

From: Iris Rotberg <irotberg@gwu.edu>
Date: November 12, 2023 at 9:15:39 PM MST
To: Patricia Tibbetts <patriciatibbetts@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: Naoshima Re: Tokyo Re: Hello!

Hi Tricia,

Sorry to hear your trip is coming to an end. I will miss your reports from Japan! It's interesting that you were in Yayoi Kusama territory. I became acquainted with her story in London when the Tate Museum had a large exhibit of her work, including the mirror rooms. At that time, her residence was a mental institution, where she could come or go as she wished.

I am wondering where you are going next—the red gate at Miyajima and Hiroshima?

What an amazing trip you are having! Next time with your girls?

Cheers and hugs,

Iris

Sent from my iPhone

On Nov 11, 2023, at 7:26 PM, Patricia Tibbetts <patriciatibbetts@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello Iris,

We're in our final days in Japan. These 3 weeks are flying by. As I'm writing we're pulling out of the Naoshima port on route to Okayama to take in another garden and castle and, if the weather allows, we'll do a day trip to Kurashiki, then back to DC me, Abuja for David.

Naoshima was really wonderful and so different from all the other stops. In addition to Yayoi Kusama's fabulous pumpkins, I loved the Tadao Ando architecture. Such a great surprise. Plus lots of winding paths/roads with traditional houses with charred wood siding.

And of course we found a cool bar (Tee's Market) which had tight seating for 8 and the best music. The proprietor was chef, DJ, server and best of all host. It was so hard to leave! Love the little bar/little coffee shop culture we seem to find at every stop.

Pulling into Okayama now. More from the train to Tokyo!

Hugs,
Tricia

Naoshima port and ferry and a snap from Hiroshi Sugimoto Gallery

<image0.jpeg>

<image1.jpeg>

Sent from my iPhone

On Nov 11, 2023, at 3:20 AM, Iris Rotberg <irotberg@gwu.edu> wrote:

Hi Tricia—I found my most recent e-mail to you on my phone so I am not sure if it went out the first time. In any case, here it is again. Wondering if you are still in Japan?

Begin forwarded message:

From: Iris Rotberg <irotberg@gwu.edu>
Date: November 9, 2023 at 9:34:54 PM MST
To: Patricia Tibbetts <patriciatibbetts@gmail.com>
Subject: Naoshima Re: Tokyo Re: Hello!

Hello Tricia,

You can now more than replace us as guides to Japan! We never did go to Fushimi Imari, although one of our granddaughters did the day the rest of us visited schools. We also were in Osaka only briefly, but that too was compensated for—this time, by a grandson who subsequently visited Japan. Osaka was his favorite.

I have always been fascinated by Japan because it is so culturally unique with layer upon layer of customs that no foreigner can fully understand. I have also loved traveling in countries like the Soviet Union and China when they first opened up. Yet, surprisingly, both these countries, even in our early visits, seemed less culturally unique than Japan.

The same is true of South Africa. We were there as apartheid was ending, but before Mandela was elected president. I might have mentioned that our daughter, Diana, interned with a South African man whose brother subsequently became Mandela's first ambassador to the United States. I learned through that family the adventures of what was then called the "mixed race" group when they were first allowed to live wherever they wished. I also learned how active Mary Futrell had been in the fight to end apartheid and how well the ambassador knew her.

I have been attracted to other places, like Iceland and Norway's Lofoten Islands, because of their remoteness and the uniqueness of their scenery.

For close calls, we have had Molotov cocktails thrown at our car in Berlin, crowds trying to overturn our car in DuPont Circle, and elephants circling our car in Tanzania. We were perceived in Berlin and DuPont Circle as nasty capitalists; I am not sure how the elephants perceived us. But we missed the many adventures you have had throughout the world, sometimes in war zones, and for extended periods of time.

I look forward to hearing about your next travel experiences in Japan. And thank you too for the photos that accompany your descriptions.

Cheers,

Iris

On Nov 8, 2023, at 5:41 PM, Patricia Tibbetts <patriciatibbetts@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello Iris,

Greetings from Osaka train station! The Hello Kitty train brought us the 30 minutes from Kyoto to Osaka. Bright, loud, fast-paced, more casual, Osaka won us over quickly with street food, fabulous signs, karaoke, and the crazy themed baths of Spa World. David and I have always loved Karaoke and it was a blast to drag our traveling friends for a 90 min session! We crushed it. And having just won the Japan series of baseball for the first time in 38 years, people here were in an excellent mood everywhere we turned. Maybe it's always like that in Osaka but I'm happy to credit the baseball win!

Before Osaka was Kyoto, of course. The philosophers path was a wonderful experience, maybe a favorite but I loved everything we experienced. The golden shrine/pavilion Kinkakuji Temple was stunning, even with the crowds of school kids (adorable). We also loved Fushimi Inari with the orange red gates and local shrines tucked away. Gorgeous! Plus imperial palace and gardens and amazing shrines and temples... but the traditional streets really pulled me in. I went for a walk one rainy morning on my own and it really felt like another world.

Next stop is Naoshima for some biking and art.

More to come!

Tricia

Xoxox

Sent from my iPhone

On Nov 4, 2023, at 1:30 PM, irotberg (null) <irotberg@aol.com> wrote:

Thanks so much, Tricia, for your description of Kanazawa. We were there for a shorter time. My main memory is of the garden. I know it is considered one of the two greatest Japanese gardens but my favorites remain in Kyoto.

Great description of the pen incident!

Are you thinking of staying at a traditional Japanese inn while you are in Kyoto? We did ask on one trip and were sent to the Westernized version of a Japanese inn—mattresses on the floor but so thick we felt as if we were sleeping on the most luxurious of beds. In the morning the mattresses disappeared, replaced by multi-course traditional Japanese meals, all in the midst of spectacular gardens. No complaints about the luxury, even if it was designed for spoiled Westerners.

We were told (indirectly) we could not go to a really traditional inn because we would not be comfortable. Translation: We would not be able to follow the proper ritual. Japanese ritual feels like a religion—breaking rules is a sin. I think being turned away at restaurants had more to do with your being Westerners than the way you were dressed.

I am reminded of our honeymoon drive from Pennsylvania to Montreal through Maine. Gene wrote ahead to a number of hotels in Kennebunkport, Maine (the George Bush family summer home); all hotels said no. Some said they were booked. Others said we would not be happy there because there were no synagogues. (We had, of course, never asked about synagogues.) We were rejected because of the name Rotberg. My maiden name, Comens, would have been acceptable if they hadn't realized it was changed from Kominsky, probably by my father.

Gene kept the letters. We recently found on the Internet almost identical letters written at the time.

Your discussion of the small restaurant reminds me of a meal in Kyoto at a counter with a famous fish chef. Customers had about 20 minutes to eat the meal. Clearly the most expensive meal per minute I have ever had.

And then there was the trip we took with three grandkids (and their parents). Quinn (now 19) turned five in Japan. His favorites: the vending machines and stepping stones in gardens. He also particularly enjoyed the day we visited schools and he was surrounded by curious children. But I will save all that for another time.

I never kept memoirs of our trips at the time so I am really glad for the opportunity to do so at least partially now.

Looking forward to hearing about your Kyoto adventures.

Cheers,

Iris

On Nov 2, 2023, at 9:35 PM, Patricia Tibbetts <patriciatibbetts@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello Iris,

These are amazing stories and especially the errors. So incredibly interesting and what a gift to have been able to be in Japan overtime. I'm already looking forward to my next trip.

I think Japan is so tolerant of visitors—but only to a point. And I'm constantly surprised at where the line is. Richard, a friend we're traveling with, accidentally took a pen meant to remain at a desk and was scolded and

police were engaged! No arrests were made but, as he tells it, it was quite an event! He's a fairly formal British guy so that makes it a better story. Happily, David and I were not present so I'll be embellishing the tale!

We've spent the last 4 days in Kanazawa—amazing. We went to the Kanazawa castle and gardens including Kenrokuen Park—home of two legged lantern—several times.

My favorite was certainly roaming around Higashi Chaya district and the traditional Samurai district. Also loved the smaller Nishi Chaya and Naga districts for wandering. Just magical—and delicious snacks and tea.

And I love seafood in all forms including raw so I could eat anywhere very, very happily. Perhaps not surprisingly, we have been turned away from several small, lovely looking restaurants. I assume because we're foreign or because we just look a little too informal! But we've been able to find wonderful small places nonetheless. And we ate several times at Omicho fish market. Great sashimi rice bowls and noodles of all kinds. I impressed a server with my appreciation of an eyeball plus socket. I still don't know which animal I have to thank but it was fab!

My favorite spot, however, might be a super small whiskey bar in Kanazawa called Mikaduki which is run by a whiskey and jazz connoisseur and, thanks to Google Translate, David was able to have a very lengthy conversation about jazz pianists. Lovely! Plus both were wearing caps, which was more amusing to me than either of them.

Okay, enough for now. More from our next stop—Kyoto!

Hugs,
Tricia

Sent from my iPhone

On Oct 30, 2023, at 2:54 PM, irotberg (null) <irotberg@aol.com> wrote:

It was great seeing you up close and personal in Tokyo with Fugi behind you on a perfectly clear day. Thank you so much for sharing it all with me. The e-mail I mentioned follows.

Thank you, Tricia, for your diary of Tokyo adventures! It reminds me of so many of our wonderful experiences in Japan and how much we enjoyed traveling there. And the best part of your trip is yet to come. Although Kyoto as a city is far from the most beautiful, it includes more beautiful places than any city I have ever been to. The 10 or so gardens and temples we have visited are only a small fraction of the total in Kyoto. And the gardens, as you are seeing, are extensive and have been cultivated for centuries by Buddhist monks. Such perfection. No gardens I have ever visited, including classical Chinese gardens, begin to match Japanese gardens.

One of many of our memorable experiences in Japan: We drove up a mountain outside Kyoto to a remote temple where we had a Buddhist vegetarian lunch sponsored by a monk who looked like he emerged from a

12th century Japanese screen. But appearances can be misleading. When introduced to Gene, he asked him why Japan, which had loaned so much capital to the World Bank, did not have more decision-making power at the Bank. The classically-dressed monk turned out to be a financial expert!

And here is one of a long list of Japanese rules I broke: I took the traditional Japanese bath first when we were with a group of Japanese men. The order by Japanese tradition is first the honored guest (Gene in this case), then the men in order of authority and age. Then the women, according to husband's rank, etc.

Another error: A nice young Japanese man had accompanied us on trips so I invited him to a party we were hosting. He came, but stood in a corner with his face to the wall most of the evening because he was outranked by everyone else at the party. I was the only one who spoke to him.

And another (of probably 100s of errors): I asked someone what Nara was like and the next day a car was outside our hotel waiting to take us there. Traditional Japanese don't ask for things directly.

The protocol rules in general are very strict among the privileged establishment. I assume the rules haven't disappeared although they had eased up considerably among younger people even when we were there. And there are surprises: One man we met who had seen Gene about a year before greeted him with, "You got fat," which I am told is not an insult in Japan, but an indicator of prosperity.

Japan in many ways is the most interesting country culturally I have visited and more interesting, for example, than China, even right after China emerged from the Cultural Revolution and reopened its doors to the West. Even then it seemed easier to have a frank and relaxed conversation with someone Chinese than with someone Japanese.

Another anecdote: We spent a day touring Hiroshima with the only American taxi driver there. He told us that in his 10 years of living in Hiroshima he had never experienced any hostility as an American for the U.S. atomic bombing of the city.

An exhibit in a museum near Hiroshima included commentary that asked for forgiveness for the role Japan had played in starting the war that ultimately led to the atomic bombing. I am told that museum commentary changes with changes in political leadership.

And then there was the time I asked a young Japanese woman who had taken me to an art museum which of two paintings she liked better; she couldn't answer because she was afraid she would choose the "wrong" one—that is, the painting that was not my favorite.

Or the time I met Gene at an elaborate dinner (with geishas) and was late. The first three of about 12 courses had already been served. When I arrived, I was served each of these courses one by one while everyone waited as I ate them. Most challenging was getting through a whole artichoke with Gene frowning at me because I had been late while a colleague of Gene's sitting next to me was joking: "Eat the entire artichoke, Iris; these artichokes cost a fortune."

Even more interesting to me than surviving the artichoke were the questions the geishas and wives asked, for example, whether American husbands help around the house. One told me it was cold one night and her husband closed the window—evidently his contribution to housework.

And I assume wives were at that dinner only because I was attending. Ordinarily the dinners were all male—except for the geishas, of course, who somehow are difficult to flirt with if your wife is sitting next to you. But the geishas were clearly much more interested in me than in the Japanese men, who they are expected to entertain night after night—often at multiple dinners with the same men, who the geishas can never openly acknowledge they have just seen at another dinner. I was like no woman the geishas had known because wives rarely come to these dinners. I was not a geisha and I was not a Japanese wife. I was in a third category—an American wife, which made me unique in their experience.

Geishas were becoming difficult to find even when we were in Japan—not a popular career choice. I read there are now only about 1,000 geishas left in Japan, many of them in Kyoto.

I think the Japanese forgive the mistakes of “gaijin” (foreigners), who are not expected to know any better). I am told of a Japanese American man who had been taught the rules but was advised to break them while in Japan so it was clear he was not native Japanese.

And Japanese food! It’s still my favorite even though I don’t eat raw fish.

This is turning into a memoir. So much more, but I’ll stop here. Please continue to send notes on your adventures. And have fun!

Iris
XOXOX

On Oct 28, 2023, at 8:43 PM, Patricia Tibbetts <patriciatibbetts@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello Iris!

So glad you’re in Denver. Very good news. Looking forward to hearing how you got there. No hang gliding, I hope.

We’re in Tokyo, leaving for Kawazana tomorrow! Amazing first few days.

The first day I just walked around our Shimbashi neighborhood to shake off the jet lag. Then David and my pals arrived and we went out for izakaya dinner. Yum!

The next day we headed out to Tsukiji fish market for eel, roe, and all the good stuff for breakfast. Amazing. Again. Then off to Sensoji temple. I got the best fortune. Now I must stay grounded. Fab curated veg dinner.

Next day imperial palace and Edo castle followed by lovely parks and a stop at Mitsukoshi department store to see a goldfish exhibit. Equally weird and great.

Then late lunch at Shiba Tofuya. Again, delicious and impeccable service. Gorgeous garden. After this we crawled to Shibuya scramble crossing. We crossed the street many times and then went up to a viewing

station. My favorite part was watching the bikes try to cross! At this point I was dead dead tired so we went on a tour hour walking tour of red light district and went to Golden Gai!

Yesterday was a bit more mellow. We met some state dept friends for fluffy pancakes and then explored Koenji which was so hip. We tried on cool shoes (did not buy) and did a ton of people watching. Then sushi dinner and finally a walk in Hamarikyū Gardens to hear musicians play from a lovely boat.

Now off to to Team Lab Planet! I'm gonna send photos in separate email.

Talk soon! I'll need recs for Kyoto!

Tricia
Xoxo

Sent from my iPhone

On Oct 29, 2023, at 7:25 AM, irotberg (null) <irotberg@aol.com> wrote:

Hi Tricia,

Pam tells me you are trying to reach me. Sorry for being unreliable about tracking messages. I would love to talk so please call any time in the afternoon or evening Denver time and we'll take it from there. Where are you now?

Miss you,

Iris

Sent from my iPhone