

Understand Tokyo

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Preparations for the 2020 Summer Olympics are in full swing, ushering in a new era for Tokyo during uncertain times.

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The amazing story of how a swampy fishing village became the world's largest urban area, despite repeated destruction.

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Manga, anime, hyperfashion, futuristic design and high-tech wizardry: Tokyo is the go-to place for all things cutting edge.

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Tokyo's rich cultural offerings include the traditional, such as kabuki, and the ambitiously modern, such as visionary new buildings.

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Take the plunge – you just might get hooked on the deeply relaxing hot springs in and around Tokyo.

Tokyo Today

Tokyo has reinvented itself countless times in the four centuries since its founding. With the 2020 Summer Olympic Games on the horizon, it hopes to do so again, with plans for a greener, friendlier city. Following decades of economic stagnation and a soon-to-be-shrinking workforce, the stakes are high. Does Tokyo still have what it takes to pull off another reincarnation?

Best on Film

Stray Dog (Kurosawa Akira; 1949)

Noir thriller set in sweltering, occupied Tokyo.

Tokyo Story (Ozu Yasujiro; 1953)

Portrait of a family in rapidly changing, post-WWII Japan.

Lost in Translation (Sofia Coppola; 2003) Disorienting, captivating Tokyo through the eyes of two Americans.

Adrift in Tokyo (2008) Two luckless antiheroes on a long walk through the city.

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs

(Naruse Mikio; 1960) Inside the world of a Ginza hostess bar.

Best in Print

Scarlet Gang of Asakusa (Kawabata

Yasunari; 1930) Lively chronicle of a gang of street urchins in Asakusa.

Coin Locker Babies (Murakami Ryu;

1980) Coming-of-age story set in a future, literally toxic, Tokyo.

Snakes and Earrings (Kanehara Hitomi; 2003) The fall of a Shibuya 'Barbie girl'.

After Dark (Murakami Haruki; 2004)

Colourful characters come together during a night in the life of Tokyo.

A Strange Tale from East of

the River (Nagai Kafu; 1937) An unlicensed prostitute in atmospheric, prewar Tokyo.

Tokyo Vision 2020

Since it was announced in 2013 that Tokyo would hold the 2020 Summer Olympics, the city has gone into full preparation mode, enacting its 'Tokyo Vision 2020'. To understand just how much hosting the Olympics means to the city (or at least to the city's image-makers), you have to look back to the 1964 Summer Olympics. The first games to be held in Asia, the 1964 Olympics marked Tokyo's big comeback after the city was all but destroyed in WWII. The powers that be are hoping that the 2020 games will again be symbolic, reaffirming Tokyo's position in the pantheon of world's great cities, following more than two decades of economic malaise and the faltering of its export giants (such as Sony).

Much of the city's current infrastructure dates to the manic preparations leading up to the 1964 games. And while Tokyo sold the International Olympic Commission on a compact games that would use many existing structures, new developments are in store. The most dramatic redevelopment will take place along Tokyo Bay, where many of the events will be held. Already in the works is the Umi-no-Mori (Sea Forest), a vast green space on one of the bay's artificial landfill islands. So far a quarter of the planned 88 hectares of trees has been planted, in compost soil created from park and roadside prunings and heat-treated sewage. When it's completed, around 2016, the park will be five times the size of Hibiya-kōen. Other positive changes to look forward to: a more accessible Tokyo for people with disabilities, expanded wi-fi networks and increased flight capacity for Tokyo's more convenient airport, Haneda.

As a whole, Tokyoites look to the 2020 games as a source of pride, though there has been some hand-wringing in the media that the city and its citizens aren't 'international' enough. That has translated into