

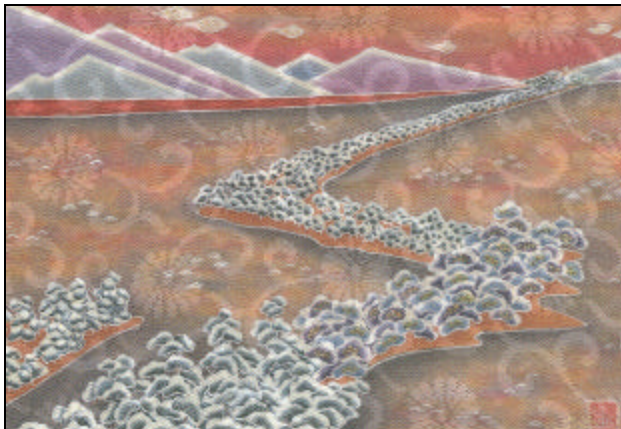
# Heaven Interrupted

By JACKSON SELLERS

It was my fault. In early April we reached the village of Amanohashidate on the Sea of Japan's coast, and we went straight to the upscale Monjuso Shorotei *ryokan* at which Yoshi had secured reservations months before — two days and nights with a clear view of Wakasa Bay and the famous pine-covered “Bridge to Heaven” sandbar. We were greeted by an assistant manager who immediately started jabbering about moving us to a nice place under the same management nearby, not today but the next day. You see, Mr. Sellers, a large group of executives from a major company will be coming in, blah, blah, blah. Sucker that I am, I agreed to the switch, thinking that the second-day accommodations would be as good



or even better than these, since we were doing the *ryokan* a favor. When I saw our Shorotei suite, however, I knew I had made a mistake. As Yoshi fumbled for a sizable gratuity for the maid hovering nearby, I snapped the above photo showing just a portion of the view we would enjoy for only one day now. The corner suite was splendid, marvelously spacious, isolated at the very tip of a mossy pine-studded promontory that jutted into the bay. The promontory is circled in the photo below.



The painting above is actually a silk postcard, too pretty to mail. I brought it home and scanned it for this report. Amanohashidate's piney sandbar stretches three miles across Wakasa Bay to the Tango Peninsula. Somebody tediously counted the pine trees on this sandbar. There are 8,000 of them, minus 193 that a typhoon toppled two years ago.







## *Heaven for a Day*

It's not often that one finds the perfect spot within a Japanese tourist mecca. Always there are compromises. With the crowds, with the location, with the comfort, with the view. I found none at Amanohashidate's Shorotei. Our garden cottage, hidden from the world, looked out on Wakasa Bay and a stretch of the "Bridge to Heaven" sandbar. Of course we were paying for it, \$700 per day, dinner and breakfast included. Not bad in Japan for a once-in-a-lifetime trip to heaven.



# Not Hell Exactly but Close Enough

We made the most of our Monjuso Shorotei cottage while we had it. But it bothered me, nagged me, that I had given it away for our second night in Amanohashidate. No other *ryokan* room in the village could possibly be as charming as this. And I knew I was right when I saw the new place the next day. We did indeed get the best room available there, but it backed up to the canal that connected the Sea of Japan with Wakasa Bay, and I was startled to see huge barges growling past my sliding glass doors just a few yards away. Also, the new *ryokan*, being cheaper if not really cheap, was so crowded that I had to stand naked as a jaybird in the *ofuro* waiting for someone to finish washing himself so I could grab his bucket and stool and soap up at a spigot. I was unhappy and made no secret of it. By god, I wasn't going to pay \$700 for this lousy *ryokan*. Damn! Some Japanese big shot was ensconced where I should be. Yoshi, bless

her, took my irate ball and ran with it, since my Japanese language skills, always polite, were not up to the task. She broached management. A call was made to the big boss. Mr. Sellers was not pleased. Not only that, he is a writer and might write about all this. There might be some bad publicity. Right away my bill for the second night was drastically reduced, and my bar bill was fully excused. Much to my surprise, the big *ryokan* boss paid a personal visit to our room, bowing and then apologizing on his knees, saying it was all a double-booking mistake by his miserable staff. Yoshi, somewhat embarrassed by his groveling, said "Please stand up," and she asked if he could guarantee two full nights in the same Shorotei suite if we returned in a couple of years. "Of course, of course," he replied, still groveling. Yoshi must have laid it on pretty thick as to my importance. I admire her for that, love her for that.

**Excerpted from the journal of Jackson Sellers, April 2006**