

Fascinated with Kyoto

– Interviews with foreigners that have fallen in love with Japan

Kyoto has long flourished as the center of traditional Japanese culture and has long been a favorite destination of foreign tourists and each individual who visits this unique city discovers different attractions and fascinations here. For some people, visiting Kyoto as a tourist is not enough and some even decide to choose it as their place to settle. What attracts them to Kyoto? What is that only Kyoto can offer that other cities in Japan and the world don't have? Here are some answers from the people who fell in love with Kyoto and decided to live in the Old Capital.

日本の文化や暮らしに惹かれ、人生の一部、中には大半を日本で過ごすことになった4人の外国人にインタビュー。なぜ京都を選んだのか？ 京都の暮らしの心地よさは？ 彼らの言葉から、観光客として訪れるだけでは見えてこない、京都の魅力が見えてくる。

“Inviting more people to Japan and let the world know the charms of the city”

James Kent & Loic Mention

James Kent, from the UK, and Loic Mention, from France, are the staff of J Team based in Kyoto. J Team is Japan's first specialist DMC (Destination Management Company), and the premier partner for incentive tours, corporate and association meetings & tailored and special-interest travel in Japan. What is DMC and how do they do that in Kyoto? Why is it important to be based in Kyoto for their job? Here are their answers.

KVG: Please introduce yourself and what is your first experience with Japan and how did it happen?

James: I was born and brought up in Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom. My first ever visit to Japan was as part of 17th World Scout Jamboree in 1991 (see photo). At that time I stayed in Osaka for three nights and Kobe for three nights. We came to Kyoto for one day.

Later in 2003, I started to work in Kyoto at the Kyoto Convention Bureau, an independent public organization that operates in support of convention events in Kyoto. Then, this year, I joined the J Team, Japan-specialist destination management company.



James Kent

Loic: I was born in Geneva, Switzerland. I first decided to come to Japan as I was passionate about this culture and Japan's beautiful landscapes since childhood and also because I had been practicing *aikido* (an art of self-defense derived from *judo*) for some years and I was willing to practice in the founder's country.

My first time in Japan was 4 years ago for a language trip of 3 months in Tokyo after studying tourism in France. When I came back from this trip I promised myself that I will live here someday, and after working for about 2 years for a tour operator specialist of Japan in



Loic Mention

Geneva, I decided to try my chance moving to Japan last spring 2012.

KVG: Why did you choose Kyoto to settle in Japan, why not Tokyo or Osaka, for example? And what was your first impression of Kyoto?

Loic: Actually, when I thought about where to settle in, I first wanted to go back to Tokyo as I enjoyed my previous stay very much, but after the earthquake in Tohoku in 2011, I chose Kyoto so my family wouldn't worry as much. However, coming back there some years later having some friends here introducing me to nice places in the city, I started to really appreciate Kyoto and its atmosphere, so choosing Kyoto instead of Tokyo to settle was also a really nice thing to me.

I liked the fact that it was easy to move around the city and its different sightseeing can be accessed very easily by train, subway or by bus, allowing me to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere in Arashiyama along the river or the experiencing old Japan's touch in Kiyomizu area and escape the "city" without spending hours in the transportation.

James: I chose Kyoto because of the Kyoto Convention Bureau job. It is a globally important organization in a globally important city. Kyoto offers infinitely more to the global business events industry than any other city in Japan – yes even Tokyo! – and arguably more than any other city in the world.

All business events now are about "adding value". This is a subjective concept but the "value" added by Kyoto is diverse and wide-ranging. Kyoto can be rewarding – using "closed" venues for events; Kyoto can be educational – using traditional Japanese culture in the program; Kyoto can offer something unique and once-in-a-lifetime treasures such as the opportunity to meet real *maiko* (apprentice *geisha*) and *geiko* (*geisha* in Kyoto).

KVG: Please explain about your job, and why is it important for your business to have an office in Kyoto?

James: The J Team is a destination management company that assists organizations without intimate knowledge of Japan how to set up business events in the country. Such events range from incentive travel, company meetings, study tours, celebratory events, product launches to academic meetings and the like. Organizations that choose Japan choose it for the value that it adds through learning, reward, inspiration and the realization of dreams.

The J Team is headquartered in Tokyo but the reason for having a physical presence here is that a destination management company must have intimate knowledge of the destination, and Kyoto is the most important Japanese city for business events after Tokyo. We have people in the field constantly gathering knowledge about Kansai.

Loic: When someone thinks about Japan, the first two cities that come to mind are generally Tokyo, the ultra-modern capital and Kyoto, reflecting tradition and strong because of its long history. Having an office in Kyoto allows us to be closer to our local suppliers and offer a better experience to our guests and gives us more flexibility.

J Team is currently the only specialist DMC in the market in Japan, and uniquely positioned to offer an ideal balance of the service and attention-to-detail quintessential to Japan, and the objective creativity of long-term foreign residents. For more information, visit their website: www.theteam.jp

“Amuse the world with Bento boxes and the bento culture of Japan”

Thomas Bertrand

Maybe many foreigners, who happen to be greeted with the stylish and non-Japanese-looking shop, Bento&co, don't know what a "Bento" is. A "Bento" is "lunch" in Japanese and *bento* are not just a casual meals but the culture of life. Thomas Bertrand, from France, started Bento&co, a fascinating shop that introduces people to the wonderland of Bento!

KVG: What is your connection with Kyoto and why did you start your business in Kyoto?

Thomas: Same as with many other French people in my generation, I was brought up with Japanese anime. I was interested in Japanese culture all the time. I had an interesting professor's class in my university which focused on Japanese history, particularly the Edo (1600-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods, and I started to think about going to Japan.

I first came to Japan 11 years ago during my university holidays. Then, one year later, I came to Kyoto to study in a university. I traveled around Japan during my trip and I liked Kyoto the best. Kyoto has such a deep culture. Kyoto is a big city but always stays green with nature. After I started to live in Kyoto, my impression about Kyoto didn't change – it was very comfortable.

KVG: Why Bento boxes? What is special about them?

Thomas: I wanted to introduce unique and interesting items from Japan to France, but I was wondering what items I should focus on. The idea of starting my own business by selling Japanese *bento* boxes suddenly came to me in 2008 when I heard from my mother in France that a popular French magazine featured lunch recipes and it was a big boom.