

TOKYO

ENCOUNTER

BRANDON PRESSER
WENDY YANAGIHARA

Tokyo Encounter

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Shaded yellow areas on the maps denote areas of interest – for their historical significance, their attractive architecture or their great bars and restaurants. We encourage you to head to these areas and just start exploring!

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BRANDON PRESSER

Tokyo has held a special place in Brandon's heart for as long as he can remember. While studying at Harvard University he wrote his senior thesis on the city's fascinating array of retail architecture, and has since collaborated with many Japanese architects throughout his professional career. These days, Brandon has joined the glamorous ranks of eternal nomadism – he travels the world, pen in hand – and has contributed to over 25 Lonely Planet titles from Iceland to Thailand and many lands in between.



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Our Readers Many thanks to the travellers who wrote to us with helpful hints, useful advice and interesting anecdotes, including Ching-Li Tor and Evi de Maeyer.

Cover photograph Woman standing in front of the Keisen Hama sculpture *Garyu no mon* in the lobby of the Peninsula Hotel, Will Robb/Lonely Planet Images.



Neon signs along busy Yasukuni-dōri, Shinjuku

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> THIS IS TOKYO

Life in Tokyo moves at a well-oiled clip, with an energy that borders on mania and an obsession with newness that seems to make all ideas quickly obsolete. Fashions begin to fade almost as soon as they are plucked from clothes hangers, and *keitai* (mobile phones) are traded up for each latest technological advancement. But even while throngs of tech-savvy, smartly styled Tokyoites trot through subway stations, there is a traditional side to this hyperurban cosmopolis, which may not be immediately evident.

Beneath the conspicuous consumption of its shopping districts and shiny façades of the latest architectural achievement, Tokyo throws out unexpected glimpses of its cultural core. At a Shintō shrine across town, a young man purchases a fortune and, after reading it, ties it to a strung frame whose many paper fortunes rustle like leaves in a breeze. In a neighbourhood *sentō* (public bath) in Asakusa, an old woman bathes with her tiny granddaughter, much as she once did with her own grandmother.

Tokyo's unique vitality springs from this intertwining of the new with the time-honoured old. While it's the wellspring of Japanese pop culture, it is also a place where the patrilineage of its imperial family is a tightly held institution. It's the city to which Japanese nonconformists flee but where individuality is often linked to an older form of small-group identity. It's a metropolis where the pressure cooker of traditional societal mores and expectations explodes into cutting-edge art, music and inventions like the 'boyfriend's arm pillow'. Even pop culture like manga, as it takes the world by storm, is rooted in the tradition of Edo-period ukiyo-e (wood-block prints from the 'floating world'). And so, as its modern gears keep turning, the basic machinery of this intriguing city remains true to its origins.

Top left A traditional wedding at Meiji-jingū-gyoen (p103) **Top right** Traditional straw sandals and hat
Bottom School kids tie their fortunes at Sensō-ji temple (p149)