

SACRED JAPAN & SOUTH KOREA

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

8 - 17 May 2024



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Day 1

Wednesday, May 8, 2024

Osaka

Osaka became the centre of our world as we met our fellow explorers at the Hilton Osaka, the hotel's location directly across from Osaka Station's South Gate a bonus as we arrived from all corners of the globe for our Sacred Japan & South Korea voyage. Heritage Expedition Operations Director & Expedition Leader Nathan Russ convened the evening, introducing us to expedition team members Peter Mathews, Etsuko Shono and Shirley Russ.

As we started to get to know our fellow adventurers better, we indulged in an Asian Fusion buffet and dessert. With our cabin numbers on our luggage tags, we closed the evening catching up on sleep from international flights or went on a self-exploration of the famed Dotonbori with its numerous kitchens and attractions.

Day 2

Thursday, May 9, 2024

Osaka

Joining us today was Taku, one of our local guides who will be on board for the voyage ahead. To connect with Japanese nature, we began with a hike in Minoh Park, a ravine cloaked in forest with a fast-flowing stream. Lush green maples contrasted the towering evergreen cedar and dark camellia, some flowering red. The pathway slowly narrowed as we climbed to the 33-metre-high waterfall for which the park is renowned. The name Minoh, or Minoo comes from the fall's resemblance to winnowing, a traditional farming technique to separate grains from husks, with the Japanese word for a winnow basket being "mino". Passing a courtyard, we arrived at a wedding party who were celebrating in this beautiful backdrop.

It was a stark contrast as we left Minoh Park and arrived at Dotonbori, the symbolic business and market centre of Osaka. Lined with giant three-dimensional signs such as crabs, lobster and beef the streets are filled with various types of restaurants and attractions. Weaving through the local streets we found our hosts for a delicious Japanese-style lunch before Taku led some of us through the alleyways, byways and the canal, eventually arriving at the stop where we would be collected by bus heading for Sakai City.

Sakai City, which merges with Osaka, is home to traditionally made Sakai knives. French-born Eric Chevallier introduced us to the process of knife making and the unique skills and presentation style including types and usage. A moon over Fuji pattern on the knife blade being a pinnacle of skill which only three people have attained, one lives in the Sakai region and has work with this pattern on display.

Crossing back to Osaka we strolled through the outer grounds of the iconic Osaka Castle before checking out the water-filled outer moat, then the dry inner moat and through the gates to stand before the towering castle. Osaka Castle was built in 1583 by the feudal lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the original castle tower burnt down in 1655 due to a lightning strike. Rebuilt, it was again destroyed 200 years later with the third rebuild being what we see today.

The lowering sun cast a golden glow onto the castle, the top storey contrasting against the white lower levels.

To close our day, we returned to the comforts of *Heritage Adventurer*, shown to our cabins and participated in the mandatory lifeboat drill. Expedition Leader Steve Todd introduced the expedition team, and David the Hotel Manager shared helpful tips for life on board.

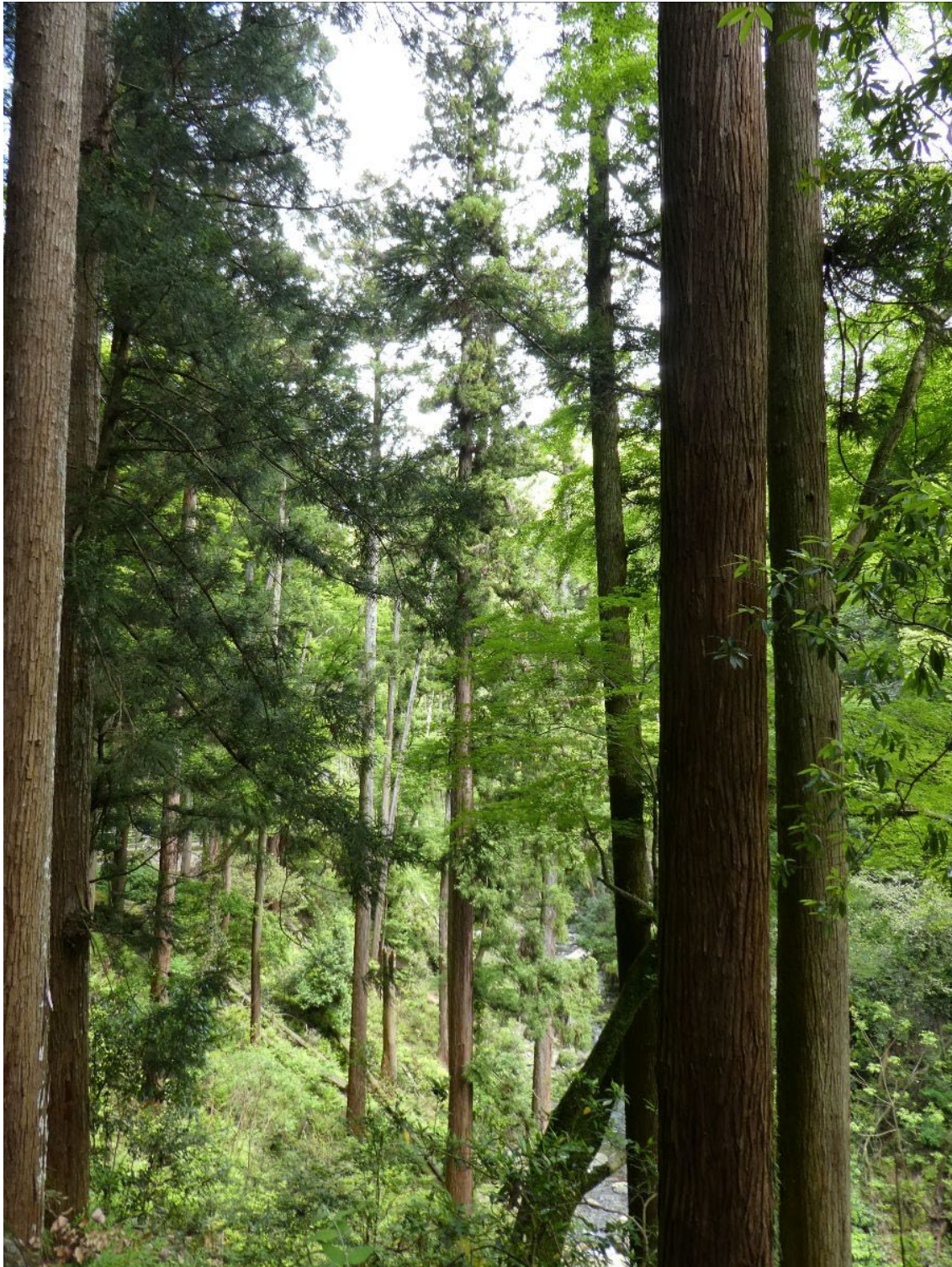
Our fabulous first day of adventure ended with dinner featuring tuna and a range of Asian-inspired dishes.



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Day 3

Friday, May 10, 2024

Uno

The first night's cruise for this voyage was through the Inland Seto Sea, under a spectacular bridge, and ended at the Port of Uno where we awoke. In the morning, we boarded the coaches for our transit to the Okayama Korakuen Garden. During the coach ride, we travelled through the densely packed developed areas for almost the entire journey. There were a few rice paddies, but the view out of the windows was mostly shopping centres, industrial areas, residential housing and business districts. In Japan, these blend together so it was a good chance to get a glimpse of the daily lives of the local population.

The Okayama Korakuen Garden is rated as one of the three finest feudal-period gardens in Japan. We walked around a stunning pond, through sprawling open lawns and to a viewpoint on the hill. Each tree was individually shaped to complement the landscape, and the Okayama Castle was visible from many sections. An aviary of endangered, Red-crowned Cranes is kept on the grounds, with the birds featured in local celebrations and festivities.

From there it was on to Kurashiki, and to the Kurashiki Bikan Historical Quarter, home of the Ohara Museum of Art. The prosperous area along the river is lined with well-preserved storehouses and residences from the Edo Period. Strolling the circuit, with the river boats and swans for company, gave a real feeling of having travelled back in time. It was a special moment as we shared the day with two local couples in wedding finery.

Ohara Museum of Art was one of the first repositories for Western art in Japan. It has an excellent collection of both classic and modern, Western and Japanese. The beautiful collection has been displayed to highlight the cross-cultural influences, with excellent signage in English.

After lunch back aboard *Heritage Adventurer* we enjoyed a cruise of a different sort. We boarded coaches which drove onto a ferry for the short passage to Japan's famous art island Naoshima. Our tour started with a visit to the Benesse House Museum, then continued with a stop at the Art House Project to see the conversion of vacant houses to art installations. Along the way, we stopped for close-up views of both the famous red and yellow pumpkin sculptures and other artworks presented in public spaces.

Even then the day was not done as we returned to *Heritage Adventurer*, champagne flutes and nibbles appeared for the Captain's Welcome Cocktails. Captain Tomasz introduced his senior officers before we retired to the dining room to share the day's experiences with our new friends.

Then it was back into the lounge for a briefing to prepare us for Zodiac operations, and a lesson in origami paper crane folding to create our peace offering for our visit to Hiroshima tomorrow.



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Day 4

Saturday, May 11, 2024

Hiroshima and Miyajima Island

It was appropriate and poignant that we arrived at the Hiroshima Peace Museum at 8:15 am on a lovely summer morning. Because it was at 8:15 am on a similar summer morning that the Atomic Bomb exploded killing hundreds of thousands and changing lives, and perhaps the world, forever. The Peace Park has been set aside to commemorate the bombing and the atrocities that occurred. The people of Hiroshima have made it their mission to ensure that the world does not forget the horrors of nuclear war and their quest for world peace. The museum gives a stark depiction of those horrors and the suffering of the victims. The surrounding park contains the cenotaph, the eternal flame, the Atomic Bomb Dome, and the monument to Sadako Sasaki – the young girl whose death started the tradition of delivering origami paper cranes to the city as a peace offering. Despite the sombre subject, the park and city's message of peace shines through.

It was lunch back on board *Heritage Adventurer* as we enjoyed a delicious BBQ on the Aft Deck in glorious sunshine. We then made use of our Zodiac training and headed to Miyajima Island - literally meaning Shrine Island. Our first destination was Itsukushima Shrine and its famous 'floating' (at high tide) torii gate, but there was much more to see. We climbed up the hill to the many pavilions of the Daisho-in temple. The bell rang regularly over the hillside walk that was lined with 500 small Buddhas with red caps. They guide the small children who die too young to know the way to the afterlife.

The town was charming and provided plenty of retail and food options - the oysters proving quite popular. It was a fantastic experience on Miyajima as we explored the streets alongside the resident deer population.

It was then back on board *Heritage Adventurer* to reflect, relax and prepare for tomorrow's adventure.



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Day 5

Sunday, May 12, 2024

Hagi

For the first time on this voyage, the Captain's toast to the weather failed to be effective. Still, we showed that when life gives you rain, bring an umbrella! So it was into the Zodiacs, and off we went.

Our first stop was the Yoshika Taibi Memorial Museum and workshop. We were able to learn the story of the introduction of Hagi-ware (or Hagi yaki) pottery from Korea, and the transformation from daily-use

items to art by Yoshika Taibi, the founder of this pottery business. On our tour, we saw his stunning works in the museum and the potters at their wheels. Finally, in the shop, many of us took the opportunity to support the Japanese economy!

A quick transit took us to the Samurai quarter to visit Kikuya Residence, the home of a wealthy merchant from the Edo Period. This traditional house and garden, full of artefacts from the time, gave a glimpse of what life was like for a close friend and supporter of the local Daimyo, or lord. Despite the liquid sunshine, we all enjoyed the walking tour of the district, passing many other historic homes, and stopping into shops to sample the local orange juice and ice cream.

Many of us chose to stay ashore with our guide, Hide-san, to have lunch at one of the restaurants in the local fish market.

After lunch, we reconvened and boarded the coaches to our next destination. Out of Hagi, we passed vibrant orange orchards, a feature of the region, and into the countryside where rice paddies were planted and flooded. Each precious inch of space is utilised to its best for water ditches, pathways, gardens and houses gathered in compounds, in stark contrast to the condensed urban cities.

Our scenic coach ride provided views of hillsides cloaked in bamboo, mixed broadleaf forest and commercial evergreen forests of cedar and camphor.

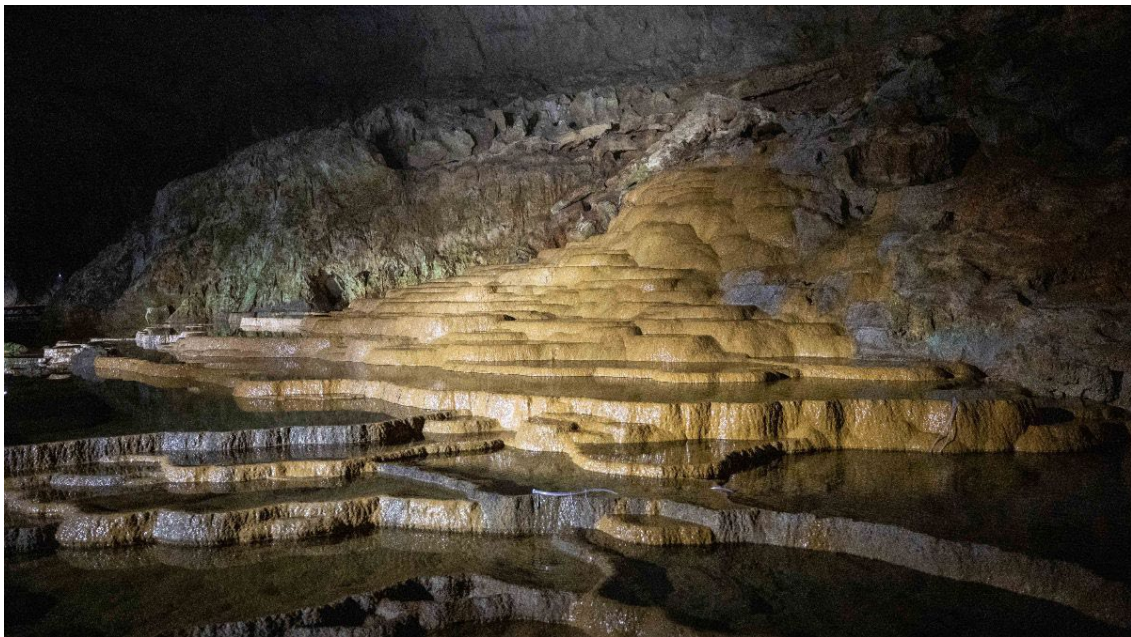
Before long we arrived at the Akiyoshidai Plateau. The barren karst limestone landscape was heightened by the lack of vegetation through selective burning. Upon arrival we headed to the time tunnel, descending through the theme park-style art and tunnel into the natural world of the limestone caves. Each feature was highlighted by lights, along with the inclusion of recorded messages available to listen to in four languages giving the name of the limestone feature or formation.

The cavernous nature of the underground system became apparent as we joined the main river, where terraces of creamy white limestone filled with water provided reflections of the overhanging stalactites. Each treasure created by nature grew in scale and beauty as we descended the cave towards the exit, which is likewise cloaked by a loquat tree merging its roots and branches in a tangle of survival, surrounded by Japanese maple over the river which in the grey skies showed as azure blue. It was truly a captivating sight.

Once back on board we cleared the immigration formalities to exit Japan and started our crossing of the Sea of Japan to South Korea. The galley team put on a special Japanese-themed dinner to add to our immersion in this culture. Tina took it one step further and had us dreaming of cloud pines, with her after-dinner presentation on The Essence of a Japanese Garden.



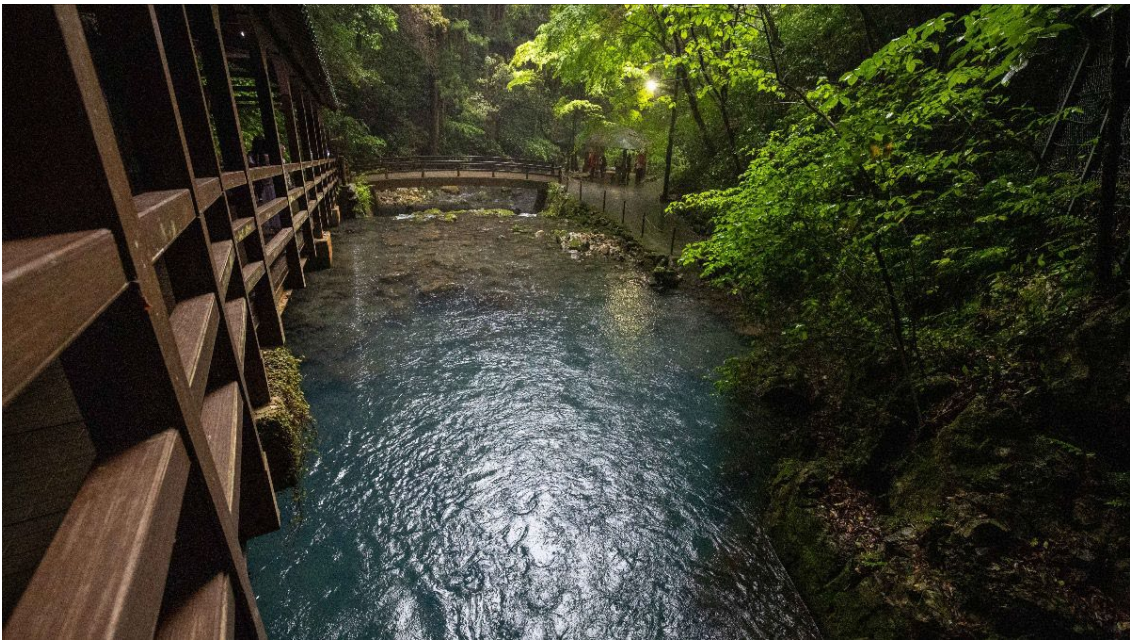
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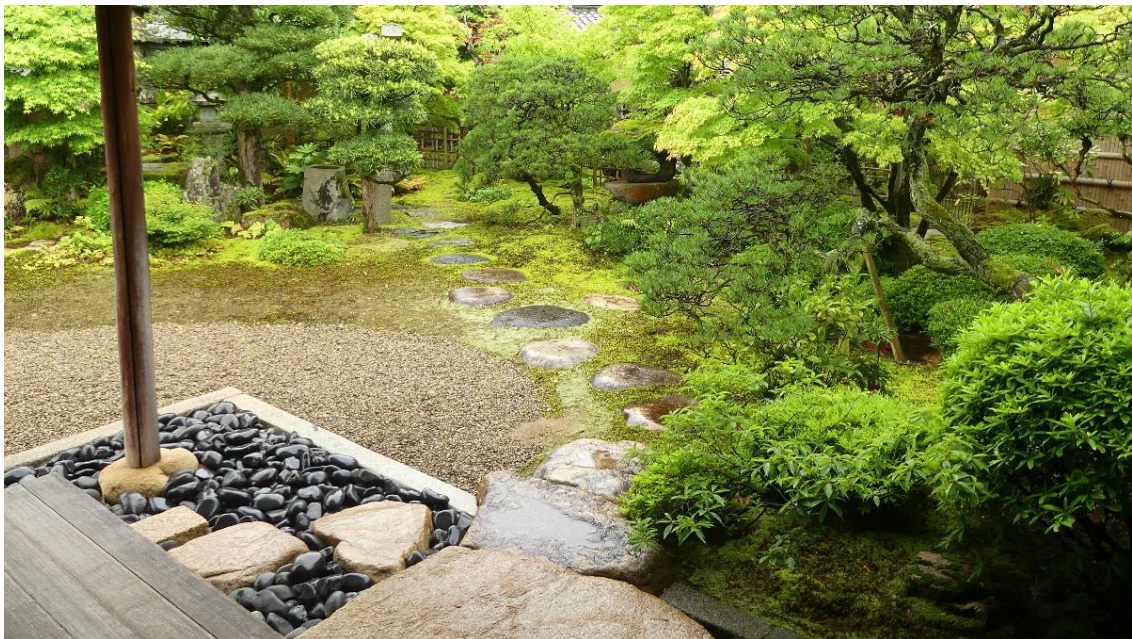
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Day 6

Monday, May 13, 2024

Ulsan, South Korea

We arrived at the second country of our voyage, South Korea. The view from the port showed that Ulsan is 'Hyundai City' with acres of new cars and thousands of pieces of heavy equipment awaiting export.

We drove out through the busy industrial area and past many clusters of high-rise apartment buildings into the forested mountains.

Our first stop was at Tumuli Park to visit the tombs of the Kingdom of the Heavenly Horse. The burial mounds for the rulers of the Silla Kingdom date from the 5th or 6th century. We entered the one tomb that had been excavated and saw the burial chamber with replicas of the golden crowns and artefacts that were unearthed.

To see the actual golden items, we made a short trip to the Gyeongju National Museum. There the beautiful items were displayed along with many other historic remains from that kingdom. Especially impressive was the huge bronze Bell of King Seongdeok the Great.

After soaking in these impressive historical sights, we visited a nearby Korean restaurant for lunch. The dishes ranged from jellyfish to tempura prawns, to sticky rice with kimchee, to pumpkin punch for dessert. They just kept coming and coming and they were all delicious!

Following lunch, we visited the Bulguksa Buddhist Temple and Art Gallery. The temple complex is large with several plazas and pavilions housing statues of the Buddha in various incarnations. Originally built in the 8th century but destroyed, it has been faithfully restored with detailed paintings and decorative motifs throughout. As a special treat, the entire temple was decorated with racks and racks of colourful paper

lanterns to honour the Buddha's birthday – only 2 days away on May 15. Many lanterns had paper tags with wishes and prayers from the petitioners.

After a hot and exciting day, a relaxing walk in the park would seem like a good way to finish. So, we travelled back to Ulsan to the Taehwagang River Bamboo Forest. We enjoyed strolling through this lush environment, and it was fun to see locals out also enjoying the sunny afternoon.

We had a chance to check our photos and relax before *Heritage Adventurer* set sail back to Japan. Our visit to South Korea had certainly been action-packed.

For some of us, the action continued after dinner with *70's Night* – classic rock and roll filling the air and the dance floor.



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Day 7

Tuesday, May 14, 2024

Sakaminato, Japan

From Korea, our overnight passage had barely raised a ripple across the glassy ocean, as we rose to another glorious sunny day for a quiet morning at sea with a relaxed start. We enjoyed two lectures in the morning. John was first with his introduction to the world of being a Geisha. From the intricacies of clothing, makeup, training and their place in society, we heard how they could become influential. Fingar

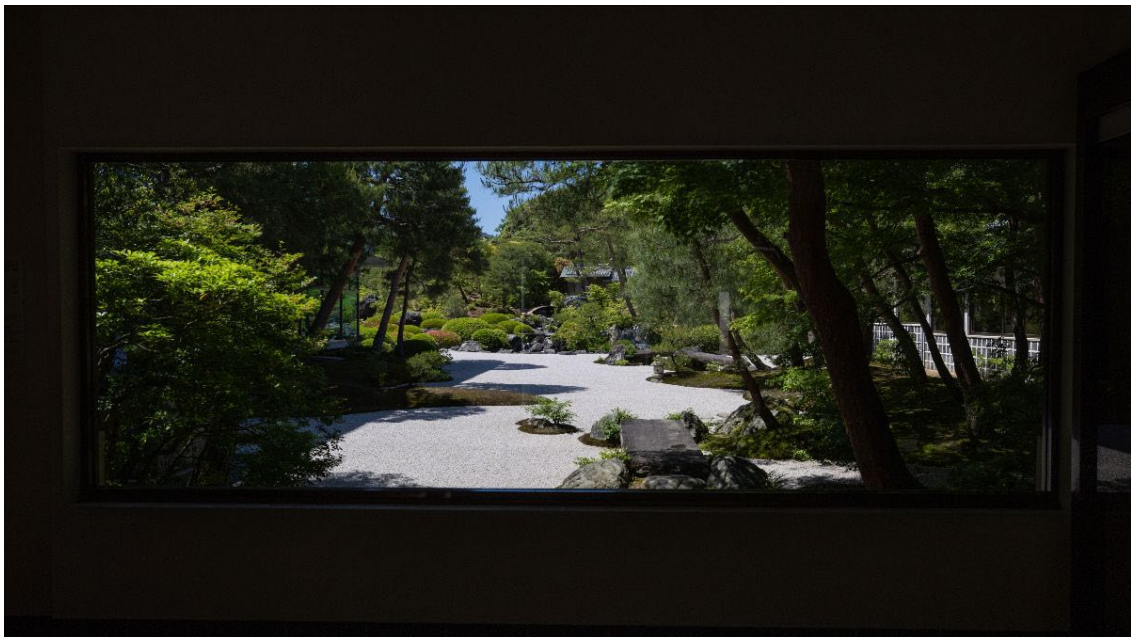
shared his insights into the international world of politics with specific reference to the history and present-day relations between Japan and the United States of America.

With an early lunch and clearance back into Japan we were welcomed by the cruise team at Sakaiminato. We boarded our Zodiac on wheels to cruise one of the two lagoons of the region and through the fertile countryside to arrive at the Adachi Garden and Museum of Art. Founded in 1978, Adachi is a garden and art gallery of international renown. The museum 'borrows' the landscape of the surrounding hills to complement the created shapes within the garden. The waterfalls and mounds within the garden were created to be viewed through the windows of the gallery, some of which can be opened. Each garden zone is manicured to perfection by a team of gardeners virtually never seen.

Then there was the stunning Rosnagin Gallery with its collection of pottery with styles, colours and areas represented from Bizen to Oribe. The significant art collection featured works by Yokoyama Taika, a core member of the modern Japanese art world in the 20th century. His work often symbolised Japan such as Mt Fuji and the rising sun.

Yuushien Garden on Daikonshima Island was our next visit. This large garden is celebrated for its bright and beautiful peony flowers. The street vendors had some on display along with the roaring spectacle in the greenhouse. Our visit explored the pathways and bridges including the iconic central red bridge, the moss-covered banks, the dry rock spaces and the central pond area of this exquisite garden. Beautiful all year round, but it was certainly a pleasure to visit in the late afternoon light. Local artisans had work on display with kimonos featuring in our purchases.

Our return to port took us over the bridge which had the optical illusion of rising straight up into the sky, before we arrived back at *Heritage Adventurer*. And so, our visit ashore ended as the local community entertained us with dance, much to everyone's delight. Thank you Sakaiminato.





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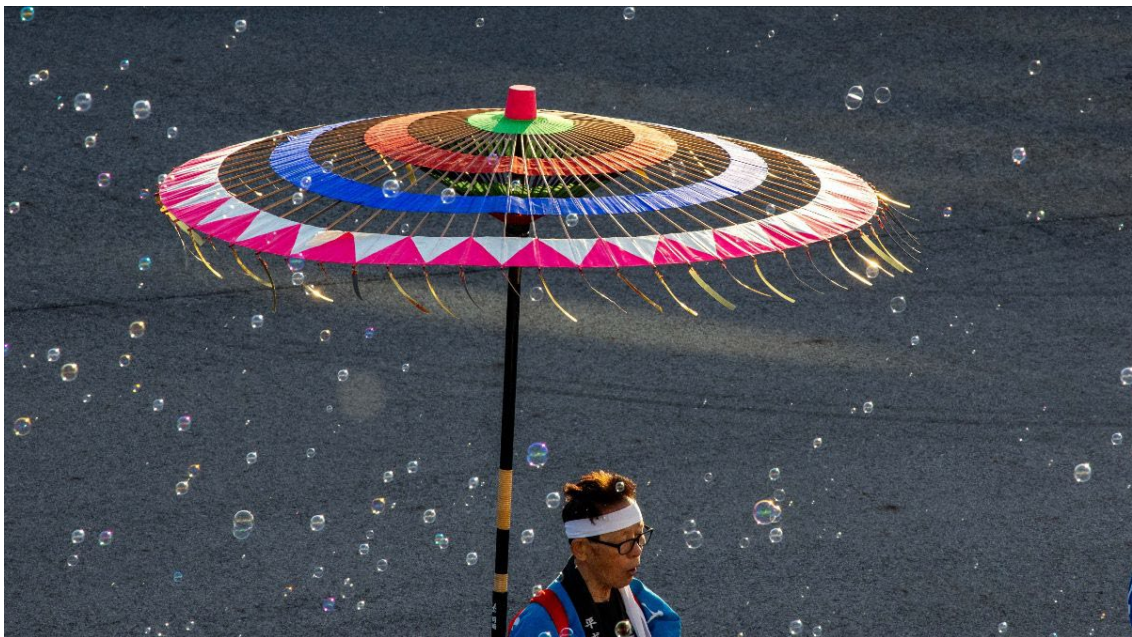
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Day 8

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Kanazawa

Our arrival at the port of Kanazawa was heralded by seeing the snow on Mount Hakusan, which stands proudly behind the city known as the centre of gold in Japan. In 1593 Lord Toshiie Maeda ordered the Kaga domain, the site of present-day Kanazawa, to produce gold and silver leaf. During its 400-year history Kanazawa's gold leaf production has survived through some rough patches, today it is making a comeback as the usage of gold and silver leaf on Buddhist traditional structures, altars and statuettes rise in popularity.

Our first stop was at the Omicho Markets. We had time to explore the amazing array of seafood and fresh produce including some of the biggest oysters we had ever seen. As the market began to bustle, we gathered to depart to the Nagamachi Samurai district. There we explored the Nomura Samurai House with its elegant tatami mat rooms and classic courtyard garden, and browsed the displays and shelves of porcelain in the Kutani style. We had some time to explore at our own pace and checked out the local café and the pottery outlets often hidden in the alleyways of the area.

Lunch was either on board *Heritage Adventurer* or in a local sushi and ramen restaurant. Tiny squid on nigiri were a highlight amongst what everyone who stayed ashore, agreeing it was a stunning meal of fresh tastes and experiences.

Arriving at Kanazawa Castle we walked through the imposing gates, and into the vast complex which reflects the history, growth, rebuilds and construction of this enigmatic castle of the feudal age. Just across the road was Kenrokuen Garden which delivered on its reputation as one of the top three landscape gardens in Japan, designed and crafted to produce beauty in every viewpoint as you stroll the pathways.

Temptation and the iconic gold leaf combined as we enjoyed a delicious gold leaf-covered ice cream while exploring the Higashi Chaya District. This district is an area of preserved historical wooden buildings, traditionally a tea house and geisha area, today the essence remains amongst the artisan outlets.

To end a fantastic day, we had fascinating lectures from Phil on Castles of Japan and Hide sharing the Japanese essence of religion encapsulated in being born into Shinto, married in Christianity and dying in Buddhism.



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Day 9

Thursday, May 16, 2024

Sado

We sailed north overnight to arrive in perfect conditions at the southern end of Sado, the largest island in the Sea of Japan, and the only one that has gold mines. The land forming Sado Island was the tip of a continent which had been sea floor and uplifted.

Sado Island is famously known for its Tarai-bune, a tub boat which is paddled by one person with one paddle. With the addition of a box with a glass bottom, they were used to view the rocky coastline for abalone. We had an opportunity to experience this for ourselves, as we stepped in and took a seat before alternatively being paddled or trying paddling. It definitely looked easier than it was!

Afterwards, we took time to explore Shukunegi Village and were introduced to rooves held down by rocks, cedar timber construction, gardens and shrines which are designated as a National Important Preservation Area for Traditional Buildings and Architecture. We relocated to the Sado Island's Ogi Folk Museum, housed in an old school and complete with a full-scale wooden fishing boat.

The Sado Island Taiko Centre (Tatakokan), constructed with local timber, houses two enormous taiko drums, hand-carved from a 600-year-old Japanese Zelkova tree. Each of us was introduced to taiko drumming playing to the beat of the leader. The reverberations echoed through mind and body; the fun was contagious.

Back at the port we boarded Zodiacs and returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch, some opting to stay ashore for a local lunch. Unfortunately, a change of weather dictated a change of plan, and we all returned from ashore as we departed from Sado bound for Niigata.

Thijs changed from Zodiac driver to presenter of the philosophy of Wabi-Sabi. Followed by Tom on the USA and China and Etsuko on Calligraphy.

Everyone met in the lounge for the final recap, thanks to our wonderful Expedition Team and the slideshow presentation by Cathy, a veritable feast of memories encapsulated through images. Our final dinner celebrated the cuisine of Japan and the skills of our culinary team.



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Day 10

Friday, May 17, 2024

Niigata

Our Sacred Japan & South Korea adventure came to an end as we put our luggage outside our doors before enjoying one last breakfast together and exchanging contact information with new friends. Time then for a final walk down the gangway and one last farewell to the Expedition Team as we headed off on new adventures, secure in the knowledge that this expedition, and our time together on board *Heritage Adventurer*, will linger in our memories for a very long time.



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