

# **SUPER CHEAP JAPAN**

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Budget Travel in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Nara,  
Hiroshima and Surrounding Areas (PREVIEW)

Matthew Baxter

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# Welcome to Japan



*View over Tokyo, to Mount Fuji*

Welcome to the Land of the Rising Sun, but with this book not the land of rising prices! Japan is a fascinating country, but unfortunately one with a reputation for being expensive. This has been changing rapidly over the last few years, with increasingly good exchange rates for foreigners and tax-free shopping galore, among other things. This guide is here to help you save as much as possible, and in the end have a much better holiday. We will show you how to experience the highlights of Honshu, Japan's main island, without burning a hole in your pocket. This includes the popular tourist hotspots of Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, Osaka and Hiroshima, as well as many nearby tourist spots to keep your trip varied and as exciting as possible.

Japan is a deeply historic and traditional culture, yet one that is also very modern and at times futuristic. This mix is what makes the country stand out from the rest. One minute you will be soaking in a hot spring bath, another playing with a talking robot and another inside a 1000-year-old shrine. What sets Japan apart from other countries is its extensive, easy to use train and bus networks, which budget travelers can use to explore many places, while easily keeping an eye on their budget. From the deeply spiritual to the plain crazy, Japan has it all.

Popular meals include gyudon (beef on rice with a mild, sweet sauce), tempura (deep fried food), yakisoba (fried noodles) and ramen (noodles in a thick broth). These can be found with prices starting from just a few dollars, and are available almost everywhere. Convenience stores, which you'll usually never be a few minutes away from, also have these items, plus cheap drinks and snacks. Many hostels also offer free drinks, snacks and bike rentals to entice guests to stay with them.

Japan can seem like another world, and has developed a very unique and at times fascinating culture. It's a very safe society, one where drinking outside on the streets will

never cause you any trouble and where people always return lost items they have found. Japanese people are generally very welcoming for foreign tourists, and while their English skills can present problems, people really try their best to help. Don't be surprised if you ask a shop owner for directions to your hostel and they close the shop to guide you there personally, or offer to give you a ride for free!

The increasingly favorable exchange rate has made Japan much more affordable compared to before. A ramen meal would have cost about \$9 in 2012, but it now costs \$7, while an average hostel room used to cost around \$40, but now comes in at \$24. These kinds of prices have helped Japan to increase tourism numbers significantly. While this does mean that the top spots are becoming rather crowded, there have been many benefits, such as improved English language support, countless new discount train passes, extensive free wifi coverage and more frequent transportation services in the countryside. Your timing could not be better for a budget trip to the Land of the Rising Sun.

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## Highlights of Japan map



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## How to save on your holiday with this book

This book is very different from the rest, and the emphasis is on traveling on a budget. Here are some tips on how to use the book to save you as much as possible.

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### Itineraries

For each region, and nationally, use the sample itineraries based on train or bus passes to help you plan your budget trip. The best way to save is to base your trip around these passes, connecting between them with a cheap bus or short train ride if needed. You'll save a bunch, as train passes can save you hundreds of dollars, or thousands if in a group!

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### Things to do

Look out for places listed as FREE, or with free sample or discounts available. Try doing the free ones that interest you first, then head to the ones that cost money. Make sure you check the discount information provided to save on admission fees to the various attractions. These discounts and bonuses often come with train or bus passes.

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## How to use the maps

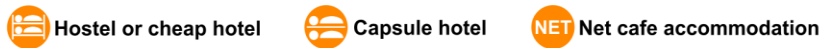
Some Japanese cities and towns can be a nightmare to visit without a simple map, especially as most don't use street names. Detailed instructions for getting to places, and simple maps when appropriate, are provided so you won't spend time and money getting lost. Plus, you'll never need to get a pricey taxi. Use landmarks on the maps to help you get there as well, as Japanese streets can be difficult to navigate, even for those who have lived here many years.

### Map icons

#### Shops



#### Accommodation



#### Information and more



Convenience stores are everywhere in Japan and have takeout meals from around 300 yen (\$3). Finding a cheap supermarket can be a time-consuming hassle for budget travelers, so we have included cheap supermarkets in the guides. Prices are often slashed in the evenings to get rid of stock, so be sure to check them out for some ultra-cheap sushi!

100-yen stores (around \$1) are even better for budget travelers. You can buy almost everything here, from drinks, to microwavable food, to gifts and clothing accessories. Japanese pharmacies and drug stores often have even cheaper prices for drinks and snacks as well.

### Volunteer guides and tours

For those that want a more in-depth experience when visiting somewhere like a shrine or temple, using one of the vast number of free volunteer guide services is advised. For Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, these are listed in the introduction pages, while for other places recommended groups are listed individually in that location's chapter.

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## Budget food

### Eating out cheaply

There are a host of cheap Japanese restaurant chains all over Japan, or focused on a particular region. These have been included on the easy-to-use maps, as well as in the Budget Food sections. As mentioned, cheap supermarkets and convenience stores are also included, to further help you keep your wallet happy!

### Drinking on a budget

It is perfectly legal to drink outside in Japan, so budget travelers should get their alcohol fix at a convenience store or supermarket. You can then drink in parks, on the street or relax outside a train station and do a bit of people watching. If you want to check out the bars, get a few drinks in before to save money.

### Water bottle refill spots

Most of the budget restaurants have water jugs to refill your bottle, and we have also included some other spots to refill, such as in parks. Buying a large bottled drink in a 100-yen shop, then using it for the rest of your trip is a great way to save on money. Also note that tap water is drinkable in Japan.

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## Types of accommodation

While we recommend hostels and hotels based on our own experiences and readers' feedback, always compare prices online. Recommended sites are Booking.com (usually free to cancel bookings) and Agoda (good choice in Asia) and of course Airbnb. For the budget traveler, the number of unacceptable rooms is almost zero, as quality and good customer service is so important in Japanese culture. Just make sure you are near a train stop or an easy-to-access bus stop so that you don't waste money and time finding your place. Also consider couch surfing ([www.couchsurfing.com](http://www.couchsurfing.com)) if you are really low on money.

### Hostels and guesthouses

Japan has the best hostels and guesthouses in the world. Prices are reasonable, rooms are kept clean, beds linens are properly washed and customer service is excellent. Sharing restrooms and showers is how people usually travel in Japan, so do what the locals do and save some cash on room fees.

### Internet cafes

Net cafes are an even cheaper option, with prices often as low as 1000 yen. Stay in a small booth or even an open seat and chill out on the computer, or use the all-you-can-drink facilities. They can be tricky to find and confusing to use for people that don't speak Japanese, so they have been included in maps or detailed descriptions have been included in this guide, plus English translations of the sleeping options. Reservations are usually not possible online.

### Love hotels

Love hotels are a great way to stay the night in any large city in Japan, if you are with that special someone. Each hotel usually has its own theme, so the best advice is to go to one of the areas we have listed, have a walk around, then settle on the hotel that looks best for you. Rates vary, so compare prices as you walk around, but they usually start from 6000 yen a night.

While it is usually the case that love hotel rooms have not been bookable, times are changing and websites such as Booking.com are starting to add them. It's still a fraction of what is available by just walking around though, so it's recommended not to book unless you are particularly nervous about going to one for the first time.

#### How to do a walk-in reservation at a love hotel

- 1) Love hotels usually have the rather Japanglish 'Rest' and 'Stay' written outside. Rest (レスト/休憩) means a stay of only a few hours, while Stay (宿泊) means to stay the night.
- 2) Once you are inside, there is usually an easy-to-understand picture display of rooms available. Select your room, then go and get your key. If only Japanese is written, 空室 means the room is available, 完全/満室 mean it is not.
- 3) You usually pay when you leave, but occasionally when you collect your key.

### Capsule hotels

Capsule hotels, where guests sleep in small pods, are becoming increasingly popular with budget conscious travelers. We have included the best ones in the guides, and put them on maps for the relevant places. Many are now bookable online.

Staying in a capsule hotel will probably be one of the most interesting experiences you can have in Japan. Usually costing from 2500 to 4000 yen, depending on spa facilities and location, they offer a great way to stay the night in the city center. Note that most capsule hotels are usually just for the night, and will not allow you to keep your luggage there during the day. Check the rules if booking online. If you want to stay in a capsule hotel for more than one night, you can put your bags in lockers at a nearby station.

## Overnight spas

Some hot springs or spas allow people to spend a little extra to stay the night. Guests usually sleep in lazyboy chairs or on tatami mats, with pillows and blankets provided. Great way to save on room costs, plus people are usually so sleepy after a long dip in the hot spring baths, that it doesn't matter if the sleeping arrangements are rather basic.

## Campsites and mountain huts

For the countryside, bringing a tent or staying in mountain huts is an excellent way to stay a night on the cheap. Mountain huts are on hiking routes, so quite easy to find. Information has been included for campsites, as these can be tricky to find if you can't read Japanese. Always download the Google Maps data for the area, in case you get lost.

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## Free wifi locations

There are so many companies trying to sell expensive wireless adapters that connect to the phone networks. While this used to be essential when wifi was crappy here, wifi access has come leaps and bounds in the last few years. If you download and use the official Japan Connected-Free Wifi app, you can see all the free hotspots nearby, even if you are offline. Almost all the main tourist spots have free wifi these days, but this book contains extra information if it's especially tricky to find or use in the area.

If you feel you will definitely need the internet at all times, get yourself a data SIM card at the airport or a large electronics store (such as Yodobashi Camera or Bic Camera). Prices in the city are usually better than at the airport.

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## Getting around

Trains and buses come regularly unless otherwise noted. There is usually no need to worry about checking the schedule in Japan, unless you are taking a limited express train. If it's possible, and interesting, to walk somewhere to save on train fares, walking route information has been included in the 'Walk and save!' sections and/or on the maps. Highway buses are also listed, as they usually sell tickets for far less than Shinkansen ones, and are highly recommended for budget travelers. Norikae Annai (Japan Transit Planner) and Hyperdia are good websites for train travel, while Willer Express, Japan Bus Lines and Japan Bus Online are best for highway buses.

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## Things to know before you visit Japan

One of the reasons for making this book was to show that Japan isn't as expensive as people often say. With the help of this guide and Japan's efficient and convenient trains and shops, the country can be a perfect destination for budget travelers. Remember that with all the great transportation systems here, more can be done in one day than anywhere else.

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## Exchange rates

These are the rates as of July 2021. Check XE.com for the latest rates.

1 US Dollar = 109 yen • 1 Euro = 133 yen • 1 British Pound = 1 yen • 1 Canadian Dollar = 90 yen • 1 Australian Dollar = 84 yen

## Average daily costs for budget travelers

Single traveler: 6000-8000 yen • Two travelers: 5000-6000 yen per person • Multiple travelers: 4000-5000 yen per person

## Usual prices

Dorm bed: 2000-3000 yen • Budget eat-in meal: 400-600 yen • Convenience store meal: 300-500 yen • Cup noodles: 100-190 yen • Bus ticket: 100-200 yen • Subway ticket: 150-250 yen

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## Money

Japan is still very much a cash-based society. Most restaurants will not accept credit cards, but an increasing number accept IC cards, such as the Suica card used for train rides in Tokyo. Before heading off into the countryside, be sure to get enough cash from a convenience store in the city, otherwise you may be left without any money to buy food or get back home! Also note that there is no tipping culture in Japan, which is good for budget travelers.

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## Electricity

East Japan (Tokyo, Yokohama) has an electrical current of 100v, 50Hz AC and the west (Osaka, Nagoya and Kyoto) uses 100v, 60Hz AC. Most devices such as phones and laptops will work fine, but appliances such as hair dryers and shavers can work slowly or may even get damaged without an adapter. Visitors from the UK and Europe will probably need to get an adapter, but those from North America may sometimes be fine as the shapes of the pins are identical. You can buy a cheap adapter at a duty-free shop in an airport or in any large electronics store.

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## Visas

In normal circumstances, Japan allows visa free travel from most countries for tourists, but make sure you check with the Japanese embassy where you live. Working holiday visas are also available for several nationalities.

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## Coin lockers (コインロッカー)

Lockers are a great way to save money in Japan, or give more flexibility to budget travelers. Almost all stations in this guide have them. Stations are usually close to the tourist action. If you arrive somewhere early, it may be cheaper and more time efficient to put your luggage in a locker and check out the sights before checking in at your accommodation. Lockers are also useful if staying in accommodation, such as net cafes, that don't have private, secure areas to store your luggage.

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## Apps to download before you go

- Skyscanner and Kiwi.com for comparing cheap airplane tickets.
- Google Translate, then download the Japanese language pack in the app for offline use. Also translates text with your phone's camera.
- Japan Connected-Free Wifi, to find free wifi spots nationwide.
- Booking.com to quickly cancel or amend bookings. Airbnb is also worth downloading.
- Google Maps and Maps.me, plus in the apps download the areas you will be visiting for offline use.
- Japan Travel by Navitime is also good for planning routes across Japan.
- XE Currency for comparing prices to back home.
- Splittr is a good app if traveling with friends. It allows you to add up and see who owes what to who.
- The Time Out apps have the latest listings for live events, new exhibitions and local festivals.
- Mymizu shows which nearby cafes, shops and hotels allow you to refill your bottle for free.

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## When to go to Japan

While for some countries the season that you go makes a huge difference in your travel plans, there is always a lot to do whatever time you decide to come to Japan. So if you see a great airplane ticket price in winter, go for it!

### Spring (March to May)

Spring is the most popular time to come to Japan, so prices do increase a bit. It's cherry blossom season in Japan, and you will see beautiful pink and white trees everywhere. Before booking your hotels, make sure you check the cherry blossom blooming times online.

### Summer (June to August)

Summer can get really hot and humid in Japan! Tokyo and Kyoto can get extremely hot, but there are countless free festivals to enjoy in the summer.

### Fall/Autumn (September to November)

Autumn is also a great time to come because of the autumn leaves. Temperatures are much more comfortable across the whole country, but bring a jumper for the evening. Or head to budget clothing retailer Uniqlo to buy a tax-free one.

### Winter (December to February)

The Christmas illuminations in Japan are some of the best in the world, and the main tourist attractions will be far less crowded than in other seasons. Many sites are closed for the New Year holidays and bus times can be less frequent, so be sure to check the closing days for the places you want to visit beforehand.

### Peak seasons to avoid

As Japanese people usually all have their holidays at the same time, there are some dates when prices can skyrocket. It's still possible to find bargains, but such places can get quickly booked up. Try to avoid Golden Week (April 29th to May 5th), Obon holidays (around August 13th to 16th) and around the New Year holidays.

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## National passes and itineraries

There are four main national passes, each with their own pluses and minuses. In addition to these, there are many regional and city-wide passes. Travelers can choose to get a highway bus between these regional and city-wide passes, or do the whole thing on a national pass.

### Japan Rail Pass

The pass most often used by travelers to Japan, but the increasing number of alternative passes is making it less popular for some budget travelers. It allows unlimited travel on all JR (national rail) trains all over Japan, including the Shinkansen and limited express trains. If you plan to ride on such trains, you can start to save money after just a few rides, so this pass offers excellent value for money if you want to quickly go to many different places over Japan. The pass can also be used for the JR Ferry to Miyajima and local JR buses (not highway buses). It's usually cheaper to buy online before coming here. For those with tourist visas only. *7 days: 29,650 yen. 14 days: 47,250 yen. 21 days: 60,450 yen (children half price)*

### Sample itinerary: The Japan Rail Pass for first timers to Japan

This is the most convenient way to see the highlights of Japan in one to two weeks. It could be started in Tokyo or Osaka, depending on where your flight is arriving. You could then spend some time before and after the pass in these cities.



On the first day of using your pass, get on the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Kyoto. Spend a day or two there visiting the World Heritage shrines and temples, possibly in conjunction with the Kyoto City Bus One-Day Pass. Next head to Osaka to see what Japan's western capital is like, with its bustling downtown and friendly, outgoing people. On the next day visit Himeji, via Kobe if you want to see some foreign influenced culture and architecture, to see Himeji castle, Japan's best. Next, continue further down west to visit Hiroshima, to learn about its sad but important history, and Miyajima to see the iconic Japanese torii gate floating on the sea. When you are done, head back on an evening Shinkansen. If you have time, try to include Okayama on the way back, to visit Japan's most stunning garden.

### **Sample itinerary: Using the Japan Rail Pass to escape the main tourist trail**

This would be a useful itinerary for those that have already been to Japan and done the main spots like Kyoto and Asakusa in Tokyo. Once you arrive at an airport in Tokyo, head straight to the JR booking office to exchange your pass (or exchange it after a few days if you want to spend a bit of extra time in the capital). With this pass activated, you can hop on the super-fast Narita Express from Narita Airport, or take the Monorail from Haneda Airport.

On your first day with the pass head to Kawagoe for a taste of traditional Japanese architecture and markets, then spend the second day exploring the more distinctive spots in Tokyo and Omiya, such as Koenji, Kichijoji and the Bonsai Village. Next, head down to the south for a day at Kyoto's little brother Uji, and another at some of Japan's most spiritually important shrines in Ise.

On day five climb up to see the ancient castle at Bitchu-Takahashi, which can be super quiet for such a great tourist spot. After this head down further south to do the Shimanami Kaido cycling trail, which passes over some sublime islands on the way to Shikoku. From here take the Limited Express train back to the main island of Honshu and spend any remaining time at Kurashiki, which has a lovely canal to relax by after all your travels.

### **Willer Express Japan Bus Pass**

Willer Express covers all the main cities in this book, so their Japan Bus Pass is a great option. It's the cheapest way to travel, especially if you want to save on hostel beds by using overnight buses. It cannot be used for local buses or short bus rides, so you will need to buy individual tickets or local transportation passes in the locations you visit. In other words, this pass is good for traveling long distances, but is not as flexible as a train pass. Get at the Willer Express website ([www.willerepress.com/en](http://www.willerepress.com/en)) and check individual ticket prices to see if the pass is worth it for your trip plan. *All Routes MON to THU Pass: 3 days 10,200 yen, 5 days 12,800 yen, 7 days 15,300 yen. All Routes ALL Day Pass (for use anytime of the week): 3 days 12,800 yen, 5 days 15,300 yen*

### **Sample itinerary: Highlights of Honshu via bus**

While the bus pass may not offer as many destinations as the Japan Rail Pass, using the three or five day passes would be a cheaper way to see all the main sites. After a few days enjoying Tokyo and the surrounding Kanto region, start the bus pass by heading down to Kyoto for a few days at Japan's cultural heartland. Next head further down south on the bus, stopping at Osaka, the country's second biggest city, and Kobe, one of its coolest. Also head to Himeji if you are interested in the World Heritage castle there. From Osaka or Kobe you can then proceed to Hiroshima. After this you'll head back to Tokyo, on a night bus if you want to save on accommodation, or alternatively you could return home via Kansai Airport near Osaka.

### **JBL Bus Pass**

If you also need to use buses other than those run by Willer Express, Japan Bus Lines has a similar, slightly more expensive pass at <https://japanbuslines.com/en/buspass>. *All Routes MON to THU Pass: 3 days 11,000 yen, 5 days 14,000 yen, 7 days 18,000 yen. All Routes ALL Day Pass (for use anytime of the week): 3 days 15,000 yen, 5 days 20,000 yen, 7 days 28,000 yen*

## Seishun 18

For real hardcore budget travelers. The Seishun 18 offers the best value for train travel in Japan. It does not allow the use of Shinkansen or limited express trains, so go for this pass if you don't mind longer journey times. It could also be a good choice if you don't want to stray too far from a particular hub, like Osaka or Tokyo, and want to visit places nearby. It provides five days of unlimited travel anywhere in Japan on JR trains (the national network), which do not need to be on consecutive days. Note that there are limited use periods, usually late July to early September and early December to early January. Available from most JR stations. *12,050 yen* • [www.jreast.co.jp/multi/pass/seishun18.html](http://www.jreast.co.jp/multi/pass/seishun18.html)

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## Tax-free shopping

Japan has a sales tax of 10%, but those with a tourist visa are eligible for tax-free shopping. If you love shopping and want to get some bargains, there has never been a better time to visit Japan. With a great exchange rate for most travelers and tax-free shopping, you'll be shopping till you drop!

What is most impressive about the latest tax-free shopping rules is that, while the main department stores and malls also offer it, almost all shops in tourist or cosmopolitan areas are offering tax-free shopping to tourists and actively promoting this. From cosmetics shops, to souvenir shops, to clothes shops such as Uniqlo, almost all are proudly displaying their tax-free signs. Almost 30,000 stores in Japan now offer tax-free shopping to tourists. All visitors need to do is head to their desired shops, follow the rules below and they can save loads of money.

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### How to do tax-free shopping in Japan

Unlike other countries, the tax-free system is usually in-store. Shops prominently tell you with bright signage if they are tax-free, so you are spoilt for choice in any city or tourist spot. Just show your passport and the tax will be taken off when you purchase. Some naughty shops levy a charge to get tax-free, so avoid these if it's mentioned.

#### Consumable items (foods, drinks, medicines, cosmetics...)

Items must be taken out of Japan within 30 days of purchase and cannot be used in Japan. Items have to be purchased at the same store on the same day, and the total spending must be more than 5000 yen.

#### General items (electric appliances, clothing, accessories...)

Items must be taken out of Japan within six months of purchase and can be used in Japan. Items have to be purchased at the same store on the same day, and the total spending must be between 5000 yen and 500,000 yen.

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### Top spots for tax-free shopping

For high end shopping, Ginza (銀座) in Tokyo has always been a great place to buy designer clothes, bags and watches. Also, an increasing number of lower end brands such as clothes megastore Uniqlo and electronic stores have opened large stores in Ginza, so the area seems to be adapting a little to cater to a more budget-conscious clientele.

Other hot spots in Tokyo for tax-free shopping are Shinjuku, Shibuya and Akihabara. They all have the major electronic stores, department stores, cosmetic shops and travel stores for travelers to load up on tax-free goods. Outside of Tokyo, Namba in Osaka has a similar number of large shops to choose from, and Den Den Electric Town is the place to go for electronics.

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## Free festivals

Making sure you see one or two festivals, called matsuri in Japanese, is a good way to save money. Most are based on city streets or in temples, so entry is free and there are lots of stalls selling cheap snacks and more.

### January

**6th** Dezome-shiki, Tokyo: Firemen show off their machines and do various stunts.

**Sunday closest to 15th** Toshiya, Sanjusangen-do Temple, Kyoto: Japanese archery contest.

**Fourth Saturday** Wakakusa Yamayaki, Nara: Large grass burning ceremony on Mount Wakakusayama.

### February

**3rd** Setsubun Mantoro, Nara: More than 3,000 lanterns are lit up in Kasuga Taisha Shrine.

**Third Saturday** Saidai-ji Eyo Hadaka Matsuri, Okayama: About 10,000 almost naked men running through the streets, competing for good luck charms!

### March

**1st-14th** Omizutori, Nara: In these ceremonies, Buddhist monks carry large flaming torches around Nigatsu-do Hall and then wave them over the side, raining embers down on the surrounding crowds below.

### April

**Second to third Sunday** Kamakura Festival, Kamakura: Ritual dance performances based on the samurai of medieval Japan.

### May

**The Saturday and Sunday closest to May 15th** Kanda Matsuri, Tokyo: One of Tokyo's top three festivals. We go every year.

**15th** Aoi Matsuri, Kyoto: In this 1000-year-old event, participants wear ancient costumes and parade through downtown Kyoto.

**18th** Shunki Reitaisai, Nikko: Grand procession of 1,000 'samurai warriors' through the town.

**Third Sunday and preceding Friday and Saturday** Asakusa Sanja Matsuri, Asakusa, Tokyo: Amazing portable shrines are paraded throughout the town. Mind-blowing stuff.

**Closest weekend to May 28th** Hanazono Shrine Grand Festival, Shinjuku, Tokyo: Featuring ceremonial rites and dances, plus some cheap food stalls. On the Sunday, a huge 1.5 ton portable shrine (mikoshi) is taken on a tour of the surrounding neighborhoods.

### June

**14th** Otaue Rice Planting Festival, Osaka: In Sumiyoshi Taisha Shrine, traditional dancing and songs are used to pray for a good harvest.

**Mid-June** Sanno Matsuri, Tokyo: Another big festival in Tokyo, with a splendid procession of miniature shrines.

### July

**1st-31st** Gion Matsuri, Kyoto: Huge golden floats parade through the main streets of Kyoto.

**24th + 25th** Tenjin Matsuri Festival, Osaka: Various events, such as 300-plus people dressed in imperial-court style clothing marching with portable shrines and one of the world's grandest boat processions.

**Last Saturday** Sumida River Fireworks, Tokyo: Tokyo's biggest and best fireworks display.

### August

**16th** Daimonji Gozan Okuribi, Kyoto: Stunning bonfire event, as five of Kyoto's mountains are set on fire in motifs of Chinese characters.

**Late August** Awa-odori, Koenji, Tokyo: Awa-odori consists of nearly 200 Japanese dance groups showing off some spectacular traditional dances and music from across the country.

**Last weekend** Omotesando Genki Festival, Harajuku: Food festival which features the traditional yosakoi dance. It's one of the largest festivals in Tokyo and has more than 5000 energetic dancers from 100 plus groups performing.

### September

**14-16th** Reitaisai, Kamakura: Horseback archery display and contest.

### October

**22nd** Jidai Matsuri, Kyoto: Traditional costume procession at Heian Jingu Shrine.

**Sundays and national holidays** Shika-no-Tsunokiri, Nara: This yearly ritual sees the local deer having their antlers sawn off, but the naughty ones can sure make it a difficult task for the skilled handlers. Near Kasuga Taisha Shrine.

### November

**3rd** Hakone Daimyo Gyoretsu, Hakone: Around 200 people in samurai warrior and Japanese princess costumes parade around the hot spring town.

### December

**15th-18th** Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri, Nara: One of Nara's biggest festivals, full of traditional rituals, dances, music and a huge fireworks display.

**Christmas and New Year lights** Japan has some amazing illuminations, in particular at Terrace City, Shinjuku.

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## Cherry blossom viewing (花見)



*Cherry blossoms in Inokashira Park, Kichijoji, Tokyo*

Great for budget travelers, cherry blossoms are free to see all over Japan. From local gardens to shopping streets, you will never be more than a few minutes away from a sakura (cherry blossom) tree. They provide a perfect spot for a cheap meal or drink, as the tradition is to grab some cheap grub and beers from the local shops and enjoy them under the pink and white

trees. Prices may be higher for some accommodations, but definitely not too much to deter a price conscious traveler. Surely one of the best times to visit Japan!

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## When to see cherry blossoms

There is a short window in which to see the cherry blossoms, so this can make it somewhat tricky for budget travelers. Train passes can really come in handy here, as if the weather changes before you visit and the conditions aren't quite right in the place you booked a hostel, you can quickly head somewhere better. For latest times check the official Japan national tourism site ([www.jnto.go.jp/sakura/eng/index.php](http://www.jnto.go.jp/sakura/eng/index.php)), but here are the averages from the last 10 years:

- Tokyo: First bloom 22nd March, full bloom 30th March
  - Kyoto: First bloom 24th March, full bloom 3rd April
  - Osaka: First bloom 25th March, full bloom 3rd April
  - Hiroshima: First bloom 24th March, full bloom 2nd April
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## Best spots for cherry blossoms

There are great cherry blossom spots in every village, town and city in Japan, but here are our favorites:

### Ueno Park

The biggest park in Tokyo for cherry blossoms, and it's all free. Can get super busy, but all the small stalls selling cheap food is a real plus.

### Sumida Park

Along Sumida river in Asakusa, Tokyo. A fun, party atmosphere fills the park, which has a varied selection of cherry blossom trees.

### Meguro River

A short walk from Meguro, the main action is around Naka-Meguro. This long, winding river is the coolest place to see the cherry blossoms, as it's lined with hip cafes and clothing shops. Come in the night with a beer or two.

### Hachiman Shrine

See the big Buddha hanging out with all the cherry blossom trees in Kamakura. The grand, wide road leading up to the shrine is lined with cherry blossoms.

### Yasaka Shrine

Head here first if on the lookout for cherry blossom trees in Kyoto. In the Gion area, this shrine is surrounded by large pink leaved trees. Nearby Maruyama Park is also worth visiting.

### Philosopher's Walk

The Philosopher's Walk is another hotspot in Kyoto. There are cherry blossoms all along the way, plus a few attractions, such as small shrines surrounded by blossoming trees, to mix things up along the way.

### Nara Park

Forget the cute deer, grab some low-cost food from the convenience store and head to this huge park in Nara. Usually lots of space to sit down, but no guarantees!

### Himeji Castle

Himeji Castle is breath-taking during the cherry blossom season. The parks outside the castle are free, but it's worth paying the entrance fee to see this World Heritage site during such a breathtaking time of the year.

# Tokyo



*Kaminarimon, Asakusa*

Tokyo is the capital city of Japan and one of the most densely-populated cities in the world. More than 13 million people live in the center, while the greater Tokyo metropolis houses over 35 million. Tokyo is very much a ‘city of cities’, with each one having its own distinct feel and attractions. We would therefore recommend heading to the highlights, and from these spots head off to other sites of interest. The fact that all these cities are connected by an excellent, and cheap, subway network means that budget travelers can do lots in one day.

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## A little bit of history

Tokyo is actually a relatively new capital. In 1590 the Shoguns, Japan’s military dictators, moved from Kyoto to Edo, the old name for Tokyo. While the emperor stayed in Kyoto, the real power and money moved to the new city. In the early 17th century, Edo blossomed under Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and spread out around Edo Castle. The city still remained cut off from the rest of the world, though.

The Shogunate finally fell in 1867, bringing Emperor Meiji into power. He renamed the city Tokyo, meaning ‘eastern capital’, and opened up Japan’s borders to the world. Foreign culture and technology, particularly from the west, flooded into the country via ports such as Yokohama. Japan really started to become important on the world scene.

In 1923, Tokyo was devastated by the Great Kanto Earthquake. More than 2 million people were left homeless and more than 100,000 perished. The city was further damaged by the bombing in World War Two, which destroyed much of the capital. Thankfully Tokyo experienced rapid growth after the war, and has become a real success story as the most vibrant, exciting and fascinating city in the world.



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## Highlights

### 1) Shinjuku

Tokyo's best cosmopolitan spot, Shinjuku is full of budget superstores, great low-cost food and a high number of tax-free shops.

### 2) Harajuku

Tokyo's best spot for all things kawaii (cute). Cheap clothes, accessories and some amazing trendsetting fashion from the locals.

### 3) Mount Takao

The essential hiking day trip from Tokyo. Super cheap to access, easy to navigate and all you can drink beer at the top!

### 4) Shimo-Kitazawa

A maze of narrow streets, that look completely unchanged from the 50's or 60's. No ugly skyscrapers here.

### 5) Shibuya

Featuring Tokyo's most photographed area, the Shibuya Pedestrian Scramble, this hyperactive area has lots of people watching and window shopping opportunities for budget travelers.

### 6) Edo-Tokyo Museum

Offers the most comprehensive information on Tokyo's history, architecture and culture. The low price more than pays for itself.

### 7) Tokyo Metropolitan Observation Decks

Skip the pricey SkyTree and head to this free observation deck for a great view over the city.

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## Volunteer guides

There are several organizations offering free guide services in Tokyo. For more visit the official list at [www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/travel/guide/list\\_volunteerGuides.php](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/travel/guide/list_volunteerGuides.php).

### Tokyo International Student Guide - [www.facebook.com/tsgg.for.tourists](https://www.facebook.com/tsgg.for.tourists)

A bunch of friendly students from local universities and colleges who are eager to show tourists around. They focus on top spots in Tokyo, but can accommodate special requests.

### Tokyo SGG Club - <http://tokyosgg.jp/guide.html>

More focused on the east side, such as the museum, parks and shrines around Asakusa and Ueno. Just show up at one of their tourist information centers and tag along!

### Tokyo Free Guide - [www.tokyofreeguide.org](http://www.tokyofreeguide.org)

Another well-known service in Tokyo. It's a free guide service with the aim to encourage cultural exchanges between Japanese people and foreigners. Services are available in multiple languages, such as English, French, Italian and Spanish.

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## IC cards

The main IC card in Tokyo is the Suica card, available to buy at any ticket machine from a JR station in Tokyo. Journey prices are a little cheaper when using the card, so if you are in Tokyo for more than a few days then you can save a little. They also reduce the chance of overpaying when transferring between lines, which can be confusing. The Suica card also works on all the subway lines and buses in Tokyo. Prices in this book are for users of IC cards. *2000 yen (500 yen deposit, 1500 yen put on card)*

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## How to get there and away

### By air

There are two main airports for Tokyo, Narita Airport (NRT) and Haneda Airport (HND). Both offer cheap ways to get into the city, so it doesn't matter too much which one you use.

#### Narita Airport transportation

Airport Bus TYO-NRT (formally called Access Narita) offers 1300 yen buses into the city (1 hour). Also consider using the Keisei local and express line trains to/from Nippori station in Tokyo (80 mins, 1042 yen).

#### Haneda Airport transportation

Haneda is much closer to downtown Tokyo, so it's cheap and easy just to use the **Keikyu Line** or **Monorail**. Take the **Keikyu Line** to Shinagawa (22 mins, 292 yen) or the **Monorail** to Hamamatsucho (21 mins, 492 yen), then transfer from these central hubs.

### By train

If you are far from Tokyo and have the Japan Rail Pass, you should take the Shinkansen to Tokyo or Shinagawa station. Otherwise, trains are often too pricey.

### By bus

If you are traveling far from Tokyo, such as from Kyoto, and don't have a Japan Rail Pass then it's much, much cheaper to take the bus. Check prices at Japan Bus Lines or Willer Bus.

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## Discount transportation passes

There are three main passes for travel in central Tokyo that will be of most use to budget travelers. Note that in central Tokyo there are three main networks: Tokyo Metro (main subway network), Toei Subway (only four lines) and JR trains. These passes are a great way to save a bit of cash when doing a lot in one day, and also give extra flexibility to try somewhere new if you have a bit of free time. The pass you choose really depends on where you want to visit, so check the 'Recommended rail passes' for each place.

At the time of writing, the one-day passes for the subway networks also come with a 'Chikatoku' discount booklet, which allows pass owners to get discounts or free bonus items at more than 400 locations in Tokyo. See <http://chikatoku.enjoytokyo.jp/en> for the full list.

### Tokyo Subway Ticket 24h/48h/72h

A pass available only to foreign tourists, so you need to show a passport when purchasing. This awesome ticket allows use of both Toei Subway and Tokyo Metro. Available at Haneda or Narita Airport, as well as major subway stations or Bic Camera stores. *24 hours: adults 800 yen, children 400 yen. 48 hours: adults 1200 yen, children 600 yen. 72 hours: adults 1500 yen, children 750 yen*

### Tokyo Metro 24-hour Ticket

If you have no need to also use the Toei Subway, then get this pass instead, and save a few hundred yen. This may require longer journey times to some destinations, but it's the cheapest way to get around the city. *Adults 600 yen, children 300 yen*

### Tokyo Metropolitan District Pass (Tokunai Pass)

A good option if you are going to main transportation hubs like Akihabara, Shibuya, Tokyo or Shinjuku stations or want to venture a little into the suburbs, such as to Koenji or Nakano. This pass allows unlimited use of JR trains only, and includes all their trains in central Tokyo, plus a little distance outside. Available at all JR stations in central Tokyo. *Adults 760 yen, children 380 yen*



## Sample day itineraries

### Cool Tokyo

First head to Harajuku to see what's trending in everything kawaii (cute fashion), before dropping into Shibuya to see Japan's top brands. After lunch, geek out in Akihabara and visit Asakusa for Tokyo's most popular temple. Then head to Koenji for a more down-to-earth vibe in the evening. Perfect with the Tokyo Metro 24-hour Ticket.

### Tradition and history in Tokyo

Good with the Tokyo Subway Ticket, first go to Ryogoku to visit the free Sumo museum and then the Edo-Tokyo museum, to learn all about Tokyo's history. After lunch head to Ueno, to see the free temples in Ueno park and the traditional markets. If you have time, be sure to check out Hama Rikyu Garden and the nearby Imperial Palace gardens. In the early evening, continue to Ebisu to enjoy the Museum of Yebisu Beer.

### The big, big city

Using the Tokyo Metropolitan District Pass, you can see lots of the most exciting, bustling areas, all in a day. Start in Shinjuku, where you can go up the observation tower to get a view over the city and see the huge Shinjuku Gyoen park. After lunch, proceed to Shibuya for some photo taking, especially of the super busy pedestrian crossing. Head east for the Imperial gardens and views of the classically designed Tokyo station. Finally head to Sugamo for some discount shopping and relax in the hot spring.

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## Grutto Pass (ぐるっとパス)

For most budget travelers wanting to visit a gallery or two, the latest listings on TimeOut Tokyo are worth checking out (many are free). But for real gallery and museum junkies, the Grutto Pass should be considered. Unlike many countries, most museums in Japan charge entry fees, so costs can add up. The Grutto Pass provides free admission or discounts for two months to around one hundred art galleries, museums, zoos and more. If you want to visit many museums and galleries in Tokyo, you will really start to save some money. See how much you could save at the official website ([www.rekibun.or.jp/en/grutto](http://www.rekibun.or.jp/en/grutto)). 2500 yen

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## Tokyo budget accommodation

Tokyo has a superb selection of budget accommodation, from female-only hostels to countless net cafes allowing overnight stays.

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### Hostels and guest houses

While these are the best ones we have stayed at in Tokyo, horror stories are almost nonexistent, so feel free to go for the cheapest one online!

#### Khaosan Hostels (カオサン)

This well-known guesthouse chain has a variety of cheap and clean guesthouses in central locations. They all have their own unique theme, so they are a bit nicer to stay at than a dull YHA hostel. *Dorms from 1500 yen, private rooms from 3500 yen* • <http://khaosan-tokyo.com/en>

#### Tokyo Guest House Ouji Music Lounge (東京ゲストハウス王子ミュージックラウンジ)

Super friendly staff, with clean and spacious dorms. Occasionally has free breakfast offers, as well as live music events. Could not come more highly recommended. *Dorms from 2000 yen* • *Near Oji station, a short ride from Ueno* • <http://oji-music-lounge.tokyo>

## Tokyo Guest House Itabashi-juku (東京ゲストハウス 板橋宿)

Quiet dorms with a large lounge and basic kitchen facilities. Lots of cheap restaurants and supermarkets around it too. *Dorms from 3500 yen* • *Naka-Itabashi station, 10 mins from Ikebukuro* • <http://guesthousejapan.tokyo/en>

## Shrek Watta House

A nice guesthouse, we have stayed here several times. Has both western and Japanese style tatami mat rooms. Run by a nice old man, this place has a nice open kitchen with loads of free travel resources. *Private rooms from 3500 yen* • *Musashi-Seki station, near Shinjuku station* • [www.shrek-watta-house.com/index.html](http://www.shrek-watta-house.com/index.html)

## GrapeHouse Koenji (female only)

This ladies-only hostel has a great reputation and gets full up easily, so try to book as early as possible. *Dorms from 3500 yen* • *Koenji station* • <http://grapehouse.jp/en>

## Anne Hostel Asakusabashi (浅草橋旅荘 庵)

Free breakfast is provided at this friendly hostel. Highly recommended by many travelers. *Dorms from 2600 yen, private rooms from 3400 yen* • *Near Ueno and Akihabara* • [www.i-hostel.com](http://www.i-hostel.com)

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## Love hotels (adults only)

### Shinjuku

Kabukicho is a heartland for love hotels, so head to the northern area if you don't have a reservation and want to see what's available. The ones available to reserve online are often two or three times as expensive as just turning up, but try Booking.com if you want that peace of mind. *'Rest' (2-4 hours) from 2000 yen, 'Stay' (overnight) from 6500 yen*

### Shibuya Love Hotel Hill

Head to Love Hotel Hill (ラブホテル坂) for a bewildering range of love hotels. Take your time to compare prices and facilities available. No need to book in advance as there is so much choice here. *'Rest' (2-4 hours) from 2000 yen, 'Stay' (overnight) from 6500 yen*

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## Capsule hotels

### Akihabara

#### Capsule Value Kanda (men only) (カプセルバリュー神田)

You will soon realize why they have a 91% rating. Really helpful staff, cheap bike rental and inexpensive rooms. *Capsules from 3500 yen* • *From Kanda station, take the south exit, walk down the track and take left turn at 2nd road under track* • <http://capsuleinn.com/kanda/en>

#### First Cabin Akihabara (ファーストキャビン)

More upmarket than Capsule Value, with spacious capsules and hotel like facilities. *Capsule from 5000 yen* • *From Metro Hibiya exit 4, 1 min down 2nd road parallel to river* • <https://first-cabin.jp>

### Shibuya

#### Capsule Hotel Shibuya (Men only) (カプセルホテル渋谷)

Cheap capsule hotel right in the center of Shibuya. *Capsules from 3000 yen* • *West side of station*

### Shinjuku

#### nine hours Shinjuku-North (ナインアワーズ 北新宿)

This trustworthy capsule hotel chain has recently opened a new branch in Shinjuku. Great English-language support at the 24h front desk. *Capsules from 3960 yen (last-minute bookings from around 2000 yen)* • <https://ninehours.co.jp>

## Book and Bed Tokyo

You may have seen this place on the blogosphere, and there's a good reason why. Book and Bed is essentially a capsule hotel inside a library. It's a very unique, 'only in Japan' experience. Also, as expected of a library, it's super quiet. *Dorms from 3800 yen • Near Ikebukuro and Shinjuku stations • <http://bookandbedtokyo.com/>*

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## Overnight spas (super sentos)

### Oedo-Onsen Monogatari Hot Spring (大江戸温泉物語)

It's also possible to stay the night here in Odaiba's huge onsen, where you can sleep in the tatami rooms or in the lazyboy chairs. *2160 yen extra to stay overnight*

### LaQua (スパ ラクーア)

A huge hot spring, taking water from 1700 meters below Tokyo. There are plenty of areas to sleep for the night. *2900 yen, then 1980 yen extra to stay overnight • Near Korakuen station in Tokyo*

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## Internet cafes

See the maps in the relevant chapters for exact locations.

### Akihabara

You are really spoiled for choice here, so here are just a few safe bets.

#### Monkey Net (もんきーねっと)

Good choice of free services, plus cool extras like all-you-can eat ice cream. *Night pack (ナイトパック) available from 5pm: 6 hours (6 時間ナイトパック) from 1100 yen, 9 hours (9 時間ナイトパック) from 1410 yen • West side of station*

#### Ai Cafe Akiba Place (アイ・カフェ)

Huge choice of comics, drinks and ice cream. Also has free food! Rice bowls, toast and curry on the house. Note the cheapest prices are for cafeteria seats. *Night pack (ナイトパック) available from 5pm: 10 hours (10 時間ナイトパック) from 1490 yen • Head up Chuo Dori and take first left after Don Quijote*

### Shibuya

Head down Inokashira Dori, parallel to Center Gai for a good selection of net cafes:

#### Bagus (バグース)

Large choice of comics, clean showers and good selection of free drinks. *Night pack (ナイトパック) available from 7pm: 9 hours (9 時間ナイトパック) from 2110 yen*

#### Manbo (マンボー)

Japan's largest chain. Free showers, comics and drinks. Possible to book via phone, at the branch or at <http://manboo.co.jp> (Japanese only). *Night pack (ナイトパック) available from 7pm: 6 hours (6 時間ナイトパック) from 1300 yen, 10 hours (10 時間ナイトパック) from 1600 yen*

### Shinjuku

#### Manbo (マンボー)

This net cafe chain has several chains around the station, so if this branch is full, ask for the others. Free showers, comics and drinks. *Night pack (ナイトパック) available from 7pm: 6 hours (6 時間ナイトパック) from 1500 yen • Head down Yasukuni Dori, passing east side Yamada Denki LABI. Manbo is just after the Family Mart, on the right*

#### Bagus (バグース)

Also has a ladies-only section. *Night pack (ナイトパック) available from 7pm: 5 hours (5 時間ナイトパック) from 1130 yen, 8 hours (8 時間ナイトパック) from 1990 yen • Next block on from above Manbo*

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## Shinjuku



*Shinjuku Gyoen in autumn*

A great place to start your adventures in Tokyo, Shinjuku is the main business and entertainment district in Tokyo. While Shibuya is well and truly aimed at younger people, Shinjuku is a bit more sophisticated than its southern brother. It's therefore a great place to introduce yourself to that Japanese mix of old and new.

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### A little bit of history

While many people have an image of Tokyo being completely full of skyscrapers, this is in fact not the case, with the city having several pockets of skyscraper districts. In 1923, when the Great Kanto earthquake obliterated most of Tokyo, west Shinjuku was left relatively unscathed due to its seismically stable location. It therefore developed as a business district, full of grand skyscrapers. In the following years, most of Tokyo was destroyed by air raids in World War Two, but the pre-war form of Shinjuku was retained to ease reconstruction, with the exception of Kabukicho. There are still therefore plenty of interesting narrow streets to explore, and a short walk will get visitors away from all the commercial activity.

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### Things to do

#### Shinjuku Gyoen Garden (新宿御苑)

Usually a must see for any visitor to Tokyo, Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden is a large, feature-full park next to Shinjuku station. The garden was previously the mansion grounds of the Naito family, feudal lords in the Edo period. Every visitor makes a trip here when coming to Shinjuku, but as this garden is so large and varied it never seems overcrowded. In addition to the traditional Japanese garden and small pavilion, there are French and English inspired gardens, a small forest with Japanese cedar trees and an ultra-modern greenhouse. *Adults 500 yen, children FREE • 9am-5:30pm (until 4pm in winter, closed on Monday) • On foot: From the station, make your way to Bicqlo (ビックロ). Walk east down Shinjuku Dori until you get to Sekaido stationery shop (世界堂), then turn right and walk down for the entrance. By subway: Take the **Marunouchi Line** from Shinjuku to Shinjuku-gyoen-mae (2 mins, 168 yen). By bus: Shinjuku Gyoen stop (WE Bus)*



### Tokyo Metropolitan Observation Decks (東京都庁)

The free Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office offers great views of the city during daytime and evening, plus on clear days you can even see Mount Fuji. You can also buy your name in Japanese characters in the gift shop at the top. Save on the cost of the expensive SkyTree and visit here instead! **FREE** • 9:30am-8pm (entry ends 30 minutes before closing) • *On foot:* Walk west for 10 minutes from Shinjuku station in the underground passageway to Tochomae station, then continue five minutes west. *By subway:* Take the **Oedo Line** from Shinjuku station to Tochomae station (2 mins, 178 yen). *By bus:* Shinjuku Washington Hotel stop (WE Bus)

### Hanazono Shrine (花園神社)

Lovely respite from the chaos of Shinjuku, a cool place to chill out and have a bento or snack. Hanazono is a Shinto shrine founded in the 17th century and is considered to be one of the most important in Tokyo by locals, which explains why it's still there with all the huge concrete buildings around it. The shrine has become a favorite for local businessmen to pray for business success and prosperity. **FREE** • 24h • *On foot:* Walk down Shinjuku Dori, take a left after Isetan Department Store and walk down (total 15 mins). *By subway:* Shinjuku-Sanchome exit E2. *By bus:* Shinjuku Oiwake stop (WE Bus)

### Kabukicho (歌舞伎町)

Tokyo's, and Japan's, most famous red light district. For budget travelers, it's a fascinating walk around, taking in all the bright lights, watching the nightclub and bar hosts and hostesses getting up to their business. It's generally recommended to stay away from bars and restaurants here, as prices are generally high and foreigners have been known to be overcharged. Just bring your camera after dark and take it all in. *Just outside Shinjuku station, take the east exit and walk towards Seibu Shinjuku station, right next to Kabukicho*

## NTT InterCommunication Center (NTT インターコミュニケーション・センター)

Free media, art and communications gallery in Nishi-Shinjuku, the skyscraper district. NTT is Japan's main telephone provider, and this museum was started to commemorate the 100th anniversary of telephones in Japan. The museum has an excellent selection of innovative, fun and thought-provoking art and multimedia pieces, and shows off some amazing new artists. *FREE (extra for special exhibitions, which are FREE with Grutto Pass) • 11am-6pm • On foot: Near the Keio New Line station. Walk along the main road in the opposite direction of the bridge and bus terminal (see map). By subway: From Shinjuku, take the Keio New Line to Hatsudai station (1 min, 126 yen). By bus: Shinjuku Washington Hotel stop (WE bus)*

## Volunteer guides and tours

The tourist information centers in the Tokyo Metropolitan Building (see above) and the bus terminal can organize free volunteer tours in English.

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## Getting around

Once you are at Shinjuku station, everywhere is within walking distance if you don't mind walking for 5-15 minutes to get between tourist spots. The shops around the station are also close, taking only a few minutes between each one. There are two main streets, Shinjuku Dori to the south and Yasukuni Dori to the north.

Be warned! Shinjuku station is a complete maze and even for people that have worked there for years, it can be easy to get lost. Use the in-station signs to get to one of the above shops or tourist sites if you are completely lost, from where you can get your bearings.

## Transportation passes and discounts

There is also a bus service called WE Bus (新宿 WE バス) that takes riders around the main spots listed above, from 7am-6pm (100 yen each ride, 300 yen for day pass). Tickets and passes available on the bus, with the most useful route being the Shinjuku Gyoen + Nishi-Shinjuku Route. Starting at the Shinjuku Bus Terminal near Shinjuku station, south exit is recommended, to avoid traipsing around the huge station looking for the right bus stop.

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## Budget food

### Around the station (east side)

There are so many cheap restaurants around Shinjuku (usually with English menus), we would actually recommend strolling around this fascinating metropolis and seeing what takes your fancy. Here are some of the highlights if you are too hungry to walk around!

**1) Yoshinoya (吉野家)** - Gyudon eat-in and takeaway. *Meals from 350 yen • 24h • Next to Yamada Denki (LABI) on Yasukuni Dori*

**2) Hidakaya (日高屋)** - Tokyo's super cheap ramen chain. Fried rice and gyoza dumplings also available. *Ramen from 390 yen • 24h • Opposite Seibu-Shinjuku station, or next to Yamada Denki (LABI) on Yasukuni Dori*

### Around the station (west side)

**3) Coco Ichiban Curry House (CoCo 一番屋)** - The true taste of Japanese curry, and officially the largest curry restaurant chain in the world. *Curry + rice from 514 yen • 8am-9pm • Just outside exit D3, from Shinjuku-Nishiguchi station on the Toei Oedo Line*

**4) Matsuya (松屋)** - Gyudon and burger eat-in and takeaway. *Gyudon bowls from 320 yen • 24h • Around the corner from the above Coco Ichiban*

**5) Ootoya (大戸屋)** - Various Japanese set meals. *Meals from 790 yen • 11am-midnight • Opposite from above Coco Ichiban restaurant*



**6) Oedo Sushi (回転寿司 大江戸)** - Reliable conveyor belt sushi joint. *Sushi plates from 140 yen • 11am-11pm • Next to the above Ootoya*

**Hakone Soba Honjin (箱根そば本陣)** - Classic train station soba, nice and simple. Other simple dishes like curry are also sometimes available. *Soba from 290 yen • 6:30am-11pm • Near ticket gates for Odakyu trains on west side of station*

### North-west of the station

Take exit D5 of Shinjuku-Nishiguchi station, or walk from Shinjuku station. The following are in the order you'll see them:

**7) Mos Burger (モス)** - Mid-range burger chain, for those that need a western food fix with some Japanese twists, like 'rice burgers'. *Burgers from 220 yen • 5am-3am*

**8) Sukiya (すき家)** - Curry and gyudon eat-in and takeaway. *Meals from 360 yen • 24h*

**9) Burger King (バーガーキング)** - Cheaper burgers than Mos Burger, and a few odd Japanese burgers. Occasionally has all-you-can eat whopper deals! *Burgers from 150 yen • 7am-11pm*

### Shinjuku Dori (Street)

There are not so many budget options heading east down Shinjuku Dori from Shinjuku station, but it's still a supremely cool street to check out.

**10) Shakey's (シェーキーズ)** - All-you-can-eat pizza restaurant, with Japanese and seasonal themed flavors. Expect to be surprised by this imaginative menu! *Lunch time: adults 1160 yen, teens 880 yen, under junior high school age 500 yen. Dinner time: 1650 yen, 1000 yen, 500 yen • 11am-10:15pm • On right side, just before Isetan Department Store*

**11) Sweets Paradise (スイーツパラダイス)** - Stuff yourself at this all-you-can-eat sweets and cakes buffet. *Adults from 1080 yen, children from 860 yen • 11am-10:15pm • Look for the old Bic Camera building on your right as you exit from Shinjuku station, east exit. Sweets Paradise is just to the right, away from Shinjuku Dori • [www.sweets-paradise.jp/guide/index\\_english.html](http://www.sweets-paradise.jp/guide/index_english.html)*

### Nightlife

#### Piss Alley / Omoide Yokocho (思い出横丁)

Super cramped bar and counter restaurant area, this place requires a photo or two for being such an authentic Japanese night out spot. Prices have been increased to catch out tourists at some bars, so be careful if you want to eat or drink here. *Head out of Shinjuku west exit and then down to the right, or go out of exit D3 near Coco Ichiban restaurant. Bar area is around and behind here*

#### Golden Gai (新宿ゴールデン街)

A maze of more than 100 tiny bars to explore. Staff are often chatty and will offer great travel advice. Many of the bars have a cover charge, so look at the board outside or ask inside. Still really worth a walk around if you are not going in though, just to see how cramped in all the bars are. *Head east down Yasukuni Dori until you get to Mister Donut on the left after five to 10 minutes. Walk down the spiraling path*

### Water bottle refill spots

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office and Shinjuku Gyoen have water fountains, plus Isetan Department store has a water cup machine on the stairs up from the 1st floor.

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## Shopping

### East side

#### Yamada Denki LABI

Modern electronics megastore, with tax-free and electronics for use abroad. There is also a quieter branch on the west side. *10am-11:30pm • From Shinjuku station, east exit, head north along the tracks, it's on the right on Yasukuni Dori*

### **Don Quijote (ドン・キホーテ)**

Chaotic megastore full of any item you could imagine, from cheap souvenirs to fancy dress costumes to travel goods. This store is maybe the premier 'what the hell is going on?' Don Quijote experience. Great prices and tax-free options available. *24h • Opposite Yamada Denki LABI on Yasukuni Dori*

### **Bicqlo (ビックロ)**

Bic Camera (huge electronics store with tax-free shopping) + Uniqlo (huge budget clothes store with tax-free shopping) = a budget traveler heaven! Also has GU, Uniqlo's new budget shop brand. *10am-10pm • East down Shinjuku Dori, not far from station*

### **LAOX Duty Free (ラオックス)**

Mainly aimed at Chinese and Korean tourists looking to buy tax-free bags, jewelry and perfume. Worth having a quick look inside to see if a bargain can be had. *9am-9pm • Across the road from Isetan*

### **Tokyu Hands (東急ハンズ)**

Tokyu Hands has everything from stationery to DIY goods to funny souvenirs and drinks. A bit more upmarket than Don Quijote, but prices can still be reasonable if doing tax-free shopping and looking out for special offers. *10am-9pm • Connected to Takashimaya department store*

### **ABC Mart (ABC マート)**

Cheap shoe shop chain, with everything from sneakers to business shoes. *11am-10pm • Down Shinjuku Dori, just before Bicqlo*

### **Free sample hotspots**

Isetan Department Store on Shinjuku Dori and Takashimaya have massive food courts in their basement floors. While the average item is quite pricey, there are plenty of free samples to be had, and it's also a fascinating window shopping experience. Just keep an eye out and don't make it look too obvious if you're not going to buy anything!

### **100-yen shops**

**Silk (シルク)** - Near Yodobashi Camera on the east side. *10am-10pm*

**Seria (セリア)** - Inside Marui Annex on Shinjuku Dori. *11am-9pm*

### **Drugstores (ドラッグストア)**

Matsumoto Kiyoshi (マツモトキヨシ) has a shop opposite Bicuro (9am-10:30pm), while on the west side the best is Daikoku Drug (ダイコクドラッグ), near Yamada Denki (8am-12am).

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### **How to get there and away**

Shinjuku is on the circular **Yamanote Line**, Toei **Oedo Line**, Metro **Marunouchi Line** or Metro **Shinjuku Line**. From Tokyo station, take the **Chuo Line** to Shinjuku station (14 mins, 198 yen). From Shibuya station, take the **Saikyo Line** to Shinjuku station (6 mins, 157 yen). *Recommended rail passes: Tokyo Subway Ticket, Tokyo Metro 24-hour Ticket, Tokyo Metropolitan District Pass*

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