



# Asia 2018, Part 2



Day 17, 7/1 – So far, we had stayed in some pretty ordinary hotels and “spas.” I did the best I could with Hotels.com, but I must admit that I was mostly disappointed in the selections up to now. Most of these places had been in the \$100 a night range, which I thought would be more than enough in Asia to guarantee a quality experience. What I got instead was something that I could have probably gotten for \$30 a night if I had only opened up my search parameters. I began to see that my issue was that I only looked for hotels with A/C, a free breakfast and a pool. We didn’t get in a single pool the entire trip. We were too busy. Growing up, a pool was a must because our kids were water kids – always in the pool. Now that Jeffrey is an adult, he doesn’t do pools. Frankly, I would be scared to go into some of the pools I had seen in these places. I still think I would prefer the free breakfast and the A/C. In Asia, A/C is a must. You can always find breakfast on your own if you needed to. Moving forward, I’ll not limit my search parameters.



Now, I say all this because I was finally impressed with a hotel. This one in Chiang Mai was awesome! The food was great, the hotel property was nice, and our rooms were huge. Barb and I had a King sized bed. We were swimming in space.

Well, we may have arrived late to Chiang Mai, but we still made our street food tour. We met our guide in the lobby and our group for the evening in the bus. Man, that food was good! We had 10 courses in two different parts of town. Our guide was a true food expert. We also traveled with a Scottish-born Aussie lawyer who has lived in Hong Kong for the last 10 years and two 25-year-olds from San Francisco. He works for YouTube and she... would rather not be here. He was an adventurous sort and had convinced his new-ish girlfriend to come to Thailand. I don’t see these two sticking together for long. Anyway, we had soup, noodles, pork, beef, sausage, lamb and several desserts. We were so stuffed by the end! What a great introduction to Chiang Mai. We finished off the evening with some “Thai Whisky,” which was actually some form of Ouzo. I liked it a lot!





Day 18, 7/2 – The breakfast was quite wonderful. I had perhaps too much food because at 8:30 we got picked up for a cooking class. It was Barbara's turn not to feel so good either. I gave her Imodium last night and another this morning.



There were 12 of us in the van: the three of us, a driver, our instructor and assistant, two Korean ladies, a couple from Taiwan and a black/white couple originally from Paris who now worked in Hong Kong. Our first stop was to the market to buy food. On the way there, we chose our dishes to prepare so that we would know what to buy once we arrived. Aoy, our instructor, showed us every ingredient we would need and then we browsed the market while she shopped for lunch. She also bought us fried bananas as a snack – delicious! After a half an hour, we got in the van and went to the cooking school, which was set up really nice. We prepared our first two dishes and then we cooked them. The first dish was easy. It was a basic Thai chicken stir fry. My coconut chicken soup needed more lime, but aside from that, the soup had the right balance of hot, salty, sweet and sour (I added half a lime to finish the balance). We ate our two dishes, making our “first baby” as Aoy put it. We were all full already, but we weren't done yet. We prepared spring rolls then Jeff and a Korean gal had the honor of making dessert – sweet coconut rice with mango. We then stuffed and cooked the spring rolls, then made various curries from scratch. The base for all of the curries is the same: pepper, ginger, garlic, lemongrass, cilantro and a kefir lime peel. For red curry, you add red chili paste. For green you add (super-hot) green chilies and basil. Penang curry is red chili paste and peanuts. We minced all the ingredients then crushed them in a mortar with a pestle. My red Penang curry was with prawns. It was delicious, as were the spring rolls and the sticky rice dessert. When it was time to say goodbye, Aoy gave us all cook books containing everything we had learned.



The three of us were tired, so we opted to get dropped off at our hotel to rest... which didn't last long. After half an hour, we decided that we were not tired after all so we went on a walk to work off our massive lunch. We saw several temples on the south side of the city near our hotel, then we went to the Hard Rock Café for a t-shirt, passing all the main things this town has to offer along the way (and all conveniently located near our hotel): restaurants, bars, tattoo parlors, local stores, massage parlors and, in the evenings, prostitutes. No wonder young people like this place – and





there were young people all over. Problem is though; you could get drunk and wake up with a tattoo or a disease or both. Anyway, after Hard Rock, we went across the street to McDonalds for a coffee, then to Hagan Das so Jeff could get a shake because McDonalds didn't serve them here, and then to Starbucks for another coffee. We did all this very, very slowly so that we could enjoy all the free A/C, but also because we were waiting for the nearby Night Market to open at 6PM. At 6PM, we shopped. Barb got two pairs of elephant pants. I got two more shirts and a couple of wood pieces. Jeff got the same two wood pieces that I did, but his were bigger and the same price. Jeff wins that round. We actually had a pretty good time shopping. Both

Jeff and I almost bought a huge wood carving of the Rama story... and maybe we still will, but we thought we should shop around first to find the best quality at the lowest price in town. There were some musicians playing three song sets at what must have been an open mic night in a food court area. All of these musicians were very good.

Tonight is Brazil vs. Mexico in World Cup Soccer. Last night, Russia upset Spain. I couldn't stay up for the match. I was too sleepy and tired.

Day 19, 7/3 – We had to get up at 5:30 today for our all day tour. Not all the breakfast items were there at 6:15 when we got downstairs, but enough to eat. At 7, we packed up and got picked up. We then picked



up a few more people on the other side of the old city. We then traveled for 1.5 hours while our guide, M (seriously, he goes by M), explained all he could about Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, where we would be going today. Chiang means "city." And Mai means "new." It was the new capital of the Lennar people, after the Burmese wiped-out and enslaved the city of Rai, named after the king. Our first stop was at a rest stop with hot springs all around. The water was at 99 degrees, or just under boiling. Some lady was hard boiling eggs in the Sulphur water – I bet they tasted good. We had a banana and chocolate Roti instead with coffee. Barbara burned her legs a little getting into one of the "cooler" hot springs. It was still too hot.





Our next stop was to the White Temple. This temple was conceived and built by an architect as a fantasy piece, not as a monastery temple, starting in 1997. It will be completed in 2070. It was built purely for the sake of tourism. Everything was so cute and either in white or gold. My favorite part was the very modern mural inside the shrine (sorry, no pictures were allowed, or I would totally show it), which included scenes of earth and hell on the near side, heaven along the sides, and finally, Nirvana at the far wall. The hell side included every imaginable “fake” hero that got worshipped (DC and Marvel superheroes, Pikachu, Sailor Moon, etc.) plus the world trade center, a cell phone, and a gas pump. There was a demon face above it all. In one eye was a reflection of Bin Laden; in the other, George W. Bush.



The bathrooms in the next building over were something to see - all gold.

Our next stop was lunch. There, we had a chance to meet our bus mates. Connie, and American Born Chinese and Alex, a Russian immigrant to the US, were married and living in NYC. Connie’s parents live in Dublin, CA. Katya and Derrick are from Berlin. She is from Vienna and is an actress. He is a theatrical set designer. M is a former monk from Chiang Rai area and Yang is our crazy and suicidal bus driver, always driving way too fast for the given conditions, and often driving on the wrong side of the double yellow lines. The roads, by the way, are not smooth and were sometimes gravel. I can see why, in the write-up for this trip, it said that it was not recommended for people with back problems.

The next stop was to the Mekong Delta, where the Hmong people used to grow opium. We toured an opium museum to learn how opium was made. It was mildly informative. In the gift shop, you could buy any kind of opium pipe you wanted, but no opium.







The boat ride around the delta, which was a confluence of three rivers, was fun. We were also right at the “confluence” of three countries: Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. We first went to Myanmar. There was really nothing there but a casino in the making. I guess the idea is to build this area up for tourism. Laos had shopping. We all tried the local whisky with a cobra in it. It is considered to be an energy drink. I bought some that had a cobra and a scorpion inside. After that, we returned to Thailand and over to a very old temple with



pagoda to see what a working-class temple looked like. Being a former monk, M had a lot to tell us. Locals, for instance, would usually only go to this temple on their birthday and light a colored lotus-shaped candle then float it in a pond or some other form of water. The color of the candle represented the day of the week in which you were born. I was born on a Thursday, so I would always buy and float a magenta lotus candle.

It was a long 4 hour drive back to Chiang Mai, broken-up half way with a rest stop for coffee, sweets and a bathroom. The sunset over the rice patties was quite lovely, but I had a heck of a time getting a good shot with this very limited iPhone. When we got home, we were exhausted. Hey, those 13 kids trapped in a cave for 10 days got rescued this morning.

Day 20, 7/4 – The half-way point of our trip, and Independence Day!

We didn’t plan for today. It was our bum-around-town “locals” day. We decided to take a Segway tour of the old city in the morning and



hit some museums in the afternoon. Our plans got scrapped almost immediately because Segway has a weight limit of 113 Kilos and I am way over that, so we grabbed a tuk-tuk and went to the Lanna Cultural Museum, which were actually three museums for the price of two. Two of the three museums were



excellent (you can skip the last one). We then found another tuk-tuk. The driver was young and super cute. She had Jeff sit in front with her. She also didn’t know where we were going and we wound up four miles in the wrong direction on a highway (tuk-tuks, with a maximum speed of 35 MPH do not do



highways) before I got Google Maps out and had her turn around. When we got to the Lanna Open Air Museum, it was field trip day for a couple hundred college students from the adjacent Chiang Mai University. They were all sketching the dozen or so historic buildings. We felt like intruders on this field trip. Still, we went into a few buildings, though only two of them allowed you to keep your shoes on. This limited my participation because I simply hate taking my shoes off and then putting them back on repeatedly. Jeff felt the same, so we watched Barbara go into building after building. Jeff and I found a cell phone on the ground, so we had an opportunity to interact. Most of the students didn't speak English. We found the teacher and asked him to make an announcement, but no one claimed the phone.

We walked briefly through the university, following the students who were now heading to lunch and then we walked another .6 miles to the Insect Museum. Now, .6 miles doesn't sound like much, but with the heat and humidity, it can quickly dehydrate you. When we got to the museum, Barbara had to rest because she was dehydrated. She had also hurt her knee walking on the uneven pavement, and let me tell you, *everything* is uneven

around here. There doesn't seem to be any uniform codes or upkeep. My ankles and knees have been taking a beating as well. Anyway, Jeff and I saw the museum in detail and then when Barbara was feeling better, she scanned the museum. Her knee still hurt though (and she was now on day three of needing Imodium as well), so I gave her some Motrin (the stuff I absolutely live on, along with glucosamine, during trips like this). We looked for a really close restaurant for lunch to minimize Barb's walking. I found a Japanese place a block away. The food was mostly excellent, but my Yakitori plate had two skewers (out of six) that I couldn't eat. I ate the chicken, pork and I'm guessing beef sticks. I also liked the one that I think might be frog. The two I couldn't eat were liver and I'm guessing either chicken hearts or goat testicles.

I was a little worried about finding a ride to our next destination two miles away because we were in the middle of a not-so-touristy suburb, but the second we stepped foot out the door, a tuk-tuk just happened to be driving by. When we got to the Chiang Mai National Museum for Lanna and Hill People, the exterior looked big and impressive. The King (Rama 9) had commissioned this to tell the story of the non-Siamese people. We had already seen the history of the Siamese people at the National Museum in Bangkok.





This museum, unfortunately, contained two very disappointing floors of stuff. It seems that all the really good Lanna art was at the Lanna Museum complex we had seen earlier in the day, and there wasn't much at all for any of the hill tribes. We left sad. Being that this was a National Museum, it was right on the highway, which meant no tuk-tuks were likely to appear. We began to walk along the highway and soon flagged down a jeepney (a covered pickup truck with seats in the back). This driver spoke no English, but knew where our hotel was, based on the calling card we kept with us. When we got there, I was 10THB short of exact change so I gave him 100 and he said "no change" and took off. What a crook! Barb needed a rest so we camped-out in our hotel room until dinnertime. I watched the latest Planet of the Apes movie, which wasn't half bad, and then I watched some of the other English channels: MTVish Thai Pop, Friends, Fox and Friends, and Al Jazeera USA (what an odd mix of news sources!). At dinnertime, it was super windy, so we decided to eat indoors at our hotel's restaurant, which would best be described as a Hard Rock Café rip-off. Good thing we ate here too because the wind quickly turned into a monsoon sort of rain. By the end of dinner, the rain had died down to a trickle. Barbara wanted to shop at the Night Market again, so she grabbed a poncho. I grabbed my trusty umbrella. Jeff, in traditional fashion, grabbed nothing. And off we went. It stopped raining soon after we got there, but now it was really muggy. More people seemed to be here tonight, but many of the shops were closed today. We did a lap of the entire complex. Barbara bought two clothing items and some Thai spices. Jeff and I cooled off with some Thai iced teas while watching local acoustic players do covers of American songs. Both guys we saw were really good. When we got home, Barb and I watched the end of a really good movie whose name we never caught, then an extremely bad movie about the Jesus movement of the 1970s and how it broke up a family. It was like watching a train wreck in slow motion.

Day 21, 7/5 – We had a whole day to do nothing before we got to the airport. At first, we tried to see if we could keep one of our rooms until 8:30 tonight, but they would charge us for a full day, so we opted to check out at 11 and have our bags stored at the hotel until it was time to leave, which they would do for free. Our plan for today was to go to a Mall and simply spend the day there as mall rats. We got to the MAYA Mall shortly after opening at 11:20AM. We went up to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor where the theater was and bought 2PM tickets for Ant Man and Wasp Woman. We tried to get up to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor roof, but it opened at 4PM. We walked the entire mall from top to bottom and wound up at a Starbucks, where we parked for a long time, enjoying their fine coffee and free Wi-Fi. At lunch, we went to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor food court, which was mostly Japanese Cuisine (as was the B1 Basement food court down below – Do the Japanese own this place? There are Japanese toilets here as well that self-clean, have a seat warmer, and play music). We ate at "Babylon" – and Iraqi place. Our first





course was burnt lentil soup. I liked it a lot, but the other two did not. They didn't like the burnt taste and asked the waiter why they did this. He didn't have an answer; they just always served it like this. The rest of the meal was very good. I especially liked my Aryan Lasse made with mint and garlic. There's a combo you don't often find together.

Hey, my principal finally emailed me about hooking-up in Seoul. I texted him back. Before you knew it, it was time for the movie, which was excellent and very funny. I had to pee so badly by the very end, but I didn't want to miss any of the show. I had to pee twice! I think I filled my kidneys as well.

We went to the roof, now opened (nice view!), then downstairs and looked at a few places. We then went back to Starbucks, where we were recognized as repeat customers. Jeff got bad milk in his Mocha, but it took Google Translate to make ourselves understood. They were very apologetic after that, even bowing in apology as we left.

Our goal was to hit another mall, but there really wasn't one. We went along a street that had several shops. Once we ran out of shops, we took a tuk-tuk to the main shopping area in the old downtown. The shopping was worse here than where we had come from. We looked at a pricy wood shop, and then we went to the oldest and most important temple in the city (Wat Chedi Luang, 14<sup>th</sup> century). This temple complex was very impressive, and we caught it right at sunset, which made for some really nice pictures. After



that, we decided to buy a Rama wood piece at the cheaper night market wood shop (not having found anything of better quality or of cheaper price). I think we really made their day. With shipping, I paid slightly above \$500 for my new, fancy wall hanging. After that, we hoofed it back to our hotel, where our bags were. We got them and left for the airport. Getting through security was a breeze. We chilled out until our flight was ready to go. For once, I paid for food and checked bags because this would be a longer flight. It would be nice not to have to lug 35 pounds of luggage around, which is how heavy my bag was at the moment. It would also be nice to get dinner and a breakfast on this long red-eye flight.

Totally off subject, but there is a Thai female version of Ed Sheeran's most famous song, "Shape of You"; I like this version and feel that my band could cover this.



Day 22, 7/6 - Well, the flight wasn't that long at 5.5 hours, but it certainly took a toll. I didn't sleep, as usual. Oh ya, the 2.5 hour layover in Bangkok began with a mile long walk between planes and another security check where we had to dump all the water that the airline had just given us. In Seoul, Jeff got money and a SIM card. We found the express train and got on. It took 45 minutes, without stops, to get to the Seoul Station. We had opted not to get the rather expensive tourist pass, so now we had to find a T-Card vendor so we would use public transportation. With that accomplished, and once we loaded our cards with cash, we went one stop on the local metro to our hotel.

We actually had a really hard time finding the hotel. With all the buildings around us, Google Maps was acting funny. We kept moving on the map. Also, our hotel was in a very small alley, which we eventually found. Our room was roughly the size of the bed. With a quick rest, we decided to walk around the neighborhood market. It was mostly filled with clothes and cheap tourist trinkets. It did have doughnuts though, which were delicious, as were my weird but wonderful "iced noodles" that I had for lunch. After a Starbucks break, we decided to call it a day at 4PM. We were all trashed from the flight. Barbara and I watched a few movies. Just when we were thinking of bed, my principal texted me; he wanted meet tonight for food and a photo op. His goodwill (potential sister city) tour would keep him busy for the entire time he was in Korea and this was the only time he could meet with us. Barb and I got out of bed and wandered to where we thought he'd be. He texted a building location. We saw that building, easy to spot because of all the colored lights, but when we got there, we couldn't find him. We backtracked. He texted that he had gotten lost. We eventually saw a guy wandering the streets and surmised that it must be him. There were very few people on the street at this time of night. It was him. He told us about his issues with Google Maps. It turns out that South Korea does not allow Google to use its satellites, so we were



actually using neighboring country data, like from China and Japan, and Google Maps was interpreting the data. This is why all the maps are off and why our "dot" keeps moving around. This is a "feature" of South Korea. Another thing we quickly learned as we walked: Seoul closes at midnight. We saw lights go out all around us at midnight. The only thing open was Karaoke and street food places. We went with the street food. We didn't quite know what we had ordered, but it was good. It looked like a pizza, but it was really rice rolls, fish cake and kimchee with cheese on top. We had a nice conversation and a waiter took our picture. We got back to bed at 1:30AM.





Day 23, 7/7 – Today's plan was to visit all the palaces and a palace temple. They were all clustered in a mile radius, but I knew that it would also be a lot of walking. We took the metro to the first palace (Gyeongbok Palace, 14<sup>th</sup> c.) and got there about 10 minutes before it opened. My first impress of this, the largest palace we would see today, was that it was a mini Forbidden City done in green (Forbidden City, by the way, is the massive Chinese palace in Beijing). It had the same gates and the same halls in the same places. Still, it was uniquely beautiful, just not as grand. Jeff and I lost Barbara when she went off to look at the palace kitchens. We saw a



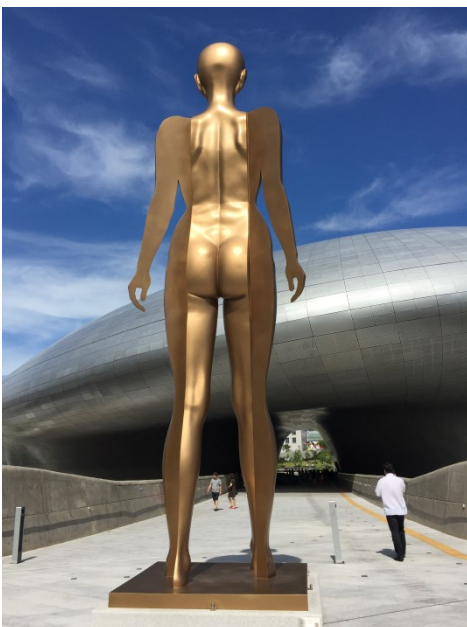
pagoda in the distance and headed towards there. After passing some construction at the back of the palace, we wound up in an adjacent cultural center where the pagoda was. We took pictures then backtracked until we found Barbara. We then went forward again and Barbara got to see the cultural center, though now without the throngs of Malaysian and Chinese tourists that we had to deal with earlier. We were on our way to our next palace, but Barb found a traditional garment rental place. Since today was a national holiday, all the kids were out of school and many of them were dressed in these traditional outfits. It was really quite a site. The reason so many were dressed up, and why





all these pop-up garment rental places were around, was because Seoul was offering free admission to all their palaces if you dressed up. The outfits, and the girls in them, were beautiful. The boy outfits were less impressive. Jeff found coffee across the street so we went there. After that, we walked to palace #2 & 3 (Changdeok Palace, 14<sup>th</sup> c. & Changgyeong Palace, 15<sup>th</sup> c.) which were side-by-side with a “secret garden” in between. Palace two was more compact, but better for picture taking. Every corner had something to see. The bathroom there was cool too because it had a glass wall that opened up into a garden and when you entered the place, the lights would come on and traditional music would begin to play. Palace 3 was less spectacular, but still nice. We had to retrace our steps to the entrance of palace 2 to get out. We then had to head south to get to the Jongmyo Shrine. The entrance we wanted was under

construction. The whole park was under construction, and it was not small. We walked the two mile perimeter to find the other entrance to the place. After seeing three fine and ornate palaces, this shrine itself was a bit of a letdown, but the park between buildings was nice. I was getting tired, my feet hurt, and I was low on sugar. Back at the entrance of the temple, Barbara wanted to see a video on the history of the temple. Jeff and I wanted to find liquids and the nearest metro stop. The two of us walked a bit until we found the metro stop. Across the street was coffee, where we parked and waited for Barbara. When Barbara arrived, we took the metro to our next stop, the design center, which turned out to be a very modern building with a lot of empty space for the sake of modernism. It was a beautiful



building with some interesting statues about the place. We were hungry so we went to a section of town called Little Russia. We found an Uzbek place and had some of my Kyrgyz favorites: montay (meat dumplings), plov (rice with lamb bits) and shashlik (skewers of meat) with beer. Feeling better, we looked at the design center some more. Though the building was beautiful, the stuff inside was pretty ordinary. Still we had some awesome smoothies there. After that, we went to the rather lame museum within this complex that showed the history of the original city wall, saw a K-Pop evening concert being set up just outside the nearby concert hall, and we saw an archaeological dig of the ancient city wall not far from the museum. We took the metro home at 4PM, having walked 11.6 miles. No wonder I hurt all over. My ankles were swollen and even Motrin wouldn’t help.

My favorite quote of the day was when Jeff saw that palace 2 & 3 were mostly the same: “Ah, a franchise.”



Day 24, 7/8 – Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Maxine!

Today should be an easier day. We're taking a bus to the DMZ. Our driver picked us up at 8AM. We then went way across town to pick up four Portuguese Millennials. Our driver was very aggressive – angry almost. Most people around here still don't choose a lane, but they do drive the speed limit. This guy didn't, and I could see why: when we got to the big busses that would be taking us to the DMZ we were the last ones on board. Barb and I got to sit up front. Jeff was five rows back with a Portuguese mathematician who works in Switzerland on something called "infinite symmetry." The bus ride took 45 minutes. I was sleepy.

Our first stop was to the Peace Park at the edge of the DMZ. The DMZ, or demilitarized zone, is a roughly four mile wide no man's land between North and South Korea. It's not a uniform four mile wide strip though; near the coast, the only thing that separates the two countries is a river. Also near Seoul is a building called the "meeting place" where a curb outside and a line inside are the only things dividing the two countries. We had just passed the river part, which is pretty easy to swim, making it an ideal spot for defections, so South Korea, not North, put up a really big, scary fence with guard towers along this river. You would think that barbed wire would be on the North side as well, but I'm thinking that they don't get much business from the South. Anyway, the peace park had a bridge that was occasionally used to transfer prisoners from one side to the other.



Stop two was inside the DMZ. We had to go through a passport check and no cameras were allowed. It turns out that the DMZ is not some barren place with landmines, at least not in this area, though I'm sure it is elsewhere. No, this place is farmland. The area is farmed by North Koreans who got stuck on the South side at the end of the war. There are around 150 families living in the DMZ today. They grow soy beans, rice, and ginseng. There are also US and S. Korea military bases here. The US protects the border and the S. Koreans spend their time here finding and removing landmines. This second stop not only had a pretty cool DMZ sign and a short movie to watch, it also had one of four tunnels that had been discovered in 1975-8. This was tunnel number three. In 1975, a defector told the South Koreans about a secret tunnel that had been dug from the northern DMZ to the southern DMZ. This tunnel was made for the purpose of invasion. It was quickly found and plugged up. In 1976, they found a second tunnel. In 1978, they found this third tunnel and a fourth tunnel. The North claims that they are copper mines, but all four start at equidistant

points along the North border, and all end pointing directly at Seoul. Once found, the South bored big holes to where the North had stopped digging and then put a series of walls across it at the DMZ midpoint. We went 400 meters down at an 11% grade to reach the North Korean tunnel. That tunnel was 300 meters long, six feet wide and anywhere from 4-6 feet tall. We all had hard hats on and we had to "duck walk" the entire length. Good thing we had those hard hats – I kept hitting my head on the shorter ceiling segments and support beams. The stopping wall was unimpressive, but it did its job. It had a hole in it that allowed you to see the next wall, which had a hole in it to see a third wall. Really? I



just duck-walked 300 meters to see this? Technically, we were now in North Korea, so that was cool. Yay, another stick pin on my world map. After that, it was 300 meters of duck-walking followed by 400 meters of an 11% incline. If you have back problems (check) or are overweight (check) or have breathing problems (check), they don't recommend that you go down. I don't either. I was near death by the time I got to the top. Jeff bought me a Pocari Sweat. I was seriously over-exerted. It took me half an hour to cool down.

Stop three was to an observation spot where we could see North Korea. We were at the half way point of the DMZ. We were told about a war of the flags where both sides had built towers and then put their flags on top. Shortly after one side built a taller tower, the other would respond. Eventually, the South let the North win and today, there is a ridiculously tall tower on the North side with a flag on top. The tower sits in what is called "Propaganda Village" because it's a thoroughly modern place, but no one lives there.



Our fourth and final stop was to the train station that is used between the two countries. It was used for a time to send South Korean workers to a manufacturing center within the northern DMZ, but then the North started testing nukes and the South shut down the train line. Both sides hope that someday, this train line will be open again. I bought a piece of the old DMZ barbed wire fence at the souvenir shop here.



The tour company included a completely useless ginseng tour on the way back to Seoul with the goal of parting us from our money, and no doubt, a kickback for them. I didn't

bite. They dropped us off at City Hall and we walked back to the hotel with a stop for a yummy Korean lunch.

About an hour later, we made our way to the Nanta Show. What a fun event! It was like Blue Man Group meets comedian chefs. They were all so fit! I guess you have to be when you are doing all those acrobatics. After the show, we went to McDonalds to have a "Bulgogi Burger." We then wandered around this excellent night market – best I've seen so far.





Day 25, 7/9 – I was not feeling well when I woke up. My stomach was upset and I had no energy. Also, my ears were clogged and my throat and chest hurt. Bronchitis or something bacterial? – I get this sort of thing sometimes when travelling, especially after being in a cave. That tunnel from yesterday had taken a lot out of me.

The first place we went to, the Grevin Museum, was an interactive wax figure place. It was fun, but I was wiped-out already. We walked to the next museum and palace, but they were both closed. Apparently, all “real” museums are closed on Mondays. We decided to go to the Trickeye Museum. It started raining harder. All day today it would be drizzling. Google got us lost and we walked quite a bit. What I wouldn’t give for a paper map right now. When we got to the museum, we almost went to the wrong one because there were two museums in the building. The other one was a museum of sex. The Trickeye Museum was a lot of fun. I managed to make it to the end of the museum, but then I had to rest for a very long time. Barbara and Jeffrey briefly went into an “ice” place, where everything was made of ice, but it was too cold. We walked for a while and made it to the train station but somehow got on the wrong train. We got stranded on a seldom used track. Maybe 45 minutes later, we got on a train and made it back to our hotel. Barb and Jeff went out for food while I stayed in bed. I got takeout food later. It was very good. I was beginning to have a spiky fever so I took an antibiotic. Barb and I watched a couple of movies then went to bed.

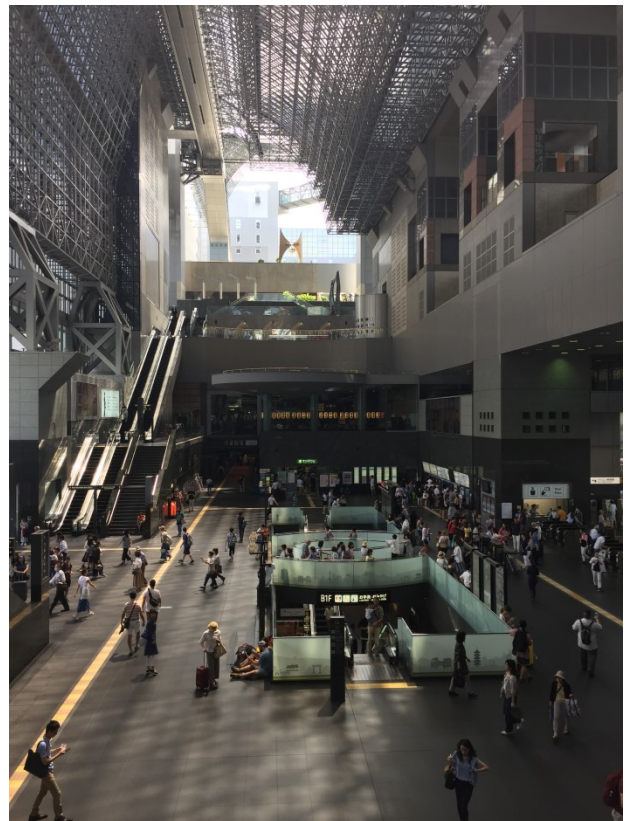




Day 26, 7/10 – We had to change Jeffrey’s flight because a typhoon is over Okinawa right now. He will stay in Seoul for another day. So far, our flight to Osaka is still good. I still had a fever this morning, so I took another antibiotic and stayed in bed in sort of a fevered delirium. Barb and Jeff went to the National Museum. By the time they came back, my fever had broken and I was more or less OK. Yay, it was bacterial and not viral! I was going to be good to go. We said goodbye to Jeff (for the week) and left for the airport.

My backpack was now at 60 pounds because I had integrated by backpack and what was my carry-on bag. We would not be checking bags for this flight. The transfer from the metro to the airport train was confusing and messy, but we made it with three minutes to spare. Somehow, we got double booked with some other guy, so Barb and I sat apart for 45 minutes. Eventually we figured out that our tickets were for a 2PM train, not the 12:10 train we were on, even though I had insisted at the ticket counter that we needed to be on the 12:10 train because we would miss our flight if we were on the 2PM train. Whatever, we got to the airport on time, checked in, got on the flight and then realized that Jeff was right: Peach Airlines might just be the worst airline of all time (OK, that honor would actually go to Aeroflot of the 1990s if we were talking about worst airlines of all time). These guys said “no” to everything. There were so many things we were not allowed to do that it might as well be called No Airlines. Well, despite all the restrictions, we made it to Osaka (even with my “illegal” carry-on. The legal limit was 7KG. Mine was 25KG). We shuttled over to the train depot and then got our Kansai One Pass Card, which, in theory, is supposed to work on most of the trains around here. We also got our airport train ticket, since that was a separate ticket. The wait for these two items was long and like an idiot (remember, still sick), I didn’t take my backpack off so I spent 30 minutes in line, sweating profusely with a 60 pound backpack on my back. Well, we got on the train and made it to Tannoy Station. From there, we began to make our transfer to the metro, realized that Japan hates tourists (no signage or help whatsoever!), and still managed to make it to our home base station despite that (thanks to a pre-loaded Osaka train app). We walked one mile to our hotel. When we got there, it was more rules and schedules from our hotel receptionist. If I didn’t know better, I would think that Japan was still under Militarism. They still act like it. I guess old habits die hard. We got to our room, expecting something similar to what we had in Seoul – small and boxy – and were pleasantly surprised to find that the place was huge! We even had a Jacuzzi in the bathroom, which we used immediately.

Day 27, 7/11 – We had our special \$5 breakfast, which we won’t pay for again (wasn’t worth it) and left in the “free shuttle,” which turned out to be a pre-paid taxi. The taxi got us to our metro stop and 45 minutes later, we were in the Shin-Osaka train station. We got on the JR Rapid to Kyoto and paid for the tickets while on board (JR trains do not work with our One Pass). Both the Shin-Osaka and Kyoto stations were very nice, very confusing, and not at all tourist-friendly. I was sensing that they didn’t want tourists here. C’mon, I’m a seasoned traveler, and I can’t make heads or tails of this place? I can tell you, it’s not my fault. I eventually gave up on trying to learn the Kyoto subway and bus system, so we took a taxi to our first destination. Big mistake – it cost us \$34 for the relatively short ride. The temple itself, the so-called Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku-ji, 14<sup>th</sup> c.), which was actually a guest house, was stunningly beautiful and was in a beautiful lake area. Even though this was an out of the way place, it was packed. It was also getting hot out, so we loaded up on liquids at the first vending machine we found.







We next walked .8 miles to the second temple, which was on a rather large plot of land that included a park with a lake in the middle... The 15<sup>th</sup> Century Ryoan-ji temple we had come to see was at the far side of the lake, of course. Its main claim to fame is in having either the earliest, or one of the earliest Japanese rock gardens. It was strangely beautiful, even though it was just a few big rocks with some carefully raked smaller rocks.

Since it was now past noon and we were hungry, we decided to take a \$25 taxi to the famous food alley of Kyoto. We need not have spent the money. There were a lot of tourists and the food here was very expensive. Most places were closed

As a side note, although I will often rant about how terrible Japan is for tourists, I must admit that they have their act together when it comes to trash, recycling and convenient vending machines. On hot days like this, and really, I've done this throughout the trip so far, it's important to hydrate, but also to keep your electrolytes up. I'll have two to three waters, then a Pocari Sweat... and maybe a coffee. I've been drinking 9-12 bottles of fluids a day. Most places we've been to offer drinks, but good luck finding a trash can or recycling bin. In Japan, you won't find trash cans, but you will often find recycling bins near vending machines, which totally works.



until dinner anyway. We went to a normal "pedestrian" street on the way to our next stop, a palace, and found a sushi bar. Let me tell you – sushi is CHEAP here! We might have sushi every day! After an excellent meal that cost us about \$10, we walked quite a bit to the Grand Palace, which was not as grand as any of the palaces we had seen in Korea. Nice gardens though. About half way through touring this palace, a Swedish family passed us. I thought nothing of this until I heard the father's voice – I knew that voice, but I couldn't place it. Eventually, it came to me. He was Ola Rosling, one of the speakers from a TED talk I show in my classroom every year. I was hesitant to go up to him, but Barbara wasn't; she walked right up to him and said: "Are you on a TED Talk?" Ola said yes, and our two families began a conversation while walking through the rest of the palace. We talked about WWII, economics and populations. I taught him some Japanese history because he wanted to know more about this place, and Japan's interactions with Korea. It also turned out that his family had lived in Menlo Park for three years while Ola worked at Google doing "free apps" including Google Classroom, which I use quite frequently. I told





him that I had been one of the Beta testers for Google Classroom and had sent in some requests that had been implemented. Ola told me that while he was working at Google, he was also putting together the Gapminder program that ran his father's global statistics. He asked me to send any suggestions I had to Gapminder as well, now that he was running it. Alas, his father, Hans, passed away last year. I show four Hans TED talks in my class. Ola's wife wanted to know if I had seen her TED talk on how the world lives. I had not, but promised to check it out when I got back. We parted ways. They were heading to the Bamboo Forest next. We went to the subway and back to the Kyoto station. While there, we went to see if Kyoto Station had lockers so we could store our bags here on our last day before going directly from Kyoto to the airport. We found the lockers, but got hopelessly lost and could not find an exit. We had to go all the way back to the subway location to exit, which was some distance away. Once we got out, we had some excellent gelato and then got on a random train... because we had gotten on the wrong track, and still made it to Shin-Osaka. Sometimes, you just get lucky. Our metro stopped at Tennoji, so we had to wait for the next train to take us to M29, our hotel stop. On our way home, we stopped at 7/11 for drinks (hey, and today is 7/11!). I had drunk 8 drinks today so far, and I had sweated everything out on this 90 degree day. Hey, I won a beer! No kidding! We then found a family restaurant and they gave us so much food that we couldn't finish. The food was cheap too. We hit the Jacuzzi, had a beer, and went to bed.



Day 28, 7/12 – My coffee tastes like seaweed. Is it really coffee at all? Perhaps it has been enhanced for a Japanese palate.

Today would be a “rest day” because we would be on high speed rails for three hours total. First though, we did need to take to 40 minute metro to Shin-Osaka Station. Barb forgot her metro card so we had to buy single journey tickets for her. The big station was a little less confusing today. Kyoto has the confusing station. We easily found the speedy train ticket counter and bought tickets. Hmmm, \$50 more than I had planned, all to get reserved seating, which the ticket guy assured me we’d want. We had some time so we strolled

around and then went to our platform and sat (and sweated) for a while. When the train came in, I could see that the non-reserved section was already standing room only, so that \$50 was well spent. The ride itself was speedy, silent and pretty boring, with sights of the Japanese countryside punctuated by industrial cities and a lot of tunnels. I had a hard time equalizing the pressure in my ears due to lingering (bronchitis? cold?) issues. We didn't have much time in Hiroshima today, only 2.5 hours, so I read up on the train about the fastest way to get to the museum. Taking the tram



was the answer, so we easily found the tram (my train card works on the tram!) and the conductor was super nice and helpful. I already like Hiroshima! After 10 stops, we were at "The Dome," the only building left standing at ground zero. Man, it's hot and muggy today, worse than Thailand. Anyway, we walked to the T-Bridge, the spot that the navigator used to sight and drop the bomb. I was surprised that they kept the T configuration after rebuilding. The sky was as clear today as it must have been on August 6, 1945 at 8:15AM. We strolled through the Peace Park. It was lush and green, peaceful and serene. I could tell that the Japanese had worked hard to make it so. No vendors anywhere, just the occasional thoughtful memorial, paid for by some group of survivors. The main museum was under construction, but the "temporary" one (probably the original one) was just fine. There was a docent there explaining the sizes and types of the bombs and why the bigger bomb inflicted fewer casualties (It wasn't dropped in the center of the city for one thing). He then asked where people came from. Everyone answered except for the Americans. I sure didn't. Barb didn't either. We were embarrassed. We had done this. The docent understood our



response. We walked pretty slowly though the museum, taking it all in. Barb bought a couple of books that I didn't already have from the museum store, then we strolled to the actual ground zero at "The Mound," which was a mass burial site and a clock as well. It was about 400 yards from the target.

We had time for a snack at the station, but not enough for a full meal so we snacked then got on the train. The seaside views were so much better than the inland views we previously had. I took pictures then napped a while. We ate at a seedy looking bar at Shin-Osaka Station. The entire menu was in

Japanese and the staff spoke no English (Hiroshima Station was set up SO much better for tourists!). We tried using Google Translate with hilarious results. The menu kept reading "blood" for most food items so we simply pointed at some pictures when ordering. Our dinner was both light and expensive. I was hungry the rest of the evening.

We got home a little earlier than usual so we did some laundry in the hotel's mini laundromat. Washing went fine, but drying took two hours. All thorough this, I watched the semi-final match between England and Croatia. The Croats played a bit dirty, but they also had the ball most of the time so it was no surprise when they won.



Day 29, 7/13 – Today was our “bum around Osaka” day. We had only two objectives: Osaka Castle and the Dotonbori food and shopping district. Getting to the castle was pretty straightforward. My metro card was almost out of cash and I was almost out of cash, so I brought my Korean Won to exchange for Japanese Yen. It was a real scorcher today. As we approached the castle, Barb started moving slower and slower. The heat and the constant travel were getting to her. She wanted an English speaking tour of this castle and she wanted some sort of a “Shinto or Zen” tour for our upcoming Kyoto day with Jeff. I guess she appreciated those previous tours we had been on and wanted more of the same here in Japan. I told her that there were no tours of value here at the castle, I had already researched this, but I hadn’t looked up anything for a Shinto or Zen sort of tour. That sort of a tour would be really interesting, and would certainly make our last day in Japan far more fun and efficient.



Well Barbara was determined to have a tour today so we spent 45 minutes in the sun doing research and came to the same conclusion that there was nothing of value here. We paid the basic admission and went into the castle. It turned out that the castle had a lot of written information, almost too much. We didn’t really need a tour guide here. I’m pretty sure Barbara read every plaque, but I also know that she’s an auditory learner, so having someone explain things to her is even better for her. I’m a visual learner, so I need pictures and visuals to make connections. I am generally too impatient to read any plaques and spoken words tend to “drift away” quickly from me. From what I understand, dyslexia has more to do with auditory scrambling than visual scrambling, but both get kind of scrambled for me when I get tired.

Well, I liked the castle and I think Barb did too, even without the tour. After a nice walk past several modern buildings, we took the metro to what I had been told was the best sushi place in town. It was too expensive, so we went closer to the Dotonbori District to find cheaper sushi, which we did. After that, we made a quick stop at the Hard Rock Café, which was right around the corner and conveniently at the entrance to Dotonbori. We walked the entire non-stop indoor-outdoor mall that is the Dotonbori District. We walked more than a mile. I did finally exchange my Korean Won for Japanese Yen, but at pretty unfavorable rates (15% loss). We hung out at Starbucks. I watched a truly great bassist, a street musician, play jazz to a drum track. We went into a multi-level arcade. In the basement, we realized that there was an entire underground walkway mall that led to the metro stop. Barb didn’t want to leave (plus it’s cool and out of the heat down here!) so we strolled this underground mall, parked for a while at a smoothie place, and bought “commuter food” to eat tonight at our hotel. I think this is where bento boxes originated. We found a Paris Baguette-like place and bought pizza, curry rolls, eclairs and custards. The train home was no problem at all and dinner that night was one the best we have had. Those pastries were great! Barb said this was a great day.



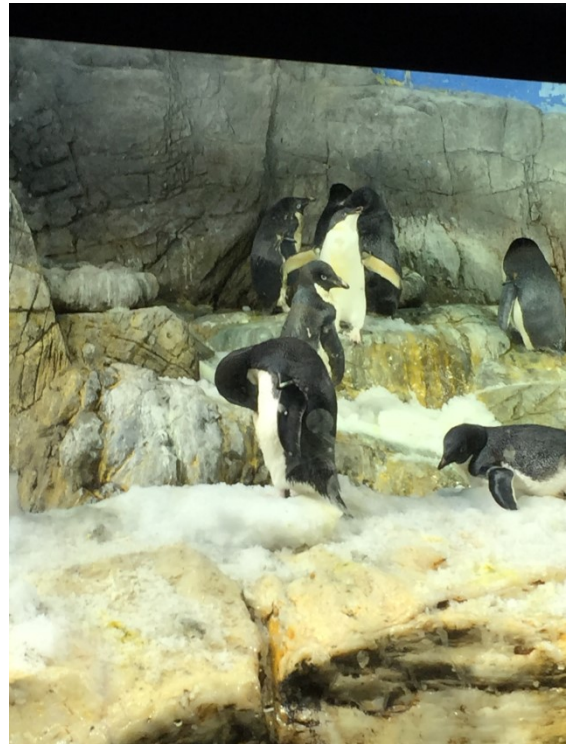


Day 30, 7/14 – What’s up with all the jazz music in Japan? Sure, it’s in elevators, but it’s also in hotel lobbies, the subway system, malls, airports, approaching garbage trucks and restaurants... except for the lunch place we went to today, which had rave music. The thing is, the jazz played everywhere is really good. Could it be that the Japanese appreciate truly great musicianship?

Our “do nothing” day started out with planning our last day in Japan. Barbara found a highly recommended guide at a reasonable price for Kyoto, so we booked him and then mapped out our trains and where our luggage would be stored on that final day. We also did a little planning for tomorrow so we could tell Jeff where to meet us once he flew in (at the Nara train station).

So, on this (yet again) hot and muggy Japanese holiday Saturday, we decided to go to the exceptional aquarium. Certainly no one else would think to go there, a nice entertaining place, out of the heat. Did I mention that it was both a Japanese holiday and a Saturday? OK, the place was beyond packed with children, parents and strollers. The train on the way there was also packed, which should have been our clue. After a long walk from the train station to the waterfront, we first found Legoland. It looked compact, but awesome. I was hoping that most of the families would go there, but alas, no. Everyone wanted the aquarium today. We took our time, mostly shuffling slowly from place to place, but hey, it was air-conditioned. The first half of this aquarium was more like a zoo with some water because there were land animals that took occasional dips in the water, but as we descended, the water became bluer and darker. The aquarium, in what we are discovering is very Japanese, offered several rules and gave us only one path to walk. Nice thing though, at the very start of our journey, the carpet showed 900M to the end of the exhibit. Every couple of hundred meters, the carpet would have another distance point. Sure enough, when we exited the place, the carpet read 0M. We somehow managed to stay in that place for 2.5 hours. After that, we went next door to the shopping and food place between the aquarium and Legoland and managed to find a recently reopened Turkish place. The old place was also Turkish

and the reviews were not stellar. This new place opened up and so far only had one review, a zero for crappy service and a one hour wait to order. I wonder if this reviewer knew about that service button that Jeffrey had shown us, that is standard at all Japanese restaurants. Well, this place was humming with what seemed to be happy customers so we went in anyway. The new place was now “family friendly” (being near Legoland and all, it better be) and it had an enormous beer selection. This was also the place that was pumping out the aforementioned rave music, which I love, by the way. We ordered. I got my beer. Barb got her dish 30 minutes later, and 45 minutes later, I





asked where my plate was, since everyone who had come to lunch at the same time as us was now eating, many with the same dish I had ordered. I got my food shortly after that, ate it, and left. They were, of course, very apologetic, but I cannot recommend the place. The three people working there were literally running to serve everyone. They needed to double their staff on a day like today.

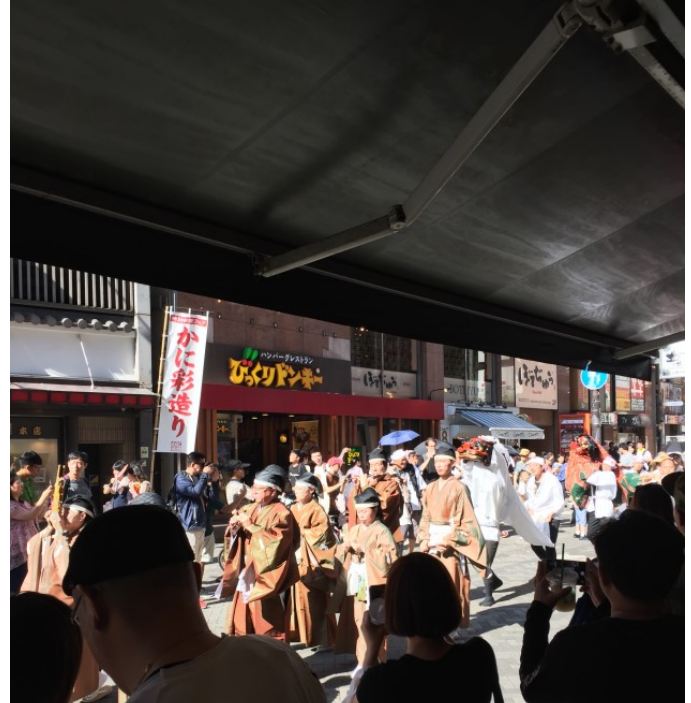
We got a gelato on the way to the subway, then decided to go back to Dotonbori, not because we like to shop that much, but because it had A/C. Unlike yesterday, today it was clogged with kids and parents with strollers. It was also clogged with an organized group of marching kids and adults in kimonos pounding on drums and shouting something like “bus strike!” (I had a lot of fun with this – trying to figure out what they were actually saying. Also, around 10 kids were pulling a cart filled with kids and drums while adults walked along the sides, encouraging them to keep walking forward. It looked, from the outside, that Japan had no child labor laws in place, but I’m sure this holiday was somehow kid-related. The kids seemed to enjoy what they were doing and the parents/adults were keeping them safe in this crowded environment.)

We people-watched from the second floor of Starbucks when we got there, and then toured the Dotonbori Food District, which we didn’t do yesterday. There were so many good food choices here! We had sushi, of course, and then I had a green tea matcha ice cream and Barb had a flan custard ice cream. Both were really good. We headed back after that.

As I write this, I ache all over. We walked 10 miles both yesterday and today on what were supposed to be our two rest days before two grueling walking tours of Nara and Kyoto. I need a rest day from my two rest days!

Day 31, 7/15 – So... my cell phone simply died last night. I had charged it up overnight, but today, it wouldn’t “wake up.” I had recently, like right before this trip, repaired the phone because I had lost audio. I had brought my repair tools just in case I had to crack the phone open again, but now I couldn’t find my repair tools (they’re really small), so we asked Jeffrey to bring his. I think I know what the problem is, but if it isn’t, I’ll try to get it repaired or replaced when we get to Hawaii.

Today is Nara day. Temps would be slightly above 100 degrees today – our hottest day so far. Our first goal of the



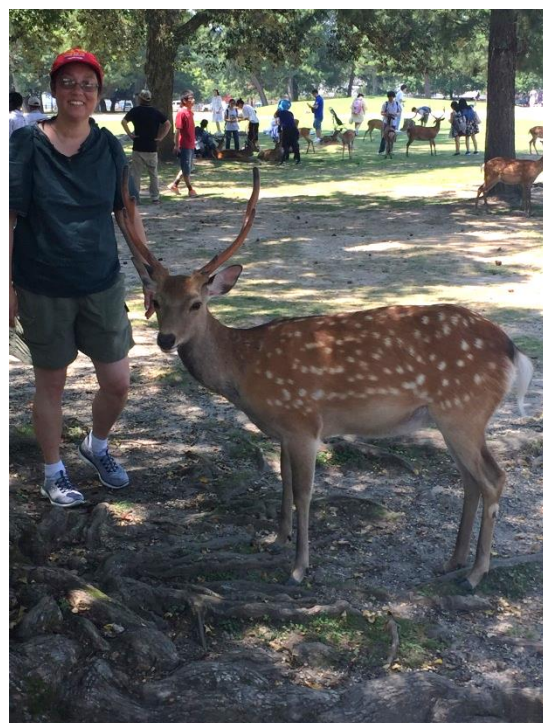




day was to meet up with Jeffrey, who would be coming from the airport directly to the Nara station. We were now used to being in commuter conditions in the metro, but today, the train wasn't quite as crowded, and I didn't see any men on our train. Could it be that men don't work on Sundays? I kept getting stares, which is unusual, because Japanese people stare out the windows, never looking at anyone. All the straps for those standing were pink. I looked at the car next to us, the décor was the usual neutral beige, and there were a lot of men. I looked back at our car: pink and only women. I connected the dots. This was a women only car. That's why I was getting the stares. At the next stop, we moved to the next car. When we got off the train, we saw on the ground a pink oval stating something to the effect: "This car is reserved for women who want to ride in a safe environment, free from the prying eyes and hands of men." It was written in both Japanese and English (one of the few things around here written in English). Hey, I learned something! I was so worried all this time that we wouldn't make it to Nara on time that I wasn't being observant.

Our "fast" train to Nara was maybe not so fast, but it did get us there on time. While on the train, I had a new thought on my cell phone issue – what if my cord had shorted and I had discharged the phone overnight instead? I tested my theory on the train with a different cord and a battery pack. Yup, bad cord. The phone charged just fine.

Jeff's train was running half an hour late, so we scoped-out the place, bought some pastries and then waited across from the entrance in the only place outside the station that seemed to have A/C. Soon enough, Jeffrey arrived. He stowed his bag at a bag check place and then we were off. The plan was to take a taxi 2KM away to the furthest place we would visit, then work our way back to the station, but Jeff wanted to



take us to Coco's Curry House for lunch about half a KM away, so we changed our route plan to one giant circle and headed to Coco's.

The curry was good too! I can see why this is Jeffrey's favorite place to eat in Japan.

Our first tourist stop was to one of the oldest pagodas in Japan, at the Kofuku-ji (630 ce). It was lovely. We saw stuffed deer plush toys in every store. This should have been a clue. I knew that there was a "deer park" near the end of our journey, where deer roam the park, but I didn't know that the deer were roaming free all over the city. The city had made these deer the main attraction and it worked! Even on this 100 degree day, it was wall-to-wall (mostly Chinese) tourists. As we were walking to the "big" temple (Todai-ji, 728 ce), we passed many deer. The temple was big, old, and had many deer about. The second temple was the "beautiful" temple





(Nigatsu-do, 1669 ce), located up a hill, so we hiked up, deer everywhere, and sure enough, this temple was beautiful. After that, we went to the deer park, which had many deer. At the park, there was this bizarre statue with two versions of the same woman, one was mostly naked but had a shirt on, and one was fully disrobed,



holding that same shirt. I didn't understand the context: get naked with deer? No one in the park seemed to be disrobing, so maybe not. Near the edge of the park, we met a guy handing out pamphlets. His English was very good. He was promoting a religion/cult that I had never heard of. We told him that we were pleased with ours. The most deer we saw today were at the entrance to the World Heritage site temple we were on our way to see (Kasuga-taisha Shrine, 768 ce).



We stopped to feed them, since there was a deer food vendor nearby. I really liked the



warning signs that we had seen all over today, stating that the deer can get aggressive. We were also told that if you hold the "deer cookie" in front of you, the deer will bow and then you can feed it to them. Not today: it was so hot out that the deer would look at us and say: "just give me the damn cookie!" Still, these deer were so adorable, and not at all aggressive. Barb and Jeff were having the best time feeding these deer. I took many pictures. One lady made the mistake of putting the deer cookies in her dress pockets. Soon, the deer were practically disrobing her while trying to get the cookies. Maybe that's what the statue was about!



The temple itself was lined with many grave lanterns, many with deer all around them. Some deer were in the ditch, where there was water. A bit more uphill and we found the temple itself, which was gorgeous. Also pretty gorgeous were these three young ladies dressed in kimonos for a photo shoot. They were using the temple as a background. The walk back down was filled with deer. We opted to walk the 2KM back to the train station. This went fine until we ran out of shade. I was getting sort of “puffy” from dehydration and I was at this point sunburned. The ride back to tour hotel was nice and easy. We went to dinner from there to a “drinks and sides” place that was popular in Japan, according to Jeffrey. Most of our orders didn’t come for an hour after ordering until we begged them for food. I was still hungry when we left. We strolled around this suburban area of Osaka then went back to our hotel, showered and packed. Whatever we wear tomorrow, we’ll be wearing for 48 hours.



Day 32, 7/16 – We were really surprised (and happy) that there was no commute on this Monday for some reason. All of us had been dreading this day because we would have all our worldly belongings on our back during a Monday commute... but there was no commute! It must have been a holiday. It would also be another 100 degree day today. We avoided the pink train, and hey, a commuter broke protocol and spoke to me. He was a retired gentleman. He pointed at my belly and exclaimed: “you so fat!” and then laughed hysterically. He then asked me how many Kilos I was. I told him 126. He said: “that’s two of me – it’s like you’re carrying me on your back!” and then he laughed again. Maybe he should just stare out the window like everyone else. Kidding – I found this guy endearing. He had no filter.



We met our guide, Richard, at the terminal and then we stowed our bags for the day at a bag storage place, rather than in the lockers, which were too small for our stuff anyway. Today, we would see several temples and shrines, learn a bit about Buddhism and Shintoism, and eat some really good food. The first thing we learned is that a “temple” is Buddhist. It’s privately run, usually charges admission, and has a Buddha statue as the centerpiece. A “shrine” is Shinto. It is owned by a government agency, it is free, and has “boxes” as its centerpiece. In a shrine, when you pray, you ring a bell, bow twice, clap twice (to wake up the spirit) and then pray. In a temple, you don’t need to ring a bell or clap. Buddha is not a god, just a man, so he is not to be prayed to and doesn’t need to be awakened.

Our first stop was to a 300 year old Samurai home for a tea ceremony. The ceiling in this place was really low so no one could swordfight. Each upstairs room had its own staircase, but the rooms were also interconnected above. This was done so people could hide and move around in case of attack.



The tea ceremony itself was pretty elaborate, with many ceremonial steps. I had been to a tea ceremony before, but Barbara and Jeffrey had not. We got to choose between beautiful looking desserts before the ceremony started. We learned about the steps of the ceremony before going into the tea room and actually performing the ceremony. This was necessary because participants had a role in the ceremony and we had to know our part. We performed the ceremony. After the ceremony, we learned how to properly whisk tea. Apparently, we all did well – we all have awesome whisking skills.

Our first temple was actually a huge temple gate (Nanzen-ji, 1291 ce). It was huge and made entirely out of wood (no nails). This temple was the compound of a Shogun, so it was very defensible. It was also a retreat and retirement villa for one of the early emperors. Only later did it become a temple. On the ground was an aqueduct, built during the Meiji restoration. Before 1850 (before the restoration), the stream on these grounds kept the area in water, but once Kyoto grew, the city needed more water than this stream could supply. The aqueduct still supplies water to the city today. We hiked up a hill to look at a holy waterfall. Zen Monks (monks who only meditate) would get naked and sit under the waterfall for hours and meditate. They would wear white robes going to and from this place. One monk lived in a cave up



here and would like torches in the mornings along the path so monks could find this place. Well, we discovered one monk who had found the spot. He was getting naked when we arrived. He didn't seem to care that we were there. He shouted, which is part of the routine, then got under the waterfall. We went downhill and found a taxi to our next location. The driver took us on the scenic route so we could see more of the city. Even with the ride, it was quite a hike and quite a few stairs to the rather famous shrine (Fushimi Inari-Taisha Shrine, 711 ce) that I had wanted to see (which wasn't on Richard's agenda, but hey, the guy is super flexible). I wanted to go here because it's in all the travel magazines. It has hundreds of tor gates and it's very photogenic. The gates were purchased by different corporations. As these gates were added, they formed passageways up the mountain. We walked a bit of the trail and took many pictures. From there, we went to a





UNESCO Heritage site that was 1300 years old (Kiyomizu-Dera-ji, 778 ce). Parts of this building needed to be rebuilt, but since this was now a Heritage site, the construction workers had to use traditional methods to do the work. It was going to take them a lot longer to use bamboo scaffolding and rope winches. The pagoda on site was a rare three tier one. Most are five. The reason this temple is here is because there is a stream with three waterfalls that gained a reputation for granting three things: health, wealth and wisdom, depending on which one you drank from. The thing is, you can only choose one. Barb went to the falls to choose one. She chose wisdom. I would have too.

As we walked to our next 1300 year old shrine with pagoda, we saw many Japanese, Chinese and even a few white folks dressed in rental kimonos. Apparently, this is the thing to do, but most tourists soon discover that the outfits are hot and the wooden clogs aren't made for walking long distances. Richard told us that real kimonos are made of silk and typically cost \$10K. They are two layers and the women typically do not wear underwear underneath because the big belt doesn't allow you to pull up your underwear once you've gone to the bathroom. After a while, the tourists were easy to spot. The rental kimonos were polyester, the belt was maybe three inches wide, rather than 12 inches wide, and with only one layer, underwear was easy to spot as well, plus, they were complaining about the wooden clogs. We only saw three real kimonos today. Richard's wife owns 20 kimonos; this is typical for a traditional Japanese woman. This means that a typical traditional Japanese woman has \$200K invested in clothing. Richard was also wearing a traditional male kimono today... even though he's an American. He was stationed in Okinawa 20 years ago, fell in love with Japanese culture, and is currently on his third Japanese wife. He lives in a traditional Japanese home and wears traditional Japanese clothing every day. He also converted to Buddhism.







We went to a few more temples today (Yasaka Shrine, 656 ce; Higashi Honganji, 768 ce; A local no-name shrine in the heart of the city), but frankly, they were beginning to all look the same. Most were painted in the same color, red, with a second



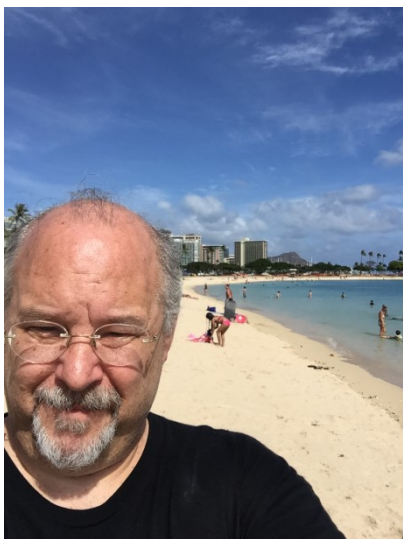
color, vermillion, a red-orange or Chinese red, which are said to be the perfect colors for temples. In each shrine, we were given 5 yen to put in the donation box and we rang the bells and clapped. We prayed to Jesus though...

Finally, after seven miles of walking, it was time for dinner. We had Yakitori and high-end sake. Both were excellent. We tried walking to the main station after that, but there was a celebration going on and they had closed the streets for a parade and for pedestrians, who had now clogged the place. At first, it was fun to weave between people, but we kept losing Barbara and eventually, it just got too congested. Richard found us a staircase that led to the underground metro. That too was packed, but it did get us to the station. We said goodbye to Ricard, who had been a wonderful tour guide, grabbed our bags, and got on our airport train. 1.5 hours later, we were at the airport. Our



transition to the plane was mostly seamless. Barbara got caught with water in her bag... for the fifth time out of seven flights, and she also found the slow line at passport control, so mostly seamless. I did not like the plane ride at all. This was an 8 hour red-eye that left at midnight. I had paid for breakfast with coffee, expecting to see that towards the end of the flight but nope, they served it the first hour of the flight when all we wanted to do was to go to sleep. Some lady that sounded like Popeye talked constantly and loudly for two hours after that, forcing me to don my headphones and listen to music. I may have dozed for 15 minutes before the plane landed at 1PM the day we left.





Day 32, 7/16... again – Yup, the same date because we had passed the International Date Line and we lost a day. We arrived 11 hours before we left. This was turning out to be a very long day and we were all still in our sweaty and now very stinky clothes from yesterday. Security was a breeze, easier than other places we had been, and it was good to be back in America (Oahu). We found an Uber to our hotel for the evening, The Pagoda, and then walked to a Mexican Restaurant. Barb and I walked to the beach then went to the Ala Moana Shopping Center where I found “sports slippers” and three shorts to wear on the Island. When we got to the hotel, we tried watching a movie, but we all fell asleep 15 minutes into it. It was 6:30.

Day 33, 7/17 – We were up at 12:45AM, and then attempted to stay in bed until 6AM.

This was hard to do, and even though this was the best bed we had slept in on this trip so far, my back was a wreck because I had slept 12 hours in it. We had a really big breakfast at a diner. We then went back to our room to pack. I walked a mile (in 19 minutes) to pick up our rental car: a white Mazda 3. Everyone at the Dollar office was very friendly. I drove back and picked up the family after that. The plan was to meet Mindy, my sister. I thought she would be at the Hale Koa a half mile away with the wedding party, but Barbara said that she was in the cabins at Barber’s Point, based on a text she had received. We headed to the cottages 35 minutes away and got just past Pearl City when Mindy texted us and said that they were now in Waikiki, at the Hale Koa. Sigh... We found our cabin but couldn’t check in until 3PM. We went to a mall, found coffee and then lunch. We got groceries and then drove around until it was time to check in. When we got to the office to get the key, we noticed a “no swimming” sign posted on the beach. A shark had been sighted in the area. Our cabin, 1701A, was a lot nicer than when we were here last. Now we had reliable A/C and at least the promise of Wi-Fi. We went to dinner at Cocos Curry House, got coffee and a rental movie. We met Mindy and her friends and then we watched the movie.



Day 34, 7/18 – Yay, I got the Wi-Fi to work. At 8:30, we went to the Flea Market at Aloha Stadium. I got three Hawaiian shirts. Jeff and I made a complete loop around the place before the rest of our party had gotten past 10 stores. They are shoppers with kids – we weren’t. We had checked out all the ukuleles along the way. The ukuleles went from garbage to excellent, but I wasn’t in the mood to buy one here (for Courtney, who had stolen my last ukulele that I had bought here). We completed loop two with the group. It began to rain, which was OK because Jeffrey had to be back by noon because he had a conference call to attend. His call turned out to be not as important as he was led to believe. He said it could have been an email. Soon after, we had lunch and then played cards for a while. In the afternoon, we went to Turtle Bay up on the North Shore. It was overcast and almost rainy when we arrived. I was pleased that it wouldn’t be so hot. Barb and Jeff went snorkeling and wound up too far out and on the wrong side of a “danger” marker. They wound up in a rip tide and the folks who serve



drinks there and keep the beach clean (not the police or lifeguards) had to rescue them. Barb was all cut up on the coral and she was simply exhausted from fighting the current. Jeff was fine. He helped swim mom back to safety. It was during this swim that Barbara had discovered something: Jeffrey had a tattoo on his shoulder. It was a map of California with a 13 in the middle of it. The story goes that back in North Carolina, a large group had gone to a tattoo parlor for a \$13 special on any pre-selected tattoo, but the catch was that a 13 would also be put on the tattoo, hence California 13. I told him that it could be for Prop 13, the Jarvis Initiative. We drove back at dinnertime and had Pho (Vietnamese Soup) when we arrived. My ankles were still super swollen from the flea market. I guess any walking at this point will cause swelling. After 30 days of constant walking, the swelling wasn't going down afterwards. I really need to rest, stay out of the sun and lower my salt intake – all the things that, in theory (and according to WebMD), would reduce my swelling.

Day 35, 7/19 – Wow, I guess everyone was tired from yesterday. I was the first one up, initially at 6, but I went back to bed until 8 and I was still the first one up. Jeff got out of bed at 9:30 and Barb at 10. The plan of the day was parasailing in the morning and a Luau in the evening, and hopefully something in the middle, perhaps shopping at Hickam AFB. Well, the parasailing went well. Eleven in our group went. Barb and the “four husbands” stayed on the beach under a tree and watched from a distance. A bird pooped on me three times. Initially, I read my book, but there were a lot of surfers to watch. One guy caught a dozen fish by spearfishing right on the beach. There were surfing lessons going on right near us as well. It was entertaining. The teachers were so smooth in their movements, the students were less smooth. Eventually, the boating party returned from their parasailing experience. They all had a great time. After that, we moved our group to the Hale Koa, a gorgeous, military-owned hotel near Fort Derussy. I had been here as a kid, but I



only vaguely remember it. I do remember the Hilton next door, the one with the big rainbow on the side, but mostly because it had penguins. Well, those penguins got moved to Baltimore. We had lunch there, and then moved over to the “Barefoot Bar,” a bar that had opened only a week ago. We hung out there until the Luau was almost ready. We got on our Hawaiian outfits and

checked into the Luau. Inside, they offered lessons like ukulele playing, basket weaving and basic hula moves. We were given a grass mat to lounge on as we watched a duo play. They were very good. I noticed that as I had moved from location to location within the Hale Koa, the Mai-Tais got weaker and weaker... and better. It turns out that the best Mai-Tai is the one with the least rum in it. The Luau drink, handed out upon entry, was the clear Mai-Tai winner of the day. I needed these Mai-Tais too because my back was acting up and I didn't have Motrin with me. The







dinner was excellent. I knew I would be getting pork, because they showed us the pig being pulled from the pit shortly before we sat our tables, but we also got chicken and fish. All were good. The evening entertainment was outstanding as well. The emcee was a guy who was a one hit wonder back in the late 70s with "Never going to give you up" (NOT the Rick Astley song), which, of course, he sang during the course of the evening. I recognized it as a 45 I had bought so long ago. I bet he hates singing that song every day. Well, during this evening of singing and dancing and fire, I

got absolutely hit with a cold. The symptoms came on me fast. Suddenly, I was clogged-up and super tired. I thought, initially, that it might be allergies, but I also had throat and nose issues that were definitely cold-related.

I could not believe that there was a traffic jam at 9:30PM on the way home. I guess some



evening road construction had something to do with it. It took an hour to get back home. When I got home, I immediately went to bed. I was clogged all night with a runny nose and no Kleenex in this place. I kept a roll of toilet paper near my bed.





Shopping Center. We found the card too quickly; we couldn't even park for the wedding until 2:30, so we got coffee. When we did arrive, a free parking spot was waiting for us. Speaking of waiting, I think the wedding started 25 minutes late. The wedding itself was brief. Chelsey looked beautiful in a wedding dress that really worked on her. Wesley was nervous. There were many pictures afterwards. Chelsey & Wesley had employed three camera men and two videographers. They had a drone. The reception was top-notch. The food was outstanding. The games and activities were hilarious. Alas, I was getting sicker and sicker, so when the dancing started at 9PM, my family bowed out and made the trek home. What a nice wedding!

Day 36, 7/20 – Wedding Day! I got out of bed early in hopes that this would solve any lingering back issues I might have and so I could get to both medicines and a shower which might lessen the symptoms of this cold. Mindy dropped by at 8:30, offering a big breakfast and coffee. She also asked if I could do the dinner prayer tonight. Usually, I'd be thrilled, but I was really foggy right now, so the prayer duties went to the other Brian in our party, who was equally thrilled to do it.

We didn't really do much the first half of the day. I was sick, so I read. Jeff looked bored. Barb found things to do. We made teriyaki chicken and rice for lunch. After lunch, we drove (for an hour again – road construction!) to the Hale Koa. Jeff and I were tasked with getting a wedding card so we dropped Mike and Barb off at the hotel and we went to a grocery store at the edge of the Ala Moana



Day 37, 7/21 – I felt much better after a full night's rest and suggested that we might go to the NEX (the Navy Exchange) at Hickam. We went and had a pretty good time. We got needed supplies, like Sudafed and Kleenex, but also got other things like some Hawaiian souvenirs. I bought four Hawaiian shirts that had patterns only available on military bases. Also, they actually fit me, unlike the so-called 2X shirts at the Flea Market that were really 1X. We had lunch in the food court, went grocery shopping, got gas then headed back. There was a bit of time before the big group BBQ (though





people had begun to show up) so we all went to the beach to body surf. Maybe I'm tired from this cold (because I am), but man, that undertow was vicious! I was being pulled all over the place and the waves were crashing close to the beach today, so any body surfing was a brief event. We would catch a wave, travel maybe 10 feet, and then hit the sand. I was exhausted but happy after doing that for about an hour. All of us showered the sand off as much as possible and changed for the BBQ. Barb made mango sticky rice for the event. I made a giant vat of Gin and Tonic. I also cooked at the event, barbecuing an array of sausages, hot dogs and burgers. We played a lot of card games (13, Kems) and some folks played corn hole. There was so much alcohol at this event that I wound up with a lot of left over Gin and Tonic. I guess I know what I'll be drinking until I leave, hopefully with a lot of community help. Jeff and Barb are non-drinkers.

Day 38, 7/22 – Sunday started with church on the green side of the island with the Ford family. It was a good service and the Assyrian pastor spoke boldly about children obeying their parents, which was the text for today. He

also had a “prophesy” session, where he talked about the recent Trump-Putin meeting and what it was really about (Syria, Iran and trade) versus what the media was telling us (collusion with Russia). I had come to the same conclusion about this meeting. By the way, did you know that this pastor can only talk about such things from the pulpit now because Trump recently rescinded the Johnson Amendment of 1954, which disallowed pastors from “preaching politics?” It's true! Anyway, he then went on to explain that Iran had gained a foothold in Syria, getting them closer to Israel. In Ezekiel 38, the nations of Jordan, Lebanon, Iran, Russia, Turkey and Ethiopia are mentioned as attacking Israel... as a sign of the end-times, according to the pastor. Notably missing from the list were Syria and America. He thinks Syria is going down, soon, and that a divided U.S. will also soon fall. Israel will be attacked, soon, ushering in the rapture and a seven year tribulation. OK, I thought, He is definitely in the Dispensationalist Premillennialism camp (a very narrow Christian belief that became a thing around 1900; only 1% of Christians believe this). Still, everything he said was well-studied and convincing. I





hope Israel will still be around for my trip in 2020... or that I will be raptured if it is not.

When we got back, the rest of the day was pretty chill. We went swimming on the west side of the island, or more correctly, Jeff and Barb did. I watched stuff while they went snorkeling. The plan was for them to return at some point, and if I felt up to it, I too would go snorkeling. And again, they went too far out, but not as far out as another couple who were genuinely being dragged out to sea. They got Fire, Ambulance, Police and Coast Guard (with choppers!) involved in their rescue. There was also a shark sighting. It was all so exciting, and for the longest time, I thought all these emergency services had been called for my two. Barb and Jeff got back to shore so they wouldn't be confused with the other two. With sharks in the water, I opted not to swim. The evening was spent watching Dead Pool and playing cards.

Day 39, 7/23 – Barb, Jeff and most of the Ford family left early for an around the island tour. I was feeling better, but I had seen everything on the tour (Barb and Jeff had too) and I had no interest in seeing it all again. There were things on this island that I had not seen yet – things of historical significance – so I went to go see them today instead. For me, today was Pearl Harbor Day. When I got to the visitor's center at 9:30, it was already full of people. The first three parking lots were full. Fortunately, I found a spot in the shade, but it was far from the center, which was a problem because this place doesn't allow backpacks and I had brought mine to the center, so I had to make a second round trip to the car to drop off my backpack. I bought the "see everything" pass and got on the bus for my first stop: The USS Missouri. I was surprised by how much teak was on the deck. I expected the deck to be all metal. Since it was a very hot, high humidity sort of day, I grabbed water and stayed in the shade as much as possible. I toured the deck first, and then spent a lot of time below decks because it was both interesting and air-conditioned. After I got off the boat, I had a







burger at a truck not far from the (currently closed) Arizona Memorial. I saw the USS Oklahoma memorial then got on the bus for stop 2: The Air Museum. The life-size dioramas were nice, but the museum was small. Maybe 8 planes were there. I almost didn't go to the hanger some distance away, but I'm glad I did; this is where most of the planes were! I toured the place, looked at the helicopters just outside, and then went



back to the air conditioning of the museum. I bought a shirt (Fighting Tigers with the Chinese Nationalist symbol on it). As I waited for the bus, I took pictures of the very famous Ford Island conning tower, immediately across from the museum. After taking the bus back off Ford Island, I saw the Bowfin Submarine. I had now seen everything in four hours and I was told that it would take six. I didn't read a lot of plaques though, and I quickly got bored of the audio tour (remember, dyslexic visual person), so maybe that's why I finished so quickly.





On the way home, I made a side trip to the grocery store to get a few supplies, and then watched TV in the cabin while waiting for the family to return. Eventually, they did. Jeff said they could have saved the tour money and simply made the trip on their own (which is what we had done as a family back in 2007; he just didn't remember). I think the tour was more so Barb could hang out with the Ford family. We ate all the leftovers in the fridge then spent the evening in Mike & Mindy's cabin, since many of the people in their cabin would be leaving tonight or tomorrow before us. We talked a little about Thailand, since Mindy and Leilani will be going there next month.

It really drove me crazy that Ashley was on her cell phone the entire time. We had not really seen her the entire trip and now she was essentially ignoring us. I wanted to slap that phone out of her hand. Chelsey was doing the same thing yesterday (more understandable, since she was doing wedding stuff). The way I see it, we were the ones who flew (at great expense) to Hawaii to see them. We were all here now. They can talk to their friends when they get home. Cell phones have made young people rude (and boy, do I sound like an old person right now!).

Day 40, 7/24 – We actually got packed ahead of time! We said goodbye to Mike and the Fords and we were off. We got gas to avoid additional charges. Since we had abundant time, we drove to the "Hawaii 5-0" base of operations, which is actually a civic building with King Kamehameha in front. Next stop was to the Hard Rock Honolulu. I think this is Hard Rock #41 for me. I bought a shirt. We used the bathrooms. We headed to the Dollar Rental place. Those Dollar folks are so nice! So was our Uber driver to the airport. Tammy texted me about flights to Thailand while we were on our way to the airport. She too will be flying to Thailand and will meet up with Mindy (she's asking about tickets now? She should have had this booked four months ago!). Anyway, both she and Mindy will be meeting their birth families while there (separate families in very different parts of Thailand). I am thrilled for them both.

Honolulu International is VERY hard to navigate. Fortunately, the people there are nice and often helpful. We got to the gate after saying goodbye to Jeff who was flying back to Okinawa on JAL. We had lunch at the terminal. An announcement went up that our plane was pre-boarding, so we moved towards the gate... and couldn't find it. Oh, that's because we were in the wrong terminal. Wouldn't you know it; our plane was at the very last gate of the furthest terminal a mile away. We somehow made it to the gate in 20 minutes, even with carry-on luggage. We were just about the last ones on board. Yay for assigned seating! Our seats were great on this very new and roomy Hawaiian Airlines A330. The service on this 4.5 hour flight was not so great, and the movies were not free. Still, we made it home OK. There was a beautiful sunset as we were landing. We got our bags, and Courtney found us without any trouble. It felt weird, but good to be home. Asia already seems like a distant memory.

