

**T**okyo has long been an expensive destination for travelers, but things are leveling out a bit with the yen-to-dollar rate somewhat steady and initiatives from the Japanese government and businesses meant to attract more tourism.

Tokyo is an almost dizzying city that can appear, at first exposure, akin to a massive and highly organized pinball machine. Its culture shock is part of what makes the city so fascinating. Major pluses: the city is very safe and local residents are consistently helpful to travelers.

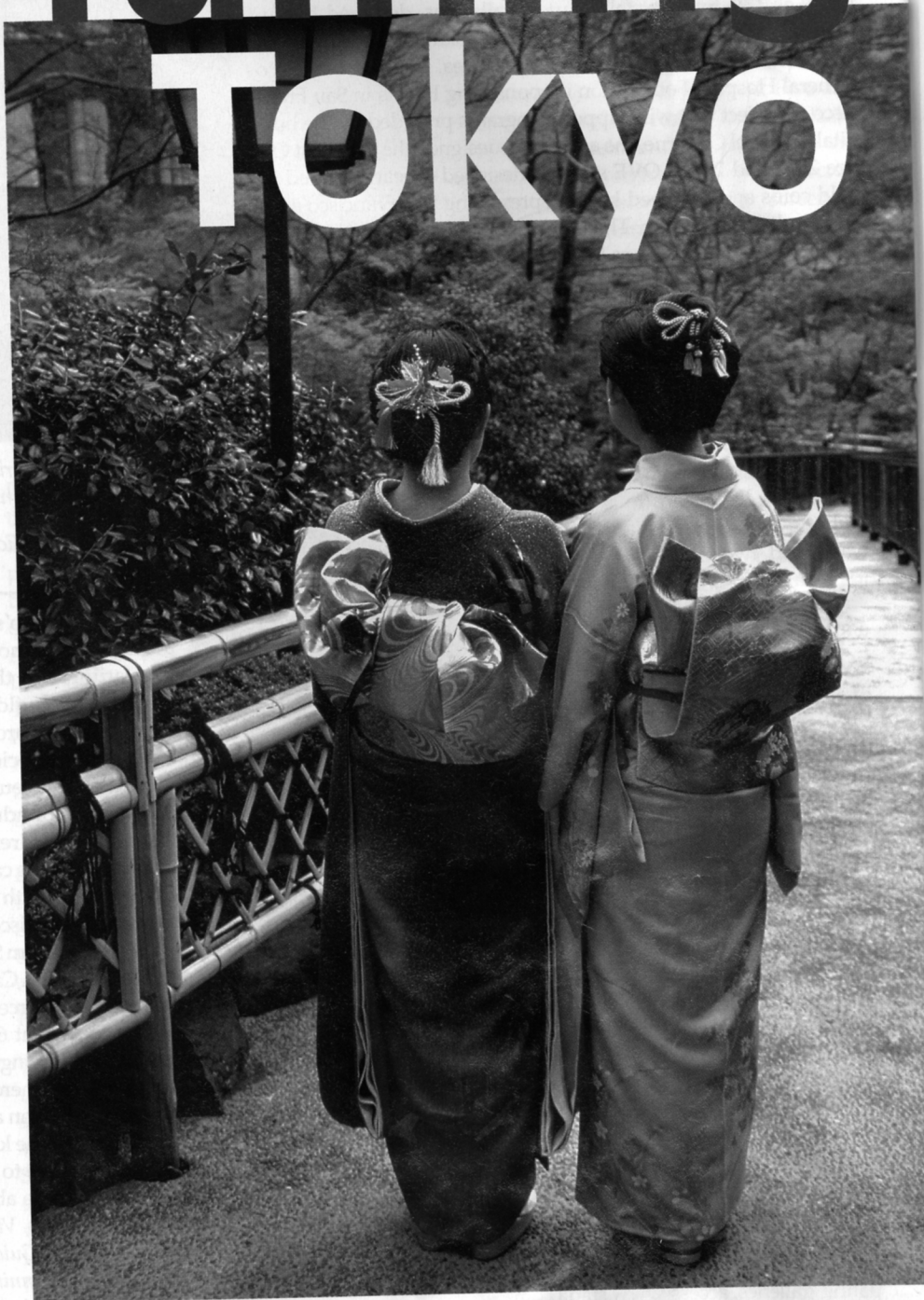
If this is your year to experience this bustling city, make the experience more manageable. Avoid visiting in August and early September when the combination of humid heat and teeming crowds shows the city at less than its best. Keep in mind that, throughout the year, weather conditions within each day can be very changeable and an umbrella could be one of your best friends during a (hopefully) brief downpour.

Be prepared to venture several hours outside of the city if you're looking for natural wonders and visual aspects of traditional Japan. If time is short, remember that the Bullet Train can speed you to Hiroshima on a route that includes stops in Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Himeji, Okayama and Kurashiki.

Avoid taxis, opting for airport shuttles, trains and buses. The taxi fare from Narita to central hotels can be close to \$200. One-trip subway fares start at about \$1.50-2.80; an open ticket, covering a day's travel, is under \$10; a Tokyo Combination ticket, under \$15, covers subway, streetcar, bus and some rail travel. Rail and subway signs are in both English and Japanese, though side street signs are rare and directions are usually given using landmarks as guides.

Try to adapt to local dining customs. Your reward will be healthy meals at reasonable cost. If you try to eat as at home, your budget will feel the pinch. Allotting \$8-15 for lunch and \$20-30 for dinner gives you choices including bento boxes (a selection of treats from sashimi to grilled salmon potato cakes), tonkatsu (tender pork cutlet), tempura, and chicken yakatori. Restaurants near Tsukiji, the city's main fish market, have reasonably priced and strikingly fresh sushi and sashimi. The Food Show, in the basement of Tokyu department store at Shibuya Station, has 80 vendors serving tempting hot and cold dishes.

# Taming Tokyo



Consider booking a city tour for your first day in Tokyo to help get oriented and discover places to explore in more depth during the rest of your stay. Most tours visit the futuristic Roppongi Hills ([www.roppongihills.com](http://www.roppongihills.com)), but with 53 stories of attractions including an observatory and an art museum, you'd need many days to see it all. Roppongi Hills is so vast (and popular) that no less than three companies

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offer lengthy English-speaking tours at prices ranging from about \$14-23.

For special events such as Kabuki or Noh performances, book tickets before you leave home. Tokyo nightlife is almost frantic in its intensity with most entertainment offerings either jam-packed or sold-out well before performance dates.

In Japan's major cities, English is a popular second language, though tourists who speak a few phrases in Japanese are greatly appreciated. It is also good to engage in a little research on the country before you travel to understand geographical basics (such as knowing the island of Honshu forms mainland Japan) and cultural mores (take time to be polite; abrupt communication can be considered insulting).

Tokyo can be eye-opening to people who believe America is the most technologically advanced country in the world. You'll see Japan's accomplishments in little things (bathroom mirrors kept fog-free) and in major ways (precise, high-speed trains that can make you think you've stepped into a brighter future).

Japan's maglev train, the world's fastest, travels at a top speed of 500 kilometers per hour on its 18.4-kilometer test track in Tsuru, just west of Tokyo. Its record speed is 581 kilometers per hour. Running along an electromagnetic guideway as it floats 10 centimeters above the track, its safety record is spotless and it has been called the future of mass transit. A struggling economy and concerns that the maglev train uses more fuel than the Bullet Train is slowing down progress, but travel on a proposed Tokyo-Osaka route would take one hour, versus the 2.5 hours the Bullet Train requires.

## Vacation Packages

One of the key ways to make a Tokyo vacation more manageable is to look into packages from bargain sources such as Go-Today ([www.gotoday.com](http://www.gotoday.com)) and Pacific Delight Tours ([www.pacificdelighttours.com](http://www.pacificdelighttours.com)). Inclusions can make these packages impressive values.

Other bargain sources include Escapes Unlimited ([www.escapesltd.com](http://www.escapesltd.com), 800-243-7227) with a \$949 per person/double package that includes roundtrip travel from Los Angeles via award-winning Singapore Air-

lines and five nights at the five-star Hilton Tokyo in the vibrant Shinjuku neighborhood. The package also provides roundtrip airport-hotel transfers and a half-day city tour. The price applies to travel through June 5. Air travel taxes and fees are additional. Add \$50 for weekend travel. Added nights are \$85 per person, per night, and the single supplement is \$399.

JAL and Japan Railway (now marketed as JR) have a JR East Package priced from \$1,331 per person/double. The seven-day/five-night vacation includes roundtrip airfare from Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Vancouver; four nights at Tokyo's Keio Plaza Hotel in Shinjuku; one night at Shosenkaku Kagetsu Inn in Nigataat (or your choice of another hot springs inn) with breakfast and dinner in-



cluded; roundtrip rail travel between Tokyo and the resort; airport-hotel transfers; and a \$65 dinner coupon you can use at the Keio Plaza Hotel. Add-on fares are available for departures from Chicago and New York. Honolulu departures are available at lower cost. For more information, access [www.japanair.com](http://www.japanair.com).

E.E.I. Travel ([www.eeittravel.com](http://www.eeittravel.com)) offers three opportunities to see not only Tokyo but more. Per person/double rates that follow are for Los Angeles departures. Other hotel options and departure cities are available at added cost.

Bangkok & Tokyo Supersaver from \$979 includes roundtrip travel into Bangkok and out of Tokyo; roundtrip airport-hotel transfers in Bangkok and three hotel nights with daily breakfast included; a half-day Bangkok city tour; air travel from Bangkok to Tokyo; and three hotel nights in Tokyo, including hotel taxes and

service charges. The basic package provides lodging at Bangkok's Manhattan Hotel and Tokyo's Shinagawa Prince Hotel (Annex).

If you want to see Japan in an escorted tour, prices rise considerably. The Japan Explorer Supersaver starts at \$2,599. It includes roundtrip air travel into Tokyo and out of Osaka; meet and transfer to your hotel in Tokyo (three nights' lodging); a half-day city tour and a full-day excursion to Hakone (including a drive half-way up Mt. Fuji and continuing train from Odawara Station to Kyoto on the Bullet Train); four nights accommodation in Kyoto; a half-day city tour and an overnight tour to Hiroshima/Kurashiki; rail travel back to Kyoto; return transfer to the airport for your flight home; and hotel

service charges and taxes. The basic package provides lodging at the Kyoto Dai-Ni Tower Hotel and Tokyo's Shinagawa Prince Hotel (Annex).

Asia Explorer (another escorted tour) starts at \$2,749. It includes roundtrip air travel into Tokyo (continuing to Beijing) and out of Bangkok; one-way flights from Beijing to Xian, from Xian to Hong Kong and Hong Kong to Bangkok; all airport transfers; three hotel nights each in Tokyo and Beijing; two hotel nights each in Xian and Bangkok; an English-speaking guide for all sightseeing

tours; all entrance fees; a total of 12 meals, including daily breakfast; hotel taxes and service charges and baggage handling. The basic package provides lodging at Bangkok's Ambassador Hotel, Best Western Beijing, Newton Hotel Hong Kong and Tokyo's Shinagawa Prince Hotel (Tower).

The lowest prices require a 22-day advance purchase. Air travel taxes and fees are additional. Packages cannot be refunded or changed once purchased.

If you decide to book your travel components separately, do some internet research on budget hotels, keeping in mind that the vastness of Tokyo can make location very important. "Business hotels" generally designate small, bare bones accommodations not, as in the U.S., high-amenity properties.

For more information on Tokyo, access [www.tcvb.or.jp](http://www.tcvb.or.jp).