The Insider’s Guide to Kyoto

In October 2016, the 23 Biennial Congress of ISAPS will be held in the best city in the world. Kyoto, Japan was selected by Travel + Leisure as Best Overall City in both 2014 and 2015, and is likely to continue its streak in the coming year. <http://www.travelandleisure.com/slideshows/worlds-best-cities/10> So there’s plenty of time to plan a few side-trips to your visit. Come a few days early or stay a few days late (or both) to discover how much the “thousand-year capital” has to offer.

The name Kyoto itself means “capital city.” For more than a thousand years, this city located on the island of Honshu was the center of government, politics, business, finance, education and culture. In contrast to the glass-and-steel of the modern capital (Tokyo), Kyoto has maintained a quiet sense of dignity and reverence for its past. The traditional Japan of your imagination - teahouses, temples, sumo wrestling, masked theatre, and geisha (geiko) – can still be found here, amid the high-tech hurry of the twenty-first century.

In fact, Kyoto is so popular with foreign tourists that the city has published a leaflet entitled, “The Insiders’ Guide to Kyoto, Part 2: ‘Don’ts’ (Akimahen) of Kyoto” for travelers to observe when visiting. http://www.businessinsider.com/heres-what-not-to-do-as-a-tourist-in-kyoto-according-to-kyoto-2015-8. These cover everything from where (not) to park your bicycle to how (not) to photograph geisha. (Perhaps tellingly, there is no corresponding Part I listing the “Do’s.” The other leaflet published by the Kyoto tourist promotion office is entitled, “How to use this toilet”...which we’ll get to a bit later.)

When you’re navigating around Kyoto on your own, here are some handy things to know:

**Public transport:** The HARUKA limited express runs twice each day between Kyoto and Kansai International Airport. You can also get to the Westin Miyako by shuttle, taxi, or airport limousine. Kyoto itself is easily navigable by bus and subway; the Raku busses have tourist-specific routes to popular destinations. A combination bus/subway daypass may be best if you plan to do lots of moving around. You can also rent a bicycle...and even have it delivered to your hotel! Visit http://www.kyotoguide.com/ver2/useful/useful-trans.htm for more information.

**Food:** The Westin Miyako, the “headquarters hotel” of the 2016 ISAPS Congress, offers no fewer than five restaurants to choose from, along with a tea room and a bar. You may also want to experience tea ceremony at a traditional...
chashitsu (tea room), or sample Kyoto’s array of street foods (everything from noodle soup to boiled octopus).

**Tipping:** Not only is tipping not practiced, but a confused server will wonder why you left your money behind. A smile of thanks and a sincere *arigatou* are all you need to offer.

**Manners:** Politeness is always important when traveling abroad, and the Japanese have elevated etiquette to an art form. Use two hands when giving or receiving anything (especially money), never pour your own drink (others will gladly do it for you, and expect the same in return), and bow slightly when you meet, thank, or depart from someone. You don’t need to worry much about mistakes, however; Japanese people are very forgiving of (and perhaps a little amused by) foreigners who unwittingly bungle an earnest effort.

**Language:** All of the above situations (like everything else) are made easier when you can speak and understand a few phrases of Japanese. A little *onegaishimasu* (please), *arigatou* (thank you), *hai* (yes), *iie* (no) and *gomen nasai* (sorry) can take you a long way.

**Toilet (** oteari **)** While many hotels and restaurants have Western-style stools and sinks, you may encounter a traditional Japanese *washiki* – the in-floor squat toilet that so confounds foreigners. Do not panic. Lower your pants to your ankles (or remove altogether them if you’re unsteady) and place one foot on each side of the toilet before carefully lowering yourself to a squatting position. It’s wise to carry tissue with you at all times, since most *washiki* don’t have toilet paper (that mysterious sprayer or bucket of water are best left alone). This also means that many plumbing systems are not designed to flush paper. Place it in the wastebasket or other receptacle provided – that’s why it’s there. For advice on what not to do, consult http://www.city.kyoto.lg.jp/sankan/cmsfiles/contents/0000185/185184/%28keiji%29youshiki.pdf