

Kuon - The Height of Japanese Hospitality

Aug 31, 2023



As I expected, uploading my data to AWS Glacier caused my Internet provider to have a hissing fit, and my upload speeds have been restricted to the speed of a 90s modem. Because of this, the video I created as the last Podcast has taken over a day to upload just 37% and may not finish during August, as I'd planned. You'll see that drip into the feed in the coming days, but today I wanted to catch up on another topic that has been on the back burner for a few months as I completed my Namibia tours.



In March this year, I received an invite to visit the Japanese hotel that I stay at each year with my Winter Wonderland Tour groups, as they were just about to open a very special VIP room for guests, and wanted my opinion on the room and their service. They kindly agreed for me to stay for a night with my wife, and so a few days later, we drove over to Shibuonsen in the Nagano Prefecture to stay in their new room called Kuon.

As I often do, I walked up to the front door of the hotel and walked in with a hearty "Tadaima" which means, I'm home. I was a little surprised when instead of the usual "Okaeri nasai" to welcome me home, I got a flurry of concerned faces. No one had told me, but they wanted to welcome me from the gate that enters directly into the Kuon room. I realized that I should have called to tell them that we'd arrived, rather than using my usual don't want to be too much trouble approach.

We were led down the street

and around the corner and down a familiar narrow street, where we saw a new beautiful gate with a cloth "noren" with the family crest on it and a plaque above with two characters reading Kuon, which essentially means "eternal". I had been of the mistaken understanding that Kuon was a better

class of room within the same hotel that I have enjoyed staying at since 2008. Kuon, as it turns out, was once a building of its own, that the hotel has acquired and renovated, and along with their experience in providing top-class service, it has become the height of Japanese hospitality.

We felt incredibly special as we were led into the entrance, where we removed our shoes, and then slid open the door to the main room, with the tatami matting floor and table, and some exquisite indirect lighting. We knew instantly that we were fortunate to be in the midst of a very special experience.



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Kuon is a mix of traditional Japan, with a number of very tasteful and carefully thought-out modern touches, bordering on futuristic, although most of the modern fixtures were purposefully kept out of sight until we'd been given a tour of the rooms that comprise our accommodation. For example, we asked where

the TV was, and with the flick of a switch a screen lowered from the ceiling, and a projector hidden in the ceiling light came to life and started to project a TV program.

There are three main rooms, a living room, bedroom and dining room, that can be used as a second bedroom if you were to, for example, take your children, or even parents, as a special treat. There are also two bathing areas with Rotenburo or outdoor baths, including a main tub made from wonderfully aromatic Japanese cypress wood, and a cold tub, outside the door to the sauna (following page).



The staff were apologetic that the bed linen they'd ordered had not yet arrived, so luxury mattress was visible on the two queen-sized beds in the bedroom, but this space was still very special. My wife rarely sleeps well in hotel rooms, but she slept like a log in this room, probably for the first time ever while

sleeping away from home. I actually didn't sleep well at all, because I ate way too much. The meal that we were served was amazing, but in usual Japanese style, it was a little more than most people can eat, and I was brought up not to leave food, and that is a recipe for overindulgence.



The large window in the bedroom and the other equally large window adjacent to the dining room, where you'll find a large desk in case you need to catch up on some work, or better still, write about your travels, have large electric blinds that open and close with the flick of a switch. These blinds are so quiet, it felt like a scene from Blade Runner as the color of the light changed with the lowering of the blind. There is another single desk in the main bedroom as well.

One of our favorite hidden gems was a washing machine behind a blind next to the desk in the main bedroom. So much thought has gone into the design of this space, and everything seems to fall at your fingertips just as you need it.

If you were to stay with children, friends, or parents, there is an indoor bath next to the dining room and each room has its own shower and wash basin. There is a toilet adjacent to the main bedroom and a

second next to the living room, so you won't be fighting for any of these amenities. I spent some time after arriving photographing the various rooms, and I also photographed many, but not all of the dishes we were served in the evening. Rather than walking you through all of these, I've placed a gallery below, so that you can explore for yourself.

久遠
SHIBUONSEN KOKUYA KUON

合久屋























弥生の御献立

先付

甘海老と長芋の黄身卸し和え

前菜

浅蜷絹川木の芽和え

鯛手毬寿司 茗荷酢取り添え

独活の梅肉煮

稚鮎唐揚げ 沢蟹甘露煮

空豆翠甘仕立て

強肴

信州牛と地鶏の焼きしゃぶ

向附

中とろ

むつ

ぼたんえび

きんめだい

ほたるいか

お椀

はまぐりの潮汁仕立て

煮物

若竹煮

揚げ物

山菜のフリッター

レモネーズ

止椀

田舎味噌仕立て

御飯

皇室献上米

小柳農園コシヒカリ

香の物

白菜の麴漬け

デザート

いちごアイス

甘味

春山

令和五年

三月

夕食膳献立

内湯九湯十四槽の宿

古久屋

料理人

山岸

和美



As you'll notice, the color palette for this space is warm and welcoming, and I can honestly say that I could live here, it's so nice. After we had checked out, I spoke with the head of the hotel and mentioned how I could imagine coming back to this space and writing about this beautiful town and surrounding mountains in my diary. I don't keep a diary, but it's a piece of a story that I was forming about how one might use this room. We went to the stationers and bought a diary so that I could make one last photograph, which you'll see below. I wish I'd had this idea before I left home as I really wanted to put a camera on that table too, but I only took one camera with me, as I used it to make this photograph.

If you would like to immerse yourself in traditional Japan while enjoying many state-of-the-art modern amenities and top-class hospitality, you can't go wrong, with Kuon. Here is a link with details about the room and a button at the bottom of the page to book. Enjoy!

https://www.ichizaemon.com/lang_en/bettei/



MARTIN BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHY K.K.

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