

POSTCARD

From Atami

The honorable check

By Stanton Delaplane



The Hot Springs seaside resort of Atami is on the neck of the spade-shaped Izu Peninsula, two-and-a-half electric railway hours from Tokyo.

It is a favorite resort in the muggy Tokyo summer: 95 degrees, 89 per cent humidity.

It has 26 hotels (one of them translates from my dictionary "The Sexy Tourist Villa"). Tourist business supports three night clubs and tiny, three or four-seat bars.

The main shopping street glows with festive neon from enormous souvenir shops. Each one reeks of dried fish packaged in attractive woven baskets.

I stay at Rising Clouds Mansion. It is owned by Mr. Brilliant Moonlight.

The owner speaks some English. The desk clerk is learning. We have some interesting phone conversations.

I looked up the word "ice" in the dictionary and got on the telephone.

"Kori."
"That," said the desk clerk proudly, "is the Japanese word for ice, sir."

The Kiunkaku Hotel is purely Japanese Inn: Polished wooden hallways; sliding paper-screen rooms opening on pine tree and fish pond gardens.

The maids wear attractive summer kimono with the colorful obi sash at the back. They pad into the room in mitten-like tabi. They sit by the table and serve while we eat.

Leave the room for a few minutes, and they have it completely straightened — fresh ice water, fresh ash trays, papers picked up and piled.

There is a television hidden by a silk table covering.

Reception is excellent. The favorite program at present is "Laramie." "I'm gunna draw on yuh, stranger! Becuz we don't like strangers, stranger!"

It sounds stranger dubbed in Japanese.

"We have seven TV stations," I was told in Tokyo. "The prime time from 7 to 10 in the evening is completely filled with American Westerns."

"When the TV star Robert Fuller came to Tokyo, thousands and thousands of people came to the airport. It was the biggest reception ever seen."

Most Tokyo sets operate perfectly on inside, rabbit-ear antennas. "When we first had TV," said the Tokyo man, "everybody had outside antenna. The appearance of antenna on your house gave you great face. And many people put up antenna before they could afford the set."

"Then the Government opened its own TV station."

"Now we pay a tax on TV—the collector comes to your house and asks if you have a TV set."

"Immediately most people took down the revealing outside antenna. It is better not to pay the tax than to have the face."

Japanese TV people think the popularity of Westerns lies in the Japanese background of the samurai.

The samurai (like the Western heroes) were warriors of high-caliber and touchy about their honor. The slightest mistake in manners was enough for the samurai to haul out his sword and chop you in half.

Some of the varmints even chopped people just to test the edge.

The leave-taking at the Japanese inn is ceremonial. I called for the honorable bill. We gave the maid a small present-o in a ceremonial gift envelope.

We put on our shoes at the outside doorway.

At the taxi, the maids bowed. The assistant manager bowed. The desk clerk bowed. Mr. Brilliant Moonlight, in view of speaking English, shook hands.

"Sayonara," I said.
"That is the Japanese word for good-bye," said the desk clerk bowing.

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