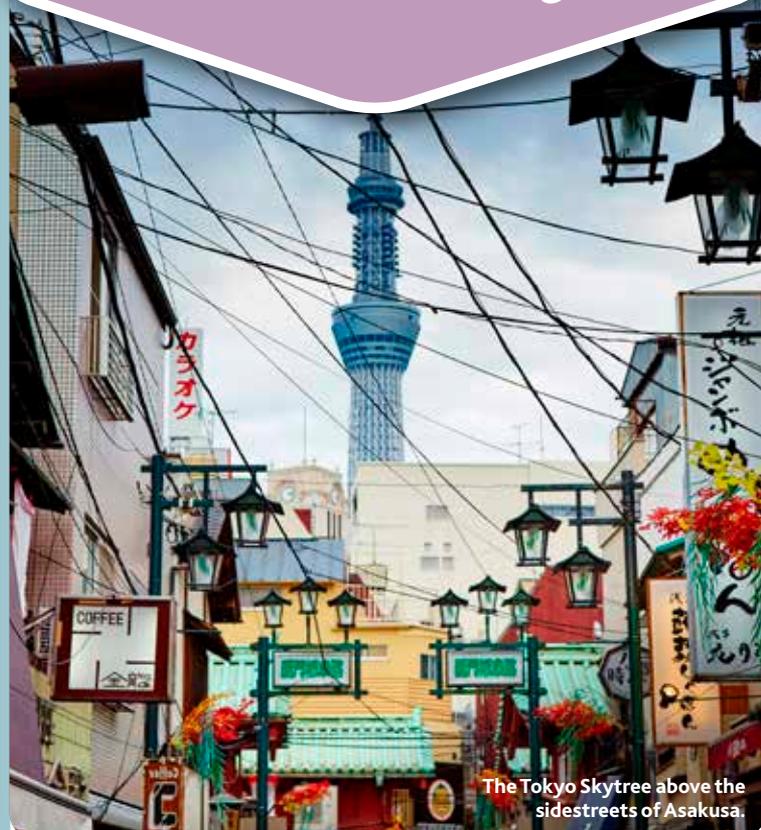


Tokyo: three ways



The Tokyo Skytree above the sidestreets of Asakusa.

Tokyo's futuristic streetscapes also contain historical alleys, raucous traditional festivals and lantern-lit yakitori (grilled chicken) stands of yore. See the best of the old city on our guided walk of Asakusa district.

FOR FIRST-TIMERS

📍 Edo-Tokyo Museum

(edo-tokyo-museum.or.jp; 1-4-1 Yokoami)

This museum documents Tokyo's transformation from tidal flatlands to feudal capital to modern metropolis. There are detailed models of townscapes, villas and tenement homes, plus artefacts such as ukiyo-e (woodblock prints) and old maps.

✂️ Maisen TONKATSU £

(mai-sen.com; 4-8-5 Jingūmae, Shibuya-ku)

You could order something else (maybe fried shrimp), but everyone else will be ordering the famous tonkatsu (breaded, deep-fried pork cutlets). There are different grades of pork on the menu, including prized kurobuta (black pig), but even the cheapest

is melt-in-your-mouth divine. The restaurant is housed in an old public bathhouse. A takeaway window (10am to 7pm) serves delicious tonkatsu sando (breaded pork sandwiches).

📍 Meiji-jingu

(meijijingu.or.jp; 1-1 Yoyogi Kamizono-chō)

Tokyo's grandest Shintō shrine is dedicated to the Emperor Meiji and Empress Shōken, whose reign (1868–1912) coincided with Japan's transformation from isolationist, feudal state to modern nation. Constructed in 1920, the shrine was destroyed in WWII air raids and rebuilt in 1958; however, unlike so many of Japan's post-war reconstructions, Meiji-jingū has atmosphere in spades. The main shrine is in a leafy wooded grove.

📍 Mitsukoshi

(mitsukoshi.co.jp; 1-4-1 Nihombashi-Muromachi)

Mitsukoshi's Nihombashi branch was Japan's first department store. It's a grand affair with an entrance guarded by bronze lions and a magnificent statue of Magokoro, the goddess of sincerity, rising up from the centre of the ground floor. For the full effect, arrive at 10am for the bells and bows that accompany each day's opening.

📍 Sensō-ji

(senso-ji.jp; 2-3-1 Asakusa, Taitō-ku)

Tokyo's most visited temple enshrines a golden image of Kannon (the Buddhist goddess of mercy) who, according to legend, was miraculously pulled out of the nearby Sumida-gawa by two fishermen in 628 AD. The image has remained on the spot ever since, but is never on public display.

📍 Shibuya Crossing

(Shibuya Scramble)

Rumoured to be the busiest intersection in the world (and definitely in Japan), Shibuya Crossing is like a giant beating heart, sending people in all directions with every pulsing light change. Perhaps nowhere else says 'Welcome to Tokyo' better than this. Hundreds of people – and at peak times said to be over 1,000 people – cross at a time, coming from all directions at once, yet still managing to dodge each other with a practised, nonchalant agility.

📍 Tokyo National Museum

(tnm.jp; 13-9 Ueno-kōen, Taitō-ku)

If you visit only one museum in Tokyo, make it the Tokyo National Museum. Here you'll find the world's largest collection of Japanese art, including ancient pottery, Buddhist sculptures, samurai swords, colourful woodblock prints, gorgeous kimonos and much more. Focus on the Honkan (Japanese Gallery) and the enchanting Gallery of Hōryū-ji Treasures, which displays masks, scrolls and gilt Buddhas from Hōryū-ji. Also explore the three-storied Tōyōkan (Gallery of Asian Art), which houses Buddhist sculpture from around Asia.

FOR REPEAT VISITORS

📍 Cafe de l'Ambre

(8-10-15 Ginza, Chūō-ku)

The sign over the door here says 'Coffee Only' but, oh, what a selection. Sekiguchi Ichiro started the business in 1948 and – remarkably at the age of 100 – still runs it himself, sourcing and roasting aged beans from all over the world. It's dark, retro and classic Ginza.

📍 Ghibli Museum

(ghibli-museum.jp; 1-1-83 Shimo-Renjaku)

Fuka Master animator Miyazaki Hayao, whose Studio Ghibli produced *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*, designed this museum. Fans will enjoy the original sketches; kids, even if they're not familiar with the movies, will fall in love with the fairytale atmosphere (and the big cat bus).

📍 Itoya

(ito-ya.co.jp; 2-7-15 Ginza, Chūō-ku)

Nine floors (plus several more in the nearby annexe) of stationery-shop love await at this famed, century-old Ginza establishment. There are everyday items (such as notebooks and greeting cards)

Don't miss

Kōenji Awa Odori is Tokyo's biggest awa odori (dance festival for O-Bon, the annual Buddhist commemoration of one's ancestors). Twelve thousand participants in traditional costumes dance their way through the streets over the last weekend of August (koenji-awaodori.com).



Neighbourhood walk



Sensoji Temple in Asakusa

Asakusa Shitamachi

- Start: Asakusa Station, Exit 4
- End: Ef
- Length: 1.5 miles; 2.5 hours

Shitamachi is the word used to describe parts of Tokyo that come closest to approximating the spirit of old Edo. Asakusa is one of those places. Not only does it have important temples and shrines dating to the Edo era (1603–1868) or earlier, but it also has the narrow lanes and wooden shop fronts that characterise Shitamachi today. This walk will take you past the main sights and down the narrow lanes of old Tokyo.

First head over to 1 **Azuma-bashi** (2 Kaminarimon, Taitō-ku). Originally built in 1774, it was once the point of departure for boat trips to the Yoshiwara pleasure district, north of Asakusa. From here you can get a good look at the golden flame of Super Dry Hall and the even

more incongruent Tokyo Sky Tree, both across the river. Retrace your steps to 2 **Kaminari-mon**, the entrance to the grand temple complex 3 **Sensō-ji**. Spend some time exploring the temple's highlights. Afterwards, walk past the nostalgic amusement park 4 **Hanayashiki**, an Asakusa fixture since 1853. Next take a detour up the covered arcade to the 5 **Edo Shitamachi Traditional Crafts Museum**, where you can see the work of local artisans. Then head down the lane called 6 **Hoppy-dōri**, lined with yakitori stalls. Go on, have a few skewers and a beer. Pop over to look at lantern-lit 7 **Asakusa Engei Hall**, reminiscent of the vaudeville halls that were once common here. The theatre is part of the

Rokku district of Asakusa, a famous (and famously bawdy) entertainment district during the century before WWII. Pay a visit to vintage store 8 **Tokyo Hotarudo**, where the goods pay homage to this era, when Asakusa was thought of as the Montmartre of Tokyo. If you resisted the charms of Hoppy-dōri you can have a meal at 9 **Daikokuya**, an old-school tempura restaurant, along Dembō-in-dōri, a strip with crafty stores. Don't miss the centuries-old comb store 10 **Yonoya Kushiho**. Take one of the roads parallel to Nakamise – a world away from the tourist hordes – and finish up at 11 **Ef**, a café in a 19th-century wooden warehouse.



and luxuries (such as fountain pens and Italian leather agendas). You'll also find washi (fine Japanese handmade paper), tenugui (beautifully hand-dyed thin cotton towels) and furoshiki (wrapping cloths).

✕ **Kikunoi** KAISEKI £££ (£kikunoi.jp; 6-13-8 Akasaka) Exquisitely prepared seasonal dishes are as beautiful as they are delicious at this Tokyo outpost of one of Kyoto's most acclaimed kaiseki (Japanese haute cuisine) restaurants. Kikunoi's third-generation chef, Murata Yoshihiro, has written a book translated into English on kaiseki that the staff helpfully use to explain the dishes you are served if you don't speak Japanese.

♠ **Mandarake Complex** (mandarake.co.jp; Nakano Broadway, 5-52-15 Nakano) This is the original Mandarake, the go-to store for all things manga (Japanese comics) and anime (Japanese animation). Once a small, secondhand comic-book store, Mandarake now has some 25 shops just inside the Nakano Broadway shopping centre. Each specialises in something different, be it books, cel art or figurines. You'll also find Mandarake branches in Shibuya, Akihabara and Ikebukuro.

◊ **Nezu Museum** (nezu-muse.or.jp; 6-5-1 Minami-Aoyama) Nezu Museum offers a striking blend of old and new: a renowned collection of Japanese, Chinese and Korean antiquities in a gallery space designed by contemporary architect Kuma Kengo. Behind the galleries is a strolling garden laced with paths and studded with teahouses.

★ **Ryōgoku Kokugikan** (sumo.or.jp; 1-3-28 Yokoami, Sumida-ku) If you're in town when a tournament is on – for 15 days each January, May and September – catch the big boys in action at Japan's largest sumo stadium. The action doesn't heat up until the senior wrestlers hit the ring around 2pm. Tickets can be bought online one month before the start of the tournament.

◊ **Tokyo Sky Tree** (tokyo-skytree.jp; 1-1-2 Oshiage) Tokyo Sky Tree opened in May 2012 as the world's tallest 'free-standing tower' at 634m. Its silvery exterior of steel mesh morphs from a triangle at the base to a circle at 300m. There are two observation decks. You can see more of the city during daylight hours – at peak visibility you can see all the way to Mt Fuji – but it is at night that Tokyo appears truly beautiful.

FOR OLD HANDS ✕ **Asakusa Unagi Sansho** JAPANESE ££ (£03-3843-0344; 2-25-7 Nishi-Asakusa) At this friendly and simple unagi (eel) restaurant, the grilled eel is served in three sizes: only go for large if you're really hungry. On the walls hang embroidery done by the mum, while the dad cooks the eels to perfection.

◊ **Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architecture Museum** (tatemonoen.jp/english; 3-7-1 Sakura-chō) This fantastic yet little-known museum has a collection of historic buildings rescued from Tokyo's modernising zeal. Among them are an Edo-era farmhouse, a modernist villa and a whole strip of early-20th-century shops, all of which you can enter. It's a short walk through Tokyo's second-largest park to the museum.

✕ **Kado** JAPANESE ££ (£kagurazaka-kado.com; 1-32 Akagi-Motomachi, Shinjuku-ku) Kado specialises in katei-ryōri (home cooking). Dinner is a set course of seasonal dishes (such as grilled quail or fresh tofu). At lunch there's no English menu, so your best bet is the kado teishoku – the daily house special.

◊ **Musée Tomo** (musee-tomo.or.jp; 4-1-35 Toranomon) One of Tokyo's most elegant and tasteful museums is named after Kikuchi Tomo, whose collection of contemporary Japanese ceramics wowed them in Washington and London before finally being exhibited at home. Exhibitions change every few months but are always atmospheric.

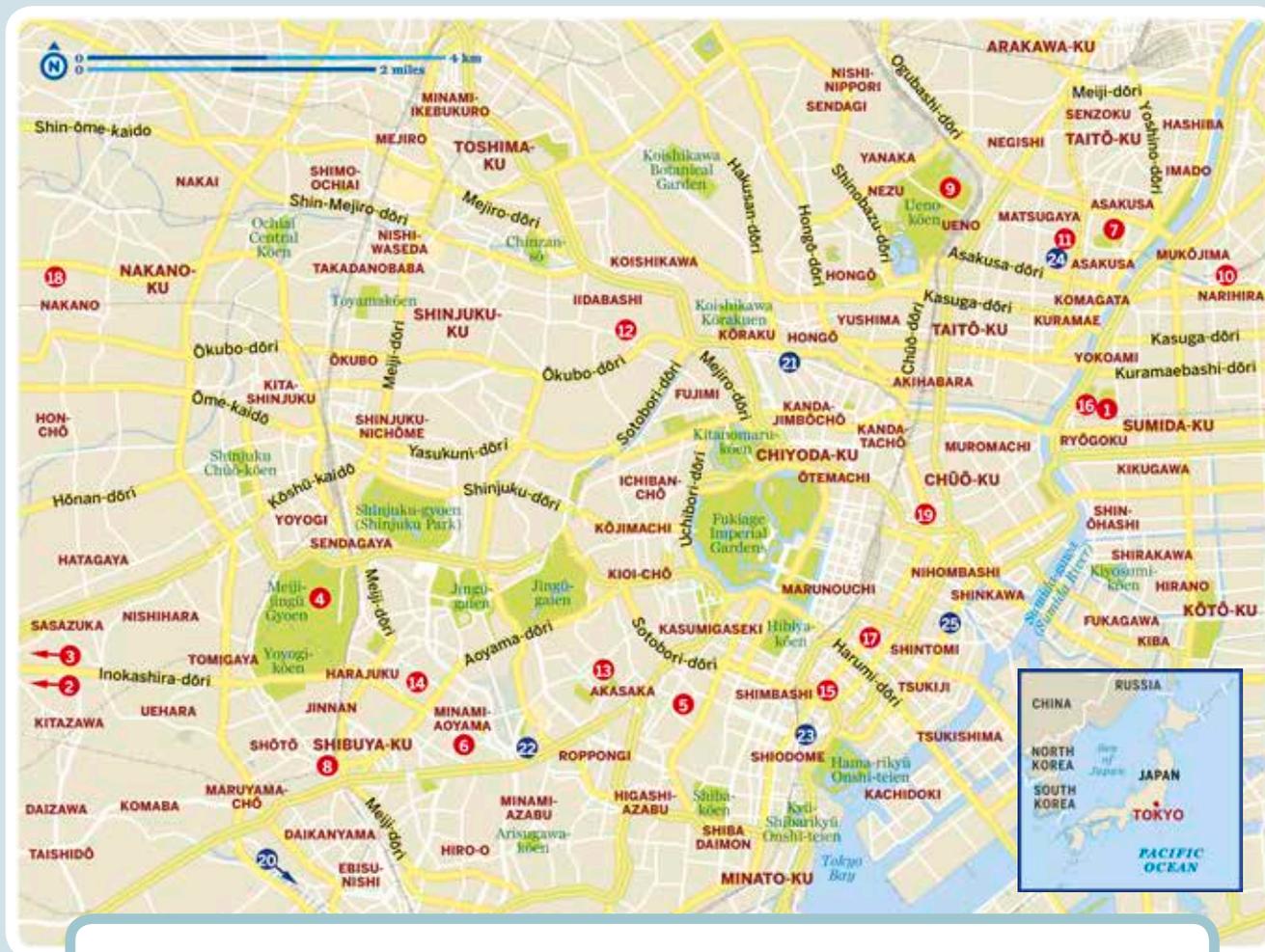


Tokyo cooking courses

A Taste of Culture Market tours and classes with a culinary expert (tasteofculture.com). Buddha Bellies Chef-led courses focusing on sushi and bentō making (buddhabelliestokyo.jimdo.com). Tokyo Cook Learn to make shōjin ryōri, vegetarian temple food (tokyo-cook.com). Tokyo Kitchen Crash courses in the basics of Japanese cookery; can do vegetarian and gluten-free (asakusa-tokyokitchen.com).



TOKYO: THREE WAYS



TOP PICKS

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Sleeping

Claska

Best for unusual décor (claska.com/en/hotel)
No two rooms are alike: some have tatami and floor cushions; others have spacious terraces and glass-walled bathrooms.

Hotel Niwa Tokyo

Best for traditional ambience (hotelnawatokyo.com)
There's a rock garden and bamboo grove, and shōji (traditional paper screens) across the windows in the rooms.

£££

Hotel S

Best for a boutique stay (hr-roppongi.jp)
This place captures the arty design spirit of Roppongi. Some rooms have design elements like tatami (in charcoal).

££

Park Hotel Tokyo

Best for artistic interest (parkhoteltokyo.com)
Thirty-one artists have decorated the 31st-floor rooms. There are all-Japanese themes, from sumo and Zen to yokai and geisha.

££

Tokyo Ryokan

Best for simple living (tokyoryokan.com)
This tidy little inn has tons of charm. There are touches of calligraphy, attractive woodwork and sliding screens.

£££

Wise Owl Hostel Tokyo

Best for sleeping centrally (wiseowlhostels.com)
This place is centrally located, above a subway, and a clever configuration of wooden bunks comprise the dorms.

£

£



FURTHER READING

Pick up Lonely Planet's *Tokyo* city guide (£14.99) or *Pocket Tokyo* (£8.50). Tokyo is listed on our Guides app, free to download from app stores.