

Zojo-ji and the Shiba Garden

Today, it's hidden in the shadow of the Tokyo Tower, but the temple of Zojo-ji was once among the grandest in Japan. This was the Tokugawa clan's favored place of worship, and the resting place of many shoguns. We visited the temple on Buddha's birthday and, afterwards, took time to check out the nearby Shiba Detached Palace Garden.



The fact that we were visiting the Zojo-ji on Buddha's birthday was a coincidence. (Until Buddha accepts my friend request on Facebook, I can't be expected to remember his birthday.) But we lucked out: April 8th is one of the few days in the year when the temple opens the doors to the Tokugawa Mausoleum, where six shoguns are buried. It's always fun to enter a place that's normally off-limits, so it hardly mattered that we couldn't read the names on the tombstones.

When the Meiji Empire came into power, the Zojo-ji found itself in a precarious position, thanks to its importance to the hated Tokugawas. The new emperor began promoting Shinto over Buddhism, and forced the Zojo-ji to relinquish over 90% of its land, dispersing thousands of the monks who lived there. In a brazen show of disrespect, the bones of the buried Tokugawa Shoguns were disinterred and moved to a tiny plot in the corner. Furthermore, the temple was targeted by newly-