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Discover regional Japan in Tokyo

From the courtly refinement of Kyoto to the street smart vibes of Osaka and the tropical flavour of Okinawa, Japan is an amazingly diverse country, with 47 prefectures having their own unique customs, culture and cuisine. Oh yes, the amazing regional cuisines, which keep travellers salivating on every step of a Japanese journey, from the seafood mecca of Hokkaido in the cold north to Fukuoka, the birthplace of the globally famed tonkatsu ramen in the southern Kyushu prefecture. We know it all too well, the struggle is real: there are too many places to visit, things to do, food to eat – and too little time to do it all. But the good news is that you can easily experience the best of regional Japan right here in Tokyo. Think of our city as a Japan taster, which will inspire you to go visit a different part of the country.

START YOUR EXPLORATION ON PAGE 24
Internationally acclaimed Japanese contemporary artist Takashi Murakami has his own vending machine in Nakano Broadway selling his signature Kaikai and Kiki mini plush toys. [tinyurl.com/TOTmurakamiVM]

Yokohama has opened a temporary poop museum, featuring the famed unke (Japanese for ‘poop’) emoji in all its cute, pastel-coloured glory. [tinyurl.com/TOTyokohamapm]

Tokyo is the best city in Asia. More than 33,000 city-dwellers participated in this year’s Time Out Index – and Tokyo was voted the best city in Asia. Globally however, Tokyo comes in at No.10, trailing just behind other international cities such as New York, London, Melbourne and Paris. Tokyo ranks high for its food and restaurant scene, drinking culture and convenience. See timeout.com/tokyo for more insights into the city.

Crushed and ground crickets go into each Bugmo protein bar, which comes in one of two reassuringly conventional flavours: matcha or chocolate. And it’s gluten-free to boot. The Japanese brand claims that crickets offer numerous health benefits and taste similar to kinako (roasted soybean flour) powder. Any takers? [bugmo.jp]

Send us your best Instagram photos of the city with #TimeOutTokyo.
Tokyo Update

ONE DAY IN...

Nakameguro

A top cherry blossom viewing spot thanks to the sakura-lined Meguro River, this trendy neighbourhood rewards exploration at any time of year. Venture away from the riverside, follow the train tracks, and you’ll find hidden art galleries, independent shops and cute cafés. By Kaila Imada

EAT

KUSHIKAWAKARU

This Japanese pachinko joint is always packed in the evenings, and the conical atmosphere doesn’t last too long, the smokiness of grilled chicken probably won’t. Tacos are a staple for the fried chicken, and you’ll also see an all-you-can-eat grill with the grill-magic with mozzarella, grilled cheese and fish on a bed of hot chips. The drinks are a treat, served in hot cups instead of glasses. 1-17-2 Yanaka, Nakameguro (Nakameguro Station), 03 6705 6880. 11am-11pm, closed Sun.

CANTEEN

This light, airy eatery boasts a selection of unique international dishes with a Japanese twist. For starters, you can enjoy a trio of skewers including beef, chicken and pork with a soy sauce dipping sauce, or seasonal strawberries and fennel seed. Then, dig into past by topped with shirasu dressing, or seasonal strawberries tossed with anise and fennel seed. 1-7-13 Kamimeguro, Meguro (Nakameguro Station), 03 3496 1771. 2F , 1-16-15 Aobadai, Meguro (Nakameguro Station). 03 3770 8998. 12pm-3pm (2.30pm), 6pm-12am (11pm), irregular hols.

SIDEWALK STAND BAISEN & BAGEL

This light, airy eatery boasts a selection of unique international dishes with a Japanese twist. For starters, you can enjoy a trio of skewers including beef, chicken and pork with a soy sauce dipping sauce, or seasonal strawberries and fennel seed. Then, dig into pasta topped with shirasu dressing, or seasonal strawberries tossed with anise and fennel seed. 1-7-13 Kamimeguro, Meguro (Nakameguro Station), 03 6705 6880. 11am-11pm, closed Sun.

SHOP

MISC

This trendy boutique моде aims to please one of Nakameguro’s hidden gems, offering some of the latest seasonal trends for ladies along with a healthy selection of fruit juices, smoothies, coffees and teas. Expect a mix of international and domestic labels like Citrus of Harunuma and Pretty Blossoms for denim and shirts respectively, as well as boutique line of handcrafted basics. 7-1, tanaka, tokyo, setagaya-ku and less expensive, as well as its own house line of labels like Citizens of Humanity and Pretty Ballerinas for hidden gems, offering some of the latest sartorial trends for ladies. 1-7-13 Kamimeguro, Meguro (Nakameguro Station), 03 3496 1771. 11am-7pm, closed Sun.

DRINK

OHKATE THE BESTBARS

Offering a selection of gourmand’s delights, from craft beer and some not-so-traditional gins, this quirky, palms reedery is a relaxing casual bar. Its handcrafted drinks menu includes unusual options like yuzu topped with midori astra, a strange-sounding concoction which works brilliantly. Pair your gins with a local craft beer from one of many microbreweries in Gakken Brewing Company of Portland, and you’ll find a great atmosphere on an evening in Nakameguro. 9-9-5 Urayasu, Meguro (Nakameguro Station), 03 6705 2281. 6pm-11pm (2.30pm), closed (2pm), closed Sun & tues.

MOST GOOGLED

Why is fruit so expensive in Japan?

Tokyo Update

APR 7-12, NICAGA

Tokyo's compact city is packed with cherry blossom viewing spots, featuring over 4,000 cherry trees. It is likely to see many paper lanterns. At Okazaki Park, around 3,000 cherry trees grow along the banks of the Shinjuku River.

APR 8-13, NAGANO

Tokyo-based Tokyo Bars has around 1,500 trees. It’s a unique wine with blossoms that feature cherry blossom trees. You’ll find another 500 to see cherry trees at the garden of the Dong-oh castle Harumoto Kaneko.

APR 17-22, ANITA

Visit the well-preserved samurai village of Nakane, famous for its weeping cherry. Alternatively, the Hakone lake, a designated National Park of Great Beauty, features a 2-km stretch of sakura.

APR 23-27, AMORI

Matsuda Park’s 2,600 cherry trees are made up of over 50 different varieties; there’s even a tunnel formed by trees you can walk through. If you’re planning to visit, head north-west to Matsuda Park, which is part of the vast Chulbug Prefectural Natural Park.

APR 30 - MAY 4, SAPPORO

Hokkaido Shiretoko National Park is among Sapporo’s top destinations for visitors (cherry blossom viewing) parties. Alternatively head to nearby Nakaizumia Park, where you can find a dozen different types of cherry tree, including the weeping cherry and the double-flowering cherry. 4. Aomori

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I, Tokyo

Sami Elu

Composer, musician, instrument inventor

Age: 37

How did you come to be based in Tokyo?

One of my friends who is also a musician asked me to come, so I moved to Tokyo from New York in 2015. I had never been to Japan before, and didn’t know how long I would be staying or what to do in terms of work. I hardly spoke any Japanese at the time either. The band I was in with that friend broke up, so I started mainly playing the chopstick piano on my own.

The chopstick piano you created is unique in that it incorporates accompaniment, melody and rhythm into a single piece of equipment and only requires one person to play it. What inspired you to build it?

It available, people will come up and buy it. In the US it’s the opposite: people pay for the performance, but won’t buy CDs.

You recently completed an ‘earpick piano’, for which you used a 3D router to carve wood?

That’s right. I used a computer program to draw a 3D model, sent it to a workshop, and used a router bit (the rotating part of a drill) to carve the wood, instead of sticking pieces of wood together by hand. You get a higher level of durability that way, and it sounds better too. I use earpicks as hammers that hit the chords. Chopsticks and earpicks are available everywhere, so they’re easy to replace when they break.

NHK World offers a wide range of multilingual programmes. Do you have a favourite show?

I like the nature in Japan, so “Journeys in Japan” is a favourite. Life and culture in Japan’s countryside is really interesting, and this show is great because it allows you to learn more about those things.

What do you plan on doing next?

I have a mixture, a new age project, with an American shakuhachi flutist, which I’m looking forward to a lot. I also started a session event at BPM, a café in Kori-Ohashi. Its aims are interaction with tourists and community building – you can sign up via AirBnb.

I, Global

Domo

NHK’s mascot introduces Tokyo to the world

Visit nhk.jp/world to find out how you can get NHK WORLD-JAPAN 24/7 in your country, on your TV, computer or mobile device.

NHK World Japan’s Travel section (www.nhk.or.jp/jh/wj/travel) features a vast selection of travel clips; these short but informative videos are sure to inspire you to start planning your journey across Japan. Watch as foreign residents in the country take you through some of Japan’s most fascinating attractions. There are also clips from popular NHK World Japan programmes such as ‘J Trip Plan’, ‘Tokyo Eye 2020’ and ‘Journeys in Japan’. Start binge-watching now. You can search the videos by interest, with topics such as sightseeing, art and shopping, as well as by season or destination. It’s the perfect resource to help you draw up the trip of your dreams.

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Beyond konnichiwa

Greeting people in Japan is so much more than just saying ‘hello’ and can be fraught with complications. Xiaochen Su introduces us to the different greetings used in a variety of potentially awkward social situations.

UNWRITTEN SOCIAL RULES abound in Japan. Whether you’re in a casual or business setting, a proper greeting is essential if you want to avoid a bad first impression.

DON’T: FORGET TO BOW WHEN GREETING. Just as a firm handshake is a key part of a more formal social interaction, bowing is a symbol of deference which in Western countries, bowing is a catch-all greeting by beginners. ‘Hello’ is perfectly fine, but it needs to be upgraded as ‘honorific language’ or keigo, a linguistic tool for doing so, known as ‘honorific language’ or keigo, is considered vital for social groups acknowledging and deferring to corporate hierarchy. Terms with professors or superiors in the private lives and their jobs, are made from premium matcha green tea, sourced from its. You can ‘go’ wrong with a matcha parfait topped with red beans and mochi ($550), a bowl of matcha with wagashi (traditional Japanese tea time sweets; ¥980), or the matcha soft-served ($40). Easily the most popular item on the menu, the ice cream features a slightly bitter yet mellow sweet taste. All of Saryo Itouen’s matcha desserts and drinks are made from premium matcha powder, which is often reserved for tea ceremonies.

Keep an eye out for the seasonal specials as well, such as sakura soft-serve in spring, refreshing kakigori (shaved ice with syrup) in summer, or shiruko (red bean soup) in winter.

If you’re looking to purchase single-origin loose-leaf green tea, head over to Waro Cha Itouen in Nihonbashi. Here you’ll find some of the finest and rarest pure green tea sourced directly from plantations all over Japan.

Common noryahou is usually a blend of different types of green tea, but this shop lets you choose from more than 50 varieties of single-origin loose-leaf green tea. By touching, smelling and looking at the sample leaves, you’ll see that they are all slightly different in shape and colour.

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In more formal settings, you’re expected to have to lower your head a little more. The full 90-degree option would look bizarre around friends but will go down a treat on serious occasions, such as meeting an important business client for the first time. For entering job interviews, regular business meetings and formal social engagements like networking events, a 45-degree bow will suffice. A quick bow, about the length of a quick head nod, is just the ticket. There’s no need to get carried away...

DO: KNOW THE RIGHT GREETING FOR EACH SITUATION. Konnichiwa is commonly used as a catch-all greeting by beginners, but if you want to graduate to true Japanese you’re going to have to learn the proper usage of different greetings in a variety of settings.

The easiest way to distinguish between different greetings is to look at the clock. In the morning, ohyo is more appropriate than konnichiwa. In the evening, you should use konnshuma (‘good evening’). Konnichiwa should be used in the afternoon, any time before sunset.

In more formal environments, where it’s important that the time of the day is not going to impress anyone. The greeting should instead convey the social relationship and the expectations of the upcoming conversation. First time meetings should be preceded with a round of high fives, an expression of gratefulness to have met. If you’re expecting to be working together in the future, you should add the term yoroshiku onegai shimasu (‘it is nice to work with you from now on’). For those who already have a business relationship, oshokonnichiwa (roughly ‘thank you for your hard work’) helps to acknowledge the mutual burden of another day on the job.

DON’T: REPEATEDLY USE CARELESS GREETINGS. Japan is a very hierarchical society. Both in people’s private lives and their jobs, acknowledging and deferring to older, more experienced people is considered vital for social groups to function properly. The Japanese linguistic tool for doing so, known as ‘honorific language’ or keigo, will help you get the right tone.

As a morning greeting to your classmates, ohyo is perfectly fine, but it needs to be upgraded into the more formal ohyo genki or kawaii when greeting professors or superiors in the corporate hierarchy. Terms with corresponding honours, like konnichiwa or konbou, are best avoided in formal settings. Instead, use oshokonnichiwa, a formal greeting that can be used in any setting of the day. Even a deep bow without saying anything is more respectful for senior figures than a casual konnichiwa.

When it comes to Japanese green tea, one product stands out: the bright green-coloured bottle of ready-to-drink O Ocha by Itouen. Japan’s largest company for yahuchena (green tea)

At the end of the 20th century, Itouen became the first company in Japan and the world to start offering its signature green tea in convenient cans and bottles. Making it possible for him to have a sip of the nation’s favourite drink anytime, anywhere. By doing so, Itouen has successfully evolved with the times, making itself relevant to the modern lifestyles of today’s society. With its refreshing flavour and health benefits, O Ocha is now sold in 316 countries worldwide and this flagship product from Itouen is celebrating its 33rd anniversary. Get a bottle now at one of the many convenience stores, supermarkets and vending machines across Tokyo.

If you want to experience more of Japan’s green tea culture, head over to these two Itouen specialty shops.

Saryo Itouen
This matcha café is located at Haneda Airport’s International Terminal, within the area designed after an Edo-period (1603-1868) town centre. Its adjoining seating area has a charming traditional atmosphere, complete with red parasols and Japanese-style floor lamps.

At Saryo Itouen you can enjoy a diverse selection of drinks and desserts made from high-quality green tea sourced from its. You can ‘go’ wrong with a matcha parfait topped with red beans and mochi ($550), a bowl of matcha with wagashi (traditional Japanese tea time sweets; ¥980), or the matcha soft-served ($40). Easily the most popular item on the menu, the ice cream features a slightly bitter yet mellow sweet taste. All of Saryo Itouen’s matcha desserts and drinks are made from premium matcha powder, which is often reserved for tea ceremonies.

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Nihonbashi Wa no Cha Itouen
If you’re looking to purchase single-origin loose-leaf green tea, head over to Waro Cha Itouen in Nihonbashi. Here you’ll find some of the finest and rarest pure green tea sourced directly from plantations all over Japan.

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Born with cerebral palsy, Terada has had difficulty walking for as long as he can remember. While he attended a regular school with non-disabled kids and insisted on living just like anyone else in his teens, the spirtly Nagoya native saw his world change at 20, when he started using a wheelchair on a daily basis. He could now move around more freely, which helped turn his outlook on life in a positive direction.

Comedy entered the equation when Terada was in college. A close friend helped him see the funny side of being disabled, and an episode of ‘Mr Bean’ featuring visually impaired characters inspired him while studying in the UK. These experiences motivated Terada to enter a comedy school in Osaka after graduating, but he decided to quit stand-up after three years of little attention.

Unsure what to do next, he met with Hirotada Ototake, a renowned author and media personality who also uses a wheelchair. Ototake, a role model for Terada, was motivated Terada to enter a comedy school in Osaka after graduating, but he decided to quit stand-up after three years of little attention.

After two years of host life and a growing sense that there was something out there he could be even better at, Terada said something to the effect of: ‘I said I wanted to travel around Japan to get people to help each other, but deep down those words weren’t sincere. To be honest, what I wanted to do was become famous.’ That’s when he met Mayumi, his most important supporter, and now also his wife.

Going out with Mayumi and getting married late in 2017 was life-changing for Terada. ‘Because of my disability, I had never expected to get married. Until now, all I had been doing was motivated by the desire to become famous and popular, but getting married made me rethink my priorities,’ he says. Terada thought about what he truly was capable of, and after talking things through with Mayumi, decided to take his talents to YouTube.

‘By showing myself working hard and trying all sorts of stupid stuff, I hope to inspire both people with disabilities and everyone else who is struggling to achieve their goals,’ he says.

Launched last summer, the ‘Terada Family TV’ channel on YouTube features clips documenting their journey around Japan, scenes from their life in Tokyo and much more, all presented from his unique perspective.

Never one to rest on his laurels, Terada is looking to make 2019 his most successful year yet. ‘I’d like to do a collab with Hikakin (Japan’s top YouTube), get him to push my wheelchair,’ he says.

‘Getting married made me rethink my priorities’
In its support of local farmers and around Tokyo, Grand Hyatt Tokyo continues to serve up an abundance of mouthwatering options at its bars and restaurants using some of the most premium and sustainable ingredients available.

**Keyakizaka beef**

Grand Hyatt Tokyo’s teppanyaki restaurant Keyakizaka is in a league of its own, mostly because it offers an exclusive beef that’s named after the Keyakizaka – ultimately resulting in the perfect fat to lean ratio that’s rare in Wagyu beef. This feed not only ensures the ideal marbling but allows the true flavour of the meat to shine through without being overpowered by too much fat. These particular cows are also kept in a clean, stress-free environment, resulting in a superior meat. A result of this well-maintained environment has enabled the farm to produce A5 or A5-ranking beef, the highest quality Japanese Wagyu beef according to the country’s grading system.

Eager diners can dig into this special beef at Keyakizaka in Grand Hyatt Tokyo, where both course menus and à la carte options are available. Keyakizaka is the only place to enjoy this special culinary experience where Chef Honda’s passion for sustainable dining and local ingredients really stands out, making for an unforgettable and enjoyable experience where Chef Honda’s passion for sustainable dining and local ingredients really stands out, making for an unforgettable and enjoyable experience.

**Supporting Local Agriculture**

In Japan, spring is the season for planting rice, a culinary staple in the local diet that is versatile as an ingredient in a wide range of dishes or simply eaten alone to appreciate its texture and flavors. Grand Hyatt Tokyo has been harvesting its very own organic rice while working closely with the farmers at Kurasawa Farm in Yamanashi prefecture.

Offering superior quality and taste, this brand of rice is grown with organic fertilizer, healthy soil and clean water from nearby mountains. Enjoy this special grain served in a traditional Japanese kama (iron pot) in a traditional Japanese setting.

**Promotional Feature**

Grand Hyatt Tokyo welcomes its very own original blend of whisky in collaboration with renowned whisky brand Ichiro’s Malt. The blend combines 10- and 20-year-old vintage whiskies from five different countries (Canada, Ireland, Scotland, the US and Japan) in a French oak cask wine barrel and leaves it to mature at a local distillery in Chichibu, Saitama. With its abundance of greenery and nature, Chichibu is the ideal place for a distillery, and it also happens to be close to Tokyo.

The unique blend of both malt and grain whiskies offers a plum-like fruitiness with hints of shiraz followed by a gentile aroma of vanilla. With its complex character and aroma, this whisky is easy to enjoy with soda or on the rocks, preferably with a large, circular ice cube.

Whisky aficionados can now get their hands on this limited-edition spirit at Maduro 4F Grand Hyatt Tokyo, 6-10-3 Roppongi, Minato (Roppongi Station). 03 4333 8783. 11.30am-12.30am (last orders for food 10.30pm).
What’s in town from April to June 2019

THINGS TO DO

Fuji Shibazakura Festival

With great views of Mt Fuji amid endless fields of shibazakura (pink moss), it’s no wonder this annual spring festival out at Lake Motosu in Yamanashi attracts hordes of Tokyoites over Golden Week every year. In addition to strolling around the immense flowery growth, you can buy your own shibazakura pot to take home or sample a range of in-season local delicacies.

Apr 13-26. Fuji Hakone Resort, 212 Motosu, Fuji Kawaguchiko-mura, Yamanashi. ¥600, primary school students and children aged 3 and older ¥250.

Craft Sake Week at Roppongi Hills

Sake lovers and newcomers alike can discover a whole new world of Japan’s national alcoholic drink at Roppongi Hills’ Craft Sake Week. Each day is set to showcase a selected variety of sake from the 100 participating craft sake breweries. Foodies are in luck too, with a number of restaurants serving up their best dishes during the week-long fest.

Apr 19-23. Roppongi Hills, 6-1-1 Roppongi, Minato. ¥1,000, university students ¥800, high school students ¥600.

Tokyo Cocktail 7 Days

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Tokyo Cocktail 7 Days

Tokyo has one of the best cocktail scenes on earth, with champion bartenders and watering holes that rank in the World’s Top 50 Bars. Tokyo Cocktail 7 Days is – as its name suggests – a week-long celebration of the flourishing local scene. The event kicks off at the “Village” – a market at the United Nations University courtyard where you can sample expertly mixed drinks at nine booths. After that, the bar hopping begins, with 63 participating venues across the city. To join in, you need to buy a passport, which comes with a ¥1,000 cocktail coupon. The more bars you visit, the more prizes you might win – and the more tipsy you will definitely get.

Apr 20-29. United Nations University courtyard, 5-53-10 Roppongi, Minato, Tokyo. ¥1,500, university students ¥1,000, high school students ¥800.

Tokyo Rainbow Pride

Tokyo Rainbow Pride is back to celebrate LGBT pride with a massive family-friendly festival (Apr 28-29) in Yoyogi Park that culminates in a joyous parade (Apr 28) through Harajuku. In the past few years the event has blossomed from a modest gathering to an epic party with turnout in the tens of thousands. Come show your pride and celebrate love, dress up, get your face painted, slap on a temporary tattoo and just enjoy the revelry.

Apr 27-May 6. Roppongi Hills, 6-1-1 Roppongi, Minato, Tokyo. ¥1,000, university students ¥800, high school students ¥600.

Kurumaya Matsuri

The ancient Okunitama shrine in Fuchu is said to have been founded in the year 301 and the annual Kurumaya Matsuri is one of its most notable events. Translating as ‘darkness festival’, the festival is lauded throughout Golden Week, with float parades, performances and plenty of family-friendly fun. The highlight comes on the evening of May 5, when eight mikoshi (portable shrines) are carried through the grounds to the beat of huge drums raucous. You can also see a spectacular yabusame (horseback archery) demonstration from 10.30pm on the same day.

Apr 30-May 6. Okunitama Shrine, 3-1 Miyamachi, Kamizonocho, Shibuya. ¥1,000, university students ¥800, high school students ¥600.

ART

TRAVELLING ON THE EDO HIGHWAY:
EDO (FORMER TOKYO) TO THE ENTIRE NATION

This annual event, known globally as Japan’s penis festival, celebrates fertility in a less-than-glamorous way – with giant phallics carried through the streets during the mikoshi parade. You can also enjoy appropriately shaped candied, vegetables and decorations, all while helping to raise money for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

Apr 17. Wakanui Gymnastics, 3-13-16 Seiroicho, Shinjuku, Tokyo. ¥1,500, university students ¥1,000, high school students ¥800.

THINGS TO DO

HANAMI

TOKYO COCKTAIL 7 DAYS

A journey of shogun and princes’ palaces.

After his victory in Sekigahara (1600), leyasu Tokugawa began developing roads that connected Edo (former Tokyo) to the entire country, with Nihonbash area as their starting point. Known as the ‘Five Routes’, they were officially used for travelling and moving goods. Post stations were built along these routes to provide a resting place for travellers and those on official business, such as the shogun and other nobilities. This exhibition offers an imaginative take on the changing landscapes of Edo, as you follow the journeys of the shoguns and princesses of the period.

Apr 27-May 6. Okunitama Shrine, 3-1 Miyamachi, Kamizonocho, Shibuya. ¥1,000, university students ¥800, high school students ¥600.

JAPANESE SKILLS

Pick up a sampler ticket to take home as well as stalls selling antiques, accessories. endemic range of coffee-themed items. Check out the stalls selling an eclectic range of coffee-themed merchandise.

Apr 13-14. United Nations University building, 5-53-10 Roppongi, Minato. ¥1,500, university students ¥1,000, high school students ¥800.

THINGS TO DO

VEGAN GOURMET FESTIVAL

Vegetarians and vegans should mark April 22 in their calendars, when a strong line-up of the best vegan chefs and restaurants take over the large Kiba Park in east Tokyo. Each food stall will list the ingredients used (in Japanese), so you can be certain that no animal was harmed in the process.

Apr 22. Kiba Park, 4-6 Kiba, Koto, Tokyo. ¥1,000, university students ¥800, high school students ¥600.

YOUTH

TIME OUT TOKYO APRIL-JUNE 2019

April, June, Year Time Out Tokyo
SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVALS

These are the hottest tickets in Tokyo and Japan, so book early!

**FUJI ROCK FESTIVAL**

The biggest and most beautiful of Japan's summer music festivals, Fuji Rock features a striking line-up – is sometimes all you really need. For its bumper 20th year, Fuji Rock is scheduled to return to itsTokyo, June, taking place at Omono-no-Hi Hills Space of the Mori Tatoe Museum Harajuku and Roppongi Hills Motto Tower throughout the month. More than 9,000 films from over 120 countries competed for entry into the main programme and around 250 shorts will be screened during the festival. Practically all events and screenings are free, and most films are screened in English with English subtitles, so there's no stopping you from taking in the best of mini-movies from all over the world. And if June feels like a long way off, you can stream a bunch of the short films for free right now on the event website.

**ROPPONGI ART NIGHT**

An annual nocturnal celebration of artsy things, Roppongi Art Night returns with a diverse line-up of door installations, live performances, cultural exhibitions, lectures and workshops, taking over the area until the early hours of the following day. It's a festival that gives you an eye on the official website for the programme line-up.

**SANJA MATSURI**

Aside from the traditional festival was held first in 1312 and celebrates the three men who founded Asakusa’s famous Senso-ji Temple. This large-scale spectacle draws over a million visitors to the neighbourhood for three days of processions and traditional dance performances, culminating in the festival highlight when three enormous mikoshi (portable statues) are shuttled through the streets.

**MARPAKU**

The annual May-14-25, various locations throughout Tokyo, 3-92 Senju, Adachi. 5-7pm daily. FREE entry.

**THINGS TO DO**

**SUMMER SONIC**

Starting in 1997, the bi-annual Electronic Daisy Carnival (EDC) has grown into an international music festival that hits four continents and nearly a million fans every year. The gloriously OTT Carnival goes by its traditional electronic music fest, blending art installations, light shows, fireworks, wacky costumes, cutting-edge stage productions and, of course, world-class electronic music. For what the organizers promise will be a ‘multi-sensory experience’ – Grab ticket now, since they tend to sell out fast.

**FUJI ROYAL AURA PERFORMANCE**

Hailing from the gorgeous rural town of Iwami in the west em part of Shimane prefecture, the Iwami Kagura dance is a traditional, mythological performance that’s the pride of the region. Every autumn, a troupe of Iwami Kagura dancers perform at various temples in the region, and many Shimane-born folks make the pilgrimage back home just to watch them. This summer, you can catch the traditional dance in Tokyo for one day only at Theater 1010. It involves elaborate make-up, costumes and stage effects – including giant ‘snakes’ – and brings to life the myths and legends from Japan’s two oldest mythological homes, the Kojiki and the Nihon-Shoki chronicles.

**THE GAME PLAN**

How to get the most out of your visit to the spectacular Robot Restaurant

Before you go, you should know that this is one of those experiences that get better the more people you go with. So gather your reediest friends and grace yourselves for a truly bizarre evening of wacky character interactions, dancing, stage shows and candlelight (only for the 4pm show on Friday), and most films are screened in English with English subtitles, so there’s no stopping you from taking in the best of mini-movies from all over the world. And if June feels like a long way off, you can stream a bunch of the short films for free right now on the event website.

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What does a gadget geek think about the new carbon-fibre G-Shock Gravitymaster?

The G-Shock ‘Master of G’ series of shock-resistant watches got its latest addition on March 15, when the new aviation-inspired GWR-B1000 Gravitymaster hit the shelves. It features an all new Carbon Core Guard structure, which improves toughness while making it the lightest watch in its series so far. We got our hands on the GWR-B1000 in advance, and promptly asked gadget geek Toru Izumoi to review the newcomer.

Carbon: the material of dreams

‘To put it simply, carbon is a material that combines lightness with strength. It’s used in race cars and other high-tech products that need to be both light yet extremely durable, giving it an aura of exclusivity. The mesh pattern on the GWR-B1000’s carbon-laminated bezel instantly captures the imagination of any gadget lover, and brings to mind those symbols of speed you’ll see on high-end sports cars.

‘As carbon is notoriously difficult to manipulate, mass producing a product like the GWR-B1000, which features a small carbon monocoque case, surely requires highly advanced technology and expertise. It’s pretty amazing that Casio actually pulled it off.’

Perfect for an active lifestyle

‘I’ve used a G-Shock with a metal body in the past but it can feel a little heavy, especially when you’re moving your arm. The GWR-B1000 weighs only 72g (about the same as an egg), making it ideal for the active wearer. “The strength of the watch appeals to this, too. For example, a good watch can be the difference between life and death for a mountainer. Having your watch break down up in the mountains can disrupt your plans and, in the worst-case scenario, lead to a life-threatening situation. For environments where electronic devices fail and even usually sturdy items can break due to a fall, this super-tough watch is just about the trustiest partner you can find.”

A story on your wrist

‘I think that an item really is to last, it needs to both be of high quality and have a story associated with it. The G-Shock, which has balanced durability and functionality ever since it was first released in 1983, was designed for extreme situations. While the plastic feel and rugged design were extraordinary back then, its underlying concept has stayed consistent while the watch itself has undergone constant evolution. Had it sacrificed durability for the sake of design, I don’t think the G-Shock would have been as popular as it is today. “That’s why you don’t have to be a race car driver or pilot to love the G-Shock; anyone wearing the watch gets to be part of its story. Few people buy a Ferrari because they actually want to drive at 300km/h – they splurge on one because they want to feel the sense of adventure and legend that come with such awesome power.”

‘I’d say the tough but light GWR-B1000 is the purest realisation of the G-Shock concept so far. Its exemplary functional beauty, brought about by pairing the ultimate material with high-tech practicality, gives it unique character. Just knowing that you’re wearing the toughest watch out there is a pretty satisfying feeling.’

Lightweight for comfort

‘The new Gravitymaster does not sacrifice style for toughness; lightweight functionality. Despite cramming intricacies into a 72g device, the watch retains a sporty metallic look that stands out from the crowd. Certainly fitting for athletes training outdoors, the watch is equally at home in the big city.

For more information on Casio’s latest timepieces and where to purchase yours, visit casio-intl.com

G-Shock Gravitymaster: tougher but also lighter

Casio’s G-Shock, chasing ever greater durability in men’s wristwatches, reaches the apex of toughness with its new Gravitymaster models. The new models signal G-Shock’s third revolution in material design, supplementing the resin of the first G-Shock series and metal of the second with carbon and titanium, for even lighter weight and better performance in tough conditions. The outcome is a machine that is anti-rust, anti-scratch and accurate, all packaged in a cool metallic finish that feels at home both in the great outdoors and everyday city life.

For more information on Casio’s latest timepieces and where to purchase yours, visit casio-intl.com
Being Japan’s capital and by far its biggest city, Tokyo hosts a diverse range of all the food and drink, culture or even arts and country’s top regional specialities, be it crafts. Why buy that pricey shinkansen ticket when you can experience the full breadth of the country without leaving the city? By the Time Out Tokyo team

**EATING JAPAN**

**KYUSHU**

The Southernmost of Japan’s main islands, Kyushu is where you’ll find food heaven like Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Kagoshima and Kumamoto. Fukuoka is known for its Hakata-style, ramen, noodles, pronounced ‘ramen’, noted for its white, cloudy soup made by boiling down pork bones. Some of today’s most popular ramen chains were born in Fukuoka, such as Ichiran and Ippudo. Home to Japan’s oldest Chinatown, Nagasaki’s cuisine is steeped with Chinese influences, especially in its noodles. Kagoshima, located on the most southern point of Kyushu, sees influences from nearby Okinawa in its cuisine. Kurobuta (black pork) is a popular product here; it’s a descendant of the Berkshire pig that was imported from England over 400 years ago. The premium breed pork can be found in everything from tonkatsu deep fried pork cutlets to shabu shabu.

**Nagasaki Hanten**

This hole-in-the-wall restaurant in Shibiya serves classic Nagasaki-style dishes, particularly champion noodles and sara udon. The champion features thick wheat noodles inside a hearty soup tureen with veggies and seafood. The sara udon, however, can be had with either deep-fried crispy thin noodles or thick ones (same as the champion), and it’s topped with a stir-fried starchy mix of veg, pork and seafood including oysters, fishcakes and squid. Don’t forget to order a plate of the sizable pan-fried gyozas to complete your meal.

**Ichinisan**

With two locations in Tokyo, this dedicated Kagoshima restaurant will provide your kurobuta fix. The house special kurobuta shabu shabu is simple, consisting of typical taco fillings served on a heap of rice instead of inside a taco shell. Thankfully, at Harmonica Quina the toppings are more inventive than the bog-standard beef, lettuce and cheese – you can add avocado, salsa and even an omelette if you please. The menu also features Okinawa soki soba if you’re in the mood for noodles.

**Tensagunuhana**

Located in Tokyo’s self-proclaimed ‘Okinawa Town’, a row of shops and restaurants celebrating island life in Suganami west of Shinjuku, this eatery is so authentic you can almost feel the sand under your feet. Clay pots full of awamori are proudly displayed at the front of the restaurant, and it’s even got a tank of umibudo (sea grapes) growing in the shop.

Harmonica Quina

This small eatery inside Kichijoji’s Harmonica Yokochi serves up Okinawan tacos, which fuse western and Japanese flavours. It was a popular staple for the American military forces who were stationed in Okinawa during the 80s. The dish is simple, consisting of typical taco fillings served on a heap of rice instead of inside a taco shell. Thankfully, at Harmonica Quina the toppings are more inventive than the bog-standard beef, lettuce and cheese – you can add avocado, salsa and even an omelette if you please. The menu also features Okinawa soki soba if you’re in the mood for noodles.

**Okinawa**

The Beautiful Tropical Islands of Okinawa joined Japan well over a century ago but have maintained many of their own customs and traditions, especially when it comes to food and drink. In Okinawan cuisine, you’ll notice a distinctive Chinese influence as well as American touches, thanks to the longstanding presence of US military bases in the area.

**Okinawa Town Mensore Daito Ichiba**

Open for both lunch and dinner, the restaurant also hosts Okinawan musical performances on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7pm and 9pm. Okinawa Town Mensore Daito Ichiba, 1-3-19 Dogenzaka, Shibuya (Shibuya Station). 03 3464 0528. 11am-2.30pm, 5pm-10pm, Sat & Sun 12pm-1am.

**Tinsagunuhana**

Okinawa’s answer to ramen is soki soba if you’re in the mood for noodles. The dish is simple, consisting of clays pots full of awamori, a zingy mix of chilli peppers that have been marinated in Okinawan awamori (rice liquor). Goya (bitter melon) is a popular Okinawan ingredient, used in everything from stir-fry to even beer. Sashimi is widely eaten in Okinawa but prepared with colourful tropical fish not commonly found in the rest of Japan, such as the parrotfish. Other must-try delicacies include awamori and the small, fried doughnut-like snacks called sata andagi, both of which are indigenous to the tropical islands.

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Minatoya
Takoyaki is a specialty of the Kansai region, but you’ll have no trouble spotting the scrumptious octopus treat in Tokyo too. What could be more challenging is finding real ‘Kansai-style’ takoyaki – in fact, most Tokyoites probably couldn’t tell the difference between an imitation and the real deal. It’s the latter you’re looking for, so seek out this specialty restaurant near Sasakusa Station.

According to the Kansai-born chef behind the counter, you can distinguish authentic takoyaki by its crust. Kansai-style offerings have a soft outer layer and an even mushier interior, while balls with a crispy crust come from somewhere else. The flour, sauce and other ingredients at Minatoya are sourced straight from Kansai, as those available in Tokyo apparently fail to satisfy the demanding chef. After enjoying your takoyaki, make sure to order dessert: the kakigori (shaved ice) sees silky smooth ice doused with your choice of the shop’s special syrups.

Kushinobo Ginza
Headquartered in the Hozenji area of Osaka, Kushinobo specialises in kushikatsu – various deep-fried delicacies served on skewers. In addition to set meals, the menu lists a wide variety of la carte treats, all made with quality ingredients. Although the skewered bites are all deep fried, you’ll be surprised by the diversity of flavours. We recommend ordering at least one skewer of everything, especially the prawn, wagyu and asparagus. After savouring a couple of skewers, try experimenting with the various condiments; these range from classic kushikatsu sauce to sesame salt and a spicy sesame-mustard sauce.

Hiroki Shimokitazawa
While okonomiyaki joints are dime a dozen in Shimokitazawa, none of the others get quite as busy as Hiroki. Although the savoury pancake dish is most often associated with Osaka, this restaurant makes it Hiroshima-style, with ingredients sourced from the southern city.

Unlike Osaka’s okonomiyaki, in which the batter and fillings are mixed together before cooking, the Hiroshima version is prepared by spreading out the batter on a hotplate, and then topping it with cabbage, pork, noodles, egg and other ingredients. Hiroki also offers noodle-free versions; however, first-timers to the shop’s special syrups.

Marusho Ariku
Hidden away just south of the calm Shoin Jinja-dori shopping street deep in residential Setagaya, Marusho Ariku is not your average neighbourhood izakaya. This shabby, somewhat bare-look joint with a small kitchen enclosed by a counter may not look much, but it actually serves up wonderful spread of oysters and ‘obanzai’ – traditional, healthy Kyoto-style meals.

A veteran of ‘Dukkii fish market, the owner constructs his menu around fresh oysters, sourced from wherever in Japan the bivalves are at their best in each season (we recommend the Hiroshima ones when they’re on the menu). You can always choose from at least three types of top-quality oysters – or you could try them all by ordering the three-piece set, which lets you compare textures and flavours before deciding on a favourite. Besides picking off the menu, you’re welcome to look around and see what the regulars are having, or just ask the chef for the daily recommendations. Whatever you end up ordering, it’s sure to pair well with some beer or sake.
Japan in Tokyo

**THE COUNTRY**

**ON A PLATE**

**Rito Kitchen Kagurazaka**
Local delicacies from a different island are served up every month at Rito Kitchen, a restaurant dedicated to promoting the edible treasures of Japan’s many far-flung isles. It occupies an old house in Kagurazaka; inside you’ll find names of the featured islands written all over the walls and ceiling of the ground-floor room.

At this no-chef seafood and other fresh ingredients served here are sourced in location and preserved with a technology called DSC (Deep Sea Cooling) during transportation. This will keep the food fresher than if frozen the old-fashioned way, making sure they survive the trip in pristine condition.

- 6-23 Kagurazaka, Shinjuku (Kagurazaka Station). 03 6265 0368. ritokitchen.com. 11.30am-2pm, 6pm-10pm (last orders 9pm) daily.

**D47 Shukudo**
You can travel Japan in its entirety through your taste buds at this specialty restaurant in Shibuya Hikarie. The eatery and drink items from all 47 prefectures; some of the ingredients used are also put up for sale. The restaurant’s comprehensive menu features food and drinks from all regions of Japan. You’ll want to check back frequently as the menu changes each month.

- 6-7-23 Shiba Park, Minato (Shibuya Station). 03 3442 7030. minato.com/shibuya/d47.html. 11.30am-10pm daily.

**Soup Curry Garaku**
Located on a quiet side street near the Nakano Broadway promenade, this curry shop has a multi-step ordering system, so it’s a good thing they have an English menu. Customers first choose their soup curry type (chicken leg, seafood, vegetable, mushroom, etc.), then their soup (house original or a specialty stock for a few hundred yen extra). Next, you can choose some extra toppings (cheese, bacon, extra veggies), your preferred spiciness level, and finally your rice type. We recommend pairing the soup curry with their delicious lassi made with Hokkaido milk. Be prepared to be too cool for the bitte they give you – you’ll need it.

- 5-7-15 Nakano, Nakano (Nakano Station). 03 0704 5211. garaku.com. 11.30am-2.30pm (last orders 2pm), 5pm-11pm (10.30pm) daily.

**Matsuo Genghis Khan**
This classy wood-panelled barbecue joint is on a narrow street off Ginza’s main drag. A row of tabletops line one wall, with the rest partitioned behind glass walls, and at the centre of each, depressed into the table surface, is a dome-shaped grill, meant to represent Mongolian warriors’ helmets.

Although their all-you-can-eat/drink dinner deals are reasonably priced, for those on a budget we recommend the warrior-sized lunch sets. You can choose from six types of lamb and veggie grills (mostly under ¥2,000 on weekdays), which include self-serve soft drinks and all-you-can-eat salad and miso soup (also self-serve), plus dessert – a traditional Hokkaido milk pudding called yukishiki-anshin.

- 5-9-5 Ginza, Chuo (Ginza Station). 03 3572 2989. matsuo1956.jp. 11.30am-3pm (last orders 2.30pm), 5pm-11pm (10.30pm) daily.

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**Kyoto**

**The Country**

**On a Plate**

**Nakamura Tokichi**
On the South Floor of the chrome-plated shopping mall Ginza Six is this unassuming little shop. At the front, you’ll find a great variety of matcha-based fare, but beyond a mysterious partition curtain in the real gem: its café.

Everything on the menu is made with matcha, including its soba and udon. The waiter will prepare complimentary tea when you sit down, while describing the day’s selection. The menu notes in everything from the noeddes to the cheeseake are mild and never overpowering. We recommend the matcha soba set, which comes with ginger-topped rice. Kyoto pickles, matcha jelly, and three different ways of seasoning the soup.

- 2-1-16 Ginza, Chuo (Ginza Station). 03 3541 1185. nakamuratokichi.co.jp. 10.30am-8.30pm daily.

**Kyo-Tsukemono no Nishi**
While tsukemono is wildly popular across Japan as a side dish staple, this café and store elevates the Kyoto pickle from its garnish status and makes it the star of the show.

Everything on the menu is pickled, including the dessert: pickled apples and ice cream. Grab a counter seat and order a meal set, a delicately arranged pairing of flavourful pickled veggies with a dish of rice, two types of tea and a white, creamy miso soup.

A long counter displays dozens of refrigerated pickles for sale, many all of which can be sampled. Don’t be afraid to ask questions – the friendly staff love to talk about their Zen-inspired pickle love.

- 3-14-1 Honmachi, Chuo (Hommachi Station). 03 5542 1885. nishiri.co.jp. 10am-9pm daily.

**WHILE TOKYO IS THE LAND**

**of glossy skyscrapers and packed crossings that look like herd migrations,**

Japan’s old capital is the land of temples and geisha. The whole of Kyoto is bike-able and it’s far more green than Tokyo. The cuisine of the region reflects this refinement, with delicate dishes that are steeped in tradition. The region has a serious sweet tooth, and green tea or matcha is one of its best loved exports.

Kyoto cuisine is heavily influenced by Zen philosophy, which means an emphasis on healthy, nutrient-rich food. Toke&tsukemono pickles) for example: they are rendered an art form in Kyoto, with dozens of varieties of pickled fruits and vegetables, at least a few of which are served with every meal.

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MADE IN JAPAN
Where to buy regional crafts in Tokyo

Nippon-ichi Nihombashi Takashimaya S.C.
Nippon-ichi's interior design is a contemporary take on classic Japanese elements. The wooden displays and furniture design are inspired by the Nihonbashi of the Edo period (1603-1868). Different sceneries of that time are featured throughout the indigo and white noren curtains. Here you can not only buy Tokyo-exclusive souvenirs but also gifts from across the country, which are thoughtfully categorised by prefectures. If you're looking for a snack, go for the crispy Yasempei crackers (¥691) from Nagasaki, or the juicy Amanatsu mandarin in syrup (¥594) from Ehime. Another popular product is the revitalising Yunohana bath salt from Beppu Onsen, a famous hot spring resort in Oita prefecture in southern Japan. The little area sectioned off with glass walls is also worth checking out for its monthly-changing variety of goods thoughtfully categorised by prefectures. If you're looking for classic Japanese elements, the wooden displays and furniture design are inspired by the Nihonbashi of the Edo period (1603-1868). Different sceneries of that time are featured throughout the indigo and white noren curtains. Here you can not only buy Tokyo-exclusive souvenirs but also gifts from across the country, which are

Marugoto Nippon
This four-storey mall in Asakusa offers a large variety of food and lifestyle goods from all 47 prefectures. The first floor supermarket boasts a diverse selection of food and drink—think soy sauce, miso (soybean paste), senbei (rice crackers), sake and much more. Grab a few for a taste test comparison and you'll definitely notice each of the prefecture's distinctive flavours. At the adjoining food market you'll find specialty shops selling natural honey from Ehime, aromatic coffee from Tottori, and smoked seafood from Tokushima prefecture. For lifestyle goods and homeware, head upstairs to Hagi no Kaze, where the cheerful bags are made from Yamaguchi prefecture's traditional fishermen flags (¥4,320), or to Osaji for organic cosmetics from Gunma prefecture—think moisturising raw soaps (¥1,728) that are soft to touch and highly absorbent and quick-drying; adorable room fragrances packed in small milk bottles (¥1,680); and the refreshing yuzu citrus bath salt (¥2,052). The brand's products are loved for their premium quality and functional features, often presented in simple designs and toned-down colours that are emblematic of the modern Japanese aesthetic the world has come to love.

Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten
This homeware and lifestyle store was established in 1766 in Nara, which explains its two deers in its logo. Deers are the symbol of the Kansai city. Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten is one of those rare artisanal stores that have survived by constantly breathing new life into traditional crafts and adapting them to suit modern lifestyles. Its Tokyo flagship store in Marunouchi stocks an extensive range of items created in collaboration with some of Japan's most revered artisans, such as Hasami porcelain from Nagasaki and Kyoto's Golden nail polish (from ¥1,503), renowned for its classic Japanese colours made with the powder of scallop shells for a shiny finish. You will also find Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten's signature Hana Fuikin cotton tea towels (from ¥760) that are soft to touch and highly absorbent and quick-drying; adorable room fragrances packed in small milk bottles (¥1,680); and the refreshing yuzu citrus bath salt (¥2,052). The brand's products are loved for their premium quality and functional features, often presented in simple designs and toned-down colours that are emblematic of the modern Japanese aesthetic the world has come to love.

Ocharaka
French wine — and now tea — sommelier Stéphane Danton is giving Japanese green tea a modern twist. Using his finely honed palate, Danton is infusing the tea with a range of aromas ranging from the sweet to the floral and the fruity. The drink's inherent taste and character is made more pronounced through the gentle aroma infusions.

Ocharaka looks like a tea library, with large boxes of loose leaf tea — 57 different types in total plus several seasonal options — lining its walls. It sources its tea exclusively from small farms across Japan, like wine, tea has terroir differences so while tea from Japan's southern prefectures, such as Kagoshima, is popular for its sweet yet umami flavour, tea from Kansai (north of Osaka) is less sweet but richer and stronger in taste. With his keen understanding of global tea culture, Danton is able to offer aromatic tea suited to the preferences of different customers. Raspberry-flavoured tea is especially popular among German tourists, peach flavour is a hit with Chinese customers, and French and American shoppers tend to like the mint chocolate variety. If you're looking for classic Japanese flavours instead, Danton also provides yuzu citrus, sakura, yuzi mochi (mochi with yuzu fruit) and raspberry-flavoured teas.

Ocharaka (Tokyo main store)
Coredo Muromachi 1 B1F, 2-2-1 Nihonbashi-Muromachi, Chuo (Nihombashi Station). 03 3217 2010. yu-nakagawa.co.jp/p/nakagawamasashichitokyo. 11am-8pm. Sun & hols 11am-8pm.

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Japan in Tokyo

Ginza Washita Okinawa
Located on the fringes of Ginza, Okinawa’s very own ‘antenna shop’ (stores run by local governments outside of their home prefectures to showcase local goods) brings a hint of tropical flavour to Tokyo’s fanciest neighbourhood.

In addition to snacks, vegetables and other edibles from the island, handicrafts such as illustration musical instruments and vividly coloured, beautifully decorated Yachimun pottery line the shelves. The tiny cafè offers Okinawan noodles, blue-ice cream and Washita’s scrumptious sata andagi doughnuts. If you’re looking for a unique gift, consider picking up a few small packs of Okinawa’s famous black sugar — the pouches are decorated with cute illustrations depicting scenes from the prefecture’s remote islands.

Ishikawa Hyakumangoku Monogatari
Indulge the prefecture’s ‘emblem’ in Tokyo occupies three stores in Ginza; there’s a café on the second floor while the basement is reserved for sake. The shop carries an impressive 1,900 products from the twin regions of Kaga and the Noto Peninsula, including seasonal edibles, handicrafts and traditional sweets. A safe bet is the ‘okagi monaka’ (pictured below), a cute doll-shaped wafer filled with red bean paste made from azuki beans grown in Ishikawa.

Nara Mahoroba-kan
Visitors to this antenna shop are greeted by Sento-jun, the fluffy mascot of Nara, whose creator was clearly inspired by the prefecture’s famous tame deer. Once you get past the welcoming committee, head straight for the food section and its savoury delicacies such as ‘narazake’ pickles, sushi wrapped in bamboo leaves, and natto (fermented soybeans) wrapped with extra-large soybeans. For something sweet, try the deer-shaped cookies (pictured above). The Aoniyoshi restaurant nearby caters to hungry shoppers with hearty servings of Nara cuisine.

Osaka Hyakkaten
The Kotsu Kaikan building on Yurakucho houses several antenna shops, among them is this foodie’s favourite. Representing Osaka with energy and flair, the Hyakkaten is easy to find. Just follow the distinct takoyaki aroma emanating from within (there’s an eat-in space for you to enjoy them). A stop-selling sweet is the Kikusui, a tiramisu-style chocolate with almonds and mascarpone on the inside and white chocolate coated with cocoa powder on the outside. The shop also stocks an impressive selection of obscure character paraphernalia, including a figure depicting Kuidaore Taro, the clown-clothed mascot of a famous Dotonbori restaurant that operated from 1949 to 2008, and the yellow, cap-wearing Fueki doll, which is associated with a long-established stationary and industrial goods manufacturer of the same name.

Chidoriya skincare set
Established in 1949 to cater for local geisha and their apprentices, the Kyoto-born brand specialises in makeup, accessories and other beauty paraphernalia made almost exclusively with ingredients picked in the wisteria grown with organic methods. Their wide range is set (look sharp, herbal rows face cream, plus massage oil and cleansing oil – all in mini sizes) is especially impressive.

Shokoku Gotochi Plaza
Forged to buy those all important local souvenirs on your journeys through Japan? Not to worry: located within First Avenue Tokyo Station, the labyrinthine underground shopping mall at Tokyo Station, Shokoku Gotochi Plaza lets you shop for snacks, drinks and kimochi from practically every region in the country. Look out for the ‘karumoto jannico’, an assortment of chocolate bonbons with various types of regional sake inside, or reach for Hokkaido’s distinctive breast-shaped ‘uppal chocolate’.

Honjyo Crystal Fujisan
This Tokyo-based specialty store features brands’ views of Mt Fuji from its slope, so if you think these sake makers are well within their rights to sell their stuff in a bottle modelled on the sacred peak, you may try your luck! The Food Republic’s Roasted Miso Meatman replicates inside a packet.

Omlyogo Hi-Chew
These fruit flavoured chewy candies are produced in 12 region-specific flavours, from Hokkaido’s Yubari melon and tohoku’s cherry to Kyushu’s extra-sour shequasar citrus.

REGIONAL TREATS

Pretz (Japanese flours pack)
Glico’s stick-shaped pretzels are available in different flavours depending on the part of Japan you’re in. If you don’t have time to cross the country as a Pretz completist, consider settling for this nine-pack box, which brings together the best of the regional varieties. Top picks include Hokkaido’s vanilla (vanilla-coated), garnier from central Japan, and apple from the Shikoku region.

Available at Don Quijote in Shinjuku.

REGIONAL TREATS

Hokkaido Jingisukan
Soft noodle and Hokkaido’s signature grilled mutton delicacy, together at last! Released in January 2019, this Poppy sauce Yubakura, a newcomer to the ever-popular Jingisukan instant ramen line, includes ‘real Jingisukan-style mutton’ which brings together the best of the regional varieties. To pick up include Kansas City-style, the unique and famous in Japan as a Pretz completist, those crisp and packed jacket front amount of punch.

Available at the Tokyo Station.

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Omiyago Hi-Chew
These fruit flavoured chewy candies are produced in 12 region-specific flavours, from Hokkaido’s Yubari melon and tohoku’s cherry to Kyushu’s extra-sour shequasar citrus.

Available at Marunouchi’s Shinshu Omiyage Shop (Shinshu Station).
Okinawa Paradise

Unfortunately the Japanese have not mastered teleportation yet, but this is the next best thing: an authentic piece of Okinawa in a nondescript Kabukicho building. Okinawa Paradise is a lovely rough-and-tumble izakaya where Tokyo-based Okinawans mingle with locals a lovely rough-and-tumble izakaya where you can sip sake from the cold north and nibble on fresh seafood or desserts made with Aomori’s famous apples while admiring the ‘mini-nebuta’ paper sculptures created by masters of the craft.

Nakajima Shoji Bldg 9F , 8-5-6 Ginza, Chuo (Shimbashi, Ginza stations). 03 3571 3799. fb.com/AkitaDiningNamahage.

Namahage Ginza

Akita prefecture is famous for its tradition of namahage – scary-looking deities portrayed by men dressed in demon masks and straw outfits who go from house to house scaring children and driving away evil spirits every February. If being yelled at by a raging ogre while enjoying a serving of Akita cuisine sounds like your idea of a fun night out, booking at this unique izakaya in Ginza will do the trick.

Namahage show take place here every evening at 7:30pm and 10pm, when diners tend to already be well fed on traditional kiritanpo hot pot. This warm welcoming, which is based on a chicken and potherb broth, can be savoured while sitting around a proper fireplace – or if you’re feeling fancy, in a private room shaped like an igloo (yes, really – Akita gets cold in the winter).

Aomori Nebuta World Shinbashi

The Nebuta festival in the northern prefecture of Aomori, which centres around a float parade of mythical and legendary warriors, draws more than three million spectators every year. Although quite as impressive as the real thing, Nebuta World in Shinbashi offers a taste of the grand, colourful float parade’s atmosphere right here in Tokyo. Run in collaboration with the Aomori prefectural authorities, it’s an izakaya where you can sip sake from the cold north and nibble on fresh seafood or desserts made with Aomori’s famous apples while admiring the ‘mini-nebuta’ paper sculptures created by masters of the craft.

Kawashionenstuk, 6-1-3 Shinbashi, Minato (Shinbashi Station). 03 6808 1777. Mon-Fri 11-3, 5:30pm-2:30pm; Sat 11-3, 5:30pm-2:30pm; Sun 11-3, 5:30pm-2:30pm. Sat & Sun 11-3, 5:30pm-2:30pm.

Saori Tokyo

A free-style hand weaving with roots in Osaka, saori is a beginner-friendly method in which mistakes can be turned into lovely design elements. Saori Tokyo in Sendagaya offers classes in this flexible approach to weaving, letting you create your very own scarf or tablecloth in only two hours. Prices are reasonable too, with participation set at ¥1,500 plus the material cost. While the staff speak only a little English, they will teach you the techniques by one while showing you exactly how to navigate the weaving process. Cloth woven with the saori method using natural materials such as cotton or wool is soft to the touch, making for a souvenir that you’ll actually use, instead of just stowing away somewhere.

Saori Tokyo

5-2-2 Sendagaya, Shibuya (Sendagaya, Nogizaka stations). 03 6733 1240. saori-eng.jimdo.com. Two-hour classes held Sat-Sun from 10am, 1pm and 3pm.

Dream Academy

Always wanted to learn how to play the shamisen (a traditional three-string, Japanese musical instrument)? Get started at Dream Academy, which operates schools throughout Tokyo and offers classes for tsugaru-jamisen, a string instrument and regional variety of shamisen from the Tsugaru region of Aomori prefecture. Said to have been the instrument of choice for blind musicians traveling around the area back in the day, the tsugaru-jamisen is generally played without a score, relying only on improvisation. Powerful at times and gentle at others, tsugaru-jamisen tunes are sometimes referred to as ancient Japan’s version of jazz or blues. You can receive guidance on your own or as part of a group, either in English or in another language of your choice (contact the school for more details). In addition to the shamisen, Dream Academy offers lessons in instruments such as drums, flute and shishu-bate. If you’re looking to fit a class into a day of sightseeing, making a booking at their outpost near Asakusa is probably the most convenient option.

Dream Academy

Hagoromo Nebuta Festival

The annual Aomori Nebuta Matsuri, with its massive paper-mâché floats and crowds of fanatical dancers, counts among the most popular of Japan’s many traditional festivals. If you can’t make it up to Aomori in August, check out this smaller but wonderful local version in the heart of downtown Shinjuku. A respectable 160,000 people turn out every year for the Hagoromo Nebuta Festival, which takes over the Higashi-Tachikawa shopping street and its surroundings with colourful parades. It features floats made by artists from Aomori, adds specialities from northern Japan, and much more.


Koenji Awa-Odori

The odori (dance/float) tradition can be traced back to Tsubaki Shrine in Shikoku, where its dancing in the streets has been going on for well over 400 years. Koenji’s version is the second biggest such celebration in Japan and draws dance teams from all over the country, including from the birthplace of the tradition. About 10,000 performers get together to strut their stuff at one of Tokyo’s most intense and exciting festivals.


Shinjuku Eisa Matsuri

Like most things Okinawan, traditional dance has been enthusiastically embraced by the rest of the country, as demonstrated by this annual Shinjuku parade. More than 1,000 dancers of all ages take to the streets around the east exit of Shinjuku Station, as well as in Harajuku, to beat portable taiko drums and dance their way through the crowds – a boisterous and colourful event sure to brighten up your day. While it's hard to resist the appeal of seeing the fun you won't have trouble finding a place nearby to cool down or run off in between dance. Shinjuku St. 5pm-6pm. Aug 26. Kunitachi stations). Aug 17 & 18. hagoromonebuta55.sakura.ne.jp.

Harajuku Omotesando Super Yosakoi

The original yosakoi started in Kochi prefecture, and Osaka’s own Super Yosakoi festival has successfully imported this energetic style of dancing to the capital. Taking over Omotesando, Yoyogi Park and parts of the nearby Meiji Shrine, the event sees brightly attired dancers trying to outdo each other as they shout the staffs they wave in the rhythm of the dance, attracting an audience of no less than one million every year. While this kind of tourist activity is great for the food and drink booths dealing in local delicacies.

Harajuku, Omotesando, Meiji Shrine. Yoyogi Park and others. Late August. Super-yosakoi.tokyo.
GOOD TO GO

Ekiben – from the words ‘eki’ (railway station) and ‘bento’ (boxed lunch) – are boxes filled with local specialities designed to be eaten on the go. Tokyo is lucky enough to have outlets selling ekiben from regions across Japan. Here are some of our favourites, should you be riding the rails or just fancy trying something different. By Kaila Imada

Kiyouken Siu Mai Bento
Yokohama, ¥860

Found all over Tokyo Station, this tasty Chinese-style ekiben consists of five pieces of siu mai (traditional Chinese dumplings), eight balls of rice plus a selection of small bites including egg, pickles and fish cakes. Originating in Yokohama, this bento comes from the long-established shop Kiyouken, which started out back in 1908. If you happen to pass by Yokohama Station, they actually have a restaurant you can dine in – but this bento is a convenient option for those in Tokyo and hungry.

Jiraiya Hana Temari
Nagoya, ¥950

The highlight of this bento are the tenmusu, or fried shrimp fritters wrapped up in rice and nori (seaweed), served alongside an omelette, meatball and assorted vegetables. They’re the perfect finger food: neat and easy to eat. Tenmusu is a delicacy of Nagoya, and these small rice balls come in a variety of stuffings and flavours. You’ll often find them at stations as part of a bento box or wrapped up snugly inside a leaf for easy travel.

Sasahachi Temarizushi Bento
Nara, ¥300

This bento from Nara is almost too pretty to eat: the tiny round nigiri sushi, otherwise known as temarizushi, is the perfect bite-sized option if you’re craving sushi on the go. Also containing a selection of edamame including a tamago egg roll, a piece of bamboo shoot and a mushroom, this bento has everything you need for a well-balanced meal.

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Abe Tottoridou Kanimeshi
Tottori, ¥1,350

You can’t mistake what’s inside this adorable bento thanks to the crab-shaped box it comes in. Simply filled with kanimeshi (crab rice), this bento from Tottori prefecture is a wonder for those who don’t have the patience to dig out all that juicy meat from the shell. Topped with two perfectly shaped claws, this is one indulgent lunch for the seafood-lover.

Takaben Daruma Bento
Gunma, ¥1,080

Packed with a healthy selection of mountain vegetables including takenoko (bamboo shoots), shiitake mushrooms and burdock, this cute bento comes in a traditional daruma doll-shaped container – understandable, as Gunma prefecture is home of the Takaben Daruma Bento and Japan’s leading producer of daruma dolls. After you’ve done eating, the box can be used as a piggy bank, thanks to the thin (coin) slot that doubles as a mouth.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEISUKE TANIGAWA
Japan in Tokyo

WHERE TO BUY

Eki-benya Matsuri
Located beyond the JR ticketing gates of the ever-busy Tokyo Station, this is the perfect pit stop before you leave Tokyo on a shinkansen. There are a host of options, so take your pick from bento sourced from all over Japan, as well as Tokyo favourites. As the store is always packed, it’s good to get there early for the best options. Also, certain bento are released at particular times throughout the day; always ask the shop staff if they can’t find the specific box you’re looking for.

1F ticketing area, JR Tokyo Station, 1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda (Tokyo Station). 03 3213 4352. 5.30am-11pm daily.

Eki-benya Itadaki
The sister store to Eki-benya Matsuri, this Shinjuku Station outpost offers a similar selection of bento. Also located past the JR ticketing gates, this grab-and-go shop is the ideal place to get your meal for the rails.

South Concourse, JR Shinjuku Station, 3-38-1 Shinjuku, Shinjuku (Shinjuku Station). 03 3340 2629. 6.30am-10pm daily.

Gransta Tokyo Station
Head down to the basement level of Tokyo Station after passing the JR ticketing gates and you’ll find the massive Gransta food and shopping complex, where everything from fresh food counters to sweet souvenir shops can be found. The takeaway area in particular offers a staggering amount of fresh food on a daily basis, where you can pick from beautifully packaged bento boxes to salads and deli items. This area stocks popular food items from other areas of Japan, such as specialty bento from Nara and tenmusu from Nagoya.

B1F, JR Tokyo Station, 1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda (Tokyo Station). 03 6212 1740. 8am-10pm, Sun 8am-9pm.

The wonderful world of Wagyu

We’re teaming up with beef specialist Wagyumafia for another dinner event. For those who didn’t get a chance to attend our exclusive Wagyu night back in March, you’ll get another chance to dine on some of Japan’s best Wagyu beef. At this special yakiniku night on May 20, you’ll get to experience Wagyumafia, the world’s most expensive standing yakiniku joint, which is usually only open to members. However, for this special evening, Wagyumafia is welcoming anyone who wants to join in on this indulgent Wagyu dinner.

The name ‘Wagyumafia’ may ring a bell for those who have drooled over its famed Wagyu cutlet sandwich that’s been hailed as the world’s most extravagant sando. However, you’ll get to taste something more premium and indulgent at this beefy dinner. Come hungry and expect to be wowed by top cuts of Wagyu beef and unparalleled knowledge that will help further your appreciation for this high-quality Japanese specialty.

Hisato Hamada and Takafumi Horie – the two personalities behind Wagyumafia – will be at the event, showcasing food demonstrations and live cooking while sharing their love for Japanese Wagyu. During the dinner, you’ll get to sample a variety of cuts from this premium beef, so you can really learn to appreciate the difference in taste and texture. Plus, you get to cook the beef to your liking over custom-made shichirin grills. It’s really the ultimate dinner for all Wagyu lovers out there.

Izasa Chaya Izasazushi Bento
Nara, ¥1,080
Originally from Nara, this picture-perfect bento box is a great option if you’re looking to get a taste of classic Japanese flavours. The box is segmented into a grid of nine, each featuring a different item, including pickled veggies, various types of rice, seafood and a sweet mochi ball filled with anko (red bean paste) to end your meal.

Ishikari Shakemeshi
Sapporo, ¥1,150
Hailing from Sapporo, this seafood bento is filled with fine flakes of salmon topped with ikura (salmon roe).

Izakaya Chaya Bento
Nara, ¥1,080
Originally from Nara, this picture-perfect bento box is a great option if you’re looking to get a taste of classic Japanese flavours. The box is segmented into a grid of nine, each featuring a different item, including pickled veggies, various types of rice, seafood and a sweet mochi ball filled with anko (red bean paste) to end your meal.

Ujille Kakimeshi
Hokkaido, ¥1,080
Hokkaido is known for its seafood, and this rice bento featuring plump oysters is filling and deliciously moreish.
One of the best ways to explore the many regions of Japan is through sake, says Jessica Thompson

TRIED ONE SAKE, you’ve tried them all, right? Thankfully, this couldn’t be further from the truth. Much like wine, the ingredients for sake are free – rice, koji (rice mold), water and yeast – and nearly all the variables are many. Rice type, rice polishing grade, the water’s mineral content, the climate and even the alchemic bent of the brewers can vastly affect the character of the resulting sake. Granted, the regional differences in sake may not be as pronounced as terroir in wine, but it can still make for a fascinating way to discover the variety of the art. Much like wine, the ingredients for sake are free – rice, koji (rice mold), water and yeast – and nearly all the variables are many. The variety of climates, the type of yeast, climate, the cuisine of a region and even the alchemic bent of the brewers can vastly affect the character of the resulting sake. Granted, the regional differences in sake may not be as pronounced as terroir in wine, but it can still make for a fascinating way to discover the variety of the art.

Regional Differences

SAGA

Sake from Saga is known for being umasuchi – sweeter, richer, more robust, a taste that spreads throughout your mouth on sipping. This matches the rich culinary content, which generally creates a sake suitable for hearty cuisine, while the coastal region of Hamadon brews light and refreshing varieties to match the local seafood.

What to expect: Rich, full-bodied, dense and juicy

Labels to try: Haruki, Kogyo, Harima, Kyo no Haru, Eikun, Tamanohikari, Mukai Shuzo, Kamoizumi

AKITA

The cold, harsh winters of Akita created a tradition of hearty cuisine, hence the plethora of bold-tasting dishes and fermented food. Such rich pickings need a bold sake, and that’s exactly what Akita produces. Aside from abundant water and rich soil quality, the emergence of A1 (Akita Flower yeast) in recent years provides the sake with a strong and aromatic complexity. Although Akita may only have around 38 breweries, they are renowned for a culture of innovation, with collaborations between young brewers and experimentation with new techniques.

What to expect: Rich, rememberable, unique sake

Labels to try: Yuki no Mijin, Aramasa, Yuki no Bosha, Karibo, Yamato Shirakawa

ISHIKAWA

Ishikawa sake will keep you guessing, and keep you engaged. During the Edo period (1603-1868), sake from Ishikawa prefecture was characterised by its sweetness and richness – the influence of the region’s group of traditional master brewers. But over the years, the brews have become a little drier and cleaner, with an end result that is often a clear and light sake of complex depth. Ishikawa brewers are known for the ‘yamahai’ style of sake, which uses airborne rather than added yeast to produce creamy, wild-tasting brews.

What to expect: Bold mouthfeel, light and clear, but with fragrant and complex depth

Labels to try: Tsurugaishi, M_EPS, Kikuzawa, Kikumai, Noto Homare

NIIGATA

Snowy winters, an abundance of mountains and rivers and one of the most famous varieties of rice for sake brewing (Gohyaku-Rihaku) endow Niigata with premium sake-producing credentials. In fact, it has the highest number of producers (around 96) of all the prefectures in Japan. Niigata’s soft water and cold winters equal a slow fermentation for the sake, resulting in a delicate brew. If you’re looking for drinking buddies to enjoy this tipple with, Niigata is the place to be – it tops the consumption per person a year.

What to expect: Dry, clean, elegant, gentle on the palate

Labels to try: Sakuraya, Yonetsuru, Matsuzaka, Tsuchiyas, Nakagawa

KYOTO

Kyoto is one of the oldest areas of sake brewing, and the second-biggest producer by volume in Japan after Yamagata. The Fushimi region in particular has a rich sake legacy, thanks to its access to the Horikawa River, which means sake casks could flow freely out of the area, its access to Kyoto aristocracy, who made up the bulk of the sake market until the end of the Edo era, and its supply of the pristine Gokosui underground spring water found in the area. If you visit Kyoto today, go check out the wooden kawa (brewery warehouses) off the charming streets of the Fushimi district.

What to expect: Smooth and silky, slightly sweet and fragrant

Labels to try: Matsumoto, Yamagawa, Kyo no Haru, Eikun, Tamanohikari, Mukai Shuzo, Kusunoki Katsura

YAMAGATA

Yamagata in northern Tohoku is the one region in Japan with a ‘geographical indication’ for sake. This is a nationally registered appellation that certifies a sake’s origin and quality, and is recognised by the World Trade Organisation. The region is known for its deep, rich snowmelt water found in the area. If you visit Yamagata sake bottles that are marked with the label ‘DENMAYA’, which indicates 100 percent of its ingredients come from Yamagata, so you can expect the distinct flavour profile of Yamagata sake to shine through.

What to expect: Dry, clean and light

Labels to try: Yajinboku, Yometsubu, Mitobe, Burokan, Eko Fuji, Fugikien

FUKUSHIMA

Fukushima has a long history as a reputable sake region, with many of the prefecture’s 60 breweries dating back over 300 years. But it was the aftermath of the Tohoku Earthquake of 2011 that really propelled local brewers to strive for sake excellence; they united together to not only rebuild the local sake industry after the disaster, but to improve it. Uniquely, the producers share their knowledge on brewing methods, which are usually heavily guarded trade secrets. The variety of climates in Fukushima result in quite different beers: the mountainous inland area of Aizu-Wakamatsu is known for a rich, sweeter, more umami-laden type of sake to match the more hearty cuisine, while the coastal region of Hamadon brews light and refreshing varieties to match the local seafood.

What to expect: Fresh, light and refreshing

Labels to try: Azumaichi, Shichida, Koimari Shuzo, Azuma Tsuru, Anamachi

HIROSHIMA

Hiroshima sake’s prestige is credited largely to the ‘father of Hiroshima sake’, Senzaburo Miura, who, in 1868, devised a unique method for brewing sake using the area’s soft water. The result is the mellow, gently aromatic brew the region is known for, which is generally sweeter than the sake of more northerly regions. Hiroshima is also home to the National Institute of Sake Brewing, and its technological advancements in sake brewing, combined with the region’s quality rice, clean water and award-winning ‘Hiroshima Ginjo’ yeast, result in consistently excellent sake.

What to expect: Rich, ricey sake on the sweeter side, but with an overall mellowness and softness

Labels to try: Kogetsu, Yonetsuru, Juyondai, Yonetsuru, Mukai Shuzo, Kamoizumi
The city's best...

Places to drink sake

UTSURA UTSURA
Located at a quiet corner in Shibuya, Utsura Utsura has that type of enticing nighttime glow that justbeckons you in. Through the wooden door you’ll find a bar counter that seats eight, running along the narrow open kitchen where you can watch the chef and sake sommelier at work. The latter, uniquely, a hot sake specialist, and will taste his way warming up the drinks to their precise temperature can be rather hyporic. There are tables for four at the back of the room, and the vibe is professional but warm. The concept of o-tsubo is to sit down and find the right sake to match the dish you'd like to eat, or vice versa. Sake comes by the glass, starting around ¥500, or 180ml carafes ranging from ¥700 to ¥1,500, with about 40 varieties of regularly changing labels on offer. The elaborate o-tsubo (quick bites, much like an appetiser) platter is a standout, with around six bite-sized dishes like strawberry with tofu and umeboshi, and duck marinated in soy sauce with poached kumquats.

1-4-15 Shiba, Shibuya (Shibuya Station). 03 3485 3111. 11am-8pm daily.

YUMMI SAGE COLLECTIVE
This dimly lit interior of Yummy Sake Collective gives it an underground nightclub feel. Just a few minutes walk from Daikanyama Station, the standing bar fits about eight people, illuminated by the glow from the sake refrigerator behind. There are chic chicattup stools, complete with white-painted timber walls, a long shared table and dangling exposed lightbulbs. The bar sells around 80 sake varieties, served in glass carafes of 90 to 100ml. No matter if you’re just getting started on your sake journey or a discerning expert, there’s always more to learn. The Japan Sake and Shochu Information Center serves up just an excellent and extensive range of sake and shochu, but also an abundance of information about these traditional Japanese beverages. Imagine a bar combined with a library – but one where you are encouraged to drink books. The shelves are lined with a cornucopia of sake and shochu information, from books published on the subject matter to pamphlets highlighting the sake of each region. The space itself is airy and modern but homely enough to feel relaxed. The bar serves around 100 varieties of sake and shochu, which change monthly. If you find a bottle you particularly like, grab a bottle to go – you can call it home.

1-6-15 Nishishinbashi, Minato (Kasumigaseki, Toranomon Stations). 03 3519 2091. tinyurl.com/TOTjapansakesochu. Mon-Fri 11am-6pm, closed Sat, Sun & hols.

GIZZA KENGO SAGE CELLAR
Kengo is part-bottle-shop, part-tasting-bar, which stocks over 150 types of boutique sake from across Japan. It’s a bright, light-filled, welcoming space, with large windows overlooking Ginza backstreets.

Sake can be bought by the 90ml glass from just ¥500. Otherwise, get a tasting flight of three kinds of sake (the A-list sake) or seasonal sake for ¥1,000 yen (616ml pints). And if you find something you like, you can purchase the entire bottle to go.

The snack selection, on the other hand, is a playfully traditional tachinomi (standing bar) offering, like cans of fried fish and steamed mochi (mochi), as well as Japanese bar favourites like potato salad, tsukemono (pickles), hiyayakko (cold dressed tofu), edamame and smoked cheese. Kengo is located just five minutes from Ginza’s main Chuo-dori shopping street, making it the perfect spot to swing by between department stores.

9-3-2 Ginza, Chuo (Ginza Station). 03 5553 4051. kengo@yummysake.jp. Mon-Fri 11am-11pm (last orders 10.30pm), Sat, Sun & hols 10am-6pm (5.30pm).

JEPSEN SAGE-and-SHOCHEU INFORMATION CENTER
No matter if you’re just getting started on your sake journey or a discerning expert, there’s always more to learn. The Japan Sake and Shochu Information Center serves up just an excellent and extensive range of sake and shochu, but also an abundance of information about these traditional Japanese beverages. Imagine a bar combined with a library – but one where you are encouraged to drink books. The shelves are lined with a cornucopia of sake and shochu information, from books published on the subject matter to pamphlets highlighting the sake of each region. The space itself is airy and modern but homely enough to feel relaxed. The bar serves around 100 varieties of sake and shochu, which change monthly. If you find a bottle you particularly like, grab a bottle to go – you can call it home.

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MEISHU CENTRE
If you want to sample a bunch of different sake in one sitting, this is the place to be. Brightly lit and filled on weeknights with a largely salaryman crowd, Meishu Centre is dotted with freestanding tables all set with three glasses each next to the walls of sake, then flag down one of the staff to fill your glasses with your selection. The prices start from ¥300 for a glass of sake, and if you get there at a time, you get a ¥100 discount. The vibe here is relaxed and jovial, with swing jazz playing over the speakers. Regular patrons interact with the staff, openly comparing sake, and if you’re feeling peckish, the fridges are stocked with old-school snacks (think potato salad, vegetable pickles, pickled squid, etc) that pair well with sake. Bottles are arranged by prefecture, and the offerings change with the seasons and according to new releases. If you find one you really like, you can also buy a bottle to take home.

Isayama Daini Bldg 1F, 3-3-18 Hamamatsucho, Minato (Hamamatsucho Station). 03 3453 6443. sakesoba.com. Mon-Fri 11am-9pm, (last orders 8.30pm), Sat 11am-7pm (5.30pm), closed Sun & hols.

HASEGAWA SAKETEN
Whether you’re looking to buy sake to take home or sit at a sophisticated little bar and drink boutique sake by the glass, Hasegawa Sake has you covered. Enter the L-shaped store and on your left you’ll find a line of glowing refrigerators brimming with sake from across Japan. To your right and around the corner is a snug little bar that seats about six. The bar has oft-sight juxtaposition of the old and the new – just outside in the Fukutoku Shinto shrine, surrounded by the stylish Coredo shopping and dining complex, and with a backdrop of towering Nihonbashi skyscrapers.

Inside Hasegawa Saketen, copper vintage lamps shades decorate the room, and the all-glass exterior makes it feel like an Edo-era liquor store-bar with a Fifth Avenue makeover. The bar serves around 15 varieties of sake by the glass, including traditional as well as many modern and innovative brews, starting at ¥400 per glass. If you’re hungry, the snacks on offer range from dishes like deep-fried broad beans, cod, grilled chicken skewers and udon with chilled miso.

8-1-1 Honmachi-mae, Chuo (Shinjuku Station). 03 6622 3111. 11am-8pm daily.
Eating & Drinking

Local heroes

These restaurants are so popular in their home prefectures they’ve opened up shop right here in Tokyo. By the Time Out Tokyo team

GYOZA HOHEI

Sister shop to their ever-popular Kyoto restaurant, this is the perfect spot to get your late-night gyoza fix. Gyoza Hohei has received the Michelin Bib Gourmand nod for three consecutive years since 2017, and is best known for its signature bite-sized dumplings with a savoury garlic and leek filling and a crisp exterior. Its signature thin noodles in a creamy tonkotsu (pork-based) broth. On the counter you’ll find some secret dishes including buttery kani miso (crab innards), glazed with miso (squid) nagi wrapped in salmon, and an icy fresh Hokkaido shrimp nigiri. Plates range from ¥141 to ¥681, and unlike many other sushi-go-round spots where it’s advisable to order directly from the chef, here you can happily pluck plates straight from the conveyor belt.

If you do want to order instead, you’ll need to write down which dishes you’d like and how many plates on a small order slip. Yes, there are cheaper range from ¥141 to ¥681, and unlike many other sushi-go-round spots where it’s advisable to order directly from the chef, here you can happily pluck plates straight from the conveyor belt.

With seafood delivered straight from the restaurant’s Hokkaido headquarters, it’s clear why people are willing to stand in long lines for a spot at this affordable kaitenzushi joint. Toriton is a seafood lover’s paradise, with menu items including buttery kani miso (crab innards), gleaming white (squid) nagi wrapped in salmon, and an icy fresh Hokkaido shrimp nigiri. Plates range from ¥141 to ¥681, and unlike many other sushi-go-round spots where it’s advisable to order directly from the chef, here you can happily pluck plates straight from the conveyor belt.

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KINGENTOKYO

Hailing from Hiroshima, where it has won a loyal following with its simple but oh-so-addictive ‘soupless’ dandan noodles. Kingken is located near Shiba Park and gets reliably packed every lunchtime. The chefs are adamant about using the exact same ingredients as the original restaurant, and apparently the taste is identical – transplants from Hiroshima make up a significant portion of the regulars. You can choose from four degrees of heat for your noodles, with ‘2’ probably the most common pick and ‘4’ recommended only for experienced spice fiends.

For just ¥700 you can get the ‘Nagahama Ramen’, with its signature thin noodles in a creamy tonkotsu (pork-based) broth. On the counter you’ll find some secret dishes including buttery kani miso (crab innards), glazed with miso (squid) nagi wrapped in salmon, and an icy fresh Hokkaido shrimp nigiri. Plates range from ¥141 to ¥681, and unlike many other sushi-go-round spots where it’s advisable to order directly from the chef, here you can happily pluck plates straight from the conveyor belt.

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Lamb restaurants

Beef may be the quintessential Japanese red meat but it’s got a new rival. Lamb is gaining popularity as a leaner, healthier option. Here’s where to get your fix of chops, shanks, steak, or shabu shabu in the capital.

**TIME OUT LOVES**

**BEIJING LAMB**
One of the few restaurants serving Chinese- and Japanese-style lamb, Beijing Lamb is a great place to try something out of the ordinary. The menu features a variety of dishes, from stir-fried to roasted lamb, as well as a selection of accompaniments like noodles and rice. The prices are reasonable, and the service is attentive. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed, making it a great spot for a quick meal or a longer dinner. Open daily from 11am to 11pm.

**YANG XIANG LAMB**
This restaurant offers a wide variety of lamb dishes, from stir-fried to roasted. The prices are reasonable, and the service is attentive. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed, making it a great spot for a quick meal or a longer dinner. Open daily from 11am to 11pm.

**HITSUJI NO YU**
A popular spot for lamb lovers, Hitsuji no Yu offers a variety of dishes, from stir-fried to roasted. The prices are reasonable, and the service is attentive. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed, making it a great spot for a quick meal or a longer dinner. Open daily from 11am to 11pm.

**NIKUJIRUYA**
This restaurant offers a variety of dishes, from stir-fried to roasted. The prices are reasonable, and the service is attentive. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed, making it a great spot for a quick meal or a longer dinner. Open daily from 11am to 11pm.
Shopping & Style

Meet your maker

Want a more engaging shopping session? For a hands-on retail experience, try out the fun workshops available at these speciality stores across Tokyo.

Inkstand by Kakimori

At this cheerful ink shop, you can customise your very own colour blend to use with fountain and ballpoint pens. The process is simple: at the self-order workshop (reservations necessary via website) you choose from a few basic colours, play around with the ratios until you get your perfect mix, and then submit your order at the shop.

Marron Papier

Flowers, flowers and more flowers. South Korean import Marron Papier, whose original store in Seoul, is a flower shop-meets-fashion boutique where you can stock up on all sorts of seasonal blooms, clothing and jewellery. This welcoming store also host frequent workshops where you can learn to craft everything from pretty floral crowns to bouquets. They’ve even got fashion styling services and beauty experts. The classes vary with the seasons, so in winter you might create some amazing paper creations, while on the fourth floor you'll find a studio dedicated to making washi paper.

Ozu Washi

At this longstanding store and cultural centre, you can discover the beauty of Japanese washi paper – and try making it yourself. The first floor houses a shop where you can pick up washi paper and calligraphy goods, and the Washi Experience Studio, where you can learn how to make washi paper at its frequent workshops. The second floor gallery space hosts weekly exhibitions and guest artists from around Japan, plus the Ozu Culture School, where serious students can sign up for a variety of classes. Finally, the third floor houses the informative Ozu History Museum, which details the many types of washi from various Japanese regions. Information is available in English and you can touch and feel the different types of paper. The washi paper packages in store come with instructions in English. Using the instructional books available for purchase, and selected origami paper packages in store come with instructions in English, you can get jewellery customised there and then.

Hiro Workshop

This charming, Kichijoji workshop offers classes in making small leather goods and brass or silver jewellery to people of varying experience levels. There’s really no set formula here, and the friendly owner will help you craft anything you’re itching to make. If you’re just visiting, you can choose from the ready-made items or have the owner customise something for you on the spot. Cool brass bracelets perfect for stacking and layering are available, as well as a variety of rings. Like many of his pieces, Hiro can customise to fit, items can be personalised with your name or a special message. You can find Hiro’s workshop pop-up in Nakahara Park’s Art Market every weekend, where you can get your jewellery customised then and there.

Ocharanotori Origami Kikan

Whether it’s a crane, butterlfies or something far more original, origami – traditional Japanese paper folding – has been practiced for centuries, and this is the country’s premier origami centre. You could do yourself using the instructional books available for purchase, and selected origami paper packages in store come with instructions in English. Or, better still, sign up for a workshop (available in Japanese or English) and learn how to create all sorts of origami designs from the in-house experts. The classes vary with the seasons, so in winter you might create Hinaamatsuri dolls for the March festival, or you might learn how to make more practical items like origami jewellery or a year-round favourite, the crane. On the second floor there’s a small gallery featuring some amazing paper creations, while on the fourth floor you will find a studio dedicated to making washi paper.


drug store

Drug store is an up-and-coming brand in Tokyo which is famous for the mastery of Cotton, Rock and Punk styles. It has a unique design with a hint of "dark literature" that you can’t find anywhere else. It’s not only a store but also a place to find something special for your family, friends and yourself.

Shopping & Style

Inkstand by Kakimori

Art Atelier du Travail Nakameguro

Ever dreamed of making your own pair of shoes? At this charmingly ramshackle Nakameguro store, you can become a cobbler for a day and custom-make your own pair of leather sandals or shoes with the help of the shop’s artisans. Run by a friendly husband-and-wife duo, the shop is homey and inviting, making leather goods like wallets and phone cases, although the leather workshops are the highlight. The leather is sourced from Tsuchi prefecture, and you’ll find to sit aside around six hours to complete your pair of shoes (classes usually run from 10am to 4pm). If your workshop is already overflowing with footwear, you can opt to make a leather handbag instead. Just visit their website to select the item you’d like to make and then submit your order at the shop.

Maroon Papier

Korean import Maroon Papier, whose original store in Seoul, is a flower shop-meets-fashion boutique where you can stock up on all sorts of seasonal blooms, clothing and jewellery. This welcoming store also host frequent workshops where you can learn to craft everything from pretty floral crowns to bouquets. They’ve even got fashion styling services and beauty experts. The classes vary with the seasons, so in winter you might create some amazing paper creations, while on the fourth floor you'll find a studio dedicated to making washi paper.

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THE JAPANESE LOVE their onsen (hot spring) baths and common areas, says Tabea Greuner around town, says them all at these unconventional cafés. Coffee, tea or... a foot bath? You can get a piece of cake. Bliss. Cafés will soothe your tired feet and help put a spring back in your step. These are lifelines, especially after a long day of sightseeing. These of places that combine an ashiyu with a café. The results are magical, or foot bath. Always keen to feet in a so-called ashiyu, a quicker way to reboot your energy levels, dip your tired into the and hot towels), plus facial treatments, right before your big night out. Hogushiya Honpo Riraku has several branches around Tokyo. The flagship salon is located at Shinjuku's Yasukuni-dori avenue, close to the bustling streetscape. Hogushiya Honpo Riraku's foot bath sessions last a long 70 minutes – and you'll be served all-you-can-drink corn silk tea, rooibos tea and soymilk tea to munch on. Who says Tokyo is expensive? HOGUREST is a great place to drop by after exploring Yokohama's Chinatown. While your feet are resting in the hot water, you can enjoy a quick foot massage (from ¥1,000). You can even add on an organic snack such as cheese or crepe for ¥800. For a healthier option, go for a 30-minute foot bath plus a drink will only set you back ¥1,200. This cozy relaxation station is conveniently located in Ueno and its uniquely-designed ashiyu is a great place to drop by after exploring the nearby museums. The seats are arranged around a circular foot bathtub, creating one of the most spa-like atmospheres on this island. A 30-minute foot bath plus a drink will only set you back ¥900. For a healthier option, go for a foot bath plus a drink, which comes in three variants: detox, anti-aging and weight-loss. You can even add on an organic snack such as popcorn or gelato (from ¥450). Foot loose

Coffee, tea or... a foot bath? You can get them all at these unconventional cafés around town, says Tabea Greuner.

Foot loose

THE JAPANESE LOVE their onsen (hot spring) baths and common areas, says Tabea Greuner around town, says them all at these unconventional cafés. Coffee, tea or... a foot bath? You can get a piece of cake. Bliss. Cafés will soothe your tired feet and help put a spring back in your step. These are lifelines, especially after a long day of sightseeing. These are places that combine an ashiyu with a café. The results are magical, or foot bath. Always keen to dip your tired into the and hot towels), plus facial treatments, right before your big night out. Hogushiya Honpo Riraku has several branches around Tokyo. The flagship salon is located at Shinjuku's Yasukuni-dori avenue, close to the bustling streetscape. Hogushiya Honpo Riraku's foot bath sessions last a long 70 minutes – and you'll be served all-you-can-drink corn silk tea, rooibos tea and soymilk tea to munch on. Who says Tokyo is expensive?

HOGUREST is a great place to drop by after exploring Yokohama's Chinatown. While your feet are resting in the hot water, you can enjoy a quick foot massage (from ¥1,000). You can even add on an organic snack such as cheese or crepe for ¥800. For a healthier option, go for a 30-minute foot bath plus a drink will only set you back ¥1,200. This cozy relaxation station is conveniently located in Ueno and its uniquely-designed ashiyu is a great place to drop by after exploring the nearby museums. The seats are arranged around a circular foot bathtub, creating one of the most spa-like atmospheres on this island. A 30-minute foot bath plus a drink will only set you back ¥900. For a healthier option, go for a foot bath plus a drink, which comes in three variants: detox, anti-aging and weight-loss. You can even add on an organic snack such as popcorn or gelato (from ¥450). Foot loose

Coffee, tea or... a foot bath? You can get them all at these unconventional cafés around town, says Tabea Greuner.

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THE JAPANESE LOVE their onsen (hot spring) baths and common areas, says Tabea Greuner around town, says them all at these unconventional cafés. Coffee, tea or... a foot bath? You can get a piece of cake. Bliss. Cafés will soothe your tired feet and help put a spring back in your step, all while you’re sipping a cup of tea or snacking on a piece of cake. Bliss.
**Things to Do**

**Top family-friendly museums**

Our favourite places for educational fun for the young and old alike.

By Tabea Greuner

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1. **THE RAILWAY MUSEUM**
   - Located about 45 minutes away from Tokyo, the Railway Museum features 36 real-life train cars – most of which you can walk into – which span over 140 years of railway history. Little ones will have a field day at the Kids Plaza, where they can drive several miniature trains along a 300m-long track (¥200; numbered tickets will be handed out in front of the attraction from 10am). Those aged six and above, including adults, can go for the more immersive experience by taking on the various train (and shinkansen) simulators on the museum’s second floor.

2. **TOKYO TOY MUSEUM**
   - The Tokyo Toy Museum exhibits not just Japanese toys but those from across the world. Infants up to the age of two can explore the first floor, which boasts a crawl tunnel and a range of wooden toys. The second floor is home to the Wood Toy Forest, where kids can frolic inside a pit filled with 20,000 wooden balls while taking in the calming aroma of cypress. The third floor displays toys related to science, as well as a large number of traditional Japanese toys. There are daily workshops too, which are open to children over three.

3. **POLICE MUSEUM**
   - The Police Museum stretches across six floors, informing visitors about the history and the work of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. Kids will find this an adventurous place to visit as they get to change into (mini) police uniforms upon arrival and pose beside a real patrol car, sit on an authentic Honda police motorcycle with flashing lights, or in the cockpit of a Harukaze helicopter. On the second and third floors, kids can learn about traffic safety in a cycling simulator and trips on crime prevention through a diorama. Through the many interactive exhibits, children and parents alike are able to understand a police officer’s work.

4. **NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURE AND SCIENCE**
   - It’s easy to spend an entire day at the National Museum of Nature and Science in Ueno Park. Start your adventure at the ‘Japan Gallery’, which focuses on the country’s formation, its indigenous flora and fauna and the island’s first inhabitants. The ‘Global Gallery’ meanwhile, concerns itself with everything from science and astronomy to the evolution of life dating back more than four billion years – expect to ogle at fossils of extinct species and life-size dinosaur skeletons. You can also trace the progress of modern technology by studying the many Japanese inventions developed since the Edo period (1603-1868).

5. **FIRE MUSEUM**
   - Run by the Tokyo Fire Department, this free museum is dedicated to firefighting and disaster prevention in Japan. While the basement houses some of the most stunning vintage fire trucks in Japan’s history, kids will likely prefer exploring the third floor. Here they can dress up as little firefighters, explore the cockpit of a fire truck and participate in a virtual rescue mission while being seated in a helicopter. After exploring a large diorama outfitted with lights, sounds and videos showing an emergency fire demonstration, children can practice their skills in extinguishing a fire in the simulation corner.

6. **MIRAIKAN – THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF EMERGING SCIENCE AND INNOVATION**
   - Miraikan examines our daily lives through a scientific lens. At its entrance is the impressive 6.5-metre Geo-Cosmos globe hanging from the atrium, fitted with 70,362 OLED panels and alternating between showing global weather patterns, human migration movements and more. However, many people come here to watch the performance of Honda’s famous humanoid robot ASIMO (from 11am, 1pm, 2pm, 4pm) or talk to the lifelike android humanoid robot Otonaroid. In the space and astronomy corner, you can step inside a model of the International Space Station living quarters. When you’re done, take a breather in the 121-seat spherical Dome Theater ‘Gaia’, which shows 3D moving images of our universe based on scientific data (¥300, children aged 18 and younger ¥210).
YOU DON'T NEED to have seen 'Lost in Translation' to know that the lens loves Tokyo. But there's so much more to the city's photographic side than neon signs and skyscrapers. The modern city's stunning visual landscape has helped generate one of the world’s most vibrant photography scenes, with enthusiasts out shooting the streets every weekend, and hip photographers and bookshops dedicated to the artform. While this city’s love affair with all things photographic predates social media, you can see social media’s influence in recent years, generating one of the world’s most vibrant photography scenes, with enthusiasts and skyscrapers. The capital's endlessly stimulating visual landscape has helped Tokyo. But there's so much more to the city's photographic side than neon signs and skyscrapers. 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Art & Culture

ESSENTIAL EXHIBITIONS

New shows to see

Art shows to see in spring include To-ji Temple treasures, early Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Gustav Klimt and Viennese Modernism. By Julie Anne Staats

As 2019 marks the 150th anniversary of Japanese and Austro-American diplomacy, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo is hosting a grand exhibition dedicated to Klimt. Over 400 works by major artists such as Klimt, Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos will be on display. Other exhibition highlights include masterpieces from the second half of the 18th century and the Biedermeier period (1814–1848).

The subtle figurative touch of 19th-century English painting found itself in a creative impasse, where strict academic conventions and mesmerizing accouterments led to ‘go to nature’, the artists’ way of ‘going with the flow’ in the direction of the French avant garde. This led to the start of an art revolution.

Undoubtedly one of teamLab Borderless’ most popular exhibits, the immersive Forest of Resonating Lamps will be refreshed with a new seasonal colour in time for spring's cherry blossoms. Open now until the end of April, the interactive Murano glass lamps feature various shades of pink, along with other seasonal hues such as Golden Kerra, Kerria/Spouts, Blue Kerra, Kerria Blossoms and Peach. If you missed these limited-time colours, the expansive digital museum is still worth your time. That being said, it’s open until 9pm on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, meaning you can roam through the interactive, large-scale works at a leisurely pace.

One of Japan’s most famous surrealists, Ichirō Fukuzawa (1898-1992) studied art in Paris for nearly a decade at the height of the French avant garde movement. Upon returning to Japan, the Ginzan born artist introduced his peers to the theories behind surrealism and produced a series of paintings embedded with social criticism. His rebellious nature came at a price as he was oppressed by the government before and after World War II. After the war, Fukuzawa continued to produce large paintings of people from a socio-critical perspective, staying faithful to the surrealism traditions. This exhibition focuses on the complex relationship between art and society, with 100 works representing Fukuzawa’s views of a post-war society.

GUSTAV KLIHM – VIENNA – JAPAN 1900

One of Japan’s most famous surrealists, Ichirō Fukuzawa (1898-1992) studied art in Paris for nearly a decade at the height of the French avant garde movement. Upon returning to Japan, the Ginzan born artist introduced his peers to the theories behind surrealism and produced a series of paintings embedded with social criticism. His rebellious nature came at a price as he was oppressed by the government before and after World War II. After the war, Fukuzawa continued to produce large paintings of people from a socio-critical perspective, staying faithful to the surrealism traditions. This exhibition focuses on the complex relationship between art and society, with 100 works representing Fukuzawa’s views of a post-war society.

To-ji by Emperor Saga, turning the temple into a focal point of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism. This exhibition will present art works handed down to it, with a focus on the numerous items associated with Kukai himself. Highlights include magnificent sculptures and paintings, as well as works of calligraphy and decorative artworks of Esoteric Buddhism.

One hundred years after Klimt’s death, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum is hosting Japan’s first comprehensive exhibition of this figurehead of Art Nouveau, with more than 25 paintings on display. For a well-rounded experience, the museum is also displaying Japanese artworks reminiscent of Klimt’s style, as well as a re-creation of the exhibits at Vienna’s Secession Building using elaborate reproductions of the wall paintings.

To-ji Temple: Kukai and the Sculpture Mandala

The To-ji Temple was founded by Emperor Kammu in 794, following the relocation of the capital to Kyoto, and it became a symbol of divine protection. Meanwhile, a Japanese priest called Kukai was travelling to China to study the teachings of Esoteric Buddhism. Upon returning to Japan in 823, Kukai was granted control of To-ji by Emperor Saga, turning the temple into a focal point of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism. This exhibition will present art works handed down to it, with a focus on the numerous items associated with Kukai himself. Highlights include magnificent sculptures and paintings, as well as works of calligraphy and decorative artworks of Esoteric Buddhism.

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Art shows to see in

Spring include To-ji Temple treasures, early Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Gustav Klimt and Viennese Modernism.

Art & Culture

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Gustav Klimt and Viennese Modernism. By Julie Anne Staats

Around the turn of the 20th century, Vienna emerged as one of Europe’s cultural and intellectual hubs. This surge of innovation in philosophy, literature, visual arts, architecture and music in the Austrian capital became known as Viennese Modernism, a period in which artists sought new forms of expression while protesting against outmoded views. Four pioneers stood at the helm of this movement: painters Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele, architect Otto Wagner and artist Koloman Moser, all of whom had lasting impact on Vienna’s culture.

As 2019 marks the 150th anniversary of Japanese and Austro-American diplomacy, the National Art Center, Tokyo is hosting a grand exhibition dedicated to Klimt. Over 400 works by major artists such as Klimt, Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos will be on display. Other exhibition highlights include masterpieces from the second half of the 18th century and the Biedermeier period (1814–1848).

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EVEN THOSE WHO ARE unfamiliar with Haruomi Hosono have probably heard his music somewhere. It could have been in a commercial or at a café, or maybe heard his music with Haruomi Hosono have started out by exploring American music history through the window of rock, he later took on both internationally focused techno-pop and domestic pop, and even dabbled in ambient in the very early days of that genre. Looking back at the history of Japanese popular music from the late ‘60s until today, Haruomi Hosono shows up as a permanent presence, so perhaps it’s no wonder that his eclectic career and innovative spirit are now capturing the attention of a truly global audience.

March 6, the day we sat down with Hosono for this interview, marked the release of ‘Hochono House’ – a reimagining of his 1973 debut album ‘Hosono House’. About to reach yet another generation of open-minded listeners, the artist himself still hasn’t quite wrapped his head around the attention.

Were you aware that people from other parts of the world are really interested in your music now? Not at all – I was a bit surprised actually (when getting word about the planned re-release in 2018). I thought there were people with quirky tastes in America. But with Vampire Weekend sampling ‘Hana ni Miz’, which is one of my old instrumental pieces, and other things like that, I gradually started to realise that there’s international demand for my stuff.

Why do you think that is? I guess it’s because the internet has changed what information is available. YouTube is such an effective medium. I also think that with the music industry becoming more and more establishment like, people are counteracting that by becoming more sensitive and open to music that doesn’t sound like everything else – the kind of music you won’t hear on the radio.

What is the concept behind your new album ‘Hochono House’? First of all, I decided that I was going to create it all on my own, and then just started out without much to go with. I would probably have finished it sooner and with less effort if I had been working with my usual band members, but I didn’t want to take the easy way out. It was really hard.

Why were you so adamant about going at it alone? Listening to my old demo tapes, I noticed that I was playing alone, instead of doing sessions with anyone else to decide on this or that arrangement. I wanted to go back to that way of doing things.

You always approach music-making from two different perspectives: one from the point of view of a musician and another from the listener’s. I think that has had an impact on other musicians around the world.

It’s true, I’m happy to hear it. Lately I’ve been making acoustic boogie, and playing only old stuff on my radio show. Young people take a fresh approach to those things, which are what I have been wanting to do. The music of the 20th century is such a mountain of treasures, but our paths to those treasures has been cut off. Unless someone does something about it, we may not be able to reach the mountain any longer. My mission is to keep that connection alive, so having my music reach people in other countries, be it in the US or somewhere else, makes me happy.

You’re writing that life is neither a straight line nor a circle, but an upward spiral. I think you can say the same for ‘Hochono House’.

Well, I’m actually just wandering all over the place. But you can’t just draw a line from one point to the other and follow it. Life sometimes turns you upside down. Maybe it’ll turn into a baby next, like Benjamin Button…

Have you been listening to any new music lately? I didn’t do for about 10 years, but I have checked out some new stuff recently. I get curious about people’s sounds all of a sudden – about once every 10 years. I tried to be objective when making this album, and compared various sounds to each other to establish standards. I didn’t do that for my previous album, so guess this marks a turning point. As for names, I like Keorpen – he’s a 15- or 16-year-old kid. Olympic athletes all feel young to me now, and maybe that’s true of musicians too.

Some of the lyrics on ‘Hochono House’ differ from those on ‘Hosono House’. What has changed for you between the two albums?

Back then [in 1973] you could still feel the Tokyo of old, but it was already disappearing. We used to lament that with Takashi Matsumoto, Happy End’s drummer and lyricist, and the others. But now, it’s all gone. I have no emotional attachment (to modern Tokyo).

What are you looking forward to on your US tour? I think America has also lost a great many things. I have a longing for diners, so I’d like to ask the places where I’m going to find a good old-school diner and go look for one.

Music

Yellow Magic Orchestra was an influential electronic band in the ‘70s and ‘80s. Today, its frontman Haruomi Hosono is seen as a mentor by up-and-coming musicians around the world. By Matsuaki Hara
All that jazz

Welcome to the jazz capital of Asia... Let Taryn Siegel guide you to the best bars and clubs in the city

JAPAN HAS HAD A LONG LOVE AFFAIR with jazz – nearly as long as the genre’s existed, in fact, with the first jazz scenes emerging in the early 1920s in Osaka and Kobe, just years after the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded the first jazz record, ‘Livery Stable Blues’ in 1917. Today, it is Tokyo that hosts Japan’s thriving jazz scene.

Tokyo offers a few beautiful mega-clubs which bring in some of the best talents, both domestic and international. But the real magic happens as you meander around the streets, up or down a winding staircase and inside a hideaway joint where the whole bar is operated by one devoted jazz fanatic. It’s here where the local scene thrives, where a dynamic mix of incredible jazz musicians can be found playing in some of the most renowned clubs in the world; nice, long sets; comfy seating; and a high-quality to match the excellent music without breaking the bank.

Sometime is no longer a neighbourhood dive but is a busy, bustling, sophisticated jazz club. The stage at Sometime is set up at the centre of the room, with the musicians facing one another in a circle, and the audience members seated all around them, with some sections depressed into the floor and others raised above, creating a very unusual viewing experience. These days, Sometime is no longer a neighbourhood dive but is a busy, bustling, sophisticated jazz club.

Salt and Peanuts

While Salt and Peanuts is a bit of a trek from the centre of Tokyo, it is definitely worth the trip. Opened in 1981, the place started as a conventional bar but gradually jazz took hold. It’s actually quite spacious for a jazz bar, with a gorgeous small piano and drum set. There’s an excellent music charge without breaking the bank, the bar. If you’re looking for cozy elegance and a fine dinner, this is the perfect place.

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Cotton Club

If you’re looking to get the elegant route with your jazz experience, with a full-course dinner and excellent wine list, Cotton Club is a great choice. This venue is enormous, with a gorgeous dark wood interior sparkling under crystal chandeliers, and a food quality to match the music is great, and you can get a jazz history lesson just by scanning all the postcards and photos papering the bar’s walls.

Pit Inn

Pit Inn is definitely the tiniest bar on this list. The space is so confined that the stage is set up in front of the door, meaning you can’t center a set has already started before bringing the whole performance to a grinding halt. Check the sign outside the door for set times – generally two a night. If the cramped interior seems a bit intimidating, never fear: the owner Yasuhiro Mochizuki (it’s a one-man operation) is immensely friendly, as are all of the talented musicians he brings around. The vibe is homey, the music is great, and you can get a jazz history lesson just by scanning all the postcards and photos papering the bar’s walls.

Naru

Naru is best known for its ‘guitar street’ – a long row of guitar shops jetting off from the JR station exit, selling every make and model on the market, used and new, and every kind of accessory or equipment you could imagine. But smack right in the middle of this street is the basement jazz bar Naru. The club celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015 with much fanfare. Its continued success can be credited to its emphasis on music above all else. All the seats in the spacious basement bar face the stage, with minimal service and disruptions during the sets. Tickets are also quite reasonable compared to equally famous joints around town, with most evening shows posting a music charge of ¥3,000 to ¥4,000 (tickets in other top-floor jazz clubs often approach ¥10,000), a bargain for such a memorable night.

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Sometime is no longer a neighbourhood dive but is a busy, bustling, sophisticated jazz club. The stage at Sometime is set up at the centre of the room, with the musicians facing one another in a circle, and the audience members seated all around them, with some sections depressed into the floor and others raised above, creating a very unusual viewing experience. These days, Sometime is no longer a neighbourhood dive but is a busy, bustling, sophisticated jazz club.
Since the famed seafood market left for Toyosu, Tsukiji has gone from a place buzzing at sunrise to a place that gets going after dark, with a host of restaurants and bars opening late into the sunset, and a host of restaurants to choose from. Since the famed seafood market left for Toyosu, Tsukiji has gone from a place buzzing at sunrise to a place that gets going after dark, with a host of restaurants and bars opening late into the sunset, and a host of restaurants to choose from.

The Beloved Wholesale Fish Market may have packed up and moved to Toyosu, but Tsukiji, with its charming labyrinth of market stalls, restaurants and shops, is still very much worth your time. While most of the action in Tsukiji goes on in the morning when the remaining outer market is operating, the neighbourhood is now slowly establishing itself as an after-dark destination, where excellent food and drink can be savoured on the cheap. Here are six superb restaurants and bars, which are all set on ensuring that Tsukiji remains an essential stop on the Tokyo foodie trail even in its post-market era.

**TAKENO**
The quintessential old-school Tokyo cafeteria. Takedo has been keeping locals well-fed on cheap classics such as stewed fish, katsudon (pork cutlet over rice) and yakisoba (stir-fried noodles) for a good 80 years now. Approximately the same number of dishes can also be spotted on its ‘menu’, which consists of hastily scrambled eggs plastered all over the shop walls. While lunchtime is its busiest time, many people also frequent Takedo for its small izakaya-style dishes, which make up the majority of orders in the evenings. For a seasonal speciality, you can’t go wrong with one of the sashimi platters - the one with three kinds of fresh fish (two whitefish plus tuna) for ¥1,250 is particularly good value. And if you’re visiting between October and April, don’t miss out on the deep-fried oysters, made with seafood fresh and premium enough to be eaten raw. Expertly prepared to be crunchy on the outside and rare on the inside, these creamy and flavaourful bivalves are addictive.

- 9-11 Tsukiji, Chuo (Tsukiji Station). 03 3543 5228. tsukiji-takeko.com. 8am-5pm (last order at 4pm). closed Sat & Sun.

**TSUKIJI ITADORI URASIME**
Most Tokyoites choose to eat an evening of drinking with a bowl of ramen, but in Tsukiji you’d do well to opt for udon instead. And not just any old bowl of thick wheat noodles; specifically, the curry udon from Itadori Urasime. Served in a creamy but not too heavy curried soup made with bonito broth, the dish is available in regular (¥800) and half (¥520) sizes – opt for the latter if you’re concerned about overeating. First, consider topping your bowl with a piece of shrimp tempura (¥400).

- 1-11-9 Tsukiji, Chuo (Tsukiji Station). 03 3545 8181. homemagazine.com. 11am-8pm. closed Sun & hols.

**TSUKIJI BACCANALE TOKYO**
Opened in July 2018 just as many joints around it were preparing to close their doors for good due to the wholesale market’s impending move to Toyosu, this bar is run by an event-planning business based in Tsukiji. Worried about what the future of the neighbourhood would look like once the market left, the company’s staff decided to do their part in keeping the streets alive. The resulting tavern specialises in craft beer, with five or six beers on tap at all times. The selection changes regularly, so you can always look forward to something new. Beers are available in both regular (¥300) and small (¥500) sizes, so you can work your way through more of the selection. The bar also has a popular billiards table allowing you to combine craft beer with shots. The resulting tavern specialises in craft beer, with five or six beers on tap at all times. The selection changes regularly, so you can always look forward to something new. Beers are available in both regular (¥300) and small (¥500) sizes, so you can work your way through more of the selection. The bar also has a popular billiards table allowing you to combine craft beer with shots.

- 9-13-18 Tsukiji, Chuo (Tsukiji Station). 03 3543 5228. tsukiji-baccanale.com. 6pm-2am. closed Mon.

**GREEN KITCHEN**
There’s only room for ten diners along the counter at this intimate French restaurant, hidden away on a backstreet towards Namiyoke Shrine. When slipping into your seat, the first thing you’ll notice is the row of bottles with spices and herbs lined up in front of you, providing a hint of things to come. Seafood of the quality you’d expect from a fancy sushi joint is prepared with extreme attention to detail, and turned into unconventional but utterly delicious French-style dishes using the aforementioned array of seasonings. Our personal favourite dish is the abalone steak (¥4,800), steamed for an impressive eight hours before grilling. This time-consuming process results in a wonderfully soft meat, which is then served with a sauce combining abalone liver with fermented sansho pepper to really bring out the umami. All mains come with simply grilled, naturally sweet seasonal vegetables, which are some of the best in Tokyo. For the full experience, have your meal with a ‘spicy highball’, made with Japanese whisky plus a sprinkling from those ever shaking spice bottles. If you ask, the staff will even switch things up with a pepper or herb of your choice.

- 9-1-17 Tsukiji, Chuo (Tsukiji Station). 03 3543 7175. fl-restaurant@gmail.com. Tue-Thu 5pm-11pm, Fri-Sat 5pm-12midnight, Sun 5pm–8pm. closed Mon.

**MARUKITA SHOP 2**
Kaisendon (sashimi over rice) is probably still the single most popular meal in Tsukiji, and Marukita does these bowls of seafood with panache. While it’s famed for serving them from 5am almost every day, a lesser known fact is that the restaurant actually turns into an izakaya from 3pm. That means the menu, which in the morning only lists kaisendon and sushi, expands to include seasonal seafood appetisers, grilled scallops and other boozefriendly eats, in addition to about a dozen types of sake. But the kaisendon here is the major draw – while the popular ikura (salmon roe) and tuna with salmon options start from ¥1,000, we recommend spending ¥2,500 for Marukita’s ‘omakase-don’ – a luxurious bowl topped with a daily selection of 11 kinds of seafood. The exact contents vary by season, with typical choices including super-fresh shrimp, fatty tuna, salmon, scallops, salmon roe and uni (sea urchin). Our personal favourite dish is the abalone steak (¥4,800), steamed for an impressive eight hours before grilling. This time-consuming process results in a wonderfully soft meat, which is then served with a sauce combining abalone liver with fermented sansho pepper to really bring out the umami. All mains come with simply grilled, naturally sweet seasonal vegetables, which are some of the best in Tokyo. For the full experience, have your meal with a ‘spicy highball’, made with Japanese whisky plus a sprinkling from those ever shaking spice bottles. If you ask, the staff will even switch things up with a pepper or herb of your choice.

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**GODDESS**

Hiroko’s premier lesbian dance party takes place no more than four times a year, making the event a must for femme-identifying people everywhere. Unlike many other Japanese women-only parties, this one is noticeably international, hosted by both foreign and Japanese DJs. Kuro won eyesopen for Goddes’ perfect mix of Kitsch and quick as this party is full of offbeat attractions. Some memorable highlights from the last party included female pre-warers tussling poolside, beautiful female boxers and covered raffle prizes. And don’t worry about missing that pesky last train – these events rage all day, such as the Goddess summer party, all night, as in the upcoming Pride Party this April.

**GOLD FINGER SINCE 1991**

The femme-first lesbian party Gold Finger since 1991 is an iconic staple ofNichome nightlife and this women-only standing is currently split over two venues on the third Saturday of every month. Kick off your evening at Bar Gold Finger with karaoke and a flat fee of ¥2,000, then dance your way next door to Aisotope to find your Miss Right (or Miss Right Now), while Tokyo’s hottest female DJs spin tracks until the last drop falls. Reserve spots through their Line account, and remember to flash your ID at the check-in — that month’s birthday girls get in for ¥9,000.

**VITA PRIDE PARTY**

Vita is known for its elegant twist on gay parties, with past parties taking place everywhere from cruise ships to sleepy resorts. These events often have the feel of a private gathering, with thoughtful venue choices for an intimate, international crowd. It welcomes all genders and orientations, but the guests are majority femme-identifying and seeking the same. Various DJs change the mood throughout the night, from smooth R&B to blood-pumping EDM. Come regain some Vita-ility to your life, swing between velvet couches, or hang back and get tipsy - taking your cues from the event name - while watching the dancers perform on the bar counters. Vita is a safe space for couples, too; this party often has a reverse-stoplight theme, giving out pink glowing bracelets for mingling and singles and green for those just looking for friends.

**KI'S DELIVERY SERVICE 1989**

It seems unimaginable now, but in 1989, Hayao Miyazaki’s revered Studio Ghibli, which was founded in 1985, had not yet had a hit. Kiki’s Delivery Service, the tale of a young witch who leaves home for the big city, adapted from the Eiko Kadono novel of the same name, needed to deliver at the box office so the region would be in serious financial trouble. But perform it did, becoming the top-grossing film of Heisei’s first year. The film charmed audiences with its portrayal of a young woman on a quest for independence — and her pet, cat taking cutie, Jiji, didn’t hurt either.

**ONLY YESTERDAY 1991**

Hayao Miyazaki may now be Ghibli’s best-known director, but when it was formed his co-founder Isao Takahata was the more senior partner, who had already directed several mature, neo-realist films that pushed the boundaries of anime. In his first film, ‘Only Yesterday’, Takahata traces the life of a Tokyoite named Taeko whose trip to the countryside brings back memories of childhood (the Japanese title is ‘Omoide Poroporo’, roughly translating to ‘memories fall like raindrops’). With no robots, magical girls or muscle-bound aliens in sight, this is the perfect anime film for anyone who ‘isn’t into anime’.

**END OF EVANGELION/EVANGELION 1.0/EVANGELION 2.0 1997 (H9) / 2007 (H19) / 2009 (H21) / 2012 (H24)**

It’s hard to overstate the impact of the hit television series ‘Neon Genesis Evangelion’. Airing between 1995 and 1996, its 26 episodes pushed what an anime could be, and the fragrant robot could be, touching on themes of alienation and fear in the aftermath of two of Heisei’s most painful historical moments: the Aum Shinrikyo sarin attacks and the Great Hanshin Earthquake, both of which occurred in 1995. 1997’s trippy big screen outing ‘End of Evangelion’ was intended to draw the story to a close, but the ‘End’ in the name didn’t exactly stick – 2007 saw the release of ‘Evangelion 1.0’, the first film in a four-part theatrical retelling of the series. The long-awaited fourth film is expected to hit in 2020, making Evangelion an era-spanning film that perhaps his most, well, perfect. A thrilling Hitchcockian tale, its confidence and mastery are even more remarkable when you consider this is the director’s debut. The story of a pop idol and a fan whose obsession goes too far, the film works as both a critique of Japan’s pop culture system and an effective woman-in-peril psycho-thriller. Kinji had passed away in 2010 at just 46, but not before leaving us with many more anime classics, including ‘Millennium Actress’ and ‘Paprika’.

**FILM**

**Perfect Blue**

© 1997 (H9)

Honestly, we could have chosen any of the films by director Satoshi Kon, but ‘Perfect Blue’ is perhaps his most, well, perfect. A thrilling Hitchcockian tale, its confidence and mastery are even more remarkable when you consider this is the director’s 20th film in a four-part theatrical retelling of the series. The long-awaited fourth film is expected to hit in 2020, making Evangelion an era-spanning film that perhaps his most, well, perfect. A thrilling Hitchcockian tale, its confidence and mastery are even more remarkable when you consider this is the director’s debut. The story of a pop idol and a fan whose obsession goes too far, the film works as both a critique of Japan’s pop culture system and an effective woman-in-peril psycho-thriller. Kinji had passed away in 2010 at just 46, but not before leaving us with many more anime classics, including ‘Millennium Actress’ and ‘Paprika’.

**SUMMER WARS 2009 (K21)**

The latter half of Hayao saw the emergence of Mamoru Hosoda, a director who cut his teeth on franchises like ‘Digimon’ and ‘One Piece’ before moving on to helm his own original films. His breakthrough was Summer Wars, a film about a large family living in the Japanese countryside who pull together to defeat an artificial intelligence threatening to bring about nuclear armageddon. Modern reliance on technology is the story’s primary concern, though its unexpectedly multilayered plot reveals themes of family, friendship, community and what is the social fabric of a film’s plot. Hosoda revisited themes in his latest film, Mirai, which garnered an Academy Award nomination this year.
After the devastating atomic bombing of World War II, Hiroshima has risen again to become a beacon of world peace, and one of Japan’s top tourist destinations. "Let’s go there," the Japanese. These English-speaking guides can put together a custom ride based on your preferences and also offer a number of preset routes. The latter include the Peace Tour, which takes you around remains of the city that existed before the atomic bomb was dropped, and lets you see how Hiroshima rose from the ashes in the postwar era. Experiencing the city on two wheels is a great way to make new discoveries, and Sokuko’s expert guides are always happy to point you to hidden gems off the beaten tourist path.

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### Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park

One of the only two cities in the world to have suffered an atomic bombing, Hiroshima and its Peace Memorial Park are a testament to the horrors of war. Raw, thought-provoking and solemnly beautiful, this expansive park in the centre of the city was established in 1954 close to the hypocentre of the bomb. Dedicated to world peace, its grounds contain several ruins of buildings devastated by the blast, as well as monuments built to honour the victims. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (visit the east building while waiting for the main building to reopen on April 25), the World Heritage-listed A-Bomb Dome, and Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims are all essential destinations for anyone looking to learn more about Hiroshima’s darkest hour.

1-1 Nakajimacho, Naka, Hiroshima. 082 241 4004.

### Hiroshima Hon-dori Shotengai

Hiroshima’s main thoroughfare is 577 metres long and cuts right through the city centre from east to west. Shops along this pedestrian arcade cover a wide range, and they draw 100,000 or so shoppers every weekend. Stop by Hiroshima Yume Plaza (yumeplaza.com) if you’re keen on picking up local regional food and goods as well as tourist brochures for the area. Country Cat, on the other hand, carries a host of feline-themed gifts, souvenirs and bric-a-brac. While Hon-dori itself has enough to see for at least half a day, do consider saving some time for the back streets, where you’ll find quirky cafés and smaller shops.

Hon-dori, Naka, Hiroshima. hondori.or.jp.

### Sokuko

If you’re looking to experience a different side of Hiroshima, book a bicycle tour with Sokuko (the name means ‘Let’s go there’ in Japanese). These English-speaking guides can put together a custom ride based on your preferences and also offer a number of preset routes. The latter include the Peace Tour, which takes you around remains of the city that existed before the atomic bomb was dropped, and lets you see how Hiroshima rose from the ashes in the postwar era. Experiencing the city on two wheels is a great way to make new discoveries, and Sokuko’s expert guides are always happy to point you to hidden gems off the beaten tourist path.


### Orizuru Tower

Located just a quick stroll from the A-Bomb Dome, this 12-storey shopping and office complex is best visited for the wooden observation deck on the top floor. Known as Hiroshima no Oka (‘Hiroshima Hill’), it offers superb views of the Peace Memorial Park and the aforementioned dome. On clear days, when Mt Misen on Miyajima comes into view, you can rest your eyes on both of Hiroshima’s World Heritage sites simultaneously. Take in the sights and sounds of the city over coffee at the observation deck’s café, or head down to the huge gift shop on the ground floor to browse through a selection of about 1,000 kinds of local snacks and souvenirs.

1-2-1 Otemachi, Naka, Hiroshima. 082 241 4694.

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### Travel & Hotels

No trip to Hiroshima is complete without a visit to the holy island of Itsukushima, more commonly known as Miyajima. It has traditionally been considered one of Japan’s ‘three most beautiful places’. Locals believe the island to be the home of the gods and it has been a site of worship since antiquity. In fact, the sanctity of the island is so fiercely protected that there are no graves or maternity facilities on the island (women leave the island when their due date is close and only return after giving birth).

Home to a large number of shrines and temples, including the World Heritage-listed Itsukushima Shrine, the island has seen an influx of stylish restaurants and cafés in recent years. When it gets crowded over the weekends, venture off the main street to seek out Kakiwai (kakiwai.jp), a restaurant where you can nurse a cup of artisanal coffee while gazing out over a nearby shrine and the sea beyond.

The fastest way to get to Miyajima from Hiroshima Station is to take the JR Sanyo line to Miyajimaguchi Station (¥410; about 25 minutes). At Miyajimaguchi, it’s a two-minute walk to the ferry pier, where a boat (¥180) will take you to the island in about 10 minutes.

For more information, see miyajima.or.jp/english.
Okonomimura
You can’t visit Hiroshima and not eat okonomiyaki, the local soul food. Sometimes described as a Japanese savoury pancake, this delicacy is packed with vegetables (particularly cabbage), meat and seafood, and topped with a savoury pancake, this delicacy is packed with vegetables (particularly cabbage), meat and seafood, and topped with a

However, there are two types of okonomiyaki: Kansai- and Hiroshima-style. Differing preparation and appearance, with the latter cooked by placing layers of batter, toppings and uniquely for Hiroshima – noodles on top of each other. To experience it at its best, make a detour to Okonomimura, a popular foodie destination just off the

Mei-Mei
While most versions of Hiroshima’s famous okonomiyaki include pork, Muslim visitors to the city need not despair. January 2019 saw the opening of the world’s first halal eats parking, which also operates its own riverside bar and café.

Ekinishi
Located beside JR Hiroshima Station’s south exit, this jovial bar-packed neighbourhood is where locals come to party. While its streets were previously lined with old-school watering holes, the past few years have seen a younger crowd move in, resulting in the opening of many trendy joints housed in beautifully renovated buildings. Small invite but unbeatable for its variety. Ekinishi isideal for bar-hopping, where you’ll find wine bars right next to fancy Italian restaurants and even hole-in-the-walls specialising in street food from different parts of the world (Thai joint Bahan Syedodó is particularly popular).

Brooklyn
Nagarekawa is Hiroshima’s entertainment centre, and this hideaway bar is where to start your journey through its neon-lit streets. Look for the red sign at the back of the building – the address points to, open the door and enter a dimly lit, classy space decorated with rococo-style sofas and plenty of unusual knick-knacks. Brooklyn is famed for its beautifully presented fresh fruit cocktails, and lets customers choose out of the vast selection of perfumes and body creams which line the bar counter and tables.

36 Hostel
Located across the bridge from the A-Bomb Dome, right in the heart of the city, this hip guesthouse offers overnight stays from as low as ¥2,000. Both dorms and private rooms are available at 36, which also operates its own riverside bar and café. Sit down here for a coffee or glass of whisky, or head up to the second-floor lounge for a view of the cherry trees lining the river.

Mei-Mei
Located in front of JR Hiroshima Station, this spacious restaurant specialising in the Hiroshima version of the pancake-like delicacy. Mei-Mei makes its version with chicken, and also offers a plentiful teppanyaki menu with beef and seafood. Even the hotplates on which the chefs do their thing have been officially approved by the religious authorities – plus the staff here speak English.

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**EVERYONE KEEPS TELLING** you how expensive Japan is, right? Don’t believe the hype. There are bargains to be had, particularly when travelling in this fine country. So if you’re looking to cross town or fly the length of Japan, we’ve got you covered.

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Only available to tourists; this pass is similar to the common one-day ticket, but comes in 24-hour, 48-hour and 72-hour options. It’s valid on all subway and metro lines – so no JR or private train lines for you (even then it should cover all the major tourist sites and attractions in Tokyo). Tickets can only be bought at Narita and Haneda airports, some larger hotels and Bic Camera locations within Tokyo, and you’ll have to flash your passport to get one.

- **¥920** (children ¥460)

**JR Tokyo Wide Pass**

If you’re looking for a whistle-stop tour of Kanto, this beauty will give you three days of unlimited travel on JR East Shinkansen (bullet trains) and limited express trains in the region. There are drawbacks though – tickets can only be used on consecutive days and cannot be used for Tokaido Shinkansen or JR busses.

- **¥10,000** (children ¥5,000)

**Toei Bus one-day pass**

Valid for one-day unlimited use of Toei buses around Tokyo. Don’t worry, the buses display upcoming stops in English.

- **¥300** (children ¥150)

**GREATER TOKYO (KANTO REGION)**

**Japan Rail Pass**

The trump of rail passes, this will get you on all JR trains – including shinkansen – as well as local JR bus services and a ferry service to Miyajima Island in Hiroshima during the validity period (1 to 24 consecutive days after first use). Only visitors to Japan are eligible; it’s highly recommended that you buy your pass outside of Japan (check jpyonrailpass.com for a list of authorised sales offices), as there are only a few vendors within Japan, who sell passes at a mark-up.

- **¥98,980** (30 days)

**Japan Bus Pass**

Offered by Willer Express, which operates highway buses across Japan, this pass gets you three, five or seven non-consecutive days of travel (which can include weekends with the right pass) – within a six-month period. There are some blackout dates (namely, Golden Week and the Obon holidays in August), but other than that you can pretty much ride whenever you want within two months of your first journey. The deal is only available via willerexpress.com, and to those with a foreign passport, including residents.

- **¥11,800**

**JAL oneworld Yokoso/ Visit Japan Fare**

Flying can sometimes be cheaper than taking the shinkansen. Especially if you’re travelling to Japan on any one world member airline – including Japan Airlines (JAL), British Airways, American Airlines and Qantas – which allows you access to discounted domestic flights. The Visit Japan Fare costs only $130 per flight, including code-share ones. You must live outside of Japan, but your international ticket to or from Japan can be with any airlines. This fare is limited to a minimum of two to a maximum of five segments, and must be issued outside of Japan. Blackout dates apply.

- **¥14,040** per sector.

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- **¥14,800** per sector.

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TIME OUT READERS will know about our popular series of free maps: pocket-sized guides to the multifarious delights this city has to offer. They’re hard to miss these days – as well as our ever-popular ‘101 things to do in Tokyo’ edition and the comprehensive ‘88 things to do in Tokyo’, we’ve come up with maps for nearly all the top areas including Roppongi, Shinjuku, Shibuya, Harajuku, Ginza, Ochanomizu, Koenji and Ginza.

Each edition squeezes the best of the capital into a compact guide, complete with a city map, and we’ve included everything from offbeat art galleries and otaku meccas to ancient shrines and hipster hangouts.

We’ve also recently expanded the series to include places beyond Tokyo, launching special maps for those of you heading to Shimane or the temples of Nikko – both make for a great mini getaway.

All of these publications, along with issues of our free quarterly magazine, are available to pick up at Shibuya Station’s Tourist Information Centre, conveniently located in the underground passage on the second basement floor of the station. The English-speaking guides will help you stock up, provide sightseeing tips and assist you in navigating the bowels of the cavernous station itself.

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April-June, 2019 Time Out Tokyo
LED LIGHTS FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

A tragic but well-known fact about Japan is its high suicide rate. Hundreds of these deaths each year happen when people jump in front of trains – an event broadcast to commuters as a jinshin jiko or ‘human accident’. A lot of stations have installed chest-high barriers that make it impossible for commuters to jump. But not all stations can afford this costly improvement.

Studies have shown that a calming blue light can help mitigate stress, so many train stations have installed LED blue lights at the ends of their platforms (where most suicide victims jump from). It may sound like a long shot, but it’s actually been amazingly effective. A 10-year study showed an 84 percent decline in the number of suicide attempts at stations where these lights were installed.

MARKING THE QUEUES

Even during the craziest of rush hours, train platforms always maintain a sense of orderliness, with markings on every platform indicating where waiting passengers should stand to embark. Some train lines take this a step further, with two queues marked out – one for the ‘first train’ and one for the ‘second train’.

After queuing up in Tokyo train stations for a couple of weeks, you’ll almost certainly find yourself wondering where to stand before you remember that it’s just a lawless free-for-all outside of Tokyo.

DOOR-CLOSING CHIMES

To cut down on commuting stress as much as possible, in 1989 JR East commissioned Yamaha and composer Hiroaki Ide to create pleasing seven-second-long chimes known as hassha melodies to warn passengers when the train doors are closing.

Nearly every station and line has its own unique jingle – some are upbeat, some are soothing, and some are oddly familiar, like the Disney tunes you can hear on the Toypokk-line down to Yokohama or the ‘Star Wars’ theme at Jiyugaoka Station.

POINTING AND CALLING

You may notice that train conductors and platform attendants seem to use an excessive amount of gestures and verbal calls every time a train is approaching or leaving. No, these aren’t aspiring performance artists dressed up as train personnel; they’re actually employing a mandatory practice called ‘point and call’.

Studies have shown an 85 percent reduction in human error can be achieved by pointing to an object and then verbalising your actions, since more of the brain is being employed, thereby increasing your situational awareness. Due to this increased accuracy and decreased likelihood of human error, this method for issuing instructions is mandatory throughout the rail industry in Japan.

CROWDED YET ON-TIME

Japan has 45 of the world’s 50 busiest stations, and yet trains here are incredibly on-time, with the average delay about 36 seconds. You might remember when a train between Tokyo and Tsukuba made headlines after the operator issued a sincere apology after a 20-second accidental early departure (though to be fair, even Japanese people found the apology hilarious and ridiculous). But even a few minutes delay is exceedingly rare here and will definitely come with a mea culpa issued several times via loudspeaker throughout the ride.

You know you’re in Tokyo when...

With about 10 percent of Japan’s population residing in Tokyo – and with most Tokyoites using the city’s trains every day – a slick public transport system is crucial to keep the city on the move. The capital’s trains have become famous for their to-the-second efficiency. But there’s a lot more than just on-time departures that makes Tokyo’s train stations some of the smartest around...

...the train stations are super smart

By Taryn Siegel
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