

ENTERTAINMENT

top picks

- **Kabuki-za** (p176) – Reminiscent of Himeji Castle, this is the best kabuki venue in the world.
- **Karaoke** (p184) – Rent your own deluxe karaoke room and splurge on sweets.
- **New York Grill and Bar** (p181) – Have your *Last in Translation* experience in this spectacular eyrie.
- **Kokuritsu Nō-gakudō** (p176) – Don't say no to *nō* because it's slow; it's transporting theatre if given a chance.
- **New National Theatre** (p178) – This is a renowned venue for Western opera.
- **Street Performers** (p186) – Tokyoites may seem conformist until you meet the weekend buskers around Yoyogi-kōen.
- **Blue Note Tokyo** (p189) – Tokyo's premiere jazz club.
- **Session House** (p178) – This small theatre hosts traditional, folk and modern dance.
- **Aoyama Enkei Gekijō** (p177) – A lovely round theatre nestled in the National Children's Castle.
- **Bunkamura Theatre Cocoon** (p177) – Hosts many experimental modern dance troupes of international renown.

What's your recommendation? www.lonelyplanet.com/tokyo

Slicing into a pumpkin-sized, ice cream-topped loaf of toasted bread while swilling draft Kirin and belting out your fave Queen tunes in a room the size of a broom closet. Or quaffing thimble after thimble of sake with an unknown and increasingly rosy salaryman who then insists you join him at a bar down a dark lane in Roppongi. Or watching an unexpected shower of artificial snow falling on Kabuki actors who have just dispatched their samurai foes with feats of swordsmanship and acrobatics in *The Tale of the Forty-Seven Ronin*, a beloved Japanese epic of loyalty, blood and revenge served very, very cold.

That's fun, Tokyo-style. The city will rock you 'til you drop in its live houses, drink you under the table in its *izakaya* (Japanese pubs) and mesmerise you with its traditional arts. Entertainment-wise, Tokyo is a microcosm of the best of Japan and the world, from the hippest hip-hop clubs to the old-timey *rakugo* storytelling venues. What Dr Johnson said of London also applies to this city on speed – if you're bored in Tokyo, you might as well be dead.

TRADITIONAL THEATRE

Tokyo has one of the best traditional-theatre scenes in Japan. The Kabuki-za is splendid – watching a show here is a must-do. You've probably already been warned, but keep in mind that *nō* (stylised Japanese dance-drama) performances can feel like they're crawling at a snail's pace (see p36). Believe it or not, it's even considered acceptable to doze (though not to snore). *Takigi* (torch-lit) *nō* performances are more rousing because of the fires.

CERULEAN TOWER NŌ THEATRE

Map p106

セルリアンタワー能楽堂

☎ 3477-6412; www.ceruleantower-hotel.com; B2 fl, 26-1 Sakuragaokachō, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; ② Shibuya (south exit)

Performances in Japanese are held in this traditional theatre (you can also pop by just to admire it between 2.30pm and 5.30pm daily) in the [Cerulean Tower Tōkyū Hotel](#) (p212).

KABUKI-ZA (KABUKI THEATRE)

Map p62

歌舞伎座

☎ 3541-3131; www.shochiku.co.jp/play/kabukiza/theater/index.html; 4-12-5 Ginza, Chūō-ku; tickets ¥2500-17,000; ② Hibiya or Toei Asakusa Line to Higashi-Ginza (exit 3)

Performances and times vary from month to month at Kabuki-za (p61) so check with the TIC (Tourist Information Center; p255) or the theatre for programme information. Be sure to rent a headset for blow-by-blow explanations in English, and pick up a *bentō*

downstairs. A full kabuki performance (see p36) comprises three or four acts (usually from different plays) over an afternoon or an evening (typically 11.00am to 3.30pm or 4.30pm to 9pm), with long intervals between the acts. If four-plus hours sounds too long, you can purchase last-minute tickets for a single act, although seats are only on the highest balcony. Since some acts tend to be more popular than others, inquire ahead as to which to catch, and arrive well in advance.

KANZE NŌ-GAKUDŌ Map p106

観世能楽堂

Kanze Nō Theatre; ☎ 3469-5241; www.kanze.net, in Japanese; 1-16-4 Shōtō, Shibuya-ku; tickets from ¥3150; ② Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

Kanze Nō-gakudō is one of Tokyo's most highly regarded *nō* troupes. By far the most exciting are the rare outdoor night performances of *Takigi Nō*, where the masked actors are illuminated by huge burning torches. They are usually held on the grounds of a temple or shrine in Tokyo.

KOKURITSU NŌ-GAKUDŌ Map p110

国立能楽堂

National Nō Theatre; ☎ 3423-1331; www.ntj.jac.go.jp/english/index.html; 4-18-1 Sendagaya, Shibuya-ku; tickets ¥2800-5600; ② JR Chūō Line to Sendagaya (west exit)

This theatre stages the traditional chants and dances *nō* is famous for, as well as the interludes of *kyōgen* (short, lively comic farces) that serve as cathartic comic relief. The stark legends and historical dramas unfold on an elegant cypress stage.

TAKARAZUKA GEKIJŌ Map p62

宝塚歌劇

☎ 5251-2001; <http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/index.html>; 1-1-3 Yūrakuchō, Chiyoda-ku; tickets from ¥3500; ② Chiyoda, Hibiya or Toei Mita Line to Hibiya (exits A5 & A13)

While not really traditional theatre, the all-female Takarazuka Gekijō revue, going back to 1914, exposes Tokyo's knack for complexity. These musicals are in Japanese, but English synopses are available. A mostly female audience swoons over actresses in drag. If you love camp, this is for you.

CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

Tokyo has a lively contemporary theatre scene. Language can be a barrier, as most of the productions taking place in these alternative performance venues are in Japanese.

DIE PRATZE Map pp48-9

ディブラッツ

☎ 3235-7990; www.geocities.jp/kagurara2000, in Japanese; 2-12 Nishi-Gokenchō, Shinjuku-ku; admission varies; ② Tōzai Line to Kagurazaka (exit 1) Home to experimental theatre group OM-2, this small space features a variety of genres, from ballet to *butō* (contemporary dance style; p32) to experimental performance pieces. Die Prätze is northwest of the Imperial Palace, near Kagurazaka Station.

SUZUNARI THEATRE off Map pp48-9

ザ・スズナリ

☎ 3469-0511; www.honda-geki.com/suzunari.html, in Japanese; 1-45-15 Kitazawa, Setagaya-ku; admission varies; ② Odakyū or Keiō Inokashira Line to Shimokitazawa (south exit)

WHERE TO FIND WHAT'S ON

Because of Tokyo's sizeable expat community, there is loads of English-language information available about what's going on in town. Below are several options, many of which you can pick up around town in hard copy, usually at music stores or in international supermarkets.

Japan Times (www.japantimes.co.jp/entertainment.html) Comprehensive movie listings service, also available in the hard-copy newspaper.

Metropolis (www.metropolis.co.jp) An excellent free resource that lists and reviews events, including contemporary film. Available in record stores and expat-frequented cafés and restaurants.

Tokyo Q (www.tokyoq.com) Run by long-time expats who adore Tokyo, *Tokyo Q* is an excellent place to catch glimpses of the city from the inside. Reviews and listings cover clubs and bars – colourful, thoughtfully crafted and discriminating. Many listings include fairly detailed maps.

A good bit of Japanese would be helpful in getting the gist of these underground theatre pieces. Like most avant-garde theatre, plays here tend towards experimental explorations of contemporary issues.

DANCE

Tokyo's dance scene is a mixture of both international and indigenous styles. At venues around the city you will find all the usual Western dance forms – ballet, modern, jazz and experimental – in abundance. You may also be able to see *butō* (contemporary dance style) in its home environment, if your trip happens to coincide with a performance here.

AOYAMA ENKEI GEKIJŌ Map p110

青山円形劇場

Aoyama Round Theatre; ☎ 3797-5678; www.aoyama.org; 5-53-1 Jingūmae, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; ② Chiyoda, Ginza or Hanzōmon Line to Omote-sandō (exit B2)

Found within *Kodomo-no-Shiro* (National Children's Castle; p71) this midsized round theatre stages musicals, ballet and modern dance. Though the theatre is lovely, performances tend towards the conservative. Because of the venue's location, many programmes are ideal for kids.

BUNKAMURA THEATRE COCOON

Map p106

文化村シアターコクーン

☎ 3477-9999; www.bunkamura.co.jp/english; 2-24-1 Dōgenzaka, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; ② JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

This dance space in one of Tokyo's liveliest arts complexes (p107) shows occasional

experimental works by international dance troupes. It has also been known to stage musical dramas, though these take place less frequently than dance programmes.

SESSION HOUSE Map p156

セッションハウス

☎ 3266-0461; www.session-house.net, in Japanese; 158 Yaraichō, Shinjuku-ku; admission varies; ④ Tōzai Line to Kagurazaka (exit 1) Most dance aficionados consider Session House one of the best traditional, folk and modern dance spaces in the city. The small theatre seats only 100 people, which means that all performances have an intimate feel to them.

SPACE ZERO Map p116

スペースゼロ

☎ 3375-8741; www.spacezero.co.jp, in Japanese; B1 fl, 2-12-10 Yoyogi, Shinjuku-ku; admission varies; ④ Toei Ōedo or Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku (exit 6)

This is a 550-seat, fine-art performance venue that happens to be located centrally in Shinjuku. Space Zero is host to contemporary dance performances and experimental theatre productions. You'll find it in the basement of the Zenrōsai Kaikan building.

OPERA

World-class opera can regularly be seen in Tokyo at venues such as the New National Theater, next to Tokyo Opera City (p114) in Shinjuku. The Japan Opera Foundation, managing the renowned Fujiwara Opera troupe, stages French and Italian operas.

NEW NATIONAL THEATRE Map p116

新国立劇場

Shin Kokuritsu Gekijō; ☎ 5351-3011; www.nntt.jac.go.jp/english/index.html; 1-1-1 Honmachi, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; ④ Toei Shinjuku Line to Hatsudai (Theatre exit)

This is a main venue for opera in Tokyo, with Fujiwara Opera, Nihon Opera Kyokai and Nikkai Opera performing here. Part of the New National Theatre's arts complex, the Playhouse and the Pit are performance venues for modern dance, with the latter hosting just about every international dance luminary who passes through. A web resource is www.operajaponica.org.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Many of the world's top-flight classical musicians are trained in Japan and much of the nation's talent makes its home in Tokyo. A thumb through one of the English dailies or a quick navigation through their websites will tell you what's on.

TOKYO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

www.tpo.or.jp/english/index.html

Founded in Nagoya in 1911, the Tokyo Philharmonic is Japan's oldest and largest orchestra with 166 members. Featuring distinguished foreign soloists and conductors and a perennial presence on the NHK TV New Year's special, the Philharmonic is based at Tokyo Opera City in Shinjuku (p114) but also performs at Suntory Hall in the Ark Hills complex in Akasaka (Map p92) and at Bunkamura Orchard Hall (p106) in Shibuya.

TOKYO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

www.tokyosymphony.com/e-tokyo

One of Tokyo's best, established in 1946, this orchestra premieres works by contemporary Japanese composers, such as Ikumu Dan and Yoshiro Irino. It also performs traditional works by Western masters, such as Berlioz, Mahler and Schoenberg. Check its website for performance times and venues.

BARS

Alcohol is very much a social lubricant in Japan, and a lot of heavy drinking goes on in Tokyo, something you will realise very quickly if you happen to hop on any train after 10pm; violence, though, is quite rare. Roppongi, long the *gaijin* (foreigners; literally 'outside people') bar capital of Tokyo, has the lion's share of bars per square metre, though Shinjuku is no slouch. Most bars in the city officially claim to be open from 5pm or 6pm until midnight, though many stay open until late becomes early again.

SHINJUKU

The streets and lanes radiating from the world's busiest train station hide enough watering holes to souse an army. The largest red-light district in East Asia, Kabukichō, is northwest of the station and abuts the storied old drinking alleys of Golden Gai. Next door

DRINKS WITH A VIEW

To decompress from pounding the pavement all day, rise to a different atmosphere. Savour spectacular views while sipping a vodka martini at these bars with views.

Aurora Lounge & Sky Bar Polestar (right) Both have fine views from the Keiō Plaza Hotel in Shinjuku

New York Grill and Bar (p181) Get the *Lost in Translation* experience with floor-to-ceiling vistas

Top of Akasaka (p184) Feels like floating in a spaceship above Tokyo

is Shinjuku Ni-chōme, Japan's gay mecca, home to about 200 gay and lesbian bars.

ADVOCATES CAFÉ Map p116 Gay & Lesbian

アドヴォケッツカフェ

☎ 3358-8638; B1 fl, 2-18-1 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 8pm-4am; ④ Marunouchi or Toei Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exits C7 & C8)

This corner bar is so small that as the crowd magically expands during the course of an evening, it becomes more like a block party and takes to the streets. Advocates welcomes people of all genders, identities and nationalities. It's great place to start off the night.

ALBATROSS Map p116 Arty/Stylish

アルバトロス

☎ 3342-5758; www.alba-s.com; 1-2-11 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 5pm-2am; ④ Shinjuku (west exit)

Tucked away in aromatic Omoide-yokocho (Memory Lane), Albatross and the surrounding *yakitori* (charcoal-broiled chicken and other meats or vegetables, cooked on skewers) joints would have been knocked down long ago if owners had let developers have their way. It's a tiny postwar space for cheek-to-jowl chats and boasts the incredible rarity of a third-floor terrace right in the middle of the neon jungle.

ARTY FARTY Map p116 Gay & Lesbian

アーティファティー

☎ 5362-9720; www.arty-farty.net; 2nd fl, 2-11-7 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 5pm-5am Mon-Sat, 4pm-5am Sun; ④ Marunouchi or Toei Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exits C7 & C8)

This bar for boys and gals has been the gateway to Tokyo's gay neighbourhood, Ni-chōme, for many a moon. A cavernous

place with a dancefloor and intimate booths, Arty Farty is open to all in the community.

AURORA LOUNGE Map p116 Stylish

オーロララウンジ

☎ 3344-0111; 45th fl, 2-2-1 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm; ④ Toei Ōedo Line to Tochōmae, exit B1)

Perched 150m up in the Keiō Plaza Hotel (p213), this bar has great views and drinks. On the same floor, the crisp, elegant **Sky Bar Polestar** (スカイバーポールスター ☎ 3344-0111; ☎ 5-11.30pm Mon-Sat, 4-11.30pm Sun & public holidays) is built for gazing out over the city, with each seat facing the windows. Drinks start at ¥1500.

BAR PLASTIC MODEL Map p116 Arty/Stylish

バープラスチックモデル

☎ 5273-8441; 1-1-10 Kabukichō, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 8pm-5am Mon-Sat, 6pm-midnight Sun; ④ Marunouchi or Toei Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exit B5)

It's true that in the last few years construction has started around Golden Gai, but some of those hammers are wielded by a new generation of iconoclastic bar masters rather than a major developer. Bar Plastic Model is one of the new joints, with an '80s soundtrack and decorated with retro knick-knacks.

BON'S Map p116 Shots

ボンズ

☎ 3209-6334; 1-1-10 Kabukichō, Shinjuku-ku; admission ¥500; ☎ 7pm-5am; ④ Marunouchi or Toei Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exit B5)

There's a sign reading 'American Bar' out front, but Bon's is about as American as *anko* (azuki bean paste). Look for this cosy dive on the Golden Gai's (p119) southeast corner, next to the police box. It's one of the few bars in the neighbourhood that will accommodate the odd nonregular patron.

CLUBHOUSE Map p116 Sports

クラブハウス

☎ 3359-7785; www.clubhouse-tokyo.jp; 3rd fl, 3-7-3 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ from 5pm Mon-Fri, from 3pm Sat & Sun; ④ Marunouchi or Toei Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exit C3)

This clubhouse looks like the kind of wood-trimmed beer bar you'd find at any ski lodge, and it's a magnet for Tokyo's diehard

GAY & LESBIAN TOKYO

Though issues like gay marriage are not on the public radar screen in conservative Japan, media is rife with *tarento* (media celebrities) who are gay or who pretend, like pseudo leatherman Hard Gay. Social acceptance has been slow, but in 2007 the central and metropolitan governments joined the Tokyo Pride Parade for the first time. Entertainment-wise, the Tokyo scene is concentrated in Shinjuku Ni-chōme, a few blocks east of Shinjuku Station that house hundreds of gay and lesbian establishments. An English-language social networking site for gays in Japan is Homodachi (www.homodachi.jp), and there is the more comprehensive, info-stuffed Gay Japan (www.gay-jp.com, in Japanese) as well as www.japanvisitor.com, in English.

A great place to get basic info and tips on Tokyo's gay and lesbian scene is Utopia (www.utopia-asia.com), which has a page on Japan. For info on Ni-chōme, see the Japanese site www.shinjuku-2.com. Ni-chōme mainly caters to gay men, but more and more lesbian bars are opening up. There are usually lesbian theme-nights every month in Tokyo that make up the local party scene. Three big organisers are Goldfinger Party (www.goldfingerparty.com, in Japanese), Diamond Cutter (www.diamondcutter.jp, in Japanese) and Grand Panache (grand-panache.fem.jp, in Japanese).

Best Gay & Lesbian Bars

Advocates Café (p179) This Ni-chōme establishment has zebra-print walls and welcomes men and women.

Ageha (p184) Massive club in Shin-Kiba holds gay parties every other month.

Chestnut & Squirrel (opposite) A cosy, chatty lesbian bar in Shibuya with a seductive low-key vibe.

GB (below) Busy, lighthearted pickup joint featuring Madonna videos on the tube.

Kinswomyn (below) This Shibuya lesbian bar is perfect for chatting.

rugby fans. Its comfortable, rugged interior is a friendly place to settle in for one of the fine imported or domestic beers and whatever game's on the tube.

DUBLINERS

Map p116

Pub

ダブリンナーズ
☎ 3352-6606; www.dubliners.jp; 2nd fl, Lion Beer Hall Bldg, 3-28-9 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ noon-1am Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun; ㊟ JR Yamanote Line to Shinjuku (east exit)

The strains of an old Irish tune may meet you at the door. Live music, good beer and a warm break from Tokyo's smooth, cool rhythm have made this one of the city's most frequented international watering holes. Pub grub includes a few Irish standards in portions that are larger than normal for Tokyo. There's a second branch in [Ikebukuro](#) (Map p122).

GARAM

Map p116

Specialty

ガラム
☎ 3205-8668; www17.big.or.jp/~kamal; 7th fl, 1-16-6 Kabukichō, Shinjuku-ku; admission from ¥1000; ☎ 8pm-5am; ㊟ JR Yamanote Line to Shinjuku (east exit)

Garam is a cool little reggae club with a friendly owner and no Rasta poseurs. The house DJ spins a mix of dub, hip-hop and

roots reggae, but guest DJs also make appearances. The cover includes one drink.

GB

Map p116

Bar

☎ 3352-8972; 2-12-13 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku

☎ 8pm-3am

A welcoming, dimly lit bar with 1980s videos on the tube and a cruise vibe. GB has friendly staff and decently generous drinks and makes for a great spot to begin the night.

KINSWOMYN

Map p116

Gay & Lesbian

キンズウイミン

☎ 3354-8720; 3rd fl, 2-15-10 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 8pm-4am Wed-Mon; ㊟ Marunouchi or Toei Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exit C8)

This established girls-only spot is welcoming and comfortable, and is run by a lesbian activist. English is spoken here, making it a perfect stop for visitors, but it's more a spot for drinking and chatting than for dancing.

LA JETÉE

Map p116

Arty/Stylish

ラジェットテ

☎ 3208-9645; 1-1-8 Kabukichō, Shinjuku-ku;

☎ 7pm-late Mon-Sat ㊟ Marunouchi or Toei Shinjuku Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exit B5) Kawai-san, the proprietor of this Golden Gai bar, knows more about film (especially that

of Chris Marker) than most of us ever will. No English is spoken here, though you're welcome to practise your rusty Français. Unlike many Golden Gai establishments, this one is amenable to foreign visitors.

NEW YORK GRILL AND BAR

Map p116

Bar

ニューヨークグリル
☎ 5322-1234; 52nd fl, 3-7-1-2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 5pm-midnight Sun-Wed, 5pm-1am Thu-Sat; ㊟ Toei Ōedo Line to Tochōmae, (exit A4)

You may not be lodging at the Park Hyatt, but that doesn't mean you can't ascend to the 52nd floor to swoon over stunning views of Mt Fuji and the city. There's a cover charge of ¥2000 after 8pm.

SHIBUYA

Shibuya mainly caters to teens and 20-somethings, but more adult-oriented pubs and lounges abound. For Golden Gai-style old-timey watering holes, check out Nonbei Yokocho alley northeast of the station by the JR Yamanote Line tracks; most tiny bars there only seat a handful. Harajuku and Omotesandō have more sophisticated options.

BELLO VISTO

Map p106

Bar

ベロビスト

☎ 3476-3000; 40th fl, 26-1 Sakuragaokachō, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 4pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat, Sun & public holidays; ㊟ Shibuya, south exit)

This 40th-floor eyrie on the Cerulean Tower keeps the interior lights dim so that you can see the lights on the far horizon. The 95-seat capacity ensures the atmosphere is always intimate. Cocktails and wine start at ¥1155.

CHESTNUT & SQUIRREL

Map p106

Bar

☎ 090-9834-4842; www.chestnutandsquirrel.com; 3rd fl, 3-7-5 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 8pm-12am Wed)

This café has international lesbian nights on Wednesdays and guest DJs. It's in the Oishi Building behind the Shibuya police station.

HUB PUB

Map p106

Pub

ハブパブ

☎ 3770-4135; www.pub-hub.com; B1 fl, 25-9 Udagawachō, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, 5pm-2am Fri & Sat; ㊟ JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

A generally English ambience, pub food and a decent selection of beers attract a mixed crowd of 20-somethings, especially on weekends. The Hub has branches all over the city, though this is probably the most comfortable of the lot.

INSOMNIA LOUNGE

Map p106

Arty/Stylish

インソムニア

☎ 3476-2735; B1 fl, 26-5 Udagawachō, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 6pm-5am; ㊟ JR Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

Insomnia Lounge is that rare Shibuya find: a bar for grown-ups. Good food, low music and a cosy, mirrored red interior make it the kind of place to come when you're in the mood for conversation. The kitchen's open late, and the oddly eyeball-esque mirrored wall behind the bar will induce insomnia if you're not already feeling it.

PINK COW

Map p106

Arty/Stylish

ピンクカウ

☎ 3406-5597; www.thepinkcow.com; B1 fl, 1-3-18 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 5pm-late, Tue-Sun; ㊟ Chiyoda, Ginza or Hanzōmon Line to Omotesandō (exit B2)

With its animal-print décor, rotating display of local artwork and terrific all-you-can-eat buffet (¥2625) every Friday and Saturday, the Pink Cow is a funky, friendly place to hang out. Also host to stitch-and-bitch evenings, writers' salons and indie film screenings, it's a good bet if you seek some artistic stimulation.

HARAJUKU & AOYAMA

DEN AQUARIUM

Map p110

Specialty

デンアクアルーム

☎ 5778-2090; B1 fl, 5-13-3 Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku; admission ¥500-1000; ☎ 6pm-2am Mon-Sat, 6-11pm Sun; ㊟ Chiyoda, Ginza or Hanzōmon Line to Omotesandō (exit B1)

Darting fish within the walls of immaculate blue aquariums make a visual counterpoint to the bop of jazz basslines. But even prettier than the dark décor is the chic clientele hanging out here for the evening. Chill with a fruity cocktail in this velvety lounge and enjoy the view.

LAS CHICAS

Map p110

Café-Bar

ラスチカス

☎ 3407-6865; 5-47-6 Jingūmae, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 11am-11pm; ㊟ Chiyoda, Ginza or Hanzōmon Line to Omotesandō (exit B2)

Slated to reopen in spring 2008, Las Chicas is also a restaurant and one of Harajuku's core art spaces. But that doesn't mean you can't come here just to hang out in the bar area, which is the kind of place where you want to sit and sip for hours.

TOKYO APARTMENT CAFÉ

Map p110 Café-Bar

東京アパートメントカフェ
 ☎ 3401-4101; 1-11-11 Jingūmae, Shibuya-ku;
 ☎ 11am-3am; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Meiji-jingūmae (exit 1)

This subterranean room with a view doubles as a cool daytime coffee house and eatery. At night, the atmosphere goes a shade hipper and cocktails are served until closing. This is a good place to hole up for the evening if you're out for the night on Omote-sandō.

ROPPONGI

Roppongi's downhill slide into a jungle of pushy foreign touts luring drinkers to rip-off joints has slowed with the opening of posh megacomplexes Roppongi Hills and Tokyo Midtown. It's still the best place to drink in Tokyo, though it may not feel especially Japanese. There's a great mix of cheap shot-bars and upscale spots here.

A971 Map pp96-7 Arty/Stylish

☎ 5413-3210; www.a971.com, in Japanese; 9-7-1 Akasaka, Minato-ku; ☎ 7am-5am Mon-Fri, 10am-5am Sat, 10am-12am Sun; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit for Tokyo Midtown)

Tucked into an outside corner of the recently built Tokyo Midtown complex, this hip restaurant-bar pulsates with friendly drinkers on Friday and Saturday nights. The crowd, a good mix of *gaijin* and locals, spills out onto the surrounding sidewalk and the vibe is very laidback and conversational.

AGAVE Map pp96-7 Specialty

アガヴェ
 ☎ 3497-0229; B1 fl, 7-15-10 Roppongi, Minato-ku; ☎ 6.30pm-2am Mon-Thu, 6.30pm-4am Fri & Sat; www.agave.jp; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 2)

Rawhide chairs, *cruzas de rosas* (crosses decorated with roses) and tequila shots for the willing make Agave a good place for a long night in search of the sacred

worm. Luckily, this gem in the jungle that is Roppongi is more about savouring the subtleties of its 400-plus varieties of tequila rather than tossing back shots of Cuervo.

BUL-LET'S Map pp96-7 Specialty

ブレッツ
 ☎ 3401-4844; www.bul-lets.com; B1 fl, 1-7-11 Nishi-Azabu, Minato-ku; admission ¥2000; ☎ from around 6pm; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 2)

This mellow basement space plays world-wide trance and ambient sounds for bare-foot patrons. Mattresses in the middle of the floor provide refuge from the madding crowd, but don't get the wrong idea – it's not always tranquillity and deadbeats.

HEARTLAND Map pp96-7 Arty/Stylish

ハートランド
 ☎ 5772-7600; www.heartland.jp, in Japanese; 6-10-1 Roppongi, Minato-ku; ☎ 11am-5am;
 ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

Named for the house beer from Kirin, Heartland is a chic, easygoing watering hole at the base of Roppongi Hills' West Tower that caters to professional expats and Japanese. It doesn't have the zoolike atmosphere of bars on Roppongi's main drag and drinks are reasonably priced.

MISTRAL BLUE Map pp96-7 Shots

ミストラルブルー
 ☎ 3423-0082; www.trainbar.com; 5-5-1 Roppongi, Minato-ku; ☎ 6pm-3am Mon-Sat; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

This lovable hole in the wall, also known as Train Bar for its resemblance to the interior of a carriage, is about as unpretentious as it gets in Roppongi. The many foreign customers who have drained cheap beers here have left their mark – every surface, even the light bulbs, is covered with signatures.

MOTOWN HOUSE 1 & 2 Map pp96-7 Shots

モータウンハウス
 ☎ 5474-4605; www.motownhouse.com; 2nd fl, 3-11-5 Roppongi, Minato-ku; ☎ 6pm-5am;
 ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

The crass may call it 'ho town', but on the pick-up front it's no worse (or better?) than its neighbours, and since it expanded to two venues, it can actually be quite relaxed. Drinks start at ¥800. Funk, soul, R&B and hip-hop dominate here, of course.

PROPAGANDA Map pp96-7 Shots

プロパガンダ
 ☎ 3423-0988; 2nd fl, 3-14-9 Roppongi, Minato-ku;
 ☎ 6pm-dawn Mon-Sat; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

A shot bar calling itself Propaganda couldn't possibly take itself too seriously, and it doesn't. Happy hour (6pm to 9pm) specials cost around ¥500, and it's sort of a pick-up scene if this is on your agenda.

TOKYO SPORTS CAFÉ Map pp96-7 Sports

東京スポーツカフェ
 ☎ 3404-3675; www.tokyo-sportscafe.com; 7-15-31 Roppongi, Minato-ku; ☎ 6pm-5am Mon-Sat;
 ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 4)
 With Kilkeny beer on tap, a pool table and a talking computerised alcohol tester, this friendly sports bar is the obvious choice for cheering on your favourite team. Sports-wise, it's more Rotherham United than Chicago Bulls, and many events here are broadcast live. By the early morning it can get quite rowdy.

IKEBUKURO

Off the beaten path for imbibing travellers, Ikebukuro's wealth of restaurants, karaoke rooms and *izakaya* (Japanese-style pubs) make it worth the trip.

BOBBY'S BAR Map p122 Pub

ボビーズバー
 ☎ 3980-8875; 3rd fl, 1-18-10 Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku; ☎ 6pm-3am Mon-Thu, 6pm-5am Fri & Sat;
 ⑨ JR Yamanote Line to Ikebukuro (west exit)

One of Tokyo's longest-standing and best-known *gaijin* bars, perfect for those in need of a warm barstool, a dartboard and reasonably priced drinks (from ¥500). The crowd here is always international – a good mix of long-time expats and travellers.

SASASHŪ Map p122 Izakaya

笹周
 ☎ 3971-9363; 2-2-6 Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku; meals from ¥6000; ☎ 5-10pm Mon-Sat; ⑨ Marunouchi Line to Ikebukuro (exit C5)

The proprietor is famous for having been a kamikaze pilot whose number was just about up when the war ended. To celebrate his good fortune, he dedicated himself to knowing all there is to know about sake, making Sasashū a favourite of those seeking a dignified *izakaya* experience (p172).

OTHER NEIGHBOURHOODS

Great bars can be found throughout Tokyo, whether it be a friendly *izakaya* by a suburban station or a British pub in Ebisu.

AUX AMIS DES VINS Map p62 Specialty

オザミデヴァン
 ☎ 3567-4120; 2-5-6 Ginza, Chūō-ku; ☎ 5.30pm-2am Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat; ⑨ Yūrakuchō Line to Ginza-itichōme (exits 5 & 8)

Even when it rains, the plastic tarp comes down and good wine is drunk alleyside. The enclosed upstairs seating area is warm and informal, and you can order snacks to go with your wine or full prix-fixe dinners. A solid selection of wine comes by the glass (¥800) or by the bottle.

FOOTNIK Map p102 Sports

フットニック
 ☎ 5795-0144; www.footnik.net; 1-11-2 Ebisu, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 11.30am-1am Mon-Fri, 3pm-1am Sat & Sun; ⑨ JR Yamanote Line to Ebisu (east exit)
 Cold pints cost only ¥700, and the big-screen TVs broadcast – what else? – footy (er, soccer) for the footniks. Find this friendly pub downstairs from *Good Day Books* (p143).

HOBGOBLIN Map p92 Pub

ホブゴブリン
 ☎ 6229-2636; www.hobgoblin.jp; 2-13-19 Akasaka, Minato-ku; ☎ 11am-3pm & 5pm-1am Mon-Fri, 5pm-1am Sat; ⑨ Chiyoda Line to Akasaka (exit 2), Ginza & Namboku Lines to Tameike-sannō (exit 9)

Far better than your average Britpub replica, Akasaka's Hobgoblin is run by an Oxfordshire brewery. It serves good pub fare, like toad in the hole, with excellent microbrews. You'll find this Hobgoblin in the basement of the building next to the clearly marked Marugen 23 building.

LION BEER HALL Map p62 Pub

銀座ライオン
 ☎ 3571-2590; www.ginzalion.jp, in Japanese; 7-9-20 Ginza, Chūō-ku; ☎ 11.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-10pm Sun; ⑨ Ginza, Hibiya or Marunouchi Line to Ginza (exits A2 & A3)

This is an almost-Bavarian beer hall smack in the middle of the otherwise ritzy, retail-crazed Ginza. Good pub food and a lovely 1930s mural on the wall only add to the atmosphere on weekend nights, which have been known to erupt into song.

GRAND PRINCE HOTEL AKASAKA

Map p56 Cocktail Lounge

トップオブアカサカ

☎ 3234-1121; 40th fl, 1-2 Kioi-chō, Chiyoda-ku;
☎ 5pm-1am; ⑨ Ginza & Marunouchi Lines to
Akasaka-mitsuke (exit 7)

If you're planning an intergalactic rendezvous, this cocktail lounge is the place. White tables on a purple carpet floating in the middle of the city create a very spacey atmosphere.

WHAT THE DICKENS Map p102

Pub

ザ デイッキンズ

☎ 3780-2099; www.whatthedickens.jp; 4th fl, 1-13-3 Ebisu-Nishi, Shibuya-ku; ☎ 5pm-1am Tue-Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun; ⑨ Hibiya Line to Ebisu (exit 2) or JR Yamanote Line to Ebisu (west exit) What the Dickens occupies the 4th floor of the Roob building, whose outstanding façade looks as if it's finished with a layer of mud, and adorned with the mirrored replica of a hummingbird. The beer and pub grub are up to snuff, and good live music and the occasional poetry reading keep things rolling.

KARAOKE

You can't avoid it and you can't beg off when the mic gets passed to you! Karaoke is a national pastime in Japan, an ice-breaker and welcome tonic for the strictures of the daily grind. The easiest way to understand the phenomenon is to simply take a swig of Asahi, fill your lungs with air and belt out your best version of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' no matter how off-key. Luckily, most group singing is not open-mic bar-room style – it takes place in private rooms that are rented by the hour for around ¥600 per person. Parlours are ubiquitous but the big ones are in entertainment areas like Shinjuku and Shibuya. Popular chains include Big Echo and Karaoke-kan.

PASELA Map pp96-7

パセラ

☎ 0120-759-880; www.pasela.co.jp, in Japanese; 5-16-3 Roppongi, Minato-ku; ☎ 5pm-8am Mon-Fri, 2pm-10am Sat & Sun; ¥525 per hr per person Sun-Thu, ¥630 per hr per person Sat & Sun; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

Pasela boasts decor that is a cut above the other yodelling parlours. With six floors of karaoke rooms including swanky VIP suites, this branch of the chain is right in the heart

of Roppongi. There's an extensive selection of Western songs, wine, champagne and sweets on the menu and a decent Mexican bar-restaurant in the basement. From 5pm to 7pm it's karaoke happy hour – ¥400 yen including one drink.

CLUBS

You'll find tons of techno and disco and house in the city, with most of the music starting when doors open, usually around 8pm – you won't really want to arrive until 10pm or so, when the volume increases and the floor fills. Many clubs claim they close at midnight (they're legally required to tell you so), but don't buy it. At most places, you can dance until dawn. Your biggest concern is when the trains stop and start running.

AGEHA Map pp48-9

アゲハ

☎ 5534-1515; www.ageha.com; 2-2-10 Shin-Kiba, Kōtō-ku; ☎ 11pm-5am Thu-Sat; admission ¥4000; ⑨ Yūrakuchō Line to Shin-Kiba (main exit) This gigantic waterside club rivals any you'd find in LA or Ibiza. Mostly international DJs appear here, with Japanese DJs filling out the mix. Counterbalancing the thumping dance floors are lounge spaces and a little pool area. Free buses run to the club every half hour from the east side of Shibuya Station on Roppongi-dōri; bring photo ID.

CLUB 3.2.8 Map pp96-7

クラブサンニイハチ

☎ 3401-4968; www.3-2-8.jp, in Japanese; B1 fl, 3-24-20 Nishi-Azabu, Minato-ku; admission ¥2000-2500; ☎ 8pm-5am; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 1)

DJs at San-ni-pa (aka San-ni-hachi) spin a quality mix, from funk to reggae to R&B. With its refreshing un-Roppongi feel and a cool crowd of Japanese and *gaijin*, 328 is a fabulous place to boogie 'til the break of dawn. Two drinks are included in the cover charge.

CLUB ASIA Map p106

クラブエイジア

☎ 5458-2551; www.clubasia.co.jp, in Japanese; 1-8 Maruyamachō, Shibuya-ku; admission around ¥2500; ☎ 11pm-5am; ⑨ Shibuya (Hachikō exit) This massive club is worth a visit if you're on the younger end of 20-something.

top picks

CLUBS

- Ageha (opposite)
- Club 328 (opposite)
- Ruby Room below
- Space Lab Yellow right

Events here are usually jam-packed every night. Occasionally the club hosts some of Tokyo's bigger DJ events and hip-hop acts.

MUSE Map pp96-7

ミュージーズ

☎ 5467-1188; B1 fl, 4-1-1 Nishi-Azabu, Minato-ku; Sat admission ¥2000, incl 2 drinks (women get in free); ☎ 7pm-12am Mon-Fri, 9pm-12am Sat; www.muse-web.com/etop.htm; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

Muse, a catacomblike underground space with intimate booths, dance floors and billiards, has an excellent mix of locals and foreigners. There's something for everyone here, whether you want to dance up a storm or just feel like playing darts or table tennis.

NEW LEX EDO Map pp96-7

ニューレックスエドワー

☎ 3401-1661; B1 fl, 3-13-14 Roppongi, Minato-ku; admission from ¥2000; ☎ 8pm-5am; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

The Lex was one of Roppongi's first discos and is still the place where every visiting celebrity ends up. The cover here starts at around ¥2000 unless you've had your visage on the front of *Vogue* or *Rolling Stone*. But even noncelebrities get a free drink with admission.

RUBY ROOM Map p106

ルビールーム

☎ 3780-3022; www.moderndining.com/RubyRoom/index.shtml; 2nd fl, 2-25-17 Dōgenzaka, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥1500; ☎ 9pm-late; ⑨ JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

This cool, sparkly gem of a cocktail lounge is on a hill behind the Shibuya 109 building. With both DJ'd and live music, the Ruby Room is an appealing spot for older kids hanging in Shibuya. The cover includes one drink, but if you dine downstairs at *Sonoma* (p168), admission is free.

SALSA CARIBE Map pp96-7

サルサカリベ

☎ 3746-0244; www.salsacaribe.jp; 2nd fl, 5-3-4 Roppongi, Minato-ku; admission Fri & Sat ¥1500; ☎ 7pm-5am Sun-Thu, 7pm-7am Fri & Sat; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

The narrow bar Salsa Caribe has long been a gathering place for an internationally diverse crowd that usually arrives at midnight and leaves in the early hours of the morning – only after every man has danced with almost every woman in the room.

SALSA SUDADA Map pp96-7

サルサスダーダ

☎ 5474-8806; www.salsasudada.ne; 3rd fl, 7-13-8 Roppongi, Minato-ku; admission Fri & Sat ¥1500; ☎ 6pm-6am; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 4)

Tokyo's sizable population of Peruvian and Colombian workers, many of whom grind away at factories in Kawasaki and Yokohama, come here to salsa and merengue, as do many salsa-mad locals. If you don't know how to dance, they'll teach you (lessons held nightly).

SPACE LAB YELLOW Map pp96-7

スペースラボイエロー

☎ 3479-0690; www.club-yellow.com; B1 & B2 fls, 1-10-11 Nishi-Azabu, Minato-ku; admission ¥2000-3500; ☎ 8.30pm-late; ⑨ Hibiya & Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 2)

Located by Nishi-Azabu crossing, Space Lab Yellow spins everything from house to acid jazz, Brazilian samba to techno. Foreign DJs are sometimes spotlighted: regardless of who it is, the sound is always excellent. Look for the entrance to this inky basement space next to the coin parking-lot.

VANILLA Map pp96-7

ヴァニラ

☎ 3401-6200; www.clubvanilla.com; 7-14-30 Roppongi, Minato-ku; admission from ¥1500; ☎ 7pm-late; ⑨ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exits 2 & 4)

Attracting a mostly Japanese clientele, Vanilla attracts fewer drunken *gaijin* kooks than nearby clubs. Three floors of dance space are filled with different beats and crowds of peeps. It's at the end of a small alley off of Roppongi-dōri, close to Roppongi crossing.

of many a Tokyo punk, is often grungy and smokey – with just the right level of sweaty intimacy. The music is always loud and usually good.

MILK Map p102

みるく
☎ 5458-2826; www.milk-tokyo.com, in Japanese; B1 fl, 1-13-3 Ebisu-Nishi, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥1000-3000; ☎ 8pm-4am; 🚶 Hibiya Line to Ebisu (exit 2) or JR Yamanote Line to Ebisu (west exit) In Ebisu, this is one of Tokyo's best small live clubs, featuring international punk, hard rock and alternative, along with some Tokyo dub, hip-hop and electronica. This cool space comprises three underground levels housing a crowd of weirdos and punks. The building also houses [What the Dickens](#) (p184).

SHIBUYA-AX Map p106

渋谷アックス
☎ 5738-2020; www.shibuya-ax.com, in Japanese; 2-1-1 Jinnan, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; 🚶 JR Shibuya (Hachikō exit) Shibuya-Ax has hosted big international names like Stereophonics, the Pogues and Cyndi Lauper as well as Japanese acts like Triceratops. It's a large, slick venue with its own line of proprietary merchandise. Look for the logo evoking the nuclear hazard symbol.

SHIBUYA O-EAST Map p106

渋谷オ・イースト
☎ 5458-4681; www.shibuya-o.com; 2-14-8 Dōgenzaka, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; 🚶 JR Shibuya (Hachikō exit) Shibuya O-East is the big mama of several related venues forming a compound of clubs up Love Hotel Hill. With its sheer size, this house draws bigger-name international and domestic acts.

COMEDY

Japanese comedy relies more on silly puns and slapstick than irony as in the West, but laughs both modern and traditional, home-grown and foreign, are on offer in Tokyo.

ASAKUSA ENGEI HALL Map p86

浅草演芸ホール
☎ 3841-6545; 1-43-12 Asakusa, Taitō-ku; adult/student/child ¥2500/2000/1100; 🚶 Ginza Line to Tawaramachi (exit 3)

top picks

LIVE-MUSIC VENUES

- Blue Note Tokyo (p189)
- Crocodile (opposite)
- Hot House (p189)
- Liquid Room (below)
- Milk (right)

Follow the spiral staircase to the basement to hear blues, rock or light jazz musicians get low down. Most acts are local, and of the lighter, sweeter variety. Show up to see whether tickets aren't completely sold out on a given night, and take a quick listen at the door to sample before committing. Most shows start around 7pm.

LA.MAMA Map p106

ラママ
☎ 3464-0801; www.lamama.net, in Japanese; B1 fl, 1-15-3 Dōgenzaka, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥2000; ☎ 6.30pm-12.30am; 🚶 JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (Hachikō exit) Just about every Japanese band from Buck-Tick to Melt-Banana has passed through here. The room is fairly spacious, but even when the place gets crowded you'll never be far from the stage. Shows usually begin around 7pm.

LIQUID ROOM Map p102

リキッドルーム
☎ 5464-0800; www.liquidroom.net; 3-16-6 Higashi, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; ☎ 7pm-late; 🚶 JR Yamanote Line to Ebisu (east exit) Some of the world's greatest performers have graced the stage of the Liquid Room, from the Flaming Lips to Linton Kwesi Johnson. This is an excellent place to see an old favourite or find a new one, but you'll have to buy tickets as soon as they go on sale.

LOFT Map p116

ロフト
☎ 5272-0382; www.loft-prj.co.jp, in Japanese; B2 fl, 1-12-9 Kabukichō, Shinjuku-ku; admission ¥1500-3000; ☎ 5pm-late; 🚶 Shinjuku (east exit) This well-respected, quarter-century-old Tokyo live house, whose chequerboard stage has hosted the feedback and reverb

as any good John, Paul, George or Ringo fan would know, is the same as that of the Liverpool club that first featured the fabulous four flopheads.

CLUB QUATTRO Map p106

クラブクアトロ
☎ 3477-8750; www.club-quattro.com; 32-13 Udagawachō, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥3000-4000; 🚶 JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (Hachikō exit) This venue feels like a concert hall, but it's actually more along the lines of a slick club. It books local and international bands of generally high quality. Though there's no explicit musical focus, emphasis is on rock and roll with leanings towards world music.

CROCODILE Map p110

クロコダイル
☎ 3499-5205; www.music.co.jp/~croco/index2.html; B1 fl, 6-18-8 Jingūmae, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥2000-3000; ☎ 6pm-2am; 🚶 Chiyoda Line to Meiji-jingūmae (exit 1) Crocodile has something happening almost every night. It could be jazz, it could be rock, it could even be country and western or Cuban. Get here early, as things are known to fill up fast, especially on Friday and Saturday nights.

EGGMAN Map p106

エッグマン
☎ 3496-1561; www.eggman.jp, in Japanese; 1-6-8 Jinnan, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥1000-3000; 🚶 JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

BUSKER HEAVEN by Tim Hornyak

Going to my weekend news job at NHK TV, I would get off the Yamanote Line at JR Harajuku Station and proceed through three distinct Japanese subcultures until I reached what I called Busker Heaven. First there are the *gosurori* (Gothic Lolita), teens who sport black neo-Victorian fashions – lace, frills and Little Bo Peep frocks. They congregate on Jingū-bashi bridge between JR Harajuku Station and the entrance to Meiji Jingū Shrine. Next, just inside Yoyogi-kōen, are the twisting rockabillys with their pompadours, leather jackets and sound systems pumping out Chubby Checker. Finally there are the BMX kids doing freestyle tricks on their bikes, plus a few skateboarders. Each group keeps to its own turf, and each attracts foreign gawkers.

But travellers who keep going towards [NHK Hall](#) (Map p106) will meet an amazing parade of rockers, rappers, folk singers, acrobats and unclassifiable misfits who are out to show off their skills. They can be found on the sidewalk lining Yoyogi-kōen and in the pedestrian lane between the park and Kōen-dōri leading to Shibuya Station (the lane also hosts ethnic and organic food fairs as well as flea markets). These performers are a throwback to the days of the *takenoko-zoku* (bamboo-shoot tribe), youth who thronged here in the 1970s and 1980s in colourful, exotic costumes to dance and sing. The weekend scene got so popular and crowded that authorities shut it down in the early 1990s, but these vestiges are still highly entertaining – you'll find everything from *manzai* stand-up comics to inscrutable men in white bodystockings. Most are out to promote themselves and have fun, not make money. This cornucopia of independent talent is the flipside of Tokyo's conformity, homogeneity and corporatism. It's also the best free spectacle in town.

WOMB Map p106

ウーム
☎ 5459-0039; www.womb.co.jp; 2-16 Maruyamachō, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥1500-4000; ☎ 8pm-late; 🚶 JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (Hachikō exit) Womb is all about house, techno and drum 'n' bass. All four floors get jammed at weekends. Bring a flyer and they'll knock ¥500 to ¥1000 off the cover – check around Shibuya music shops beforehand, or print one from Womb's website. Picture ID required at the door.

LIVE MUSIC

Though the live-music scene keeps geriatric hours (shows often end around 9pm), rock, house, blues, jazz and electronica are thriving in Tokyo. Big international acts often appear at large venues such as the [National Stadium](#) (p199) in Yoyogi or [Budōkan](#) (Map pp48-9). But Tokyo has many good small live houses. Shibuya is particularly ripe with them, and exceptional, idiosyncratic venues are also scattered throughout the city.

CAVERN CLUB Map pp96-7

カバークラブ
☎ 3405-5207; www.cavernclub.jp, in Japanese; 5-3-2 Roppongi, Minato-ku; admission ¥1500; ☎ from 6pm; 🚶 Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3) The heartfelt, adeptly executed covers performed at Cavern Club continue to shine after all these years. The name of the spot,

Asakusa Engei Hall hosts traditional *rakugo*, with all performances conducted in Japanese. The linguistic confusion is mitigated by lively facial expressions and traditional props (performers use only a hand towel and a folding fan), which help translate comic takes on universal human experiences.

TOKYO COMEDY STORE

www.tokyocomedy.com

You probably know the type – the class clown, the merry exhibitionist – who joins this kind of comedy troupe. Basically, this is a funny bunch of expatriated amateurs and professionals doing their shtick. Shows take place at various venues; check the website for schedules.

CINEMAS

Tokyo cinemas show blockbuster movies in small spaces, while charging you an average ¥1800. Some Hollywood flicks take a while to open here. Most independent films in English are not dampened by dubbing and some of the more avant-garde theatres show films you might not see anywhere else.

At larger theatres, getting seated is a free-for-all once the doors open, so it's a good idea to go early and get a decent seat. For mainstream flicks, the most stress-free theatres are *Virgin Toho Cinemas Roppongi Hills* (right) and *Yebisu Garden Cinema* (right), which each have their own seating systems.

CINE AMUSE EAST/WEST Map p106

シネアミューズ

☎ 3496-2888; www.cineamuse.co.jp, in Japanese; 4th fl, 2-23-12 Dōgenzaka, Shibuya-ku; ㊟ Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

This well-known arthouse standby screens Japanese and foreign classics, as well as new independent releases. Coffee, beer and snacks are available at the small café in the lobby. This is a great place to take a break from Shibuya's hectic pace while taking in a matinée.

CINEMA RISE Map p106

シネマライズ

☎ 3464-0051; www.cinamarise.com, in Japanese; 13-17 Udagawachō, Shibuya; ㊟ Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

Cinema Rise screens independent international cinema but very few indie Japanese films. Just around the corner is an

even more avant-garde space called *Rise X* (☎ 3464-8555), a tiny offshoot of Cinema Rise that screens mostly Japanese digital films.

EUROSPACE Map p106

ユーロスペース

☎ 3461-0211; www.eurospace.co.jp; 1-5 Maruyamachō, Shibuya-ku; ㊟ Shibuya (Hachikō exit)

The focus at this fine theatre remains unwaveringly on small European films. Eurospace also occasionally hosts documentary or feature-film festivals, which will be listed in the major English-language weeklies; and sometimes screens late shows.

VIRGIN TOHO CINEMAS ROPPONGI HILLS Map pp96-7

ヴァージンTOHOシネマズ六本木ヒルズ

☎ 5775-6090; www.tohotheater.jp/theater/roppongi/index.html; 6-10-2 Roppongi, Minato-ku; adult ¥1800-3000, child ¥1000, 1st day of month ¥1000, women on Wed ¥1000; ㊟ 10am-midnight Sun-Wed, 10am-5am Thu-Sat; ㊟ Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (Roppongi Hills exit)

Virgin's nine-screen multiplex has the biggest screen in Japan, as well as luxurious reclining seats and Internet booking up to two days in advance for reserved seats. This state-of-the-art theatre also holds all-night screenings on nights before holidays.

WASEDA SHOCHIKU Map p122

早稲田松竹

☎ 3200-8968; www.h4.dion.ne.jp/~wsdck/, in Japanese; 1-5-16 Takadanobaba, Shinjuku-ku; tickets ¥1300; ㊟ JR Yamanote Line to Takadanobaba (main exit)

Waseda Shochiku softens the blow by screening two films for the price you'd normally pay to see one. A favourite with students and cash-strapped expats, the bills normally feature second-run double features, some of an artsy bent.

YEBISU GARDEN CINEMA Map p102

恵比寿ガーデンシネマ

☎ 5420-6161; www.kadokawa-gardencinema.jp/yebisu, in Japanese; Yebisu Garden Place, 4-20-2 Ebisu, Shibuya-ku; adult/child ¥1800/1000, 1st day of month ¥1000; ㊟ 10am-11pm; ㊟ JR Yamanote Line to Ebisu (east exit, then Skywalk)

This small, comfortable movie house is at the far end of Yebisu Garden Place and screens foreign independent films, many in

English. Tickets are numbered as they are sold and theatre-goers are called to screenings as their numbers come up, preventing competition for seats.

JAZZ

Tokyo has long loved jazz, and affections don't seem to be on the wane. Major international artists invariably stop in the city, often at the Blue Note, and Japan's emerging improvisers most often get their start here at one of the smaller clubs.

B-FLAT Map p92

ビーフラット

☎ 5563-2563; B1 fl, 6-6-4 Akasaka, Minato-ku; admission from ¥2500; ㊟ 6.30-11pm Mon-Sat; ㊟ Chiyoda Line to Akasaka (exits 5A & 5B)

Located in a part of Akasaka that empties and grows quiet at night, this hip jazz club often features local and European talent, as well as healthy doses of Latin jazz. As the owner recently passed away, so too may the club – check locally when you're in town.

BLUE NOTE TOKYO Map pp96-7

ブルーノート東京

☎ 5485-0088; www.bluenote.co.jp; 6-3-16 Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku; admission ¥6000-15,000; ㊟ 5.30pm-1am Mon-Sat, 5pm-12.30am Sun; ㊟ Chiyoda, Ginza or Hanzōmon Line to Omote-sandō (exit B3)

Serious cognoscenti roll up to Tokyo's prime jazz spot in Aoyama to take in the likes of Maceo Parker, Herbie Hancock and Doctor John. Like its sister acts in New York and Milan, the digs here are classily

decorated with dark wood and deep velvet, making this a good spot for a slow night of cool sounds.

HOT HOUSE Map pp48-9

ホットハウス

☎ 3367-1233; 3-23-5 Takadanobaba, Shinjuku-ku; admission varies; ㊟ 8.30pm-2am; ㊟ JR Yamanote Line to Takadanobaba (main exit)

This must be the smallest jazz dive in the world. Musicians play in twos and threes (there's no room for more). Audiences are usually a few dozen; get here early if you're set on sitting in for the evening.

JAZZ SPOT INTRO Map p122

イントロ

☎ 3200-4396; www.intro.co.jp; B1 fl, 2-14-8 Takadanobaba, Shinjuku-ku; admission ¥1000; ㊟ from noon; ㊟ JR Yamanote Line to Takadanobaba (main exit)

It's a good sign when a little club allows a quarter of its floor space to be monopolised by a sexy grand piano. It also bodes well when the place is staffed by musicians who love to talk shop all night. At Jazz Spot Intro, all the omens are favourable.

JZ BRAT Map p106

ジェイゼットブラット

☎ 5728-0168; 2nd fl, 26-1 Sakuragaokachō, Shibuya-ku; admission varies; ㊟ from 6pm Mon-Sat; ㊟ Shibuya (south exit)

This lovely, airy venue in the Cerulean Tower Tōkyū Hotel books consistently solid acts from Tokyo and abroad. The space seats just over 100, who are always treated to an intimate ambience. Though there's no

KABUKICHO'S 'WATER TRADE'

During the late-Tokugawa period, a colourful world was born in which kabuki actors, prostitutes, poets and high-living merchants cavorted in pleasure quarters such as Tokyo's Yoshiwara district. This was the so-called 'floating world' (*ukiyo*), an ephemeral world of night pleasures (called *mizu shōbai* or 'the water trade') centred on geisha houses, brothels and drinking establishments.

Although prostitution was made illegal during the Allied occupation of Japan following WWII, the water trade is alive and well in Japan. A new form of floating world exists, one in which gaily painted kimonos and decorative hair combs have been replaced by gaudy miniskirts and flashing neon lights, particularly in the modern red-light districts of Shinjuku's Kabukichō and the areas around Ikebukuro Station.

While it is easy to romanticise the exploits of those otherworldly figures who live on in *ukiyo-e* (wood-block prints), the modern floating world allows for little in the way of sentimentality – today it is primarily a sleazy underworld of illegal Southeast Asian sex workers and economically poor, young Japanese women controlled by thoroughly unromantic *yakuza* (Japanese mafia) bosses. Unfortunately, there are few legal protections for sex workers – and immigrant women in the sex trade are completely vulnerable to the whims of the law and the street.

formal dress code, you'll feel better dressing up rather than down.


SHINJUKU PIT INN [Map p116](#)

新宿ピットイン

☎ 3354-2024; www.pit-inn.com; B1 fl, 2-12-4

Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; admission ¥3000-10,000;

🕒 from 7.30pm Mon-Fri, from 2pm Sat & Sun;

🚶  Marunouchi Line to Shinjuku-sanchōme (exit C5)

Shinjuku Pit Inn, which has been around for over 35 years, is not the kind of place you come to talk over the music. Aficionados come here to listen in silence to Japan's best jazz performers. Weekend matinées are half the price of evening performances.

SWEET BASIL 139 [Map pp96-7](#)

スイートバジル 1 3 9

STB 139; ☎ 5474-0139; <http://stb139.co.jp>; 6-7-11

Roppongi, Minato-ku; admission ¥3000-7000;

🕒 6-11pm Mon-Sat; 🚶  Hibiya or Toei Ōedo Line to Roppongi (exit 3)

Sweet Basil has a large, lovely space that draws big-name domestic and international jazz acts. Performances range the gamut of the genre; check the calendar on the website for the current line-up.

This classy joint is a good place to have an Italian dinner before a show; call for reservations between 11am and 8pm Monday to Saturday.

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