

# Understand Tokyo

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How Tokyo has gotten back on its feet (and then some) after the 2011 earthquake.

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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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From anime to Zen gardens, kabuki to crafts, Japan's rich artistic culture mixes deep tradition with modern irreverence.

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

# Tokyo Today

After being sideswiped by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake that devastated northern Japan in 2011, Tokyo shrugged off power shortages and slight damage, pulled itself together, and worked to help victims. It returned its conservative mayor to office, refurbished the historic Tokyo Station in 2011, and in 2012 unveiled the world's tallest tower, Tokyo Sky Tree. For a city at the heart of the largest metropolitan area on Earth, destruction and innovation are a constant part of life. That's how Tokyo survives.

## Best on Film

**Tokyo Story** (1953) An aging couple's devastating visit to Tokyo.

**Godzilla** (1954) The monster masterpiece that spawned an industry.

**When a Woman Ascends the Stairs** (1960) The confessions of a Ginza bar hostess.

**Train Man** (2005) A shy *otaku* (geek) falls for a woman, and attempts to date her.

## Best in Print

**A Strange Tale from East of the River** (Nagai Kafu; 1937) The story of an unlicensed prostitute in prewar Tokyo.

**Coin Locker Babies** (Murakami Ryu; 1980) The tale of two boys left to die in coin lockers.

**Snakes and Earrings** (Kanehara Hitomi; 2003) The fall of a 'Barbie girl' spellbound by a tattoo artist.

**1Q84** (Murakami Haruki; 2009–10) An assassin enters an alternate reality in Shibuya.

## The Great Wave of Tōhoku

When the quake and tsunamis struck the Tōhoku region of northeast Japan on 11 March 2011, train and subway services were disrupted, stranding millions of commuters in Tokyo. Thousands began a long walk home to suburbs, marching for hours until they could catch a bus or taxi. Of course, the disruptions to life in Tokyo, including damage to its port and Tokyo Disneyland, were nothing compared to the devastation in the north: nearly 20,000 dead and over 125,000 buildings damaged or destroyed. It was the worst crisis to hit Japan since WWII, and its effects continued for months. Power rationing by Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, seriously affected manufacturing and other businesses. Leaking radiation was detected in minute quantities in Tokyo, but fears of contamination slammed Japanese exports, and travelers stayed away. Tokyoites, however, invoked the age-old mantra of *ganbaru* (to do one's utmost) and donated their time, money and goods to help their compatriots up north. They diligently observed *setsuden* power-saving campaigns, and the electricity squeeze gradually eased. The government has moved to nationalise TEPCO, and the cost of the disaster is still being counted.

While earthquakes have and will always be a possibility in Tokyo, fears about radiation have subsided significantly one year after the disaster. Background radiation in Tokyo is no higher (and in some cases is less) than that of other world cities.

## Olympic Dreams

As it has done so often in the past, after fires, earthquakes and the US air raids of WWII, Tokyo carried on with its day-to-day business after the disaster. In 2011, despite calling the Tōhoku quake 'divine punishment' for greed, and mounting a costly but failed attempt to win