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Must-see destinations in Japan

On www.japantoday.com C James Dale recommended some places for visitors to Japan.

1. Ancient Kyoto

It's the ancient capital of Japan and has many beautiful temples and shrines.

At the end of World War II the ancient city might have been destroyed by an atomic bomb. U.S. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson removed it from the list of potential targets because he had happy memories of his honeymoon there.

Old Kyoto attracts many visitors who enjoy staying in old *ryokans* and eating traditional *kaiseki* meals. But they should also explore the city's new side. Old teahouses and geisha houses are being redeveloped. "Niti", located inside a former geisha house, is a sleek bar and café that blends modern touches with Japanese tradition.

Another fascinating place is "The Garden Oriental", an Italian restaurant and bar created inside the former house and studio of famous Japanese painter Seiho Takeuchi.

2. Kumano Kodo pilgrimage

This is a side of Japan not many tourists see. Monks, retired emperors, aristocrats and regular people have been hiking this pilgrimage route since the Heian period.

The Kumano Kodo is a network of trails winding through the forests and fields, villages and towns that stretch across the southwestern Kii Peninsula in the Kansai region. The routes lead to inspiring natural sites, and visitors can find hot springs, delicious food and traditional accommodation.

3. Amazing Nagasaki

Nagasaki was almost completely destroyed in 1945 but has been rebuilt into an exciting modern city. Nagasaki grew from a tiny fishing village into an important port for trade with Europe and China. When the rest of Japan was cut off from the world, Nagasaki kept its doors

open. These days, visitors come to learn about the city's history, enjoy its Chinatown and marvel at the hillside Glover Gardens.

The best place to take photos is from Mount Inasa, which towers 333 meters above the city.

4. Cool Karuizawa

In autumn this is one of the most beautiful places in Japan. It's several degrees cooler than Tokyo in the summer. It's near Mount Asama, which is a dangerous volcano, but the town's natural beauty and charm help people to forget about the risks. John Lennon and Yoko Ono holidayed in Karuizawa in the 1970s and stayed at the Mampei Hotel.

The town has great hiking, hot springs and bird watching. Yacho-no-mori, or Wild Bird Forest, is home to about 120 species of bird.

5. Tokyo's parks

Most people believe this giant city is a steel, glass and concrete jungle but it actually has its fair share of green spaces. Popular parks include Yoyogi Park, Shinjuku Gyo-en and Ueno Park. The small, but stunning, Hoppo-en garden in Shirokanedai is just as impressive. It's a perfect place for quiet thinking. Hoppo-en also hosts a Japanese teahouse and two restaurants. It's also a popular place for weddings so visitors can watch newlyweds pose for photos in traditional Japanese clothes.

Questions

1. Have you been to Kyoto? What's your favourite place in Kyoto? Do you prefer old Kyoto or new Kyoto?
2. Have you hiked in Kumano? How was it?
3. Some people say Nagasaki is the best city in Japan. Do you agree? Why? Why not?
4. Do you think Mount Asama is dangerous? Would it stop you from living in Karuizawa?
5. What's your favourite park in Tokyo? Why do you like it?
6. What do you think about these recommendations? Are they good? Bad?
7. Which 5 places in Japan would you recommend to visitors? Why?

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