



Not Like It Used to Be



Well, nothing is ever as it used to be, so I wasn't really surprised. I could see it coming in late 2004, when I also spent a month in Japan. It was still a smoker's paradise then, but there were signs, little signals that Japan wouldn't put up with public smoking forever. Oh, Japan is still a paradise for smokers. Most restaurants and all bars allow smoking, but you can get fined nowadays for smoking on a Tokyo street, unless you join the puffing clusters at designated curbside spots. Early on my first morning in Japan this time, in Osaka, I got my first hint that things had changed. There was no smoking in the hotel dining room. No big deal. Like most smokers, I approve of smoking bans in restaurants. I ate my scrambled eggs and left the hotel looking for a cup of coffee and a cigarette. At a bakery coffee shop a block away, I was told: "Sure, you can smoke on the third floor." I carried my cup up two flights of stairs, past a

few healthy sissies, and joined the smoking crowd on the top floor. More than 50% of Japanese men smoke, women considerably less than that. All Japanese bullet trains have smoking cars, with the recent single exception of the fast Nagano Prefecture train that took us from Tokyo to Karuizawa. Another hint? Probably. Unfiltered Peace cigarettes in a can, above left, are available only in tobacco shops, but packs of domestic and foreign cigarettes are sold from street vending machines on almost every block. I shot a picture of one vending machine, above right, because it offered four varieties of American Spirit, the favorite brand of a friend of mine. On each pack, in polite Japanese, is the world's weakest warning label: "Please remember to follow good smoking manners. Since smoking might injure your health, be careful not to overdo it."

Jackson Sellers, April 2006



No Smoking, but If You Must...

We were touring a museum in the small town of Ako on Japan's Inland Sea. The museum was devoted to Ako's only claims to fame — salt-making and loyal *samurai*. I was interested in both, but Yoshi, bored, went looking for a place to smoke. Later I found her sitting at the damnedest contraption I'd ever seen. It was a smoking table with ashtrays at all four corners. It hummed as it vacuumed cigarette fumes from the museum smoking area. Ain't technology great?