

Day 15 (Saturday 10/04/08) Kyoto, Japan

We got rolling early this morning and went down to our tour bus to Kyoto about 7:30. This was going to be a 10 hour jaunt taking us to some of Kyoto's most famous sites. We were scheduled to see the Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku) at the Rokuon-ji Temple, the Nijo Castle, the Shinto Heian Shrine and a handicraft/souvenir center before returning to Kobe.

Once on the bus we met our guide whose short westernized name was Sue. We started our journey to Kyoto along an elevated freeway through Kobe which had sound barriers installed on both sides of the road to protect the nearby residents from all the highway noise. The barriers had transparent plastic windows but the view of the passing cities was still very restricted. This photo gives some idea of what the barriers on the road side looked like when viewed out the front of the bus. The sound barriers went on continuously for about 30 miles and then there were breaks where we could see the passing buildings and a little open country.



One thing we noticed right away was that they have the kudzu vine ground cover growing profusely here just like we have in Tennessee. It was doing a fine job of covering the hillsides and in some cases all the trees along the roadside.



We left the freeway when we reached Kyoto and worked our way through the city streets. We noticed that Kyoto had a wide range of building types with very old wooden buildings with traditional upturned eaves mixed in with

modern concrete buildings. This view of Kyoto shows the range of architecture that was common.

About 30 minutes after leaving the freeway we came to our destination at the Rokuon-ji Temple. About 600 years ago the buildings and grounds were dedicated as a Zen Temple. The grounds contain the Golden Pavilion building which gets its name from the fact that it is covered with gold leaf. The original buildings of the Temple were destroyed over the years but the Golden Pavilion was preserved until a



disastrous event in 1950 when a Buddhist monk burned it down. The Golden Pavilion was rebuilt in 1955 as an exact duplicate of the original. Because the original building was destroyed by arson in 1950, visitors are no longer allowed to go inside but the exterior view is still worth the trip.

We had a marvelous day for the visit and the bright sun made the gold shine with real brilliance. The Gold Pavilion is obviously a national treasure and there were many groups of enthusiastic Japanese school children visiting the site.



Another ancient attraction at the temple is a 600 year old pine tree. The tree was originally a bonsai tree kept by the Shogun who created the original facility as his home. When the site was dedicated as a Zen temple 600 years ago the tree was planted in the soil and was no longer a bonsai. However, it was carefully tended and still lives on as shown below.



After touring the Rokuon-ji Temple and seeing the Golden Pavilion we boarded the bus and headed for the

Nijo Castle. The Nijo Castle contains a building known as the Ninomaru Palace. The Tokugawa Shoguns controlled feudal lords between 1600 and 1867. In 1604 the Nijo Castle was built in Kyoto as a home and fortress for the first Tokugawa Shogun. One of the problems with being a Shogun was the tradition that the person who assassinated a Shogun then became the Shogun. For ambitious politicians and warriors there was a real incentive to kill the Shogun and take his place. Therefore, the Shogun lived in constant fear that someone might try to assassinate him. They had elaborate procedures to avoid being killed but the Shogun of Nijo Castle came up with the ultimate defense. He had the floor of the Ninomaru Palace constructed so that it was not possible to walk in the passageways of the castle without causing the floor to chirp like a small bird. If anyone tried to sneak up on the Shogun he would be warned by the sound. The wooden floor of the castle is sometimes referred to as the Nightingale Floor because when walked upon it makes chirping sounds like nightingale birds.

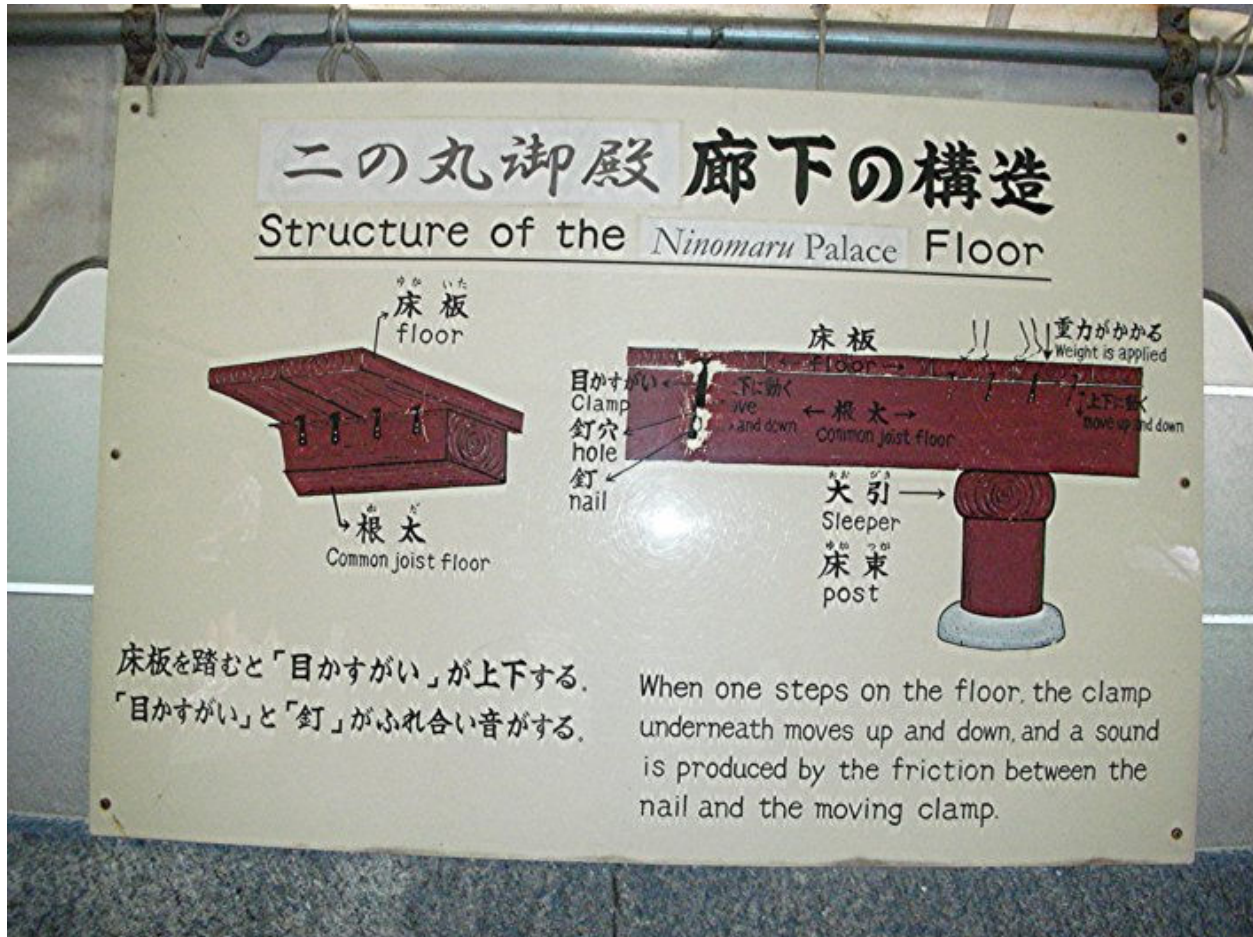
As we entered the Nijo Castle gate we were looking forward to hearing firsthand the mysterious chirping sound from the floor. The castle gates are huge and looked like a fitting place for a Shogun. The roof of the gate is thatched with cypress tree bark and was about 1 foot thick. It was showing some wear around the edges and may be about due for replacement after its design lifetime of about 40 years. Before we could enter the main Ninomaru Palace we had to take off our shoes.



The wooden floor of the castle is 400 years old and thousands of tourists go through it each year so in order to preserve the floor it is necessary for everyone to take off their shoes before entering. We all took off our shoes and stored them on shelves in section 19 so they could be easily found when we finished the tour. Unfortunately, no pictures could be taken during the tour so the magnificent artwork that we saw in the castle could not be photographed.

Our group of about 40 people walked along the wood plank floors of the hallways and the chirping sound that we had heard about was clearly audible. With all the people walking it sounded like there was a flock of small birds roosting near us. We are familiar with the annoying sound of our own wood floor creaking as the boards rub together but this was a completely different sound and actually rather pleasing.

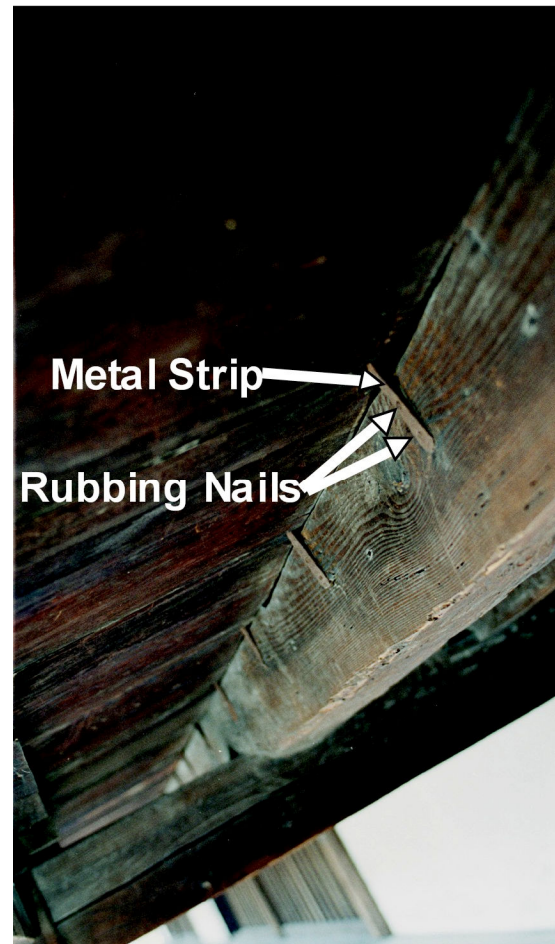
We were very interesting in knowing just how this sound effect was obtained. At the end of the tour there was a sign that attempted to explain the mechanism that produced the sound we heard. Here is what was posted.



In the Nightingale Floor a metal strip (called a clamp in the sign above) was firmly attached to the floor board and extended down along the surface of a stationary floor joist. A nail was driven into the joist through a slot cut in the metal strip. The nail touched the metal strip but did not hold it tight. As someone steps on the floor board it flexes up and down causing the metal strip to move up and down and rubbing it against the nail. The friction of the nail rubbing on the metal strip causes the metal strip to vibrate at a high frequency that sounds like a small bird chirping.

After the tour we were still curious about exactly how the noise was made. While walking around the castle outside there was a place when it was possible to photograph a small section of the floor from underneath. Orlin crawled into the spot where the photograph could be taken and got a picture. However, that picture was not as good as available on the Internet. The following picture obtained from the Internet (Google Nightingale Floor) was taken looking up at the underside of the Nightingale floor showing the metal strips which are labeled. The Nightingale Floor would be incredibly labor intensive to install but no expense was too great to protect the Shogun.

In addition to the Ninomaru Palace and its Nightingale Floor the Nijo Castle grounds contain one of the most beautiful gardens we saw in Japan. The guide said the garden was designed to look like a painting when the Shogun looked out his window. Here are a couple photographs that give some idea of what it looks like.



After the Nijo Castle tour it was time for lunch and the bus took us to the Rihga Royal Hotel where we enjoyed a sit down meal with excellent food and service. There were about 120 Amsterdam passengers in the three tour busses and the hotel had no trouble seating and serving all of us in a timely manner. It was a beautiful room and we were particularly impressed with the magnificent chandeliers that lit up the banquet room. One of the chandeliers is shown on the right. Here is a picture of the dining room.



The next stop on our itinerary was the Heian Jingu Shinto Shrine. Sue informed us that Buddhists have Temples and the Shinto religion has Shrines. She said that she was a member of both the Buddhist and Shinto

religions. This combination was the best way to live because the Shinto religion provided Gods who could bring you good luck and happiness in this life while the Buddhist religion provides for peace and tranquility in the next life.

Normally a Shinto Shrine gate is very simple, with two horizontal bars, such as this example on the right.



Today we walked through the much more elaborate gate of the Heian Jingu Shinto Shrine. There were large crowds with many people actively practicing their prayer rituals as we tourists milled among them. Here is a view of the Shinto Temple gate, on the left, and the main square below.



From the superficial standpoint of a western tourist it seems that a major part of the Shinto religion is praying for good luck in whatever you want to do. There is a tradition of writing your particular request on a cloth and tying the cloth to a tree within the shrine. This prayer tree on the right was located in the main square and appeared to be loaded down with prayers.



Sue said that some days are considered lucky for weddings and some days are not. Today, being October fourth was a lucky day so there were lots of weddings. We took this picture of a wedding photography session that was taking place as we visited. The bride is in the white traditional Japanese gown. This was obviously being conducted in a Shinto Shrine but Sue said that Western style "Christian" weddings are becoming more popular. A previous guide had said about 50% of weddings are Christian style even though only 1% of the people are Christian.



The Shinto shrine included a garden area around the back of the main square. Our tour walked slowly along a winding path through the tranquil scenes. The path included this series of stones providing a way to cross the small creek.



On the way to the exit of the Shinto Shrine we saw this magnificent stone dragon located in the main courtyard.



After the visit to the Shinto Shrine we went to the last stop of the tour which was at a handicraft and souvenir store. There were 8 floors filled with all kinds of Japanese and



imported goods. Barbara was fascinated by the cast dragons (\$75 US) and beautiful kimono outfits (\$350 US) but we escaped with only a small bit of colorful fabric.

On the 2 hour ride back to Kobe and the Amsterdam our guide, Sue, continued to give us little stories that provided a glimpse into the Japanese culture.

For example, we passed by a small amount of graffiti on a concrete wall. Graffiti is very unusual in Japan but Sue said that in the high schools you could find graffiti in the rest rooms from time to time. One image you might find would be a boy's and girl's name under a drawing of an umbrella. This would be similar to the graffiti we might find in the US with a boy's name and girl's name in a heart with an arrow through the heart. Both images convey the message that the two people are in love. She then explained the Japanese connection of love with the umbrella. At the time when Sue's grandmother got married it was the custom for the woman to walk at least 3 paces behind the man. The only time they could walk close together would be when it was raining and they both had to get together under an umbrella. Thus the umbrella became a symbol for closeness between a man and woman. The old custom of the woman walking 3 paces behind the man is no longer practiced but the umbrella symbol lives on.

Another comment was that although Japan remains a male dominated society 60% of men give all the family income to the wife to spend on household functions.

We got back to the Amsterdam about 6pm. Later in the evening there was entertainment provided by the Kobe Visitor's Bureau. This was typical of our



gracious Japanese hosts wherever we went. Two ladies in traditional Japanese dress played Beatles songs on ancient stringed instruments. The audience loved it and it provided a great way to end our visit to this part of Japan.

At 11pm we got underway for Shanghai, China.