

Tokyo Sites Overview

The history of the city of Tokyo stretches back some 400 years. Originally named Edo, the city started to flourish after Tokugawa Ieyasu established the Tokugawa Shogunate here in 1603. As the center of politics and culture in Japan, Edo grew into a huge city with a population of over a million by the mid-eighteenth century. Throughout this time, the Emperor resided in Kyoto, which was the formal capital of the nation. The Edo Period lasted for nearly 260 years until the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when the Tokugawa Shogunate ended and imperial rule was restored. The Emperor moved to Edo, which was renamed Tokyo. Thus, Tokyo became the capital of Japan.

During the Meiji era (1868-1912), Japan began its avid assimilation of Western civilization. Buildings made of stone and bricks were built on the sites of the mansions of feudal lords, and the major roads were paved with round stones. In 1869 Japan's first telecommunications line was opened between Tokyo and Yokohama, and the first steam locomotive started running in 1872 from Shimbashi to Yokohama. Western hairstyles replaced the traditional topknot worn by men, and bowler hats, high collars, and bustled skirts were the height of fashion. In 1882 Japan's first zoological gardens were opened in Ueno. In 1885 the cabinet system of government was adopted and Ito Hirobumi became Japan's first prime minister. With the promulgation of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan in 1889 Japan established the political system of a modern state.

In September 2013, Tokyo was selected to host its second Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020. To make the 2020 Games the best ever and leave valuable legacies for the future, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is working to advance both tangible and intangible initiatives including infrastructure upgrades, measures for the environment, and the promotion of culture.

Tokyo's population is projected to start declining once it reaches its peak in 2020. Also taking into consideration changes to the structure of society such as the graying of the population, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is pushing toward its goal of becoming the world's best city where a balance between economic affluence and the quality of life is achieved and anyone can fully enjoy life.¹

¹ From [History of Tokyo](#)



1) Shibuya

Shibuya (渋谷) is one of the twenty-three city wards of Tokyo, but often refers to just the popular shopping and entertainment area found around Shibuya Station. In this regard, Shibuya is one of Tokyo's most colorful and busy districts, packed with shopping, dining and nightclubs serving swarms of visitors that come to the district every day.

Shibuya is a center for youth fashion and culture, and its streets are the birthplace to many of Japan's fashion and entertainment trends. Over a dozen major department store branches can be found around the area catering to all types of shoppers. Most of the area's large department and fashion stores belong to either Tokyu or Seibu, two competing corporations.

A prominent landmark of Shibuya is the large intersection in front of the station's Hachiko Exit. The intersection is heavily decorated by neon advertisements and giant video screens and gets flooded by pedestrians each time the crossing light turns green, making it a popular photo spot.

Shibuya Station and surroundings are currently undergoing major redevelopment, lasting almost two decades. Several new buildings have opened over recent years, including Shibuya Hikarie (in 2012), Shibuya Stream (2018) and Shibuya Scramble Square (2019), and more will be opening until works are completed around 2028. In addition, the flow of pedestrian traffic around the station will be greatly improved.

The rooftop area of Shibuya Scramble Square, SHIBUYA SKY comprises three zones: SKY GATE, a transitional space on the 14F–45F; SKY STAGE, an outdoor observation area; and SKY GALLERY, an indoor observation corridor on the 46F. This facility provides not only a 360-degree panoramic view from 229 m above Shibuya but also a series of experiences sure to stimulate your intellectual curiosity and arouse your imagination.

The department store Shibuya 109 also has a great view of the Scramble Square, Mags Park. While looking over the entire scramble intersection, you can enjoy events and eat and drink as a roof top space.



2) Harajuku

Harajuku (原宿) refers to the area around Tokyo's Harajuku Station, which is between Shinjuku and Shibuya on the Yamanote Line. It is the center of Japan's most extreme teenage cultures and fashion styles, but also offers shopping for adults and some historic sights.

The focal point of Harajuku's teenage culture is Takeshita Dori (Takeshita Street) and its side streets, which are lined by many trendy shops, fashion boutiques, used clothes stores, crepe stands and fast food outlets geared towards the fashion and trend conscious teens.

Just south of Takeshita Dori and over twice its length is Omotesando, a broad, tree lined avenue sometimes referred to as Tokyo's Champs-Elysees. Here you can find famous brand name shops, cafes, and restaurants for a more adult clientele. The stylish Omotesando Hills complex was opened in 2006 and targets fashion conscious urbanites in their 30s and 40s, while Kiddy Land has hundreds of unique toys for kids of all ages.

Harajuku is not only about teenage culture and shopping. Meiji Jingu, one of Tokyo's major shrines, is located just west of the railway tracks in a large green oasis shared with the spacious Yoyogi Park. Beautiful ukiyo-e paintings are exhibited in the small Ota Memorial Museum of Art, and the Nezu Museum has an impressive collection of various Asian art as well as a traditional Japanese garden.





3) Meiji Shrine

Meiji Shrine (明治神宮, Meiji Jingū) is a shrine dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his consort, Empress Shoken. Located just beside the JR Yamanote Line's busy Harajuku Station, Meiji Shrine and the adjacent Yoyogi Park make up a large forested area within the densely built-up city. The spacious shrine grounds offer walking paths that are great for a relaxing stroll.

The shrine was completed and dedicated to the Emperor Meiji and the Empress Shoken in 1920, eight years after the passing of the emperor and six years after the passing of the empress. The shrine was destroyed during the Second World War but was rebuilt shortly thereafter.

Emperor Meiji was the first emperor of modern Japan. He was born in 1852 and ascended to the throne in 1867 at the peak of the Meiji Restoration when Japan's feudal era came to an end and the emperor was restored to power. During the Meiji Period, Japan modernized and westernized herself to join the world's major powers by the time Emperor Meiji passed away in 1912.





4) Yoyogi Park

Yoyogi Park (代々木公園, Yoyogi Kōen) is one of Tokyo's largest city parks, featuring wide lawns, ponds, and forested areas. It is a great place for jogging, picnicking and other outdoor activities.

Although Yoyogi Park has relatively few cherry trees compared to other sites in Tokyo, it makes for a nice cherry blossom viewing spot in spring. Furthermore, it is known for its ginko tree forest, which turns intensely golden in autumn.

Before becoming a city park in 1967, the area where Yoyogi Park is located served as the site of the Olympic Village for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and before that, as a residential area for US military personnel.



5) Shinjuku

Shinjuku (新宿) is one of the 23 city wards of Tokyo, but the name commonly refers to just the large entertainment, business, and shopping area around Shinjuku Station.

Shinjuku Station is the world's busiest railway station, handling more than two million passengers every day. It is served by about a dozen railway and subway lines, including the JR Yamanote Line. Shinjuku is also one of Tokyo's major stops for long-distance highway buses. A large bus terminal, named Busta Shinjuku, is conveniently located on top of the railway station.

West of the station is Shinjuku's skyscraper district, home to many of Tokyo's tallest buildings, including several premier hotels and the twin towers of the Metropolitan Government Office, whose observation decks are open to the public for free.

Northeast of the station lies Kabukicho, Japan's largest and wildest red-light district, while department stores, subterranean malls and electronic shops surround Shinjuku Station on all four sides, including the redeveloped Southern Terrace.





6) Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building

Hours: 9:30 to 23:00 (entry until 22:30)

Closed: Dec 29 to Jan 3 (except Jan 1) and occasional inspection days

Admission: Free

The 243-meter-tall twin towers and surrounding buildings contain the offices and the assembly hall of the metropolitan government of Tokyo, as well as observatories on the 45th floor of each tower. The view from the southern tower is considered slightly more interesting.



7) Omoide Yokocho

Omoide Yokocho, a maze of narrow alleys close to the West Exit of Shinjuku Station, stands in stark contrast to all the bright and clean modern environs of the station. Tiny restaurants and open barbecue food stalls spill their smoke, noise and greasy steam over alleys hardly wide enough to stretch out your arms.

The buildings are old and mostly run down, the food stalls very traditional, the visiting crowd multilingual. At dinner time, when it gets most crowded here, tired Tokyo office workers relax with a beer and a few sticks of yakitori chicken at the food stalls, sitting next to excited tourists chattering loudly in Chinese, Cantonese, English or Korean.



8) Ueno Park

Ueno Park (上野公園, Ueno Kōen) is a large public park next to Ueno Station in central Tokyo. The park grounds were originally part of Kaneiji Temple, which used to be one of the city's largest and wealthiest temples and a family temple of the ruling Tokugawa clan during the Edo Period. Kaneiji stood in the northeast of the capital to protect the city from evil, much like Enryakuji Temple in Kyoto.

During the Boshin Civil War, which followed the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Kaneiji suffered nearly complete destruction in a battle between the victorious forces of the new Meiji government and loyalists of the overthrown shogunate. After the battle, the temple grounds were converted into one of Japan's first Western style parks and opened to the public in 1873. A statue of Saigo Takamori, one of the generals in the Battle of Ueno, stands near the park's southern entrance.

At the southwestern end of the park lies Shinobazu Pond, one of many reminders of Kaneiji Temple's former grandeur. The pond represents Lake Biwako (in a reference to Kaneiji's model, the Enryakuji Temple of Kyoto, which overlooks Lake Biwako). On an island in the middle of the pond stands Bentendo, a temple hall dedicated to the goddess of Benten.

Today Ueno Park is famous for the many museums found on its grounds, especially the Tokyo National Museum, the National Museum for Western Art, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, and the National Science Museum. It is also home to Ueno Zoo, Japan's first zoological garden.

Additionally, Ueno Park is one of Tokyo's most popular and lively cherry blossom spots with more than 1000 cherry trees lining its central pathway. The cherry blossoms are usually in bloom during late March and early April and attract large numbers of hanami (cherry blossom viewing) parties.





9) Toshogu Shrine

Hours: 9:00 to 17:30

Closed: No closing days

Admission: Free (inner shrine area 500 yen)

Ueno Toshogu Shrine was built in 1616 and is one of numerous shrines across the country that are dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Edo Shogunate. The Ueno Toshogu Shrine used to be incorporated into Kaneiji Temple until 1868. The shrine's Botan Garden is open from January to mid-February and from mid-April to early May (700 yen).



10) Ameyoko Shopping Street

Ameyoko (アメ横) is a busy market street along the Yamanote Line tracks between Okachimachi and Ueno Stations. The name "Ameyoko" is a short form for "Ameya Yokochō" (candy store alley), as candies were traditionally sold there. Alternatively, "Ame" also stands for "America", because a lot of American products used to be available there when the street was the site of a black market in the years following World War Two.

Today, various products such as clothes, bags, cosmetics, fresh fish, dried food and spices are sold along Ameyoko. Opening hours and closing days depend on individual stores, but stores typically open around 10:00 and close around 20:00. Many stores remain closed on selected Wednesdays.



11) Odaiba

Odaiba (お台場) is a popular shopping and entertainment district on a man-made island in Tokyo Bay. It originated as a set of small man made fort islands (daiba literally means "fort"), which were built towards the end of the Edo Period (1603-1868) to protect Tokyo against possible attacks from the sea and specifically in response to the gunboat diplomacy of Commodore Perry.

More than a century later, the small islands were joined into larger islands by massive landfills, and Tokyo began a spectacular development project aimed to turn the islands into a futuristic residential and business district during the extravagant 1980s. But development was critically slowed after the burst of the "bubble economy" in the early 1990s, leaving Odaiba nearly vacant.

It was not until the second half of the 1990s, when several hotels, shopping malls and the Yurikamome elevated train line were opened, that Odaiba developed into one of Tokyo's most popular tourist attractions and date spots with a wide selection of shopping, dining and leisure options.

Despite the initial setbacks, several lavish development projects did materialize, including some of Tokyo's boldest architectural creations, such as the Fuji TV Building, Telecom Center and Tokyo Big Sight. Modern city planning furthermore provides Odaiba with plenty of green space and a pleasant division of motorized and pedestrian traffic using elevated walkways and the like.



12) Palette Town

Palette Town is a large shopping and entertainment complex consisting of the Venus Fort shopping mall, Toyota Mega Web, a Ferris Wheel, the Zepp Tokyo music venue, a Ferris Wheel and teamLab Borderless, a unique attraction featuring digital art.

teamLab Borderless

Hours: 11:00 to 19:00

Closed: Small number of irregular closures

Admission: 3200 yen

Borderless is a popular, new type of attraction featuring digital art. It is housed in a spacious building with multiple, dark rooms which are illuminated by colorful digital images projected on the walls, floors and various objects. Some displays react on visitors' movements. It is possible to spend several hours exploring the labyrinth of rooms. Advance ticket purchase is recommended on busy days, as tickets can sell out.

Venus Fort

Hours: 11:00 to 21:00

Restaurants: 11:00 to 23:00

Closed: No closing days

Admission: Free

Venus Fort is a shopping mall in the style of a 18th century South European town. The mall features over a hundred shops, fashion

boutiques, cafes and restaurants on three floors including a few outlets shops on the upper floor.

Toyota Mega Web

Hours: 11:00 to 21:00 (some attractions end 1-3 hours earlier)

Closed: Small number of irregular closing days

Admission: Free (test rides: 300 yen)

Mega Web is a giant Toyota showroom that shows off all of Toyota's latest models, car accessories and technologies. Attractions include test driving of cars (requires driving license valid for Japan) and a museum exhibiting cars from past decades.

Ferris Wheel

Hours: 10:00 to 22:00 (until 23:00 on most Fridays, Saturdays)

Closed: No closing days

Admission: 1000 yen

This 115-meter-tall ferris wheel is one of the world's largest and offers nice views of Tokyo

Bay and Odaiba below. Each cabin seats six (or four in the all-glass cabins), and the complete revolution takes about 15 minutes.



13) Decks

Shops: 11:00 to 21:00

Restaurants: 11:00 to 23:00 (some restaurants until 24:00)

Theme Parks: various hours

Closed: No closing days

Admission: Free (separate admission fees for theme parks)

Decks is a shopping mall featuring various stores, restaurants and multiple indoor theme parks, including the Tokyo Joypolis (reopened in July 2012 after renovations), a Legoland Discovery Center, a Madam Tussauds wax museum and a trick art museum. A Hong Kong themed food theme park and the Muscle Park were closed in 2010.



14) Aquacity

Hours: 11:00 to 21:00

Restaurants: 11:00 to 23:00 (some restaurants until 4:30)

Closed: No closing days

Aquacity is a shopping mall featuring various stores, boutiques, restaurants, cafes and a 13-screen cinema complex. The fifth floor houses a ramen food theme park where you can try different ramen from all over Japan. There are nice views of the Rainbow Bridge from the wooden deck in front of Aquacity and neighboring Decks.



15) DiverCity

Shops: 10:00 to 21:00

Restaurants: 11:00 to 23:00

Closed: No closing days

This shopping, dining and entertainment complex opened in 2012 and features attractions related to the Gundam anime series, including a large, "life-size" Gundam statue in front of the building and Gundam Base Tokyo, a shop dedicated to plastic models.



16) Rainbow Bridge

The Rainbow Bridge connects Odaiba to the rest of Tokyo. The two-story bridge is an iconic symbol of the bay and is especially

beautiful during its nightly illumination. The bridge supports an expressway, a regular road, the Yurikamome train line and pedestrian walkways along both sides.





17) Asakusa

Asakusa (浅草) is the center of Tokyo's shitamachi (literally "low city"), one of Tokyo's districts, where an atmosphere of the Tokyo of past decades survives.

Asakusa's main attraction is Sensoji, a very popular Buddhist temple, built in the 7th century. The temple is approached via the Nakamise, a shopping street that has been providing temple visitors with a variety of traditional, local snacks and tourist souvenirs for centuries.

Asakusa can easily be explored on foot. Alternatively, you can consider a guided tour on a rickshaw (jinrikisha, literally "man powered vehicle"). A 30-minute tour for two persons costs around 9000 yen. Shorter and longer courses are also available.

For many centuries, Asakusa used to be Tokyo's leading entertainment district. During the Edo Period (1603-1867), when the district was still located outside the city limits, Asakusa was the site of kabuki theaters and a large red-light district. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, modern types of entertainment, including movie theaters, set foot in Asakusa.

However, large parts of Asakusa were destroyed in the air raids of World War Two. And while the area around the rebuilt Sensoji has regained its former popularity after the war, the same cannot be said for Asakusa's entertainment district. The opening of the 634-meter-tall Tokyo Skytree, a twenty-minute walk across the Sumida River from Asakusa, has led to an increase of tourists recently.



18) Kaminarimon

Hours: Always open
Admission: Free

Kaminarimon is the first of two large entrance gates leading to Sensoji Temple. First built more than 1000 years ago, it is the symbol of Asakusa. The Nakamise shopping street leads from Kaminarimon to the temple grounds.



19) Sensoji Temple

Hours: 6:00 to 17:00 (from 6:30 October to March)
Admission: Free

Sensoji ("Senso" is an alternative reading for Asakusa and "ji" means temple) is Tokyo's most famous and popular temple. Built in the 7th century, it is also one of its oldest, although the current buildings are postwar reconstructions.



20) Asakusa Shrine

Hours: Always open
Admission: Free

Asakusa Shrine, also known as Sanja-sama, was built during the Edo Period and survived the air raids of 1945. The shrine's festival, the Sanja Matsuri, is one of Tokyo's most spectacular and popular. It is held every year on a weekend (Friday to Sunday) in mid-May.



21) Nakamise Shopping Street

Hours depend on the individual shops; typically, daily from 9:00 to 18:00

The Nakamise shopping street stretches over approximately 250 meters from Kaminarimon to the main grounds of Sensoji Temple. It is lined by more than 50 shops, which offer local specialties and the usual array of tourist souvenirs.





22) Miyamoto Taiko Store

Founded in 1861, Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten Co.,Ltd. has been consistent in both maintaining high standards of tradition as well as cultivating improvements in production of musical instruments and festival equipment. The fruits of these efforts have been acknowledged not only in Japan but throughout the world. Inside the Asakusa store is a Taiko Museum.

Taikokan (Drum Museum)

Hours: 10:00 to 17:00

Closed: Mondays, Tuesdays, New Year and Obon

Admission: 500 yen

Drums from around the world, including Japanese taiko drums, are exhibited in this small museum. Visitors can play several of the drums. The museum is located in a floor above the Miyamoto Unosuke Nishi Asakusa store, which sells Japanese drums and festival goods.



23) Sumida River Cruise

Located on a bay and having rivers as convenient transportation routes, Tokyo has a few ferry companies that tourists may find useful. The Water Bus (水上バス, Suijō Basu) services are an enjoyable alternative to trains or subways when traveling between destinations that are near the water.

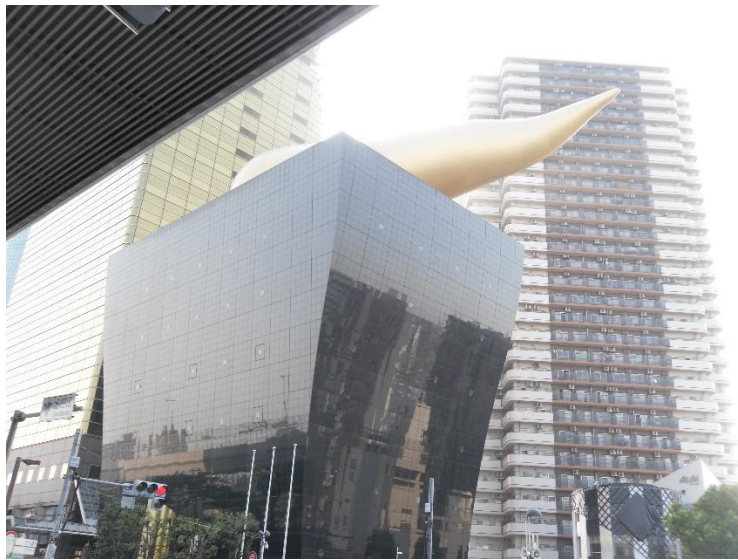
The locations that are most notably convenient for water bus access are the man-made islands of Tokyo Bay, especially the Odaiba shopping and entertainment district. Many water buses also travel along the Sumida River, one of the city's most famous rivers. The many bridges that span the river have each been designed differently. Boats along the river provide access to Asakusa and Ryogoku.

Most of the water buses are operated by the Tokyo Cruise Ship Company. The Asakusa-Odaiba Direct Line (50 minutes, 1720 yen, 6-8 boats/day) is one of the most popular routes because of its boldly designed boats with panoramic windows, such as the Himiko and Hotaluna.

The Sumida River Line runs from Asakusa to Hama Rikyu garden (35 minutes, 1040 yen, 1-2 boats/hour). The dock at Hama Rikyu is located within the garden's paid grounds, and admission to the garden is included in the price of the boat ticket. After Hamariku, the boats then travel a further five minutes to the Hinode Pier (40 minutes, 860 yen from Asakusa), where a transfer can be made to boats bound for Odaiba. Note that Hama Rikyu is not served by boats in direction of Asakusa.

The Odaiba Line travels from Hinode to Odaiba Seaside Park (20 minutes, 520 yen, about two boats/hour). The Tokyo Big Sight-Palette Town Line travels to both the Tokyo Big Sight and Palette town attractions (about 25 minutes, 460 yen, 5 boats/day), but it does not operate on Mondays and Tuesdays (except in the case of national holidays).

There are also boats between Asakusa, Toyosu and the Hamamatsucho pier in the Takeshiba district and between Asakusa, Nihonbashi, Toyosu and Odaiba; however, they do not run very frequently.



24) Asahi Beer Hall

Restaurants open daily from 11:30 to 22:00

The Asahi Beer Tower and Asahi Super Dry Hall with its characteristic Flamme d'Or were, completed in 1989 and host the headquarters of Asahi Breweries. Furthermore, several restaurants can be found in the complex. Behind both the Beer Tower and the Super Dry Hall is the Asahi Craftmanship Brewery. The restaurant and brewery offer diners decently priced lunches as well as Asahi craft beer on tap.





25) Tokyo Sky Tree

Hours: 8:00 to 22:00 (entry until 21:00)

Closed: No closing days

Admission

For foreign tourists only:

Fast Skytree Single Ticket (first observatory): 3200 yen

Fast Skytree Combo Ticket (both observatories): 4200 yen

The Tokyo Skytree (東京スカイツリー) is a television broadcasting tower and landmark of Tokyo. It is the centerpiece of the Tokyo Skytree Town in the Sumida City Ward, not far away from Asakusa. With a height of 634 meters (634 can be read as "Musashi", a historic name of the Tokyo Region), it is the tallest structure in Japan and the second tallest in the world at the time of its completion. A large shopping complex with aquarium is located at its base.

The highlight of the Tokyo Skytree is its two observation decks which offer spectacular views out over Tokyo. The two enclosed decks are located at heights of 350 and 450 meters respectively, making them the highest observation decks in Japan and some of the highest in the world.

Tembo Deck, the lower of the two decks is 350 meters high and spans three levels with great views from all of its floors. The top floor features tall, broad windows that offer some of the best 360 degree panoramic views of the city. The middle floor has a souvenir shop and the Musashi Sky Restaurant, which serves French-Japanese fusion cuisine, while the lowest floor features a cafe and some glass panels on the ground from where you can look all the way down to the base of the tower.

A second set of elevators connects the Tembo Deck to the 450 meter high Tembo Gallery. Dubbed "the world's highest skywalk", the Tembo Gallery consists of a sloping spiral ramp that gains height as it circles the tower. The construction of the steel and glass tube allows visitors to look down from the dizzying height of the tower and out over the Kanto Region to spectacular distances.

At the top of the spiral ramp is a more conventional observation deck floor with lounging areas and tall windows from which to look out over Tokyo. This floor is officially located at 451.2 meters and constitutes the highest point of the observation decks.

A visit to the Tokyo Skytree starts on the 4th floor where the tickets for the first observation deck (but not for the second deck) are sold. A fast and smooth elevator ride takes visitors to the top floor of the first observation deck where tickets for the second observation deck can be purchased. Visitors then access the second deck before descending back to the lower floors of the first observatory where they board the elevator down to the tower's exit on the 5th floor.