



International Get Together in Japan, April 2013

Cherry blossoms started blooming one week earlier than usual in Japan this spring, and they were almost finishing their best at Inuyama Festival on 6th and 7th in April. In spite of bad weather, such big smile blossoms bloomed beautifully when 21 members got together on the first meeting in Nagoya at the welcome lunch party. Seven participants from overseas and 15 Japanese members had a good time in Inuyama with five local guide volunteers. We enjoyed traditional puppet shows on the top of the festival floats in front of Inuyama castle and the festival floats in the old town. The day before we stayed at Ryokan (Japanese style inn with outdoor hot spring spa and big dinner and breakfast) Of course, we enjoyed outdoor hot spring bath with a nice view, light up castle, could see over Kiso River, and even cherry blossom petals were floating on the hot water in

the outdoor bath. We went to Kyoto after Inuyama and on 8th we enjoyed a day trip by city bus from Kyoto station to Arashiyama, Chionin and Nishiki market. For our lunch we dropped in at a cafeteria of Kyoto University, and enjoyed student food there, amongst other students. We all enjoyed Kyoto like local tourists.

Nagoya was our meeting point, after which we travelled on to Inuyama and Kyoto. In Inuyama, our ryokan inn by the river had a view of the old castle, outdoor hot spring baths and exquisite traditional meals. We joined the crowds for the 400 year-old festival of the Haritsune shrine and its parade of three-storey floats, with flute and drums and life-size puppets, each highly decorated float manoeuvred on its stone wheels by teams of enthusiastic young men. Added pleasures: a dog dressed by its owner for the occasion in a kimono; and cup of saki, courtesy of the festival. In Kyoto, we wandered among the cherry blossoms – with cherry blossom ice-cream – lunched at the students' university refectory and climbed to the Chionin temple where school-children offered tea in celebration of the birthday of Buddha. Many thanks to our organiser for this kaleidoscopic weekend and also to our Japanese members who made it all such fun for their visitors from Australia, Germany and UK.

The first night of the second Get Together in Japan added to earlier experiences of wonderful, welcoming home-hosting hospitality (in Shizuoka). Many thanks to each host family and also local members who assisted whenever language difficulties arose and who were such good company. The next 3 days were interesting and varied times travelling by various modes of public transport (local buses, cable car, ropeway, boat), with small baggage in tow (the excellent forwarding service sent our big bags 4 days further ahead). In the Mt Fuji National Park and lakeside towns we had beautiful weather offering splendid views of Mt Fuji, the large crater lakes and volcanic area. We had the opportunity to dress in Kimono or Samurai for photos, to visit several museums, swim in natural hot spring pools, use 'onsen' (communal baths - naked, segregated but definitely outside the comfort zone for Australian visitors). We stayed in Ryokan where beds are futons on the tatami mats and meals are on low tables at which you sit on your feet on a cushion. All 7 'foreigners' with 7 locals had some truly exotic, distinctly Japanese experiences

The heartfelt bonding in Chiba

First of all, I would express my gratitude to all the participants. We met in the local region, here in Chiba. The program in Chiba was quite moderate, but the activities created the bonding, < We are One>. After welcome lunch at my place, we roamed at Sengen Shrine, the beautiful garden and the historical cottage near the area. That night, we enjoyed Japanese cuisine at a restaurant. Next morning, we bought fresh foods at a local wholesale market. We enjoyed the atmosphere as well. After that, our cooking program together started. I prepared some recipes with cookery program using the Chiba delicacies produced. All of them (17 attendants) with the wonderful kitchen organizers! We enjoyed the buffet with the big a la carte in season. The last entertainment was the live music ; KOTO playing . We were all ears while the meaning with the green tea & sweets. Thank you for the wonderful bonding, again. Lots of thanks for visiting us from long distance.

