

Cherish Beauty and Meaningful Traditions through Machiya Life

An interview with Tondaya's Ms. Tanaka

The Nishijin area, which used to be and continues to prosper as a textile production area, is one of the districts where you can truly experience Kyoto-style living. Here, many old machiya are still in use and the pace of life is slow and simple. Tondaya is a spectacular example of machiya living . . .

Tondaya originally operated a money exchanging business in Fushimi (in southern Kyoto). They built a warehouse in the Nishijin area in the Meiji period (1868-1912). That property has been preserved for over 100 years and is now registered as a national important cultural property. Today, the 13th generation female master, Ms. Mineko Tanaka, operates Tondaya as a cultural

facility to inform people all over the world about the beauty of traditional Kyoto life.

"When Tondaya was designated a national important cultural property we decided to open it to the public as a museum which we called the Nishijin Lifestyle Museum. In Kyoto or even in Nishijin there are very few families that have maintained traditional Japanese customs and ways of life.

I particularly love the Japanese sense of seasonal beauty. For example, the Setsubun ritual in February (see pg 1 for details about the ritual). Many families continue to celebrate Setsubun according to traditional customs. Unfortunately, many people have forgotten the deeper origins and meanings of these rituals or celebrations. Nishijin families hang a special amulet over the front door on the day of Setsubun. The amulet is

a sardine head attached to the branch of a holly tree (hiiragi). Few people who do this know why . . . In the old days, people grilled sardines on their charcoal brazier at home. They believed that the smoke and strong fish smell kept evil away. And the prickly leaves of the holly are also said to keep bad things away . . .

We have four beautiful seasons in Japan but in reality there is a different season every two weeks or so. Living in a machiya townhouse means to live with all the deities of life all around you. In traditional times these included the deity of fire at the kitchen hearth and the deity of water by the well. Fire and water were part of our daily life.

My dream is to introduce as many people as possible to the old world and ways of Japan here at Tondaya. Let's cherish beauty and meaningful traditions together."

Tondaya offers unique Japanese experiences to visitors. **Recommended set plan:** a machiya tour with an English guide, kimono dressing, tea ceremony, and a traditional Japanese lunch (¥10,500; ¥7,350 without lunch) and a machiya tour with tea ceremony (¥3,150). For reservations and enquiries, contact Tondaya: Tel: 432-6701; open: 10:00-17:00, closed Mon.; www.tondaya.co.jp; **also see their ad on pg 23.**

