

John Sinclair and Tokiko Dawson's
Japanese Study Tour
15th to 31st October 2017
Diary



We saw thousands of these banners during Stage 1 of our study tour proclaiming the aspirations to World Heritage listing of most natural parts of four Japanese sub-tropical islands

The 15 days of our 2017 Japanese journey had four distinct stages:

1. Assessing the World Heritage issues in the southern islands of Japan;
2. Visiting Hakone with the President and Founder of the Ashinaga Foundation
3. Visiting the Tokiko's (Su's) home village of Uganji and meeting her family
4. Visiting Ise a site of great cultural significance.

Stage 1

Assessing World Heritage

Sunday 15th October

It was raining as we left Brisbane with more forecast in the coming days. Qantas had overridden the window seats we had reserved and thrust us into the middle of the plane. It was raining when we arrived at Narita. Narita was Narita— clean efficient with something of a sterile quality. We cleared migration customs. The Japanese organization is something to be admired. We negotiated the kilometre plus walk from the plane gateway to the Customs-Immigration hall with the aid of multiple travellers.

Narita is over 70 kilometres from Tokyo centre so we opted to stay there. The bus to the hotel arrived on time at the designated bus stop (there were forty) outside the airport.

The ingenuity of Japanese engineering in the plumbing that goes into the toilets and showers is something to bewilder and admire. Alas our shower didn't work but it was nice to unfold and unpack in the economy size room at the Narita View Hotel after the flight.



Su and Fearless Leader in Japanese flight mode

*Above the grey clouds
The sky is blue and sun shines
Not all is gloomy*

Monday 16th October

We had plenty of time to catch our 12.30 flight to Amami Oshima. We needed it all as we left our ANA hotel (Narita View) and went back to the Airport for breakfast despatching some luggage to Uganji, getting a Japanese Sim Card, shuffling between the Terminals before boarding the bus for the wet trip to Haneda Airport. It was an hour and a half and took us on a freeway just east of the Tokyo CBD but we saw little because of the rain and the sound barriers that are also a barrier to visibility.

We wasted no time because it was pretty much straight on to our flight. I was surprised that the 737 was packed full for the 1274 kilometre flight heading SSW. It is further than Brisbane to Sydney and almost the distance Brisbane to Cairns. It was all over water from take-off to landing. But even at 37,000 feet (7 miles high) for the first part of the journey we were in cloud. I was the only Westerner on board. I had intentions to work so I took out my computer. Because I didn't use it at all I forgot about it when we landed and left it on board. Because I didn't know that people at the airport (speaking in Japanese) were trying to locate the owner of a lap-top we went into Amami City on a town bus before I discovered it missing.

Instead of typing I did spend some time working on a few of Haiku all based on the clouds and the weather:

*Droplets of water
Suspended in the atmosphere
Affecting our moods*

The first thing we noted as we drove at a maximum of 50kph to Amami City were plants familiar to us, cycads, pandanus and the weeds, casuarinas and Luecaena but we kept noticing them.

The other outstanding feature were all of the dead "stags" from the forest. I recognized them as pines but they emerged well clear of the canopy of the dense sub-tropical rainforest. At first I assumed that it was part of a program to cull what I thought were exotics in the interest of World Heritage which the islanders are enthusiastically pursuing, but I was mystified by how anyone could have got to so many trees on such steep terrain. We later learnt that a self-introduced beetle was wiping out these pines.

I later learnt that there are two endemic species of native pines in Japan and these are Black pines. They seem to prefer lower elevations and on soil disturbed by landslides our humans but in fact they occur right through the forest. Luckily the beetle that has so decimated the pines seems to be limited to Amami. However it is symptomatic of the

priority given to protecting fauna with seeming indifference to the vegetation. No mention was made anywhere of the impact of this invasive pest or how to deal it let alone quarantining the other parts of the proposed World Heritage sites to prevent its introduction there.



The black pines, endemic to Japan are being wiped out in Amami due to the introduction of a beetle

*Typhoon moves closer
Towards our Archipelago
What chaos awaits?*

Tuesday 17th October

Like many villages and settlements here Amami City is wedged between the sea and the steep surrounding mountains with the suburbs being connected by road tunnels. It is also a city that lacks any form of town planning except around the waterfront. Our hotel is a tower block adjacent to the main port where we can witness the comings and goings and rapid turn-around of the ferries that service this island. We gained the impression that Amami isn't as prosperous as other parts of Japan that we have experienced.



Our encounter with *Thespesia* that was common around the coast of all four islands

Our first mission of the day was to retrieve the computer but that I had left on the plane. But before we could do that we first had to collect a rental car. That accomplished we set off to the airport in some mini Nissan but not one of the more common box cars.

The Prefecture Visitor Centre was just near the Airport so one we had retrieved the computer we called in at this stunning architectural edifice to see what we could learn. There are two Prefectures covering this chain of islands. This one was established the Kagoshima Prefecture 16 years ago. There are two parts, one is an art gallery with an admission fee. Its appearance and presentation whetted my curiosity. It consists of three large connected galleries standing above a shallow reflective pond. Although I didn't look inside the galleries but the impressive engineering and the structures looked as if they would have won many architectural awards.

The main part was a dome with hemisphere roof supported by huge arches of laminated timber. Those exposed beams were "Wow" items. Inside there was a souvenir shop and lots of interpretative displays about life and culture of this part of Kagoshima prefecture with separate interpretations for each of the six inhabited islands in this prefecture. The exterior looked grotty but it used coralline bricks that quickly stained by mould (Cyano bacteria). The architecture used the same local material and practices as locals have used for generations to protect themselves from typhoons using coral rock barriers around their homes.



The Prefecture Visitor Centre close to the Amami airport attracted most of the 100,000 island visitors

Statistics are very hard to obtain but it seemed eerily quiet when we arrived and I wondered about the justification of this multi-million dollar structure. I was assured that because it was near the airport most of the tourist visitors to Amami Oshima visited the place. The suggestion was that

was about 100,000 per year. My scepticism abated when I saw more cars in the car park as we emerged. The place looked a little grotty on the outside but then I discovered that every part of the design, building materials and landscaping had a cultural significance. That discovery made me admire the black staining on the brickwork. Sadly the Prefecture Visitor Centre had only limited reference to the World Heritage nomination which is being touted at the airport and on banners on the highway so to learn more about World Heritage and the issues involved we drove back through Amami City to the Amami Wildlife Conservation Centre, run by the Ministry of Environment.

We stopped for lunch beside a small but run-down fishing port. There seemed to be many unused facilities for markets and sports events that have been long abandoned. However to my surprise I recognized a *Thespesia* growing side by side with a cottonbush. Having just become aware of *Thespesia* with our recent discovery of it on Fraser Island this was a significant observation making me aware of the Kurushio Current that flows from the tropics making these islands so warm and humid. Our nights are very sweaty without air conditioning.

Subsequently throughout our tour of these Southern Islands we were to encounter *Thespesia* in many places, even thickets of very tall *Thespesia* growing in Iriomote.



Fearless Leader with the Manager of the Wildlife Centre, head Moongoose Buster and senior Ranger

Our unannounced visit to the Wildlife Centre excited interest and soon we were in spontaneous interactions with three of the senior staff, two of who had English understanding. I assessed that one was the head of the Centre and the chief Prefecture representative on the island. The second one was a Mongoose Buster (roughly equivalent to a Dingo Ranger) but with a wider responsibility for natural resource management. The third, Yasuto Chiba was a Ranger with the Ministry of the

Environment who had some significant role in preparing the World Heritage nomination. We learnt that the IUCN had just inspected the site and wasn't supportive of the nomination of the mangrove area. When we learnt that despite the appeal of this from a Japanese perspective the site contains only two species of mangroves which doesn't measure up very well on a global scale.

There seems to be a heavy emphasis on fauna with not a lot of attention being given to the flora, particularly the invasive weeds. The main concern is with the Indian Mongoose introduced to the island to control the Habu (a venomous viper). However like the cane toad it has largely ignored its intended target and preyed on vulnerable wildlife such as the endemic Amami rabbit and other endangered birds and mammals. There are estimated to be 30,000 Mongoose now living in the wild and there is a concerted "Mongoose Busters" program to eliminate them from the island by 2020. Already the reduction in mongoose numbers is being rewarded by an increase in populations of threatened species.



We learnt about the program preparing for World Heritage listing next year and around the island there are banners promoting "To World Heritage". We were impressed by a 15 minute video highlighting some of the fauna and the management issues associated with them but nothing on flora which I suspect has been much under-rated because it has been studied much less. I didn't think that there was a full understanding of what World Heritage might mean in terms of visitor management



The displays were relatively inexpensive but effective

We were most impressed by the whole Visitor Centre with its theatre and displays. It wasn't as grand and as interactive as the prefecture Centre or as well located to capture visitors but it provided a wealth of information about the natural resources of Amami Oshima and prepared us well for the morrow's forays to explore the interior of the island and its natural values



The endemic Amami rabbit is now in threatened due to the predation by the introduced Indian Mongoose



Paranoia about Japan's only venomous snake, the Habu viper, saw the introduction of the Indian Mongoose that has devastated native fauna in these islands since 1979



14 men are employed in a program to eradicate the mongoose using trapping methods only

Wednesday 18th October

Our mission for the day was to sample the natural resources of the island particularly to examine the World Heritage values that it had been identified for. The first stop was to climb into the mountainous area at the core of the World Heritage nomination. To our surprise there were dead-end bitumen roads providing access to many parts of the interior. These are well used by the Mongoose Busters.



This little used campground in the Amamigunto National Park offers on site tents and a kiosk

The Mongoose eradication program began in 2005 and has made a significant difference in improving the populations of endangered species. We caught a glimpse of a Mongoose and photographed one of the many traps set along the roads. We also passed Mongoose busters branded vehicles suggesting the activity of the 14 or so warriors to rid the island of this menace. They also have the benefit of roads carved through the forest during war-time to access deep into the thick rainforest. Our destination was the highest mountain on the island. It is over 700

metres in height. We didn't make the final ascent that is done on foot.

We saw a lot of forest and a lot of birds. Birds are almost absent from the settled area and the coast. It was amazing not to see any gulls or terns although many of the roads we traversed hug the coastline. We later inquired at the desk of our hotel and were advised that there were no seabirds (gulls and terns) to be seen in Amami. We saw one lone Intermediate Egret which has us wondering why the coastal bird population should be so bereft. There were a few corvids in the forest and we saw at least 20 species of birds most of which we couldn't identify — a large pigeon, at least one raptor and some doves, the most frequently seen looked surprisingly like our Bar-shouldered dove.

We stopped at a camp ground which seems little used and at a waterfall which despite the good access also shows little evidence of much visitation. It was here that we learnt that the National Park has only been declared over this area in 2017. It is all new and relatively pristine. In contrast with our drive yesterday there were relatively few weeds and relatively few pine wildings. However there is evidence of the beetle's presence to provide some biological control. On our drive we were particularly focussed on the flora. Most of it unfamiliar except for the hibiscus in flower and the tree ferns. There were also some trees that seemed to be part of the sequoia family.



The core of the Amami Oshima part of the World Heritage nomination is the mountainous Amamigunto National Park that supports dense vegetation with a relatively low canopy

We were astonished by the scale of quarrying operations but were later advised that these are being done to build a new air-force base. After leaving the Mt Yakudake area we had a pleasant drive crossing the island on the Hibiscus Highway and then back to Amami City via the Mangrove Forest that has spawned a popular tourist

destination for kayaking tours. I thought of Butch Titmarsh's mangrove tours and how popular they may yet become.



The four components of the proposed World Heritage site stretch over 700 kms

Thursday 19th October

There is little to report for today as we moved from Amami Oshima to Okinawa. We caught a bus to the Airport that was touting the prospect of World Heritage listing. Once in the Airport we discovered that our flight to Kagoshima had been cancelled and we waited an extra two hours without wifi which was infuriating as I was desperate to comment on the World Heritage Assessment that is in a Dropbox that I can't access. Waiting in the Amami airport I realized that I was not aware of sighting any other Westerners for the three whole days we have been here. That may change with World Heritage listing.

The four islands containing parts of this World Heritage proposal spread over a large distance. Iriomote is over 2,000 kilometres from Tokyo but only 332 from Taiwan.

The day was almost a wash-out as I couldn't access wifi until we belatedly reached Kagoshima and finally I was able to receive a copy of the document in Word from Sue Sargent. I was able to work on it until we arrived in Naha, the main city of Okinawa with a population of 325,000. The grandeur of the high rise buildings were like any other modern city but the heat and humidity narrowed down the options. Honolulu sprung to mind but the signs in Japanese and the small Japanese cars were a dead give away.

We caught a bus to Nago the second City of Okinawa in the north of the island with a population of 62,000. It was a tedious hour-long drive on an airport shuttle bus especially at night.

Friday 20th October

We have been waiting expectantly for Typhoon Lan that has been building up and heading our way but so far we have been spared any disruption to our plans. Today proved no exception except that as we drove back into Nago the wind had begun to pick up sharply and after delivering the car we experienced

a squall. We will be keeping a weather eye on the Typhoon but believe that we will miss it.

The Toyota Car Hire vehicle was a hybrid Corolla. It was very nice to drive but while it had every other feature it didn't have cruise control which would have been very helpful to keep within the law in a country where the speed limit even on the expressways is 50 kph. In many places it was down to 40 and even 30. It was a challenge.

Before I left the Car Hire Company office they attached two magnetic logos front and back indicating that I was an elderly driver. Initially I thought was an affront but then I warmed to the idea of (a) having some sort of priority and (b) being forgiven for minor transgressions. I am now thinking of procuring some and attaching them to Sujo when I get home. Su also thinks that this display of social dispensation for the elderly might grace her car too. We can take orders.



The Fearless Leader beside the symbol for the elderly

Our first destination was the Yambaru Wildlife Conservation Centre run by the Ministry of Environment. Our inquiries quickly resulted in Takuma Kaito coming to the counter and spending the next 90 minutes showing us around the centre discussing the major management issues and the principal problems confronting the managers. The principal ones are:

- There is now a fence across the northern part of Okinawa from coast to coast sealing off the park to prevent the entry of any more moongoose. This leaves 30,000 moongoose inside the fence. Trapping by the Moongoose Busters is catching about five animals per day and Moongoose are the major pest species. No thought has been given to baiting ;
- The iconic bird of the park is the handsome and endemic Okinawa Rail whose population has dwindled to 1,500. Apart from predation by Moongoose 50 rails are

victims of road kill annually. There are over 500,000 visitors to the park annually and there are about 6,000 people living within the park and this generates a lot of traffic movements. There is an impressive program of public education about the Okinawa Rail and a concerted effort to slow traffic in the park that was from our observations not very effective.

- Again the focus of the park managers on fauna almost completely neglects the flora. We learnt little about the weed problem or even the botanical ecosystems and components;
- We did learn that there was also a problem with feral cats and feral dogs but these didn't seem to measure up to the impact of the mongoose and there was only plans to stop more introductions and not to reduce /eliminate those cats and dogs already on the loose.
- There was a lot of local use made of the wildlife a local bring in specimens of ants and other material for identification as well as a number of students using the centre apparently for assignments

Armed with much more reading material we left the Wildlife centre and then drove along the west coast to the most northern part of Okinawa and then again along the coast south. The coastline was etched with familiar plants — pandanus, Octopus bush, scaveola, casuarinas, goatsfoot-convolvus, beach almonds, beach hibiscus, Callaphyllum and more. What was notable were the cycads that were growing almost to the high tide mark. They are so different to any of the cycads in Australia but they seem to be native even if shared with Micronesia.

Even the beachfront vegetation was being invaded by weeds particularly *Luecaena*. Again there was a total absence of seabirds. There was a quiet suggestion that they may have all been extirpated by fishermen but nothing was said aloud. It was an eerie feeling not seeing a seabird. These apparently aren't covered by JAMBA.

We then headed for the mountains to see the forest that has been so under-appreciated. While the component species are different it resembles in structure the rainforest of Lord Howe Island because it is thick with a low canopy. On our foray to the mountain we called in at a Forest Centre. This seems similar to Queensland's Outdoor Education Centres such as at Maroon Dam except that although established by the government it is now privately run and draws in about 20,000 guests annually.

We were glad to be back in Nago in good time before the squalls preceding Typhoon Lan hit.

Saturday 21st October

The wind picked up during the night but according to the TV the centre of the cyclone has passed east of Okinawa without the anticipated deluge. Thus it was my thought that we would be in sunshine 400 kilometres SSW of Okinawa and only 332 kilometres from Taiwan.

We also discovered that our visit to these islands coincides with an inspection team from IUCN. They have identified a number of management issues that they would like to see addressed before they return next June or July to make their final recommendation to the World Heritage Committee. However already they have suggested that the inclusion of the mangrove and coral reefs isn't justified. We saw a press conference on TV and saw a bit in the Okinawa newspaper where the advisers pointed out that World Heritage is not the end-goal but the starting point in the process. They pointed out that before qualifying the site managers needed to seriously tackle the identified problems and incorporate the local tourist industry and culture into their planning.

We got to Naha earlier than planned due to abandoning plans to look at some of the World Heritage cultural sites. This meant that we were able to advance our flight to Ishikagi from 2.30 to 12.30. As we waited in one of the most crowded airport terminals I have been in we heard ominous announcements of other flights being cancelled and the possibility of flights to Tokyo being turned back.



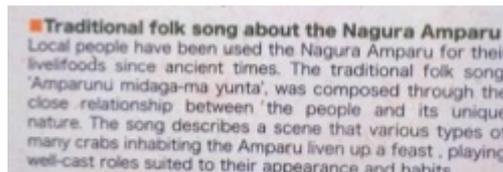
The fictitious Okinawa lion was waiting at Naha Airport

Ishigaki is the centre of the Yaeyama group of islands. It's tourism industry has just taken off in a big way with the opening of the new airport in 2013. It is through here that travellers move on to Irimote, deemed to be the more pristine of this

group and the only one considered for World Heritage nomination.

It was a bouncy landing with a cross wind but we soon learnt that we were far from exempt from the influence of the Typhoon even here with the ferries to Irimote cancelled for the day. Later we learnt that they are also cancelled for tomorrow. We are now bunkered down in a very comfortable pension.

Than God for wifi. Over dinner I was able to sort out a problem for our Eurong volunteers and their dinner arrangements at the Resort.



Sunday 22nd October

Outside the wind is still howling although we are now over 600 kilometres in the wake of the eye. This typhoon certainly has a wide path. The Coral Research Centre is closed because it is a Sunday and the options of what we can do are very narrow. I aimed to work on the "*History of K'gari and Cooloola*". It was slow work but I have reviewed Chapter 1 fairly thoroughly incorporating Colleen's corrections and notes.

It didn't rain all day but the wind continued to howl. We went out to a nearby very traditional and very nice restaurant close to our pension for lunch. It was so good that we booked in for dinner that we enjoyed even more with a musician and dancer coming in during our meal. He sang very sweetly and played a shamisen. It was a traditional banjo like instrument with three metal stings and the sound box covered with snake skin (Not a scarce commodity here although the paranoia about the Habu has heavily impacted the ecology).



Palms endemic to only Ishikagi and Irimote Islands

Later to get out we chartered a taxi to have a brief look around the island. Su was almost blown over when we went to a lookout. It wasn't pleasant

although this island had dodged the typhoon. When we returned we began to feel apprehensive about landing on Tokyo that it scheduled for a direct strike by the typhoon and that could stop our flight into the airport there. Already we are hearing of Shinkusen services and some flights being cancelled.



A monument to those who died of malaria on Iriomote

Monday 23rd October

Iriomote

We woke at 5.30. We think that our flight will be right but we have a morning to fill in and the ferries are running so it is off to Iriomote which has a larger World Heritage area than the other three sites in Amami, Tokoshima and Okinawa. It also has the most intact ecosystems. This is largely thanks to it being the only island in Japan where malaria (now eradicated) once prevailed.

The swell from the cyclone had almost abated as we took the 35 minute ferry ride to just get a small glimpse of this richest part of the World Heritage nomination. Iriomote spans about 290 km² (110 sq miles). The Kuroshio Current sustains the coral reefs of Japan, the northernmost coral reefs in the world. It is similar to the Gulf Stream in the North Atlantic and is part of the North Pacific ocean gyre. It enables the diversity of mangroves, reportedly 7 species in Iriomote and accounts for the warm nights of this island chain

We only had an hour and a half to explore and we learnt that being a Monday the Wildlife Centre was closed. Just our luck. So was chartered a cab to get at least some feeling for this island. It is certainly the most pristine due mainly to the fact that it was the only area of Japan ever to be affected with Malaria. As a consequence it escaped a lot of opportunistic exploitation.

There is a low population still in Iriomote —2400. Our taxi driver was an Okinawan who married an islander. They intended to stay here for only 6 years after marriage but she has been here for 30 and

seems destined to stay. There is only one road that reaches only half way around the island mainly between the two ports and only one set of traffic lights. Visitors, at over 150,000 a year, outnumber residents by almost 100:1. 90% of the island is covered in dense jungles and swampy mangroves, most of which are either part of the Iriomote National Park or protected state land, and the island is unquestionably one of the few remaining great wildernesses of Japan.

Our driver took us to the south to start where we walked down to the beach to see a monument to the victims of malaria, most of whom were conscripted to work here. However I was in a botanical wonderland discovering a forest of huge *Thespesia*, ginger and other exciting plants including a grove of papayas that may have gone feral. The boardwalk itself deserved attention because of its width and construction using wood and steel even though this was all within 200 metres of the sea. What was encouraging was that there were surprisingly few weed species although the cobbler pegs grew in a thicket almost waist high, the *Luecaena* that ran rampant on the other three islands wasn't so out of control here (yet).

The driver pointed out how the road had been straightened and widened and this has speeded up the traffic with tragic consequences for the island's icon, the wild Iriomote cat. There are only about 100 of them left in the wild but there are about 7 road kills annually. I wish I had the opportunity to discuss this at the wildlife centre.



Only 100 of this pussy sized sub-species of the leopard survive on Iriomote with 10 dieing on the road annually

Wikipedia has this to say, "*The Iriomote cat (Prionailurus bengalensis iriomotensis) is a subspecies of the leopard cat that lives exclusively on the Japanese island of Iriomote. It has been listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List since 2008, as the only population comprises fewer than 250 adult individuals and is considered declining. As of 2007, there were an estimated 100–109 individuals remaining.*"

*Iriomote cats,
Critically endangered,
Need more than nine lives.*

In addition to endemic plant species that only grow on Iriomote, such as *Asarum yaeyamensis* and *Chikusichloa brachyanthera*, Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park is home to endemic that only grow on Ishigaki and Iriomote, such as the Yaeyama palm tree (*Satakentia liukuensis*) and *Rhododendron amanoi Ohwi*, as well as *Rhaphidophora kortharthii* and *Macodes petola*, the northern distribution limit for which is Iriomote-jima Island.

While we didn't see as much as we wanted of Iriomote due to the ferry cancellation, we were impressed by what we did see in a short time. Then it was a ferry ride back to Ishigaki a trip to the airport, a long queue to check in, lunch and eventually on to our flight to Haneda.



On our departure from Ishigaki Airport we saw this sign as evidence that there is an active trafficking in wildlife and the smugglers seem more interested in the invertebrates than the mammals or birds

Due to the late arrival of our flight, we took a cab from Haneda into our hotel to maintain our rendezvous. We seemed to travel about 25 kilometres of tunnels like earthworms but at 100 kph and straining to keep up with the traffic. We emerged near Shinjuku which is where our hotel is but the taxi driver had to go around the block three times to find his way to its entrance. Shinjuku is like Broadway in New York only larger and glitzier. I couldn't get over the contrast of coming from an island with the largest primitive area in Japan to the most crowded and glitziest place on Earth in the centre of the world's largest city.

We have finally met up with Su's daughter, Jennifer and her husband, Andy who landed from London earlier in the day.

Assessment of things learnt of proposed World Heritage

- A lot of attention has been given to identifying the fauna and the threats to it. It seems that the forest ecology may be of greater value but much less attention has been paid to preserving the natural integrity of the forest ecology.
- The focus on feral fauna and protecting endangered species is admirable but if the weed invasion is allowed to go unchecked.
- Whereas the Ogasawara World Heritage islands were acutely aware of the need to enforce quarantine, there seemed to be no measures to major threats from potential introductions such as the beetle decimating the native pines on Amami Oshima on other islands.
- The interpretation especially the reaching out for public support with banners promoting World Heritage values everywhere was most positive;
- The interpretive Visitor Centres were to be envied. These also facilities benefitted from community support such as the Lions Club seating. Some of the interactive material was very sophisticated but much was inexpensive such as hand painted silk screens and stuffed models and specimen cases.
- There was much more community interaction and engaging them in the protection of the World Heritage values such as people bringing in ants to be identified.
- There was overall a much greater appreciation of the invertebrate fauna probably due to the black market trade that exists here.



The promotion of World Heritage and the measures to gain more community involvement are evident in this logo of the special critters as well as being featured in bus and other advertising. K'gari's logo needs to be promoted.

Stage 2

Ashinaga and Hakone

Tuesday 24th October

The sun is shining, the air is crisp and clear and the typhoon has passed without undue impact on Tokyo. We had breakfast with Jennifer and Andy and prepared for Stage 2 of our study tour. Su had a late night washing and an early morning reorganizing our luggage to head for Hakone and later to Uganji.

After breakfast at the Tokyustay Shinjuku we headed to the Shinjuku station to convert our rail passes and make train bookings then it was lunch before catching a cab to the hotel booked by Tamai San for all of us. It is the very luxurious Chinzanso Hotel that we could never afford to book for ourselves. We are staying here preparatory to heading off to the hot springs and spas of Hakone in the morning again hosted by Tamai San. We really felt luxury normally reserved only for the rich. It was really wonderful and the rooms were three or four times the size of the rooms we have experienced for the last week. The service was amazing with all of the staff being multi-lingual. It features one of Tokyo's greatest gardens.

We were first met by Nana Tagami, Tamai San's Personal Assistant who we first met in Brisbane and again last night. Tamai San who has been a friend of Su's for almost 60 years. After coffee Tamai San himself arrived. It was a great reunion.

That night we participated in one of the most memorable meals of my life hosted by Tamai San in one of the poshest hotels in Tokyo. We had a special Kaiseki Menu that served up eight beautifully presented courses. We had a lot to celebrate in a private dining room over three hours but the food, the presentation and service were exceptional. I couldn't resist photographing most of the dishes as they arrived.



Entree



Two of the eight courses served up for dinner

Wednesday 25th October

After a good night's sleep in the most comfortable beds I woke early and went for a walk in the garden. It was a bit briefer than I had planned because it had just started raining. It continued raining all day. The garden dates back centuries and has been embellished over time but it is the centrepiece of this great hotel.

It was a wonderful breakfast. When we were packed we were joined by Tamai San's Secretary who assisted us getting him back to Shinjuku in a chartered cab. We just had time to catch a Romance car driverless train to take us to Hakone. We were on our own from Tokyo with Tamai San who is in his 80s and afflicted with Parkinsons which affects his mobility. He needs a wheel chair for many occasions. Su had the responsibility of being his carer.

Travel took us most of the day but we had a wonderful dinner



FL with Tamai San's and his Eleanor Roosevelt Medal

Thursday 26th October

The day dawned fine and sunny. The air was initially a little crisp. After a leisurely breakfast I went out to enjoy it. Our hotel in Hakone is the Fujiya established in 1878 which is modelled on the grand Victorian style but it reminded me of other hotels I have stayed in that were built in that era in Durban, San Francisco and New York. It has a lovely spacious garden like the Chinzanso and after breakfast I went for stroll to appreciate it. I captured lots of images.



One of the waterfalls in the Fujiyan Hotel Garden

At 10.30 a taxi chartered by Tamai san arrived and took us on a tour of this most scenic, well forested mountainous area. Hakone is located on the Tokaido Trail established centuries ago when Japan's nobility were obliged to make annual trips with their large entourages to Tokyo to pay homage to the Shogun. We saw parts of that trail but many have been widened and converted to roadways with the loss of some of the scenic value. However it was a grand drive through the mountains and we saw so much more in the time available than we would have seen any other way.

We were in awe of Mt Fuji that only belatedly has received a snowfall this week following the typhoon. I was so amazed that the snow should be SO late that I wrote another Haiku.

*Twenty three days late
The first snow falls on Mt Fuji
Climate is warming*



Enjoying Mt Fuji's first snow of the season

We made three other stops along the long way about to catch a Shinkansen train. One was at an ice-cream shop with good views looking down on Lake Hakone. The second was for lunch at a small port beside Lake Hakone and the third was at a craft shop that produced to most amazing woodcraft. The Master tradesman was a seventh generation woodworker and explained how he created such amazing patterns using wood.



The 7th generation master wood craftsman

We caught the Shinkansen back to Tokyo where Tamia san's Secretary was waiting to greet hi with his wheel chair and wish him off to prepare for the lecture he was due to deliver less than two hours later. We thanked and farewellled Tamai-san. Jennifer and Andy expect to see him in London next month but after seeing me ensconced in our room she took off immediately to catch Tamai-san's lecture at the University of Tokyo



The Suzuki family home for over 700 years but no more

Stage 3 Unganji Friday 27th October

This was yet another wonderful and enriching day enhanced by the sparkling weather. We cleared the Tokustay hotel after breakfast and made our way to the subway passages leading to the Shinjuku Station. It was here that I started feeling that I was in an ant colony. We tried to board a train for the main Tokyo station to catch our booked Shinkansen. The first train was so crowded with commuters, mostly men in business suits, we couldn't possibly have fitted and the next train that we and our luggage were tightly squeezed into wasn't much better. There were 6 stations between Shijuku and Tokyo and as at each there was almost as many boarding as in the exodus.

It was at Tokyo station itself that I began to really feel like an ant in the centre of the colony. Millions of people daily travel through these subways along underground passages, each with their own self-appointed destinations and despite this teeming human traffic nobody bumped into anyone else. It seemed like a chaotic scene and it seemed that crossing the main flow might see one trampled to death but the reality was so different. It was like watching the chaos of traffic in Saigon.

We found the Shinkansen. It was less crowded and in fact had empty seats and we made express speed to Nasu Shiobara where Su's niece, Keiko was waiting for us and took us down a familiar route to the loveliest village I have experienced. I had forgotten what a charming drive it was through rice fields and forests now in the start of autumn tones but there was interest every metre of the way. This was my fifth visit to Japan and on each occasion I have visited Unganji. I have stayed here three times but alas this may be my last visit.

Su's sister Masako was already at the old Suzuki family home in Unganji when we arrived in glorious

sunshine in the crisp air. It was a trip of nostalgia and renewal as old memories they walked through the wonderful building that is now unoccupied although well tended to by the monk who is now responsible for it. I noted the vegetable garden and the monk admitted that he personally was the gardener.

The monk had joined us for lunch. Masuko and Fumi had arranged lunches of bento boxes. It was nice especially to be entertaining the Monk. This was soon reciprocated when after the lunch the monk escorted us to the temple philosophising along the way. We passed many familiar places including Su's reading tree in the temple grounds where she would stop to devour the books she borrowed from the temple before heading home.



The monk and his newly created garden at the former Susuzki home for 700+ years

*Falling golden leaves
From temple tree of knowledge;
Dispensing wisdom.*

The monk is the main gardener for the temple although he does have some assistance and he saw him admonish a worker for using an air broom. This is a device that we mutually detest. Right beside Basso's garden, where a poem he wrote there is chiselled in stone, the Monk showed us a pathogenic epiphyte that looked like a green old man's beard but which was killing any branches on which it occurred. I suggested that he Google up the answer to this problem that is affecting many

woody plants in his beautiful garden and poses a serious threat.

Suggesting the use of a computer to a man who shuns Email is a point of contentious between us. Although the Monk is university educated and familiar with computers from his student days, he has shunned them ever since as he strives for enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition. However there is some ambiguity in his philosophy as witnessed by the us, of power tools, pressure pack insect spray and electricity being used. I inquired about the use of electricity and he simply stated that if the lights failed he could go to bed.

*Seeking a simple life
Electricity prevails
Technology fails.*

At the temple we were treated to an exquisite display of Buddhist ritual as we sat (very, very uncomfortably) on the tatami mats to be served tea in a special ceremony by one of the novices while the Monk conversed on a wide range of topics. After the tea ceremony we were relieved to be upright again and be restored to our sane footwear.



An unforgettable tea ceremony at Unganji Temple

The Monk then accompanied us back to see the new stage of the temple and to see the temple builders at work preparing timber harvested on site for further renovations to this stunning complex. Su recognized one of the workmen from a family she knew. We then farewelled the Monk and returned to the house to collect Masako, Fumi and flowers to place on the graves of Su's daughter and ancestors at the family shrine. Even that short procession was interrupted catching up with neighbours of generations ago on the way.

The Temple is over 700 years old. It was built soon after Buddhism began to be widely practiced in Japan although the Imperial family had long been adherents.

After our respects, prayers and offering (flowers and incense sticks) we farewelled Masako and Fumi who returned to their home while we headed to Otawara with Keiko to stay in the home of her 89 year old father who lives alone. She soon cooked up a hot-pot for a wonderful meal.



Off to the cemetery we met a long-time neighbour

Saturday 28th October

We had an early start for a very well planned outing. Keiko's daughter Shoko, has graduated from art college where she had specialized in lacquer ware. She now lives and works in an ancient City of Aizu in Fukushima Prefecture, which is the third largest Prefecture in Japan. Aizu is over 98 kilometres from the site of the nuclear power disaster Keiko and her husband, Hiroshi hired a large, very comfortable mini-bus for the day and fit us all in for the 140 kilometre drive north.

The drive was very scenic and the colours of autumn were assuming greater prominence. In another week to 10 days I am sure that the landscape will be draped with fiery colours. However we were impressed as we sped along the Expressway with a 100 kph speed limit.



The imposing Tsurugago Castle in Aizu, Fukushima

Our objective in Aizu was to visit the Tsurugago Castle. This castle was first built in 1354 but it has

been destroyed and rebuilt three or four times over the decades since by ravages of war and earthquakes. The current structure was built in 1964.

The tour of the castle was most informative of the feudal culture of Japan prevailing before the modern era and the relationships of the various shoguns and clans and their quests for power as well as the means of war. It seemed bloody but possibly not as bad or as brutal as the many power struggles in Britain over the same period.

We went to a very nice tea-house followed by a wonderful restaurant for lunch. Then after a viewing (and acquisition) of lacquer ware we headed back south in the dark to Otawara with those wonderful autumn tones we had glimpsed on the way up being invisible in the early darkness. .



*Trees in Autumn tones
Foliage heralds in winter
The fourth stage of life.*



The moat surrounding Tsurugago Castle in Aizu

Back at Keiko's Dad's house we were joined by a friend of Keiko's, another Masako, who has visited us twice in Australia. The last time was with her husband, Ataiu. It was an animated dinner discussion that continued until late.



We farewelled Nasu Shiobar- on this bullet train that took us to Tokyo where we transferred to another of these amazing vehicles to take us to Nagoya where we were transferred again but this time to a rail motor.

Stage 4

Ise

Sunday 29th October

It is just a week since the last typhoon passed over Tokyo but there is another due tomorrow. Luckily it will pass further eastwards but although we will evade destructive winds we are still in the path of a drenching. It actually began overnight and as Keiko drove us to the railway station it was quite heavily. It got heavier during the day as we moved south closer the typhoon centre as it moved north. It wasn't a pleasant day but it didn't worry us until our arrival at Ise when it pouring without a break. The weather even caused the last scheduled leg of the railmotor journey to be cancelled.

We arrived in Ise at about 1.30 and went straight to the ryokan. There we couldn't access our rooms until 4.00pm but it was too terrible to go outside so we waited around. This ryokan is really charming. I stayed in ryokan previously in Kyoto Nikko and Yakushima. They are very interesting with very strong attachment to culture and tradition although I am finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the constant changing of footwear.

Whilst there is little to report from the Shinkansen to Nagoya the local railmotor to Ise was full of interest despite the rain limiting visibility. Despite Japan seemingly lacking any town planning in Japan, because of the port all of the industrialization was between the rail line and the port while the residential side seemed free of industry. Most of the industry that we could see was based on oil refineries and petrochemical industries but Su said that Nagoya was a big centre for Toyota.



Our Ryokan in Ise. These are very traditional guest houses so different to the luxury of the hotels we had stayed in Tokyo and Hakone but with a more homely character

Monday 30th October

Today our objective was to see the two famous Shinto Shrines in Ise. They were commended to us by the Uganji Monk, a Buddhist who predicted that we would feel the spirit emanating from the site. I have been confused by the overlapping of Buddhism with Shintoism. The clearest differentiation that I can distil is:

- Buddhism is a philosophy aspiring to enlightenment;
- Shintoism is a religion based on the worship of Nature.

They are not mutually exclusive. The Royal family is Patron to both. For example, the temple at Uganji is under royal patronage and for centuries it has been the role of a royal Princess to be the Patron of the two Ise temples.

The typhoon may have passed and the rain deluge ceased but the wind was strong and blustery all day and the temperature has dropped significantly. I wore a jumper, jacket and scarf all day

I was surprised by the numbers of people we saw as we visited the first shrine, Geigu. There was a constant stream of visitors. They were all on foot although there were a number of motorised wheelchairs. The paths were wide and well maintained with the help of volunteers and there were divisions to maintain a one-way flow and in the two-way sections visitors were obliged to keep to the right. I estimated the number of visitors in the thousands. I later learnt that these Shrines are deemed so significant in Japanese culture that they attract 7 million visitors to Ise annually.

Surprisingly little could be seen of the temples themselves because they were fenced off from the public but this didn't deter the flow of visitor who were here on pilgrimages to bathe in the aesthetics

of the forest and the aura of the place. It is a lovely ancient forest beside a river and an ideal setting for this religion based on the worship of nature and with 8,000 gods from stones and rocks to trees and lakes and other landscape features

At the second Shrine, Naiku, we glimpsed some Shinto Priests taking some guests inside the walled odd area but no photographs were allowed of anything inside the wall unless taken from afar



The manicured paths of the Ise Shrines are maintained by volunteers are so wide that they can comfortably handle the 7,000,000 visitors annually and there was no need for signage as people religiously stayed on the path. One concession to numbers was a median strip in places to allow free flow of pedestrians in both directions.



For our last evening meal together we dined where members the royals dine whenever they are in Ise

Tuesday 31st October

There is little to report. We retraced our tracks back to Tokyo. Su dropped me off at Narita where I shuffled through the procedures for a long almost sleepless overnight flight home



Bicycles are widely used for general transport. These at Ise Station didn't feature elaborate Shimano gears