

Series: **My Favorite Kyoto**

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Memories of Kyōto*

Hadi Arefi
(Iran)

I still remember the day I arrived in Japan; it was in June 2015, and I was so enthusiastic about the future. I was going to start a 3-year postdoctoral job in the Chemistry Department of Kyoto University. This was the type of experience I always wanted to have, and it would be good to have on my resume that I had worked for one of the top universities. I had a chance to live in one of the greatest cities of Japan for a long time and see everything from the inside: the culture, the technology, and the discipline that everyone talks about. Most of my friends thought it would be a fun adventure, and I did too.



Hadi (on right)

Being confused with the Japanese language in the beginning and the fact that people did not speak much English made me think I could not make it through 3 years here, but that feeling disappeared very quickly. Soon enough I heard about the Kyoto City International Foundation from a friend, and I registered there for an elementary level Japanese language class. I didn't attend the class all the way to the end, but it was enough to make the Japanese language appear less difficult in my mind, and I felt less confused when looking at things in stores or markets, at ATM machines, and seeing train and bus station names.



Arashiyama bamboo grove

I started to enjoy Kyōto very much; I liked the spirit, the traditional look, exploring different places, the food, and the beauty of colorful festivals. Usually I am not used to going out by myself and prefer to go sightseeing in a group, so I took every chance I got to do that. The Gion Matsuri and the Gozan Okuribi (Five Mountain Bonfire) festivals, among the most famous ones in Kyōto, were the first two that I saw, and both occurred shortly after my arrival in Japan. Life was much easier by then, though I still was not used to the small size of my apartment in Yoshida International House. That wasn't hard



Cherry blossoms on Kiyamachi Street

* Pronunciation tip: any vowel with a macron over it (ā, ī, ū, ē, ō) has a "long" vowel sound, 1.5 to 2 times longer than the regular vowel sound

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Winter in Kyōto

It is said that people feel “chilled to the bone” during the winter in Kyōto, but if you have not experienced that yet, it may be difficult to imagine how it actually feels. I will try to explain it clearly; the main point is that the city of Kyōto is located in a geological bowl or basin. In the winter, the temperature near the ground sometimes decreases rapidly and it becomes very cold on clear, windy mornings. This occurs due to “radiative cooling”, when heat is radiated as infrared rays from the ground upward to the sky. As the ground cools, the air above becomes cold, and since cold air is heavy, it stays at the bottom of the basin. This cold air surrounds our feet and legs, chilling our bodies to the bone. This is the cause of Kyōto’s special winter chill. By contrast, it is hot and humid in the summer, because the surrounding mountains prevent the winds from passing through and carrying away the heat and humidity. It means that cold winters and hot summers are unique features of Kyōto’s climate. These changes of temperature also give us the beautiful four seasons. In autumn, the greater the temperature difference is between day and night, the *momiji* (Japanese maple leaves) and ivy will turn even brighter shades of red.

Additionally, since the geography of Kyōto is a gradual downhill slope from the north to the south, it is said that the scenery is different on the south and north sides of Imadegawa-dōri Street, and that snow seems to accumulate north of Kitaōji-dōri Street. Actually, the top of the five-story pagoda of Tōji Temple, at 54.8m above Kujō-dōri Street (in the south part of the city), is almost the same elevation as the ground around the Kitayama-ōhashi Bridge across the Kamogawa River (in the north part of the city)! Because of this difference in elevation, when it is snowing lightly around Kyōto Station (in the south), snow is often piling up north of Kitaōji-dōri Street. On those kinds of days, please note that if you take a taxi without snow tires from Kyoto Station, the driver may not be able to take you anywhere north of Kitaōji-dōri Street.

This winter in Kyōto, I recommend the event: “Kyoto Arashiyama Hanatouro 2016”. The Togetsu-kyō Bridge area and the bamboo forest walkways will be beautifully illuminated, and you can enjoy the unusual and fantastic views.

Info: Kyoto Hanatouro Promotion Council
(Tel 075-212-8173 / 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. weekdays)
When: December 9 - 18, 2016 (Open rain or shine)
Illumination hours: 5:00 – 8:30 p.m.
Website: <http://www.hanatouro.jp/e/index.html>



The Kimono Forest

(Photo: Kyoto Hanatouro Promotion Council)



Illumination of Togetsu-kyō Bridge

(Photo: Kyoto Hanatouro Promotion Council)



Bamboo Forest Walkway

(Photo: Kyoto Hanatouro Promotion Council)

Kyoto International Manga Museum

– Reusing a closed historic school

The Kyoto International Manga Museum is the first comprehensive cultural facility in Japan dedicated to *manga* (Japanese comics), serving as both a library and a museum; it was formed as a joint project of Kyoto Seika University and Kyoto City. The core of this museum is the *manga* material that is a product of more than forty years of education and research on *manga* culture at the university. On November 25, 2016, the museum had its tenth anniversary.

The historic school that was converted for use as a *manga* museum was the former Tatsuike Primary School. It opened on November 1, 1869, however, due to the “doughnut phenomenon”^{*} and a decline in the overall number of children in recent years, the building closed; the school merged with four other schools in April 1995, and the new Gosho Minami Primary School opened at another location.

As of 2016, there are 300,000 *manga* items stored in the museum, and you can pick up and read about 50,000 of them. There are also about 5,000 *manga* that have been translated from the original Japanese into various foreign languages, and comics that were published in foreign countries.

In the gallery, there are: a number of Permanent Exhibitions that explain *manga* systematically, its history and the *manga* industry itself; and Limited (temporary) Exhibitions, which exhibit original manuscripts of *manga* and related materials. Moreover, the museum holds talk shows and lectures by *manga* artists and researchers, Live Drawing Events where artists make drawings on the spot, and “cosplay” (dressing in costume) gatherings.

When you buy a one-day ticket, you can go in and out as many times as you like that day, so why not come to the museum sometime?

Kyoto International Manga Museum

Website: <https://www.kyotomm.jp/en/>

^{*} People move outward from the city center, leaving a “doughnut hole” in the population density there.



Wall of Manga

(Photo: Kyoto International Manga Museum)



Main Gallery

(Photo: Kyoto International Manga Museum)



**Museum exterior and
the mascot character Mamyu**

(Photo: Kyoto International Manga Museum)

Let's go to an *Izakaya* (Japanese Tavern)

In December and January, for year-end parties and New Year parties, we have many places and more opportunities for drinking with coworkers and good friends. Now, when you drink with others, where do you go? As for drinking establishments, there are pubs or bars, but many people go to *izakaya* in Japan. An *izakaya* is also a drinking establishment, but unlike pubs and bars, *izakaya* offer many kinds of food, and put the emphasis on meals. However, it is not so much a place to enjoy a meal like at a restaurant, it is more of a place to go to drinking with others. I think that perhaps as eating places, *izakaya* are unique to Japan.



Izakaya

At an *izakaya*, they have beer, *sake*, *chūhai**, wine, whiskey, and various other liquors. Additionally, juices, *oolong* tea, and many kinds of soft drinks are available, so if you don't drink alcohol, it is no problem.

As for food, there are meat dishes, fish dishes, grilled dishes, fried dishes, boiled dishes, salads, pizza, rice, fried noodles, desserts, and other things. At some *izakaya*, they have more than 200 different menu items. Each dish is served on a separate plate, so people can order various foods and share them together.

Any size group, from a few people to ten or more can get together, eat, drink, and chat; you can enjoy this for about 3,000 to 4,000 yen per person. In addition, even if you are a foreigner and you can't read Japanese characters or you don't know much about Japanese food, it is not a problem. At many *izakaya*, the menu has photos of the food items, and in some cases, the name of each dish is written in English, Chinese, Korean, etc.

To anyone who has never been to an *izakaya*, at this year's end and at the beginning of the New Year, I invite you: "let's get together and go to an *izakaya*"!

* *shōchū* (a type of distilled liquor) with fruit juice and soda water

SUZUKI Hidetoshi

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Counseling Day for Foreign Residents

Do you have any questions or concerns regarding legal issues, visa problems, taxes, insurance, your pension, etc.? Are you worried about something? Professionals in those areas can discuss any of these with you. Interpreters will be available on request. Advanced reservations are required. We will protect your confidentiality.

When: Saturday, December 17, 13:00 – 17:00

Where: kokoka Kyoto International Community House, 3F, Conference Room and Counseling Room

Reservations: phone: 075-752-3511

to overcome either, as I was mostly at work during the weekdays and spending most evenings at bars and restaurants with friends until late, while weekends were mostly dedicated to sightseeing and shopping, so simply as a place to sleep, it wasn't bad at all. Sometimes I was confused about what to do and where to go because there are so many temples, shrines and places to see in Kyōto, so I had to look up reviews and get other people's ideas about popular spots and must-do activities here and there. Thanks to our group members at the university, I visited quite a few places with them as well, such as Arashiyama, the Fushimi Inari Shrine, the Yoshida Shrine, and the Imperial Palace, and that always ended with having dinner and drinks at some good restaurants. The hiking group in our department is quite well organized too, usually going for one-day hiking trips every week during spring and autumn. I had the chance to accompany them to Hōrai Mountain (1,174m) in Shiga Prefecture, and that was a very lovely experience.

Compared to other large cities of Japan (Ōsaka for example), Kyōto does not have many tall buildings, especially near historical spots or in the downtown area. The fact that there are many temples and shrines in Kyōto makes the city look quite old-fashioned and less busy; there are many old houses, streets, shops and daily markets that have been kept intact for years. You can often see people dressed up in Japanese *yukata* (lightweight *kimono*) walking around in the city, mostly during national holidays and festivals but also on weekends! It is rare to see that in other Japanese cities, and is one of the many advantages of living in Kyōto. My favorite area is the northern part of Kyōto, especially along the Eizan Densha train line and around Mount Hieizan nearby. I was there during the cherry-blossom season, and it was wonderful. Even though I have been in Kyōto for more than a year now, I believe many things still remain to be discovered in this city. Sometimes I just bicycle around, and when I try different routes, I always find something new. Luckily, I still have a little over a year to enjoy my time in Japan and to explore. Hokkaidō and Tōkyō are the next places I am planning to visit, hopefully soon. I am pretty sure I will miss it here after I leave, but hopefully with many good memories, and of course, I can always come back to visit sometime.

Library Letter

kokoka recommends this book

“Whole Christmas Special”

(Marugoto Kurisumasu Supesharu)

Author:

KODASHIMA Ako

Publisher:

Kamogawa Shuppan, 2010



Even in Japan, in December cities get in a Christmas mood, with Christmas trees and illuminations/decorations in places all around. This year, by reading this book, why not have your own “hand-made Christmas”? Let's try making Christmas trees, ornaments, Christmas cards, and lots of other things! Recipes for Christmas dishes are also introduced here.

How well do you know the annual events of Japan? There are yearly events that have been rooted for a long time in daily life here. “Japanese Annual Celebrations and the Art of Shitsurai*” (Author: MATSUDA Noriko, Natalia MORRISON, Publisher: Shitsurai Kenkyūkai Yuzuriha, 2015) introduces them, one for every month. Please read this book to get a glimpse of Japan's unique cultural lifestyle.

* Room planning & decoration

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

Newspapers and magazines from all around the world.

Books are not available for check-out

[Hours] 9:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Closed on Mondays & last day of every month

[Tel.] 075-752-1187 [Fax.] 075-752-3510

[URL] <http://www.kcif.or.jp/en>

Rakuchūrakugai-zu-byōbu - "In and Around the City of Kyōto" Folding Screen Painting



Rakuchūrakugai-zu-byōbu
(Photo: GALLERY Kyoya)



**Naginata Boko float shown leading
the Gion Matsuri Festival procession**
(Photo: GALLERY Kyoya)



Shin'yo or mikoshi (portable shrine)
(Photo: GALLERY Kyoya)

This type of artwork was created during the 1500's to 1700s, and is culturally valuable. Some of the most famous ones, such as this *byōbu* (folding screen), were done in the early 1600's by a group of artists from the *Tosa-ha* (Tosa school). This screen depicts shrines, temples, houses, the *Gion Matsuri* Festival, civilian life, and the *Nijō Jō* Castle. The Tokugawa government constructed the castle, which at the time had a tower that stood high enough to watch and observe all of Kyōto. Also shown is a long procession to the *Gosho* (old Imperial Palace) in Kyōto, said to represent the marriage of the daughter of Hidetada, the 2nd Tokugawa Shōgun, to Emperor Gomizuno'o. Additionally, in this screen, the Shin'nyodō (a Buddhist temple) is shown standing near the *Gosho*, not at its current location south of Mount Yoshida. Since some old town areas still have Shin'nyodō in their names, this indicates that it originally stood close to the Imperial Palace as depicted in the *byōbu*. You can also find a few foreigners shown in this screen. *Kinpun* (gold-powder paint) was used throughout this painting, giving it a gorgeous, glowing atmosphere.

In order to enjoy *byōbu* more readily, replicas have been made and are widely available. An original *byōbu* is laser-scanned into computer memory, and printed by first putting *kinpun* on the replica base material and then overlaying the landscape from the digital archive. The replica is a beautiful and clear reproduction of the original *byōbu*. There remain approximately 100 original *byōbu* today; some are housed in Kyōto, including at the Kyoto National Museum. When they are on exhibit, you really should see them, to enjoy both the artistry of the scenes and their histories.

FURUTA Tomiyoshi

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