

A visit by the University of Tasmania Taiko Society to Mie Prefecture, Japan in February 2005.

(A personal account by Maria Grist)

On the 3rd of February, the Tasmanian taiko group travelled from Yaizu to Mie, where we met up with our host families in a traditional Japanese house belonging to one of the host mums, Fumiko Kamiya. The house was beautiful, and was set up especially for performing the traditional tea ceremony. We shared in the tea ceremony while overlooking the wonderful Japanese gardens. One



of the members of our group, Steve, had just turned up, so our group was all together for the first time. There was a lot of good food to eat and good company. The group were all pleased to meet up with Professor Miyamoto, who was there as well.



Then we all went home with our host families. My host family was the Inoguchi family, who live in Tsu City. They were really nice and did everything they could to make my stay memorable. My room was a traditional room, and I slept very well on the futon and tatami. The Inoguchis have 2 daughters and 1 son, but only 1 daughter living at home.

Next day we went by combination of train and taxi to a beautiful shrine. This is a very famous and important shrine, the oldest in Japan. It is called Ise Shrine. An English-speaking guide had been organised to show us around. We walked through gates which had green branches strapped to them, to mark the entrance to a sacred area. We also saw the water purification area and beautiful gardens. We were fortunate to be able to see a traditional ceremony. Firstly, we were ushered into a waiting room where we were served Japanese tea. Then we were led across to the main hall, where the performance took place. We sat down Japanese style for the introduction to the ceremony. An elder sang a chant and there were six instrumentalists, three on each side, Then we relaxed as two young women



performed a beautiful slow dance, which was carefully executed and beautifully choreographed. They wore long trousers which trailed along behind them. Their sleeves hung down and formed part of the movement of the dance. After it was completed, the elder offered more prayers in which we caught the word "Tasmania", we were told that they knew of our visit and offered special prayers for us. After the ceremony we walked through other areas of the grounds, including another smaller shrine dedicated to the god of wind. There were beautiful bridges, ponds and gardens which we enjoyed on the way out. The monks have a huge stack of empty sake containers which look quite picturesque also.

Then it was lunch and shopping at the nearby stalls and shops surrounding the shrines. I picked up some of the famous local pearls for my two daughters-in-law.

During the evening we had an exchange with the local wadaiko group, Seiryu, which was



really great, and there was a wonderful reception, along with excellent food.

Next morning we went down to another section of Mie Prefecture, which was Inabe City. It was a long drive, and my host parents drove me all the way. During the trip I got a glimpse of a monkey by the side of the road. After we arrived we met up with three more local wadaiko groups. It was great to see them

all perform. One of them performed a lion dance, and the lion bit each of us on the head. It was a very cold day that day.



It was now the 5th of February and this time we went with a different host family. Helen and I shared a host mum, Ito Tomoko, who had both a Buddhist and a Shinto shrine in her house. We were taught to greet the ancestors when we came in and went out of the house. Our host mum didn't speak any English but a young woman came with us who translated for us. The house was in the old style, and it had a separate prayer room, as well as a fully sound-proofed music room, and a separate dancing room with mirrors all around the walls. This lady had a lot of beautiful things, including art books, artefacts, screen doors which (when closed) produced a continuing picture, and a huge stack of kimonos which were hand-made and beautifully crafted. She gave Helen and me some colourful kimono belts.



Next morning our group went to a local wadaiko building factory, where we were shown the process of creating a drum, and some of us bought bachi. The factory also reconditions old drums for re-use. It was fascinating, and we wished that we could buy many more items out of this shop.

All in all our time at Mie was a great experience. We all agreed that we had enjoyed every minute of our time there.

I would also like to add a few comments from Lara Wasiewicz, another member of our group who came on this trip.

Lara writes,

" . . . we were very quickly comforted by the welcoming warmth of the Mie people, who treated us to their company and a feast of sashimi, sushi, exotic fruits and sake. Observing the traditional tea ceremony and being given the opportunity to perform the ceremony ourselves was a privileged and cherished experience. Ise Shrine lived up to its reputation as a 'must see' in Japan - a most beautiful and spiritual place.

I greatly enjoyed my time at the Mie University. It was an honour, as it always is, to perform along side fellow Wadaiko players and observe the diverse rhythms and formations that are played. I was particularly fascinated with a style of bachi I had not seen before, and was delighted when pair of these bachi were given to me as a gift. Thank you again. The reception following the performance was very entertaining - I enjoyed interacting with the guests and University students.

In short, I wish to sincerely thank the people of Mie for their warm hospitality and for exposing myself and the other members of our group, to so many wonderful cultural aspects of the Japanese society. "