

Japan - The culture



View over the lake by the Fukuoka Art Museum, seen from the north.

We arrived at Fukuoka Airport 08.20 in the morning after a 16 hour long journey across two continents. After clearing customs and checking in at Access Tenjin, the hotel we were staying at, we had a stroll through town. It was nice finally having a walk and to finally see this new and unfamiliar country. I'd dreamt about going to Japan for at least six years, and finally coming here was truly special. Seeing how the buildings and streets actually look like they draw in the mangas, meeting people in shops, and experiencing their incredible hospitality and welcoming attitude. We had a great lunch at an old shop, 65 years old actually, run by a lovely lady and her husband. I had soba noodles and tempura vegetables. At this point it really started to dawn on me how different the culture of Norway is compared to the culture of Japan. After Suganuma-sensei's training in the old dojo, we went out to have supper, before we went back to the hotel. As it is obligatory when you go to Japan, I tried sushi. Many different types. When we were about to leave, Nishida-san paid for Vetle's and my food, completely unexpectedly. All day, Japan had shown itself from a great side. Needless to say, we're plotting something in return for him someday.



Vetle and I in the park by one of the old temples in Fukuoka, Shofukuji.

After oversleeping terribly due to jet lag, and thus missing morning practice (which was extremely embarrassing), we got up to meet up with Dimitris and Bjørn Eirik. We went out and about in Fukuoka, visiting Japan's oldest zen temple, Shofukuji, and checked out several shops. After having lunch at a shop specialized in one meat and cabbage dish, we had dessert at a café and split up to see more of town. Vetle and I went to see if I could get a kimono, and met a serious language barrier for the first time. I couldn't make myself understood completely in Japanese. Luckily for me, an elderly lady happened to come by. She also happened to speak fluent English. She even happened to have lived in New York for 45 years, had nothing to do but to kill time, and thus decided to help us out in our endeavours. I ended up getting a complete kimono and some incense, before she walked us a little around town and showed us the port as it was long ago. The Japanese hospitality had baffled me again. She got my e-mail to send a photo she took of us, and hopefully we'll correspond by mail in the future. After evening training that day almost everybody came out to eat, and some even went out to a bar. (While there we ordered drinks called "Screaming Orgasm", and "After Sex". It was hilarious!) On the way home, we stopped by a ramen shop on wheels, called Yatai. There, we were served ramen accompanied by beer. It was the first time in my life I had ramen, and it was delicious.



Bjørn Eirik and Dimitris enjoyed our first "official" japanese meal in a shop close by the lake by Fukuoka Art Museum.



Bjørn Eirik and Dimitris walking by the lake close by Fukuoka Art Museum. We walked a lot around town. The "oldies" outwalked us so-called "youngsters" by far! Embarrassing!

On one of the first days on this trip Dimitris-sensei had gotten a haircut, and proceeded to talk both me and Vetle into getting a haircut at a local shop, and even letting him decide what haircut we were having. It was a leap of faith for me, but I really liked the end result. Returning to the hotel, we only had an hour or so resting and eating our O-bento (Japanese lunch box), before we were to leave for the evening class. After training we went out to eat with a friend of Bjørn Eirik-sensei at a lovely restaurant which had apparently been a Yatai in the past, but had been a great success giving them the chance to upgrade to a restaurant. On the way back Dimitris-sensei wanted to stop again for a bowl of ramen, and the four of us got a glass of sake in a traditional square box to catch spillage, and a big big bowl of delicious ramen.

The last day, we had to get up early to catch the plane. As with the other nights it had been a short sleep and to some extent we looked forward to be able to sleep on the plane ride back. However, the trip was a once in a lifetime event. To be able to see my sensei, my sensei's sensei, and even my sensei's sensei's sensei on the mat, and to be able to train with these magnificent people was fantastic. The events I've sketched out here was not even close to a fraction of what I experienced in Japan. It's a truly marvelous country. One that I look forward to seeing again as soon as possible.

Thank you for reading.

By Fride Eilin Blindheim, April 2015



The temples are gorgeous. Here, from one of the doors outwards. You can see the tall buildings from the rest of the city in the background.