

Hidden Retreat of Tokyo Geisha District  
**Mukojima Kagai**



Sharing Knowledge & Passing on Hospitality for Generations to Come

Price Free

Mukojima Kagai  
**MAP** narrow area

You can come to Mukojima by train, car, or boat.  
 We look forward to your visit.

- Shuto Expressway No. 6 Mukojima Route "Mukojima Exit IC"
- Tokyo Metro Hanzomon Line "Oshiage (SKYTREE) Sta." Exit A3  
 Tokyo Metro Ginza Line,  
 Toei Subway Asakusa Line,  
 TOBU SKYTREE Line "Asakusa Sta."
- Tokyo Mizube Cruising Line "Sumida Kuyakusyomae"



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|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Ryotei</b><br>Irifune<br>5-28-5 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3622-6233  | <b>Ryotei</b><br>Kiyoshi<br>5-35-3 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3622-0224 | <b>Ryotei</b><br>Sakurachaya<br>5-24-10 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3622-2800 | <b>Ryotei</b><br>Sumida<br>2-15-13 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3622-5234 | <b>Ryotei</b><br>Sensui<br>2-9-3 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-5819-0334                       | <b>Ryotei</b><br>Chiyoda<br>5-20-13 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3622-1755  |
| <b>Stores</b><br>Tsukibue<br>5-29-9 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3621-4404 | <b>Stores</b><br>Dojoji<br>5-32-1 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3621-1243  | <b>Stores</b><br>Namimura<br>2-15-8 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3626-1641     | <b>Stores</b><br>Futaba<br>5-24-13 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3624-7010 | <b>Stores</b><br>Momofuku<br>5-29-4 Mukojima, Sumida-ku                                    | <b>Stores</b><br>Sakinoya<br>2-11-12 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-6324-0734 |
| <b>Kenban</b><br>Aya<br>5-27-10 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3626-3757     | <b>Kenban</b><br>Kintaro<br>5-34-9 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3625-1812 | <b>Kenban</b><br>Kanamura<br>2-9-13 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-6456-1629     | <b>Kenban</b><br>Mizunoe<br>5-20-6 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3626-3335 | <b>Kenban</b><br>Mukojima Bokutei Association<br>2-9-9 Mukojima, Sumida-ku<br>03-3623-6368 |  |

**Inquiries**  
 For more information about tours, please contact Visit Sumida Tourism Association (tour@visit-sumida.jp).  
 For other inquiries, please contact Mukojima Bokutei Association (mukojima.kenban@gmail.com).  
 The booklet is available in English, Chinese (traditional and simplified characters), and Korean.  
 If you wish to download the data version, please use the QR code on the right to visit our website.



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Price Free

# The Geisha World You Never Knew

It's a world of secrecy, where geisha showcase their arts such as singing, dancing, and playing shamisen, and occupy the banquet rooms, creating an extraordinary realm for enjoying cuisine and drinks.



## What is a Kagai?

The place where geisha engage in their activities is referred to as a "Kagai." The reading of the kanji varies by region, but it is often read as "Hanamachi" or "Kagai." The term is said to originate from the Chinese phrase "花街柳巷" (Kagai ryuko) which symbolizes a town with charming women resembling the beauty of red flowers and green willows. The Kagai serves as a commercial hub where various industries gather around the presence of geisha. It becomes a bustling area where artisans gather to meet the needs of people flowing into the city, giving rise to entertainment, and shaping local customs, aesthetics, and performing arts specific to each region.



**Ryotei**

A restaurant that serves Japanese food, especially kaiseki cuisine, and is permitted to invite geisha to the Ozashiki. Ozashiki refers to a banquet to which geisha are invited.



**Okiya**

These geisha houses hold the responsibility of educating the geisha community. The Okami (landlady), while living and dining with the geisha and apprentice geisha, provides comprehensive education in various aspects of life. The name is derived from the fact that it is the house where geisha display their signboard.



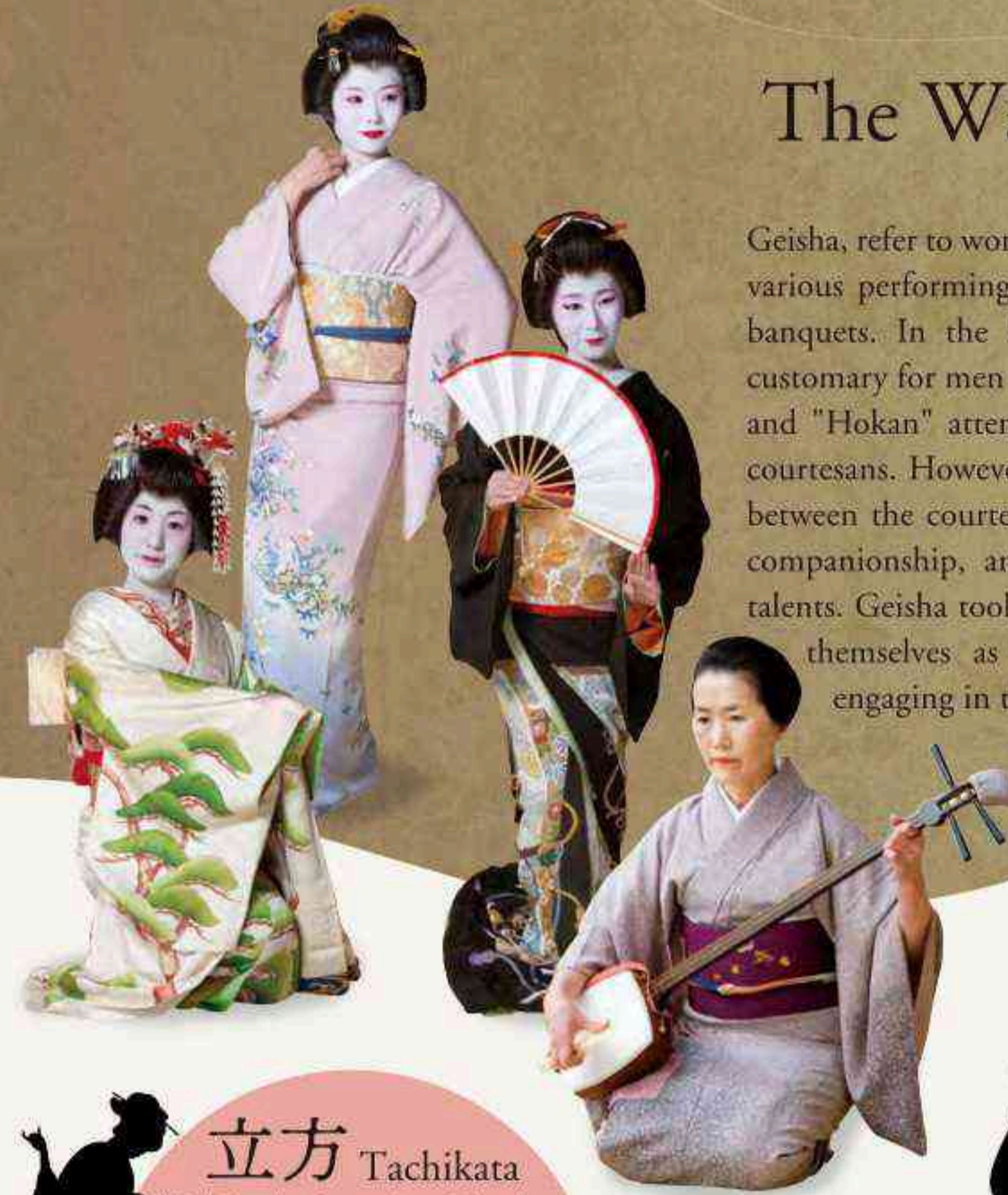
**Kenban**

An office that handles business communication between Ryotei and Okiya and dispatches geisha. It centrally manages the sales of geisha and is responsible for public relations and serving as the contact point for the entertainment district. It also functions as the office of an association formed by ryotei, okiya, and geisha.



# The Way of the Geisha

Geisha, refer to women who entertain guests by showcasing various performing arts such as dance and music during banquets. In the Edo period's pleasure district, it was customary for men to arrange gatherings by inviting geisha and "Hokan" attendants (taikomochi) to accompany the courtesans. However, there was a clear distinction in roles between the courtesans, who were involved in the sale of companionship, and the geisha, who sold their artistic talents. Geisha took pride in their work and distinguished themselves as professionals selling art rather than engaging in the sale of physical intimacy.



## 半玉 Hangyoku

"Hangyoku" refers to women in their training period before being recognized as full-fledged geisha. They undergo practice and practical apprenticeship while aspiring to become geisha. In the past, it is said to originate from the fact that they could be summoned to entertain in the parlor for half the usual fee of a fully recognized geisha. Depending on the region, they may also be called maiko, suugi, or oshaku.

## 立方 Tachikata

"Tachikata" refers to the geisha who are in charge of dance. In each entertainment district, they are trained in traditional Japanese dance styles by their dance instructors. The repertoire of dances that each geisha possesses ranges from classics to their own unique performances, totaling dozens of pieces.

## 地方 Jikata

"Jikata" refers to the geisha who handle the playing of the shamisen and singing. They sing songs and enhance the dance performances of the tachikata. Mastering this role requires considerable experience, talent, and skill, making it something that cannot be achieved overnight.

## Kagai Culture Across Japan

It is said that there were once over 500 Kagai in Japan. Today, Kagai still exist in Kyoto, as well as in Iwate, Yamagata, Niigata, Ishikawa, Aichi, Osaka, Nara, Kagawa, Tokushima, Ehime, Kochi, Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Tokyo. In Tokyo, the Kagai within the 23 special wards (Yoshicho, Shinbashi, Akasaka, Kagurazaka, Asakusa, and Mukojima) are collectively referred to as the Tokyo's Six Kagai districts. Each district preserves and passes on its unique characteristics and culture, connecting them to future generations.



▲ The Scene of a Joint Performance in Tokyo's Six Kagai districts

# Mukojima Kagai

## Beloved by Writers and Artists

Mukojima, depicted in ukiyo-e since ancient times and serving as the backdrop for numerous novels and plays. The quietly standing Mukojima Kagai in the 2nd and 5th districts of Mukojima. On the other side of the Sumida River, just across from Asakusa, lies a hidden utopia of Edo traditions that still lingers today.

### From Everyday Life to the Extraordinary

## Mukojima, Once a Hidden Retreat

"The term "mukou" in Mukojima refers to the areas like Sumida, Terajima, and Ushijima, which are seen as the opposite side when viewed from Asakusa. During the Edo period, it was renowned for its cherry blossoms, scattered shrines, and temples, with pastoral landscapes just a little further out. Along the riverbank, there were restaurants and teahouses where affluent individuals, tired of the extravagance in Edo, brought geisha from Yoshiwara and Yanagibashi to visit Mukojima's establishments. For the people of Edo, crossing to Mukojima by boat was an escape from the ordinary, a secluded retreat.

Mukojima geisha, once known as "Hazakura Geisha", saw the emergence of a geisha district, although there are various theories about its origin. By 1940, it had become a major district with 215 restaurants, 408 geisha houses, and 1,300 geisha, ranking first nationwide in numbers. Being a hidden gem, Mukojima attracted distinguished figures from politics, business, culture, and sumo wrestling. Even today, it houses 10 ryotei, 45 Okiya, and 80 geisha, making it a significant geisha district in Tokyo."



## The Mukojima Bokutei Association

# Uniting the Kagai World

The Mukojima Bokutei Association was formed through the merger of upscale dining establishments that also serve as waiting rooms, known as Ryotei, and Okiya, which dispatch geisha to ryotei, as well as engage in succession planning. In other geisha districts, it is also referred to as Kenban. The association is actively involved in comprehensive information management for the entire Kagai, as well as the guidance and cultivation of traditional cultural arts such as traditional Japanese music, shamisen, flute, taiko drum, Tsudumi drum, singing, dance, Elegant Etiquette, and more. Within the association, there is a dedicated practice space for geisha to hone their skills. Occasionally, the sounds of geisha practicing, including musical accompaniment and singing, can be heard as one passes by the association premises.

### Events to Meet Geisha

Geisha participate in various traditional events throughout the year in the entertainment districts and also take part in local events. This offers a precious opportunity to encounter geisha not just in traditional tea houses but also in various locations across the town.

#### 1 January New Year Visits

In the New Year, geisha dress in formal attire and visit various teahouses to offer New Year's greetings. In the Ozashiki, geisha perform lion dances to celebrate the New Year with the customers.

#### 2 February Setsubun Festivities

Geisha participate in a unique event referred to as 'obake,' where they dress up in costumes and visit the Ozashiki. It's a rare chance to see geisha in unconventional attire, which isn't typically observed.

#### 3 March Bokutei Cherry Blossom Festival

The festival held at Sumida Park features a limited-time "Geisha Teahouse" where geisha serve tea—an exclusive event offered by the geisha for a brief period.

#### 7 July Sumida River Fireworks Festival

On the day of the fireworks festival, the geisha district's restaurants open their rooftops and other areas for special banquets. While geisha usually wear kimonos, on that day they appear in yukata.

#### 9 September Ushijima-Jinja Shrine Grand Festival

The grand festival that occurs every five years sees geisha performing a ceremonial dance. During the evening neighborhood procession, you can witness the geisha's palanquin procession.

#### 10 October Sumida Festival

The festival centered around Kinshi Park features geisha performing traditional dances. It's a lively event that attracts many people every year.

#### 11 November Mukojima Odori

This is held as a stage to showcase the results of the geisha's regular practice. It's an opportunity to witness dances and musical accompaniments that are exclusive to the Ozashiki and cannot be seen elsewhere.\*the events are held irregularly.





# Basics of Ozashiki Etiquette

Even though the concept of Ozashiki may seem unfamiliar and daunting for beginners, Mukojima Kagai offers numerous traditional Japanese restaurants where even first-timers can enjoy the company of geisha in this setting.

Generally, Ozashiki sessions follow a specific sequence. Understanding this flow can help you enjoy the Ozashiki experience without feeling nervous. Please take a moment to read through this before heading to Ozashiki.

**1 Start**  
 The session begins once everyone participating has gathered. There's a designated time for the presence of geisha in the Ozashiki. Arriving late means potentially reducing the time available to enjoy the company of the geisha, so it's important to be mindful of this.

**3 Ozashiki Odori Dance**  
 Once the dance begins, chatting and eating are temporarily paused. Indulge in the songs and dances performed by the geisha, tailored to the occasion.

**5 Closing**  
 Although it may initially come to an end, if time feels insufficient, consider inviting the geisha to a cooperative establishment. There might be another Ozashiki reservation following yours, but if not, it's possible to extend the duration. (Additional charges will apply)

**2 Conversation With the Geisha**  
 While enjoying a Kaiseki-Ryori (traditional multi-course meal), guests indulge in drinks and conversation with the geisha. As the geisha pour drinks for the guests, it's polite to offer them drinks as well by saying 'douzo.' Geisha typically do not eat during the banquet.

**4 Ozashiki-Asobi Games**  
 Enjoy Ozashiki-Asobi with the geisha. Even if you're unfamiliar with the games, the geisha will kindly teach you how to play.



# Ozashiki-Asobi Games

They are games played with geisha to liven up gatherings. These games often utilize items in the Ozashiki and involve simple activities that anyone can participate in. Here are three common games.



## Kompira Funefune

This game involves a geisha and a customer sitting facing each other with a small table in between, and a bowl placed atop the table. To the tune of the "Kompira Funefune" song, both parties alternately place their hands on top of the sake cup in the middle and quickly retract them. If your opponent picks up the tool, you're "Rock." If the tool remains untouched, it's "Paper." As the tempo increases, the one who makes a mistake loses.



## Tora Tora

Tora Tora is a gesture game similar to "Rock-paper-scissors." This is a game in which the geisha and the customer dance to the tune of the "Tora Tora" song, while a folding screen or something similar is placed between the geisha and the customer to obscure each other's view. At the end of the song, each person makes a gesture representing either a tiger, Watonai, or an old woman (Watonai's mother) to compete. The tiger loses to Watonai, Watonai loses to the old woman, and the old woman loses to the tiger.



## Omawarisan

This is a game where there is a drum placed between the geisha and the customer. Both stand at either side of the drum and, to the tune of the "Omawarisan Yoiyasa" song, play rock-paper-scissors. The rule is that the winner strikes the drum twice, while the loser spins in place once. Gradually increase the speed of the song, and the one who makes a mistake loses.





# FAQ Answered By Geisha



Do you have a lot of questions but aren't sure whom to ask? We have compiled common inquiries received from customers and shared them with the geisha and Kenban. Take a look at these as a reference to prepare for your Ozashiki experience.

## Q

**I have a food allergy.  
Can the dishes be modified?**



**A** Yes, please let us know in advance if you have any food allergies. We can also serve a dietary diversity such as vegan, halal, vegetarian, etc., so please contact with us beforehand.



## Q

**How can I make a reservation?**

**A** For reservations, you can call each Ryotei restaurant directly. If you have a budget in mind, the establishment can offer advice based on that amount. The Mukojima Bokutei Association also provides explanations about their system and more. Feel free to contact us for further details.



## Q

**What kind of attire do geisha wear in Ozashiki?**

**A** The standard attire is Western-style hair with a kimono. However, for special occasions like New Year's formal wear or yukata during fireworks festivals, the attire varies based on the season or event. Please consult when making reservations.



## Q

**What is Goshugi?**

**A** "Goshugi" is similar to what is known as a tip in foreign countries. It's a gratuity given by customers to express appreciation to the geisha. It can be handed directly to the geisha or given collectively to the female proprietor.



## Q

**What should I talk about with the geisha?  
I get nervous and I'm not sure what to talk about.**

**A** You can talk about anything. You can ask questions like: Why did you become a geisha? What do you usually do? Even casual questions like these or discussions about your work are fine. Enjoy a fun conversation together.



## Q

**Do you have chairs available in the tatami room?**

**A** Depending on the facility, we can provide chairs or a Japanese style with sunken kotatsu tables (\*Kotatsu tables with space to extend your legs). If you prefer a specific setup, please inquire in advance.



## Q

**I'm concerned about the price.  
How much does it cost?**

**A** The fees vary depending on the menu and the number of people, so please contact us in advance. The charges include food and beverage costs, geisha performance fees, and "Hanadai," which is the gratuity paid to the Geisha. Understanding these cultural practices enhances the enjoyment of the Ozashiki experience.





# Sustainers of Mukojima Kagai District

Comprised of various individuals, Mukojima Kagai is a vibrant community. We had the opportunity to speak with those working tirelessly to preserve the Kagai, not just the geisha but individuals striving to protect and pass it on to the next generation. Through these interviews, the passionate commitment of those who cherish Mukojima Kagai is apparent.

## Hangyoku Kosuzu

Learning Japanese traditional dance since I was young was the starting point that led me to aspire to become a geisha. Upon hearing that there were many geisha of my age in Mukojima, I decided to come here. Now, I'm diligently practicing every day, aiming to become like the senior geisha as soon as possible.



## Chomeiji Sakuramochi Yamamotoya President YAMAMOTO Yukio

Geisha and Artisans, ryotei, and customers visiting the entertainment district often purchase our items as souvenirs. There has been a long-standing connection between our store, which has been running for 11 generations, and Mukojima Kagai. Both the store and the Kagai were born in this area, and we want to protect and preserve the culture that has been passed down through the generations.



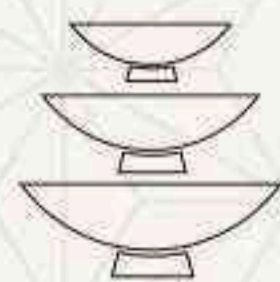
## Salon de Kei OGATA Hideko

Not knowing there was an entertainment district, I opened this shop in Mukojima. Geisha and the managers of traditional Japanese restaurants come here to have their hair styled. I hope to continue running this shop with my daughter in the future.



## Ryotei Sakurajaya Executive Chef SOENO Koji

I believe it's crucial to meet the customers' requests in the realm of cuisine. However, being in the entertainment district, I find it most delightful when customers enjoy engaging in conversation with the geisha while savoring the food. If they leave thinking the conversation was enjoyable, and the food was delicious, that brings me the greatest joy.



## Okiya Hatsuwake Kikuyoshi Mother Hiro

I inherited the role of 'Okiya Mother' from the "mother" of the previous generation. I have a strong desire to nurture young geisha to connect and uphold the Mukojima Kagai tradition. I believe that Mukojima's geisha have a lot of spirit and vitality. It would make me happy if the younger generation became interested in geisha.



## Kyo Komamono Manekiya TOKAIE Kyoko

Our shop deals with Kyoto goods. Geisha from Mukojima, as well as geisha from across the country, visit to make purchases. With many original store products available, we also accept custom orders. In the future, I aim to continue crafting a shop specialized for geisha.

## Geisha Manten

During my student days, my homestay experience became the catalyst for me to choose this profession of geisha, which is unique to Japanese women. I believe Mukojima offers a broad entrance, with the Kamome training System in place, providing an environment that is easy to enter and continue in. Personally, I definitely want to live my whole life as a geisha.

