

20

reasons to love ...

Kyoto

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Photos: Alamy

**1 EXPERIENCE THE CITY**  
It's no wonder that Kyoto, the former imperial capital of Japan and blessed with a human scale and welcome walkability, especially in contrast to Tokyo, its megacity counterpart, has become such a cherished destination among foreigners. For first-time visitors to Japan it's a perfect, manageable and inspirational introduction to a magical country and its distinctive culture. In fact it's possible to devote a number, even several, days to exploring both the city and the myriad attractions that surround it. *See [kyoto.travel/eng/](http://kyoto.travel/eng/)*

**2 EXPLORE KYOTO STATION**  
Although it turned 20 years old this year, this true behemoth of a building still feels as modern and impressive as the day it opened. And it's likely that, as a visitor, you'll pass through it or utilise it services on at least a few occasions. Aside from being Kyoto's primary transportation hub, including as a terminal for Japan's famed bullet trains, the shinkansen, meaning "trunk line", services, it's also home to a range of excellent and affordable restaurants and cafes as well as an upmarket department store. The station also hosts the Granvia Kyoto, a terrific and terrifically convenient five-star hotel. *See [kyoto.travel/en; granviakyoto.com](http://kyoto.travel/en/granviakyoto.com)*

**3 STROLL PONTOCHO**  
One of Japan's most atmospheric streets, this narrow, pedestrian-only laneway in downtown Kyoto not far from the Ritz-Carlton, runs parallel to Kamo-gawa River. Best experienced at night, Pontocho, festooned with traditional lanterns, is lined with small restaurants and bars. A favoured geisha district since the 16th century, many of the premises along Pontocho remain off-limits to foreigners but it hardly diminishes the captivating nocturnal experience. *See [kyoto.travel/en](http://kyoto.travel/en)*

**4 STAY MACHIYA**  
Aside from staying at a traditional ryokan, or inn, one of the best ways to experience the art of Japanese accommodation, Kyoto-style, is to stay in a machiya or traditional wooden townhouse, right in the middle of a



**5 STAY THE RITZ-CARLTON**  
Beside the Kamo-gawa River, which runs through the city, this low-rise boutique-like hotel, with its 134 (unusually spacious for Japan) rooms and suites, is one of the most expensive, and best-situated, hotels in Kyoto. Newly opened, the Ritz-Carlton is a class act, being not just a fine place

to stay or visit for a meal – perhaps at its stunning Japanese restaurant or afternoon tea at its elegant lobby lounge – but also a veritable showcase of the ancient capital's craftsmanship with its plush interiors decorated with the finest contemporary local art. *See [ritzcarlton.com/kyoto](http://ritzcarlton.com/kyoto)*

typical neighbourhood. Iori Machiya Stay expertly manages a collection of self-contained, luxuriously appointed townhouses scattered throughout central Kyoto. *See [kyoto-machiya.com](http://kyoto-machiya.com)*

**6 EXPLORE GION**  
Along with the equally charming and historic Higashiyama district, if there's one part of Kyoto that conforms to the Western perception of Japan it has to be this gorgeous centuries-old pleasure district famed for its geisha and maiko, their apprentices. Full of well-preserved machiya with their characteristic burnished facades, the district is also home to some of Kyoto's finest and priciest restaurants. *See [kyoto.travel/en](http://kyoto.travel/en)*

**8 WANDER THE SAKE DISTRICT**  
Most foreign visitors to the shrine at Fushimi head straight back to town unaware that the area is also famous for something else sacred to the nation. Even if you're not partial to sake, the national drink of the Japanese, a stroll around Fushimi-ku's sake district is an interesting way to spend half a day or so. Sake is still produced in this area inside centuries-old breweries which source the pristine water essential for its production. *See [kyoto.travel/en](http://kyoto.travel/en)*

**9 VISIT SHOTOKU SHUZO SAKE BREWERY**  
Foreigners are welcome to visit some of the breweries in Fushimi, including Shotoku Shuzo

**7 VISIT FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA SHRINE**  
Since its establishment in 711 AD, the Japanese have been drawn to this shrine to pray for harvests, prosperity and family. Today, it's one of Kyoto's most iconic sights. The most prominent

feature of this 1300-year-old shrine, in the city's south, consists of a dizzying, arcade-like succession of amber-coloured gates that meander all the way up and down a mountain. *See [inari.jp/en/](http://inari.jp/en/)*

