

Tokyo, Japan



Airport: Tokyo Narita (NRT)

Served by: American Airlines, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Finnair, JAL Japan Airlines, Qantas

> [View the Terminal Map](#)

Airport: Tokyo Haneda (HND)

Served by: JAL Japan Airlines

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City Statistics



Location: Kanto region, eastern Japan.

Dialling code: 81 (Japan); 3 (Tokyo).

Population: 12,838,000 (2008).

Time zone: GMT + 9.

Electricity: 100 volts AC, 50/60Hz; flat two-pin American-style plugs are standard.

Overview



Effortlessly blending the old and the new, Tokyo is a city that defies definition. Cutting edge technology glitters beside ancient temples, flashing neon lights bathe kimono-clad women, and shining skyscrapers tower above stunning Shinto shrines. Home to over 12 million people (and more than 35 million people if you include the entire metropolis), Tokyo is a city with a history and a heart that captivates every visitor.

The towering business districts swarm with soberly dressed corporate warriors and the demure young secretaries known as 'office ladies'. The architectural anarchy and sheer crush of humanity assaults the senses. Amid the frenzy of consumerism, brash electronics outlets are crammed next to refined upscale boutiques and hordes of giggling schoolgirls swoon over pop idols and the latest fashions in glitzy emporiums.

History

In 1590, the city was founded as Edo, the capital of the shoguns, the succession of hereditary absolute rulers of Japan and commander of the Japanese army. Following the fall of the shoguns in 1867, the city was renamed Tokyo, the Eastern Capital, heralding its rebirth as a dynamic modern city and the showpiece of a rapidly modernizing country. Despite the catastrophic 1923 earthquake, which killed 140,000 and left a further 1.9 million people homeless, and near obliteration during WWII, Tokyo rose from the ashes.

When to go























Visiting the city is a pleasure at any time, except perhaps the sweltering heat of summer (July and August). While winter in the city is cold and crisp, spring (March to May) is the highlight of the year for many, with the arrival of delicate cherry blossoms inspiring sake-soaked picnics in the city's parks and avenues. Autumn (September to November) sees the oppressive summer heat give way to balmy days and golden leaves.

But avoid Golden Week (late Apr-May) and New Year (late Dec-early Jan), the two most important festivals in the Shinto calendar, because the city closes down. With festivals celebrated almost every week, however, there will always be something of the old Japan to experience, whatever time of year you visit.

Getting There By Air



Narita Airport (NRT)

Tel: (0476) 322 802.

Website: www.narita-airport.jp/en/

Narita International Airport is located 66km (41 miles) east of central Tokyo, and is the main gateway to Japan, with over 60 airlines operating out of its two terminals. The airport handles mainly international flights, with most domestic flights using Haneda Airport (see below).

Airport facilities: These include various bureaux de change, ATMs, travel agent, tourist information, numerous restaurants and shops (including duty-free shopping), left-luggage service, luggage delivery service, showers and day rooms, children's play rooms, clinics, copy and fax facilities, executive lounges and post offices. Coin-operated Internet terminals are available at various locations throughout the passenger terminals.

Transport to the city: The *Narita Express (N'EX)*, operated by JR East (tel: (0476) 331 630; www.jreast.co.jp) and *Keisei Railway's Skyliner* (tel: (0476) 328 501; www.keisei.co.jp), both provide rapid, frequent and comfortable service to passengers travelling between Narita International Airport and Tokyo Metropolitan areas. Trains run during the day and into the evening, with a journey time of just over 50 minutes.

Airport Limousine buses (tel: (03) 3665 7220; www.limousinebus.co.jp) serve major hotels in central Tokyo, Haneda Airport, Tokyo City Air Terminal, and Yokohama. The journey time, depending on traffic and the destination, is about 90 minutes. Taxis to the city centre are notoriously expensive, costing between ¥25,000 and ¥30,000. The journey time is about 90 minutes, depending on traffic.

Approximate flight times to Tokyo: From London is 12 hours; from New York is 14 hours; from Los Angeles is 11 hours 30 minutes; and from Sydney is 9 hours 30 minutes.

Haneda Airport (HND)

Tel: (03) 5757 8111.

Website: www.tokyo-airport-bldg.co.jp/en

Haneda, Tokyo's domestic airport, is conveniently located 16km (10 miles) south of central Tokyo. Rather confusingly, Haneda continues to be officially known as Tokyo International Airport, despite the fact that most international flights now use Narita Airport.

Airport facilities: Facilities include ATMs, post office, banks, travel agent, restaurants and souvenir shops, left-luggage service, luggage delivery service, information counter and car hire. There are no business facilities at the airport. A free shuttle bus is available between the terminals.

Transport to the city: The *Tokyo Monorail Co.* (www.tokyo-monorail.co.jp/english) connects the airport to Hamamatsucho Station on the JR Yamanote loop line, the city's major transport artery (journey time around 25 minutes). The *Keikyū Railway* (www.keikyū.co.jp/english/haneda/) runs to Shinagawa Station (journey time around 20 minutes) and other stations in the centre of the city. Both operate during the day and well into the evening.

Airport Limousine buses (tel: (03) 3665 7220; www.limousinebus.co.jp) run to major Tokyo railway stations and hotels. Taxis to central Tokyo cost approximately ¥7,000.

American Airlines

BRITISH AIRWAYS

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JAL JAPAN AIRLINES

LAN

MALEV

MEXICANA

QANTAS

الخطوط الملكية الأردنية
ROYAL JORDANIAN

Getting Around



Public Transport: Tokyo has one of the most sophisticated and efficient public transport systems in the world - a combination of an extensive train network operated by a number of private companies, 12+ underground lines, bus services and several monorails.

The complexity of the network and the sheer size of some of the stations can seem daunting at first, but navigation is remarkably easy. Most signs are written in English, there are numerous easy-to-use ticket machines and the clear colour-coded underground map makes navigation simple.

A single journey from one part of central Tokyo to another is unlikely to cost more than ¥200. Best of all for confused travellers, if in doubt simply buy the cheapest fare available at the ticket machine. You can then settle up at the fare adjustment machines at your destination without the risk of a fine. For information in English call the *JR East Infoline* (tel: 050 2016 1603).

There are a variety of passes available designed to save travellers' money. **Suica** and **Pasmo** are pre-pay cards - they won't save you any money, but they will save you time as you simply charge it up at the machines and swipe it at each ticket gate.

Note that Tokyo's subway network is operated by two principal companies, the *Toei Subways* and *Tokyo Metro*.

With the number of Tokyo commuters, trains are uncomfortably crowded during rush hours (0730-0900 and 1700-1900), despite very frequent services. But now that the problem of women being groped by men in the morning crush has been eliminated by the introduction of women-only carriages, public transport is also very safe, even after dark, and staff and passers-by are generally quick to help confused foreigners.

Despite Tokyo being very much a 24-hour city, the service does not operate 24 hours - trains run from approximately 0500-2400/0100. Nevertheless, there are many 24-hour pubs and cafes in the city, and waiting for the trains to start running in the early morning is a long established tradition among the revellers wishing to avoid ruinously expensive night-time taxi fares.

The Tokyo Tourist Information Office (tel: (03) 3201 3331) can provide detailed service and timetable information for all the different service providers.

Taxis: Tokyo's taxis are numerous, and can be hailed easily on the street, or found at taxi ranks. It is also possible for one to reserve a taxi in advance, from one of the many companies. Fares vary slightly between taxi companies but are uniformly expensive at ¥710 for the first 2km (1.25 mile), then ¥100 every 350m thereafter. Tipping is not customary and could offend.

Taxi drivers are very professional, but rarely speak English, so it is advisable for tourists to have their destination written out in Japanese, or to be able to point to it on a Japanese map. During rush hour, it is often quicker to take the train. Unoccupied taxis become scarce at around 0100, once the train services have finished. A peculiarity of all Japanese taxis is that the rear doors are operated automatically by the driver - visitors should not try to open or close the doors themselves.

Driving in the City: Tokyo's public transport network and taxis are excellent, and driving in the city is therefore not advised. Traffic is heavy, navigation is greatly complicated by the fact that streets rarely have names, and parking is expensive and difficult to find.

Car Hire: The biggest car hire company, with 150 branches in the Tokyo area, is *Nippon Rent-A-Car* (tel: (03) 3485 7196; www.nipponrentacar.co.jp). Other companies include *Toyota Rent-A-Car* (tel: (03) 5954 8020; <http://rent.toyota.co.jp/en/index.html>) and *Nissan Rent-A-Car* (tel: (0120) 004 123; <http://nissan-rentacar.com>).

Car hire in Japan costs from around ¥6,000 per day for the smallest class of car. Basic insurance is usually included in the price. Both a national driving licence and an International Driving Permit are required. Drivers must have held their licence for at least a year and the minimum age for hiring a car varies between 19 and 26, although is usually 21 years.

Bicycle Hire: SCS, 2-1-16 Hakusan, Bunkyo-ku (tel: (03) 3815 6221; www.scs-tokyo.co.jp), arranges scooter hire from ¥5,000 per day. Bicycles often can be hired at suburban train stations for around ¥1,000 per day.

Hotels



Hotels

As you might expect from a city this size, Tokyo offers an enormous array of places to lay your head. From traditional Japanese futons and western king-size luxury, to wacky pay-by-the hour 'love hotels' and tiny capsule pods, there is a room to suit every budget.

As with everything else in Tokyo, the neighbourhood you choose determines the flair and flavour of your visit. However, one thing does remain a constant - hotel rooms are small, so if space is important to you, prepare to pay for it.

All hotel accommodation is subject to a number of taxes. Japan's consumption tax, which currently stands at 5%, is added to the final bill. Rooms costing ¥15,000 or more per night (including service charges) incur an extra 3% tax. A flat tax is also required, at a rate of ¥100 per person per night on rooms costing between ¥10,000 and ¥14,999, and ¥200 per person per night on rooms costing ¥15,000 or more.

Tipping is not customary and might even offend, but luxury hotels add a 10-15% service charge to hotel bills.

The hotels below have been grouped into four different pricing categories:

\$\$\$\$ (over ¥45,000)

\$\$\$ (¥30,000 to ¥45,000)

\$\$ (¥15,000 to ¥30,000)

\$ (under ¥15,000)

These prices are the starting prices for a double or twin room, including tax, and do not include breakfast, unless otherwise stated.

Business

Cerulean Tower Tokyu Hotel

One of only a few high-end hotels in Shibuya, this is a good choice for visitors looking for some buzz with their business travel. Sleek modern design extends from the lobby to the guest rooms, which are highlighted by minimalist Asian décor. Bathrooms are small but luxurious - those hankering for a bathroom view should request a corner room, where breathtaking vistas are on offer from the bath. At the business salon, computers and conference rooms can be hired, and in line with other Tokyo hotels leisure facilities, incur an extra cost for each use.

26-1 Sakuragaoka-Cho, Shibuya-ku

Tel: (03) 3476 3000.

Website: www.ceruleantower-hotel.com

Price: \$\$\$\$

Hotel New Otani

Located within minutes of the Imperial Palace, this enormous hotel towers over the vibrant Akasaka government and entertainment district. The Otani is every inch the Tokyo mega hotel, but hidden behind the concrete facade is a historic 400-year-old Japanese garden. With Tokyo green spaces in desperately short supply, this 10-acre oasis, complete with waterfall, ponds and bridges, offers guests a tranquil haven from the city's hustle and bustle. Rooms range from basic doubles and twins to 'conceptual suites' such as Suite Hiroshige, whose design is inspired by the famous artist from the Edo era.

1 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku

Tel: (03) 3265 1111.

Website: www.newotani.co.jp

Price: \$\$\$

Hotel Nikko Tokyo

The spectacular curved edifice of this 'urban resort hotel' is located in Tokyo's bustling waterfront area, close to the Tokyo Big Sight international exhibition centre, and only 15 minutes from the city's main business districts. Each guest room has a private balcony overlooking the bay, while sophisticated rooftop suites boast private gardens and jacuzzis. The hotel's contemporary design features pale colours, natural materials and works of art. The spacious, airy feel and excellent service make it a fine choice for those not requiring a city centre location.

1-9-1 Daiba, Minato-ku

Tel: (03) 5500 5500.

Website: www.hnt.co.jp/index_en.html

Price: \$\$\$

Luxury

Conrad Tokyo

Located in Tokyo's fashionable Shiodome neighbourhood, this 37-storey building has all the facilities a luxury traveller might need, including a renowned spa and an impressive 25m swimming pool. Panoramic views are on offer from every bedroom - choose between the neon lights of the Tokyo Bay skyline, or the green oasis of Hama Rikyu Garden, the former royal hunting grounds. The surrounding Shiodome area offers the buzz of a multitude of restaurants, theatres and shops right on the doorstep.

1-9-1 Higashi-Shinbashi, Minato-ku

Tel: (03) 6388 8000.

Website: www.conradtokyo.co.jp

Price: \$\$\$\$

Imperial Hotel

The grand dame of Tokyo's international hotels, the Imperial's reputation for impeccable service can be traced back to its 1890 origins. Many changes have taken place since then however, including the unfortunate demolition of the art deco building designed by world renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright, which had incredibly survived Tokyo's devastating 1923 earthquake. Now a thoroughly modern 31-storey building, the hotel currently offers 1,000 rooms equipped with all modern conveniences.

1-1-1 Uchisaiwai-cho, Chiyoda-ku

Tel: (03) 3504 1111.

Website: www.imperialhotel.co.jp/e/tokyo

Price: \$\$\$\$

Park Hyatt Tokyo

For years a byword in decadent luxury, it was the Hyatt's role as muse and backdrop to Sophia Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation* that pushed it onto the world stage. The hotel is a stunning 52-storey edifice in fashionable West Shinjuku, and guests check in at the 41st floor reception, and first glimpse the stunning views that give this hotel its wow factor. Both the surprisingly spacious guest rooms and public spaces testify to an incredible eye for design, while original artwork is on display everywhere.

3-7-1-2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku

Tel: (03) 5322 1234.

Website: www.tokyo.hyatt.com

Price: \$\$\$\$

Moderate



Asia Center of Japan

Quite possibly offering the cheapest double rooms in central Tokyo, this hotel has an old fashioned décor at an old fashioned price. Those seeking sleek modern rooms will be left disappointed, but as a central base for a short visit, this hotel cannot be beaten. Within walking distance of the expat haven of Roppongi, and the restaurants and bars of Aoyama Itchome, guests are well placed for sightseeing.

8-10-32 Chome, Akasaka, Minato-ku

Tel: (03) 3402 6111.

Website: www.asiacenter.or.jp

Price: \$

Hotel Villa Fontaine Shiodome

Stylish and with an excellent location, the sleek rooms at the Fontaine have the minimalist Asian design ethic sweeping Tokyo's hotels. Standard Queen sized beds offer a comfortable night's sleep, whilst those looking for a little more can upgrade to the larger room and King size bed on offer in the Premier Business Room. The hotel is located in the shiny Shiodome district, and guests have excellent transport links and facilities right on their doorstep.

1-9-2 Higashi Shinbashi, Minato-ku

Tel: (03) 3569 2220.

Website: www.hvf.jp/eng/

Price: \$-\$\$

Other Recommendations

Ginza Yoshimizu

Tucked away in a quiet side street, this traditional Japanese B&B is a welcome oasis in the urban landscape of neons and giant TV screens of buzzing Ginza. With carefully selected natural materials throughout, as well as an organic restaurant on site, the emphasis here is very much on healthy living, and a return to a more traditional way of life.

3-11-3 Ginza Chuo-ku

Tel: (03) 3248 4432.

Website: www.yoshimizu.com

Price: \$\$

Ryokan Shigetsu

If bland business hotel beds and carb-heavy breakfasts are beginning to bore, why not book a room at one of Tokyo's traditional Japanese inns. Just minutes from Tokyo's famous Sensoji Temple, this small but beautiful ryokan is the perfect base for exploring the bustling neighbourhood of Asakusa. Bowing kimono clad receptionists welcome you into a small but bright lobby, filled with calligraphy and Japanese nick nacks. Bedrooms are spacious with sliding doors and en suite bathrooms, all in the simple Japanese style.

1-31-11 Asakusa, Taito-ku

Tel: (03) 3843 2345.

Website: www.shigetsu.com

Price: \$\$

Business Etiquette



While Tokyoites are generally the most cosmopolitan of Japanese, many will be reserved in the company of foreigners, particularly when called upon to speak English. Whereas almost everyone under 50 has some basic knowledge of English, very few are able to speak fluently.

Misunderstandings can easily occur, and the use of professional interpreters is advised. Foreigners are not expected to understand the complexities of Japanese etiquette, and allowances will be made cheerfully.

However, it is worth bearing in mind that shoes must be removed upon entering homes, as well as some offices and restaurants. Also, tips are never expected - the practice is considered vulgar, as is eating while walking. Blowing one's nose in public should also be avoided (it is, however, perfectly acceptable to sniff). Business clothes should be smart but conservative, with suits a must for both men and women.

For men, grey and navy are the favoured colours amongst the conservative business class. It is probably impossible to be over dressed in Japan and business visitors can expect to be judged by their appearance. Business cards are an essential part of introductions - no one can expect to be taken seriously without them.

Corporate entertaining is done mainly in restaurants and *izakaya* (drinking halls). Invitations to the homes of business associates are unusual. Drinking (beer, whisky and sake) is very much part of the culture, as is smoking. Corporate entertaining remains largely male dominated and business travellers' partners are rarely invited to such events.

For the most part, foreign businesswomen tend to be treated as one of the guys, and it is not unknown for them to be taken to strip clubs. Compared to the west, there are remarkably fewer Japanese businesswomen. Gifts are very important (they need not be particularly large or lavish) and are exchanged with great ceremony.

It is usual to refer to colleagues by their surnames and hierarchies should be respected. Business negotiations may require patience as directness is mistrusted and disliked, thus straight 'yes' or 'no' answers are generally avoided. Impatience is frowned upon, and confrontation is out of the question, as it is considered a sign of gross weakness. Apologies and thanks are very important and should not be rushed.

Normal business hours are 0900-1700 Monday to Friday.

Sightseeing



Sightseeing Overview: From the hectic multi-road crossing at **Shibuya** (made famous in *Lost in Translation*) to the peaceful tree-filled gardens at **Meiji-jingu**, the city's key sights are varied and mesmerising. Watch the fashion-obsessed teens every Sunday in Shibuya, step back in time in **Asakusa's** crowded street stalls, and revel in the neon lit view from the top of Roppongi's **Tokyo Tower**.

Unlike other cities of its size and significance, however, Tokyo lacks a definable centre or landmark. Instead the city is divided into separate and wholly distinct neighbourhoods, each with their own secrets to discover. The best way to navigate these mini-cities is on the excellent Metro system, specifically the Yamanote Line, a commuter train loop which passes through many of Tokyo's major stations.

But as with all of Japan, the key to discovering the true Tokyo lies in the details. Simply wandering through an area reveals the secrets that make this city so unique.

With no street names, however, finding exactly where a building is in Tokyo can be fiendishly difficult. Buying a detailed bilingual map will certainly help, and with so little crime to solve, the police in their boxes (called *koban*) on practically every corner are both plentiful and experienced in redirecting the lost traveller.

Lastly, study the large and detailed maps on display at every Metro station. These clearly show which exit is needed, in English.

Tourist Information: The Japanese National Tourist Organisation (JNTO) runs two Tourist Information Centres (TIC) in Tokyo, one in Narita Airport and one in central Tokyo. They both offer a wealth of information to the new arrival; detailed maps, guides to Japanese culture and hotel information. English speaking staff can book your accommodation commission free and are a fantastic source of local knowledge.

American Airlines

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ROYAL JORDANIAN

Tokyo Tourist Information Center (TIC)
10F, Tokyo Kotsu Kaikan Building, 2-10-1 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku
Tel: (03) 3201 3331.

Website: www.jnto.go.jp

Passes: There are no sightseeing passes as such in Tokyo, but a couple of guides printed by the *Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau* offer discount vouchers to foreign visitors. The Tokyo Museum Guide for example offers discounts in art galleries and museums, while the Tokyo Handy Guide covers more than 30+ affiliated attractions.

Key Attractions



Roppongi Hills

Created as a city within a city, this immensely popular complex offers visitors a taste of Tokyo's future. Every inch of Roppongi Hills has been beautifully designed; visitors can wander through peaceful Japanese gardens and beside water walls, then eat and shop in one of more than 200 restaurants and boutiques. Those exhausted from shopping can enjoy the 12-screen Virgin cinema, showing the latest blockbusters, and night visitors shouldn't miss the chance to catch the best view of the city at Tokyo City View.

Roppongi Hills, Minato-ku

Tel: (03) 6406 6000.

Website: www.roppongihills.com/en/information/

Opening hours: Daily 24 hours.

Free admission.

Tokyo Tower

Opened in 1958, this 333m (1,092ft) red and white tower is an almost exact replica of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. But standing several metres taller than the original, it also includes an aquarium, numerous gift shops and a waxwork exhibit. The 250m- (820ft-) high observation tower offers views as far as Mt Fuji.

4-2-8 Shinbakoan, Minato-ku

Tel: (03) 3433 5111.

Website: www.tokyotower.co.jp

Opening hours: Daily 0900-2200.

Admission charge.

Tsukiji Ichiba

Set your alarm clock early as visiting the world's biggest fish market before dawn has even broken is a sight not to be missed. Relocated to this area following the 1923 earthquake, the market is now open six days a week (it's closed on Sundays and national holidays). More than 2,000 tons of fish pass through here every day, and the main action starts with a tuna auction at a jetlag-friendly 0530, where each enormous brightly-labelled fish can sell for as much as ¥1 million.

5-2-1 Tsukiji, Chuo-ku

Tel: (03) 3543 4176.

Website: www.tsukiji-market.or.jp

Opening hours: Mon-Sat from 0500.

Free admission.

Hama-Rikyu

Those exhausted by the fish market can seek solace at these nearby gardens. Hidden within a beautiful walled moat, this city oasis boasts manicured lawns, an ancient pine tree and three peaceful lakes. Once the hunting

ground of a shogun, the tranquil garden now offers only peace, quiet and a view of Tokyo's famous Rainbow Bridge.

1-1 Hama Rikyu Teien, Chuo-ku

Tel: (03) 3541 0200.

Opening hours: Daily 0900-1700.

Admission charge.

Tokyo Tocho

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Offices are notable both for their extraordinary architecture and the free observation decks on the 45th floor. Designed by Kenzo Tange, one of Japan's top architects, the monumental twin towers are said to be inspired by Notre Dame in Paris, although the imposing granite façade rather brings to mind scenes of Batman's Gotham City. The observation decks (one in each tower and both providing a cafe) are reached by high-speed elevator and give spectacular views over the city. When the Tokyo mist lifts, visitors can see Mount Fuji.

2-8-1 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku

Tel: (03) 5320 7890.

Website: www.metro.tokyo.jp

Opening hours: (North deck) Tues-Sun 0930-2230, (South deck) Wed-Mon 0930-1730.

Free admission.

Shinjuku-gyoen

Originally created for the royal family, these are perhaps the most beautiful gardens in Tokyo. The layout is meticulous and breathtaking, with both Japanese and French garden design, an imperial villa and a tropical greenhouse to explore. The place is filled with families on sunny days, as picnicking here is a Japanese tradition, although cafes are also on hand. The garden is particularly beautiful in the spring, when the cherry trees are in full bloom.

11 Naito-cho, Shinjuku-ku

Tel: (03) 3350 0151.

Website: www.env.go.jp/garden/shinjukugyoen/english/index.html

Opening hours: Tues-Sun 0900-1630.

Admission charge.

Bunkamura

For a glimpse of international art, as well as the most innovative and exciting Tokyo can offer, this is the best gallery in town. But it is much more than just a museum, it is a multimedia building offering a complete range of music, cinemas and events.

24-1, Dogenzaka 2-chome Shibuya-ku

Tel: (03) 3477 9111.

Website: www.bunkamura.co.jp

Opening hours: Daily 1000-1900.

Admission charge.

Meiji-jingu

One of Japan's finest examples of Shinto architecture, the atmospheric Meiji Shrine is tucked away in the centre of a dark, cool forest - an unexpected oasis in the centre of the city. Passing through a vast wooden *torii* gate, the visitor follows the wide gravel path through the forest and into the shrine precincts. Completed in 1920, the shrine honours the memory of Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken, under whose reign Japan rapidly modernised and was opened to the outside world.

1-1 Yoyogi, Kamizono-cho, Shibuya-ku

Tel: (03) 3320 5700.

Website: www.meijijingu.or.jp

Opening hours: Daily dawn to dusk (can vary, but usually 0900-1700).

Free admission to the shrine, charge for the Gyoen Inner Garden.

Ueno-koen

The largest park in Tokyo, Ueno is where locals head when the cherry blossoms suddenly bloom. With over 1,000 trees it makes a spectacular sight every spring. Home to several important museums, as well as Ueno Zoo, the park is dotted with historically-interesting temples and shrines, including the Tokyo 'branch' of the Nikko Toshogu Shrine.

Taito-ku

Tel: (03) 3828 5644.

Opening hours: Daily 24 hours.

Free admission to the park and shrines.

Sensoji

Tokyo's most revered Buddhist temple, and a site of pilgrimage and tourism for many centuries, Sensoji Temple was founded in AD628, to enshrine a gold statuette of the Kannon Bodhisattva (the Goddess of Mercy). The temple and its five-storey pagoda are concrete reconstructions built after a 1945 bombing raid, but the temple precincts are nevertheless always bustling with worshippers. Smoke from the huge incense burner in front of the temple is said to have healing powers.

2-3-1 Asakusa, Taito-ku

Tel: (03) 3842 5566 (Asakusa Cultural and Sightseeing Centre).

Opening hours: Daily 24 hours (grounds), 0600-1700 (shrine).

Free admission.

Tokyo International Exhibition Centre

Commonly called 'Tokyo Big Sight', and located on the reclaimed island of Odaiba in the middle of Tokyo Bay, this is Japan's largest convention centre. Since opening in 1996, it has housed hundreds of world famous exhibitions.

3-21-1 Ariake, Koto-ku

Tel: (03) 5530 1111.

Website: www.bigsight.jp

Opening hours: Vary depending on events.

Free admission.

MegaWeb

The centerpiece of the Odaiba land reclamation project, *MegaWeb* houses the giant ferris wheel that plays such an important part on Tokyo's new skyline. This development also includes *Toyota City Showcase*, where petrol heads can both see the newest cars in development, and give them a virtual test drive.

Aomi 1-chome, Koto-ku

Tel: (03) 3599 0808.

Website: www.megaweb.gr.jp

Opening hours: Daily 1100-2100 (2200 Sat-Sun).

Free admission.

Kyoko Higashi-gyoen

The Imperial Palace East Garden, on the site of the old Edo Castle of the shoguns, is the only part of the Imperial Palace that is regularly open to the public. Entered through the Otemon Gate, once the main entrance to the castle, it is a pleasant formal garden, surrounded by a section of the original moat and incorporating walls and foundations of the inner castle. Special features include a teahouse, pond and waterfall.

Otemachi, Chiyoda-ku
Tel: (03) 3213 1111.
Opening hours: Daily 0900-1630.
Free admission.

Yasukuni-jinja

Perhaps the most controversial of all Tokyo's sites, this shrine houses the souls of those killed in various Japanese wars. The grand shrine displays various artefacts and contains a sumo ring and *noh* theatre.

3-1-1 Kudankita, Chiyoda-ku
Tel: (03) 3261 8326.
Website: www.yasukuni.or.jp
Opening hours: Daily 0900-1700.

Free admission to the shrine, charge for the museum.

Edo-Tokyo Hakubutsukan

Housed in what looks like a colossal white spaceship, the Edo-Tokyo Museum is a wonderful place for visitors to get a feel for Tokyo's history and culture. The permanent exhibition is divided into three distinct areas. The 'Edo Zone' opens with a replica of Nihombashi 'Bridge of Japan', taking visitors through 'Tokyo Zone' post war reconstruction ending at 'History Zone'.

1-4-1 Yokoami, Sumida-ku
Tel: (03) 3626 9974.
Website: www.edo-tokyo-museum.or.jp
Opening hours: Tues-Sun 0930-1730 (Thu and Fri 2000).
Admission charge.

Culture



Fully embracing the legacy of the pleasure-loving inhabitants of old Edo, modern Tokyo continues to host an astonishing number of festivals, rituals, observances and celebrations (see *Special Events* section). The traditional arts, too, thrive here, with drama, martial arts, the tea ceremony and flower arranging all widely taught and performed. Tokyo is a stop on the touring schedules of many internationally famous music and dance companies, pop groups and art exhibitions, further adding to the vibrancy of the local arts and entertainment scene.

The Tourist Information Centre (tel: (03) 3201 3331) has a database of detailed information on the city's festivals, and the English-language magazines *Metropolis* (www.metropolis.co.jp) and *Tokyo Journal* (www.tokyo.to) publish listings of events, concerts and exhibitions.

The English-language booking agencies, *Ticket Pia* (tel: (03) 5237 9999; <http://t.pia.co.jp/>) and *Lawson Ticket* (<http://l-tike.com/>), are the major ticket merchants, with outlets located around the city. Events are regularly sold out and bookings should be made well in advance.

Music: Lovers of classical music are well catered for in Tokyo. There are five resident symphony orchestras - including the **Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra** (tel: (03) 5353 9521; www.tpo.or.jp/english), the **Tokyo Symphony Orchestra** (tel: (44) 520 1511; www.tokyosymphony.com/top-E.html) and the **NHK Symphony Orchestra** (tel: (03) 3465 1780; www.nhkso.or.jp).

There are numerous major venues, among them the **Bunkamura Orchard Hall**, 2-24-1 Dogenzaka, Shibuya-ku (tel: (03) 3477 9111; www.bunkamura.co.jp), **Suntory Hall**, 1-13-1 Akasaka, Minato-ku (tel: (03) 3584 9999; www.suntory.co.jp/suntoryhall) and the stunningly designed concert hall, **Tokyo Opera City**, 3-20-2 Nishi Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku (tel: (03) 5353 0770; www.operacity.jp).



Tokyo International Forum, 3-5-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku (tel: (03) 5221 9000; www.t-i-forum.co.jp) stages a variety of musical and cultural performances in its four halls, one being among the largest in the world, with 5,012 seats. Traditional Japanese musical performances, such as *taiko* (drum) and *shamisen* (a stringed instrument), are occasionally held at **Bunkamura** (see above) and in smaller local venues.

Theatre: Of Japan's traditional dramatic arts, *kabuki*, with its gorgeous costumes, elaborate staging and complex plots, is probably the most accessible. **Kabuki-za**, 4-12-15 Ginza, Chuo-ku (tel: (03) 3541 3131; www.kabuki-za.co.jp), is a beautiful theatre that holds regular performances. English earphone commentary is available. Performances are long, sometimes lasting 5 or 6 hours, however, it is usually possible to purchase tickets for a single act.

Information on programmes of other traditional performing arts, including *noh* (restrained and highly stylised drama, little changed since Japan's medieval era), *bunraku* (puppet theatre) and *kyogen* (short satirical plays, often performed as intervals during *noh* dramas), can be obtained from the Tourist Information Centre (see above).

Contemporary Japanese theatre tends towards the obscure, and the language barrier is an additional dissuasion. Far more accessible are the extravagant review-style performances of the glamorous all-female **Takarazuka** troop, held at the **Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre**, 1-1-3 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku (tel: (03) 5251 2001; <http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp>).

Dance: Overseas dance companies, ranging from ballet to tango, regularly include Tokyo on their itineraries. Performances are often held at **Bunkamura**, 2-24-1 Dogenzaka, Shibuya-ku (tel: (03) 3477 9111; www.bunkamura.co.jp).

Butoh, an experimental, sometimes grotesque form of expressive dance developed in Japan in the 1960s, has a loyal following among more avant-garde Japanese audiences. Performances take place in various venues, including **Setagaya Public Theatre**, 4-1-1 Taishido, Setagaya-ku (tel: (03) 5432 1526; www.setagaya-pt.jp).

Film: At the giant **Virgin Toho Cinema** multiplex (tel: (03) 5775 6090; www.tohocinemas.co.jp/roppongi/index.html) in Roppongi Hills, shows run late, or sometimes 24 hours, and seats are always allocated on purchase. Round the Yamanote line is the **Shinagawa Prince Cinema** (tel: (03) 5421 1113; www.princehotels.co.jp/shinagawa/cinema/), a plush 10-screen multiplex with enormous seats and all the latest films. A good arts cinema is **Cinema Rise**, 13-17 Udagawa-cho, Shibuya-ku (tel: (03) 3464 0052; www.cinemarise.com).

Rather than literary representations, Tokyo has always inspired powerful images, from the ukiyo-e woodblock prints of the Edo period to the films of the present day. Juzo Itami's *Tampopo* (1986) and Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953) explore aspects of life in the city, while Katsuhiro Otomo's acclaimed *Akira* (1988) is a sci-fi animation set in a futuristic vision of Tokyo.

In recent years, 2003's *Lost in Translation*, presenting Sophia Coppola's beautiful vision of Scarlett Johansson and Bill Murray lost in the neon wonders of modern Tokyo, has been the most powerful image to westerners.

Literary Notes: Tokyo is home to Japanese authors as diverse as Kenzaburo Oe, 1994 Nobel Laureate in Literature, and Banana Yoshimoto, author of the cult novel *Kitchen* (1993).

From the great 'interpreter of Japan', Lafcadio Hearn (an early foreign resident of Tokyo) and from the diplomatic wives of the 19th century, who delighted in the cherry blossoms and the dainty manners of the people, to Angela Carter, who pronounced Tokyo 'an exceedingly pleasant place in which to live', Tokyo has merited inclusion in a host of memoirs.

These include the writings of William Faulkner, Aldous Huxley, Jean Cocteau and Charlie Chaplin. William Gibson's novel, *Idoru* (1997), explores Tokyo's technological future, while the darker side of the city is vividly portrayed in *Speed Tribes: Children of the Japanese Bubble* (1994) by Karl Taro Greenfeld.

A Booker-shortlisted novel set in Tokyo is the wonderful *Number 9 Dream* (2001) by David Mitchell. Although written by an American author, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, by Arthur Golden, ignited worldwide interest in Japan and Japanese culture when it came out in 1998.

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