

Local knowledge: Kyoto

Two long-time residents give us different perspectives on their city

_ COMPILED BY **UTE JUNKER** _ PHOTOGRAPHS BY **VINCENT LONG**

Your guides:

Name: Matthew Crabbe
Occupation: Executive chef, Hyatt Regency Kyoto.
Interests: Swimming, bike riding, squash, cooking, playing with my daughter.

Name: Miwa Ozaki
Occupation: Public relations manager and Japanese tea instructor with the 300-year-old Ippodo Tea Company.
Interests: Travelling, reading, playing tennis, cooking and eating.



Cherry blossom time ... Locals as well as tourists delight in the abundant flowers that bloom in the spring in Kyoto.

TRAVEL



The heart of Japan ... Clockwise from top left: Cherry blossoms in the Pontocho area; a peaceful atmosphere pervades the Ryoanji Temple; *maiko*, an apprentice geisha, stops on the street in Gion; an array of foods and Japanese wares are for sale on the street leading to Kiyomizu Temple; fresh catch at the Nishiki Market.



Where do you live and why?

MATTHEW CRABBE: Just off the main strip of the Kyoto downtown area, Shijo (Fourth Street) Karasuma. It is a beautiful area, in close proximity to a lot of the goings-on in Kyoto. The royal palace is just up the road and Nishiki, the fresh food market, is a five-minute stroll from the front door.

MIWA OZAKI: I live in a cosy suburb of Kyoto called Yamashina, in the same house that I grew up in. The familiarity of the surroundings; the warm childhood memories; the long-standing relationships with my neighbours ... to have all that and still be just 10 minutes from the heart is a great combination.

Your favourite time of year?

MC: Although all the seasons have their special character, spring is my favourite. A Kyoto spring is one of the true wonders of the world – one that everyone should put on their list of things to see. The cherry blossoms (*sakura*) are so beautiful and abundant, as are a multitude of other blooms. We called our daughter Sakura after the Kyoto spring.

MO: I love all the seasons in Kyoto, but especially spring. The cherry blossoms seem to add an elegant, almost magical, touch to a city that is already rich in arts and tradition.

What is your city's best-kept secret?

MC: There are two. One is Takasegawa (Takase River). This little river is usually overlooked when people are searching for beautiful *sakura*. Every day I ride my bike down to the river to take in its magnificent beauty. Then there's Notoyo, an *unagi* (eel) restaurant in Nishiki Market. It's not famous and probably never will be, but it has the best *unagi* you will have anywhere.



Travel Essentials

How to get there

Qantas Airways has 38 flights a week to Tokyo, with connections to Kyoto. Return economy fares start at \$1,545, plus taxes.

Best time of the year to travel

It's aesthetics, not just temperature, that make spring and autumn the best months to visit. Autumn's vivid foliage and spring's cherry blossoms are each an attraction.

Shopping

Department store

Fujii Daimaru, Shijo-Teramachi The famous department store chain, Daimaru, started life as a kimono shop in Kyoto in 1717. These days, this outlet offers nine floors of high-end goods.

Boutique

Ichizawa Hanpu Kogyo, Higashioji-dori Furumonzen Remove your shoes before entering this Kyoto institution, where generations of the Ichizawa clan have sold classic bags made from heavy cotton sailcloth.

Café

Kyoto Nama Chocolat Organic Tea House, Okazaki Tenno-cho Kyoto is known for its traditional tea houses; this one also offers delicious cakes made using traditional ingredients (*matcha* and black bean) as well as more unusual combinations, such as chocolate, okra and fig.

MO: The Miyako-odori dance festival at Gion Kobo Kaburenjo theatre, performed by traditional *maiko* and *geiko* dancers and musicians, is one event that I really look forward to in the spring. These performances usually take place in exclusive private salons, so it is a rare treat to see them in a theatre.

One thing you need to know about Kyoto?

MC: Kyoto is the essence of Japan, the 'heart'. You walk around and you can feel the real Japan. The food; the culture; the nightlife; the definite seasons all define the character of this ancient Japanese capital.

MO: Kyoto was the ancient capital of Japan for more than 1,000 years, so many everyday features of the city carry a lot of history. The city itself is not so big. Taking the time to walk through the tiny curvy streets and paths is one of the best ways to get a true feel for the city and its people.

What is the flavour of Kyoto?

MC: Kyoto *kaiseki* (Japanese degustation), which uses local Kyoto ingredients. Kyoto vegetables are rated as some of the best in Japan, prepared simply to show their natural flavour.

MO: Kyoto is like a bowl of *matcha* green tea, Japan's oldest and most traditional style, served with a variety of sweets. The peaceful gardens and rich culture of the ancient capital are nicely captured by the natural brilliant green of *matcha* which is starting to be enjoyed with western sweets, not just the more traditional Japanese sweets, as some Kyotoinites are starting to adopt a more modern way of life. However, Kyoto will always be Kyoto, just as *matcha* will always be *matcha*.



Your favourite building in town?

MC: I have a few favourites. There's a group of temples and gardens in an area called Daitokuji, including a little Zen garden called Daisen-in which is housed in a stereotypical Zen Buddhist temple. It's so special, so peaceful. The Silver Pavilion with its moss garden is also not to be missed.

MO: Kyoto has many temples, and Shisendo and Shorein are two of my favourites. There is something very peaceful about sitting on the floor, feeling the light breeze, and seeing the sunlight shimmering through the beautiful leaves in the garden.

You have a visitor who has one day in Kyoto; what would you do?

MC: Start off at 8:30am at the Sanjusangendo Temple and buy the special incense on the way out. Catch a taxi to Daitokuji and check out the little temples and gardens. Head to the famous Ryoanji rock garden. Do a quick circuit of the Golden Pavilion. Head to the Nishiki food market; walk down from Teramachi and stop off at Notoyo for the best *unagi* you will ever have. Catch a taxi to the Silver

Temple and do 'the philosophers' walk' for about two hours, stopping off at all the temples along the way. Walking the winding cobbled streets filled with Japanese-ware shops to Kiyomizu Temple, you may see a real geisha. Go back to Hiiragiya (your ryokan), have an *onsen* bath, then have *kaiseki* served in your room.

MO: Let's start the day very early with zazen meditation at Shinju-an Daitokuji Temple. After breakfast, we'll go to the Higashiyama area and visit Kiyomizu Temple. After enjoying the great view of downtown Kyoto, we can walk along the stone road and have lunch in the Gion area. Then we can do some shopping in the Gion/Shijo area, and end the day with dinner at an authentic soba shop near the Heian Shrine.

Is there a tourist attraction that lives up to its hype?

MC: The World Heritage-listed Kiyomizu Temple is the most popular attraction in Kyoto and rightly so. It is very impressive to stand on the wooden terraces and look over Kyoto.

MO: The Gion Matsuri thanksgiving festival in July is the most important event at the Yasaka Shrine. The whole downtown area is engulfed in festive Gion Bayashi music.

What is the one thing you need to know to live well here?

MC: Kyoto is the ancient capital of Japan. The people (Kyoto jin) are very proud of their city and its many wonders – so much so, that a person is not considered a Kyotonesse until their family has lived here for at least three generations.

MO: Kyoto can be hot and humid in summer and bone-chillingly cold in winter. But because of that, your appreciation will be heightened. ■