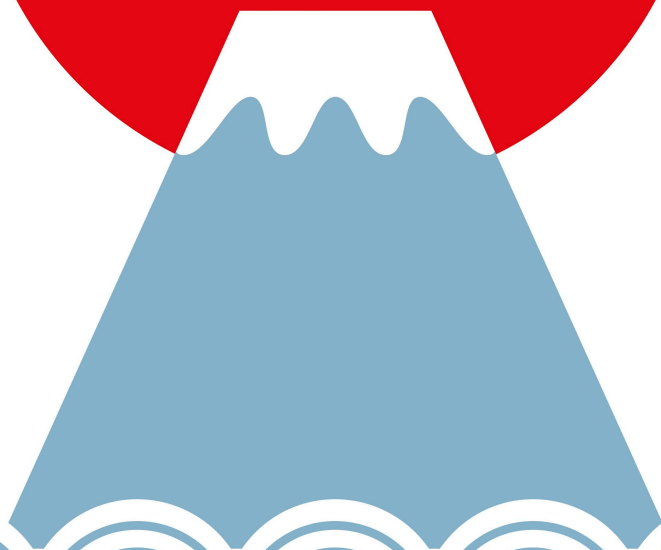




EYEWITNESS

# BE MORE JAPAN



the art of japanese living

日本人の暮らしの形







BE MORE  
JAPAN







# BE MORE JAPAN


the art of japanese living

日本人の暮らしの形









< A stunning view of  
Mount Fuji and the  
Chureito Pagoda.

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< *An apprentice  
geisha in Kyoto.*

前書き

# INTRODUCTION

The art of Japanese living

In the summer of 1853, four American ships sailed into Tokyo Bay, ending Japan's 200 years of self-imposed isolation.

The extraordinary, insular country they found immediately captured the world's imagination, sparking a craze known as Japonisme that changed Western art and aesthetics forever. Today, Japan continues to fascinate and delight; a country of startling modernity and of ancient traditions, where elegant geisha, robe-clad priests, J-pop megastars and visionary engineers all make up a part of the authentic face of Japan.

*Be More Japan* takes you on a journey of discovery by exploring the art of Japanese living: the delicate balancing act

of holding on to timeless traditions while enjoying all the benefits of modern life and looking fearlessly into the future.

We invite you to absorb a little Japanese wisdom into your daily life by experiencing its kaleidoscope of contrasting pleasures – enjoy the fleeting beauty of the cherry blossoms, join in a raucous summer festival, savour the precision of the tea ceremony, belt out your favourite song at karaoke, or soak in a hot spring with a jaw-dropping view of Mount Fuji. There are countless reasons to fall in love with this beguiling country, and with *Be More Japan* you'll find even more excuses to travel, time and again, to the land where the sun rises.







日本へようこそ

# WELCOME TO JAPAN

Japan stretches from the frozen edge of Siberia down to the tropics. This archipelago of thousands of islands is home to an incredible array of disparate landscapes, not only ultramodern cities and smouldering volcanos, but also remote beaches and lush valleys. What unites the range of climates, geographies and outlooks are the rhythms of the seasons, to which the heart of the country still beats, dictating the ever-shifting weather, cuisine and cultural life of the country's 127 million inhabitants. And binding it all together is an astonishing transport network, which makes it easy get there and explore – whether by bicycle, plane, bullet train or ferry. If you're planning a trip to Japan, want the afterglow of your stay to last a bit longer, or simply wish to indulge in some quintessential Japanese experiences, the culture has never been more accessible: whether it is eating sushi in London or enjoying blossom viewing in San Francisco, you are closer to Japan than you know.

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring Japan's regions

Lying to the east of mainland Asia and curving across 3,000 km (1,900 miles) of Pacific Ocean, Japan is made up of thousands of islands. Mainland Japan is typically defined as the five largest islands in the archipelago: Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and Okinawa. These islands are divided into 47 administrative units called prefectures, which in turn are informally grouped into eight different regions. Each region has its own distinct character, with local customs and culture shaped by the country's highly changeable weather and geographical features.

**127M**

people live in Japan,  
making it the eleventh  
most populated country  
in the world.

## PREFECTURES

### HOKKAIDO

1 Hokkaido

### TOHOKU

- 2 Aomori
- 3 Akita
- 4 Iwate
- 5 Yamagata
- 6 Miyagi
- 7 Fukushima

### KANTO

- 8 Tochigi
- 9 Ibaraki
- 10 Saitama
- 11 Tokyo
- 12 Chiba
- 13 Kanagawa
- 14 Gunma

### CHUBU

- 15 Niigata
- 16 Toyama
- 17 Ishikawa
- 18 Fukui
- 19 Nagano
- 20 Yamanashi
- 21 Shizuoka
- 22 Aichi
- 23 Gifu

### KANSAI/KINKI

- 24 Hyogo
- 25 Kyoto
- 26 Shiga
- 27 Osaka
- 28 Nara
- 29 Mie
- 30 Wakayama

### CHUGOKU

- 31 Tottori
- 32 Okayama
- 33 Shimane
- 34 Hiroshima
- 35 Yamaguchi

### SHIKOKU

- 36 Kagawa
- 37 Tokushima
- 38 Ehime
- 39 Kochi

### KYUSHU-OKINAWA

- 40 Fukuoka
- 41 Saga
- 42 Nagasaki
- 43 Oita
- 44 Kumamoto
- 45 Miyazaki
- 46 Kagoshima
- 47 Okinawa

### CHUGOKU REGION

Chugoku, or "the middle country", is a region of two halves, with bustling cities in the south and a quieter pastoral feel in the north.

### KYUSHU-OKINAWA REGION

Kyushu-Okinawa combines the active volcanoes, rolling grasslands and bubbling hot springs of Kyushu with the laidback tropical paradise of more southerly Okinawa.

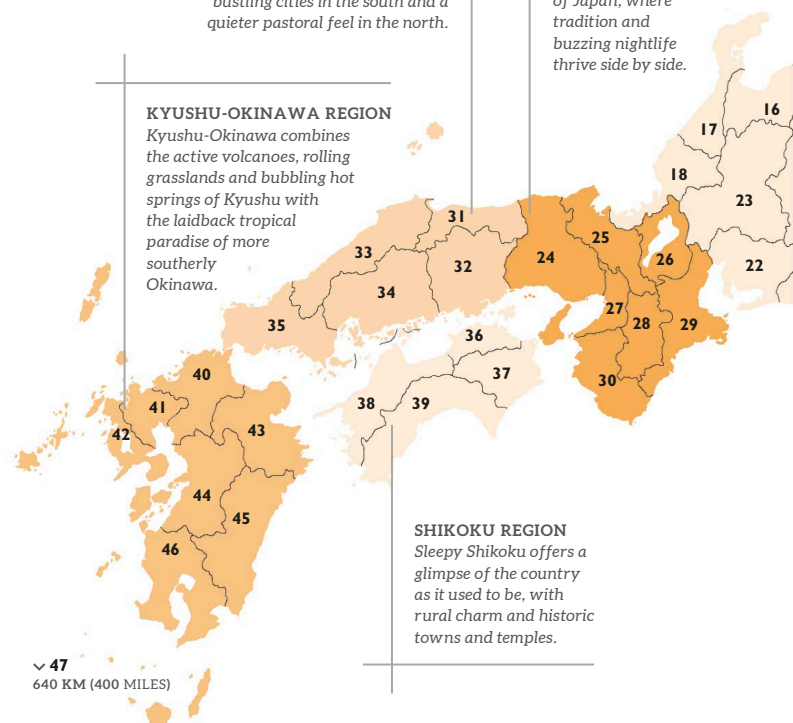
### KANSAI/KINKI REGION

Referred to as both Kansai and Kinki, this region is the historic and cultural heart of Japan, where tradition and buzzing nightlife thrive side by side.

### SHIKOKU REGION

Sleepy Shikoku offers a glimpse of the country as it used to be, with rural charm and historic towns and temples.

▼ 47  
640 KM (400 MILES)





#### HOKKAIDO REGION

*Hokkaido is a region of fire and ice, characterized by fertile plains, looming volcanoes and perfect skiing conditions.*

#### TOHOKU REGION

*Rugged and remote, Tohoku is steeped in myth and legend. It's home to sacred mountains, dense forests, and vibrant folk traditions.*

#### KANTO REGION

*Highly urbanized, Kanto encompasses both Tokyo and Yokohama and is home to around one-third of Japan's total population.*

#### CHUBU REGION

*Mountainous Chubu is a region of stark beauty, merging ancient heritage with modern industry.*

0 kilometres 150  
0 miles 150



### MICRO-SEASONS

Traditionally the Japanese calendar had 24 seasons, which in turn were broken down into micro-seasons such as *higurashi naku* (the evening call of cicadas).

### THE FIVE MAIN ISLANDS

The Japanese Archipelago is made up of 6,852 islands, of which only 430 are inhabited. The vast majority of the population live on the five main islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and Okinawa.



0 kilometres 400  
0 miles 400







春

# SPRING

The season of new beginnings

The calls of “*oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi*” (devil get out, good luck come in) to celebrate Setsubun on 3 February are the first sign Japan is ready for spring. New buds begin to shoot in parks and gardens, starting with the pinks and purples of plum blossoms in late February. And by March, a new round of sneezing and surgical mask-wearing begins as the annual wave of cedar allergies hits.

## FRESH FLAVOURS

By the time spring is officially declared on Shunbun no Hi on 21 March, the weather is mostly warm and sunny in Honshu,

Kyushu and Shikoku, with cooler Hokkaido lagging a little behind and warmer Okinawa already ahead of the game. And with the new season, heavy winter food gives way to lighter flavours: mountain vegetables come to the fore, plump strawberries appear in supermarkets, and tender bamboo shoots add a freshness to spring menus.

## THE ANNUAL BLOSSOMS

Nothing says spring like the cherry blossoms, and as they briefly repaint the country a palette of pinks – a movement meticulously tracked on the daily news and





in weather apps – the Japanese celebrate with *hanami* (flower viewing) parties. For most Japanese people, *hanami* is simply a way to enjoy nature and the company of family and friends, but culturally there is a deeper philosophical significance to the ritual. The viewing of the blossom's fleeting existence epitomizes the concept of *mono no aware*, the melancholy and joy we feel with something so beautiful, yet impermanent. You can experience *hanami* anywhere in Japan – all you need to join in with the locals is a picnic sheet, a bento, and a few drinks.

## THE SPRING CALENDAR

*Hanami* isn't the only major event in spring. If you visit in mid-March you will witness White Day on 14 March, when men give gifts to women in return for those they received on Valentine's Day – only women give gifts on 14 February in Japan.

Golden Week from 29 April to 6 May is a period in which a collection of national holidays falls, and it feels like the whole of Japan is on the move: public transport gets really busy and travel prices spike.

On the third weekend of May, Tokyo's Asakusa district is home to one of the most sake-fuelled and high-energy festivals on the annual calendar, the Sanja Matsuri. Honouring the founders of Sensoji temple, it features teams of pallbearers carrying 100 portable shrines through the heaving streets – bouncing, jostling and hollering in the warmth of the late spring sunshine.

Back down to earth, the fiscal and academic years start on 1 April, bringing the annual round of transfers in many businesses, plus entrance ceremonies at universities, high schools, junior highs and even nurseries. The rice cycle begins, too, with seedlings being nurtured in greenhouses and then planted into paddies.

^ Cherry blossoms (sakura) in full bloom in Kyoto.



夏

# SUMMER

Festivals, fun and family

The musky aroma of mosquito coils, the relentless humming of cicada, parasols to cast some shade – welcome to Japanese summer. From late June, every conversation contains at least one sigh of “*Atsui!*” (hot), as the stickiness of the brief rainy season signals the change from spring to summer. By the time summer begins in earnest, it feels like the most used word in Japanese.

## THE MERCURY RISES

In July and August, temperatures away from the mountains frequently top 35°C (95 °F), sometimes reaching even higher in

notoriously hot towns like Kumagaya in Saitama Prefecture. And when night cools, it often doesn’t feel much better, with the humidity rising into the 90 per cent range after dark. Thankfully, Japan also has some short-term fixes with cooling seasonal food like *kakigori* – shaved ice topped with fruit-flavoured syrup and condensed milk – and *somen* and other chilled noodles. Grilled corn, juicy watermelon and chilled edamame are other summer staples, as is savouring a few cold beers at the rooftop beer gardens that pop up in cities all around Japan for summer only.





## SUMMER CELEBRATIONS

When Japan reaches peak festival season in summer, no amount of heat and humidity stops the fun. The festivals vary wildly, but there are common traits: out come the colourful cotton *yukata* gowns, the street vendors selling fried noodles and *kakigori*, and the plastic fans people waft for scant relief. Many of the festivals celebrate Obon in mid-August, when the spirits of ancestors are said to return home, prompting family get-togethers and the hanging of lanterns to guide the spirits through the darkness.

In Kyoto, the whole balmy month of July is given to the thousand-year-old Gion Matsuri, its focal point a procession of huge floats in mid-July. The Awa-Odori festival in Tokushima on Shikoku and the smaller Tokyo version in Koenji (both in August) happily have the sense to wait until nightfall before teams of dancers and musicians take to the streets for several evenings of

frenetic fun. And the hundreds of firework displays throughout the summer have no option but to avoid the midday glare.

## BEAT THE HEAT

To escape the heat – or at least be somewhere it isn't as hot – you could follow the Japanese to popular summer holiday destinations like Hokkaido in the far north, where winter ski areas like Niseko provide a cooler summer setting for hiking and other outdoor pursuits; head to the breezy Japanese Alps; or explore the less-visited Tohoku region's farmland, rugged coastline and mountain ranges. It might sound counterintuitive but going to hot-spring resorts is popular too. The air is often cooler there, and hanging out in traditional inns – in light *yukata* gowns and airy *tatami*-mat rooms – isn't just refreshing, it's a great way to recharge during the draining seasonal heat.

^ Summer sun at one of Okinawa's tropical white-sand beaches.



秋

# AUTUMN

Japan repainted red

As the heat begins to abate at the end of September, you can almost sense Japan heave a collective sigh of relief. At home, the electric fans get stored away and windows are left open as everyone enjoys breathing in fresh air again. There are more kids playing in the parks. And under mostly blue skies, foliage across the land transforms into reds, rusts and yellows.

## EARTHY FLAVOURS

The annual wave of typhoons will occasionally put a windy dampener on proceedings, but the weather in October,

November and even early December is still magical – warm by day, cool at night, and largely dry and sunny. The autumnal food is equally special. By the end of November, it begins to get cool enough to start enjoying *nabe* hotpots. Highly prized *matsutake* mushrooms reappear, too, simply grilled to bring out all their earthiness, steamed with rice as *matsutake gohan*, and used along with shrimp, chicken and seasonal ginkgo nuts in *dobin-mushi*, a clear soup steamed in a small teapot then served in tea cups with a squeeze of *sudachi* citrus.





## APPRECIATING NATURE

In a similar way to how the cherry blossoms are a major part of spring, in autumn the *koyo* (autumnal leaves) come to the fore. While there is no exact autumn equivalent of spring's cherry-blossom viewing *hanami* events, people visit parks and travel to the mountains to enjoy the seasonal colours. The bright yellow leaves along Ginkgo Avenue in Meiji-jingu Gaien Park are a highlight in Tokyo, as are the reds and yellows of Rikugien Garden. In Kyoto, the deep-red maples at Eikando Temple have people queuing for hours to see them. Away from the cities, less-crowded options include the Fuji Five Lakes near Mount Fuji and the wilds of Daisetsuzan National Park in Hokkaido, while Mount Hachimantai, which straddles Iwate and Akita prefectures in Tohoku, is a riot of autumnal colours – best enjoyed when soaking in one of the region's many natural hot-spring baths.

## AUTUMN CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS

Beyond enjoying nature, in autumn you can take in major events like Kyoto's Jidai Matsuri in late October, which features a parade of more than 2,000 people representing figures from Japanese history, and the Grand Autumn Festival held in mid-October at Nikko's UNESCO-designated Toshogu Shrine, which includes *yabusame* horseback archery displays. More low-key, Shichi-Go-San in mid-November is a nationwide highlight, where children aged three, five and seven dress in colourful kimono and visit shrines with their families to pray for a good future. And on Halloween, it's still warm enough at night for Shibuya in Tokyo to host the largest fancy-dress street party of the year. Though it's not for kids – attracting as many as one million people, the atmosphere can get pretty raucous.

^ Autumn foliage at Kiyomizu-dera Temple in Kyoto.





冬

# WINTER

Keeping warm and looking ahead

When the last of the autumnal leaves are crumbling on the ground in Tokyo in late November, winter begins to creep up. You notice it little by little. Under mainly blue skies, the air dries to skin-cracking levels. In vending machines, many of the drinks switch from cold to hot, and at night, the catchy jingle of sweet potato trucks can be heard, bringing with it a charcoal caramelized aroma that says winter is upon us. And as soon as the Halloween decorations are taken down, up go the winter illuminations, bringing a festive feel across the country.

## WARMING FOOD

From December through February, the temperature in many parts of Japan significantly cools, and people turn to warming seasonal foods like stews, curries, and one-pot dishes such as *oden* to keep out the chill. The most distinctive seasonal food, however, comes towards the end of December, when *osechi-ryori* (traditional New Year foods) appear in ornate lacquered boxes on dining tables across Japan. Beautifully presented, the boxes contain divided portions of beans, meats, fish and other small morsels that each have





meaning. You'll see black beans to symbolize health and *kobu* seaweed because it sounds close to *yorokobu*, or happiness. There'll be red and white *kamaboko* fish cakes, where the white means purity and the red is the colour for good luck. In all, there'll be more than a dozen things to try. Late on New Year's Eve, people will also eat soba noodles, as the long noodles are said to signify a long life.

## CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

Winter experiences vary wildly in Japan, from the heavy snows of Hokkaido to the pleasant warmth enjoyed in Okinawa, but certain elements play out all over. Christmas is largely cosmetic: Santa visits nursery schools, trees go up in apartment building lobbies, and KFC does its traditional roaring trade in Christmas chicken. But, by and large, no one takes time off work, and the festivities don't last past Christmas Day.

The end of the year is similarly low key. It's a time for family and resetting for the year ahead. New Year involves a lot of year-end TV and eating – tucking into *osechi-ryori* while watching the annual Kohaku singing contest and cooking your legs under the *kotatsu* heated table.

## WINTER CELEBRATIONS

One thing that gets many away from the feasting is *hatsumode*: the first shrine visit of the year to pray for a good year ahead. Many people flock to auspicious shrines like Meiji Jingu in Tokyo and Ise Jingu in Mie Prefecture, while others head to the coast or mountains or to watch the *hatsuhinode*, the first sunrise of the year. And once the holidays are over, there are plenty of other events to see people through the cold months – none as big as the Sapporo Snow Festival in Hokkaido, which sees giant ice sculptures created around central Sapporo.

^ Snow-covered countryside in Fukushima Prefecture.

初めての出会い

# FIRST ENCOUNTERS

Feel the rhythm of daily life

Arriving in Japan for the first time is a thrilling experience. It's surprisingly easy to get into the rhythm of daily life here; the food, the language and the etiquette that guides every interaction are all part of the excitement of discovering Japan.

Let us guide you through your first experiences in Japan; as you negotiate public transport, understand the importance of good manners, meet local people and uncover the meaning behind the symbols you'll see all around you, your grasp on the culture will become stronger with each day and new encounter.

## GETTING AROUND

Japan has the most amazingly efficient public transport system (and as a result car ownership is about half that of the US). So you should find travelling to almost any point in the country by train or by coach fast, stress-free and comfortable. However, for the two-thirds of all commuters who

rely on the train and subway systems to get to work, things are a little different. In Tokyo, 20 million train passengers pass through the network every day. This leads to an incredibly busy commuter rush hour – an experience to be braved or avoided, depending on your point of view. What gets everyone get through the daily crush is good train manners; the key rules are to avoid loud conversations and to hold your backpack or luggage in front of you to make space for others.

Public transport signs are usually written both in English and Japanese, so it's easy to get around. However, if you're in a small town in the countryside, finding your destination can be a whole new challenge. Not all streets have names, and buildings within a block may be numbered in the order that they were built – intriguing but confusing. If in doubt, ask a policeman; in the city of Kyoto, as much as 90 per cent of police time is spent giving directions.







## ETIQUETTE

Japan has a reputation for restraint, but anyone who has heard the piercing yell of “*Irasshaimase!*” (“Welcome!”) when entering a shop or restaurant knows that the culture isn’t always quite as reserved as it seems. Still, there are some unspoken rules you should know to help you feel at ease. No one expects foreigners to get everything right but engaging with the rules – which are all about valuing harmony (*wa*) – will generate good will.

**Bowing** When meeting someone for the first time, it is polite to bow as a sign of respect. You can also bow when thanking someone or saying goodbye.

**Shoes** Anywhere there are *tatami* mats – and always in a person’s home – you will need to take off your shoes, to avoid bringing in dirt from outside, so best wear clean matching socks at all times.

**Bathrooms** When you enter a bathroom in a house or *ryokan* (traditional inn), there

will often be a pair of slippers at the door; leave your own footwear outside and switch to the these. If you bathe, whether it’s at a public bath or a hot spring, it is important to shower in the wet room on the stool provided before getting into the bath, which is exclusively for relaxing.

**Chopsticks** Never point your chopsticks at another person, wave them in the air, or use them to spear food. And you should never leave your chopsticks sticking into a bowl of rice, as this is reminiscent of funeral rituals.

**Money** In Japan, money is rarely passed directly from hand to hand, so when paying for an item or service, place your money on the small tray provided. Tipping is not part of the culture and if you leave money for a server they’ll always return it.

**Shopping** If you use the changing rooms at a shop, you may be offered a bag; wear this over your face to prevent your make-up staining new clothes.

^ Left to right: Shinjuku is a major transport hub in Tokyo, with the busiest train station in the world; chopsticks are used for cooking and serving food as well as for eating.

## INTERACTIONS

If you have time to pick up a few useful Japanese phrases before your trip, all well and good but, if not, you'll still get by just fine. You don't have to speak the language to communicate: respectful behaviour and good manners will go a long way.

You'll probably find that striking up a conversation comes easily and naturally. Most Japanese people you meet will be thrilled that you are interested in their country and in getting to know them. Although they may not be confident speaking English at first, many Japanese people will have studied it at school, and will love the chance to practise.

Even in a casual setting like a sporting event or an *izakaya* (Japanese tavern), people will often present you with their business card, which is standard etiquette when being introduced. Accept the card using both hands, and present your own if you have it on you. It's important to make sure you treat their card with respect and

do not jam it in your pocket, but instead slip it carefully into your wallet.

## SYMBOLISM

Colours are loaded with meaning in Japan. This dates back to the country's early history when they used to denote rank in society. Animals also carry fascinating symbolic significance derived from folklore and myth. Keep your eye out for these common motifs.

## COLOURS

**Akane** A special shade of red is used for shrines, and it's said to grant protection from evil and disaster, and to increase the power of the spirits.

**White** This is regarded as godly and pure, so sacred places are often strung with white, lightning-shaped paper (*shide*), marking the boundary between the earthly and the spiritual worlds.

**Black** Exuding dignity and formality, black is used for the robes of Buddhist monks.

~ Left to right: Torii gates at Shinto shrines are painted akane red; white paper shide streamers are used in Shinto rituals; unlike the vibrant colours of China and India, the robes of Buddhist monks in Japan are an austere black, or muted tones like brown and grey.







**Purple** In ancient times, purple dye was difficult to produce, so the colour is traditionally associated with high status. In *no* theatre, for example, you can recognize emperors and gods by their purple and white costumes.

**Blue** In the language of early Japan, there was no distinction between blue and green. It is the legacy of this oddity that the word for blue (*ao*) is still used to describe green traffic lights and leaves.

## ANIMALS

**Koi** With their ability to swim upstream and resist the flow of water, carp are a symbol of perseverance. The colourful koi carp varieties also symbolise faithfulness and marriage.

**Cranes** In Japanese folklore it is believed that cranes live for 1,000 years, so these birds represent good fortune and longevity. The crane is also closely associated with wedding and New Year celebrations.

**Fox** Foxes are said to be messengers of the Shinto spirit Inari, so you'll often find

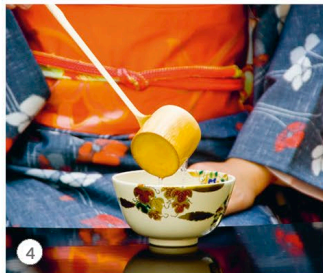
^ Left to right: Tanuki statues carry sake as a symbol of virtue; lucky cats were introduced in the Edo period.

statues of them at shrines. Old folklore also paints them as wily tricksters who can transform into humans; there is a theory that the common greeting "*moshi moshi*" is used when picking up the phone because it's a tongue twister for foxes and proves you're a real human.

**Tanuki** A subspecies of the Asian Raccoon Dog, *tanuki* are seen as masters of disguise and cunning shapeshifters. *Tanuki* sculptures with comically inflated scrotums are, rather surprisingly, a common sight and represent good luck.

**Cats** The *maneki-neko* (beckoning cat) is thought to bring luck, happiness, wealth and prosperity. These colourful felines, with their smiley faces and raised paw, will often greet you at the entrance to shops and restaurants.





## THE ESSENCE OF JAPAN

Whether planning your first trip or needing ideas for yet another visit, here are some essential highlights you won't want to miss. Blending cultural experiences with breathtaking views up and down the archipelago, these moments will draw you deeper into the heart and soul of Japanese life.

**1. Cross the threshold into the world of the gods at a Shinto shrine.** You'll find some are peaceful and intimate, while others are lively destinations resounding with ringing bells and the chatter of people discussing the love fortunes they've bought at the shrine stalls.

**2. Picnic under the cherry blossom trees in spring** – a truly Japanese celebration of nature and the changing seasons. You can even chase the blossoms as they burst into life in stages across Japan from March in the south to early May up north.

**3. No talent required: sing your heart out at karaoke.** You can order food and

drink right to your private, soundproof room, so settle in for the evening and get ready to belt out your favourite tunes in the ultimate singalong.

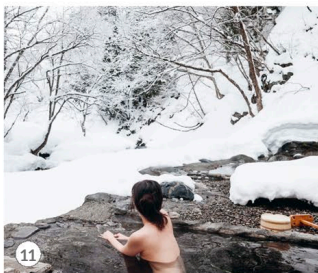
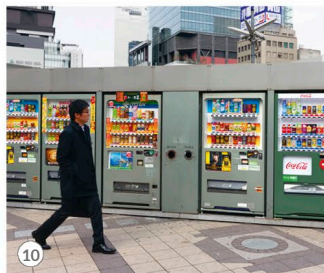
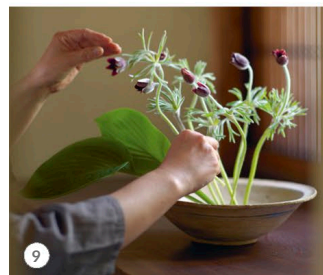
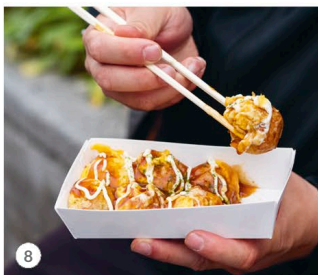
**4. Experience a tranquil tea ceremony** and fall under the spell of this traditional, elegant ritual. The ceremony is full of Zen-inspired moments of peace and meditation, and beauty in the form of the ceramic bowls and wall art.

**5. Visit Kyoto, a historic icon in the heart of modern Japan.** The city is home to an amazing array of incredible architecture, with more UNESCO-listed World Heritage Sites than any other city on the planet. The best way to experience Kyoto is to stay in a *ryokan* (traditional inn), where you'll sleep on a futon on *tatami* mats, and dine on classic Japanese food washed down with plenty of sake.

**6. Express yourself through style in the fashion districts of the big cities.**

Get inspired on Sundays when the streets





become a catwalk of stylish shoppers – either showing off the latest chic trends or continuing the Japanese tradition of colourful experimentation.

**7. Find your inner peace in a Zen garden.** Sparse and barren at first glance, look closer to seek the meaning behind each choice of rock and stone, as understanding the scene before you is the key to unlocking true tranquillity.

**8. Join the riotous celebrations at a summer festival.** Although each festival is different – some honouring a particular shrine or historic event – you'll find they're all full of exuberant crowds enjoying delicious street food, lively entertainment and quality time with friends and family.

**9. Create a living sculpture in an ikebana class.** Everything from the choice of vase to the spaces between the twigs and flowers becomes an artistic tool to design a piece that captures the fleeting beauty of nature.

**10. Check out a vending machine classic: canned coffee,** an everyday staple all across Japan. Ditch the ordinary cafés and stop at the nearest vending machine – you'll never be far from one of these ubiquitous gadgets – to enjoy a refreshingly cold coffee in the heat of summer, or deliciously hot can in winter.

**11. Take a dip in a relaxing hot spring.** As one of the most active volcanic regions in the world, is it any wonder that hot springs are such an integral part of Japan's culture? Find out why they're so important to the Japanese by soaking in a *rotenburo* – an outdoor hot spring – to enjoy not just a unique cultural experience but also the stunning natural views.

**12. Savour Japan's award-winning whisky in a refreshing highball,** which pairs perfectly with either meat or seafood. With the help of its seasonal climates and the native wood used for casking, Japanese whisky now takes centre stage across the world.

歴史

# HISTORY

The story of Japan



^ Lady Murakami's  
*The Tale of Genji*  
is considered the  
world's first novel.

Japanese history has been marked by periods of isolation, allowing Japan to develop a unique and insular culture that captivated the world once it opened up to the global community in the 19th century.

As contact between China, Korea and Japan deepened, a new Japanese elite emerged, deeply steeped in the culture of the Chinese aristocracy. Named after its capital (present-day Kyoto) the Heian Era (794-1185) was a turning point in Japanese civilisation, as the aristocrats of the court fused indigenous elements and themes, such as native mythology and the celebration of nature, to traditional Chinese pursuits of courtly painting, calligraphy and poetry.

Meanwhile, cultured Heian women pioneered the first Japanese syllabary, *hiragana*, which they used to compose epoch-defining works of literature such as *The Tale of Genji* and the *Pillowbook*, works of exquisite sensitivity that immortalised the elegant world of the Heian Court.

## THE HEIAN ERA

The first records of Japan appear in the 3rd-century annals of the Chinese courts. They recount the existence of people living on the islands off the coast of Korea, ruled over by a queen, named Himiko.

## KEY MOMENTS IN JAPANESE HISTORY

**239**  
Himiko, queen of Yamato (early Japan), sends envoys to China.

**300 BC-AD 300**  
New methods of farming, metalworking, and pottery reach southwestern Japan from the mainland via Korea.

**794**  
Heian-kyo (Kyoto) becomes the capital of Japan.

^ C 1000  
The Tale of Genji is written by court Lady Murasaki.

~ 1180-85  
The Minamoto clan defeat the Taira and establish the Kamakura Shogunate.



## THE SAMURAI RULE

In 1185, the refined world of the court was shattered by the struggle of the Taira and Minamoto clans – marking the point at which a feudal warrior culture, the samurai, supplanted that of Kyoto's aristocracy. This civil war led to the establishment of Japan's first Shogunate administration, and the transferral of true power from Kyoto to Kamakura. The Shoguns were hereditary warrior-rulers, exercising power over the country on behalf of the emperors in whose name they ruled. It was at this time that Zen Buddhism, another Chinese import, became popular with the warrior elite for whom its precepts – acting with intuition, confronting death without fear – were concepts to be cultivated.

In 1467, a new civil war ended the authority of the shoguns, and a century of turmoil followed. Eventually, a trio of leaders – Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu – re-established the authority of the central government. The seat of power was moved to the site of a small fishing settlement named Edo, present-day Tokyo.

## EDO JAPAN

The new Tokugawa Shogunate sought to promote stability by restricting foreign shipping to the area of Nagasaki. The Portuguese, who had previously been welcome in the country, were expelled following Jesuit attempts to convert the Japanese to Catholicism. Only the Dutch, who aided in the suppression of Japan's Christian community, were allowed to continue trading.

For the following two hundred years, Japan was largely cut off from the west. With peace restored, the country boomed, and by 1700 Edo was the largest city in the world – with more than 1,000,000 inhabitants. In the newly rich cities, the wealthy merchants created their own distinct culture characterised by bawdy literature, riotous theatre, and pleasure quarters known as the "floating world." This period of isolation is largely responsible for the creation of the distinctly Japanese culture, which remains one of the country's enduring fascinations to this day.

✓ The helmets of samurai armour were adorned with crests, like the camellia below.



1274

An invading Mongol fleet is destroyed by a typhoon, which the Japanese dub the "kamikaze."

1467

The devastating Onin War begins. Much of Kyoto is destroyed by fire in the fighting.



~ 1603

Tokugawa Ieyasu wins the battle of Sekigahara, and establishes the Tokugawa shogunate based in Edo (Tokyo).

1689

Famous haiku poet Matsuo Basho departs on his journey to the north.

1641

All foreign commerce is confined to an island in Nagasaki Bay, and only the Dutch and Chinese are allowed access.

✓ 1831

Hokusai's Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji is published.



## THE MEIJI ERA

In 1853, Commodore Perry of the U.S. Navy steamed into Edo Bay to challenge Japan's refusal to enter into international relations. Weakened by unrest from within, the Shogunate had no choice but to accede to his demands. During a period of civil war that followed, reformers made use of Western military tactics and technology to force damaging concessions from the Shogunate, resulting in its total collapse.

In 1868, imperial power was restored, and Emperor Meiji relocated to the new capital of Tokyo. The Meiji regime quickly embraced the technological achievements of the West and set out to modernize the country. Seemingly overnight, all the trademarks of Western civilization exploded into life across Japan, from railways and banks to cigarettes and top hats.

## EARLY 20TH CENTURY

After a hugely transforming reign, the Meiji Emperor died in 1912. The Taisho era that followed saw party politics flourish, while suffrage was extended and new labour laws enacted. A vibrant new culture

blossomed as young Japanese men and women revelled in their new economic, social and political freedoms.

Japan seemed to be set on a course for liberalization. But then, in 1923, the devastating Great Kanto Earthquake struck.

More than 100,000 people died, and much of Tokyo was destroyed. In the eyes of many conservatives, this catastrophe was heaven's judgment on the excesses of the Taisho era. A rumour soon spread that Korean residents of Tokyo were taking advantage of the disaster, looting and committing arson. As mob violence broke out against the Korean population, conservatives used the chaos to reassert their authority. Soon the military was in complete control of Japanese society and acting increasingly assertively abroad.



^ A moment of silence is observed across Japan at 11:58:44 on 1 September, in memory of those who lost their lives in the Great Kanto Earthquake.



^ 1853  
Commodore Matthew Perry anchors in Edo Bay, and Japan is re-introduced to Western society.

1856  
Japanese prints are found in a packing crate in Paris, and Europe goes wild for "Japonisme."

1868  
Imperial power is restored after the Shogunate era, and the capital of Edo is renamed Tokyo.



^ 1905  
Japan emerges victorious from the Russo-Japanese war. Korea becomes a Japanese protectorate.



~ 1923  
The Great Kanto Earthquake devastates Tokyo and Yokohama, leaving 600,000 people homeless.



By the mid-1930s the country was embroiled in a war with China that estranged it from the rest of the world. Then, in December 1941, Japan made the fateful decision to launch surprise attacks against both the US and the British Empire, entering World War II. In August 1945, with millions dead across Asia and most of Japan's cities already in ruins, the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima, and Nagasaki Emperor Hirohito instructed his government to sue for peace.

## THE POSTWAR YEARS

Following the Japanese surrender, the Americans occupied Japan for seven years that proved transformative to Japan. The Americans brought democracy and the expectation of a level of personal freedom that would have been unthinkable even in the free-wheeling Taisho Era.

In 1952 the American occupation ended and Japan was finally free from military control for the first time in decades. A creative shockwave was unleashed, ushering in a period of intense innovation in art, film, literature and architecture.

As the US became involved in first the Korean, and then Vietnamese Wars, Japanese industrial production surged to meet demand, and soon automotive and technological exports made Japan one of the richest nations in the world. The country continued to boom until the economic bubble burst in 1992, followed by over two decades of stagnation.

## 21ST-CENTURY JAPAN

Despite the legacy of Japan's post-bubble economic malaise, the nation remains an industrial and cultural behemoth on the world stage. The Japanese have shown great resilience in overcoming all manner of setbacks. They have persevered and rebuilt in the aftermath of the Great Tohoku Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disasters of 2011, and continue to be visionaries in the fields of transport, space exploration, technology, design and media.

As a new emperor takes the throne, the whole nation is determined to use the opportunity of the 2020 Olympic Games to step forward into the world spotlight once again.

✓ Across the world, excitement builds for the opening of the Summer Olympics on 24 July, 2020.



△ 1941-5  
Japan attacks Pearl Harbour and enters World War II. The war draws to a close when atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima.



✓ 1964  
Tokyo becomes the first Asian country to host the Olympics.

1992  
Japan's economic bubble bursts, ending decades of continuous postwar growth.

2011  
A major earthquake and tsunami hit northern Honshu. As a result, a major nuclear emergency is declared at Fukushima.



△ 2019  
End of the Heisei era as Emperor Akihito retires. Crown Prince Naruhito ascends the throne and the new Reiwa era begins.





<The Tanabata (Star Festival) has been celebrated in Sao Paulo since 1979.

世界中の日本

# JAPAN AROUND THE WORLD

Be more Japan wherever you are

Japan's cultural influence stretches far beyond its borders, impacting everything from Hollywood movies to what we eat for lunch. These days it's easy to bring Japanese culture into your life thanks to an array of international sights and festivals showcasing its creative legacy – here are some highlights to help get you started.

## FESTIVAL FUN

**UK** HyperJapan at London's Olympia every July is a high-octane extravaganza of the very latest in food, fashion, live music, gaming, anime and alternative arts.

**USA** Brought to Hawaii in the 19th century, the Obon festival – which honours the spirits of departed ancestors – is now a summer-long event redolent of the sounds and smells of Japan, with street food, live music, dancing and lanterns at sunset.

**Germany** Düsseldorf's annual Japan Day (held in May or June) is a hugely popular celebration of every facet of Japanese culture from cosplay to origami.

**Brazil** In July each year, the streets of the Liberdade neighbourhood in Sao Paulo – home to the world's largest expatriate Japanese community – are thronged with festival goers marking Tanabata, or the Star Festival by hanging prayers from the trees.

## BEAUTIFUL BLOSSOMS

**USA** Join the festive fun around San Francisco's Japantown district during the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival, or head to Washington, DC's National Cherry Blossom Festival to celebrate the city's thousands of trees that were donated from Japan.

**Canada** Feast your eyes on the pink and white blooms of 40,000 cherry trees – gifted by Japan in the 1930s – at the joyful Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival.

**The Netherlands** Head to the Bloesempark section of Amsterdamse Bos to join the families and friends picnicking under the pastel-pink trees in celebration of Amsterdam's Cherry Blossom Festival.



## A TASTE OF JAPAN

**UK** For the chance to experience an *izakaya* (a Japanese-style tavern), head to London's Asakusa, or try recreating your favourite dishes at home with ingredients from Ichiba, Europe's largest Japanese food hall, just down the road. Wash it all down with a Japanese whisky tasting at Kouzu.

**USA** Home to the oldest Japanese community in the US, it's no surprise that San Francisco offers some of the best Japanese food in America. The restaurants here are so authentic, they even display real *sampuru*, or "samples", the waxwork display of menu items that are commonplace in restaurants in Japan.

**Germany** Home to the largest Japanese community in Europe, Düsseldorf is known as "Little Tokyo on the Rhine". There are a plethora of good ramen bars in the city, but for something more unusual, try Soba-an at the heart of the Japanese neighbourhood. The house-made buckwheat noodles of this unassuming spot are a balm for every homesick expat and one of the best kept secrets in the city.

**The Netherlands** The Netherlands was the only country in the West permitted to maintain a presence in Japan during its 200 years of isolation. These historic links are reflected in the ready availability of dishes such as *okonomiyaki* (savoury pancakes), sushi, yakitori and ramen in Amsterdam. For Michelin-starred cuisine, visit Teppanyaki Restaurant Sazanka or Yamazato Restaurant at the Hotel Okura Amsterdam.

## TRANQUIL GARDENS

**UK** Take a break from the hustle and bustle of London with a visit to the Japanese-inspired roof garden at SOAS, University of London, or the impeccably kept Japanese Landscape at Kew Gardens.

Cowden Garden in Scotland, meanwhile, has been described as "the most important Japanese garden in the Western World" and is the first and only garden of its size and scale to be designed by a woman.

**USA** Laid down in 1894, San Francisco's enormous Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park includes a Tea House and dry garden, and hosts an annual Summer Festival with a tea ceremony and other events. Portland's serene Japanese Garden is widely lauded for its authenticity, but the most quirky offering in the US is the secret sanctuary on the rooftop of the DoubleTree Hotel in Little Tokyo in LA. Featuring manicured greenery, cascading waterfalls and tranquil ponds, it's a meticulous recreation of the garden created for samurai lord Kiyomasa Kato in Edo in the 16th century.

**France** Featuring one of the finest bonsai collections in Europe, the beautiful Parc Oriental in Maulévrier contains enchanting traditional Japanese tea-rooms as well as meandering streams, a bridge, a pagoda and a garden shop – perfect if you want to start your own bonsai collection. In Paris, meanwhile the beautiful Ichikawa Japanese Garden provides an unexpected retreat in the heart of the city.

**Monaco** Designed in 1994 by Yasuo Beppu, Monaco's Japanese Garden was conceptualized as a miniature representation of Shintoist philosophy. Take a stroll through the gardens to discover a verdant oasis featuring an unusual combination of Japanese tradition with Mediterranean touches.



THE JEWEL-LIKE JARDIN  
JAPONAIS IS AN OASIS  
OF TRANQUILLITY.





**Australia** Designed as a *kaiyu-shiki*, or strolling garden, the Cowra Japanese Garden in New South Wales was established to commemorate the Japanese war dead buried in the district, and was supported by the Japanese government as a sign of thanks for the respectful treatment of the graves. A cherry blossom festival is held at the garden each year as well as Girl's Day and Boy's Day festivals, and you can also take part in tea ceremonies and workshops on Japanese crafts.

## TRADITIONAL TEA

**UK** For a more modern take on tea culture, pay a visit to Japanese tea specialist Postcard Teas in London's smart Mayfair district – reputed to be the finest tea shop in Europe. Customers are encouraged to

try the teas before buying, with samples provided in beautiful traditional Japanese ceramics (also for sale). To immerse yourself even further in the world of Japanese tea, you can join a tea ceremony group such The London Tea Club in Hackney, which offers the opportunity to meet for regular tea ceremonies.

**France** Hidden away in the heart of Paris, next to the Panthéon Bouddhique museum (which has a fine collection of Japanese art), you'll find a lovely small Japanese garden and tea hut. The jewel-like Jardin Japonais, with its lush groves of bamboo, miniature stream and charming stepping stones, is an oasis of tranquillity. Built by a master Japanese carpenter, the Pavillon de Thé hosts regular tea ceremonies.

^ San Francisco's Tea Garden is the oldest public Japanese garden in America.



^ Sou Fujimoto: *Futures of the Future* is one of many exhibitions on Japanese art and design that have been held at Japan House London.

## INSPIRATIONAL ART

**UK** Between the British Museum, the V&A and the hip White Rainbow gallery in Fitzrovia, London offers an impressively comprehensive exhibit of Japanese art. In the British Museum alone you'll find some 430 artworks and archaeological and historical artefacts.

**USA** The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is reputed to hold the finest collection of Japanese art outside Japan. The early Buddhist paintings and sculpture are the envy of even Japanese museums, while their collection of *ukiyo-e* prints, swords and *No* masks are unmatched in the West.

**Greece** The island of Corfu's Museum of Asian Art of holds one of the most unexpected collections of Japanese art in

the world. This first-rate exhibit owes its existence to the Greek ambassador to Austria, Gregorios Manos, who purchased 9,500 or so Chinese, Korean and Japanese artefacts at art auctions in Vienna and Paris in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

## CUTTING-EDGE DESIGN

**UK** London's chic Japan House is an elegant cultural centre with a carefully curated programme that highlights Japan's regional craftsmanship and refined design sensibilities, as well as showcases the country's cuisine and technology. It is one of three such spaces around the world (the others are in Sao Paolo and LA).

**USA** At New York City store Nalata Nalata, you'll not only find an amazing array of beautifully crafted Japanese objects, but also discover the stories behind them. The concept was created by husband-and-wife team Stevenson Aung and Angélique Chmielewski, who also offer thoughtfully written and beautifully photographed articles on their website.

HEAD HERE FOR A TASTE OF A JAPANESE ONSEN IN THE WILDS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE.





▼ Termas Geometricas' natural hot-spring pools offer a taste of the Japanese onsen experience in Chile.

**Malaysia** Head to Isetan in Kuala Lumpur, a lavish Japanese emporium spread over six floors. The store's avant-garde "Cube" space has 12 experiential areas where you can delve deeper into Japanese culture, while the bookstore features a some 10,000 titles.

## ECLECTIC ENTERTAINMENT

**UK** The Royal Holloway campus in Egham has hosted numerous *No* performances at its dedicated Handa Noh Stage. There, distinguished *No* actor and professor Naohiko Umewaka organizes workshops and demonstrations to help make this art more accessible to Western students.

**USA** In Columbia, Missouri, you can watch performances of traditional Japanese puppet drama (*bunraku*) by the Bunraku Bay Puppet Theatre. All manner of traditional entertainments are on offer at Florida's Morikami Museum, which has a full calendar of classes, workshops and shows throughout the year. You can even book onto one of the one-day *koto* (zither) courses taught by master instrumentalist Yoshiko Carlton.

**Israel** The embrace of Japan's *otaku* (geek) culture has spread as far as Jerusalem with the city's Harucon comic convention. Held during the Purim holiday, it offers sessions with comic book professionals, previews of films and portfolio review sessions with

top comic book and video game companies, as well as the obligatory cosplay contest.

## RELAXING HOT SPRINGS

**USA** Inspired by Japanese *senjo* (public baths), Onsen in San Francisco, is the best place in the city to enjoy the restorative powers of soaking in a hot water bath. Meanwhile, on the East Coast, at Pembroke Springs in Virginia you can relax in two large Japanese baths fed by natural spring waters, surrounded by beautiful forest.

**Australia** Located just 75 minutes from Melbourne in Hepburn Springs, Shizuka Ryokan offers an authentic Japanese experience. This quiet, minimalist space features traditional *tatami* mats, *yukata* robes and *shoji* screens, as well as a Zen rock garden to contemplate post-dip.

**Chile** Nestled in a lush forest canyon in Chile, the Termas Geometricas spa is a stunning maze of red planks that wind over a flowing stream through the verdant trees. Head here for a taste of a Japanese *onsen* in the wilds of the countryside.

## SACRED SPACES

**USA** Established on the Big Sur coast of California in 1967, Tassajara is a Soto Zen training monastery. It offers courses during autumn and winter, or you can pay a visit in the summer guest season and savour the monastery's vegetarian cooking.

**France** Located in Valaire, La Gendronnière is the oldest Zen Buddhist temple in France. Join other disciples in the practice of Soto Zen at this remote community, surrounded by a forest of ancient trees.

**China** To explore the Chinese roots of Zen Buddhism, head to Song Shan, the towering mountain that looms over Henan Province. It's home to the Shaolin Temple, China's most important Buddhist monastery.









日本の見方

# A VIEW OF JAPAN

Look beyond typical travel brochure images of temples, castles and neon-drenched city centres, and you will find there is far more to Japan than initially meets the eye. From the subtropical islands of Okinawa to the rolling farmlands and heavy winter snows of Hokkaido in the far north, Japan delivers diverse scenic beauty. Mountain ranges dominate much of the land, providing the Japanese with places of pilgrimage and play: hiking trails, hot springs and ski slopes. As an island nation, the archipelago is dotted with island chains, some windswept and rugged like the Oki Islands and Sado, others sun-soaked and balmy. The country's varied climates have created distinct local cultures, meaning that even urban Japan isn't cast from a single mould. Among the modernity, Kyoto frequently reveals glimpses of its ancient past, while regional hubs operate not just at a different pace to Tokyo, they wear their local heritage with pride.

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring Japan's landscapes

Make your journey an exploration of Japan's diversity. Experience big-city buzz in Tokyo, slower urban life in Matsuyama and traditional island ways in Okinawa. Hike the paths trodden by pilgrims for centuries in the Japanese Alps, go diving in the Izu Islands and discover the rural folklore of the Tono Valley in Iwate. From the ice floes off Hokkaido to the mangroves of Iriomote, there are countless ways to see Japan.



## ^ URBAN CALM

*Enjoy a more relaxed urban experience in regional cities like Matsuyama, where local traditions linger and modern life moves at a laidback pace.*



## ^ ISLAND PARADISE

*The beautiful Yaeyama Islands in Okinawa are home to lush jungle, pristine beaches, sleepy villages and top-class dive spots.*



## NATURAL HAVEN

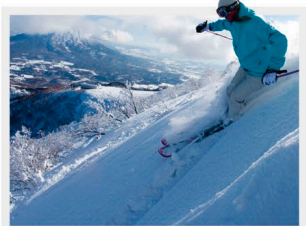
Of Japan's 34 national parks, the most remote is Ogasawara National Park, about 1,000 km (600 miles) south of Tokyo.

## UNSHAKEABLE SPIRIT

*Reborn after the devastating 1945 atomic bomb, Hiroshima is today a buzzing metropolitan centre.*







## SAPPORO

### FESTIVAL FUN

One of Japan's youngest cities, spirited Sapporo stands out for its American-style grid system. Visit in September for the Autumn Fest food festival or in February for the annual Snow Festival.

## NISEKO

### ^ SNOW CENTRAL

Snowboarders and skiers alike flock to Niseko for its long, cold winter season, numerous slopes, and quality powder.



## TONO

### HIKING HEAVEN

Mount Fuji may be more famous, but the best hiking and most striking mountain views are found in the Japanese Alps.

### ^ RURAL IDYLL

Steeped in legend, Tono offers a taste of traditional countryside life, with people still living in rhythm with nature and observing age-old traditions. Look out for the town's distinctive magariya (L-shaped houses).

## JAPANESE ALPS

## TOKYO

### ~ CAPTIVATING CAPITAL

Home to 9 million people in its central wards, Tokyo is one of the busiest, crowded and most built-up cities in the world. It's unmissable.

## CLOSE QUARTERS

Don't expect much space in Japan's biggest cities. The population density in central Tokyo is roughly 15,000 people per square kilometre.





^ Clockwise from above: Shibuya Crossing is one of Tokyo's most famous sights; Yokohama has long been a centre of shipping and trade; Osaka Castle sits at the heart of the city.

## KYOTO

Kyoto is only Japan's ninth most populated city, but in terms of culture and tourism it's up there with Tokyo. The city offers many ways to experience traditional Japan: relax at a tea ceremony, try zazen meditation, stay at a ryokan inn, or maybe even enjoy a night of geisha entertainment.







## 都市の景観

# CITYSCAPES

Japan's dynamic metropolises

Encapsulating the country's contrasts, Japan's stimulating cities marry tradition and modernity while also carving out their own unique local character.

### THE BIG FIVE

Travelling to Japan's most populous cities will fully immerse you in Japanese life, providing the perfect introduction to the country's culture.

#### TOKYO

The capital since 1868, Tokyo is Japan's most densely populated city, with over 9 million people living in its core 23 wards (council districts). Busy central wards like Shinjuku and Shibuya have all the neon, high-rises and crowds you would expect, but you can find a different side of Tokyo life in the city's classical gardens, historic temples, quiet riverbanks and traditional neighbourhoods like Shibamata, Yanaka and Nezu.

#### YOKOHAMA

As part of Greater Tokyo, Yokohama in many ways feels like an extension of the capital – but the 3.5 million people living there would be quick to call out some differences. The city has a vibrant Chinatown, for one thing, and a lively bay area that splices modern entertainment complexes with Western-style architecture that dates back to the end of Japan's self-isolation in the mid-1800s.

#### NAGOYA

Just over 300 km (185 miles) west of Yokohama, Nagoya gets overlooked by many travellers, but with 2.2 million residents, the city is a major economic player – it's the birthplace of Toyota, among other things. Nagoyans, however, take more pride in their food than business savvy: *miso*, *tebasaki* (peppery deep-fried chicken wings) and *miso katsu* (breaded pork cutlets with a miso sauce) are just some of the delicious local specialities.

#### OSAKA

Moving west again from Nagoya, the 2.7 million people in Osaka are defiantly different – with a reputation for being more direct and outgoing than any other Japanese – and their city reflects that. Dazzling downtown Dotonbori has more neon and hustle than anywhere in Tokyo.

#### SAPPORO

The capital of Hokkaido in Japan's north, Sapporo is the most distinctive of the big five. Settled by the Japanese in the latter half of the 1800s, the relatively new city incorporated – unusually for Japan – a grid system that makes it a very easy, uncluttered city to get around. It also stands out for its snow. In winter, Sapporo gets a whopping 6 m (20 ft) of it annually, along with temperatures that can dip as low as -15°C (5°F).

## BEYOND THE BIG CITIES

Beyond the sprawling mass of metropolises like Tokyo and Osaka, Japan's smaller cities offer very different urban experiences. More mellow and less densely packed, they're full of local flavour and history.

### HAKODATE

Located at the southern tip of Hokkaido, Hakodate's Motomachi and port districts are home to old red-brick warehouses, churches and other Western architecture that serve as a reminder of European influences on Hokkaido's early development in the late 1800s. The city's fishing fleet, meanwhile, lands some of Japan's finest crabs, sea urchins and other seafood, which you can eat fresh at the morning market. Don't miss the most famous Hakodate sight – the night view of the city from the observation deck atop 334-m (1,096-ft) Mount Hakodate.

### KANAZAWA

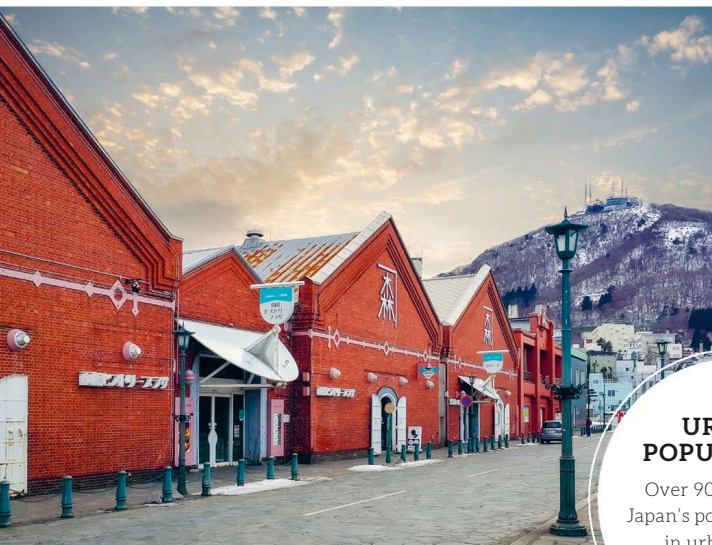
On the Sea of Japan coast on Honshu, Kanazawa is often referred to as "Little Kyoto". Known for its gourmet seafood,

the city is connected to Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto by direct train, but still doesn't get huge numbers of tourists. In the Edo era, the city rose to prominence under the Maeda clan as the centre of the Kaga region, and just as Kyoto is dotted with remnants of its past, so too is Kanazawa. The preserved Higashi Chaya geisha district, Nagamachi samurai quarter and serene Kenroku-en gardens are just a handful of its treasures.

### HIROSHIMA

On the far west of Honshu, Hiroshima is one of Japan's best-known cities because of the tragic events that occurred on 6 August 1945, when the US Air Force's *Enola Gay* bomber dropped an atomic bomb into the heart of the city, killing tens of thousands of Hiroshimans in a split second. Moving memorials to the tragedy dot the centre of modern-day Hiroshima, but they don't overshadow it – the city itself has a bubbly nightlife and is within easy reach of Miyajima, the island that's home to Itsukushima Shrine and its sublime "floating" torii gateway.

✓ Left to right:  
Hakodate's historic  
warehouses have  
today been turned  
into shops; walking  
through Kanazawa's  
streets is like stepping  
back into the past.



### URBAN POPULATION

Over 90 per cent of  
Japan's population lives  
in urban areas.







^ Clockwise from left: Hiroshima's modern architecture sits alongside memorials to the city's tragic past; Matsuyama's Dogo Onsen Honkan bathhouse is a Japanese icon; Naha comes alive at festival time.

## MATSUYAMA

Located on Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, Matsuyama is a fine example of a city that balances past and present. The largest and most cosmopolitan of Shikoku's cities, it has a skyline dominated by a hilltop castle and its streets still employ a network of rickety old trams. In its Dogo Onsen area, Matsuyama also has one of the most celebrated bathhouses in Japan, the creaking Dogo Onsen Honkan, which has been both a key location in renowned novelist Natsume Soseki's book *Botchan* and the inspiration for the bathhouse in Studio Ghibli's Oscar-winning animated movie *Spirited Away*.

NAHA HAS A VERY DIFFERENT FEEL TO OTHER JAPANESE CITIES, WITH A LAID-BACK ISLAND VIBE.



## NAHA

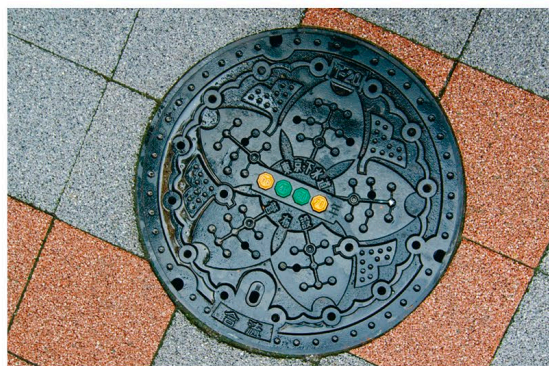
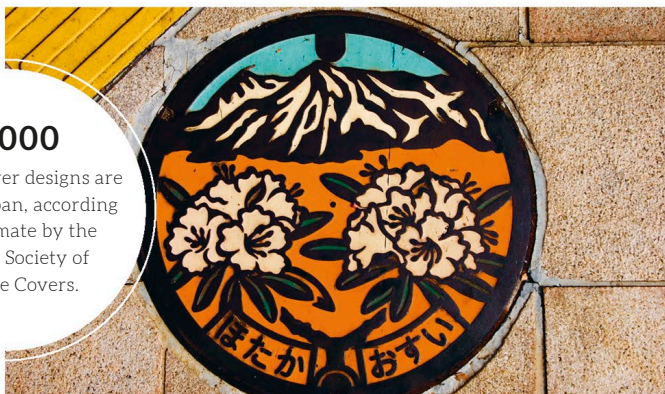
Way down in Okinawa, Naha has a very different feel to other Japanese cities. Warm to hot temperatures year-round, palm trees and a relative lack of high-rises have seen to that, while there are also influences from the US military presence and from Ryukyu, an independent kingdom that included Okinawa until it was annexed by Japan in the 1870s. Apart from the main entertainment area, Naha has a laid-back island vibe, and it makes a great jumping-off point to explore the stunning Okinawan island chains.





19,000

different cover designs are in use in Japan, according to an estimate by the Japanese Society of Manhole Covers.

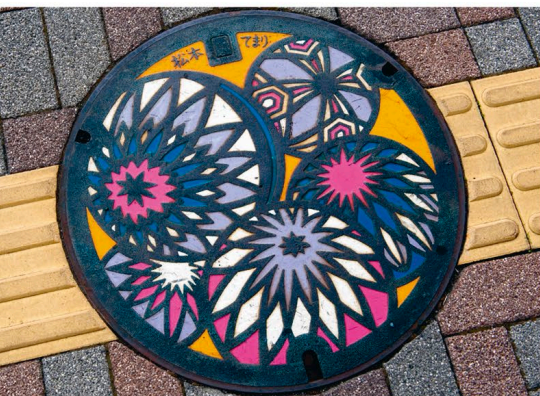


## DRAINSPOTTING

Dedicated "manholers" travel across the country, posting their favourites on social media.







マンホールの蓋

## MANHOLE COVERS

*Art beneath your feet*

The Japanese have a talent for elevating the mundane into a thing of beauty, and there is no finer example of this than the humble manhole cover. Originally designed to make taxpayers more amenable to paying for costly drainage projects, Japan's decorated manhole covers have become a source of local pride, highlighting regional attractions, wildlife, festivals, historic events and even folklore.

Matsumoto (Nagano Prefecture) celebrates the local craft of making *temari* – handmade balls of intricately woven silk yarn used as gifts and decorations – while Kusatsu in Gunma Prefecture depicts a woman in traditional dress carrying out *yumomi*, a centuries-old method to cool the town's hot-spring water to bathing temperature by stirring it with wooden paddles. Throughout the country you can spot an array of colourful designs that celebrate Japan's fire departments with depictions of firefighters at work.

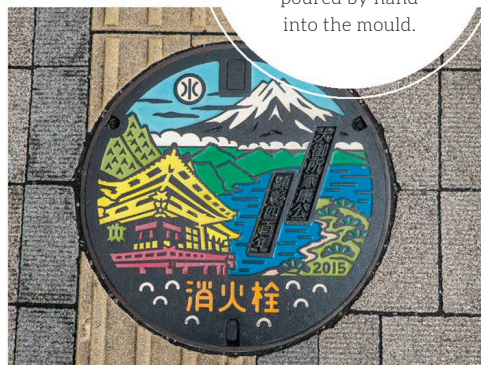
Not surprisingly, these manhole covers are now a social media phenomenon. You can track them with apps like Manhoo!, which lists the locations of more than 3,000 different designs around the country. In February 2019, there was even a Manhole Cover Festival held in Tokyo, complete with stands selling manhole cover snacks, pens, pin badges, and trading cards: everything a drainspotter could dream of.

<Japan's colourful manhole covers not only vary according to the region that they're in, but also differ depending on the utility type and the manhole manufacturer.



### HANDMADE

The manhole covers are cast in local foundries. Coloured resin is poured by hand into the mould.





日本の農村

# RURAL JAPAN

A slower way of life

Visit the Japanese countryside and you'll soon understand that things look and work differently: the colourful strings of orange persimmons you see hanging outside homes to dry, the occasional scent of a bonfire, the clusters of watery rice paddies between homesteads and the way darkness blankets everything at night, with the sky up above

speckled with vivid stars. Life here moves at a much slower pace than in urban Japan, dictated by the changing seasons and the planting of crops.

## STUNNING VISTAS

Because Japan is so mountainous, only about 12 per cent of the country is farmland – an insignificant figure compared to other major economies. With relatively so little space for farming, Japan grows less than half its own food. Travel through Hokkaido and you'll see rolling fields and expansive flat lands, but in many other

LIFE HERE IS DICTATED BY  
THE CHANGING SEASONS  
AND THE PLANTING OF CROPS.





< Left to right:  
Shirakawago is famed  
for its unique thatched  
houses; persimmons are  
a common sight in the  
countryside in autumn.

## GET INVOLVED

You don't have to visit rural Japan as a sightseer – you could also go on a working farm holiday to really go deep into Japan. An organisation called World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) has hundreds of farm stay hosts all over Japan who can give short- and mid-term work experiences to travellers.

parts of rural Japan farmland takes a different form in line with the natural terrain: such as the main tea production areas of Shizuoka and Kyoto, where green tea bushes grow in photogenic rows on tiered, hillside plantations – they're tricky to reach without a car, but worth the effort for the wonderful views.

✓ Tea fields follow  
the contours of the  
country's hilly terrain.



It's in the village of Shirakawago in Gifu Prefecture – at the foot of holy Mount Haku – that Japan's countryside arguably looks its most idyllic. The steeply thatched *gasshozukuri* farmhouses here, enveloped by the green of rice paddies in summer and frosted with snow in winter, take their name from the way they resemble hands clasped in prayer.

## OFF THE TOURIST TRAIL

Less-trodden alternatives include the Tono Valley in Iwate Prefecture, which feels almost frozen in time. Rice paddies and smallholdings dot the valley floor, and local folklore adds a touch of mystique, with stories like that of the *kappa*, a pond-dweller with a taste for cucumbers and a sinister fondness for drowning people. The Iya Valley in Tokushima Prefecture is even more idyllic, its river gorges and wooded mountainsides home to thatched houses, vine bridges and the odd natural hot spring.

山

# MOUNTAINS

Peaks of pilgrimage and play

More than 70 per cent of Japan's landmass is mountainous, bestowing the country's peaks with a special place in Japanese culture, spirituality and life. Spend time on their slopes and you'll have not only the chance to see some of the country's most spectacular scenery, but also the opportunity to connect with Japanese traditions both old and new.

## THE THREE SACRED PEAKS

For their displays of natural power (which gives them a close connection to the gods), three Japanese peaks have traditionally been deemed holier than all others. Collectively known as the Sanreizan, the

trio includes Mount Fuji, the now-dormant volcano lying to the west of Tokyo. Second on the list is the 2,700-m (8,860-ft) Mount Haku, on the borders of Ishikawa, Gifu and Fukui prefectures, revered for the meltwater lakes at its base – though today it is perhaps more prized as a destination for winter sports. Finally, there is the 3,015-m (9,890-ft) Mount Tate in Toyama Prefecture, dotted with natural hot springs and sulphur vents, and said to be where the spirits of the deceased gather. For centuries, pilgrims have scaled their heights in search of spiritual enlightenment, launching a tradition of Japanese mountain climbing that continues to this day.

✓ *The Japanese Alps were named for their resemblance to the European Alps.*

## PIONEERING MOUNTAINEERS

Japan's tradition of mountain climbing is one of the oldest in the world, dating as far back as the 9th century.







## JAPAN'S ALPS

Pilgrims and monks first carved out many of Japan's top hiking routes, and there are none more popular than those in the Japanese Alps, which are divided into three sections. The northern part contains the Hida Mountains, which run just over 100 km (60 miles) through Gifu, Nagano and Toyama prefectures and include the 2,999-m (9,839-ft) Mount Tsurugi, rated as the most dangerous climb in Japan. The Kiso Mountains in Nagano and Gifu make up the central section, and the valleys between their peaks contain some of the prettiest preserved villages in Japan – former staging posts on the old Nakasendo highway, such as Tsumago. In the southern section are the Akaishi Mountains, on the border of Nagano, Yamanashi and Shizuoka prefectures. Home to ten of the 100 top-ranked mountains in Japan, they are a good place to spot Japanese serow (goat-antelopes), sika deer and birds like the rock ptarmigan and spotted nutcracker.



## HITTING THE SLOPES

Skiing was introduced to Japan in the early 1900s by an Austrian army major called Theodor von Lerch – he is commemorated by one of Niigata Prefecture's local mascots, the moustachioed Lerch-san. Today, Niigata is still home to great skiing and snowboarding in areas such as Yuzawa and Naeba, as is neighbouring Nagano, where Hakuba hosted the 1998 Winter Olympics. But both have been eclipsed by Niseko in Hokkaido, which has become one of Asia's top winter sports destinations thanks to its powder snow and backcountry options.

^ Left to right: Wildlife found in the Japanese Alps includes the rock ptarmigan; Niseko is one of Japan's premier destinations for winter sports.

## THE TOP 100

In the 1960s, the writer and mountaineer Kyuya Fukada published a book titled *100 Famous Japanese Mountains*, each peak selected by him for its grace, history and individuality. Covering mountains across the nation, it has become something of a bible for Japanese hikers – the 100 mountains everyone wants to summit.

富士山

# MOUNT FUJI

Japan's iconic peak

As Japan's tallest and most sacred mountain, with an almost symmetrical form that dominates the landscape, the 3,776-m (12,388-ft) Mount Fuji is the classic symbol of Japan and a source of inspiration for artists and poets. The woodblock artist Katsushika Hokusai famously depicted the peak in his *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* series, which includes one of the most reproduced images in history, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*.

The first person to climb it is said to have been a monk in the 600s and it has long been revered as one of the three holiest peaks in Japan thanks to its sheer size, volcanic power and tales of deities that call it home, as well as the ascetic challenges provided by its climate and terrain.





^ The Okinawa  
archipelago is  
made up of 160  
small islands.

日本の島々

# ISLAND DIVERSITY

From windswept to subtropical

With close to 7,000 islands in total – both large and small, inhabited and deserted – Japan is undoubtedly an island nation. The area known as mainland Japan is actually comprised of five large islands – Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and Okinawa – while around these are small island groups like the Oki, Izu, Ogasawara, and Yaeyama islands. Take a trip to these outer reaches and you will be rewarded with a broader and deeper experience of Japan.

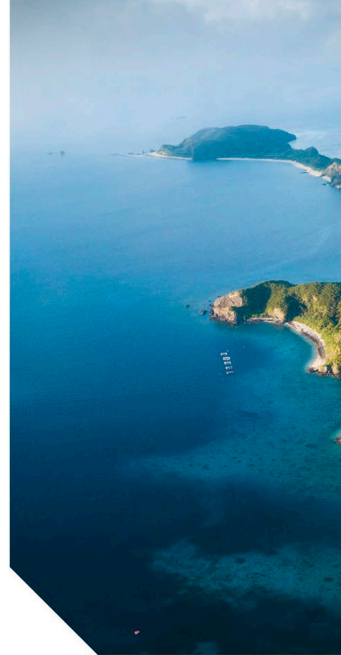
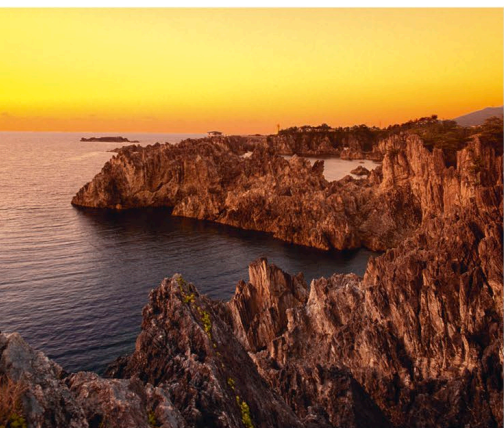
## ISLANDS OF EXILE

Looking north to the Sea of Japan, Sado Island off the coast of Niigata and the four Oki Islands off Shimane are all rugged and windswept northern isles that were once places of exile – the monk Nichiren was a famous exile on Sado in the 1270s and the Emperor Go-Toba died in exile on Oki in 1239. Far off many visitors' radars, they are wonderful, under-visited destinations, with fishing and agriculture as their mainstays. Sado hosts the annual Earth Celebration music festival in August, while the Oki Islands offer a taste of slow island life amid stunning nature – a patchwork of rocky shores, pretty beaches, and highlands where cows and horses graze.

## TOKYO SIDE TRIPS

The easiest island chain to visit is the Izu Islands, just off the southern coast of Tokyo and administratively part of the capital. The largest of them, Oshima –

< Sado Island was  
once the home of  
political exiles.







which has the volcanic Mount Mihara at its centre – is only 1 hour 45 minutes by jetfoil from Tokyo Bay and is especially pretty when camellias are in bloom in early spring. In the same chain, Niiijima is good for surfers, while Miyakejima – an overnight ferry away – has great hiking, diving and hot-spring baths.

## SUN-KISSED RETREATS

Technically still in Tokyo Prefecture, the 30 small Ogasawara Islands 1,000 km (600 miles) south of mainland Tokyo are well worth the 24-hour ferry trip. In 2011, they received UNESCO designation for their natural beauty and diversity, which encompasses coral reefs, indigenous wildlife and rare flora and fauna. The islands of Okinawa are similarly stunning, with the subtropical Yaeyamas in particular standing out for their incredible diversity. Highlights in the archipelago include the preserved villages on Taketomi, where water buffalo taxi carts are still a common sight; the dense jungle and mangrove groves of Iriomote; and the pristine beaches and diving sites of Ishigaki.



## THEMED ISLANDS

Forget themed restaurants, Japan specialises in themed islands. Naoshima (Kagawa Prefecture) and a cluster of other small islands between Shikoku and Honshu are famed for their contemporary art, while Okunoshima in Hiroshima Prefecture is overrun by friendly feral rabbits and Aoshima in Ehime is the most famous of Japan's dozen or so "cat islands".

^ Wildlife found off the Ogasawara Islands includes Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins.









## 時代を超越した日本

# TIMELESS JAPAN

A meticulous attention to detail, an appreciation for the imperfection and impermanence of life (*wabi-sabi*), and a love of nature are all reflected in Japan's extraordinary craftsmanship and cultural traditions.

The country's indigenous Shinto religion is essentially worship of nature, leading, for example, to the desire to create beautiful gardens and bonsai. The introduction of Buddhism in the 6th century played an enormous role in the development of Japanese aesthetics and the arts, from temple architecture to sculpture and lacquerware. And Buddhist philosophy, in particular the precise rituals of the tea ceremony, profoundly influenced flower arranging, calligraphy, ceramics and landscape gardening. Through the centuries, Japanese artisans have refined their crafts, perfected their techniques, and passed their knowledge down for generations. Japan considers artists so vital to the nation's cultural heritage, it officially recognizes the best of them as Living National Treasures.

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring timeless Japan

Japan's cultural legacy is so entwined in everyday life, it's hard to travel without experiencing it everywhere you go. Temples and shrines are the heart and soul of every community, while gardens are an integral part of Japan's artistic expression. You'll encounter Japan's decorative arts throughout the country, from galleries selling local crafts to world-renowned national collections in Tokyo.

## STAY HUMBLE

Entrances to traditional garden teahouses are small, requiring guests to duck or crawl through them as an act of humility.



## ^ SAMURAI SUBURB

Tucked behind the stone walls of Chiran's samurai district are seven beautifully preserved traditional homes. Get a closer peek while touring their charming gardens.



## ^ GARDENS AS ART

There's no finer union of art and gardening than the Adachi Museum in Yasugi, where cleverly placed windows frame the landscapes like works of art.

## ORIGAMI TRIBUTE

Thousands of origami cranes decorate the Children's Peace Monument in Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park.

YASUGI

HIROSHIMA

KINASHI

CHIRAN

## BONSAI BONANZA

Kinashi has been growing bonsai for centuries and has more nurseries than anywhere else in Japan.



#### ✓ SACRED SHRINES

*Fushimi Inari Taisha, founded in Kyoto in 711, is the head shrine of some 30,000 Inari shrines in Japan. Look for the stone foxes in the grounds that serve as messengers to the gods.*



#### HIRAIZUMI ●

#### A BUDDHIST UTOPIA

*Hiraizumi's Golden Hall and Pure Land Garden are part of a 12th-century complex designed to create a Buddhist paradise on earth.*

## DIVINE MESSENGERS

The deer that roam freely in Nara Park are considered messengers to the Shinto gods.

#### SAITAMA ●

#### ● TOKYO

#### LIVING SCULPTURE

*Saitama's Omiya Bonsai Art Museum displays hundreds of miniature trees.*

#### ● NAGOYA

#### ● KYOTO

#### SHINTO TREASURE

*Nagoya's Atsuta Jingu shrine houses a sacred treasure.*

#### ✓ UKIYO-E MASTER

*Hokusai is one of Japan's most well-known artists and is thought to have produced some 30,000 works. You can peruse a selection at the Sumida Hokusai Museum in Tokyo.*

## UNDER ONE ROOF

The Tokyo National Museum contains the world's largest collection of Japanese art and decorative crafts.



神道

# SHINTO

Way of the gods



^ The torii (gate) of Itsukushima Shrine (Miyajima Island) is one of Japan's three most scenic views.

Japan's oldest religion, Shinto ("way of the gods") finds divinity in all aspects of nature. It has no founder or sacred scriptures; instead, its philosophy is centred around living life in harmony and cooperation with

everything and everyone around you.

The core concept of Shinto is that deities known as *kami* preside over all things in nature, be they living, dead, or inanimate. There are lesser and greater *kami*, who exist in everything from rocks and trees to phenomena like the wind and waves and even illnesses. The *kami* reside at sacred shrines (*jinja*), where people go to worship them. Each shrine is devoted to a particular *kami* – Inari shrines such as Fushimi Inari-Taisha in Kyoto, for example, are dedicated to the god of prosperity (symbolized by rice) and safety, and are easily distinguishable by stone foxes in

the grounds that serve as the deity's messengers. Other popular *kami* include Hachiman, the deity of archery and war, whose shrines include the famous Tsurugaoka-Hachimangu in Kamakura.

## PRAYER AND HARMONY

Purification ceremonies and other rituals are performed at set times throughout the year, but generally shrines are informal places that people visit at their leisure to make a prayer or offering. Shinto's emphasis on harmony means that it is highly tolerant of other religions, and you may sometimes find Shinto shrines at Buddhist temples – many Japanese people will happily visit and perform rites at both.

Many facets of Japanese life, including an emphasis on cleanliness and an austere aesthetic, have their roots in Shinto practice. Shinto's deep affinity with nature is also reflected in the concept of *wabi-sabi*, which sees beauty in natural imperfections.

> The honden is the most sacred building at a shrine; this one is at Ueno Toshogu in Tokyo.





## LIKE NEW

Japan's ancient Shinto shrines often look brand new - this is because they are rebuilt as exact replicas every 20 years to re-purify the ground.





^ Left to right: The torii at Meiji Jingu is made from 1,500-year-old cypress pine from Taiwan; thousands of vermilion torii line the 4-km- (2.5-mile-) long trail to Fushimi Inari-taisha; the unique Meoto Iwa, or “wedded rocks”, at Futamigaura Beach symbolise the union of marriage.

## VISITING A SHRINE

Visiting one of Japan’s 80,000 shrines is like stepping into an oasis of intense calm, where the atmosphere thrums with an almost tangible connection to the natural and spiritual worlds. To reach this hallowed space you must first pass through a *torii* – a vermilion gateway that symbolises the border between the ordinary and sacred realms. Most shrines just have one *torii*, but some, such as Kyoto’s Fushimi Inari-taisha, have tunnels made up of thousands of them. As you enter the complex, look out for the auspicious animal statues and *shimenawa* (decorative ropes of rice straw or hemp that hang over entrances), which protect the shrine from evil and sickness.

Before heading further inside the shrine, make your way to the stone water basin near the entrance to wash your hands (a sign of purification). From there, a stone

*sando* (pathway) leads to the *haiden* (offering hall) and *honden* (sanctuary) where the shrine’s *kami* resides. Only the *haiden* is open to the general public; the *honden* is usually only entered by the head priests. Alert the *kami* to your presence by ringing a bell and clapping your hands before praying. It’s also traditional to toss a coin into the trough in front of the shrine – five and fifty yen (the coins with holes in them) are considered the most propitious.

## JAPAN’S MOST SACRED SHRINES

Nearly every community has a Shinto shrine, but the following hold a special place in the Shinto world.

**Ise Jingu** Japan’s most sacred Shinto shrine, in the seaside town of Ise (Mie Prefecture), is split into two compounds: the outer Geku and the more significant inner Naiku. Legend has it that a mirror representing the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the ultimate ancestress of Japan’s current imperial family, rests in the Naiku.

**Izumo Taisha** Second in importance to Ise Jingu is Izumo Taisha in Izumo (Shimane Prefecture). It is dedicated to the God of

ALERT THE KAMI TO YOUR PRESENCE BY RINGING A BELL AND CLAPPING YOUR HANDS.





## WEDDED ROCKS

The wedded rocks of Futami represent the union of the central deities in the Shinto creation myth.

Happy Marriage, Okuninushi-no-mikoto, which makes it popular with couples. It is also the location for the annual November gathering of the millions of *kami* from all over Japan, who are believed to meet to discuss the year's events.

**Atsuta Jingu** Established around 1,900 years ago, Atsuta Jingu in Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture) was founded to house a legendary sword that is one of Japan's Three Sacred Treasures.

**Meiji Jingu** Tokyo's premier Shinto shrine is a memorial to Emperor Meiji and his empress Shoken. Built in 1920, it is a grand, austere affair surrounded by 120,000 trees of 365 different species. The 12-m- (40-ft-) tall *torii* is the largest in Japan.

**Itsukushima Jinja** On Miyajima Island (Hiroshima Prefecture), Itsukushima Jinja is one of Japan's most recognisable shrines. Its low-slung halls, which rest on pier-like bases, and its striking vermilion *torii* rising out of the bay make it appear as if the shrine is floating on water.

**Tosho-gu** Breaking the austere mould of Shinto architecture is Tosho-gu in Nikko (Tochigi Prefecture), final resting place of the 17th-century shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa. Elaborately decorated with carving, gilding and lacquering, its standout feature is the glittering Yomei-mon (Sun Blaze Gate).

## THE THREE SACRED TREASURES OF JAPAN

Legend has it that the Three Sacred Treasures of Japan – the mirror Yata no Kagami (housed at Ise Jingu, Ise); the jade jewel Yasakani no Magatama (Imperial Palace, Tokyo); and the sword Kusanagi (Atsuta Jingu, Nagoya) – were brought to earth by the deity Ninigi-no-Mikoto, ancestor of the Japanese imperial line. Few know for sure if they exist, however, as they are never put on public display.



< The fox (*kitsune*) is a messenger of the kami Inari.

## SHOCKPROOF

The Great Buddha in Kamakura has shock absorbers in its base to protect it from earthquakes.







< Clockwise from far left: The Great Buddha in Kamakura (Kanagawa Prefecture) was cast in 1252; Buddhist monks in Japan often wear black robes; Kyoto's Kinkaku-ji is one of Japan's most famous Zen temples.



## 仏教

# BUDDHISM

Simplicity and serenity

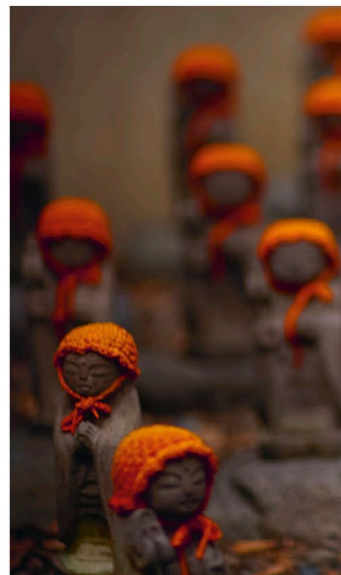
Based on the teachings of the Buddha, Buddhism in Japan has evolved to complement the native Shinto religion. Its belief system and morality permeate modern Japanese life, especially in the emphasis on mental control found in Zen Buddhism.

Buddhism, founded in India, arrived in Japan in the 6th century AD via China and Korea. Hundreds of different Buddhist movements, sects and subjects – some incorporating native Shinto beliefs – subsequently developed in the country. Contrasting beliefs appealed to different groups of nobility, samurai and commoners, who each adapted practices to their own ends. The most famous of these is Zen, which places an emphasis on *zazen* (sitting meditation) and self-help. Zen's austere aesthetic and paring of life back to its essentials has had a profound influence on Japanese arts and culture, from philosophical

concepts such as *wabi-sabi* and *mono no aware* to garden design to rituals such as the tea ceremony. Other important sects include Shingon, which incorporates Hindu elements such as hand gestures (*mudra*) and the chanting of mantras; Tendai, which places emphasis on selfless devotion; and Shugendo, an offshoot of Shingon that combines Buddhism and Shinto beliefs.

## PERSONAL FAITH

At least a third of Japan's population identify as Buddhist, and many more will visit Buddhist temples to attend festivals or ceremonies such as funerals. Temples rarely hold set services, so most worshippers visit at their convenience. Many Japanese homes will have a small Buddhist altar, and believers may also carry small charms that have been blessed by a priest for good luck.



## VISITING A TEMPLE

A visit to a Buddhist temple will transport you from the earthly world to that of the Buddha. Entrance is through the *sanmon*, an imposing main gate. Inspecting you from either side of the *sanmon* – in alcoves or on the wooden gates – will be figures of two fearsome Nio guardians, who protect the temple from evil spirits. Once you're inside the compound, the main focal point is the *hondo* (main hall), which houses the temple's principal image of Buddha and contains a table for offerings. (Some temples will enshrine other enlightened figures such as Kannon, Goddess of Mercy.) Prayers are made in silent contemplation, kneeling before the altar.

## PAGODAS

Some temple complexes contain pagodas, Chinese versions of the Indian *stupas* that enshrine relics of the Buddha – although few Japanese pagodas have this reliquary function. Many are constructed with five floors, which are said to represent the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind and sky.

## JIZO STATUES

Another common feature at temple complexes are red-bibbed Jizo statues. Jizo is the guardian of children and unborn babies, and helps children who have died pass into the next world. Bereaved parents often dress the statues in red bibs and baby clothes as part of the grieving process, while others leave clothes as offerings in thanks for saving their children.

## JAPAN'S MOST NOTABLE TEMPLES

Japan has no shortage of historic Buddhist temples, but the following stand out as the most monumental.

**Senso-ji** At the heart of Tokyo's Asakusa district, this venerable Buddhist temple was founded in the mid 7th century to enshrine a tiny gold image of the Goddess of Mercy that was caught in the net of two local

^ Left to right: Pilgrims to Buddhist temples typically dress in white; statues of the guardian Jizo often depict him holding a staff in one hand and a jewel talisman in the other.

TWO FEARSOME NIO  
WARRIORS PROTECT THE  
TEMPLE FROM EVIL SPIRITS.





fishermen. It is hugely atmospheric and perpetually thronged with visitors.

**Kotoku-in** The seaside town of Kamakura (Kanagawa Prefecture) is littered with temples, the most famous of which is Kotoku-in. Here you can come face to face with an 11-m- (36-ft-) tall bronze Daibutsu, a giant Buddha statue that has serenely withstood typhoons, tidal waves and even the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

**Kinkaku-ji** This iconic Zen Buddhist temple in Kyoto dates back to the 14th century. Today a national Special Historic Site, its centrepiece is the dazzling gold-leaf-coated pavilion that perches delicately at the edge of a lake.

**Kiyomizu-dera** Overlooking Kyoto, the 8th-century Kiyomizu-dera is famous for its capacious wooden terrace, built as a stage

for sacred dances. Also within the grounds is a small shrine dedicated to Okuninushi, the Shinto god of love. Legend has it that if you can traverse the 10 m (33 ft) between the two stones in front of the shrine with your eyes closed, you will find true love.

**Todai-ji** The Great Buddha Hall at Todai-ji, in the city of Nara (Nara Prefecture), is reputedly the largest wooden building on the planet. It has been rebuilt several times down the ages, but has always housed a huge, 16-m- (53-ft-) tall bronze statue of Buddha sat cross-legged.

**Kosan-ji** This technicolour temple on the island of Ikuchi-jima in Onomichi (Hiroshima Prefecture) is the creation of a local industrialist who wanted to honour his mother. Construction began in 1936 and lasted 30 years, during which time smaller-scale versions of famous Japanese temple buildings were erected in the grounds, along with an enormous statue of Kannon, the Goddess of Mercy.



> A visit to Kiyomizu-dera's pagoda is said to bring about an easy and safe childbirth.



### MIXED FATE

Omikuji are classified into different rankings, ranging from Dai-kichi (excellent luck) to Kyo (bad luck).



### LOCAL DESIGNS

Fox-shaped ema are popular at Inari shrines because of their link to the fox messenger of the kami Inari.





### USE-BY DATE

Omamori usually expire after a year, at which point they should be disposed of in a sacrificial fire.

おみくじと願い事

## FORTUNES AND CHARMS

*A little bit of luck*

A common sight at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, charms and fortunes can be purchased by anyone in need of a little extra luck from the gods. The most eye-catching talismans are the colourful *omamori*, small, silky cloth bags containing a prayer that has been blessed by a priest. Encouraging good fortune for everything from health and wealth to good exam results and safe driving, they can be worn next to the body or placed somewhere relevant – but it is vital not to open the bag to read the charm or it will not work. Other popular options include *ema*, small wooden votive plaques on which a prayer or wish is written before being hung at the temple or shrine for the *kami* (deity) to see and – hopefully – make come true. They are often printed with vibrant illustrations of auspicious animals and folk gods connected with the shrine.

Those seeking more immediate influence on their fate can draw an *omikuji* (fortune-telling slip). Usually this works by pulling a random stick out of a bundle, and then selecting the printed fortune slip that corresponds to the number on the stick; alternatively, you might get your fortune from a vending machine. Beware that not all fortunes are good – if you get a bad one, it's traditional to tie the slip to a pole or pine tree at the shrine to prevent the bad luck from following you.

< Clockwise from top left: An omikuji; omamori for sale; drawers containing omikuji; omamori come in brightly coloured bags; ema plaques at Rokuharamitsuji, Kyoto; fox-shaped ema





FUKUROKUJU



BENZAITEIN



BISHAMONTEN

## 七福神

# SEVEN LUCKY GODS

Folk deities of fortune

Like kids in the West knowing all about fairy tales, Japanese children are raised to be familiar with a quirky cast of ancient folk gods and mythical creatures. Here we meet the most popular of these, the Shichifukujin – the Seven Lucky Gods.

The Shichifukujin blend Shinto and Buddhist beliefs, and also have roots in Hindu and Taoist traditions. You will spot sculptures and paintings of the seven at temples and shrines throughout Japan, and the deities also pop up as talismans in bars, restaurants and shops. On New Year's Eve, it's traditional to sleep with a picture of the Shichifukujin under your pillow to bring luck for the year.

### THE SHICHIFUKUJIN

Travelling together in their treasure-laden ship *Takarabune*, the Shichifukujin are a

motley collection of colourful personalities with unique powers and characteristics.

**Fukurokuju** The patron of chess players, Fukurokuju is the god of wisdom, luck and longevity and happiness. His head is as big as his body and he carries a cane and a written scroll. He's often accompanied by a turtle, crow or deer, as these animals symbolise long life.

**Benzaiten** The only female of the seven, Benzaiten is a beautiful and artistic deity who is the patron of creative people such as artists, writers and geisha. She carries a *biwa* (a traditional lute-like instrument) and has a pet white snake.

**Bishamonten** Bishamonten is the warrior god and patron of fighters. He's dressed in armour and carries a pagoda in one hand and a spear in the other – a reference to his role as a protector of holy sites.





DAIKOKUTEN



EBISU



HOTEI



JUROUJIN

## THE SHICHIFUKUJIN ARE A MOTLEY COLLECTION OF COLOURFUL PERSONALITIES.

**Daikokuten** Daikokuten is the smiling, short-legged god of commerce who wears a hat and carries a bag full of swag. He is the patron of bankers, cooks and farmers, and is sometimes depicted in female form as Daikokunyo.

**Ebisu** God of prosperity and wealth, Ebisu is the only one of the seven who is purely Japanese. The patron of fishermen, he is identified by his fishing rod and is often used as a mascot at fish restaurants and shops.

**Hotei** Hotei, who represents fortune and popularity, is the patron of children and barmen. Too fat for his clothes, the cheerful, bald man carries a bag packed with fortunes over his shoulder. He is believed to be based on a real Chinese man of the 10th century called Kaishi.

**Juroujin** Juroujin is also a god of longevity and is patron to the elderly. Very tall with an elongated head and straggly white beard, he is often depicted with a tortoise and a 1,500-year-old crane.

*Sculptures of the Shichifukujin are a common sight at shrines and temples*



^ On New Year's Day, residents of Shirakawa (Gifu Prefecture) dress as the Shichifukujin and dance around the village to celebrate the arrival of the deities.

BENZAITEIN

## 美意識とデザイン

# AESTHETICS AND DESIGN

### Concepts of taste and style

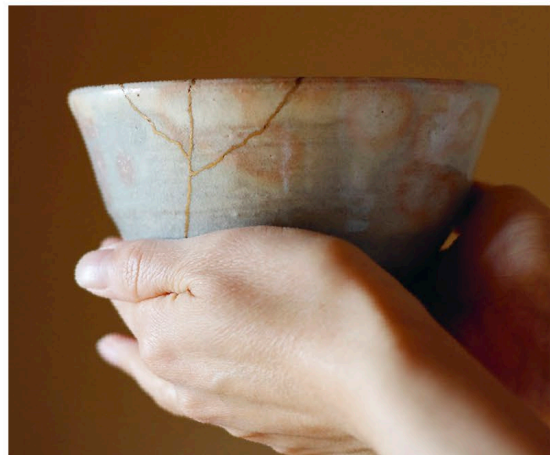
Deliberately embracing imperfection and asymmetry, Japanese aesthetics are underpinned by a set of ancient concepts that have inspired a unique approach to the creation of beautiful designs. The foundation of traditional Japanese aesthetics lies in Shinto and Buddhist beliefs, which emphasise simplicity and the ephemeral nature of life. The following principles are manifested in all aspects of Japanese design, whether it's an *ikebana* arrangement or the shape of a car.

#### WABI-SABI

Separately, *wabi* can be said to have the general meaning of rustic simplicity while *sabi* denotes a timeless beauty, an appealing patina. Combined, the hallmarks of a *wabi-sabi* design are that its attraction derives from it being incomplete, imperfect and impermanent. So, for example, rather

than being symmetrically round, a pottery bowl will be slightly wonky, its texture perhaps rough and uneven and its colour natural and muted rather than bright and bold. The Japanese general public might struggle to come up with a precise explanation of the concept, but they will instinctively know whether something is *wabi-sabi* by looking for such characteristics.

✓ A cracked bowl repaired by kintsugi can still be *wabi-sabi*.



✓ Influenced by the seasons, *ikebana* serves as a reminder of nature's transience.



#### MONO NO AWARE

Underlying *wabi-sabi* is the concept of *mono no aware*, which can be translated as “poignancy” and encapsulates an awareness of impermanence. This is the driving force behind the Japanese love of the ephemeral, such as the appreciation of cherry blossoms. It's a mixed feeling, as the joy of observing their fleeting beauty is tempered by the sadness that the blossoms will only last a short time.



◀ *Wabi-sabi can be applied to everyday life, with even a simple table setting providing a reminder that nothing is permanent.*

## IKI

Translating as “chic and stylish”, *iki* is a more recent concept of Japanese taste. It evolved out of the tastes of the merchant class that emerged in Japan from the 17th century onwards, and thus stands in opposition to the *wabi-sabi* philosophy that was promoted by the upper classes of royalty and samurai. Today, *iki* most visibly comes into play with ordinary, everyday products that have been thoughtfully and carefully designed – such as tea towels decorated with delicate *sashiko* embroidery – but it can also be detected in the sleek electronic goods produced by design studio Nendo or even the fictional works of writer Haruki Murakami.

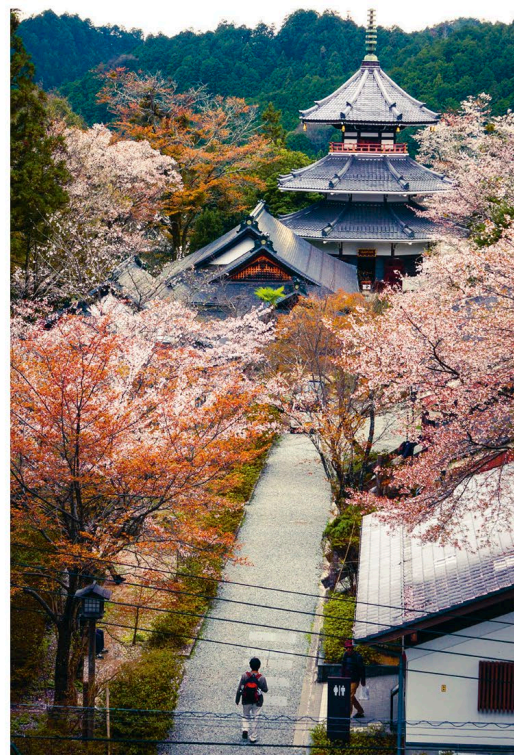
## KINTSUGI

Fix your broken pottery *wabi-sabi*-style with *kintsugi* – a technique that embraces imperfection by using golden glue to highlight the cracks.

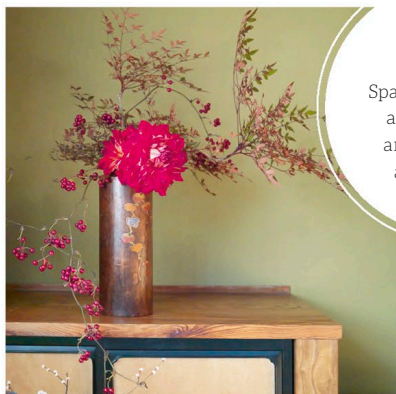
## SHIBUI

Distinct from *wabi-sabi* is *shibui*, an adjective that conveys the concept of subtle, understated beauty and refinement. While many *wabi-sabi* objects and designs are *shibui*, not everything that could be described as *shibui* will be *wabi-sabi*. There are said to be seven possible elements to *shibui*: simplicity, implicitness, modesty, naturalness, everydayness, imperfection, and silence – nothing that is gaudy or overly flashy in its design.

◃ *Japan's annual cherry blossoms perfectly encapsulate the joy and sadness inherent in mono no aware.*







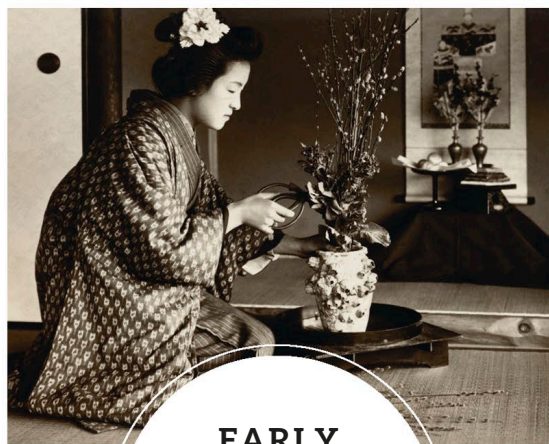
### SPACE

Space is as dynamic a component of an arrangement as the foliage.



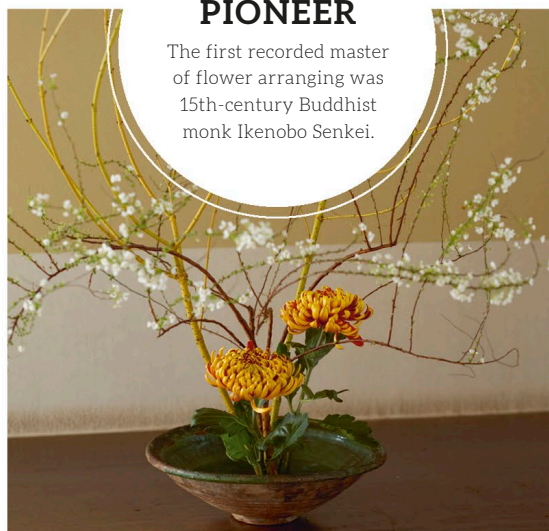
### 3 ELEMENTS

The longest stem represents heaven and the shortest earth, with the middle stem symbolising man.



### EARLY PIONEER

The first recorded master of flower arranging was 15th-century Buddhist monk Ikenobo Senkei.







生け花

## IKEBANA

*Bringing flowers to life*

A reminder of *mono no aware*, *ikebana* is the arrangement of flowers and other foliage into a living sculpture. The practice originated from early flower offerings at Buddhist temples, and was developed by Buddhist monks for use in the tea ceremony. In its simplest form, *ikebana* is a composition of just three elements, but styles have changed dramatically over the years. In the Edo Period, the *rikka* ("standing flowers") style, consisting of many-branched structures representing Buddhist cosmology, became vogue, followed by the simpler *shoka* style of one or more plants focusing on the plant's inner beauty.

Today, there is a mind-boggling variety of *ikebana* schools. Ikenobo is the oldest, adhering to the strict rules of *rikka* and *shoka*. The Ohara School, founded during the Meiji Period to incorporate use of Western flowers, revolutionised *ikebana* with the new *moribana* style, where flowers are "piled up" (*moru*) in flat containers to represent natural landscapes. Sogetsu was founded in 1927 in the belief that *ikebana* should be enjoyed anywhere, any time, using any material. More modern schools include Jiyuka (freestyle), without set rules and limited only by the artist's imagination.

< Symbolism and seasonality are key considerations in the creation of an *ikebana* arrangement, which results in a wide array of sizes and compositions.



### LEARN

The Ohara and Sogetsu schools both offer *ikebana* classes in Tokyo.



日本家屋

# TRADITIONAL HOMES

Naturally practical

Filtered through the designs of temples and shrines and influenced by styles from mainland Asia, traditional Japanese architecture is defined by an emphasis on natural materials, a reverence for careful craftsmanship and calming, well-proportioned spaces.

In a land prone to earthquakes, buildings made from natural materials that are able to flex stand a better chance of withstanding a tremor than bricks and glass. Fortunately, Japan's ancient forests were a ready source of such materials, providing builders with timber, bamboo and plant fibres. The natural beauty of the wooden elements was showcased by leaving the grain unpainted, and master carpenters became skilled at finding ways to join the beams of a house without using nails. Although largely unadorned, houses sometimes had decorative features carved into roof lintels and window frames.

Bamboo was used for rafters, ceilings, fences and external blinds (*sudare*), while the interior space was divided as necessary by *shoji* (movable screens) and *fusuma* (sliding doors). Panels of opaque *washi* (Japanese paper) in the *shoji* both allowed

in light and cast calming shadows. This clever combination of design features and sustainable materials suited to the Japanese climate – with extremes of hot and cold weather and high humidity – enabled the interior to stay refreshingly cool in the summer and warm and cosy in winter.

## CALMING INTERIOR

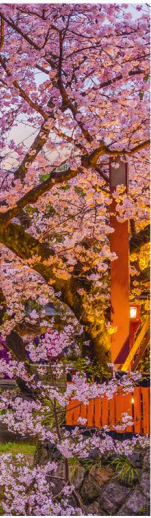
Visiting a traditional Japanese home – or, even better, staying in one of the country's many *ryokan* (traditional inns) – feels like stepping into a meticulously designed work of art. You enter first through the *genkan*, a porch area that acts as a clear point of separation between the outside world and the domestic sphere. Remove your shoes here, then step up to the wooden surface of the main entrance corridor and proceed into the house. Some larger houses may also have an entrance for visitors on the *engawa* – a raised wooden veranda that

^ Left to right:  
Shirakawa is famed for  
its traditional buildings;  
interiors are designed  
to work in harmony  
with the building's  
natural surroundings.



VISITING A TRADITIONAL  
HOME IS LIKE STEPPING INTO  
A METICULOUS WORK OF ART.





## TRAVEL BACK IN TIME

A great example of a traditional upper-class home is Nomurake in Kanazawa (Ishikawa Prefecture), while Chiran (Kagoshima Prefecture) and the old travellers' rest stops of Tsumago (Nagano Prefecture) and Magome (Gifu Prefecture) feature whole streets of traditional wooden houses. In the countryside, you'll come across *minka*, the homes of farmers and artisans, often with steeply raked thatched roofs: the most famous are in Shirakawa (Gifu Prefecture) and Gokayama (Toyama Prefecture).

runs around the outside edge of the house; here, you stand on the stone step to remove your shoes. The *engawa* acts as a corridor that can either be left open as a place to sit and enjoy the surroundings in good weather or be sealed off by storm shutters.

At the heart of the house is the *irori*, a sunken hearth where charcoal is burned for heating and cooking. Reception and living rooms are heated in winter by a

*kotatsu*, a low wooden table with a heater underneath and a fringe of a blanket or futon under which you can tuck your legs. Also in the main reception room will be the *tokonoma* – a recessed space for displaying artistic items such as a hanging calligraphy scroll and an *ikebana* flower display. These items are often changed to reflect the seasons.

✓ Seating inside the home is on cushions on the floor.



## TATAMI

The distinctive and pleasant smell of a Japanese room – not unlike freshly cut grass – comes from the *tatami*. These rectangular padded straw-and-rush mats are used for flooring, providing a soft surface on which to sit and sleep (cushions and futons are used instead of chairs and beds). *Tatami* come in an aspect ratio of 2 to 1 and have different standard sizes depending on the region in which they are made: Tokyo *tatami* mats, for example, are smaller than those in Kyoto. They continue to be popular even in modern Japanese homes, where at least one room may be covered in *tatami*, and room sizes are often still quoted in terms of the number of *tatami* mats that would cover the floor.



## 日本庭園

# GARDENS

Snow, moon and flowers

Designed to reflect the seasons, the arrangement of Japanese gardens draws inspiration from the Shinto love of nature and the Buddhist concept of paradise. Classic Japanese gardens can be roughly divided into four types, but they all share many components and principles.

### HEAVEN ON EARTH

Paradise gardens are designed to evoke the Pure Land, or Buddhist paradise, with Buddha meditating on an island in the middle of a lotus pond. One of the most famous examples is Byodo-in near Kyoto, with a pond that represents the Western Ocean, where the dead are reborn.

### A SPACE FOR MEDITATION

*Karesansui* or “dry-landscape” gardens are also commonly known as Japanese rock or Zen gardens, because they often are part of the landscaping of Buddhist Zen temples. Intended to provide a focus for meditation, carefully chosen stones are grouped amid an expanse of raked gravel. The Adachi Museum of Art in Yasugi (Shimane Prefecture) has won awards for its dry-landscape garden, but Ryoan-ji in Kyoto has perhaps the most iconic



^ Zen gardens such as Ryoan-ji in Kyoto use gravel to represent bodies of water.





< Kenroku-en in Kanazawa is designed to be equally stunning in every season.

*karesansui* garden, featuring enigmatic rock formations that appear like miniature mountainous islands amid a sea of smooth pebbles raked into linear patterns.

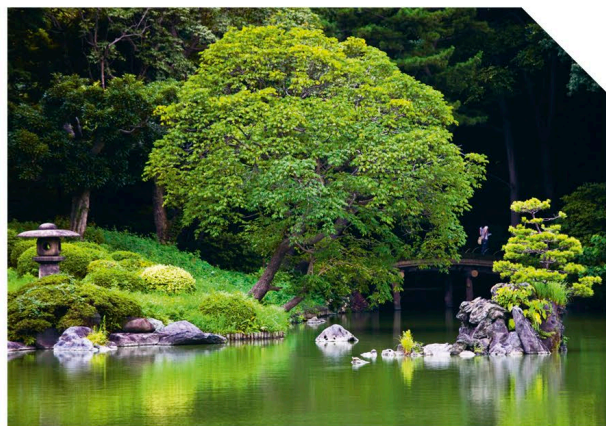
## CHANGING VISTAS

*Kaiyu-shiki* or “stroll” gardens are designed for walking, and became popular during the Edo Period (1603–1868) at the villas of the nobility. Designed to be enjoyed as you follow a path clockwise around a central pond from one carefully composed scene to another, a beautiful example is Tokyo’s Rikugi-en, where the scenery is inspired by classical poetry.

## TEA GARDENS

A *roji* (meaning “dewy ground”) is the simple garden of a Japanese tea house. Designed to resemble a mountain trail leading from reality into the magical world of the tea ceremony, its greenery is mainly moss, ferns and evergreens, though there may also be trees such as maple or plum.

✓ Rikugi-en in Tokyo recreates 88 landscapes in miniature from famous poems.



## JAPAN'S TOP GARDENS

Three gardens rank above all others in Japan, as they are said to perfectly express *setsugekka*. Translating as “snow”, “moon” and “flowers”, this term encapsulates the beautiful aspects of nature that you can experience in each of the gardens at different points in the year.

- ① *Kenroku-en* This stroll garden in Kanazawa (Ishikawa Prefecture) embodies six virtues of the ideal garden: spaciousness, serenity, venerability, scenic views, subtle design and coolness.
- ② *Koraku-en* Completed in 1700, this scenic stroll garden in Okayama (Okayama Prefecture) features a path circumnavigating a central pond, which contains three islands that replicate the scenery around Lake Biwa near Kyoto.
- ③ *Kairaku-en* Located in Mito (Ibaraki Prefecture), this garden is famous for its 100 different types of plum trees that explode into blossom in February. It is unique in that it was designed as a public park rather than a private garden.



盆栽

# BONSAI

*Miniature masterpieces*

Bonsai, meaning simply “plantings in a container”, is the art of cultivating miniature trees in shallow pots. Originating in China, tree miniaturisation was brought to Japan about 1,000 years ago, where it gained popularity as a way to capture the beauty of nature and bring it closer for personal enjoyment. Bonsai are not dwarfs by nature. Rather, any seedling tree or shrub confined to a small container, its growth controlled by trimming, pruning and pinching, can be cultivated as a bonsai. Conifers like junipers and black pines, deciduous trees like Japanese maples, flowering trees such as the Japanese wisteria, and fruit-bearing trees like apple and plum – all can be manipulated to suggest an entire landscape. Through a practitioner’s vision, patience and skilful hands, a gnarled old pine conjures up relentless snowstorms, a slanted trunk looks like it was buffeted by strong winds, a drooping tree appears to hang over a sheer cliff.

To see these living works of art, you can visit dedicated bonsai villages at Kinashi in Takamatsu (Kagawa Prefecture) and Omiya in Saitama (Saitama Prefecture). Saitama is also home to the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, which houses an astonishing 1,000-year-old Ezo spruce named Todoroki (Thunder’s Roar). Standing just 94 cm (37 in.) tall, its decayed trunk and carefully cultivated, brilliant-green canopy have an ethereal beauty imbued with the aesthetic of *wabi-sabi*.









日本画

# PAINTING

The evolution of artistic style

Encompassing a wide range of genres, styles and techniques, Japanese painting has evolved as a masterful blend of native aesthetics and outside artistic influences.

## EPIC ILLUSTRATIONS

Having largely taken its artistic cues from China, Japanese painting began developing its own unique style with the start of the Heian era in 794. The movement of Japan's capital from Nara to present-day Kyoto unleashed a flourishing of creativity, out of which emerged a new type of painting known as *emaki* – narrative picture scrolls depicting legends, historical tales and romances. One of the richest styles of *emaki* was *yamato-e*, characterised by its stylised figures, floating clouds of colour, and innovative aerial interior views.

## MONOCHROMATIC SIMPLICITY

The 14th century saw the popularisation of a more pared-back style in the form of monochromatic ink and wash paintings. Imported from China, the technique was initially used to decorate Zen Buddhist temples – its simplicity and fluid, imperfect nature chimed perfectly with the concept of *wabi-sabi*. Masters of this style include Sesshu, whose most famous work is the 15-m- (49-ft-) long *Sansui Chokan* scroll painting of the four seasons, held at the Mori Museum in Hofu (Yamaguchi).

THE SHOGUNS DEMANDED  
STYLISTICALLY LAVISH ART  
THAT WAS BIG AND GRAND.

^ This Kano school painting, *Amusements at Higashiyama* in Kyoto (c. 1620), shows people enjoying cherry blossom season.





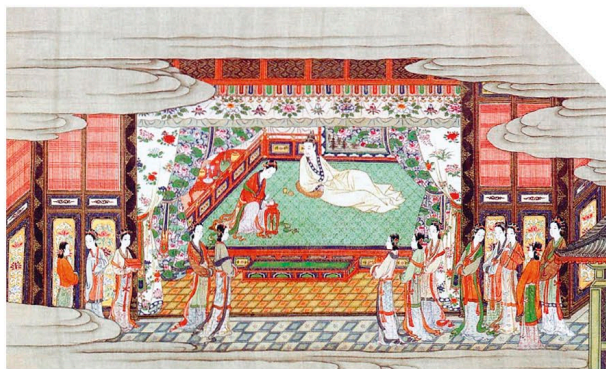
Prefecture) and Shubun, whose *Reading in a Bamboo Grove* is on display at the Tokyo National Museum.

### KANO'S GLITTERING GRANDEUR

From the 15th to 19th centuries, the Kano school of painting was dominant. Brightly coloured and stylistically lavish, often incorporating areas of gold or silver leaf, this style blossomed with the rise of the shoguns and their demand for art that was big and grand. The paintings were often on *byōbu* (folding screens) and *fusuma* (sliding doors) – a beautiful example is the dreamlike *Red and White Plum Blossoms* by Ogata Korin (1658–1716), held in the collection of the MOA Museum of Art in Atami (Shizuoka Prefecture).

### WESTERN INFLUENCES

In the late 19th century, traditional styles of Japanese painting were pushed aside in favour of *Yōga* (Western-style painting). In reaction to these imported styles came the *Nihonga* movement, which combined traditional painting techniques with more modern subject matter. You can see examples of these distinctive works at the Yamatane Museum of Art in Tokyo.



### SCROLL THROUGH ART HISTORY

The oldest surviving *yamato-e* are four 12th-century handscrolls of *The Tale of Genji*. One of the world's earliest novels, its exquisite illustrations beautifully convey the ambience of court culture of the time. Three of the scrolls are part of the collection of the Tokugawa Art Museum in Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture), and one is held by Tokyo's Gotoh Museum.

^ Chogonka Emaki by Kano Sansetsu is in the *yamato-e* style of scroll painting.

## 木版画

# WOODBLOCK PRINTS

Pictures of the floating world

Literally meaning “pictures of the floating world”, *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints, and also paintings) take their name from the colourful scenes of 17th- to 19th-century Japan that they depict.

Developed as affordable art for the Japanese mass market, *ukiyo-e* captured the sensory pleasures of everyday life. Favourite subjects included famous geisha, kabuki actors and sumo wrestlers, as well as renowned townscapes. Picturesque landscape views were also sought after –

not least because of the vicarious pleasure they provided in an age when few could travel to see locations themselves. Hugely popular throughout Japan, *ukiyo-e* were also a big hit abroad, influencing Western art movements such as Impressionism and Art Nouveau and artists such as Manet, Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec.

The first *ukiyo-e* prints are believed to have been produced by Hishikawa Moronobu, whose clean drawing style set the standard for artists to follow. The most

✓ Hokusai's The Great Wave off Kanagawa can be viewed at Tokyo's Sumida Hokusai Museum.





## KEY UKIYO-E ARTISTS



### ▽ KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI (1760-1849)

As well as his celebrated Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji series, Hokusai is also known for drawing shunga (erotic images).



### ▽ UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE (1797-1858)

Hiroshige is best known for his landscape series Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido and One Hundred Famous Views of Edo.



### △ HISHIKAWA MORONOBU (1618-94)

The earliest ukiyo-e master, this prolific artist is best known for his depiction of female beauties.

### △ UTAGAWA KUNISADA (1786-1864)

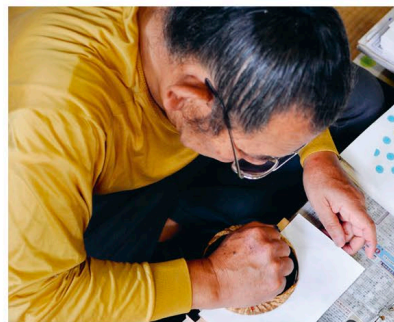
Kunisada was hugely popular during his lifetime, with a reputation that surpassed all of his contemporaries.



famous of these is Katsushika Hokusai, whose *Great Wave off Kanagawa* (part of his *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* series) has become a globally recognised icon of the genre. Other influential artists include Utagawa Hiroshige, an ukiyo-e master who created over 8,000 works during his lifetime, and Utagawa Kunisada (also known as Utagawa Toyokuni III), famed for his actor prints and one of the most prolific and commercially successful ukiyo-e artists in late 19th century Japan.

## AN INTRICATE PROCESS

Printing ukiyo-e is a multi-layered process that involves multiple stages and a variety of craftspeople. It begins with the artist, who designs the image and breaks it down into the different colours that will be used. Next comes the woodblock carver, who transfers each separate colour image to a series of woodblocks. The printer then uses each of the blocks to make the final complete image, starting with the lightest colour and ending with the darkest. Each block has registration marks to help the printer line the colours up.



△ The graphic style of ukiyo-e printing is still popular today.

## UKIYO-E IMMERSION

Immerse yourself in the floating world with fabulous collections of ukiyo-e at the Japan Ukiyoe Museum in Matsumoto (Nagano Prefecture) and the Ota Memorial Museum of Art in Tokyo. There are museums devoted to Hokusai in Tokyo and Obuse (Nagano Prefecture), and one to Hiroshige in Ena (Gifu Prefecture).

DEVELOPED AS AFFORDABLE ART, UKIYO-E CAPTURED THE SENSORY PLEASURES OF EVERYDAY LIFE.



## 陶芸

# CERAMICS

Regional interpretations of an ancient craft

Rustic and imperfect, delicate and finely patterned: Japanese ceramics come in many beautiful forms. They are made today by skilled artisans following centuries of tradition.

Fuelled by the central role of ceramics in cuisine and in the tea ceremony, myriad styles have developed in different areas. Each one incorporates distinct techniques and practices, which are often related to the properties of the local clay.

LOCALS BELIEVE THE CLAY  
IMPROVES THE TASTE OF  
FOOD AND DRINK.

### MASHIKO

Mashiko clay is rich in silicate and iron, which makes it not only easy to shape but also fire-resistant. With around 250

potteries and 50 ceramics shops, Mashiko (Tochigi Prefecture) is one of Japan's top pottery towns. The area is particularly known for its rustic wares made from red clay, popularised by Mashiko native Shoji Hamada, a major figure in the *mingei* folk art movement.

### ARITA

In the 16th century, Korean potters were forcibly brought to Arita on the island of Kyushu to share their knowledge, including the technique of coloured overglazing. Their legacy of thin, light and durable porcelain – also known as Imari-ware – is notable for its delicate decoration, commonly featuring blue and white floral patterns. One of the oldest manufacturers is Arita Porcelain Lab, established in 1804 and still producing both traditional and contemporary designs.



## IMBE

Bizen ceramics have been produced in Imbe (Okayama Prefecture) for over a millennium. A warm, reddish-brown colour, they are typically made from an earthy, iron-rich clay. Locals believe the clay has extra-special qualities, improving the taste of food and drink and helping extend the life of flowers kept in Bizen vases.

## YOMITAN

The balmy islands of Okinawa are home to the Tsuboya style of ceramic, produced there since the 16th century. Tsuboya is a district in the city of Naha, where the potteries were historically located before the kilns were moved to the Yomitan peninsula in the 20th century. The simple, unglazed *arayachi* style is typically used for large storage vessels, while the more colourful glazed *joyachi* style tends to be reserved for decorative tableware.

## TOBE

Manufacture of the distinctive ceramics in Tobe (Ehime Prefecture) on the island of Shikoku has changed little since they were first introduced in the 18th century. The beautiful indigo-on-white designs are still skilfully hand-painted by local craftspeople.

### BUY YOUR OWN CERAMIC TREASURE

Pottery festivals provide an excellent opportunity to find unique ceramic souvenirs. Twice a year, in spring and autumn, Tobe hosts the Tobe-Yaki Ware Festival, when some 60 stalls sell the town's eye-catching indigo-and-white ceramics. Mashiko also hosts annual major pottery fairs at the end of April, early May and in early November.

### ANCIENT ART FORM

Ceramics-making in Japan started during the Jomon era around 15,000 years ago, with earthenware vessels decorated with distinctive rope-like patterns.

*Painted by hand,  
each Tobe design  
is unique*



TOBE



Lacquerware from Wajima often uses gold decoration



^ Left to right: The most common lacquerware colours are black and red; traditionally, wood used for marquetry is not stained or coloured.

## 伝統工芸品

# DECORATIVE CRAFTS

## Art in the everyday

In Japan there is no rigid distinction between arts and crafts – both have a long, distinguished history and are equally prized. Traditional decorative crafts still thrive throughout the country, with the most skilled practitioners revered as Living National Treasures.

Across the country you can visit markets and workshops brimming with an array of beautiful decorative crafts – some even offer the opportunity to try your hand at making your own. The following are some of most popular types.

### LACQUERWARE

Glossy Japanese lacquerware (*shikki*) is a joy to behold. Originating over 5,000 years ago, it is made by covering wood with

layers of lacquer (derived from tree sap) and then burnishing it to a smooth, lustrous finish. The elegant lacquerware from Wajima (Ishikawa Prefecture) displays beautiful techniques such as *chinkin*, inlaid with gold, and *maki-e*, decorated with metallic powders, while the area of Tsugaru (Aomori Prefecture) in the north of Honshu specialises in a technique that uses multiple layers of different-coloured lacquers to create a mottled effect. Negoro lacquerware, from Wakayama Prefecture in west Japan, features an outer red layer that slowly wears away to reveal the black lacquer beneath. Quite apart from the artistic skills involved, a high degree of technical skill is required by artisans as the lacquer is poisonous until it dries.



## MARQUETRY

West of Tokyo, the hot springs resort of Hakone (Kanagawa Prefecture) is known for its intricate marquetry (*yosegi-zaiku*), where paper-thin slices of local wood are used to create elaborate geometric designs. Traditionally used for puzzle boxes and bowls, *yosegi-zaiku* is being adopted by a new generation of artisans on everything from mobile phone cases to jewellery.

## METALWORK

The neighbouring towns of Tsubame and Sanjo in Niigata Prefecture have been centres of metalworking for centuries. The area's speciality is Tsuiki copperware, in which a single piece of local copperplate is hand-hammered into the shape of the desired object. Gyokusendo workshop in Tsubame is particularly special, having been designated an Intangible Cultural Property by Japan's Agency of Cultural Affairs.

## PAPERMAKING

Made by hand from plant fibres, *washi* (Japanese paper) encapsulates *wabi-sabi* in its irregular, unique and natural appearance. Used for items such as door screens and lampshades, it comes in many different types. *Hosokawa washi*, known for its strength and durability, is made from *kozo* (mulberry) fibres, and uses petals, grasses and wood ash to create different colours and textures. *Sekishu-banshi*, made in Shimane Prefecture and valued for its toughness, adds Oriental paperbush, *gampi* (a clove-like bush) and fermented hibiscus roots to the mix.

> Washi has been made in Japan for over 1,000 years.



## DOLLMAKING

In Japan, dolls (*ningyo*) have a much wider cultural appeal than just as children's toys. Everyone buys papier-mâché *daruma*, roly-poly red dolls modelled after Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism. These good-luck talismans are often sold with blank eyes: the idea is you paint in one eye when you set a goal and the other when the goal is achieved. Far more elaborate are *hina* dolls, dressed in the flowing, ornate robes of court nobles from the Heian Period (794–1185) and made for display during the *hina-matsuri* festival on 3 March.

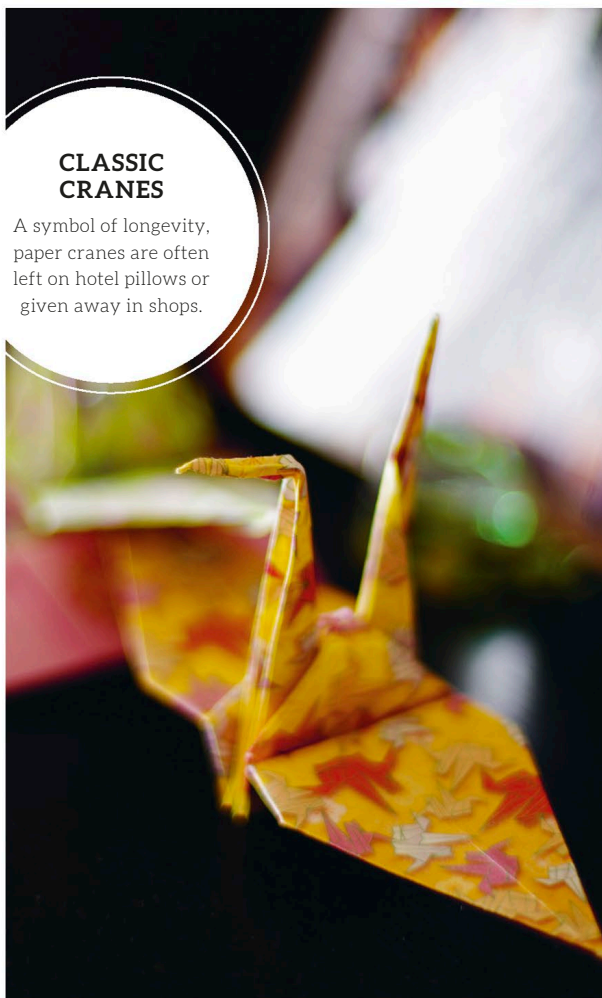
^ Colourful daruma dolls are a symbol of perseverance and luck





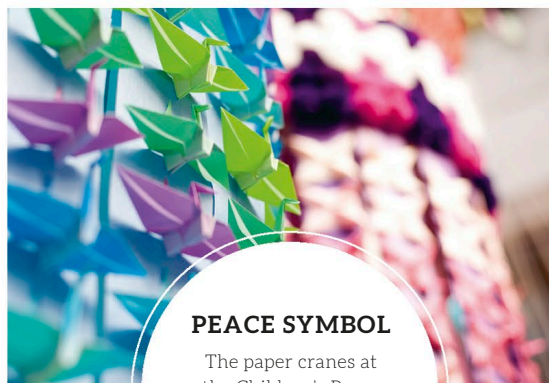
### KEY SKILL

Origami is taught in schools to help children learn geometry, spatial visualisation and fine motor skills.



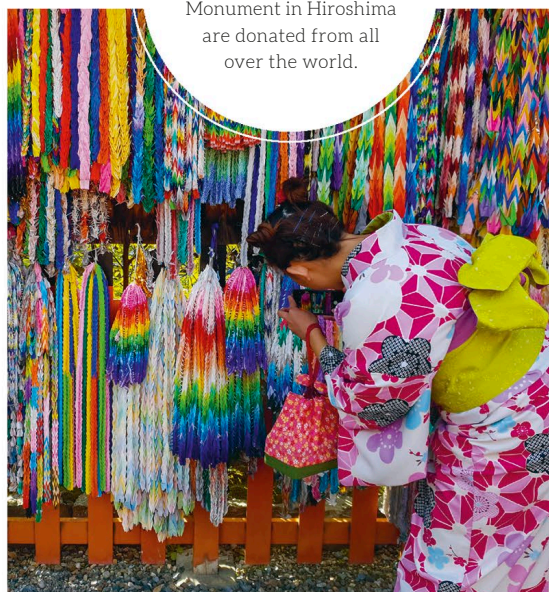
### CLASSIC CRANES

A symbol of longevity, paper cranes are often left on hotel pillows or given away in shops.



### PEACE SYMBOL

The paper cranes at the Children's Peace Monument in Hiroshima are donated from all over the world.







折り紙

## ORIGAMI

*The art of paper folding*

It starts with one simple fold, then another and another, until a single sheet of paper is crafted into an elegant design, all without the aid of scissors or glue. Originating in religious ceremonies, the practice of origami blossomed into an art during the Edo Period (1603–1868), when written instructions were published and sturdy *washi* (Japanese paper) became widely available. Interest waned at the turn of the 20th century, but was reignited by the fanciful creations of origami grandmaster Akira Yoshizawa. Today, origami is a popular hobby, and there are whole museums dedicated to the art – Nippon Origami Museum in Kaga (Ishikawa Prefecture) is the world's largest and one of the many places to take classes. Origami's techniques have also found unexpected uses in technical applications, such as rocket solar panels that can be folded for launch, unfurled in space and then refolded for the return journey.

One of the most iconic origami designs is that of the crane. Considered auspicious in Japan, they are associated with the belief that anyone who can fold 1,000 cranes will have their wish granted. The most famous example of this story is Hiroshima's Sadako Sasaki, who folded more than 1,000 cranes in the hope of recovering from leukemia caused by the 1945 atomic bomb. She did not survive, but is memorialised at the Children's Peace Monument in Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park, decorated with streamers of paper cranes.

< The art of creating origami designs was first formally described in the book *Hidden senbazuru orikata* (How to Fold a Thousand Cranes), published in 1797.



### RELAX

Origami is widely recognised as a way to reduce stress.



> Japanese is traditionally written vertically, from top to bottom.



書道

# CALLIGRAPHY

The way of writing

In the Western world, calligraphy (*shodo*) is associated with penmanship, but in Japan it's considered an art. The angle and pressure of the brush on paper, the gradation of the black ink, the journey of the stroke, and the position of the script all reflect the artist's pursuit of beauty and self-expression.

Japan had no form of writing system until Chinese ideograms, derived from pictographs, were introduced around the 5th century. Known as *kanji*, each Japanese ideogram has its own meaning or meanings, and they can also be combined to create new words. For example, 木 (*ki*) on its own means tree, but three together, 森 (*mori*), mean forest. However, because the Japanese language – indigenous to Japan

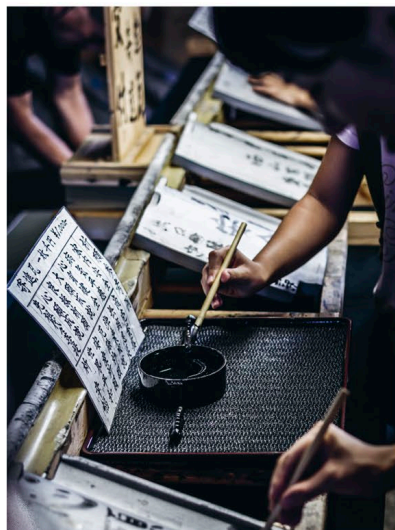
and unrelated to any other tongue – cannot be expressed entirely in *kanji*, two syllabic scripts were added. *Hiragana* is used for grammatical endings and some original Japanese words, while *katakana* is for all foreign words and names. Today's written Japanese is a combination of all three writing systems. Calligraphers, meanwhile, can choose from a variety of different *kanji* styles, including *kaisho* (regular block script), *gyosho* (semi-cursive) and *sosho* (cursive).

Japanese children study *kanji* throughout their time at school, and calligraphy is also part of the national curriculum – students are taught *shodo* from around the age of nine, and in high school there are often *shodo* clubs.



^ The kanji for "winter" in the *sosho* style of calligraphy.





## PUTTING BRUSH TO PAPER

In recent years, performance calligraphy has caught the imagination of teenage *shodo* clubs across Japan, in which participants write oversize calligraphy using big brushes in sync to music. The most famous contest is the annual Shodo Performance Koshien in Ehime Prefecture, which inspired the Japanese film *Shodo Girls: Watashitachi no Koshien* (2010).

Today, children and adults alike take private calligraphy lessons, while introductory courses for foreigners are available in Tokyo, Kyoto and other cities. National museums and private galleries, such as the Tokyo National Museum and the Calligraphy Museum in Tokyo, stage regular exhibitions of calligraphy, and there are even ponds with *kanji* shapes, such as the one in Kyoto's Saihoji temple moss garden that is shaped like the *kanji* for "heart".

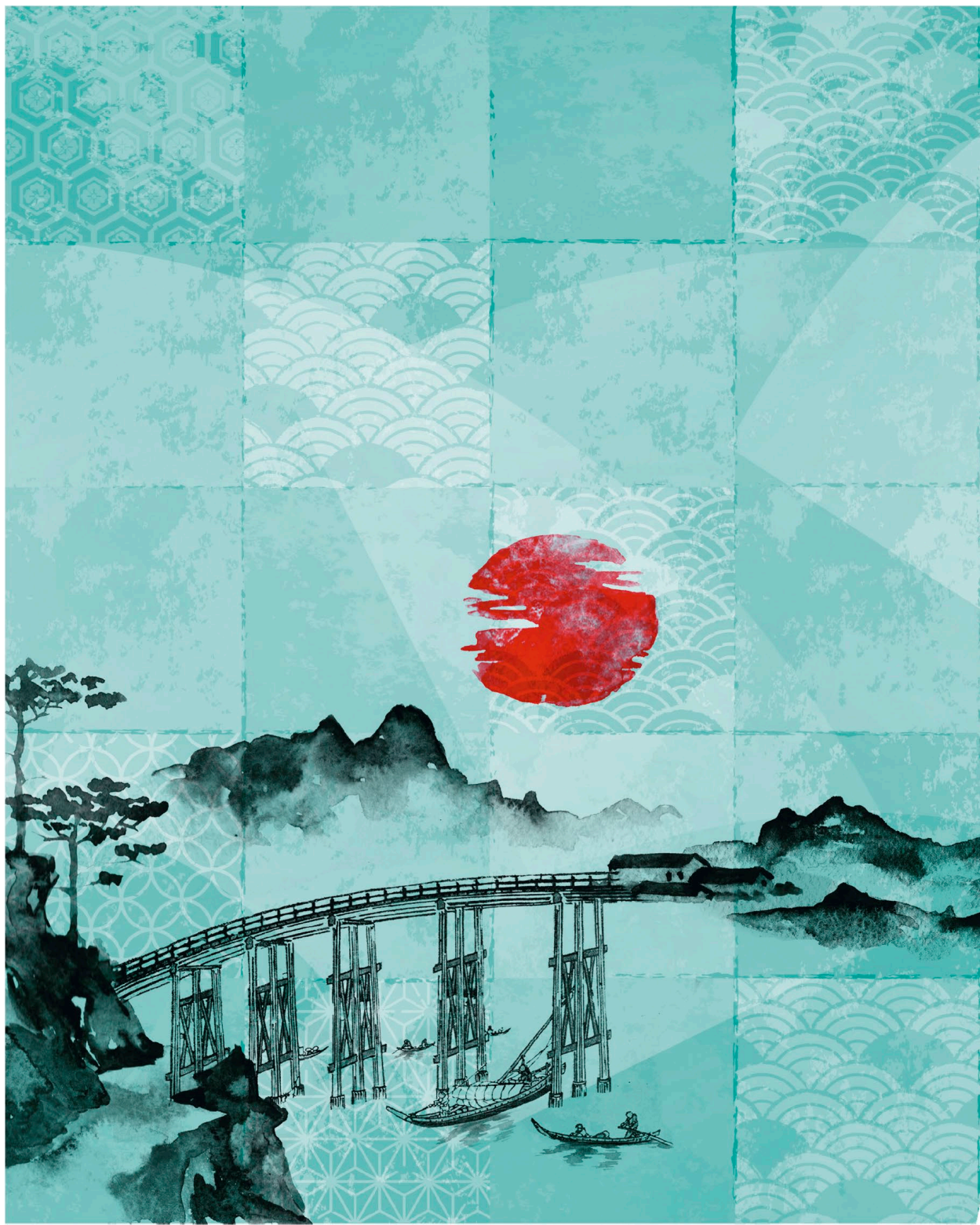
Writing a personal calligraphy for the New Year (*kakizome*) is a popular custom in Japan; traditionally the *kakizome* is burned two weeks later, and if the wind lifts the burning ashes it is said to be a sign that the skills of the writer will improve.

^ Traditional writing implements consist of a brush, ink, inkstone and a water vessel.

> Early calligraphy styles were developed by Buddhist monks.









The background of the page is a teal color with large, abstract geometric shapes. On the left and right sides, there are vertical bands featuring a repeating pattern of white, stylized star or snowflake motifs. The central area is a solid teal color.

## 革新的な日本 INNOVATIVE JAPAN

Japan is often associated with futuristic cityscapes from science fiction, and it's no wonder. Just visit Tokyo's Shibuya Crossing at nightfall and you might imagine you're on the set of another *Blade Runner* sequel. With more and more visitors coming to Japan, the country is eager to show off its forward-looking approach to technology. It's building a maglev Shinkansen bullet train between Tokyo and Osaka and a network of hydrogen stations for fuel-cell vehicles, and the government has launched a plan for a super-smart society, in which artificial intelligence, robotics, and big data will become ubiquitous, changing the lives of citizens. For travellers to Japan, however, it can be the little things that impress: a warm toilet seat; trains that run on time; an airport luggage receptacle that automatically dispatches your suitcases. Quirky but dependable, Japanese technology is always an eye-opening experience.

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring innovative Japan

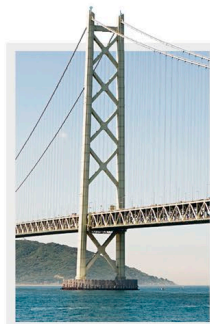
Innovative technologies can be found everywhere in Japan, whether it's a heated table or an earthquake-proof vending machine. For an overview of science and engineering past and present, your best bets are museums in or near big cities, such as Tokyo's Miraikan and Nagoya's Toyota Commemorative Museum of Technology, while research centres like Science Square TSUKUBA will give you a taste of the future.

**4.2M**

vending machines can be found across Japan – approximately one per every 30 people.

## STIRRING SOUNDS

Renowned for its art museums, the island of Naoshima is also home to inspiring soundscape art installations: Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's "Storm House" recreates a storm inside a traditional Japanese house.



## ^ ISLAND LINKS

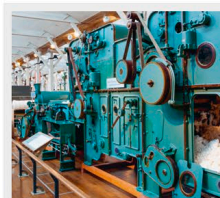
Connecting Kobe on Honshu to Awaji Island, the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge is a wonder of engineering with a main span of nearly 2 km (1 mile).

**NAGOYA**

**KOBE**

**AWAJI**

**NAOSHIMA**



## < TITAN OF INDUSTRY

Centred on Nagoya, Japan's industrial heartland is home to the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Technology and Industry, and also the Toyota Kaikan Museum, where you can join a tour of ultra-efficient assembly plants staffed by industrial robots.



## OUT OF THIS WORLD

Japan's Hayabusa probe was the first to successfully retrieve samples from an asteroid in deep space.



## < AT THE CUTTING EDGE

Science Square

TSUKUBA is a showcase for innovation from the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, a major R&D centre. Experience exhibits on robotics and other groundbreaking ideas.

TSUKUBA

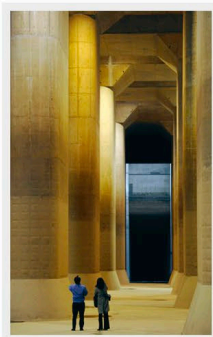
KASUKABE

TOKYO

TSURU

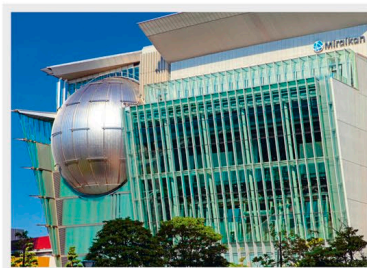
## ✓ WEATHER DEFENCES

The Metropolitan Area Outer Underground Discharge Channel is an underground flood-control facility that protects the capital. Touring this spectacular structure feels like visiting an extraterrestrial cathedral.



## < INNOVATION HUB

The artificial island of Odaiba in Tokyo is home to Miraikan (the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation), as well as the Panasonic Center Tokyo, which displays futuristic lifestyle technologies and has a Nintendo gaming area.



## > THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL

The next-generation maglev Shinkansen bullet train will travel about 500 km/h (300 mph), almost twice as fast as current models. You can watch test runs at the Yamanashi Prefectural Maglev Exhibition Center.



## SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Toilets in Japan can have as many as 30 control buttons for functions including bidets and seat warmers.

> The Tokyo Skytree  
dominates the  
capital's skyline.

エンジニアリングの驚異

# ENGINEERING MARVELS

Forging cutting-edge beauty

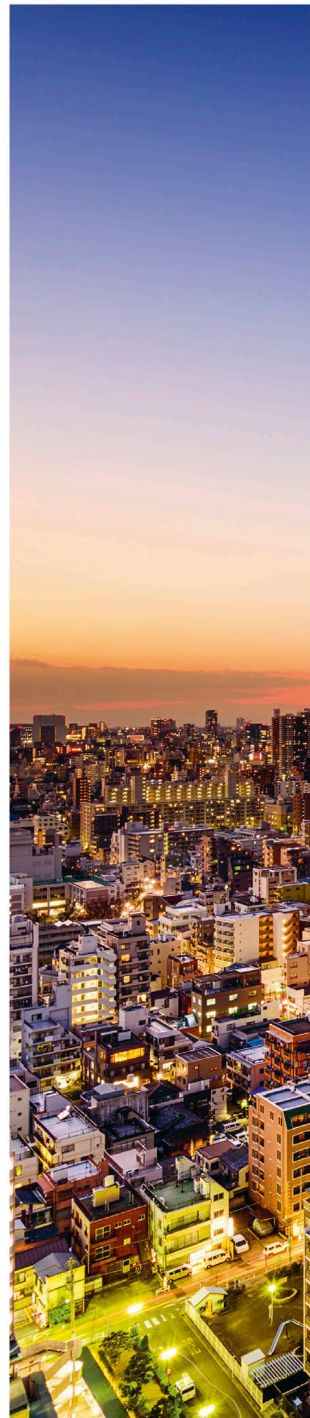
Japanese engineers dream big. From super-fast trains to buildings that help you live longer, Japan has been at the cutting edge of engineering and design since the country began modernising at the end of the 19th century.

A mountainous archipelago prone to earthquakes and typhoons, Japan has not only faced immense challenges when building infrastructure, but also has little in terms of natural resources. The Japanese, therefore, have had to adapt, design, manufacture and export their way to prosperity. A dedication to high-quality craftsmanship and a willingness to invest huge sums of money in large, long-term projects have produced a modern nation with excellent infrastructure and a propensity for developing cutting-edge technology. Revolutionary technologies may be born abroad, but the Japanese will adapt them to their own needs, often with

innovative results. For example, the World Wide Web debuted in the US around 1993, but it was Japanese mobile carrier NTT DOCOMO that six years later introduced i-mode, the world's first service that allowed mobile phone users to surf the web and send emails.

## DISCOVER TOKYO'S HIGHS AND LOWS

You can trace Tokyo's engineering prowess – from the subterranean depths of the Metropolitan Area Outer Underground Discharge Channel to the top of the Tokyo Skytree (pictured). The former is open for daily tours, while the latter offers 360-degree views of the city from its observation deck.







The Tokyo Skytree is the tallest building in Japan.



^ Bullet trains connect Tokyo with most of Japan's major cities.

## CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES

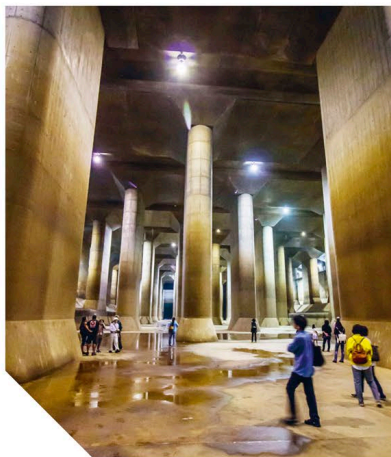
One of the most visible examples of Japanese engineering prowess is the rail system. The Tokaido Shinkansen bullet train line reaches top speeds of up to 285 km/h (180 mph) and covers the 515 km (320 miles) between Tokyo and Osaka in a cool 2 hours, 22 minutes. It has a daily capacity of 360,000 passengers and yet the average annual delay is less than 30 seconds per operational train. Despite having carried over 10 billion passengers since 1964, the Tokaido Shinkansen has had zero fatal accidents. Not one to sit on its laurels, operator JR Central is now building the Chuo Shinkansen, a maglev train that will travel at a speed of 500 km/h (300 mph), connecting Tokyo and Osaka in just over an hour.

> The Metropolitan Area Outer Underground Discharge Channel is part of an important flood control system.

## CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

Underground spaces play a vital role in regulating river levels in Japan. On the outskirts of Tokyo is the Metropolitan Area Outer Underground Discharge Channel, otherwise known as G Cans. This mammoth sewer system, costing ¥230 billion and completed in 2006, is designed so that Tokyo can cope with the typhoons and severe rainy periods that are a feature of the capital's weather. The system consists of five colossal silos that are connected by a 6.5-km (4-mile) tunnel leading to a huge underground storage tank. This temple-like structure – 177 m (58 ft) long, 78 m (256 ft) wide and 25 m (82 ft) high – can pump out the equivalent of an Olympic pool in one second.

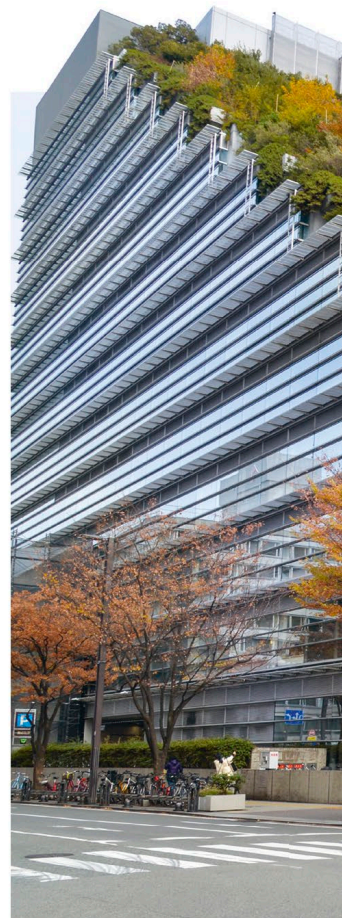
Above ground, the Tokyo Skytree – the world's tallest free-standing broadcast tower at 634 m (2,110 ft) – has taken inspiration for earthquake-proofing from Japan's centuries-old technology for building five-storey pagodas. The pagoda's central column (*shimbashira*) does not physically support any storeys, but instead acts as a counterweight about which the rest of the tower can vibrate; similarly, the Tokyo Skytree's core column was constructed separately from its surrounding steel frame. Oil dampers were also installed so that in the event of a quake, the shock can be absorbed. And just like actual trees, Tokyo Skytree is also supported by sturdy roots in the form of clusters of 50-m- (165-ft-) deep walled piles with steel-reinforced concrete nodes.



## POPULATION PRESSURE

In Japan's population-dense cities, where land prices are astronomic, finding space to build homes is a pressing issue. This has resulted in architects designing so-called "skinny houses". One of the most famous examples is Tadao Ando's Row House, built in Osaka in 1976. At just over 3 m (10 ft) wide, this starkly simple concrete building has no windows (to enable privacy), instead allowing light in via a central open courtyard. A more recent iteration is Muji's prefab Vertical House, with a footprint of just 50 sq m (540 sq ft). The three-storey home has no interior walls and doors, instead using the central staircase as a room divider.

The lack of space for building in cities also means that parks and communal green spaces are limited. One solution has been to design buildings that preserve and create as much green space as possible. A good example is the Acros Building in Fukuoka on Kyushu Island. Looking like a



^ The green roof of the Acros Building in Fukuoka (Fukuoka Prefecture) is part of a public park.

ONE SOLUTION HAS BEEN TO DESIGN BUILDINGS THAT CREATE GREEN SPACE.





## RECYCLING

The Acros Building's green roof captures rainwater runoff to support local flora and fauna.



^ The Reversible Destiny Lofts, by Arakawa and Madeline Gins, aim to redefine life for the elderly.

contemporary Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the green roof also reduces the complex's energy consumption by keeping the temperature inside more constant.

The challenges of an ageing population have also encouraged ingenious designs for Japan's built environment, such as the inventive Reversible Destiny Lofts in the Tokyo suburb of Mitaka. This rainbow-coloured apartment complex is made up of stacked cubes, spheres and tubes, with units featuring sunken kitchens, multiple levels, power sockets in the ceilings and weirdly angled windows and walls. This is not just architectural eccentricity but a deliberate design to challenge residents, with the aim of helping to extend a person's life by constantly stimulating their senses.

# ガジェット

# GADGETS

Improving the everyday



^ Washlet toilets are controlled by a panel next to the seat.

Japanese gadgets for home and personal use are primarily about convenience, cleanliness and engineering a solution to common problems, but they're often imbued with a spirit of fun. While outsiders might see items such as Thanko's full-face Pollen Blocker 2 visor-hood as "wacky", the Japanese prefer to describe them as "Galapagos" products. These unusual, home-grown technologies often struggle to thrive overseas, making them as unique to Japan as the species that evolved on the Galapagos are to that Pacific archipelago.

## AMAZING APPLIANCES

Appliance manufacturers in Japan are always chasing the cutting edge while dealing with intense domestic competition.

From the humble *kotatsu*, a low table with a heating element for relaxing in winter, to advanced induction-heating rice cookers, automatic shoe-deodorizing machines, body-scanning bathroom scales and steam inhalers designed to mitigate allergies, Japanese homes are full of surprising products to assist with everyday life.

## PUBLIC HYGIENE

Revolutionised by TOTO's Washlet series launched in 1980, Japanese toilets have functions you've never dreamed of, all in the name of cleanliness and comfort. Sometimes featuring dozens of buttons on their control panels, they can do everything from automatically opening lids to warming seats to cleansing and drying

## INVENTED IN JAPAN



### ^ KARAOKE MACHINE

Invented by musician Daisuke Inoue, the karaoke machine sparked a global craze.



### ^ VHS

Pioneered by JVC, the VHS triumphed in the 1980s as the format of choice for home video systems.



### LAPTOP

Epson's trailblazing HX-20 featured a full-size keyboard, LCD display and even a printer.



### ^ SELFIE STICK

Initially named the "extender stick", the first patented selfie stick was released in Japan in the 1980s.



your posterior to shooting a mist over the bowl after every use, all while scrimping on water use. No visit to Japan is complete without hearing the noise of Otohime – audio functions or devices that play recordings of toilet flushes or running water to protect people’s modesty while using the bathroom.



## PHOTO FUN

Commemorate your time in Japan with a trip to one of the country’s many *purikura*. These elaborate photo booths allow you to take pictures with friends and then embellish them with a wide variety of automatic digital edits and additions before the final sticker photos are printed; popular themes include cosmetics and fashion. As edit functions have become increasingly sophisticated, booths have expanded in size, with some as large as a compact car. Introduced in the 1990s and popularised by J-pop idol group SMAP, *purikura* are found in arcade centres throughout Japan and are particularly popular with teenage girls. Dedicated *purikura* shops sometimes also offer costumes for dress-up photos.

^ *Purikura* are a ubiquitous part of Japanese youth culture.

## CHINDOGU

The undisputed king of off-the-wall gadgets is Kenji Kawakami, creator of countless Chindogu (“strange tool”) inventions. Designed to make people think and perhaps laugh, they include head-mounted toilet paper dispensers for allergy sufferers, portable zebra crossings for pedestrians in a rush, and subway straps attached to toilet plungers for commuters needing something to hang on to. Kawakami describes them as a form of art.



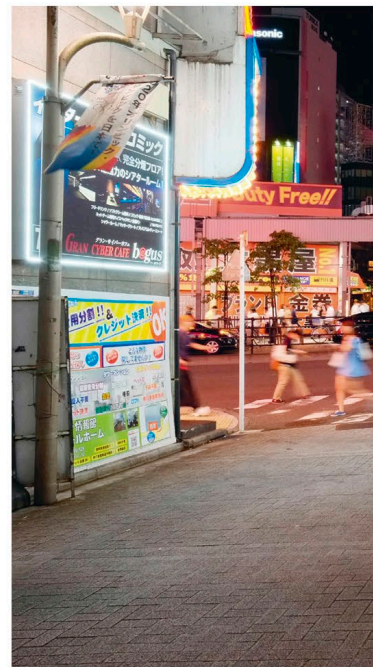
## CALCULATOR

The first handheld battery-powered electronic calculator was Canon’s Pocketronic.



## ^ WALKMAN

Sony’s Walkman revolutionised the way people experienced music and sold an astonishing total of 200 million units.



## COMPLETE CONVENIENCE

From train stations to rice paddies to the slopes of Mount Fuji, vending machines can be found just about anywhere in Japan. With one of the highest vending-machine densities in the world, about one per every 30 people, they provide essential products to many Japanese. In a densely populated country with expensive, limited space for retail shops, vending machines are prized as convenient and always available.

## FUTURE-FACING

Aside from their variety, vending machines in Japan deploy sophisticated technology. Developed by JR East Water Business, Acure vending machines possess a number of smart features. Found in Shinagawa Station and at other spots around Tokyo, they have touch-panel displays, are programmed to use data to estimate users' age and gender to suggest suitable drinks, and they can be used to gift drinks to

friends via a smartphone app; they also accept smart card cashless payments, unlike many other machines.

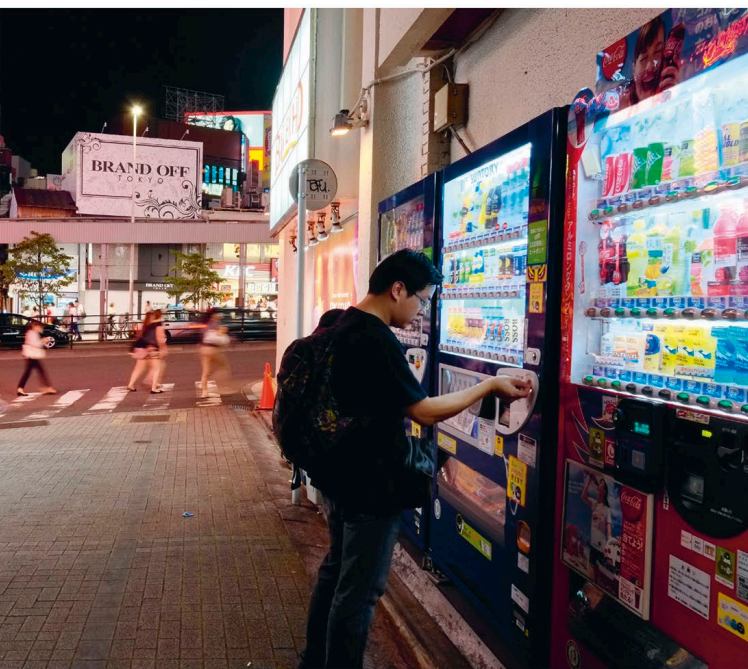
To cope with power failures and other service disruptions amid Japan's frequent earthquakes, vending machines are also becoming more resilient. Some machines can operate on battery power or by a hand crank during blackouts, while others will dispense drinks free of charge during disasters. The 2011 earthquake that



^ Left to right: Vending machines can be found even in the middle of the countryside; accessible any time of day, vending machines are the epitome of convenience; drinks are one of the most common items for sale.

< Vending machines provide refreshments for hikers at the top of Mount Fuji.





## SOME MACHINES WILL DISPENSE DRINKS FREE OF CHARGE DURING DISASTERS.

devastated northern Japan affected electricity supplies and sparked a rethink of power use by vending machines. Vacuum-insulated vending machines, for instance, can go without cooling their drinks for 11 hours. Billed as the most energy-saving machines in Japan, Suntory's Eco Active Machines use half the electricity of vendors with standard heat-pump technology. Energy used by all machines was down 62 per cent in 2017 compared to 2005.

## EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK

Vending machines for coin lockers and tickets are a common sight, but other items you might come across range from

batteries, umbrellas and eyeglasses to floral bouquets, Shinto amulets and underwear. Particularly popular are *gachapon*, which dispense capsule toys. Named for the sound of the dispensing mechanism, they spit out every trinket you can imagine, from miniature Tokyo Towers and Godzilla to fake sushi and bonnets for cats. One hit *gacha* has been Koppu no Fuchiko, a female office worker in all kinds of odd poses, which has sold over 20 million units.

Nearly 60 per cent of vending machines in Japan sell drinks, including beer, sake, milk and green tea. Food is a smaller sales category, but it features some arresting items. You can buy bananas, bags of rice, *onigiri* (rice balls), *natto* (fermented soybeans), *takoyaki* (octopus balls), pizza, hotdogs and, of course, instant noodles. If that isn't unusual enough, head down to Kumamoto Prefecture, where you can buy chocolate-covered grasshoppers and other insect snacks.

## 1603-1868

Western clock technology is repurposed during the Edo Period to create automatons, today regarded as the fore-runners of Japanese robots.



## 1928

Makoto Nishimura unveils the 3-m- (10-ft-) tall Gakutensoku, thought to be the first robot ever built in Japan.



## 1952

Osamu Tezuka's Astro Boy (known as Tetsuwan Atomu in Japanese) debuts as a comic strip in *Weekly Shonen Magazine*.

## 2017

Groove X's *kawaii* companion bot coos and closes its eyes when it is cradled, further advancing Japan's argument that robots can be warm and cuddly.



## 2014

SoftBank Robotics' Pepper has an emotion-recognition engine that can detect how humans are feeling.

## 2013

The 34-cm- (13-in-) tall Kirobo becomes the first humanoid robot to be sent into space.



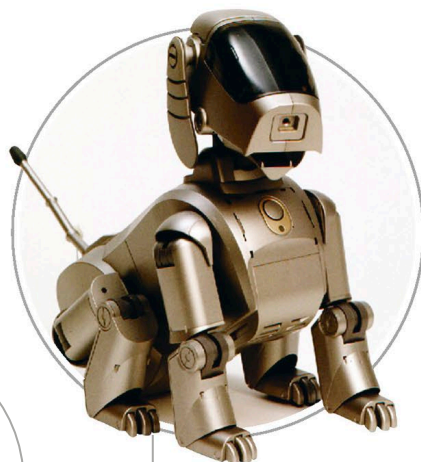
**1970-73**

WABOT-1 is the world's first full-scale anthropomorphic robot, able to walk, grasp objects and converse.



**1996**

Honda unveils the P2, the first humanoid robot capable of realistic movement.

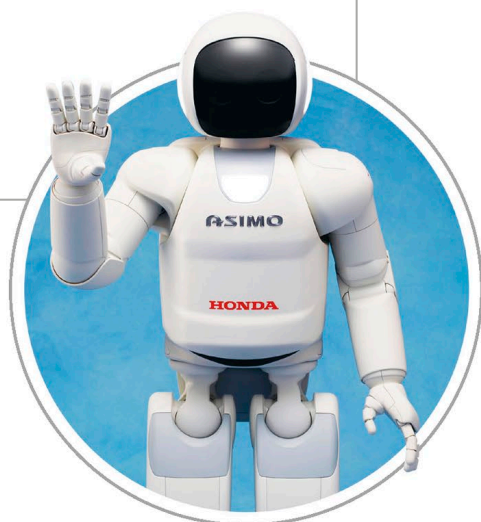


**1999**

Aibo – a disarmingly cute robot dog designed to be a companion instead of a toy – is launched by Sony. It is later revived in 2017.

**2000**

Honda's ASIMO is able to walk, run, communicate in multiple languages and also serve tea.



ロボットの進化

## ROBOT EVOLUTION

*Development of intelligent machines*

Japan loves robots. It's one of the most automated countries in the world, and leads in the development of intelligent machines for manufacturing and other applications. Advanced humanoid robots are working in Japanese shops, showrooms and information centers, giving the world a glimpse of what's to come. This embrace of robotics has its roots in the deeply ingrained national respect for *monozukuri* (craftsmanship) as well as Japanese science fiction, in which robots are often portrayed as heroic friends to mankind – Osamu Tezuka's Astro Boy, an android imbued with superhuman powers as well as a soul, inspired generations of Japanese engineers to bring Tezuka's dream to life.

▷Akihabara, Tokyo's  
“Electric Town”, is  
a treasure trove for  
video-game lovers.



ビデオゲーム

# VIDEO GAMES

Art, storytelling and technology

It's impossible to imagine the world of video games without Japan. The country has not only created countless iconic characters, but also revolutionised the way that people play. Companies like Nintendo, Sega and Sony are household names, and their products are used by millions across the globe. Key to this success has been Japan's ability to create video games that are the perfect fusion of art, story-telling and intuitive technology.

Although Japan began introducing arcade games in the late 1970s, the country's rise truly began in 1983, when a glut of bad

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO IMAGINE  
THE WORLD OF VIDEO GAMES  
WITHOUT JAPAN.

games caused the bottom to fall out of the American home console market. That same year, Nintendo's Family Computer, or Famicom, came out in Japan. Released internationally a couple of years later as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), it not only resurrected console gaming in America with an array of high-quality games, but also ushered in an era of domination by Japanese gaming companies.

Innovation is what Japanese gaming does best, such as the Famicom and NES's eschewal of Atari-style joysticks for dual button controllers with D-pads. Later Nintendo controllers had shoulder buttons, analogue thumbsticks and rumble feedback, all of which are now standard on modern game pads – even those from rivals.

◁Nintendo consoles  
continue to be popular  
across the world.







## GET GAMING

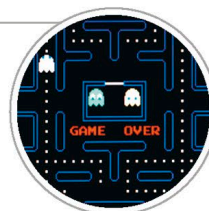
A video gamer's visit to Japan would not be complete without a trip to Akihabara, Tokyo's geek mecca, or Den-Den Town, Osaka's equivalent. Retro shops like Super Potato (found in both Tokyo and Osaka) are a must-stop for classic consoles and games of yore, while the latest releases can be found in big electronic shops.

While Japanese video games have pushed hardware and graphical boundaries, they are not mere technical exercises. Japan has created beloved characters like Mario and Sonic the Hedgehog, and developed games with stories that are genuinely moving, like PlayStation's *Final Fantasy VII*. The country has also popularised new ways of playing, such as music games and fitness games, and it has created distinct genres like survival horror (with games such as *Resident Evil*) and story-heavy Japanese role-playing games (like the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise).

## GROUNDBREAKING GAMES

### > PAC-MAN (1980)

Originally called "Puck Man", Pac-Man was the first game character to capture the public's imagination, inspiring the top ten hit "Pac-Man Fever". The game's Ghost enemies featured incredible AI tech for their day.



### < STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR (1991)

While not the first fighting game, Street Fighter II was a complex, pro-gaming bellwether that inspired players to master the memorable characters.

### > POKÉMON RED AND BLUE (1996)

Released on the Game Boy, the first Pokémon became a global craze. It offered fulfilling gameplay outside the home, laying the foundation for modern smartphone games.



### < SUPER MARIO 64 (1996)

This, along with The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, featured cutting-edge 3D graphics and gave players a newfound freedom to explore the in-game 3D world instead of confining them to a linear 2D platform.

### > FINAL FANTASY VII (1997)

Utilising the first PlayStation's CD-ROM format, this set the bar for role-playing games with cinematic 3D cutscenes, an epic story and beautiful score. It even went on to inspire a feature film.



### < WII SPORTS (2006)

Nintendo created a worldwide phenomenon with its easy-to-use motion-controllers. The Wii was not a high-powered, high-def console, proving that video game success isn't just dependent on the best graphics, but on good ideas.

## 音の風景

# SOUNDSCAPES

A journey into sound

*Tinkling bells such as the suzu are a common sound at shrines and temples.*



SUZU

Ambient sound is everywhere, but it is such an important part of the essence of Japan that in 1996 the Ministry of the Environment created a list of the country's top 100 soundscapes (compiled from submissions by the public) in a novel move to both guard and champion the environment. Natural and man-made, whimsical and riotous, spiritual and commercial, Japan's amazing variety of soundscapes range from flowing and falling water, hissing steam, shifting ice and local flora and fauna to temple bells, ship whistles and ancient crafts. This appreciation of natural and historical

soundscapes reflects the open-minded Japanese approach to sound in general, which has allowed

innovative experimental music and aural art installations to become a significant part of the cultural landscape.

## AURAL IMMERSION

Many of Japan's evocative sounds can be listened to as recordings from the comfort of your own home, but they are at their most powerful when experienced in person.

## SOUND SCULPTURES

Japan excels at contemporary art, and soundscape art has long been one of the country's most inventive creations. Key artists include Ryoji Ikeda, whose performances and installations combine sound, visuals and mathematical notations. Japan's art museums also have numerous sound installations within their collections, such as Christian Boltanski's *La forêt des murmures* and Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's "Storm House" at Benesse Art Site Naoshima (Kagawa Prefecture), which both feature traditional sounds recorded in Japan. Art and experimentation further cross over into the world of music, with the likes of Yellow Magic Orchestra, Ryuichi Sakamoto and Cornelius manipulating sounds to create unique arrangements.



*<Weaving is one of several ancient crafts that appear on the top 100 soundscapes list.*





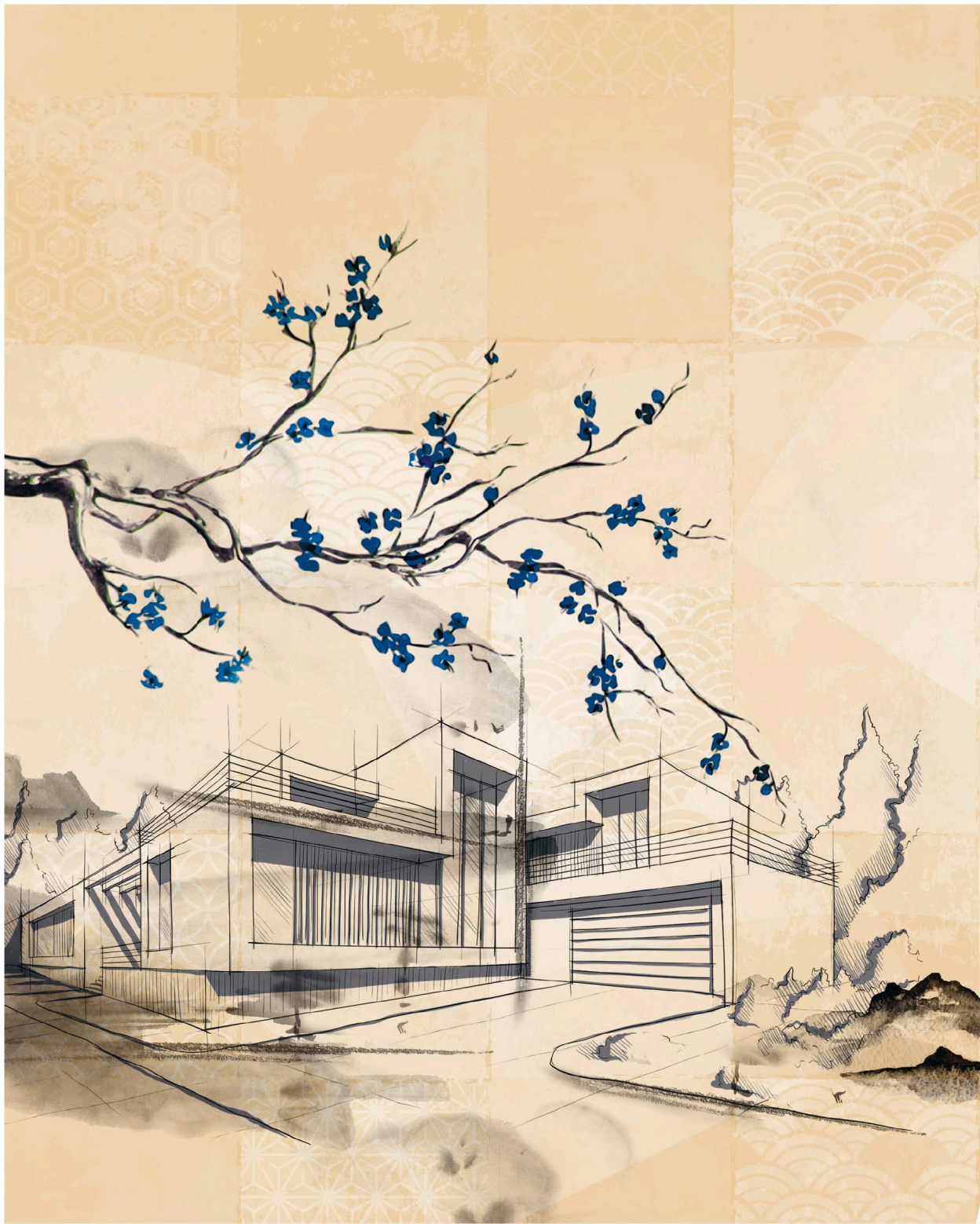
## NATIONAL TREASURES

You can find a soundscape anywhere you go in Japan – you just need to pause a moment to stop and listen. The top sound on the Ministry of the Environment’s list is drift ice in the Sea of Okhotsk, but more easily accessible options include the “singing” sands at Kotobikihama Beach (Kyoto Prefecture), Sapporo’s Clock Tower bells, and the hubbub of red-crowned cranes in Tsurui (Hokkaido). One of Japan’s most fun sounds are the nightingale floors at Nijo Castle in Kyoto – designed to act as an alarm system for the samurai, they chirp when walked upon.



YOU CAN FIND A SOUNDSCAPE  
ANYWHERE YOU GO IN JAPAN –  
JUST PAUSE TO LISTEN.

^ Top: Drift ice in the Sea of  
Okhotsk is Japan’s favourite  
sound. Above: Ryuichi  
Sakamoto is one of Japan’s  
leading experimental musicians.





# クリエイティブな日本 CREATIVE JAPAN

Japan is a land of contrasts: from a unique juxtaposition of tradition and innovation spring forth creative, fascinating trends that continue to unfold, influence and inspire. Arising from the richness of spirituality, art forms and traditional aesthetics, Japanese creativity draws deeply from the well of the past. Sometimes the evolution is clear – like the thread winding from 19th-century woodblock prints to postwar Pop Art and manga. In other cases, the legacy of Japan's traditions is more subtle, harking back to deep and intrinsic values – like the reverence for nature seen in modern architecture, or the survival of *shibui* (simplicity) in modern product design. Whatever the inspiration, it is the new heights of creativity growing from these roots that have made Japan such a key figure on the world stage of artistic expression.

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring creative Japan

Just set off down the street and you'll feel the creative spirit of Japan like a living entity all around you. It's in the breathtaking designs of the architecture, the *kawaii* (cute) mascots in posters and ads, and the displays of high fashion and chic homeware in shop windows. The whole country becomes a gallery showcasing the newest offerings of Japan's influential art and style.

## FALL IN LOVE WITH KUMAMON!

Kumamon the black bear is the yuru-kyara (mascot) of Kumamoto. Snap a selfie with this charming celebrity at Kumamon Square.

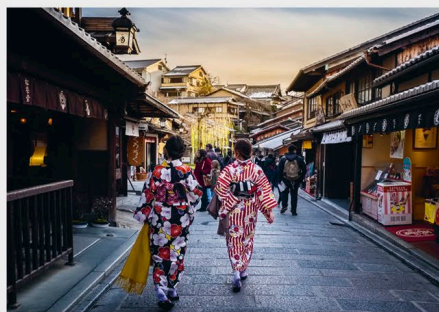
● KUMAMOTO

● HIROSHIMA

● KYOTO

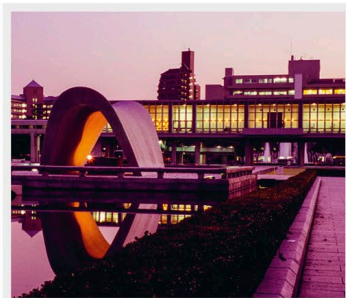
## ▽ KYOTO IN A KIMONO

If you've always been fascinated by traditional Japanese clothing, Kyoto is the place to be. Kimono rental is big business here and there are plenty of places to choose from to try on these elegant, traditional robes.



## > A VISION FOR A PEACEFUL FUTURE

To see the works of architect Kenzo Tange, visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. The museum is a modern twist on haniwa, tombs of Japanese rulers.





## DAILY READING

The daily paper with the highest circulation in the world is Japanese – as is the second highest.

ONAGAWA

SAPPORO

ONAGAWA

### ✓ INSIDE AND OUT IN HOKKAIDO

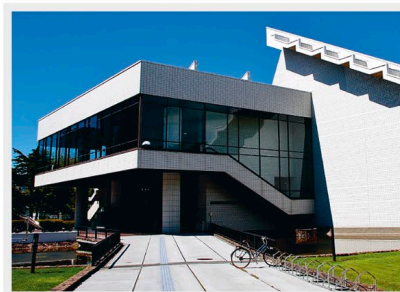
Inside the Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art you'll find stunning Japanese contemporary art. Nearby is the magnificent sculpture park Moerenuma Park.

TOKYO

FUJI

### ANIME WORLDS

The Fuji-Q Highland theme park has several areas dedicated to popular anime.



## ±0

Naoto Fukasawa's ±0 homeware range brings sleek contemporary design to items such as toasters, coffeemakers, clocks and earphones.



### ^ ANIME ATTRACTIONS

Head to one of Tokyo's three Pokémon Centers to shop 'til you drop. Have your photo taken with the amazing displays and pick up regional merch, not available anywhere else.

## 建築トレンド

# TRENDS IN ARCHITECTURE

A marriage of the traditional and modern

The connections between traditional, wooden Japanese architecture and the concrete, glass and steel creations that cover the country today may not be immediately apparent. But look closer and you'll notice the timeless Japanese qualities of exacting precision and craftsmanship. Setting the contemporary structures apart is their innovative use of design and natural materials, be it in service of stark minimalism or soaring flights of fancy.

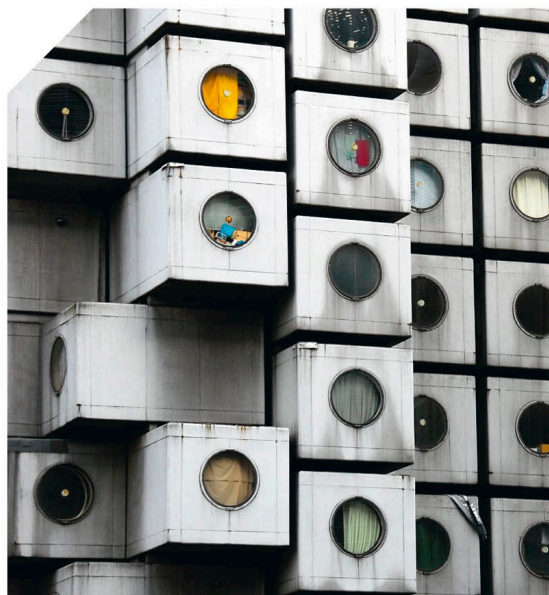
### METABOLISM

One influential trend was Metabolism, an architectural movement that emerged in postwar Japan and set forward-thinking architects down a new path. Championed by the likes of visionary architects Fumihiko Maki, Kenzo Tange and Kisho Kurokawa,

the Metabolist movement saw cities as changing entities that needed to grow and develop like the human body. You can still see Kurokawa's iconic Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo, and while it's one of the few remaining Metabolist structures in Japan, you can experience the movement's enduring legacy by staying in an ultra-modern, ingeniously designed capsule hotel. The first of its kind was Kurokawa's Capsule Inn Osaka, which opened in 1979 and was heavily influenced by the Metabolist concept.

### BACK TO NATURE

Some of the most stunning contemporary structures in Japan are those that blend natural materials with ultra-modern designs, creating architecture that feels



^ The building-block style of the 1972 Nakagin Capsule Tower is reminiscent of organic cells, bringing Metabolism alive as a visual concept.





## TOWERS OF THE TOKYO SKYLINE

### **Tokyo Tower** (1958, Tachu Naito)

A symbol of Japan's postwar boom, this bright broadcasting tower is a key landmark rising above the city's clustered skyscrapers

### **Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building** (1990, Kenzo Tange)

This twin-towered building complex (*left*) is an iconic sight to the Japanese.

### **Tokyo Skytree** (2012, Nikken

Sekkei) In sharp contrast to its neo-futuristic style, the tower's illuminations evoke the traditional aesthetic concepts of *iki* (style) and *miyabi* (elegance).

new and yet traditional. Many of these are found in natural settings, harking back to Japan's traditional appreciation for nature and the four seasons.

## EXPLORING MODERN ARCHITECTURAL MARVELS

**Jikka House** This private retirement home sits on a hilltop surrounded by woodland in Shizuoka Prefecture. A cluster of five teepees clad in cedar panels, the home was designed by Issei Suma for his mother and her companion, who also wanted to use the building as a community café.

**Tetsu Tea House** This highlight at the Kiyoharu Shirakaba Museum in Hokuto (Yamanashi Prefecture) was designed by Terunobu Fujimori. Taking its use of traditional materials to the next level, it uses a single cypress trunk as support for the suspended treehouse, and can sway safely during storms and earthquakes. Other organic designs by Fujimori include homes whose chimneys are planted with pines and whose roofs are covered in leeks and chives.

**Ribbon Chapel** The award-winning Ribbon Chapel designed by the firm NAP stands in the garden of the Bella Vista Spa & Marina in Onomichi (Hiroshima Prefecture). Inspired by a flying ribbon, it has two spiral stairways that intertwine and support each other – a visual metaphor for the act of the marriage.

✓ *The striking design of the Ribbon Chapel links the elements of earth and air.*



> The Japanese concept of *shibui* (simple and modest beauty) has carried over from traditional folk crafts to modern design.



モダン スタイル

## MODERN STYLE

The elegance of simplicity

The design of household objects and furniture tends to focus on function and practicality in an increasingly fast-paced world. And yet, in Japan, traditional aesthetic concepts like the subtle beauty of *shibui* and the refinement of *iki* still have a profound impact on contemporary designers. Preserving these styles has allowed Japanese products to strike a fine balance between the artistic and the everyday, meaning the beautiful qualities

of Japanese design survive and stand out even in an era of global mass production.

### FOLK CRAFT REVIVAL

The production methods and attentive care behind Japan's traditional crafts could easily have been lost in the transformative industrial years of the early 20th century. But the old styles of ceramics, textiles and other everyday crafts survived in the form of *mingei* (folk crafts). This is truly the people's art – so much so that the creators of *mingei* are usually anonymous.

It was primarily due to the efforts of art critic and philosopher Soetsu Yanagi (1889–1961) in the 1920s that this strand of traditional design was protected. Yanagi valued artistic concepts celebrating the simplicity and utilitarian aspect of everyday objects – particularly inexpensive, functional and rustic crafts. He gathered together key examples to establish the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo in

### EVERYDAY ART

To turn a corner of your home into a modern, stylish gallery that's still a useable household space, seek out some pieces by Nendo. This award-winning design studio was established by Oki Sato in 2002, and creates everything from furniture and household products to graphic designs.





< The Butterfly Stool is so called because of its fluid, curvaceous shape, reminiscent of a butterfly in flight.

## THE EPITOME OF MODERN DESIGN

Founded in 1980, MUJI has become the face of contemporary Japanese design. Natural colours and textures evoking traditional aesthetics are a key ingredient in the company's beautifully designed yet functional and accessible products. Short for *Mujirushi Ryohin* ("no-brand quality goods") its products – which include furniture, clothing and stationery – are known for their chic, simplified design and lack of logos. Since 2001 MUJI's art director has been the designer Kenya Hara, who has taken the company's ethos into new business areas including hotels and prefabricated homes.



1936, which remains one of the best places to see classic examples of *mingei*.

## INFLUENCE FROM ABROAD

While Japan's traditions were carefully preserved by some designers, other artists were also exploring further afield for inspiration. Soetsu Yanagi's son Sori (1915–2011) was a notable designer in his own right. His most famous creation, the Butterfly Stool, combined the Japanese art of origami with plywood moulding techniques developed by American designers Charles and Ray Eames. Sori Yanagi's elegant modern designs were also influenced by Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand, in whose office he worked during the 1940s.

> Like the creators of *mingei*, the designers of MUJI products are often anonymous, to maintain the generic branding.



現代アート

# CONTEMPORARY ART

Redefining art in postwar Japan

Modern art in Japan was born from the ashes of World War II. Free from military rule, artists began to re-create the concept of art in the same way that Japan itself was going through a reconstruction on a national scale. The new generation of creators embraced performance art, explored figurative movements like Surrealism and eschewed traditional galleries for the street, the stage and the screen. From these bold origins full of avant-garde experimentation, Japan has become an inspiring artistic force.

## POP ART REVOLUTION

Japan's version of Pop Art evolved from the nation's experimental art scene of the 1950s. In a society that had experienced

both cultural censorship and great devastation, Pop Artists of this postwar, avant-garde era were a great force for change and freedom, adding a sense of cultural playfulness to the new wave of artistic expression.

Japanese Pop Art is now iconic. Takashi Murakami's rainbow-coloured paintings, sculptures and designs have been taken up by fashion firms including Louis Vuitton and Issey Miyake, making his Pop Art style a truly global phenomenon.

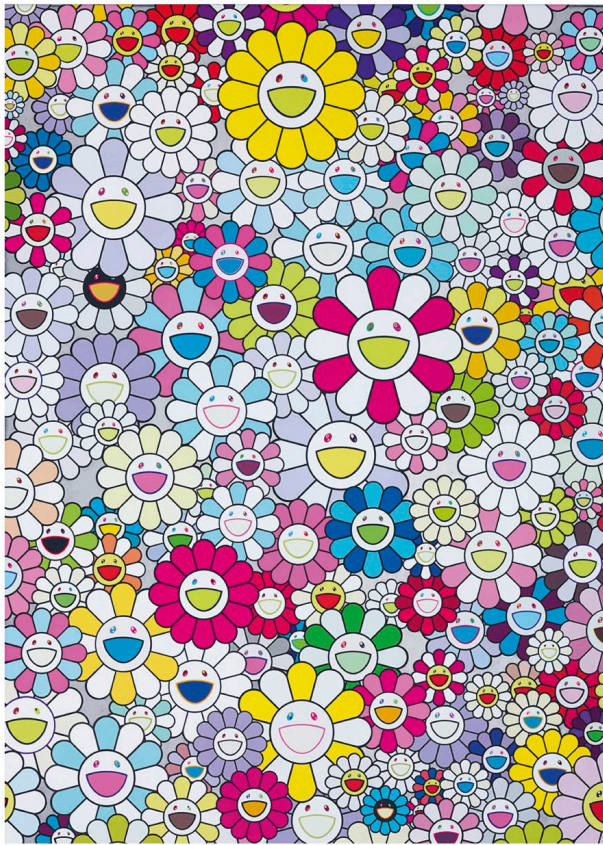
## PIONEERING PHOTOGRAPHY

Artists in Japan embraced photography almost from its inception, but during World War II only pro-government

✓ *The Hakone  
Open Air Museum  
(Kanagawa Prefecture).*







△ Takashi Murakami  
Multicolour Flowers,  
2012.

photojournalism was allowed. Some iconic photographers, such as Ken Domon, were still active during this era, but it was in the postwar years that many artists took to photography again. Grasping their new-found artistic freedoms, they experimented with the medium and focused on new subjects, changing the purpose and course of photography and gaining international reputations.

In the late 1960s, the small press photography magazine *Provoke* helped launch the career of Daido Moriyama. Moriyama pushed the boundaries of street photography by capturing the beauty of the mundane, creating a subversive narrative to the street scenes and inviting viewers right into the action.



## OUTDOOR ART

*The natural world and the four seasons have always been an inspiration for the country's artists. Here are three of the best sights to experience the quintessentially Japanese blend of art and nature.*

- ① **The Hakone Open-Air Museum**  
In the hot-spring resort town of Hakone (Kanagawa Prefecture), this park became the blueprint for similar sights across Japan when it opened in 1969. Across the gardens are scattered hundreds of bold and larger-than-life works from both local and international artists.
- ② **Moerenuma Park**  
This park occupies a former landfill site outside of Sapporo (Hokkaido Prefecture). Explore how the artists have merged man-made installations with the natural elements to create ingenious and dramatic works of art.
- ③ **Enoura Observatory**  
This sight in Kanagawa Prefecture is the passion project of renowned photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto. Looking out over Sagami Bay from the observatory feels like stepping into one of his extraordinary seascape photographs.

> Left to right: Hello Kitty has become a global media franchise; the Sanrio Company is worth about \$62 billion; Piipo is the face of the Tokyo police force; over 1,000 mascots enter the annual Yuru-Kyara Grand Prix.



カワイイ

# KAWAII

The power of cute

The impact of the candy-coloured, picture-book aesthetic of *kawaii* on Japan's design industry is profound. The *kawaii* style has been applied to all kinds of products and images, resulting in striking fashions and a universe of cute characters and mascots adorning practically everything from handbags to *shinkansen* trains.

## THE BIRTH OF KAWAII

As the popularity of manga grew in the 1950s and 60s, young Japanese people began to embrace the exaggerated, cute style of the characters. The taste for these images fed through to consumer culture and resulted in the birth of the global queen of *kawaii* - Hello Kitty. The little white cat was designed by Yuko Shimizu in 1974 to join the cast of characters decorating the fashion and lifestyle products of the Sanrio company, which

now includes fan favourite characters such as Little Twin Stars, a brother and sister duo, and Gudetama, an egg yolk. Sanrio's designs and marketing are so amazingly successful that even a social media campaign using fictional high school boys to promote the company's products ended up with its own line of merchandise, as well a stage play, a manga and an anime.

## KAWAII STYLE

Embrace all things *kawaii* with a trip to Tokyo's Harajuku district, where you can pick out a small souvenir of the country's cuteness culture, or bring more *kawaii* into your life with a full wardrobe update. The street style that made Harajuku famous is still there but has also spawned something more commercial. Boutiques and shops to zone in on include sanrio vivitix for Sanrio characters, and Kiddyland, a multi-storey





toy shop stocking cute character goods. Another highlight is 6% DokiDoki: a bubblegum pink emporium of vividly coloured fashions and accessories. This rainbow-bright boutique is the brainchild of artist and art director Sebastian Masuda, whose projects have included the installation of tall translucent sculptures of Hello Kitty stuffed with personal objects in cities around the world, part of an art project called *Time After Time Capsule*.

## MASCOTS

Japan's love for *kawaii* has been embraced by businesses and institutions, who create their own mascots similar to those of sports teams. These mascots are known as



NHK's Domo is one of Japan's most famous yuru-kyara.

DOMO

*yuru-kyara* – meaning “loose” or “relaxed” characters – and you'll see them all over the country. Some are corporate characters promoting everything from the national broadcaster NHK to Tokyo's police force, and others are created by local authorities to drive tourism.

The public can vote for their favourite mascots in the annual Yuru-kyara Grand Prix. While the event is light-hearted and fun, it's also serious business for the companies who enter their *yuru-kyara* – the winners often get a huge boost in revenue from all the publicity.

JAPAN'S LOVE FOR KAWAII  
HAS BEEN EMBRACED BY  
BUSINESSES AND INSTITUTIONS.





## KIMONO ART

Museums with great kimono exhibits include the Itchiku Kubota Art Museum in Kawaguchiko (Yamanashi Prefecture) and the Kioi Art Gallery and Ome Kimono Museum, both in Tokyo.



< Clockwise from top left: Tokyo Fashion Week is a showcase for Japanese style; the fabric used for women's kimonos is often hand-painted; Harajuku girls are famed for their flamboyant style.

ファッション

# FASHION

Traditional elegance to the avant-garde

Dominated for centuries by the kimono, Japanese fashion underwent a seismic shift with the introduction of Western-style clothes (*yofuku*) in the 20th century. Both taking inspiration from and rebelling against traditional garments, designers and fashionistas have evolved an excitingly eclectic array of modern Japanese styles.

## A COMPLEX SIMPLICITY

The traditional form of dress in Japan, the kimono (literally, “garment to wear”) can be dated back to the 700s. It was used to denote status, with quality materials like silk reserved for the elite and cotton and hemp used for the masses. The more of your body that was covered, the higher rank you were seen to be. Workers would wear simpler outfits, but they would still be based on wrapping and folding, a technique of dressing inspired by the Chinese and expertly mastered by the Japanese.

The intricate process of dressing in a kimono involves layering, traditional folding and careful placement of accessories. Essentially, the garment is wrapped tightly around the body – with the left side folded over the right side (right over left is how the deceased would be dressed) – and tied in place with the *obi* (sash); accessories are then draped, tied and folded over it. Often the services of a kimono dresser are required, especially for women's kimonos.

Today, few people wear a kimono as an everyday garment, but you can still glimpse them on the streets of Kyoto and traditional villages such as Takayama (Gifu Prefecture) or *onsen* towns. Kimonos are also worn to celebrate rites of passage such as *shichigosan* (the lucky ages of three, five and seven), *seijin-no-hi* (coming of age at 20) and marriage, as well as for festivals, tea ceremony and during cherry-blossom viewing (*hanami*).

## DECONSTRUCTED ELEGANCE

Taking cues from a history of intricate design, new makers started to emerge in the late 20th century with a unique approach to garment construction. Building on centuries of masterful manipulation of materials, a restless and inventive youth used the traditional techniques of draping, folding, pleating and accessorising to create an alternative fashion with the power to shock and innovate. Staging some of the most startling and game-changing catwalk shows in couture history – such as Comme des Garçons Spring collection in 1982 – Japanese designers have literally transformed the shape of couture fashion.

✓ Left to right: Junya Watanabe's designs have been described as "techno couture"; Rei Kawakubo's Comme des Garçons creations have inspired designers around the world.

## VISIONARY DESIGNERS

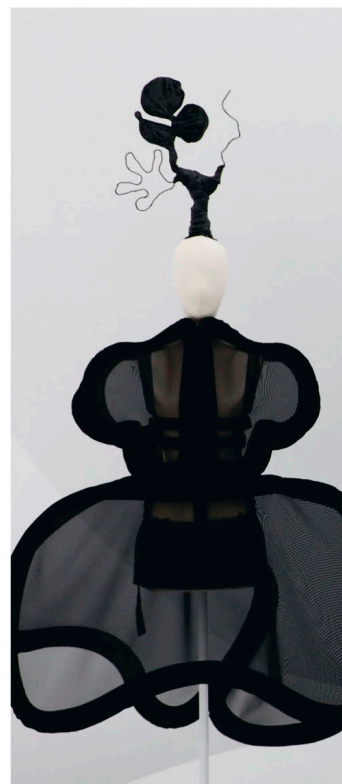
Blurring the line between clothing and art, the following designers are some of the most influential figures in the world of Japanese fashion.

**Issey Miyake** Miyake's Pleats Please label turned pleating into a religion. Wearable and sophisticated, his garments provide a timeless, refined look for women and men of any age.

**Rei Kawakubo** Kawakubo's designs for her Comme des Garçons label are cut from the rebellious and creative spirit of Japanese youth culture. Her clothes are angular, torn, organic and flowing – quite unlike anything else. Those who can pull them off look otherworldly.

**Junya Watanabe** Kawakubo's protégé (and pattern maker), Watanabe followed in his mentor's footsteps as a fashion innovator. He uses synthetic fabric and technology to create futuristic wearable art.

**Yohji Yamamoto** A master tailor and fabric manipulator, Yamamoto studied law before becoming one of the world's best-known designers. His origami-like structured outfits firmly placed Japanese avant-garde on the world stage.





## STYLE ICONS

As Tokyo and Osaka became hotspots for fashionistas the world over, street fashion in turn began to influence designers. Today's style icons have huge followings on social media, with popular figures including cool grandma Emiko Mori, joyous in colourful crocheted outfits; Coco Pink Princess, a mix-and-match youngster who will happily clash high-end labels and second-hand finds; and Mr. Bon and Mrs. Pon, a couple in their sixties who colour-coordinate their stylish androgynous outfits. Twin sister music duo Amiaya are also major trendsetters, and you can't go to Japan without seeing Rola, a model and personality who became the muse of Gucci, splashed on a billboard somewhere.



^ Trendsetting style icons Amiaya with their bold coordinated looks.

JAPANESE DESIGNERS HAVE  
LITERALLY TRANSFORMED THE  
SHAPE OF COUTURE FASHION.



## BUY A PIECE OF WEARABLE ART

If you're shopping for high-end fashion in Japan, there's no better place to start than the wide boulevards of Tokyo's Ginza district, which plays host to some of the world's most elaborate and luxurious retail monoliths. Omotesando, stretching down to upscale Aoyama, is another definite hotspot, as are upmarket department stores such as Takashimaya in Nihonbashi and Isetan in Shinjuku. The hip Daikanyama neighbourhood also has lots of refined independent fashion shops. In Kyoto, the best stores to head to are Bal and Isetan, while Chiso offers couture kimonos.



Voluminous petticoats are a key part of Lolita fashion.

## FASHION PILGRIMAGE

One Sunday a month, devotees gather for the Harajuku Fashion Walk to celebrate the area's fashion culture.



## CONFOUNDING EXPECTATIONS

Offbeat, challenging and endlessly fascinating, Japanese alternative fashion has influenced major designers all over the world and inspired countless Western songs and videos. If Japan is the street style capital of the world, then Tokyo's Harajuku and Shibuya districts are the mecca for anyone wanting to discover the more unusual side of the country's fashion tastes. Although most people will be wearing the global brands and ordinary clothes you'll find anywhere else in the world, these districts are still your best chance to see the creative legacy of Japan's experimental fashion, and the streets can become a pavement catwalk of eye-catching styles that function as the ultimate form of artistic expression.

## KEY STYLES

Japan's alternative street styles come in all shapes and forms. The following are some of the most popular that have burst onto the scene over the last few decades.

**Rockabilly** This exaggerated version of 1950s American fashion is particularly popular with 50- to 60-year-old men, who meet in Tokyo's Yoyogi Park on Sundays.

**Dolly Kei** Taking inspiration from European fairy tales, girls (and guys) dress themselves up in a style that is reminiscent of antique European dolls.

**Fairy Kei** This over-the-top feminine style is a multilayered confection of vivid pastel colours with a touch of the 1980s.

**Lolita** Victorian and Edwardian children's clothes are the basis for this fashion, which is so popular it has spawned numerous subgroups, including goth and steampunk.

^ Left: A large quiff is an essential aspect of the Rockabilly style. Right: The Lolita look ranges from the cute Sweet variation (top) to the darker Gothic.





< Left: The Ganguro look was inspired by LA surfer style. Below: Tokyo's youth gather in Harajuku at the weekend to show off their latest outfits.



**Gyaru/Ganguro** Translating as “girl” or “gal”, this subculture is a celebration of all things feminine, involving high boots, loud clothes, thick make-up, heavily tanned skin, dyed blonde hair and outrageous nails.

**Harajuku Girls** Part punk, part *kawaii*, this look evolved post World War II and has been popular ever since. “Harajuku Girls” is also used as a broad term for Tokyo youth that congregate in the Harajuku area.

**Kogal** This rebellious take on school uniform features shortened skirts and loose socks. It is commonly adopted by high-school girls, who hang around Shibuya’s 109 building.

**Mori** This whimsical and stylish subculture is personified by the fashion label Earth, Music, Ecology. The look is elfin floaty chic, featuring long dresses and long hair, accompanied by longing, wistful looks.



< Left: Kogal fashion is based on Japanese school uniform. Above: Mori style involves lots of floaty layers.

## JOIN THE ALTERNATIVE REVOLUTION

Tokyo's Harajuku is the spiritual home of street fashion in Japan, and Yoyogi Park comes alive on Sundays with gatherings of style tribes en masse. Osaka's street scene is fiercely independent from Tokyo – it's louder and much more outrageous (think glitter and bold prints) – and Shinsaibashi is its centre. Okayama (Okayama Prefecture) is famous for great-quality engineered denim, while Kyoto is notable for modern, inventive takes on traditional clothing. Sapporo's Tanukikoji shopping street is a catwalk for locals showing off local vintage-themed street styles.

## 文学

## LITERATURE

## Poetry and popular novels

Japan's profound literary legacy has captured the imagination of writers and readers around the world. The haiku challenges us to draw meaning from every word of its short form, while the novel itself was born in Japan and is now one of the most important mediums of Japan's long history of story-telling.

## HAIKU

Japan's most famous poetic form – the haiku – was originally the opening verse of a much longer poem. The traditional haiku was a short three-line stanza of 17 syllables, and was meant to work as a complete scene. It required great skill

to condense an event or feeling to such a short form, so the haiku became popular as a stand-alone poem.

Japan's best-known haiku poet is Matsuo Basho (1644–94). Despite his fame, Basho preferred a simple life and spent most of his time travelling around

Japan, writing about everyday experiences. Basho combined literary sensibilities with a down-to-earth approach, and his haiku are famous for distilling a feeling or moment to its very essence.

Though the three lines and 5-7-5 syllabic structure are the best-known features of haiku, there are other important elements: the *kigo* is a word indicating a season, while the *kireji* (cutting word) adds emotional effect or interrupts the stream of thought. Plenty of modern poets ignore these formal constraints, though, preferring a style called *jigyūritsu* (free form) – and even the old masters ignored the rules sometimes.

## A BASHO HAIKU

Basho wrote his most famous haiku in the late 17th century.

*furu ike ya  
kawazu tobikomu  
mizu no oto*

There have been many translations of this poem, such as this one by Lafcadio Hearn from 1898:

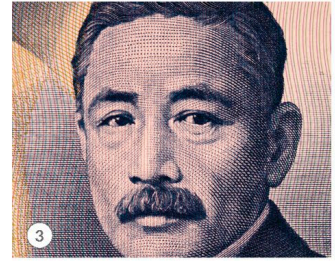
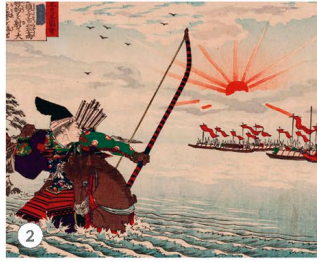
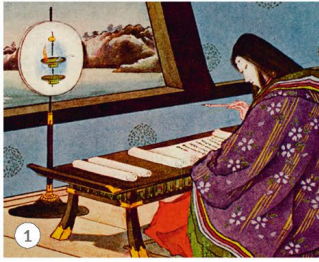
*Old pond  
frogs jumped in  
sound of water*

The popularity of this simple yet elegant poem has endured because of the clear image it paints, the sense of immediacy and the unpretentious playfulness.



◀ Basho travelled alone, seeking the peace and contentment he couldn't find in the city.





^ Top row from left:  
illustration of  
Lady Murasaki;  
painting of a scene  
from the Heike  
Monogatari; portrait  
of Soseki Natsume.  
Bottom row from left:  
Ryunosuke Akutagawa;  
a selection of Haruki  
Murakami Novels;  
Banana Yoshimoto

## THE BEST OF JAPANESE LITERATURE

From its early roots in oral story-telling to the popular novels and manga of today, Japan has produced a constant stream of incredible tales and thoughtful works across the centuries. Fall in love with Japanese literature by taking a journey through some of its most famous works.

**1. *Genji Monogatari***, Murasaki Shikibu (c 1020): Written in the eleventh century, *The Tale of Genji* may be the world's first novel. It reflects the refined life Murasaki Shikibu would have experienced as a lady-in-waiting of the imperial court.

**2. *Heike Monogatari*** (c 1330): This military epic recounts the defeat of the Heike clan in the Genpei War (1180–1185). It explores themes of impermanence, honour and justice, and is important both as a classic work of literature and a historical source.

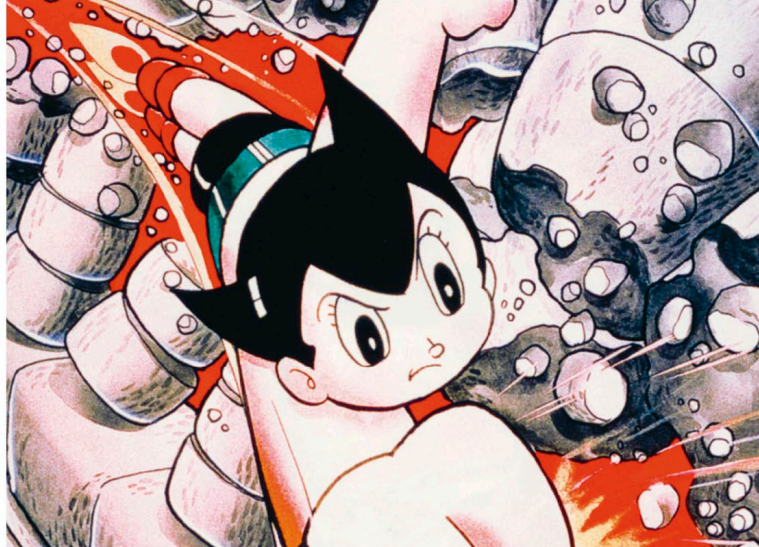
**3. *I Am a Cat***, Soseki Natsume (1905): Narrated by a cynical housecat, *I Am a Cat* turned a satirical eye on the way Japanese

and Western cultures were mixing in the Meiji era. It was Soseki's first major work, setting him on the path to becoming one of Japan's most influential writers.

**4. *In a Grove***, Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1922): This is one of the best-known short stories by Akutagawa, whose name was given to a prestigious Japanese short-story prize. It blends Japanese themes with the more Western styles of modernist literature.

**5. *Norwegian Wood***, Haruki Murakami (1987): The modern master of the Japanese "I" novel – a style of first-person confessional literature – Murakami became a literary sensation both in Japan and abroad after the release of this lyrical, elegiac yet critical look at the youth movement of the 1960s.

**6. *Kitchen***, Banana Yoshimoto (1988): A hit both in Japan and abroad, *Kitchen's* simple style is reminiscent of traditional Japanese poetry. Yoshimoto uses everyday domestic scenes to reflect on big issues such as grief, societal expectations and the loneliness of modern Tokyo life.



^ Left to right: The Chōjū-giga scrolls are viewed as Japan's first manga; Astro Boy was the first anime to be aired overseas and has since inspired several films.

漫画とアニメ

# MANGA AND ANIME

A global phenomenon

Since the end of World War II Japan has developed enormous industries in comics and animation. Loved for their imaginative characters and complex plots, these exciting media are a modern incarnation of Japan's deeply held tradition of storytelling.

## THE EVOLUTION OF MANGA

Manga and anime are the Japanese words for comics and animation respectively. Some argue that manga has deep roots in the country's earlier art forms, harking back to illustrated scrolls and the *ukiyo-e* of the Edo era. However, the clearest

forerunners of manga were Japan's first colourful comic strips, developed in the years before World War II.

The postwar years saw the rise of story comics, printed in monochrome on rough paper – which remains the standard today. The comics are released first in thick manga anthology magazines, before being compiled as *tankōbon* (book volumes) to unite the whole story in one collection.

Whether you're a die-hard fan or eager to learn, the Kyoto International Manga Museum is a must-see stop providing a fascinating tour of manga history. The real highlight, though, is the museum's library, and gazing up at the thousands of colourful *tankōbon* on these towering bookshelves brings home the passion behind the much-loved world of manga.

MANGA HAS DEEP ROOTS IN JAPAN'S EARLIER ART FORMS SUCH AS WOODBLOCK PRINTS.





^ Most magazines have a specific target audience, but the right stories and characters cross every boundary and attract fans from all demographics.

## FROM MANGA TO ANIME

The birth of modern anime came in 1963, when popular manga artist Osamu Tezuka created a cartoon version of his hit comic series *Mighty Atom* (*Astro Boy* in English). The show introduced an

enduring aesthetic style, cemented the link between manga and anime, and also helped shape the standards of TV anime. The advertising company that purchased *Mighty Atom*'s weekly time-slot wasn't prepared to pay high sums for a cartoon, partly due to the availability of American imports. Tezuka offered his series at far less than its production cost, relying on advertising deals, merchandise and foreign sales to make up the shortfall – which is still common practice in the industry.

## CARTOON HEROES

Around the world, manga and anime have become an accessible gateway to Japanese culture. They draw in readers with wildly imaginative characters and amazing stories that unfold over the weeks and years that a series goes on. *Astro Boy* was an early star of both anime and manga because of Tezuka's deceptively deep and often dark stories, but he was soon joined by many other characters that found a dedicated following. *Sazae-san* is a housewife created by artist Machiko Hasegawa for a newspaper strip in 1946; the character debuted in her own TV anime in 1969, which is now the world's longest-running cartoon. Originally a revolutionary series full of forward-thinking feminist ideas, it is now a nostalgic and beloved show that focuses on family life in postwar Japan.

These days, the manga magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump* has become famous for publishing comics that turn into long-running and popular anime full of brilliant characters. It's the origin of hit series like *Dragon Ball*, *Naruto* and *Death Note*, as well as the ongoing manga *Haikyuu!!* – which follows the story of a high-school volleyball team – and *My Hero Academia*, a Japanese twist on American superhero comics.



> Weekly Shonen Jump series have become so popular overseas that the magazine is translated into multiple languages.

## DIVE INTO MANGA

Many manga run for dozens of volumes, but if that seems too much of an investment for your first foray into Japanese comics, pick up any volume of *Hetalia*. There's no plot to this light-hearted comedy series about world history, so you can start anywhere. Each character is a personification of a different country, which offers interesting insight into the Japanese writer's view of foreign people and cultures.

## ANIME TODAY

While manga are commonly used as the source material for anime, the reverse is also true – and both formats can spawn adaptations in many other media, from films and games to novelisations and music albums.

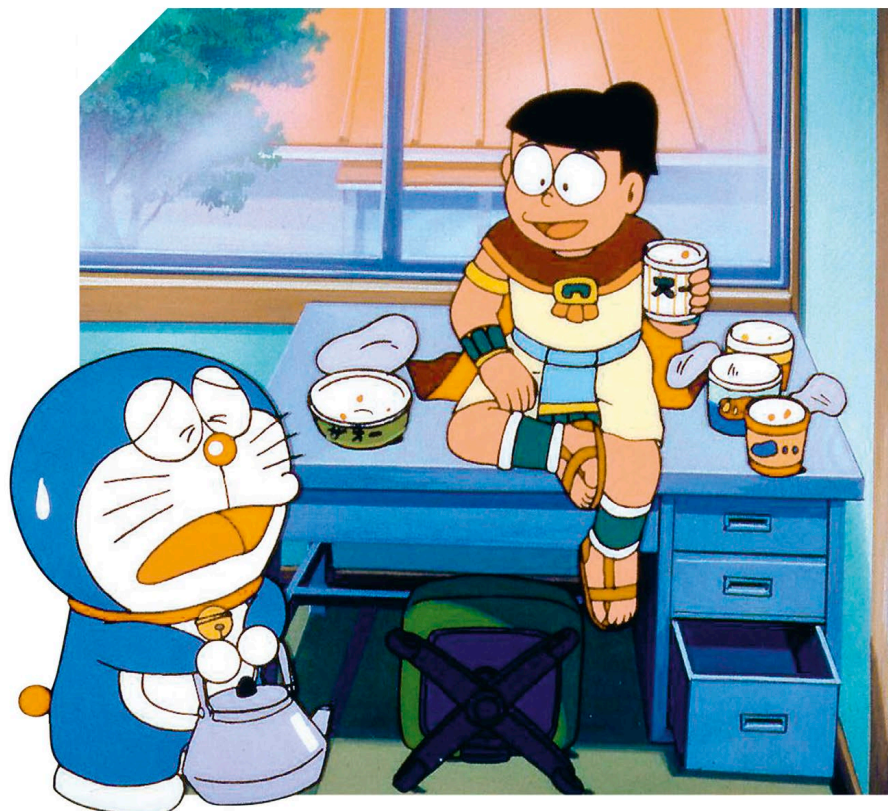
TV anime are primarily targeted at children, so the most well-known shows in Japan are often those for younger audiences. These long-running series are mainstream staples of television, and it's not uncommon to see the smiling faces of the main characters in adverts, and on packaging and toys.

Anime for older audiences, on the other hand, is a lot more niche. Many of these series are broadcast after midnight and watched only by small

audiences of enthusiastic fans, who follow their favourite shows passionately and attend conventions to buy merchandise and cosplay as their favourite characters. There can be large adverts for these series in the *otaku* (geek) districts of big cities, but they're not mainstream entertainment. And yet, despite their lower profile in Japan, these are the series that have captured the most attention abroad.

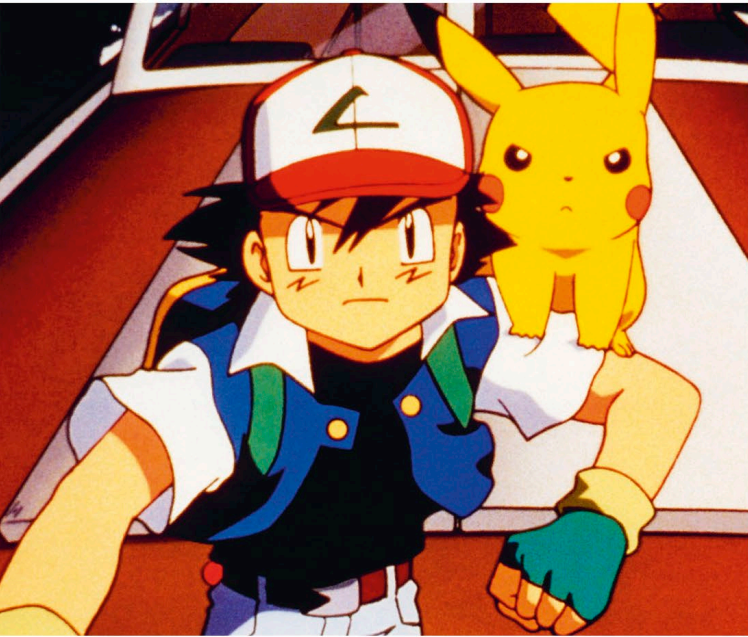
## ENDURING CREATIVITY

Some look to the future of the manga and anime industries with a degree of uncertainty. Manga sales peaked in 1995, when they accounted for 40 per cent of all publications sold, but by 2017 sales had fallen by over two-thirds. One likely reason is the rise of smartphones, which offer



< Children's favourite Doraemon is one of Japan's biggest anime franchises.





◀ The Pokémon craze of the late 1990s introduced anime to a new generation of fans around the world.

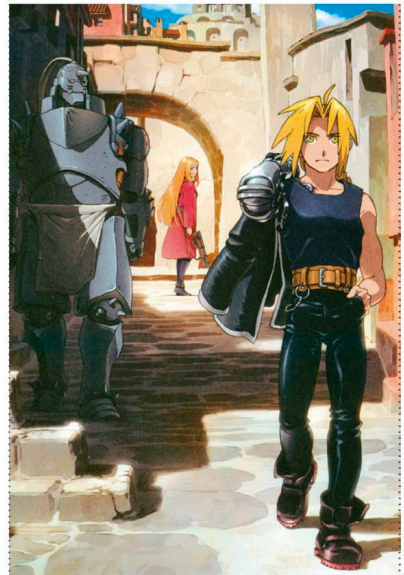
## ANIME FOR OLDER AUDIENCES ARE FAIRLY NICHE, BUT GET THE MOST ATTENTION ABROAD.

other means of portable entertainment. Both manga and anime have also been threatened by digital piracy, with many Western fans accessing series online to save waiting months for official translations.

And yet, despite the decline in sales and the threat of piracy, manga and anime are sure to survive the hurdles of the digital age. Streaming services like Crunchyroll now translate and air new instalments shortly after the original Japanese release, while Netflix is making anime accessible to more viewers. Back in Japan, the creative spirit of anime and manga is as strong as ever, with new series drawing in fans at home and abroad as old favourites are revitalised in new forms.

### FIRST-TIME ANIME

If you're looking to explore the world of Japanese TV anime, there's no better place to start than *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* – an iconic adventure series set in a steampunk-esque world where alchemy is a known science. The story starts when the young Elric brothers have their lives turned upside down by an alchemical ritual gone wrong, and grows to epic proportions as the series goes on. A huge cast of memorable characters and a perfect balance of action and comedy have helped make this series a classic.



**TANKOBON**

Manga usually begin life as serials in long anthology magazines. The chapters are then collected and published as *tankobon* (book volumes).

**MERCH MANIA**

Stores like Animate sell official merchandise for legions of eager fans to add to their collections.

**ANIME**

Popular manga, such as *Naruto*, are then adapted into anime, reaching new audiences both in Japan and abroad.

**HOLLYWOOD BECKONS**

Live-action Hollywood versions bring in new audiences. Look out for upcoming films of *Attack on Titan* and *My Hero Academia*.

**ON STAGE**

Despite the complicated special effects, no series is too daunting for a live-action stage version.

**THEME PARK THRILLS**

Super-popular series inspire attractions at theme parks such as Universal Studios Japan™ or Fuji-Q Highland.







### ANIME MOVIES

As the series builds momentum it spawns multiple animated films, both long and short.

### GAMES GALORE

Video game tie-ins are released for various consoles, with mobile gaming more popular than ever.

### THEMED CAFÉS

Serving up exclusive merchandise and themed menus, cafés are a fun way to enjoy a series with friends and fellow fans.

### LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Live-action versions bring a series to the mainstream media, appealing to viewers way beyond the original fanbase.

進化する漫画

## THE EVOLUTION OF A MANGA SERIES

*Creating new experiences*



A popular manga can take on a life far beyond the pages of its original comic magazine. Die-hard fans always want to know more about their favourite characters and the worlds they live in, so hit series can end up inspiring adaptations in all manner of forms. Some may explore the background of a side character, some delve deeper into the fictional world of the story, and others create opportunities for fans to experience the series in a new way. From black-and-white drawings that capture the imagination to Hollywood blockbusters that bring a series to life for a global audience, we chart the journey of popular series as they evolve through new adaptations and win the hearts of new fans.





The background of the page is a vibrant red, featuring large, abstract geometric shapes. On the left and right sides, there are vertical bands of white, repeating geometric patterns, including star-like and floral motifs. The central area is a plain white space where the text is located.

## 面白い日本

# ENTERTAINING JAPAN

From traditional theatre, geisha and sports to modern pastimes such as arcade gaming and karaoke, Japanese entertainment offers up a world of delights for escaping the everyday. Even the attractions that seem most traditional, such as kabuki theatre and martial arts, have a firm place in modern society – their historical origins not tying them down in old-fashioned, outdated ways but allowing them to survive and inspire over the centuries. More modern forms of entertainment such as film have taken full advantage of the technological innovations of the past century, evolving over the years to remain both influential and enjoyable. In 1954 *Godzilla* was just a man in a suit, but the spark lit by this postwar classic has grown into an explosion of Japanese films that have inspired moviemakers around the world for decades. The world of entertainment has also created some passionate subcultures – like the J-Pop fanbase and *otaku* (geeks) – whose enthusiasm has spread around the world and inspired a fascination and love for Japan in a whole new generation.

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring entertaining Japan

It's often some form of entertainment or sport that inspires an interest in Japan in the first place. Some are introduced to Japan through karate lessons as a child, or through a love of J-Pop, or an obsession with *otaku* (geek) culture. However you were introduced, diving into the fun-filled opportunities for entertainment is the perfect first step to exploring Japan, as the experience is often shared with locals and can be a great way to meet people.



## < A VISION OF TRADITION

Kyoto is the center of the geisha world.

See a variety of elegant performing arts at the Miyako Odori festival, where geisha and their apprentices gather to dance and play instruments.

## EMBRACE THE GEEK SIDE

Let your inner otaku run free in Osaka's Nipponbashi district. Ditch your regular shopping list for anime goods and cool gadgets.

## SUMO

Head to the city of Fukuoka for the Grand Sumo Tournament held each November.

FUKUOKA

KOTOHIRA

KYOTO

OSAKA

KANSAI

## FLAMBOYANT DRAMA

The Shikoku region is one of the best places to see kabuki theatre. There are many theatres here, including the oldest in Japan: the Konpira Grand Theatre in the town of Kotohira.



## ^ "KANSAI HAI!"

Sport is big in the Kansai region, so book your tickets early. Osaka hosts sumo in March, while baseball lovers should join the passionate fans at a Hanshin Tigers game.



## 285 KG

At 285 kg (630 lb) the heaviest sumo wrestler ever was Yasokichi Konishiki. The average weight is 165 kg (363 lb).



### ^ BRINGING FILMS TO LIFE

Movie buffs will have plenty to enjoy in Tokyo. The National Film Archive holds viewings of a restored 1917 animated film, and the Studio Ghibli Museum has original shorts only available to view on site.

TOKYO

KAMAKURA

### > OTAKU PARADISE

Head to Akihabara and Ikebukuro for arcades and themed cafés.

### ✓ SAMURAI SPORTS

Be amazed by displays of horseback archery at the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Reitaisai Festival, held every September in Kamakura.



## BASEBALL FEVER

Japan's high school baseball tournament (Summer Koshien) is a popular annual sporting event.

**FAMILY  
BUSINESS**

The traditions of *no* theatre were established by father and son team Kan'ami and Zeami.





< During a *no* performance, only one or two masked characters appear on the bare stage at a time.

## 日本の舞台

# JAPANESE THEATRE

A balance of tradition and avant-garde

Japan's plays and musicals may seem difficult to appreciate for non-Japanese speakers, but the language barrier shouldn't put you off. The exaggerated visuals and exciting atmosphere of traditional theatre are still an unmissable experience, and contemporary adaptations of Western plays are a fascinating twist on old favourites.

### THE THEATRE OF NO

Japanese theatre has its roots in sacred Shinto dances, which were performed on a bare wooden stage with a painted backdrop of a pine tree and a canopy of a shrine-like roof. *No* (or *noh*) plays were developed in the 14th century and are defined by their mythical subject matter, slow-moving choreography and masked performers. Musicians playing drums and flutes sit at the rear of stage, across which leading performers move with studied grace and deliberation, wearing extravagant silk costumes and carved wood and painted masks.

### THE PLAYS AND KYOGEN

The 240 or so *no* plays that make up the current repertoire are performed at public theatres in Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka, as well as the theatres of famous *no* schools

such as Kanze in Tokyo. The plays are divided into five general genres and at a typical performance, which can last several hours, you'll get to see a selection from each. They're interspersed with comic interludes called *kyogen* – amusing monologues designed to provide some light relief and counterpoint to the serious *no* dramas. Performers of both styles are male, but *kyogen* actors don't wear masks and use far less formal speech.

### KABUKI

Kabuki is the most flamboyant of classical Japanese performing arts, and seeing a performance is an unforgettable experience. Famous for being performed by an all-male cast, kabuki is believed to have been created in the 17th century by Izumo-no-Okuni. Her unique style of performing sacred songs and dances inspired the creation of several all-female troupes. Women performers were banned in 1629 for being too erotic, but kabuki's popular support ensured its survival. Cross-dressing male actors, called *onnagata*, took up the female roles and the emphasis moved from song and dance to drama.



## BUNRAKU

Japanese puppet dramas began in the 17th century in Osaka, which remains the home of the National Bunraku Theatre. The performing art developed out of the storytelling tradition of minstrels reciting popular tales of famous heroes and legends, accompanied by musicians playing traditional instruments like the *biwa* and *shamisen*.

The large puppets used for bunraku are incredibly lifelike, about one-third to half the size of a human. They take three people to operate: the main puppeteer who manipulates the face, head and right arm, and assistants for the left arm and legs. All are dressed in black and are in full view of the audience. Thanks to their skill in working the puppets – a process that takes years to learn – they usually fade into the background as the audience focuses on the realistically moving figures and the emotions conjured by the narrator and the musicians.

✓ Left to right: Bunraku puppeteers are known as *Ningyotsukai* or *Ningyozukai*; the puppeteers must carefully coordinate their movements.

## EXPERIENCE BUNRAKU

To enjoy a bunraku performance, there's no better venue than the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka, which provides audio guides in English as well as translated programmes. There are only a few shows every year, so keep your eyes open for performance information. A good introduction to bunraku is through special performances for beginners. These combine a demonstration of the art of bunraku along with actual plays, and are conducted in multiple languages – perfect for foreign theatre-lovers.

## INTERPRETING THE WESTERN STORIES

Some modern playwrights and performers in Japan have turned to Western theatre for inspiration, adapting existing stories with a twist in the storytelling or the performance style. The director Yukio Ninagawa (1935–2016) was a leading figure in this branch of the modern



### CROSS-INFLUENCE

Many kabuki plays were originally written for puppets; bunraku has in turn borrowed from a number of kabuki dramas.







< Left: A performance of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, directed by Yukio Ninagawa. Above: Takarazuka's production of *The Rose of Versailles*.

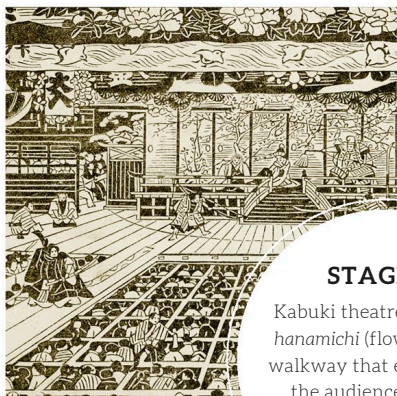
Japanese theatre scene, best known for his localised interpretations of Greek tragedies and Shakespeare. His version of *Macbeth* featured Buddhist chanting and witches in kabuki costumes.

The railway tycoon Ichizu Kobayashi was a lover of Western opera, and founded an all-female group in 1914 called the Takarazuka Review Company. It has flourished to become one of Japan's most beloved theatrical troupes, and performs Western-style musical dramas and shows based on Western novels such as *Gone With the Wind* and *War and Peace*. Millions of fans flock to the troupe's Tokyo stage to attend the shows, which are performed by one of six troupes – Flower, Moon, Snow, Star, Cosmos and Senka, the last made up of the company's most senior members. Each troupe has a star pair of actors – the male impersonator, the *otoko yaku*, and the *musume yaku*, the female lead.

## 2.5D MUSICALS

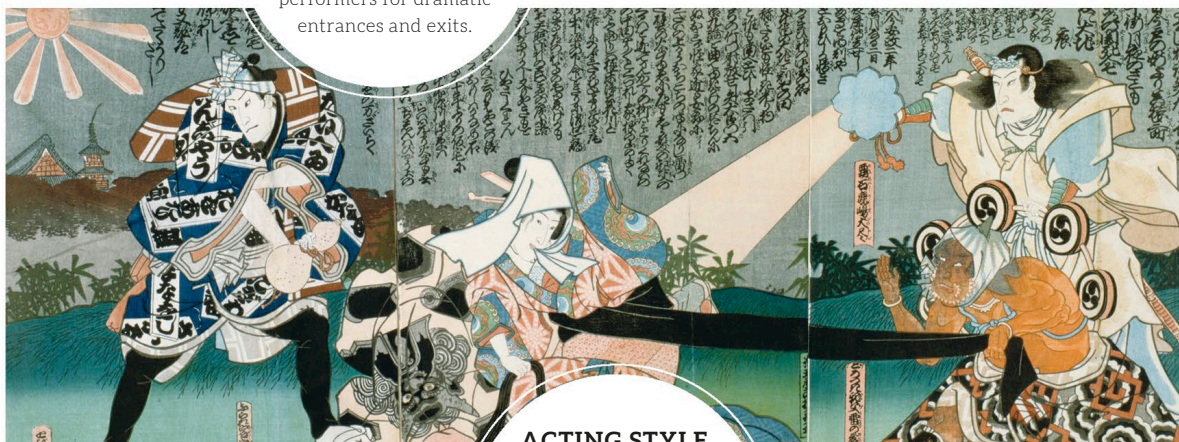
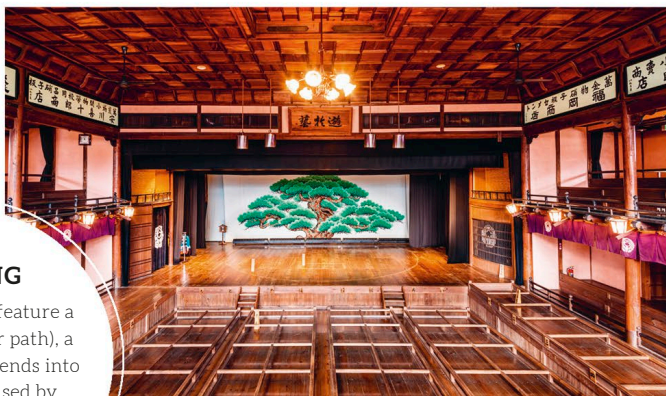
One of the latest trends in Japanese theatre is the creation of shows based on popular manga, anime and video games. A unique fusion of a two-dimensional comic book work and a three-dimensional onstage world, the format is known as a 2.5D musical. Using elaborate sets, costumes, music and special effects such as freeze frames, the shows vividly bring the source material to life. One of the most popular productions is *The Prince of Tennis*, based on the manga series by Takeshi Konomi about a teen tennis prodigy. There have been more than 20 variants of the show, selling millions of tickets.





## STAGING

Kabuki theatres feature a *hanamichi* (flower path), a walkway that extends into the audience, used by performers for dramatic entrances and exits.



## ACTING STYLE

Grand poses and exaggerated movements are the order of the day. To emphasise a beautiful scene, all the actors may freeze in a tableau.







### MAKE-UP

Heavily applied make-up is used to symbolise the age, gender and class of each character, as well as their mood and personality.

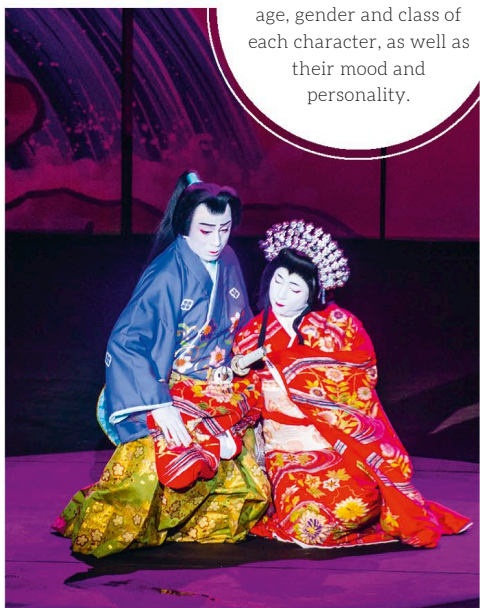
### 歌舞伎の経験

## THE KABUKI EXPERIENCE

### *Watching a live performance*

With its dramatic storylines, fabulous costumes, bold make-up, striking stage effects and elaborate sets, it's easy to see how kabuki caught the public imagination to become the pre-eminent form of traditional entertainment. There are many historical kabuki stages dotted around Japan, such as the beautifully preserved Uchiko-za in Uchiko (Ehime Prefecture) dating from 1916, and the Kanamaru-za, or Konpira Grand Theatre, in Kotohira (Kagawa Prefecture), which is said to be Japan's oldest original kabuki theatre. However, one of the best places to watch a performance is Tokyo's celebrated Kabuki-za, which offers almost daily kabuki shows. The flamboyant façade of the theatre – decorated with red lanterns and draped purple banners – chimes perfectly with the exaggerated acting style found within. If you're daunted by the language barrier, you can get an individual ticket for a single act, so you can enjoy the over-the-top experience without worrying about following the full story. There's also an English synopsis in the programme for a general outline, and the "G-Mark Guide" which offers the whole script in translation. While it's rude to talk during a performance, there are times when your fellow audience members suddenly and loudly shout out a popular actor's stage name. This practice, called *kakegoe*, is an expected part of the kabuki experience.

< Kabuki is flamboyant and colourful, with a large stage and cast. The major actors are stars, often from famous acting dynasties.







## ODORI

Each geisha district stages an annual public dance, or odori. In Kyoto, Gion's Miyako Odori is in April and Pontocho's Kamogawa Odori is in May.



< Left to right: In Kyoto, apprentice geisha are known as maiko; dancing is one of the essential skills that a geisha must master.

## 芸者の世界

# A GEISHA'S WORLD

An echo of the past

Contrary to misconception, a geisha is not a courtesan but rather a highly skilled entertainer, with a work schedule full of lunches and dinners, as well as continual training in music, dance and conversation. Her clients are the business and political elite, whom she entertains at teahouses or high-class traditional restaurants. For that reason, most Japanese people have never had contact with a geisha.

## BECOMING A GEISHA

Although there were an estimated 80,000 geisha in the 1920s, there are now only around 1,000. Apprenticeship begins at the age of 15, and involves living in an *okiya* (geisha boarding house) and undergoing five years of rigorous training in the traditional arts of dance, music, tea ceremony, *ikebana* and literature. Being an apprentice can also mean putting up with such demands as weekly visits to a hairstylist (and no hair washing in between), little contact with families and friends, and no cell phones. Only after a woman graduates to geisha status is she allowed more freedom, perhaps even her own apartment – though often this lifestyle is unsustainable, as she may have to retire when she gets married.

## GEISHA DISTRICTS

There has always been regional variety in geisha culture, but a common thread is the *hanamachi* (geisha districts), where geisha live, work and study.

The most famous *hanamachi* are in

Kyoto, of which Gion is the largest and most prestigious. Official geisha appointments are extremely hard to come by, but you can catch a glimpse of Gion's geisha and apprentices on their way to clients. In today's high-tech Japan, they look like an apparition, sprung from a woodblock print: their faces a powdery white and lips a startling crimson, with elaborately coiffed hair decorated with dangling ornaments and silk flowers.



^ Geisha are trained to play a range of musical instruments.

IN TODAY'S HIGH-TECH JAPAN,  
THEY LOOK LIKE AN APPARITION  
FROM A WOODBLOCK PRINT.

> Traditional instruments include the shamisen (lute), fute (flute) and various drums.



## 日本の音楽

# JAPANESE MUSIC

From spiritual roots to modern idols

Referential to Western styles and yet uniquely Japanese, Japan's music will entertain, delight and inspire you. There are familiarities and curiosities, offering a fascinating journey of discovery whether you want to dip your toes or dive in headlong. There's something for everyone, with styles ranging from deeply traditional and spiritual to experimental and avant-garde to buoyant, playful, quirky pop.

### THE SOUND OF TRADITION

Early Japanese music can be traced back to *gagaku*, a type of classical music played at the Imperial court to accompany dramatic performances. The music was often sparse

and driven by the action onstage. *Shomyo*, the chanting and singing of the monks, was also a major part of Japan's musical lineage. A key element of both styles was the *hyoshigi*, a simple-looking instrument made of two wooden boards. The spiritual, tonal sound made by hitting them together is part of the fabric of Japanese traditional music, and is also a feature of *no* theatre. Meanwhile, lacking direct contact with the court and the high arts, ordinary people

THE SPIRITUAL, TONAL SOUND OF *HYOSHIGI* IS PART OF THE FABRIC OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC.





^ (Left to right) Izumi Yukimura, Chiemi Eri and Hibari Misora were three of Japan's top pop singers in the postwar era.

developed their own form of traditional folk music, and *yoruri* – a style of music and storytelling – became popular with all classes.

One other important style, *enka*, came into fashion before the advent of contemporary music. Originating in the early 20th century as political messages set to music, the style was made up of slow, sentimental songs and would later become the basis for Japanese popular music. *Enka* singers would often use extensive vocal wavering and vibrato, predicting the vocal flourishes of modern R&B music.

## THE BIRTH OF A NEW ERA

In the 20th century, Japan made the leap from a long period of traditional music to soaking up a range of outside influences. Hawaii, Japan's American neighbour, introduced some Hawaiian and 1950s Americana elements to late *enka*, which became a full-blown obsession with early Western rock and roll that endures to this day. "Ue Wo Muite Aruko" by Kyu Sakamoto, released in 1961, is probably

## THE EPITOME OF ENKA

For an introduction to *enka*, you should listen to Misora Hibari's "Kawa no Nagare no Yo ni" ("Like The Flow of the River"). Frequently voted the best Japanese song of all time, this emotional ballad is considered the finest example of late *enka* and is as popular today as it was upon release in 1989.



^ Saburo Kitajima is one of Japan's most popular *enka* singers.

the true birth of the new wave of Japanese music. Sung by an Elvis-inspired crooner, this spiritual link between *enka* and J-Pop remains the only Japanese song to ever top the American charts. In the West, the song was renamed "Sukiyaki" – not because it has anything to do with the slow-cooked meat dish known as *sukiyaki*, but because it was easier to say.

## THE AGE OF J-POP

J-Pop is a mega-force of contemporary music that kicked off in the 1990s. The name was originally coined to denote every type of pop music apart from *enka*, but is now most closely linked to bubbly chart toppers that have an irresistible rhythm and simple – almost clichéd – lyrics, and are often accompanied by choreographed dance moves. Strong melodic songwriting and catchy, hummable tunes have made sure that J-Pop is here to stay, despite the influence of smoother, R&B style K-Pop (Korean pop) – another music industry behemoth that has swept the globe.

### FEEL THE MUSIC

The thrill of a live concert is always exciting, and Japan takes it to the next level with *wotagei*.

Performed by *wota* (J-Pop idol fans), this high-energy dance involves waving

glow sticks and chanting, and is truly a sight to behold when a whole crowd joins in. To see the *wota* in action, download some J-Pop and hunt out a band or two to see live in concert in Japan. Hugely popular bands include SMAP, Arashi and Glay, whose “best of” album sold 4.8 million copies and who hold a live concert audience record at 200,000 people. But the genre isn’t just about bands. Singer Hikaru Utada is one of the best-known J-Pop artists outside Japan, while Kyary Pamyu Pamyu is also a hugely popular icon, adored by hordes of Japanese teenagers for her catchy tunes, sugary-sweet lyrics, and hyper-cute Harajuku-inspired style.

If simple pop music isn’t your thing, you can explore an endless supply of unique Japanese twists to different music genres, like the hugely popular Babymetal. This seemingly impossible blend of super-cute and death metal takes the form of an all-girl trio decked out in gothic Lolita and



< Left to right: Singer Kyary Pamyu Pamyu is the queen of the cute aesthetic; Glay is one of Japan’s biggest rock bands.







^ Mosaic is one of many live houses that can be found in Tokyo.

dolly-kei chic, with incredible talent and quality songs that ensure the fashion statement doesn't overpower the music. The band have dominated the live arena with the help of their highly talented backing group, the Kami Band.

## ENTER THE LIVE HOUSE SCENE

There's more to enjoy than just the world of the pop idols, with a contemporary music palette that offers incredible breadth and diversity. Outside the mainstream, experimental music, electronica and melodic pop have grown to share sound space with hip-hop, dub and rave. To fully

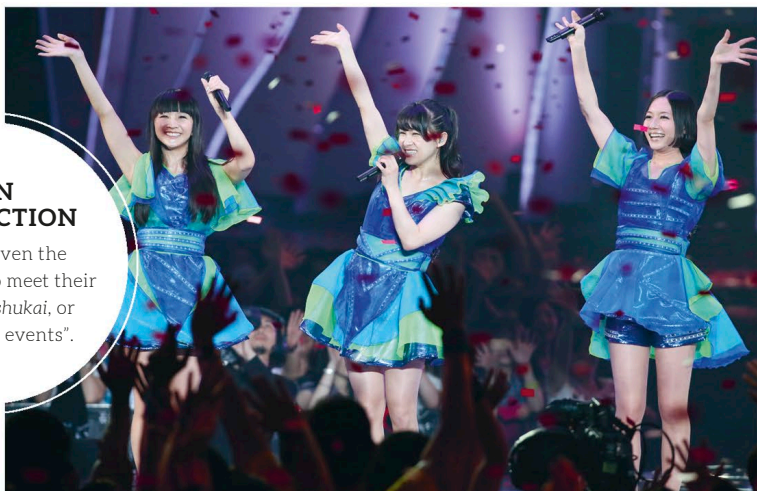
immerse yourself in these new sounds, your best option is to head to a live house. These Japanese institutions serve up jazz, electronica, heavy rock, thrash metal, folk and punk in large doses, often combining the different styles. There are people on stage who shouldn't give up their day job and some who you can't believe are playing in a venue this tiny. A true live house is usually small and dark, and customers come to appreciate the music – it's a serious business, and many spectators don't even drink. The best-known bands often have no actual success outside of the sphere of the performance, making it truly a moment in time, a microcosm of creativity and appreciation that takes place nightly across Japan. Shows usually kick off in the early evening with a line-up of four or five bands, and will be finished in time for you to catch the last train home or hit the local bars or late-night eateries.

BABYMETAL IS A SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE BLEND OF SUPER-CUTE AND DEATH METAL.



### FAN INTERACTION

Fans are given the opportunity to meet their idols at *akushukai*, or “handshake events”.



### IMAGE

Most bands have a young, cute and innocent image, which is reflected in their outfits and strict codes of behaviour.



究極のポップアイドル

## THE ULTIMATE POP IDOLS

*Girl bands with clout*

Since the 2000s, female pop idol bands have become big business in Japan. While some boy bands also have large followings, it's nothing compared to the culture around the female *aidoru* (idols), who earn themselves legions of fans that worship them – as the name suggests – like idols. The Japanese even refer to this era as “*Idol sengoku jidai*”: the Age of the Wars of the Idols. It sounds like an epic era in history, and for all the money it has generated and the dramas it has created, it might as well be.

Arguably the reigning monarchs are the girls of AKB48. Formed in Tokyo's *otaku* (geek) paradise of Akihabara in 2005, the band are the ultimate in prefabricated pop. The group was put together by mega-producer Yasushi Akimoto, who wanted to create a girl band with their own performance space (in Akihabara), to enable them to do daily shows and meet-and-greets for the obsessive fans. In order to keep up with this demanding schedule, the group has over a hundred members in their teens and early twenties, split into separate teams with a general theme and colour to each group. The band is the highest selling act in Japan and has occupied the first four places on the yearly singles chart since 2011. It has also spawned numerous spin-offs, with more “48 groups” around Japan and in several other Asian countries.

< Clockwise from top left: Pop idol fans; the band Perfume; a poster for AKB48 in Akihabara; AKB48 member Mayu Watanabe; AKB48 in concert.



### POPULARITY CONTEST

Fans of AKB48 can vote for their favourite members in the annual Senbatsu Election.





< Shimbashi is a popular nightlife district in Tokyo.

ナイトライフ

# NIGHTLIFE

From dusk till dawn

When the sun sets, Japan's streets transform under the bright glow of neon lights. From frenetic clubs to chilled out live music events, the country has all the usual nightlife options that you might expect. For a quintessentially Japanese night out, however, your best port of call is an *izakaya* or a karaoke bar.

## IZAKAYA

A cross between a bar and a restaurant, *izakaya* are the Japanese equivalent of pubs. Evolving out of standing bars in sake shops, they offered small plates of food to go with the drinks and became popular places for after-work socializing. You can usually find *izakaya* near train stations or in entertainment districts, and the atmosphere is lively with lots of chatter. They make the perfect venue for a long, relaxed evening – grab a table, order yourself some sake and steadily work your way through the appetizing array of tapas-style dishes.

## KARAOKE CULTURE

Karaoke has its roots in *utagoe kissa* – singing cafés that were popular in the 1950s to 1970s – and since then has become a global phenomenon. Standing





^ Izakaya are great for socialising and unpretentious food.



^ Trips to karaoke bars are a convivial way to relax after work.

up in front of your friends to sing along to a recorded backing track might seem like a nightmare to some, but for a hard-working Japanese population it's a way to let off steam. It's even common as a team-bonding exercise, and acts as a great leveler – proficiency level is not taken into account, and quite often the worst vocal will get the best response. At the majority of Japanese venues you book a private room, so you don't have to worry about singing in front of strangers. You can also order in food and drink, and while many Japanese people won't need to get drunk to let their karaoke inhibitions go, it adds to the bonding experience – combining the casual feel of after-work drinks with the entertainment value of a sing-along.

### TRY IT OUT

In any urban area of Japan, you're likely to be spoilt for choice when it comes to picking a karaoke place for your evening entertainment. Big Echo and Joysound are the most foreigner-friendly in terms of the technology and instructions, but the

assistants at any venue will be happy to give you a walkthrough of the handheld console that's used to input the songs. English words almost always accompany the Japanese lyrics on screen, and Joysound even have a list of the best non-Japanese Karaoke songs for the 2010s.

### ESSENTIAL TERMS

**Juhachiban:** the song you excel at singing – if you don't have one already, karaoke will help you find it.

**Karamovie:** the music video that plays along with the songs at karaoke – often a retro-looking creation by the karaoke companies, as the real videos are too expensive.

**Hitokara:** singing karaoke alone; not as common as going as a group, but sometimes you just need to practice your juhachiban!

日本のオタク

# OTAKU JAPAN

A celebration of geekery

Japan's small but passionate *otaku* (geek) subculture has been gaining momentum around the world since the 1990s, when anime (cartoons) started to become more famous and accessible overseas. For the new generations of people growing up on a steady diet of Japanese video games, anime and manga (comics), it's a dream to make a pilgrimage to Japan, where shops, restaurants and attractions created just for *otaku* customers have become the fabric of whole districts.

## DEFINING OTAKU

When the term "*otaku*" was coined by essayist Akio Nakamori in 1983, it was

used in a disparaging way to define all those people who were obsessed with something that was otherwise considered fairly geeky and immature: be it manga, dolls or video games. This negative view endured for many decades, and while geek culture has become more acceptable in the 21st century, many Japanese people still have mixed feelings on this subject – and *otaku* often prefer to keep their hobbies to themselves. Foreign fans, on the other hand, have wholeheartedly adopted the term, and the title of *otaku* is a badge of honour which they proudly use to declare themselves a die-hard fanatic of their particular passion.

✓ Left to right:  
Arcades such as Club  
Sega and Taito Station  
can be found across  
Japan; Tokyo's  
Akihabara district is  
a hotspot for arcades  
and all things otaku.







< The Gundam Café in Tokyo's Akihabara district celebrates one of Japan's long-running and hugely popular mecha (giant robot) franchises.

## ARCADE CULTURE

Arcades, known as game centres in Japan, used to be a worldwide staple. Now the scene seems to exist solely on the set of 1980s films, replaced by home consoles, PC software and portable devices. Except, that is, in Japan, where arcades continue to thrive, thanks to the owners' commitment to creating a unique experience that can't be duplicated anywhere else.

The venues differ in size but their basic layout is about the same. The first floor is crammed with fun games and crane machines which are more likely to attract casual passersby, young couples and families. The upper floors feature perennial favourites like shooting, fighting and music games – and this is where you can go to play alongside the hardcore gamers of *otaku*-level expertise. The last floor is usually devoted to *purikura* photo-sticker booths, which are a must on any outing with friends.

The key to the arcades' continued success is innovation, and the latest trend

is represented by virtual reality (VR). Most VR game centers are concentrated in Tokyo and require visitors to have at least some Japanese language ability – or you can just wing it and enjoy the experience.

## ESCAPE REALITY IN A THEMED CAFÉ

The first maid café was a temporary pop-up in 1998, but a permanent site opened in Tokyo's Akihabara district in 2001. Themed cafés in *otaku*-centric areas have since become a standard, as they're the perfect place for customers who enjoy escaping into their favourite hobbies. Some places are devoted to a particular franchise, while others – such as the Animate Cafés (with 25 branches around Japan) – change their theme every month or so, focusing on a different anime every time. Both groups offer a themed menu and sell time-limited merchandise.



A MAID CAFÉ SERVER

> Many fans bring suitcases to Comiket to hold all the merchandise they buy at the event.

## THE CONVENTION CALENDAR

*Otaku* of all kinds have exciting events and conventions to look forward to throughout the year, where they can hear news about their hobbies, buy new products and meet up with friends. Embrace your geeky hobbies by joining the crowds of eager *otaku* at one of these events – it can be a great place to meet like-minded fans, especially since some of these events draw over 100,000 attendees.

At BitSummit (June) and Tokyo Game Show (September) you can try out the latest innovations in gaming and hear all about new installments of your favourite video game franchises. Jump Festa (December) focuses instead on the manga content of best-selling *Shonen Jump* magazine. Among more niche events, the Dolls Party (May) and I Doll (events throughout the year) attract thousands of fans of Dollfie and Pullip, two popular doll brands.



## THE DOJIN MARKET

Collecting official merchandise is important for many *otaku*, but there's also a huge demand for fan-made products based on popular manga and anime. These *dojin* (independent) goods may take the form of novels or video games, but the biggest sellers are comics (*dojinshi*). The creators are often avid fans of a series who make *dojinshi* as a hobby, though some are aspiring manga authors or artists. As the products use copyrighted stories and characters, *dojin* goods are technically illegal. Surprisingly, though, the official publishers tend to look the other way; for the manga industry, in particular, it's a win-win situation as the *dojin* community is a hotbed for talent and helps fuel fans' interest in new series.



< New virtual reality equipment and games are often on display at Tokyo Game Show.





*Otaku* districts often have chain stores (such as Mandarake and K-Books) dedicated exclusively to *dojin* goods. You can also explore the world of the *dojin* community at Comiket (usually August and September), a hugely popular independent comics event held twice a year in Tokyo.

## DRESS TO IMPRESS

Dressing up as your favourite fictional character isn't a uniquely Japanese concept, and has been part of geek fandoms since the mid-20th century. But this hobby has been inextricably tied up with the *otaku* community since fans began donning costumes for the first Comiket events in the 1970s. The word "*cosplay*" (a portmanteau of "costume" and "play") was coined in 1983 by writer Nobuyuki Takahashi, and is now a common word used by geek and *otaku* communities around the world. You may find a few shops selling costumes, wigs, and other accessories in Japan, but hardcore

cosplayers make their own costumes, whether it's a simple school uniform or a full-on suit of armour.

Many *otaku*-centric conventions such as Comiket have a *cosplay* area where people can meet and take photos, and every month there are a few dedicated *cosplay* events around the country. Surprisingly, the two most important annual *cosplay* gatherings aren't held in the *otaku* districts of Tokyo. One is Osaka's Nipponbashi Street Festa (March), featuring a 1,000-strong parade of colourful cosplayers. The other is the World Cosplay Summit held at the end of July in Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture), uniting passionate *otaku* from around the world for a vibrant celebration of *cosplay* culture.

^ Japanese anime, manga and video games are common inspirations for cosplay, but you'll also likely see Western creations such as Disney characters and Marvel superheroes.

OTAKU HAVE EXCITING EVENTS  
TO LOOK FORWARD TO  
THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.



オタク街

## OTAKU DISTRICTS

Shopping in geek central

Tokyo is Japan's indisputable geek haven. From giant billboard video game ads to public awareness campaigns featuring popular manga characters, you just can't escape *otaku* imagery. Even the jingles that play at train stations are sometimes from popular anime. With few exceptions, all the Tokyo subcenters — such as Shinjuku, Shibuya and Harajuku — have their fair share of *otaku* attractions, from themed cafés to arcades. But serious *otaku* should take a couple of days to explore the fabulously geeky Akihabara (shown here) and Ikebukuro. Akihabara, also known as Akiba, has shops for all kinds of *otaku*, whether you're a fan of *mecha* models or J-Pop idols. Ikebukuro, meanwhile, is full of fun for casual shoppers, but also teems with geeky wonderlands aimed especially at anime and manga fangirls. The elegant Swallowtail Café, for example, is the female answer to the male-oriented maid cafés of Akiba.

Wherever you are in Japan, keep an eye out for the blue "Animate" sign. Each location of this nation-wide chain feels like a mini *otaku* treasure trove of all the latest anime goods.



## BEYOND TOKYO

For some *otaku* fun outside the capital, head to the Nipponbashi district in Osaka or Osu in Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture).





> Left to right: Japan began regular TV broadcasting in 1953, after its initial tests in the 1930s were halted by the onset of World War II; many period dramas are based on novels or comics, or, like the 2010 version of *13 Assassins*, remakes of older films.



## 日本の映像作品

# JAPAN ON SCREEN

## Nation-defining genres

In the latter half of the 20th century, Japan's prolific and influential media industries rose to international fame through the development of new techniques, modern genres and moving stories.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT GAME SHOWS

Japanese TV is often thought of as bright and wacky, dominated by sci-fi anime and inexplicable game shows. However, the country's most enduring TV hits are its lively variety shows and serious period dramas.

The appearance of *Matthew's Best Hit TV* in the 2003 film *Lost in Translation* cemented the overseas image of the Japanese game show as a bizarre blend of high-energy interviewing, slapstick comedy and gaudy transitions. These game shows do exist – and they're popular – but

they're usually just segments on longer variety shows. These shows have been a Japanese TV staple since the 1950s, and some of them have been around for decades. Some of the genre's roots lie in Japan's theatrical traditions: the exaggerated characters mirror elements of kabuki, while the comedic games and sketches of the *owarai* (comedians) have strong links to *rakugo* (on-stage storytelling). Alongside these comedians, segments might include travel stories, musical performances, interviews, challenges or competitions, and even investigative pieces. The hosts' reactions

SOME OF THE ROOTS OF JAPAN'S VARIETY SHOWS LIE IN ITS THEATRICAL TRADITIONS.





are often shown in a small box in the corner of the screen throughout.

## HISTORICAL DRAMAS

On both the big and small screens of Japan, historical dramas – known as *jidaigeki* – are always big business. Many fall under the umbrella of *chanbara*, “samurai cinema”, which tends to focus on samurai trying to live by their moral code in a changing, often hostile world. But though this is the most famous sub-genre of *jidaigeki*, there are plenty of others, including romance, politics and comedy.

You can get a glimpse of what it would be like to work on a *jidaigeki* film set by visiting Toei Kyoto Studio Park in Kyoto, where you can try on costumes and traditional kimono, watch performances and visit period-themed attractions like a house kitted out with ninja traps.

## THE ISOLATION ERA

*Jidaigeki* are most often set around the Edo period. At this time Japan was mostly cut off from the outside world, so setting dramas in this era gives filmmakers a clearly defined social structure in which to set conflicts. The unique role of the

## ADAPTATIONS

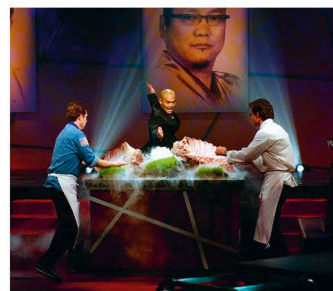
You may not think that you’ve watched much Japanese TV, but you’ve almost certainly seen something based on it. Here are just a few you may have heard of:

**Home movie bloopers:** A segment from variety show *Kato-chan Ken-chan Gokigen TV* became the basis of famous series such as *America’s Funniest Home Videos* and *You’ve Been Framed*, where viewers send in funny home videos.

**Ninja Warrior:** With adaptations found around the world, this thrilling physical challenge show started life as the obstacle course series *Sasuke* in Japan.

**Hole in the Wall:** Inspired by the *nokabe* (“brain wall”) segment from variety show *The Tunnels’ Thanks to Everyone*, this unexpected classic is similar to human Tetris.

**Iron Chef:** All the adaptations of this much-loved cooking contest are based on the Japanese original.



samurai in this period means *chanbara* films have plenty of opportunities for dramatic sword-fight scenes, while the wandering *ronin* (masterless samurai) has the same independent, roguish feeling as the outlaw in Hollywood Westerns.



^ Above: From left to right - Shoichi Hirose, Haruo Nakajima and Masaki Shinohara were the actors behind the legendary monsters King Ghidorah, Godzilla and Rodan. Left: Nakajima on set.



## MAKING MOVIE HISTORY

Japan's film industry is not only one of the world's largest and longest-established, but also one of its most influential. Domestic films get well over half the box office share in Japan, and its directors are regularly nominated for international awards. Beyond the proliferation of historical dramas it shares with television, there are three styles in which Japan is undoubtedly a global leader: *tokusatsu* (special effects), horror and animation. Here are a few standout examples to whet your appetite.

### TOKUSATSU

Although the name comes from a portmanteau of special effects (*tokushu satsuei*), *tokusatsu* movies have a more hand-crafted aesthetic than the CGI-heavy films we're used to today. To understand the vision of *tokusatsu*, just

think back to the original *Godzilla* (1954). Inspired by the special effects of the 1933 *King Kong*, the creators of *Godzilla* became the first to truly define the *tokusatsu* style of live-action adventure films, setting the visual template for many films to come.

Just a few years later, *Super Giant* was released, introducing Japan's first big screen superhero. This early classic became the foundation for the "masked hero" sub-genre of *tokusatsu*, which soon spilled over onto TV screens and continues to play a major part in the realm of children's televisions. The *Super Sentai* series has been running in various forms since 1975, and was even adapted into the 1990s smash hit *Power Rangers* in the West.

### HORROR

After the release of the cult-classic *Ring* in 1998, a new term was invented: J-horror.

^ The *Godzilla* franchise now comprises over 30 films.



It brought international attention to Japan's unique approach to horror films, which focus on building suspense and psychological tension – whether in stories about the supernatural (such as in *Dark Water*, 2002) or those that come with a heavy helping of gore (as in *Audition*, 1999).

Japan has long enjoyed a good horror story, with ghosts and malevolent spirits often cropping up in folklore, and the *kaidan* (ghost story) genre becoming hugely popular during the Edo period. Many J-horror films take these sources as inspiration, but they often deal with modern themes, as well; *Ring* (1998) deals with the fear and urban legends which grow out of new technology.

## ANIMATION

Japanese anime (short for animation) may be more famous in its TV form, but big-screen animated features are one of the country's most influential cultural exports. Its wide appeal has given rise to a long line of family classics to rival those of the Walt Disney Animation Studios, so if you haven't had a chance to try them yet, don't hesitate to add some Studio Ghibli to your movie library. Co-founders Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata have produced unmissable films such as *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, and their creations often balance a child's-eye-view of the world with a nuanced, elegiac tone which appeals to adults.

But while animation in the West has historically been aimed at children, Japanese anime isn't bound by a single target audience, and can cover the same range of styles, budgets and genres as any other type of film. This means Japanese animated movies can be so much more than just family favourites: they are often ground-breaking contributions to world cinema, reaching beyond the medium of animation and influencing moviemakers on a global scale.

## THE WIDE APPEAL OF ANIME HAS GIVEN RISE TO A LONG LINE OF FAMILY CLASSICS.

The dystopian cyberpunk flick *Akira* (1988) was one of the first anime movies to cross over to the West, changing the way that moviegoers and filmmakers perceived animation in the West. Since then, a steady stream of incredible features has followed: the psychological thrillers of Satoshi Kon, dreamy visuals and bittersweet stories by Makoto Shinkai, and the distinct aesthetic of Mamoru Hosoda. His film *Mirai* was nominated for Best Animated Feature at the 2019 Oscars, the first non-Ghibli anime to be recognized in this way.

✓ *Your Name.* (2016) by Makoto Shinkai is the fourth-highest grossing film in Japanese history.



## UGETSU

(1953) From their use of long takes to their narrative ambiguity, the films of Kenji Mizoguchi clearly inspired French New Wave directors.



## SEVEN SAMURAI

(1954) This film by Akira Kurosawa had a huge impact on the work of George Lucas.



## LADY SNOWBLOOD

(1973) A bloody revenge story with a female lead: the influence on Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* is clear.

## ISLE OF DOGS

(2018) This stop-motion feature by Wes Anderson is crammed with references to Japanese culture and cinema, particularly the films of Akira Kurosawa.



## BATTLE ROYALE

(2000) *The Hunger Games* has obvious parallels, and Tarantino has called it one of his favourite films.

## PAPRIKA

(2006) From blurry lines between dreams and reality to similar wardrobe choices – there are clear links between this animated film and the 2010 hit *Inception*.





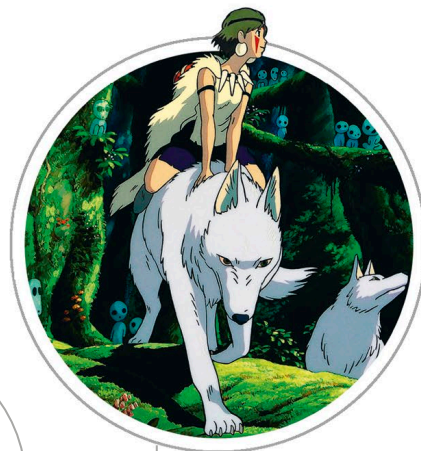
## TAMPOPO

(1985) A love letter to Westerners and to food, *Tampopo* is director Juzo Itami's take on American film styles.



## AKIRA

(1988) You can draw a clear line from *Akira*'s wildly influential action scenes and gritty aesthetic to many later sci-fi films.



## PRINCESS MONONOKE

(1997) Studio Ghibli's first breakthrough in the West paved the way for more animated films to come.

## RING

(1998) Eschewing gore in favour of psychological terror, *Ring* defined the J-Horror genre. It was remade as *The Ring* by Gore Verbinski, and influenced scores more restrained horror films.

日本の映画

# JAPANESE CINEMA

*A conversation with the West*



From adaptations to homages, here are just a few of the most important moments in the conversation between Japanese and Western films. Japanese cinema has always mixed foreign technologies and styles with its own culture and sensibilities, creating something truly unique in the process – but the flow of influence goes both ways. In some cases, Japanese films have been directly remade for Western audiences, with everything from J-horror film *Ring* to the heart-warming story of Hachiko the dog getting this treatment. But often the influence is subtler, with film styles pioneered in Japan inspiring foreign directors, or key themes and plotlines being reused for a different audience in a new era or nation.

> Soccer was introduced to Japan in the 1870s, by a Canadian officer of the Royal Navy.



スポーツ

# SPORTS

A way of life and leisure

Growing up in Japan, sport often plays a key role in everyday life, as extra-curricular clubs and showing team spirit are crucial elements of the school experience. Many children join one of their school sports clubs in elementary or middle school and carry on right through to university – and sometimes beyond, becoming members of local community teams as an adult.

A key reason behind this widespread participation is the intrinsically Japanese concept of *wa*: the importance of the group dynamic. While *wa* is an undercurrent running below the surface of Japanese life, sport is where the concept comes alive, exemplifying the crucial values of harmony, communication and cooperation. With this kind of upbringing, sport becomes not just

a fun leisure activity but an essential part of Japanese culture.

However, it's not all about deep-rooted tradition and philosophy. Another reason behind the importance of sport is also just the pure love of the game – whatever that may be.

For many, baseball is close to an obsession, dominating the back pages of newspapers. Yet centuries-old sumo still draws big crowds, too, and Japan lands many of its Olympic medals in martial arts.

While baseball and soccer are the most-watched sports on TV, Japan has diverse sporting interests, with everything from table tennis to rugby catching the public's attention at some point during the year.





< The baseball season is eight months long, going from April to October.

## TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME

Because of their many stints as Central League and Japan Series champions, the Yomiuri Giants have both the most avid fans and die-hard haters – who are happy to declare themselves the *anchi-Jaiantsu* (anti-Giants), so going to see one of their games is sure to be a lively experience. But if you're going to adopt a team, you'll make far more friends opting for one of the other 11 choices – maybe the Hiroshima Carp or the Hanshin Tigers from Osaka, both of which have a passionate fanbase.



## BASEBALL

In 1867, an American professor called Horace Wilson at what is now the University of Tokyo is said to have first shown the Japanese how to play baseball. The love affair that began that day is still burning bright, and Japan is now giving back to the nation who introduced it to its favourite sport. Nowadays the names of Japanese baseball players trip off the tongue in the US.

▽ The Japan Open is an annual, international table tennis tournament held in Japan.

## THE JAPANESE LEAGUE

In the Nippon Professional Baseball league (NPB), 12 teams are split between the Pacific and Central leagues, where they play through a hundred-plus-game regular season in hopes of reaching the playoffs and competing for the coveted Japan Series. Going to a game, whether you understand it or not, is a fun experience, with choreographed cheering and clapping producing a rousing atmosphere on even the muggiest of summer nights.



## BUDO – THE MARTIAL WAY

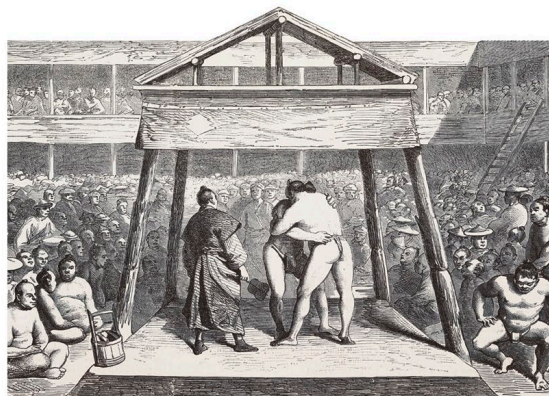
The legacy of feudal Japan is starkly apparent in the clattering of *kendo* practice swords and the poise of *kyudo* archers. Though no longer for war, the concept of *budo* (the martial way) is nevertheless preserved and respected through the practice modern martial arts. The *budo* philosophy values not just the skills each sport entails, but the mental discipline they breed and the grounding calm they offer in an increasingly hectic society.

## THE ORIGINS OF SUMO

While sumo epitomises many of the hallmarks of *budo*, it actually predates the origins of the martial way of feudal Japan. Nobody knows exactly when sumo began, but there is one word always given to the country's most recognisable sport: ancient. It's likely 1,500 years old at least – an

estimate based on wall paintings and unearthed figurines of wrestlers – and is thought to have begun as part of harvest rituals, a way to entertain the gods and gain their support for a good crop.

What is known for sure is that in the Nara period (710-794) sumo bouts were first performed in the Imperial court as entertainment, and by the Edo era wrestlers were fighting for public crowds, to raise money for the construction of temples and shrines. This spread sumo's popularity from beyond the sphere of the upper classes and throughout



^ Currently only men can be sumo wrestlers in Japan, but in other countries such as Brazil there are female rikishi.





the masses, paving the way for sumo to be declared the national sport in 1909.

Although sumo is considered very Japanese, it's grown a big international following, and many wrestlers themselves come from overseas. The most successful sumo wrestler of all time, in fact, is Mongolian-born Sho Hakuho.

## ATTENDING A TOURNAMENT

Every year Japan hosts six 15-day grand sumo tournaments – three in Tokyo's 11,000-seat Kokugikan arena and the rest in the Prefectures of Nagoya, Osaka and Fukuoka. They are an incredible display of pomp and power, with pre-bout posturing that sees the *rikishi* (professional wrestlers) tossing salt to purify the ring, stamping their feet hard into the ground and then, when the referee gives the nod, crashing into each other with a thud and crack that

## SUMO TOURNAMENTS ARE ARE AN INCREDIBLE DISPLAY OF POMP AND POWER.

sends gasps around the arena. At times, a bout ends in seconds, with one *rikishi* being thrown to the ground or tumbling out of the *dohyo* (ring) after an initial flurry of slaps and pushes. On other occasions, they spend long minutes holding on and jostling, trying to get leverage for a throw.

Either way, it's not hard to see that sumo is a brutal sport, and wrestlers accumulate a string of injuries during a career. It's a hard life, too: many *rikishi* live together in training stables, sharing sleeping quarters, performing chores for their seniors and being put through gruelling daily training sessions.

✓ Left to right: A *rikishi* purifies the ring by throwing salt; *rikishi* competing in the Grand Sumo Summer Tournament; as well as refereeing the bouts, *gyoji* (referees) often work in the stables where the *rikishi* live.

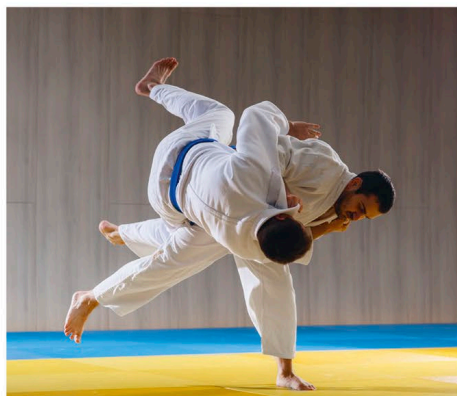






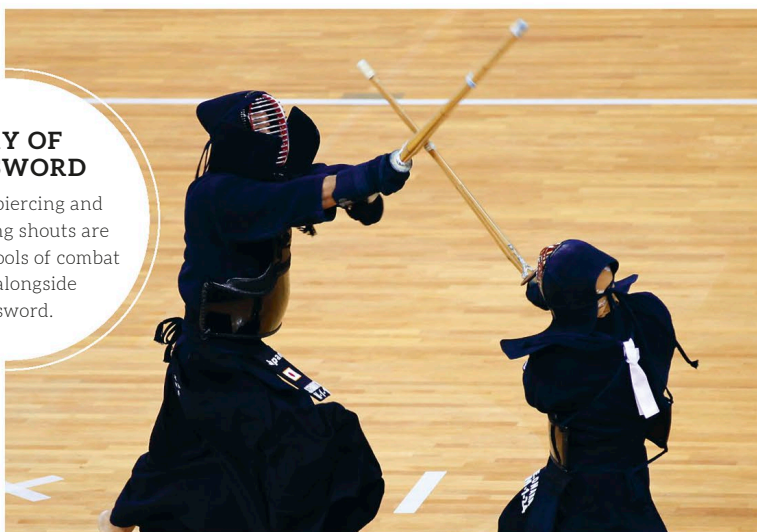
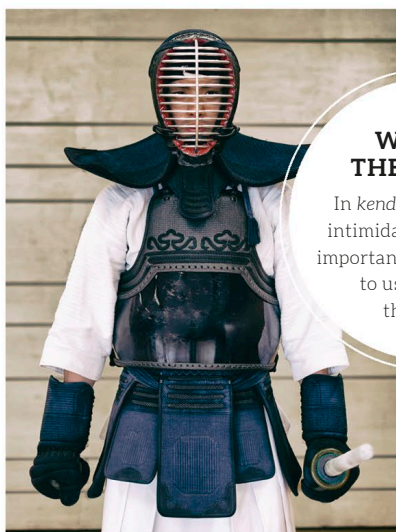
### OLD SCHOOL

Modern martial arts (bujutsu) have evolved from the military traditions of samurai. Ninjutsu are the skills descended from ninja.

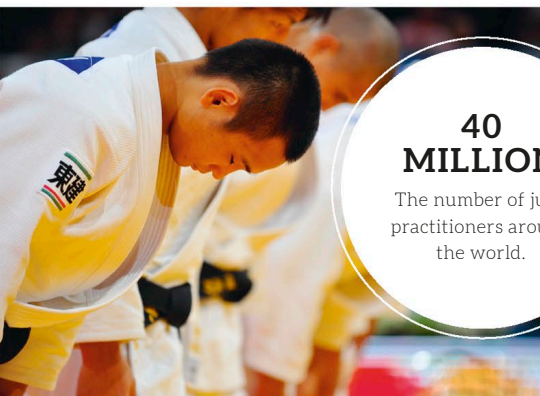


### WAY OF THE SWORD

In kendo, piercing and intimidating shouts are important tools of combat to use alongside the sword.







40  
MILLION

The number of judo practitioners around the world.

武道

## MARTIAL ARTS

*Military science turned modern sport*

Born from warfare, Japan's martial arts are a bridge between the country's past and its present. Instead of going down the path of war, however, the current practitioners of *budo* are on a quest for self-improvement, seeking fitness, discipline and a balance of mental flexibility and resilience to face life's challenges.

Japan's two most famous martial arts styles are karate and judo, but there are plenty of others you should make time to see on a trip to Japan. For a sport with a long history and obvious samurai connection, look no further than *kyudo* (archery), which can be traced back to the Yayoi period (300 BC–300 AD). It's a discipline that requires mental poise and extreme calm to be able to use a Japanese longbow to hit 36-cm (14-inch) diameter targets from 28 metres (90 ft) away. Put that on horseback and you have *yabusame*, which sees riders in full traditional gear firing at targets while their horses hit a gallop. And in *kendo* (the way of the sword) there's yet another samurai skill being preserved in modern Japan. Using wooden swords, the aim of the contest is to land two hits on the designated (and well-protected) strike zones on their opponent's body. Like other martial arts, the ultimate aim of training for most practitioners goes deeper than proficiency – it's all about the philosophy of *budo*: learning respect and self-control, and striving for personal development.

< Martial arts is a unique and thrilling way to access Japanese history, with the Nippon Budokan Tokyo arena offering lots of chances to see tournaments.



SAMURAI  
SKILLS

See *yabusame* (horseback archery) at the Tsuwano Yabusame Festival (Shimane Prefecture) held in April.









## 日本を食べる

# EDIBLE JAPAN

Wherever you travel in Japan, you'll soon discover the unique joys of *washoku* (Japanese food) – the ways that seasonal produce and regional characteristics shape menus, and the manner in which chefs are able to elevate even the simplest fare to art. From high-end sushi to cheap ramen, Japanese food is a mouth-watering menu of flavours, textures and styles. For a special night out, there's refined *kaiseki-ryori*, tempura or *teppanyaki*, while for a quick bite there are all sorts of noodles and street stalls. And those with a sweet tooth can take their pick from traditional *wagashi* sweets, cream-filled crepes and convenience stores full of sweet breads, chocolates and candies. There's an equally varied choice when it comes to the liquid options – the refreshing green teas, flavourful sakes, award-winning whiskies, and so much more. It's a miracle the Japanese manage to stay so trim.

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring edible Japan

Eating well is easy in Japan, whether it's street food in Osaka or Michelin-starred dining in Tokyo. Regional specialties abound, so the key is to try something of everything – Hokkaido in particular is famed for its top-quality produce, while Okinawa is renowned for its pork dishes. Complement the food with a glass of local whisky or sake, and if it all gets too much take some time out with the serene ritual of the tea ceremony. With vending machines and convenience stores to satisfy your every whim, you'll never go hungry whatever the time of day or night.



## SUSHI INSPIRATION

The use of salmon in sushi was suggested to Japan in the 1980s by a Norwegian delegation.

### △ TIMELESS TEA

The tiered tea fields of Uji in the south of Kyoto Prefecture produce some of the finest green teas in Japan. At Fukujuen Ujicha Kobo, in the centre of Uji, you can try and buy many varieties, as well as take part in a tea appreciation workshop.



### OKINAWAN ODDITIES

Pig – in all forms – is big on menus in Okinawa, even stewed trotters and vinegared ear. Wash it down with awamori, an extra-strong local spirit distilled from rice.

### > EAT UNTIL YOU DROP

Osaka's unofficial motto is *kui daore* – eat until you drop. Osakans love food and the city is famed for its wonderful foodie offerings. Join the locals in sampling cheap and delicious street foods such as takoyaki (battered octopus balls).



OSAKA

KYOTO



**WHISKY  
WONDERLAND**  
The Yoichi Distillery,  
run by Nikka, is one  
of Japan's main  
distilleries.

**HOKKAIDO**

**YOICHI**

**LOST IN  
TRANSLATION**

The Japanese word for the English term "sake" is *nihonshu*. The Japanese *sake* (or *o-sake*) refers to alcohol in general.

**✓ THE NATION'S BREAD-BASKET**

The northernmost of Japan's four main islands is the country's largest producer of rice, wheat, potato, beans, sugar beet, vegetables, and dairy products. For the Japanese, if agricultural produce comes from Hokkaido, it must be good.



**MORIOKA**

**OODLES OF  
NOODLES**

Morioka is famed for its wanko soba noodle-eating challenge.

**NIIGATA**



**◁ SAKE CENTRAL**

The breweries in Niigata make the best sake in Japan. The pure run-off water from the region's snow melt is a key component in the brewing process and also nurtures the numerous rice paddies where local sake rice is grown.

**TOKYO**



**◁ CULINARY  
CAPITAL**

Tokyo is one of the best places to eat in the world, with the most Michelin-starred restaurants of any city. Treat yourself to an elaborate dinner or grab a set-lunch bargain.

**GOOD MANNERS**

It is polite to say *itadakimasu* before a meal and *gochisosama* afterwards to show appreciation to all those involved in creating it.

> Nigiri sushi is thin slices of fish on top of rice.

寿司と刺身

# SUSHI AND SASHIMI

Ubiquitous classics

Ask someone outside Japan to name one Japanese food and the chances are high they'll say sushi. The lightly vinegared rice topped with seafood has become the unofficial national dish. Sashimi – sliced fillets of raw fish served without rice – is perhaps less well known internationally, but is no less of a Japanese culinary classic.

## WASABI

Indispensable to both sushi and sashimi, wasabi not only provides a warming accent but also functions to suppress certain microbes in raw fish that could potentially cause food poisoning.



## FRAGRANCE FREE

Sushi is subtle, so scents matter. High-end restaurants ask customers not to wear any perfumes that might taint the air.

## SUSHI

What the world calls sushi nowadays developed in Tokyo in the 1800s. Initially a dish of raw fish on a bed of vinegared rice, it evolved into bite-sized format as a quick-to-eat street food. Sushi in its current form spans multiple culinary levels, from three-Michelin-star restaurants such as Sukibayashi Jiro in Ginza, Tokyo, to low-cost *kaitenzushi* (conveyor-belt sushi). Go high-end for a special occasion and you can expect to enjoy a tasting menu of seasonal seafood prepared directly in front of you – typically starting with lighter flavours such as flounder and then progressing to heavier tastes like sea urchin and eel.

Go low-end – the way most people would enjoy sushi with family or friends – and you can still eat well, plucking anything





you fancy from the conveyor belt and even ordering very un-sushi sides like fried chicken, cheesy chips and creamy parfait. Even cheaper are supermarkets, where you can get a good-quality sushi bento (take away) – ideal for a picnic.

## SASHIMI

More often seen than sushi on *izakaya* (pub) menus or as part of dinner at home, not to mention a staple in the early courses in refined *kaiseki-ryori*, is sashimi. Sashimi is more popular full stop, though it has nowhere near the same kind of profile outside Japan that sushi enjoys.

Maybe that's because it's such a simple dish – just skilfully sliced fresh seafood served with a little soy sauce and wasabi or grated ginger. Sashimi's simplicity goes



perfectly with a nice sake as a starter to a meal, when the palate is still clean enough to appreciate the delicate flavours of the seafood prepared this way. Tuna, salmon, sea bream, squid, bonito, yellowtail and octopus are among the typical options you'll see on menus.

^ Top to bottom: At kaitenzushi you are charged per plate; sashimi must be eaten with chopsticks, but for sushi it is also acceptable to use your hands.

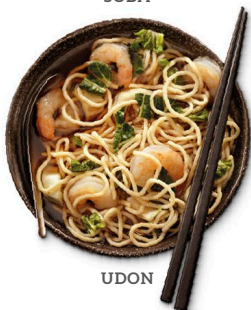
麵

# NOODLES

A national institution



SOBA



UDON



SOMEN

Eaten at home, at no-frills stands, in restaurants, for lunch or dinner, hot or cold, spiced or subtle, noodles (*men*) in Japan come often and in numerous guises.

Of all the many noodle varieties in Japan, it's ramen that sits at the head of the table. It was first imported from China in the 19th century, when Japan reopened itself to the world after centuries of near-isolation, and today there are more than 50,000 ramen restaurants across the country. There are numerous types of ramen styles, which vary depending on the combinations of chicken, pork, fish and vegetables used in their broths. Tonkotsu (or Hakata) ramen, for example, gets its distinctive milky look from its pork bone base, while the thickness of Sapporo ramen comes from the addition of miso (fermented soy bean paste) to the broth. *Shoyu ramen* – the most common of all – has a clear brown broth because the chicken and vegetable base has soy (*shoyu*) added to it.

Other variations include soba, a brownish noodle made mainly with buckwheat flour and with a similar thickness and length to spaghetti. Typically, it's served chilled with a dipping sauce or in a hot broth. Udon is a thick, whiteish wheat flour noodle with a neutral flavour, which at its simplest comes in a warming broth of *dashi* (fish/seaweed stock) and soy sauce – though it can also be stir-fried (*yaki udon*), served in a thick curry sauce or cooked up in many other ways. *Somen*, a very thin wheat noodle, is never better than in the oppressive heat and humidity of summer, when it is chilled and served with an equally cool soy sauce and *dashi* dipping sauce.

## SLURP UP

Whatever the noodle, the soundtrack is the same: slurping. In some cultures slurping might be considered off-putting to other diners, but not in Japan. The act of slurping is part of the fun, a way to

WHATEVER THE NOODLE,  
THE SOUNDTRACK IS THE  
SAME: SLUPRING.





Ramen is usually served with a renga (ceramic spoon) to help drink the broth.

immerse yourself in the fleeting enjoyment of a bowl of noodles. It will also augment your tasting experience, as the process of aeration when slurping is said to enhance flavour, while the brisk inhalation supposedly sends delicate aromas deeper into the nasal passage.

However, don't feel bad if you just can't get used to slurping. A phrase coined in 2016 suggests not everyone likes it. *Nu-hara* (noodle harassment) describes the feeling of being annoyed by the sound of others slurping noodles.



^ Shoyu ramen broth is based on soy sauce.

< Slurping is considered a sign of enjoyment when eating noodles.





ご飯

# RICE

An essential staple

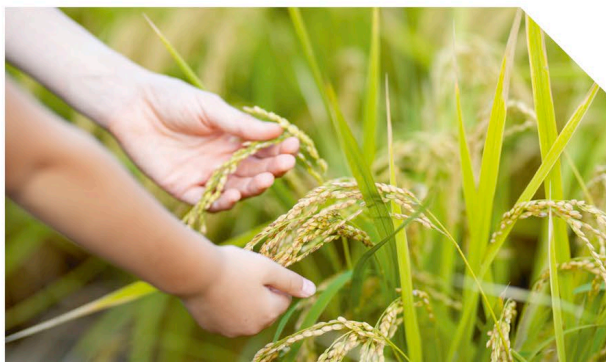
^ Rice has been cultivated in Japan for over 3,000 years.

✓ The rice harvest usually takes place in autumn.

It's integral to sushi and millions of daily bento (take-away boxes), is served in bowls as part of the traditional breakfast and *teishoku* set meals, and is also processed into *mochi* rice cakes and *senbei* rice crackers, as well as sake. Rice is the Japanese staple.

## KEY CROP

Rice farming is a major industry in Japan, with the country's rice paddies producing 7.5 million tons of rice annually, including food varieties like Koshihikari and sake strains such as Yamada-Nishiki. Much of it is grown in rural areas like Hokkaido, Niigata and the Tohoku region, but small-scale farms are scattered all over the country. The production cycle begins in the spring, when farmers cultivate seedlings in greenhouses and then plough and irrigate the paddies (*tanbo*) before transplanting the seedlings into the *tanbo*'s thick, wet mud. By autumn, the rice stalks will have golden ears hanging ready for harvest.





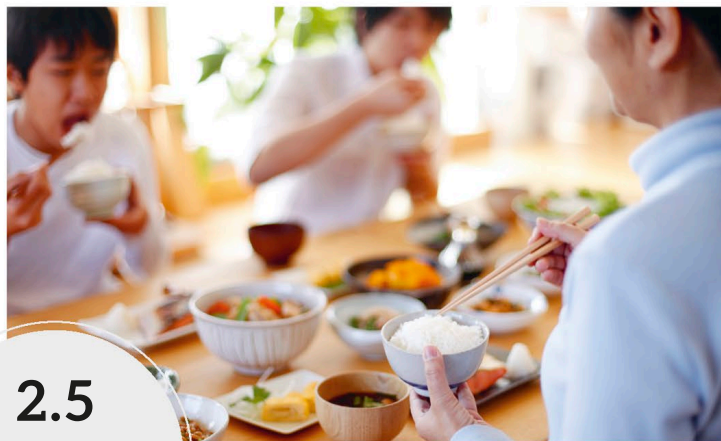


< Left: Bento boxes often feature rice with fun decorations. Below: In a meal with several dishes, rice is usually served in a separate bowl.

## POPULAR DISHES

Rice consumption in Japan has dropped as more Western foods have entered the Japanese diet, but it still appears in myriad forms beyond sushi, bento and plain bowls. For the ever-popular *donburi*, it's served in a bowl and then topped with all sorts: *tendon* (topped with tempura), *gyudon* (with a beef and fried onion mix) and *oyakodon* (chicken, onion and loosely scrambled eggs) are just some of the options that you might come across. *Chahan* (fried rice), though Chinese, is another very popular rice dish, as is rice served with Japanese, Indian and Thai curries. *Onigiri* rice balls are a savoury snack found in every supermarket and convenience store, while nourishing but light-on-the-stomach rice porridge (*okayu*) is the perfect comfort food if you're feeling under the weather – every rice cooker in Japan features a setting for making it.

Given how widespread rice is, it perhaps shouldn't come as a surprise that the Japanese word for rice, *gohan*, is used to mean both "cooked rice" and "meal". It also appears as a suffix in breakfast (*asagohan*), lunch (*hirugohan*), and dinner (*bangohan*).



# 2.5

bowls of rice per person are eaten each day in Japan on average.

## MIND YOUR MANNERS

The dos and don'ts of eating rice are easy to follow. First, don't leave your chopsticks standing in the rice bowl – this is what happens in funeral rites; use the chopstick rest instead. When eating from a rice bowl, hold the bowl with one hand and bring it toward your mouth when taking a mouthful with your chopsticks. That way, any food that drops should land back in the bowl. It is also polite to finish every last grain to show your appreciation for the food and farmers.

地域の食べ物

# REGIONAL FOOD

Experiencing local flavour

Going local means eating local, and in Japan every city and region has its own specialities to try. Here are some of the highlights.

**Hokkaido** The chill of Hokkaido's deep winters is staved off with some of Japan's heartiest regional dishes, from the springy noodles and miso-heavy soup of Sapporo ramen to the *jingisukan* mutton barbecue and the warming *supu kare* (soup curry).

**Tohoku** Morioka in Iwate Prefecture is noodle country, its *sandaimen* (three great noodles) including *reimen*, an extra-chewy noodle served in a chilled sour-spicy soup, and *jajamen*, a chunky wheat noodle that's mixed with a meaty miso paste. But the most distinctive of all is

> Street foods such as takoyaki are served at stalls known as yatai.



< Toppings for Sapporo ramen vary, but the soup is usually miso-based.

*wanko soba*, single mouthful bowls of soba noodles. Consuming this dish has become an all-you-can-eat challenge, where diners see how many bowls they can devour – the record is a stomach-churning 632.

**Tokyo** Tokyo's *monjayaki* is the epitome of *B-kyu gurume* – simple, soulful, low-cost food. A bubbling, gooey batter mixed with diced cabbage and other ingredients, it is best tried at one of the many *monjayaki* restaurants that can be found in the capital's Tsukishima neighbourhood.

**Kyoto** Kyoto does exceptional vegetarian food. As well as tofu dishes such as *yudofu* (simmered tofu), there's *shojin-ryori*, a multi-dish form of Buddhist cuisine centred on tofu variations and seasonal vegetables.

**Osaka** A classic Osaka street food, *takoyaki* are chunks of octopus cooked into dough balls and then served with a thick brown sauce, *aonori* (seaweed flakes) mayonnaise and bonito flakes.





**Hiroshima** *Okonomiyaki* (savoury pancakes) are common all over Japan, but the way Hiroshima makes them is extra special. The key is the addition of noodles, and the gradual layering of ingredients before the pancake is lathered in a savoury sauce.

**Kyushu** For many ramen aficionados, Hakata ramen from Fukuoka is the best. With a milky broth that comes from pork stock, it has slightly thinner noodles than other ramen and is topped with sliced roast pork and chopped green onions.

**Okinawa** Pork is highly prized as an ingredient on menus in Okinawa; local specialities include *mimiga* (vinegared pig ear) and *tonsoku* (simmered trotter). Arguably the most Okinawan dish of all, however, is *goya champuru* – a filling stir-fry of firm *shima-dofu* (island tofu), egg, Spam and a bitter local gourd that's known as *goya*.



## TAKE A BITE

A gastronomic tour of Japan.

- ① **Hokkaido** Warm your body and soul with hearty comfort food.
- ② **Tohoku** Get your noodle fix and try the *wanko* soba challenge.
- ③ **Tokyo** Enjoy home-style, budget-friendly *monjayaki*.
- ④ **Kyoto** Enter vegetarian heaven.
- ⑤ **Osaka** Take to the streets to try *takoyaki*.
- ⑥ **Hiroshima** Flip out on delicious savoury pancakes.
- ⑦ **Kyushu** Get your fill of Japan's best ramen.
- ⑧ **Okinawa** Go crazy for all things pork.

TOKYO'S MONJAYAKI IS THE  
EPITOME OF B-KYU GURUME –  
SIMPLE, SOULFUL FOOD.

**SAKIZUKE**

*Kaiseki-ryori* menus vary, but usually feature set types of dish. They often begin with the *sakizuke* course – a small appetiser or amuse-bouche.

**SUIMONO**

This light, clear soup, presented with minimal garnishes, is served as a refreshing palate-cleanser.

**HASSUN**

The most attractive and artistic of all *kaiseki-ryori* components, the *hassun* is a seasonal platter of four or five hors d'oeuvres.

**MIZUMONO**

The meal concludes with a dessert, such as seasonal fruit, ice cream or a traditional sweet.

**SHOKUJI**

A trio of dishes – rice, miso soup and pickles – that are served together towards the end of the meal.

**SUNOMONO**

The *sunomono* course is a small vinegar-based dish designed to cleanse the palate. It usually features vegetables or seafood.



### OTSUKURI

The *otsukuri* course is comprised of a selection of sashimi, which varies by season and by region.



### TAKIAWASE

A lightly simmered vegetable dish served with fish, meat, or tofu.



### YAKIMONO

A grilled dish that showcases seasonal fish (either fresh-water or from the sea) or meat such as local *wagyu* (beef).

### AGEMONO

A deep-fried dish, often featuring tempura and served with a dipping sauce or salt seasoning.



### MUSHIMONO

This steamed dish can contain fish, chicken or vegetables, and may also include a savoury custard.

会席料理

## KAISEKI-RYORI

*A traditional tasting menu*

Nothing demonstrates the intricacies of Japan's culinary arts like *kaiseki-ryori*. Prepared by specialist restaurants and also served at dinner in *ryokan* (traditional inns), *kaiseki-ryori* typically features 10 to 12 dishes enjoyed over the course of a couple of hours. From the traditional teahouse-like interiors through to the kimono-clad staff and the tranquil atmosphere, it's a deeply Japanese experience before you even begin to eat. While the exact course progression and dishes served will vary, one thing you are guaranteed is a focus on seasonal ingredients. Dishes appear like works of art, served on fine lacquerware and ceramics, and delicately garnished with seasonal motifs like a cherry blossom bud in spring.



^ Left to right:  
Konbini stock a  
mind-boggling array  
of snack options;  
rice crackers come  
in many varieties.

おやつ

## SNACKS

Eating on the go

Whether it's *senbei* (rice crackers) in front of the TV or a sneaky *melonpan* (sweet bun) in the office, Japan loves to snack. Visit any convenience store and the variety and volume of *oyatsu* (snack) options might leave you wondering how the Japanese got their reputation for being svelte and healthy.

Alongside daily necessities, ready-made meals and drinks, *konbini* (convenience stores) like 7-Eleven, Family Mart and Mini-Stop are where kids with a few spare

yen can grab cheap gum, candy and classics like *Umaibo*, a puffed corn stick that comes in cheese, corn potage, teriyaki and many other variations. Sharing the aisles with that are chocolates and chewy treats – the likes of Pocky chocolate-covered biscuit sticks and fruit-flavoured Hi-Chew – as well as local crisp brands with flavours that run from standard salt to consommé, pizza, pickled plum (*ume*), salted seaweed (*nori shio*) and fish roe (*mentaiko*). Then come the more traditional savoury options in the shape of *senbei*, hard rice crackers that usually have a soy tang to them but can also be sweetened, wrapped in seaweed or flavoured with sesame. Like *wagashi*, they are often eaten with tea.

NOTHING LIKE THE CREPES YOU  
FIND IN FRANCE, THE JAPANESE  
VERSION IS ALL ABOUT EXCESS.





Overlapping the culinary middle ground between snack and meal, convenience stores also sell rice balls known as *onigiri*. Although they aren't actually balls – most are triangular – *onigiri* are ideal for a cheap lunch or a quick refuel, functioning as a Japanese equivalent to a sandwich. Typical single fillings inside the dried seaweed-wrapped rice include *konbu* seaweed, pickled plum, salmon flakes, and tuna with mayonnaise.

Away from the *konbini*, cake shops and bakeries offer a treasure trove of sweet treats. Creamy mille-feuille and red bean paste-filled doughnuts (*an-donatsu*) are common goodies, but arguably the most sumptuous offerings are crepes. Nothing like the crepes you find in France, the Japanese version is all about excess. They are best typified by the colourful creations you find at Café Crepe in Harajuku, Tokyo – crepe wraps bursting with whipped cream and fruit then lathered in chocolate and caramel sauce, some with a chunk of cheesecake or a scoop or two of ice cream squeezed in for good measure.

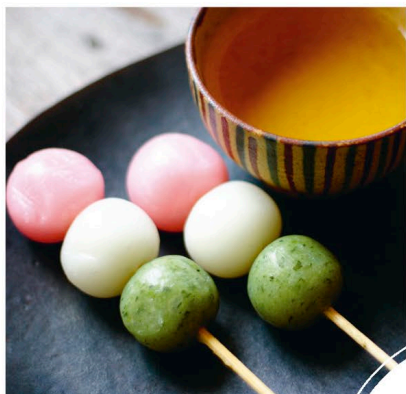
### TASTE THE REGION

One trend you will notice while in Japan is regionality. Popular snack brands often create region-only versions based on local produce to tap into Japan's unrelenting custom of *omiyage* – bringing souvenirs home for friends, family and co-workers. The epitome of this is Kit-Kats, with regional flavours including *hojicha* tea in Kyoto, lip-tingling *shichimi* spice mix in the Shinshu region, and wasabi in Shizuoka, as well as Japan-only varieties like sake and *matcha*. The brand initially became popular in Japan because the Japanese pronunciation sounds like *kitto katsu*, or "good luck", making it a suitable gift to give a little encouragement.

^ Left to right: Onigiri are a common sight in *konbini* throughout Japan; Japanese crepes are a popular street food and come in hundreds of flavours.



KIT-KATS



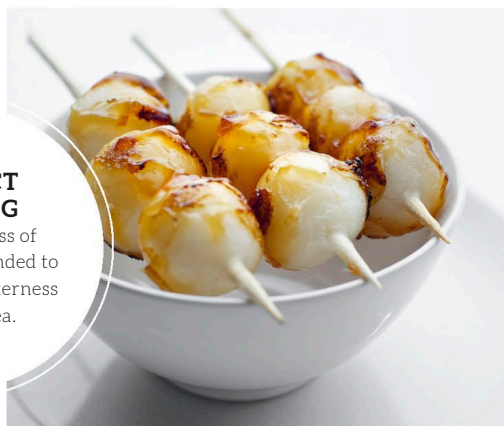
### SEASONAL SHAPES

*Wagashi served in tea houses are often fashioned in forms that reflect the season.*



### PERFECT PAIRING

The sweetness of *wagashi* is intended to balance the bitterness of green tea.







和菓子

## WAGASHI

*Exquisite confectioneries*

Delicately sculpted works of edible art, *wagashi* (traditional sweets) are typically served with a soothing cup of green tea. They are a time-honoured component of the tea ceremony, but you can also find them in supermarkets, convenience stores and sweet shops to enjoy at any time.

*Wagashi* come in countless variations, but many share certain characteristics. Rarely creamy or chocolatey, they frequently feature ingredients like *anko* (sweetened azuki bean paste), *mochi* (glutinous rice cake) and flavourings like tea, sesame and fruits. One of the most common types is *daifuku*, a small round of *mochi*, most often stuffed with *anko* or a whole strawberry. Another classic *wagashi* is *yokan*, a firm jelly block typically made with *anko*, sugar and Japanese agar, though also look out for non-*anko* versions such as green tea, chestnut and plum. *Dango* is an essential delicacy to try if you visit the old Shibamata area of northeastern Tokyo – these little dumplings made of rice flour are never better than when skewered, basted with a sweet and sticky sauce and then finished on a grill. Other highlights include *manju* (a small steamed bun with an *anko* filling), *dorayaki* (a kind of spongy sandwich), *warabimochi* (a wobbly bracken-starch jelly coated with sweet toasted soybean flour) and *karinto* (an airy, deep-fried mix of brown sugar, flour and yeast).

### BEAUTIFUL CREATIONS

*Wagashi* are designed to be appreciated as much for their appearance as for their taste.



< The shape, texture and flavour of *wagashi* vary greatly, with some forms only available in certain regions or seasons.

お茶

# TEA

Japan's favourite pick-me-up

It is served in business meetings, comes hot or cold in bottles and cans in vending machines across the land and is the perfect accompaniment to sweet treats or the comforting warmth of a *kotatsu* heated table. Full of goodness and caffeine, green tea is a Japanese institution.

✓ Tea is traditionally brewed and served in a handcrafted teapot.

It was first brought to Japan from China by Buddhist monks and the earliest reference to tea drinking in Japan dates to the early 800s. Just over 1,200 years on,

green tea is a firm feature in everyday life. It's a healthy habit to acquire – green tea is not only packed with vitamin C, but also contains antioxidants. Research has linked regular consumption of green tea to numerous health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and strokes, lower levels of bad cholesterol and potential anti-cancer effects.

Tea is sipped everywhere, from Tokyo's cool cafés to elaborate tea ceremonies in temple gardens. While drinking green tea straight – either hot or cold – is by far the most common approach, you'll also find it

YOU CAN EVEN FIND GREEN  
TEA NOODLES, CREAM  
PUDDINGS AND LIQUEURS.

## TEA VARIETIES TO TRY



### ✓ SENCHA

This archetypal green tea is made with whole, dried leaves. Sencha has a balanced bitterness and refreshing aroma.



### ^ GYOKURO

The highest grade of green tea, gyokuro is brewed at lower temperatures than normal. It's very rich and highly savoury.







in chilled lattes and milkshakes. And green tea's reach goes far beyond drinks. Kit-Kats, Pocky, Oreo and many other confectionary brands have green tea varieties, and you often can spot *matcha* ice cream in convenience store freezers. Visit a tea centre like the town of Uji in Kyoto Prefecture – along with Shizuoka Prefecture one of the top tea-producing areas in Japan – and you'll soon discover green tea noodles, cream puddings, sweet *mochi* (rice cake) dumplings, and liqueurs. Tea is simply everywhere.



MATCHA ICE CREAM



△ Left to right: Shizuoka is known as the green tea capital of Japan; matcha tea is made with powder.

#### HOJJICHA

The leaves are roasted, producing a rich, nutty tea with a reddish-brown colour.



#### △ MATCHA

A finely ground powder that is whisked with hot water, this is the tea used in tea ceremonies. It's rich, almost creamy, and full of flavour.

#### ▽ MUGICHA

Cold-brewed from roasted barley, toasty mugicha is especially popular in summer.



#### GENMAICHA

Dried green tea leaves are mixed with popped brown rice to give a nutty flavour.



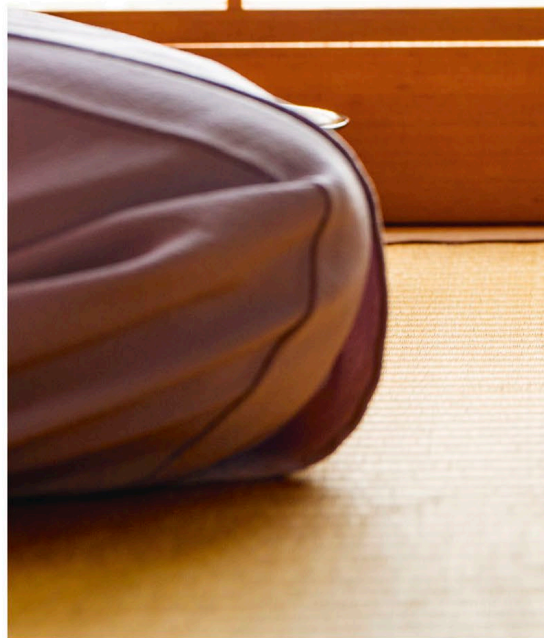
茶の湯

## TEA CEREMONY

*The way of tea*

The Japanese tea ceremony is a highly choreographed ritual, perfected over centuries to clear the mind by focusing on the moment. The exact way to whisk powdered green tea and hot water into a frothy *matcha*, the placement of tea utensils, even the vocabulary – all are strictly prescribed. Rooted in the tenets of Zen and the spiritual discipline of the samurai, the tea ceremony is based on principles laid out in the 16th century by Japan's most famous tea master, Sen No Rikyu. Crafts relating to its accoutrements – *ikebana*, calligraphy, ceramics and landscape gardening – have all been profoundly shaped by this philosophy.

A ceremony that includes a *cha kaiseki* meal can last up to four hours, but you can take part in shorter versions lasting from 20 to 90 minutes. For a beautiful garden setting head to Gyokusen'en in Kanazawa (Ishikawa Prefecture), or, for full immersion in all things tea, make your way to Matsue (Shimane Prefecture) for the annual October Grand Tea Ceremony. Kyoto is home to the headquarters of the tea ceremony training school Urasenke, which provides in-depth courses.







## ETIQUETTE

Conversation should be limited and respectful, centred on the beauty of the tea bowl, the excellent flavour of the tea, and the garden view or *ikebana*.

ウィスキー

# WHISKY

Award-winning spirits

Whisky production is a relatively new craft in Japan, but the country's distillers have wasted no time in making their mark on the industry. Today heralded as world-class, Japanese whiskies have won countless accolades and praise – not bad going for a country with only a handful of distilleries.

## SCOTTISH ORIGINS

In 1854, armed American ships opened up Japan after more than two centuries of self-imposed isolation. The Americans brought gifts with them, including casks of whisky. However, it wasn't until 1920, when chemist Masataka Taketsuru returned from studying whisky-making in Scotland, that the brown spirit's distilling secrets

SUNTORY AND NIKKA DISTIL  
A MIND-BOGGLING ARRAY  
OF WHISKIES IN-HOUSE.



arrived in Japan. In 1923, Taketsuru helped set up the Yamazaki Distillery before later establishing his own, the Yoichi Distillery. The companies behind each one – Suntory and Nikka respectively – still dominate the Japanese whisky industry today.

## A LOCAL TWIST

Japan's distillers typically adhere to Scotch methods, but the country's distinct seasons have a significant impact on the maturation process – the cold winters slow the ageing of the spirit, while the humid summers speed it up. A variety of casks are used in the ageing process, but the country's indigenous lumber, most famously *mizunara* (Japanese oak), ages unique whisky that's subtle, yet strong. Unlike their Scottish counterparts, Suntory and Nikka distil a mind-boggling array of whiskies in-house, giving them great control over their products and enabling them to experiment with different whisky-making techniques.

< The Yoichi Distillery  
was founded in 1934.





< Left to right: Suntory's blenders sample up to 250 whiskies a day; whisky highballs are a refreshing mix of whisky and fizzy water.

## JAPAN'S FAVOURITE WHISKY DRINK

Japanese whiskies can be drunk either straight or on the rocks, but the most popular way to enjoy them in Japan is as a whisky highball. Three parts carbonated water and one part whisky (cheap blends work well), highballs helped to power the spirit's national ascent in the decades after World War II. Adding soda knocked down the high alcohol percentage, creating a refreshing beverage the country loved. After whisky fell out of favour in the early 1980s, being overshadowed by clear spirits like *shochu* (sweet potato, barley or rice liquor), it was highballs that brought Japanese whisky roaring back in the 2000s. The highball won't overpower your food, making it ideal for pairing – soul foods, like *takoyaki* (octopus balls) and *okonomiyaki* (savoury pancakes) are particularly good companions, as is *yakiniku* (grilled meat).

Commemorative bottles celebrate events like the Year of the Pig.



WHISKY BOTTLE



## TAKE A TOUR

Learn about whisky-making and taste the wares at these top distilleries.

- ① **Yoichi Distillery** (Yoichi, Hokkaido Prefecture) Perhaps the most beautiful distillery in Japan, Yoichi is the only whisky distillery in the world to have coal-fired pot stills.
- ② **Kirin Fuji Gotemba Distillery** (Gotemba, Shizuoka Prefecture) Kirin's whisky distillery sits at the foot of Mount Fuji, which provides the water for its whisky.
- ③ **Yamazaki Distillery** (Shimamotocho, Osaka Prefecture) Founded in 1923, the Yamazaki Distillery is the oldest in Japan.

## 日本酒

## SAKE

The quintessential Japanese tipple

The Japanese call it *nihonshu*, in English it's sake – whatever the terminology, it's estimated that some form of fermented rice has been drunk in Japan for almost 2,000 years. From its earliest days being brewed at temples and shrines (where sake still plays a role in many rituals) through the first sake breweries in the Muromachi Period (1333-1573) to now, sake has become Japan's national drink.

## AN ANCIENT PROCESS

The basic process followed by Japan's 1,200 sake breweries, who between them produce roughly 168 million litres (37 million gallons) annually, has remained largely unchanged for generations. First, rice is polished, washed and steamed, then mixed with yeast and *koji* (rice cultivated with a mould) and allowed to ferment over several days of mixing before being added to water for three or four weeks of full fermentation. Pressing, filtration, pasteurisation and maturation take place before bottling, then it's ready to pour into a glass, give a *kampai* (cheers) and drink.

SOME FORM OF FERMENTED  
RICE HAS BEEN DRUNK IN JAPAN  
FOR ALMOST 2,000 YEARS.



^ Above: High-quality rice is essential for good sake. Right: Sake is matured in wooden casks made of cypress.







## MAKING THE GRADE

The grade is a key part of a sake. At the most refined end of the scale comes *junmai daiginjo*, where the rice has been polished down to at least 50 per cent. This is done because the outer part of the rice grain contains fats, proteins and other things that can produce undesirable flavours or interfere with fermentation; the innermost core is where all the starches are found, and it's these that ferment into top sake in the brewing process. The more the rice is milled, the more refined, fragrant and lighter on the palate the final brew will be. And what makes *junmai daiginjo* extra special is the *junmai* (pure rice) part – no extra alcohol is added, the only ingredients are rice, water, *koji* and yeast. With low-grade sake, brewed sake is mixed with large amounts of distilled spirits.

## SPOILT FOR CHOICE

For aficionados, each sake is defined by its intricacies – where it was brewed and by whom, what rice was used and how extensively the rice was milled, what *koji*

or yeast was employed and at what temperatures. For the average drinker, choices are made from much simpler criteria. With a standard form of sake, do you want something that is dry (*karakuchi*) or sweet (*amakuchi*)? And what temperature? For a standard sake, room temperature is common, as is chilled (*reishu*), but on a cold night a gently warmed sake (*atsukan*) is very appealing. It all comes down to your personal taste rather than rules or etiquette.

Sake is usually enjoyed with food. Whatever type of sake you opt for, in most restaurants and *izakaya* (pubs) you usually order it in a measure called an *ichigo* (180 ml/6 fl oz), which comes in a small decanter along with a very small glass or a ceramic cup (called a *choko*). Sometimes your sake will be served in a *masu*, a little wooden box with a glass inside that's filled until it spills over into the box. Sake pairs beautifully with Japanese cuisine, but you can also try it with Western food, from cheese to steak and chips.



^ Sake is frequently served in delicate ceramic cups.





健康な日本

# HEALTHY JAPAN

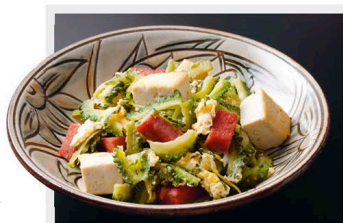
The Japanese are among the longest-living people on earth, attributed in part to a healthy traditional diet. Looking inward, there's a degree of mindfulness that could also play a part in Japan's exceptional culture of wellness and longevity. The importance of the group and appreciating every connection helps ward off the feelings of isolation that can afflict people struggling through the daily grind of modern life. Meanwhile, the concept of *ikigai* (purpose) asks us to find our reason for getting up in the morning, and encourages the older generations of Japan continue to get out and stay active. There are also ways of thinking ingrained in Japanese culture that provide a different perspective from Western thought, many adopted from ancient, spiritual principles. Shinto, for example, fosters a love of the outdoors with its nature worship and deities residing in every aspect of the world around us. Natural extensions of those principles include *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing) to help reduce the stress of urban living, and, most pleasurable of all, soaking in Japan's *onsen* (hot springs).

地図の上から

# ON THE MAP

Exploring healthy Japan

It's easy to absorb some of the country's healthy lifestyle in your everyday experiences in Japan – especially taking in the traditional diet of fish, rice and fermented foods. For some exercise, join in with the weekend joggers running the course around Tokyo's Imperial Palace, or take it one step further by following an ancient pilgrimage or hiking in a stunning national park. With Japan's strong Shinto belief in celebrating nature, spending time in the great outdoors has always been important here, and one of the best ways to get out and unwind is to take a dip in a natural hot spring, to soak your cares away and give your skin a healthy glow.



**> HEALTHY DIET**  
Okinawa Prefecture has one of the world's highest percentage of centenarians, but they're also incredibly healthy, living on a plant-based diet that balances their love of fatty pork. Typical dishes are served in Yunangi and are taught in cooking classes at Taste of Okinawa, both located in the city of Naha.



## LOVE IT OR HATE IT

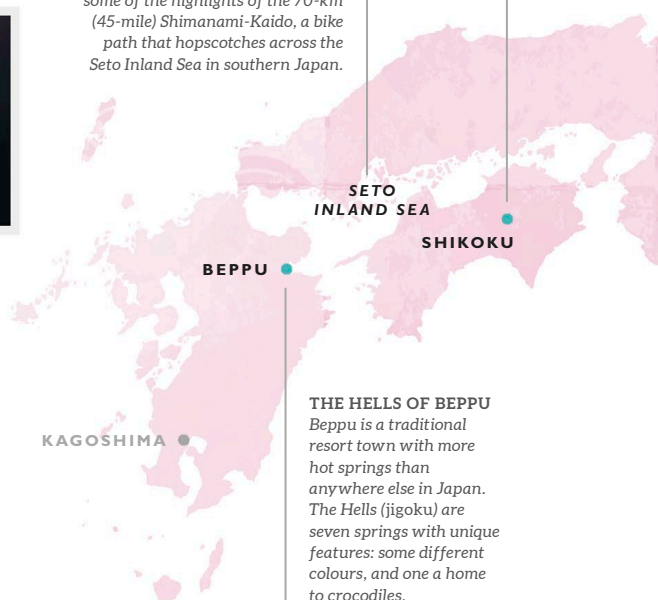
*Natto*, fermented soybeans with a slimy texture, may be good for you, but even many Japanese don't like it.

## ^ SHIKOKU PILGRIMAGE

It can take up to 60 days to trek this 1,400-km (870-mile) circular route connecting 88 Buddhist temples. On your journey you'll take in rugged coastlines, steep mountains and beautiful rural landscapes.

## EXERCISE WITH A VIEW

Spectacular vistas of alluring beaches and the island-studded sea are just some of the highlights of the 70-km (45-mile) Shimanami-Kaido, a bike path that hopscoches across the Seto Inland Sea in southern Japan.



## THE HELLS OF BEPPU

Beppu is a traditional resort town with more hot springs than anywhere else in Japan. The Hells (*jigoku*) are seven springs with unique features: some different colours, and one a home to crocodiles.



## HAKODATE

### LONGEVITY

Life expectancy is 87 years for women and 81 for men, and Japan has over 65,000 centenarians.

### ▽ HEAVENLY CHERRY BLOSSOMS

*Ichigo ichi-e is a Japanese concept that urges us to appreciate the moment and cherish every meeting.*

*Make your own treasured memories and enjoy the fleeting beauty of spring by gathering with friends at Goyokaku Park in the town of Hakodate or a cherry-blossom viewing party.*

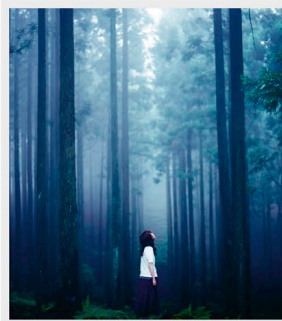


## NIIGATA

## TOKYO

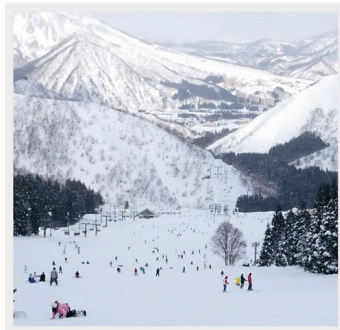
### > BACK TO NATURE

*Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing, is a way for stressed urbanites to unplug and immerse themselves in the healing power of nature by letting the sights, smells and sounds of the great outdoors fill their senses. Even sprawling Tokyo offers respite at nearby Mount Takao.*



### > HOT AND COLD

*Grab your skis and enjoy the dozens of ski resorts in Niigata Prefecture. Warm up afterwards in a hot spring, from the milky-white waters of Tsubame to the grass-green Tsukioka.*



### TATTOOS

Tattoos are associated with the Japanese mafia, so people with inked skin are banned from many *onsen* in Japan. Check the rules before booking.

温泉

# HOT SPRINGS

An essential Japanese experience

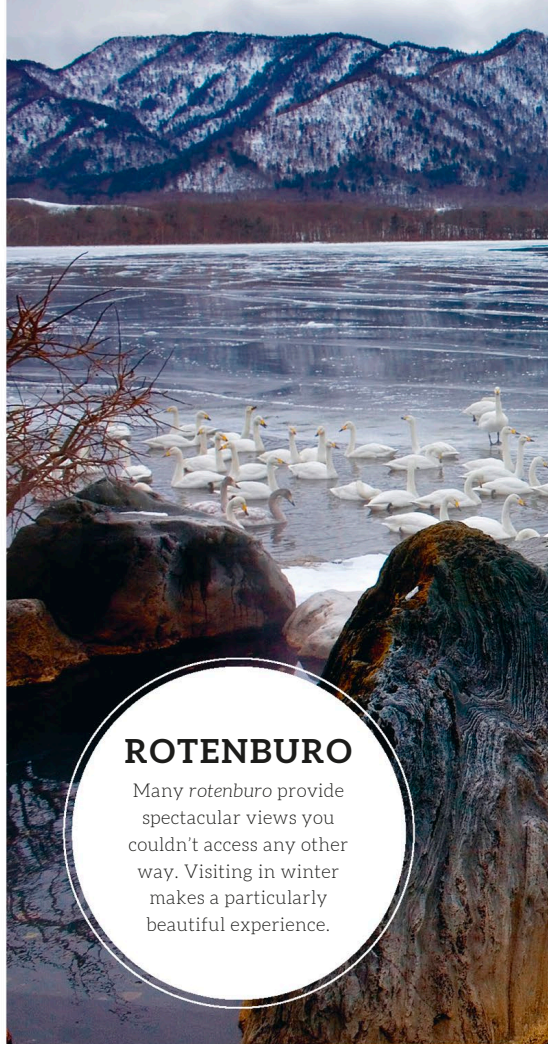
With over 100 active volcanoes and more than 27,000 thermal springs, Japan has developed a unique culture around bathing that centres on the country's much-loved hot springs, known as *onsen*. The fondness for these warm, natural pools has turned what would otherwise be just an ordinary bathing routine into a cultural and social experience, and the Japanese soak in *onsen* to heal aches and pains, escape the rigours of daily life and socialise with friends and family. The Japanese are such *onsen* fans that dedicated *onsen* resort towns have been developed, where guests can wander around in their *yukatas* (cotton kimonos)

and dine on local cuisine between baths. There are even *onsen* just for pets – and wild animals also get in on the act, with Japanese macaques blissfully soaking away in Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park (Nagano Prefecture).

## TYPES OF BATHS

There are several types of bath to choose from in every resort town. A *sento* is simply a public bath with artificially heated tap water, while the authentic *onsen* use natural springs. A thermal bath that is located outdoors is called a *rotenburo* and is loved by Japanese as a way to connect with nature, sometimes offering unparalleled views of the countryside or a peaceful garden.

< In the north of Japan, the macaques live in the coldest climate of all wild primates.



### ROTENBURO

Many *rotenburo* provide spectacular views you couldn't access any other way. Visiting in winter makes a particularly beautiful experience.







## NATURAL REMEDIES

Although any *onsen* can stimulate blood circulation and metabolism, most also contain minerals considered beneficial as treatment for arthritis, diabetes, neuralgia and other ailments. There's even a word – *toji* (balneotherapy) – for the treatment of health problems by bathing in mineral springs.

A key bonus of *onsen* comes from the water's sodium chloride, which encourages perspiration, thereby ridding the body of waste. This helps produce the feeling of silky-smooth skin much prized by

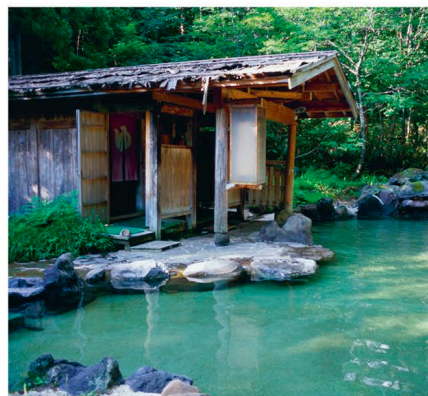
Japanese women, as well as being good for skin ailments such as eczema, abrasions, burns and dermatitis.

On a trip to a resort town, the Japanese may make several trips between soaking in the natural baths and cleaning themselves at the taps, but they usually end with one last dip in the *onsen* to take full advantage of the water's medicinal qualities.

^ *There's nothing more peaceful than sitting in a warm rotenburo surrounded by snow.*

JAPAN HAS A UNIQUE  
CULTURE AROUND BATHING  
THAT CENTRES ON ONSEN.





## FUJI VIEWS

Head to Lake Kawaguchiko (Yamanashi Prefecture) for onsen with views of Mount Fuji.



## RYOKAN

Traditional inns (ryokan) often have their own private onsen or sento for patrons.



## SPLIT BATHS

Baths are usually separated by gender, with a blue curtain signifying the men and a pink one for women.

温泉で楽しむ

# ENJOYING THE ONSEN

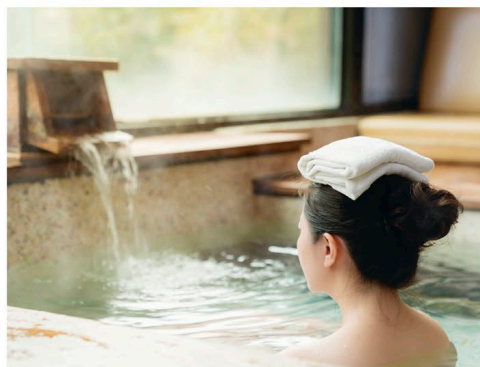
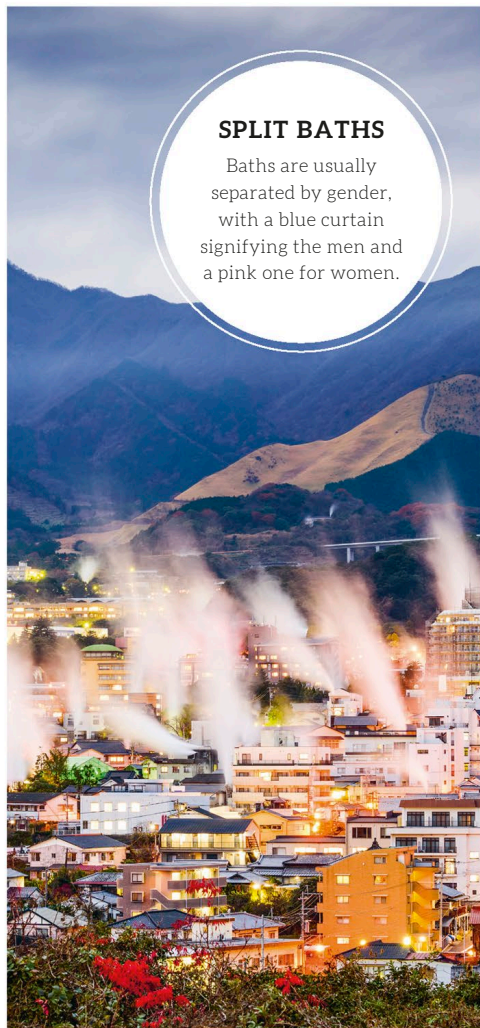
*Healing powers and stunning views*

More than 3,000 *onsen* towns dot Japan's mountain ranges, river valleys and coastlines, offering a unique cultural experience and some of the most breathtaking views of Japan from the waters of outdoor *rotenburo*. Don't miss a chance to enjoy this quintessential Japanese custom, as *onsen* are the perfect place not only to rejuvenate but also to meet Japanese people on weekend getaways or on extended stays for balneotherapy.

Whether it's a *sento* or *onsen*, etiquette is the same. With few exceptions, bathing is done in the nude, and customers must soap up and rinse off from head to toe at one of the taps lining the wall before entering the bath. Washcloths, provided free or for sale, should never touch the bathwater (it's a good idea to drape it over your head to keep track of it).

For a unique experience beyond the typical *onsen*, there are other spa treatments to discover – some of which allow patrons to be clothed or wear swimsuits. At Yunessun Spa Resort in Hakone (Kanagawa Prefecture) you can swim in pools filled with wine or sake, each claiming to have specific health benefits. On Ibusuki beach (Kagoshima Prefecture) customers dress in *yukatas* (cotton kimonos) and are buried up to their necks in the hot, black sand, supposedly to improve fertility and help with weight loss.

< Clockwise from top left: Ibusuki beach (Kagoshima Prefecture); Nyuto Onsen (Akita Prefecture); Beppu (Oita Prefecture); washcloth etiquette; Hell Valley (Hokkaido Prefecture); Hoshi Chojukan ryokan (Gunma Prefecture); Kawaguchiko (Yamanashi Prefecture); Hakone (Kanagawa Prefecture)





^ Exercise is integrated into the daily routine for many commuters.

食生活、運動、長寿

# DIET, EXERCISE AND LONGEVITY

How to reach 100

Healthy living is practically ingrained into the everyday through the traditional diet of fish and rice, and by the common practice of incorporating exercise into the morning routine. With more than 2 million people currently aged over 90, Japan certainly must be doing something right when it comes to wellness.

✓ Edamame and other soy products are thought to reduce the risk of all kinds of diseases, from diabetes to depression.

## EAT THE TRADITIONAL DIET

Japan's advanced public health system is certainly one factor that contributes to the nation's reputation for healthy living and longevity, but another key element is the

classic Japanese diet. Typical meals are lean and balanced, consisting of a bowl of rice, miso soup, a piece of meat or fish, with vegetables and green tea. These and other time-honoured foods help protect against heart disease, obesity and many other disorders. The Japanese are also major consumers of heart-healthy fish and soybeans, from fresh edamame and tofu to fermented *natto*, which offers probiotic qualities if you can get over its slimy texture. Both fresh and pickled vegetables are a staple, as is seaweed, which contains essential nutrients and antioxidants. Dessert tends to be fruit or foods containing *anko* (sweet bean paste).

Even the Japanese style of dining – consisting of several small dishes rather than a single plate piled high with food – is said to encourage mindful eating.





## EXERCISE BECOMES PART OF THE DAILY ROUTINE WITH RADIO CALLISTHENICS.

### KEEP ACTIVE

For older Japanese people, exercise has been part of the daily routine since *rajio taiso* (radio callisthenics) was introduced by national broadcaster NHK in the 1920s. The programme is still going today, providing an early morning workout that takes listeners through 15 minutes of movements to kickstart the day.

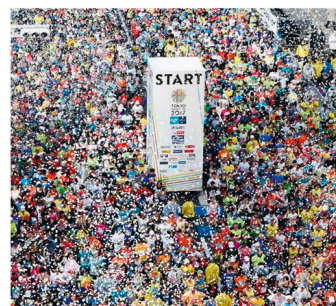
Of course, a 6:30am workout is often the last thing on busy minds in the morning these days, and *rajio taiso* is not as popular as it once was. Still, about one-third of the population walks or takes to their bicycles as part of their morning commute or daily errands, so staying active is still integrated into many people's routines.

### OKINAWA'S CENTENARIANS

Japan is well known for its long-living and healthy elderly population, something which has made Okinawa Prefecture particularly famous. The warm climate of this tropical island chain is definitely a factor here, as is the traditional, plant-based diet – but it's also the lifestyle and essential culture of wellness that have made the Okinawans global icons. Even in their 90s and beyond, many of the elderly are still fishing and farming as they always have. This idea of *ikigai* (having a reason to get up in the morning) and contributing to the community make the centenarians of Okinawa a real inspiration. Try adopting some of their traditions for your own well-being, like following the rule of "*hara hachi bu*" – which means you stop eating when your belly is 80 per cent full.

### TOKYO ON FOOT

If you want some exercise in Japan, put on your running gear and head to Tokyo's Imperial Palace. The 5-km (3-mile) route looping around the grounds – uninterrupted by stop lights or crossings – is one of the most popular jogging spots in the city and a venue for numerous running events during the year. Tokyo also has its own major marathon in spring, which has close to 500,000 applicants for only 35,000 spots.



✓ Okinawa is designated as one of the world's five "blue zone" regions, where people live exceptionally long and healthy lives.





^ Left to right:  
Gokurakuji in Kamakura  
(Kanagawa Prefecture)  
is a stop on the Shikoku  
88 Temple Pilgrimage;  
pilgrims traditionally  
dress in white.

巡礼の旅と道筋

# PILGRIMAGES AND PATHWAYS

Seeing Japan from a new perspective



KOBO DAISHI

With mountains covering most of Japan, travel was historically done mostly on foot. During the Edo Period, feudal lords were required to travel to Edo (present-day Tokyo) every two years – arduous journeys that included long processions of samurai retainers and attendants travelling on official roads like Nakasendo and Tokaido. For commoners, travel was mostly forbidden, but an exception was made for religious pilgrimages to sacred sites, making these routes wildly popular. Today you can set out on one of these pilgrimage routes as a way to connect with Japan's past and experience the islands' varied countryside – and maybe even get in touch with your spiritual side as well.

## STEP INTO SPIRITUAL JAPAN

Pilgrimages today are as much about the journey as the destination. On the Kumano Kodo in the Kansai region you can hike a 1,200-year-old network of trails in the dense forests of the Kii Mountains, following in the footsteps of religious pilgrims and members of the imperial family, who considered Kumano a "Buddhist Pure Land". Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Kumano Kodo's various routes offer many options, including visits to the Grand Shrines of Kumano or Ise Jingu, sleeping in a Buddhist temple atop Mount Koya, relaxing at an *onsen*, or seeing natural wonders like Japan's tallest waterfall.





◀ Daisetsuzan National Park in Hokkaido is Japan's largest national park.

Shikoku's 88 Temple Pilgrimage honours charismatic Buddhist monk Kobo Daishi, who in the 9th century established the Shingon sect of Buddhism on Mount Koya. The pilgrimage links 88 temples on a 1,400-km- (870-mile-) long circuitous route that takes up to 60 days. *Ohenro-san* (the name for the pilgrims on this route) are traditionally clad in white with cone-shaped hats and walking staffs, topped with a little bell to help keep their mind on the present. Nowadays many *henro* complete the circuit on chartered buses, but for a truly unique travel experience, set out on the trail on foot.

laced with waterfalls and the challenging 55-km- (34-mile-) long Grand Traverse trail. Meanwhile, the 700-km (435-mile) Michinoku Coastal Trail is Japan's newest footpath, hugging Tohoku's coastline with its rugged cliffs, marine scenery, beaches and fishing villages. In central Honshu's Japan Alps, Kamikochi is a popular base for day and extended hikes, while the stretch of the old Nakasendo highway between Tsumago and Magome is like taking a step back in time, as you journey through old post towns that once catered to feudal lords and samurai.

✓ Kamikochi's wild scenery attracts hikers from all over Japan.

## EMBARK ON A LONG-DISTANCE WALK

There's no better way to see the country beyond the big cities than to get on your hiking boots and set out for a long walk. There are all kinds of landscapes to explore, so take your pick of the trails crisscrossing the country and enjoy the breathtaking landscapes on offer. For a little bit of everything, Daisetsuzan is Hokkaido's most spectacular national park, full of volcanic peaks, forests, river gorges





吉田口登山道

## THE YOSHIDA TRAIL

A hike to the top of Mount Fuji

A site of pilgrimage since the 7th century, Mount Fuji continues to attract climbers, though most people undertaking the ascent today do so for recreational purposes rather than spiritual ones. During the July to September climbing season, some 250,000 people from Japan and all over the world make the laborious trek to the top, motivated by the satisfaction of having climbed Japan's highest peak – not to mention the reward of the awe-inspiring views. There are numerous routes of varying lengths and difficulties, the most popular of which is the roughly eight-hour Yoshida Trail. It's easily accessible, with lots of facilities along the way. For a truly unforgettable experience, make the climb by night – or start in the afternoon and sleep in a mountain hut before an early start – to ensure that you arrive in time to catch the breathtaking sight of sunrise from the peak.







## GORAIKO

The Japanese have  
a special word for  
the sunrise from  
the top of Mount  
Fuji: *goraiko*.

日本人の哲学

# JAPANESE PHILOSOPHIES TO LIVE BY

Finding inner contentment

While most Japanese people would hesitate to identify themselves as religious, the influence of ancient spiritual beliefs winds through many aspects of modern society and the way the Japanese view the world around them. The idea that objects are ingrained with a spirit is a core tenet of Shinto, and this manifests in all kinds of common rituals. The introduction of Buddhism brought such concepts as life's transience, mindfulness and the positive state of *mu* (nothingness): a void filled with meaning and possibilities. Confucianism arrived in Japan around the 6th century and centred on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius,

and while the religion itself gradually disappeared after World War II, some of the concepts it emphasised are still key elements of Japanese culture: loyalty, duty and consideration of others in the pursuit of harmony. This group dynamic is also inherent in the Japanese concept of *wa*, which prioritises solidarity of community over individual interests.

The legacy of these beliefs is ever present throughout life in Japan: from the importance of team spirit in school to the mindfulness of *ikebana* and the tea ceremony. It's also why a Japanese person today can find great satisfaction in a job well done – as their success isn't purely

personal but helps the whole group – or why they can be awestruck by the beauty of spring cherry blossom, appreciating the bittersweet fleetingness of this perfect moment.

< Mindfulness and an appreciation of nature are central to Japanese philosophy.



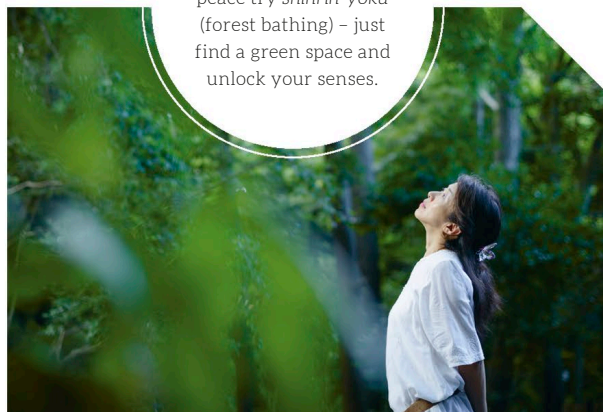


< Spending time with friends should be cherished as a moment that will never be repeated.



## DE-STRESS

For a step towards inner peace try *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing) – just find a green space and unlock your senses.



## CHERISH THE MOMENT

This awareness of life's transience perhaps inspired the proverb *ichi-go ichi-e*, which means “one time, one meeting”. The idea urges us to treasure any encounter with a stranger or friend as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Be mindful of how each gathering with friends and family is unique, and how meeting people you'll never see again is a special moment in time when your paths have been destined to cross. To really get the feel for *ichi-go ichi-e* in Japan, join in a tea ceremony, where each experience is valued as one that can never be replicated.

## FINDING HAPPINESS

In modern society, it's easy to get wrapped up in the daily routine of commuting, working and household chores. This is one reason why the Japanese concept of *ikigai* has become more important than ever. Your *ikigai* is the reason you get up in the morning; intensely personal, it's about

doing what you love and what you're good at, whether it's work or a hobby. Finding your *ikigai* gives you inspiration and confidence and purpose, so take some time to figure it out. It may even help you to live longer – *ikigai* could be a contributing factor to Japan's famous long-living communities, as continuing to get out and enjoy their *ikigai* helps the older generations stay happy and active.

^ Escaping the urban sprawl with forest bathing is a great way to rejuvenate.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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