly blue skies. You can see all the huge buildings surrounding us.







They were kind to us and let us meet them for breakfast at a very civilized 9am! The hotel had a huge buffet breakfast included in our room price. It had everything from sushi to yogurt! Even had an omelet station! We were on the road about 10am. There was a covered walkway from the hotel to the Train Station and we started out on that, but first stop was to be an ATM for yen for us. That ended up being a bit more difficult than we had thought because the majority of the the Japanese ATM's do not allow international cards! And couldn't locate a bank that would exchange American dollars. Finally Kenji got some advice from a security guard to try the Post Office ATM's. Bingo! Success! So after purchasing tickets for the Romance train to take us to the Odawara Station to meet our next dancer guides, we exchanged our Japan Rail Pass Coupons for actual tickets and reserved our seats for every segment of our trip. Kenji & Nobuko had booked all our hotel stays with the help of an agent and set up dates. I had found a website on line to check the train schedules and had picked the shortest train trips to match our tendency to sleep in a bit!!! We almost panicked at first because the very first time I had selected was full!!! Yipes! Ended up having to change to one that was 2 hours later. Oh well, got it done! So then the next order of business was SHOPPING!!! I was jealous of the clothes Tammy Worlock had come home with, so Nobuko had promised to take me shopping as well!!! George & Kenji occupied themselves getting coffee and talking shop while I picked out 3 new outfits!! It was great fun! Forgot to take any pictures of the shopping, too busy trying things on! Can't wait to show off my new clothes!!

Okay, so back to regular sightseeing, we used our train passes and headed to another part of the city to look for a huge dance shop. Unfortunately it was closed for renovation. But passed a warehouse for Japanese Dolls.



They were really expensive (550000 yen -almost \$7000). We bought 2 -NOT!! I'll bet Tom & Marge have one though!



We had cheeseburgers at the Freshness Burger (now we know that's a chain, we've seen it several times since). Also homemade gingerale. That was really interesting!!



Most of the streets were lined with these trees. Don't know what they are -at first we thought they had vines growing on them, but it was just the way they were growing.



We had a few minutes to spare, so wandered through the Edo Tokyo Museum. Found out that before Toyko became the capital of Japan (it was Kyoto at first), the city was called Edo. Toyko actually means East Kyoto. This museum is about the time before it was called Tokyo. Lots of dioramas and had this decorated pole that was used by the fire fighters to lead the way. Nobuko and I tried to wave it! It's really really heavy!!





Then on to the highlight of the day -a SUMO Wrestling Tournament! Turns out that Nobuko is quite a fan and knew most of their names and nationalities. The 2 hours we spent there were wonderful! Learned a lot about the meanings of the posturing and even got my picture made with one that had won his match while we watched.











After that, we headed to the Asakusa District to see the famous Temple and the brand new Tokyo Sky Tree. The Tree has not officially opened yet (supposed to be May 28th), but will soon be the highest observation tower in the world -beating out the one in Shanghai that we were on!













We enjoyed a fabulous dinner (presentation is everything -it was served in a representation of a Japanese Lamp!) in the district and took a last train ride back to the hotel. So ended our first full day in Japan!!!



George & Pamela

Hello Everyone,

We are still having a wonderful time in Japan! The weather has been fantastic and things are moving right on schedule! The Japanese are very very precise and organized!

Soooo, on Friday morning, we hopped (uppa hoppa, just to keep our Swedish knowledge fresh for later this summer) out of bed at a bright hour of 7:00am! Ick! Had our wonderful buffet breakfast and headed to the train station -all on our own!!! This time it was very easy to go straight to the Post Office, get our cash and on to our track. We are actually still very trainable (vice the old saw about teaching ole dogs!! Ha Ha!!). Train was right on time (of course) and we had short journey to Odawara Station on the Romance Train.



This train trip was purchased separately from our Japan Rail Pass because it was a much easier connection and very plush train! It was only about an hour trip and we recognized our next guides from the train! Takao & Setsuko Ito had brought along support, 2 girls that dance together, Kazuko and Masako. Both are married, but their husbands didn't come to play with us!! Kazuko's husband does not dance, but both Masako and her husband call squares. Kazuko has been studying English for 5 years and spoke very good English and also could write & read English. She had made up a very elaborate itinerary for us with photo's & English descriptions of everywhere they were taking us. It was very impressive!! Takao & Setsuko are very well known and established cuers in Odawara with a quite successful there (50 or so couples!). Most cuers will know their names as they do quite a lot of choreography that's used internationally. Anyway Takao was our driver and we loaded up in their van to start our drive to Hakone. The van was a shock for us -it was quite large and seated all 6 of us very comfortably (much like Kenji & Nobuko's, so not sure why we were surprised!!! -Guess we expected everything in Japan to be compact!). However, as long as I'm on the subject, we discovered that their gas mileage is much much better than ours. Upwards of 50MPG (assuming of course that George's calculations from liters to gallons and Kilometers to Miles was correct!!). They are very very efficient people!! More of that later!!

Enough, on to the gorgeous pictures. Hakone is a National Park area with views of Mt Fuji

one of the prime attractions. Our first photo shop only gave us a tiny little shadow of Mt Fuji rising about beautiful Lake Ashi, but we were still thrilled to see it. High mountains around the world are known for their shyness! They are hidden behind clouds quite often! But, Takao spotted it for us!



Our first real stop was to Onshi Hakone Park. A Japanese Garden park with a museum building with a balcony to view Mt Fuji & Lake Ashi. It was trimmed & landscaped as only the Japanese can do!!



Mt Fuji was already out and in the clear!



Just kidding! I took a picture of a picture hanging on the wall! Sounds good, though doesn't it!!
Ha!



It was showing a little more, but you can't really see it from my photos! Anyway, we wandered around a bit, then on to the Hakone Checkpoint, which was like a fort where they kept women and children hostage to keep the men from leaving Edo (old Tokyo). Something to do with maintaining the Feudal system. Not much was in English, so it was a bit hard to understand.



They paid to have our picture taken together (by a samurai, but he didn't get in the picture with us!!!)



Then we headed on to the Hotel de Yama (Hotel of the Mountain!) for lunch and a walk through the Azelea Garden's. Lunch was good, but the Azelea's were amazing!! Hit the absolute peak!!



And this time, the picture of Mt Fuji is for real!! Awesome!!



Got another group picture with Mt Fujisan in the background.



Then we headed out to do the Ropeway from Togendai to Owakudani. That was exciting!! Again we got an incredible view of Mt Fuji. My photos don't do it justice!!!



At Owakudani, we got out to meet Takao (he had driven up) and walk up the mountain. Our goal was to purchase & eat the black eggs (regular chicken eggs cooked in the sulfurick water of the hot springs). They are guaranteed to increase your life span for either 5 or 7 years (depending on the advertisor!!)



It was definitely a little stinky around there!! We were happy anyway!!



We immediately felt the life giving effects -or maybe that was just the sulfur smell!!



Called for another picture. Don't we all look younger??



Got one more shot of Mt Fuji -clouds were definitely coming and going!!



Then on down for a potty break and a snack. We had Wasabi icecream. Ick! I think that took the 5 or 7 years back! You know Wasabi?? The really hot Japanese pepper? Made into icecream was really strange. A little sweet, but a strange hotish aftertaste. Weird. Don't have to do that again!!



Everyone was smiling because they hadn't tasted it yet!! Ha Ha!!



I told the girls they should have been making a W with the fingers instead of the peace sign to stand for Wasabi!! Then on to the Hakoni Art Museum. No photos were allowed except from the fabulous panoramic gallery room (probably the reason most folks come in, although the art exhibit was quite nice).





The special exhibit was kaleidoscopes. Couldn't get any pictures of them, but had some really really fabulous ones.



Last stop before we were taken to our hotel was the Stone Paved Road of Hakone Old Highway. Everyone used to walk this route which is lined with old Cedar Trees that protected them from rain and snow.



They dropped us off at the NanPu-So Hotel. We took a little walk around the area. It was very pretty. With a waterfall right beside our room!!



We were in the lowest room on the right (3 from the top!). The sound of the gentle running water was wonderful through the night.

Oh oh -AOL has decreed that this was enough of the pictures! I'll continue in the next one!!

Good night all & best wishes!!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #3
Date: 5/21/2012

Hi Guys,

I'll just continue right where I left off!!!

It was a Japanese style hotel with "tatami" rooms, meaning the room had a mat and they would come and make it up with the futon for sleeping on the floor. Ours was had twin western beds too and had a bathroom in the room. We had a choice and we elected to try the Japanese style.



This was before it was made up for sleeping. We went on to dinner which was included with the price of the room. Dinner was a REAL EXPERIENCE!!! It started with sushi mi. You guys know I am not a lover of fish. Much less raw fish. However, I had vowed I would give everything a real try. Soooooo, I did!!

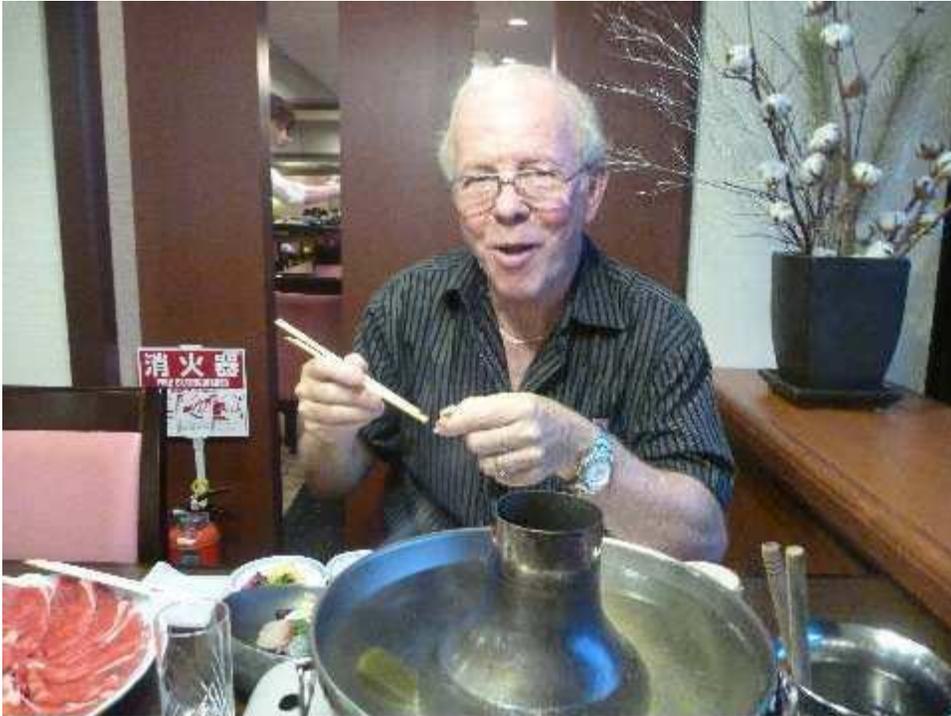


I must admit that I did quite like the 2 white pieces. Not sure what they were -think the one on the left might have been tuna and the one on the right seemed to be scallops. I tried the red stuff, not my cup of tea, rather gummy and fishy tasting. Also the clearish/tranparent one was kind of like eating blubber. The weird little things in the bowl on the far right were some sort of pickled something. Unsure, but they were rather tasty and we both ate them. The yellow sauce on the left was very very tasty. Again unsure what it was, but I liked it. So see that little empty bowl sort of in the center? That was the only empty dish we were given. No plate, saucer, or bowl.



Here's where it got really interesting. The container on the top of the picture is water. It was on a gas grill that was lit when they delivered it to our table. The lower plate on the left was different vegetables and the upper left was some sort of sliced meat. We were told to wait until the water boiled, then put things in the boiling water and dip it in one of the sauces and eat it. Now that info was delivered through sign language, not real speech. There was not anyone else around us eating this meal, so we couldn't watch and yes, we were eating with chop sticks!

I'll tell you that we didn't starve, but we were quite perplexed about the entire situation. Since then, we have asked some questions and found that overall, we figured it out pretty well, but now realize we could have spiced things up with some other ingredients on the table! But found we love the little mushrooms (kind of buttons on tiny trunks -wonder what they are called????) and the cheese & noodles are hard to eat with chop sticks!!



Then we got back to our room and saw the Japanese style beds laid out!!



They even provide kamona's. Don't think they are really called that. Not hooked up to the internet right this minute, so can't look it up, but think they really call them something else. Either way, they are very comfortable and found out that in the "tatami" style hotel, you are welcome to wear them exclusively around the hotel. Dining room, community bath (didn't have the nerve to try), or even the lobby!!





So, some things can't change.... it was still time for computers and wine!!



Note the screens behind George. They covered the windows, but the next morning, They kind of glowed with the morning sun. Quite nice actually!
The Gang came & picked us up at 10am and we headed out to visit Odawara Castle before our train left.





There were some caged monkeys and according to our friends, they were a local type of monkey and were also around in the wild. I had seen some signs similar to "deer crossing" with monkey symbols on them, so that explained that!!!



Once again, they paid for some special pictures -this time for George & I to dress up for them!!



平成24年 5月19日



That is the Odawara Castle Tower in the back ground.



A gentleman with a very young girl asked if we would take a picture with her. Made we feel special! We continued on the check out the castle tower and museum.





The view from the top of the castle was really really good. Even if the azelea's were blooming here either!!



We made a short stop at a local Shrine for prayers for a safe journey. That was very sweet!!!



The Shrine had a beautiful garden attached. The Japanese Maples are gorgeous!!!

And then our time was up and it was time to head to Hiroshima!!! Made some great new friends!!

So far, we are

really really really loving Japan!!!

Enough for now,

Best wishes and love to all!!!

George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #4
Date: 5/22/2012

Good Evening Dearest Friends!

We were again very very lucky and had beautiful views of Mt Fuji on our train trip to Hiroshima!! Looked like it was just floating in space! The photos don't really do it justice, but you can get the idea!!



Train travel in Japan is certainly comfortable and the Japan Rail Pass that we purchased before arrival here seems to work great!! Anyway, it was a pretty long train trip (about 4 hours, 20 minutes), but went very quickly. We both worked on computers and had a train change in Nagoya. It was an easy one, only 2 tracks away and had a half hour for the change. The 2nd half was very comfortable, only 2 seats on each side of the aisle and lots of leg room. A girl comes through with a cart selling everything from potato chips to beer, and for a reasonable price. However, the dancers had purchased us a lunch before we boarded, so we had a nice picnic lunch!!



We arrived in Hiroshima right on time of course and Toshiko was there to greet us as soon as we stepped off the train. She led us down to street level and Fumiaki was there with the car to greet us. Immediately set the stage for what was to come by asking us to pose in front of the statue lifting our legs to match in a semi eros line!! He took the picture on his camera, so I don't have it yet, but you can see what he was having us do!!!!



Our first stop was to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. Although I had read about it of course and knew what it was all about, but seeing all the pictures and reading about the details of the actual event and the days following it was just heartbreaking. I started taking pictures, but soon quit. Other than some of the Holocaust museums, I have never felt such sorrow about an event. And to think we (as an American although I was not born then) were responsible for such total devastation. It's horrifying. I only pray that nothing like this will ever occur again and I'm so impressed that the Japanese people have not only overcome the event, but have turned it into something to make them soar into a people who are on the forefront of the world.



The city before and after. Total devastation. The government building on the top right somehow mostly survived although everyone in it was killed. The bomb exploded right over it. Anyway, it has been preserved to remind everyone of the events of that horrific day in history. It is called the Atomic Dome. We could see it from our hotel room window.



To brighten our hearts, Fumi met us with the car and had us do a dance pose right in front of the Dome!! To prove that life continues!!



We had planned a trip to a garden, but it was just too late. We did make a quick stop at Hiroshima Castle and did a few dance poses there. Fumi parked illegally, but the guard popped in and gave him the okay!!







We got checked in at the Rihga Royal Hotel (room on the 26th floor with corner windows with incredible views in 2 directions!! It was hazy, but you can see out into the Inland Sea and see the beautiful volcanic islands that dot the water. Then they took us to a fantastic restaurant where we cooked our food on a hibachi. We ate way way way too much and spent the evening laughing! These guys are wonderful!!









Enough for now! Time for bed! Got most of the photos loaded onto Shutterfly if anyone wants to see all of them!!

Lots of love and a wonderful good night!!

George & Pamela

Subj: Japan Travelogue #5 -Hiroshima/Mirajima
Date: 5/24/2012

Hello Everyone! This is really a magical vacation!! Our dancer guides for Hiroshima are great fun. We are laughing our way around town!! They picked us up at 9am at our hotel and first stop was the Shukkein Gardens. We were there for them to open the doors! Guess you realize that means we were up really early!!! But it was worth it! Lots of things to see and places to go today!



広島県縮景園
Shukkeien Garden



This is a public garden constructed in 1620 and maintained beautifully. Unfortunately we were inbetween flowers. The azeleas and iris's were pretty much done. However just the symmetry of the greenery, paths and rocks were gorgeous. It was completely destroyed by the Atomic Bomb in 1945 of course, but was restored to the historical plans.







Had to keep on schedule, so off we went to take a scenic tour from the Peace Memorial over to Mirajima. Unfortunately, we were seated in the center, windows were small & you couldn't go outside, so didn't get many pictures. Believe I made up for it on the island!!!



Confucius visited Mirajima and declared it to be one of the top 3 scenic places in all of Japan. Haven't see all of Japan yet, but can agree that it is a beautiful place! We didn't have time to walk all over it, but made quite a large dent! We only had a couple of hours to visit. There is a Ropeway on the far side of hte island, but we decided we didn't have enough time to take it. But went through the main Temple. And of course, it has the tame deer (well mostly tame, but lots of warnings that they are like goats and will eat anything that is hanging loose from your person - paper, bags, snacks, maps!!!!). We didn't feed them -they look plenty fat without our help!!! Several kids were getting nipped at -guess they smelled like food!!

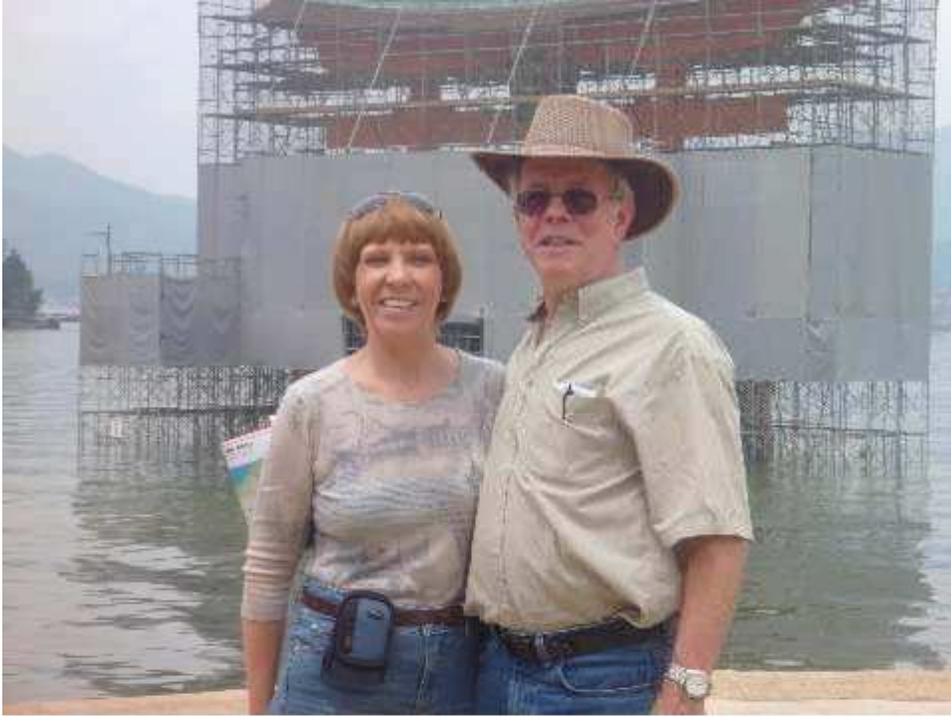




Saw a wedding!



Unfortunately the most well known view of the island, O-Torii, the Grand gate to the Itsukushima Shrine from the water side was under reconstruction and totally covered. Such a shame!!







These are tubs/barrels/containers of sake. Never did quite figure out why they are at the entrances to all the shrines & temples -not sure if the monks drink it or if they make it or what? But we've seen them at almost everyone!



George bangs a bell for good luck on the way up to Daishoin Temple. Made a beautiful clear dong.





This tea -not quite the same as what we commonly call green tea, although it is very very green, it tastes like grass and is drunk cold & hot. The lovely little cookie is a specialty on Miyajima - called momiji manju. There are many types of fillings for it and we tried the sweet bean paste (my favorite) and chocolate (George's favorite). They are always shaped like the maple leaf. Tasted even better for eating it high on a mountain overlooking the Inland Sea.



Shortly after having our snack on the top of the hill, we took a quick stop at the 5 Story Pagoda & made our way back down to the shopping arcade and watched them making them. Had to try a chocolate filled one, warm from the ovens!! Yummmm!





Even the shop had a beautiful garden with Koi. Fumi told us that the Japanese consider the red & white koi the perfect ones.





We lost Toshiko for a while. We were running late and couldn't locate her where we thought she would be (she stayed at the bottom of the hill to rest). Wandered a bit, but eventually found her waiting patiently at the ferry for us. We headed back across (took the JR Ferry this time, had a quick lunch looking out on the water and took off for the Castle town Iwakune. It is most well known for its 5 Arch Bridge that we walked across, but it looks better from the aerial view from the cable car going up to the castle.





Back down to earth, we saw the famous white snakes that are only native to the small region of Iwakune -no where else on the world! They are said to be messengers of Benzaiten -the goddess of Good Luck. They are actually designated as a National Treasure!!



We walked around the beautiful Kikko Park and admired the rose garden. Won't try to put many of those pictures here -trying to finish this up in one email and figure I'm about out of pictures. I loaded them all on my Shutterfly page <http://pamspics.shutterfly.com> if you want to look at them.

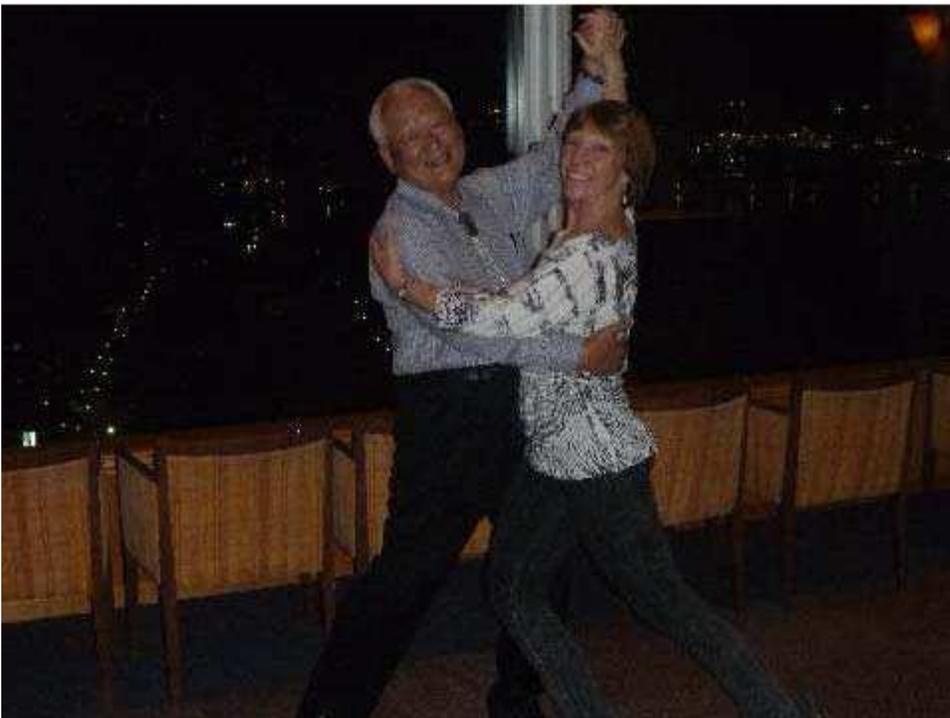


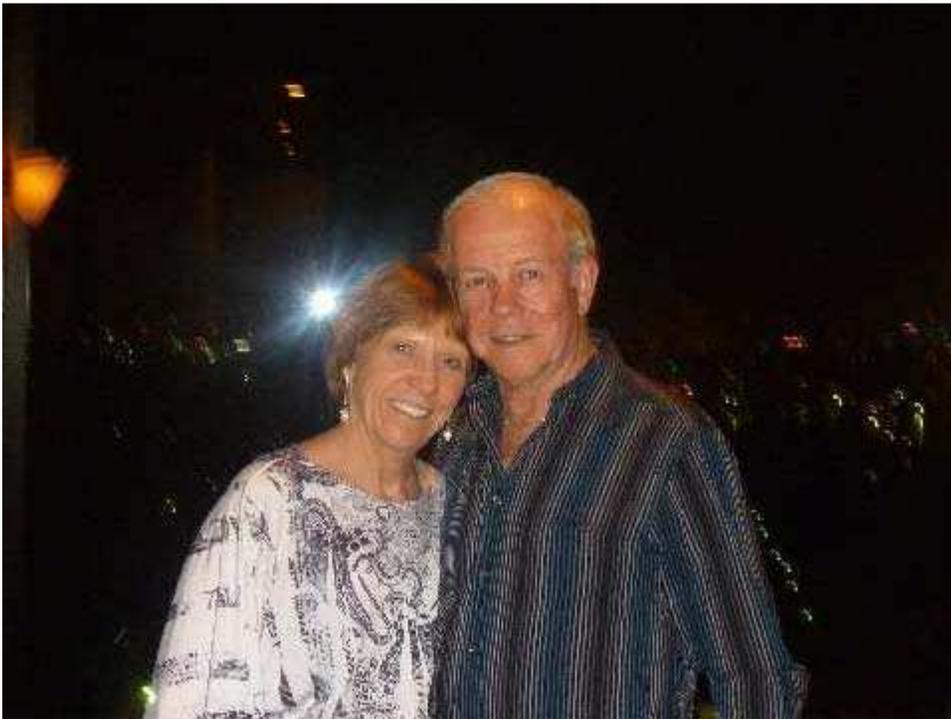


On the drive back to Hiroshima (about an hour north), we stopped at a Japanese Highway rest area. I was amazed! The bathrooms were immaculate (that was not the surprise -Japan is extremely clean & neat, practically no little at all) and had gorgeous arrangements of fresh flowers. That was the surprise! And they had machines that dispensed FREE hot tea! Can you imagine? That sure wouldn't happen!! We noticed that Sumo was on and realized that it was the last 2 matches of the tournament so we sat down and watched. The match that should have been the last one resulted in a tie of 12 wins and 3 losses for the top two competitors, so there had to be a 13th match!!! And guess what????? The guy that I had my picture made with was one of the top 2!!! Unfortunately he didn't win, but WOW! How about that??? I was actually standing next to the guy that came in #2 in the country!! Pretty cool!

Anyway, we got back into town and took a few minutes to freshen up and headed to Grand Prince Hotel. We ate in the Chinese Restaurant on the top with a magnificent view of Hiroshima!!! It is actually on a

separate island from the mainland. We carried our laptop and shared pictures & videos with Fumi & Toshiko after dinner. Trying to encourage them to come visit us in Mesa!! They will attend Nationals & ICBDA this year, but since we're not going to either of them, we'll not see them there!!! Phooey!







Funniest thing happened on the way out of the hotel. Hang with me, I have to give you a little background! In the hotels here that have the Japanese style community baths, you are given a kimono to wear (men & women) and allowed to go anywhere in the hotel in it. You can go to dinner in your Kimono or whatever. Anyway, it was quite late when we were leaving, about 9:30pm and as we were going down in the elevator, we stopped at a mid floor. A gentleman was standing waiting to get on the elevator and when the doors opened, and we were there looking at him, he doubled over and nearly fell to the ground. He was obviously heading to the baths and thought it was late enough that no one would be around! His kimono was hanging open and he just freaked. He was wearing shorts or swim trunks or something (thank goodness), but he was horrified that we were seeing him! He did get in and went down one floor with us to the baths, but he stayed all bent over and was laughing and carrying on! It was hilarious!!!

Soooo, that was our wonderful day in Hiroshima! It was a marvelous time!! Such a wonderful city and great memories!

Enough for this one! More later!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Japan Journey #6 -Hiroshima to Kyoto
Date: 5/24/2012

Good Evening Family & Friends!!

It's getting late, but thought I'd do a quick one to share our last little bit in Hiroshima and then our arrival in Kyoto. Since most of the day was spent on the train, there's not a whole lot of pictures! However, it was much clearer when we got up on Monday morning, so we had a beautiful view of the Soto Mountain Inland sea with all the islands in view. However, WE TOTALLY MISSED THE ECLIPSE!! We had been told that there would be a full eclipse, but not the time and it wasn't until we saw the headline picture on Tuesday morning with pictures that we realized we had missed it!!! We got up at 8am and the eclipse was at 7:30am or around there anyway. If we had known, we would have gotten up a little earlier, BUT, oh well! Looks like it was totally awesome! Anyway, since it was so clear, we realized that we had a view of Miyajima and that the Atomic Dome was practically right under our noses!







The other thing I wanted to share was the amazing toilets that they have here. This digital toilet has been in every bathroom since we've been here -hotels, public toilets, highway rest areas, etc. It has an automatic seat warmer, and water temperature adjustments for both a bidet and a spray! Howabout them apples???? Cool or what? Americans are just so behind the times!!!





We got a final picture with Fumi & Toshiko -one normal & one dance pose -sway to the left!!





What great fun!!!! On to the train station and we hopped on the bullet train to Kyoto. Had to change trains in Osaka for the short little leg to Kyoto. Unfortunately, when we got to the train station, we found that there had been some type of mechanical problem that had tied up the train line (most all trains use the same tracks, just timed to pass at stations with multiple tracks) and we were delayed leaving by 40 minutes. This is highly unusual for Japan. They are usually on time to the minute!! Anyway, Fumi & Toshiko sat with us and we finally got on our train (with the lunch they bought us while we were waiting!!!). Missed our connection in Osaka, but it was an easy fix to explain what happened and with the passes, we were issued new tickets and hurried to the departing track. Luckily we looked at the tickets a little closer while we were standing in line and realized she had given us tickets back to Hiroshima!!!! While we enjoyed our time there, it was not in the plans to return this soon!!!! We hurried back to the ticket counter and started trying to explain. Luckily for us, a young business man heard us and offered his excellent English to explain to the girl what had happened. Took us another half hour or so, but we finally arrived in Kyoto and another set of dancing friends met us there!!! We used Nobuko's cell phone that she loaned us to call Takao & Harue and let them know what train & car we were on. They were there to meet us in no time & whisked us off to our hotel which happened to be in the train station itself! Kyoto Train Station is HUGE!! It's like a city unto itself! It has an enormous shopping mall in it, but more on that later, I'm getting ahead of myself!!

Our first views of Kyoto from our hotel window. It was the 12th floor, facing south. If you could blow up the photo and knew what you were looking for, you could note all the temples & shrines you can see in the picture! This is a wonderful city!! You could stay here a month and not see all the gorgeous temples & shrines!!





This is the Kyoto Tower -symbol of Kyoto! Actually a hotel, but the residents love it and you can see it from all over the city. Our hotel room faced the opposite direction. But we were at the end of a long long long hallway (got our exercise walking to/from the elevator!!) and there were picture windows ever 4 rooms looking in both directions.



We met Takao & Harue downstairs about 5pm, an hour later than we were originally planning to meet, so we only had time for one shrine, Heian Shrine & Garden. It was a lovely choice to start. We walked around the garden and it just totally relaxed us!









Well AOL has done something weird and won't let me add anymore pictures, so I'll just stop here. They actually took us to an unbelievable restaurant on the river for dinner and we sat outside on mats. I have pictures, so I'm going to wait until later to finish this description!!! Now it's late and I need to get some sleep!!!

Sure miss you all and wish you were here to see all these incredible sights and enjoy this wonderful people with us!!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #7 -Kyoto
Date: 5/25/2012

Good Evening Everyone,

Today was a lovely day, but I'm 4 days behind in my travelogues, so can't jump ahead!!!

Actually I want to start with Miyajima's Famous gate. Fumiyaiki and Toshiko gave us some postcards of the Island and one shows what we were supposed to have seen if it wasn't under construction. So here is the O-Torii the way it should have looked at high tide.



Guess we'll have to go back to see it the way it's supposed to look!!!

Okay, now I'll continue where I left off with our first dinner in Kyoto with Takao & Harue. It was in

the Gion district which is known for its evening entertainment and fine restaurants along the river. We had steak and it was fantastic!! Soooooo tender. Of course the appetizers were not really recognizable and in general it's better not to ask!! But I have to admit that the orange disc on the blue dish was really very tasty. It was eel. Yum. That's RAW eel!! Yes, I ate it and it was really tasty. But the steak (cooked!!!) was better! The Japanese cuisine is just so varied and the presentation is amazing. This meal was call "yata" because we sat on the plastic woven mats on pillows. The same mats that are used in the Tatami rooms to sleep on the futons.







The next morning we started at the very civilized time of 10am. We had a breakfast buffet at the hotel. We've found that most everything is very good, however there are some problems. Although they generally serve hard boiled eggs for breakfast (and that's what I go for), George usually tries for scrambled eggs or omelets. For some reason these are generally not really cooked. The scrambled eggs are a runny mush and the omelets are cooked on the outside, but totally raw inside, almost like over easy, but the whites are not even done. George has tried special ordering them and it's a big fight. He has to hand them back over and over. They just do not want to cook the eggs!!! The coffee is generally way too strong for us (like espresso) and I've found that I generally don't like the teas. They are a very different flavor that we are used to and I just can't seem to develop a taste for them. I really miss my caffeine in the mornings! They have green tea and something called "roasted" tea in the rooms. The green tea is very mild and I'm assuming has no caffeine and the roasted tea is just not for me. I've tried it at 3 different hotels now and just don't like it. I'll have to start drinking hot water like the Goss's!!! Otherwise, the food here is really good. The dinner buffets are an amazing mix of Western and Japanese cuisine. We've found that we both really love eating with chopsticks. I'm actually planning on buying some for us to take back. We'll try to eat with them at home some too! Anyway, back to the pictures! We met Takao & Harue in our lobby at 10am and headed straight out to the Regular Tour Bus station for our first tour. It was a half day tour and included 3 Temples. The first was Kinkaku-ji Temple. The formal name is Rokuon-ji and is one of the most famous in Kyoto. It is on the World Heritage list. It is easily recognizable because of it's fabulous gold "kinkaku" (reliquary hall). The shogun who built this Zen Buddhist Temple acquired the land in 1397!!! Can you believe it! History that goes that far back!! Wow!!! That's really gold tin foil!!





It also has a beautiful garden (named Jodo-teien) and we walked all around it. George even followed Takao's lead and tried to toss some yen in one of the small shrines for good luck. Neither of them hit the cup, so guess the only good luck would be for the monk's picking up the money!!





Hakao invited us to do the tea ceremony and I almost totally missed it when I ran to the toilet!! I just had time to take my shoes off and kneel at the tea bowl and drink it down before running to the bus! (I think George got a picture on his cellphone, but he hasn't shared them with me!!!) They gave me my sweet to go!! It was sure beautiful though, even the cake had gold decorations!



The next temple was Ginkaku-ji Temple. It is at the foot of Higashiyama and is also on the World Heritage list. It was built in 1482 as a mountain villa. It is a theory that they originally intended to make it silver to compare with the gold one, but they ran out of money!! It's still amazing!! Especially the gardens! You enter through these amazing hedges!! They are made of stones, bamboos, & camelias. Impressive!



Then you get to the beautifully sculpted gardens. We ran into some school children who asked to be photographed with us! How sweet!









And then on to Kiyomizu-dera Temple, another Buddhist temple. It's on Higashiyama (east mountain) with a fabulous view of Kyoto!! I think this might have been one of the ones we could see in the distance from our hotel window. It had started to drizzle just a little before we toured this temple, but not enough to cause any real issue!!



Phoey -reached the end of the pictures!! Have to continue in another issue!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey -#8 -Kyoto continues
Date: 5/25/2012
Hi Guys,

I'll just continue right on with Kiyomizu-dera Temple. It's actually built into the cliffs of the mountain and it's very steep -lots of stairs.





There are 139 pillars to build up this stage and not a single nail was used.



The stage looks out over the city. I'm sure the view would have been even more impressive if the drizzle hadn't have dimmed it! Still very nice!!





See the tall white tower with the red top? That's the Kyoto Tower and it's directly in front of our hotel. It is a symbol of Kyoto, recognized everywhere. And this next bit is rather interesting. The water fall from the mountain stream that runs directly through the temple is considered spiritual with healing powers. It was encouraged drink from the water with the cups, but the 4 of us decided it might not be so healing and didn't participate. Watched them for a long time though. There was a steady stream of visitors from all over the world drinking that water (all from the same cups!!!!).



Walked through a really neat "tourist trap" shopping area on the way back down. Couldn't resist pictures of the beautiful Japanese fans! But only took pictures!!



After the tour, we split up for about an hour, George & I walked around the Kyoto Station. It's a city unto itself!!!! Probably one of the biggest shopping malls I've ever been in! It's about 5 stories and had everything from groceries (wine too), bakery items, clothes, knick knacks, electronics, you name it and it was there!!!





Here's a good photo of the tower from our Hotel's door step. Our hotel was actually in the station, I've mentioned that right?



Anyway, Harue headed back home for the evening and we hopped in a taxi with Takao for one more 2 more shrines before dinner!!! Both were really closed, but we got a little peek at them. The first, Nanzen-ji is supposed to have one of the most beautiful gardens in Kyoto, but it was closed!! Phooey. Actually we were supposed to see it the first night, but since we were late, we didn't get there. Unfortunate! Have to do it next time!!



Had a really neat Roman aquaduct. Have to Google more info on this -the why's etc!!





And on to Gion Yaska Shrine



Takao rang the bells to pray.



And back to the Gion area for dinner. Takao had the taxi drive cruise the area to look for some Makai (not positive of the spelling!) dancers and we actually saw one. I couldn't get a picture but here's a billboard advertisement to show what she looked like.



Gion Street is really interesting. It was a fun place to walk & gawk!!



This time we had a meal of mixed meats & vegetables and cooked it ourselves on personal hibachi's on the table! Again outside on the river. The weather had cleared up and it was perfect!!



Well, that gets me through the 1st full day in Kyoto!! Still behind in our adventures, but it's late and time for bed!!! Hope you are enjoying this tour! We certainly are! Japan is even more amazing than I expected and the people are just unbelievably wonderful! They just help with everything. Certainly makes you enjoy the country even more! The language barrier is hard, but it's worth the challenge to come over. The Japanese people really take care of you!!

Well, sleep well and I'll continue tomorrow!!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Good Evening Everyone!

I took last night off and answered emails and played on Facebook rather than working on my travelogue!! Oh well, I'll try to get caught up tonight and tomorrow on the train back to Tokyo!!

On the second day in Kyoto, Takao & Narue scheduled us for a busy busy day of sightseeing in Nara. Nara was actually the capital of Japan in the late 700's and has a population of a little less than 400,000 people and about 1200 deer!!! The deer run free all around the city, but are especially prominent in Toudaiji Temple which was to be our first stop!

We took the JR train to Nara.



This is one of the oldest of the trains, but even so, it was quite comfortable. I'll take this time to mention a little about the trains and the train system. There are several train lines throughout Japan. The one we used the most is called the JR line. They offer a deep discount ticket to foreigners through the internet. The Japanese are not offered this and it can't be purchased in country. Kenji & Nobuko alerted us to this pass and we purchased it on line. It allowed us unlimited trips on any itinerary JR travels throughout the country for 14 days. An unbelievable deal! AND, like I mentioned earlier, we could even reserve seats. Each train has about half the cars are walk on and about half are reserved. You can also pay extra (about double) and get something that would equate to first class on airlines. Seemed like about 1 in every 4 or 5 cars were first class. Anyway, the stations are very clearly marked and it was very easy to get around, once you know the system. Having reserve seats, all we had to do was look for the train number, find the track and then stand under the number for the car where your seats are assigned. It's all marked! But that said, we didn't have reserve seats for the day trip to Nara, but we didn't even need tickets. With the JR pass, we just passed through the gate and went to the track and stood to get on the train. Of course Takao & Harue had to buy tickets, but we went through together and got 4 seats facing for the hour ride to Nara. Just an on the side -most of the time, a certain train makes set runs from one station to the other, and when it reaches the end of it's line, it just returns. It does not turn around -they go both directions. **THE CARS ACTUALLY TURN AROUND AUTOMATICALLY SO THE PASSENGERS ARE FACING**

WHERE THEY ARE GOING. We saw that one time and we were amazed! It was really really cool. Apparently the passengers can push a button and turn a set of seats around if they would like, so that they can sit in a grouping of 4 people. It's really sophisticated!! So enough! On the train, we watched the scenery go by and I enjoyed seeing the clothes and bedding that were being aired off the balconies!!



Anyway, we made it to Nara and took a short taxi ride to Toudaiji Temple. It's a Buddhist Temple (Temple is the designation if it's the Buddhist sect from China and Shrine if it's a Japanese Shinto Buddhist) that was established in 669 (can you believe the dates????). It's burned down many times, but has always been reestablished according to ancient plans. It has actually been taken apart and moved 3 times! It is one of the 8 historic monuments labeled as UNESCO World Heritage sites in Nara. And like I said, there are many deer there and they are protected by the government and fed by the tourist!!



Takao bought some food and scattered it on the ground to let us watch them. I didn't have any food, but they let me pet them anyway!



On to the temple.





This is called the Temple of the Big Buddha.





This was a smaller, but even more beautiful Buddha.



Not exactly sure what this guy was, but according to the sign, if you had a body part that had some sort of ailment, you could rub the corresponding part on him and then on you and it would be healed. I rubbed mine and his left knee. Can't say it's been healed, but not hurting right this minute!!



I have to admit that one of the most memorable thing for me was that as we were leaving, we were approached (actually George got the most attention) by young children who were obviously sent on "scavenger" type hunts. They would be in small groups of 3 or 4 children and had plastic coated forms. They would approach and say "excuse me, my name is ????, could I ask you a question?". When George said yes, they would say, "can you show me where are you from" and hand over some stickers with a map of the world. Then they would show another plastic covered form with 4 pictures and ask, "which is your favorite?" These pictures varied. Some were of 4 different foods and some of 4 different shrines or temples. You were to put a sticker on your favorite. This just delighted me. They were so very cute. George got a picture of me speaking with one of the children. They were just very polite and wonderful!



More deer on the way out!



We took another taxi a very short distance to the Kofoku-ji Temple.





I didn't get many pictures from here as we spent most of the time in the Treasure Hall and you couldn't take pictures. The many statues and historical items inside were phenomenal. Reminded me of some of the museums in Egypt!

Anyway, we walked on to a station for a different Train line and had lunch before taking a Tourist Bus for the afternoon Temples. George & I experienced trying to eat noodles with chopsticks. I should have taken a movie! It was really hilarious. We should have had bibs! Luckily there were no tables available and they sat us separately from Takao & Harue, so they didn't get to laugh in our faces!!! Supposedly you "lead the noodle to your mouth" and then suck it in. According to the books, making a sucking noise is a sign of deep pleasure and not considered bad manners at all. However, the "leading a noodle to your lips" is not as easy as it sounds. Plus we had ordered a noodle bowl that also had fried vegetables. We didn't realize that they fry the vegetables together so that when they give it to you, it is basically a compact oval of fried batter that is sitting on top of a HUGE pile of noodles. The noodles were freshly made and extremely slick & flexible. All I can say is that if I had to eat that all the time, I would be Twiggy!!!



Good grief! I have been soooooo long winded, I have just barely covered the morning and already AOL has said enough for the pictures! I'll try to make the afternoon short in the next email!!

Hope this is making you want to come to Japan. Maybe not to eat noodles... Ha, but at least to come & visit!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #10 -Nara continued
Date: 5/27/2012

Hi Guys,

I'll just continue with the afternoon in Nara. I should mention that Takao and Harue had especially looked for tours that would have English guides and this one had a CD for us to listen to through out both of the afternoon temples and for the drive inbetween. It was quite informative. We didn't get all of the information apparently, because the Japanese guide spoke non-stop (not sure how she was breathing), while our CD only spoke on occasion for little short bursts. But, non the less, it worked out well and I think we got the gist of everything. So, on to the first temple. It was about an hour's drive from the city and is acknowledged as the oldest wooden structure in the world!! It is of course on the UNESCO World Heritage list. It is called Houryu-ji and is a Buddhist Temple.











Enroute to the next Temple, we drove past lots of ponds. It was explained that this area was the largest goldfish/koi/carp farm in Japan. Didn't get to see them close up, but snapped some pictures as we sped by!





Next stop was Yakusi-ji Temple. It is a huge temple area and is acknowledged to be one of the finest pagoda's in Japan. It was beautiful.









After taking the train back to Kyoto, we all went back to our rooms for a little bit and then met at our hotel for a Grand Finalee dinner! We had the Western/Japanese Buffet and it was very extravagant! Even had lobster! Lovely way to end our time in Kyoto. Such a gorgeous city! Must return someday! Having our own friends to show us around made it even more special! Thank you Takao & Harue!!



They met us at the hotel on Thursday morning and saw us to our train to Takayama! Now we'll be on our own for a couple of days! Even more adventure to come!!! A news flash from a just arrived email. Takao had lost his camera somewhere on Wednesday night. We were not sure where. He just emailed to say that the Taxi driver had turned it in to the police and they had returned it to him today! Is that amazing or what? Just goes to show how honest and wonderful the Japanese people really are!!!!

Good night for now and hang on for more to come!!

George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #11 -Takayama
Date: 5/27/2012

Good Morning Family & Friends!!! Just now speeding down the tracks back to Tokyo!! Probably our last train ride for this trip. We'll be traveling with Kenji & Nobuko from today until we leave on June 5th. But, I don't want to get ahead of myself, you still have to hear about Takayama and the Japanese Alps.

We left Kyoto about 10am and had about a 3 hour train trip with one transfer. That was very easy this time. We had about 15 minutes between trains and only a few tracks to maneuver.



We had seen on the internet that our hotel (The Takayama Green Hotel, a tatami hotel) had a free shuttle and we were all set to ask around about how to find it. But...we didn't have to worry, as we stepped off the train, here was a gentleman holding up a sign in Japanese AND English saying Green Hotel! We walked over, he asked our names, checked us off a list, loaded our bags on the bus (with a lot of groaning and possibly Japanese cussing???) and away we went. It was beautiful weather and the hotel was only 5 minutes away and that included driving around the station due to one way streets! We got checked in easily (Kenji & Nobuko had given us registration cards for each hotel -all in Japanese -but Kenji had put little yellow stickers on them with the name in English) and had to wait about 30 minutes for our room to be ready. Just enough time to walk around the hotel and get oriented. This is a huge hotel with 5 restaurants (we only used 4 of them) an enormous souvenir shop that even had demonstrations of how to make different things and several other fancy dress shops.



We sat in the tea room and had a beer while we waited. It had a gorgeous garden with a koi pond. A really interesting thing happened as we were going back to the desk to get our room key. A Japanese business man stopped in front of us with a look of pure amazement on his face. "George Hurd?", he asked? "Dance?" I recognized him as someone we had seen with Kenji & Nobuko at ICBDA and RAR, but didn't know his name. So I said "round dancer" and he nodded with a big smile!! We didn't have a chance to chat, he was with a group of business men heading somewhere and our hotel clerk was waiting with our bags to show us to our room. But what a small world, huh??? Never saw him again -hopefully he will be at the Roundup in Tokyo!!!

Anyway, up to our room on the 4th floor. WOW!! It was awesome!!! I took a zillion pictures over the next couple of days! Stated with the view from the huge picture windows.







You can see that we were in the Japanese foothills. Later that evening I noticed that several of the mountains in the distance had lots of snow on them. Just lovely!
Here's the room.





It had a separate entry way to leave our shoes and put on our slippers -we usually just left our socks on instead of the slippers and a area with a cabinet with glasses & tea service. Then there were 2 other rooms, one with the fancy digital toilet -this time it even had a small sink in it too.



And the room with the sink & counter, towels and basket to take your stuff to the community bath (called onsen in Japanese). And another room with a tub and the shower facilities. The shower was not in the tub, it was a removable sprayer that is actually set up so that you shower beside the tub. It gets the entire room wet, which was disconcerting at first, but the room is designed for that with a drain for the floor and a shelf & mirrors for the bathing amenities.





Back into the main room to show how the windows look.



Notice that George is on the phone. I think I might have mentioned before that Nobuko loaned us her phone for emergencies while we were traveling? Anyway, a friend of hers kept trying to call. George kept trying to explain that she should call Kenji's phone or the home phone, but she must have just thought she was dialing the wrong number because she kept trying and trying. She called 4 times in a row. George just didn't answer the last time. He finally figured out how to look at the list of calls (everything on the phone was in Japanese of course!) and we gave the number to Nobuko. She must have taken care of it, because we never got another call!!! And the cops didn't track us down to find out what we had done with Nobuko!!!!



We left our beautiful room and headed out to check things out. I had a map and had found park where I just wanted to get out and walk -no museums, no shrines or temples, just nature. But check out the streets -you could almost eat off them. Soooooo very clean and neat. Really impressed with Japan and their sense of pride and care for their cities.



And the residential gardens. Just amazing!



A river runs right through the middle of town. It's a relatively small town and there's a suggested walking area that is only about a 20 minute walk from north to south and very narrow east & west. We were heading to the south end to walk around a little. On the way we walked through an area of quaint little shops that have been restored and maintained. There are places to show you how sake is made and many small restaurants & shops.

Phooey. AOL has already cut me off. I'll continue with the next email!!

Love ya,

George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #12 -Takayama cont.
Date: 5/28/2012

Hi Guys, I'll continue right on. Here's the shops I was trying to show you.



Wisteria vines were everywhere as were lots of blooming flowers & herbs maybe?





A shop selling all types/kinds of sake.



Only had to ask directions once and found our little nature walk in Shiroyama Park. Gave us some great over views of the city.





Check out the little kitty in the crook of the tree! Forgot to ask how to call a kitty in Japanese, but "kitty, kitty kitty" got no response at all!!



Anyway, we walked for about an hour and then walked back to the hotel for an early dinner. Didn't totally escape the local shrines, they are everywhere, but very pretty and neat.



Saw a sign about the local birds, but didn't really see many different kinds.





Found these adorable statuettes on one of the bridges. George Googled them that night and I'll fill you in now. It's too long a story to relate the entire thing, but apparently these guys are not Buddha's, they are little evil demons (called Long Arms & Long Legs) and were controlling the weather here in Takayama and keeping the farmers from growing their crops. A special Buddhist priest came along and tricked them into diving into a little bottle and trapped them, saving Takayama from starvation. They don't look so evil, but glad that Takayama was saved!!





I'm sure I'm getting carried away with the pictures. This was such a picturesque place! I'll just mention one other thing that I thought was really neat. As we got back into the city and headed back, we ran across a shop that sold nothing but chopsticks! Short ones, silly ones, gorgeous ones and full sets. They also had all the adorable little stands they use to prop them up so that are not lying on the table cloth. I was entranced. Have to buy some -but didn't do it this time!!



Had skipped lunch and we were starved. Dinner was included with the room. It was a buffet with both a Japanese side and a Western side. Huge amounts of food!!! Even a totally separate Tempura station where he was constantly deep frying different items: shrimp, every vegetable you could think of (mushrooms were mouth watering!!) & little crunchy fish (nope I didn't try one!!!). Both sushi and sushimi of course and I didn't do that either.



Could go on and on forever, but have to finish up! This is still only our 1st afternoon here. I think this might have been my favorite stop. Except of course, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Mirajima, Iwakune, Kyoto, & Nara!!! Ha Ha!!



We walked around the Souvenir shop before going back up to our room for the evening. They demonstrate how to make rice cakes in these ovens, but we were never there at the right time to see them.



Have to finish this one up. I'll just close with a picture of one of the beautiful displays all around the hotel. We spent the evening relaxing in our wonderful room, George watching movies and me on the computer!
Done for now!!
Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #13 -More of Takayama
Date: 5/27/2012

Hello Everyone,

I'll continue with our stay in Takayama. We slept late -1st morning since we've arrived in Japan!!! We even missed breakfast!! George opened the screens (one thin almost transparent rice paper and one a heavier for blocking the light) to find that it was raining pretty hard. We went down for lunch (shared a BLT & a cheese pizza!) and then decided to just spend the rest of the morning and early afternoon working on dances -since we had a huge dance floor!!



Discovered that the tatami mats dance really really well on sock feet. Should we mention it to ICBDA?? Anyway, it was a great way to spend the rainy day, we had the beautiful view out our

window and a great floor to practice on. What a life!!! But....you give me a little time without being totally occupied and I'll start thinking! Soooo, I noticed in my guide books that it was only a 90 minute bus ride into the Japanese Alps where there is a cable car (called Shin-Hotaka Ropeway) up onto one of the tallest peaks. I had already put in my notes about Japan that I'd like to see Chubu National Park, which is the area north of Takayama in the Alps. Then I saw that it was about 120 minutes by bus from Shin-Hotaka Ropeway to Matsumoto, our next stop. We already had reserved train seats to get there, but it was a 5 hour ride, way south and then back up. I convinced George that we should go check on that option (it was a very hard sell -he was not really anxious to try our hand at the bus system, especially with the luggage, having to change buses, etc.), and we slipped on our rain coats and off to the train/bus station. Luckily the girl at the Information desk spoke excellent English AND she totally agreed with me that it was not only a doable option, but a recommended one. Even had a package deal that covered the buses and the Ropeway costs. Still had one difficult change from one bus line to another to finish the trip to Matsumoto. Yippee! That will be for tomorrow!!

Since we were out in the rain already (it was not a hard rain, just warm drizzle), we decided to go to the Takayama Festival Float Exhibition Hall. Really glad we did that. It was amazing. They gave us an audio system to listen to in English and it was excellent. The best information we've been provided in a tour (other than the Hiroshima Peace Museum, it was really really good too). Apparently twice a year Takayama has one of the largest festivals in Japan -with about 300,000 people attending. They had 12 enormous floats that they use for the festival that are maintained by neighbor hoods in Takayama and the repair and maintenance costs are funded by the government. One of the floats burned, so now they only have 11. They maintain 4 at a time in the Exhibition Hall to let tourist see. They are unbelievable. I'll bet the festival is amazing. For now, I'll just post the pictures of the floats themselves..



This Gold one is no longer really used. It is to be carried and weighs 2.5 tons. It required 80 men to carry it and they said "since the war, it has become too difficult to find 80 men of the same height to carry it!!!!" But it's certainly gorgeous!!



Here's the next one, they are all named, but I'll not bother with the names, couldn't pronounce them anyway!!















The last one had puppet show on the back that was quite elaborate. Took 16 people (I think!!) inside to control the movements. They would tumble along lines and then jump onto the back of the kindly Buddha.



There was also a little museum of the clothes, etc used in the festival.



And included with the entrance fee was admission to a museum with a miniature scale exhibit of the Nikko Temple. Hopefully we'll see that in real life after the Round-Up. Anyway, the detail of the exhibit was amazing!!



That was about all we accomplished in Takayama. Must come back here again someday, it was really interesting and we barely scraped the surface. There is an open air folk museum here that is supposed to be awesome, but due to the rain (and to take advantage of our dance floor!!), we didn't get to go to it. But certainly loved this stop! After dinner, we put on our kimono's and relaxed in our room!! Great visit!!!





More on the beautiful Japanese Alps later!!

Good night!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #14 -Takayama to Shin-Hotaka Ropeway
Date: 5/28/2012

Hello Everyone! Very excited about sharing our experience on the bus to Shin-Hotaka Ropeway in the Chubu Sangaku National Park! We were excited to see it was pretty clear after the heavy clouds of yesterday. After having breakfast and finishing up the packing, we ran downstairs to take the shuttle to the station, but just missed it. It was pulling away as we came to the lobby. One of the agents saw us and ran out to try & stop it, ran all the way across the parking lot!!, but they didn't look in the rearview mirror. Decided just to walk it -since both bags roll anyway and it was only about a 10 minute walk. It got our hearts pumping for the morning! We were early at the station, so got our tickets, canceled the train reservation and I hot footed it to a jewelry store that I had noticed having the blingy little stretch bracelets that I like!! Really got my exercise, but also got 2 new bracelets!! Yippee! Anyway, loaded the luggage on a bus seat behind us and away we went to Shin-Hotaka Ropeway.





The country enroute was very pretty. Mostly green farmland with lots of rice fields and the mountains got steeper and steeper. Saw lots of the pretty fish kites. Takao Maeda (the Kyoto dancer/guide) had told us that the kites are mostly flown in May. June is the rainy season, so guess they don't put them out in the rain??



Saw lots of flowers, both along the roadside and in resident's gardens. We got tickled because at several stops, older Japanese women got on and apparently all knew each other, because they all sat together in the front and just chatted non-stop! Like a coffee club meeting on the bus!! They all got off a separate stops too! Just a casual morning meeting of friends!



Started seeing lots of snow on the mountains in front of us.



We were following a rushing river up. It was such clear fast flowing water!



Once we arrived at the Shin-Hotaka Ropeway (bus pulled up right to the entrance, we stored our luggage in lockers (had to use 2 lockers at 500 yen apiece -not too bad, about \$12.50). Easily got on the first leg of the Ropeway and up we went! First leg was short -only about 4 minutes or even less, but quite vertical.





Arrived at the 1st station (at 1308 meters -4291 feet, there is a road to this station) and walked with the crowd straight over to the 2nd leg. It was twice as long and even steeper! This was a double decker car -the only one in Japan, possibly the longest and steepest in all of Asia. The top is 2156 meters (7073 feet).





We had hoped to be on the top level, but they load it first and we didn't make it. They have it lined up so that each level of the car is open to a boarding area. Didn't really matter, the view is the same, SPECTACULAR!!



We had a girl operator and she gave info on the way up, entirely in Japanese of course!!



Every time we went over a tower, the folks in the car would go "ooh and aah!!" Really cute.





We soon traveled above the snow line!!



The highest peak visible was Mt Nishihotakake at 2909 meters.



Once we arrived at the top, you could go to the 4th floor of the building to an observation floor, which of course we did immediately. It was a little windy up on top and we did have to leave on our coats, but it was just beautiful. There were a couple of guys there that would take a picture "professionally" with their camera and would also take one with your own camera, so we had them do that. We went ahead and purchased one of theirs too. The little doll is a specialty of the Alps area and brings good luck. The camera man also said it was a Japanese "grandchild!!!"











I could keep putting picture after picture, it was absolutely gorgeous up there. We had a fun experience to buy a drink downstairs.



There's a kitchen there that serves some food and drinks, however; they only took tickets, not money and you had to buy your ticket from the machine. The machine had pictures of the foods/drinks on the left and then corresponding buttons on the right. However, the buttons didn't show the pictures or numbers and had nothing on them except the Japanese characters! We finally figured out how to match the Japanese characters to choose the right button. Got our tickets, turned them in and the kitchen and WAH LA -they handed us our drinks!! Too Cool! Thank goodness for playing Mah Jong!!!





We spent a little time outside playing in the snow and finally decided it was time to head back down the mountain.



I took zillions of pictures -I will post them on my Shutterfly account!



One last picture -this was an interesting little thing -he acted like a hummingbird, but was very small. Not sure what he really was, but managed to get a picture. If anyone knows what he is, let us know!!



We got our luggage out of storage and got on the bus heading to Matsumoto. One last challenge, we had to get off the bus in Hirayu and find the other line, buy a ticket and ride that bus to Matsumoto. We made it without a hitch. Are we great or what??? The drive from Hirayu to Matsumoto went through lots of tunnels. Many were quite long. Apparently most of the tunnels are less than 10 years old. Looking on the

map, the road is higglysquiggly, but the tunnels just took us straight through. What a wonderful life! It was a glorious day!! We knew our hotel in Matsumoto was right across from the train station, but we weren't sure how close that would be to the train station. Turns out, it was even closer! They dropped us off at the corner of the building of our hotel! Could have been more perfect!! But I'll describe Matsumoto in another email.

Now it's time for bed!! **George & Pamela**

Subj: Japanese Journey #15 -Matsumoto
Date: 5/30/2012

Good Evening Family & Friends,

We are in the midst of the Shibata Roundup, but need to give you a description of our last stop on our own, Matsumoto.

But first I have to clear something up and save some face! In the email about Takayama, I posted a picture of the toilette in our Tatami Room. I admit, it really looked like a urinal!!! I even thought it was one when we first checked into the room, however!!! It was really a little sink for washing your hands after using the toilette!! I promise!! It is fairly common to have a little sink with the commode, if it is a separate room. As a matter of fact, in one hotel and I just found out from Kenji & Nobuko that in most homes, the sink water drains into the tank of the commode to recycle the water. Is that cool of what! Soooooo, anyway, since I got several emails asking about and laughing about the little urinal, I felt I had to explain!!! Ha!

So, Matsumoto was a neat little city, still considered a Gateway to the Japanese Alps. As I said before, the bus dropped us off right at the corner of our hotel, the Tokyu Inn.



It had the smallest of rooms we had experienced on this trip (still bigger than that one in Copenhagen if you remember the one we had to walk sideways to get around the bed!!), but had nice big windows looking out over the train station and city and served a nice buffet breakfast! Anyway, we dropped off our luggage and took off to walk around the city. I had done less research on this city than any of them, only knew that we needed to visit the Castle. So we started walking towards the castle and looking for the Tourist Information Center for ideas!



As we were walking along, we noticed this shop with these items in the window. We stopped to look at them sorry for the glare, but hopefully you can see them fairly clearly. We realized the entire shop was full of the same things. Small tubular items in a case. Prices varied from about \$10 to more than \$300!! Had no idea what it was. Showed the picture to Kenji & Nobuko and they immediately recognized it. Apparently everyone in Japan has a seal (or maybe you should call it a stamp?) and this store was selling personalized stamps. For example, Kenji & Nobuko had one for them together and they each have one as individuals. They are totally individualized. These stamps are actually accepted by the banks for their accounts, rather than a signature. Very interesting, had never heard of that before!





This was our first view of the Matsumoto Castle. More on it later. It took about 20 minutes to walk from our hotel to the castle. A very pleasant walk I might add. Like every other Japanese city, the streets were extremely clean and even the traffic seemed organized and precise!! The cross walks had lights that let you know how much time you had to wait before the light changed. Cool!



We located the Tourist Information Center and stopped for info. One of the attendants spoke excellent English and she marked a map for us on the high points and must see areas. We found that 2 of the main tourist streets were between the castle and our hotel (the Train Station area), so we just started walking back. This statue is at the corner of Namaste, one of the main streets. I had read on Trip Advisor that some called it Frog street because of this statue.



It was full of little shops and restaurants.
Don't have internet to Google it, but wonder if the street name means Frog? Because there were more frogs on the street in statute form!! And beautiful flowers of course!!



Turned down another main street heading back towards the station and found ourselves in the last remnants of Ice Sculpture contest. This was the last of the exhibits unfortunately. There was still some vendors around and we sat for a while to watch the people pass by. The only other thing I had found on my quick check of Trip Advisor was a comment about a huge clock that opened and had a display like a German cuckoo clock. Had not looked up where it was, but as we sat there and realized we were hearing music and seeing some movement, we had happened to sit right at the base of the clock!! It was 6pm and we got to see the show!!!! I took a picture of it the following day in it's closed position without the tents around it (but we weren't there on the hour so didn't see it again), so I'll give you the entire sequence!!









The ball, by the way, is something unique to Matsumoto. They are toys, made of thread and extremely beautiful.



I really hate to admit it, but a week of Japanese food and we were feeling a bit homesick. We actually ate supper at McDonalds. We actually never eat at McDonalds in the US, but the Golden Arches were beckoning and we were craving a touch of home!! Sooooo, we had a Big Mac & large fries!!



And apparently the Japanese were trying to make us feel at home, because we saw little black & white cows everywhere we looked!!! The shopping mall and the station was full of them!! Japan has such a safe feeling, we had no qualms about walking around alone at night, but finally headed back to the hotel to relax for the evening!!

One more day in Matsumoto to report and figure I'll do that in another email! Time is quickly flying by to the end!! It's sad!! Hate to see it end!!

Hopefully I can finish up this last day in the next email!!

Lots of love,
George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #16 -Matsumoto Continued

Date: 6/7/2012

Hello Everyone!!

Our full day in Matsumoto was really nice! We had lucked out and arrived here for the Annual craft fair. It's the biggest one in Japan and only happens on the last weekend of May. It was about a 20 minute walk from our hotel straight down the street in Agatanomori Park (old Matsumoto High School). We had slept in a little, but still got up at 8am to make sure we could get to Breakfast on time! Can't miss a free meal, you know!! We actually hung around a bit and made some Skype calls. What a wonderful system that is!! No pictures of that, though!



We walked directly to the main entrance what had police directing traffic for it. We didn't think much about it at first, but once we started into the area, we realized it was HUGE!!! Every time we turned a corner, we saw that there was another spider leg heading out! Our original plan was to stay on the right side and then double back to see the other side, but with legs going in all directions, that plan didn't work! Figure in 3 hours, we walked through about 3/4's of the whole area. Definitely saw items that we have never seen before (and probably will never see again)!!



Loved this. Actual granite stones that looked to have a zipper with stuff inside!! Bit heavy to bring home, but sure impressed!!



There were strangely dressed folks doing small demo's/dancing in different spots around. This guy (??) was stalking around in slow motion throughout the park.



And others were sneaking up on kids and making them squeal!





Loved the wood carvings. Very very realistic.



And these metallic creatures stepped out of someone's sci-fi fed mind!! There were folks melting lead to make interesting little creatures.





And cool musical instruments.



Found and chatted with an American from California that had lived in Japan 23 years. We bought his burrito (had to sign up in advance to get one! They were very popular!!) and George said it was the tastiest he had ever had! Had fresh mango in it. Great flavor!! One little side note -got to chatting with another displaced Californian living in Japan, she spoke Japanese, English, & Spanish (her husband was from somewhere in South America). What was interesting was that we ran into her again later that evening walking around the "Frog Street." Small world!



We walked back across town, crossing over the Metoba River that runs straight through the middle of the city (took about a half hour) to the Matsumoto Castle.



It tried to rain a little, but never turned into anything but a few spits. I had read about Volunteers at some of the major sites that would do guided English speaking tours. Sure enough as we walked in, there was a booth to request a free guided tour. It was 3:05pm when we walked up and asked if anyone was available. The manager there asked someone behind a curtain and he peaked out and said yes, he'd be glad to guide us. His name was Kenji and he was excellent. He told us he learned his English in Singapore and called it "slinglish." We laughed and mentioned about the "chinglish" we had heard throughout China!! But he was really very very good. Made it much more interesting to have info about the castle in English. There were some English signs, but not many. The castle is called "crow" castle due to its black exterior. It is a National Treasure of Japan, built in 1504. No one actually lived in it, mostly built for show of force.



It had several different sized holes cut in the walls, some for arrows, some for guns and some along the bottom edges to toss down rocks.



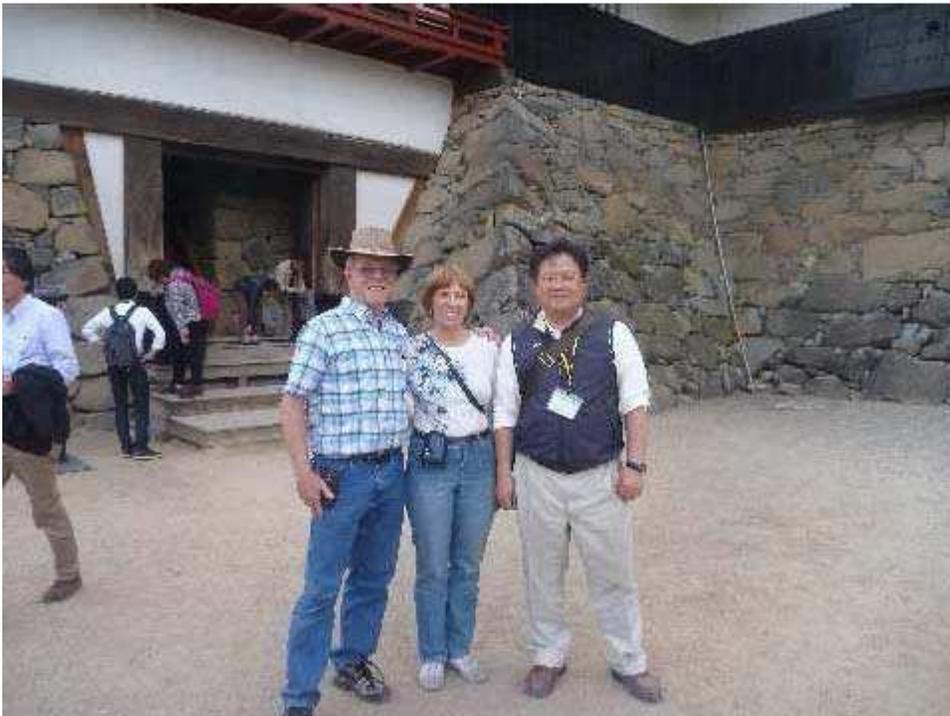
Views from inside were really good!





There were several really steep stairs to climb inside. There weren't a lot of people, but there was always a traffic jam to get on the stairs. Kenji said that normally there was a steady line of people through the entire castle tour. Glad we didn't have to experience that! Found out one really interesting thing -several times I had seen samurai soldiers in all their Armour and called them Darth Vador. According to Kenji, Darth Vador was truly based on samurai! So how about that?





Kenji told us he had really been released at 3pm, but decided since he had only gotten to do one other tour, he wanted to guide us. We were very appreciative! That's a nice program, certainly recommend anyone who visits to look for the Volunteer English guides (think there are several services, but our guide was from the Alps Language Service Association (ALSA)). We walked around the grounds a little while longer. Found a little shed with some gorgeous Bonsai plants. The azaleas were still blooming here too.







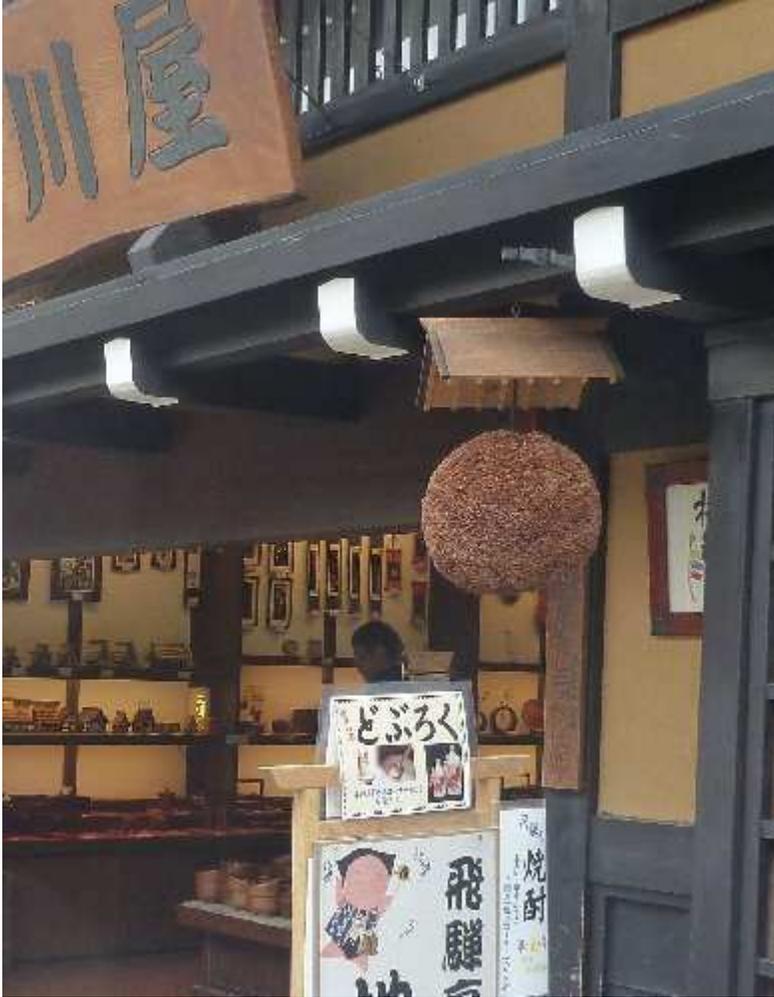
After wandering around a bit more, back down the Tourist spots, Nawate Street (back across Metoba River) and Nakamachi Street, we headed back to our hotel. Had dinner in an English pub!! Had a neat experience in the Pub. Sitting next to a table of young college age Japanese boys. They heard us talking and one slid over to help us with descriptions of the items on the menu (even an English pub in Japan has some not too common items on it's menu!!). They were all sharing something that on the menu said was potato salad. I don't think soooooo! Really enjoyable chatting with the young men. Don't think that would happen in the US! While George had pretty straight forward fish & chips, I ordered fried chicken which is a Matsumoto specialty -marinated in a soy based sauce & deep fried. Had a really odd flavor! Definitely not McNuggets!







Have to add this one bit of information. This picture is actually from Takayama, but didn't find out what it was until we got to Matsumoto! This wooden ball called a sugi-tama cedar boughs and traditionally meant that sake had recently been brewed! Pretty cool sign, huh? There were on several of the shops in Matsumoto also, but didn't get a picture.



Saw this cool antique shop and check out the old black & white phones! Too funny. Also don't think I mentioned before that we bought a bottle of water and had not really looked at it until I went to drink from it in our hotel room. It was imported water from Mt Shasta!!! Too funny!!



Love all the "happy cats." That's my name for them. Saw them all over China too. Most are not quite this big!! I had always assumed it was waving, but Kenji Shibata explained that it was actually motioning to "come here." They gesture to come with the palm down and fingers curled

rather than the way we do with our palm up.



This was quite an enjoyable city. Many things here suggested for visiting that we didn't have time for -Time Piece museum, City Museum, other shrines, but our memories of it will be wonderful! Only a few more days left in Japan!!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #17 -Hanno & RoundUp
Date: 6/7/2012

Hello from McCloud, CA! We made it back from Japan via LAX & Reno on Tuesday night. Went from high 80's in Tokyo to low 50's in Reno and then low 40's in McCloud! Too overcast to see Mt Shasta on our drive from Reno. But Wednesday was clear and in the 70's.

Can't stand to not finish up the descriptions of our last few days in Japan. They were just as good as the first few days!! First at breakfast, there was a cute display of origami on the counter.



We were right across the street from the station, here's a shot from the station with our hotel sign, Tokyu Inn, visible across the tracks.



This was a very small station, but still had a shopping mall & food courts. The stations in Japan have certainly been very functional! Are last train ride on our own was through lots of mountainous country. Kenji said we passed along the back side of Mt Fuji.



Kenji met us at the Shinjuku Station in Tokyo and then we backtracked to Hanno to spend a night within easy walking distance of Kenji & Nobuko's condo. One funny enroute. The weather had gotten pretty rotten, it was raining very hard. I looked out and saw the nasty green sky and it reminded me of storms back in Texas. I asked Kenji if they ever got hail and he said no, not usually. Within less than 5 minutes, we starting hearing hail beating on the train and bouncing on the road beside us!!! Kenji looked at me as if I had magical powers!! It was really funny. Luckily the bad weather only lasted a little while and it was already almost clear when we arrive in Hanno. We had a very nice room on the 9th floor of the Prince Hotel and could see their condo from our window. It's the white building in the center.



We walked over to their place for a relaxing evening visit.





Have to share this one really interesting bit of info. They have this unique parking system. It's a parking garage with the cars on metal shelves that slide back & forth and up and down to store. There is a motorized call box and they punch in their vehicle number and the cars move around like puzzle pieces to bring the car to the opening to be able to drive out. Should have taken a movie. It was really really cool! Of course they said that means they have to add at least 10 minutes to departure time to allow getting the car out, but what an innovative space saver!!! Assume they must have things like that in New York City, but never seen one before.





Nobuko fixed us supper, Sukiyaki -meat & noodles & vegetables cooked in a pot at the table. Very tasty!! Still struggled a little with noodles, but have fallen in love with the tiny long skinny bunches of mushrooms!!



Check out the bicycle parking lots visible from their deck!! We had seen several, but hadn't gotten a picture. Some were 3 times or more the size of this one! Almost like Amsterdam!



Anyway, had a nice visit with them and then back to the hotel for the night. The next morning we got up early enough to walk around a little bit -saw some little Finches, interesting statues and really complicated origami!!





They picked us up in the big van they had rented to get us to the Jyuraku Hotel in Minakami. It was north east of Tokyo and about a 3 hour drive from Hanno. Enroute we stopped for what Kenji called a Japanese burger, a specialty of this restaurant. Much like sizzling fajitas, they were served on hot metal plates and you had to hold up the placemat as a guard to protect you from the hot popping liquid! It was yummy!!





On to the hotel. It was in a gorgeous setting in the mountains.







Also a hotel with the traditional onsen (public baths). With Nobuko with me and Kenji with George, we finally tried them after supper. It was a fabulous experience. The baths are very very clean of course and the hot springs water was relaxing and enjoyable. They treat the baths as a family affair, and there are strict rules about using them. No tattoos allowed!! It is almost a ceremonial feel with the standard routine of washing off, getting in the hot bath, washing off again and another dip into the hot bath before a final wash/rinse and dry. Great way to relax before teaching for 4 days!! No pictures of that of course!!

The actual Shibata Round up started the next day about 1pm. It was divided into 2 sessions, but we taught the same dances at each. We taught our waltz, cha, & quickstep. Kenji & Nobuko taught their jive, rumba, & mambo. The dancers were fantastic. Lots of women couples and the woman dancing the man's part always wore pants. Some of them dressed in coordinated outfits. There was lots of laughing and their sense of rhythm was phenomenal. I told George I thought that was because there were so many women!! No men to get upset and up the stress level!! No offense men!! I took several pictures of the dancers from the stage. About 3/4 of the attendees were teachers. Such beautiful beautiful dancing!!







Just like any other festival we've been to around the world, the dancers would get together to socialize during meals and after the evening dances. We joined them anytime we could. Tried some sake and realized there is a large variety of taste -the free sake from our hotel in Hiroshima was not nearly as good as the stuff that one of the dancers offered us! Should have gone to a Sake tasting!! Oh well, maybe next time! One evening a dancer who is licensed (you actually required a license -how about that) to do a Tea Ceremony had us attend! She showed us how to sit on the pillows (my knees will never be the same!), how to mix the tea (adorable little bamboo whisk), and how to serve and receive the tea. Even rules for passing the little cakes and placing them on your napkin! It was really fun. Thrilled that she went to so much trouble to have us experience that! We loved the Japanese dancers. Hope some of them will come and visit us in Mesa! Have to mention two things -first: one evening there were demos by several of the attendees. **THEY WERE FABULOUS!!!** Just amazing talent! One couple demo's an Argentine Tango of their own choreography. At first I was excited that maybe we could teach it -then

the lifts started! Nope, not something we could do! Oh well, it was wonderful to watch! Second thing: Kenji smiles and laughs when he teaches/demos in Japan! A beautiful smile!! Have to harass him at RAR this year to make him smile when he's demoing! Nobuko of course always smiles, but Kenji definitely looked happier while teaching in Japanese!!

Almost ready to leave Japan! Only a couple of days left!!

Done for now!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: Japanese Journey #18 -Nikko
Date: 6/7/2012

And a final Hello to Everyone,

Our last 2 1/2 days in Japan were as good as the rest! The manager of the hotel led us over the mountains in a short cut to Nikko. It got colder & colder as we traveled up and over the mountains and east to Nikko. Even traveled up past the snow line!!



We stayed in the Nikko Lakeside Hotel (on the east end of Lake Chuzenji). It was overcast unfortunately, I'm sure the view of the mountains around us was gorgeous. We had nice relaxing evening with a lovely 5 or 6 course (lost count) French dinner (still couldn't pronounce the food - but this time it was French-Japanese food!!!). I even ate my course of fresh trout! What's happening to me??? I had forgotten to take my camera, so no pictures!!! There were supposed to be monkeys out back behind the hotel....I looked and looked but never saw them!!!



After checking out the next morning, we walked directly to the Kegon Waterfall in the Nikko National Park. I started raining just as we started walking over. Still got some beautiful pictures, but Kenji & Nobuko said that Curt & Tammy had sunshine! I'm jealous!!



Never saw live monkeys, but saw plenty of stuffed ones -so they must be here!!!



We drove down the mountain in the rain on really sharp switchbacks, called Skyline Road. Reminded me of the mountains in Norway! 15% grades!!! Incredible!



We had a heck of a time finding the hotel, Turukame-Daichi (Crane & Turtle) Hotel, in downtown Nikko. Our GPS kept saying 10 meters, then make a u-turn!! Finally parked and realized we were at the back entrance. Turned out that was the best place to park anyway, so they led us through the employee entrance and stored our luggage (too early to check in!). We headed out in the slight drizzle to see the 2 Shinto Shrines in Nikko that make it a UNESCO World Heritage site. The first one was Toshogu and it has 42 buildings on the list with 8 of them being considered National Treasures of Japan. The 5 Story Pagoda (nope not the same one as in Nara!!! Just looks similar) is beautiful with gorgeous carvings. Many of these carvings were done by the most famous artist in Japan in the 1600's. His carvings were said to come alive now and again.



The stable has a carving of the famous 3 wise monkeys -hear no evil, see no evil, & speak no evil. Even I was taught about them in my childhood!!



The Shrine was gorgeous.



We walked to the other Shrine, Futarasan. Decided not to pay to go inside this one, just looked at the outside gates.



We walked back into town and did some window shopping. They almost convinced me to have a Japanese popsicle, but I decided to save that for later!!! Much later!!



Enjoyed this precious little music box shop.



Walked on down to the Shinkyo Sacred Bridge. It is only used once a year by the Shogun family to enter the Fautarasan Shrine for an annual ceremony.



We continued on up the hill to the Kanaya Hotel. It was built in the late 1800's and had many many important world famous visitors, especially during the 1940's. Nobuko square danced there as a teenager!



We walked on down to the River Stroll.



Came back into the main entrance to the hotel and they had posted a sign with our names -well Kenji & Nobuko said it said George, party of 4!



We enjoyed a beautiful Japanese meal.



Some of it was better than others. At least according to my tastes!!



Love the beautiful plates/dishes. That is lotus root. It's not bad!!



Yum -here's the fish on a stick!! Yes, I ate mine too! It was actually quite good!!



Proof!!!



And that was dinner!! We enjoyed the meal and then relaxed in the Onsen on the top floor of the hotel. Both men's & women's had a covered outdoor bath too. That was really nice. Then back to our room to try a Nikko specialty. It was a pound cake like treat with gold dust in the crust. Yummy! These were tatami rooms, so for the last time of this trip, we got to sleep on the floor! Kinda felt like camping out!!!!



The next morning we were served a true Japanese breakfast. They met us as we came downstairs to have us choose our own fish!!! How special! George & Kenji had some, Nobuko and I skipped the fish. So one last meal picture -this was our breakfast in Nikko!! Humm? There was a tiny cup of yogurt on the side!! And a bowl of rice of course.



We had only a day left in this gorgeous country. Kenji & Nobuko had found a place a little further north and east.

Those pictures will be my last for this travelogue!!!

We just can't get any luckier than this!!!

Hang on for one more set of pictures!!!

Lots of love,

Subj: Japanese Journey -#19 Final day!!!
Date: 6/8/2012

Hi Guys!

Down to the final day in lovely Japan!! We didn't have a definite plan, just thought we'd get up and check the weather. It was a fine day, so we decided to drive to Nasu Flower World. It was about an hour and a half drive north and east. Nice place to stretch our legs and enjoy beautiful flowers and a lovely setting. Snow dusted mountains were all around us. The focus flowers right now were single poppies.



A bonus was that they were cleaning their tulip beds. Everyone was allowed to take 10 bulbs free. Have no idea what kind or color they were, but with the 4 of us picking a selection, they

should look good in Kenji & Nobuko's garden!! Would have been nice to bring some home to Mom, but no way to transport from one country to another -would have set off all kinds of alarms!! Check out the shoes the gardener was wearing!!! They wear socks like that too -made to use with thonged shoes!! But hadn't ever seen any garden boots like that!!!



Also had lovely lovely lupines!!





And what are these? Couldn't get an English translation -somewhat like Phlox?



Tulip pickers!!



I could post these forever, but we made one more really fun stop!! We went to a place called Trick Art Museum. It was great fun -Oh, one picture for Brother Dan!! Didn't find Godzilla, but did find King Kong!!

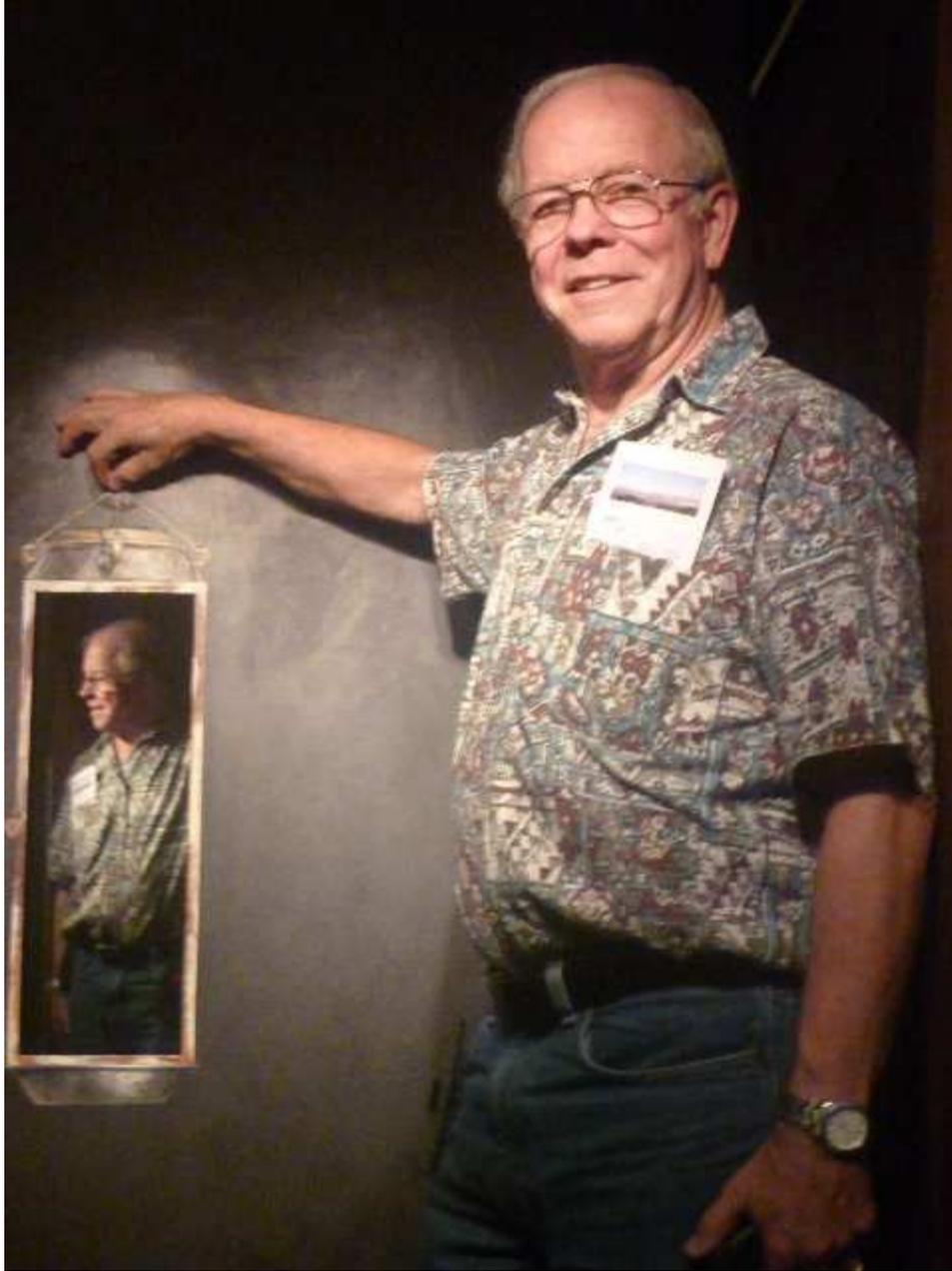


So on to Trick Art -feel sure I'm running out of photo space with AOL, so trying to wrap this up. Trick Art was a place that made 3 dimensional style art. There were many buildings, but the most fun was one that was set up to allow you to become a part of the picture. I'll have to load a folder of just these pictures on my Shutterfly or maybe Facebook! Anyway, here's a few of our favorites!!











Okay, so we were playing a bit like kids!! So nothing wrong with that, right? Great way to end our trip laughing!!

At last it was time to head towards Narita Airport. Kenji & Nobuko would have one last dinner with us and then they would head home (still had a 3 hour drive across Tokyo!!! Yipes!!). A last view of the Tokyo Skytree enroute to the Narita Airport Garden Hotel. A last memory of this awesome Japanese Journey!!



This has been an incredible trip. We have anticipated it for sooo long. Hate for it to be over!!! It was way way better than we could have possibly anticipated. All the Japanese dancers treated us like royalty. I have never ever been given sooooooooooooo many gifts! It was an unbelievable once in a lifetime experience. We are so very blessed. What a wonderful life we lead!!

And so until our next vacation! Hope everyone has a wonderful summer and please share with us your exciting experiences also!!

Thank you Kenji & Nobuko for setting up this stupendous vacation!!

Lots of love to all our friends & family!!



George & Pamela

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at my pictures on Webshots <http://community.webshots.com/user/pshurd>

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pamspicts.shutterfly.com>