

Religions of Asia

June 10-24, 2017

Join Asian Religions professor Livia Kohn for an in-depth, in-country course on the history, culture, and current state of the religions of Asia as seen through the shrines, temples, palaces, and holy mountains of Japan. Gain a new level of understanding of Asian culture by immersing yourself in Japanese lifestyle to learn first-hand about the unfolding of its religions in history.

Requirements

Textbook: Robert Ellwood, *Introducing Japanese Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Read BEFORE departure to Japan.

Reports: Based on the textbook, relevant websites, and on-site lectures, observations, and experiences, WRITE two short (no more than 300 words) reports on topics boldfaced in the Itinerary below each day DURING the stay in Japan. Reports are due by midnight of the day in question. Best read materials ahead of time, then take notes during the day for easy write-up.

Paper: Using your own research and initiative, write a term paper of no more than 3000 words on any course-related topic AFTER returning from Japan. A style sheet will be provided. Deadline is July 15, 2017.

Itinerary

Sat, 6/10 Depart from home.

Sun, 6/11 **Arrival.** Arrive at Kansai International Airport and transfer to Kyoto. Check into your hotel and relax.

Mo, 6/12 **Shrine Shinto & Popular Buddhism.** Appreciate the dominant facets of religion in Japanese daily life, expressed in the home as the **kamidana and butsudan**. Walk through the busy downtown, cross the Kamo River, pass through the old quarter of Gion to reach **Yasaka Shrine**, the major Shinto sanctuary. Learn about the importance and role of Shinto in Japanese life and how to properly attend a shrine. After paying your respects to the deity protecting the city, pass through Maruyama Park and meander slowly through a gorgeous traditional neighborhood, perusing numerous souvenir, cookie, and pickle shops on the way. After lunch, reach **Kiyomizu Temple**, founded upon finding a sweet spring gushing from the mountainside, the residence of **Kannon**, granter of wishes. A veritable jewel of Buddhist architecture and worship, it also contains a Shinto shrine dedicated to the **god of love** and relationships. Following the visit, descend toward the southwest, overlooking a massive cemetery, appreciating Japanese **funerary customs**. Back on city streets, meander back home, browsing through antique, pottery, and souvenir shops on the way, then have dinner on your own—as always, unless specified otherwise.

Tue, 6/13 **Imperial Shinto.** Ride a bike to the **Gosho**, the imperial palace, in the middle of the city and visit the ritual buildings essential for the **enthronement ceremony** of the **emperor**, believed to be the descendant of the **Sun Goddess** (Amaterasu Omikami), worshiped centrally at the imperial shrine at **Ise**, whose main officiant is always a **shaman** and female imperial relative. After lunch in a popular eatery, move on to **Kitano Tenmangu**, the shrine dedicated to the vengeful spirit of the scholar **Sugiwara no Michizane**, who was exiled from the capital due to court intrigues by his enemies, the powerful Fujiwara clan. He is now the Shinto deity of academic success, the **protector of students** and scholars. Bike leisurely back to the hotel, enjoying the quiet neighborhood streets, stopping at Nishjin textile center to learn about traditional weaving and dying techniques. After returning the bike, go for a relaxing soak in the nearby public bath (*sentō*).

Wed, 6/14. **Sect Shinto & State Buddhism.** Take a train to **Tenri**, the headquarters of **Tenrikyō** the oldest and largest new Shinto sect, about an hour south of Kyoto. Walk through a shopping arcade to the main center, a massive square temple built around the central pillar of the universe (**kanron-dai**), where the deity Tenri first appeared and took possession of the sect's founder. Visit the local museum, then have lunch locally. From here move on to **Nara**, the first residential capital of the country, founded in 710. Walk through quiet neighborhoods to **Todaiji**, the major center of state-sponsored Buddhism built in 752. Home of the Great Buddha (**Daibutsu**), it is still the headquarters of the **Kegon school**. From here, meander through Nara Park, admiring the numerous fearless deer, to **Kasuga Taisha**, dedicated to the tutelary deity of the **Fujiwara clan**, a key noble family and provider of marriage partners for the imperial house. Return to Kyoto by train.

Thu, 6/15 **Tendai Buddhism.** Come to understand the role of Buddhism in **Heian** Japan by taking bus and cable car up to **Mount Hiei**, the spiritual protector of the city from the baleful influences of the northeast. Established when Kyoto was first founded in 794, it is the headquarters of the Tendai sect and also the home of the **marathon monks**. Walk around the back of the mountain, enjoying the views. Visit the numerous halls of the institution, learning about its history and development. Marvel at the ancient sanctuary to the **Medicine Buddha**, then have Japanese noodles in the souvenir shop for lunch. Walk to the western cable car and descend toward Lake Biwa, then take a local train to **Ishiyamadera**, a temple founded in 747, where **Murasaki Shikibu** wrote *The Tale of Genji*. Return to Kyoto and, if you like, soak in the hot tubs of the public bath near the hotel.

Fri, 6/16 **Pure Land Buddhism & Business Shinto.** Get up early and walk over to **Higashi Honganji** to participate in the morning chanting that starts at 7 am. Admire the gilded ornamentation and large statue of the **Buddha Amitabha** (Amida butsu). Have breakfast near Kyoto station, then take a train to **Uji**, southwest of Kyoto. Observe the Uji River near the site of a major battle between the **Heike and Taira clan** armies, rival contenders for the role of **shogun** that inaugurated the **Kamakura period** in 1185. Next, visit **Byodoin**, the ancient Pure Land temple that miraculously survived centuries of neglect, admiring its artful **apsaras** and beautiful landscaping. Also note the vast amounts of **tea** in the area, which is a primary growing site in Japan. Take a sample of various teas at the local shops. Then take a train to Fushimi Inari to appreciate the role of Shinto in the flourishing of the merchant class by visiting **Inari Taisha**, a major shrine complex dedicated to the messenger of the rice goddess and a protector of business. Climb to a great overlook of the city, passing through tunnels of orange Shinto gates on the way. On the way back, pass a **Daoist** sanctuary on the side of the mountain. Return to the hotel by train.

Sat, 6/17 **Zen Buddhism.** Understand the important role of the main schools of Zen, **Rinzai** and **Soto** in Japanese history. Take a bus to visit **Daitokuji** in the north of the city to study the tradi-

tional lay-out and architecture of a **Zen monastery**. Meandering through the carefully kept grounds, visit one of its numerous **subtemples** to appreciate **Zen gardens** and **Zen art**. After lunch, visit **Kinkakuji**, the Temple of the Golden Pavilion and subject of a novel by Yukio Mishima, and go on to **Ryoanji** with its world-renowned rock garden. Return to the hotel by bus. In the evening, attend a performance of various Zen-sponsored **traditional Japanese arts** at Gion Corner.

Sun, 6/18 **FREE**. A day to explore on your own. Connect with local friends, rent bikes to cycle along the river, or plan your personal trip. Suggestions include Ohara (scenic village with gorgeous temples north of Kyoto), Arashiyama (a scenic tourist center west of the city, with bamboo forests and numerous temples), Uzumasa (the film studios where samurai movies are made), and the Kyoto Handicraft Center (traditional garments and art work). Further afield, possibilities include the Hino Museum (phenomenal Ian Pei architecture) and Osaka (castle, Tennoji, ethnological museum). You can also use the time to get a relaxing shiatsu massage or immerse yourself in an enzyme bath near the hotel. No report due.

Mon, 6/19 **Mountain Cultivation**. Go by bus to Demachi Yanagi station, the terminus of the Keifuku line, at the confluence of the two rivers, and take a train to Kibune guchi in the northern mountains. Walk leisurely along a bubbling river, then enter the mountains and hike for about 45 minutes to the top of **Mount Kurama**, where in the early 1900s **Usui Mikao** meditated for 21 days, connected to cosmic energy, strongly present there due to a meteor hit, and developed the technique of **Reiki**. Enjoy the massive **sacred trees**, marvel at the great views, relax in the Buddhist temple, and appreciate the power of the **Tengu** mountain spirits as well as the cultivation practices of the mountain worshippers of **Shugendo**. Descend to Kurama village and have lunch, including a sample of local pickles. Take the shuttle to the open-air **hot springs** at Kurama Onsen for a languid spa experience, then return to Kyoto by train and bus.

Tue, 6/20 **Shingon Buddhism**. Pack your luggage and leave for **Koyasan**, a 3000-foot-high sacred mountain south of **Osaka**, to stay two nights in a Buddhist temple. After three changes, ride first a cable car and then a bus into the village, which consists of hundreds of temples, many of which offer overnight stays. Drop your bags at the temple, then walk to the western area. Visit **Kongo-buji**, the headquarters of all Shingon temples in Japan, then see the ancient ritual center with its Great **Pagoda**, Golden Hall, and Portrait Hall. Visit the local museum to get a better sense of **tantric art**, then explore the area's shops. Join together to enjoy a sumptuous traditional **vegetarian Buddhist meal**. End your day by soaking in the temple's hot tub.

Wed 6/21 **Mount Koya**. Filled spiritually with the chantings and prayers of the temple's **morning service** and physically with a traditional Japanese breakfast, enjoy a walk to the eastern area of the village, meandering through the largest cemetery of Japan with its phenomenal **tomb structures**. Visit the impressive Lantern Hall, a prayer chapel dedicated to **Kukai** (Kobo Daishi), who brought **tantric Buddhism** to Japan and first opened the mountain in 816. After offering a bow at his mausoleum, go on a hike around **Koyasan village** and mountains. The trail follows a circuitous route around the sanctuaries that **Buddhist women** had to take until 1872, when they were finally allowed access. Today their path is a well-signed trail over hills and dales, presenting lovely views. Return to the temple in the late afternoon for another delicious dinner and soak in the hot tub.

Thu, 6/22 **State Shinto**. Take bus, cable car, train, and subway to Osaka, then board the Bullet Train to the capital, formerly known as **Edo**. Reach the hotel and check in, then have lunch and set out to explore the central district. Begin by visiting the East Garden of the **Imperial Palace**,

built the the first **Tokugawa Shogun** in 1590. Admire the humongous gate, the main keep, and the surrounding stone walls of the **ancient castle**. Passing through popular Kitanomaru Park, reach **Yasukuni Shrine**, the central sanctuary of the war dead and major focus point of **State Shinto**, the imperial cult that caused Japan to invade other countries during World War II. From here move on to the commercial district of Ginza, admiring the bustling business of the modern city.

Fri, 6/23 **Capital Cults**. Take a subway to **Ueno**, the major northern hub of the city and visit Ueno Park with **Kan'ei ji Temple**, established by the first shogun to ward off baleful influences from the northeastern quadrant, and **Tosho-gu shrine**, the sanctuary dedicated to him. Take in the National Museum with its extensive collections of **statues, paintings, woodblock prints**, and other **religious art works**. Strolling through Matsugaya neighborhood, reach **Sensoji**, the temple to the Akasuka Kannon, founded in 645 and a major hub of religious and commercial activity. Return to the hotel via subway, on the way passing through the vibrant Ameyoko Market. In the evening, there is an option to set out for Harajuku, the center of fashion and youth activities, or Roppongi, the core of the modern Japanese music scene.

Sat, 6/24 **Onward**. Take a train to the airport to return home, or stay on individually.

Price: \$3,600 includes program fee, airfare, hotel, 2 meals daily, transfers, bus/train fares, and entrance fees.