

# Japan leaves lasting memories

## Food, crowds weren't always appealing, but scenic views made trip worthwhile

The first thing one notices about Japan, and is aware of the whole visit, is that it is a very crowded country. All those people who worried about Japan taking over the world in the 1980s should rest easy. They don't care about world domination, they're too busy trying to move around each other on sidewalks and in buildings.

Because of the lack of space, people will build anywhere. You can see houses built on hills and even mountains that would give coastal Californians the shivers. The houses (or, more likely, apartments) themselves are scarcely roomy. A spacious Japanese apartment would go on the market as an efficiency apartment here, or be used as a small storage space. Bathrooms are roughly the size of broom closets.

In business districts, the shops and stores are built literally out to the narrow streets, with a thin sidewalk separating the two. Small wonder that Tokyo has the highest cost-per-square-foot priced real estate in the world.

And speaking of the streets, they're narrow. So are the highways. And they're so congested as to make rush hour, at 90th and Dodge in Omaha seem like the Indy 500. It took me, one time, six hours to cover the 70 miles to Tokyo from Yokosuka.

Alleyways, homes to dumpsters and the homeless in America, are utilized. Scores of stands and shops line alleys — many of them restaurants.

The restaurants, or more specifically, the food, provide some of the more interesting aspects of the culture. I never developed a taste

for it, unfortunately. Japanese food cooked in Japan is an acquired taste. I knew those who swore up and down that squid was delicious, but I kept remembering "20,000 Leagues Beneath the Sea," with one of those things trying to swallow a sub.

Hearing about all the deaths from eating improperly cooked blowfish didn't do wonders for my appetite, either. If it didn't have eyeballs, it had suckers, both of which I avoided.

And, of course, I had to learn to eat with chopsticks. It's really not as hard as you might believe, although the first couple of times I was reminded of all those pictures of Nixon manhandling a pair in China. It's all in the wrist action.

Lest one be fearful, don't think you have to subsist on sushi your whole stay. There's nothing quite like laying down 300 yen for a Teriyaki Burger at McDonald's.

Perhaps the oddest thing about my whole sojourn in Japan was the fact that most of the time, while outside, I was the only Occidental in a decidedly Oriental environment. It might have been worse, had the people been given to staring, but they were either too polite or too indifferent to notice. If you actually stop and ask questions, practically all the people are very polite and helpful.

You might occasionally get what looks like a peace sign, but the two fingers mean "We owe you two" — cities, that is, namely, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some things die pretty hard. During the Gulf War, when I was there, anti-war protestors staged regular rallies outside the nearby

naval base (and, of course, they were relatively polite, as demonstrations go). It wasn't screaming hordes of fanatics screaming "Death to the Great Satan," but it was a reminder that not everyone out there loves us. Japan also has very little in the way of environmental legislation. The harbors are fairly polluted; I can remember walking along a seawall at night, and kicking gravel into the water. To my amazement, the water fluoresced blue where the gravel hit. Definitely not a swimming hole, yet I saw people fishing there every day. My consumption of Teriyaki burgers increased thereafter.

Two things will stay in my mind forever, though. The first was looking upon the Pacific Ocean from a cliff on a clear day. The surf crashed, the water glistened like a fistful of jewels, the seagulls called to one another. It was only 3,000 miles to California.

The second, and most beautiful, was watching the sunrise on Mount Fuji on a winter's morning, turning the snow cap orange against a violet sky and half moon, wending its way down the slopes. You may have seen the Rockies, or other mountain ranges, but the sight of that lone volcanic cone rising to the heavens burns its way into your memory, as it has the national mind of the Japanese people — small wonder it's one of their most popular images, like our Statue of Liberty.

I didn't get to make the climb up Fuji, though. That will have to wait for my return trip.

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# Comic-book character gets even

## The Spectre gives new meaning to the definition of "superhero"

Over the last few years comic book companies have gone into the past to get new characters. Characters such as Ghost Rider, Shade-The Changing Man, Sandman, Animal Man and others are all old characters that were revamped for the present. A few months ago DC Comics brought back the Spectre, and they have hit a gold mine. This book has all of the elements of a great horror comic; basically, it's pretty damn creepy. "The Spectre" is written by John Ostrander with art by Tom Mandrake.

The Spectre is really James Corrigan, a cop in the 1940s who was killed by the mob. (They put him in a barrel, filled it up with cement and threw him into a river.) Corrigan, however, was allowed to come back as the Spectre, with the condition that he avenge those who cannot avenge themselves. Sounds kind of cheesy right? In theory yes, in practice no.

The Spectre is not one who believes in any kind of mercy. He tortures the guilty before they die. Even after they are dead, they are

not free from the Spectre's wrath. In one issue he pursues a man to hell in order to get some information. The Spectre sees things in two colors: black and white. You are either good or you are evil; there is no in-between. This should create some interesting story lines in the future: a hero who thinks that he can do no wrong, but what if he does.

For that matter, the Spectre cannot even really be called a hero. The character is not from the same vein as a Superman or a Batman. Instead he is the manifestation of the fear that everyone feels when they are walking alone at night, the fear that everyone feels when they are confronted with a situation from which they could receive bodily harm. The only difference is that the Spectre can strike back. And that is where his appeal lies. He can do things all of us can only dream about doing.

"The Spectre" is well worth reading and could turn out to be the sleeper hit of the year. Although the book is not labeled "Mature Read-



courtesy of DC Comics

ers," it contains strong language and situations. Read this book and you'll get a whole new idea of the term revenge.

William J. Harms is an arts and entertainment reporter for the Daily Nebraskan and a Diversions contributor.

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