

# Tokyo Translated

In a country as diverse as Japan, can you really navigate its capital in less than 24 hours?

**Charley Larcombe** starts the clock.

📷 Charley Larcombe & Michael Eggert

8AM  
Tsukiji Market

Proper travellers set their alarms for 4am to make the start of the fish market auction here and to join the Michelin-starred chefs trying to catch the monster haul. However, having spent six days learning to ski in Niseko the week before, my friends and I weren't best suited to roll out of bed for an early call time to play tourists. We were super sushi fans though and this was enough to get us moving sort-of-early at 7:30am (can you tell we're not parents yet?).

We hopped off the subway and a quick 10-minute walk later we hit the crowded market where, like a shoal of fish, little restaurants and sushi shacks were piled up and alongside each other. Honestly, you can pick one; any one and you won't be disappointed. Try and get a seat at the bar where you can watch the sushi masters at work and then greedily just keep ordering.

When you've worked your way through the *omakase* offerings (the chef's suggestions), wander the tiny alleys and keep your eyes peeled for the weird and the wonderful (over 480 kinds of seafood daily) as well as sights of the ginormous tunas being sliced and diced; it's a bit macabre but fascinating to watch the sword-wielding of the fishmongers.

However, you need to get down there ASAP; the 80-year-old market, the world's biggest, is being moved from this original site out to Toyosu later this year.

11AM  
Sensoji Temple

Pop up out of Asakusa Station – always use the subway when navigating the sprawling city by the way; it's efficient, pretty easy to navigate, cheap and taxis are just traffic-crawlers – and walk through the Kaminarimon, the iconic 'thunder gate' of Tokyo. We headed down the shopping street of Nakamise-dori, stopping to stock up on souvenirs like folding fans, *yukata* (casual kimono) and postcards of *Ukiyo-e*-style prints.

You'll then see the oldest Buddhist temple in Tokyo ahead of you. You'll see worshipers patting themselves with smoke from a large pit in front of the main hall, believed to improve everything from your health to your smarts. It can't hurt right? Also, take a look at getting your fortune told: you have to shake a box of sticks, pick one which will then direct you to a shelf which you can open and discover how your year will turn out.

As with any place of worship there is a certain atmosphere which we felt just walking up the steps into the temple. Take a moment here – whatever your religion or belief. Sometimes it's just good to be still for a while.

1PM  
Shinjuku

Mainly famous for its shopping credentials or its red light district, Kabukicho, we found ourselves in the area for more of a historical experience. The Samurai Museum offers a small but surprisingly good insight into another aspect of Japanese culture. Book in with a tour which runs every half an hour or so and you'll see extraordinary displays of armour, have a quick history lesson, watch an incredibly serious man demonstrating how to use the *katana* (the traditional Samurai sword), and get to dress up in the garb. Your selfie game goes through the roof when you're wearing a Samurai helmet.

Then it's about time for another plate of sushi. My friend explained that last time he was in Tokyo, he literally forced himself to walk around sightseeing just so he could work up a hunger for the next sushi restaurant. We followed his lead. I picked a great joint – I'm sorry I wouldn't be able to find it again; it was like the unicorn of sushi restaurants – down a side alley with splintery wooden stools and plastic menus in Japanese. After another huge assortment of sashimi, it was back into the wintery sun of the afternoon.



5PM  
Shibuya  
Junction

I'm still not 100% sure why this is a Something-to-See. It's a road crossing. A busy one, but a road crossing all the same. However, our hotel literally looked down on it, so we had our obligatory photoshoot, getting in the way of actual commuters who had to dodge us tourists as part of their way home. The bright lights as dusk turned to night were pretty spectacular though.

As the meeting point of so many different aspects of Tokyo, it makes for great watching for a while and once you're done with the scramble, just wait for the light to turn green and you can be on your way.

7PM  
Nonbei  
Yokocho

You may have heard of it as Drunkard's Alley, a street lined with bars that fit a maximum of five people, where the barman essentially joins your party. This fantastically haphazard street is just waiting to provide you with several stories to take home. They aren't the most salubrious of bars, the drinks aren't cheap and fighting for a seat can seem like an effort, but you're richly rewarded. We'd heard talk of a red 'piano bar' and we walked past it several times – almost like it was purposely hidden away, so that it doesn't get too well-known. Once we discovered it behind a heavy carved door and wiggled our hips and shoulders to fit up the stairs, we settled in for sake and beers with fellow travellers who rapidly became new friends. *Kanpai!*

9PM  
Izakaya

Less a place to check out, more like another drinking and eating experience to work your way through. (As I mentioned earlier, can you tell we're not parents yet, with many responsibilities and schedules?). *Izakaya* are casual sake and beer joints which offer tapas style snacks through to *shabu-shabu*. They're low-key but that doesn't necessarily equal low-option. Our friend found a knock-out of a place called Nakamenoteppen near our hotel in Shibuya. There was barely a sign outside letting us know we'd made it, but we were greeted warmly once inside.

We sat on *tatami* mats, tried delicious food that just kept on emerging from the kitchen and ordered yet more rounds of warm sake. I suggest you do the same.

10PM  
Karaoke

I know, I know, very few of us can hold a note, but we don't all have to belt out a tune like Adele to give this a go. See Karaoke – a mash up of the Japanese words for 'empty' and 'orchestra' (*kara oukesutora*) – as a rite of passage. Find a bar you can take over – you don't want to share the mic too much or book a room in one of the chain-like spots like Karaoke Kan – and settle in for an evening of rock anthems and Ed Sheeran on loop. Beware the witching hour though where you feel practice has made perfect and you can now sing like Whitney. You can't. It's time to go home.

**So, the truth is, no, you can barely scratch the surface of Tokyo in a day – but hell, you'll have fun trying. [a](#)**

