

Understand Tokyo

TOKYO TODAY..... 202

The city has its sights on the 2020 Olympics and beyond. Can it pull through in uncertain times?

HISTORY 204

The amazing story of how a swampy fishing village became one of the world's leading cities, despite repeated destruction.

POP CULTURE..... 213

Manga, anime, hyperfashion, futuristic design and robots: Tokyo is the go-to place for all things cutting-edge (and cute).

ART & ARCHITECTURE 218

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

ONSEN..... 227

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 (Satoshi Miki; 2008)

Two luckless anti-heroes on a long walk through the city.

Your Name (Kimi no Na wa; Shinkai

Makoto; 2016) Dreamy anime contrasting life in Tokyo with life in rural Japan.

Best in Print

The Book of Tokyo: A City in Short

(eds Michael Emmerich, Jim Hinks & Masashi Matsuie; 2015) Ten stories by contemporary Japanese writers set in the capital.

Coin Locker Babies (Murakami Ryū;

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

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.

Countdown to 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 hope that the 2020 games will again be symbolic, reaffirming Tokyo's position in the pantheon of the 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 Committee on a compact Games that would use many existing structures, new developments are in store. The most dramatic of these are planned to take place on and along Tokyo Bay. Already in the works is the Umino-Mori (Sea Forest), a vast green space on one of the bay's artificial landfill islands, overseen by architect Andō Tadao. Other positive changes to look forward to: a more accessible Tokyo for people with disabilities, better English signage and tourist information, and expanded wi-fi networks.

Political Shake-up

Tokyo ran through two governors in four years, with both pressured to resign after just two years in office, amid claims of misusing campaign funds (Inose Naoki) and government money (Masuzoe Yōichi). In 2016, with the sentiment that enough was enough running high,