

Tokyo 東京



You know Tokyo – perhaps from the illustrated pages of *Akira*, or the films of Akira Kurosawa. Maybe your personal style is informed by Harajuku street fashion or the classic avant-garde of Comme des Garçons; maybe your musical taste runs to BoA or the Zazen Boys. Or maybe you only know it in passing, from images of pulsing pedestrian traffic across Shibuya Crossing, stereotypes of buttoned-up businessmen or a clip of an incomprehensibly wacky Japanese game show. This is a city where a macaque can work as a waiter and unconventional individuals find freedom in the anonymity of the city – the Japanese aphorism, *the nail that stands up gets hammered down* doesn't necessarily apply in Tokyo.

Tokyo's bubbling *nabe* (pot) of creativity is a rich, long-simmering brew resulting from the mix of age-old Japanese traditions, a modern uberurban society and novel international ingredients. Likewise, its cuisine, popular culture and psyche are curious blends of old Japan and twists of modern tastes. It's a city torn between the rigidity of rules and etiquette, and the flux of reinvention and fusion – all of which create a flavour that is heady with subtle, fleeting nuances of the recognisable and the totally foreign. The city's massive scale alone means a stunning abundance of idiosyncratic experiences.

So how well can you get to know Tokyo?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stroll the grounds of **Meiji-jingū** (p155), Tokyo's most impressive Shintō shrine
- Snapshots of goth Lolitas at **Jingū-bashi** (p155), who pose and preen for your photographic pleasure
- Take in high art and low culture in **Roppongi** (p157)
- Dodge flying fish on the floor of **Tsukiji Fish Market** (p150) and feast on early-morning sushi
- Attend the seasonal spectacle of sumō at **Ryōgoku Kokugikan** (p188) for salt-slinging, belly-slapping and solemn ritual
- See how the Edo-half lived at the wonderful **Edo-Tokyo Museum** (p159)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 03

■ POPULATION: 12.56 MILLION

HISTORY

Tokyo is something of a miracle, a city that rose from the ashes of WWII to become one of the world's leading economic centres.

Tokyo was formerly known as Edo (literally 'Gate of the River'), so named for its location at the mouth of Sumida-gawa. The city first became significant in 1603, when Tokugawa Ieyasu established his shōgunate (military government) there. Edo grew into a city from which the Tokugawa clan governed the whole of Japan. By the late 18th century it had become the most populous city in the world. When the authority of the emperor was restored in 1868, the capital moved from Kyoto to Edo, which was renamed Tokyo (Eastern Capital).

After more than 250 years of isolation, Tokyo began transforming itself into a modern metropolis. Remarkably, it has succeeded in achieving this despite two major disasters that each practically levelled the city – the Kantō Earthquake and ensuing fires of 1923, and the devastating US air raids of 1944 and 1945.

After the giddy heights of Japan's Bubble Economy of the 1980s burst in the '90s, Tokyo spent much of the interim recovering from the resulting recession. These days, the economy is feeling the pinch again. Apart from economics, Tokyo's cultural exports continue to strongly influence the global scene, with its fashion, music, design, manga and anime, and quirky, uniquely Japanese technology.

ORIENTATION

Tokyo is a vast conurbation spreading out across the Kantō Plain from Tokyo Bay (Tokyo-wan). The central metropolitan area is made up of 23 *ku* (wards), while outlying areas are divided into 27 separate *shi* (cities), a *gun* (county) and four island-districts. Nearly everything of interest to visitors lies on or near the JR Yamanote line, the rail loop that circles central Tokyo. Areas not on the Yamanote line – like Roppongi, Tsukiji and Asakusa – are nonetheless within easy reach, as the central city is crisscrossed by Tokyo's excellent subway system.

In Edo times, Yamanote referred to 'Uptown': the estates and residences of feudal barons, military aristocracy and other Edo elite, in the hilly regions of the city. Shitamachi or 'Downtown' was home to the working classes, merchants and artisans. Even today this distinction persists. The areas west of the Imperial Palace (Kōkyo) are more modernised, housing the commercial and business centres of modern Tokyo; the areas east of the palace retain more of the character of old Edo.

A trip around the JR Yamanote line makes a good introduction to the city. You might start at Tokyo station. Near the station are the Marunouchi and Ōtemachi office districts and the high-class shopping district of Ginza. Continuing north from Tokyo station brings you to Akihabara, the discount electronics centre of Tokyo. Further along is Ueno, home to many of the city's museums. After rounding the top of the loop you descend into Ikebukuro, a shopping and entertainment dis-

TOKYO IN...

One Day

Show up at dawn to **Tsukiji Fish Market** (p150) for a look at the day's catch. Follow this with green tea and a stroll around **Hama-Rikyū-Teien** (p150). Then window-shop along Chūō-dōri in **Ginza** (p149), browsing techie toys at the **Sony Building** (p149) or **Leica Ginza Salon** (p149). Stop for a weekday lunch in the **Tokyo International Forum plaza** (p148), wander through **Imperial Palace East Garden** (p148) to **Kitanomaru-kōen** (p148) and possibly to **Yasukuni-jinja** (p148). Then top it off with a decadent supper at **L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon** (p179) and a night in **Roppongi** (p183).

Three Days

Do the one-day itinerary and then sleep in! Shop high fashion and pop culture along **Omote-sandō** (p155) and **Harajuku back streets** (p188), winding up at an all-you-can-eat dessert cafe in **Shibuya** (p177), or the **Blue Note Tokyo** (p186) for top-notch jazz.

On the third day take it easy, poking around the tiny bars, cafes and boutiques of **Daikanyama** (p156), **Kichijōji** (p159) or **Shimo-Kitazawa** (p159).