



日本国



In the Land of the Rising Sun

2004 | September 9th to 21st



RICHARD G RUSSO



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prologue

It's 5:20am, Eastern Daylight Time, and I'm sitting in the Orlando International Airport awaiting the first boarding call for flight #1400 to Atlanta – the first leg of my. As I sit here, I am almost in disbelief that I'm finally undertaking this experience; that I am finally going to the Land of the Rising Sun. It seems as if I've been waiting for this day for years and now, today, it's finally starting to come true. What will I think when I step foot on Japanese soil at Narita, I wonder? How overwhelmed will I actually be?

I invite you now to turn the page... and find out!

In the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 {Kanto Segment}



「The Unexpected Tour of Benkyo-ku」

september 10, 2004

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.*

Sorry for the slurp; I'm just having a sip of kofi (コヒ), or coffee, with the locals at the neighborhood Starbucks (スターバックス), Cosmos Hongo, 4-1-4, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, which is just a few blocks down from my Ryokan. I apologize for my bad manners but, believe it or not, slurping is allowed here in Japan, or so I've read. So while slurping may be bad form in other corners of the globe, in Japan it's all well and good.

Whew, it's been a long journey and an even longer day; I am bushed. The coffee house is a wonderful sight for these droopy, sleepy eyes - a nip of espresso and a bite of cinnamon bun are a welcome treat at the end of this very long day. The coffee is warm and pleasing, soothing my battered nerves, but at the very same time it is working to fuel my weary body. I've got to try and keep myself going for another hour or so to properly acclimate to this time zone, which is not an easy task since all I really want to do is fall fast asleep.

Although I was at a loss for words ordering my favorite drink, it didn't take nearly as much effort as I thought it would. I approached, bowed and greeting good evening to a lovely girl who stood patiently awaiting my order, and then promptly hesitated. Should I attempt to ask for what I wanted in Japanese - even though I hadn't a clue how - or should I be the stupid foreigner and speak broken English to her? It's my first night here in Tokyo, after all, what a time to have such a dilemma. But that's what I faced as I walked into this coffee haven, tired, nervous, but most of all not wanting to offend. I even gestured with my hands exactly what size I wanted, but I shouldn't have worried - English is somewhat spoken here even in Starbucks within the suburbs of Tokyo. Or perhaps it's the universal language of "Starbuckese" - Double-Tall No-Whip Mocha?

I smiled, bowed upon receipt of my drink, and took up a nice cozy spot at the window; looking out over the darkened, slick streets of Bunkyo-ku (文京区), a district of Tokyo, which is where I am now. There's a lot of chatter inside, as this is without a doubt, a very popular spot for young Japanese to hang out. That's what I gather by the age of the clientele currently present, at least. At times I think they're staring at me too, a gaijin in their midst; other times I get the feeling they could care less. It doesn't matter though. I, like they in my country, are here to experience the wonders of the land. They can stare all they want. I am here. I made it. How cool is this?

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.

Getting to this chair, though, was an experience all its own.

In preparation for my journey, the weeks and months leading up to this moment were filled by learning not only how to speak, but also read and write Japanese. It's been a slow, arduous process, but a very rewarding one. To say to be able to recognize, comprehend and translate Hiragana and Katakana characters is a thrill I cannot explain. Perhaps because it's like opening up a lost world or a secret code that only you and a few others can understand. Certainly the vast majority of people around the world can't understand it, and yet I can on some basic level. Nicole, my beautiful girlfriend, expressed this thought as she began to learn the language in university. I'm but a newcomer to this language and yet I feel I've come so far in so short a period of time. She's been a great help too, by providing me notes from her classes and support when I became frustrated at its translation. And that was quite often.

I recall one evening, April 5th to be exact, when Nicole Instant Messaged (IM) me a sentence in Japanese and I, like a good little student, rushed off to translate. The sentence was simple enough – she said she was writing a script for a presentation – but I had problems translating the entire sentence due to a verb I hadn't yet seen: *kikimasu*. Eventually I figured out that Nicole used the “polite present tense” of the verb *kaku*, which literally means, “write.” She used this verb to mean, “writing” or “am writing;” however, in my limited knowledge of Japanese, I took *kakimasu* literally to mean, “to write” or “write” and thus her sentence didn't make any sense.

Thus, I attempted to figure out the “-ing”, or Gerund portion, of the verb in Japanese; a long, convoluted journey through verb conjugation charts, rules of forms and various other things that passed right over my head. The first place I looked was the appropriate section of my “Red Book” - Master the Basics: Japanese (ISBN: 978-0812090468), but within its pages I learned the Gerund in Japanese is not like the English equivalent, whereby we turn verbs into nouns by adding the suffix “-ing.” Japanese gerunds are not nouns, thus I was introduced to another verb tense called “Present Progressive,” which is used to express the corresponding Japanese “-ing” ending.

kaite imasu is literally “am writing” in Japanese, but this two word phrase took the longest to construct because in order to find the “Present Progressive” tense of the verb, one must first use its gerund and add the appropriate form of the verb *iru* (“iru” for plain form or “imasu” for polite form,) a verb meaning “to be; to exist” but when connected with another verb in the “te” form, it means “to do something.” Thus to find the gerund one must first find the “Plain Past” form, and to do that one must know the “Dictionary” form. So...

- 1) Dictionary form of *kakimasu* (“write”) is *Kaku* --- Thus, this verb falls into a category called a “c-stem” verb, a verb that ends in a consonant (the 'u' is dropped and thus the verb ends with 'k').

- 2) The verb's stem, then, is “kak-“ --- This form is used for the “Infinitive,” or base, for forming other verb forms. The infinitive form of *kaku* is *kaki-*, thus forming *kakimasu* as the polite present tense form of the verb. However, don't be fooled here like I did, in using this stem to conjugate the verb into past tense. Yes, I conjugated *kaku* into *kakita* for the past tense, which is wrong, wrong, wrong.
- 3) The verb's Plain Past Tense form is “kaita” --- There's a rule for c-stem verbs that end in -ku; to conjugate, replace '-ku' with '-ita' thus forming *kaita* (“wrote,”) as the correct plain past tense. Consequently, *kakimashita* is the polite past tense form of the verb.
- 4) The verb's Gerund form is “kaite” --- This is formed by taking the plain past tense form of the verb and changing the final '-a' to '-e'. This is also called the “te” form.

This last step leads us to our final verb form: *kaite imasu*, for the “Polite Present Progressive” tense to mean, “am writing.” Thus to say, “I am writing a letter,” one would say in Japanese: “*Tegami o kaite imasu*” (literally ‘letter am writing’).

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.

Be that as it may, that night would not be my only foray into Japanese verb forms. On the night of May 10th, I recall being up until 1:00am researching verb, the stems, and the different tenses/moods there are in the Japanese language. The audio lessons I was taking – Pimsleur’s Speak and Learn Japanese I (ISBN: 978-0743523530) – were getting harder and harder, and introduced a new verb form: the “can” form. This new form joined the “Dictionary”, “Infinitive”, “Present Polite” (both Affirmative and Negative) and the “-tai” (which expresses “want”/“desire” for the speaker) forms. It was an experiment in futility as I attempted to take a verb I knew (“to eat”) and conjugate it into all these forms:

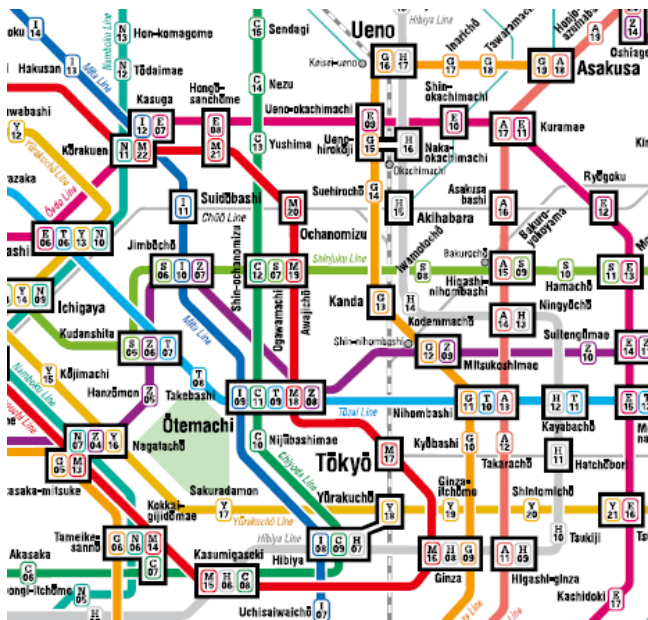
taberu / tabenai = eat / don't eat (plain)
 tabemasu / tabemasen = eat / don't eat (polite)
 tabetai desu / tabetaku arimasen = want to eat / don't want to eat (polite)
 taberaremasu / taberaremasen = can eat / can't eat
 tabeta / Tabenakatta -- Past Plain Tense
 tabemashita / tabemasen deshita -- Past Polite Tense
 tabete / tabenaide, tabenakute -- Gerund (-te form)
 taberu daro / tabenai daro -- Presumptive ("Probable Form") Plain
 taberu desho / tabenai desho -- Presumptive Polite
 tabero / taberuna -- Imperative ("Command Form") Plain
 tabete kudasai / tabenaide kudasai -- Imperative Polite

Confused yet? I certainly was; which is why I realized that verb conjugation is *iki-jigoku*
 -- LIVING HELL!

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiitip.
Ahhhhhhh.

The flight, on the other hand, went well (though I could barely sleep on the 14-hour journey,) navigating the airport was a breeze (all signs were in Japanese, English, Korean and Chinese,) entering the country through immigration/customs was not a problem (in fact, it was quite simple and efficient,) getting on the Narita Express or N'EX (an express train from New Tokyo Airport Narita to Tokyo-eki, a main metro/train station in downtown Tokyo) was also simply done. The Tokyo Metro, however, is another story but I think I have that down now.

Believe it or not, Tokyo International Airport (Narita) is not even located in Tokyo. It's actually in a city called Chiba, which is about 100km outside of Metropolitan Tokyo. The N'EX, or Narita Express, takes less than an hour and ¥2940 to traverse the distance. It's an express train, after all, which means it doesn't stop at any stations along the way and it leaves you right in the middle of Tokyo-eki, one huge underground "megatropolis" of shopping, services, train links, shinkansen (bullet trains), metro platforms and offices. I don't think I have a word to describe this underground behemoth – enormous, massive, mammoth, or colossal just doesn't seem to fit. One could easily get lost in the dozens of exits, tunnels and platforms; and no doubt I will when I return to Tokyo-eki later in my trip to catch Shinkansen to Kyoto, which leaves from... somewhere around here.



If becoming overwhelmed in Tokyo-eki wasn't enough, getting down to the Marunouchi Line's (Red Line) Tokyo station platform was equally daunting. It has become quickly apparent that not only are there competing train lines – Japan Rail and other local companies – but also competing metro systems. Thus far I've come across just the one (Tokyo Metro) but apparently there exists another (Toei,) which complicates the Metro map ten-fold. It also doesn't help that the map I was able to stare at was only in Japanese. Thankfully, some of the characters were in Hiragana, and thus translatable, or I would have been

stopped right there. And like many of the places I visited in Europe with metros, the maps displayed the prices from one station to the next. It took ¥240 to go from Tokyo to Hongo San-Chome, my station.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiitip.
Ahhhhhhh.

Speaking of the Yen (pronounced “en”), denoted with the Latin symbol (¥), is that there is a lot of it. Besides the paper currency, which starts in denominations of ¥1,000, ¥2,000, ¥5,000 and ¥10,000, there are a plethora of coin denominations of all shapes and sizes: ¥1, ¥5, ¥10, ¥50, ¥100 and ¥500. While I haven’t gotten my hands on many of these denominations yet, I can see they will all be pretty useful in day-to-day transactions. The ¥100 and ¥10 coins will be very useful in the many vending machines I see around – and consequently, you can get just about anything from these machines I see – to the metro ticket machines, which accepts all manner of coin denominations and bills! It seems the Yen is pretty versatile, though it takes a lot of it to get where you’re going. That ¥230 ticket, to go from one station to another, is about \$2.10 using the conversion of ¥110 to \$1. I shudder to think how much I’m going to spend on transportation alone!

It took a few minutes to decipher the map and the machine (it also didn’t hurt that I found one that would display English) and I was off on my first metro ride with the locals. Thankfully I didn’t have too far to go. My station, Hongo San-chome (or Hongo 3-chome) is the forth stop going toward Ikebukuro (the terminating station in this particular direction), which takes me through Otemachi, Awajicho, Ochanomizu, and finally Hongo San-chome. The ‘san’ in san-chome means “three” in Japanese; therefore, the station is in the 3rd ward (or –chome) of this part of Tokyo (the before-mentioned Benkyo-ku). I haven’t figured out all the names yet, or how the city is ordered, but I’m sure to pick it up once I get settled and out amongst the Tokyoites. I hope.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.

That wasn’t much the case for finding Homeikan, however. The brochure stated it was only an 8-minute walk from Hongo san-chome station, but when you don’t know where exactly things are, those 8-minutes can turn into an hour... or more, which is exactly what happened to me. I mean to say, picture this: I stepped out from the station, following the map in hand, and came to a big intersection – just like I’m supposed to. I crossed the highway and then... where do I go? Most of the side streets aren’t labeled with names, though most of the main ones are. According to the map in hand, I needed to walk up a side street – but which one? I was faced with two or three as I crossed the intersection. I chose one, walked up, hoping to find some sign, some direction, but found absolutely none. I turned down another, hoping for a sign... or symbol... or something and again found nothing.



Then my tour of Benkyo-ku turned wet; rain began to fall in droves. First, it was rather light and manageable, but then, as I continued to walk along with my pack on my back and my laptop bag on my front, it began to rain harder... and harder. My shoes became as soaked as my clothes and I was beginning to question my motives for being here. If I couldn't even find the place I was staying, how could I navigate? That realization was a blow to my ego, see, because I safely managed the airport, the Narita Express, the Metro and arrived where I was supposed to be. Unfortunately, that one last step was proving to be the straw that broke the camels back. No, I take that back, what was breaking my back was the bags I had on me! I was about to give up and go back to the metro station and try yet again when...

「すみません! すみません!」

「えいごがわかりますか?」

「いいえ, えいごがわかりません」

「これはどこですか?」

"Sumimasen! Sumimasen!" -- I spotted a police person; oh thank goodness.

"Eigo ga wakarimasu ka," I asked of him, hoping he understood English.

"Iie, eigo ga wakarimasen." He didn't.

"Kore wa doko desu ka," I asked him and pointed to the address on my confirmation papers. (This basically translates to: "Where is this?")

Unfortunately he could not tell me, but he provided a map of the community (in Japanese only) and set me off on a direction he thought was the correct one.



To make a long story short, I circled the entire community about three times before winding up at the doorstep of Honkan Daimachi Bekkan – Homeikan. At first I wasn't sure since there was no name on the building, but the numbers of the address matched. Therefore, I mustered up some courage and entered the facility, soak and wet. They immediately attended to me, speaking in English. And with a deep sigh of relief, I found my name on a list they kept of those checking in that day, and was quickly ushered up to my room. The staff about fell over themselves apologizing for the problems in finding their facility, the rain, and how wet I was but by that time I did not care – I finally found the place.

The room? Homeikan is a Ryokan, or traditional Japanese residence. My room is located on the second floor of this two-story structure, situated in the heart of a quiet, but thriving little community. One enters this and any room at Homeikan in socks only, leaving the slippers provided at the front door just behind you in the hall. The room is very sparse; the walls are barren, colored like bamboo, while the floors are laden with Tatami mats. As you come into the room, a small table, a couple of cushions to sit on, a small safe for valuables, a little television and a telephone are placed to the left wall, out of the way.

The wall directly opposite of the sliding door has a standard window, but the building beside this one cuts off the view (and thus is closed over with a sliding hatch.) To the right rests a Futon, or traditional Japanese bedding; this is where I'll be sleeping for the next five days. Do mind the covers though... I couldn't resist a small nap before and didn't make my futon. There's not much else to the room, save for one overhead florescent circular light and an air-conditioning unit jetting from the wall, but for something traditional, or as traditional as one can get these days, it's a very nice room. Exactly what I wanted.

Eventually I changed clothes, acclimated myself to the environment, and made my way here... to the Starbucks... where I've been ever since.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.

So, yes, it's already been an adventure. But now that I've had time to reflect up on it, now that I have gotten partially settled, I'm doing well. I find that I'm real excited to be here, and that's the most important thing. I could have sat in my room tonight and gone to sleep, but what's the fun in that?



Consequently, there's a McDonalds on the corner and its smells I'm almost ashamed to say are quite inviting (I'm hungry!), but I haven't yielded to temptation. I am here for the cultural experience, after all; I can get McDonalds anytime back in the States. But, the restaurant will come in handy as a navigational marker. And there's also a convenience store a quick block down from the fast-food place called Waku-Waku. Believe it or not, I think it's the Japanese version of Circle-K! I think I'll wrap things up here now and wander down. Maybe I can pick up some provisions (snacks, water and Pocky) for the morning before returning to Homeikan. And, I suspect, I will be in there more often than not getting edibles for my time here in Tokyo! (I'm such a picky eater)

What? Can I make it back to Homeikan?
Sure I can. Watch me now.

Turn up the side street with the colorful arrow sign (just beyond the McDonalds) and continue walking up the narrow road until I see a strange yellow cat sign to my left and the green address marker with "6" on my right. Turn up that street and keep going up the hill until it ends.

Homeikan Honkan Daimachi Bekkan is on the right.

Yoshi!
(よし!)

In the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 {Kanto Segment}



「Shibuya, the Busiest Crossing」

september 11, 2004

Itai... Itai... Itai...

(「いたい... いたい... いたい...」)

Ooooh, my head hurts.

But the rest of my body appears to be quite numb.

That's what uncounted shots of Sake and beer have done to me since I'm not accustomed to drinking quite as heavily.

There's a reason for that; the Japanese have a tradition, or rather a custom: never let a friend's drinking glass become empty, and tonight mine was never less than full. I won't complain though -- I had a great time!

Actually, I'm not quite so disoriented now that I've been away from that never-empty cup, but earlier in the evening I seriously began to wonder if I'd ever make it back to the Ryokan.

Ricky,

Welcome to Japan! We'll meet you at Bell-Vie Bldg at Akasaka-Mitsuke Sta at 6PM on Saturday. If you need any help, just call me.

Enclosed is a tel card, just insert it and press the number.

See ya!

Rie



Hai, I was that sloshed on Sake (さけ) and Biru (ビール).

As you might have guessed I've just returned from a glorious night on the town: partying hearty, drinking heavily, getting rowdy and painting Tokyo a deep shade of red!

Well... not exactly.

As can be imagined, it is rather late here at Homeikan, and even at this late hour (or wee hour, depending on your point of view) an adventure emerged – The lights were dimmed and the place was eerily still when I strode into the compound sometime after midnight. It appeared that everything was locked up for the night, which presented quite a problem; had everyone gone off to bed?

Chukusho, I cursed.

For a moment I thought I too would be shut out for the evening, destined to sleep on the steps of my home-away-from-home until someone came to my rescue (probably in the morning.) The main front door was closed and locked tight, but thankfully a side door, which was outlined by the dim glow of a lamp placed just inside, was found unlocked. I slid it open quickly, stepped inside, relieved myself of my shoes and slipped into a pair of slippers, then made my way up to my room as quietly as humanly possible.

Which is where I am now and where my day comes to an end.

Its adventure began, though, almost the moment I arrived at the steps of Homeikan yesterday afternoon: I was dripping wet, confused, and soon clutching a gray envelope that the proprietor handed off most efficiently, curiously addressed in my name. At first I thought it had to be some kind of mistaken identity case – who would mail me anything in Japan? – But sure enough my name was written across the front of the envelope (in English and in Katakana). I was dumbfounded, but I took the envelope back to my room, settled in and peeked inside. Within was a small note, which my eyes poured over quickly -- *Rie!*

I was taken quite by surprise! I turned the envelope upside down and a smaller one fell out – white with a picture of the White Singer from Alegría, Rie’s favorite Cirque du Soleil show. Inside was the card: shiny, gold-hologram-like with the same image on one side and calling usage information in Japanese on the other. In fact, that’s how I know her, through the Cirque du Soleil fandom. Not only is she a subscriber to *Fascination*, my Cirque du Soleil newsletter, she is also active in organizing her friends for events when the Canadian-born circus comes to her country. And at 6:00pm, we were to meet for coffee somewhere in the city. Coffee turned into a snack, which turned into dinner, which is where I’ve just come.

I’ll expound more on that later, though.



While dinner consumed my evening, my morning and afternoon were taken touring the sights in Tokyo, and getting to know the Metro system was a top priority. As I thought yesterday, the Tokyo Metro Network is a conglomerate of two subway companies and a handful of private railways. The most prominent of these companies is the *Tokyo Metoro* (東京メトロ) and *Toei* (都営), each operating a network of trains and lines that crisscross Tokyo prefecture. The charts below detail the lines that are in operation for the two companies: *Color* denotes the line’s color, *Sym* denotes the letter symbol assigned to that line, *#* denotes the number of stations serviced on the line, *Line Name* denotes the line’s given name, *Japanese* denotes that name in Nihongo, and *Route* denotes the start and terminating stations of the line.

Tokyo Metoro (東京メトロ)						
Color	Sym	#	Line Name	Japanese	Route	
	G	19	Ginza Line	銀座線	Shibuya to Asakusa	
	M	25	Marunouchi Line	丸ノ内線	Ogikubo to Ikebukuro	
	H	21	Hibiya Line	日比谷線	Naka-meguro to Kita-senju	
	T	23	Tozai Line	東西線	Nakano and Nishi-funabashi	
	C	20	Chiyoda Line	千代田線	Yoyogi-uchara to Kita-ayase	
	Y	24	Yurakucho Line	有楽町線	Wakoshi to Shin-kiba	
	Z	14	Hanzomon Line	半蔵門線	Shibuya to Oshiage	
	N	19	Namboku Line	南北線	Meguro to Akabane-iwabuchi	

Toei (都営)						
Color	Sym	#	Line Name	Japanese	Route	
	A	20	Toei Asakusa Line	都営浅草線	Nishi-Magome to Honjo-Azumbashi	
	I	27	Toei Mita Line	都営三田線	Meguro to Nishi-takashimadaira	
	S	21	Toei Shinjuku Line	都営新宿線	Shinjuku to Motoyawata	
	E	38	Toei Oedo Line	都営大江戸線	Shinjuku to Hikarigaoka	

Distance	Fare
1 – 6 km	¥160
7 – 11 km	¥190
12 – 19 km	¥230
20 – 27 km	¥270
28 – 40 km	¥300

One of the things I learned in my quick study of the trains today was that the Toei system is operated completely by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. In fact, the name itself reflects this: (ei) meaning “operated,” and (to) meaning “Metropolis”. Put them together and you get Toei. What you might find fascinating is that its competitor - the Tokyo Metoro - while a private company is actually a joint effort between the Tokyo Metropolitan

Government and the Japanese National Government. So it's no wonder the two lines are linked and yet remain separate entities (you'll still need to buy a transfer ticket if you plan to transfer between the two systems, as an example.) And while the company is relatively new (formed on April 1, 2004,) many of its lines date as far back as 1927, pre-dating the previous joint effort (the Teito Rapid Transit Authority; 帝都高速度交通営団; *Teito Kosokudo Kotsu Eidan*; or *TRTA*)

The system can be identified by its logo, but you'll often see a combo insignia (pictured right), which identifies that both systems are available at that particular station. Furthermore, you can get around purchasing transfer tickets if you buy into a one-day fare pass for ¥1000, which allows the bearer unlimited passage on both the Tokyo Metoro and Toei lines for a single day. Buy these; they'll definitely come in handy and will save a bundle in transportation costs, especially if you plan to utilize the metro/subway system multiple times a day.



All of this, of course, was necessary to understand so I could get myself from Hongo san-chome to the Government Metropolitan Building (TMG) in Shinjuku. Thus, with a day-ticket in hand, and my iPod playing the “Lost in Translation” motion-picture soundtrack, I descended the steps at Toei Oedo’s Kasuga station and took the line westward toward Shinjuku (E-1), caught the Oedo extension to the following station (Tochomae, E-28) and exited there.

And the adventure began...

Tokyo Tocho, the Government Building



Tokyo is a city constantly on the move. Its kinetic energy can be felt everywhere, on its streets, in its subways, even in the buildings that thrust ever skyward. Every nook, cranny, and alleyway of this city pulsates with life – at all hours of the day, every day, all year round. Because so, there are very few places one can escape this hustle-and-bustle, this constant state of bombardment and confusion, without enclosing one’s self inside their own apartment, house, or office, in music, hidden behind covered ears, or in tormented sleep.

But I have found a place.

I have joined the skyscrapers in their domain.

I’ve found myself atop the 45th floor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (TMG), or natively Tokyo Tochosha (東京都庁, or “Tocho” for short), gazing incessantly out its windows onto the chaos that is metropolitan Tokyo. There are two extraordinary observation decks here: one on the north tower and the other on the south. Both platforms are open to the public and, most importantly, are free of charge.

The TMG Building is essentially Tokyo’s City Hall, where all of Metropolitan Tokyo’s 23-wards and outlining areas are governed. The complex consists of the main office building - Building #1, which is easily the tallest in Tokyo, standing at 243-meters (797-feet) with 51-floors; an Annex – Building #2, which stands at 163-meters (535-feet) and has 37 floors; the



Metropolitan Assembly building – Building #3, standing 41-meters (135-feet) high; and a huge central courtyard. But if their size doesn't impress you, perhaps their cost will: reportedly a staggering ¥157 Billion (\$1 Billion US) and all of it public taxpayer's money.

I am in the North tower of Building #1 and the view is absolutely phenomenal. There's Shinjuku, Shibuya, Roppongi, Ginza and Yoyogi Park as big as day around me. Over there is the Park Hyatt Tokyo, made famous for appearing in the motion picture "Lost in Translation" starring Bill Murray. Off in the distance is the Tokyo Tower (the largest structure in Tokyo prefecture, standing 333-meters tall – 9 meters taller than the Eiffel Tower!), and even Tokyo Bay, where Tokyo Disneyland and DisneySEA are located (I'll be going out that way tomorrow). I'm told that on a good day one can even spot Mount Fuji hanging in the background, though, unfortunately, Fuji-san is hidden today.



There's a false sense of calmness here. Cars move on the streets below and yet there is no noise. People are but specks of dust on the grains that make up the sidewalks. Even the houses that pepper the landscape look insignificant from high up.

Ah, I'm so captivated, I'm forgetting about my Coca-Cola!

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

The moment I saw the bottle in the vending machine nearby I had to try one. Vending machines are very popular in this country and you can purchase just about any liquid refreshment you desire from them. This one is a Coca-Cola (コカ・コーラ) machine, but there are many other Japanese liquid concoctions

inside, including: "Ion Replacement" drinks – "Pocari Sweat" and "Amino Suppli", and there's also some seaweed drink, milk and coffee, fruit juices and green tea derivatives, among others I have no translation for. The Coke sports the tiniest bottle I have ever seen, but it highlights the differences in portions from my native country to those here in Japan. I find that even its small size is enough to quench my thirst.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

Ahhhhhhh.

An express elevator to bring me back down ground level will show up shortly so my time here has just about come to an end. Before I go though let me make a recommendation: if you visit, take a moment to stand squarely against the windowpane and let your imagination take flight...

Meiji-jingu (明治神宮)



There's a small bench here made of rock and wood, sitting perfectly under a trio of trees; let me sit for a moment, rest my feet and I'll tell you all about Meiji-jingu.

Unlike Tokyo Tocho's false sense of serenity, it's relatively naturally peaceful here even though there are many visitors around. No one seems to be in a hurry here, or rambunctious; they seem quite reserved and peaceful. Except, maybe, for the children who occasionally run past me; their feet chomping on the stones that layer the footpath as they speed by – *crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch*. Their laughing is infectious, though, and I cannot suppress a smile.

Under one of the huge torii, or gate, towering over the main path at a main juncture appears to be a Japanese-based tourist group hopelessly trying to gather round for a photo. At least, that's what it appears the leader of this group is intending to do, but the team doesn't seem to be cooperating. They look like they're having a good time, though.



To my left, nearby, there's a gentleman tending to the leaves that have fallen from the woodland that surround the shrine. He's doing so with what is called a Kumade (熊手), a rake made of bamboo. It's similar in style and appearance as our own garden-variety rakes, yet the fan is flexible enough to sift through the thousands of stone pebbles that make up the walkway without disturbing them. The leaves seem to cling to the rake's surface without

effort, then fall gracefully from it, as the groundskeeper sweeps from side to side. For the past five minutes he's been carving a path in an innumerable amount of these leaves. The most surprising part, as I watch, is that he leaves nothing behind. The ground is completely devoid of leaves where he has tended. At least for a little while, I say. I don't think the leaves stop falling here.

I can't believe I've only been walking around a few hours and already my feet hurt. Damnable things, these feet are, but I guess they can accept only a fraction of the blame I dish upon them. The rest lies squarely with me; had I thought to pad my feet with over-the-counter insoles, perhaps they wouldn't scream at me so. Could also be the shoes? Of course, unexpected tours of Tokyo suburbs do not help matters either.

What I should have done was taken the Tokyo Metro Chiyoda line to Meiji-jingu-mae (C-3) station or the JR Yamanote line to Harajuku station to visit the shrine. I made the mistake of using the Yoyogi station (E-26) on the Toei Oedo line instead and ended up wandering the streets of Shibuya some parts north of the park. It's unfortunate that the exit to Meiji-jingu is not well marked from this station. Had this been known, I wouldn't have returned three, four, upwards to five times to the station to set out again in a brand

new direction. But after an arduous on-foot tour of the neighborhood, I eventually found the boundary of the park just under the elevated Metropolitan Expressway, and its back-door entrance.

It's a good thing too because I was about to give up. Be that as it may, let me get on with telling you about Meiji-jingu itself:

At Kamizono-cho Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku, and nestled within the 175-acre Yoyogi-koen (代々木公園; 園 = park) is where you'll find Meiji-jingu, a memorial of the most unique kind because it's not a shrine devoted to an ages old deity, it's one in dedication to a very

influential and important man. Established in 1920, and later rebuilt in 1958 after suffering devastation during World War II, Meiji-jingu was constructed as a means to enshrine Emperor Meiji and his consort Empress Shoken.



Emperor Meiji was a significant figure in Japanese history and to say otherwise would be an understatement in terms. He is credited for the many reforms that brought Japanese society into modern times, including a doctrine called "The Five Major Policies," which established deliberative assemblies, involved all classes in carrying out state affairs (there were four distinct social classes in Japan at the time), provided freedom of social and occupational mobility, replaced what he thought were "evil customs" with the "just laws of nature" and opened up dialogue with international forces to search for knowledge to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.



In 1869, his legacy was fulfilled in what history refers to as the Meiji Restoration. To comprehend this one must have a historical understanding of Japan's past, its pre-industrial society matrix and how the Shogunate form of government was executed. It's a fascinating subject but it's not something I can speak about knowledgeably. Suffice it to say, the Restoration was a yearlong coup

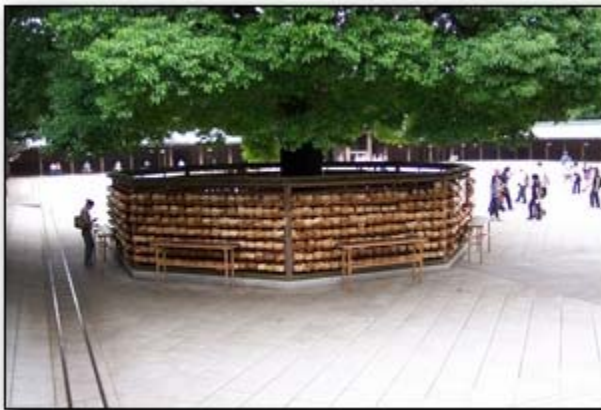
d'état (called the Boshin War, or "The War of the Year of the Dragon" due to the year in which it took place, 1868-1869) of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which had ruled Japan for over 250 years. The Restoration ended the feudal system of military rule (that the Shogunate fostered for over 675 years) and returned sovereign power, at least in theory,

to the Emperor. In reality power passed to an oligarchy of the Daimyo (大名, baron) instead of passing powers to the Emperor, but it was he who constituted the reform that followed.

The Emperor's body is buried in the Fushimi Momoyama Ryo (graveyard) in Kyoto, but his soul has been enshrined here. You can pay your respects to Meiji (or any deity at a Shinto shrine) in a number of ways, but there are generally four rules of conduct one must follow in order to do so properly. They were so detailed in the information pamphlet provided on site; they are:



1.	Enter through the torii gate and be appropriately dressed; respect the deities in your best dress.
2.	Rinse hands and mouth by using water from the stone basin, called Temizusha, but do not place your lips directly on the dipper.
3.	Proceed to the main building in reflection; you may toss some coins in the Offering Box if you wish.
4.	Bow twice, clap your hands twice, and then bow once more again to pay your respects in prayer.



If you hang around long enough you'll be able to witness this procedure being performed at the main hall, as I did. It's quite interesting and refreshing to see how other peoples and cultures worship their gods, or how religions that differ from Christianity conduct their affairs. While I know this is just a small peek into these other religions, it's one of the great cultural experiences I was glad to have witnessed. And if you get a

chance, hang around for a while or even practice the prayers yourself.

Prayers don't have to involve such a ritual though. One can purchase a small block of wood that is used to write offerings or wishes upon them then attach or hang them to a special designated tree or spot specified by the shrine. Priests will then burn these blocks during special ceremonies at special times to help make your wishes come true. There is

one of these trees on the grounds - you can't help but be drawn to it - with hundreds of these prayer blocks attached to it. It's a fascinating sight.

So, that's basically Meiji-jingu.

Can you believe the tourist group leader still hasn't taken that picture? You know, I think that'd be an interesting one: me taking one of them getting their picture taken. Let me grab it, and then I'll be on my way.

Shibuya-ku (渋谷区)

siiiiiiiiip

You won't believe it, but I've found myself in yet another Starbucks.

But it's not just any: it's the largest Starbucks I have ever seen! It's not the "world's largest" (that distinction befalls one in Seoul, South Korea), but it fills the first 3 or 4 storefronts of the Tsutaya building (the one marked Q-Front on the top) and is reportedly the busiest in the world. Since I'm a big fan I couldn't pass up a nip and a cup. Busy almost doesn't even describe the chaotic mass here, it's organized and friendly, but don't count on finding a place to sit or even a convenient place to stand. I just found this spot I'm in on the stairwell between levels 2 and 3. It was the only place not packed with other patrons. Honestly, it's a zoo in here, but it's been a great pick-me-up to my afternoon.



This particular Starbucks overlooks the famous Shibuya crossing and at this particular moment I'm almost glad to be indoors instead of fighting the crowds outside. Getting here wasn't too much of a hassle. I departed Meiji-jingu through the Harajuku entrance, picked up the Chiyoda Line at Meiji-jingu-mae station (C-3), and made way to Shibuya-ku, one of Tokyo's "super-downtowns", though the Omote-sando (C-4, G-2) station on the Ginza line.

One cannot prepare for the chaos that is Shibuya.

Having read about it, seen pictures and video (the before mentioned motion-picture "Lost in Translation" comes to mind, as a scene in the film was shot here) some time before my trip, I thought I was more than equipped to experience this chaotic expanse of urban

Tokyo life. I was wrong. Shibuya is one of the most complex and busiest stations in all of Tokyo and is ground zero for a huge commercial and entertainment district the likes of which will ensnare the senses. You'll find various department and specialty stores right outside the station gates, including HMV, Tower Records, an Apple and a Disney Store.

However, the most infamous of these is Shibuya 109, with its unmistakable round tower thrusting itself skyward almost in defiance of those (square) around it. A homegrown fashion statement is 109; it's a hangout of young Japanese girls and teens alike. Here a techno fashion culture has been cultivated that is largely responsible for the girls of Harajuku (原宿): young ladies who dress in outlandish and eccentric clothing with equally bizarre accessories, makeup, and hair. You'll hear them referred to as Harajuku girls because they tend to gather in and around Harajuku station, which is not far from Shibuya. You'll know when you meet one; I met several at Harajuku itself and in some of the various shops here in Shibuya.

Did you know that the name of the store 109 is actually quite a clever one? "to" is the Japanese word for 10 and "kyu" is the Japanese word for 9. Join the words and you get "Tokyu," the name of the company that owns the store. It's means to be a snub to Seibu, the company that owns the other half of the stores in the district.

They'll definitely catch your attention. Admire, but don't gawk.



The building I'm currently in sports a giant video screen, which gives the crossing - also reportedly the world's busiest - its distinctive glow (two others are attached to nearby buildings.) While the neon, the flicker of the big screens and flashing lights will dazzle, nothing will frazzle more than a mass of scurrying Japanese crossing this 4-way intersection at one time. For 30 to 45 seconds every 2 to 3 minutes, the intersection of Dogenzaka,

Bunkamura-dori (文化村通り) and Koen-dori (園通り) comes alive and opens up to the pedestrian; hundreds upon hundreds of them, all rushing to get to the other side, whichever one that may be. It can be a daunting experience to be in the middle of it all and if you get a chance, and you will if you want to browse any of the stores, I highly recommend taking a moment to experience it. There's not a lot of pushing and shoving, but being in the midst of such a crowd of people isn't an experience to be missed.

Though, at the moment I'm glad to be missing it.

Besides shopping and café's, you'll find a wide variety of other "sites" in Shibuya to explore -- "Love Hotel Hill" is just down the block (home to the infamous capsule hotels and various other "love" establishments for those who need a quick rendezvous.) And if you're looking for a place to meet, look no further than the statue of Hachiko at the square named in his honor. This plaza, right in front of the Shibuya station, is dedicated to and named



after an Akita dog who faithfully saw his owner off every morning and greeted him at the end of the day. Even after his master's death (in 1925), Hachiko (忠犬ハチ公) returned every day to wait for him and reportedly did so for the next eleven years until he died. The story so touched the people of Tokyo (and all of Japan) that he was honored with a statue, which exists today and is one of the better-known meeting spots in all of Tokyo. While I didn't spot Hachiko, I did spy a place to communicate with my friends, family, and girlfriend back home atop the HMV building – a cyber café. I've actually just come from a two-hour session so I'm all set.

Well, I've just finished my sandwich and espresso and since other patrons will need a place to stand, I guess I'll be off!

* * *



Viewing Tokyo from atop the Government Metropolitan Building, visiting the Meiji-jingu shrine and experiencing the hustle-and-bustle of Shibuya-ku was nothing short of amazing. I met Rie at 6:00pm around the Akasaka-Mitsuke station as planned, having spent some time connecting with those back home down in Shibuya. Akasaka-Mitsuke is equally expansive underground, complete with various shopping establishments lining the subway

walls. If you poke around long enough you'll find a couple of Starbucks, and a shopping mall. Rie was standing just beyond the escalators and at first I didn't see her. She approached me, introduced herself, and soon after we were on the streets of Akasaka looking for an eating establishment. We found one and soon the five of us were laughing it up, talking about our common interests (traveling and Cirque du Soleil) and enjoying each other's cultural differences.

And that's what this trip is all about, no?

In the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 {Kanto Segment}



「Boku wa Mickey Mouse Desu!」

september 12, 2004

Oh, excuse me for a moment while I finish getting into my robe.



It's called a Yukata (浴衣); according to my cultural research a Yukata is what the Japanese refer to as a "summer kimono". During the Heian era (794-1185), a Yukata was worn by court nobles after bathing and was also worn by Japanese warriors during periods of rest. By the Edo era (1600-1868), the public at large wore Yukata after public bathing became popular in the country. Today the Yukata is predominately worn as casual wear in the summer months (when it can get quite hot), during festivals, and at Ryokan (or a traditional Japanese Inn). And since I'm staying at a Ryokan, I'm furnished with my very own Yukata to wear!

Bathing in Japan is also a singular experience, one said not to be missed. Here the bath has been elevated to a serious endeavor; taken not just to cleanse the body but to also allow for the stresses of the day to ease away. The typical Japanese bath consists of two rooms: one that is used to undress and prep, and a second where the tub itself is located. As with everything in Japan there is proper etiquette that must be strictly adhered. Failure to do so could find the bather a lot of disgusted stares and lead to embarrassment, which is to be avoided at all costs. To take a Japanese bath: you must first rinse your body thoroughly by using a washbowl, a rag and water from the tub. Once you've carefully rinsed, you may then submerge and soak in the tub's hot spring waters. Cleaning does not take place in the tub; leave the bath when you're ready to soap up and be sure to rinse thoroughly before returning. The Japanese frown on soap bubbles in their bath. When you're done soaking, simply get up and leave – never drain the tub yourself as others will use the water for their baths.

Consequently, the name Yukata comes from the word for "bath" (湯; yu) and "under clothing" (katabira), and is very comfortable. It's a light-weight cotton material that easily moves with you, breathes well and is nice to snuggle into after a warm bath. Speaking of which, I just had mine. Not that I've allowed myself the pleasures of a Japanese style bath, and I don't think I shall since I'm not really into disrobing in front of other Japanese men. There are no showers or other Western-style bathing amenities here

at Homeikan, so the first night and the following morning I used a pre-moistened towelette to wipe down. Tonight I've gotten a little more sophisticated: I took the washcloth the Ryokan provided to the sink down the hall, wet it, returned to the room, stripped down and lathered up with the bar of soap I brought along. Once sufficiently soaped, I turned the rag over, wiped off and then dried with my towel. While not the most exciting way to get cleaned up, it's not totally undesirable either -- I don't have to share a tub of hot water with some other naked Japanese guys, or foreign travelers!

There, all snug in my robe.

It feels good to get cleaned up too. I've been running around Tokyo Disneyland all day and it's left me feeling a bit grubby, but boy was it a lot of fun! The weather was picture perfect today: it wasn't too hot, there was a cool breeze, and the sky was blue and devoid of clouds. I couldn't ask for better park weather and that made running around the resort a real treat. I'm glad I made it out there and back, really, because at one point I thought I'd never make it.



Of the many ways of getting to the park – rail, car, taxi, and bus – I could only champion for one: the rail. But while there are many rail-lines throughout Tokyo interconnecting the city's wards, there isn't a single metro line that runs all the way out to Tokyo Disneyland. Only a JR Railway line (the Keiyo line) connects the resort with the main city. In fact, Tokyo Disneyland Resort isn't even in Tokyo; it's located in Urayasu, Chiba prefecture some 45-miles from downtown. Unfortunately there's only one place to catch the Keiyo line: Tokyo-eki, one of the busiest and most massive underground and aboveground stations in all of Tokyo. There's only one station in the city larger – Shinjuku – and both Shinjuku and Ikebukuro handle more passengers on a daily basis; hence the adventure.

If yesterday was an intimate lesson in Tokyo's metro system, with its many different (and colorful) routes, today was a study in the city's other major transportation alternative: the Japan Railways Group (or JR for short). The JR Rail, as I've learned, was once a government subsidized company but has most recently (since 1987) become a private holding group of seven different companies for six operating regions much like the creation of the Regional Bell Operating Companies (RBOCs) after the AT&T Breakup of 1984. These companies are: JR Hokkaido (JR 北海道), JR East (JR 東日本), JR Central (JR 東海), JR West (JR 西日本), JR Shikoku (JR 四国), JR Kyushu (JR 九州), and JR Freight (JR 貨物). Only the JR East operates in the Kanto and Tohoku regions (the region existing of Tokyo and surrounding environs); the Keiyo line is one serviced by JR East at Tokyo-eki.

As I noted upon my arrival, the station is huge and daunting – an underground maze of passageways, stores (there's a huge mall inside), offices, lines (regular train and Shinkansen, bullet trains) and platforms (dozens of platforms). My assessment of the station hasn't changed in the past two days. There are nine different lines (denoted, 線) serviced here: Chūō Line (中央線), Keihin-Tōhoku Line (京浜東北線), Keiyō Line (京葉線), Sōbu Line (総武線), Tōkaidō Main Line (東海道本線), Tōkaidō Shinkansen (東海道新幹線), Tōhoku Shinkansen (東北新幹線), Yamanote Line (山手線), and Yokosuka Line (横須賀線), not to mention the Narita Express (N'EX) and the Maranouchi Metro line (the metro line I arrived on); with each line having many different ports of call throughout the city.

So when I say huge, I mean enormous!

Thankfully I was able to find my way around Tokyo-eki without too much trouble (and indulge in a little sip of Pocari Sweat (ポカリスエット) on the way). Many of the signs were in just enough Kana so that I could translate them and, when that wasn't enough, some could be found in romaji to aid in navigation. I found the Keiyo line after a long walk across the station's main floor, down a flight of stairs, across yet another long hallway, then down another staircase before I arrived at two unsuspecting and rather deserted platforms. Well, one platform really with dual tracks; one on each side. Only an illuminated sign above pointed out the platform number and the train's destination. Since the Keiyo Line terminates at Tokyo-eki, all platforms (and thus trains) lead to the same destination – toward Soga, in Chiba Prefecture (its other terminus).

But I'd believe it if someone had told me I was now standing at the end of civilization. It was quiet. Too quiet. Eerily quiet. Where was everyone?



The Keiyo trains have a reddish exterior and one was waiting, vacant, just as I stepped onto the platform. I wasted little time in boarding one but soon wondered if that was the right decision – it's very easy for a gaijin like me to make a mistake and end up in a place only the locals would know where. I was breathing easier when a father and son boarded the train a few cars down (and the child seemed excited to be visiting

Disneyland) and more people shuffled onto the platform. It was obvious I was early, so I kicked back, tried to relax, and let my eyes soak in some of the train's many advertisements and pitifully attempted to translate them.

It's surprising really the amount of adverts the Japanese are bombarded with on a daily basis; the numbers are overwhelming. Observing the Japanese people in transit, however, offers up a good working theory: since most pay more attention to their mobile phone while in commute rather than their surroundings, in order to reach the Japanese audience (and thus up the viewing percentage) an advertiser has to bombard its potential viewers with more and more banners. Though you do tend to get used to it all – the silly cartoon characters, the bizarre kana, and caricatures – it's still quite a shock. The train was chock full of these signs - there wasn't an inch left uncovered - including one I found worthy of note, hanging just above my head nearby: an advert for CATS the musical, the Japanese cast of course.

It's a peaceful and beautiful twenty-minute train ride to the bay – destination: Maihama. The sun, which had been rising since 5:30am (it rises very, very early in Japan), had now fully reared its head out for all to see, casting its yellow glow on everything below. Its rays danced off the rolling waters of the bay providing us travelers a look at natural Japan, something lost within the concrete jungles of the metropolis from wince we came. It's really this Japan I've come to see most; I find I cannot wait for my other train rides into the country.

As the train pulled into Maihama station and the doors opened to omit us onto the platform I was greeted by two things: the wonderful cool breeze blowing in from the bay and the rush and noise of patrons trying to get into the park. I pushed through the masses, rode down to the next platform (which contained the platform for the Disney Line Monorail and a Guest Services building), shuffled by Bon Voyage (a giant suitcase and hatbox shaped store full of Disney souvenirs) and passed through the gates of Tokyo Disneyland unceremoniously.

Tokyo Disneyland (東京ディズニーランド) was opened on April 15, 1983 and became the first (of many) Disney parks to be launched outside the United States. One of the many things I did not know about the park was that it's the only resort destination (at the time of this writing) bearing the Disney name that the Disney Company does not outright own. Its theme is licensed by the Oriental Land Company, which developed the land and resort into a magnificent destination consisting of the two parks: Disneyland and DisneySEA, a plethora of hotels: two that are Disney's own-- the Ambassador Hotel and Miracosta Hotel -- and five other non-Disney brand hotels (Sheraton Grande, Hotel Okura, Hilton Tokyo Bay, Tokyo Bay Hotel Tokyu and the Sunroute Plaza), Ikspiari: a multi-level shopping mall similar to Downtown Disney, and an AMC Theater (which seems to be a staple of all Disney parks).





Circling the entire property is the Disney Resort Monorail Line, which features unique Mickey Mouse-shaped windows and hand straps. You can identify each monorail on the system, much like you can at Walt Disney World, by the color sported on its nose and sides. There are five different trains on the system: blue, green, peach, purple and yellow. Riding the monorail is not free; single-ride fares are ¥200 for adults. There are

many options, though, like multi-day passes or a book of single tickets in order to obtain fare. Either way, you must pay for this train just like you would for any other train in Japan. It may seem strange to have to pay for transportation at a Disney park, but this is but one key difference between Japan and the United States. Buy it. It'll come in handy on the route's four stops: Resort Gateway (which is adjacent the JR Maihama station), Tokyo Disneyland station, Bayside station (for the hotels on the bay) and the Tokyo DisneySEA station.

Tokyo Disneyland Park, like the Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World, Disneyland in Anaheim, California, and Disneyland Paris in France, is virtually the same as its brethren around the world; it's divided up into several themed lands: *World Bazaar* (which takes the place of Main Street USA), *Adventureland*, *Westernland*, *Critter Country*, *Fantasyland*, *Toontown*, and *Tomorrowland*.



And just like its other world-wide counterparts, many of the attractions I know and love are found right here. In *Adventureland*, for example, there are versions of "Pirates of the Caribbean", the "Jungle Cruise", the "Swiss Family Tree house" and "The Enchanted Tiki Room." In *Westernland*, we have the "Diamond Horseshoe", "Big Thunder Mountain Railroad", "Tom Sawyer Island", "Country Bear Theater", and the "Mark Twain Riverboat". In *Critter Country*, there is "Splash Mountain" and the "Beaver Brothers Explorer Canoes". In *Fantasyland* we have all the favorites, including "Peter Pan's Flight", "Snow White's Adventures", "Dumbo the Flying Elephant", "It's a Small World", "Alice's Tea Party", "Pooh's Hunny Hunt", "Pinocchio's Daring Journey" and even the "Haunted Mansion" (which I couldn't ride due to its conversion to the "Holiday Nightmare" seasonal edition, where Jack Skellington takes over for our usual Ghost Host).

Mickey and the gang can be found over in *Toontown*. And in *Tomorrowland*, you'll find "Space Mountain" (one of the best I've ridden!), "Star Tours", "StarJets", "Buzz Lightyear's AstroBlasters", the "Grand Circuit Raceway" and "MicroAdventure!" (this is nothing more than the "Honey I Shrunk the Audience" attraction.).



While there are similarities, there are noted differences too. For example, this version of "Pirates of the Caribbean" isn't quite as sophisticated as that found in Disneyland Paris – there are no dueling animatronic pirates, and the scenes progress backwards from that found in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World. Or, actually, I suppose since this version is based on the one at Disneyland in Anaheim, the adaptation in Orlando is the one that's backwards.

Another example of differences can be found in "The Enchanted Tiki Room" whereby we're asked to "Get the fever!" instead of the original performance or the "Under New Management" drek that's at Magic Kingdom. *Tommorrowland* also still has that 70's futurist motif that once was proudly displayed at the Magic Kingdom in Orlando before it was renovated in the late 1990s. And I have to say I think I prefer what's here at Tokyo Disneyland to that which we have back home. It's nostalgic Disney!

And, of course, there's *World Bazaar*, which is analogous to *Main Street U.S.A.* at the other parks. Like other *Main Street U.S.A.*'s, there's tracks for a horse-drawn trolley, the buildings are in forced perspective (a technique to make small objects appear larger), Town Hall (where Guest Relations is located), the Main Street Bank (or, in this case, World Bank), names of Imaginers painted on the second-story windows, a Confectionary, an Ice Cream Parlor and many, many shops. Did you know that the shops are laid out to take advantage of the fact that most people walk on the right-hand side of streets? I learned that here, and it's true! Just think about it: stores that sell camera film, batteries, hats, sunglasses, sunscreen and similar needs can be found on the right-hand side just as you walk into the park. The shops on the opposite side of the street sell the toys, books, souvenirs, clothing items, jewelry and other items you wouldn't want to lag around. Interesting, ne? And besides the name there's one other thing that sets *World Bazaar* apart from its counterparts: its Victorian-style glass conservatory roof – there's no other Disney park in the world that has this feature!





Around 8:00pm Tokyo Disneyland settled down for "Tokyo Disneyland's Electrical Parade: Dreamlights," the upgrade to the original "Main Street Electrical Parade," which has been dazzling audiences around the globe since 1972, and so did I. I happened to pick quite a good spot facing Cinderella's Castle (another interesting feature of Tokyo Disneyland is that this is the only park, besides the Magic Kingdom,

that does not feature Sleeping Beauty's Castle as its centerpiece), but it soon filled up with hundreds upon hundreds of Japanese. At first I was rather peeved that my spot, which had been devoid of people for an hour, filled up to the point where we were packed in like those you see on the news in the subway. Only here there weren't attendants wearing white gloves.

By the time Baroque Hoedown sparkled in its singular electromagnetic musical sound, my mood lightened and I realized I could see right over the masses! You know, I'll never tire of watching or listening to the Main Street Electrical Parade, in whatever incarnation it happens to be. I thoroughly enjoyed watching it at Disneyland Paris in 2003 (before it was replaced by Tokyo Disneyland's Fantillusion) as I did in 2000 in the Magic Kingdom when it was brought back to celebrate the Millennium. It's simply a Disney classic not to be missed!



Out of all the experiences I've had at Tokyo Disneyland today, from ordering water from a refreshment cart in Japanese ("Mizu o Kudasai") to the Japanese boy saying hello to me in English (who I completely ignored because I've gotten used to hearing Japanese and not English), the one thing I will never forget is hearing Mickey Mouse, that quintessential American creation and character, speak Japanese:



"Boku wa Mickey Mouse desu!"
"I am Mickey Mouse!"

WAAAAAOH!



In the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 {Kanto Segment}



「BraviSEAmo, Tokyo DisneySEA」

september 13, 2004

*An unsettling grumble is about...
Unnatural mist hangs in the air...
Something massive is coming...
Building...
Malice.*

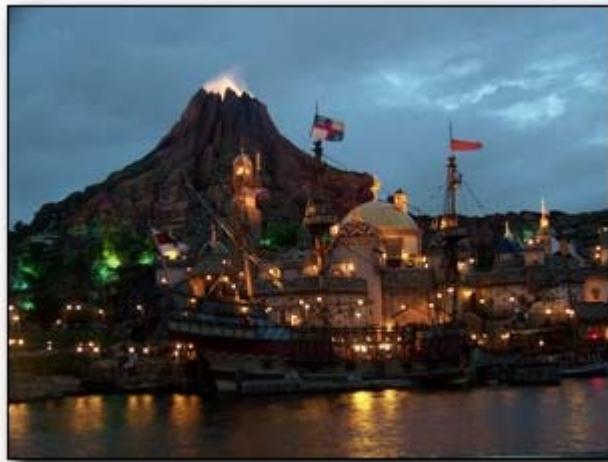
*The harbor quivers...
Can you feel it?
It knows.
It hears the growls...
The Beast Within.*

*A Dragon in waiting...
No longer in slumber...
Are you prepared?
Prometheus belches.
It wakes.*

The Unleashing!

*Disgorge of Fire and Ash...
Flames illumine the harbor...
Dance upon its edifices...
Winds carry stunned cries...
Repentance; who knew?*

*Then nothing.
The fires recede...
Smoke retreats...
The dragon falls back asleep...
Prometheus quiets.*



It's about 6:30pm currently and I'm sitting here on a secluded bench overlooking Mount Prometheus in Mediterranean Harbor, Tokyo DisneySEA, 1-1 Maihama, Urayasu-shi, Chiba-ken, Japan. I've been in the park about eight hours thus far, having gotten a later start than I had wanted (but I needed to recover from the on-the-go day that yesterday was). The mountain still rumbles even though it has just erupted -- it'll do so again in a few more minutes -- and it's really a sight to see, but so is the rest of this park. It's lively; people are milling about, chatting and having a good time. There's a healthy breeze going but that's to be expected sitting on the bay like we are here. And it's cool; the sun has been steadily going down for a little while now. It's almost too windy for me to write, but I'm actually too excited not to since I finally have paper and pen!



Though it took an exhaustive search of the Disney parks just to find one, let me tell you. Oh, the pen was easy enough to find, it was the notebook that was the hardest. I'm guessing that in this digital world that Japan has become, the locals don't find much need for pen and paper, because they sure make finding any quite difficult. Be that as it may I'm just happy my search has ended; I have a nice little book too -- a sparkling dark blue journal featuring the Sorcerer's Apprentice

from Fantasia on the cover. For ¥600 I can't complain; at least it's lined.

It's unfortunate that I must resort to this written style in order to maintain a narrative of my time here in Japan, but an incompatibility in technology has deemed it so. Thanks to a difference in electrical current (100VAC in Japan compared with 120VAC in the United States), the converter won't, well, convert and the AC portion of the laptop won't engage. I can't even get the laptop's batteries to take charge. Therefore my portable computer is dead in the water. I can't use it here. The reasons why elude me but I have other concerns than just keeping a written record of my journey: the laptop was also to be a repository for my digital camera. Since I can't even do that I potentially have a real problem on my hands once I reach Kyoto. I've taken so many pictures thus far and with only the one card... I may run out of room.



Alas, it's such a trivial thing to worry about sitting inside a Disney Park, right? This is such a magnificent park too, and before I take you on a brief tour, how about a little background?

Tokyo DisneySEA (which is a take off on DisneyLAND) opened next to Tokyo Disneyland park on September 4, 2001 at a cost of ¥338 Billion and is divided up into seven "ports of call", or themed lands: *Mediterranean Harbor*, *Mysterious Island*, *Mermaid Lagoon*, *Arabian Coast*, *Lost River Delta*, *Port Discovery* and *American Waterfront*. Styles, themes, attitude, atmosphere and ambiance of each land are all richly invoked and distinctly themed here to the likes I've never before seen in a Disney Park. You'll literally lose yourself within it. I know I have, and enjoyed every moment doing so, as if I were a kid in a candy store! I could wax poetic about this place, but perhaps I'll leave that for a later time.

As for Prometheus, the rumbling volcano across the lagoon I'm seated next to, is this park's central symbol, rising out of the depths of each port like a beacon. For comparison, Prometheus is a much, much larger version of the volcano outside the Mirage casino/resort in Las Vegas, but unlike the Mirage volcano, Prometheus dominates the landscape from all angles of the park.



Speaking of which...

Mediterranean Harbor is considered the gateway to Tokyo DisneySEA, offering the old-world charm of a romantic southern European seaport (Porto Paradiso) as its backdrop. The spirit and beauty of old-world Europe comes alive and shines as the sunlight dances off richly detailed buildings reminiscent of those found in Florence, Venice, Paris or Prague. Look closely and you'll find the famous top of the Duomo and a replica of the Ponte Vecchio Bridge found in Florence. Look even closer and you'll see those detailed edifices are actually wings of the Hotel MiraCosta, Tokyo DisneySEA's posh resort that adorns the entranceway of this port of call. The details here are stunning; the moment I crossed into the harbor my breath was taken away. Everything about this part of the park is beautiful and comes alive with people milling about, chatting, and admiring the cool breezes blowing in from the bay. If anything, *Mediterranean Harbor* is a distinct reminder of Epcot's World Showcase in ambiance, but vastly different -- almost ten-fold better. I can't quite put my finger on it, but this part of the park seems shiny, grand, and classy. You really are in another world here and it seems as if this is where I belong.



Besides the MiraCosta front and its picturesque lagoon, Mediterranean Harbor also features "Fortress Explorations," one of the port's attractions. Like Skull Rock and the Hedge Maze from Disneyland Paris, and Tom Sawyer's Island in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, Fortress Explorations at Tokyo DisneySEA allows one to have a little fun by becoming immersed in a Renaissance style stronghold, filled with nooks and crannies for even the most seasoned explorer to discover.

The S.E.A., the Society of Explorers and Adventurers, who are dedicated to the gathering of newfound knowledge, constructed the fortress and within are the tools and spoils of their explorations. You can fire off cannons on the Cannon Deck, align the heavens in the Chamber of Planets, check out scientific discoveries of the period in the Pendulum Tower, Illusion Room, or Sundial Deck, and even wander aboard the Renaissance, an authentic recreation of a galleon used during the Golden Age of Exploration. Wandering around the fortress is marvelous, I must say. Around every turn and down (or up) every stairwell is something new to discover and explore. I found this to be one of the most enjoyable attractions at Tokyo DisneySEA, perhaps, because, it wasn't necessarily geared for the child-mind. But I found out that it's also a nice hideaway for horny Japanese teenagers. More than once I stumbled across a pair sufficiently hand-wandering, lip-locked and quite preoccupied. Which raises a question... I thought the Japanese frowned on public displays of affection? Guess not.



Mysterious Island, set within a South Pacific volcanic caldera of the 1860s, draws its inspiration from the writings of Jules Verne, bringing much of his adventurous world to life. This land provides an opportunity to explore the mysteries of the ocean's depths ("20,000 Leagues Under the Sea") and to join a thrilling expedition to the center of the Earth, where the only escape route lies through an active volcano ("Journey to the Center of the Earth")! *Mysterious Island* is a very forboding place and such a stark contrast to the colorful and lively *Mediterranean Harbor*. The landscape here is confined; rocky and devoid of natural plant life of any kind and yet alive with unforeseen energy bubbling just below the surface. Steam rises out of the rocks and waters, creeping out of the cracks in Prometheus, the resident volcano. Waters churn below, at times violently, as whirlpools appear and disappear at will and geysers actively shoot their waters dozens of meters into the air. I was drawn to this land multiple times throughout the day. Not because of its rides but because of its coolness factor!



Consequently, the name *Mysterious Island* is somewhat of a misnomer. While it is mysterious (the walkways are metal mesh and it's suspended above a pool of water), it is hardly an island. Yet this island, or structure (whichever you'd prefer), features two of Tokyo DisneySEA's signature attractions: "Journey to the Center of the Earth" and "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea".

"Journey to the Center of the Earth" is one of the most unique attractions I've

seen at the various Disney Parks I've visited as of this writing (Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney Studios, and Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, USA; Disneyland Paris and Disney Studios Paris at Disneyland Paris Resort in Paris, France; and of the two parks in Japan). The ride is based on the Jules Verne novel of the same name and takes you on an expedition of discovery deep into the earth's core. Along the way the novel comes to life with expansive crystal caverns and strange unearthly creatures. And just when you think your ride is going to be a slow one, your vehicle speeds up and sends you hurtling through one of Prometheus' lava tubes in order to make your great escape! "Journey to the Center of the Earth" is a very thrilling ride, but it isn't for everyone. Those who do not like dark, cramped spaces and/or sudden changes in

velocity will not enjoy this attraction. But for those who do... look for the opening to *Mysterious Island* as you whiz by – you're circling around the Island!

"20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" is probably considered to be a quintessential attraction at any Disney Park, and at Tokyo DisneySEA it's taken to an entirely new level. Here you are to "explore the depths of the ocean aboard research submarines designed by Captain Nemo, and discover a fantastic undersea world as an honorary member of his crew." But you don't do so in the Nautilus submarine, instead your adventures will take place in the cramped 6-crew mini-sub called the Neptune. Two people sit up front and four on the sides (two on each) and while dark and cramped, the Neptune does have one thing over its Nautilus predecessors: the ability to control a light source to illuminate your surroundings. The ride is basically the same as that found at Disneyland and what was at Disney World, but its composition and surroundings make it much more exciting!





Mermaid Lagoon is a whimsical “under the sea” world of fun and play with Ariel, “The Little Mermaid.” This cartoon-like realm beneath the waves includes fun-filled attractions, a deep-sea live entertainment show (“Under the Sea”) and an interactive playground designed primarily for children. Triton’s Kingdom rises into the skies at Tokyo DisneySEA and becomes a whimsical beacon for those a little unsettled from the harsh conditions of *Mysterious*

Island – once again another contrasting land. Unfortunately there isn’t much here for an adult to enjoy without a child in tow, but I do highly recommend the production “Under the Sea”, which is billed as a “one-of-a-kind live musical ‘liquid theater’ experience featuring Ariel and her pals, as well as dazzling puppetry, colorful costumes, and amazing special effects.” And they aren’t lying. “Under the Sea” is a unique theatrical experience that combines elements from Festival of the Lion King at Animal Kingdom (at Walt Disney World), Lion King Musical (on Broadway and Touring throughout the world), and Voyage of the Little Mermaid at the Disney Studios (at Walt Disney World). Puppets soar above your head, intricately detailed and blended in with the puppeteer, floats fill the theater space (a complete 360 circle), and performers dazzle with dance and show. It’s been called one of the most amazing experiences at DisneySEA and that is no understatement!

Arabian Coast harks back 10 centuries and offers the mysterious enchantment of “1001 Arabian Nights.” Sail with Sinbad the Sailor as he sets out on his seven voyages to explore the mysteries of the unknown sea (“Sinbad’s Seven Voyages”), take a ride on the exotic animals of Majestic “Caravan Carousel” and witness a live magic show hosted by the wild and eccentric Genie from the animated classic *Aladdin*. And like



Mediterranean Harbor, the moment your eyes dance upon the glimmering landscape of the *Arabian Coast* you really become lost for words. Like a jewel in the desert, this oasis at Disney Sea is anything but ordinary; it’s wonderfully themed and detailed, inviting and mysterious. Leave the pinks and purples of *Mermaid Lagoon* or the reddish, unforgiving rocks and mountains of *Mysterious Island* behind and embrace Arabia and all its riches.



Unlike *Mermaid Lagoon*, I spent some time in *Arabian Coast* off and on throughout the day. In fact, I had my first rice meal in this land by visiting the Casbah Food Court where a nice steaming bowl of beef curry (and rice!) awaited me. Delicious only begins to describe what my palate tasted, but I shall not waste time speaking of food. Of all the wondrous nooks and crannies in *Arabian Coast*, the only item I was able to see was “Sinbad’s Seven Voyages,” which is akin to

“The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh” and “It’s a Small World” at the Magic Kingdom (Walt Disney World). Seven Adventures is a storybook ride and you, as the explorer, ride through in a boat as he narrates his adventures. Scenes from these adventures bring alive the story, but unfortunately, it’s in Japanese only. The language barrier aside, “Sinbad’s Seven Voyages” is a wonderful sparkling attraction not to be missed at Tokyo DisneySEA.





Lost River Delta features the shoreline and the foreboding jungles of Central America in the 1930s that sets the stage for the wild adventures to come. “The ruins of a mysterious pyramid rise above the jungle on the shores of El Rio Perdido, the ‘Lost River’.” In this secluded rainforest environment, you will uncover perilous, hidden adventures and take a wild ride through a mysterious pyramid (“Indiana Jones Adventure: Temple of the Crystal Skull”), “while in an abandoned hangar across the water the rainforest plays out its own amazing story” (“Mystic Rhythms”). And once again the moment you step into *Lost River Delta* you are immersed in a brand new world: river boats, wooden shacks, rope fences, rickety rope bridges, and an overgrowth of vines and trees. The only thing that reminds you of where you are is *Mount Prometheus*, the most prominent feature

of the park. It stands out as a backdrop for all the “ports of call” - your eyes can’t help but be drawn to it.

In the “Indiana Jones Adventure”, you’re on an expedition to search for the Fountain of Youth in a harrowing life-or-death quest. But we’re warned: “the fountain is purported to be guarded by a vengeful supernatural spirit known as the Crystal Skull!” Or so the story goes, but since it’s in Japanese it’s really hard to tell. The technology surrounding this attraction is similar to the technology used for the Indiana Jones attraction at Disneyland in California and for Dinosaur (a.k.a., Countdown to Extinction) in Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World. You and your rover traverse the inside of the pyramid looking for the fountain, but the Crystal Skull has other plans and you must leave as quickly as possible. The ride is meticulously detailed and the mechanics seamless. With great special effects (including that of a whirlwind of mist) this attraction is not to be missed!



“Mystic Rhythms” was one of those attractions that I almost bypassed for other attractions at the park; however, the heat of the day and the pain in my feet dictated I sit for a spell, thus I chose this show, located in a converted hangar supposedly far, far from civilization as a place to rest. I wasn’t sure what to expect, as the brochure doesn’t describe the show well enough, but I can tell you it’s a story about the powerful elements of wind, water and fire coming to life in a rainforest, such as the one we are located in at *Lost River Delta*. The theater is reminiscent of that found for the Tarzan Rocks! Show in Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World, but with a distinctly Japanese flair. Vines hang about, criss-crossing the theater walls, ceiling and various other locations... growing wildly just as real vines would do.



The performance stage is curtained off by what appears to be an old canvass cloth. Water trickles from somewhere. Noises of the jungle begin to slowly fill the space. And then the theater explodes with dance, music and special effects. Animals, characters and elements of the rainforest come alive in this 25-minute production that is truly one-of-a-kind. One doesn't need to know the language of the land to understand the actions here, for

"Mystic Rhythms" speaks to us in a universal language – the language of survival. Look for the actor in Jaguar skins... and don't pass up this amazing production. It's simply not to be missed.

Port Discovery lies across the horizons of time in what is said to be a marina of the future; at least in the eyes of Jules Verne. *Port Discovery* is yet another great example of theme and sea merging into one distinct port of the park. *Mount Prometheus* is ever present in the backdrop, and yet instead of taking the dark, gritty approach to Jules Verne as seen in *Mysterious Island*, *Port Discovery* takes the shiny, futuristic look of a future that the great visionaries dreamed could be. Reds and golds appear more prevalent here, suggesting that exciting look of the future seen in the late 1800s. In *Port Discovery*, we're invited to "celebrate the thrills, adventure and excitement of new frontiers! Board a hovercraft for a wild water-ride through an obstacle course ("Aquatopia") and take a daring journey into the eye of a storm ("StormRider")."



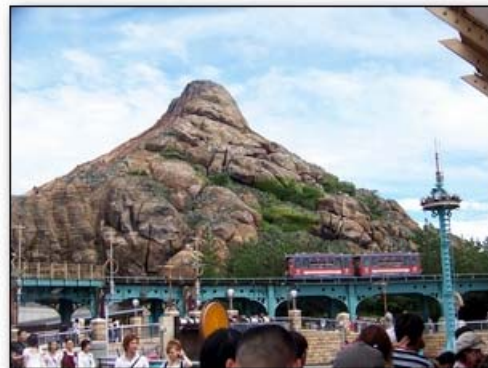
Port Discovery is also home to the Center for Weather Control and their scientists have been quite busy building every one of the contraptions one sees in this futuristic port of call. In "Aquatopia," the scientists invite you aboard one of their newest navigational marvels, a watercraft of the future. Your boat twists, twirls and whirls through a labyrinth of fountains, rock formations and whirlpools.

There are some kinks to be worked out, of course, but Aquatopia is destined to be the wave of the future in sea fairing navigation! If “Aquatopia” sounds familiar, it should, as this attraction borrows its namesake from Disneyland’s Autotopia, which features cars on a track instead of boats. But don’t let that fool you: Aquatopia is a technical marvel. Not only do you have no control over the watercraft, neither do the scientists... at least not directly. “Aquatopia’s” ride mechanism is guided completely by a series of laser beams, which the boat’s systems use to navigate themselves through the various terrain conditions. That may not sound special enough, but when you consider those boats don’t go off course, you’ll see it’s the first of its kind and something unique to see!



In the “StormRider” attraction, scientists of the Center for Weather Control have developed a contraption they call a “Storm Diffusion Device,” which is a brand new invention to be taken into the heart of a storm and detonated, thereby dissipating its violent energy. You’ll be able to see this new invention in action as, luckily, there appears to be a typhoon just off the coast of *Port Discovery*... and as a guest of the CWC... you’re invited aboard to observe the inaugural mission first hand! “StormRider”

is a thrilling simulator attraction. It takes the technology from various other movie-simulator rides and kicks it up a notch by adding in realistic motion, explosive sound, and thrilling effects. Unfortunately the narration is in Japanese so lost on those who do not know the language well, but that doesn’t detract from this attraction; it’s not short on thrills, especially when that harpoon jabs into your ship in mid-air. What, harpoon? You’ll see...





One of the last parts of the park (at least in the manor I traversed it) is *American Waterfront*, which recreates two distinct American harbors at the dawn of the 20th Century – New York and Cape Cod. The energy of a big city abounds in New York as you can ride period touring cars, stroll along legendary streets and see a Broadway show. In quaint Cape Cod, you can wander through a costal New England fishing community. This is probably one of the more wide open areas of the park, beside *Mediterranean Harbor*. It features classic American design, but not much in the way of attractions. The steamer boats (“DisneySea Transit Steamer Line”) I’ve seen throughout the water ways in the park can be boarded here, which offers a lazy 13-minute ride around the park. The Electric Railway also terminates here, taking people to and from *Port Discovery*.



American Waterfront is also home to the SS Columbia, a huge American sailing ship and at its docks is “Sail Away!” a musical extravaganza to help launch the ship on its maiden voyage. The “Big City Vehicles”, which are cars inspired by early 20th-century vehicles, and “Encore!”, a 30-minute Broadway type revue, round out the other attractions.



If this part of the park doesn't sound overly exciting, I'll be the first to tell you that you'd be right. It's not. And most of the Japanese think so as well since this part of the park was the most deserted every time I wandered through. That's not to say the visuals aren't nice – you can get a great view of the sea and cityscape from here – there just isn't much in the way of exciting attractions to enjoy.





Lastly, but certainly not least, the beautiful entrance plaza and the *AquaSphere*. The moment you step through the turnstiles at either the North or South entrance of the park, your eyes are immediately drawn to the center of this wonderful plaza and to the fountain that resides there. Called the *AquaSphere*, this globe-shaped fountain represents Earth (our "Water Planet") and seems as if it magically floats on a plume of water. Sheets of water cling to the

globe's surface, running behind the landmasses and disappearing from view. It's a wonderful draw and centerpiece for this park's entranceway. Consequently, the *AquaSphere* is the park's second icon; the other is, of course, Mount Prometheus: the big volcano rising up from the center of the park.

Thus my day has been filled by traversing these lands, these ports of call -- over and over and over again. I've had so much fun here it pains me to think that in a couple of short hours I'll have to leave, which will conclude my journey to Tokyo Disneyland Resort. But I must move on, for there's much more of Tokyo to see, as well as, all of Kyoto to explore later in the week. In a short period of time Tokyo DisneySEA will present their night-time entertainment extravaganza: "BraviSEAmo!" I hear it's a wonderful production on the lagoon so I'll definitely want to stick around for that.

Otherwise, it's cool, it's dusk and I'm having great fun. What more can one ask?



In the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 {Kanto Segment}



「Homeikan Honkan Daimachi Bekkan」

september 14, 2004

Ahh, sliding off my slippers sure feels good.

It's 6:10pm and I'm back at Homeikan Honkan Daimachi Bekkan (鳳明館・本館・台町別館) at 12-9 Hongo 5-chome, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo. Tonight I've had a revelation. As I made my way back to Homeikan tonight, I found that I didn't have to think what streets to cross, where to turn or how far to walk before I got there; my poor, tired feet found the place without a problem, which is a far cry from just a few short days ago. Back then I wondered whether or not I'd be able to navigate this metropolis - especially once I became lost - but now it's almost second nature. Have I become a Tokyoite living in this wonderful neighborhood filled with winding, narrow streets, small hilltops and bizarre shops? Can I truly call this my home? I'd like to think so. Amazing what a couple of days on one's own can do. Even I laugh at the new gaijin who wander aimlessly looking to make sense out of the barrage of characters and the city's address system. To hammer home this little epiphany, I think I've come to terms with Tokyo's address system and have made sense out of how the country is divided up:

Prefectures of Japan			
Aichi	愛知県	Miyazaki	宮崎県
Akita	秋田県	Nagano	長野県
Aomori	青森県	Nagasaki	長崎県
Chiba	千葉県	Nara	奈良県
Ehime	愛媛県	Niigata	新潟県
Fukui	福井県	Oita	大分県
Fukuoka	福岡県	Okayama	岡山県
Fukushima	福島県	Okinawa	沖縄県
Gifu	岐阜県	Osaka	大阪府
Gunma	群馬県	Saga	佐賀県
Hiroshima	広島県	Saitama	埼玉県
Hokkaido	北海道	Shiga	滋賀県
Hyogo	兵庫県	Shimane	島根県
Ibaraki	茨城県	Shizuoka	静岡県
Ishikawa	石川県	Tochigi	栃木県
Iwate	岩手県	Tokushima	徳島県
Kagawa	香川県	Tokyo	東京都
Kagoshima	鹿児島県	Tottori	鳥取県
Kanagawa	神奈川県	Toyama	富山県
Kochi	高知県	Wakayama	和歌山県
Kumamoto	熊本県	Yamagata	山形県
Kyoto	京都府	Yamaguchi	山口県
Mie	三重県	Yamanashi	山梨県
Miyagi	宮城県		

Let me start from the top -- Japan, like the United States, is divided and subdivided into various regions, states, counties, cities and townships. As such, Japan consists of four main islands. They are from north to south: Hokkaido (北海道), Honshu (本州), Shikoku (四国) and Kyushu (九州).

The islands are sub-divided into eleven Regions (地方; *Chihō*): Hokkaido (海道; island), Tohoku (東北; northern Honshu, including Sendai), Kanto (関東; eastern Honshu, including Tokyo and Yokohama), Chubu (中部; central Honshu, including Hakone and Mt. Fuji), Hokuriku (北陸; northwestern Chubu), Koshinetsu (甲信越; northeastern Chubu, including Nagano), Tokai (東海; southern Chubu, including Nagoya), Kansai (関西; also known as Kinki (近畿); including Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto), Chugoku (中国; western Honshu, including Hiroshima), Shikoku (四国; island) and Kyushu (九州; island, including Fukuoka and Okinawa.)

These regions are further divided into Prefectures (都道府県; *todōfuken*), which are the country's sub-national jurisdictions. There are forty-seven (47) of these Prefectures in four flavors: a Metropolis (都; *tō*), Tokyo; a District (道; *dō*), Hokkaido; an Urban Center (府; *fu*), Osaka and Kyoto; and 43 other prefectures, or (県; *ken*). This system was established by the Meiji government in July 1871. Initially there were over 300 prefectures, but this number was reduced to 72 in 1871 and again to the current number of 47 in 1888.

Wards of Tokyo			
Adachi	足立区	Nakano	中野区
Arakawa	荒川区	Nerima	練馬区
Bunkyo	文京区	Ota	大田区
Chiyoda	千代田区	Setagawa	世田谷区
Chuo	中央区	Shibuya	渋谷区
Edogawa	江戸川区	Shinagawa	品川区
Itabashi	板橋区	Shinjuku	新宿区
Katsushika	葛飾区	Suginami	杉並区
Kita	北区	Sumida	墨田区
Koto	江東区	Toshima	豊島区
Meguro	目黒区	Taito	台東区
Minato	港区		

Furthermore, each Prefecture is further subdivided into Districts (郡; *gun*). And each District contains Cities (市; *shi*), Towns (町; *chō* or *machi*) and Villages (村; *son* or *mura*). Larger cities, like Tokyo, are further divided into what are called Wards (区; *ku*), which are prefectures inside a city, or something similar. Believe it or not, Tokyo is comprised of 23 of these wards, which includes 26 cities, 5 towns and 8 villages. And each of these has their own local government and municipalities, but shares some governing powers with the

united Tokyo Metropolitan Government. And each of these special wards has zones, which are like villages. For example, Bunkyo-ku, the ward I reside in, contains the neighborhoods of Hakusan, Yayoi and Hongo. Hongo, you may recognize, is my neighborhood. Other more interesting are Chiyoda-ku, which features (among others) the neighborhoods of Otemachi, Marunouchi and Akihabara; Chuo-ku, which features the Ginza; Kita-ku, of Akabane; Minato-ku, with Odaiba, Shinagawa, and Roppongi neighborhoods; Shibuya-ku, with the neighborhoods of Shibuya, Harajuku, and Yoyogi; and Taito, with Ueno and Asakusa.

As you can see, there are many logical divisions of Japan from the large right down to the smallest of neighborhoods. Unfortunately, however, it doesn't stop there. Addresses in neighborhoods are further noted by a Section (丁目; *chome*) and Block (番地; *banchi*). Houses are then assigned Numbers (番; *ban*) by the order in which they were built. Therefore, it's possible to have a house with a ban number of 20 next to house with a ban

number of 1. This is why many Japanese don't rely on the actual physical address of locations when giving directions, rather, they provide cross streets and landmarks. This can be quite confusing to travelers, just as it was confusing to me when I first arrived.

Had this information been known to me before hand, I think finding Homeikan Daimachi Bekkan at 12-9, Hongo 5-chome, Bunkyo-ku, would have been much simpler when I first arrived. With this information I know that the Ryokan is located in the Bunkyo ward (denoted Bunkyo-ku) and is part of the Hongo neighborhood (as previously mentioned). Its house number is 9, on the 12th block in the neighborhood's 5th district.

I rather enjoy the walk to Homeikan too... it's a treat for the senses.

You know, in one long breath I can sense the wonderful textures of delicious foods cooking and a subtle trace of incense burning mixed in with the putrid stench of rotting fish, discarded garbage and, yes, sewage. This might be a strange cocktail of scents that could give anyone the impression that Tokyo is an urban nightmare, but together they concoct a wonderful soup-de-jour that my olfactory sense has become acquainted with and expects. Yes, Tokyo has a scent of its own - sometimes inviting and other times nauseating - but it's my neighborhood and that of hundreds of Japanese. I find it exotic and comforting all the same.

It also occurred to me, as I strolled along, that tonight would be the last time I'd take in such smells for the next few days. That's right, I'm bound for Kyoto on Shinkansen HIKARI (ひかり) come tomorrow morning and with that I have to face the realization that my journey is half over. As I understand it, the name HIKARI translates as "light" or "brilliance" in Japanese, I just wish I felt more upbeat at the moment. It's hard to feel anything but sadness at having to pick up and go.



Alas, you may wonder why I'm back at the Ryokan so early. The honest answer is that I'm tired of wandering around Tokyo (oh, okay, so I'm giving my feet a rest) and I'm doing a load of laundry downstairs. Washing clothes is more of a necessity though, as I have been running out of things to wear. The plan was to wait until I reached Kyoto to wash, but why wait, you know? The facility downstairs, which is nothing more than a small-

sized washing machine, is one of the reasons I chose to stay at Homeikan. Could you imagine what I'd have to haul around if I couldn't wash my clothes here? At least double or triple the amount of clothes, which would definitely have meant a much larger suitcase. Thus having the ability to wash my clothes while here is a big deal; this makes Homeikan

the best choice for me. That and I was sold on their non-curfew policy, so I could enjoy the fireworks shows down at Tokyo Disneyland.

Speaking of which, the last time I caught up I was sitting on a bench in Mediterranean Harbor at Tokyo DisneySEA, patiently waiting for the evening show to begin. And I must say it's worth waiting for; it's a nighttime spectacle that rates as high as *Illuminations: Reflections of Earth* (at Epcot) or *Fantasmic!* (at Disneyland and Disney/MGM Studios), my two all-time favorites. What I like best about these two night-time spectacles is that both have a linear narrative that's

powerful and sincere. Take *Illuminations: Reflections of Earth* for example; this spectacle uses the elements of fire, water and fireworks coupled with thrilling and inspiring orchestrations to tell the story of Earth from its earliest beginnings (the big bang) through today in three distinct acts:

- Act 1: Chaos – Signifies the Big Bang and the creation of the Earth.
- Act 2: Order – The Solar System cools and Earth forms, bringing order to chaos. The fires that raged have calmed and the Earth floats amongst the stars.
- Act 3: Celebration – A celebration of 2000 years of life on Earth in dance and song.



bring them all together as one. I hope you enjoy our story tonight -- Reflections of Earth."



"Good evening and welcome," the narrator begins as the World Showcase Lagoon becomes lit with flame (its 19-torches glow in the darkness). "We've gathered here tonight, around the fire, as people of all lands have gathered for thousands and thousands of years before us: to share the light and to share a story; an amazing story, as old as time itself but still being written. And though each of us have our own individual stories to tell a true adventure emerges when we

Much like *Illuminations*:

Reflections of Earth, the pageant at Tokyo DisneySEA also adheres to a specific narrative. *BraviSEAmo!*

follows the romantic story of a "Spirit of Water" and a "Spirit of Fire" as they meet on the waters of Mediterranean Harbor. The "Spirit of Water" is angelic, pure and beautiful; the "Spirit of Fire" is menacing, dark and powerful. The show opens with a greeting from our favorite mouse – "Boku wa Mickey Mouse desu!" – before the soft tones of the Water Spirit invade our souls. But her innocence, and ours, is shattered when the harsh, darkened Fire Spirit growls and flexes his might. The two look as if they are preparing to battle one another, but wait a moment longer and you see this battlefield in a different light: it's a passionate ballet of love and affection; the two spirits co-exist as one. As the DisneySEA website says, "once you see the show's grand scale and special effects, you too may find yourself calling out 'BraviSEAmo!'" I agree!



Of course doing laundry and reminiscing about DisneySEA isn't all I've been doing today. I had planned to be hiking, biking and enjoying the great outdoors in Nikko today; although I must confess I didn't make the trip. I could make a bunch of excuses for reasons why I didn't go, like: oh, I really didn't know how to get a ticket from Tokyo-eki to Nikko; or, I didn't want to leave Tokyo because I still had so much to see or do; or, my feet hurt too much and I needed a day of rest. These are all valid reasons, of course, and they dogged me from the moment I got out of bed, you see, until I was standing in line down at Tokyo-eki hoping to get a ticket. Unfortunately I used them all to justify not going today and instead used the opportunity to square away tomorrow's travel to Kyoto on Shinkansen.

My indecision doesn't mean this day is a failure; far from it in fact!

After making the reservation (departing 11:36am and arriving 2:20pm), I made my way down to Shibuya crossing to hop on the Internet atop the HMV building. While there I was able to catch up with Nicole, my beautiful girlfriend, chat with my mom, talk with my friend Jen in New Zealand and even get the latest updates on the tropics. 3 hours later I was wandering the streets of Roppongi looking (again) for that Hard Rock cafe. I spent at least the better part of an hour getting lost amidst the narrow streets and still came up empty. And this was after I looked up the address and plotted its location on a map! Having been thwarted once again, I hopped the metro to Ueno, where I knew a second location existed. Within five minutes or less, I had the juices of a "Mt. Fuji Burger" dripping down my chin.

Hard Rock Cafe Tokyo
5-4-20 Roppongi, Minato-ku
Tokyo 106-0032 Japan

And now I'm here, enjoying the air conditioning of my room, the solitude and, of course, the time of rest. As soon as my laundry finishes I'll be back out there; maybe as far as Shinjuku, Shibuya, Ginza, or just to the corner Starbucks. Who knows, either way I will be happy!



In the Land of the Rising Sun

関東地方 {Kanto Segment}

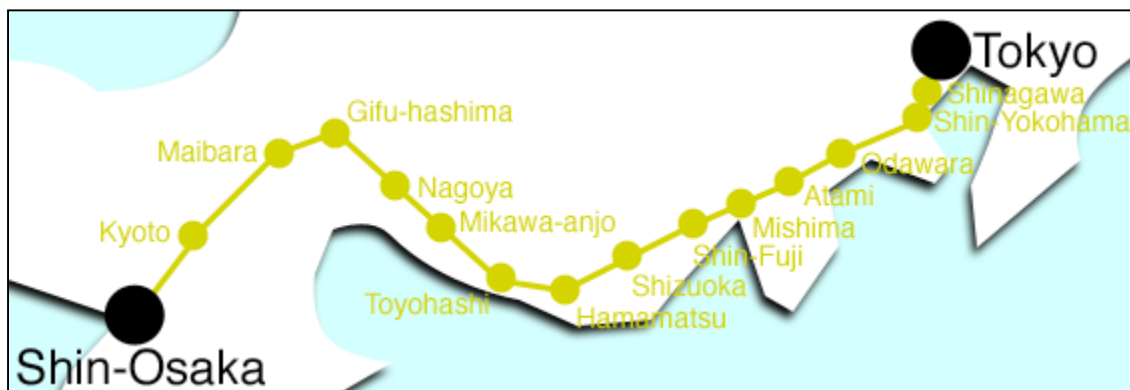


「Crossover: Kanto to Kansai」

september 15, 2004

Shinkansen Hikari

It's Wednesday, a few minutes before noon, and the Tokaido Shinkansen (東海道新幹線) train HIKARI (ひかり) has just pulled out of the Shin-Yokohama (新横浜駅) station. I, of course, am one of its many passengers on a westward journey toward Japan's ancient capital of Kyoto. It's not the fastest train, this HIKARI -- the NOZOMI (のぞみ) train is the fastest on the Tokaido route, reaching speeds of 300km/h (186 mph) -- but it'll get me there just the same. I have just begun my journey though, there's plenty more stops to make along the way, including: Odawara (小田原市), Toyohashi (豊橋市), Nagoya (名古屋市), Gifu-Hashima (岐阜羽島駅) and Maibara (米原市). But if all goes according to plan (and the Shinkansen is as punctual as I've been lead to believe) I should be rolling into Kyoto-eki around 2:20pm this afternoon; plenty of time to get to know my new home before it gets dark.



Stops along the Tokaido Shinkansen line between Tokyo and Shin-Osaka - Courtesy of Wikipedia

I just wish I were ready to bid Sayonara to my old home.

You never know how much you take your surroundings for granted until you're forced to leave them. Taking that final stroll out of my neighborhood, Benkyo-ku, was gut wrenching. Imagine, for the next five days I won't be able to see my cats -- a sign for a transit company (I think) that told me I needed to turn right up the hill toward Homeikan. I won't have my support network -- the Starbucks, the Waku-Waku mini-mart, and the knowledge of knowing where I'm going and how to get there.



Nor will I revel in the aromas that make up my neighborhood - a mixture of both good and bad. And over these past few days I've grown quite accustomed to these smells and I'm not sure what I'll do without them. Or my cats. Or the waku-waku on the corner. I won't have any of these things in Kyoto, at least not right off. I'll have to build them all over again. And that makes me a little sad, and uneasy. I guess for now I'll have to stick with the comforts I brought aboard: Glico Reverse (a Pocky derivative) and Pocari Sweat (an Ion Replacement drink), my two recent obsessions.

Both of those items have been a godsend these last few days, and have been easily obtainable when I have been in need of a quick snack walking around the city. If there's one thing the Japanese take very seriously here, it's their snacking. You'll find all sorts of chips, pretzels, cookies, mixed nuts and varieties of items and flavors I would think are unnatural in various convenience stores and product carts all over Japan. So much so you might become dizzy just trying to take it all in. Vertigo sufferers beware. I've never seen such an eclectic array of snacking options anywhere else in the world. But then again, there's much about this country that is eclectic. That's part of its charm.



Pocky (ポッキー), a snack first sold in Japan in 1965 under the name "Chocoteck" and so named after the sound it makes when bitten (ポッキン; *pokkin*), has to be one of the most quintessentially recognized Japanese snacks throughout the world. It's a simple product – a slender biscuit dipped in chocolate – but it has found its way into the most sophisticated hearts and minds of millions worldwide. You can get it, in dozens of flavors and varieties, virtually anywhere. I was introduced to Pocky in the late 90s through a friend at the Japanese pavilion in Epcot and ever since that fateful day I have been a fan of the snack, purchasing it anywhere and everywhere I can find it. I was even able to enjoy a box while waiting for an over-night train from Paris to Firenze at Gare du Nord, if you can believe that. So as you can see, Pocky is truly international.

Reverse (リバース), then, is a Pocky stick flipped inside out with a chocolate filling.

Pocari Sweat (ポカリ・スエット), on the other hand, is a more recent concoction (first sold in 1980) and has found a loyal following in the “ion-replacement” niche. Much like the sports drink craze in the United States (Gatorade, PowerAde, Propel, etc.) Pocari Sweat is the Japanese equivalent, advertised to help replace vital electrolytes and nutrients lost in perspiration. The name is somewhat uninviting to many English speakers (although I find it quite on target,) but the contents therein are quite enjoyable. It’s has a very light, fruity taste, and a quick ability to hydrate. I’d recommend the drink on that principle alone; it’s what’s kept me going these past couple of days. A quick sip of Pocari Sweat and away I go!

There’s not much else to do here on the train, except watch the country fly by. So, while I have my notebook out, why don’t I catch up?



When I closed last time I was just hanging up my last load of laundry to dry in preparation to leave Homeikan for Shinjuku and the Government Tocho Building for a view of the Tokyo skyline at night. I did so; the North tower was open at this hour (about 9:00pm) and without fuss I was ushered up to the top for one of the most magnificent nighttime views around. Tokyo at night is simply amazing; lights as far as the eye can see and then some

stretch across the landscape – blinking and flashing in all colors of the rainbow. Many of the “super downtowns,” as my Tokyo guide calls them – Shibuya, Ginza, Akabane, Ikebukuru and Ueno – glow with intensity, like a beacon. There’s no mistaking them at night, or any other part of Tokyo, and I was in awe. Perhaps that is due in part from never having lived in a huge city such as this before. But the Japanese have an expression for what I felt – Sugoi! (凄い!) (I’ll leave you to look up what that means.)

Enjoying a birds-eye view of Tokyo at Night was just the beginning of my evening trek. After climbing down from on high, I rode over to Shibuya, the busiest crossing in Japan. From my previous experience with this area, I knew to expect a lot of people. I was not expecting, however, to run into people en masse. You’ve heard that the Japanese have impeccable service standards, right? And that they have what is considered the best “white-glove” treatment in the world, correct? Well, I’m not so sure about any of that, but they do provide “white-glove” treatment in their Metro system – the infamous pushers that are employed to do one simple task: to shove as many people onto trains as possible. And I took part in one of those great subway-pack-em-in sessions we hear about; I’ve never felt so close to another human being in my life – literally. Oh, but what an experience!

It almost supersedes the experience I had in the London Underground on an evening my travel partners and I were attempting to make our show time down in the West End: I was unceremoniously shoved onto a metro-car at Green Park station. Imagine my dismay finding myself standing on the platform one moment (Minding the Gap, of course) and in the middle of the car surrounded by an unknown number of native Englishmen and Women the next. All I could do was turn around and wave at my friends who were stranded on the platform. To add insult to injury, when my compatriots caught up with me at our destination station, I chose an escalator that had been roped off at the top (but was still running) and became sandwiched between those who could not go any farther (in front of me, thanks to the rope) and those who were being led up the stairs mechanically (behind me). For that brief, harrowing moment, I wondered if I would become a statistic – flatted there on the moving staircase – like you hear happens at Soccer tournaments when fans get a little unruly. As you can see, though, I survived that incident without a scratch.

It was total madness in the Underground then and somewhat true here at Shibuya now. When I emerged from the metro system I thought I was in another world. People were everywhere; I've never seen such a crowd! (Not even during that war march I happened to get caught up with in London.) The crossing was busier than ever and the lights... Total madness! I had to stand aside for a few minutes to acclimate to the crowds and to just take it all in. It truly is an amazing sight. Eventually, though, I found my feet and made my way across to HMV. This time it wasn't to carouse at the top, but to browse the store within. After shopping I returned to Homeikan, but I didn't come away empty handed. I added three new CDs to my collection: the Japanese version of Brother Bear, the Lion King Musical Japanese Cast and the music to BraviSEAmo, DisneySEA's closing spectacle.

Oooh, there are mountains around me outside the train window and they are beautiful. It's too bad the weather out west is somewhat dreary. It's overcast where I am – wherever that is – but back in Tokyo there was nothing but blue skies and that wonderful sun. Why did I leave again?

A quick comment on the efficiency of the Japanese if I may. When this train pulled into Tokyo-eki, there were already people on-hand to service the train and they took to it quickly. I watched. First they ran from row to row looking for and picking up trash. Then a woman ran down the aisle throwing a white towel on every seat. Finally, the company went through and straightened each one, opened all the shades, and who knows what else in a matter of a few moments.

I've made a few other observations of Tokyo too:

- Japanese gas stations are very different from that elsewhere I have noticed. I passed a small Shell brand store on my first day in Tokyo and noted there were no lanes, store or pumps! I wondered, "How do they pump fuel?" And then a vehicle pulled in and I was able to see the process in action: the cars pull up into designated boxes painted on the ground. The

attendants, then, perform a 10-point inspection on the car: an art lost in the United States today. The fuel is pumped from overhead containers (ah, there's the pumps!) from hoses that drop down. The hoses retract when fueling is complete and then the vehicle is ushered out; the attendants bowing until the vehicle is long gone.

- There are many more American fast food chains here than I had anticipated. McDonalds is here (マクドナルド; ma-ku-do-na-ru-do), as is Subway (サブウェイ; sa-bu-u-ee-i), Wendy's (ウェンディーズ; wa-i-n-de-i-zu), Kentucky Fried Chicken (ケンタッキー・フライド・チキン; ke-n-ta-k-ki-fu-ra-i-do-chi-ki-n), and Denny's (デニーズ; de-ne-zu). I figured on McDonalds but I was taken by surprise with all the others.
- Convenience stores are also very recognizable here. There's plenty of Japanese brands but also many American brands: 7-Eleven, AM/PM, Lawson, and the before mentioned Circle K (わくわく; waku-waku).

WAKU WAKU?

A group of Japanese tourists just boarded at Gifu-Hashima, and they're snapping pictures of each other from left to right.



Sanyo Solar Ark – Courtesy of Sanyo

It looks like the group toured the Sanyo Solar Ark, a banana shaped building that a brochure I picked up here suggests is “the world’s largest solar-power generating structure.” It also says the Solar Ark “combines the efficiency of a massive photovoltaic power generation system with a state-of-the-art science centre.” So, I assume, the Sanyo Solar Ark is some kind of local tourist attraction -- ahh, which would explain the cameras, of course. It’s a strange looking building to be sure. If it weren’t for the brochure in hand I wouldn’t have known what to make of it. I didn’t

think I’d see it along the way but it’s very prominent from Shinkansen.

Some other facts regarding the Sanyo Solar Ark can be found in the table on the right. As for other figures, I certainly hope when I get to Kyoto-eki there will be a tourist station around where I can pick up a decent map and some information on surrounding spots. Oh, and I’ll definitely be needing a cash machine that’ll take US cards. I couldn’t find the one at Tokyo Station, though I found the department store it’s supposedly next to. I still have about ¥15,000, but that might not be enough.

Sanyo Solar Ark	
Length	315 meters
Height	31.6m (in center) 37.1m (at ends)
Width	4.3m (top) 13.7m (bottom)
Weight	3,000 tons
Panels	5,046

We’ll arrive at Maibara shortly; I have a feeling the group of Japanese tourists will be disembarking now, as they have been collecting their items for the past minute or so.

The next stop will be Kyoto-eki, and while that's a bit off yet, I'll sign off until I'm settled in. The countryside is becoming a bit more interesting and I want to spend a little more of my time carelessly gazing out the window drinking it all in.

K's House, Kyoto

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.*

I know what you're thinking. I bet you think I'm down at a Starbucks enjoying a nice bit of something while sipping on an espresso... am I right? If that's what you're thinking you'd be absolutely incorrect. In fact, I'm seated at the western-style table at K's House - a youth hostel here in Kyoto where I'll be for the next few days - with a beer in one hand and maps of the surrounding environs sprawled out before me.



It's a dark "black" beer - Namakuro (生黒) by Kirin (キリン) - and it certainly has a distinctively bitter taste, not to mention a rather nondescript black-colored can (pictured left). The drink itself is referred to as a happoshu (発泡酒), or low-malt beverage. This particular draft contains 25% or less of malt and about 5.5% alcohol by volume. As I understand it, the tax laws in Japan governing the sale of alcohol gave birth to drinks like this: a low-cost alternative to malt beverages. In a sense, Namakuro is nothing more than a cheap beer in a cheap container for a cheap price. Although you'd think it was a bit more from the inscription on the can: "Kirin's passion combined with its brewing technology brings you the masterpiece of Happo-shu. Bittersweet like you have never tasted. Enjoy it on any occasion." What more do you want from a vending machine?

As I said, I'm seated at the western-style table with maps of Kyoto surrounding me; it's a little past 9:00pm, there's about 15 minutes left on the dry cycle of my small load of clothes and I'm letting myself unwind a little. I've been on the go all day today, I'm somewhat dehydrated, and this beer is making me woozy. Pretty sad state of affairs if you ask me, but you didn't, I know.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

As I detailed in an email I sent out upon my arrival here, it's been quite an afternoon, and a story, since I stepped from Shinkansen Hikari little past 2:00pm, and of course I plan on sharing it with you.

I'll come right out with it: I found little or no navigable luck in finding K's House here. The map I had of Kyoto was and is woefully inadequate; half of the streets are not marked and those I found to traverse are not signed in Romaji (English equivalent) so that led to one undeniable truth: getting lost (this seems to be a recurring theme, does it not?) Thankfully I came across a nice English-speaking Japanese fellow who saw my distress and offered his help. Not only did he ask where I was from and where I was

staying, he went above and beyond by entering establishments to ask for directions upon my behalf. After he found out where K's House was located, he even walked me to its front door. I couldn't thank him enough and I found it pleasing that folks here would go out of their way to help you as best they can. Unfortunately I never found out his name but as it turns out he's off to Florida next week to visit the Dali museum in St. Petersburg. Talk about a small world, eh?

As for K's House, you'll find it at 418 Nayachou, Shichijo-agaru, Dotemachi-dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto, Japan, and it's quite nice with all sorts of western amenities. I've already checked out the bathroom and showers - one word: heated toilet seats. Everything here is dormitory style, including the bathrooms although, thankfully, the toilets have their own individual stalls and the showers their own pods.



This, of course, means I do not have a room all to myself; I'm sharing a room with three other people. In my email I also had mentioned that I hadn't yet met my suitemates, by now I have -- a pair from Scotland (a guy and girl who travel together) and a third guy from Canada, but he I have not yet seen. I've been told he's from Montréal - an old stomping ground.



Besides the dorm style rooms and the toilet facilities, Backpacker's Hostel K's House Kyoto has double and single rooms (with your own personal table, hangers, mirror, night table, TV and LAN connection), triple rooms, and "ensuite" rooms (for one or two people), a fully equipped communal kitchen (with have a microwave, toaster and rice cooker,) a dining room/living space (where I'm at), a Japanese Style space (inset table for six on Tatami), a patio, and two high-speed internet connected

computers. Oh, and of course a small place to wash and dry clothes, as I've previously mentioned.

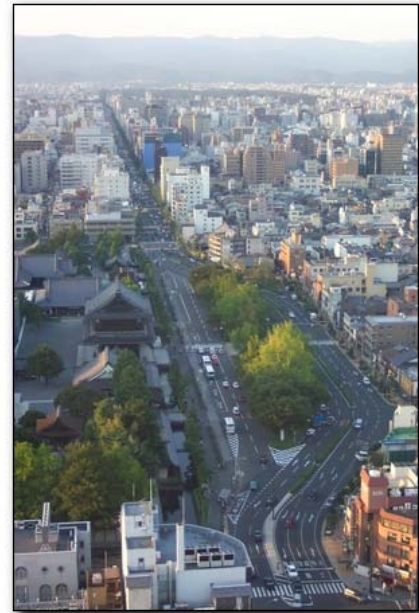
It's a lot of change to take in but I'm a little more at ease. Earlier, as I was getting myself lost, I really longed for Tokyo -- someplace I now know. What I wouldn't have given for a few good landmarks, but now that I've had a chance to walk around the station, grab a map, get a decent shower and acclimate myself, I'm doing better. A few minutes ago I was plotting out my days ahead on the maps and I think I have it down now. Since it's dark out I won't be going out again, but I haven't hung about all day.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

As I stated I returned to the Kyoto Station in an attempt to find the Tourist Information Center, which is located on the 9th floor of the station, to procure a proper map of the city.

I knew from my experience in Tokyo that this would be the ideal place to pick up maps in English and all sorts of other pertinent information. They had some; had CNN-J (the Japanese/English equivalent of CNN I suppose) on a television, and even were able to point me in the direction of where an ATM withdrawal could be made (using my American card, of course) for some much needed Yen. If there's one thing you can never have enough of in Japan is actual paper money. Many places just don't take plastic cards of any kind and you can quickly run out of cash and not realize it! But now I'm set. Knowing that I can return to the Post Office and use my Visa Check Card at the ATMs there is a major, major lifesaver and stress-reducer. Honestly, if I hadn't been able to find an ATM to take my card I don't know what I would have done -- I had very little Yen left!

While I was down I also rode up to the top of Kyoto Tower (京都タワー), a 131-meter behemoth of a tower right outside the Kyoto train station. It offers sensational views of the Kyoto skyline and surrounding environs but it's almost hard for me to describe, really. Entire shrines and parks open up before you -- below you really -- for your eyes to gaze upon, you'll find hundreds of roadways crisscrossing the landscape, off in the distance peaks of mountains show themselves as they envelop the city within their protective arms, and if you're a good spot, you can even catch some of those shrines tucked away in the mountain foothills. I recommend catching the city within its afternoon glow at sunset, as I did; the color and shadow play was simply breathtaking.



Naturally I found the local Starbucks too, near the Kyoto Tower, and a local McDonalds just down the street, although I've yet to break down and eat at one. There's also a convenience store right round the corner and I've got my markers down on how to get from here (the hostel) back to Kyoto-eki: turn left out of the building (which is yellow), go past the HONDA sign,

turn right at the cross-street, pass the "duckies" sign, turn left at Kyoto Tower, and straight onto the station. It's a bit of a walk but I can at least navigate now. The strange "duck" sign on the side of this building is a great marker; as soon as I see it I know I'm coming up on my turn into K's House.

Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.



There are a few different groups here, I've noticed. I've seen a trio of either French or Jewish girls, a group of Japanese currently sitting at the Japanese style table, and a set from England – the group I'm sitting with at the table. We're drinking beer while they're drinking tea. The conversation is light; they're talking about clubs and bars. And there's the click-click of the keyboards of those on the Internet. Otherwise it's quiet here and that's a plus.

It's 10:15pm now and the 3 people I've been sitting with have finally decided to head out to drink. Two of them, guys both, are from Australia – just north of Sydney. The third person, a girl, is from England. I'm not sure where they're headed actually, but it is somewhere in Gion, a section of the city known for its pleasure. They've left an invite for me, but I'm not the bar and booze type so I'm staying behind. This one beer has pretty much done me in for the night.

Thankfully my laundry is all done. I've had this blonde-haired guy chasing me for most of the night: first for the washer then later the drier. He wasn't being nasty about it, just asking if I was done. I'd guess this is his last night here and he needs some clean clothes, but I don't pretend to know. Consequently, at first I thought the dryer was just hanging the clothes on the fence, right outside the second-floor door. I didn't see – at first – the dryer hidden under a cover. I didn't notice it at all until a motion-detected light came on and lit up the porch. It didn't seem right paying ¥100 for just the privilege of hanging your clothes on the fence. Silly me, I know.

So far Kyoto has been an interesting place: I saw my first toupee on a Japanese guy (I couldn't believe how bad-off it was; it looked ragged and very unconvincing!), also the crosswalks here beep, much like they do in Prague, only these play a little tune of some kind. I'm sure it's something traditional, but my knowledge of Japanese traditions, especially that of songs, is quite limited. Perhaps I'll learn what this interesting tune is tomorrow.

Did you know that the name of the song I heard at the crosswalk is a traditional Japanese children's tune? It's called "Toryanse" and is sung very much like "London Bridge is Falling Down" in Western society. It's used at Crosswalks as an analogy, telling pedestrians that it is safe to cross until the music stops.

Yeah, I think I'm going to like it here. More than Tokyo I cannot say at this time, but I'm comfortable so things are good.

*Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.
Ahhhhhhh.*

In the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 {Kansai Segment}



「Tetsugaku no Michi」

september 16, 2004



It's about 7:10pm here at K's House in Kyoto and I'm in for the night. My feet are up, I'm freshly showered and I'm ready to take it easy. My tootsies are overjoyed at the relief they've been given; I've had a rather full day of walking don't you know. Call me a tenderfoot if you will, but I would wager I've put at least 10 kilometers or more on my feet today and that's quite a lot in this hilly region of Kansai. I couldn't be happier about what I've seen and where I've been though, and I'm very excited to see much, much more of this historical city in the days to come!

You know, the sun rises here just as early as it does in Tokyo, but this tired body didn't see fit to rise with it on this particular morning. In fact, I didn't climb out of the Hostel until about 9:00am, a bit later than I envisioned, yes, but okay never the

less. Today I set out for the shrines, temples and other sights in the hills along the eastern edge of the city: Nanzen-ji, the Philosopher's Path, and Ginkaku-ji, with a few surprises along the way. One of them, happily, didn't turn out to be Kyoto's metro system.

Kyoto's transportation system is made up of various bus routes, two metro lines (a north-south and an east-west line), the JR Lines and a variety of private railways, but they're all very similar to what I found in Tokyo so I won't touch on them further. Today I braved the metro system, making my way out of Keage station on the Kyoto City Subway Tozai Line, prepped for the long haul ahead: a map in hand and change in my pocket. The first kilometer or two were earned on my way toward the first destination -- Nanzen-ji (or Nanzen Temple).

Nanzen-ji (南禅寺)

Nanzen-ji lies tucked into the foothills of Higashiyama (東山) (山; -yama for Hill/Mountain) in the extreme eastern lie of the city. Home to the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, Nanzen-ji is considered to be the most famous Zen temple in the world and as such has a long,

Did you know the difference between a Shinto shrine and its Buddhist counterparts is easily known by examining the suffix affixed to its name? The "-ji" suffix denotes a temple of Buddhism. You'll also find "-jinga" and "-taisha" label shrines of the Shinto following. Notice: it is Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, not the other way round.

rich history filled with myth and legend. Its complete story is somewhat difficult for a foreigner to ascertain by just visiting the grounds but that in no way diminishes its inherent beauty. Even the translation of its name is somewhat up to interpretation -- “Southern Mountain Temple”, “Southern Zen Temple”, or just “Southern Temple” has been seen in various texts regarding the site.



History records Nanzen-ji was first established in 1264 as a villa for Emperor Kameyama (亀山天皇), who abdicated (or relinquished his throne) in 1274 and retired. Legend suggests the villa became a Zen Temple after, in 1290, the emperor invited Fumon, a priest, to exorcise a spirit that had been plaguing the palace grounds. Instead of chanting incantations to drive out the malignant spirit, Fumon simply sat and meditated until the ghost left. The emperor was said to be so impressed with the strength of Zen meditation, he graced Fumon with his lower palace, allowing the priest to teach about the Zen way of life. The emperor himself later came to believe so deeply in Zen Buddhism the palace was changed into a temple and thus Nanzen-ji was born.

Throughout the years of its initial birth, Nanzen-ji prospered into 62 sub-temples and a number of gardens on roughly 378,902 square meters of land. But it has seen it share of calamity too. The temple has been ravished by fire several times -- in 1393 by the warrior monks of Mount Heiei (belonging to the Tendai sect of Buddhism) and during the Onin War of 1467 (a civil war of the Ashikaga Shogunate, 足利幕府), and has been rebuilt at least that many -- lastly by the mother of Shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (徳川 綱吉) in 1703. Today, Nanzen-ji consists of 12 sub-temples (of which only a few are open to the public) and several gardens (only three are open to the public) on roughly 112,087 square meters of land.

As I stepped onto the site and was completely surrounded by three magnificent sights:

Sanmon -- Called either the Mountain Gate (San-mon; because Buddhist temples are oft referred to as a “mountain”) or Dragon Gate (Tenkanoryu-mon; for reasons I do not understand), this two-story behemoth will quickly capture your attention (it is one of the three biggest gates in all of Japan). Said to symbolize the three roads to Buddhist liberation, its history is as violent as the rest of Nanzen-ji: the gate was built in 1296, destroyed in 1447 and rebuilt later in 1626, as a memorial to the soldiers that died at the Battle of Osaka Castle. One can also climb atop this magnificent wooden structure and get a wonderful view of the



grounds and of Kyoto. Just take off your shoes and ascend the wooden staircase, you won't be sorry. The view from the platform is simply breathtaking and (for me) a completely unexpected one; I hadn't known about the Sanmon before my visit. (Oh, and there's a sign on the steps leading to the second story warning you to "Mind Your Head"... and you had better!)



Hojo -- The Abbots' Quarters is divided into a larger (Daihojo) and smaller (Shohojo) building. The Daihojo building (originally called Seiryoden-do) was actually a gift to the Emperor by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣 秀吉; a daimyo /大名, or feudal ruler, who unified Japan in the Sixteenth Century) and was relocated to the site from the Imperial Palace in 1611. The paintings on the fusuma, or sliding doors, are priceless; created by

masters of the Kano school. But it's the Shohojo that draws the most attention with its fusuma decorated in Chinese landscapes and Tigers and for the karesansui (枯山水), or dry-garden (rock garden) outside. The garden is believed to have been created by landscape architect Kobori Enshu (小堀遠州; 1579-1647) and while the garden's name is somewhat of a stretch in translation -- "Toronoko-watashi"; "Young Tigers Crossing the Water" -- the lack of a moniker doesn't detract from its beauty. Sit a spell and gaze into the garden scene, depicting tigers (three small rocks) accompanied by cubs (three smaller rocks) in a stream (the pure white sand) and contemplate its meaning.

Nanzenin -- the original palace (or temple) created by Emperor Kameyama and Priest Fumon. Inside you'll find a portion of the remains of the Emperor, a statue of him dressed in his priestly robes, and wonderfully adorned place settings. While small, it's the gardens outside that'll garner more attention. Reportedly created by Muso Soseki (夢窓疎石; 1275-1351), the garden is the epitome of peace and tranquility. The garden's pond contains several small islands, one even in the shape of shin, the Kanji character for "heart", and a few fish! A brick aqueduct, built in 1890 as part of the Lake Biwa Canal Project, also exists on the grounds still ferrying water to a small Shinto shrine well concealed within the mountainside.

Of course, Nanzen-ji has many more sub-temples and features to discover than I have discussed here: including huge stone lamps called ishi-doro (石灯籠) (I love these!), wonderfully adorned stone walkways, secondary gardens, smaller gates, lake bridges, and more! It's unfortunate I couldn't spend an entire day wandering around the grounds I enjoyed it so much, but I had to press on. There's just too much of Kyoto to see!





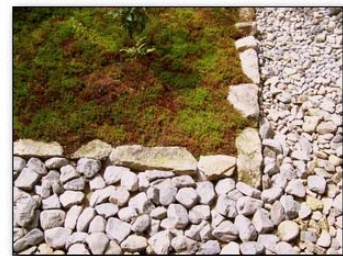
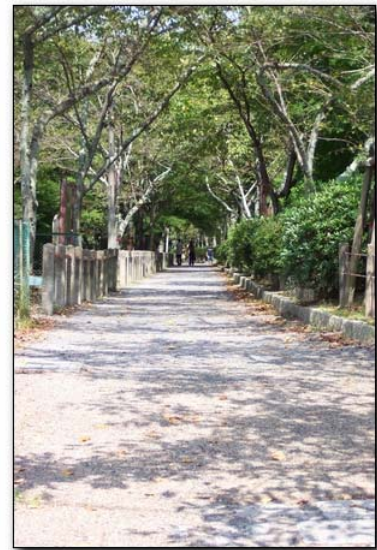
Ginkaku-ji (銀閣寺)



From Nanzen-ji, I passed Eikando Zenrinji (永観堂禅林寺) on the Tetsugaku no Michi (哲学の道), or Path of Philosophy. This gravel and stone path sits atop a hillside is so named after philosopher Nishida Kitaro (西田 幾多郎 ; 1870-1945) and has become one of the most popular spots to view the cherry blossoms in the spring and fireflies in the summer. At times it was quite peaceful walking along the ancient path, listening to the water trickle down a small canal to my right or the gravel crunching beneath my feet. It was along this path I found a place to stop for lunch... a small cafe called Pomme, which served sandwiches and teas. It was a great spot; I sat outside on a little table and chair set aside the walkway eating my egg sandwich and sipping my lemon tea without a care in the world. I tell you there's no better feeling.

Tetsugaku no Michi has a destination: Ginkaku-ji, the Silver Pavilion Temple.

Contrary to its name, the Temple (or its pavilion) isn't laden with silver but the initial intention was for it to be, hence its name. Ginkaku-ji is a common name for the temple but its real name is Tozan Jisho-ji (慈照寺) and it, like Nanzen-ji, belongs to the Rinzai Zen sect of Buddhism. The grounds were a villa for Ashikaga Yoshimasa (足利 義政; 1436-1490), the 8th Ashikaga Shogun and grandson of Ashikaga Yohimitsu, the constructor of Kinkaku-ji (the Golden Pavilion -- which I have yet to see), who eventually did retire here. Construction is said to have begun in 1460, but postponed during the Onin Wars and eventually resumed in 1480 before finally being established in 1482. During this time the grounds were known as Higashiyamadono, or the Palace of the Eastern Mountains, and flourished to house up to 12 sub-temples and buildings, an expansive garden, and sand sculpture. Unfortunately only a small handful of these buildings capture the imagination to this day.



The treasures of Ginkaku-ji are:



Ginkakuji-gaki -- Your first encounter with Ginkaku-ji will be with this 50-meter long passageway between the main gate and inner gate made of sand lined with a beautiful hedge of stone, bamboo and camellias. It's said to be a harmony between Higashiyama and Zen cultures and is actually referred to as the Ginkakuji-gaki style of fencing. "Originally meant for protective purposes," the pamphlet states, "the solemn sparseness of the space also helps us to extinguish our worldly thoughts." Regardless of what the

Japanese think of it, it's just a hedge. It's a beautiful one, but a hedge nevertheless. At the end of the passageway, turn to the left and enter Ginkaku-ji through a wonderful Chinese Gate (called Kara-mon) that dates to the 17th century.

Ginshaden & Kogetsudai – Rounding Kara-mon, these next two structures come into view situated in the front of the Abbot's Quarters (or Hojo). Ginshaden, or *Sea of Silver Sand*, is a "garden" that consists of a two foot sand platform covering 1.75 acres of land and is meant to be viewed as a sea. And like a sea, its sands are fluid needing to be reshaped and raked everyday! Kogetsudai (向月台), or Moon-Viewing Platform, is a distinctive cone-shaped mound of sand thought to represent Mt. Fuji. Legend says the *Sea of Silver Sand* is meant to reflect the light of Tsuki (月), the moon, while the Moon-Viewing Platform was meant to be used to sit and watch the moon rise. But, according to Ginkaku-ji pamphlets, neither of these structures was part of the complex during its original construction, and date only as far back as the Edo period (1615-1865). Either way they're interesting additions to the temple and wondrous sights to behold.



Togudo -- The Togudo (東求堂), or the Hall of the Eastern Quest, is next and was once Yoshimasa's residence here. Inside stands a wooden statue of him and a room called the Dojin-sai, which is probably one of the most important rooms in all of Japan. It's a tearoom (of Souan style) and it's said that this room is believed to be the original design for all tearooms in Japan to come after. An alcove for displaying flowers or scrolls and the sliding shoji that are present in today's tearooms made their first appearance here. It also created a strict 4.5 tatami mat flooring scheme, which also became the standard throughout Japan.



Kannonnden – While the entire grounds are referred to as Ginkaku-ji, it's this building that has garnered the name Silver Pavilion. Called Kannon Hall, the pavilion is a two-story structure of mixed thematic styles. The first floor, referred to as Shinkudan, or Empty Heart Hall, measures 5.5 meters by 6.7 meters and was built in Shoin style, meaning it's a single room divided into several by fusama, or sliding panels. The second floor, named Chouonkaku, or Hall of Roaring Waves, was built according to Chinese Temple style. Among other traits, a structure of the Chinese Temple style features special windows called Katoumado, a rounded ogee-type pointed top opening with a series of S-like curves on either side and Chinese style sliding doors. Perched atop the building is a bronze phoenix dedicated to Kannonbosatu, the Goddess of Mercury, and faces east in order to guard the temple.

The Gardens -- Ginkaku-ji has a magnificent garden and path that leads up the mountainside, providing a magnificent view of the city and of the pavilion, peeking from under the tree line like it does. As for the garden itself, there are many features here one can really only enjoy in person, such as the Brocade Mirror Pond (Kinkyo-chi) that reflects mirror image of Ginkaku-ji within, Meditation Rock (Zazenishi), Floating Rock (Ukiishi), White Crane Island (Hakkakushima), the Moon-Cleansing Spring (Sengetsusen) that was specially designed to spread ripples across the pond, and a series of stone bridges: the Bridge between Worlds (Bunkeibashi), Bridge Welcoming Immortals (Geisenbashi), Brocade Cleansing Bridge (Takkinbashi), Immortals' Laurel Bridge, and the Sleeve of the Immortals Bridge. I'm also told that each rock in the pond has its own unique name but what those names may be haven't been foretold.



Regardless of the names of its rocks or its many stone bridges, the pond and gardens of Ginkaku-ji were fantastic. And so were the rest of the grounds I might add. While the Silver Pavilion may not be made or inlaid with silver-leaf, it's still very much a cultural asset and a wonderful place to visit. Do so. Unfortunately it can become quite crowded during the day, filled with many tourists foreign and domestic to Japan. At times the crowds made it difficult to enjoy the natural setting, but beyond that one undeniable truth, my visit to the Silver Pavilion turned out to be a very exciting one. Oh, and watch out for the row of shops and café's catering to the tourist outside the gates, they've got their eye on your wallet.





On my way out I stumbled across a real shrine, real in the sense that it wasn't a tourist destination. I found it tucked away down an alleyway and I wouldn't have seen it except for the torii made of stone marking its entrance. Intrigued, I walked to it, climbed the stone steps to its summit, and immediately stepped foot into another world. The woods fell silent. There were no birds singing, or crickets chirping; even the breeze ceased to ruffle the leaves on the trees nearby.

The entire area was devoid of noise and I was only a few meters from busy mid-morning traffic. Standing in the middle of this shrine made me feel uneasy; it was creepy! But I managed to walk up, poke around and take a few photographs. I'm quite sure I wasn't supposed to do that, so I do hope the spirits forgive me. And I'm not being cynical; the last thing I want to do is anger spirits right now. Ever see the movie "The Grudge" or play the game "Fatal Frame"? If you have you know exactly what I'm talking about, ne? Spoooooooky!

To Gion (祇園), the Pleasure Quarter

From Ginkaku-ji and the "Spooky" shrine, I retreated west down Imadegawa-dori (今出川) and back into the city at large. By this time my feet were already screaming to halt the assault on them, so I decided to head back to the hostel, dump the camera's digital memory, rest a moment and go out again. Getting back to the hostel, however, turned out to be more of an adventure than I had planned to take. Since I wasn't sure about the bus system and there weren't any metro stops nearby, I decided hoofing it would be best. Why I made such a decision is rather lost on me, though perhaps I figured I could walk to a nearby station. Therefore I walked... and walked... and walked... and walked... for miles... and miles... and miles... until finally coming upon Marutamachi-dori and the metro station that resides there. I was so thankful; my feet too.



I hopped on the Kyoto City Keihan Electric Railway (京阪電気鉄道株式会社), a privately owned rail company, and rode down to Shichijo station, a mere two blocks from the hostel. K's house was a welcome sight let me just say. I hobbled through the doors, took off my shoes and was in a pair of slippers before anyone could say Konnichiwa! While at the hostel I had my pictures transferred to CD for a small price (Thanks Tomi!), doctored up my feet and even talked to my girlfriend Nicole via AIM Express!



What was more stirring about the break was that it allowed me to research more about the Onin War (応仁の乱), which I had briefly read about during my tours of Nanzen-ji and Ginkaku-ji. And if you don't mine (or even if you do) I'd like to share what I learned.

Come to find out these wars were a civil conflict caused by the selection of an heir Ashikaga Yoshimasa, the 8th Ashikaga Shogun, made. History records

that Yoshimasa originally had no children of his own and therefore in order to continue the reign of the Ashikaga shogunate, he had to select an heir. He initially opted for his younger brother to succeed him; however, in 1465 his wife bore him a son. This caused the house to split loyalties and led to the Onin Wars, in which both factions claimed the title of Shogun. This war virtually destroyed Kyoto and I understand why I've seen it mentioned twice now. Consequently, Yoshimasa abdicated his position to his son in 1473 (the wars lasted from 1467-1477); his brother was named Shogun after the son died in 1489 to make up for the oversight.

I ended up hanging about for an hour or so then put on my shoes for round two. It was already about 4:00pm by the time I set out again and while that doesn't sound late, Kyoto merchants begin shuttering about 5:00pm, with the Shrines and Temples. Therefore, in order to see anything, I had to hurry. I

scrambled over to Yasaka-jinja, a shrine on the east end of Gion, the "Pleasure District". Don't let that moniker fool you however; Gion is pleasurable only in the spirits that flow out its doors. And I don't mean the spooky kind. It's said that Kabuki had its start on these streets and there have been teahouses and Geisha about since the late 1500s. If Nanzen-ji is the ideal peace, Gion is the exact opposite; totally commercial in that wacky, Kyoto kind of way; lined with shop after shop. The shrine was a welcome diversion from the hustle and bustle of a very big tourist trap. It is diverse, however, offering many different things to many different kinds of people.





Built in 656, Yasaka-jinja (八坂神社), or more popularly and fondly referred to as Gion-san, sits prominently at the eastern end of Shijo-dori (四条通; 4th street) in Gion. It is one of the few shrines open twenty-four hours a day, seven-days a week and is really one of the most important shrines in all of Kyoto. Gion-san is a Shinto shrine (marked by its stone torii) and is dedicated to its deities: Susa-no-o (須佐之男命 ; brother of Amaterasu Omikami and "black sheep" of the

mythological progenitors of the Imperial family), his spouse Inadahime-no-Mikoto and their eight mythological children. What makes this shrine important is that Susa-no-o is the Shinto god of medicine and in the year 869, thousands prayed for relief from an epidemic, an event that lead curiously enough to the Gion Festival, or Gion Matsuri.

Yaskaka-jinja contains many interesting features, including the Haiden (拝殿; the Offertory building) and the Honden (本殿), the Spirit Hall where one prays to the gods by first waking them by rattling the pan-shaped bells at the front of the building. What struck my attention first off was the Romon, the two-story gateway of bright vermillion posts and white walls that greeted me as I climbed the steps to this wonderful shrine.



As I understand it, the gate was built in the Muromachi Period (1338-1573) style and has two Shinto guardians on both sides protecting it and the grounds. These guardians, which

are half lion/half dog are of Korean origin and called Koma-inu (狛犬). Caution is warranted as you climb the steps; these guardians are anxious and ready to pounce on those deemed unworthy to enter these sacred grounds, especially if you've partaken in some of Gion's pleasurable quarters.



I really took to the Koma-inu.

I continued southbound on Higashioji-dori toward what is known as the Yasakanoto (八坂の塔) Pagoda, a magnificent 5-story structure. If you need a reference to what a pagoda looks like... think the Japanese Pavilion at Epcot. It was already shuttered by the time I got there, but the grounds looked sparse and thus it appears I didn't miss much in overall presentation. But I tell you, watching the Pagoda rise out of the modern-day housing around it sure was an interesting sight to behold. The next item on my list for the evening was to be Kiyomizu-dera, but it also closed early and thus I decided to leave it for another day and walk home. Even the walk home was long. If there's one thing I've learned today is that the buses are your friend -- I think I'm going to brave those tomorrow. There's no way I'm walking around this city tomorrow like I did today.



So, now I'm sitting at the western-style table and relaxed, enjoying a sandwich, chips, some Pocky Reverse and a Pocari Sweat I picked up at the Waku-Waku ready to spend the next few hours enjoying the company of my fellow travelers and figuring out just what I'm going to see tomorrow! What more can one ask for on a vacation?



In the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 {Kansai Segment}



「Kansai Miyako」

september 17, 2004

What a day.

What a glorious day.

I hope I have the vocabulary and the depth of description to accurately convey and paint a picture of the wonders I have seen today: beautiful gardens, vermilion hallways made of thousands of torii, a sparkling pagoda and a rock garden so famous it's almost revered. Kyoto has been amazing thus far, and I've only been here a total of two full days. Its rich history is everywhere, and every new place I visit I receive a new piece to its long and sordid puzzle.

In America we say never leave home without your American Express card, but here in Japan you shouldn't be without your Kansai Miyako card. For ¥1000 worth of rides, this card allows the holder to simply move in and out of the Subway, the Railway and Bus system here in the city and most of the Kansai region; however, the catch is that once the ¥1000 is spent, the card is worthless. But it does become a nice picture souvenir and a record of your travels, so do plan to keep it. I only needed the Kansai Miyako Card to get to Fushimi-inari Station on the Kyoto City Keihan Electric Railway (京阪電気鉄道株式会社), the beginning of my journey.



It was about 9:30am.



Fushimi-inari-taisha (伏見稲荷大社)

Exit Fushimi-inari Station and come upon Fushimi-inari-taisha, the head shrine of no less than 30,000 similar shrines in all of Japan, each dedicated to Inari (稲荷), the Shinto god of rice. Like most shrines, Fushimi-inari has a variety of sub-buildings and gardens that are ages old. You'll find the Sakura-mon Gate (桜門 ; a large Shinto-gate made of wood and painted vermillion) and Go-Hoden Shrine on the premises, but what makes this particular location special and

exciting (and the reason for my visit) is a pathway that wanders 4km up Inari-san, the nearby mountain. Harking back to the 8th century and founded by the Hata family, this shrine and its stone walkway draw you in like no other I've visited thus far. Thousands upon thousands of Torii (鳥居), or Shinto gates, line the walk creating a claustrophobic tunnel of vermillion that hugs the mountainside landscape. Eerie? Indeed so. There were so few people about and such a fright of calm, save for the few raven calls heard echoing throughout the forest along the way, that I wondered if I had stepped into another realm. Each step was a labor, climbing up and up and up and up in what seemed like an endless journey to the sky.



Statues of menacing looking Kitsune (狐), or foxes, pepper about and break apart the Torii gates as you walk along. The Kitsune, which you'll recognize as darkened statues with their tails held high and by the white and red scarf tied about their necks, are the messengers of Inari and they reportedly have magical powers enabling them to take possession of a human spirit. Never fear though, for he is revered as the guardian of harvest (of rice and cereals) and is busy guarding the sacred rice granary. If you look closely, you'll find he carries a key to a rice granary within his jowls. Consequently, a popular sushi dish "o-inari-san" is named for these guardian foxes, for it is written that foxes love rice balls rolled in fried tofu, which is what you get when ordering "o-inari-san". I didn't indulge.

Besides the foxes you'll find a number ishi-doro (石燈籠; stone lamps), several small waterfalls and two large ponds hidden on the pathway depending on which trail you take. And while that might be a strange thing to say, while the path starts out as one, it branches off again... and again... and again... criss-crossing the mountainside in a confusing maze of vermillion. If you take up the 2.5-mile walk you'll end up on the other side of the mountain and at the gates of Tofuku-ji, a Buddhist temple. I highly recommend you make Tofuku-ji from the torii walkway, I attempted to find the temple from the next train platform, only to tour the surrounding village and turn away empty handed because the entrance eluded me. It's a strenuous climb, however, so come with your walking shoes and a good sense of direction. Any signs are in Japanese and it's quite easy to forget from which way you came up. But, if you do find yourself wandering the gates, sit a spell and take in the serenity or stop and grab a bite, shop or drink at the dozens of stops along the way!



Kinkaku-ji (金閣寺), the Golden Pavilion

I returned to Kyoto-eki about noontime via the JR-Nara line whereby I procured my first ever bus pass (as I previously mentioned) and braved the city lines. Getting one was easier than I thought, but like in all situations involving Japanese / English relations, patience was required. With pass in hand I made my way across town on bus 205 to the northwest quadrant of the city and took in beautiful Kinkaku-ji, the Temple of the Golden Pavilion.

Properly called Rokuon-ji, (Deer Park Temple) after the owner's posthumous name, this estate was built in the 1220s as a comfortable villa (Kitayamadai) for Saionji Kitsune (1178-1244), an aristocrat. The estate eventually withered and became the property of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (足利 義満; 1358-1408), the third shogun of the Ashikaga Shogunate (remember hearing of him before, at Ginkaku-ji?).

He turned this villa into a retirement estate he named Kitayamadono in 1398. Only after his death did the site become a Buddhist temple for the Rinzaï sect, which is now dedicated to the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, Kannon (観音, thus it is also sometimes called Kannon-den).



Tread softly along the stone walls and gravel walkway leading up to these stunning grounds, and pass through Somon, or Main Gate, to enter this magnificent estate. Just beyond the main gate, in amongst a beautiful stand of trees, you'll find the Shoro (Bell Tower) and the original bell owned by the Saionji family within, ready to be struck; an enormous ichiigashi tree, an evergreen native to Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu that is thought

to have existed on site prior to the construction of Kitayamadai or planted at that time (it's also a city landmark); boat rock will be on your right-hand side next to the Kuri (Priests & Living Quarters and Kitchen), which may have been constructed during the Meio and Bunki eras (1492-1504); the Hojo (Abbots' Quarters); and the Karamon, the beautifully constructed gate of Chinese design just to the left of the Hojo also await you. It's through here, however, where you'll find Kinkaku, the Golden Pavilion, resting peacefully on the shores of a Kyouki-chi, a mirror pond.

The pavilion and the pond on which it stands were designed to resemble the image of the Seven Treasure Pond in scenes of the Buddhist paradise. On this 6,600 square meter parcel of land you'll find the pond full of lotus plants, symbolizing the flower of truth, and several stones and islands, representing the eight oceans and nine mountains of the Buddhist creation story. As for Kinkaku itself, it's a beautiful 3-story structure of various designs, measuring 12.8 meters (42-feet) high, 10.0 meters (33 feet) wide, and 15.2 meters (40 feet) long.



The first floor, called the Hosui-in, or Chamber of Dharma Waters, was constructed in the Shinden-zukuri style first developed in the Heian period for its palaces. This style is depicted by having a large room with a veranda and was probably used as a reception hall for Yoshimitsu's guests. The image of the Buddha Shakyamuni wearing a jeweled chaplet sits on an altar, while a seated portrait of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu rests on its left. The second floor, called Cho-on-do, or Grotto of Roaring Waves, is in the Buke-zukuri style originally used in Samurai houses, and it is said Yoshimitsu held private meetings here. The floor is decorated with paintings by Kano Masanobu (狩野正信; 1434-1530) and holds an image of the Bodhisattva Kannon with Shitenno images (four such guardians) on either side. The third floor, called Kukkyo-cho, or Superb Apex, is a sparse room of



23-square feet and was reportedly used for intimate meetings with friends and for tea ceremonies. The style is of Chinese Temple, complete with bell-shaped windows and a floor that simply glows in the sunlight. The roof is thatched with thin boards of sawara, or Japanese cypress, and perched atop is a golden fenghuang (a Chinese Phoenix), which watches guard. It, like the rest of the pavilion, is leafed in gold.

But Kinkaku isn't the only treasure to behold here: beautiful and spacious grounds surround the pavilion. You'll find a small flight of stone steps leading up to Shin'un, a small shrine dedicated to the Shinto god Kasuga Myojin (a guardian); the Gingasen, or Milky Way Spring, what was once a source of water Yoshimitsu used for his tea

ceremonies; beautiful expanses of trees and shrubs; and Ryumon-taki, a small waterfall. Check out the rock at the base of this waterfall: it's called Carp Stone (rigyoseki), so named to impress an ancient Chinese myth of carp swimming upstream to transform into dragons. The dragon is manifested by the rock at the base of this 2.3-meter falls.

Turn up the steps from Ryumon-taki and be led up the mountainside, across a small stone bridge named Tiger's Gorge Bridge (kokeikyo) to Anmintaku, Tranquility Pond. Also known as Ushitaku and Bountaku, this small pool is surrounded by lush foliage and inhabits a small island with a five-element Stupa (a Buddhist monument) known as the White Snake Mound (Hakuja no Tsuka). Beyond the mound you'll find a teahouse and a hall for worshipping the deity Fudo Myoo (不動明王).



If there's one unsettling thing to learn about Kinkaku-ji is that the building that exists today is not the original, nor is it even hundreds of years old. The pavilion that stands is only a little more than 50-years old; a 21-year old student from Otani University, who also just happened to be a monk, torched it on July 2, 1950. Today the site serves as a Shariden, a house for Buddha relics, but remains a wonderful destination and a sight to behold. The grounds are spacious and the gardens beautiful; it's hard to grasp that the villa once was someone's residence. It really tends to boggle the mind. And the Golden Pavilion itself... when it catches the sunlight, Kinkaku sings!





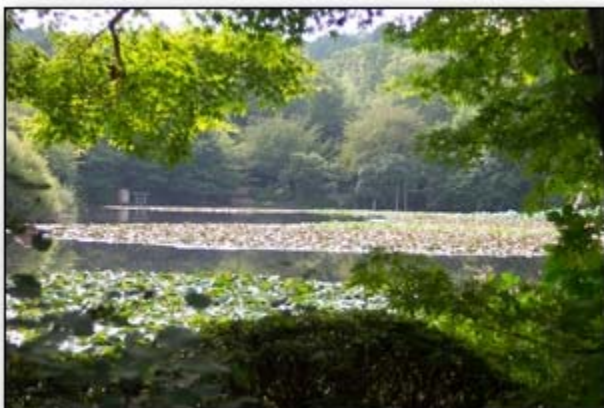
Ryoan-ji (竜安寺), the Temple of the Peaceful Dragon

From golden Kinkaku-ji, I turned westward and walked down Kinukake-no-michi to Ryoan-ji, the Temple of the Peaceful Dragon. It, like so many in Kyoto, is recognized as a World Heritage site for its temple buildings and spectacular gardens, but what drew me here was not the promise of beautiful foliage, but its rock garden – a world renowned example of Zen creationism.



I hadn't planned to walk down, mind you, but a missed bus stop and a strong will provided the opportunity. Although I shall not speak of it, I confess I did lose my sense of wherewithal after appearing through the gates of Kinkaku-ji and just ended up traveling in the general direction of my next stop. I found it about 30-minutes (give or take) later, but it was sure more steps I had wished to take on my feet. Ryoan-ji was worth the effort, though, and I soon lost all interest in the throbbing pain below and paid more attention to all that was around me.

If I described the grounds of Kinkaku-ji as beautiful then what exists here at Ryoan-ji is heavenly: as a residence it must have simply been nirvana to live here. Today, this huge 120-acre estate is of the Myoshinji School of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism. So while affiliated with nearby Kinkaku-ji and Ginkaku-ji, it's of a different school lineage. Its history is as widely vast as all the other places I've thus far visited, and just as interesting: The earliest temple recorded on this site dates back to 983 and originally was an estate for the Fujiwara family. Some years later the estate served as a retirement home for an emperor and became known as Tokudai-ji (or Enyu-ji). During the Muromachi Period (1336-1573), a military commander named Hosokawa Katsumoto (1430-1473) built his estate on its ruins though he was later killed during the before-mentioned Onin Wars. It was after his death the estate (now laid in ruins) became the birthplace of Ryoan-ji.



A massive pond, called Kyoyochi, is the center focal point for the entire villa and is beautifully lined with native trees and filled with varying species of lily pad. Until recently one could find many Mandarin ducks floating on its surface, which earned Ryoan-ji the nickname, Oshidori-dera (the temple of Mandarin ducks) and the pond the name Oshidori-ike (the pond of Mandarin ducks.) You'll also find within the pond two

small islands: Fushitora-jima (“Hiding Tiger Island”) and Benten-jima, so called for a small shrine that houses an image of Sarsavati, the lone female of the seven Shinto gods of good luck. Take your time strolling around this magnificent pond, I beg of you. Stop and wonder at the lilies as they rise out of the mirror surface and relish the inherent beauty found here. Depending on the season, you’ll find an array of color in the garden and I daresay you’ll not find a more peaceful setting or a more stunning place to stroll.

Further up are the buildings that consist of the rest of this complex: the Kuri (Monks quarters), the Hojo (Abbots quarters), and the Zorokuan (tea room). The Rock Garden lies within the Hojo but it’s of the Zorokuan I wish to speak of first: A true gem lies here, if you know to look for it. It goes by the name “Tsukubai” and its message outweighs its practicality; for its here, nestled in the shrubbery, where one of the most famous washbasins in all of Kyoto (and perhaps all of Japan) exists.



Used to rinse the hands and mouth before entering the tearoom, this washbasin was reportedly contributed by Tokugawa Mitsukuni (徳川光圀; 1628-1700), a feudal lord and a member of one of the most influential families of the Edo Period in Japan. While not known to American audiences, Tokugawa is credited for compiling the “Dai-Nippon-Shi” – the greatest history of Japan containing 397 volumes that he originally started in 1657. But it’s not its contributor’s name or his feats that make this basin unique, it’s the inscription chiseled around its edge.



The basin’s top, which at first glance appears to be a recreation of an ancient Chinese coin, is the keeper of a riddle. Piece it together and you’ll learn one of the most important concepts in Zen teachings. You may first realize that the central part of the basin, which should be circular if depicting a coin, is square – this is your first clue. It’s actually the radical for “mouth” (口 – Kuchi). You’ll find other radicals around: there’s “five” (五 – Go) and “arrow” (矢 – Ya).

Reading from right to left and piecing together the radicals correctly, you’ll find this inscription encoded:

吾唯足知

われただたるをしる
ワレタダタルヲシル

Ware tada taru wo shiru
“I learn only to be contented”

He who learns only to be contented is spiritually rich, while the one who does not learn to be contented is spiritually poor even if he is materially wealthy. This is an important philosophical realism that Zen teaches and one we can contemplate gazing into another of Ryoan-ji's infamous treasures: the rock garden. Its simple design was laid out at the end of the 15th century, measuring 25-meters east to west and 10-meters south to north, and consists of only white sand and fifteen rocks. Notice the rocks are arranged in groups of five, two, three, two and three and only 14 of the 15 can be seen from any one vantage point. It is said that only when you attain spiritual enlightenment, as a result of deep Zen meditation, can you see the last invisible stone. Notice still the raked lines are circles around the rock groups and yet straight everywhere else. *The lines stop without a single misplaced pebble when they touch the circular patterns, then resume unchanged beyond them as if the rocks are islands.*



I sat and stared for timeless minutes, losing myself in the serenity and simplicity of the garden. And for a few minutes I forgot all about my agenda... and that my time in Japan was short and priceless.





Kitano Tenmangu (北野天満宮)

Eventually, though, my time at Ryoan-ji came to a close and I got back upon my feet, donned my shoes and hopped the bus to Kitano Tenmangu, yet another shrine on my list of must-see Kyoto. But of all the other shrines and temples I've visited thus far, Kitano Tenmangu has a different purpose. While it is dedicated to Tenjin-san, the god of scholarship, it was originally built in 942 to venerate Sugawara no Michizane (菅原道真 ;

845-903), a poet and scholar of the age. It is written that Sugawara had been exiled to the island of Kyushu as a result of political maneuvers from the Fujiwara clan, his mortal enemies. Soon after his death in exile, however, strange happenings befell his enemies: severe earthquakes and thunderstorms constantly wracked the home provinces, and unexplained or untimely deaths occurred to those that opposed him. Thus the Imperial Court granted Sugawara the posthumous title of Karai Tenjin, or God of Fire and Thunder, and in 986 became deified. The grounds are filled with Sugawara's favorite tree (the ume, a Japanese Plum tree) and have become popular with students praying for success on exams.



The shrine was very interesting, though much like the few I've seen thus far, so I won't bore you with descriptions of its dragon relief's and/or its tiger paintings. I will say that there were some very interesting lamps to photograph, a few Koma-inu (the Korean half lion/half dog statues), and stone torii of various sizes that caught my attention. But the shrine itself, I'm sorry to say did not.

After Kitano Tenmangu I tried for Nijo-jo, a very interesting looking castle in the middle of the city. I was able to grab a picture of one of the outside corners but it had already closed by the time I got there (which was 5pm and it closed at 4pm). It also is on my must-see list, with about 3 other places I have yet to visit. Its these three or four places that I really would like to explore instead of Osaka, which I scheduled myself to visit tomorrow, so I may cut

my losses with Osaka and just stick around one more day to get the rest of these shrines and temples in. But I'll make that decision soon. There are some books here to read about Kyoto and its environs so I may yet decide to go down to Osaka.

Time will tell.

I'll close this update but I may do some laundry, grab some snacks at the Waku-Waku or hike back down to Kyoto Tower and take in a nighttime view of the city from atop its observatory... that is if it doesn't close early!



In the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 {Kansai Segment}



「Nijo, Toji and the Floating Garden Observatory」

september 18, 2004

clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack

It's a virtual never-ending journey I seem to be on here, with only the familiar sounds of a train in transit, chugging along its rail-line, carrying us, the mass of travelers from one city to the next as companions. Today it's ferrying between Osaka and Kyoto, delivering workers and explorers alike to their ports of call in between. And me, it shall deliver back to my Kansai home – K's House in Kyoto - in due time.



Unlike the express train I caught to Osaka this very afternoon, this much slower “local train” will stop at each station along the return to Kyoto-eki, taking what was a 30-minute trip over into an hour or more trip back. But I don't mind. What a great opportunity to rest and reflect upon the day's accomplishments, right?

And to share them!

While today has been a great day, with sights taken in both Kyoto and Osaka, I must confess that up until last night I wasn't sure this little journey would even be possible. You see, while Osaka was on the original itinerary drawn up for this adventure, when I arrived in the Kansai area and found Kyoto to be much more massive than I had first thought, I began to wonder just how much of the city's treasures I would have to sacrifice for side-trips like Osaka. Of course, the dilemma I faced with Nikko and Hakone from the Tokyo side was fresh in my mind; and while I didn't want to lose yet another location, it seemed the only choice to be made in order to continue visiting some of the other wonderful sights in Kyoto.

I mulled this decision over as I walked down to Kyoto Tower Observatory to fetch a glimpse of the city at night last night. And I did so with a new friend.

My suitemates, if I've neglected to mention them before, consist of three other travelers: a Scottish man and woman, and a young man from Montreal. All three departed sometime during the previous day leaving me with the potential of meeting new folks. Surely enough, new suitemates awaited my return that day; all four beds were filled. Bed 1 and 2 are now occupied by a couple of guys from San Francisco – Steve and Eric, who have just graduated from college. Eric is on a “Teach English in Japan” program and Steve is here visiting Eric. The other new arrival is Yoshi, a Japanese young man on his summer vacation. I ran into Yoshi setting up his gear; I introduced myself and asked if he wanted to accompany me down to the tower. He had no plans and thus we walked down.

At first the conversation was light (though he spoke English very well) but I eventually found out he was currently employed as a security guard, originally hailed from Yokohama (a city outside of Tokyo) and went to school in one of Kyoto's many vocational establishments.



You know, if there's one thing Kyoto doesn't lack (besides temples and shrines) it is schools; but I'm getting off track here.

Yoshi said that in all the years he was in Kyoto interest in exploring its history was not within his purview. Only recently did he become drawn to it, which is why he came to Kyoto. And it was that conversation that prompted me to revisit my decision to skip Osaka. I

had already missed a lot of Japanese history by cutting out Nikko and Hakone (the surrounding area of Mount Fuji) and I didn't want to miss visiting Osaka as well. I knew then as soon as I made it back to the hostel I would figure out a way to make the day-trip work, and I did.

I also discovered my new-found friend had been to the United States: visiting Seattle, San Francisco and, of course, Las Vegas. Strangely enough when Yoshi was in Las Vegas he saw Cirque du Soleil's “O”, which he pronounced to be “Awesome!” so our conversation turned to Cirque du Soleil, Las Vegas and other places to visit. I had a grand time talking with my Japanese friend and soon forgot all about the non-impressive night-time skyline that Kyoto offered. I was on my way to Osaka for sure.

clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack

Osaka (大阪市)



Osaka is one of the largest cities in all of Japan – third-largest population wise (with an estimated population of 2.7 million) – and is the capital of its own Prefecture. Historically, Osaka has been regarded as Japan's industrial headquarters and many of Japan's industries can still be found here. But it wasn't its industries that drew me to this borough, in fact, there wasn't much of a draw at all except

for the fact that I could say I stepped foot in Osaka, and set my eyes upon this equally well-known city.

Okay, so that's not entirely true. There were a couple of locations I wanted to visit in Osaka. First, Osaka-jo (大阪城), a sixteenth-century fortification built on the order of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉; 1536-1598) and for many years considered to be the largest in all Japan. Its purpose was not one of peace; however, Toyotomi used his castle to wage war against rebellious feudal lords (he, himself, was a Sengoku Daimyo), crushing them, and uniting the country under his rule (he is also credited with invading Korea and instituting restrictions that only Samurai could bear arms). This rule did not last, for Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川家康; 1543-1616) seized power (in 1600) and established his family's Shogunate; ruling for many years thereafter.

But the castle was not given up so easily; Osaka-jo passed to Hideyoshi's son, Toyotomi Hideyori (豊臣秀頼; 1593-1615) who took up the insurrectionist fight until Tokugawa attacked and eliminated them in 1615. Tokugawa later rebuilt the castle for his own uses but it befell victim to a lighting strike in 1629. The rest of the castle burned to the ground during the shogunate's last stand (the Meiji Restoration) in 1868.



The present day castle dates from 1931 but is equally impressive: with massive stone walls, black and gold-leaf trim, a copper roof, an eight story donjon (prison tower) that rises 39-meters (130-feet), and an observation platform on the top floor.

Unfortunately I would not get a chance to see this magnificent castle, its museums describing the life of Toyotomi Hideyoshi or any of the folding screens depicting scenes of the battle for the grounds.



I just couldn't bring my feet along with me.

They did make it to the second point of interest, however: the Floating Garden Observatory (空中庭園展望台; Kuchu Teien Tenbodai) atop the Umeda Sky Building (梅田スカイビル), just a few minutes walk from Osaka-eki. As with all things here in Japan, it took a small tour of the surrounding neighborhood just to reach it and although I will confess had I taken a moment to acclimate myself to the city's cardinal directions, I wouldn't have gone on such an excursion if the map in hand was labeled more accurately. Furthermore I shall add that the map in hand was not an adequate one to use in navigating a large city such as Osaka. Do I accept any of the blame?

Of course not.

Ahem.

The Floating Garden Observatory is a unique observation post found perched on the 41st floor, 167-meters (557-feet) in the air surrounded in nothing but glass. In fact, it's an adventure in glass just to reach the viewing platform; the going rate -- ¥700. The ascent begins on the third floor in a super-fast express elevator made entirely of glass. After reaching the secondary observatory platform, you'll embark across an escalator that actually bridges the two towers enclosed only in... you guessed it... glass. When you reach the top and step out through the double doors (made of glass, of course) and onto the rooftop, you're surrounded by nothing but... glass!

The view is unparalleled.

The wind too; be prepared to hold on.

But it's one of the most exciting views to behold. North, south, east and west; all of Osaka opens up to you in this completely panoramic 360-degree view. The skyline is brilliant at any time of day, and you'll see some of the most



interesting engineering marvels Japan has to offer!

And if you're lucky, you'll also get to be part of a cultural celebration in the building's concourse, as I did when I approached. There's music, food, people and good times being had by all.

You know, we really aren't that different from the Japanese.

Nijo-jo (二条城)



While Osaka would be the culminating point of today's journey, Nijo-jo (城;-jo or castle) would be its origination spot. The morning started off rather early; I hurriedly dressed, checked emails and chatted online with Nicole before departing the warm confines of the hostel.

Rising out of the cityscape on the cross-roads of busy Horikawa-dori and Marutamachi-dori in the

northwest corner of Kyoto's populous downtown is the unmistakable Nijo Castle, one of the most important landmarks and treasures in all of Kyoto. Its rich history traverses the centuries: it was once the home and rule of the Shogun (in the fifteenth century) and later to the Cabinet assembly of the re-instated Emperor (in the seventeenth century). The castle, like the rest of Kyoto, has seen its fair share of siege having been built, burnt and remade many times over and yet it stands defiantly, proud and true, showcasing the wealth, power and artistic prowess of the Japanese people for all to admire. To miss Nijo-jo is to miss all of Japan. Don't.

Nijo-jo's grand and miraculous story begins in 1601 with an order from Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川 家康; 1542-1616), the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate (徳川幕府; Tokugawa bakufu, bakufu meaning "military government"). He requested all Feudal lords throughout western Japan to undertake its construction as a means of paying tribute to the ruling class and his own family's administrative control. In two years,



Ieyasu established Nijo Castle as the de-facto stronghold of the Tokugawa Shogunate. His predecessors later completed the castle and grounds, adding many of the structures the public can visit today: the Hinomaru (inner palace), the Ninomaru (outer palace), gardens, walls, moats and other sub-buildings that pepper this 275,000 square-meter estate.

In 1788, the city was besieged with unrest and Nijo-jo was not spared this wrath of flame. Fire destroyed the inner palace and gardens, leaving much of the castle empty until 1862. Six years after Tokugawa returned to the palace grounds it became the home of the Imperial Cabinet (in 1868) after Tokugawa Yoshinobu (徳川 慶喜; 1837-1913), the fifteenth Tokugawa Shogun, reluctantly restored sovereignty to the Emperor in what became known as the Meiji Restoration. Twenty years after the castle was returned to the Imperial family it was given to the city of Kyoto as a municipal treasure.

In the past you could enter the grounds through four magnificent gates: Minami-mon (south gate), Nishi-mon (west gate), Kita-Ote-mon (north gate) and Higashi-Ote-mon (east gate); today, however, entrance is gained only through the East gate. Stepping through this gate and past the high, non-descript brick walls is like stepping through and into a whole other world. Inside you'll find:

- Bansho, the Guardhouse;
- Seriyu-en (Seriya Garden), a 16,500 square-meter garden boasting groves of cherry and Ume trees, a large pond, two tea-houses and more than 1000 carefully arranged stones;
- and Honmaru (Inner Palace), a transplanted structure from the Kyoto Imperial Palace (originally called Katsura Palace after the young prince.)



Through the Kara-mon (or Chinese style gate) one enters the outer palace grounds and into the domain of the Ninomaru, or outer palace, but I urge you not to pass through too quickly. This cypress-thatched, garbled roofed gate might just be another in a large line of gates dotting the countryside, but take another look at its four supporting pillars. You'll find finely crafted and colored carvings of dragons, exquisite metal trimmings, and other ornamental features that make this particular gate a wonder to behold. Passing through without taking a glimpse of the wonderfully pigmented dragon above and you would have missed one of the best artistic expressions found at the site.

You'll find others inside the inner palace, where stately needs are matched with aesthetic desires. An amazing statistic regarding Ninomaru Palace is that amongst its five buildings and 33 rooms, you'll find a grand total of 800 Tatami mats.



A Tatami (畳) mat is made of woven straw and its use is actually constrained by rules; for example, a Tatami mat's dimensions are fixed at 90-centimeters by 180-centimeters by 4-centimeters (35 ½ inches by 71 inches by 2 inches).

Therefore many rooms are constructed and thereby measured by the number of Tatami, not by their physical dimensions. In this way, many ceremonial rooms (like tea rooms) are all constructed with the same dimensions regardless of what part of Japan they are found. Even the layout of these mats is governed by certain conventions: mats must never be laid out in a grid pattern in the home and should never show a point where the corners of the mats intersect. Consequently, due to the cultural differences between western Japan and eastern Japan, Tatami in western Japan are slightly larger than those in the east.

Accentuating the Tatami are beautifully painted sliding doors and walls by great Kano School artists: Kano Tan'yu (狩野探幽; 1602-1674), Kano Naonobu (狩野尚信; 1607-1650) and Kano Koi (d. 1636) and masterfully carved transoms made out of cypress blocks. And it's unfortunate that photography within Ninomaru was restricted, for that reason, I shall use the descriptions in the pamphlet provided to give you a peek into this amazing palace.

1. ***Yanagi-no-ma (Willow Room) and Wakamatsu-no-ma (Young Pine Room):*** Inspectors used these two rooms to verify the identities of visiting feudal lords. They are named after the paintings on the sliding doors and walls.
2. ***Tozamurai-no-ma (Retainers Room):*** These rooms decorated with scenes of romping leopards and tigers on the screen doors and walls functioned as waiting chambers for visiting feudal lords. The artists of the Kano School had to rely on imported hides to depict these exotic animals, as there were no such animals in Japan at that time.
3. ***Shikidai-no-ma (Reception Room):*** The Shogun's ministers received visiting feudal lords in this room, and accepted presents intended for the Shogun. The great artist Kano Tan'yu painted the massive ancient pine trees depicted here when he was only twenty-five years old.
4. ***Ohima San-no-ma (Third Grand Chamber):*** This is the waiting room for visiting Tozama Daimyo (feudal lords who did not become retainers of the Tokugawa until after the decisive victory at the battle in 1600). Each of the panels in the transoms is made of a single block of cypress 35 centimeters thick, and carved on both sides with different designs. The metal nail covers of the gold-plated copper found on the grooves are particularly notable here.

5. ***Ohiroma Ichi-no-ma, Ni-no-ma (First and Second Grand Chambers)***: These two chambers served as the most important official audience rooms in the palace. The interior design, incorporating bold forms of pines and a lavish use of gold and lacquer, was intended to overwhelm visiting feudal lords with the power and authority of the Tokugawa Military Government. Behind the sliding doors with beautiful red tassels is a room called Musha-kakushi-no-ma (the bodyguards' room). Here armed guards stood by to protect the Shogun. These chambers are of great historical significance because here, in 1867, the fifteenth Tokugawa Shogun (Yoshinobu) announced the restoration of the Emperor's sovereignty. With this declaration, the long 250-year rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate was brought to a close.
6. ***Kuro-Shoin (Inner Audience Chamber)***: Here the Shogun granted private interviews to Shinpan Daimyo (feudal lords who are nearly related to Tokugawa) and Fudai Daimyo (feudal lords who sided with Tokugawa even before the battle of 1600, which consolidated their power). The architectural design of this room is similar to that of the Ohiroma (grand chambers). Kano Naonobu, a younger brother of Kano Tan'yu, executed the paintings here.
7. ***Shiro-Shoin (Shogun's living quarters)***: The modest and quiet mood of these mountain and water scenes by Kano Koi served to create a relaxing atmosphere for the Shogun's daily life. A unique point here is that only female attendants of the Shogun were allowed entry.
8. ***Ohiroma Yon-no-ma (Fourth Grand Chamber)***: This was the weapons chamber; kept here were the Shogun's spears, swords and other armaments. The screen paintings of magnificent pine trees and hawks by Kano Tan'yu are appropriate symbols of military prowess. One of the pine branches is 11-meters long.
9. ***Rochu-no-ma (Ministers' Offices)***: Three adjacent rooms served as offices of the Shogun's ministers. Kano Tan'yu did the excellent wall paintings of birds in natural settings. Notable are the plain upper walls and plank ceilings, reflecting the frugality of decoration in lesser, non-public areas of the palace.
10. ***Chokushi-no-ma (Imperial Messenger's Room)***: The Imperial Messenger of the Emperor was received by the Shogun in this splendid room. Paintings of Maples on the walls and sliding doors were also executed by Kano School painters and give the room a wonderful, earthy feel.

Another book (on site for purchase) shows off this magnificent artwork; I hope I can share some of these wonderful relief's when I get back. It really was something else to walk around the palace with only your socks on, listening to the floor squeak with every step and have some of the most wonderful art to feast your eyes on.

Speaking of which, the floors from the entrance of the Ninomaru Palace to the Ohiroma (or Grand Chambers) squeak and creak whenever anyone treads on them. According to the brochure, "when the floor is trod upon, the clamps under it move up and down, creating friction between the nails and the clamps which hold them in place, causing the floor to squeak. It is the bird-like sound thus emitted that gives this the name Nightingale Floor." And the Shogun (and his guards) would instantly be alerted to anyone walking about!



Walking back through the Kara-mon will lead you to the one and only exit. Oh, and it might interest you to know that, like the Honmaru, this gate is not an original Nijo-jo structure. It was originally part of Fushimi-jo but relocated here after that castle was destroyed. A replica of that castle was built on the old location, but it's not something I scheduled to see. Nijo-jo, on the other hand, was such a delightful site it pained me to move on. When in Kyoto, please spend some time here, I highly recommend it!

To-ji(東寺): The Five Storied Pagoda



The second stop of the day was to a temple in the southern part of the city: To-ji. This temple, more formerly known as Kyo-o-gokoku-ji (教王護国寺; "temple that guards the capital"), came to be in 794 when Emperor Kammu (桓武天皇; 737-806, reigned: 781-806) transferred the capital of Japan from Nara to Heian-kyo (present day Kyoto). In doing so he built two huge guardian temples -- To-ji (east temple) and sai-ji (west temple) -- to guard the city's southern gate: Rashomon/Rajomon (羅生門 / 羅城門; "the castle gate"), a 106-foot wide by 26-foot high stone wall built in 789.

Thirty years later, Emperor Saga (嵯峨天皇; 786-842, reigned: 809-823), honored Kukai (空海; posthumously known as Kobo-Daishi; 弘法大師) the founder of Shingon Buddhism with the temple, and thus it was made the central seminary of Esoteric Buddhism. To say there are many examples of Buddhist art on display would be an understatement. In one room alone there are twenty-one statues on display, and their arrangement is specific to the religion. Further information

from the site's pamphlet follows:

Kondo, or Main Hall, was first erected in 796. It burnt down in 1486, and reconstructed by Toyotomi Hideyori in 1603. The double roofed irimoya-style Kon-do is the biggest building in Toji. The raised central part of the lower roof offsets the regularity of the front view of the building. Here the Tenjiku (old Indian) style is introduced into the traditional Japanese architectural style. The statues of the Yakushi Trinity (Yakushi-nyorai and his two attendants, Nikko and Gakko Bosatsu) look filled with mercy to heal the sick in body and soul. The statues of the Twelve Sacred Generals placed under the “Mokakeza” (The seat of Nyorai) are said to have been carved by Kosho, the 21st generation sculptor of Buddhist images after Jocho, and are representative masterpieces of the Momoyama period.



Kodo, or Lecture Hall, was started by Kukai in 825 and completed in 835. It was heavily damaged by typhoons and earthquakes and repaired many times. It was burnt down in 1486, but reconstructed by Toyotomi Kitanomandokoro during the Keicho period (1596-1615); it retains its original elegant appearance. Twenty-one Buddhist statues are arranged according to the Mikkyo Mandala described in the main sutra of Esoteric Buddhism, with the principal one, Dainichi-nyorai in the center. The Esoteric Buddhist statues, which were brought from China by Kukai, can be observed in the Kodo. One characteristic is the special arrangement of the figures in the hall. On the Shumidan platform, Tathagatas of the five wisdoms are placed in the center, five Bodhisattvas are on the right side, five Fearful Kings are on the left, and Brahmadeva, Sakrodevánám-indra, and the Four

Guardian Kings are arranged around them. The grouping of the 21 figures is in the formation of the Karman Mandala. Unlike the usual arrangement of figures in ordinary Buddhism, the arrangement itself has a meaning in Esoteric Buddhism.

Yet, here it was the Pagoda that drew me... the highest in Japan. It measures 57-meters (187-feet) high and is actually not the original. The first structure was completed in 826, but it and its three predecessors burnt to the ground thanks to Mother Nature's fire-bolts. Tokugawa Iemitsu (徳川 家光; 1604-1651) reconstructed the present structure in 1644. It towers above the grounds and is easy the focus of the eyes though it's not the main building, nor is it in the center of the grounds. The Pagoda is tucked away in a nondescript corner and is left to its own but it's still a magnificent sight to see.



Next door is the Rakunan High School and it seems the grounds and outlying areas are playgrounds for the local children; Toji is swarming with children at play. Leaving provided a few glimpses into the games and activities of this country's youth: I watched a couple of groups paying games just outside the inner walls. What they were doing was lost to me but at one time there were about seven boys together tied at the ankle and they were attempting to move together as one. And for a few steps they actually accomplished their goal: each foot rising and falling with the group. No doubt this was a test of teamwork; eventually one faltered and the group stopped. They didn't seem too concerned about it though, having fallen into a lump of laughter...



clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack

Well, that's been my day. A gray seems to be cast across the land as the sun slowly slips behind the mountains of Kansai. We'll be arriving at Kyoto-eki shortly, so said an announcement overhead a moment ago, therefore, I shall close out here. As for the rest of the evening, I'm not sure? A sandwich, chips and cookies at the Waku-Waku for sure, a nice warm shower, and rest! Tomorrow is Nara and that promises to be an adventurous day!

In the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 {Kansai Segment}



「Na-Na-Na-Nara!」

september 19, 2004

Na-na-na-na-NARA, you've got the look!

I must thank Roxette, the 90s Swedish pop/rock group, for the inspiration for this day's subject. Unfortunate as it is, the song was the first that came to mind when I hopped out of bed this morning, preparing for the day's adventure. It's probably not the most culturally correct thing to think of when prepping to visit a historical site, but its motivational properties outweighed any cultural taboos; at least in my book.

And what a fun time it turned out to be too -- filled with deer, curry and turtles!

Yeah, I'll explain later.

As you may be able to guess, I took a little side-trip to Nara, a 40-minute ride on a limited express train from the JR Kyoto Station on the, you guessed it, JR Nara line. Heijo-kyo (京; -kyo, "capital"), as the city is traditionally referred, is about 42km

(26mi) south of Kyoto, but it seems like a whole world away. It's said that Buddhism in Japan first flourished in this past-capital, and you'll find a number of religious relics in its numerous historic temples.

The Capitals of Japan				
Historic Name		Present Day		Date
Naniwa	難波	Osaka	大阪	645-694
Fujiwara	藤原	Kashihara	橿原	694-710
Heijo	平城	Nara	奈良	710-784
Nagaoka	長岡	Nagaokakyo	長岡京	784-794
Heian	平安	Kyoto	京都	794-1868
Edo	江戸	Tokyo	東京	1868 +

Do yourself a favor and make visiting the Tourist Information Center (TIC) located on Sanjo-dori the first thing you do upon stepping from either of the train stations. While Nara is a much smaller town than say, Kyoto, there is still plenty to see and a wide expanse of territory to cover. You'll find that Sanjo-dori is one of the busiest and most commercial avenues in the town, but this center will be your saving grace. If you're lucky, and get the nerve to ask, the Japanese hosts (which do speak English) will be more than happy to point out sights to see, provide maps of the area and show you how to get the most out of your visit to Nara. Listen to them.

In fact, my hosts set me out on one of the great "walking tours", a 4-hour long (and approximately 7-9km) tour that visits most of the cultural heritage spots (i.e., the most important and, consequently, the most visited): Kofuku-ji (興福寺), Sarusawano-ike (a

picturesque pond), Todai-ji (東大寺), Nigatsudo Hall, Kasuga Taisha (春日大社), and Shin-Yakush-ji (薬師寺).

While my time in Nara was limited, thanks to my friends at the TIC I was able to explore each and every one of these places in the time allotted, and yes, I walked the entire route.

Oh man... my FEET!

Kofuku-ji (興福寺)

A 15-minute walk from the JR Nara station (or a 7-minute walk from the Tourist Information Center, TIC) and I found myself here: at Kofuku-ji. Its history reads much like many of the other historical sights I have visited and is just as colorful. Originally called Yamashina-dera, it was once part of the Fujiwara clan as a tutelary temple, constructed to pray for the recovery of Fujiwara Kamatari (藤原鎌足; 614–669), the family founder, who had fallen ill. Before becoming a temple, it was designed to be a celebratory mark of Fujiwara's defeat over the Soga clan, which he accomplished in 645 by slaying Soga Emishi (蘇我蝦夷; 587-645), a statesman of the Imperial Court. The temple was later moved from Yamashina Suchara (in modern-day Kyoto prefecture) to Umayasaka (in the Nara prefecture) and renamed to Umayasaka-dera. When Nara became the capital of Japan in 710, the temple moved within the city limits and became known as Kofuku-ji.



Historical Note

"The Four Great Temples" were – Daian-ji, Yakushi-ji, Gango-ji and Kofuku-ji.

"The Seven Great Temples" were – Todai-ji, Saidai-ji, Daian-ji, Kofuku-ji, Gango-ji, Yakushi-ji and Horyo-ji

1185). During their reign the Shoguns bestowed Kofuku-ji with the status of "protector" over the Yamato province, which gave it de-facto political powers in the region but its powers waned by the end of the Muromachi period (1533-1568) and thus its influence fell. In 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川 家康; 1543-1616) attempted to revive the temple as a purely religious establishment, which it continues as today -- the head temple of the Hosso sect of Buddhist instruction, which teaches a "consciousness only" approach to Buddhism.

At the height of its prosperity the temple had about 175 buildings and was one of the most powerful. It was recognized as one of the "Four Great Temples" of the Nara period (710-794), and one of the "Seven Great Temples" of the Heian period (794-



Most of the site's structures have been lost to the sands of time or confiscated by shifting political powers, but there are still a few to be found here including a five-story pagoda (Goju-no-to) dating from 1426 (at 50.1 meters it's the second largest in Japan) and a three-story pagoda (Sanju-no-to) from 1143. Also enshrined within the many remaining halls are several Buddhist pieces that date back to the early 8th century. These include:

- **Eastern Golden Hall (Tokon-do)** – The original structure was built at the behest of Emperor Shomu in 726 to speed the recovery of his ailing empress (Gensho); this is the fifth iteration and dates to 1415. The Hall is seven bays long and four bays wide with classic tiled hip-roof and elaborate bracketing.



- Yakushi Nyorai – (Bhaisajya-guru; the Buddha of Healing), a statue of bronze standing 255cm in height dates from the 15th century. The original was cast in 726 by the Emperor for Gensho's recovery.
 - Nikkō Bosatsu – (Sūryaprabha; Bosatsu of the Sun), a bronze statue standing 298cm in height dates from the 7th to 8th centuries.
 - Gakkō Bosatsu – (Candraprabha; Bosatsu of the Moon), a bronze figure 300.3cm in height also dates from the 7th to 8th centuries.
 - Monju Bosatsu – (Manjusri; Bosatsu of Wisdom), a wood figure 94cm in height dates from the 12th century.
 - Yuima Koji – (Vimalakirti; the layman), a figure of wood 88.1cm in height dates from the 12th century.
 - Shi Tenno – (Four Diva Kings), carved of wood and lacquer dates from the 9th century.
- Juni Shinsho – (Twelve Heavenly Generals), also carved of wood, gilded and colored. Each between 113cm and 124.2cm in height date from the 13th century.
- **The Central Golden Hall (Karikon-do)** – The images of Sakyamuni Buddha, Yakuo (the Medicine King), Bhaisajyasamudgata Bodhisattva, and Shi Tenno (Four Diva Kings).
- **Northern Octagonal Hall (Hokuen-do)** – Miroku Nyorai (Maitreya; Buddha of the Future), the Bodhisattvas Mujaku and Seshin (Asanga and Vasubandhu), and the Shi Tenno (Four Diva Kings) are enshrined here. Something to note here, however, is that these statues were carved by Kamakura period sculptor Unkei (運慶; 1151-1223).
- **Southern Octagonal Hall (Nanen-do)** – Fukukensaku Kannon (Amoghapaśa-avalokitesvara; the “Bosatsu of the ‘Unfailing Fishing Line’”), statues of six influential patriarchs of the Hosso school, and the Shi Tenno (Four Diva Kings).

Most of these halls are not open to the general public and those that are require a separate entrance fee. If you're interested in the teachings of the Buddha, Kofuku-ji offers an eclectic array of Cultural and National treasures to behold. The site's two pagodas are also eye catching and will more than sate the inquisitor in each of us.

Exit Kofuku-ji and continue down Sanjo-dori. Within a few steps you'll find yourself at the doorstep of Nara-koen (奈良公園), or Park. This huge green space is the largest municipal park in all of Japan and prior to 1888, it was in such a deteriorated state it was considered a wasteland. Nara-koen measures 4km east to west and 2km south to north covering 525-hectares (1297 acres) of land and as you can see, it dominates the landscape within this historical city. In fact, most of Nara's treasures lie within its boundaries, such as: Todai-ji, Ni gatsudo Hall, Kasuga Taisha and Shin-Yakush-ji, the next locations on my walking tour.

Cultural Notes

The term *Bosatsu* or *Bodhisattva*, is bestowed upon those who are dedicated in assisting all sentient beings into achieving Nirvana, by delaying their own entry.

The Twelve Heavenly Generals function as protectors of the faithful, delivering them from illness and harm. Their malevolent faces express violent anger directed at malicious spirits and enemies of Buddhism.

The Four Diva Kings are warrior demigods; their function is to protect the structure in which they are placed by warding off evil spirits. They are known as: Jikoku-ten (Dhrtarastra), Zocho-ten (Virudhaka), Komoku-ten (Virupaksa) and Tamon-ten (Vaisravana).

Todai-ji (東大寺)

The Daibutsu		
	m	ft
Height	14.98	49.15
Face	5.33	17.49
Eyes	1.02	3.35
Nose	0.50	1.64
Ears	2.54	8.33

The next point on my walking tour was Todai-ji, a temple that is well known for housing what the Japanese simply call Daibutsu (大仏; "great Buddha"), a 500 metric ton (551 standard ton) bronze statue of Buddha. This image of

Buddha, depicting Rushana (Dainichi Nyorai; The Cosmic Buddha), is probably one of the most culturally treasured in the nation. It certainly is the largest (dimensions left); it was completed in 571 and consumed nearly all of Japan's bronze production at the time and had consumed it for several years prior, leaving the country virtually bankrupt. It's been recast over the years as various natural disasters have damaged the original statue: in the 9th century, an earthquake knocked over the Buddha's head and in 1180 and again in 1567, his right hand melted during a fire, which also destroyed the building housing this great figure.





Even today at 66% its original scale, the Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall) at Todai-ji is the largest wooden structure in the world and that is really saying something. The original building took 15-years to construct and originally had two 100m pagoda's standing beside it. Alas, they fell by earthquake and the temple succumbed to fire twice during its lifetime – the last in 1692. Even if the building is smaller than it was in ancient times it will still marvel; it dominates the entire landscape!

Oh, and if you see some Japanese attempt to squeeze through a whole in Daibutsu's support pillars, do not worry. The Japanese have a belief that if one is successful in squeezing through, they are guaranteed a place in paradise. Not a bad thing really, but just incase you are wondering, I didn't even attempt to secure my place; what if I caused the whole thing to come down? I shudder to think.



Unfortunately the walk to and from Todai-ji is very commercial; however, if you like, take a moment upon leaving to pause at one of the shops or eateries along the path. Not only will you find some of the best deals, you'll also find some of the greatest foods to eat! I recommend a hearty bowl of Beef Curry and Rice. Each place makes it a little differently, which adds to the fun and adventure. It's good stuff!

Kasuga Taisha (春日大社)



With my belly full of rice and beef I returned to my tour, bypassed Nigatsudo Hall, and climbed the stone steps to Kasuga Taisha. Kasuga is a shrine of the Shinto following and was founded by the Fujiwara clan (in 768); although, records indicate the site may be slightly older - dating to around the beginning of the Nara period. And it's actually one of the most sacred

in all of Japan. The reason? Location, location, location! It is here, at the foothills of Mount Mikasa and Mount Kasuga, where the Shinto gods are said to have first descended upon the Earth. As such, you'll find two very important deities enshrined here: Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto and Futsu-nushi-no-mikoto. Two deities of the Fujiwara family are also enshrined here, they are: Ame-no-koyane-no-mikoto and his consort Hime-gami.

Besides the historical and spiritual significance, this shrine offers two uniquely Japanese cultural curiosities. First, and foremost, are the vermilion colored corridors that surround the outside of the shrine's buildings (there are 30 in all). Like the red-stained torii of Fushimi-inari Taisha in Kyoto, these corridors stand out in contrast to the woods of cedar they inhabit. The shrine is also noted for its 3000 toro (灯籠; lantern). You'll find 2000 of these made of stone lining the path from the mountain base to the central atrium. This 1km walkway is said to function to provide an appropriate atmosphere for visitors to clear their mind of errant thoughts and prepare the soul for worship. The lanterns, then, help illuminate the proper path and state of mind for those who come. The other 1000, made of bronze, can be found adorning the eaves of the shrine's main halls.

While the vermilion lacquered halls are very impressive (if not colorful) it's the lanterns that garner the most attention. If you're lucky enough to visit the shrine while these are lit - only on February 3rd or 4th, and August 14th and 15th - you're in for a real treat! Unfortunately, my journey did not fall on either of these days, but having witnessed 3000 lanterns of various shapes and sizes, I can almost imagine how illuminating an experience it must be. Visitors to the shrine will also find traditional dance performances in the Kagura, Bugaku, Dengaku and Sarugaku styles in the central atrium. And there's even a little quiet place where you can take off your shoes, settle upon a nice fluffy pillow and rest for a moment or two. I indulged.



Another of the site's most interesting features is its "tame" deer. The deer, which are revered as messengers of the spirits, are protected by law and actually give the surrounding park its secondary name: Deer Park. There are approximately 1200 of them roaming around Nara and they're quite friendly. Too friendly, in fact, as they'll just stand there and watch you, let you pet them, and for ¥200, you can buy little

"deer biscuits" to feed them. I wasn't going to take part in this ritual but an elderly Japanese lady placed a biscuit in my hand and insisted I feed one. How could I refuse? Consequently, if they think you have something in your pocket or in your backpack they will follow you. The deer have become so revered they're actually the unofficial mascots of the city; you'll certainly find plenty of deer merchandise for sale: plush animals, plush antlers, pictures, and other nonsensical items. The unfortunate consequence of the animals is their droppings. It's everywhere and you'll do well to mind your step.

Shin-Yakushi-ji (新薬師寺)

On the outskirts of the park lies Shin-Yakushi-ji, a Buddhist Temple founded in 747 by Empress Komyo with the prayer that her husband, Emperor Shomu, would recover from his eye infection. All the structures have long since been destroyed by fire, but this temple, while small today, exists as a priceless national treasure because it is the only building from the 8th century (Tempyo period) that is currently kept in its original condition. You'll find various other treasures from the period inside as well, including a sculpture of Yakushi, the patron of medicine made of one block of Kaya (Torreya) wood and clay versions of the Twelve Heavenly (or Divine) Generals. Both sets of items date back just as long as the building, which make them rare National Treasures today. It is unfortunate that the day of my visit I found the temple grounds to be very... overgrown. The gardens and surrounding areas looked very unkempt and the entire place screamed "go away;" therefore, I did not spend a lot of time poking around.



After only a few minutes, I exited the temple's gates and hobbled my way back across town, about 3-kilometers, and found myself at one of the most active reflection ponds in all of Japan... I think. Called Sarusawano-ike, this small pond is by far one of the most picturesque in all of Nara; you'll even find it part of the city's image. For it is from this pond the magnificent five-story pagoda of Kofuku-ji reflects within its waters. There are benches lining a corner so sit a spell and enjoy the activity. You'll find a variety of locals and tourists alike here, enjoying the scene and the pond's inhabitants: turtles! The turtles, for all their fuss, were searching for food and the locals were obliging, throwing scraps of their lunch - fried potatoes (French Fries to those in the States), chunks of bread, and any other foodstuff they could get hold of - to the shelled reptiles. And these turtles wasted no time in snapping it up, no pun intended.

I left the turtles in their mad dash to make one of my own toward the JR Nara station in the middle of town and literally hopped on a train just as it began to pull away. Thankfully it was the one I wanted -- the limited express back to Kyoto. And just like on my return trip from Osaka yesterday, the journey back provided an excellent time to rest, reflect and enjoy being in Japan. Walking around Nara was definitely a treat, even if it was on a Sunday: one of the busiest days to be wandering around Japan, as the populous of Japan also picks this day to be out. It was crowded, but not unbearably so; it was hot, but too blistering in the park; it was commercial, which really wasn't what I had expected; but it was a good trip that I'm glad I decided to make.



Tomorrow I leave K's House and Kyoto and make my way back to Tokyo on Hikari Shinkansen. It's almost unreal to think that my time here is almost up. I have an afternoon and evening in Tokyo before I depart, now on the 21st, which will allow me to get in one or two last minute things in the Tokyo area before I go. And too, tomorrow, I may end up at one or two shrines before I catch the train to Tokyo... or maybe not. One never knows

with me. My feet, of course, will dictate tomorrow's agenda that's for sure. Either way, my journey here is coming to a close and what a ride it's been. What a marvelous and awesome ride. I can't wait to come back to Japan and see all those things I missed! Though, I think time I'm going to take it easier... all this running around is for the birds!



In the Land of the Rising Sun

関西地方 {Kansai Segment}



「Sayonara Japan」

september 20, 2004

Aa! Gomen nasai. Choto mate kudasai.

ああ、ごめんなさい。ちょっとまってください。

Oh, sorry. One moment please...

It's just a few minutes till 8:00pm here, and as planned I have returned to Homeikan, my old stomping grounds in Tokyo. I picked up dinner on the way home, so give me a few moments to spread out my meal, get settled, and then I'll continue, okay?

There.

It's been a rather full day if I do say so myself; my feet are doing fine but my tummy is rumbling, so I'm looking forward to tucking in. It's a *special* meal (御飯; gohan = meal) too, but I'll get to that in a minute or two.

Tearing myself away from the beautiful and tranquil surroundings of Kyoto earlier this afternoon, once again bound for metropolis Tokyo on Hikari Shinkansen, was one of the hardest things I've had to carry out yet here in Japan; and if I thought leaving the comfortable surroundings of Tokyo behind was daunting, parting Kyoto made my heart tremble with sorrow. Leaving Kyoto was like leaving my home... again. But it does feel good to be back at Homeikan, having the familiarity of the neighborhood streets, the smells both awful and pleasant wafting from its windows, the Tatami mat floors and pillow seats, and the small table beside which I'm kneeling.



I find it quite ironic, or perhaps just coincidental, that the room I am now in is right next door from the one I occupied just a few short days ago. My first thought, as I was being lead up the stairwell to the second floor was the hostess offering the very same room I had before. But she shuffled by, dragging me along and I with an idiotic grin on my face, as she slipped to the next, slid the door open and beckoned me inside. It's a corner room, which creaks with every gust of the wind, but it's much nicer than my old one – bigger too - and I have the slightest suspicion that it's actually for two people. I would have taken pleasure in having my old room again, though. I enjoy the improbability.



Although, it feels like a lifetime has passed since I've last had this privilege.

But, I've already been down to Shibuya, taking in my final glimpses of this amazing borough, chatting with my friends and family online atop the HMV building, and attempting one last time – and finding - that Disney store (there's a sale on "life-size" Stitch plushies!)

It's a good thing you can't see what I'm having for dinner tonight because you may not believe what I've done. Yeah, I finally broke down and purchased a meal at the corner McDonalds (マクドナルド; ma-ku-do-na-ru-do.) The aromas of the meat cooking and fries bubbling smelled so lovely and I was so famished I

couldn't help myself, you know? Besides, I find it somewhat interesting to try American brands in a "foreign" market just to see how different they really are. It's a weak excuse, I know, but one I'm sticking to. While McDonalds might be an American institution, as American as a white-picket fence and apple pie, the stores here are uniquely Japanese.

Menu items are written in the Japanese language, of course, but you'll find accompanying pictures of the food item to make it easier for travelers (and locals alike) to make their selections. You'll find all the standards here: the Big Mac - (ビッグマック; bi-gu-ma-ku); Fillet-o-Fish - (フィレオフィッシュ; fi-re-o-fi-shu); Double Cheeseburger - (ダブル・チーズバーガー; da-bu-ru-chi-su-ba-ga); McChicken Sandwich - (チキンフィレオ; chi-ki-n-fi-re-o); and the Bacon, Lettuce and Tomato Burger - (ベーコン、レタス、トマト、バーガー; ba-ko-n, re-ta-su, to-ma-to, ba-ga) among many other standard McDonalds favorites for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Unlike stores in the United States, "value meals" are referred to here and are ordered as "sets" (セット; seto,) in this case as "value sets" (バリューセット; ba-ryu-se-to.) These sets can be ordered with standard fries and a drink, McNuggets and drink, or a side salad and drink. And although they do have the equivalent to "super-size," denoted "m --> L," you'll find the sizes to be much, much smaller than we're used to getting in the United States. In theory, that's why we're much fatter than the rest of the world - Portion sizes.



you know what else? The meal isn't as greasy as the American counterpart. I found the same thing to be true at the McDonalds I was a patron of next to the Pantheon in Rome.

I have the television going in my room while I eat; I've not done a lot of television watching since my arrival in Japan (who has the time?) but tonight I find myself with time to tune in. In just the past minute alone I've seen the most interesting commercials ever. One was for a Chevy vehicle of unknown make and model, the second for Kalkan cat food (Kalkan has long-since changed their name to Whiskas in the United States), a third for CATS the musical in Osaka, and the fourth for McDonalds, which gave me the name of the burger I'm now eating!

It's called the "Tsukimi-seto" (月見バーガー; tsukimi-ba-ga) and appears to be a seasonal offering. While I'm sure my television watching and choice for dinner is enthralling, why don't I tell you about going down to the Ginza! The Ginza (銀座) is unlike any place else on earth.

Cultural Note

Tsukimi (月見) is a Japanese custom that pays homage to Tsuki (月), the moon, especially the Full Moon found in September. One marks this occasion by the setting of dumplings and seasonal fruits at a window in full view of the moon. It's a custom from a less sophisticated time; Japanese farmers would pray to the moon goddess for abundant harvests. Thus this time in September is generally known as "the season of Tsukimi." Today "tsukimi" also refers to a cooking style, such as eggs, which when cooked in this way makes the egg appear like the moon thus giving the dish its name.

It was founded during the Edo period by the Shogunate, in 1612, and is named after the silver-coin mint established there at the time. This is reflected in the kanji used in the districts name: 銀; gin = "silver", 座; za = "mint". Modern-day Ginza was founded after a devastating fire in 1872 and is now part of what is called the Chuo ward (中央区) of Tokyo. The area is considered the most exclusive and coveted in all of retail; space in the Ginza commands the utmost highest price. As such you'll find an array of neon signs displaying the names of the most expensive department stores in all of Japan, including the likes of Wako and Mitsukoshi.

Did You Know?

Did you know that Ginza station is the fourth busiest station on the Tokyo/Toei Metro network? Ikebukuro station is the busiest, followed by Kitasenju and Otemachi stations.

In addition, Otemachi is the biggest metro station in Tokyo, serving 5 lines.

Ikebukuro is the second busiest train station in the entire world; Shinjuku is the busiest.

Finding your way to the Ginza is generally easy and trouble-free. In the heart of this neon district is the enormous underground Ginza station, connected by three Metro lines: The Marunouchi (M16), Ginza (G09), and Hibiya (H08) lines. You can also reach the area on Toei: Higashi-Ginza station on the Asakusa (A11) line or the Ginza-Itchome station on the Yurakucho (Y19) line. And also on foot by using the JR Shimbashi or Yurakucho stations.

When you arrive, you'll want to egress onto the Ginza 4-chome intersection, which is the crossing of Chuo-dori/Ginza-dori (中央通り / 銀座通り) and Harumi-Dori (晴海通り).

You really don't understand how huge the Ginza metro station complex is until you're there. Usually the stations, the larger ones anyway, may have up to eight exits labeled A1, A2, A3 and so on. For Ginza, not only did they have A1-13 (or more, I lost count) but a dozen "B" and "C" exits. And not only that, but two other lines share this underground behemoth and getting lost, while not a real reality since there are signs about, is definitely on your mind. I know it was on mine.

At the heart of the Ginza is the 4-chome intersection; a neon paradise fans out from this cross-section in all directions. The landscape here is dominated by the iconoclastic San-ai "Dream Center" building, a towering glass cylinder which has become one of the most oft-photographed buildings in the world and thus you'll find it pictured on countless post cards around the world. The building is instantly recognizable - it's round for goodness sake - and is crowned by a gleaming red-and-white neon sign featuring the logo of British mobile phone company *VODAPHONE*. There are many other buildings that encircle the crossing too, including the Wako (和光) department store, which is considered to be one of the most exclusive and prestigious department stores in all of Japan, and the Mitsukoshi (三越) department store, one of the first western-style department stores in Japan.

Beyond the glamour and glitz of the exclusive shopping establishments, you'll also find history here. It bears noting that the building Wako occupies is one of the few left standing in the district after the Second World War. Its famous Clock Tower is world-renown and plays the famous *Westminster Chimes* on the hour.

Just down Harumi Street, next to Sukiya-bashi crossing (すきやばし,) is the colorful, post-modern Sony Building (銀座 ソニービル). Many of the earliest towered buildings were constructed here and the Sony Building is ranked amongst one of the earliest examples of such buildings in all of Japan. It's a multi-leveled paradise for SONY fans and other gadget aficionados; every level has the very latest Sony gadgets and gizmos on display. You'll find the latest digital camcorders and high-tech digital cameras, music players, cell

phones, gaming platforms and many other personal devices; there's also a theater and a broadcasting studio on other floors. And like many other buildings in Tokyo, the space is shared, and in this case with a BMW showroom.



On the opposite end of the district, up Chuo-dori at the crossing of Matsuya-dori (松屋通り,) is Apple Store Ginza, my second stop. Interestingly enough, Apple Store is not generally translated into Japanese, but you will find Apple translated into Katakana - アップル. Irregardless, this pearly-white cube is seven stories of Apple goodness; you'll find all varieties of Apple products here – the latest iPods, the new Powerbooks and even the new iMac G5, which I was able to play with. I tell you, there's nothing better than checking your email on a new iMac G5 in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the Ginza!

And there's a lot of hustle and bustle on these streets. During the evening hours and certain days of the week, the streets of the main strip are courted off from automobile traffic to allow pedestrians free reign. And take over they do! It's so crazy down there I can hardly explain it; it really is an experience that has to be had.

Otherwise, I've retired to my room, eating my meal from McDonalds, watching "Big Cat Diary" on the television and looking up Kanji. It's not the most exciting of things to be doing, I realize, but my time here has come to an end and I've got to get ready. I'll still have a little time to wander around tomorrow afternoon; perhaps I'll trek back down to the Apple Store in Ginza to check my email one last time, or maybe I'll visit the Starbucks down in Shibuya, or grab lunch at the Hard Rock in Ueno, or maybe I'll just wander around my neighborhood and say goodbye.

Either way, this may be the last time you'll hear from me here in Japan, and if that's so I wish everyone to know how much fun I've had here and how I can't wait to come back!

Well, until then.

Ja mata!

(じゃまた; See ya later!)



日本国



In the Land of the Rising Sun

2004 | September 9th to 21st

epilogue

And there it is, my journey in the land of the rising sun. I hope you've enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed telling it.

Japan is such a rich country, both historically and culturally, it seemed a shame to leave just as I was becoming accustomed to the differences, and eager to experience more.

Re-adjusting to American life and language was one of the most difficult tasks to re-master upon my return, too. I became so accustomed to seeing and hearing Japanese in my brief time there, a language I could barely comprehend at first, and thus it's strange to say that I was totally unprepared for the onslaught of English that it almost overwhelmed me.

Imagine returning from a place where signs on store fronts are nothing but a splash of ink arranged in strange, funny characters to finding those same storefronts swashed in characters and letters you can suddenly comprehend. Overpowering isn't it?

But even if I had to shut my eyes on the way home from the airport to keep from overwhelming my newly trained mind, I would not shut out Japan. I would look to return to this cultured land just as soon as I could.



日本国

In the Land of the Rising Sun

2004 | September 9th to 21st



MESSAGES

September 11 - 21, 2004

The following are the original emails sent back home from my travels in Japan. While many were inspired by the journal entries you've read, I couldn't help but include them here.

September 11, 2004

GREETINGS FROM JAPAN.

SORRY FOR THE CAPITAL LETTERS BUT THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN GET SOMETHING TYPED WITHOUT THE KEYBOARD GOING WACKO WITH HIRAGANA OR KANJI, SO IM NOT REALLY SHOUTTING AT YOU... HONESTLY.

AS YOU CAN SEE IVE MADE IT OVER TO TOKYO WITHOUT A PROBLEM. THE FLIGHT WENT WILL IF NOT LONG BUT OTHERWISE OK. NAVIGATING THE AIRPORT WAS A BREEZE -- NO PROBLEMS WITH IMMIGRATION OR CUSTOMS. GETTING ON THE NARITA EXPRESS WAS ALSO NOT A HASTLE. THE TOKYO METRO IS ANOTHER STORY BUT I THINK I HAVE THAT DOWN NOW.

LAST NIGHT (BEING FRIDAY THE 10TH) IT RAINED A LITTLE AND THUS I GOT SOAKED TRYING TO FIND THE RYOKAN. THE DIRECTIONS SAID ONLY AN 8-MINUTE WALK FROM THE METRO STATION BUT THAT TURNED INTO AN HOUR OR MORE AS I TOOK A TOUR OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD... WHICH WAS NOT PLANNED. EVENTUALLY I GOT THERE AND ITS A NEAT PLACE. ITS ALL TRADITIONAL JAPANESE, MEANING YOU TAKE YOUR SHOES OFF AT THE DOOR AND WALK AROUND IN SLIPPERS. MY ROOM IS SMALL AND

SPARCE BUT DOES COME WITH A TABLE AND A TV, NOT TO MENTION A SAFE TO KEEP YOUR VALUABLES IN. THE FLOOR IS MADE OF TATAMI MATS AND THERES A FUTON TO SLEEP ON. ITS PRETTY COMFY. ILL TAKE PICTURES LATER, DONT WORRY.

LAST NIGHT AFTER I ARRIVED I DIDNT DO MUCH SINCE IT RAINED BUT I DID EVENTUALLY GET OUT TO MY NEIGHBORHOOD STARBUCKS AND HAVE A SIP OF JOE WITH THE LOCALS. I EVEN SHOPPED AT A GROCERY STORE! I WENT TO BED RATHER EARLY, LIKE 8PM, BUT THAT WAS NOTHING CONSIDERING I HADNT GOTTEN MUCH SLEEP BEFORE I LEFT, BARELY ANY QUALITY SLEEP ON THE PLANE AND REMAINED UP ONCE I GOT HERE.

TODAY HAS BEEN A BUSY DAY THUS FAR, WALKING ALL OVER TOKYO. MY DAY STARTED AT THE GOVERNMENT OFFICES WHERE YOU CAN GO UP TO THE 45TH FLOOR OBSERVATION ROOM (FREE) AND TAKE A LOOK AROUND. QUITE A MASSIVE CITY TOKYO IS. FROM THERE I WALKED DOWN TO YOYOGI PARK WHERE THE MIJI SHRINE IS LOCATED, THOUGH I DONT THINK I HAVE THAT SPELLED RIGHT. I WALKED FOR AN HOUR OR TWO AROUND TOKYO JUST TO GET THERE... I GOT OFF AT THE RIGHT STATION BUT WENT IN THE WRONG DIRECTION... IT REALLY WASNT LABELED WELL. BUT I MADE IT REGARDLESS, EVEN IF MY FEET ARE NOW KILLING ME.

IM WRITING TO YOU ALL FROM A CYBER CAFE ATOP THE HMV BUILDING IN SHIBUYA AND LET ME TELL YOU THAT STATION IS HUGE. THERES SO MANY PEOPLE AROUND THERE AND THE AREA IS IMPRESSIVE. THERES STILL PLENTY OF THINGS TO DO TODAY. ANOTHER SHRINE I THINK AND ILL BE MEETING RIE, A FRIEND OF MINE HERE IN THE TOKYO AREA, FOR COFEE LATER TONIGHT (6PM, ITS NOW 2PM). IM GETTING KINDA HUNGRY SO I MIGHT STOP IN THE STARBUCKS THATS LOCATED ON THE CORNER HERE IN SHIBUYA, WHICH I THINK IS THE LARGEST STARBUCKS IN JAPAN IF NOT THE WORLD!

SO I WILL CONCLUDE NOW AND WILL WRITE AGAIN WHEN I GET ANOTHER CHANCE, WHICH MAY NOT COME UNTIL MUCH LATER IN MY TRIP. TOMORROW IM OFF TO TOKYO DISNEYLAND AND MONDAY TOKYO DISNEYSEA. THE 15TH I HOP THE TRAIN TO KYOTO AND SOMEWHERE IN THERE I NEED TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO ACTUALLY BOOK THAT USING MY RAIL PASS!

TALK WITH YOU ALL SOON.

* * *

September 14, 2004

Contrary to my subject title, I'm not leaving Tokyo... yet. I'm still here for another day but tomorrow, which is the 15th for me, I'm Kyoto bound on a Shinkansen, where I hope to get out of the hustle and bustle of city life and slow down a little.

Tokyo thus far has been great. It's an amazing city that seems to never sleep. At all hours there are people walking the streets, riding their bicycle's somewhere or traveling to and from home/work. The city is a-glow with activity, and not to mention lights! I wish I could say I've been able to understand many of the signs here... because I haven't, but getting around has been easy enough.

Since we last spoke I continued wandering around Shibuya, watching the people stream out of the station. It's the busiest station in the entire country and it's amazing how many people live here...or just come here in general. That night I had an amazing dinner with my Japanese friend Rie, and three friends of hers. She took us to a Japanese sit-down restaurant and we ate, drank, and talked. What did we talk about? Mostly Cirque du Soleil, since she's a fan and so are her friends. But we did talk about a lot of things... some of which I can't recall because I had way too much sake and a couple of beers. Yeah, me. Believe it.

On Sunday I woke up bright and early, and made my way to Tokyo Disneyland, which is a 15 to 20-minute train ride to the bay area. Tokyo is so spread out that one can ride a train for an hour, it seems, and not leave the city. Anyway, I spent the entire day at Tokyo Disneyland, from 8:30am until 12-hours later. Tokyo Disneyland is a fun place, similar to the Magic Kingdom at WDW, with its noted differences. Unfortunately the Haunted Mansion was closed for a Halloween make-over, but that didn't detract from my enjoyment of the park. Tokyo Disneyland has about the best Space Mountain (of WDW, Tokyo Disneyland and Disneyland Paris) but one of the more mundane Pirates of the Caribbean. Though I have to say I did enjoy the covered World Bazaar (which is their name for Main Street USA). All-in-all, Tokyo Disneyland was quite fun.

Monday I took in DisneySea, which is the second park at the Tokyo Disney Resort. Unlike Disneyland, Tokyo DisneySEA is a concept born here... it's not found anywhere else in the world. And boy is it a beautiful park. All the rides and shows are top-notch. The theming is great and grand... I've never seen a park so detailed before. You really forget your in a Disney Park or even in Japan at DisneySEA. As with Disneyland, the signs are in English and Japanese but many of the rides aren't... so sometimes I don't know what's going on because it's in Japanese! DisneySEA has one of the best shows, which rivals Festival of the Lion King at Animal Kingdom, and has one of the most unique versions of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea ride I've ever been on. Oh, and the nighttime show -- BraviSEAmo -- rivals Illuminations at Epcot. It's beautiful. Everything about the park is beautiful. I really didn't want to leave it.

Today (Tuesday) I was going to go to Nikko, which is a small town a couple of hours north of Tokyo, but I decided not to at the last moment. Tokyo is amazing and it seems

like I've not had enough time in the city, so I've decided to stay and walk around some more. Besides, I'll get to see my share of shrines and temples in Kyoto... I'll save Nikko for another time.

Well, I'm not sure what else I'll do today. There's the Ginza to see and maybe I'll return to Yoyogi park to find the Cirque du Soleil tent... or who knows. The day is young!

* * *

September 15, 2004

It's about 6:30pm on Wednesday here at K's House Kyoto, where I'm staying for the next five days. It's quite nice, with all sorts of western amenities. This time, however, I don't have a room to myself; I'm sharing a room with three other people. I've not met my suite mates yet, but I know they're there... we've missed each other throughout the day. And yes, I did get lost trying to find the place... more on that later.

Leaving Tokyo was gut wrenching, let me tell you. Taking that final stroll out of my neighborhood, Benkyo-ku, was very sad. For the next five days I won't be able to see my cats -- a sign for a transit company that told me I needed to turn up the hill toward Homeikan. Nor will I smell the aromas that make up Tokyo, a mixture of good and bad. In one breath one can sense the cooking of delicious foods and incense mixed in with the putrid smells of rotting fish, garbage and yes... sewage. Still, it's Tokyo and I came to expect these smells and more.

The ride on the Hikari Shinkansen was very smooth and quite enjoyable. I brought along my two recent obsessions -- Glico Reverse (a Pocky derivative) and Pocari Sweat (an Ion Replacement drink). With my iPod, my notebook, and the knowledge that I'd once again be in a foreign place, I took to my window seat and prepared for my journey. As I sat there admiring the tall buildings around me from my seat, I began to wonder whether or not I should have left Tokyo. I mean, there were still so many things I had yet to experience that I really didn't want to leave. And I had my support network -- the Starbucks, the Waku-Waku mini-mart (think Circle-K) and, of course, the knowledge of knowing where I was going and how to get there. I wouldn't have these things in Kyoto. I'd have to build them all over again.

But eventually I would. As I said before I got a little lost on the way to K's House. The map I had of Kyoto was and is woefully inadequate. Half of the streets are not marked on the map and the streets I was walking down were not marked in Romaji (English equivalent), so yes I got lost. Thankfully I came across a nice Japanese fellow who spoke English and saw that I was completely lost and offered his assistance. Turns out he's going to Florida next week... to St. Pete to the Dali museum, he said. So, Paul, look out for him! Though, I didn't catch his name.

I've been out since though. I returned to the Kyoto Station in an attempt to find the Tourist Information Center, which is located on the 9th floor of the station. There they

have maps in English and all sorts of information. They even had CNN-J (the Japanese/English equivalent of CNN) on their TV and provided me a place to make an ATM withdrawal for some much needed Yen. It really is an eye-opener in regards to finances too... you can quickly run out of cash and not realize it. Many places just don't take cards. But now I'm set.

I found the local Starbucks, near the Kyoto Tower, and the McDonalds though I've STILL not broken down and eaten at one in Japan yet. There's a convenience store right around the corner and I've got my markers down on how to get from here (the hostel) back to Kyoto-eki: turn left out of the building (which is yellow), go past the HONDA sign, turn right. Pass the Duckies sign and straight onto the station. It's a bit of a walk but I can at least navigate now. Oh, and the view from Kyoto Tower is magnificent... you can see the entire city from there and its such a wonderful view. I can't wait to post my pictures.

Well, I think that's about it for now. Tomorrow I'll begin my exploration of Kyoto... starting with what hasn't been decided but since I have quite a lot of time left tonight I'll study the maps I procured!

I hope all is going well back in the states. I see Hurricane Ivan has decided to spare Central Florida... YAY! See you all in a few days!

* * *

September 16, 2004

So, Kyoto Day 2...

Technically its the first *full* day in Kyoto... and boy what a day.

It's about 7:10pm here at K's House in Kyoto and I'm in for the night. It's been a rather full day today... a full day of walking, which has my feet screaming for me to stop. But I can't! I'm not sure how many miles I've put on them today but I would wager at least 10-miles... maybe a whole lot more!

Today I was out of the hostel at 9:00am, a bit later than I had expected, but okay never the less. My destination for the day was some shrines, temples and other sights along the eastern edge of the city. And so I braved the subway and made my way out of Keage Station on the Kyoto City Subway Tozai Line and prepared for the long haul ahead. So, with a map in hand and change in my pocket, I walked to my first destination -- Nanzen-ji (or Nanzen Temple).

Along the way I came upon a variety of other smaller shrines and temples, and made stops accordingly. Some of the shrines I took pictures of along the route I don't even know their names -- it was all in Japanese! But, I do know that I went by Konchiin temple... went by but not into.

Nanzen-ji is surrounded by three magnificent sights -- 1) the temple itself, which was built by Emperor Kameyama in the Kamakura era. It's said that he believed so deeply in Zen Buddhism he changed the palace into a temple in 1291. The building has been ravished by fire several times and rebuilt throughout the ages. The last time was in 1703 by the mother of Shogun Tsunayoshi. 2) Hojo-Garden, a beautiful small garden of stone and foliage. The building that stands here was relocated from the Imperial Palace in 1611. The garden itself was named "Toranoko-watashi" or "young tigers crossing the water." 3) Sanmon, or huge gate. One can climb atop this magnificent wooden structure and get a wonderful view of the grounds and Kyoto city. The view was simply breathtaking and it was totally unexpected... since I hadn't known about the Sanmon. Oh, there's a sign on the steps up that says Mind Your Head... and you had better!

From Nanzen-ji, I passed Elkando (Zenrinji Temple) on the Tetsugaku no Michi, or Path of Philosophy. This path, which is exactly what it is -- a gravel and stone path -- on top of the hillside in this one particular Kyoto neighborhood. At times it was quite peaceful walking along the ancient path, listening to the water trickle down a small canal to my right or the gravel crunching beneath my feet. It was along this path I found a place to stop for lunch... a small cafe called Pomme, which served sandwiches and teas. It was a great spot and I sat out on a small table on the side of the walkway eating my egg sandwich and sipping my lemon tea... without a care in the world.

Tetsugaku no Michi has a destination and that is the Ginkaku-ji, the Silver Pavilion Temple. Contrary to its name, the Temple (or its pavilion) is laden with silver (there is one in Kyoto called the Golden Pavilion that is covered in Gold, which I have yet to see) but the grounds are beautiful never the less. It was quite crowded here, with many tourists foreign and domestic to Japan. It was kind of hard to enjoy the setting... the temple and gardens... but it was a very interesting sight -- including the row of shops and caf  s to cater to the tourist mind.

On my way out I stumbled across a real shrine... er, real in that it wasn't a tourist destination. It was tucked away down an alleyway and I wouldn't have seen it except for the torii made of stone marking it. Intrigued I walked up and immediately fell silent. The entire area was devoid of noise. It was creepy. But I managed to walk up, poke around and take a few photographs. I'm quite sure I wasn't supposed to do that... so I do hope the spirits forgive me. And no, I'm not being cynical. The last thing I want to do is anger spirits right now.

From Ginkaku-ji, I retreated west down Imadegawa-dori and back into the city. By this time my feet were already killing me so I decided that since I had seen so many nifty things thus far (and my camera had filled up), I would return to the hostel, dump the pictures, rest for a moment, and go out again. I wasn't sure about the bus system and there weren't any metro stops nearby so I walked... and walked... and walked... and walked... for miles... and miles... and miles... until I finally came across Marutamachi-dori and the station that resides there.

I hopped on what is known as the Kyoto City Keihan Electric Railway and rode down to Shichijo station, a mere two blocks from the hostel. K's house was a welcome sight let me say right now. I hobbled through the doors, took off my shoes and was in a pair of slippers before anyone could say Konnichiwa! While at the hostel I had my pictures transferred to CD for a small price and even talked to my girlfriend Nicole via AIM Express! I hung about for an hour or so, then put my shoes back on and went out for round two.

It was already about 4:00pm by the time I set out again and while that doesn't sound late, Kyoto merchants begin shuttering about 5:00pm, as do the shrines and temples. Therefore I hotfooted it to the Yasakajin-ja, a shrine on the north end of Gion, the "pleasure district". Don't let that moniker fool you... pleasurable only in the spirits that flow out its doors. And no, I don't mean the spooky kind. Gion is totally commercial in a wacky Kyoto kind of way; lined with shop after shop. The shrine was a welcome diversion.

After a few minutes there I continued southbound on Higashioji-dori toward what is known as the Yasakano Pagoda, a magnificent 5-story pagoda. If you need a reference to what a pagoda looks like... think the Japanese Pavilion at Epcot. It was already shuttered by the time I got there, but the grounds looked sparse and thus I didn't miss much... but seeing the Pagoda rise out of the housing around it sure was a sight. The next item on my list for the evening was to be Kiyomizu-dera, but it also closed early and thus I decided to leave it for another day and walk home.

Even the walk home was long... if there's one thing I've learned today is that the buses are your friend -- I think I'm going to brave those tomorrow. There's no way I'm walking around this city tomorrow like I did today. Either way, I stopped at a Waku-Waku convenience store, which is a Circle-K, picked up a sandwich, chips, some Pocky Reverse and a Pocari Sweat and came back to the hostel to eat.

And now I'm sitting and relaxing... what more can one ask for on a vacation?

* * *

September 17, 2004

It's been a hell of a day yet again, as I tramped from one end of the city to the other. I managed to see mostly everything I set out to see today, with a couple of exceptions. And those exceptions may decide whether or not I take the time to go to Osaka tomorrow. Osaka was always a day-trip idea, something I could do to get out of Kyoto and go explore. But with just a little over half of the sights left to see here in Kyoto, I may stick around for one more full day, then go to Nara the day after tomorrow. We'll see how planning goes later tonight.

Today I braved the bus system, but not before I got back on the Kyoto City Keihan Electric Railway, by using what is called a Kansai Miyako Card. For 1000yen worth of rides, this card allows me to simply move in and out of the Subway, the Railway and Bus

system; however, the catch is that once the 1000yen is spent, the card is worthless. Thankfully I only needed it to get to Fushimiinari Station, the beginning of my journey. It was about 9:30am.

At Fushimiinari Station exists Fushimi-inari-taisha, a shrine. Like most shrines, the Fushimiinari has a variety of temples and buildings that are ages old, but what makes this particular shrine special and exciting is a pathway that wanders 4km up Inari-san, the nearby mountain. Harking back to the 8th century, the shrine and its stone walkway draw you in like no other. Thousands upon thousands of Torii, or Shinto Gates, line the walk creating a claustrophobic tunnel of vermilion that hugs the landscape. Eerie? Yes; more so because there were so few people about and it was dead quiet, save for the few raven calls. Each step was a labor, but I couldn't help myself. Higher and higher I climbed until I just had to turn back... there was more on the agenda and if I spent anymore time I wouldn't be able to do it all.

Thus, from the torii walkway, I hopped the Electric Rail two stations back to Tofukuji station to, if you can guess, Tofuku-ji -- another temple. Only when I left the station platform I could not locate the temple itself, though I saw its entrance from inside the railcar. So I had to turn away empty-handed. No bother, I hopped on the JR-Nara line and returned to Kyoto-eki whereby I procured my first bus pass and braved the city lines.

It was noon-ish by this time and thus I made my way across town on bus 205 to the northwest quadrant of the city and took in beautiful Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion. Properly called Rokuon-ji (and formerly called Shariden), this villa/shrine/pavilion was built in the 1220s, as a comfortable villa of Kintsune Saionji. The grounds are spacious and the gardens beautiful; I can't believe someone actually built the place as their residence. It really boggles the mind. You'll just have to see the pictures to believe this place... and the Golden Pavilion itself... when it catches the sunlight, Kinkaku sings!

From Kinkaku-ji I walked down to Ryoan-ji, special for its big rock garden. I hadn't planned to walk down, mind you, but I missed the bus stop I was supposed to be at, got lost, and ended up just walking in that general direction. I found it about 30-minutes (give or take) later, but it was sure hell on the feet. Ryoan-ji was worth the effort, however, and I soon lost all interest in the foot pain and paid attention to all that was around me. If Kinkau-ji was beautiful then the grounds of Ryoan-ji are heavenly. As a residence, it must have been heaven-on-earth to live in such a place.

A massive pond, called Kyoyochi, is the center focal point for the entire villa and is beautifully lined with native trees and filled with varying species of lily pad. And the Rock Garden itself is very simple, measuring 25-meters east to west and 10-meters south to north, and consists of only white sand and fifteen rocks. The design was laid out at the end of the 15th century and is a worldwide masterpiece. I sat and stared for timeless minutes, losing myself in the serenity and simplicity of the garden. And for a few minutes I forgot all about my agenda... and that my time in Japan was short and priceless.

Eventually I got back upon my feet and hopped the bus to Kitano Tenmangu, yet another shrine on my list of must-see Kyoto. The shrine was very interesting, though much like the few I've seen thus far, so I won't bore you with descriptions of its dragon reliefs and/or its tiger paintings. Nah, you don't want to hear about that! (and you won't).

After Kitano Tenmangu I tried for Nijo-jo, a very interesting looking castle in the middle of the city. I was able to grab a picture of one of the outside corners but it had already closed by the time I got there (which was 5pm and it closed at 4pm). It also is on my must-see list, with about 3 other places I have yet to visit. Its these three or four places that I really would like to explore instead of Osaka, so as I said I may cut my losses with Osaka and just stick around one more day to get the rest of these shrines and temples in.

But I'll make that decision later. There's some books here to read about Kyoto and its environs so I may yet decide to go down to Osaka. We shall see!
In any case, I'll close this update but that may not be the end of my day. I may hike back down to Kyoto Tower and take in a nighttime view of the city from atop its observatory... that is if it doesn't close early!

* * *

September 18, 2004

It's time once again for another update from Japan! Can you hardly contain your excitement? I certainly can't! I bet you're wondering how many times I'll complain about my feet, or that I didn't quite do what I set out to do? Aren't ya? Am I right? Well, sit back because I shant complain about my hurting feet in this email nor tell you that I didn't accomplish what I set out to do today... because I did, but more on that later.

I closed last night's update with the possibility that I would head out of K's house and walk down to the Kyoto Tower Observatory to fetch a glimpse of the city at night. And that's just what I did, though I did so with a new friend. I shall explain.

My suitemates, if I've neglected to mention them before, consist of three other people: a Scottish man and woman, and a guy from Montreal. All three left sometime during the day yesterday leaving me all alone, but with the potential of meeting new folks. Surely enough I received new suitemates and once again all four beds were filled. Bed 1 and 2 are now occupied by a couple of guys from San Francisco -- Steve and Eric, who just graduated from college; Eric is on a Teach English in Japan program, which is why he's here and Steve is visiting him. The other new arrival is Yoshi, a Japanese young man on his summer vacation. He works as a security guard, he said, and is originally from Yokohama.

When I entered my room after lounging around for a bit, I ran into Yoshi and introduced myself. Eventually I asked if he wanted to accompany me down to the Tower, he did, and so we walked down. We started talking -- he speaks English very well -- and found out that he used to go to school here in Kyoto. If there's one thing Kyoto doesn't lack (besides

temples and shrines) its schools. Yoshi said in all the four years he was here in Kyoto he was not interested in its history... only recently had he become interested and that's why he was here. Kinda cool. I also discovered he's been to the States a total of three times. Can you guess where?

Seattle. San Francisco. Las Vegas.

And in Las Vegas he saw Cirque du Soleil's "O", which he pronounced was AWESOME! So anyway, we ended up viewing the skyline at night, which I must say is quite non-impressive as compared to Tokyo at night, but I guess that's to be expected. Perhaps I expected to see some of the temples and shrines lit up from a distance, and yet I saw none. Okay, maybe one or two, otherwise where there should be shrines and temples there was blackness... or at least the lights of surrounding buildings. After hanging about a few minutes we trekked back to the hostel and he went to sleep; I studied the Lonely Planet Japan book and attempted to make a decision about Osaka... I rose rather early this morning, which is Saturday incase anyone is confused, and started my day by quickly dressing and checking emails/chatting online. Nicole was there and so we were able to talk for a while, but eventually I had to let her go so I could start my day, which began right here in Kyoto.

The first stop was to Nijo-jo, or Nijo Castle. The castle was originally built in 1603 to be the official Kyoto residence of the first Tokugawa Shogun Ieyasu, and it was completed in 1626 by the third Shogun Iemitsu, who transferred some structures from Fushimi Castle, built in the Momoyama Period (1573-1614). The palace, as it were, is magnificent and built for not only stately needs, but for safety as well. The floors from the entrance of the Ninomaru Palace to the Ohiroma (or Grand Chambers) squeak and creak whenever anyone treads on them. According to the brochure, "when the floor is trod upon, the clamps under it move up and down, creating friction between the nails and the clamps which hold them in place, causing the floor to squeak. It is the bird-like sound thus emitted that gives this the name Nightingale Floor." And the Shogun (and his guards) would instantly be alerted to anyone walking about!

Unfortunately pictures were not allowed inside the Palace but on the walls and doors were painted some of the most wonderful relief's I've seen in temples yet. The artists are named -- Kano Tan`yu and Kano Koi -- and they did a magnificent job. I was able to purchase a book showing off this magnificent artwork that I hope I can share with you when I get back. It really was something else to walk around the palace with only your socks on, listening to the floor squeak with every step and have some of the most wonderful art to feast your eyes on. Great stuff. I really hated to leave, but I had to.

The second stop of the day was to To-ji, a temple in the southern part of the city. It was on my list of must-see because of the five-story Pagoda on site, which is the largest in all of Japan. To-ji, or more formerly known as Kyo-o-gokoku-ji, came to be during the 13th year of the Enryaku (794), when the Emperor Kammu transferred the capital of Japan from Nara to Kyoto. In doing so he built two huge guardian temples -- To-ji (east temple) and sai-ji (west temple). Thirty years later, the Emperor honored Kukai (774-835), the

founder of Shingon Buddhism with the temple and thus it was made the central seminary of Esoteric Buddhism. To say there are many examples of Buddhist art on display would be an understatement. In one room alone there are twenty-one statues on display, and their arrangement is specific to the religion.

Yet, here it was the Pagoda that drew me... the highest in Japan. It measures 187-feet high and is actually not the original. The first was built in 826 and burned down four times after being struck by lightning. The third Tokugawa Shogun Iemitsu built the present structure in 1644. It towers above the grounds and is easy the focus of the eyes though its not the main building, nor is it in the center of the grounds. The Pagoda is tucked away in a nondescript corner and is left to its own. Its still magnificent and I'm glad I got to see it.

The place must also be a good place for the local school children to come, as there were a couple of groups playing games outside the inner walls. What they were doing was lost to me but at one time there were about seven boys together tied at the ankle and they were attempting to move together as one. For a little bit they actually accomplished their goal. Each foot rising and falling with the group... it was actually a sight to see, but eventually one faltered and the group stopped.

The last stop on my journey today was in Osaka. Yes, I did it. I decided to go. There were two things I wanted to see in Osaka to begin with, but by the time I got down there I only ended up with one -- the Floating Garden Observatory. The observatory, atop the 41st floor of the Umeda Sky Building (173-meters above ground), offers a magnificent view of Osaka in complete panoramic 360-degrees. Unfortunately it was a bit hazy, but that didn't detract much from the experience. Osaka is just about like Kyoto and everything else in Kansai... strange.

I took a local train back to Kyoto, which took about an hour. Contrast that with the 30 minutes it took me to get there. But that's ok. What else did I have to do? Tomorrow is Nara and who knows what else before that. There are still a couple of places in town that I've yet to see so tomorrow may be another interesting day!

* * *

September 19, 2004

Na-na-na-na-NARA, you've got the look!

Thanks to the Roxettes for the inspiration for this update's subject. Today, as you may be able to guess, I took a little trip on the train to NARA this morning. NARA is about 42km (26mi) south of Kyoto, and was the old capital of Japan from 710-784. It's said that Buddhism first flourished in Nara, which originally was called Heijokyo. The trip took about 40 minutes on a limited express train from JR Kyoto Station on the, you guessed it, JR Nara line and here's a little bit about what I saw.

Three words sum this up: Deer, Curry, and Turtles!

One of the first things I did when I got to Nara was hit the TIC, or Tourist Information Center. This is located on Sanjo-dori, one of the busiest and most commercial avenues in the town. I say town because Nara isn't a city, though it tries to be with a few multi-leveled buildings, but at its heart, it's a small town. Not the quiet reserve I thought it was going to be, but interesting never the less. Getting back to my story... at the TIC a nice Japanese man who spoke English provided me a map and a few destination points.

In fact, the map he provided me was also a "walking tour" map, which means it had outlined upon it a route to walk and places to visit. So I set out on that. The walk, which would be about 4-hours long (and approximately 7-9km), would take me by such world heritage sights like Kofuku-ji, Sarusawano-ike, Todai-ji, Nigatsudo Hall, Kasuga Taisha, and Shin-Yakush-ji. Each and every one of these places I did see in the four hours, and yes, I walked the entire route. Oh man... my FEET!

The first point of interest was Kofuku-ji, a temple founded in 710. At the height of its prosperity, the temple had about 175 buildings but most of them have been lost to the sands of time. There are a few buildings left, which include the five-story pagoda dating from 1426, the Eastern Main Hall (Tokondo Hall) dating 1415 and a three-story pagoda from 1143. Enshrined here are many Buddhist statues that date back to the early 8th century. They really were quite a sight to see! Consequently, Kofuku-ji was not built in Nara; it came from Asuka and was originally called the Umayasaka Temple. It moved when Nara became capital.

The next point was Todai-ji, a temple that is well known for the Daibutsu, a 16.2m (53.1ft) high bronze statue of Buddha. The structure that houses the Buddha is the world's largest wooden building (originally completed in 752), and that is really saying something. The original building burnt down twice and the current version (rebuilt in 1692) is 2/3rds the size of the original and it's still huge! This temple was a wonderful site to visit; I wish I could attach a picture or two for you... but I will soon have the photos online when I get home and you can see for yourself.

I walked by Nigatsudo Hall, and instead went to Kasuga Taisha, a Shinto shrine founded in 768, which is one of the most famous in the entire country. It is generally believed to have been founded by the Fujiwara family (the most powerful imperial court nobles in the 8th century), to their tutelary deity, after the capital was moved to Nara. The architectural style of the sanctuary is referred to as the "Kasuga Style", because of the shape of its roof. The surrounding vermilion lacquered buildings filled with bronze hanging lanterns forms a beautiful contrast to the woods it inhabits. And there's even a little quiet place where you can take off your shoes, walk on a tatami mat floor, and sit upon a pillow while you rest. I indulged myself :)

From Kasuga Taisha, I walked through Nara-koen, or better known as Deer Park because of all the tame deer that inhabit it -- they just stand there and watch you, let you pet them, and for 200yen, you can buy little "deer biscuits" to feed them. Consequently, if they think you have something they'll follow you! The unfortunately part about the deer... is the poop. Its everywhere and half of the time you have to mind your step.

Anyway, through Nara-koen is Shin-Yakush-ji, a small temple founded in 747 by Empress Komyo with the prayer that her husband, Emperor Shomu, would recover from his eye infection. All the structures of this temple have since been destroyed by fire, save one... the main hall... and inside are several Buddhist statues that date back to the early 8th century, during the NARA period, so they say. The temple itself was very... overgrown. The gardens looked very unkempt and the entire place screamed go away, but it was rather interesting, if rather pricey. But what do you expect for statues that are designated National Treasures?

Once I had finished touring this temple I hobbled my way back across town, about 3km, returned to the station and literally hopped on a train just as it was pulling away... thankfully it was the one I wanted -- the limited express back to Kyoto. Walking around Nara was definitely a treat, even if it was on a Sunday when the population of Japan is also out. It was crowded, but not unbearably so; it was hot, but not too bad in the park; it was commercial, which really wasn't what I had expected. Regardless, it was a good trip that I'm glad I made. So, what's with the three key words up above you may now be asking?

Deer -- for the psycho deer of course. My goodness, they were everywhere. I have never seen deer so tame, but the problem is... they're protected by law, as messengers of the spirits. There are about 1200 of them roaming around Nara and they've actually become the identity of the city. Like a mascot; they certainly have a lot of deer merchandise for sale!

Curry -- for the wonderful bowl of Beef Curry & Rice I had on my way from Todai-ji. I was just saying, as I walked down the street, what I wouldn't do for a bowl of Curry and out pops this restaurant menu! It's good stuff, let me tell you, and each place makes it a little differently, which adds to the fun!

Turtles -- for all the turtles popping their heads up at the passers-by at Sarusawano-ike, a small pond just south of Kofuku-ji. In fact, the five-storied pagoda reflects in this pond, which makes for a nice sitting area! The turtles, for all their fuss, were searching for food. People were throwing in fries, bread and any other foodstuff they could get hold of and those turtles were snapping it up, no pun intended.

Well, tomorrow I leave K's House and Kyoto and make my way back to Tokyo on Hikari Shinkansen. It's almost unreal to think that my trip is almost over. I have an afternoon and evening in Tokyo before I depart, now on the 21st, which will allow me to get in one or two last minute things in the Tokyo area before I go. And too, tomorrow, I may end up at one or two shrines before I catch the train to Tokyo... or maybe not. One never knows with me... my feet will dictate my itinerary tomorrow. That's for sure.

Either way, my journey is coming to a close and what a ride. What a marvelous and awesome ride. I can't wait to come back to Japan and see all those things I missed! Though, I think next time I'm going to take it easier... all this running around is for the birds!

This may be the last time you hear from me. So, sayonara from Japan! I shall see most of you again real soon!

* * *

September 21, 2004

I'm home! Tadaima! I'm home!

I am so tired, let me tell you. I've been up now for about 30 hours straight and the lack of sleep is really starting to take its toll on me. It's been a real hell of a day too. While the sun peeked about 5:30am, I first arose off my futon about 8:00am Tokyo time (21st), which is the equivalent to 9:00pm EST (20th). I hadn't planned to rise so early, but I wanted to have some free time to make a trek down to the Ginza, like I had last night, to check my email at the Apple Store. Nicole was firmly on my mind and I wanted to see if there had been any emails from her before I left the city for the airport, and of course, to send some last minute love from Ginza. I decided, however, that going out and coming back to Homeikan wasn't the best option because it took so long to get from the Ryokan to the Hongo-sanchoe station, therefore I waited until check-out time, about 10:00am, to get started with my day.

I settled the bill, slew my laptop bag over my shoulder and set my backpack down upon its wheels, as I made my way out of Homeikan for the very last time. I didn't look back... I'm not sure why, but I just couldn't bring myself to look back. Instead, I walked down the inclined road, found my cats sign, turned left and continued down Kikuzaka-dori toward Hongo-dori, which would lead me to the Marunouchi Line's station. Since my destination was Ginza right off, the "red-line" was exactly what I wanted. Not only did it go through Tokyo-eki, where I would later be taking the Narita Express to Narita Airport, but it also went straight to the Ginza, though stopping at the opposite side of the district.

I'm quite sure I was a sight carrying my laptop bag and wheeling my backpack through the likes of Mitsukoshi's department store, there at the Ginza, but at that particular moment I didn't care. You really don't understand how huge the Ginza metro station complex is until you're there. Usually the stations, the larger ones anyway, may have up to eight exits labeled A1, A2, A3 and so on. For Ginza, not only did they have A1-13 (or more, I lost count) but also a dozen "B" and "C" exits. Not only that, but two other lines share this underground behemoth and getting lost, while not a real reality since there are signs about, is definitely on your mind.

To get topside, I took the entrance that lead up and into Mitsukoshi, the one I took the night before. I knew if I took this exit I would end up on the very same street as the Apple store, and knew it was just a short walk down. It took some time to get out of Mitsukoshi, but when I made it the hustle and bustle of the Ginza greeted me with a smile. There were cars everywhere! The streets were closed off to all traffic but pedestrians the previous night, but at this hour the street was open to all sorts and boy was it jammed.

Once I was out of Mitsukoshi, I immediately walked over to the Apple store and ponied up to one of the new iMac G5's (I simply love this machine!) to check my email. I logged on to Azlance, Yahoo and any other place I could think of but there wasn't anything of consequence to be found; at least I made the attempt, right? Then I took my leave of the store and went back underground and meandered over to Tokyo station, purchased a ticket for the Narita Express and prepared to leave the greater Tokyo area.

By 12:15pm I was on a train to Narita and bidding farewell to Tokyo. But even this was still early... I would still have plenty of time to myself once I reached Narita and had no idea on how to fill that time. I couldn't use the laptop so writing anything complicated was out. I did have my note pad so I decided to take it out and make a few notes, which I shall share with you at a later time. So what was I to do? An answer came almost instantly as I saw a sign that said Internet Cafe. It was one of those Yahoo! Cafe's and the best part about it was that it was free. So I spent the rest of my time checking email and chatting with my friend Jen from New Zealand -- Nicole wasn't online, much to my chagrin.

Jen was bringing me up to speed on her life since I hadn't a chance to speak with her with any regularity once I was in Japan and it was a singular thrill to actually speak to her being on that side of the world. Yes she's in the southern hemisphere and I'm in the northern in Tokyo, but being close to the same time zone was kind of nifty! Usually when we talk it's her early morning when it's my late evening and therefore we are hardly on the same day let alone the same page. So, as I said, being able to talk when it was morning to both of us (and on the same day) was rather exciting.

About 30 minutes before my flight I meandered over to the gate, purchased some munitions -- pocky, chips and, of course, Pocari Sweat -- to take on the plane, settled down and waited. I didn't wait long and before I knew it I was ensconced on the 777 bound for Atlanta. Now, I shant bore you with useless details about airplane food and a fitful attempt to sleep, but I shall say that I watched "Oceans 11" twice and a movie called "The Day After Tomorrow" or something like that, featuring a killer cold front storm. Either way, the time was passed either reading (which I did finish reading "Ender's Shadow" on the way back) or watching the in-flight entertainment.

When I arrived in Atlanta I was so exhausted that I stretched out on the carpet in my gate area and attempted to sleep for the five-hour layover. For the most part that didn't work out but I was at least able to stretch and lay down, which is something I could not do very well on the plane. I grabbed another Venti Mocha and attempted to perk up and then boarded my hour flight back to Orlando. Cedric and Sharon were waiting for me at the Arrivals Pick-Up area where I had asked them to be and they took me home. Looking out the window at signs in English was confusing to me, since I wasn't used to seeing the language, and eventually I just spaced out, got home, called my mom, and then got on the phone with my baby...

It was good to be home.



日本国

In the Land of the Rising Sun

2004 | September 9th to 21st



the 36 views of mt. fuji

I leave you now with this last bit of cultural information pertaining to the Japanese – the highly celebrated *36 Views of Mt. Fuji* (富嶽三十六景, Fugaku Sanjūrokkei). You may have noticed that spearheading each chapter of my Japanese journal was an image depicting Mt. Fuji in differing seasons and weather conditions from a variety of distances and locations. These images were taken in part from an ukiyo-e (浮世絵; meaning: “Pictures of a Floating World”) series by artist Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎; 1760-1849), who first published the series in 1827. Their popularity grew and by 1837, 10 more images were added, bringing the total number of landscapes to 46; however, the title of the work remains unchanged.

I chose to sample only 11 of the 46 – as there are only 11 chapters – but each of the images are marvelous in their own right.

One of the most famous, and the one I chose to open the first chapter, is widely known to English speakers as “The Great Wave off Kanagawa” or sometimes more simply as “The Wave” (神奈川沖浪裏, Kanagawa-oki nami-ura). This particular



view of Mt. Fuji depicts three boats being threatened by a rather ominous looking wave. It's so famous that even if you're unfamiliar with the series, its artist, or the other images, you'll probably know “The Wave”.

The other 10 I used from the series follow...



September 10, 2004
 神奈川冲浪裏 (#1)
Kanagawa-oki nami-ura
The Great Wave off Kanagawa



September 11, 2004
 甲州犬目峠 (#9)
Kōshū inume-tōge
Inume pass in the Kai Province



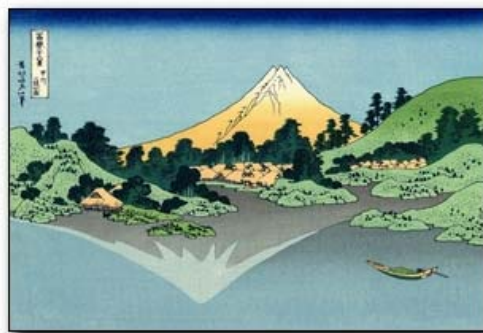
September 12, 2004
 相州仲原 (#40)
Sōshū Nakahara
Nakahara in the Sagami Province



September 13, 2004
 山下白雨 (#3)
Sanka hakū
A Shower Below The Summit



September 14, 2004
 相州梅沢庄 (#14)
Soshū umezawanoshō
 Umegawa in Sagami Province



September 15, 2004
 甲州三坂水面 (#35)
Kōshū Misaka suimen
 Fuji reflects in Lake Kawaguchi, seen
 from Misaka pass in Kai Province



September 16, 2004
 身延川裏不二 (#42)
Minobu-gawa ura Fuji
 The back of Fuji from Minobu river



September 17, 2004
 相州七里浜 (#13)
Soshū Shichiri-ga-hama
 Shichiri beach in Sagami Province



September 18, 2004
 甲州石班沢 (#15)
Kōshū Kajikazawa
 Kajikazawa in Kai Province



September 19, 2004
 駿州江尻 (#18)
Sunshū Ejiri
 Ejiri in the Suruga Province



September 20, 2004
 駿州大野新田 (#43)
Sunshū Ōno-shinden
 Ono Shindon in the Suruga Province

終わり？

(owari; "the end"?)