

Guide Excerpt: Travel Kyoto

Japan's Cultural Capital at a Glance

Kyoto reigned as the imperial capital of Japan for over a thousand years. Founded in 794 AD, Kyoto, meaning “western capital,” was built to replicate China’s grandest cities of the age. Step back in time on stone streets lined with 11th century wooden townhouses and see white-faced geisha in colorful kimonos beside centuries old temples. Kyoto is striking in all seasons, its quiet snow-covered Golden Pavilion, cherry blossom lined Path of Philosophy, and vibrant red maples at Kiyomizu-dera. Spared from the destruction of World War II, Kyoto preserves the beauty and prosperity of Japan’s past.

Explore Ancient Temples, Shrines, and Castles

With over 1000 temples, 400 shrines, and 50 gardens, the sights of Kyoto transport visitors back to the time of ancient Japan. Kiyomizu-dera Temple sits partway up Otowa Mountain. This 1200 year old temple offers breathtaking views of Kyoto and the surrounding mountains, making it one of Kyoto’s most popular sights. The shrine of a thousand red gates, Fushimi Inari Taisha, is Kyoto’s most revered Shinto Shrine. The red-orange torii gates wind up Inari Mountain for 2.5 miles. In the center of Kyoto, Nijo Castle, built by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, and the graceful Imperial Palace, home to Japan’s emperors for a thousand years, are masterpieces of Japan’s feuding ruling class.

Enjoy Kyoto’s Exquisite Cuisine

Kyoto cuisine is modern yet traditional, decadent and simple. Kyoto’s renown for beauty extends to the appearance of its dishes, making Kyoto’s cuisine as visually pleasing as it is delicious. *Kyo-ryori* (Kyoto cuisine) is the most sophisticated and elegant of all Japanese food and is prepared with an emphasis on creating artistic dishes in the theme of the current season. *Kyo-ryori* includes *yusoku* (Imperial court food), *kaiseki* (multicourse dinner meant to accompany a tea ceremony), *shojin ryori* (Buddhist monk cuisine), and *obanzai* (traditional homestyle cooking). Sit among peaceful gardens on tatami mat floors and sample the subtle flavors of Kyoto’s edible works of art inside the temples and thatched roof restaurants of the city.

The Japan of Geisha and Zen Gardens

Kyoto flourished for a thousand years as the capital of Japan and remains the cultural heart of the country. The city embodies the many eras of traditional Japan, a place where Buddhist temples coexist with Shinto shrines and graceful geisha still perform. In Kyoto, Japanese

hospitality and courteousness exceed even that of other regions. The people and the city share a refined elegance. The classical Japanese arts of Kabuki Theater, Noh, and *chado* (Japanese tea ceremony) continue to be honored traditions. The Japanese are both proud of and fascinated by Kyoto's mesmerizing architecture and subtle landscapes, which have influenced design throughout the world.

Tour Kyoto's Traditional Markets and Shops

Kyoto is brimming with old world shops hidden down narrow streets and centuries-old markets found inside temple gates. Kobo-san and Tenjin-san, the two largest outdoor markets in Kyoto, are excellent spots to shop for antiques and kimonos and sample Japanese street food. Because the markets are only held once a month, they are crowded and lively, but great for people watching. The largest food market in Kyoto, Nishiki Market, often called "Kyoto's pantry," is over 400 years old and still supplies most of the restaurants in the city. Along Shijo-dori popular Japanese department stores, like Takashimaya and Mauri, tower above nearby shops. Across the Kamo River near Yasaka Shrine, small clothing and specialty food boutiques cater to tourists.