

Japan Travel Recommendations

Prior to travel, get a QR code from [Visit Japan Travel](#) to speed up immigration process

5 apps you should download:

- Suica - transit
- GO - taxi app
- EX - Tokaido Sanyo Kyushu Shinkansen booking
- Tablelog - restaurant reviews

Transportation from the airport

From Narita Airport: The easiest way to get into downtown Tokyo from Narita airport is to take the Limousine bus which takes about 1 hr 30 mins. Immediately after exiting baggage claim, you will see the Limo bus counter. They have frequent buses going to all areas of downtown Tokyo, so just buy a ticket (~\$30 adult, \$15 child), head outside, find the location for your bus, and get in line. They will tag and load your luggage and bring you straight to your hotel.

The fastest way to get from Narita Airport to Tokyo city is by train, taking about an hour. There are two main train operators that offer services from Narita Airport: Narita Express / N'EX (JR East) and Keisei Skyliner (Keisei Electric Railway). The Japan Rail Pass permits you free use of the Narita Express, so if you've purchased one, you should opt for this option. Also, the Keisei Skyliner terminates at Keisei-Ueno station so, depending on where you are staying, you may need to transfer trains. Narita Express offers direct, same-train service to Shinjuku, Shinagawa, and a few other locations in downtown Tokyo.

From Haneda Airport: Haneda is much closer to downtown Tokyo so if you are traveling as a family with luggage, a taxi might be your best option and will cost you about ¥8,000 (\$55 USD). The Limousine bus is also an easy alternative. If it isn't rush hour, the train is also very accessible from the airport.

Shinkansen/Train/Subway within Japan

Japan Rail Pass - a special fare ticket that is available only to travelers visiting Japan from foreign countries for sightseeing. There are 7-day, 14-day, and 21 day passes. This pass must be purchased BEFORE coming to Japan. Use the [Rail Pass Calculator](#) to see if it makes sense for you.

PASMO or Suica - instead of buying a subway/train ticket each time, buy an IC card and just load some money on it. It will make your life much easier!

Connectivity

If your phone plan does not offer a good international plan, an eSim, pre-paid SIM card, or pocket wifi are the best options.

eSim: yesim (download from app store, select plan, purchase and install)

Prepaid sim card: Japan Wireless (<https://www.japan-wireless.com/>).

Download the app "Japan Wi-Fi auto-connect" (icon shown below), which will automatically connect you to any free wifi available when you travel.

Hotels in Tokyo

I would recommend staying in Shibuya, Shinjuku, Marounouchi, or Roppongi (in that order). Shibuya and Shinjuku offer the greatest convenience in terms of trains, food, and ease of taking day trips. Many of the luxury hotels are in the Marounouchi area, which is also close to the Imperial Palace and Tokyo Station, but lacks a neighborhood feel since it's Tokyo's business and financial district. Roppongi is an interesting neighborhood with lots of food and shopping options, but is less convenient for train access and day trips.

Some notable hotels by location:

Shibuya hotels

- [Trunk Hotel](#) - boutique hotel in Shibuya
- [Shibuya Excel Hotel](#) – in the heart of Shibuya so great access to other areas and shopping
- [Cerulean Tower Tokyu Hotel](#) - 5 min walk to Shibuya Station, but quieter neighborhood

Shinjuku hotels

- [Park Hyatt](#) - one of the most iconic luxury hotels in the world, made famous for it's role in Lost in Translation
- [Hyatt Regency Tokyo](#) - recently renovated hotel in West Shinjuku
- [Kimpton Shinjuku Tokyo](#) - chic boutique hotel near Shinjuku Station
- [Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo](#) - 7 min walk from Shinjuku Station

Marunouchi hotels

- [Hoshinoya Tokyo](#) - vertical ryokan in the middle of Otemachi—wear a yukata throughout, take your meals as kaiseki, and soak in a rooftop onsen under the open sky.
- [Palace Hotel Tokyo](#) - direct connection to the Tokyo rail network (great for day trips), rooms overlooking the Imperial Palace moat
- [Tokyo Station Hotel](#) - housed inside the landmark 1914 red-brick Tokyo Station building.
- [Aman Tokyo](#) - in Tokyo's financial district. Close to the Imperial Palace and Tokyo Station. Magnificent views including the Imperial Palace Gardens and Mt Fuji.
- [The Peninsula Tokyo](#) - in Tokyo's upscale Marunouchi district.
- [Imperial](#) – oldest luxury hotel in Tokyo, opened in 1890; near Ginza and Hibiya

Roppongi hotels

- [Grand Hyatt Roppongi](#) - large full-service hotel
- [Mitsui Garden Hotel Roppongi Tokyo Premier](#) - newer boutique hotel

Akasaka/Toranomon hotels

- [Andaz Tokyo Toranomon Hotel](#) - located between Tokyo Tower and the Imperial Palace. Elegant mid-century Japanese design.

- [Hotel Okura](#) – luxury hotel in Tokyo's central Toranomom district that opened in 1962
- [The Capitol Hotel Tokyu](#) - designed by famous Japanese architect Kengo Kuma (contemporary Japanese décor)
- [ANA Hotel Tokyo](#) - central location; 10 mins from Akasaka and Roppongi where there are tons of restaurants

Other

- [Westin Tokyo](#) - located near Ebisu Garden; 10 min walk from Ebisu Station (Yamanote line)
- [The Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo](#)
- [Hotel Gajoen Tokyo](#) - small luxury hotel in Meguro with beautiful Japanese pre-war art

Asakusa area

- Sensoji Temple (Address: Taito Ku, 2-3-1, Asakusa Kannon no Senso-ji) – note that it is extremely crowded on weekends.
- Nakamise dori street - stretches from the outer gate to the temple's second gate. The street is lined with shops selling souvenirs, handicrafts, as well as local Japanese street food.
- Day cruises are available in the nearby Sumida river. The Tokyo water bus also connects historical Asakusa to the relatively newly developed Odaiba area.
- Kappabashi street – this street is full of ceramics/dish stores and caters to restaurants, so prices are very reasonable. They have beautiful Japanese tableware, tea sets, platters, nabe pots, etc.
- Tokyo Skytree - the world's tallest free-standing broadcasting tower at 634m. You may want to reserve tickets in advance.
- Dining –
 - [Imahambekkan](#) (今半 別館)-sukiyaki
 - [Akashi](#) – tempura (small and no reservations; usually a wait)
 - [Sugimoto Honten](#) (スギモト本店 東京スカイツリータウン・ソラマチ店) - sukiyaki
 - [Kura Sushi](#) - [largest conveyor belt sushi in Tokyo](#)

Tsukiji/Ginza/Marunouchi area

- Tsukiji Market
The old Tsukiji market had an inner market and an outer market. The inner market closed in October 2018 and moved (it's now called Toyosu Market). The outer market still exists in the old location and is filled with food stalls and restaurants. I haven't been to the new Toyosu market so I can't tell you if it's worth the trip. I have heard from friends that there is very limited access for visitors and there's not much to see anymore. But if you want to see the famous tuna auction, it's at the inner market in Toyosu. Here's a link that provides some description of it: [Tokyo Travel: Toyosu Fish Market](#). For the tuna auction, I heard you have to arrive at about 3am to apply for entry at the Osakana Fukyu Center (Fish Information Center) at the Kachidoki Gate. At 5am, they will take the first 60 people.

- A fun way to get from the Tsukiji area to Asakusa is to take the water bus (<http://www.yurikamome.tokyo/facilities/148/>) at Hama-rikyu Gardens (about a 10 minute walk from Tsukiji market). The garden used to be the family garden of the Tokugawa Shogun. There is a 5-10 minute walk through the garden to reach the water bus.
- Kabuki-za - the principal theater in Tokyo for the traditional kabuki drama form. There are morning shows and afternoon shows, so most people only go to one of those (otherwise, I think it's close to 5 hours). Also, there are "day-of" tickets, where the tickets are substantially discounted, but the seats may not be the best. Normal ticket prices are around \$150, but you can get a "day-of" ticket and watch one scene for \$15.
- Imperial Palace - Guided tours of the palace grounds are offered, but no buildings are entered (I believe the tours are only in Japanese). Advance reservations can be made through the Imperial Household Agency. The East Gardens of Imperial Palace are open to the public without reservations.
- Ginza – lots of high-end shopping and restaurants.
- [Suigan](#) - watch an abridged noh drama while being served delicious food, sake wine, Japanese tea, and sweets from the Edo, Meiji, and Taisho periods. Prices range from ¥5,000 to ¥12,000 per person, depending on seat selection. This price does not include food.
- Dining --
 - [Yurakucho dining district](#) – tons of restaurants under the train tracks -- restaurants extend for a few hundred meters both north and south of the station, and run nearly all the way to Tokyo Station in the neighboring Marunouchi district. Good place to find an authentic izakaya and get some yakitori.
 - [Shin-Hinomoto](#) (a.k.a. Andy's) - a popular place (especially among expats) under the train tracks. Food is very good (great fresh seafood-amazing crab legs, sashimi, braised fish, etc.) and affordable. Try their grapefruit sour - squeeze fresh grapefruit juice into your shochu and soda water
 - [Tokyo Ramen Street at Tokyo Station](#)
 - [Ryugin](#) - excellent 3 Michelin star kaiseki restaurant in Hibiya Midtown
 - [Sushi Dai](#) - sushi restaurant in Tsukiji
 - [Tempura Yama-no-ue Ginza](#) – nice tempura restaurant
 - [Imahan](#) – fantastic sukiyaki
 - [L'Osier](#) - French fine dining with 3 Michelin stars. Beautifully presented and delicious course meals.

Harajuku/Omotosando/Shibuya area

- Harajuku - Takeshita-dori is a great place to walk around and people watch on Sundays where you'll see some extreme Japanese fashion.
- Omotesando – adjacent to Harajuku, Omotesando is known as Tokyo's Champs-Elysees.
- Meiji Shrine (Meiji Jingu) is a Shinto shrine located just west of Harajuku. It's also adjacent to Yoyogi Park, which is fun during the weekends because there are lots of street performers.

- Nezu Museum- small but beautiful museum which has a collection of East Asian artwork that includes various objects from Japan, China and Korea. They also have a very nice garden and cafe.
- Shibuya – one of Tokyo’s busiest areas and is a center for youth fashion and culture. It’s mainly a shopping area, so not much to really see. A prominent landmark of Shibuya is the large intersection (Shibuya crossing), which is just beyond the Hachiko statue. Hachiko is a famous loyal dog who waited for his master every day in front of Shibuya Station, and continued to do so for years even after his master had passed away. It is one of Tokyo's most popular meeting points.
- [Shibuya Sky](#) - new building with a birds-eye view of Shibuya Scramble
- Dining –
 - [Umeagaoka Sushi no Midori-Sohonten](#) – good value sushi, but really long wait typically about 2 hrs (get there early, pick up a number, then go shopping); located in Mark City.
 - [Maimon Sushi](#) - conveyor belt sushi; 7th floor of Shibuya Parco
 - [Tsukiji Tama Sushi Sasashigure](#) - well-priced sushi in Omotesando
 - [Oreryu Shio-Ramen](#) - wide selection of ramen; look for the orange sign (the name is in Japanese only); 6 Chome-9-14 Jingumae, Shibuya City, Tokyo 150-0001
 - [Cicada](#) - Mediterranean food; 5 Chome-7-28 Minamiaoyama, Minato City, Tokyo 107-0062
 - [Afuli](#) Harajuku – ramen
 - [Denkushiflori](#) - chefs from 2-Michelin starred restaurants Den and Florilège collaborate for this restaurant
 - Bepocah (<http://www.bepocah.com/en/index.html>) - Peruvian food
 - Kaikaya by the Sea (<http://www.kaikaya.com/>) - izakaya
 - Two Rooms Grill | Bar (<https://tworooms.jp/en/>) - nice views, stylish space
 - Fluffy pancakes: [Flippers](#), [A Happy Pancake](#), [Burn Side St Cafe](#)

Hiroo/Roppongi/Midtown/Akasaka

- Roppongi/Roppongi Hills - a district in Tokyo that is well known as the city's most popular nightlife district among foreigners. A lot of expats live in this area. Lots of restaurants and shops. There are also 3 museums: The National Art Center (Japan's largest art museum), Mori Art Museum, and Tokyo Midtown's Suntory Museum of Art. Exhibits change so check their websites.
- Midtown – high-end area with luxury shops and restaurants.
- Tokyo Tower - used to be the world's tallest self-supporting steel tower, but that title now belongs to Skytree. It's 9 meters taller than its model, the Eiffel Tower.
- [Teamlab Borderless Exhibit](#) - very fun light exhibit from Mori; very popular so purchase tickets online in advance; located in Toranomom-Azabudai
- Dining –
 - [Butagumi Tonkatsu](#) – best tonkatsu (pork cutlet)
 - [Suju Masayuki](#) - great lunch spot with casual Japanese cuisine in Tokyo Midtown
 - [Ningyocho Imahan Tokyo Garden Terrace Kioicho](#) - sukiyaki and shabu shabu

- [Roppongi Robotaya](#) - The chef sits on a deck and you point at what you want for him to scoop up (seafood, beef, veggies) on a huge wooden paddle and cook it right before your eyes and is served back to you on the same paddle. Very lively and unique setting. Omakase meals are pretty pricey, so if you go with kids, probably want to get a la carte.
- [Gonpachi](#) - Kill Bill scene filmed here
- [Ryugin](#) – 3 Michelin star Japanese restaurant with course meal
- [Matsukan](#) - Authentic Edomae Sushi in Azabu Jyuban
- [Shabuzen](#) - Shabu shabu and sukiyaki
- [Tori Yoshi](#) - yakitori; open for dinner only
- [Soba Mae Yamato](#) - soba and other dishes; locations in Roppongi and Azabudai
- [Umaya](#) - izakaya
- [Aji no Nakamura](#) - izakaya in Hiroo
- [Ode](#) - 1 Michelin star restaurant with innovative French cuisine
- [Warakiya Akasaka](#) - izakaya specializing in straw grilled foods.
- [Uoshins Nogizaka](#) - casual izakaya featuring fresh seafood
- [Afuri Ramen](#) - ramen, multiple locations

Daikanyama/Nakameguro/Ebisu area

- Daikanyama – Our neighborhood. This area has lots of interesting small boutique shops, cafes and restaurants.
 - Tsutaya bookstore is worth a visit and is ranked one of twenty most beautiful bookstores in the world.
 - Kyu Asakura House - beautiful 1919 house and expansive gardens; an excellent example of Taisho period architecture and landscaping.
- Nakameguro – from Daikanyama, you can stroll down to the Meguro river, which is lined with cherry trees. During Christmas season, they light up the trees and it's quite beautiful. Again, there are really cute shops and restaurants lining the small streets.
- Ebisu – an area renowned for its high concentration of bars and restaurants. Located in Ebisu, Yebisu Garden Place is a shopping and cultural center. It has a sloped promenade leading to a large central plaza covered by a wide glass arch.
- Dining --
 - [Gohanya Isshin](#) - (Daikanyama) great lunch spot with meal sets; dinner is more of a modern izakaya
 - [KushiWakaMaru](#) - (Nakameguro) very casual, typical yakitori restaurant with english menu
 - [Udon Yamacho](#) - (Ebisu) thick chewy udon noodles
 - [Wari Road](#) - famous for tsukemen (ramen with dipping sauce)
 - [Beef Kitchen](#) - (Ebisu) - casual but nice yakiniku restaurant
 - [Sushi Matsue](#) – (Ebisu) reasonably priced but very good sushi restaurant/bar
 - [Uoshin 魚真 恵比寿店](#) - (Ebisu) casual seafood izakaya; Japanese menu only
 - [Toriyoshi](#) – (Nakameguro) yakitori

- [Tonkatsu Tonki](#) - (Meguro) popular tonkatsu place in Meguro (personally, I thought it was too greasy)
- [Ten Masa](#) – (Meguro) one Michelin star restaurant serving a kaiseki meal, specializes in tempura
- [Higashi-Yama](#)- (Nakameguro) modern kaiseki
- [Tacubo](#) - Italian fine dining
- [Restorante Yagi](#) - (Daikanyama) elegant refined Italian cuisine
- [Recte](#) - (Daikanyama) 1 Michelin star small French restaurant with emphasis on meat preparation
- [Seirinkan](#) – (Nakameguro) known for their pizzas (only two options: margherita and marinara); featured on the show “Ugly Delicious” with Chef David Chang.
- [Craftale](#)– (Nakameguro) creative French fine dining with one Michelin star
- [Sal y Amor](#) - (Daikanyama) small Spanish restaurant
- [Abyssse](#) - (Daikanyama) - 1 Michelin star restaurant featuring a seafood course dinner
- [Starbucks Reserve Roastery Tokyo](#)

Shinjuku area

- Metropolitan Government Building - free observation deck; projection mapping shows in the evenings
- Samurai Museum and Ninja Trick House
- Drinks at Park Hyatt Hotel – film Lost in Translation was filmed here
- [Shinjuku Gyoen](#) – park
- Kabukicho - red light district
- Shin Okubo - Koreatown
- Kagurazaka - a large variety of French cafes and restaurants can be found throughout the district; many quaint cobblestone alleys
- Dining –
 - Omoide Yokocho (memory lane), aka Piss Alley - area filled with yakitori and izakayas
 - Golden Gai - over 200 tiny bars
 - [Kohaku](#) - excellent 3 Michelin star kaiseki restaurant near lidabashi station
 - [Kyubey](#) - sushi-ya; original location in Ginza
 - [Numazukou](#) - kaiten sushi (conveyor belt sushi)
 - [Fūunji Shinjuku](#) - tsukemen dipping noodles
 - [Ninja Restaurant](#)
 - [Le Clos Montmartre](#) - cute French bistro in the Kagurazaka area of Shinjuku

Yokohama area

- Cup-a-Noodle museum - I did this with the kids and it was really fun! The main museum is interesting, but not too exciting. The fun part is the chicken noodle factory "tour". This is where you will get to make and package your own ramen. You need to make a reservation for this because it fills up (<http://www.cupnoodles-museum.jp/attraction/06.html>). The reservation process is confusing, but with google translate, you can make it work.

- Ramen Museum - museum and food court
- Yokohama Chinatown - it's small, but nice and fairly close to the Cup-a-Noodle museum.
- Motomachi – shopping street highly influenced by foreigners and has a European feel.
- Red Brick Warehouse - historical building with shops

Other activities / dining

- Hikes:
 - [Mt. Takao](#) followed by lunch at Ukai Toriyama
 - [Todoroki Valley](#) - short wooded valley with temple
 - [Mt. Mitake](#) - one of the many highlights of the Chichibu-Tama-Kai National Park, which covers more than 1250 square kilometers of forested mountains, hills, gorges. Can be reached in less than two hours from central Tokyo.
- Japanese baseball games are a blast. It's very different from the games in the U.S., so it's a fun experience.
- Sumo tournaments (honbasho) are a very interesting experience, but are held only once each season, so timing may not work out. If you can visit a sumo stable (where they practice), that's an incredible experience where you are about 10-20 ft away from you.
- [Teamlab Planets Exhibit](#) - body immersive artworks where you walk through water, and a garden where you become one with the flowers; very popular so purchase tickets online in advance; located in Odaiba
- Visit the old town of [Yanaka](#) - Tokyo's most traditional district with a temple-town feel, narrow streets, wooden houses and plenty of back alleys to explore, the mix of genuine old spots and their retro-style neighbors is interesting to explore. Located north of Ueno (Nippori station).
- Edo-Tokyo Museum – in the Sumida area
- Yakatabune Dinner Cruise Tour

Day/Weekend trips from Tokyo

- **Kamakura** is about an hour away from Tokyo by train. There are numerous temples, shrines and other historical monuments, such as the Great Buddha, Hasadera Temple, Hokokuji Temple, Kenchoji Temple, etc. This is a very easy day trip.
- **Hakone** is about 85 mins away from Tokyo by train. It's famous for it's hot springs (onsens), open air museum, and the view of nearby Mt. Fuji.
 - Transportation -- You can take the Romance Car from Shinjuku station (<http://www.odakyu.jp/english/romancecar/>)
You may want to reserve round-trip tickets in advance as these get filled up, especially on weekends.
 - Lodging -- I would suggest staying in Hakone overnight so you can relax, go sight-seeing, and enjoy the onsens.
 - Hakone Ginyu (<http://www.hakoneginyu.co.jp/>) is very nice, but difficult to get a reservation.

- Hyatt Regency Hakone is also nice, with big rooms for the family.
- Gora Kada (<http://www.gorakadan.com/en/gorakadan/guestroom/index.html>) - famous old hotel; expensive
- Activities --
 - A great way to see the views in Hakone is to do the Hakone Ropeway, which is an aerial tram with great views and it takes you to a Lake Ashi, where you can take a cruise around the lake (<http://www.hakone-kankosen.co.jp/foreign/en/index.html>).
 - Open Air Museum – really nice museum to visit on a nice day. They have a small Picasso exhibit too.
 - Hakone Shrine
 - Lake Ashi and the town of Hakone
 - Gotemba shopping outlet is about a 20 drive from Hakone
- Dining –
 - If you stay in a ryokan, usually there are meals with your stay plan
 - One of the most iconic restaurants in Hakone is Gora Kadan where you can have a wonderful kaiseki meal. It's pricey so you may want to go for lunch.
 - [La Terrazza](#) - Italian restaurant near Lake Ashi with nice views; great for lunch on a sunny day. They also have very good gelato (recommend pistachio flavor)!
 - [Maison Kei](#) - French restaurant in Gotemba with an amazing view of Mt. Fuji; book for sunset time
 - [Toraya Kobo](#) - Japanese confectionary shop with beautiful garden
 - [Kikukawa Gotemba](#) (きくかわ 御殿場店) - famous unagi restaurant

· **Nikko** is a small city in Japan's Tochigi Prefecture, about 2.5 hrs away from central Tokyo. It's the site of Toshogu, the famed Shinto shrine established in 1617 as a lavish memorial for Tokugawa Ieyasu, founding ruler of the Tokugawa shogunate, or Edo Period. The Shinkyo Bridge (神橋, Shinkyō, "sacred bridge") stands at the entrance to Nikko's shrines and temples, and technically belongs to Futarasan Shrine. The bridge is ranked as one of Japan's three finest bridges.

- Lodging --
 - [Ritz Carlton Nikko](#) - just opened July 2020; luxury hotel with onsen
 - [Hoshino Resorts KAI Nikko](#) - ryokan-type hotel with great views

· **Karuizawa** is about 90 mins away from Tokyo by train. It's known as a mountain resort town that many Tokyo residents flock to in the summer to escape from the heat.

- Transportation -- Hokuriku-Shinkansen from Tokyo Station
- Lodging - we stayed at Kyu Karuizawa Hotel (<https://www.kyukaruizawa-kikyo.com/>); nice, small, centrally located hotel.
- Activities - there's a cute small town. Nice area to walk around or bike to.

· **Nakasendo Trail (Magome to Tsumago)** is the route that connected Tokyo to Kyoto during the Edo Period. It's a 8.3 km walk between the two postal towns in the Kiso Valley.

- Transportation -- Take the shinkansen to Nagoya → take a local train (Shinano Limited Express is the fastest) to Nakatsugawa Station → Magome Bus

- Lodging -- very limited options so book in advance
 - Inn Tajimaya (approx \$180 per night; includes dinner and breakfast); most popular and central
 - Magome Chaya Hotel - simple traditional rooms with futon bedding and a tatami-mat floor; meals available if reserved in advance; 20-30 min walk from central Magome
- Activities --
 - Quaint charming town with lots of small shops
 - Tatebajaya tea house
 - Otaki and Metaki waterfalls
 - Wakihonjin - construction based on castle architecture
- Dining –
 - This area is known for soba, dango, grilled mochi, and chestnut (when in season)
 - Masuya for soba in Magome
 - Fujioto in Tsumago

Multi-Day Trips from Tokyo

Combine Kawaguchiko with Hakone (see Hakone section above)

Approximately 1 hour 45 min by car from central Tokyo (not very accessible via trains). Spend 1 night/2days in Kawaguchiko, then drive about 1 hr 15 mins to Hakone.

- Attractions:
 - Lake Kawaguchiko
 - Mount Kachi Kachi Ropeway - great view of Mt Fuji
 - Arakurayama Sengen Shrine - panoramic views of Mt Fuji from the top and 5-storied pagoda
 - Aokigahara-jukai forest (aka suicide forest) and lava caves (e.g. Fugaku Wind Cave and the Narusawa Ice Cave)
- Lodging:
 - [Fufu Kawaguchiko](#)- onsen hotel with beautiful views of Mt. Fuji
 - [Hoshinoya Fuji](#) - luxury glamping with prime views of Mt. Fuji
 - [Rakuyu Ryokan](#) - moderately priced ryokan in central Kawaguchiko
- Dining
 - This area is known for hoto, which consists of wide noodles freshly made from kneaded flour, served with seasonal vegetables and meat cooked in a miso-flavored soup. There are many restaurants that serve this.
 - Fuji-mabushi - rice cooked with quality sockeye salmon or rainbow trout from Lake Sai.

Kanazawa

Approximately 3.5 hours from central Tokyo. On the coast of the Japan Sea, Kanazawa is one of the best-preserved historical cities in Japan. During the Edo Period (1603-1868), Kanazawa was one of Japan's most powerful cities, as home to the Maeda Clan. Thankfully, the city was spared air raids

during World War II, leaving much of the old city intact. Kanazawa is renowned for its geisha and samurai districts, the iconic Kenrokuen stroll garden, and some of Japan's highest-quality seafood.

- Attractions:
 - Kanazawa castle, Kenrokuen, Seisonkaku villa
 - Higashi Chaya District (tea district)
 - Myouryuji Temple (Ninja Temple) and Nagamachi Samurai District
 - 21 Century Museum
 - Suzuki Taisetsu Museum (prominent Buddhist philosopher)
- Lodging:
 - [Kanazawa Yuwa Onsen Hyakurakusou](#) - onsen ryokan about 30 mins outside the city center. Spend one night to start or end the trip.
 - [Mitsui Garden Hotel Kanazawa](#) - nice onsen hotel very central to all the major sites in Kanazawa.
 - [Asadaya](#) - historic luxury ryokan in central Kanazawa
- Dining (Kanazawa is known for having the freshest seafood in all of Japan)
 - [Zeniya](#) - 2 Michelin starred sushi restaurant (~¥25,000 per person)
 - [Otome Sushi](#) - 1 Michelin starred sushi restaurant (~¥18,000 per person)
 - [Gorohachi Izakaya](#) - variety of dishes including sashimi, grilled dishes, simmered dishes, fried dishes
 - [Itaru Honten](#) - izakaya similar to Gorohachi
 - [Sushi Mitsukawa](#) - (~¥18,000 per person)
 - [Sushi Asanogawa](#) - (~¥15,000 per person)
 - [Plat Home](#) - contemporary blend of Japanese and western cuisines prepared with locally sourced seasonal ingredients.
 - [Levo](#) at Garaku Toyama - Toyama is the station right before Kanazawa when taking the shinkansen. A beautiful city, but less historic sights. The resort's main restaurant, Levo, is a work of art (and surprisingly affordable, probably because of the location). One option is to spend a night here and then continue to Kanazawa.
- Side trips from Kanazawa:
 - [Shirakawago](#) - a World Cultural Heritage site with gassho style farm houses, some of which are more than 250 years old. You can also stay overnight in one of the old [farmhouses](#). Get there via bus or renting a car.

· **Hida-Takayama** –

About 3.5 hours southeast of Kanazawa; has a similar vibe to Kyoto, but smaller and a bit less touristy. It's about a 4.5 hour train ride from Tokyo. There is a beautifully preserved old town with building and houses from the Edo period. Sake is a local specialty and several old sake breweries can be found in Takayama's old town. They are also known for their hida-beef. Most hotels/ryokans also have onsens, which are great to relax in after a long day out.

- Accommodations: Honjin Hiranoya Bekkan
(https://selected-ryokan.com/ryokan/honjin-hiranoya-bekkan_hida-takayama_gifu_nagoya-chubu-hokuriku.html) - modern ryokan
- Side trips from Takayama:

- [Shirakawago](#) - a World Cultural Heritage site with gassho style farm houses, some of which are more than 250 years old. You can also stay overnight in one of the old [farmhouses](#). Get there via bus or renting a car. Location is between Takayama and Kanazawa.

Ise | Matsusaka | Toba | Shima | Nagoya

Approximately 4 hours from central Tokyo or 2 hours from Kyoto. Located on the Shima Peninsula in Mie Prefecture.

- Attractions:
 - Ise Jinju/Shrine - Japan's most sacred Shinto shrines.
 - Start at the Outer Shrine (Geku)
 - Oharai-machi - area filled with restaurants, souvenir shops, and marchant stores. Try local specialties including akafuku (a snack made from sweet mochi and red bean paste), Butasute Croquette (mince meat croquette), Fukusuke Ise Udon (lighter and fluffier)
 - Okage Yokochō (Edo style townscape)
 - Uji Bridge to Neiku (inner shrine)
 - Matsusaka City - 15 min train ride from Ise; known for its beef and trademark indigo cotton
 - Gojouban Yashiki - an old town of samurai residences
 - Ruins of Matsusaka Castle
 - Former Ozu Residence (Matsusaka Merchant Museum) - built around 1700
 - Dining: Matsusaka beef - cattle are raised, and treated to full-body massages and beer that reportedly help give the meat its soft texture and rich marbling; Isshobin Miyamachi Ten (moderately priced Yakiniku); Wadakin Sukiyaki (expensive)
 - Toba
 - [Mikimoto Pearl Island](#) - ama diver demonstration; pearl museum- learn all about the cultured pearl industry; make your own pearl jewelry at Miekken Pearl (三重県真珠)
 - Toshijima - fishing island off of Toba (20 mins by ferry); explore fish market, small alleys, and eat in an amagoya (hut).
 - Toba Aquarium
 - Hinjitsukan (former guesthouse built in 1887)
 - Meoto Iwa (Wedded Rocks)
 - Dining:
 - 3 famous Ama (women divers) huts in the Toba/Shima area - [Hachiman-Kamado](#), Osatsu Kamado, Satoumi-an
 - All you can eat oysters (winter time) - Uramura area / “oyster road”
 - Shima - coastal city off of Ago Bay
 - Shima Spain Village; ride the Esperanza, a ship modeled after a Spanish pirate ship
 - Ninja kingdom
 - Stay at Shima Kanko Hotel The Bay Suites

- Nagoya and Nabana-no-sato
 - Nagoya Castle
 - [Nabana-no-sato](#) - flower park with tunnel of lights; illumination starts at 6:40PM

Kyoto

- An article that provides a snapshot of each area of Kyoto:

<https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2158.html>. Kyoto is actually larger than people realize, so you may consider moving hotels midway so you don't spend as much travel time and taxi fare. Kyoto has some of the most beautiful and traditional ryokans so I would recommend booking one for one night (most include a kaiseki dinner and breakfast).
- Accommodations:
 - Where we stayed: If you want to experience staying at a ryokan (traditional Japanese inn), I would recommend Shiraume (<http://www.shiraume-kyoto.jp/en/>). Guest are served a kaiseki dinner in their room, as well as an elaborate breakfast (choice of Japanese or Western). The inn keeper speaks English and will explain the meaning of the dishes. This ryokan is right in the heart of Gion. Depending on how many days you are in Kyoto, you probably would only want to stay in the ryokan for 1-2 nights, and a regular hotel the rest of the time.
 - Additional options that look nice:
 - Hoshinoya (<https://hoshinoya.com/kyoto/en/>) - near Arashiyama, western Kyoto
 - Hokkaikan Ohanabo (<https://www.ohanabo.com/en/>)
 - Ryokan Motonago (<http://www.motonago.com/en/room.html>) - in the Gion area, eastern Kyoto
 - Kinmata (<http://www.kinmata.com/english/>) - closer to central Kyoto
 - Suiran (<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/ukylc-suiran-a-luxury-collection-hotel-kyoto/>) - near Arashiyama, western Kyoto
 - Benkei Kyoto (<https://benkei.biz/>) - near Arashiyama, western Kyoto
 - Hanaikada Ryokan (<http://www.hanaikada.co.jp/english/onsen.html>) - Arashiyama area next to Monkey Park, 15 min walk to bamboo forest
 - Grand West Arashiyama - great service and price, close to Monkey Park Iwatayama
 - Lists of the best ryokans in Kyoto:

<https://asianwanderlust.com/en/best-ryokan-kyoto-japan/> (2022)

<https://www.insidekyoto.com/2012/01/best-high-end-ryokan-in-kyoto.html> (2012)
- Sights:
 - Gion – famous geisha district; Hanamikoji street of Gion and Shirakawa Canal
 - The Higashiyama District along the lower slopes of Kyoto's eastern mountains is one of the city's best preserved historic districts.
 - Kiyomizudera – temple (lit up at night and less crowded)
 - Tofukuji Temple
 - Kinkakuji - Golden Pavilion

- Fushimi Inari Shrine - Shinto shrine in southern Kyoto famous for its thousands of vermilion torii gates.
- Nijo Castle - former Kyoto residence of the shogun
- Ninenzaka and Sannenzaka streets - quaint shopping streets (near Kiyomizudera)
- Arashiyama bamboo grove - located in the western part of Kyoto
- Arashiyama Monkey Park Iwatayama - hike up a tranquil mountain inhabited by a troop of over 170 Japanese macaque monkeys. Great views at the top.
- I've only listed a few sights, but if you have more time, there are so many more sights to see.

· **Osaka** - 30 min train ride from Kyoto. Known for their food!

- Dotonbori shopping area and Dotombori Canal (Glico Man)
- Hozenji Yokocho Alley (法善寺横丁) - Edo period stone paved alley, night pub crawl area
- Osaka Castle
- Between Osaka and Kyoto is a beautiful Buddhist temple called Byodoin Temple, its ornate Phoenix Hall is featured on the back of the ¥10 coin

● Dining:

- Okonomiyaki Mizuno (1 Chome-4-15 Dotonbori, Chuo Ward, Osaka, 542-0071) - awarded 4 consecutive years of Osaka Michelin guide since 2016
- Other okonomiyaki options: Kiji, Fukutaro
- Also known for takoyaki, kushikatsu (deep-fried meat or vegetables on a stick), kitsune udon

· **Nara** - 50 min train ride from Kyoto. Significant temples and artwork dating to the 8th century, when it was Japan's capital. We haven't had a chance to visit, but I've heard good things. The park, with a huge deer population, is very popular.

- Take the underground crossings to get to the northeast corner of the Nobori-oji/Route 169
- Walk up Nobori-oji Street
- Isuien Garden (依水園), Kofukuji Temple (2nd tallest pagoda), Todaiji Temple (bronze buddha)
- Daibutsu-den --> Nigatsu-do Hall --> base of Wakakusa-yama
- Kasuga Taisha (春日大社) - follow the narrow pathways through the forest
- Naramachi - narrow streets are lined with Edo-era wooden machiya merchant townhouses, now shops and restaurants
- Dining: Edogawa Naramachi (江戸川ならまち店) - 43 Shimomikado-cho, Nara-shi; unagi and sashimi

● Accommodations:

- Nara Hotel - founded in 1909 overlooking Nara Park
- An-Grande Hotel Nara - mid-tier centrally located hotel

· **Hiroshima and Miyajima** -

When the first atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, the city became known worldwide for this unenviable distinction. The destructive power of the bomb was tremendous and

obliterated nearly everything within a two kilometer radius. Miyajima is a short ferry ride from Hiroshima. It's a small island with a beautiful tori gate and hiking.

- Attractions:
 - Hiroshima: Atomic Bomb Dome
 - Hiroshima: Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum
 - Hiroshima: Peace Memorial Park
 - Miyajima: Itsukushima Shrine
 - Miyajima: Momijidani Park
 - Miyajima: Mt. Misen Hike & Shishiiwa Observatory
 - Miyajima: Daisho-in Temple
- Lodging:
 - [The Knot Hiroshima](#) - basic hotel very close to the Memorial Museum and Atomic Bomb Dome
 - [ANA Crowne Plaza Hiroshima](#) - basic hotel very close to the Memorial Museum and Atomic Bomb Dome
 - [Kurayado Iroha Ryokan](#) - in Miyajima
- Dining
 - Hiroshima Okonomiyaki - savory mixed pancakes also famous in Osaka. The main difference with Hiroshima okonomiyaki is that it contains yakisoba noodles in addition to sliced cabbage, pork, egg, seafood and batter.
 - Oysters - the area produces two-thirds of all the oysters in Japan

· **Naoshima and Teshima Islands** (Art Islands) - can be combined with Hiroshima and Miyajima. About 45 shinkansen ride to Okayama Station from Hiroshima Station. From Okayama, take the train to Uno Port and then a ferry to Miyanoura Port or Honmura Port. Can stop at Himeiji Castle on the way back to Tokyo.

Hidden amongst some 3,000 mostly uninhabited islands in the Seto Inland Sea - there lies a cluster of Art Islands filled with art installations, cutting edge museums, and architectural gems. Sculptures appeared across the island including Yayoi Kusama's iconic yellow pumpkin.

- Attractions:
 - Chichu Art Museum - [advanced reservations](#) required
 - Lee Ufan Museum
 - Benesse House Museum
 - Yayoi Kusama yellow pumpkin (currently under repair)
 - Art House Project (6-7 houses)
 - ANDO Museum - personally, I would skip this
 - Teshima Yokoo House
 - Teshima Art Museum
 - Les Archives Du Couer
- Lodging:
 - [Benesse House](#) (Naoshima Island) - hotel with amazing views; access to the museum after hours
 - [Umitota](#) or [Ryokan Takamatsuya](#) (Teshima Island)

- Dining
 - Area is known to have good udon
 - [Terrace Restaurant](#) - French restaurant at Benesse House

Skiing

Niseko/Hokkaido - the snow in Niseko is great and there are many great intermediate runs. Prices do run higher than the Japanese ski resorts and the place is filled with foreigners, especially Australians.

- Harafu Village Hotels:
 - Ki Niseko (<https://www.kiniseko.com/#>) -ski in/ski-out resort minutes from the gondola which accesses the Niseko Grand Harafu area (on the ski trail map); great service at the hotel; wonderful onsen; 5 min shuttle ride to the village
 - Aya (<https://www.ayaniseko.com/>) - -ski in/ski-out resort which accesses the Niseko Village area (on the ski trail map); great service at the hotel; small onsen; 5 min walk to the village
 - Vale (<https://nisekoalpineaccommodation.com/en/>) - Friends say this hotel is similar to Aya, but slightly older.

Shizukuishi/Iwate - the snow in Iwate is great since it's very close to Hokkaido. The resorts in this area are older and smaller though. Prices are very reasonable, but most places are Japanese speaking so it's more difficult to navigate as a foreigner.

- Shizukuishi Prince Hotel - nice hotel with a beautiful onsen. Big buffet dinner with fresh crab legs. Great snow, but limited options for ski runs.
- Appi Kogen - we didn't stay here, but it's a popular option in this area.

Nozawa Onsen- northern part of Nagano Prefecture – a charming hot spring village with 13 outdoor onsens located at the foot of Kenashi-yama Mountain. The village is said to date back to 8th century but has been renowned for it's hot springs and traditional inns since the Edo period. Nozawa Village is located at the foot of the Nozawa ski resort, which spans across three main areas.

As far as I can tell, there are no ski-in/ski-out hotels. From the village, you need to walk uphill about 5-10 minutes (depending on where you are staying) to the moving walk-way. That takes you directly to the ski area. We rented our skis at [St. Anton Rental](#), which is basically next to the gondola. You can rent ski clothes and equipment there and can leave everything there overnight so you do not need to transport it back to your hotel.

- Accommodations
 - [Ryokan Sakaya](#)
 - [Residence Yasushi](#) - modern inn with great service. Giorgio assisted with equipment rental, purchasing lift tickets, and restaurant recommendations and reservations. They have two private onsens open 24-hours. They serve an afternoon tea every afternoon at 4pm with a featured cake / pastry of some sort. There's also a small lounge area where we played cards at night. From this location, it's about an 8-minute walk to the walkway.
- Dining
 - [Juntos](#) - Mexican restaurant with mediocre food, but good margaritas

- [Kaze no Ie](#) - Italian restaurant run by a husband and wife. Great bruschetta and grilled steak. Nice wine list too.
- [Izakaya Sakai](#) - decent well-priced yakitori

Snow Monkey Park (Jigokudani Yaen Koen) and Shiga Kogen Ski-

From Tokyo Station, take the Shinkansen to Nagano Station, then take the Nagano Dentetsu Line (local train) to Yudanaka Station. From Yudanaka Station, it's a short 5-10 min taxi (or bus) ride to Shibu Onsen. Spend the night in one of the many ryokans in Shibu Onsen so you can get an early start to the monkey park. Depending on where you stay, you may need to take the [local bus](#) to the Snow Monkey Park. The entrance to the park is approximately a 30-40 minute walk. At about 9am, the monkeys are fed, so they will come down and gather during that time. Very cool experience to see the snow monkeys!

- Accommodations
 - [Ji Pyo Kaku Ryokan](#) - beautiful ryokan very close to the entrance of the monkey park; they provide a shuttle service from Yudanaka Station.
 - [Sakaeya Ryokan](#) - modern ryokan in the small village of Shibu Onsen
- Dining
 - Enza Cafe - nice restaurant/cafe at the base of the monkey park

[Shiga Kogen is a ski area](#) (comprising 18 ski areas) about 30 minutes away from the monkey park. The 1998 Winter Olympics were hosted there, but it hasn't seen much development or renovation since then so most of the hotels look very tired. We stayed at the [Shiga Kogen Prince Resort](#) East Wing, which is a ski-in/ski-out resort. While the room was pretty nice with a view of the mountain, overall, facilities were old and it was VERY inconvenient to go between the east-south-west wings because the bus service runs only about every hour or so. The dining was also very limited in the east wing, with only one dining room available with buffet meals. The west wing had 3 dining options and the onsen, but the rooms are more "basic". Perhaps having a rental car would have made the experience better, but without one, I would not recommend staying there. Snow quality was good, but not the best I've experienced.

Beach

- **Okinawa and Ishigaki -**
Okinawa is easily accessible from Tokyo (3 hr flight). Beautiful beaches, but the city is not very charming.
 - Attractions:
 - Shurijo Castle
 - Shikinaen Royal Garden
 - Nakagusuku Castle
 - Churaumi Aquarium
 - Nakijin Castle Ruins
 - Lodging:
 - Halekulani Okinawa - luxury hotel

- Sheraton Okinawa Sunmarina Resort - mid-range hotel with lots of water activities for kids
- Dining
 - Ufaya Restaurant (Address: 90 Nakayama, Nago, Okinawa 905-0004, Japan)
 - Shimujo - 2-124-1 Shuri Saneyoshicho Naha-city Okinawa
 - Steak House Jam Okinawa - teppanyaki meets Hawaii
 - Okinawa soba - thick wheat noodles more closely resembling the texture of udon
 - Blue Seal ice cream
 - sata andagi - dense donuts
 - sweet potato soft serve
 - Taco rice

· **Ishigaki, Taketomi, Iriomote Islands-**

Ishigaki is in Japan's southwestern Okinawa Prefecture. It's known for beaches and sites for snorkeling, diving and surfing. Within Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park lies the Shiraho Reef's rare blue coral. In the interior is Mt. Omoto and other peaks. On the northern HIRAKUBO Peninsula is the Fukido River, a mangrove forest habitat. Possible itinerary: stay on Ishigaki, take a day trip to Taketomi (15 min ferry ride), and an overnight trip to Iriomote (45 min ferry ride from Ishigaki).

- Attractions/Activities:
 - Iriomote: boat tour - waterfall in a mangrove river, a jungle waterfall, some beautiful snorkeling spots, deserted beaches
 - Iriomote: Mayagusuku waterfall ("the castle of a wildcat"); or Nara Falls (Nakara River)
 - Ishigaki: glass bottom boat at Kabira Bay (Manta rays congregate and black pearls cultivated here)
 - Taketomi - water buffalo-drawn cart, visit Kaji Beach (star sand beach)
- Lodging:
 - [ANA InterContinental Ishigaki Resort](#)
 - [Fusaki Beach Resort Hotel & Villas](#)
 - [Club Med Kabira](#) - all inclusive resort
 - [Hoshinoya Taketomi Island](#) - 48 traditionally built Okinawan pavilions
 - [Hoshinoya Iriomote](#) - The Nansei Islands, to which Iriomote Island belongs, have maintained a highly endemic ecosystem, and are a rare area where many endangered species live.
 - [Nilaina Resort](#) - only 3 guest rooms surrounded by the jungle; feels like a treehouse

Miscellaneous

Antique markets / Shrine Sales / Flea markets

- Seibon Gallery (formerly Kanarusha Antiques)
1-26-4 Shiraitodai, Fuchu-shi, Tokyo

(30 minutes ride from Shinjuku Station by both car and train)

https://www.seibon-gallery.jp/?_gl=1*kjdwyt*_ga*MTlwNzEzMjYwOC4xNjgwMDQxODQ5*_ga_4NX116FQC5*MTY4MDA0MTg0OS4wLjAuMTY4MDA0MTg0OS4wLjAuMA..

- Tankyodo
<https://www.tankyodo.com/>
- Kawagoe narita Fudomon Flea Market
<https://www.kawagoe-yell.com/sightseeing/kawagoe-nominoiti/>
- Tokyo City Flea Market
<https://fmfm.jp/event/detail/?sid=12335>
- Okura Oriental Art
<https://www.okura-art.com/>
- Yamamoto Antiques
<https://www.antique-yamamoto.co.jp/>
- Tomioka Hachiman Shrine Antique Market
<http://www.kottou-rakuichi.com/about.html>