

N E R V A L ' s D I A R Y

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

*Japan, in the fall of 1996, in the month of October
when the Gods leave their peaks and convene ...*

Kumamoto, October 26–28: Sophrology and Mount Aso

A trip to Kyushu Island introduced me personally to Dr. Akira Matsunaga, his philosophy and work at his Maternity Clinic in this city. Natural painless delivery is what he aims at, not evermore cesarean sections. President of the Japanese Society of Sophrology, we came in touch through the personality of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) and his magnetism. The warm hospitality of a Japanese home surrounded me and literally peaked in a trip atop Mount Aso with the world's largest (25 × 18 km) volcanic crater and its fancy museum.

*Okayama, October 28–30: 4th Meeting of the
German-Japanese Dermatological Society*

The meeting was run by Hiroaki Ueki, head at Kawasaki Medical School in neighboring Kurashiki. The first morning took us to the very impressive Seto Inland Sea Bridge, the world's longest road-rail bridge (I immediately wondered if the Niterof Bridge is not slightly longer and was told it truly is but as a road-only bridge). A technical marvel before a scenic island background. The meeting was delightful and well organized; an encounter with many old friends. The GJSD has about 150 members of which many attended (1 Swiss, 1 Austrian amongst them). Small meetings have their own charm and can be handled more easily in every respect, e.g. with regard to discussions. Spectacular Japanese folklore, an ensemble of drummers and old music adorned the farewell dinner. The next meeting is planned for Marburg, in 1999.

Tokyo, October 31 to November 1: Mozart and Tattoo

Invited by the Matsunagas to a Mozart concert (KV No. 133, 134, 162, 491), performed by the Kanazawa Orchestra, it whisked me off into dreams of nostalgia. The subsequent day brought me to a tattoo master. Knowing the parlors of South-East Asia, I have never made it to a Japanese Master despite more than half a dozen attempts on earlier visits to Japan. It was quite a privilege to be permitted to look over his shoulder for a whole morning and see some of his clients. The History Symposium at the CID in Sidney will feature this subject

also, addressed by an expert and connoisseur in the field. All Saints' Day morning finally, with rain, darkness and mist looming over Tokyo, let me fear the worst for on-time take-offs. But the Japanese handle that. Not only the fabulous Shinkansen is incredibly punctual, also planes are. How often have I complained, to the IAPA in London, to KLM, to Austrian Airlines, because of the intolerable overuse of cellular phones in lounges, preventing even newspaper reading. To no avail. Both lounges in Kansai/Osaka display signs in every nook, asking patrons to walk up to the public phone areas when using their devices. How considerate! I will distribute copies to all the above. More compliments are due for seemingly trivial details, automatic same-day laundry, aquaphor toilets, ecological two-size options for flush, the no-tip mentality. Then came the unpleasant surprise. Leaving Japan proved more time consuming and laborious than leaving any Third-World country. Europe and North America cash airport fees at purchase of the tickets. Not so Japan. After being asked four (!) times to present my passport, I was faced with the need to pay airport tax right before boarding. No prior information at two check-in counters and one transfer counter at Haneda and Kansai was provided. All yen purposely spent, it turned out an arduous task in the overheated airport atmosphere. An unworthy situation for such an orderly country with millions of her citizens roaming the world as tourists.

Relaxing in my 'native' Austrian Airlines seat, immersed in Mozart's melodies again and looking forward to being propelled into Vienna within 11 h plus made me quickly cool off. Precious memories remain, many new impressions and new acquaintances, books, documentary material, a Bizen pottery vase and more. And the elegant traditional teapot of Mme Matsunaga promises hours of delight to eyes, nose and palate.