

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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# Lucky cats and bibbed Buddhas - April 21, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

We arrive in port in Kochi and are treated to a performance/greeting of music and (enormous) flag waving. Our excursion takes us first to Kochi Castle, a beautiful facility in black and white. Lots of stairs (are you sensing a trend?) to reach the castle and it's second floor. To reach the 5th floor observation level requires climbing multiple VERY steep staircases. These staircases make those in the Netherlands look like child's play! Next is the Castle Museum which is mostly an attempt to sell memorabilia (Museum Store) or food (Museum Café). We bolt in favor of a version of a food court for potstickers and beer. On to the Chikurin-ji

Temple, one of 88 on the sacred Shikoku Pilgrimage Route. We're told we have a great privilege to see the face of the Buddha in the temple which is only open to the public every 50 years. The face is actually hidden behind a cloth so we see only from the chest down. I try to clarify why they keep saying we can see the face. Scott tells me I'm acting like a "Karen" which causes hurt feelings and an end to my attempt at understanding. Excellent dinner onboard at Prime C Steakhouse, one of the ship's specialty restaurants. - Karen

[Photos](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

### ***DETAIL***

We are in Kochi, Japan today. As is their wont, the captain and navigator somehow work it out so we're gliding noisily into the dock just as we're all out on our porches enjoying our morning coffee. It's delightful. And these smaller ports, where we're the only ship in town for a few days, are happy to have us (and our tourist dollars) so they put on a show. In this case it's flag wavers and a cartoon geisha.

We do all the normal waking and eating. We get to our excursion on time. We're headed to the famous Kochi castle in the center of town. Off the bus we start climbing the 100 or more big stairs up towards the castle. In front of us is a big, impressive entrance. This is the castle's fake entrance, surrounded on three sides by sniper nest vantage points for archers. Very clever. There were indeed lots of stairs to climb. Our guide explains this is to make the castle harder to invade.

To go inside we're required to take our shoes off. We surmise that this would have also stymied some invaders. The building has very traditional Japanese features in amazing condition. To get to the top we have to take many sets of extremely steep stairs. With the merry band of overweight octogenarians from our ship, we were sure we were going to see (or be a part of) a bad tumble. But all's well that ends well. After the castle we walked around town and find a store. We look for glycerin soap (NutraGena), which we're low on. No joy. Probably a pharmacy thing.

On the bus, our guide told us about some of the local delicacies including imokenpi. Deep fried matchstick-sized, sweet potatoes. I asked a stocker, mid-stock, where they were and her eyes lit up at understanding the question and being able to help a foreigner. She took us to the Imokenpi section and held out her hands as if to say "ta-da!" She then scurried off in another direction, not back to where she had been stocking. We guessed that she was off to tell all of her colleagues about this amazing event.

We walked to our next meeting point, the castle museum. Along the way, at open stall stores, we see a wide variety of different sized Ginzu knives for cooking and yardwork. Beautiful scissors for doing bonsai trimming. Toenail clippers. Kitchen shears. If it needs cutting, they have the tool here for you.

The museum has one big claim to fame: a collection of the Mickey Mouse looking hats that were worn by the various emperors. That section is closed today. As recompense they give us a postcard with a drawing of a whale. We blew through the remainder of the exhibits fairly quickly. There were a few interesting things, but our inability to read Japanese limited their appeal.

We got back to what we do know: shopping. We head out and down the street to the indoor market space. It is covered and has many different shops, but also small bars and restaurants. One small café has a piece of paper with a picture of a beer, a + sign, and a picture of potstickers. All this for only 900¥ (US\$6.75). We're sold. They were so good we decide to have another beer. (We have to support the local economy, don't cha know).

Our next stop is a beautiful garden with a shrine, or maybe, vice versa. It's famous in this country, because there is a television show about the gentleman who designed the gardens. We gather that the show has romance, drama, and maybe some intrigue. All this and beautiful gardens. What more could any Japanese viewer want?

The shrine, or maybe temple, was a little confusing. They only open it up every 50 years. This year is it 1300th anniversary, so it's open the whole year (or maybe just one full month). In any case, we get to see inside. Yawn. They do have a braided golden cord hanging down in front of us that we can hold. It leads directly to the bodhisatva. Drop a coin the box (at least 100 yen) and you can touch the cord and get good luck. We're guessing there's no money back guarantee.

Outside, among other things, is a statue of a cat. If I heard the story correctly, this might be a cat that you've seen before. The cute one sitting up, holding one paw up in the air? This is the lucky cat. According to local legend this came about by local a family that had a cat which, ON IT'S CHEST in Japanese writing, appeared the name of the family. Extremely lucky. So now we have all these statues of cats with their paws in the air. Cat power!

Not to be out done by the 10,000 Torii of yesterday, this shrine/temple also has 1,000 Buddha statues. They're small. We see maybe a couple dozen. Again will have to take their word for how many there are. Many are wearing bibs. Why the bibs, you might ask (as did we). When a local family loses a child they need to take care of something small as a replacement, to fill the hole in their hearts. So they come and take care of one of the small Buddha statues. Sad and touching.

On our way back to the boat, walking through the building that houses customs and immigration, there are some shops. Earlier, on the bus, we were told of the types of local things you can buy in these shops. One of them is a saki cup with a hole in it. Who wants a saki cup with a hole in it?? The idea is that you hold the cup, stopping up the hole with your finger, and someone fills the cup with saki. You are then precluded from putting it down and ignoring it until it's completely empty. It's a combination sight gag, drinking game, and suitcase gift. Great Japanese fun. We defer to the small size, and current fullness, of our suitcases and leave the cups for future passengers.

Back on board the ship, we prepare for the 5 PM show on the dock by local dancers and musicians. We're up on the ship's deck five looking down at them and they're all dressed up in costume, one of them with a huge colorful flag. In each hand each dancer has a wooden paddle clacker which, as was explained to us on the bus, are great for scaring away crows and ravens. We don't see any nearby so they must work.

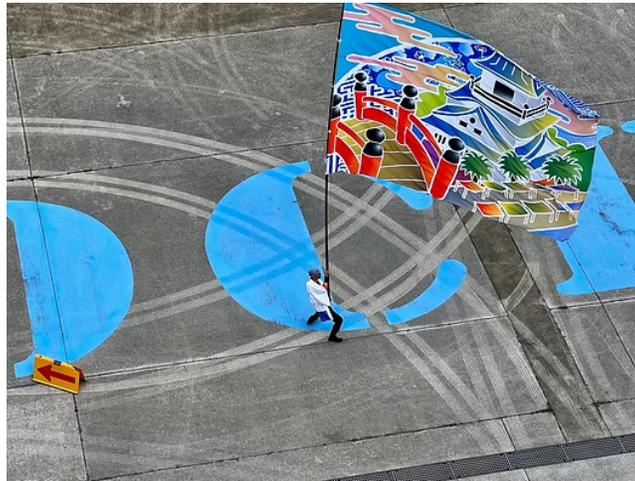
The dancers have amazing energy and are extremely into this. Very happy and cheerful. They dance for us up until the ship starts to leave at which point they wish us bon voyage and beseech us to hurry back, bring more money next time.

For dinner, we are scheduled in one of the specialty restaurants, the Prime C steakhouse. We studied the menu earlier and have decided on splitting an 8 ounce filet mignon. 4 ounces for each of us should be more than enough. Our waiter, in trying to figure this out, seems to imply that each of us getting a smaller (5 ounce) filet mignon, would be very close to that 8 ounces, and let's do that. We do and end up each eating about half our steaks. We're full.

The restaurant is alarmed at this. They think that maybe there's something wrong with the meat or their preparation. We assure them there's not. They promise us we can split an 8 ounce steak on our next visit.

Earlier in the afternoon, in the hot tub, we were chatting with a couple from Canada. We mentioned where we're having dinner. The gentleman hot tub neighbor indicated that when he eats at Prime C, he gets the "14 ounce Chateaubriand steak for two" just for himself, and yes he finishes it. We feel like such slackers.

## Photos



Flag to wake up by



Does this kimono make my head look  
big??



I don't want to run into this guy in a dark alley



Kochi Castle. That room, way up high?  
That's to where we climbed up.



Er ma gerd, this looks just like (what I had in my mind for) the dioramas I made in 4th grade.



Scott and Karen and Kochi





Deep fried sweet-potato fries! (You had me at "Deep fried sweet-potato fries")



You're not thrilled at me taking this picture, are you?



There's this great love story about this bridge (ask Karen)



These Columbine were bred specifically as a thank you for that guy who designed this garden.



Amazing pruning of azaleas! One tall bare stalk. And you get these flowers, and not much else.

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Lucky cats and buddhas with bibs. Say no more.



So many buddhas with bibs.



Karen ringing the big bell. I think after my inappropriate comment she wanted to ring my bell!



Are those lime slices on those dancers heads??

[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

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