



a romantic japanese adventure

ABOARD MILLENNIUM'S SUITE CLASS

ARTICLE BY SANDY BORNSTEIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE TRAVELING BORNSTEIN'S

Cruise ships sail to worldwide destinations where couples can rediscover their sense of wonder. Tropical ports of call and exotic locations are usually near the top of these lists. Ira and I fell in love with Japanese history and culture during a 2015 visit to Nagasaki. Fascinated by what we discovered, we researched future Japanese itineraries. To sample coastal towns, we chose a 2019 Celebrity Cruises' 14-day immersive Japanese cruise.

During this two-week period, we circled Japan. Since we had limited time in each port, we selected shore excursions designed to maximize our land experiences while simultaneously including sufficient time aboard to take advantage of cruising perks. To provide a sampling of our memorable experience, I am highlighting our key land experiences along with a taste of our Suite Class experience.

YOKOHAMA (TOKYO)

By arriving a couple of days early, we were able to explore Japanese culture and history in Tokyo and Yokohama. During a guided tour of the Edo-Tokyo Museum and the Tokyo SkyTree Observatory, we compared early history with modern life. A rickshaw ride through the streets of Tokyo and an Amezaiku workshop offered glimpses into the past. To learn more about our visit to Tokyo, read **Tour Tokyo in Comfort and Style**.

Prior to embarking on the cruise, we walked around the harbor area. Unlike many other ports of call that are not pedestrian friendly, Yokohama, Japan's

second-largest city, is easily maneuvered by foot and public transportation. We came across several diagrams and pictures informing visitors of the city's transformation from a fishing village into a vibrant port. These changes occurred after Japan emerged from its isolation in the last half of the 19th century. In Tokyo, our visit to the Edo-Tokyo Museum had educated us about the impact of Commodore Matthew Perry's visit to Japan. Now, we saw first-hand how foreign trade had molded Yokohama.

BOARDING CELEBRITY MILLENNIUM

After boarding the Millennium, we were offered an upgrade to The Retreat, a suite class experience. Our butler, Ramir, extended his first-class expertise and assistance. After Ramir left our cabin, I turned to Ira and said, "This is truly sweet! I can't wait for 14-days of pampering."

Suite class amenities catapult a passenger's experience into an incredible level of luxurious extra perks. On a cruise ship, I often feel overwhelmed by the volume of people. On the Millennium, our Suite Class designation gave us access to private areas—the Luminae Restaurant, an indoor lounge called The Retreat, and an outdoor sundeck. These exclusive gathering places minimized our daily interactions with others and offered spectacular culinary treats and non-stop beverage service. The service we received was comparable to a 5-star boutique hotel. Priority status was extended during custom procedures and when entering and exiting the ship.

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*Building at
Kiyomizu-Dera
Temple*

SHIMIZU

A cable car ride to Kunozan Toshugu took us to the 17th-century shrine with more than a dozen buildings and an assortment of statues. This early Edo period architecture was painted in a bright red lacquer and decorated with colorful patterns. Each set of buildings was reached by climbing up a series of steep steps. At the top, we paused in front of the Tokugawa's mausoleum. He was the first shogun of the Edo Period.

On the way back to the port, we walked through a narrow pine forest leading to a rocky beach. A sunny day offered incredible views of Mt. Fuji and photo opportunities.

KOBE (2 DAYS)

Entering Kobe Port

Ira and I were invited to be on the Bridge with Captain Theodoros Zakkas when we entered the port. We have a collection of still shots as the captain maneuvered the enormous ship into the harbor. Champagne, mimosas, and a cake in the shape of a book and bearing the title of my book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, were added perks.

Kobe and Kyoto

Due to my extensive background and interest in Jewish history, we had a private tour of Jewish Kobe. Takayoshi Iwata, a retired professor, and the leading authority on Kobe's Jewish history, met us at the terminal and then offered a half-day tour. To learn more about this tour read "Exploring Japan's Jewish History."

The following day, we joined dozens of passengers for a Celebrity Shore excursion featuring a ride on the Shinkansen (bullet train) to Kyoto. For more than 1,000 years, Kyoto had been the Imperial Capital. In Kyoto, we divided our time between two UNESCO World Heritage Sites— the Kiyomizu-Dera Temple (Pure Water Temple) and the Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Temple), and had a Japanese lunch at the Fortune Garden, a restaurant dating back to the 1920s.

To reach the Kiyomizu-Dera Temple, visitors walk on a narrow street lined with restaurants and small shops. After entering this spiritual place, we were guided through the forested grounds filled with almost three dozen points of interest.

At select locations, we had panoramic views of the city, as well as many of the temple's structures. Some of our fellow passengers chose to indulge in the ritual of drinking water from a slowing stream of water to gain the good fortune of longevity, success at school, or a successful love life.

The Kinkakuji Temple is frequently listed as one of the top places to see because visitors are guaranteed to walk away with amazing images. Unfortunately, little more can be obtained from this overcrowded tourist attraction.

KOCHI

The Kochi Castle and the Ryugado Cave were the highlights for our stop in Kochi. The castle transported us back in time to the Edo Period. We climbed up six floors



Kintai Bridge

inside the Castle Tower that was rebuilt in 1749. Along the way, Japanese and English signs and exhibits offered useful information. At the top, we had panoramic views of the nearby city.

At our own pace, we explored the inside of the cave. Steep metal staircases enabled us to go from one area to the next, where colored lights and signs identified geological formations and archeological finds. After exiting the cave, we followed a trail through a dense forest. Signs adjacent to the pathway identified the indigenous foliage.

HIROSHIMA

While docked in Hiroshima, we spent the morning in Shin-Iwakuni. We admired the construction of the famous Kintai Bridge, a pedestrian five-meter-wide walkway constructed with five archways. When we reached the other side of the bridge, our pictures were enhanced by the autumn colors coupled with the remains of fall cherry blossoms. This city is one of the few places in Japan where cherry blossoms can

be seen in the spring and the fall. We eventually broke off from the group so we could visit the Iwakuni Art Museum focusing on Samurai history. This small, uncrowded museum is an historical gem.

CRUISING ON THE MILLENNIUM

With a 16-hour time difference, jet lag was inevitable. Attempting to remain active could not forestall the need for rest and relaxation. Suite Class offered places to unwind and spend time together. When the weather cooperated, we sought out the outdoor deck. Sometimes inclement weather made us head inside to The Retreat.

Dining in the Luminae was an added perk. Chefs prepared the special menu options in their own designated space. Our knowledgeable and personable waiters offered useful information about unfamiliar dishes. For more in-depth information about Suite Class dining read “Luminae: Celebrity Millennium Cruises’ Suite Class Experience.”

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Luminae Entree ... ans, pea puree and vanilla essence



Tokyo Mori Digital Art

KAGOSHIMA

A short ferry ride to an island followed by a motor coach ride took us to the Arimura Lava Observatory, where we witnessed Sakurajima in all her glory. White clouds of volcanic gas and ash spewed out from her top. Mt. Sakurajima, the most active Japanese volcano, is in the Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park.

We trekked on well-marked lava and ash-covered trails surrounded by vegetation. Warning signs along our route pointed to the nearest evacuation shelters and other signs identified nearby landmarks. Even though it has been decades since the last major eruption, our guide reminded us that volcanoes can be unpredictable.

HAKODATE

Our journey to Onuma National Park was met with freezing temperatures and brisk winds as we explored one of Japan's natural treasures. Our nature guide led us along barren tree-lined paths offering spectacular views of a three-lake ecosystem. This area was initially created by a volcanic eruption and is known to attract cooper swans, mallard ducks, and white geese. More than 100 small islands dot these lakes. Disappointingly, the allotted time for our adventure was less than two hours. This short visit singles out one of the disadvantages of shore excursions—too little time at places worth exploring.

AOMORI

Our arrival in Aomori was delayed. The harbormaster closed the port for two hours due to treacherous waters. When we eventually disembarked, we were greeted by snowflakes. Since our shore excursion had been cancelled, we were on our own to explore the port.

At the nearby Nebuta Museum Wa Rasse, we were introduced to Nebuta Matsuri history. For centuries, this August festival has been associated with colorful floats.



Yokohama

Decreasing visibility and piercing winds caused us to abbreviate our time onshore. We trudged back through the snow-covered streets to the cruise terminal.

YOKOHAMA (TOKYO)

From the port, we took a long taxi ride to Tokyo to see the highly acclaimed Mori Building Digital Art Museum and the Mori Museum in the Roppongi Hills Mori Tower. Our senses were ignited by the digital artwork and the musical tones featured throughout 10,000 square meters of imaginative space.

Before traveling to the airport, the next day, we braved a torrential rainstorm so that we could visit the Hikawa Maru, a maritime museum showcasing a cargo-passenger ship built in the 1930s. In the pre-World War II era, this vessel was considered a state-of-the-art ship and, during its time at sea, carried more than 25,000 passengers. The decks were arranged by classes, and each class had its own dining room and public areas.

While modern-day ships offer different price points, most amenities are shared by everyone. Most modern-day cruisers are unable to relate to the disparity in service. Having just disembarked from a Suite Class cruise experience, I simply chuckled.

Our list of top five romantic adventures includes this Japanese sailing. This intensive itinerary along with The Retreat experience offer a perfect balance between captivating sightseeing and comforting relaxation.

Disclosure: *Celebrity Cruises upgraded Sandy and Ira to Suite Class during this sailing. They were offered a discounted rate for all Celebrity shore excursions. While in Tokyo, the Traveling Bornsteins were hosted by the Tobu Railway Co. Ltd. They were provided a complimentary stay at the Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo, a private full-day tour, a traditional lunch, and admission to all attractions.*



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