

The Search, the Plan, the Destination.  
Not always as it seems.

Before I left for Japan in March of 2011, I researched a few things that I would like to see, and do well I was there.

In the back of my mind I had the thought of pursuing something, (not quite sure what that was?) but something? that had a connection to women, and Buddhism in Japan. Via a Google search I read a few articles that pertained to the subject, but nothing that gave me a destination to strive towards.

Then a few people mentioned that if I had the opportunity, I should try and travel to Koyasan, a monastic community founded in 816 at the top of Mount Koya, and the centre of Shingon Buddhism. Also known as a UNESCO world heritage site.

I became curious, and again continued inquiring. As I read deeper into it I became excited at the thought of spending a night in a temple, “Shukubo” temple lodging, which was offered at more than 50, out of over a hundred temples there. This could also include ‘shojin-ryori’ a vegetarian meal, and joining the daily morning services. And then my excitement grew as I discovered that there was a women’s pilgrimage route that traces a course through the encircling mountains and stopped at 7 of the traditional entrances to the sacred temples.

Until 1916 women pilgrims were forbidden to enter Koyasan, so devout females had to hike the holy mountain area, where they only got glimpses of the gorgeous temples.

So my plan was to go to Koyasan, spend a night in a temple, and then walk part of the Sanzan route, (the women’s pilgrimage route.)

What wasn’t part of my plan, was getting a knock down, drag out cold in Kyoto and having to pursue a doctor... (one that spoke English! Not so easy a task!) and getting some medicine to help me feel better. At this point I realized that Koyasan was probably going to have to be crossed off the agenda.

A few days later in Osaka, I began to feel better and decided to venture to Koyasan just for the day. (I was only a couple of hours away, so close, and

had come so far.) I realized that the temple staying and hiking were now not going to be part of the program, but that some part of the plan could still be ventured.

I left early the next morning, taking a train that leaves the busy, flat, crowded city of Osaka behind, and slowly started to climb up into the mountains. Through valleys and tunnels, with Japanese houses and farms below, with beautiful vegetable gardens, and intricate rooflines. And then it began to lightly snow.

One train ended, and then another, a cable train that literally goes straight up the mountain. A short winding bus ride at the top, and then a magical world with a 100 plus buddhist temples. Old temples, BIG temples and thousands and thousands of shrines, mausoleums and grave markers, all through an ancient cedar forest. It was truly magic. And just as I got off the bus, it stopped snowing and the sun came out! I walked around in total Ahhhhhhhh. So breathtaking that photos really could not capture it, and words can't really do it justice.

I felt that perhaps I had traveled all the way to Japan just for those few hours of walking through Koyasan. My plans had changed back and forth a few times...but the outcome was exactly what it was suppose to be, I suppose.

When I returned to the hotel in Osaka I realized that as I was blissfully being enchanted by a world that seemed so far away, the rest of Japan was glued to the news about the earthquake and tsunami that had devastated parts of the north east coast.

I have no words for how that felt. I had been blessed to have had experienced part of my plan. And could I send those blessing to the people of Japan. For as I was experiencing something blissful, their lives had been dealt a devastating blow.