

Nijo Castle, Kinkaku-ji (The Golden Pavillion) and **Ryoan-ji** (the world's most famous Zen rock garden) are on every tourist's agenda and are close to each other in northwest Kyoto. Virtually all Kyoto tours will take you there, and rightly so. But there is so much more! Here are some wonderful ways to spend any 'free' time you might find yourself with in beautiful Kyoto.

A serene walking tour in northeastern Kyoto, requiring about 1.5 hours: The Path of Philosophy

This delightful walk takes you along the relaxing, beautiful "Path of Philosophy", or *Tetsugaku no michi*, in Kyoto's eastern hills (Higashiyama). The Path begins at Ginkaku-ji (The Silver Pavillion) temple, built in the 15th century by the Ashikaga Shogun at the height of the tea ceremony aesthetic. The inside of the temple is not usually open to the public, but there is a lovely dry garden (*karesansui*) and hill behind it. Start walking up the approach to the temple before veering off to the right to start the cherry-lined walk. There are signs posted for the walk along the way and most of it is along the old canal. You'll pass Honen-in, a small but beautiful temple, Eikan-do temple with its unique and famous backward-gazing Buddha, many quaint shops, and tea houses, before ending near Nanzen-ji temple, the supreme Kyoto Zen temple with its wonderful abbot's quarters, numerous sub-temples, and the beautiful Konchi-en garden. There is an excellent vegetarian restaurant in Nanzen-ji for those interested. Total distance above is about 1 mile.

In Central Kyoto: Nishiki Market

The Nishiki Market, also known as "Kyoto's Kitchen," is a 400-year-old covered market that extends for 5 blocks in central Kyoto just one block north of and parallel to Shijo-dori, perpendicular to the Terramachi Shopping Arcade. It's a great place to wander and gaze at a staggering variety of interesting foods and diverse ingredients required for Japanese cooking. There are over 100 stalls, stores, and restaurants, almost all specializing in fresh, locally-procured goods. Open approximately 9-5 daily but things wind down considerably in the afternoon, so going earlier is better.

Kyoto's most famed and popular mountainside Shinto shrine: Fushimi-Inari Taisha ("The Inari Shrine")

This Shinto shrine in southern Kyoto is one of the most picturesque in Japan. The massive site is dedicated to *inari*, the Shinto *kami* (god/spirit/essence) whose earthly messenger is the fox (*kitsune*). *Inari* and his fox avatar have many roles in Japanese mythology, the most important being their association with the rice harvest. The fox's bushy tail represents a rice plant teeming with rice. The fox will often be depicted with a key in its mouth - the key to the rice granary. *Inari* is also, logically, the god of sake. Very importantly he is also the patron saint of businessmen and merchants, and he symbolizes prosperity. Foxes are generally thought to be benign and helpful, but they can sometimes be mischievous and cast spells on people. There are wonderful *inari* fox figures all throughout the shrine. There are over 40,000 shrines dedicated to *Inari* in Japan - this one is the big kahuna and the official 'Head Shrine' (*Taisha*) of *Inari*.

Fushimi-inari Taisha is most famous for its thousands of vermillion *torii* gates, many arranged in long tunnels through which one walks to reach many mini-shrines. The path snakes all the way up the mountain (a full visit all the way to the top is about 2 hours round trip, but there's no need to push it as the site's most impressive features are near the base). Each of the many hundreds of *torii* has been donated by a Japanese business as tribute and offering to *Inari*. The shrine dates back at least to the early 8th century and was a site blessed with imperial patronage in the Heian Period (794-1185). During the Meiji Period, when Shinto became the state religion, Fushimi-inari was designated as one of only four *Kanpei-taisha*, a special exalted status meaning "Most Highly Ranked".

Fushimi-inari is extremely easy to get to - only about 15 mins by train from one of the stations below. It's located - very logically - in Fushimi. You can either take the JR line from the main Kyoto Eki (train station) to Fushimi-Inari Station, or the Keihan Electric Railway from the Jingu-Marutamachi station on Marutamachi-dori which is the east-west street running just south of the Imperial Palace grounds. There are two well-marked entrances to the Keihan Railway, one on the west bank of the Kamogawa River and one just across the bridge on the East side. Fushimi-Inari Taisha is a hugely popular and busy place, so expect lots of company. Businessmen are especially frequent visitors to this shrine. Near dusk the crowds wane and it becomes very peaceful and magical as you wander through the tunnel of *torii* gates. The road leading up to the shrine from the Keihan train station is lined with vendors of all kinds of goods and delicious foods, both savory and sweet.

There are also some nice little restaurants. Specialties include *Kitsune* (Fox) Udon which is udon noodles with pieces of fried tofu. The famous inari sushi, thin skins of fried tofu wrapped around sushi rice, also originated here. You definitely don't have to eat before you go to this shrine - eat on the walk up.

One of Japan's great museums, since 1897: Kyoto National Museum – 527 Chayacho, in Higashiyama. An outstanding collection of pre-modern Japanese art, particularly strong on pictorial art but also ceramics, sculpture, metalwork, and calligraphy. Frequent and wonderful special exhibits. Closed Mondays.

Retail therapy: Kyoto Handicraft Center on Marutamachi-dori near the Heian Shrine. Shop 'til you drop in 2 adjacent buildings – a wide assortment covering the gamut from ceramics to kimonos (new and used) to *ukioy-e* woodblock prints, "souvenir foods", pearls, contemporary crafts, and an excellent bookstore.

Walking tour: Kiyomizu-dera / Higashiyama ('Eastern Hills') area

This walk begins at the famed Kiyomizu-dera, Buddhist 'Temple of Clear Water', and winds down the delightful pedestrian-only *ninenzaka* and *sannenzaka* slopes, lined with interesting shops and cafes. The approach to the temple is lined with souvenir shops. After visiting the temple, there is a turn-off on the left to the first of many sets of steps. There's a black awning with chili peppers on it where you turn to go down the first set of steps to the walking path. Continue along the walking path as long as you like before taking a taxi back to downtown or elsewhere. Shops along here close at around 6:00pm and Kiyomizu-dera itself closes at 5:00pm.

Another walking tour: The Arishayama ('Stormy Mountains') area around Tenryu-ji temple. A wonderful area for strolling around shops, temples tucked into bamboo groves, and the lovely Kameyama-koen Park. From Arashiyama you may want to take a taxi about 10 mins south to the amazing Saiho-ji Temple, more commonly referred to as 'Kokodera', or 'The Moss Temple'. The name says it all, and it is uniquely beautiful. It dates back to Prince Shotoku, a cultural and political hero of ancient Japan, father of Japan's first constitution in 604AD. NOTE: As of 2018 you need a reservation to visit Kokodera. The temple only takes reservation requests by snail mail (I kid you not) but Voyagin online tour services and some JTB (Japan Tourist Board) offices can make reservations. It's well worth the effort and will be unforgettable. Another note: This is a slippery place and its beauty is distracting, so be careful.

Visit the food emporium (*depachika*) in the basement of any major upscale department store (*depato*)

This is a must - in that it must be seen to be believed. Takashimaya, Daimaru, Isetan are favorites. Make sure your camera/phone is charged.

Evening: Walk the Ponto Cho This is a don't-miss if you have an evening Kyoto. The Ponto Cho is a charming and vibrant 'alley street' along the Kamo River bank. Enter between Sanjo and Shijo-dori. You will find innumerable restaurants and *izakaya* (pubs), most opening about 6:00PM. If you are up for more walking (or a very short taxi ride), cross over into atmospheric Gion - Welcome to the world of the *geikos* (*geishas*) and Old Kyoto. You can also reverse this - start in Gion, cross the river, and end up at the Ponto Cho for dinner.