



into JAPAN SPECIALIST TOURS



Visit a traditional Sumo 'stable' (*beya*) and watch the wrestlers in their morning training.

The rules of sumo are essentially simple, but the fighting techniques (combinations of pushes, grabs, and pulls) can be complex. The wrestlers position themselves on either side of the raised clay platform, or dohyo, and scatter handfuls of salt into the ring - an ancient ritual of purification that dramatically reflects the mood of the combatants. The opponents then crouch down and size each other up, carefully choosing the best moment to launch their assault.

Once it begins, the action is dramatic and usually over in just a few seconds. Whoever is thrown or pushed out of the ring or hits the ground with any part of the body except feet is declared the loser. The training starts with physical exercises and wrestling move practices, and ends with a series of practice bouts, which is less formal but more vigorous and fast-paced than an official tournament.

Take an early morning visit to one of Tokyo's Sumo stables and watch the wrestlers go through their morning training session. You will sit right next to the training ring, so you will see everything up close. Your visit will include some very special images of you together with the wrestlers.

Other options:

Go to one of the main "Grand Sumo" tournaments with seats close to the action.

Visit the wrestlers' exclusive restaurant.

Join an exclusive after tournament party.

Visit to a Sumo Stable





Have a sushi class with one of Tokyo's top sushi chefs.

Most famous of all the increasingly popular and amazingly varied Japanese cuisine, sushi actually refers to the sweet vinegar rice rather than the raw fish most usually eaten with it. Raw fish is often described as sashimi, which simply means uncooked. In Japan, good sushi and sashimi must be as fresh as possible so it is no surprise that some of the top sushi restaurants are just in Tsukiji next to the world's largest fish market. Tokyo's demand for fresh fish is as strong as ever and the tuna auctions to continue to break records, currently around \$2,000,000 for a single fish!

We have an exclusive arrangement with one of the very best sushi restaurants to provide sushi preparation classes with their top chef. One of the absolute pleasures is the meal that follows as you can consume the results of your class!

Sushi Making Class





Learn Ninja secrets from members of a genuine Ninja clan

Renowned worldwide as masters of stealth combat, Ninjas are a staple of martial arts movies and comics but also a very real part of Japanese history. Although there is no doubt that they trained and practiced as covert warriors, in feudal Japan Ninjas also fulfilled other important roles as spies, inspectors and advisors.

The Musashi clan's Ninja heritage dates back to 1583, when they pledged their allegiance to Ieyasu Tokugawa (not long before his rise to power as Shogun in 1603). They served the Shogunate until its collapse in 1868, and the clan has continued to pass down the philosophies and techniques of its ancestors to the present day.

Visit the Musashi clan's Tokyo Dojo for a 2-hour session covering the various aspects of Ninja or Samurai training:

- Learn about the spiritual side of Ninja; meditation, ancestor veneration, the concept of Ku ("no-self")

- Dress in authentic Ninja costume

- Study and handle a variety of distinctive Ninja weapons such as throwing stars and blowguns

- Practice Ninja techniques; stealthy steps, hardened hands, the "inner eye"

- Learn the basics of Samurai swordsmanship

Ninja & Samurai





Spend a day with an ascetic mountain monk

One of the highlights of a stay in Togari - a day out with a shamanistic mountain monk called a Yamabushi

Deeply tied with Japan's animist religion, Mt. Kosuge is one of the three most sacred places in Nagano for shugendo - Japanese mountain ascetic shamanism. Established more than 1300 years ago, mountain ascetics called yamabushi stayed on the mountain for spiritual training, creating an area now known as Kosuge village. We can offer clients the chance to hike with a modern-day Yamabushi through a cedar-lined forest trail to the Inner Shrine, a 400 year-old sacred site on the mountain. With an interpreter alongside to assist, they'll learn about the life of a modern day ascetic monk as well as the history of the ancient shrine and the deep connection it has in the local community.

This day out really offers clients the opportunity to experience a very different way of life and it's one that will leave real and lasting memories.

Yamabushi

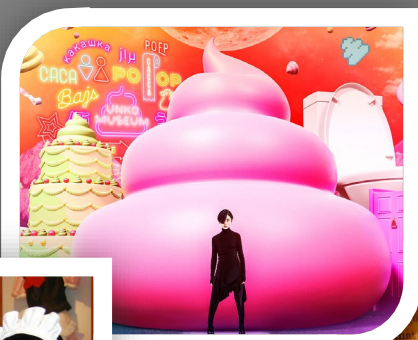




Take a walk on the weirder side of Tokyo in a personalized, escorted tour of some of the city's more unique and charmingly kitsch stores, cafes, restaurants, and museums.

Enjoy a personalized tour to discover the weird and wacky side of Tokyo. Enjoy a drink served by a French maid or perhaps in the company of a cat, bunny, or owl at any one of the many kitschy cafés in the city. Have your picture taken in a photo booth that can increase the size of your eyes to cartoonish proportions and try a canned coffee endorsed by none other than Tommy Lee Jones from the vending machines that dot nearly every street. Visit the Pokémon Center or one of many anime related stores or perhaps a visit to the laughably bizarre Poop Museum is more your thing. Shop for some realistic plastic food, or maybe try your hand at making it yourself for some truly unique souvenirs! See Godzilla statues or get “into” some cool artwork at the trick art museum before finishing your day with a meal served by your choice of ninjas, robots, or characters from the magical world of Alice in Wonderland at one of Tokyo's themed restaurants. Whatever your fancy, you're in store for a delightfully peculiar day.

Tokyo Weird & Wonderful

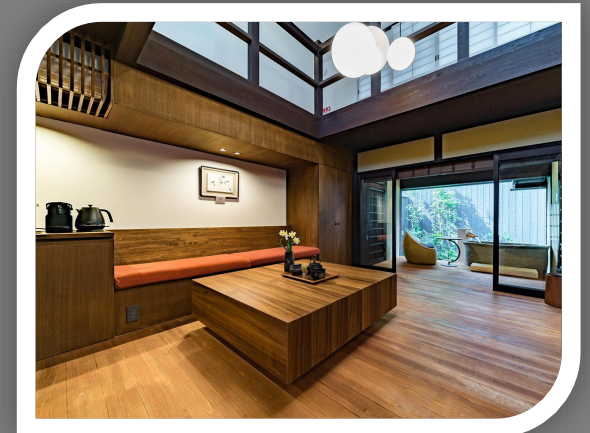
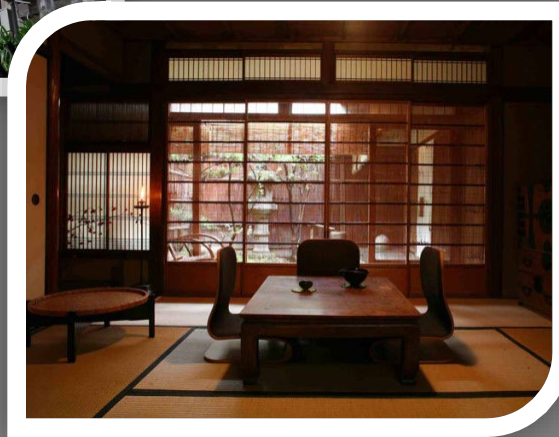




Explore Kyoto's historic temples, royal residences and machiya .

Enjoy a tour of an imperial villa, visit secluded temples and learn the secrets of Kyoto's hidden Machiya houses. You can enjoy special access to these locations, and discover how the architecture of these buildings was closely related to the history of tea ceremonies. Explore the wonder of Kiyomizu Temple, built with dramatic supports but without the use of nails and immerse yourself in the world of traditional architecture in Japan's most traditional city.

Traditional Architecture

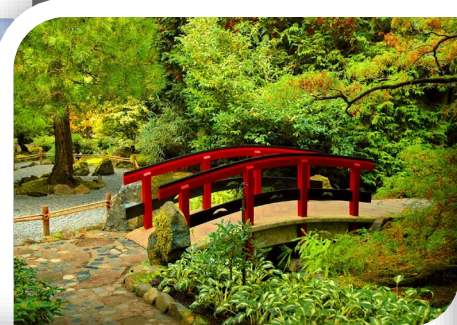




A tour of some of Kyoto's hidden gems and private gardens with a specialist in Japanese garden design and landscape architecture

The history of Japanese gardens is intrinsically linked to Buddhism and nowhere is this more apparent than in Kyoto, with its thousands of temples, palaces and historic residences. While many of the gardens are very famous, bringing huge crowds of visitors, there are many which are private or can only be visited with special permission. With your guide, a landscape architect and garden historian, you will be able to get access to such special gardens and will have the opportunity to learn about the theory behind their design and their relationship to architecture and their surroundings. For anyone keen to discover the world of Japanese gardens with an expert guide, this tour is highly recommended!

Specialist Garden Tour





Enjoy a private geisha performance in a top restaurant or exclusive location.

The alluring geisha of Japan have long captured the imagination of west and east alike. White-faced and traditionally dressed in stunning kimono with seasonal ornaments in their elaborately coiffed hair, geisha still entertain at exclusive parties, and are as much a symbol of Japan as Mt. Fuji or the cherry blossoms.

Despite the external glamour of parties and beautiful clothes, the rigorous apprenticeship as a maiko requires discipline, and the women who become geisha are proud of their status as artists. Called geiko in the Kyoto dialect, a geisha's training in music and dance is that of a disciplined performer.

Once at the cutting edge of fashion, maiko apprentices wear an elaborate costume in the old style – longer, brighter, and considerably harder to wear gracefully than a modern kimono. Full geisha wear more subtle attire, though both dress stunningly in seasonal patterns and colours.

More than any other place in Japan, Kyoto is known for geisha. Both Gion and Pontocho, Japan's best known geisha quarters, lie within the old capital's boundaries, and exclusive tea houses are tucked in amongst the houses and restaurants of Kyoto's more traditional areas.

The most comfortable way to enjoy a private performance is at a good restaurant in a private room. This can be arranged according to various dietary requirements with two or more performers. You will be able to find out about their mysterious lives and freely take photos for those special memories.

Geisha Dinner





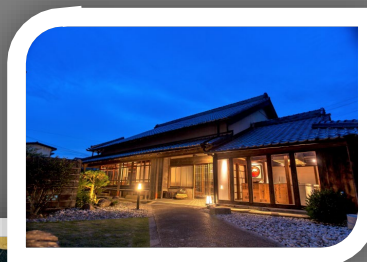
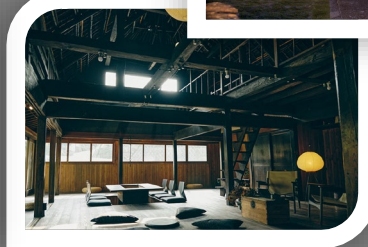
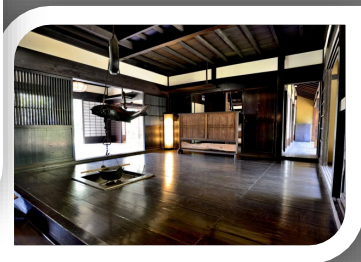
A private tour of traditional Japanese farmhouses

Enjoy a fascinating tour of traditional Japanese farmhouses - *minka*. *Minka* are one of the most unique and important historical assets of Japan. Despite their historical value, many farmhouses were demolished and replaced by modern buildings, better suited to contemporary lifestyles. Thankfully there are local people who appreciate the value of *minka* and have tried to preserve these cultural gems especially in Nagano Prefecture.

Our *minka* expert is passionate about saving *minka* and protecting "authentic Japan" and will be with you every step of the way as you travel back to ancient times! You will have the opportunity to explore a number of *minka* with our specialist, who will lead you through the house and teach you about the lifestyle of its former residents. Take the opportunity to chat with the locals, who call the *minka* their homes, and ask them about their unique lifestyle - some have even found samurai swords hidden in the roof!

For lunch you will have the privilege of being invited into one of the *minka* and enjoy some local delicacies over an *irori*, traditional Japanese fireplace. The *minka* owners will instruct you how to prepare the local ingredients before you tuck in and enjoy your delicious meal.

Minka Tour



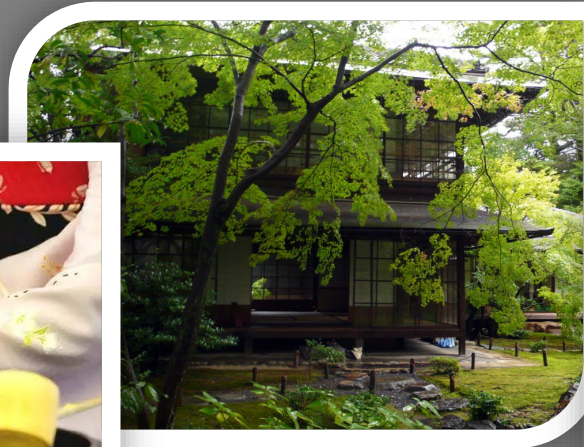


Experience a private tea ceremony with a master in a traditional setting.

Unlike the familiar daily brew of steeped green tea, or o-cha, tea for the ceremony is made from bright green powdered matcha, and served with the utmost hospitality during an elaborately restrained ceremony. Also called chanoyu, sado, or chado, the ceremony is, quite literally, “the way of tea.” Drinking the stimulating matcha began in monasteries as an aid to meditation. Developed as an art by the samurai in the thirteenth century, it was formalised two centuries later by the tea master Sen-no-Rikyu.

A full tea ceremony is traditionally performed in a specially designed tea house within a formal garden. The guests enter the tea house through a door so low that everyone must stoop to enter, signifying equality within the tea house. Chanoyu ceremonies vary in length depending on the food and tea served, from a light and very traditional kaiseki meal accompanied by both thick and thin whisked teas, to a simple bowl of matcha tea complemented by a Japanese confection.

Tea Ceremony





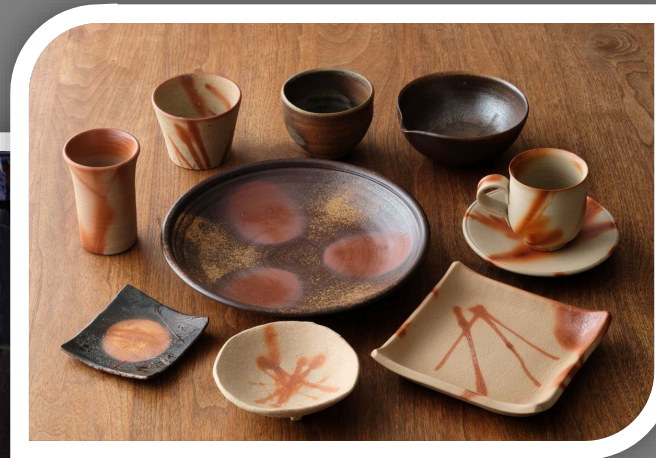
A day in an ancient pottery town with a Master Potter

The small town of Bizen in Okayama Prefecture has been producing pottery for over 1000 years. One of the Six Ancient Kilns of Japan, Bizen retains a thriving ceramics industry and its distinctive reddish brown pottery is highly prized.

In this private experience, you'll visit Bizen for a day's pottery experience with a master potter. Kazuya Ishida was born in Bizen city, but his love for pottery has taken him all over the world. He regularly travels and organises events worldwide where potters from all walks of life come together to learn from each other's techniques.

Your pottery day will include a visit to an ancient kiln site, Kazuya's own studio and gallery, and an exhibition showcasing local pottery. Spend time getting to know Kazuya over making a pizza lunch together, (cooked in a "pizza kiln") and ask him any questions you may have about Bizen pottery. You will also have the chance to try your hand at throwing your own pot, which will be the perfect souvenir of your visit.

Master Potter





Visit a private traditional Kyoto ceramics studio with a local expert.

Japanese pottery and porcelain is one of the country's oldest art forms, dating back to the Neolithic period. Traditionally divided into distinct pottery districts throughout the country, styles range from fine Imari ware porcelain to stylish yet rough raku. Kyoto pottery became very popular as the tea ceremony developed in the 14th century and has been cherished both inside and outside Japan. There are two main pottery styles in Kyoto, Kyo-yaki and Kiyomizu-yaki. Works created by highly skilled potters, possessing unique and traditional skills can be seen here.

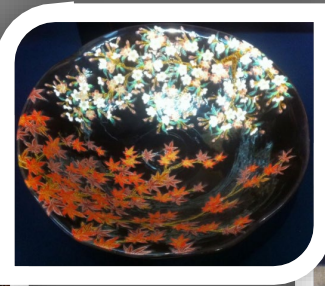
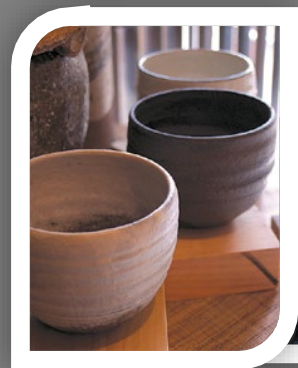
With our ceramic expert you can visit a private ceramics studio to see this highly stylised art form and meet some of the most renowned pottery masters of Kyoto. A long term Japan resident, your American born guide is one of the world's foremost experts in Japanese ceramics. His own gallery includes many new artists as well as some antique pieces for a souvenir of your visit. We can arrange:

A private visit to a ceramics studio.

A ceramics studio visit combined with a tour of his local area in Kyoto.

Advisory service for purchasing traditional Japanese pottery.

Ceramics Studio Visit





Learn the art of using a samurai sword in combat with a professional actor

Although originally the most important skills of the warrior class were proficiency at horse-riding and shooting the bow, this eventually gave way to swordsmanship. In 1600 AD, Tokugawa Ieyasu gained total control of all of Japan, and the country entered a period of prolonged peace that would last until the Meiji Restoration. During this period, the techniques to use the sword underwent a transition from a primarily utilitarian art for killing, to one encompassing a philosophy of personal development and spiritual perfection.

You have the exclusive opportunity to learn traditional Japanese stage combat as seen in films such as *The Last Samurai*. Your class is at Eigamura, home to studios providing many of the sets for these period dramas.

Samurai Sword Lesson





An Exclusive Tea Picking and Tea Making Tour in rural Kyoto Prefecture

We have liaised with a special tea farm near Nara to design a unique tour, that offers an authentic tea picking, tasting and making experience. You will pick tea surrounded by the beautiful fields covering the mountains. Then you can take part in the process to prepare the tea by hand to take home with you. The visit includes an unusual lunch using tea as one of the ingredients and a tasting of the locally made traditional teas.

It is a truly unique experience to see tea travel from plant to cup. Highly recommended!

Tea Farm Experience



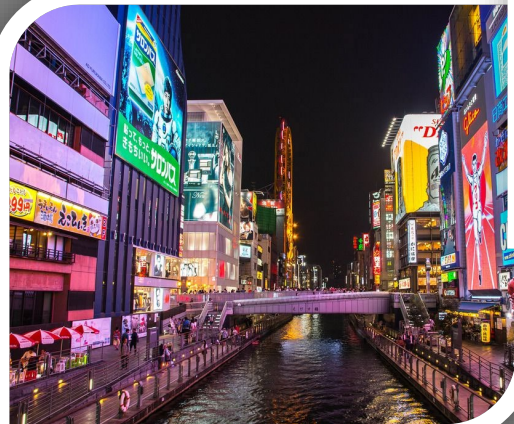


Spend an evening living as a local, sampling backstreet food and hidden bars in Osaka

Osaka is a veritable concrete jungle, teeming with bars, restaurants, food stalls and merriment. Soak up the atmosphere with a British expat who has called Osaka his home for the last nine years. You'll be able to ask all those questions that you just weren't comfortable asking a Japanese guide! Together you will explore some of Osaka's quirkier bars and nightlife spots, and eat like a "real" Osakan.

The tour will be tailored to your food preferences. You'll begin with a visit to Sakai for an exclusive tour of a traditional Japanese knife shop. You will then move on to Shinsekai, and sample kushikatsu (deep-fried skewers). Fancy something up-market? Explore the basement food halls in Umeda, or browse the markets in Tenma. Keen to go for drinks like a local? Check-out Namba's bar scene with our guide: from bicycle bars, to tiny hole-in-the-wall venues, your guide will show you the places where locals like to hang-out, but which are inaccessible to non-Japanese speaking tourists. This tour is a must for those who like to explore a city from a culinary perspective. A memorable night awaits!

Osaka Nightlife Tour





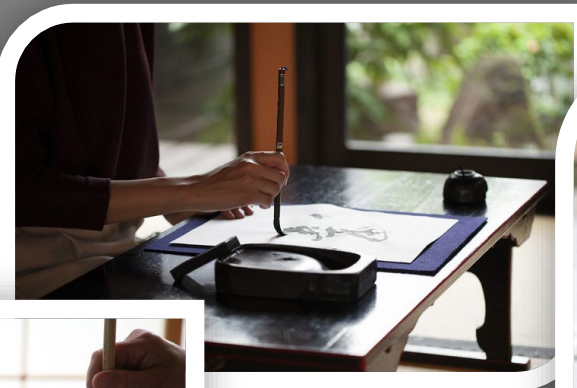
Take a private Japanese calligraphy lesson with a renowned artist in a private temple

Kanji are the main characters in Japanese used to represent words. They have been slightly simplified from their original Chinese forms but there are about 4,000 in common usage. Most words are made from two characters put together but the most elemental words, such as seasons, animals and simple objects tend to be single characters. However each character often has components which may represent water, man or signify a living thing. “Shodo” is the ancient art of writing these characters with expression and emotion. Like so many of the Japanese arts, it is all about finding beauty in simplicity.

Your “sensei” is a young calligrapher, whose works have been exhibited in Japan and in China. She will help you write the beautiful kanji characters in the traditional way, using a brush and sumi ink.

You can be presented with your own personalised scroll. This will be mounted in the traditional way and sent to you as a special souvenir to hang in your home.

Private Calligraphy Lesson



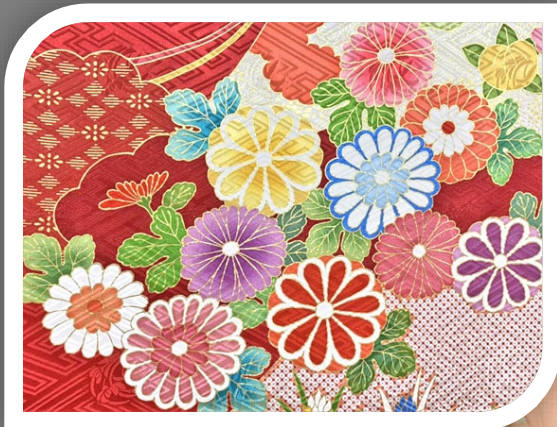


Visit to a Traditional Kimono Painting Atelier

Tegaki-yuzen or hand-painted yuzen, is a fabric painting technique which originated in Kyoto. It consists of painting colours on white fabric, but the skill and craftsmanship involved is so exceptional that the resulting kimono are often praised as wearable art. The entire kimono-making process is separated into 20 distinct stages, with each being carried out by a different craftsman.

A visit to this special atelier is highly recommended!

Yuzen Atelier Visit





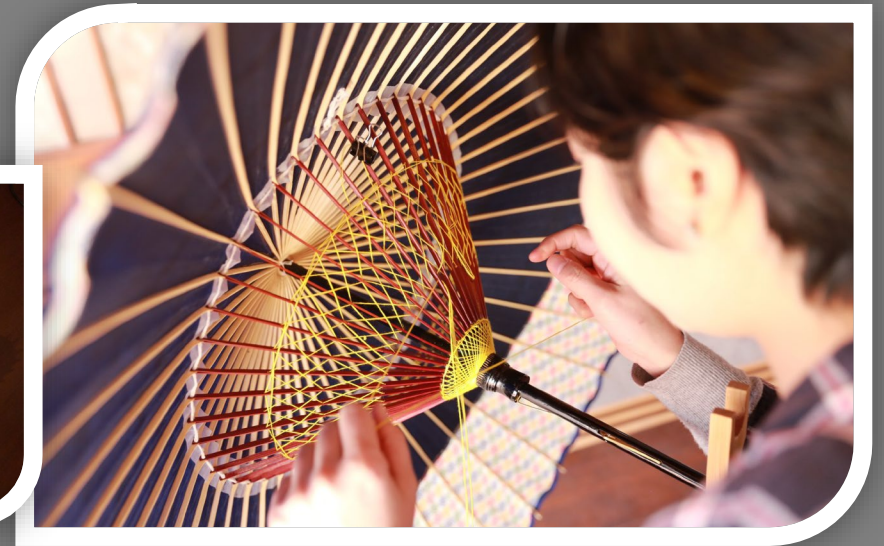
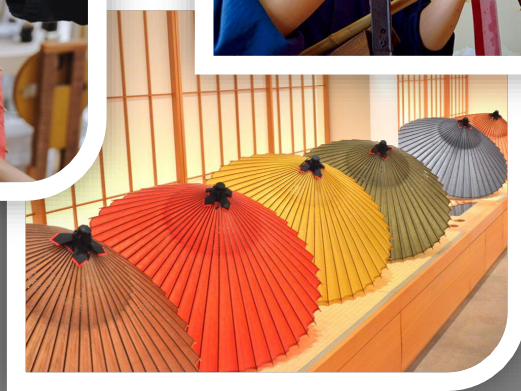
Visit the only producer of kyo wagasa umbrellas in Kyoto, established a century ago

Kyoto-style umbrellas and parasols play an important role in various cultural events such as outdoor tea ceremonies and Noh or Kabuki theatre performances. They are made from specially selected bamboo and washi paper and prized for their delicate beauty.

When cheap Western umbrellas flooded the Japanese market during the Meiji period, the demand for traditional Japanese umbrellas went into sharp decline, so there are very few wagasa umbrella makers left.

You have the opportunity to visit one of the last wagasa umbrella makers in Japan and make your own mini umbrella.

Umbrella Making Experience





If you have any questions or need
more info, please contact us!

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