

Asakusa's Secrets Revealed

Hidden Asakusa, where the traditional performing arts of kabuki and geisha flourished

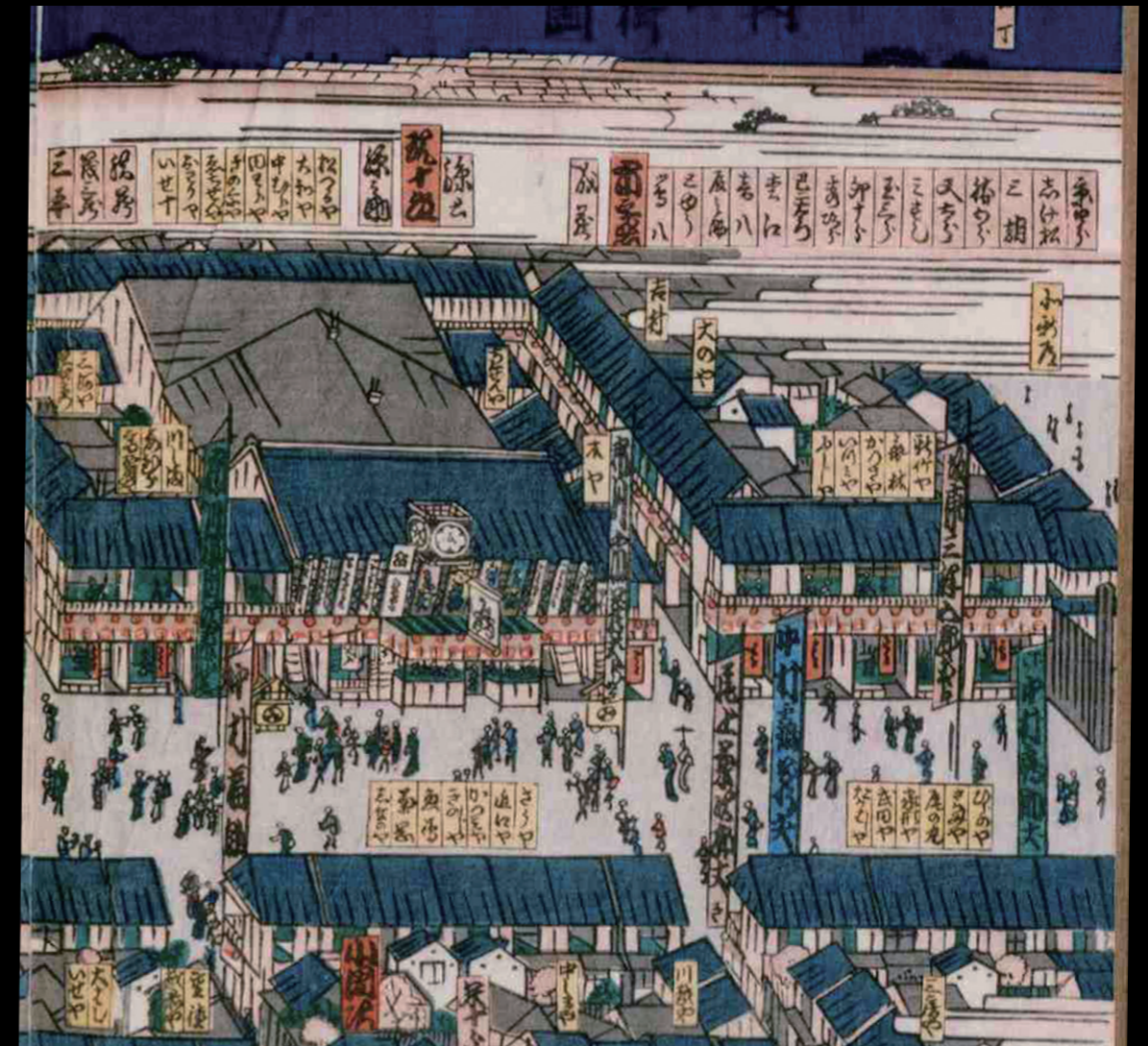
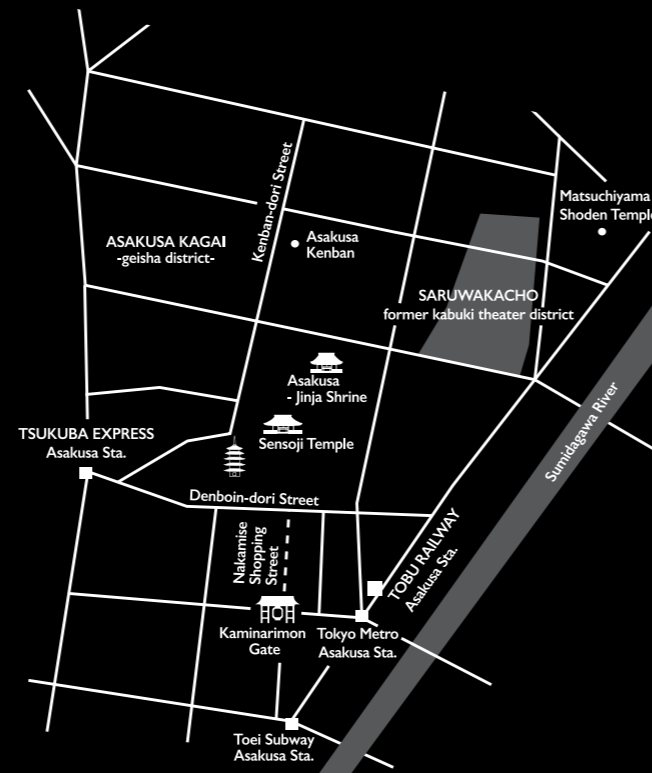


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The glorious years of kabuki and geisha in the entertainment district of Asakusa

Today Asakusa is a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors with the magnificent Sensoji, Tokyo's oldest temple, and the surrounding maze of small merchant streets exuding Edo era charm (1603-1868). While Asakusa developed as a temple town in its early days, and later as a trade center for a diverse group of artisans and merchants, the district's true heyday occurred during the Edo period. This was mainly due to the large concentration of venues devoted to the performing arts and resident artists. In the mid-19th century, many teahouses and actors' residences along with three of the most prominent kabuki theatres and two puppet theatres, were relocated to Asakusa, forming Saruwakacho, the largest performing arts district in Edo. Behind these relocation measures was the shogunate's desire to sequester the pleasure districts of the urban class from the central parts of the city, Asakusa being an outlying suburb of Edo. But the effect was precisely the opposite: this led to the birth of a new type of geisha entertainer originating from these theatrical teahouses who, together with geisha from the two other locations in the area, greatly boosted Asakusa's popularity, enhancing its reputation as a bustling center of urban culture. Today the theaters in the Saruwakacho quarters no longer exist, yet the remaining Asakusa Kagai geisha district, annual New Year kabuki performances, and numerous artisan workshops still serve to remind us of Asakusa's enduring greatness as Tokyo's most significant performing arts district.



Premium kabuki and geisha experiences to discover the renowned legacy of Asakusa's performing arts

In the footsteps of Asakusa's vibrant kabuki heritage

Although the former Saruwakacho kabuki district no longer exists, there are many vestiges of the glorious kabuki years to be found throughout Asakusa. Many are hidden around the corners of small back alleys, within shrine grounds and even behind Sensoji Temple itself. The best way to uncover the secrets of Asakusa's kabuki heritage is to follow a kabuki professional (either a current actor or a stagehand), who will guide visitors around the neighborhood's historical spots and introduce artisans who have a deep connection to the performing art. The highlight of this expedition is an introduction to the mysteries of kabuki stage makeup and basic performance styles. Visitors will even have the opportunity to apply the makeup and try their hand at performing themselves.



Exploring the Enchanting World of Asakusa Kagai's Geisha

Asakusa is currently one of the six remaining Kagai districts (geisha districts) in Tokyo. The art of entertaining guests through traditional Japanese dances and musical performances has its roots in the former pleasure districts around the country, but from as early as the 17th century a clear distinction was made between pleasure girls and sophisticated geisha entertainers. Today Asakusa Kagai is the only place in Japan to include not only female geisha, but also hokan (male entertainers). Their refined skills were historically nurtured by the performing musicians from the past theaters in Asakusa. The so-called "ozashiki" experience is a unique opportunity to admire the performances of Asakusa's geisha up close during a traditional dinner in a historical Japanese restaurant or a teahouse. For foreign visitors, private guidance is provided to facilitate communication with the geisha and navigate the etiquette of the Kagai district. To fully experience the art of geisha, it is highly recommended to interact and engage with them. Their mastery of the craft includes offering unparalleled hospitality through anticipating the guest's mood and preferences while performing traditional dances, playing musical instruments, serving drinks, and having engaging conversations, all within the intimate setting of a tatami room.



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