

# Café and Coffee Shop Tours in Kyoto #1

At coffee shops and cafés, we can take refuge and relax in a homelike atmosphere. This series of articles explores places in Kyoto where we can enjoy a nice cup of coffee or tea, local snacks, or light meals. The first spot we recommend is “Shinshindo Kyodai Kitamon-mae,” the oldest café in Kyoto City.

\* Prices in this article include taxes.



Curry bread set, the signature item of the café (1,000 yen)

The shop is located in an elegantly antique building, as befits the oldest café in Kyoto. Step inside, and you will find the interior decorated with gargoyles, a wooden relief carving, and other expressions of Western culture, quietly claiming their place in that particular setting. The relief features a poem by Wordsworth, a favorite of Hitoshi Tsuzuki, the shop’s founder, who was a Christian and a poet himself. Akira Kawaguchi, his great-grandson and the fourth-generation owner of the café, interprets the poem, stating that the author aims to preserve



Wood relief carving with the poem “The Rainbow” by the English poet William Wordsworth and a plaque saying “Calm Contemplation” by Makoto Nagao, 23rd President of Kyoto University.

the childhood thrill of seeing a rainbow even after growing old.

Hitoshi founded “Shinshindo” bakery in 1913 after learning how to bake bread in Paris. Inspired by cafés in the student district in Paris, he opened a café next to the Kyoto University Faculty of Agriculture in 1930, called “Shinshindo Kyodai Kitamon-mae (literally “in front of Kyoto University’s North Gate”)" (now operated independently). The chic, Westernized design and concept amazed people at the time.

Akira is not only the fourth-generation successor as owner of the shop but also embodies the founder’s spirit. “That’s why I try to maintain the founding context. Extra care is necessary, since the original building materials, such as bricks and mortar, are hard to find,” he says. As the shop’s long-held nickname, “Kyoto University Library No. Two,” suggests, the founder’s spirit of rooting for Japan’s future standard-bearers abides, and breathes throughout the café. “Students don’t change. They study, read books, and so on. It’s only that notebooks and pencils have become computers. That’s all,” he adds.

Long tables (which seat twelve each) and chairs made by Tatsuaki Kuroda, a woodworker, who has been designated as a Living National Treasure of Japan, furnish the café. Two out of eight are offered as a student study zone (1:00 to 6:00 p.m.), while a terrace at the back creates an open atmosphere. There are customers of all stripes, including neighbors and tourists. Those who visit after a long time are happy to see the good,

old café unchanged.

One day, some French tourists visited and were impressed to learn that the shop was a family business. According to them, the number of family-operated shops is decreasing even in France, the country that inspired Hitoshi Tsuzuki to found this café.

As for the menu, students enjoy privileges including a discount service and exclusive items, while the general customer can also enjoy a delightful cup of coffee for 500 yen. The coffee features a unique blend of light and dark roasted beans with a vivid sourness. Customers can order their cups of coffee to be served with creamer added by a barista (instead of themselves), which can prevent their enthusiastic discussions from letting their coffees cool before creamer is added. Iced coffee (600 yen) and soft drinks are also available.

The most highly recommended morning item is a buttered toast and mini salad set (750 yen), while the lunch menu is available until evening. One of the popular items is the curry bread set (1,000 yen), which consists of a hot curry dip and bread (instead of curry-filled bread), accompanied by a mini salad and either coffee or orange juice. For larger-volume eaters, a curry-and-rice version has recently been added (900 yen). The curry roux is made with famous Awaji Island brand onions and Mochi-butu (soft, juicy pork) prepared by Meat Shop Murase, located in Demachi, Kyoto. The rice served for the set is also produced in Japan.

Time seems to pass slowly inside the café, where men and women, young and old, are absorbed in relaxing comfort. Akira says, “The shop should stay unchanged, but the menu has to be updated regularly.” The café’s centennial is just a few years away.



## Shinshindo Kyodai Kitamon-mae

88 Kitashirakawa Oiwakecho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto City  
TEL: 075-701-4121

- Open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (last order 5:30 p.m.)
- Closed on Tuesdays
- Approx. 5 minutes’ walk from Hyakumanben or Kyodai Nogakubu-mae bus stop, Kyoto City Bus
- Approx. 9 minutes’ walk from Mototanaka Station, Eizan Main Line, Eizan Railway
- Approx. 13 minutes’ walk from Demachiyonagi Station, Keihan Main Line, Keihan Railway

