



KIYOMIZU-DERA TEMPLE

There's a reason this is one of Kyoto's busiest temples: it's World Heritage listed and sits high on the eastern hills above town, adjacent to a waterfall and flanked by a pagoda. A jutting wooden platform provides views towards the city across cherry and maple trees. Behind the main hall is a small shrine dedicated to the ever-popular god of love. Successfully stumbling, eyes closed, between two upright stones is said to indicate you'll soon fall in love. Half the fun is getting here, with the lane up the hillside flanked by lively souvenir shops and eateries.

See kiyomizudera.or.jp



MYOSHIN-JI TEMPLE

This sprawling complex in north-east Kyoto, a 14th-century imperial palace turned headquarters of an important Zen Buddhism sect, is cluttered with some 50 sub-temples which, although mostly closed to the public, provide a pretty backdrop from winding pathways. Taizo-in Temple, which can be visited, has a notable 1960s pond and rock garden, while Keishunin Temple has a pleasant tea room. Other temples are occasionally open, and seldom disappoint. Then take a guided tour of the main Hatto Hall, where a fabulous dragon writhes on the ceiling, and a 7th-century temple bell is Japan's oldest.

See myoshinji.or.jp



HEIAN-JINGU SHRINE

This Shinto shrine, built in 1895, is new by Kyoto standards but recreates a former imperial palace and is visually striking. It stands behind a giant orange torii gate 25 metres high, between two Chinese-style towers and around a courtyard of blinding white gravel, and has a strolling garden notable for its April-flowering cherry trees, yet pretty at any time of year. Time your visit for regular Shinto festival days, when locals turn up for religious rituals and to have their fortunes told. October 22 is especially spectacular, featuring parades with participants in historical attire.

See heianjingu.or.jp

Six of the Best



By **Brian Johnston**

Photos: Alamy

Brian Johnston was a guest of Kyoto Convention & Visitors Bureau.



FUSHIMI INARI-TAISHA GRAND SHRINE

It's worth the effort to get to this collection of shrines on a hillside on Kyoto's edge, one of the city's most important and striking Shinto shrines. The gods of agriculture and commerce are worshipped here, and locals flock to pray for business success. Clamber up the hillside under the watchful eyes of stone foxes, through a tunnel-like series of orange torii gates engraved with the names of business donors; one in English for a tattoo parlour comes as a shock. You can sit at a teahouse halfway up and contemplate the little shrines in the forest.

See inari.jp



TOFUKU-JI TEMPLE

Autumn is the moment to hit this south-east Kyoto temple – sometimes, it feels, along with half Japan – when its maple trees erupt in a fabulous display of red and orange, usually in the last two weeks of November. Tsuten-kyo Bridge and the temple's covered walkway are prime viewing and selfie spots, though you might need sharp elbows.

The temple's colossal gateway and massive wooden buildings, built over various centuries, are, however, worth seeing at any time of year, as are the traditional pebble-and-moss gardens of the Hojo, or abbot's house, and summer displays of hydrangeas and azaleas.

See tofukuji.jp



KENNIN-JI TEMPLE

Kyoto's oldest Zen temple, right in the middle of old geisha district Gion, is somewhat overlooked behind high walls and a confusing system of gateways. It was founded in 1202, though its best buildings (such as the abbot's quarters and teahouse) are late-16th century. Painted screens depicting the gods of thunder and storms are famous, while a 2002 inked ceiling portraying two rampaging dragons provides a lively contemporary note. The austere garden – little more than a tree, some gravel and a circle of moss – is a superb example of Zen landscaping.

See kenninji.jp