Opened in 2012, at 634m, Tokyo Sky Tree is among the world’s tallest structures. Two observation decks, at 350m and 450m, present a stunning panorama of the greater Tokyo area and, if you’re lucky, Mt Fuji. At night the exterior of steel mesh is illuminated, turning the tower into an otherworldly beacon in relatively undeveloped east Tokyo. (observation deck admission 350m/450m ¥2060/3090; 8am-10pm; JR Hanzōmon Line to Oshiage)

★ Top tip To increase your chances of spotting Mt Fuji go in the early morning, or in the winter.

Rumoured to be the world’s busiest, this intersection in front of Shibuya Station is known as the Scramble. It’s a spectacle of giant video screens, neon and people coming from all directions at once. Up to one thousand cross with every light change, yet still manage to dodge each other with a practiced, nonchalant agility. (JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya, Hachiko exit)

★ Top tip There’s an excellent view from the Starbucks on the 2nd floor of the Q-front building across the street (though it’s hard to get a seat).

East Shinjuku is Tokyo’s largest – and liveliest – nightlife district. The size and depth means there is truly something for everyone, from flashy cabarets to bohemian hole-in-the-walls, neon-lit karaoke parlours to bars for every fetish under the sun. Come dark, a motley cast of characters hits the town to shed the day’s anxieties and let loose. (JR Shinjuku. Take the east exit then follow the station signs for Kabukichō. When you emerge, you should see the glowing screen of Studio Alta, Shinjuku’s de facto meeting spot.)

★ Top tip Smoke billows nightly from the yakitori stalls that line Omoide-Yokochō, an alley by the train tracks.

From ☐ to your afternoon destination

From ☐ to your evening destination


**MEIJI-JINGŮ**

Tokyo’s grandest Shintō shrine

**TOKYO JOYPOLIS**

Virtual reality attractions and action rides

**SUMÔ**

Experience the spectacle and ritual of sumō
Tokyo’s grandest Shintō shrine is dedicated to the Emperor Meiji and Empress Shōken. Constructed in 1920, the shrine was destroyed in WWII air raids and rebuilt in 1958, but it has an authentic feel. The shrine occupies only a small fraction of the sprawling forested grounds, which contain 120,000 trees collected from around Japan. (1-1 Yoyogi Kamizono-chō, Shibuya-ku; FREE; JR Yamanote Line to Harajuku, Omotesando exit)

★ Top tip The best times to visit are 8am and 2pm when a priest strikes a large drum as part of a ritual offering of food to the deities enshrined here.

From ② to your afternoon destination

This indoor amusement park has three storeys of virtual reality attractions and action rides. Popular big-kid attractions include the Spin Bullet, an indoor spinning roller coaster, and the snowboard-like, video-enhanced Halfpipe Canyon; there are rides for little ones, too. If you plan to go on more than a half-dozen attractions, the unlimited ‘passport’ makes sense. (2-3-6 Aomi, Kōtō-ku; adult/child ¥800/300; 10am-5pm Wed-Mon; Yurikamome Line to Odaiba Kaihin-kōen)

From ③ to your evening destination

Travellers who visit Tokyo in January, May or September should not miss a Grand Tournament at Ryōgoku Kokugikan – 15-day tournaments at the national sumō stadium. Ancient sumō is captivating for its spectacle and ritual. During the rest of the year, you can catch the big boys in action at one of the neighbourhood stables, such as Arashio Stable (www.arashio.net), one of many stables where wrestlers sleep, eat and train. (www.sumo.or.jp/eng/index.html; 1-3-28 Yokoami, Sumida-ku; admission ¥2200-14,800; JR Sōbu Line to Ryōgoku, west exit)

Try chanko-nabe, a protein-rich stew eaten by the wrestlers, at Chanko Kaijō (noon-4pm), in the stadium’s basement.

Nearby Hibiki (6th fl, Aqua City Odaiba, 1-7-1 Daiba, Minato-ku) offers views across the bay.
3 SENGÔ-JI

The spiritual home of Tokyo’s ancestors

16 JINGÛ-BASHI

Harajuku’s legendary cosplayers

29 KABUKI

Breathtaking costumes, elaborate stagecraft
If you’re hunting to take photos of Harajuku’s legendary cosplayers (costume players), this is your best bet. Though the scene appears to be fading, on sunny weekends (especially Sundays) you might catch eccentrically dressed teens assembling here. ([JR Yamanote Line to Harajuku, Omote-sando exit])

★ Top tip Consider the crowds part of the experience, as there doesn’t seem to be a time of a day when Sensō-ji isn’t packed.

If you’re hunting to take photos of Harajuku’s legendary cosplayers (costume players), this is your best bet. Though the scene appears to be fading, on sunny weekends (especially Sundays) you might catch eccentrically dressed teens assembling here. ([JR Yamanote Line to Harajuku, Omote-sando exit])

★ Top tip Takeshita-dori is another good spot to catch a glimpse of gosurori (gothic Lolita) kids.

Dramatic, intensely visual kabuki is Japan’s most recognised art form, developed during the reign of the shōgun and shaped by the decadent tastes of Edo’s wealthy merchant class – resulting in breathtaking costumes and elaborate stagecraft. Kabuki-za is Tokyo’s kabuki theatre. Established in 1889, the theatre reopened after a lengthy reconstruction in 2013. The new building is a blend of traditional elegance and modern sensibilities, with scarlet and gold throughout. ([www.kabuki-bito.jp/eng; 4-12-15 Ginza, Chōō-ku; tickets ¥4000–20,000; [Hibiya Line to Higashi-Ginza, exit 3])

Order bentō at Hanakago (¥2100–3500) on the 3rd floor of Kabuki-za or get take-away (around ¥1000) from stands inside the theatre.
4 TAKESHITA-DÔRI

Where aspiring goths, Lolitas and punks come to shop

7 IMPERIAL PALACE GARDENS

See one of Japan’s most famous bridges

30 TOKYO DOME CITY

Baseball arena meets amusement park