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Wanted!!!

Writers and artists to
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for upcoming issues of
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Retreat from Suburbia at Shōmyōji



The reflection of the red bridge arch wavers in the ducks' wakes as they swim squabbling towards me. Across the pond a trio of roofs signal the long history of Shōmyōji: the tiled Kondo, the thatched Shakado and the green copper of the bell tower. Shady benches provide comfortable places to sit and contemplate the temple's pond, garden and surrounding hills.

Shōmyōji is a twelve-minute walk along a narrow suburban road from Kanazawa-Bunko station on the Keikyu Line. A red gate marks the start of the temple approach. A teahouse and a couple of noodle shops stand beside the flagged road leading to the Niomon inner gate. Despite being protected from pigeons by netting, the two guardian figures remain imposing defenders of the temple. They are said to be the largest in Eastern Japan.

Shōmyōji was founded in 1267 by Hojo Sanetoki when Kanazawa was an important port serving Kamakura. Under the Hojo family it flourished until the decline of the Kamakura period from 1333. A library was

established here and consequently the temple became an important academic center in mediaeval Japan. Some of the documents from the library and treasures from Shōmyōji can still be seen today in the Kanazawa-Bunko Museum, reached from the temple through a short tunnel.

The quiet atmosphere of an old library pervades the hills surrounding the temple. Following paths up and down I come across several groups of lichen-encrusted stone tablets. The hill top of the eight sided hall (Hakkakudō hiroba) has a panoramic view of the nearby coast and the Yokohama skyline. Benches and picnic tables on the hilltop are an invitation to return here with friends. Descending down a gentle path through a cherry grove, the only people I meet on my walk are three elderly local women taking an afternoon stroll in the warm sunshine and a woman calling to her wayward dog across a small meadow.

The garden and its pond at Shōmyōji are said to have been designed to express the Buddhist Pureland Paradise.

For me this tranquil oasis in the midst of Yokohama's bustling suburban life is a little bit of paradise easily reached on earth.

A map in Japanese showing access to Shōmyōji from both Keikyu Kanazawabunko and the Seaside line (Uminokoen shiba guchi and Uminokoen minamiguchi stations) can be obtained from the city information office just outside the east exit of Kanazawa Bunko station.

For more information about Shōmyōji see the following websites:

<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~QM9T-KN DU/shomyoji.htm>

<http://www.hikyaku.com/gallery/english/shomyo.html>

<http://www.xs4all.nl/~daikoku/junrei/rei jo/43-ban.htm>

<http://www.welcome.city.yokohama.jp/eng/tourism/courses/1020.html>

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