

# THE JAPANESE GEISHA TO REVIVE TOURISM



To promote Japanese culture and lure tourists to their city, Kyoto now features a rarity: maiko - apprentice geisha - perform their traditional dance every Sunday at the Museum of Traditional Crafts.

Japanese culture has always attracted a lot of attention. It almost seems out of this world - the long lost samurai, sushi, completely different rules of social conduct and of course, the geisha. Many tourists are drawn by the mysterious appearance of these professional entertainers. As part of the new initiative, which aims to lure more foreign visitors, **Kyoto has launched a weekly performance by maiko, the apprentice geisha, at the Museum of Traditional Crafts.**

The plan works. The number of visitors has increased significantly, as everyone is keen to take a look at these beautiful creatures and admire their elaborate kimonos and artistic performance. Though given the history of the geisha, today it seems more of a downfall of their fame. In the golden era of 1920, there were more than 80,000 geisha in Japan; today, it is a sad 1,000 - 2,000.

The maiko follow a very rigorous and long training before they deserve to become geisha and their artistic talent and power of performance bewitch all spectators. The services of such skilled performers do not come cheap; usually they range between \$500 and \$600. There seems to be slight confusion among many Western visitors as to what range of services the geisha provide. They are not courtesans, as many mistakenly believe.

While the income from visitors is most welcome, many local residents and the maiko as well as geisha complain about being nearly hunted by the foreign tourists. These often do not have any courtesy to respect the maiko's privacy and pursuit them to get a close-up picture or even tuck on their kimonos - which is exceptionally rude. **Tourists are now being asked to pay their respect from a distance and follow local rules.** After all, it would be a great shame to lose such fascinating symbol of Japanese culture.

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