

# JAPAN *The luxe guide*



AS SEEN IN  
**VOGUE**

## DISCOVER MORE

Refined and beautiful, Japan's allure is steeped in tradition and surprises, with hidden gems around every corner.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CITY

Maiko Tomitae outside the Tomikiku teahouse in Kyoto.

# Work of art

Fusing ceremony, tradition and modern innovation, Japan's endless beauty is an artisan's delight.

Her brilliant red lips are mesmerising in their colour and perfection, a perfectly proportioned scarlet slash against the white foundation covering her childlike round face. Mysterious brown eyes don't give much away, the deep pools so dark that it's almost impossible to distinguish the pupil from her iris. Tomitsuyu has wanted to be a *geiko* (the Kyoto name for a *geisha*) all her life, and after three years of training as a *maiko* (an apprentice *geiko*) seven days a week, is still unsure whether she will pass the test to become fully qualified in two years' time. But under the steady hand of Reiko Tomimori, who owns the Tomikiku teahouse she inherited from her grandfather, Tomitsuyu will continue her *maiko* training in dancing, music, calligraphy and tea ceremonies. An only child, born and raised in Kyoto, she is impossibly poised and polite. When asked whether she misses her parents, who she sees just twice a year, the first sign of emotion flickers across her face. "Of course," she demures, "but they are proud of me."

At just 19, Tomitsuyu has already travelled to Australia, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates, with hopes to travel much more once she becomes a *geiko*, commanding rates of up to \$2,500 a booking. Tomitsuyu is a symbolic face of traditional Japan, loyal to beautiful Kyoto, where her favourite time of year is autumn, as the streets and gardens become awash with the seasonal reds, purples, yellows and gold of the city's tree-lined streets and parks.

She's clearly a local in Gion-machi, greeting and acknowledging local shopkeepers and neighbours, but casting her eyes downwards as fascinated passers-by stare shamelessly at her silk robes and red parasol, beaming only as she looks directly into the approved camera lens; the consummate professional.

Much like the sunshine and beauty of Tomitsuyu and her blue-*kimonoed* *maiko* sister Tomitae, Kyoto's charming good looks are steeped in tradition, the former capital famous for its five *geiko* districts, cobblestoned streets, temples, shrines, carefully preserved buildings and a mere 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites.

By day, the city is an endless treasure trove of history, Edo-period architecture and opportunities to uncover the artisan traditions that have held the city strong for thousands of years. At night, the unmarked restaurants, tiny bars and teahouses come to life with lantern after lantern punctuating dusk and the narrow streets.

In a small workshop in a nondescript lane, brothers Shun and Ryo Kojima are continuing the 10th generation of their family lantern-making business, one of just three traditional workshops in Kyoto, with a history dating back 220 years. To watch them work is mesmerising: Shun splits the thick pipes of bamboo into the thin strips that will form the backbone of the lanterns, while Ryo's steady hand fixes the opaque paper to the lantern's frames with a traditional glue. Together they have taken over Kojima Shoten while at the same time launching their own brand, Ko-Chube, which offers a new style of lantern suited to modern lifestyles.

Their custom hand-made lanterns, available to order in over 100 shapes and sizes, illuminate many of the streets of Kyoto, including guesthouses, restaurants, bars and the Minami-za theatre, famous for its *kabuki* performances. What stands them apart from their mass-produced competitors, however, is their distinctive lantern-making method of *jibari-shiki* ("affixing style"), which requires considerable craftsmanship and time, a method they learnt as apprentices under their father Mamoru's eagle eye and unequivocal dedication to perfection.

After the lanterns are crafted, Shun and Ryo work with local artists and calligraphers who decorate the delicate *washi* paper with unique imagery and script by hand; each design unique to their customer's request and painted directly on to the lantern using brush and ink.

Kyoto quietly boasts a wealth of artisans like Shun and Ryo who have stood the test of time, long after the capital was relocated to Tokyo (visit [kyotoartisans.jp/en](http://kyotoartisans.jp/en) to find and book an artisan experience). Compared to Tokyo, Kyoto is a relatively small city of around 1.3 million, divided by two rivers and a multitude of bridges. Getting around the main areas is relatively straightforward, but the luxury of a private guide and interpreter makes it even easier to experience the best the city has to offer (both in Kyoto and Tokyo).



Local guide and interpreter Hiroko Inaba, who works with Chris Rowthorn Tours ([chrisrowthorn.com](http://chrisrowthorn.com)), is the ultimate companion when visiting the city, offering a unique insight into daily Kyoto life, with her quick thinking and local knowledge helping to negotiate little-known entrances to popular sites such as the Fushimi Inari Taisha, a shrine in south-east Kyoto. Entering the woods, it's a steady climb up the northern forested slope of Mount Inari with not even a local in sight. After a network of strange lichen-covered stone foxes, shrines and shady tableaux, it's a gentle merge into a stream of visitors flowing through the mountain's arcades of 5,000-plus vermilion *torii*, a sacred Kyoto tradition dedicated to business success, with large companies paying over a million dollars to have the huge pillars inscribed with their names.

Apart from the myriad temples, shrines and landscaped gardens, Kyoto is also home to hundreds of restaurants and bars, with over 100 Michelin-starred restaurants. Sample the specialties of the region, including *tofu*, tea ceremonies with *Kyo-gashi* (Kyoto speciality sweets), dumplings of rice flour on skewers (*mitarashi dango*) and *Kyo-kaiseki*, the pinnacle of multi-course dining which could only be described as food art. Not for the faint-hearted, *Kyo-kaiseki's* intricate dishes offer a memorable foray into local delicacies such as sea bream, octopus eggs, abalone, pickles and sea urchin. Presented with formality and quiet respect, a *Kyo-kaiseki* meal can take several hours to be served.



**KYOTO ADVENTURE**  
(CLOCKWISE FROM THIS PAGE): Komyo-in temple; Shun Kojima showing a hand-made lantern from Kojima Shoten; dessert at Sushi Mizuki at the Ritz-Carlton; a Kyoto street scene; Arashiyama Grove.

From the carefully served *kaiseki* dish to the carefully wrapped *bento* boxes served in the heart of Kyoto at lunchtime, the genuine expression of *omotenashi* in Japan is felt at every turn. A heartfelt expression of hospitality, it's a spirit that so aptly underpins many experiences.

The very nature of *omotenashi* makes it a difficult word to define: with no literal translation in English, it's an attitude and a spirit that has been woven into Japanese culture for centuries. To be aware of it before a visit deepens an experience; a new appreciation for the bow of the head, the careful presentation of a card or the taxi driver who steps forward in his white gloves to open the passenger car door.

At the elegant Ritz-Carlton, built on the banks of Kyoto's Kamo river, the Japanese principle of *omotenashi* is alive and well. Close to downtown Kyoto, its style easily makes it the most luxurious of Kyoto's hotels, with beautifully appointed rooms subtly furnished with Japanese prints, lacquerware, cherry blossom motifs in the bathroom and a signature *bonsai*. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame the river and village aspect, creating a powerful sense of place, with the high-end rooms boasting private gardens.

Seated at Sushi Mizuki's *sushi* counter overlooking the hotel's meticulously manicured gardens, sit back and watch as the head chef prepares mouth-watering *sushi* with nimble hands and impeccable English. He humbly attributes his skill to his Tokyo training and the sharpening of his well-worn knives every night. His precision is clear: the local scallop with a delicate lemon cream almost melts in the mouth. Sushi Mizuki is not to be missed.

Around 30 minutes from the Ritz-Carlton, at the base of Kyoto's western mountains, is the famous Arashiyama Grove, a twisting winding narrow road that's sheltered on either side by towering green bamboo that creates a shaded tunnel-like effect, with the sun streaming through to create surreal lighting. For bamboo appreciation minus the masses, head to the area early in the day for guaranteed solitude.

The nearby Tenryu-ji Buddhist temple is the headquarters of the Rinza school of Zen Buddhism. While it looks simplistic from the outside, the small gate and office belie the discreet beauty hidden

inside, with a large carp-filled pond mirroring the maples and botanical variety of the Zen-like world-class gardens. In autumn the gardens are a riot of colour, while in *sakura* (cherry blossom) season the show is just as beautiful.

One would be hard-pressed to visit all of Kyoto's temples and shrines in a lifetime, so to find a handful of quiet ones in between the guidebook must-sees is a necessity in this picture-book town.

Above a wealthy residential area in the back streets is Komyo-in, one of the Buddhist sub-temples of Tofuku-ji. Sculptured pines stand proudly in the front



The lobby at the Ritz-Carlton in Kyoto.



garden, while inside the *tatami* mats are devoid of visitors. In socks and with hushed voices, the scene is one for quiet contemplation, the pavilions looking out on the carefully raked dry garden with a gentle mist of summer rain. The name "Komyo" consists of two *kanji* characters meaning "bright" and "light". Combined, it alludes to the light given off from the mercy of Buddha. There's quiet beauty everywhere here, even in the naming of the shrine. Central to the garden design is the group of three stones that is thought to represent one of the Buddhas, flanked by two bodhisattvas, a placement common in Buddhist gardens.

*"In socks and and hushed voices, the scene is one for quiet contemplation"*

From Kyoto to Tokyo it's just over a two-hour bullet-train journey. Travelling between cities in Japan this way is a civilised and memorable way to move. The gentle rocking and hum of the tracks is a soothing soundtrack as the *shinkansen* speeds past rice paddies, thatched homes, farms and modern towns. Crossing rivers, the trains wind up past mountain ridges punctuated by tunnels cut through the rock, emerging to a new landscape and an expanse of sky.

Some of the *shinkansen* routes also offer luxurious "Gran" class reserved seating complete with *bento* service, plush reclining seats and a dedicated carriage

attendant. Passengers are shown to their seats upon boarding and treated to slippers and an eye mask, although it's a shame to sleep on these journeys and miss the beguiling scenery. Rail passes need to be pre-purchased before leaving Australia – go to railplus.com.au – and can be used for *shinkansen* trips (although you'll need to pay extra for "Gran" class).

Pulling into Tokyo Station, the rhythm of the city is immediately evident, a phenomenal network of trains above and below ground moves millions throughout the city's neighbourhoods every day.

Just five minutes by taxi from this enormous transport hub, Palace Hotel Tokyo sits on the banks of one of the Imperial Palace's numerous moats, its high-rise views looking back across to the tree-shrouded palace gardens. One of Tokyo's most iconic luxury hotels, its location in exclusive Marunouchi (with a handy Otemachi subway entrance directly accessible via the hotel basement) makes it the ideal base to uncover all that this fascinating city has to offer. Steps away is nearby Marunouchi Naka Dori, a tree-lined shopping and dining street very much like New York's Madison Avenue.

Tokyo has been Japan's capital since the Meiji restoration of 1868, taking over from Kyoto with a powerful confidence. For first-timers and return visitors alike it's arguably one of the world's most energetic, playful and vibrant hyper-modern cities, with good manners at every turn. It would be hard to have a bad time here. The Palace offers a quiet sanctum from the buzz, with 290 elegant rooms offering sophisticated design restraint and generously proportioned rooms in a city where real estate is at a premium. The independent Japanese-owned hotel

**SPECIAL FEATURE**



**kaiseki DINING**

Hidden down a narrow lane in Kyoto's Gion district is the tiny and hard-to-find Michelin-starred Gion Nanba, where chef Nanba prepares *kaiseki*, the traditional multi-course Japanese experience. Dine at the six-seat counter or choose a private dining room mere steps from the action as the two chefs prepare a haute cuisine based on local seafood specialties.



**modern YAKITORI**

Not far from the Kamo River in central Kyoto, Torito's relaxed atmosphere and English menu makes it easy to enjoy the smoky charcoal flavours of traditional Japanese skewered chicken in all its forms. Book ahead and choose a counter seat to order big and watch the young chefs in action. Don't go past the spicy deep-fried chicken thighs.



**sake CRAFT**

A contrast to traditional Kyoto, newcomer Before 9's two-storey vibe is equal parts hipster and minimalist, filled with locals and the occasional traveller. Choose from around eight craft beers or the sake selection, along with a small bar menu. The floor-to-ceiling-glass shopfront style creates an open bar experience, with customers spilling out onto the street on a warm night.



**TOKYO FEAST:** Tsukiji market is a hive of activity in the early hours, slowing to a close by 11am, as most of the local seafood vendors have sold the majority of their produce. Locals wander the stall lanes to inspect row after row of seafood specialties within the buzz of a working market. Fishmongers fillet their fresh catch, while trolleys and forklifts whizz past the sky-high piles of wooden boxes and Styrofoam stacks. Beyond the inner workings of the seafood area, the outer markets sell fresh produce, ingredients and kitchen essentials, while the steady supply of Tokyo eateries continues with noodle bars and plenty of hole-in-the-wall street vendors and *sushi* restaurants. The markets are a short walk from Tsukiji Station.



The lobby at Palace Hotel Tokyo in Marunouchi.

clearly draws on Japan's rich history, culture and art scene offerings. After a day on the streets of Tokyo, it's hard to resist some quiet time back in your room, taking in the views from the private balcony or soaking in the open-style bathtub looking out to the Tokyo skyline.

For even more indulgence, retreat to the hotel's fifth floor for the first Evian-branded spa in Japan. The all-white Alpine-inspired design and the flock of white *origami* cranes suspended from the roof is balanced perfectly with the signature Japanese *seitai* trigger point massage treatment, the ideal antidote to retail fatigue.

Anyone with a hankering for *tempura* should book ahead for Palace Hotel Tokyo's intimate Tatsumi six-seat *tempura* restaurant, where the chef cooks a range of vegetables and seafood fresh from Tsukiji market, presented on traditional ceramics and served with a delicate seasonal range of salt pairings to enhance the natural flavours of the day's offerings.

The mythical Tsukiji market, close to Ginza, is the world's busiest fish market and is absolutely worth a trip. There's nothing luxurious about the market's gritty working energy, but the authentic, narrow cobblestone pathways between row after row of vendors of every seafood imaginable will hold strong in the memory bank for a long time. Rustic timber and metal carts are still used to lug boxes and enormous tuna, while vibrant red octopuses, sea urchins and eels lie waiting for sale to some of Tokyo's best chefs and restaurants. The surrounding side markets and street-food eateries are packed with life and colour – and with locals slurping noodles and filling bamboo baskets with fresh produce.

Across the other side of the city, the energy is also high in Asakusa, the bustling centre of Tokyo's historic downtown. The phenomenal Buddhist temple Senso-ji draws worshippers and crowds through the enormous vermilion-lacquered gates with an oversized red lantern marking the entrance. Inside, the low drumming and wafting incense saturates the senses, with locals making their way to

the main incense burner at the top of the stairs. Here they light and extinguish their incense sticks, before waving their hands to direct the smoke over their body, a gesture that symbolises healing.

Good fortune is also on offer at Senso-ji and many Japanese temples with *omikaji*, a black and white fortune paper traditionally written in prose, based on poems written by a Buddhist monk. Custom sees good fortunes retained, while the not-so-good-luck readings

*“Anyone with a hankering for tempura should book ahead for Palace Hotel Tokyo’s intimate Tatsumi six-seat tempura restaurant”*

are left behind to flutter in the breeze, tied to the timber and wire racks with hundreds of others.

Chefs and locals frequent nearby Kappabashi Street for the four or so blocks of kitchen and commercial cooking supplies. It's a good place to pick up authentic Japanese kitchenware. A handful of key stores stand out, including Fuwari for porcelain, teapots and cutting boards, and Kama-Asa, showcasing knives (up to 80 different kinds) and exquisite Nanbu-tekki ironware and gems like crane-shaped graters.

In a city where eating is almost a spectator sport, there's no shortage of places to snack, lunch or indulge in all-out fine dining. First stop for any unique Tokyo food experience should be the department stores' food basements. Tokyu Food Show and Isetan food hall in Shibuya are an incredible mix of fresh produce, seafood, cakes, bread, *sushi*, noodles, pickles, salads, cheese, spices and Asian ingredients. Choose from over 30 varieties of *tofu* or pick up a \$180 rockmelon. Tokyu Food Show's Pariya gelato and sorbet bar tucked away in a corner is worth seeking



sushi LEGEND

In a city where *sushi* restaurants open and close daily, a Tokyo *sushi* experience is elevated to performance art at the legendary Kyubey in Ginza district (one of Kyubey's seven Tokyo and Osaka restaurants). Watch the theatre of *sushi* come alive at the counter as your personal chef prepares an unforgettable course of seasonal *sushi* in front of you. Indulgence with every bite.



secret SOBA

Leave plenty of time to find Tamawaraï, a small unmarked restaurant in a lane in the Jingumae district of Shibuya. Owner and chef Masahiro Urakawa prepares his signature *soba* noodles from the buckwheat he grows in a field in rural Tochigi. Don't miss the hearty coarse-ground hot noodles served with *tempura* and a side dish of *tofu*, roasted seaweed and Japanese pickles.

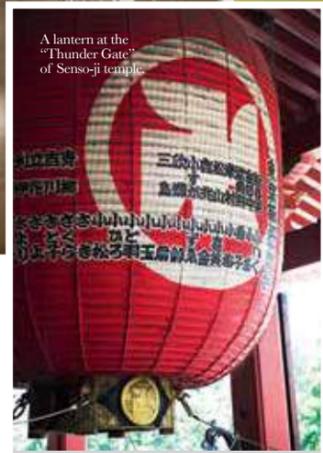


after DARK

Slip into Royal Bar at Palace Hotel Tokyo for a quiet retreat, complete with dark wood, deep leather and plush velvet in a moody interior. The bar counter itself is made from one beautiful long piece of mahogany restored from when the bar's original bartender held court over 50 years ago. Expect seasonal cocktails, an expansive whiskey selection and delicious tapas.



The Evian spa at Palace Hotel Tokyo, Marunouchi.



A lantern at the "Thunder Gate" of Senso-ji temple.



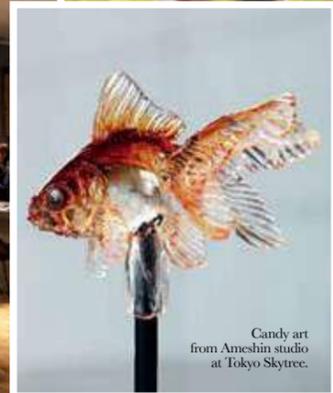
Making noodles at Marugame Seimen.



METoA installation at Tokyu Plaza Ginza.



Esquisse Cinq restaurant at Tokyu Plaza Ginza.



Candy art from Ameshin studio at Tokyo Skytree.



Photographs Chris Court and supplied.

# Taste of Tokyo



Restaurateur and Qantas Creative Director, Food, Beverage and Service Neil Perry AM shares his culinary inspiration.

I have been told there are 80,000 restaurants in Tokyo. I can't vouch for the accuracy of that information, but I can promise you one thing: it's next to impossible to have a bad meal in the Japanese capital.

The level of quality produce and dedication to the craft of cooking seems inherent in the culture. Many of the places are small and hidden away. However, it was many years ago that I first remember having *okonomiyaki* at an airport in Osaka after a ski trip. These little pancakes come in all flavours and fillings, usually served with a sweet mayonnaise.

A couple of years ago I was reacquainted with them at Tokyo Food Show in Shibuya, my favourite of all the fantastic Tokyo food halls, and I knew then we just had to have it on the Qantas menu. We thought the addition of crab would make it not only sweet but also slightly salty, with lots of *umami* flavour – a Japanese word roughly translated to mean "rich and savoury". It's now a key feature of the menu on our flights to Japan.

If you're in the centre of Tokyo, I highly recommend making time for a visit to the fantastic basement food halls in the department stores – there's all this incredible food being cooked in front of you.

For great noodles, get to Afuri in Shibuya-ku – it may well be the first time you order your noodles through a vending machine. It's far from fancy, but it's quick and delicious. I like the *kara tsuyu tsukemen* noodles served cold with *nori*, pickled bamboo, boiled egg and warm pork garnish.

Tonki is an institution in Tokyo and renowned for its deep-fried pork covered in fine breadcrumbs. It's not fast food; it's got a really nice home-cooked feeling to it; really nice and well worth the wait.

If you're after fresh seafood and a quintessential casual Japanese dining experience, there are plenty of great *izakaya*, but I love the Uoshin Group's scattering of restaurants in Tokyo in Shibuya, Shimokitazawa and Ebisu. The pub-like fun atmosphere at the Akasaka location is my favourite.

Finish an evening with a drink at Bar Martha in Ebisu for walls lined with loads of vinyl, plus old-school tunes, cocktails and whisky.

out for its exotic flavours like avocado and honey and strawberry millefeuille. Pop into the Mitsukoshi basement food hall in Ginza for more eye-popping displays of packaging, food art and outstanding customer service.

*Amezaiku* (candy art) is alive and well in Tokyo, particularly in the Ameshin studio in Solamachi shopping town in Asakusa's Tokyo Skytree. Watch as Tokyo artist Shinri Tezuka and his apprentices create exquisite detail in a range of delicate candy-shaped animals. The unique creations are then placed on stands with strict instructions for international travel. It's almost a given they are too good to eat.

For lunch on the go, Marugame Seimen *udon* noodle restaurant is unbeatable (there are 65 in Tokyo in total) but the Shinjuku branch is tucked away in a quiet spot worth seeking out. Join the queue of nearby office workers forming an orderly line out the door. Watch through the window as the kitchen hand rolls sheets of dough flat and cuts them into thick white noodles before moving them on a large wooden dowel to the steaming kitchen area.

This Marugame branch is close to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, which offers panoramic views of the city from its two observation decks. On a clear day, Mount Fuji, Tokyo Skytree and Meiji shrine can all be seen from the observatories. While no longer the tallest building in Tokyo, the landmark grey edifice has attracted volumes of acclaim since its completion in 1990, with architect Kenzo Tange's design making the central building look like a giant computer chip. Sunset and evening views over the neon-studded city make it a worthwhile destination at night.

Offering an alternative viewing space with late opening hours, the world-class Mori Art Museum in the Mori Tower in modern Roppongi Hills showcases a range of major contemporary exhibitions, ranging from video art to *anime*,

*"Watch through the window as the kitchen hand rolls sheets of dough flat and cuts them into thick white noodles"*

curated to include global art trends with an emphasis on Asian artists. Pause at the Tokyo City View observation area on the 52nd floor for 360 degree views (particularly at night) or head to the rooftop Sky Deck for the open-air vista. The museum is part of Art Triangle Roppongi, which also features the Suntory Museum of Art and the National Art Center Tokyo with a handful of galleries in between. The gleaming, glass-walled ultra-modern National Art Center Tokyo is Japan's largest exhibition space and is dedicated to special exhibitions (it has no permanent collection). For advance planning, [tokyoartbeat.com](http://tokyoartbeat.com) is an up-to-the-minute site and app featuring current and future exhibitions and art events.

In downtown Ginza, where every global brand has a presence in Tokyo's most famous shopping area, Mitsubishi has recently opened the contemporary multi-storey METoA in Tokyu Plaza Ginza, an exhibition, cafe and shop space dedicated to providing visitors with limited-run hands-on experiences and installations. Break a shopping morning session here with Me's contemporary high-ceilinged cafe serving an Australian-inspired menu and Allpress coffee.

Tokyu Plaza Ginza only recently opened, its stunning exterior designed to look like Tokyo's Edo period *kiriko* cut glass. Across 12 floors and two basements levels, it's a breezy range of 125 stores and restaurants with the light-filled Kiriko

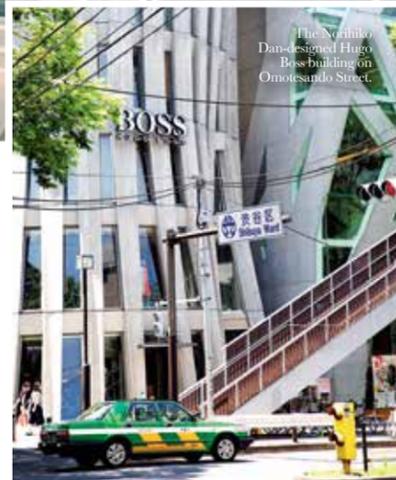
Lounge on the sixth floor. Stop to take in the overhead lighting while sipping coffee and looking down on to Ginza's Sukiya-bashi crossing. Tokyu Plaza Ginza also features a Hands Expo Culture Mall showcasing Japanese treasures such as plastic food, wooden phone covers and the ubiquitous range of Japanese stationery. The art of Tokyo shopping is no more apparent than here at the plaza.

Seven subway stops away from Ginza is Shinjuku, home to the world's busiest train station. Emerge from the underground network to a plethora of high-rise buildings, video screens, neon lights, shopping centres, restaurants, cafes, departments stores and footpaths packed with shoppers and commuters. It's the ultimate Tokyo "here I am" moment. Pause a few minutes and drink in the sight as pedestrians cross from every corner when the traffic lights turn red. For an inner-city oasis, look for Shinjuku Gyo-en National Garden, a park that is home to more than 1,500 trees in blossom from the end of March to early April.

Harajuku is a mecca for Tokyo's under-30 fashion collective, with everything from small designer brands to Japanese streetwear. There are plenty of Tokyo quirks in the never-ending lanes, including the new White Atelier Converse store and, on Cat Street, the successful US export Luke's Lobster, which draws 50-deep queues of locals waiting for their taste of the Maine-inspired lobster rolls. Countless designers, global trends and fashion subcultures got their start in this small neighbourhood of Tokyo.

A counterpoint to the pop-culture manic experience of Harajuku, the tree-lined Omotesando Street offers a more refined shopping pace with a steady stream of well-dressed locals enjoying the sunshine, French patisseries, contemporary architecture, luxury international brands and Tokyo's never-ending perfection of visual merchandising. Window shopping never looked so good.

FASHION



# Fashion CENTRAL

The history of Japanese fashion is no more evident than in the fascinating hub of Tokyo.

Japanese designers have had a profound and singular impact on global fashion. No other country has been as successful in presenting a cohesive fashion narrative about its unique style and changing vision, nor in nurturing second and third design generations that work together with a sense of teamwork rarely seen elsewhere.

Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo, of Comme des Garçons, have revolutionised the way we think of fashion, followed by a second generation of designers, such as Junya Watanabe and Jun Takahashi, and a new generation, including Tao Kurihara, Akira Naka and Hiroaki Ohya.

What each generation shares is a unique sensibility of Japanese design and its sense of beauty embodied in clothing, which often means questioning existing Western aesthetic ideals. When Japanese designers burst onto the international fashion scene in Paris in 1981, they deconstructed existing fashion rules and reconstructed their own vision of what it could be, using concepts such as asymmetry and minimalism to produce radical silhouettes, frayed and distorted fabrics and sizeless garments.

What sets Japanese designers apart from their American and European counterparts is an immersion in traditional Japanese culture and a desire to reinterpret it and make it relevant for today.

The capital of Japanese fashion is certainly Tokyo, a beguiling mix of the radical, the traditional and the now that is home to global names, emerging designers and the flagship stores of Japan's top luxury brands. Traditional crafts and *kimono* jostle for floor space with futuristic, cutting-edge designs in a city that has a plethora of fashion districts that are as diverse as they are plentiful.

Yamamoto and Miyake both have flagship stores in Tokyo, where Miyake references the traditional art of *origami* with his Pleats Please line, which uses new fabric technology to create garments that are washable, wrinkle-free and elegant. His APOC range (A Piece Of Cloth) was built around the invention of a way to cut an entire garment from a single piece of cloth, while Yamamoto also explores new techniques of cutting and finishing garments that often appear frayed and distorted, but always with an artist's understanding of sculpture and texture.

A rich lineage and the mentorship by these designers of the next generation, including

Watanabe and Takahashi, has resulted in a design continuum and a canon unique in the world.

A key concept in Japanese design is *wabi-sabi*, *wabi* meaning "without decoration" and *sabi* meaning "atmospheric and old". This translates to garments that find beauty in imperfection and an aesthetic that meditates on the wonder of flaws and chaos disrupting the natural order. Takahashi explores *wabi-sabi* with extraordinary outerwear referencing traditional Japanese textiles and the beauty of nature, which can involve anything from a royal ruff at the neck to faces masked with flowers. As Watanabe has said: "I have never thought about whether or not I am successful ... I am not interested in the mainstream." Instead, he creates mesmerising garments that are perplexing, fascinating and seductive in equal measure. Sacai designer Chitose Abe takes a more feminine, but no less conceptual, approach that mixes colour, pattern and traditional tailoring techniques, and has won a legion of new fans through her shows at Paris Fashion Week.

In sum, Japanese designers eschew trends and the mainstream in favour of testing the sculptural and philosophical possibilities of cloth and thread, which recalls a comment from the late couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga. "A couturier," Balenciaga said, must be "an architect for design, a sculptor for shape, a painter for colour, a musician for harmony and philosopher for temperance".

The beauty of Japanese design is its reimagining of fashion that balances tradition with innovation to celebrate all of the above qualities in a way that is consistent with its country of origin yet utterly unique when compared to anywhere else.

## Tokyo HOT SPOTS

### ISETAN (SHINJUKU)

A luxury fashion mecca stocking the world's top brands, with a superlative food hall. Browse the *kimono* section for *obi* sashes and other traditional accessories.

### COMME DES GARÇONS (AOYAMA)

This visually stunning store is the flagship for Rei Kawakubo's dark, asymmetrical designs, and stocks almost every brand within the Comme des Garçons stable.

### ISSEY MIYAKE (AOYAMA)

This Tokyo flagship carries the full line, and a short walk away you'll find other Issey Miyake stores, including Issey Miyake Men and Pleats Please.

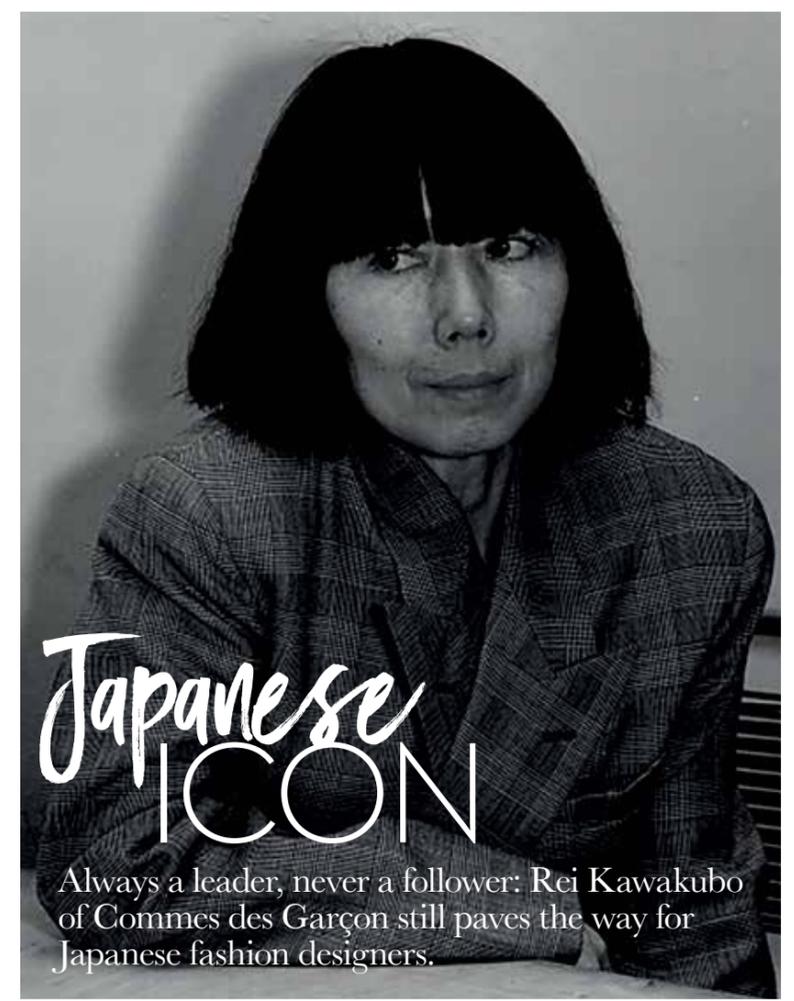
### PRADA (AOYAMA)

This six-storey green glass Herzog & de Meuron commission is an architectural marvel and one of the most distinctive buildings in Tokyo. The largest Prada store in Japan carries every line produced by the Italian luxury label.

### MIU MIU (AOYAMA)

This understated box-like store was also designed by Herzog & de Meuron and sits opposite the Prada flagship.

Images: Chris Court; Getty Images; Wondr; Georgetown Safe



# Japanese ICON

Always a leader, never a follower: Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçon still paves the way for Japanese fashion designers.

Rei Kawakubo did not train as a fashion designer. Instead, she studied art and literature at Keio University in Tokyo, which is perhaps why she questions the very codes fashion has been defined by.

As the creative director of Comme des Garçons, Kawakubo is often referred to as the world's most influential living fashion designer. She made her debut in Paris in 1981, then followed in 1982 with a collection aptly named Destroy, as she would go on to subvert all fashion conventions by consistently challenging established notions of beauty. Destroy, for example, featured tattered, asymmetrical and holey garments in an entirely new aesthetic, still sewn by hand using haute couture techniques.

Kawakubo was soon so famous that her black-clad fans were dubbed "the crows" by the Japanese press, but the designer told the *New Yorker* in 2005 that she "never intended to start a revolution": she only wanted to show "what I thought was strong and beautiful. It just so happened that my notion was different from everybody else's."

While Destroy was confronting to many – it was hailed as a new "aesthetic of poverty"

– it paled in shock value compared to Kawakubo's 1997 collection Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body, which was otherwise known as "lumps and bumps". The collection featured models in simple gingham dresses with padding in the wrong places to create hunchbacks, swollen hips and other growths on the body. The point was to question existing conventions of beauty such as symmetry and perfect proportion, which Kawakubo has done consistently since founding Comme des Garçons in 1969. Today, she is the creative director of a global empire turning over \$220 million a year with over 20 distinct lines, and is also the co-founder of the Dover Street Market chain of international concept stores.

Throughout her career Kawakubo has been renowned for nurturing other designers, in particular Junya Watanabe and Tao Kurihara, and has inspired numerous fashion designers, including Martin Margiela, Helmut Lang and Ann Demeulemeester.

"My approach is simple," she once told *Interview* magazine. "It is nothing other than what I am thinking at the time I make each piece of clothing, whether I think it is strong and beautiful. The result is something that other people decide."

# Scenic ROUTE

Journeying into Japan's regional areas makes it even easier to appreciate the breathtaking beauty during any season.

Photographs: Chris Court Works, Claire Catt



REGIONAL GETAWAY (CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE): a teahouse in Kanazawa's Higashi Chaya-gai district; Kenroku-en garden; a cafe in Higashi Chaya-gai; Kanazawa Castle; *matcha* (green tea) ice-cream in Kanazawa.



Skiing in Hokkaido.

## Destination SNOW

With over 500 ski resorts in Japan, there's no shortage of places to ski and board.

### HOKKAIDO

The Hokkaido powder belt is home to several ski areas, including Asahidake and Kurodake. For a luxury stay, many of the best options are within the Niseko area, outside of Sapporo.

### SHIGA KOGEN IN NAGANO

With 19 ski areas and 52 lifts, Nagano, north-west of Tokyo, is Japan's largest ski destination. Head to the furthestmost point and least-visited, Okushiga Kogen, for unspoilt natural scenery with some of Japan's best powder snow – and snow monkeys. Hire a local guide for an even deeper exploration of the area.

### ZAO IN TOHOKU

The northern end of the main island of Japan (Honshu), Tohoku has a number of resorts, including Zao Onsen, which is accessible via bullet train from Tokyo. Zao Onsen has 26 runs, 37 lifts and is renowned for *julyo*, frost-covered giant trees known as "snow monsters".

A typical Japan traveller narrative goes something like this along the "Golden Route": Tokyo, Hakone, Mount Fuji, Kyoto, Osaka and perhaps Hiroshima, if there's enough time. Of course, for anyone partial to a little white powder, there's a whole snow scene in Japan to be explored.

Beyond Tokyo and the Golden Route, a wealth of regional areas offers ways to experience the beauty and luxury of Japan, staying at luxury *ryokan* and small hotels outside the main cities.

Since the new bullet train service from Tokyo to Kanazawa was launched in 2015, the pretty castle town has found new favour. In just two and a half hours, Tokyo is a world away and classical Edo-period Japan comes into play in this UNESCO City of Crafts and Folk Art.

Amid tracts of tall timbers, moss-covered rocks and a dedicated blossom path, one of Japan's three most famous gardens, Kenroku-en garden, is a living *haiku*. This is everything a Japanese landscape should be. It's not hard to imagine the changing colours through the seasons; in the heat of summer it still emits colour and shade. Even the sight of three gardeners sweeping silt from one of the garden's pebble-lined streams using traditional Japanese bamboo brooms is poetry in motion.

Across from the gardens, the restored Kanazawa Castle stands tall on the hill overlooking the town, its huge stone walls topped with white walls and simple peaks. In winter, when the snow sits along its grey rooftop, the beauty is picturesque.

Just a walk from the castle is the Kanazawa 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, a low circular building with glass outer walls and a combination of community areas and public art space. Argentinian artist Leandro Erlich's fascinating *Swimming Pool* is a permanent installation in one of the central courtyards. An optical illusion creates the effect of seeing people immersed in the water when they're actually just in the room beneath.

Kanazawa is home to Japan's second biggest *geisha* area, after Kyoto. In the Higashi Chaya-gai district, a series of carefully preserved teahouses line the narrow streets. In between the teahouses are cafes, galleries and places to buy the area's traditional gold leaf and lacquerware craft. The *geisha* houses have a screening of *kimusuko* (timber lattice) on the ground floor, with timber and glass on the outside of the first-floor entertaining areas.

For art lovers, journey south-west of Osaka to Naoshima, a small, isolated island offering one of the world's most remarkable art and architecture experiences. Stay at Benesse House, a museum, restaurant and hotel centre in one, the unique concept a collaboration between billionaire art collector Soichiro Fukutake and Pritzker prize-winning architect Tadao Ando.

The 49 luxury rooms are all Western in design, with a Japanese sensibility, and there's unique artwork in each room, spread across four distinctly different buildings. To savour the one-of-a-kind experience, guests in the museum hotel have special 24-hour access to major works and site-specific installations, bringing new meaning to art after dark.

SPA

A private balcony *onsen*.

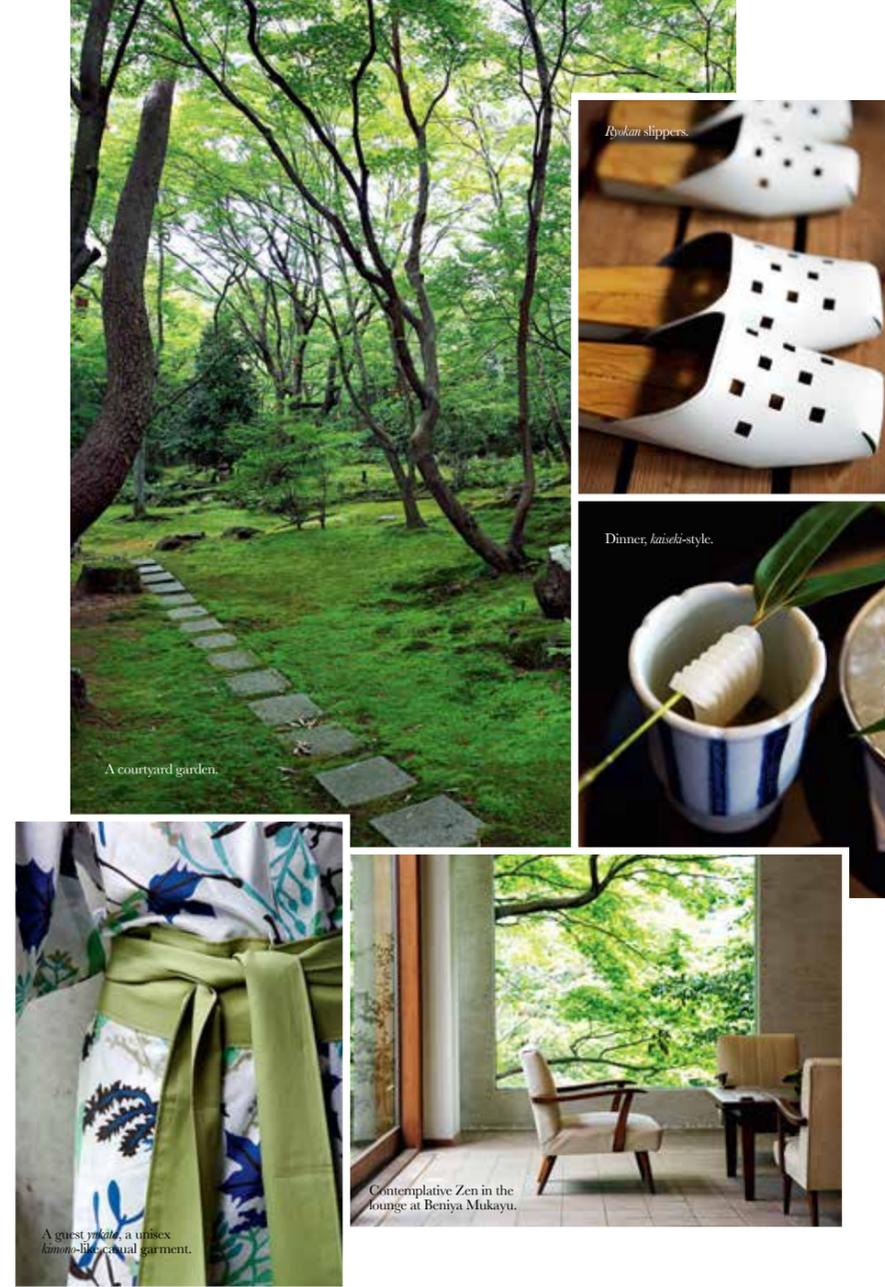
# Natural BEAUTY

Tapping into natural mineral-rich hot spring waters, Japan's *onsen* experience has a curative effect on both body and mind.

Soaking in a private *onsen* (geothermically heated spring) while looking into the green canopy of maple, red pine and mountain cherry makes it nearly impossible not to relax. The silence is as powerful as the simplicity. Giving yourself up to nature to bathe in the curative waters of an *onsen* is absolutely unmissable on any visit to Japan.

For thousands of years, the Japanese have whiled away hours in the country's 3,000-plus indoor and outdoor *onsen* scattered throughout the volcanic belt of the country's 6,852 islands, often grouped together in key hot spring areas. Openly revered, the mineral-rich waters are considered to have restorative properties that heal aches and pains, ease and prevent illness and generally maintain a healthy body. According to Japanese *onsenhou* (hot spring law), to be officially classified as an *onsen* the water temperature must be at least 25 degrees at its point of release. Whether they're seeking healing, cleansing or general relaxation, millions of Japanese flock to the *onsen* experience every day, making a private, luxury *onsen* experience particularly special.

Tucked away on a winding road at the foot of the hills in the *onsen* town of Yamashiro on Honshu's west coast, Beniya Mukayu is rated as one of Japan's best luxury boutique hotel experiences, with all the *omotenashi* of a family-run *ryokan*, drawing its healing 40-degree waters from the nearby Yamashiro spring. Billed as one of the country's best hot-spring areas, Yamashiro has a 1,300-year history dating back to 725, when a holy priest named Gyoki reportedly found a crow healing its wounds in the spring water.



A courtyard garden.

Ryokan slippers.

Dinner, *kaiseki*-style.

A guest *yukata*, a unisex *kimono*-like casual garment.

Contemplative Zen in the lounge at Beniya Mukayu.

The *ryokan* tradition is a fascinating window into old-world Japan, where great pride is taken in the hospitality, dining and beautiful bathing facilities offered. Beniya Mukayu is no exception to this tradition, standing on a hill of the sacred Yakushiyama, with all the tranquil Zen-like simplicity to be expected; its modernist architectural design perfectly complementing the moss-covered Japanese garden at its centre. This is a retreat where less is more and the traditions of Japan are quietly incorporated into all 17 of the Western-style and traditional *tatami*-mat rooms and suites.

Downstairs from the main lounge are separate men's and women's *onsen* with sauna. While getting naked in front of strangers may be confronting, the *onsen* ritual of bathing on the wooden stool, rinsing and preparing for the hot spring waters is worth the journey, with every step as liberating as the next. The *ryokan*'s unique Yakushiyama natural body products add further sensuality to the preparation. Compared to a *sentou* (Japanese public bathhouse), the *onsen* is a much more private experience at Beniya Mukayu; however, if the quiet communal area is still too much, each guest room also offers a private outdoor *onsen* (known as a *rotenburo*) on the balcony of each room.

Melding the power of the spring waters with Japanese herbs, the *ryokan* also offers Yakushiyama facial and body treatments using customised herbal balls and creams blended according to the physical condition and constitution of each guest. A unique spa experience is guaranteed.

Beniya Mukayu is a modern *ryokan* at its very best, with impeccable attention to guests. As the sun rises, proprietress Sachiko Nakamichi hosts 7am yoga on the timber deck, a 45-minute stretching and contemplative experience that brings new meaning to the tree pose, as the perfect proportions of the branches of the region's red pines rise up from the garden in front, while the sun moves steadily behind.

At night, guests gather in the *ryokan*'s black timber dining room while the resident chef prepares a traditional 10-course *kaiseki* meal made from locally sourced ingredients, with a particular focus on seafood from the Sea of Japan in the Honshu area, served on locally crafted ceramics.

Find Beniya Mukayu and other luxury *ryokan* with *onsen* in Japan at [tablethotels.com](http://tablethotels.com).

SPECIAL FEATURE

## TOP THREE ONSEN



### minimalist LUXURY

South of Tokyo, luxurious Amanemu offers serious *onsen* indulgence, sitting quietly among forested hills off the beaten track of Japan's main visitor trails. Retreat to ocean views from the spa treatment suites, outdoor *onsen* bath pavilions, a yoga studio, *watsu* water therapy pool and the signature Aman face and body treatments; [www.aman.com](http://www.aman.com).



### riverside ZEN

With superb views of the surrounding mountains and namesake river from every room, Bettei Otozure offers a boutique *ryokan* and *onsen* experience with all the serenity of rural Japan. Enjoy the natural healing properties of the mountainous hot springs in your own private hot-spring bath on the balcony in each room; [tablethotels.com](http://tablethotels.com).



### forest RETREAT

A picturesque French-inspired retreat, Arcana Izu sits south of Mount Fuji and offers a complete escape from the city. With soothing floor-to-ceiling views of the forest, Arcana Izu is popular with international guests and wealthy Tokyoites for its Zen-like simplicity and private hot spring baths. Book ahead for an Akura Spa experience using the therapeutic waters of the Yagashima *onsen*; [tablethotels.com](http://tablethotels.com).

GETTING THERE

# Perfect TIMING

Qantas's convenient daily flights to Japan guarantee a relaxed arrival in Tokyo.

It's early morning in Japan's capital and the city is already wide awake. With the kaleidoscope of neon lights well and truly off, the early-morning Qantas flight from Sydney taxis into one of the world's busiest airports. Welcome to Tokyo, a city that will almost certainly blow your mind, no matter how often you're lucky enough to visit.

In 2015, Qantas began operating the first-ever direct flight from Sydney to Haneda International Airport, in addition to the Brisbane-Narita route, allowing Australians to arrive at Tokyo's most central airport. The beauty of the departure time from Sydney is an arrival in Tokyo just after dawn, allowing a full day ahead for exploration, relaxing or making domestic flight or train connections.

The flight is just a little over nine and a half hours, passing in the blink of an eye with the constant stream of entertainment, in-flight dining options and, in Business Class, the enviable flatbed in the refurbished B747, now matching the standard of the A380.

Supper is served not long after the seatbelt sign switches off: choose from Neil Perry's Rockpool-inspired menu, including a generous selection of

Japanese dishes such as a black sesame rice parcel for travellers keen to start their culinary journey immediately. Expect outstanding service plus a range of snacks, fruit and chocolates available at any time during the night, with premium beer, champagne and a wine list selected by Rockpool sommeliers. *Sake* is also available exclusively on flights to Japan.

There's no doubt that after the premium dining it's easy to reach into the vivid Kate Spade amenities kit, don the soft black eyemask and settle in for some uninterrupted hours of in-air slumber. The cocoon-like flatbeds, with adjustable entertainment screens and latest movie, music and television options, and the electric privacy screen between seats, maximises the pleasure of the journey.

The return flight to Australia is also perfectly timed, with the Qantas late-evening service from Tokyo providing an early-morning arrival into Sydney. A generous 40 kilograms of checked luggage and two carry-on bags for Business Class means all that Tokyo retail therapy is easy to get home. Now to unpack ...



## on The MOVE

Qantas offers 14 flights weekly from Australia to Tokyo (Haneda and Narita airports). Narita services international flights, while Haneda's three terminals offer international and domestic connections. On arrival in Haneda, a taxi to the centre of Tokyo is approximately 30 minutes or less (depending on traffic), while the monorail is an easy option that bypasses busy Tokyo streets and brings you right into the city. The monorail, subway and rail system all have English signage, comprehensive maps and clear station names, making it super-easy to get around.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
VISIT [QANTAS.COM.AU](http://QANTAS.COM.AU).

 **QANTAS**  
Spirit of Australia

FOR MORE INSPIRATION AND TRAVEL TIPS, VISIT THE JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION SITE AT [JNTO.ORG.AU](http://JNTO.ORG.AU).