



# JUST IN TOKYO

A GARRETT COUNTY PRESS TRAVEL GUIDE

Just In Tokyo

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# **Just In Tokyo**

**a city guide by  
Justin Hall**

**published by the Garrett County Press  
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*Japan's population is estimated around 127.1 million. 12 million of those people live in Tokyo metro, making for a population density of around 5,514 people per square kilometer.*

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# Welcome to Japan

Every year more people visit Tunisia or Croatia than visit Japan.

- Alex Kerr, *Dogs and Demons: Tales from the Dark Side of Japan*

Japan is an island, five times further away from Korea than England is from France. This isolation has resulted in a marvellous mutant culture, the leading reason to see Japan. Still that distance and isolation is at the heart of some alienating expense and inconvenience in traveling to Japan.

But for the flexible Western traveller, travel to Japan can be inexpensive and immensely stimulating.

This guide is composed by a young American male with about six months experience living in Japan. Somewhere between visitor and resident, with some middling Japanese, and a fresh eye. I've travelled to Africa, Asia, Central America, Russia and Europe. So some of this is hardened travel advice earned squatting over holes cut in the Honduran soil, picking blood sucking insects out of my short

*Japanese folks are avid travellers. In 2000 17 million Japanese traveled abroad, while 5 million foreign tourists visited Japan.*

hairs, and some of this has been inspired by giant televisions in the streets and the chance to eat raw cod sperm as smiling Japanese folks lead me into safe exploration.

My first visit to Japan I didn't speak a word of Japanese. Even without the language, I managed to meet provocative people, have wild experiences, eat unusual food, stay in some relatively inexpensive lodging, and develop an abiding curiosity in the country that brought me back to live there.

So while I offer fresh perspective on a country that has been well editorialized, there is some very real danger that I am generalizing or specifying erroneously. None of this is true for sure! Some is regional, some is misinterpreted. Take these observations as fodder for your own poking around, and question everything. Most folks you meet, foreign and Japanese, will be happy to share data with you and talk with you about Japan.

It's a sensory deprivation experience to visit Japan, where you can't read and write. You'll be confronted with most of the services and settings you might expect in modern western society, except the interface will be largely unintelligible. This is changing somewhat as instructions are increasingly provided in English, in roman letters. But occasionally the English you'll find is more curious than helpful. They have interpreted English language and western culture in their own way and you're likely to learn as much about your home and yourself as you will learn about whatever "Japan" is.

You don't have to go to Japan to have an inkling that the Japanese are not as the rest of us are. In fact, they're decidedly weird. If you take the conventional gamut of human possibility as running, say, from Canadians to Brazilians, after 10 minutes in the land of the rising sun, you realise the Japs are off the map, out of the game, on another planet. It's not that they're aliens, but they are the people that aliens might be if they'd learnt Human by correspondence course and wanted to slip in unnoticed. - A.A. Gill, "Mad in Japan"

### Ni-Hon



Two Japanese Kanji characters, the first one is "sun" and the second "source." Together "ni-hon," they mean Japan, sun-source. The second character also means origin, root, or book; look for it on bookstores.

# Conveniences for the Foreign Traveler

## Safety

After travelling to difficult and tense places around the world, Japan can come as a relief. Wandering a dark alley, you are likely to be more scary as a foreigner than anything native you might encounter. You can lurch around mostly drunk, if you so choose, and you will only be acting as the locals do. Few people will mess with you in that state; they are too busy staggering about and throwing up on the streets themselves. There are some folks who don't like foreigners; keep your eyes out and don't provoke any tough guys in nice suits or the young men who work for them. Police help maintain the social order in Japan; you'll find that their jobs can extend to helping the foreigner find lodgings or some obscure building.

## Costume

Japanese people seem more fashion conscious than most other folks; people wear appropriate outfits, with great attention to detail. Witness not just the articulate style of some young people, but the colorful and precise outfits of service personnel around Tokyo. This is helpful for the foreign traveller; you don't have to wander through a store wondering who works there; anyone wearing an apron is likely ready to receive your question. Accordingly, most of the folks who might mean trouble for you are dressed like porno thugs - slightly outrageous style, compared to the ubiquitous black suited salarymen. Gangsters in fine silks (*Yakuza*) and sweatsuits and young men with shaven eyebrows might in fact be friendly but at least you should be able to read what place they have in society by their clothes before you decide to flag them down. There are some Japanese kids frontin' American gangsta style: baggy jeans, gold chains, sport shirts, cornrow hair; it's not clear that they back up their thug appearance with any real-life gaffling.

## Vending Machines

Why rely on messy human interaction when you can have machine mediated clarity? You will find vending machines in Japan selling a wider variety of goods than they do elsewhere - toiletries, food, drinks, pornography to name a few. Over five million vending machines on this small island means you are never more than a few

*An estimated 97% of Japanese students continue schooling on through high school.*



coins and a block or two away from a bubbly vitamin drink, hot creamy tea in a can, a “Pocari Sweat” athletic drink, sweet corn soup and hot chocolate rum drinks.

## **Photography**

Travellers who want to take pictures will find themselves well supported by one of the most camera-happy countries in the world. You’ll see middle aged ladies heading to the park on the weekend with three foot long lenses. 83% of the population is estimated to own cameras. People will understand what you are doing with a camera and might agree to pose or at least take a photo for you. Accessories and batteries for most cameras are easy to come by.

## **Convenience Stores**

There are rich worlds of compressed shopping in nearly every neighborhood, what seems like every block in Japan. If you figure out what you like in a Japanese convenience store you are never far from immediate gratification.

## **Coin Lockers**

A busy vagabond can stash their stuff in a multitude of coin lockers available in train stations, dance clubs, hotels.

## **Traveler’s Inconveniences Cost**

Japan can be awfully expensive. Recent dollar to yen rates have favored the foreign traveller, still it seems you can’t walk out your door in Tokyo without spending \$30. It’s the cost of importing things to this island. It’s the cost of an elaborate system of permissions and bureaucracy. Someone once turned to me in Tokyo and chirped, “I love that you don’t have to tip here!” Yes, well, consider the cost of tips factored into the cost of everything. Think of it as membership dues for a helpful island club. The trains are painfully punctual, you’re not likely to get mugged, and often people will go out of their way to help you. And so you pay a little bit more, sometimes a lot more.

For prices in this book, we assume an exchange rate of around 130 yen to each US\$ dollar. The quick and dirty way to approximate the exchange rate is to take a price stated in yen and trim off two zeros. For example, 1000 yen would be around 10 dollars. Actually, it’s about \$7.70; if you think of it as ten dollars instead of the actual amount you should come out ahead.

## Vending Machines

There's quite a number of restaurants where you'll be expected to buy a ticket from a vending machine as the means of ordering your food. This is inconvenient because it doesn't make any sense. There's a person, standing behind a counter, next to another cash register, and they won't take your money and give you food. Then once you realize they've been gesturing at the vending machine and not at the door, you'll have to decode what's on the menu of small buttons. Fret not; you can always flail about helplessly until someone comes over to help you pick something, often based on the plastic food in the window, pictures, or what someone else is already eating.

## Smoking

More than 55% of adult Japanese men smoke and increasing numbers of women as well. Cigarette vending machines line streets and alleys. If that bothers you, try to find an empty seat in the nonsmoking section provided by some restaurants and cafes: invariably a dank corner sandwiched between the bathroom and the smokers. Get used to it. Be thankful people don't smoke on subway trains.

## Nativity

Groucho Marx would have been fine here; this club would never have had him for a member. What exactly Japan is and who exactly is Japanese is the subject of many books and sustained debates. Suffice it to say that some Japanese have a strict sense of social order and there might be times you will be made to feel unwelcome. There's a ready cold shoulder here for those who obviously don't know how to fit in with a uniquely organized system. "*gaijin*" is very common slang, short for "*gaikokujin*" which means outside-country-person. That's you, everywhere, all the time.

Your foreign language and foreign persona will immediately intimidate some folks. This can be disheartening when you need help or you are just curious about something. Participation is the best fun in travelling, and you should not let occasional ignorant moments throw you off from poking your nose in some Japanese corners. Be gentle, be graceful and keep a welcoming smile on your face. Most people want to be helpful and many are curious about you as well.

# Infrastructure

## Communication

There are payphones all over Japan. Most payphones use thin plastic phone cards rather than coins. Some folks collect these cards for their pictures of local attractions or frolicking animals. You can buy these at convenience stores.

### **Mobile Phones - *keitai denwa***

Tokyo is a large city and if you plan to be there for a number of days, you should consider procuring a mobile phone. These are available for rental at Narita airport, and at some high-end hotels. A mobile phone is useful in Japan only if you think you might like to meet people and stay in touch. Especially if you plan to do some wandering without hotel reservations, a mobile phone is a fantastic way to actually develop some sorts of short or long term relationships. For example: On the train from the airport, you meet a Japanese guy coming back from three months living in Thailand. “Wow!” you think, “A Japanese person who seems like someone I might be friends with!” He’s headed home now, but he’d be happy to meet you for drinks in two days. But you don’t know where you’ll be staying then! Do you have any way to stay in touch besides payphones?

You might consider buying a mobile phone if you plan to be in Japan for more than a short while or you have money to burn and you want an odd technology souvenir. While phones in the west are mostly black and white bricks, mobile phones in Japan boast cameras, email/Internet access, and they can play Galaga, Pac-Man or Arkanoid to boot. Of course most of the mobile phone Internet is in Japanese. Still it can make a marvellous thing to show off from Japan back at home. You’ll have to supply an address and credit card number. Some of the mobile phone providers in Japan will not sell mobile services to visiting foreigners - only cheap, basic prepaid phones. If you want the fun, technologically advanced models, keep checking around. If you eventually decide to leave Japan, cancelling the service after you sign up could pose a challenge.

*Japan has the highest rate of vending machines per capita - one for every 23 people. In the United States, there’s one vending machine for every 32 people or so.*

## Internet Access

Tokyo has a glut of cheap DSL and broadband connections. You should find some Internet cafes easily in areas where young folks are milling about. Try asking about Internet access at hotels and perhaps video game arcades; you might end up in a room stacked with Manga comics and a few computers for rent in the back, or perhaps at a full-fledged Internet cafe. The keyboard will invariably be in Japanese; all the keys you need to email your baby are there but the spacebar is a hazard - extra-narrow, and if you hit any of the adjacent keys, you toggle the Japanese typing mode on. Hit the escape key a bunch of times, and try punching the key in the upper left hand part of the keyboard; that often seems to bring your “*romaji*” back (roman script).

### Payphones

You can jack in with an ordinary phone cord and dial-up through the fairly-common gray NTT payphones. They can handle ISDN dialup as well, if you can figure that out. Payable with phone cards. A few of the US service providers offer Japanese dial-up numbers, occasionally with a surcharge attached (Earthlink, for example).

### Kinko's

The ubiquitous copy shops and virtual offices are here in Tokyo and they offer expensive rental Internet connections on PCs and Macintoshes.

### Necca - [www.necca.ne.jp](http://www.necca.ne.jp)

A small chain of locations stuffed with PCs, mostly kids playing online games inside. They'll rent you a computer attached to a printer, with access to a CD burner for fairly reasonable rates. Snacks and coffee available. Akihabara and Shibuya.

### Wi-Fi - 802.11b

Knowledgeable gearheads with an 802.11b connection in their laptop should be able to find some Tokyo hotspots. Ask online before you go, try the Tokyo PC Users Group: [www.tokyopc.org](http://www.tokyopc.org)

## Name Cards

Business cards are a big deal in Japan. Individuals have them. While young folk have somewhat dispensed with some of Japan's famous bowing, two-handed-handoff business card rituals, it's still

expected that you should be able to introduce yourself with a piece of paper. Definitely get a cheap card with your email address to bring with you if you want to make some friends in Japan. Add an illustration or even a photo of yourself, something to remember you by. Traditional Japan is interested in your organizational affiliation, so if you have any be sure to include it - any school, office, club, coven or cabal should do.

## **Money**

### **Cash Machines**

Cash machines throughout Tokyo readily distribute yen from foreign accounts. The Japanese Post Office system offers ATMs that might accept your foreign bank card, and Citibank has foreign-friendly locations in Tokyo as well. If you can afford it, expect to walk around with a few hundred dollars in your wallet. While it's possible to live cheap in Japan, you might find yourself in a pinch where folks expect you to have piles of cash to peel off. The society is still very cash-based. Fortunately it's safe enough that you should fear losing things more than you should fear being mugged. And even if you lose your wallet, Japan has a built-in incentive system for returning lost wallets; the returner gets 10% of the contents if the police can find the owner. Mark your possessions with your address, and a telephone number in Japan if you can, and let Japanese efficiency and honesty protect your belongings. Many have been pleasantly surprised.

### **Credit Cards**

Credit Cards are fantastic tools for travellers. They can help you out in a pinch, allowing you to travel beyond your means. And if you have a crappy day, you can treat yourself to something nice, without having to consider any immediate cash ramifications.

Not always in Japan. A friend was in Tokyo and had to buy a last-minute plane ticket. We found a travel agency that could handle our request. The new ticket would cost \$1500. My friend whipped out his credit card; "Sorry, we don't take credit cards." We were flabbergasted. They expected us to head to our bank and walk back through town with over a thousand dollars in cash? "Why don't you use credit cards?" "We don't want to lose that 2 or 3 percent [fee charged by the credit card companies]" they said.

Some stores take Visa cards, but only Visa cards issued by Japanese banks (this may seem illegal or illogical to you; good luck arguing your point). Some stores will take your plastic, but they will charge you a credit card surcharge. At the cash register, ask about “*kaado*” and hand them what you have. Also having more than one variety of credit card can help.

## Packing

Easy slip-on shoes without laces - you'll be removing them to enter some restaurants, hotel rooms and homes. When should you remove your shoes? Often when stepping up on to another level or type of flooring. Or when you see straw mat floors, but mostly when you see other slippers and shoes lined up near a doorway.

Nice socks - you might be hanging around quite a bit without shoes on; try to avoid gnarly socks.

Gifts for new friends and folks who might do you a favor - chocolates are easy, something local from your home region is better. Bring a bunch of small presents and sort it out when you get here.

Earplugs - Tokyo can be noisy, people live, travel and work close together. Especially if you care to try any of the unusual accomodation options, you might find a disturbing amount of ambient noise.

### **The Royals, the Uyoku and the Yakuza**

The Japanese royal family is purportedly the oldest surviving royal lineage - 125 generations. The Emperor was considered divine by the Shinto religion up until the end of World War II when the Americans forced him to announce on the radio that he was not, in fact, a god. Some Japanese folks are still pissed off about that - the “*uyoku*” are right-wingers who drive vans around Tokyo blaring nationalist sentiments and songs. They occasionally visit people who express ideas different from their own and rough them up, often until they are paid off - political extortion linked to the *Yakuza* gangsters who are supposedly quite close with the right-wingers. Certainly during the Emperor's annual birthday speech in December, it is the suited mafiosi and raving flag-wavers who make the biggest show of the event. Meanwhile, the Emperor himself never breaks his perfectly rational and pleasant facade as the largely backgrounded leader of modern Japan. Recently, he just seems happy to finally have a grandchild, even if it is a girl.

# Movement

## Landing

You'll likely land at Narita Airport, five stories tall. Expect to be able to take a train or bus into central Tokyo. If you take a bus, you'll see the staggering amounts of gray concrete buildings and electric lights composing urban Japan. If you take the train, you'll get there a little faster.

You should be able to get from the airport in to Tokyo for around \$20. A cab might cost you over \$250.

## Walking

It has been said that Tokyo was designed to resist invasion. Roads run twisting, narrowing and widening. Save for a very few notable examples such as the Ginza, streets are not laid out and marked like they are in many cities in America; there are very few urban grids in Tokyo.

Generally, people don't talk about intersections and street corners. Most streets aren't readily labelled. Addresses identify the district, neighborhood and block a building is on. Like the Charles and Ray Eames short film on the powers of ten, use an address in Japan to zoom into a district, then a neighborhood, and finally a block to find any particular building.

Tokyo is a series of small towns. You'll find each neighborhood has two ramen restaurants, a tea shop, a fast food burger shop, a stationery store selling *hanko* (Japanese name stamps used for signing documents), some place to buy a mobile phone, four convenience stores, a small store selling fresh vegetables and dry goods, a fishmonger, a sweets shop and bakery, three small "snack" hostess bars, a karaoke parlour. Central Tokyo does not have residential and business neighborhoods split up as much as some other cities.

### Hand Paper

Public bathrooms in Japan typically lack hand towels and occasionally lack toilet paper. Accordingly, as you are walking about the city, people will attempt to hand you little promotional tissue packages. Feel free to reach out and stock up; these can come in quite handy.

*The Japanese are shrinking. According to 1997 figures, the birthrate is 1.39 children per couple. Japanese folks are not replacing themselves. Who, or what, will be Japanese in the future?*

Tokyo often appears in the keen essays posted by Scottish musician **Momus** on his web site: [www.demon.co.uk/momus](http://www.demon.co.uk/momus)

“If you’re printing a flier in Tokyo, you put a little map in one corner showing, not street names or monuments recognisable citywide, but the nearest subway exit and then the positions, relative to your club, of local branches of konbini chains like AM/PM, or landmarks like McDonalds and Starbucks. This is because most built structures in Tokyo are impermanent, unremarkable, boxlike and forgettable. What marks one from another is its ‘electrographic architecture’ — the neon and LED displays mounted on facades, the graphic design of familiar logos draped, often several stories deep, across their blank faces.”  
- from “I Lovehate LA”

Still each neighborhood has its own speciality, flavor. As you walk you’ll come across wild gems: an archery store in Kanda, an underground jazz bar in Yotsuya, a go (Japanese strategy board game with black and white pieces) boutique in Ginza.

You’ll find yourself wandering through a small alley until it narrows and you’ll wonder if human beings are supposed to be able to pass through. Just then a Japanese luxury car with

its rear view mirrors flattened against its sides will come up alongside you, plowing ahead through the impossibly narrow gap at frightening speed.

## Walking Tours

Most of my long walks happen by accident. You could walk from Shinjuku to Shibuya, through the young parts of town. Then take a walk from Nippori to Kanda, the older part of town. Pick a place in Tokyo and ask random people, for example, say: “Asakusa?” and someone will likely say some things and finally point in one direction or another. More on walking in the Neighborhoods section later.

## Koban

Scattered throughout town are Police Boxes, called *koban*, where police sit waiting to give people directions. They will be happy to point you around. They have maps, patience, and occasionally some basic directional English.

## Rails

Japanese people ride more rails than any other people on the planet. Accordingly, they have an addictively useful rail system. Tokyo is crisscrossed by subway lines. It’s not unusual to be walking in Tokyo for twenty minutes and pass four different train stations on

*In 1997 there were estimated to be around 710,000 robots in the world; over 400,000 of those were living in Japan.*



three different subway lines. Of course the subway map may appear to be an immense tangle. But the rail professionals are prepared to help you reach your destination. And in spite of what you might read in the language section of this booklet, you'll find many Japanese people are singularly excited to help you get around.

You can get a handy bilingual subway map by asking one of the men at the ticket taking stations. If they don't understand what you want, try *chizu*, that might be Japanese for map.

Tickets are purchased from machines near the gates. Some of the more modern machines feature computer animated pictures of ladies bowing to you as you make your purchase. You buy a ticket to cover the initial cost of going through the gates, usually around 120 yen, and then there is some additional amount required on the ticket above and beyond that amount, depending on how far away your final station is. You can buy the cheapest ticket, get yourself on the train, and pay a bit more at the last station before you exit. Please note: you're required to hold on to your ticket stub to get back out. My very tall brother lost his ticket stub. Frustrated, he simply strode through the gates. Small alarms went off; no one bothered us.

Frequent traveller passes are quite convenient; for 1000, 3000 and 5000 yen, you get a pretty picture card that will feed the machine quick so you don't have to pause to buy a ticket and miss that train. This can be invaluable, as it could be up to four minutes before the next train comes.

It's quite easy to be swept along by the confidence of your fellow subway travellers. Especially when they are moving so fast and so sure, and you can't read all of the signs, or even if you can read the signs you might not read them right. At once it seems like a methodical place, but if you get an overview of the subway system, you can see, it's easy to get lost. A frequent occurrence; fortunately most station masters are quite forgiving, urging you in the right direction and helping you with your tickets.

**Titillating subway shots here:  
[www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/subway](http://www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/subway)**

*Average life expectancy in Japan is the highest in the world. In 2001, it was 77.63 years for men, 84.1 years for women. This is due in part to the varied diet including small portions and sparing bits of fish, not much dairy or meat.*

Businesses, museums and other institutions in Japan are prepared to help you find them by subway. The subways have multiple exits, places where you emerge out from the subterranean city into busy Tokyo. If someone says exit 12A, be sure to remember that; in stations with multiple exits, some will be hundreds of meters away from each other, and without grid streets you can't expect to find your way from one subway exit to another easily.

## **Subterranean Mingling**

Riding the subway in Tokyo is the closest many foreigners could ever come to physical intimacy with Japanese people. You will find yourself compressed severely. Picture a silent mosh pit with people in nicer clothes. Morning and evening rush hour is the business suited folks; the last train after midnight is the real fun with inebriated souls exhaling and laughing and swaying a bit more wobbly-like.

There's something fantastic about being this close to this many people when most of them are being quiet. Most manage to keep their personal boundaries even though they have an elbow in their face. People are careful with their eyes in these crowds; little or no eye contact with nearby riders helps maintain personal space.

Crowds surge out and in, an unstoppable force carrying whatever pieces of you might be sandwiched between them. Unsuspecting passengers can lose a shoe or a bag easily, especially if they are standing near the door.

## **Subterranean Health**

Riding the subway in Tokyo puts you at ground zero for the 1995 sarin gas attacks by Aum Shinrikyo. Religious cultists excited to see doomsday thought they might premeditate the end of the world by poisoning the Tokyo subway system with sarin gas. When you see how remarkably efficient the system is, you can imagine how scores of coughing, bleeding, blinded people groping their way around these stations must have really thrown a wrench in the works.

So is that why you'll see so many Japanese folks in the subway wearing facemasks? It can be unsettling - are they paranoid, or protecting themselves from something the rest of us are too lazy and ignorant to understand? Maybe Sarin poisoning? To discover the reason people wore these things, before I spoke Japanese, I donned

my own cotton face mask. Eventually someone stopped staring long enough to let me know that most facemask wearers are protecting themselves from hayfever, because they're sensitive to it and it's allergy season. Or they have a cold and they're keeping it to themselves. Like many things that seem odd here, once you find out the reasoning behind them, they make good sense.

## **Subterranean Love**

Flirting is a fantastic way to pass twenty minutes on the train. People are already glancing at you since your clothing, body language, apparent cluelessness and perhaps ethnicity mark you as an outsider. So feel free to have fun with that by tossing about some loaded glances. Just remember please don't take a young person's curiosity too seriously, and respect your hosts.

Another thing to remember, always, is to smile. You will find many chance encounters on the trains (with people of all ages!) if you remember to present a friendly countenance.

## **Subterranean Fashion**

Of course the subway is a fantastic place to people watch, and keep up on Japanese fashion. Suddenly you'll blink and you'll realize that every lady you see under the age of forty has a small set of fur balls hanging off of her purse. Or many of the young dudes are wearing puffy brown leather coats. Fashion here happens fast and hard and the subway presents a wonderful thick pool of Japanese people to study.

Particularly shoes, something you can watch without seeming too intent on surveillance. Look down, notice the shoes - that lady in business formal attire has curly-toed high heels that would make the Mad Hatter proud. That bird-legged lady walking up the steps out of the station has an ankle cast on, and she's still wearing some high high heels.

## **Subterranean Foreigners**

Tokyo may be the only major world capital where you can board a crowded subway car and look around you and see no one else that appears to be from a foreign country. There may be some Koreans or Chinese folks in the mix, but if you were in London, or Paris, or

New York, there would be Africans, Arabs, Hassidim, Russians, people from all over the world jostling for that seat near the door.

So when you do see a foreigner it can feel like a bit of an event. Whether or not you want to make contact, I urge you to smile; there can be some lonely moments around Tokyo and it's nice to keep things peaceable between folks

Of course that foreigner may be a longtime resident sizing you up as a greenhorn. Or a fellow traveller who speaks less Japanese than you do. Either way, the other folks visiting Japan likely have a story to share; they're probably as weird as you are.

## **Subterranean Commerce**

The subway stations in Tokyo are integrated with stores, such that you might emerge from your cross-city train ride, sweaty and confused, in a giant, well-lit, sweet smelling mall basement food court.

Tokyo itself is saturated with advertising, as much as any large city except things are more closely packed. And there's more lights and large public advertising TVs. The subways are no different, except that you're a more captive audience. Use the kwik katakana guide on page 32 to amuse yourself with sounding out supposedly English lanaguage words!

Riding the subways affords opportunities to peek over the shoulders of Japanese people reading comic books and sports papers with some salacious and straightforward content. And you can see what people are doing with their mobile phones; sometimes Galaga, sometimes Breakout, mostly reading and writing short mail.

## **Yamanote Line**

The Yamanote is a great line for seeing Tokyo, it runs an elevated loop around the city. It's not the fastest way around town, but it's the only train that will take you from Ueno to Ikebukuro to Shinjuku to Harajuku to Shibuya to Ebisu to Yurakucho near Ginza. It's the tourist's line for Tokyo. Japan Railways runs the Yamanote line, and they sell something called the "Suica" a thin card with a radio frequency transmitter in it. So what? So you can stick this card in your wallet and just swipe your wallet over the ticket machine. The money is deducted from the running total you've deposited on the card. It feels like magic each and every swipe.

## Cabs

Wandering through some of the populous neighborhoods at night, it's not unusual to see a line of cabs running over four blocks. I've had cabdrivers insist I walk to the front of the line before I can get in a cab. Other times they'll pick you up just fine.

The door swings open automatically to anticipate your arrival. And then it closes behind you (the driver has a lever for the door at his side). Inside is white lace covering the seats and headrests. The meter starts at around 660 yen, about \$5. That will carry you for a decent bit of time before more money is added to your fare.

Since the trains stop running between 12.30 and 1am, the cabs might end up being your only means of transportation during late hours. They know this too, so there is a late-night surcharge added to the usual expensive rates.

Like New York, the train is usually faster for getting across town than a taxi, during the daytime when there is plenty of traffic. It's fantastic to see Tokyo go by. But you'll miss the people show of the subway.

## Cars

You could get a car for your time in Tokyo. You'd be driving on the British side of the road; it's reputed that the Emperor of Japan learned to drive from the King of England. Or, according to Stephen Church, "it's all to do with swords and being right-handed."

You'll see some of the smallest cars you've ever seen driving on the open road, tiny boxes that look just fine for getting around but would seem to be wimpy on the American freeway, competing with station wagons and sport utility vehicles. But not all cars in Japan are small; head to some areas where young folks party and you'll invariably see a large van modified with purple plexiglass to look like Batman's bad hair day, giant tailpipes thundering motor sounds, and maybe popstar faces painted on the back doors. They are spectacle cars composed of fantastic plastic and they probably wouldn't be allowed on your home streets. Too bad for you.

*The United States has 17,000 marines stationed on Okinawa, two and a half hours south of Tokyo by plane. This is America's largest permanent overseas military posting.*

# Neighborhoods

Following Nara, and then Kyoto, Tokyo is the latest in a series of Japanese capital cities built around the Emperor. Many Tokyo neighborhoods have character hundreds of years old; some have evolved modern meaning from rubble following a disastrous earthquake in 1923 and the severe firebombing during World War II. Tokyo has been built and rebuilt; there's a scattershot quality to it. A modern mirrored office building rises up narrow between a squat cinderblock laundromat, a leaning wooden house and a small shrine.

## Shitamachi

Shitamachi means 'towns below' and refers to those areas beneath the castle but still within the city limits. Edward Seidensticker has felicitously translated the term as 'Low City' - the hills became the Yamanote, the 'High City'. He has also estimated that the Low City, which gave Edo so much of its character, only occupied about one-fifth of the city.

It now occupies even less, the High City has grown so much. Yet the traditional Low City perseveres, even now remaining different in feeling from the Westernized Yamanote. Now comprised (according to the Shitamachi Museum) of Kanda, Nihombashi, Kyobashi, Shitaya (Ueno), Asakusa, Honjo and Fukagawa, it still retains what little is left of the feel of old Edo - distinctly plebeian, also fun-loving, less inhibited than those remains of areas where the military aristocracy, the shogunate, observed its rules of decorum.

- Donald Richie, *Tokyo*

Tokyo means "Eastern Capital." It was referred to as "Edo" when woodblock prints and kabuki were cutting-edge stuff. Mostly when people talk about Edo now they refer to a bygone era. Shitamachi is a broad part of eastern Tokyo, the older side of town that best preserves some of the flavors of Edo-era Tokyo - wooden homes, loads of shrines and temples, accessible people in less constant cosmopolitan hurry.

## Ueno

Ueno Park is a home to the homeless in Tokyo. You'll see widespread encampments. Blue construction tarps have been fashioned into tents and lean-tos. Get close and you'll spy some industriousness - clothes hangers with clean laundry, a golf bag hung from a tree holding rakes and brooms. It's rumoured people can receive postal mail addressed to Ueno Park. Some of these homeless folk speak English; don't worry, they'll likely approach you.

Ueno Park also houses a zoo, a temple, a shrine, the Tokyo National Museum, the Natural Sciences museum, a Western art

museum and an awesome giant bronze blue whale. The Tokyo National Museum is a good traditional arts overview, a solid Japanese craft and culture download doable in an afternoon.

More small and more entertaining is the Shitamachi museum, located near a large marsh in Ueno Park. Downstairs you can wander shoeless into recreations of century-old tenement homes and crafts studios, upstairs you can get your hands on some toys and games from the old days.

At the base of the Ueno Park steps, the large Ueno Station. From here trains leave for North Japan. After the Ueno Park steps, a crowded intersection begins with street vendors and even some foreigners distributing some occasionally illegal goods. Just beyond this start markets that run along the train tracks between Ueno and

Okachimachi. These dense corridors are packed with shops where vocal hawkers push foodstuffs, discount luggage, shoes, lighters. The shoulder to shoulder conditions, market smells and market chants make this one of the most lively places to wander about in Tokyo.

## **Akihabara - Electric Town**

Wander far enough through the Ueno-Okachimachi market and you'll end up in the crowded capital of consumer electronics. Akihabara is new stuff located in an old section of town; imagine electronics merchants wheeling piles of gleaming slim laptops in wooden carts through narrow streets.

As unlikely as that may sound, the beating heart of Akihabara is the small rabbit warren tunnels between and beneath buildings where you can find security cameras, electric lights, walkie-talkies, minidisc

### **1945 Firebombing of Tokyo**

In an effort to strike at Japan's military production integrated with homes and neighborhoods in Tokyo, the United States dropped incendiary bombs on the city in the waning days of World War II. Tokyo's density and wooden buildings made it a perfect target for a firestorm.

Well over 100,000 people are estimated to have died as a result of these attacks. The death and devastation was more extensive than the atomic bomb attacks. Large sections of Tokyo were flattened and charred bodies filled the rivers. This event resonates in the Tokyo psyche; it was depicted in Isao Takahata's animated film "Grave of the Fireflies," the tear-jerking story of two children orphaned by these attacks.

**TOKYO NEIGHBORHOODS:**  
**[www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/tokyo](http://www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/tokyo)**

## **This Here Is Pagan Country**

Japan is the world's largest and most technologically advanced pagan country. The native religion of Japan *Shinto* is animist, worshipping *Kami*, gods of ancestors and nature spirits. Witness abundant graven images. In Japan temples are Buddhist and shrines are Shinto; these religions mix liberally. Accordingly, religion is a fluid part of life; you'll see aging shrines slotted in between new buildings. You should visit these places; if there's any kind of ceremony or festival (*matsuri*) you might come to see monotheism as comparatively quite dull.

There's not too many temples and shrines detailed in this book; stumbling upon them and treating them right is a personal journey.

players - all electronics, pieces of electronics that have ever been made, sold from a narrow, low-ceilinged stall by a guy smoking Peace-brand cigarettes as he sits soldering on a three-legged stool.

The technology is plentiful here, but the prices are not cheap. Televisions, Walkmen and laptops are not bargains in Akihabara. But you will discover gadgets here you cannot find anywhere else - a robotic jellyfish, electric cuticle trimmers.

If you are a game enthusiast, for example, you will find infinite video games, consoles and accessories on sale - including the older machines and even some American video game antiques. Of course nearly all the software and videos here are in the Japanese language, for the Japanese market. Unlike

much of the rest of Asia, it's fairly hard to find bootlegged media here. No pushcarts filled with burned CDs and DVDs with badly photocopied covers. The Japanese pop culture machine manufactures an immense amount of new material on a regular basis and they seem to have strict copyright enforcement on their side. Their DVDs are region encoded to play only on players that use "Region 2" discs (or players that have been modified to play Japanese movies; computers are a fairly easy way to get around this nuisance, for example). Videotapes from Japan are NTSC; they should play on most American VCRs and TVs.

## **Yamanote**

### **Roppongi - "High Touch Town"**

Cheap love, fast folks, bad vibes. Roppongi is the best place to go for quick evening fun with other foreigners. This neighborhood is made to help you have a "good time." Accordingly, music you might hear at night at home is blaring from clubs as Russians, Nigerians, Swedes and Chinese all hustle about selling or buying desire or what passes for it in the intercultural urban night. Ebisu on the Yamanote Line connects to the Hibiya Line to Roppongi.



## Shinjuku

The band X has a song where they refer to Los Angeles as the “City of Electric Light.” They were talented, but they were wrong. Tokyo is the city of electric light. And Shinjuku is its brightest spot.

Shinjuku at night is New Year’s eve anywhere else, says Tokyoite Donald Richie. Shinjuku literally means “new inn,” new in the 1600s or so. Shinjuku today is tall bright streets and alleys with tiny stalls and stores. This is the part of Tokyo that looks the most like *Blade Runner*. Electronics, books and sex are for sale here, like any other area, just in more dense profusion. Out the East gate from the giant Shinjuku station you’ll find both large department stores and small massage parlors. Nearby Kabukicho is about as sleazy as modern Tokyo gets; a dense profusion of video booths, small sex clubs and love hotels. On the Yamanote Line, Shinjuku Station is the busiest train station in the world, where over 700,000 riders mingle daily.

## Harajuku

Harajuku on Sunday afternoon is Halloween anywhere else. Kids dress up: Amish fetish, mutant tan and blonde girlstyle, fresh-from a car wreck makeup. There’s a narrow street of shops, Takeshita-dori, where you can accessorize yourself completely for any fetish or flash-in-the-pan trend. It’s some of the best people watching in the world. The nearby park is also nice walking on weekends, between the tough looking 50s Greasers. On the Yamanote Line; listen for the unique bittersweet Harajuku chime on the JR line subway platform.

## Shimo-Kitazawa

In Shimo Kitazawa neon crowded teenage culture is compressed into narrow streets and low-rise buildings. Shimo is known as a theater and performing arts district, a relaxed and intimate locale with many small pleasant restaurants and shops. Take the train to Shibuya and head west four stops on the Inokashira line.

*Of the Japanese population of 127.1 million, over 17 percent are over 65 years old. The Japanese government forecasts that percentage could go as high as 28 percent by 2025. Add the lengthy Japanese lifespan, a low birthrate, an absolute aversion to immigration, and Japan may soon be a nation of old folks.*

# Language

You enter a train station, clutching a map. Sweating from wandering around Tokyo lost, nerves slightly frayed, you summon the courage to approach a stranger to ask for help. You turn to a middle aged man waiting for a ticket machine, “Do you understand English?” The man waves his hand in front of his face, the Japanese gesture for “no” as he backs away quickly, his bowed head displaying signs of terror. You look around only to discover that everyone else nearby has moved further away from you and those people you can see on the periphery are moving rapidly in the other direction.

## **Do they speak English?**

Japanese people learn some English in school. English reading and writing are drilled into their heads. But the system hasn't done a good job of encouraging them to chat in foreign languages. Combine that with a cultural ethic emphasizing harmony (embarrassment avoidance for themselves and others) and you have people who occasionally react with terror when asked to use what they feel must be poor English skills. This is not to give you the impression that all Japanese people would react this way, but you will occasionally find yourself isolated. Sometimes people will not want to communicate, and your gentlest efforts to reach out will appear to threaten them.

You might find that some people who will be unable to communicate with you verbally in your language can manage to write you a fine coherent English language letter later.

The language presents significant barriers, especially to foreigners visiting from Western countries. Japanese signs mostly have symbols you cannot sound out. While many of the trains and restaurants and hotels have English-language signage, by and large you will be illiterate in Japan.

Still most Japanese people, like people in the rest of the world, they are curious about foreigners and excited to share their culture.

Some folks will offer to help you and practice English with you even before you even look helpless. If you keep a smile on your face, and

offer basic greetings, many folks will then feel welcome to ask you questions they invariably have for anyone not Japanese.

And Japan presents some unique affordances. Plastic food will help you order. Most of the subway hotspots are marked in English. If you want to wander off the beaten path where there are fewer foreigners, so you can see some of the “real Japan,” you will find little English. There will be moments of massive miscommunication and great insecurity. And someone might help you. And you will survive.

## Long-Term Learning

The research has been done. While having a romantic partner who speaks Japanese is the best way to alleviate both illiteracy and loneliness, the best way to quickly learn Japanese is to study the rules of grammar before you arrive in Japan. Living there is a bath in vocabulary. Knowing which is a verb and which is a noun will be far easier after a few hours in a wooden chair somewhere in your home country.

## Engrish - Japanese English

The Japanese have taken English and made it their own. Much has been made of “Engrish,” the seemingly mangled Japanese English on packaging and signage in Japan. There’s a web site entirely devoted to cataloging these strange moments of adapted Japanese-English, [www.english.com](http://www.english.com). From their archives: from the side of a “Palnap” tissue box: “What feeling do you need the best in your lifestyle? Trendy feeling, natural feeling and traditional feeling. We’ll lead a tasteful life to find your personal style. Mild and tenderness are basic of our living life.”

Engrish should not be read literally. Think of Japanese English as non-specific, expressing feeling. For example, the use of “let’s” to express enthusiastic collective activity: “Let’s Kiosk!” “Let’s Skiing!”

Japanese grammar is not for the faint of heart or weak of mind. What’s more, the Japanese also do not have any words for “me”, “them”, “him, or “her” that anyone could use without being incredibly insulting (the Japanese word for “you”, for example, when written in kanji, translates to “I hope a monkey scratches your face off”). Because of this, the sentence “He just killed her!” and “I just killed her!” sound exactly the same, meaning that most people in Japan have no idea what is going on around them at any given moment. You are supposed to figure these things out from the “context”, which is a German word meaning “you’re screwed”.

- Dan Barrett, *So You Want To Learn Japanese*, [danbarrett.cjb.net](http://danbarrett.cjb.net)

## Some Traveler's Japanese

*sumimasen* - sorry my large bag just nearly knocked you over on the train.

*sumimasen* - please distract yourself from typing on your mobile phone long enough to move out of the way so I can get off this subway car seconds before the doors close.

*wakarimasen* - I am unable to speak any of your language except to say "I do not understand" and if you say anything more I might repeat this word even if I'm better off shutting up and nodding and reading your facial expression to try to figure out what you're saying but the jet lag is kicking in and all I wanted to know is if you have a room that doesn't smell like forty years of accumulated cigarette smoke.

*dozo* - older lady carrying two large canvas shopping bags; you are standing up in a crowded subway car as young men and women who have seats fiddle with their mobile phones ignoring you. Locals will force you to stand in spite of your age, but I am a foreigner and I will stand up to offer you this seat. Please, please, take it!

*domo* - thank you, you have said many things to me that I do not understand, and it would probably be okay if I said nothing, but *domo* is a small gesture of my appreciation for this delicious muscat grape yogurt drink that I have just successfully purchased from you in this very fluorescent-lit convenience store.

*arigato* - *domo* just sounds too short, so I will say *arigato* to you, the eager waitress who just handed me a hot towel.

*domo arigato* - I am grateful, o subway station manager, that you have let me through this gate even though I lost my ticket and I could have been lying about it and I can't speak your language but you figured out from my worried expression and gestures that I am a good person and I just want to leave your station.

*konnichiwa* - I've heard this one Japanese greeting and so I'm going to say "good afternoon" all day and all night long as my international gesture of friendship.

*ohayo* - let's smile, bow slightly, perhaps awkwardly, and say "good morning!" because it's easy to remember and fun to say.

*In Japan, six newspapers are printed for every ten people, nearly three times the rate of newspapers per person in America.*

*kanpai* - let's drink! because sometimes alcohol does help ease the pain I feel in my shoulders and legs from traveling. And maybe when we are a little bit drunk we will feel like we understand each other, mister air conditioning systems engineer with some basic English and a great fondness for the TV show *Friends*.

### **Combinations:**

*arigato, sumimasen* - thank you for at least standing in front of me while I pleaded unsuccessfully. Though I thought you couldn't comprehend me, I will finally admit that it was inappropriate to ask you to believe me: when I pulled that sport drink out of the mechanized fridge in my room I was merely inspecting it and I really hadn't read the sign that said in large red English letters that I would be charged for anything I so much as touched.

*domo sumimasen* - I'm sorry I made you feel obviously flustered in my attempts to communicate with you, late night Ginza cab driver refusing to take me anywhere because you say you don't understand even though I am showing you an address printed in Japanese. You must be discriminating against me but to preserve international harmony and experiment with Japanese thinking I will apologize instead of demanding justice.

### **What they might say to you**

*Irrashaimasse!* - welcome to our restaurant/store/business! person who can not understand our greeting and might feel slightly assaulted since six Japanese people just shouted at them as soon as they slid open that door.

### **Machine Translation**

Those folks eager to understand some of the world around them and begin to try to communicate might be helped by some of the many electric dictionaries available in Japan. Nearly all of these dictionaries are made for Japanese people to translate into English, so the menus and buttons won't be labelled so you can read them. But Seiko Instruments has a model called the RM-2000 that is built for English-speakers to read Japanese. It's a great tool, missing some words; notably tuna, boss, boyfriend. If you type in "prostitute" it will suggest maybe you wanted the world for "protestant." Still useful though. The RM-2000 can be found at most electronics stores and it will cost you around 19800 yen.

## Physical Language

Besides some basic Japanese words, you can have fun with some of the Japanese physical gestures, in context:

A pinky held up out of a fist alone is a sign for girlfriend; a thumb alone is a sign for boyfriend. (Accordingly, if you do the “hang loose” gesture from America, fist with thumb and pinky extended rocking back and forth, you might be implying sexual flexibility.)

Most Japanese will generally understand if you hold your thumb up like “right on” and you’re a man, you’re not asking for homosexual relations or inferring that the nearest man is your boyfriend. But you might shift your “right on” gesture to be the thumb and index finger making a circle with the other fingers extended, “okay,” a gesture Japanese might understand to mean “I’d like my change in coins.”

Two single index fingers extended over your head on either side like horns is a gesture for an angry wife. I would say, angry anyone, except that the traditional headdress worn by a Japanese bride was said to be for the purpose of covering her horns.

Holding the left hand flat, palm up, and taking the right fist upright, circling over the left palm, imitating a mortar and pestle, that may be a Japanese gesture for flattery.

Point at your nose to refer to yourself, not at your chest. It looks funny in your home country!

## Japanese Writing

There are three written scripts used in Japan. While this might initially sound complicated, difficult, obfuscating, and inefficient, it allows great variation in personal expression through writing and typography.

### Hiragana

Hiragana is the relatively simple-looking curvaceous phonetic script used to spell out native Japanese words. Invented by a Japanese monk in the 800s, it was intended for women to use since they were thought to be unable to manage the complex Chinese/Kanji characters. Accordingly, many of the first literary works published in Japan were composed by Japanese women using hiragana. Notably, *The Tale of Genji*, composed by Lady Murasaki (Lady Purple) just before Christ was 1000 years old.

# Kanji

Japan's complicated characters, or Kanji, were borrowed from China in the 6th century, they have meanings associated with them (not so much phonetic sounds). American poet Ezra Pound believed he could decipher the pictographs at the root of these characters; he actually managed to be correct some of the time. Here's a few samples, see if you can trace the visual representation here:

## Sample Kanji

女	a pregnant person sitting - woman	男	an eye on its side - eye
東	a rice field over a sword/power - man	見	an eye on its side with legs - to look
大	the sun is behind a tree, so you must be looking east - east	母	breasts on their side - mother
	a man with his arms stretched wide - big		

## Sample Compounds

Compounds are two or more Kanji strung together to illustrate a concept.

電話	electric + talk = telephone	電車	electric + car = train
	electric + word = nothing, because they stopped making new Kanji compounds before the computer came along. But electric + word should equal web page, don't you think?	電書	

These sorts of pictograms are explained some by Len Walsh's helpful *Read Japanese Today* - a fun book to take with you on the subway to start to decode some of the Kanji around you. If you learn Kanji, you might be able to read some things in Chinese, though there are occasionally differences in meaning. For example, in Japanese, hand-paper means letter, and in Chinese, hand-paper means toilet tissue.

手紙

**Katakana** *Note: This is a heedlessly incomplete introduction to this language.*

Katakana is the script the Japanese have reserved especially for foreign words. Mostly consonants paired with vowels, the sounds mirror the Hiragana alphabet. Amuse yourself around Tokyo by sounding out words you find in advertisements, signs and menus. Words like “Hollandaise” take on entirely new character; check out some of the “Katakana Kwizes” in this booklet for other examples and practice on the plane.

	<b>A</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>O</b>
<b>Vowels</b>	ア	イ	ウ	エ	オ
<b>K</b> with ` = G	カ	キ	ク	ケ	コ
<b>S</b> with ` = Z	サ	シ shi	ス	セ	ソ
<b>T</b> with ` = D	タ	チ chi	ツ tsu	テ	ト
<b>N</b>	ナ	ニ	ヌ	ネ	ノ
<b>H</b> with ` = B with ° = P	ハ	ヒ	フ	ヘ	ホ
<b>M</b>	マ	ミ	ム	メ	モ
<b>Y</b>	ヤ		ユ		ヨ
<b>R</b>	ラ	リ	ル	レ	ロ
<b>WA</b>	ワ	ン	ン	ン	ヲ
					一



# Lodging

Lodgings alone are a great way to see the city and much of Japanese culture. There are a wide variety of options, ranging from the sleekly high-tech to the kitschy. If you're willing to live like a nomad, moving around between nights, you can find some good cheap adventure around bedtime.

## Ryokan

Stay in a Ryokan if you want to experience some of old Japan: a futon on the floor, under padded blankets. The smell of straw mats under stockinged feet. Rice paper screens. A large bathtub; please don't empty the water (others might bathe after you - scrub up and rinse down before you enter). Possibly a squat toilet. And food; many ryokan offer traditional Japanese dinner and breakfast to their guests; it may be included in your costs, or not. You may find yourself sitting in a thin cotton robe, freshly bathed, working chopsticks over slices of pickled vegetables, looking at a TV playing the evening news next to a long black and white wall scroll, legs folded on a cushion on a straw mat, and you might feel fantastic.

## Taito Ryokan

Set in Asakusa, near Tawaramachi Station on the Ginza Line, staying at Taito Ryokan puts you in the middle of old Tokyo, short walking distance from town's big shrine with all the nearby old-fashioned merchant madness. This ryokan is owned by a twenty-something Kenichi, he likes having travelers around so he runs the place cheap and welcoming: 3000 yen a night for a single room. You'll have to share a shower and toilet with a dozen other wanderers, and the facilities are not quite as starched neat and clean as elsewhere in Tokyo. But for cheap, location, a bit of traditional flavor, and a very helpful proprietor, it doesn't get much better than Taito Ryokan - [www.libertyhouse.gr.jp](http://www.libertyhouse.gr.jp)

## Kimi Ryokan

In Ikebukuro, Kimi Ryokan is quite international. Listed in many Tokyo guidebooks and thick with Australians and Americans, you'll find it a cheap, accommodating place to stay, sleeping with a bit of

old Japanese flavor, even if the ambient sounds are non-Japanese speaking tourists and travellers. There was a nice man behind the counter; I told him how surprised I was to be offered so many massages on the nearby streets. I think he misunderstood me; he asked if I wanted him to call a masseuse to visit my room? Kimi Ryokan has a fancy electric toilet on the first floor.

## **Business Hotels**

This is how the Japanese refer to the minimal in Western accommodation. A room tiny but still large enough that you can crouch next to your luggage between the door and the full to queen-sized bed.

Often a tall American might graze the ceiling with his or her head.

Perhaps you can touch all four walls with your limbs from your bed.

### **Try a Toilet!**

Your hotel stay could be your chance to try elaborate Japanese high-technology toilets. These toilets might have cleaning jets for women's parts and everyone's parts, bum drying heated air jets, vents to suck up foul airs, remote controls and heated seats (the hardest thing to give up if you return home). Please note that these toilets can be quite powerful; if you turn on the water jets, there's usually a way to turn them off, or you should wait - don't panic and try to leave. If you stand up while the toilet is spraying, something unintended could become wet. Fortunately, if you are alone in your hotel room you can experiment with these features and not have to emerge from a restaurant bathroom with pants soaking wet from toilet spray.

Still there are some nice touches: convenience, comfort, a console next to the bed, brochures for the pay-per-view cable (these are occasionally more explicit than *Playboy* back at home).

If you try to arrange a cheap room at the airport, this is the type of hotel they will likely suggest. Central Tokyo room rates for a single bed with a bathroom attached will usually run from 7500 to 11,000 yen (\$58-\$85). And they do mean single; I have been caught trying to bring a friend up to the room with me, and forced to rent a larger room intended for two.

### **Kanda Green Hotel**

A nice bamboo lined exterior walkway, this hotel is a convenient walking distance from Akihabara. They prevented me from bringing a guest up to my room. The rooms themselves are a marvel of compression - as

small a space as you could imagine providing a human being while still being able to stand (though if you are over six feet tall, you will not be able to stand fully). The furnishings here are newish and it's quite clean, which helps. Starting around 8400 yen per night (\$65).

# Love Hotels

Since most Tokyo homes and apartments can be quite small and privacy can be hard to come by, there are Love Hotels throughout Japan to facilitate licit and illicit trysts. These places offer comparatively palatial accommodations at very reasonable rates.

You can find a room ready for shagging (rotating beds, giant baths) costing between 5000 to 15000 yen per night (\$38-\$115) - versus 8000 minimum (\$62) for a cramped business hotel room. These rooms are far grander than most cheap hotels - larger beds, floor space, a sitting area, and a two or three person bathtub and shower.

And some rooms are decorated to delight. The older Love Hotels tend towards unusual stylings: historical or theatrical themes. A bed shaped like a race car, with wheels. Bathtubs set in stone, like a outdoor sulfur springs. A room-sized roulette wheel built into the ceiling. Stereos that power quivering beds. In Love Hotel rooms, you could find karaoke, water beds, tanning beds, small saunas, pachinko and slot machines, TV console video games, VCRs with free and rental movies. If your idea of fun is to sing naked karaoke under neon green electric light, then love hotels are for you. If you want to visit a bit of cheap kitsch anthropology, Love Hotels can be immensely rewarding. If you're tired of anonymous, sanitary and cramped, then Love Hotels are the best bang for your travel buck.

Love Hotels are frequently in slightly dodgy-seeming neighborhoods, places where people might be buying and selling sex. This may creep you out, but since this is Tokyo there is little chance you will be assaulted or stolen from. These are by and large semi-legitimate businesses that cater to wide swaths of Japanese society, from teenagers up to older folks escaping their families. It may not be polite conversation, but you'll find many, if not most, Japanese folks have visited one or more of these places. Note some common euphemisms for Love Hotel: couples hotel, leisure hotel, fashion hotel. You can

## Love Lost?

*Satellite of Love*, edited by Kyoichi Tsuzuki, is a sumptuous if poorly bound picture book about Japanese Love Hotels. The author has a certain fondness for the unusual and especially kitschy hotels, disappearing and endangered since recent laws have worked to tone down the sex shack business. If you can find a copy, these pictures should certainly whet your appetite for elaborate entertainment lodgings.

# ホテル

recognize them from the placards out in front listing different rates for a few hours, a few more hours, and overnight. Often along

with the Katakana characters for hotel, these places have English names: Hotel Elmer, Hotel Clean, Hotel Princess, Hotel Carrot.

Love Hotels can be easier to book than normal hotel rooms. You walk into a lobby and look at a collection of photos posted on the wall. If there's a light behind a photo, the room is available. Press a button, go to the small hole in the wall and give the receptionist behind the hole some money in exchange for a key. If you're checking in after 11pm, you're typically staying for the whole night.

## Itami's Taxing Woman

Some lively Love Hotels make an appearance in the excellent 1987 Japanese comedy "A Taxing Woman" (*Marusa no onna*). Like most of Juzo Itami's films it is a funny and revealing look at contemporary Japan.

Still, Love Hotels are definitely not appropriate for long-term stays. Overnight guests must check in after 11pm, and you probably can't leave your luggage multiple days.

Love Hotels present the same communication problems you could have anywhere else, compounded by sex trade overtones and any of your own insecurities you might have packed.

## Hotel Manjo

The Hotel Manjo in Uguisudani is an aging exemplar of low-cost entertainment lodging. Rooms themed for feudal Japan, Versailles, "Countryside & Western" cost \$65 overnight. From the Uguisudani station platform, head out through the downstairs exit. Out of the station, turn right to walk along the tracks. A few hundred meters along on that street. The sign is high up, in black and white English sixties-styled letters.

## Hotel Paruko

パルコ

Hotel Paruko is in the thick of Love Hotel hill in Shibuya. Here dozens of small hourly hotels vie for the active casual sex business in this area popular with young folks. Paruko is another aging love hotel. Here some beds are shaped like race cars, some round beds spin in circles. I sat in a bathtub shaped like a large bowl, atop a pillar in the middle of the bathroom. Fun stuff! The sign is not in English; search for the katakana letters on the side of a red brick building.

**more low-down on Tokyo lodgings:**  
[www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/lodging](http://www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/lodging)

## Hotel Sekishu

This Uguisudani Love Hotel offers some traditional Japanese-themed rooms with straw mats, beds on the floor, rice paper screens. Each room boasts a large stone-lined bath area, nearly natural two or three person rock tubs set into the floor. A beautiful place to take a private bath in the big city. Just down the street from Hotel Manjo, look for the sample stone bath out front.

## Capsule Hotels

“capsule”: カプセル

Capsule Hotels present the smallest amount of space necessary to sleep. About three feet tall, three feet wide, and six and a half feet deep, a plastic coffin open at one end. Inside, you'll typically find a TV suspended from the ceiling, a bedside console with a radio, clock and alarm and controls for the TV, lights and air conditioning system. For privacy you close a cloth screen at the end of your capsule. On a typical floor in a capsule hotel there might be twenty to seventy capsules, so you are essentially sharing lodging with this many other people. You will hear them snore, cough, take mobile phone calls, stumble out of their capsules to head to the bathroom.

These hotels are primarily male institutions, designed for salarymen who miss the last train home. If you are stuck somewhere in Tokyo late at night, go to the station and ask the police or the station master where the nearest “ka-pu-su-ru ho-te-ru” is - they'll likely have a map to show you.

These places are packed with extremely drunk dudes. Some pass out in the hallways and lounges before they get to their capsules. It's really quite a scene. And then they manage to get up and out by 8am. You will likely be kicked out by ten. Often the baths and showers close before the hotel does. Don't wait until the last minute to clean up.

There are a few capsule hotels that cater to women, though women probably shouldn't leave their capsule hotel search until the last train.

Capsule hotels often offer collective spa facilities. You'll find a waist high shower for pre-cleaning and then a large hot water tub. Some

### Console Control

Most hotel rooms have a bedside console for controlling the lights, air conditioning, TV and stereo. This convenience is common in most all lodgings, from the cheapest to the most expensive. These consoles are often a good way to date the hotel; the built-in clocks in particular reveal when the room was constructed.

add a cold water tub and a sauna. This can be a great way to luxuriate and relax. Don't worry much about standing out, you already do. There are signs up forbidding tattoos; probably a prohibition against the tattooed Japanese mafia, the *Yakuza*, but perhaps they prohibit hip foreigners as well.

Large folks will likely be uncomfortable in capsules, as will folks who tend to toss and turn, move around in their sleep. And light sleepers. Bring ear plugs and they should tide you over. With earplugs, the primary drawbacks are the poor air circulation (only slightly ameliorated by the sometimes functional in-capsule air conditioning), and the lack of storage space. In the capsule itself, there is no room for your luggage if you want to lay down properly. There are occasionally lockers provided; often these are large enough only for a briefcase, though some capsule hotels offer larger coin lockers. Capsules generally fall in the 3000 to 5000 range per night (\$23-\$38).

## **Shibuya CapsuleLand**

Near love hotel hill in Shibuya, this ten or so storey building offers around 30 capsules per floor. Bathing facilities include showers, a warm bath and a small dry sauna. The capsule TVs have one channel of porn and seven other channels. Cheap headphones are provided. CapsuleLand offers standard single and double hotel rooms as well. Rates around 3700 yen (\$28), out by 10am. They'll try to make you buy your room from a vending machine, but they will take credit cards behind the counter as well.

## **Shinjuku Green Plaza**

Beneath some marvellous baths covered in the Pleasure section, the Green Plaza hosts a capsule colony - hundreds of nondescript plastic coffins stuffed with businessmen staggering in from their bad luck in the pleasure quarters. A short walk from Shinjuku Station, through some of the lively sex-for-sale area Kabukicho. Accepts credit cards.

## **Sauna and Capsule Mizuho - Omori**

If you find yourself in Omori, near Shinagawa, inquire at the police station for the two nearest capsule hotels, and go to the capsule hotel second closest to the train station. The Mizuho is a modern facility with beautiful new capsules, a restaurant serving dinner and

breakfast. For those looking for super-cheap accommodations, you can sleep on a mat on the floor of the “big room” for around \$25 in the immediate company of dozens of other men. The highlight of the this capsule hotel is doubtlessly the bathing: skylit atrium bathtubs tiled with pleasant mosaics. A giant aqueduct looking marble-protrusion in the room signals a contemporary spin on Rome. Sauna and cold plunge as well. Accepts credit cards.

## **Luxury Hotels**

Japan boasts some of the most elegant hotels in the world. For over \$200 a night you can stay in a large room with silk wallpaper, nice art, and fantastic service. It’s a different way to see Tokyo, often removed from the exciting hustle bustle of the neon city. If you like the person with whom you share your room, that might not be a problem. But if you’re only in Japan for a few days, why drop out?

### **Park Hyatt**

In front of Shinjuku Park, this hotel is a modern marvel of postmodern luxury. Artful art and lighting abounds. It’s a bit like staying in a contemporary art museum. There were dried leaves sticking out of in the wall above my bed the last time I stayed there. The rooms are palatial, giant and expansive. Seating for two, a large desk, a large bed, and still room to run laps. Japanese English dictionary and the OED in the rooms, with fax machine. Health club. Top quality restaurants. Drawbacks? It’s isolated. It’s a pleasant enough walk through the municipal buildings and park strewn with house-less Japanese folk, but it is a bit lonely to exit your hotel into deserted streets when so much of Tokyo is still thumping. About a twenty minute walk from the Shinjuku subway station - that’s pretty far for the amount of money involved. Maybe that’s the point. Rooms starting around 50000 yen per night (\$385).

### **Hotel Okura**

Japan’s lodgings of luxury for over 40 years. Celebrities, investment bankers and rich folks from the States who arrange trips to Japan often end up here. This is where Kissinger stays, and Steve Jobs, and Björk. It’s a warmer feeling than the Park Hyatt; the large 60s high style high-ceilinged lounge in the main wing is more welcoming than the postmodern equivalent. The Okura is located near the

American Embassy, short walking distance from three or four centrally-located subway stations. The rooms are straight up luxury, great comfort, nothing jaw-dropping. Quaint touches; the expensive boutiques in the basement, a draft beer cart that will pour you a twenty dollar mug in your room. Extra daily charge for Internet access. Rooms starting at 29000 yen (\$223).

### **Cerulean Tower Tokyo**

This hotel just opened last year. Tasteful clean granite and wood styling, eminent comfort. Eminently comfortable rooms and delightfully large shower bathrooms. It's a short walk to Shibuya, on the other side of the tracks from the fun love hotels and teenagers running rampant. There's a jazz club in the hotel as well as a Noh stage (traditional Japanese opera - highbrow). Rooms starting at 30000 yen (\$230).

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### **Katakana Kwiz: Drinks**

Sound out these common beverages using the Katakana Chart on page 32; answers appear at the end of the book.

コーヒー	コーラ
オレンジ”	ビ”ール
ワイン	ミルク

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### **Katakana Kwiz: Countries**

Sound out this country:

アメリカ



# Food

Typically Tokyo residents live in small dwellings that make entertaining too intimate. The culture doesn't lend itself to having dinner parties. Instead, a dense variety of restaurants serve as venues for nightly meals and socializing.

Perhaps it's a mental justification after paying much money for food here, but it may seem to you that the average meal in Japan is well prepared and likely tasty. Some visitors find the food bland and don't care for the Japanese emphasis on texture and presentation. Either way, Japanese food is made with care - these folks seem to obsess over their edibles. If there are eight channels on a Japanese TV, at least two of them are playing a food or cooking show. Many prime time shows feature food competitions, restaurant visits and celebrities pronouncing different dishes *oishii!* - delicious!

Talking about "Japanese Food" is a bit like talking about "American Food" - there's a lot of different ingredients, spices and flavours available. Pay particular attention to the texture of a food, if it has no taste or some bad taste, maybe people eat it for the feeling they get in their mouth or between their teeth.

At the core of Japanese dining is an immediate closeness with the ocean surrounding them, and an abiding fondness for pickled and bitter flavours. But over the years the Japanese have adopted many external cuisines and made them their own. If you leave yourself open to eating in Japan, you can find a wide range of fish and fowl, mammals and plantmatter to chew on. If you must eat cuisine like you have at home, be prepared for something just slightly different. Learn to love it, imagine someone put time into making it different. Whatever they're doing with food in Japan they're doing one thing right; these people live the longest of any in the world.

## **Plastic Food and Photographs**

Funny and freaky, the plastic food all over the city can be quite convenient. Foreign folks too tired to decode a Japanese menu can find their next meal in plastic models outside in the window. It's just fine to ask the waitperson to accompany you outside the restaurant so you can point at the particular polyurethane curry that looks just

Most Japanese restaurants provide hot hand towels before your meal. Besides offering a brief sensual pleasure, these often serve as the only napkin you'll receive for the meal.

### ***Let This Be a Lesson To You:***

At first, I didn't have the nerve. I wandered Roppongi's early-morning streets, tortured by the delicious smells emanating from the many businessmen's noodle shops, intimidated by the crowds. Japanese salarymen sat cheek-to-jowl, happily slurping down bowls of soba. I didn't want to stare. I didn't want to offend. I was acutely aware of how freakish and un-Japanese I looked, with my height, in my boots and leather jacket. The prospect of pushing aside the banner to one of these places, sliding back the door, and stepping inside, then squeezing on to a stool at a packed counter and trying to figure out how and what to order was a little frightening. One couldn't enter a place, change one's mind and then creep away. The prospect of being the center of attention at this tender hour, with the capillaries in my brain shriveled from all the beers on the flight, and the jet lag even worse than it had been the day before - I just couldn't handle it. I wandered the streets, gaping, my stomach growling, looking for somewhere, anywhere to sit down and have coffee, something to eat. ... There was no way, I told myself that I was gonna eat my first Tokyo meal at Starbucks! ... Muttering to myself, I found the narrowest, most uninviting-looking street, pushed aside the banner of the first soba shop I entered, slid back the door and plopped myself down on a stool. When greeted, I simply pointed a thumb at the guy next to me and said, 'Dozo. I'll have what's he's having.'"

- Anthony Bourdain, *Kitchen Confidential*

right to you. Some restaurants have picture menus or translated menus; if you appear not to be Japanese, like most of the world, they will likely bring this menu to you if they have it. And you can always look at the food of the people around you and point at what they're having.

Nearly any style of Japanese food is available both as a densely elegant simple presentation of the freshest food to cross your tongue, or as a cheap chain-store alternative.

## **Noodles**

If you want to eat cheap and frequently, you'll find yourself slurping down a lot of noodles. You'll be surprised at how good any hole in the wall noodle shop can be in Tokyo.

## **Ramen**

Ramen isn't necessarily instant fried bits in a styrofoam cup. Ramen can refer to a large steaming bowl of freshly spun noodles soaking in rich smoky pork juice, miso paste or soy/salt broth. Typical toppings include pork, egg, bamboo shoots, sliced onion, seaweed. It may not be healthy or subtle, but it's often delicious and it's a

**Japanese Food Porn:**

**[www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/food](http://www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/food)**

mainstay of Japanese street cuisine.

### **Tetsugakudou Ramen**

Tetsugakudou Ramen is ramen made with ample black magic. The name means “philosophy house” and they say good ramen and good eating experience are at the core of their entire worldview. These bowls of soup may be the best thing you’ve ever tasted for the first seven minutes. Thereafter, you may come to feel increasingly deadened. It’s an extremely intense eating experience. Try to eat the medium boiled eggs carefully, so you don’t leak the loose yolk into the pork broth. But even if you did, you’ll be quite full. Whoo boy.

Tetsugakudou makes other ramen stands seem instant. Near the Uguisudani train station, head through the downstairs exit. Out of the station past McDonald’s, right at the first corner, about six doors down. Closed Sundays.

### **Soba**

Soba are buckwheat noodles. While they can be served with tempura and other fixings, they are often served alone, cold noodles with a dipping sauce.

### **Kanda Soba**

Only the neighborhood is off the beaten track; this soba

shop is famous, well marked in guidebooks. The food is delicious, the atmosphere nicely aged, the staff sings most of the orders. The prices are high for soba. Go to Kanda station and ask where it is; it’s famous. Kanda Soba. At least a policeman should know where it is.

### **Udon**

Udon are the thicker noodles, made of rice flour. They typically come in a soup, often slightly lighter fare than ramen (less pure pork). My favourite variety of udon is *inaniwa*, thin strands popular in Akita, northern Japan - you can find them in some Tokyo restaurants.

### **Meat Gyudon**

Thinly sliced beef marinated in soy, served on top of a bowl of rice. Optional additions include onions, green onions, thin slices of pickled ginger and raw egg. A sweet corn and lettuce salad on the side. Simple, and often quite cheap. Yoshinoya is the leading chain purveyor of this fare; most of the *gyudon* restaurants you’ll see in Tokyo will be chain stores. *Gyudon* is popular fast cheap fare.

## Shabu Shabu

Thinly sliced beef that you wave briefly through hot water, barely cooking it before dipping it in salty or sweet sauce and then straight to your mouth.

The bubbling water in the center of the table takes on meaty flavor, and to this you add mushrooms, carrots, tofu and noodles. Fish these out and then add noodles to make Shabu Shabu a deconstructed soup meal.

### Mo-Mo Paradise

Mo mo is the Japanese word for moo, or cow. This restaurant may not serve the highest quality ingredients, but they offer all you can eat shabu shabu and sukiyaki for an hour or so for under 30 dollars. That can be an enormous amount of meat, tofu and vegetables.

Look out - it's possible to injure yourself overeating here.

Located on the fifth floor of a building near Shinjuku Station, across the street from a Kentucky Fried Chicken. Good luck finding it.

## Curry and Rice

Brown sweet spicy sauce poured over mostly unrecognizable meat and vegetables sharing a plate with rice.

## Yakitori

Yakitori literally means roasted bird. You'll find roadside shacks set up to serve little skewers of meat and vegetables. *Nankotsu*, roasted bits of chicken with cartilage are quite good, crunchy. Shitake (mushrooms) are wonderful as well. You can get pretty crazy at yakitori joints, ordering pork temples and even grilled rectum.

### Yurakucho Yakitori

In crowded smoky streetside stands under the JR tracks near the Yurakucho station you'll find some of the best skewers around. The spirit is lively with proprietors calling out to customers and you might find some drunk diners willing to help you order. Great for intimacy, shoulder to shoulder communal eating fun.

## Tonkatsu

Mostly pork, though occasionally chicken, shrimp or oyster, breaded and deep fried. Typically served topped with a thick brown sauce and some shredded cabbage.

### Sanno Park Tower

NTT DoCoMo's "i-mode" mobile phone service has been one of the few Japanese business successes in the Internet age. Sanno Park

Tower is DoCoMo's headquarters, and there is a fine *katsu* restaurant in the basement where you can eat amidst folks who might work for NTT DoCoMo.

## **Korean**

Much of the best meat food in Tokyo is found at Korean restaurants. Grill thin fatty slices of beef at your table. Delicious clear soup. Excellent spicy cabbage and side dishes. And of course bibimba, rice mixed with vegetables in a hot stone bowl.

## **Seafood**

Japan is an island. They make extensive use of sea products.

## **Sushi**

While sushi might be the first (and only) thing many Americans think of when they think of Japanese food, sushi is actually not a common meal. Sure, a nibble of tuna with some rice might be included with that lunch set but sushi is mostly a snack, something you eat on your way to something else. Still they love fresh fish, and if sushi is what you desire, it's possible in Tokyo to find sushi so fresh it will change your life. And you can eat as much of it as you like, often by grabbing what looks good from a con-

veyor belt of sushi plates moving by in front of your face.

The word sushi specifically refers to the vinegared rice involved, but broadly means raw fish and other stuff wrapped with seaweed and rice. Sashimi is just plain fish, maybe with a side dish of rice.

## **Tsukiji Fish Market**

Tsukiji is the world's largest wholesale fish market. A thumping thriving place, a giant aquarium where everything is dying and for sale. Narrow alleys are fascinating walking, punctuated by crazy maddened diesel carts careening carrying their loads of styrofoam and sea goods. You're best off arriving before 7.30am, so you can catch the action and not just the clean up. There are three stages; close to the river, fish and sea goods are auctioned off, including giant frozen tuna (big as a motor scooter) and swordfish taller than you are. Walk away from the river and there are stalls with folks selling sea stuff wholesale. These are the best wandering, where you can get close to the freaky fish and the salty fish-mongers. Walk further away from the river and you'll see the

goods being boxed up and prepared for the hotels and restaurants around Tokyo.

Past that, there are stalls and stands where the freshest fish you have ever eaten is being sliced and served. If there's a line out in front, it's probably good. Across from a place that sells rubber boots, there's a tiny narrow sushi place; expect to eat a great set menu course for \$30; beer and green tea always go well with sushi, surprisingly so before 9am.

## Unagi

While *unagi*, barbecued sea eel, is a mainstay of many delicious sushi meals, you will find restaurants in Japan serving large flat *unagi* steaks on their own. Not to mention the bitter hearts and tasty deep-fried spines of these beasts. Typically it's hearty, heavy fare. Often these restaurants have curly slightly cartooned eel depicted outside.

## Tako

Octopus is a popular foodstuff; misleadingly called *tako* in Japanese. Most often you'll see happy octopi on awning advertising walk-up *tako* stands, selling balls of octopus and vegetables mixed with egggy batter and fried, served in

ball shapes covered in sweet brown sauce.

## Tempura

Tempura was adopted from Portuguese travellers who visited Japan in the 1500s, batter-frying non-meat dishes on Fridays when Catholics couldn't eat meat. Tempura today is vegetables, shrimp or freshwater eel, dipped in a thin batter with much egg, then submerged briefly in hot oil

## Maguro

Tuna is popular, mostly raw. You'll see some restaurants where they're serving what looks like shiny red bits of fresh tuna over rice in snotty white mountain potato sauce with flecks of dried seaweed. It can be an unsettling mouthful.

## Miscellaneous Okonomiyaki

Do-It-Yourself pancakes thick with cabbage, seafood, meat, eggs, noodles, whatever is laying around. Be aware that if you order *okonomiyaki*, you might be expected to cook your own, on a hot griddle at your table. Still you should be able to express enough cluelessness that someone nearby will help; either way it ain't too tough. Be aware, it's usually better to cook the

pancake longer, longer longer than you expect.

### **Hiroshima-Style**

Near Yotsuya station, down the main street, and around a corner to your right just two streets after the “since 1967 Jazz Bar,” in a basement there’s a Hiroshima-style Okonomiyaki restaurant. The proprietor is also a jazz man, the food and the music are excellent. Here the proprietor prepares the pancakes for everyone.

### **Nabe**

Nabe is a hearty soup cooked at your table. Typically a clay pot is delivered with the ingredients already inside. There are many varieties of nabe, try the *karai*, a nearly-creamy spicy nabe. After you eat most of the good meat and veggies from inside you’ll get some udon to add to the remaining sauce.

### **Oden**

At a 7-11 convenience store, you might see a vat of bubbling brown briny liquid separated into six or eight different slots: inside each fishcake, squid bits, vegetables, radish, eggs marinating. You can point and choose, for a small bowl’s worth maybe with spicy yellow mustard. Other places serve it besides 7-11.

## **Breakfast**

A Japanese breakfast might consist of raw egg over rice with soy sauce, strips of dried salted seaweed (*nori*), some grilled salmon, pickled vegetables. While the raw egg over rice might seem too snot-like, it is quite delicious with just a dash of soy sauce, the flavor of the fish, or some salted seaweed. Also *natto* might be served with breakfast (covered later).

## **Fast Food**

Japan has McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken. You might find some limited entertainment and comfort of home visiting here and comparing your experience.

Besides fast food tempura, gyudon and katsu, there are local Japanese fast food burger joints.

### **First Kitchen**

Look for the large numeral “1” around town. Try the *hotate*, scallop with butter and salt - a powder you shake into a bag of french fries. Probably mostly MSG.

### **Kentucky Fried Chicken**

KFC is like you might remember from home except the biscuit might show up shaped

like a donut. There's a documentary, hard to find but rumoured to be excellent, called *The Colonel Comes to Japan*. By noted author and Japan scholar John Nathan, the movie uses KFC as a means of studying Japan-US cultural exchange in the context of commerce.

## **Konbini**

A range of weird goods in bite-sized chunks, magazines and stimulation appearing on nearly every block. They sell meals, like pasta with fish eggs or a cheese omelette and they will microwave it on the spot for you. Be mindful where you dine.

## **Rice balls**

Small triangles and balls of rice stuffed with fish and vegetables and sour plum are a delicious staple of the Japanese diet. While traditionally this is the sort of food that would be made within the family or home, the ubiquitous Japanese convenience store offers a wide range of unusual flavors that will be largely unreadable to you even after a few weeks. You could end up with mayonnaise and fish eggs, or tuna, or salmon, or sour plum. It's all filling, and some quite tasty.

Bring some back on the plane for friends, the rice balls should probably keep that long.

## **Izakaya**

These Japanese pubs might seem like the equivalent of Denny's from their picture menus and their broad, flat sampling of Japanese cuisine. But if you're hungry and confused you can't do much better than a picture menu, and often izakaya are all that's open late. The tofu salads are usually tasty and maybe try some grilled fish (often *sapa*, mackerel). And always *gyoza* (greasy, meaty potstickers), maybe *edamame* (boiled soybeans).

## **Drink**

Sitting down to a Japanese meal you are most often greeted by a cup of warm tea. Maybe cold tea. Water is infrequently provided, and if you request it (*omizu*), they're likely to forget the first two times you ask. As Mizuko Ito explained it to me, the Japanese are raised drinking tea. So water seems kind of plain; maybe they feel its kind of sad or boring to drink something with no flavor. These must be among the most thoroughly caffeinated people on the planet.



## Vending Machines

You will find vending machines everywhere including your bedroom in Japan, selling all manner of flavoured drinks.

Alcoholic and social drinking is covered in the pleasure section.

## Curiosities Whale

If Greenpeace and mammal-friendly concerns don't outweigh your food curiosity, you might be able to find whale, *kujira*, to eat around Tokyo. Mostly Minke whale, served cooked, or thin sliced shaved raw sashimi-style, it has a meaty flavor. The supply of whalemeat in town fluctuates according to the supply left over from Japanese national "scientific research." You might see proud excited signs with exclamation points outside of some restaurants that serve it; not at all in keeping with the dour mood of the international whale protection community interested in preventing the Japanese stomach from conquering presumed dwinding species.

## Horse

Japanese folks eat horsemeat. Not as a matter of daily dining, but more as a delicacy. Mostly

raw, thin shaved slices frozen, or thicker bloody chunks of raw horsemeat (*basashi*).

Horsemeat tastes better than it might sound, especially with some soy sauce and a bit of green onion. Yum.

## Yaki-Imo

If you hear a doleful song "Ya-ki-i-mooh, Ya-ki-i-moooh" coming from a tiny pickup truck with a smoking chimney in the back, that's the *Yaki-imo* man, parked somewhere nearby selling roasted yams. Try one, they're slightly smoky, but mostly plain yam.

## Natto

*Natto* is a popular breakfast food in Japan. These raw fermented soy beans have a pungent odor; some Japanese folks are repelled by the stuff. Japan is the only nation in the world that eats this stuff raw; elsewhere in Asia they cook it.

The texture resembles snot; small brown bits suspended in a puddle of sticky, pasty, stringy goop that will resist your efforts to pull it apart without carrying the strings into your mouth. If you order and consume *natto* in a Japanese restaurant, you will never have to prove your courage in any other way.

# Pleasure

There are so many things to do in this crowded city; just leaving your lodging and deciding to find a washcloth can be an urban adventure. This section is largely concerned with modern pleasures; how the Japanese entertain themselves today and how you might join them.

## Games

### Go

The Japanese play a board strategy game called go (or *igo*). It's over 4,000 years old, and they borrowed it from China. If you can sensically manipulate these black and white stones on a grid etched in wood, you'll find ample opportunities to play go, near food carts, in public parks, cafes, and go parlors. It could be a great way to get to meet some folks; the game transcends spoken language.

### Pachinko

Any town in Japan with a population greater than seven has a giant loud gaudy Pachinko Parlour. Festooned with neon and animated characters beckoning, the automatic doors part and you are standing in the midst of a cacophony of clanging bells and falling metal balls.

Chaotic, crass and common, a visit to a Pachinko parlour is mandatory. Pachinko should quickly disabuse you of any notion that the Japanese are a bunch of zen, sophisticated, tea-drinking, rock-garden raking, kimono-wearing aesthetes.

Pachinko is an analog arcade game, like vertical pinball. If Pinball is a fight against death, working to prevent a very few balls from disappearing at the bottom of the board, then Pachinko is a search for balance in the midst of the voluminous stream of life.

The Pachinko machine is a board with nails on it. You grasp a plastic knob on the right side, below the board, and as you turn the knob, a steady stream of metal balls arc up from the bottom left over the top of the Pachinko playing field to fall down between the nails. You can't control the path of the falling balls, you can only make adjustments to their starting speed. If you time it right, more of your balls will fall down the center, towards an open chute. The more

balls that fall in the chute, the more balls you are given to continue playing Pachinko.

When you reach that sweet spot, you are holding steady on a knob, breathing, watching balls fall with a certain likelihood, but still largely out of your control. The right spot is a place of balance, the middle way between too hard and too soft. And it is a place you want to stay. You'll know if you found it; you'll be accumulating balls faster than you can spend them.

The successful pachinko players sit with large stacks of ball-filled plastic bins behind them. Pachinko is gambling, unofficially. The parlours give you prizes in exchange for the balls you've won, and there are invariably small nondescript storefronts nearby that will take your prizes and trade them for cash.

There's no recommended Pachinko parlour here; they're so overwhelming that no one has stayed in the memory. Find one with lots of people in it playing. Usually you purchase a card at a vending machine (surprise surprise) for 1000 or 2000 yen; this card is inserted into the side of the machine. If you sit near some Japanese players long enough, you'll might find that folks will help you out, getting you started, giving you tips, maybe a few balls.

## **Video Games**

Tall, packed video game arcades appear in every neighborhood of Tokyo. Inside, beyond the crane machines where you can reach out to win candy, stuffed animals, consumer electronics or live lobsters, there are lively stand up arcade games, many of which never reach the United States. The latest technology here is always something to marvel at, along with the bizarre game culture that seems unique to Tokyo or at least Asia. A dog-walking game, a game of two large taiko drums, a game where you swing the handle of a samurai sword to slash foes on-screen; the games in Japan are more varied, and at times more physically involving. Most games are 100 yen (75¢).

In the back corners or upper floors of many video game parlours in Japan there are horse-racing games where you raise a stallion to race against the other players seated at nearby consoles.

Horseracing is popular in Japan; this involving equestrian arcade game would likely never sell widely in the United States.

The most popular games seem to be the fighting games. Sega's Virtua Fighter 4 allow frequent players to carry their statistics with them on cards. If you're good, get a card from a vending machine and you can prove yourself in mostly silent matches between men who don't make fun of each other or seem to talk smack between matches.

## Print Club - "puri kura"

Photo booths are a popular curbside attraction in Japan. A far cry from simple quick-printed pictures, the state of the art in Japan includes multiple cameras you can set at any angle and the chance to review your pictures on a small screen, doodling on your image or adding a background to fashion yourself floating in space or standing in a sea of British flag-patterned stars.

These are not machines intended for passport photos, or anything terrifically useful. Some of these machines are in areas of video game arcades intended for girls only; single men walking through might get some strange looks and an invitation to leave. Still there are so many of these machines, anyone should be able to find a place to get a little goofy in front of a camera.

The results? A sheet of colorful photostickers. Many locations will have scissors so you can cut up and distribute stickers to any folks who might have appeared in your sticker-shots with you. It can be great fun to have your photo taken with locals, especially if they are hyper-fashionable, dressed up Tokyo kids. Good luck inviting them to join you in a small curtained room; patience and an innocent expression have yielded some great fun souvenir stickers. Be sure to scissor and share what you have taken! Depending on how you muddle through some of the on-screen Japanese, your stickers might appear online. [www.mitemite.ne.jp](http://www.mitemite.ne.jp) is one such site displaying photostickers beamed directly from the booths.

## Bathing

Japan has a tradition of public bathing. Japanese people travelling within the country frequent *onsen*, traditional hot springs.

In the cities where the sulfur mostly bubbles up in nightclubs, you can still find places to soak in hot tubs and saunas in various neighborhoods. The etiquette is roughly this: sit on a stool in front of one

of the waist-high showers. Soap and shampoo thoroughly. Rinse off - go into the tubs clean. Take a small clean washcloth with you. Soak this washcloth discreetly and then lift it above you. Assume a mostly serious expression on your face as you leave a lumpy dripping washcloth on your head.



### **Shinjuku Green Plaza**

The Green Plaza is a labyrinthine complex of baths and saunas, undergirded by hundreds of capsules and topped by rooftop soaking baths overlooking the skyscrapers of Shinjuku. There are two or three separate floors involved, with four or five staircases, be persistent in searching until you're standing naked looking at the twinkling lights of Tokyo commerce. The spa facilities are available for both men and women. This includes access to a 24 hour restaurant and lounge with televisions, newspapers and smoking Japanese people. The Green Plaza is in Shinjuku's Kabukicho, a sex for sale district.

### **Jakotsuyu - Asakusa**

Buried in a side alley of a side alley, this natural hot springs near Tawarimachi Station on the Ginza line is located in a lively old part of town. Nearby are the homes of three of the *Yakuza* (mafia) groups; you can see some of their tattooed, perhaps tough looking dudes in the buff here. There are bathing spaces for both genders. The name here means "Snake Bone Baths;" in the male tubs you might feel some friendly physical contact. Depending on how you like your stimulation, you could try a light electrocution: Jakotsuyu has some electric baths; you'll know when you sit in them.

## **Shopping**

### **Fake Food**

Near Asakusa there is a street where they sell the plastic food models. While this would seem to be a fantastic souvenir, grabbing a few fake bowls of ramen and curry rice to share with folks back home, the models turn out to be expensive goods. A nice fake grilled squid on a plate with some glistening plastic rice might run you upwards of \$50. Either way, these are fun to look at.

### **Religious Goods**

You can find beads, household shrines, monk's clothes and other religious and traditional goods near Asakusa, at the Tawaramachi station, just past Ueno on the Ginza line.

## **Consumer Electronics**

Japan is awash in consumer electronics. That doesn't mean they are cheaper, just that there is a fabulous selection. So you are better off trying to find something weird, like an electric nosehair clipper, rather than a nice new TV. See the Akihabara section under neighborhoods.

## **Stationery**

The Japanese seem to love fine paper and pens and so you'll find marvellous stationery stores in nearly every neighborhood. Stuff found in these stores can make for great gifts for folks back home.

## **Parks**

Tokyo has less public green space than many cities. "Public space" seems to be in short supply, and often collective recreation comes if it's sponsored, brightly lit, and there are plastic attractions involved. Still there are a number of parks around town. Most make for pretty walking, good places to watch Japanese people pursuing hobbies and maybe mingle with locals, foreigners and homeless folk. Even after dark, most parks seem to be safe.

## **Museums**

Tokyo is fairly well littered with small, corporate sponsored or individually crafted museums - to cultural movements, to odd industries, or famous individuals.

### **Edo-Tokyo Museum**

Like a spaceship landed gracefully in Shitamachi, the Edo-Tokyo museum is a remarkable high technology exterior hosting inside an expansive museum on old Tokyo. A major museum destination.

### **Asakura Choso Museum**

Visiting this accomplished "naturalist" sculptor's home might be the only chance some visitors have to take off their shoes and pad about through a traditional tatami-mat Japanese house. This museum is a nice quiet place to look over his art (evocative of Rodin), his courtyard garden and get a feeling for the spirit of a high-minded Japanese home. He had 15 cats, though, and sculpted all of them, so it's not entirely weighty art there. Located near the Nippori station's north:west exit. The surrounding neighborhood, loaded with temples, graveyards and old homes, can make for idyllic strolling.

# Commercial Amusement

Much of Tokyo may seem like commercial amusement, but there are places that present more thoroughly manufactured artificial pleasure.

## Odaiba

They filled in parts of Tokyo Bay and built the shopping city of tomorrow. Sure to look increasingly aged, Odaiba today is a contemporary commercial entertainment mecca. Mall-type stores, a Sega game palace, movie theatres, a car history museum and new car showroom / amusement park presented by Toyota.

## Disney

Disneyland in Japan is much the same as it might be in Europe or America, except stuffed with Japanese people. Some visitors might seem to you to be unsettlingly fond of Winnie the Pooh, for example, but I could introduce you to some Americans who are similarly devoted. Japan has the DisneySea resort, that is unique to this island nation: It's the usual artful artifice from Disney, coupled with a few thrilling rides and a lot of walking between middling food stands.

## Makuhari Messe

Tokyo's convention center offers a regular stream of giant exhibitions. If you show up with a plausible-enough business card you could claim to be press and you might find yourself wandering amidst consumer electronics, video games, cars or flowers.

## Karaoke

ka-ra-o-ke

カラオケ

Karaoke means empty orchestra. Karaoke also means inhibitions lost, and small group good times. Most people around the world have some tradition of social singing; karaoke takes pop songs, removes the vocal tracks, and presents this music to you with a microphone and the lyrics so you can entertain your friends with your favourite songs onscreen.

Karaoke in America is typically one big room where one person performs at a time, for a crowd. Besides Karaoke in bars, most of the inner-city Karaoke in Japan consists of buildings packed with small rooms for rent. Groups of one to six people can sit comfortably around a private TV and sing their songs for people in their group. You can order snacks and beverages here as well. Word has it hard-up teenagers rent these rooms to crash or get it on.

If you have a chance to go out for Karaoke with some Japanese folks, do sing some English-language classics. Most folks love the Beatles and the kids seem to know quite a few Bon Jovi songs.

## **Dancing**

Tokyo has some wild clubs. You can spend money quickly, and you might find some good DJs. Be warned, often clubs are in basements, fairly unventilated and packed with smokers.

### **Gas Panic**

This legendary Roppongi institution was named for the original location that had no bathrooms. It's a clearinghouse for intercultural desire, where marines and foreign businessmen leer at made-up Japanese ladies probably also on the make. Gas Panic verges on being a Disco Inferno at times: there's relentless dancing, dancing up on the tables even. You must always have a drink in your hand. Put it down, they clear it away, and then some guy with a menu comes up to you and harasses you to order another drink or leave.

### **Muse**

Muse is located a short walking distance from Roppongi, in Nishi-Azabu. A much more sedate and perhaps mature vibe than Gas Panic, you'll find a few different moods built into this basement bar. Billiards near the front, small private booths, sculpted seating areas, and finally a small cave-like dance area in the back.

### **Department H**

At Department H, there's definitely dancing but most of it takes place on stage and some of it on all fours. Department H would seem to be the heart of Tokyo's kink-scene; you'll find fetishes you had never heard of or had long ago forgotten paraded through the audience or performed to promote another club or establishment across town. Not for the faint of heart or easily offended; blood and live booty-licking might be on the menu, as are public nudity and touching between strangers. Department H happens on the first Saturday of each month, after midnight, in a club above an AM/PM convenience store in Shibuya's Love Hotel hill.

## **Drinking**

The Japanese enjoy their alcohol; walking around Tokyo there will seem to be more social drinking than you might see in most coun-



tries. People blatantly stagger about, throwing up on subway platforms, red in the face, acting happy. I say acting because performance is a rich part of social drinking in Japan. The point is not only to get thoroughly sauced, but to revel in it; act drunk, be drunk.

The Japanese drink an enormous amount of domestic beer. It can be difficult to track down a dark, foreign or micro-brew. Iwate-ken to the North has a local microbrew that appears elsewhere at times; the logo is two reindeer butting heads or prowling about with a field of stars overhead. The blue bottle or blue can is a delicious rich flavour, nearly a Belgian taste.

Sake is served at most restaurants, sometimes in a small wooden box. If it's cold, it's usually nicer sake. If it's served overflowing into a small plate beneath the glass, it's a gesture of generosity and you're welcome to sip the spilled remnants. Some sake is cloudy-white, called "nigori" it is often sweet and only partially fermented.

Rice-based spirits, *shochu*, are clear with a nice citrusy bite. Popular in Korea as well; Japan has its own brands and varieties. Many Japanese have an abiding fondness for whiskey, both foreign and domestic labels.

If you go out for drinks in Japan, the beer and sake are typically served in a large bottle with small glasses for everyone. Pour for other folks and hope they pour for you. It's a nice way to encourage social lubrication; once you return home and people are busy serving themselves it might seem positively selfish.

If you wander around at night, you will notice small signs hanging off the sides of buildings. Millions of them, each one representing a bar, tiny dimly-lit watering holes. These are the places that Japanese businessmen go to unwind, and places they entertain their friends. It's possible that your unannounced appearance will not be well-received by the intimates at any one particular establishment but if you feel imbued with cash and charm, give it a whirl.

### **Umeboshi Sour**

*Umeboshi* is the sour plum, a popular flavor in Japan. An Umeboshi sour is one of these pink-purple plums in the bottom of your glass, mingling with ice, club soda and *shochu*. You are encouraged to

mash up the sour plum with your chopsticks to break up the fruit flesh and distribute the flavour. Note, an “ume sour” is a drink flavored with a syrup, not the natural briny flavor of umeboshi - be sure you are ordering all six syllables - oo-meh-boh-shi-sau-wah.

### **Ginza Lion**

The Ginza Lion was built in 1899 as a German-style beer hall. Marvellous tiles and mosaics, and invariably the insides packed with Japanese and foreigners tilting back large mugs of Sapporo, as they run it to promote their beer. Some German and Japanese food available as well, and occasionally a beer-promotional floorshow.

### **The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan**

Located above the Hibiya Station exit A2, this is a fantastic place for a visiting foreigner involved with any sort of media. The Club was started after World War II as a place for visiting journalists to find a bed, a desk and a place to file stories. They've lost the beds, but they serve food, drinks, broadband Internet connections, and often fascinating speeches on Japanese culture, business and politics. They have complementary guest memberships, which gives you access to a giant English-language library about Japan, daily newspapers and monthly magazines from around the world, and a great place to check your email at your leisure. Guest membership should not be hard to come by if you can represent yourself as somehow being associated with the media or as a foreign businessperson visiting Japan. They have a certain aging problem as well, so permanent membership is severely discounted for people under 35. The bar here is a great place to get context for your time in Japan, talking to journalists who report on health care, taxes, automobiles, banking troubles, politicians. These people process Japan for the outside world and they often like to share their observations. You can't buy drinks here without being some form of a member.

### **Yotsuya Jazz Bar**

Along the main street running through Yotsuya, near the subway station, there's a “Jazz Bar” advertised, “Since 1967.” Down in the basement, the music rules, conversation obliterated by giant speakers placed at the end of the lovely Scandinavian wood-paneled room. Order yourself a drink and sit there and listen to high fidelity recorded jazz.

# Drugs

I would not bring pleasure drugs with me into Japan. Paul McCartney spent nine days in jail for some weed in his suitcase, and he co-wrote “Let it Be,” a song many Japanese people adore, and “Hey Jude,” which is the on-hold muzak for half the phones in Japan. Still you’ll see headshops and marijuana culture icons around - there’s definitely some weed here somewhere. Carry it at your peril - you already stand out and the slightest variation from the routine here might earn you some inspection from the authorities.

Due to a loophole in the drug laws, psychedelic mushrooms are for sale in areas frequented by hipster teenagers, namely Shibuya. The people that sell them often look positively twitchy. Legislators are actively working to close this loophole; it may already be gone.

Speed, or *shabu*, snorted, smoked and even injected, would seem to be the drug of choice in Japan. It fits in with societal productivity. Methamphetamines were popular and legal during Japan’s lauded post-World War II rebuilding. Now definitely illegal, speed is more often used for pleasure; recently cheap methamphetamines manufactured in China have pushed prices down and so more kids are getting involved with velocity-enhancing drugs.

# Socializing and Sex

If you are getting ready to move to Japan and you are curious to meet some Japanese, you can find Japanese folks eager to meet and talk with strangers over the Internet. Sites like Tokyo Friends and Tokyo Classifieds promote cultural exchange with message boards and personal advertisements. Find someone of your preferred gender interested in meeting for language exchange (whatever that entails) and email them before you go to set up a possible date.

## Homosocial

Japan is probably more homosocial than what you’re used to. Men and women have separate social spheres. Many restaurants, bars and cafes might seem to have an assumed gender preference printed above the door. Don’t take this seriously unless it makes you uncomfortable or you are asked to leave. You already don’t fit in anyhow.

## For Women

Caroline Pover's *Being A Broad in Japan* is unquestionably the best book for western women coming here. She interviewed 250 foreign ladies about their experience living in Japan and mixed in her own commentary in this straight-talking guide. While the target audience is ladies, anyone will find some insight into living in Japan.

Pover's focus is long term living, but she takes up dating and culture. In short, Japanese men are a bit different. Perhaps shy. As she

There is never enough to do when you travel.

This must be one of the reasons why travelers the world over are known for their attempts to pick other people up. It is not that they want sex so much as it is that they want something to fill the emptiness that their very freedom has created. And what else can you do after the coffee shops, the zoos, the museums, and the libraries are rifled?

Too - another factor in favor of seeking sex - there is no more personal undertaking. Naked, lying down, one is resolutely oneself, the person one otherwise left at home. The freedom to lose yourself, one of the great attractions of the sexual encounter, is based, after all, upon the assumption that you have first found yourself.

At the same time - tips for the traveler - there are few better ways of learning the language, of taking the temperature of the land, of measuring the inner states of its inhabitants. Also, there are few more attractive memories to take home with one. Sex makes, in its way, the ideal souvenir.

- Donald Richie, *The Inland Sea*

observed, western women looking to date or enjoy a Japanese man might have to make the first move, multiple times.

On one hand, Japan is safer as rates of rape are lower. But rape is how you define it; rates of public molestation are higher.

*Chikan* are infamous subway perverts who use the crowded conditions on subways to find their fingers in someone's panties, hoping that a woman's fear of drawing attention to herself will keep her from calling out. Recently the government and individual woman have been fighting these sorts of gropers more effectively. But Pover's interviewees observe that reporting sexual misconduct can often lead to misunderstanding and reverse accusation.

Women are advised to keep their wits about them in spite of the seeming widespread public safety. This is obvious. But women should find Japan will welcome a solo female traveller largely with curiosity. If you are out late drinking, you're tempting the devil no matter where you live. Japan is safer than most places.

## For Men

Each neighborhood in Tokyo would seem to have an area entirely devoted to stimulating the heterosexual male imagination. Some

of these businesses, but not all, prefer to cater specifically to Japanese men, or foreign men who can fake Japanese well enough to make easy customers.

## **Pornography**

If you are curious about pornography, Japan is a wild place to research the stuff. You'll find cheap newsprint porn comic books in the convenience stores, alongside typical pornographic magazines. All hotels with TV have plenty of porn. And there are plenty of sex-media shops around town. If you have no qualms about making horny Japanese men shopping for porn uncomfortable, you are free to wander and inspect the goods. Tapes of very young girls playing in the park will be sold near tapes of secret cameras from bathrooms and hotel rooms. It's an unsettling world of mediated male desire unleashed.

Porn in Japan contains plenty of non-consensual sex. Often one partner involved says nothing much more than stop, stop (*yamete*). But while the themes and conduct may seem aggressive, the genitals are typically fuzzed out, pixellated: a striking contradiction, violence and prudishness.

### **I.K.U.**

An artist Shu Lea Cheang made an unofficial, pornographic sequel to *Blade Runner* called *I.K.U.* In Japanese *iku* means "to go" and it's what some Japanese people say when they experiencing orgasm. The film evolves *Blade Runner's* teasing replicants into full-fledged neon night sex warriors engaged in rectum-hunting in beautiful electric color. Available on DVD in Japan; you might have to special order *I.K.U.*, or write out the name; it's not a common title in most video shops, and it's a little too artsy weird for most porn vendors.

### **Sex Software**

Over a quarter of all PC software sold in Japan is pornographic. Most of this is cartoon anime porn, sometimes called *hentai*. Wandering around Akihabara looking at software and computer stores, you'll find that if you walk too far into the corner of a store you're all of a sudden surrounded by tiny cartoon girls with giant tits - nurses, schoolgirls, dominatrixes available for conquest on your personal computer. The games are mostly adventure games, stories that you play through by multiple choice; if you pick properly you see

slideshows of hot anime sex action. There is sex software featuring male models; typically in its own much smaller section.

## **Prostitution**

Prostitution is supposedly illegal in Japan. You wouldn't know it from walking certain neighborhoods. In places like Shinbashi, Kabukicho near Shinjuku, or Uguisudani near Ueno, sex certainly seems to be for sale. There are straightforward streetwalkers, often located near love hotels so you can readily shack up with Japanese ladies and women from Southeast Asia and China. There are home delivery services as well; in Tokyo you can order a wicked wife or soiled schoolgirl to come to your house or hotel room for different sex acts. These are often advertised by small salacious paper flyers decorating phone booths and adhered to signposts at night. There are also "image clubs" places where you can have a fantasy performed for you. Fancy sex in a schoolroom? An enema from a naughty nurse? How about breaking and entering to molest a sleeping woman?

If you prefer some bit of discretion there are telephone clubs, places where men arrange dates with young ladies. If the date arrangement goes well over the phone, men can purchase affection and the young ladies can make a good bundle. If you believe the weekly tabloids, young girls sell sex to afford expensive accessories in a vicious fashion race. All these sorts of services are available to someone who has particular fantasies, can afford paid sex pleasure, and can read and speak enough Japanese to arrange it and convince the pimping people that you are not a dodgy foreigner.

## **Massaji?**

The commercial sex most foreign men will be offered in Japan is "massaji?" Ladies in padded overcoats will call out and occasionally grab your arm, offering to take you somewhere for some physical contact. What exactly that contact entails and how much it should cost are fluid things. Once I was lonely and looking for a place to stay; one young Chinese woman made a rather persistent offer and I was slightly dismayed to discover that she was really only selling a back massage. Afterwards I was allowed to sleep on her massage table until noon. Total for an oily back rub and seven hours sleeping: 6500 yen (\$50).

*There are around 400,000 non-Asian foreigners living in Japan. The bulk of these are from South America.*

You will see scores of small storefront massage parlors all over Japan. Most are thinly-veiled cover-ups for straightforward massage, meaning they will rub your back and your feet, maybe with oil or baby powder. If the massage offer contains the words “health” “service” or “fashion,” that’s a tip off that the message might involve your child-making parts. Prices for those services should likely be at least double typical massage rates.

## **Hostess Clubs**

You might see a bright street-level sign with smiling ladies, advertising “Fun Pub Guilty” or some such bar. The cover charge might be \$75-\$150, in addition to similar hourly rates. Curious Westerners might be surprised to find men sitting with young ladies mostly chatting and drinking inside. They might be singing karaoke. These places, called Hostess Clubs or *sunaku* (“snack”) are the modern descendent of the traditional Japanese Geisha establishment. In olden days, highly made-up and elaborately dressed ladies played three-string cat-gut guitars and sang traditional poems while men became increasingly drunk and perhaps hoped to get beneath the female kimono. Geisha were, and are, thoroughly trained and very expensive. Think of hostess bars as a more democratic form of Geisha, a social club where more average salarymen can afford to entertain friends and maintain a paid girlfriend. After repeat visits, costing thousands of dollars, a young lady might be willing to join you for dinner beforehand or maybe even take a short trip somewhere. And if you buy her a mink coat, an expensive ring, or give her money to start her own business? The boundaries are fluid, and set by each party. These ladies have their work cut out for them if they expect to get rich. Some western women have ventured into the “water trade” and they discovered that you have to work to maintain your clientele - routinely calling them to entice more spending “Why haven’t you come around lately?”

There are male “Host Clubs” as well, mostly staffed by locals. Rumor has it that there are even host bars populated by foreign men. Either gender, if you feel like you can do a good job selling your charms, you might find this is a fabulous way to earn fast cash to stay in Japan; practice your language skills while having a chance to alienate your emotions and come to detest the opposite sex.

It's a strange world of gendered commerce, and it can be quite expensive to study. Besides the \$150 cover charge, you might pay over \$100 for a bottle of whiskey or vodka that will be kept at the club for your next return. Most clubs will turn you away at the door if you are not in the company of a Japanese man, or if you do not speak Japanese yourself. To enter expecting sex outright is *déclassé*; for the amount of money involved most Westerners might be surprised to find that these people are, in fact, just talking.

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### **Katakana Kwiz: Appliances**

Sound out these common appliances using the Katakana Chart on page 32. Answers appear towards the end of this book.

テレビ”    ハ°ソコン  
ラシ”オ    リモコン

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### **Katakana Kwiz: Random Words**

Sound out these words using the Katakana Chart:

ト”ア    コントロール  
サービ”ス    トイレ

*Around 14,000 adult videos are made in Japan every year, in the United States that figure is closer to 2,500.*



# References

## Books

### **Donald Richie**

Donald Richie cannot come more highly recommended. A foreigner from Ohio, middle America, he craved some foreign experience. Landing in Japan with the American army after World War II, he found a country digging its traditions out from under smouldering rubble. He's spent 50 years living in Japan, exploring the country with a wide eye. *The Donald Richie Reader* gives a great survey of his writings on Japan, including food, foreigners, sex and culture. Always he is observant, self-critical and well-informed. In 1999 he wrote a short book on Tokyo that is fascinating reading as well.

### **Being A Broad**

Caroline Pover's *Being A Broad in Japan* is not only useful for Western Women residing in Japan, the intended audience, but for anyone who wonders how they might go about living in this island nation. The tone of the book is fantastic - straightforward and personal.

### **Tokyo Confidential**

Mark Schreiber is an excellent guide to the seamy side of Japan, working for decades to translate and embellish stories from Japan's weekly tabloids. He edited *Tokyo Confidential*, a fascinating collection of sensational news and rumors from the popular Japanese press. It's a telling look at the Japanese subconscious.

### **Lonely Planet**

There are plenty of guides to Tokyo and Japan. Some are marvelously focused, considering just food, traditional lodging or craftworks. Lonely Planet was my first all-around guidebook to this town, a good start for someone without a lot of money looking to try some weird stuff.

## Magazines

Formerly called Tokyo Classified, *Metropolis* is the most comprehensive English language city paper for Tokyo. Entertainment listings, trend watching, and the lively classified advertisements for services and personals. If you think you might want to find a job, house, romantic partner, buddy or club in Japan, this is a fantastic place to

start. Check their web site: [www.tokyoclassified.com](http://www.tokyoclassified.com), an excellent stash of old articles, Japanese celebrity profiles, cultural curiosities. A free monthly mag, *JapanZine* is a cheeky bit of insight into contemporary culture as reported by underbelly-crawling Gaijin visitors. The monthly *J@panInc* magazine considers Japanese technology and business issues in English.

From A.A. Gill an article entitled “Mad in Japan,” Sunday Times, 9 September 2001. It’s a scathing writeup of modern Japan from someone wildly underinformed and deeply opinionated. Quite amusing and offensive! Search the web for it; it’s out there.

## WebSites

JapanToday.com is a good overview of recent news in Japan.

“Gaijin In Japan” online forums, filled mostly by English teachers sharing wisdom and stories about life in Japan. There’s some pretty tasty lowbrow stuff in here.

Chanpon.org is a magazine and web community considering the mix of Japanese and foreign cultures. If you’re interested in some intellectually stimulating contacts in Japan, you might find them in the Chanpon message boards.

Ed Jacob’s “Quirky Japan Homepage” defies stereotypes and conventions. Unusual and even unsettling information about this country jostles with genuinely helpful advice for residents and visitors.

I have written about my time in Japan and supplemented it with photos. Long after this booklet is printed, this site should be updated: [www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/tokyo/guide/](http://www.links.net/vita/trip/japan/tokyo/guide/)

Nearly all the statistics provided in this book come from the Japanese Government, provided online in the Statistical Handbook of Japan 2001: [www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/contents.htm](http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/contents.htm) with some initial guidance on statistics provided by Jonathan Watts of the Guardian UK.

*Answers for the Katakana Kwizes: Drinks: biru (beer), kohee (coffee), kora (cola), orenji (orange), uain (wine), miruku (milk) - Appliances: terebi (TV), rajio (radio), pasokon (PC), rimokon (remote control) - Countries: amerika - Random: doa (door), kontororu (control), sabisu (service), toire (toilet)*

About the Author:



Justin Hall is a writer, traveler, born in Chicago, lived in Oakland, California and Tokyo. He loves working on an old unruly web site, Justin's Links ([www.links.net](http://www.links.net)). He went to Japan for a video game trade show in April 2001, was seduced by the stimulation, accidentally signed up for an intensive Japanese language class and figured he might as well move there for a while once he'd half-way learned how to stumble through Japanese. Since October 2001 he's been living in capsule hotels and ryokan. His email address should still be [justin@bud.com](mailto:justin@bud.com).

**cover art by J. Wilson Kello of samelabs:**



## **some response to *Just In Tokyo*:**

“Why settle for a laundry list of hotels and sites when you can have a Justin's-eye view of one of the more impenetrable cities in the world? I doubt you will find loving attention to capsule hotels, cyberporn, and First Kitchen hotate fries anywhere else. Part travel diary, part ethnography, and part guidebook, *Just In Tokyo* gives hints to the enterprising traveller on how to beat your own inspired and irrepressible path through a city of riotous density and flux.”

**- Mizuko Ito, Visiting Associate Professor, Keio University, Graduate School of Media and Governance**

“Put down that ‘Prague on \$5 a Day,’ you hippie! Justin’s Tokyo-On-No-Yen-Just-Confused-Smiles will have you flirting, reeling with liquor and dressed up like an extra from a bootleg high-school production of *Neuromancer* as you chow down on a hearty breakfast of vending-machine schoolgirl panties. As you lie awake in your coffin hotel, listening to the midnight symphony of salaryman flatulence and drunken good cheer, fire up your DoCoMo handset, aim its flat-panel display at this book and read and you will feel comforted.”

**- Cory Doctorow, Author: *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom***

I have many foreign friends, when I know that their sightseeing in Tokyo is the same, I am disappointed extremely: Tokyo Tower, the Imperial Palace, Kabuki-za. Maybe I will not go to such a place more than 3 times in a lifetime.

It is the same as giving only kiss, although you are married.

It is the same as playing only Tetris, although you have Playstation2.

It is the same as eating only sausages, although you ordered a jambalaya.

Traveler, Taste more!

American! Play Japan deeply!

You should marry Tokyo!

Tokyo, I think almost every country is the same. It depends on you whether Tokyo becomes interesting or less boring. You can encourage the man of past 40 who was fired from restructuring in the public bath called 'Sento' and you can be mistaken for a molester by a high school student girl who operated orthopedically in the train. You can eat the sushi which the robot made in the dance-club. You can say "You are a person really kind" to the cute pet in a mobile phone at the capsule-hotel. After that, you will know the merit and poorness of Tokyo. Meritorious and poor - When you love it, you are already a Japanese about 24%. No, you don't need to worry if you become so. You can be original you again, if you burn this book which is used as the first step of your trip, you already know.

**- Kenji Eno, Video Game Creator, President of fyto inc.**



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