

Adventures in Japan, Part 5; Takayama and Matsumoto

Our journey from Kyoto to Takayama began on the 09:33 Bullet train from Kyoto to Nagoya, where we then changed onto the Express Train Hida 7, from Nagoya to Takayama. The journey on this latter train was spectacular in places, as the train weaved its way from city up into the mountains, known as the Japanese Alps. Takayama was a smaller more traditional town, situated high in the Alps, with splendid views of the snow capped peaks from our hotel, The Hida Hotel Plaza.

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Sadly, a lady on our tour tripped and broke her wrist in two places whilst getting off the train, but unlike if you were to suffer an injury like that in our country, she was back at the hotel, in a plaster cast and sling by 5:30pm!

We had a guided walking tour of Takayama that afternoon, taking in Jinya Old House, a Historical Government House, which was very interesting and also the beautiful Kamisannomachi Street.

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Jinya Old House, Takayama

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Kamisannomachi Street, Takayama

The town is absolutely beautiful. It grew up as the home of carpenters employed to build temples and palaces, and woodwork is still very much a part of its day to day life- many of the shops selling hand crafted wooden souvenirs. We bought some lovely wooden lacquered rice bowls. We also enjoyed a Green Tea flavoured Mr Whippy. There are also lots of Sake breweries in Takayama, recognisable by the large balls hanging over the front door. We bought some local sake to bring home.

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Green Tea Mr Whippy

After a lovely stroll we returned to the Hotel for a traditional Onsen, a Japanese Bath. We were lucky in that our hotel had its own rooftop Onsen. Keith tells me that the Onsen is very similar to a German Sauna. You have to

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strip off, have a good wash before you go in and then have a nice relax in the natural spring water. I enjoyed watching the sun setting behind the Alps. Sorry no pics, for obvious reasons!

After a short bath we hit the town again in search for our tea, Hida Beef, a local speciality to the area. Sadly, we hadn't realised, Takayama is very much a day trip town- the street we'd visited earlier that was packed was now all shut, shutters closed and no sign of life whatsoever. The restaurants that were open elsewhere, many of them didn't have English menus, and we got turned away from a handful of restaurants just, we are assuming, because we weren't Japanese. We ended up going in a sake bar and having a light

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night of Hida beef, which was delicious, but possibly a touch over priced for the size of the dish. Never mind!

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Takayama by night

I decided I was going to try a starlit late night bath on return to the hotel, so donned the traditional Japanese Pyjamas supplied by the hotel and made my way upstairs. It was a very relaxing experience and I loved being under the canopy of the stars.

Next morning and we had a guided walk through Takayama's open air market, situated on the river side and full of local food, souvenirs, interesting veg, you name it.

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Takayama's open air market

We made our way to the Float museum afterwards, home to Takayama's national floats, which come out twice a year to celebrate the harvest. They were HUGE! Flamboyant and very gold, the intricate carving and designs were amazing. To give you a sense of size- the figures next to the floats were adult sized. Each float is pulled by around 6-8 men. Incredible!

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Takayama Yatai Kaikan (Float Museum)

We had one final walk around the streets of Takayama before a Hida Beef burger for lunch, and then met the rest of our group for the next leg of our journey, to Matsumoto via Hida Holk Village.

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PICCOLLAGE

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Food and Drink in Takayama plus Japanese PJs!

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Takayama

We took the coach the short distance to Hida Folk village, which is home to around 30 traditional Japanese farm houses, many of which are open to visit. There is also a traditional of hand made crafts here and we visited the wood carver, who we watched hand carving figurines from one single block of wood, with one blade. It was fascinating to watch, and we bought a hand carved dragon as a souvenir.

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Hida Folk village



Hida Folk Village

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We rejoined the coach after our visit here and had a relaxing journey to Matsumoto. We ventured into town for our meal, but far from the larger cities meant that we were struggling to find anywhere that welcomed us. Just as we were having a discussion as to whether we should admit defeat and return for dinner at the hotel, we bumped into a lovely American man Steve and his fabulous Japanese wife, Hisae. They live in San Francisco and had caught sight of Keith's San Francisco T shirt he was wearing I think. They recommended a noodle bar, which we followed them into, then when we sat down we realised the menu was completely in Japanese- no pictures or anything! We were just decid-

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ing whether to leg it or be brave and pick something randomly, Steve came over and invited us to join them- Hisae would translate the menu for us. What superstars! We had a wonderful meal, of curry, noodles and tempura for Keith, a couple of beers then tagged on to them for an evening visit to Matsumoto castle, which we were due to visit tomorrow with the group, however it had been specially illuminated for the evening. It was breathtakingly beautiful. We enjoyed Steve and Hisae's company and felt eternally grateful that they had rescued our evening- so insisted we took them for a couple of sake nightcap. What a fab evening. We hope to meet up with Steve and Hisae sometime again in the future.

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Matsumoto meal

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Matsumoto castle by night (iPhone pics as didn't have
proper camera that night!)

Next morning and I'd be lying if I said we weren't hungover! ☐ We went as a group to Matsumoto Castle, which even despite seeing it illuminated the previous night still was beautiful. I really loved it there.

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Matsumoto castle

We had the chance to go inside and up the top floor, which offered nice views over Matsumoto, although the stairs to get up there were VERY STEEP! There was also an interesting museum to explore too. All in all, despite feeling rough! we had a great visit.

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Museum

Next stop, Mt Fuji!

Until next time

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