



SHINKI NEWS

Journey to Japan 2025





SHINKI NEWS



Onegai shimasu

Editorial

Text: Nigel Downes

Japan 2025 – More Than Just a Journey

Some journeys are measured in kilometers, others in moments. Our Japan 2025 trip was both – thousands of kilometers traveled and countless moments shared.

For 19 unforgettable days, from Wednesday, May 21, to Sunday, June 8, we walked, ate, drank, laughed, and trained our way through Tokyo, Kamakura, Nikko, Kashima, Kanazawa, Nagoya, Kyoto, Nara, Uji, Koya-san, Muroran – and many other places along the way.

None of this would have been possible without Kristina's tireless and forward-thinking planning – domo arigatou gozaimashita! A special thanks also goes to our Sensei, who inspired, challenged, and guided us both on and off the mat – hontōni arigatou gozaimashita!

This special edition of Shinki News is our chance to relive those moments, to share them with others, and perhaps already ignite enthusiasm for the next Japan trip.

Be sure to also check out Arian's and Henry's blogs for even more memories from along the way:

Arian: <https://tr.arianw.de/> (user: gast password: travel)

Henry: <https://kyerim.de/category/blogbuch/reise/japan-2025/>

Across Countries, Clouds, and Times from Frankfurt to Tokyo

Wednesday, May 21 – Thursday, May 22

Claudia Buder and Franziska Dierschke

After long and intensive preparation, the time has finally arrived: Anticipation and high expectations fill the air as everyone makes their way to Frankfurt Airport from various directions. Familiar faces greet each other with a cheerful “Good Morning” on every corner.

As a talisman for the journey, Claudia hands each of us a card with an image of the Miroku Bosatsu (Chūgū-ji, Nara) – a graceful Buddha sculpture. “Opening destiny – bringing in good luck” is the promising Japanese inscription on the card.

Due to a storm over Hungary, we have to wait in the plane for about another hour before taking to the skies at 3:10 p.m. At 1,000 km/h and at an altitude of 10,000 m, we fly in an L-shaped pattern south of Russia, over Kazakhstan and Mongolia, and into the next day. For some, these hours of flight pass with more sleep, for others with less – the 7-hour time difference will also have a further impact on alertness in the days to come.

The landscape transforms beneath us from farmland to steppe landscape – isolated towns gleam out of the apparent void of darkness – and in the morning, we are greeted by a stretch of coastline, then a hilly forest landscape, followed by the sea of buildings above Tokyo, where we land shortly after 10:00 a.m., having largely made up for our delay.

After the security check, we head straight to the Hotel Groove Shinjuku, where we meet up right on time with Helen, who is already in Tokyo, as well as Beth and Scott from Michigan. The suitcases are quickly stored in the lobby (check-in only starts at 2 p.m.), and then it’s time to head out into the city.

Helen takes over as our tour guide and expertly guides us to Shinjuku Station, where most people buy their Suica cards for public transportation. Our first stop is Shibuya Station.



Barely stepping out of the station, we find ourselves in front of the bronze Hachikō statue: a memorial to the loyalty of the famous Akita dog, who waited here every day for nine years for his deceased owner.



Immediately afterward, we cross the prominent Shibuya intersection – as soon as the traffic lights turn green, countless different people stream toward each other at the same time, crossing each other without touching. We dive in, let ourselves be swept along, and find ourselves on the other side.

We continue on foot to Yoyogi Park, an oasis of peace in the middle of the big city. We enjoy a short rest under leafy trees to soothe our feet

and our first matcha ice cream before continuing on to the nearby Meiji Jingu Shrine. This Shinto shrine, built in 1920, is dedicated to Emperor Meiji and his wife, who led Japan into a more modern era. After all these impressions, it all seems a bit surreal—but also quite beautiful.



Even before the evening of this first day, we learned that wine and sake are important commodities for cultural exchange and peace, as well as embodying economic prosperity in a blend of tradition and modernity. We learned how to move smoothly through crowds, that it's best to carry your backpack in front of you, and how to retrieve lost items from dangerous train station tracks.

Then we head back to the hotel, catch our breath, and check into our cozy yet stylish rooms with breathtaking views from the 30th floor or so. After what feels like 10 minutes, we meet up again and take the bus to the restaurant. The seven-course meal at the traditional-style Kitaohji Kaiseki is uniquely delicious and a taste of what awaits us in the coming weeks, both culinary and hospitable.

With a heartfelt smile and two tired eyes, we end the first day – the journey has begun.



Aikikai Hombu Dojo / Trip to Kamakura

Friday, May 23

Kristina Tomasevic and Danijel Tomasevic

The panoramic view of Tokyo from the, in our case, 26th floor of this truly fantastic Groove Shinjuku Hotel is incomparable, indescribable. And this panorama of Shinjuku even makes up for the fact that we had to get up very early today after a short night. Today we all went to the first training session at the Aikikai Hombu Dojo, to the class of Doshu Ueshiba Moriteru, whose classes take place from 6:30 to 7:30. As I said, it was very early, but this interplay of short nights and early mornings will remain a constant companion on this trip.

From our hotel, we had two options for getting to the Hombu Dojo: either walking the entire way to the Hombu Dojo, or taking the subway first and then taking a shorter walk there. We took the second option, which turned out to be the more difficult and longer option, causing unnecessary nervousness. In the future, we all stuck to the first option.

The Aikikai Hombu Dojo is located on a rather inconspicuous street, and we all gathered in front of the main entrance to wait for the registration process. Luckily, Duncan had already checked in for us in advance.

It was time to get started. As expected, Doshu's class was very, very full, probably due to the fact that the All Japan Aikido Embukai was taking place the next day, and so

many aikidoka were taking advantage of the opportunity to train with Doshu. After there was almost no room to change, there was correspondingly little room on the mat to train. After a roughly five-minute warm-up, Doshu demonstrated clear basic Aikikai techniques, which we tried to practice properly in this confined space. As is customary at the Hombu Dojo, we always trained with the same partner. Once we were out of the confines of the locker room, we all met up again in front of the entrance and walked back to the hotel. At this point, I decided to do what Henry had done and change at the hotel and walk to the Hombu Dojo in my dogi. In retrospect, that was much more relaxing.

Not only was the view from the hotel room fantastic, but the upcoming breakfast was also excellent. The selection of Japanese and continental breakfasts was so overwhelming that it was almost impossible to eat everything you were looking forward to when you saw it. Great!

After breakfast, we all gathered again and set off for our excursion to Kamakura, located about 50 km southwest of Tokyo. During the Kamakura period, which was named after her, it was the seat of government and the de facto capital of Japan from 1185 to 1333.



After a nearly hour-long drive, passing the statue of Ofuna Kannon, which can be seen from the train near Ofuna Station, we arrived in Kamakura. Here we met Sensei and Susanne for the first time!

From here, we took the Enoshima Dentetsu Line train, which was more like a light rail (very, very crowded, as it was primarily used by tourists), to Hase Station.

Our first destination was the Hase-dera Buddhist temple complex. We had plenty of time to explore the temple complex on our own. The complex consists of two levels. On the way to the upper level, the hundreds of small Jizo statues remain in your memory (Jizo is the protective deity of children, although today it is believed that Jizo watches over the souls of deceased children) and the numerous Buddhist statues. On the second level is the famous Kannon statue of the Hesa-dera, called the Hase-Kannon. At 9.18 m high, it is the largest wooden Kannon statue in Japan. It was later decorated with gold overlays. According to legend, the wood for the Hase-Kannon was washed ashore on Kamakura (by divine decree). The statue stands in the main building of the complex, in the Kannon-do. Next to it is a hall containing an Amida statue. Those who wished could enjoy a panoramic view of Kamakura Bay from the complex.



After we all regrouped, we set off on foot to what I considered one of the highlights of our entire trip to Japan: the Buddhist temple complex Kotoku-in, with its stunning statue of the Great Buddha, the Daibutsu. Incredibly large, incredibly beautiful, and possessing an incredible aura, the Daibutsu sits in a meditative pose on an outdoor pedestal. The position of its hands (called Amida Jo-in in Japanese) is also particularly remarkable. The Great Buddha is one of the most important depictions of the Amida Buddha, the Buddha of the "Pure Land," and viewed from all angles, it radiates great peace and spirituality. Originally, the statue was located inside a temple building and covered in gold leaf, but after several earthquakes and a tsunami, the Great Buddha has stood outdoors for centuries. The Daibutsu weighs 121 tons and is 13.33 meters high. You can also admire the Great Buddha from the inside, and we saw that the statue was assembled from several parts. The large shoes of the Daibutsu can also be admired in one of the corridors.

This statue radiates such great peace and reverence that it's understandable why many people find their faith in the all-goodness of the Amida Buddha here.





We took the bus back to our starting point, Kamakura's train station square. Now it was time to find a suitable spot to join Sensei in our final preparations for the All Japan Aikido Embukai the next day. Sensei led us on a lovely walk to another, smaller temple located a little way up a hill: Myohon-ji. Myohon-ji is one of the oldest Nichiren Buddhist temples in Kamakura. A statue of Nichiren is located on the grounds. Directly in front of the temple hall, we discussed and practiced the routines for the next day. Who with whom, who demonstrates what, in what order, and always within a time limit of 90 seconds. This required several runs. This samurai-worthy atmosphere and backdrop was enhanced by the fact that a photoshoot of a couple in traditional (wedding) attire was taking place at the same time.



After these preparations for the next day's performance, we returned to Kamakura Station, and most of us used the remaining time to conclude our trip to Kamakura by entering through the large red gate and strolling down Komachi dori, a bustling shopping street in the heart of Kamakura that serves as a pedestrian zone during the day. Many of us initially had only one goal in mind: matcha ice cream! And we succeeded. The craving for matcha ice cream will remain a constant throughout this trip to Japan. There were many beautiful shops to admire, but the long day was slowly starting to take its toll. Little by little, we all gathered back at the station.



After saying goodbye to Sensei and Susanne, we returned to the hotel in Shinjuku (Tokyo). Now we had an evening at our leisure. In our case, we strolled a bit through the sea of lights of Shinjuku, ate some ramen in a small group, and then, stocked up on the essentials from the 24/7 store, enjoyed the panoramic view again, this time at night, from our hotel room.

國際合氣道連盟 (IAF)

Aikido Shinki Rengo

【7】海外道場演武演武

國際合氣道連盟 (IAF)

國際合氣道連盟 (IAF)

台灣合氣道推廣訓練協進會

All-Japan Aikido Demonstration – Tokyo

Saturday, May 24

Sophia Wohlleber and Helen Rosenberger

On Saturday, we woke up early in a gray Tokyo. Our bodies were slowly getting used to the new time zone and the early training at the Honbu Dojo. Today, Sensei also attended the morning training session, because after breakfast together, we headed to the Nippon Budokan to represent Germany as Aikido Shinki Rengo.



Taking the subway to the Imperial Palace, a registration committee awaited us in front of a huge building complex. The hallways were filled with budo markets, food stalls, and an excited crush of performing groups. We had left early to get seats in the lower tiers, but they were all already taken. After the obligatory group photo, it was time to change, secure our seats, and get our bearings. Once those points were checked off, we could only wait anxiously for our time slot for the demonstration and watch the other aikido schools perform. Groups from companies and, for example, the fire department also came. The final appearance of Ueshiba Morihei's grandson and great-grandson caused a reverential hush throughout the stadium.

A brief survey of the performers in our group after the presentation revealed that these very intense 90 seconds were generally perceived as exhausting, but that no one could really remember what had happened at that moment.

However, those who remained in the stands collected enough video footage to support later analysis.

(A video can be seen on [Arian's Blog](#))

After a brief acclimatization and a change of clothes, we watched the remaining presentations. We also watched the closing ceremony together and then, with Ki-filled hearts, made our way back to the hotel.

The evening was spent individually. Small groups joined together to go to restaurants or bars and explore Tokyo a bit.



Paths through Edo and Nikko

Sunday, May 25

Simone Schulz

The bus ride from Tokyo was an experience in itself: No longer winding around Shinjuku's grid, driving from traffic light to traffic light, stopping to yield to the crowds of pedestrians on extra-wide zebra crossings, but in no time at all, our bus climbed onto one of the multi-lane highways on stilts running through the city. At a steady pace, we passed apartment blocks and industrial complexes, with residential areas abruptly jutting into ugly commercial areas, and even an apartment towering up to the same roof as a car repair shop. As we watched the ups and downs of the lanes, each on its own stilts, twisting four or five times over the inlet to Tokyo Bay like giant headless snakes, the welcoming green of the shoreline came into view.

We can only roughly measure the sheer size of the megalopolis by the time it took the bus to finally reach the first rice field, reflecting the gray sky, after the residential areas of single-family homes. Driving past them into the green-sky-hued countryside and then into the mountains took another hour. The first Japanese rest stop, greeted at least by first-time travelers with great curiosity and—wait, the journey is still long and there will be many more discoveries. Nevertheless, the toad with its young that greeted me at the entrance coaxed a few coins from me to place on its back...

Edo Wonderland

With a determined expression, the warrior tightens the knot of his headband. What I initially thought was a soldier, or even a samurai, in the enlarged reproduction of a woodcut from the Edo period was actually a firefighter from ancient Edo. In the well-crafted exhibition at the beginning of the park, guarded by one of the fire watch towers, I learned about the unconditional loyalty and willingness to sacrifice of the firefighters: Bushido.

I looked at the reproductions of the woodcuts depicting the fight against fires: how close they climbed to the rafters above the source of the fire (usually the open hearth of the house, without a chimney) to extinguish it from above, while flames already licked around their boots. They were dressed in flame-resistant leather and similar fabrics. Neighboring houses were ruthlessly demolished to create an open space for the fire to feed on. They were given unconditional obedience. They became the benefactors of the neighborhood, helping the poor and weak and arresting thieves and criminals.

In the mid-19th century, they stood armed at the gates of the imperial city to protect it from troops of one of the conflicting parties in one of the numerous civil wars during the transition to the more cosmopolitan Meiji period. Others are certainly well-versed in Japanese history, which I only touch on in relation to the fire department of old Edo. With the subsequent modernization of the country, the associations were absorbed into state-controlled fire brigades.

The Meiko marches in her procession on 15 cm high getas (or is it the Oiran, the noble concubine who wears the obi knot at the front?).

One of the attendants and protectors announces her arrival in song, followed by her students and assistants. Their stride is a dancing art form in itself. The foot in motion describes a pleasing arc before being placed directly in front of the supporting leg, which is pushed back slightly. After years of education and constant study of many arts, from music and dance to conversation, tea ceremony and flower arranging, this being has become a living work of art.





Children's training in the hall today. School classes roam the alleys enthusiastically, brandishing small bokken and plastic swords. The businessmen of "old Edo" were as skilled then as they are now.

In the Museum of Crafts, after rows of glasses, wickerwork made of rice straw, and ink drawings, I was captivated by the blade of a katana, solitary in its dark, shimmering iron gleam. The iron, born of the earth, is annealed, woven into strands, outer shell and inner core, until the "soul" of the weapon, which in itself does not represent division and war, but, crafted with rigorous consciousness, stands for peace, for growth under its protection, is formed. Finally, it is sharpened as if for eternity. Will its soul ever cool?

For followers of Shinto, everything is animated. The 90-year-old senior boss of a company bids a ritual farewell to a veteran aircraft. He and his entourage, dressed in black business suits, pay their last respects. Seen on a Facebook post from a Japan tourism account.



Nikko

It is unlucky for anyone to take in the magnificent shrine in its entirety.

A wealth envelops the visitor, in colorful and gilded carved reliefs. Friezes in the cornice of the gate, on the walls of the palatial main building, the famous three monkeys at a shrine near the pagoda, which rivals the tall crowns of the ancient cedars. The supreme perfection in just one image in the endless series demands thorough exploration. Birds, modeled on life, which in themselves tell little stories. Not to forget a kowtow to the famous spotted cat, who at the end of the 17th century curled up for a perpetual nap, giving his highly prized attention neither to the crowd of visitors below a resting place nor to the sparrows above him. Of course, the Three Monkeys deserve our respect. Respect depends on one's priorities. The depictions of elephants, more like mythical creatures due to a lack of anatomical knowledge, find their European counterpart in an early Renaissance depiction of a rhinoceros.

The tomb of the greatest of all shoguns, Ieyasu Tokugawa, monumental in its simplicity, is reached after countless steps. Shrouded in mist lie the remains of the ruler who united Japan into a functioning state like no other before him, who has been worshipped as a god throughout all ages. Anything can attain sacredness, from a living being to the supposedly dead rock of a mountain. Or, as I already hinted, a tool, a katana, a car. But this monster in my mobile device?

Our tour guide, Kazuo, accompanied us charmingly. On the drive home, he played us a lullaby on his recorder—like a loving father.



My Thoughts on the Divinity of the Shogun

Christianity initially caused controversy by denying a Roman emperor the status of a god. Was this also a reason for persecution in Japan? Perhaps philosophy played a role. The decisive factor was the experience that in neighboring countries, missionaries were followed by hordes of Western conquerors.

At this point, I'll allow myself to elaborate on an idea, drawing on the content of the novel "The Escape" by the young author Fuminori Nakamura. A retrospective is interwoven into the superficial, action-packed plot, including the history of Japan from the perspective of Christians. My point is:

The term "charity" cannot be translated directly into Japanese. It was translated by the statement: Every person is valuable.

This contrasts with the divinity of the ruler, and that the individual is nothing.

Every person (in more recent theology, every living being) is valuable, intended by God.

This perspective also undermines the meaning of honorable suicide, and even more so of "dying for the Kaiser" in WWII. It undermines the supposed meaning of suicide, as "useless to the community" – culminating in a sad, and rightly mostly denied, tradition:

Abandoning old women, who are supposedly a burden to a survival-oriented group, in the wilderness to die. Google "Ubasute" and discover the story, which, thankfully, had a happy ending.

Leave No One Behind

One more thing:

If a man-made work of art like the Shogun's Shrine lays claim to being incomprehensible in its entirety and maintains this for centuries (except for the team of architects planning the restoration), how incomprehensible is life, how unpredictable is change? What does categorization and evaluation entail?

LEAVE SOUL BIRDS FREE



One day, two dojos, training with Doshu and Kashima

Monday, May 26

Michael Dieterle and Jens Roessler

On May 26, 2025, the day began early with a special highlight of our trip to Japan: training at the Hombu Dojo in Tokyo's Wakamatsu-cho. Before breakfast, we had to get up, walk the short distance to the dojo, change in the cramped locker room, and prepare for the intensive training. The number of participants was large, and the atmosphere was focused. After an individual warm-up, we greeted Doshu with "Sensei ni rei" before continuing the training together. I hadn't found a training partner at first, but a friendly Japanese man took me under his wing. Although I felt like a complete beginner, he patiently taught me the techniques. The confined space and the heat made the training physically demanding, but very educational. Afterward, we chatted a bit and shared experiences. At the end of the training, we were even able to take a photo with Doshu – a special souvenir.



After a quick change of clothes and a quick refreshment at the hotel, we continued straight on: At 10 a.m., our bus departed for Kashima, accompanied by our sensei. The destination was another training session – this time in Shinki Toho, our sword style. The journey there took about 1.5 hours. Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by the Shiina couple and initially led to a restaurant. Finding seats and distributing food was somewhat chaotic, as many had forgotten their pre-ordered meals. After the sumptuous meal, which was made even more filling by an even more sumptuous breakfast due to the intensive morning training, we briefly visited the nearby temple and the Japanese deer there before heading to the training hall.

There, we were particularly impressed by the vibrating wooden floor – every movement and every vigorous attack was felt. The training was intense, partners were changed regularly, and Mrs. Shiina also participated enthusiastically. Unfortunately, the training ended at 4 p.m. Before the return journey, many treated themselves to a matcha ice cream.

Back in Tokyo, small groups gathered again in the evening to round off the last day in the capital. Incidentally, I had completely missed an earthquake in the early morning hours.

Tokyo–Kanazawa: Shinkansen and Samurai Gardens

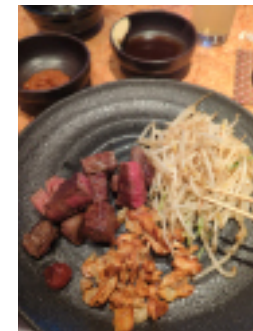
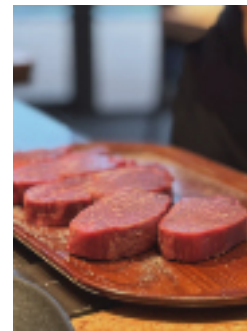
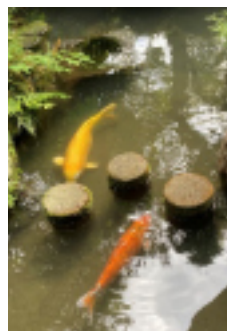
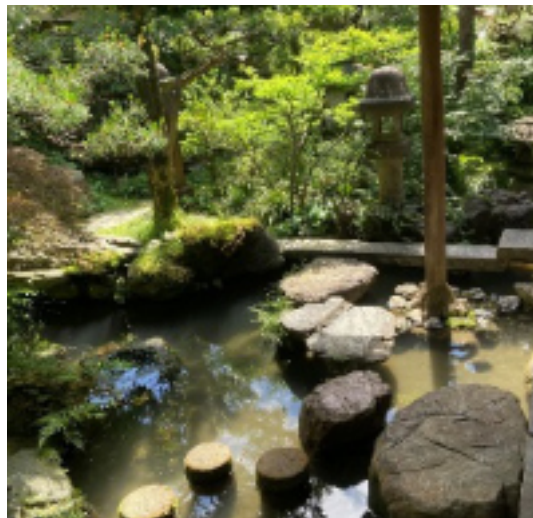
Tuesday, May 27

Martin Biegholdt and Volodymyr Demachkovych

This day we traveled from Tokyo to Kanazawa, located on the north coast of Japan's main island. The bus transfer from the Hotel Groove in Shinjuku to Tokyo Central Station offered the opportunity to take a look at the Imperial Palace. An impressive complex surrounded by a 5km-long moat and a park with 2,000 black pines.

The Shinkansen to Kanazawa took only 2.5 hours for the 320km journey. After arriving, we had the opportunity to explore the Higashiyama Chaya (Tea District), a former pleasure district dating back to the 19th century.

The next stop was the Nomura family home in the Samurai District. The beautiful garden was particularly impressive, inviting us to linger for a while.



Later, we had the opportunity to visit the Museum of Contemporary Art of the 21st Century in Kanazawa. The most striking installation there was certainly Leandro Erlich's "The Swimming Pool." This installation uses a thin layer of water over a walkable hollow space to create the illusion that visitors are moving underwater.

A perfect conclusion to the day's program was the excellent meal at Restaurant ROKKAKUDO. Here we could watch the preparation of the dishes on an open grill right at the table (teppanyaki). The Wagyu steak, served with crispy roasted garlic chips and sautéed bean sprouts, made for an exceptionally tasty combination.



Gold, Gardens, and Delights – A Day of Craftsmanship in Kanazawa

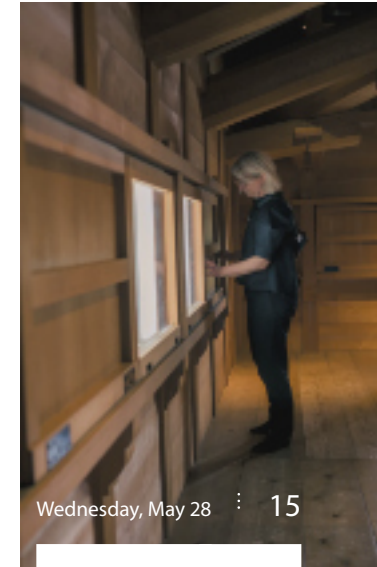
Wednesday, May 28

Michael Danner and Günter Beuchle

Our first morning in Kanazawa began with bright sunshine and a fantastic breakfast buffet.

With our tour guide, Kaoru Sato-san, our first stop (after the underground bus parking garage) was the classic Japanese garden Kenrokuen, which is one of the few gardens that fulfills all six attributes: spaciousness and seclusion, artistry and tradition, flowing water, and a sweeping view.

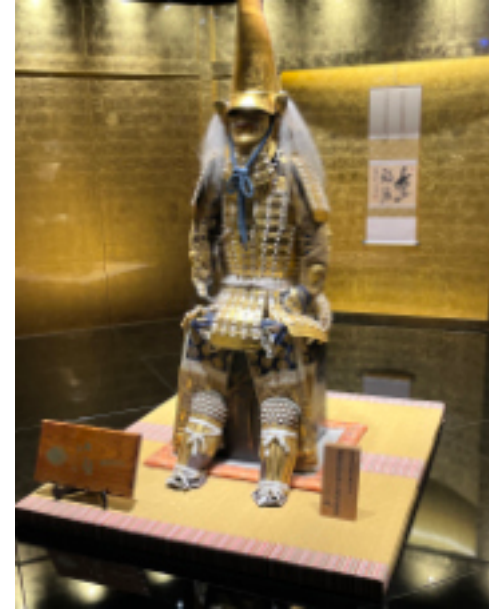
Afterwards, we continued to Kanazawa Castle, the 16th-century Maeda Castle, and first, we asked ourselves: Where is it? We saw fortress gates, walls, and warehouses in a large park, and then learned that it has been undergoing extensive reconstruction since 2001, including impressive wooden structures made without nails. Of course, stamping is possible at several locations...





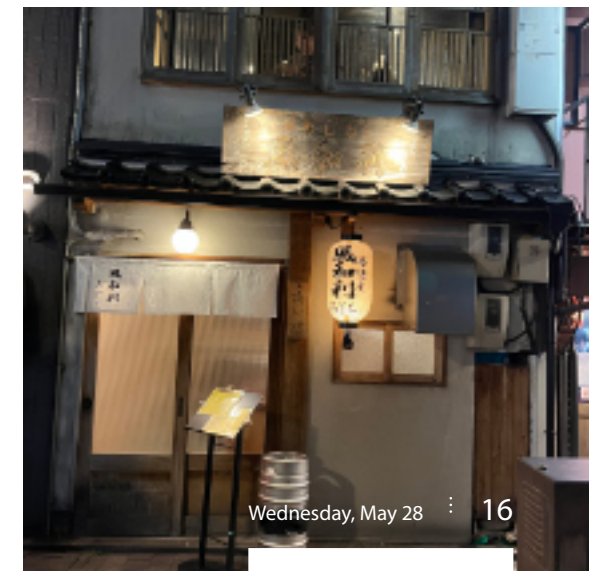
We spend lunch in the shady Omicho Market: There's plenty of seafood, either fresh or prepared for us as a delicious lunch, so there are many restaurants and stalls, as well as other groceries, flowers, and clothes.

Once fortified, we were able to visit the old Kutani Porcelain Manufacturing. Kosen Kutani – the owner in the family tradition – guided us through the various production stages and quickly formed a rice bowl and a sake jug. After four months, several firings, 18% loss of size, glazing, and painting in five colors, they would have become two individual pieces again – had he not pressed them together again at the end. We found a few souvenirs in the exhibition room.



Finally, we were able to witness the intricate production process at Hakuichi, which produces almost all gold leaf in Japan. The most important and noisy process is the beating/pushing out of the square sheets, each 8x8 cm long and 0.7 micrometers thick (for comparison: a human hair is 40-100 micrometers thick!). Finally, we were allowed to tinker and gild our hand mirrors with one of eight motifs to choose from.

We ended the evening in small groups in Kanazawa.





Tradition, Tremor & Hot Springs

Thursday, May 29

Matthias Pätz and Arian Wichmann

The day began at 8:50 a.m. in Kanazawa with a bus ride to the picturesque Shirakawa-go, a World Heritage village with about 600 residents that welcomes thousands of visitors daily. Visitors must leave the village by 5 p.m.; numerous signs indicate that entry into private homes is prohibited. Some of the historic houses with their steep thatched roofs are open to the public as museums – in one of them, one could admire old tools. There was also a report on how these thatched roofs are thatched. It takes many people working on a house at the same time; the article said around 400 in total. This high number is necessary to complete the thatching of the house in one day. Since such a large number is naturally very expensive, the system is based on everyone helping each other for free. Then, they also get their house thatched for free. From the vantage point above the village, a stunning view opened up over the valley, surrounded by mountains, a wide river, and rice fields. Afterwards, we drove to a traditional house where a typical regional meal was served: fresh fish, vegetables, rice, miso soup, and miso fried on a leaf – delicious!



In Takayama, we explored the tourist center. A mild earthquake (magnitude 4.5) was exciting. It was the first quake I'd ever experienced firsthand. It wasn't bad in the end; nothing major happened. But it was a very lasting experience for me. There were two jolts in total. I was standing between two rows of low wooden houses with sliding doors and windows. When the first jolt came, I couldn't place it. My first association was that a large truck had just passed close by. But then the first people started running out, and I thought, "Oh, this isn't an earthquake, is it?" My second thought was, "Shit?" Then I looked around for the locals. But they were all relaxed, and that relaxed me too. I noticed the second jolt much more attentively. Acoustically, it sounded totally crazy.

There were so many wooden sliding doors and windows on the street where I was. And the jolt made them all rattle. It was almost like a gust of wind sweeping through the street, shaking everything. Only without the wind. Strangely beautiful.

Another highlight followed in the evening: the onsen at the Takayama Green Hotel. The soothing warmth of the pools and the atmospheric outdoor garden made the experience unforgettable—the perfect way to relax at the end of an eventful day.



A Dance of Pure Water and Shabu-Shabu

Friday, May 30

Duncan Underwood and Henry Kowallik

Gujo Hachiman. The place is synonymous with wild water, and it flows everywhere here. And here, people dance!

Fresh Water

Canals flow throughout the city, supplying the town with fresh water, drinking water! This type of water supply also served as fire protection: red buckets still hang at the entrances to houses today, which were used to collect water in the event of a fire.

Gujo Odori – 30 Days of Dancing

The tradition of this dance has been performed for 400 years: It began in the Edo period. In the late 1590s, the dance festival was initiated by Endo Yoshitaka, the local feudal lord.

What was revolutionary was that he used it to bring together the people of his sphere of influence, regardless of their social or societal status!

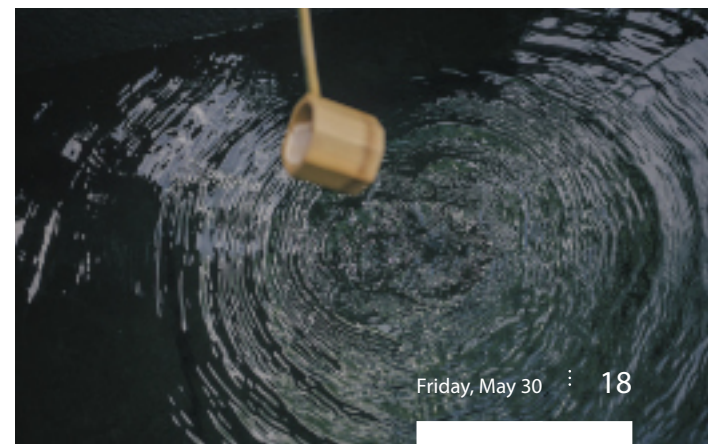
During the Edo period (1603–1868), Gujo Hachiman was an important stopover on the trade route connecting Nagoya to the Sea of Japan. During this time, the festival developed into a significant cultural tradition.

Dancing to Protect Against Evil Spirits

The origins of the Gujo dance point to the mountain cult: ancestral gods descend from the mountains, followed by evil spirits, bringing illness and misfortune. To drive away the evil spirits, people made noise—from this, the rhythmic dances developed.

The festival lasts a good thirty days, and the climax is a dance round lasting three days and nights. After that, the dancing shoes are worn out, and new shoes are needed for the next year...

At the end of 2022, this dance event was added to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.



Nagoya Castle

The history of Nagoya Castle (名古屋城, Nagoya-jō) spans almost 500 years and is closely linked to the development of Japan.

The original castle was built by Shiba Yoshimune in 1532. Oda Nobuhide took over the complex that same year, but later destroyed large parts of it ...

The Great Reconstruction under Tokugawa Ieyasu

In 1609, Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate, ordered the reconstruction of the castle. This was completed in 1612, and the new complex was of enormous strategic importance. The castle was intended to serve as a bulwark against Osaka: At that time, the final confrontation with the rival Toyotomi family was imminent.

The castle had great strategic value due to its proximity to the Tokaido trade route. Together with Kumamoto Castle and Osaka Castle, it formed the group of the country's three strongest fortresses.

Destruction in World War II

The castle survived the entire Edo period intact, but was destroyed to its foundations during the air raids on Nagoya on May 14 and 17, 1945. Only three gates and three small towers (櫓 yagura) survived. The magnificent Honmaru Palace, considered one of the most beautiful palace complexes in Japan, burned down.

Rebuild, rebuild...

After the war, the main tower, the connected smaller tower, and the main gate were rebuilt by 1959. In 1952, the original complex was declared a "special historical site" (tokubetsu shiseki). After 10 years of reconstruction, Honmaru Palace was faithfully



reconstructed and reopened in 2018.

The Golden Kinshachi

The castle's famous landmarks are its two golden Kinshachi (金鯨): stylized dolphins mounted on the gables of the main roof. Each measures approximately 2.60 m x 2.60 m, weighs over 1.2 tons, and is covered with approximately 44 kilograms of 18-karat gold. These golden mythical creatures are also symbols of the city of Nagoya.

Kyoto – Reception with Shabu-Shabu

When the tour guide invited us to Shabu-Shabu, I initially mistook it for "Schappi-Schappi" ... only to later learn that Shabu-Shabu is also quite onomatopoeic: The name describes the "sloshing" sound that occurs when the meat is tossed in the hot broth.

It's a stew that's cooked at the table. One of the guests has particularly long chopsticks, which he uses to both transfer the ingredients into the pot and transfer the cooked food to the guests' bowls.



Zen Stones, Golden Reflections & Temple Paths

Saturday, May 31

Ralf Regel and Nigel Downes

The day began with a quiet visit to Ryōan-ji, where we contemplated the iconic karesansui (dry garden). The 15 stones, carefully arranged in white gravel, remain a puzzle of perspective; it is said that you can never see all 15 at once. In the main hall of the temple, the Dragon Cloud panels floated above us, black ink swirls on a golden background, symbolizing the power and movement of the temple's guardian spirit.

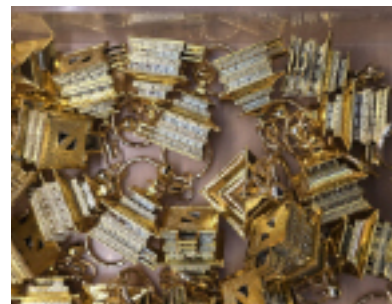
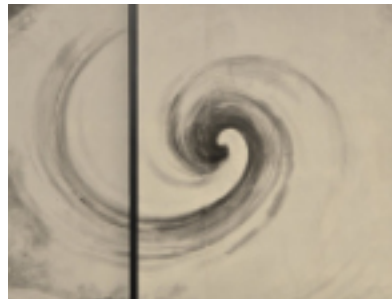
From this minimalist, albeit well-attended, tranquility, we continued to the magnificent Kinkaku-ji: the Golden Pavilion. Despite the gray sky, the temple was impressively reflected in the surrounding pond. Each of the three floors represents a different architectural style: the ground floor, in the Shinden-zukuri style, is reminiscent of the palaces of the Heian aristocracy; The second floor follows the Buke-zukuri, the architecture of samurai residences; the top floor is designed in the style of a Zen Buddhist temple. Our last temple visit of the morning took us to the famous but overcrowded Kiyomizu-dera. The crowds



made it difficult to truly absorb the atmosphere, but the complex itself was impressive, with the large wooden terrace jutting dramatically over the hillside, supported by massive wooden pillars, offering sweeping views over Kyoto.

From there, we descended along the Sannenzaka path, narrow alleys lined with traditional wooden houses, tearooms, and craft shops, and finally reached the atmospheric Jishu-jinja Shrine, located within the Kiyomizu-dera complex and dedicated to love and happiness.

The afternoon was free for everyone to explore hidden temples, others enjoyed matcha sweets, browsed local craft shops, or simply wandered through the winding alleys of the ancient imperial city...



Between Sacred Deer and a Giant Buddha – A Day in Nara

Sunday, June 1

Scott Vogel and Beth Vogel



We started our day with a breakfast buffet at the Hotel Asyl Nara and then quickly loaded up and drove into Nara Park. What stood out immediately was the Sitka Deer wandering between people and cars in and around the streets, sidewalks and shops. Apparently, the herd of sacred deer have been here since the 8th century and the herd is now over 1200 in number.

Our first destination was Todaiji Temple which is the 1300-year-old home of a colossal Vairocana Buddha that is 15 meters (49 feet) in height and is the world's largest gilded bronze Buddha. This statue is housed in an all-wood building, the Daibutsu-den, and at 48 meters (157 feet) in height, the largest wooden building in the world. Todaiji is a world heritage site. The hand gestures of the Buddha statue are positioned such that one hand signals a stop to suffering (samsara) and the other offers help to find this path to freedom through enlightenment (dharma).





After passing through Nara Park we arrived at the steps of asuga-taisha. This is a Shinto shrine that was founded in 768 and along with the adjacent Kasugayama Primeval Forest, is a world heritage site. The dominant theme, along with the sacred deer, is that of the large number of lanterns donated by subordinate shrines. There are 1000 stone lanterns leading up to the shrine and 2000 bronze lanterns within the shrine.

That evening some of us went out for Unagi (Japanese freshwater eel) cuisine. This was prepared using the Kabayaki cooking method. It involves butterflyfing the fish, removing bones, and grilling it with a sweet soy-based sauce. Unagi in Japan is a popular source of stamina in the summer and a cultural symbol of prosperity, good fortune, and longevity. Our group found it quite delicious and went well with beer.



A Day in Uji – Matcha, Temples, and Togetherness

Monday, June 2

Nicolas Six, Ulf Dettmer and Michael Erberich

After a final breakfast in Kyoto – with excellent Uji matcha and a lavish buffet – our day began leisurely around 10:00 a.m. Our first stop was a visit to Tozando, a shop specializing in budo equipment. We arrived at 10:20 a.m., and the small shop was literally overrun by our group. Despite the crowds, we received competent advice and were able to purchase suitable dogis, tabis, and other training equipment. As a nice gesture, we even received small gifts like postcards and pendants.

Shortly after 11:30 a.m., we set off on foot to the bus that took us to Uji. On the way, our tour guide, Kaoru-san, gave us a comprehensive introduction to the Byōdōin, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most famous buildings of the Heian period.

In front of the temple, we bid Kaoru-san a warm and moving farewell. She presented us with lovingly selected omiyage (edible gifts), and we also presented her with small tokens of thanks. Her praise for our “Japanese way” was particularly touching – she was impressed by how respectfully we behaved and how we ate with chopsticks in the mornings as a matter of course, while she herself often used cutlery. A wonderful mutual appreciation.

The Byōdōin itself was impressive due to its location, “like a phoenix on the pond.” Originally a country house, it was converted into a temple by Lord Yorimichi in the 11th century. The central Phoenix Hall, featuring the Amitabha Buddha, was created by Jōchō, the famous sculptor of the Heian period. His students designed the musical bodhisattvas, and the painted walls depict the Pure Land – embedded in a landscape that gives the impression of having already arrived there.

Afterward, we explored Uji on foot. During a leisurely stroll through the old town, many of us found high-quality matcha tea – a popular souvenir from the region. Although our first choice was unfortunately sold out, some were magically drawn to the “Matcha Roastery” off the main shopping street, where they served a variety of delicious matcha ice cream.



On the way to our ryokan, “Kameishiro,” we passed Kojo-ji, a Zen temple originally founded by Dōgen Zenji and relocated to Uji in the 17th century. Check-in was around 4 p.m. Our tatami rooms, overlooking the Ujikawa River or the surrounding mountains, were beautiful and inviting for a relaxing break. Unfortunately, the communal sento (bathhouse) was closed the next morning—well, shikata ga nai.

Our first training session in preparation for the Daitōryū demonstration began at 5:15 p.m. Meanwhile, Susanne and Sensei also arrived. Afterward, we headed to the nearby supermarket, which we “looted” with considerable enthusiasm to put together our communal dinner.

Starting at 7 p.m., we enjoyed our self-prepared meal in the ryokan’s dining room in convivial company – including a tasting of Kaoru-san’s parting gift. The landlady was initially somewhat surprised by our spontaneous gathering, but our numerous gifts made for a charming reconciliation.

The evening ended in a variety of ways: Some wrapped up the day in the communal bathhouse, others rehearsed the odori dance together.

Thus, a varied, impressive, and harmonious day in Uji came to a close – rich in encounters, moments of enjoyment, and a subtle touch of Japanese serenity.





In the mountains of Koyasan

Tuesday, June 3

Claudia Buder and Franziska Dierschke

*Lying awake at night
and listening to the rain:
an old friend tells his story.*

Was Toyotama Tsuno here too? This night in the rain, telling stories, on the roofs of our ryokan, next to the rushing Uji River, was certainly wildly romantic and wonderful.

Is Tsuyu, the rainy season, already beginning? The rain is clearly enjoying being with us. Well then, come on!

At 8:00 a.m., there's a traditional Japanese breakfast. The elderly, very small, but also very robust-looking Japanese women scurry around and provide us – as always – with the best. We collect tinkling and rustling omiyage for them as a thank you.

Some took advantage of the small window of time before the 9:30 a.m. departure to make their way to the nearby Koshoji Temple. In 1233, Dogen Zenji founded the first Soto Zen monastery in Japan (<https://www.ujikoushouji.jp/en/>). The desire to meditate with the monks again, as we were able to experience in 2005 and 2025, remained.



We hurried through the raindrops into the small bus, which drove us through the equally small streets along the riverbank to the large bus. And then we slowly wound our way through the slow-moving traffic past Osaka. The journey continued uphill, and the rain clouds hung low in the mountains. We were sitting inside, on the bus, and yet the atmosphere was filled with the scent of wild forest and gentle mist.

From 12:40 p.m. to 1:10 p.m., we took a half-hour break. A variety of mochi specialties and yum-yum are being passed around.

Departure! Dalli Dalli! Is everyone here? Yeeeee!! And after a 10-minute drive: Where's Michael? So, Michael Dieterle? Um... gone! The big bus turns around in three steps, and there he is in the parking lot, Michael. Crazy. With a stern expression, Kristina admonishes the "group leaders" to pay more attention. It all worked out in the end...

The bus continues to wind its way uphill, the clouds now below us. At 2:15 p.m., we roll through Koyasan and are amazed: 117 temples with around 600 monks, as well as a university for religious studies founded in 1926, are located here. The temples can breathe a sigh of relief here and welcome people more calmly, as the crowds of tourists are better dispersed.

At our Buddhist hostel, Sekisho-in (https://www.sekishoin.jp/lq_en/), we are guided quietly and safely. The temple on this site was founded 1,100 years ago, and the centuries-old spirit is palpable even before walking through Okunoin.



Well then, first we go to the prayer hall and are greeted by the oldest monk in the house—at least he radiates that wisdom. Wisdom also comes with wit, and with this he introduces us to the customs of the house: meal times, prayer times, onsen—whatever people need. Sensei translates, and after a brief time-warping, it becomes clear that we won't have to wait long for our desired meditation.

So, we quickly go to our rooms and then meet at 3:45 p.m. in front of the temple a few steps further across the street.

We climb the stone steps, wondering how we'll meditate now.

Our ears tinkle—whoops!—and hear a greeting in familiar German:

Before us stands Gunnar, friendly and humorous, who has lived in Japan for five years. First three in Kanazawa and now two years here in Kōyasan. Before that, he studied Japanese studies in Düsseldorf and Japan.

He speaks an exceptional Japanese-German fluency, as Gunnar forms the German words in the specifically Japanese tonal rhythm. Who influenced whom here?

And then he explains: The style of Shingon Buddhism focuses on the "A" of the Sanskrit script in the teachings of the Sun Buddha, the cosmic Buddha, who is simultaneously everything – the universe.

We will practice Ajikan meditation – it is very complicated, with many techniques and images – but we will practice a simple technique: the Ānāpānasati technique, a breathing meditation.

We will simply let thoughts like "What's for dinner?" or "What does my mother think about me becoming a monk?" drift away. Point by point, step by step, he points out the essential characteristics of meditation, which many of us should be very familiar with.

Can Gunnar sense who has been meditating for many years? In any case, the meditation time was very short – the next group was already waiting.

A delicious Buddhist (as it was entirely vegetarian) dinner with delicious silken tofu awaited us in a large group. The Buddhist monks are also familiar with the art of enjoying beer, so the large brown bottles are opened. But wait!

The spiritual aspect is not neglected: At dinner, you can purchase small wooden tablets, which are prepared with a written wish for the morning ritual.

Everything is connected...

After dinner, we scurry off to various destinations: onsen, community, conversation, or even a nighttime stroll in the shimmering light of Okunoin's lanterns: mystical natural power and a rich history in the dense moss. Light and shadow of a stillness that sustains us.

Back to the world. Supplies are becoming tight, as the beer has already rolled out of all the vending machines. Franziska and Nicolas become messengers to our rescue before the gentle rain on the rooftops lulls us to sleep with its tales of enchantment.





Breakfast at Koyasan and Transfer to Muroran

Wednesday, June 4

Sophia Wohlleber and Helen Rosenberger

After a very restful night in the quiet temple in Koyasan, we were awakened by the morning announcement for the start of the morning ceremony. The evening before, some of us had purchased and inscribed prayer tablets. These wishes will be presented to the gods during the morning prayer.

The rhythmic mantra of the monks and the scent of incense made the morning ceremony a powerful experience. After all the wishers had burned their wish tablets and received a prayer wreath, everyone present was able to burn some incense and make a wish to the gods.

Following the morning ceremony, we returned to the dining hall and enjoyed the breakfast carefully prepared by the monks. The early rise and breakfast gave us some free time to explore Koyasan before check-out. Before continuing our journey, some wandered around Koyasan, went to small cafes, bought omiyage, or took a final atmospheric stroll through Japan's largest cemetery.

With the departure, we said goodbye to Koyasan and also to Kansai. During the bus ride, we once again let the green landscapes pass by us until the sea and Kansai Airport came into view.

Upon arrival at the airport, the bus driver unloaded our suitcases one last time, and we were bid farewell with omiyage, a heartfelt thank you, and applause.



For us, it was now time to head north to Hokkaido. The departure from the island airport in Osaka was uncomplicated, allowing some of us to practice one more time for the 50th anniversary performance. In Hokkaido, we met our American companions and were personally greeted with banners. A welcome party awaited us at the hotel, with feasts, beer, and sake – none of us had ever experienced a reception like this before.



Hokkaido: A Cloudy Day with Surprises

Thursday, June 5

Yessica Steinert

After a Japanese breakfast at the APA Hotel – steamed rice, pickled vegetables, and a steaming mug of tea – we set off on time for today’s adventure at 8 a.m. The sky was gray and thickly overcast, giving the landscape a mysterious, almost mystical atmosphere. Our bus wound its way past Muroran and quiet villages.



Our destination for the morning was Mount Showa-Shinzan, a geologically young and impressive feature in southern Hokkaido, near Shikotsu-Toya National Park. The volcanic cone, which only emerged spectacularly from the ground in 1943, was particularly impressive that day: the reddish color of the rock contrasted sharply against the overcast sky, and fine clouds of steam rose from crevices in its flanks. The characteristic smell of sulfur hung in the air, underscoring the activity of this special place. The region’s bizarre mascots, especially the Melon Kuma – a bizarre hybrid of a bear and a Yubari melon, pierced by fish – caused amazement and chuckles.

As we quickly discovered, there are no hiking trails to the crater rim. The region is still considered active and is strictly monitored. So we focused entirely on the volcano, documenting the details of this unique natural phenomenon with short walks and photos, and visiting the small volcano museum at the foot of Showa-Shinzan. The exhibition provided vivid insights into the dramatic formation of the mountain and how the local population deals with the volcanic activity.



Stopover at Lake Toya

It wasn’t until we continued our journey and made a short stopover on the shores of Lake Toya that we were able to experience the famously still waters up close. Here, we refreshed ourselves by gently touching the cool lake water with our hands. In good weather, the lakeshore offers impressive views of the surrounding volcanoes; on our day, however, the peaks were hidden in thick clouds. Nevertheless, the scenery seemed magical – the diffused light reflected an almost silvery color on the water’s surface, enhancing the tranquil atmosphere.



At lunchtime, we fortified ourselves with a sumptuous shabu-shabu meal right on Lake Toya. Wearing bibs, we enjoyed the meat, fresh vegetables, and the soothing warmth of the hot pot – a meal that not only lifted the body but also lifted the spirits in the gray weather.

Training and Hospitality in the Evening

Well-fortified, we then drove to the dojo and immersed ourselves in the world of Daitō-ryu techniques for three and a half hours. The intensive training session not only opened up new perspectives on this traditional Japanese martial art but also allowed us to completely forget about everyday life.

The day concluded with an extraordinary example of Japanese hospitality: In the evening, we were invited to a lavish barbecue dinner at an izakaya restaurant in Muroran. After the day’s exertion, the shared meal of freshly grilled meat, fish, and vegetables provided the perfect end to the day—accompanied by warm company and many stimulating conversations.

Despite the fog and clouds, June 5 remained a vivid memory as a day full of impressions, discoveries, and culinary highlights.



Training Day with Tradition

Friday, June 6

Michael Dieterle and Jens Roessler

Our day began relaxed with a hearty breakfast at the hotel before we finally boarded the bus (almost) on time and with everyone present and set off for Noboribetsu.

There, the fascinating Date Jidai Village awaited us, a kind of historical amusement park that charmingly transported us back to Japan's Edo period. The ninja theater performance captivated us – and at the same time, provided plenty of laughter, because despite the impressive martial arts performances, the actors repeatedly surprised us with wonderful slapstick. The outdoor theater was no less entertaining, and some of us wondered whether we could secretly incorporate the tricks demonstrated into our own training.



There was also a cat temple with a gigantic waving cat. The exhibition at the Katakura Kojiro Residence, located at the far east end of the park, fascinated us with astonishingly detailed information about the crafting and special features of a real samurai sword. The highlight for many, however, was the quirky ninja house: With its sloping floors, walls, and stairs, many experienced budoka suddenly felt like beginners – a magnificent lesson in humility (and balance!).



After lunch in the cozy Aoba Goten, the afternoon portion of our seminar began. Not only Soke Hiromitsu Yonezawa, but also Nakajima, Rominski, Raymon, and others impressed us with outstanding techniques and inspiring explanations. The international exchange with participants from Japan, the USA, and our German group was particularly enjoyable – there was a friendly, open atmosphere in which everyone could and wanted to learn from one another. The joy of receiving the degrees awarded to many of the seminar participants was correspondingly great, and this was celebrated with appreciative applause. Particularly worthy of note are the 10th dan graduations of Michael Daishiro Nakajima Shihan and Tim Tung Shihan (sadly absent).

To conclude the day, we enjoyed a boisterous dinner, accompanied by plenty of beer, sake, and the occasional spontaneous arm wrestling contest. The perfect blend of conviviality, friendship, and competitive spirit on this successful day.



Remember, Experience, Honor – A Day in the Spirit of Bokyukan

Saturday, June 7

Martin Biegholdt and Volodymyr Demachkovych



With its five program points, this day offered a very wide range of travel impressions.

It began with a visit to the grave of Katsumi Yonezawa (1937-1998), the founder of Bokyukan Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu in Muroran.

Afterward, we visited Master Yonezawa's dojo, where we were able to absorb the atmosphere of the starting point of the style he founded.

The next stop after lunch was Hell Valley (Jigoku Dani) in Noboribetsu. An alien volcanic landscape with bubbling hot springs from which sulfurous vapors rise. One could almost get the impression of being transported to another planet.



When we arrived at the hotel in the afternoon, we were immediately engrossed in preparations for the planned demonstration. In addition to the locals, the German group and the American guests were also able to showcase their skills. The regional television station (NHK Sapporo News) recorded a report with excerpts from the demonstration. (The report can be seen on [Arian's Blog](#).)

The day ended with a celebratory dinner at the Noboribetsu Grand Hotel. The 50th anniversary of the founding of Yonezawa's Bokyukan Dojo was honored in several speeches and extensively celebrated with plenty of good food, beer, and sake.







Farewell and Journey Home

Sunday, June 8

Martin Biegholdt and Volodymyr Demachkovych

On the last day, we sadly had to say goodbye to Japan and begin the very long journey home. First, we took a domestic flight from Sapporo to Tokyo. Then, a 13-hour flight took us via the northern route (Bering Sea, Alaska, Greenland, North Sea) to Germany.

Arriving in Frankfurt, many of us were still far from our destination, as the German Federal Railway welcomed us with a considerable delay. This stark contrast to the well-organized rail connections in Japan finally made us feel truly at home again.

This trip, with its diverse impressions and the special blend of martial arts, culture, and cuisine, will certainly remain unforgettable for us.

Arigato gozaimasu

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The next regular edition of Shinki News will be published in September 2025.

If you would like to contribute to Shinki News, please submit your contribution(s) to: shinkinews@shinkiryu.de and we will contact you to discuss the formalities.

Enjoy the summer!
Shinki News Team.

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