



This page, clockwise from right: Susumu Okubo; preparation for a traditional tea ceremony; okonomiyaki pancakes; the mountains of Chichibu



TOKYO EATS & TREATS

Visiting Japan? Get more zen for your yen with our insider picks of the best dining and shopping experiences money can buy

Eastern promise

Mix dedication to craftsmanship with a dash of innovation and you have the perfect recipe for Japan's revered food scene...

Susumu Okubo, head chef at Osaka's Michelin-star Pierre restaurant, sums up the ethos of Japanese cuisine: "We believe the tastes and sensations we want to experience change in line with the seasons." A speciality at Pierre is shoulder of olive beef made using cattle reared in the olive groves of Shodoshima Island. "The spirit of play is important to what I do, and I strive to find the best chemistry that can exist between ingredients."

Shokunin – to be a master of your craft – reverberates through Japanese culture, especially in whisky production. Suntory, the country's first whisky distillery, uses mizunara oak casks for flavour, while in Chichibu, baking summers and freezing winters provide perfect maturing conditions for Venture Whisky.

Japan's reverence for ritual is encapsulated by the tea ceremony, where matcha green tea powder is whipped to a froth before serving, while the centuries-old tradition of mushroom

hunting sees those in the know foraging Kyoto's pine forests for *matsutake* – Japan's 'black truffle'. No celebration of Japanese cuisine is complete without sushi, and Okubo implores visitors to head to Sukiyabashi Jiro in Tokyo. "The mastery of the chef is as crucial as the freshness of ingredients," he says. "Edomae zushi is crafted so harmoniously it melts in the mouth."

Top three street eats

Okonomiyaki

Savoury pancakes with an array of fillings such as pork belly, squid and vegetables, garnished with seaweed flakes, and a thick sauce.

Kushikatsu

Deep-fried breaded skewers of meat, fish, vegetables and seafood, served with pots of sauce and a strict rule of no double-dipping.

Tako tamago

A grilled whole baby octopus with a quail's egg in its head, tako tamago is one of Japan's more unusual delicacies. It's worth giving it a go for the photo op alone.

This page, clockwise:
Eiji Takahashi; the neon signs
of Shinjuku; east meets west
in the shops on Omotesando
Avenue; Harajuku girls dressed
as anime characters



Flash in Japan

He knows good shops! Japanese fashion stylist Eiji Takahashi has worked with Stella McCartney and Uniqlo. Here are his favourite Tokyo haunts...

For classic shopping

Where I live in Shibuya is packed with cool bars and restaurants, vintage shops, independent boutiques and record stores. Omotesando is my favourite local shopping street. It's a tree-lined avenue full of high-end department stores, independent shops, big brands like Ralph Lauren and smaller indie labels. Best, though, are the quirky kawaii clothes and trinkets, toys and Japanese art.

For people watching

The best place to go is Takeshita Street in Harajuku. It's famous for people dressed in cosplay clothes, girls in lacy Lolita costumes and boys dressed like anime characters. To see celebrities, head to Isetan department store in Shinjuku. It's famous for window displays curated by leading artists. Inside, you'll find everything from Gucci and Chanel to

traditional Japanese kimonos, arts and crafts, toys and homewares, and wagashi sweets.

For new labels

My favourite brand is up-and-coming label Tan, which produces elegant clothing you can't find anywhere else. For hipster streetwear go to The Four-Eyed in Shinjuku and GR8 in Harajuku, and for Japanese vintage I like Velvet in the bohemian Shimokitazawa district. When I'm looking for art or antiques for my home, I go to Couscous Furniture in Shibuya.

For change from £1

Tokyo has lots of great bargain shops where nothing costs more than ¥100 [around £1], but the best is the huge Harajuku branch of the famous Daiso chain. It's spread over three floors and sells everything you could need, whether you're looking for cool bento boxes, toys, household products or funky gifts.

For foodies

Akomeya in Ginza is both a food shop and restaurant, both of which focus on rice. The

first floor is all groceries, the second floor covers kitchen equipment. If you like sake and Japanese whisky, visit Hasegawa Saketen in Omotesando Hills and Ajinomachidaya, which stocks more than 1,500 brands of sake.

For traditional souvenirs

Japan Traditional Crafts in Aoyama Square has permanent and temporary collections of Gifu pottery, Okinawa homewares, Osaka knives, paintbrushes and origami art, with craftsmen doing live demonstrations. For Japanese clothing, visit the Oriental Bazaar on Omotesando, where you'll find kimonos and oriental screens, china and traditional toys, and an impressive collection of Japanese clothing and modern kimonos.

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