



CIR Mariko's

# Global Café



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March 2017 No.7

## Nigatsudo Takeokuri Bamboo-Sending Festival

### February Activity Report



Carrying the bamboo

On Saturday 11th February I participated in one of Kyotanabe's yearly traditions, the Take-Okuri (Bamboo-Sending Festival).

For this event bamboo is delivered from Kyotanabe to Nigatsudo of Todaiji Temple in Nara to be used as torches during the Omizutori, a series of Shunie Buddhist Mass events that occur between March 1<sup>st</sup> - March 14<sup>th</sup>.

I began my day at Fureai-no-eki in Fugenj, Kyotanabe. Along with the other participants I watched local children carry bamboo cut down from

the bamboo forest near Kannonji Temple. Each pole of bamboo was then labelled in calligraphy style with the names of participating groups and loaded on to a truck to be taken to Narazaka in Nara, where the carrying of the bamboo was to commence.

Each pole weighed around 40kg so carrying it over the 4km distance to Nigatsudo was no easy feat! The kind hospitality of the locals during our mid-way break (a taiko drumming performance and sweet zensai soup!) and the many people that came out to watch helped spur us on, and we were able to safely deliver the bamboo to the temple.



Enjoying the view from the balcony of the Nigatsudo

I went back this month to see the Omizutori!



The event was very popular! Despite arriving half an hour before it was due to start there was already a large crowd and I wasn't able to get to the front. Once the ceremony began however I felt relieved that we were standing towards the back.

When the torches were carried they were held over the balcony causing large fire sparks to rain on the first few rows of people. Being hit by a spark is supposed to bring good health for the coming year. Judging from some of the shrieks however it seemed like they were rather hot!

## Brewing the Perfect Cup Gyokuro Tea Competition

Every year there is a National Gyokuro Tea Pouring Contest to see who can produce the best tasting cup of Gyokuro. On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March the preliminary round for Kyoto was held

Kyotanabe and I took part as one of the 40 contestants.

The rules were very simple, make 6 servings of tea in 10 minutes, and whoever won the competition was to go through to the finals held in Fukuoka.

Contestants took a variety of approaches in trying to make the best-tasting tea. Some brought weighing scales to measure out the tea leaves and to check the water temperature, whilst others used minimal equipment, relying more on their instinct.

Unfortunately I didn't even make it past the first round, but I felt proud to have managed to make six servings within the time frame! I also learnt some great tips from a short lecture given by a tea instructor. One was the importance of *omotenashi* – ie. going that extra mile. For example, keeping the cups filled with boiling water right up until the tea is poured so that the cups are kept warm. With more practice, perhaps I'll have better luck next year!



6 samples by 6 contestants differing in colour and taste

*This month I am planning on going to look for early signs of spring. Read next month's GC to find out more!*