

BEYOND THE TORII GATES

A Journey Through Japan's Timeless Heart

From golden pavilions to hidden alleys – exploring the must-see wonders of Kyoto.

Kyoto is a city where the past and present exist in seamless harmony. Once the imperial capital of Japan, it remains the cultural heart of the country, brimming with ancient temples, serene gardens, and traditions that have withstood the test of time. From the iconic golden glow of Kinkaku-ji to the mesmerising torii tunnels of Fushimi Inari, Kyoto's attractions are as diverse as they are breathtaking. But beyond the famed landmarks, the city also boasts hidden treasures – quiet temples, traditional tea houses, and vibrant districts where history lingers in every wooden facade. Whether you're a first-time visitor or

a seasoned traveller, Kyoto's ability to surprise and enchant is endless.

KYOTO'S MOST DAZZLING LANDMARK

No visit to Kyoto is complete without witnessing the sheer splendour of Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion. This Zen temple, its top two stories covered entirely in gold leaf, shimmers against the backdrop of a tranquil pond and meticulously landscaped gardens. Originally a retirement villa for shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, it became a temple after his death in 1408. Today, its reflection in the still waters of Kyokochi (Mirror Pond) remains one of the most photographed sights in Japan.







Despite the crowds, Kinkaku-ji's beauty is undeniable – a symbol of Kyoto's enduring elegance.

THE ENDLESS TORII GATES

Few sights are as hypnotic as the vermillion torii gates of Fushimi Inari Taisha, snaking their way up Mount Inari in a seemingly endless procession. Dedicated to Inari, the Shinto god of rice and prosperity, this shrine complex is one of the most significant in Japan. The thousands of torii gates, each donated by individuals and businesses, create an ethereal pathway leading into the forested hills. While the lower sections teem with tourists, those who venture further up the mountain are rewarded with quiet moments of reflection and panoramic views of Kyoto.

KIYOMIZU-DERA: THE TEMPLE OF PURE WATER

Perched on the hillside of eastern Kyoto, Kiyomizu-dera is as famous for its sweeping views as it is for its historic significance. Founded in 778, its main hall extends over a massive wooden stage, built without the use of nails, offering breathtaking vistas of the city below. The temple's name, meaning "Pure Water Temple," originates from the Otowa Waterfall, whose sacred waters are said to grant wisdom, longevity, or success in love, depending on which stream one chooses to drink from. Visiting in autumn, when the surrounding maple trees explode into fiery reds and oranges, is a truly unforgettable experience.



THE BAMBOO FOREST OF ARASHIYAMA

Step into a dreamlike world as you wander through the bamboo groves of Arashiyama. Towering stalks of bamboo sway gently in the wind, creating an otherworldly atmosphere as dappled sunlight filters through. The area on the western outskirts of Kyoto is home to the Iwatayama Monkey Park, where wild Japanese macaques roam freely, and the historic Togetsukyo Bridge, offering a postcard-perfect view of the Katsura River. A rickshaw ride through the bamboo forest and a visit to the nearby Tenryu-ji Temple completes the quintessential Arashiyama experience.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PATH

Lined with cherry trees, the Philosopher's Path is one of Kyoto's most picturesque strolls, tracing a quiet canal from Ginkaku-ji to Nanzen-ji. The name pays homage to Nishida Kitaro, a famed Japanese philosopher who found inspiration in these tranquil surroundings. During spring, the path is awash with pink cherry blossoms, while in autumn, golden leaves create a serene setting. Along the way, small shrines, artisan shops, and quaint cafés invite travellers to slow down and savour Kyoto's understated beauty.

GION: THE GEISHA DISTRICT

Kyoto's most famous entertainment district, Gion, remains the heartbeat of traditional Japanese culture. This is the city's geisha quarter, where lantern-lit alleys and historic teahouses (ochaya) transport visitors into a bygone era. In the evening, kimono-clad geiko (Kyoto's term for geisha) and their apprentice maiko can sometimes be seen gliding



between appointments, embodying a centuries-old art form. The district is also home to Yasaka Shrine, a key site for Kyoto's summer Gion Matsuri, one of Japan's most celebrated festivals. For a truly immersive experience, book a kaiseki dinner at an exclusive teahouse or enjoy a performance at Gion Corner, where traditional arts like tea ceremony and kabuki theatre come to life.

KYOTO'S CULINARY DELIGHTS

Beyond its temples and shrines, Kyoto

is a paradise for food lovers. The city is the birthplace of kaiseki, Japan's most refined multi-course cuisine, where every dish is a work of art, often served in atmospheric ryotei (traditional restaurants). For a more casual experience, the bustling Nishiki Market is a sensory delight, offering Kyoto specialties like yuba (tofu skin), yatsushashi (cinnamon rice crackers), and skewered seafood grilled to perfection.

A visit to Uji, just outside Kyoto, is a must for matcha enthusiasts. This region produces Japan's finest green tea,

and sipping a freshly whisked bowl of matcha at a centuries-old teahouse is an experience like no other.

KYOTO'S HIDDEN GEMS

While the city's major attractions deserve their fame, Kyoto's lesser-known spots offer equally rewarding experiences. The moss-covered beauty of Saiho-ji (Kokedera), accessible only by advance reservation, feels like stepping into a Zen fairytale. The quiet alleys of Kamishichiken, Kyoto's oldest geisha district, reveal a side



Bamboo Forest of Arashiyama (by Atsushi Tsubokura)



Torii Gates (by Jezael Melgoza)

of the city untouched by mass tourism. And in the backstreets of Higashiyama, tiny tea houses and traditional craft shops preserve Kyoto's living history in the most unassuming corners.

THE TIMELESS ALLURE OF KYOTO

Kyoto captivates the senses – a place where every turn reveals a new layer of history, beauty, and tradition. Whether you marvel at the golden brilliance of Kinkaku-ji, walk through the whispering bamboo of Arashiyama, or catch a

fleeting glimpse of a geisha in Gion, the city offers moments of wonder that linger long after departure. Kyoto is not just a destination; it is an experience, a journey through Japan's soul that leaves an indelible mark on those who seek it. ①

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