

Post



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# The silkworms not eaten - April 22, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

We hit the gym and stretched for the first time in weeks. Arrived at Kagoshima port after lunch. Boarded our bus and were shown some of the city's landmarks including a statue of The Last Samurai, Saigo Takamori. First stop is at a silk weaving company where they make beautiful fabric that is turned into kimonos. Next is a drive up the hill to the Shiroyama Observation Point with beautiful views of Kagoshima Bay. As it is the weekend we don't get to stop at Shochu Brewery where we were supposed to enjoy a tasting of local sake made from sweet potatoes. - Karen

### ***DETAIL***

The calendar says it's the 22nd of April. That date sounds familiar because on the 22nd of February I had my last haircut, just before we left for our trip. Karen, too, had her hair done just before leaving. Now, two months later, in the mirror and in pictures, we see much longer hair. My barber is from South Korea and was going to be there during our trip. Sadly when she was in South Korea we were in Cambodia or some such place, and so I'm just living with my longer hair.

Karen, on the other hand, has taken action against her ever lengthening hair. She has scissors (mini orange, blunt point, collapsable, TSA-approved Fiskar scissors) and she trimmed up her bangs. She thought that she removed just the smallest bit, but after then washing and drying her hair, and inspecting in the mirror, her reaction is "oh, my". No one's complained so it's probably no big deal. I shouldn't even mention it.

Today will be a bit unusual in a couple of ways. We're at sea, but only til mid day. We'll pull into Kagoshima just after lunchtime. And we'll be parked at the dock for the rest of the day (with time for an excursion) and will still be there til about 2:45 pm tomorrow (with time for another Kagoshima excursion). We're now on the southernmost of the four big islands that make up Japan (along with over 14,000 smaller islands).

We have a leisurely morning but we do catch part two of the pair of Japan briefings. It's fascinating. The facts (and opinions) come fast and furious but we're able to jot down a few of them. It's common knowledge that the Japanese have public bath houses, but why? It turns out it's a matter of necessity.

Being an island there's not a ton of land and not a ton of resources. As such when you make a house (certainly in the old days) it's going to be small. Many were too small for (or the family income didn't allow for) a proper bath. And there's not enough fuel to heat water in every house. Thus you have the public bath houses. You wash yourself really well before you get in the public bath water since it's shared. And just as you can't heat lots of water, neither can you heat your whole house. And the rice paper walls don't keep in a lot of heat. So once you're in the warm water you stay there til you're heated to the core, then you run home and climb into bed.

We learn more about the religions and about the many festivals the Japanese have. One is like the hot dog eating competition, but it's to see who can drink a huge (fixed) amount of saki the fastest. There's a set quantity for men and a different (smaller) quantity for the women contestants. Apparently it's a raucous event. Where we're going they tend to have *Okyaku* year round. That's where friends and family gather and cook and eat together, in public, lots of people. It's just something they do.

Where we're headed is the most active volcano in Japan, if not the world. The city is a sister city with Naples and other cities with volcanoes. It's clear and sunny so it should be a good day to see the volcano. The regular eruption throws ash up with comes down on their fields. That makes the soil very rich. Guinness Book of World Records lists this part of Japan as the place where they grow the largest radishes. The largest recorded radish here was 46 kg, or just over 100 pounds.

After the briefing and lunch we shimmy up to the dock. It is a clear, blue sky day, which we've not had in a while. We're loving it. Lunch is special. It's being served on the area near the pool. It's a barbecue, so hot dogs, burgers, grilled chicken, German sausage, and on and on. In case you don't want any of that they have so much other stuff, like tacos and nachos. The servers are the captain and officers of the ship. It's fun to get to say hi and to meet them up close.

After lunch we're off the boat and onto our bus. Our pretty lady tour guide introduces herself and explains what her name means. Something like pretty lady or virtuous lady. But, of course, these Japanese characters have more than one meaning, so it could also be that she's named Strange Lady. She asks us a question and then explains to us how the Japanese answer these 'yes/no' questions. They don't do the thumbs up/thumbs down, but rather 'yes' is holding both arms up in a big circle, like an O, as in OK. 'No' is arms up again, but this time in a cross, like an X. Makes sense.

Beyond the benefits of big radishes, we hear the downsides of living near a very active volcano. She explains that there have been 73 official eruptions and 23 additional explosive eruptions. There are set definitions for each of these. An event isn't an eruption unless the smoke rises more than 3,000 meters. The morning news explains which way the ash will be falling. Based on that you either dry your clothes outdoors or in.

Our first stop is Amaminosato, a garden/silk factory. The man who set all this up was born on an island much further south. A small island. When the 2nd world war came to his island it wasn't safe so he moved everything here. He recreated the gardens of where he comes from. They're beautiful and go on forever.

The silk factory was amazing. They process the thread, in part, by repeatedly massaging it in the volcanic ash. We see ladies doing the weaving. This silk is mostly for kimonos, so the work is painstaking. Each row is carefully inspected before moving on to the next. These are expensive kimonos (worn by both women and men). We don't buy one.

We hear more about the volcano. Sometimes you carry an umbrella so you don't get the ash on you. And when it falls on your car windshield you can't run your wipers and wash it off. It's so caustic that it will scratch the glass. Such problems. They're waiting for the next really big eruption. The big ones are real problems. But sometimes they help. The volcano is on Sakura Island, which isn't an island. It used to be but with the last really big eruption the lava connected the island to the peninsula. Very convenient as a lot of people live on the 'island' at the base of the volcano.

Back on the bus our tour guide holds up a decal that looks like a leaf. It's light green and darker green. It's called a 'new leaf' decal and it's to convey this is a new/student driver. There's a similar decal with the colors of autumn, that's to show that someone's old and thus probably not such a good driver anymore. For some reason old people don't like putting these stickers on their cars.

We eat dinner outside on the ship at a small "restaurant" called The Patio. It's near the pool, though there's a roof over our head. It's nice and we have a good chat with the Floridians at the table beside us.

After dinner Karen tends to her reading and I again attend the main entertainment feature in the ship's big venue. It's a talented young man on the piano, with full band back-up, telling the story of how he got here, despite having severe stage fright and self-doubts. We've heard him in the bar and he is good. His set included songs by Elton John, Carole King, The Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel and others.

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## Photos



Cruising into Kagoshima we say "Hey, that looks a bit like a volcano!"



The cruise terminal. Sunny blue sky today, but from all the extendable walkways, they must get some rain, or something.



A cheerful Scott and Karen, likely dressed from the waist up only. Ready for the day.



One of the many life-like dioramas at the silk weaving plant, showing how it used to be done. In this diorama there are two ladies working (only one visible here) and one man, goofing off, playing some stringed instrument. All the guys liked that view.



Amazing garden and very blue sky



Proof that we were there



File photo, showing that the skies aren't  
always so blue



What the silk worms normally do (if we  
don't eat them)



Dyed thread from said silk worms



That thread being woven into fabric for a kimono



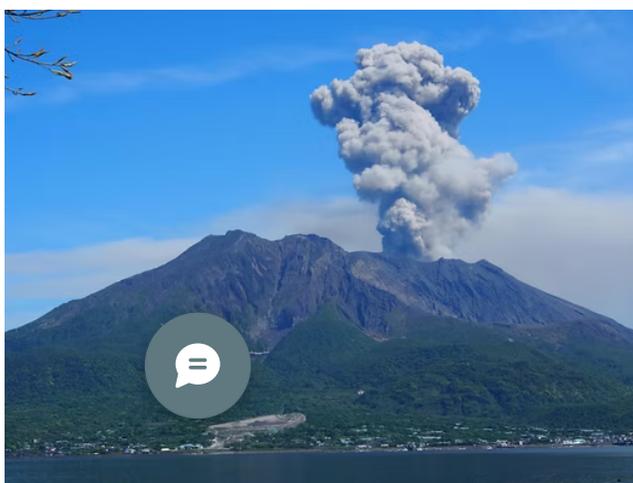
A torii gate



A non-torii gate. The wall behind still shows holes from when the Japanese invaded. Never forget.



Scott, Karen, and volcano



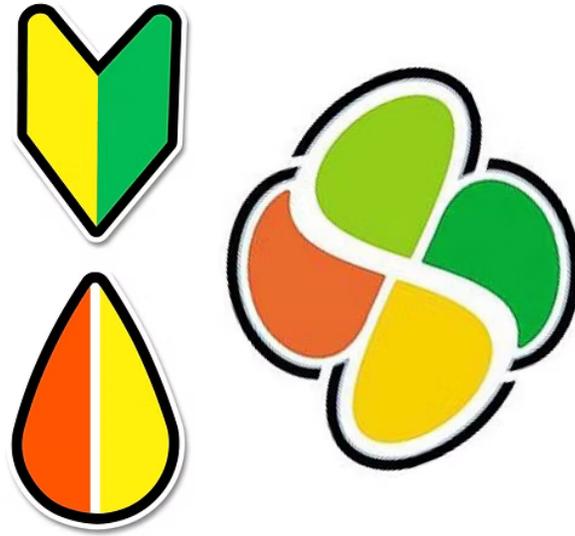
File photo showing a real eruption,  
throwing ash into the air



More cared for baby buddhas



Our tour guide, quite a few years ago, and one of the four outfits (costume changes) for the ceremony



Car stickers. Counter clockwise from top left: New Driver, Previous Old Driver sticker, New style Old Driver sticker



Cute old Mazda Karen found. Combination car and armrest.

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