

14: Miyajima, Hiroshima and Tsuwano

I wake at about seven o'clock this morning; when I hear Tamara (the American girl) moving about, I venture out of my room. She offers me a cup of coffee and toasts the remainder of my brown bread. After breakfast, I wash, shave and leave at eight o'clock, just as Estella is getting up.

Although it is a cloudy morning outside, it looks as though it will be fine. I am about to start a few days of travelling around the main island of Honshū, firstly making my way southwards, and then turning up and along the west coast. I am excited about leaving the city in order to visit smaller towns and to see some countryside. I have decided to stop first of all at Miyajima (also known as Itsukushima, 'Shrine Island') on the east coast, in order to visit its famous and much-photographed shrine.

I catch the 205 bus to the train station, and, seeing a *Hikari* Shinkansen ('Light' bullet train) due to leave at 8.43, I rush and manage to catch it. As the unreserved seat carriage is full, I sit in a reserved seat carriage – which is practically empty – and move back after I see some people leaving. As the scenery is mostly industrial and ugly (though I do see some mountains), I spend most of the time writing yesterday's diary. As usual, many of the passengers look as though they are company executives because of their smart suits, and nearly all of them are asleep.

I have since learned a little more about the workplace in Japan. Most large companies treat their staff very well, often providing them with accommodation, meals, kindergartens and so forth, and workers are generally very grateful to receive such benefits. In theory, standard working hours apply, such as nine to five, but new members of teams are often puzzled to discover that only they are ready to leave at the end of the working day – none of the other workers seem to budge. Gradually they get the message: nobody leaves until they have fully completed their day's tasks – it seems that most people are prepared to work unpaid overtime in gratitude for the good services bestowed on them by the company that so kindly employs them. These long working hours may help to explain why I see so many people asleep on moving vehicles.

We reach Hiroshima long before I have expected, at ten to eleven. We have only made two stops: one at Shin Osaka and another at Okayama. I am delighted to be here so early in the day. By now the sky has cleared and the sun is shining. I leave the bullet train, walk to another platform and wait for a local train to Miyajima.

A train finally pulls into the station at 11.30 a.m. and I hop on board. After a long, tedious journey through suburbia, the train stops at a station close to the port for Miyajima. From here I walk to the JNR (Japan National Railway) ferry. By using this service, I am able to use my rail pass, which I wave at one of the officials.

After waiting for a few minutes with some local people, I hop aboard a boat that has just docked. It is good to sit out in the sun on deck, with the fresh sea breeze blowing. We are soon off and crossing the short stretch of water to the island, which is wooded and mountainous. The view of the mainland is impressive from the boat; it too is mountainous but the scenery is marred by built-up areas and heavy industry.

As we approach Miyajima, the famous red *torii* or gateway in the sea soon becomes visible, together with the large, rambling Shinto shrine behind it. We reach the pier within fifteen minutes. I hop off and walk towards the shrine along a very touristy street lined with gaudy souvenir shops and restaurants. I stop at a small coffee shop and buy a box of assorted sandwiches for just ¥400.



Itsukushima (Miyajima) Shrine, Hiroshima Bay

I then hurry along to the Itsukushima Shrine, pay the entrance fee and go in. Although it is known to be of very ancient origin (it certainly existed in A.D. 811), it has been reconstructed several times. The verandas with their bright vermilion columns are quite astonishing. As it is lunchtime by now, I almost have the place to myself. The red buildings, which are reflected in the sea, look stunning in the sunshine. Although rather gaudy by Japanese standards, the shrine is a wonderful sight to behold. Inhaling the smell of the sea and seaweed, I feel exhilarated. I am delighted to be here at last and to view the place in such favourable conditions.

I now sit down in the sun on the main veranda, with the spectacular *torii* (constructed in 1875) rising from the sea before me, and eat my sandwiches. While I munch away, admiring the magnificent view, several Japanese tourists appear, stop to take photographs of each other with the *torii* behind them, then leave.

When I have finished my lunch, I continue wandering around the complex. Although there is really not much to see, it is just wonderful to be here. I eventually discover the whereabouts of the old and important *Nō* stage: a weather-beaten but noble wooden structure, believed to be the oldest in Japan. Unlike everything else here, it is not painted red; it is constructed of plain but beautifully mellowed old wood.



Itsukushima Shrine, with the red *torii* rising from the sea

When I emerge from the shrine, I find myself at the other side of the bay. I scout around, find an old Buddhist temple with its statues covered in newspaper, then a museum, which I decide is probably not worth visiting. I climb uphill to a small red pagoda and walk a short distance along a footpath, but as there is nothing to see from here but built-up areas, I retrace my steps, walk through the shrine once again, come out by the entrance, and climb uphill to see the Senjō-kaku (Hall of a Thousand Mats), which I find is undergoing rather noisy repairs. Beside it is another bright red pagoda.

I then walk downhill, wander across to the waterfront and sit down. Here I meet a Japanese man who strikes up a conversation with me. We begin in Japanese and then, when I very quickly run out of vocabulary, we switch to English. Although his English is rather poor, he seems to be able to understand me. I ask him how long he has been learning English. 'I learn English,' he tells me, then stops to count on his fingers, folding them inwards in the Eastern manner, starting with his little finger, 'for six years.' It comes as no surprise to learn that the Japanese are, in general, poor at mastering foreign languages. I save him the bother of grappling with the English language by doing most of the talking. We chat for some considerable time and end by exchanging addresses.

When I return to my luggage, I find a deer tugging at it. I have noticed quite a lot of tame deer on the island. When I approach it, it tears off my name tag and runs away. These deer obviously eat anything! I walk back to the ferry port, where I meet an Australian couple, and catch the next boat at 4.35 p.m. On the mainland again, I try to catch a bus back to Hiroshima, as I have read that the route is far more interesting, but nobody seems to know anything about it. I soon give up and take the train. Once again, the journey is uninteresting, but at least I have the company of the Australian couple, who tell me that they have been in Ireland on holidays several years ago.

Back in the train station in Hiroshima, I ring the youth hostel, reserve a bed, then set about finding my way to it. At the information centre I am given instructions printed in English. I quickly find a bus stop and jump on a bus that is about to leave.

So here I am in Hiroshima. Although I am not particularly interested in this well-known city, I am, of course, very much aware that it and so much of its population were destroyed by the first atomic bomb on 6 August 1945. While I feel very sorry that so many innocent people had to be killed, I do believe that something drastic had to be done in order to stop the Japanese invasion of southeast Asia. The Japanese had

been isolated on these islands for a very long time, during which powerful and savage armies emerged and waged wars with each other. In addition, they had never been invaded by outsiders during their two thousand years of history; a *kami kaze* ('divine wind') had driven back Kublai Khan, the Mongol Emperor of China in 1281. Because of this, the Japanese came to believe that they were invincible. Hence, when they invaded China and southeast Asia during World War II, they were absolutely ruthless, torturing and killing millions of innocent people. The reports of the brutalities carried out during this appalling period of savagery are truly terrifying. The theoretical physicist Richard Feynman (1928–1988) need not have felt so guilty after he had helped in the development of the atomic bomb and had subsequently learned of the devastation and loss of life that had been caused by it.

The bus journey lasts about fifteen minutes. I hop out at the appropriate stop and walk up a hill to the hostel. As everything here is clearly signposted, I have no bother finding it. I discover that the hostel overlooks a fine view of the city, which, I discover, looks like any modern large city, though it is flanked on both sides by high and magnificent mountains.

Once settled in the hostel, I wash some clothes, write some more of my diary outside, have supper at 6.30, write some more, speak to a French couple who live here in Japan, take a bath, and continue writing until bedtime. A very satisfying day.

At 6.30 this morning we are woken by the sound of syrupy music and the usual announcements in Japanese and English, though this time they are spoken by a lady who has a similar voice to the one heard on buses announcing the stops. I am down for breakfast by seven: stodgy white toast, a fried egg and salad. I am out of the place before eight o'clock, striding down the road to the nearby bus stop. It is a pleasant, fresh morning; the sun shines brightly from a clear blue sky and a stiff but invigorating wind blows. The panoramic view of the city looks impressive in the morning light.

At the bus stop, I meet an American chap and a Dutch girl from the hostel, and together we wait for the blue JNR bus, on which we can use our passes. One soon appears and we hop on board. However, unlike yesterday's journey, it takes a long roundabout route to the train station. Eventually we arrive and I reserve a seat on the next *Hikari* bullet train to Ogōri, which will leave at 9.05 a.m.; it is all done in a couple of seconds on a computer. As I have time to spare, I wander around, looking for some postcards of Miyajima, but discover that only packets of cards – far too many for my needs – are available. On the platform I meet the Australian couple from yesterday. We chat until the train arrives and go to our separate carriages. As expected, the train leaves on the dot of 9.05 and hurtles towards our destination.

Once we are out of Hiroshima, the scenery improves, though it is difficult to see it as the train travels so quickly and rushes in and out of numerous tunnels. This region is far less built up and more mountainous. There are impressive mountains to the right, and on the left can be seen mountains on the islands in the Inland Sea. Everything looks so beautiful in the bright sunshine.

We arrive in Ogōri at 9.50 after a journey with no stops. I hop off and catch a JNR bus at 10.05 to Hagi – my next place of interest on the Japan Sea coast of Honshū. Travelling here is so easy, as everything works like clockwork. The bus is quite luxurious and comfortable, and there are very few people on board. I open my window in order to let in some air.

We travel through miles of suburbia on our way to the next major city, Yamaguchi. This, like Ogōri, looks like any other modern Japanese city. I fall asleep for a while,

and when I wake I discover that we are up in the mountains. It is a pleasure to see some dramatic scenery at last. The wooded mountains are high and the valleys are small and narrow; the breathtaking views keep changing every minute. Gone are the ugly industrial surroundings – now I begin to see small farm houses, some terraced fields with people working in them, and lots of untamed, wild nature. I have since learned that large parts of these islands are uninhabited because of mountains, volcanoes and large areas of forest. I wish that the bus would stop so that I can snap a photograph or two; because of the speed we are travelling at, and the bumping and swaying, it is impossible.

On we go, swerving around corners, from where I can glance at other valleys and more amazing mountains, and crossing one or two rivers of sparkling blue water. Enchanted by the splendid vistas, I wish that this journey could go on indefinitely. However, we reach our destination, Hagi, sooner than I have expected – shortly after 11.30 a.m. The place takes me by surprise. I have been led to believe that it is a small and charming old-world town; instead, it has all the appearances of a small, modern and fast-moving city. My heart sinks when I see it.

When I leave the train at the station, I ask an American chap about the *minshuku* (family-run guest houses). Although he has been staying in one, he does not sound wildly enthusiastic about it. In the end, I decide to try the one that the staff in the Kyoto Tourist Information Centre have recommended to me. I go to the little information office in the station, ask about the price of staying there (¥4,500), and the man telephones the guest house for me. They are full. I ask about another one that I have noted, the Higashi-Hagi. They charge ¥5,000, are just around the corner, and can take me. A man in the street shows me the way and I ring the doorbell.

The door is opened by the couple who own the house, which looks quite modern and clean. I chat with the husband and wife in Japanese at first, then switch to English. Both of them speak my mother tongue, though the husband speaks it better than his wife. They are extremely good humoured, and we all laugh together. I have to give them a long explanation as to how I have heard about their guest house and have found my way to it before I am invited inside. I am shown to a small, basic room upstairs with *tatami* mats and a view overlooking the nearby river. I spruce myself up and prepare to go off sightseeing.

Downstairs, the lady calls me, brings me into the dining room, and offers me some tea. This, she explains, is special *sencha*, a delicate-tasting tea made with water that has been boiled and then allowed to drop to 60° C by pouring it into a ceramic bowl. When it cools to the correct temperature, it is put into a small teapot. The tea is then poured into a miniature cup and presented to me, using both hands – a gesture used in the East when offering hospitality to an honoured guest. (Courtesy demands that the guest receive the bowl in like manner, using both hands.) The first cup, my host explains, is for savouring the aroma of the tea, and the second is for tasting it. What is expected from the third cup is not explained. In between the first and second cups, then the second and third cups, I eat two halves of a circular sweet that has been cut in two, one half white in colour and the other half pink. It is all very charming and the tea is quite refreshing.

After chatting and laughing a little more, I am given a present of a tiny bell attached to a couple of hearts made of fabric and a cord. Finally I excuse myself and leave.

Map in hand, I now begin to wander around the streets. As I am now looking for some food and a bank, I stay in the city centre. I find a bank nearby, where I get another ¥50,000; then, in a quiet side street I find a small restaurant. I order the *gobō*

tempura soba depicted in the window, and sit down to a big bowl of edible burdock (*gobō*), deep-fried fish, meat and vegetables (*tempura*) and buckwheat noodles (*soba*) in a hot broth of *dashi* (stock) and soya sauce. Here in the restaurant I have not managed to escape the noise, as a television has been switched on at full volume.

After my lunch I go wandering around the back streets, heading for the various sights marked on my map, but there is little of interest to see. The streets are just typical Japanese alleyways, and the temples are all tumbledown, neglected and tiny.



Samurai houses in Hagi

As I head towards the old quarter at the western end of the town, things begin to improve. I now begin to see the characteristic white walls with tiled tops and the older, traditional houses. I now arrive at Joka-Machi, the Castle Town, where I see the interesting wood and white plaster houses of the samurai – the hereditary military nobility and officer caste of medieval and early-modern Japan, who held sway from the twelfth century to their abolition in the 1870s. Some of these houses are very striking. These, the little temples and the more secluded residences that I see, are being sketched by boys and girls in blue uniforms, all presumably from the same school. As usual, the boys are cheeky and the girls are shy. However, one group of girls become quite excited when I appear and one calls out in English, ‘Please come here, sir!’ We have a slightly erratic conversation both in Japanese and English. These

girls obviously have not been learning English for long, for they find me rather difficult to understand.

Another group of girls, whom I find sketching and painting in a shrine, become wild with excitement when they see me. They say something about '*gaijin-san*' ('Mr Foreigner') to a companion, but can only giggle when I try to speak to them. A crowd of noisy young boys romping about the Kasuga Shrine keep asking me the time until their lady teacher appears and talks to me sensibly. In the middle of our conversation a man appears on a motorbike and says something to her. The lady explains that it is time to go back to school, stops me in mid-sentence and says goodbye. She seems to be a strange sort of lady – rather impersonal, I feel.

The area that I have now reached is basically a park, and is therefore much quieter. Here the old buildings and long white walls are quite picturesque; I manage to take some photographs of them, despite the darkening sky. A big group of clouds has now appeared and is being blown across the sky by the wind, making the scene in front of me look quite spectacular.

I then wander around the alleys and lanes, finding various quaint corners. One house in its own grounds is particularly pleasing. Behind the walls can be seen trees bearing *natsu mikan*, a type of Japanese orange grown here in Hagi. These trees are to be seen everywhere, in fact, and add great colour.

Passing a cemetery, I head towards Mount Shizuki in the westernmost part of the town, by the sea. I stop for a quick look at the Asa Mōri clan house, which is interesting but not worth paying money to visit, I think. I manage to peep at the inner courtyard through a gap in a hedge at the back of the building.

Satisfied, I continue and walk along a winding path lined with touristy shops selling the local Hagi pottery. The genuine article is rough, textured and highly prized, but this looks just a little too smooth and perfect; no doubt it is specially manufactured for the tourist industry. I also see kilns in the area. As I am unable to see any prices, I assume that everything is expensive.

Turning a corner, I suddenly come upon the ruins of an old castle: nothing more than a moat and some stone walls. There is an admission fee to see this, but I do not bother to go in. The view here is quite fine.



I press on and suddenly find myself approaching a sandy beach. Before me is a very impressive seascape bathed in an spectacular burst of late afternoon sunlight. The coastline is wild and rugged, and together with the clear, dramatic skyline, it

immediately reminds me of the West of Ireland. Once again, I breathe in the sharp sea air. Over the waves, a sailboard with a bright red sail comes scudding into view: out comes my camera and I capture the magical moment for posterity. I stand gazing out to sea and the distant coastline until I have drunk it all in; then, happy, I turn around and head back for the town centre.

This time I take a slightly different route, stopping to see some more fascinating old buildings and temples. This town is pretty enough in spots, though it is not wildly exciting. It certainly has not come up to my expectations.

As it has become quite cloudy and dark by now, photography is out of the question. I march back at a brisk pace. Although the breeze is still blowing, it is not cold by any means. I peep into some private houses and temples, arrive back in the main street, and reach the *minshuku* at 5.20 p.m. I enquire about taking a bath; after a little bit of confusion I am told that I can have a shower at 5.30. I get the distinct impression that I have made a blunder; maybe I should have asked where the nearest public bath is.

I take my shower and am ready for the evening meal by six o'clock. There are three other men dining; I am put at a separate table, facing in the same direction, in front of them, so that I am completely on my own. This is one practice that I do not like, as it makes me feel like the odd one out, and I cannot observe the Japanese eating (which may save me from making mistakes). The food is excellent: 'special' rice, fish soup, *tempura* fish and vegetables, fresh vegetables, *sashimi* (slices of raw fish) with salad, a couple of mussels, something on a skewer that I think must be a type of fruit, and, to finish the meal, one of the famed Hagi *natsu mikan* oranges. It is all delicious. It takes me a while to work my way through all this, but the Japanese men wolf it down in minutes and leave. This is one of the things that puzzle me here; despite all the ceremony and show of good manners, people seem to gobble up their evening meals like savages. One thing seems to be clear: mealtimes are not for conversation – they are solely for eating.

After my meal, I look through a magazine containing photographs of Ireland and England that the lady has thoughtfully lent me. Like all the Japanese photographs that I have seen so far, they are extremely dramatic. I then repair to my room, where I spend the rest of the evening reading and writing this diary. I also telephone the youth hostel at Tsuwano. I finally hit the sack at ten o'clock.

After a reasonably good night's sleep, I get up at seven o'clock this morning, and come down to an excellent breakfast that is served at 7.30 on the dot. Afterwards I pay up (I am only charged ¥4,500 – not ¥5,000 as I was told) and, leaving my luggage in the hall, I go out to do some more sightseeing. It is a fine, fresh morning – both sunny and cloudy. Once again the wind blows and the clouds move briskly. It is almost like being in Ireland!

I head south towards the mountains and the Shōin shrine, dedicated to Yoshida Shōin, a local hero of the 1800s, who advocated learning from the West. When I leave the main road and scout around, I discover that I have taken a wrong turn; as usual, my vague map is to blame. I quickly rectify the mistake and walk along the correct road, but still cannot find the shrine. When a man points to it for me, I discover that it has been placed on the wrong side of the road on my map. It is all very confusing.

Although it is only 8.30 a.m. by now, I find the shrine full of tourists taking photographs of one another. It is pretty enough, though not a patch on anything that I have seen in Kyoto! The most interesting part of the complex is a tiny wooden building grandly named the Shoka-son juku Academy, where Yoshida Shōin gave his

lectures. From outside, it is easy to see its simple interior of *tatami* mats and paper *shōji*. The shrine itself, although it is located in pleasant surroundings, is not up to much.

Once I have seen the shrine, I climb up into the hills to visit the more pleasant Tokoji Temple, where I meet more shy and giggling schoolgirls. Like many other schoolgirls that I have encountered, they hold their hands over their mouths to cover their giggles. For a small entrance fee, I climb up some steps through two gateways and enter the temple complex, where I find the main building. Away from it all, it is delightfully peaceful here and the architecture is very beautiful. The sun streams through the trees and into a little cloister, which I photograph. I then go up to the cemetery, where I am invited to join two boys and two girls in a photograph. Using a tripod belonging to one of the lads, I take a photo of us with my camera. When the girls leave, the boys begin chatting to me; both of them are very friendly and speak English well. They offer to take me back down to the Shōin shrine in their car and so I go with them: they have a very comfortable Toyota Corolla. I walk around the shrine once again with them and then go into a museum where the history of Yoshida Shōin (1831–1860) is portrayed in lifelike wax figures placed in old-world settings. As I know nothing about Shōin and cannot read the Japanese text, I soon become bored. The lads pay little attention to the displays, despite the fact that one of them has bought all three tickets at ¥380 apiece.

They then ask me where I am going next; when I say that I need to go to the train station, they offer me a lift there. I hop out just before we reach it, I thank them for their kindness and return to the *minshuku*. There I collect my luggage and thank my charming hosts. The little bell that I had left behind on the table yesterday by mistake has now been tied on to my bag. Bowing and saying goodbye, I leave the guest house and walk the short distance to the station. Leaving my bag in a locker, I wander off to some shops nearby, where I buy a plastic container of sandwiches.



Scenery, between Hagi and Masuda, as seen from the train

I then return to the station, where I board the local – and therefore slow – train to Masuda when it arrives at 10.48. I am told that it will arrive in Masuda at 1.20 p.m. As we move off, the old train rattling and bumping, an official on board calls out the name of the next station in a sing-song voice over the loudspeakers, and repeats it in the same manner when we approach it. At first the scenery is uninteresting until we leave the suburbs of Hagi – then the fun begins. The fast-changing views are soon of a

most spectacular nature: high, dramatic green mountains, irregularly-shaped straw-coloured fields, and then, on the left, a wild, rugged coastline with mountainous, tiny islands here and there in the rough sea. The scenery is truly breathtaking, and I am kept busy hopping from one side of the carriage to the other, opening the windows and attempting to take photographs. As I am now thoroughly enjoying the journey, I do not care how long it will take. What I am seeing confirms that the western side of the island is far more rural and spectacular than the eastern.

Much to my surprise, we arrive at Masuda before midday. From where I am, it does not look like much of a place. I hop off the train, transfer to another platform and ask an official about the next train to the mountain town of Tsuwano, my destination for today. I am informed that I am on the correct platform and that a train to Tsuwano will arrive in a matter of minutes.

It soon pulls into the station and I am happy to discover that it is much more comfortable than the first one. It heads off into the mountains and I set about eating my sandwiches. Afterwards I buy a little plastic bottle of tea from a lady with a trolley. Just as I finish drinking it, the town of Tsuwano is announced in the same type of sing-song voice that I have heard in the previous train. Once again, I have arrived before I have expected – it is not yet one o'clock!



Santa Maria Chapel, Tsuwano

Outside the station I spruce myself up and put my luggage in a locker. When I have got my bearings, I set off on foot for a sightseeing tour. The town itself, in true Japanese style, is ugly and functional, and is certainly not the rural place that I have imagined it to be. My first stop is the Santa Maria Cathedral (as it is called on my map), a Catholic chapel built in 1948 by a German priest in memory of 135 Christians from Nagasaki, who were sent by the Tokugawa Shōgunate (the feudal and military government of Japan from 1600 to 1868) to an abandoned temple here and forced to apostatize. The site of the persecution (on which chapel was built) is now called Otome Toge (Mountain Pass of the Virgin). To get to this, I have to struggle up a steep, narrow footpath in the wooded hills surrounding the town. It is beautiful here; I follow the course of a rushing stream and am surrounded by nature. Almost immediately I arrive at the 'cathedral': a tiny and pretty wooden building with columns and a Japanese roof, but topped with a short spire. It looks so incongruous! I peep into its interior, which is large enough to hold a dozen people at the most, and

survey the peaceful surroundings. The sun is shining, it is warm but fresh, and the place is truly heavenly.

I now wander downhill, stop to admire a spectacular temple not marked on my map – it has an unusual roof and two circular windows – and then find my way to the Yomeiji Temple. This is an enchanting Zen temple with a thatched roof, set in the tranquil surroundings of the hills. I do not bother to pay the admission fee, for I can see everything from the gate and a nearby cemetery. As it is so beautiful, I take several photographs of it. I linger for a while here, lost in admiration, wander around a little and then descend to the town. It is now beginning to cloud over.

Back in the town I speak briefly to a tour guide, then walk up another hill, along a crazy zigzag path under 1,174 red *torii*, to a famous shrine known as the Taikodani Inari. This turns out to be a rather modern and gaudy building made of wood, recently painted bright vermillion. To me it all looks horrible and gimmicky.



Main street, with stream filled with carp, Tsuwano

Having looked around briefly, I hurry back to the town centre and its historic main street, the Tonomachi, where I find some white plastered samurai houses and characteristic low white walls – quite similar to the ones that I have seen in Hagi. In a narrow stream running along the side of the street I see huge carp of assorted bright colours swimming back and forth. The street is interesting for a short distance, then

modernity begins to intrude. Although the town has been dubbed 'Little Kyoto', I fail to see the similarity.

I now walk back to the train station, collect my luggage and, because I am unsure about the buses here, I decide to walk to the youth hostel as it does not seem to be far away. This means retracing my steps, but I do not mind.

In the end I begin to regret this decision, as the hostel turns out to be quite a distance away. Obviously this part of my map has been somewhat compressed and is not to scale. Rain is now threatening. The mountains look truly magnificent: the tops are lost in the clouds and are lit by narrow rays of sunlight. Despite the ugly buildings dotted about, the scene is quite spectacular; it must have been superb in bygone days.

Finally, feeling weary and my shoulder aching from the weight of my bag, I arrive at the little hostel. The warden, a man dressed almost like a Buddhist monk, attends to a Japanese lad and me, and shows us up to the small and very basic dormitory. Upstairs, the lad, who has arrived by motorbike, opens up and chats to me in reasonably good English. We take a bath together (like the dormitory, it too is very basic) and then, at six, a group of us, all fellows, have dinner together. This turns out to be a tasty meal and includes some fruit, which is very welcome.

Later I sit down to write my diary. Afterwards I talk to my Japanese companions and then we go to bed at the regulation time of 10 p.m.