



# Traces of Tradition

Japan was once a paradise on earth. Age-old mountains, rivers, coastlines, fields, forests and rocks were masterfully assimilated into Japanese culture over the course of millennia. Japan was unique, and no other country on earth was as beautiful. From this special environment sprang the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, Buddhist temples and statues, and much, much more. Surely the bewitching image of this mysterious land fills pro-

spective visitors with excitement and anticipation.

But what happens when these visitors actually arrive in Japan? Inevitably they are surprised by the enormous gap between their image of the country and the reality they see before them. It is not difficult to imagine their disappointment when they alight from a train at Kyoto Station, gateway to Japan's ancient capital and the home of traditional Japanese culture. The sight of the kitschy Kyoto Tower and



PHOTOS: SATOSHI KAWAI

**ABOVE:** Kerr restored this *machiya* in Kyoto's Sujiya district and turned it into visitor accommodation. Originally the building served as a soybean wholesaler's store and residence.

a railway station reminiscent of a giant battleship must provoke an unexpected kind of culture shock.

Although this is the undeniable reality of modern Kyoto, facets of Japan's past beauties do still manage to survive. I have worked hard to preserve such aspects for posterity, and I would like to share these glimpses of Japan's former charms with overseas visitors. That's why I purchased several

**YOKOSO JAPAN!** AMBASSADOR



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*machiya*, 19th-century merchant's houses, and turned them into accommodation for foreign tourists. Here they can get a true feel for the beauty of traditional Japanese living spaces. I also restored an old farmhouse to live in, and devote my energies to various activities aimed at preserving the Japanese countryside. The essence of traditional Japanese culture lies in its tranquility and subtlety. One night in a space and time preserved from that traditional culture dispels the fatigue of modern life and reinvigorates the spirit.

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The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism's "Yokoso Japan!" campaign aims to attract 10 million foreign visitors to Japan annually by 2010. As part of the campaign, people striving to increase visitor numbers are appointed as Yokoso Japan! ambassadors.