

# NIPPON NEWS

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

## Blayze's Impressions

On our first stop today, we stopped at a Garden. Next to the Garden is a temple called Chion-in. The entrance has a hill which has quite a few steps, after the entrance is a beautiful temple where mostly buddhists as most tourists just stop at around the first flight of stairs.

I bought a mini manekineko for both my friend and for myself for a decoration for the house.

After that was a Golden temple which I thought was cool but was too touristy.

Tomorrow we go on a Shinkansen bullet train to Hiroshima where we will see the bomb dome and the peace memorial.



## Kyoto and Beyond

A two hour drive from Gifu took us to Kyoto. The first location of the day was no doubt my highlight. We went to a garden in central Kyoto. The guide gave us an hour to get lunch or wander. We decided on the wander. We went up several flights of very steep steps to a beautiful Buddhist temple. Blayze chose the steep more direct route and I walked around the easier steps (designed for either lazy or old people - not sure which category I fit into). Up top, few people had ventured, so we had a pleasant, peaceful experience. After taking our shoes off, we entered the main temple and watched and listened.





The roof was extremely high and ornately decorated. Gold leaf abounded. After leaving the temple we ascended some more stairs and found our way to other smaller buildings. At one, numerous people were standing silently before a small building and obviously contemplating or paying their respects (to whom or what I don't know). But Blayze chose to join the group. I left him there and concentrated on the pond under the small bridge on which I stood. I spent several minutes watching a tortoise move up onto a rock to sun itself. A very peaceful few minutes.

The rest of the day was a rather busy walk, amongst many people, sometimes through beautiful gardens and other times busy commercial areas. The most obvious thing about the gardens was the shape of the trees. Not much blossom is out yet, but the shapes are enticing. On one body a water a blue heron sat quite conveniently for us all the photograph. At one location, I entered a restaurant that I thought had a nice atmosphere and was told I had to have a reservation. Later the guide informed us that that area was the fancy eating end of the garden.

After transferring back to the bus, we were taken to the main area of Gion where geishas are famous. The streets were narrow and bounded by obviously old buildings mainly constructed of timber with a oil stained appearance. Gift shops and eateries abounded. Lots of girls and young and older couples were



attired in kimono. They looked beautiful. Interestingly, the guide pointed out that one of the outfitted young ladies was obviously not a Japanese person as her kimono was purple and that is the colour of mourning in Japan. Blayze acquired a katana like umbrella, to complement the garments he has already acquired. We saw no geisha but apparently one had passed by. Its a shame we don't have time to go and have a in-depth experience of things like the geisha or sumo wrestlers for that matter.



Our next stop was the Golden Temple. It literally glowed in the late afternoon light. It is on the banks of a small irregular shaped pond. The lovely thing about it was the small islands which were adorned by shapely trees. We were all directed around together and, every step or two, a new fine visit opened up. It was visually very lovely but there were hundreds of people dogging our steps so the tranquillity was somewhat dashed.



The last stop for the day. Was the Vermillion Gates. The Inari temple of which the vermilion gates are a part is one of 30,000 scattered around Japan. These shrines are visited by people to pray for things such a business success, good harvests and safety. The shrine complex we saw today was founded in 711. It would have been impressive if we were not crowded by masses of people. There is a 2km long route of these “tori gates”. We only walked a couple of hundred metres and turned back. Nevertheless Blayze and I and one other lady managed to go the wrong way so we lost contact with our party. However, we studied the map nearby and found our group again. Blayze took the lead on this.

One funny thing we have not mentioned so far, is that before one is permitted entry to

breakfast, we have to wear plastic gloves. They are dispensed one at a time from a little machine that blows air into the “glove”, so that you can easily put your hand into it. Who says COVID has not given us anything.

Another delight we have already mentioned but needs another comment is the toilet system here in Japan. You almost need a degree to figure out how to use them. The one I was in today looks like the cockpit of a large plane!!!

It’s about 9 pm here now and I have just returned from my first experience of an onsen. An onsen is a public bathing place — there is one here in the hotel. Two other ladies from the group came with me and we all had a new experience. One strips naked, sits on a tiny stool with your own tap and washing devices and away you go to make yourself as clean as possible. Then you rinse off and climb into the very hot communal pool. Jenny and Binny and I enjoyed it very much. It was a great place to get to know one another.



