

Tokyo

Autumn / Winter 2019

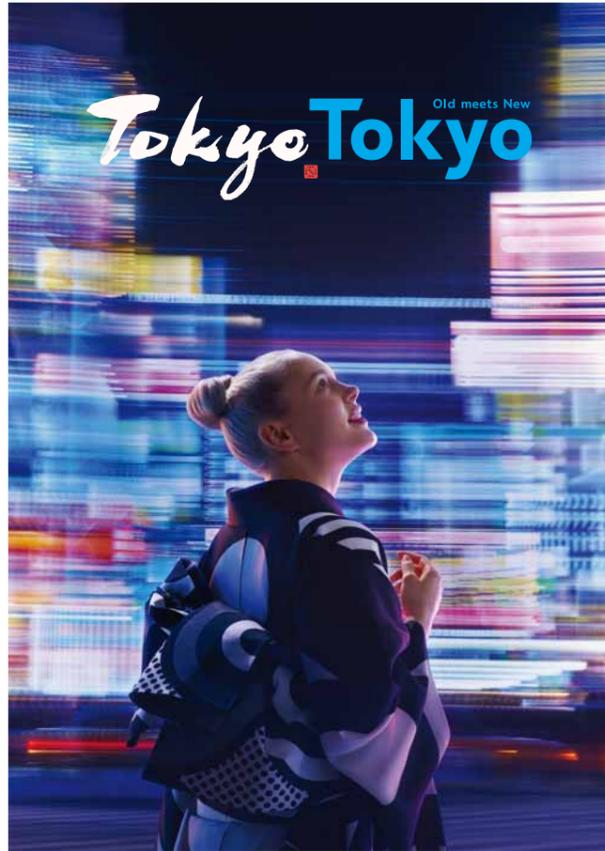


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HOST CITY



The image above is the logo and slogan for Tokyo. The unique aspects of the city are conveyed in two different fonts representing the coexistence of old and new: the brushstroke expresses the traditions that date back to the Edo period (1603–1868), while the sleek block typeface expresses the cutting edge culture of a modern city and is done in sky blue to represent an innovative future. The traditional square stamp in red which graces the logo illustrates the famed crossing in front of Shibuya Station, one of Tokyo's symbolic landmarks.

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Tokyo is a publication issued periodically by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government with the aim to provide readers with the latest information on various aspects of Tokyo, including events, programs, and experiences.

Rugby Fandom Flourishes in Tokyo

The Rugby World Cup 2019™ is to play an integral role in the game's growth.

by **Stephan Jarvis**



A boy enjoying street rugby. After this moment a try was scored.

Over 400,000 international rugby fans are expected to touch down in Japan this September as the Rugby World Cup 2019™ kicks off for the first time in an Asian country. It is also an early opportunity for the capital to showcase its readiness for next year's Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Accompanied by motifs and appearances from Ren-G, the official Rugby World Cup 2019™ mascots, the flurry of flags and banners set to fly across the nation's host cities will

no doubt create a warm, carnival-like atmosphere for fans to revel in. Plenty of pre-game events are planned. For those so unlucky as not to have secured stadium tickets, there will be two Fanzones open to the public, where you can enjoy public viewing on a large screen and various rugby experiences. One in Yurakucho, a short walking distance from Tokyo Station and the high-end shopping district of Ginza, will screen all the 48 matches. Another Fanzone will be established in the area adjacent to Chofu Station



Miyuki Street, in the high-end shopping district of Ginza, resounds with the festive atmosphere of street rugby.

in western Tokyo. There will be shuttle buses between the venue and the Tokyo Stadium where 8 games, including the opening match will be held, and 35 games will be shown live on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays.

To help raise awareness of the sport, street rugby was invented—a simple interpretation where two teams of three players on a seven-meter-wide artificial court play games of one-minute duration and touch instead of tackle. It has proved to be a fun and popular way for people of all ages to get involved. And it is continually growing in popularity.

Debuting in 2015, street rugby events have since been held over 100 times across numerous locations, including some very unexpected places such as Miyuki Street, in Ginza. On one day here, the spontaneous participation of some passersby mixed with the enthusiasm of the children organized to attend, along with the vocal encouragement and appreciation of the many spectators who thronged to witness the event, created a really festive atmosphere.

While showing such an upsurge in Ginza, expectations for rugby are also increasing in Fuchu City, which is also located in western Tokyo. With two top league teams, a stellar women's rugby team, numerous junior rugby teams, and even a community radio station that regularly broadcasts a rugby program called "Studio No. 8," rugby's popularity in Fuchu City is paramount. It is little wonder then that two of rugby's heavyweights, England and France, have chosen to base their team camps there.

Fuchu City is also strong at grassroots level too. A tag rugby tournament featuring around 60 teams (appxi-

mately 500 children) takes place every year, as well as rugby programs that involve the neighboring cities of Chofu and Mitaka. In order to add further appeal, these cities also produced an illustrated rugby rulebook for all students of their municipal elementary and junior high schools.

Appealing to the nation's youth is a strong focus for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Having children learn the value of sports and taking on challenges and fair play will improve their lives. Junior rugby players from prefectures affected by disasters such as the Great East Japan Earthquake have been invited to attend some of the RWC2019 matches. Additionally, rugby programs with junior players in Tokyo are offered to help them achieve their dreams.

By hosting the RWC2019 and next year's Tokyo 2020 Games, the capital is fast becoming known as a sports city. The tournament is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the charm of Tokyo itself; a city where tradition and innovation beautifully coexist. Spectators from overseas are expected to visit not only Tokyo, but also to travel around the country, with games being played in stadiums from Sapporo in the north to Kumamoto in the south.

Being the first Asian country to host this global tournament has put Japan under an intense spotlight, but confidence is high. In addition, the experience and know-how acquired during Rugby World Cup 2019™ will greatly contribute to the success of the Tokyo 2020 Games.



In Fuchu City, there are classes where players from the Japan National 7-a-side team teach rugby to primary schoolchildren.

The Stage in the Sky

The newly renovated South Observation Deck at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building unveils a unique piano that is proving to be an artistic force for cultural exchange.

by **Anne Lucas**

A young teenage boy steps toward the grand piano. He pauses briefly before taking a seat at the instrument he is about to play, probably to absorb the unusual yellow color adorned with black patterns. He has never seen anything like it. This is unmistakably a work created under the supervision of avant-garde Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. Then he begins an astounding rendition of “Moonlight Sonata” by Beethoven.

Nearly every person in the observatory turns to watch him. As he finishes, the crowd gives him a round of applause for his impromptu performance. It is an incredibly moving intersection of young Japanese talent and one of the most revered and oldest living artists in the country. The impact is heightened by the fact we are standing 202 meters above ground level; views of sprawling Tokyo visible through the windows. The experience is enough to perfectly convey and fulfill the purpose of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in installing this piano: to bring local people and travelers in the area together through the power of art, culture, and music.

The observation area was refurbished at the beginning of April 2019 with changes made including window glare reduction, expansion of the spaces for better wheelchair access so that people can now get closer to some of the windows for a better view, and a newly built deck area using wood from the Tama suburbs of Tokyo.

As for the piano set up in the room, it offers a chance for valuable exchange through music with the idea in mind that more foreign tourists will be visiting for the Rugby World Cup 2019™ and the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. Understanding the value in the purpose of the piano installation, Kusama agreed to supervise its artistic treatment.

Born in 1929, Kusama has been active in the art world for nearly six decades. She has become globally recognized for her work and has been awarded the title of Tokyo Honorable Citizen. In 2017, she opened her very own Yayoi Kusama Museum in Shinjuku Ward. Aside from her ubiquitous polka dots, she is also famed for her sculptures, installations, and “Infinity Mirror Rooms.”

The instrument that now resides in the 45th-floor South Observation Deck was donated by a Tokyo resident and has been named “Tokyo Metropolitan Government Omoide Piano”—the “Piano of Memories”—a nod to the 30 years of happy memories it holds from its previous owner and players, as well as to the new memories that will surely be made here. Since its unveiling on April 8, it has already attracted a plethora of musicians of all ages, including tourists visiting from abroad, all eager to have their turn tickling these already iconic keys. Best of all, it is free to play and no reservation is needed. Musicians simply need to arrive and enjoy their five minutes of showmanship on this extraordinary stage in the sky.



People who visit the Observation Deck can hear beautiful melodies played on “Tokyo Metropolitan Government Omoide Piano, collaborated with Yayoi Kusama.”

A New Kitchen for Japan

Tokyo's ultramodern fish market at Toyosu is open to visitors and has a focus on sustainability.

by **Tim Hornyak**

Japan is the birthplace of sushi, so when one of the world's biggest fish markets moved to a new location, Toyosu, last year, it drew international media attention. Those who visit this Central Wholesale Market will soon notice that it has a lot more going on than just trading in fish.

The storied Tsukiji Market, opened in Tokyo near Ginza in 1935, was one of the largest wholesale seafood markets in the world until it closed in 2018. It was celebrated by generations of Japanese and visitors from abroad for being a unique place where one could not only watch seafood wholesalers in action, but also sample the world's freshest sushi. Opened last October, the market's new spot is about 2.3 kilometers to the southeast on the artificial island of Toyosu in Tokyo Bay, and is easily accessed via Shijo-mae Station on the Yurikamome Line.

One thing you will realize when you set foot here is that it is a thoroughly modern facility with an emphasis on food safety, sanitation, and security. While Tsukiji had an old-school, mid-20th-century atmosphere, it was old and also partly open to the outside world and the elements. Just about anyone and anything, including rats, insects, and dust, could get in. Toyosu, which cost some 570 billion yen (\$5.1 billion), is a walled facility with climate controls suited to the function of each of its parts. In addition to its shutters, the market has air curtains to repel outside air, insects, and dust, as well as support air conditioning. While Tsukiji was originally set up for train shipments



From the tour course, you can see how sushi shops and restaurants buy ingredients at the intermediate wholesale markets.

of goods, trucks later took over and the layout was not ideal for that mode of transport. Toyosu, however, has been designed for truck transport and is located by a major thoroughfare.

All this does not mean the market does not welcome members of the public and tourists. Visitors can learn about the market through a promotional corner, panels, and other displays in the various buildings, as well as QR links to the online Toyosu Market Guide, available in 15 languages.

Fans of the market's famous early-morning tuna auctions can get quite close to the action from the Observation Deck, which is limited to 120 people daily

mediate Wholesale Market Building, home to 490 distributors, and the Fruit and Vegetables Building, where about 100 companies buy and sell produce. An average of 1,200 tuna are auctioned at the market every day; while the sales volume for Toyosu has not been compiled yet, Tsukiji averaged about 1,458 tonnes of seafood daily. Some 15,000 people work at the market every day.

"Toyosu is an essential market for food distribution in Japan," says Takeshi Miyama of Toyosu Market Management Section. "It's the largest fish market in the country, but many tourists visit as well. That's why we think it's important to satisfy the general visitor while fulfilling our market role in food distribution."



If you go up to the Green Roof Plaza, you can see views overlooking Tokyo Bay.

(reservations can be made online). Visitors can also view parts of the wholesale and intermediate wholesale markets for fish from galleries. About 70 shops offer products related to the market, while nearly 40 restaurants serve up platters of market-fresh sushi and sashimi, as well as Italian seafood and other fare.

Toyosu Market looks a bit like an airport on the outside, with many vehicles, goods, and people streaming in and out. By sheer numbers, it is overwhelming: with a lot measuring 40.7 hectares, it is 1.7 times as large as Tsukiji was. Three buildings dominate the lot: the Fisheries Wholesale Market Building, where seven major wholesale companies trade, the Fisheries Inter-

One emphasis of the new market is sustainability. Covering parts of the market are solar panels that supply 2,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity to the facility per day, enough to power nearly 580 households for a year. The Green Roof Plaza is a grassy expanse where visitors can view Tokyo Bay landmarks such as the Rainbow Bridge and Athletes' Village for the Tokyo 2020 Games; the plaza connects with the adjacent Toyosu Gururi Park. Surrounded by greenery, the market is designed to be a tourist-friendly, sustainable hub in Japan's vast logistics network of seafood and produce. Next time you want to try the freshest seafood in the country, check out Japan's new "kitchen" at Toyosu.

New Olympic and Paralympic Sports to Ramp Up the Thrills

Skateboarding and Para Taekwondo will make their debut on the world's biggest stage.

by **Stephan Jarvis**



Kicking and kick-flipping their way onto the Olympic and Paralympic program, the debut events of skateboarding and Para Taekwondo, in addition to sport climbing, surfing, and Para Badminton, and the reinstating of baseball/softball and karate, are being highly anticipated for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. New events always draw an extra level of interest from the media and public, and with the spectacular energy, action, and remarkable skill on display in these two particular sports, they look certain to be both exciting and worthy additions.

Skateboarding's image as a counter-culture sport has undergone a transformation since the 1990s. It is thought that in Japan, the number of children and parents getting involved with the sport has increased. That is because many of the riders from the 1980s boom generation have become parents themselves and are passing down their skills and knowledge.

The organizers of the Tokyo 2020 Games are hoping to nurture this increasing popularity by embracing the vibrant, youth-focused, carnival atmosphere that is associated with the sport. The skateboarding events will take place at the brand new, bayside Ariake Urban Sports Park—a facility that aims to deliver a more dynamic and

For the first time, the best skateboarders in the world will be competing for an Olympic gold medal, at the Tokyo 2020 Games.

engaging experience for fans. It will also serve as a symbol of the efforts made in making the Tokyo 2020 Games in general more appealing to a younger audience.

Two disciplines of skateboarding are on the program: street and park, including both men's and women's events. The faster, more original, and complex performances are awarded the higher overall scores. Street takes place in an arena with an assortment of stairs, rails, benches, walls, and slopes, similar to those found throughout a typical city, upon which individual competitors can display their repertoire of tricks and skills. As riders skillfully chain together an awe-inspiring combination of moves, it is an impressive spectacle to watch. Park, which combines a dome-shaped bowl and a variety of complex curves, gives riders more of an incentive to perform mid-air execution of tricks. Free-flowing around a curved, hollowed-out course, riders can gain immense speed, leading to higher jumps and the opportunity to pull off more complex moves. The sight of riders grabbing their boards at the peak of a jump, twisting and spinning their bodies as they do, is a thrilling master class in bravery and commitment, and seeing them manage a successful landing further heightens the tension and excitement.

More lower limb dexterity will be on display during the Para Taekwondo events over at Makuhari Messe—one of the largest convention halls in Japan, located adjacent to Tokyo in Chiba Prefecture. Taekwondo, the Korean national sport that combines martial arts with sporting competition, already has Olympic pedigree, having been made an official Olympic sport during the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. The Tokyo 2020 Games will provide opportunities for Paralympic athletes to display their mastery of the fast-kicking martial art on the stage for the first time.

Para Taekwondo was only established in 2005 and held its first World Championship in 2009. There are two versions of the sport: *Kyorugi*, for athletes with upper limb

impairments, and *Poomsae*, for those with intellectual impairments. Only *Kyorugi* will be on the 2020 program, with athletes divided into different classes depending on weight and the level of physical impairment.

Unlike in regular taekwondo, which allows kicks to the head, kicks to the body are the only way to score points in Para Taekwondo. However, the incentive of a special four-point award for landing a successful, but difficult to pull off, 360-degree spinning kick on an opponent is set to ramp up the excitement. (Two points are awarded to regular kicks and three points for 180-degree kicks.)



Para Taekwondo displays power and skill.

With the eyes of the world on them next summer, the respective governing bodies of skateboarding and Para Taekwondo are hopeful that the thrills and excitement on offer will work wonders for their popularity levels, and provide opportunities for more growth and development beyond the Tokyo 2020 Games.

Connection in Contemporary Art

Renovations at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo breathe new life into the community.

by Rosie Ball

After three years of renovations, Tokyo's downtown Kiyosumi-shirakawa district welcomed the reopening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT) in March 2019. The area has always had a close-knit community and has in recent years evolved into a new hub for young families. To support the ever-changing cultural landscape, MOT has set out to become an open and barrier-free public space. Enlisting designer Yoshiaki Irobe to oversee interior planning and architect Jo Nagasaka to design the new signage and fixtures, the renewal was a landmark project for MOT. By making facilities even more user-friendly and welcoming to people from all walks of life, the museum invites visitors to join an open discussion about contemporary art and culture. The renewal is a significant step in MOT's ongoing quest to further link community and modern art.

Though the building's exterior remains as striking as ever, the museum's interior has seen a total revitalization. Throughout the museum's interior, the major aesthetic difference is the embrace of textural, earthy materials. Signs have been remade with plywood, while benches are now made from textural cork that awakens the senses. Contrasting with the metal and steel of the surrounding architecture, this incongruity serves two useful functions: to make the signposting more distinctive, and to create an overall feeling of warmth. It is a place where visitors can relax and yet still witness the immense possibilities of human innovation. The wood materials also acknowledge Kiba Park's original role in the community. *Kiba* literally means "wood place," and long ago the land was home to a timber mill and various factories. Today the area adjacent to MOT is a vast, multipurpose space that attracts the



Neighbors and casual passersby can now enjoy the new outdoor seating, and other thoughtful additions have been made to aid accessibility.

whole community with its network of paths, play equipment, and botanical gardens.

To make navigating the museum easier, the renewed MOT has embraced symbols on their signage. Not only is the new visual direction handy for foreigners and the elderly, parents of young children can also rest assured. With clear, concise visuals printed on each board, the time and stress of decoding many different languages disappears. Now it is even easier to find the redesigned restaurants on the basement and second levels, or the public art book library on the basement level. The final major design change is the additional bench space inside and outside the museum. Suddenly, the building's vast interior has a relaxed and cozy air. Families can enjoy sitting in the refurbished courtyard for as long as they like, while the benches inside the museum are great for visitors who want to be comfortable and contemplate the artworks.

Aside from aesthetic changes, over the last three years MOT has undergone a meaningful shift in its relationship with the surrounding Kiyosumi-shirakawa community. Resolving to maintain its connection during its closure, the museum launched MOT Satellite, a free event that brings

contemporary art directly into the neighborhood, displaying remarkable works in temporarily-vacated factories, houses, and public spaces around the area. In the spirit of a mini art festival, visitors receive maps to move freely around the exhibition spaces as they wish.

Throughout the last three years MOT Satellite has become a treasured event within the local community. Supporting artists by giving them a place to exhibit their work, the program also boosts local businesses like cafes and independent galleries by forming special partnerships. The fourth MOT Satellite event was titled "Wandering, Mapping," and encouraged visitors to roam through the lively surrounding streets of Kiyosumi-shirakawa after their visit to the museum. MOT hopes that people from far and wide will form deeper connections with this small but vibrant community, marking it on their own mental maps of Tokyo.

The joy of visiting MOT lies in the duality of being in a spectacular museum that is also a public space. As you leave the building you can see children playing, joggers running, and families strolling in the nearby park. Nestled right in the heart of daily life—this is where contemporary art belongs.



The courtyard of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, with cork benches, after the renewal.

Photo: Kenta Hasegawa

A New Way for Noren

How Noren Nakamura is adding to the modern evolution of the famed curtain dividers of Japan.

by Anne Lucas



The *noren* welcomes you at the entrance of the storied Japanese confectionary maker Toraya in the Tokyo Midtown mixed use complex in Roppongi.

As anyone who lives in or visits Tokyo knows, the city is home to hundreds of treasured cultural traditions. To pay homage to the many local businesses that have been creating superbly crafted traditional products since ancient times, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike launched the Edo Tokyo Kirari Project in 2016 to select the leading companies. The project is based on the concept of “old meets new” and introduces Tokyo brands that have roots in the past and are finding innovative ways of passing these on to future generations. Each enterprise honored by the project is selected for the high quality and design of their craft as well as for their inspired approach to incorporating con-

temporary perspectives. One of the latest companies to be highlighted by the project is Noren Nakamura, which deals in producing *noren* (traditional Japanese curtains).

“The way I think about *noren*, it’s not a wall,” says Shin Nakamura. “It’s more like a subtle border.” The CEO and director of Noren Nakamura is describing his interpretation of traditional fabric dividers, often seen hanging outside storefronts or at the entrance to hot springs and public baths. The subtle border he is referring to can be understood any time a gentle breeze briefly lifts the partition cloth, offering a glimpse of activity on the other side and representing the humble modesty of the Japanese which

helps to shape their unique culture. He compares the partition cloth to Japan as a country, insofar as they both welcome in different people and cultures, and he wants to use Japanese handicrafts in this way to re-introduce *noren* into the present age.

Although only launched in 2014, Noren Nakamura was formed on the back of his family’s long-standing *shikkaiya*, founded in 1923. *Shikkaiya* businesses have roots in the Edo period (1603–1868) and act as an intermediary amongst kimono craftsmen, assisting with every stage of the creation and maintenance of the garment. Realizing that in present-day society there is a growing lack of this kind of middleman for creators in general, and drawing on his affiliation with a wide community of *noren* craftsmen, Nakamura saw a gap in the market. So he opened what he refers to as a “modern-day *shikkaiya*.” “The main purpose of my work is to create an interface with the creators and users of traditional crafts and to design new relationships,” he explains.

Thought to have originated in the Yayoi period (tenth century B.C.–third century A.D.), *noren* were first and foremost used to prevent dust from entering houses and as sun shields. Gradually, they developed into commercial products with shops displaying their logos and symbols of their wares on the fabric. Nakamura refers to these uses for the dividers as “version one and two,” and he has now given himself the challenge of designing a version three that creates new value in the modern age.

Nakamura places high importance on partnering with young, innovative craftsmen who are motivated to explore new ways of working. He showed us a variety of examples of the kind of work they have produced—including *noren* for the esteemed Coredo shopping complexes in Nihonbashi. Whether a client brings an existing logo or fabric for printing or they require help in the design and manufacturing from the start, Noren Nakamura is equipped to facilitate every step of the way.

“I really want to work with clients who want to do something interesting and new,” says Nakamura, his final sentiments conveying not only his business acumen but also his visionary thinking.

In Nihonbashi, which was the most lively part of town in the Edo period, entrances of the Nihonbashi Mitsui Tower and the Coredo shopping complexes display various newly designed *noren* with logos, symbolizing the attractiveness of the city.



It Takes Two

Being a blind marathon guide is an exercise in connection and trust.

by Rosie Ball



Sunday mornings in Yoyogi Park are crowded with people enjoying walking and jogging. In the blind marathon practices it is an important role of the guide to convey to their partner that other people are approaching.

As we arrive in Harajuku in the early morning of Sunday, 2nd of June, the sun is already hot and the atmosphere in Yoyogi Park is buzzing. It seems like the whole city has come out to enjoy the park, with families strolling, young people socializing, and hundreds of joggers sweating it out on the pavement of one of Tokyo's most beautiful green spaces. Among them is a particularly large and lively group of runners wearing fluorescent vests, talking and mingling. At first glance you would think they were just one of the many running teams coursing through the park,



A small rope called a companion rope, or bond that connects visually impaired runners and their guides. The length and material are determined by the official rules.

but in fact this is a marathon training event organized by the Japan Blind Marathon Association (JBMA). Composed of visually impaired runners, running guides, and helpers, the differences between this group and the others are small but significant. You cannot help noticing there is a slightly greater sense of excitement tingling in the air here.

Some people may be surprised to know that blind marathon running is widely practiced all around the world. Locally, it is thanks to organizations like JBMA that visually impaired runners have been given greater opportunities to participate in this cultural pastime for 35 years. The goal has always been the same: to empower people, foster community, and normalize visual impairment. While participation from the visually impaired community is obviously fundamental to the organization, you could say it is the volunteers that lay at the heart of JBMA's work.

Anyone can become a volunteer or guide, just attend a Yoyogi Park practice session on the first Sunday of every month with your running shoes and an open mind. Attracting a surprisingly diverse crowd of various ages and nationalities, today's volunteer turnout is very impressive. Generally, a practice session is made up of

30 percent runners and 70 percent volunteer staff there to provide assistance, encouragement, and general care for the runners. Since a large portion of volunteers who come to monthly practices are usually new, before running starts, JBMA provides in-depth training for the unacquainted. This involves learning about the varying degrees of visual impairment, and how to alter your technique for each category in order to be a more effective guide.

The first thing the guides learn when they begin training is that the most crucial aspect of blind marathon running is not actually running at all. Their job is to be the eyes of the unit, guiding their partner with a comprehensive account of the ever-changing conditions around them. Partners are linked together at the wrist with a small rope called a companion rope, or bond, and must run in perfect synchronization to be most successful. JBMA outlines three principles for guides: ensure your partner's safety, match your partner's running style, and always put your partner's needs before your own.

During the training, new guides also practice running with vision-obscuring glasses, ranging in severity. The idea is simple: by running a mile in their visually impaired

partner's shoes, guides have a better understanding of the information their counterparts need. One middle-aged volunteer guide says he surprisingly enjoyed the experience of wearing the glasses. Having spent years running regular marathons, they allowed him to experience different sensations while running. "I felt like I could run faster than I could when I do it alone," he said. We ask him how long it takes to feel a sense of trust with his partner. "About 500 meters or one kilometer," he says, as his partner chimes in: "I know immediately."

Two young female partners return from their first run. Was it challenging? "Becoming synchronized with my partner was very tough," they say, "but when it did happen, it was such a nice feeling."

Fresh volunteers undoubtedly face a demanding and fascinating array of new challenges when they decide to start blind marathon training. But therein lies the joy of being a partner. More than just physical exercise, it is an exercise in problem-solving, building connections and trust, and a chance to improve another person's quality of life. In a blind marathon it is not about the finish line, it is about how you get there.

Better Ways to Spend Money in Tokyo

Japan's banking culture provides opportunities for Tokyo-based fintech start-ups.

by **Kelly Wetherille**

When most people think of tech start-ups, they think of Silicon Valley. But Tokyo is also proving itself to be the perfect home to some very interesting and innovative initiatives in the fintech sector. Two companies, Moneytree and Money Forward, are leading the way with technology that helps people to easily manage their finances.

It is said that while in the United States many people go their entire lives with just one bank account, in Japan the average person has accounts with three banks by the time they turn 30. Add this to various credit card accounts, and managing one's money can become a very messy affair. This is where businesses like Moneytree and Money Forward come in.

These two Tokyo-based companies have developed technology that links information from different bank, credit card, and online shopping accounts into one user-friendly smartphone app, making it possible for people to easily track their spending across different channels, all in one place.

Moneytree was founded in 2012 and launched its app in 2013, winning Apple's Best of iPhone award that same year. The company's chief executive and founder, Australian-born Paul Chapman, said that the company's real business is providing a platform for data aggregation, which helps both the customers and their banks.

"Our mission is to better connect banks with their customers," Chapman said.

Young, diverse, multicultural workers brainstorming at Money Forward.

Moneytree signed Mizuho, its first bank client, in 2016. It now works with over 20 banks from across Japan, including all three of Japan's major banking corporations: Mizuho Financial Group, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, and Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group. It was the first company ever to receive simultaneous investment from these three megabanks.

In addition to banks, Moneytree provides its platform to other companies as well, including those that make accounting software to help people more easily file their

taxes and manage their accounts. "We work with everyone, not just major banks," Chapman said. "We provide a data platform for banking, finance, and fintech."

Money Forward, also founded in 2012, provides similar products and services to Moneytree. "We want to solve the challenges relating to money by helping people manage their assets," said a spokesperson for Money Forward.

Through the Money Forward ME app, customers can see all of their finances in one place, including their bank accounts and credit card statements, and even their online

shopping history from places such as Amazon. Through data tracking in the app, users can see which categories of products and services they spend most of their money on, and they can even see how their spending compares with other users in the same age bracket. This helps people to more actively follow the flow of their money, and to make adjustments to their budget or spending habits accordingly. "Most Japanese people do not learn about money in school," the spokesperson said. "They just start earning and have to figure it out as they go."

While Moneytree and Money Forward were founded in Tokyo, both have international aspirations. Money Forward recently opened an office in Vietnam, which recruits and trains staff to support the team in Tokyo. At the same time, the company is doing research into the market to see how its unique platform might best serve customers there.

Moneytree is also looking beyond Japan for the future. Chapman refers to it as a "born-global company started in Japan," meaning that it has the potential to expand overseas. But before it looks further than Japan, the company will focus on growing its presence domestically.

Japan, with its unique banking culture, provides both challenges and opportunities for growth for fintech companies. And because of this, if these companies can succeed here, their likelihood to succeed overseas only increases.

The broad open-planned office of Moneytree, with a kitchen and many plants.





Autumn is one of the more popular times of the year to visit the Akigawa Valley and see the leaves as they change color. Winter is a less crowded season and always stunningly beautiful. The Ishibunebashi Bridge is one of the most picturesque places in the valley.

Escape to Nature in the Akigawa Valley

A beautiful oasis just an hour from the center of Tokyo.

by **Kelly Wetherille**

With a population of over 13 million and a density of more than 6,000 people per square kilometer, it is no secret that Tokyo is one of the world's true megacities. But what many people may not realize is that it also encompasses a surprising amount of wilderness and green space. One of those areas is the Akigawa Valley, which can easily be reached by train in just an hour from the center of the city.

Located in western Tokyo and nestling Akiruno City and Hinohara Village, the area is beautiful year-round, making it the perfect quick escape from the frenetic pace of central Tokyo. Surrounded by beautiful nature and fresh, clean air, visitors will find it hard to believe that they are still technically in Tokyo.

One of the most enjoyable times to visit the valley is

in the autumn, when the trees change to vivid shades of orange, yellow, and red. One particularly striking spot is Kotokuji Temple, where two large ginkgo trees inside the massive Mountain Gate turn from green to bright yellow in mid-November.

The Akigawa Valley is home to numerous hiking trails. It also has a number of beautiful waterfalls, including the 30-meter-tall Otaki Falls, located along the hiking trail to Mt. Otake. Another photogenic spot is the Ishibunebashi Bridge, a narrow 96-meter-long pedestrian suspension bridge that offers sweeping views of the valley.

Fishing is another popular activity in the area. The clear water produces some delicious fish, and at the Akigawa International Trout Fishing Ground visitors can rent everything from rods and bait to barbecue sets. This makes

it possible to visit with no equipment whatsoever and to enjoy a freshly caught and grilled meal on the spot.

Fewer people visit the valley in the wintertime, making it even more peaceful than it is at other times of the year. Those lucky enough to visit during or shortly after a snowfall will be treated to the magnificent sight of the trees and mountains blanketed in stark white. This is best enjoyed from the warmth and comfort of Seoto-no-Yu Spa, a relaxing hot spring in the area, which also has restaurants and cottages. It goes without saying that the spa is captivating in any season.

Whenever you choose to visit the Akigawa Valley, you are sure to be treated to beautiful natural scenery that will make you soon forget that you are still in Tokyo.



The entrance to the Toranomom Osakaya Sunaba assures customers that this is a place of fine dining.

A Taste of History in the Heart of Tokyo

We take a look at two long-standing soba restaurants that continue to thrive after more than 100 years of business.

by **Matthew HERNON**

A quintessential Japanese dish made from buckwheat flour that dates back to the eighth century, soba can be enjoyed either hot or cold, and is known to be good for your health. A source of several nutrients, it is considered a staple soul food in Tokyo. Two of the most traditional and popular soba restaurants in the capital are Kanda Matsuya in Kanda, a vibrant downtown region with many traditional eateries, and Toranomom Osakaya Sunaba in Toranomom, a wealthy business district full of skyscrapers. Both restaurants were founded during the Meiji era (1868–1912).

Kanda Matsuya was first opened in 1884 by the Fukushima family who ran the place

until it was destroyed by the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. The shop was restored soon after and taken over by the Kodaka family. Almost a century on and the restaurant is still going strong with his great-grandson Takayuki Kodaka in charge, who says, “The soba noodles are all handmade without assistance from machines. On a busy day, we make around 800 plates. It is important to strike a good balance between taste and texture with noodles that are fresh and the *tsuyu* (dipping sauce) that is slightly rich in taste and dark in color.”

130 kilometers north of Tokyo, and I am in constant communication with the farmers there to make sure things are going as planned.”

Slightly older than Kanda Matsuya, Toranomom Osakaya Sunaba, is another famous soba eatery in Tokyo with an outstanding reputation. A Registered Tangible Cultural Property of Japan that was founded in 1872, it also had to be rebuilt after the earthquake in 1923. The exterior has remained the same ever since, though the restaurant has moved slightly westwards to accommodate the widening of the adjacent street. A majestic two-storied structure that is castle-like, it stands out in an area full of modern buildings. The first floor is bright, spacious, and modern-looking while the upstairs feels more historical with two tatami rooms that have hosted many distinguished guests down the years.

They serve a Sunaba style soba, one of the three main types of soba served in Tokyo (along with Yabu and Sarashina). The name can be traced back to 1584 when a confectioner opened a soba restaurant in a *sunaba* (sandpit in English) near Osaka Castle. At the family-run shop in Toranomom, sixth generation soba master Takatoshi Inagaki recommends *mori* soba, a cold soba dish with a simple *tsuyu*. “Sunaba soba noodles have a mild taste,” he says. “We use the inner part of the buckwheat which is not as strong. Also,

the soy sauce needs to be aged before being used to make the *tsuyu*, it will be too sharp if you use it immediately after purchase. Waiting for the right amount of time gives it a smoother taste.” According to Inagaki the style of the soba noodles has remained the same since the restaurant first opened 147 years ago. He would like customers to appreciate the surroundings and slowly take in the aroma and arrangement of the dishes before eating.

More than just restaurants, Toranomom Osakaya Sunaba, and Kanda Matsuya are two long-standing establishments with rich histories that are well worth visiting. Just be warned, both places are extremely popular so you may have to wait in line.



The simplicity and subtleness of *mori* soba, a staple of Toranomom Osakaya Sunaba, is highly recommended. The noodles and dipping sauce are served cold, and separately.



A seasonal special at Kanda Matsuya is a soba dish of sakura shrimp with spicy radish.

The restaurant is charmingly designed in a Taisho era architectural style with a simple and elegant facade. Once inside, it feels like you have been transported back 100 years. Customers eat and drink on shared tables, creating a special atmosphere. In the corner, there is a glass-fronted booth where you can watch the soba noodles being prepared. There are a variety of dishes to choose from including tempura, duck, and herring. Highly recommended is the *goma* soba, served with a thick, savory sesame *tsuyu* where the flavours blend deliciously in your mouth. “The key to great soba is the source of the buckwheat flour,” opines the owner. “As with rice or vegetables, the land has to be right. We usually get our ingredients from Ibaraki Prefecture,

Repurposing Valuable Real Estate in the Sky

Rooftops of commercial buildings in Tokyo are reborn as urban oases.

by Kelly Wetherille

Tokyo is one of the world's great urban jungles, and you never know what you are going to find when walking around the city. Not only might there be hidden shrines or pockets of green space around corners and down alleyways, but there are also plenty of hidden treasures above us. While it may seem like an endless sea of concrete and glass, many of the rooftops in the city are beginning to tell a different story.

Over a decade ago a project was launched to make use of the rooftops of commercial buildings in Ginza, one of the most fashionable shopping districts in Tokyo, in a way that would benefit both the environment and the community. A community-based project called the Ginza Honey Bee Project, or Ginpachi, is taking formerly underutilized rooftop space in the heart of the city and turning it into homes for honeybees. The project began with the idea to produce something in the district that is mainly known for consumerism. About 1,000 visitors from all over the world visit the Ginza beehives to learn about beekeeping each year.

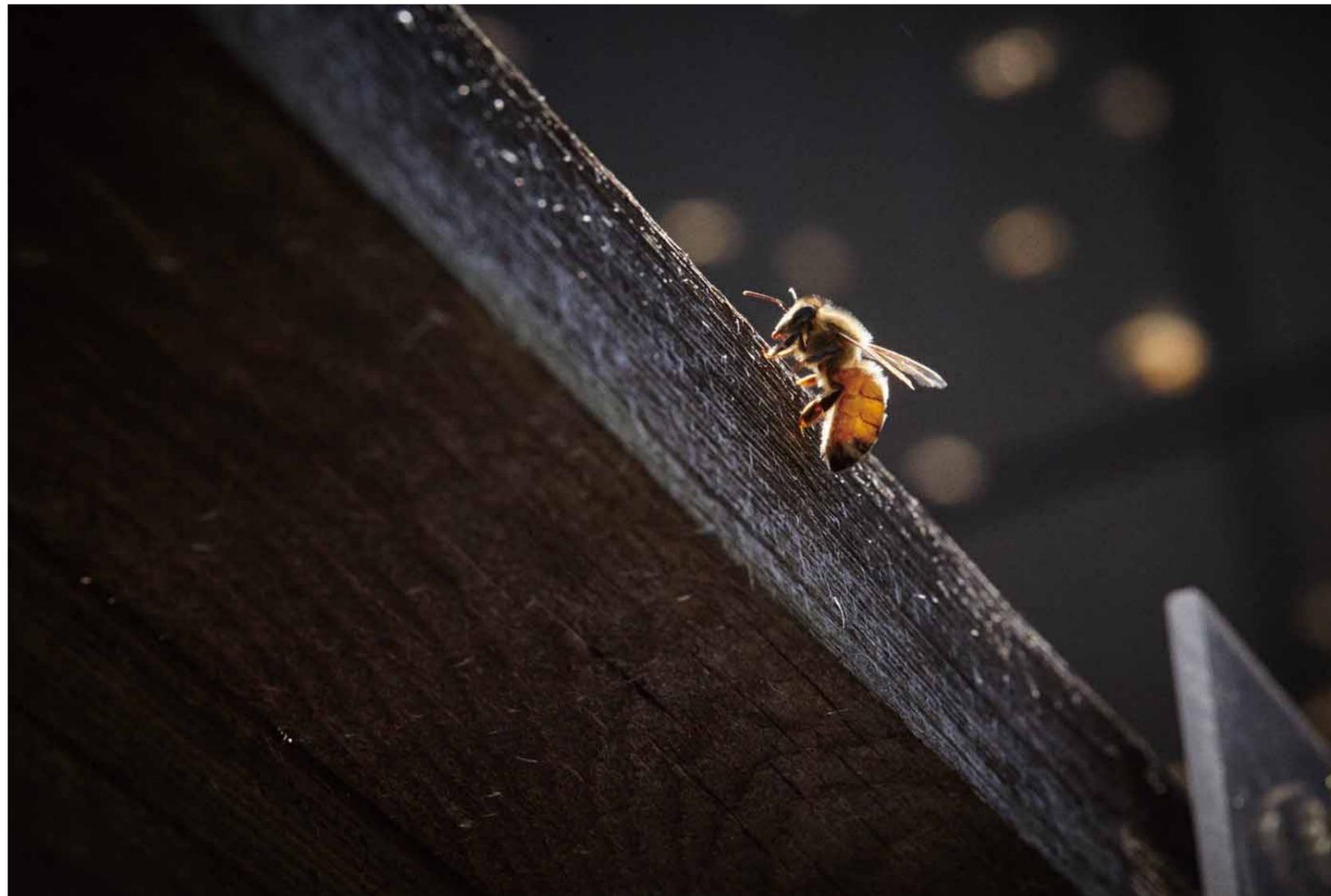
In 2017, the project yielded a total of 1.6 tonnes of honey, and in 2018 it produced a further 1.4 tonnes. Ginpachi honey can only be purchased in Ginza, where it is proudly sold as a local product. Other businesses in the area have also used the honey to make unique, original goods, such as French toast with honey, a honey ale, and honey highball.

Bees are incredible creatures because even though their flight patterns cover a large area, not much space is needed for a single hive. Many of the rooftops used in the Ginpachi project are not particularly spacious, and yet they can accommodate tens of thousands of bees. In addition, honeybees normally need to cover an area with a radius of

about four kilometers in order to find enough nectar to produce honey. But Ginza's location provides the bees with access to the diverse plants on the grounds of the Imperial Palace, Hibiya Park, and Hama-rikyu Gardens, all within a two-kilometer radius. Even the linden trees on Namiki Street in Ginza produce nectar that is gathered by the bees. In fact, there are more honey sources (flower nectar) that are safe for bees in central Tokyo than in rural areas. The reason is that pesticides are not often used for street trees in central areas, and honeybees are vulnerable to pesticides.

Aside from bee raising and honey production, some other Tokyo rooftops offer a lush oasis for people of all ages to temporarily escape from the chaos of the city. Many department stores in Japan turn their rooftops into beer gardens during the summer months, but the Seibu Ikebukuro Main Store in one of Tokyo's busiest districts has gone a step further, transforming its rooftop into a beautiful urban garden. The Cuisine and Green Aerial Garden has 10 food carts serving a variety of food and beverages throughout the year, in addition to the beer terrace that welcomes guests between late April and late September.

The rooftop garden is now a delightful, family-friendly place, and after its remodel the number of visitors has increased by almost eight times. The most impressive feature is the pond and water garden inspired by Claude Monet's famous gardens and ponds in Giverny, France, immortalized in his masterpiece series of Water Lilies.



One of the tens of thousands of busy workers at the Ginza Honey Bee Project, where they make honey on a rooftop in the fashionable shopping district.

Gazing at the lush greenery and the aquatic flowers, it is easy to forget that you are actually standing on a rooftop in one of the largest cities in the world.

With new buildings constantly popping up and old ones being renovated all over Tokyo, it seems only logical that we will be seeing more and more rooftops being transformed into pleasing spaces of contemplation, relaxation, and entertainment, giving both residents and visitors to the city more places to feel at one with nature. So next time you are out walking through the streets, do not forget to look up—you never know what you might find.



On the roof of the Seibu Ikebukuro Main Store, you can contemplate scenery that might make you forget that this is one of the busiest areas of Tokyo.



This is the standard Tokyo manhole cover, colored for display in order to make it understood easily. The four small colored caps in the center convey location and other information about each individual manhole cover.

Visitors to Japan often remark how Japanese love to beautify things that are often overlooked overseas: a slick robotic toilet, for instance, or an ornate wooden cover for a Buddhist temple’s fire extinguisher. This tendency also applies to sewers. Manhole covers in some municipalities and sightseeing spots in Japan are adorned with colorful, eye-popping designs, and the same is true in Tokyo.

Specially designed manhole covers often feature local attractions or historic figures. In Tokyo, even run-of-the-mill, standard manhole covers feature a bold design. They depict flora and fauna that symbolize the capital: surrounding a large *somei yoshino* cherry petal are ginkgo biloba leaves and a ring of wavy lines representing black-headed gulls.

today manholes and sewer pipes play vital roles in Tokyo’s sanitation, rainwater drainage, and disaster mitigation. For instance, manhole covers with blue rubber caps indicate that the cover can be opened and an emergency toilet can be set up on top of the manhole in times of disaster. Meanwhile, modern manholes are fitted with unique seismic dampening technology to reduce the chance of ruptures in major quakes, as well as water-pressure equalization valves to mitigate damage from soil liquefaction.

Aging sewer pipes must be replaced to prevent sinkholes, but blocking off space for construction can be very difficult in a dense, crowded city like Tokyo. That is where another unique technology comes in: the sewage pipe renewal (SPR) method. With SPR, rigid polyvinyl material is unspooled into the existing sewer and formed into a large pipe while backfill material is inserted between the old and new pipes; the flow of sewage can continue during the installation. The SPR method allows the existing sewer to be reused while eliminating the need to dig it up in a large above-ground construction zone. As of 2017, some 1,200 kilometers of pipe renewed with the SPR method had been installed in Japan, as well as 138 kilometers in 17 foreign countries and regions.

Before central Tokyo’s sewage and rainwater are discharged into the sea, they are treated at the Shibaura Water Reclamation Center in Shinagawa Ward, which lies on Tokyo Bay. Established in 1931, the facility can treat up to 830,000 cubic meters of wastewater a day from an area of some 6,440 hectares. Recovered heat and recycled wastewater from the treatment plant are used for heating and as toilet water in the building; neighboring areas also use this recycled water for toilets. Part of the plant is covered by Shibaura Central Park, a public space full of greenery, while a commercial skyscraper, Shinagawa Season Terrace, sits atop a 76,000-cubic-meter combined sewerage overflow storage tank. Just as it has done with manhole covers, Tokyo has added a touch of beauty to a wastewater treatment plant. Tokyo’s sewerage system, full of unique advanced technologies, is a success born out of the challenge to keep a giant metropolis clean and safe. It represents know-how that is worth spreading to other cities around the world.



©1976, 2019 SANRIO CO., LTD. APPROVAL NO. G602272 Hello Kitty™ adorns manhole covers in Tama City in west Tokyo, home to the theme park Sanrio Puroland.

The Art and Science of Manholes

Tokyo’s manholes and sewers showcase both beauty and modern technology.

by **Tim Hornyak**



Manhole covers in Hachioji City in the west of Tokyo depict a Hachioji Kuruma Ningyo (wheeled puppet), a style of puppetry originating at the end of the Edo period.

Apart from their looks, Tokyo’s standard manhole covers are functional and informative. They are the only visible parts of the underground sewerage system, and are designed to reduce noise and vibration when vehicles travel over them. The “T-20” at the top of the manhole means it can support vehicles of up to 20 tonnes, while inscriptions at the bottom indicate whether the sewer is used for rainwater, sewage, or a combination of both. Four colored caps display the cover’s identification number and the year it was manufactured. They also precisely identify the location of each manhole cover, making maintenance more efficient and enabling prompt responses to residents’ concerns.

Construction of Tokyo’s sewerage system began in the 1880s and reached nearly 100 percent coverage in 1995. Over the past century, the system has evolved, and



Medaka, a type of killifish, swimming in a clear stream, with fireflies hovering above adorn the manhole covers of Setagaya Ward, a leafy green residential area in the inner southwest of Tokyo.

Accessibility in Japan

Josh Grisdale knows a lot about the pros and cons of access, having faced most of his life from a wheelchair.

by **Matthew Hernon**



If you want to know how to get around in Tokyo, just ask Josh Grisdale, he has vast experience.

According to Josh Grisdale, “Japan is far more accessible than people would expect,” and that is something he is trying to get across with his website, Accessible Japan. A Canadian-born, Japanese citizen with quadriplegic cerebral palsy, Grisdale has been using a wheelchair since he was young, but it has never put him off traveling around the world. He first visited Japan in 2000 and immediately fell in love with the place. Since moving to Tokyo in 2007, he has wanted to give something back to the country and felt the best way to do that was to show just how accessible a nation it is.

“I think people have this image of capsule hotels, narrow streets, and passengers being pushed on to trains.

They are, therefore, sometimes put off coming,” says Grisdale. “My experiences, on the other hand, have generally been very positive. Between 2000 and 2006 I visited on four occasions and each time I felt it had become more accessible, especially in terms of transportation. I was seeing things that I had never seen anywhere else. At stations, there would be a staff member with a ramp to help you get on the train, and then somebody else waiting for you when you reached the destination. Also, the tactile paving to aid visually impaired people (invented by Seiichi Miyake in 1965), can be seen all over the place.”

Residing in Edogawa Ward in eastern Tokyo, a delightful area full of parks, waterways, and narrow streets, Grisdale says he has few problems getting around. He initially started blogging about his experiences here, and then in 2015, went a step further, creating the Accessible Japan website. “It is a passion project for me,” he says. “I was getting many questions on my blog about medicine, renting wheelchairs, guide dogs, all kinds

of things. Many of these issues I did not necessarily know about in great detail, so I had to do my own investigating. The natural progression seemed to be to make the website. The information is very important. As a person with a disability, I know how nerve-wracking it can be to go abroad without knowing what you are getting yourself into.”

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government’s Accessible Tourism Promotion Project is constantly attempting to improve accessibility in the city so people with disabilities and the elderly can comfortably move around easily. The project is steadily underway: as well as establishing symposiums for tourism-related industries, local businesses, and citizens, there is now a portal site for tourists from inside and outside the country. The Accessible Japan website is a good place to see some of the progress that is being made. It features general information about things like transportation and how to find accessible restaurants and restrooms, as well as useful Japanese phrases for getting around. There is also a forum, a blog, and a database of accessible hotels.

“Communication is one of the biggest challenges when it comes to accessibility in Japan, particularly regarding tourists,” opines Grisdale. “Sometimes there will be hotels with accessible rooms, however, when you go on their English site there will be nothing written about it or sometimes things get lost in translation. A bit of extra information here and there can make the difference between someone coming here or not. I received a message from an Australian family with a daughter in a wheelchair who loved anime and really wanted to visit Japan. They said they were encouraged to come because of what they read on my website. I was delighted to hear that, but my mission is to make things even bigger so more people can visit this wonderful country.”

For Grisdale, it is about more than just aiding people with disabilities as he feels accessible tourism benefits all kinds of groups and individuals. “Most of the inquiries on the website are about acquiring wheelchairs for elderly relatives,” he says. “Accessible tourism can help those who are older as well as parents with young children and people who have been injured. When tourist companies start realizing that, and the potential economic impact it could have, I think they will start promoting it more. With the Tokyo 2020 Games coming up, it is the perfect time for Japan to show how accessible it is.”

Capsule Toy Vending Machines: A Cultural Phenomenon in Japan

More than half a century on from when they first arrived on these shores,

capsule toys continue to capture the imagination of children and adults in Japan.

by **Matthew Hernon**

If you have ever walked past a mysterious and enticing capsule toy vending machine, you know how hard they are to resist. Scattered throughout Tokyo, these hugely popular machines dispense toys and trinkets in round plastic capsules, though you never know exactly what you are going to get.

It is the element of surprise that adds to the allure. At T-ARTS Company, Ltd., one of the most famous toy manufacturing companies in Japan, there is an extensive set of Gacha (a Japanese onomatopoeic word describing the sound made when the machine is used) toys to choose from including famous character figurines, original forms and some useful everyday goods. With each vending machine housing different series, it is then a case of potluck as to what comes out. It was Ryuzo Shigeta who first introduced the concept here back in 1965 after one of his American customers sent him a vending machine that spat out gumballs and toys. As the items were often mixed together, he decided to encase them individually and sell them outside his shop in Tokyo, Penny Shokai, which is now a subsidiary of T-ARTS.

T-ARTS soon started selling their own capsule toy products and, according to a spokesperson, they proved an immediate hit. “They were different to everything else out there because they were only 10 yen. Rather than waiting for a gift on a special occasion, children could spend their pocket money on these capsules. Initially, miniature toy weapons and insects were sold with the target being elementary school children. Eventually, the quality and price of the products rose.”

The capsule toy vending machines became a cultural phenomenon in Japan and by the 1990s an increasing number of adults were showing an interest in them, mainly due to the popularity of video games and anime. Even in today’s technologically advanced world, they are still going strong as many people like to upload pictures of the toys on social networking sites. For the creative team at the toy company the challenge is to keep coming up with innovative ideas to entice new and existing customers.

“We have meetings once a month,” says the spokesperson. “Proposals come via drawings on paper and we try to imagine what



they will look like as 3D objects. If 70–80 percent like the idea, or if someone is very passionate about what they have come up with, we will often go with it.”

ZooZooZoo (a collection of sleeping animals in comical human-like poses) is one of the best-selling Gacha series at T-ARTS. They are even the most popular items at places mostly frequented by tourists such as Haneda airport. The hope is that the latest releases, including a series related to dams, will be just as attractive.

One of the main goals of the company right now is to continue creating innovative products while also trying to control the amount of waste. Designing the plastic capsules as ornaments or jewelry boxes should encourage consumers to keep them, rather than immediately throwing them away.

The staff know how important it is to keep on evolving. Inventiveness is the key to their success and that is something you can feel as soon as you walk through the doors and see all the toys and posters of their products scattered around the head office in Aoto, Katsushika Ward in the downtown area of Tokyo. It is a district that was known for celluloid doll production during the Taisho era (1912–1926) and the early part of the Showa era (1926–1989), making a significant contribution to overall toy production in Japan. The same could be said about the area today, thanks to the influence of T-ARTS and its vast selection of toys, including those famous little ones packed inside capsules known as Gacha.



How about buying your last souvenir of Tokyo with the capsule toy machine at Haneda Airport?

You can try your luck at capsule toy machines. You might be fortunate enough to get one of the adorable ZooZooZoo series’ sleeping animals.

The dazzling spectacle of fireworks (*hanabi*) above Tokyo are a summer staple. Souke Hanabi Kagiya is a long-established company which has passed down the techniques and skills of fireworks for almost 360 years. The fireworks maker is very famous for its involvement in displays including the Edogawa Fireworks Festival. Currently at the helm is 15th-generation Akiko Amano, a former member of the Japan national judo team, as well as the first Japanese female to serve as an Olympic judo referee at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. She is also the first woman to take charge of Kagiya.

Kagiya has been in operation since 1659, when they started making hand-held fireworks from improvised gunpowder and reed. According to one historical record, fireworks were first brought to Japan by an Englishman during the Edo period (1603–1868), yet due to limited contact with the outside world, subsequent fireworks techniques from abroad were not introduced until later. For this reason, Japanese fireworks (*wabi*) at the time developed differently from those abroad, and had a distinctive, orange hue.

On the orders of a shogun, the first *wabi* fireworks display was held over the Sumida River, which snakes past Tokyo's downtown areas, in 1733 to commemorate those who had perished in a famine. That festival evolved into the current Sumida River Fireworks Festival. From the Meiji era (1868–1912), the colors and shapes which define modern fireworks started to be developed, something which the 10th and 11th generation of Kagiya contributed to. To this day, those in the know will shout “Kagiya!” during festivals to show their support.

To carry on the company name was a challenge that Akiko Amano relished. From the second grade of elementary school, she was determined to trace her father's footsteps and join the family business. “It wasn't that I was fascinated by fireworks per se, but I thought my father was cool, and I wanted to be like him,” she laughs.

With restrictions on handling fireworks by minors, she took up judo, a sport practiced by both her father and grandfather. She thrived, winning third place in the Fukuoka International Women's Judo Championship, and becoming a referee later on. Yet the connection to the family trade proved strong. By the time she came of age she started an apprenticeship to learn the technical skills of fireworks. Aged 29, she succeeded her father as the first female to lead Souke Hanabi Kagiya.

In person, Amano is characterised by her easy confidence, even though her path is nothing less than trailblazing. However she realizes that recent social changes may have enabled her success. “Having done judo from a young age, me being a girl never felt like an issue. It was more about me being young,” she laughs.

Her views on fireworks have changed over the years too. “I'm very conscious of fireworks being something imbued with the spirit of fire, which you wouldn't want to upset. I still get excited by beautiful fireworks, but a sense of safety is crucial.”

Besides the importance of safety, the distinctly Japanese interplay of color, shape, light, and sound characterizes Kagiya fireworks. “In Japan, the quality of fireworks is of course important to build excitement for viewers, but the timing of their launching is also an important element,” Amano notes. That rule holds no matter what time of year—fireworks may have a summery connotation in Japan, but firework shows occur in all seasons. There are late autumn festivals, and winter sees fireworks at ski resorts and for countdowns.

“I actually think fireworks are more beautiful in winter,” Amano confesses. “The sound is good—fireworks in autumn and winter are usually launched in the mountains, so there's a great echo. In winter, when it's been snowing, the light reflects off the white mountains. The pace and rhythm is also changed from the summer version, which gives visitors a different experience.”

For Amano herself, the pace may soon be different as well. She is aiming to be a referee again at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. However, it is not that simple to be selected as a referee for this prestigious event. Since she has been so busy with her duty leading Kagiya, being selected as an Olympic referee is not assured. But due to her vast experience gained through fireworks and judo, she is confident her wishes will come true.

A special *hanten* (jacket) emblazoned with the Kagiya company logo.



Akiko Amano: Starting with a Bang

The first woman to lead a centuries-old fireworks company combines her passion for the family tradition with martial arts.

by Kirsty Bouwers



Glowing with well-deserved confidence, Akiko Amano is the 15th-generation, and Souke Hanabi Kagiya's first female leader. It is one of the oldest fireworks companies in Tokyo. She is holding a model *hanabidama* (fireworks ball), one of the tools of her trade.

Tokyo Basics

Population

Total Population of Tokyo (2019)

13,929,286

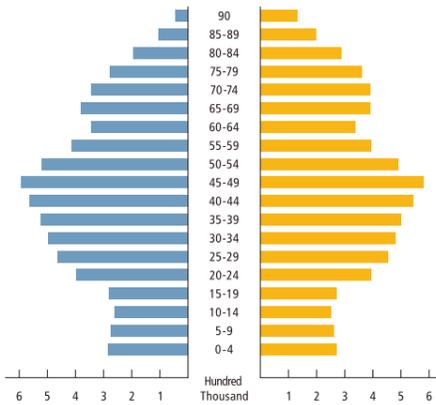
Population Age Structure by Gender (2019)

Men (2019)

6,849,135

Average Life Expectancy (2015)

81.07



Women (2019)

7,080,151

Average Life Expectancy (2015)

87.26

Foreign Residents (2019)

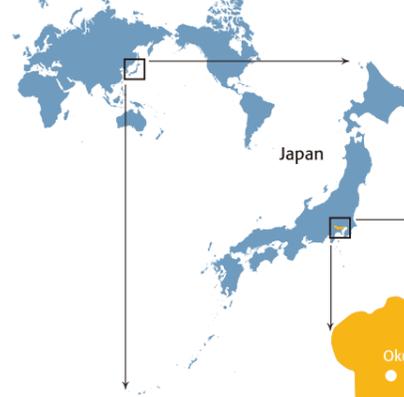
551,864

People Over 100 Years Old (2019)

5,892

Location

World

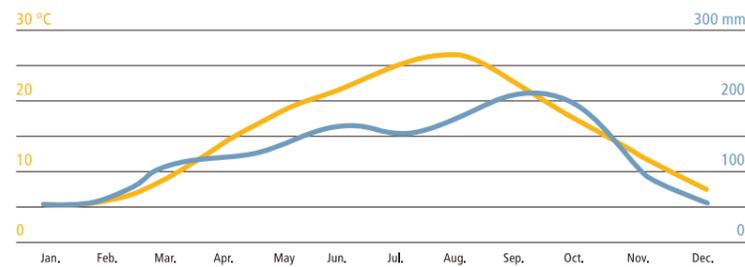


Area

2,193.96
sq. kilometers



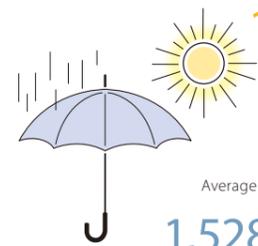
Average Monthly Temperature and Rainfall



(Source: Japan Meteorological Agency, 1981-2010) ● = Average temperature ● = Average rainfall

Average Annual Temperature

15.4 °C
(59.7 °F)



Average Annual Rainfall

1,528.8 mm

Sister and Friendship Cities / States *

- ① New York (USA)
- ② Beijing (China)
- ③ Paris (France)
- ④ New South Wales* (Australia)
- ⑤ Seoul (South Korea)
- ⑥ Jakarta (Indonesia)
- ⑦ São Paulo* (Brazil)
- ⑧ Cairo (Egypt)
- ⑨ Moscow (Russia)
- ⑩ Berlin (Germany)
- ⑪ Rome (Italy)
- ⑫ London (UK)



Annual Foreign Tourists (2018)



14.2
million

A 3.4% increase over 2017

Tokyo's GMP¹ (Nominal) as a Share of Japan's GDP (FY2016)

Japan ¥539.3 trillion



19.4% of
Japan's GDP

¹ GMP: Gross Metropolitan Product
² \$964.0 billion
(2016 annual average conversion rate ¥1 = \$0.0092)

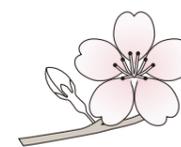
Tokyo's Budget (Initial FY2018)



¥14,959
billion*

* \$138 billion
¥1 = \$0.0092 (Bloomberg, July 31, 2019)

Symbols



The *somei yoshino* cherry tree was developed in the late Edo period to early Meiji era (late 1800s) by crossbreeding wild cherry trees. The light-pink blossoms in full bloom and the falling petals scattering in the wind are a magnificent sight to behold.



Ginkgo biloba is a deciduous tree with distinctive fan-shaped leaves that change from light green to bright yellow in autumn. The ginkgo tree is commonly found along Tokyo's streets and avenues and is highly resistant to pollution and fire.



The *yurikamome* gull has a vermilion bill and legs. It comes south to Tokyo in late October every year and sojourns at the surrounding ports and rivers until the following April. A favorite theme of poets and painters, it is also called *miyakadori* (bird of the capital).



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