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P. 69



TEN MUST-SEE
JAPANESE SUMMER
FESTIVALS
by Ai Faithy Perez

A \$1,000 DAY IN
TOKYO FOR \$100
by Lucas Peterson

KYOTO: 10 THINGS
TO DO
by Rob Goss

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FEATURES

08 Ten Must-See Japanese Summer Festivals

It's the season of taiko sounds, late night food stalls, yukata and goldfish games: yes, it's matsuri time! Summer in Japan brings a number of creative things to help you beat the heat.

Ai Faithy Perez

14 Kyoto: Ten Things To Do

Japan's capital for over 1,000 years, Kyoto remains awash with remnants of its past glory. The city's stunning collection of UNESCO World Heritage sites alone would be enough to set it apart, but Kyoto also boasts a still-working geisha district, and some of Japan's most exquisite cuisine.

Rob Goss

50 A \$1000 Day In Tokyo For \$100

I walked out of Tokyo Station, the big commuter hub in the city's Chiyoda district, and turned to look up at its gorgeous brick facade. I was lost. I couldn't find the Tokyo Station Hotel — a well-reviewed luxury property that was renovated in 2012.

Lucas Peterson

80 36 Hours In Osaka, Japan

Tourists from other Asian countries have it figured out: Osaka is the new place to be in Japan. The city's visitor statistics are soaring, yet most Americans still bypass Osaka in favor of Kyoto and the guidebook sights of Nara. What are they missing?

Ingrid K Williams

DEPARTMENTS

04 Matsuri Time Food

Different festivals in Japan are held every year.

Yuri Tanaka

06 Travel Necessities - What To Bring To Japan

What to pack? A big question before any trip.

Inh Duong

22 The Best Ramen In Tokyo

Where do you find the ultimate ramen?

Kate Krader

24 The Secret World Of The Geisha

The world of the Japanese geisha is shrouded in myth, mystery, and misconception.

Violet Cloutman

36 Van Gogh's Long Distance Love Affair

Van Gogh (1853-1890) never went to Japan, though he idealized it briefly as a utopia in which artists worked communally in converse with nature.

Matthew Larking

44 Should You Drink Matcha Tea?

While green tea has long been a recommended part of a healthy diet, another brighter shade is becoming increasingly popular: matcha.

Alexandra Sifferlin

58 Handmade In Tōhoku: Traditional crafts of Northern Japan

Japan's 'deep north', the largely rural Tōhoku region is home to craft traditions that have been handed down over generations.

Manami Okazaki

65 Eating Out In Japanese: A Guide to Japan's Restaurants

The Japanese love to eat out, and the profusion of culinary options, even in the smallest towns, can be overwhelming.

wLonely Planet

75 Okinawa: Secrets for a Long and Happy Life

Japan's sunny southern islands see a remarkable number of 100th birthdays.

Rory Goulding

86 Tokyo's Sumo Scene: Tradition, Tournaments and Hearty Hot-pots

Sumo is an ancient, disciplined sport. But best of all, it's seriously fun.

Wendy Yanagihana

Matsuri Time Food

ALL OF THE DELICIOUS FOODS YOU NEED TO TRY AT THE JAPANESE SUMMER FESTIVALS. BY YURI TANAKA



Left: Japanese cotton candy, called Watame, is often enjoyed in the summer by festival goers looking for something sweet and light.

Different festivals in Japan are held every year and one of those festivals that the Japanese people, especially the youngsters look forward to is the Summer Festival. One of the reasons why the locals and tourists anticipate the summer festival is because they get to enjoy pretty fireworks, food carts, and stalls together with their friends and loved ones. Although it is true that the food you can usually buy in a summer festival can be easily done at home, it still feels a whole lot different and even tastes better when you get to eat them with the festive atmosphere of a Japanese summer festival. Now if you are troubled on what to eat on your first encounter with a Japanese summer festival, then let this list serve as a guide for you on what to try on the anticipated event!

Takoyaki - Octopus balls

Takoyaki (“tako” which means octopus) is a popular street food in Japan made of wheat flour-based batter filled with

diced octopus. The said snack originated from Osaka, but is now seen and sold in almost any part of Japan especially during festivities, special occasions, and gatherings.

Yakisoba - Fried Japanese noodles

Yakisoba is a type of fried Japanese noodles commonly seen sold in food carts in festivals like the summer festival. Although “yakisoba” includes the words “yaki” (which means fried), and “soba” (Japanese buckwheat noodles), yakisoba noodles are made of wheat flour.

Yakisoba is seasoned with a rich and thick sauce similar to oyster sauce. Additional flavor is also attained by adding some meat or vegetables.

Kakiko-ri - Shaved ice

Kakiko-ri is a cold dessert in Japan which is commonly seen especially during the summer season. It is basically shaved ice mixed with fruity flavors of syrup and condensed milk. Some of the most common flavors of shaved ice include



strawberry, melon, lemon, blue Hawaii, cola, mango, orange, rainbow, coffee, etc.

Okonomiyaki - Japanese savory pancake

Okonomiyaki is another type of Japanese food commonly found in summer festivals. It is called Japanese savory pancake by some tourists because it resembles one, and is made of wheat flour batter and cabbage fried on a large flat pan. Okonomiyaki is given the additional flavor by adding in some meat or seafood or cheese, and is topped with okonomiyaki sauce, katsuboshi (fish flakes), Japanese mayonnaise, and dried seaweed.

Okonomiyaki is found all over Japan but you might encounter two particular types: Hiroshima-style and the Osaka-style okonomiyaki whose recipe originated from the two cities respectively.

Choco Banana - Frozen coated banana

Choco banana is frozen banana coated in chocolate and is sprinkled with sweet confectionery such as multi-colored sprinkles or nuts. Although

it is called chocolate banana, it is also dipped in other kinds of melted chocolate such as white chocolate, strawberry chocolate, and all sorts of chocolate variants. It is served in sticks on food carts.

Wataame - Cotton candy

Wataame, or is also called as “watagashi” by some locals is flavored cotton candy. It is a kind of flossy sugar spun in sticks which melts in your mouth. It comes in different colors and flavors and is famous in festivals and carnivals.

Ringo Ame - Candied apples

Ringo Ame (Ringo, meaning “apple”, and ame meaning “candy”), is a type of Japanese confectionery snack often seen during festivals. It is apple dipped in melted toffee or sugar mixed with corn syrup, cinnamon, water, and red food coloring. It is sold and is put on sticks.

Yakitori - Grilled chicken skewers

Yakitori (yaki, meaning “grilled,” and tori, meaning “bird”), are grilled bite-size chicken parts put on wooden sticks and seasoned with savory sauce.



Top, clockwise starting from left: Okonomiyaki is a wheat flour pancake with various toppings put on it. Kakiko-ri is Japanese shaved ice, good for hot evenings. Takoyaki is fried octopus ball.

Yakitori is available as grilled chicken thighs, chicken meatballs, chicken skin, chicken wings, chicken tail, and even internal chicken organs.

Crepe - Very thin pancakes

Crepe is a very famous dessert in Japan and are sold in restaurants and cafes in different variants. Crepes are very thin layers of pancakes topped with a wide selection of toppings from fruits, ice cream, syrups, cream, and more.

Ikayaki - Grilled squid

Ikayaki (ika meaning “squid”, and yaki meaning “grilled”) is another type of grilled skewered food seen in Japanese festivals.

It is usually seasoned with soy sauce and is served as horizontally cut squid rings, and comes with a few squid tentacles at times.

Festivals and special occasions such as the summer festival will never be complete without the festive atmosphere brought about by the cheerful people.

Photos left and right courtesy of Pixabay and Wikipedia Commons.

Tokyo's Sumo Scene

TRADITION, TOURNAMENTS AND HEARTY HOT-POTS

BY WENDY YANAGIHARA



Left: The Sumo wrestler throws salt to purify the ring. This is a tradition that goes back more than one thousand years.

Sumo is an ancient, disciplined sport. But best of all, it's seriously fun. The rules are simple: the rikishi (wrestler) who gets the other outside the ring, wins – but there's so much more going on. Don't miss the chance to see it live if you're in Tokyo at tournament time.

Spiritual Origins

Sumo is thought to have originated about 2000 years ago, but only became a popular sporting event in its own right in the 17th century. The wrestling matches that were precursors to sumo made up a part of Shintō ritual prayers for good harvests.

Sumo's whole visual vocabulary is infused with Shintō motifs and ideas. There's a roof suspended over the dōyō (wrestling ring) that resembles a Shintō shrine. At the beginning of each match, the victor of the last match offers a wooden ladle full of water to the next wrestler before entering the ring, for the incoming competitor to perform a symbolic cleansing of the mouth and body. And before entering the ring, each rikishi takes a handful of coarse salt to scatter into the ring to purify it.

In The Ring

Once in the dōyō, the two wrestlers square off, squatting at opposite ends of the ring. Facing each other, they outstretch their arms to the sides, palms raised, to show their intentions for a fair fight. They both saunter to the center of the ring, slapping thighs and bellies, with intimidating stares, and then retreat. This charged spectacle is repeated several times until the two opponents settle into a squat for the final stare-down.

Then, suddenly, they charge at each other. It's exciting – and more often than not over in less than a minute. To the uninitiated, it might not look like much happened, but the winning rikishi will have executed one of several official kimarite (winning moves), such as oshidashi (pushing one's opponent in the chest) or yorikiri (lifting one's opponent by his mawashi, loin cloth). Size matters in sumo, but scrappy smaller wrestlers can pull off



a win by using his opponent's weight against him. (There are illegal moves, too, like top-knot pulling).

See A Tokyo Sumo Bout

The action during the Tokyo tournaments, or bashō, takes place at the green-roofed Ryōgoku Kokugikan from mid- to late January, mid- to late May and early to mid-September. Although the best ringside seats are bought up by those with the right connections, box seats (from around ¥10,000/US\$90 per person) accommodating up to four people are a great way to watch sumo in traditional style. These are sectioned-off seating areas where guests sit on cushions on the (raised) floor. Attendees in box seats can order food and tea from servers dressed smartly in happi (half-coats) and straw sandals.

Cheaper tickets are available for standard arena seats and the cheapest option is a same-day general admission ticket (¥2200/US\$20). For the latter option you'll have to get there early as keen punters start

queuing the night before. Only one ticket is sold per person to foil scalpers.

When a tournament isn't in session, you can enjoy the neighboring Sumo Museum with its portraits of past yokozuna (champion wrestlers) and video footage. During tournaments the museum is open only to those attending the tournament; otherwise it's free to enter.

Watch Sumo Practice

If you're in Tokyo outside of tournament season, swing by a heya (wrestling stable) to watch an early morning practice. This is arguably more fascinating, as you get to see the rikishi – literally, 'the power men' – up close. Just as impressive as their strength is their astonishing agility.

Arashio Stable is the most welcoming heya. Anyone can turn up and watch through the window when practice is on. Most stables are located in and around Ryōgoku, so if you hang around here you're likely to see wrestlers walking around the neighborhood in yukata (light cotton kimono) and topknots. Keep your ears open for their geta (wooden sandals) clapping down the street.



Top, clockwise starting from left: A sumo wrestler throws his opponent out of the ring, achieving a **victory**. Mixed hot pot, or **Chanko-nabe** is a protein rich stew that sumo wrestlers enjoy. The **Gyoji** or referee stands at the ready with his fan.

Eat Like A Wrestler

Chanko-nabe – it means 'mixed hotpot' – is the protein-rich stew the wrestlers eat to sustain themselves through grueling practice sessions. There are a few restaurants around town run by former wrestlers. Koto-ga-ume, owned by the one-time rikishi of the same name, is the best of the bunch. Or go one step further and eat in a former heya at Kappō Yoshiba, which still has the dōyō in the center of the historic building.

Sumo Tournaments Across Japan

If you don't make it to Tokyo in January, May or September, there are other opportunities to see a match elsewhere in Japan. Tournaments are also held in March in Osaka, July in Nagoya and November in Fukuoka. Check sumo.or.jp for dates and ticket information.

Photo courtesy of Yokota Air Base, Pixels, PXLHere, and Pixabay.

TEN

MUST-SEE

SHINJUKU EISA MATSURI

JAPANESE

SUMMER

AOMORI NEBUTA MATSURI

SENDAI TANABATA MATSURI

KYOTO GOZAN OKURIBI

FESTIVALS

KISHIWADA DANJIRI MATSURI

IT'S THE SEASON OF TAIKO SOUNDS, LATE NIGHT FOOD STALLS, YUKATA, AND GOLDFISH GAMES: YES IT'S MATSURI TIME!

BY AI FAITHY PEREZ

WHILE

there are countless of unique festivals across the country, here's a round-up of our top ten to see in Tokyo and other parts of Japan! Wait no longer, it's time to get into the matsuri spirit!

1 Sumida River Fireworks Festival (Tokyo)

Rumored to have had its first launch in 1733, the Sumida River Fireworks is one of the most popular (and crowded) summer festivals in Tokyo. With nearly four centuries of history, it's survived the Meiji Restoration and continued strong until it fizzled out during the World Wars, and a few decades following. The festival was reinstated in 1977, and this year it celebrates its 40th anniversary in its current form. Visitors will see a spectacular view of 22,000 fireworks, but be prepared — last year nearly one million people went to this event, so expect large crowds, too!

When: Sat July 28, 2018 7:05 pm - 8:30 pm

Where: Sumida River, Sumida-ku, Tokyo

Access: Nearest station for 1st Venue: Asakusa Station or Honjo-Azumabashi Station; Nearest station for 2nd Venue: Kuramae Station or Ryogoku Station

2 Shinjuku Eisa Matsuri (Tokyo)

Born on the island of chinsuko and brown sugar, Okinawa's dance and music culture has always been different from that of the mainland, and Eisa Matsuri is no exception. The traditional costumes, drumming and dancing will be at the height of the "new and improved" — after all, the majority of dancers will be in their 20s and 30s. The origin of the name is unknown, but there is a theory that says the name was derived from an exclamation used in the original song of Eisa — "ensaa." This year will be its 43rd event and the organizers are expecting around one million people to join the fun — so again, be prepared for the crowd!

When: Sat July 28, 2018 12 pm - 8 pm

Where: Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo

Access: Shinjuku Station, West Exit

Opening spread:

Fireworks in Tokyo during the Sumida River Fireworks Festival. With nearly four centuries of history, it's survived the Meiji Restoration and continued strong until it fizzled out during the World Wars.

Bottom, clockwise from left:

Men jumping during the performance during the Eisa Matsuri. Men arrange the rope on the mikoshi in preparation to carry it. Men bear the weight of the mikoshi and process down the street carrying it. Young men raise their drumsticks high in the air prior to performing for the Eisa Matsuri.

3 Fukagawa Matsuri (Tokyo)

Formally known as the Fukugawa Hachiman Matsuri, the Fukugawa Festival is one of the three great Shinto festivals in Tokyo, along with the Kanda Matsuri and the Sanno Matsuri. The Fukugawa Festival is held at the vintage Tomioka Hachiman Shinto shrine in Tokyo's Koto district. Dated back to 1642, the festival sees the shrine's 120 mikoshis (portable shrines) being carried down the local streets while the onlookers splash purifying water at the mikoshi-bearers. Could it possibly be an equivalent to the Thai water festival, Songkran?

When: August 10-14, 2018 9 am - 9 pm (several events on all days, times vary)

Where: Tomioka Hachiman, 1-20-3 Tomioka, Koto-ku, Tokyo

Access: Monzen-nakacho Station, Exit 1

4 Azabujuban Matsuri (Tokyo)

Officially known as Azabujuban Noryo Matsuri, "Noryo" translates as "summer nights" according to many dictionaries, but on closer inspection, the definition is truer to, "escape the heat and find coolness." Having a reputation for being on the "trendy" side of festivals, as opposed to "traditional," the majority of the 300,000

festival-goers are young folks, all united under the same goal — to stuff their face. The stalls peddle regional specialties from all over Japan, from the northern island of Hokkaido to the southern ones of Okinawa. The Bon Dance in the evening is also a must-see experience.

When: August 25-26, 2018 3 pm - 9 pm

Where: Minato-ku, Tokyo, Azabu-juban shopping district

Access: Azabujubanw Station, Exit 4



Opening spread courtesy of Pixabay. Photos left, bottom courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.

Photos (right) courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.

5 Koenji Awaodori (Tokyo)

Originating from Tokushima Prefecture in Shikoku, Awaodori is the most popular type of Bon dance in Japan. Taking off in Tokyo approximately 56 years ago, this festival is now considered one of Tokyo's largest and best-known summer events of its kind. With 10,000 dancers moving through the streets of Koenji, the little city has succeeded in attracting nearly one million visitors yearly. It gets crowded, but the experience is priceless!

When: August 25-26, 2018 5 pm - 8 pm

Where: Sugunami-ku, Tokyo, Koenjiminami 2nd, 3rd and 4th Chome, and Koenjikita 2nd and 3rd Chome

Access: Koenji station

Top:

Female performers gather around a platform for the festival Azabu Juban. With their bright headdresses and yukata, they wow the audience.

Bottom:

Similarly to the dancers in the Azabujuban photo, seen here are female dancers for the Koenji Awaodori wearing bright dress, as well as amigasa which are straw hats. Thousands of dancers perform during this festival.



6 Soma Nomaoui (Fukushima)

Famous for horse breeding, the Soma region in Fukushima Prefecture holds the annual 1,000-year-old festival, Sama Namaoui. Organized by three different shrines in the area — Ota Shrine, Odaka Shrine, and Nakamura Shrine, the highlight of this festival is a recreation of an age-old battle scene from Japan's turbulent Sengoku period. Clad in elaborate armor and holding katana swords, the several hundred samurai horsemen race to grab the 40 shrine flags that are shot into the air with skyrockets.

When: July 28 -30, 2018

Where: Nomaoui Gyoretsu and Hibarigahara Field, Soma, Fukushima

Access: JR Haranomachi Station



ACCORDING TO LEGEND THE SHOGUN
SAKANOUÉ NO TAMURAMARO IS
 REMEMBERED FOR PLACING GIANT LIT
UP LANTERNS AT THE TOP OF HILLS
 WITH HIM AND HIS SOLDIERS

7 Aomori Nebuta Matsuri (Aomori)

The Aomori Nebuta Matsuri, or simply Aomori Nebuta, is one of the three largest festivals in the Tohoku region. “Nebuta” refers to the gigantic paper floats made into the shape of fierce warriors. According to the legend, the shogun Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, is remembered for placing giant, lit-up lanterns at the top of hills with him and his soldiers while waiting to ambush the Emishi tribesmen. Presently, at festivals, the dancers wear a unique outfit (which I can only describe as kimono-ish with a fruit basket for a hat), called haneto and call out “rassera” while dancing wildly around the floats. One of the largest in the country, this matsuri should be on everyone’s Japan bucket list.

When: August 1-6, 2018 7:10 pm - 9 pm, August 1-5 1 pm - 3 pm, and 7:15 pm - 9 pm August 6.

Where: Aomori City Hall

Access: JR Aomori Station



8 Sendai Tanabata Matsuri (Miyagi)

Tanabata, literally meaning “evening of the seventh,” originated from the Chinese Qixi Festival that celebrates the annual meeting of a young cowherd and a weaver girl, known in Japan as Orihime and Hikoboshi. While Tanabata festivals are celebrated throughout Japan, the Sendai

Top, clockwise from left:

A young mag clad in samurai armor races to get one of several shrine flags for Soma Nomaoui. Festival goers will often wear a summer kimono, called a yukata, to festivals. During Gozan Okuribi, there are huge bonfires held on a mountain, in order to welcome back the spirits of ancestors. Men in samurai armor parade through the street before participating in the race during Soma Nomaoui. During Tanabata, people will write wishes on strips of paper and tie them to bamboo trees, in hopes Orihime and Hikoboshi will grant them.

Bottom:

Gigantic paper floats are made to resemble fierce warriors, kabuki actors, gods, and monsters. They are pushed down roads by manpower.

Tanabata Festival is the most popular, with nearly two million tourists flocking to see the thousands of wishes that decorate the bamboo trees. It’s a spectacular sight and a wonderful opportunity to experience Japan in its brightest and liveliest!

When: August 5 - 7, 2018 10 am - 10 pm, August 5 - 6 10 am - 9 pm, August 7. Fireworks: August 4, 2018, 7 pm - 8:30pm

Where: Kotodai Park Citizens’ Square (Central Sendai and neighboring shopping districts)

Access: JR Sendai Station

9 Kyoto Gozan Okuribi (Kyoto)

Gozan no Okuribi (literally, “five mountain send-off fire”), or more commonly known in Kyoto as Daimonji (big letter), is almost like a summer equivalent to Halloween. During Obon, households around Japan prepare their homes to welcome back the spirits of their ancestors, and on the 3rd day following, light giant bonfires around the city of Kyoto, in the shape of five Chinese characters – Daimonji (“large” or “great”), Myo-Ho (“wondrous dharma,” referring to Buddhist teachings), Funagata (“boat shape”), Hidari Daimonji (“large left”), and Toriigata (“shrine gate shape”). A spectacular sight that attracts millions of tourists annually — for a good reason.

When: August 16, 2017 8 pm - 8:30 pm

Where: Central Kyoto, panoramic view possible from Funaokayama Park

Popular viewing areas:

Daimonji: Along the east bank of the Kamo River (Marutamachi Bridge-Misono Bridge)

Myoho: Around Notre Dame Women’s College

Funagata: Along Kitayama St. (Northwest of Kitayama Bridge)

Hidaridaimonki: Along Nishioji St. (Saiin Station-Kinkakuji Temple)

10 Kishiwada Danjiri Matsuri (Osaka)

The Kishiwada Danjiri Festival first took place in 1703 when the daimyo (feudal lord) of Kishiwada Castle, Okabe Nagayasu prayed to the Shinto gods for an abundant harvest. Today, the festival has a reputation for being Osaka’s wildest and boldest. The local boys will try and prove their courage and bravery by dancing on the roofs of the 35 floats being pulled through the streets, known as “Danjiri”. All floats are elaborate, hand-carved and weigh over 3,000 kg. Famously, the most exciting part of the hyper-parade is the danjiris going around corners at a 90-degree angle. A festival that takes manpower to a whole new level.

When: September 16-17, 2017

Where: Near Kishiwada Station, Kishiwada city, Osaka Prefecture

Access: Kishiwada Station

Continued p. 95

Bottom:

Two girls pose for a photo in their yukatas. Yukatas are worn by both men and women, they are made of cotton, with straight seams. They are more informal than kimonos and are worn to summer festivals.

A woman’s yukata will have sleeves that measure nearly 8 inches long from the armpit seam to the bottom of the sleeve, and a men’s will have a 4 inch sleeve.

Young, unmarried women will wear bright colored yukata while married women usually wear more subdued colors in their yukata. The yukata is worn with an obi, or wide belt, which typically is 6in wide and 10 feet long, tied in decorative knots.



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Photo courtesy of Pixabay.



by ROB GOSS

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TEN THINGS TO DO

The city's stunning collection of UNESCO World Heritage sites alone would be enough to set it apart, but Kyoto also boasts a still-working geisha district, some of Japan's most exquisite cuisine, and a whole lot of Zen. Not that it's all temples and tradition: the city also hosts its share of hip cafes and modern art. Think of it as the cultural yin to Tokyo's yang, but with a sprinkling of modernity. Here's how to get a taste of it all.

KYOTO REMAINS AWASH WITH REMNANTS OF ITS PAST GLORY.

1 Kinkaku-ji (The Golden Pavilion)
Be it capped by snow in winter or set against a lush green background in summer, nothing is as symbolic of Kyoto as Kinkaku-ji's golden reflection shimmering across the rippled surface of the pond before it. Not even the crowds of tourists — and they come by the thousands — can detract from Kinkaku-ji's undoubted splendor.

The current gold leaf-coated reconstruction was unveiled in 1955, five years after the 14th-century original was torched by one of the temple's monks. Kinkaku-ji is open daily from 9am to 5pm. Admission is ¥400. Take bus numbers 101 or 205 from Kyoto Station to the Kinkaku-ji Michi bus stop. If you are coming from another part of the city, you can also take the number 59 and 12 buses to the Kinkaku-ji Mae bus stop.

2 Ginkaku-ji (The Silver Pavilion)
Here's an oddity: the Silver Pavilion doesn't have a trace of silver on it. When the temple was built in the 1480s as a retirement home for the then shogun, the plan was for it to be coated in silver leaf. Scholars believe he ran out of money before they got to that part of the project. And when he died a few years later, the silver-less pavilion was converted into the Zen temple it is today.

Though the temple itself is small and unassuming — a Spartan version of its illustrious golden cousin Kinkaku-ji — the reflective pond and manicured trees, the raked sand garden, and the mossy, wooded hillside to the east, from where you can see Ginkaku-ji holding back a sprawling, low-rise urban backdrop, all combine to make a spectacular whole. Ginkaku-ji can be reached from Kyoto Station by bus numbers 5, 17 and 100. Get off at the Ginkaku-ji Michi bus stop. Admission is ¥500 and it is open daily 8.30am to 5pm (9am to 4.30pm from Dec to Feb).



Photos courtesy of Pixabay and Wikipedia Commons



3 Ryoan-ji
Ryoan-ji Temple's dry rock garden is a puzzle. Nobody knows who designed it or what the meaning is of the 15 rocks scattered across its expanse of raked white gravel. Some academics say they represent a tiger carrying a cub across a stream; others believe they depict an ocean accented with small islands or the sky dotted with clouds. There's even a theory that the rocks form a map of Chinese Zen monasteries.

The only thing scholars do agree on is that Ryoan-ji is one of the finest examples of Zen landscaping in the country. You could stay there for years quietly contemplating the garden's riddles and still get no nearer to an answer, and maybe that's the point. You can reach Ryoan-ji on the number 59 bus route. Admission is ¥500 and the temple and garden opens daily 8am to 5pm (8.30am to 4.30pm from Dec to Feb).

4 Toei Kyoto Studio Park
Yes, it's touristy, and yes, it's a bit tacky too, but dressing up as a samurai and watching TV actors hamming it up on set does hold a certain charm. Eigamura, or Kyoto Toei Studio Park to give it its English name, is a working TV and movie set that doubles as a theme park, where besides dressing up in period costume you can wander around a mock-up Edo-era samurai town and take in

Far left: The Golden Pavilion is truly golden, plated in gold leaf. **Left:** The Silver Pavilion, unlike the Golden Pavilion, has not one trace of silver on it though the intention was originally to coat it in silver leaf. **Top:** Oiran (courtesan), Samurai actors and actresses, and spectators are seen during the Uzumasa Edosakaba, an event recreating an edo-period bar at the Toei Kyoto Studio Park.

exhibitions of the well-known TV series and films shot here. It's the live studio performances, however, that steal the show.

The sword fights are extravagant, the facial expressions and body language overly dramatic, and the dialog at times delivered about as convincingly as an elementary school end-of-year play. It's Japanese kitsch at its finest. Quentin Tarantino would love it. Eigamura is open daily from 9am to 5pm (9:30am to 4pm from Dec to Feb). Admission is ¥2,200, though you can get in for half that if you come dressed in a kimono. Take bus number 75 from Kyoto Station to the Uzumasa Eigamura-michi bus stop.

5 Gion
It's not the only geisha district left in Japan, but Gion, a collection of streets defined by its old wooden buildings, teahouses and exclusive Japanese restaurants,

is by far the most famous. Spend an hour wandering the area and chances are you'll glimpse a geisha or two shuffling between teahouses in their cumbersome zori sandals and exquisite kimono.

Much to their annoyance, you'll probably see camera-happy Japanese tourists stalking them too. Not that Gion is just about geisha. Every July, their charms are eclipsed by the Gion Matsuri, a festival that attracts in excess of a million visitors for its procession of festival floats and traditional musical performances. Numerous bus routes from Kyoto Station and other parts of the city stop at the Gion bus stop.

6 Kyo-Ryori

A waitress in kimono kneels on the tatami mat floor and silently begins placing a dozen or so small, yet picture-perfect dishes on the low dining table. Among the subtle favors and seasonal tones are a clear soup garnished with a sprig of green sanshou, slices of raw sea bream and tuna specked with tiny, delicate yellow flowers, and a simmering silver pot of off-white soy milk and tofu.

Japanese cuisine doesn't get more refined than Kyo-ryori, or "Kyoto cuisine." For a quintessential Kyo-ryori experience, head to Gion and the 100-year-old Minokou restaurant, where they do an 11-course Kyo-ryori dinner for ¥15,600, as well as lunchtime sampler sets presented in shiny lacquer ware bento boxes for ¥4,000. Alternatively, try the equally traditional Kinobu, where they have a seven-course dinner for ¥12,000 and a ¥4,200 lunchtime sampler.

7 Tea Ceremony

Zen again, but this time in a tea cup. The cleansing of the tea utensils, the gentle bow as you receive your cup, the three clockwise turns before you take a sip: it's not difficult to see how deeply rooted the slow and graceful movements of the tea ceremony are in Zen Buddhism.

Chado or sado, as the ceremony is known, is by no means limited to Kyoto, but with the city's rich Zen connections, it is an ideal place to experience it. Try visiting En, a small teahouse in Gion with tatami tearooms and English-speaking Kimono-clad servers. You'll find it next to Chionin Temple, a short walk from the Chionmae bus stop on route number 206 from Kyoto Station.



8 Kyoto International Manga Museum

Few museums are as hands-on as this old elementary school turned shrine to manga, or comic books, and its collection of some 300,000 comics and manga-related exhibits. Visitors can read any piece of manga they fancy from the towering wooden bookcases that line every wall and hallway. Some read propped up against the walls or sitting crossed legged on the floor; others hunker down with a coffee at the museum's wood-decked outdoor café.

The eclectic and universally transfixed crowd is a testament to how much a part of mainstream Japanese culture manga has become. The museum is a one-minute walk from Karasuma Oike Station on the Karasuma and Tozai subway lines. Admission is ¥500 and it's open from 10am to 6pm. Closed Wednesdays and New Year's holidays.

9 Shopping on Shijo-Dori

The futuristic glass and steel facade of Kyoto's train station, though not universally welcomed by locals when it was unveiled in 1997, is proof that Kyoto is not stuck in the past. So too is Shijo, Kyoto's brand-name adorned central shopping precinct. It begins near Shijo Station, with the Daimaru department store, eight floors of cosmetics, jewelry and fashion that are topped off by a restaurant floor.

Fifteen minutes east, by Kawaramachi Station, the edge of the district is marked by the larger Takashimaya department store, which sits directly across from Koto + (pronounced Koto Cross), home to eight narrow floors of fashion, beauty salons

Left: Geisha perform dances with fans, accompanied by a shanshin, a type of stringed instrument.

Top left: Rows of manga at the Kyoto International Manga Museum

Top right: The face of the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art
Right: Kyoto is a city that brims Sights seem like a fairy tale.

Visitors can read **ANY PIECE OF MANGA** they fancy from the towering wooden bookcases that line every **WALL AND HALLWAY.**

and cafes aimed at a young female crowd. Inbetween you'll find brand-name boutiques like Louis Vuitton and Armani, plus several traditional Japanese craft and high-end souvenir shops. If it weren't for the wooded hills in the distance, you could easily think you were in Tokyo. *Continued p. 124*



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 Samsonite