

# Understand Kyoto

## KYOTO TODAY..... 144

Find out how a weak yen and a surge in tourist numbers are changing the Old Capital.

## HISTORY ..... 146

The capital of Japan for over 1000 years, Kyoto is *the* place to learn about Japanese history.

## PEOPLE & CULTURE ..... 158

From geisha to gardens, Kyoto is Japan's cultural storehouse. Even Japanese come here to learn about their own culture.

## ARTS & CRAFTS.....161

Home to the imperial household for most of its history, Kyoto has always attracted Japan's finest artists.

## ARCHITECTURE & GARDENS..... 168

Shintō shrines, Buddhist temples, imperial villas, traditional townhouses and the finest gardens in Japan – it's all here in Kyoto.

## THE TEA CEREMONY.....173

This is no ordinary cuppa – this is caffeine-fuelled performance art.

# Kyoto Today

In Kyoto today the word *enyasu* is on everybody's lips. Formed from the words *en* (the Japanese pronunciation of yen) and *yasu* (the Japanese word for cheap), *enyasu* is how Japanese speak of the yen, which has plunged in value against other world currencies in recent years. A weaker yen and a strengthening world economy have resulted in a huge influx of tourists to Kyoto. The city now finds itself trying to balance cultural preservation against economic development.

## Best on Film

**Rashomon** (1950) Kurosawa Akira's classic uses the southern gate of Kyoto as the setting for a 12th-century rape and murder story told from several perspectives.

**Sisters of Nishijin** (1952) The father of a silk-weaving family kills himself as the family is caught between the old and the new.

**Lost in Translation** (2003) Most of this film takes place in Tokyo, but there's a lovely montage of shots of the heroine's trip to Kyoto.

## Best in Print

**The Old Capital** (Kawabata Yasunari; 1962) A young woman's past is disturbed by the discovery of a twin sister in another family.

**The Temple of the Golden Pavilion** (Mishima Yukio; 1956) A fictionalised account of a young Buddhist acolyte who burned down Kyoto's famous Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku-ji) in 1950.

**Memoirs of a Geisha** (Arthur Golden; 1997) This account of the life of a Kyoto geisha was later turned into a successful movie (most of which was not filmed in Kyoto).

**The Lady and the Monk** (Pico Iyer; 1991) An account of the author's relationship with a Japanese woman against the backdrop of Kyoto.

## The Yen Drops & Kyoto Bounces Back

In December 2012 Japan's conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), headed by Abe Shinzō, handily defeated the ruling Democratic Party in a general election. The party quickly implemented a raft of policy changes that become known as Abenomics. One of the main goals of the policy was to weaken the Japanese yen, in hopes that it would bring prices of Japanese exports down and stimulate the economy.

Whether due to Abenomics or world trends beyond Japan's control, one thing is clear: the yen has dropped about 25% in value against the US dollar since late 2012. It's now trading at levels not seen since before the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. And, despite some mild inflation and a tax raise that have come since the LDP took power, Japan once again seems cheap to foreign travellers.

For Kyoto, the drop in the yen could not have come at a better time. Tourists started returning in force in 2013, and in 2014 there were record numbers of arrivals in the city. The largest increase has come from other Asian countries, including China, Thailand and Taiwan.

However, the icing on the cake was the announcement by the International Olympic Committee in September 2013 that Tokyo would host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. As Kyoto is just 2½ hours from Tokyo by *shinkansen* (bullet train), it was clear that the Tokyo Olympics would be a huge win for Kyoto as well.

## Reinventing Kyoto

The city's business and political leaders have come to realise that Kyoto's greatest potential lies in the ever-increasing numbers of tourists who visit the city, including those from nearby Asian countries. In order to meet the demand and attract even more tourists, the