

DAY 1 - APRIL 7 : ARRIVE AT NARITA

Arrive at 3:40PM ANA

Take limo bus to Yokohama

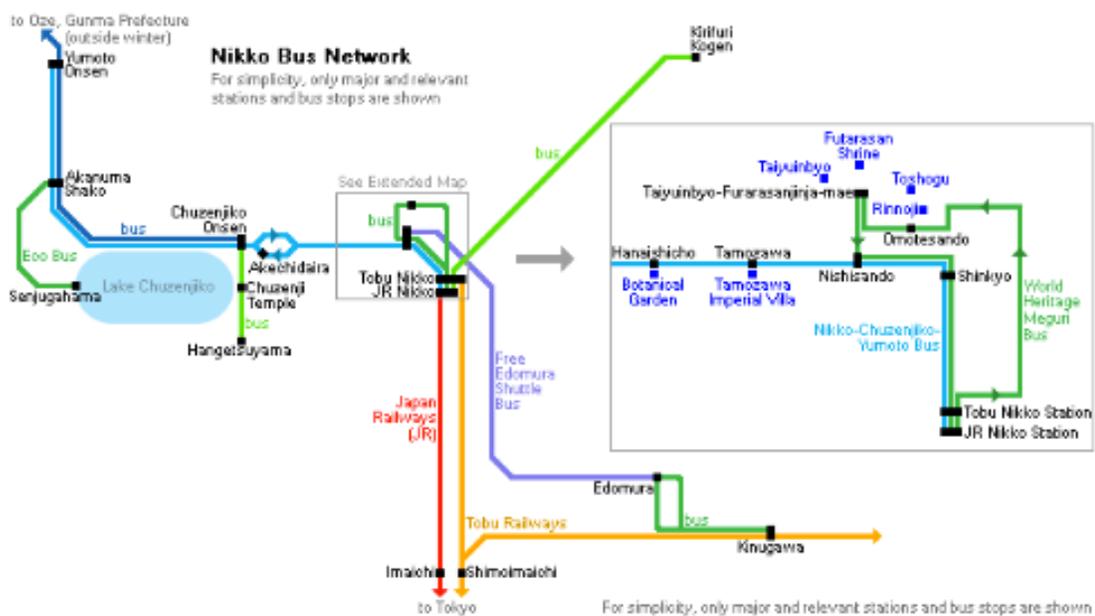
Ian will meet me at the limo bus station in Yokohama

DAY 2 - APRIL 8 : NIKKO

How to Get to Nikko from Tokyo

Nikko is easily accessible from [Tokyo](#) by train. If you have a Japan Rail Pass, take a Shinkansen from Tokyo station to Utsunomiya, then transfer to the Nikko line and ride it to the final stop. Total journey time is around 90 minutes, depending on how you work your connection. [Click here](#) to search schedules.

How to get to and around Nikko



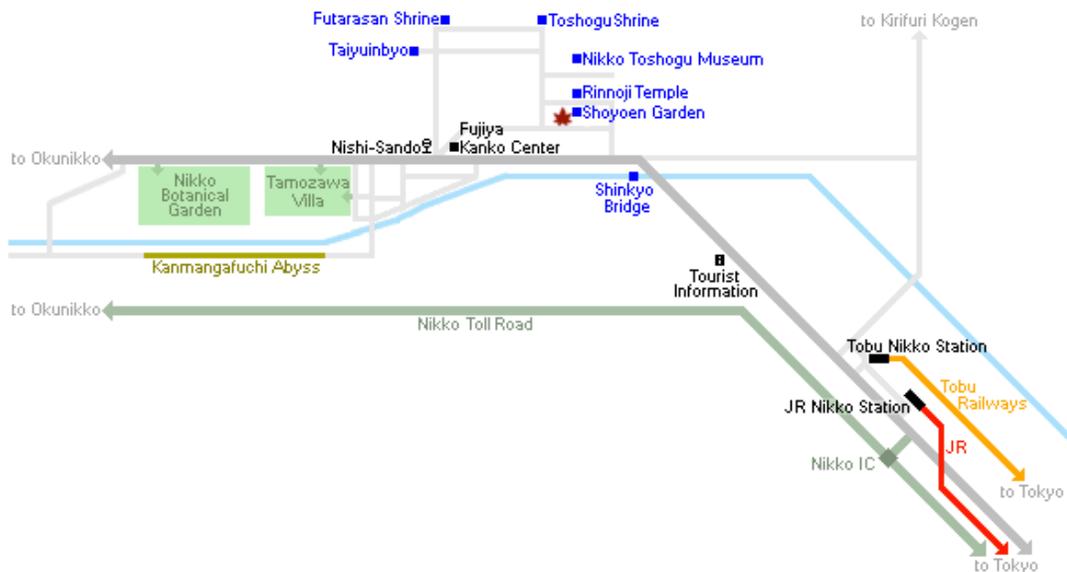
Things to Do in Nikko

This is going to sound like a cop-out, but the best thing to do in Nikko is to cross over the aforementioned bridge (which is also pictured in the montage above) and bliss out amid the temples, shrines and scenery. Unless you're a Japanese history major, you'll drive yourself crazy trying to memorize the names and importance of all the structures in Nikko, so it's best to focus on just being grounded, focused and present, and trying to

absorb as much of the energy as possible.

SHIKYO BRIDGE:

How to get there:



Shinkyo Bridge is located in central **Nikko**, along the way between the railway stations and **Toshogu Shrine**. It can be accessed from JR or Tobu Nikko Station by a **bus** which stops at Shinkyo bus stop (5 minutes, 200 yen one way) or in about 20-30 minutes on foot.



The **Shinkyo Bridge** (神橋, Shinkyō, "sacred bridge") stands at the entrance to **Nikko's** shrines and temples, and technically belongs to **Futarasan Shrine**. The bridge is ranked as one of Japan's three finest bridges together with **Iwakuni's Kintaikyo** and Saruhashi in **Yamanashi Prefecture**.

The current Shinkyo was constructed in 1636, but a bridge of some kind had marked the same spot for much longer, although its exact origins are unclear. Until 1973, Shinkyo was off limit to the general public. It underwent extensive renovation works in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and visitors can now walk across the bridge and back for an entrance fee.



Toshogu Shrine (東照宮, Tōshōgū) is the final resting place of **Tokugawa Ieyasu**, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate that ruled Japan for over 250 years until 1868. Ieyasu is enshrined at Toshogu as the deity Tosho Daigongen, "Great Deity of the East Shining Light". Initially a relatively simple mausoleum, Toshogu was enlarged into the spectacular complex seen today by Ieyasu's grandson Iemitsu during the first half of the 1600s.

The lavishly decorated shrine complex consists of more than a dozen buildings set in a beautiful forest. Countless wood carvings and large amounts of gold leaf were used to decorate the buildings in a way not seen elsewhere in Japan, where simplicity has been traditionally stressed in shrine **architecture**. Visitors may note that Toshogu contains both **Shinto** and **Buddhist** elements. It was common for places of worship to contain elements of both religions until the **Meiji Period** when Shinto was deliberately separated from Buddhism. Across the country, Buddhist elements were removed from shrines and vice versa, but at Toshogu the two religions were so intermingled that the separation was not carried out completely.



Nitenmon Gate

Taiyūinbyō (大猷院廟, Taiyūinbyō) is the mausoleum of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, the grandson of Ieyasu. Iemitsu's lavish mausoleum complex resembles nearby Toshogu Shrine in its layout and architecture, but it was intentionally built somewhat more modest than the Toshogu, due to Iemitsu's deep respect for his grandfather. Taiyūin is the posthumous name of Iemitsu.

Like the Toshogu, the Taiyūinbyō features a mix of Buddhist and Shinto structures. It was common for places of worship to contain elements of both religions until the Meiji Period when Shinto was deliberately separated from Buddhism. Across the country, Buddhist elements were removed from shrines and vice versa, but at Taiyūinbyō the separation was not carried out completely. While Toshogu was officially made a shrine, the Taiyūinbyō became a subtemple of nearby Rinnoji Temple.

Honden (back) and Haiden

A short walk west of Toshogu Shrine takes visitors to the vermilion Niomon Gate, the entrance to the Taiyūinbyō. Proceeding on leads to the more lavishly decorated Nitenmon Gate which is guarded by two heavenly kings, followed by two beautiful structures - a drum tower on the left and a belfry on the right.

Arriving at the Karamon Gate which stands majestically in front of the praying hall (haiden), look out for the famous sculpture of a white dragon that embellishes the transom of the gate. Visitors are allowed to enter the haiden and see its lovely interior decor featuring precious ornaments, an elegant coffered ceiling, nice carvings and gold lacquered pillars and walls.

The main hall (honden) is located just behind the haiden but can only be viewed from the outside. The two halls are connected by a short corridor and the structures combined have a slightly subtle yet grand-looking facade. Next to the halls at the innermost precincts is Tokugawa Iemitsu's mausoleum, which lends a composed and dignified charm to the temple.



Sanbutsudo before the renovation works

Sanbutsudo before the renovation works

Rinnoji (輪王寺, Rinnōji) is Nikko's most important temple. It was founded by Shodo Shonin, the Buddhist monk who introduced Buddhism to Nikko in the 8th century.

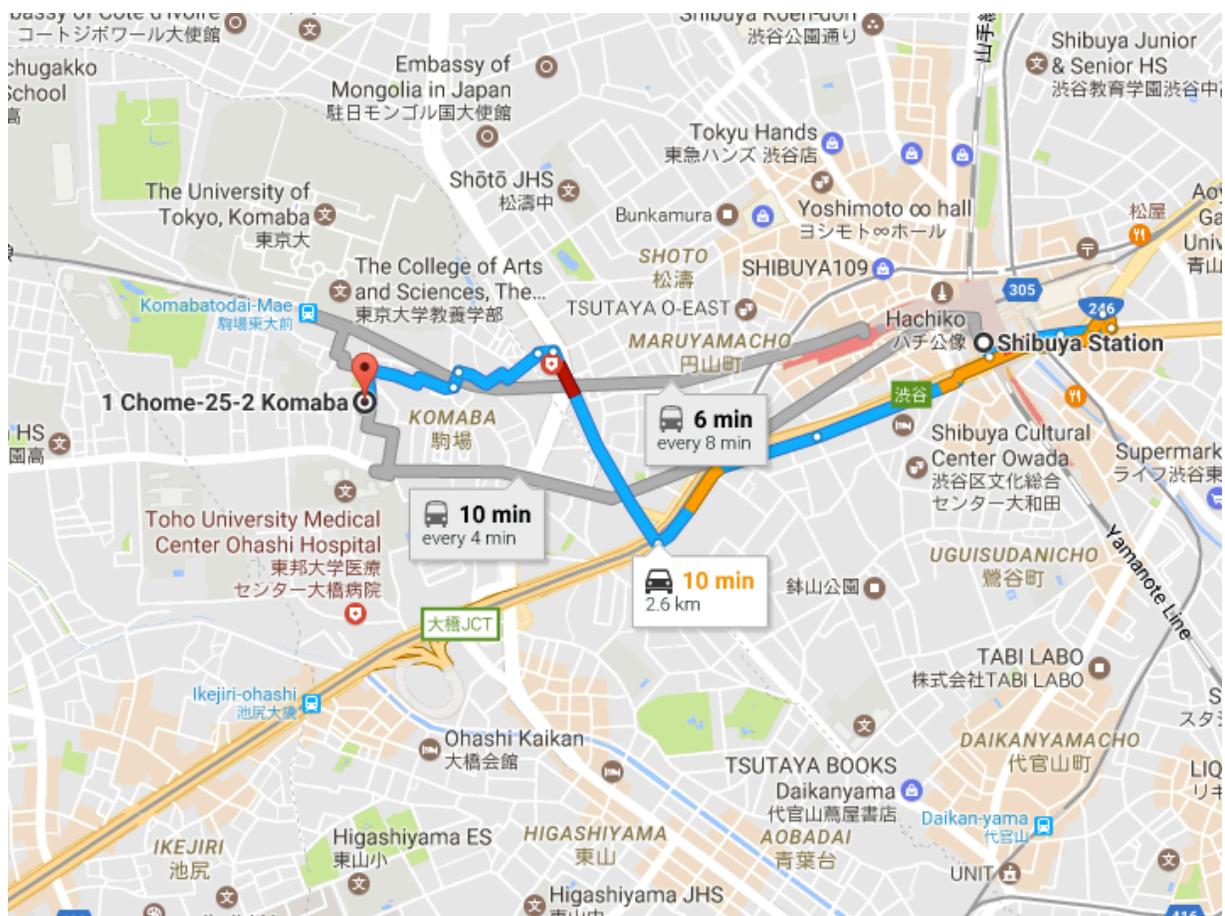
The temple's main building, the **Sanbutsudo**, houses large, gold lacquered, wooden statues of Amida, Senju-Kannon ("Kannon with a thousand arms") and Bato-Kannon ("Kannon with a horse head"). The three deities are regarded as Buddhist manifestations of Nikko's three mountain deities which are enshrined at **Futarasan Shrine**.

RETURN TO YOKOHAMA TO PICK UP SUITCASES FOR TRAVEL & GO TO TOKYO TO CHECK IN AND GO FOR DINNER AT ROBOT RESTAURANT

1 Chome-25-2 komaba
Meguro-ku, Tōkyō-to 153-0041
Japan

·2minutes walk from the komabatodaimae stasion
→I live near Shibuya station, the second stop from komabatodaimae station.

·15 minutes walk from the Shibuya station



DAY 3 - APRIL 9

AIRBNB:

7 Chome-8-10 Nishinakajima
Ōsaka-shi, Ōsaka-fu 532-0011
Japan

Roanji Temple:

How to get there:

Ryoanji can be reached directly from Kyoto Station by JR bus. The bus ride takes about 30 minutes, costs 230 yen and is covered by the [Japan Rail Pass](#). There are buses every 15-30 minutes. Alternatively, Ryoanji is a five minute [bus](#) ride or 20 minute walk west of [Kinkakuji](#).



Ryoanji Temple (龍安寺, Ryōanji) is the site of Japan's most famous **rock garden**, which attracts hundreds of visitors every day. Originally an aristocrat's villa during the **Heian Period**, the site was converted into a **Zen** temple in 1450 and belongs to the **Myoshinji** school of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, whose head temple stands just a kilometer to the south.

As for the history of Ryoanji's famous **rock garden**, the facts are less certain. The garden's date of construction is unknown and there are a number of speculations regarding its designer. The garden consists of a rectangular plot of pebbles surrounded by low earthen walls, with 15 rocks laid out in small groups on patches of moss. An interesting feature of the garden's design is that from any vantage point at least one of the rocks is always hidden from the viewer.

A few stones of Ryoanji's famous rock garden

Along with its origins, the meaning of the **garden** is unclear. Some believe that the garden represents the common theme of a tiger carrying cubs across a pond or of islands in a sea, while others claim that the garden represents an abstract concept like infinity. Because the garden's meaning has not been made explicit, it is up to each viewer to find the meaning for him/herself. To make this easier, a visit in the early morning is recommended when crowds are usually smaller than later during the day. Ryoanji's garden is viewed from the **Hojo**, the head priest's former residence. Besides the stone garden, the Hojo features some paintings on the sliding doors (fusuma) of its **tatami** rooms, and a couple of smaller gardens on the rear side of the building. In one of the gardens there is a round stone trough that cleverly incorporates its square water basin into a Zen inscription, which students of **kanji** may be able to appreciate. The Hojo is connected to the **Kuri**, the former temple kitchen, which now serves as the temple's main entrance.

The Kuri building (former temple kitchen)

Ryoanji's temple grounds also include a relatively spacious **park area with pond**, located below the temple's main buildings. The pond dates back to the time when the site still served as an aristocrat's villa and features a small **shrine** on one of its three little islands that can be accessed over a bridge. Besides some nice walking trails, the park also offers a restaurant which specializes in the Kyoto specialty of Yudofu (boiled **tofu**). The food is served in attractive tatami rooms that look out onto a traditional Japanese garden. It is also possible for patrons to order just drinks or share one dish between multiple people, but in both cases an extra charge applies.

KINKAKU-JI

How to get there: 20 minute walk



Kinkakuji (金閣寺, Golden Pavilion) is a **Zen temple** in northern Kyoto whose top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf. Formally known as Rokuonji, the temple was the retirement villa of the shogun **Ashikaga Yoshimitsu**, and according to his will it became a Zen temple of the Rinzai sect after his death in 1408. Kinkakuji was the inspiration for the similarly named **Ginkakuji (Silver Pavilion)**, built by Yoshimitsu's grandson, Ashikaga Yoshimasa, on the other side of the city a few decades later. Kinkakuji is an impressive structure built overlooking a large pond, and is the only building left of Yoshimitsu's former retirement complex. It has burned down numerous times throughout its history including twice during the **Onin War**, a civil war that destroyed much of Kyoto; and once again more recently in 1950 when it was set on fire by a fanatic monk. The present structure was rebuilt in 1955.

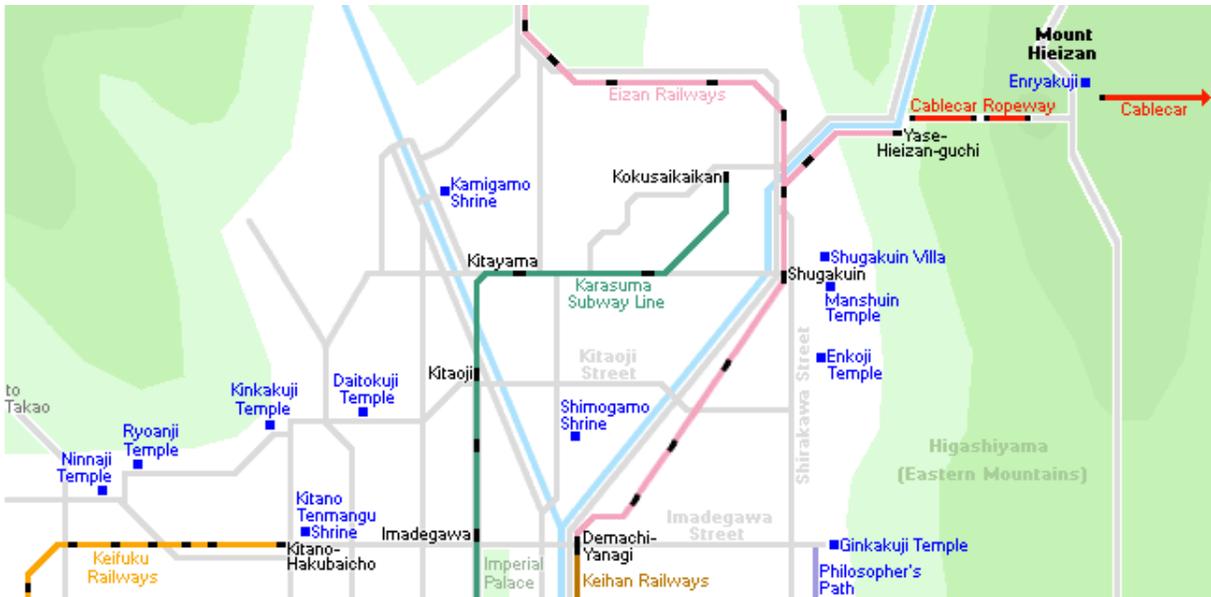
Kinkakuji was built to echo the extravagant Kitayama culture that developed in the wealthy aristocratic circles of Kyoto during Yoshimitsu's times. Each floor represents a different style of architecture.

The first floor is built in the Shinden style used for palace buildings during the **Heian Period**, and with its natural wood pillars and white plaster walls contrasts yet complements the gilded upper stories of the pavilion. Statues of the Shaka Buddha (historical Buddha) and Yoshimitsu are stored in the first floor. Although it is not possible to enter the pavilion, the statues can be viewed from across the pond if you look closely, as the front windows of the first floor are usually kept open.

The second floor is built in the Bukke style used in **samurai** residences, and has its exterior completely covered in gold leaf. Inside is a seated Kannon Bodhisattva surrounded by statues of the Four Heavenly Kings; however, the statues are not shown to the public. Finally, the third and uppermost floor is built in the style of a Chinese Zen Hall, is gilded inside and out, and is capped with a golden phoenix.

After viewing Kinkakuji from across the pond, visitors pass by the head priest's former living quarters (hojo) which are known for their painted sliding doors (fusuma), but are not open to the public. The path once again passes by Kinkakuji from behind then leads through the temple's gardens which have retained their original design from Yoshimitsu's days. The gardens hold a few other spots of interest including Anmintaku Pond that is said to never dry up, and statues that people throw coins at for luck. Continuing through the garden takes you to the Sekkatei Teahouse, added to Kinkakuji during the **Edo Period**, before you exit the paid temple area. Outside the exit are souvenir shops, a small tea garden where you can have matcha tea and sweets (500 yen) and Fudo Hall, a small temple hall which houses a statue of Fudo Myoo, one of the

Five Wisdom Kings and protector of **Buddhism**. The statue is said to be carved by Kobo Daishi, one of the most important figures in Japanese religious history.

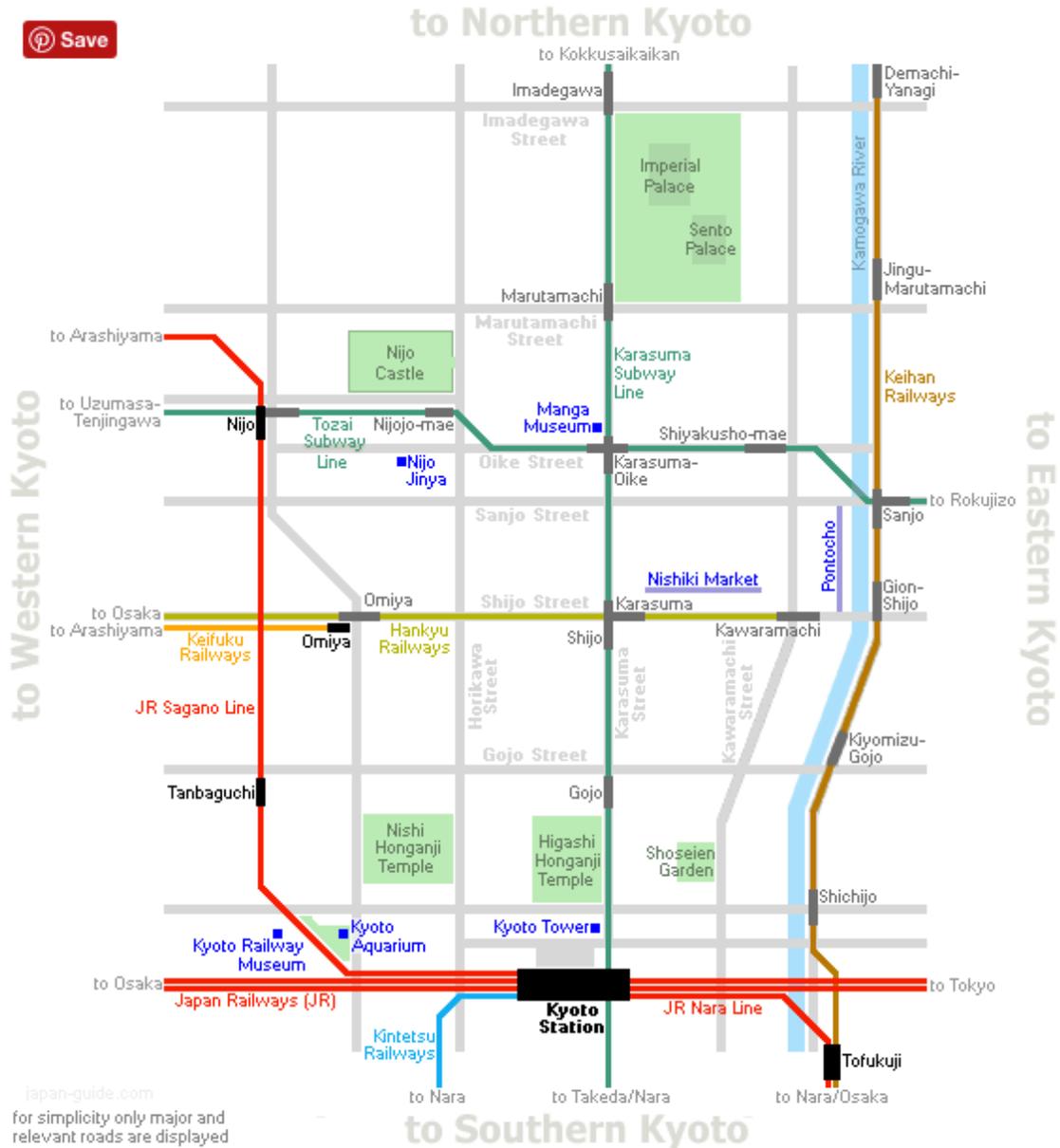


Access

Kinkakuji can be accessed from **Kyoto Station** by direct Kyoto City Bus number 101 or 205 in about 40 minutes and for 230 yen. Alternatively, it can be faster and more reliable to take the Karasuma Subway Line to Kitaoji Station (15 minutes, 260 yen) and take a **taxi** (10 minutes, 1000-1200 yen) or **bus** (10 minutes, 230 yen, bus numbers 101, 102, 204 or 205) from there to Kinkakuji.

KYOTO IMPERIAL PALACE

How to get there: Take Bus 59 and get off at Karasuma-Imadegawa



The current **Imperial Palace** was reconstructed in 1855 after it had burnt down and moved around town repeatedly over the centuries. The complex is enclosed by long walls and consists of several gates, halls and gardens. The enthronement ceremonies of Emperors Taisho and Showa were still held in the palace's main hall. **Tokyo Imperial Palace** is now used for enthronement ceremonies. Formerly only accessible on guided tours that required advance reservations, the palace grounds can now be entered and explored without joining a tour and without any prior arrangements (although tours in English are still available). Visitors can see the the

palace buildings and gardens, but note that none of the buildings can be entered.

Besides the Imperial Palace and the **Sento Palace** grounds, a few **other historic sites** are located within Kyoto Imperial Park, including the Kaninnomiya Mansion, a former residence of court nobles that is open to the public in the park's southwestern corner. Not far away stands a small branch shrine of **Miyajima's** famous **Itsukushima Shrine** on a small island of a pond.

The 1300 meter long and 700 meter wide park also serves as **recreational space** for both tourists and residents, featuring attractive, broad gravel paths, lawns and tree groves. A pretty group of weeping **cherry trees** stands beside Konoe Pond in the park's northwestern corner and is usually in bloom for two to three weeks from late March to mid April.

Nijo Castle



Nijo Castle (二条城, Nijōjō) was built in 1603 as the **Kyoto** residence of **Tokugawa Ieyasu**, the first shogun of the **Edo Period** (1603-1867). His grandson Iemitsu completed the castle's palace buildings 23 years later and further expanded the castle by adding a five story **castle keep**.

After the Tokugawa Shogunate fell in 1867, Nijo Castle was used as an **imperial** palace for a while before being donated to the city and opened up to the public as a historic site. Its palace buildings are arguably the best surviving examples of castle palace architecture of Japan's feudal era, and the castle was designated a **UNESCO world heritage site** in 1994.

Nijo Castle can be divided into three areas: the Honmaru (main circle of defense), the Ninomaru (secondary circle of defense) and some gardens that encircle the Honmaru and Ninomaru. The entire castle grounds and the Honmaru are surrounded by stone wall and moats.



Karamon Gate

Visitors to Nijo Castle enter the castle grounds through a large gate in the east. English audio guides are available for rent (500 yen) at a kiosk just inside the gate. Venturing further into the castle will bring you to the Chinese style Karamon Gate, the entrance to the **Ninomaru** (secondary circle of defense), where the castle's main attraction, the Ninomaru Palace is located.

The **Ninomaru Palace** served as the residence and office of the **shogun** during his visits to **Kyoto**. Surviving in its original form, the palace consists of multiple separate buildings that are connected with each other by corridors with so called nightingale floors, as they squeak when stepped upon as a security measure against intruders. The palace rooms are **tatami** mat covered and feature elegantly decorated ceilings and beautifully painted sliding doors (*fusuma*).



How to get from Nijo Castle to Kyoto Station:

Walk to the Nijojo-mae Station along the Tozai Subway Line and take it to Kyoto Station.

From Kyoto Station to Shin Osaka Station to go home.

DAY 4 - APRIL 10 ARASHIYAMA

By Japan Railways (JR)

The fastest access from **Kyoto Station** to Arashiyama is provided by the JR Sagano Line (also known as JR Sanin Line). The one way ride to Saga-Arashiyama Station takes 15 minutes and costs 240 yen. From Saga-Arashiyama Station, central Arashiyama can be reached in a 5-10 minute walk.

Arashiyama (嵐山) is a pleasant, touristy district in the western outskirts of **Kyoto**. The area has been a popular destination since the **Heian Period** (794-1185), when nobles would enjoy its natural setting. Arashiyama is particularly popular during the **cherry blossom** and **fall color** seasons.

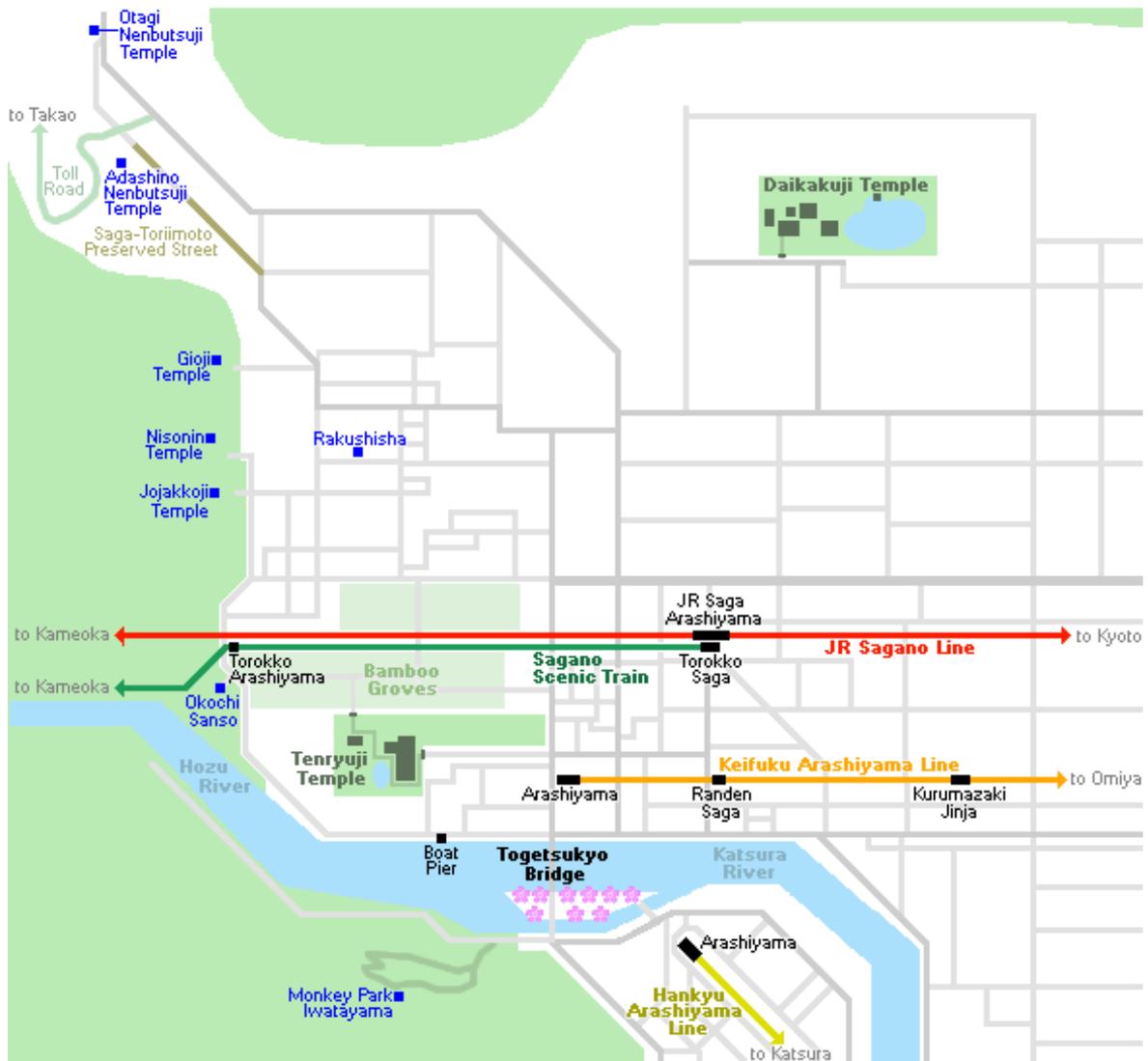
The **Togetsukyo Bridge** is Arashiyama's well known, central landmark. Many small shops, restaurants and other attractions are found nearby, including **Tenryuji Temple**, Arashiyama's famous **bamboo groves** and pleasure boats that are available for rent on the river.

North of central Arashiyama the atmosphere becomes less touristy and more rural, with several small temples scattered along the base of the wooded mountains. The area north of the Togetsukyo Bridge is also known as Sagano, while the name "Arashiyama" technically just refers to the mountains on the southern bank of the river but is commonly used to name the entire district.

Pleasure boats and cherry blossoms

One of the most enjoyable and convenient ways to travel around the Sagano area is by rental **bicycle**, which are available for around 1000 yen near the train stations. Cycling through rural residential areas and past fields while traveling between temples can be one of the most enjoyable parts of a visit to Arashiyama. There is also an attractive **preserved town area** near the **Adashino Nenbutsuji Temple**.

Arashiyama becomes most attractive (and busy) around early April and the second half of November when the **cherry blossom** and **fall color** seasons usually peak. During the summer months, traditional **cormorant fishing** is practiced on the Hozu River for tourists to watch. Another good time to visit is during December's **Hanatoro** illumination, when lanterns line the streets and **bamboo groves**.



BAMBOO GROVES



The walking paths that cut through the bamboo groves make for a nice walk or bicycle ride. The groves are particularly attractive when there is a light wind and the tall bamboo stalks sway gently back and forth. The bamboo has been used to manufacture various products, such as baskets, cups, boxes and mats at local workshops for centuries.

TENRYUJI TEMPLE



Hours: 8:30 to 17:30 (until 17:00 from late October to late March)

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 500 yen for gardens, additional 300 yen to enter buildings

Ranked among Kyoto's five great **Zen temples**, Tenryūji is the largest and most impressive temple in Arashiyama. Founded in 1339 at the beginning of the **Muromachi Period** (1338-1573), the temple is one of Kyoto's many **UNESCO World Heritage Sites**. In addition to its temple buildings, there are attractive gardens with walking paths.

OKOCHI SANSO VILLA



Hours: 9:00 to 17:00

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 1000 yen

This is the former villa of the popular actor Okochi Denjiro (1896-1962), located in the back of Arashiyama's bamboo groves. Okochi Sanso consists of several different gardens and buildings, including living quarters, tea houses and gates. The buildings can only be viewed from the outside. Admission includes matcha green tea with a snack.

Saga-Toriimoto Preserved Street



Much of this street along the way to the [Adashino Nenbutsuji Temple](#) has been preserved in the style of the [Meiji Period](#) (1868-1912). Many of the buildings are traditional machiya ("town houses") that served as private residences but have since been converted into shops and restaurants.

Rakushisha Residence



Hours: 9:00 to 17:00 (10:00 to 16:00 from January to February)

Closed: December 31 and January 1

Admission: 250 yen

The Rakushisha Residence is a thatched hut that belonged to the 17th century haiku poet Mukai Kyorai. Mukai was a student of Basho Matsuo, one of Japan's greatest poets. Basho even composed a few poems here. Mukai named his residence Rakushisha ("fallen [persimmon](#) hut") after a storm had taken down the fruits of the surrounding trees.

Temples

Tenryuji Temple

Hours: 8:30 to 17:30 (until 17:00 from late October to late March)

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 500 yen for gardens, additional 300 yen to enter buildings

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Daikakuji Temple



Hours: 9:00 to 17:00 (entry until 16:30)

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 500 yen (600 yen combination ticket with [Gioji](#))

[Daikakuji](#) is a temple of the [Shingon sect](#) of Japanese Buddhism. Formerly the residence of an [emperor](#), the buildings were converted into a temple in 876. During its history the temple traditionally had members of the imperial family serve as the head priest. Beside the main temple buildings there is a large pond and a pagoda.

Jojakkoji Temple



Hours: 9:00 to 17:00 (entry until 16:30)

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 400 yen

This mountainside temple was founded in [1596](#). With small, attractive buildings and gates, the temple has a quiet and understated atmosphere. Maple trees and moss are located just beside the paths and stairs that lead across the temple grounds. From a number of spots, visitors can enjoy views over Kyoto.

Nisonin Temple



Hours: 9:00 to 16:30

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 500 yen

Similar to [Jojakkoji](#), Nisonin Temple is a hillside temple with slightly larger and imposing buildings. A generally understated atmosphere on the temple grounds is partly due to the overhanging trees along approach. Founded in the mid 9th century, Nisonin is a temple of the [Tendai sect](#). There are views over the city from the upper grounds.

Gioji Temple



Hours: 9:00 to 17:00 (entry until 16:30)

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 300 yen (600 yen combination ticket with [Daikakuji](#))

Gioji is even more nestled into the forest than [Jojakkoji](#) and [Nisonin](#). It is known for its moss garden that is punctuated with tall maple trees. The temple's entrance gate and small main hall have thatched roofs. The latter has an attractive round window looking into the gardens.

Adashino Nenbutsuji Temple



Hours: 9:00 to 17:00 (until 16:00 from December to February). Admission ends 30 minutes before closing

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 500 yen

Adashino Nenbutsuji is located at the end of the [Saga-Toriimoto Preserved Street](#). The temple was founded in the early 9th century when the famous monk Kobo Daishi placed stone statues for the souls of the dead here. Today, the temple grounds are covered by hundreds of such stone statues. In the back of the temple, a short path leads through a bamboo forest.

Otagi Nenbutsuji Temple



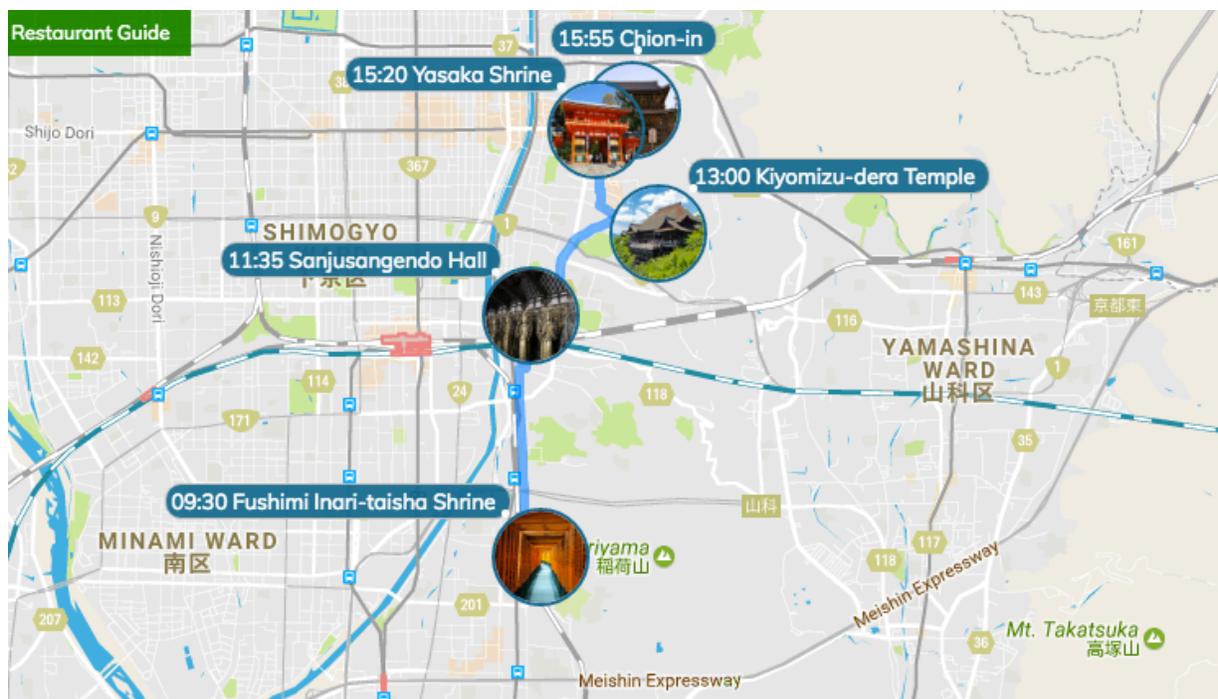
Hours: 8:00 to 17:00 (entry until 16:45)

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 300 yen

Another ten minute walk north of the similarly named [Adashino Nenbutsuji](#), the Otagi Nenbutsuji Temple is famous for its 1200 stone statues of rakan, devoted followers of Buddhism, each with a different facial expression. Created relatively recently in the 1980s and early 1990s, the many statues stand across the temple grounds which cover part of a forested mountain slope.

DAY 5 - APRIL 11



Fushimi Inari Shrine is located just outside JR Inari Station, the second station from Kyoto Station along the JR Nara Line (5 minutes, 140 yen one way from **Kyoto Station**, not served by **rapid trains**). The shrine can also be reached in a short walk from Fushimi Inari Station along the Keihan Main Line.



A walking path leads through a tunnel of torii gates

Fushimi Inari Shrine (伏見稲荷大社, Fushimi Inari Taisha) is an important **Shinto shrine** in southern **Kyoto**. It is famous for its thousands of vermilion **torii gates**, which straddle a network of trails behind its main buildings. The trails lead into the wooded forest of the sacred Mount Inari, which stands at 233 meters and belongs to the shrine grounds. Fushimi Inari is the most important of several thousands of shrines dedicated to Inari, the **Shinto god** of rice. Foxes are thought to be Inari's messengers, resulting in many fox statues across the shrine grounds. Fushimi Inari Shrine has ancient origins, predating the capital's move to **Kyoto** in 794.

While the primary reason most foreign visitors come to Fushimi Inari Shrine is to explore the mountain trails, the shrine buildings themselves are also attractive and worth a visit. At the shrine's entrance stands the Romon Gate, which was donated in 1589 by the

famous leader **Toyotomi Hideyoshi**. Behind stands the shrine's main building (Honden) and various auxiliary buildings.

At the very back of the shrine's main grounds is the entrance to the torii gate covered hiking trail, which starts with two dense, parallel rows of gates called **Senbon Torii** ("thousands of torii gates"). The torii gates along the entire trail are donations by individuals and companies, and you will find the donator's name and the date of the donation inscribed on the back of each gate. The cost starts around 400,000 yen for a small sized gate and increases to over one million yen for a large gate.

Getting there: 30 min walk from Inari 2.9 km

Sanjusangendo (三十三間堂, Sanjūsangendō) is the popular name for Rengeo-in, a **temple** in eastern **Kyoto** which is famous for its 1001 statues of **Kannon**, the goddess of mercy. The temple was founded in 1164 and rebuilt a century later after the original structure had been destroyed in a fire.

Measuring 120 meters, the temple hall is Japan's longest wooden structure. The name Sanjusangendo (literally "33 intervals") derives from the number of intervals between the building's support columns, a traditional method of measuring the size of a building. In the center of the main hall sits a large, wooden statue of a 1000-armed Kannon (Senju Kannon) that is flanked on each side by 500 statues of human sized 1000-armed Kannon standing in ten rows. Together they make for an awesome sight.

1000-armed Kannon are equipped with 11 heads to better witness the suffering of humans and with 1000 arms to better help them fight the suffering. Note that the actual statues have only 42 arms each. Subtract the two regular arms and multiply by the 25 planes of existence to get the full thousand.

KIYOMIZU-DERA TEMPLE

How to get there:

2 km, 24 min walking

Kiyomizudera can be reached from **Kyoto Station** by **bus** number 100 or 206 (15 minutes, 230 yen). Get off at Gojo-zaka or Kiyomizu-michi bus stop, from where it is a ten minute uphill walk to the temple. Alternatively, Kiyomizudera is about a 20 minute walk from Kiyomizu-Gojo Station along the Keihan Railway Line.

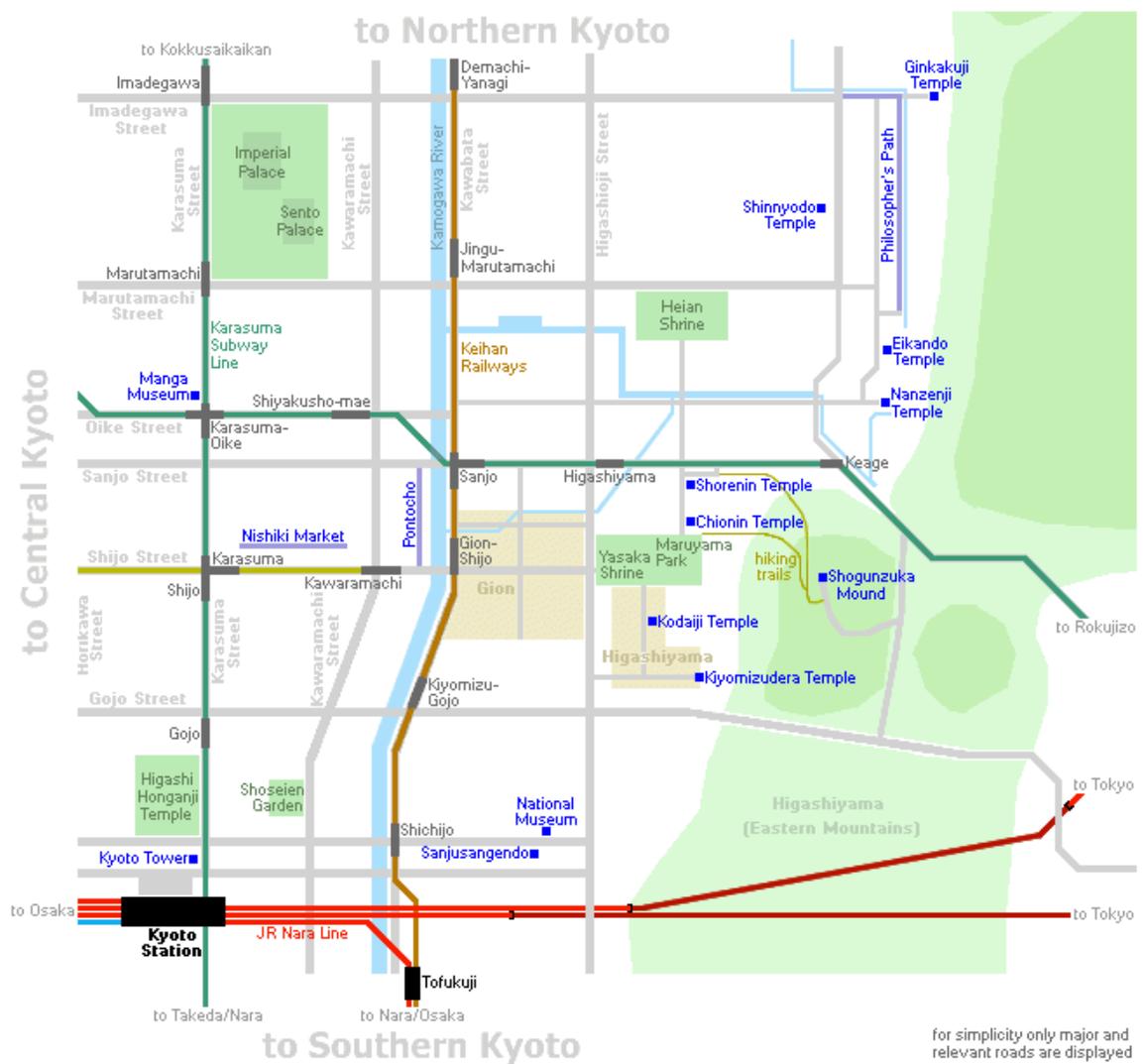


Kiyomizudera (清水寺, literally "Pure Water Temple") is one of the most celebrated **temples** of Japan. It was founded in 780 on the site of the Otowa Waterfall in the wooded hills east of **Kyoto**, and derives its name from the fall's pure waters. The temple was originally associated with the Hosso sect, one of the oldest schools within **Japanese Buddhism**, but formed its own Kita Hosso sect in 1965. In 1994, the temple was added to the list of **UNESCO world heritage sites**.

CONSTRUCTION NOTICE:

Kiyomizudera's main hall will be covered up from February 2017 to March 2020 for the **renovation** of its roof. On February 6, 2017, work started on covering up the hall. The cover is scheduled to be completed in June 2017. Visitors will be able to enter the main hall during the renovations.

Kiyomizudera is best known for its **wooden stage** that juts out from its main hall, 13 meters above the hillside below. The stage affords visitors a nice view of the numerous **cherry** and **maple** trees below that erupt in a sea of color in spring and fall, as well as of the city of **Kyoto** in the distance. The main hall, which together with the stage was built without the use of nails, houses the temple's primary object of worship, a small statue of the eleven faced, thousand armed Kannon.



YASAKA SHRINE



How to get there:

1.5 km, 18 min walking

Yasaka Shrine can be reached by **bus** from **Kyoto Station** in about 20 minutes. Take number 100 or 206 and get off at Gion bus stop. The closest train stations are Gion Shijo Station on the Keihan Line and Kawaramachi Station on the Hankyu Line.

Alternatively, the 20-30 minute walk from **Kiyomizudera** through the narrow lanes of the

Higashiyama District to Yasaka Shrine is highly recommended.

Yasaka Shrine (八坂神社, Yasaka Jinja), also known as Gion Shrine, is one of the most famous **shrines** in **Kyoto**. Founded over 1350 years ago, the shrine is located between the popular **Gion District** and **Higashiyama District**, and is often visited by tourists walking between the two districts.

The shrine's main hall combines the honden (inner sanctuary) and haiden (offering hall) into a single building. In front of it stands a dance stage with hundreds of lanterns that get lit in the evenings. Each lantern bears the name of a local business in return for a donation.

Yasaka Shrine is well known for its summer festival, the **Gion Matsuri**, which is celebrated every July. Arguably the most famous **festival** in the whole country, the Gion Matsuri dates back over a thousand years and involves a procession with massive floats and hundreds of participants. The shrine also becomes busy during the **cherry blossom** season around early April, as the adjacent **Maruyama Park** is one of the most famous **cherry blossom spots in Kyoto**.

CHION - IN

How to get there:

.5 km, 6 min walking

Chionin is located just north of **Maruyama Park** and **Yasaka Shrine** in Kyoto's **Higashiyama District**.

The temple is also a ten minute walk from the nearest subway station, Higashiyama Station on the Tozai Line (15 minutes, 260 yen from **Kyoto Station**), or a five minute walk from the nearest bus stop, Chionin-mae bus stop (20 minutes, 230 yen from Kyoto Station by Kyoto City Bus 206).



Miedo Hall (main hall) before the start of the renovation works

Chionin (知恩院) is the head temple of the Jodo sect of **Japanese Buddhism**, which has millions of followers and is one of the most popular **Buddhist sects** in Japan. The temple has spacious grounds and large buildings. Visitors will surely notice the temple when they come across its massive Sanmon Gate.

The **Sanmon Gate**, Chionin's main entrance gate, is located alongside the road between **Maruyama Park** and Shorenin Temple. Standing 24 meters tall and 50 meters wide, it is the largest wooden gate in Japan and dates back to the early 1600s. The gate's balcony is not open to the public. Behind the gate a wide set of stairs leads to the main temple grounds.

CONSTRUCTION NOTICE:

Chionin's main hall, the Miedo Hall, is undergoing major renovation works that fully started in 2012 and will last until March 2019. During the renovation works, the hall is covered by a large scaffolding structure and closed to visitors. The Honen Shoin Mido Hall is used for the main ceremonies, instead.

Covered up Miedo Hall in April 2013

At the center of Chionin is an open area with stone paths connecting the temple's main buildings. The massive **Miedo Hall** houses the temple's principle object of worship: a statue of the priest Honen, who founded the Jodo sect. Nearby is the **Amidado Hall**, which houses a statue of Amida Buddha, the most important Buddha in the Jodo sect.



The priest Honen was initially a follower of the **Tendai sect** of Japanese Buddhism at the mountain temple of **Enryakuji Temple**. Buddhism during Honen's time was limited to monks and aristocrats, and was not available to commoners who did not have the resources or learning to partake in Buddhist rituals and ceremonies. In 1175, Honen was introduced to Chinese texts that claimed the possibility of salvation by simply proclaiming faith in the Buddha Amida, and soon after he founded the Jodo sect. The central premise of the new sect was that the Buddhist deity Amida had created a paradise that anyone could enter after death. One needed only to recite the name of Amida in faith. Jodo literally means "pure land", and refers to Amida's paradise, and the new sect gave common people the same opportunity for salvation as priests or aristocrats. The Jodo sect became very popular among the masses, but also met with opposition from the already established Buddhist sects.

Stone paths leading to the Miedo Hall during an evening illumination

Beyond the Miedo there is a path that leads up the hillside to a number of small buildings. The **Seishido Hall** is the oldest building on the temple grounds, dating back to 1530. There is also a mausoleum that contains the ashes of Honen. Elsewhere on the grounds is a massive bell that was the largest in the world from the 17th to the 19th century, as well as a few other buildings and two gardens.

The **Hojo Garden** is located behind the Miedo Hall and is built alongside the priest's living quarters. It is a traditional **Japanese garden** that was designed by a monk in the

mid 1600s. The **Yuzen Garden** is located just beside the Sanmon Gate and was designed in modern times. It includes both rock and pond gardens and is built along a slight incline.



A statue in the middle of a pond at the Yuzen Garden



Viewpoint above the Hojo Garden

HOW TO RETURN TO AIRBNB:

The temple is also a ten minute walk from the nearest subway station, Higashiyama Station on the Tozai Line (15 minutes, 260 yen from **Kyoto Station**), or a five minute walk from the nearest bus stop, Chionin-mae bus stop (20 minutes, 230 yen from Kyoto Station by Kyoto City Bus 206).

AIRBNB:

1-9-11, Tamakushimotomachi, Higashiosakashi, Osaka

My nearest station is Kawachihanazono station.
It is not JR line. It is Kintetsu line.



DAY 6 - APRIL 12 OSAKA CASTLE

How to get there:

The recommended approach to Osaka Castle is through Otemon Gate at the park's southwestern corner. The closest station is Tanimachi 4-chrome Station along the Tanimachi Subway Line and Chuo Subway Line.

The closest JR station to Osaka Castle is Osakajokoen Station on the JR Loop Line, a 10 minute, 160 yen ride from JR Osaka Station.



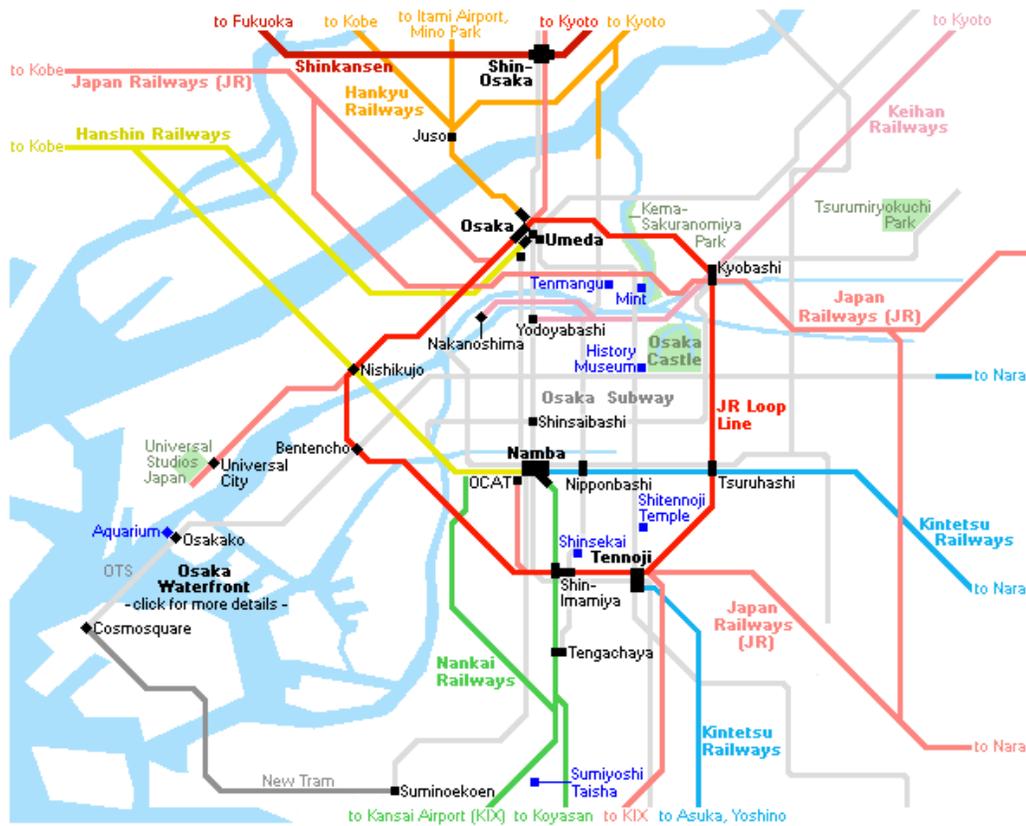
The construction of Osaka Castle (大阪城, Ōsakajō) started in **1583** on the former site of the Ishiyama **Honganji Temple**, which had been destroyed by **Oda Nobunaga** thirteen years earlier. **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** intended the **castle** to become the center of a new, unified Japan under Toyotomi rule. It was the largest castle at the time. However, a few years after Hideyoshi's death, **Tokugawa** troops attacked and destroyed the castle and terminated the Toyotomi lineage in 1615. Osaka Castle was rebuilt by Tokugawa Hidetada in the 1620s, but its main castle tower was struck by lightning in 1665 and burnt down.

It was not until 1931 that the present ferro-concrete reconstruction of the **castle** tower was built. During the war it miraculously survived the city wide air raids. Major repair works gave the castle new glamor in 1997. The **castle tower** is now entirely modern on the inside and even features an elevator for easier accessibility. It houses an informative museum about the castle's history and **Toyotomi Hideyoshi**.

The castle tower is surrounded by secondary citadels, gates, turrets, impressive stone walls and moats. The **Nishinomaru Garden**, encompassing the former "western citadel", is a lawn garden with 600 cherry trees, a tea house, the former Osaka Guest House and nice views of the castle tower from below. Unlike most of the rest of the castle grounds, the garden requires an admission fee.

The entire Osaka Castle Park covers about two square kilometers with lots of green space, sport facilities, a multi-purpose arena (Osakajo Hall) and a shrine dedicated to **Toyotomi Hideyoshi**. The park is one of Osaka's most popular hanami spot during the **cherry blossom season**, which usually takes place in early April.

How to get to and around Osaka



**RETURN TO YOKOHAMA TO PICK UP SUITCASES AND DROP OFF
AT PLACE IN TOKYO
SHIBUYA STATION - TAKESHITA STREET**

**DAY 7 - APRIL 13 LEAVE FOR THE AIRPORT
TAKE TAXI TO MARK CITY HOTEL FOR LIMO BUS TO HANEDA
DEPART 9:45AM MUST BE AT THE AIRPORT BY 7:45AM LEAVE FOR
AIRPORT AT 6AM**