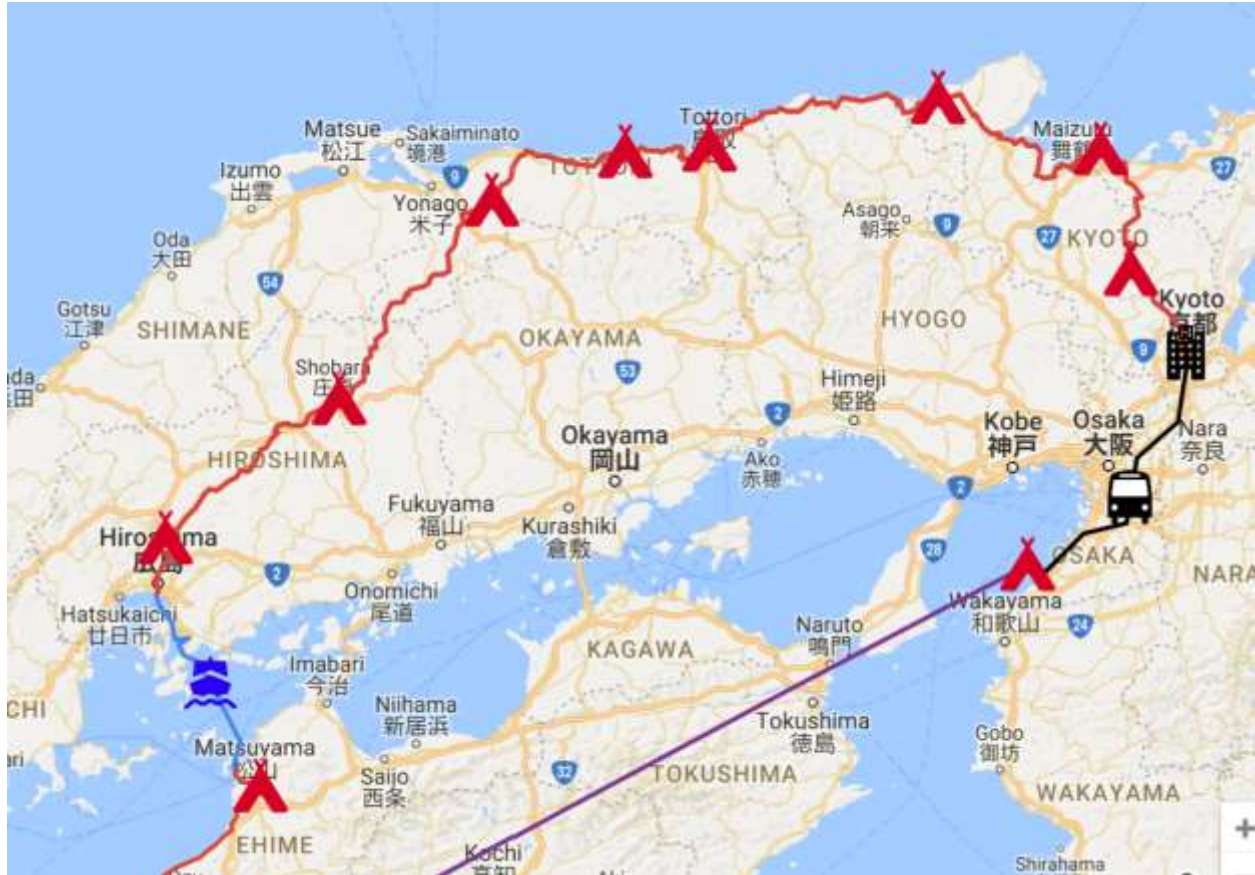


Season 11 – Part 1. Japan – Honshu Island from Kyoto to the North Coast.



Sa 6.8.2016, day 391. Flight Hongkong to Osaka (Osaka 0 km)

By now we have got accustomed to the procedure. We packed up our bikes, had a rather unpleasant ride through the construction congestion to Kowloon train station. There we found a quiet spot and dumped all our stuff, then I rode back to the hotel with empty bike and empty trailer, collected the bike box that the hotel had kindly stored in an unused room for us. Then I tried to figure out how to strap the bike box onto the trailer. This bike box was huge and not collapsed, the only way it went was upright. With the kind help of one of the many interested onlookers we managed to strap the box more or less securely onto the trailer. The front of the box went on the saddle leaving not much room for me to peddle. But it somehow worked and so I biked off towards Kowloon station. While stopped at a red light a homeless man gave me a present of a valid bus ticket. I guess he felt sorry for me.

We boxed the bikes up, packed everything away into the trailer and the IKEA style carry-bag we had bought, somehow loaded everything onto the train and were very happy it was Saturday morning and rather quiet.

Also the airport was rather quiet and we arrived with plenty of time. Unfortunately, the clerk we got was rather officious and he insisted that I wrap up and check in my guitar, but apart from that everything went very smoothly. And so, once again, we said goodbye to our 150kg of luggage at the oversized luggage belt and feeling much lighter went through security and enjoyed the wait for the plane over some hot brew. In fact, we enjoyed the wait a bit too much, as by the time we ambled off towards the gate we saw the “Last Call!” sign flashing on the screen.

The flight was very nice with great views down onto Penghu Islands of Taiwan, where we were originally planning to go and look for some kite surfing wind and then a spectacular sunset over Japan. We had a bit of surprise when we landed though. We didn’t arrive at Osaka International Airport, from where we had already planned our itinerary and a place to sleep, but instead we landed at Osaka Kansai, which is an airport built on an Island. Bikes are not permitted to go on the only road away from the airport and after a very long discussion with Japanese Rail, we also learnt that the train would not take the bikes. We were a bit clueless as to what to do. Taxi would be far too expensive, the public bus would not take the bikes, we were thinking of renting a car, putting the bikes in the car, driving to the mainland, sleeping in the car and returning it the next day. Finally we learnt that the long distance bussed would take the bikes. It was already 10pm by this time, there would still have been a bus to Kyoto, but we really didn’t feel like arriving in Kyoto without a place to stay at midnight with two boxed up bikes. So finally we decided to sleep at the airport and take the early bus next morning to Kyoto. Sleeping at the airport turned out to be quite OK, we got some much needed hours of sleep and we were by far not the only ones sleeping there...







Su 7.8.2016, day 392. A day in Kyoto (Osaka – Kyoto, bus. 0 km)

The airport started waking up at about 5am. People started bustling around and the lights that had mercifully been dimmed after midnight, came back on in full force. We slowly made our way down to the bus stop ready for the first bus. The luggage compartment looked really small and I was a bit worried that the huge bike box would not fit in, and of course we also had the trailer and the huge IKEA bag, nicely bundles up with a bit of string in true refugee style. But again everything went very smoothly and soon we were standing on the footpath in Kyoto right next to the bus station in the sweltering heat assembling our bikes. Right next to us was an automatic bike parking machine. It was absolutely fascinating. You simply push you bike into a slot leading to a glass door, push a button to collect a ticket and whoosh, the bike gets sucked in through the door and is gone. Fascinating!

Siria had booked a fantastic deal on Agoda, we had a whole apartment for only 35\$. Check in was only at 3pm, but we could leave all our bags at the apartment, giving us all day to explore Kyoto. We had a fantastic day full of temples and gardens and we also bumped into a large group of dancers rehearsing a show on a stretch of grass up along the river at the edge of town. We lasted quite well in spite of only having slept a couple of hours.

We also realized, that prices here in Japan were certainly something else. Hotels and restaurants that had become the norm in South East Asia were going to become a rarity! We bought some vegetables and a couple of potatoes in a supermarket and cooked our own dinner for the first time in quite a while.

My first impression of Japan was that everything is small. Cars are small, pickup trucks are tiny, bathtubs are small, trees are small, it seems to me that the Japanese just like small things. The other thing that struck me is that Japan is full of smart interesting little things. What struck me in the apartment is that when you flush the toilet, the water that is used to refill the cistern comes out of tap and so can be used to wash your hands. A simple and ingenious way of saving water!

















































Mo 8.8.2016, day 393. Back on our bikes (Kyoto – Route 162, 38 km)

Before heading off I nipped downtown to get a bottle of white gas for the stove, then we went to stock up on some essential food and somewhere around 11 am we were off. We quickly learnt that biking in Japan is tough, but very very rewarding. Outside Kyoto the road started to climb steeply. From that moment onwards it was permanently up and down, the road was hardly ever flat. In addition, it was really hot and humid. The road condition on the other hand was superb. Mostly there was also a foot path / bike path on the side of the road. This is of course very nice, but at every entrance to every house there was a little kerb, maybe 1 cm high, that we had to bump over. This meant reducing speed and even then, with the heavy load on the back of my bike, it chewed up my tire and bashed the rim of my wheel. The countryside was absolutely stunning. A mix of lush green pine forests and bright green rice paddies. Sparklingly clear little rivers and many lovely traditional Japanese houses with the characteristic dark tile roofs and the curved eaves. Most of the nicer houses also had their own little Japanese rock garden with immaculately manicured trees, moss, often little fish ponds and gravel walkways. The other striking thing is that everywhere there are vegetable gardens, some commercial, but most seem to be private little gardens. Also these are immaculate and full of very tasty looking veggies. I find this particularly noteworthy, as in many of the poorer countries we crossed like Myanmar, the Philippines or Cambodia, where the additional vitamins from a home garden would have been badly needed, there were no vegetable gardens anywhere to be seen. Instead there were little shops at every corner selling sweet drinks and candy wrapped in plastic.

Just about as the sun was setting we found a perfect little camping spot up a gravel road in the forest. There was a little stream close by to wash and a patch of grass to pitch our tent. We cooked spaghetti with tomato sauce and got to bed nice and early.









Tu 9.8.2016, day 394. To the northern coast (Route 162 – Takahama, 68 km)

Again it was a lovely bicycle day through the hills of central Honshu Island. Heading down towards the coast we had a dizzying downhill run on a road that wound and even spiralled down the steep hill. The northern coast was spectacular. We hit the coast at a wonderful beach side park. There were notices up everywhere that eating was not permitted, BBQs were only allowed on a small little fenced off patch and it was already packed with Japanese happily BBQing. We decided not to break the rules on our second day, so we pushed on towards a camping that we had seen on the map. It turned out that the camping was quite a bit of a detour along incredibly steep roads. We were utterly starving by the time we arrived and badly needed a shower. We were a bit shocked when we saw the price of the camping: 30\$ for 2 people and a tent! We were so hungry and tired that we bit the bullet. At least it was a wonderful spot and we learnt that all tap water in Japan is good for drinking. We had a nice encounter with an elderly gentleman who was retired, but working on the campsite on the side. He had lived in Basel for 5 years where he worked for Ciba Geigy and he spoke excellent German. What a coincidence!















We 10.8.2016, day 395. (Takahama - Yuhigaura, 92 km)

We roughly followed the northern coast road that was quite hilly and a tough ride. We stopped here and there to admire a temple of a Japanese garden in someone's house. Japan is a really and incredibly tidy and clean country and there are interesting little things to admire at every corner.

We were lucky enough to stumble upon a bike path that was beautifully marked with a continuous blue line on the road and nicely painted kilometre markers with a little image of a bicycle.

After the expensive camping the previous night, we had smartened up and found a bunch of useful internet sites with maps showing free camp spots. The free campsite we found for that evening was right on a beach. There were a few other people there camping and there were outside showers at one of the beach toilets. It was a magnificent spot and we had a truly spectacular sunset. We also had an interesting little stroll around the town that we a touristy holiday place with lots of Ryokans and Japanese strolling around dressed in Kimonos, obviously just coming from some bath or going to one. Also there were a lot of kids on the beach playing with fireworks, that seem to be a big thing here in Japan.























Th 11.8.2016, day 396. (Yuhigaura - Tottori, 106 km)

We had breakfast on the wonderful beach, that had been our camp spot for the night and managed to get a relatively early start (Early by our standards, we were on the road before 8 am). It ended up being a huge bike day. We more or less followed the coast westwards all day. This ride very much reminded us of Big Sur in California, the scenery was equally stunning with magnificent beaches and spectacular views out over rocky coastline but the hills were more numerous and also steeper. In all it was an absolutely fantastic bike ride and it was not really surprising that we met quite a few touring bicyclists coming the other way. Close to the end of the day, we had one last hill to go over. On the map it looked really nasty and steep. But there was also a tunnel. However there was also a sign saying no bikes through the tunnel. The tunnel had a nice wide shoulder and we had been through innumerable tunnels during the last few days, so we decided to go for it. Everything went without problems, soon we were out and back on the coast road. Then however a police car came heading towards us. "Stop! Police!". We stopped and two policemen got out of the car and stated the obvious: "We are Japan Police!". They spoke no English whatsoever, but it was clear that they had found out that we had gone through the tunnel. We had to show our passports and they proceeded to write down our names. I was called Grundy Berne. I tried to explain that "Berne" was the place of issue of my passport. I was a bit scared that we would get a fine. And with the incredibly high prices of everything here I feared the fine would be hefty as well. Finally we got away with a reprimand. "No bike on Highway!". "OK sir, we are sorry.". A cheery good bye wave and they drove off. And that was that.

It was dark when we arrived at our free camping for the night. When we arrived we were very surprised, that it was a huge place and it was packed with families in huge tents, most people were cooking

delicious food on little grills, drinking beer, children were running around playing. The place was hopping. Unfortunately, there were no showers. So we went to bed smelly and sticky after a very long and hot day.















