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Templeton Story of the Year



The Way of Shikoku

The Way of Shikoku: Part I

I stumbled up the bell tower steps, grasped the rope and hauled the long wood pole back as far as possible in its cradle. Then I swung the rope forward and slammed the pole against the bronze bell. A loud "bong" rang through the courtyard of Shosanji temple and echoed across the mountain valley. It was, I thought, a most satisfying way to announce my presence to the presiding gods and, presumably, scare away any evil spirits lurking in the forest.

The Way of Shikoku: Part II

I didn't get very far before my leg muscles twanged and trembled in protest. And that was only at the half-way point. By the time I reached the top and limped across the courtyard to the hondo and the temple office, I was seeing spots in front of my eyes. I sat on a bench in the temple compound to rest and read a guidebook.

The Way of Shikoku: Part III

My second morning saw me all the way from Anrakuji, Temple Six, to Kirihataji, Temple 10. Anrakuji, the Temple of Everlasting Joy, is surrounded by a quiet village. The pagoda with its white walls and red pillars makes a colourful contrast to the green of the temple garden. Legend says Kobo Daishi founded the temple when he realized the hot spring's rust-coloured water could cure disease.

The Way of Shikoku: Part IV

Wear and tear take their toll, slowing this pilgrim's progress.

The Way of Shikoku: Part V

I was the first to meet the threesome. I'm not sure who was more startled: me, at the sight of a woman holding two children in her arms, or them, at the sight of a sweaty gaijin, or foreigner.

The Way of Shikoku: Part VI

The morning we left Minshuku Chiba - my sixth day on the Shikoku no Michi - it was raining. Not just a sprinkle or a drizzle, but a heavy-duty, coming-down-in-buckets, Noahic downpour. It lasted most of the day. Only a couple of minutes down the road and I was soaked head to toe, bemoaning my fate and wondering when I would find a vending machine to buy a can of hot Georgia Café au Lait.

The Way of Shikoku: Part VII

I was parked on a bench beneath the cherry trees at Yakuōji Temple, admiring my ugly new shoes - blue and grey with splotches of iridescent yellow - when a man approached wearing a white peaked cap and carrying a little girl.

The Way of Shikoku: Part VIII

I noticed a couple of Japanese policemen looking at us from a window. Had I broken some obscure law? Was it illegal for a gaikokujin, an out-of-country person, to pass a police station in Japan without saying hello? Was this woman waving her hands and gesturing for me to follow her, supposed to fetch me inside?



The Way of Shikoku: Part IX

Shuji Niwano crouched beside me on the gravelly shore, held out his arms and opened his hands to reveal a stone in each palm. "Please, which one do you like?"

The Way of Shikoku: Part X


The rain came down like doom, so hard it ricocheted off the asphalt to form a curtain-like spray two feet above the ground. I walked through walls of water.

The Way of Shikoku: Part XI

I draped the cloth on my head and sank into the Kami No Yu, the Water of the God. The hot water lapped across my chest as I lay back against the blue granite rim of the pool. My sigh of pleasure must have been audible to the half-dozen other bathers in the Dogo Onsen.

Minor Miracles: Eating with my eyes, a jukebox in my brain

Yukuo Tanaka gestured for me to follow him to the temple altar. I ignored my feelings of looking foolish as he instructed me on how to hold my hands and bow my head before Amida Nyorai, the honzon, or main deity, of Emmyoji Temple. I tried to imitate him when he started to chant the Hannya Shingyo, the Heart Sutra, the most popular of Buddhist sutras, the one that is said to open the heart to the wisdom of the Buddha. Well, why not? I was here as a pilgrim, so maybe I should learn to be one.




A brush with zen: Our pilgrim finds some inner peace, or was it just some hallucination? Descending the rock-strewn slope, dropping deeper into the dark cedar forest of Mount Yokomine, the trail looked the same as all the other mountain paths I had been trying in hopes of finding one that would lead me back to the valley town of Komatsu.

The Journey's End Sayonara!

Update: In the previous episode, Robert Sibley had a brush with Zen (or was it hallucination?) at a small temple near Komatsu as he finished his sixth week on the pilgrimage trail.

The Journey's End Sayonara! (Part 2)



It took us five days to complete the Shikoku no Michi. From Marugame we traipsed through the suburbs of Sakaide to Temples 78 to 79, before turning into the mountains. From Kokubunji to Ichinomyaji, Temples 80 to 83, the henro trail climbed through mountains and then descended to a coastal plain and the city of Takamatsu. It was a good walk. Jun was, as always, late to get moving in the mornings, but he was on his best behaviour. The weather was sunny and warm. The ryokans we found each night were clean and cheerful. I slept well. And I ate well, consuming sashimi.