



Photo by Jackson Sellers, Enhancements by Bart Everett

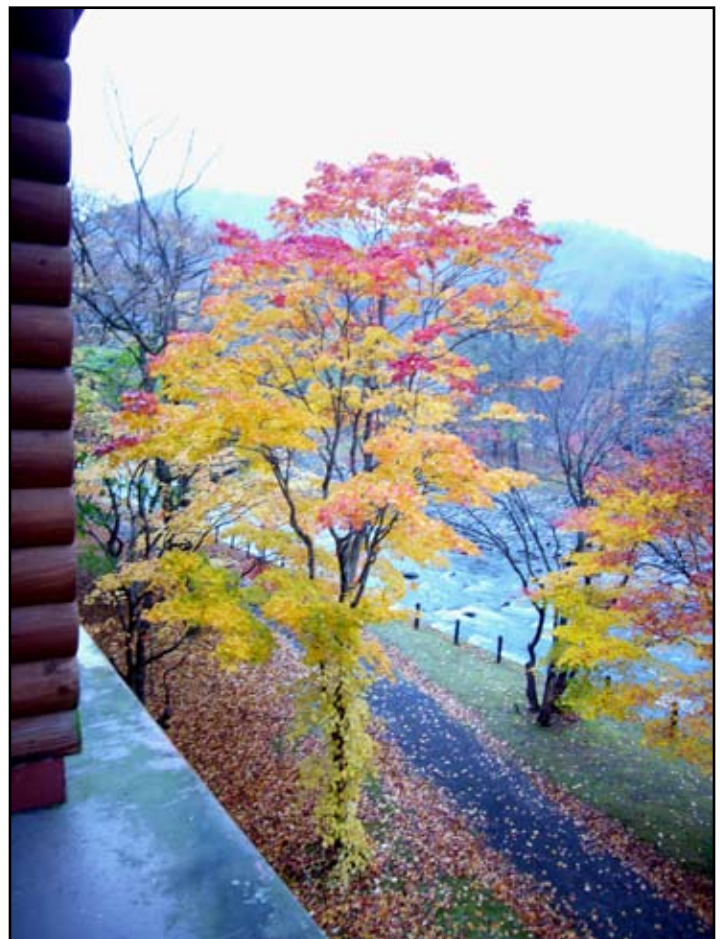
Window Views by JACKSON SELLERS, Autumn, 2007

Three whole weeks were spent in the rural Tohoku region of Honshu's "Deep North," far from civilization. If I sound a bit grouchy, it's because of the traditional Japanese minimalist accommodations – woven-reed *tatami* flooring that never gets a shoe scuff, low tables that pain a Westerner's legs and lower back, *futon* bedding that is put out only at night on the assumption that it's never needed in the daytime when an old guy like me may want to take a nap. But don't get me wrong. There's a mysterious something here that appeals to me. Maybe, after all these decades, this Kentuckian has become part Japanese, somewhat accustomed to the ways of Japanese. In the photo above, taken just after check-in at a Matsushima *ryokan*, Yoshi relaxes with a cigarette and gazes out at a few of the 250 pine-topped islets that dot the huge bay. I like the looks of everything here – the *tokonoma* with its hanging scroll, the glass-encased Japanese

doll, the green cotton *yukata* kimonos and sashes laid out for us, to be donned when we decide to traipse off to the bathing pools. The all-Japanese food, both dinner and breakfast, is included in the outrageous room fees, so I'm sort of stuck with in-house meals, no matter how much I'd like to go out and find a McDonald's, assuming there were any to be found. Oh, the food is all right, beautiful in its presentation actually. I like slices of raw fish as a dinner appetizer – *sashimi* it's called – but I can't face little marinated fishes, head and all, for breakfast. Only rarely can I get what I really want, fried eggs and buttered toast, in the mornings. Coffee? Forget it. You are in tea country. But I'm not stupid. I bring my own instant coffee in a little jar that's easy to tote around. Matsushima on Japan's northeastern Pacific coast was a prime destination for us this time. Neither of us had ever been there, and it's famous as one of the three grand seashore views in Japan. We had



seen the other *Nihon Sankei* sites – Amanohashidate just last year on the Sea of Japan coast, and Miyojima near Hiroshima while on our honeymoon more than 40 years ago – but never Matsushima, which offers succulent oysters, a treat for both of us. For whatever reason, perhaps laziness, I like to photograph the views from the windows at the hotels where we are staying. Above, from the Akita Prefecture side of Lake Towada, I waited one morning until the sun had risen just enough, then snapped the photo. Another minute and it would have been too late. The sun itself would have blinded my camera. At right, I captured an image of colorful maple trees alongside the rushing Oirase River in Aomori Prefecture. We were staying at a lodge that I hated. My attitude somewhat annoyed Yoshi, since she had made the reservations. Well, again, it was all right, but I had two reasons for my hatred. One, the hotel had several really nice bars, but all of them were closed until there were sufficient hotel guests to open them. Two, the toilet in our room was equipped with a “warmlet,” not the “washlet” that gives full service for a daily human requirement. We had to leave the room and go down the hall to a public toilet if we wanted full service. Oh, well, it was





the only time in our 35-day vacation when we were inconvenienced in that way. In Fukushima Prefecture, we stayed at the Mukaitaki *ryokan*, an official Japanese cultural treasure that can't be modernized all that much. Only one of its several *ofuro* facilities had water spigots for washing your body before slipping into the hot pool for soaking. In the others, you had to dip wash water from the pools, just like a couple of hundred

years ago. The woodwork in our main room, above left, was exquisite. Beyond the decorated sliding doors was a second room, which came in handy. The alcove sitting room, above right, was charming, furnished in a manner that suggested the Taisho era of 90 years ago. I shot a photo from there. Below is the view we enjoyed for three days. The Mukaitaki sits in a canyon between wooded hills that can hardly be climbed.

