Chapter 39
Japan 2016

Journal of Trip to Japan – Tokyo and Hokkaido, July 29 - August 9, 2016





Tuesday, August 2, 2016, Tokyo

I am just about to spend my last night in the Palace Hotel Tachikawa, in the Tachikawa section of Tokyo near the campus of Hitotsubashi University, where I have been attending a conference for the last two days. Tomorrow, I move to another hotel in the center of Tokyo where I'll be giving two more talks. Then on Saturday, I will fly to the island of Hokkaido, at the north end of Japan, for a workshop.

I was invited by Jota Ishikawa, a trade economist whom I've known since he was a grad student at Western Ontario in the late 1980s. He's one of two trade economists at Hitotsubashi whom I've known here; the other is Taiji Furusawa who did his PhD at

Wisconsin in the early 1990s. The two are of similar age and appearance, and I've managed to mix them up repeatedly while I've been here.

I've just returned to my room with a venti coffee from Starbucks, but I will wait a bit before drinking it since I'm still hot from being outside.

I left the hotel about an hour ago to get something to eat, unsure what sort of place I wanted. There was a café between here and the train station that I'd gotten a sandwich at on Sunday, but when I went there, I saw that most of its sandwiches were gone, so I kept looking. I guess it was mainly a lunch place. I then found a bakery at the front of a department store that looked promising, but when I went in, they told me they were just closing. I looked further and saw a McDonalds down on street level (I was on an elevated walkway), so I took the escalator down thinking that would have to do.

Before I got to it, however, I saw a small eating place with people sitting at a counter. Looking more carefully, I saw that it was sushi, which wasn't what I wanted, but I also saw signs by a stairway that seemed to indicate that there would be a noodle shop upstairs. I went up and found a similar small place with people seated at a counter, but here they were eating noodles.

Inside there were several customers using what appeared to be vending machines just inside the door, and I watched. They inserted money, pressed one of many buttons, and got a ticket and their change in return. A woman who worked there – the only staff other than the men behind the counter who were cooking – took the tickets from them and directed them to seats at the counter. This was clearly what I wanted to do, if I could figure out what button to press. The buttons were clearly marked with prices, so that was easy, but most had only Japanese characters to explain what the food was. Fortunately, there were a few buttons at the top with pictures, and I picked one that looked good and bought my ticket.

There was a seat – stool, really – at the corner of the counter that was unoccupied. As I sat down, I noticed that the men sitting next to me were, like me, wearing backpacks, and they were eating noodles just as I was about to. They also looked a bit nerdy. I felt that I fit right in, except of course for not being Japanese.

When the food arrived it was close to what I expected, but not quite. There was a medium sized bowl of liquid, brownish in color and presumably broth, with some seasoning, and an Asian-style spoon. And there was a larger bowl with noodles and a couple of halves of a brown hard-boiled egg. When I tasted the noodles, I found they were cold, which was the surprise. I gathered that I should scoop the noodles into the broth and eat them from there, which is what I did. It was very good, although by the time I got to the last of the noodles, the broth wasn't hot enough anymore to warm them much. Still, it was good. My only regret was that I had not tried harder to identify a dish with ramen noodles, instead of the udon noodles that I got.

Let me back up now and fill in some details about the trip up to now.

I flew here on Delta business class, which was wonderful. The flight was only 12 hours long, shorter than I expected, and I slept for most of it after dinner and a movie, then woke just in time for breakfast. Neither meal was worth writing home about, so I won't. The movie was one that I'd come close to attending at the Michigan Theater last week: Funny Face, with Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire. I could certainly see why Audrey Hepburn became a star. I was less clear about Fred, whose dancing outshone both his looks and his acting. It's a musical, of course, with music by George and Ira Gershwin, which I thought would be really good. It wasn't.

The directions we were given for getting from Narita airport to the hotel gave us two options: a bus that would go directly but take 170 minutes, and a train that would require a change, and take somewhat less time. I took the bus, because I was in no hurry and wanted it to be easy, which it was. I found it hard to believe that the ride from the main Tokyo airport to my hotel in Tokyo would take almost three hours, and in fact it took somewhat less. But this is a very big city, and both the airport, the campus, and the hotel are far from the center and on opposite sides.

All I wanted that evening was dinner and bed, and I got both. But not before I watched some fireworks. Fortunately, someone in the hotel had told me they'd be happening, since otherwise when I heard the explosions, I might have assumed something else. I watched them only briefly from just outside my hotel and then turned in for the night.

I had the day free on Sunday until we would gather at 7:00 for dinner, and I used it to walk just a bit around the neighborhood. A block from the hotel, going in the direction of the train station, which I'd been told would take me to shops and a Starbucks, I reached a major street that looked hard to cross. Then I noticed a stairway up and realized that there was an elevated walkway all along the street, which is what I've used ever since. In fact, the hotel entrance that is used most if you're not in a car is on the second floor onto this walkway. I don't know if all of Tokyo is like this – I'll learn more tomorrow – but in this neighborhood it seems that these walkways take pedestrians everywhere.

I did find a Starbucks and ordered a venti coffee. The girl asked if I wanted it iced, and I said no. That surprised her, with good reason. It's been very hot and humid here, and I was probably the only one in the shop drinking hot coffee. But the shop was air conditioned, and I enjoyed it.

Dinner that evening was with a group of about a dozen, and I sat near one end of the table with a professor from Oslo, Andreas Moxnes, and his wife Ida (pronounced Ee-da, not Eye-da like my great aunt). Someone ordered for the group, so the dinner consisted of a series of small dishes that we shared and sometimes wondered about. Like other Asians, the Japanese like to eat all parts of a creature, so this dinner included both the livers and the hearts of chickens. The first of these I've always liked, and the second was OK with me. But then we had a dish that they had a hard time translating into English, but it seemed to be a chicken's esophagus. (I just looked that up to see that I was spelling it

right, and it suggested calling it gullet. That sounds more appropriate as food than the heart.)

A pair of grad students collected us on Monday morning at 8:30 to take us to the conference. You'd think that if we traveled so far to reach the hotel then it would have been right next to the campus, but no. We walked (on the elevated walkway) to the train station, took the train toward Tokyo just one stop, and then walked again for maybe eight blocks to get to the campus and the building where the conference would be. It took about a half hour, so we got there at about 9:00. Oddly, the conference wasn't to start until 10:00, and there wasn't really anything to do until then.

Of course, normal people enjoy times like that, as they stand around and chat. I'm not that fond of chatting unless someone else initiates it, and I'm even less fond of standing. So, I spent most of this time as I did later during coffee breaks, sitting off by myself and messing with my phone. I've played lots of Sudoku these last two days, which does not seem inappropriate in Japan. Better still would be Pokemon Go, I suppose, but I've not succumbed to that yet.

I was the first speaker on Monday, and I was glad to get that out of the way. The paper I presented was simple and not very impressive, but there was nobody here inclined to tell me that. The program had included Jim Anderson, from Boston College, whom I've known for years and who surely would have told me that, but he had to cancel his trip due to emergency surgery. That sounded bad until I learned later that it wasn't serious and resulted from a surfing accident. He's about my age, so I can't imagine why he was surfing. Or where, for that matter. Can you surf in Massachusetts?

You don't want to hear about all the papers that were given at this conference, or the people who gave them. But I do have to mention two who particularly impressed me. One was Dennis Novy, the last speaker on Monday, whom I don't think I had met before. He showed how a very standard result that economists get from the data on trade, called the "border effect," is both sensitive to how you group the data, and wrong. Dennis is a professor at Warwick University in England, but he's German.

The other was a fellow I may have met – he certainly greeted me as though I had – named Nick Bloom from Stanford. I've heard lots about him and knew he was impressive, but I was still surprised at how much I liked his work and his presentation.

I returned to the hotel this afternoon and spent some time in the hotel lobby, which has a large section with comfortable chairs and couches, and a bar serving drinks. I worked on my laptop and drank iced tea for an hour or two. In the center of this area there's a grand piano, and I enjoyed the music it was playing. I do mean "it." There was nobody sitting at the piano; it was just playing by itself. I don't know how many times I forgot that and looked up, when a piece would finish, to see if the pianist might be stopping to take a break. When I first sat down, it was playing light popular music, which I didn't pay much attention to. But at some point, it switched to playing classical music, and it was

amazing how many were things that I have on my playlist on my iPhone. It was wonderful.

Ok, that catches me up to the current moment. I've just finished my venti Starbucks coffee and will settle down to more Sudoku and perhaps some CNN.

Tuesday, August 9, Delta 276 from Tokyo to Detroit

I'm on board, but they just announced a one-hour delay because of congestion at security that is delaying passengers. Perhaps that's an after-effect of yesterday's Delta shutdown, but I don't really see why. Security wasn't crowded when I went through a few hours ago.

So… I've spent about ten days here now, first in Tokyo and then in Otaru. After the conference at Hitotsubashi, in the west of Tokyo, most of the trade people, including me, moved on Wednesday to downtown Tokyo to another workshop, this one focused on trade costs, at REITI. Not sure that what stands for, but it seems to be a research institute affiliated with the government. After four nights at the Palace Hotel, I then spent three nights at the Dai-Ichi Hotel Annex. It was half a block from the Dai-Ichi Hotel itself, which we went into briefly for something. The Annex was nice, but not as fancy as the main hotel, which was using John Sweetland's luggage carts, and the Annex was not.

On Wednesday I mainly had a meeting with Hirofumi Katase, the Vice Minister for International Affairs at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). Why? Because it turns out that he was my student way back in the early 1980s, when he was a Master's student in Econ and took both my trade policy course and the law course that I taught with John Jackson. He claimed that my teaching was especially important to his career, but I'm sure what was most valuable was the trip to Washington DC that we did in John's class to meet with trade policy people in government. Vice Minister Katase somehow learned of my visit and asked to meet with me.

Initially, when his secretary e-mailed me for this, I agreed, and she sent me detailed instructions for getting to his office in METI. These instructions included what I'd have to do for them to let me in. But before we moved from Hitotsubashi, Jota learned of this plan and contacted the minister's office to insist that they pick me up from my hotel. So, the secretary met me there and took me by taxi to the ministry, where she easily led me through any barriers. I was glad to have this help. But I got the impression that she was not confident of her ability to communicate with me, as I suspect because her English wasn't great.

The Vice Minister and I chatted for about 45 minutes, and I learned some interesting things about his views and experience with trade negotiations, with which he has been heavily involved. Then the secretary took me back to my hotel, again by taxi. It was a short distance, as we learned the next day when our workshop was in the same building and we walked there easily.

That evening, I went out looking for a place to eat. Once again, I was about to give up finding a place that I'd understand and go instead to McDonalds, when I found another noodle restaurant. This one didn't require me to order by machine; it had a woman who met me at the door, took me to a seat, and encouraged me to select a noodle dish that she thought I'd like. She was right; it was wonderful. Again, I was seated at a counter with a low wall in front of me and the cooks working behind it. That seems to be the standard for noodle shops.



Noodle shop, from Web 2025

On Thursday we had an all-day workshop that started with my paper and then included several that I found interesting. The three of us who had come from abroad – Dennis Movy, Andreas Moxnes, and I – had all presented papers at the Hitotsubashi conference and now presented papers here. As one of them noted later, it is unusual for conference participants to get to hear more than one paper from the others, and it was interesting because it gave us a fuller appreciation for their work.

There was a conference dinner that evening at a restaurant, but I'm afraid I don't remember much about it, or at least I can't distinguish it from other meals that we've had as a group. I do know that more than once I've had the chance to eat sea urchin. When that was introduced to me, I told the story of having hit one with my foot while swimming in Croatia, and getting its spines imbedded painfully in my foot. I was encouraged to get revenge by eating one now. It was just a squishy bit of flesh that didn't do much for me.

On Friday I had yet another presentation to do. Jota had asked if I would give a talk to a Brown Bag Lunch that they have regularly at REITI for people from government, the press, and the private sector. I gave a version of a talk that I've given previously in China, in Europe and in the US about the changing landscape of trade negotiations. I think it went OK, but I'm sure that many in the room knew more about trade negotiations than I do, as at least two of them mentioned having participated in them.

On Friday evening I again went out by myself to seek noodles. I asked at the hotel where I might find a ramen shop and got directions that turned out to be less precise than I needed. I did find a noodle shop, again of the sort where you order and pay from a machine, and I picked a dish whose picture looked to me like ramen. It wasn't; it was udon. It was good, but I was still craving ramen. So, after I ate, I continued looking at the other shops as I passed them and found one with a sign that said "ramen" in English. I went in and had a second dinner. As I prepared to order from the machine, a man came out and helped me select a dish, which was good. He then asked if I wanted the ramen hard, medium, or soft. I chose medium, and I was surprised when it arrived that it was much harder – less well cooked – than I was expecting. It was ok, but still not entirely what I was hoping for.

By the way, I've continued to check my blood sugar morning and evening while I've been here, and I've surprisingly found it to be pretty good most days. But that next morning, after two noodle dinners, it was high.

On Saturday our group all flew north to Otaru, on the northern island of Hokkaido. The group included Dennis, Andreas, and me; the two senior trade economists, Jota and Taiji; and at least half a dozen younger trade economists, some from Hitotsubashi and some from other universities. One was Chinese and another Vietnamese. There were some Ph.D. students as well. The purpose of our trip was to host SWET, the Summer Workshop on Economic Theory, which would feature paper presentations by young scholars from Otaru and other Japanese universities, discussions of those papers by the students, and whatever input we wanted to provide.

Our flight was not to Otaru, but to the bigger city on Hokkaido, Sapporo, and we had to take a train from there to Otaru. That was not very pleasant, because it was so full that we could not get seats for the first half the trip from the airport into Sapporo. And it was very hot. Fortunately, enough got off in Sapporo that we were able to sit the rest of the way. I've now learned that there are seats set aside (as in the city busses in Ann Arbor) for the old, infirm, pregnant, and with small children. The symbol for being old, though, was a cane, and I didn't have one. Perhaps if I'd tried, I might have gotten a younger person to give up their seat, but I didn't.

We met that evening for dinner at a restaurant that had been reserved. After removing our shoes, we were seated on the floor on cushions at tables only a few inches off the floor. We westerners didn't find sitting cross-legged all that comfortable, and Dennis, who is several inches taller than me, found it impossible. He spent most of the dinner with his knees up in his face.

The workshop went all day Sunday. I found this the most interesting of the trip. At least two of the papers had creative and original ideas that I will hope to explore further. I asked three of the authors to send me their papers.

We had dinner at another restaurant, again without our shoes and seated at a low table. But this time, to our surprise, when we put our feet under the table we found there was a hole there, so that we could sit normally. Dennis especially was relieved.

Dennis, Andreas, and Ida all had to leave that evening. They would be flying out of Sapporo early the next morning and connecting in Tokyo for flights home, so they were to stay the night at the airport hotel. The rest of us wouldn't be flying out until Monday evening, so we went back to the hotel.

This hotel was called Dormy, and it included a hot spring spa. Dennis and Andreas had used it the evening before and encouraged me to use it, so I did. I'd done the same on another visit to Japan years ago, and it was very similar. The room provides a robe and slippers that you wear to go to the hot spring. Inside – with separate sections for men and

for women – you leave your robe and slippers in a locker, carry the key on an elastic band on your wrist, and enjoy the hot spring in the nude.

One surprising restriction: A sign says that you are not allowed in the spa if you have tattoos. That is apparently motivated by the fact that members of the Japanese Mafia, called Yakuza, typically have extensive tattoos, and in Japan other people do not. I didn't see anybody monitoring us as we went in, and I'm sure that a westerner with one or two tattoos wouldn't be noticed.

The largest part of the spa is just a rectangular pool of hot water, just deep enough to immerse yourself if you crouch. There is also a separate smaller pool lined with large rocks, and another like that outdoors. Both inside and out it is walled and roofed, and the light is somewhat dim. Finally, there is a small pool of cold water, which I enjoyed going into after I was hot. I was hoping I'd feel the same pleasant tingle that I used to get from our hot tub followed by the snow, but I didn't really.



Sample hot spring spa in Otaru, from Web 2025

It's been a very long time since I spent any time around nude men and boys, and I found it a strange experience. I suppose if I were an athlete, I'd be used to locker rooms, but the last time I was in one of those, I was much younger, and thinner, than I am now. Fortunately, most of the men I was sharing the hot spring with were as fat as I am or fatter.

On the walk back from the hot spring, I passed the room where breakfast had been, and I was reminded that the hotel provides a free bowl of ramen noodles between 8:00 and 11:00 PM each evening. That seemed too good to be true, but it was true. I went in and had a nice bowl of noodles, this time with the ramen done the way I like it. A nice way to end the day.

I knew that my flight from Sapporo back to Tokyo would be Monday evening, and I thought I'd have the day free on Monday but then would have to find my own way back to Sapporo. I was pleased to learn late on Sunday that the plan was for all of us who were still there to spend the day together being tourists, managed and guided by one of the young faculty, Choichi. All of us would be flying back together, so I didn't have to find my own way at all.

On Monday we started with a short boat trip to another place on the coast where we visited the Herring House. This is an old house that used to be the home of the person who owned all the herring fishing here. As is customary in buildings where the floor is either bare wood or covered with mats, we had to remove our shoes before entering. That was not surprising. Later, though, when some of us went to the public restroom that had

been added to the side of the house, the bathroom floor was concrete and was provided with slippers for us to wear. I've never seen that before.



Otaru Herring Palace, from Web 2025

In the house, there were photos of the herring catches, incredible numbers of them, which were caught by workers who were also housed, miserably it appeared, in a small attic room of this house. Upstairs in the house was a large open room with tatami mats covering the floor and windows looking out on the sea. With some of the windows open, there was a nice breeze, and we all enjoyed relaxing on the mats and feeling the breeze.



Inside Herring House, from trip.

As I looked at the floor, I saw that the mats covered the floor perfectly with no space at all between their decoratively bound edges. I happened to be sitting next to one of the young professors, Mari, and I mentioned to her my surprise at how these mats seem to have been made exactly the right size to fit together and fill the space for them in the room. She explained that it was just the reverse. Tatami mats have been a standard size for centuries, and the room would have been designed to fit them. Also, the area of a tatami mat is still used to indicate the size of a room. She said she had recently been looking at apartments, and they were described to her has having rooms of so many tatami mats. That's not the word they use of course, she just said "jo," but a jo is the area of one mat. So just as we would describe a house as having so many square feet, they have them with so many jo.

After the Herring House, we took a bus back into the center of the city and had lunch. Again, a restaurant had been reserved for us, but this one was "western." That meant it had seafood pasta and seafood salads, for example. I had a dish of beef and avocado, sort of a small casserole, that was delicious and a nice change from fish and other seafood.

Our plan had been to go to a whiskey factory that they are very proud of here. I was not interested in the whiskey, but I might have found the factory interesting. Interesting enough was its name: the Choichi Whiskey Factory. If you've paid attention, you'll recognize Choichi as the name of the young faculty member who was leading us on this day. The reason that is interesting is that these are not the same names. In Japanese

characters, the two names are completely different characters, which if split in two would be said Choi Chi for one and Cho Ichi for the other, but when put into English they look and are said the same.

But we didn't get to the whiskey factory. Our lunch took too long, and we had to change our plans. We went instead to a German brewery that is right in the center of Otaru. There we had a brief tour of how they make beer and then enjoyed some very nice brews. They are proud that this is genuine German beer, satisfying the German beer purity law, and made from ingredients that are all, except the water, brought in from Germany. Taiji mentioned that it is not uncommon in Japan for bars to have a set price for "all you can drink." Not a good idea, I'd have thought.

Led by Choichi, we took the train back to Sapporo, this time having comfortable seats all the way. I was seated next to Taiji, and we talked. I learned that he is originally from Hiroshima, which prompted me to ask if he had older relatives affected by the atomic bomb. He did, but none that he mentioned were killed, just injured and not that seriously. I gathered that they were affected more by the trauma.

At the airport we found a sushi restaurant and had a leisurely dinner. The restaurant was full when we got there, and there was a line to enter. As I'd seen at least one place before, but never in the US, the line formed on chairs set up against the outside wall. As parties were then taken from the front of the line to go into the restaurant, everyone else gets up and moves to the left and sits down again.

I guess I've never eaten in a true sushi restaurant like this. It was the kind where the dishes pass by on a conveyor and people just take the ones they want. However, our group was too big (there were 7 of us) to sit together at the counter and we took a large table. That meant we had to order, which everybody but me and the Chinese scholar did from the Japanese menu on an iPad. Choichi ordered for me. Soon small dishes were arriving with sushi for each of us. These were not the sushi rolls that I am most familiar with from the US, but longish pieces of fish draped across a glob of sticky rice. You dip it in a bit of soy sauce and, if you are like my Japanese colleagues, put the whole thing into your mouth at once. The fish pieces are a bit too long to go in all the way, so you suck in the last of it and then chew. To me it looked like an animal eating a smaller animal, sucking in the tail.

They explained to me how they decide what to charge you for the dishes you've ordered. At the counter, of course, you don't order at all but just take the dishes off the conveyer. The plates on which the sushi is served are of different colors and designs. Each color is for a given price, so they only have to count the plates of each color to calculate the bill.

That, one might think, would take a bit of time. But no, at least at this restaurant, they are high tech. The waitress comes around with a handheld device that she moves along the edge of a stack of plates, and it somehow counts them by color and calculates the charge. This is then transferred to a little plastic rectangular display that she gives to each of us, and we take that to the cashier to pay. Amazing!

Our leisurely dinner was perhaps too leisurely, since I only realized afterward that the restaurants were all outside the security perimeter. That is, we hadn't yet gone through security, and of course there was a line for that, and it took a while. I wondered if we'd make our flight, and I know that at least one other, Mari, was concerned that we would not. But we did. In fact, we reached the gate exactly as they were starting to board. We timed it perfectly.

Back in Tokyo, Choichi stayed with me as our group took the train from the airport and gradually the others split off to go their own ways. Before that, I sat with a young professor from Kazakhstan, Konstantin Kucheryavyy, and learned a few things about him. His parents were from Ukraine, and though he was born in Kazakhstan, he and they speak only Russian. Well, not only, since he speaks English (he did his PhD at Penn State) and some Japanese; but he doesn't speak Kazakh.

He explained that he'd be flying to Kazakhstan the next day to visit his parents, but he had to return to his apartment in Tokyo to get something he'd forgotten. He was going to give his old iPhone to his mother, at her request, and he wanted to take along the box it came in and the other things that had been in that box, like the instructions. This was because he was going to try to persuade his mother to sell the phone, not keep it. And the reason for that was that, even though she said she very much wanted a smart phone, he believed that it would be useless for her. "What would she be able to do with it?" he asked. This was not, apparently, because of any lack of phone service or internet in Kazakhstan, but because he thought she was too old to be able to use it. She is 54. Ugh.

Choichi escorted me to the last of my four hotels where I would stay just one night, this one the Metropolitan Hotel, next to the train station. He left me at the entrance to the building with instructions to take the elevator to the 27th floor for reception. Sure enough, that's where it was, and all the rooms were on even higher floors, mine on 31. The building was a skyscraper with offices on the lower floors.

When I turned my phone back on as we left the flight from Otaru, I found a message from Pat saying that Delta had shut down all flights. That was unsettling, but correct. For several hours on Monday, Delta has not been able to board any flights because its computer system had shut down due to a power outage. Fortunately, a bit later that evening it looked like they had gotten some of their flights in the air, and with luck mine would not be cancelled or delayed.

It wasn't cancelled, and the short delay we experienced wasn't a problem, at least for me. The man in the seat in front of me, however, was furious. He kept making remarks, sometimes just to himself, and sometimes to the flight attendants. The delay, we were told, would be one hour so that passengers who were held up at security could make it. In spite of that, this man stood at his seat looking back at the entrance to the plane and saying, "Look at that, they are still letting people on." I pointed out that this was the



Night view from Metropolitan Hotel, from trip.



Day view from Metropolitan Hotel, from trip.

purpose of the delay, but he wasn't happy.
I overheard him talking to one of the flight attendants, complaining that he would get stuck in Detroit, "which is an awful city."

OK, I'm pretty much done with this except for filling in a few details that I made notes of along the way. The first has to be the toilets. I can't recall if I've ever mentioned these in a journal before, but Japanese toilets are very special. They have a nozzle that, when you press a button, moves out from under the back of the seat and squirts warm water up where it is needed to wash you off. Controls allow you to move it back and forth and change the pressure. Typically, there is one button just marked with a spray, and another with something indicating female. The female one squirts further forward than the other.

What has not been clear to me is exactly what role toilet paper is supposed to play. You'd think it might be used to dry one off, at least. But their paper is so thin that it almost dissolves. I kept meaning to Google how to use the toilet but never got around to that. Anyhow, I became very attached to these toilets and will miss them. In my last hotel, I thought it did not have this feature, and I complained to Pat about that. She was very understanding. In fact, the toilet was a proper Japanese one, but it had the controls on the front of the bathroom counter, next to the toilet, instead to attached to the toilet seat directly, as is more common.

Another bathroom detail: the public restrooms at the university and also, I think, at Reiti, did not have towels or hand dryers of any sort. A colleague explained that the Japanese

customarily carry with them a small cloth to dry their hands after washing them. Since I carry a clean handkerchief, I took to using that.

Twice during my stay, I sent laundry to be done by the hotel. That's much more convenient than taking along enough clothes for this length of trip, and I've done the same before. Typically, you fill out a form with the numbers of items, put it all in a plastic bag, call housekeeping, and they send someone to pick it up. At the second hotel I did that just before I was to leave my room, and as I got on the elevator a short way from my room, I saw a member of hotel staff knocking on my room door. I stepped off the elevator and went to ask what it was about. He was there for my laundry, but didn't have a key. I don't get that. What would he have done if I hadn't answered? (Yes, my laundry did get done for me and returned later that day. This was not a laundry thief.)

Totally unrelated to Japan or my trip, I think it was Andreas who is a runner and who mentioned to me the need to wear a "bear bell" when running in the woods. I guess this is standard in places with lots of bears. The bell is to let the bear know you're there, so that it will (one hopes) get out of the way.

At the SWET workshop at the university, a local host (a former colleague from Michigan, as it happened) requested that we not leave the room dirty or with any signs that we'd been eating or drinking. This was a classroom, and students are prohibited from having any food or drink there except water, and if we left signs of that it would be a problem. I doubt we could enforce such a restriction on our students if we wanted to.

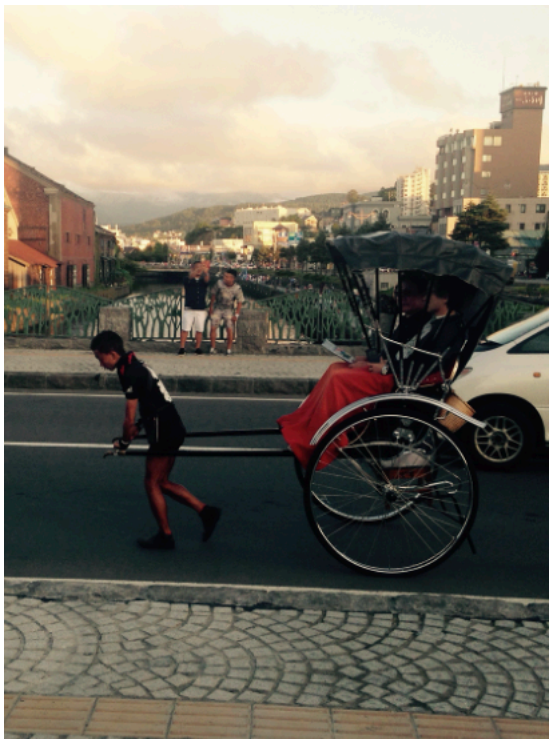
In one of my hotels, a sign by the sink said, "Tap water in this hotel has been magnetically activated." I can't imagine what that means. That's far from the only sign I saw that I wondered about, but it may have been the most mysterious. A sign on the street said, "be careful to tsunami." I understand that one, if not necessarily how to do it.

That's it for my trip. I'm now almost halfway through my flight home, and I guess I'll get some sleep.

I'll close with a few more photos from the trip.



From trip



From trip.



From trip.



From trip



From trip



From trip



From trip