

## My Time in Japan – 2023

### 19th Aug – Arrived in Japan

On the day of my flight to Japan, I arrived late in the day at around 5pm. During the flight, I watched the “Super Mario Bros. Movie” and read a volume of “Ascendance of a Bookworm” light novel that I saved for the flight.

I redraw my first lot of yen at an airport ATM using the Post Office card I brought with me. I got a bus to Shinjuku and managed to find my hotel for the night.



### 20th Aug – Tour Start/Shinjuku

Woke up in the morning but didn’t feel jet lagged luckily. Started roaming around the area and had sushi for breakfast at a Sushi-go-round restaurant.

I met up with Rory a friend of mine in the evening who is staying in Japan for a year but I couldn’t hang out with him long due to needing to meet up with the tour group for introductions. I was late to the meeting with our guide Kumiko but went out for dinner with the group and got to know some of them.



After I went to the arcade and got arcade account cards (they save your game progress), I had some trouble asking around about them though the people I asked were very willing to help.

### 21st Aug – Kanazawa

I was given a JR Pass which would last for the duration of the tour and took the Shinkansen (Bullet train) to Kanazawa. Bought my first boxed lunch at the station (was a bit much). I talked with a Japanese man on the train who plays “Dead by Daylight” which is a game on Steam I used to play, unfortunately, it escaped my mind that I should have asked for his Steam user ID.



Visited the Kazuemachi Chaya District and Higashi Chaya District viewing the architecture and the scenery. Found a quite big Cicada in the trees on the way and went past a Shinto shrine (Kuboichitsutsurugigu).

At dinner, I went to a Sushi restaurant with Shea (who was from the tour group) and had a good talk about Japan and other topics.



## 22nd Aug – Kanazawa

In the morning we went to Kenroku-en, a traditional Japanese garden with evergreens and a pond. From what I learned on my trip; evergreens were often used by the shogunate as their trait of being green all year round was seen as a symbol of eternity which they wanted people to associate with their rule. It was very hot so it didn't take me long to go for refreshments, I had milk shaved ice which was quite tasty. While wandering around I found what I think were cicada husks left on the trees. After, we went next door to look around Kanazawa Castle Park before going for lunch.



Next up we went to Nomura-ke Samurai Residence, a traditional Japanese house with a beautiful zen garden complete with a pond and koi fish. There were also a lot of items on display for their historic value such as old currency, weapons, and letters. Some of the group split up after this and we went to Myouryuji, nicknamed the "ninja temple", due to its traps and odd structure. I believe they said that at the time only two-story houses were permitted so it was built with 3 floors but across 7 layers to hide it. There were also traps and hidden routes, where in a fight, they could be used to dispatch enemy forces or hide VIPs. Unfortunately, photos were not allowed to be taken on the property.



I had ramen in the evening and went for a walk along the Asano River to visit the Kazuemachi Chaya District and Higashi Chaya District again but at night (they were very pretty). Walking through the streets at night reminded me a lot of a horror game called Yomawari as the silence certainly built tension. I also saw a Heron in the river as I walked by which was nice to see, I must have looked odd to a person who drove by as I crouched to take pictures of it.



## 23rd Aug – Takayama

We left Kanazawa for Takayama but I caused a bit of trouble at the station as I spent too much time trying to find gold leaf ice cream in the station shop and didn't have time to get food after. The hotel we arrived at was a traditional Japanese ryokan with tatami flooring and an onsen.



After arriving, we went to the Sakurayama Hachimangu Shrine which has some very big Shinto gates on the approach to the main temple. I had my first go of doing a Japanese prayer to the shrine's kami there.



I had a mix of food while walking through Takayama; Dango, Yakiniku, and Wagyu sushi. The plastic Yakiniku model was so lifelike that I reached for it after I paid. I also went to Harada Sake Brewery to do taste testing which I did with Shea and Keith but I got a bit drunk. I walked back home alone as I somehow missed where they went in the store next door, I saw a lot of dragonflies during my walk back down the road.



We had a group meal for dinner with me having Jakoushimizu Sake and Hida Beef Kalbi and Houba Miso set. I went in the Onsen but it was smaller than I expected. It was very satisfying to fill the bowl with water and drop it on top of myself to rinse my hair before entering the water.



### 24th Aug – Takayama

In the morning we got up early to go down to Miyagawa Morning Market which had lots of food and trinkets. I ate rice from inside a large leaf of some kind and had Tamaten which was a soft cubed egg sweet, and brought a 3 pack of different sweet dried biscuits, from what I can translate (the text on the packaging is very stylised) they were black sesame, white sesame, and tea flavoured. I also got my sister a hair stick while there.



After we went to the Hida Folk Village, the Edo period village was moved to the site in 1971 and has been running as a museum ever since. The place was very interesting as it gave a glimpse of how the people's daily lives were as well as the tools that were developed to support the production of rice and other necessities. I stayed longer than the other members of the tour and bought a Daruma doll at the shop on the way out.



I returned to the main town using a coach and looked for gifts. During my walk, I saw some more merchandise for Hyouka, a slice-of-life mystery anime I watched many years ago. It turns out the original light novel's location was based on Takayama (called Kamiyama instead in the novel).



In the evening we went to a family dinner which had a robot waiter which was interesting to watch. As we left Karl found a brown praying mantis which I took some pictures of. Back at the ryokan I had a call with my parents before joining the others downstairs to do some origami paper cranes in preparation for tomorrow at Hiroshima. I also had a little walk down the road to experience the town at night like I did in Kanazawa before returning and ending the day with a bath in the onsen.



### 25th Aug – Hiroshima

We had a 5-hour train trip to Hiroshima, on arriving we went to the Atomic Bomb Dome which survived ground zero of the first nuclear bomb at the end of WW2. We then went into the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum to learn more about the attack. I was unsure whether I should take photos but I decided it was okay based on the objective of the museum which is to prevent another nuclear bomb from being used, and so photos showing the effects of the blast would aid that goal. The testimonials of how their everyday lives were forever changed were heartbreaking and the paintings were disturbing. I did a poor job at keeping track of time as I had to be found by Karl to bring me over to the group at the exit. We left our paper cranes from yesterday at the Children’s Peace Monument as we left. For dinner, we went to an okonomiyaki restaurant, watching them make them was fun.



### 26th Aug – Miyajima/Hiroshima

In the morning we got the train to Miyajimaguchi station and took the boat across to Miyajimacho Island. Around the port, we saw the floating Tori gate as well as many wild roaming deer. We took a group photo while here before heading inland to Daishoin temple a Buddhist temple with many impressive statues. It also had a dark underground path you could walk through which represented the struggle to find enlightenment.



After this Kumiko told us about the two routes up Mt. Misen that she recommended. I resolved to climb up Mt. Misen via the Daishoin route, I had two drinks with me but I could get more at Reika-do Eternal Fire Hall. During the ascent, I encountered a snake on the way (luckily not on the path) I managed to a picture of it but I wasn’t getting any closer as a sign below warned of poisonous snakes. I also started running low on drinks as it was still quite hot despite the path being very hidden by the shade, luckily, I made it to Reika-do with no drinks to spare where I brought two new drinks.



I then went up to the Mt. Misen Peak Observation point where I got an amazing view of the surrounding ocean and islands. I found a gift shop here too where I went to buy a pin badge but found I didn’t have the funds after buying the drinks earlier. However, a Japanese passerby insisted on buying it for me as a present and also gave me a second one to give to someone in my tour group. I had prepared a few presents from England as I had heard that Japanese people wouldn’t accept cash but would accept gifts but I didn’t take one with me today. He was very kind to buy it for me, it was just a shame I couldn’t reciprocate with a gift of my own.



I took the Momijidani route on the way down and regrouped with Shea who I gave the other pin badge I was gifted earlier. On the way back to the boat a deer took a bite out of my map that I used all the way up the mountain. Once on the train back we discussed space exploration efforts and I recommended the manga/anime Space Brothers to Shea. After food, I was going to see if I could find an arcade but chose against it when I thought about how much walking I had already done, so I retired for the day. In the late evening while I was in bed there was a light magnitude 3 earthquake, it was a very strange experience.



### 27th Aug – Kyoto

On arriving in Kyoto, we went to the Nishiki Market, a very crowded place with many food stalls, I tried strawberry mochi, grilled squid, spiced fish, and scallops. After we took a train to the Fushimi Inari Taisha where I brought a Macha ice cream before starting an ascent up the shrine. It wasn't as hard going as Mt. Misen and I had more drinks prepared. There were so many Shinto shrine gates that the path up was lined with them. I picked up an Omamori charm and postcards for my sister and grandma respectively on the way down.



We split up for dinner (I had sushi) and regrouped for a night walk through Pontocho and over the Kamo River with the Shijo-Ohashiashi Bridge. We then walked down Hanamikoji Street where the Geisha live and train, we were warned not to take photos but didn't see any while there. Kumiko called a taxi to take us back to the hotel, on the way I talked to the taxi driver in Japanese which surprised the others.



### 28th Aug – Kyoto

On this day we went for a trip to Kinkaku-ji, the gold of the temple reflecting off the pond and the garden surrounding was beautiful. Kumiko told us about how the gold temple is actually a replica, as the original was burnt down in an act of arson by an obsessive priest at the end of the Second World War.



The Nijo Castle was next on the list, unfortunately, photos were not permitted inside. The structure of the castle was very interesting with the layers and artwork representing the power dynamics of the time. There was also a room set up to show the scene when news of the Shogunate conceding power back to the Imperial Palace was communicated to the vassals. The tour ended for the day, so I went to the Kyoto Imperial Palace which was unfortunately closed for the day but the wall of its grounds was very long and uninterrupted by other structures which made it look very impressive.



In the evening the tour group went for Karaoke I specifically put on “My Way”, “Radio Killed the Radio Star”, and “Baka Mitai” (with limited success). Being a bit drunk from the Sake we ordered was a great confidence booster.

### 29th Aug – Kyoto

In the morning we went to Arashiyama Bamboo Grove, there was a lot more Bamboo than in my back garden at home. We also walked around Okochi Sanso Garden which had some vantage points for some great views. There weren't many people around too so it was a very peaceful experience sitting on the Observation Deck. Apparently, when the maple red leaves appear it will be even more beautiful, I will need to return here in future. Before leaving we had some Macha tea, I really liked it, it was quite sweet. After we walked along the Katsura River before ending the tour for the day in Sennensaka.

In Sannensaka I looked in the shops on my way up the hill and I got some Sake cups for myself. From there I went to Kiyomizu-dera a temple with a great view of Kyoto. I spent a bit too much time here as I noticed that Rengeo-in (Sanjusangen-do) was due to close soon so I headed over there right after. There I saw the 1001 Kannon statues flanked by Fuujin and Raijin along with many gods from Buddhism between them. From the information provided it also hosted archery contests. Photos weren't permitted so I brought a booklet with information and pictures about it instead.

For dinner I had a Japanese Curry, I got to choose my level of spice so I chose the hottest (level 15 I believe it was) and it did not disappoint. After, I went to the first Pokémon Center of the trip where I brought a Trading Card Game deck box.

### 30th Aug – Fujikawaguchiko

We then went to Fujikawaguchiko to Royal Hotel Kawaguchiko which was a Ryokan right next to Mt. Fuji, unfortunately, Fuji was blocked by clouds when we arrived. The Ryokan was right next to a lake that was formed after an eruption from Mt Fuji in the past.

In the evening, we had dinner at the Ryokan which was very good with a great amount of variety. The thin meat was raw but we cooked it ourselves in the soup. After I went to the Onsen which was bigger than the one we stayed at in Takayama. In the night, I woke up to go outside to see if Mt. Fuji was visible but it was not yet.



### 31st Aug – Fujikawaguchiko

Before our return trip to Shinjuku in Tokyo, we had the morning to explore Fujikawaguchiko. Luckily by this time, the clouds had passed by and so Fuji was perfectly viewable. I hired a bike and headed over to the Mt. Fuji Panoramic Ropeway. At the top I got some perfect pictures of Mt. Fuji, I also noticed Fuji-Q Highland from there too. There was also a shop where I bought some playing cards, a Mt. Fuji 3D Picture, and two Fuji pin badges; one for myself and the other for Rory as I saw that he climbed up Mt. Fuji just the other day.



I then travelled to the Kubota Itchiku Art Museum which was about Itchiku Kubota who revived a lost dyeing technique for kimonos. I got to watch an educational video about his work and then viewed the kimonos on display. In the book I brought there, I saw that some of the kimonos were designed to be placed next to each other to create a full picture. My favourite Kimono on display was Hijiri/Saint, the yellow paired with a blue-to-green gradient was very pretty.



After leaving and returning to Tokyo Shinjuku we went up the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building which had a great view of the surrounding area and finished the day with some ramen at Ichiryu with Shea.



### 1st Sep – Asakusa/Harajuku/Shinjuku

Today was the last day of the tour, we went to Asakusa where we saw the Asahi headquarters which looked like a beer. The building next to it has a golden tear-shaped object which is meant to represent foam on your beer glass but due to complaints that it blocked the sun it had to be placed sideways which is why it has been nicknamed the “Golden Poo”. We then went nearby to the Senso-ji temple, there were a lot of shops down the street leading up to it. The Hozomon Gate nearby had large sandals on it to scare evil spirits away out of fear of how big the kami that wears them is. I met up with Keith and we both had some honeyed sweet potatoes (sweet but very filling) from Oumoyasen Koshin as well as some gyoza from Yoroiya Ramen which were very well seasoned. I also had potato cake (which is much more cake than potato) and some Kawara Senbei which was a hard tile-shaped snack which was quite sweet.



We then went to Shibuya, went across the famous Scramble crossing and saw the statue in honour of loyal Hachiko a dog whose master had died suddenly at work due to a cerebral haemorrhage. Hachiko continued to wait for his return at the station he left at for the remaining ten years of his life. I had some lunch with Karl before taking the train to Harajuku.



At Harajuku, we went to the Meiji Jingu, a temple in the middle of a man-made forest that was made to enshrine the souls of Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken who helped Japan modernise. My friend Jack had previously visited this location, and while I couldn't find the exact Shinto Gate, I tried to recreate the photo as best I could. We then went down Takeshita Street which had very "interesting" shops which were fun to go into with Karl.



In my free time before our final meal of the tour, I visited the Pokémon Center in Shibuya which also had a Nintendo, Shonen Jump, and Capcom store right next to it.

In the evening we went for the final tour meal in Shinjuku, who ordered what was a bit confusing but it was an enjoyable meal despite that.

### 2nd Sep – Tour End/Ueno

After saying my goodbyes to the tour group in the morning I took the train to Ueno and dropped off my stuff at the Tosei Hotel Cocone. I took the opportunity to look around the area while waiting for the room to be ready. I found an advertisement for a Ueno Cygames art exposition who is a developer who has created some games I know about; I visited but the tickets were sold out for the day. I also visited Ueno Zoo, the stand-out animals being the Rhino, Hippo, Armadillo, and Giant Panda. I felt a cold coming on today so after the zoo I returned to the hotel and had some ramen nearby in the evening.



### 3rd Sep – Ueno

Unfortunately, due to developing a cold, I stayed in my room for a while in the morning. After a time, I felt well enough to go out to visit the Tokyo National Museum. There I saw a lot of weapons and armour as well as information on Japan's ancient native culture.



One of the most interesting things I saw was vessels which were buried containing Buddhist scriptures which were to act as time capsules to inform the people 5,670,000,000 (a bit much) years in the future of the teachings. I was confused about why they were necessary as I didn't think there was anything threatening Buddhism in Japan as Shinto was able to co-exist with it from what I heard but I found the reason later on. The Buddhist faith was prophesied to have a decline 2000 years after the Buddha's death and with the arrival of multiple natural disasters and social problems, many thought that time was upon them.



After the Edo period, Japan's country-wide isolation from the rest of the world came to an end with the Meiji government wishing to show Japanese culture on the world stage. Unfortunately, a lot of Japanese art was functional objects like doors, kimonos, tea ceramics, and the like which were not identified as art by the West during that time. So, in an effort to be acknowledged, they paid Japanese artists



to create Western-style art (Paintings, sculptures) while retaining the art's Japanese identity. Of the art on display, the "Eagle" statue by Suzuki Chokichi was very graceful and life-like. The piece by Miyagawa Kozan called "Footed Bowl with Crabs" with two crabs climbing on a bowl was also very life-like but very unique. There was also a scroll



with what I think was the path from Tokyo to Kyoto in watercolours, I didn't take a picture/video of the whole of it but I did take a picture of my favourite part which was "Okazaki" by Kosugi Misei.

On my way out I picked up some Onigiri for lunch (they are a very convenient lunch option), and saw a dragon float being paraded past the Museum. This was likely put on by the Tokyo University of the Arts for a Festival that Agnieszka mentioned was on. Unfortunately, my cold had me retire early for the day.



#### 4th Sep – Akihabara/Ginza

On this day my cold became manageable so I visited Akihabara. Shea had told me about Super Potato a few days ago so I visited there first. Every floor was filled with old retro games that were available to buy. There were even arcade cabinets for Fatal Fury and PuyoPuyo which I played while eating some Japanese sweets they sold too.



I looked about and found a gift for one of my friends back home before taking the train to Yurakucho station where I then walked to Ginza from.



There I was looking for Jule's Whisky Collection to get a Whisky for my brother. It took a bit but I eventually found the shop and a good Whisky at a decent price. I then visited Uniqlo (ユニクロ) a clothes shop where I saw some shirts that I liked the look



of, one of them looked like a Japanese oil painting and the other was sake-themed. I got both for ¥1500 each which I felt was a great price.

In the evening, I went out to Yakitori Bunraku for Yakitori, the wait time was quite bad but I did arrive a bit late in the evening. While I was waiting a group of people nearby invited me over to eat and talk with them. While I was cautious for a while, they slowly won me over, two I think were friends with one of them visiting home from the US. The third person was also called over (like me) who was in Japan for a business trip. There was a fourth person who tried to join the group without being invited but was shooed away by the restaurant staff as he had a bad reputation, I am glad I was justified in exercising a bit of caution around strangers.

### 5th Sep – Fuji-Q/Tokyo

I went to Fuji-Q Highland on this day. I knew that one ride was closed but there more were closed than I expected. I did ride the rollercoasters Fujiyama and Eejanaika as well as other rides like Tondemina – Super Pendulum. I had fun on the rides I went on but likely due to the closures, the wait times were quite bad.



I opted to return to Tokyo earlier than planned and went to the last Pokémon Center of my trip at Tokyo Station, I brought a present for one of my friends back home and got a Turtwig coin for the TCG from a gacha machine.

When I went out to Akihabara in the evening a man stopped me and wanted me to pay ¥500 for some chocolates to help fund his university tuition. Naturally from the shady man who tried to sit with our group the other day, I was still a bit cautious. In the end, I did pay but I have no clue if they were legit. The chocolates were nice enough though.

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### 6th Sep – Tokyo/Akihabara/Ueno/Asakusa



Today I went early to the Cygames expo and talked in Japanese to explain that I couldn't use e+ to buy a ticket as I didn't have a Japanese mobile phone number or address. They directed me to go to a Family Market and ask for help to print a ticket off at the photocopier, which I did.

With my time slot set for 3pm, I spent time by going to Tokyo Station and walking to the Imperial Palace grounds; I didn't go into the East gardens though. I saw a statue of Kusunoki Masashige nearby, he was a samurai who was loyal to the emperor and died trying to remove the shogunate from power. Naturally, due to this, he wasn't honoured until the Meiji Emperor came into power when the Shogunate came to an end. After looking him up I found that the phrase "Would that I had seven lives to give for my country!" is heavily associated with him.



I then went to Akihabara to buy some presents. I got my dad some model cars, and a puzzle for my mum of Kinkaku-ji. Then I visited the nearby Kanda Shrine and got some Japanese sweets for another one of my friends back home. They had a lovely family of Stone Lion statues from the Edo period by a small waterfall that was rebuilt when Emperor Akihito was enthroned in 1989. While there I also did a final prayer to the shrine's kami.



20/10/2023

By now the time on my ticket for the Cygames expedition had rounded around so I made my way back to Ueno. On entering there was an explanation of their game development history and I got a branded fan too. The expo was split up per game so my interest was mainly in Granblue Fantasy section but the others were interesting too. At the end, there was a video of two of their future projects; Granblue Fantasy Relink, and Garnet Arena: Mages of Magicary, which I am keeping my eyes on. Off to the side, there was a small shop where I brought some merchandise based on their existing games.



I returned to Asakusa and went to Hyozemon's Chopsticks to buy two pairs of chopsticks, one for my sister and the other for a friend with their names engraved on them in Japanese. While waiting I went next door to Yoroiya Ramen which was the restaurant where I had eaten some tasty gyoza a few days ago, so I knew it would be a good pick for my last dinner in Japan. I had pork Ramen and chicken Gyoza with some Sapporo beer on the side. Once I was finished and gave my thanks for the meal, picked up the chopsticks next door, and picked up a few other choice items from the nearby shops.



I then went to the arcade for the final time on my trip where I used my remaining funds aside from the necessary money for my train rides tomorrow at the airport.

### 7th Sep – Left Japan

In the morning I had my last Japanese-style breakfast that was included in my hotel plan and headed to the airport via train and monorail. It turned out that the plane I was returning on recently got a retheme to a Pokémon style. On the plane, I watched "Top Gun: Maverick", "Everything Everywhere All at Once", "Iwane: Sword of Serenity", "Our Little Sister", and half of "Big Hero 6". After getting my luggage, I left the gate, reunited with my family, and returned home.

