

Kyoto

Kyoto Prefecture · Japan

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Kyoto was the capital of Japan for more than 1,000 years, from 794 to 1868. It was largely spared from bombing in World War II. Temples, shrines, wooden townhouses and tea houses are still part of daily life here. UNESCO lists 17 monuments in the city as Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto.

Kyoto suits first-time visitors who want culture more than nightlife. Come for temples, gardens, tea, seasonal food and traditional crafts. It is also a good base for day trips to Nara, Osaka and Uji. Sights are spread across the city, so plan each day around one or two areas and start early.

When to visit

Late March to early April has cherry blossom. Mid-November to early December has autumn leaves. These are the busiest and most expensive weeks, so book hotels early. May is mild and green. June is the rainy season. July and August are hot and humid. Winter is cold and quiet, with the smallest crowds.

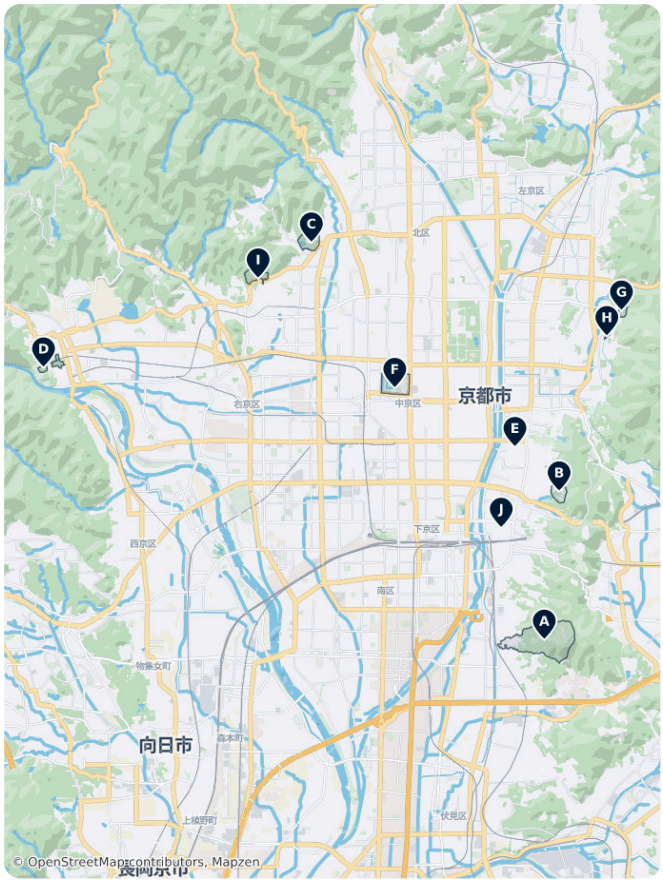
The biggest annual event is the Gion Matsuri, which runs through July and is organised by Yasaka Shrine. The two large float processions are on 17 and 24 July. On the three evenings before each one, central streets close to cars and fill with food stalls.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for sightseeing	7° / 12° Feels like 3°	1° / -2°	18 rainy days · Dry air
February	Poor Poor for sightseeing	9° / 16° Feels like 4°	1° / -2°	15 rainy days · Dry air
March	Poor Poor for sightseeing	13° / 20° Feels like 9°	3° / -1°	14 rainy days · Dry air
April	Good Good for sightseeing	18° / 24°	8° / 2°	Dry air
May	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 27°	13° / 8°	12 rainy days
June	Good Good for sightseeing	27° / 30°	18° / 14°	15 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
July	Fair Fair for sightseeing	30° / 33° Feels like 34°	23° / 19°	16 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds
August	Poor Poor for sightseeing	31° / 34° Feels like 35°	24° / 20°	16 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds
September	Fair Fair for sightseeing	28° / 32°	20° / 15°	16 rainy days · Muggy, humid air
October	Good Good for sightseeing	22° / 27°	14° / 8°	13 rainy days
November	Good Good for sightseeing	16° / 22°	8° / 3°	13 rainy days · Dry air
December	Poor Poor for sightseeing	10° / 16° Feels like 6°	3° / -1°	18 rainy days · Dry air

Best months: May

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights



- A Fushimi Inari Shrine is known for thousands of red torii gates that line the trails up the mountain behind it. It is open day and night, so go early or after dark to avoid the crowds.
- B Kiyomizu-dera Temple sits on a hillside. Its large wooden terrace was built without nails and has wide views over the city.
- C Kinkaku-ji is the Golden Pavilion, covered in gold leaf beside a pond. The current building dates from 1955, after a fire in 1950.
- D Arashiyama Bamboo Grove is a path through tall bamboo in western Kyoto. Visit early in the morning, then continue to the temples and river nearby.
- E Gion Quarter is the historic district of wooden teahouses where geisha (geiko and maiko) work. Evening is the best time to walk here.
- F Nijō Castle was built by the Tokugawa shoguns in the early 17th century. The Ninomaru Palace has painted screens and "nightingale" floors that chirp when you walk.
- G Ginkaku-ji is the Silver Pavilion, a Zen temple with a moss garden and a sand garden. The H Philosopher's Walk canal path starts nearby.
- I Ryōan-ji is a Zen temple with a famous rock garden of raked gravel and stones. Sit on the wooden veranda and look at it quietly.
- J Sanjūsangen-dō has a very long wooden hall. It holds 1,001 statues of the thousand-armed Kannon.

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What to experience

Experiences that fit Kyoto well:

- Tea ceremony: Join a short ceremony in a temple or townhouse. A host prepares matcha and serves a sweet. Book ahead in busy seasons.
- Kimono rental: Many shops rent kimono for a day. People wear them in the old streets around Higashiyama.
- Riverside dining in summer: From May to mid-October, restaurants along Pontochō build wooden platforms over the Kamo River. Evenings are cooler there.
- Kurama to Kibune hike: A 3.9 km mountain trail (2–3 hours) links Kurama-dera Temple and the village of Kibune in the north. Kifune Shrine is a short walk up the road.
- Seasonal night openings: In spring and autumn, some temples open in the evening with lit gardens. Kiyomizu-dera Temple is one of them.
- Gozan no Okuribi: On 16 August, bonfires in the shape of characters burn on five hills around the city. Many people watch from the Kamo River banks.

Day trips

Kyoto is close to several major sights. Travel times below are one way.

- Uji: a short ride by JR train. Byōdō-in has a Phoenix Hall from 1053 and appears on the 10-yen coin. Uji is also famous for green tea, so try matcha sweets.
- Ōtsu and Lake Biwa: a short ride by JR train. Lake Biwa is Japan's largest lake. Temples such as Mii-dera and Ishiyama-dera are in Ōtsu.
- A Nara: under 1 hour by Kintetsu or JR train. See the Great Buddha at Tōdai-ji and the free-roaming deer in Nara Park.
- B Osaka: about 30 min by JR Special Rapid train. Visit Osaka Castle and eat street food in Dōtonbori.
- C Himeji: about 1 hour by Shinkansen. Himeji Castle is a white castle and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Getting there

- By air: Most international visitors fly into Kansai International Airport (KIX). The JR Haruka limited express goes to Kyoto Station in about 75–80 min. An airport limousine bus takes about 100 min and carries your luggage. Osaka Itami Airport (ITM) handles domestic flights. A limousine bus to Kyoto takes about 50–55 min.
- By train: The Shinkansen stops at Kyoto Station. From Tokyo the Nozomi takes about 2 h 10 min. From Nagoya it takes about 35 min. From Osaka, JR Special Rapid trains take about 30 min. Hankyu and Keihan trains connect Osaka with central Kyoto.
- By bus: Overnight coaches from Tokyo are cheaper than the train but much slower.

Kyoto City Official Guide: getting to Kyoto

Getting around

- Public transit: The subway has two lines (Karasuma and Tōzai). It is fast but does not reach most temples. City buses reach most sights, but they are slow and crowded in peak seasons. IC cards (ICOCA, Suica, PASMO and similar) work on buses, the subway and trains. A Subway & Bus 1-Day Pass costs 1,100 yen and is sold at the Kyoto Station information centre.
- Trains: JR, Keihan, Hankyu and the small Randen and Eizan lines fill the gaps. The JR Nara Line stops at Inari Station, next to Fushimi Inari. The JR Sagano Line goes to Arashiyama.
- Avoid Kyoto Station buses in peak season: Get off or board at a quieter JR station such as Nijō, Enmachi, Tōfukuji or Yamashina.
- Taxi: Taxis are easy to find. They are good for short trips, early starts and groups of three or four.
- On foot and by bike: The central grid is flat, so cycling is practical. Rental bikes are widely available.

Kyoto City Bus and Subway guide

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

Moderate

The central grid and each sightseeing area are walkable, but major sights are spread across the city, so you will also need buses or trains.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

High

The central basin is flat and rental bikes are widely available.

Driving

- Is a car worth it?: No, not for the city. Buses and trains are faster and easier. A car is only useful for the countryside north of Kyoto. Japan drives on the **left**.
- Licence: Japan accepts only an International Driving Permit under the 1949 Geneva Convention. A 1968 Vienna permit is not valid. Licences from Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium, Monaco and Taiwan can instead be used with an official Japanese translation from JAF.
- Parking: Coin-operated lots near the centre charge by time and are expensive. Many temples have small paid lots that fill early.
- Restrictions: Streets in Gion and Higashiyama are narrow and often one-way. Traffic is heavy on weekends in April and November.

Food & drink

Kyoto cooking uses seasonal ingredients, tofu, pickles and green tea. Look for kaiseki (a multi-course meal), yudofu (simmered tofu, a speciality near Nanzen-ji), obanzai (small home-style dishes) and matcha sweets. Cash is still useful in small restaurants, market stalls and at many temple ticket counters.

Good areas to eat:

- Nishiki Market is a covered street of about 130 shops. It sells pickles, tofu snacks, seafood and kitchen knives. Go in the morning.
- Pontochō is a narrow lantern-lit alley with many restaurants and bars. It is best for dinner.
- The Fushimi district in the south has sake breweries and tasting rooms.

What to eat & drink

DINNER

Sushi · 寿司 (Sushi)
Vinegared rice paired with raw fish, seafood, or vegetables; ranges from casual conveyor-belt shops to high-end counters.

Ramen · ラーメン (Ramen)
Wheat noodles in a meat or fish-based broth, with countless regional styles.

Tempura · 天ぷら (Tempura)
Lightly battered, deep-fried seafood and vegetables.

Okonomiyaki · お好み焼き (Okonomiyaki)
A savory grilled pancake with cabbage and a choice of fillings, popular in Osaka and Hiroshima.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Onigiri · おにぎり (Onigiri)
Rice balls wrapped in seaweed, often with a savory filling; an everyday convenience-store staple.

Yakitori · 焼き鳥 (Yakitori)
Grilled skewers of chicken, popular at izakaya alongside beer or sake.

DRINKS

Green Tea · 緑茶 (Ryokucha)
The everyday non-alcoholic drink, served hot or cold.

Sake · 日本酒 (Nihonshu)
Rice wine served warm or chilled, a traditional accompaniment to a meal.

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Safety & health

Kyoto is very safe for visitors. Violent crime is rare, and petty theft is uncommon.

- **Crowds**: Big sights are very busy in cherry blossom and autumn leaf seasons. Go early.
- **Gion etiquette**: Photography is banned on the private alleys of Gion, with a fine of ¥10,000. Do not block or follow geiko and maiko to take photos.
- Heat: July and August are hot and humid, so heat stroke is a real risk. Drink water and rest in the afternoon.
- Typhoons and earthquakes: Typhoons are most likely from late summer to autumn. Earthquakes are possible. Follow instructions from your hotel and local alerts.

History

Emperor Kanmu moved the capital here in 794 and named it Heian-kyō. Emperors lived in Kyoto until the court moved to Tokyo in 1868–69.

- East Temple dates from 796, the early years of the city. Its five-storey pagoda, about 55 m high, is the tallest wooden pagoda in Japan.
- In 1397 the shogun *Ashikaga Yoshimitsu* turned an estate into the retreat that became Kinkaku-ji.
- The Ōnin War (1467–1477) destroyed much of the city. Many temples were rebuilt afterwards.
- At Nijō Castle the last shogun, *Tokugawa Yoshinobu*, announced in 1867 that he was returning power to the emperor.
- Heian Shrine was built in 1895 to mark the city's 1,100th anniversary.

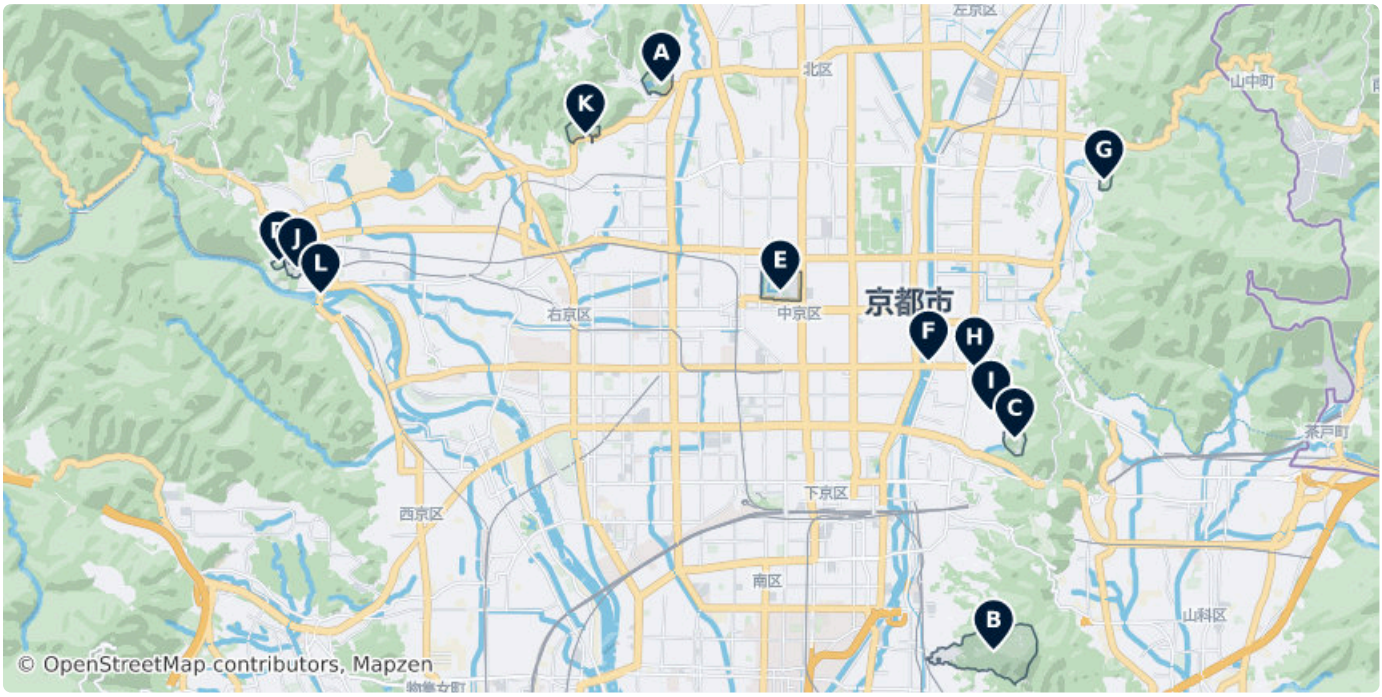
Country facts

Here are the essentials for traveling in Japan:

CURRENCY	ELECTRICITY	LANGUAGES	TAP WATER
JPY ¥	Type A / Type B 100 V	Japanese	**Safe to drink**

Kyoto's Absolute Essentials

Kyoto’s landscape is defined by centuries of architectural and spiritual heritage. This collection features UNESCO World Heritage sites like the gold-leafed Kinkaku-ji, the 15th-century Ginkakuji, and the massive wooden stage of Kiyomizu-dera. It includes the thousands of vermilion torii gates at Fushimi Inari-taisha and the influential Zen rock gardens of Ryōan-ji and Tenryu-ji. Beyond temples, the list highlights the 1603 Nijō Castle, the geisha districts of Pontochō, and Arashiyama’s mōsō bamboo groves. These sites represent the evolution of Japanese Shinto, Buddhist, and shogunal history across more than a millennium.





Ⓐ Kinkaku-ji

Zen Buddhist temple featuring a gold-leaf-covered pavilion and historic gardens. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its cultural and architectural significance.

603-8361 京都市, JP (35.03928, 135.73014)

Mo–Su 09:00–17:00

shokoku-ji.jp/kinkakuji/, +81754610013



Ⓑ Fushimi Inari Shrine

Shinto shrine with a history of over 1300 years, renowned for thousands of vermilion torii gates leading up a sacred mountain. It serves as the head shrine of Inari worship and features traditional Japanese architecture.

68 Fukakusa Yabunouchicho, Fushimi Ward, Kyoto, Kyoto Prefecture 612-0882, Japan (34.96785, 135.78121)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

inari.jp, +81756417331



C Kiyomizu-dera Temple

Historic Buddhist temple known for its large wooden stage and scenic views, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

1-294 Kiyomizu, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto Prefecture 605-0862, Japan (34.99453, 135.78447)

Mo–Su 06:00–18:00

kiyomizudera.or.jp/lang/01.html, +81755511234



D Arashiyama Bamboo Grove

Natural bamboo forest featuring scenic pathways and lush mōsō bamboo. The grove is situated near historic temples and shrines.

Bamboo Groves, Ukyō Ward, Kyoto, Sagaogurayama-Tabuchiyamachō 616-0000, Japan (35.01682, 135.67137)

Mo–Su Open 24/7



E Former Imperial Villa Nijō Castle

Built in 1603, this castle belongs to one of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto which have been designated by UNESCO as a World...

541 Nijojocho, Nakagyo Ward, Kyoto 604-8301, Japan (35.01314, 135.74842)

Mo–Su 08:45–17:00

nijo-jocastle.city.kyoto.lg.jp, +81 75 841 0096



F Pontochō

Ponto-chō is a Hanamachi district, which literally translates as "flower town." This name is a Japanese way of saying that there are geisha...

(Unnamed Road), Kyoto, Japan (35.00425, 135.77121)

japan-guide.com/e/e3921.html



G Ginkakuji Temple

A Zen temple from the 15th century AD. It is surrounded by beautiful gardens, with famous decorative sand patterns, trees, and ponds, said...

606-8402 京都市, JP (35.02704, 135.79817)

Mar-Nov Mo–Su	08:30–17:00
Dec-Feb Mo–Su	09:00–16:30

shokoku-ji.jp/g_about.html, +81 0757715725



H Yasaka Shrine

Yasaka Shrine is one of the Kanpei-taisha, which means that it is highly supported by the government. Its history dates back to 656.

625 Kitagawa, Kyoto, Higashiyama-ku, Japan (35.00349, 135.77829)

Mo–Su	Open 24/7

yasaka-jinja.or.jp/en/, +81 75 561 6155



I Ninenzaka & Sannenzaka Neigbourhood

Ninen-zaka and Sannen-zaka are one of Kyoto's most preserved neighbourhoods.

Kyoto, Japan (34.99800, 135.78082)



J Tenryu-ji Temple

Tenryū-ji, formally known as Tenryū Shiseizen-ji, is the head temple of the Tenryū-ji branch of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, located in...

Sagatenryuji Susukinobabacho, Ukyo Ward, Kyoto 616-8385, Japan (35.01595, 135.67422)

Mo–Su	08:30–17:00

tenryuji.com, +81 75-881-1235



K Ryōan-ji

Ryōan-ji is a Zen temple located in northwest Kyoto, Japan. It belongs to the Myōshin-ji school of the Rinzai branch of Zen Buddhism.

Japan (35.03283, 135.71846)

Mo–Su 08:00–17:00

ryoanji.jp



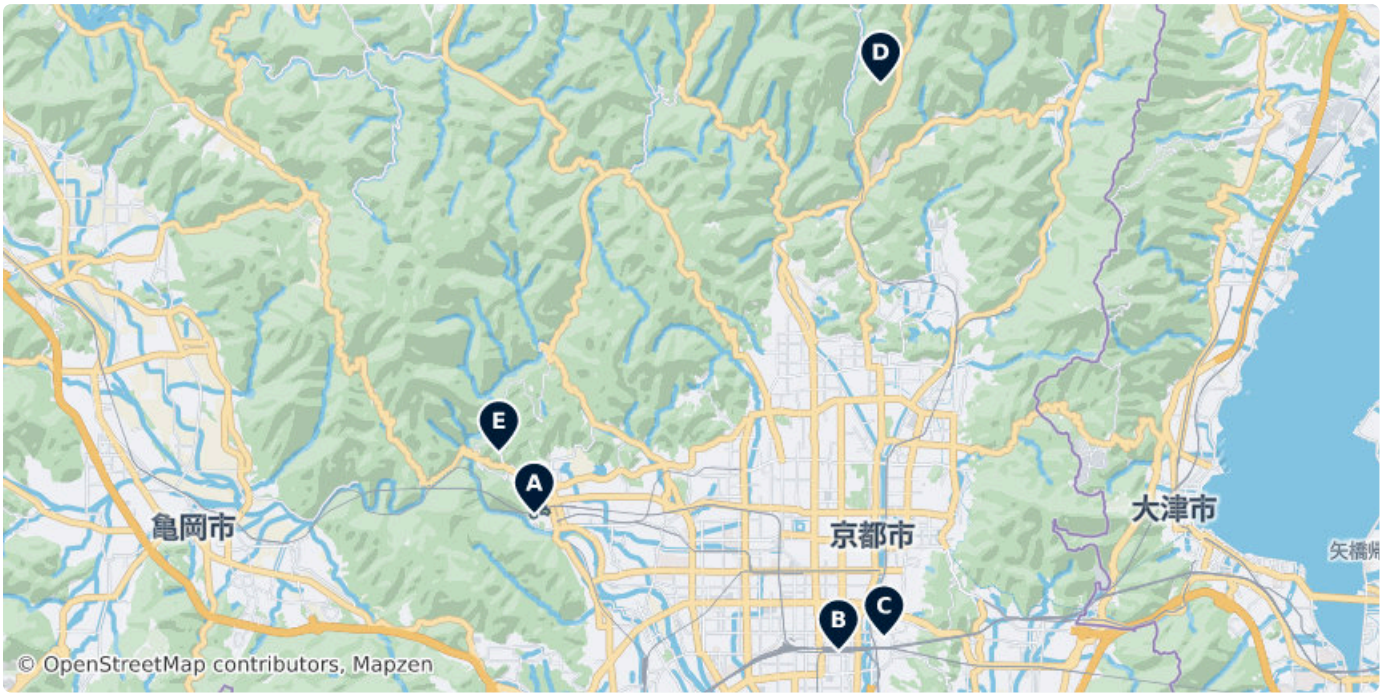
L Togetsu Bridge

This charming more than 150 meters long bridge with wonderful views of Mount Arashiyama is a great place for a stroll.

(Unnamed Road), Japan (35.01274, 135.67773)

Editor's Choice Kyoto

Kyoto's diverse landscape spans from the towering mōsō stalks of the Arashiyama Bamboo Grove in the west to the mountainous Kurama-dera temple in the north, which houses several National Treasures. In the city center, the 11-story Kyoto Station showcases modern architectural scale, while the Higashiyama district features Sanjūsangen-dō, famous for its 1,001 life-sized statues of Kannon. The list also includes Otagi Nenbutsu-ji, a temple distinguished by its 1,200 unique, hand-carved stone rakan statues representing disciples of Buddha.





A Arashiyama Bamboo Grove

Natural bamboo forest featuring scenic pathways and lush mōsō bamboo. The grove is situated near historic temples and shrines.

Bamboo Groves, Ukyō Ward, Kyoto, Sagaogurayama-Tabuchiyamachō 616-0000, Japan (35.01682, 135.67137)

Mo–Su Open 24/7



B Kyoto Station

The Kyoto Station, a huge, 11-storey railway station for normal and bullet trains located in the heart of Kyoto, is the second largest...

Kyoto, Japan (34.98470, 135.75867)

kyoto-station-building.co.jp/english/



C Sanjūsangen-dō or Rengeō-in-hon-dō

Sanjūsangen-dō is a Buddhist temple of the Tendai sect in the Higashiyama district of Kyoto, Japan.

Yamato-ōji Street, Higashiyama Ward, Kyoto, Makitacho 605-0951, Japan (34.98798, 135.77177)

sanjusangendo.jp, +81-075-561-0467



D Kurama-dera Temple

Kurama-dera is a temple in the far north of Kyoto, Japan which houses some National Treasures of Japan.

Japan (35.11792, 135.77076)

japan-guide.com/e/e3933.html



E Otagi Nenbutsu-ji Temple

Otagi Nenbutsu-ji is a Buddhist temple in the Arashiyama neighborhood of Kyoto, Japan.

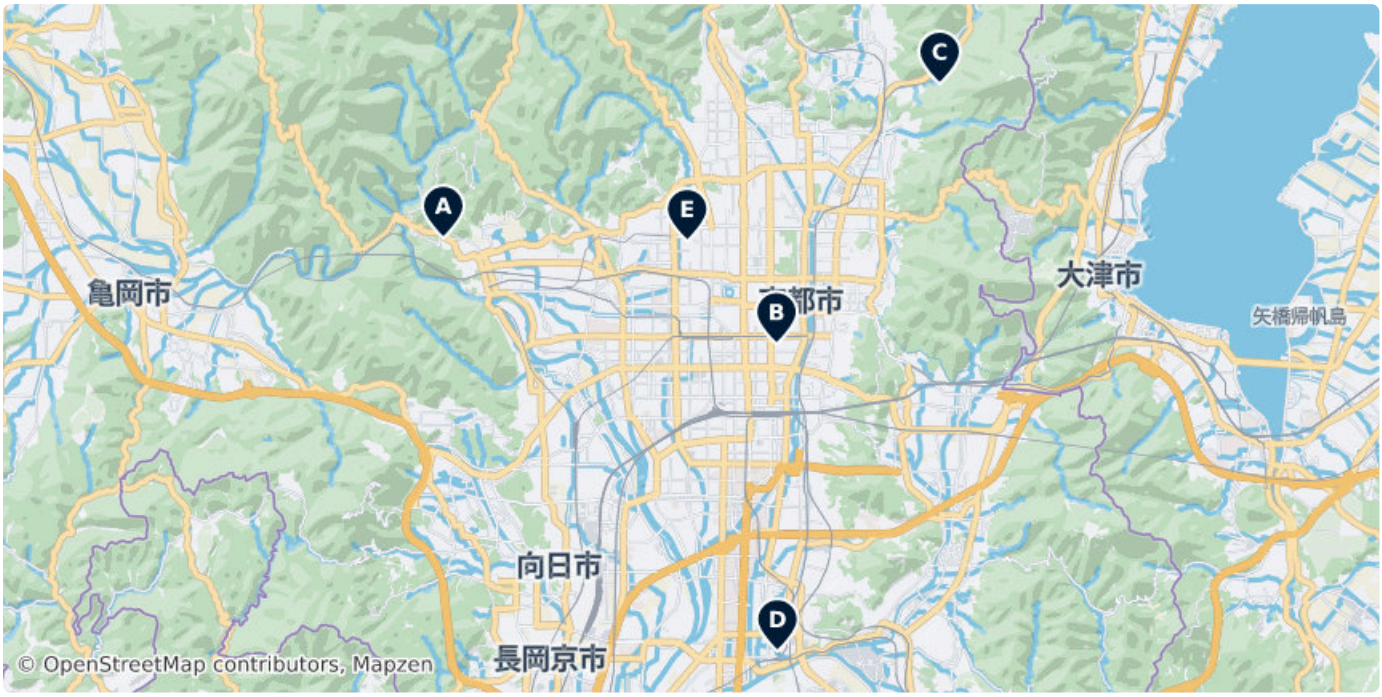
(Unnamed Road), Japan (35.03136, 135.66120)

Mo–Su 08:00–16:45

otagiji.com

Kyoto's Hidden Gems

Beyond the main tourist circuit, Kyoto contains specialized sites ranging from the 8,000 stone statues of Adashino-Nenbutsudera to the traditional washi paper collections at Yamato-shi. Ruriko-in Temple offers seasonal views of polished interior reflections, while the Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum in Fushimi details brewing techniques dating back to 1637. For a look at local folklore, Yokai Street features handmade monster sculptures along the Taishogun Shopping Street, commemorating the legendary Night Parade of One Hundred Demons.





Ⓐ Adashino-Nenbutsudera Temple

Adashino Nenbutsu-ji is a Buddhist temple in Ukyo-ku, Kyoto, Japan. In 811 Kūkai is said to have founded a temple, then Honen altered it to...

右京区嵯峨鳥居本化野町17 (35.02692, 135.66463)

nenbutsuji.jp/index.html, +81 75 861 2221



Ⓑ Yamato-shi Paper Shop

This store offers a wide range of various Japanese washi - traditional handmade paper.

〒600-8095, 京都市下京区東洞院通仏光寺上ル扇酒屋町298カジノハビル1F (35.00169, 135.76129)

Mo–Fr	09:30–17:30
Sa	09:30–16:30
Su	09:30–17:30

wagami.jp, +81 75 341 1419



C Ruriko-in Temple

Located at the base of Mount Hiei, this temple is known for its polished black floors that reflect the surrounding maple foliage. It is typically open to the public only during specific periods in spring and autumn.

Japan (35.06349, 135.80864)

Mo–Su 10:00–17:00

rurikoin.komyoji.com, +81 75 781 4001



D Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum

Housed in a former brewery from 1909, this museum in the Fushimi district showcases the history of Gekkeikan, founded in 1637. Exhibits include traditional wooden tools and the step-by-step process of sake production.

Kyoto, Japan (34.92876, 135.76159)

gekkeikan.co.jp/english/kyotofushimi/museum.html

E Yokai Street

Also known as Taishogun Shopping Street, this area is lined with handmade statues of Japanese spirits and monsters. The theme references a legend from the Heian period about a supernatural parade occurring along Ichijo-dori.

Kyoto, Japan (35.02618, 135.73540)

DATA SOURCES

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