

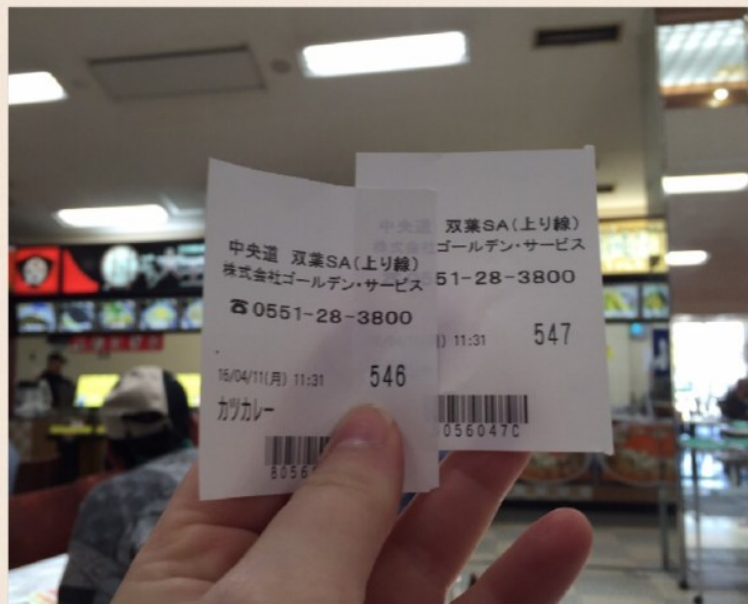
Adventures in Japan, Part 6; Mount Fuji and Hakone National Park then back to Tokyo

After an enjoyable visit to Matsumoto Castle, it was back onto the coach for a couple of hours- our destination, Mount Fuji. We were so excited to be heading to see Mount Fuji, possibly one of Japan's most famous "landmarks" - and it really didn't disappoint! Our first viewing was from the coach- in near perfect conditions. Silly me didn't take a picture through the window as we hurtled down the

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motorway, thinking we will be seeing it much
closer, for much longer blah blah blah! When
we pulled up at a lunch stop, picked presum-
ably because of it's viewing area of Fuji,
Keith and I naturally headed straight to the
restaurant to fill our grumbling hungover bel-
lies, rather than follow the majority of the
coach to the viewing area. Lunch was an in-
teresting experience- our first go at Vending
Machine ordering of hot meals.

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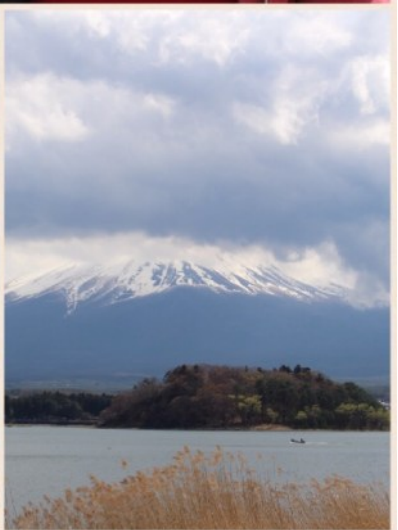
Vending machine lunch

After our bellies were suitably full, we headed out to the viewing area just in time to see a great band of cloud hide the peak of Mt Fuji. We sat for about 15 mins huffing and puffing trying to get the cloud to shift, but it didn't! We then heard from our Japanese guide Kazoooh, that he has been to this area 500 times and only seen the full view 1 in 5 times. Whoops- we hadn't considered that we may come and NOT see it!

Luckily by the time we reached our next stop, nearer the base of Fuji, it more was visible. We were all trying to get "the perfect

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cherry blossom” shot! I didn’t manage it, I
wonder if any of our travel companions did!

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Mount Fuji

We got plenty of memory shots, as Kazoooh would say, and boarded the coach to the Mt Fuji Visitor Centre to watch a short film about Fuji throughout the year. It was then onto Hakone- which was another hour or so on the coach. Having travelled on the high speed trains for the first half of our trip, travelling by coach was a bit of a shock to the system, however it offered a great chance to see the tiny villages dotted about and get a feel for “Real Japan”.

We arrived at our Hotel in Hakone, the Hakone Hotel, in time for Happy Hour. The Hotel were generous and gave everyone a welcome drink, but sadly Keith and I had to

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spend some time (nearly an hour and a half!)
on the phone to HMRC to tie up a few loose
ends for our house purchasing project that is
currently underway - whilst being away
things had become dormant, and we were
keen to get things moving! Thank goodness
for Wifi and the O2 TU Go app. And I suppose
if “office views” are to go by, this wasn’t a
bad one..

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Working refreshments

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We managed to get downstairs to the bar just before the end of Happy hour, and after a few stiff drinks and a bar meal- sadly we had been booked to eat in the hotel's Teriyaki Restaurant that evening, which we had been really looking forward to, but hadn't been given the price (over £75 per person not including drinks-yikes) we had to resort to Pizza and chips- mind you it was pretty tasty!

Next morning dawned, and the weather gods were smiling down on us. Here's our view from Breakfast!

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View from breakfast of Mt Fuji. Breathtaking

We took an early boat ride from our hotel to Togendai, where we transferred to a cable car and went up to a view point. Sadly the weather god's had decided to retreat by this time and Fuji became invisible with cloud cover, but we were still afforded great views of

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Lake Ashinoko, and we could hardly com-
plain! We were supposed to visit the hot sul-
phur springs but they were closed due to it
being unsafe due to volcanic activity. Gulp.

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First transport of the day. Cable car station in bottom
right was where we were heading first.

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Cable car

Next was a public bus and then a tram that went up a hill! We visited some Japanese Gardens and Keith had a funny encounter over lunch with his first cold udon noodles and angry waitress, who (humorously) had a rather large tantrum at him including feet stomping, when he emptied the noodles onto the nice bamboo sheet on his plate and poured the sauce on top, when in fact he shouldn't have done that! Apparently this is NOT the done thing....!!

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Public bus

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Tram

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Hakone Gardens

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Keith and his cold udon noddles

I think Great Rail Journeys and Kazooh were keen to make sure we experienced every transport type possible, as we were next on a Funicular Railway and then finally a local train back to Tokyo, known as the Romance car. The difference being that we were at the front of the train and we had the drivers view! The driver sits on a mezzanine level above us, accessed by a simple ladder, meaning that everyone in the front carriage, The Romance car, can see through the window screen that stretched from top to bottom, left to right. Quite amazing!

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Romance Car!

a day of public transport video

Before we knew it, despite travelling on 6 different modes of transport, we were back in the centre of Tokyo and only 5 minutes walk from our original Hotel. Our adventure was nearly over and although we were sad that it was coming to an end, we felt thoroughly satisfied that we had seen the very best of Japan, and what an amazing country it was.

Our final evening was spent in the hotel, as Great Rail had organised a farewell meal for

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our group. The buffet meal was incredible-
plenty of Japanese food amongst other nationalities, some delicious fresh sushi and most excitingly, a massive chocolate fountain. I was in food heaven and will let you decide how many courses Keith and I rocked up between us!

Our final day was all too soon here, but we were pleased to have a full day on our own before we transferred to the airport for our night flight home. We spent the day shopping in many stationary stores (!) visiting the busiest crossing in the world, visiting the Sony Store to gawp at the latest technology about to hit our shelves, unsuccessfully hunting down a 100 yen store (75p) and then using all our remainder Yen in the bar where

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we started, trying the local whiskeys and
sakes! And it worked a treat, we both slept
for nearly 8 hours on the flight on the way
home!

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Last Day in Tokyo

Our trip was absolutely incredible. Once again, Great Rail Journeys had taken us on a trip of a lifetime, and how lucky were we to have crammed two into one year! John, our tour manager, was once again ever patient, knowledgeable and charming and we felt lucky to have shared our experience with him.

The Japanese have to be one of the friendliest bunch out there, they go out of their way to help you, and their knowledge of the English language is fabulous. The food was some of the best we've ever eaten, the scenery breathtaking. What more can one want from a holiday!

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Until Next time,

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