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Kyoto's Nishiki Market: A Historic Watering Hole for Tourists, Locals, and Food Lovers

Add this cultural and historic landmark to the itinerary for your next trip to Japan. Your belly will thank you.



Courtesy onthegotours.com

A staple to Kyoto's food culture for over four hundred years, Nishiki Market is a haven for people looking to try some of Japan's most revered culinary delicacies. It's like you're a kid in a candy store when you

walk down the aisles of the narrow market, all while breathing in the enticing smells wafting through the air of treats like tamagoyaki omelettes and Japan's version of croquettes (*korokke*) that are sure to satisfy all your heart's desires.

The iconic Nishiki Market set up shop in Kyoto's downtown district four centuries ago, and is fueled by its rich history to this day. Some of the hundreds of shops that line this market have been operating by the same families for generations now. According to japan-guide.com, Nishiki Market was originally an open-air fish wholesale district. In his article "Japanese modern municipal retail and wholesale markets in comparison with European markets," Masami Harada explains that in pre-modern Japan, feudal lords solely permitted wholesale dealers to operate as long as they paid their dues. The Meiji Restoration period in the nineteenth century ended this feudal system, and Japan soon built retail markets in order to satisfy the growing demands for food after the 1918 Rice Riots. During this time, Nishiki Market made the transition from wholesale to retail, pushing out many of the market's signature fish shops.

Don't be alarmed by this fact, however. Seafood is still a main offering at what locals refer to as "Kyoto's Kitchen," ranging from fresh-out-of-the-water octopus, raw fish used for sushi and sashimi, and eels that are laying on their neatly packed beds of ice.

If you're not the biggest seafood fan, Nishiki Market's other 120 stalls might peak your interest. With everything from the market coming in from a local source, you can expect the highest quality offerings. A crowd favorite is Japanese pickles (*tsukemmo*), a vinegary, crunchy snack for a hungry traveler. If a sweet tooth is your weakness, you may find yourself gravitating towards the soy milk donuts and ice cream or the variation of sweets made from matcha powder nestled in tea shops. With tea being a central part of Japanese culture, be sure to check out other teahouses close to where Nishiki Market is located. According to Culture Trip, many of these traditional teahouses can be found in the Gion district, like Ichiriki Chaya and Camellia, where you can expect to be served by geishas wearing vibrant kimonos in a rather calming environment.



DUSTED WITH PERFECTION: Traditional matcha sweets, like warabi mochi, are covered in a thin coating of roasted soy powder (*kinako*) like the ones here at Sawawa// Courtesy of matcha-jp.com

For those looking for a cheap meal, Nishiki Market is home to a few restaurants usually specializing in a particular food item. A guarantee is that you will never go hungry while shopping at Nishiki Market, as vendors are constantly handing out samples on skewers or small plates. As if the low prices weren't enough, you know that Nishiki Market will satiate your cravings.

At the Nishiki Market, stalls operate individually, however Condé Nast Traveler states that most are open from 9am-6pm each day. You can expect to find the majority of the stalls to be closed on Wednesdays, a change of pace for this bustling food market.

Not only an epicenter for Japanese delights, Nishiki Market is also the place to go in Kyoto for artisan goods and souvenirs. Intricate Japanese paper (*washi*), fans to cool yourself off in the sticky summer heat, and sake cups are all offered in these various souvenir shops.

After moseying your way through Nishiki Market's six blocks worth of displays that have been harvested just a short while before you set eyes on it, chances are you will leave the market more full than you have ever been in your entire life. It sounds fishy, but it's true. And you'll be sure to silently thank the Japanese who constructed this landmark so long ago.