

# INTRODUCING TOKYO



Women in kimonos outside Kubuki-za (Kabuki Theatre, p61), Ginza

Tokyoites inhabit a singular capital inimitably yoking past and future, where Zen temples nestle in sci-fi cityscapes and centuries-old madness for cherry blossoms coexists with an insatiable desire for nonstop novelty.

Old and new are forever juxtaposed in Tokyo: its residents are at home both donning loincloths to shoulder a portable Shinto shrine through Asakusa's religious festivals and piloting humanoid fighting machines in Akihabara's robot sport tournaments. Tradition, happily, is not ossified, but feted along with innovation.

The workaholic stereotype is very true – death from overwork is legally recognised in Japan – but stroll through a neon-lined row of Shinjuku yakitori joints on the weekend, or any cherry grove in spring, and you'll see that people take pleasure very seriously here. There is ever-flowing sake, deep respect for freshly filleted fish and heartfelt karaoke, and constant curiosity about how outsiders view this archipelago at the end of the world.

Orderly, efficient Tokyo works stunningly well for a metropolis its size, yet it has about as many masks as there are hostess clubs in Kabukichō. Peeling back each façade reveals a city that's far less Western than first impressions suggest; nearly everything Tokyoites do, from taking out the trash to cheering a ball game, is profoundly un-Western. Their reverence for ritual, courtesy and the power to *ganbaru* (persevere) gives this super-dense megalopolis a calm at the heart of the storm. This is *wa* – social harmony – and it's the force that makes Tokyo more a series of one-of-a-kind experiences than a collection of sights.

## TOKYO LIFE

Tokyo never stops. Change trains during rush hour at Shinjuku Station and you'll experience Tokyo at its most dizzying, with rivers of people pouring from the platforms. Gaze out from the observation deck at the nearby Metropolitan Government Offices and you'll see a vast labyrinth of a city that seems to continue forever. This metropolis of over 12 million people (expand that to 33 million if you include the greater metropolitan area) has been constantly reinventing itself following natural disaster, war and an endless architectural construction-demolition cycle.

Tokyo is far from beautiful, but it is totally modern. What it lacks in greenery and historic structures is made up for by an almost playful chameleon character, with new redevelopment zones transforming neighbourhoods like Roppongi, Marunouchi and Shiodome into chic new centres of entertainment, business and media. Grand municipal schemes to host the Olympic Games in 2016 and to bury elevated expressways may again reconfigure the urban landscape. Meanwhile, yet another subway line will be added when the Fukutoshin Line starts tunnelling people between Ikebukuro and Shibuya in 2008. Even though Japan's population has started a long decline because of low birth rates and zero immigration, Tokyo is still evolving.

Social pressures are often the subject in *izakaya* (Japanese-style pubs). The government seems incapable of preparing for the system-wide shock that workforce shrinkage will deliver to the slowly recovering economy. Leaders are often mired in corruption scandals, yet the Japanese have kept the same party in power virtually uninterrupted since 1955. Between beers, they may say there are no viable alternatives. Politics is a prickly subject, and touchier topics like Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine honouring the war dead, and indeed WWII in general, are best avoided.

The most popular visitors are usually those with a deep curiosity for Japanese culture, and Tokyoites delight at trying to explain their native foods, social etiquette or the writing system. Tokyo's millions are almost as intensely interested in themselves as outsiders, and devour articles on the sex lives of the elderly, the latest schoolgirl prostitution scandal or trends in yoga for pets. Turn on the TV and you're bound to see infantile buffoonery on the variety shows and firemen belting out their best *enka* blues on the national karaoke programme. Beneath its staid corporate face, the city is a child at heart. Tokyo's *joie de vivre*, frantic pace and pure energy never lets up.



Bright lights illuminate the classic meeting place outside Studio Alta, Shinjuku (p114)

# THE AUTHORS

## Matthew D Firestone



Matt is a trained anthropologist and epidemiologist who should probably be in the midst of a successful academic career by now, though somehow he can't seem to pry himself away from Japan.

Smitten with love after a fifth grade 'Japan Day' fair, Matt started down the road to being a full-fledged Japanophile after being diagnosed with a premature taste for green tea and sushi. After graduating from college and moving to Japan to work as a bartender, Matt taught himself Japanese while learning a thing or two about the Tokyo underworld. These days however, he prefers moonlighting as an English teacher when he's not on the road writing guidebooks to far-flung locales in Africa and Central America.

### MATT'S TOP TOKYO DAY

Exploring every corner of Japan's sprawling capital can take several lifetimes, especially since each of Tokyo's neighbourhoods is defined by its own unique urban stylings. However, a great introduction to the city is to walk from Harajuku through Aoyama to Shibuya, which takes in historic temples, ultramodern storefronts, *cos-play* (costume play) kids and high fashion-clad yuppies. Starting at Meiji-jingū (p109), one of Tokyo's most historic

shrines, wind your way down Omote-sandō (p142). Along the way you'll pass by trendy teens sporting bizarre fashions, as well as Tokyo's rich and beautiful frequenting a whole slew of name-brand boutiques. After arriving in Shibuya (p105), get lost in the urban jungle of neon-lit streets for a bit of retail therapy.

## Timothy N Hornyak



A native of Montreal, Tim Hornyak moved to Japan in 1999 after watching Kurosawa's *Ran* one too many a time. Since then he has written on Japanese culture, technology and history for titles including *Wired News*, *Scientific American* and *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

He plays bass in a rock band in Tokyo, has lectured on Japanese robots at the Kennedy Center in Washington, and has travelled to the heart of Hokkaidō to find the remains of a forgotten theme park called Canadian World. His interest in haiku poetry has taken him to Akita-ken to retrace the steps of Bashō, as well as to Maui to interview poet James Hackett. His favourite robot is Astro Boy, but he firmly believes that the greatest Japanese invention of all time is the *onsen* (hot spring).

## LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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# GETTING STARTED

Diving head first into the world's largest megalopolis is daunting to even the most intrepid of travellers. From language barriers and cultural shock to budget woes and the ever present threat of getting lost, Tokyo is not exactly the gentlest of destinations. With that said, the challenge of seeking out the heart and soul of modern Japan is rewarding in itself, especially since Tokyo never ceases to assault your senses and blow your mind.

Depending on your preferred style of travel, a trip to Tokyo can be as organised or as spontaneous as you'd like it to be. In the modern age of travel, all of your accommodation can be booked online before you ever step foot on a plane, and there is no shortage of guided city tours (see p255) to help you catch your bearings. But, Tokyo is perhaps best experienced by simply putting down the guidebook, getting lost in the crowds and finding your own secret corner of the city.

Truth be told, Tokyo is the most expensive destination in Asia, and you certainly will not be able to survive here on a shoestring budget. However, one of the biggest misconceptions about Japan is that it is prohibitively expensive – on the contrary, Tokyo is arguably a better bargain than New York, London and most European capitals. Of course if you do have the cash to burn, Tokyo will roll out the tatami mat for you, and cater to your every conceivable whim without sparing even the slightest bit of style and class.

## WHEN TO GO

As one of the world's most exciting cities, Tokyo will enchant regardless of when you visit. In fact, if you take a quick look at the calendar of festivals (see right), you'll quickly realise that Tokyo hosts a number of big events every single month.

Festivals aside, the weather can have an impact on your trip, especially since summers (June to August) are stiflingly hot and humid, while the winter chill (December to February) can severely limit your outdoor time. But if you happen to time your visit to coincide with the blooming of the cherry blossoms in the spring (March to May) or the changing of the leaves in autumn (September to November), you'll catch Tokyo at its best.

### ADVANCE PLANNING

Check out some of Tokyo's top websites (p21) and find out the latest from local media, including expat magazines. Check to see if your trip coincides with popular festivals (right). Make sure your passport and other documents are in order.

Give some thought to possible itineraries (p46) and how to best manage your time, especially if you are planning some excursions (p218). Scout around for a good hotel (p202) and consider which restaurants are worthy of your yen (p150).

On the day before you leave, reconfirm your flight (and make sure the oven is turned off).

Otherwise you might want to time your visit so you can catch one of several annual sumō tournaments, which take place in January, May and September (see p125), or perhaps a baseball game or two (p198), which are played from March to October.

## FESTIVALS

Old Edo was home to an abundance of *matsuri* (festivals), which originated in farming communities as expressions of the Shintō religion. Spring festivals were held to supplicate the local gods and to secure a plentiful harvest, while autumn festivals were held in thanks and celebration of a rich harvest. Summer and winter festivals were less common, though this changed with the rise of large urban settlements, where they were held in the hope of circumventing pestilence and plague. Today, Tokyo's civic calendar is jam-packed with *matsuri* as well as a mix of events from traditional flower viewings to trade shows covering everything from motorcycles to design.

For a list of Japan's national holidays see p249.

## January & February

### SHŌGATSU (NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAY)

1 to 3 January

While Tokyo comes to a virtual halt on the first few days of the year (also referred to

as O-Shōgatsu, 'Honourable New Year'), the city's large Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples swell with visitors; Sensō-ji (p85) and Meiji-jingū (p109) are good places to start. Although both of these places get extremely crowded – Meiji-jingū gets millions of visitors alone – it can be a particular thrill to be part of the crowds of people from all walks of life, many of whom are dressed in fine kimono and purchasing seasonal trinkets.

You may also want to stop in at Yasukuni-jinja (p55), where the shrine's dramatic *nō* (stylised dance-drama) is performed in honour of the shrine's god. On 2 January, you should consider a visit to the Imperial Palace (p50) as the emperor and imperial family make a brief appearance in one of the inner courtyards – it's one of the very rare occasions when visitors are allowed a glimpse into imperial life behind bullet-proof glass.

### SETSUBUN

3 or 4 January

Setsubun marks the first day of spring in the traditional calendar, a shift once believed to bode evil and bring disaster. To ward off the oncoming evil, temples erupt into metaphysical food fights as rowdy supplants throw tiny sacks of roasted beans and shout, 'Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!' ('Devil out! Fortune in!').

### SEIJIN-NO-HI (COMING-OF-AGE DAY)

15 January

Arrows fly at Meiji-jingū (p109) during traditional archery displays in the celebration of the world of the grown-up.

### HARI-KUYŌ

Early February

Women mourn the passing of broken pins and needles by burying their beloved sartorial pals in cubes of tofu or in radishes at Sensō-ji (p85).

## March & April

### HINA MATSURI (GIRLS' DAY)

3 March

Homes and public spaces are decorated with squat dolls dressed in the traditional dress of the *hina* (princess). Around this time, dolls made by children are set adrift on the Sumida River (Map p86) from Sumida-kōen near Azuma-bashi. There's also a Boys' Day held in May (see Otoko No Hi, p18).

# top picks

## QUIRKY EVENTS

- Hari-kuyō (February; left)
- Setsubun (February; left)
- Design Festa (May & November; p18 & p20)
- Takigi Noh (July & August; p18)
- Samba Carnival (August; p19)

### UME HANAMI

Early March

Before the riot of cherry blossoms comes to town, the plum trees do their own number. Mt Takao, in far western Tokyo, fairly explodes with them. The closest station to Mt Takao is Takaosanguchi Station on the Keio Line.

### HIWATARI MATSURI

Mid-March

Mountain monks take the lead in this festival in Mt Takao by walking over hot coals. If you're feeling invincible (or drunk), you're also welcome to try.

### ST PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

Mid-March

[www.inj.or.jp/stpatrick\\_e.html](http://www.inj.or.jp/stpatrick_e.html)  
Sometime around 17 March, crowds line the Omote-sandō route (Map p110) rain or shine for the wearin' and drinkin' of the green. The parade is usually led by local Irish dignitaries and well attended by Tokyo's sizable, cohesive and always merry Irish expat community.

### HANAMI (CHERRY-BLOSSOM VIEWING)

Late March to April

Late March through April sees the much-anticipated and glorious reign of the cherry blossom. See the boxed text (p20) for details on the best spots for these blossom-viewing parties.

### TOKYO INTERNATIONAL ANIME FAIR

Late March or Early April

[www.taf.metro.tokyo.jp/en](http://www.taf.metro.tokyo.jp/en)  
Tokyo's International Anime Fair at Tokyo Big Sight (Map p131) brings in everyone from the 17-year-old animeophile living next door to big-screen voice actors and some 170 exhibitors. Sorry, *cos-play* (costume play) is sadly not permitted inside as the decorum of this bit of the event is surprisingly serious – in an anime sorta way.

**HANA MATSURI**

First Week in April

Happy birthday Buddha celebrations happen across Japan. Look for the parade of children in Asakusa, pulling a white papier-mâché elephant.

**TOKYO MOTORCYCLE SHOW** Early April

At Tokyo Big Sight (Map p131) the biggest motorcycle show in Japan has been letting the good times roll since the 1970s.

**May & June****OTOKO NO HI (BOYS' DAY)**

5 May

This is the male counterpart to Hina Matsuri (see p17). Homes where boys live fly *koinobori* (banners or windsocks in the shape of a carp), a symbol of strength, never-ending struggle and other masculine virtues.

**KANDA MATSURI**

Mid-May

[www.kandamyujin.or.jp](http://www.kandamyujin.or.jp)

One of the city's three big *matsuri*, this festival features the obligatory music, dancing and a healthy dose of sake. The highlight is the parade of *mikoshi* (portable shrines) through the streets of Kanda (see Kanda Myōjin, p69).

**SANJA MATSURI**

Mid-May

Another one of the city's three big *matsuri*, this three-day festival attracts around 1.5 million spectators to Asakusa-jinja (p86). The highlight is watching half-naked men (and women, although not half-naked) carry more than a hundred *mikoshi* around the shrine and neighbouring Sensō-ji. The crowd sheds its reserve and things get rowdy, so grab a beer or two and feel free to jump into the action and let it all hang out – so to speak.

**DESIGN FESTA**

Mid- to Late May

[www.designfesta.com](http://www.designfesta.com)

At Tokyo Big Sight (Map p131), this two-day arts and design fair brings in 6000 exhibitors (professionals and amateurs alike) and some 50,000-plus visitors, making it the biggest art event in Asia. Also held in mid-November (see above).

**IRIS VIEWING**

Early to Mid-June

Mizumoto-kōen (3-2 Mizumoto-kōen, Katsushika-ku) & Horikiri Iris Garden (2-19-1 Horikiri, Katsushika-ku)

These parks in Eastern Tokyo show off more than 100 unique iris species. Saturdays and Sundays bring drum performances and larger crowds; weekdays are better for a quiet walk. These parks are best reached by taking the Keisei Line to Kanamachi Station.

**SANNŌ-SAI**

Mid-June

Tokyoites turn out to Hie-jinja (p91) for this *matsuri* with music and dancing and the usual frenetic procession of *mikoshi*, at the former protector shrine for Edo Castle.

**July & August****INTERNATIONAL GAY & LESBIAN FILM FESTIVAL**

Mid-July

IGLFF; [www.tokyo-igff.org](http://www.tokyo-igff.org); various venues

An outgrowth of the Gay Art Project, IGLFF has nearly 20 seasons beneath its belt. The festival highlights the best gay and lesbian films from both Japan and around the world.

**SUMIDA RIVER HANABI**

Last Saturday in July

Summertime in Japan is synonymous with exhibitions of fireworks (*hanabi*), which happen throughout the country. The ones on the Sumida River (Map p86) are among the most spectacular around. Although you may have seen fireworks displays elsewhere, they probably haven't prepared you for the grandness of this one, which goes on, marvellously, for hours.

**TAKIGI NOH**

July or August

As the summer weather starts to peak, shrines, temples and parks stage evening outdoor *nō* backlit by bonfires. Meiji-jingū (p109), Kichijoji Gesoji and Shinjuku (Map p116) are the usual spots for evening performances within the city limits. This is a great bit of old Edo that has been preserved in modern Tokyo.

**O-BON**

Mid-August

For several days, Japanese city dwellers return to their ancestral provinces to gather with family and visit the graves of ancestors, marking the time when Buddhist teaching says the dead revisit the earth. *Bon-odori* (folk dances) by people in *yukata* (light cotton kimono) are held throughout Japan, but the one at Yasukuni-jinja (p55) is famous, illuminated by *bonbori* (paper lanterns).

**FUKAGAWA HACHIMAN**

Mid-August

The latest of the city's three big *matsuri* is famous for its traditional chant of '*wasshoi! wasshoi!*' as spectators pour sacred water over the *mikoshi* carriers along the route. Needless to say, everyone gets wet, which is certainly welcomed if the August sun is beating down. Tomioka Hachimangū (p125) is located near Monzen-nakacho Station on the Tokyo Metro Tozai Line.

**KŌENJI AWA ODORI**

Late August

More than 10,000 participants do the Fool's Dance along a 2km stretch. If you happen to find yourself along the parade route at Kōenji Station (Map pp48–9), you're welcome to break into your own rendition.

**SAMBA CARNIVAL**

Last Saturday in August

This universally loved event, which is staged by the Nikkei Brazilians, features roughly 3500 dancers moving their fleshy way down Kaminarimon-dōri in Asakusa (Map p86) past a half-million spectators. The dancing is top-notch, and the judged competition is fierce, drawing dancers all the way from Rio.

**September & October****TOKYO GAME SHOW**

Mid-September

[www.tgs.cesa.or.jp](http://www.tgs.cesa.or.jp); Makuhari Messe

Get your geek on when the Computer Entertainment Suppliers Association stages this massive expo at a convention centre on the way to Narita Airport (Makuhari Messe is about 30 minutes east of Tokyo, via the JR Keiyō Line from Tokyo Station to Kaihin Makuhari Station). The holding of the event in 2008 marks its 17th year, and you can expect more than 130 exhibitors and 175,000 visitors over three days.

**NINGYŌ-KUYŌ**

Late September

Childless couples pray for children by offering dolls to Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. More interesting for spectators is the ceremonial burning by priests of all the dolls held in the temple precinct from the previous year. See Kiyōmizu Kannon-dō (p71) for more info.

**TOKYO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Late October

TIFF; [www.tiff-jp.net](http://www.tiff-jp.net)

Bigger doesn't necessarily mean better when it comes to film festivals, though the

TIFF – the biggest in Asia – maintains its integrity by keeping a feature-length film competition at its core. The TIFF pays special attention to films from Asia, although there are always selections in English.

**EDO TENKA MATSURI**

Late October

This festival in Marunouchi (Map pp52–3) began in 2003 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Edo, and is held every two years (next is 2009). You'll find exhibits and demonstrations of traditional Edo crafts, as well as a parade of *mikoshi*.

**TOKYO METROPOLITAN CHRYSANTHEMUM FESTIVAL**

Late October to Mid-November

Chrysanthemums are the flower of the season (as well as the flower of the imperial family), and this dazzling display in Hibiya-kōen (p61) is certainly cause for celebration, and has been ever since 1914. You can also catch dazzling chrysanthemum displays at Shintō shrines, including Meiji-jingū (p109) and Yasukuni-jinja (p55).

**November & December****TOKYO JIDAI MATSURI (FESTIVAL OF THE AGES)**

3 November

On National Culture Day, locals, dressed in splendid costumes representing figures from Japanese history parade around the Sensō-ji temple precincts in Asakusa (Map p86). This festival takes after a much bigger (and older) one in Kyoto, held a couple of weeks earlier.

**TOKYO DESIGNERS' WEEK** Early November

[www.tdwa.com](http://www.tdwa.com)

Video, furniture and fashion are a few of the genres represented at venues around the city, mostly in arts enclaves such as Aoyama, Harajuku and Roppongi. Parties happen in the evenings.

**SHICHI-GO-SAN (SEVEN-FIVE-THREE FESTIVAL)**

Early to Mid-November

This adorable festival celebrates children of these tender ages, who were once thought to be in danger of imminent misfortune. Parents dress girls aged seven and three and boys aged five in wee kimono and head to Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples throughout town, grandparents often in tow. It's a prime photo opportunity.

**KŌYŌ (AUTUMN FOLIAGE SEASON)**

The city's trees undergo magnificent seasonal transformations during *kōyō*. For listings of optimum foliage-viewing pleasure, see boxed text, (below).

**DESIGN FESTA**

Mid-November

[www.designfesta.com](http://www.designfesta.com);

This enormous art and design festival at Tokyo Big Sight (Map p131) is held for a second time in mid-November. See also p18.

**INTERNATIONAL ROBOT**

**EXHIBITION** Late November to Early December

This biennial event organised by the Japan Robotics Association and friends attracted more than 100,000 people in 2007. The next event scheduled is for 2009.

**COSTS & MONEY**

Tokyo, once known as an impossibly expensive city, has become a lot more affordable in the last 10 years – or at least prices have frozen, giving the rest of the world a chance to catch up. Truth be told, it's still possible to spend thousands of dollars on a five-star hotel room, and wine and dine on gourmet cuisine until your bank account is in the red, but Tokyoites are quick to point out that their city is as expensive as you want it to be. In fact, for every upmarket hotel or sophisticated restaurant in the capital, there are numerous affordable guesthouses and cheap noodle shops scattered about. And, in light of the recent plummeting of the US dollar and the strengthening of the British Pound and the euro, a trip to Tokyo is arguably better

**HOW MUCH?**

- 1L petrol ¥135
- 1L bottled water ¥145
- Kirin beer at a bar ¥700
- Kirin beer from a vending machine ¥300
- Pack of cigarettes ¥280
- Souvenir T-shirt ¥2000
- Onigiri (rice ball) ¥120
- Cup of coffee in a café ¥450
- Cinema ticket ¥1800
- 2km taxi ride ¥660

value than one to London, Paris or any other European capital.

Although shoestringers will have to part with a bit more cash than they're perhaps used to, it is possible to survive in Tokyo for around ¥5000 a day, though you will have to sleep in dormitories, subsist on noodles and rice, and limit your sight-seeing to cut down on entrance and transport fees. More realistically, a budget of ¥10,000 to ¥15,000 will allow you to bed down in a private room, sample Tokyo's spectacular culinary offerings and snap a few hundred shots at sights around the city. If money is no object, then welcome to paradise – Tokyo is a rich person's fantasy come true.

Throughout this book, we have broken down sleeping and eating listings based on price. For instance, budget sleeps are rooms costing ¥6500 or less, midrange rooms cost between ¥6500 and ¥16,000, and top-end rooms will cost more than ¥16,000. Budget eats will cost around ¥1000 or less for lunch, and ¥2000 or less for dinner. A quality mid-range meal can run upwards of ¥5000, while *haute cuisine* can easily run to ¥20,000 per person.

As any Tokyoite will tell you, you don't need to raid the shelves of the convenience

stores or to eat *rāmen* (noodles) three times a day to survive here. Generally speaking, anything that requires a lot of space costs a lot (eg bowling alleys, cinemas, domestic produce), so you can save a bit if you avoid these minor pleasures. Also, although most museums and cinemas don't generally offer discounts to adults, concessions are usually available to students, children and senior students. And finally, you should know, too, that Tokyo's little-kept secret, the bargain lunch set, can sometimes put your foot in the door at places that might otherwise be beyond your budget.

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

There is a vast treasure trove of Japan-related info on web. Before touching down in Tokyo, take a few moments to check out the following sites:

**Hyperdia** ([www.hyperdia.com](http://www.hyperdia.com)) Having problems finding your way around Tokyo? Resident expats use this English site to make sense of Tokyo's overwhelming transportation grid.

**Japan National Tourist Organization** (JNTO; [www.jnto.go.jp/eng](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng)) The JNTO offers an extremely comprehensive guide to tourism in Tokyo and the whole of Japan.

**Japan Times** ([www.japantimes.co.jp](http://www.japantimes.co.jp)) Tokyo's most widely circulated English-language newspaper is a great way to catch up on the latest Japan headlines.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Includes summaries on travelling in Tokyo, the Thorn Tree Forum, travel news and links to the most useful travel resources on the web.

**Metropolis** ([www.metropolis.co.jp/default.asp](http://www.metropolis.co.jp/default.asp)) Japan's most popular English-language weekly magazine is a great insight into what's happening around the country.

**The Man in Seat 61** ([www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com)) The source for all your train-related inquiries in Japan as well as the rest of the world.

**Tokyo Notice Board** ([www.tokyonoticeboard.co.jp](http://www.tokyonoticeboard.co.jp)) From apartment listings to job openings, this weekly English-language classified zine is worth checking out.

**TOKYO IN BLOOM**

Owing to the seasonal nature of Japanese culture, monitoring the progress of spring blossoms and autumn foliage is an obsession up and down the archipelago – the national news carries maps of their progress. Even though Tokyo is largely hemmed in by concrete, blossom-viewing and leaf-peeping are still a big deal.

**Hanami**

Cherry blossoms seem to burst out overnight sometime between the end of March and the beginning of April, representing the climax of spring. *Hanami* (cherry-blossom viewing) parties begin with the earliest buds and endure to the last clinging blossoms. Both daytime parties and moonlit soirees are standard, as crowds flood the parks with beer and good humour.

- Hama Rikyū Onshi-teien (p66) – there are about a hundred cherry trees here, including a few wild varieties. A small admission fee keeps the crowds at bay.
- Zōjō-ji (p98) – about a hundred trees are found here at Shiba-kōen, with the temple for a backdrop.
- Shinjuku-gyōen (p119) – a prime cherry-blossom attraction, this garden has several varieties of cherry trees, including the spectacular *yaezakura* (double-blossoming cherries).
- Ueno-kōen (p70) – ground zero for the *hanami* explosion as enthusiasts vie for the best angle on Ueno's 1000 flowering trees.
- Yasukuni-jinja (p55) – there are more than a thousand cherry trees in the grounds of the shrine; check out the cherry trees lining the nearby Imperial Palace moat as well.
- Yoyogi-kōen (p108) – there is plenty of space here to stretch out and admire the park's 500 or so cherry trees.

**Kōyō**

During the *kōyō* (autumn foliage season), which runs from about mid-October to early November, Tokyo's trees virtually explode in colour. Look especially for the maple, which goes through a minor spectrum of yellows and oranges before climaxing in a fiery red. Some of the best spots include the following.

- Kitanomaru-kōen (p51) – located just north of the Imperial Palace, this grassy expanse is a great place for an autumn stroll and/or a picnic.
- Koishikawa Kōrakuen (p58) – a lovely pond and surrounding gardens make this park one of Tokyo's best foliage spots.
- Shinjuku-gyōen (p119) – this sprawling garden's many leaf-peeping locales include the Western-style garden.
- Ueno-kōen (p70) – as popular for autumn foliage as for cherry blossoms.
- Yasukuni-jinja (p55) – the tree-lined walkway leading to this temple explodes in a fury of autumn colours.
- Yoyogi-kōen (p108) – this sprawling park is dotted with picturesque ginkgo, zelvoka and cherry trees.

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