



This page: Naito Shoten, Kyoto. The brushmaker has been open since 1818 and has never had a shop sign, instead relying on word-of-mouth and repeat customers. **Right:** Asahiyaki, Uji, Kyoto Prefecture. The ceramics shop and gallery is some 400 years old and today run by Housai Matsubayashi: the 16th generation of master potters



► **Lessons learned**

1. Visitors to Japan invariably return with stories of meticulous customer service: the reverent gift-wraper who handles the purchase as though it were his own or the sales assistant whose attention verges on personal shopping. Customer service must never be underestimated.
2. Tradition may be the cornerstone of Japan's retail offering but the country isn't afraid to embrace the new. You're just as likely to find porcelain bowls in a 17th-century setting as boundary-pushing threads in a sci-fi space. Being able to play both sides equally puts Japan a cut above the rest.
3. The Japanese know their limits. Retailers are conscious that overstocking shelves with too many products or trying to be a bookshop-cum-barber-cum-cobbler is risky. It's best to narrow your remit and excel, which is why you'll often find shops dedicated entirely to, say, kitchen knives – and you bet your bottom yen they won't disappoint.

