

Vacations & Travel

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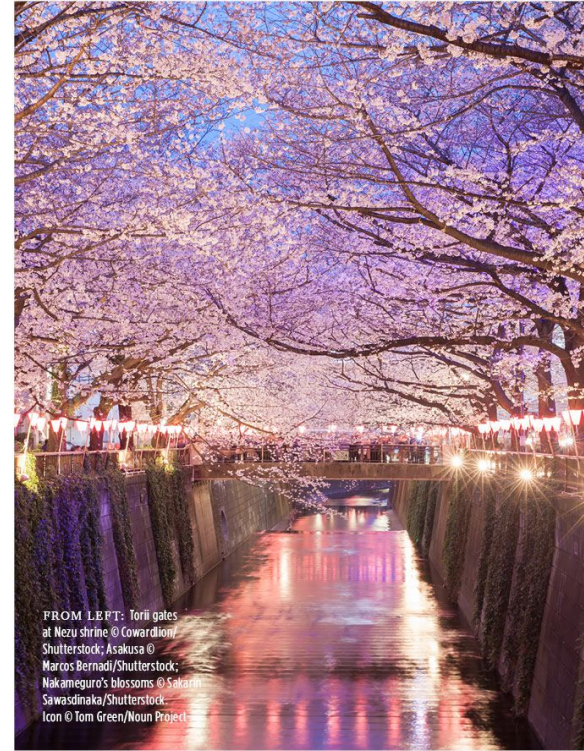




Tokyo Tokyo Old meets New

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FROM LEFT: Torii gates at Nezu shrine © Coward/Icon/Shutterstock; Asakusa © Marcos Bernadi/Shutterstock; Nakameguro's blossoms © Sakari Sawasdinaka/Shutterstock; Icon © Tom Green/Noun Project

#JAPAN #TOKYO #EXPLORE

Tokyo trends neighbourhoods to watch

Tokyo is vast, and can be daunting to visit until you get to know its districts and neighbourhoods. Each has its own distinct vibe and offerings. Here are three we love.

Tokyo's 23 wards, or *ku*, divide the world's most populous city into digestible neighbourhoods, often nicknamed after whichever train station serves them. Step off and you might find yourself caught up in a whirlwind of neon and nightclubs in one 'hood, or traditional gardens and teahouses in another. Here's our guide to three locally-loved neighbourhoods to explore on your next trip to Japan's always-vibrant capital – and what to eat, see and do when you get there.

ASAKUSA & KAPPABASHI

Downtown's historic heart

There are few places in Tokyo that encapsulate tradition quite like Asakusa – unsurprisingly, given that it's home to Sensoji Temple. This is the oldest Buddhist temple in the Japanese capital, and one of the prettiest of its kind in the world, marked by its imposing

Kaminarimon Gate and giant red lantern. Arguably the best way to get to Asakusa, on the banks of the Sumida River, is via a Tokyo Water Bus ferry from Hama-rikyū Garden, Odaiba and Toyosu. When you arrive, you're not only greeted by historic Sensō-ji but also jaw-dropping vistas of the city's tallest landmark, the Tokyo Skytree. We recommend exploring via rickshaw.

If you have a love for all things culinary, you'll want to walk the short distance to neighbouring Kappabashi, Tokyo's 'kitchenware town' – there's not much you can't find here to stock an enviable kitchen.

Local Foodie Tip: If you love the diversity of street food, you've come to the right place. Favourites in Asakusa include delectable savoury pancake, *okonomiyaki* (try it at Tsurujiro); tempura (head to Tempura Daikokuya); and all manner of Japanese sweets (don't miss Funawa).

YANAKA & NEZU

Downtown life with a retro vibe

Step back in time when you visit Yanaka and Nezu, remarkably well preserved thanks to the fact that both areas escaped major damage during the world wars and Tokyo's natural disasters. The vibe is retro and charming, evoking a bygone era where time seems to stand still. Must-visit historic sites include Yanaka Cemetery and Nezu Shrine (one of Japan's oldest), tucked down alleys and hemmed by traditional wooden houses.

There won't be just window shopping at Yanaka Ginza, the region's retro retail street – the stores and galleries here are that enticing. Speaking of art, visit HAGISO for eye-popping paintings and installations in a renovated wooden apartment, now part hip cafe and part gallery. Then drop in on SCAI the Bathhouse, formerly a public bathhouse (*senzo*), transformed into a contemporary art gallery.

Local Foodie Tip: Unsurprisingly, this neighbourhood is bestowed with restaurants (and snacks) that date back generations. Try rice crackers at Kikumai Senbei, and meat cutlets (menchi-katsu) at age-old restaurants like Niko no Suzuki and Nikuno Sato in Yanaka Ginza.

NAKAMEGURO

Cool cafes, bars and bookstores

Along the banks of the Meguro River and within walking distance of fashionable districts like Daikanyama and Ebisu, Nakameguro holds its own in the sophistication stakes. The area has become a bit of mecca for fashionistas. You'll find many in the new Nakameguro Koukashita – 700 metres of bars and stores anchored by the uber-modern Nakameguro Tsutaya Books.

Nakameguro is a bustling bastion of cool throughout the year, but you'll find the crowds swell in late March and early April when the densely packed riverside cherry trees bud and blossom, creating an ultra-photogenic tunnel of pink.

Local Foodie Tip: Our pick of trendy cafes to frequent? Onibus, for coffee every which way and served by dapper waiters. Then enjoy modern French at Graffale, vegan fare at Saïdo and craft beer at Spring Valley Brewery Tokyo. tokyotokyo.jp 🍷