



Why Did I Come To Osaka?

A question I get far too often since moving to and settling in Japan's third-largest city.

As a young entrepreneur in the experience design field, you would think my first and only option would be to settle down in Tokyo. The scientific term for this kind of decision is called a "no-brainer," which includes a soft tap on the head and a slight shoulder shrug to emphasize, "do you even have to question it?"

This was essentially the reaction I received from local Japanese and the ex-pat communities; however, having stumbled upon a burgeoning startup scene and dizzying energy right under Tokyo's nose, I was pretty sure something big was about to happen.

Anecdotally, I have noticed Osaka is generally not talked about unless you are directly tied to it, so I'm sharing my observations, research, and gut feelings with anyone who might find this helpful. This article responds to the same questions and the same answers, and the connecting thread is that no one is having a real conversation about Osaka.

It's time for them to shine.

But let's rewind just a little to understand how I got here.

■ Cash Out While You're Ahead

It's October 2020, and much of the US has been in various stages of lockdown. I'm living in Las Vegas with my growing family. It has come to a point in time where we have to consider our future in the US.

For the past four years, I lived and worked at an ad agency in Las Vegas under a NAFTA visa. Trump's administration was seeking reelection, the nature of people was starting to look really ugly and bleak, and we did not want our infant daughter to grow up in this. So, we made the tough decision to pack up and go.

Always wanting to live and work in Japan, I thought this might be the best time to go, albeit, with a level of uncertainty not seen in quite some time, my wife and I felt it was worth the risk.

I had a reasonable sum saved for a rainy day, my career was in a great place, and we had a bit of a safety net having family waiting for us until we find our feet. Returning to Canada didn't seem appealing to us, and the cost of living was getting out of hand. Japan seemed so much more accessible to our growing family, and Asia's economics looked more favorable. The timing was now.



It helped that my wife is a Japanese national, which made the relocation possible during Covid. The process to get going was dicey at the best of times, but patience and persistence paid off. This relocation wasn't without its sacrifices.

One month later, the three of us, with our belongings in 10 suitcases, landed in Kansai International Airport to begin a new adventure and a two-week quarantine.

■ There's No Place Like Tokyo

This is true but also incorrect.

With nothing but time, I looked into the process of relocating to Tokyo, establish my business and start the long hustle of generating relationships and turning them into client work.

Tokyo was always the established center of everything in Japan. From business to design, from entertainment to culture, it was a country within a country that you couldn't get bored of, and it was constantly changing, so why would you need to go anywhere else?

Tokyo's PR machine is a behemoth, and for the longest time, it was the image of Japan outside its borders.

Tokyo, as it turns out, is not Japan. However, ask anyone outside of Japan about Japan, and you could forgive them if you didn't hear Osaka, Gifu, or Wakayama ever mentioned.



I had grown up idolizing Tokyo. I would credit my many visits over the past 2 decades as a significant influencer on my design career. And now, here was my chance to join the bustling metropolis.

Covid, it would seem, had other plans for me.

■ A Blue Ocean of Opportunity

While much of Tokyo's businesses went remote, much of what I needed to accomplish required me to be physically present for in-person meetings, signing documents, and searching for apartments. Tokyo's rising Covid infections put a stop to me to freely travel back and forth. It would be nearly seven months until I returned to Tokyo.

Seeing no relief in sight, despite the government's "best intentions," I needed to keep the momentum going. I would establish in Osaka and eventually move operations to Tokyo.

Osaka's Covid numbers were relatively lower for a time and more convenient to travel to.

Before leaving the US, I had done extensive research on Osaka, connecting with various organizations like [O-BIC](#), [Canadian Chambers of Commerce Japan](#), [JETRO](#), [Osaka Innovation Hub](#), and [Knowledge Capital](#) (to name a few) about the Osaka market, gathering the necessary intel needed to start my business. Some helpful facts about Osaka:

1. The third-largest city in Japan.
2. [Osaka ranks #2 most livable city in the world.](#)
3. [The cost of rent in Tokyo is about 45% more than in Osaka.](#)
4. Centrally located in Japan for easier access to other domestic cities.
5. Osaka is a central hub in west Japan, with state-of-the-art transportation networks traveling to and from quite frictionless: Tokyo is 2.5 hrs. by bullet train or 1 hour by air. Kyoto is 1 hour away by train.
6. Osaka has two international airports to access Asia, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas with great ease. LA is around 10 hours. Singapore is 7 hours. Hong Kong is less than 3 hours. Seoul is less than 2 hours.
7. Kansai has always been home to innovative technology companies (Panasonic, Capcom, Sharp, Nintendo, and Kyocera, to name drop a few)
8. Osaka is the host city for the [2025 World Expo](#).
9. [The excitement of welcoming another foreign startup in Osaka.](#)

Despite the lockdowns, it was business as usual, and in-person meetings were a regular occurrence in Osaka. During my many meetings with trade groups, co-working spaces, and business organizations, I encountered young people from Singapore, Australia, Britain, the US, and Canada trying to cut their teeth here. The sign of a growing diverse community was a good indicator that the city was serious about investing in its future.

The plethora of busy co-working spaces showed the vibrancy of the startup scene. People genuinely were curious and offered advice, a moment of their time or access to their contacts to give you "the new guy" every chance you need to succeed.

There is this shared pride in seeing each other reach for a goal and succeed.

Depending on whom you spoke to, my decision would be met by shock and awe that I chose to settle in Osaka "because no one ever comes here," or the arrogance as to why I picked Osaka over Tokyo, "because Tokyo is the center of it all."



An Osaka businessman admitted to me that "the world will soon take notice that Osaka is a blue ocean of opportunity for anyone willing to make the trek." The more time I spent in the city, the more I understood.

The many corporate-backed accelerators supporting ambitious AI, IoT, and Fintech entrepreneurs prove that the startup movement here is not a trend but a commitment to playing a more prominent domestic and international business role. Osaka's central location within Japan makes it a perfect home base to get around and attend your Tokyo meetings and be home before dinner. Its airports are a gateway to Asia, and with many international routes connecting the rest of the world, Osaka is the perfect hub for business opportunities.

The perception is, Osaka is a blank slate and collectively the citizens are defining its future through emerging technology, design, and a good sense of humor. Covid has woken up opportunities that would have either not materialized or be too late to appreciate. This is an exciting time for experimentation and discovery.

■ It's Time to Flip the Script

While Osaka didn't have the best reputation and wasn't entirely a stable place not that long ago, today, young families from all over the world are flocking here for a new start. It's cheaper, safer, and friendlier, providing just as many opportunities as Tokyo does.

Hosting the 2025 World Expo is an excellent validation of Osaka's future importance to the global community and is one way that is shedding new light on Japan's third-largest city.

The challenge now is getting the word out about Osaka's potential. The first step is recognizing Osaka has a PR problem.

It's not really shocking to see people unaware of what's happening outside of Tokyo. Tokyo's strength is its size, and the force of its gravity draws everyone in. However, as digital tools become more ubiquitous, Osaka doesn't need to rely on expensive ad buys or wild campaigns. Instead, Osaka can tell an honest and authentic story and empower future advocates from its growing communities.



I absolutely love Tokyo, but I've chosen to write this article because I think Osaka is a special place and ideal for anyone looking for a change of pace and scenery.

This vibrant city with a rich history is building a progressive future on a foundation of boldness and innovation.

The more I look around the city, the more I realize I have everything I need right here. I like the charm and charisma of the Kansai people, and I especially appreciate the "we're doing things our own way!" mentality. This scrappy town has so much to offer and all the time in the world to show it. [This is why I came to Osaka.](#)

I wrote this closing statement with sincerity reflecting on my time here so far. I hope it gives you, the reader, something to consider.

"Osaka is open for business. There's excitement in the air and ideas to share. We've saved you a seat at the table. You can expect a cold beer with a warm greeting. Here, you're not a visitor. You're one of us."