

Series: **My Favorite Kyoto**

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Tanuki, Wagashi, and Izakaya: Notes on My Accidental Kyoto Life

Jon Holtzman
(USA)

I may be one of very few world travelers who, before coming to Japan, was not really interested in visiting here. In the U.S., I am very lucky to be a professor of cultural anthropology*, which allows me to travel a lot, but even so, there is not enough time to visit every country in the world. The images I had of Japan were of crowded Tokyo subways, skyscrapers, and neon lights, so I had very little desire to come to Japan. Then some colleagues at Kyoto University invited me to a conference, with everything paid, and even a trip to an *onsen*. Despite what my friends might say, I am not stupid; an all expense paid trip to Kyoto? I would give it a try! Of course, I found Kyoto to be very different from the false stereotypes that I had of Japan, and I spent nine magical days in this beautiful city, full of amazing shrines and temples, calm and peaceful natural spaces and wonderfully kind people. So, I sort of fell in love with it, and knew I should return.

I may also be one of very few people who came to Kyoto because of Africa. Most people who are interested in Africa would simply go there. So, why Kyoto? As an anthropologist, I actually have done research for many years in Kenya, among the Samburu ethnic group. They are traditionally herders, who raise cows, goats, sheep and camels. One of my main research topics with them has been their food. Kyoto University has an incredibly strong program in African Studies, so some excellent colleagues who also do research in Kenya invited me here. They have continued to welcome me and we work together on projects about Africa.

From my first visit, many aspects of Japan's rich culture fascinated me. Japan is really interesting to me as an anthropologist, because there are many things about life here that are very similar to Western countries, but then other things are very different. One of the first things to intrigue me in Japanese culture and folklore was the *tanuki* (raccoon-dog). Lots of people like *tanuki* because they are cute, but I like the idea that the *tanuki* is a "shape-shifter"**, a master of disguises, and kind of mischievous, but mostly good-hearted and cheerful. I too like to joke a lot and use my imagination, especially with the many complex parts of culture and history in Japan that even many Japanese do not know or understand. So, for fun, I can



Author with giant *tanuki*,
Shiga Prefecture



Pokot girl from
Northern Kenya

continued on page 5



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Old-fashioned popular culture of Japan: *Sentō* (public bathhouse)



Ume-yu *sentō*



Yose
(Japanese traditional storytelling)



Mr. Minato

One type of Japanese public bathhouse that people pay to enter is called a *sentō*. I visited one of them, named “Sauna no Ume-yu”, located south of the Kawaramachi-Gojō intersection, on Kiyamachi-dōri street.

The manager, Mr. Sanjiro Minato, is from Shizuoka Prefecture, and is only 25 years old. It is not exactly clear when *Ume-yu* started their business, but according to historical records, there was a *sentō* in this community in the Meiji period (1868-1912), and it seems like this *Ume-yu* is the same one. The bath-water is heated with firewood; it is a lot of work to add firewood every 40-50 minutes, but water heated this way can warm bodies to the core. Also, the water used for the baths is drawn from natural underground sources. I asked Mr. Minato what is the most challenging part of managing the *sentō*, and his answer was that he struggles to satisfy both the local regular customers and the first-time visitors (especially from overseas).

The *sentō* existed as a local public gathering place in Japanese towns from a long time ago; many generations have gathered here, from children to old people. Sometimes children making noise in the baths would be scolded by the old men of the neighborhood. Children learned sociability through communication in the *sentō* that way, and grew up to become sensible adults. However, unfortunately, these kinds of places are decreasing.

A *sentō* may be an unfamiliar place to many people from overseas, but *Ume-yu* welcomes foreign guests. Tattoos are not a problem here, though they are unacceptable at “Super *sentō*” (larger *sentō*). Recently, guidebooks have offered information about *sentō*, but some people may be confused by cultural differences and manners in the *sentō*. If you have any questions or problems at *Ume-yu*, you can ask Mr. Minato, who will kindly help you. Also, you can learn from the English instructions provided there about *sentō* manners and how to use public baths.

Mr. Minato told me that the *denki buro* (electric bath) is popular with foreign guests. The bathwater in it carries a weak, harmless electric current. I think you will be absolutely addicted to this bath after trying it.

Ume-yu also holds many events, such as live music, traditional Japanese storytelling, and talk shows in other rooms of the bathhouse. It opens at 6:30 a.m. every weekend in August and September, as a morning bath service.

Soak in the big bath and stretch your legs, and you will recover from the tiredness of travelling or your daily work. After refreshing in the bath, I recommend enjoying a cold drink of milk and relaxing in the old-fashioned atmosphere.

Address: 175 Iwataki-cho, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto-shi

Business hours: 3:30 p.m. – 11:00 p.m., closed Thursday

Bath fee: 430yen, towel rental: 30yen

Twitter for *Ume-yu*: https://twitter.com/umeyu_rakuen (only in Japanese)

Kyoto Art Center – Reusing a closed historic school

All over the country, there are effective ways to rebuild and utilize schools that have been closed due to low birth rates and municipal mergers. Schools that have a long history of being loved by the children in their districts can now be used as places with new roles, becoming cafés, event locations, and hotels.

This issue of Life In Kyoto will begin a series that introduces some of the facilities that made use of closed schools, those having some cultural and historical value.

The first one is the Kyoto Art Center, formerly the Meirin Elementary School, located in the center of Kyoto, close to Shijo Street. The school, which opened in 1869 and closed after 124 years of operation, is now a facility where people can easily experience all kinds of modern art, traditional entertainment, and culture, such as *noh* theater, *kyōgen* (a type of play), and tea ceremony.

When you go through what looks like a school gate at the Center, your attention will be drawn to the elegant school architecture, such as the Western-style cream colored outside wall (said to be built 80 years earlier), the Spanish roofing tiles, the unique round window, and so on. In its time, it was praised as the best decorated building in the East.

The Center is divided into a West Wing, a North Wing and a South Wing; the historical charm and “retro” atmosphere come from the well-used wooden corridors, stairs, and classrooms. In the South Wing, there are former classrooms used as galleries, an Information Room, and a small library; anyone can use these rooms freely. In the library, there are many books about Kyoto culture and art that you can browse through. There is also an old-fashioned café that we recommend, where you can enjoy drinking coffee or have a light meal of sandwiches or cake. When you are in this calm and quiet place, despite it being located in the downtown area, it will make you forget time and want to stay there longer.

The Kyoto Art Center holds many events, in forms such as music, dance, and theater, and in categories such as exhibitions, workshops, and lectures. You will be able to have fresh, new experiences of the old and new cultural city of Kyoto.

Website: <http://www.kac.or.jp/eng/>



Charming, but not splendid schoolhouse design



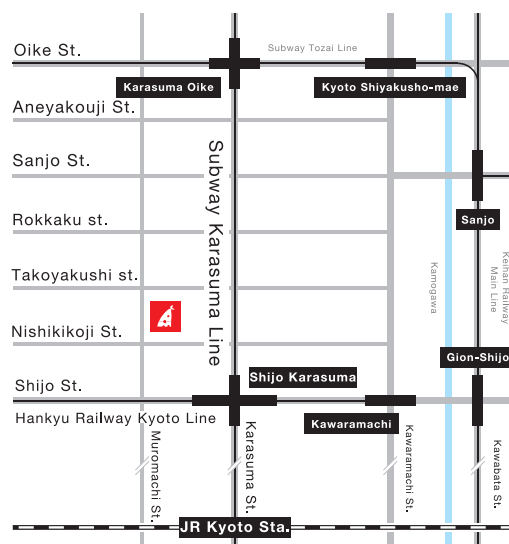
Gallery



Old-fashioned feeling corridor



Café
(Maeda Coffee)



Access: 5 minute walk north-east from Shijo Karasuma intersection.

ITO Shima
Translated by KANAYA Chinami

Kyōyasai (Kyoto Vegetables)

Do you like vegetables? I think there may be a lot of various vegetables in your country, but in Japan also, there are many delicious vegetables. You may have seen or eaten some of them for the first time when you came to Japan. In Kyōto, there are certain kinds of vegetables called *kyōyasai*, meaning Kyōto vegetables. These are traditional vegetables from the past history of Kyōto, and they are popular nationwide as special products of Kyōto. There is no concrete definition of *kyōyasai*, but generally speaking, it refers to vegetables certified as “Traditional Vegetables of Kyoto” or “Kyoyasai Brand Vegetables”; these were defined by the Kyoto Prefectural Government.



The history of *kyōyasai* is very long; because Kyōto had been the center of politics and culture since at least 1200 years ago, many top quality agricultural goods were gathered from all parts of Japan or China, as the offerings for the Court, temples and shrines. In addition, because Kyōto was so far from the sea, it was difficult to get fresh fish and such, so people simply ate more vegetables. Moreover, the climate, fertile soil, and plentiful water of Kyōto were suitable for growing vegetables, and the breeding of vegetables was refined over a long period, producing excellent quality *kyōyasai*, delicious and nourishing.

Currently, about 50 kinds of vegetables are certified as being “Traditional Vegetables of Kyoto” or “Kyoyasai Brand Vegetables”. Here I will introduce some of them:

- *Mizuna* (potherb mustard)

Mizuna has been cultivated for many years and is also called *kyō-na*. The narrow, jagged-edged leaves and crisp texture are peculiar to it. It is often used for *nabemono* (hot pot cooking) and in salads. It is also nutritionally excellent, containing a good balance of vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber.

- *Kujō negi* (“Kujo” green onion)

Kujō negi is a kind of long, slender green onion. Characteristically, it has soft leaves that have a coating inside that is a bit slimy, with some sweetness and scent. In the cold of winter, this coating becomes sweeter. It is commonly used in *nabemono*, miso soup, and as a condiment for noodle dishes. It is rich in Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin C, and carotene, and is also said to be effective against colds.

- *Shōgoin daikon* (“Shōgoin” radish)

Shōgoin daikon is a large round radish with a diameter of about 20 centimeters. It is unique in that it is sweet and very soft, but has less bitterness and pungent taste. Because it does not fall apart easily when boiled, it is often used in *oden* (Japanese boiled food) and other boiled dishes.

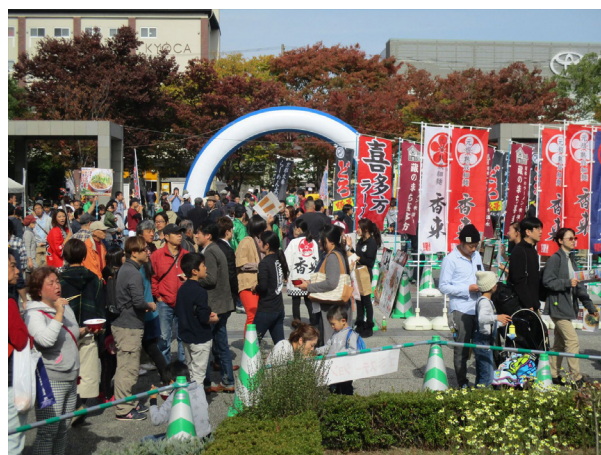
- *Kamo nasu* (“Kamo” eggplant)

Kamo nasu is a round, ball-shaped eggplant, and is also called “Queen of Eggplants”. Its distinctive feature is that the flesh is hard and firm, and it is chewy. It is often used in *dengaku* (baked, sweetened miso-glazed eggplant) and some boiled dishes.

Incidentally, an event called the Kyoto Vegetable Festival is held every year to promote the appeal of *kyōyasai* to many more people. Last year, more than 100,000 people came to this event; some events took place, such as: the *Rāmen* Battle - famous *rāmen* restaurants from all parts of Japan competed using *kyōyasai* in limited menus, and the Kyoto Local Gourmet Festival - a gathering of various dishes made using Kyōto ingredients. I hope you will get to see, learn about, and actually taste *kyōyasai* at the Kyoto Vegetable Festival.

For further details, please use the following contact info:

**Kyoto Prefecture Department of Agriculture,
Forestry and Fisheries Research and
Brand Promotion Division Tel: 075-414-4941**



Kyoto Vegetable Festival

photo: Kyoto Prefecture Department of Agriculture,
Forestry and Fisheries

SUZUKI Hidetoshi

make up things about obscure parts of cultures that sound *almost* true. For instance, the Japanese and Chinese calendars are a bit different. (This part is true). So, for someone like me whose birthday is in late January, my zodiac animal is actually different if I am in Japan or in China. (This part is also true). So, I claim that this makes me a shape-shifter, since in one place I am one animal of the zodiac and in another place I am a different animal; So my zodiac animal must really be the *tanuki*! (People insist that there is no *tanuki* in the zodiac, so maybe even if I say it isn't true?)

By now, I have come to Japan over 10 times, usually for two or three months at a time, always based in Kyoto. My colleagues at Kyoto University invited me for African Studies, but after visiting several times I wanted to study Japanese culture, too. One of my main specializations in anthropology is studying food, and I have written a book and many articles about food in Africa. My first and main interest in Japanese food was sweets. With Japanese food, most foreigners think about things like rice and *sushi*, so I was surprised to learn about the rich tradition of sweets in Japan. Japan has visually beautiful traditional sweets, *wagashi*, that reflect the feeling of the season and also are very important in the tea ceremony. There are also simpler Japanese sweets, and Western sweets like chocolate have also become very popular. As my studies have continued, I have added other areas of interest to my research, such as questions about why Japanese tend to be thinner than people from other countries, and research into almost every type of Japanese food and drink. Of course, this work is very difficult because, besides doing interviews, this research requires me to spend a lot of time going out with friends to eat Japanese food and drink Japanese drinks in *izakaya* and other places! This type of activity is challenging but I hope somehow important, and I am always happy to meet new friends who can help me with this research.

* the study of similarities and differences in human cultures across the globe

** a mythical figure that can take different forms



Fancy Kyoto *wagashi*

kokoka Kyoto International Community House Library

October • November 2016

Library Letter

 kokoka recommends this book

“A Sushi Handbook in English and Japanese”

Editorial Supervisor:

IMADA Yosuke

Publisher:

Natumesha, 2013



Sushi, a traditional Japanese cuisine, also has great popularity with foreigners, doesn't it? This book features about 50 types of *sushi* toppings, shown in pictures taken at the Ginza Kyubey restaurant, a well-known shop. In addition, this book also introduces things such as how to prepare and eat *sushi*, which will considerably deepen your knowledge of *sushi*. If you want to be called “*sushi*-man” or “*sushi*-woman”, you must read this book.

If you like bread more than rice, the book for you is: “The World's Breads Picturebook 224 - Definitive Edition” (Editorial Supervisor: OWADA Toshiko, Publisher: Heibonsha, 2013). This book features 224 different baked foods from world regions such as the Middle East, the Near East, Western Europe, Asia, and so on, separated into geographic sections. Also introduced are things such as drinks that go well with these baked goods, so this book is recommended. After reading this book, you will definitely want to go to a bakery.

The following items are also available

Books for foreigners to help their daily life in Japanese, study Japanese, learn about Japanese law, visas, Japanese culture and sightseeing in Kyoto.

Books for Japanese to learn about foreign countries, overseas travel, extended stays, studying abroad, working holidays and volunteering.

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kokoka OPEN DAY 2016

When: Thursday, November 3, 2016 (National Holiday) 10:00 - 16:00

Where: kokoka - Kyoto International Community House

LIK project: Let's Play Karuta! - 3F Study Room

Website: <http://www.kcif.or.jp/en>

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※ *waka* translation by SIG English Lounge: <http://www.pureoffice.skr.jp/kyomi/database/h1/index.htm>

Welcome Party & Seminar for foreigners new to Kyoto 2016

Foreigners: come to the seminar, and the party is free (500 yen for party only)

Japanese: only 500 yen for a great international party!

Seminar:

Information about: visas and part-time jobs; bicycle rules and traffic safety; useful information for living (cellphones, internet, cheaper shopping); and kokoka Kyoto International Community House facilities and activities. Presentations will be in Japanese, English and Chinese. Reservations required!

International Party:

Japan nationals welcome too; reservations required (150 person limit)

When: Sunday, October 16, 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Where: kokoka Kyoto International Community House

Reservations:

Website: <http://www.kcif.or.jp/HP/jigyo/student/jp/kangeikai/kangeikai.html>

Tel: 075-752-3511

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