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Temples and tower blocks, karaoke and kimonos – the Japanese capital is like nowhere else on earth



Tokyo is a city that can afford to play hard to get to. A vast sea of futuristic skyscrapers, illuminated billboards and 13 million residents, it can be an intoxicating experience for the uninitiated yet deeply fascinating for the adventurous. One

of the most densely populated cities on earth, Japan's capital is also a beguiling city of contrasts: a place of salarymen crowds and Shinto shrines, tower blocks and temples, karaoke and kimonos. Tokyo is a place where cutting-edge technology jostles alongside deeply rooted tradition and here old-world etiquette is an essential part of every day life despite the city's hyper-modern veneer. >



SEE

TSUKIJI MARKET

> The biggest food market in the world, Tsukiji is famous for its 5.30am tuna auction (closed to tourists). Meander through the fish market and feast on the freshest sushi imaginable for breakfast at one of the small counters.

www.tsukiji-market.or.jp

MEIJI SHRINE

> Next to the bustle of the Harajuku district, with its street fashion and youth culture, this forested oasis of serenity contains a Shinto shrine dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife.

1-1 Yoyogikamizoncho, Shibuya

www.meijijingi.or.jp

Tel: +813 3379 5511

SENSO JI TEMPLE

> Completed in 645, Senso-ji is Tokyo's oldest Buddhist Temple. Filled with crowds and trinket sellers by day, the famous red lanterns look particularly magical by night when calm descends.

2-3-1 Asakusa, Taito

www.senso-ji.jp

Tel: +813 3842 0181



THE GUIDE

> It's highly recommended to have a guide or fixer in Japan, not only for translation purposes but also for organizing exceptional experiences. Nemo Glassman at Plus Alpha is an American fluent in both Japanese language and customs. His tailor-made itineraries offer an intelligent insight into the depth of Japan's culture.

Nemo Glassman

www.plus-alpha.jp

Tel: +81 90 9875 1696



SHOP

OMOTESANDO STREET

> Tokyo's equivalent of the Champs-Élysées, this elegant tree-lined avenue is home to all the best designer brands. The splendid architecture of some of the boutiques – Prada and Louis Vuitton among them - is attraction enough.

Jingumae, Shibuya

TAKASHIMAYA

> The food hall of this enormous department store is the perfect place to buy wagashi, the colourful confectionary that is a highly appreciated gift among the Japanese.

*2-4-1 Nihonbashi
www.takashimaya.co.jp
Tel: +813 3211 411*

SHIBUYA 109

> The epicentre of Tokyo youth culture, this famous cylindrical department store stocks all the latest trends for fashion conscious teens and twenty year olds.

*2-29-1 Dogenzaka, Shibuya-ku
Tel: +813 3477 5111*

ANTIQUÉ MALL GINZA

> Renowned for its range of antiques and collectables from Japan and beyond, this vast mall stocks vintage kimono, ceramics, scrolls and jewellery.

*Daiwa Bldg, 1-13-1 Ginza, Chuo-ku
www.antiques-jp.com
Tel: +813 3535 2115*



> Originally a small fishing village called Edo that was ruled by a series of shoguns, Emperor Meiji established Tokyo in 1869 when Imperial rule began once more. Feudal Japan had isolated itself from the world and its traditions were very tightly held. When the country dramatically opened itself up to the West during the Meiji

Period, it revealed a complex social etiquette that remains fundamental to Japanese identity today. This is most tangible in the dignified bows, gift-giving and bathing rituals, and the insistent removal of shoes when indoors and this adherence to Japanese customs is very much part of the country's unique allure.



EAT

IMAHAN

> A restaurant of tatami mat private rooms with sliding doors, the speciality here is sukiyaki – a Wagyu beef hot pot that is beautifully prepared at the table by a kimono-clad waitress.

*2-9-12 Ningyocho, Nihonbashi
www.imahan.com
Tel: +813 3666 7006*

NODAIWA

> Established in 1850, Mr Kanemoto is the fifth generation owner of this specialist unagi (freshwater eel) restaurant. Basted, grilled and served with rice in a lacquer box, eel has stamina-giving properties that are beneficial in the heat of summer.

*1-5-4 Higashi-Azabu, Minato-ku
Tel: +813 3583 7852*

SUSHIKO HONTEN

> One of the best sushi bars in Tokyo, Mamoru Sugiyama is the fourth generation owner and a famed sushi wizard. All the expert chefs here deftly prepare and serve sushi piece by piece over a counter to just 11 customers.

*6-3-8 Ginza, Chuo-ku
Tel: +813 3571 1968*

KUSHINOBO

> With chic interiors and a sleek cocktail bar, this restaurant serves up crispy kushikatsu: delicious deep-fried nuggets of meat, seafood and vegetables on skewers with dipping sauces.

*6-10-1 Roppongi
Minato-ku
Tel: +813 5771 0094*



DRINK

VILLA FOCH

> Nestled away behind an inconspicuous door, this decadent members' bar acts as an ambassador in Tokyo for over 30 brands of Champagne. Sultry and sophisticated, the ambience here perfectly matches the offering.

*1-4-40 Shino Bldg. 2F, Nishi-Azabu
www.villa-foch.com
Tel: +813 5474 6833*

In 2013, Tokyo's restaurants were awarded more Michelin stars than in any other city in the world. By creating highly innovative dishes that often take inspiration from Japan's landscape and distinct seasons, meticulous Tokyo chefs have earned the city the title of global gourmet capital. Beyond the intricate haute cuisine however, Tokyo has a multitude of delicious delicacies that range from ramen and soba noodles to teppanyaki and tempura. Sushi was invented in Tokyo and is ubiquitous throughout the city but the atmosphere of eating these elegant morsels at the early morning Tsukiji Fish Market is hard to beat. For another typical Tokyo experience, don't miss the shabby-chic backstreets of Omoide Yokocho, which are stuffed with tiny yakitori bars that have been grilling chicken, salamander and loach for decades.



SLEEP

PARK HYATT

> Perched on the top 14 floors of a tower in Shinjuku, the hotel famous for starring in Sophia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* is deserving of its celebrity: refined rooms, impressive public spaces, impeccable dining and a jaw-dropping skyline confirm its top-notch status.

3-7-1-2 Nishi Shinjuku,

www.park.hyatt.com

Tel: +813 5322 1234

**MANDARIN ORIENTAL**

> The ultimate in modern masculine chic, this renowned hotel oozes refinement. In addition to its coterie of excellent restaurants (two with Michelin stars) and buzzing central location, the relaxation pool gives the blissful sensation of floating over Tokyo.

2-1-1 Nihonbashi Muromachi, Chuo-ku

www.mandarinoriental.com

Tel: +813 3270 8800

**SHANGRI LA**

> With its profusion of elegant crystals, flowers and stunning art works, the Shangri La is seductive and feminine in style. The 28th floor lobby lounge offers terrific panoramic city views that are best admired over afternoon tea.

1-8-3 Marunochi, Chiyoda-ku

www.shangri-la.com

Tel: +813 67397889



> The highly efficient and English-signed metro system is the easiest way to explore the city. Shibuya is packed with shops, bustling traffic and the busiest crosswalk in the world. Nearby, in the Harajuku district, young fashionistas showcase their kaleidoscopic styles at the weekends: prim 'Lolitas', cute 'fairies' and tough goths parade down Takeshita Street hoping to be photographed. Although



Tokyo was heavily bombed and rebuilt after World War II, you can still catch occasional glimpses of the old city in the tiny lanes and traditional wooden houses where a wizened old man might be selling handmade chopsticks. And whenever Tokyo feels too frantic, the serene oases of The Imperial Palace, Meiji Shrine and temple gardens remind you about the grand history of this captivating city. ●