

Post



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10,000 Torii Gates (but who's counting?) - April 20, 2023

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SUMMARY

Room service breakfast again. So civilized! Arrived at Osaka port to the beat of 3 men pounding on large Japanese drums - loved it! Boarded a bus for our excursion to Kyoto. First stop was the beautiful bamboo forest surrounding the Nonomiya Shrine. Learned that (in Japan at least) shrines are Shinto and temples are Buddhist. Next stop: the gorgeous Golden Temple which sits on a small lake then a set-menu lunch at a hotel. Last stop is the Fushimi Inari Taishi, one of Kyoto's oldest shrines. It's famous for the 10,000 red Torii gates on the

grounds. The effect is quite stunning!
Opted for a casual dinner of Mexican food. Our expectations weren't high and they were met. - Karen

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DETAIL

At 6:30am we awaken and we're motoring slowly into the bay of Osaka. Outside it's 64° which feels good and the water is glassy, very smooth, but sadly the sky is very hazy.

As we pull into port, there's a tall tower with a big white flashing letter F. We saw the same thing in Tokyo in a couple of places around the harbor. As we were departing, the letter F changed to the letter was O. Karen was thinking that the "O" might mean "OK. But that makes us wonder what it means when we're "F"'ed. We never did find out.

We have another good breakfast in our room, ordering less today. We have a long day of excursions, so we're up and washed and out early. The excursion buses are full and our guide at the front of the bus is telling us about Osaka in her pretty good to OK English. Tokyo is 10 million people (in Tokyo proper) to Osaka's 3 million. Japan has 100 million people total and if you add up the greater Tokyo and Osaka areas, you get half of Japan's population. hm.

That's a lot of people for a group of islands that's not getting any bigger. But the big concern of the government is the aging population, like in so many countries. The latest figures say that the population growth fell by 5% last year, which apparently is a big number. The government is very worried. But still, they did some good stuff. They raised the minimum age to marry from 14 to 16, with no limit on the age difference. This isn't stuff that our tour guide told us, but there was some news of late that makes this germane. Japan looks very peaceful from the outside, but it does have its dark side.

We don't get any good news on our hunt for Cherry blossoms. We hear about where they normally peak to the south and north and it sounds like we'll have to be happy with what we saw and look for azaleas now, and wisteria. Iris are next. What's big here are bamboo, and that's where we're headed, to a big bamboo forest. From the bus you can see big swaths of swaying bamboo just covering the hillsides. We're told that it grows quickly and is very invasive. If only the pandas in China were better swimmers.

In addition to bamboo forests we'll be able to see some temples, or is it shrines? The difference is explained to us. 90% of the Japanese population are Buddhist, and 90% are Shintoist. Which means a big percentage are both. Apparently most people aren't overly devout, so it's like "what'evs". But a temple is where a Buddhist goes to worship and a shrine is where a Shintoist goes. Got it.

There's a fair walk to the bamboo forest, through a forest of gift shops and other tourist magnets. There's lots of advertising for soft ice cream, which is a good thing, but this stuff is all green. We're guessing that it's green tea flavored, but who knows, maybe it's wasabi? Not sure I have a spare 300 yen to find out.

Apparently bamboo is big around these parts, as there are a ton of tourists. Everyone wants a picture of themselves with the bamboo. The only problem are the other gajillion people there also trying to take their own picture with the bamboo. It's not our favorite situation.

Thankfully there's a next stop which is the Golden Pavilion. Fewer people. The pavilion (not sure if it's a temple or a shrine) isn't solid gold, we're told, but the second and third floors are covered with sheets of solid gold leaf (that is, there's not much gold in there). There has been a golden pavilion here for hundreds of years. And this would be the original, had it not been for that buddhist trainee monk who burned it down. Whoops. His bad. Four years later they rebuilt it and that's what we're seeing now.

We drive to lunch, passing through one of four or five parts of Osaka known for housing and training geishas. They're not called geishas here, they're called geicos. I'm picturing a small gecko looking thing, but I'm probably wrong. Our guide describes what they do and especially what they (supposedly) don't do. She says that her father really liked to come to these parts of town when she was younger, but swears it was just for the sake. Hm. OK...

After lunch we go to the temple of 1,000 Torii Gates. You'd know one of these if you see one. Their purpose, we're told, is to divide the sacred part of a temple from the non-sacred (profane?) part. So if one Torii makes that big of a distinction, think what 10 or 100 would mean! So they make this Torii mountain with 1,000 Torii! Wait (they say) if you count all of the Torii on this mountain there are 10,000 of them! We're ready to call 'bull shit' but don't have time to count how many they do have.

Back on the ship we have dinner. Afterwards Karen reads and I go listen to the evening's musical program. It's the cruise director, who has performed all kinds of parts on Broadway. We hear songs from South Pacific, The Sound of Music, Evita, Frozen, and many more. Lots of fun. I behave and just have fizzy water with lime. Tomorrow's another big day (I'm guessing).

Photos



Motoring slowly to the port in Osaka



The closer we got the funner it looked,
complete with Ferris Wheel



There was a three piece band to greet us. Thumping drums. Great acoustics. This is the view (zoomed in) from our balcony.



Riding on the bus. The road signs looked a bit confusing. I'm sure I wouldn't want to try to drive here.



Rickshaw, that's more our speed. We didn't do it but we could have. It's a slight incline for the route. The book says they limit people to 75kg per person for a couple but they'll really go to 80kg. Many people on the boat are way over that.



Most people just walked. And that's a lot of people (too many!)



Everyone's goal was to get a picture with just you and the bamboo.



Next stop the Golden Pavilion. Rebuilt after it was burned down by that apprentice buddhist monk. Bad boy.



Another building on the same grounds. The tree in front used to be a bonsai but they eventually put it in the ground. 600 years ago. It's supposed to look like a boat... sailing west... towards nirvana.



Drove in the bus quickly past many temples and shrines.



and five tier pagodas. Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Heaven. Lots of fire (and necessary rebuilding)



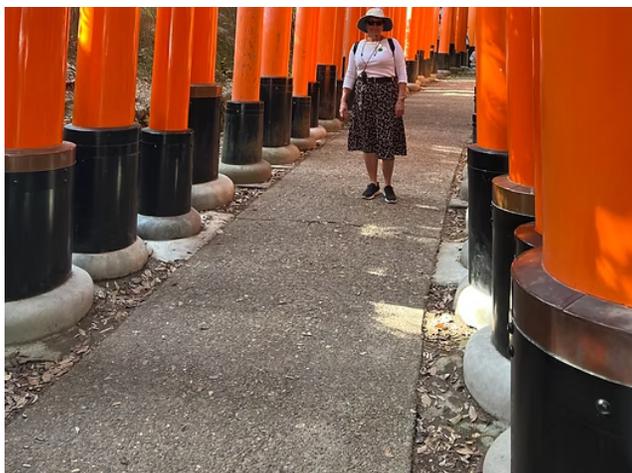
Our first Torii gate. 9,999 to go (we're told).



Very popular. Lots of people here. Many westerners. Everyone's goal? Make it look like no one is here.



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and then quickly take your picture with the gates



Alone or as a couple. Why so many gates?
Buy your way into nirvana. Same as it ever
was.



Another religious building back down from
all those 10,000 Torii Gates



Our cruise director back in her Broadway days (the one with the microphone). She sang for us that we're not to cry for her. She did such a great job crying was inevitable. [sorry, couldn't resist]

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