

## **Paul Stevenson. Kiyomi ESG**

### **Saturday 5 October Home to flight**

The taxi arrives as arranged at 8.15. Initially we make good progress but there's a long queue for the airport tunnel. However I meet Paul Stevenson, our tour manager, at around 9.15 at departures in terminal three.

Check in and baggage drop is all automatic and security doesn't take too long. Most of the waiting time is taken up with the Times, but also I find another adapter with USB inputs.

Boarding is as ever, and I'm soon in my window seat for the 12.20 departure which is as scheduled. During the afternoon/evening we get drinks, Ham with barley, Kung Pao chicken and Ice cream, and later cup noodles to eat with chop sticks.

The journey is mainly spent with podcasts until breakfast which is served at about an hour before our 7am landing. From the choice I have juice, Fresh fruit, Congee with prawns and mushrooms, bread roll and coffee.

### **Sunday 6 Hong Kong to Sapporo Hotel JR Tower Nikko**

The airport at Hong Kong is big and modern and there are no signs of the protests of recent weeks. The Wi-fi is reasonable and I am able to catch up with things.

The plane is on time, and full again. I get a middle seat next to Paul, the tour manager, and things progress as before with a second breakfast, and landing on time at 1525. Immigration and luggage take time but everything is efficient and soon we are on the coach heading for the hotel, about an hour with quite heavy traffic. It's comfortable comfortable rooms including bath and shower, efficient AC and Wi-fi.

I manage a quick bath before we leave for dinner at the Bärenwald, a local German style restaurant with a good selection of dishes as a buffet, with a glass of beer and pineapple for dessert. A short stroll around before an early night and a reasonable sleep until six.

### **Monday 7 Sapporo**

Up for a bath and to breakfast on the 35th floor. A Japanese breakfast which turns out to be excellent with salmon, mushroom soup, rice porridge and lots of bits and pieces and I finish with yoghurt and honey and a couple of cups of coffee.

We leave at nine with a coach ride to Otaru which is an old port, canal and street with some moderately old buildings, and interestingly an old steam clock with jets of steam generating various pitched notes on the quarter hours. Not an exciting morning but plenty of time for snacks from the multitude of tourist shops, and stamps from the post office.

The. It's back to the bus for the drive along the coast to the Yoichi distillery to look around the various buildings. It's in a beautiful location, the sun is shining and there is a tasting of two whiskies and an apple wine.

Then back along the motorway to Sapporo in the rain. I find I have some medicines missing, but when it seems complicated I elect to see how I get along without them.

After some quiet time and a bath I go out for supper to a ramen bar for a hot (two ways) dish of miso soup, pork and noodles and a beer for 1350¥. It's good and Paul is interesting to talk to.

Back for a mixed night with several podcasts.

### **Tuesday 8 Sapporo to Hakodate La Vista Hotel**

I eventually slept and awoke just before seven for a very hurried bag outside the room (I'm glad I packed last night) bath and breakfast before the lobby meeting at eight.

We walk the short distance to the station for the 8.39 train for Hakodate, and we have most of a coach reserved. It's comfortable and semi fast; back to the airport and then along the coast. It's very grey with rain and low clouds. I'm next to David who doesn't prove a very interesting conversationalist. He spends quite a bit of time talking across the aisle to Paul. There's no food on the train.

Soon after two we are met at a suburban station in Hakodate by the coach which takes us to the star shaped fort Goryokaku. First to the top of the tower for the view, a walk around the fort and inevitable gift shop and then to the bus for the transfer to the ropeway. Lots of rain now, but the view at the top is pretty comprehensive. Back down and a walk through the churches area for a short bus transfer to the hotel for check in and a welcome hot bath.

Out at seven for a very modest meal at the Beer Hall, followed by a beer at the hotel with David.

### **Wednesday 9 Hakodate to Tokyo Keio Plaza Hotel**

After a poor night up at six for a bath and down to breakfast at 6.30. It's already busy, and the range of food is immense, Japanese and western. The weather is grey and overcast with windy gusts, but no rain.

At 8.15 we set off by coach for the short transfer to the market, which is substantially fish but also plenty of fruit and vegetables. After time to walk around a bit view the port it's back onto the coach for the transfer to Hakuto to catch the Shinkansen for the journey to Tokyo. Before that there's plenty of time to look around the station and buy snacks for the journey.

We witness the orderly boarding of the train. My reservation is for an aisle seat of three but there are plenty of spare seats for the first half of the journey so that I can have a double with a view. The scenery is quite hilly to start with but flattens out and becomes more built on as we head south, and the weather gets warmer and brighter with a clear blue sky over Tokyo.

It's a short but interesting walk to the coach and about twenty minutes to the hotel which is huge and comfortable. After a bath, at six, Paul shows us where there are plenty of places to eat in the nearby station complex. I use a 'French patisserie' and have a pork and veg curry with rice, a glass of wine and an ice cream.

A tour of the department store and photos of the night streets get me back to the hotel. Bed by mine for a better night.

### **Thursday 10 Tokyo Keio Plaza Hotel**

Up at six, bath, pack and to breakfast, Japanese set, for seven. It's excellent and peaceful and much the same as at Sapporo.

It's mostly sunny with a little cloud, and we leave in the coach at 8.15; it has decent WiFi. It's a full day. The first stop is at the Meiji Shrine, which is situated in a beautiful wooded parkland. Then to the Edo Tokyo Museum which is excellent with models and artefacts, and a good shop where I buy some small dishes. After that to the shopping area of Asakusa which is heaving with tourists, many dressed up in kimonos. There are several elaborate shrines and a Buddhist temple.

I get lunch at a recommended Tempura restaurant; the tempura set plus a small bottle of Saki, the remains of which I take out. Then more sightseeing and join the group for the coach to Hamarikyu gardens for Green two and a sweet. It's getting overcast but still warm and humid. A stop at the imperial palace plaza for photos and then to the Shibuya crossing for more photos. We lose one member, and it's half an hour before we are reunited, and then a tedious drive back to the hotel through the rush hour traffic, arriving about 6.45.

Mostly in room, with a trip to the observatory floor. Rainy.

Poor night.

### **Friday 11 Tokyo to Hakone Ten Yu Hotel**

Up at six, bath and to breakfast, western buffet for a change, excellent omelette.

We leave at 8.00, leaving luggage for transfer to Hakone. It's a grey rainy day and we walk to Shinjuku station via an underground passage. The train is a comfortable limited express with 2X2 seating and a trolley. There are lots of photos of the Rhätische Bahn, the sister railway. We arrive at Hakone at 10.30 and transfer to the mountain railway and bus to the lake, followed by a cable car ride up to the fog and heavy rain and back down. There is free time and after walking down to the lake side in the rain, seeing crabs crawling along the ground go into the coffee shop at the Prince Hotel for an excellent, if expensive, coffee and chocolate cake. Then we have 20 mins on the lake boat with heavy rain and very limited views.

Then it's a bus transfer to the hotel where we find we are staying for two nights instead of one, with dinner included on both nights. As it's a beautiful and comfortable new hotel the opportunity for a rest day is welcome. There's plenty of time for a hot tub on the balcony fed from a spring, hot and a hint of sulphur, before dinner at 7.45. It's an excellent seven course Japanese meal and I have a bottle of Saki.

To bed at 10.30 for a rather better night.

### **Saturday 12 Hakone**

Up at six for a hot tub and shower before breakfast soon after seven. I have western style from the buffet, and then back to bed.

As the rain and winds increase, it's a restful day, with all the usual activities. Accweather suggests 330mm rain and gusts up to 300kph during the day.

Dinner at six; almost as good as yesterday with seven courses. Bed at nine for a reasonable night until three.

### **Sunday 13 Hakone to Takayama Hotel Associa**

Hot tub at six, shower and down to breakfast at eight with luggage. We are told that departure is delayed as all roads out of Hakone are blocked. Ten becomes eleven, twelve...

Eventually we leave at two, after a snack of bread, squash, snack bars in a fleet of minibuses down to the lake which the coach can reach. Then it's a long coach ride with just a couple of comfort stops. We get a brief view of Mount Fuji as the clouds gather, but as night falls there is dreadful film; I'm glad I have my noise reducing headphones. We eventually arrive at 8.45. The room is comfortable if rather dated. I have a bath and a glass of Saki, although the bathroom floods after I drain the bath. Reasonable night until five.

### **Monday 14 Takayama to Kyoto Hotel Tokyu**

Up just before six for bath and down to breakfast which is OK but not as good as the previous ones. The cases are taken to Hiroshima and so we are without them for two nights. At 8.30 we leave in the coach, and do various walking tours around the town, mostly in the rain. There is an interesting market by the river, with a lot of food, and an 'old' street with lots of food and tourist shops, it also two Saki testing places, including one where you buy a small cup for 350¥, and then test 12 or so different Sakis. Then to the Takayama Jinya, a large old house.

We take the train at 13.29, a limited express, to Nagoya. It's an interesting journey along a river with steep sides, but there is mostly rain and low cloud. At Nagoya we catch the bullet train to Kyoto, after I'm nearly left behind.

A short coach transfer gets us to the hotel. After a bath I set out to a local noodle bar where I sit at the counter, one of eleven, after queuing for about ten minutes and buying a ticket from the machine. Ramen noodles with ground pork and broth. Tasty and filling and just 800¥!

Back to the room and a decent night until 4am.

## **Tuesday 15 Kyoto**

Bath and to breakfast at 6.30 for the Japanese set meal. I'm by myself at first but joined by Japanese people. For coffee I get a card to redeem at one of the other restaurants for a take away.

As there is plenty of time I stroll down the road to the local Buddhist temple, with its ancient Gingko tree.

We meet at 930 and it's a full day of sightseeing, with bus transfers, a guided tour at each site followed by free time.

\*Nijo-jo

\*Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion)

\*Kodaiji Temple (approx 30min) - Free time for lunch - chilli noodles, kimchi pork and beer

\*Tea ceremony experience (approx. 1 hour)

Gion walking tour and back to the hotel, but an excellent day.

To the post office to post cards, and then a bath. To bed at nine for a good night until five.

## **Wednesday 16 Kyoto to Hiroshima Sheraton Hotel**

Japanese breakfast followed by a walk to the Higashi Honganji temple. It's a clear blue sky and getting warm.

We leave at 8.30 by bus to Nara in about forty minutes, and then walk to the deer park and the wonderful site around the Todai-ji temple with the great Buddha. The grounds are heavily wooded with lots of temples and lots of tourists, including several large school groups. The deer seem tame and take food from people, and even bow on occasions. After our formal tour there is 2.5 hours for exploring and I eventually find the Botanical Garden.

Then there's the coach transfer to Osaka station for the bullet to Hiroshima and the hotel adjacent to the station. A large comfortable room and a modest buffet at seven.

Bed at nine for a reasonable night until four.

## **Thursday 17 Hiroshima**

A bright morning that gradually deteriorates until it's raining late afternoon.

Coach to the peace park for a wander around, museum and talk from the daughter of a survivor. There seem to be the whole population of the schools walking around in large groups. Then to the various monuments and memorials and a coach pick up to take us to Hiroden for the ten minute ferry ride across to Miyajimacho island. By now it's grey but it's a lovely place lots of greenery. I elect to explore alone, and visit the five tier pagoda, treasure hall, Daishoin temple and the Itsosukima shrine. The temple is particularly fine with lots of buildings surrounded by gardens and water. The rain gets steadily heavier on the way back to the ferry back to the mainland, which is followed by a suburban train.

With a quick turnaround it's back to the station with Paul and a few others for Okonomiyaki, a sort of pancake with cabbage, noodles and, in our case, bacon and eggs. OK!

### **Friday 18 Hiroshima to Fukuoka Hotel New Otani**

Reasonable night, grey morning. 9.21 train to Hakata in the rain. It's very grey and raining for the rest of the day. We transfer to the south of the city for time in a shopping street for lunch. Just the same as lots before, but a handmade pottery shop where I get another bowl. Just round the corner there are beautiful gardens and temples. When we meet we go to the shrine and the museum, which is an interesting large building, with plenty of space inside, with some good carving.

Transfer to the hotel for an early check in. Comfortable but rather smaller room.

At seven a subway ride and walk to our restaurant which turns out to provide a decent set western meal with excellent steak. As three people haven't joined the meal, David and I have two meals with free drinks each.

Back the same way to the hotel, for a late bed.

### **Saturday 19 Fukuoka to home**

I eventually get up at 730 after a reasonable night. To the Japanese breakfast at 830. It's much the same as before and good. Back to the room for a relaxing and loomed morning. It's a grey start with some rain but it gradually gets brighter until it's warm and sunny for a walk when the room ceases to be available before twelve, and I go out to explore the locality. An excellent cup of hand made coffee in Coffee County, and two markets with lots of fish.

Coach transfer to the airport at 1.15. Plane to Hong Kong, and then to Heathrow with window seats on both. The second is chilly.