

## Kyoto geisha

Kyoto Geisha (or geiko) girls are trained vigorously in music, art and dancing. If you translate the word 'Geisha' into English, it means artist. It is a great honor to become a geiko and it takes years of practise. If a girl begins her training as a geisha before she is 21, she would be called maiko (child dancer) however, it is not necessary to be a maiko to become a geiko. Nevertheless, she would enjoy much more prestige. There are many ways that you can become a geisha. Some girls are sold to the okiya (geisha house), however, this is very uncommon. It is more likely that you would be that daughter of a geisha or volunteered yourself.



The first stage of training is called shikomi and the girl would have to work as a maid to the more senior geishas. They would have to help to dress and undress them as well as waiting on them at times as late (or early) as 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. During this time, the girls would also have to attend a hanamachi geisha school. There, they would learn what they are and aren't allowed to do as well as music, art, dancing, tradition and how to dress. After that, they would take an exam before moving onto the second stage, minari. This is the stage where their maid duties are dropped and they are given their specially designed kimonos that are meant to represent their personality as well as the current season. The minari will then team up with an onee-san (older sister) and will shadow her to learn exactly how to do everything she will learn about the perfect conversation and how to pour tea properly. After the next tests, she will be promoted to maiko and once the onee-san feels comfortable, she may now participate and help out with the older sister's duties. The onee-san teaches the maiko how to be a true geisha, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, playing the shamisan (a three string instrument), dancing and conversation. She will help her pick a new professional name. She will perfect her way of doing her hair and makeup. They must use a special pillow because the hairstyle takes hours to do and is re-made once a week. Kyoto geisha must be constantly polite and demure. Now the onee-san feels that she is ready, the maiko will become a geiko- a fully-fledged geisha and will charge full price.

There is a difference between prostitutes and geisha, despite the fact that some prostitutes call themselves geisha to bring in more customers. Both would wear kimonos but the obi (sash) would be tied in contrasting places. Prostitutes would need to tie and untie their sash themselves, therefore they tie it at the front but geisha tie it at the back. Another huge difference is that real geisha WILL NOT engage in paid sexual activity.

Emma Troman



