Daijihi - Japan Trip 2026

In June 2026, Koryu and I traveled to Japan. There were many reasons: to visit Dharma friends and temples, to promote our tea shop “Shinkoko,” and to get to know the country better. We had actually planned to visit our Dharma sister Jisho-san at her temple, Muryoji, and would even have had the opportunity to attend a tea ceremony class with Aoyama Roshi. Jisho always says her temple is only about two and a half hours by train from Tokyo. So, being the tourists that we are, we thought it would be a short and easy trip. The thing is: in order to arrive at Muryoji within two hours, one must be at the right train station. Tokyo is huge! In the end, our trip would have taken 4 hours altogether. Because we had a very tight travel schedule, we couldn’t visit Jisho, but we’ll definitely make up for it soon!

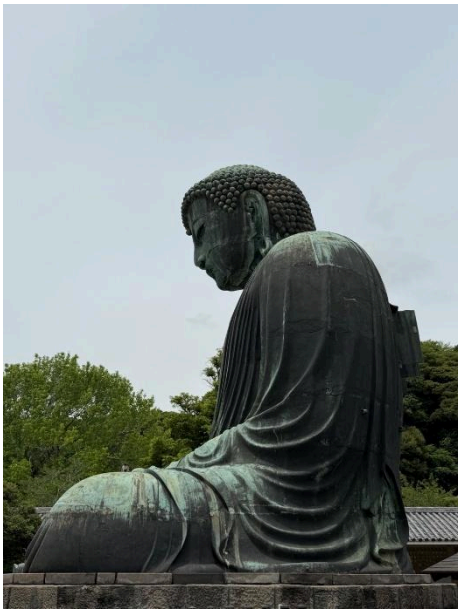
However, we were able to visit our Dharma friend Hojun-san at Shogakuji Temple in Tokyo and sit a zazenkai with him.

Unfortunately, Abbess Yuko Yamada, whom we had visited the last time, was not present. She’s been traveling a lot lately, as she was appointed a “Toku ha fukyoshi” (a teacher designated by Sotoshu to be dispatched for dissemination) and is therefore traveling extensively throughout Japan. Nowadays, many temples have to close down, but Yuko Yamada is currently building a new three-story temple building for an authentic Sodo. It’s scheduled to be completed in October.

Hojun-san accompanied us as an interpreter for our tea business meetings in Kagoshima, and we had a wonderful time together.

Among other things, we visited the incredible island of Yakushima. It’s a piece of nature unlike anything I’ve ever seen before. This island served as the inspiration for Studio Ghibli’s animated film “Princess Mononoke,” and you could truly feel the presence of the spirit of the forest.

A week later, at the end of our trip, we spent another day in Kamakura and Enoshima with Hojun-san. There, we saw the Daibutsu statue and admired its poor posture.



We also visited Hase-Dera Temple, which is famous for its Jizo statues and its incredibly large hydrangea garden. The hydrangeas were in full bloom at the time.

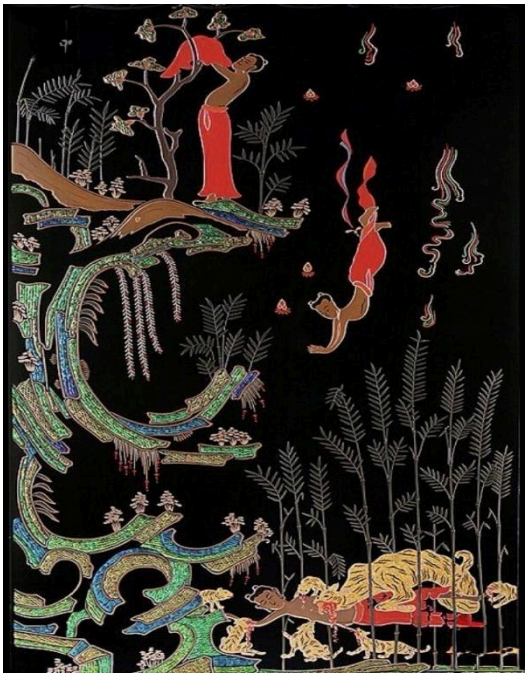
Since we were already in Kagoshima, we visited the nearby Kotaiji monastery in Nagasaki, where I had spent my angō in the fall of 2025. It was a heartwarming reunion with Reiho-san, and my shusso, Rinzai-san, as well as my dear Dharma friend Kasho-san, all of whom were still living at the temple. This meeting between Reiho-san and Koryu was also significant because she registered for the ango at La Gendronnière Monastery in the fall of 2026, which Reiho will be leading.

Afterward, we went to Kyoto, where, among other things, we were able to pick up some items for our temple and Koryu's ango at the Zen shop Matsumatoya.

The most exciting temple visit of this trip was to Nara, where I fulfilled a long-cherished wish: a visit to Horyoji to see the original Tamamushi Shrine. Horyoji is an extremely important temple, not only because Kodo Sawaki studied there for three years, but also because it bears witness to the founding of the Japanese nation. In the year 604 Prince Shotoku wrote the first Japanese constitution there, consisting of 17 articles; a replica of it is on display. The first article states that "harmony takes precedence over all else."
Incidentally, Horyoji is also the oldest wooden building in the world.

A few years after the constitution was written, Shotoku's sister is said to have donated the Tamamushi Shrine in his honor. This shrine has been a part of my practice for a very long time, as it features a special painting. It is named after the Tamamushi insect, whose glittering shell served as an ornament for the shrine.

The painting in question is a Jakata story and depicts Shakyamuni Buddha in one of his early bodhisattva incarnations. He offered his body as food to a tigress so that she would not eat her own cubs. The story is depicted very impressively as a series of pictures, much like a comic strip, and it moved me deeply the very first time I saw it. For me, it is the ultimate depiction of a bodhisattva's deed.



This image moved me just as deeply as the story of Saint Martin did when I was a little boy—the story of how, with nothing but a cloak, he shared it with a naked beggar, leaving both of them

half-naked.

Right next to Horyoji, a surprise awaited me. In the temple next door, Chugu-ji, there is a statue that has also played an important role in my life. It depicts the mother of Prince Shotoku, Anahobe no Hashihito.
She has turned completely black from the many incense sticks that have been burned in her honor!
All the statues at Horyoji have rather elongated faces. This is because Buddhism first reached Japan via Korea, and that was the traditional way of depicting faces there.

There are still so many little details we discovered that I could share—such as Kiriko glassware, a forgotten art from the Meiji era; colorful, finely cut glass reminiscent of Bohemian glass (a region that once belonged to Austria and is now part of the Czech Republic in Central Europe) from the last century, but featuring Japanese motifs—but perhaps I'll save that for another time.
Koryu and I try to travel to Japan once a year—on the one hand, to strengthen our relationships with our tea farmers and to find new suppliers, and on the other hand, to strengthen our ties with the temples we're friends with and, more generally, to immerse ourselves more deeply in Japanese culture and thereby gain a deeper understanding of our practice.
"Chazen ichimi"— "Tea and Zen are one"—is an old Japanese saying; the history of tea is very closely linked to Zen. The first book about tea in Japan, *Kissa Yōjōki*

Kissa Yōjōki ("A Record of Drinking Tea for Good Health") was written by Eisai, who introduced the Rinzai school to Japan. He was the teacher of Myozen, Dogen's first Zen teacher, with whom he traveled to China. Eisai brought tea leaves to Japan but initially gave them as a gift to the monk Myoe of Kosanji Temple.

(Information sign from Myoe's temple garden, Copyright Hojun-san)

Myoe planted the tea in his temple garden (see photo)—this is where it all began. During his journey, he brought the leaves to Uji in Kyoto.

For us, tea is an ideal way to fund our "Daijihi" project in Vienna (Austria); you can read more about it in our impact report.
Our zazen forms the foundation for our daily activities, including our economic endeavors. Dogen Zenji says, "Samsara and Nirvana are one"—meaning there is no difference between samsara and nirvana.
In this impact report, we aim to convey what we have accomplished in the past two years since our project house was established. An important part of our daily life is working together in the teahouse. Temples have always been economic enterprises as well, and economics is, in principle, not a bad thing, the question is always the underlying intention.
I would like to conclude my report with the words with which Eisai opens his essay on the healing effects of tea:

"As for tea, it is an elixir made of powdered tea leaves for everlasting good health, the secret to fulfilling one's human duties, and the prolongation of life."