Welcome to Tokyo

Yoking past and future, Tokyo dazzles with its traditional culture and passion for everything new.

Tokyo’s neon-bright streets still look like a sci-fi film set – and that’s a vision of the city from the 1980s. Tokyo has been building ever since, pushing the boundaries of what’s possible on densely populated, earthquake-prone land, adding ever taller, sleeker structures. Stand atop one of the city’s skyscrapers and look out over the city at night to see it blinking like the control panel of a starship, stretching all the way to the horizon. Tokyo is a modern city built on old patterns, and in the shadows of those skyscrapers you can find quiet alleys, raucous traditional festivals and lantern-lit yakitori (grilled chicken) stands.

Speaking of food, Tokyo is one of the world’s top dining destinations. Here you can splash out on the best sushi of your life, made by one of the city’s legendary chefs using the freshest seasonal market ingredients. Or you can spend ¥800 on a bowl of noodles made with the same care and exacting attention to detail, from a recipe honed through decades of experience. Tokyo is also Japan’s pop-culture laboratory, where new trends grow legs. See the newest anime and manga flying off the shelves in Akihabara, shop for your favourite character goods, or just pick up some style inspiration walking down the streets of Harajuku.

“Tokyo is a modern city built on old patterns”

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Plan Your Trip

This Year in Tokyo

Tokyo

From contemporary arts events to festivals that have been taking place for centuries, there is always something going on in Tokyo. Like elsewhere in Japan, the seasons have special meaning, with every new bloom a reason for celebration.

Clockwise from above: Sanja Matsuri (p10); Kōenji Awa Odori (p13); Cherry blossoms (p9)
Top Festivals & Events

- **Hatsu-mōde** January (p6)
- **Cherry Blossoms** April (p9)
- **Sanja Matsuri** May (p10)
- **Sumida-gawa Fireworks** July (p12)
- **Kōenji Awa Odori** August (p13)
April

Warmer weather and blooming cherry trees make this quite simply the best month to be in Tokyo.

**Buddha’s Birthday** 8 Apr
In honour of the Buddha’s birthday, Hana Matsuri (flower festival) celebrations take place at temples. Look for the parade of children in Asakusa, pulling a white papier-mâché elephant. Pictured above: Wooden and metal ladles used to sprinkle baby Buddha figurines.

**Kannon-ura Ichiyo Sakura-matsuri Festival** mid-Apr
The highlight of this annual spring event that takes place in the backstreets behind Sensō-ji is the Edo Yoshiwara Oiran-dōchū – a procession of women dressed in the finery of Edo-era (1603–1868) courtesans. There’s also a flea market.

**Earth Day** 21–22 Apr
Tokyo celebrates this international event with a weekend-long festival at Yoyogi-kōen with organic food stalls, live music and workshops for kids.

**Cherry Blossoms** early Apr
From the end of March through the beginning of April, the city’s parks and riversides turn pink and Tokyoites toast spring in spirited parties, called hanami, beneath the blossoms.

**Naki-zumo** 29 Apr
In Japan it’s believed that crying babies grow big and strong. At this amusing festival, held at Sensō-ji, sumo wrestlers are brought in to pull faces at babies (in cute mini sumo outfits) to make them cry. The one who cries first, or loudest, is crowned the winner.
Plan Your Trip
This Year in Tokyo

September

* Days are still warm – hot even – though the odd typhoon rolls through this time of year.

☆ Tokyo Jazz Festival  early Sep
Enjoy three days of shows by international and local stars at Tokyo’s biggest jazz festival (www.tokyo-jazz.com).

☆ Japan Media Arts Festival  mid-Sep
The year’s top animation, manga and digital installations go on display at the Japan Media Arts Festival (www.j-mediaarts.jp).

☆ Tokyo Game Show  late Sep
Get your geek on when the Computer Entertainment Suppliers Association hosts Tokyo Game Show (http://tgs.cesa.or.jp; pictured above), a massive expo at Makuhari Messe in late September.

Moon Viewing  25 Sep & 25 Oct
Full moons in September and October call for tsukimi, moon-viewing gatherings. People eat tsukimi dango – mochi (pounded-rice dumplings) that are round like the moon.
Plan Your Trip

Need to Know

**Currency**
Japanese yen (¥)

**Language**
Japanese

**Visas**
Visas are generally not required for stays of up to 90 days.

**Money**
Post offices and most convenience stores have international ATMs. Credit cards are accepted at major establishments, though it’s best to keep cash on hand.

**Mobile Phones**
Purchase prepaid data-only SIM cards (for unlocked smartphones only) online or at airport kiosks or electronics stores. For voice calls, rent a pay-as-you-go mobile.

**Time**
Japan Standard Time (GMT/UTC plus nine hours)

**Tourist Information**
Tokyo Tourist Information Center (p233) Has English-language information and publications.

**Daily Costs**

Budget: less than ¥8000
- Dorm bed: ¥3000
- Free sights such as temples and markets
- Bowl of noodles: ¥750
- Happy-hour drink: ¥500
- 24-hour subway pass: ¥600

Midrange: ¥8000–20,000
- Double room at a business hotel: ¥14,000
- Museum entry: ¥1000
- Dinner for two at an izakaya (Japanese pub-eatery): ¥6000
- Live music show: ¥3000

Top End: more than ¥20,000
- Double room in a four-star hotel: ¥35,000
- Sushi-tasting menu: ¥15,000
- Box seat for kabuki: ¥21,000
- Taxi ride back to the hotel: ¥3000

**Advance Planning**

Three months before
Purchase tickets for the Ghibli Museum; book a table at your top splurge restaurant.

One month before
Book any tickets for sumo, kabuki and Giants games online, and a spot on the Imperial Palace tour; scan web listings for festivals, events and exhibitions.

On arrival
Look for free copies of *Time Out Tokyo* and *Metropolis* magazines at airports and hotels.

**Useful Websites**
- Go Tokyo (www.gotokyo.org) The city’s official website includes information on sights, events and suggested itineraries.
- Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/tokyo) Destination information, hotel bookings, traveller forum and more.
- Time Out Tokyo (www.timeout.jp) Arts and entertainment listings.
- Tokyo Food Page (www.bento.com) City-wide restaurant coverage.
- Tokyo Cheapo (www.tokyocheapo.com) Hints on how to do Tokyo on the cheap.