



Summary of ITHF Trip to Japan & South Korea (May 16 – 27, 2016)

First and foremost we would like to thank Steve & Noko Yoshida for scheduling, organizing and coordinating this tour. The skill and dedication they bring to Rotary and ITHF is second to none. This tour was the most recent of many tours they have hosted, including one which Donna & I participated in May 2012 to northern Thailand. I would also like to thank ITHF President Medicare for his leadership and devotion to ITHF and for his commitment to making this tour a reality. Last, but not least, to JTB USA, Inc. for serving as travel agent for the tour.

Donna & I learned a lot about the history and culture of both countries. We particularly enjoyed the fellowship with the group. It was a fantastic experience for us and we look forward to participating in another ITHF tour in the future. Members of this international group included: Steve & Noko from Hawaii, Sheena from New Zealand, Beryl from Canada, John from Australia, Marge, Christy & Penny from San Diego, Nelson & Anna from Tapei, Medicare & Linda from Taiwan, Melvina from Chicago, Hisako from Japan, Binod & Chandrakala from India, Bill & Alice from Florida, and Carey & Donna from New Mexico.

The 12 day tour began in Kyoto, Japan on Monday, May 16, 2016 and ended in Seoul, South Korea on Friday, May 27, 2016. Donna & I arrived in Osaka after having flown by way of Phoenix and Honolulu, at 6:30pm, then took a 1-1/2 hour bus ride from Osaka to Kyoto. When we arrived in Kyoto the rain was coming down in buckets. We walked about 6 blocks, dragging our luggage, in the cloudburst, and finally made it to the hotel after traveling non-stop for 20 hours. We missed the tour's "welcome dinner" due to our late arrival. After breakfast on Tuesday, May 17 we met our Kyoto tour guide and proceeded, by bus, to the Kiyomizu and Kinkakuji Temples.



Kiyomizu Temple (above) is an independent Buddhist temple in eastern Kyoto. The temple is part of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The temple was founded in 778, and its present buildings were constructed in 1633, ordered by the Tokugawa Iemitsu. There is not a single nail used in the entire structure. It takes its name from the waterfall within the complex, which runs off the nearby hills. *Kiyomizu* means *clear water*, or *pure water*.



Kinkakuji Temple (above) - This Golden Pavilion is set in a magnificent Japanese strolling garden. The location implements the idea of borrowing of scenery that integrates the outside and the inside, creating an extension of the views surrounding the

pavilion and connecting it with the outside world. The pavilion extends over a pond, called *Kyōko-chi* that reflects the building. The pond contains 10 smaller islands. The Zen Buddhist typology is seen through the rock composition, the bridges, and plants are arranged in a specific way to represent famous places in Chinese and Japanese literature.

We had lunch at Ganko Takasegawa Nijoen restaurant. This was our first experience eating in a traditional Japanese restaurant. The service was excellent and the food was uniquely Japanese. We had to learn how to use chopsticks while the host explained what we were eating.



After lunch we enjoyed making yatsushashi. Just about anyone who takes a trip to the historical city of Kyoto goes home bearing a box (bag) of this small delicate sweet that is rolled & flavored with *strawberry, chocolate or bean*.



Chandrakala & Binod (from India)

Alice & Bill (rear) Medicare (front)

Donna & Carey

Following our cookie-making experience we were on our way to the Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum. (Sake is a Japanese rice wine made by fermenting rice that has been polished to remove the bran. Unlike wine, in which alcohol (ethanol) is produced by fermenting sugar that is naturally present in grapes, sake is produced by a brewing process more like that of beer, where the starch is converted into sugars before being converted to alcohol.) We were given an opportunity to taste three different flavors of Sake.



We ended the day with a dinner at the Sodoh Higashiyama, a Japanese-Italian restaurant where we dined with several members of the Kyoto Rotary Club.



On Wednesday morning we walked from the hotel to the train station to leave for Hakata by JR super express train (Nozomi 9). These bullet trains are absolutely amazing. Reaching speeds of 186 mph we covered the distance in a little over 2 hours. The word *nozomi* in Japanese means "hope" or "wish". →



Upon arrival we met our new tour guide – Kaeke - who led us to lunch at Ramen Stadium (a fast food restaurant) in the Canal City Shopping Center.



Ramen is a Japanese noodle soup dish. It consists of Chinese-style wheat noodles served in a meat- or (occasionally) fish-based broth, often flavored with soy sauce or miso, and uses toppings such as sliced pork, dried seaweed, menma and green onions. Nearly every region in Japan has its own variation of ramen.

After finding our way back to the bus we were off to visit the Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, followed later by a roof top view of the city from the Fukuoka Tower.



Dazaifu Tenmangu is a shrine built over the grave of Michizane Sugawara venerated by the Japanese throughout the country as the Tenman-Tenjin or God of literature.



Carey at the ox statue at the entrance to the Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine.

There are approximately 6,000 plum trees of 197 varieties in the vicinity of Tenmangu, reflecting Michizane's lifelong affection and regard for the trees and their blossoms. Perhaps the most famous is the one to the right of Honden (main shrine). Known as Tobiume (the flying plum tree), legend has it that after Michizane left Kyoto for a life in exile, this particular tree yearned so much for him that, uprooting himself, it flew to reunite with him in Dazaifu.



← A bridge representing the past crosses over a heart shaped pond.

The visit to Fukuoka Tower was an uplifting experience (literally). The tower is 767 feet high, covered with 8000 half mirrors and is the tallest seaside tower in Japan.



On Thursday we had a full day of sightseeing beginning with a brief stop at the Okawachiyama Village. Town of Imari. Okawachiyama is an area surrounded by mountains and dynamic shaped stone cliffs like those drawn in Chinese landscape paintings. The village is famous for its pottery and the area is scattered with old brick chimneys and 30 kilns and we could feel the history and tradition of about 350 years, alive here.



The porcelain bridge entering the town. Street in the town. Bought some pottery from her. One of the pottery kilns in the town.

The next stop was the Arita Porcelain Park - a small theme park located in Arita town, Saga Prefecture, Japan. The Porcelain Park is a recreation of a traditional German village, and is located just on the outskirts of Arita on the road to Hasami. Most stunning is the reproduction of the “Zwinger,” a famous palace in the German city of Dresden. Inside the palace are impressive permanent exhibits of both European porcelain in one wing and Arita-yaki in the other. Behind the palace lies a European style garden. The theme park also houses various stores selling both traditional Japanese and European-style products.



Entrance to the Arita Porcelain Park. The Zwinger palace replica. Tourists captured by a heart !!

After lunch we visited the Arita Pottery Kiln and manufacturing facility. The owner gave us a private tour of his factory. (See photos on the next page.)

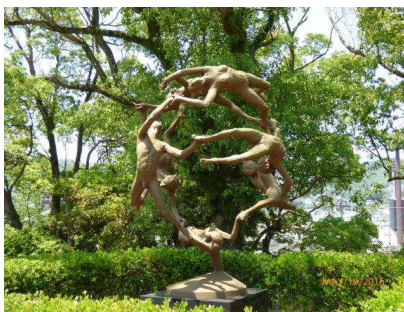


----- Arita Pottery Kiln and manufacturing facility -----

Next we headed for our hotel in Nagasaki. We had dinner that night at the Kyokaen Chinese restaurant in Nagasaki. Friday was one of the most interesting and educational days on the whole tour. We were about to visit the Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park and the Atomic Bomb Museum. The museum is a remembrance to the atomic bombing of Nagasaki by the United States, August 9, 1945 at 11:02:35 am, bringing an end to World War II. Next to the museum is the Nagasaki National Peace Memorial for the Atomic Bomb Victims, built in 2003, which marks the hypocenter of the event. The bombing marked a new era in war, making Nagasaki a symbolic location for a memorial. The counterpart in Hiroshima is the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. These locations symbolize the nuclear age, reminding visitors of the vast destruction and indiscriminate death caused by nuclear weapons, and signify a commitment to peace.



Peace Park "Hypocenter" Memorial



Constellation Earth Statue



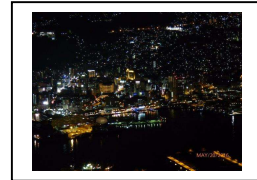
The Peace Statue

The term *hypocenter* is used as a synonym for [ground zero](#), the surface point directly beneath a nuclear blast. The Constellation Earth Statue at Nagasaki Peace Park commemorates Nagasaki's sister-city relationship with Saint Paul, Minnesota. The Peace Statue is a 32-foot bronze, whose right arm points upward toward the threat of nuclear destruction while the left arm is extended in a gesture of peace. His eyes are closed in prayer for the dead, but his muscular figure symbolizes the strength needed by the living to keep the dream of peace alive. The statue represents a mixture of western and eastern art, religion, and ideology. Installed in front of the statue is a black marble vault containing the names of the atomic bomb victims and survivors who died in subsequent years. A plaque by the Peace Statue is titled *Words from the Sculptor* and reads: "After experiencing that nightmarish war, that blood-curdling carnage, that unendurable horror, who could walk away without praying for peace? This statue was created as a signpost in the struggle for global harmony. Standing ten meters tall, it conveys the profundity of knowledge and the beauty of health and virility. The right hand points to the atomic bomb, the left hand points to peace, and the face prays deeply for the victims of war. Transcending the barriers of race and evoking the qualities of Buddha and God, it is a symbol of the greatest determination ever known in the history of Nagasaki and the highest hope of all mankind." — *Seibo Kitamura (Spring 1995)*

Later that day we toured Glover Garden. Commanding a stunning view of Nagasaki Harbour from its position on top of the hill of Minami-Yamate, this scenic area retains the atmosphere of a foreign settlement. Thomas Blake Glover, who travelled across the sea from distant Scotland, built his home here in 1863. At that time, the town of Nagasaki was brimming with the enthusiasm of those dreaming of a new dawn for Japan.



We had dinner that evening at Watami – a local Japanese restaurant, followed by a night time visit to the Mt. Insa Ropeway for a scenic view of the city. If you ever find yourself in Nagasaki, Japan and you are stuck for something to do after the sun goes down – take the cable car up Mount Insa and you can take in Nagasaki’s “10 Million Dollar Night View”! It was recently rated as the 3rd most spectacular night cityscape view on Earth.



On Saturday we started our day with a tour of Shimabara Castle which is a white walled castle built during the early Edo Period as the seat of the local feudal lord. Shimabara was eventually destroyed (1868-1912). The current buildings are concrete reconstructions from 1964. The five-story structure houses the **Castle Tower Museum** with a collection of Christian artifacts excavated from the castle ruins, weapons and armor. An observation deck on the 5th floor has views out to Mount Unzen.



Before proceeding to Mizunashi Honjin (a memorial to a volcanic eruption that has a large sheltered enclosure built over houses dragged down in the lava flow. The houses remain as they landed buried in the lava) we were treated with a foot bath.



Binod/Chandrakala/Bill/Sheena/John

Medicare

The entire group

Whos who?



----- Buried houses at Mizunashi Honjin -----

This was followed by a visit to the Mt. Unzen Disaster Memorial Hall Museum. (*See pictures on the next page.*) The Shimabara Peninsula in Nagasaki Prefecture is dominated by a large, active Mount Unzen volcano at its center. The volcano erupted in 1792 with massive loss of life and more recently in 1991 killing 43 people, mainly journalists and scientists at the scene. Pyroclastic flows issued from the volcano from 1990 to 1995 causing billions of yen's (Japanese currency) worth of damage to the area. The Unzen Disaster Memorial Hall is dedicated to the volcano and aims to teach future generations about the power and science of volcanic eruptions. The museum building was opened in 2003. Exhibits include the scorched TV cameras of the doomed camera crews when the volcano erupted, photographs, panels and interactive displays. A visit to the Great Eruption Theater, within the museum gave us a resemblance of the atmosphere of being in the middle of a volcanic eruption.



Lighted glass walkway allows a view of the destruction below.



Inside Mt. Unzen Museum

Scenic view from the top of the memorial

Have you ever eaten a 9-Course meal? That was our dinner tonight. We were taken to the Restaurant Forest, a local French restaurant in Nagasaki. The panoramic sea view from the wall to wall restaurant windows was impressive. The interior design is clean and simple, and the food and service were outstanding. The courses were carefully planned to complement each other gastronomically; spread out over the evening. On the down side – a glass of wine was \$18.00, however everyone enjoyed the meal and the fellowship. It was great!



Today (Sunday, May 22nd) was a full day of sightseeing, beginning with a stop at the Yoshinogari Historical Park, an outstanding archaeological site in the Saga Prefecture - Kyushu, Japan. The sprawling park covers a large settlement from the Yayoi Period (300 BC to 300 AD) where dozens of pit dwellings, elevated store houses and over 2000 tombs were unearthed. It is the largest and most important Yayoi Period site in Japan.



Next stop (lunch stop) at the Beer Forest Sapporo Hita – a local brewery. Everyone had a chance to sample the product. **Sapporo Breweries Limited** is a Japanese brewery founded in 1876. It is the oldest brand of beer in Japan.



Later that day we were transported to a hotel in Beppu. It was our first experience in a Japanese style room. The hotel was also famous for its hot spring baths, so everyone got naked (men & women each had separate bath areas) and enjoyed the hot springs. (Sorry: I don't have pictures of anyone in the group naked. :->) We all had dinner in our Japanese kimono robes.



Our hotel room – we slept on the floor



Dinner was special

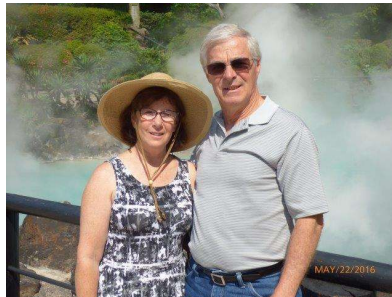


Welcome to ITHF – Japan style

We continued exploring Beppu the next day, by visiting Umi & Chinoike Jigoku, otherwise known as Beppu's Boiling Hell.



This boiling hot spring is named Blood Pond Hell. (red water). The red is due to natural iron minerals in the water.



Umi-jigoku - The king of Jigoku, beautiful cobalt blue color, you can cook and eat onsen eggs here. Onsen is a term for hot springs in the Japanese language. Onsen were traditionally used as public bathing places and today play a central role in directing Japanese domestic tourism. Japan has thousands of onsen scattered along its length and breadth.



Another opportunity for a foot bath



Bill & Penny taking a break



Lotus pond within the greenhouse

Later that morning we made a brief stop at the Usa Jingu Shrine. The main shrine of Usa Jingu is located on the top of a hill. It was constructed in 1860 and registered as the national treasure. The Usa-jingu Shrine is the head shrine of thousands of shrines across Japan that are dedicated to Hachiman, the deity of archery and war. The shrine is also said to be the origin of 4,800 shrines of Japan.



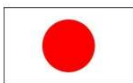
This was the end of our tour in Japan. On Tuesday morning (May 24th) we transferred to the port at Hakata to board a ferry (The Beetle) to Busan, South Korea. The Beetle is a jet hydrofoil ferry service that travels between Fukuoka, Japan and Busan. Hydrofoil means it sits well out of the water ensuring a smooth ride. The trip lasted 3 hours and we arrived in Busan shortly before lunch.



Our lunch was a buffet at a local restaurant in Busan. The culture in South Korea is noticeably different than Japan, as is the food. Korea was formerly a single country but was divided towards the end of the World War II into North and South Korea. The area occupied by these 2 countries is known as the Korean peninsula. Japan is an archipelago of islands forming a country just off the South Korean coast separated by the Strait of Korea. Koreans speak their own language called Hanguk. This is known to be the most planned language in history and the alphabet is easy for some to learn. Japanese is the language spoken in Japan. This language has 3 scripts mainly derived from Chinese. Modern day Korean cuisine mainly consists of simple food. This is probably due to the fact of continued periods of subjection and food shortages. A typical meal would consist of soups, kimchi (pickled vegetables), main rice or noodle dish and a side dish. The Japanese cuisine is a bit more elaborate and they still observe some rituals while eating and serving. Some of the Japanese dishes are world famous like Sushi and Tempura.



Our first meal in South Korea.

← Flag of Japan and Flag of South Korea →



After lunch we toured the Jagalchi Fish Market (in the rain), but it worked because we all had umbrellas.



Our next stop was the well known Haedong Yonggungsa Temple which is situated on the coast of the north-eastern portion of Busan. The main sanctuary of the temple was reconstructed in 1970 with careful attention paid to the colors that were traditionally used in such structures. On the right-hand side, inside the cave, is a uniquely designed Buddhist sanctuary, while situated just in front of the main sanctuary is a three-story pagoda with four lions. The four lions are symbolizing joy, anger, sadness, and happiness. Other special sites at the temple are the 108 stairs and stone lanterns lining the rocky landscape. After going down the 108 steps, we were able to see the beauty of the temple. Midway down the 108 steps we stopped to enjoy the calming sounds of the waves.



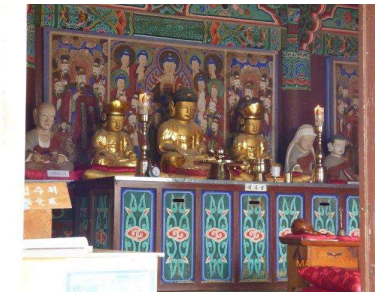
Wednesday morning (May 25th) we left for Gyeongju, a coastal city in the far southeastern corner of North Gyeongsang Province in South Korea. Gyeongju is often referred to as "the museum without walls". Among such historical treasures, Bulguksa temple, Seokguram Grotto, Gyeongju Historic Areas and National Museum, Donggung & Wolji, and the Cheomseongdae Observatory, some are designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. These major historical sites have helped Gyeongju become one of the most popular tourist destinations in South Korea. Many of these attractions are located in Gyeongju National Park which is located in the province of Gyeongsangbuk-do, South Korea, and is the country's only historical national park. It was first designated a national park in 1968. The park covers many of the principal Silla historical sites in Gyeongju City and is divided into several non-contiguous sections. (See pictures on the next page)



Seokguram Grotto Historical Site



Bulguksa Temple is a head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism and encompasses seven National treasures of South Korea, including Dabotap and Seokgatap stone pagodas, Cheongun-gyo (Blue Cloud Bridge), and two gilt-bronze statues of Buddha. The temple is classified as *Historic and Scenic Site No. 1* by the South Korean government. In 1995, Bulguksa was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List together with the Seokguram Grotto above. The temple (shown below) is considered a masterpiece of the golden age of Buddhist art in the Silla kingdom.



Cheomseongdae is the oldest existing astronomical observatory in Asia. Constructed during the reign of Queen Seon-deok (632-647), it was used for observing the stars in order to forecast → → → the weather. This stone structure is an interesting combination of straight lines and curves, and was designated South Korean National Treasure No.31 on Dec. 1962.



Tomb visit - Large ancient tombs of kings and nobles of the Silla Kingdom can be seen around Gyeongju at the Daereungwon Tomb Complex (Cheonmachong Tomb). There are twenty-three large tombs located here; the most famous being Cheonmachong and Hwangnamdaechong. Our guide, Sam, gave us an opportunity to view the inside of Cheonmachong. There are 11,526 remains and royal crowns inside the tomb, demonstrating the lavish lifestyle of the king. (See pictures below)



Later we visited a local sculptor of black pottery (Shilla Kiln Pottery) who has been turning the pottery wheel for over 40 years. It was a fascinating demonstration, and clearly the work of a master potter.



On Thursday (May 26) we were heading for Seoul, the capital city of South Korea and the site of this year's Rotary International Convention. Once again, we rode the bullet train; this time it was the Korea Express Train which left from Sin Gyeongju station. After a typical Korean lunch we were transported by bus to Kintex – the convention site, to allow those who were participating in the convention to register.



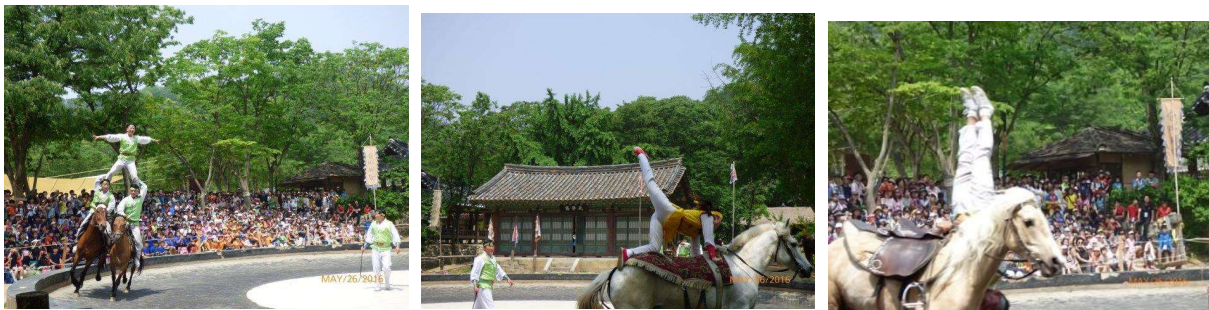
RI Convention Headquarters – Kintex – Seoul, South Korea

(Registration Area)

(Flags of Various Nations)

The ITHF tour had officially ended when we arrived at Kintex, however the tour hosts, Steve & Noko Yoshida arranged for several of us to participate in another sightseeing event today (Friday – May 27). It included a visit to the Korean Folk Village, followed by a tour of the Gyeongbokgung Palace and the National Folk Museum of Korea. It was an interesting day because shortly before the tour ended we had to catch a bus to Seoul’s Incheon airport for our flight home.

At the Korean Folk Village we were entertained by Korean dancers, acrobats and horseback riders who put on an incredible show for the audience.



We had lunch in the Korean Folk Village followed by an ice cream cone (one of many during this tour).



After lunch we began our tour of the Gyeongbokgung Palace and the National Folk Museum of Korea. More commonly referred to as the Northern Palace because of its location compared to the other palaces of Seoul, Gyeongbokgung is a visual reminder of the Joseon Dynasty, with elements of the complex still intact from that time, despite the wars and occupations that have since happened. The Gyeonghoe-ru pavilion and Hyangwonjeong pond are gleaming examples of that reminder, helping Gyeongbokgung become the most stunning of the five palaces. Originally built in the 14th century, the main gate of the palace is the only thing dividing the once royal quarters from one of the busiest parts of the city. The grounds of the palace contain a number of structures, including Geunjeongmun (the Third Inner Gate), Geunjeongjeon, (the Throne Hall) and Sajeongjeon (the Executive Office). The palace also contains a royal banquet hall, a royal study, and of course, the queen's and king's quarters. Also located within the palace grounds is the National Folk Museum of Korea, which features over 98,000 artifacts and presents a thorough overview of the history and culture of Korea.



Gyeongbokgung Palace Gate



Queen & King at the Palace - :-)



Royal Banquet Hall



----- Exhibits within the National Folk Museum of Korea -----

Donna & I caught a bus to the airport after this museum visit. Our International Travel & Hosting Fellowship tour of Japan and South Korea had come to an end. Others in our group continued on to the Rotary Convention. We boarded our flight to Honolulu at 10:00pm that evening and arrived in Honolulu at 11:30am Hawaii time. Our afternoon and evening were spent walking and sunbathing on Waikiki beach. The next day we caught a flight back to Phoenix where we had booked a motel for the night. The following day we drove home.

Waikiki Beach →



This was truly a trip to remember. The things we learned about the culture in both countries left an indelible impression on us. The people we met on the tour were wonderful traveling companions and the job done by the hosts and guides was spectacular. The hotels we stayed at had top-of-the-line (first class) accommodations and we were delighted to have the opportunity to taste traditional Japanese and Korean cuisine. Thank you to all who participated and we look forward to seeing you again in the near future. (Carey & Donna Beamesderfer – June 4, 2016)