

# The Dozo Chronicles

2-6 January 2004



Denboin, a five tiered pagoda adjacent to Senso-ji temple.

Following a visit to San Francisco for Christmas and New Years, I stopped off in Tokyo on my way back to Bangkok. A bit of work and a bit of fun; I participated in the drafting of a project proposal for a Japanese firm that I've been associate with for the past couple of years, and I got together with friends.

I stayed in the Asakusa district of Tokyo. The center of Asakusa is Senso-ji temple, otherwise known as Kannon-sama (the Goddess of Mercy). It's one of the major sights to see in Tokyo, drawing both Japanese and foreign tourists. Being New year, there was a carnivalesque atmosphere surrounding the temple.

Senso-ji is the oldest temple in Tokyo. The story goes that "in 628 AD, two brothers, fishing downstream of the present day Sumida River, found a statue of a Buddhist saint, and built a small temple to worship it, and that was the origin of Senso-ji." In 1945, most of the buildings were burned out from war damage.



Street to Senso-ji temple crowded with tourists.



The main gate to the Senso-ji temple (above) was originally erected in 942 AD; the present structure is a reconstruction built in 1960. From the center of the gate hangs a huge red paper lantern.

I spent one morning wandering around Ueno–koen Park, three subway stops from where I was staying in Asakusa. Ueno–koen park is a carefully landscaped park dotted with museums, temples and a zoo.

Attractions inside the park include the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Tokyo National Museum, the National Science Museum, the National Museum of Western Art, the Tokyo Metropolitan Festival Hall and the Ueno–no–Mori Art Museum.

One of the most frequently and fervently patronised temples in Ueno–koen park is the Kiyomizu Kannon–do temple. Women wishing to conceive leave a doll here for the 1,000–armed goddess Senju Kannon; after the dolls are burnt in an annual bonfire on 25 September, the women wait to see if Kannon has granted them the gift of fertility. Given the fact that Japan has negative population growth, either this doesn't work, or not enough women visit the temple.



Attendants at the Kiyomizun Kannon-do temple (above and below). Street-entertainment; a juggler in Ueno-koen park (below left).



# Shinjuku Angles

The Shinjuku district is, without doubt, the most vigorous part of Tokyo; two million people per day pass through Shinjuku subway station alone. Shinjuku's architecture is dominated by skyscrapers — “monoliths of the square angle and the uncompromising materials stone, steel and glass”.(Stefan Stenudd)

