

Café and Coffee Shop Tours in Kyoto #4

Locals often say, “Morning in Kyoto starts with the aroma of Inoda coffee.” True to this phrase, Inoda Coffee is an iconic Kyoto traditional coffee shop. In this issue, we will reveal the origins of how the chain began and how it is maintained today, as told to us by the company’s three key figures, with a focus on its original flagship store, in central Kyoto.

* Prices in this article include tax



Set menu “Kyoto Breakfast,” including boneless ham, salad, scrambled eggs, and a croissant, served with a mini orange juice and hot coffee.

The shop’s uniqueness starts with how it pronounces “coffee” in Japanese. The founder, Shichiro Inoda, insisted on reading “koh-he” (short e vowel) instead of “koh-hee,” based on how the word was originally pronounced in Japan. The red coffee pot trademark logo also remains the unchanged. The chain’s traditional coffee taste continues to suffuse the six Kyoto locations (including the flagship shop), as well as in Tokyo, Kanagawa, and Hiroshima, and its online distribution.

At seven a.m., the shop opens, filling the air with the aroma of its hallmark blend, “Arabian Pearl,” served since Inoda Coffee’s founding. The Mocha-based blend is carefully prepared in a deep-roasted European style, conveying a delicate balance of aroma, richness, and acidity. The coffee is brewed using the traditional nel-drip method, another consistent pursuit of the shop.

“You’ll never find a coffee so deep and rich as this Arabian Pearl,” Kikuyo Shimada, the shop’s executive operations manager, strongly affirms.

The original shop has been restored to the south of the current townhouse-style

building. Dubbed the “Memory House,” it displays items from Inoda’s history, including photos of notable regulars who were contemporary novelists and celebrities.

The founder himself was an artist. At age 24, in 1940, he began importing coffee beans from abroad, but closed his business when he was conscripted for military service. After the war, he returned to Kyoto and opened a small café in 1947.

Yasuko Kaku, the chief planner/public relations officer, explains: “We have heard that the coffee beans in storage were in perfect condition, which was a stroke of luck for him.”

Coffee was a luxury item when the shop opened. While other shops offered ersatz coffee, Inoda served the real thing for the same price, gaining popularity among nearby kimono merchants and cultural figures.

In 1953, an inner seating area was added, now known as the “Old Wing,” still used and loved today for its serene, nostalgic atmosphere. In 1967, the main building was expanded to the north, featuring a lattice-style exterior and a bright European-style interior, along with a west-facing terrace.

After the main building was destroyed by fire in 1999, it was rebuilt and reopened in 2000. While incorporating reinforced concrete, the design preserves a wooden texture that blends with the surrounding streetscape. The café offers 211 seats (156 on the first floor, 55 on the second),

allowing customers to enjoy Kyoto-style coffee in different atmospheres.

The founder was also a step ahead in menu development. He led the industry by introducing Western-style items such as sandwiches, spaghetti, and French toast. Inoda’s high-quality food, developed through long experience, meets the ever-growing expectations of many discerning palates.

One of its signature items is the “Kyoto Breakfast” (1,890 yen). Reminiscent of a luxury hotel breakfast, it includes boneless ham from a famous Chigasaki smokehouse, fresh vegetable salad, fluffy scrambled eggs, and a rich buttery croissant. The menu is diverse, and the “Clubhouse Sandwich” (1,880 yen) has been recently renewed as a more

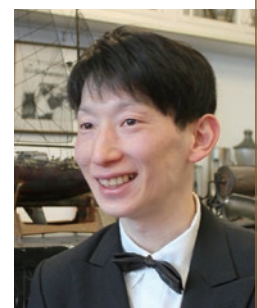


Club sandwich only available at the flagship shop

luxurious offering.

A different kind of blend promoted by Inoda is that of digital technology (implemented in sales / purchase transactions in 2023) and non-digital operations (such as a dedication to hospitality). Ryoichi Yomo, the flagship shop manager, insists that Kyoto-style hospitality must be passed down to the next generation, despite changes (e.g., a change in its parent company in 2025).

The aroma of Inoda Coffee fills the air, marking the start of another morning in Kyoto.



Manager Ryoichi Yomo



Inoda Coffee (Flagship Shop)

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TEL: 075-221-0507

Website: <https://www.inoda-coffee.co.jp/>

- Hours: 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (last order: 5:30 p.m.)
- Open year-round
- Approx. 5-minute walk from Karasuma Oike Station, Kyoto Municipal Subway / 10-minute walk from Karasuma Station, Hankyu Railway / 15-minute walk from Sanjo Station, Keihan Railway

