

Tokyo STORY

The host city of the 2020 Olympics has been delighting and seducing visitors for decades. Here, a veteran travel guide writer recalls her own 30-year affair with Japan's capital

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AND OTHERS

Twilight view from
Tokyo Skytree Tembo Galleria

日本的首都东京是一座让人感到不可思议的城市。比如现在也能感受到江户(在1603~1867年间,东京被称为江户)情趣的浅草、让人犹如置身于未来都市的汐留、最适合和朋友一起喝酒的新宿……东京的不同地区会为您展现出不同的色彩。

既然有这么多可以游览观光的地方,也许大家会想:东京的中心到底在哪里呢?其实,您现在所在的地方就是。

如果是第一次来东京,推荐您先去东京塔或者都厅的高层大厦。这些地势较高的地方应该很不错,因为从这些地方您可以感受到这座城市的规模。从高层建筑向下俯瞰,您会惊奇地发现本以为热闹的大都市也有宁静的一面,而且绿化非常好。

传统和高科技、都市特有的喧嚣和寂静,您也一定会喜欢上这样的东京。

Yokocho with its early 19th-century architecture and craft stores; have lunch at the 42nd-floor En restaurant in Shiodome while gazing upon the traditional-style Hamarikyu Gardens and futuristic-looking Odaiba; zip over to Shimokitazawa to explore its funky vintage clothing shops; and then meet friends for yakitori in a neon-drenched nightlife district like Shinjuku's Kabukicho. It's these "towns" that give Tokyo its human dimension and, after moving back home to the United States, that have lured me back again and again.

During my frequent trips here to update Frommer's travel guides, which I've been writing for almost 30 years, I sometimes play host to family and friends. High on my list of must-sees is the Edo-Tokyo Museum, which does an excellent job of presenting the city's history from 1590 to the hosting of the Olympic Games in 1964.

Then, for a visually striking view of the city's layout, I take my guests somewhere high up, like the iconic Tokyo Tower, the free observatories in

Shinjuku's Metropolitan Government buildings, or the recently opened Tokyo Skytree®, the world's tallest free-standing broadcasting tower. From these lofty heights, the metropolis takes on an almost surreal peacefulness and beauty, spreading out as far as the eye can see. Visitors are always impressed to learn that the huge swath of greenery in the city center is home to the imperial family, who moved from Kyoto to the new capital (formerly known as Edo) after the 1867



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When Tokyo hosted the Summer Olympics in 1964, it was the coming-out party for a city—and country—that had spent the past 20 years recovering from the devastation of World War II. To say that things went well would be an understatement; half a century on, the city is still wowing visitors. And as Tokyo prepares to host the 2020 Summer Olympics, it's getting ready to wow a whole lot more.

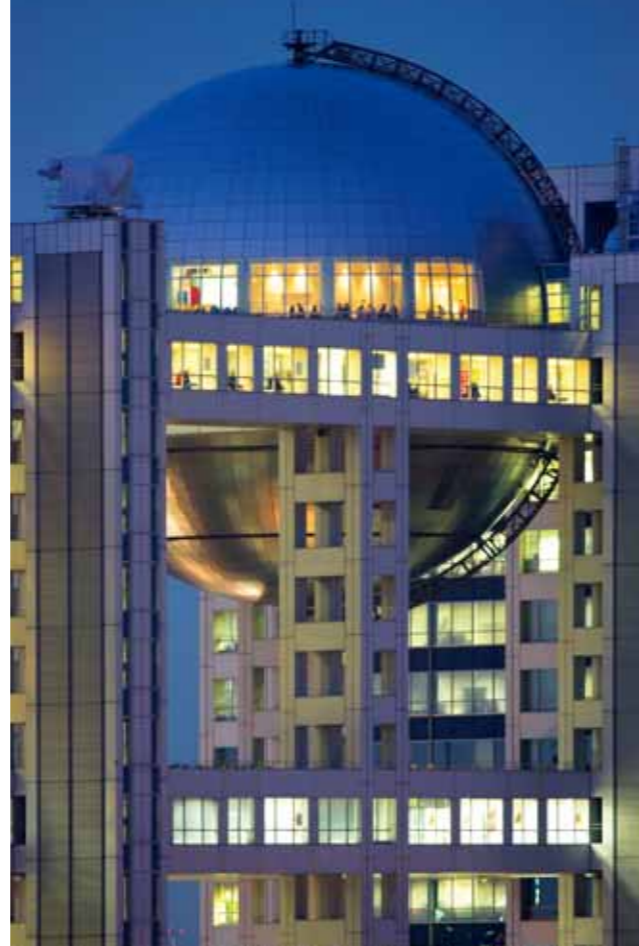
I first came here in 1983, and—like so many others who've stepped ashore since Japan opened its doors to the outside world almost 160 years ago—I found it difficult to pull myself away. The city's intoxicating energy flowed through me like an electric current, propelling me to places and experiences I could never have imagined. There was so much to take in, it felt like being four years old all over again.

Yet during those first months, it was hard to shake the feeling that I was missing out on the "real" Tokyo. Where was the city center? Which area best defined the essence of the place? Gradually, as I explored the backstreets of Shibuya and Asakusa and everywhere in between, I came to realize that the real Tokyo was simply wherever I happened to be. Home to more than 13 million people, Tokyo is best characterized not by its magnitude (the prefecture covers 2,188 square kilometers) nor by any specific place or street, but rather by its uniquely diverse neighborhoods, each with its own history and character.

In a single day, I can stroll along Ningyocho's tree-lined Amazake-

Right: Sightseers cross Togetsukyo Bridge in the elegant Rikugien garden
Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The dizzying view from Tokyo Skytree Tembo Galleria, seen by day and night; the Keihin-Tohoku Line swooshes into Ueno Station above the Ameya-yokocho market; chefs at work in ramen shop Tanaka Shoten at Diver City Tokyo Plaza, Odaiba's newest retail and entertainment attraction





Clockwise from top left: A mother and child enjoy the polar bear exhibit at Ueno Zoo; the sphere atop the Fuji TV Headquarters in Odaiba serves as an observatory; Kaminarimon gate frames crowds on Nakamise, the shopping street leading to Sensoji temple; dawn rises on the Fushimi Yagura castle keep at Tokyo Imperial Palace; taking down the *noren* curtain signals last orders at this traditional restaurant in Ginza

overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate.

This is when I usually whip out a map to explain how the Imperial Palace occupies grounds where the magnificent Edo Castle once stood, renovated and expanded by shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and his successors in the first half of the 17th century. Today, only the keep's stone foundation and a few other structures remain, preserved in the wonderful (and free) East Gardens, with their traditional Japanese landscaping, flowering plants and trees,

and benches populated by local office workers enjoying a *bento* lunch.

But the coolest thing to see on the map is the whorl of moats built to defend the castle, still visible 400 years on. Old Edo developed along its perimeter, with a silver mint established in what is now Ginza and merchants settling just east of the palace in Nihombashi. The grand Nihombashi bridge once marked the starting point of all roads leading out of Edo, though these days its majesty is reduced somewhat by the expressway that passes directly overhead.

Northeast of the palace is *shitamachi*: the old "low city," centered on Asakusa and Ueno, where townspeople and craftsmen once built their tiny wooden homes. More than any other place here, shitamachi preserves the spirit of old Edo, with shops selling a great diversity of goods, including handmade knives and boxwood combs, elderly Japanese shuffling their way to public bathhouses, and age-old restaurants serving cuisine perfected in the

days of the samurai.

As it was then, the most pleasurable way to reach Asakusa is still by boat, with departures from Hamarikyu taking about 45 minutes to work their way up the Sumida River. In the 7th century, a golden statue of the Buddhist god of mercy was fished out of this same river, which led to the founding of Asakusa's Sensoji—still one of the most popular temples in Tokyo. Nakamise, the ever-busy pathway that leads to the temple, is famous for souvenir stalls selling everything from fans and toy swords to snacks, such as the rice-based sweets offered at Tokiwado, in business for 250 years now. For the most photogenic views, head to the rooftop terrace of the nearby Amuse Museum, which contains an astounding display of kimono, household crafts and *boro*, patchwork clothing that's been handed down through generations.

Not far from Asakusa, Ueno Park is a magnet for families and school groups making the rounds of the impressive Tokyo National Museum—home to the world's largest collection of Japanese art and antiques—and Japan's oldest zoo. If time permits, I also take guests for a spin through nearby Yanaka, an old-fashioned district complete with temples and well-preserved traditional residences. We end up at Nezu Shrine: sleepy most of the year but brimming with visitors when its hillside azaleas burst into bloom each spring.

For contrast, I love introducing Aoyama, my old neighborhood, where I'm always amazed by the new eateries and shops that seem to have



popped up overnight. Here, we find refuge in Nezu Museum, with its traditional Asian art, seemingly secret garden and glass-enclosed café. The leafy Omotesando thoroughfare—lined with posh shops dedicated to fashion icons from Louis Vuitton to Tod's—leads to Harajuku, where wide-eyed teenagers are likely to feel like they've landed in paradise. Of course, I now look positively ancient as I join the throngs inching their way down Takeshita Dori, but even I am likely to find a few outfits I can pull off. Heading further west, we reach the wooded sanctuary of Meiji Shrine and Yoyogi Park, a weekend playground for people from around the world.

Satisfied that my guests have now seen the basics, I explain how to use what I consider the most user-friendly transportation system in the world—the Tokyo Metro—and help them buy a prepaid Suica or Pasma fare card. Then I tell them to get lost.

And get lost they will—for what other city the size of Tokyo consists of mostly unnamed streets? But it's a wonderful place to lose yourself in, not least because it's the safest metropolis in the world and the residents will go out of their way to help you.

There's so much to explore, too, like Akihabara, Japan's number one destination for electronics stores, not to mention maid cafés and shops aimed at fans of *cosplay*, video games, anime and manga. There are entire neighborhoods devoted to particular goods: Kappabashi Dori in Nishi-Asakusa stocks every implement a restaurant

(or home kitchen) could ask for, while you can probably guess what to expect from Doll Town, near Asakusabashi Station, and Fabric Town in Nippori.

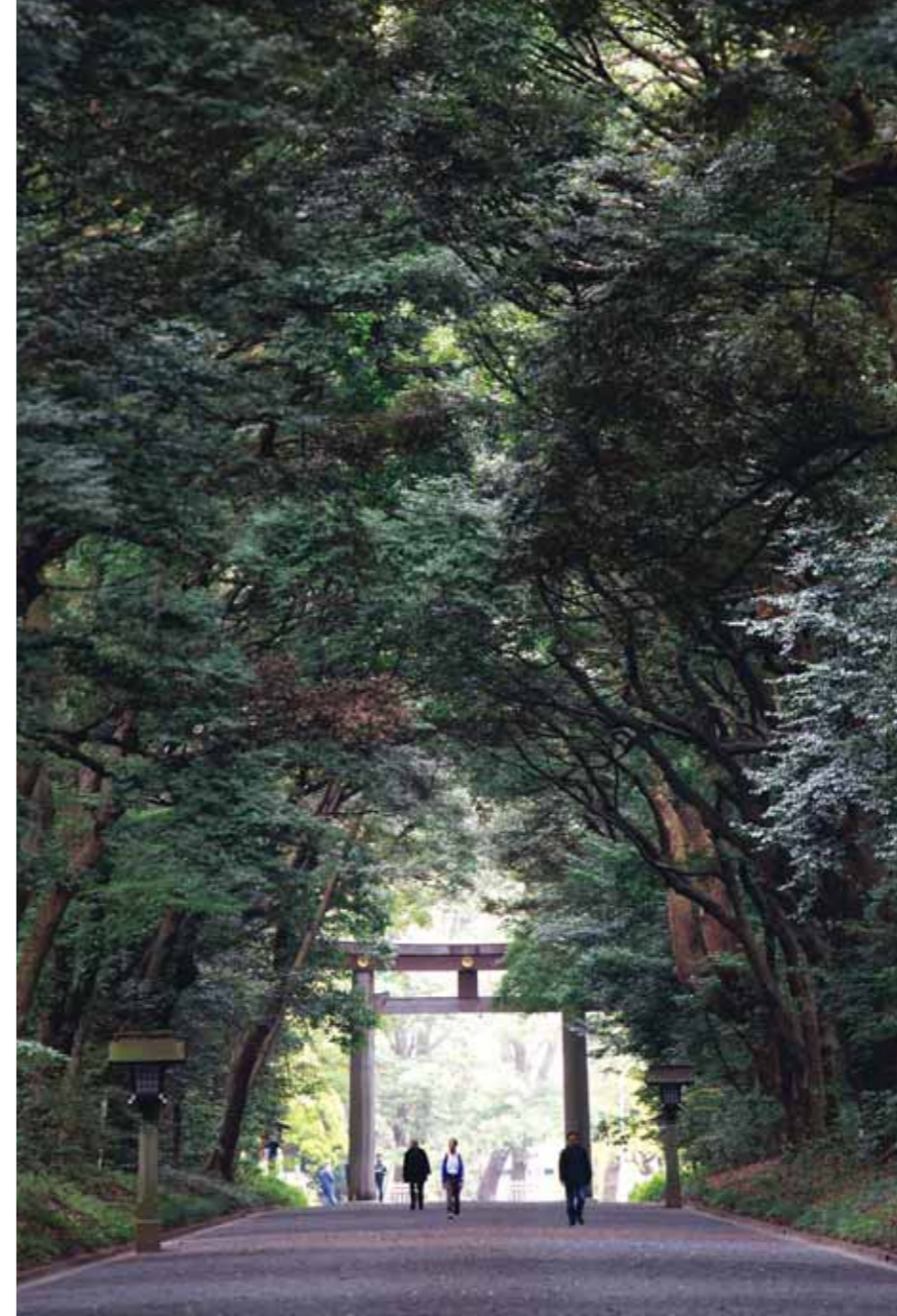
But it's equally easy to escape, especially in the expansive Shinjuku Gyoen, where there's a traditional Japanese garden that rarely draws crowds. My favorite hideaway is Rikugien, an exquisite garden established in 1702 by a former feudal lord, but I also love picnics in Sumida Park, weekday hikes on Mt. Takao, and strolls through the grounds of the Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum among thatched-roof farmhouses and other historical buildings dating from the Edo period (1603–1867) to the 1940s.

It goes without saying that a huge part of Tokyo's allure is its dining scene, which was a foodie's paradise long before Michelin awarded it more stars than any other city. Japanese attention to detail, so evident in the country's many fine crafts, is also applied to the art of creating food, whether it's sushi at a Tsukiji Market

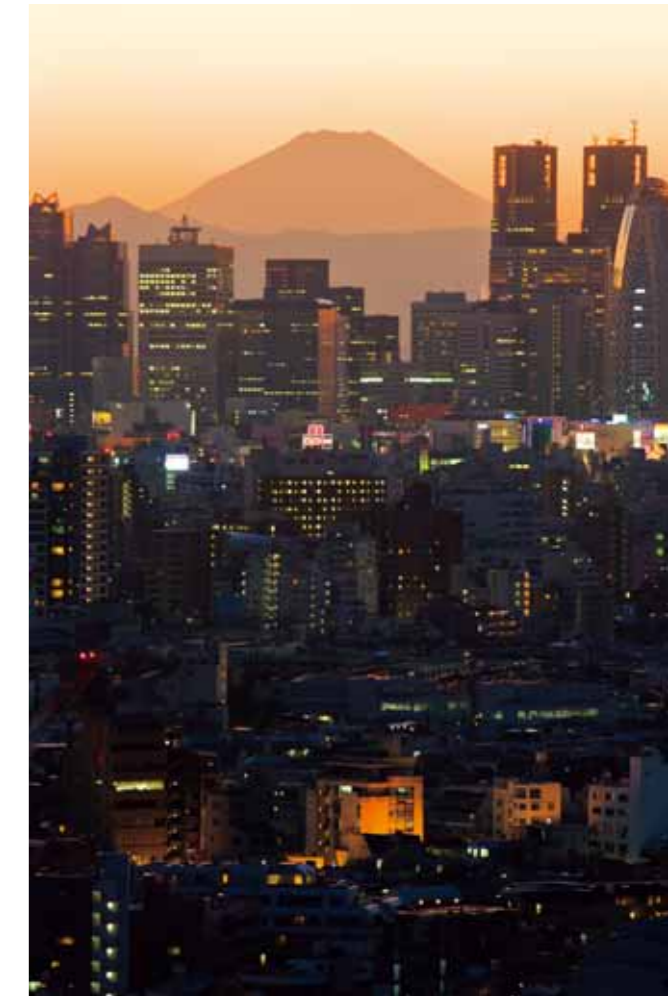
hole-in-the-wall, elaborate *kaiseki* feasts that delight the eyes and palate, or steaming bowls of ramen that can inspire rhapsody.

I figure I've spent the equivalent of 14 months of my life, 8 to 14 hours a day, walking around Tokyo to update my guidebooks. Yet 30 years after I first arrived in the city, I still feel like I've barely scratched the surface. I can't imagine being bored, even for a minute. And I suspect that there are plenty of other Tokyo fans, old and new, who feel the same way.

Clockwise from top left: The subway entrance near Azumabashi bridge in Asakusa mimics Tokyo's traditional architecture; a stylish young mother and daughter stroll on a quiet Asakusa backstreet; Meiji Shrine, dedicated to Emperor and Empress Meiji, is surrounded by dense forest; Mt. Fuji crowns the Shinjuku skyline at twilight; evening traffic pauses in front of the newly renovated Kabukiza theatre; a rickshaw guide stops to give his passengers a view of Tokyo Skytree®



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Navigator

GETTING THERE

>> Tokyo is served by Narita International Airport and Tokyo International Airport, also known as Haneda
 ➔ www.narita-airport.jp/en
 ➔ www.haneda-airport.jp/inter/en

GETTING AROUND

Rechargeable Suica and Pasma IC cards, sold at station ticket machines, are accepted on all Tokyo-area rail and bus routes. The Tokyo One-Day Free Ticket (adults 1,580 yen, children 790 yen) offers unlimited travel

on JR East, Tokyo Metro and Toei subway lines as well as Toei buses

FURTHER INFORMATION

There are tourist information centers at Narita and Haneda airports as well as in most major train stations, select hotels and at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building. The Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau offers English-language maps and sightseeing information at
 ➔ www.gotokyo.org/en

