



Lantern light in Osaka

Small restaurants, warm counters, and a blue-grey evening. Choose a family-friendly dinner stop and keep the lane clear while looking.

SHRINE, TEMPLE AND A WARM LUNCH

A little Kyoto context

A little context makes the two visits feel distinct.

Fushimi Inari is a shrine

Fushimi Inari Taisha is a Shinto shrine dedicated to Inari. Its repeating torii gates belong to the shrine landscape. Keep the route open, use quiet voices and treat it as a living place of worship.

Kiyomizu-dera is a temple

Kiyomizu-dera is Buddhist and associated with Kannon. Its large timber hall and projecting stage make the hillside setting especially memorable. You can appreciate the building and the city view without turning the visit into a photo session.

Kyoto lunch words

Hot tofu | 湯豆腐 (yudofu), buckwheat noodles | そば (soba), and a set meal | 定食 (teishoku) are useful things to recognize. Temple-style vegetarian cooking | 精進料理 (shojin ryori) is a particular tradition; confirm ingredients rather than assuming every tofu dish is vegetarian.

A quiet question

What changes when you know whether a building is a shrine or a temple? Look again at its gate, roof, courtyard and the way people approach it.

Rice, fish and noodles

English name • Japanese menu characters • a simple way to recognize it



Sushi

寿司

sushi

Seasoned rice with a topping or filling. Sushi does not always mean raw fish.



Sashimi

刺身

sashimi

Sliced raw fish or seafood, served without sushi rice.



Ramen

ラーメン

ramen

Thin wheat noodles in broth. The broth and toppings vary by shop.



Udon

うどん

udon

Thick pale wheat noodles, often served in a warming broth.

Three scripts, one living language

You do not need to learn every character to start noticing patterns. Japanese usually mixes three scripts on the same menu or sign.

Kanji | 漢字

Meaning-bearing characters used in many words. 山 can mean mountain and 川 river. A kanji can have several readings, especially in combinations; this book's game matches basic meanings, not one permanent pronunciation.

Hiragana | ひらがな

A sound-based script used for grammar and many everyday Japanese words. You may see おにぎり for onigiri and そば for soba.

Katakana | カタカナ

Another sound-based script, often used for borrowed words and emphasis. ラーメン is ramen and スープカレー is soup curry.

Try one tiny recognition each day

Find one character from the next page. Look for it again in a compound, then ask what the whole word means. Use a translation tool for context rather than assuming one familiar character explains an entire sign.

Kanji match: look for the shape

Match each numbered character to a lettered meaning. Work alone first, then compare as a family. A shape can be a memory hook without explaining its full history.

1

山

Meaning letter: ____

2

川

Meaning letter: ____

3

人

Meaning letter: ____

4

木

Meaning letter: ____

5

日

Meaning letter: ____

6

月

Meaning letter: ____

7

火

Meaning letter: ____

8

水

Meaning letter: ____

9

口

Meaning letter: ____

10

田

Meaning letter: ____

11

上

Meaning letter: ____

12

下

Meaning letter: ____

Choose from these meanings

A water

B mountain

C mouth / opening

D down / below

E tree

F sun / day

G person

H rice field

I fire

J river

K moon / month

L up / above

KANJI GAME KEY

The answers, and another way to play

These are basic meanings. Pronunciations and meanings can change in words, so keep the whole sign in view.

山 1 > B mountain

火 7 > I fire

川 2 > J river

水 8 > A water

人 3 > G person

口 9 > C mouth / opening

木 4 > E tree

田 10 > H rice field

日 5 > F sun / day

上 11 > L up / above

月 6 > K moon / month

下 12 > D down / below

Turn it into a memory game

Use the separate printable card set. Lay the twelve kanji cards and twelve English cards face down. Turn over two at a time; keep a matching pair and take another turn. Most pairs wins, or cooperate to clear the table.

The family version

Everyone can choose different memory hooks for the same character. Adults and children can join without pretending to know more. A good explanation can be more interesting than a fast answer.