

NEXT STOP



35.000° N, 135.779° E

KYOTO



EIJI KITADA

Buying a traditional house in historic Kyoto is within reach for Australians looking for a restoration project. *By* **ELICIA MURRAY**

WHAT YOU CAN BUY FOR ...

\$2.435 million

A four-bedroom unit in a modern building. Has a balcony with knockout views of Kyoto.

\$1.761 million

A charmingly renovated guest house on nearly 200 square metres, near Daitokuji Temple.

\$713,000

A traditional two-storey timber house in Fushimi ward built in 1918 and renovated in 2018.

“Kyoto is old Japan writ large – atmospheric temples, sublime gardens, traditional teahouses and geisha scurrying to secret liaisons,” observes Lonely Planet. The former imperial capital is a white-hot favourite among international tourists and now its property market is offering foreigners a surprisingly affordable slice of history.

For decades, Japanese buyers have favoured newer homes built to withstand one of Kyoto’s less appealing characteristics: earthquakes. This has rendered many older buildings – including pre-war machiya, timber houses of merchants – vulnerable to demolition or ripe for renovation.

Australian architect Luke Hayward’s Osaka-based practice, atelier Luke, renovates traditional houses. “We always try to enhance and reveal existing heritage character and make any

additions clearly new, so the memory of the past is always clear,” Hayward says.

One of the studio’s recent projects, Ichijoji House (above), involved transforming a dilapidated 1960s house into an elegant contemporary residence for the owners, a Brisbane couple. The original layout was inverted, with living spaces put on the upper floor and sleeping areas on the ground.

Some previously hidden structural elements, such as roof beams, were exposed to dramatic effect and wallpaper and lacquered floorboards were hand-finished using traditional techniques.

Current market

Hayward says similar unrenovated homes could cost from about seven to 10 million yen, or up to

\$A123,000. Expect to pay from \$180,000 to \$300,000 for a comparable renovation.

Average land prices in Japan have risen for three consecutive years, according to government figures, while Japan’s economy has weakened. This is predicted to end before the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. Property prices have risen in Kyoto City, where surging apartment prices are pushing younger residents to surrounding districts.

Can Australians buy in?

There are no restrictions to foreign buyers. Would-be purchasers submit an application to the seller, which must be reviewed by a licensed real estate agent. If the offer is accepted, the deal is done via a solicitor, with stamp duty at 10 per cent of the purchase price. Some older buildings can be tricky to insure. 

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