

お城から文化へ

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日本に着いて、私のやりたいことの中で一番にしたい事があった。まず日本のお城を見たかった。仏教のお寺や神社に行く前に、噂に聞いていた東京や大阪の大都市に行く前に、最初はお城に行くことだった。すぐに自転車に乗って、新しい友人をさそって和歌山城まで40分のサイクリングの旅に出かけた。

遠くから撮った写真しか見たことがなかった私は、自分がお城に何を期待しているのかわからなかった。ただ、日本の都市にそびえ立つ、美しくも堂々とした建物を見たいと思った。和歌山にお城があると知ったとき、私は嬉しくなり、それが自転車で行ける距離にあると知ったときはさらに嬉しくなった。

和歌山城は、和歌山市の高層ビルの中に少しだけ見える、伝統的な外観の城だった。和歌山城を間近で見たらどのように見えるのだろうか、写真で見たような特別な景色になるのだろうか、それとも大都市の典型的な雑音や騒音に囲まれて、和歌山城の美観が台無しになってしまうのだろうか、と考え始めた。

とても大きな都市（私にとっては）の真ん中にある静かな自然のオアシスは、私が思っていた以上のものだった。和歌山城の敷地に入ると、街の景色や音は消え去り、まるでタイムスリップしたかのようだった。古代の石垣とそびえ立つ木々に囲まれ、自分たちがこんな大きな都市の真ん中にいることが信じられなかった。

城の敷地だけでも、すでに十分に印象的だったが、実際に城に入るとまったく別世界だった。日本に来るまで、私は桜を見たことがなかったし、お城の入口に広がる桜の景色は予想できなかった。

たいていの観光地では、見るべきものをすべて見てしまうと、最初の興味や魅力はすぐに薄れてしまい、次の場所に行きたくなくなってしまう。和歌山城の場合は、何時間もそこにいて、夕方になっても帰りたくないと思った。

その後、再び、日本人の友人のガイドで再び和歌山城を訪れたとき、最初に訪れたときに見ていなかった場所が城内にたくさんあることを発見した。ガイドをしてくれたのは、和歌山大学の写真部で知り合った友人で、なんと本物の忍者（和歌山城で忍者のアルバイト）だった。今回はアジサイの庭園と、まだ訪れていない城内のいろいろな場所を見た。





このことは、これまで和歌山を旅したほとんどすべての場所で繰り返されてきた経験だ。紀三井寺、根来寺、和歌浦.....どこを旅しても、その美しさに心を打たれる。その美しさに魅了され、その場を離れたくなくなる。

それ以上に、どこに行っても和歌山の歴史と文化が愛情をもって保存・保護され、誰もが見て楽しむことができるようにはっきりと見えるものだと感じる。お祭りをただ遠

くから見るのではなく、参加できることは、和歌山の人々や文化を身近に感じることに大きく貢献している。

和歌山の文化は、博物館に閉じ込められているようなものではなく、生き生きとしていて、注意深く見ていけば、どこにいてもそれに気づくことができる。和歌山で過ごすうちに、私は和歌山の文化に触れ続け、その文化を作り上げている人々に出会う。和歌山の文化が最もよく見られる場所を訪れ、和歌山の文化がはっきり見える祭りに参加する。和歌山に来てよかったと、ますます思いを強くしている。

From Castles to Culture

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When I arrived in Japan, there was one thing that sat at the very top of my to do list. I wanted to see a Japanese castle. Before Buddhist temples and Shinto Shrines, before going to the big cities of Tokyo and Osaka I had heard so much about, the first item on my sightseeing agenda was a trip to a castle. I hopped on a bike as soon as I could and dragged a new friend on a 40-minute bike ride to Wakayama Castle.

I don't know exactly what my expectations were, I had only ever seen photos taken from a distance. Seeing the beautiful yet imposing buildings looming over Japanese cities. When I learned that Wakayama had a castle, I was ecstatic, and even more so when I discovered it was within cycling distance.

As we cycled eventually Wakayama castle became visible, a traditional looking Japanese castle barely visible between the crowded high-rises of Wakayama city. I began to wonder how the castle would look up close, if it was really going to be as special a view as I had seen in photos, or whether it would be a so surrounded by the typical noises sights and sounds of a massive city that the aesthetic of the castle would be ruined. If at least the cityscape did not ruin the aesthetic of the castle too much then I would be happy.

An oasis of quiet nature nestled in the middle of (what is to me) a massive city was certainly not what I had expected. As we entered the Wakayama castle grounds the sights and sounds of the city faded and it felt like we were transported back in time. Surrounded by nothing but ancient stone walls and towering trees it was difficult to believe that we were right in the center of such a massive city.

This feeling was only to be repeated, as although the castle grounds were already impressive enough, actually entering the castle was something else entirely. Before coming to Japan, I had never seen Sakura before, and nothing prepared me for the view that guarded the entry to the castle itself.

I find that when I go to most sightseeing spots, my initial interest and fascination quickly fades as I see everything there is to see, and just want to move on to the next place. With Wakayama castle, I did not want to leave until we

had been there for hours, and evening had already come.

But this experience was not all, as when I subsequently returned to the castle with a local friend acting as a guide, I discovered that there were many areas of the castle grounds that I had not even seen on my first visit. My guide, a friend I had met through the Wakayama university photography club turned out to be a real-life Ninja (part time) and had offered to show me around the castle again. This time I saw the Hydrangea garden, along with various other parts of the castle I had yet to visit.

This is an experience that has been repeated almost everywhere I have travelled in Wakayama up to this point. Kimiidera, Negoroji, Wakaura, wherever I travel I am struck by the beauty of these places. A beauty that captures you and threatens to prevent you from ever wanting to leave.

More than this, I feel that everywhere I go, the History and culture of Wakayama is something that is lovingly preserved and clearly visible for everyone to see and enjoy. Being able to participate in festivals, rather than just watch on as an onlooker has contributed greatly to feeling a sense of closeness to Wakayama's people and culture.

Rather than feeling like something locked away in museums or in vaults, Wakayama's culture feels vibrant and alive, and if you pay attention, you will notice it anywhere and everywhere.

As I spend time here, I continuously come into contact with Wakayama's culture by meeting the people who make that culture what it is. As I travel to the places where that culture is most visible and participate in festivals where that culture is exalted and celebrated. I feel more and more that I am lucky to be here.