[Template:Redirect](/wiki/Template:Redirect" \o "Template:Redirect) [thumb|Profile of geisha Kimiha from](/wiki/File:Geiko_Kimiha.jpg) [Miyagawacho](/wiki/Miyagawacho), wearing a formal black [kimono](/wiki/Kimono) ([tomesode](/wiki/Tomesode)) and a [Shimada](/wiki/Shimada_(hairstyle))-styled [nihongami](/wiki/Nihongami) wig. Her [obi](/wiki/Obi_(sash)) is tied in the "taiko" ([drum](/wiki/Taiko)) style. All these are details which clearly distinguish her from a [*maiko*](/wiki/Maiko) (an apprentice). [thumb|Geiko Tsunemomo of Gion Higashi](/wiki/File:Gion_Higashi_Tsunemomo.jpg)

[Template:Nihongo](/wiki/Template:Nihongo) (/ˈɡeɪʃə/; Japanese: [ɡeːɕa]), **Geiko**/**Geigi** ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)) are traditional Japanese female entertainers who act as hostesses and whose skills include performing various arts such as classical music, dance, games and conversation, mainly to entertain male customers.

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## Terms[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[thumb|right|Typical](/wiki/File:Geisha-kyoto-2004-11-21.jpg) [nape](/wiki/Nape) [make-up](/wiki/Make-up) on a *maiko* (Note the red collar) [thumb|*Maiko* Tomitsuyu playing the game "konpira fune fune" with a female patron](/wiki/File:Konpira_fune_fune.jpg) *Geisha* ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en); [Template:IPA-ja](/wiki/Template:IPA-ja)),[[1]](#cite_note-1) like all Japanese nouns, has no distinct singular or plural variants. The word consists of two [kanji](/wiki/Kanji), [Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2) (*gei*) meaning "[art](/wiki/Art)" and [Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2) (*sha*) meaning "person" or "doer". The most literal translation of geisha into English would be "artist", "performing artist", or "artisan." Another name for geisha is *geiko* ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)), which is usually used to refer to geisha from western Japan, which includes Kyoto.

Apprentice geisha are called [*maiko*](/wiki/Maiko) ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)), (literally "dance child") or *hangyoku* (半玉), "half-jewel" (meaning that they were paid half of the wage of a full geisha),[[2]](#cite_note-2) or by the more generic term *o-shaku* ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)), literally "one who pours (alcohol)". The white make-up and elaborate [kimono](/wiki/Kimono) and hair of a maiko is the popular image held of geisha. A woman entering the geisha community does not have to begin as a maiko, having the opportunity to begin her career as a full geisha. Either way, however, usually a year's training is involved before debuting either as a maiko or as a geisha. A woman above 21 is considered too old to be a maiko and becomes a full geisha upon her initiation into the geisha community.

On average, Tokyo apprentices (who typically begin at 18) are slightly older than their Kyoto counterparts (who usually start at 15).[[3]](#cite_note-3) Historically, geisha often began the earliest stages of their training at a very young age, sometimes as early as at 3 or 5 years. The early *shikomi* (in-training) and *minarai* (learns by watching) stages of geisha training lasted years, which is significantly longer than in contemporary times.

It is still said that geisha inhabit a separate reality which they call the *karyūkai* or "the flower and willow world." Before [they disappeared](/wiki/Oiran#History), the [courtesans](/wiki/Oiran) were the colourful "flowers" and the geisha the "[willows](/wiki/Willow#Culture)" because of their subtlety, strength, and grace.[[4]](#cite_note-4)

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

### Origins[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

In the early stages of Japanese history, there were female entertainers: *saburuko* (serving girls) were mostly wandering girls whose families were displaced from struggles in the late 600s. Some of these *saburuko* girls sold sexual services, while others with a better education made a living by entertaining at high-class social gatherings. After the imperial court moved the capital to [Heian-kyō](/wiki/Heian-kyō) (Kyoto) in [794](/wiki/Heian_period#History) the conditions that would form Japanese Geisha culture began to emerge, as it became the home of a [beauty-obsessed elite](/wiki/Heian_period#Beauty).[[5]](#cite_note-5) Skilled female performers, such as [Shirabyōshi](/wiki/Shirabyōshi) dancers, thrived.

Traditional Japan embraced sexual delights (it is not a [Shinto](/wiki/Shinto) taboo) and men were not constrained to be faithful to their wives.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) The ideal wife was a modest mother and manager of the home; by [Confucian custom](/wiki/Confucian_view_of_marriage) love had secondary importance. For sexual enjoyment and romantic attachment, men did not go to their wives, but to [courtesans](/wiki/Courtesan). Walled-in pleasure quarters known as [Template:Nihongo](/wiki/Template:Nihongo) were built in the 16th century,[[6]](#cite_note-6) and in 1617 the [shogunate](/wiki/Tokugawa_shogunate) designated "pleasure quarters", outside of which prostitution would be illegal,[[7]](#cite_note-7) and within which *"yūjo"* ("play women") would be [classified and licensed](/wiki/Prostitution_in_Japan#Shogunate_era). The highest *yūjo* class was the Geisha's predecessor, called "[*Tayuu*](/wiki/Tayuu)", a combination of [actress](/wiki/Actress) and prostitute, originally playing on stages set in the dry [Kamo](/wiki/Kamo_River) riverbed in Kyoto. They performed erotic dances and skits, and this new art was dubbed *kabuku,* meaning "to be wild and outrageous". The dances were called "kabuki," and this was the [beginning of kabuki theater](/wiki/Kabuki#1603.E2.80.931629:_Female_kabuki).[[7]](#cite_note-7)

### 18th-century emergence of the "geisha"[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[thumb|Ukiyoe depicting a Gion geisha, from between 1800 and 1833](/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_Beauty_-_Gion_Seitoku.jpg) [thumb|Ukiyoe print by Yamaguchi Soken of a Kyoto geisha](/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_A_Kyoto_Geisha_-_Yamaguchi_Soken.jpg) These pleasure quarters quickly became glamorous entertainment centers, offering more than sex. The highly accomplished courtesans of these districts entertained their clients by dancing, singing, and playing music. Some were renowned poets and [calligraphers](/wiki/Calligraphy). Gradually, they all became specialized and the new profession, purely of entertainment, arose. It was near the turn of the eighteenth century that the first entertainers of the pleasure quarters, called *geisha,* appeared. The first geishas were men, entertaining customers waiting to see the most popular and gifted courtesans ([*oiran*](/wiki/Oiran)).[[7]](#cite_note-7) The forerunners of the *female geisha* were the teenage *odoriko* ("dancing girls"):[[8]](#cite_note-8) expensively trained as chaste [dancers](/wiki/Dance)-for-hire. In the 1680s, they were popular paid entertainers in the private homes of upper-class samurai,[[9]](#cite_note-9) though many had turned to prostitution by the early 18th century. Those who were no longer teenagers (and could no longer style themselves *odoriko*[[10]](#cite_note-10)) adopted other names—one being "*geisha*", after the male entertainers. The first woman known to have called herself *geisha* was a [Fukagawa](/wiki/Fukagawa_(Tokyo)) prostitute, in about 1750.[[11]](#cite_note-11) She was a skilled singer and [shamisen](/wiki/Shamisen)-player named Kikuya who was an immediate success, making female geisha extremely popular in 1750s Fukagawa.[[12]](#cite_note-12) As they became more widespread throughout the 1760s and 1770s, many began working only as entertainers (rather than prostitutes) often in the same establishments as male geisha.[[13]](#cite_note-13)

### Rise of the geisha[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[thumb|Tokyo *geisha* with](/wiki/File:Tokyo_Geisha_with_Shamisen_c1870s,.jpg) [*shamisen*](/wiki/Shamisen), circa 1870s The geisha who worked within the pleasure quarters were essentially imprisoned and strictly forbidden to sell sex in order to protect the business of the [Oiran](/wiki/Oiran). While licensed courtesans existed to meet men's sexual needs, *machi geisha* carved out a separate niche as artists and erudite female companions.

By 1800, being a geisha was considered a female occupation (though there are still a handful of male geisha working today). Eventually, the gaudy Oiran began to fall out of fashion, becoming less popular than the chic ("[iki](/wiki/Iki_(aesthetic_ideal)#Interpretation)") and modern geisha.[[7]](#cite_note-7) By the 1830s, the evolving geisha style was emulated by fashionable women throughout society.[[14]](#cite_note-14) There were many different classifications and ranks of geisha. Some women would have sex with their male customers, whereas others would entertain strictly with their art forms.[[15]](#cite_note-15) Prostitution was legal up until the 1900s (decade), so it was practiced in many quarters throughout Japan.

[World War II](/wiki/World_War_II) brought a huge decline in the geisha arts because most women had to go to factories or other places to work for Japan. The geisha name also lost some status during this time because prostitutes began referring to themselves as "geisha girls" to American military men.[[16]](#cite_note-16) In 1944, the geisha world, including the teahouses, bars and geisha houses, was forced to close, and all employees were put to work in factories. About a year later, they were allowed to reopen. The few women who returned to the geisha areas decided to reject Western influence and revert to traditional ways of entertainment and life. "The image of the geisha was formed during Japan's feudal past, and this is now the image they must keep in order to remain geisha".[[16]](#cite_note-16) It was up to these returning geisha to bring back traditional standards in the profession, though with increased rights for the geisha: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

There were many rumors that stated before the war, a maiko's virginity would be auctioned (the original "[mizuage](/wiki/Mizuage)").[[17]](#cite_note-17)[[18]](#cite_note-18) but this was confused with the girls who were apprentices to yujo and courtesans. This practice was completely outlawed in 1959.[[19]](#cite_note-19) Compulsory education laws passed in the 1960s made traditional geisha apprenticeships difficult, leading to a decline in women entering the field.[[20]](#cite_note-20) In her book *Geisha, a Life*, [Mineko Iwasaki](/wiki/Mineko_Iwasaki) said: "I lived in the karyukai during the 1960s and 1970s, a time when Japan was undergoing the radical transformation from a post-feudal to a modern society. But I existed in a world apart, a special realm whose mission and identity depended on preserving the time-honored traditions of the past."[[21]](#cite_note-21)

## Ranking[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

At the pinnacle of the complex *geisha ranking system* are the [grand dowagers](/wiki/Dowager#Noun) of Kyoto. The *gokagai* of Kyoto are its five geisha districts,[[22]](#cite_note-22) also known as [*hanamachi*](/wiki/Hanamachi) ("flower towns"). [Gion Kōbu](/wiki/Gion), [Ponto-chō](/wiki/Ponto-chō) and [Kamishichiken](/wiki/Kamishichiken) have the highest status;[[23]](#cite_note-23) they are very expensive and are frequented by powerful businessmen and [politicians](/wiki/Politics_of_Japan#Human_factor)[[7]](#cite_note-7) (Gion Kobu is sometimes seen as having the very highest ranking). As reported by Dalby (1983) from her impressions in 1975[[24]](#cite_note-24) Geiko from the other two *hanamachi* (Gion Higashi and [Miyagawa-chō](/wiki/Miyagawa-chō)) have high prestige but are considered to be one rank lower.

## Stages of training[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[thumb|A *geiko*, *minarai* and *shikomi* from Odamoto](/wiki/File:Geisha,_maiko,_shikomi_in_Kyoto.jpg) Traditionally, Geisha began their training at a young age. Some girls were bonded to geisha houses ([*okiya*](/wiki/Okiya)) as children. Daughters of geisha were often brought up as geisha themselves, usually as the successor (atotori, meaning "heir" or "heiress" in this particular situation) or daughter-role (musume-bun) to the okiya.

A maiko is an apprentice and is therefore bonded under a contract to her okiya. The okiya supplies her with food, board, kimono, [obi](/wiki/Obi_(sash)), and other tools of her trade. Her training is very expensive and her debt must be repaid to the okiya with the earnings she makes. This repayment may continue after the maiko becomes a full-fledged geisha and only when her debts are settled is she permitted to move out to live and work independently.[[5]](#cite_note-5) A maiko will start her formal training on the job as a *minarai*, which literally means "learning by watching" at an ozashiki (お座敷, a banquet in any [traditional Japanese building](/wiki/Minka) with [tatami](/wiki/Tatami)), to sit and observe as the other maiko and geiko interact with customers. This is a way in which she will gain insights of the job, and seek out potential clients. Although minarai attend *ozashiki*, they do not participate at an advanced level. Their [kimono](/wiki/Kimono), more elaborate than a geiko's, are intended to do the talking for them. Minarai can be hired for parties but are usually uninvited (yet welcomed) guests at parties that their *onee-san* attends. They only charge a third of the usual fee. Minarai generally work with a particular tea house (*minarai-jaya*) learning from the *okaa-san* (literally "mother," the proprietress of the house). From her, they would learn techniques such as conversation and gaming, which would not be taught to them in school. This stage lasts only about a month or so.[[25]](#cite_note-25) [thumb|Two senior *maiko* performing a dance.](/wiki/File:Performing_Gion_Kouta.jpg) After a short period the final stage of training begins, and the students are now called "maiko", rather than minarai. Maiko (literally "dance girl") are apprentice geisha, and this stage can last for up to 5 years. Maiko learn from their senior maiko and geiko mentors. The *onee-san* and *imouto-san* (senior/junior, literally "older sister/younger sister") relationship is important. The *onee-san*, any maiko or geiko who is senior to a girl, teaches her maiko everything about working in the [hanamachi](/wiki/Hanamachi). The onee-san will teach her proper ways of serving tea, playing [shamisen](/wiki/Shamisen), dancing, casual conversation and more.

[thumb|left|Senior *maiko* Suzuha wearing *sakkou*, two weeks before her](/wiki/File:Geisha-obi.jpg) [*erikae*](/wiki/Erikae). There are three major elements of a maiko's training. The first is the formal arts training. This takes place in special geisha schools which are found in every *hanamachi*. The second element is the entertainment training which the maiko learns at various tea houses and parties by observing her *onee-san*. The third is the social skill of navigating the complex social web of the *hanamachi*. This is done on the streets. Formal greetings, gifts, and visits are key parts of any social structure in Japan and for a maiko, they are crucial for her to build the support network she needs to survive as a geisha.

Maiko are considered one of the great sights of Japanese tourism, and look very different from fully qualified geisha. They are at the peak of traditional Japanese femininity. The scarlet-fringed collar of a maiko's kimono hangs very loosely in the back to accentuate the nape of the neck, which is considered a primary erotic area in Japanese sexuality. She wears the same white makeup for her face on her nape, leaving two or sometimes three stripes of bare skin exposed. Her kimono is bright and colourful with an elaborately tied *obi* hanging down to her ankles. She takes very small steps and wears traditional wooden shoes called [*okobo*](/wiki/Okobo) which stand nearly ten centimeters high.[[5]](#cite_note-5) There are 5 different [hairstyles](/wiki/Hairstyle) that a maiko wears, that mark the different stages of her apprenticeship. The "[Nihongami](/wiki/Nihongami)" hairstyle with ["kanzashi"](/wiki/Hairstyling_tool#Kanzashi) hair-ornamentation strips is most closely associated with maiko,[[26]](#cite_note-26) who spend hours each week at the hairdresser and sleep on holed-pillows to preserve the elaborate styling.[[27]](#cite_note-27) Maiko can develop a [bald spot on their crown](/wiki/#Hair) caused by rubbing from Kanzashi strips and tugging in hairdressing.

Around the age of 20–21, the maiko is promoted to a full-fledged geisha in a ceremony called [*erikae*](/wiki/Erikae) (turning of the collar).[[17]](#cite_note-17)[[28]](#cite_note-28) This could happen after three to five years of her life as a *maiko* or *hangyoku*, depending on at what age she debuted. Geisha remain as such until they retire.

## Female dominance in geisha society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote) The term geisha literally translates to mean "entertainer". Some prostitutes refer to themselves as "geisha", but they are not. A geisha's sex and love life is usually distinct from her professional life. A successful geisha can entertain her male customers with music, dance, and conversation. [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

Geisha learn the traditional skills of dance and instruments and hold high [social status](/wiki/Social_status). Geisha are single women, though they may have lovers or boyfriends whom they have personally picked, who support them financially.

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

### Relationships with male guests[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[thumb|A geisha entertaining a foreign guest](/wiki/File:Geisha_Kyoto_Gion.jpg) The appeal of a high-ranking geisha to her typical male guest has historically been very different from that of his wife. The ideal geisha showed her skill, while the ideal wife was modest. The ideal geisha seemed carefree, the ideal wife somber and responsible. Historically, geisha did sometimes marry their clients, but marriage necessitated retirement, as there were never married geisha.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

Geisha may gracefully flirt with their guests, but they will always remain in control of the hospitality. Over their years of apprenticeship they learn to adapt to different situations and personalities, mastering the art of the hostess.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

### Geisha as a women-centered society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

Women in the geisha society are some of the most successful businesswomen in Japan. In the geisha society, women run everything. Without the impeccable business skills of the female tea house owners, the world of geisha would cease to exist. The tea house owners are entrepreneurs, whose service to the geisha is highly necessary for the society to run smoothly. Infrequently, men take contingent positions such as hair stylists,[[29]](#cite_note-29) dressers (dressing a maiko requires considerable strength) and accountants,[[16]](#cite_note-16) but men have a limited role in geisha society.

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

The majority of women were wives who did not work outside of their familial duties. Becoming a geisha was a way for women to support themselves without becoming a wife. Thus, some argue that geisha women live in a women-centered society.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) Women run the geisha houses, they are teachers, they run the tea houses, they recruit aspiring geisha, and they keep track of a geisha's finances.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) The only major role men play in geisha society is that of guest, though women sometimes take that role as well.[[29]](#cite_note-29) Historically, [Japanese feminists](/wiki/Feminism_in_Japan) have seen geisha as exploited women but some modern geisha see themselves as liberated feminists.[[30]](#cite_note-30) "We find our own way, without doing family responsibilities. Isn't that what feminists are?".[[16]](#cite_note-16)

## Modern geisha[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

Modern geisha still live in traditional geisha houses called *okiya* in areas called [*hanamachi*](/wiki/Hanamachi) ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2) "flower towns"), particularly during their apprenticeship. Many experienced geisha are successful enough to choose to live independently. The elegant, high-culture world that geisha are a part of is called *karyūkai* ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2) "the flower and willow world").

Before the twentieth century, geisha training began when a girl was around the age of four. Now, girls must go to school until they are 15 years old and have graduated from middle school and then make the personal decision to train to become a geisha. Young women who wish to become geisha now most often begin their training after high school or even college. Many more women begin their careers in adulthood.[[31]](#cite_note-31) Geisha still study traditional instruments: the [*shamisen*](/wiki/Shamisen), [*shakuhachi*](/wiki/Shakuhachi), and drums, as well as learning games,[[32]](#cite_note-32) traditional songs, [calligraphy](/wiki/Japanese_calligraphy#Today),[[33]](#cite_note-33) Japanese traditional dances (in the [nihonbuyō](/wiki/Nihonbuyō) style), [tea ceremony](/wiki/Japanese_tea_ceremony), literature, and [poetry](/wiki/Japanese_poetry).[[34]](#cite_note-34)[[35]](#cite_note-35) By watching other geisha, and with the assistance of the owner of the geisha house, apprentices also become skilled dealing with clients and in the complex traditions surrounding selecting and wearing [kimono](/wiki/Kimono), a floor length silk robe embroidered with intricate designs which is held together by a sash at the waist which is called an obi.[[36]](#cite_note-36)[[37]](#cite_note-37) Kyoto is considered by many to be where the geisha tradition is the strongest today. The geisha in these districts are known as *geiko*. The Tokyo *hanamachi* of Shimbashi, [Asakusa](/wiki/Asakusa#Sightseeing_and_historic_sites) and [Kagurazaka](/wiki/Kagurazaka) are also well known.

In modern Japan, geisha and maiko are now a rare sight outside *hanamachi*. In the 1920s, there were over 80,000 geisha in Japan,[[38]](#cite_note-38)[[39]](#cite_note-39) but today, there are far fewer. The exact number is unknown to outsiders and is estimated to be from 1,000 to 2,000, mostly in the resort town of [Atami](/wiki/Atami,_Shizuoka). Most common are sightings of tourists who pay a fee to be dressed up as a maiko.[[40]](#cite_note-40) A sluggish economy, declining interest in the traditional arts, the exclusive nature of the flower and willow world, and the expense of being entertained by geisha have all contributed to the tradition's decline.[[41]](#cite_note-41) However, the flower and willow world has seen a resurgence in new members over the last 10 years due to the accessibility that the internet has provided for young girls wanting to know more about the profession and not needing a formal introduction to an okiya.

[thumb|Entrance to](/wiki/File:Ichiriki_entrance.jpg) [Ichiriki Chaya](/wiki/Ichiriki_Chaya), one of the most famous tea houses where *geisha* entertain in Gion Geisha are often hired to attend parties and gatherings, traditionally at [Template:Nihongo](/wiki/Template:Nihongo) or at traditional Japanese restaurants (ryōtei).[[37]](#cite_note-37) The charge for a geisha's time used to be determined by ([measured by burning incense stick](/wiki/Incense_clock#Stick_incense_clocks)) is called *senkōdai* ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2), "incense stick fee") or gyokudai ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2) "jewel fee"). Now they are flat fees charged by the hour. In Kyoto, the terms *ohana* ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)) and *hanadai* ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)), meaning "flower fees", are preferred. The okasan makes arrangements through the geisha union office ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2) *kenban*), which keeps each geisha's schedule and makes her appointments both for entertaining and for training.

### Non-Japanese geisha[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

In recent times, non-Japanese women have also become geisha. [Liza Dalby](/wiki/Liza_Dalby) worked briefly with geisha as part of her doctorate research in the 1970s, although she did not formally debut.[[42]](#cite_note-42)[[43]](#cite_note-43) Other foreign nationals who have worked as geisha in Japan include Ibu, a geiko of Ukrainian ancestry working in Anjo,[[44]](#cite_note-44) Juri, a Peruvian geisha working in the resort town of Yugawara,[[45]](#cite_note-45) and Fukutarō (Isabella Onou), a Romanian national working in the Izu-Nagaoka district of Shizuoka.<ref name="japantimes">[Template:Cite news](/wiki/Template:Cite_news)</ref>[[46]](#cite_note-46) Australian national [Fiona Graham](/wiki/Fiona_Graham) formally debuted under the name Sayuki in the Asakusa district of Tokyo.<ref name="independent">[Template:Cite news](/wiki/Template:Cite_news)</ref><ref name="telegraph">[Template:Cite news](/wiki/Template:Cite_news)</ref> She has been reported to be the first Caucasian to become a full-fledged geisha.[[47]](#cite_note-47) [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), Sayuki works as a geisha in Japan and overseas, and has her own independent geisha house in Tokyo.<ref name="TheNational">[Template:Cite news](/wiki/Template:Cite_news)</ref> As of October 2015, Kimicho, an American, is in training in the Oimachi district of Shinagawa, Tokyo.[[48]](#cite_note-48) A 2016 article in the Japanese cultural magazine Metropolis mentions that only Juri and Sayuki are currently working as geisha. [[49]](#cite_note-49) The website for the Japanese immigration service states that it is illegal by law to work as a geisha without long-term residency, which can only be obtained by people who have been living in Japan for at least ten years.[[50]](#cite_note-50)

### Public performances[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

While traditionally geisha have led a cloistered existence, in recent years they have become more publicly visible, and entertainment is available without requiring the traditional introduction and connections.

The most visible form of this are public dances, or [*odori*](/wiki/Japanese_traditional_dance) (generally written in [traditional kana spelling](/wiki/Historical_kana_orthography) as をどり, rather than modern おどり), featuring both maiko and geisha. All the Kyoto hanamachi hold these annually (mostly in spring, with one exclusively in autumn), dating to the [Kyoto exhibition](/wiki/Kyoto_exhibition) of 1872,[[51]](#cite_note-51) and there are many performances, with tickets being inexpensive, ranging from around 1500 yen to 4500 yen – top-price tickets also include an optional [tea ceremony](/wiki/Japanese_tea_ceremony) (tea and [wagashi](/wiki/Wagashi) served by maiko) before the performance;[[52]](#cite_note-52) see [Kyoto hanamachi](/wiki/Hanamachi#Kyoto_hanamachi) for a detailed listing. Other hanamachi also hold public dances, including some in Tokyo, but have fewer performances.[[52]](#cite_note-52) [thumb|left|A *maiko* from the](/wiki/File:Maiko_serving_tea_at_Kitano_Tenmangū_2011-02-25.jpg) [Kamishichiken](/wiki/Kamishichiken) district serving tea at the plum blossom festival at [Kitano Tenman-gū](/wiki/Kitano_Tenman-gū). Another notable event is that the geisha (including maiko) of the [Kamishichiken](/wiki/Kamishichiken) district in northwest Kyoto serve tea to 3,000 guests on February 25 in an annual open-air tea ceremony (野点, *nodate*) at the plum-blossom festival (梅花祭, *baikasai*) at [Kitano Tenman-gū](/wiki/Kitano_Tenman-gū) shrine.[[53]](#cite_note-53)[[54]](#cite_note-54) [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), these geisha also serve beer in a [beer garden](/wiki/Beer_garden) at Kamishichiken Kaburenjo Theatre during summer months (July to early September);[[55]](#cite_note-55)[[56]](#cite_note-56)[[57]](#cite_note-57) another geisha beer garden is available at the Gion Shinmonso [ryokan](/wiki/Ryokan_(Japanese_inn)) in the Gion district.[[55]](#cite_note-55) These beer gardens also feature traditional dances by the geisha in the evenings.

## Arts[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[thumb|*Geisha* are skilled artists, trained in and performing music and dance.](/wiki/File:Dancing_geisha,_Gion,_Kyoto_-_August_30,_2007.jpg) [thumb|*Geisha* Komomo and Mameyoshi playing the *shamisen*](/wiki/File:Two_geishas_playing_shamisen.jpg) Geisha begin their study of music and dance when they are very young and continue it throughout their lives. Geisha can work into their eighties and nineties,[[58]](#cite_note-58) and are expected to train every day even after seventy years of experience.[[59]](#cite_note-59) The dance of the geisha has evolved from the dance performed on the noh and kabuki stages. The "wild and outrageous" dances transformed into a more subtle, stylized, and controlled form of dance. It is extremely disciplined, similar to [t'ai chi](/wiki/T'ai_chi_ch'uan). Every dance uses gestures to tell a story and only a connoisseur can understand the subdued symbolism. For example, a tiny hand gesture represents reading a love letter, holding the corner of a handkerchief in the mouth represents coquetry and the long sleeves of the elaborate kimono are often used to symbolize dabbing tears.[[7]](#cite_note-7) The dances are accompanied by traditional Japanese music. The primary instrument is the [shamisen](/wiki/Shamisen). The shamisen was introduced to the geisha culture in 1750 and has been mastered by female Japanese artists for years.<ref name=Maske>Maske, Andrew L. "Geisha Beyond the Painted Smile." Peabody:Peabody Essex Museum, 2004:104</ref> This shamisen, originating in Okinawa, is a banjo-like three-stringed instrument that is played with a [plectrum](/wiki/Plectrum#Non-Western_instruments). It has a very distinct, melancholy sound that is often accompanied by flute. The instrument is described as "melancholy" because traditional shamisen music uses only [minor thirds](/wiki/Minor_third) and sixths.<ref name=Maske/> All geisha must learn shamisen-playing, though it takes years to master. Along with the shamisen and the flute, geisha also learned to play a [*ko-tsuzumi*](/wiki/Tsuzumi), a small, [hourglass-shaped](/wiki/Hourglass_drum) shoulder drum, and a large floor [*taiko*](/wiki/Taiko) (drum). Some geisha would not only dance and play music, but would write beautiful, melancholy poems. Others painted pictures or composed music.[[7]](#cite_note-7)

## Geisha and prostitution[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

K.G. Marshall wrote that geisha's purpose was "to entertain their customer, be it by dancing, reciting verse, playing musical instruments, or engaging in light conversation. Geisha engagements may include flirting with men and playful [innuendos](/wiki/Innuendo); however, clients know that nothing more can be expected. In a social style that is common in Japan, men are amused by the illusion of that which is never to be."[[60]](#cite_note-60) Furthermore, Sheridan Prasso wrote that Americans had "an incorrect impression of the real geisha world, where geisha means "arts person" trained in music and dance, not in the art of sexual pleasure."[[61]](#cite_note-61) In 1872, shortly after the [Meiji Restoration](/wiki/Meiji_Restoration), the new government passed a law liberating "prostitutes (shōgi) and geisha (geigi)". The wording of this statute was the subject of controversy. Some officials thought that prostitutes and geisha worked at different ends of the same profession—selling sex— and that all prostitutes should henceforth be called "geisha". In the end, the government decided to maintain a line between the two groups, arguing that geisha were more refined and should not be soiled by association with prostitutes.[[62]](#cite_note-62) Also, geisha working in [*onsen*](/wiki/Onsen) towns such as [Atami](/wiki/Atami) are dubbed [onsen geisha](/wiki/Onsen_geisha). Onsen geisha have been given a bad reputation due to the prevalence of prostitutes in such towns who market themselves as "geisha", as well as sordid rumors of dance routines like Shallow River (which involves the "dancers" lifting the skirts of their [kimono](/wiki/Kimono) higher and higher). In contrast to these "one-night geisha", the true onsen geisha are in fact competent dancers and musicians. However, the [autobiography of Sayo Masuda](/wiki/Autobiography_of_a_Geisha), an onsen geisha who worked in Nagano Prefecture in the 1930s, reveals that in the past, such women were often under intense pressure to sell sex.[[2]](#cite_note-2)

### Personal relationships and danna[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

Geisha are expected to be single women; those who choose to marry must retire from the profession. It was traditional in the past for established geisha to take a *danna*, or patron. A *danna* was typically a wealthy man, sometimes married, who had the means to support the very large expenses related to a geisha's traditional training and other costs. This sometimes occurs today as well, but very rarely. A geisha and her danna may or may not be in love, but intimacy is never viewed as a reward for the danna's financial support. While it is true that a geisha is free to pursue personal relationships with men she meets through her work, such relationships are carefully chosen and unlikely to be casual. A hanamachi tends to be a very tight-knit community and a geisha's good reputation is not taken lightly.

### "Geisha girls"[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

"Geisha girls" were Japanese women who worked as prostitutes (not entertainers) during the period of [the Allied Occupation of Japan](/wiki/Occupied_Japan). They almost exclusively serviced [American GIs](/wiki/Military_of_the_United_States) stationed in the country, who referred to them as "Geesha girls" (a mispronunciation).[[63]](#cite_note-63)[[64]](#cite_note-64) These women dressed in *kimono* and imitated the look of geisha. Many Americans unfamiliar with the Japanese culture could not tell the difference between legitimate geisha and these costumed performers.[[63]](#cite_note-63) Shortly after their arrival in 1945, some occupying American GIs are said to have congregated in [Ginza](/wiki/Ginza) and shouted, "We want geesha girls!"[[65]](#cite_note-65) Eventually, the term "geisha girl" became a general word for any female Japanese prostitute or worker in the [mizu shōbai](/wiki/Mizu_shōbai) and included [bar hostesses](/wiki/Hostess_bar) and [streetwalkers](/wiki/Streetwalker).[[63]](#cite_note-63) Geisha girls are speculated by [researchers](/wiki/Japanology) to be largely responsible for the continuing misconception in the West that all geisha are engaged in prostitution.[[63]](#cite_note-63)

### Mizuage[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) **Mizuage** ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)) was a ceremony frequently undergone by courtesans and prostitutes where a man paid money for the privilege of having sex with the apprentice. Prostitutes posing as geisha often used this term to refer to their acts with customers. Such prostitutes often called themselves "geisha" in the company of foreign soldiers and even Japanese customers, thus leading to the confusion between the roles of the two.[[66]](#cite_note-66) Mizuage literally means "raising the waters" and originally meant unloading a ship's cargo of fish.[[67]](#cite_note-67) Over time, the word came to represent money earned in the entertainment business.[[5]](#cite_note-5) During the [Edo period](/wiki/Edo_period), courtesans undergoing mizuage were sponsored by a patron who had the right of taking their [virginity](/wiki/Virginity).[[68]](#cite_note-68) This practice became illegal in 1959.[[28]](#cite_note-28) Once the mizuage patron's function was served (of deflowering the young courtesan) he was to have no further relations with the girl.[[69]](#cite_note-69) The money acquired for an apprentice's mizuage was a great sum and it was used to promote her debut as a full-fledged courtesan.[[70]](#cite_note-70) The ceremonial deflowering of the young girl was not only a commercial transaction, but was a [rite of passage](/wiki/Rite_of_passage):[[5]](#cite_note-5) The idea that maiko underwent mizuage can be attributed to both confusion between true geisha and courtesan, as well as the idea that a fully fledged geisha is a sophisticated "professional woman" expected to have worldly knowledge of the opposite sex.[[67]](#cite_note-67)

## Appearance[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[thumb|Mature *geisha* (center) ordinarily wear subdued clothing, makeup, and hair, contrasting with the more colourful clothing, heavy makeup, and elaborate hair of maiko (apprentices; left and right).](/wiki/File:Geisha-and-two-maiko.jpg) [thumb|The *maiko* Mamechiho in the Gion district. Notice the green pin on the mid-left called *tsunagi-dango*: this identifies her as a maiko of Gion kobu.](/wiki/File:Maiko_in_Gion.jpg) A geisha's appearance changes throughout her career, from the girlish, heavily made-up maiko, to the more somber appearance of an older established geisha. Different hairstyles and hairpins signify different stages of a girl's development and even a detail as minute as the length of one's eyebrows is significant. Short eyebrows are for the young and long eyebrows display maturity.<ref name=Prasso>Prasso, Sheridan. "The Asian Mystique." New York: Public Affairs, 2005:206</ref>

### Makeup[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

In modern times the traditional [makeup](/wiki/Makeup) of apprentice geisha is one of their most recognizable characteristics, though established geisha generally only wear full white face makeup characteristic of maiko during special performances.

The traditional makeup of an apprentice geisha features a thick white base with red [lipstick](/wiki/Lipstick) and red and black accents around the eyes and eyebrows. Originally, the white base mask was made with lead; after the discovery that it poisoned the skin and caused terrible skin and back problems for the older geisha towards the end of the [Meiji Era](/wiki/Meiji_period), it was replaced with rice powder.

The application of makeup is hard to perfect and is time-consuming. Makeup is applied before dressing to avoid dirtying the kimono. First, a wax or oil substance called *bintsuke-abura* is applied to the skin. Next, white powder is mixed with water into a paste and applied with a bamboo brush starting from the neck and working upwards. The white makeup covers the face, neck, and chest, with two or three unwhitened areas (forming a *W* or *V* shape, usually a traditional *W* shape) left on the [nape](/wiki/Nape), to accentuate this traditionally erotic area, and a line of bare skin around the hairline, which creates the illusion of a mask.

After the foundation layer is applied, a sponge is patted all over the face, throat, chest, the nape and neck to remove excess moisture and to blend the foundation. Next the eyes and eyebrows are drawn in. Traditionally, charcoal was used, but today, modern cosmetics are used. The eyebrows and edges of the eyes are coloured black with a thin charcoal; a maiko also applies red around her eyes.

The lips are filled in using a small brush. The colour comes in a small stick, which is melted in water. Crystallized sugar is then added to give the lips luster. Rarely will a geisha colour in both lips fully in the Western style, as white creates optical illusions and colouring the lips fully would make them appear overly large. The lower lip is coloured in partially and the upper lip left white for maiko in her first year, after which the upper lip is coloured. Newly full-fledged geisha will colour in only the top lip fully. Most geisha wear the top lip coloured in fully or stylized, and the bottom lip in a curved stripe that does not follow the shape of the lip. Geisha round the bottom lips to create the illusion of a flower bud.

Maiko who are in their last stage of training sometimes [colour their teeth black](/wiki/Ohaguro) for a brief period. This practice used to be common among married women in Japan and, earlier, at the imperial court, but survives only in some districts. It is done partly because uncoloured teeth seem very yellow in contrast to white face makeup; colouring the teeth black means that they seem to "disappear" in the darkness of the open mouth. This illusion is of course more pronounced at a distance.

For the first year, a maiko wears this heavy makeup almost constantly. During her initiation, the maiko is helped with her makeup either by her *onee-san*, or "older sister" (an experienced geisha who is her mentor), or by the *okaa-san*, or "mother" of her geisha house. After this, she applies the makeup herself.

After a maiko has been working for three years, she changes her make-up to a more subdued style. The reason for this is that she has now become mature, and the simpler style shows her own natural beauty. For formal occasions, the mature geisha will still apply white make-up. For geisha over thirty, the heavy white make-up is only worn during those special dances that require it. [Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further)

### Dress[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[thumb|A senior *maiko* (left) with *darari obi* and *geisha* with *taiko-musubi*](/wiki/File:Maiko_and_geisha_back.jpg) [thumb|Niigata *geisha* performing dance, dressed in *kimono* and *taiko musubi*](/wiki/File:Niigata_geisha_dancing2.jpg) Geisha always wear [kimono](/wiki/Kimono). Apprentice geisha wear highly colourful kimono with extravagant [obi](/wiki/Obi_(sash)). The obi is brighter than the kimono she is wearing to give a certain exotic balance. Maiko of Kyoto wear the obi tied in a style called "darari" (dangling obi), while Tokyo "hangyoku" wear it tied in various ways, including taiko musubi. Older geisha of Kyoto wear more subdued patterns and styles (most notably the obi tied in a simpler knot used by married women known as the "taiko musubi" ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2)), or "drum knot"). Tokyo and Kanazawa geisha wear [Template:Nihongo](/wiki/Template:Nihongo), taiko musubi and [Template:Nihongo](/wiki/Template:Nihongo).

The colour, pattern, and style of *kimono* is dependent on the season and the event the geisha is attending. A *kimono* can take from two to three years to complete, due to painting and embroidering.

Geiko wear red or pink *nagajuban*, or under-kimono. A maiko wears red with white printed patterns. The junior maiko's collar is predominantly red with white, silver, or gold embroidery. Two to three years into her apprenticeship, the red collar will be entirely embroidered in white (when viewed from the front) to show her seniority. When she becomes a fully fledged geisha her collar will turn from red to solid white.

Geisha wear raised wooden sandals, called [*geta*](/wiki/Geta_(footwear)) while maiko wear a special wooden sandal known as [*okobo*](/wiki/Okobo) and wear only [*tabi*](/wiki/Tabi) (white split-toed socks) indoors. Geisha and apprentices wear the flat-soled sandal [*zōri*](/wiki/Zōri) outdoors during inclement weather.

### Hair[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[thumb|Mamechiho as a *geiko*.](/wiki/File:Geiko_-_Tea_ceremony.jpg) The hairstyles of geisha have varied through history. In the past, it has been common for women to wear their hair down in some periods and up in others. During the 17th century, women began putting all their hair up again, and it is during this time that the traditional [shimada hairstyle](/wiki/Shimada_(hairstyle)), a type [chignon](/wiki/Chignon_(hairstyle)) worn by most established geisha, developed.

There are four major types of the shimada: the *taka shimada*, a high chignon usually worn by young, single women; the *tsubushi shimada*, a more flattened chignon generally worn by older women; the *yuiwata*, a chignon that is usually bound up with a piece of coloured cotton [crepe](/wiki/Crape). Additional hairstyles are Ofuku, Katsuyama, Yakko-shimada, and [Sakko](/wiki/Sakko). Maiko of Pontochō will wear an additional six hairstyles leading up to the Sakko, including Umemodoki, Oshidori no Hina, Kikugasane, and Osafune.

These hairstyles are decorated with elaborate hair-combs and hairpins ([kanzashi](/wiki/Kanzashi)). In the seventeenth century and after the [Meiji Restoration](/wiki/Meiji_Restoration) period, hair-combs were large and conspicuous, generally more ornate for higher-class women. Following the Meiji Restoration and into the modern era, smaller and less conspicuous hair-combs became more popular.

Maiko sleep with their necks on small supports (takamakura), instead of pillows, so they keep their hairstyle perfect.[[29]](#cite_note-29) To reinforce this habit, their mentors would pour rice around the base of the support. If the maiko's head rolled off the support while she slept, rice would stick to the pomade in her hair. Even if there are no accidents, a maiko will need her hair styled every week. Many modern geisha use [wigs](/wiki/Wig) in their professional lives, while maiko use their natural hair.[[71]](#cite_note-71) Either must be regularly tended by highly skilled artisans. Traditional hairstyling is a slowly dying art. Over time, the hairstyle can cause balding on the top of the head.

### In popular culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

### In books[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
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### In geisha photography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

* Ogino, Naoyuki (2007). *A Girl Inherited Maiko (Apprentice Geisha) Life*. Japan: Canon Gallery.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* Perkins, P.D. (text) & Haar, Francis (photographs) (1954). *Geisha of Pontocho*. Tokyo News Service.

### In film[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

* [*Sisters of the Gion*](/wiki/Sisters_of_the_Gion) (1936)—Dir. [Kenji Mizoguchi](/wiki/Kenji_Mizoguchi)
* [*The Life of Oharu*](/wiki/The_Life_of_Oharu) ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2) *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*) (1952)—Dir. [Kenji Mizoguchi](/wiki/Kenji_Mizoguchi)
* [*A Geisha*](/wiki/A_Geisha) ([Template:Nihongo2](/wiki/Template:Nihongo2), *Gion bayashi*) (1953)—Dir. [Kenji Mizoguchi](/wiki/Kenji_Mizoguchi)
* [*The Teahouse of the August Moon*](/wiki/The_Teahouse_of_the_August_Moon_(film)) (1956)—Dir. [Daniel Mann](/wiki/Daniel_Mann)
* [*The Barbarian and the Geisha*](/wiki/The_Barbarian_and_the_Geisha) (1958)—Dir. [John Huston](/wiki/John_Huston)
* [*The Geisha Boy*](/wiki/The_Geisha_Boy) (1958)—Dir. [Frank Tashlin](/wiki/Frank_Tashlin)
* [*Late Chrysanthemums*](/wiki/Late_Chrysanthemums) (Bangiku) (1958)—Dir. [Mikio Naruse](/wiki/Mikio_Naruse)
* [*Cry for Happy*](/wiki/Cry_for_Happy) (1961)—George Marshall comedy
* [*My Geisha*](/wiki/My_Geisha) (1962)—Dir. [Jack Cardiff](/wiki/Jack_Cardiff)
* [*The Wolves*](/wiki/The_Wolves_(film)) (1971)—Dir. [Hideo Gosha](/wiki/Hideo_Gosha)
* [*The World of Geisha*](/wiki/The_World_of_Geisha) (1973)—Dir. [Tatsumi Kumashiro](/wiki/Tatsumi_Kumashiro)
* [*In the Realm of the Senses*](/wiki/In_the_Realm_of_the_Senses) (1976)—Dir. [Nagisa Oshima](/wiki/Nagisa_Oshima)
* [*Ihara Saikaku Koshoku Ichidai Otoko*](/wiki/Ihara_Saikaku_Koshoku_Ichidai_Otoko) (1991)—Dir. [Yukio Abe](/wiki/Yukio_Abe)
* [*The Geisha House*](/wiki/The_Geisha_House) (1999)—Dir. [Kinji Fukasaku](/wiki/Kinji_Fukasaku)
* [*The Sea is Watching*](/wiki/The_Sea_is_Watching) (2002)—Dir. [Kei Kumai](/wiki/Kei_Kumai)
* [*Zatoichi*](/wiki/Zatoichi) (2003)—Dir. [Takeshi Kitano](/wiki/Takeshi_Kitano)
* [*Fighter in the Wind*](/wiki/Fighter_in_the_Wind) (2004)—Dir. [Yang Yun-ho](/wiki/Yang_Yun-ho)
* [*Memoirs of a Geisha*](/wiki/Memoirs_of_a_Geisha_(film)) (2005)—Dir. [Rob Marshall](/wiki/Rob_Marshall)
* [*Wakeful Nights*](/wiki/Wakeful_Nights) (2005)—Dir. [Masahiko Tsugawa](/wiki/Masahiko_Tsugawa)
* [*Maiko Haaaan!!!*](/wiki/Maiko_Haaaan!!!) (2007)—Dir. [Nobuo Mizuta](/wiki/Nobuo_Mizuta)
* [*Lady Maiko*](/wiki/Lady_Maiko) (2014)—Dir. [Masayuki Suo](/wiki/Masayuki_Suo)

### In music[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

* "Geisha Girl" on *Foreign Love*—[Hank Locklin](/wiki/Hank_Locklin) (#4 in US Country in 1957)
* "Lost to a Geisha Girl" on *Blueberry Hill*—[Skeeter Davis](/wiki/Skeeter_Davis) (#15 in US Country in 1958, answer to the previous)

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

* [*Ca trù*](/wiki/Ca_trù), a similar profession in Vietnam
* [*Hanayo*](/wiki/Hanayo)
* [*Kanhopatra*](/wiki/Kanhopatra)
* [*Kisaeng*](/wiki/Kisaeng), a similar profession in Korea
* [*Taikomochi*](/wiki/Taikomochi)
* [*Yiji*](/wiki/Yiji), a similar profession in China

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[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

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