# BACKGROUND

## HISTORY

### EARLY HISTORY

Although the origins of the Japanese race remain unclear, anthropologists believe humans first arrived on the islands as early as 100,000 years ago via the land bridges that once connected Japan to Siberia and Korea, and by sea from the islands of the South Pacific. The first recorded evidence of civilisation in Japan is *jōmon* (pottery fragments with cord marks) produced around 10,000 BC. During the Jōmon period (10,000–300 BC), people lived a primitive existence as independent fishers, hunters and food gatherers.

This stone age period was gradually superseded by the Yayoi era, dating roughly from 300 BC to AD 300. The Yayoi people are considered to have had a strong connection with Korea. Their most important developments were the wet cultivation of rice and the use of bronze and iron implements, and they also introduced new practices such as weaving and shamanism. The Yayoi period witnessed the progressive development of communities represented in more than 100 independent family clusters dotting the archipelago.

As more and more of these settlements banded together to defend their land, regional groups became larger and by AD 300 the Yamato kingdom had emerged in the region of present-day Nara. Forces were loosely united around the imperial clan of the Yamato court, whose leaders claimed descent from the sun goddess, Amaterasu, and who introduced the title of *tennō* (emperor). The Yamato kingdom established Japan's first fixed capital in Nara, eventually unifying the regional groups into a single state. By the end of the 4th century, official relations with the Korean peninsula were established and Japan steadily began to introduce arts and industries such as shipbuilding, leather-tanning, weaving and metalwork.

During the Yamato period a highly aristocratic society with militaristic rulers developed. Its cavalry wore armour, carried swords and used advanced military techniques similar to those of northeast Asia. The Yamato government also sent envoys directly to the Chinese court, where they were exposed to philosophy and social structure.

The Yamato period is also referred to as the Kofun period by archaeologists, owing to the discovery of thousands of *kofun* (ancient burial mounds), mainly in western Japan. These massive tombs contained various artefacts including tools, weapons and *haniwa* (clay figurines of people and animals), which had been ceremonially buried with nobles. With the arrival of Buddhism, this labour-intensive custom was abandoned in favour of cremation.

### BUDDHISM & CHINESE INFLUENCE

When Buddhism drifted onto the shores of Japan, Kyoto was barely more than a vast, fertile valley. First introduced from China in 538 via the Korean kingdom of Paekche, Buddhism was pivotal in the evolution of the Japanese nation. It eventually brought with it a flood of culture – through literature, the arts and architecture, and kanji, a distinctive system of writing in Chinese characters.

#### TIMELINE

**Early 7th century**

The vast, fertile plain of the Kyoto basin, then known as Yamashiro-no-kuni, is first settled by the Hata clan from Korea. Another clan, the Kamo, also settles the area.

**622**

Kōryū-ji is established in northwest Kyoto to house a statue given to the Hata clan by Prince Shōtoku. The temple becomes the tutelary temple of the clan.

**784**

Emperor Kammu moves the capital from Nara to Nagaoka (a suburb of Kyoto) to avoid the powerful Buddhist clergy who had previously meddled in the imperial court.

However, initial uptake of Buddhism was slow until Empress Suiko (554–628), the 33rd emperor of Japan, encouraged all Japanese to accept the new faith. Widespread temple construction was authorised and in 588, as recorded in the 8th-century *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicle of Japan), Japan's first great temple complex, Asuka-dera, was completed.

Gradually the wealth and power of the temples began to pose a threat to the governing Yamato court, prompting reforms from Prince Shōtoku (574–622), regent for Empress Suiko. He set up the Constitution of 17 Articles, which combined ideas from Buddhism and Confucianism to outline the acceptable behaviour of the people, and laid the guidelines for a centralised state headed by a single ruler. He also instituted Buddhism as a state religion and ordered the construction of more temples, including Nara's eminent Hōryū-ji (p158), the world's oldest surviving wooden structure. Another significant accomplishment of Prince Shōtoku was the first compilation of Japanese history in 620; however, the book was later burned.

Despite family feuds and coups d'état, subsequent rulers continued to reform the country's administration and laws. Prior to the establishment of the Taiho Code in 701, it had been the custom to avoid the pollution of imperial death by changing the site of the capital for each successive emperor. Reforms and bureaucratisation of government led to the establishment, in 710, of a permanent imperial capital, known as Heijō-kyō, in Nara, where it remained for 74 years.

The prosperous Nara period (710–94) saw further propagation of Buddhism and, by the end of the 8th century, the Buddhist clergy had become so meddlesome that Emperor Kammu decided to sever the ties between Buddhism and government by again moving the capital. He first moved it to Nagaoka (a suburb of Kyoto) in 784, but due to the assassination of the city's principal architect, several ominous natural disasters and superstitious beliefs regarding the location, a decade later he suddenly shifted the capital to Heian-kyō, present-day Kyoto.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF HEIAN-KYŌ

The Kyoto basin was first settled in the 7th century when the region was known as Yamashiro-no-kuni. The original inhabitants were immigrants from Korea, the Hata clan, who established Koryū-ji (p78) in 603 as their family temple in what is today the Uzumasa District. A major reason Emperor Kammu proclaimed Heian-kyō the new capital of Japan was his realisation that the city lay within a strategic natural fortress created by the rivers and mountains which surround it on three sides, fulfilling the geomantic requirements derived from proto–feng shui.

As with the previous capital in Nara, the city was laid out in accordance with Chinese geomancy in a grid pattern adopted from the Tang dynasty capital, Chang'an (present-day Xi'an). The rectangle-shaped precincts were established west of where the Kamo-gawa flows. Originally measuring 4.5km east to west and 5.3km north to south, the city was about one-third the size of its Chinese prototype. Running through the centre was Suzaku-ōji, an 85m-wide, willow-lined thoroughfare dividing the eastern (Sakyō-ku) part of the city from the west (Ukyō-ku). The northern tip of the promenade was the site of the ornate Imperial Palace and to the far south stood the 23m-high, two-storey Rajō Gate, over 35m wide and 10m deep. However, to avoid a repeat of the power struggle between the imperial court and Buddhist clergy, only two temples, the West Temple and the East Temple (Tō-ji; p57), were built within the city limits.

Literally, capital of peace *(hei)* and tranquillity *(an),* the ensuing Heian period (794–1185) effectively lived up to its name. Over four centuries the city went beyond its post as a political hub to become the country's commercial and cultural centre. Towards the end of the 9th century, contact with China became increasingly sporadic, providing an opportunity for Japan to cultivate an independent heritage. This produced a great flowering in literature, the arts and religious thinking, as the Japanese adapted ideas and institutions imported from China.

The development of hiragana (Japanese characters), whose invention is attributed to the Buddhist priest Kūkai in the 9th century, led to a popular literary trend best recalled by Murasaki Shikibu's legendary saga *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji). This period in Kyoto's history conjures up romantic visions of riverside moon-gazing parties where literati drew calligraphy and composed poetry while the aristocracy frolicked in their self-imposed seclusion.

Rivalry between Buddhism and Shintō, the traditional religion of Japan, was reduced by presenting Shintō deities as manifestations of Buddha. Religion was separated from politics, and Japanese monks returning from China established two new sects, Tendai (or Tenzai, meaning Heavenly Terrace) and Shingon (True Words), that became the mainstays of Japanese Buddhism. Soon other sects were springing up and temples were being enthusiastically built.

The powerful Fujiwara clan, whose influence stemmed from its matrimonial alliance with the imperial family, dominated Japanese politics during the Heian era. Fujiwara princes served as high ministers of the imperial court and regents for underage monarchs, and were the proverbial 'power behind the throne' for centuries. Despite their supplanting of imperial authority, the Fujiwara clan presided over a period of cultural and artistic prosperity.

The Heian period is considered the apogee of Japanese courtly elegance, but in the provinces a new power was on the rise – the samurai (warrior class), which built up its armed forces to defend its autonomy. Samurai families moved into Kyoto, where they muscled in on the court, and subsequent conflicts between rival military clans led to civil wars. Members of the Fujiwara, Taira and Minamoto families attacked each other, claimed control over conquered tracts of land and set up rival regimes. This was the beginning of a long period of feudal rule by successive Shogunates (samurai families). This feudal system effectively lingered on for seven centuries until imperial power was restored in 1868.

## FROM ARISTOCRATIC TO MILITARY RULE

Although Kyoto served as home to the Japanese imperial family from 794 to 1868, it was not always the focus of Japanese political power. During the Kamakura period (1185–1333), Kamakura (near present-day Tokyo) was the national capital, while during the Edo period (1600–1868) the Tokugawa Shōgunate ruled the country from Edo (present-day Tokyo). Still, despite the decline in influence of the imperial court, Kyoto flourished as townspeople continued developing age-old traditions.

By the 12th century the imperial family had become increasingly isolated from the mechanics of political power. In 1185 the corrupt Fujiwara Shōgunate was eclipsed by the Taira clan, who ruled briefly before being ousted by the Minamoto family (also known as the Genji) in the epic battle of Dannoura (Shimonoseki). By this time 'Kyoto' had emerged as the common name of the city.

In 1192, while the emperor remained nominal ruler in Kyoto, Minamoto Yoritomo, the first shōgun of the Kamakura Shōgunate, set up his headquarters in Kamakura. Yoritomo purged members of his own family who stood in his way, but after fatally falling from his horse in

**788**
Saichō establishes a monastery atop Hiei-zan (Mt Hiei), north of the city. The temple serves to protect the city from the 'dangerous' northeast direction. Saichō starts a school of Buddhism known as Tendai (or Tenzai).

**794**
Things go poorly in the new capital at Nagaoka and Emperor Kammu searches to the northeast, in the Kyoto basin, for another site for his capital. Late that year, he finds a suitable spot in present-day Kyoto.

**794**
A pair of temples, Tō-ji and Sai-ji, are built at the southern edge of the city to protect the city and the imperial court. Sai-ji no longer exists, but Tō-ji can still be visited today.

**10th century**
The centre of the city gradually shifts eastward, closer to the Kamo-gawa and the Higashiyama. During this time, imperial properties in the west are abandoned.

**1168**
The priest Eisai travels to China and observes Chang Buddhism. He later introduces this as Zen Buddhism in Japan. He also introduces the practice of tea drinking.

**1192**
Minamoto Yoritomo is appointed shōgun and establishes the political capital in Kamakura. While the imperial court remains in Kyoto, the real power centre of the country leaves the city.

1199, the Hōjō, his wife's family, eliminated all of Yoritomo's potential successors. In 1213 they became true wielders of power behind the shōguns and warrior lords.

During this era the popularity of Buddhism spread to all levels of society. From the late 12th century, Eisei (1145–1215) and other Japanese monks returning from China introduced a new sect, Zen, which encountered resistance from the established sects in Kyoto but appealed to the samurai class. Meanwhile, as the spiritual fervour grew, Japanese merchants prospered in increased trade dealings with China.

Forces beyond the sea undermined the stability of the Kamakura regime. The Mongols, under Kublai Khan, reached Korea in 1259 and sent envoys to Japan seeking Japanese submission. The envoys were expelled and the Mongols sent an invasion fleet which arrived near present-day Fukuoka in 1274. This first attack was only barely repulsed with the aid of a typhoon that destroyed up to 200 Mongol ships. Further envoys sent by Khan were beheaded in Kamakura as a sign that the government of Japan was not interested in paying homage to the Mongols.

In 1281 the Mongols dispatched an army of over 100,000 soldiers to Japan. After an initial success, the Mongol fleet was almost completely destroyed by yet another massive typhoon that assaulted the shores of Kyushu for two days. Ever since, this lucky typhoon has been known to the Japanese as kamikaze (divine wind) – a name later given to the suicide pilots of WWII.

Although the Kamakura government emerged victorious, it was unable to pay its soldiers and lost the support of the warrior class. Emperor Go-Daigo led an unsuccessful rebellion to overthrow the shōgunate and was exiled to the Oki Islands near Matsue. A year later, he escaped from the island, raised an army and toppled the government, ushering in a return of political authority to Kyoto.

## COUNTRY AT WAR

After completing his takeover, Emperor Go-Daigo refused to reward his warriors, favouring the aristocracy and priesthood instead. In the early 14th century this led to a revolt by the warrior Ashikaga Takauji, who had previously supported Go-Daigo. When Ashikaga's army entered Kyoto, Go-Daigo fled to Mt Hiei and sent the imperial Sacred Treasures to Ashikaga in conciliation. Ashikaga installed a new emperor and appointed himself shōgun, initiating the Muromachi period (1333–1568). Go-Daigo escaped from Kyoto and, the Sacred Treasures he had sent to Ashikaga being counterfeit, set up a rival court at Yoshino in a mountainous region near Nara. Rivalry between the two courts continued for 60 years until the Ashikaga made an unfulfilled promise that the imperial lines would alternate.

Kyoto gradually recovered its position of political significance and, under the control of the art-loving Ashikaga, enjoyed an epoch of cultural and artistic fruition. Talents now considered typically Japanese flourished, including such arts as landscape painting, classical nō drama, ikebana (flower arranging) and *chanoyu* (tea ceremony). Many of Kyoto's famous gardens date from this period, such as Saihōji's famed Moss Garden (p90) and the garden of Tenryū-ji (p80). Kinkaku-ji (Golden Pavilion; p77) and Ginkaku-ji (Silver Temple; p71) were built by the Ashikaga shōguns to serve as places of rest and solitude. Eventually formal trade relations were reopened with Ming China and Korea, although Japanese piracy remained a bone of contention with both.

The Ashikaga ruled, however, with diminishing effectiveness in a land slipping steadily into civil war and chaos. By the 15th century Kyoto had become increasingly divided as *daimyō* (domain lords) and local barons fought for power in bitter territorial disputes that were to last for a century. In 1467 the matter of succession to the shōgunate between two feudal lords, Yamana and Hosokawa, ignited the most devastating battle in Kyoto's history. With Yamana's army of 90,000 camped in the southwest and Hosokawa's force of 100,000 quartered in the north of the city, Kyoto became a battlefield. The resulting Ōnin-no-ran (Ōnin War; 1467–77) wreaked untold havoc on the city; the Imperial Palace and most of the city were destroyed by fighting and subsequent fires, and the populace was left in ruin.

The war marked the rapid decline of the Ashikaga family and the beginning of the Sengoku-jidai (Warring States period), a long-protracted struggle for domination by individual *daimyō* that spread throughout Japan and lasted until the start of the Azuchi-Momoyama period in 1568.

## RETURN TO UNITY

In 1568 Oda Nobunaga, the son of a *daimyō* from Owari province (the western half of present-day Aichi Prefecture), seized power from the imperial court in Kyoto and used his military genius to initiate a process of pacification and unification in central Japan. This manoeuvre marked the start of the short-lived Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1600). To support his military and political moves, Nobunaga instituted market reform by invalidating traditional monopolies and promoting free markets. However, Nobunaga is especially remembered for his ruthless destruction of temples and massacres of monks, particularly those of his most tenacious enemy, the members of the Ikkō sect. In 1582, Nobunaga was betrayed by his own general, Akechi Mitsuhide. Under attack from Mitsuhide and seeing all was lost, Nobunaga disembowelled himself in Kyoto's Honnō-ji.

Mitsuhide held Kyoto for 13 days until Toyotomi Hideyoshi sped to Kyoto to attack and ultimately defeat him. Hideyoshi was reputedly the son of a farmer, although his origins are not clear. His diminutive size and pop-eyed features earned him the nickname Saru-san (Mr Monkey). Hideyoshi worked on extending unification so that by 1590 the whole country was under his rule and he developed grandiose schemes to invade China and Korea. The first invasion was repulsed in 1593 and the second was aborted.

By the late 16th century, Kyoto's population had swelled to 500,000 and Hideyoshi was fascinated with redesigning and rebuilding the city, which had been devastated by more than a century of war. Prior to his death in 1598 he transformed Kyoto into a castle town and greatly altered the cityscape by ordering major construction projects including bridges, gates and the Odoi, a phenomenal earthen rampart designed to isolate and fortify the perimeter of the city, and to provide a measure of flood control. He also rebuilt temples burned by Nobunaga, including the stronghold of the Ikkō sect, the great Hongan-ji.

The rebuilding of Kyoto is usually credited to the influence of the city's merchant class, which led a citizens' revival that gradually shifted power back into the hands of the townspeople. Centred in Shimogyō, the commercial and industrial district, these enterprising people founded a *machi-shū* (self-governing body), which contributed greatly to temple reconstruction. Over time, temples of different sects were consolidated in one quarter of the city, creating the miniature Tera-Machi (city of temples), which still exists.

The Azuchi-Momoyama period has been referred to as the 'Japanese Renaissance', during which the arts further prospered. Artisans of the era are noted for their boisterous use of colour

**1202**
Eisai establishes Kennin-ji, the Zen temple on the eastern bank of the Kamo-gawa, under sponsorship of the shōgun Minamoto no Yoriie. It remains one of Kyoto's most important Zen temples.

**Early 13th century**
A priest named Hōnen, troubled by disagreement between Japan's major Buddhist sects, establishes a new populist sect of Buddhism known as Jōdo (Pure Land) Buddhism. He fasts to death in 1212.

**Mid-13th century**
Shinran, originally a follower of Hōnen, preaches a radical doctrine of Buddhism which becomes known as Jōdo-Shinshū (True Pure Land Buddhism). Followers of this school establish the vast Higashi-Hongan-ji and Nishi-Hongan-ji.

**1281**
Kublai Khan of Mongolia attempts to conquer Japan for the second time, but the invasion force is destroyed by a massive typhoon (the so-called kamikaze).

**1333**
The Kamakura Shōgunate is defeated, Emperor Daigo II returns from exile and the political capital is re-established in Kyoto, where it remains until 1868.

**1467**
The devastating Ōnin War breaks out in Kyoto between two families competing for shogunate succession, leading to a nationwide war known as the Sengoku Jidai (Warring States) period.

and gold-leaf embellishment, which marked a new aesthetic sense in contrast to the more sombre monotones of the Muromachi period. The Zen-influenced tea ceremony was developed to perfection under Master Sen no Rikyū, who also wrote poetry and practised ikebana. The performing arts also matured, along with skill in ceramics, lacquerware and fabric-dyeing. A vogue for building castles and palaces on a flamboyant scale was also nurtured, the most impressive examples being Osaka-jō, which reputedly required three years of labour by up to 100,000 workers, and the extraordinary Ninomaru Palace in Kyoto's Nijō-jō (p73).

## PEACE & SECLUSION

The supporters of Hideyoshi's young heir, Toyotomi Hideyori, were defeated in 1600 by his former ally, Tokugawa Ieyasu, at the decisive Battle of Sekigahara in Gifu prefecture. Ieyasu set up his *bakufu* (literally, field headquarters) at Edo, marking the start of the Edo (Tokugawa) period (1600–1868). Meanwhile the emperor and court exercised purely nominal authority in Kyoto.

There emerged a pressing fear of religious intrusion (seen as a siphoning of loyalty to the shōgun) and Tokugawa set out to stabilise society and the national economy. Eager for trade, he was initially tolerant of Christian missionary activities but, fearing the Christians would support Hideyori's efforts to resist the *bakufu* military government, he took steps to prohibit Christianity before destroying the Toyotomi family. Japan entered a period of *sakoku* (national seclusion) during which Japanese were forbidden on pain of death to travel to (or return from) overseas or to trade abroad. As efforts to expel foreign influences spread, only Dutch, Chinese and Koreans were allowed to remain, under strict supervision, and trade was restricted to the artificial island of Dejima at Nagasaki.

The Tokugawa family retained large estates and took control of major cities, ports and mines; the remainder of the country was allocated to autonomous *daimyō*. Foreign affairs and trade were monopolized by the shōgunate, which yielded great financial authority over the *daimyō*. Tokugawa society was strictly hierarchical. In descending order of importance were the nobility, who had nominal power; the *daimyō* and their samurai; farmers; and, at the bottom, artisans and merchants. Mobility from one class to another was blocked; social standing was determined by birth.

To ensure political security, the *daimyō* were required to make ceremonial visits to Edo every alternate year, while their wives and children were kept in permanent residence in Edo as virtual hostages of the government. At the lower end of society, farmers were subject to a severe system of rules that dictated in minutest detail their food, clothing and housing and land surveys which were designed to extract the greatest tax yield possible.

One effect of this strict rule was to create an atmosphere of relative peace and isolation in which the arts excelled. There were great advances in haiku poetry, *bunraku* puppet plays and kabuki theatre. Crafts such as wood-block printing, weaving, pottery, ceramics and lacquerware became famous for their refined quality. Some of Japan's greatest expressions in architecture and painting were produced, including Katsura Rikyū in Kyoto (p71) and the paintings of Tawaraya Sōtatsu, pioneer of the Rimpa school. Furthermore, the rigid emphasis of these times on submitting unquestioningly to rules of obedience and loyalty has lasted in the arts, and society at large, to the present day.

By the turn of the 19th century, the Tokugawa government was characterised by stagnation and corruption. Famines and poverty among the peasants and samurai further weakened the system. Foreign ships started to probe Japan's isolation with increasing insistence and the Japanese soon realised that their outmoded defences were ineffectual. Russian contacts in the north were followed by British and American visits. In 1853 Commodore Matthew Perry of the US Navy arrived with a squadron of 'black ships' to demand the opening of Japan to trade. Other countries also moved in with similar demands.

Despite being far inland, Kyoto felt the foreign pressure, which helped bring to a head the growing power struggle between the shōgun and emperor, eventually pushing Japan back into a state of internal conflict. A surge of antigovernment feeling among the Japanese followed and Kyoto became a hotbed of controversy. The Tokugawa government was accused of failing to defend Japan against foreigners, and of neglecting the national reconstruction necessary for Japan to meet foreign powers on equal terms. In the autumn of 1867, forces led by Satsuma and Chōshū samurai armed with English weapons attacked the palace demanding an imperial restoration. The ruling shōgun, Keiki, offered his resignation to avoid bloodshed, and Emperor Meiji resumed control of state affairs. This development has since been referred to as the Meiji Restoration.

## EMERGENCE FROM ISOLATION

With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the seat of Japanese national political power was restored to Kyoto, but the following year the capital was transferred to Edo along with the imperial court. Political power now resided in Edo and many great merchants and scholars of the era followed the emperor. After more than a millennium as capital, the sudden changes came as a major blow to Kyoto as the population dropped dramatically and the city entered a state of bitter depression.

Kyoto quickly set its sights on revival, taking steps to secure autonomy and rebuild its infrastructure. It again flourished as a cultural, religious and economic centre, with progressive industrial development. By the late 1800s Kyoto led the country in education reforms by establishing Japan's first kindergarten, elementary and junior high schools, and public library. In 1871 the first Kyoto Exhibition was launched, in which the Maiko and Kamogawa *odori* (dances; p142) originated. In 1880 the nation's first public art school, the Kyoto Prefecture Art School (now the Kyoto City University of Arts) was opened. In the same period the city introduced Japan's first electricity system, water system and fully functioning transport network. In 1885 work began on the monumental Lake Biwa Canal, which, in just five years, made Kyoto the first Japanese city to harness hydroelectric power.

Up until this point, the city of Kyoto was under the jurisdiction of the Kyoto prefectural government. In 1889 a proper city government was finally formed, which helped create an atmosphere in which industry could flourish. As traditional industry pushed on, research developed in the sciences, in particular physics and chemistry. Modern industries such as precision machinery also grew, as did the introduction of foreign technologies such as the automated weaving loom, which bolstered the struggling Nishijin textile industry. To celebrate the 1100th anniversary of the city's founding in 1895, Kyoto hosted the 4th National Industrial Exhibition Fair and established the country's first streetcar system (fuelled by the Keage Hydroelectric Plant). The same year saw the construction of Heian-jingū (actually a five-to-eight scale replica of Daigokuden, the emperor's Great Hall of State; p72), and the birth of the Jidai Matsuri (Festival of the Ages).

**1591** — The ruling shōgun, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, orders the construction of a wall around the city of Kyoto. The wall extends for 23km and is traversable by seven gates.

**1600** — Tokugawa Ieyasu's forces defeat Toyotomi's army at the Battle of Sekigahara and the Tokugawa Shōgunate government is established in Edo (present-day Tokyo). The capital, however, remains in Kyoto.

**1620** — Construction starts on Katsura-Rikyū Imperial Villa. The villa was originally built to house an adopted son of Tokugawa Hideyoshi. The imperial family cooperates in the construction.

**1646** — Omotesenke tea-ceremony school is founded by Sen Sosa, the great-grandson of Sen no Rikyū, Japan's great tea master. The school remains in Kyoto to this day.

**1853** — American Commodore Matthew Perry's 'black ships' arrive at Uraga Harbour (part of present-day Yokosuka), leading to a treaty allowing American trade with Japan.

**1867** — An alliance of the powerful Chōshū and Satsuma *daimyō* and the titular Emperor Meiji overthrows the Tokugawa Shōgunate and restores imperial rule (the so-called 'Meiji Restoration').

Despite the apparent industrial boom, the initial stages of Kyoto's restoration were undermined by a state of virtual civil war. The abolition of the shōgunate was followed by the surrender of the *daimyō,* whose lands were divided into the prefectures that exist today. With the transfer of the capital to Edo, now renamed Tokyo (Eastern Capital), the government was recentralised and European-style ministries were appointed for specific tasks. A series of revolts by the samurai against the erosion of their status culminated in the Saigō Uprising, when they were finally beaten and stripped of their power. The fighting, however, had drained the national treasury, caused serious inflation and driven land values and badly needed taxes down.

Despite nationalist support for the emperor under the slogan of *sonnō-jōi* (revere the emperor, repel the barbarians), the new government soon realised it would have to meet the outside world on its own terms. Promising *fukoku kyōhei* (rich country, strong military), the economy underwent a crash course in westernisation and industrialisation. An influx of foreign experts was encouraged to provide assistance and Japanese students were sent abroad to acquire expertise in modern technologies. Western-style factories were established and mining operations were expanded under the management of *zaibatsu* (wealthy groups), such as Mitsui and Sumitomo. In 1889 Japan created a US-style constitution that gave the appearance of a democracy but preserved the authoritarian rule of the emperor and his select group of advisers.

By the 1890s government leaders were concerned at the spread of liberal ideas and encouraged a swing back to nationalism and traditional values. Japan's growing confidence was demonstrated by the abolition of foreign treaty rights and by the ease with which it trounced China in the Sino–Japanese War (1894–95). The subsequent treaty nominally recognised Korean independence from China's sphere of influence and ceded Taiwan to Japan. Friction with Russia over control of Manchuria and Korea led to the Russo–Japanese War (1904–05), in which the Japanese navy stunned the Russians by inflicting a crushing defeat on their Baltic fleet at the Battle of Tsu-shima. For the first time, the Japanese commanded the respect of the western powers.

## THE PURSUIT OF EMPIRE

Upon his death in 1912, Emperor Meiji was succeeded by his son, Yoshihito, whose period of rule was named the Taishō era. When WWI broke out, Japan sided against Germany but did not become deeply involved in the conflict. While the Allies were occupied with war, Japan took the opportunity to expand its economy at top speed.

The Shōwa period commenced when Emperor Hirohito ascended to the throne in 1926. A rising tide of nationalism was quickened by the world economic depression that began in 1929. Popular unrest was marked by political assassinations and plots to overthrow the government. This led to a significant increase in the power of the militarists, who approved the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the installation of a Japanese puppet regime, Manchukuo. In 1933 Japan withdrew from the League of Nations and in 1937 entered into full-scale hostilities against China.

As the leader of a new order for Asia, Japan signed a tripartite pact with Germany and Italy in 1940. The Japanese military leaders viewed the US as the main obstacle to their imperial conquest of Asia, and when diplomatic attempts to gain US neutrality failed, the Japanese drew them into WWII with a surprise attack on the US Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. The intent of the strike was to neutralise the fleet, which Japan rightly viewed as its main threat in the region.







At first Japan scored rapid successes, pushing its battle fronts across to India, down to the fringes of Australia and into the mid-Pacific. But eventually the decisive Battle of Midway turned the tide of the war against Japan. Exhausted by submarine blockades and aerial bombing, by 1945 Japan had been driven back on all fronts. In August, the declaration of war by the Soviet Union and the atomic bombs dropped by the USA on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the final straws: Emperor Hirohito announced unconditional surrender.

Despite being spared from air raids, Kyoto suffered a great drain of people and resources during the war. To prevent the spread of fires, hundreds of magnificent wooden shops and houses were torn down, and some great temple bells and statues were melted down into artillery. Fortunately, however, the majority of its cultural treasures survived.

## POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION & REVIVAL

Japan was occupied by Allied forces until 1952 under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. The chief aim was a thorough reform of Japanese government through demilitarisation, the trial of war criminals and the weeding out of militarists and ultranationalists from the government. A new constitution was introduced which denounced war and banned a Japanese military, and also dismantled the political power of the emperor, who stunned his subjects by publicly renouncing any claim to divine origins.

At the end of the war, the Japanese economy was in ruins and inflation was running rampant. A programme of recovery provided loans, restricted imports and encouraged capital investment and personal saving. In 1945 the Kyoto Revival Plan was drafted and, again, Kyoto was set for rebuilding. In 1949 physicist Hideki Yukawa was the first in a long line of Nobel Prize winners from Kyoto University, and the city went on to become a primary educational centre.

By the late '50s trade was flourishing and the Japanese economy continued to experience rapid growth. From textiles and the manufacture of labour-intensive goods such as cameras, the Japanese 'economic miracle' had branched out into virtually every sector of society and Kyoto increasingly became an international hub of business and culture.

In 1956 Japan's first public orchestra was founded in Kyoto and two years later the city established its first sister-city relationship, with Paris. Japan was now looking seriously towards tourism as a source of income, and foreign visitors were steadily arriving on tours for both business and pleasure. By this time Kyoto had further developed as a major university centre and during the 'Woodstock era' of the late '60s, antiwar movements and Japanese flower power mirrored those of America and brought student activism out into the streets. The year 1966 saw the enactment of a law to preserve historical sites in the city and the opening of the Kyoto International Conference Hall, where the Kyoto Protocol was drafted in 1997.

During the 1970s Japan faced an economic recession, with inflation surfacing in 1974 and again in 1980, mostly as a result of steep price hikes for the imported oil on which Japan is still gravely dependent. By the early '80s, however, Japan had fully emerged as an economic superpower, and Kyoto's high-tech companies, including Kyocera, OMRON and Nintendo, were among those dominating fields such as electronics, robotics and computer technology. The notorious 'bubble economy' that followed marked an unprecedented era of free spending by Japan's nouveau riche. Shortly after the 1989 death of Emperor Shōwa and the start of the Heisei period (with the accession of the current emperor, Akihito) the miracle bubble burst, launching Japan into a critical economic freefall from which it has not yet fully recovered.

**1869**

The 17-year-old Emperor Meiji moves from Kyoto to Edo, renamed Tokyo the year before, where Japan's new political and economic centre capital is established.

**1871**

Japan's first exposition is held in Kyoto. The Miyako and Kamogawa *odori* (dances performed by geisha and apprentice geisha) are first performed at the Kyoto exhibition the following year.

**1915**

The first street lamps are installed on Shijō-dōri and the accession of Emperor Taishō is celebrated throughout Japan (although he had officially become emperor three years prior).

**1941**

The Imperial Japanese Navy attacks the US Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in a strike designed to prevent American interference in Japan's territorial expansion in Asia.

**1966**

Kyoto International Conference Hall opens at Takaragaike as the first international conference hall in Japan. Takaragaike later serves as the site for the Kyoto Protocol agreement.

**1981**

Karasuma subway line starts service between Kyoto and Kitaōji stations. The city's first subway line allows easy north–south travel through the city. The line later extends south to Takeda and north to Takaragaike.

## WHAT REALLY SAVED KYOTO?

Kyoto's good fortune in escaping US bombing during WWII is a well-publicised fact. Still, while it may provide patriotic colour for some Americans to hear that the city was consciously spared out of US goodwill and reverence for Kyoto's cultural heritage, not everyone agrees with the prevailing story.

The common belief is that Kyoto was rescued through the efforts of American scholar Langdon Warner (1881–1955). During the latter half of the war Warner sat on a committee that endeavoured to save artistic and historical treasures in war-torn regions. Now, more than a half-century later, Warner is a household name in Japan and is still alluded to in discussions on the future preservation of Kyoto. He is said to have made a desperate plea to top US military authorities to spare the cities of Kyoto, Nara, Kamakura and Kanazawa.

Despite this popular account, other theories have surfaced, along with documentation pointing to an elaborate conspiracy aimed at quelling anti-American sentiment in occupied Japan. The evidence has fuelled a debate as to whether or not it was in fact a well-planned public relations stunt scripted by US intelligence officials to gain the trust of a nation that had been taught to fear and hate the American enemy.

Some historians have suggested that both Kyoto and Nara were on a list of some 180 cities earmarked for air raids. Kyoto, with a population of over one million people, was a prime target (along with Hiroshima and Nagasaki) for atomic annihilation and many avow the choice could easily have been Kyoto. Nara, it has been suggested, escaped merely due to having a population under 60,000, which kept it far enough down the list not to be reached before the unconditional surrender of Japan in September 1945.

Whether the preservation of Kyoto was an act of philanthropy or a simple twist of fate, the efforts of Warner and his intellectual contemporaries are etched into the pages of history and even taught in Japanese schools. Disbelievers avow that the 'rumour' was sealed as fact for good after Warner was posthumously honoured by the Japanese government, which bestowed upon him the esteemed Order of the Sacred Treasure in recognition of his invaluable contribution to the Japanese nation. There is a symbolic tombstone placed as a memorial to Warner in the precinct of Nara's Hōryū-ji.

## KYOTO TODAY & TOMORROW

In 1994 Kyoto marked the 1200th anniversary of its founding. While the city celebrated its ancient heritage, however, developers celebrated this milestone by building several structures in excess of the height restrictions that had been put in place to maintain the city's traditional skyline.

Fortunately, in September 2007, the Kyoto city government enacted new ordinances that restrict building heights and ban all rooftop and blinking advertisements. Other recent positive developments include attempts to ban cars from the main Downtown thoroughfare of Shijō-dōri during certain daylight hours, and heightened interest in the city's *machiya* (traditional wooden town houses; see the boxed text, p34).

While the usual tension between old and new plays itself out, Kyoto remains an important cultural and educational centre. Today more than 60 museums and 37 universities and colleges are scattered throughout the city, and more than 200 of Japan's National Treasures and nearly 1700 important Cultural Properties are housed here.

As Kyoto heads into the future, the real challenge is to preserve its ancient history while meeting the desires of its citizens for economic development and modern convenience. Looking back at the many incarnations of Kyoto, one can be hopeful that the city will find its own unique way to meet this challenge.

**1994**

Kyoto celebrates the 1200th anniversary of its founding and 17 Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto are registered as Unesco World Heritage sites, including Kinkaku-ji and Ginkaku-ji.

**1997**

The futuristic Kyoto Station building, featuring a 60m-high atrium over the main concourse, opens in the same year as the Tōzai (east–west) line, Kyoto's second subway line.

**2007**

Kyoto city passes a new law limiting building heights and gaudy advertising in an effort to protect the city's skyline and traditional character.



## ARTS

Until the 20th century the main influences on Japanese art came from China and Korea, which passed Buddhism on from India in the 6th century. While incorporating these outside influences, the Japanese add something unique to their art. There is a fascination with the ephemeral and the unadorned, and with forms that echo the randomness of nature. A gift for caricature is also obvious, from early Zen ink paintings right up to contemporary manga (Japanese comic books). An interest in the grotesque or the bizarre is also often visible, from Buddhist scrolls depicting the horrors of hell to the highly stylised depictions of body parts in *ukiyo-e* wood-block prints of the Edo period.

When asked to define their aesthetic principles, the Japanese reach for words such as *wabi, sabi* and *shibui* (which refer to a kind of spare, natural, rustic and refined beauty). Such ideals are by no means the final say on a long and vibrant artistic tradition that continues to seek new inspirations and produce new forms.

### top picks

#### KYOTO MUSEUMS

- Kyoto National Museum (p60)
- National Museum of Modern Art (p72)
- Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art (p72)
- Kawai Kanjirō Memorial Hall (p61)
- Fureai-kan Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts (p72)

## PERFORMING ARTS

The two most famous Japanese theatrical traditions are kabuki and nō. Both forms work well as spectacle and some theatres have programmes with an English synopsis or headphones with an English commentary. Other forms of theatre include the comic drama of *kyōgen*; the puppet theatre known as *bunraku*; *rakugo*, which employs comic narrative; and *manzai*, a style of slapstick comedy.

### Nō

Nō is a hypnotic dance-drama that reflects the minimalist aesthetics of Zen. The movement is glorious, the chorus and music sonorous, the expression subtle. A sparsely furnished cedar stage directs full attention to the performers, who include a chorus, drummers and a flautist. There are two principal characters: the *shite,* who is sometimes a living person but more often a demon or a ghost whose soul cannot rest; and the *waki,* who leads the main character towards the play's climactic moment. Each nō school has its own repertoire, and the art form continues to evolve and develop. One of the many new plays performed over the last 30 years is *Takahime,* based on William Butler Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well.*

The Takigi nō performance, held annually in the precincts of Heian-jingū (p72) on 1 and 2 June is your best chance to sample nō.

### Kabuki

The origins of kabuki lie in the early 17th century when a maiden of a shrine led a troupe of women dancers to raise funds for the shrine. Prostitutes were soon performing the lead roles until the Tokugawa government banned women from the kabuki stage; they were replaced with attractive young men and finally by older men. This had a profound effect on kabuki, as these older male actors required greater artistry to credibly perform their roles. Thus, while remaining a popular art form, kabuki also became a serious art form.

Kabuki employs opulent sets, a boom-crash orchestra and a ramp through the audience to allow important actors to get the most out of their melodramatic entrances and exits. Formalised beauty and stylisation are the central aesthetic principles of kabuki; the acting is a combination of dancing and speaking in conventionalised intonation patterns. Kabuki deals thematically with feudal tragedies of the struggle between duty and inner feelings; the latter has produced a large body of work on the theme of love suicides.

In this style of theatre, the playwright is not the applauded; the play is merely a vehicle for the genius of the actor.

## JAPANESE TEA CULTURE *Morgan Pitelka*

Tea came to Japan from China as part of a cultural package that included kanji and Buddhism, but the beverage did not become popular until the medieval period. Buddhist monks drank tea for its medicinal and stimulatory properties, a practice that gradually spread to warrior society and then to commoners. By the 16th century elite urban commoners such as the merchant and tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–91) had elevated the preparation, serving and consumption of *matcha* (powdered green tea) to an elaborate performance art. In the 17th century tea masters established their own schools of tea, and these institutions codified, spread and protected the practice over subsequent centuries.

Although *chanoyu* (hot water for tea) is often referred to in English as the 'tea ceremony', the practice has always been more focused on collaboration, pleasure and artistic appreciation than on dutiful ritual. Tea gatherings can be short and spontaneous or long and extremely formal. They might be held to mark an anniversary, the changing of the seasons or just as an opportunity to see old friends. Typically a group of guests arrive at the location of the gathering, perhaps a home or a temple with its own tea house, and wait in the outer garden, a peaceful and meditative space. After entering the tea house, they observe while the host arranges the charcoal and serves a special meal known as *kaiseki* cuisine. After the meal, they eat some simple sweets, take a brief intermission, then return for a serving of viscous *koicha* (thick tea) followed in many cases, by a round of *usucha* (thin tea). The movements of the host and guests are carefully choreographed and rehearsed, making the sharing of the beverage a satisfying mutual performance. At certain moments during the gathering, the guests have the chance to admire the hanging scroll, the flower arrangement and the host's careful selection of *chadōgu* (tea utensils).

Tea culture has stimulated and supported the arts and crafts in Japan for centuries, and utensils – including tea bowls, tea caddies, tea scoops and tea whisks – can be purchased in tea shops and galleries or directly from artists. Urban department stores such as Takashimaya and Daimaru (see the boxed text, p109), Seibu and Mitsukoshi, among many others, frequently have whole floors devoted to ceramics, lacquerware and other crafts, as well as galleries in which the finest artists hold solo exhibitions and sales. A trip to a town famous for its crafts, such as Bizen, Hagi or Karatsu, can also present opportunities to buy tea utensils.

Some tea schools, such as Urasenke (p76), Omotesenke, Mushanokojisenke and Dai Nippon Chadō Gakkai, hold tea gatherings that are open to the public, particularly in large cities. Speciality cafés such as the confectionary store Toraya also offer a serving of sweets and tea. Museums that specialise in art associated with tea, such as the Nomura Museum (p67), Raku Museum and Kitamura Museum, display historical tea utensils and on occasion serve tea as well.

*Morgan Pitelka, PhD, is the author of* Handmade Culture: Raku Potters, Patrons, and Tea Practitioners in Japan

During the Edo period, Kyoto had a total of seven kabuki theatres. The sole remaining theatre is the venerable Minami-za (p142). You can find out what's on while you're in town by asking at the Tourist Information Centre (p199).

### Kyōgen

*Kyōgen* is a comic drama that originally served as a light interlude within a nō play, but that is now more often performed separately between two different nō plays. *Kyōgen* draws on the real world for its subject matter and is acted in colloquial Japanese. The subjects of its satire are often samurai, depraved priests and faithless women – the performers are without masks and a chorus often accompanies.

A famous performance is held annually at Kyoto's Mibu-dera (p57).

## IKEBANA

Ikebana, the art of flower arranging, was developed in the 15th century and can be grouped into three main styles: *rikka* (standing flowers), *shōka* (living flowers), and free-style techniques such as *nageire* (throwing-in) and *moribana* (heaped flowers). There are several thousand different schools, the top three being Ikenobō, Ōhara and Sōgetsu, but they share one aim: to arrange flowers to represent heaven, earth and humanity. Ikebana displays were originally used as part of the tea ceremony but can now be found in private homes – in the *tokonoma* (sacred alcove) – and even in large hotels.

Apart from its cultural associations, ikebana is also a lucrative business – its schools have millions of students, including many young women who view proficiency in the art as a means to improve their marriage prospects.

WAK Japan (p191) offers introductory classes in ikebana to foreign tourists in English.

## PAINTING

By the end of the Heian period the emphasis on religious themes painted according to Chinese conventions gave way to a purely Japanese style, known as *yamato-e*. S*uiboku-ga* or *sumi-e* (ink paintings) by Chinese Zen artists were introduced during the Muromachi period and copied by Japanese artists, who produced *kakemono* (hanging pictures), *e-maki* (scrolls), and *fusuma-e* (decorated screens and sliding doors). During the Azuchi-Momoyama period, Japan's *daimyō* commissioned artists who painted in flamboyant colours and embellished with copious gold leaf.

European techniques, such as the use of oils, were introduced during the 16th century by the Jesuits, and the ensuing Edo period was marked by the enthusiastic patronage of a wide range of painting styles. The Kanō school was in demand for the depiction of subjects connected with Confucianism, mythical Chinese creatures or scenes from nature, while the Tosa school, whose members followed the *yamato-e* style, were commissioned by the nobility to paint scenes from the classics of Japanese literature.

The Rimpa school not only absorbed the style of these other schools but progressed to produce a strikingly original decorative style. The works produced by Tawaraya Sōtatsu, Honami Kōetsu and Ogata Kōrin rank among the finest of the period.

The best place to sample Japanese painting is at the Kyoto National Museum (p60).

## LITERATURE

The first examples of literature in Japanese, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicle of Japan), were written in the 8th century in emulation of Chinese historical accounts. Later Japanese literature developed its own voice; interestingly, much of the early literature was written by women. One reason for this was that men wrote in imported kanji (Chinese characters), while women were relegated to writing in hiragana (Japanese script). Thus, while the men were busy copying Chinese styles and texts, women were inadvertently producing the first authentic Japanese literature. Among these early female authors is Murasaki Shikibu, who wrote Japan's all-time classic *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji), documenting the intrigues and romances of early Japanese court life.

*The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is a travel classic by the revered Japanese poet Bashō Matsuo. *Kokoro*, by Sōseki Natsume, is a 20th-century classic depicting the conflict between old and new Japan in the mind and heart of an aged scholar; while the modern and the traditional also clash in the lives of two couples in *Some Prefer Nettles* by Tanizaki Junichirō. *The Makioka Sisters,* also by Tanizaki, is a family chronicle that has

### top picks

#### KYOTO NOVELS

- **The Old Capital** (Kawabata Yasunari) A young woman's past is disturbed by the discovery of a twin sister in another family and her future raises a symbolic question for Kyoto: will she follow tradition and stay with her father's kimono business or marry and move forward into the modern age?
- **The Temple of the Golden Pavilion** (Mishima Yukio) In 1950, a young Buddhist acolyte burned down Kyoto's famous Golden Pavilion, shocking the nation. In this novel (also a film entitled *Conflagration*) Mishima fictionalises the monk's obsession with its beauty and his desire to destroy it.
- **Memoirs of a Geisha** (Arthur Golden) This hugely popular book details the life of a Kyoto geisha. It was later turned into a successful movie (most of which was not filmed in Kyoto).
- **The Lady and the Monk** (Pico Iyer) Iyer's account of his relationship with a Japanese woman against the backdrop of Kyoto is a great book to read while you're here.
- **Ransom** (Jay McInerney) Deals with a young man who winds up in Kyoto after some harrowing travels around Asia. It may not be McInerney's best, but it does capture the feeling of expat Kyoto in the pre-bubble days.

been likened to a modern-day *Monogatari* (below). Meanwhile, Ibuse Masuji's *Black Rain* deals with the aftermath of Japan's defeat in WWII.

Perhaps the most controversial of Japan's modern writers is Mishima Yukio. In *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion,* he reconstructs the life of a novice monk who burned down Kyoto's Kinkaku-ji (p77) in 1950. Many Japanese consider Yukio's work unrepresentative of Japanese culture – his work makes for interesting reading.

## CINEMA

Japan's film industry is both highly productive and critically acclaimed, with 40% of box-office revenue coming from domestic films and a slew of awards honouring several of Japan's actors and directors, past and present. Japanese genres range from highbrow art to the unique styles of *anime,* to the classic 'monster-stomps-Tokyo' films – Kyoto was where it all started. Inabata Katsutaro, a Kyoto businessman, was studying in Paris when his classmate Auguste Lumière invented the first film projector. Inabata leapt at the chance to purchase a projector and held Japan's first projection in 1897, two years after Lumière's first showing.

At first Japanese films were strongly influenced by kabuki, with kabuki actors taking most leading roles in what was primarily historical subject matter. However, by 1912, two distinct camps had set up: Kyoto's studios, producing *jidaigeki* (period films), and the Tokyo studios, creating *gendaigeki* films (modern themes). However, the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923 caused many Tokyo studios to move to Kyoto's Uzumasa district, establishing it as the 'Hollywood of Japan' and emphasising the period film as the most popular genre. By this time the style had moved away from kabuki and focused more on realistic samurai sword-fighting and special effects. In the years leading up to and during WWII, this same sense of samurai loyalty was heavily promoted in film; of those thousands of films produced, less than 2% still exist.

The golden age of Japanese cinema arrived with the 1950 release of Kurosawa Akira's *Rashōmon,* set against the backdrop of Kyoto's ancient southern gate. The film won the Golden Lion at the 1951 Venice International Film Festival and an Oscar for best foreign film. The increasing realism and high artistic standards of the period are evident in such landmark films as *Tōkyō Monogatari* (Tokyo Story, 1953), by the legendary Ōzu Yasujirō; Mizoguchi Kenji's classics *Ugetsu Monogatari* (Tales of Ugetsu, 1953) and *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* (The Life of Oharu, 1952); and Kurosawa's masterpiece *Shichinin no Samurai* (Seven Samurai, 1954). Annual attendance at the country's cinemas reached 1.1 billion in 1958, and Kyoto – with its large film studios, such as Shōchiku, Daiei and Tōei, and more than 60 cinemas – was at the centre of the boom.

Unfortunately, today Kyoto's studios are all but dead, with the vast majority of production now being done in Tokyo. These days there are two relics of Kyoto's film history: Ōkōchi-Sansō Villa (p81) in Arashiyama, and Eiga Mura. Ōkōchi-sansō Villa was the hilltop villa of one of Kyoto's most successful *jidaigeki* actors, Ōkōchi Denjirō (1898–1962). Playing roles such as scarred and one-armed samurai, Ōkōchi became very wealthy over the course of his long career. His stunning Arashiyama home and garden remain as testament to the popularity of his movies.

### top picks

#### CLASSIC KYOTO FILMS

- **Rashomon** (1950) Kurosawa Akira's classic uses the now non-existent southern gate of Kyoto as the setting for a 12th century rape and murder story told from several conflicting perspectives, raising doubt as to whether the truth can ever be known.
- **Life of Oharu** (1952) Arguably Mizoguchi Kenji's most acclaimed film, the story follows the life of a courtesan who loses her honour in an affair and stumbles from one disaster to the next, ending up as an old prostitute trying to reconcile with her fate.
- **Sisters of Nishijin** (1952) Set in the famous Nishijin textiles district. The father of a silk-weaving family kills himself as the family is caught between the old and the new and cannot adapt to the mechanisation of their trade. Directed by Yoshimura Kozaburō.
- **Peacemaker Kurogane** (2005) This recent *anime* series follows a young man who joins the famous Shinsengumi samurai who defended the shōgunate before the Meiji Restoration. While not exactly classic or even historically accurate, the show is a fun introduction to Kyoto's history.







Tōei Uzumasa Movie Village (Eiga Mura; p78) is all that remains of Tōei's Kyoto studio. Part studio and part theme park, it is more tourist trap than anything else, but the historical sets are still occasionally used for new *jidaigeki*. Visitors can poke around sets from famous Japanese movies and TV shows, watch actors perform sword fights, and learn more than they thought possible about the multitude of Power Ranger–type characters Tōei has produced for film and TV over the years.

## ARCHITECTURE

Kyoto's architecture is a schizophrenic jumble that ranges from some of the world's most sublime traditional wooden structures to one of the world's most modern train stations, with a lot of forgettable concrete buildings in between.

First and foremost, Kyoto is the best city in Japan to feast on the glories of Japanese religious architecture. The temples and shrines of Kyoto are the finest in the country and many are paired with brilliant examples of Japanese garden design.

Kyoto's traditional secular architecture is also stunning, including what some critics have termed the most beautiful wooden structure in the world: Katsura Rikyū, a fine imperial villa. More humble, but equally appealing, are Kyoto's *machiya,* the traditional wooden town houses that are, in some ways, the quintessential Kyoto structures.

## TEMPLES

Temples *(tera/dera, ji* or *in)* vary widely in their construction, depending on the type of school and historical era of construction. From the introduction of Buddhism in the 6th century until the Kamakura period, temples were the most important architectural works in Japan and hence exerted a strong stylistic influence on all other types of building.

There were three main styles of early temple architecture: *tenjikuyō* (Indian), *karayō* (Chinese) and *wayō* (Japanese). All three styles were in fact introduced to Japan via China. *Wayō* arrived in the 7th century and gradually acquired local character, becoming the basis of much Japanese wooden architecture. It was named so as to distinguish it from *karayō* (also known as Zen style), which arrived in the 12th century. A mixture of *wayō* and *karayō* known as *setchuyō* eventually came to dominate, and *tenjikuyō* disappeared altogether.

With their origins in Chinese architecture and emphasis on otherworldly perfection, early temples were monumental and symmetrical in layout. A good example of the Chinese influence can be seen in the famous Phoenix Hall, a Tang-style pavilion at Byōdō-in in Uji (p89).

The Japanese affinity for asymmetry eventually affected temple design, leading to the more organic – although equally controlled – planning of later temple complexes. An excellent example in Kyoto is Daitoku-ji (p53), a Rinzai Zen monastery, which is a large complex containing a myriad of subtemples and gardens.

Temples generally have four gates, oriented to the north, south, east and west. The *nandai-mon* (south gate), is usually the largest one. The *niō-mon* houses frightful-looking statues of gods such as Rai-jin (the god of lightning) and Fū-jin (the god of wind). There is also a central gate, *chū-mon,* which is sometimes incorporated into the cloister.

## SHRINES

Shrines can be called *jinja, jingū, gū* or *taisha*. The original Shintō shrine is Izumo Taisha in Shimane prefecture, which has the largest shrine hall in Japan. It is said to have been modelled on the emperor's residence and its style, known as *taisha-zukuri,* was extremely influential on later shrine design. Shrines tend to use simple, unadorned wood construction, and are built raised above the ground on posts. The roof is gabled, not hipped, while the entrance is generally from the end, not the side; both elements distinguish shrines from temple design. The distinctive roof line of shrine architecture is due to an elaboration of the structural elements of the roof. The crisscross elements are called *chigi* and the horizontal elements are called *katsuogi*.

As Buddhism increased its influence over Shintō it also affected the architecture. The clean lines of the early shrines were replaced with curving eaves and other ornamental details. Worshippers were provided with shelter by extending the roof or even building a separate worship

## MACHIYA TOWN HOUSES: LIFE IN THE OLD CITY *Alex Kerr*

A big surprise awaits foreign visitors to Kyoto – the actual look of this fabled cultural capital. Outside temple gates, there stretches a *Bladerunner* landscape of concrete and aluminium apartment buildings, pachinko parlours, pink plastic houses and empty lots filled with parked cars, the whole festooned with a web of electrical wires and out-of-control signage. It's the result of decades of purposeful destruction of the old town, which city fathers saw as 'old fashioned'.

A few blocks, such as the geisha district of Gion, preserve traditional architecture. In the rest of Downtown Kyoto, however, old town houses, called *machiya,* are something you can just occasionally catch a glimpse of: you'll see three or four down one street, just one down another. They're the last remnants of a style of city living that could once be found in all Japanese large towns, but survived as remnants only in Kyoto.

*Machiya* are long and narrow wooden row houses that functioned as both homes and workplaces. The shop area was located in the front of the house, while the rooms lined up behind it formed the family's living quarters. Nicknamed *unagi no nedoko* (eel bedrooms), the *machiya*'s elongated shape came about because homes were once taxed according to the width of their street frontage.

Inside a *machiya* is a self-contained world, complete with private well, storehouse, Buddhist altar, clay ovens outfitted with iron rice cauldrons, shrines for the hearth god and other deities, and interior minigardens, called *tsuboniwa* (garden in a *tsubo* – two-tatami-mat space). The kitchen area forms a two- or three-storey open atrium, into which smoke rising from the ovens has darkened the dramatic overhead beams.

On the street side, *machiya* present a distinctive 'vocabulary' of elements. Most prominent are the wooden lattices covering walls, doors and windows. Forbidden by law to use painted, gilded or carved decoration (allowed only to samurai and nobility), the merchants of Kyoto played with the right angle. Ingeniously devised lattice frameworks served as a way to let in light and air and maintain privacy at the same time. It's easy to look out but very hard to look in. Along the street they placed curving barriers of bamboo, called *inu-yarai* (dog-avoiders) which functioned as described but also protected against spattered mud. Above street level they carved *mushiko-mado (*narrow slitted windows) out of thick plaster walls. This limited but infinitely varied set of basic features played itself out in a symphonic harmony along the old city streets.

Unfortunately, *machiya* were not conducive to modern life. Dark at all times, they were humid and hot in the summer, damp and cold in the winter, and often encrusted by thick coats of dust and soot. Combine this with ancient electrical wiring and primitive toilet facilities and it was little wonder that modern townspeople rushed to tear them down as soon as they could afford it. At the same time the city was desperate to prove to the world that it had become 'modern' and provided almost no support for historic homes.

Recently *machiya* have made a bit of a comeback. Following a drastic decline in numbers, the remaining town houses acquired an exotic appeal. Developers began converting them into restaurants, clothing boutiques, even hair salons. Others have turned *machiya* into rental homes. Rather than visiting as a guest in a hotel or *ryokan,* you can feel the pulse of the old city by living in a *machiya.*

The turning point arrived in the early 2000s when international techniques of restoration finally came to Japan. People found that they could have both beauty and comfort, which previously seemed impossible. You could restore an old *machiya* by keeping its original structure, but at the same time add good lighting, nice baths and toilets and other conveniences that modern people seek. Meanwhile, spurred by a new interest in developing its tourist industry, Kyoto discovered a new-found pride in its heritage. In 2007 the city government did a dramatic about-face. Kyoto promulgated a Landscape Law, the most sweeping of its type ever established in Japan. It limits heights, encourages new and old buildings to incorporate traditional features, and restricts signage.

The new law is just a beginning and *machiya* are still being torn down and made into car parks. However, Kyoto seems to have turned a corner. The *machiya* will survive and, in some parts of town, even flourish. Unique in all Japan, some echo of that old symphony will still be heard.

If you're keen to experience one of Kyoto's *machiya,* you can have a meal or even stay overnight in one. Here are five of our favourite *machiya* restaurants and accommodations in Kyoto:

**Shuhari** (p128) This fine old *machiya* has been converted into a casual, hip French restaurant.
**Mukade-ya** (p123) Sample *kaiseki* cuisine in this fine *machiya* restaurant.
**Kailash** (p134) On the eastern side of town, this new organic restaurant is located in a simple converted *machiya*.
**Café Bibliotec HELLO!** (p126) This brilliant café shows the possibilities of Kyoto's traditional town houses.
**Iori** (p150) Iori has seven beautifully appointed *machiya* that you can spend a night in.

*Alex Kerr is author of Lonely Planet's* Lost Japan. *In 2004 he founded Iori, a Kyoto-based company dedicated to saving* machiya.



hall. This led to the *nagare* style, the most common type of shrine architecture. Excellent examples in Kyoto can be found at Shimogamo-jinja (p56) and Kamigamo-jinja (p91).

The *gongen* style uses an H-shaped plan, connecting two halls with an intersecting gabled roof and hallway called an *ishi no ma.* This element symbolises the connection between the divine and the ordinary worlds. The best example of this style in Kyoto is at Kitano-Tenman-gū (p76).

At the entrance to the shrine is the *torii* (gateway) marking the boundary of the sacred precinct. The most dominant *torii* in Kyoto is in front of Heian-jingū (p72), a massive concrete structure a considerable distance south of the shrine.

Fushimi-Inari-Taisha (p59), south of Kyoto, has thousands of bright vermilion gates lining paths up the mountain to the shrine itself.

*Shimenawa,* which are plaited ropes decorated with strips of *gohei* (white paper), are strung across the top of the *torii*. They are also wrapped around sacred rocks or trees, or above the actual shrine entrance. A pair of stone lionlike creatures called *koma-inu* can often be found flanking the main path. One usually has its mouth open in a roar and the other has its mouth closed.

The *kannushi* (chief priest) of the shrine is responsible for religious rites and the administration of the shrine. The priests dress in blue and white; on special occasions they don more ornate clothes and wear an *eboshi* (a black cap with a protruding, folded tip). *Miko* (shrine maidens) dress in vermilion and white.

# GARDENS

Garden enthusiasts, look no further. Kyoto is the place to gorge yourself on Japanese gardens in all their splendour. The city is home to a vast collection of Japan's foremost gardens encompassing the entire spectrum of styles.

Broadly speaking, Japanese gardens fall into four basic types: *funa asobi* (pleasure-boat style), *shūyū* (stroll style), *kanshō* (contemplative style) and *kaiyū* (many-pleasure style).

The *funa asobi* garden is centred on a large pond used for pleasure boating, so the best views are from the water. During the Heian period, such gardens were often built around noble mansions, the most outstanding remaining example being the garden that surrounds Byōdō-in in Uji (p89).

The *shūyū* garden is intended to be viewed from a winding path, allowing the garden to unfold and reveal itself in stages and from different vantages. Popular during the Heian, Kamakura and Muromachi periods, *shūyū* gardens can be found around many noble mansions and temples from those eras. A celebrated example is at Ginkaku-ji (p71).

The *kanshō* garden should be viewed from one place. Zen rock gardens, the rock-and-raked-gravel spaces that are also known as *karesansui* (dry mountain stream gardens), are examples of this garden. The *kanshō* garden is designed to facilitate contemplation: such a garden can be viewed over and over without yielding to any one 'interpretation' of its meaning. The most famous *kanshō* garden is at Ryōan-ji (p77).

Lastly, the *kaiyū* features many small gardens surrounding a central pond, often incorporating a teahouse. The structure of this garden, as with the *shūyū* garden, lends itself to being explored on foot and provides the viewer with a variety of changing scenes, many built as miniature landscapes. The most famous *kaiyū* garden is at the Katsura Rikyū Imperial Villa (p71).

Japanese gardens may also use a technique known as *shakkei,* or borrowed scenery, in which features outside the garden – distant hills or even the cone of a volcano – are incorporated into the garden. One example of this is the garden at Shūgaku-in Rikyū Imperial Villa (p58) in the north of the city, which incorporates mountains 10km distant.

For more on gardens, see the boxed text, p75.

# ENVIRONMENT

Kyoto is a landlocked city that makes up part of the eastern side of a mountainous region known as the Tamba Highlands, and the northern half of the Kyoto (Yamashiro) Basin. Kyoto City has an area of 827.9 sq km and population of approximately 1.47 million.

The Kyoto Basin is surrounded on three sides by mountains known as Higashiyama (Eastern Mountains), Kitayama (Northern Mountains) and Arashiyama (Stormy Mountains) in the west, all of which rise to less than 1000m above sea level. The city itself is relatively flat, with land highest in the northeast and descending towards the southwest. This interior positioning results in hot, humid summers and cold winters. There are three rivers in the basin: the Kamo-gawa to the east, the Katsura-gawa to the west and the Uji-gawa to the south. The Kamo-gawa originates in the mountains in the north and then flows through the centre of the city. The riverbanks are lined with *sakura* (cherry trees) and paths that are popular walks for residents and tourists, and in summer restaurants open balconies perched alongside the river. In the past, the river was a crucial source of drinking water as well as a means of transportation and irrigation. The purity of the water was highly prized for the production of Fushimi sake and it also played a vital role in *kyō-yūzen* dyeing, a traditional craft of Kyoto.

As well as cherry trees, the flora of Kyoto includes *tsutsuji* (azalea), *tsubaki* (camellia), *momiji* (maple trees), *shidare-yanagi* (weeping willows) and katsura trees. *Kamo* (ducks), *sagi* (herons), and *uiguisu* (bush warblers) can be seen in and around the Kamo-gawa, and *shika* (deer), *inoshishi* (wild boars), *saru* (monkeys) and even *kuma* (bears) are known to roam the surrounding mountains.

# GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

The Kyoto city government is made up of 72 council members elected by majority vote with elections being held every four years. In the most recent city council election, in April 2007, the Liberal Democratic Party took 23 seats, followed by the Japan Communist Party with 19, the Democratic Party with 13 and the Kōmei with 12.

Kyoto's present mayor, Kadokawa Daisaku, was elected in February 2008 by a narrow margin. The former head of the city's education department, Kadokawa received the backing of the Liberal Democratic Party. Kadokawa replaced the city's previous mayor, the popular Masumoto Yorikane, who had held power since 1996.

Visitors to the city are most likely to encounter Kyoto's political world if they arrive during the run-up to a local or national election, when speaker trucks ply the city's streets bombarding citizens with entreaties to vote for their candidates.

# ECONOMY

Kyoto City has a workforce of about 730,000 people whose combined labour results in a GDP of just over ¥6 billion. The major industries are tourism, which employs roughly 65% of the workforce; electronics; manufacturing; and textile production. With the rest of Japan, the city is slowly recovering from the post-bubble-economy recession of the late 1990s. The city's economy grew by almost a full percentage point in 2006, the third straight year of economic expansion.

While many of Kyoto's traditional industries, such as silk-weaving, fabric-dyeing and cabinet-making, have been in steady decline, several of its high-tech companies are thriving, including international camera giant Kyocera and video game trailblazer Nintendo. Other large corporations include Omron and Nissha.

Kyoto's business and civic leaders today face a dilemma: how to keep tourism and the traditional industries as an integral part of the economy while modernising in order to remain competitive. Some effort is under way to preserve parts of traditional Kyoto (perhaps those most profitable to tourism) and, as part of its plan to boost local infrastructure, the city has invested heavily to create world-class science facilities and in joint private-public ventures, such as Kyoto Research Park, Kyoto Science City and Kansai Science City on the border of Kyoto and Nara Prefectures.

# CULTURE

It is often observed that Kyoto is the cultural heart of Japan; that is, the place in which Japanese culture is at its most refined, most intense and most distinctive. Indeed, Kyoto is the place where many Japanese go to learn what it is to be Japanese.









The cultural life of Kyoto was centred around the imperial court for over 1100 years. The court drew to it the finest artisans and craftspeople from all over Japan, resulting in an incredibly rich cultural and artistic atmosphere. Today, Kyoto is still the home of Japan's traditional arts, from textiles, to bamboo craft, to the tea ceremony. The imperial court also left its mark on the language of the city, and true *Kyoto-ben* (Kyoto dialect) has the lilting tones and formality of the now-departed imperial residents.

In addition to playing host to the imperial court, Kyoto has always been the headquarters of Japan's major religious sects, including Zen, Pure Land and Tendai. The astonishing preponderance of temples and shrines in the present-day city is testament to the role that Kyoto has always played in the spiritual life of the Japanese.

Kyoto's cultural life is also deeply informed by the natural world. Due to its geographic location, Kyoto has always enjoyed four very distinct seasons, which are reflected in and celebrated by the yearly procession of Kyoto rituals and festivals. From the hanging scrolls in people's homes, and tableware in *kaiseki* restaurants, to the young lady's *yukata* robe the night before the Gion Matsuri festival (p16), every aspect of Kyoto is a reminder and echo of the season. This rich and complex culture is still apparent to even the most casual visitor and it seems to embody a certain elegance, refinement and style that has few rivals elsewhere in the world.

Of course, it's impossible for a city to develop such a sophisticated culture without arousing the envy and even the ire of outsiders. Ask other Japanese about Kyotoites and they will probably tell you the same thing: that they are cold, arrogant, conservative, haughty, indirect and two-faced. They'll tell you that Kyotoites act as though the city is still the capital and the imperial seat; that your family has to live there for three generations before it will be accepted; and that they never understand what a Kyotoite really means because they never say what they're feeling.

The good news is that as a visitor you'll probably never pick up on a bit of this. In defence of the people of Kyoto, there is a good reason for their famed indirectness: as the seat of Japan's political life for so many centuries, the residents of the city naturally learned to guard their opinions in the presence of shifting political powers. Furthermore, as the seat of Japanese cultural, artistic and spiritual life, it is hardly surprising that Kyotoites feel a certain pride which can easily be mistaken for arrogance. The fact is, they've got a lot of culture to guard, so a little conservatism is only natural.

It's difficult to talk of a Kyoto identity, of course, because it is true that there are two different cultures existing in modern-day Kyoto: that of the old and the young. While most older Kyotoites cling to the traditional ways of the city, the young identify with the national Japanese culture that has its epicentre somewhere in the shopping malls of Tokyo's Shibuya district. The comparison can be jarring when you see a Kyoto *mama-san* (older woman who runs drinking, dining and entertainment venues) sharing the sidewalk with a group of gaudily clad *kogals* (fashionable young things). You might conclude that you're looking at two totally different species.