

GOING GREEN IN TOKYO

The Japanese capital may be known for its skyscrapers and neon-lit streets, but the metropolis is also home to a remarkable wealth of green spaces and nature-based activities, writes Natasha Dragun.

There's no denying that Tokyo is one of the world's most modern cities, from its high-tech trains to its gleaming shopping malls. But the Japanese capital also nurtures centuries worth of traditions, many of them best experienced in a pocket of the city few tourists know about. Travel 90 minutes west from the Central area and you'll find yourself in the heart of the Tama region, a place of wide open spaces where rivers and waterfalls cloak sacred mountains, and mistify forests and gorges. It's a lush base for artists and artisans – here's how to discover the best of the area in just two days.

Day 1

Morning

Begin your day as you wish to continue it – on a natural high. Hiking trails weave around 599-metre-high Mt. Takao, guiding you across postcard-perfect forest trails, with each vista more ravishing than the last. This is your backdrop until you reach the summit, and soak up the serenity at Yakuo-in Temple, a shrine dating back to the 8th century.

Afternoon

Reward your efforts with a cool beverage at Mt. Takao Beer Mount, the highest beer garden in the city – make sure you time your visit between June and October to get a seat at this scene-stealer. Appetite whet, move on to Ukai Toriyama or Ukai Chikutei for lunch, via shuttle bus

from Takaosanguchi Station. Toriyama restaurant is surrounded by manicured gardens – think cherry blossoms in spring and fiery leaves in autumn – and its menu heroes chicken and beef grilled over coals. Its sister restaurant is enveloped by koi ponds and bamboo, featuring *kaiseki* (multi-course) cuisine that highlights the seasons.

Evening

Check in to Kabuto-ya Ryokan, an exclusive abode with Japanese-style rooms. When you're not soaking in the *onsen*, fed by mineral-rich springs, enjoy meals that include wild and foraged vegetables, seafood, meat and chicken specialties.

If you want to get close to nature, book one of the five glamping tents at Circus Outdoor, each designed with an individual theme. Dinner and breakfast are included in rates – and meals are nothing short of spectacular.

Day 2

Morning

Today begins with a good dose of nature, and ends with an equal dose of culture. Lace up your hiking shoes and wander along the banks of Lake Okutama, surrounded on all sides by mountains (including Mt. Kumotori, Tokyo's tallest peak), accompanied by an outrageous explosion of colour every spring and autumn thanks to cherry blossoms and maple trees.

Afternoon

The pure beauty of the Tama region draws Japanese creatives in droves. Drop in on a *washi* master, making paper by hand using local fibres and techniques passed down through generations. Or witness a *sake* brewer in action, crafting the national drink using crystal-clear water.

Establishments like Ozawa Brewery show how the beverage is made – and then let you sample the wares through a cheeky *sake* tasting. Whether hot or cold, the flavour variances and subtle notes are incredible.

End your day at one of the region's many textile stores, where you can learn the fine art of *tama ori*, a traditional style of weaving where artisans produce the finest silk products, whether ties and scarves or table runners. Don't just shop – some weaving masters also offer hands-on classes where you can make your own piece to take home. ♦

Travel file

Accommodation
kabutoya.net
circusoutdoor.com

Dining
ukai.co.jp

Experiences
sawanoi-sake.com
dento-tokyo.jp

Information
gotokyo.org



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