

ぶらぶら日記

GOING WHERE
WIND BLOWS ME

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Under Ground Press

GOING WHERE WIND BLOWS ME

Day 1

Tuesday

Sept. 26 2023



Leave Sendai 9 a.m. on a highway bus bound for Tsuruoka in Yamagata Prefecture.

Knowing nothing about history
nothing about culture
nothing about people . . .

Concrete city
Concrete city

Knowing something about history
something about culture
something about people . . .

Concrete city
Concrete city



Every body on this bus (half full / half empty) the driver counts twice. Every body on this bus "has a story." Is a story, is a telling—not a selling. How life is: no copyright, no copyright [sic].

Up in Yamagata's (N: Yamagata is a prefecture's name, which can be rendered in English as "mountain shape/s" or, as I see it, "shaped by mountains") mountains, mountains surround human settlements, mountains and mountains of mountains' unknown.

Beyond a ski resort
beyond ski slopes,
mountains and mountains
and beyond mountains sky
and all of it as breath as fresh as you're here.



Seeing from a bus places I'd traveled on foot as a twenty years' younger man wondering anew what it's like.



Arrive in Tsuruoka, leave my suitcase at a hotel, find a place to eat lunch near a train station, which is near my hotel. Way too expensive! AND a deceptive menu! The area around

the train station has a lot of newy newy borey borey buildings. The one with restaurants is called "Gastronomie" something or other, a word many locals don't know or what language it's from. (Tsuruoka advertises itself as "Creative City of Gastronomy," and has a Unesco certification.) Very trendy though, which seems to be what matters and means for sure twice as much as I would have paid for the same meal elsewhere.

Went walking along what used to be the town's shopping streets but now 90% are closed, deserted.

My guess is that many gave up the ghost when grandpa's generation got too old and there was no one in the family wanting to take over nor anyone from outside foreseeing any future business happening there. All the new biz is in the newly developed mally-mally area hugging the train station. Just like Kyoto. Just like Sendai. Likely a nationwide trend. Then bulldoze the old and build high price condos. In a nation trying to cope with inflation.

There was though in the Sannomachi area a used book store open. At first I just walked on by. Then came a recollection that this is a Santōka trip and Santōka came once here to Tsuruoka. That old bookstore might have something connected with ole Mr. Mountaintop Fire (which is what Santōka's haiku name—Santōka is his haiku name—means in English). So I went back and went in. Stacks of old books, piles of old books, overflowing with old books, old magazines, and old hanging scrolls. And an old woman behind a counter who's in her 90s and still mentally sharp. Her son or maybe grandson is a middle-aged fellow back in the stacks recording book data. He's the one found Santōka books for me.



Turns out they had two. One big one of his calligraphy along with calligraphy of his free-style haiku founding friends. Big book a foot-and-a-half high. More than two inches thick. I thought Yoshiko (calligrapher in Okayama) would like it. Too big to take with me on a trip I tell him, but when I ask its price he tells me it's 7 bucks (approximate US dollar rendering). So I buy it and one other old book of Santōka studies that includes writing about his adventures in Michinoku (another name for this northeast region).

Good thing I decided to bring a suitcase that is half full / half empty.

Down the street from the used book shop is a cafe called Cocon, written with the kanji 古今 (old/now) in an old wooden building that was built, I'm told later, in the Edo period (1603~1868). The young ladies working there were the friendliest ever. They were excited to have me there. One sat with me to chat, then gave me a tour; she took me into the back which they use as a restaurant serving to guests seated on tatami mats dishes made with locally grown veggies and locally raised animals. She took me up to the second floor and even showed me the attic. We even saw a praying mantis. It looked like a little Santōka with his begging bowl; only green.

This young lady, Ms. Misato, told me the owner is thinking about turning the place into an inn. It's good there is no plan to tear it down.


I guess having a foreigner as a customer is not something that happens every day. I made their day. They made mine. Thanks to Santōka.


I came to Tsuruoka with no plan, with nothing in mind to see or do. All I did was walk, and walking took me into such a special, unforgettable experience.

In this Creative City of Gastronomy I bought a lunch box at a convenience store to eat in my room for dinner.


Day 2

Sept. 27

 Breakfast buffet style at the hotel. Included in the plan. Rice, miso soup, natto, grilled fish, broccoli..... No fresh fruit. Coffee.

 By train from Tsuruoka to Niigata. The Inaho Line runs along the coast. The ticket seller yesterday told me he's giving me a window seat so I can see the coastline, but today it's raining. A rainy coastline then.

Coastline is coastline rain or shine line. Inaho means head of rice, or, alternatively, rice ears. Like ears of corn. Niigata is known for its rice. Maybe I'll be able to hear rice growing if I grow rice ears. Just nice ears would nice. Just hear nice stuff if I eat just rice. If it hasn't been already harvested. There is a town along the way named Inaho. Reminds me of Idaho.

 Why does there always seem to be steam rising out of mountains in Japan. Only early morning?

 Yesterday on a bus through mountains. Today on a train along a coast.

Sea too
teeming with wonder
more than any story.
Book in a backpack.
Why get news second hand?

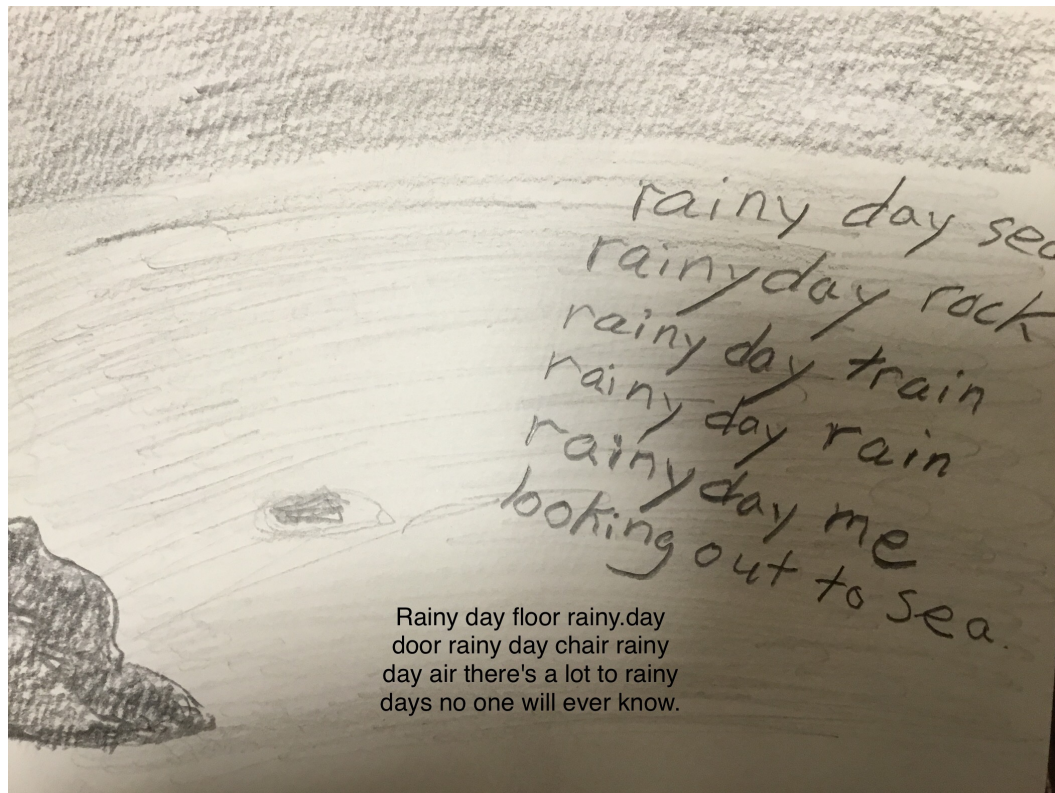
Rolling on rolling on
coastline cloudy
offshore island dark in distance.

Old man of the sea
Odysseus met
speaks out to me
"You did more with it
than me." Whatever
supposedly I did who knows
but it gets me musing:
We each do what we do
which is why
it's not about how many
are reached but
how deeply
sea change occurs.

The sea we see
holds mystery even more
as land rock knuckling
into it.

In a long tunnel is where I could break out a book.
Some paragraphs or page then here we are
the light at the end of a tunnel—
not an illusion of light but an illusion of tunnel
dug by a focus on artificial.

Sea today from train looks flat
but looks can be de-sea-ving. 🤪



🏠 My hotel today is near a Royal Host.

👍 Royal Host is a family restaurant I've been going to since our children were little. Decent food, reasonable prices, good service. One of my favorite similar-to-a-New-Jersey-diner places.

Day 3

Sept. 28

Niigata. ✂ Breakfast buffet at my hotel. Pan-fried noodles, tomato corn soup; lettuce, carrot, and seaweed salad; grilled fish, natto, grapefruit, coffee.

Rain again. Light rain. Though it's not so hot, humidity is high.

🚶 Walk around downtown Niigata. Furumachi and Honchō area. A lot of temples around. So many it's sometimes called Temple Town. So many temples but,

looking in at one,
see its graveyard.
No fear of getting lost.

There are 30 minutes before most shops open (10 a.m.) so find a coffee shop called DoTour. DoTour has places all over Japan but this one is in an old building with an old style polished wood interior. Quite nice. Like an old style coffee shop.

On the wall is a "Kamidana" (shelf for protective deity) but I see on it a 25-centimeter-tall porcelain figure of maybe a 17th or early 18th century European. I ask a young staff-woman who it is but she doesn't know. My guess is that it's Mozart.

The toilet too is old style. Asian style. The kind one has to squat over.

Santōka, too, liked shopping streets though possibly for different reasons. For him, shopping streets meant

people coming to shop,
people with money, money for
his begging bowl.

Time to walk. Up and down these partially roofed shopping streets or totally (semi-transparent) roofed shopping arcades. (There are more here than in Sendai. Because there's more snow?) Here the old coexists with the new. A shop in business since 1911 in a two-story wooden building that has definitely been, euphemistically put, weathered by time is next to a newer building several stories high that's a nationwide chain. Outside are street vendors selling fresh veggies. One has so many varieties of garlic! I never there were so many.

For example the leather backpack I carry was bought in Sendai in a shop that's been run by the same family for seven generations.

Between 10 and until just before noon there are not many people on these streets but after noon numbers increase; some establishments are definitely geared towards evening customers. They serve booze.

Coming back out onto a shopping street after looking into a nook in which there was a little Shintō shrine, one of a group of half a dozen 5th grade girls asked to interview me. I was up for it and expecting a bit more than her one question "Where are you from?"

In that nook was, on a wooden signpost:

海に降る

雨や恋しき うき身宿

[umi ni furu
ame ya koishiki uki shinjuku]

Rain on sea how
I long for an inn to float
on my back

According to that signpost, it's a haiku attributed to Bashō. It's one that supposedly didn't make it into the final draft of 奥の細道, Oku no Hosomichi.



If I hadn't walked....

If I hadn't come with nothing particular in mind to do....

I would not have chanced upon an amazing connection. A bit of background for some:

From Wikipedia:

"**Ryōkan Taigu** (良寛大愚) (1758 – 18 February 1831)[1] was a quiet and unconventional Sōtō Zen Buddhist monk who lived much of his life as a hermit. **Ryōkan** is remembered for his poetry and calligraphy, which present the essence of Zen life."

Priest Ryōkan was from here in what is now called Niigata Prefecture. Tomorrow I will head to Okayama City in Okayama Prefecture and will meet calligraphy master Yoshida Ryōshun who has had a deep ongoing fascination with Priest Ryōkan for many years. In fact Ryōkan attained enlightenment at a temple in Okayama. She has done several of his poems in her own calligraphic style. Please check her new website: <https://snd00803.wixsite.com/yoshikoyoshida>

Anyway..... I'm walking along a shopping street and see a shop specializing in what I think are just antique hanging scrolls. I'm looking in its shop window and a little old man with a white beard comes out to invite me in—the other day in a Tsuruoka cafe, two young women and today it's two old men. Long story short: the shop is devoted to Priest Ryōkan. Run by some sort of Ryōkan preservation society. All the scrolls are connected with him. Wood carvings as well. Lots of books and periodicals devoted to him. So: using fb messenger on my iPad I ring Yoshiko-san in Okayama. What a surprise for her! She video chats with the two old men operating the shop. I use the reverse on my iPad camera and show her what's in the room. Then one fellow tells her the shop is going to close the end of this month.

It is exciting for me when these connections arise. Arise out of where? Arise out of walking!

Fresh experience freshens these aging legs. I want to walk on and on, but call it a day and hail a taxi."Hail, taxi!"

This humidity brings a lot of sweat. Back at my hotel I use a coin laundry. First time ever? It's not a complicated one like we have at home with 25 different settings. You just put your stuff in, add the detergent, and push "on." Cool!

Sleep when I sleep

awake when I awake.


No telling what all else I do.


Day 4

Sept. 29

Clear sky. Let's pop off to Okayama, shall we then, old chap?
Get the powdered green tea ready! お待ちや！ねええ！


Nowhere to go
Not just another day
But going where
today takes me
Hey joy ride bro
Who knows

 Hotel breakfast. Buffet style. Cabbage bacon bean sprout sauté; natto, sweet-fish, carrot, potato boil, sautéed Spanish mackerel. Coffee.

 On a bullet train heading for Tokyo where I'll change onto another bullet train for Okayama. My first visit to Okayama—and my first meeting with Madam Yoshiko Yoshida—was in 2014. Seems like ages ago. We knew each other on fb and then, on my way back from a conference in Hiroshima, I stopped for a night in Okayama and Yoshiko and her friend kindly drove me way out of town to a country temple called Mairai-ji. The temple priest is a hanga (woodblock print) artist. He and I were involved in a project that appeared in an American haiku magazine. His woodblock prints of Santōka poems and my English translations. Since I don't get to that part of Japan often, it seemed like a good chance to meet Yoshiko and the woodblock printing priest.

It was fine weather, a fine day.

Before that Madam Morie and I met Yoshiko's husband, Professor Yoshida. He teaches Russian history at Okayama University and was in Sendai to give a lecture—to an open audience—not just college kids—about Russian food culture. After the lecture Morie and I went up and introduced ourselves.

 From Niigata the train route runs by and through mountains, along rice fields, here and there a city, here and there small towns and villages. But once we get to Ōmiya in Saitama Prefecture, from there into Tokyo is all concrete city. The only green is a river bank.

The green ride from Niigata to Ōmiya is green on an eye and so green on a mind. Relaxing. Concrete is hard on an eye and so hard on a mind. Though some people are fascinated by cityscapes and their geometric multiplicities.

All that concrete is needed to accommodate all that concentrated human mental buzz. Or is it that all that mental buzz needs to be expressed as concrete. Busy bees. Concrete honeycombs. Moneycombs.

Rolling by Kyoto
see only one pagoda
taller hotels

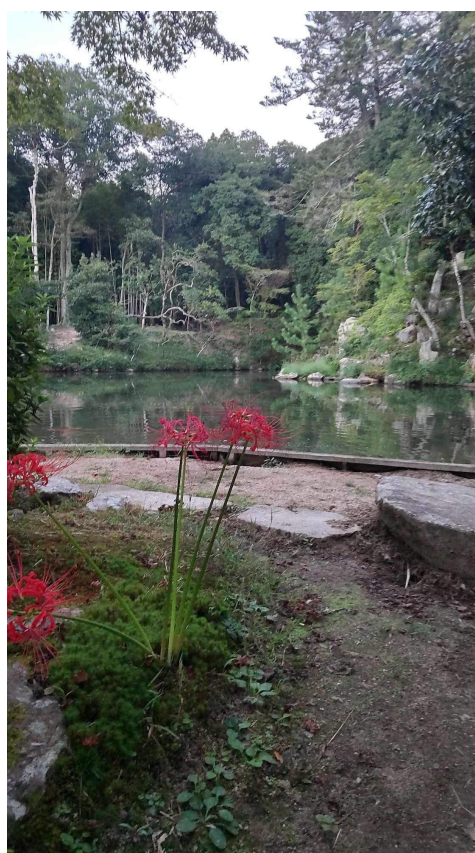
Nose of a bullet train
spattered with dead bugs
what did I expect.

🏨 Check in at a hotel right next to Okayama Station. Still the summer heat! Alright already! Immediately take a bus to visit Ryōshū (Yoshiko). She's waiting at my bus stop. Hell Under a Mountain (獄) is the kanji for where she lives. Who names these places? Ha!

She shows me in her house her two-roomed studio. Half a wall of hanging calligraphy brushes, different sizes and shapes. I've never seen so many together before. And closets full of calligraphy paper.

I feel sort of naked in my art which only needs a notebook and pen. Notebook to cover my pen/is! (((I got a million of 'em, スケベ jokes!)))

Yoshiko served me some local fruit. Okayama is known for its fruit. And some veggie dishes she'd made. AND..... some MATCHA tea in a Hagi-ware pottery matcha bowl. Hagi-ware my favorite! Then we walk 15 minutes to a Sōtō Zen temple called Sōgen-ji. Not a tourist temple. Quiet, peaceful, meditative as soon as one enters its grounds. Feed some carp in a large pond.



Then we walk to a Nepali curry restaurant and order more than we can eat, but I bring what's left in a doggie bag back to my hotel. Breakfast!

Day 5

Sept. 30

🍴 Breakfast of last night's curry in my hotel room. Convenience store banana. Green tea made with room apparatus.

Will meet Yoshiko and some members of her English group and head off to two Shintō shrines and a lunch in between.

🚆 We leave by train from Okayama Station and first visit Kibitsu Shrine. That old legend of Peach Boy is connected with here. That's Momotaro in Japanese. I won't go into a long explanation here but there is in depth material on Wikipedia and elsewhere online or on paper. Peach Boy is a folktale. He fought off demons.

"It is said that a shrine was built in the place where Kibitsu Shrine/Momotaro captured Onra, [or, as I heard it, Ura ~ SW] an ancient demon who committed evil deeds, after a fierce battle. This shrine is called Kibitsu Shrine. Therefore, Kibitsu Shrine has historical value as "Momotaro Legend's Birth Town: Okayama."



Don't let anyone tell you Bingo was invented here in Okayama. No kibitzing! There's a Bizen (where the famous pottery is made); there's a Bitchu (no comment about how many sons are of there); and there's a Bingo, where the game old folks play was invented. NOT!

After that a delicious lunch at a small family run place nearby. We get to know each other. Then by train again to Kibitsu Shrine. (The word "Kibitsu comes up a lot around here. I get confused. Kibi was the name of an ancient kingdom that was here. 4th century.)

Within the shrine grounds is a place where fortunes are told by interpreting voice-like sounds from a boiling cauldron. "Round about the cauldron go...."

After a hot day of a lot of walking, a lot of talking (getting to know each other), we settled into some coffee or peach floats at a place near the shrine. Delightful.

What a nice group of English practitioners Yoshiko found! I hope they'll visit Sendai someday.



Dinner back in my hotel room. Good old pensioner special: lunchbox bought at a convenience store. Soak these tired legs in a warm bath.

Five days on the road

hit the mother lode


sleep


Day 6

Oct. 1

6:50 a.m. a bit overcast. Morning not so hot.

From what I'm told Okayama is a good place to live. No earthquakes! Not much trouble from typhoons. Not much snow.

 My poor man's pensioner breakfast of rice balls and veggie juice comes from a nearby convenience store. Otherwise I'd have to shell out 30 ~ 40 bucks for a hotel breakfast. No thanks.

 Today I'm off to Sōja with Yoshiko and some of her friends. Sōja is located near Okayama City. We go by train. Already here we are! Nice talking with Yoshiko on the train about shamanism and such matters. Wanted to keep talking but here is where we had to get off.

From what I could see of Sōja it's a rural scene. Rice fields and rice fields and rice fields. Reminds me of Northern Miyagi where Madam Morie's from.

Our purpose for a visit to Sōja was not sightseeing but to meet Yoshiko's friend who was once Sōja's mayor. So happens he too is a Santōka lover. The former mayor, Mr. Takeuchi, is now back to farming. He grows rice without using any agricultural chemicals. Yea!

We had lunch in an open barn of sorts inside which were huge machines used for drying rice. It was a very simple setting, a working setting. That morning Mr. Takeuchi had caught three wild boars in a trap. That was our main dish. Yoshiko and I helped him skin one.

We ate wild boar deep fried, boar tenderloins raw with soy sauce, boar charcoal grilled spare ribs, etc. A rare experience! That and sweetfish, or also called, according to my dictionary, freshwater trout. Whatever it is it was salted and then charcoal grilled. Delicious!

About a dozen people in all gathered and we enjoyed a picnic of sorts there in the wide open barn. Mr. Takeuchi and I enjoyed exchanging Santōka lore. It's quite rare to find a Santōka fan. Many Japanese never heard of him.

We went back to Okayama by car. One of today's members, Satoko-san, kindly gave us a ride.

My stay in Okayama is almost at an end. I'm alone in my hotel room now. After a big lunch, my dinner is two rice balls and broccoli & octopus salad from at a nearby convenience store.

Sayonara, Okayama! Thank you, dear Yoshiko for your kind hospitality. I hope you and your friends will come to Sendai!

Day 7


Oct. 2

TODAY 

Sandalwood hand fan

ancient capital elegance

will I smell like wild boar

 Well here I'm off to one of the ancient capitals. Called Heian-kyo back then, Kyoto was Japan's capital from 794 to 1185. I can already smell temple incense and hear deeply intoned sutra chanting. NOT! That was an ancient memory from 42 years ago when as soon as one left Kyoto station there was Higashi Honganji. Big Buddhist temple of gracefully sprawling roofs. Kyoto station is much different now. Temple is still there. Now there's much else that busies the scene.

歩けば nothing to buy

座れば nothing to buy

The above was inspired by Yanagi Sōetsu, art critic and founder of the Folk Craft Movement in Japan. Things made by hand. Not "make a living by writing" but making a writing by living. See what the industrial revolution has done.

Most of us don't want to think of ourselves as revolutionaries. Many just don't want to think, which is fine if only they would buy the nothing they think. Unfortunately thought is manufactured just as is all the crap for sale. If it were an independent, self-worked-out way away from mass-produced thought it would fit right in with folk craft.

But we are all revolutionaries engaged in an ongoing Industrial Revolution. Because we're born into it seems to us natural but revolution it is. Revved up destruction.

Kyoto still burns mystery from a big deep-hearted incense coil. Something dreamy or mystical arises from deep under ground. Under foot and all around.

Today doing my ぶらぶら (aimless wandering) took me to Teramachi (🎵🎵 Won't you take me to. Temple Town🎵🎵) looking for washi (和紙 Japanese paper) notebooks but wow the price is way out and way too expensive for my meager Kyoto-for-a-dollar-a-day budget. ¥5,000 (\$35) plus for a notebook!

But I came across a temple where warlord Oda Nobunaga (16th C., Period of Warring States) was killed. Which connects with my friend Matsubara-san and a Kenkun Shrine—here in Kyoto too—she grew up in, at which Oda Nobunaga's spirit is enshrined.


Cool! I mean autumn weather at last! Hail Buddha!

N: Oda Nobunaga is loosely connected with a character in James Clavell's novel SHOGUN.



Day 8

Oct. 3

Not hot.

 Breakfast again in my hotel room; again convenience store fare. I'll have to check out a different convenience store to see if they stock anything different. A convenience store breakfast already breaks my Kyoto-on-a-dollar-a-day budget. I'll have to sit zazen at a Kyoto temple all day just to save money doing nothing.

That's the ticket to Kyoto on a dollar a day! 南無阿弥陀仏!

 One convenience store has mixed nuts but they use oil. Another convenience store has mixed nuts dry roasted (using no oil). お勉強になりましたー！ My mama used to tell me "You learn something new every day." As they say, "Live and learn." Why am I feeling so giddy?  Have I gone goofy with travel? It must be Kyoto! The spirit of some way long gone zany Zen priest!



Never homesick

finding wherever

everywhere is

step by step

Santōka

Speaking of Zen priests: Zen Priest Eisai, founder of the Rinzai Zen sect in Japan, and the man who introduced from China a ritual of drinking powdered green tea in that frothed-up way that became a Tea Ceremony Oda Nobunaga was doing when killed at that temple I visited yesterday (HonNō-ji), was born in Okayama where I was the other day. He started the first "Zen" temple in Kyoto (it's complicated, of course), which I plan to visit today. That would be Kennin-ji, the head temple of the (Kennin branch of) Rinzai sect and the oldest Zen temple in Kyoto. In fact Okayama-born Eisai is buried here at Kennin Temple. HOWEVER—and this is why we can't always rely on Wikipedia—or anything it turns out—we were told by temple staff that he is NOT buried at Kennin-ji. Here are Wikipedia's words:

"The monk Eisai, credited with introducing Zen to Japan, served as Kennin-ji's founding abbot and is buried on the temple grounds."

The following is from another Wikipedia article:

"Eisai died in 1215 at the age of 74, and is buried in Kennin-ji's temple grounds."

In fact quite a few Wikipedia articles have Eisai buried at Kennin-ji, but when actually there, asking where is his grave, I was told it's not there.

SO! Big mystery about that! Not that it really matters much, but it might be of use to have some sort of reliable information available.

In fact we found a memorial stone for Eisai but it wasn't a gravestone, and if it had been certainly the staff we asked would have directed us to it, but they did not. So where, then, is he buried? 🎵 Twilight Zone music 🎵

Another online article says his grave is in fact at Kennin-ji but is not open to the public. Visitors are not allowed to see it.

Another article says Eisai is enshrined (his spirit this means—not necessarily his ashes) at Kennin-ji at the Kaisan-do (開山堂), the Founders' Hall, but, again, this is not open to visitors. So: why couldn't the staff I asked at Kennin-ji have told me that? Answer: they just work there! Jesus Buddha Christ!

After that somewhat frustrating experience, I found a place to have matcha tea. 😊 Thank you, Priest Eisai—wherever you're remains are—for introducing this green delight to Japan (from China). In fact he wrote a book, 喫茶養生記, Kissa Yōjōki, Drinking Tea for Health (is the English title I came across). I feel healthy.





Eisai's ashes

powdered green tea


frothy



No coin laundry at this hotel. Using the hotel laundry service cost 25 bucks. Coin laundry the other day cost 4 dollars. Gee.

Day 9

Oct. 4

 At day's start it was sunny and warm. While walking towards Tōji Temple sky became overcast. There were puddles and wet benches there, while on this side of the station there was no evidence of rain.



If talking

were walking

would we know

what we're walking about

Tōji Temple's 5-story pagoda I'd seen from the bullet train on way to Okayama. It looked smaller than my memory because of the new tall buildings surrounding Kyoto Station. So I decided to pay a visit close up.

"東寺, Tō-ji, "East Temple"), also known as Kyō-ō-gokoku-ji (教王護国寺, The Temple for the Defense of the Nation by Means of the King of Doctrines) is a Shingon Buddhist temple." [Wikipedia]

"It once had a partner, Sai-ji (West Temple) and, together, they stood alongside the Rashomon, the gate to the Heian capital." [ibid]

Its partner, West Temple, is no longer around. Only a small park remains. A graceful pagoda was built to house sacred relics of the historical Buddha, brought by Priest Kūkai (空海, Priest Sea of Emptiness, 774 – 835) from China. I haven't as yet been able to find exactly what those Buddha relics are, but whatever they are they are said to be in the pagoda's central column. Could it be a tooth? Bones fragments or ashes?

Rain earlier might connect with Tōji's main person, Priest Kūkai (also posthumously called Kōbō Daishi). He was an important figure in Japanese Buddhism. A mover and shaker. Long ago there was a drought, and East Priest and West Priest competed praying for rain. East Priest Kūkai succeeded (don't ask me how the winner was decided). West Priest became envious, shot an arrow at East Priest. Jizo Bodhisattva (Ksitigarbha) appeared to intercept the arrow. West Temple eventually faded away.

Wars have been fought over The Buddha's ashes (he was cremated). Buddhist priests shooting arrows at each other. Not all that exemplary but this is us, the human.

Rain to wet an ink brush. Kūkai was famous for calligraphy. Supposedly he could hold brushes in both hands and both feet and do different calligraphy with each. Quite a feat!

I wrote this
with one finger
pointing at a moon.



Day 10

Oct. 5

Farewell Kyoto. 

I love ya but too many tourists. "Overtourism" is the word being used to describe the scene. Sounds about right.

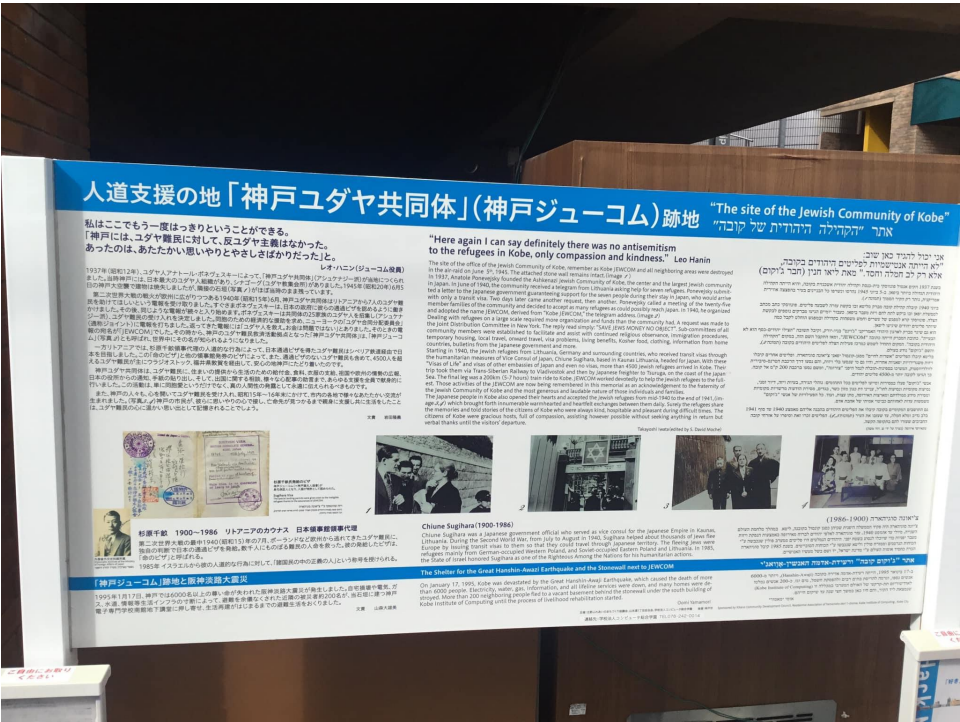
Kobe I first visited briefly in March of 1981 when there was a spring break from teaching. "Portopia 81" ("Creation of a New Cultural City on the Sea") was a thing happening then and that was our purpose for visiting. Me and a guy teaching in Osaka. Kind enough to let me crash at his place during my first solo trip in Japan. To Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, and the Portopia gig in Kobe.

Portopia was sort of a World's Fair/Expo type thing celebrating land reclaimed from the sea. (Actually an island built from crushed mountain.) It's now called Port Island and is covered with concrete buildings which, I guess, are the "New Cultural City."

This visit I wanted to check out the Jewish community, or where the Jewish community once was. This was a Schindler sort of story about Lithuanian Jews (as well as Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Poland) who would have been rounded up and sent off to Nazi work/death camps had it not been for a compassionate Japanese vice consul to Lithuania named Sugihara Chiune.

There is a movie about all this so I won't go into it all here. Long story short, Sugihara gave thousands of Jews a visa to enter Japan. Those Jews travelled through the Soviet Union—some opting to stay and become Soviet citizens—by the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, where they boarded ships to Japan.

Some settled here in Kobe. Some left Japan for elsewhere. Today I visited a wall and a signboard, which is all that is left of those thousands of Jews. If some math is applied I read that it comes to some hundred thousand people today who are alive because of those thousands to whom Sugihara issued visas.



I'd long known of a Chinatown in Kobe but wasn't aware until recently of a significant settlement of Indian people in Kobe's Kitano area. It's a comparatively permanent scene. In Sendai there are of course people from Indian and Nepal but they don't seem to live in a particular area that might be called a community and most don't seem to be permanent. In Kobe they are there with families. Their children attend international schools. There are Hindu temples, Indian markets, etc.

And of course there is Chinatown, where I had dinner tonight. Lunch was at an Indian restaurant in the Kitano area.

Tomorrow? ぶらぶら Chinatown?

Day 11

Oct. 6

Stinkbug

at my hotel window

whatcha gonna do today?

Walking around all day every day at 70 can take its toll. This morning take it easy in Meriken Park. Supposedly its name comes from Americans being called "Meriken" back in the Meiji period (1868~1912). Meriken Park is at water's edge.



PORT CITY

All the goods coming in

where do all the bads go?

Weather is pleasant enough, but when there are clouds overhead it gets cool so put on my jacket; when clouds pass it gets warm so take off my jacket. Put it on, take it off. Put it on, take it off.

秋そらや

ジャケットを着たり脱いだりする

煙り💨

Across the water I see Port Island, a man made island, which was quite a feat as I remember: a mountain ground up and sent down a slide and on to the sea (putting it simply). Beyond that dimly seen is Awaji Island. A Japan Coast Guard ship is docked across the inlet. Unlike America, I heard that Japan's Coast Guard has no military function. They have no weapons. Sort of like a fire company I guess.

Cranes for shipping freight off to horizon

捨てきれない荷物の重さまえうしろ



From the park it's a ten-minute walk to Kobe's Chinatown, called Nanjing Town here. Is that because Chinese here mostly from Nanjing? It's a street a few hundred meters long with some narrow side streets shooting off here and there. Most of the shops are eating establishments. Others are selling various Chinese goods. Some specialize in Chinese tea.

One place had Vietnamese tea such as I drank on my trip there back in 99. Other little treats. Five-ingredient moon cake. Yum!

Lunch of Japanese buckwheat noodles on Motomachi Street of Shops, which stretches much longer than Chinatown's street. Then back to my hotel for a nap.

Tomorrow on to what may be my last stop before heading home: Tokyo.

Day 12

Oct. 7

Slept well. Rose early, took a morning bath. Overcast at the moment. 7:30 a.m. Cooler. Seems as though autumn has at last settled in. It was a long beastly summer heat and humidity.



A free shuttle bus that makes a stop at Shin Kobe Station stops at my hotel. From Shin Kobe by bullet train to Tokyo.

Farewell, Kobe. 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷 I hope to see you again. Let's not wait 42 years this time.

One can rest during or after a trip but how does one take a rest from life? Hint hint:

One last look before checking out. Did I forget anything? "You'd forget your head if it wasn't screwed on!"

A high school classmate asks me if Japan is safe for Americans. He and his wife are thinking of travelling abroad. 43 years no problem so far. As far as public safety. Of course there are earthquakes, typhoons, etc.



Changing times, changing economic situations. When I first came here—1980—Japan was the moon's far side for many I knew in America. Some couldn't imagine even addressing an envelope to Japan. Did they think they'd have to write kanji? Plus Japan was being broadcast as so expensive and so on. "Highest cost in the world!" Back then many Americans—East coast at least—had not yet heard of sushi. Many would never think of eating raw fish. "RAW FISH!? GROSS!!!" Then came the sushi boom. Now there are a sushi places all over America. Sushi yummy yummy.

Around 1980 there was a change in why people came to Japan. Back then in Sendai if one saw a caucasian foreigner that person was either an English teacher or a Christian missionary.

Most elder missionaries I met could speak Japanese. One boasted that he was one of maybe a thousand non-Japanese in the entire world fluent in Japanese. He and his wife had come after WWII, answering General MacArthur's call: "Send missionaries!" They came as already married couples and raised children in Japan.

Others from Western countries were here to study Zen but mostly not in Sendai. For months or years. Around then things changed. Japan was rich. A best seller had a title JAPAN AS NUMBER ONE. All sorts of books on Japan. The book of five rings for corporate success. Japan Japan Japan! 🎵🎵Honey got a booty like pow pow pow! 🎵🎵 Japan got money. Japan got game. Suddenly Japan was the coolest place on earth. Worship success, worship money 🚗 More than ever a bloodsucker world. If one of Trump's shit-hole countries were to suddenly become rich, shit-hole would be all the rage. Shit-hole hats and shit-hole restaurants and shit-airlines like....✈️ (You-Name-It).

Back in the states I'd be grilled by people I knew, people in business, about things (= biz) in Japan. They were disappointed. I never paid attention unless it was about exchange rates.

Japan—outside make-a-buck-trophy-bootybooty-world—was and is about people trying to get by. Day by day. Just like anywhere else. But who cares about that?

"I'm in Japan because my God sent me here" was the reply of a (Protestant) Christian missionary in Sendai when asked by a Japanese. One needed a lofty purpose because there was an age old tendency of some native Japanese to see foreigners—the ones in Japan—as scum of the earth, which some no doubt were/are.

What could be more above criticism than being on a mission from God? "We're putting THE BAND back together! We're on a mission from God!" (The Blues Brothers.)

2001: my first trip on foot through parts of the north. I wore a samue (sa-mu-ey) a garment the name of which is written with kanji for work and robe/garment. (I wear samue a lot because they are comfortable and I like them.) And a sedge umbrella hat. A village woman mistook me for a Buddhist monk on a begging trip. "Gokurōsama desu, Oshō-san" (Thank you for your effort, Priest.)

It's okay lady; I'm just walking here. In fact Buddhist temple inhabitants do wear such garments around the temple, but they are not formal wear.

Reverence for matters connected with god or purity of spirit.
Reverence for things connected with money.
Do the Socratic syllogism: God = Money.

What is reverence FOR, anyway? Can't people naturally be as we are, which in my experience is essentially kind? What's the matter with being just as we are, without a value placed on it to make it worth something?

Breathe in, breathe out. It's just right just as it is.

Mausoleum is museum.
Museum is mausoleum.
Beyond both is a muse dear to my dharma.

MYthos:

Dharma met muse. Gave birth to the way things are. The way things are in nature (universe included), but for the speck of dust that is civilized humanity, is without money.

Mountains, clouds, stars, rivers, moons, black holes, dark matter, big bangs or no big bangs, asteroids, meteors, rain, snow, sleet, hail, grasses, ants, pine trees, and squirrels—none have any need of money. But money is the center of the civilized human mind. It's what everything is reduced to.

How's that for a sermon, Mr. and Mrs. Missionary? "PREACH!"
(It's not even Sunday.)

A missionary mash!

♪♪ Do the mashed potato ♪♪

Time to unwind. A wind
has come up.

Go where wind blows.

Muse of the winds.

Mythological Odysseus.

Pathological Santōka.

Analogical me.

Arrive Tokyo just after noon. Lovely autumn weather! Leave my suitcase at the hotel (one I've stayed with many times on way to or return from abroad. Friendly, family run atmosphere. Until check in time (3) find a place for lunch (soba) and a coffee shop to write this.

For an evening meal I went to an izakaya sort of restaurant in the same building as my hotel. An izakaya is something like a tavern. It's name is 庄や in case anyone gets a chance to check one out somewhere. When I'm staying here with Madam Morie we often eat there. Very convenient and many kinds of delicious dishes. If you like Japanese food. Not expensive.

Tonight I was alone so sat in a counter seat. Not long after I sat down an elderly Japanese fellow sat on the stool next to me. He ordered a beer, some foods, and after while ordered a chūhai, which is a cocktail made of brandied Japanese sakè and tonic water with one of a variety of flavors. Lemon for example.

Almost finished what I ordered, my after dinner roasted green tea brought, I'd just been feeling how good it is to be back here in Ueno where I haven't been since the pandemic. And how good it feels to be in a familiar place. A place with character. Just then the man next to me offered me his small bowl of sautéed spinach. I politely declined. He offered more sincerely. I asked him if he didn't want it. Finally I with my chopsticks removed a portion of spinach from his bowl and placed it in one of my empty plates.

We'd never seen each other before. He didn't know me from Adam nor I him. What prompted him to offer me his spinach? The fact that I'm a foreigner? Just a human wanting to be human after a beer and a cocktail on a Saturday night? Maybe he wanted to talk—but he could see I was finishing. Or he's a Bodhisattva reaching out by any means necessary. The thing about Japan is that all of the above are possibilities and the latter is the most probable. Everyone's a Bodhisattva reaching out. He is a Tokyo local Ueno Bodhisattva showing kindness in the big rush rush concrete city. People reaching out to each other. All we have to do is open ourselves to that dimension.

孤掌難鳴

What Is the Sound of One Hand Clapping?

Back in my youth reading a Salinger story—was it *Catcher in the Rye*?—there was the Zen koan above. I thought everyone in Japan must be enlightened. So I came to Japan. Then I thought everyone in Japan isn't enlightened. Now 43 years later I think everyone is. What does that mean?

A circle ink-brushed with a single stroke

in Zen calligraphy (円相).



Day 13

Oct. 8

This morning I ate at my hotel's breakfast-only restaurant. From experience I know it's a full and healthy traditional style Japanese breakfast, and inexpensive. About the same as what I'd spend on food from a convenience store. It's a set menu—not buffet style like so many larger hotels and inns these days. Prepared by hand on site—not from a box shipped from who knows where. Guests are fed in person by people who prepare food in person right then and there.

Cloudy. Cool. Looks like there may be rain.

My room. It's so small but I like it very much. Though I wouldn't want to stay in it long. Not including the bathroom/toilet, my guess is this room is 4 mats. Traditional rooms are measured by number of tatami mats. There's not much room to move around. What amazes me is what all they fit into this room and still have room to maneuver, by which I mean get to the bathroom. From bed to bathroom: two steps.

In my single room is a desk and chair, which I'm at now writing this, a small refrigerator, on top of which is an appliance for boiling water, a tissue box, and the usual coffee & tea provisions. One end of this desk serves as a shoe shelf with a hair dryer on its bottom shelf. There's a night stand in which are a clock and room light controls. A telephone is on the night stand. A television is on this desk over the shoe shelf, and a trash can is on the floor under this desk. A full length mirror. Hooks and hangers for clothing on a wall. And a single bed. Wow!

This hotel's history goes way back. Not sure how long. I'm told it used to be a traditional style inn.

Today I wanted to check out the Japan Folk Craft Museum. It's in the Meguro area of Tokyo about a ten-minute walk from Komaba Todai-mae Station of the Keio Inokashira Line.



I'd forgotten, in the early days of this journey passing by Tokyo in a bullet train, that there is much more to Tokyo than just tall grey or drab colored buildings. Walking around Tokyo with various others over the years I recall rather pleasant neighborhoods both old and new, quiet green parks, and so on. The area around the Folk Craft Museum is a quiet residential neighborhood.

The museum itself contains things I can't say I haven't seen before, but across the street from the museum is the home Yanagi Sōetsu (founder of the Folk Craft Movement in Japan), which he designed himself. It was brought here from its original location in Tochigi Prefecture.

Somehow I'm drawn to Yanagi, which is really why I'm here—not to see tea cups, etc. He saw how mass production that came with industrialization was making irrelevant what people had been making themselves, for themselves, for . . . well, since forever, really. I see the present digital revolution as another wave of the industrial revolution. We learned how people were moved away from traditional ways of life, which were mostly connected with agriculture, into cities to work in dark unhealthy factories where they performed the same monotonous assembly line tasks over and over.

There's no telling what havoc the present digital revolution will wreak, along with, yes, all its "conveniences" (such the 15 minutes it took a friend using a smartphone to pay for parking last summer in Dallas).

I felt like saying to Yanagi-san "Hey. I know what you're talking about." What was so bad about tea cups made locally by hand for everyday use? Why did they need to be replaced by sweatshop products sold at a Walmart or other outlets for factory-made goods?

What was so bad? Wasn't it just that such a way of life got in the way of industrialist dreams? "WE'RE GONNA PAVE THIS WHOLE DAMN PLANET WITH ASPHALT SO WE CAN MAKE MORE CARS!"

"WE'RE GONNA MAKE EVERY DAMN BLESSED TOOTHBRUSH DIGITAL SO WE CAN...SO WE CAN.... BECAUSE WE CAN!"

I dig where you're coming from dear Mr. Yanagi. Rest in peace.

Another kind of Last Samurai!

Next to the Folk Craft Museum are two buildings that belonged to Marquis Toshinari Maeda, son of a feudal lord in what is now Gunma Prefecture, and were used to welcome foreign dignitaries. One is used as a teahouse even now. I was surprised to

read that Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Pacific Douglas MacArthur made his residence here for a while in these Maeda buildings. One building is Japanese style, the other Western.

In the vicinity is a Museum of Modern Japanese Literature. I wandered over to see what that was all about. It was all about being closed. Today is Sunday.

So I sauntered back towards the station and found a coffee shop named Colorado. 🎵Colorado Rocky Mountain high....🎵 There I had a clubhouse sandwich and ice coffee. Colorado coffee shop. I was in one in Kyoto. There are none in Sendai. I guess Sendai is too far northeast for Colorado. Hmmmm.

Took a rest in the afternoon.

Tonight's dinner was at the same restaurant as last night. Only tonight a former seminar student who is working now in Tokyo joined me. We enjoyed catching up. A pleasure to see Ayaka-san!

Day 14

Oct. 9

Rain 🌧

Sports Day in Japan. National Holiday.

Bodhi's birthday (but it's not yet the 9th in America). She's 3.

Heading home.

I notice that staff at various railways answer in English whatever I might ask even if I ask in Japanese. Good of them want to do that.

There is much good to be said. "The joy of being alive" as one friend put it. That friend is right. It takes many forms, that joy. It takes all forms. The air we breathe. The sound of a bicycle tire on a quiet Sunday morning street in Meguro, Tokyo. I could go on in a Whitmanian revelry, but I haven't had breakfast yet.

Santōka, even though possibly suffering from bipolar disorder that made him at times suicidal, took pains to praise the kindness of others. His many free-style haiku poems are in essence a response to the joy of being alive.

It's likely that all poetry is a response to joy = being alive. At depth I mean. Even though at surface it might seem depressing or gloomy. Sunny days cloudy days. That which moves it, existence itself, the presence of moon, flowers, mountains, galaxies and seas and everything else is the joy of being alive. A universe is what joy is.

Moon rock flowers stars,

A universe enjoys

imagining

itself.

I don't feel like wheeling my suitcase through pouring rain to JR Ueno Station. I'll have it sent by delivery service.

Now to pack. Slightly heavier than when I left. What's deeply felt isn't in a suitcase. Look around. Did I forget anything. Here I am.

Met some friends. Made some new friends. I hope to see them all again. I'll welcome you in Sendai! ❤️ Thanks to so many, my journey was fecund.

 Now headed home. Farewell, Tokyo. ❤️❤️

Scott Watson

万流庵

All-Flowing Cottage

