



Making Friends in Kyoto's Arashiyama Monkey Park

2015/09/22by [Brette Sember](#)



Although [Japan](#) is overwhelmingly brimming with spectacular sites and landmarks, it's always a good idea to stop and enjoy the county's beautiful landscape, especially if you can do it with some fun companions. Today, My Itchy Travel Feet guest writer, Brette Sember, shows us how to take a break from temple sightseeing in Kyoto in order to monkey around a bit with some of the local wildlife at Arashiyama Monkey Park.

There are a lot of opportunities to see monkeys in Japan, but one of the best is at [Arashiyama Monkey Park](#) in [Kyoto](#), where you can come face to face with snow monkeys (also called Japanese macaques), feed them, and enjoy a spectacular view.



Sitting on top of the world, isn't he?

Planning Your Day

The park is located in the Arashiyama section of Kyoto on the Oi River. Arashiyama is about a half an hour west of the main part of the city if you go by car, longer if you take a train. It's worth the trip though since this feels like a separate small town with a personality all its own. The streets are narrow and there are lots of shops and tourists mulling about.



Make sure to dress appropriately when visiting. The walk up is quite tough!

When you're heading to the monkey park be sure to wear shoes or boots you can walk uphill in: you are in for an [active boomer travel adventure](#). The steep trail can be muddy in rainy season. Sandals or flips flops won't cut it here. Bring water and be sure to have some yen since you need to pay in cash to enter and for monkey food. Don't bring any food with you because the monkeys will smell it. Be sure to take the park rules very seriously. You should not stare directly into the monkeys' eyes since they perceive this behavior as a threat. You also cannot touch them or offer them food outside of the designated feeding area. The monkeys are wild and unpredictable and we saw someone badly frightened (but unhurt) when a monkey jumped at her off of a tree, so take the rules seriously.

Heading Up to Monkey Heaven

The entrance to the park is next to the Ichitani-jinja shrine, so look for the orange torii gates. Once you pay your entrance fee, you'll start to hike up a moderately inclined trail. It's filled with switchbacks and has no railings in most places. There are also several sets of stairs, some crudely made of stone. The climb takes about half an hour, but you'll enjoy it since it is through trees and past a stream. As you get closer to the peak, you may see a monkey or two hanging out in a tree. Don't waste your time here with photos – there will be closer and better encounters at the top.

Meeting the Monkeys

Once you encounter a playground you will know you are almost there and then suddenly you go up one more flight of stairs and you are at the top of the world. Kyoto and surroundings is spread out before you in a glorious, wide panorama. And everywhere you look there are monkeys! The monkeys average about the size of a medium dog and they have very solemn reddish faces. They aren't afraid of people but they aren't too interested in them either. You will be far more excited by them than they are by you. You get the feeling they're looking at you with weary, jaded eyes. "Another tourist? So boring."



Is there anything cuter than a monkey with her little baby?

Wander around the park and see monkeys in trees, on the ground, by a pond, and climbing everything they possibly can. If you're looking for the money shot when it comes to photography, position yourselves by the edge of the cliff with a monkey climbing a coin operated viewing machine behind you. You can also probably crouch next to a monkey or two elsewhere in the park for a great photo, but be careful not to get too close.

Mano a Mano with Monkeys

The highlight of the visit is feeding the monkeys. The park has a method that allows you to feed the monkeys while staying safe. You enter into a small building that is enclosed with screens. There is a monitor at the door to ensure no monkeys can get inside. Once inside you can buy peanuts or apple slices to feed the monkeys through the screens. The peanuts are a better deal since you get more of them, giving you more opportunities to feed the monkeys.



Mano a mano!

The monkeys climb onto the screens and you hold the food by holding it in the palm of your hand. The monkeys reach through the screens with aplomb, casually grabbing the food from your hand. Their hands are amazingly human-like and their touch gives you a bit of zing of connection to these ancestors of ours. When we visited, many of the monkeys had babies and were carrying them around, so there was often a two-for-one encounter happening when we fed. Several monkey spats broke out while we were feeding. Dominant monkeys swoop in and screech at others, stealing the food. It's startling, but definitely entertaining.



Hang on, little guy!

Before You Leave

When you're done feeding the monkeys, there is a sink to wash your hands, as well as a Western-style toilet should you need one, inside the small building. The trek back down the hill is much easier than on the way up. Before you leave Arashiyama, don't miss the [bamboo forest](#) which is within walking distance. It's free and you'll be awed as you walk on a path through the deep forest of towering bamboo plants. There's a strange sense of light in this forest. It's not as dark as a deciduous or evergreen forest since the trees are so narrow with so few leaves, but the light is filtered as if through a green lens. It's a very zen experience and the perfect way to relax after hiking to visit the monkeys.

Have you visited some of Arashiyama Monkey Park? Join the conversation at the [My Itchy Travel Feet page on Facebook](#) or [send us an email](#) with your comments or questions.



Author Bio



Brette Sember is a dedicated travel shopper who blogs about her finds at [Travel Shopper Expert](#). She is the author of [The Gluten-Free Guide to Travel](#).



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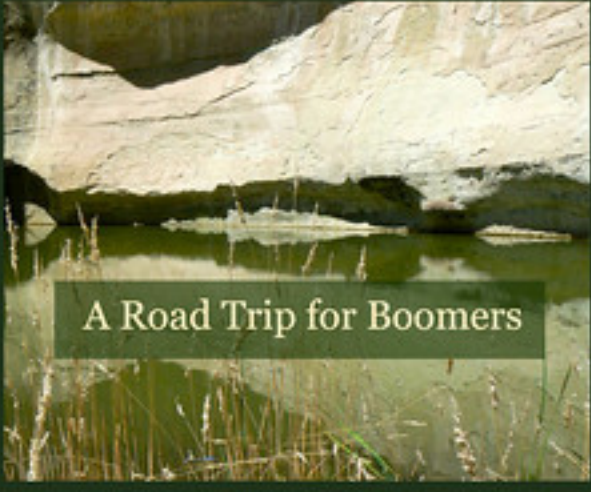
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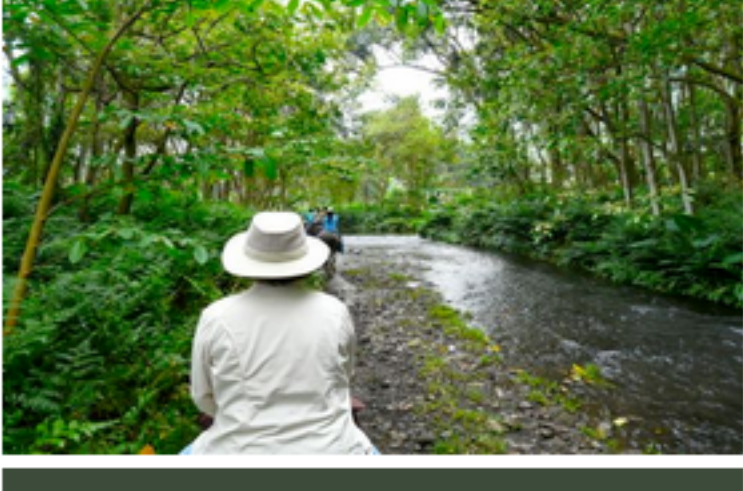
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