

Hiroshima, Japan: An Eternal Hope

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

Some places are known primarily for one event and sadly, all too often, they're events that took place in wartime. Think of Pearl Harbor for example and there's every chance you'll think of the attack by the Japanese in World War II. It's exactly the same story when you mention Hiroshima.

Had it not been for the events of August 6, 1945, Hiroshima would no doubt only attract a small proportion of the visitors who come here every year. When we first planned our trip to Japan, my husband said to me at an early stage that we had to visit Hiroshima. In his words, "It's one of only two places in the world where a nuclear bomb was dropped and we have to see it." I couldn't disagree with his logic and I was keen to visit the city, although there was a part of me that wondered whether it was almost as if we were preying on a truly terrible event. I did wonder whether the residents would almost resent tourists coming here to remember the worst day in this city's history, but nothing could be further from the truth.

It was a warm day when we visited Hiroshima, with a beautiful blue sky, and I caught myself wondering on a number of occasions whether this was the weather on the day that the bomb was actually dropped. It was so peaceful that you could almost imagine life here before that terrible event took place. There's no danger of anyone ever forgetting what happened, as the center of the city is home to a massive Peace Memorial Park that stretches along the banks of the river. All around the park, Hiroshima is a thriving, modern city with offices and shops. It's quite an odd feeling to stand on the edges of the park and look the other way and see life carrying on as you would expect in any other major city.

The centerpiece of the Peace Memorial Park is the A Bomb Dome, the one building that remained intact following the bombing. After much deliberation, it was decided in the 1960s to preserve this building and now it's a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Originally this was the Industrial Promotion Hall and what saved it was the fact that it was so close to the epicenter of the bombing. It's amazing to look at the building and see how much has survived, with walls completely intact in places and huge gaps elsewhere. It's a haunting sight and we walked around it in complete silence, almost numbed by what we were seeing. It's a place for somber contemplation and, although it is a tourist attraction in every sense of the world, it's not somewhere you come to for photos of you laughing and smiling.

Despite that, the whole Peace Memorial Park has an amazingly uplifting feeling to it. There's very much a sense that the city wants to remember what happened here and wants people to learn from it and for something good to come out of it. Everywhere you look there are memorials and calls to ensure that Hiroshima's history is never repeated anywhere else in the world. You can ring the Peace Bell to call for an end to nuclear weapons and there's a similar message with the Flame of Peace, which will only be extinguished when all nuclear weapons are removed from the world. In front of that is the Cenotaph to the bomb victims and, looking through it gives you a perfect view back up to the A Bomb Dome.

One of the more touching memorials is the Children's Peace Memorial, which remembers the story of a child who believed that if she could make 1,000 paper cranes that would help her to recover. She reached her target, but sadly it made no difference to her health and she died from the effects of the bomb. The paper crane then went on to become the sign of eternal hope with thousands still sent here from schools all over Japan to add to this memorial. Once again, it's a very uplifting story and, despite the overwhelming sadness behind this, you can't help but smile when you see all the wonderful paper cranes that children have created over the years.

There's much more to Hiroshima though that just the legacy of the bombing. On the northern side of the city lie the Shukkeien Gardens, a real hidden gem that didn't merit much of a mention in any of my guidebooks, which was a real shame, as they were a great find. Originally founded in 1652, it was leveled in the bombing and then completely rebuilt. The sad part was that many of the survivors came here, with a large proportion of those dying in the days following the attack. They were buried here and the garden then rebuilt. It brought a whole new dimension to the gardens, which were exceptionally peaceful and all located around a huge lake with intricate bridges across it. If you love Japanese gardens, this really is one of the best that you will see.

A streetcar ride from Hiroshima is the island of Miyajima, home to what's regarded as one of Japan's top three sights for photographing -- the beautiful red Torii gate that was the inspiration for Epcot's version. You take a ferry over there from the streetcar stop and it's only a short journey before you arrive, with some great views of the Torii gate on the way over. Behind the gate is the Itsukushima Shrine, which was founded in 593 and is built on stilts over a cove. Just like the gate that protects it, it's a vibrant red color, which makes for some stunning images. In fact, that's the one constant as you walk through the shrine -- everywhere you look are picture postcard images for you to enjoy. No visitor to Hiroshima should leave without seeing it first.

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Although the reason for Hiroshima's popularity with visitors is sad beyond words, it's a city that is filled with hope and optimism, despite its tragic history. As we left at the end of our time there, that spirit very much stayed with us and, as my husband had said before we headed there, Hiroshima is definitely a city that you have to see, if you get the opportunity.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

Article last updated: 8/13/2009

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