



OSAKA-KOBE-KYOTO: INCONSPICUOUS, DIVERSE GIANT

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population**	18,400,000	Sao Paulo, Mexico City
Urbanized Area* Population	15,450,000	Sao Paulo, Seoul
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	1,050	Paris, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Buenos Aires
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	2,720	
Population per Square Mile	14,700	Lisbon, Amsterdam, Munich, Santiago
Population per Square Kilometer	5,700	
2 nd largest urbanized area in Japan		
6 th largest urbanized area in the world.		
*Continuously built up area		
**Hyogo, Kyoto, Nara and Osaka prefectures.		

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Perhaps the least well known of the world's largest urbanized areas is Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto. It is the world's sixth largest urban area and has three legitimate centers that grew together during the 20th century.

The largest city is Osaka, which had been Japan's largest city from World War II until it was displaced by Yokohama in 1980 (there is no city of Tokyo --- it was abolished during World War II). Osaka is also the business core, with nearly 1.4 million jobs within the Osaka Loop (the elevated West Japan National Railway loop). Like Tokyo and most other large central business districts, employment is dropping, down nearly 10 percent from 1996 to 2001. The city is also losing population, having fallen below 2.6 million in 2000. The peak was 3,150,000 in 1965, slightly below the pre-war 1940 peak. Since 1965, like Tokyo-Yokohama, all population growth has been outside the core cities (table). The three cities combined lost nearly 200,000 population, while the suburbs gained 4.7 million.

Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto Area Central City and Suburban/Exurban Population: 1965-2000				
Sector	1965	2000	Change	%Change
Osaka	3,156,000	2,591,000	-565,000	-17.9%
Kobe	1,217,000	1,494,000	277,000	22.8%
Kyoto	1,365,000	1,468,000	103,000	7.5%
Central Cities	5,738,000	5,553,000	-185,000	-3.2%
Suburbs	8,158,000	12,890,000	4,732,000	58.0%
Metropolitan Area	13,896,000	18,443,000	4,547,000	32.7%
Source: Census of Japan				

Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto is defined by and exceeds its geography. Osaka itself is built on a river plain that is perhaps 10 miles wide at the north, stretching from the highly industrialized port area to

the mountains to the east. Further to the south, is the industrial suburb of Sakai (800,000 population) and the new international airport, on an artificial island. As the southern limits of the suburbs are reached, the plain becomes much less wide. To the north, the Osaka plain continues into a triangular broad valley that ends in Kyoto, approximately 30 miles away. Across the bay is Kobe, a very dense long and narrow city that also has a very industrialized water front. Kobe is defined on the west by its mountains, barely two miles from the bay. Between Osaka and Kobe are other highly urbanized suburbs, such as Amagasaki and Nishinomiya. But while the mountains constrain Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto, the urbanized area spills over Osaka's eastern hills to the ancient capital of Nara, the one sector of the area with plenty of room to grow. Some definitions of the urbanized area do not include Nara. But Nara is as much a part of the urbanized area as Beaverton and Cedar Hills are a part of the Portland area or as Green Tree is a part of the Pittsburgh area. Nara is served by frequent, direct suburban rail service to Osaka, and the principal roadway connection is similar to that of the Canyon Road entrance to Portland or the I-279 westerly entrance to Pittsburgh.



The area has a better roadway system than Tokyo-Yokohama. Osaka itself has an ample motorway system, the most important parts of which are segments of the national tollway

system. Elevated boulevards and tollways have been built above a number of central business district streets. Kobe is served by a waterfront motorway, which collapsed in the 1995 earthquake. On my first trip to Kobe, in 1999, there was little evidence of quake damage. There is also a tollway bypass in the mountains behind Kobe. The motorways in the Kyoto and Nara areas are less well developed, but both areas are served by wide, grid oriented street systems that make travel comparatively convenient.

Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto has a less extensive suburban rail system than Tokyo-Yokohama, but public transport accounts for a larger share of travel. Approximately 60 percent of travel in the area is on public transport (compared to 57 percent in Tokyo-Yokohama, 25 percent in Paris and 9 percent in New York). Among high-income urban areas, only Hong Kong has a higher public transport market share. Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto public transport usage is 30 percent higher than the total United States figure, and more than three times that of larger New York.

As in Tokyo, public transport is profitable, with most of the travel handled by the private railways. The largest volume is carried by the West Japan Railway (a segment of the former Japanese National Railway). The Hankyu Line, owned by the Hankyu Department Store firm provides service from the Hankyu Department Store (a station across the street from the WJR Osaka Station) to the Hankyu Department Store in central Kyoto, and many stations in between. It is not hard to understand why most commuters from Kyoto take the train rather than drive to Osaka. The rail fare is less than \$4.00, while the motorway tolls are more than \$15.00. Yet, public transport's share of trips is falling, like in Tokyo-Yokohama. Since 1975, public transport's share of travel has dropped by 20 percent.

Kyoto is the old imperial capital. But like other cities of Japan, the tourist sites are spread throughout the city. The tourist photos are better than the reality. The temples and other sites are as impressive and beautiful as in the guide books. Between the sites is comparatively low density residential and commercial development, linked together by the grid of wide arterials. Unlike Osaka and Tokyo, the main railway station is located a mile or two south of the core of the city.

One of the most impressive sites in the metropolitan area is Himeji Castle in the exurb of Himeji. This perhaps most famous of Japanese castles is well worth the time for an in-depth visit. On the way, the rental car route travels by the Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge, at this writing (2003), the longest suspension bridge in the world, with a central span more than 50 percent longer than that of the Golden Gate Bridge. But Himeji is not the only castle in the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto area. Just inside the east side of the Osaka Loop is the similarly impressive Osaka Castle.

Osaka's new international airport, itself one of the world's great planning disasters, is a convenient way to enter Japan. Unlike Tokyo-Yokohama, flying in and out of this airport gives a good view of the urban area on a clear day. This includes the urbanization of Osaka, Kobe and in-between along the bay, and the suspension bridge to the south of Kobe. In fact, the suspension bridge can be seen from the airport terminal.

Nara has a large historical district with temples and other sites. Convenient motorway access is available from Osaka, though the road from Kyoto is well below motorway standard. Like Kyoto, a grid network of broad arterials provides good mobility within the Nara area.

Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto is a complex and diverse urban area. It contains some of the most intense urbanization in the high-income world, along side some of the most historical attractions. As an urban form, it could not be more different than Tokyo, which sprawls continuously due to its

broad, flat geography and the surrounding hills it has not yet mounted. Not so in Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto. Here is an urban area of distinct sectors and cities separated from one-another by topography, but still an integrated whole.



Residential Area: Northern Nara



Leap Frog Development Between Kyoto and Nara



Residential Area: Nara



Japanese Dream: Nara



Hankyu Department Store and Railway Station: Osaka



Elevated Roadway Over Osaka Central Business District Street



Double-Deck Motorway over Osaka Central Business District Street



Kyoto from the Eastern Hills



Central Kyoto: Residential Area



Himeji Castle



Himeji



Big Box Automobile Store



Nara



Approaching Kansai International (Osaka) Airport

By Wendell Cox

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