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# Fukuoka Time



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## How May I Serve You



We decided to stay at a tradition Japanese style hotel called a Ryoken. Everything from the start is done a little different and made for an interesting and fun experience.

It started in the lobby where we sat and had some very green and strong tea with a mochi sweet treat. A girl in a Kimono walked up and took us to our room.

The door of the room has a sliding grid to look more tradition and when entering you must immediately remove your shoes. The entry is separated from the main room with sliding doors and from the entry you

can access the bathroom.

In the main room there are small mats covering the whole floor with a table in the center that sits about a foot high. The chairs around the table do not have legs but do have backrests. Then there are sliding doors to the room with a tea sitting area and sliding glass doors to the balcony.

About 30 minutes after we got to our room the hostess came back with origami paper and schooled us on making small animals of folded tissue. Even with someone showing you step by step it is still almost impossible.

When checking in we had

set up a time for dinner which is served in our room which we set up for 7:00. On the money the hostess came in and started setting up the meal which in all had 11 courses. When they enter and leave they go to their knees when crossing the threshold, maybe showing some kind of respect or tradition.

After eating dinner they cleaned up all the dishes and removed the table. In the closet were futons that they lay out on the floor and covered each with a duvet. They looked uncomfortable but I slept very well that night and Maddie had a hard time getting up in the morning.



## Shrine Time



*Madison watching Koi swim in a pond at the Hakata Shrine.*

Everywhere you look in Japan there is either a temple or a shrine and if you're lucky there is a shrine in a temple. They seem to be a place of quiet and piece for the people who frequent them.

The temples in Japan are actually Chinese designs and honor the Buddhist religion. At these temples you will smell a lot of burning incents which they call joss sticks and charge money for. You will also see offerings placed around the temple for the gods.

The Shrine is the most common in Japan called the Shinto Shrine they number more that 100,000 across the country. Some shrines are no more than a simple wooden structure. The one we visited in Fukuoka was more elaborate with

several structure and gardens. We have also seen simple ones placed around the cities or from the window of the train.

For us the presence of a perfectly manicured pond with beautiful color Koi fish was exciting to see in such a tradition setting. The fish seemed to be very tame and came over as soon as we sat down at the pond. The water was crystal clear and looked almost spring fed.

At both the temple and the shrine we visited there were an abundance of cats living around the structures. I have also heard that in other parts of the country there are monkey colonies that live at the shrines so maybe we will get a chance to see them.

Long story short - once you visit one shrine you have seen them all so I can say that I have visited 100,000 shrines while traveling across Japan.



## Home Sweet Home

Sometimes nothing is better than a juicy burger and greasy fries when you



have been eating a lot of strange and foreign foods.

That is what we got at Yufuin Burger a local one man operation that makes a mean burger in a small town in the hills of Japan. His shop consists of 200 square feet of kitchen/counter and about 5 seats to sit and eat your burger.

But the size of the place does not matter when the food is good and cooked to order even in a remote part of the world. So if you are ever in Yufuin, Japan and need a little pick me up to get you through the trip and a reminder of what food taste like 5,000 miles away in a place called America then stop by.

## Not a Suzuki Samurai



Built around 400 years ago Karatsu Castle stands on top of a hill next to the bay with a river inlet on one side. The castle is actually reconstructed as the original was knocked down after a takeover of some kind over 100 years ago. The castles are made of wood and stone construction and were made more as fortresses than castles.

To reach the castle you have to climb about 200 steps all made of hand carved blocks of stone and at the top entrance is a giant wooden gate with a large mechanical lock.

Inside the castle is a museum with a large collection of Edo period weapons and armor on display as well as other artifacts of the time. There are also scaled replica's on display of what the castle would have looked like during its operations

400 years ago.

The most impressive though are the Samurai swords that were an amazing piece of metal work for the time. The swords range in size from a foot long to 4 feet long and looked extremely sharp. The armor was very well crafted and looked to provide good protection for the warriors. These swords can fetch over \$100k in the open market because of their age.



Next you went up the castle about five stories in all and there was a panoramic 360 degree view from the top level which at the time gave the guards plenty of warning of an attack.

The architecture of the roof is very details and there are precise curves that would be difficult to make 400 years ago. But the inside of the castle was quite simple with not a lot of detail.

Around the castle are tall rock walls that were constructed so they are practically smooth and built only slightly off vertical.

After leaving the castle you realize how much history there is in Japan and why the people are so formal in their presence and seem to be so proud of their heritage.



*"Armor from a Shogun Samurai warrior on display at the Karatsu Castle near Fukuoka, Japan."*



*“Grab the handlebars because this stinky contraption goes 200mph on a bullet train.”*

## When You Got to Go

As in most Asian countries they have a different method of using the toilet. Luckily for us we usually stay in western style hotels that feature western style plumbing. But once in a while you are on a train, Ferry or a traditional hotel and you are faced with the task of using an Asian toilet.

So gentlemen squat down grab the handlebars and start your engines. And this is especially fun if you are riding a train while trying to use one of these such as a Shinkansen that goes 200mph.

As for the western style toilets they are very nice as the Japanese make their own versions. These devices have built in washing systems and

bidets as well as heated seats. Some of these make you feel like your Captain Kirk driving the Starship Enterprise. The only problem is that most of them have all the controls written in

Japanese symbols.

It might be a small inconvenience to use these but at least they have clean water and plenty of toilet paper unlike places like Sri Lanka and India.



*“Trying something new for the first time may bring a strange face.”*

## Street Food

One thing you can be sure of is any Asian country will have its selection of street carts cooking tender

morsels of unidentified meats. The sweet aroma from these smoldering viddles will make even the

timid take the risk and try something unusual.

Maddie has decided to be more open to trying strange foods and has even tried the squid. The other day we were served a snail and she was daring enough to take a bite when Lisa would not.

I will say though that sometimes there are “things” that even the hardened stomach will not even venture to try.

