

The Japan Experience

(March/April Akita World by Loren England)



Our journey began Thursday, December 5, 1996. We left San Francisco early in the afternoon and arrived in Tokyo, Japan late in the afternoon Friday, December 6. The reason for the trip was to attend the first World Akita Congress as guests of the Japan Kennel Club. The JKC requested three persons as official delegates of the Akita Club of America be present. All expenses would be paid by the JKC. ACA president Nancy Henry, AKC delegate Sophia Kaluzniacki and myself were pleased to attend. With a little help from an experienced traveler to Japan, I found a reasonably priced ticket for my wife Cristina to accompany me as well.

Saturday, December 7 was our free day. This helped us to settle in to the time change and gave us the opportunity to do a little sightseeing. While I was looking at a map, I noticed Shibuya wasn't too far away from our luxurious Royal Park Hotel.

I remembered that was where the Hachiko statue was, so after Cristina, Nancy and I had breakfast, we found that the subway train underneath our hotel went directly to Shibuya station. Sophia wasn't with us because of weather-related problems on her flight to Portland to meet and fly with Nancy. She did not make her connection and didn't arrive in Japan until late Saturday.

While we were visiting the Hachiko statue at Shibuya station, a most incredible coincidence occurred. A man from England who was in Japan on business approached me because I looked familiar to him. He eventually realized he had seen me showing my red bitch puppy at the 1995 National Akita Specialty in Chicago. His name was Carl Jones. His Akita bitch was the number one bitch in the UK at the time. Carl and his business associate Koichi Okabayashi and wife Keiko were on their day off. They asked us if we would like to go sightseeing with them in their car. We accepted and had a wonderful time with our new friends.

That evening, we all were invited to dinner by the JKC and met some of the other delegates from other countries. We were seated at the table with the head officials of JKC and the four FCI representatives. We enjoyed several courses of food, some conversation and toasting with beer. The JKC often served us beer with the meals we had as a group.

On Sunday morning, all the delegates were taken by bus to attend the JKC National Akita Specialty. While on the one hour bus ride, delegates from each country would give a few brief comments on the Akita situation in each country that were very interesting. Sophia shared a very good overview of the Akita in the United States.



The National Akita Specialty was held outside in a park and the weather was beautiful and sunny all day. A brief demonstration was given to show how to properly show the dogs. The exhibitors were supposed to follow procedures much like we do at AKC shows. However, several exhibitors were not present during the demonstration and were showing their dogs Akiho style, completely hands-off, free stacking their Akitas.

There were over 100 Akitas at the show. Two rings were used, one for dogs and one for bitches. Both rings were going at once. Young puppies were also allowed to show in the Baby class. The quality of the dogs varied, just as it does in America. There were some Akitas that were very nice. Frank Sakayeda was in attendance from the United States. He travels to Japan often. His impression was that the overall quality was less than at the Akiho shows he has attended. He said that the entry is much larger at the Akiho head-quarters shows.

On Monday, the International Akita Conference was held with several delegates representing over a dozen countries from Europe, Australia, Mexico, Brazil and the FCI Scientific and Standard Commission. After the opening address and the introduction of all the delegates, a slide show and history of the development of the Akita was given, followed by a discussion of the Akita standard that is accepted by the FCI.

The afternoon session was mostly for general discussion with delegates from each country having the opportunity to speak about the Akitas in their countries. I will not go into detail of the conference in this article since Sophia Kaluzniacki will be covering the congress in her report to the ACA. I will add, though, that it appears the JKC will hold another one or more Akita conferences in the future.

The evening after the World Akita Congress was for the thank you party. An awesome ice carving of an Akita was placed in the middle of the room, filled with all sorts of wonderful Japanese delicacies for our enjoyment. There was also plenty of beer. It was a very enjoyable conclusion to the day with much interesting conversation with delegates from other countries. The JKC also gave each delegate an Akita statue and promised to send the address of each delegate and a videotape of the JKC National Akita Specialty to each of us.

Tuesday, December 10 was a day of planned sightseeing. It began with a tour of the Japan Kennel Club headquarters in the morning. The afternoon was available to go to Asakusa to see the temple architecture and shopping area where we could buy the gold chain, gold collar and silk lead that the Akiho exhibitors used to show their dogs. Usually the set was about \$300, but JKC made arrangements for a twenty percent discount. A deal we could not refuse! We had to spend some money on our trip!

Tuesday evening we were treated to the Kabuki Theater, dinner and a drive through the well-lighted Ginza shopping district where property sells for \$120,000 per square meter, just for the land. The tour bus narrator suggested this was a good place to go shopping, WINDOW SHOPPING!

We were scheduled to depart from Tokyo at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 11. After packing up and checking out, we did some shopping after we walked down the block from our hotel to see the Akita statue we had heard was there. It was slightly worn from people rubbing it for good luck.

We arrived home fairly early the morning of Wednesday, December 11, so we had the whole day to live over again. The whole trip was tiring, but it still beat working.

I cannot say enough good things about how we were treated by the people in Japan associated with the JKC. They thought of every little detail to make our Japan experience a pleasant one.

It was a privilege to have been a part of such an enjoyable week of events. It only seems appropriate that I share some of our trip and pictures with Akita World subscribers who share our interest and love of the noble breed from Japan, the Akita.