

## **History of the Church in Japan - Part 12: 1965 - The first temple excursion**

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For believing Saints few earthly acts have more significance than participation in temple ordinances. The young leaders within Japan were no exception. They wanted to receive their own endowments or special blessings from the Lord and to be sealed to their wives or husbands and children for eternity. This hope notwithstanding, until 1964 no one had figured out a way to take a group of Japanese Saints to the temple.

The stimulus to organize a tour group to travel to Salt Lake City or to Hawaii came from Yamanaka Kenji, an older convert who, in addition to being a tour director, knew many people in influential places. He concluded that at least a small group of branch and district officers, thirty or forty people, could afford to go to Salt Lake City. At about the same time, early 1964, President Andersen learned that Flying Tiger Airlines would be willing to carry a charter of approximately 160 people for \$300 each. With this possibility in mind, mission leaders sent word to all branches asking how many people would like to participate in an excursion to Hawaii during the summer of 1965, a year and a half away. One hundred and seventy people said they would make the financial and spiritual preparations for the trip. The mission sponsored a number of money making projects to raise funds, such as selling pearl tie tacks and recording a stereo record of Church music and Japanese songs.

After the mission had announced its intention to follow through with the excursion, numerous problems arose, the most serious ones related to the cost of fare. The Civil Aeronautics Board would not allow Flying Tiger Airlines to come into Japan to pick up passengers. The mission leaders turned to Japan Air Lines. But Japan Air Lines was generally uncooperative until President Andersen pointed out that during 1964 the Church had done over \$70,000 business with them. The Church, in fact, was their largest single client. After that JAL agreed to charter a jetliner for \$273 per person, round trip.

Making charter arrangements was time-consuming, but more important and more time-consuming were the spiritual preparations. The participants studied the significance of temple work, made changes in their lives if necessary, and in every way prepared themselves to be morally and spiritually ready to enter the temple. When the First Presidency learned through Elder Hinckley that the trip was going to become a reality, they asked President Andersen to send a translator to the temple in Hawaii to prepare the entire temple ceremony in Japanese. Sato Tatsui was selected for this assignment.

When the JAL jetliner was coming in over Pearl Harbor in July 1965, one of the 166 participants looked down and said to himself, "I wonder what kind of reception I will get since my fellow Japanese dropped bombs . . . on Pearl Harbor? How will I be treated?" When the plane landed, the Hawaiian Saints gave the Japanese Saints one of the greatest welcomes ever. They piled leis high on every neck and greeted the newcomers warmly. "I had heard about brotherly love," said the worried brother, "but I never really knew what it was. Now I know what brotherly love is. Now I want to share this brotherly love that I have felt among these people who we tried to destroy, but in return they have

shown kindness and love." (Terry G. Nelson, "A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Japan from 1948 to 1980," (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1986), p. 26)

Elder Hinckley joined the group in the temple and sealed some of the couples. Many of the visitors had deeply moving experiences. In the words of Watanabe Kan, "The spirit that was there was just indescribable and it burned so strong that those offering prayers were choked up for lengthy periods of time before continuing in the supplications to the Lord." (Kan Watanabe, et al, "Japan: Land of the Rising Sun," Ensign 5 (August 1975): 42.)

Of the 164 Japanese who went to Hawaii, 134 were adults who received their own endowments. The rest were their children.

An added benefit from this excursion was the opportunity for the Japanese Saints to participate in meetings of the wards and stakes of Oahu. Arrangements were made to have each Japanese member assigned to a person who was his or her counterpart in the Church. Branch presidents from Japan spent considerable time with bishops in Hawaii and attended all of their meetings. Likewise district presidents went with stake presidents, district councilors with high councilors, and so on. The leadership training was of immeasurable worth to the Japanese Saints.

The 1965 temple trip was the first of many. The next one came in 1967, and after that the charter groups went to Hawaii almost yearly until the last group flew to Hawaii in July 1979. The Tokyo Temple was completed by the time the next departure would have taken place.