

JAPAN'S NATIONAL PARKS, ART & CULTURE

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

28 May - 8 June 2024



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Day 1

Friday, May 24, 2024

Osaka

Osaka, one of Honshu's largest port cities, was the starting point for our Japan's National Parks, Art & Culture voyage, a 16-day circumnavigation of Japan's main island. Adventurers from all corners of the world made their way to the Osaka Hilton where we checked into the stunning hotel handily located around the corner from Osaka Station and in the heart of the city's bustling foodie and shopping scene. Meeting up for dinner in the Shinju Room, we enjoyed a delicious banquet with new and returning friends as we were introduced to some of our expedition team and Expedition Leader Aaron Russ who shared the following day's plan.

Day 2

Saturday, May 25, 2024

Osaka

We woke in the land of the rising sun on the first full day of our Japan's National Parks, Art & Culture expedition and enjoyed a buffet breakfast at the Hilton Osaka's Folk Kitchen, with new and old friends from dinner the night before. We joined our buses and wove through the Japanese traffic bound for Minoh Park. Despite being just 9.6 square kilometres (963 hectares) and one of Japan's smallest National Parks, Minoh Park is an oasis just minutes from the city centre. Our walk to its famous waterfall took us alongside a crystal-clear stream under the canopy of lush forest home to resident monkeys and various birds, which were heard but not always seen. Passing historic homesteads and temples selling souvenirs and snacks, including the local delicacy of battered maple leaves, we headed up the hill alongside the stream.

A few fortunate people enjoyed the rare sighting of a large Japanese Giant Salamander under the fast-flowing water – its incognito markings making it easy to miss alongside the canal's wall. Reaching the falls we were rewarded with the iconic red bridge and the impressive 33-metre-high falls named after the farming technique winnowing (which separates grains from husks), soft serve ice creams and deliciously refreshing, and well-earned, yuzu beer.

It was then off to Osaka's famed dining district Dotonbori, exploring its streets heaving with hungry diners under supersized, towering dragon, crab and cow decorations before enjoying a traditional lunch. We then headed to Osaka Castle, one of Japan's most famous landmarks. The gilded details of the 16th-century shogunate castle glinted in the sun as we walked around its moats, astounded by the impressive engineering feat. Making our way to the castle we observed its golden tiger motifs before entering and climbing the 8 stories to the observation deck. We enjoyed 360-degree views of Osaka Castle Park, the Osaka Plain and the city stretched out to the horizon. The exhibition rooms in each story showcased authentic historical artefacts and brought to life the castle's rich history.

Excitement mounted as we made our way to Osaka Port where our home away from home *Heritage Adventurer* waited for our arrival looking resplendent in blue and white and two golden bands. After checking in and settling into our staterooms and suites, we weighed anchor and set sail for Ise-Shima as we farewelled Osaka from the Observation Deck.



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Day 3

Sunday, May 26, 2024

Ise Shima

Our day started with a hearty and delicious breakfast as *Heritage Adventurer* sailed into Port Tasoura ready for adventure. As we would become accustomed to our journey, our options for today included excursions for parks or arts activities.

Guests opting for the parks option departed first, Zodiacs skipping over the water as we passed fishermen lining the wharf and Black Kites wheeling in the sky above, looking for an easy meal from the fisherman's bait fish, as we made our way to Oyahama Beach. Boarding buses with our local guides we headed to the Ise-Shima Skyline Observatory where short walks were rewarded with stunning panoramas across Isewan Bay, the island-studded ocean and the sprawling city. Coinciding with our visit we were treated to the region's high school students taking part in a traditional dance competition complete with booming music, colourful costumes, clapping and giant flag waving - all in celebration of Ise-Shima's proud fishing history. Some guests also took the opportunity to send postcards from the observatory's famed 'post-box in the sky'.

Lunch for the parks option was a special treat with a visit to Ise City and 'Japan's most famous restaurant' Daiki – as endorsed by the Royal Family. Slipping off our shoes we entered the upstairs dining room, where Japanese royalty had dined before us, and were treated to a series of traditional delicacies in a trio of stacked bento boxes. After lunch, we headed to Japan's famed Meoto Iwa (Wedded Rocks). Here there was time to explore as we learned of the significance of the rocks and the shimenawa rope connecting

them which acts as the division between the spiritual and earthly realms. We also learned about the role of the frog symbol in Shinto lore with the opportunity to enjoy what was arguably Japan's best coffee (so far) and a traditional cleansing ritual. We then explored Mount Yokoyama taking in the grand scale views from three different viewing platforms with some ticking off the summit.

Meanwhile, those of us on the art option had only a short ride up the coast to Shiogahama Little Park for a walk further along the coast overlooking the sandy beaches and bush-clad hills. We headed to the Isobue Observation Deck with expansive ocean views, including our floating home. The outlook featured the Tsubasu Bell and shrine and some of us made an offering, writing our wish on a scallop shell and ringing the bell.

A drive through the hills took us to the Ise Contemporary Art Museum. This museum features a diverse collection of contemporary artworks by both Japanese and international artists. The highlight for most of us was the sculpture garden featuring work by Atsuo Okamoto. Brett Graham, our representative from the New Zealand Art Foundation, had been his student and helped us understand the techniques used.

We returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch, and then off for an afternoon tour of Osatsu Village which is famous for its ama divers. These are women who practice the traditional method of free diving to collect seafood. Our local guides took us to the museum to learn the history of the area, and to the local shrine. We even met a diver who generously answered our many questions.

With everyone back on board it was time to freshen and dress up for the Captain's Cocktails in the lounge, followed by the delicious welcome dinner.



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Day 4

Monday, May 27, 2024

Izu Oshima Island, Tokyo

Our day started as *Heritage Adventurer* sailed towards 'Tokyo's Treasure Islands' Izu Oshima during breakfast, where we were met with a functional art installation of concrete triangles acting as a breakwater and arrived at the volcanic stone beach.

We enjoyed a red-carpet treatment with a surprise welcome from celebrity politician and Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike! The famous Tokyo leader who has held the position since 2016, warmly welcomed us to the remote Tokyo Island offering gifts of books and postcards of the geopark.

We made our way to Mount Mihara, at 758 metres tall it's known by the less than 7,000 locals as Oshima Fuji. Despite being an active volcano, which last erupted in 1986, our guide reassured us that with today's level remaining at 1, we were perfectly safe.

Winding up the perfectly maintained roads, we were flanked by lush vegetation and passed a family of self-liberated Taiwanese Macaques now making the island their home. As our buses climbed higher, we entered a mist which would accompany our hikes, but not dampen our adventurous spirit. Hiking up to the lookout we passed lava flows, chunks and ghostly jagged geo-rock garden outlines through the mist. Exploring this otherworldly landscape, we marvelled at the 'miracle shrine' which narrowly survived destruction with the lava flow stopping just under the shrine's ornate eaves.

Making our way down the crater it was time to don our jackets as a light rain set in, but it wasn't long until

we were back on board our buses bound for the natural wonder that is the Great Road Cut Geological site. We then explored the 700-metre-long towering cliffs and their undulating layers of volcanic stratum which has earned it the nickname Baumkuchen due to its resemblance to the famous layered cake.

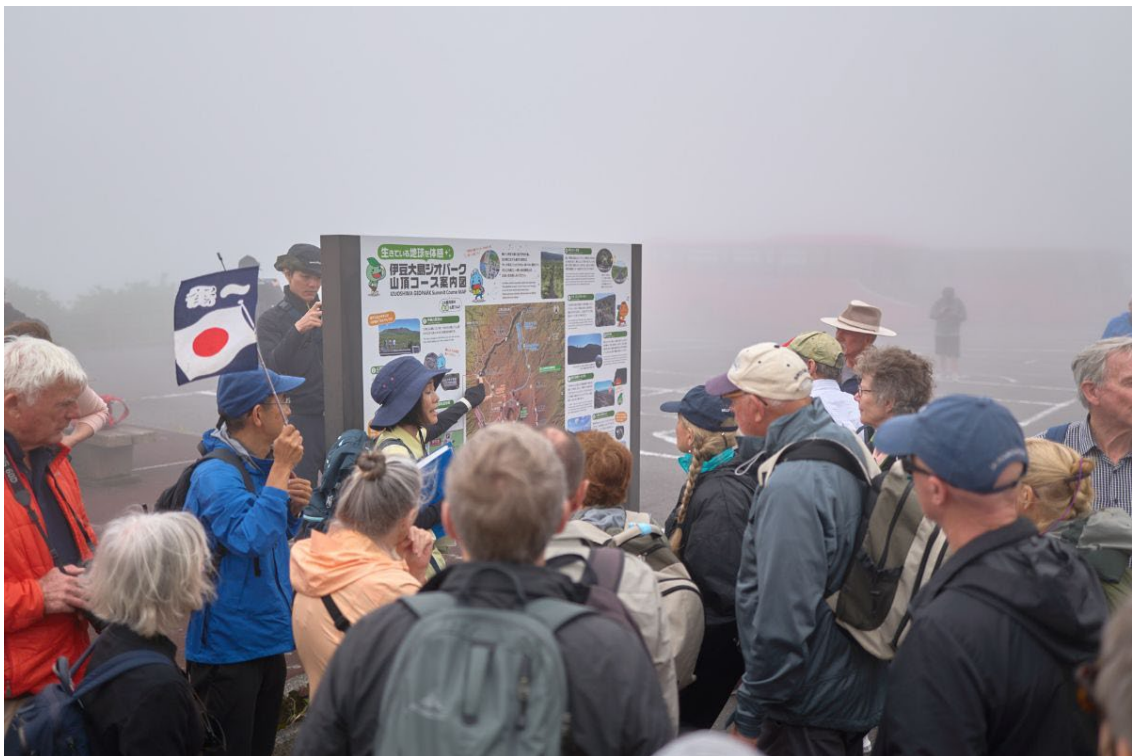
Returning to the comfort of our home away from home, it was time for lunch and a leisurely afternoon of lectures on the History of Japan from John, Japanese Etiquette with on board local guide Hide-san and Japanese Writing Demystified with Heather followed by some retail therapy in the Sea Shop as we sailed towards Ishinomaki.



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Day 5

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

Ishinomaki

We enjoyed a relaxed start to the day as we sailed north along the east coast enjoying a delicious breakfast. After breakfast, it was into the lounge for our further education. Ewan explained how to get the most from our phone with his talk on Why You Don't Need a Camera to Take Great Photos, then Tina gave us an insight into some of the subjects of those photos with A Sense of Japanese Gardens.

We enjoyed an early lunch to make the most of the afternoon. As we pulled into our berth we were greeted by music and a large contingent of flag-waving locals – out in force despite the wet conditions. Even better, several samurai warriors were available for photographs at the bottom of the gangway.

When the coaches carrying those choosing the parks option pulled away, we could see the empty spaces left by the devastation of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Nearly 4,000 lives were lost in the 10-metre wave.

Our destination was Matsushima Bay which is celebrated as one of the three most famous views in Japan. Some of us took the opportunity to visit Zuiganji Temple - one of the region's most famous and prominent Zen temples, well known for its beautifully gilded and painted sliding doors. The rest went walking and had time to cross the iconic long red bridge and tour Fukuurajima Island. The trail meandered through the lush forest past many outlooks into the bay.

We headed to the boat terminal for a one-hour cruise to get close-up views of some of the bays that featured more than 200 islands. Each island is uniquely shaped and named for its distinct appearance or for the Japanese poetry that it has inspired. Back ashore, we enjoyed shopping, sampling curried oysters and trying our hand at painting Kokeshi Dolls.

Those of us who had chosen to do the arts option were mostly unfamiliar with the Manga art form, and as we walked across the bridge towards the Ishinomori Manga Museum, we were greeted by the sight of a building that looked like it was out of the 1970's TV show 'The Jetson's'.

We were all surprised and intrigued by what we encountered as we were introduced to one of Japan's most celebrated Manga artists, Shotaro Ishinomori's, work. We learned of *Kamen Rider* and *Cyborg 009* to the history of Manga art and its impact on parts of the Japanese culture and Ishinomori's prolific input into this art form, which has earned him the Guinness Book of Records Record for contributions to it. Even those of us a little sceptical of what we were to encounter, were drawn in by his talents.

We then walked back across the bridge to the Kawaramachi Communication Centre where we were greeted by several volunteers who talked about the famous Kokeshi Dolls. These traditional wooden dolls have had a recent resurgence and are now one of the most popular souvenirs sold around the city. Then, we all got the chance to paint our own dolls, a fun activity in which some of us realised we wouldn't be offered careers, others might get a callback.

Downstairs from the Centre is the newly formed Genki Market which has been created to promote local food and produce, offering local sake and beer, fruit and vegetables, many different varieties of fish including Minke Whale, sashimi, miso pastes and dashi stocks. This was our first real close look at food at a local level, and we met with good timing enjoying 50% off the remaining sushi plates.

Afterwards, Kenji and Umi organised a visit to the 2011 Tsunami Memorial Museum, many of us knew about the devastating earthquake but didn't realise the real effect it had on this small city. This was an excellent stop and showcased exactly how destructive a Tsunami can be, with the 39-metre wave travelling almost 5 km inland. We also then realised what an amazing job has been done to repair all the damage and rebuild this city, all the while remembering those lives lost and those that remain missing.

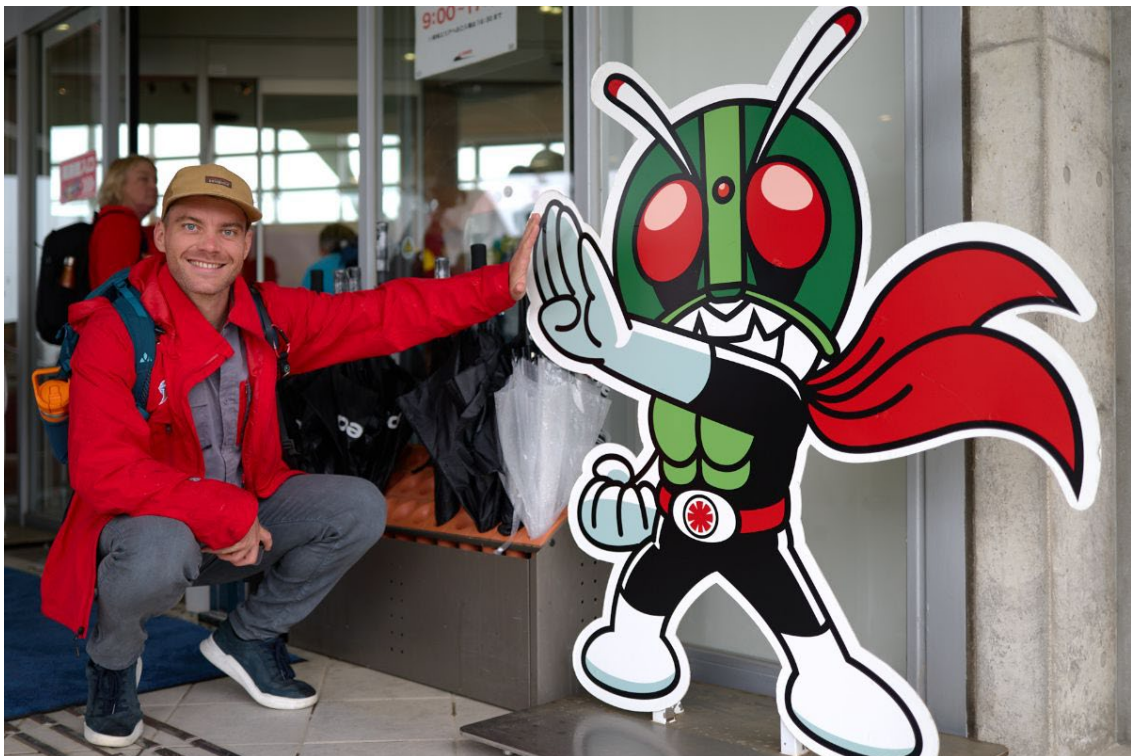
Then it was back to *Heritage Adventurer* for complimentary sake tasting on the dock, and hot chocolate at the top of the gangway as we headed towards our next destination.



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Day 6

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

Hachinohe

We arrived at Hachinohe with the weather clearing, and a beautiful day greeting us upon arrival. We were met by an enthusiastic welcome committee, two mascots that were half squid and half seagull!

First away was the parks option group travelling to Towada-Hachimantai National Park. On the drive, we wound through large areas of newly planted rice paddies as we gradually approached the mountains. We walked along the crystal-clear waters of the Oirase Stream through Oirase Gorge. The walls of the gorge supplied impressive waterfalls and the river valley was covered in greenery of all sorts with numerous cascades.

For lunch we headed along the shore of Lake Towada, the source of the nearby river. We seated ourselves in the local restaurant with a hot plate of sukiyaki, a bowl of udon, a small trout, and rice. Beer, sake and juice added to the festive atmosphere of this delicious meal. Some of us then went up the mountain to Hakka Pass Observatory for the panoramic view of the lake sitting in the volcanic crater of Mount Towada.

The group reassembled at Tsuta Numa Lake for walks of various lengths to see the ponds and verdant growth in this wetland area. The bright sunshine and still conditions made for beautiful reflections.

Those on the art option headed for Hachinohe City Museum, getting great views of the city along the way. The museum had rebuilt the old castle into its former state, including stables, storages and the workshop. Walking through this area, was like walking back in time. The museum showcased what they found in the area, leaving us with a better idea and vision of how life had been when the castle was at the peak of its glory. At the Hachinohe Art Museum, we learned how a museum can foster creativity and community through art experiences.

After a great lunch on board *Heritage Adventurer*, we arrived at the Towada Art Center, one of Japan's best contemporary art museums. The final stop was at Kabushima Shrine on top of a small hill located at the sea, dedicated to Benzaiten, the Goddess of fortune and music. We had a spectacular view of huge numbers of Black-Tailed Gulls. Not afraid of any human, they were in huge numbers sitting and flying everywhere. According to the locals, if you are lucky, you get good luck and fortune when something 'dropped' on you from a Black-Tailed Gull.

After enjoying the view of the sea, that surrounded the shrine, it was time to head back to our beloved *Heritage Adventurer* for an evening cruise in a spectacular sunset before recap, briefing and delicious dinner.



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Day 7
Thursday, May 30, 2024
Muroran

A few of us were awake early to see *Heritage Adventurer* enter Muroran Harbour, Hokkaido, under the impressive Hakucho Bridge. We would cross the bridge several times during our expedition.

As has become our custom, we had selected our favourite options and split into groups to explore how we best saw fit. We travelled through the centre of Muroran, which has seen a decline in the formerly strong steel and coal industries and a fall in population. From there we quickly emerged into the surrounding countryside of wooded hills with plenty of tunnels and viaducts for the highway.

Those opting for the nature option made their way to Lake Tōya, part of the Shikotsu-Tōya National Park and the location of the 2008 G8 summit. At the lookout, we enjoyed grand scale views of this almost circular caldera lake ringed with lush green vegetation. Japan's third largest (at 70.7 km²) and sixth deepest lake (at 180m) is famous for the clarity of its impossibly blue water and named 'to-ya' meaning 'the shore of a lake' in the Ainu language. After capturing the moment at the Toya sign, we rejoined our bus heading to Mount Usu. This is an active volcano which last erupted in 2000 and its offspring Shōwa-shinzan, one of Japan's youngest mountains, rose out of a flat wheat field to a height of 290 metres during volcanic activity between 1943 and 1945. We captured some great shots of the still venting earthy red mountain named after Emperor Showa before ascending Mount Usu aboard the cable car gondola known as Usuzan Ropeway. While we couldn't see the top of Mount Usu due to fog, we needn't have worried as we ascended 1,370 metres in just 6 minutes passing through the clouds to a perfect day above. At the top, we enjoyed incredible views of Lake Toya, Shōwa-shinzan and the central crater of Mount Usu (Ginnuma Crater) with some tackling hundreds of stairs to reach the furthest viewpoint.

For lunch we returned to our trusty expedition vessel or sampled local delicacies at a traditional sushi train or soba noodle house – there was no wrong choice. Our next stop ashore was to the Jigokudani (Hell Valley), Lake Oyunuma under Mount Hiyori and Lake Oku no Yu. Hell Valley lived up to its name displaying an incredible red and white earth landscape venting scorching sulphur steam, a bubbling blue creek and mud pools and crater lakes framed by intensely green lush jungle and perfect blue skies, making it a photographer's dream. Jigokudani was named for its traditional depiction of Hell, but other than its eggy fragrance, it was all rather pleasant with a boardwalk taking us into its steam heart. Some of us headed to Lake Oyunuma which was at 377 metres and a lovely climb up through the forest to a beautiful view of this round, gourd-shaped crater with a sulphur spring reaching 130°C. From the lookout, we found Oku no Yu, a black sulphur spring with a surface temperature of 85°C and was especially fragrant.

Guests choosing the arts option had an action-packed day, heading to Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park. This museum, inaugurated in 2020, is the first national museum dedicated to the indigenous Ainu people of Japan and the islands to the north. We browsed the excellent exhibits showing many aspects of Ainu life, culture, history and the current situation. The cultural performance of song and dance in traditional costume was a highlight. Some of us stopped at a nearby farm restaurant for steak, fish or vegetarian burgers Japanese style.

Those of us who chose to visit Noboribetsu Onsen were treated to a hot bath in the sulphur-rich water, reputed to provide health benefits, including improving skin condition and easing joint pains. Certainly, we all came out feeling better.

We arrived back at *Heritage Adventurer* to receive a rousing and generous farewell including fireworks. From there it was back under the bridge on our return journey to Honshu Island. Lindsay took the opportunity of our early departure to describe his experiences with Flower Growing in Hokkaido.

As we entered the nutrient-rich waters of the Tsugaru Strait, numerous seabirds and a pod of dolphins were spotted before we sat down for a delicious dinner and swapped stories of our day's adventures.



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Day 8

Friday, May 31, 2024

Akita

After an overnight passage through the Tsugaru Strait, we arrived at Akita in the mid-morning. This gave time for John to start our day with his presentation on *The Life of a Geisha*. This prepared us well for our welcome to the port, which featured a presentation of traditional song and dance including a shamisen and a geisha in her traditional costume and make-up.

As usual, we chose how to enjoy our selection of the attractions of the Akita area. The first destination for some was the museum and presentation space dedicated to Kanto – where we enjoyed a performance balancing huge frameworks of lanterns on long poles with accompanying taiko drumming. It was fun to see the performer's skills and imagine hundreds of them out at night during the August festival.

We explored the city during our visit to the Akita Art Museum. The building designed by Tadao Ando is a work of art itself, and houses work by Tsuguharu Foujita and other Japanese who painted in the European style.

The drive to the Ogi area was along the waterfront with many towering wind turbines, then past terraced rice fields as we climbed into the mountains. There we visited the Namahage Museum to learn about the tradition in this area of ogres that visit on New Year's Eve to search for lazy children or wives. The re-

enactment in a traditional house was both fun and a bit frightening. In the museum, we saw many examples of the costumes and could dress ourselves as Namahage too. The grounds of the museum and the shrine at the rear were lovely as we took the chance to explore the area.

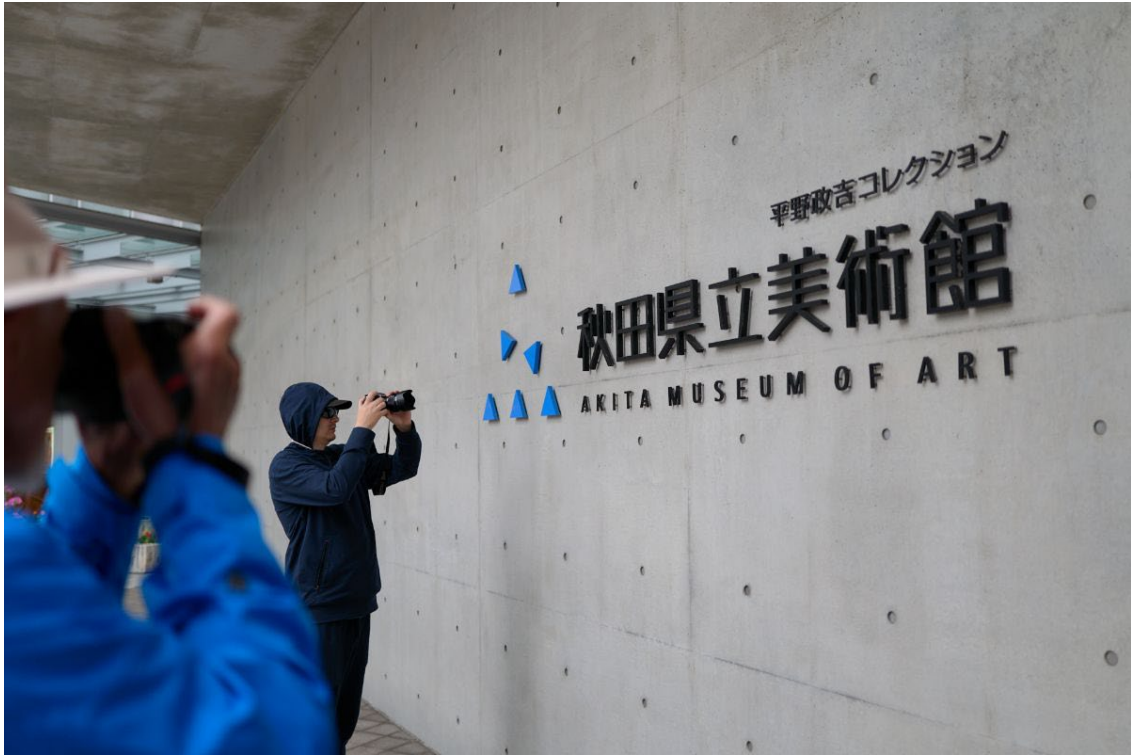
The Suishin Garden visit featured many pathways, bridges, ponds filled with Koi, waterfalls, and birdsong and we enjoyed photographing several gorgeous green tree frogs. We had the place to ourselves and plenty of time to admire the scenery and wander through the iris fields, some of us explored even further and found extra delights in the form of a complimentary refreshing tea.

The farewell on the wharf featured a very energetic taiko performance – with a special guest appearance of Namahage on the drums. As we pulled away the fireworks display started off the starboard bow and featured a long and dazzling sequence of fountains of colours and rosettes in the sky. Wow, thank you, Akita.

After another full and exciting day, we had plenty to share over drinks and dinner as we chatted alongside our newfound friends.



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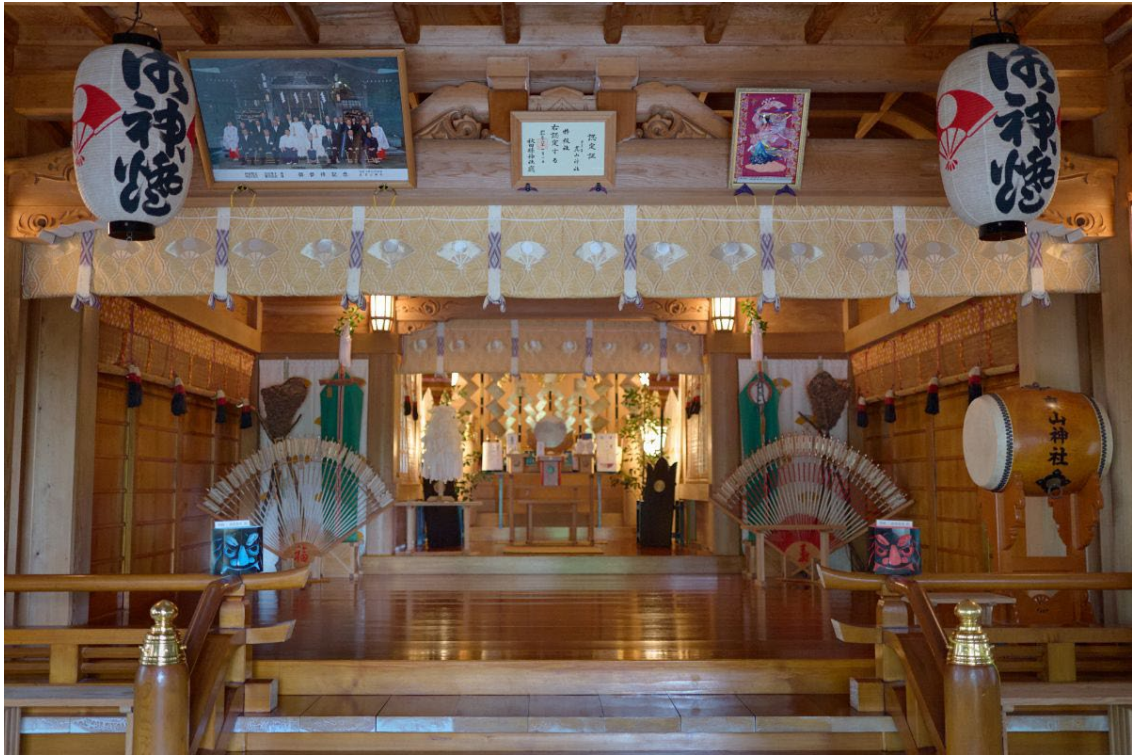
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Day 9

Saturday, June 1, 2024

Niigata

Arriving at Niigata, we were welcomed by two of the region's friendly mascots – a tall yellow man and a short woman in a kimono before heading to our various destinations.

The nature group departed at 0745 aboard the 'party bus' complete with chandeliers and gold tasselled curtains bound for Shishinokura Forest. Passing through the bustle of Tainai City the numerous Pachinko parlours made way for endless rice paddy fields. Soon we were winding our way up through the lush forest and popular ski area, stopping near the construction of a new dam and the start of our walk. We climbed a stairway with roped rails under the forest canopy alive with birdsong, interesting insects and the fleeting glimpse of a Japanese Common Kingfisher. Before long we met with the forest's ancient beech trees, hundreds of years old, they were an impressive sight with swollen trunks and gnarled branches twisting skyward.

Back on the bus, there was a quick rest stop at the pink-marbled elegance of a local ski resort before arriving at Fukushima Wetlands, where we enjoyed our boxed lunches with 360° panoramic views of the sprawling wetlands and neighbouring Echigo Plains from the 6th-level of the Fukushima Museum. A maze-like collection of reed-lined waterways and ponds connected by boardwalks and bridges, 163 of Fukushima's 193 hectares are designated as a National Wildlife Protection Area home to more than 220 species of birds and plants including the rarely seen gigantic lotus *Euryale Ferox*. Exploring this birder and botanist's paradise it's easy to see why this wetland makes Japan's 100 greatest natural

environments. Keen-eyed adventurers spotted numerous bird species including nesting Great Crested Grebes, Carrion Crows, Oriental Reed Warblers, Common Cuckoo, White Egret, and Osprey patiently watching the water waiting for its next meal to swim by. We also saw a range of frogs, tadpoles, turtles, freshwater crayfish, snakes and the peculiarly named Green Pheasant with a metallic, blue-feathered head. Many were excited to hear the booming call of the notoriously elusive Bittern, despite best efforts the master of camouflage remained an enigma among the reeds.

After all the action, nearby Lagoon Brewery provided a delicious respite with many enjoying the tomato soft serve ice cream and sampling the progressive sake flavours.

Those on the arts options visited three excellent and varied museums. The Niigata City History Museum replicates a 1911 office, with a domed central area and marble stairway. On one side of the exhibition space, it houses a series of displays that cover the history of the area, from sand dunes to the now-modern city. The other side shows the area's development, from draining the swamps to rice paddies in a series of dioramas. The Northern Culture Museum is the well-preserved mansion of a wealthy farming family dating from 1882. The spacious tatami rooms, wonderful gardens, and beautiful ceramic pieces give a hint of their lifestyle. The grounds have been converted to display working farm buildings from the local area. The Niitsu Art Museum was full of fans of the manga *Golden Kamuy*. We donned our facemasks and joined in to enjoy the superb detail of the drawings and the drama of the story. The botanical garden, just across the road, was the perfect spot for a stroll to end our visit.

Arriving back on *Heritage Adventurer*, we cast off and were farewelled by a dynamic taiko drumming performance as we pulled away.

Finally, Kay was on the Bing Bong to invite us to the Observation Lounge to try our hand at calligraphy with Yumi-san and Julia-san providing pens and guidance. A fabulous way to end the day!



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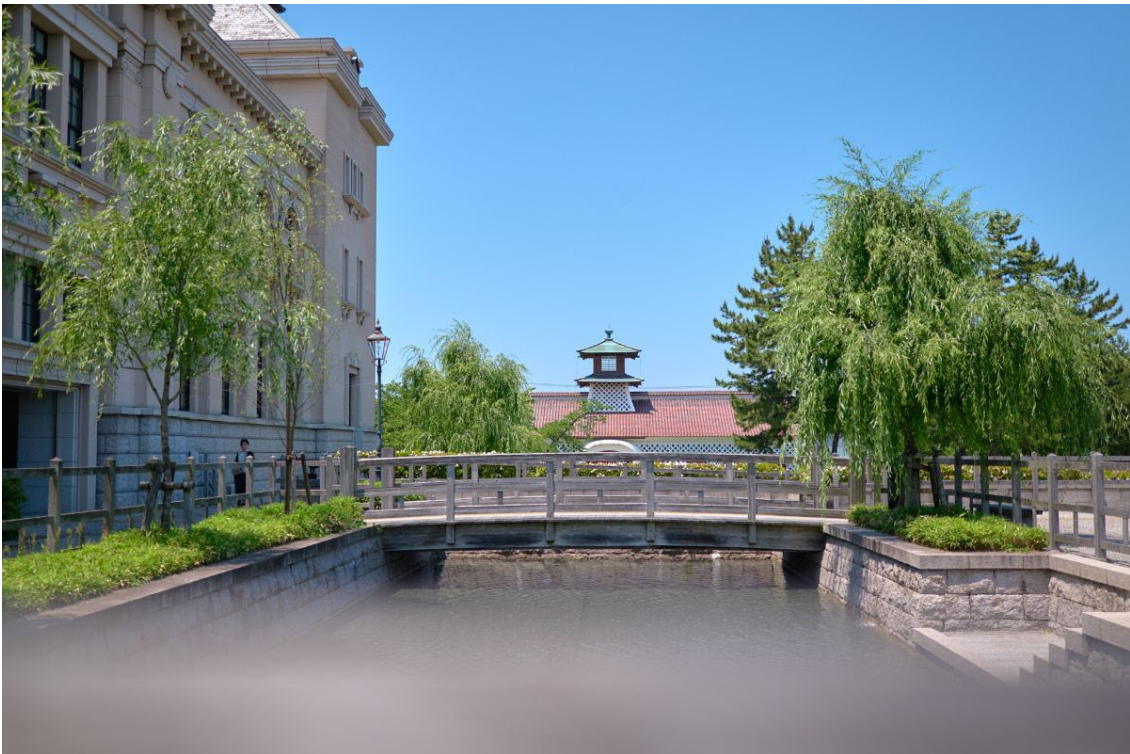
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Day 10
Sunday, June 2, 2024
Kanazawa

After a sprinkling of rain in the morning, we were greeted by glorious sunshine as we arrived at the wharf in Kanazawa to begin our day.

Both the arts and nature groups started with a scenic drive through the city and into the rice fields. Some of us headed to Yunokuni no Mori, a cultural village tucked into the foothills. The winding streets are lined with thatched cottages each one housing a different artisans' workshop. We tried our hand at lacquerware, dyeing, gold leaf, glass etching or papermaking and afterwards had time to explore the village. We kept the objects we created and then explored the area on our own. The shops were full of unique and high-quality merchandise, so most ended up with bags in our hands and ice cream and other treats were also enjoyed. To make it even more special the areas around the houses were nicely landscaped with many charming little garden spots tucked away between them.

It was an amazing bus ride to Shirakawa-go, with the scenery transitioning from bustling cityscapes to tranquil mountains. As the bus wound through narrow roads flanked by dense forests, anticipation built among us. Upon arrival, the sight of Ogimachi Village, with its iconic gassho-zukuri farmhouses, was breathtaking.

We eagerly stepped off the bus and began our walk through the village. The air was crisp, and the sounds of nature enveloped us as we strolled along the quaint paths. Each historic house seemed to whisper stories of the past, and we found ourselves drawn to the Kanda House, known for its impeccable preservation.

Inside the Kanda House, we marvelled at the traditional architecture. The steep thatched roof and the spacious, wooden interiors gave us a glimpse into the ingenuity and lifestyle of the village's former inhabitants. The artifacts and displays further enriched our understanding of this cultural heritage.

After our exploration, we enjoyed a traditional Japanese lunch at a local eatery. The meal, prepared with fresh local ingredients, was satisfying and a perfect conclusion to our visit.

As we returned to *Heritage Adventurer*, the magnificent scenery accompanied us once more. The mountains, now bathed in the soft light of the afternoon sun, seemed to bid us farewell. The experience was unforgettable, leaving us with a deep appreciation for the beauty and history of Shirakawa-go.

After lunch, those choosing the art option visited the Kenroku-en Garden, considered one of Japan's top three traditional gardens. The Garden was developed from the 1620s to the 1840s by the Maeda clan, the daimyōs (feudal lords) who ruled this rich area. The garden is named for the six contrasting attributes that it embodies – spaciousness, seclusion, artificiality, antiquity, abundant water and panoramas. It was a weekend during a Kanazawa festival, so many locals were out on the paths with us, some in kimonos or other traditional attire. The grounds of Kanazawa Castle, just across the bridge, were packed with tents and locals, with the castle itself standing majestically above it all.

Afterwards, a quick shuttle brought us to the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art. We were able to explore the avant-garde exhibits and sculptures both inside the building and on the grounds.

In the afternoon, those choosing the park's options visited Kanazawa's geisha district, Higashi Chaya. We explored the atmospheric streets, where traditional teahouses stood as remnants of a bygone era. The district's charm captivated us as we explored various shops, offering artisanal crafts and local delicacies. As the sun began to set, casting a golden hue over the rooftops, we returned to our trusty expedition vessel, the memory of the day's stunning scenery and cultural immersion firmly etched in our minds.

Aaron had hinted that Kanazawa takes pride in presenting the best farewell performances. Still, we were not prepared for the hundreds of costumed dancers in four separate troupes, and huge flags being waved. The skill, energy, enthusiasm, smiles and genuine happiness of the groups were infectious and delightful. We clapped and waved from the rail as *Heritage Adventurer* pulled away.

Japan, the land of the rising sun, has turned on a series of spectacular sunsets on our evening cruises. This evening was no exception, and we enjoyed dinner basking in the views around us.



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Day 11
Monday, June 3, 2024
Sakaiminato and Matsue

It was an early start for those visiting the towering Mount Daisen. The mountain was hidden in the clouds as we approached, but we enjoyed great views of the summit from Ogamiyama Shrine at the top of the climb. Our two local guides directed us along the winding paths through the beech forest, for a visit to Daisenji Temple and then up the final staircase. They educated us on the properties of the various plant species, and the history of the Buddhist monastery that was once the home of more than 3,000 soldier-monks. Both the shrine and the temple featured outstanding wooden architecture, while numerous small statues honour the Jizo Bodhisattva, protector of the souls of children who died as infants.

Others visited Matsue Castle – one of the few original castles remaining in Japan. It was built in the early 1600s and has been faithfully restored. The strong compact form and the displays of defences in the interior make it clear why it survived. The views over the town from the top were worth the climb and several Grey Herons could be seen feeding their chicks in the top of the pine trees.

On departing the castle, we drove 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 garden 'borrows' the landscape of the surrounding hills to complement the created shapes within the garden. The waterfalls and mounds of the garden were designed to be viewed through the gallery's windows and there are several areas where one can sit and enjoy the stunning work, everything is immaculate and looks like a postcard scene.

The Adachi has been voted the most beautiful garden in Japan for 21 years running – with good cause. It was a unique experience to look at the gardens presented as works of art, then transfer to the art gallery and enjoy the more traditional artworks.

For our farewell, Sakaiminato went overboard on cute with a group of preschool toddlers showing off their dance moves with red and yellow pom-poms. We cheered and laughed from the decks as *Heritage Adventurer* made a start toward South Korea.

It was nice to have time on board *Heritage Adventurer* to rest, relax, or sort photos, but there were activities to tempt us as well. Yumi-san and Tina-san brought out a selection of kimonos and helped the ladies learn the history and techniques of wearing them, and then we all gave it a go. Brett gave his presentation on Art We See on our Voyage and Hide-san told us the story of Sadako Sasaki and the origami cranes of Hiroshima before we tried our hand at making them. We did very well, and many strings of cranes were prepared for our visit.

Another very full and exciting day was wrapped up with drinks, recap, briefing and dinner.



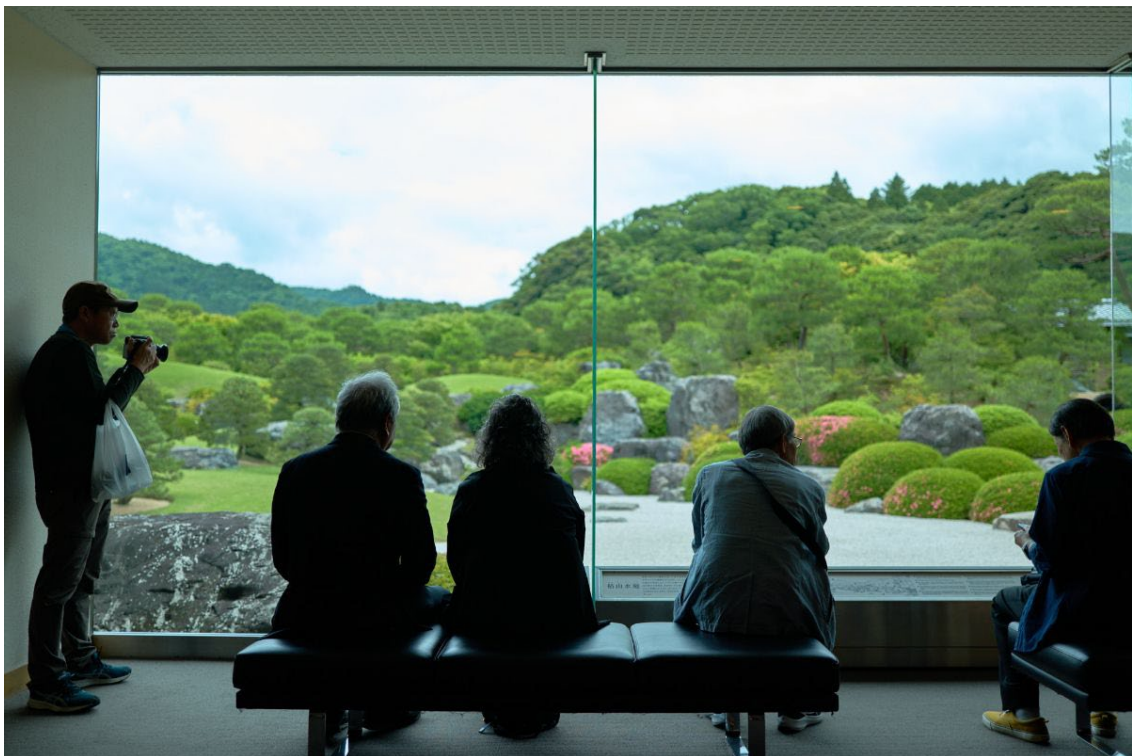
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Day 12
Tuesday, June 4, 2024
Ulsan, South Korea

Arriving at the second country on 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 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 a tomb that had been excavated and saw the burial chamber with replicas of the golden crowns and artifacts that were unearthed. We had the place almost to ourselves, and got quality time with our local guides, having a real appreciation for the treasures found and the work to unearth them.

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 relics from that kingdom. Especially impressive was the huge bronze Bell of King Seongdeok the Great.

We stopped at a local hotel for a buffet lunch with seemingly endless choices, then moved on to the Bulguksa Buddhist Temple. 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. Some of the plazas were decorated with paper lanterns left over from Buddha's Birthday and their colour added to the festive feeling.

After a hot and busy day, it seemed like a walk in the park would be a good way to finish. So, we travelled back to Ulsan to the Taehwagang River Bamboo Forest. We enjoyed a quick stroll, and it was fun to see the locals out also enjoying the sunny afternoon.

For those who had missed the entry to the port, the exit was a chance to see the true might of this industrial city. *Heritage Adventurer* took her place in the queue of departing vessels as we passed bridges, ships, shipyards, wharves, tugboats and more which just seemed to go on and on. After yet another pastel sunset we saw the lights from the many squid boats in the Sea of Japan and admired the skill of the Bridge Team to navigate our way through. Our visit to South Korea had certainly been action-packed.



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Day 13

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Shimonoseki, Japan

Returning to Japan, we arrived dockside in Shimonoseki and set off on activities of our choosing.

Those bound to the island of Tsunashima followed the coastline almost the entire way. The sea views across the clear waters included the local fishermen at work and the occasional villages were full of traditional houses. Across the long bridge to the island, we explored the vicinity of the lighthouse and visited the Natural History Museum.

Some returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch while others opted to make their selection from the Karato Fish Market area. A large variety of food was available from nearby restaurants, including the local delicacy of fugu, or puffer fish, for those brave enough to try it – fugu being deadly if not prepared by an expert chef.

For those on the art option, we visited the Shimonoseki City History Museum. There were excellent displays and videos showcasing the changes and development of this area which allowed an understanding of the history that surrounded us.

Due to the City Art Museum being closed, we instead headed to the Idemitsu Sazo Museum. This

presented us with a great insight into this man, Sazō Idemitsu, who built up an empire and collected magnificent art pieces, mainly pottery and bronzes on display today. It is a fabulous presentation of his life, the hardships he endured and his successes, that led to his ability to have pottery from the 14th Century and bronze items from the 10th Century. The majority of the pottery items are related to traditional Tea Ceremonies, so we learnt about that as well.

We all had the chance to visit Chofu Garden, a historic and tranquil garden that offered an escape from the nearby bustling city. The garden, dating from the Edo Period is in traditional Japanese style, featuring beautifully landscaped ponds, stone lanterns, and meticulously maintained trees and flowers (especially Iris).

Back on board *Heritage Adventurer*, we were treated to a brass band farewell and then joined the parade of vessels through the busy Kanmon Strait. We followed the navigation lights and passed the sights we had seen from the land. This was the entrance to the Seto Inland Sea which will carry us eastward for the rest of our voyage. It was a treat to relax in the warm breezes on the outside and top decks as the busy commerce of the area went by on either side.

We learned more at the recap and briefing, and enjoyed another amazing dinner and dessert, before joining Aaron in the lounge for his presentation of Heritage Expeditions: The Story So Far.



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Day 14

Thursday, June 6, 2024

Miyajima and Hiroshima

It was a fabulous start to the day as *Heritage Adventurer* arrived off the island of Miyajima - literally "Shrine Island" - and the Zodiacs were soon lowered for our adventure to begin. Our first destination was Itsukushima Shrine and its famous 'floating' torii gate. We were lucky to be there while a wedding party was taking photographs and the bride's and mother's kimonos were beautiful.

We climbed the hill to the many pavilions of the Daisho-in temple. The bell rang regularly over the hillside walk filled with 500 small Buddhas with red caps who look after small children who die too young to know the way to the afterlife.

The town was charming, with plenty of retail and food options with the coffee and ice cream proving quite popular. Roaming the streets with the visitors were the resident deer population, who were happy to oblige for photos.

Returning to *Heritage Adventurer*, we enjoyed a delicious BBQ on the Aft Deck in the sunshine. It turned out that the hotel team had done a bit of shopping at the oyster farms that we passed on the Zodiacs, so oysters and sake were a tasty and popular appetiser as well!

Our afternoon visit to the Hiroshima Peace Museum and Peace Park was in the company of large groups of school children. The museum gives a stark depiction of the horrors and suffering of the victims of the

nuclear bomb that exploded over the city on the morning of August 6, 1945.

The Peace Park has been set aside to commemorate the bombing and the result. 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. It 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. We placed our offering of cranes among the many at the Children’s Memorial. Despite the sombre subject, the park and city’s message of peace shines through.

Our farewell from this lovely city of broad boulevards and many parks was an energetic duo of drums and keyboards, who produced the sound of a much larger group. We cast off into another colourful sunset and headed to the lounge to continue the festivities.



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Day 15
Friday, June 7, 2024
Takamatsu & Naoshima

Expedition Leader Aaron has made sure that every day has been as full of 'Japan' as possible, and the last full day of the voyage was not to be an exception. The arts group got an early start for the day on Naoshima. The bus, and us, boarded the ferry for the 60-minute trip from Takamatsu to Naoshima. From there we explored in small groups alongside our local guide Yumi-san and expedition team.

Throughout the day, we visited the iconic red pumpkin at the ferry terminal and the yellow pumpkin made by Yayoi Kusama. At the beach, we enjoyed our Bento Box lunch and other public artworks that Naoshima is renowned for.

We then explored the Honmura Art House District, an immersive art project that took us on a hunt for art installations in converted abandoned houses and other spaces. Each was strikingly different.

We visited the Chichu and Benesse House Art Museums – both housed in dramatic structures designed by the renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando. We navigated through the naturally lit and dramatically scaled rooms, stairways and hallways to visit works by Walter De Maria, James Turrell, Claude Monet and many others.

The ferry ride back to Takamatsu gave us a chance to share impressions and our understanding that there is nowhere else in Japan, or the world, quite like Naoshima.

Those choosing the parks option had a great morning in Takamashi, starting with a visit to the Kinashi Bonsai area. This area is one of the largest bonsai production centres in Japan, supplying exquisite Bonsai Trees to enthusiasts worldwide. We were met by a lovely local guide, who told us the story of the area and shared her knowledge about different bonsai styles, where they get seeds from, and how they plant and look after these miniature trees. We had a tour of the area and visited one of the farms with lots of Bonsai Trees that were 200-300 years old and older. There was a great souvenir shop at the farm where some of us bought some souvenirs.

After visiting the Kinashi Bonsai area we continued exploring Takamatsu and its stunning Ritsurin Garden, a designated Special Place of Scenic Beauty. It is one of Japan's most famous historical gardens, known for its beautiful landscape that harmoniously blends natural features with artful design. We spent an hour discovering charming teahouses, traditional wooden bridges and seasonal flowers. Koi and turtles were a great addition to this stunning nature.

Some of us stayed in town for lunch to have Udon noodles which Takamatsu is known for, while others returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch and a chance to unwind.

Our exploration of Takamatsu continued with a visit to Mount Yashima, a historic mountain that played a significant role in the Genpei War during the late 12th century. We went through the temple area to Yashima viewpoint where we enjoyed panoramic views of the city and the Seto Inland Sea. Shikoku-mura was our next stop, an open-air museum that showcases traditional buildings from across Shikoku Island. Kenji-san and Hide-san took us to a small art gallery showing paintings and sculptures by modern artists from around the world. The gallery had a spectacular view over the surrounding city and on the way back

one of the most popular attractions was a vine suspension bridge.

After visiting Shikoku-mura we headed to Takamatsu Castle, our final destination for the day and our voyage as well. The castle was built in 1590 and is one of the few Japanese Castles built along a waterfront. It was quite special to visit the park and the garden that again presented a unique signature of Takamatsu-Bonsai Trees, which were different shapes, sizes and ages.

Our return to the *Heritage Adventurer* was quickly followed by an impressive display of firearms and swordsmanship by modern-day samurai as a farewell. To end a fantastic voyage, we enjoyed the Captain's Farewell Cocktails while giving a heartfelt round of applause in appreciation for the efforts of the ship, hotel and expedition teams. The farewell dinner was even more extravagant than the others of the voyage, and the lounge was buzzing. Still, we had to tear ourselves away at some point to pack those bags, but the conversations continued well into the night.



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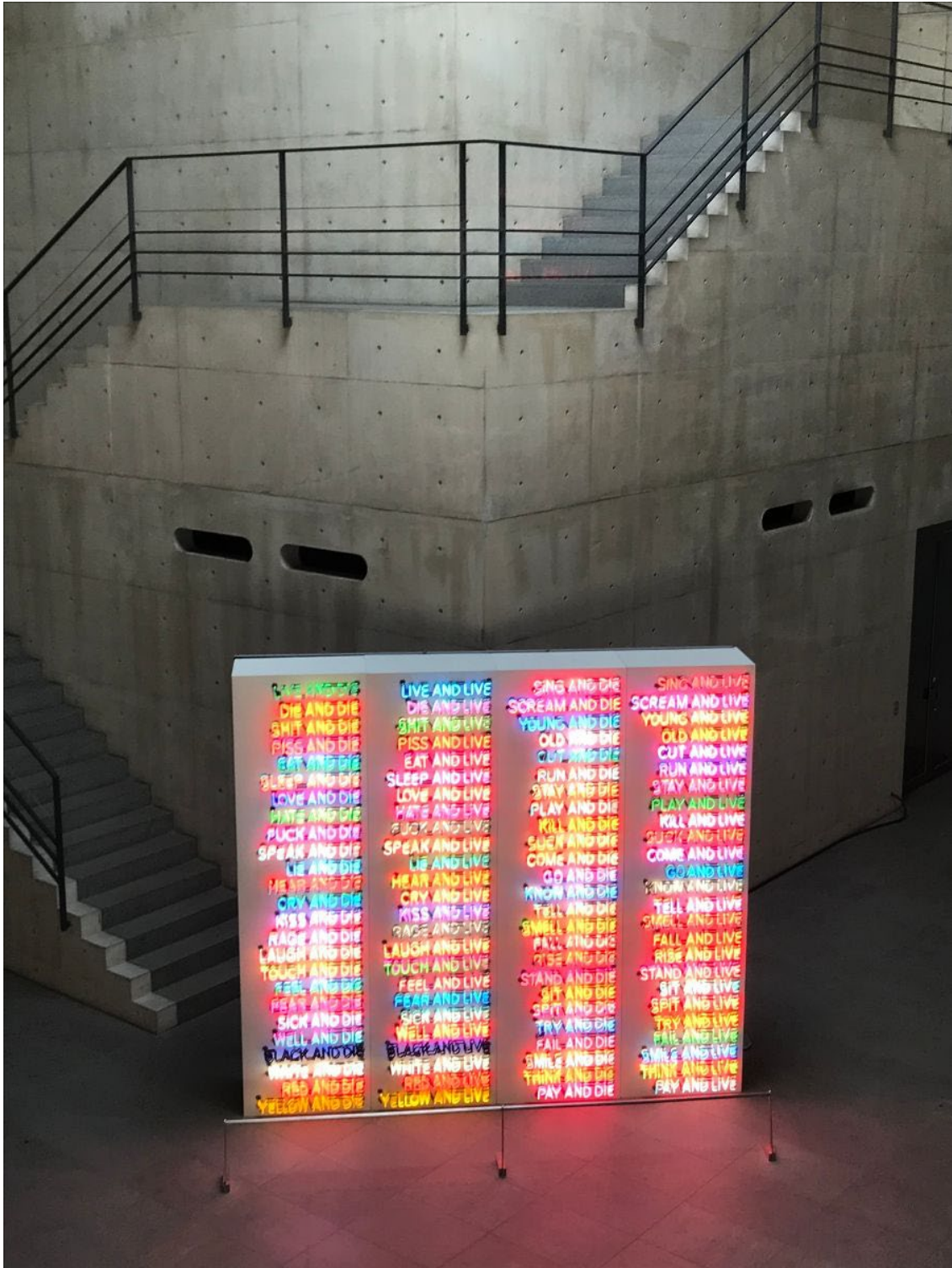
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Day 16

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Osaka

Our Japan's National Parks, Art & Culture expedition had ended, and it was a sad farewell as the luggage was moved to the passageway, one final breakfast together enjoyed, and contact information exchanged. We had one last walk down the gangway and waved to the expedition team as we headed off on new adventures, Japan and our shared adventure finding a special place in hearts.



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