

10: Kyoto

Thanks to the snorer in our dormitory (a very pleasant Swiss chap), I slept badly again. I began the day with a shower, as I had had no time for one yesterday evening, then sat down for breakfast. Afterwards I packed up, paid for my accommodation and left the hostel. Although it had been very clean and efficiently run, the noise and endless announcements over the loudspeakers had proved to be very irksome.

Outside, it was cloudy but hot. I walked down the road, caught a bus to the Daitokuji temple and, after a little bit of confusion, found my way to Mrs Tani's Tiny House. This turned out to be a lovely old Japanese house, complete with *tatami* mats, paper screens, and a miniature garden. I spoke to the lady, who asked me to sign her visitors' book and showed me to a room, which, she explained, I would be sharing with others. I left my bag in an anteroom.



Sammon (South Gate), Daitokuji, Kyoto

I then walked to the Daitokuji (Temple of Great Virtue): the largest temple in Kyoto and one of the chief temples of the Rinzai sect of Buddhism. Having read about this temple, I was very interested to see it. It had been founded in the early fourteenth century by Daitō Kokushi, a monk who had enjoyed imperial patronage.

This large complex and its many sub-temples did not look particularly impressive at first sight. I was disappointed to discover that most of the main buildings, which I expected to be open, were closed. I wandered around, taking photographs, until I found myself at the small Daisen-in temple. According to my notes, this contained a famous rock garden. I removed my shoes, stepped inside, bought a ticket and then, when asked if I would like to drink some green tea, I said yes and paid a little extra for this traditional refreshment. I was given a piece of paper that served both as a ticket and a serviette for a little cake that I would be given when drinking the tea.

Turning a corner, I came across a garden of raked sand; it was a typical Zen garden but not a particularly impressive one. Was this *it*? I doubted that this could be the famous one. I looked around as best as I could, for the place was crowded, and waited

for it to become quieter. I examined the garden and the fine painted screens decorated by Kanō Motonobu; these were the most refined ones that I had seen so far.



Rock garden, Daisen-in, Daitokuji, Kyoto

At last the crowds dwindled and I walked around the corner. *There* was the rock garden – I recognized it immediately! Designed by Sōami (d. 1525) and regarded as his highest achievement in the country, it was tiny but fascinating.

I spent a long time in this temple, revelling in the simplicity of the various gardens and rooms, and enjoying the blissful silence that had now descended upon the complex. This was the ideal place in which to linger. Several people were either sitting on the verandas, resting, or ambling around the buildings. It was just blissful!

Finally, when I saw some schoolgirls going into the tea room, a Japanese couple and I followed them. While the girls were served in two groups, we three adults were served separately. We were offered tiny cakes, which were really sweets, and drank our bowls of bitter tea-ceremony tea. I watched the Japanese people carefully, observing how they held their tea bowls. Finally, after chatting to the young man who had sold me the ticket, I left.

I now walked up an attractive pathway to the Hōshun-in, another sub-temple, which had been founded in 1608. Like the Daisen-in, it was tiny but beautiful. After I had removed my shoes, an old lady sold me a ticket, and I entered. In the front garden was a beautiful arrangement of moss, rocks and shrubs; I sat down, admiring all this for a while, and reflecting on how moss, regarded as a nuisance back home, was regarded as an adornment here, and cultivated extensively. The back garden was more decorative; in it was a two-storeyed pavilion (the Donko-kaku, built in 1617), and a little pond with a stone bridge and viewing platform. As I knelt down on my haunches, Japanese-style, to admire this wonderful scene, some ladies came along, sat beside me and began making tea for themselves. Although most of them drank from plastic beakers, they very kindly presented me with a tiny porcelain bowl of the delicate drink. They also offered some tea to an American lad who was in the garden with us. I was charmed and thanked them politely. I was able to tell them that I was not American but came from Ireland (*'watashi wa Airurando kara desu'* – 'I-wa^{*} Ireland from am'). *'Ah – Airurando? Sō desu ne!'* was the ladies' reaction to this: 'Ireland? Really!' I also told them that I worked in our television station (*'watashi wa*

* *Wa* after a word indicates that it is the subject of a sentence.

teribikyoku de hataraitte imasu’). Their manners were perfect, of course, and they treated me with great courtesy. When I had finished the tea, I returned the little bowl, excused myself, then left.

On my way to the next temple I reflected on the sad plight of women in Japan, a country that seems to be so perfect to outsiders. So many of the women here, in fact, are treated as second-class citizens, and are very much at the mercy of their menfolk. There is little or no sympathy for a woman who has been raped; as in other societies, it is assumed that the woman must be at fault. However, judging by the amount of hard-core porn magazines and comics openly displayed in newsagents everywhere, one may conclude that there may be many cases of sexual abuse every year in Japan, by men – and, it is reported, by monks. The police here tend to turn a blind eye to the abuse of women (both native and foreign), especially if the perpetrator is rich or influential. There seems to be no organization to which a woman can turn for help.

Another hidden trait among menfolk here is the luring away of young, newly-married men from their wives by male colleagues in the workplace. Unsuspecting men, especially those starting work in a large company, are invited out by a few older colleagues for drinks and a meal after they have finished a day’s work; when the man tells them that his wife is expecting him home for his evening meal, he is told to telephone her and fob her off with some excuse. Not wishing to offend his colleagues, he does so, and off they go. After drinks in a nearby pub, they eat at a restaurant, where more alcohol is consumed, and then, suitably inebriated, they finish the evening by seeking the pleasures of the flesh. Many marriages have been ruined through such behaviour.



Kōtō-in, Daitokuji, Kyoto

Banishing such thoughts from my mind for the moment, I now consulted my plan of the Daitokuji and found my way to the Kōtō-in, famous for its Chinese paintings. This was founded in 1601 by the Samurai warrior Hosokawa Tadaoki, who devoted himself in later life to the study of Zen Buddhism; his wife, Gracia, was a Christian convert. I walked along a zigzag path between trees to the entrance, paid for a ticket and entered the temple. Because of the trees, it was much darker here. Although not spectacular, the gardens were beautiful and peaceful. I lingered here, admiring the main moss and rock garden, which was quite large. I then turned my attention to the tea garden with its little tea house, and the few screens and paintings on display.

Unfortunately, as nothing was marked in English, I had no idea what I was looking at. As everything was quite charming, I took several photographs. Finally, I left.

Hungry by now, and having seen enough for the time being, I decided to leave the rest for tomorrow and find something to eat. I walked up the busy main road towards the Kinkakuji and Ryōanji, and, after a long search, stopped to have a good, big and varied meal in a restaurant. I made short work of it, paid up and left.



Lake at Ryōanji, Kyoto

As I knew that the Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion) would be crowded today, it being Sunday, I decided to head first for the Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple), which was famous for its rock garden. As it had turned rather cloudy and gloomy, it was a little cooler by now. The temple was a distance away, but I walked quickly and soon arrived at the entrance. I bought a ticket and started my visit by walking around a spectacular lake full of huge lotus plants. The grounds here were quite extensive and beautiful. The main temple building was quite crowded, which made it difficult to appreciate its unusual rock garden – a space normally requiring peace and quiet. Another irritant was a Japanese commentary relayed over loudspeakers and the sound of people talking – hardly the right atmosphere for Zen meditation! This *karesansui* or dry landscape garden was a masterpiece by the designer Sōami; its fifteen rocks, grouped in a particular manner, were supposed to represent a tiger and its cubs being chased by a leopard, fleeing from one island to another.



Rock garden, Ryōanji

I wandered around, looking at some other gardens (which were disappointing) and returned to the famous rock garden. A girl who was sitting beside me turned out to be Australian; we chatted and left together, walked around the other side of the lake and parted at the exit.



Kinkakuji, Kyoto

I now walked briskly, back the way I had come, to the Kinkakuji, which I now found almost deserted. I guessed that people would be leaving around now, even though it would be open until later; I arrived shortly after four o'clock. As luck would have it, the sky had cleared, and the sun, which was now beginning to set, shone brightly. I paid only ¥100 for a ticket, walked around a corner and there it was: the famous pavilion gleaming in the setting sun, its golden reflection gently rippling in a beautiful lake. The setting was heavenly: surrounded by trees and hills, it seemed to be in another world. It struck me immediately that this had to be the high point of my visit to Kyoto: if one had not seen this, I thought, one had not seen Kyoto. The Shōgun Yoshimitsu, who was steeped in Zen Buddhism, had built this pavilion and laid out the garden in 1394 and had spent the latter part of his life here in retirement. His son and successor turned it into a Buddhist temple, which was deliberately burnt in 1950, then reconstructed as a Zen temple in 1955.

Although this rather odd, fanciful building was probably grossly overrated, I still found it very attractive and exciting. I was so glad that I had left it until this time of the day to see it, for the conditions were perfect: it was very quiet and the early evening light was magical. I ambled around and discovered a most unusual view of the gleaming pavilion from the other side of the lake. I then tore myself away and climbed up to a fine landscape garden; a zigzag path led me from it to a little building made of wood and thatch. Finally, and somewhat reluctantly, I left and returned to the noisy streets.

On my way back to the guest house, I took a different route through narrow and quiet back streets as I wanted to investigate the Myōkenji, the temple that I had tried to stay in. This turned out to be a small place, but pleasant enough, though I could find no signs of life. I continued walking and eventually stopped to eat a bowl of noodles with vegetables and other ingredients in a small restaurant. Here I was able to watch the chefs working at top speed. I then bought two huge apples and at last returned to the guest house, which was by now full of young Americans. I ate one of

my apples, had a bath and spent the rest of the evening writing most of yesterday and today's diary entries, despite the noise of a party in the next room. There was a pleasantly informal atmosphere in this place; everyone did their own thing. I finally went to bed at midnight.

This morning I was woken at 6 a.m. by my companion in the room, who was getting up for a dawn ceremony at the Daitokuji that I had told him about. It was just as well that he woke me, for I never would have surfaced – I had slept soundly for a change.

I jumped up, dressed hurriedly, threw some cold water over my face and, a few minutes later was walking down the road with my companions and some of the Americans from the guest house. This morning it was cool and fresh outside. Although I had been told that the ceremony would start at six o'clock, I feared that it would be all over since the sun was up by now and it was bright.



Butsuden, Daitokuji, Kyoto

Sure enough, by the time we reached the temple there were no signs of life. However, the Butsuden or main hall was open. Just inside the entrance we could see rows of slippers. One of our party tried to go in, but was turned away by a young attendant. We hung around for a while, and just as we were about to give up and go away, a few monks, dressed in unusual robes, appeared and went into the hall. More gradually appeared and soon the place began to fill. We then discovered that we could have an excellent view of what was happening by going round the other side and looking through the windows. At 6.30 a bell was rung – a dull, deep sound – and was answered by the striking of a gong. More monks, and finally the abbot, appeared.

When everybody had settled down inside, the chanting got under way; this was punctuated by the sound of drums and gongs. Although quite long-winded, I found it fascinating. The cantor sang in a strange, yodelling voice, and the monks intoned the responses together, everyone at his own pitch, so that it sounded like an eerie suspended chord. The abbot spread out a prayer mat several times and bowed low to the statue of the Buddha. Suddenly it all ended, quite abruptly; the monks filed out and the hall was closed immediately.

I ran after the monks, trying to take photos of them, but they quickly disappeared into a building. I now found myself almost alone in this wonderful temple, ambling around the deserted pathways. I poked around and took a few photos of places that I



Monks leaving the Butsuden, Daitokuji, Kyoto

had photographed yesterday, as everything looked so much better today in the early morning light. During my ramblings I met a Londoner who was a professional photographer, and stopped to talk to him. We arrived at the entrance of the Kōtō-in and had a quick look around until a lady appeared looking for money. As I had been here yesterday and as my companion found the light too dim for photography, we did not pay the entrance fee, but left. It had been wonderful to be here so early, with nobody about.



Isshidan rock garden, Ryōgen-in, Daitokuji, Kyoto

I then went off again on my own and walked around to the Ryōgen-in, where I bought an entrance ticket. I had the place completely to myself. Everything looked terrific in the bright morning sunshine. The first thing to catch my eye was the fine Isshidan rock garden designed by Sōami. I found this more exciting than his famous garden in the Ryōanji (the one in which the rocks represented a tiger and its cubs fleeing from a leopard). Enchanted, I sat gazing at this little masterpiece amid the blissfully tranquil surroundings for a long time – all I could hear was a monk chanting prayers in another room.

Next I turned my attention to the fine screens in the Hōjō or Meditation Hall. One set depicted hermits and the other depicted a dragon. I then stopped to admire a moss and stone garden called the Ryogintei. Then came the smallest rock garden in Japan, the tiny Toteikiko: just a couple of rocks and some raked sand.

After spending about an hour here at my ease, I left, ambled around to the Zuihōin, which I discovered was closed, poked around some other little gardens nearby and finally returned to the guest house, where I breakfasted on some free coffee and a sticky, chocolate-filled roll that I had bought in a nearby shop. I then washed and shaved.

I lingered for a while in this charming little house and set off again. By now it was quite hot outside. I caught a bus to the Ninnaji, where I bought a ticket and went in. Just as I had noted, it was a little neglected and ignored. As much of it had been restored and rebuilt after a series of fires, architecturally speaking it was not so important. However, it contained some pleasant gardens: a large one of rock and sand, and a dramatic landscape garden, complete with a little waterfall, a bridge over a stream, a pavilion, and a thatched tea house. As there were so few people here, I was able to take my time and enjoy everything to the full.

After I had looked at the other buildings in the complex, which included a pagoda, I left at about midday. While trying to find the way to my next venue, I got lost and had to ask a policeman for directions. Finding a restaurant, I stopped for a good lunch of fish, rice, salad, and soup.

Next I walked down the road to the Myōshinji, another Zen temple, though it seemed to be undergoing repairs. I walked along the main approach, stopping to peep into sub-temples here and there, and finally arrived at the main buildings. Having paid to enter, I was told, '*Jippun*' ('ten minutes'). Thinking that I had only ten minutes left before the place was closed, I felt rather annoyed.

I now found myself in the Hōjō or Master's Quarters, where I admired yet more fine *sumi-e* paintings on screens by the great Kanō Tan'yū. A man then called me and I followed him, together with a Japanese couple, outside. I now realized that we were about to be taken on a guided tour. First of all we were brought into the impressive Hattō or Sermon Hall, where we saw a huge dragon painted on the ceiling by Kanō Tan'yū: we were told that it had taken him three years of meditation and five years of work to complete it. It certainly was a great feat of art. Fortunately the lady in our little group was able to translate what the guide was saying. We were also shown a famous bell in a corner.

After we had seen all this, we were asked to wait a while. The guide went off and escorted a group of Japanese women around the building that we had just seen, and then I joined the party. By now the couple had left. The women, who were able to speak some English, were all very pleasant, and laughed and joked with me. We were now shown some smaller buildings and a curious old bath house. All the ladies emitted loud gasps of amazement at everything.

After this little tour I found my way over to the Taizōin sub-temple, a fine little complex that contained a moss garden, a small, intimate rock garden, a famous painting by Jōsetsu, and a large, impressive landscape garden designed by Kanō Motonobu. This was both unusual and attractive: it had a meandering path, low shrubs, trees, rocks, a pond and a splashing waterfall. Once again I sat for a while, gazing at my surroundings.

I finally left, caught a bus to the main railway station, paid another visit to the Tourist Information Centre, where I picked up the latest edition of the Kyoto Monthly Guide (today being the 1 October), walked to Dee's place, where I collected the rest

of my luggage (she was not in but Elly next door gave me the key), then travelled back to Mrs Tani's guest house. There I relaxed, had a bath, went out for a meal and spent the rest of the evening writing my diary while various people came and went.