Open Tokyo. It doesn’t matter if you are ♂, ♀ or ♂♀... Seeking a place that welcomes 🐦.

With access for ♂ or 🚶. Where you can bring your ♂♀ or 🌈. You can find it in here ➔
TOKYO GOOD MUSEUM is a museum without walls, a living showcase of the little things that make Tokyo such an amazing city. Like the polite way people wait in line for trains. Or the way neighbors work together to keep streets clean and free of litter. And the way everyone washes before they get into a public bath. Good manners come naturally to most Tokyoites—they’re simply a way of showing consideration for the feelings and needs of others. To find out more about the little things that make Tokyo so special, just walk around the city or visit us on the web. We have an ever-expanding collection of exhibits, and we’re open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.
Hello Tokyo…

Sure, Tokyo is pretty damn great as it is, but how can our city become even more amazing for all residents and visitors alike? Most of you would probably agree if we were to claim that accessibility and openness is one area with room for improvement. Determined to unlock Tokyo for absolutely everyone, we’ve taken up the task of creating a truly inclusive guide to the capital. Flip to page 18 to see the city from a different perspective, including where to view art in a wheelchair, where to find a great halal restaurant or an LGBT-friendly bar, and where to entertain your kids on a rainy day, plus ideas on how we can all help make Tokyo a more open - and ultimately, better - place.

Park life
Head outdoors with our pick of the best picnic spots
PAGE 42

A woman’s work
Meet ‘living national treasure’ Komano Suke Takekuma
PAGE 50

A drink with a view
Get a taste of the high life at these rooftop bars
PAGE 58

The sake route
Tour western Japan’s best sake breweries
PAGE 68
**City FAQ**

**That Friday Feeling**

**Can Premium Friday save the economy?**

When Premium Friday was announced by the government back in late 2016, most people thought it was an elaborate prank. Conjured up by movers and shakers in the Japanese business world to get people out and spending again, Premium Friday lets people leave their offices at 3pm on the last Friday of every month, thus stimulating the economy and ensuring capitalism keeps crounnding along.

Friday February 24 saw the inaugural “PF”, but early signs are far from encouraging. According to a marketing survey taken after the first Premium Friday, only a measly 3.7 percent of company employees in Tokyo actually observed the first edition. Possibly because the end of the month is traditionally the busiest time for most companies.

Yes, the point is essentially to promote consumerism instead of, you know, combating excessively long hours, but some say that the idea might actually lead to a diversification in working habits. Unfortunately enough, we here at Time Out Towers are too busy crafting the city’s finest magazine to take out Premium Fridays, but will more than make up for it come good ‘ol Friday night.

**Time Out Tokyo**

**April-June, 2017**

**April-June, 2017**

**Tokyo Loves...**

**WHAT YOU SAID**

Here’s what you tweeted in response...

“It’s just cosmetics covering an overbearing work culture”

“Who’s going to keep the business running in the meantime?”

“Who’s going to keep the business running in the meantime?”

“Is this a pointless bureaucratic exercise or a cruel joke?”

“Premium Friday, Karoshi Monday”

“I’d rather just go home and sleep than shop”

“Every Friday is premium”

“Can we have a Premium Week, too?”

**WHERE IN TOKYO IS THIS?**

Every issue we show you a picture of a Tokyo location and challenge you to name it. In this issue, you’ll definitely be pasting, after climbing up these steps to a little oasis in the heart of Tokyo, originally built in part as a fire lookout and still boasting some smoking views of the city.

**1) The shape of samurai.**

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTsamurai)

**SUBCULTURAL READS**

**IAN MARTIN: ‘QUIT YOUR BAND: MUSICAL NOTES FROM THE JAPANESE UNDERGROUND’**

Every once in a while, a Japanese musical act starts trending on YouTube and attracts the attention of the Western world. These performers often find fame because they embody the clichéd view of “weird Japan”, of something being so strange and foreign that they have to be seen – a label that can be confusing for the artists themselves. Ian Martin has set out to change this image. “Quit Your Band” is a work of passion, documenting groups lost to time and showing that Japanese music is more than a string of novelty acts, full of variety and originality. The book is a great intro to the nation’s under-and-overground, but what ties it all together is the same sense of devotion and fandom music lovers anywhere can relate to. Absolutely nothing weird about that.

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTmameya)

**CHARLES SPECKLEY: ‘PEOPLE MAKE PLACES’**

First-time visitors often wax lyrical about Tokyo’s glittering exterior: its neon streets and multi-storied walkways and futuristic train lines zipping through buildings above your head. But as any long-term resident knows, the real magic is to be found indoors. This book introduces these spaces and, as tittle suggests, is not only about places, but the people who create them. In Japan, and particularly Tokyo, owners of restaurants, cafés, galleries, gift stores and fashion boutiques put extraordinary effort into transforming their spaces, often decorating them in an obsessively authentic way. ‘People Make Places’ is also an app and a personal concierge service – which means that places are continually added to the list.

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTpeopleplaces)

**KOFFEE MAMEYA**

For coffee lovers still grieving the loss of the internationally renowned Omotesando Koffee, whose last days were in late 2015, this place is sure to bring respite. Opened by the same man, Eichi Ikusawa, and located in the exact same place (albeit in a new building), Koffee Mameya is a bean specialist with enough shebang to turn you into a proper barista at home. Order at the counter and take a bag of beans home to create your own dreamy cup of illustrate goodness in peace. At the focus is on selling beans, there’s no place to sit down, and but regular coffees and espressos can be ordered at the counter.

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTmameya)

**TOKYO SARYO**

Green tea has been the roughly underrepresented in Tokyo’s coffee culture for the past few years. Thankfully change is in the air, with the locals finally addition of a new and deliciously decorated Tokyo Saryo, which offers single-origin green tea in a hand drip format. The folk behind the minimalist shop have even developed their own tea dips, which is supposed to help bring out all the flavours of the leaves. Under the leading light, composed of five green teas of your choice in two scopes, a cup of green tea and a small sweet at the end.

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTsaryo)

**VEGAN JUNK FOOD**

2016 appeared to be Tokyo’s year of the vegan, with the ethical diet sweeping the city. One thing that was completely missing, until now, was any type of guilty pleasure – something to have when you just need some fat, sugar or carbs to counter all the goodness. Enter an entire menu dedicated to ‘vegan junk food’, created by the team at Organic Table by Lapaz.

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTretsuko)

**AGGRESSIVE RETSUKO**

Manga characters continue to dominate the Tokyo skyline. But none of the rest of the rug-rat has been more popular than Retsuko, a red panda employed as a mediocre ‘office lady’ in Marunouchi who lets off steam after work by singing heavy metal at karaoke while drinking beer. We’re fans.

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTretsuko)

**KOE HOUSE**

Lifestyle concept stores are a longstanding Tokyo craze that have seen a recent renaissance, Koe House is one of the best of the new breed. It stuffs wearables, home gear and a love of knitting is the name of the game. T miejscu efektywnego, yet very well-curated and guilt-free, life.

[Link to Time Out](https://tinyurl.com/TOTkoe)

**TOYOTA QT**

First-time visitors often wax lyrical about Tokyo’s glittering exterior: its neon streets and multi-storied walkways and futuristic train lines zipping through buildings above your head. But as any long-term resident knows, the real magic is to be found indoors. This book introduces these spaces and, as tittle suggests, is not only about places, but the people who create them. In Japan, and particularly Tokyo, owners of restaurants, cafés, galleries, gift stores and fashion boutiques put extraordinary effort into transforming their spaces, often decorating them in an obsessively authentic way. ‘People Make Places’ is also an app and a personal concierge service – which means that places are continually added to the list.

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DOMINIQUE ANSEL BAKERY GINZA

The name should ring a bell to anyone who has ever travelled to Paris. Dominique Ansel is the current king of innovative desserts, sweets and pastries. His latest outpost, opened in Ginza in late March 2017, is home to limited edition, often Japan-inspired offerings like daruma-shaped cakes, mouse square watermelons and, to top it all, ‘flying’ cakes.

PHOTO: TOSANSHUKEI

PIERRE HERMÉ PARIS

Known as the Picasso of pastry making, Pierre Hermé, a major player in the modern French pastry industry, originally opened this Aoyama store in 2005. Renovated in late 2016, it exhibits beautiful sweets that look almost too good to eat. Displayed on the ground floor of this self-styled ‘luxury convenience store’, there are over 20 kinds of macaron available, with new variations introduced each season, while you’ll also find superb croissants, financiers, cakes and the like, all crafted in-store.

PHOTO: TOSANSHUKEI

LAPOPPO FARM

Located just outside of the Seibu-Shinjuku Station ticket gates, this new shop focuses on vegetable-based sweets. The menu includes creations like the ‘Kaki-imo custard and brown sugar’ (autumn rice custard and layers of roasted sweet potatoes), the ‘Haru-imo brûlée’ (sweet potato and chestnut cream and caramelized) and the ‘Kaki cookies’, which come in an infinite number of fillings such as little root, jujube, cardamom and carrot.

PHOTO: TOSANSHUKEI

GOTOJIN TAMACHI

Located four hours by ferry from Nago, the Goto Islands are an absolute, but this oasis prevents most of their produce and cuisine right here in Tokyo. Based on dishes made with rich, stewed horse mackerel, or what is known as ‘arakabu’ in Kyushu, these are transformed into dishes that highlight all the things Goto. Last but not least, the Goto fish, notably its head oil and its soup base, is best when a cup of shochu is on the side.

PHOTO: TOSANSHUKEI

KARIYUSHI SHOKUDO

This creative Ryukyu (Okinawan) restaurant and hub for craft beer from Japan’s southernmost spot serves up both classic island dishes and more contemporary fare centered around the theme of Okinawa. You’ll find vegetables including island carrots, taro and blackened vegetables, including Obaashima vegetable bagna cauda and Okinawa yaki-imo (carrots) diced on dishes made with rich, stewed horse mackerel, or what is known as ‘arakabu’ in Kyushu; these are transformed into dishes that highlight all the things Goto. Last but not least, the Goto fish, notably its head oil and its soup base, is best when a cup of shochu is on the side.

PHOTO: TOSANSHUKEI

TOKYO UPDATE

LOCAL LEGENDS

THE SWEETEST THINGS

CITY DISPATCHES

NEW OPENINGS

Island influences
What’s on in town April-June 2017

THINGS TO DO
KOINOBORI AT TOKYO TOWER

Now an annual sight at Tokyo Tower, the colourful Children's Day carp-streamers will be set up in front of the main entrance again from early April. In addition to 333 'koinobori', which play on the height of our beloved Eiffel Tower replica, the decorations include a 6m ‘sama-nobori’ – this one a reminder of the ongoing recovery efforts in Tohoku’s Sanriku region, a major producer of Pacific saury (‘sanma’).

APRIL

FILM

CAHIERS DU CINÉMA WEEK

April 1-23. 1-1 Shinko, Naka, Yokohama. tinyurl.com/TOTcahiers. ¥1,200, àfrom past Cahiers du Cinéma of director Alain Guiraudie, famed cinema. In addition to a ‘Cahiers du Cinéma’ film effort organised by the Institut français d’art du film, there will be a chance to see the world premiere of ‘Le Jour’ en 'saison,’” a documentary by Alain Guiraudie focusing on a motif that has been explored in his past works, and ‘Eugénie, la folle bretonne’ directed by the award-winning director of ‘Disobedience’ and ‘A Fantastic Woman’.

THINGS TO DO
MIDTOWN OPEN THE PARK 2017

April 29-May 28. 9-7-1 Akasaka, Minato. tinyurl.com/TOTopenthePark. Free.

MIDSUMMER NIGHTS DREAM


THEATRE

30TH TOSHIYA NOH


MUSIC

KURAYAMI MATSURI


MUSIC

KHAYLA KURUDA

April 29-May 7. Multiple venues. tinyurl.com/TOTKHAYLA. ¥7,400, casual area ¥5,900.

MUSIC

MAXI PRIEST


MUSIC

TOKYO RAINBOW PRIDE 2017

Rainbow Tokyo Park in Akasaka hosts a host of events, including a parade, that everyone will want to check out the Hawaiian dance performances will also be a popular attraction. Expect a packed lineup of artists when you have hits like ‘Close to You’ and ‘Let’s Hang On’ – a quality that should be on full display over these two nights of one of Tokyo’s most popular events.

THINGS TO DO
COHGEN 2017

Launched in 2011, this annual event hosts a plethora of workshops related to traditional Japanese culture and design. Highlights include classes for tea ceremony and ‘zazen’ meditation, talks on the meaning of life and a workshop during which you’re encouraged to imagine what your future city on this earth might be like, plus rakugo storytelling and sutra recitation.

THINGS TO DO
KAMIMURA BONSAI FESTIVAL

First held in 1989 in Saitama, arguably the birthplace of bonsai, this international celebration of tiny topiary takes place once every four years and has travelled to Germany for past editions. It’s returning to its roots in this international celebration of the globe will be on show in a variety of outdoor fun for Golden Week celebrations last a week, with float parades and more and more is great with established national and international bonsai creators, plus hands-on Japanese culture experiences.

THINGS TO DO
8TH WORLD BONSAI CONVENTION IN SAITAMA

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THINGS TO DO
BONSAI WEEKEND

May 6-7. Kuriya Kurenai, Shinko, Naka, Yokohama. tinyurl.com/TOTbonsai. ¥800 adv, ¥1,000 on the door.

TOKYO KURUMA2017

Tokyo Tower, the colourful Children's Day carp-streamers will be set up in front of the main entrance again from early April. In addition to 333 ‘koinobori’, which play on the height of our beloved Eiffel Tower replica, the decorations include a 6m ‘sama-nobori’ – this one a reminder of the ongoing recovery efforts in Tohoku’s Sanriku region, a major producer of Pacific saury (‘sanma’).

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TO DO

THINGS TO DO

HANAZONO SHRINE GRAND FESTIVAL
Held annually on the closest weekend to May 28, this festival at Shinjuku’s Hanazono Shrine has been going on since the 1600s and features an array of food stalls and colourful ceremonial rites. The highlight comes during the daytime on Sunday, when the shrine’s handsome 1.5-tonne mikoshi (portable shrine) is taken on a tour of the surrounding neighbourhood.


MUSIC

ITADAKI 2017
Shimokitazawa’s contribution to the summer music festival calendar is held in lush seaside surroundings on the Suruga Bay coast and attracts an eclectic lineup of domestic stars, some of whom will be playing the intimate ‘Candle Time’ after-hours slots. This year, the biodiesel-powered festival area will again be buzzing with the tunes of regulars including Goma and the Shibusashirazu Orchestra, plus newcomers Tue and Never Young Beach.

- Jun 3-4. Yoshida Park, Kawashiri, Yoshida, Haibara, Shizuoka. tinyurl.com/TOTitadaki. One-day ticket ¥7,000, two-day pass ¥13,000.

MUSIC

AMERICAN FOOTBALL
Downstate Illinois quiet-emo pioneers American Football have only released two self-titled albums (yes, they both have the same title – good luck, record store clerks), but the group’s arpeggio-heavy sound continues to strike a chord. Last year, Mike and Nate Kinsella turned out the hotly anticipated ‘American Football’ volume two, and now hit Tokyo for two legs of a three-stop Japan tour.

- Jun 6-7. Jun 6 at Liquidroom, 3-16-6 Higashi, Shibuya; Jun 7 at Akasaka Blitz, Akasaka Sacas, 5-3-2 Akasaka, Minato. tinyurl.com/TOTamericanfoot. ¥6,300.

TO DO

JUNE

THINGS TO DO

SANNO MATSURI
Celebrated since the early 17th century and recognised as one of the three great festivals of Edo, the Sanno Matsuri marks the start of Tokyo’s summer festival season. This year’s edition of the festival will unfortunately not feature the spectacular float parade, held only once every two years, but is packed with a variety of other events don’t miss the children’s parade on June 11.


THINGS TO DO

TSUKIJI LION DANCE FESTIVAL
Taking place in its most impressive form only once every three years, the Tsukiji Shishi Matsuri or Lion Dance Festival at Namijyoe Inari shrine will be somewhat more subdued this June – but that’s not to say it isn’t worth catching. The festivities – perhaps the last of their kind before the market moves to Toyosu – culminate in the eponymous lion dancing on Sunday.


THINGS TO DO

SALSA STREET FESTIVAL
First held in 2015, this multinational celebration takes over Yoyogi Park again with food, drinks, music and merriment, plus all the salsa dancing you can possibly endure over a single weekend. Grab a spicy taco and wash it down with a beer or mojito before moving onto the vast selection of rum and tequila. Less alcoholically inclined visitors will appreciate the stalls selling handicrafts and other summery accessories.


TO DO

JUNE

MUSIC

VIVA ITALIA
For a light-hearted take on new Italian cinema, head to Yurakucho to catch this six-film programme composed of both recent hits and critically acclaimed movies previously unreleased in Japan. Among the highlights should be Gennaro Nunziante’s comedy ‘Quo Vado’, which follows the defiant struggle of a public servant in an era of funding cuts and downsizing, and the satirical ‘The Mafia Kills Only in Summer’.

- May 27-Jun 17. Human Trust Cinema Yurakucho, Yurakucho Itocia 4F, 2-7-1 Yurakucho, Chiyoda. tinyurl.com/TOTvivaitalia. ¥1,800, college students ¥1,500, high school students and younger ¥1,000.

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How to phone like a Tokyoite

No matter how long you’ve been in Tokyo, dealing with things over the telephone often seems harder than it should be. Put your manners on the line with our guide to the dos and don’ts of dialling.

Kirsty Bouwers

**DO: USE SET PHRASES**
Most people know that ‘Moshi-moshi’ is ‘telephone hello’ in Japan. But with phone calls occupying their own special corner in the complex world of Japanese protocol, where do you go from there? Conversational conventions are the secret sauce for making your call progress smoothly. At an appropriate moment, even if you’ve never, ever talked to the person before, be sure to deploy the set phrase, ‘Itsumo osewa ni natte imasu’ (‘Thank you for your continuing support and kindness’), and you’re good to go. If you’ve just had a call referred to you, say ‘Odenwa kawarimashita’ (‘The phone has changed’). And if all else fails hit the abort button with ‘Shitsureishimasu’ (‘Excuse me’), the universally accepted cue for hanging up.

**DON’T: USE YOUR PHONE ON THE TRAIN**
You’re on the train and your phone rings. Anywhere else, the worst that might happen is you go into a tunnel and your conversation cuts off. In Tokyo, however, submitting innocent bystanders to your cellphone chitchat is deeply frowned upon, and in a packed train carriage you’ll be committing a serious courtesy crime simply by taking the call. Instead, ignore the impulse to answer and send a quick text to say you’re on the train. Or pick up, say the same in hushed tones, and get off the line. And whatever you do, be sure to put your phone on silent (‘manner mode’) before boarding so your Babymetal ringtone doesn’t shatter the sacrosanct peace and quiet of a Tokyo rush hour.

**DON’T: ARUKI-SUMAHO**
One of the most appealing aspects of the Japanese language is its penchant for creating new words by chopping old ones in half and pasting them together. Behold: ‘aruki’ (from aruku, to walk) and ‘sumaho’, the already bastardised Janglish word for smartphone, meaning ‘walking while playing with your smartphone like an idiot and not looking where you’re going’. Most train companies started major campaigns last year to warn users about the intense levels of ‘meiwaku’ (nuisance) caused by phone zombies, and anecdotes about people (almost) walking off platforms onto the tracks are rife. So don’t get too absorbed in texting, Facebook or Pokémon Go as you move about the city – partly because there isn’t an app yet for dealing with an oncoming truck, and partly because when they cart you off to hospital a whole culture will be quietly murmuring ‘We told you so’.

**DO: BE PROFESSIONAL ON AN OFFICE PHONE**
Picking up the phone at your office for the first time may be a terrifying experience for many in Japan – locals included. Make sure you have those amazing set phrases down (see left), but also ensure your timing is flawless: pick up within two rings or be ready to apologise for taking so long. When handing over the phone to someone, press the ‘hold’ button in between – the background faff of passing the handset to someone else may well result in embarrassment for both caller and colleague. Most of all, don’t stress. If you’re really slipping up and putting the company’s future on the line, consider handing the phone over to a co-worker, stepping away from the device and choosing a profession where calls aren’t required, like becoming a mime, mortician or trappist monk.

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Stay strong, Kumamoto

Two powerful earthquakes hit Kyushu’s Kumamoto prefecture on April 14 and 16, killing at least 49, injuring thousands and forcing many local residents to abandon their homes. Historic Kumamoto Castle also suffered extensive damage. The recovery process is well on its way, but serious challenges still remain. Our thoughts go out to everyone affected by this disaster.

Visit forkumamoto.yahoo.co.jp for more information on how you can help the disaster victims.
I, TOKYO
Stéphane Danton
Tea merchant at Ocharaku
Age: 52

I, GLOBAL
Domo
NHK’s mascot introduces Tokyo to the world

GREEN TEA DEALER Stéphane Danton’s flavourful Japanese brews could be just what you need to familiarise yourself with the nation’s favourite beverage. This multi-talented merchant served his tea at the Japanese pavilion during the 2008 World’s Fair in Zaragoza, Spain, and now works on spreading the joys of Japanese tea to the world, while harnessing the power of tea to revitalise rural communities in Japan.

When did you first come to Tokyo, and what made you choose Japan as your new home? I homestayed in Hokkaido in 1986, and came back in 1992 to work as a sommelier. I later worked at a French tea salon and that sparked my interest in tea.

What brought you into the world of green tea? Since my days at the tea salon, I’ve had the idea that there are similarities between wine and tea. When I decided to start this business, people around me were against it, asking why a French sommelier would work with green tea. But there are so many Japanese sommeliers promoting France’s favourite drink, so I thought I’d love to do the same for Japan’s favourite drink.

Do you have any tips for promoting Japanese tea overseas? People are likely to show off the very top products in other countries, because they have confidence in these. That makes sense, but it’s hard to understand the true quality at first – someone trying a premium Bourgogne as their first wine. I try to let everyone enjoy the world of tea in a casual way at the beginning, let them develop their interest, and then hope that people can eventually start understanding quality sencha.

You also work with local governments, helping produce their local teas. What made you dedicate your time to this? After my time at the tea salon, I worked as a promoter of Western-style wedding parties in rural areas while running a restaurant in Nerima. So I travelled throughout Japan, and fell in love with the local people and products. I hope to give back by helping them produce their own original, locally made tea, which can revitalise entire communities.

When did you first feel like a Tokyoite? When I moved to Tokyo for Japanese language school and rented a flat by myself for the first time. It was very small but felt like I was a part of this city.

You have been listed as a Japanophile on NHK World’s ‘Begin Japanology’ (currently ‘Japanology Plus’). What aspect of Japan do you like the most when you are away? Since my livelihood has been here for over 20 years, I start missing Japan within two weeks of leaving. Needless to say, I love the nature of this country, and I also love the morning sunlight.

What do you think of Domo as a character? People are likely to show off the very top products in other countries, because they have confidence in these. That makes sense, but it’s hard to understand the true quality at first – someone trying a premium Bourgogne as their first wine. I try to let everyone enjoy the world of tea in a casual way at the beginning, let them develop their interest, and then hope that people can eventually start understanding quality sencha.

Finally, any survival tips for first-time visitors? When you get lost, you might want to ask people for directions. In this case, just remember that you need to be polite: speak face to face, nicely and slowly. Japanese people are very shy but friendly, so even if they can’t explain the directions in English, they might take you all the way to your destination!

WE’VE GOTTEN WORD THAT DOMO’S ‘NEW WORLD’ WILL BE UNVEILED THIS YEAR. WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE? You’ll already know that Domo himself travels around the world, often playing sports and even doing his bit to promote an active lifestyle. But what you might not know is that a long, long time ago, in ancient times, hundreds of thousands of Domo lived peacefully in another world. This year, you’ll be able to peak into this realm.

AS DOMO FANS, WE’RE HAPPY TO HEAR HE HAS A FAMILY! WHEN CREATING THIS NEW WORLD, WHAT DO YOU PAY MOST ATTENTION TO? We focus on the details of each individual Domo. There are several generations of Domo in the new world, and each one has a different personality: some are artistic or playful, others geeks – just like us humans. This will let people find new aspects of the character. But in creating the world, we also wanted to emphasise that all Domo are a family. Although we might not have intended it at first, once we saw all the different Domo moving, we felt like they were part of the same family, all sharing certain characteristics.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON RIGHT NOW? This multi-talented merchant has worked as a promoter of Western-style wedding parties in rural areas while running a restaurant in Nerima. So I travelled throughout Japan, and fell in love with the local people and products. I hope to give back by helping them produce their own original, locally made tea, which can revitalise entire communities.

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Japanese people might not notice, but it’s very bright and somewhat special compared to that of other countries.

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TO BE REVEALED SOON!

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

Unveiling Domo’s secret world!

DOMO, THE FLUFFY, brown and lovable creature known as an ambassador for NHK World, now has fans all over the world. But have you ever thought about where he came from? In 2017, Domo’s origins will finally be revealed: the new ‘Domo! World’ series will guide you into a brand new realm. Eager to get to the bottom of this big announcement, we sat down for a talk with Noriko Matsumoto, producer of ‘Domo! World’.

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What are you working on right now? We built a huge Domo’s ‘World’ drama and have been working on short stop motion animation clips for each Domo since the end of last year, all in order to create a brand new, dynamic world. We’re finally getting there!

Finally, what can we expect next? You’ll be seeing Domo’s world unveiled little by little this year, so keep your eyes open. Also, I’d like to emphasise that Domo’s ‘primitive’ world comes to life with stop motion, which is itself a ‘primitive’ way of doing things in this digital-dominated era. It’s a great example of Japanese craftsmanship, too.

©NHK-TYO
OPEN

TOKYO

In a time where the world appears to be putting up barriers and lowering its tolerance levels – we’re looking at you, President Trump – Tokyo is bravely swimming against the tide. No matter what your age, religion or sexuality, you are welcome here. Over the following 12 pages we answer your questions about how to get the best out of the city, but first Time Out Tokyo’s editors reveal their master plan for an unrestricted city.

1. **Talk to Each Other**
   - **Tokyotes are naturally reserved – at least until the karaoke beat kicks in – and the thought of striking up a conversation with a stranger brings many out in a cold sweat. However, communication is the first step towards a barrier-free city. As a simple first step, if you spot someone looking lost, ask to help, if you see somebody in a wheelchair or with a stroller, let them know where the closest elevator or ramp is – and once in a while, unplug those headphones and talk to the person next to you on the train.**

2. **Check Your Attitude**
   - **Stairs and bumps in the roads aren’t the only hurdles those with physical disabilities or the elderly face when trying to enjoy the city. Be aware that a little consideration from you can go a long way towards encouraging everyone to get out onto the open. They don’t necessarily need your help, they certainly don’t need your sympathy, just to be treated with the consideration you would show anyone else.**

3. **Change Your Perspective**
   - **Try going out into the city with a stroller or cane, or with a small child. You’ll soon notice all the steps and differences in floor level, that many pathways are far too narrow, and that people treat you differently. The same applies to those of you in wheelchairs. While it might sound like a daunting task, don’t hesitate to explore Tokyo; after all, staying inside won’t help change attitudes. Recognising that things need to be improved is the first step towards actually making them better.**

**MANIFESTO FOR AN OPEN TOKYO**

**1. Talk to Each Other**
   - Time Out Tokyo’s editors lay out their ten-point plan for a better city.

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4. **Harness the Power of Design**
   - In a diverse, multi-cultural society, communication and consideration for each other’s circumstances are crucial, of course, but the power of design can go beyond individual efforts and bring about comprehensive solutions. Aim for answers that work for everyone.

5. **Help People Over the Language Barrier**
   - Support for multiple languages is commonplace at airports, train stations and shopping centres in Tokyo, while nationwide emergency response in five languages is set to be realised in the near future. That’s all well and good, but welcoming visitors is about more than just making things more convenient. When in town, try walking on the culinary wild side: cross the threshold of a local restaurant, point, shrug, gesture and prepare to be rewarded.

6. **Some People Love Gay – Get Over It**
   - In 2014, a prohibition against discrimination based on sexual orientation was included in the Olympic Charter. Some things don’t need to be written down. Tokyo has long been a place where LGBT visitors can feel comfortable. The Rio Games reportedly saw more athletes come out than ever before. Hopefully Tokyo can continue the trend.

7. **Start Your Paralympic Preparations Early**
   - Tokyo is set to host the Paralympics in 2020, but there’s no need to wait that long to watch the athletes in action: a wide range of Paralympic sporting events are being held around Japan throughout the year. Find out where you can watch sports like goalball, boccia or blind football in the Tokyo area on our site: timeout.com/tokyo.

8. **Blur Those Boundaries**
   - Able-bodied and disabled athletes may still compete in separate events, but some facilities are already bringing the two together through the power of universal design. Opened in 2016, Tokyo’s Shin-Toyosu running stadium is open to all athletes, whether they have a disability or not, and functions as a symbol of the future we all want.

9. **Give the Kids a Chance**
   - You often hear that Tokyo is a very difficult city to raise children in, with attitudes, architecture and policies often turning against families with small kids. How can we make the city more child-friendly, and thus ensure Tokyo’s future? It starts with you. If you see an unruly child causing trouble on your flight or at a restaurant, try to resist tutting or rolling your eyes and offer the parents a friendly smile. Or better still buy them a drink – chances are they’ll need one.

10. **Live and Let Diet**
    - Tokyo is the gourmet capital of the world, with delicacies from virtually every corner of the globe available here. Options for vegetarians and celiacs are on the increase, but how well does the capital cater to those with religiously motivated diets? As a first step, take a look at our list of the city’s best halal restaurants over at page 26.

**The inaugural issue of ‘Futurecity’, a new Japanese-language magazine published by Time Out Tokyo and the Nikkei newspaper, was released on March 30.**
Tokyo's public bathhouses ('sento') are frequently used by the elderly, so the floors are usually level, with very few ups and downs. However, most of these are hard to enter with a wheelchair. Mikokuyu, around ten minutes on foot from Honjo-Azumabashi Station in eastern Sumida ward, is a welcome exception.

A public bathhouse with a history that dates back to 1947, Mikokuyu was your typical eastern Sumida ward, is a welcome exception. The family bath draws on the same black hot spring water as the rest of the bathhouse, and, as customary, split into men's and women's sections. You'll find temperature-specific tubs, mineral baths and open-air baths, with different types on each floor. The renovation effort has seen the addition of a partially visible symbol of this rebirth is the fully accessible family bath on the ground floor, allowing bathers with leg and hip issues to get in without too much effort.

The material used throughout Mikokuyu is slip-resistant and unevenness in the floor surface has been kept to an absolute minimum. The family bath draws on the same black hot spring water as the rest of the bathhouse and, unlike most similar facilities in Japan, is very easy on the eye – both the tubs and walls are decorated with gorgeous Japanese cypress wood. Baths for able-bodied visitors can be found on the fourth and fifth floors, and are, as customary, split into men's and women's sections. You'll find temperature-specific tubs, mineral baths and open-air baths, with different types on each floor. The renovation effort has seen the addition of a partially open-air bath, adding to the already extensive selection. All baths are equipped with handrails, while those on the fourth floor are specially built with lower edges than usual, allowing bathers with leg and hip issues to get in without too much effort.

Most major art museums in Tokyo are barrier-free. For a comprehensive introduction to art in Tokyo, head to Roppongi, home to numerous museums and galleries. This spring, the place to be is the National Art Center, Tokyo (7-2-2 Roppongi, Minato, www.nact.jp), where popular exhibitions focused on the work of Yayoi Kusama and Afro-Mexican art running until May 22 and June 5 respectively. The building's main entrance is on ground level and you won't need to worry about steps or the like blocking your path, while the galleries are spacious enough to move around in freely. Other noteworthy options in the area include the Mori Art Museum (Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, 6F, 6-10 Roppongi, Minato, www.mori.art.museum), and the Suntory Museum of Art (Shinjuku Midtown Gallery, 3F, 9-7-3, Azabu, Minato, www.suntery.com/ja/), both of which can be accessed in a wheelchair. All three of the museums mentioned above are equipped with accessible bathrooms. — Yukako Izumi

We sure do! Space is at a premium everywhere in Tokyo, but venues like record stores and clubs tend to be particularly cramped. However, accessible alternatives do exist. Take one of the finest jazz clubs in town: Marunouchi's Cotton Club, one of Tokyo's 'big three' that also includes Blue Note Tokyo and Billboard Live, which is accessible by elevator and has no steps at the entrance. Contact Cotton Club in advance and they'll be happy to arrange wheelchair seating. Record aficionados, meanwhile, will want to head for either the indie-focused Jet Set in Shimokitazawa or the more mainstream HMV, found inside the Alta building in Shinjuku – both of which have flat entrances and elevators. Jet Set is rather small and slightly difficult to navigate in wheelchair, but using the listening station or picking up items at the counter shouldn't present any problems. HMV, on the other hand, boasts wide aisles and is perfect for leisurely browsing. — Kunihiro Miki

Open Tokyo

Q: CAN I SEE ART IN TOKYO FROM A WHEELCHAIR?

Q: WHERE CAN I FIND AN ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC BATHHOUSE?

Q: DOES TOKYO HAVE ANY ACCESSIBLE MUSIC SPOTS?
Sensoji, the oldest and grandest temple in the city, is an essential part of any Tokyo itinerary and one of the capital’s most recognisable sights. In addition to offering service in several languages, the temple is noted for its bilingual omikuji fortune slips — and for being one of the most accessible places in Tokyo. After snapping an obligatory selfie in front of the Kaminarimon (“Thunder Gate”), you can pass through the lively Nakamise shopping street in front of the temple and make it all the way to the main hall without having to navigate a single staircase or ramp. Once on the temple grounds, try purifying your hands at the fountain and buttering in the healing smoke from the round incense pit before heading into the sanctum itself.

Although the main hall may appear daunting with its wide staircase, wheelchair-users need not worry: there’s an elevator along the left side that can be used without having to contact the staff. Its doors stay open longer than usual, so you’ll have plenty of time to get on and off. Once inside the hall, it’s all barrier-free: again, you can reach the coin donation box and fortune slip counters in no time. If you get a lucky slip, great, if not, just roll it up your unlucky piece of paper and tie it onto one of the designated wires nearby. Consider also picking up an omamori amulet, which can come in several varieties; the selection can be viewed conveniently while sitting in a wheelchair.

On your way back through the Nakamise, browse through the dozens of souvenir shops, which sell everything from ninja costumes and Y-shirts to traditional crafts. Although the shopping street can get very crowded at times, Sensoji itself is quite spacious — especially if you arrive early (the temple opens at 6am), which is the most magical time to visit.

— Yukako Izumi
COCOLO CAFE

Ideal for a late-night rendezvous, this café and restaurant is a popular hangout that’s also a great spot to kick off an evening exploring Shinjuku Ni-chome, Tokyo’s gay district. Everyone is welcome to sample CocoLo’s healthy grub and imaginative drink selection: try the ever-popular daily special (Cocolo Plate), sip on some Vietnamese coffee or choose from its different kinds of tea. The homemade fruit cakes and ice cream parfaits are highly recommended, too.
9-13-3-1 Aoki, Taito (Asakusa Station).
03 3842 0181. Daily 8am-10pm (last entry 9pm).

GOLD FINGER

Running on a regular basis since 1991, Japan’s first women-only party, Gold Finger, currently held on the third Saturday of every month at Ni-chome’s Aisotope Lounge, is also the force behind this sassy party bar, formerly a women-only spot. Gold Finger now keeps its doors open to the entire LGBT community — although Saturday nights are still only for members of the fairer sex. It’s decorated with vintage furniture themed on a ’70s motel and staffed by fashionistas, including a few DJs.
2-12-1 Shimbashi, Shibuya (Shibuya, Ginza Line stations). 03 3266 0865. http://goldfinger-bar.com. Daily 5pm-3am (last entry 2am).

Q: CAN YOU POINT ME TO TOKYO’S BEST ACCESSIBLE SIGHTS?

Q: COULD YOU POINT ME TO A FEW LGBT-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS AND BARS?

ALAMAS CAFE

‘Alamas’ means diamond in the Thai language, but this chill café on Ni-chome’s main drag exudes more of a Balinese vibe with its hip décor and island-inspired menu. It has various performances and is equipped with both free Wi-Fi and electrical outlets. Make sure to try out the rooftop terrace during the warm season.
9-1-13-1 Aoi, Shinjuku (Shibuya-Sanchome, Shinjuku Gyoenmae stations). Royal Line, Yamanote Line, Yurikamome Line (Shibuya, Yoyogi stations). Mon-Thu 6pm-2am, Fri 6pm-5am, Sat 6pm-5am, Sun 8pm-5am.

OTHER NOTEWORTHY SPOTS

PALETTE TOWN DAIKANRANSHA

Built on an artificial island, the Odaiba area is dotted with massive shopping malls and large-scale attractions. Most establishments here offer barrier-free access, including this 125m ferris wheel, once the world’s tallest. Towering high above the Palette Town complex, the symbolic wheel has 64 gondolas, two of which have doors wide enough for direct wheelchair access.
1-1-3 Odaiba, Minato (Odaiba station). 03 4533 1364. Mon-Thu 11am-11pm, Fri, Sat 11am-12am, Sun 12pm-12am.

COOL CAFE

Yes, yes we can… — Yukiko Isayama

MEIJI JINGU

With a paved trail connecting the majestic entrance and the main buildings, this iconic shrine appears difficult to reach for wheelchair users. Not so, if you take the backdoor: take the approach from Kitasando or Yoyogi stations and you’ll find it a paved path suitable for wheels. Do note that there’s a short bit of dirt there too, but the distance is certainly manageable.
1-1 Yoyogi Kaminarimono, Shibuya (Yoyogi, Kitasando station). 03 3215 5511. meijijingu.or.jp. Open from seniors to children.

TOKYO SKYTREE

This 634-metre city landmark, opened in 2012, has observatories at 350m and 450m above ground. Both of these can be accessed in a wheelchair, although the basement is slightly inclined — the staff are happy to help if necessary. You’ll also find several accessible toilets here.
1-1-2 Ohashi, Sumida (Tokyo Skytree, Oshiage stations). 03 5568 8854. tokyo-skytree.jp/en. Daily 8am-10pm (last entry 9pm).

Gyoenmae stations). 03 6383 4649. tinyurl.com/TOTgoldfinger. Mon-Thu 6pm-2am, Fri 6pm-5am, Sat 6pm-5am, Sun 3pm-12am.

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WHERE CAN I PIMP MY CANE?

Canes tend to come mainly in plain colours and designs, but in Japan, ‘kawaii’ culture has even infiltrated the walking stick market. Our favourite is this foldable cane with a Hello Kitty print (¥7,500), ideal for lovers of Japan’s favourite moggie.

DOES TOKYO HAVE ANY ‘SPORTS FOR ALL’ CENTRES?

We sure do – take the new Shin-Toyosu Brillia Running Stadium, opened in December 2016 out by Tokyo Bay, quite close to where the Olympic Village is currently being built. This slick facility is completely barrier-free, and hosts a 60-metre track made with the same materials used for Paralympic and Olympic tracks. It also has the home of Oxybo, a prosthesis company that makes prosthetic limbs for both athletes and non-athletes, and the Slow Label nonprofit, which works to promote and support arts projects that focus on diversity.

We have been actively constructing an Olympic village that can be enjoyed by both young and old. I also hope that, in the true sense, a society without barriers in people’s minds. This reminds me of a realisation I had after becoming a Paralympian and having more opportunities to travel abroad. In Europe and the Americas, many of the world’s leading sporting nations, as naturally like Olympic and Paralympic athletes to practice in the same facilities and be instructed by the same coaches. On the streets I often saw people helping those around them who were in wheelchairs, or even those without any physical differences. Our society as a whole accepts the presence of a diverse array of people as a natural thing, including those with disabilities, the elderly, parents with their babies, people of different nationalities – the air itself is imbued with this acceptance. I felt like I saw the shape that Tokyo should take in 2020.

WHO DO I GO TO FOR DIVERSITY-FOCUSED PERFORMANCES IN TOKYO?

You can’t go wrong with Slow Movement, a performing arts collective that consists of a highly diverse group of both disabled and able-bodied participants. They perform at several different venues in central Tokyo, communicating a message of diversity, openness and harmony, and rehearse at the Shin-Toyosu Brillia Running Stadium featured above. Details of future performances will be posted on their website.

WHAT CAN TOKYO DO TO BECOME AN EVEN MORE ACCESSIBLE CITY?

With the Olympics and, more importantly, the Paralympics just around the corner, what does Tokyo still need to accomplish in the barrier-free department? Paralympian Mami Tani, who is gearing up for her fourth Games, gives us her view.

As an athlete who believes in the power of sport to make a difference, I have enormous expectations for both the Olympics and Paralympics. Yet at the same time, I do feel there are some issues with how things are in Japan right now. One question is whether truly barrier-free accessibility can be accomplished here. In Japan, discussions regarding the concept tend to centre around physical elements, such as the installation of elevators or slopes. However, as a person with a disability and also as the mother of a small child, I feel like it is much more important to change people’s attitudes toward those who are different. If someone needs help, it should be natural to speak up and offer them a hand. I think it is necessary to focus more attention on removing the “barriers” in people’s minds.

...
Your prayers have been heard: halal food has finally arrived in Tokyo.

WHERE DO I GO FOR HALAL EATS IN TOKYO?

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WHERE DO I GO FOR HALAL EATS IN TOKYO?
Haranuki may be Tokyo’s centre for flamboyant youth fashion, but Sugamo is where the golden generation goes to strut their styles. This is the otherwise unspectacular corner of Toshima ward is famed for its Jizo-dori, an 800m shopping street where elderly folks from all over the city and further afield stroll, shop and spend quality time with each other. Although the area essentially owes its popularity among retirees to a single statue – a depiction of the Jizo bodhisattva housed at Kogani Temple – it essentially owes its popularity among retirees to its popularity.

Q: **WHY IS SUGAMO KNOWN AS ‘HARAJUKU FOR GRANNIES’?**

For a day out that won’t leave you so exhausted that you’ll fall asleep in your dinner, head to Kichijoji. First stop: the newly renovated Coppice complex, on the north side of the station, for a little retail therapy. The fifth floor contains a lineup of Japanese kids’ clothing brands including Beeze and Sequoia, and the world’s first Eric Carle Plaza, dedicated to the ‘Very Hungry Caterpillar’ author. After working up an appetite, make your way to the opposite side of the station for lunch at Café & Meal Muji, found on the seventh floor of the Marui department store. The spacious interior is perfect for families worried about bulky strollers. While nursing stations are available within the department store, while there’s no kids’ menu, you won’t need one – Muji is committed to serving freshly prepared dishes using in-season ingredients and without preservatives. For little ones that have energy to burn after lunch, it’s a quick stroll over to Inokashira Park. A few trips around the swanboat-dotted, sakura tree-lined pond and their precious eyes will start to droop – the perfect signal to head home with a peacefully sleeping child.

> **Amanda Imasaka**
> 9-3-37-5 Kichijoji Honcho, Musashino. 0423 27 2108. coppice.jp. Daily 10am-9pm.

For a more substantial meal, opt for an indoor Japanese sweets at Koganji Temple. The line at Koganji snakes out over the length of Jizo-dori and onto the temple gates. If you can’t make it on any other days, consider going on Sunday, when the shopping street is off limits to cars between noon and 6pm (3-6pm on other days). Once you’ve picked up some luck-bringing red underwear – a Sugamo specialty sold at several different outlets in the area – stop for a cup of matcha tea and some traditional Japanese sweets at the Kano Shichifukujin-kai café (3-3-7 Sugamo, Tokyo, 03 3844 8004. 11am-noon, closed Thu), where a trio of well-fed cats stand guard and occasionally step inside to play with the patrons.

Q: **WHICH PARK IS THE MOST KID-FRIENDLY?**

Try Shinjuku Gyoen, an easy ten-minute walk from the New South exit of Shinjuku Station, which is accessible by elevator. A ¥200 buy-you-admittance ticket (under six is free) and you get access to the traditional Japanese, French and English garden, open lawns and the teahouse. Alcohol is prohibited on the grounds, so it’s an ideal space for sakura-viewing with children, without the worry of long bathroom waits or noisy neighbours. Bring a plastic sheet or blanket, pack a picnic lunch and enjoy the springtime cherry blossoms, tranquil teahouse and the ‘Very Hungry Caterpillar’ area, complete with a line-up of Japanese kids’ clothing brands including Muji and Marui.

> **Amanda Imasaka**
> 9-11 Naitomachi, Shinjuku (Shinjuku-Gyoenmae Station). 03 3350 0151. tinyurl.com/TOTgyoen. 9am-4pm, closed Mon

Q: **WHAT’S A GOOD PLACE FOR ENTERTAINING CHILDREN ON A RAINY DAY?**

Head to the Kawaii Monster Cafe for a taste of the kind of Harajuku subculture both you and your kids can enjoy. It’s easily accessible from two stations, with elevator access and stroller parking in the monster mouth (lobby). The 90-minute lunch time table limit that allows for wait times of just 30min or under – even on crowded week-ends – is a lifesaver, and ‘the Monster girls’ greeting you at the door are dressed in the latest Harajuku fashions. Plus, you’re actually encouraged to leave your seat and admire the decorations that just beg for family selfies.

> **Amanda Imasaka**
> YM Square Bldg 4F , 4-31-10 Jingumae, Shibuya (Harajuku, Meiji-Jingumae stations). tinyurl.com/DTotryen. Open 4pm-1:30pm. Little kids in a little box.

Q: **WHICH TOKYO NEIGHBOURHOOD IS BEST FOR A RELAXING DAY OUT WITH THE KIDS?**

For a day out that won’t leave you so exhausted that you’ll fall asleep in your dinner, head to Kichijoji. First stop: the newly renovated Coppice complex, on the north side of the station, for a little retail therapy. The fifth floor contains a lineup of Japanese kids’ clothing brands including Beeze and Sequoia, and the world’s first Eric Carle Plaza, dedicated to the ‘Very Hungry Caterpillar’ author. After working up an appetite, make your way to the opposite side of the station for lunch at Café & Meal Muji, found on the seventh floor of the Marui department store. The spacious interior is perfect for families worried about bulky strollers. While nursing stations are available within the department store, while there’s no kids’ menu, you won’t need one – Muji is committed to serving freshly prepared dishes using in-season ingredients and without preservatives. For little ones that have energy to burn after lunch, it’s a quick stroll over to Inokashira Park. A few trips around the swanboat-dotted, sakura tree-lined pond and their precious eyes will start to droop – the perfect signal to head home with a peacefully sleeping child.

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IT WAS THE LARGEST planning application the UK had ever seen. In 2007, a 15-volume, 10,000-page document that set out the Olympic Delivery Authority’s master plan for a new east London. Ten years to the day it was published, Peter Tudor of the London Legacy Development Corporation is talking to me from the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park – 2.5 square kilometres of Stratford now reborn as a maze of world-class sporting venues and landscaped greenery. ‘Walking through the park and seeing it still being used is the best thing imaginable,’ says Tudor, the park’s director of visitor services. ‘It really has become a destination – a place to get out and get active.’

This sporting ideal was not easily achieved. After the euphoria that followed London being awarded the Games in 2004 came the hard work – could the country deliver on its promise? ‘Every host nation had had something go wrong,’ says Debbie Lye, chief executive of Spirit of 2012, a funding charity charged with continuing the legacy of the Games. ‘There’s always that sense that there’s a banana skin around the corner.’ In London’s case it was a particularly slippery one. The global financial crash of 2007 hit the country hard and people questioned whether we could afford the Games. ‘The turning point was the torch relay. This sense of excitement swept the country,’ says Lye, who experienced the exhilaration first-hand when she carried the torch. ‘The relay proved this was about the whole country, not just London. By the time Danny Boyle’s wonderful opening ceremony had finished it felt like everyone was on our side.’

ENTER THE GAMES MAKERS

The Games were a triumph for Team GB. Across the Olympics and Paralympics the team took a record 185 medals. Paralympic swimmer Susie Rodgers was among them, winning three bronzes. ‘I was very pleased to come away with the medals, but equally, just to be a part of something that was so special,’ she says. ‘It felt like the nation was just completely united for that period of time around the Games.’

For Rodgers the key to that unity went beyond success in the pools and on the tracks, courts and pitches. She believes the 70,000 ‘Games Makers’ – volunteers who staffed venues, directed the lost and patched up the poorly – helped create a sense of inclusion that went beyond elite athletes. ‘It showed everyone could be involved,’ she says. ‘If I’m not competing as an athlete, I’d want to be a Games Maker.’

The scheme continues to have an impact. ‘We have a programme called the “Park Champions” which is a continuation of the Games Makers programme,’ says Tudor. ‘We even retained that charming bright pink colour they all had to wear. So a lot of our Park Champions are former Games Makers – they welcome people to the park, they work on events with the big foam hands to make sure everyone knows where they’re going. This summer the park is hosting the IAAF and IPC 2017 World Championships so they’ll be working hard at that as well.’

THE PARALYMPICS REACH NEW HEIGHTS

While pulling off a successful Olympics was a huge relief, it was during the 2012 Paralympics – declared by IPC president Philip Craven as the ‘greatest ever’ – that London set new standards. With 4,302 athletes, they were the largest Paralympics to date, but more importantly they reached a wider audience, setting records for ticket sales and television viewing figures.

‘There wasn’t one secret to success, there were a lot of factors which shouldn’t be secret at all,’ says Tim Hollingsworth, chief executive of the British Paralympic Association and the man charged with delivering a successful Games in 2012. ‘Most importantly there
was a fundamental belief at the heart of the committee that they were organising both an Olympics and a Paralympics. One event, two Games. It’s hard to escape the view that some previous organising committees thought they were organising an Olympics and then had to put on a Paralympics afterwards. London established that that shouldn’t be the case. Another key decision, according to Hollingsworth, was to split the broadcasting rights. While the Olympics were shown on public broadcast the BBC, the Paralympics were on Channel 4, a partially advertisement-funded channel. “They marketed the Games so well with their “Meet The Superhumans” campaign that helped change perceptions,” says Hollingsworth. “That along with the success of Team GB at the Olympics meant everyone wanted to get a ticket.”

Paralympics GB ex-sprint star Sophie Christiansen got to witness the enthusiasm close up, winning three gold medals in front of record crowds. “The London Games were the pinnacle of the Paralympics,” she says. “It was amazing how much interest there was in disability sport. I didn’t realise how big an impact London would have until we saw the ticket sales and heard people sitting on the tube talking about the Games. I got the opportunity to compete in front of 60,000 people in Greenwich – something unheard of in our sport.”

FORWARD MOMENTUM

Peter Tudor watched the Paralympic and Olympic triumphs from the sidelines. “We were delighted to see the Games be a success, but our job was to worry about what comes next,” he says. “We were waiting for the party to finish so we could get on with the job of creating a legacy.”

Tudor and his team wasted no time. The day after the closing ceremony they began taking down temporary venues and landscaping the park for the public. “We did a lot of work with the local community, saying ‘this is your park now’,” says Tudor. “Within a year we had opened half of the north of the park, and within 18 months the south of the park.”

“The key to the park’s lasting success, according to Tudor, was the legacy team working alongside those responsible for delivering the Games. ‘You need somebody looking at what is next. You need 17,000 seats in the swimming pool for the Games: you know you’ll never need them once the Games are finished. So the building was designed for legacy, the seats were put on for the Games but designed to be removed to create the community pool that we’ve got now with 60,000 people swimming in there every month.”

Hollingsworth says it is too early to assess the full impact of 2012, believing the effects will be felt for generations. “I don’t like the word ‘legacy’, says Hollingsworth. ‘That implies you’ve hit your high point and need to maintain it. We felt after London it should be about momentum, carrying on this journey of growth.”

Enter Debbie Lye and the Spirit of 2012 team who have made sure that the momentum of the Games has continued across the entire country. Spirit of 2012 was founded by Peter Ainsworth, chair of the Big Lottery Fund who, according to Lye, “made a decision after the 2012 Paralympics closing ceremony, that this moment must not be allowed to die.” Ainsworth allocated £47 million to the new organisation to ensure the Games had a lasting impact. To date Spirit of 2012 has impacted 1.5 million people in more than 100 locations across the UK.

One of the schemes Lye is most proud of is Inclusive Futures, which recruited, trained and gave leadership skills to disabled and non-disabled volunteers aged 14 to 19. “The slogan for London 2012 was ‘Inspire a Generation’,” says Lye. “When people talk about inclusive projects, they often mean a project for disabled people, but this is genuine integration. They trained 1,700 of these young leaders and volunteers, and 57 percent were disabled.”

Inclusive Futures has already had an impact. Disabled volunteers make up an average one to two percent of volunteers at sports events, at the UK School Games the use of Inclusive Futures volunteers meant that number was 12 percent. “You can change the world if you start small and focus on something,” says Lye. “Not everyone can be an elite athlete. Inclusive Futures puts disabled and non-disabled young people alongside each other doing everyday activities. The person in the wheelchair isn’t the person being helped into the venue; it’s the person helping other people into the venue.”

LESSONS FOR TOKYO

Everyone interviewed for this story cannot wait for the 2020 Games in Tokyo, Christiansen is considering competing, which would make Tokyo her fifth Paralympics. All of them also agree 2012 represents a great opportunity for the Japanese capital. “Every edition of the Games is different, and I think that the best part about it,” says Rodgers. “But the one thing Japan should do similarly to London is keep the momentum going. Use it as an opportunity to get people to try different sports, build their sporting ability, and facilities within the country.”

“It was an extraordinary summer here,” says Tudor, “but reserve some energy for getting everything ready for legacy, and make the extraordinariness last.” Lye agrees: “I think you’ve got to identity early on what you want the world to look like in 2021. It’s hard for the people charged with delivering a successful Games in 2020 to do that. That’s not their job, but somebody must do it. There will be a feeling of positivity and joy and excitement. You get an immense wave of goodwill to ride, so get ready to surf that wave.”

‘We were delighted to see the Games be a success, but our job was to worry about what comes next’

TWO GLOBAL CITIES BY THE NUMBERS

How Tokyo and London measure up to each other in openness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tokyo</th>
<th>London</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average hours of sunshine per year</td>
<td>2,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passengers into major airport per year</td>
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<td>Number of international tourists per year</td>
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<td>Number of international students studying in the city</td>
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<td>Cost of 0.5 litres of draft domestic beer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of green space</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of step-free Metro/Underground stations</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>Cost of a 24-hour travel card</td>
<td>¥8,600</td>
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Open Tokyo
Eat your way around the world in Shibuya

Malaysia

Malay Asian Cuisine

You know you must be doing something right when your restaurant comes recommended by the former Malaysian PM. That honour was bestowed upon Malay Asian Cuisine, located on the second floor of a nondescript building on Araya-dori. The interior is quite sleek, with the walls providing a bit of contrast by virtue of being covered in posters of Malaysian tourism campaigns, information on different regions and their local cuisines, and food selfies held at the restaurant. We tiptoed their nasi ayam (chicken rice), which came with cucumbers and three different sauces on the side and was bang on in the flavour department. The scrumptious nasi goreng kampong ('village' fried rice) was definitely spicy – piquant for a Japanese palate, slightly toned down from a fiery Malay streetside version – and the flavours of the seafood, vegetables and fried egg blended beautifully. Street food fanatics will be excited to see lesser-known staples like murtabak also featured on the menu.

Czech Republic

Sedmíkraský

Named after the Czech 1960s cult film (known as ‘Daisies’ in English), this cosy restaurant serves up pretty authentic Czech fare on a quiet street in Fugan-cho. The owner is a Japanese lady who took a liking to the Czech Republic and decided to bring a little bit of it to Tokyo. The interior is a definite throwback to central European establishments, with its yellowish walls and dark wooden beams, whereas the crockery and tin of pickles and sauerkraut will probably make many Češi feel as if they’ve just entered their grandmother’s home. It helps to come prepared with some knowledge of Czech cuisine, as the majority of the menu is in Czech – so you could just ask the owner for today’s recommendations. Try the classic ‘vepřo-knedlo-zelo’, a plate filled with just the right amount of roast pork, sauerkraut, bread dumplings (‘knedlíky’) and gravy, all of which were surprisingly light on the stomach. Alternatively, opt for their chunky ‘guláš’ (goulash), which is closer to a filling stew than its soupy Hungarian counterpart. Finish with a piece of ‘sáblemý závin’ (strudel) or ‘koláč’ (fruit tart) and course, don’t forget to order a glass of ‘pivo’ (beer).

Vietnam

Hoang Ngan, Shibuya Bunkamura-dori

Pass through the bustling of Bunkamura-dori and climb up to the sixth floor of an average-looking building to Vietnamese cuisine heaven. Chef Pham from Hoang Ngan is a self-proclaimed connoisseur of Vietnamese food. Upon entering the restaurant, you’ll have a hard time finding anywhere else in Tokyo – no wonder they’re often hired to do catering for the embassy. Don’t miss the chicken soup, which comes with chewy rice noodles soaked in chicken soup and topped with juicy chicken slices for a real mouthful of bird. One of the dishes recommended by the restaurant is a Vietnamese-style okonomiyaki (Bánh xèo) – a rice omelette served with chilli sauce that matches the sweetness of the roast onion and juicy prawns packed into the dough. The rice paper used at Hoang Ngan is strained one by one in the kitchen, so your spring rolls are sure to taste fresher than anywhere else in Shibuya.

What I like best about Shibuya is its multi-cultural atmosphere. You can find a unique variety of restaurants, including Vietnamese of course. Some are run by Vietnamese people, others by Japanese. Incidentally comes across a Vietnamese café that appears to be a local operation – it’s very interesting, so I would like to visit it soon.

Shibuya satisfies all your senses. All at once, and in a very Shibuya kind of way. Your eyes can(range away from the masses and the people passing on the other. The otherworldly atmosphere energises you; the tiny stores just stop away calmly. Shibuya also teaches you with the inviting smell of yakitori, feeds you and touches your heart. You feel like you’d rather stay to leave, but still do – because your senses are being stimulated in such an intense way.

One More Pick!

Asei Mat Yacob, Counsellor, economic & technical co-operation at the Embassy of Malaysia

One weekends, Asei likes to go strolling around little Tokyo and Shibuya, where people come to enjoy their holidays and hang out at a park or café. Diakanyam 5-5B, with its lush and fancy atmosphere, is his favourite. It’s very to know that there is a bookshop behind the café, which includes a good range of English-language titles, art books, antique tomes and magazine back issues.

When you think of dining out, Shibuya is the nicest area you’ll find a variety of cuisines and atmospheres. Usually like that many of the restaurants here are foreign-friendly and have a unique atmosphere. I often go to the Daikanyama for a quick and reasonable priced lunch, but there are many upscale options too – you’ll never get bored. I think Shibuya truly is a symbol of Tokyo, always filled with the energy of different generations from all over the world.

Marcel Sauer, Counsellor, commercial and economic section at the Embassy of the Czech Republic

When Sauer goes out with his kids, the Monti-Bell store located near Toy’s Hand is one of his destinations. As his outdoor gear shop, people can try climbing the 12-metre-high rock wall every day from 1pm-4pm. One 15-minute go costs ¥800 (¥600 for children), and anyone over four feet tall welcomes. For more rock-climbing action and a decent skateboarding spot, visit nearby Miyashita Park.

Pham Quang Hung, First secretary at the Embassy of the S.R. of Vietnam

Yoyogi Park is another one of Hung’s favourite spots. Like a lush oasis in the middle of crowded Harajuku, it’s filled with people strolling, walking their dogs, having picnics, playing with kids, checking out the international array of food stalls and so on. It’s a perfect place for a Vietnamese-style picnic, eating, drinking, and enjoying the sunset in the spring, while colourful roses welcome you in May.

AN ESSENTIAL TOKYO tourist destination, Shibuya is also one of the most international districts in the city and boasts a very diverse restaurant scene. One of the most effective ways of finding out where to go for less familiar flavours is posing the question to the relevant country’s local representatives. That’s why we asked a few employees at embassies in the neighbourhood to name their respective recommendations. Here’s what they came back with...
Always open to everyone

Although Shibuya is famed as a hub for street culture and youthful energy, the area is now preparing to better cater to visitors of all ages and nationalities. Here are some useful tips for making the most of the city with your family:

**1. Climb the Miyamasuzaka hill without using stairs**

- After alighting at Shibuya Station on the Tokyu Toyoko line, you’ll find yourself on the fifth basement floor. Take elevator C or D (depending on which side you got off) from the middle of the platform directly to the ticket gates of Exit 15 on the third basement floor, which is connected to the Shibuya Hikarie building.

**2. Look out for this point – you can go straight through Shibuya Hikarie's network of escalators and elevators, collectively known as 'Urban Core'. Make your way up to the second floor.**

**3. Step off the escalators and walk straight ahead to pass through the building to the other side.**

**4. Once outside, take the nearest pavement along the Hikarie building and you’ll soon be on Anyama-dori, right on the top of Miyamasuzaka – one of the longest and steepest slopes in the neighbourhood.**

**GOAL!**

**COSMO PLANETARIUM SHIBUYA**

Escape the hustle and bustle and admire thousands of stars in urban surroundings at this planetarium, which gives viewers the feeling of being right under the stars. With topics ranging from space exploration to life and culture on Earth, it offers enjoyment for visitors of all ages. A special programme for children is offered from 11am and noon on weekends and holidays; the 30-minute participatory show will teach your young ‘uns about stars and the cosmos. If you’re planning to visit after work, aim for the 7pm programme. Maximum capacity is 120 people.

- Shibuya Cultural Center Owada 12F, 23-25 Sakuragaokacho, Shibuya (Shibuya Station). 12noon-8pm (weekends 12am-4pm), closed Mon (Tue if Mon is a holiday). ¥600, ¥300 for children of elementary and junior high school age, free for children of pre-school age (¥300 if they need their own seat).

**SHIBUYA HIKARIE**

A high-rise shopping complex housing classy boutiques, restaurants and an arts complex, Shibuya Hikarie is particularly popular among discerning urbanites. The restaurant selection includes the family-friendly Flowers Common, which features relax, high-chairs for kids, children’s menus and plentiful dessert and soft drink options. Restrooms on each floor are equipped with nursing facilities. After your meal, head up to the 11th-floor Sky Lobby to admire panoramic views of Tokyo. A spacious lobby also fits for strollers and toddlers, it offers vistas of moving trains and cars speeding away on the Metropolitan Expressway, plus rare glimpses of the evolving city underground.

- 2-25-1 Shibuya (Shibuya Station)

**SHIBUYA CHIKAMICHI LOUNGE**

Upon arrival in Shibuya, you might want to freshen up a bit before heading out to explore. Besides bathrooms, this very convenient and spacious lounge near exits 3 and 4 of the station offers dressing rooms for men, powder rooms for women (designed by photographer and director Mika Ninagawa), a nursing room and a playroom for kids. It even has free Wi-fi and English-speaking concierges, who are happy to help out if you get lost or need to store your baggage ($600 per bag for one day).

- Shibuya Station Exit 4’s rear area: 3rd and 4th Shibuya 109. The information desk is open from 10am to 8pm.

**SHIBUYA FUREAI BOTANICAL CENTRE**

Although this hidden greenhouse in Shibuya is said to be the smallest botanical facility in Japan, it still houses around 500 kinds of tropical plants, including bananas, meat-eating baddies and aquatic plants. At the event space, seasonal happenings are held for kids and families who’d like to re-establish their connection with nature. The big pool of fallen leaves is one of the most popular attractions in winter, while firefly-watching parties and beetle games are held in summer. Surrounded by abundant greenery, this calm and warm spot is a true oasis; families and even some office workers come here to enjoy a quiet lunch.

- 2-25-37 Higashi, Shibuya (Shibuya Station). 12noon-4pm, closed Mon (Tue if Mon is a holiday). ¥900 (free for children of pre-school age, seniors 60 or older, elementary and junior high school students in Shibuya Ward, and people with a disability certificate).

**Farmer’s Market @ UNU**

Farmer’s Market @ UNU is one of Tokyo’s longest running and best-attended markets. Taking place every weekend in front of the United Nations University, this one always attracts a knowledgeable crowd. Over 70 shops gather, and organic and local fare including vegetables, jam, honey and fresh juice, as well as art and crafts, is readily available every Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm. The farmers themselves are happy to provide details about their wares, making the market a great option for parents hoping to sneakily educate their kids. There’s also a nice selection of food trucks every time.

- *In front of UN University, 5-31-78 Inagashira, Shibuya (Shibuya, Dainandori stations).

**Superb spots for kids and families**

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The mores and manners that make Tokyo tick

ENJOY A CLEAN GETAWAY

Recognised by UK-based consultancy Skytrax as the World’s Cleanest Airport in 2016, Haneda – the city’s more convenient hub – can feel almost freakishly spotless at times. This is, above all, thanks to the 300-plus cleaners who work here throughout the day, mopping up spilled drinks and catching stray plastic bags before most travellers even notice their existence. While waiting for others to get in, keep one finger on the Open button. When ready, ask others where they’re headed and press their floor number for them. When someone is getting out, hold Open again to make sure they don’t get caught between the closing doors. Such elevator etiquette has long been expected of all Tokyoites, but lift manufacturers have now also started paying more attention to the accessibility aspects of their products. You’ll often find an additional batch of buttons inserted at a height convenient for wheelchair users, while various accessories meant for emergency situations are being installed as well – some companies are even considering adding disposable toilets (essentially seats with specially made plastic bags underneath) to their lifts. They’re far less effective for actually preventing illness in the mask-wearer, but many healthy urbanites snap one on anyway – be it to warm their chin, hide a face after a long night out or fond of and thus stop your germs from flying all over your colleagues. Besides the usual white masks sold at any convenience store and 7-11 shop in Japan, you can choose from super-comfy soft ones made of polyurethane, ‘3D’ masks that adapt to your facial features, and funny but still functional masks decorated with everything from cat whiskers to zombie chops. Peak mask season is usually late winter and spring, when the twin terrors of influenza and cedar pollen menace most city-dwellers.

SQUEEZE IN A DRINK

A type of no-frills watering hole dating back to the time when Tokyo was still known as Edo, the humble stand bar continues to thrive and remains a common sight in virtually any neighbourhood – from the working-class to the very fancy. Besides the cheap drinks and down-to-earth pub grub, the key to this wonderfully simple style of boozer’s popularity is the array of unspoken rules that apply in all ‘tachinomi’ (literally ‘stand and drink’) joints. Although most of these are simply common-sense guidelines – don’t go in big groups, bring some cash (not cards), don’t behave badly – there is one dictate that perfectly captures the communal ethos of the standbar. Where the place gets packed, you’re expected to share tables or squeeze close to your fellow imbibers, all in order to give newly arrived patrons just enough counter space to put their glass down. They say a tachinomi can only get crowded, never full – kind of like a Tokyo commuter train.

FINDERS – KEEPERS

With its controversial move out to Toyosu stalling for now, Tokyo’s legendary Tsukiji Market is as busy as ever: around 42,000 people step through its gates every day; while many more stick to wandering the streets of the surrounding Outer Market in search of marine delicacies. Crowds like that result in plenty of dropped belongings, practically all of which are found and deposited at Tsukiji’s own lost and found office. Outside its door you’ll find a whiteboard listing the day’s catch: lettuce, salmon, a credit card, a driver’s licence… So if you ever happen to lose your phone, wallet or even a stick of chikuwa fish paste, chances are you’ll get it back. Just make sure to ask for it sooner rather than later, as perishables are only stored for three days. And if you see any lost treasure scattered around the market, you know where to take it.

LIFT YOUR SPIRITS

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DISCLAIMER

For more praiseworthy manners, customs and etiquette, check out the Tokyo Good Manners Project at goodmanners.tokyo/en

LOCAL INSIGHTS

Promotional feature

The mores and manners that make Tokyo tick

WE NEVER GET TIRED OF hearing both newly arrived Tokyoites and tourists marvel at how clean, polite and well-functioning our dear metropolis is. After all, living in one of the world’s safest, most convenient, yet dynamic cities is something to cherish. But this doesn’t happen by accident: it takes constant effort by us all to keep the city running smoothly, and such effort often starts coming naturally as soon as you’ve lived in Tokyo for longer than a few months. Here we highlight some of the people, customs and manners that are essential parts of Tokyo life but hardly ever get the attention they deserve.

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Where to eat in... Ryogoku

**KOKUGIDO**

The shop on the ground floor of this venerable sweets dealer, not far from the station, sells traditional snacks and sumo merchandise, while the café upstairs offers truly offbeat treats like bean paste coffee and anmitsu desserts with ice cream. Owned by a fellow obsessed with anko bean paste, who also crafts rare delicacies like red bean crackers, Kokugido is the ideal spot for you to get your bearings before heading out to explore the neighbourhood. Don’t miss the rice cracker ice cream, made by mixing fragrant ‘senbei’ into a supremely milky base.

*à 2-17-3 Ryogoku, Sumida (Ryogoku Station). 03 3631 3856. Daily 10am-8pm.*

**TOMOEGETA**

There is no official definition of the dish known as chanko nabe, but it refers to the protein-rich stew eaten by sumo wrestlers. It makes sense, then, that you’ll find a cluster of chanko nabe restaurants near the Ryogoku Kokugikan sumo stadium. One of these is the hugely popular Tomoegata, which was built by a master of the Tomozuna sumo stable and is actually on the stable premises. Order their signature dish, Kunimiyama Chanko, which is prepared in a lightly salted chicken broth and includes fresh sardines that are brought in daily from Tsukiji and minced for the hot pot. In addition, they also serve chanko with beef, chicken, salmon and scallops – all with serving sizes to satisfy the heartiest eaters.

*à 2-17-6 Ryogoku, Sumida (Ryogoku Station). 03 3632 5600. Daily 11.30am-2pm, 5pm-11pm (last orders 10pm).*

**CRAZY CAFE BLANK**

Located in a residential street 15 minutes’ walk north of the station, this comfy neighbourhood café is worth the trek. Housed in a former factory that’s been turned into a light-filled, stylish space, it’s famed for its lattes, made with high-grade milk from the Nakahora farm up in Iwate, and for an unwavering commitment to fair-trade, organic beans. Those partial to more straightforward coffee may want to order an espresso, pulled on a shiny Marzocco machine.

*à 1-35-8 Ishiwara, Sumida (Ryogoku Station). 03 6284 1995. facebook.com/crazycafeblank. 9am-7pm, closed Tue.*

**MOMONJIYA**

Deliberately difficult to find – look for the boar statue on the wall above the entrance and you’ll know you’re in the right place – Momonjiya was founded in 1718, when eating meat was still taboo. A pharmacy back then, the place now specialises in boar meat and other game dishes. The delicious shishi nabe (boar hotpot) is a highlight, but do try out the venison sashimi and bear soup too. For the whole nine yards, go for the prix fixe game dinner (¥7,140), which includes all of the above plus appetisers and deep-fried venison that goes nicely with a cup of sake or shochu.

*à 1-10-2 Ryogoku, Sumida (Ryogoku Station). 03 3631 5596. 5pm-9pm, closed Sun (open daily during sumo tournaments).*

**GYOZA KAIKAN BANDAISAN**

Satisfying locals’ dumpling cravings for well over half a century now, this Ryogoku classic deals in thick, simple and delicious – you guessed it – gyoza. Big eaters may want to take part in the shop’s ‘gyoza challenge’ – any man who eats 100 of their signature pan-fried treats within an hour can walk out of the shop without paying a yen, while women need to finish 50 gyoza in 60 minutes to receive the same treatment. But beware: failure to complete the mission will result in a fine of ¥18,000. Less gluttonous gourmands can take their time to savour the Bandai Ramen, a veg-filled minestrone swimming in a soup made with both shoyu and miso.

*à 3-24-2 Ryogoku, Sumida (Ryogoku Station). 03 3634 0456. Mon-Fri 11.30am-2pm, 5pm-10.30pm, Sun 11.30am-1.30pm, 4pm-8.30pm. closed Sat & hols.*
Park life

**Eating & Drinking**

**Park life**

Now one of Tokyo’s most popular destinations, Yoyogi Park has a colourful history. It was the site of the first successful powered aircraft flight in Japan and a former army parade ground, as well as the location of the main athlete’s village during the 1964 Olympics. These days it’s also a hangout spot for some of the city’s joyful eccentrics, who practice anything from juggling to cosplay among the geraniums. About a 20-minute walk from the park is casual eatery Bondi Coffee Sandwiches. Inspired by Sydney’s biggest neighbour hood, complete with laid-back atmosphere and easy-going staff, the spot will soon have you daydreaming of Down Under. The Instagrammable specialty coffees, smoothies, sandwiches and freshly made breads are perfect picnic fodder. Close to the Yoyogi-chihan entrance of the park, and away from the madling crowds, is Arms. Inspired by the classic hamburger joints of the US, this parkside café serves a wide selection of homemade burgers, sandwiches, hot dogs, salads and cakes.

**YOYOGI PARK + BONDI COFFEE SANDWICHES + ARMS**

**MEGURO’S PARKS + KIWI KITCHEN + JUBILEE COFFEE AND ROASTER**

To start your outing in the Meguro area, pick up a sandwich, salad or wrap from gourmet food company Kiwi Kitchen. All items are freshly made each day and the menu changes frequently. For desert, try the generously sized banana salad or wrap from gourmet food company Kiwi Kitchen. To start your outing in the Meguro area, pick up a sandwich, salad or wrap from gourmet food company Kiwi Kitchen. All items are freshly made each day and the menu changes frequently. For dessert, try the generously sized banana

**SHIBA KOEN + LE PAIN QUOTIDIEN**

Japan’s oldest park is built around the celebrated Zojoji, the main temple of the Jodo sect of Japanese Buddhism in the Kanto region. With lush greenery and beautiful cherry trees, the spacious park is an oasis of peace in the concrete jungle. Catch a glimpse of nearby Tokyo Tower from the many footpaths or sit under the ancient ginkgo tree, a listed National Treasure, near the entrance. The park is at its best during hanami (cherry blossom-viewing) season, when it really gets into full swing with families and intoxicated salarymen alike enjoying the fine weather and quintessential Japanese festivities. Just around the corner, about a five-minute walk away, is Belgian bakery and restaurant Le Pain Quotidien. First opened in Brussels in 1990, it has 200 locations around the world, all offering a dependable combination of rich coffee and freshly baked pastries, bread and sandwiches – the crunchy prosciutto sarnie with rucola is a particular favourite.

**ARISUGAWA PARK + LUKE’S LOBSTER + AND THE FRIET**

A park like no other, Arisugawa once belonged to feudal lord Minonokami Nambu who used it as an urban villa. Just a five-minute walk from Hiroo Station and across from the National Archeology Import Supermarket, this tranquil retreat is built into a small hill and incorporates different tiers, streams, ponds and wooded areas, crisscrossed with stone and dirt walkways. A great bird-spotting spot, it’s especially beautiful in spring with blossoming plum trees and water lilies. En route stop by Luke’s Lobster for famous crab and shrimp rolls, as well as crab booties. Established in New York’s East Village in 2009 by Maine lobsterman Luke Holden, the seafood shack serves simple and affordable dishes with superior ingredients sourced from sustainable fisheries. Since its opening in spring 2015, Japan’s first branch in Harajuku’s Cat Street still attracts extraordinarily long queues. Avoid the crowds at the less conspicuous Hiroo shop, and treat yourself to grilled or fried lobster exclusive to the Hiroo menu. Just across the road is And the Friet, where the humble french fry has been given a facelift. Choose from six varieties of potato, some of them imported from Belgium, as well as different cuts, homemade salts and dips for a potato experience like no other.

**SHIBA KOEN + LE PAIN QUOTIDIEN**

**SETAGAYA PARK + NOZY COFFEE**

A haven for kids and parents alike, Setagaya Park houses an outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, playgrounds and a large outdoor gym. It’s a great place to let off steam in the fresh air and enjoy a picnic lunch. For a change from the usual fried fare, try the delicious focaccia with caramelized onions and mozzarella cheese. The focaccia is baked in a wood-fired oven and is the perfect way to end your day in the park. Setagaya Park is also home to the beautiful Setagaya Park Zoo, which offers a variety of animal exhibits, including a large pond with waterfowl. There is also a children’s play area and a petting zoo with pony rides, which are great for younger children. Overall, Setagaya Park is a wonderful place to spend a few hours with the family, as it offers something for everyone. 

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Kimono cool

Kirsty Bouwers guides you into the world of the traditional garment

For Classic, High-Quality Items: Ginza Kimono Aoki

Exactly what you'd expect from a Ginza establishment, Kimono Aoki exudes serenity and class. They offer a large variety of obi and tend more towards the classic and traditional (although we found some stunning, modern patterns too). You can walk in feeling like a slob and walk out as a proper kimono-sporting, Ginza lady-who-lunches.

9-2 Puwano Bldg 1F, 1-2-2 Ginza, Chuo-ku (Ginza Station), 03 2564 7171. Mon-Sat 12noon-8pm, Sun 12noon-1pm.

For Bold, Showa Look: Kimono Hazuki

Hitomi Ito is determined to keep the 1930s, Ito explains. ‘Whereas younger women) or ‘tomesode’ (for unmarried, women) is reserved for formal occasions, and early Showa periods (1868-1926), it’s better if you’re attending a wedding.
The obi (belt) should reflect the formality of the kimono too; simply put, anything brocade or with gold and silver threads is formal, whereas base colours in a simple fabric are casual. For coordination, Ito recommends picking an obi that matches one or more colours of the patterns on your kimono, rather than the base colour, for a sleek whole.
Top off your ensemble with two small cloth which keeps things in place and presents a pop of colour between the top of the obi and your kimono, while the latter is aspeted around the obi.

The kimono is a huge part of how the world sees Japan. In virtually every Oriental depiction of the country, kimono-clad women will be doing the rounds, and to this day, it’s synonymous with the ideals (and stereotypes) of this island nation. For most average Japanese people today, however, kimonos are often seen as off-limits or as relics of the past – adorning, complex arrangement of clothing that they may only have worn as a kid, if ever. Hitomi is determined to keep the tradition alive. A kimono, or kimono expert. It wears mainly kimono – she actually threw out most of her Western-style clothing a few years ago – and treasures the clothing passed down in her family, in addition to shopping for beautiful, pre-loved garments at secondhand shops. ‘Antique’ kimono roughly refers to garments from the Meiji, Taisho and early Showa periods (1868-1960’s). Ito explains. ‘Whereas recycled kimonos are anything from mid-late Showa (1960’s) onwards.

If you want to buy a kimono, the key thing is thinking about when you would wear it’, she says. Kimono aren’t exactly like other kinds of clothing, which you can just buy without knowing when you’ll wear it. Seasonal goods are placed to start. In winter (October to March), deeper, bolder colours with seasonal flowers are popular. ‘At the end of the day, what matters most is what you like and what you feel comfortable in.’

Kimono are very reasonable, with many kimonos going for under ¥10,000. The tatami room is a colourful treasure chest, with each kimono, obi and haori (kimono jacket) more vivid than the next. Kimono are carried a great range of geometric, less traditional and bold patterns. Check out the water-friendly haori and accessories too, which are just as dazzling.

FOR HAIR ACCESSORIES AND CHILDREN’S KIMONO: Oedo Kazuko

A stone’s throw from Gallery Kawano, Oedo Kazuko is a swanky shop in an unassuming basement along Omotesando. If you’re looking for a vivid kimono with traditional prints, this is the place to be, while their small patches of kimono fabrics are popular too. They also carry a large range of hair accessories and children’s kimonos, so you’ll definitely be able to find something to suit your taste and needs here – with prices matching the quality.

9 Omotesando Bldg B1F, 2-29-3 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku (Omotesando Station), 03 3440 2920. Mon-Wed, Fri-Sat 11am-7pm, Sun, Sat 12noon-7pm, closed Mon.

FOR VINTAGE SPOTS:

Ginza Kunitsuna

Set in the backstreets of Omotesando, Gallery Kawano has a dazzling selection of obi, some of which are almost a century old. Their kimono and haori selection leans towards the traditional in terms of patterns and colours, but – unusually – they also carry larger sizes, making it perfect for taller women. Check out their range of kimono fabric too: they have everything from simple-patterned silks to elaborately printed ones, and the bags with different fabrics bunched together make a great gift. Unlike most other places on this list, they have English signage to help you distinguish what is what.

6 Flats Omotesando 102, 4-4-9 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku (Omotesando Station), 03 3478 1285. Daily 11am-6pm.

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Kimono are very reasonable, with many kimonos going for under ¥10,000. The tatami room is a colourful treasure chest, with each kimono, obi and haori (kimono jacket) more vivid than the next. Kimono are carried a great range of geometric, less traditional and bold patterns. Check out the water-friendly haori and accessories too, which are just as dazzling.

FOR HAIR ACCESSORIES AND CHILDREN’S KIMONO: Oedo Kazuko

A stone’s throw from Gallery Kawano, Oedo Kazuko is a swanky shop in an unassuming basement along Omotesando. If you’re looking for a vivid kimono with traditional prints, this is the place to be, while their small patches of kimono fabrics are popular too. They also carry a large range of hair accessories and children’s kimonos, so you’ll definitely be able to find something to suit your taste and needs here – with prices matching the quality.

9 Omotesando Bldg B1F, 2-29-3 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku (Omotesando Station), 03 3440 2920. Mon-Wed, Fri-Sat 11am-7pm, Sun, Sat 12noon-7pm, closed Mon.

FOR VINTAGE SPOTS:

Ginza Kunitsuna

Set in the backstreets of Omotesando, Gallery Kawano has a dazzling selection of obi, some of which are almost a century old. Their kimono and haori selection leans towards the traditional in terms of patterns and colours, but – unusually – they also carry larger sizes, making it perfect for taller women. Check out their range of kimono fabric too: they have everything from simple-patterned silks to elaborately printed ones, and the bags with different fabrics bunched together make a great gift. Unlike most other places on this list, they have English signage to help you distinguish what is what.

6 Flats Omotesando 102, 4-4-9 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku (Omotesando Station), 03 3478 1285. Daily 11am-6pm.
Five things you can’t miss at Laforet Harajuku this spring

Some say that there are no more fashionable kids in Harajuku, but we dare you to stand by that statement after exploring Laforet Harajuku. Setting trends since it opened in 1978, its most recent renewal has the shopping centre roaring forward with a fiercely original collection of over 130 boutiques from Japanese and international brands: it’s an organised mishmash of subculture, high fashion, DIY and (trendier) everyday looks. It all adds up to an astonishingly bold crash course in just how fun clothes can be. Here are five highlights.

1. GENJIYAMA TERRACE (2.5F)
   While its shops may point towards the future, Laforet’s new garden entrance celebrates the past. Named after a hill that once rose above the area, the Genjiyama Terrace is a calming blend of Japanese and European elements with greenery that includes weeping plum, agave, and squares of moss set against dark stone. Compared to the front entrance that faces Meiji-dori and a major intersection, the back entrance remains a refreshingly peaceful oasis (and prime Instagram location).

2. VIVIENNE WESTWOOD ANGLOMANIA (1F)
   As the design powerhouse that gave shape to the punk rock style pioneered by the Sex Pistols, it’s fitting that Vivienne Westwood Anglomania flanks Laforet’s front entrance. The size of the galactic orb logo outside the boutique is as ostentatious as the brand’s history; the steady crowds it draws are testament to Japan’s ongoing love affair with this British designer. Note the made-in-Japan items, available only here.

3. GR8 (2.5F)
   It feels like being in a top-level music video surrounded by brands including Yeezy and Off-White. GR8’s unconventional layout, killer lighting and thrum of electronic music combine to form one of the most remarkable shops at Laforet. Having opened a hole in the wall and installed a huge Japanese-style cypress entrance for this renewal, Mitsuhiro Kubo’s ‘select shop’ now blends in seamlessly with the new Genjiyama Terrace.

   ‘This time, both Laforet and GR8 are highlighting the gap between traditional Japanese styles and high fashion,’ says Kubo. ‘GR8 is marking its 12th anniversary this year, which means we’ve been around for an entire Chinese zodiac cycle – an occasion that’s led to a rethink of our sensibilities.’ ‘Thinking of clothes as “living creatures”, Kubo conjures up inspiring lines that continue to attract fashionistas from all over the world. In our globalised age, fashion doesn’t have borders. I believe that Tokyo is the centre of fashion in Asia, and hope to satisfy customers coming from all over the region,’ says Kubo.

4. MADSTORE UNDERCOVER (1F)
   Clean lines and bold, contrasting colours dominate Jun Takahashi’s ground-floor flagship store. Celebrated as a pioneer of Japanese street fashion, Madstore is home to Takahashi’s iconic U jackets and playful accessories including the UFO Coffee mugs and small clutches shaped like painting palettes, all of which pop against the red of the shop. Madstore also carries a combination of merchandise from Takahashi’s JohnUndercover and SueUndercover labels, in addition to a rotating selection of goods from the main brand. Their famous ‘hamburger lump’, which sold out in an instant when last on the market, is also on display.

5. GUZMAN Y GOMEZ AND ONIGIRI STAND GYU! (2F)
   Even the most dedicated of shoppers need to eat, and Laforet’s Good Meal Market on the second floor is a prime space to recharge. For the famished, Guzman y Gomez is an Australian chain serving Mexican food, complete with vegetarian-friendly options. If you can tackle a colossal burrito, order the large size and prepare not to eat again for the rest of the day. Those looking for a light snack should mosey over to Gyu!, an onigiri stand with sizable portions of handmade rice balls, miso soup, and an adorable ‘onigiripetit’ menu that offers unique flavours. Can’t decide? Have both. There’s open seating between the restaurants and down an adjacent corridor.

You have worked as the main visual art director for Laforet Harajuku since 2015. Could you briefly explain the visual image for 2017? How is it related to the renewal?
   I wanted to see what would happen if I changed the conventional material of fashion to something edible, such as cheese. The main visuals are about conveying the overall attitude and character of Laforet Harajuku. ‘Renewal’ is not just a physical thing – it’s also about creating new ways of thinking about fashion and culture.

COMMENT FROM STEVE NAKAMURA
www.laforet.ne.jp
Enjoy a coffee mid shopping spree at these supremely convenient shop-café hybrids. By Shiori Kotaki

WE ALL NEED A PICK-ME-UP: during a lengthy shopping spree, but finding a suitable spot for a break can be harder than you think – especially in Tokyo, where most of the precious seats at coffee shops tend to be occupied by sleep-deprived students and nomad workers. Enter the shop-café hybrid. An increasing number of stylish retailers now run their own in-store cafés, some of which also function as hands-on showrooms for tableware, furniture and other home accessories. Trying before you buy has never tasted so good.

1LDK Apartments

1LDK offers a selection of simple yet refined clothing, shoes and bags, which appeal to fashionistas of all generations. They also sell tableware and other household items, which you can try out in the café space set up on the right side of the shop. The international menu includes burritos and curries, with all dishes available for takeout, but if you have the time it’s worth hanging around: weekday lunches come with unlimited trips to the excellent salad bar.

→ 1-7-13 Kamimeguro, Meguro (Nakameguro Station). 03 5728 7140. 1ldkshop.com. Shop open daily 12noon-8pm, café 11.30am-11.30pm.

Sippo

Worth the 20-minute trip west from Shinjuku on the Chuo line, this antique furniture and homeware boutique in Mitaka appears a little overstocked: what doesn’t fit on the shelves is usually displayed on the street outside. But there’s treasure to be found, and the perseverant can find everything from designer tableware, including some exquisite Hasami pottery, to towels, postcards and spices. Bargain hunters should stay outside: the open-air displays feature secondhand plates, cups and more, with prices starting as low as ¥50. Once the digging gets too much, step into the café and sit down for some Japanese-style curry, a sandwich or the daily lunch special. Wi-fi is free, and the antique clocks on the walls make for a bit of added entertainment.


Tegamisha 2nd Story

Another hybrid found far out west, Tegamisha is hidden away near Shibasaki Station on the Keio line and deals mainly in original stationery and curious, often random, knickknacks. Look out for the cute postcards and pouches, or opt for some kawaii socks to add a little colour to your outfit. At lunchtime, the adjoining café turns out superb sandwiches, made with bread baked on the premises, while evenings see a lineup of old-school Japanese favourites including ‘napolitan’ spaghetti take over the menu. The ground floor is occupied by Books and Coffee Tegamisha, a coffee stand that also features a hand-picked selection of books (mainly in Japanese, sorry).

→ 2F, 1-17-5 Kikunodai, Chofu (Shibasaki Station). 042 426 4383. tegamisha.com. 12noon-11pm (last café orders at 10pm), closed Mon (Tue if Mon is a holiday).

Camera

Cakes and cookies and fine leather items make unlikely, but welcome, bedfellows at this cute little shop, located on central Kokusai-dori in Kuramae. As you enter, take a right to find Numeri brand products including bags, wallets and hair bands, or head left for delicious handmade cookies and pastries courtesy of local baker Miwako Naka. As the artisanal leatherware comes with quite hefty price tags, we’re very thankful for the opportunity to spend a few quiet moments over a piece of heavenly carrot cake pondering whether to splurge.

→ Okamatsu Bldg 1F, 4-21-8 Kuramae, Taito (Kuramae Station). 03 5825 4170. camera1010.tokyo. 11am-6pm, closed Mon.
A woman’s work

Apuko Takahashi meets ‘living national treasure’ Komanosuke Takemoto, who has dedicated her life to the art of ‘gidayu-bushi’

Throughout the history of performing arts around the world, women have often been pushed away from the stage. In Elizabethan England young male actors would play the women in Shakespeare’s plays, and in Japan women in kabuki were outlawed by the Edo government, thus giving rise to the ‘onnagata’ – male actors specialising in female roles. But there is one branch of performing arts in which a few determined women have survived. ‘Gidayu-bushi’, included in some forms of kabuki theatre, is the chant, shamisen-accompanied narration for traditional ‘bunraku’ puppet theatre and its forerunner ‘ningyo joruri’. Gidayu is performed by the ‘tayu’ (storyteller), who conveys the thoughts, speeches and emotional landscapes of all the characters on stage, regardless of gender. Women were first allowed to perform this role in the late Edo period, while during the subsequent Meiji period (1868-1912) they rose to status not unlike that of today’s pop stars, with even the Japanese literary class falling for their charms.

The premier storyteller in the ‘joryu gidayu’ school, it was decided that I should go to Osaka [a centre for the artform], they were kind enough to me a prodigy, so in my third year of junior high school, it was decided that I should go to Osaka and study under a master there.

Komanosuke eventually had the chance to study under tenth-generation puppetry master Wakayaotoyokonosuke Takemoto, who then asked his protégé Shimanosuke Takemoto to teach her. Both men were famed tayu revered in bunraku circles, and training with them was no walk in the park, Komanosuke remembers how his master Harukoma Takemoto and mother-in-law, both of whom also lived in the same house, she often struggled with the demands of housework and child-rearing while also looking after her long-term master Harukoma Takemoto and mother-in-law. ‘If I were a man, or if I had not married, my life would have turned out to be something of no consequence. I think that’s how it left untouched in form. But on the other hand, the intuition and imagination of a person beauty, must be left untouched. I believe that true master, regardless of gender, can sound feminine if the character is a woman, and masculine if the character is a man. So it is very important to first of all forget who you are, and then go ahead to create the artistic illusion. That is where the personality of the character first emerges, so I definitely don’t think it’s easy to understand or play the woman’s part just because I’m a woman.’

Though she discarded her gender when it came to art and devoted herself to training, Komanosuke did play the part of a wife in real life. Scrambling to combine housework and child-rearing while also looking after her long-term master Harukoma Takemoto and mother-in-law, both of whom also lived in the same house, she often struggled with the demands of being a woman. ‘Gidayu is not performed very frequently, so you can’t make a living doing it. That did consider giving up my work! I’m married!’

To this day, Komanosuke’s life is itself the story of Her art. A famous tea vessel, or any object of beauty, must be left untouched. I believe that in the same way, the traditional arts must be left untouched in form. But on the other hand, the intuition and imagination of a person who has devoted herself completely to the art must be left untouched in form, she says. ‘If I were a man, I would have turned out to be something different. But I have arrived at a point where, at every performance, I must act as if gender was of no consequence. I think that’s how it has been for most women at the forefront of traditional arts.’
THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MASAMICHI KATAYAMA: LIFE IS HARD... LET'S GO SHOPPING

THE ART OF DISNEY – THE MAGIC OF ANIMATION
Get ready to nourish your inner child at this exhibition dedicated to all things Disney, as Odaiba’s Mikanaka is displaying over 450 animation sketches and storyboards related to films from the old timer ‘Steamboat Willy’ to new fare including ‘Moana’ and ‘Frozen’. The history of The House of Mouse is synonymous with that of the latest technologies in the field, and ‘The Magic of Animation’ guides your through this illustrious past by starting from flip-books and finishing in the world of 3D and CGI.

THE ART OF DISNEY – THE MAGIC OF ANIMATION

THE COSMOS IN A TEA BOWL
Subtitled ‘Transmitting a Secret Down the secrets of an art from generations through the method practised in Japan since antiquity, this exhibition might be of interest even for those unacquainted with all the intricacies of the tea ceremony. In the business of crafting teaware and related utensils since the 16th century, Raku and the globetrotting Ryan Gander, the Japanese potters and a Frenchman, a collector of antiques, furniture and contemporary art by the likes of Takashi Murakami and Ryan Gander, the globe-trotting Raku invite us to immerse ourselves in their world.

NEW ESSENTIAL EXHIBITIONS

ESSENTIAL EXHIBITIONS

NEW SHOWS TO SEE

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN DIGITAL WOODBLOCK PRINTS

EXHIBITIONS

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NEW ESSENTIAL EXHIBITIONS
THE SUMMER MONTHS are obviously when most of Japan’s big-time outdoor music festivals take place, but that’s not to say the spring season isn’t deserving of attention: the weather is generally very agreeable from April to June, the weather is generally very agreeable from April to June, and the small crowds are easier to navigate than at summer’s big-time parties, and you won’t be paying through the nose for the ticket. But the real draw is the passion: spring festivals tend to be less about attracting the maximum amount of visitors and more about keeping it real. Here are the best parties heading to the small side of summer.

**Rainbow Disco Club**

This combo event uniting music and art packed up and moved from Tokyo out to the Izu Peninsula, around two hours away by train, in 2015. That move paid off and this year’s edition. The set-up, which will neighbour the expansive Nihon-ji temple complex famed for its stone Buddha statues, promises to be as dramatic as the performances, which come courtesy of a lineup skewed towards ambient techno act System 7 and Croatian indie favourites like Never Young Beach and D.A.N.. Tokyo’s top-drawer Da.Vinci Kunoji, D3 Nori and Maro, and rapper duo Cypress Venom and Robert Toshio. Away from the music there will be film screenings and a wide range of workshops for both kids and adults, including ‘toy scout experiences’.

**The Star Festival**

Formerly held out by the water, on the Chiba side of Tokyo Bay, the annual Re:birth Festival moves a few kilometres inland to the dramatic surrounds of Mount Nokogiri for its 2017 edition. The set-up, which will neighbour the expansive Nihon-ji temple complex famed for its stone Buddha statues, promises to be as dramatic as the performances, which come courtesy of a lineup skewed towards the underground and the electronic. British ambient techno act System 7 and Croatian techno producer Peter Dov dov headline.

**Zipang**

Make the two-hour trip out to Shirahama Flower Park, perched on the southern edge of the Boso Peninsula in Chiba, for this all-night dance and art party which combines house and techno sets with video performances, live painting and a market – all right by the beach. Taking over the Master Blaster sound system will be familiar Tokyo favourites including Nobu and Killer Box. Consider picking up a ‘dormitory ticket’ that includes a stay at the park hostel and use of the open-air hot spring bath on the premises.

**The Camp Book**

Spend a musical weekend out in the lush forests of northern Karuizawa, where the expansive Nihon-ji temple complex famed for its stone Buddha statues, promises to be as dramatic as the performances, which come courtesy of a lineup skewed towards the underground and the electronic. British ambient techno act System 7 and Croatian techno producer Peter Dov dov headline.
Life under the tracks

Tokyo’s newfound fascination with eateries, bars and artsy spaces under elevated railway tracks is paying off big time. By Mari Hiratsuka

BACK IN THE DAY, the phrase ‘under the railway tracks’ was associated mainly with rows of cheap watering holes frequented by middle-aged ‘salarymen’ drowning their sorrows. But a recent rash of notable re-development efforts have led to the opening of clusters of restaurants, bars and even art galleries under viaducts in hip neighbourhoods like Nakameguro and Shimokitazawa, bustling old stereotypes into bits. Get ready to raise your glass to the sound of a train rumbling by and follow us on a tour of the city’s hottest under-stereotypes into bits. Get ready to raise your glass to the sound of a train rumbling by and follow us on a tour of the city’s hottest under-stereotypes into bits. Get ready to raise your glass to the sound of a train rumbling by and follow us on a tour of the city’s hottest under-stereotypes into bits. Get ready to raise your glass to the sound of a train rumbling by and follow us on a tour of the city’s hottest under-stereotypes into bits.

**NAKAMEGURO KOKASHITA**

Stretching for a total of 700m from the Meguro River across Yamanote in the direction of Yutenji, Kokashita opened in November 2016 and houses shops selling everything from books to wine, in addition to several noteworthy restaurants. Walking from the station towards Yutenji, you’ll come across an andalab-hopping strip composed of standing-only specialist sake bar Shin, yakitori grilled meat stall Jironmai, Niwaakaya Chosuke, an izakaya dedicated to udon noodles, and so on. Best of the lot is Sanon, an oden specialist from Nagoya, distinguished by the rather eye-catching, oversized stew pot sitting outside the entrance. The odon is superb, simmered in a chicken and vegetable stock noted for its full-bodied and rich taste. Closer to the river you’ll find the playful Pavilion, which is perfect for a romantic date. Enter through the ‘secret door’ and you’ll be welcomed by art from star duo Kohts Nawa and Tatuji Nishi. The restaurant even has its own currency, which feels a bit gimmicky but still fun and can also be used to buy flowers for that special someone.

*Straitdown for 13 minutes by train from Yurakucho Station. www.nakamegurokoukashita.jp.*

**SANAGI SHINJUKU**

Drawing on youthful energy, the colourful and fusion-minded Sanagi is an apt symbol for its international and diverse neighbourhood. Tucked in beneath the elevated Koshu Kaido highway next to Shinjuku Station, this space opened in December last year and is home to a bunch of fine boozers. Right at the entrance you’ll find Neo Tokyo Bar, a standing-only spot perfect for a quick drink and with Japanese craft beers on tap including Hitachino Nest’s Westen and Coedo shibukku. Further inside there’s a self-serve food area where you can fill up with small servings of a selection of noodle dishes, odon and sushi rolls. Sanagi hosts regular art exhibits, DJ performances and gigs, and is frequented by some of the city’s stars in waiting.

*1-3-3-3 Shinjuku, Shinjuku (Shinjuku Station). www-sanagi.tokyo. Shops 11am-9pm (until 8pm Sun & hols), restaurants 11am-11pm (until 9pm Sun & hols).*

**YURAKUCHO**

For a taste of Showa-era (1926-1989) life under the tracks, there’s no beating the overpass that links Yurakucho and Shinbashı stations. Known as ‘salaryman heaven’, this area is home to countless yakitori and tonkatsu (stewed pork) joints, standing-only bars, Chinese restaurants, tempura and sushi spots and even a German-style beer hall. Start out at the Hibiya exit of Yurakucho Station and head for Shin-Hinomoto, better known as Andy’s. In business for over 70 years, this izakaya is now run by third-generation English ‘master’ Andy, who serves up mean sashimi and grilled fish made from ingredients brought in fresh from Tsukiji every day. Next up is Matsuso, which you’ll find on the Shinbashı side of Harumi-dori. Cutting additives down to a minimum while turning the hospitality up to eleven, the staff at this unpretentious izakaya are as much part of the attraction as is their famed ‘nikudofu’ (a block of tofu topped with flavorful beef). For a more refined meal, book a seat at Sushi Daizen, where the only menu option is the omakase (chef’s selection, ¥7,000-¥8,000 depending on the day) but bringing your own drinks is fine. Service includes chilling your bottle for you.

*1-2-1-2 Hibiya, Chiyoda (Hibiya, Yurakucho stations). For a more refined meal, book a seat at Sushi Daizen, where the only menu option is the omakase (chef’s selection, ¥7,000-¥8,000 depending on the day) but bringing your own drinks is fine. Service includes chilling your bottle for you.*

**SHIMOKITAZAWA CAGE**

Rising up underneath the elevated railway tracks close to Shimokitazawa Station, Cage started business in summer 2016 and will be around until 2019, when something, well, more profitable is set to take its place. Until then, however, you can enjoy after-dark events including markets, food and drink festivals and family-friendly happenings. Right next to the cage that gives the place its name is casual food stall and stand bar Hub Long Vi Quan, which draws inspiration from the night markets of southeast Asia and offers a variety of exotic-sounding delicacies (try the bánh xèo, which is Vietnam’s answer to Osaka’s savoury okonomiyaki pancake and makes for a heavenly match with a beer or cocktail).

*7-3-1-2 Shimokita, Kita (Shimokitazawa Station). For a more refined meal, book a seat at Sushi Daizen, where the only menu option is the omakase (chef’s selection, ¥7,000-¥8,000 depending on the day) but bringing your own drinks is fine. Service includes chilling your bottle for you.*

**MAACH ECUTE KANDA MANSEIBASHI**

This curiously named complex opened at Kanda’s old Manseibashi Station in 2013 and is one of the best examples of conservation-focused under-the-tracks development. Located between Kanda and Ochanomizu stations on the Chuo line, it owes its history thanks to the mid-1970s brick walls that were part of the original station, constructed in 1912. You’ll find rows of handsome shops inside, in addition to the Hitachino Brewing Lab, a brewery that offers beer-making classes and the full lineup of Hitachino Nest beers brewed on site. The innovative nibbles come served stuffed into convenience store-style sake cups.

*1-2-5-5 Kanda-Manseibashi, Chiyoda (Akihabara Station). www maac-ecute.jp. Shops 11am-7pm (until 6pm Sun & hols), restaurants 11am-1pm (until 11pm Sun & hols).*

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**MAACH ECUTE KANDA MANSEIBASHI**

This curiously named complex opened at Kanda’s old Manseibashi Station in 2013 and is one of the best examples of conservation-focused under-the-tracks development. Located between Kanda and Ochanomizu stations on the Chuo line, it owes its history thanks to the mid-1970s brick walls that were part of the original station, constructed in 1912. You’ll find rows of handsome shops inside, in addition to the Hitachino Brewing Lab, a brewery that offers beer-making classes and the full lineup of Hitachino Nest beers brewed on site. The innovative nibbles come served stuffed into convenience store-style sake cups.

*1-2-5-5 Kanda-Manseibashi, Chiyoda (Akihabara Station). www maac-ecute.jp. Shops 11am-7pm (until 6pm Sun & hols), restaurants 11am-1pm (until 11pm Sun & hols).*
Nightlife

A drink with a view

Mari Hiratsuka gets a taste of the high life at the city’s best rooftop bars

BE IT ON A COZY SPRING EVENING or a balmy summer night, outdoor drinking is one of the very best ways to enjoy Tokyo. But as every city resident knows, not all rooftop bars are created equal. Fortunately, you don’t have to spend your evening nursing a cocked-up cocktail or taking in a view of a still-buzzing office building packed with poor souls working overtime. We’ve picked out two spots – from a luxurious poolside retreat to a quirky suburban hideout – that offer both enviable vistas and excellent drinks.

A-Bridge

A comfy café and bar found on the rooftop of a well-worn building right next to Sangenjaya Station, A-Bridge charms with an anti-commercial ethos befitting its neighbourhood close to the local jumble of izakayas and small bars known as Sankaku Chitai. Catch the sunset early in the evening and stick around for a DJ set or indie gig. In addition to finger foods that make for perfect cocktail companions, the kitchen turns out more substantial fare including Japanese-style chicken curry, hashed pork over rice and eclectic pasta dishes.

Two Rooms

With its spacious outdoor terrace and slick modernist interior, this bar and restaurant on the fifth floor of Omotesando’s R-Complex lends itself equally well to weekend brunches and boody evenings spent drooling over the vast wine list. The trio behind Two Rooms boasts impressive pedigrees – Matthew Crabbe, Eddie Baffoe and Nathan Smith are all veterans of Hyatt International – and they bring a similar level of quality here. Dine on premium steaks and teppan-grilled Tsukiji fish, accompanied by a choice bottle from the 1,800-strong wine list, then head back for a Sunday morning brunch of eggs benedict and bloody marys.

Shinjuku Granbell Hotel

Although they are right there underneath you, the love hotels and host clubs of Kabukicho feel a million miles away from the Shinjuku Granbell’s 13th-floor bar. Renovated last summer, it’s become even more comfy thanks to the addition of exotic-looking plants and other greenery, while the views of Nishi-Shinjuku’s sparkling skyline are as spectacular as ever. An all-you-can-drink beer garden opens during the summer months, but you won’t need to wait until the hot season to enjoy a few cheap tipples: happy hour, when all drinks go for ¥500, is every day from 5pm to 7pm.

Hacienda del Cielo

A far cry from the kitsch decor you’d find at countless other Mexican joints around town, Hacienda del Cielo is suitably named – ‘place in the sky’ – as its all-lobby ceilings, lounge-style seating and tall windows with views over central Daikanyama. The spacious rooftop terrace is one of the nicest places in town when the weather’s good – fill up that wallet and get ready for an evening fuelled by Mexican beer, frozen margaritas and, for the brave out there, jalapeño-laced ‘premium’ margaritas.

No 3-14-1 Sangenjaya, Shibuya (Sangenjaya Station). 03 3418 5013. a-bridge.jp. 12noon-1.30am (Sun until 2am nightly), closed Wed.

A-Bridge

Mansard Daikanyama 9F, 10-1 Sarugakucho, Shibuya (Daikanyama Station). 03 5457 1521. modern-mexicano.jp/hacienda. Mon-Fri 11.30am-4am, Sat 11am-4am, Sun & hols 11am-11pm.

Mari Hiratsuka

Shinjuku Granbell Hotel

Aoyama Laputa Garden Thirty Six

Aoyama’s Laputa Garden and its gorgeous outdoor pool always come into their own when the weather turns warm. The Thirty Six bar at this flashy complex wows with designer furniture, courtesy of high-end Italian maker Cassina, a refined atmosphere and Italian meets French meets Californian fusion cuisine. With organic veg, super-fresh seafood, voluminous steaks and artisanal cocktails, the menu offers something for everyone. Got a date to impress or a special occasion to celebrate? This is the place.

Aoyama Laputa Garden 36

1-1-11 Iidabashi, Chiyoda (Iidabashi Station). 03 5215 9091. laputa-garden.com. Mon-Sat 5.30pm-4am, Sun & hols 5.30pm-11pm.

Mari Hiratsuka

Aoyama Laputa Garden Thirty Six

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Mari Hiratsuka
Why the Robot Restaurant continues to attract sell-out crowds almost every night

ALTHOUGH FIVE YEARS since it opened on an inconspicuous Kabukicho street and turned the entire neighbourhood upside-down, Robot Restaurant – Shinjuku’s unmissable den of glitter, glamour and giant bots – remains wildly popular. Although slight tweaks to the show are made on a regular basis, the essentials have stayed the same: you’re always in for a mind-boggling combo of intense drumming, logically inexplicable but spectacular battles, the occasional ballad and, of course, mighty robots that can both crush their enemies with a single punch and shake it like the King of Pop. Sure, such a concoction alone is enough to attract plenty of visitors, but we feel like there’s a deeper charm to the intentionally OTT spectacle – one that makes you long for more as soon as the hour-long show is over and you’ve retrieved your wallet. So, let’s take a look at the most jaded soul.

THE ONE-UPSMASH Just when you think the action unfolding in front of your eyes can’t get any crazier, along comes yet another mind-bending monstrosity. We wouldn’t want to give too much away, but know this: the giant mechanical shark, commanded by a mermaid armed to the teeth, is still far from peak robot.

THE TALE OF METAL Raging aliens, demonic taiko drummers and futuristic ninjas are all well and good, but what really gets the crowd excited – every time – is the arrival of the intimidating but ultimately rather friendly King Robota bots. These impeccably polished machines take the stage during the laser-lit night-time extravaganza that is the Robot Restaurant’s signature act, and are sure to raise the spirits of even the most jaded soul.

THE CONGENIAL FEEL Although there’s enough glitz and glamour to go around at the Robot Restaurant, it’s far from uptight establishment. The bento meals are pure comfort food, the beer is served in plastic cups and seating is, well, crammed. All this contributes to a wonderfully casual atmosphere – it’s almost like you’re watching one of Tokyo’s most sensational shows in your friend’s living room.

THE SUSHI PIRATE SHIP What more can we say? Any show that includes a maki- (portable shriek)-esque float shaped like Jack Sparrow’s Black Pearl and decorated with blinking nigiri pieces deserves your attention. Repeat visitors will do well to also keep an eye out for other quirky ‘easter eggs’ hidden in the midst of the action.

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The confectionery was enough to attract plenty of visitors, but we feel like there’s a deeper charm to the intentionally OTT spectacle – one that makes you long for more as soon as the hour-long show is over and you’ve retrieved your wallet. So, let’s take a look at the most jaded soul.

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To BOOK: Robot Restaurant is open for three shows daily, starting at 5.55pm, 7.50pm and 9.45pm (with an additional show at 4pm daily until April 23 and on weekends and holidays after that), and the format of the show is changed every few months to keep things fresh. You can reserve your spot a couple of days ahead by calling the booking number below between 9am and 5pm. The entrance fee is ¥8,000, excluding food and drinks. Note that the schedule might change due to maintenance.

Shinjuku Robot Bldg, 1-7-1 Kabukicho, Shinjuku (Shinjuku Station), 03 2206 5500. www.shinjuku-robot.com. 4pm-11pm daily.

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Shinjuku Robot Bldg, 1-7-1 Kabukicho, Shinjuku (Shinjuku Station), 03 2206 5500. www.shinjuku-robot.com. 4pm-11pm daily.
The Giants are headquartered in Tokyo Dome, a cavernous balloon of a stadium. Sometimes rooting for the underdog pays off: in 2015, the Swallows won their first pennant in 34 years. The Swallows can’t match their passionate cheering society that does not rely on Japanese baseball experience, and their home ground, the beautiful and historic Meiji Jingu Stadium. Sometimes rooting for the underdog pays off — in 2015, the Swallows won their first pennant in 34 years. Same-day tickets (from ¥1,000) can usually be had simply by getting to the stadium before same-time game, but can also be purchased online.

**Pick a Team**

Pick a team, but don’t count out the Giants. The Giants may be Japan’s national team. Japan’s largest media company (Seibu department stores) has managed to get the team to boost company morale after a giant sales. Around the country hold football fans. Said to resemble those of football fans.

**Baseball on the Kanto Plain**

Tokyo’s intra-city rivalry is a bit of a David and Goliath tale. The Giants, Japan’s first pro team, were founded in 1934 by media magnate, Masami Uesugi, who was known for cheerfully hoisting multi-coloured plastic umbrellas in the stands and prepare to be blown away by the passionate cheering squads. Staffed by baseball-crazy volunteers, the squads lead fans in synchronised chants, including songs dedicated to each individual player, the likes of which American baseball has never seen.

**Myomi Giants’ Tokyo Dome (www.giants.jp/en)**

Closest station: Korakuen, Suidobashi

Tokyo Yakult Swallows / Meiji Jingu Stadium (www.yakult-swallows.co.jp/en)

Closest station: Kameido

**The Community got together to own and produce their own energy by themselves**

This was a practical first step. He says that in the future, the group, collectively called Co-op Tohoku Green Energy Corporation, will expand into photovoltaic solar and biomass energy production. ‘We believe that expanding renewable energy is important not only to Tohoku, but also to Japan,’ says Ohara. After the 2011 disaster, all 42 of Japan’s commercial nuclear reactors were turned off, and in the time since, only three have been put back in operation. As a result, in 2013 the government implemented a feed-in tariff system, based on Germany’s, that spurs investment in renewable energy by requiring utilities to buy electricity from renewable energy sources at a rate set higher than the market price. The tariffs have been lowered every year by design, which makes renewable energy potential, so that expanding renewable energy is important not only to Tohoku, but also to Japan,’ says Ohara. After the 2011 disaster, all 42 of Japan’s commercial nuclear reactors were turned off, and in the time since, only three have been put back in operation. As a result, in 2013 the government implemented a feed-in tariff system, based on Germany’s, that spurs investment in renewable energy by requiring utilities to buy electricity from renewable energy sources at a rate set higher than the market price. The tariffs have been lowered every year by design, which makes renewable energy potential, so that expanding renewable energy is important not only to Tohoku, but also to Japan.’

"The Tohoku area has huge renewable energy potential, so that expanding renewable energy is important not only to Tohoku, but also to Japan.‘
A welcome change

Kosuke Shimizu meets Shibuya ward’s ‘diversity director’ Ryutaro Nagata

AT THE END OF 2015, Shibuya Ward became the first municipality in Japan to issue what are known as ‘partnership certificates’, which grant same-sex couples living in the ward a status equal to that of married heterosexual couples. Despite such progressive steps, many believe there is much more to do to achieve true parity — enter Kyutaro Nagata.

Nagata, who came out as gay while working at clothing company Gap and has long been a driving force behind many LGBT-related initiatives in Japan, is now six months into his post as Diversity Lead for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Diversity for Shibuya Ward. We sat down with him at Iris, Shibuya’s first municipality in Japan to issue what’s also about ‘femininity’ — a driving force behind many LGBT-related initiatives in Japan, since the ‘90s. Since assuming his position, Nagata has focused on further expanding the centre in order to tackle deep-seated issues of discrimination in whatever form it may take. ‘The issue of sexism and those of the LGBT community are not separate,’ he says. ‘For example, the way clothing companies Gap and its power to impact views across the city. We’ve also come out with maps for nearly all the top areas including Roppongi, Shibuya, Nihonbashi, Marunouchi, Koenji and Ginza. We’ve also recently expanded the centre’s symbol – a big, colourful world clock designed by Harajuku impresario Sebastian Masuda. The centre provides sightseeing information for the Shibuya area, including Harajuku. It also provides essential information and services such as counter assistance, a foreign currency exchange machine, and free wi-fi. That’s not all: aiming to serve as an entertainment centre in itself, it’s a place where overseas visitors can experience J-pop culture through activities such as singing on kimos. There’s also a souvenir shop where you can pick up Mt Fuji artwork and quirky items such as sushi socks and accessories with popular Harajuku motifs.

A significant greater degree by transgender people, he points out. The role of Nagata’s section at the Diversity Centre is to broaden and improve education related to the diverse nature of gender through the two pillars of gender equality and LGBT issues, and is symbolised by a rainbow-coloured iris — a play on the ward’s official ‘city flower’ which derives its name from the Greek word ‘rainbow’.

Nagata’s daily activities involve organising human rights-themed lectures, setting up consultation centres and connecting with the community through events at lounges and libraries. But how did he make the jump from the fashion business to such a vastly different job? (Shibuya)’s mayor (Ken Hasebe) believes that problems like sexism and prejudice stem from people’s perceptions of minorities,’ says Nagata. ‘Our efforts to change that perception require expertise in fields like advertising and marketing. We need to educate not only the residents of Shibuya, but also those working within the system.’

Nagata believes that one of the best ways to do this is through art. He recently screened Naoko Ogigami’s film ‘Close Knit’, a moving drama about a transgender woman and her family which was highly praised at this year’s Berlin International Film Festival, and saw an instant response. ‘[My work] is not only about educating others — it’s also about impacting people’s feelings,’ says Nagata. ‘Movies and other interesting and beautiful works of art have great power in this regard.’

Nagata’s role is unique in Japan and another example of Shibuya’s progressive position when it comes to LGBT issues — it is the only ward in Tokyo with a diversity centre and plays a central role in the city’s annual Rainbow Week.

Nagata hopes that Shibuya can act as a model for others to follow. ‘Society is currently in a time of transition,’ he says. ‘For Nagata and his team are striving to make that change a positive one. Let’s all hope they are successful.'
The centuries-old English tradition of afternoon tea is alive and well in Tokyo, where city hotels offer ever more luxurious servings. Especially popular with the capital’s ladies of leisure, these sets generally come with an extensive sweets selection including cakes, scones and delicate sandwiches to accompany the high-quality brews. Here are our top picks of hotel lounges and restaurants catering to those looking to add a hint of style to their afternoon.

**The tea set**

Enjoy some indulgent afternoon teas at Tokyo’s luxury hotels. By Mayumi Koyama

**Mandarin Oriental: Oriental Lounge**
The top-floor lounge at Nihonbashi’s Mandarin Oriental provides spectacular city views, along with an afternoon tea set complete with scones, sandwiches and a wide variety of seasonal petits fours. The sweets aren’t too sweet, so you won’t feel guilty even after finishing all three tiers. 20 kinds of coffee and tea are available, all with free refills. Prefer a lighter lunch? You can also order à la carte.

**Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo 38F , 2-1-1 Nihonbashi-Muromachi, Chuo (Shin-Nihonbashi, Mitsukoshimae stations). 03 3270 8188. mandarinoriental.com/tokyo/fine-dining/oriental-lounge. Daily 12noon-5.30pm.**

**The Ritz-Carlton: The Lobby Lounge & Bar**
Feel the heart of the city at this 45th-floor space, where the Heavenly Tea set comes with superb scones and a seasonal range of pastries and sandwiches. The resident ‘jam butler’ will be stopping by your seat with a trolley, letting you choose any flavour from their selection. This spot also offers a set for kids aged 12 or under, inviting you to enjoy an elegant tea moment as a family.

**From ¥4,200 (plus tax and service). The Ritz-Carlton, Tokyo 45F , Tokyo Midtown, 9-7-1 Akasaka, Minato (Roppongi Station). 03 6434 8711. ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/japan/tokyo/dining/the-lobby-lounge. Daily 12noon-5pm.**

**Conrad: China Blue**
Who said afternoon teatsets should be dominated by sweets? The Conrad’s China Blue offers din sam afternoon teatime weekdays, serving up three varieties of savoury steamed dumplings and even a bowl of spicy noodles. Chef Albert Te’s creations incorporate influences from Chinese herbal medicine to keep you healthy, while the subtle presentation is sure to satisfy your eyes. You’ll also get to pick your favourite from a range of Chinese teas, including blooming tea, white teas and pu-erh.

**¥3,800 (plus tax and service). Conrad Tokyo 28F , 1-9-1 Higashi-Shinbashi, Minato (Shiodome Station). 03 6388 8745. conradtokyo.co.jp/restaurants/chinablue. 2pm-4pm (from 2.30pm on Monday holidays).**

**Strings by InterContinental: The Dining Room**
If you’re looking for an original take on tea, visit the Strings by InterContinental in Shinagawa. The menu changes frequently and until the end of April you can enjoy cherry blossom-themed delights in celebration of sakura season. Highlights of the set include sakura cherry cake roll and sakura cream puffs, served in three-tiered Art Nouveau ceramic globes, and a masterful sakura leaf-flavoured scone with cherry-flavoured clotted cream, all washed down with your choice of seven kinds of TWG tea and French press coffee.

**¥4,000 (plus tax and service). Shinagawa East One Tower 26F , 2-16-1 Konan, Minato (Shinagawa Station). 03 5783 1258. intercontinental-strings.jp/ru/restaurant/dining_room. Daily 12noon-5.30pm.**

**Hotel New Otani: Garden Lounge**
Looking out on the hotel’s Japanese garden, the New Otani’s most popular restaurant started serving afternoon tea in 2016. Grand chef Shinzuke Nakahira adds a Japanese touch to the classic English set-up, serving up sandwiches and scones made with original twelve-grain rice flour, plus seven kinds of pastries presented on a three-tier cake stand.

**Hotel New Otani, Garden Lounge, 4-1 Kioicho, Chiyoda (Nagatacho, Akasaka-Mitsuke stations). 03 5226 0246. newotani.co.jp/restaurants/gardenlounge/index.html. 3pm-6pm (Sat, Sun & holidays from 1.30pm).**

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The sake route

A tour of sake breweries in western Japan.

By Kirsty Bouwers

FOR YEARS, SAKE (nihonshu in Japanese) was considered a somewhat dying tipple. However, international interest has seen Japan's best-known native beverage make a bit of a renaissance. Kanazawa, the area around Osaka and Kyoto, is one of the regions known for its sake, as it has the indigenous ingredients needed to craft great sake: good rice and natural mineral water, plus cool temperatures in winter, which is production season. If you’re looking to distinguish your diagnosis from your horoscope and learn more about the brewing process, here are our top picks for a two-or three-day tour — from large producers to the small-scale brewery next door too. Save time by booking at least a day in advance and getting a guided tour, as you’ll be able to enter the breweries. The tour is very rural, and the few train stations dotted around see a train an hour, if that. The easiest place to get to is Tanba, which is held in very high regard. Although it’s not the most convenient place to get to — most of it is walled-off complex looks a little intimidating, from the outside, the brewers rather than the Tanba toji would make the trek to Nada near Kobe to help out with the smell of fermenting sake. The original brewery, like many in Nada, was destroyed completely in the 1995 Hanshin earthquake, but miraculously they managed to reopen just a year later. In a bid to reinvigorate the local community and regain pride, as a memorial, one of their signature brews is the Kuro, the same being a combination of ‘open’ or ‘sky’ and the character commonly used for ‘brewery’. Tastings are available at the counter — ask for any recommendations.

FUSHIMI, KYOTO

If you’ve ever had a cup of nihonshu at a Japanese restaurant abroad, chances are that it was made by Gekkeikan. One of the world’s oldest companies, Gekkeikan has been producing sake since 1637 and established a US outpost in 1989 which caters to the international market. Home, though, is in Fushimi, now part of Kyoto and known for its fine water. Here you’ll find the Gekkeikan Okura Museum (247 Minamihamacho, Fushimi, Kyoto; www.gekkeikan.co.jp, 075 623 2056). This informative sake sanctuary of and only occasionally offer brewery tours is: in terms of explaining the entire brewing process, it’s one of the best exhibits going. Seeing as 80 percent of all sake produced in Japan is made in Nada, it’s one of the best places to indulge in a little tipple and learn a bit more. All of the breweries here (good 40s in total) rely on the mythical, mineral-containing ‘miyamizu’ water, which flows from Mt Rokko, to create the region’s characteristic dry nihonshu. The western and central bits of the region are arguably the most interesting, with many old brewery buildings having been converted into museums, whereas Nishimonaya and Imazu have few sightseeing opportunities to speak of. If you’re looking to gain even more liquid knowledge, consider joining a group led by the SSA in London. The SSA organises all kinds of courses and events, for everyone from beginners to sake experts, both in Japan and abroad — among these is the Advanced Sake Sommelier Course, which is a five-minute walk from Hanshin Sumiyoshi Station to the first brewery. HAKUTSURU (4-5-5 Sumiyoshi-Cho, Yasu, Tanba, Hyogo; www.hamafukutsuru.co.jp, 078 411 8339) is a good, natural Chinese-style lunch set for ¥2,000, while the Sakuramasamune brewery (Sakuraen) (4-3-14 Uozaki-Minamimachi, Higashi-Nada, Kobe, www.sakuramasamune.co.jp, 078 821 5350) does great, natural Chinese-style lunch sets for ¥1,500.

TANBA, HYOGO

Every winter in bygone days, the ‘toji’ (sake brewing) of the Tanba region would make the trek to Nada near Kobe to help out with the local labour shortage and make sake at the breweries that冬天 and the Tanba toji are held in very high regard. Although it’s not exactly the right place to get to — most of it is very rural, and the few train stations dotted around see a train an hour. It’s a visit to this region is highly rewarding for the more interpid nihonshu lover. Nishiyama Shuzo (1-9-1 Uozaki-Minamimachi, Tanba, Hyogo; www.nishiyama-shuzo.co.jp, 0795 86 0331) is a good place to start, and the humongous factory (brewery) is a five-minute walk from Hanshin Sumiyoshi Station to the first brewery building. Hamafuku-shu (4-5-5 Sumiyoshi-Cho, Yasu, Tanba, Hyogo; www.hamafukutsuru.co.jp, 078 411 8339) is a good place to start, and the humongous factory (brewery) is a five-minute walk from Hanshin Sumiyoshi Station to the first brewery building. The brewery is also one of the few with the kimoto (traditional shuzo-making) process, which is explained through an insightful video. HAKUTSURU (4-5-5 Sumiyoshi-Cho, Yasu, Tanba, Hyogo; www.hamafukutsuru.co.jp, 078 411 8339) is a good place to start, and the humongous factory (brewery) is a five-minute walk from Hanshin Sumiyoshi Station to the first brewery building. The brewery is also one of the few with the kimoto (traditional shuzo-making) process, which is explained through an insightful video.

NISHIYAMA SHUZO

NADA, HYOGO

Wedge between Osaka and Kobe, the Nada Gogo Five villages of Nada — Nishi, Migako, Uozaki, Nishinomiya and Imazu — are known throughout Japan for their nihonshu production. Seeing as 80 percent of all sake produced in Japan is made in Nada, it’s one of the best places to indulge in a little tipple and learn a bit more. All of the breweries here (good 40s in total) rely on the mythical, mineral-containing ‘miyamizu’ water, which flows from Mt Rokko, to create the region’s characteristic dry nihonshu. The western and central bits of the region are arguably the most interesting, with many old brewery buildings having been converted into museums, whereas Nishimonaya and Imazu have few sightseeing opportunities to speak of. If you’re looking to gain even more liquid knowledge, consider joining a group led by the SSA in London. The SSA organises all kinds of courses and events, for everyone from beginners to sake experts, both in Japan and abroad — among these is the Advanced Sake Sommelier Course, which is a five-minute walk from Hanshin Sumiyoshi Station to the first brewery building. HAKUTSURU (4-5-5 Sumiyoshi-Cho, Yasu, Tanba, Hyogo; www.hamafukutsuru.co.jp, 078 411 8339) is a good place to start, and the humongous factory (brewery) is a five-minute walk from Hanshin Sumiyoshi Station to the first brewery building. The brewery is also one of the few with the kimoto (traditional shuzo-making) process, which is explained through an insightful video. HAKUTSURU (4-5-5 Sumiyoshi-Cho, Yasu, Tanba, Hyogo; www.hamafukutsuru.co.jp, 078 411 8339) is a good place to start, and the humongous factory (brewery) is a five-minute walk from Hanshin Sumiyoshi Station to the first brewery building. The brewery is also one of the few with the kimoto (traditional shuzo-making) process, which is explained through an insightful video.
Fly on the cheap

Japan’s budget airlines offer an alternative to bullet train travel. By Kumi Nagano and Kirsty Bouwers

SKYMARK

Skymark is Japan’s first low-cost airline and its fares are a tad high compared to other LCCs. Still, they’re much cheaper than ANA and Japan Airlines and have a wide network. Economy seats are comfortable and they offer substantial discounts for early bookings, in addition to age-based deals for those aged 12-21 and over 60.

www.skymark.co.jp.

Major destinations: Sapporo, Kobe, Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Naha.

AIRDO

Fittingly for a Hokkaido-based airline, AirDo offers special deals for round trips to the northern island. Baggage, including ski or golf bags, is free up to a total of 20kg. Free breakfast is offered on the first morning flight on weekdays between Sapporo and Tokyo, while soft drinks, blankets and picture books for kids are all free, and they use the latest Boeing aircraft on all routes. With an average seat pitch of 81cm – wider than the industry average – there’s plenty of legroom. As with AirDo, the free baggage limit is 20kg.

www.airdo.jp.

Major destinations: Sapporo, Asahikawa, Memanbetsu, Kushiro, Obihiro, Hakodate.

SOLASEED AIR

Operating mainly in Kyushu, the smiley-faced Solaseed is probably the most friendly, hippie-sounding LCC out there. Soft drinks, blankets and picture books for kids are all free, and they use the latest Boeing aircraft on all routes. With an average seat pitch of 90cm – wider than the industry average – there’s plenty of legroom. As with AirDo, the free baggage limit is 20kg.

www.solaseedair.jp.

Major destinations: Miyazaki, Kumamoto, Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Osaka.

STARFLYER

In true nouveau riche fashion, Starflyer tries its hardest to provide a champagne lifestyle on a beer budget. Based in Kitakyushu, its aircraft interiors are upholstered in chic leather to keep with the black exterior, seats are fitted with a monitor, USB and power outlet, and the seat pitch is a comfortable 90cm. Despite this the prices are still reasonable.

www.starflyer.jp.

Major destinations: Kitakyushu, Fukuoka, Yonago, Ube, Osaka (Kansai International).

JETSTAR JAPAN

Notorious for having very detailed handling charges that can catch out the unprepared, this Ozzie/New Zealander LCC serves both international and domestic airports. If your flight gets cancelled, a transfer to JAL or paid hotel is provided. Jetstar guarantee the lowest fares: if theirs are higher than on a competitor’s site, they’ll deduct 10 percent from their price.

www.jetstar.com/jp.

Major destinations: Sapporo (New Chitose), Fukuoka, Osaka (Kansai International), Kumamoto, Kagoshima, Naha.

PEACH

Based at Kansai International Airport, this fruity airline is a good choice for frequent flyers: the more flights you book, the lower the price. Payment for the cheapest tickets is by credit card only. The add-ons can quickly add up – you’ll be charged up to ¥2,280 for checking in your bag, seat reservations cost up to ¥1,000, with four classes available, and if you really don’t want to sit next to someone, you can buy an unoccupied seat next to yours with the ‘Space Seat Option’. No freebies here.


Major destinations: Osaka (Kansai International), Sapporo (New Chitose), Fukuoka, Naha.

VANILLA AIR

The most vanilla of them all, Vanilla Air keeps it clean with two main fare plans: the ‘simple fare’ or with checked baggage and seat reservation included. Either way, you can change your reservation until just before the departure date (for a fee). These travelling in groups of three or more will want to look out for ‘minna de wari’ deals, which provide a 30 percent discount on select flights.


Major destinations: Osaka (Kansai International), Sapporo (New Chitose), Hakodate, Naha, Amami Oshima.
Best in classes

The top places in town to learn a Japanese craft.

By Kirsty Bouwers

SURE, PRANCING AROUND some of Tokyo's greatest tourist hits is fun, but to really get under the skin of the city you need a little help. Here are the best cultural courses in town – note that you'll need to book ahead though.

1. **COOK UP SOME FAKE FOOD**
   - Plastic food samples outside a restaurant might be considered a bit kitsch in any place besides Japan, but here, the level of detail means these fake foods are micro works of art. Located near Kappabashi-dori in Asakusa, the shopping street for all your kitchen-related needs, this fake food specialist hosts workshops so you can take home your very own faux lettuce or tempura shrimp.
   - **Ganso Shokuhin Sample-ya. 3-7-6 Nishi-Asakusa, Taito (Tawaramachi Station). www.ganso-sample.com/experience. Reservations through the online form or via email: ganso-info@ganso-sample.com.**

2. **LEARN TO SEE THE BEAUTY IN THE CRACKS**
   - Kintsugi, or the art of mending broken pottery with gold dust to show off the cracks, has seen a bit of an attention boom overseas in the past few years. There are a few places in Tokyo that offer courses, but most of them are quite irregular. This community centre in Kita-Shinagawa welcomes students every week, although considering the slow process, you'll likely have to come back a few times to actually finish up your work.

3. **HONE YOUR NINJA SKILLS**
   - Actual ninjas may be mythical relics of the past, but at this school in Tabata, you'll be able to channel your inner ninja through meditation (it's not all about throwing ninja stars), weapons training and stealth classes, all dressed in proper ninja garb. Things end with a proper ninja-style sign-off – nine different hand gestures used to raise spiritual and mental strength.
   - **Hands-on Ninja Experience. 6-3-5 Tabata, Kita (Tabata Station). musashi.ninja/program-01.**

4. **CREATE CUTE CANDIES**
   - Asakusa is home to a number of traditional craft centres, but none are as sweet as this shop specialising in the art of amezaiku – the craft of making tiny sculptures from candy. You can also pop by their store inside the Tokyo Solamachi mall and ogle at the daintily crafted sweets, but it's much more fun to try and create one yourself. Book in advance to learn how to make your own lollipop koi fish or panda.
   - **Amezaiku Ameshin. 1-4-3 Imado, Taito (Asakusa Station). www.ame-shin.com/workshop.**

5. **FEEL THE BEAT OF THE DRUM**
   - There are few things more stirring than a full-scale taiko drum performance. Although getting to a professional level requires years of training and dedication, Asakusa’s Jidaiya will start you on your journey with a taster session that lets you hang your drum to your heart’s content. Jidaiya also offers a variety of other cultural courses, from calligraphy to kimono dressing.
   - **Jidaiya Japanese Drum Experience. 2-3-5 Kaminarimon, Taito (Asakusa Station). www.jidaiya.biz/taikenmono_e.html#taikenmono7.**

TOKYO’S BEST

Getting Around

Time Out Tokyo April-June, 2017

April-June, 2017 Time Out Tokyo
Rainy days mean it’s time for plum wine

By Kirsty Bouwers

THE CLIMATE
Tokyo is more like an obstacle course than a weather system. You might successfully dodge the deep freeze of winter and navigate the sweltering temperatures of summer, only to be caught out by ‘tsuyu’, the rainy season that descends in June and July. Dreary, wet, increasingly humid and just quite icky in general, ‘tsuyu’ is when Japan turns into an overcast and steadily warming moisture fest – like being trapped inside a dehumidifier for two months solid. Here’s what you need to survive the season...

In the next issue of Time Out Tokyo...

WET WIPES AND SMALL TOWELS
Rain does not necessarily equal cold weather. Like boil-in-the-bag rice, ‘tsuyu’ is a case of gradually rising temperatures and high humidity, which will eventually morph into the sweltering heat of midsummer. Wet wipes and hand towels are a necessity for combating perspiration build-up, and you’ll see anyone from classy Ginza ladies-who-lunch to Sanya workers dabbing their faces. Cooling wet wipes in particular are a lifesaver, although oddly enough, most seem to be marketed towards men. Clearly they’ve never come across the English phrase ‘sweaty Betty’ – and that’s probably a good thing too.

KONBINI UMBRELLAS
Okay, brollies should be obvious when it’s raining, but Japan specialises in one very particular type of umbrella. Indeed, if you’ve spent more than one ‘tsuyu’ in Tokyo, you’ll be a veteran in the art of absent-mindedly losing countless white or see-through convenience-store umbrellas. At this time of year they litter trains, workplaces, bars and restaurants like so much fallen space debris. Nobody knows why these things are so hard to keep hold of – maybe they should make them tartan rather than transparent.

PLUMMY PARADISE
‘Tsuyu’ literally means ‘plum rain’, and it’s the time of year when Japanese plums are ripening and ready for picking – and pickling – during a preciously short window. Even when they’re ripe, it’s advisable to avoid just biting into them: Japanese plums are notoriously tart, and are rarely eaten raw. Do yourself a favour for the rest of the year and try to make your own batch of plum wine or branch out with more unorthodox plum pick-me-ups: plum brandy anyone?

GOKIBURI CAPS AND MOULD
Mould and cockroaches are an inevitable double-bill once the rainy season hits, and you’ve best to invest in anything that can keep the two out. Dehumidifiers are an effective remedy, as are gokiburi kyappu (cockroach caps) – little round things that disseminate an acid that kills the supposedly indestructible insects. When the sun is out, seize the day and dry out all your stuff as much as possible, even things you don’t wear or use often. You’ll be thanking us come August.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND HYDRANGEAS
Secret: it doesn’t rain all the time during ‘tsuyu’. In fact, September sees more damp days on average than most rainy seasons in Tokyo. With kids still in school and the overcast weather coating everything in mist, it’s the perfect off peak time to see some nature before the really ferocious heat hits. Hydrangeas bloom abundantly around this time, and many outdoorsy tourist spots such as Mount Koya or Hakone will be lush with flora; coupled with the excessive moisture in the air, they become even more stunning and mysterious. And if you still can’t handle it all, head north to Hokkaido, which is blissfully ‘tsuyu’-free.

THE CLIMATE IN Tokyo is more like an obstacle course than a weather system. You might successfully dodge the deep freeze of winter and navigate the sweltering temperatures of summer, only to be caught out by ‘tsuyu’, the rainy season that descends in June and July. Dreary, wet, increasingly humid and just quite icky in general, ‘tsuyu’ is when Japan turns into an overcast and steadily warming moisture fest – like being trapped inside a dehumidifier for two months solid. Here’s what you need to survive the season...

In the next issue of Time Out Tokyo...

Summer excitement
Travel tips and tricks for the steamy season

Available across Tokyo from July 2017