



Kyoto - 2 days: Sample itinerary

Autumn foliage period: End of October - Mid-December

**Peak period: Mid-November - Early December (Arashiyama)
Early November - Early December (Kyoto / Nara)**

A true autumn destination, Kyoto has many splendid temples and gardens where you can admire the red foliage of the Japanese maples (koyo). The mountains surrounding the former imperial capital also participate in the show and are adorned with vivid colors from November to early December.

Day 1 : Tokyo / Kyoto

Departure in the morning for Kyoto by Shinkansen from Tokyo station (about 2h15).

Sightseeing and meals are on your own.

Kyoto is the cultural capital of Japan. Former residence of the emperors and the first shoguns between 794 and 1868, this provincial city, although modern, jealously perpetuates its cult of tradition. The city is a mixture of modern neighborhoods and countless islands of traditional monuments, not to mention private residences with gardens and tea pavilions, where flower arranging, dancing and lute and harp music are still commonly performed.



Nanzen-ji Temple (Kyoto)



Suggestions of popular visits during autumn in Kyoto:

- **Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine**

The Fushimi Inari is one of the most impressive shrines in the country. Founded in the 8th century, it is famous all over Japan for the thousands of torii (porticoes separating the sacred world from the profane world) which form a real tunnel of four kilometers long. There are also many statues of foxes, messengers of Inari, God of fortune.

- **Tofuku-ji Temple**

Tofuku-ji is a complex of several temples and gardens famous for its autumnal landscape. Its fame is based on the spectacular views from the Tsutenkyo and Gaunkyo bridges over the Sengyokukan Gorge, covered with contrasting autumn colors. There are more than 2000 maple trees in the temple, including five different varieties.

Night in hotel.

Day 2 : Kyoto

Breakfast at the hotel.

Visits and meals at your convenience

Suggestions of popular visits during autumn:

- **Kodai-ji Temple**

Visit the Kodai-ji temple which is steeped in the practices of the Zen Buddhist sect Rinzai and boasts gardens that are adorned with the red and gold colors of autumn..

- **Nanzen-ji Temple**

Nanzen-ji is one of the five major Zen temples in Kyoto. It is famous for its colossal gate, Sanmon, in which it is possible to climb to admire the view of the city, as well as for the paintings of the artist Tannyū Kanō. The Zen garden of the main building is really worth a look. Very surprisingly, at Nanzen-ji there is a Western-style aqueduct built during the Meiji period.

- **Eikando**

Just 10 minutes north of Nanzen-ji, the buildings of the Eikan-dō, built on different levels and connected by a set of elevated walkways and bridges, are perfectly integrated into the natural setting around them, especially in the fall. At the top of the hill is the Tahōtō (or high pagoda), built in 1928. From there, the view of Kyoto is admirable.

- **Kitano Tenmangu Shrine**

Founded in 947, Kitano Tenmangu is one of the many shrines dedicated to the worship of Tenjin god. This deity is assimilated to Sugawara Michizane, an important political figure of the Heian period (794-1185) and unjustly exiled by the Fujiwara family. Several buildings have been classified as National Treasures and the gardens are very popular during the plum blossoming at the end of winter and in autumn for its maples. It hosts every 25th of the month the Tenjin-san flea market.



Popular visit suggestions in Arashiyama:

During the Heian period (794-1185), Arashiyama was the favorite walking destination of the imperial court. The landscape keeps the imprint of this period. One comes to admire the cherry blossoms in spring or the red maples in autumn.



Bamboo forest (Arashiyama)

- **Togetsu-kyō (the bridge that the Moon crosses)**
Togetsu-kyō is truly the icon of Arashiyama. Built during the Heian period (794-1185) and then rebuilt in the 1930s, it blends perfectly with the forest and mountainous landscape seen in the background. The autumn colors are spectacular.
- **Tenryū-ji Temple (Heavenly Dragon Temple)**
In the heart of Arashiyama, Tenryū-ji is among the five great Zen temples of Kyoto. Its garden symbolizes a dry waterfall of rocks flowing into a pond representing the Chinese ideogram "heart".
- **Hongoin Temple**
This temple is a secondary temple of the very famous Tenryū-ji and is only open to visitors during a limited period in spring and autumn.
- **Jōjakkō-ji Temple**
Climb the stone steps and you will discover the pleasant complex of Jōjakkō-ji, a temple famous for its colorful maples and the Tahôtô pagoda. It offers, from its upper part, beautiful views of Kyoto and the east part of the city.



- **Nisonin Temple**

Built between 834 and 847 in the Heian period, the Nisonin Temple was the official temple of Emperor Saga. The temple and Mount Kokura beyond have long been renowned for their beautiful autumn foliage.

Suggested day trips to Kurama and Kibune:



Kurama-dera (Kyoto)

Only 30 minutes north of Kyoto, Kurama and Kibune are two quiet valleys, long appreciated by the Kyoto people who want to forget the hustle and bustle of the city below. There is nothing more pleasant than to enjoy a delicious meal on their platforms above the cool and lively waters of the Kibune-gawa! The two valleys can be explored together. Start from Kurama, climb up to its temple, then go down the other side to Kibune to enjoy a lunch above the stream.

- **Kurama-dera Temple**

The entrance of the temple is just at the top of the hill at the exit of Kurama station. A small funicular takes you to the top for 100 yens, otherwise, follow the same way by foot. From the top, there is an incredible view, especially in autumn when the trees show their brightest colors.

- **Short hike to the Kibune valley.**



- **Kurama Onsen.**

One of the few easy-to-reach onsen from Kyoto, Kurama Onsen is a great place to relax after a hike. The outdoor bath offers a splendid view of Mount Kurama and also a sauna and relaxation areas.

- **Kibune Shrine**

This shrine, halfway up the valley to the hamlet of Kibune, is worth a look. The best times to visit Kibune are in August, when the summer heat is not too intense and in autumn when the maple trees dazzle visitors with their colors.

Return to Kyoto by rail.

Suggestions for a day trip to Nara*:

*Nara is less than an hour from Kyoto.



Nara Park

photo courtesy of Nara visitors Bureau

Nara is the heart of Japanese civilization. It is here that, after having assimilated the Chinese and Korean contributions, the proper culture of Japan was developed. Nara was the first great capital from 710 to 784. The city of Nara is famous for being one of the best places in the country to observe nature in its autumn foliage.



- **Nara Park**

Nara Park is a vast public green space of more than 500 hectares, starting from the foot of Wakakusa-yama to the heart of the city. Dating back to 1880, the "deer park" is home to nearly 1,400 shika deer that roam freely around the temples, avenues and tourists who came to visit the treasures of the former imperial capital.

- **Shoryaku-ji Temple**

This temple was founded in the very last years of the first millennium (992), and historical records suggest that there were nearly 100 buildings at the height of its glory in the Heian period (ending in 1195). Only two important buildings remain today. This temple, the birthplace of sake in Japan, is in the mountains surrounded by beautiful autumn foliage.

- **Chogaku-ji Temple**

Chogaku-ji is a temple located on the Yamanobe road, the first one in Japan to be mentioned in writing. It was built in the 9th century by the great monk Kobo Daishi (or Kukai) on the order of Emperor Junwa, as a temple attached to Yamato Temple. In the quiet and spacious 40,000 square meter compound, one can smell the scent of flowers in every season: in spring, azaleas, in summer, blue irises, in autumn, reddened leaves of maples and in winter, camellias.

- **Hasedera Temple**

This temple is the mother house of the 3000 temples of the same name. The place called Hase has been considered sacred since ancient times and is mentioned in the Tale of Genji, a major work of Japanese literature, and Man'yōshū, the first anthology of Japanese poetry. Hase-dera enchants pilgrims with its flowers, hence its nickname "the honorable temple of flowers": cherry trees and peonies in spring, hydrangeas in summer, maples in autumn, and winter peonies in winter.

- **The Tanzan Shrine**

Located on the mountains bordering the historic town of Sakurai, east of Asuka. This shrine was originally a large Buddhist temple. During the Meiji era, the Japanese wanted to restore the cult of the emperor and Shintoism as the official religion of Japan. Many Buddhist temples, considered as foreign contribution, were then destroyed or transformed into Shinto shrines. This is the reason why Tanzan Shrine includes a pagoda, a Buddhist religious building which was part of Tonomine-ji temple. This magnificent thirteen-tiered pagoda, the only one in Japan, was erected in 678 but the present building dates from 1532. Tanzan has thus become a Shinto shrine in its own right. Now, this shrine is famous for the beauty of its autumn foliage.

At the end of the day, return by Shinkansen.



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