

Kyoto, Japan



Report made by

- **Name:** Joan & Yumi
- **Social media handles:** @joan_pahisa (Twitter, Instagram), @joanp (TabiFolk) & @latinatropicana (Twitter, Instagram)
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General information of the city

- **Name of the city and country:** Kyoto, Japan
- **Description:** The former imperial capital of Japan, Kyoto retains the traditional atmosphere of past eras in geiko¹ neighborhoods, such as Gion, or in the dozens of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines that dress the city. Fantastic place to be in spring during the cherry blossom season or in autumn with its vibrant foliage colors.

Transportation accessibility

- Subway is 100% wheelchair accessible with help from the staff (tell staff near platform access gates your destination and transfers, if any, and you're all set, no need to reserve or to get there in advance; the process is very fast) and has reserved seating for disabled and elderly people. Anyone needing help to get to the platform or to board the train can ask for assistance (assistance will also be waiting when getting off).

¹ "Geiko" and "geisha" (probably the term that most people internationally are familiar with) are the same, although in Kyoto they are called "geiko".

- Despite it being 100% wheelchair accessible, there are only 2 subway lines in Kyoto that cross the city from North to South and from East to West, so it's not the main means of public transportation. The bus is.
 - It may be difficult to locate elevators in bigger stations, as they may be inside adjacent or nearby buildings, even across the street (e.g. office buildings). Ask around if in trouble, as people are usually kind and eager to help.
 - Tactile pavement in all subway stations both on aisles, entrances and platforms.
 - More than 80% of the bus fleet is wheelchair accessible, usually with manual ramps deployed by the driver. However, as buses are the main means of public transportation, they can get really crowded. Try to avoid rush hours (before 9am and after 4pm).
 - Buses also get crowded near tourist attractions, so if you're a wheelchair user, the best is to take buses at the beginning of the bus line or avoid peak touristic hours. Otherwise, you may not be able to board the bus.
 - It's quite common for bus drivers to want to strap wheelchairs in place (there's probably a regulation), which takes a bit of time and is not really convenient for short rides or if the bus is rather full.
 - Around 60-70% of train stations, including Kyoto Station, are wheelchair accessible (with the aforementioned staff assistance) and have tactile pavement, however wheelchair spots and assistance need to be booked in advance for long distance trips (e.g. Shinkansen).
 - You can check for accessibility of stations on Google Maps by clicking on top of the station's name. If a wheelchair icon appears next to the name (in Japan this feature works well for stations), you're good to go.
 - Most train stations also have accessible toilets and most of them have sockets that may be useful to charge a mobility device.
 - The tramway, though, useful to go to Arashiyama, for instance, is only 50% wheelchair accessible. Here is a [list of accessibility in each of the stations](#).
 - Accessible taxis need to be specifically booked. There are a few small companies that operate in Kyoto, such as [Let's Go Taxi](#), [Kaigo Taxi](#), [Miyako](#) or [MK Taxi](#) (not all their fleet is accessible; also available in other cities).
 - Next stops are announced both on trains, subways and buses, but only few bus stations have loudspeakers for incoming bus line announcements.
- **Score: 3/5.** Even though, the subway is 100% accessible, as there are only 2 lines, the bus is the main means in the city. Most buses are wheelchair accessible, but boarding them can be difficult in rush hour or nearby tourist attractions. Taking buses at the beginning of the line, may help solve these issues, but overall, moving around the city requires a bit of planning.

Streets accessibility

- Streets in the center of Kyoto are mainly flat, but streets on outer areas, where many of the touristic temples are, can be quite steep.
 - Sidewalks on main streets are mostly wide and well maintained, although surrounding the Gion area and other touristic places, they can get crowded with tourists making them difficult to navigate on a wheelchair or for people with visual impairments.
 - All main streets have tactile pavement marking crossings and curb cuts -many at nearly zero level-.
 - There are no sidewalks on side streets, although no tactile pavement on side streets either.
 - Traffic lights in major crossings have beeping sounds for people with visual impairments, but crossings with narrower streets don't.
 - There are not many cycling lanes and bicycles sometimes use the sidewalk.
 - In touristic areas there are some streets reserved only for pedestrians, for example, in Gion, the most famous geiko neighborhood.
 - There are also accessible walkways along some of Kyoto's rivers.
 - Aside from train and subway stations, some public areas -specially in parks- also have accessible toilets.
- **Score: 3.5/5.** Sidewalks and streets are well maintained and there are well-made curb cuts nearly everywhere. However, there are touristic areas where streets are steep and can get really crowded. Pedestrian only streets in the geiko district of Gion and accessible walkways along the Kamo river are also a bonus.

Restaurants & shops

- Only about 40-50% of shops and restaurant entrances are wheelchair accessible. Some of them are zero level and some others have ramps.
- All ramps are different in size and length, some of them are quite steep.
- The inside of small shops and restaurants is usually really narrow and many traditional bars have only high counters.
- Nevertheless, as there are so many -even in areas where restaurant and shop accessibility may not be good-, if you look around a bit, you will always find an accessible place nearby.
- Shopping malls are a safe bet and they also have traditional food.
- Outside shopping malls, not many restaurants have accessible toilets.

- **Score: 3/5.** Not really good, as less than 50% of entrances are wheelchair accessible, but the sheer amount of options compensates a little bit.

Hotels & accommodation

- Not many hotels in Kyoto have wheelchair accessible rooms per se.
 - In general, hotels -even if they mostly have elevators- tend to have really small regular rooms (wheelchairs may get to the bed, but not be able to move around the room or even to turn around). Only suite style rooms may be big enough to move around.
 - Most of them also have a step -between 10 and 30cm- separating the room from the ensuite toilet. Sometimes, there can also be a similar step a meter or so after the room's door.
 - Toilets are extremely small.
 - If you need an accessible room, the easiest way is to look for international hotel chains and to always check accessibility details (always ask about steps in the room and to get to the room and about width of doorways) calling the hotel before booking -information on their website may not be trustworthy due to different criteria on accessibility-.
 - If you're looking for budget-range hotels, Toyoko Inn hotels are a good option with accessible rooms.
 - Problems with entrances for smaller hotels are similar to the ones described in the previous section.
 - Traditional hotels -aside from single steps separating areas and rooms- usually have tatami flooring and wheelchairs are not usually allowed on them.
 - AirBnB apartments, which in other cities may be an option, are mostly illegal in Kyoto (around 80% of them don't have a license). Moreover, in terms of accessibility, they have similar problems to hotels.
 - Here is a [list of accessible hotels in Kyoto from Accessible Japan's website](#).
 - Overall, as accessibility in hotels is bad, try to secure accommodation in advance.
- **Score: 2/5.** Not many accessible options, but there are some and improving. The Toyoko Inn chain is one of them in the budget-range hotels. As a tip, don't wait until the last minute to secure your accommodation.

Tourist attractions accessibility

- The good news is that all main tourist attractions in Kyoto are at least partially wheelchair accessible, Kinkakuji (The Golden Pavilion), Kyomizudera, Fushimi Inari, Gion, Arashiyama's Bamboo Grove, etc. The bad news is that all of them have also inaccessible areas.

- Most of the above listed attractions are either temples or shrines. For these, you can get to see most of them on the outside, but not all the way around due to steps or stairs going uphill. Attractions with these issues are Kinkakuji, Ginkakuji (The Silver Pavilion) or Fushimi Inari, among others.
 - Some others, you can see from the outside, but the inside may be partially or totally inaccessible due to many steps (e.g. Kyomizudera). Temples where the inside is the main attraction, such as Ryoanji, with a fantastic rock zen garden, are completely inaccessible for wheelchair users (aside from steep gravel slopes leading to it, the wheelchair needs to be left outside and the inside has various steps).
 - On the other hand, there are nice exceptions where the inside is accessible, such as Nijo castle (although the gravel at the entrance is really deep and hard to manage for manual wheelchair users) or Sanjusangen-do, where they wipe your wheelchair tires before entering.
 - As mentioned, another problem is gravel on the outside of temples or uneven paths (e.g. at the Philosopher's Walk or in Fushimi Inari). Some of them have shallower gravel (Kinkakuji, Ginkakuji) that although bothersome is still manageable on a manual wheelchair, but others have mildly deep or wide and unavoidable gravel areas, like the Imperial Palace of Kyoto, or deep gravel, such as the aforementioned Ryoanji.
 - Also, steep slopes or inclines leading to the attractions (e.g. Ginkakuji or Kyomizudera) or inside the attraction (Arashiyama's Bamboo Grove, although accessible has some mid-level inclines that may be difficult for some manual wheelchair users, specially on rainy days) are also a problem.
 - Finally, for Gion (the most famous geiko neighborhood), even though the streets are completely wheelchair accessible, many of the buildings where tea ceremonies or geiko performances are held are not.
 - All main attractions have accessible toilets either at the attraction or in the streets nearby.
- **Score: 2.5/5.** The good news is that all main attractions are partially wheelchair accessible and all of them have accessible toilets nearby. The bad news is that most of them have inaccessible areas, due to a combination of gravel of different depths, uneven paths, steep slopes, steps or stairs. For manual wheelchair users we highly recommend having some kind of power assist (be it human or electric).

Getting there

- Kyoto's nearest international airport is Kansai International Airport (KIX) that connects to many cities in Asia and some in Europe and North America.
- Kansai airport has easy access by train to Kyoto Station, located at the center of Kyoto, boarding the JR Haruka train (an 80-minute ride).

- If train doesn't work for you, there are also buses that go to Kyoto Station from the airport, though accessibility to board the bus with your wheelchair needs to be booked in advance ([Accessibility Information for Kansai airport buses](#)). The bus ride is 90 minutes.
- You can also get to Kyoto from other cities in Japan by Shinkansen (bullet train), which is also wheelchair accessible (wheelchair seating needs to be booked in advance by phone or at the station when buying the tickets). A Shinkansen ride from Tokyo Station to Kyoto Station is a bit more than 2 hours.
- Kyoto Station is connected to the rest of the city either by the subway (Karasuma Line) or by several bus lines.
- **Score: 4/5.** No need to plan in advance for accessible transportation, as all arrivals have accessible options. Being more than 1 hour away from the nearest international airport is the only downside.

Overall accessibility score

- **Score:** 18/30. Overall **3.0/5 stars**.
- **Summary:** Kyoto may not be the most accessible destination, but it is still accessible enough to enjoy. Don't let the aforementioned issues in tourist attractions stop you, as their beauty and uniqueness highly compensate the potential hassle. Accommodation, for sure, and sometimes transportation within the city also require planning. For details on specific attractions, you can either refer to the full report at troublewithme.com or go to [Accessible Japan's website](#).