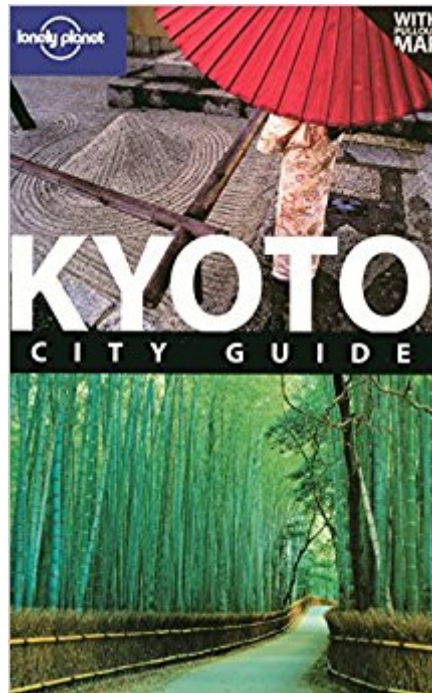




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Lonely Planet Kyoto (City Travel Guide)



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

Lonely Planet guidebooks are, quite simply, like no others.' --New York Times

I used the 4th Edition of the Lonely Planet Kyoto City Guide for an 11-day visit to the city and environs, and by far found it the most useful guidebook available. In general, the guide includes at least brief references to almost all the sites I was interested in visiting, with accurate descriptions and logistical information (about location, travel directions, hours of operation). Restaurant descriptions were also helpful in combination with those found in other guides (e.g., Time Out). The pullout map turned out to be the most valuable tool we had in our explorations of the city, with very useful transportation information and a map of Greater Kyoto on the reverse. Although some have written that maps available free through the tourist information office are just as good, we did not find this to be the case and consistently relied on the Lonely Planet map for every day's outing,

eventually annotating it and adding to it some information we had found in other guidebooks. We used it so much that it had to be taped and re-taped during our trip. The detailed maps inside the book are extremely useful in pinpointing locations of sites, shops, and restaurants. These maps enabled us to figure out how to organize our day and, although we did not use this information, these maps also included Japanese names for each item referenced, which could be useful if trying to direct a taxi driver. We found two errors in the representation of the transportation system on the front of the overall map--the Tozai subway line extends further west than depicted, beyond Nijo, and the Hankyu Railway does not extend east to the Keihan Line as shown on the map. While these are surprising errors, they did not have serious impact on our travels. For us the most challenging part of planning our visit to Kyoto--not a particularly short visit--was selecting which sites to see. I would encourage the author of Lonely Planet Kyoto City Guide to vary his language a bit more to help readers better distinguish between the various temples and shrines particularly. He accurately describes many of them as among the most important, or most popular, but further research with other guides was sometimes necessary to get a better understanding of how these sites differed or what distinguished one from the other. In this respect the guide would benefit from some illustrations. Finally, I encourage users of this guide to take lightly the author's definition of Central Kyoto as an overarching geographical area. I had initially clustered various "Central" sites together before realizing that this was not a very helpful definition--many of the sites in so-called "Central Kyoto" are, in fact, closer to other parts of the city than to one another and more easily visited in conjunction with other well-defined neighborhoods than as a separate group. My criticism of this guide is very specific and does not diminish the fact that it was far and away the most useful of the 7 guidebooks we purchased in preparation for our Kyoto travels.

I read the reviews for this book before buying it and I was concerned about the complaints that the maps were horrible. However, there were no other recently-published guides to Kyoto so I decided that a guide with bad maps was better than no guide at all. So, I bought the book and I am happy I did. Yes, the maps for the book were bad and I am thankful to the other reviewers for pointing this out so I did not unknowingly try to rely on the maps and find myself lost. Here is the good news: You can get excellent maps for free in Kyoto Station. The maps in this book were helpful for a general outline of where things are in relation to one another, but I relied almost entirely on the free maps I obtained from the tourism office in Kyoto Station. If you are traveling to Kyoto, I recommend you do the same. The maps provided in the station were up-to-date, detailed, and extremely helpful. And, best of all, free! As most people traveling to Kyoto will arrive through Kyoto Station, picking up these

free maps is easy and the first thing you should do when you arrive. Maps aside, I found this book very helpful. A friend and I traveled to Kyoto for the first time and had five and a half days in the city. Although I knew I could find resources for visiting Kyoto online, I wanted a small and informative book that I could carry with me everywhere and refer to whenever I needed it. This book provided exactly that. It was the perfect resource for a brief trip to Kyoto (combined with the free maps from Kyoto Station, of course). So if you're looking for a book that will help you find things to do while in Kyoto (as well as places to eat and sleep), I highly recommend this city guide in combination with the maps from Kyoto Station.

I used this book along with three others on a recent trip to Kyoto. Some of the negative criticisms of earlier reviewers seem to have been corrected, though not entirely. But no other general guide (with a Kyoto section as part of a Japan guide) was more useful. I have some criticisms, but it is a useful guide. Maps could have been more detailed (as well as descriptions of where things were).

Restaurants were shown on maps but, at best, within a block or two of where they were. Addresses for restaurants were given (doubtless accurate using Kyoto address standards) but don't describe the exact street each is on. For example, we went to Ichi-Ban (a yakitori restaurant in the Gion district) which was merely described as "3 minutes" from the "Sanjo Keihan" subway stop. The map in the book suggested it was on Sanjo-dori ("dori" means street or avenue) but the address didn't say so. The book also said it had "a" red lantern out in front (which is used by yakitori or grill restaurants). We did find it by asking a nearby florist shop, but it would have been useful if the description had said it was "on" Sanjo-dori and also that it had "several" small red lanterns and that it did not have an English name on the facade. (It was a good restaurant, incidentally, once we found it.) The same was true for Omen, a restaurant near the Silver Pavillion. No description other than it was "near" the Silver Pavillion and was shown on a very small map of the general area. A couple of local vendors directed us there. It is two short blocks south of the approach to the Temple on the street used by Bus 32. (It was a superb restaurant for lunch--I recommend it highly--as well as the sister restaurant on Shijo-dori a few feet west of the south end of Pontocho alley, a famous night location.) There were some recommended restaurants we didn't even try to find--partly because the maps and description seemed inadequate, but we found enough to satisfy us on a five day visit. The book could have been more useful in describing the details of the bus system. The busses cover most of the city quite well and the Tourist Bureau has a good (though very hard to follow--it takes intense study) map of bus routes. The presumption in the book is that most people will start from Kyoto station to reach various tourist sites. But, in my opinion, the most useful hotels

are located within a third of a mile from the intersection of Shijo and Karawamachi "dori[s]" and several useful busses do traverse this intersection but don't go to the train station. Further, though "stops" are listed on the Kyoto bus map, the actual stops are often a block or so from the "listed" intersection and different bus numbers may have different stops for the intersection. For example, busses at the Karasuma-Shijo intersection that traverse Shijo-dori stop either a block West of Karasuma OR a block East of Karasuma. We figured it out, but it took a couple of days as well as intense study of the Kyoto bus route map. (Busses are useful in reaching most tourist sites. The main exception is the Kyomizera-dera where the busses deliver people some distance away. A cab gets one much closer--though still probably a quarter mile away--and if one is not "athletically" inclined, cabs are a useful alternative. Our cab there (from Karasuma and Shijo-dori) was a bit more than twice what a bus ticket would have cost.) Cabs are in general a reasonable alternative both in terms of time saved and for those for whom walking isn't an ideal alternative (we are in our 70-s and though young in spirit do have some limitations which makes excessive walking less desirable if it can be avoided). Except for distant locations a cab ride will be between 600 and 800 yen and a bus ride for two is 440 yen and takes much longer. (Our maximum cab ride bill was 1300 yen but it was for a long distance with bad traffic. A daily pass on busses is 500 yen each.) Avoid a cab if you are going to traverse the area surrounding the Karasumi-Shijo intersection in the evening. It is VERY crowded and a cab will take many, many minutes to traverse the area (with the meter running.) But to the Golden Pavillion or the Silver Pavillion a bus ride is substantially cheaper than a cab. A cab would be even more expensive to Arashiyama--and the Kiefuku railroad (old fashioned streetcars) is much cheaper--and gets one to the center of things, unlike the Japan Rail alternative. The hotel recommendations seemed to be useful. We stayed in the Karasuma hotel, near the Shijo-Karasuma intersection and it was a decent and not outrageously priced hotel and a convenient location--less than a third of a mile from the epicenter of evening "action." Hotels near the Karawamachi-Sanjo intersection might be slightly closer to the "action" but they are substantially more expensive. The book recommends most of the main tourist attractions. We were most interested in gardens and it did a decent job of describing them. We found the "Sento Gosho" the "retired emperors" palace in the old Imperial Palace grounds to be the "best" garden we visited--it is in the "stroll garden" category--vistas appearing as one "strolls" through the garden. It is better than the actual old "Imperial Palace" which has a much smaller garden (and the tour of it concentrates on the buildings rather than the garden). One needs to go to the Imperial Palace office and show a passport but it can be done shortly in advance of the visit (there are two tours a day of the Sento Gosho, the first at 11am). The Golden Temple and the Silver Temple are three star attractions, but the Ryoan-ji (the

most famous of the Zen gardens) is being renovated and part of the famous "garden" is obscured. It is still worth a visit, however--though it will be closed for a couple of months in winter 2010-11. Nanjin-ji in the eastern sector of Kyoto is almost as spectacular as a Zen garden and Konchi-in in the Nanzen complex is close behind. (There are four temples in the Nanzen complex worth visiting--a real treasure trove for those who love Japanese gardens.) We didn't get to Daisen-in complex of gardens not far from the Golden Pavillion which also has famous Zen gardens but judging from pictures, they are worth a visit, time permitting, if Zen gardens (as opposed to Stroll Gardens) are of special interest. We also didn't get to the Katsura garden, reportedly a spectacular "stroll garden" in the suburbs (it also requires permission from the Imperial Palace office) partly because it is difficult and time consuming to reach and partly because the "Gardens of Kyoto" book, mentioned immediately below, suggested that the tour is so "fast" as to substantially reduce the pleasure of visiting it. If we'd had a couple more days we would have visited it (and the Daisen-in complex), but time didn't permit. Other useful books if you are going to be in Kyoto for a substantial amount of time: Treib and Herman "The Gardens of Kyoto"

A detailed guide to Kyoto. Have used it for planning so far, but haven't yet been to Kyoto.

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