

KYOTO'S GEISHA DISTRICT FIGHTS UNRULY TOURISTS



Kyoto, ancient Japan's capital, has always been a popular tourist destination. However, the famous Geisha district, Gion, has been facing some issues due to misbehaving visitors.

Tourists often crowd the district's narrow streets, following tour guides who lecture for long hours. Isokazu Ota, the area's representative secretary to the city's South Side District Council, said that some private-property alleys would be closed due to the complaints received. In April, **the authorities plan to put up signs asking tourists to stay out of the private streets.** Isokazu Ota added that they are being forced to take this step, desperate to maintain peace and privacy in the area.

In the district of Gion, Kyoto, winding alleys lead to beautiful teahouses where geishas and maiko apprentices perform traditional dances and music. Unfortunately, some visitors have ignored the signs, requesting they keep their distance and avoid touching the women's expensive kimonos. Additionally, there have been complaints about people trespassing on private property in the area.

To address these issues, a sign in Japanese and English will be displayed in the geisha district stating that the road is private and pedestrians are not allowed to pass through it. The warning carries a fine of ¥10,000 (US\$68). The ban only applies to a few blocks of Gion, so the rest of Kyoto remains open to tourists. However, the residents' outrage highlights the growing resentment towards excessive tourism in the area, even though Japan's economy relies on tourism revenue to sustain growth.

Complaints about excessively enthusiastic tourists started surfacing years ago, but the issue was mitigated by the lull in tourism caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, now that visitors have returned, the problem has resurfaced with a vengeance. **Last December, the local council called on the city's government to take action against unruly tourists, complaining that their neighborhood was "not a theme park."**

Some visitors behave like amateur paparazzi, jumping at the chance to take photos when they spot a geisha walking along the narrow streets, some just 2 meters wide.

The number of foreign visitors surged by 79.5% in January compared to the last year, reaching levels seen in January 2019. Taiwan and China were the next-largest sources of travelers after South Korea.

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