

HOW TO GET TO NIPPORI STATION Greetings from Arakawa Nippori Station is the gateway to the Arakawa

okyo Monora

JR Yamanote Line

JR Joban Line

Keisei Main Line

Walking

··· Minami-Senju Station

Odai Station

Kumanomae Station

Higashi-Ogu-

Sanchome Station

Machiya-Ekimae

Minowabashi

Station

3 mins

2 min

1 mins

Mikawashima Station ….

Shakomae

Ekimae

Tokyo Sakura Tram

Haneda

'Arakawa may be close to central Tokyo, but it feels a world away from the capital's busy business and entertainment districts. This cosy, mostly residential area is where you can experience the life of ordinary Tokyoites, including public bathing - Arakawa has a greater concentration of sento than most other parts of the city. Some of the bathhouses are certifiably traditional, others distinctly modern, but together they make for a fascinating dive into what remains an integral part of urban culture.'

Naofumi Kurita

'If you'd rather get to know the real Tokyo and experience the local culture than tour the usual sightseeing spots, you've picked up the right guide. Visiting sento, or public bathhouses, is a great way to see everyday life and meet new people. Many of the bathhouses in this guide have been in business for more than a century and have traditionally been community hubs where diverse people interact, making them ideal places for studying the Tokyo lifestyle. I hope you'll enjoy the Arakawa sento experience – and all the bathing, of course!'







Teikoku-yu's gorgeous wooden architecture immediately distinguishes this venerable bathhouse from your average neighbourhood sento. In business for over a century, it's seen all sorts of visitors over the years; a bird once made it into one of the tubs, but escaped with ruffled feathers after encountering the 43°C water.

Peek into the future of public bathing

Established in 1951, Ume no Yu turned a corner 65 years later when it reopened as a certifiably modern, almost spa-like shrine to relaxation equipped with an enviable variety of baths. We love the trendy and colourful *noren* curtains, towels and T-shirts - and they have craft beer, too.

003 Takeaway

Score some spooky

sweets Cute and quirky Japanese sweets are the speciality of this wagashi shop with an impish sense of humour. Its Yokai Daifuku, bean paste-filled rice cakes shaped to resemble ghosts, are inspired by Yanaka Cemetery nearby - each one has a whole strawberry, apricot, or other seasonal treat stuffed in its

Be considerate -

it's the sento way

Remember that sento are public

bathhouses: it's considered good

etiquette to always be attentive of

other bathers. For example, while

most particularly hot tubs have

cold-water taps for adjusting the

temperature, don't forget to turn off the water once you get used to the

heat – the next user may prefer a

Hit up a reborn classic

One of the longest-operating bathhouses in all

comprehensive makeover in 2015, when it also

launched its own line of totes, towels and other

cute merchandise. The five tubs, including the

bath), are all suitable for bathers with sensitive

microbubble-rich, 'silky' rotenburo (open-air

Dine among dinosaurs

The already high entertainment factor of

an okonomiyaki meal gets turned up to

eleven at this dinosaur-themed joint, where

paintings of prehistoric beasts stare at you

from the walls, the menu features dishes

and the owner, when in the right mood,

'dinosaur show'.

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tokyo

such as 'Edmontosaurus' and 'Pteranodon'

treats unsuspecting diners to a mechanised

Okonomiyaki 110

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in this guide is subject to change.

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of Tokyo, the 80-year-old Saito-yu received a

different temperature.

006 Sento

021 Sento

Lockers

Opt for a silky soak

Kanda-yu has been a fixture of its neighbourhood

since the '70s and shows no signs of slowing

down: the latest addition to its tub repertoire is

a microbubble-rich 'silk bath' that's said to both

The free-to-use rubber ducks are a nice touch,

improve your circulation and smoothen your skin.

Sento have separate lockers for your

shoes (at the entrance) and the rest

of your stuff (in the changing room).

while others ask you to return your

changing room key when you leave.

The systems vary by sento, but are

hearty kaisendon (sashimi over rice, ¥980) is

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especially good value. Genki na Sakanaya-san

usually quite intuitive.

Some establishments keep your

shoe locker key while you bathe,

Lie down under Mt Fuji Spotless and functional, Yu-Land is ideal

Discover a new jet lag

The cryptically named Time Resort entices

passers-by with a gaudy neon sign and a

mysterious 'radon bath' that appears wine-

coloured thanks to its shimmering red tiles. After

away - the sauna-like effect is supposed to be a

If you like your baths hot and your Mt Fuji murals

majestic, there's no going wrong with this time-

honoured sento that still uses a wood-burning

to a stiff 43°C, which can feel a bit steamy for

boiler. All three tubs at Nozaki Yokujo are heated

entering, close the door behind you and soak

remedy

005 Sento

Beat the heat

for larger bathers: both the main tub, which features extra-powerful jets, and the rotenburo (open-air bath), complete with a recently repainted mural of Mt Fuji, are spacious enough to stretch yourself out in. A basic sauna and a cold tub complete the package.

Kanda-yu

Learn from the locals

Regulars fill this simple neighbourhood bathhouse every evening, but are more than happy to welcome newbies into their midst. This sense of community is Kogane-yu's greatest asset, though we do like the warm light of the ageless signboard too. Note that the sauna is currently out of order.



It's one of the least modern bathhouses around - think push-button taps instead of showers - but Unsuisen has plenty to see for art buffs. The highlight is a vivid twin mural that features Mt Fuji on the men's side and the Yatsugatake peaks on the women's, painted by the late great sento mural master Toshimitsu Hayakawa.

Grab a snack on the go Being able to fill up on the cheap is one of

Tuck into secret sashimi the joys of a shotengai (traditional shopping Former martial artist and World Order frontman street): you won't go hungry with ¥500 at Joyful Genki Sudo's seafood store looks much like Minowa, where a rice ball can be had for ¥100 your average fishmonger but hides a 30and a set of eight gyoza dumplings for ¥330. seat restaurant in the back, where you can pair super-fresh fish with quality sake. The

026 Sento

Take a one-room hot spring tour

Situated along the Joyful Minowa shopping street, Taisho-yu offers a miniature circuit of some of Japan's most renowned hot springs: the onsen room behind the tile mural features baths with water from high-end resorts such as Kusatsu in Gunma and Wakura Onsen on the Noto Peninsula

027 Restaurant

010 Sento

011 Sento

012 Sento

small steam sauna.

Mt Fuji murals

Go tub-hopping

Low on décor, high on variety - if you care less

about frills and more about the core sento

experience, New Ebisu is your spot. Its deep,

L-shaped tubs are split into several sections,

Imposing castle-like architecture,

Tokyo's sento have plenty of

noteworthy design features, but none

than the Mt Fuji mural. Each depiction

of the sacred peak is unique, making

comparing murals a fun exercise.

Note: Not all sento have Mt Fuji murals -

Note that some sento have separate

Men's doors are marked with the 男

entrances for men and women.

character and women's with 女.

some don't have wall art at all.

Entrances

among these is more eye-catching

coffered ceilings, cosy patios

including an 'ultrasound' bath, and there's even a

Bathe like an Edoite

Said to help improve circulation and relieve back

recipe from the Edo period (1603-1868). There's

rental is included in the entrance fee. Chitose-yu

free-to-use shampoo and conditioner, and towel

pain, the brown-coloured 'medicinal' bath at

Chitose-yu is tried and tested: it's based on a

Bathe your way back in

Boasting a vaguely castle-like entrance, a

certifiably retro interior and almost 70 years

of history, Yamato-yu is a real blast from the

steamy with a wood-burning boiler. A resident

turtle hangs out in the tiny garden on the men's

past, where the basic but comfy baths are kept

Rehydrate with a Hoppy

Thirsty after a hot bath? Make a beeline for

the Ume no Yu sento's very own pub, where

the people's drink of choice is Hoppy, a beer-

like carbonated beverage usually mixed with

shochu. The strong bit is called 'naka', so just

Public bathhouses used to be an

facilities until around the mid-'70s.

dramatically since those days, but

the centuries-old culture is still

The number of sento has decreased

going strong - and is currently being

rejuvenated by new generations with

a longing for community and the

Slip into a hidden oasis

Kodakara-yu can be a bit hard to find – there's

no sign out front – but this charmingly retro spot

is well worth seeking out, if only for the old-school

massage chairs and wood-framed mirrors in the

Mix up a beautifying bath

noticeably modern buildings, attracting bathers

with a dry mini-sauna and milky waters said to

work wonders on the skin. The baths are quite

hot, so do remember to mix some cold water into

Take no Yu stands strong in between two

the tub of your choice before getting in.

changing rooms. The water temperature varies

by bath and ranges from 39°C to 42°C.

atmosphere of bygone days.

where few homes had bathing

integral part of everyday life in Tokyo,

History

ask for that when you need a refill. Umekyo

Have dessert at the noodle shop

This 'noodle izakaya' unites two unlikely bedfellows in its ramen and anmitsu set (¥780): you can choose a bowl of either shio or shoyu ramen to go with your serving of translucent jelly, sweet bean paste, seasonal fruits and black sugar syrup. The fruit-packed whisky highballs are worth a punt, too.

clientele, ranging from families with young kids to local creatives. The place has sizeable screens for watching sports and offers free, reliable wi-fi. Tokyo Local Base

Partake in the future of

Run by a local nonprofit, this expansive and

welcoming café-restaurant attracts a diverse

Machiya

Tebura' sets

No need to bring your shower bag

- all sento in this guide rent out

tebura ('empty-handed') sets that

include towels, shampoo and soap.

Some even provide towels and/or

shampoo-soap sets for free.

014 Sento Tend to tired legs Hidden away on the ground floor of an apartment building, Chiyo no Yu features cat-themed noren curtains and a spacious 'medicinal' tub, the mineral-rich water of which relieves muscle and joint pain. The

¥500 entrance fee includes towel rental, and

shampoo and conditioner are also provided.



Pricing

017 Sento

worlds

Get the best of both

Reopened in December 2018, Daimon-yu

chimney) with the contemporary (a clean,

polished interior). The refreshing 'lemon

mixes the traditional (imposing entrance, tall

bath', sakura-themed Mt Fuji mural, and cute

goldfish tiles on the bottom of the tubs are

All sento in Tokyo charge a flat ¥470 for bathers aged 12 or over, ¥180 for children aged 6-11, and ¥80 for younger kids. Only cash is accepted. Bathhouses with saunas usually charge an additional fee for sauna use, payable upon entry Note that if you use the sauna without paying, you may be issued a hefty fine afterwards!



Fans of fabric designs from all over the world flock to this one-kilometre stretch of street where more than 90 textile stores carry both Japanese and Western fabrics at surprisingly low prices. You'll also find an endless variety of buttons and other accessories. Nippori Fabric Town

016 Sento

experience.

Cleanse yourself under chandeliers

Traverse stormy waters

the main bath at Kou no Yu is equipped with

punchy 'Body Power Jets' that keep the tub in

a constant state of upheaval. If you don't mind

the waves, a soak here makes for a unique

Tattooed? No problem

Many hot spring resorts and spas

in Japan enforce a blanket ban on

in Arakawa, which welcome inked

bathers with open arms.

tattoos. That's not the case at sento

A steep step up from your average jacuzzi,

Come for the chandeliers and classical architecture, stay for the unique tub selection: Togi Yokujo boasts 62 years of history and some of the quirkiest baths in town, including an oval-shaped one split down the middle into 'hot' and 'lukewarm' (actually quite steamy)

018 Sento

Soak among sea life

It doesn't look extraordinary, but Fuji no Yu is a wonderfully homey sento with helpful and mural that's one of the cutest we've come across. The herbal bath is changed up daily encouraging repeat visits.

030 Sento

Loosen up the oldfashioned way

A local institution watched over by a charming receptionist, Kiraku-yu gets crowded early, so you may have to wait for a chance to scrub yourself down before bathing. Some of the tubs are equipped with a ghastly-looking but actually quite effective massage contraption that works wonders on stiff shoulders.

Push all the right

buttons Heated with a wood-burning boiler, the baths at Kusatsu-yu can feel a bit hot at first but work wonders on tired joints - especially if you take advantage of the button-activated jacuzzi and jet functions. The handsome Mt Fuji mural is the work of Mizuki Tanaka, the only female sento-e artist in Japan.

'Oyasuminasai' Oyasuminasai means 'good night' in Japanese, but it's also the standard greeting when leaving a sento (at least in some places). Try it when passing by the reception on your way out.

to the changing room.

























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