

[Notes: The Japanese are a food-obsessed people and their national cuisine is unique. Kyoto is often termed the “cradle of Japanese culture,” and this is true from a culinary standpoint as well. The classic Japanese banquet meal of *kaiseki ryori* and many other culinary traditions originated here. The recommendations which follow are based on personal experience as well as some suggestions from trusted sources. I have focused primarily on Japanese cuisine in this guide, but know that the Japanese are renowned for their superb execution of other national cuisines, particularly French and Italian. *Addresses in Japan are notoriously tricky for non-Japanese to find*, so even if you are mapping it on your smartphone I strongly recommend you have the concierge write down the restaurant name and address *in Japanese* in case you need help. All of these restaurants are in central Kyoto. Note that the huge price range represents differences in atmosphere, service, presentation, and reputation, moreso than differences in food quality. All food in Japan is excellent due to the extreme care and pride with which it is prepared – you cannot get a bad or even a mediocre meal in Japan! Most but not all of these restaurants now take credit cards. It is possible that some may have closed during COVID-19 and not re-opened. I welcome your feedback and any new recommendations. Enjoy!]

RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVE (BY JAPANESE STANDARDS) - under \$50 per person- very casual :

SUSHI:

Hisago Sushi. Good, moderately priced Kansai-style sushi with a small counter on the ground level and plenty of table seating upstairs.. On west side of Kawaramachi, just north of Shijo. Tel. 75-221-5409.

Musashi – *Kaiten* sushi (fresh-made sushi that you select from a rotating conveyor belt). A popular place to pick your freshly-made favorites off a conveyor belt or order what you want fresh-made in a minute. On Kawaramachi just off the northwest corner of Sanjo. 10-minute walk from Hotel Okura.

Nishiki-Ichiba – *Kaiten* sushi on Nishiki-koji-dori between Daimaru and the entrance to Nishiki market.

Sushiwakamara – Another excellent *kaiten* sushi venue just outside the northwest entrance of the Kyoto Eki (main train station). As a bonus you get to see the amazing train station building.

Wakasaya – a hole-in-the-wall specializing in donburi bowls – fresh sushi rice topped with sashimi of your choice – quick, easy, delicious, and inexpensive. Packed with students. You can get a “double” (twice the fish, same amount of rice) for a 50% premium. Minutes from Hotel Okura in Sanjo Arcade just off Kawaramachi.

Ganko Honten (not to be confused with the more upscale Ganko below) – Decent sushi and also a huge menu of Japanese cuisine. Somewhat ‘downscale’ but a favorite of tourists and locals alike. Just a 5-minute walk from Hotel Okura – go south on Kawaramachi, make a left on Sanjo, and it’s on your left. Always packed.

OTHER:

Ukiya – House-made soba and other traditional Japanese fare – located in basement (B2F) arcade of the Kyoto Hotel Okura. Very casual, a place for a relatively quick and very convenient (but authentic) bite.

Tagoto- A typical *kappo* – traditional Japanese restaurant. Just steps away from the busy Shijo-Kawaramachi intersection, but hidden away behind a narrow entrance and a long, lantern-lit passageway. The menu includes budget-friendly mini-*kaiseki* dinners (Y3000) and all-you-can-eat lunch specials (also Y3000). Shijo-dori Kawaramachi Nishi-iru (entrance alley on Shijo, just west of Kawaramachi) Tel. 75-221-1811.

Jin-no-hana – This restaurant specializes in *chankonabe*, a rich stew beloved by sumo wrestlers. The full-course *chanko* dinner is Y5000, and *kaiseki* service starts at Y6000. Nishi-ishigaki Shijo-sagaru, Saitocho 140-6. (along the waterfront just S of Shijo). Tel 075-351-0711. Closed Sun.

Kappa - Robatayaki– Grilled fish and other *izakaya* (pub) fare in a lively, very casual setting. In central Gion, 2-suji-me-Shijo-dori, Nawate-agaru (On Nawate 2 blocks north of Shijo). Tel.75-531-4048.

Katsukura - in Sanjo arcade – specializing in mouth-watering *tonkatsu* (fried pork cutlet)

Donguri – *Okonomiyaki* (Japanese crepe/pizza/pancake-like concoction)– on Sanjo, E of Kawaramachi before Starbucks – full of locals at all hours.

Shiori-ya – Stylish, modern Japanese *izakaya* (pub). Not much English spoken so a spirit of adventure is required. Kamiyanagicho, Shimogyoku, Kyoto 600-8099, south of Shijo. Tel 75-361-4001.11:30–2:30 and 5-12.

Kokora-ya – A friendly and lively spot serving Kyoto folk specialties. English may be sparse but you’ll get by with a spirit of adventure. Dinner only as of January 2016, from 6p.m. 96-2 Nakajima-cho, in alley off corner of Sanjo and Kiyamachi. Tel. 75-241-0359

Le Bouchon – excellent French bistro. I love this place and it is one of the few non-Japanese restaurants I eat at in Japan. Across from the Post Office on 71 Enoki-chō, Nijō-dōri, just a 10-min walk from the Hotel Okura. Lunch and dinner. Closed Thurs. Tel. 75-211-5220

Hitomi- Top-quality yakitori. Recommended by the *NY Times* in their “36 Hours in Kyoto” piece. 96 Okiku-cho, Sakyo-ku; Tel. 75-771-7818.

Kushi Tanaka. Likewise a *NY Times* favorite. Specialists in *kushiage* which is deep-fried everything on skewers. A set meal with at least 6 different delectables is about 3800Y. 310-10 Uradeyama-cho, Nakagyo-ku.

Misoka-an Kawamichiya - Good choice for a simple, quick lunch or dinner featuring home-made soba or udon noodles and broth. 295 Shimo Shirayama-cho, Fuyacho-sanjo agaru, Nakagyo-ku (on Fuyacho-dori, just off of Oike-dori). Tel. 75-221-2525. Open 11am-8pm, closed Thurs.

MODERATELY EXPENSIVE BY JAPANESE STANDARDS (\$75+ per person)

Tsukiji Sushisei – Excellent quality sushi targeted at Daimaru *depato's* upscale customers. Shijo Takakura-agaru, near Daimaru department store between Nishikikoji-dori and Shijo. Tel. 75-252-1537

Pontocho Kappa Sushi. Fresh, tasty, well-priced sushi on the atmospheric Pontocho. Informal. Tel 75-213-4777. Dinner only– Pontocho only comes alive at night.

Kitamura – Fantastic tempura just off the Pontocho – this is an annex to the Harukami *kaiseki* restaurant but specializes only in delicate artisanal tempura. One of my favorites. 169-3 Kashiwayacho, Nakagyo Ward, Kyoto. Tel. 75-221-0011.

Ryozanpaku – Wonderful *kaiseki*, mostly seafood, in a beautiful setting. Very highly recommended. Near Kyoto University. Tel 75-771-4447. Closed Sundays.

Ganko- Excellent value traditional kappo with *kaiseki*-style Japanese cuisine– On Kiyamachi-dori, just south of Nijo, around the corner from the Hotel Okura (before the Kamo River). Tel. 75-223-3456. Lunch and dinner. Not to be confused with Ganko Honten on Sanjo (above).

Moritaya –Venerable spot (since 1869 Meiji period) specializing in sukiyaki, shabu shabu and other beef dishes. An excellent, not-too-expensive (relatively speaking) option for fine Japanese beef in the spirit of the westward-looking Meiji Restoration. Kiyamachi-dori N of Sanjo. Tel. 75-231-5118

Kitcho Kyoto Station - This is “Kitcho lite” (see below) - a little more affordable, yet still elegant. Full *kaiseki* service starts at under Y10,000. Next to the JR Kyoto Station, in the striking Hotel Granvia. Tel. 75-342-0808

Izujū - This 100-year-old sushi shop specializes in *saba-zushi* (mackerel pressed onto squares of rice), although they have other seasonal fish as well. In Gion. Corner of Shijo and Higashi-oji-dori, across from the Yasaka Shrine. Tel. 75-561-0019. Closed Wed.

Tempura Yasaka Endo – World-class tempura but you pay for it - around 3,500 yen at lunch and 9,000 yen at dinner. In Gion, 566 Komatsu-cho, Tel. 75-551-1488. Open 11:30–2:00 and 4:30–10:00.

Casa Bianca - Italian food meticulously prepared by a Japanese chef trained in Italy. Casual and quaint. 214 Imadegawa-Dori (about a 15-min taxi ride from the Hotel Okura). Closed Monday. Tel. 75-241-3023.

Restaurant Ogawa – French with a *nouvelle* spin leveraging Japanese artistry and creativity. Lunch and dinner, reservations essential. Kiya-machi Oike-agaru. Tel. 75-256–2203 . Closed Tuesdays.

Misono - One of the original teppanyaki steak restaurants in Japan, with delicious steak and vegetables grilled on iron cooktops at your table. 300 Narayacho Kawaramachi-takoy 5th fl of Kawaramachi Bldg, on Kawaramachi-dori) Tel: 075-255-2981. Open 11:30-3:00 and 5-10. Closed Tues.

EXPENSIVE – AND UNFORGETTABLE (\$150++ per person):

Mishima Tei – Sukiyaki - The ultimate sukiyaki experience in one of Japan’s oldest and finest sukiyaki restaurants. Reservations always required. In the Terramachi arcade. Tel. 75-221-0003. Closed Wednesdays.

Awata Sanso- The absolute best shabu-shabu I have ever had, in a lovely tea ceremony house atmosphere. The beef is Kyoto-gyu, which some say is one step *above* Kobe beef. Melts in your mouth. They also do *kaiseki*. 2-15 Sanjobocho, Awataguchi, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto Tel. 075-561-4908

Kitcho - World-famous upscale *kaiseki* - lavish and unforgettable. Susukinobaba, Tenryuji, 616-8385. Tel 75-881-1101. Note: 30-min taxi ride.

Hyotei - Venerable (300 years old!), subdued, traditional venue for *kaiseki*. 3-star Michelin destination restaurant. They also have an annex for high-end lunch *bentos* for about Y4000 in an elegant environment. 35 Kusakawa-cho in the Nanzen-ji temple area. Tel. 75-771-4116.

Kinmata - A 200-year-old ryokan now known mainly as a restaurant, with excellent seafood-focused *kaiseki* service. On Gokomachi north of Shijo. Tel. 75-221-1039. Closed Wed.

Doi - First-rate *kaiseki* in a gorgeous traditional *ryotei* (very upscale, highly traditional setting). They have a moderate-cost option known as "table *kaiseki*," where you sit in a regular chair instead of on a tatami. Dinners starts at Y9,000 for table *kaiseki*, Y25,000 for the traditional tatami-room *kaiseki*. Lunches start at Y7,500 and

Y16,000 respectively. In fabulous Gion off Kodaiji, Masuya-cho 353. (on a small side street about 3 min. S of Kodaiji). You may well see authentic geisha in and around the restaurant. Tel. 75-561-0309

Kogetsu Best known for its *hamo* (conger eel), one of Kyoto's famous local dishes, but they also serve sushi and udon. Full-course seasonal seafood dinners are around Y15,000, and more varied *kaiseki* menus start at Y10,000. *Hamo* season is May-October, in winter you'll find crabmeat in its place. Shimokawara Kodaiji Monzen, Shimokawara 469. (just W of Kodaiji Temple). Tel.75-531-6178. Closed Mondays.

Kikunoi Celebrity chef Yoshihiro incorporates European influences in an innovative approach to traditional Kyoto-style *kaiseki*. 3 Michelin stars. Prix-fixe menus from Y8000 at lunch; Y15,000 at dinnertime. In Gion on Maruyama Makuzugahara, on the N edge of Kodai-ji. Tel. 75-561-0015.

Wakuden This traditional *ryotei* has three branches around town, but this is the most luxurious. 1 Michelin star. Lunch starts at Y15,000, dinners from Y25,000.) In Gion, one block N of W end of Kodaiji Temple. Tel. 75-533-3100. Closed Sundays.

Minoko Elegant old teahouse famous for *cha-kaiseki*, a formal style of meal associated with the traditional Zen tea ceremony. The meal begins with a bowl of thick green tea, and progresses through a multitude of tiny dishes. Dinners start at Y15,000. Lunchtime bento boxes in the tatami room from Y3500. In Gion on Shimogawara-dori (1½ blocks S of Yasaka Shrine). Tel. 75-561-0328.

Nanzenji Elegant *kaiseki* lunches and dinners. Look for a plain facade hidden behind a bamboo fence with a sign shaped like a gourd. In Gion, West of Shirakawa Dori and south of Murin-an. Tel. 75/771-4116 Closed 2nd and 4th Tues.

Yoshikawa Inn –Tiny *ryokan* famous for its delectable tempura. From 8,000 yen at lunch and 12,000 at dinner. *Kaiseki* available from Y20,000 Tominokoji-dori, S of Oike. Tel. 75-221-5544. Lunch 11-1, dinner 5-8. (Note: This is Tom Cruise's hangout – if you see him, give him my regards.)

A note on *depato* food emporia: In a nutshell: DON'T MISS THIS!

No visit to Japan is complete without a visit to a food emporium in the **basement** of one of the major department stores (known as *depatos*). This is an exciting cultural experience. You will be truly amazed by the variety, beauty, and energy of the gastronomic extravaganza you will see. It makes Zabar's in New York look like a 7-Eleven. Endless delicacies of every kind abound and are presented in an oh-so-Japanese way. In downtown Kyoto just a 15-minute walk from the Hotel Okura you'll find Takashimiya and Daimaru department stores just a few minutes away from each other on Shijo-dori. They vie for the best basement food emporium. You can go just to take in the spectacle – you've never seen anything like it, guaranteed –or to take some delicious food back to your hotel room for a little feast.

A note on Nishiki Market: This market is known as 'Kyoto's Kitchen' and is wonderful to stroll through. This is where Kyoto's chefs buy their fine ingredients and you can also find small restaurants and food stalls there. It is a 15-minute walk from the Hotel Okura and you can get there by snaking through the shopping arcades which start just a few steps from the hotel on the corner of Kawaramachi and Sanjo. The market actually runs along Nishiki-koji Street. It's well-marked on the nice little Walking Map of Kyoto that the hotel provides. Open 9-5 every day but many shops are closed on Wednesdays. It winds down in the afternoon so go earlier rather than later if possible. It's 400 years old so they must be doing something right.

A note on the Pontocho: The Pontocho is a fabulous must-see alley-like pedestrian street that runs next to the Kamogawa River between Sanjo and Shijo, just a 15-minute or so walk from the Hotel Okura. It is chock full of charming, hip restaurants and bars of every sort. It only comes alive at night (after 6pm). Whether you choose to check it out for dining or not, don't miss a stroll along the Pontocho in the evening. If you cross over the river into Gion (a longer walk), it gets even more magical - you'll likely see geishas dashing through the shadows.

A note for sushi-lovers: Kyoto, being inland, is not traditionally a "sushi city". Sushi as we know it was born in Tokugawa Ieyasu's Edo in 1603, now known as Tokyo. Its origins are in the raw sliced fish preserved for transport from China and Korea between layers of vinegared rice in a wooden box. Classic Kyoto sushi is similar to this earliest form of sushi and is a pressed cake of vinegared rice and raw fish known as *ozizushi*. That said, Kyoto sushi restaurants serve plenty of delicious *Edo-mae* (Edo-style) sushi, which is the sushi style that is famed and enjoyed around the world.

For those going on to Tokyo, don't miss my favorite sushi restaurant *in the world*: SUSHI-MIDORI on Ginza Corridor. There's no English sign but you'll see the people waiting outside and the energy inside, and you'll know you're there. Bring your iPad or Kindle since there is always a 30-60-minute wait – WELL worth it. It is one of only 2 restaurants in the world that I will wait in line for!