

Edomura, an unique experience in Japan!

- Adriana Elena Stoica

A common topic of interest among people interested in Japanese language and culture is the fascination towards the image of the ancient Japan, especially in the Edo period (1603-1868). As the Japanese literature and many works of popular culture (novels, stage plays, films, television shows, animated works, manga, video games and movies) are abundant in presenting the lifestyle and customs, facts, great events of the period (Siege of Osaka, Shimabara Rebellion, and the decline and fall of the Tokugawa shogunate), historical and fictional people and groups of the period, including Miyamoto Musashi, Izumo no Okuni, Yagyū Jūbei Mitsuyoshi, the fictional Isshin Tasuke, Yui Shōsetsu, Matsuo Bashō, Tokugawa Mitsukuni (Mito Kōmon), Ōoka Tadasuke, Tōyama Kagemoto (Tōyama no Kin-san), the Forty-seven Ronin, Sakamoto Ryōma, Katsu Kaishū, and the Shinsengumi, as well as the fifteen Tokugawa shoguns, it is obvious that almost everyone became attracted to experience the lifestyle of that time.

For an unforgettable experience of the old Japan, Nikko Edomura (Edo Wonderland) is the perfect place to visit. The theme park that recreated the ancient town and buildings of Edo period give the visitors a complete image of the downtown just as it was in the past with streets, merchant houses, commoner's houses and samurai's (warrior) residences, traditional houses, arcades, pavilions, restaurants and theaters. The houses and shops, replica of the original ones, are built using traditional materials and methods and give a clear picture of how period craftsmen worked.

Indeed, visitors feel as if they went back in time as soon as passing through the entrance, since Edo's townscape as well as roads, post station, old towns, and samurai residential areas are recreated exactly like how they seemed in those days. Park staff wears traditional costumes and look perfectly integrated in the scenarios, performing different traditional activities. Visitors can also join the atmosphere by renting costumes and weapons of samurai, kimono and decorations of princesses, and other Edo characters and wearing them around the town, while joining the main activities and event of the time:

Mizugei (water magic show), the Oiran's (high-class courtesans) march shows, as well as performances by ninja's, geisha's and other traditionally dressed artists and townspeople.

Indeed, every space you can find in the park quickly turns into a theatrical performance spot where you will find the people of Edo engaged in various occupations while also seeing many other uniquely Edo features such as street performers doing the Nankin-Tamasudare (trick performed by using a 30-centimeter bamboo curtain and changing it into various shapes such as fishing pole, bridge, willow tree, and flag while singing along).

Around the park there are lots of other performers and also games for visitors to participate in, but I think the most popular attractions are the spectacular and dynamic Ninja shows at the Dai-Ninja Gekijo and Ninja Karasu Yashiki where the audience enjoys following the story and watching the martial arts demonstrations. A wide range of samurai's clothes, steel swords, throwing stars and other weapons can be found at the Ninja House, together with full explanations about their purpose and significance. For an interesting experience to understand samurai's life style and training, the audience can try the Ninja maze, a tricky labyrinth made of wood logs that look repetitive and disorienting. The bravest can visit the wax museums, Kodenmacho Jail House and Kira-Kozukenosuke Residence that show graphic scenes of prison life, torture, battle. Another challenge worth visiting is the haunted house where different Japanese spirits and ghosts, pop up from nowhere amongst sloping floorboards and tricky mirrors and some other optical illusions.

After enjoying the shows and displays, visitors take rest at the local restaurants. Good food is guaranteed inside as well as outside of restaurants, as there are many stands selling dumplings and freshly-steamed Manju. Before returning, people love buying souvenirs from the traditional shops or taking picture with the popular mascot Nyan-Mage.

For the ones interested in Japanese culture, Edo Mura is a "must-see" place to enjoy and have good memories! □

