

Japan Guide

Brook

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Tokyo

Tokyo is a great first stop for any trip if you're not sure what you want to do, or what you want to see. Flights to Tokyo are usually cheaper than ones to the Kansai region, at least from the west coast. Tokyo is *huge*—like, really hard to explain huge. The transit is unparalleled, the streets are clean and well-ordered, and you stand on the *left* side of the escalator.

There are plenty of temples, shopping, food, and mystery to keep you occupied for years, and if you've never been to Japan, I recommend spending most of your time here just wandering around, and finding what you can. Whether you're a collector, a hungry gastronomer, or a whiskey-enthusiast, there's a Tokyo for you.

Near Slack



- Glitch Coffee

If you happen to work at Slack, the best coffee nearby is Glitch. It's excellent, and they roast beans on-site.

Koenji

Koenji is a special neighborhood that I always return to. It's full of artists, vintage stores, and chill people. There's good food, and some relaxing cafes as well. There are a couple sentos in the neighborhood, but I'm not sure how they feel about tattoos.



- Koenji BnA

This art hotel is one of a few in Japan, and while small, it's a fantastic place to stay if you need a delightful home base, with a downstairs bar and a regular cast of characters. They host parties and art events sometimes as well. It's relatively affordable, but don't expect Park Hyatt amenities. The bathroom is spacious, the shower is great, and the beds are comfy.

- Coffee



City Hand Drip is a rad place to hang out and drink coffee in the afternoon. If you need a faster cup, or an earlier one you can get a to-go coffee or sit in the back of Porta Coffee Stand just south of the station in the outdoor shopping street.



- Nanatsumori

One of the first meals I ever had in Tokyo. This quaint cafe has coffee and curry and is open late. **Smoking allowed**

- **Bariki**

Under the tracks west of the station is a late night bar that serves until 4am. They have Hoppy and yakitori.

- **El Pato**

Delicious Spanish-influenced cuisine with lots of wonderful wine. This is a popular local spot with tables that fill up fast.

Nakano

Nakano has fantastic food, and one of my favorite shopping areas. If you find Akihabara too confusing, big, and cleaned-up, you might love Nakano Broadway here.

– Nakano Broadway

I usually tell friends this is the dirty uncle of Akihabara. There's very strange small stores mixed in with the audiophile, watch, and collector's toy stores here.



- **Bar Zingaro**

Tucked into Nakano Broadway is a fantastic coffee shop affiliated with [Takashi Murakami](#). They have a great bean selection, and even serve veggie burgers. The furniture is comfortable and they often play jazz music. This is a great place to escape for a little while. **No smoking allowed.**

- [Taco Che](#)

This bookstore is amazing. It's full of rare, strange books, and esoterica. Erotic, punk, and creative. A gem.

- Saikoro

Delicious ramen, with an affordable price, and cute interior. As usual, you buy a ticket when you walk in, then present your order to the staff. The flavor is a mix of chicken and seafood that I crave when I'm not in Japan.

- Yakitori Akiyoshi

This yakitori shop has locations in Osaka and a few other places, but often has a bit of a line. The jidori chicken is excellent, as are the other vegetable skewers and French fries. I have no idea what they use as mayo, bc it's strangely watery, but that's my only complaint. A great, affordable yakitori option.

Asakusa

Generally, Asakusa is a busy place for temple visitors, and tourists. There are tons of back-alleys and other places though, so be sure to wander.



- Sensoji Temple

This temple is gorgeous. Tucked behind it is a small Inari shrine that's connected to the Fushimi Inari shrine in Kyoto. Recent years have meant a large increase in tourists, and signs request that you keep your photos to a minimum. This is a place for contemplation and prayer.



- **Yakitori Motsuyaki Kujira Asakusa Yataro**

This place rules. There's outdoor seating, huge lemon chu-his, tons of tasty chicken parts, and a friendly staff. They also have an English menu in case you weren't diligent in your studies.

Smoking allowed



- Splendor Coffee

A bit off the beaten path in 4-Chome is a lovely little coffee shop. The proprietor spends a lot of effort and time selecting beans and making your coffee. It's a nice place to relax, read, and sip a coffee.

Shinjuku



Shinjuku can get overwhelming fast. There's so much to do here, and so much to see. One of the best ways to experience Shinjuku is to just explore and find small places. There are also a few gorgeous parks nearby, like Shinjuku Gyoen pictured above.



- Blue Bottle

There's a Blue Bottle very close to Shinjuku station, and while I'm sure there is better coffee around Shinjuku, this is where I usually grab a cup if I'm there in the morning. It's dependable.



- Bar Benfiddich

A truly fantastic cocktail bar. Both the location on the 9th floor and the new brandy-focused outpost on the second floor are delicious. They often get packed, mostly with foreigners, so be prepared to be turned away. There are a lot of cool bars in Shinjuku though, so keep wandering.

- Ni-Chome

Shinjuku Ni-chome is the queer part of Shinjuku, and it has tons of lesbian and gay bars. Most of these aren't super great for foreigners, but if you're interested in recommendations, let me know.

Here's a few lesbian bars:

- **Kinswomyn** – 3F, Daiichi Tenka Building, 2-15-10 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, (across from Club Zip and Books Rose)
- **Motel #203** Sunny Corpo 203, 2-7-2 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan / www.bar-motel.com

- **Adezakura** 2-15-11 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku / www.agit-k-kaku.com/adezakura
- **Goldfinger** 2-12-11 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan
This spot has karaoke sometimes.

Ebisu

- Ebisu Yokochō

This is basically an alleyway of food. It's almost always packed, but can be fun if you can get a seat. Try to come alone or with one other person.



- Bar Track

A great vinyl bar with a very impressive collection of largely foreign whiskeys. They have some solid local stuff too, but the highlight is the atmosphere and the assortment of snacks in jars on every table.

Yoyogi



- Little Nap

Great coffee at a small shop near Meiji Jingu. Lovely beans, and friendly staff. This is usually my go-to coffee in the area.

Harajuku

- Hay

A Danish brand's store that also has a chocolatier and a coffee shop. All the furniture is also for sale; and there's cute books too.

Nakameguro & Daikanyama

- **Minotaur**

Fantastic men's coats and pants. This is a local brand and while slightly costly, the quality and uniqueness of their garments makes me very sad they don't do women's cuts.

- **T-Site (Tsutata)**

This bookstore is incredible. It has a bar, a small restaurant, a Family Mart, and smart sections for every kind of book you can imagine. They even have a respectable record collection. This store is near a lot of high-end shopping and across from a neat bit of architecture at the Danish embassy.

Kyoto

Kyoto is a place I'm trying to better understand. It's often beautiful, with old temples and history around every corner, but it's also filled with tourists at times. I'm convinced that there's a lot of Kyoto to love, but I keep visiting and finding the pockets and areas that are more my speed.



Try a lot of pickles at the Nishiki market if you're able. They're amazing.



It's a bit out of the way, but if you make your way to **Cafe Kosen**, you'll be glad you did. Excellent coffee beans, made with a Nel Drip. One word of warning: the only toilet is a squat and pray one.

Pontocho



- Brown Sugar

This area is largely touristy and ridiculous, but there's a hidden treat in the north bit that plays tons of jazz, funk, and soul records. They have a lot of shochu and whiskey, and the owner carves his own ice spheres from blocks of ice brought in by a very chill older man.

Karasuma



- D&Department

Inside of a large temple area, there is a truly cool design store that also sells small sake boxes in addition to tons of well-crafted goods and an in-house magazine. This area is just a bit south of Gion and south-east of Nishiki. There are a number of good cafes and restaurants near here as well.

Fushimi Inari



This area is known for a large shrine up a mountain with tons of orange gates. This is connected to the shrine I mentioned above in Asakusa. If you're lucky, you might even meet some monkeys who might try to steal from you. There are rest areas and bathrooms up and down the hike, but if you go too late, you'll have a hard time making it to the bottom as everything closes up before sunset.



- Inari Coffee

Very good coffee a bit out of the bustle of the temple area. If you're in the neighborhood, you can catch your breath, read, and sip.

Arashiyama

A mountain area near Kyoto, this town is well-known for it's classic architecture, souvenir shopping, and onsen. Stay at a ryokan here, and enjoy some coffee while you wander around and sample foods.

- [Arashiyama Benkei](#)

No tattoos allowed in the public pool, but there are some very nice private baths. Food is excellent.

- [% Arabica] (<https://arabica.coffee/en/location/arabica-kyoto-arashiyama/>)

This coffee shop has a few locations around Kyoto, but this one is always bustling. They make a great cup of coffee, and the shop, while tiny, is very cute and well-designed. During more busy times, you may wait for a while for coffee here.



- Monkey Park

For very little money, and a short hike, you get to see a large population of Japanese monkeys, and even feed them fruit by hand. Don't look at them in the eyes. The signs on the way up to the park are adorable, and informative. Bring cash for the fruit and snacks at the top.

Osaka

I love Osaka. In general, Osaka is a more chill and laid-back place than Tokyo, with lots of canals and tons of food. Don't forget to ride the escalator on the right side when here.

Namba



One of my favorite things to do is wander the fake food area near Namba station. There's tons of hand-crafted inedible art all over. Pick up a really amazing piece for your home or your friends.



- Brooklyn Roasting

Yes, this is another American coffee shop. This shop rules. It's under the train tracks, and has ample room to spread out, a pizza shop in the back, and delicious sugar donuts. The coffee isn't my favorite, but I love to read and write in my journal here. This is the only cafe I have a punch card for in Japan.

There are some cool home goods stores next door to this shop as well, and they have a second outpost further north near one of the canals.

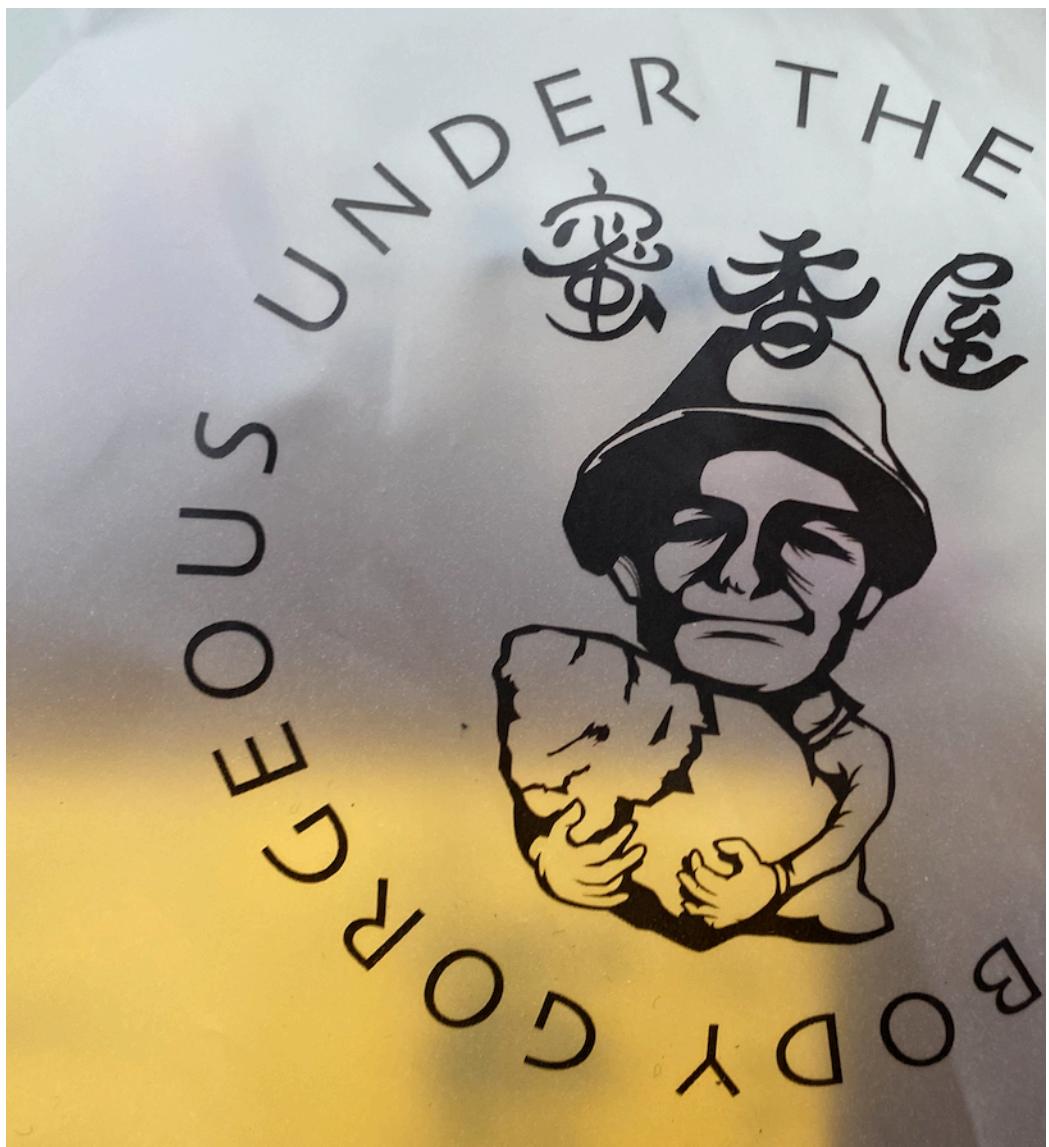
Nakazaki-cho

This is an older part of town with a lot of pre-war buildings as it escaped much of the bombing. Lately more hipster clothing stores and granola places have moved into town, but it's largely small mom & pop shops and is near Tenjimbashi's many food alleys.



- Haiku coffee

This shop is owned by a super nice couple from Japan and Hawaii. They roast beans onsite and even make bagels and breads. The large family-style table encourages you to sit near other folks, or choose the bar, where you can talk to the proprietor or read alone. This is a nice sanctuary from 11am.



- **Awesome sweet potato spot**

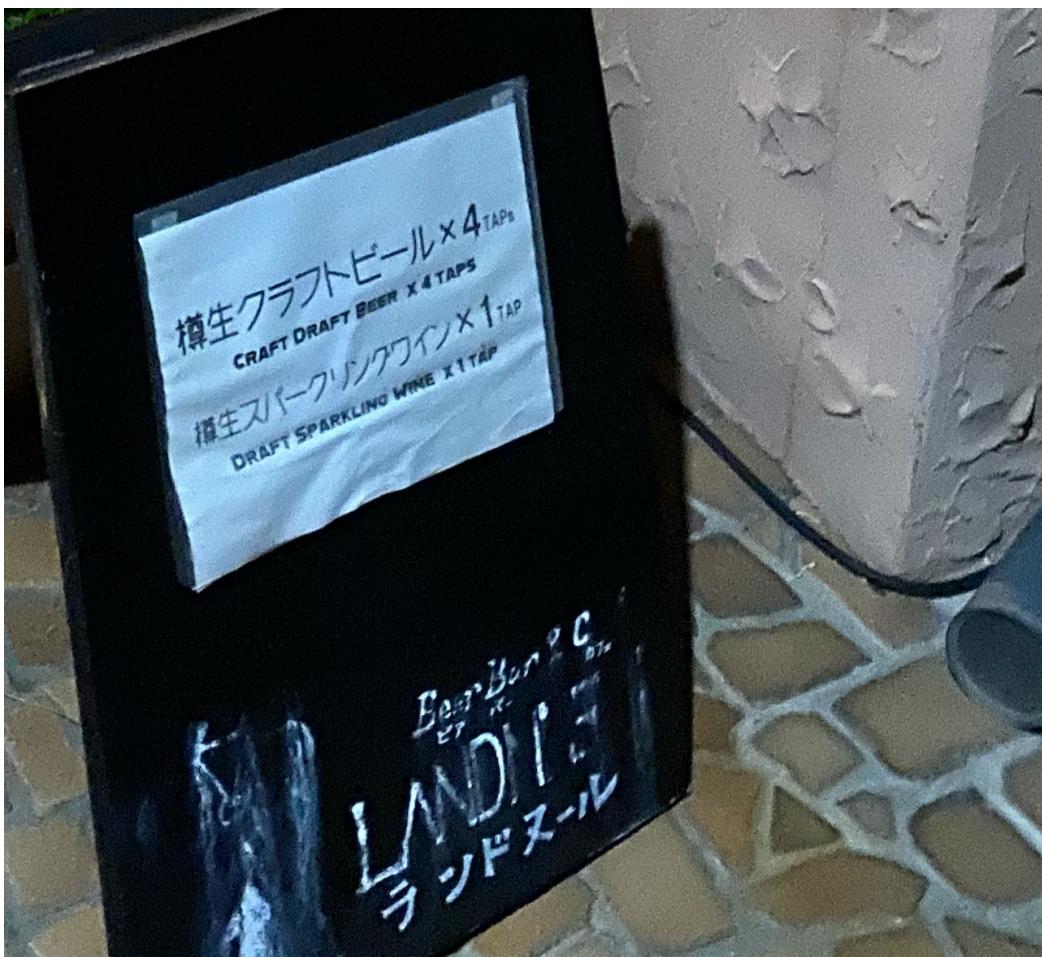
I can't for the life of me remember the name of this place, but if you're going down the main east to west mall in Nakazakicho, you'll see it. It's near a 7/11 and a really good ramen shop.



- **Ramen Kasumi**

For an excellent bowl of ramen, be sure to hit up Kasumi. It's near the sweet potato shop and Haiku, and is a really excellent meat-ful bowl.

– Johnny's Karaage in Tenma is a wild delight of fried foods and lemon chuhai with frozen lemons used as ice. This spot requires a bit of Japanese knowledge, but is worth the studying.



– **Landneur**

A cute hidden bar with craft beer and a lot of excellent Japanese whiskey. The owner is super nice, and my friend goes here often. If you see an English woman, please say hi for me.

Amemura

- LILO Coffee

Excellent coffee with small trading cards to tell you more about the beans you're enjoying. They roast on-premise, and have a few other locations around Osaka, including one very cute kissaten.

Dotonburi



This area is full of great food, and interesting sites. Wander around if you get a chance.

Orange Street

This street is a very large shopping area for international brands, and local shops as well. There's everything from Japanese-only Carhartt, to a pretty cool outdoor shop hidden down the back streets. Spend a few hours shopping if that's your thing.

- BIOTop Coffee

A very good cup of coffee in a fashion and plant store. They also have beer and pizza, the latter of which I can't vouch for due to lactose issues. This is a nice place to recover from shopping, and write a little bit in your journal. They also carry my signature scent.

Shinsekai



A new world indeed! Tons of wild outdoor displays for various famous Osaka foods, as well as some historical buildings and as a friend says "lots of drunk old guys". The building pictured above has sadly been torn down, but the weird porno theater is still right near it. There's even a retro game store nearby.



Near the Zoo

There are a few great parks near the zoo, which is also near Shinsekai. Here you can find some truly bizarre statues, and the grave of a samurai. Bonus points for older folks hanging out with stray cats in the courtyard areas.

Random Bonus Kobe



I don't know what might bring you to Kobe, but if you're there, snag some coffee at **Unicorn**, then proceed under the station for a huge old food court.

#travel