

# NIPPON NEWS

10 Day Tour of Japan | March 2023 | Heather and Blayze

## Blayze's Impressions



## Historic Towns

Blayze is tired tonight to write any notes, so my thoughts will have to suffice. A beautiful breakfast was again presented to us. I concentrated on the misso soup again as I really love it, but added some western eggs and sausages and Blayze went for the rice. He really fits into this place — black, thick hair, polite to the extreme and loves rice!!

Before our bus ride we took a brief walk to view the Matsumoto castle in the sunlight. It's a very beautiful place made more tranquil by the calm water in the moat.





We had a short journey to a wasabi farm. I have never tasted it but Blayze has, and says he likes it. I had my first taste in the form of an ice-cream. It was actually a little hot for me and half ended up in the bin. The location on the banks of numerous melt water streams was tranquil and beautiful. The water is supplied by the imposing Japanese alps that loom in the distance behind a screen of bare branched trees. The wasabi is grown in the water diverted from the streams. We wandered the stream banks and climbed to some of the lookouts. Music floated to us from the entrance building. It was extremely peaceful.



We then set off on what turned out to be a long drive (about 1.5 to 2 hours) up and into the alps we viewed from the farm. The country became gradually more snow covered and we passed beside many streams. The isolated buildings in the valleys all had associated cultivated areas — the vast majority about to sown to rice.

Our intended destination was Takayama old town. Takayama's old town has been beautifully preserved with many buildings and whole streets of houses dating from the Edo Period (1603-1868), when the city thrived as a wealthy merchant town. The southern half of the old town, especially the Sannomachi Street, survives in a particularly pretty state with many old homes, shops, cafes and sake breweries, some of which have been in business for centuries. However it is a little underdone since COVID, as many businesses have remained closed and it really lacked a lot of atmosphere. The main interest for most was the saki shops. Because Blayze and I, were obviously not interested in that, we wandered the streets for a while, but went back to the bus early.

Not far away, after venturing through tunnels and into another valley we arrived at the UNESCO listed Shirakawago. It is a mountain settlement in what was once considered a wild and unexplored region. Because of the area's natural environment, with high mountains and heavy snowfall, interaction with neighboring regions was limited. However, this also created the conditions for the development of unique cultural practices and lifestyles. The particular one on evidence today was the fabulous old, traditional buildings. Gassho style houses are residences built from wooden beams that support their characteristic, steeply sloped, thatched roofs, that meet at a high peak, and are said to resemble hands meeting in prayer. In the 1970s the majority of the population agreed to three things — don't sell, don't rent and don't change. Only locals are allowed to

drive cars in the town. All visitors must park on the other side of a large river. Today, the place was still covered in a great deal of snow. Apparently the town has the average highest snowfall in all of Japan. We enjoyed our short time there. Blayze even managed to bomb me with snow in retaliation for Fuji San.

We then had a two hour journey to our hotel to give a flying jump to Kyoto tomorrow. The trip involved driving up and through many, many tunnels and across much snow covered country. We were quite happy to get to our hotel. Blayze did not want to go out again to get tea, so I ventured out the what the Japanese call the Family Mart and got some takeaways. Day four finished.



