

TO / FROM NARITA AIRPORT

Airport Limousine

011-81-3/3665-7220, limousinebus.co.jp

The best choice for transportation into the city. Buses depart hourly from a stand directly outside the Arrivals lobby and make drop-offs at major hotels. Look for the counter as you exit Immigration. From the airport to the central Shibuya area takes about 85 minutes, to the Shinjuku Station transportation hub takes around 100 minutes. \$26 for a one-way ticket on both routes.

Japan Rail (JR) Narita Express (N'EX)

011-81-3/3423-0111, jreast.co.jp/e/nex/index.html

Trains run every hour (every half hour during peak times) between the airport station just below the Arrivals lobby and the city's main stations: Tokyo Station (one hour, \$25 each way) and Shinjuku (80 mins., \$27 each way). Purchase tickets at the airport's JR Reservations Office or from vending machines at the stations.

Keisei Skyliner Train

011-81-3/3831-0989, keiseibus.co.jp

A good choice if you're staying in Asakusa, but not if your hotel is in the more westernized Shinjuku or Shibuya neighborhoods. Purchase tickets at stations or through the Keisei Ueno information office. The plush trains depart every 40 minutes for the central Ueno Station, \$17 each way for the hour-long ride.

Keisei Limited Express Bus

011-81-3/3831-0989, keisei.co.jp

Eleven routes connect Narita and major suburban cities in and around Tokyo, including Kichijyoji, Makuhari, Kasai, and Yokohama. Departing times and fares vary depending on the destination. Rides into Tokyo take one hour. Purchase tickets at stations. From \$9.50.

TO / FROM HANEDA AIRPORT

Haneda Monorail

tokyo-airport-bldg.co.jp

Haneda is Tokyo's central domestic airport, with few international flights, mostly to/from Asian destinations. If you arrive here, the smartest transportation option into the city is the monorail. Consult the map on the Haneda Airport website for details. Purchase monorail tickets from machines at airport stations. From \$4 each way.

TIP A new system assigns each Metro station a letter and number (e.g. Ebisu on the Hibiya Line is H-02), but the odds of finding a Tokyo resident who actually knows that Ebisu Station is H-02 are close to zero. You're best off jotting down the name of the station(s) you want to go to, asking a local or station staff for help, and forgetting the numbering system altogether. Note: Presently, stops are listed with names *and* numbers.

GETTING AROUND

Japan Rail (JR) Lines

011-81-3/3423-0111, jreast.co.jp/e/index.html

The Yamanote Line, which encircles the city, and the Chuo Line, which bisects Tokyo, are cheap and convenient, and they connect many places worth visiting. Other lines are more circuitous, and more expensive. Trains arrive and depart every few minutes 5 A.M.–1 A.M. Note: Try to avoid the infamous Tokyo morning rush (7:30 A.M.–9:30 A.M.). Purchase tickets from vending machines. From \$1.15/ride, depending on the distance.

Tokyo Metro

011-81-3/3941-2004, tokyometro.jp

The Metro is not as confusing as its colorful map looks. Depending on where you want to go, it can be a great way to get around areas not covered by the nicer JR Lines. Trains run every few minutes 5 A.M.–midnight. From \$1.50/ride.

Pick up the handy free *Tokyo Metro Guide* in stations. It lists major landmarks and sights and their corresponding metro stations. You don't want to explore Tokyo without it.

Toei Subway Lines

011-81-3/5322-0400, kotsu.metro.tokyo.jp

In addition to Tokyo Metro lines, Tokyo has four city-operated Toei subway lines—Asakusa, Mita, Shinjuku, and Oedo. You can transfer to and from JR and Metro lines at many stations, but you'll need to pay separate fares. If you know you'll be transferring to or from another transit line, you can purchase a joint ticket at the station where you get on. From \$1.50/ride.

Special value tickets

Tokyo Metro's One-Day Open Ticket allows unlimited travel in a 24-hour period. The one-day JR Tokunai Pass is valid for travel on all JR city lines. Both 24-hour passes can be purchased at any station from the cash-only ticket machines. Around \$6.25 for a One-Day Open Ticket, \$6.50 for a JR Tokunai Pass.

Passnet Cards

Available for Tokyo Metro and Toei subway lines, as well as several other local trains and buses. They won't save you money, but they'll save you time lining up at cash-only ticket machines. As you enter and exit stations, fares are automatically calculated and deducted from the card. Available in 1,000 yen (\$8.75), 3,000 yen (\$26.25), and 5,000 yen (\$43.75) increments.

Fare Adjustment Machines

If you don't quite get the train line maps and ticket pricing system, don't worry. Simply buy the cheapest ticket available when entering a station, and pay the extra at the other end using a Fare Adjustment Machine. Just press the English button for directions and insert your ticket. The machine will tell you how much to pay.

GETTING AROUND, CONT.

Taxis

Fares are about \$5.75 plus \$2.50 for every additional 262 feet traveled. Rates increase 30 percent 11 P.M.–5 A.M. The average cab carries up to four people. In Tokyo, you can hail a cab just about anywhere by holding your arm out. A red windshield light means vacant; green means out of service. Note: Licensed taxis vary in color and make of car; just look for the identifying windshield light.

“Something like 15 million people live in Tokyo, and my estimate is that at any given moment, 14.7 million of them are lost.”

—Dave Barry

USEFUL WORDS

Conbini General term for convenience store (Lawson, Family Mart, etc.—most are open 24 hours and are licensed to sell alcohol).

Futon Thin mattress. Unlike a western futon, there is no wooden frame; the mattress is folded up when not in use.

Onsen Hot spring

Ryokan Traditional Japanese inn; guests use futons rolled out on tatami mats on the floor. Baths are usually communal.

Shoji Wood and paper screens used as room dividers

Tatami Traditional reed mat

Yukata Light cotton robe provided in ryokans and onsens. A thicker, more stylish variety is worn outside at summer festivals.

TIP Finding addresses can be difficult in Tokyo because most streets don't have names. The locals get around by using landmarks and by asking directions. Ask the concierge at your hotel to direct you. And be sure to get a card with a map of your hotel from the front desk to make sure that you can find your way back again.

WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND TOWN

Free on the street *Metropolis* (the best of the English guides), *Tokyo Notice Board*, *Tokyo Journal*, and *Japanzine*; available at HMV, Tower Records, and Kinokuniya

In bookstores *Katei Gaho International* is a beautiful, glossy English-language magazine with articles on traditional and contemporary Japanese culture and the arts, as well as on local events and restaurants. Well worth a look. \$7.50.

TOURS

Goodwill Guide Tours

Asakusa Cultural and Sightseeing Center, Kaminarimon 2-18, 011-81-3/3842-5566

Enthusiastic English-speaking volunteers conduct walking tours of the historic Asakusa area, which encompasses Tokyo's busiest temple, Senso-Ji. Another tour option takes you through Ueno Park and the city's liveliest market, Ameya Yokochō. Asakusa tours last one hour and depart at 1:30 P.M. and 3 P.M. on Sundays. Ueno tours run 90 minutes and depart at 10:30 A.M. and 1:30 P.M. on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. Free.

Hato Bus

World Trade Center, Hamamatsucho 2-4-1, 011-81-3/3761-1100, hatobus.co.jp

Half- and full-day bus tours in English that include the space-age sounding Cityrama Tour, which covers the distinctly unfuturistic Meiji Jingu Shrine and Senso-Ji Temple. \$35.

NUMBERS TO KNOW

Directory inquiries 104 (ask for English assistance)

Police 110 (for English assistance call 011-81-3/3501-0110)

Fire/Emergency/Ambulance 119

Narita Airport Flight Information 011-81-4/7634-5000

JR East Infoline 011-81-3/3423-0111

Train information in English, Korean, and Chinese

International Access Code From U.S. 011; from Japan 001

City Code 03

Note: When dialing from abroad, drop the 0 in the city code in the Japanese number, e.g. from U.S.: 011-81-3/3761-1100

- Pay phones take 10- and 100-yen coins. (Note: If you use a 100-yen coin, you won't get change back.)
- Some phones only take calling cards, which you can purchase from vending machines and at most convenience stores. To use, insert the card in the slot and begin dialing. For international calls, there's the popular KDDI Super World Card, also available at most convenience stores.
- Within Tokyo, start dialing without the city code 03; e.g., 3501-0110.
- For example: If you want to call A Bathing Ape (p. 5) from a pay phone in Shinjuku, pick up the receiver, insert coins or a calling card, and dial 3407-2145.

ASAKUSA **Ryokan Asakusa Shigetsu**

Asakusa 1-31-11, 011-81-3/3843-2345, shigetsu.com
Traditional inn in the shadow of Senso-Ji Temple with kimono-clad, English-speaking staff. Don't miss the wonderful wooden tub on the top floor. There's no extra fee for a soak with views of the neighboring five-story pagoda. From \$129 for a western double, from \$140 for a more interesting Japanese-style room with tatami mats, futons, and shoji screens.

ASAKUSA **Sukeroku no Yado Sadachiyo**

Asakusa 2-20-1, 011-81-3/3842-6431, sadachiyo.co.jp
Atmospheric, cozy *ryokan* filled with Japanese fire-fighting antiques from the Edo period. Rooms are simple, with wood detailing, tatami mats, and futons. There are also bicycles for rent; the charming landlady will point you in the right direction. The neighborhood has plenty of colorful back streets that are ideal for exploring on two wheels. (Note: People bike on the sidewalk in Japan.) Doubles from \$160; add \$9 for stays on Sat., Sun., and nights before holidays. \$1.75 per day for bike rental.

KAMAKURA **Homeikan (Morikawa Annex)**

Hongo 6-23-5, 011-81-3/3811-8171, homeikan.com
For over 50 years this exceptional *ryokan* has provided a way for guests in the city to experience the charm of a traditional rural inn. In the Morikawa section, each room features expert carpentry, elegant shoji screens, and delicate wood carvings of pine trees and landscapes. Within easy walking distance of three major subway stops—Hongo-Sanchome, Marunouchi, and Todai-Mae. Doubles from \$97.

MEGURO **Claska**

Chuo-cho1-3-18, 011-81-3/3719-8121, claska.com
Tokyo's only boutique hotel. It has just nine rooms—all chic. Some come with glossy hardwood floors and sexy glass-paneled bathrooms. The first-floor lobby lounge, complete with DJ, bookstore and canine grooming salon, is popular with local fashionistas, but don't expect service with a smile. Doubles from \$170.

MEGURO **Meguro Club Sekitei**

Shimo Meguro 2-1-6, 011-81-3/3494-1211
An imitation castle, this is Tokyo's favorite "love hotel." It provides discreet sanctuary for amorous young couples seeking to escape their cramped apartments and families—most Japanese live at home until they marry. Themed rooms are available for a euphemistic "rest" or overnight stay. Weekends get especially crowded. A fun, uniquely Japanese experience. No reservations. Note: Most overnight rates are for stays 10 P.M.–10 A.M. From \$50 for a three-hour "rest," from \$80 for midweek overnight stays, \$105 on weekend nights.

ROPPONGI **Villa Fontaine Roppongi**

Roppongi 1-6-2, 011-81-3/3560-1110, villa-fontaine.co.jp
One rank up from other so-called business hotels. It even provides you with your own pair of pajamas, and some rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art vibrating massage chairs. The best features of the attractive rooms are the cozy feather comforters. The complimentary breakfast buffet—a rarity in Tokyo—has flaky pastries and fresh fruit. There's no concierge, but the reception staff can provide information and directions in English. Doubles from \$125.

SHINJUKU **Green Plaza Capsule Hotel**

Kabukicho 1-29-2, 011-81-3/3207-5411, hgpsinjuku.jp/cap/
The king of capsule hotels, with 660 horizontal "pods" for male guests only. Capsule hotels are famous for providing cheap emergency accommodation for drunk Japanese salarymen who've missed their last train home. All baths are communal, and there's also a sauna with a giant hunk of 400 million-year-old Himalayan salt (it supposedly emits healthy negative ions). Note: There's a strict no-tattoo rule. (See box on p. 6.) Capsules from \$38, including outside locker rental.

SHINJUKU **Odakyu Hotel Century Southern Tower**

Yoyogi 2-2-1, 011-81-3/5354-0111, southerntower.co.jp
Great city center location—it towers over Shinjuku Station. Guestroom interiors are nothing too special; the real reason to stay here is the dramatic city views. Rooms are on floors 22–35. Beds are comfortable, and the staff brews free pots of green tea every morning. Doubles from \$190.

YANAKA **Sawanoya Ryokan**

Yanaka 2-3-11, 011-81-3/3822-2251, sawanoya.com
Although the Japanese-style guestrooms—some with private baths—are small, this is a warm family-run *ryokan* in a peaceful part of the city that's steeped in history. Ask charismatic owner Mr. Sawa about the area's temples and traditional shops, and for his hand-drawn English map to help you get around. Reservations recommended. Doubles from \$85.

\$ SPLURGE **Park Hotel Tokyo**

Shiodome Media Tower, Higashi Shimbashi 1-7-1, 011-81-3/6252-1111, parkhoteltokyo.com
A glitzy giant in the newly developed Shiodome area, where the service is slick and the concierge can help you with just about anything. The light-filled atrium lobby stretches 10 stories high. Guestrooms are light and airy, with soothing neutral color schemes, modern wood furniture, custom-made pillows, and artwork inspired by nature. It's worth paying extra for a Tower Side room with uninterrupted views of the city and, when the sky is clear, distant Mount Fuji. Tower Side doubles from \$210.

Budget Travel Tokyo / Ginza, Yurakucho, and environs

SNAP GUIDE

Compact, central area known for high-end shops, restaurants and galleries, Ginza is the spot where the elite meet—especially on Sundays, when many streets are pedestrian-only. Yurakucho lies to the northwest.

SEE Mitsukoshi Department Store Jizo and Shrine

Ginza 4-6-16, 011-81-3/3562-1111, ginza.mitsukoshi.co.jp
Push through crowds shopping for everything under the rising sun and head to the rooftop. Overlooking the scene is a large stone statue of Jizo, guardian deity of luck, success, and prosperity in business. Open daily 10 A.M.–8 P.M.

SEE Tokyo International Forum

Marunouchi 3-5-1, 011-81-3/5221-9000, t-i-forum.co.jp
Standing inside this architecturally stunning, swooping, almond-shaped exhibition center is like being inside a whale. The excellent Oedo Antique Fair, held on the first and third Sunday of every month, is also worth a look; it's a good place to search for antique kimonos.

EAT Ginza Sembikiya Fresh Fruit and Parlour

Ginza 5-5-1, 011-81-3/3572-0101, ginza-sembikiya.jp
Perfect apples, ambrosial grapes, and heaven-sent melons have been the hallmarks of this high-end fruit store since 1894. For those who can't afford a \$185 melon, the parlor upstairs serves single slices.

EAT Little Okinawa Taketomi-jima

Ginza 6-12-13 B1F, 011-81-3/5537-1293, little-okinawa.co.jp
Exotic items—such as stir-fried bitter melon, 'sea grape' seaweed, and sliced pig's ear—from Japan's southernmost Okinawan islands draw a young and devoted crowd. They believe that the cuisine here may be the secret to longevity—Okinawans have an average life expectancy of 81 years, one of the highest in the world. Everything pairs nicely with *awamori*, a rice wine from the islands.

EAT Yakitori Alley

Under the JR train tracks near Hibiya Station
(Use Exit A1, walk south)

Follow the smoke and join the merry salarymen at one of these convivial street-side *yakitori* (meat on skewers) bars. If you don't fancy the chicken skin and cartilage options, ask for *negima* (boneless meat with leek). The bullet trains speeding by overhead provide a stark contrast to the old street stalls.

\$ SPLURGE Hanadaikon

Ginza 6-7-4 B1F, 011-81-3/3569-0953, e-ohashi.com/hanazen/hanadaikon
High-quality Japanese flavors emerge on little plates from the kitchen. Traditional *ikebana* (Japanese flower arrangement) and *washi* (handmade paper) decorations adorn this small basement restaurant. Take a seat on the floor at one of the low tables with ladies who lunch. Order the Tofu Rakuzen (\$23): your 12 dishes of seasonal delicacies might include sesame tofu, sweet steamed pumpkin, or grilled eel. The pretty, patterned wooden chopsticks are for taking home. Warning: There's no English sign; look for the giant chopsticks and head down the stairs.

\$ SPLURGE Sushi Karaku

Ginza 5-6-16, 011-81-3/3571-2250 ginza-karaku.com
Top-quality, melt-in-the-mouth sushi at reasonable prices. The chef will recommend the best catch of the day or season, but you can't really go wrong with the buttery *chu-toro* (fatty tuna). The evening *omakase* (chef's selection) costs \$138; cheaper options are available at lunchtime. Try the assorted *nigiri* sushi plate—delectable slices of raw fish on lumps of vinegar rice. From \$27.

DRINK Cha Ginza

Ginza 5-5-6, 011-81-3/3571-1211, uogashi-meicha.co.jp
A teashop that perfectly combines contemporary Japanese architecture and traditional taste—smooth concrete walls, white benches, and a long beverage menu. For just \$4.50, you can sip *matcha* green tea, which comes in espresso-size cups, accompanied by a flower-shaped *wagashi* sweet made from rice or bean paste. Closed Mon.

SHOP Bic Camera

Yurakucho 1-11-1, 011-81-3/5221-1111, biccamera.com
All the newest Japan-made electronics. There's a dazzling array of cell phones, digital cameras, computers, hand-helds, and video games. This store is a less nerdy alternative to the vast tech emporium of Akihabara, but it does feature an irritating, non-stop jingle. It has handbags and booze, too.

PLAY Big Echo Karaoke

Ginza 4-2-14, 011-81-3/3563-5100, clubdam.com/be
Individual themed rooms that accommodate up to 30 people. Thanks to extensive soundproofing, crooners are protected from added humiliation as they belt out old favorites. The pink, sparkling Hello Kitty floor is especially fun—a talking statue of the bubbly 30-year-old character welcomes you as you exit the elevator. From \$7.50 per person for 30 minutes; \$9 for the astounding 120-minute all-you-can-drink option.

TOKYO TREND: THEME RESTAURANTS

Ever wanted to dine while handcuffed to your partner, or under the hallowed gaze of the Virgin Mary? Alcatraz E.R.+ (Dogenzaka 2-13-5 2F, 011-81-3/3770-7100), a prison-cum-hospital-themed restaurant, serves up "prescription cocktails" in test tubes to inmates locked in their cells. Diners can only leave if they post "bail" after their meal. For an altogether holier experience, the cathedral-like Christon Café (Dogenzaka 2-10-7, 011-81-3/5728-2225) has statues of Mary, stained glass windows, and chalices for the holy wine. The food at both places is surprisingly good.

Budget Travel Tokyo / Harajuku and Aoyama

SNAP GUIDE

Omotesando Boulevard is at the heart of Harajuku, a trendy shopping district that spawns outrageous styles. Aoyama caters to an older, more chic clientele and has the highest concentration of outlets.

SEE Omotesando architecture

Jingumae (between Meiji-Dori and Aoyama-Dori)

The crumbling but beautiful pre-war *dojunkai* apartments have been razed, but this avenue is still an architect's delight, with creations such as the Tod's Building (Jingumae 5-1-15) by Toyo Ito, the Dior Building (Jingumae 5-9-11) by Sanaa, and the not yet completed Omotesando Hills (Jingumae 4-12) by the current darling of Japanese architecture, Tadao Ando. All are within a stone's throw of each other.

SEE Prada Boutique Aoyama

Minami Aoyama 5-2-6, 011-81-3/6418-0400

Even if you're not in the market for a \$700 cashmere sweater, this breathtaking edifice of convex glass diamonds by Herzog & de Meuron is a stunning sight.

SEE Yoyogi Park

Just behind Harajuku Station on the Yamanote Line

Famous in the '80s for its tribes of hip rockabillics. It's still the spot to sneak a peak at some of Tokyo's most outlandish hobbies and their practitioners. The rabbit group meets regularly to trade bunny tips and show off their long-eared pets on leashes. If you're lucky, you'll also catch the ukulele group strumming "I Fought the Law" and other rock classics. Good weird fun.

EAT Chao Bamboo

Jingumae 6-1-5 (just off Omotesando), 011-81-3/5466-4787, bamboo.co.jp/chao

Delicious Southeast Asian food in unpretentious surroundings. The fresh Vietnamese spring rolls and mild to-die-for green curry draw a dedicated stream of regulars. Be prepared to wait on weekends.

EAT Harajuku Gyoza

Jingumae 6-2-4 (opposite Chao Bamboo), 011-81-3/3406-4743

Line up with those in the know at this lively restaurant for some of Tokyo's tastiest—and cheapest—*gyoza* (fried or boiled dumplings). Sit at one of the long wooden tables, or try a counter seat to experience the kitchen-patron banter.

EAT Heiroku-zushi

Jingumae 5-8-5 (on Omotesando), 011-81-3/3498-3968, heiroku.jp

Technology and sushi unite. Novices can inspect passing plates on a conveyor belt, choosing whatever looks appetizing. Good quality dishes start at a very economical \$1 per plate (2 pieces).

DRINK Carmenere Omotesando

Jingumae 4-4-7 BF1, 011-81-3/3401-6779

Some 70,000 Swarovski crystals provide added sparkle to this swish basement champagne bar frequented by Tokyo's young and beautiful. Arrive before 9:30 P.M. for one of the coveted counter seats in front of the crystal mural. From \$15 for a glass of bubbly. Cover charge (for men only): From \$9.

SHOP A Bathing Ape

Minami Aoyama 5-5-8, 011-81-3/3407-2145, bape.com

Tokyo's coolest street label. On the second floor, smart new sneakers ride round and round on a sushi conveyor belt. The best buys, however, are the iconic T-shirts. A recent one featured a crossover *Planet of the Apes* meets Che Guevara image on the front. From \$50.

SHOP Bunkaya Zakkaten

Jingumae 3-28-9, 011-81-3/3423-8980, bunkaya.co.jp

Jesus and Mary chopstick rests and Jackie O. sunglasses made out of buttons are among the cheap trinkets at this cheerful little shop dedicated to kitsch. One of many fun boutiques in the narrow backstreets running off Omotesando avenue.

“Harajuku girls, you got the wicked style.”

—“*Harajuku Girls*” by Gwen Stefani

SHOP The Daiso 100 Yen Shop

Jingumae 1-19-24, 011-81-3/5775-9641, daiso-sango.co.jp

A frugal shopper's paradise located on crowded Takeshita-dori street, the capital of cool for Tokyo's teens on the hunt for anime character notebooks, cute stickers, make-up and other must-have items. Everything in the four-story emporium costs 100 yen (90¢), plus tax.

SHOP Pet Paradise

Jingumae 1-6-5, 011-81-3/3497-0379, creativeyoko.co.jp

For those who like to play dress-up with their dogs. Canine costumes for sale include lamb suits and fire fighter outfits.

\$ SPLURGE Henshin-Studio Mon Katsura

Jingumae 4-28-4, 011-81-3/3470-0027, henshin-maiko.com

Create your own *Memoirs of a Geisha* with a makeover and photo session. Women can don an exquisite kimono and voluminous wig and smile demurely through perfectly painted lips. Men are transformed into samurai. Makeovers available daily 11 A.M.–4 P.M. Reservations a must. \$105 for women, \$43 for men; prices include three photos.

HARAJUKU WHO?

The legions of now-famous Harajuku girls (and some guys) keep growing and morphing. Their eye-popping styles are easy to spot—punk hipsters, cartoonish girly-girls, ghetto fabulous hip-hoppers. Shop alongside them at Laforet, a complex of over 100 trendy boutiques (Jingumae 1-11-6, Shibuya-ku, 011-81-3/475-0411, laforet.ne.jp), and along the crowded main drags: Takeshita, Meiji-dori, and Jingumae.

Budget Travel Tokyo / Shibuya, Daikanyama, Ebisu

SNAP GUIDE

Thriving nightlife, flashing neon, and trendy boutiques draw teens to Shibuya; Daikanyama has a quiet but hip vibe; Ebisu is known for museums and the Yebisu Garden Place entertainment complex.

SEE Meguro River

Shops line this shady stream running through the heart of Tokyo's hippest neighborhood. Competition is tough, and impossibly cool boutiques and cafés come and go in the blink of an eye. See it before the next high-rise giant goes up in their place. From the Naka-Meguro Station on the Hibiya or Tokyu lines, exit the station and walk straight ahead.

SEE Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography

Mita 1-13-3, 011-81-3/3280-0099, syabi.com

Rotating exhibits by influential photographers. There's always something worth seeing. Recent shows have included Mario Testino, Brassai, and an exhibit on "How Photography Changed People's Viewpoint." Closed Mon. From \$4, depending on the exhibit.

EAT En

Shibuya 1-24-12 11F, 011-81-3/5468-6196, izakaya-en.com

Tatami mats complement the excellent modern Japanese flavors and decor at this popular casual *izakaya* (a Japanese pub with lots of beer and tasty eats). Try the succulent grilled tuna cheek with garlic.

EAT Luxis Aqua Restaurant and Bar

Ebisu Nishi 1-7-3 BF1, 011-81-3/5428-2288, luxis.co.jp

It's easy to let yourself be mesmerized by the two-story floor-to-ceiling aquarium and the fishy inhabitants who swim in blissful ignorance of what's consumed outside the tank. The Chardonnay-steamed mussels and the tuna and avocado tartare are both superb.

\$ SPLURGE Maimon Oyster Bar and Charcoal Grill

Ebisu Minami 1-1-10, 011-81-3/3715-0303, maimon.jp

Handsome dark woods, modern blue spot lighting, and an impressive counter completely covered with ice combine to make an ideal setting for slurping oysters. A popular "shooters" order is three fresh oysters in individual shot glasses topped with Japanese seasonings, such as vinegary *ponzu*, raw sea urchin, or *yama-imo* (yam). Cold dry *tenyuri* sake goes nicely with the briny shellfish. The waitstaff know their stuff and are happy to make recommendations.

TABOO TATTOOS

The *yakuza* are notorious Japanese gangsters whose history dates back to the Edo period (1603–1837). Proof of an individual's strength, elaborate tattoos are the nearly exclusive hallmark of members of this Japanese Mafia. Most swimming pools and *onsens* in Japan ban tattoos to keep out the *yakuza* and avoid trouble.

DRINK Starbucks Coffee

Opposite the Hachiko exit of JR Shibuya Station, 011-81-3/3770-2301

Not the most inspired venue for coffee in Tokyo, but the window seats have the best views of the famously chaotic Hachiko intersection. Sip a green tea Frappuccino, snap a few photos, and gaze at the throngs elbowing across.

SHOP Hanjiro

Sarugaku-cho 24-1, 011-81-3/5784-5627, hanjiro.co.jp

The funkier secondhand shop in town, and not just for its reasonably priced reworked vintage items. Decorative accents include religious icons, live parrots, and bathtubs filled with goldfish.

SHOP Kamawanu

Sarugaku-cho 23-1, 011-81-3/3780-0182, kamawanu.com

A popular little store selling one of Tokyo's beloved collector's items—exquisitely hand-dyed *tenugui* (cotton handkerchiefs). The beautiful designs change by season—falling cherry blossoms in spring and vivid leaf patterns in fall. From \$8.

SHOP Okura

Sarugaku-cho 20-11, 011-81-3/3461-8511, hrm.co.jp

Cooler-than-cool men and women buy indigo-dyed shirts with distinctive kimono-inspired designs from this unusual boutique, whose owners keep a pet chicken on the second-floor balcony of the old stone house.

PLAY Air

Sarugakucho 2-11, 011-81-3/5784-3386, air-tokyo.com

Spare but trendy basement club hosting big name DJs from around the world. The laid-back Frames café upstairs serves lattes and cheesecake until dawn. Cover from \$10, depending on DJ.

ESCAPE

Shonan Beaches

The gray volcanic sand beaches of Shonan, to the southwest of Tokyo, turn into resorts in summer, with countless bars and cafés that cater to the thousands of vacationers. The swimming isn't so great, but the party atmosphere is fun. Check out the Little Thailand area of Thai-run food stalls and massage shacks on Yuigahama Beach. Not quite Southeast Asia, but not a bad antidote to the unbearable humidity of the Japanese summer. From Kamakura, hop the Enoden electric railway line. \$1.50 each way from Kamakura. (See box on p. 1.)

Budget Travel Tokyo / Shinjuku and environs

SNAP GUIDE

Flashy and modern, with dazzling skyscrapers and department stores. Train tracks divide the commercial hub to the west, Nishi-Shinjuku, from shops and bars in Higashi-Shinjuku.

SEE Metropolitan Government Offices

Nishi Shinjuku 2-8-1, 011-81-3/5321-111, metro.tokyo.jp
Architect Kenzo Tange's twin towers still make an imposing mark on the Tokyo landscape. The boundless (and free) views from the 45th floor are enough to make even an exhausted Tokyo government employee smile. The north observatory is open daily 9:30 A.M.–11:00 P.M. and closed the second and fourth Monday of each month. The south is open daily 9:30 A.M.–5:30 P.M. and closed the first and third Tuesday of each month. Both are closed Dec. 29–31, Jan. 2–3.

SEE Shinjuku Gyoen National Gardens

Naito-cho 11, 011-81-3/3350-0151, shinjukugyoen.go.jp
This vast green oasis in the heart of the city has acres of lawns that you are actually allowed to walk on. It's a more relaxed alternative to Ueno Park, and a wonderful spot for cherry-blossom viewing come spring. Open daily 9 A.M.–4:30 P.M. Closed Mon. \$1.75.

SEE Yoyogi National Gymnasium

Yoyogi (halfway between Shinjuku and Harajuku), Jinnan-2-1-1, 011-81-3/3468-1171, naash.go.jp/yoyogi/
For the 1964 Olympics, Japan's most influential 20th-century architect, Kenzo Tange, created a vision of the future: twin swooping, grey concrete buildings that resemble flying saucers. The grassy hill next door is a good place to lounge and take in the view.

EAT Canal Café

Kagurazaka 1-9, 011-81-3/3260-8068
In spring, cherry trees form a pink canopy over the deck of this European-style café. To reach it, hop on a Chuo Line train, get off at Iidabashi Station, and take the west exit.

EAT Okubo Korea Town

Authentic Korean food that's definitely not made for tourists. Choose any of the crowded restaurants, like the Healthy House (Hyakunin-cho 1-18-10 2F, 011-81-3/3366-2611, English sign), famous for its barbecued meats and *bibimbop* (rice mixed with vegetables and fried egg), or Oasis (Okubo 1-15-12 2F, 011-81-3/3209-6535, English sign), known for cheap, filling, spicy stews. Get off at Shin-Okubo Station on the Yamanote Line, and follow the locals—and your nose.

EAT Thai Country

Shinjuku 3-11-1, 011-81-3/3358-0557
A tiny, country-and-western-themed restaurant that's a favorite of local Thais for its home-style dishes, such as fried egg salad and curry.

DRINK Advocates

Shinjuku 2-18-1, 011-81-3/3358-3988
This small, dark, zebra-striped café/bar in Tokyo's largest gay district has \$9 all-you-can-drink specials on Sundays 9 A.M.–9 P.M. It's the place to come for pre-club drinks on weekends, when the crowd spills over onto the street outside.

DRINK Omoide Yokocho

Near the western exit of JR Shinjuku Station
Memory Lane, a narrow alley squeezed between Shinjuku Station and a jumble of bigger, newer buildings, is a clutch of tiny charming drinking shacks with just enough space for a handful of customers. Most patrons order beer and *yakitori* (meat on skewers), but the daily drink and snack specials can be delicious. Go now before the property developers get their way and this slice of Tokyo is lost forever.

“One kind word
can warm three
winter months.”

—Japanese proverb

DRINK Motsuyaki-Dokoro Ishii, Nihon Saisei Sakaba

Shinjuku 3-7-3, 011-81-3/3354-4829
Styled after 1950s Tokyo, the boisterous, standing-room-only bar is packed every night of the week. Vintage ad posters cover the walls and the staff wears old-fashioned *happi* aprons. Sample the *shochu*, a distilled spirit made from rice, sweet potato, or sugar cane. Order it mixed with oolong tea, fresh lemon or grapefruit and soda, or straight over ice.

\$ SPLURGE New York Bar

Park Hyatt Hotel, Nishi-Shinjuku 3-7-1-2, 011-81-3/5322-1234, parkhyatttokyo.com
Recreate a favorite *Lost in Translation* moment at the sexy wood-paneled bar on the 52nd floor, where Bill Murray's character drowned his sorrows in whiskey. After-dark views of the city's flickering neon are stunning, and there are excellent live jazz performances nightly. \$18 cover after 8 P.M.

SHOP Lammfromm The Concept Store

Uehara 1-1-21, 011-81-3/5454-0450, lammfromm.jp
Exceptional boutique that stocks works by some of the hottest contemporary artists from Japan and abroad—Yayoi Kusama prints, Yoshitomo Nara T-shirts, and accessories by Takeshi Murakami of Louis Vuitton. The knowledgeable staff can guide you, and prices are not as steep as you'd think.

SHOP Tokyu Hands

Times Square Building, Sendagaya 5-24-2 (New South Exit of JR Shinjuku Station), 011-81-3/5361-3111, tokyu-hands.co.jp
You name it, they have it. Wander the seven floors of this hardware store and you're sure to find items that you never imagined under one roof, like emergency earthquake supplies, gold lamé kimonos, and “bow-lingual” machines that tell you exactly what your dog is trying to say by “analyzing” its bark.

Budget Travel Tokyo / Ueno, Asakusa, Yanaka

SNAP GUIDE

All three northern areas have traditional houses, markets, and tiny streets characteristic of *shitamachi* (the old downtown).

SEE Nezu Shrine

Nezu 1-28-9, 011-81-3/3822-0753, nedujinja.or.jp

A long winding tunnel of sacred orange *torii* gates marks the entrance to this peaceful shrine—one of the oldest in Tokyo. Well off the tourist track. Follow the English signs outside the Nezu Station on the Chiyoda Line.

SEE Scai the Bathhouse

Yanaka 6-1-23, 011-81-3/3821-1144, scaithebathhouse.com

Works by the hottest contemporary artists, both foreign and local, are on view in this beautiful gallery in a former public bathhouse. Closed Sun. and Mon.

“The only country
I know where a
flower can bring an
entire nation to a
state of near-sexual
excitement.”

—Karin Muller

SEE Senso-ji Temple and its backstreets

Asakusa 2-3-1, 011-81-3/3842-0181

Tokyo's most popular Buddhist temple attracts thousands of people every day, many of whom buy 'fortune slips' there in hopes of receiving good luck. If the fortune is negative, they just tie the slip of paper onto one of the poles outside to let the wind carry the bad luck away. Others come to waft incense smoke over their bodies as a cure for ailments. A wander around the surprisingly quiet backstreets provides glimpses of tranquil gardens, ponds filled with koi, and smaller, quieter shrines.

SEE Ueno Park

JR Ueno Station Park Exit

Site of some of the city's best museums and galleries, such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and National Science Museum, as well as a large proportion of Japan's homeless. It is also *the* place to come for cherry-blossom viewing in spring, when it's taken over by revelers with beer and portable karaoke machines.

SUMMER IN THE CITY

In the summer, Tokyo becomes a city of street festivals, many of which are topped off by incredible fireworks. The city's biggest and most anticipated display is the Sumida River Hanabi Taikai, on the last Saturday night in July.

EAT Edo Monja Hyotan

Asakusa 1-37-4 (opposite Ryokan Shigetsu),
011-81-3/3841-0589, asakusa.24663.com

Cook-it-yourself *monja yaki* may not be a feast for the eyes, but it's surprisingly delicious. Just toss your choice of seafood, vegetable, and meat with a batter made from flour and *dashi* broth (usually made from fish) and throw the mixture on the hotplate in the middle of the table (the expert staff can help). The place itself is nondescript, but the boisterous crowds and good food make it fun.

EAT Funawa

Asakusa 1-22-10, 011-81-3/3842-2781

A small café upstairs serves tea and Japanese sweets, such as marble-size *ankodama* made from bean paste. The real star is the tasty (and very bright) green tea soft-serve ice cream sold at the take-out window. For the less adventurous, there's also vanilla. Just look for the line.

SHOP Sample Shop Maiduru

Nishi Asakusa 1-5-17, 011-81-3/3843-1686, maiduru.co.jp

Lifelike food souvenirs—plastic dumplings, *yakitori* skewers, and sushi—for the folks back home.

PLAY Momidokoro Rakuya

Asakusa 1-32-11, 011-81-3/5830-0595

A relaxing shiatsu center. This traditional form of massage uses the body's pressure points and meridians to relieve stiffness and promote healing. Wonderful wood and stone footbaths provide a bit of extra pampering for weary feet. All massage rooms are private. Some English spoken. Note: There's no English sign, so ask directions. \$19 for a 20-minute massage.

\$ SPLURGE Ebisuya Rickshaws

Departs from across the Senso-ji Temple main entryway,
011-81-3/5806-8881, ebisuya.com

Sit back in a plush rickshaw and let your driver pull you through the lesser-known streets of historic Asakusa. The English-speaking guides are very knowledgeable. Two people per rickshaw. \$35 per person for a 30-minute ride.

ESCAPE

Kamakura

A statue of the awe-inspiring Great Buddha (*Daibutsu*) gazes over the lovely coastal town of Kamakura, home to ancient temples and peaceful shrines. Dousing your yen in sacred spring water at the Zeniarai-Benten shrine is said to bring prosperity. JR trains regularly depart Tokyo's Ebisu, Shibuya, and Shinjuku stations for Kamakura. Rides take about one hour. \$8 each way from Tokyo and Shinjuku stations.