



A Field Trip to Kumano Kodo

By AIKO IMAIZUMI

From ancient times, people among different societies from emperors to commoners made their pilgrimage on the routes spread around the Kii Peninsula to visit three Kumano shrines. The routes were called the "Kumano Kodo". The pilgrimage routes were registered as UNESCO World Heritage in 2004. Nowadays, 100,000 overseas travelers visit this place in a year.

On June 12th, 9 Les Clefs d'Or Japan members went on a field trip to Kumano Kodo. Met with staff from Tanabe City Kumano Tourist Bureau (TCKTB) at the Kii Tanabe Station. After visiting the tourist information center and the Kumano Travel agency where they provide general support to visitors, we enjoyed lunch at the restaurant "Kirinosato Takahara". Then, the walking tour led by the storyteller began. The storyteller gave us enormous amount of information from history, flowers and culture of Kumano Kodo from her rich experience and knowledge. The route we walked was the golden route from Hosshinmon-Oji about 7km in distance to reach Kumano Hongu Taisha. Although it was a tiny part of whole pilgrimage route, we all enjoyed the fresh air, rich nature and numinous history. After 3 hour-walk, we finally reached our goal and were welcomed by the chief priest and made an official visit.

We stayed at the Kawayu Midoriya Ryokan where we enjoyed beautiful local cuisine with members from TCKTB and refreshed ourselves with *onsen*, the hot springs.

The second day started by a visit to Yunohachi Onsen where ancient people visited to relieve the weariness during the pilgrimage. Then, we visited Kumano Hayatama Shrine and Kumano Nachi Shrine to complete the three Kumano Shrine visit.



The most impressive part of this valuable two-day tour was the attentiveness of support that members of TCKTB provided to visitors. From planning of the journey and advice on accessories, etc., they exchange emails with foreign visitors prior to their visit, welcoming visitors at the tourist information center and giving course explanation, and even after departure to the walking tour, they provide a great support by rich network with local residents.

Knowing the people and with a strong network enrich our daily work at our concierge desks in providing information and experiences to our guests.

We sincerely appreciate the members from TCKTB for planning, acceptance and great care they provided to us during our visit.

June Monthly Meeting

On June 5th, the monthly meeting was held at The St. Regis Osaka with attendance of 18 members and affiliates. After the reports from the committee, we invited Ms. Kumazawa, the writer of Japanese "rakugo" (comical story-telling), and studied on "bunraku". Bunraku is the Japanese traditional puppet theatre originating in Osaka and is recognized as the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.



Networking with The Ryokan Collection

By SHINOBU MOMOI

On July 12th, the third meeting with The Ryokan Collection was held in Tokyo on a *yakatabune*, a traditional Japanese dining boat. The modern *yakatabune* is air-conditioned and the roof-top deck allows guests to enjoy the breeze and view. Excellent cuisine is something to be noted.

There were 10 attendees from The Ryokan Collection and 11 members from Les Clefs d'Or Japan. They first presented their recent news and then we discussed on the latest guests' requests. The Japanese guests usually check into *ryokan*, the Japanese style inn, and stay inside throughout the day, relaxing which is the major reason to experience a *ryokan*. On the other hand, overseas visitors demand for more exciting activities and memorable experiences.



Another important topic discussed was how guests can receive accurate information, especially under difficult situations like a natural disasters. The attendee from Kurashiki shared their recent experience on the heavy flood and the fact that it was exaggeratedly broadcasted as if the entire region was flooded. As a result, some *ryokan* experienced numerous cancellations due to incorrect information by media. We must have accurate information for our guests planning to spend their precious and memorable time which we could assist in making the correct decision. The strong network and sharing details between The Ryokan Collection and Les Clefs d'Or Japan would enable this. Later in the month, Les Clefs d'Or Japan members made donations for the heavy flood to the *ryokan* in Kurashiki which is to be used for serving meals to disaster victims at the shelters.

CSR Activity Report

By KAZUSHI KAWAMURA

On May 28th, the volunteering activity by Les Clefs d'Or Japan started. Mr. Kawamura (Palace Hotel Tokyo) visited the "Kids door" and lectured at their English class. They were established in 2007 to run free after school for junior and senior high school students. They operate 50 branches in Tokyo and Tohoku region where they suffered *tsunami* in 2011.



Most of the volunteers were college students and workers. The classes were held to familiarize students in speaking English. There were 14 students and 11 volunteers on the day. Mr. Kawamura lectured on hotels and Les Clefs d'Or. Students seemed to understand about hospitality through the activity.

July Monthly Meeting

On July 17th, the monthly meeting was held in Roppongi, Tokyo, with attendance of 31 members and affiliates. After the reports from the committee, the members shared how they operate, manage and train the concierge team at each hotel. The certificate of membership was presented to the Meikai University who is our newest "Affiliate".

