

ENTERTAINMENT

top picks

- Minami-za (p142)
- Kyoto Cinema (p143)
- Orizzonte (p140)
- Metro (p141)
- Jumbo Karaoke Hiroba (p141)
- A-Bar (p140)

ENTERTAINMENT

Kyoto is far more than temples, museums and shops. By day, you can choose from sports such as swimming and hiking, not to mention movies and game centres. By night, you can party down in one of Kyoto's three main nightlife districts: Gion, which is generally fairly upscale; Pontocho, which is both upscale and traditional; and Kiyamachi, which is plebeian, raucous and a whole lot of fun. You can choose from *izakaya* (Japanese pub-eateries), bars, clubs and karaoke boxes, many of which stay open almost until dawn. The fact is, Kyoto knows how to party – it's just a matter of whether you can keep up.

As for traditional Japanese culture, you will have to work a little harder. Most of Kyoto's cultural entertainment is of an occasional nature, and you'll need to check with the Kyoto Tourist Information Center (TIC; p199) to find out what's on while you're in town. Alternatively, check the *Kansai Time Out* (p197) or the *Kyoto Visitor's Guide* (p197).

DRINKING

Kyoto has an astounding variety of bars, from exclusive Gion clubs, where it's possible to spend ¥100,000 in a single evening, to grungy *gaijin* (foreigner) bars. Most bars are concentrated in Downtown Kyoto (Map p50), around Kawaramachi-dōri and Kiyamachi-dōri. For something a little more upscale than the bars and pubs listed in this section, try one of the bars in any of Kyoto's upmarket hotels (see the boxed text, below).

It would be crazy to come all the way to Japan and not sing karaoke! If you shy away from karaoke back home, where singing on

stage is the norm, you'll feel much more comfortable in Kyoto, where the 'karaoke box' is king. Here, you and your friends get a small room and karaoke system to yourselves.

Yes, you can also dance the night away in the cultural heart of Japan and give the temples and shrines a miss the next day while you sleep off your hangover. Most clubs charge an admission fee of ¥2000, which usually includes a drink or two.

A-BAR Map p50 Bar
☎ 213-2129; Nishikiyamachi-dōri; drinks from ¥350; 🕒 5pm-midnight; 📍 10min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line

This is a raucous student *izakaya* with a log-cabin interior located in the Kiyamachi area. There's a big menu to choose from and everything's cheap. The best part comes when they add up the bill – you'll swear they've undercharged you by half. It's a little tough to find – look for the small black-and-white sign at the top of a flight of concrete steps above a place called Reims.

ATLANTIS Map p50 Bar
☎ 241-1621; Shijō-Pontocho agaru; drinks around ¥1000; 🕒 6pm-2am; 📍 5min walk from Shijō Station, Keihan line

This is one of the few bars on Pontocho that foreigners can walk into without a Japanese friend. It's a slick, trendy place that draws a fair smattering of Kyoto's beautiful people, and wannabe beautiful people. In summer you can sit outside on a platform looking over the Kamo-gawa. It's often crowded here so you may have to wait a bit to get in, especially if you want to sit outside.

CAFÉ BON APPÉTIT Map p62 Bar, Café
☎ 525-0585; Shirakawa Nawate; drinks from ¥500; 🕒 11am-11pm; 📍 5min walk from Shijō Station, Keihan line

Not exactly a bar, not exactly a café, this is a fine spot to sip a drink and watch the characters of Gion stroll by. It's near the Shira-kawa canal and right alongside some of Kyoto's best cherry trees.

ING Map p50 Bar, Izakaya
☎ 255-5087; Nishikiyamachi-dōri-Takoyakushi; drinks from ¥580; 🕒 6pm-2am Mon-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat; 📍 8min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line
This bar/*izakaya* on Kiyamachi is one of our favourite spots for a drink in Kyoto. It offers cheap bar snacks and drinks, good music, and friendly staff. It's in the Royal building on the 2nd floor; you'll know you're getting close when you see all the hostesses out trawling for customers on the streets nearby.

MARBLE ROOM Map p50 Bar
☎ 213-0753; Pontocho Sanjō kudarū; drinks from ¥700; 🕒 5.30pm-3am Sun-Thu, 3pm-3am Fri & Sat; 📍 5min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line
The Marble Room is what a lot of people in the 1950s imagined the year 2000 would look like. It's a mod space that draws Kyoto's fashionable young set for decent drinks and snacks. If you're over 30 here, you'll probably feel like an antique. It's on the 4th floor of the Pontocho Building, which has a white front.

MCLOUGHLIN'S IRISH BAR & RESTAURANT Map p50 Bar
☎ 212-6339; Empire Bldg, Kiyamachi Sanjō-agaru; drinks from ¥500; 🕒 6pm-late; 📍 5min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line

This is our favourite expat bar in town. It has ripping views over the Higashiyama mountains, great beer on tap, good food and a nice, open feeling. It also hosts some excellent music events and is an ideal spot to meet some local folks, both expat and Japanese. There is wi-fi internet access in case you want to do some surfing while drinking your beer.

RUB-A-DUB Map p50 Bar
☎ 256-3122; Kiyamachi-dōri-Sanjō; drinks from ¥600; 🕒 7pm-2am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat; 📍 5min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line
On the northern end of Kiyamachi-dōri, Rub-a-Dub is a funky little reggae bar with

a shabby tropical look. It's a good place for a quiet drink on weekdays, but on Friday and Saturday nights you'll have no choice but to bop along with the crowd. Look for the stairs heading down to the basement beside the popular (and delightfully 'fragrant') Nagahama Rāmen shop.

ZAPPA Map p50 Bar, Restaurant
☎ 255-4437; Takoyakushi-dōri-Kawaramachi; drinks from ¥500; 🕒 6pm-midnight; 📍 10min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line
Unbeatable if you're looking for a more intimate venue. It's a cosy little place that once played host to David Bowie (he's said to have discovered the place by chance and decided to drop in for a drink). Zappa serves savoury Southeast Asian fare and a few Japanese tidbits for good measure. It's down a narrow alley; turn south at the wooden *torii* (shrine gate).

METRO Map pp68-9 Club
☎ 752-4765; Kawabata-dōri-Marutamachi kudarū; admission around ¥1000-2000; 🕒 10pm-3am Sun-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat; 📍 Marutamachi Station, Keihan line
Metro is part disco, part 'live house' (small concert hall) and it even hosts the occasional art exhibition. It attracts an eclectic mix of creative types and has a different theme every night, so check ahead in *Kansai Time Out* (p197) to see what's going on. Some of the best gigs are Latin night and the popular Non-Hetero-at-the-Metro night, which draws gay and lesbian clubbers and everyone in-between. Metro is inside exit 2 of the Marutamachi Station. Admission varies by event.

WORLD Map p50 Club
☎ 213-4119; Nishikiyamachi-dōri-Shijō agaru; admission from ¥1500, drinks from ¥500; 🕒 10pm-5am; 📍 1min walk from Kawaramachi Station, Hankyū line
World is Kyoto's largest club and it naturally hosts some of the biggest events. It has two floors, a dance floor and lockers where you can leave your stuff while you dance the night away. Events include everything from deep soul to reggae and techno to salsa.

JUMBO KARAOKE HIROBA Karaoke
Map p62
☎ 761-3939; Kawabata-dōri-Sanjō, Sanjō-Ōhashi East; per person per hr before 7pm/after 7pm

top picks

HOTEL BARS

Some of the best bars in Kyoto are inside hotels. These are usually very easy to enter and you will have no communication problems. Here are our favourites:

- **Orizzonte** (Map p50) In the *Kyoto Hotel Ōkura* (p149); this is a restaurant by day, lounge by night, usually from 8.30pm to 11pm). The view over Kyoto is stunning.
- **Sekisui** (Map p50) Open from 5pm until 1am, this bar on the basement floor of the *Hotel Fujita Kyoto* (p149) looks out over water falling onto stones (hence the name, which means 'stone and water').
- **Tōzan Bar** (Map p62) We love this cosy and cool underground retreat below the *Hyatt Regency Kyoto* (p152), one of Kyoto's best hotels. It's worth a visit just to marvel at the design.

¥280/640; ☎ 11am-6am; 🕒 1min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line

Expats love this place as it's in the same building as the **Pig & Whistle** (below) – and more than one drunken evening has started at the Pig and moved on to this place! There's a decent selection of English songs and the price includes all drinks. There's also a **Sanjō Kawaramachi branch** (Map p50; ☎ 231 6777; Kawaramachi-dōri-Sanjō, northwest; 🕒 3min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line) in Downtown Kyoto.

PIG & WHISTLE Map p62 Pub

☎ 761-6022; Kawabata-dōri-Sanjō; drinks from ¥500; 🕒 5pm-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat; 🕒 1min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line
The Pig is a British-style pub with darts, pint glasses, and fish and chips. While many of its patrons have moved on to other venues, we still like this place for its relaxed layout and homey interior. The two main drawcards are Guinness on tap and friendly bilingual staff. The Pig's on the 2nd floor of the Shobi building near the Sanjō-Kawabata crossing.

GAEL IRISH PUB Map p62 Pub

☎ 525-0680; Yamatoōji-dōri-Shijō agaru; drinks from ¥600; 🕒 5pm-1am, later on Thu & Fri; 🕒 5min walk from Keihan Shijō Station
The Gael is a welcoming and convivial Irish pub on the edge of Gion. It's got table and counter seats, a good menu with a variety of pub food, and excellent beer on tap. It's a good place to go if you're travelling solo – you'll soon find yourself involved in a conversation. It's on the 2nd floor of the Kamo Higashi building; take the steps on your right just after you enter.

ARTS

As the cultural capital of Japan, it's no surprise that Kyoto is the best place to sample some of the country's traditional performing arts. You can choose from kabuki, geisha dances, nō and traditional music concerts. Of course, you can also enjoy the full range of modern entertainment; Kyoto has several excellent cinemas and an active music scene.

THEATRE

Kyoto is the best city in Japan in which to see traditional forms of Japanese theatre. The easiest way to find out what's on while you're

in town is to check *Kansai Time Out* (see p197) or to ask at the **TIC** (p199).

For nō performances, the main theatre is **Kanze Kaikan Nō Theatre** (Map pp68–9; ☎ 771-6114; Sakyō-ku-Okazaki; admission free-¥8000; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed Mon; 🕒 10min walk from Higashiyama Station, Tōzai subway line). Alternatively, Takigi Nō is a picturesque form of nō performed in the light of blazing fires on the evenings of 1 and 2 June at **Heian-jingū** (p72). Tickets cost ¥2000 if you pay in advance at local ticket agencies or ¥3300 at the entrance gate.

GION CORNER Map p62

☎ 561-1119; Gion-Hanami-kōji-dōri; admission ¥2800; 🕒 performances 7pm & 8pm 1 Mar-30 Nov, closed 16 Aug; 🕒 5min walk from Shijō Station, Keihan line
Gion Corner presents regularly scheduled shows that include a bit of tea ceremony, koto (Japanese zither) music, ikebana (flower arrangement), *gagaku* (court music), *kyōgen* (ancient comic plays), *kyōmai* (Kyoto-style dance) and *bunraku* (classical puppet theatre). It's geared to a tourist market and is fairly pricey for what you get.

MINAMI-ZA Map p62

☎ 561-0160; Shijō-Ōhashi; admission ¥4200-12,600; 🕒 irregular; 🕒 1min walk from Shijō Station, Keihan line
The oldest kabuki theatre in Japan is the Minami-za theatre in Gion. The major event of the year is the Kaomise festival (1 to 26 December), which features Japan's finest kabuki actors. Other performances take place on an irregular basis. Those interested should check with the **TIC** (p199). The most likely months for performances are May, June and September.

GEISHA DANCES

Annually in spring and autumn, geisha and their *maiko* (apprentice geisha) from Kyoto's five schools dress elaborately to perform traditional dances in praise of the seasons. The cheapest tickets cost about ¥1650 (unreserved seating on tatami mats); better seats cost ¥3000 to ¥3800, and spending an extra ¥500 includes participation in a quick tea ceremony. The dances are similar from place to place and are repeated several times a day. Dates and times vary, so check with the **TIC** (p199).

Gion Odori (☎ 561-0224; Higashiyama-ku-Gion; ¥3500, incl tea ¥4000; 🕒 1pm & 3.30pm) From 1 to 10

November at the Gion Kaikan Theatre (Map p62), near Yasaka-jinja.

Kamogawa Odori (☎ 221-2025; Pontocho-Sanjō kudar; regular/special/special incl tea ¥2000/3800/4300; 🕒 12.30pm, 2.20pm & 4.10pm) From 1 to 24 May at Pontocho Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p50), Pontocho.

Kitano Odori (☎ 461-0148; Imadegawa-dōri-Nishihonmatsu nishi iru; ¥3800, incl tea ¥4300; 🕒 1pm & 3pm) From 15 to 25 April at Kamishichiken Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p74), east of Kitano-Tenman-gū.

Kyō Odori (☎ 561-1151; Kawabata-dōri-Shijō kudar; ¥3800, incl tea ¥4300; 🕒 12.30pm, 2.30pm & 4.30pm) From the first to the third Sunday in April at the Miyagawa-chō Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p62), east of the Kamo-gawa between Shijō-dōri and Gojō-dōri.

Miyako Odori (☎ 561-1115; Higashiyama-ku-Gion-chō South; nonreserved/reserved/reserved incl tea ¥1900/3800/4300; 🕒 12.30pm, 2pm, 3.30pm & 4.50pm) Held throughout April at the Gion Kōbu Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p62), on Hanami-kōji, just south of Shijō-dōri.

CINEMA

You'll find a large number of movie theatres in Kyoto's Downtown area around Kawaramachi-dōri and Kiyamachi-dōri. These theatres are dominated by Hollywood films, which arrive in Japan up to six months after their original release. Foreign films are screened in their original language, with Japanese subtitles. Tickets average around ¥1800. The exception to this is the first Tuesday of each month (Eiga-no-Hi, or 'Movie Day'), when tickets cost ¥1000.

KYOTO CINEMA Map p50

☎ 353-4723; Shimogyō-ku, Karasuma dōri Shijō sagaru, Suiginya-chō 620, Cocoon Karasuma 3F; 🕒 generally 10am-9pm (varies by movie); 🕒 Shijō Station, Karasuma subway line

This new art-house theatre right downtown is a tremendously welcome addition to the Kyoto cultural scene. It rivals **Kyoto Minami Kaikan** (below) as Kyoto's best place for arty films. It's directly connected to Shijō Station; take exit 2.

KYOTO MINAMI KAIKAN Map pp54–5

☎ 661-3993; Minami-ku, Nishi-Kujō, Higashihieijō-chō; admission ¥1800; 🕒 varies; 🕒 2min walk from Tōji Station, Kintetsu Kyoto line

Try this theatre for lesser-known imports and eclectic Japanese films, including Japanese *anime* (animation). It's on Kujō-dōri.

MUSIC

Rock, Folk & Acoustic

There are several options for live music. Most venues vary the type of music they feature from night to night. Check *Kansai Time Out* (see p197) to see what's happening at the following 'live houses'.

JUTTOKU Map p74

☎ 841-1691; Ōmiya-dōri-Shimotachiuri; admission ¥1000; 🕒 5.30pm-midnight, live music 7-9pm; 🕒 10min walk from Nijōji-mae Station, Tōzai subway line

Juttoku is located in an atmospheric old *sakagura* (sake warehouse). It plays host to a variety of shows – check *Kansai Time Out* to see what's on.

TAKU-TAKU Map pp54–5

☎ 351-1321; Tominokōji-dōri-Bukkōji; admission ¥1500-3500; 🕒 7-9pm, closed irregularly; 🕒 10min walk from Shijō Station, Hankyū Kyoto line
This is one of Kyoto's most atmospheric clubs, located in another old *sakagura*. It's central and tends to present major acts (the Neville Brothers, Los Lobos and Dr John have all performed here).

Jazz

Live jazz takes place irregularly at several clubs in Kyoto. The best is **Rag** (Map p50; ☎ 241-0446; 5th fl, Empire Bldg, Kiyamachi-dōri-Sanjō; admission ¥1500-4000; 🕒 varies; 🕒 5min walk from Sanjō Station, Keihan line).

Classical

The **Kyoto Concert Hall** (Map pp54–5; ☎ 361-6629; Sakyō-ku, Kitayama-dōri; admission varies; 🕒 performances vary, office 10am-5pm, closed 1st & 3rd Mon of each month; 🕒 3min walk from Kitayama Station, Karasuma subway line) and **ALTI** (Kyoto Fumin Hall; Map pp54–5; ☎ 441-1414; Karasuma-dōri-Ichijō kudar; admission varies; 🕒 9am-9.30pm, office to 6pm, closed 1st & 3rd Mon of each month; 🕒 5min walk from Imadegawa Station, Karasuma subway line) both hold regular performances of classical music and dance (traditional and contemporary). Ticket prices average between ¥3000 and ¥5000. Check with the **TIC** (p199) for current schedules.

Traditional Performances

Performances featuring the koto, *shamisen* (three-stringed Japanese instrument) and

shakuhachi (traditional Japanese bamboo flute) are held irregularly in Kyoto. Performances of *bugaku* (court music and dance) are held at shrines during festivals and occasionally you might catch a contemporary *butō* dance. Check with the [TIC \(p199\)](#) to see if any performances are scheduled while you are in town.

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

Kyoto offers much more than just high culture, temples and shopping. You'll find there are plenty of ways to burn off the calories from last night's tempura feast. The park-like banks of the Kamo-gawa, which flows through the middle of the city, are a great place for walking, cycling or other sports, as is the [Kyoto Imperial Palace Park \(p52\)](#). There is also great hiking in the hills around the city, and you can swim in pools and even in the Kamo-gawa during summer months (unless you happen to be a drunk Kyoto University student, in which case it seems to be a year-round activity).

GAME CENTRES

Japanese kids are wild about video games and the city is full of game centres, ranging from the ultra-high-tech to simpler spots with only a few machines. If you or your kids

love these sorts of games, you've come to the right place!

HIKING

Kyoto has great hiking in the hills surrounding the city. The best hikes are in the Higashiyama above [Ginkaku-ji \(p71\)](#) and [Nanzen-ji \(p66\)](#). A great hike within easy reach of the city is the climb up Daimonji-yama (see the boxed text, [p71](#)). It's a relatively easy two-hour return trip if taken at a moderate pace. For more on hiking in and around Kyoto, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Hiking in Japan*, which is available at Kyoto's English-language bookshops.

SWIMMING

You can swim in the Kamo-gawa in the summer. The best spot is about 1km north of [Kamigamo-jinja \(p91\)](#); just look for all the people. Keep in mind that swimming here is not without hazard and people have drowned swimming in this river. Parents should keep a close eye on their kids. Otherwise, try [Tōsuikai \(Map pp68–9; ☎ 761-1275; Marutamachi-dōri; per visit ¥1200; 🕒 10am–3pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun; 🚶 10min walk from Shijō Station, Hankyū Kyoto line\)](#). This place has Kyoto's only 50m outdoor pool. It's pretty shallow and is sometimes taken over by local swim teams for summer training, but it's your best option for lap swimming in Kyoto.