



## *Yu-Yu Jiteki*

A very informal little club was created in America about a year ago. Its four members are senior citizens, and its Japanese name, “Yu-Yu Jiteki,” defines a philosophy of life to which all four aspire. The whole thing started when *Los Angeles Times* writing coach Jim Hayes of Los Osos, Calif., sought my help in finding just the right Japanese word or words for the way of life we envisioned. Yoshi had little to contribute on the matter, so I turned to my old friend Masataka Usami, who lives nearby in California’s Saddleback Valley. Masa came up with *Yu-Yu Jiteki*, which suggests someone who has gotten beyond worldly concerns and conducts his life with quiet dignity. Phil Jordan of

Pennsylvania, once my boss at *The Times*, quickly joined the club. So perhaps you can imagine my surprise last month when I checked into Nagano Prefecture’s Kashiwaya *ryokan* and found that its bathing pools were named “Yu-Yu Jiteki Hot Springs.” The inn’s employees were amused that a foreigner would take so much interest in the name of their spa. Above, in a photo taken while I, *yukata*-clad, was on my way to grab a hot bath, I paused to gesture at the *Yu-Yu Jiteki* sign. Incidentally, it helps if you can read a bit of Japanese when staying at a remote inn such as this. The little sign behind me says “Gentlemen.” One saying “Ladies” is around the corner. I confess that I

have made the mistake several times since I started vacationing in Japan five years ago. Typically, Japanese inns switch the bathing facilities once a day, so that men and women can enjoy different accommodations and garden views while bathing. If you are not paying attention, you may absentmindedly enter the spa where you bathed before, and find yourself confronted by the opposite sex in various stages of undress, often completely undressed. When that happens to me, I stumble back with profuse apologies, and the smiling naked ladies invariably say, "No reason to apologize." It probably helps that I am just a dumb *gaijin*, always the only foreigner staying at the inn. I am expected to be ignorant, and that gives me some leeway when I make a cultural mistake.

Below, I check the temperature at one of the *Yu-Yu Jiteki* bathing pools. Hot mineral water from a natural spring flows into it. No reheating is required. If anything, the water needs cooling to satisfy most Americans, but the only option, when you step in, is to position yourself as far as possible from the spot where the hot water flows in. Even so, you may want to sit down slowly, inch by inch until the water is up to your neck. *Ahhhh*. This wooden pool and its surrounding walls are made of Japanese cypress, which is virtually impervious to water. The pool may look primitive to you. Indeed, most *ryokan* pools are tiled nowadays in a bow to modernity, but I enjoy the old-fashioned kind, as do most Japanese. *Yu-Yu Jiteki*, for as long as I live and can stand the heat.



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