

Day 14 (Friday 10/03/08) Kobe, Japan

This morning we cruised into the harbor at Kobe, Japan. We had an overcast sky and the temperature was a pleasant 68F. Here is where we are located in Japan and in the city of Kobe.



As is typical, when entering a busy harbor there were large ships moving in and out past the Amsterdam. Kobe is obviously a very modern port with many cranes lining the port and tall buildings with dramatic architecture.



The Amsterdam docked at Shinko Pier next to the new Cruise Ship Passenger Terminal. Two bands were standing on the pier ready to greet the Amsterdam. First a brass band dressed in white uniforms played marching music and other pieces that reminded us of what you might hear at any American civic center on the Fourth of July. When the brass band had finished they



marched smartly off and were replaced by a large group wearing traditional Japanese garb and playing Taiko, or Japanese drums. The Amsterdam passengers lining the rails clapped and cheered after each piece was played.



We had signed up for a tour of Mount Rokko scenic overlook and the Hakutsuru Sake Brewing Company. We joined forces with Bob, Esther and Joan and boarded our tour bus at 9:30. The tour guide's name was Matiko. She spoke fine English and did a good job of guiding us.

Matiko described the good public transportation system of Kobe and then told us she relied on public transportation because she had never driven a car. She said that cars were too expensive and then she shared the fact that she was born in the year of the Tiger. Women born in the year of the tiger were known to be very impatient and she was afraid that her impatience would get her into trouble if she drove a car. Going further she looked a couple of the men passengers in the eye and said that because of this impatience, women born in the year of the tiger are destined to kill three men in their lifetime. We got a little Japanese folklore and a chuckle out of her dry sense of humor.

Kobe suffered a huge earthquake in 1995 and many of the older buildings collapsed. Matiko said that most of the damaged buildings had been replaced by modern construction. We didn't see any evidence of damage from the earthquake in the part of Kobe that we visited.

The bus wound its way up the 10 miles of narrow, twisting road to the top of Mount Rokko which was visible from the Amsterdam. The city of Kobe was visible below us, laid out between

the harbor and the steep mountain we had just climbed. There was a lot of mist in the air so the view was not great but we got a sense of the size of Kobe city and how it was laid out between the mountain and the harbor. The Google map of Kobe provides a better illustration of how Kobe is squeezed between the mountains and the harbor.

The ever present gift shops were located at the scenic overlook and we had about 30 minutes to sight see and browse the



shop. Barbara, as seen through this shop window, quickly lost interest in the scenery and concentrated on shopping.



We got back on the bus and after a short ride got off at the mountain top station

for the funicular, or cable car, that runs up and down the mountain side. The guide got tickets for the group and we took our seats on the cable car.



The cable car tracks led through dense trees and shrubs so that there was not the good view of the city that we expected. However, a ride such as this was unusual so we made the best of it. The view shown in the photo below gives some idea of how the cable car looked on the inside. Matiko (on the right) and her assistant, in their blue uniforms, can be seen chatting during the 15 minute ride down the mountain inside.





At the bottom of the mountain the station had a wooden carving of a bear welcoming us to Mount Rokko. That reminded us of what you might find at tourist attractions in the Smokey Mountains near our home in Oak Ridge.

From the cable car station the bus took us to the Hakutsuru Sake Brewing Company in an industrial section of Kobe. The main attraction at the brewery was the Sake Museum that had elaborate displays showing how sake has been made over the centuries. Sake is a wine made with rice instead of grapes. Rice is polished, steamed, and then subjected to a fermenting and filtering process. The resulting clear liquid has an alcohol content on the order of 15% and a distinctive taste of sake. It can be served cold or more traditionally it is served hot and sipped slowly. Here is a display portraying the casks of sake bound up in protective wrapping ready for shipment to market. There was a tasting room for the Hakutsuru Sake and everyone tried a little bit of it. Surprisingly, it was served chilled and not hot as is more traditional.



After the tour of the sake museum we headed back towards the Amsterdam. However, Matiko offered to let us off the bus in downtown Kobe next to the big Sogo Department Store. After getting detailed instructions about how to take public transportation back to the Amsterdam we exited the bus with Bob, Esther and Joan into the heart of downtown Kobe. This turned out to be the best part of the tour.

We found the Sogo Department Store and went immediately to the basement where Joan said we would find the food department. Indeed, there were all kinds of food on display and plenty of customers browsing and making purchases. Here on the right is some Kobe beef being sold for the equivalent of



\$63 US. More exotic foods were also available for the plentiful customers as shown on the left.



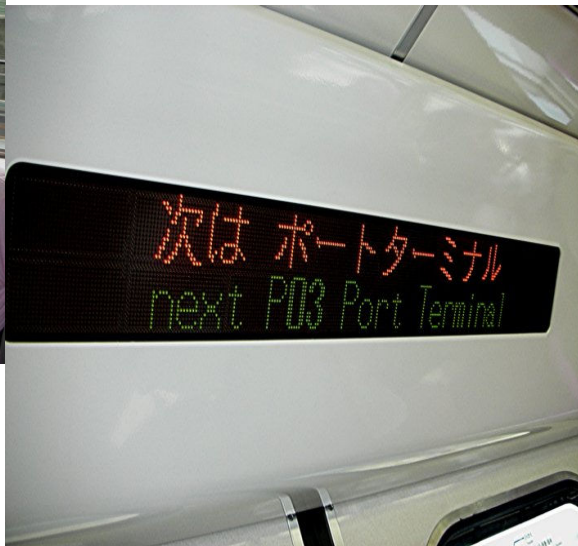
The prices tended to be a little higher than we would expect at home. For example, Joan inquired about a bottle of her favorite cologne (not perfume) in the exquisite cosmetic department. The price of 131,000 Yen (\$131 US) was more than she was used to paying.

In the upper floors were other displays that were very similar to any that could be found in upscale department stores in the US. Barbara particularly liked their display of ECCO shoes which have become a favorite of hers. At the price of 16,300 Yen (\$163 US) she decided to pass on this opportunity to buy. Later, we were told that some other department stores in Kobe had lower prices. We didn't see any Wal-Marts in downtown Kobe.



After exploring all nine floors of the Sogo Department Store we decided to head back to the Amsterdam. Our tour guide had given fairly detailed instructions on how to take public transportation back to the ship.

We decided to take this adventuresome route back to ship rather than the more straight forward method of using a taxi. By frequent use of helpful attendants at the railroad station we found our way to the "Port Liner" station and purchased tickets in the automatic machine. The machine was set up to display instructions in English if you pressed "English" on the screen. That was a big help and we simply inserted 200Yen (\$2.00 US) in coins into the slot for each ticket. Then at the turnstile we got additional assistance in the technique for passing our tickets through the machine. We found our train at Track 1 and took our seats, trusting that we were in the right place. This photo above shows the



hopeful tourists ready for the trip to the Amsterdam. We were all relieved when the scrolling sign over the door flashed a message in English that our destination, the "Port Terminal" was the next stop. We gathered our things and tramped happily back on board the Amsterdam.