

7: From Nara to Kyoto

Up at seven again and down to the dining room for another excellent breakfast. It looks as though it will be a good, sunny day. Hopefully the Buddha has answered my prayer, for yesterday at the Tōdaiji I had thrown a coin into an offering box and lit a stick of incense, in the hope that I would have good luck and better weather today!

I now need to sort out alternative accommodation for this evening, for I am told that the hostel will be full. I telephone the other hostel, but they too are booked up. A French chap in my dormitory was also hoping to stay there tonight. A Japanese lad, together with the help of the warden, kindly makes numerous telephone calls in order to find somewhere cheap to stay. After many unsuccessful attempts and a long wait, the warden rings somebody to confirm a booking and is told that a group will not be coming to stay here this evening. He therefore is able to offer us beds in another dormitory. This turns out to be a lovely Japanese room with *tatami* mats and *futon*. We are both delighted at this opportunity to experience sleeping in the Japanese manner!



Monks' residences in Nara Park

As soon as everything is sorted, I set off immediately and walk briskly, despite the heat, to the park and the Shōsoin. I am disgusted to discover that it is still closed. I ask an official, who confirms that it is not open to the public. Disappointed, I consult my little guide book and walk along a path north of the Tōdaiji and find myself, as the book has described it, in a very beautiful and photogenic area. The pathway is lined by magnificent old houses in which the priests and monks live. Built in the classical Japanese style, they are extremely picturesque.

The winding path eventually leads me back to where I have been yesterday, at the Nigatsudō. I climb up the covered stairway to the veranda and view the scene, now bathed in sunlight. It looks far better than yesterday, though the city is shrouded in mist – just as well, perhaps, for I am discovering that Japanese cities tend to look very ugly from a distance. I take a photograph, look around and go down.



Nigatsudō, Nara Park

I now make my way back to the Tōdaiji, which is swarming with people and students. What I have come to see is the Nandaimon or Great South Gate, which I have missed seeing yesterday. This is a massive wooden structure, originally painted red but now very weathered. It is difficult to examine it properly because of the crowds of people, but I eventually manage to see the two great wooden *niō* (celestial guardians) carved on the inner sides of the structure. They look quite formidable.



Kaidan-in, Tōdaiji, Nara

I leave this crowded area, and, after a little confusion as to which way I should go, I escape to the peace and tranquillity of the nearby Kaidan-in or ordination platform, made in AD 754 and housed in a beautiful building dating from 1731. On the high platform I see clay figures of the Four Heavenly Guardians (*Shitennō*) at the sides, and, in the centre, an elegant shrine containing two small statues. One is of Śākyamuni (the Historical Buddha) and the other is Tahō-Nyorai (Prabhūtaratna or Buddha of Many Treasures). I stay here in the cool building for some time, lost in admiration, then leave for the Kintetsu-Nara train station, passing through some more picturesque narrow streets lined with beautiful old houses. From time to time I catch tantalizing glimpses of tiny but very elegant gardens, some of them containing what look like small pine trees.

Out on the main road I meet an American couple who are trying to make sense of a map. A short distance ahead, a group of Japanese ladies stop me and offer me a colour printed brochure. Some of them attempt to speak English to me, but I cannot make out what they are saying. Another lady steps forward and addresses me in better English. Finally I realize that the others have been asking me if I am a Christian. I guess that these people are members of some new-fangled Japanese sect; when I look inside the brochure, I see pictures of Christ, the Buddha and an Egyptian figure all making the sign of what the ladies tell me is 'power'. I try to escape, but it is impossible to be rude to them. I explain to them that I must go, but they insist that I stay with them, saying, 'Only ten minutes'. Reluctantly I agree.

I am asked to sit down on a bench, facing the sun, and am put through some sort of ritual. I have to bow twice, clap my hands three times, and shut my eyes. They begin to chant something for a minute or two and then there is a long silence. I wonder if I have been left on my own, but when I open my eyes for a split second I see one of the ladies standing in front of me. Somehow I manage to keep my composure for ten long minutes. Then, after they have intoned something, it is all over. Once again, I am asked to bow and clap my hands. When this is finished, the ladies thank me. What all this has been about, or what the ladies have been trying to achieve, I have absolutely no idea, and no explanation is offered. The brochure is returned to me, together with the name of the group and an address. One of the ladies now shows me a photograph of her daughter's foot, which is either horribly deformed or burned – I am not sure which – and, calling her over, shows me the foot, which by now has been cured. Although I am not at all convinced, we part on good terms. It has been a very curious experience, but it is clearly a load of mumbo jumbo. I chuck the brochure and the address into the nearest waste-paper bin, not caring whether they see me doing this or not.

As I walk down the street, I recollect a sentence that I have read in Fosco Maraini's book *Meeting with Japan*, which states that civilizations and beliefs 'always look strange from the outside.'^{*} Before going to China in 1977, I had read a little about Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. While in China, I found myself regarding Christianity in a new light – from a distance – and suddenly realizing that it too looked strange from the outside. At the same time, I realized that the 'exotic' religions I had read about at home were quite normal and of great comfort to the people who had grown up with them in their own countries. It was a turning point for me, and from then on I became more critical of and distanced from the faith in which I had been brought up. Just as a child becomes disillusioned and disappointed on discovering that Santa Claus and everything about him is just a myth, then finally dismisses the whole fabrication, I quietly edged away from Christianity – though I never lost my interest and curiosity in it. Since then I have continued to learn, in a dispassionate manner, about other faiths (including Shintoism) but have never had any inclination to become involved with them.

I finally reach the train station, where I catch the number 60 bus to the Hōryūji, the oldest existing Buddhist temple in Japan, and the number one item on my list of things to see here. It takes forty-five minutes to get there on this bus, which drives through heavily built-up suburbs. The bus itself is fascinating: the name of the following stop is announced over loudspeakers in Japanese, and, if it is of interest to tourists, it is repeated in English. This recorded information is repeated when the bus stops. The entrance to the bus is at the back; a buzzer sounds when the door is opened

^{*} Fosco Maraini, *Meeting with Japan*, p. 132

and the passenger pulls a ticket from a machine that goes ‘ding’. The front door, which is the exit, makes a different sound, and beside it is an electronic display showing the prices for the various stages of the journey. Also at the front an illuminated panel signals passengers’ requests to stop, the indicators and brakes.

All these new-fangled innovations keep me amused for the duration of the otherwise uninteresting journey. At last the anonymous voice announces, ‘Hōryūji Temple’ and I hop off. A middle-aged couple invite me to follow them and so together we walk up a street lined with souvenir shops to the entrance. As it is one o’clock by now and I am hungry, I decide to eat – even though I realize that, as the place is quiet at the moment, I should visit the temple now. I find a cheap restaurant and demolish a big bowl of noodles and fish in soup. I also drink two glasses of iced water as I am so thirsty from the heat.

I leave the restaurant at half past one and make my way to the wonderful old temple. Just as I have feared, I have timed it badly: children are arriving in droves. I have to pay ¥500, but it is worth it. As I have seen many pictures of this famous Temple of Noble Law (Hōryūji), I feel that I am already familiar with it, but this does not stop me from enjoying it in the least. The architecture, Chinese in style, is classical, elegant and refined, and the combination of weathered timber, plaster and stone looks perfectly harmonious. This important temple was founded in AD 607 by Prince Shōtoku Daishi and was rebuilt in AD 708.



Hōryūji temple, Nara

Avoiding the students, I make my way to the western section of the extensive precincts and stop to examine the elegant five-storeyed pagoda of the Asuka period (c. AD 538–710), one of the oldest wooden buildings in the world, and note its *mokoshi* or added roof. Beside it is the Kondō or Golden Hall; dating from AD 623, it is also of the Asuka period and is essentially Chinese in design. In its dark interior are ancient and important statues of the Shaka Trinity, and also others. I am delighted to see these ‘in the flesh’. I manage to get into this hall between groups of students and study the statues at my leisure.

When I eventually emerge, a Japanese man approaches me, and, speaking in Japanese and just a little bit of English, asks me about myself. He obviously is a school teacher, for he calls a student over and gets him to take a photograph of us together.



Five-storeyed pagoda, Hōryūji, Nara

Next, I walk the short distance to the Kōdō or lecture hall. Inside are several large statues, but none of any great importance. Out in the courtyard again, I gaze at the various buildings around me, then walk to the nearby Saiendō (West Rotunda), a small octagonal hall, just west of the courtyard. Having admired it, I head for the east side of the courtyard to visit the Shōryōin (Prince's Chapel), where I remove my shoes and step up to the sanctuary for a few minutes. After a short rest, I come down and visit the Hōzōden (Treasure Museum), where I see the famous Tamamushi or Beetle Wing Shrine in a glass case.



Yumedono, Hōryūji, Nara

I then leave this western part of the complex (the Sai-in) and walk across to the eastern section, the Tō-in. Although this is a small area, it is quite pretty. In the centre is the Yumedono (Hall of Dreams, built in AD 739), said to be the most beautiful octagonal building in Japan. I sit down to admire it for a while, then peer inside, where I discover another important statue of the early Asuka period: the gilded wood statue of Guze or Nyoirin-Kannon (Guanyin). This statue is believed to be a portrait of Prince Shōtoku, who, according to tradition, was appointed regent in AD 593. It appears that this is displayed only at certain times of the year.

Just north of the Yumedono is the Denpōdō or Preaching Hall, originally the residence of Lady Tachibana, a court lady. Just around the corner is the Chūgūji, a noted nunnery containing two valuable treasures. Knowing the importance of this building and its contents, I pay for a ticket and go inside. The treasury is stark and modern, though the rest of the nunnery is small, intimate and very refined.

Removing my sandals, I clamber up to the sanctuary, where I kneel on *tatami* mats and gaze in awe at a small black statue of Nyoirin-Kannon, made during the Asuka period. This famous statue, seated in semi-lotus position, is the picture of serenity. It is flanked by two smaller statues and various objects pertaining to a temple sanctuary. I kneel in silence, lost in admiration.

To my left is a screen containing a scrap of ancient embroidery: the oldest surviving piece in Japan. It is part of a Buddhist *mandala* or sacred picture and it is difficult to make out what exactly it depicts. Knowing that it dates from the seventh century AD, it is easy to see why. Originally it was sixteen feet long.

When I leave shortly after four o'clock, I notice that the nunnery is now closed to the public – this is why I have had the place to myself. Pleased with the day's achievements, though a little dissatisfied that I had not arranged it a little better, I catch the bus back to the city and walk to the hostel.

In the evening I write some of yesterday's diary, enjoy another excellent meal (there is a large number of students here and we are well fed), then after I have written some more, I have my bath. I now learn that we have been moved back into our ordinary dormitory – so no sleeping Japanese style tonight!

I spend the rest of the evening writing. A Japanese boy, who is fascinated by my diary, shows me his: every entry consists of a list of times and locations – nothing else. What an existence, I think, living by the clock! He kindly gives me a present of a beautiful Japanese stamp and a sticker.

When I have finished my diary, I decide to write an airmail letter to my parents, knowing that I will be unable to sleep owing to the noise out in the corridor: the Japanese students are having a party and there is no sign of lights out at 10 o'clock. I finish at about eleven and retire to bed. Fortunately the racket dies down soon afterwards when everyone settles down for a night's sleep.

I am up early this morning and am washed and shaved before everyone else. I have breakfast with the French chap just before 7.30. I am delighted to discover that it is a bright, sunny morning, but I curse the heat when I leave at eight. I walk to the Nara Youth Hostel just up the road – I have booked to stay here this evening. Although the hostel is closed when I arrive, the warden opens the door and takes my luggage and An Ōige hostel card, which is a great relief. The place looks very impressive; it is obvious that the standard here is very high.

I then walk briskly down the main road to the Kintetsu-Nara Station, where I catch the number 52 bus to the Tōshōdaiji, another important Buddhist temple. Today's journey is much shorter than yesterday's, and it only costs ¥180. Soon we are travelling through a rural area, with green fields and houses built in traditional style. I hop off at the appropriate stop, and, following a sign, make my way to the temple, which was founded in AD 759 by a blind Chinese monk who arrived here in AD 753, aged 67. This temple now houses members of the Ritsu sect of Buddhism. It turns out to be a small, elegant complex set in beautiful and peaceful surroundings. The architecture, especially that of the Kondō or main hall, is especially fine. The harmony between the various elements here is perfect: one building with another, the wood with the white plaster, and the stone with the pine trees. As well as the familiar

sounds of birds and insects, I hear the gentle splash of water from a fountain and the *tsukubai*, the place where hands and mouths are ritually rinsed before praying. The setting is perfect and the ancient buildings shine in the bright sunshine. At this hour of the morning – shortly after nine o'clock – there are very few people about and so I more or less have the lovely temple to myself. I amble around the grounds at an easy pace and wander into the exquisite Kondō to view the statues. The building, of moderate size, was built during what is known as the Tempyo era and is reckoned to be the greatest of that period as regards style and harmony. It was also praised in poetry of that period.



Kondō, Tōshōdaiji, Nara

Behind the Kondō is the Kōdō or Lecture Hall, and, within the rest of the complex, many more interesting buildings, including a drum tower. There is also a modern museum, which I decide to skip.



Yakushiji, Nara

After about an hour spent wandering around this delightful temple, I notice that tourists are beginning to arrive, and so I leave and walk to the nearby Yakushiji, another important temple. When I enter, I gasp. So *this* is it: the temple that I have seen in so many pictures and have wanted so much to visit. When I examine the

buildings carefully, I realize how horribly new everything looks; the timber is painted a rather vulgar shade of orange that has not yet weathered. All this is due to the fact that the main hall was rebuilt in the 1970s and the entire temple has been restored. Although pleased to discover that the buildings are now in good order, I am rather disappointed in the overall appearance. At least everything looks impressive from a distance.

The erection of this temple in the seventh century was planned by the Emperor Temmu in order to pray for recovery from illness for his consort, who succeeded him as Empress Jitō. It was believed for a long time that the temple was moved to its present location in AD 718, after the capital was moved to Nara in AD 710, but recent excavations suggest that there may have been two temples of the same name. The area in which the Tōshōdaiji and this temple are at present used to be in the centre of old Nara, a city that was built in imitation of the then capital of China, Chang'an, on a grid of straight streets, running east-west and north-south – similar to the plan of modern Beijing.

Anxious to escape from the heat of the sun, I dive into the shade of the first building, the Kōdō, and examine the statues on view. The large Yakushi Trinity is of rather inferior quality, but it does not stop me from sitting down, resting and regarding it in silence.

I then venture outside once again and make an attempt to view the other buildings, but it is difficult because of the blinding sunshine. I enter the Kondō, where I gaze in admiration at the main treasures: a famous bronze Yakushi Trinity, completed in AD 696, the figures now blackened after a fire in 1528. The base on which the central figure of the Buddha sits is interesting, as its design incorporates foreign influences: Greek, Islamic and Indian, all of which had travelled along the Silk Route. This is the unique aspect of Nara: it is a relic of ancient Chinese civilization that has almost vanished in China, for many of the temples and buildings in modern Xi'an (formerly Chang'an) have crumbled and their contents have been lost or destroyed.

I next make my way to the Tōindō (East Hall), the oldest Zen hall in Japan, where I examine the important and beautiful statue of Shō-Kannon (Guanyin), which may have had Korean origins. However, there is definitely some Indian influence of the Gupta Period (AD 350–650), which came here from Tang dynasty China (AD 618–907). In front of the statue is the usual Buddhist altar, on which offerings of flowers, fresh fruit and, of course, incense are placed. It is satisfying to see people still worshipping such an ancient and valuable statue, rather than peering at it through a glass case in a museum.

I venture outside again, and somehow managing to avoid crowds of students, I snap a couple of photographs. I then realize that I have come to the end of my film and have no more. Although somewhat annoyed by this, I realize that I have seen the most important temples in Nara by now and have taken enough photos. I think about buying a film, but decide against it.

When I am satisfied that I have seen all of the Yakushiji, I leave and foot it to the nearby train station, where I pay just ¥90 to travel to another temple, the Saidaiji. I have learned my lesson: for cheaper travel, go by train – especially by the ones owned by private companies!

The journey to the appropriate station is short; on the street I ask for directions and walk around a corner and up another street. The Saidaiji is a small, quiet and intimate complex, set in peaceful surroundings. The various halls, built in the thirteenth century, look old and elegant. Like most of the visitors, I manage to see the interior

and everything of interest in the Hondō free of charge by just standing at the entrance; the Shitennō or Four Heavenly Guardians inside are rare relics of the Nara period.

I relax here for a while and set off again, in the heat, for the Akishinodera, which is a good walk away through the narrow streets. At last I reach the entrance gate, hot, tired and thirsty. It is delightful to rest in the shade of the trees and draw my breath. I soon recover, buy a ticket and enter the neat little complex. I firstly make my way to the fine Hondō, dating from the Kamakura period, though following the Nara prototype. Inside is the famous and refined Gigeiten image: a dry-lacquer head dating from the Nara period, which has been joined to a body from the later Kamakura period.

I learn that almost all of the original buildings in this temple were burned in 1135, leaving only the Kōdō, which I now examine. I then wander around the grounds and sit on a seat in a sheltered corner to admire my delightfully peaceful surroundings. As in other temples, the exquisite harmony in the proportions of the elegant buildings and their positioning always makes a profound impression on me. Such pleasing places provide welcome oases of peace and much-needed balm against the noise, bustle and ugliness of the outside world.

I finally leave and walk along a main road from this relatively rural part of Nara towards the city centre. I stop at a little restaurant, where I order a rather inadequate meal consisting mostly of vegetables, and watch the man cooking the dish behind the counter. I sit down, eat it and leave. I arrive back at the Saidaiji station, where, after asking directions, I catch the number 12 bus to the Hokkedō, which is not far away.

This temple centres around a building known as the Hokkedō or Lotus Hall, which is affiliated to the Tōdaiji (the temple I have visited the day before yesterday). It is a small but quite beautiful structure. I do not bother to pay in order to look at a famous statue (I see a couple going in and coming out a moment later), but content myself with ambling around the complex and relaxing in the shade.

I then walk the length of Ichijo avenue to the turning for the hostel, stopping briefly to glance through the entrance of the Futaiji temple, which I do not bother to visit. I finally arrive at the smart, modern hostel soon after 4.30 p.m., where I check in, take a bath and sit down to a good meal: two types of soup, chicken with vegetables and rice, and tea. I speak to a pleasant Japanese lad afterwards and then go to my room, where I settle down to write my diary. I discover that I am sharing the room with a chap from New Zealand who has been in the other hostel with me. He very kindly gives me a present of a 50 New Zealand cent coin and some cactus oil to rub on my peeling, sunburnt neck; he tells me that the oil is very effective. We chat for a while before I hit the sack.

Another fine sunny morning. I get up just before 7 a.m., wash, dress and go downstairs for a rather disappointing western-style breakfast, most of which I cannot stomach – especially the stodgy white bread, which tastes very peculiar. I give my fried egg to the husband of a French couple who are sitting beside me. With my head now full of Japanese and Russian, I find it very difficult to switch to French!

I leave at eight o'clock, catch the number 20 bus to the train station, and start my journey to Kyoto. However, I have planned to break it at Uji, where I want to see the famous Byōdō-in temple. The fare is ¥410 – not too bad, considering the distance. It is the same old train again (the one that has brought me here from Kyoto) and it takes ages to get there. It is full of smartly-dressed people and lots of cute little children. The children here are really delightful; yesterday I stumbled across a kindergarden, where I saw children being taught. At the train station in Kamakura a few days ago, I

had seen a group of young boys and girls chanting, ‘*A-ri-ga-to go-za-i-mass*’ and ‘*sa-yō-na-ra*’ (‘thank you’ and ‘goodbye’) to the young lady teacher who was with them.



Byōdō-in, Uji

At last I arrive at Uji, where I hop out, consult a map of the district and walk to the famous Buddhist temple, noted for its great beauty. It is a long trek in the heat, and it is made worse by having to carry all my luggage. At a river I cross the oldest bridge in Japan and finally find the entrance. I buy a ticket, leave my bag at the kiosk and walk in. My initial impression of the temple is disappointment: it looks smaller and darker than expected. However, after a long, hard look from several viewpoints, it grows on me as I discover its finer points. The water in which it is reflected is green and murky, and, because of this, the overall picture is not as dramatic as I have seen in photographs. However, I finally conclude that this is a fine temple. The leaflet I have received explains that the complex was once a villa for a prime minister, whose son had remodelled and converted it into a temple in 1052.

In the grounds beside the lake I meet an elderly Dutch couple who have travelled with me on the Trans-Siberian train, and I stop to talk with them. I then walk around to the entrance of the temple and, as soon as a group of Japanese tourists emerge (their guide has been explaining things to them through a loudhailer), I step into the small central hall, where I examine the most beautiful statue of the Buddha that I have seen yet. This is a three-metre-high lacquered wooden statue of Amitabha carved by a sculptor named Jōchō in 1053. The expression on the face is merciful, the body is well proportioned and, as the leaflet explains, these qualities and the delicate lines of drapery give ‘the impression of perfect unity and harmony’. Around the whole figure is a flame-shaped halo, and, above it, a rare and intricately-carved canopy inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which is regarded as marking the highest pitch of excellence of Fujiwara art.

When I have taken all this in, and another group of people assemble for a guide’s explanation, I leave and amble outside. I admire some of the other fine buildings and finally view the whole from the other side of the small lake. I now fully realize that the place looks super.

京都
Kyō To
(Metropolis Capital)

I finally collect my bag, leave and foot it back to the train station. I have to wait here some time before a train to Kyoto finally appears. Off I go and at last arrive in Kyoto's large station by midday. As the Tourist Information Centre is closed, I try to telephone Dee, an Irish girl who lives here and who, I have been told, may be able to offer me accommodation. However, there is no answer. After several tries, I make my way upstairs to a restaurant for some lunch and choose a big bowl of Chinese noodles (*rāmen*) with a small amount of meat and vegetables added.

Later I try ringing again, but to no avail. I have forgotten that it is Sunday today; I only know this from keeping a diary, as no church bells can be heard in this part of the world. Now I realize why the Tourist Information Centre is closed. For me, at least, it seems that every day of the week is much the same as another. I put my bag into a locker and go off to do some sightseeing. It has been raining a little while ago, but by now it has cleared up. Outside, the sky is grey and it is marginally cooler.

First of all I head for the Higashi-Honganji temple of 1895, which is not far away. It is a huge black complex of little elegance, made of wood, though it is quite impressive. I do not take any photos, but just wander around. Because it is a Sunday, the place is crowded and the more important buildings are not open to the public because of the Buddhist ceremonies. I enter the huge Daishidō and Hondō to see the sanctuaries and watch the people at prayer. Despite the sanctity of these places, children romp around and some adults sleep on the *tatami* mats. The place has a pleasant, informal atmosphere.

I then walk to the Nishi-Honganji temple, which is almost a duplicate of the first. The names are, respectively, The Eastern and The Western Monastery of the Original Vow. In this second temple I do exactly as I have done in the first, for its treasures are also closed to the public today. This is the more important of the two; I will have to come back again.

I leave at four o'clock, when the place is being closed, and, taking a quieter road – the streets here are ugly and noisy – I return to the station, where I use the phone again. As there is still no answer from Dee's house, I retrieve my luggage and ring all the youth hostels here, but every single one is full. I then try some cheap *ryokan* or guest houses, but still I have no luck. By now I am becoming a little desperate. I ring Dee's house again and finally get through. A friend of hers answers and gives me another number, her own house, where Dee is busy doing something. She advises me to ring her in half an hour and tells me that accommodation should be no problem.

Feeling very relieved, I go upstairs again to another restaurant and have an excellent meal – it is quite substantial. I then ring and speak to Dee, who tells me that she can put me up for the night. She tells me that tomorrow will be a bank holiday – which explains why all the hostels are full. She then asks me to take a taxi to the Tobakaido station, where she will meet me. The journey costs ¥670 (£2.68); we meet and she brings me to a charming little Japanese house, complete with *tatami* mats and paper screens, where I am introduced to several English girls and a chap from Mullingar. I learn that they are all living in Kyoto and are teaching English. We drink beer, chat and then sit down to a meal. Although I am quite full and am not expecting this, I am persuaded to take a couple of helpings. Afterwards I am able to enjoy the luxury of a hot bath.

Later, when most of them have gone to bed, Dee and I leave, catch a train and, when we arrive at our destination, go into a nearby bar, where we talk to another Irish fellow and drink more Japanese beer. This goes on a little too long for my liking; by now I am tired and can hardly keep my eyes open. I also do not like the atmosphere of this bar – I feel that it is rather sleazy. At about 1 a.m. we leave, hail a taxi and drive a short distance. A quick walk then brings us to Dee's tiny two-room house. She spreads a *futon* on the floor of her upstairs room for me, beside her own, gives me some blankets, and we prepare for bed. When she gets into the bed on my left, she turns away from me, pulls her clothes off in one deft move, throws them onto the *tatami* mats and we settle down for a very welcome night's sleep.