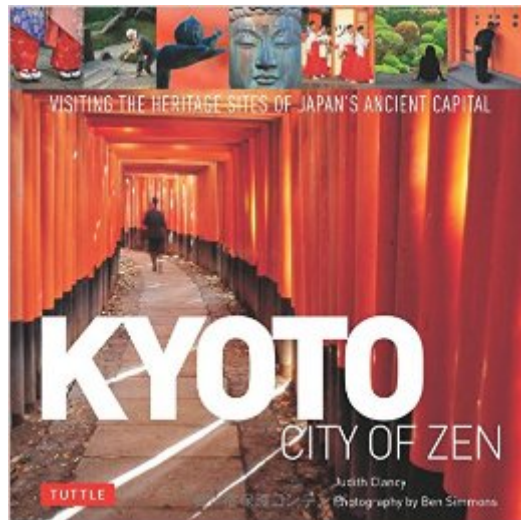


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# Kyoto City Of Zen: Visiting The Heritage Sites Of Japan's Ancient Capital



## Synopsis

This travel pictorial and Japan travel guide captures the sites and soul of KyotoâJapan's historic and spiritual center. An elaborate kaleidoscope of craft, artistry and religion, Kyoto is one of the world's most popular travel destinations. Art and design form the weft and warp of this vibrant 1,200-year-old city, home to hundreds of gardens, palaces, villas and magnificent wooden temples, including seventeen UNESCO World Heritage sites. Like a Zen koan, Kyoto defies easy description. Its citizens may work at Nintendo designing video games, at a company designing precision medical instruments, or sitting cross-legged meticulously affixing micro-thin flakes of gold foil onto a painting. All of them share a living heritage grounded in centuries of traditional culture. In *Kyoto: City of Zen*, local Kyoto expert Judith Clancy presents the most important gardens, temples, shrines and palaces of this ancient capital city and enduring cultural center. In addition to unveiling the city's spiritual and historical riches, this travel book shares with readers the exquisite foods, artistic crafts, religious ceremonies and architectural traditions that have flourished in Kyoto for over a millennium. Tea ceremonies, calligraphy, weaving, pottery, painting, drama, and many more traditional arts and crafts are presented through more than 350 photographs by Ben Simmons, whose images capture the true essence of Kyoto. The city's natural setting also comes into focus as you walk along leafy mountain paths and through spectacular parks and gardens viewing the best foliage each season has to offer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

My pre-ordered copy of "Kyoto, City of Zen" arrived a few weeks ago. This collaborative effort

between photographer Ben Simmons, and Kyoto expert Judith Clancy is a jewel of a book - very pleased to own it. The book devotes several pages of images and text to each of the seventeen World Heritage Sites in Kyoto, along with orienting maps, and insights into tea, crafts, food, and the architecture of Kyoto. Judith Clancy is known for her quintessential book on exploring old Kyoto, and combined with Simmon's extraordinary photos - you truly get a sense of the potential of experiencing these sites first hand. I have made two trips to Japan - though only one too short stay in Kyoto. Although I intend to use the book to plan a future visit there, I would also endorse it as a gift for someone interested in exploring the historic culture of Japan. It is not a traditional guidebook - it is more of an inspirational introduction to the best of historic Kyoto. I am a fan of Simmon's photographic work focused on Japan, and 'City of Zen' is equally rich. This book with Judith Clancy makes good on his standard of combining skillful, artistic images with a narrative that is both informative and exceedingly well written. The photos of maiko in Pontocho at dusk, and the light raking through the torii of Fushimi Inari shrine, exquisitely conjured the images in my head of my moments there.

Great photos! Great descriptions of attractions! No information on transportation, food, accommodations etc. A good book for a home collection, but NOT a guide book!

"Kyoto: City of Zen" is a small gem of a book, filled with gorgeous photographs, delightful commentary, and a few excellent maps. If you can't get to Kyoto, spending time with this book is surely the next best thing. But if you are planning a trip, take it with you. Its wisdom about everything from raked-pebble gardens to the street life in quarters few tourists visit will add immeasurably to your adventures in this amazing city.

Kyoto: City of Zen has been a singularly timely find. We decided on visiting Kyoto in the autumn of this year, and I had begun research on the trip not long before literally tripping across this book in a local Kinokuniya Bookstore. It has answered all of our questions on the city and added on mountains of information. The book is a concise, yet thorough work covering the history, architectural layout, symbolism, and aesthetic objectives of many of the World Heritage Sites. The text covers topics ranging among the history of the tea ceremony, the periodic Shinto and Buddhist rituals and festivals, the rigid training of gardeners who upkeep the moss, trees and raked pebbles of the many gardens in the temples and villas, the regional food and arts and a plethora of other cultural practices unique to the former imperial capital. Judith Clancey's descriptions are

complemented by the exquisitely rich and colorful photography of Ben Simmons. The attention to style and layout already present in the design of the gardens and buildings is enhanced by Mr. Simmons's own sense of composition, resulting in images that are a delight to view. The layout of the book makes a visit to Kyoto immediately accessible. The book is divided into chapters according to location, beginning in Central Kyoto, and then branching out to the eastern, northern, western and southern sections. Each section is supplemented with informative maps that are comprehensive, yet not overwhelming. I believe this will enable us to hit the ground running, so to speak, allowing us to visit many of the sites in our two weeks in Kyoto. If you are looking for a comprehensive book on Kyoto, this is it.

The photos in the Kindle version are low-resolution, and it is VERY disappointing how small they are on a Kindle Fire HDX. If zoomed to fill the screen, they are quite blurry. I assume the print version is much better, but I wanted a more portable version to carry to Kyoto with me. It is most definitely not worth getting the Kindle version if you want it mostly for the photos. The text is also a bit skimpy--I feel that each of the locations described would benefit a lot from another page or so of historical context. Still, it is worth having for the information that is given. I would be much happier if I could have bought the hardcover edition and received with it the Kindle version free or at reduced cost.

This book offers the best of two worlds. Both visuals and text shine. The writer, Judith Clancy, knows Kyoto in all its intricacies. Her knowledge comes through in her nuanced phrasing, her attention to detail, and her ability to weave into the text the answers to just the questions I wanted answered. The photographer's approach is just as astute. Ben Simmons captures the subtleties of Kyoto culture with a fresh eye (and sidesteps the clichés). In each piece—whether temple, castle, or one of Kyoto's unique districts—there is a wonderful range of shots, so that we get a strong visual sense of each, often stunning site. Rather than, say, one representative shot, we get anywhere from 5 to 10, sometimes more. Happily, in this book what the subject requires dictates the page allotment rather than a predetermined grid, and this is as it should be. What is also abundantly clear is that Simmons did the extra legwork to cover each subject thoroughly, and the result is a well-rounded impression of every subject he tackles. As far as content goes, the book opens with an introductory section that gives a brief overview of Kyoto's history, Zen Buddhism, the tea ceremony, the cuisine, the architecture, and the arts and crafts. From there the book moves to the city itself, portioning out the town in the same age-old manner Kyotoites themselves do. There are temples, shrines, gardens, imperial villas, a castle, the secluded districts that are so much a part of

Kyoto but easy to miss, plus maps that give you an overview of each key area, with all the site locations marked. Another plus: I found a satisfying number of my favorites in these pages—Arashiyama, Saiho-ji, Ryoan-ji, the Philosopher's Path, and more. In short, this is a thoughtfully written and visually satisfying book on one of Japan's jewels. A keeper for home and travel.

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