

## Japan Travel Story 2014

Our previous travels took us many times through Japan's primary airport to get to China, Manila, and other places in Asia, but Nancy and I had only spent extended time in Japan three times and these were all trips for my meetings for the international IT in education project about 15 years ago. Our first trip to Japan took place in 1992, and we took a side trip to Kamakura. Our other two trips to Japan were taken in 1999 and 2000, which included a bullet-train trip to Kyoto.

Narita lies about an hour's drive north of Tokyo, and the hotels offer good, inexpensive bus service, door to door. Even though Japan has the most sophisticated and pervasive train service in the world, the system is not suitcase friendly, so we used buses to get from and back to Narita. Our main destination was Yokohama (about 20 miles south of Tokyo), but we spent one night in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo, before taking the train the rest of the way.

We were heading to Yokohama for the World Congress for the Int'l Sociological Association meetings, held every 4 years. About 7 thousand people attended from all over the world. I had signed up to give two papers and to chair a session on world suffering. All three sessions were held on the first day of the conference and two out of three went pretty well.

My Grandfather Stafford and his family stopped in Yokohama in 1909 on their way to Shanghai. He left dozens of black and white photos from their ship's stopover, many of them fea-

turing the culture of the Japanese people. I was anxious to see Yokohama.

### I. Sankeien Gardens in Yokohama

Our favorite place this trip turned out to be the *Sankeien Garden*, only a few miles from Yokohama City Center where we stayed. Built over a century ago as a huge, peaceful family estate, it had an inner garden for the family only and an outer garden open to the public. The family of a wealthy industrialist hired the best artists, architects, designers and engineers they could find to design and build the Garden. In 1925 the inner estate opened to the public as well. It remains a site for anyone to enjoy its natural and architectural beauty and unusual peacefulness.

Those who enter the estate first see a little lake with a Three-Storied Pagoda standing tall among the trees (Photo 1). On the other side of the main path lies a huge Lotus Pond filled with giant Lotus plants 6-8 feet tall with leaves two feet wide and dozens of large, pink lotus flowers. You will see that we got several good shots of the lotus flowers (Photos 2, 4-7). Nancy stands beside them in one photo, revealing the unusual height of the Lotus plants. Photos 8 and 9 show scenes from the inner garden.

The day we visited the Sankeien Garden, two wedding couples happened to be in the middle of photo shooting, so I joined in and captured some amazing images. Both brides wore a white *tsunokakushi*, which is a wide, white headdress or hood, which covers her elaborate wig or hairstyle. *Tsuno* means "horns" and the headpiece repre-

sents a covering of any "horns of jealousy" a bride might have (presumably now and forever), so that she enters her marriage with "openness and obedience." The wedding garb, surrounding beaming smiles, can be seen in Photos 3, and 10-13.

## **ii. Tokyo – Shinjuku**

Tokyo, the largest city in the world with 37 million people in the metro area, reminds people of Los Angeles, but has a very different feel. Its freeways are not jammed for 6 to 10 hours a day, although during rush hour, every train car looks like standing sardines in a can. Also, unlike LA where streets mostly follow a grid or a diagonal, Tokyo's streets wander around with little pretension of order.

Shinjuku claims to have the largest train station in the world, with 3 million passengers per day. Partly, it is so large because it is the main hub for trains to Kyoto and other parts of the country, but mostly because it is the largest business district as well as entertainment center in Tokyo. In a fairly level city, all of a sudden dozens of 30-60-floor office buildings, hotels, shopping centers and apartments spring up in a tight cluster. And nearby are opera halls and strip clubs and lots of bars and restaurants.

During our one-day visit, because of the very hot weather, rather than walk the district, we took a stroll around Shinjuku's Central Park on Sunday afternoon. Not only did we find a wonderful forested area, but a flea market and many families enjoying a stroll or watching their children play in the wad-

ing pool. Several of our best photos featured families having fun. You'll see some of these in Photos 14-18. Nancy captured the best photo of all, the sleeping girl on the kissing parents.

## **II. Yokohama**

Yokohama, a relatively new city, already has nearly 4 million people and nearly 10 million in its prefecture (county). Considered, 'Tokyo's World Port,' it lies on Tokyo Bay, about 20 miles south of metropolitan Tokyo. Minato Mirai 21, the name for Yokohama's main business and entertainment district, squeezed between Yokohama's main train station and the Bay, has been 30 years in the making. Originally a shipyard, it goes by the name "Minato Mirai 21" (MM21) that means 'Port of the Future, the 21st century.' MM21 is a huge area encompassing the convention center, 5-6 hotels, 100s of shops and restaurants, and many tall commercial buildings. About 90,000 office workers cram through the MM21 train station every working morning and evening. Photos 19-28 capture the tall buildings and the scenes taken from them.

On the weekends MM21 feels packed too because thousands of families arrive to explore the harbor and to enjoy the Cosmo World Amusement Park (See Photos 21 and 22). This Park, on the edge of the water, can be seen all over the City because its Ferris wheel height reaches that of a 35-story hotel. At nearly 400 feet, it is the 15<sup>th</sup> tallest in the world. (Las Vega put up the largest this year.) The changing lights of the Ferris wheel light up the night sky even though the wheel goes around on-

ly once in 15 minutes. Minato Mirai 21 attracts over 60 million tourists per year. Nearby are cruise ships, docks and the graceful Yokohama Bay Bridge, which you can see in at least one of the pictures.

The Hama Wing wind turbine (Photo 28) in Yokohama Bay has a rotor diameter of 260 ft. and the tower is 387 ft. tall, which is just a bit taller than the 369 ft. Cosmo Ferris wheel in Yokohama's MM21. The wind turbine produces enough power for 860 homes. Hama Wing is among the world's largest turbines, but its main purpose is to suggest that the MM21 neighborhood is environmentally friendly.

The Landmark Tower and "Sky Garden" is the tallest building and lookout in Yokohama (Photo 20.) We took the fastest elevator in Japan reaching the 69th floor lookout in 40 seconds. All four sides of the building's lookout offer amazing views on a clear day of not only Yokohama, but also Tokyo and Mount Fuji. As skies all week were hazy, like most of our previous visits to Japan, no Mt. Fuji.

Yokohama Marine Tower, the tallest lighthouse in Japan and the 3rd tallest in the world, rises skyward to a height of 106 meters with lookout floors at the top. Built in 1961, it still functions as a lighthouse guiding ships into the harbor. Also, it marks the hills where many of the City's old mansions sit. Most of these mansions were built by the British in the early 20th Century, but had to be completely rebuilt after the earthquake of 1923 that nearly destroyed Yokohama forever.

### III. Kamakura

While I went to meetings, Nancy worked at her regular job for a good portion of each day. Toward the end of the week, we took a half-day off and took trains to Kamakura, about 45 minutes south of Yokohama (including a change to a local train). During the trip we saw almost no undeveloped green space, making it seem like the city never ended. Within a hundred years, some predict that all of Japan could easily be one single metropolis, with a few, tiny gardens.

Nancy captured the girls with cell phones on the train (photo 29). Of course, occasionally they talked to each other. However, one young woman watched a movie on her cell phone while walking over 100 feet down a moving escalator, never looking up.

Japan's train system is a world wonder, if you read Japanese. As some of the signs of names of train stations appear only in Japanese, we had to try to memorize and match the Japanese characters from a guidebook, but then make an intuitive guess. Most of the time, it worked; several times we could not have made the transfer if a polite Japanese that spoke English had not come up and asked if we needed help. To navigate, you also have to be able to read a map. E.g., the Shinjuku Station has over 200 separate exits and 35 tracks.

Most tourists go to Kamakura just to see the Great Buddha statue known as Kamakura Daibutsu (See Photos 32 to 33.) It sits about 100 feet high and weighs 121 tons. Built in 1252, now it has become a national treasure and the biggest tourist draw in Kamakura.

Our favorite attraction in Kamakura was the Hasedera Temple and Garden. Walking there, we encountered a mailman delivering mail to the residences (photo 30). His job is made harder by the fact that many, if not most, houses have no house number. A proper address only need contain the name of the neighborhood, not the road name or house number. Around the corner I captured a Japanese cement truck (photo 31); all are about half the size of American cement trucks.

The Hasedera Temple contains many statues, temples, and beautiful flora. Japanese architecture feels peaceful and gives splendor. Here landscaping feels like an art form. The focal point of the temple grounds is the main hall with a 9m-high, carved and gold-painted statue in the front-center. During our visit at 11am Friday morning, the temple was packed with about 100 people in street clothes sitting and listening to the monks chanting in monotonous. Instead, we took advantage of the Japanese Tea House Cafe with a panoramic view of the town and long beach.

Kamakura fills with crowds of Japanese on the weekends because of the long beach near the center of the 130,000-person town. Photo 43 shows two girls taking a selfie on the beach. Their camera sat in the sand about 15-ft away while they leaped arm-in-arm together into the air for their photo.

#### **IV. Narita**

Naritasan, a Shingon Buddhist temple located in central Narita, was first built in the year 940. Actually, the temple contains a collection of about 15

halls and temples with a large forested park taking up a huge hillside. Naritasan lies near the International Airport of Narita and next to the old town of Narita, which has both narrow, picturesque streets and suburban-type apartments and car dealerships. We tried to get there by city bus but missed our stop. Fortunately we were able to find taxis to get in and out.

Just inside the entrance, the beautiful, 300-year-old Three-storied Pagoda exudes exquisite color (See photos 44-45.) Many other buildings appear more modern but also serve as symbols of harmony and peace. An eternal incense burner stood in the center, which is where the little boy had joined hands in respect (See Photos 47-48.)

As we wandered through the park, the rain started to come down in full force, so we sought shelter under the eaves of the Great Pagoda of Peace (Photo 51), which stands out because of its size and the huge gold spire. The rain let up a little, so we continued our pilgrimage, taking pictures of the Pagoda in the rain.

You can see by the umbrellas in the photo of Shakado (also Buddha) Hall (Photo 52) that many people came prepared for rain. The rain had its beauty especially as big drops landed on the large green leaves of flowers around the temples.

A woman walking by us with an umbrella took pity on our rain soaked condition and gave us her umbrella, saying she lived nearby. It was a very kind and compassionate gesture, which would not likely occur in any other country or culture.

## **V. Other Observations**

As the last story illustrates, politeness cannot be escaped in Japan, nor can respect. Both men and women always bow or lower their heads at the beginning and ending of every transaction. In Yokohama, every time we entered or left the dining or coffee/tea area, the staff would rise from their desks, bow their heads and say “Thank you very much.” Of course, being respectful people, we did the same thing in exchange.

What I learned while in Japan this time, from reading and talking to Japanese at the world sociology congress, is that the Japanese, more than most other nationalities, have two separate identities, the individual self and the social self. As part of their socialization, children learn to conform to social norms and rituals that show their loyalty and respect for family, friends and nation,

but when it comes to their own living space and decisions about their personal lives, they can be fiercely individualistic. Incidentally, most Japanese support physical punishment of misbehaving kids by both parents and teachers. Even more importantly, the cultural understandings somehow convince the children that they deserve the punishment but are loved by the entire family. Neither hard punishment of children, or the expectation that mothers should stay at home with the children rather than return to the workforce, seem likely to fade away in the near future in Japan.

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## Japan 2014



*01 Yokohama Sankeien Garden - Pond with Three-Story Pagoda*



*02 Lotus in Full Bloom in Sankeien Garden - Yokohama*



*03 Sunkeien - Coy Bride with Tsunokakushi Headdress*

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*04 Strolling among the Giant Lotus in Traditional Dress - Sankeien Garden Yokohama*



*05 Two Pink Lotus Blooming Buds - Sankeien Garden Yokohama*



*06 Nancy and the Giant Lotus Patch in Sankeien Garden - Yokohama*

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*07 Lotus Bud at 8 ft tall - Sankeien Garden - Yokohama*



*08 Sankeien Garden Monument of a Shogun for the Health of his Mother*



*09 Sankeien Garden - Yokohama -Forest Flowers*

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*10 Bride Close Up with Tsunokakushi Headdress*



*11 Wedding Couple with Parasol*



*12 Wedding Couple at Sankeien Garden Yokohama*

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*13 Wedding Couple in Sankeien Garden in Yokohama*



*14 Shinjuku 50-story for 3 vocational schools - named Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower*



*15 Sleeping Girl During Kiss - Tokyo Street*

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*16 Shinjuku Sunday Bike Ride*



*17 Shinjuku Central Park Forest*



*18 Shdjuku Business District - Tokyo*

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*19 Yokohama Harbor at Dawn 15July14*



*20 Landmark Tower Yokohama*



*21 Ferris Wheel Yokohama Harbor 15jul14*

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*22 Harbor Midway at night 15july14*



*23 Yokohama City - Eastern view 15jul14*



*24 InterContinental Hotel and Board from Landmark Tower in Yokohama*

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*25 Yokohama Bay Shipping Cranes and Freeway*



*26 Yokohama Bay Bridge*



*27 Yokohama Marine Tower*

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*28 Hama Wing Wind Turbine in Yokohama Bay*



*29 Girls n Phones on a Train to Kamakura*



*30 Kamakura Mailman Delivering to Un-numbered Houses - 17jul14*

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*31 Baby Cement Truck in Kamakura*



*32 Great Buddha with people - Kamakura, Jpn 17jul14*



*33 Great Buddha and watermelon - Kamakura*

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34 Tiny Temple next to Great Buddha in Kamakura 17July04



35 Great Buddha Head Only - Kamakura, Jpn 17jul14



36 Gate to Hasedera Temple - Kamarkura

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*37 White Lotus Flower at Hasedera Temple - Kamakura*



*38 Lotus Flowers n Pods at Hasedera Temple - Kamakura*



*40 Bamboo Forest at Hasedera Temple - Kamakura*

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*41 Flowers by Forest in Hasdera Temple Grounds - Kamakura*



*42 Kamakura Town Seaside*



*43 Girls taking Selfie on Kamakura Beach*

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*44 Three-storied Pagoda - Naritasan*



*45 Lower roof of the Three-Storied Pagoda in Naritasan*



*46 Naritasan Park Forest*

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*47 Incense-burning Fire Pot - Naritasan*



*48 Boy at Temple*



*49 Forest light and dark in Hasedera Temple - Kamakura*

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*50 Flowers in the Rain - Naritasan*



*51 Great Pagoda of Peace - Naritasan*



*52 Shakado (Buddha) Hall - Naritasan in Rain*

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*53 Chinese Trumpet Flower - Naritasan*



*54 Purple Flower at Naritasan Hasedera Temple - Kamarkura*