

Kyoto

Two sightseeing days

I walked through Fushimi Inari in 36-degree heat and somehow still thought it was worth it. My Imperial Palace attempt was less successful: wrong entrance, assumed it was closed, left. So this Kyoto guide comes with a little experience of getting it wrong. I'd keep the days focused, eat before getting too hot and check the actual entrance before dramatically abandoning the plan.

The route at a glance

Day 1 AM	Fushimi Inari
Day 1 PM	Higashiyama, then Gion if energy allows
Day 2 AM	One palace, garden or museum visit
Day 2 PM	Nishiki area and a relaxed finish

[Full guide, photographs and latest updates](#)

A printable companion to the online guide. Prices retain their original check date; confirm access, fares and bookings for your own travel dates.

Before you go

Carry yen for small restaurants, temple admission and rural buses. Cards are useful in hotels and larger shops, but I would keep enough cash for the next day's smaller stops.

Suica, PASMO and ICOCA work across many participating local transport systems; they do not automatically cover every rural bus, reserved train or sightseeing ticket. Use one card per traveller.

Plan the exact station exit as well as the rail journey. For taxis, ask your accommodation or check the GO app's coverage; remote pickups need arranging ahead.

Save place names in Japanese and download an offline translation pack. 'Sumimasen' is useful for excuse me; 'arigatō gozaimasu' is thank you.

An unlocked, eSIM-compatible phone makes a data plan straightforward. Check activation timing and coverage before purchase; many visitor plans are data-only.

Keep the accommodation address and last return connection available offline. For countryside and mountain days, a downloaded map is useful even with a SIM.

Your route

This route uses two days for different parts of Kyoto. Keep Fushimi Inari and the palace area on separate days if you want time to walk beyond the entrances. Add arrival and departure time around that plan.

Day 1 · Choose your distance at Fushimi Inari

Begin at Fushimi Inari and decide how much of the uphill route suits you. The lower shrine precinct and a partial ascent are a different commitment from a full mountain circuit. Leave time for the descent and a drink before transferring to Higashiyama; don't start the day by exhausting the whole walking budget.

Fushimi Inari is dedicated to Inari, associated with rice and prosperity, and its donated torii turn the wooded path into a changing tunnel of colour. I would keep walking only as far as I can enjoy the atmosphere, rather than make reaching the summit the point.

In hot weather, the lower gates and a shorter ascent are a sensible visit in their own right. Keep water with you and turn back while the descent still feels manageable.

Higashiyama with a seated lunch

After Fushimi Inari, travel towards Higashiyama and allow time for the uphill approach to the Kiyomizu area. Make Okutan Kiyomizu your seated lunch break, then explore Kiyomizu-dera and the surrounding lanes. If you are already hungry or tired, stop earlier for a snack or rest. Continue towards Gion and the river only if you feel like more walking.

Kiyomizu-dera's timber stage projects over the hillside, giving its Buddhist temple setting a strong relationship with the city below. I would pause for the building and the valley view as well as the familiar photograph.

Gion is associated with Kyoto's traditional performing arts and hospitality, and its streets remain places where people live and work. I would come for the streetscape without chasing performers or entering private lanes.

Lunch in the Kiyomizu area: Okutan Kiyomizu

A specific choice for the second day

Kyoto Imperial Palace recalls the city's long role as Japan's imperial capital. I would choose it when I want spacious grounds and architectural detail after the busier temple approaches.

Choose one temple, garden or museum that interests you and fits your base or departure route, then allow around two hours before lunch in central Kyoto. If Arashiyama is the reason for the day, replace the central programme with that western area instead. In rain, an indoor collection can take the main window, leaving a short river walk for an improvement in the weather.

Arashiyama brings river scenery, hills and temple gardens together on Kyoto's western side. I would give it a day of its own instead of treating it as a quick extension after a central-city lunch.

Day 2 · Central Kyoto and an unhurried finish

Use the Nishiki area for browsing and lunch, following individual shops' eating and photography rules. Leave the rest for a café or a short river walk. If luggage collection and a train fall that afternoon, shorten the browsing rather than treating the transfer as invisible time.

Nishiki's food shops show Kyoto through everyday ingredients, preserved foods and small specialities. I would browse slowly and choose a few things that interest me instead of turning lunch into a tasting checklist.

Lunch or dinner: Katsukura - Shijo Teramachi

Food and photographs

I've eaten at both of these and loved the food. They're two places I'd happily recommend for this trip.

Okutan Kiyomizu

Traditional yudofu, or gently simmered tofu, in the Kiyomizu area. I'd make this the seated lunch break on the Higashiyama day, allowing time for the uphill approach.

Katsukura - Shijo Teramachi

Tonkatsu for a satisfying lunch or dinner around Nishiki and central Kyoto. A straightforward main meal before deciding whether there is room for matcha sweets afterwards.

A few photo tips

At Fushimi Inari, an early visit gives the best chance of gaps between walkers. Frame the repeating torii from the side of the path and keep moving when the passage is busy.

At Kiyomizu-dera, use permitted viewpoints for the wooden stage and wooded hillside; gentle early light is easier than harsh midday contrast. Follow the temple's restrictions on tripods and commercial photography.

In Higashiyama, include the curve of a public lane or roofline and wait for a natural gap. Respect private-lane signs and avoid photographing residents or performers without consent.

Budget and backup plans

What to budget

Prices checked September 2026. Published examples below are for the named ticket or service; check your travel date and inclusions before paying.

Kiyomizu-dera adult admission: JPY 500 - Standard admission listed by JR Central's Kyoto guide; special events or other sites can have separate charges. Price source

[Price source](#)

Kyoto sightseeing express bus: JPY 500 per ride - EX100/EX101 visitor routes; this is not the fare for every ordinary city bus. Price source

[Price source](#)

For a simple meal, I'd allow JPY 1,000-2,500 per person. This is a planning allowance, not a checked restaurant quote; drinks, tasting menus and resort dining can cost more. Price the actual transfers separately, especially private drivers, boats and airport journeys.

If the weather changes

Use a museum or an open palace/castle interior for the wettest part of the day and keep lunch nearby. Temple approaches and stone lanes can be slippery; shorten the outdoor walk rather than add a distant replacement.

The final day and your flight

Morning flight: for Kansai or Itami, arrange the transfer the night before and make departure the only plan. Consider an airport-side final night if the first service does not fit.

Afternoon flight: stay near your hotel or Kyoto Station for breakfast and a short browse, then collect luggage. Check which Osaka-area airport you booked and the full connection; Fushimi Inari and Higashiyama are better on a sightseeing day.

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