



Japan



April 4-14, 2026

Saturday, April 4 – We began our Abercrombie & Kent’s (A&K) tour, called “**Classic Japan**”, with a shuttle ride from the Hilton Garden Inn at 04:00 to **PWM**.

Our United Airlines flight departs at 06:00, arriving at **EWR**, where we will wait in the Polaris Lounge for about three or four hours.

Then we will fly to **NRT**, arriving at 14:30 on April 5.



Sunday, April 5 - So, at this point of the trip, we have spent about twenty-one hours traveling, with more to come. Next was waiting in line to get through Customs and Immigration, which took about another hour. Fortunately, We had prepared for the encounter with something like a visa in the form of a QR code, which made it much easier.

We went into the arrival hall where we met a representative from A&K. She escorted us to a waiting van, where we were driven to the **Four Seasons Otemachi** hotel in **Tokyo**. We made it to our room (3401) on the thirty-fourth floor, then quickly went to the **Virtu** bar, on the thirty-ninth floor,

QR Code for Immigration clearance and Customs declaration



QR Code for Customs

for drinks and a light meal. Afterwards, we were ready to return to the room for a good night's sleep.

Monday, April 6 – Today would have been the actual first day of our tour; however, we planned to arrive yesterday since we wanted to be able to explore on our own. So, after ordering breakfast in the room, we decided to



see the **Sensō-ji Temple** in the **Asakusa** district of Tokyo. We arrived at the gate, just before the long, narrow **Nakamise** shopping street, between the gate and the temple. Sue wanted to see the **O-mikuji** area, where people



supposedly have their fortunes told. I saw this on the Tokyo episode of



Eugene Levy's "Reluctant Traveler" TV show (I watched it on the flight over). There were many Japanese people



playing this "game" and it was interesting to see many wearing traditional Japanese dress. After roaming around the street, looking at the food and wares being sold and visiting the temple, we began looking for a place to have lunch and found a small eatery called **Funachu**. After a nice lunch, we went back to the hotel where we met Izumi, our guide for the trip. She was there to meet



Izumi

us and the other sixteen people in our traveler group, offering a synopsis of what the next few days will involve and asked about any specific requirements such as dietary or



This is a picture of the Pagoda of the Asakusa Shrine that we saw on our way to the Senjō-si Temple.

mobility issues. Some of the other participants did not wish to eat raw fish, for example. Anyway, we were still rather tired from all of the previous day's traveling, so we went back to the room, had a short nap, and went back to Virtu again for a light dinner.

Tuesday, April 7 – We had our first breakfast at **Pignetto**, the hotel restaurant. They offered a buffet, a Western style breakfast menu, and a Japanese style breakfast menu. After breakfast, Izumi hosted a more detailed orientation meeting, with an itinerary explaining what we would be doing in Tokyo (more on that later), then traveling from Tokyo to **Hakone** in a couple of days, a mountainous spa town near **Mount Fuji**. Next, she explained how we would be traveling for the remainder of our trip, which I'll cover in the next day's descriptions.

After the meeting, we were taken by bus to Asakusa again, this time we were invited to attend an interesting **Shinto** ceremony at the **Hie Shrine**. We were required to take off our shoes to enter the shrine. Then we watched the Shinto ceremony by the priest and his helper and also participated in drinking tea. When the ceremony ended, we put on our



shoes and walked down a narrow, steep stairway to the street where we boarded our bus to be taken to the **Tsukiji** outer market. When we arrived, we began walking through the crowded streets and seeing all kinds of food such as



produce, etc., as well as cooking utensils and knives, just an abundance of



things. Then we went to **Shunju Tsugihagi Hibiya** for a special **bento** lunch. Next, we went to **Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten**, a

souvenir and drum shop, where we were entertained with a drum solo by a twenty-two year old young woman who



began learning to play at five years old. We also got to play the drums ourselves, which was very difficult. I had worn a raincoat since it was a cool day and possibly could rain. I had to take it off because the drum pounding made me extremely hot. Then I had to leave the store in order to cool down outside. A few of the people in our group bought souvenirs so I was able to do some people watching outside of the store. We finally left to go back to the Sensō-ji Temple. Since Sue and I had already visited there, we roamed around the Nakamise shopping street to see what we had missed yesterday. There were many food vendors with some interesting concoctions: e. g., bananas dipped in various things like chocolate, fruit dips, etc. I was intrigued by the two Buddha statues. Between them was the sign below:



We were taken back to the hotel, this time by vans instead of the bus because the bus could not park

nearby.

When we returned, we began to prepare for the Welcome dinner at Pignetto. We were seated with Saul and Susan from Rhode Island. They were familiar with Brunswick and we had a wonderful evening dinner talking with them.

Wednesday, April 8 – we met Izumi in the lobby of the hotel, then boarded the bus to the **Tokyo National Museum**. It's the oldest and largest national museum in Japan and consists of several art galleries. We were only able to tour the **Honkan** (Japanese)



gallery. Although it has only two levels, it is large and has an impressive collection of arts and crafts. So, we boarded the bus and returned to Tsukiji outer market where we walked to our next adventure, making **sushi** for our lunch. We went into a small building and walked upstairs to a tiny restaurant. We each took a place which had been set for us at one of the tables. The presenter and the chef were in a platform above us that had a



stove and preparation space, as well as a mirror over the stove so that we could watch the chef cooking. They began by preparing the rice for sushi. It usually requires short grain rice that has been well rinsed before cooking, then after cooking, mixed with vinegared rice, salt, sugar, **kombu** (powdered), and cooled and mixed for service. Each table was given a large bowl of sushi rice and a plate of various raw fish and vegetables. We began by making a sushi roll with the fish, vegetables, rice, and sheets nori of for rolling. Rice is spread evenly over the nori sheet (lying on the rolling mat) leaving about an inch strip uncovered. Fill with fish and/or vegetables parallel to the uncovered nori strip and, using the rolling mat, roll the rice around the filling toward the strip into a cylinder, making sure that no rice is coming out at the seam. Cut the cylinder into six round sushi rolls and serve with soy sauce and **wasabi**. We also made a more traditional nigiri sushi with a narrow strip of nori topped with a bit wasabi, rice, and a slice of fish (usually raw) or other topping.



This was Sue's version, looking very professional.

After everyone finished eating their sushi, Izumi helped everyone with information about their next destination. Each of us was given three options for this activity: visiting the National Art Center (no takers), Samurai Experience (a few), or Sake tasting (Sue and I, joined by Izumi). Most people also wanted to shop and explore, some wanted to shop after the Samurai Experience. Everyone was responsible for dining on their own. The **Wasake Sake Experience** was fascinating. It was in a small bar-like space in the back and sake dispensers on one side and a table in the middle of the space. The owner was a sake sommelier with twenty years of experience. He explained the sake making process, beginning with the rice used for starting the fermentation process. We were given a total of

fourteen different sakes during the session. Fortunately, Izumi procured a cab for our trip back to the hotel. We ordered a pizza for dinner in our room and went to sleep early to be able to prepare for our trip to Hakone tomorrow.

Thursday, April 9 – After breakfast we met in the lobby and boarded the bus for our trip to Hakone. After about an hour, we stopped for a short break, then proceeded on to the **Mt. Komagatake Ropeway** in Hakone. It was very windy and we barely made it onto one of the last gondolas before it was shut down. When we made it to the top, we were surrounded by the smell of sulphur. It came from underground due to the volcanic activity in the area (near Mount Fuji). We were able to return without incident and took the **funicular** down the hill to the third stop where we walked to the restaurant (**Itoh Dining by Nobu**) for lunch. After lunch we took the funicular back up the hill to the Ropeway station where our bus was parked. Next, we visited the **Hakone Open-Air Museum** on our way to the **Gora Kadan (ryokan)**.



Mount Fuji



Garden of Stars

The museum is Japan's first open-air museum offering five galleries on the seventeen and one-half acre property with over one thousand sculptures. We wandered from the main gallery entrance, down the paths to the Garden of Stars, a star-shaped maze



Woods of Net



Symphonic Sculpture

comprised of different geometric shapes at various angles. Next, we encountered the Woods of Net, which was designed for children to climb inside a piece of art, bounce, and climb on balls. The Picasso Pavillion focused on Pablo Picasso's ceramics, added to works like paintings, sculptures, tapestries, and other objects. I most admired the Symphonic Sculpture gallery, which was an eighteen meter stained glass tower with a spiral staircase that could be climbed to see a panoramic view of the museum and the mountains around Hakone. After a long walk back to the main gallery, we boarded the bus to continue on to the

ryokan. When we arrived, we were escorted to our rooms and Sue and I dressed in the kimonos that were provided and headed for the mineral baths. There were two baths, one for men and one for women. It was very relaxing and afterward, on the way back to our room, we saw John and Kathy (from our tour group) in the bar. So, we stopped in for a drink before dinner.



Our dinner was served in a dining room with a long table and (fortunately not on a tatami table) with Western style chairs. I'm displaying the menu here because it's easier than writing about the courses that we were served. As you can see, it was lots of dishes and all of them were delicious. We had a wonderful time then went back to our rooms where we would sleep on the floor on mats.



"Classic Japan" tour group

DINNER MENU

Amuse

Steamed glutinous rice with clams, bracken fern, grated ginger, *dashi* sauce

Appetizer

Burdock root wrapped in conger eel, egg omelet, mugwort wheat gluten with creamy sesame sauce, mustard-stuffed lotus root, deep-fried *ayu* sweet fish with a squeeze of *sudachi* citrus, king crab *sushi*, cockle and green onion with vinegar *miso*, simmered firefly squid and canola flower with *sansho* pepper, white asparagus and abalone with *dashi* jelly and *sansho* leaf on the top

Soup

White *miso* soup with *sakura* shrimp dumpling, butterbur, bamboo shoot, *karashi* Japanese mustard

Sashimi

Catch of the day from nearby waters

Grilled dish

Grilled red rockfish, fava bean, stick ginger

Simmered dish

Simmered spiny lobster and spring *daikon* radish with kudzu starch, chrysanthemum, yuzu citrus

Small dish

Wagyu beef loin fillet grilled with kudzu powder, spring onion, fatsia sprouts, mushrooms, horse radish, fresh pepper

Rice dish

Spring sea bream mixed rice with *myoga* ginger, red *miso* soup, assorted pickles

Dessert

Strawberry bavaois, seasonal gelato

April 2026

Gora Kadan

Executive chef Keiji Takase

Keiji Takase

Friday, April 10 – We were served a Japanese breakfast in our room at the ryokan. It was quite a spread, as you can see. There was a grilled fish, vegetable, rice, pickles, miso soup, tea, and coffee for Sue. The ryokan also offered a Western breakfast (eggs, bacon, toast, etc.) but we were probably the only ones who had the Japanese breakfast. It really made it a true Japanese experience.

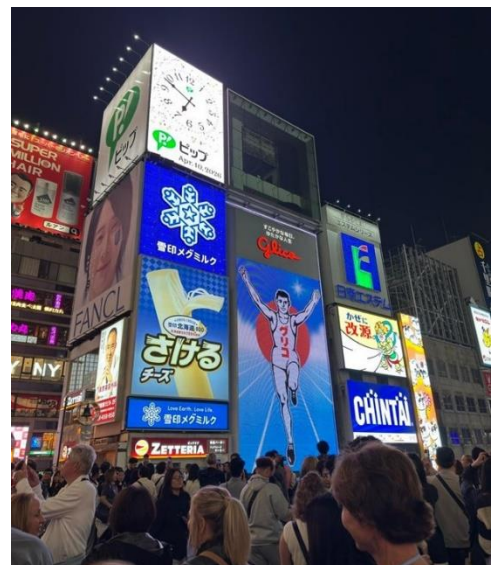


After breakfast, we got dressed in our regular clothes, packed up, and met the group in the lobby boarding the bus to the **Okada Museum of Art**. Although the museum was closed, we were given special passes to tour it. A Japanese billionaire owns the museum once owned an iconic woodblock



print of **Great Wave Off Kanagawa**, which he sold to satisfy a legal judgement against the museum.

After a short visit, we needed to board the bus to transfer to the **Odawara Station** where we would take the **Shinkansen** (bullet train) to **Osaka**. As we waited on the platform for our train, another train passed through the station at full speed and it shocked us all. It was probably traveling about two hundred MPH. Anyway, we boarded our train when it arrived and found our seats. The train was clean and comfortable, unlike many of the trains I've used in the United States, and we quickly arrived at the **Shin-Ōsaka Station**. We took another bus to the **Four Seasons Osaka** hotel, checked into our rooms to rest before going to the **Dōtonbori district** this evening. We had to take vans here because the bus would have been too difficult to





maneuver in the traffic. We crossed the Dōtonbori bridge to see this incredible place. It reminded me of Times Square in New York, with the crowd of people and the lights. Izumi began leading us into the streets, stopping occasionally to provide some of the street food that we encountered along the way. We even went into a small eatery and had beers with a selection of mostly fried foods. Essentially, we were having dinner as we made our way through the crowds. At one point, we detoured into an area where there was a temple. It seemed out of place in all the chaos surrounding it, but it was



seriously a temple, as this

sign explained. John's wife, Kathy, realized that John was not in sight of the group. So, we waited for a while until a few people found him. We were all concerned and glad John was back with us. We continued on, eating, shopping, and taking pictures, until finally making our way back to the vans to take us back to the hotel.



Saturday, April 11 – Today's excursion is to begin with a trip to **Nara** to visit **Kehaya-za**, which is a **sumo** museum, for a demonstration of sumo wrestling, followed by lunch at **Shisui**. After lunch, there will be a visit to the **Tōdai-ji** Temple, then **Nara Park** where there are wild **sika** deer roaming amongst the people. Sue wanted to go, so she boarded the bus and left. I decided to forego the bus ride and the events in Nara to explore Osaka instead. You know, releasing my inner **flâneur**. I began roaming the streets in the neighborhood. I was also looking for somewhere to get lunch

later. Many of the eateries I passed were advertising the Wagyu beef. There was even an English pub like that. Others were coffee shops, bakeries, etc. So far, nothing is tempting me and I eventually passed a place that had a line of presumably local Japanese people. This intrigued me until I saw the menu. It didn't seem much different than others and, since this place didn't open for about thirty minutes, I decided to continue on. Eventually, I ordered lunch in the hotel's French restaurant **Jardin**, which was an excellent decision. I was seated in a side table with a relaxing view of the hotel gardens. I ordered the Fettuccine Porcini which consisted of a duck rillette amuse bouche, green salad, fettuccine with wild porcini mushrooms and Parmesan fondue, accompanied by a glass of red **Côtes du Rhône**. I went back to the room but, although I was feeling relaxed, I found an attraction instead. There was an art museum on the **Nakanoshima** island between the Dōjima and Tosahari rivers that seemed nearby. Somehow, I was directionally challenged and got lost. It took quite a bit of walking, but I finally found my way back to the hotel and prepared for the dinner at Jardin tonight.

When Sue returned from Nara, she told me about her trip. They saw a sumo demonstration match at Kehaya-za museum, followed by a nice lunch at Shisui. Sue was impressed by Tōdai-ji temple and the large Buddha statue there. The thing I missed seeing were the deer in Nara park.



Fortunately, Sue has some good pictures. The sign on the right is a warning that the deer, particularly bucks, may bite, kick, butt, or knock one down. The left shows Sue and Izumi feeding them that are provided for the deer to eat.



To continue with the story, at the end of the day we went to

Bar Bota for a Sundowner Cocktail at the thirty-seventh floor of the hotel. It was a relaxing way to get together and recap the day before tomorrow's trip to **Kyoto**. Afterwards, we went to Jardin for a Western set dinner that was fit for royalty. Lots of food! We all had a wonderful time.

Sunday, April 12 – We departed by bus for Kyoto and the **Togetsu-kyo** bridge, which would be the meeting point when we return after visiting the garden of **Tenryū-ji** and the **Sagano Bamboo Forest**. We walked to the garden, which had a beautiful koi pond, and was the entrance to the bamboo forest. There were several trails in the forest and when we began climbing an increasingly more inclined trail, we went the other way instead. This eventually led to the street where we would walk back to our meeting spot by the bridge.



So, we casually walked back along the street, occasionally going into shops or looking at the plastic food that advertised what they offered to eat. We didn't find any of the plastic food that was for sale. When we got back to our meeting spot, we walked with Izumi to the **Suiran Hotel** where we would have lunch in their lovely dining room. We had a lunch. Sue and I both chose the rice bowl from the menu, and it was delicious. After lunch, we walked back to our bus, which took us to the

Kinkaku-ji temple. It's beautiful with a golden color reflected on the pond. After shopping at the gift shop, we boarded the bus to take us to the **Ryōan-ji** temple. We walked up a hill from the parking lot, past a peaceful lake before entering the temple. We took off our shoes, as required, and went in to see the carefully manicured **Zen** garden, as well as Kyoyochi Pond, which is a water garden, and a tea garden and teahouse.



We walked back to the bus and were transferred to **The Mitsui Kyoto** hotel, where we'll spend the next two nights. It's a luxurious hotel that is reminiscent of a ryokan, but with Western furniture. However, we were not interested in having dinner there. The concierge recommended a local Japanese sushi restaurant named

Yamani Sushi, which she called and made a reservation for us this evening. She also made arrangements to have a cab take us there. It was a cute little corner restaurant with a sushi bar and a few tables. When we sat down on the corner of the bar, a couple sitting next to us were smiling and laughing. I asked why they were laughing and the young woman sitting next to me spoke to me in English and explained that they were surprised that we would come into this local sushi restaurant, especially to eat raw fish. They were very pleasant and we had an enjoyable conversation after ordering several sushi dishes. The food was being prepared by the chef, neatly cutting and preparing the fish as we watched.



After that wonderful experience, probably the best evening we've had in Japan, although this has been a great trip, we took the cab that the restaurant hostess ordered for us back to the hotel. We decided to have a nightcap to celebrate our dinner experience by going to the **Garden Bar** at the hotel.

Monday, April 13 – Today we're touring the **Kiyomizu** temple, which was at the top of a hill and required walking up many steps. However, the view of Kyoto from the top was gorgeous. When we came down, I was also given the opportunity to buy socks, since I had not worn any of my own because I forgot that we had to take off our shoes at the next temple we were going to visit. Our bus took us to the **Ryōzen Kannon** temple, where we were invited to a **Tea Ceremony**.



It was presented in a separate room after a Zen meditation session in the temple. Sue volunteered to make tea after the host demonstrated the procedure. Of course, I was the guest to whom the tea was served, so I was part of the ritual. I was glad that I had bought some socks.

Afterwards, we returned to the hotel to prepare for the Farewell dinner at **Funatsuru**. We enjoyed a five-course meal and a **Geisha** performance by Maiko and Geiko. They both did ritual performance dances, both of which were beautiful and fascinating. Their kimonos, traditional

Menu

Poached Hokkaido scallops and seasonal vegetable mousse
Seasonal potage served with cappuccino
Simmered golden-eyed snapper Seaweed butter emulsion
Grilled domestic beef loin with red wine sauce
Seasonal fruits and blancmange with sorbet

Drink Menu

Beer/Wine (white/red)/Whiskey/
Shochu (barley/potato)/Sake
Various cocktails
(Vodka, Campari, Cassis, Gin, Peach)
with Soda/Tonic
Oolong Tea/Orange Juice/Apple juice
Ginger ale/Cola



hairstyles and **oshiroi** make-up were perfectly applied and the music and dancing were carefully performed. It was an unforgettable experience. We were also invited to have our picture taken with Maiko and Geiko.

Tuesday, April 14 – Sayonara! Our last day in Japan. After our last breakfast at **Forni**, we boarded our van for the one hour trip to **ITA**. Armand, our helper from A&K, guided us into the airport and assisted us to our gate. We found our way to our flight from ITA to NRT. The flight was about an hour so being in coach wasn't too bad but I was looking forward to getting through Customs and Immigration at NRT and getting into the Polaris Lounge before boarding the flight to EWR. The flight took only twelve and a half hours rather than the fourteen hours coming to Japan. Still, it was a long flight, although I was sleeping more this time. When we arrived at EWR, there was only one TSA agent at Global Entry with a hand-help terminal. But it didn't actually take that long, so we were able to get into the Polaris Lounge for our three hour layover. Finally, we took the flight to PWM then got the last shuttle at midnight and were taken to the Hilton Garden Inn for a restful night's sleep. Tomorrow, we will drive our car home to Brunswick.

